



# THE EVOLUTION OF A LIE

## Chapter 8

*The UOW Lie – Scott's story*

Louise Greentree 2016

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### *The UOW Lie – Scott's story.*

After Scott and Machelie settled in Wollongong Scott completed a double degree of Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Laws at the university there. He was then granted a scholarship to undertake research for a PhD. During this lengthy time of study, he obtained casual work in the UOW Commerce Faculty and Machelie took in homestay students (students who needed accommodation because they were far from home - mostly from overseas) and between them they managed to provide a home and necessities for their family of six children.

#### *First contact with Corinne Cortese:*

It was in 1999 that he was a seminar leader for the group of 15 or 16 students that included Corinne Cortese. He remembers her as a very bright student who could be relied upon to have prepared for the seminar (many students did not) and who could give the correct answer when asked. Frequently he would ask another student to address a seminar discussion point only to find that student woefully ill-prepared, and he would then look at Corinne and invite her to give the correct answer, which she could and did. Also, she submitted well-researched and well-presented assignments, earning her very high marks. On one occasion, Scott was so impressed by the depth of scholarship displayed in her assignment he showed it to his supervisor, who recommended full marks, something that Scott declined to do on the basis that nothing was perfect. His supervisor suggested that Scott ask Corinne whether she would like to take an Honours year.

#### *Scott gives Corinne her marked assignment in his office in November 1999:*

Shortly after that Scott was taking the seminar, but had left the class's marked assignments in his office. He told the students that he would return them in the next seminar. However, at the end of the seminar Corinne asked him whether she could come with him to his office to collect hers, as she was anxious to know her mark. He agreed and they went back to his office, he took her assignment out of the bundle and gave it to her and then told her about his supervisor's suggestion that she do an Honours year. He did not suggest that he be a supervisor because he would not have been sufficiently qualified to be one. He had only recently finished his own undergraduate degree and he did not have a Master's degree which he had hurdled to go straight to a research scholarship for a PhD. In any event, Corinne declined the offer, saying that she already had a job lined up for the next year with the giant accounting firm KPMG. They left the room together, he to go on his way home and she in another direction.

He was astonished when, 6 years later in 2008, he found out that in 2005, she claimed she was uncomfortable in his presence in his room and was backing around the room to escape from there as quickly as possible. He says she did not display any visible discomfort at the time and the conversation was confined to a compliment on her academic ability which he deemed outstanding as a preliminary to passing on his supervisor's offer of an Honours year.

#### *What happened three years later:*

And so, three years passed without any contact between them, until he encountered Corinne by chance among some 50 to 80 people at a UOW doctoral symposium. They had a brief conversation when he told her he was glad that she was

doing academic work – she was at Macquarie University by then. He was unaware that she was apparently perceiving him as making eye contact with her during lunch and the afternoon sessions. There was no further conversation with her.

*What happened a week after that:*

And so, a week passed without any contact between them. Imagine his surprise to find out in 2008 that he had been accused by her in 2005 of being the author of a string of emails from an anonymous Hotmail account sent a week after the doctoral symposium in 2002 asking her to run away with him, leaving ‘a loveless marriage’ and his six children. Apart from his lack of anything that could possibly be called a personal relationship with Corinne and his lack of desire to desert his wife and his children, all of whom he adored, he was a man of strong Christian principles (he had been a Christian missionary with YWAM, as was Machel, then they met in Hawaii) and it would take more than two isolated direct conversations within a period of three years with any woman no matter how pretty to cause him to act in such a fashion. In addition, he was a man of some experience of life, not a moonstruck teenager, and if he had desired a romantic relationship with Corinne he would not have approached it in such a fashion at all, let alone with confidence in any realistic prospect of success. He is an intelligent and not uncouth man.

The fact that she claimed the anonymous email account was called ‘*writetomeifyourlucky@hotmail.com*’ and that she actually opened an anonymous email from a web address like that, with its reference to Google searches and Nigerian scams, caused him to pause and wonder whether an intelligent woman as he knew Corinne to be would be even likely to do something so foolish.

Apparently, Corinne declined the offer and asked the anonymous correspondent to stop emailing her after she had engaged in several exchanges of emails, which ‘he’ did.

It was the unlikeliness of such behaviour by an intelligent woman that first sowed the seeds in my mind that Corinne Cortese’s complaint not only lacked substance but was fabricated.

*Scott completes his PhD and works at UOW:*

Scott completed his thesis and was awarded the degree of PhD in 2003. He was offered a position as a Lecturer in the Faculty of Commerce on a probationary casual contract.

*What happened two years after the last contact with Corinne Cortese:*

And so, another two years passed without contact between him and Corinne, although by then she had moved back to Wollongong (she told Ken Taylor that she wanted to return to be with her mother who was ill) and she was completing her PhD research at UOW with Mary Kaidonis and Helen Irvine as her supervisors for her thesis. She was due to complete it in time to obtain her degree and be ready to seek full-time employment as a lecturer at UOW in mid-2006.

Scott’s next encounter with her was at another UOW doctoral symposium in 2004. In another brief conversation, she talked to him about how she had been offered some tutoring but she did not feel confident that she would be able to do it, as it was outside her area of expertise. He reassured her that all she needed to do was to keep a page or so ahead of the students in the textbook to keep the lecturer in the subject happy. And that was the extent of that encounter.

Imagine his surprise to read in 2008 that in 2005 Corinne had complained about the conversation and attributed to him some entirely fictional statement ‘*You can please me anytime*’, cryptic in its lack of context, and also, she named a purported witness to

the statement, although that witness was never interviewed or even contacted for confirmation. He was also surprised to read that he had offered her some work over the Summer session, which he had not done. Her stated reason for refusing this fictitious offer of work, namely that she was uncomfortable working with him, he found bewildering for its lack of a rational and reasonable foundation.

*The story of Anika Rose (Lee Tran) who offered Scott a sexual relationship:*

It was in about 2003 or 2004 that he was approached by a female student whose name was Lee Tran, but who called herself Anika Rose, presumably after the African-American singer. This student wanted to have a sexual relationship with Scott, which he refused. During these troubling times for the faculty it was not uncommon for students to try to engage academic staff in such unwise relationships out of a wish to secure good marks, either from favouritism or the threat of a sexual harassment case. That could have been the case here, or even just a matter of straightforward love or lust on her part. Scott is a handsome man.

Whatever her motivation, his rejection of her overtures would be a more than adequate explanation for her decision to spread a false claim about the incident to Helen Irvine in the first instance in a casual conversation in 2005, followed by seeing the false claim taken up by Jane Edward and Mary Kaidonis. Her refusal to make a complaint at the time nor, except under the cloak of anonymity in 2005 (which was not acceptable to the university process), and again, only under the cloak of anonymity to Helen Irvine for the purposes of Helen's interview with Ken Taylor only makes sense if in fact she had no sustainable grounds for a complaint.

Apart from a disinclination to engage in extra-marital sex, Scott was just too busy to accept: he was working very hard in his job and helping Machel look after the needs of their family. One demand upon his time was the need to look after the other children while Machel ferried one or another of them to auditions and filming in a series of engagements making advertisements, episodes of the long-running TV 'soap' 'Home and Away, and such like.

Helen Irvine, in her interview with Ken Taylor, the investigator engaged by Phillip Gerber of the Sydney Anglican church Professional Standards Unit (PSU), told how Machel would come to Scott's office at 5.00pm to chivy him away to come home and help with the family. She describes this as something indicating Machel's jealousy of Scott but in fact it was simply because Scott was, and remains, a man with the disposition to immerse himself in his work to the exclusion of his other needs and obligations – a 'workaholic' in fact – and she needed his help at home with six children and the homestay students.

*Scott's application for permanent employment comes before the Academic Probations Committee (APC):*

On 5 November 2005, his application for a permanent appointment as a Lecturer in the Faculty came up for consideration by the Academic Probations Committee (APC). Remember, he was totally unaware of Corinne Cortese's complaints against him, made on 3 November 2005 in an interview with Robyn Weekes, the head of the UOW Equal Employment and Diversity Unit (EEDU) which was also attended by Mary Kaidonis, senior academic in the Faculty.

The document, called the Record of Interview was signed the next day, 4 November 2005 by all three women and, as specifically authorised by Corinne Cortese, it was passed on to John Patterson, the APC Chairman. Mary Kaidonis was a member of the Academic Probations Committee, and Robyn Weekes also attended the Committee deliberations.

The process was that the Committee would first consider, in the absence of the

applicant, anything it wanted to consider, and the applicant had to keep him or herself available to be called into the room for an interview.

*What was discussed in Scott's interview with the APC:*

Scott was called in for his interview. In that interview, only three things were raised with him to discuss.

First, he was asked about the papers he had written and which had been submitted for publication. He had submitted two for publication and given a paper at an international conference. The process for obtaining publication of academic papers is a lengthy one involving review by others who are experts in the field (known as a 'peer review') followed by consideration of the review and, if appropriate, acceptance or rejection of the paper for publication.

Second, he was asked about his work. He had been teaching 10 – 12 hours per week, that is, hours in front of a class, but needing many more hours each week which were taken up with research and preparation of course materials, writing lectures, assignment questions and exam papers, and carrying out administrative tasks, such as booking rooms for the subject, and arranging tutors in some of his subject classes that contained between 200 and 400 students, not to mention marking and recording results.

He talked about his additional work seeing 10-12 students each week as the Postgraduate Student Adviser. He was also the coordinator and scheduler for the Faculty's Seminar Program.

He talked about how he had been able to lower the fail rate among students in his classes, bringing it down from 25% to 8%, by carefully watching his students' progress and identifying those who needed more help, and providing specialized help to them.

There was no mention of any dissatisfaction with his work.

The third thing that was discussed he raised himself: earlier a group of overseas students who were upset by the stringent controls which he introduced to make cheating more difficult (if not impossible) had got up a petition complaining that he was 'racist.' These students sent copies of the petition all around the University, not just the Faculty. However, another group of Scott's students in the same classes as the original complainants got up another petition complaining that the signatories to the original petition did cheat and were also disruptive in class. Scott, they said, was always encouraging and always accessible to his students. The first petition came to naught.

Scott asked about the 'racist' petition, and was told by John Patterson that it was '*not before the Committee.*' That the whole incident reinforced Scott's contention that there was a culture of cheating in the Faculty and that he was taking what steps he could to address it and guard the reputation of the faculty should have been recognised, but was not. The loyalty of other students and their testimonial to Scott's outstanding work as a teacher was also something that should have been recognised, but was not,

*What was NOT discussed in Scott's interview by the APC:*

Nothing was said to him nor was there any information put before him to answer about Corinne Cortese's complaints as set out in the Record of Interview dated the day before on 4 November 2005, that had been prepared specifically for delivery to John Patterson and for consideration by the Committee. And yet, two of the signatories were sitting in the room with the Committee, Mary Kaidonis and Robyn Weekes. Nor did anyone raise for discussion any sexual harassment complaint by any anonymous 'Asian student' (which Corinne Cortese referred to in her interview with Ken Taylor), nor by any student of any ethnicity.

Mary Kaidonis said nothing at all to or about Scott in his presence, and nor did John Patterson insist that this occur.

Later, another member of the Committee (who wishes to remain unnamed) said that Mary Kaidonis had plenty to say, very strongly, against Scott Dobbs' application, and that she overbore the objections of more moderate people in the room. And yet she did not put these matters to him when she had the opportunity to do so, in denial of the principles of natural justice.

Scott says that he felt the interview went well, although he had anticipated 'trouble' when he saw the expression on Mary Kaidonis' face during the interview.

*Scott's application refused; his appeal refused; he leaves the University of Wollongong:*

None-the-less, he was stunned to receive a letter stating that he would not be offered a permanent position. This meant he would be out of a job in about 6 months' time when his contract expired. The stated reason was lack of published works despite the 2 papers already submitted for consideration for publication and an earlier paper presented at an overseas conference, all of which in the light of his very heavy teaching load and other activities for the benefit of students and staff, represented a reasonable amount of research for someone who was 'teaching active'. Also, to his certain knowledge another applicant at the time was granted a permanent position even though she also had not had any papers published.

He appealed the decision, but without success, and again, the decision to reject the appeal was taken in secret.

Again, nothing was disclosed to him about any sexual harassment complaints.

He went to see John Patterson and talked to him again about the issues of cheating and attempted bribery among the international students on the Wollongong campus as well as on the Dubai campus and soft marking, and the emails Scott had sent him as evidence of these issues. It was after Scott talked about these things that he was offered payment out of the balance of his contract and asked to leave immediately. It was during one of these conversations that John Patterson made a remark to the effect of '*people talking*' but he did not explain what he meant by this. Scott was still kept in the dark about the existence of Corinne Cortese's complaint and the way in which it had been used against him in secret to destroy his future academic career.

Scott was devastated by the refusal of his application for a permanent position at the university. Although he negotiated a reasonable financial compensation, overall, he was emotionally traumatized and too worried about how to support his family to do anything more with the evidence of corruption.

*In 2008 Scott learns of the Record of Interview and Corine Cortese's interview with Ken Taylor:*

However, when the existence of the Record of Interview signed by Corrine, Mary Kaidonis and Robyn Weekes was disclosed by Ken Taylor's Report and supporting statements and documents several things about his failure to obtain a permanent position became clear. But at first, he (and I) took Corinne Cortese's complaints at face value even though two things were apparent even then. The first was that none of the complaints constituted sexual harassment in breach of Federal or State legislation, firstly, because they failed the 'reasonable person' test, that is the legislation contains a requirement in the definition of sexual harassment that the actions and/or words complained of be such that a reasonable person would know that they were likely to be sexually harassing. Secondly, some of the complaints were clearly untruthful.

Both of us were puzzled that a sassy and confident, intelligent woman would stoop to making such a complaint, unless, as I postulated, Corinne Cortese was on a par with the women who complained about the Master of Ormond College in one of the most infamous cases of 'victim feminism' discussed by Helen Garner in her examination of

that case in her book *'The First Stone'*. I published on Louise's Page on the anglicanfuture website an examination of this complaint in my article *'The First Stone Revisited'* looking at striking similarities (now published on [www.churchdispute.com](http://www.churchdispute.com)).

However certain other aspects of the complaint struck me as I went on with my analysis of this case after obtaining copies of Ken Taylor's interview transcripts. A conversation with a colleague in the Faculty of Business at UTS who read *'The First Stone Revisited'* and who knew the people in the case as she had been a member of academic staff at UOW also opened a window on a new and, if correct, horrifying idea. This idea went to the very root of the honesty and integrity of several senior people in the Faculty and the University as well as Corinne Cortese herself, and the overall reputation of the Faculty and the University. The idea was this: that Corinne Cortese had consented to be 'recruited' by Mary Kaidonis, to make a sexual harassment complaint against Scott because, understandably, Anika Rose would not do so unless anonymously, because her complaint was itself a fabrication. Thus, Corinne Cortese and Mary Kaidonis fabricated the complaint that was presented to the APC behind Scott's back.

And this was done with the complicity of Robyn Weekes who found a way around letting Scott know about and answer the complaint by making it an 'informal complaint' to by-pass UOW protocols. Although there is no evidence that she knew Corinne Cortese had fabricated it, she should have applied the law and UOW protocols to an assessment of the validity of the complaint, if not common sense to an assessment of its credibility.

That Corinne Cortese's complaint was only cobbled together at the very last moment before Scott's interview is further evidence of the desperation of those involved because, although Mary Kaidonis had had plenty of time to investigate Scott in order to *'get something on him'* (as Corinne Cortese says to Ken Taylor), it is obvious that she could not find anything to stick. Anika Rose and her hysterical rejection of any attempt to get her to come forward, and her extraordinary explanation for her reluctance to do so (*'Scott would kill her if he knew she had complained'* Helen informed Ken Taylor, which both he and she greeted with deep scepticism), clearly would not do.

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***Postscript:***

In Appendix 1 People and Organisations that appear in the story there is a photo of Robyn Weekes at an event honoring her retirement where she is receiving a UOW T-shirt. It reminds me of the saying: "Been there, done that, got the T-shirt." Just how much of 'that' she did to enable Scott's application to be comprehensively destroyed is still a matter of conjecture, but it was enough.