



Mover of mountains

Author Gabriella Kelly-Davies on her biography of pain pioneer Dr Michael Cousins

Gabriella Kelly-Davies at her Mosman home. Picture: John Appleyard

At the beginning of National Pain Week, the national advocacy body PainAustralia launched my biography of Dr Michael Cousins AO, a trailblazing Australian pain medicine pioneer from Sydney's north shore.

Breaking Through the Pain Barrier: The Extraordinary Life of Dr Michael J. Cousins, explores the way historic events and larger forces shaped Dr Cousins and how he in turn shaped international pain research, treatment and policy.

The biography also highlights the personality traits that enabled Dr Cousins to overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges and accept countless personal sacrifices in pursuit of his quest.

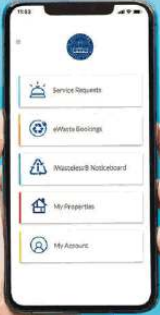




One Saturday night in 1964 as a junior doctor, Michael Cousins saw two critically burned boys limp into a Sydney hospital begging for help. He saved their lives but struggled to reduce their suffering because few pain treatments existed back then. That weekend Michael Cousins dedicated his life to reducing suffering by improving the treatment of pain.

In 1990, Dr Cousins set up the pain centre at Royal North Shore Hospital. From humble beginnings, his centre rose to international fame and pain centres around the world modelled their facilities on his innovative blueprint. In 2014, the hospital named it 'The Michael J. Cousins Pain Management and Research Centre'.

But it wasn't all plain sailing. At first, 'Prof' as colleagues and patients fondly called him, 'made do' with

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whatever space he could squeeze from the hospital's administrators — the pain clinic occupied the leaky veranda of an old building. He recalls the struggle to secure enough funding meant that at the beginning the pain centre was understaffed and team members felt "continually beleaguered", as though they "worked on a half-empty tank — sometimes even an empty tank".

Despite the somewhat ramshackle accommodation and understaffing, the mood at the pain centre was optimistic.

"Everyone knew they were pioneers in the nascent field of pain medicine," Dr Cousins says.

Over the years, Dr Cousins' negotiating skills became legendary as he gently guided government bureaucrats and hospital administrators into decisions they hadn't realised they needed to make. And those decisions usually involved funding pain management services for the one in five Australians who live with chronic pain.

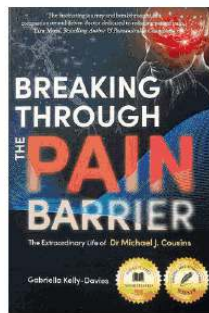
Michael Cousins gave me my life back in 2005 after two decades of crippling migraines. On my 24th birthday, some thugs pushed me off my bicycle from their speeding car. The force of impact was so strong it propelled me into the air, and I landed on my head before rolling headfirst down the road. That day heralded the onset of a life of daily migraines.

What followed was over a decade of Dr Cousins trying every possible treatment to manage my migraines. I sensed his determination in the way he persevered, even when my migraines didn't respond to treatment. When we finally had a small breakthrough, I felt as if he had given me my life back.

In *Breaking Through the Pain Barrier* my story and the stories of some of Dr Cousins' many patients from across Sydney's north shore and eastern suburbs



Thugs pushed me off my bicycle from their car ... it heralded the onset of daily migraines

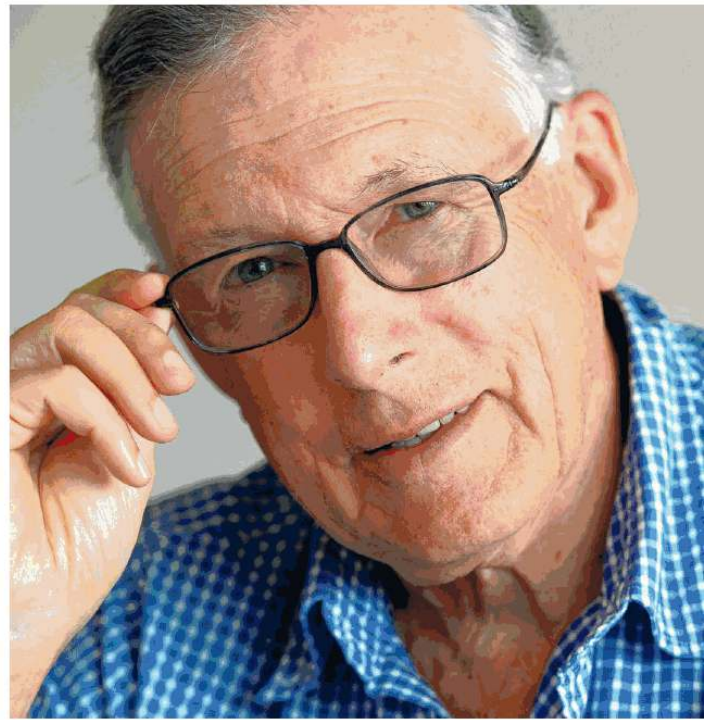


are woven into the narrative to show how his progressive treatment approaches improved our lives.

As Michael Cousins' patient, I risked writing a hagiography, a biography that idealises its subject. This risk was uppermost in my mind every day. I was determined that after reading the book, no-one would accuse me of being under Michael's spell. I'll leave it to you to decide whether I've achieved my aim.

It was Michael Cousins' perseverance, combined with his compassion and kindness, that inspired me to write his biography. I also wanted to show how an individual with vision, determination and courage can move mountains to improve the human condition despite the personal toll, roadblocks and crushing disappointments along the way.

Michael Cousins and his wife Michele generously opened their home to me every Wednesday afternoon for months on end until Covid-19 hit, and we convened using Facetime. Our weekly interviews felt like we were reliving the memoir Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom. Michael patiently answered my hundreds of questions and provided me with access to his private archives and photo albums. He also opened doors to the pain world, introducing me to people across the globe who, like him, had shaped pain management as we know it today.




Professor Michael Cousins pictured in 2014. Inset: *Breaking Through the Pain Barrier: The Extraordinary Life of Dr Michael Cousins*, by author Gabriella Kelly-Davies, a chronic pain sufferer herself. Picture: John Appleyard

For several decades, Michael Cousins led the pain world. Through nearly 50 years of research, he advanced pain treatments such as epidural analgesia and spinal cord stimulation to relieve lower back pain. He designed Australia's National Pain Strategy that several countries replicated, and he was the driving force behind the creation of PainAustralia, which developed and is implementing the National Pain Strategy's action plan.


Still, Michael Cousins maintains that to ensure all Australians who live with chronic pain can access specialist pain services, federal and state governments must fund the rollout of multidisciplinary pain management across the country. "We need a sustainable funding model," he says, his four-decade long battle cry.

A passionate advocate for people living with chronic pain, Michael Cousins tirelessly crusaded to destigmatise the condition. Through

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heart mind life



School Readiness Information Evening

Tuesday 10 August 5pm ONLINE

How do you know if your pre-schooler is ready to start school in 2022?

At this information seminar, you will discover some of the school readiness indicators that point to whether or not your child is prepared for Kindergarten.

Bookings essential:

www.sacs.nsw.edu.au/events/school-readiness-for-kindy

E: enrolments@sacs.nsw.edu.au

P: 02 9286 9664

Sydney Square, Sydney | www.sacs.nsw.edu.au

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his relentless advocacy he also persuaded governments and organisations internationally to accept access to pain management as a fundamental human right.

In the 1670s Sir Isaac Newton wrote in a letter to his friend Robert Hooke, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants".

While writing the biography I often thought about this statement. I thought that by examining the life of a giant like Michael Cousins, I might inspire people who were searching for their own way of making a difference in the world to forge ahead despite professional jealousy, inertia and immense personal sacrifice.

I hope Breaking Through the Pain Barrier will inspire anyone who longs to bring about change. I also hope it will intrigue those curious about reaching the heights of human endeavour. There are many books written about climbers of the tallest peaks, but there is also much to learn from studying those who have climbed moun-

tains of inertia and changed societal and cultural responses to how our own bodies are treated by fellow human beings.

Michael Cousins' biography shows how one person with vision, compassion, indefatigable energy and an almost superhuman determination can move mountains to bring about reform that benefits millions of people.

I hope the book inspires the 3.24 million Australians living with chronic pain as they hear the stories of people like them who Michael Cousins helped. He restored their hope and, in many cases, saved their life after decades of living in intolerable pain.

I'm donating a portion of the proceeds from book sales to pain research to enable Australia's world-class researchers to continue Dr Cousins' groundbreaking work. I'm also hoping the book will provide a platform for me to continue his advocacy for people living with pain. While governments must provide more funding for pain management servi-



Gabriella Kelly-Davies suffered years of migraines and was helped by Dr Michael J Cousins. Picture: John Appleyard

ces, all of us can play a part in reducing the stigma and social isolation of chronic pain by embracing compassion, empathy and acceptance of one another.

In closing, it's probably best to let one of Michael Cousins' patients articulate his legacy because his lifelong quest was to reduce their suffering by improving the treatment of pain.

Symantha Liu's most vivid memory of Dr Cousins involves a hospital ward and a tuxedo. She'd been suffer-

ing with a cluster migraine for days when the pain became unbearable. Dr Cousins admitted her to Royal North Shore Hospital for care and observation, and at one point, the pain was so bad she begged the nursing staff to "just knock me out". Symantha was vomiting, dehydrated and sobbing from the pain.

"The migraine was impacting my vision, and I'd never felt so vulnerable," she said. "I thought death would be better."

A little while later, Symantha felt a gentle hand on her shoulder and heard a soft voice say: "Sam, it's me, Michael Cousins".

Through her tearstained eyes and blotchy vision, she struggled to make him out. Slowly a man wearing a dashing dinner jacket and with dapper silver hair came into view. He was almost luminous, and in her state one thought came to mind.

"Am I dead, Michael? Is it really you?"

Dr Cousins giggled quietly and told Symantha he was still beside her and not to worry. She asked him why the hospital had disturbed him, if he had somewhere important to be.

"Whenever I feel one of my patients has reached a migraine crisis, I can only feel better if I lay eyes on them for my own peace of mind," he said.

Symantha says this is the measure of the man. "For me, forever, a saint on earth."

Breaking Through the Pain Barrier is available in bookstores, libraries and from hawkeyebooks.com.au



ADVERTISING FEATURE

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Find a tutor online

It's no secret that schooling this year has been severely disrupted and top-notch online tutors have never been as sought after as they are in 2020.

But finding experienced and qualified tutors who click with your child can seem a daunting and time-consuming process.

Juggle Street has recently launched an update to their popular babysitting platform that allows parents to find the best tutor for their child from the thousands of qualified tutors registered on the platform.

"We're delighted with the French tutor we found for my daughter on Juggle Street" says

Eastern Suburbs resident, Georgie.

"She prepares interesting and engaging lessons each week, which my daughter looks forward to."

Juggle Street founder David James, "Juggle Street is about building supportive community networks. We hope this release can help ease some of the stress on parents, help kids get back on track with their schoolwork and provide an avenue for out-of-work educators to find some income."

To find a suitable tutor for your child, visit jugglestreet.com.au



Woollahra Council

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Notice of Development Decisions Issued by Council cont'd

DA271/2020 30-32 Newcastle Street ROSE BAY

The demolition of the existing structures and the construction of a seniors housing development containing 10 self contained seniors dwellings, with one affordable dwelling, landscaping and site works, and basement parking for 10 vehicles

DA470/2020 1 Belah Avenue VAUCLUSE

Demolition of the existing dwelling and construction of a new dwelling house

DA539/2020 1 Bell Street VAUCLUSE

Alterations and additions to an existing residential flat building including new rear balconies and ground floor veranda; new roof terrace; new entrance at ground floor and changes to windows

DA72/2021 10 Burrabirra Avenue VAUCLUSE

Alterations and additions to a new dwelling approved under a Complying Development Certificate, but not yet constructed

DA496/2020 40A Fitzwilliam Road VAUCLUSE

Extensive alterations and additions, essentially comprising the construction of a new dwelling

Approvals – s.4.55 Modification Applications

DA11/2019/8 548 New South Head Road DOUBLE BAY (The former Woollahra Library - St Brigid's)

Internal and external modifications to the approved community art gallery including changes to the New South Head Road entry with new LCD screen signage

DA468/2018/3 1 St Mervyns Avenue POINT PIPER

Internal and external modifications to the approved residential flat building

DA514/2019/2 78 Moncur Street WOOLLAHRA

Internal and external modifications to the approved development

DA254/2020/3 33 Rush Street WOOLLAHRA

Deletion of Condition C.11
The reasons for decision and how community views were taken into account in making the decision is contained in the relevant Notice of Determination. Notices of determination are publicly accessible on Council's website. Go to DA Tracking from our home page.

CRAIG SWIFT-MCNAIR COUNCIL CHAMBERS GENERAL MANAGER DOUBLE BAY NSW 2028
4 August 2021

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