

just another day

part three

community...



Tania grins a thank you at her husband as he holds the door of The Crossing open for her to walk through. She can tell by the look on his face that, even after four weeks, he's still uneasy, although his attitude has improved a lot since that introductory night of the Toolbox 'Parenting Teenagers' class. Talk about stepping out of their comfort zone. Not quite so daunting for her, since she's attended the odd parent/teacher evening, experienced things outside of the familiarity of home, work, pub. But for Bill it's been hard. Flash place, straight-looking people everywhere, good, upstanding citizens...

"Better not try preachin' to me," he'd grumbled as they'd pulled into the car park that first night.

"It's a parenting class, babe, not a church service."

"They'll be lookin' down their noses."

"They won't!"

And they haven't. In fact, the easy-going and personal nature of the place has gone a long way to softening Bill's defenses. He even participated in a class discussion last week, something she thought he'd never do. He's starting to become more involved with the kids at home; they both are. It's a case of having to, with Cody and Cassandra so far off the rails.

Tania feels intervention has almost come too late but she tries to think positively. Max Bauer, the presenter of the class and a highly-respected parenting 'guru', has been so supportive, reassuring them it is never too late to learn new parenting skills.

Perhaps he wouldn't be so encouraging if he knew about their own bad behaviour. She walks beside Bill through the carpeted area leading to Room 4. There are lots of things going on and the centre hums with an atmosphere of learning, of aiming higher, making things better.

In one room, English is about to be taught to an ESOL class and Tania smiles at a shy-looking Asian student waiting near the door. The next room along is for another Toolbox class, 'Parenting Through Separation'.

Tania supposes she should be thankful she's walking past that one. Although her relationship with Bill has never been a picnic, at least they're still together – just.

If only she can talk to someone about the things that have been churning round in her mind for weeks now. Well, ever since they started the course, really.

As parents, they are such hypocrites. How can they steer Cody and Cassie down a right path when they themselves are struggling?

"You're not smoking dope in my garage!" Bill roared at Cody last night, eyes red from the joint he'd just shared with the neighbour. "You can't do that, hun," she'd tried to talk to Bill about it, but he'd just mumbled something about Cody needing a good kick up the backside.

Perhaps, thinks Tania, it's time to talk to someone here at The Crossing. She knows they have a counselor on site, and a family therapist. There's also a director of social services. Max Bauer mentioned the woman last week; said she hooked people up with

the likes of CYFS and WINZ. There's loads of help for those who want to tap into it, who have plucked up the courage...

"Hi, Tania."

Startled from her thoughts, she turns to see a youth with a healthy tan and dreadlocks, grinning at her from a doorway.

"Oh, giddyay, Matthew." It's the son of Carol, her friend and workmate. Trying to ignore Bill's impatient scowl, she stops to chat. "What are you up to?"

He waves a casual hand toward the room he's just come from, "Aw, we're making a trailer for a youth group event."

Tania's gaze goes beyond him to the friendly-looking bunch of young people lounging around a computer. A far cry from Cody and his mates. When Bill and she had left, they'd been slumped in front of the TV, cigarettes drooping from their mouths, beers in hand.

She chats briefly to the boy, then follows her husband on to Room 4.

She's made up her mind. Tonight she will find out what she has to do to see The Crossing counselor. Max Bauer is right. It's never too late for change.

Anne Cleary

