

Waiting for Danica: My Sister, My Story

By Ana Dean

JoJo Publishing

RRP \$29.99

Danica wants to wear her moccasins to church.

She is 16.

It is Christmas Eve 1979.

Her mother says no.

An enormous argument erupts, as Danica's sisters Angela and Ana and their father stay silent.

They go to church without her.

When they get home she is gone.

They are not to know that this is the beginning of the end of life as they know it.

Branko and Jelka Kadic are hardworking practising Catholics and proud Croatians who are actively involved in their community.

They love their three Australian-born daughters.

They live in a nice house in North Altona in Melbourne.

When their sixteen-year-old daughter Danica disappears for four days they fear the worst.

Not knowing if she is alive or dead, they sit by the phone with their daughters Angela and Ana.

Then Danica calls, and comes back home....but not for long.

Thus begins every parent's worst nightmare: a cycle of coming and going and 'hanging' with her friends on the rough streets of Melbourne in the 1980s, when gangs such as the Sharpies, Lebanese Tigers and The Black Dragons ruled.

On the streets Danica finds the acceptance she craves. Making friends quickly, she becomes well-known to police, is in and out of court, rehabilitation centres and jail.

She drinks until she blacks out, pops prescription pills and cuts up. She lives by the rules of the street—never ask questions—a rule that allows people to reinvent themselves.

The police harass her. Knowing she often catches the very last train home drunk, they regularly seek her out, pick her up and throw her in the cells for no reason. One police officer puts a cigarette out on his hand, and blames Danica. Two officers pick her up, drive her to Swan Street Bridge, and throw her into the dark swirling waters late at night. For a moment, she feels better and considers succumbing to the dark waters.

This is Danica's sister's account of what happened to her sister Danica, and how it affected her and her parents. Her father drinks to drown his sorrows, and they all become consumed with anxiety and blame themselves.

She became our collective focus and nothing else mattered...her fun was our nightmare.

Why did a teenage girl from a good home go off the rails so badly? Perhaps the signs can be traced back to the bullying Danica experienced in at school, over her weight and her high intelligence.

A story of self destruction and horrific street and police violence...and a young girl's determination to survive. A must read for any family.

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