

# Disaster in Relation to Attachment, to Community, and to Place: The Marysville Experience.

**David Barton** PhD (Cand); MA (R); BA (CC); Cert. II PS (SES-R); CPL (H); PPL (A); Dip. CMCM; Dip. YW; Cert. YSRA; Cert. TES; Cert. BML. School of Management - RMIT University.

*From the  
Researched ...*



## What's this all about?

**This project is about loss – about what loss involves, about what loss means and about how people recover from loss.**

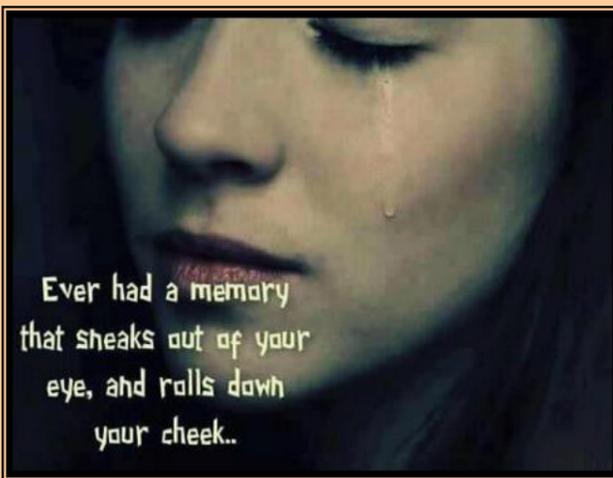
**This project is about me and about my community of Marysville. It is about what we went through on Black Saturday, 2009, and of what we have been through since.**

This is my journey, and it's the journey of my fellow travellers too. The project tells my story and the stories of others to create a vivid and evocative account of the human element of Black Saturday, not only the first disaster, the fire itself, but also an account of the second disaster – all that has happened since the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009, and of the effects that the fire and post-fire recovery has had on not only me, but on my local community as well.

## What do you value most in life?

If your home was under imminent threat, if your family, pets and livestock were about to be destroyed, what would you do? What would you take with you? Then the unthinkable happens – it's all gone, in a flash, in an instant! Your home, your possessions, your community, your environment, perhaps even family, friends and treasured pets have all been killed – where to now? What do you do?

Recovery, Rebuilding, Resilience, are all great buzzwords for helpers and academics, but what do they mean to the people who actually have to **do** those things? It's a journey of great pain, of many tears, of heartache, of sorrow, of unwanted challenges and change. Could you do it? Are you up for it?



## Methodology:

Because I was there and have lived through it all, and have been living through the 'recovery' for the last 4½ years as well, any semblance of objectivity is not really possible. This leaves one credible alternative for serious research, and that's autoethnography. Autoethnography is about the researcher telling his or her story; but for me that's not enough for serious research. There's two styles of autoethnography: *evocative*, which tells such a strong story that it evokes strong feeling and thence action from the reader, and *analytical*, which takes a more traditional approach to research by way of comparative analysis. To avoid the oft-quoted criticism of autoethnography, that of narcissism, the project utilises both styles – a compelling and evocative story, mixed with the stories of others and a critical and evaluative analysis.

## Progress To Date:

Over a two year period an extensive literature review has been undertaken, along with 28 formal interviews and many other informal interviews and 're-visit' interviews as well. Emergent themes have been identified and analysis continues. The project is now on the 'down hill run', with submission due by the end of 2013. The interviews are mostly concluded and have been transcribed. The thematic analysis and interpretation continues, and the 'write-up' also continues apace. It's almost there!

*... to the  
Researcher.*

## From There To Here – What A Journey!:

In January, 2013, the destructive 'Dunalley' fires affected south-east Tasmania. I was fortunate to be a part of the Bushfire CRC Research Team conducting over 120 important interviews with affected residents. Wow – from being one of the 'researched' back in 2009, I became one of the researchers in 2013, using my experience to help others, and myself, make sense of these disasters – what a privilege!

This 4½-year cathartic journey for me and those who have participated has meant that we have talked much, told many stories, laughed loudly and cried quietly together as we have recounted all that has happened since that day – what a privilege to be allowed into these people's lives!

**Photo Credits:** David Barton and [http://www.facebook.com/home.php?clk\\_loc=5#!/photo.php?fbid=459592904117430&set=a.432513643492023.52524239.432512153492172&type=1&theater](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?clk_loc=5#!/photo.php?fbid=459592904117430&set=a.432513643492023.52524239.432512153492172&type=1&theater)



## Research Issues:

The Research Problem and Research Questions have been thoroughly considered, worked and re-worked, finally taking their current form, as below:

### The Research Problem:

What issues are raised from the experiences and challenges of Marysville Black Saturday bushfire survivors?

### The Research Questions:

1. What issues and challenges can be identified from the experiences of Marysville Black Saturday bushfire survivors?
2. To what extent is attachment theory important when considering survivors' experiences of attachment, loss and grief?
3. What are the implications of survivors' experiences, challenges and issues for understanding disaster response and recovery in the future?

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### 'Attachment' – To What?:

Bowlby's *attachment theory* has been a seminal work in describing human behaviour, but to what extent can it be expanded? Are people 'attached' to lots of other things, like place, possessions, environment, pets, lifestyle? Yes, I think they are, but at what level and why? This project seeks to answer those questions.

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### 'Solastalgia' – What Is It?:

Enter Solastalgia – just like its cousin, 'nostalgia' (homesickness), solastalgia is the loss of comfort, or 'solace' when one's home is transformed by external forces (often natural disaster) from what it once was to something that is now, to its inhabitants, barely recognisable. Such rapid transformations may provoke symptoms of illness, including depression, that may radically disturb lifestyle, recovery and a sense of hope for the future. This project seeks to further explore that element of human response to disaster.

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Having identified the issues and challenges arising from the Black Saturday experience and subsequent events, and then by viewing my own and other peoples experiences through the arising themes and prisms of attachment and solastalgia, a great deal of rich and informative data is being obtained that will be available for others in their post-disaster recovery work.

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### What the End User says:

The project has as its end user supporter the Fire Services Commissioner, Victoria, and should provide useful material for the Commissioner's Office.

*"This is a deeply challenging research project in both personal and methodological terms. David's unique proposition has the potential to provide valuable insight into how individuals endure and rebuild their lives after catastrophic loss."* John Schauble FSCV.

