



## My leaded life story by electronics enthusiast Kim McWaters

*By Kim McWaters, 16<sup>th</sup> Feb 2026*

I've been asked to write "the story of me" in the hope that others suffering from lead poisoning may gain some insight into their potential future or guidance to avoid doing inappropriate things. I don't want to be an inspiration for anyone. That implies they are already ill. What I want is to be a warning about the dangers of lead exposure.

I have learnt a lot out of necessity because it feels like there hasn't been much help from the health system but there has been great support from my wife, Sharon.

My story began 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 1954, born in a country town on Yorke Peninsula South Australia. That's the leg shaped peninsula just across from Adelaide. I often joke that if the "Yorkes" wasn't here then Australia wouldn't have a leg to stand on. It's a great place with normally mild weather, low crime, great food (if you cook it right), great people and great beaches (although not so much at the moment).

My father, a mechanic, and mother, bookkeeper, operated a country garage. We were one of the larger petrol retailers in our area with a 24/7 service station. **Leaded petrol was phased out in 2002 but was the only available petrol up until unleaded petrol was introduced in to Australia in 1985.**

By the age of 7 I could count money and operate a petrol pump so I did a lot of that.

It included often running the servo solo from age 10 while my father played golf on some Saturday afternoons. If customers wanted their tanks filled (**which was common before the self-serve petrol era of the 1970s**), then I had to keep my ears close to the fuel spouts listening for the petrol rising up the spout **as automatic shut-off nozzles that stopped pumping petrol when the vehicle's tank was full didn't exist then.** I got to enjoy the smell of leaded petrol.

I also helped with lead-based soldering of radiators etc. and always washed my hands in leaded petrol before entering the house, **which was on the site of the service station. That's just what people did in those days, not realizing that the organic lead in the petrol could be absorbed via the skin and 100% of the organic lead in the fumes, plus the carcinogens in petrol fumes themselves were inhaled and absorbed via the lungs.**

Up until age 10 I wanted to be a doctor, but my mind was changed. 1964 was a time of huge advancements in electronics with the rise of transistorised devices. My brother brought home a "Practical Electronics" magazine, and I was hooked on the amazing technology. So electronics became an obsessive hobby for me.

Components were expensive so I started stripping parts from old TV sets (with their leaded cathode ray tubes, leaded glass and lead solder) and other appliances to be able to build basic electronic devices for myself. Occasionally I electrocuted myself but I have high skin resistance so I survived.



During primary school we did "intelligence tests" and I was apparently very good at them, so much so that once, when I was 10, I only achieved an average score, alarm bells rang and the headmaster called my mother and I in to the office to find out what was wrong. I had been ill during the test. I didn't mention that I had been making necklace pendants from soft lead fishing sinkers because I didn't suspect a connection. After that it was easy to get a day off school because my temperature was always slightly elevated so all I had to do was say I felt ill to stay home. My mother and doctor soon realised I was faking it, so it was back to full time schooling.

At 11 I broke my right leg twice so spent nearly 7 months in plaster. The doctor was worried I might have chalky bones. **I later found out that lead replaces calcium in the bones (and teeth).** It soon became apparent that sound equipment was very rewarding because good music was wonderful, so I started focusing on audio electronics. Some years later I was accused of making sound better than the original recordings.

I spent most of my time playing with electronics and studying new devices and technologies as they developed and realised that electronics was only limited by imagination. By the time I completed high school I had been building stereo amplifiers and speakers, even designing some circuits for myself.

I had also started smoking and broke my right hand 5 weeks before my final exams, the night I was starting my swatvac (**study vacation from school just prior to the end of high school exams**). I still managed university entrance with a full scholarship and attended the University of Adelaide studying electrical engineering. Much to my father's delight.

I had some health issues during my first year with glandular fever, bronchitis and concussion all coinciding with exams, so I quit university and worked a desk job for a car manufacturer for 14 months before returning to university. During my second try I realised a degree would have resulted in a desk job and I didn't want that so I quit to do something more hands-on.

My father had given me a used car while I was working so I made many modifications to it to enhance speed (**all cars ran on leaded petrol at this time as it was only from 1986 that all new cars had to run on unleaded petrol**) and handling and especially the sound system. I fitted 8 speakers and loved Crocodile Rock by Elton John because my seat vibrated with the bass.

So, I was back to working again now for my parents as showroom/spare parts guy for almost a year until an argument with my father over my "hippy" attire made me quit and get a job repairing TVs etc. at the local electrical appliance store. I was building a lot of amps and speakers and PA (public address) equipment. So, I had a reputation which got me the job. Later I built an entire PA system for a popular local band who also used it to record an album for sale. After over 6 years I tried to quit smoking but quit my job instead (in anger) and started my own business doing the same thing. That was in 1982 and my second son now runs it. I had a lot of sound equipment and provided PA systems for many school concerts and events like Christmas Carols, mostly for free. At one point my home "stereo" was 12 speakers and 6 channels of amplification and a special box of my own design to give 3D sound. Quadrophonic with a vertical component as well. "Time" and "Money" from Dark Side



of the Moon sounded amazing.

I also designed a cereal grain moisture meter and gained a "provisional specification" patent for my "Novel technique for measuring the moisture content of cereal grain" and subsequently built them myself (which required some lead tin soldering) and sold several thousand of them. Some farmers still prefer my meters to the modern digital devices.

Later I developed and built touch volume control and fully electronic switching with no mechanical contacts 6 months before it was commercially available, but I had waited 18 months for parts from America to be able to do it. That amplifier was extremely advanced with ultra-low distortion, huge dynamic range and ultra-low noise. I still have the speakers I built for that system. They are the size of refrigerators and weigh around 80 kgs each and I use them every day.

It became apparent that electronics alone wouldn't provide an adequate income in a small town, so I began repairing other appliances as well, fridges, washing machines etc. My qualifications now included "Tradesman Radio", "Refrigeration Mechanic" and "Electrician".

My family and work meant that I had little time for my sound system hobby, and my afterhours were now taken up by work so my exposure to lead solder and other toxics was still high. Work took up around 80 hours each week. I joined a gym to maintain my strength for the heavy work I did and was repping over 600 pound on the leg press.

Around 30 years ago (1996) I was concerned by lead toxicity, so my doctor took blood for testing. The lead level was 5 micrograms per decilitre (5 ug/dL) but he told me since it was below 10 ug/dL I shouldn't worry about it, so I didn't.

I began to suffer from very strong pain which was first diagnosed as degenerative disc disease (DDD) and widespread psoriasis. The latter was mostly triggered by food sensitivities I had developed. Then in 2005, our youngest son, at 17, was killed while a passenger in a car crash. It was very traumatic for Sharon and I.

He was a fantastic kid. Very bright and capable. He set school records in middle- and long-distance running, joined an Adelaide athletics club (lots of travelling) and won most points for his age group several years. Was ranked highest in the state in age pole vault and state champion triple jumper. Coaches wanted him to compete at the 2012 Olympics. Honors in classical piano and received a full scholarship to one of Adelaide's top colleges on his own merit. Also honours in state-based school maths and science tests. Received the Arts Award for Drama for two years at the college where a boarder's garden now carries his name. The sports day trophy at his primary school is now also named in his honour and also the most points trophy for his age group at the sports club.

I miss him.

The subsequent psychological effects gave rise to type 2 diabetes and depression. Constant pain became a problem, so I was prescribed various opioids for a few years. Codeine, Tramadol, Tapentadol, Endone and others. Between opioids and lead poisoning my gut started playing up so Movicol became and continues to be a nightly ritual.

I was diagnosed with diffuse idiopathic skeletal hypertrophy "DISH" disease after x-rays in



2010. Then in 2011, after hitting my thumb with a hammer, developed fungal septic shock after just 4 days. I hadn't been looking after myself, so the diabetes suppressed my immune system. The doctor was sure I would die so he shipped me to the [Royal Adelaide Hospital](#) (RAH) in a plane. Well, much to his surprise, I survived but developed functional myoclonus which, several years later forced me to retire early and my immune system has still not fully recovered. Things were going downhill.

I started seeing a nutritionist who was very helpful and after a while recommended a very good doctor who did some unconventional pain therapy. The doctor thought I might have chronic lead poisoning so arranged a hair [trace mineral](#) analysis (HTMA). I remember the out-of-the-blue mid-Thursday afternoon phone call well. "You've got an appointment 10:30 tomorrow morning" she announced. I asked if the results were back which she confirmed. It showed the second highest lead level she had ever seen, along with [high](#) Aluminium, Antimony, Arsenic, Cadmium and Uranium. The lead in solder is never pure. I began IV DMSA (intravenous Dimercapto succinic acid) chelation on the spot which continued for months. Then after a few months break did a second hair analysis. The levels had increased. My overall toxicity was now over 100% [of the normal HTMA toxic metal levels for a "representative" sample of the population](#). Oh my God, am I going to die? No, I was just going to get sicker. IV chelation started again.

I've had many IV and oral chelations since then and have another booked for late February this year (2026). There is a very good [chelation clinic](#) in Belair near Adelaide. It was expensive, but had to be done and involved over 6 hours of travel each time.

During this time I had eliminated all environmental and minimised occupational exposure [to lead](#) so the problem was now entirely due to my existing body [lead](#) burden.

2012, I was diagnosed with a hiatus hernia and reflux disease, then in 2013 it was heart disease. In 2015 it was diverticulitis and chronic constipation. I also joined a drug trial for a METAP2 inhibitor that year [because ???](#). It felt so good that I got back into my gym and trained for a 12km City-Bay fun run but only as a walk. I was doing so well that I pushed the last 500m too hard and collapsed across the finish line. I beat my best training time by nearly 2 minutes at 1hr 34min 23 sec. I was walking past joggers. Pretty good for a 60yo but spent 4 days in a hospital cardio ward. So began my heart problems.

2016 I developed hypothyroidism and grew my first kidney stone which was "blown up" by ultrasound and mostly removed. The last part came out in an Adelaide Airport toilet several weeks later. The surgeon was a bit rough and damaged my kidney. That was the worst pain I have ever had. So, when another stone developed several years later, I took advice from my favourite doctor and started taking well over 300mg of Vit B6 each day to dissolve it. This only works on some stones. I also had lemon every day and after 30 days another scan showed it was gone. The doctor didn't tell me to stop the Vit B6 and I didn't want another stone so I kept taking it.

2017 brought ocular hypertension and laser work to fix it. Oh, and I broke my foot.

2018 saw my abdominal myoclonus flare up so bad that after 5 days of spasticity in hospital, I



was told to make some changes in my life. We shut down our second business, and I retired early now with Valium on hand for the flare ups. Later I had a candida overgrowth in my gut, lost 7kg in 12 days and was hospitalised for 2 weeks. Spent time taking Nilstat and Fungilin after that.

2019 was interesting. During our longest ever holiday, 5 weeks in England and Europe, I had 2 cardiac events which I didn't recognise at the time. One in the middle of upstairs Palace of Versailles and the other in a Chinese airport on our journey home. I went back to the cardiologist I had seen before and he said "Kim, there's nothing wrong with you. What do you want to do?". My reply "With my family history, I'd rather be safe than sorry" so he booked me for an angiogram that week.

There I was, Sharon in the waiting room and me floating around the ceiling in the theatre. I was so high on fentanyl and other stuff. I heard the cardio ask for a 16 by 3.5 so I knew I was getting a stent but didn't care. When they finished, two nurses went to tell Sharon, and she freaked out "He only came in for a checkup". Turns out I was 95% blocked on the left and 65% blocked on the first branch on the right but he didn't do the right because it was too difficult. It was left for later.

I was rather upset next morning when he walked into my room and the first thing he said was "Well, Kim you weren't faking it after all." Was that a comment on his impression of me, or his competence? I also had numerous micro blockages so chest pain would persist and began taking numerous cardio medications.

7 weeks later a different cardiologist did that right stent.

2020 brought a kidney cyst, enlarged prostate (BPH), micro eye aneurisms, central sleep apnoea (CSA) and Cheyne Stokes respiration (CSR), spinal stenosis with nerve root compression at multiple levels and peripheral neuropathy. Wasn't a good year.

I discovered I had bradycardia in 2022 with pulse rate dropping into the 30s occasionally and had my left hip and knee replaced. The peripheral neuropathy was now severe. The hip and knee jobs didn't work out for me so I won't ever have the other side done, ever!

2023 was another terrible year. Pain was very high and there were other psychological problems, so I lost it. I had planned for a while how I would suicide and had things in place. Something non-violent and painless. I had been stockpiling opioids and antidepressants for some time. A police officer found me before I had ingested enough and I was institutionalised for several weeks. The "other psychological problems" were removed from our house, so I returned home. That was almost 3 years ago now and I still fight with my demons every day but those close to me keep me going.

2024 saw surgery to remove the last of my top teeth. Reflux disease had caused that. **Though my lead exposure probably didn't help.**

2025 came with cataracts (**which can be caused by lead poisoning**), enlarged right ventricle and another candida overgrowth now with a gastric bleed.

That brings me to now. I had my third heart stent Jan 19<sup>th</sup> this year (**2026**). Once again "nothing was wrong with me" when I was 80% blocked on the right and now also have severe



coronary artery calcification.

Well, here I am sitting at my desk, freaking out, worried about everything and searching for answers. My GP told me he "I don't know how to treat you" and my cardio said, "you're the most complicated patient I've had in a long time". It feels like doctors can't treat everything, so they don't treat anything. I'm beginning to direct my doctors to do what I need. I've had to research and learn a lot about this infirmity. Last year my best friend, of 57 years, and I joked that we had more lives than cats because we have each dodged a lot of bullets. It appears I am "luckier" than him, I guess, because he died Jan 1<sup>st</sup> 2026.

RIP Garry.

I try very hard to look like there's nothing wrong with me, that's just my pride taking control. Sometimes I wonder if death is my only avenue for healing. I certainly don't want to live to a "ripe old age" because for me it would be a "rotten old age".

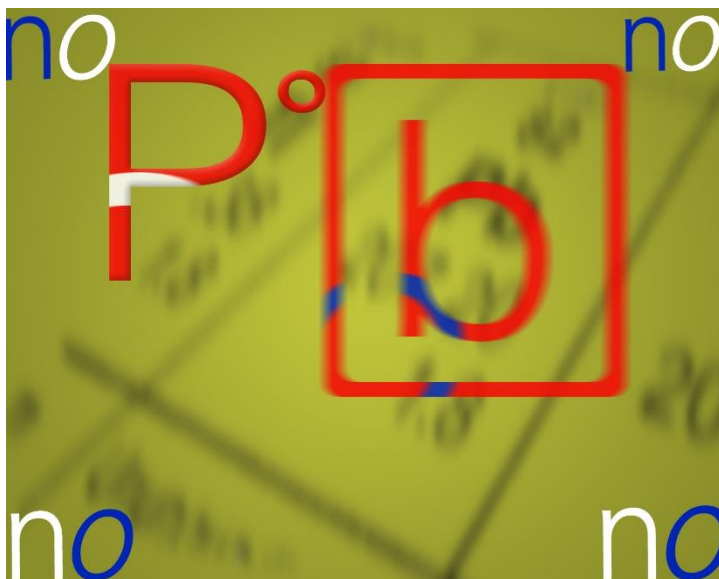
There are many things I have omitted in this story, I've tried to keep it concise. I am currently taking around 50 medications every day. Even with government support it still amounts to over \$700 per month. Much of my meds are not covered by the PBS ([Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme](#)). I'm now on ketamine, CBD oil and THC for pain but it's losing its efficacy. Don't know where to next. I'm not looking forward to it.

I was exposed to lead for around 53 years, now I take precautions. Kim

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## Make electronics lead-free globally, to protect workers and kids

*In the first year that Volcano Art Prize (VAP) was run by The LEAD Group – 2012 - this prize-winning graphic and message was entered by:*



**Artist:** Dennis Leight

**Title:** Pb - No Lead Squared.

**Lead-Safety Message:** Making electronics lead-free globally, will protect electronics workers, e-waste recyclers (including many child-labourers in Africa and Asia) and the environment from lead.

**URL:**

<https://volcanoartprize.com/portfolio-item/pb/>