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Picture: KERI MEGELUS

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**MONDAY, AUGUST 6**

**MIDAWARR/HARVEST: MULKUN WIRRPANDA AND JOHN WOLSELEY**

Immerse yourself in a vast Arnhem Land floodplain and lose yourself in a forest of bark paintings, in an ambitious and beautiful cross-cultural collaboration between renowned landscape artist John Wolseley and the great Yolŋu artist, Mulkun Wirrpanda. **Museum and Art Gallery of the NT. FREE**

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 7**

**COUPLE CONNECT**

A skill and information packed two sessions for couples at any stage to upskill, reconnect and focus on their relationship. Improve communication, increase closeness and trust, build on your friendship and create something life long. **6pm at Relationships Australia NT. \$80 per couple**

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 8**

**FROM COUNTRY TO COUTURE**

Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair's fashion show, *From Country to Couture*, is back shining a spotlight on wearable art. The success of the textile design movement in remote indigenous communities has led to exciting collaborations with well-known Australian designers and this is your chance to see the latest and greatest taking to the catwalk. **4pm at SkyCity. \$55**

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 9**

**LIMBO**

The stunning Aurora Spiegelent is set to take pride of place at The Esplanade and you're invited to experience the intoxicating mix of cabaret, circus and acrobatics that is *LIMBO*. **7.30pm at the Aurora Spiegelent. \$68**

**FRIDAY, AUGUST 10**

**PIVOT**

Festival Park becomes a playground for adults with *Pivot*, a collection of semi-intelligent seesaws designed by Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey, artists who create unexpected situations for listening. Join in this live art conversation kick-starter that connects you with other festival goers in a philosophical tête-à-tête mediated by a talking seesaw. As you enjoy the rare opportunity to ride, speak and listen, remember that *Pivot* is programmed to consider all words it hears – so it's reflecting your own views, and the views of many others. **4pm at Festival Park. FREE**

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 11**

**REBOOT YOUR LOOT- CAR BOOT SALE**

Bargain hunters rejoice, the popular car boot sale – Reboot Your Loot returns to Palmerston. It's a fun way to declutter, find a home for your preloved stuff, fundraise, reduce waste and meet people from the community. **8am to 11am at the Palmerston Civic Plaza council carpark. FREE**

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 12**

**TEDDY BEARS' PICNIC**

Join Big Ted and a host of Festival guests for a morning full of performances, activities, yummy food and, of course, plenty of excitement and fun – including the a jungle party disco hosted by Darwin duo Team Fun. **9am to 12pm at the Darwin Cenotaph. FREE**



Angela Mollard and her daughter

Picture: NIGEL WRIGHT

**ANGELA MOLLARD OPINION**



**A LIFETIME OF LOVE** As our children grow up we realise what was important in their childhoods

**T**OMORROW my eldest daughter turns 18.

I decided to make her a photo book chronicling her life from birth to adulthood. It would be a gift to treasure – probably not now when life is all about looking forward, but sometime in the future when she has cause to look back.

Before you nominate me for parent of the year, let me be honest. The photo book was like a lot of my parenting – excellent in concept, poor on execution. I left it to the last minute, deadlines were pressing and said teen was midway through exam trials so, as you'd expect, exhibiting peak helpfulness, positivity and joy.

I considered outsourcing the job to Airtasker.com but realised I'd still need to copy the photos from old CD discs and albums. I'd have to squeeze it in late at night. This on top of organising her party – an afternoon tea for 30 girls who would require something a little more sophisticated than fairy bread and chopped watermelon.

But as I embarked on the project something unexpected happened. What was to be an act of love for my child - a meaningful present achieved via time and effort, not money - became a gift to myself. Because as the full moon shone through my office window and my tea grew cold in its cup, I was treated to a slideshow not only of the child I've raised but the mother I've been.

Mostly, the photos are of her: bare-bummed playing in a rock pool; collecting Easter eggs, dancing in a snowstorm with her cousins; playing soccer; making a camp fire; snuggling

with her beloved cat; lying in a hospital bed after having her tonsils out.

Every frame captures a moment, every smile holds a memory but these images are not just a turning over of one year to the next. They're not a bracelet of pretty charms or a collection of greatest hits. Rather, they are a big bold story of a life, a life created and nourished and celebrated by me and her dad and all who love her. A life, ultimately, that reflects the people we are rather than anything special we've done.

From the moment our children are born we focus on the details: should she breastfeed to a routine or on demand; should we try control crying; is he ready for potty training; would she be better in the B team rather than the As; has he got a good teacher; is so-and-so a suitable friend; should we make him persevere with the clarinet; should she study more or get a part-time job; when should we have "the talk" (sex, drugs, alcohol); is he giving back to society; has she written a thank you email to her grandparents.

Yet as I put the final photos in place I realised the best parenting happened when I let go, when I worried less and watched more, when I let the painting come to life of its own accord rather than agonising over every brushstroke.

As one of my favourite writers, Anna Quindlen, observed: "Raising children is presented at first as a true-false test, then becomes multiple choice, until finally, far along, you realise that it is an endless essay."

Only now as my daughter transitions from childhood to adulthood can I see that nothing I've said, no wisdom I've imparted, no strictures I've followed are as important as how I've lived my life. Did she see me being kind? I hope so. Did she see me persevere

when times were tough? I'd like to think so. Did I model loyalty rather than bang on about it? I honestly don't know.

Likewise, I've realised there is no one "talk" which will serve as a guiding light or inform the person she will be. There must've been words that mattered - fragments, unexpected revelations, insights I didn't know I had until something I said resonated. But, ultimately, I doubt it's the words she'll remember, rather the fact that we talked. Always. About anything. Only recently I read about "listening to understand". I wish I'd known earlier that I'm here to acknowledge, not solve. As psychologist Dr Sarah Hughes writes: "You have two ears and one mouth – when it comes to conversations with your teen, be guided by that ratio".

There is plenty I now know. They all lie at some stage. No satisfying conversation ever begins with the question, "How was your day?". A messy bedroom, though annoying, is irrelevant in the scheme of things. Rudeness and lack of respect will leave you aching and full of self-doubt but, largely, it's nothing to do with you, rather a discomfort with themselves. A cuddle will often work when words fail. A bewildering day will be followed by a brilliant day and you'll have no idea how it happened or how you can possibly recreate one again. You'll know when you're not present and so will they; "doing" is always more fun than "getting done".

Finally, don't presume they want a photo book aged 18. When I asked my daughter this week what she'd like for her birthday, she said she'd like a letter. A long one, with plenty of thought put into it.

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