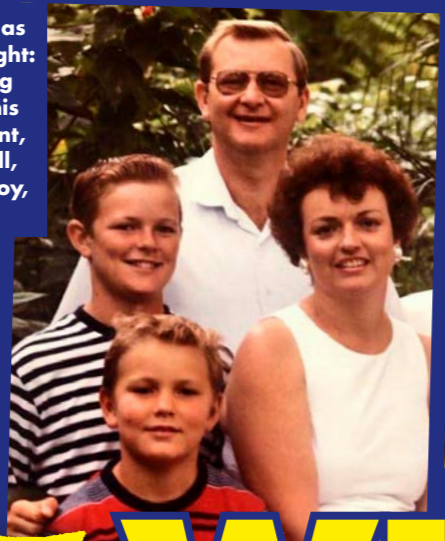




Russell hid his fragile state from his wife, Joy, and their children.



Left: Travis as an adult. Right: as a young boy with his brother Trent, dad Russell, and mum Joy, in 1989.



A QUEENSLAND FATHER WAS DRIVEN TO THE BRINK AFTER A FAMILY TRAGEDY

When local radio host Travis Winks answered

his phone, he never expected the shocking news he was about to receive. His family's recent run of bad luck was about to get significantly worse. First, Travis' brother Trent had suffered a medication overdose. Next, his sister was arrested. Now, his dad, Russell, a retired accountant, had just been shot dead by police.

The series of tragedies are enough to make any person break, but Travis held strong. Instead, he channelled his grief into a book about his family's experience.

Titled *Shattered: 67 Days to a Family's Self-Destruction*,

Travis hopes the book will help others struggling with mental illness. "I've seen so much tragedy and heartbreak," Travis, 40, tells New Idea. "Either I could fight or fold like an origami. I chose to fight, with my wife, Amanda, by my side."

The series of unfortunate events began when Trent nearly died after suffering an overdose. Then, his sister Amy was remanded in custody following an incident with her partner. Family patriarch Russell had been worried sick about his children.

"I had no idea he was as vulnerable as he was," says Travis, a dad-of-five. "I spoke to him many times, but he never said anything."

"He led us to believe he was so good – he masked his fragile state of mind."

"DAD WOULDN'T HURT A FLY... HE WAS A TRUE-BLUE AUSSIE"

Two months later, Travis says he got a phone call from a neighbour who lived by Russell, 65, and his mum, Joy, 68, to tell him that his dad had died.

Further details revealed he was killed after the police shot him on their family property in the Queensland town of Freestone.

"I fell to my knees when I heard that Dad had passed away from a gunshot wound

inflicted by the police," Travis tells New Idea. "My father wouldn't hurt a fly – he was such a gentle soul and I couldn't comprehend how that was possible."

Travis and Amanda raced from their home in Wollongong, NSW, to console his mum, Joy.

There, he learnt that Russell had told Joy that he wanted to "bash his head against a tree and bleed to death".

He felt hopeless to the struggles Trent and Amy were experiencing. Russell was also awaiting results to confirm if he had bowel cancer.

Joy told Travis that an agitated Russell had gone into the bush behind their property carrying a rifle. She called Triple Zero after she heard gun shots being fired.

The police and Russell

were in a stand-off for two hours, with police officers telling Russell to drop his rifle he kept waving around in the air, while yelling at the officers to shoot him and using abusive language.

Finding no solution, police had decided to do a tactical retreat, when Russell had suddenly walked out from the gully towards one of the police cars and pointed his rifle at an officer.

The officer pulled out his taser first, but then drew his pistol after he realised it would be ineffective, as would a pepper spray, due to the distance between them.

Russell was shot by the police officer acting in the course of his duties.

"I don't hate those guys for doing that ... they did what they had to do," says Travis.

"Dad pressed the green button that afternoon, he got the ball rolling, and he wanted to end his life."

Travis says his heart goes out to his mum, who has blamed herself. She called the police to save Russell because she thought he was suicidal.

Travis is also haunted thinking about the circumstances that must have brought his kind, caring father to suffer so much that he wanted to end his life. He wonders if he could've done something to save his dad, but knows none of them is at fault.

"He was a true-blue Aussie, a top bloke, funny and firm," says Travis, remembering his dad.

Tragically, two years after Russell's death, Trent, 42, took his own life.

"Every family has a story," Travis says. "But I hope no other family goes through this pain."

By Astha Gupta

• If you or anyone you know is struggling to cope, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or visit lifeline.org.au.

WHY DAD BEGGED COPS TO SHOOT HIM