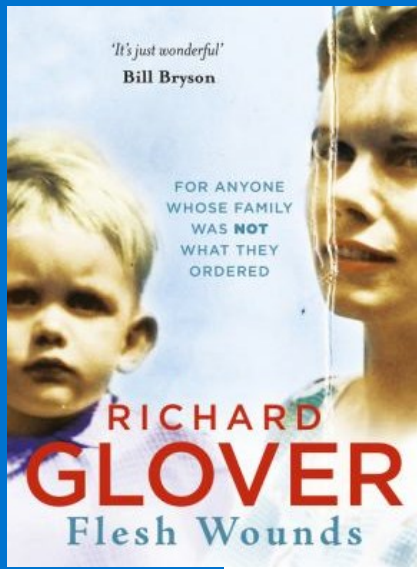


# Flesh Wounds



## Author Background

### Richard Glover

**Born:** Australia, 1958

**Raised:** Papua New Guinea and Canberra

**Lives:** Sydney

Richard Glover is an author, ABC Sydney broadcaster and *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist.

Prior to joining the ABC in 1996 as a radio broadcaster, Glover's career in print journalism included stints working as the *Sydney Morning Herald's* news editor, arts editor and European correspondent. Glover's weekly humour column has continued to appear in the *Sydney Morning Herald* since 1985.

In 2009, Glover published *The Mud House — Four Friends, One Block of Land, No Power Tools* which describes the experience of building a mud house in the bush with fellow journalist and broadcaster Philip Clark and their respective partners. Glover's other publications include a humorous dictionary, books for children and collections of his newspaper columns. Glover has been shortlisted three times for a Walkley Award for journalism.

In December 2011, Glover interviewed author and journalist Peter Fitzsimons for an exhausting 24 hours on ABC radio. The pair achieved a Guinness world record for the world's longest radio interview.

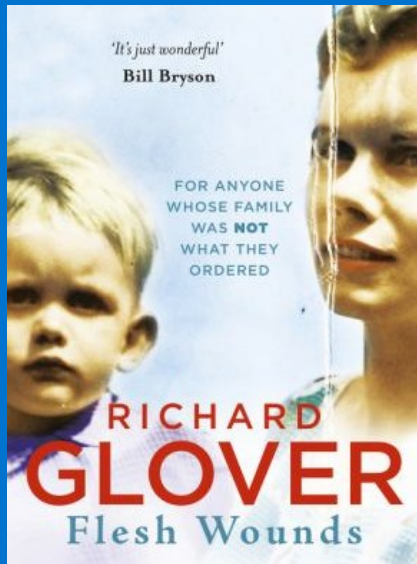
Glover is the partner of playwright and screenwriter Debra Oswald. They have two sons. Glover has credited Oswald's role in encouraging him to write *Flesh Wounds*:

*"She's been an important influence. It fits the theme of finding the love elsewhere. Parents aren't the end of the story. Uncles, children, mentors, partners – you can find the love elsewhere. I think it's a strong part of [Flesh Wounds] – not having the perfect parents is not the end of the story."*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Richard Glover quoted by Shelly Horton, "The book that will change what you think about Richard Glover forever", Mamamia website post, 4 September 2015.

Source: *Flesh Wounds*, Wikipedia, ABC website, Mamamia website.

# Flesh Wounds



## Book Summary

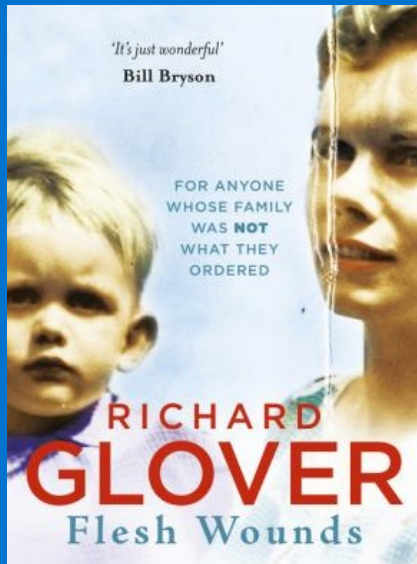
A mother who invented her past, a father who was often absent, a son who wondered if this could really be his family.

Richard Glover's favourite dinner party game is called 'Who's Got the Weirdest Parents?'. It's a game he always thinks he'll win. There was his mother, a deluded snob, who made up large swathes of her past and who ran away with Richard's English teacher, a Tolkien devotee, nudist and stuffed-toy collector. There was his father, a distant alcoholic, who ran through a gamut of wives, yachts and failed dreams. And there was Richard himself, a confused teenager, vulnerable to strange men, trying to find a family he could belong to. As he eventually accepted, the only way to make sense of the present was to go back to the past - but beware of what you might find there. Truth can leave wounds - even if they are only flesh wounds.

Part poignant family memoir, part rollicking venture into a 1970s Australia, this is a book for anyone who's wondered if their family is the oddest one on the planet. The answer: 'No'. There is always something stranger out there.

Source: Publisher (Harper Collins Australia) website

# Flesh Wounds



## Discussion Questions

1. Richard Glover is known for his sense of humour and yet his childhood was one of neglect. On the whole, did you find *Flesh Wounds* overwhelmingly funny or overwhelmingly sad?
2. Does Glover's talent for telling an amusing anecdote highlight or mask the emotional truths underlying his memoir?
3. What was your reaction to Richard's father? Did your feelings about him change in the course of reading the book?
4. According to one reviewer, "*Mothers are always held to higher standards than fathers and this is certainly true here*".<sup>1</sup> What do you think of Glover's assessment of his mother? Does his father get off relatively lightly?
5. What do you think of the way Bunty recreated her identity, severing ties with her family in Britain? Can you imagine creating a new persona and history for yourself? Do you know of anyone else who has completely turned their back on their past?
6. What did you think of the life Richard's mother made for herself with Richard's English teacher, Mr Phillipps?
7. Do you enjoy reading the genre of memoir? Have you read any other memoirs dealing with difficult childhoods, such as Augusten Burroughs' *Running with Scissors* or Mandy Sayer's *Velocity*?

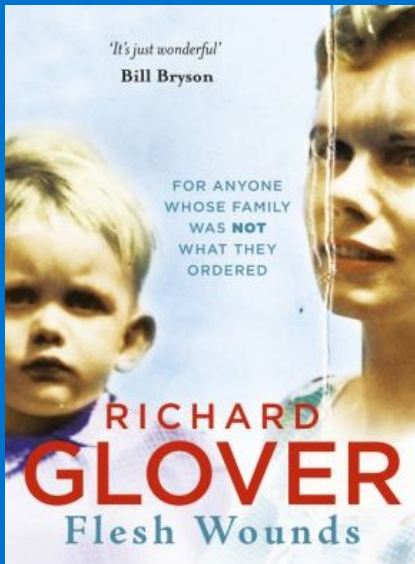
### *Just for Fun*

8. Richard Glover's favourite dinner party game is called "Who's Got the Weirdest Parents?". Who amongst your book club has got the weirdest parents? Alternatively, whose kids have the weirdest parents?

<sup>1</sup> "SR", *The Saturday Paper*, 19 September 2015.

Source: Some questions adapted from Adelaide U3A reading guide.

# Flesh Wounds



## Reviews

[Glover's] parents bequeathed their son an abundance of bizarre anecdotes. Such riches afford Glover a wonderfully casual way with the most absurd situations. ... In the darker moments, he writes with candour and plain-speaking sincerity. Poignantly, he speaks not so much of his pain but of his numbness.

Mothers are always held to higher standards than fathers and this is certainly true here, with Glover reserving his harshest criticism for Alice/Bunty/Anna. To be fair, his mother was a figure of more mystery and comic potential than his garden-variety much-married drunk father. But the value of *Flesh Wounds* lies not just in Glover's absorbing family story, but also in his sensitive reflections on topics ranging from modern parenting to the British class system. For a book that takes indifference as its starting point, *Flesh Wounds* is impressively warm and big-hearted.

"SR", *The Saturday Paper*

It's often thought that early dysfunction can rock a creative boat more than safe harbours and clear skies. With his memoir, *Flesh Wounds*, broadcaster, columnist and author Richard Glover has joined a fleet of scribes whose talent has swelled as a consequence of trauma. ....

In the hands of a lesser writer these scenes could have descended into caricature or, even worse, self-pity, but Glover maintains a tone so tragicomic that the effect is both poignant and wildly entertaining. ....

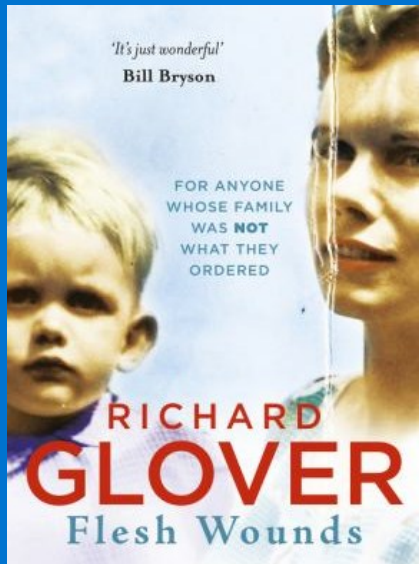
As a child, Richard Glover may have suffered flesh wounds, but the scar tissue has grown back beautifully.

Mandy Sayer, *The Sydney Morning Herald*

Richard Glover conducts a heartfelt, meticulous autopsy of his key family relationships in *Flesh Wounds*. The result? We get the sinister and the sensitive, the heart-wrenching and the uplifting, the humorous and the melancholy, the hubris and the intellect — but wait there is more. Never is there a moment in this book where Richard short-changes the reader. You'll read it in a couple of days – and feel compelled to do so.

*Aussie Writers* [not for profit organisation website]

# Flesh Wounds



## Reviews (Continued)

In this amusing but serious autobiography, writer, radio personality, parent and worrier Richard Glover looks at his startling family and asks the question —could it be the weirdest on the planet? ... Glover's account of his early years is touching yet often hilarious as the boy tries to make sense of his parents' behaviour. The book's tone darkens as the older Glover wrestles with filial duty versus the realisation that his parents are too busy and self-absorbed to be bothered with him. Yet the book is replete with entertaining recollections. ... Do you have parents who bewilder and perplex you? This is the book for you.

Max Oliver, *Books + Publishing*

Memoirs and travel writing... offer story, plot, character, incident, development, and even resolution. Travel writing is a bit like light comedy, though, often good, but by its nature rarely great.

But memoirs confront no limitations of form. Only a few Australian political memoirs are a delight. John Button and Paul Hasluck are the standouts, and Bob Carr's *Diary of a Foreign Minister*. But our literary memoirs have been superb, from Hal Porter to Donald Horne to Clive James. I realise that two of these — James and Horne — are journalists.

Now there is a new classic. Richard Glover's *Flesh Wounds* is a minor masterpiece, and I use the word minor only because I am a bit shy of making too big a claim. ....

If I have a quibble with anything it is perhaps that the jokiness and conversational directness is marginally overdone in the early passages. But this is a very small quibble. And it could be that Glover is hedging here against some quite shocking revelations of predatory sexual behaviour by characters outside the family.

Greg Sheridan, *The Australian*