

Staying in the job, Dad?

BY BRETT WILLIAMS

He is a police officer, a husband, a father, a university graduate, a union delegate, a Down syndrome advocate and a PTSD survivor. It all makes Nathan Paskett hugely valuable to policing, but can SAPOL hold on to him?





It was the tipping point

for Jamestown brevet sergeant Nathan Paskett. A missing-person search had ended with the discovery of a decomposing adult body in a ravine. It was up to police – who had detected the smell of death from more than 100 metres away – to undertake the recovery effort.

The missing man appeared to have fallen to his death at least two days earlier. As Paskett played his part in lifting the body out of the ravine, he could feel its skin pulling away in his gloved hands.

Despite the confronting nature of the scene, on that hot summer day in 2016, Paskett initially brushed it off, as cops do, with some police humour.

But, on the drive from Melrose back to base in his patrol car, he called his wife, Kylie, and to her exclaimed: “Something’s wrong!” Not immediately obvious, the unease he felt was the onset of PTSD, and dealing with it would take time and attention.

The impact of the body recovery was such that even Paskett, a tough, capable police officer, needed seven months to get his head back in the game.

“Everything you do in the police has a price,” he says. “Every stressful job, every death, every gruesome body, every death message.

“For all those things, you’ll pay a price. You just don’t necessarily know when you’ll pay it. Sometimes it’s all paid at once. Sometimes it’s not paid (until) years down the track. With the Melrose one (the body recovery), that just brought up everything.

“You start to have flashbacks of all your other jobs. At one stage, I was getting auditory hallucinations. I’d be in the kitchen thinking: ‘Oh, yeah, the radio’s going.’ You think you hear it, then you go: ‘Hang on a second, I haven’t been to work for two months. There’s no radio in here.’”

Paskett fought his way through that seven-month bout of PTSD and got back to work at the coalface. But, three years later, he would suffer a relapse. Death was again the trigger.

In one three-week period, each of three separate jobs he responded to involved a corpse. And one of those bodies had gone undiscovered for three months.

Then there were the traumatized family members of a 46-year-old manslaughter victim killed in Peterborough. Paskett was there with them as they grieved after receiving the death message.

A few days later, in May 2019, there was a fatal crane-versus-motorbike crash on Warnertown Road at Solomontown. Paskett and his partner were the second crew on the scene, at which the motorcyclist, 25, had died.

It was a lot of exposure to a lot of horror in a short period, and Paskett paid that high price he speaks of today. And what made it all worse were the same issues that still plague SA policing in 2025.

“The workload,” he says. “Being short-staffed at the time, and covering for four stations with the recall, I just had a relapse.”

Had Paskett pursued another course in life he might have wound up on the other side of PTSD, helping sufferers just like him. He had attained a bachelor’s degree in behavioural science from Flinders University and was on his way to a psychology (honours) degree.

With his outward calmness, attentive manner and soft American accent, he must have seemed a natural for the role of therapist.

But he gave up on the idea of a psych honours degree and took on a police career instead. The prospect of contributing to society as a police officer aligned with the idealist in him. His other option, to be a psychologist “listening to people with not real problems”, held much less appeal.

And despite the heights he might have reached as a clinician, a researcher or a consultant, Paskett on reflection regrets nothing about the path he chose.

“The bank accounts would have been nice (as a psychologist),” he says. “But 100 per cent it was the right decision (to take on policing).”

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Of course, Whyalla-born Paskett, 46, has spent almost all his 21 years in policing as a country cop. And Whyalla was indeed his first county post, where he served in general duties and Intel for seven years up to 2013.

He had gone there with his then-future wife, Kylie Furler, granddaughter of former assistant commissioner Bruce Furler. The two had been “inseparable” since they met in 2005, the same year in which Paskett graduated from the police academy and worked metro (Christies Beach).

“We were just thinking about a change one night and saw Whyalla in the *Police Gazette*,” he recalls. “I said: ‘Why don’t we just go up there?’ Kylie said: ‘Yeah,’ and we took that leap.

“We thought: ‘If it doesn’t work out, we can always do something else.’

But we’ve just fallen in love with the country and living there, and country policing.”

What the pair never did, however, was live the country life, or any other life, alone. Kylie had seven children from a previous marriage and Paskett had a son. With their parents, the eight children – two girls and six boys – made a family of 10.

Then, in 2007, came a surprise wedding at the Whyalla Yacht Club. Paskett and Kylie staged an engagement party, or so it appeared, until a celebrant emerged and married them.

No one, as far as Paskett recalls, ever tried to warn him against taking on a “stay-at-home mum with seven children”.

“If they did, I didn’t even hear it because I wouldn’t listen,” he says.

“I know what’s important in life, and I absolutely loved Kylie and the kids.”

And Kylie, 55, knows well what Paskett is to her children. “He’s Dad,” she says. “He’s been Dad for pretty much that whole time. And we don’t do the step kids (terminology). They’re *our* kids.”

Of course, those kids have gone on to create their own families, giving Paskett and Kylie 10 granddaughters and one grandson – the youngest five months; the eldest 13.

The big family the two now-grandparents created at the outset of *their* relationship was never a concern or burden to them. Indeed, Kylie became pregnant two more times.

The first pregnancy ended in the stillbirth of daughter Eden in 2005. The second produced Felix, born with Down syndrome in 2010.

1. Felix helps his dad out in the patrol car.
2. The Paskett parents with their son Daniel at his 2010 graduation.
3. Kylie, representing CFS, and Paskett at an Anzac dawn service.
4. At home as Felix plays chef.
5. Left muddy after his patrol car got bogged on a dry-weather road on the way to a house fire.



“He's helped Nathan sometimes on days when he comes home feeling pretty beaten up from work. So, he's certainly brought us lots of joy.”

His parents knew he would have the condition owing to a scan Kylie had had at the 19-week mark of her pregnancy. But they refused to consider the option to terminate, no matter how strong the advice to do exactly that. The prospect of a son with Down syndrome held no concern for them.

Says Kylie: “He's changed our lives for the better. He's helped Nathan sometimes on days when he comes home feeling pretty beaten up from work. So, he's certainly brought us lots of joy.”

Inspired by their son, Paskett and Kylie became, and remain, “heavily involved in advocacy for him and others”. They channel much of that advocacy through Foundation 21 and Celebrate T21, which are support organizations for families with Down syndrome children.

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In his police life, change came for Paskett with transfers to Hallett police station as OC in 2013 and Jamestown in 2015. And he speaks of these last 10 years as a struggle just as intense as the one his metro counterparts have faced with understaffing and extreme workloads.

In an incident earlier this year, a solo Paskett wound up holding a suspect at gunpoint while he waited 20 minutes for a back-up patrol. The suspect had triggered a car chase through Jamestown and driven directly at Paskett.

And, on the Barrier Highway at Ucolta last year, there was the alleged hit-run incident which left Brevet Sergeant Mark Woods injured and hospitalized. Paskett, as the relieving Peterborough sergeant at the time, had responsibility for not only Peterborough but also five neighbouring outstations.

He was at home and yet to start work when he received a call about the incident and responded immediately. At the scene of the alleged hit-run, and that of the arrest of the suspect, Paskett made the welfare of the first responders his ultimate priority.

“It was just making sure they were okay,” he says. “Making sure they had the support that they should have been getting for what had happened.”

Member welfare has long worried Paskett, chiefly because he considers SA policing to be “in absolute crisis at the moment”. He speaks of country police, particularly junior officers, “being thrown out (into the field) with not enough training, mentorship or on-road experience”.

“We're having constables relieve as sergeants,” he says. “So, not only are they managing a team of five, but they also have to manage the jobs, the recall and the assessments of other significant incidents.”

“And to put them in that position, with such little experience, training, and mentorship, is setting them up to fail.”

“Thankfully, they've been able to rise to the challenge, but you worry about that one time that they can't. And then what's going to happen to them? Are they going to be hung out to dry?”

And, as a former sufferer of PTSD, Paskett is deeply concerned about his workmates who hit the wall in the sense of their mental health. From his personal experience, he easily relates to their struggles.



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just been losing faith for years.”

6. An encounter with an emu. 7. At home where dog Envy always used to greet Paskett after a shift. 8. The Paskett trio not too concerned yet about the big question: “Staying in the job, Dad?”

For inadequate support, and for the crisis in which Paskett sees policing, he is critical of the SAPOL executive leadership team. He describes its performance as, in a sense, “a dereliction (of duty)”. And the yet-to-succeed district policing model is, to him, “the perfect example” of its failures.

“And we don’t see any self-reflection in the ELT,” he says. “I think there needs to be some more genuine self-reflection.

“If they have a workforce (of which) 75% feel that senior management doesn’t understand, they need to address why people feel that way. Instead of saying: ‘Oh, no, we do understand.’

“They can have their own thoughts and feelings about things, but the reality and the results are people just don’t feel understood.

“They need to have a bit of humility about what the situation actually is, compared to what they think it is, because people have just been losing faith for years.”

SAPOL has, in some sense, been lucky to hold on to the highly regarded

Paskett throughout the last 10 years. He has, after all, asked himself at times: “Why am I persisting in this job?”

That question was on his mind one day at a Krispy Kreme drive-through as he waited in his marked police car to order a coffee. He had worked a 13-hour day, just wanted to get home, and was about to take the drive from Adelaide back to Jamestown.

When he got to the window to pay for his coffee, there was no charge. In the line of drive-through customers, the one immediately before him had already paid for it.

And the surprise gesture came with an impact. It had Paskett shift his thinking, at least momentarily, away from resigning.

“Just that little act by a stranger was enough to sort of re-centre me,” he says, “and for me to think: ‘This (policing) is worth it. What we do is important, and people recognize that because they know it’s vital.’ ”

But the prospect of Paskett leaving his police career has come up at other times, in conversation with Kylie. She concedes that she has her moments when she thinks the worst of SAPOL and delights in the idea of her husband taking on another career. And Paskett does not rule it out.

“It (policing) absolutely takes a toll,” Kylie says. “If he’s been super busy, he walks in the door, and I can already see that he’s home physically but his mind’s not home.

“But, at the same time, I couldn’t see him doing anything else because he’s so passionate about his job. He’s good at it, and that’s not just me being the proud wife. It’s the feedback from other people as well. So, I don’t think he’ll do anything else.”

And Kylie should know. She knows her husband far too well not to know.

Like him, she too presents as calm, personable and open. And one striking parallel in their childhoods was religion. Kylie grew up in “a very strict Christian family”. Her parents served as missionaries in the Philippines.

In the Paskett household it was Mormonism. LA-born Alan Paskett came to Australia in 1973 to perform missionary work, and that was when he met his then-future wife, Edith.



“It does change you. It becomes ingrained in you. I wouldn’t say I would never leave the job. I would only leave if I was pushed to the point of leaving.”

Later, he went back to the US, where he worked as an aeroplane mechanic for United Airlines. But he returned to Australia and married Edith.

Then, in 1984, Alan took his wife and children – five-year-old Paskett and his two older sisters – to the US to settle in California.

“We were in a place called San Mateo, which is just outside San Francisco,” Paskett recalls. “My dad worked for United Airlines at the airport in San Francisco, and San Mateo’s a quasi-suburb just down from that.”

But the move to the US turned out not to be permanent. After 10 years, Paskett was 15, speaking with a US accent, and about to come home to Australia with his family.

“My dad just didn’t like the cities,” Paskett says. “He grew up in LA, so you can imagine the eight-lane highways and just concrete everywhere. He just loved Australia too much. And my dad loved the country life and so chose Whyalla (as the place to resettle).”

And, in Whyalla, Paskett continued and finished his schooling before going on to university to study behavioural science and psychology.

Clearly, with his life so full, Paskett has scarcely needed extra responsibilities. But, for the past 11 years, he has committed himself to the police labour movement. His innate “desire to help people in the job” drove him to take on the role of union delegate, representing Peterborough.

And, in March, he ran for but missed out on a position on the Police Association committee of management. Paskett wanted to be a strong influence for country members and figured he could use his experience to good effect.

“Because,” he says, “it’s a different world in (country) policing. It’s a different environment and, a lot of times, you probably can’t understand it

until you’re actually in it. I thought if I could bridge that gap between country and metro, I could achieve some good.”

Paskett did not emerge from his election loss disheartened. Indeed, he insists that he is “still committed to bridging that gap” through his service as a delegate.

He will, as always, have Kylie in his corner, giving him her support. No surprise that fear struck him when, recently, he thought he had lost her to a severe illness. Two brain aneurysms had come to light after an MRI, and the medical advice was to coil one of them as soon as possible.

Kylie took the advice, had the surgery and, as Paskett describes it, “so far, so good”. Her first-anniversary check-up showed the aneurysms to be stable.

But that moment of terror for Paskett came after the surgery. Kylie became stricken with severe headache, which created fear of a rupture. She came to Adelaide by helicopter and wound up in the RAH emergency department. There, she was taken to undergo another MRI, as was another patient.

Paskett, standing by in the waiting room, overheard a call on the hospital paging system.

“It was that someone was crashing in the section where they had taken Kylie,” he says. “It turned out it was the other person. Frightening stuff when you think you’ve lost your soulmate.”

While the likelihood might be that Paskett stays in the job, he recognizes what police work does to the individual.

“It does change you,” he says. “It becomes ingrained in you. I wouldn’t say I would never leave the job. I would only leave if I was pushed to the point of leaving. I never want to be put in that position.”

“But, if you’re pushed because of the nature of conditions and how the job’s changed from what it should be, then, yeah, (leaving) would be a real possibility.

“I could look at going back to the psychology side of things. That’s always in the back of my mind.” **PJ**