



TWO

OF US

STORY BY Nicole Partridge | PHOTOGRAPH BY Wolter Peeters

Veteran actor and producer Bryan Brown, 69, and his daughter, actress, writer and director Matilda Brown, 29, enjoy working together, but over the years they haven't always seen eye to eye.

MATILDA: The smell of leather reminds me of Dad. When I was little, Dad travelled a lot and whenever he returned he'd call mum from the airport to let her know he was on his way home. I'd hear the phone and squeal, "Is Dad back?" Then I'd sit and wait. As soon as the taxi pulled in, I'd run down to meet him, jump into his arms and snuggle into his brown leather jacket. When you're a little girl, there's no better feeling than being in the arms of your strong father.

Dad has so many strengths. For a start, he is eternally optimistic – sometimes annoyingly so. Dad's classic lines are, "Every no is closer to a yes" and "These things make you stronger." With dad ... there's always a lesson.

Dad's also really funny. At the dinner table he'll have the family in stitches with his larrikin stories and lame dad jokes, like, "There were two baked beans that went on a trip around Australia but still ended up in Cairns." We can't help laughing with him or at him.

Growing up, Dad was the disciplinarian. He made sure we all made our beds and did our homework. He'd call ahead to make sure there was no alcohol at the party. At times I got so angry with him for laying down the law. I'd

scream, "I hate you!" Dad would yell back, "Good! I don't care!" Deep down I knew he did.

One time I was at a party, drank way too much alcohol and got so sick. I said, "Call my dad." Next thing, Dad's carrying me to the car. I woke up the next morning thinking, "I am in so much trouble." As expected, I got a roasting but I now understand why I needed those boundaries.

Dad and I are very similar. There's a photo of us when I was four: Dad is hauling two large saddles under his arms. I am this skinny little thing with spiky blonde hair struggling to lug one saddle with both hands. I'm walking behind him and looking up in earnest, which so depicts our relationship and our careers.

Dad was 29 when he got his big break in films and that was after he started producing his own pub theatre. I had an early start aged nine with a role in [1990s TV series] *Twisted Tales*, then it wasn't until I finished film studies that I pursued my career. Like those early days for Dad, I faced lots of rejections. Then I thought, "If people don't want to put me in shit, I'll make my own stuff." That's how my ABC series *Lessons From the Grave* and Foxtel's *Let's Talk About* originated.

Now I get to work with Dad a lot, which I love. We are both passionate about storytelling, which comes from both of us being so interested in people. On set, Dad knows his place and when to speak up; he's very respectful of my direction.

Working in such a competitive industry, I've sometimes thought: "I can't do this anymore." Once after a trip to LA, I returned to Australia emotionally drained and spent months in my bedroom painting, listening to Eckhart Tolle and trying to find myself again. Dad sat me down and said, "Tildy, I know it's hard, but it's all about persistence." Pretty soon we were like a couple of old musos jamming new ideas.

If it weren't for Dad, I wouldn't be where I am today. He's my biggest fan, and when you have that in your life you can go a long way. That's not to say there aren't times when he annoys the shit out of me.

BRYAN: When Matilda was four, her hair matched her personality. She had these white blonde spiky locks that stuck up everywhere. It was quite the look. In many ways Matilda's hair reflected her attitude towards life – the hair was up, she was up.

She was the kid who always wanted to know what was going on with everyone. One time I flew to Africa for a Citroën commercial and brought Matilda, then six, with me. I was sitting in the Citroën one day and it was boiling, so I yelled to the director, "Has anyone got a fan?" He had everyone on set running around in circles. Next thing, Tildy came careening through the jungle, breathless and waving a battery-operated fan. Somehow she'd heard my call from the other side of the village. That was Tildy – incredibly observant and intuitive.

As she got a little older we saw another side to Tildy: this strong-willed, rogue independence. One morning, [actress wife] Rachel [Ward] and I were at the breakfast table when in walks Matilda with a suitcase, "I'm seven now," she announced, "I think I'll get my own apartment." The next minute, she opened the front door and off she tottered down the road. I followed her for a while until she stopped at an intersection. It was hilarious – she didn't know where the bloody hell she was going.

There have definitely been times when we have questioned Matilda's direction, particularly during those teen years. She often pushed the boundaries and struggled with her identity. Although she had a normal middle-class childhood, Matilda faced the extra challenge of growing up with two well-known parents. Although our relationship took a battering during this time, Matilda still loved her cuddles and I always told her I loved her.

I never imagined Matilda would follow in my footsteps, but I'm glad she did – she's very talented. In year 12 Matilda produced a short film for HSC English which was excellent, and more recently she's created more than 200 minutes of television which she's written, acted in and directed. Her storylines are raw and honest; that comes from an innate desire to learn about what makes people tick. She's also got her mother's creativity and adventurous spirit.

With Matilda, the child who was once full of wonder is now the adult who will continue to live a wonderful, creative and adventurous life. ■

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