

July 1st 2025

As soon as I walked into the house this morning, I just knew I had to write this down. It was all I could think about the entire walk home. That weird phone call with Taki has turned everything I know upside down. And I already thought the world was upside down after FPV!

I feel like I need to step this out, starting from the start so I can make sense of it myself. But also, if anyone were to ever read this (ha – who do I think I am, Anne Frank?!) perhaps the backstory would at least provide some context.

Where was I again? Oh, yes. I got up early this morning to take the dogs out for a walk around the lake. Muffin and Socks are always eager to get out and I had decided to fit in a couple of phone calls with clients for work. I always feel on top of things if I can do some client follow up before I get into the office. That way, when I get in, I can have that chat with Pam about her weekend and not feel so hurried. Plus, when I'm walking, I can focus on the conversation and not get distracted by the string of emails that enter my inbox throughout the day. I'm good at my job, and I take pride in it too. Plus, I really love social work and fixing things for people. I like to refer to myself as the case management queen.

Taki was my third and final phone call this morning. Taki has been having trouble finding housing. After things had turned sour at home, she had been sleeping on her friend's couch while I had been supporting her with housing options. The rental market is tight in Benalla. Not quite as bad as other places nearby but it's still hard to get your foot in the door especially as an 18-year-old. Plus, Taki looks different to other Benalla locals which inevitably adds an extra challenge. Many people don't pronounce her name right and make assumptions about her based on her name and appearance. Of course, racism runs deep and is perverse like that. I desperately wanted to help Taki (like all my clients) but without clear pathways into appropriate housing it's nearly impossible to do. The youth refuge is full with no signs of movement in the near future and so I have been pushing the transitional housing team to get her a placement with no luck. So, when I made the call to Taki, it was more of a check in and to reluctantly update her with "no news". Which is never a nice conversation when someone's life is dependent on it.

When I started walking, I realised winter had well and truly set in, so the walk around the lake was meant to be a quick one. I had forgotten my gloves too and having my hand exposed as I held it to my ear was not ideal. The fog sat thick upon the lake, like a huge marshmallow cloud and it was hard to see much beyond 10 metres or so. I could feel the presence of the looming red gums, but I could barely see them. I thought to myself, if I had been looking on from the warmth of my house, the setting would be quite romantic. But I wasn't, and it just felt bitterly cold.

Taki had answered the phone call with an unusually upbeat 'hey!' This had initially put me off, but I continued to share the not so good news, carefully ending my spiel with 'we'll keep trying.' To my complete surprise, Taki said she didn't need my help anymore because she had secured a

two-bedroom rental all on her own. I didn't want to appear shocked, but she must've picked up on my surprise. Somehow, the standard 'apply now' button via real estate.com had worked! Of course, I was so happy for her, but it didn't make sense! I've helped so many people with housing locally and it was near impossible to get anything that quickly. Plus, unfortunately in my experience racial discrimination in housing was pervasive which meant an even longer wait for people like Taki. And yet, here was this young woman who had defied all odds and signed a tenancy in central Benalla without me advocating – or to be perfectly honest - doing anything!

Ever since Fluffy Penguin Virus had taken the world by a storm, things had felt different. We had all adjusted our lives to 'the new normal'. And whilst I had heard the whispers about the total wipeout of racism following recovery from FPV, it had seemed so unbelievable that I hadn't taken it seriously. But could this be just that?

When I hung up the phone call, my head was spinning. And to be honest it still kind of is. This all feels so completely illogical.. But then again, so too is racism. My knees are still itchy from where the fluffy penguin feathers once were and whilst I could do without the scratching, I am excited to imagine what Benalla will be like now, without racism.