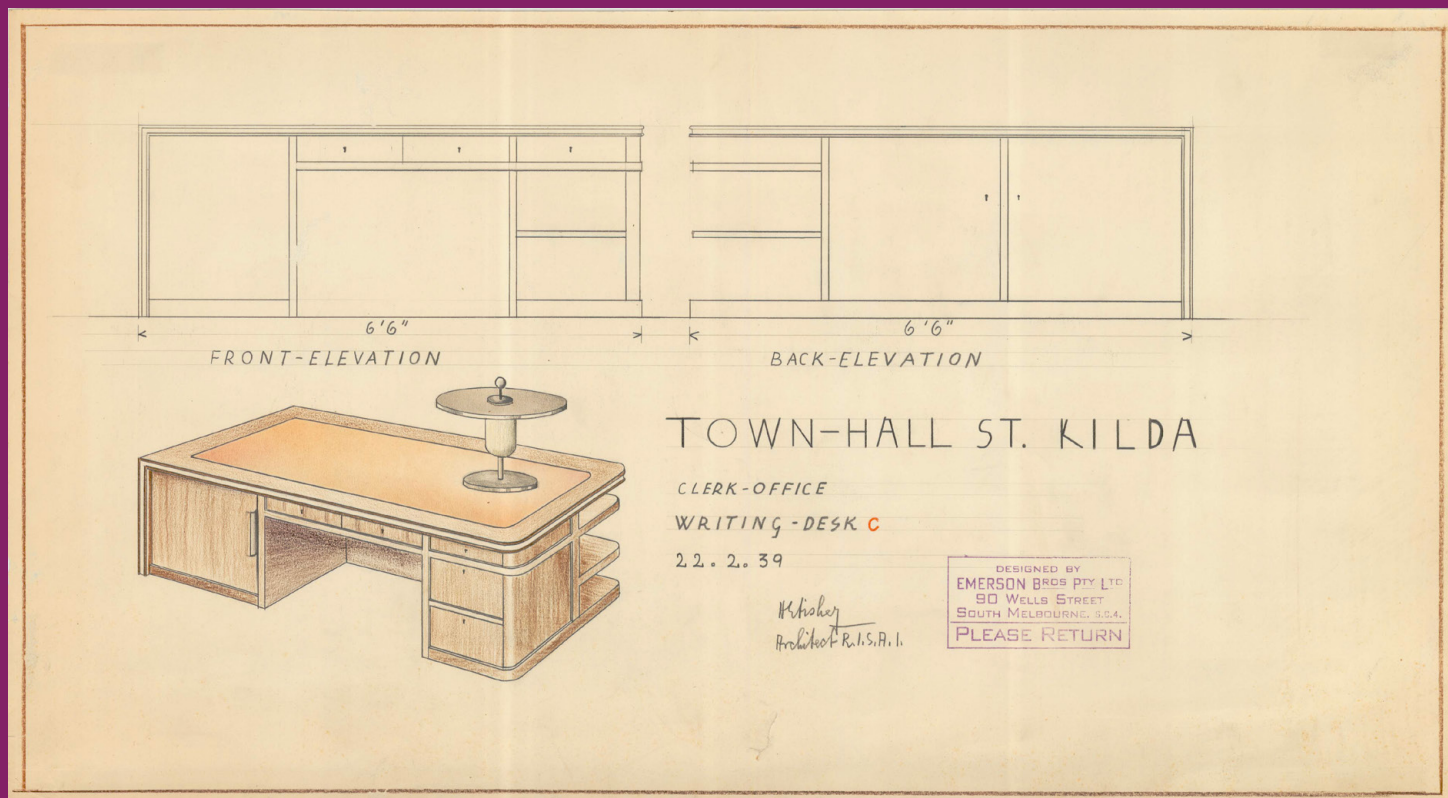


PORT PHILLIP WRITES

Stories and Poems

Gathered from the City of Port Phillip Seniors' Writing Awards 2021



PORT PHILLIP WRITES

Stories and Poems

Port Phillip Writes Stories and Poems celebrating 17 years of publication



South Melbourne Public Library, 1948, Port Phillip Collection

Disclaimer

The contributions in ‘Port Phillip Writes’ were all submitted as entries in the 2021 City of Port Phillip Seniors’ Festival Writing Awards.

A condition of entry was that all contributions are considered for publication.

Publication of the contributions by the City of Port Phillip does not constitute an endorsement of or agreement with any opinions or views expressed or statements made in the contributions.

The City of Port Phillip does not warrant and disclaims liability for the accuracy, authenticity, completeness and reliability of any advice, opinion, views, statement or other information contained in the contributions. The City of Port Phillip disclaims any responsibility for typographical errors though a best attempt has been made to grammatically correct and spelling check entries.

Each contributor retains copyright in his or her contribution and asserts his or her moral rights to be identified as the author of his or her contribution. No part of a contribution may be reproduced, published or made available online without the consent of the relevant contributor. City of Port Phillip owns copyright in the remainder of the publication. All rights, including the rights to reproduce, publish or make available online, are reserved.

Photo and signage

Unless otherwise stated all photographs in this publication are courtesy of the writers these images cannot be reproduced without prior permission.

Writer’s stories and poems cannot be used in full or in part unless permission is gained by the writer.

Cover Image: Desk, Port Phillip City Collection sk2741

Internal photographs as credited.

Design by Sweet Creative Pty Ltd

Printed by Highlight Printing Pty Ltd

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION by Freda Erlich OPAC Chair	6	WHERE THE WAVES START by Deb Hall	50
IN PRAISE OF NEIGHBOURS by Lois Best	7	IT’S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT MATTER! by Roslyn Jones	52
BAGDAD (AKA PORT MELBOURNE) by Megan Jones	9	ACQUAINTANCE by Aziza Khamlichi	54
THE WAVE by Mary-Grace Levakis	11	NERVE PAIN by Jnge Kulmanis	56
SOMETHING TO LOOK AT by Jacki Burgess	12	REFLECTIONS by Jnge Kulmanis	57
COVID COFFEE UNDERBELLY by John Craven	14	ANNIE AND ME by Mary-Grace Levakis	58
THE 109 TRAM by Jan Harper	15	JUST SAYING by Warwick Lloyd	59
WHERE’S WARWICK? by Janine Mifsud	17	MY GOLD CAN WAIT by Warwick Lloyd	60
JUST RELAX by Sheila Quairney	19	MY “FOREVER HOME” by Barbara Anne Magee	61
MOON BEAMS by Brenda Richards	20	FORBIDDEN FRUIT by Barbara Anne Magee	61
THE WIND by Lois Best	22	THE PROMISE by Janine Mifsud	62
THE QUEEN OF ST KILDA by Chris Burgess	24	BOASTS AND BRAVADOS by Maggie Moran	64
SPOILT FOR CHOICE by Julie Butcher	26	THE WAITING ROOM by Maggie Moran	65
ENDURING TRIBAL CONFLICTS by Nicholas Cecic	28	TURNABOUT by Barbara Overbury	68
SOLILOQUY by Nicholas Cecic	30	SHARING by Sheila Quairney	69
DON’T BE AFRAID by Cristina Ceddia	32	ONE SMALL FRIEND by Brenda Richards	70
DON’T YOU DARE by Cristina Ceddia	34	LINE OF CONDUCT by Anna Rogalina	72
THE GOD GIG by John Craven	36	HOME HELP by Anna Rogalina	72
KAKARIKI by Bob Croker	38	TALES FROM AN AIRBNB HOST by Rosemary Rule	73
THE 11TH HOUR by Kerrie Cross	40	A WEEK IN A LIFE by Neville Smith	76
GARDEN CITY RESERVE – A HAVEN IN TIMES OF NEED by Lois Daley	41	GOOD ON YA’S by Neville Smith	78
THE LITTLE ASSASSIN by Trevor Donohue	42	IT’S A (RESCUE) DOG’S LIFE by Josie Speranza	79
THE MAN IN THE MIRROR by Trevor Donohue	43	JILLAROO by Roderick Waller	81
BROWN SHOES by Veselka Gencic	44	MENYAMA MUSTER by Roderick Waller	83
SURF BUDDIES by Michele Green	46	AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES	86
BECOMING AN ISLAND by Deb Hall	48	TRIBUTE TO LESLEY GREAGG	92

INTRODUCTION

by Freda Erlich, Chair Older Persons Advisory Committee

It is with great pleasure that we introduce another year's publication of the City of Port Phillip's Seniors Writing Awards 'Port Phillip Writes', now in its 17th year.

We thank the contributing writers for the 2021 edition, their memories, stories and poems are enriching and stimulating. This year we had 48 entries from 31 entrants. Each writer is limited to two entries. It is pleasing to see works from previous entrants and new entrants being published for the first time.

As always, the topics chosen by this year's writers are varied. Contributions encompass a richness of shared experiences, social memory and fun, and a profound sense of achievement and of being visible, heard, and present.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an abrupt change in routines and livelihoods all around the world. In these times of uncertainty and change, the need to find meaning and stay connected is even more salient. The time to pause and reflect has given many an opportunity to express their feelings, experiences, and thoughts through creativity. This year's publication demonstrates that participating in creative pursuits can strengthen our connection to others through story and increase our sense of purpose and reassure us we are not alone.

Judging the awards is a big task and is done anonymously, so it is always exciting after the decisions are made to discover the writers who have been awarded. This year's judges were Carmel Shute, Co-founder and co-convenor of Sisters in Crime Australia, Nicholas Green member of Council's Older Persons Advisory Committee and Edward Burger writer and Port Phillip Council Librarian. We thank them for the care they took in their role as judges, and for their patience and good humour. They kindly gave their time for free and brought their knowledge, insight, and passion to the project.

Port Phillip Writes is funded by the City of Port Phillip. The continued support of this initiative reflects the enthusiasm of the Older Persons Advisory Committee and the City of Port Phillip.

Thank you to the Lions Club of Port Phillip for their kind donation.

Freda Erlich
Chair Older Persons Advisory Committee

IN PRAISE OF NEIGHBOURS

by Lois Best

Clunk. Uh oh. That's the sound of the back door locking behind me. I try the knob. Yep, it's locked. This is not good. I am locked outside my daughter's house, in her Fort Knox style backyard.

I'm staying here just to look after my *teenage* granddaughters' rabbits during one of Port Phillip's rare heatwaves. I've come outside first thing in the morning to give the rabbits some greens, cool water, and shade to keep them safe. Backyard bunnies don't do well in the heat. My family are off looking after a house with a swimming pool and a dog. (I thought that gave me the easier job.)

My brain goes into overdrive. The back gate is locked and barricaded. The side gate is padlocked. (I've never seen a key for it.) I contemplate huddling in a heap and living on rabbit pellets and lemons until they come and rescue me. They would (eventually) notice my phone going unanswered because it is, of course, locked inside the house.

The heat is the problem, and it's the reason I shut the door in the first place – to keep the heat out of the house. (Didn't mean to keep myself out as well!)

So, what to do? Even if I could climb over the high fence, which is unlikely, it is hardly practical because I am clad only in my nightie. And add to that (and I realise this could be classified as *way* too much information) no glasses, no denture, no underwear.

I contemplate breaking into the house. But if I did smash the multi-framed window, there's still the problem of clambering through it.

Instead, I will break out - through the side gate. I scour the shed for suitable tools. Armed with screwdriver and hammer, I attack the padlock. I break part of the gatepost (oops) but it means I can slide the bolt and open the gate.

My objective is the key-keep on the front porch. This, of course, brings on another dilemma. I don't know the code. Thankfully my daughter knows her neighbours well, and they know me by sight. (But usually I am more appropriately dressed and with all my teeth.)

I take a chance and bashfully creep through their front gate. Thankfully Amanda is up and to her credit she doesn't laugh. She doesn't know the code, so she texts my daughter. Awkward minutes pass then I say, 'She's sent the code to my phone, hasn't she?'

My daughter's next text produces the code. Then I need more help as, without my glasses, I can barely see the key-keep let alone its numbers!

Amanda's boisterous new puppy is overjoyed by the early morning excitement and will not be left home. I happily carry him while she wrestles with the underused, awkwardly placed, key-keep. Eventually she calls her (grown up) son over to help. Oh, the embarrassment. Thankfully I have the puppy to hide behind. But it gets me the key.

Inside, reunited with my phone and glasses, I find texts from my bewildered daughter:

Text 1: *Hi, the pin is...*
[and there is the magic number]

Text 2: *Sorry the bike is in the way*
[No answer from me, of course.]

Text 3: *Everything ok?*
[Well at that stage, no!]

I text back that the bike was the least of my worries and give a brief rundown of events. I'm able to reassure her that at least she knows that her house isn't easy to break into.

Oddly, we continue to text instead of calling.

IN PRAISE OF NEIGHBOURS (CONT.)

by Lois Best

She texts:

Just got confused because:

A) It was early

[I am notoriously not a morning person]

B) you are always organised with keys

[True]

C) you always have your phone!!

[Again, true and I briefly admire her ability to text in an orderly alpha style list]

She continues:

1st thought (literally) was that maybe you'd been up all-night partying and just got home! LOL! And lost your keys and phone in a bar or something.

[Who? Me?]

2nd thought was that you'd been out for a walk and didn't take keys – that's why I pinged your phone first – didn't occur to me that that's why Amanda was sending the message for you! Coffee not quite kicked in! What a drama. I'm so sorry that happened to you! Thank goodness for amazing neighbours. I'm still trying to process it all. But glad you're safe and sound. I think scout badge earned.

[I'll accept that]

The flurry of texts eventually ends with her:

Phew! Well played!!

[She's right!]

It's then that the adrenalin kicks in.

I indulge in comfort food.

[I earned salted caramel ice-cream drowned in chocolate topping for breakfast].

When I feel brave enough, I prop the door open so I can check on the rabbits.

[At this point I no longer care if the heat gets into the house.]

And:

There they were, oblivious to the drama. So cute, contentedly chomping kale.

There I was, completely exhausted before eight o'clock in the morning.

MAJOR AWARD

BAGDAD (AKA PORT MELBOURNE)

by Megan Jones

'What the...' the newcomer says to the back of his wife's head as his Mercedes mounts the curb in front of their Albert Street home. His lovingly tendered, green garden patch, encircling the Council-planted Frangipani Tree, had been demolished and its plants removed. The raised timber garden bed had been deconstructed with the planks laid in tram lines against his letter box.

'I am trying to do something to save the planet here and this is all the thanks I get,' he moans to his wife as he lifts bags from the boot.

In the hiatus between Melbourne's first and second horrid Covid lockdowns, he had escaped with his family to his parents' investment property on the beach in Noosa. Three months later, once the *all clear* sounded, they returned.

Employing the few skills he had gained from studying the Yates handbook during first lockdown, he had laid potted soil, erected a fence around the plot, added beetroot, celery and kale, as well as assorted herbs: coriander, two kinds of parsley, garlic and chilli. This marvellous market garden occupied one car space on the street. Together with his sporty Merc, his wife's people mover and his eldest girl's vintage Land Rover, the family lay claim to four parking spots on a street nine meters wide and not enough footpath to plant a tree.

Some of his neighbours, who were sick of playing musical cars and still missing out on a space, were not happy with his contribution to climate control; no one ever said anything to his face for the entire street knew his wife was a successful barrister.

He whined about his garden grievance to anyone who was passing.

'Why would anyone do this?' he pleaded with his next-door neighbour Ken, a former council employee and secretary of the Port Melbourne branch Labor Party, who still lived in the house where he was born.

Ken's own frequent complaints concerning lack of access to his handicapped parking space had fallen on the newcomer's deaf ears. Ken waved his head from side to side, and replied: 'Bagdad.'

'Bagdad. What does that mean?' demanded the newcomer as he rubbed his chin with the fingers of his right hand.

'Well,' he said, followed by a deep breath, a sure sign Ken was ready to tell one of his stories about old Port. 'When I was a nipper my Dad was an electrician working on the Bank Houses back in the 30s.'

The Bank were part of a housing initiative launched by the State Bank of Victoria. Initially designed to house Port's poor in a Colonial facsimile of the English Progressive Garden City movement, the development ran over budget and the houses were sold to the highest bidders, often outsiders. Port's poor, understandably, were miffed.

Like all newcomers, who could only afford a worker's cottage in Port, this newcomer aspired to own a Bank House, so he listened intently to Ken.

'Dad used to say, when he was not on the job, of course: that they were rubbish. He said it was impossible to wire them properly as the walls were made of mulch. You'd never find me living in one of 'em,' Ken added, seriously nodding no.

BAGDAD (AKA PORT MELBOURNE) (CONT.)

by Megan Jones

The neighbour tapped his foot. His time was money. 'What's that got to do with Bagdad,' he said in a tone that meant *hurry up old man*. 'Was it because of all the sand? The houses were built on reclaimed swamp?' he guessed, to speed the old man up.

'If you stop interrupting, I'm coming to it,' Ken scolded. 'When them houses were finished, the State Bank paid gardeners to plant trees and flowers, being called Garden City, after all. As soon as the flowers and trees were planted, workers returning the next day found all the greenery ripped out. This happened so often the State Bank surrendered their plan to create private gardens. Garden City had no gardens, see,' he chuckled, knowing precisely who'd plundered his neighbour's plants.

'What has this got to do with Bagdad?'

'Don't you get it? Garden City became known as Bagdad.'

'Because of the sand?'

'Haven't you been listening? Because of Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves. The police, investigating the thefts, reckoned the whole Port community was in on it.' Ken chuckled. 'Reckon that's who stole your plants.'

THE WAVE

by Mary-Grace Levakis

I gazed into your secret heart; sea green.

As you hung, poised triumphant

Before thundering down

Your white mane flying,

Shattering, scattering that hidden heart

Into a froth of milk white foam.

Where is it now?

That soft curve of green; sea green?

Lost, sea changed, then breathed

With a whisper, a sigh

As thin as a veil of lace.

SOMETHING TO LOOK AT

by Jacki Burgess

There was always something to look at from the window. The window was big and the view was huge.

There were sunsets every evening, of course, and big storms from time to time, and the ever-changing cloudscapes, and the sea changing colour and, right in the middle, there was the always delightful little lighthouse.

Everyone, it seemed, who lived in Marine Parade, claimed the lighthouse as 'their' lighthouse. But it was ours, truly, because we lived right opposite it and it formed the background to all the scenes we saw.

It was a very useful landmark for the little fleet of speedy motorboats that zipped back and forth from the St Kilda Marina to the docks carrying strike-breaking dock workers – 'scabs' they were called by the employees of Patrick Corporation who'd been locked out of work.

It was a useful landmark, too, when hundreds of hooners chose to do burnouts, to entertain their friends and wake the neighbours, in the big carpark by the lighthouse and in the street directly in front. Until the police came and sent them scattering.

Our apartment was at the opposite end of Marine Parade to Luna Park, but what we saw from our windows, was every bit as entertaining.

There was a frightful rainstorm one day, which coincided with an equally frightful quarrel between a young man and a woman who walked through it all, arguing heatedly.

The young woman ripped all her clothes off, flung them to the ground and kept walking along the footpath. The man gathered up her sopping wet clothes and ambled after her, their exchange of shouts being overwhelmed by the sound of the rain and the tooting of passing motorists.

There was an equal amount of emotion another day, when we could see a smallish yacht that had grievously misjudged the entry to the yacht club moorings and had run aground on a sand bar. The yacht broke in two and the distressed owner walked through the water, grabbing bits of yacht and items from the deck, and it was obvious that he was crying as he did so.

One rainy day, a big plank of timber inadvertently got into the drainage system out to the bay, and the result of the backup of debris behind the obstruction was a flood along Marine Parade, with water coming within an inch or two of flooding our building. It did flood the garage where we parked our car up the street. Ours was the last car out of the garage at three o'clock in the morning and joined a line of cars parked in the driest area of the median strip. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage was done to cars, lifts, and apartments. But looking out of the window that day was like looking out of a window in Venice.

Another time, it was more like looking out of a window in a strife-torn city in, say, America. Someone had driven into the back of the truck in front of it in the line of traffic. Unfortunately, it was a truck carrying sheets of glass, and the noise of the crash of the vehicles and the thunder of breaking glass

must have made someone think a bomb had gone off because, very shortly afterwards, there was an even more astonishing thunder of a helicopter, hovering at second floor level above the crash scene while it ascertained it was merely a car crash and not the start of something worse.

Death came to someone, as we saw from our window. We watched as police pulled a dead body out of the water within the marina. Some poor soul had ended up there, perhaps as a result of a suicide. Nothing ever appeared in the papers about it, so suicide would seem to have been the cause.

But there was abundant life to observe. We saw a flurry in the shallow waters right at the entrance to the marina – a sure sign of fish. Then the sight of cormorants bombing into the water to go after the fish. Then what must have been the sleek head and shoulders of a seal gliding out of the water in an apparent battle to frighten off or fight off the birds. You could almost hear the birds and seal cursing at each other.

We saw firework displays on New Year's Eve, balloons gliding past in early morning flights, people parachuting down to a nearby park, and thousands of runners and joggers in the comparative peace and quiet of fun runs.

Nearer to home, we saw police set up their operations to catch drink-drivers. No place to run to, no place to hide on that stretch of road. Afterwards, there would be a line of cars locked and left in the carpark. Over-the-limit drivers went off to find their way home by foot, cab, or public transport, while over-the-speed-limit drivers drove home but regretted the invention of the speed guns, which picked off speeding drivers so quickly.

On the other side of the bay, we watched clusters of lights at night, creeping along towards Geelong, as year by year Melbourne's suburbia expanded.

We watched the big, beautiful boats come and go. The majestic, elegant Queens, and more recently, gleaming white ships looking like apartment blocks on the water. The Spirit of Tasmania, gliding there and back, there and back, day after day.

And we saw the Solar System from our window. The big, beautiful bronze sun sculpture was opposite our window, and school children would come by to discover the start of the system, which ornamented the edge of the bay with different planets right round to Port Melbourne. A temporary art piece of the solar system had been displayed there, and I suggested to Port Phillip Council that it should be recreated in permanent form and, to my delight, it was.

And every night we saw a different sunset.

COVID COFFEE UNDERBELLY

by John Craven

Over many years, people have remarked that my integrity is beyond reproach. But, dear friends, I feel that I need to tell you an almost unbelievable tale about how I stumbled on a conspiracy and had no choice other than to blow the whistle and take the consequences. It started with a paper in the Journal of Delusional Science claiming a link between holding a coffee cup and immunity from COVID. It caught the attention of a prominent, not very bright, 'Shock Jock' desperate for TV ratings. He saw a golden opportunity to spread the word to his followers and to reap a bonanza from coffee companies and coffee shops. The biggest risk was from the medical and scientific classes who would, in all probability, insist on properly designed experiments published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. The saving grace was that no one in the scientific community listened to the Shock Jock and, as an added precaution, he told his paltry audience they must keep the story to themselves and only share it with trusted families and friends.

At first, people in the know just bought their coffee as usual and drank it in a way that attracted no attention. It worked like a charm. None of them caught COVID and their belief in the power of coffee was reinforced. Inevitably, the word spread to less reliable people and they made the leap in logic that just walking with a coffee cup rendered them immune and, in some perverted way, this validated their belief that masks were an over-kill. The pandemic rolled on and ever-increasing numbers of people were carrying coffee cups on their daily walk and dispensing with face masks or, at best, using them to warm their chins.

Respectable people were becoming steadily less tolerant with this wanton behaviour and, not knowing the coffee cup/COVID immunity theory, were beginning to challenge individuals that were in flagrant breach of the COVID laws. This, of course, led to some

pretty ugly scenes and, as emergency wards began to overflow with beaten bodies, the authorities were directed to get to the bottom of this apparent outbreak of civil disobedience.

Lockdown followed lockdown and, quite by accident, I stumbled on this coffee cup underground movement. What was the honourable path forward? My timid nature prompted a retreat into doing nothing, but after a particularly harrowing news item about the COVID-induced death of a teenager, I could no longer remain silent. It was thought that the deceased teen had become infected when traversing a street full of maskless hoons who were, it was reported, all carrying coffee cups.

My disclosure of the coffee cup COVID immunity theory was sensational and, as the media blitz flourished, I was also subjected to threats allegedly prompted by the self-important Shock Jock, aided and abetted by the coffee companies. The baying chorus pointed to proof of their mad crusade in the form of more articles in the Journal of Delusional Science. It did not take long for the genuine scientific community to expose the articles as fraudulent. Not surprisingly, the dopey Shock Jock and the less reputable parts of the coffee industry thundered about the lack of real evidence and carried on as before. The science-driven COVID suppression elite thundered back, and, in time, the unmasked coffee cup mob was reduced to a nasty little rump of faux freedom fighters. Transmission of COVID plummeted.

I am sure that you are imagining that, at least, I would be bestowed with an Order of Australia but, sad to say, I am still in hiding from the thugs that have seen their ill-gotten gains go south. Whistle blowing is, unfortunately, not on the list of Australian achievements worthy of celebration.

THE 109 TRAM

by Jan Harper

The 109 Tram route is a kite of Bay-blue at the end of a long thread tightly held in Collins St. The string has wandered along different paths over time, starting with a mail cart run by Wilbraham Liardet in 1840, a footpath for goldminers, a cable tram up Bay St, a train from Station Pier and finally, by 1987, our own 109 tramline. Whatever the transport mode, there was mail to be carried between Port and City, soldiers to be taken to their ships, conveyance for waterside workers, passage for migrants to their new homes, and transportation for beachgoers to the Bay.

We from Port Melbourne often forget about the other thread of the 109 tram – the route onwards from the City to Box Hill. Those from Kew or Balwyn tend to see the 109 as their own, but we know it to be ours.

As we hop on the tram at Beacon Cove, we leave behind the Bay and the beautiful but fickle 'Spirit of Tasmania', looming red and white beside the Pier. Before Covid, we would have packed the tram, but now we are few and well-masked.

'Touch on' and 'hold on'. If we neglect the first the 'authorised officers' might get us. If we neglect the second we might fall on our noses. And there are more directives – 'The next stop is...', 'The doors will open on the right', 'Top up your Myki card', and recently, Brett Sutton telling us to wear a mask and get tested.

You can travel on the 109 every day and see nothing, face buried in your mask and your phone. Or you can enrich your journey. After leaving Port Melbourne, you can first rejoice in the plastic garden beside the track featuring vibrantly coloured flowers, ducks, and gnomes, lovingly attended by locals. These compete with the sweet-scented wattles, delighting us with their golden balls, as well as the pepper trees and the wild cherries.

Approaching the Graham St stop is a small skate park, often hosting a few eager skateboard riders. Who knows whether the young things there today won't end up the Poppy Olsens of tomorrow's Olympics, where 'disappointment looked strangely like joy' – *The Age*.

After stopping at Graham Street, drivers take us at speed through the parkland, tram screeching like a dying cat. How we enjoy both the pace and the park! Our tram drivers love this stretch, with its straight line of rails stretched out in front of them, waiting to race at top speed, unencumbered by the constant stop-starts of busy roads or the uncertainty of cars coming from right or left.

The job of a tram driver is a solitary one, bearing responsibility for both their vehicle and their passengers. Bound by rules and confined by strict timetables, they get cheer by signalling greetings to drivers speeding in the opposite direction.

We might be nostalgic for the clitter-clatter of horseshoes on the pavement, but if we listen instead to the rhythm of the tram wheels on the track, it also is a joyful sound. And the smell of metal on metal is sweet compared with the smell of horse poo.

Slowing down at Montague St, we can either marvel at or frown upon the graffiti splurged over the warehouse backs. Then after the race to Montague Street in its running shoes, the 109 becomes more sedate, crossing the Yarra in high heels and, on reaching Collins St, limping along in bedroom slippers.

THE 109 TRAM (CONT.)

by Jan Harper

Fellow passengers are as intriguing as the scenes from the windows. What a kaleidoscope of dressing styles tram travellers display! Here is an elderly woman in a purple hat, re-imagining 'When I am old I will wear purple'. There is a man sheathed in a black and white calf skin. Someone looks like a race-goer, but where is the race during Covid? In winter here is a girl with bare shoulders and midriff. I am lacking in imagination in my black cords, puffer jacket and handbag!

Low-floored trams are a blessing for the elderly; age and a stick always ensures a seat. They also provide a wonderful introduction to conversations. One delight was to meet an old woman who had spent all her life in Garden City, 'Old Baghdad' as she called it. Most of her neighbours had been waterside workers, but now they had moved on after changes to stevedoring.

Seated in the 109 tram you might eavesdrop on a phone call, a woman quarrelling with her siblings about arrangements for Mother's Day, or gossiping over a love affair gone wrong. One fast and furious negotiation by a sleekly-groomed woman went 'eighty', and then after a pause, 'eighty-two', many ums and has, followed by a reluctant 'eighty-five', in what finally proved to be a property purchase.

Notable was a woman at 5 pm at Spencer Street, newly released from a drug habit and sleeping rough. She and her partner were using the 109 tram to move into a place at North Port. They had shifted the bulk of their belongings the previous night in near-empty trams, she said, as she heaved an enormous cabin trunk, their final load, onto the crowded carriage.

In the recent past, nothing provided more fertile ground for conversation than the passengers from the cruise ships that, before Covid, berthed at Beacon Cove. Passengers would board the 109 tram for a day in Melbourne town, and were keen to chat with an Aussie for travel tips. 'Victoria Market is a must,' I'd advise. But for most, their destination was the city shops. You'd meet them or their counterparts at the end of the day, laden with souvenirs.

As we alight at the end of the 109 line, the winds of Port Melbourne hit us in the face. But, oh! the sand and the sea - blond and cobalt in the sunshine, shades of grey at dusk, or a sunset over the Bay. Thank you, Tram 109, for transporting us here.

WHERE'S WARWICK?

by Janine Mifsud

The slimy green reeds entwined his legs as he struggled to upturn the submerged boat. Freezing murky water filtered through his wet-weather gear, his hands clutching at the sail as it dug deeper into the mud at the bottom of the lake. He was hoping someone at the club had witnessed his misfortune but Warwick had only recently joined Albert Park Yacht Club and guessed no one would be looking out for him.

With renewed effort he tried to right the boat, a boat he had only purchased two weeks ago. A little gem of a thing, more like a surfboard with a sail or a dinghy without a paddle, it was an old-fashioned Moth, lovingly handcrafted in wood by its previous owner. Warwick had only paid \$200 for it, so he wasn't sure whether his current ridiculous predicament was due to the bargain and the craft's seaworthiness or his own human error. Warwick knew he'd been a bit hasty in embarking on his maiden voyage; he'd been offered lessons but been a little too cocky, thinking that his many years of sailing yachts would hold him in good stead.

The cold was starting to penetrate his bones now and his arms were weary from his continued efforts to get his little Moth, aptly named 'Frog', back on track. At 64 he was no longer the kid who'd been sailing International Cadets for Sandringham Yacht Club, the 16-year-old who had been lucky enough to attend a regatta in Hobart, nor was he the young man who bought a twenty-eight-foot S80 yacht with three mates from work. That Yacht was named 'Great Expectations,' certainly the opposite of what he was enduring now!

For five years he'd been a member of Mosman Yacht Club, sailing the harbour, showing off to friends and family the delights of the New South Wales Coastline. He was king of the seas then. He could sail with the best of them. 'Great Expectations' had three sails to contend with and now he couldn't even manage one.

He drew some comfort from the fact he wouldn't drown. At six foot tall and on tippy toes, he could at least keep his head above water and surely someone within the short distance must spot 'Frog' soon. He tried to call for help through chattering teeth but alas, as he searched the banks of the lake for possible joggers or walkers who usually frequent the paths, found it bereft of passers-by. Today the weather was keeping them indoors.

And he'd begun the day with such optimism.

He'd naively assumed his hours crewing for Royal Melbourne Yacht Club in the not-too-distant past had honed the sailing skills he'd learnt in his youth, surely auguring well for a positive outcome. He'd known the weather was not really in his favour. But this was his opportunity to play with his new toy, a chance to relive the past excitement of skimming across the water, the wind in his hair, the birds flying high and mates to cheer him on.

WHERE'S WARWICK? (CONT.)

by Janine Mifsud

It had all started so well. Pushing off from the platform outside the clubhouse had been child's play. Seated on the wooden base, he'd guided the boom and set the sail to catch the wind. It was exhilarating! The moment 'Frog' moved beyond the edge of the lake, Warwick had confidently sat back to enjoy the experience, tracking the course, steering his journey to the centre of the lake. With the clubhouse now a speck in the distance, he'd decided to tack north, a mistake too late to correct; the wind caught the little boat by surprise, throwing it off kilter. Too late Warwick tried to move his weight to the other side of his tiny craft hoping to counterbalance the upswing; too late he reached for the rudder in an effort to avoid the inevitable disaster. The sight of the sail submerging coincided with his gentle splash into the water. Clinging to the side of the boat, he'd hoped to use his strength to right the wrong.

He heard it before he saw it - the chug of an engine. His relief was palpable; he'd probably only been in the water for a matter of 15 minutes but it felt like a life time. His rescuers from the club couldn't help but grin as they looked at the wreck of the man in front of them, a soaking wet 64-year-old Warwick with green algae streaking through his hair looking like a guilty schoolboy who had done something wrong.

'Okay mate, we'll just help you into the rescue boat before we right the Moth.'

Self-conscious but happy to be hauled from the water, Warwick settled onto the wooden bench, not realising that once 'Frog' was ready to go – he, Warwick – would be the one sailing 'Frog' back to the clubhouse. Transition made, sail set, the very contrite survivor steered his little craft back to its moorings.

With remnants of weeds still clinging to his legs, a bedraggled and soaking-wet Warwick walked sheepishly into the midst of the social gathering. Embarrassed to the core, he couldn't help but be grateful his fellow sailors were genuinely happy to greet him.

The newcomer was no longer an unknown.

In the Albert Park Yacht Club rooms the jokes abounded with a new catchcry, not of 'Where's Wally?' but 'Where's Warwick?' Now, mustering just a tiny bit more confidence and joining in the humour, Warwick vowed to turn his 'Frog' into a Prince and even become King of the Lake.

JUST RELAX

by Sheila Quairney

'Just relax' murmurs the doctor soothingly as she attempts to probe tender bits of my anatomy with something alien, cold and rather unpleasant. Relax? Seriously? I think to myself, trying and failing to unclench my jaw and other bodily parts.

We've all been there, haven't we, rigid with fear and tension, willing ourselves into a sense of detachment and pretending that this invasive procedure is happening to someone else and not to us.

Whether it's swabs up noses or needles in jaws, it's not exactly pleasant, is it?

We try desperately and without much success to imagine we're on a desert island, or floating down a river, or up on a cloud, when the reality is that we're imprisoned on a chair or a couch, at the mercy of a determined medical practitioner. The hitherto unobserved ceiling becomes an object of great interest to us, as we watch with impotent and horrified fascination an abseiling spider drawing ever closer. At least it takes our mind off whatever procedure is happening to us. Maybe there'll be a fire alarm, or a very minor earth tremor will hit Bay Street, and we will be reprieved from both the spider and the treatment. We can but hope.

Whatever part of the body it is, subjecting ourselves to possible pain or discomfort at the hands of dedicated and very capable doctors, nurses and dentists brings out the latent coward in most of us. Our inner five-year-old wants to wail 'Mummy, don't let that nasty woman hurt me!' while we grit our teeth (dental equipment permitting), try to breathe out slowly and put into practice all those relaxation techniques that seem so effortless in Yoga classes.

We know it's for our own good (we may even be voluntarily paying for it), we know it will soon be over, but we don't like it. We're embarrassed at being so pathetic and tell ourselves sternly that this is NOTHING compared with what people who are really ill are going through, that we should be ASHAMED of ourselves for making such a fuss, and it's for our OWN GOOD.

But it doesn't make it any easier....

Time to 'fess up – I was for many years one of those Yoga teachers who played soothing music and talked in a low monotone to lull my classes into a semi-dormant state of relaxation. It's easy, isn't it, when you're lying on your mat in that dark room with nothing to disturb your peace of mind. I'd mentally transport my class to warm sandy beaches, or cool mountain forests, or favourite places, and we'd all think beautiful thoughts. But put me on that doctor's couch or dentist's chair, and all my years of practice and training go out the window as I frantically wriggle my toes (as advised by a long-ago dentist) and try – and fail – to let go.

I'm a real wimp when it comes to medical stuff. I'm the sort who faints giving blood, and never ever wanted to play Doctors and Nurses. I close my eyes during the gory bits in movies and would have to be dragged kicking and screaming to watch a hospital reality show.

So dear Doctor, lovely Dentist, caring Nurse, if there is not to be a fire alarm or other divine intervention, be kind, be gentle but above all, be quick. And then I can relax....till next time.

MOON BEAMS

by Brenda Richards

Maggie was tidying up. It was a never-ending job with a four-year-old. She straightened the blankets on the little bed, picked the teddy bear off the floor and placed it neatly on the pillow. She sighed as she looked out the window and watched Millie and the old dog cuddling up on the front veranda. Looks like Millie had found her own teddy bear. Maggie watched as the little girl ran her fingers through the tattered ruff around Max's neck as he snuggled up against her. Then she heard Millie's soft voice.

'He's up there Max. That's where he is. He liked me singing to him. What if he doesn't have anyone to sing to him? If we sing loudly, maybe he'll hear us.'

Max snuggled close and thumped his tail. The little girl's gentle voice filled the air.

'I see the moon and the moon sees me

The moon sees somebody I want to see.'

Maggie remembered singing that to Millie when she was a baby. Then the sound changed. Maggie went to the door and looked out. A strange duet was in progress. Max was making a high-pitched yowling noise. The girl and the dog were synchronising in some strange way, as they sat with their faces raised up to the full moon.

It was getting late. Maggie sighed – it had been a long day. She was mesmerised by the strange caterwauling chorus that Max and Millie continued to send skyward. She hated to interrupt.

'OK you two. It's bed time'

The girl reluctantly came in, with the old dog padding along beside her.

'Make sure you fill up Max's water bowl – he gets thirsty now that he's getting old – and as there's no school tomorrow, you can sleep in.'

Maggie was used to getting up early. That happens when you have a new baby. The pattern still continued. She wandered out to the kitchen and switched on the electric jug, then spooned some Nescafe and a shake of sugar into a mug, followed by a splash of milk. She held the handle of the jug as she gazed out the window. She didn't wait for the automatic timer to work, flicking it off when the water started to bubble. The early sun was just starting to shine on the ever-cheerful geraniums next to the window.

Maggie sipped the coffee slowly, her hands comforted by the warmth of the mug. The house was quiet. Too quiet. It was like a big blanket had descended on it and muted all sound. She picked up the tin of dog food to refill Max's bowl and went into the laundry where he slept on an old blanket. He was usually sitting up looking for his breakfast by now. The poor old fellow must have been tired out. She gave him a nudge.

'Wake up Maxie.'

There was no response. Something wasn't right. She gently wrapped his blanket around him. She heard Millie's voice behind her

'What's wrong with Max?'

'He's sick. I'll have to take him to the vet.'

'Wait for me. I'm coming too,' said Millie as she darted back into her room and put a jacket over her pyjamas. She picked up the teddy bear on her way out. 'I can sit with him while you drive.'

The vet looked at the little girl in the waiting room. While she was patting the old dog, her tears fell on his raggedy head. She was singing softly to him. The teddy bear was between his paws. This was the hardest part of the vet's job. He gently picked up the dog.

'Max was old, Millie, and he had a lot of pain. He's peaceful now. We'll look after him. He knows you love him.'

Mother and daughter drove home in silence.

That evening, Maggie again heard the young voice soaring up to the sky. She came out to join Millie on the veranda.

'I see the moon and the moon sees me

The moon sees somebody I want to see.'

Millie stopped as she heard her mother behind her. She turned around.

'Baby James isn't on his own any more, Mum. Now Maxie is up there to look after him.'

'You're right darling,' said Maggie as she hugged her little daughter. With faces raised, they sang the next two lines together.

'Please let the light that shines on me

*Shine on the ones I love' **

And the moon beamed.

*'I see the Moon.' Old children's lullaby. Possibly Irish. There are a number of different versions. Author unknown.

THE WIND

by Lois Best

Striding along the beach I'm enjoying watching the kite surfers. Kites as far as the eye can see, from St Kilda to Port Melbourne, making the most of the steady onshore wind. How I wish I were young enough to be out there with them.

On the beach people are sprawled in Covid-safe clusters, many wearing masks. I'm carrying mine, feeling safe with this strong wind blowing in my face.

Suddenly a volleyball player abandons play and the beach energy changes. Something is not quite right. A kite is coming in at an odd angle. It becomes obvious that it's untethered. Immediately groups form. The volleyball players manoeuvre to grab the kite before it can leave the water and cause mayhem on Beaconsfield Parade.

Others of us scan the sea, our phones at the ready. The kite surfer could be in trouble, or safely clinging to their board. I catch sight of someone swimming and point that out to the others. We glimpse between waves a swimmer with a board swimming strongly.

Groups disperse and the volleyball game resumes. Two of us wait to see the swimmer safely onto the sand. He wades out of the water with a broad smile, thanking us for watching out for him. He looks as if he enjoyed his escapade. We tell him we're happy to see him safe. He shows us the cord that snapped. To me it looks very flimsy.

When asked, he estimates he was about a kilometre offshore when the kite broke loose. Then he laughs and tells us one of the first rules of kite surfing; 'never go out further than you can swim back in'. We acknowledge that as a very good rule. I point out the volleyball players who first noticed the situation then caught the kite and anchored it with sand. Then I leave them to handle the kite and round out their part of the story.

As I walk home, I think about how quickly we strangers rallied to look out for an unknown surfer. I find that interesting in this weird history we're living. We are looking out for each other even when we are not aware of it. Surely that means we really do care about our fellow human beings.

This sets me wondering and thinking, and my thoughts start joining dots. I wonder how we have arrived at this point where the natural environment is under threat of collapse, with areas becoming too hot or cold or flooded, unable to sustain life. A time when our 24-hour news cycle is filled with stories of bullying and disaster. Perhaps no one cares because we hear the same sort of stories, day after day, year after year. Then this is all topped off by a global pandemic.

But in thinking that, I realise that recently, maybe because of the pandemic, there has been a subtle change, especially on social media.

People in positions of power, and those with the money to keep them there, are being called out. People are speaking out about corruption, racism, sexism, cruelty, and bad behaviour. People are challenging the status quo, demanding action, no longer allowing misdeeds to go unchecked.

Our young people and First Nations people have raised their voices. When we're allowed out, I join the thousands who rally for truth-telling and change. When we're not allowed out, we keep up the pressure online. And then, on the beach, strangers band together to care for a fellow human being.

That's when I feel a glimmer of hope. Not actual optimism yet, but hope. Maybe things can change. Maybe equity is possible. Not equality, that's just another divisive word picked up by the nay-sayers to derail constructive change.

Can we achieve equity in a true meritocracy? Maybe we can harness these winds of change. Maybe we can use our human kindness.

Maybe, just maybe, we humans haven't gone out further than we can swim back in.

THE QUEEN OF ST KILDA

by Chris Burgess

Our dear friend, we'll call her Doreen, died just a few months after her hundredth birthday; she had hung on long enough to receive a letter from the Queen.

At her wake, there were upwards of a hundred friends who came to pay their last respects. The wake was held in the back garden of the house she had lived in for more than ninety years.

The house was a huge, three-bedroom weatherboard Edwardian that sat on a block of land large enough to build a similarly sized dwelling.

Our next-door neighbour, Scott, introduced us to Doreen not long after we moved to St Kilda, sometime in 1997. Doreen was sitting in a chair on her front veranda.

'I'd like you to meet The Queen of St Kilda,' said Scott.

The woman laughed. 'Don't take any notice of Scott. He treats me like a queen, however, my name is Doreen, by the way.' We all shook hands.

Doreen was born not long after the end of the First World War. Her house was the house in which she grew up with her parents. Even when she got married, she was able to stay in the house; her husband moved in with her. After divorcing her husband, it naturally made very good sense to Doreen to stay on.

When her parents died, Doreen inherited the house. The large family home was just minutes from the beach. It was also close to public transport with frequent trams into the city. It was ideal for a woman who didn't own a car.

Over the years though, the house had fallen into disrepair. The foundations were slowly rotting. The floorboards had buckled and some of the doors were hard to close.

According to Doreen, whoever bought her house would probably knock it down and build two – maybe three – of those ugly townhouses. But she would be long gone by then. As far as she was concerned, life was short and getting shorter with each passing day. So why not just enjoy life, and drink champagne!

Which is exactly what she did.

The house next door to Doreen's was a free-standing Victorian brick villa. It was in excellent condition compared to her house.

The man who owned the property was single, around the same age as Doreen, maybe older. He had no siblings or other relatives as far as Doreen knew.

He lived in one room of the house and rented out the other five rooms to men, and only men. Doreen suspected she was the first woman to cross the threshold in decades.

Being next-door neighbours, Doreen struck up a friendship with him. This friendship blossomed into an affair, by all accounts. Though for propriety's sake, Doreen slept in her own bed at night.

It is not known how long the affair lasted (Doreen was very circumspect about such matters), or how old he was when he was carried off to hospital, where he subsequently died.

What is not in dispute was that this gentleman was obviously extremely fond of Doreen, caring enough for Doreen's welfare to bequeath her his house.

From being the outright owner of one house in one of Melbourne's more trendy suburbs, Doreen was suddenly the owner of two such houses.

When Doreen went to inspect her 'new house' for the first time since the old man had died, she was upset to see how grubby it had become since she was last there. There was mess everywhere. Cupboard doors in the kitchen had been torn off their hinges. Someone had scrawled a crude message on the living room wall. When she opened the bathroom door, flies buzzed angrily around the toilet bowl. Slamming the door shut, she beat a hasty retreat.

A few days later, Doreen went back a second time. Most of the rooms were vandalized in one way or the other. The small back garden was a sea of mud. Doreen had no idea how much it would cost to make the house habitable once more, but she reckoned it wouldn't be cheap.

Doreen quizzed a number of real estate agents about their fees and what they thought the house was worth. Every estate agent agreed that Doreen would have no trouble selling it.

A couple of men the estate agent often used for jobs like Doreen's came in to give a quote. Wallpaper would have to be stripped off, cracks filled, and the walls given a fresh coat of paint. The shower and toilet might need to be replaced. Carpet decades old and cracked linoleum would have to be pulled up and thrown out. All this would have to be junked so that the floorboards, which the men thought were the original ones, could be polished. They estimated it would take at least three weeks.

One day, Doreen decided to go and see how the work was progressing. There was a huge skip out front, already nearly full with old rolls of carpet, plasterboard, cracked linoleum, bits of plumbing, and god knows what else.

The front door was open. Doreen found the men standing at the kitchen sink. On the draining board in front of them were stacks of bank notes.

'Where did all that money come from?' asked Doreen.

'We found it under the linoleum in the front room and were just counting it all. We were just about to bring it in to you.'

'How much?'

'Just over \$150,000 in ten, twenty and fifty dollar notes. All in the old paper notes!'

They gave her the \$150,000.

But Doreen couldn't help wondering occasionally how much they had actually found.

SPOILT FOR CHOICE

by Julie Butcher

Barry Jones' latest book, *What Is To Be Done*, has finally risen to the top of my bedside-reading pile. I am a wide reader, mostly enjoying biography, memoir, non-fiction and historical fiction. I am addicted to the weekend papers and magazines, and I like to scan others such as *The Big Issue*, *The Economist* and *NGV Magazine*. I've been known to pour over a *New Idea Royals Monthly*.

My early education was ordinary and conservative. I studied, worked, and studied some more. In later life I thought of myself as a 'short-course junkie.' Retirement came a bit sooner than expected, but then I found U3A.

Network Victoria states on its website: *U3As (Universities of the Third Age) provide lifelong learning to people who are retired or semi-retired.* Through the U3A Creative Writing group in Port Phillip I experienced an organisation run entirely by volunteers for like-minded retirees. All for the piddling price of \$40 a year. I could not believe my good fortune.

Six years later I was invited to work on the history of the Port Phillip branch of the U3A, and it has been my privilege and honour to meet and interview some founding and life members. Two things stand out in concluding my part of this project. Firstly, these people were absolutely determined to help Port Phillip residents remain intellectually stimulated in their retirement. They believed in the importance of U3A for the friendship and connectivity it provided. Other members and involved locals helped them overcome significant hurdles in making the Mary Kehoe Centre a focal point for U3A Port Phillip (U3APP). Secondly, concerns the very first event they organised. It was a seminar where the U3APP team aimed high by inviting astrophysicist Andrew Prentice

from Monash University to speak, which was designed to 'test the waters.' It was a scorching hot Saturday in November 2003 and the team was worried that no one would turn up. They were in fact overwhelmed by the positive response. From that time, U3APP membership grew and grew and grew. Ten years later they invited Andrew Prentice back, and again it was a class act.

Today, amazing courses, conversations and seminars continue to attract and captivate new members. Long serving tutors still contribute to the magic, and the organisation enthrals with its depth and breadth of talent – on both sides of the desk.

I was spellbound during a Saturday Seminar, when Barry Jones said that only about one percent of people really care about or directly involve themselves in the politics of the day. Most people believe the government will manage things for the greater good. This is what governments should do, but it seems when invited to comment, or commit to policies or plans, many people grasp at sensationalist slogans, or worse, know almost nothing. Do people really elect governments for their ideas or vision? Or is it because they've had enough of a bad party?

This seminar inspires me to read Barry Jones' book where on page five I discover Neil Postman's fascinating observation:

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one.

Thanks to other Saturday Seminars, I learn about the American voter, I get some insight into the world of Angela Merkel and German politics, and I better appreciate the difference between a strong leader and an effective leader.

Spoilt for choice, I'm also drawn to classes where I might consider philosophy, discuss some books and movies, or dabble in some fine art. Feldenkrais and Relaxation classes take the pleasure to another level. Imagine the joy of learning how to truly savour a chocolate. And if that isn't enough, there's always the coffee club.

But here's the thing about U3A in Port Phillip. With over 750 members mostly living in the precinct, I'm always bumping into someone I know. It feels like my hometown of Adelaide – living the theory 'six degrees of separation.' Apart from the customary chat, such as checking on health, commenting on the weather, and ruminating over the restrictions, I might enquire, 'What are you reading?' Nearly all my reading comes from these recommendations.

Since COVID-19 and the consequent lockdowns, my neighbourhood seems a warmer and more caring place. I am sure this is due to the friends I have made through U3A. No wonder my bedside-reading pile continues to grow exponentially.

ENDURING TRIBAL CONFLICTS

by Nicholas Cecic

It was a simple mistake. I got on the wrong tram. The oncoming tram was full of Richmond supporters whose team had just won another Grand Final. I should have motioned for the tram to pass, but it stopped suddenly and a large hairy hand grabbed my arm and hauled me up. Next second, I was a part of the jubilant rabble. Unfortunately, the person who was calling me 'Bro' noticed I was wearing a black and white floral shirt. 'You don't barrack for the *dregs of humanity*, do you?' Not knowing who or what constituted the 'dregs of humanity' I answered, 'Of course not!' The interrogator wasn't satisfied and asked, 'Where do you live?' I replied, 'Victoria St.' Knowing our street was the boundary between two suburbs, I lied, saying, 'Our home is an even number, the Richmond side.' 'Well done, son. What's your name?' 'Jack,' I replied, feeling happy the brotherhood had been re-instated.

At this point the tram was rocketing up Chapel Street, electrified but hyper-fuelled by alcohol. The tram driver, decked out in a gold and black guernsey two or three sizes too small, was also orchestrating the 100th singing of 'Oh We're from Tiger Land'. When approaching the Chapel Street Bridge at a speed trams should not go, the 20-hippo vehicle veered off its steel tracks across the oncoming traffic, miraculously missing a Merc, and sailed headlong into the Yarra River. There was no splash; it was like a seal silently slithering into the sea. They say it can take ten seconds for a baby to drown in five centimetres of water. It took us a bit longer as the electronic doors remained jammed shut and a cascade of water poured into the tram through the windows that were fixed open the standard twelve centimetres. In a matter of moments, we were goldfish thrashing about in a bowl of muddy Yarra River water. No one survived!

I don't know how this works but whatever was left behind, all those bodies entombed in that steel can like sardines, gave way to another ghostly tram, a spiritual version with the same passengers, now all passive, muted, and zombie like, which arose out of those murky waters some 400 metres into the sky, circled the MCG twice, and slowly entered Cloudland.

Wow! Where to now? Suddenly an authoritative voice broke the silence, 'Please be seated. Those standing squeeze in with other seated passengers.' The persuasive newcomer was nearly seven feet tall with bulging arm muscles and large white wings slung on very broad shoulders, the kind of wings full-forwards dream of. 'I am your conductor, fellas. My name is Ray.' I could see some of the Richmond supporters beginning to cower as they noticed the heavily tattooed arms sporting the words 'Good Old Collingwood Forever'. Ray then asked me, 'What are you doing on this tram?' His direct question seemed to un-mute me and I felt free to launch into a clumsy explanation. 'Mr Ray, I'm... I'm here accidentally as somebody pulled me aboard. I was g g g... going to the forest, I mean the Woods, the Nest.' My poor brain was struggling to find euphemisms for Victoria Park, the Magpies home ground. 'Ok,' said Ray, 'I can tell you don't belong here. You better stay with me while I finish my job. My punishment for losing two Grand Finals in a row is to welcome Richmond supporters to the next life.'

I celebrated the budding friendship by asking, 'Where's the tram heading?' 'Where? All footy fans eventually end up in the Football Section of Heaven. All sports and respective teams have their own piece of heavenly real estate. Hang on a second,' said Ray with a wicked grin as he vigorously tugged the stop cord. The tram came to

shuddering halt. The tram driver soon appeared and announced, 'It stopped but now the bugger won't budge.' 'Water damage,' said Ray and then shouted, 'Everybody out to push this rust bucket to get it going again.' As all passengers started disembarking, Ray whispered to me, 'Stay here mate. This is part of the purging process; we are passing through Purgatory. These guys will be pushing this tram for the next seven years.'

As Ray finished speaking, a thundering, crashing sound shattered any semblance of heavenly serenity. As a result of the forceful impact, I briefly finished up in Ray's arms. Much of the human horsepower propelling the tram now found themselves on their backs flaying their arms like upturned turtles. Ray's mind was temporarily rocked. 'What the hell?' he bellowed. 'How can two trams travelling at two kilometres an hour collide? It is like two bulls charging each other in slow motion. It just doesn't happen!' 'Hey Ray, the other tram is full of Collingwood supporters,' I said. 'They are starting to kick the Tiger supporters still lying on the ground! Ray, stop them!' 'No, no!' yelled Ray. 'It's Armageddon. It's all a part of Heavenly theatre.' Nevertheless, I felt obliged to blow the whistle on the escalating melee. I unwisely jumped between two crazed combatants and shouted, 'Stop, stop, it's only a game!' All to no avail as in the next second, a wayward fist connected with my delicate jaw. A quick trip around a galaxy and then, with the wobble of a punch-drunk boxer, I kissed the carpet. Definitely down and out for the full count and even longer in a world of darkness.

My first recollection on recovering consciousness was the sight of Ray leaning over me with a satanic smirk, waving the accusative finger of disappointment. As my vision and hearing adjusted, another angelic form and voice became recognisable. It was my wife. 'Jack Russell, you have fallen out of bed. You started shouting in your sleep. Sounds like a bad dream.' I replied, 'It was! So glad to be back. Please remind me tomorrow to renew my Bulldogs Football Club Membership!'

SOLILOQUY

by Nicholas Cecic

Three score and ten, Doris! You left too soon. I know you say ‘Doug, it was not my choice; it was the cancer.’ I know, Doris. I’m sorry. I remember you explaining that we are like insects: we pass through 3 stages of existence – egg and larva here on Earth, and angel in heaven. You have left an unhappy grub back here. I loved being married to an entomologist. Remember when people would enquire, ‘What is your occupation?’ and when you replied, ‘Entomologist’, most would ask ‘What is that?’ You delighted in explaining your field of work, particularly asserting, ‘We don’t need to engage in the Star Wars intergalactic travel to see amazing, unbelievable creatures. They are here on Earth! You just need to dare to visit the world of insects!’ When I am here in our little garden attending to your plants and your pet insects, I imagine you as a miniature angel, the size of a hummingbird, fluttering about, sipping nectar in your flowery Garden of Eden. I wish I were there with you.

Where’s that portable radio? You know, Doris, *Radio* and *Wellington* are my two best companions. Radio is, of course, a talker but Wellington, like you, is an excellent listener. Would you believe, Wellington is now 18 years old, which is 88 in cat years. I now catch his mice for him. We both eat a lot of chicken mince. I reckon all those antibiotics explain why he looks so healthy. Doris, I still set the dinner table for two. Guess who thinks it is for him? His table manners are something to endure...I turn a blind eye.

Come on, Radio, start working. I want to hear the news headlines. Doris, the radio is like me as the batteries of life are slowly faltering. Haha! Here we are:

‘Good evening. Eastern Standard Time is 10pm. ABC News with Josh Jones. Concern is growing in Sydney, where passengers on the Ruby Princess Cruise Liner were permitted to disembark including some with suspicious coughs. Medical authorities are now questioning whether the virulent Covid virus may have been inadvertently introduced to Australia.’

Did you hear that, Doris! ‘Inadvertently introduced!’ ‘My foot! The virus has been treated like a tourist. This could only happen in silly Sydney! If this virus gets out of hand, I could be joining you sooner rather than later, God willing!

Enough of that fear mongering, let’s change stations. Ah, here is some talk-back:

‘Well, sir, as long as I am the talk-back host, I am not going to let anyone berate my listeners. We value a diversity of views, informed opinions —’

‘No, you don’t! No, you don’t! You are just a left-wing donkey. I am going to write to the ABC Board.

‘Well, sir, you can write to the Queen, the Prime Minister and the ABC Board but I will not tolerate uncouth behaviour, ridicule or denigration from anybody, so good riddance and goodbye!’

Doris, bit of a ding-dong on talk-back but I don’t need to be stirred up this time of a night. Let’s find another station. Oh, here’s one you might like.....some science:

‘So, Dr Karl, how would you explain the impact of a full moon on human behaviour?’ ‘Well, the moon has been an object of human interest since time immemorable and there have been many beliefs about the power of the moon, however, one school of scientific thought was promulgated by the great Isaac Newton. He suggested that if the moon’s magnetic effect pulls the planets oceans, causing the ebb and flow of tides, then it could have a similar effect on the liquidity of the human body.’

Oh, come on, Dr Karl. Enough! Leave Isaac to his apples. Too much unravelling and we have a life bereft of fantasy and dreams. Allow us to believe that the moon is made of cheese. Let us understand all those French men who sit by their windows at night staring at the moon while pondering how its yellow cheese will go with their crisp baguettes. Maybe the cow didn’t jump over the moon? It more likely was jumping out of the moon to escape endless cheese production!

Dear Doris, we have our own special rendezvous with the moon. Remember the song lines?

Blue Moon
You saw me standing there,
Without a dream in my heart,
Without a love of my own.

And, Doris, then you came along, and our theme song became

Blue Moon
Now I am no longer alone,
Without a dream in my heart,
Without a love of my own
Goodnight, Doris, my Love.

DON'T BE AFRAID

by Cristina Ceddia

Monday August 1st 1983

Dear Cristina

Don't be afraid. Your dad is coming up the stairs to change your nappy and feed you.

Don't be afraid your brother is nearby to protect you. I know you don't like the crèche and being made to have an afternoon sleep with all the other toddlers. Don't be afraid of the darkened room. Mark is nearby, playing in the yard, on a tricycle, you can do this.

Stand up in that cot and hold onto the bars and look for the light coming through the darkened room. I know you can't go to sleep like all the other toddlers. Please understand you are not old enough to play in the yard.

Don't be afraid to sing and smile at the people, it gives them such joy. Don't be upset when your mother tells you to take that stupid grin off your face. You are not stupid.

Your brother and your father understand your sensitivity, even if your mother doesn't.

Your first word was beautiful, do not forget that. A complex word for a complex child, full of fear but also full of joy. Your sensitivity is an asset that should not be exploited by others.

Your smile, your intelligence, your ability to see a need and respond to it, these are assets that in your greater life, you will need. You don't have to throw yourself to the ground and paddle because your mother did not hear a word you said. One day your language will be heard, and your voice will be loud.

You are going to need that strength so don't be afraid. Life is going to challenge you; there will be many situations when you will need that smile and the bravery that goes with it. Learn to show compassion but don't be fooled by the wicked who will exploit this. Be humble, be graceful, accept that not everyone is well-meaning. Don't feel despair at their ignorance. Keep being who you are, your authentic self. The little girl afraid of the dark.

In every corner look for the joy and be grateful. Even if the pain of loss is unbearable, be grateful for what has been. Your mother passed at a young age, yet you got to be an adult while she was still present. Time to let go of that pain, the burden of being a big girl in a little girl's shoes. The little girl with the silly smile, don't be afraid. 'Monday's child is full of grace.'



South Melbourne Public Library, 1948, Port Phillip Collection

DON'T YOU DARE

by Cristina Ceddia

'I think I will ring the Alfred because my throat is sore.'

'Don't you dare! Put your St Kilda F.C. scarf over your face. Get yourself on that bus!'

Melbourne was on the cusp of a Covid-19 lockdown. Our hospital system was in a mad scramble to clear 'non' elective surgery, in readiness to batten down for the pandemic and the potential for our hospital system to be overrun. 'Everyone' was shopping to stock their pantry. This included an arsenal of pharmaceuticals, hand sanitiser, toilet rolls and, of course, grog! My friend had managed to find a new job and go to Thursday's Grand Prix before the next day's cancellation. At the same time, he was dealing with a melanoma.

Before the eminent lockdown we felt the need to press some buttons at the Army and Navy Club. The poker machines 'Happy Prosperous' and 'Princess Peacock' provided a temporary relief.

'Only you could find a job the same week everyone was down at Centrelink to apply for Jobseeker. I suppose now I will be able to boast about you becoming a Rocket Scientist.'

The week before Lockdown was madness and yet my friend, an out of work aeronautical engineer, managed to get a job with Defence. His job network provider nearly fell off her seat when she heard the good news. Sarina Russo was going to have to come up with some money so Norman could buy some computer monitors in readiness to work from home. The melanoma was an unwelcomed distraction that was fobbed off at the job interview as a routine mole check. And the pandemic, at this stage we were all numb and in a collective denial.

Norman had been trapped in a cycle of persecution and repentance. Gilt and blame had been laid at his feet all his life. Punishment for original sin, well, we were all going to find about this soon enough. While we all have our personal experience of the 'Great Pandemic of 2020', the world experience was a shared one, with an enemy we could not see. With Covid-19 the whole world felt it. Still trapped in his Christian 'good fellow bubble,' with the belief that God's miracles were exclusively for him, Covid was just another duty for Norman. A duty than nearly cost him his life.

It was a crisp day in Melbourne, the grey of the morning gave way to a sunny blue sky, but the chill still lingered. Twelve months on and after a tri-monthly check another suspect mole appeared on Norman's back. I was accompanying him to the Alfred where he was to have the offending mole investigated. We had a plan to park the car well away from the thieving car park and walk the leafy autumn streets.

'Walking is good for you. We don't walk enough. The sun's rays will give us our vitamin D.'

I stopped at an olive tree peeping over a high fence. Norman said in his proper-ridged way, 'You can only take the olives that hang over the boundary.'

As I pulled the soft green branches it occurred to me, I had moved the boundary and my picking was within the law.

'No more marathon running, just walking. A marathon is too taxing on your body.'

'I like to compete with Hugh.'

'You compete with yourself, own benchmark.'

Has Hugh had cancer?'

Norman pondered as we continued up the well-trafficked Punt Road.

'We are all going to die. No need to accelerate it.'

It occurred to me that my friend had spent so much time fearing death that the lure of an afterlife had become spellbinding. He neglected to live his life. In fact, he feared living as if to be human was a sin.

We enjoyed the freedom of the walk, the fresh air and the nature on the boundary of the ugly congested road with its narrow footpaths. Soon we would arrive at the hospital to be reminded of Covid-19 with checking-in, masking up and hand sanitising. Compared to the rest of Australia, Victoria was hammered, and no place more than Melbourne; a second wave of Covid-19 had brought on an extensive lockdown. The pandemic was invisible but not absent. We had enjoyed a respite as new variants popped up in South Africa and the United Kingdom. Italy seemed to be wresting back some sort of control and the ticking bomb that was India loomed. America, or more correctly the United States, had freed itself from Trump, and took a breath of improvement, but was still nowhere near to a remission. Team *Stat Uniti* built on religious persecution, with a bedrock of 'the individual,' could not pull it together from Trumpism or Covid.

In the United States war was always against an external enemy and was a distraction from their own malevolent thinking. 'God bless America, we are lucky to be here with so many socialist privileges still intact.'

We proceeded to the clinic. The mole checked out fine but there was a lump, the size of the tip of your thumb, near the surgery scar. An ultrasound was scheduled, and the resulting biopsy confirmed the cancer had returned.

For the first time in his life Norman saw the need to put himself first and the importance of the flesh. The hubris of eternal life left him like the glitz of a luxurious item purchased without need. The talking tongues made no sense. The laying of the hands would soon be replaced with the surgeon's knife. It was the fall of 2021 and Delta loomed large casting a shadow over Melbourne's winter.

'The mystery of life is death, but in the meantime live and aim to live a good life.' I wondered if Norman would overcome his disease and the impotent way he lived his life? Day became night and, in the glint of darkness, a malevolence returned to Norman's eyes and his hands took control of his body once more. Norman chose life over death.

THE GOD GIG

by John Craven

Every now and again the Gods have a conference to review developments and kick up their heels in ungodly frivolity. A key part of the celestial fun is to review a component of the universe and, in 2021, the focus is on planet Earth. The performance criteria are, basically, related to matters that affect the longevity of the planet and, to simplify the review, this is defined as a place where the apex predator maintains a viable breeding population. On Earth, *Homo sapiens* is the focus of the study. The key performance indicators include:

- Harmony within the human species
- Sharing of wealth
- Food adequacy and distribution
- Health
- Environmental stewardship.

The Chair of the enquiry opened proceedings by reminding the Gods that planet Earth had been set up as an experiment to see if it was possible to establish a mix of plants, animals, insects and micro-organisms and have it evolve into a stable, self-sustaining biological community. They had started modestly with a few micro-organisms and then steadily added other bits to the mix. There had been some spectacular periods such as the time when the giant reptiles and dinosaurs ruled the earth. It had not always worked, and the Gods were reminded that they had already had to implement five mass extinction events to get the ecosystem back on track. They were also reminded that at the 100,000 BC conference they had decided that the whole thing was a bit of a mess and that the answer might be development of a species with a large brain capable of advanced analysis. They postulated that such a being would be able to consider complex questions of survival and evolve strategies to optimise a harmonious, self-perpetuating rhythm of life

on Earth. They popped a few hominids down in Africa and, in due course, they wandered all over the planet. The swarming masses seemed to be going OK, but the onset of intergroup rivalry was sufficiently worrying that at the 10,000 BC conference they had divvied the population up into religious groups and given each God a portfolio more or less aligned to geographic regions. This really had not worked well as the different religions kept dividing into smaller groups and using their religious alignment as an excuse to fight each other.

The review systematically discussed their terms of reference and concluded:

- The harmony of different bits of the human race was not going well and, despite some serious learning modules during world-wide wars and pandemics, they had not made much progress. Indeed, the big brain that had been given to the humanoids had been used to develop horrendous weapons that could wipe out whole countries. The rapporteur was at pains to point out that the vast majority of the human race lived at peace with their fellow citizens and the problem was that a nasty class of people had got into leadership positions and were out of control. There was, however, no way that the review panel could mark Harmony as anything better than an F.
- Sharing wealth had never had much of a run and in every society, there were people scheming to get more than their fair share. Marked F.
- Food production has been an enormous success as the humans had innovated new ways to grow food and, despite some poor performance in distribution and sharing, the report was a B.

- Health was also an area where extraordinary innovation had achieved huge improvements in treating and preventing diseases. The weakness noted in the report was that the advances in health care had not been shared very well across the nations of the Earth. Marked C.
- Looking after the environment had been reasonably successful until the last 100 years when the human race had started to clear the land to grow more food with little regard for the sustainability of their bit of the ecosystem. They had also discovered the joys of using fossil fuels for heating, power and transport. This had transformed life on earth but, unfortunately, generated the production of gasses that became trapped in the upper atmosphere and were steadily causing temperatures to rise. The smarter humans knew all about this and devised means to halt the heating. However, the fossil fuel barons had undue influence on governments and, globally, it is touch and go whether the human population takes action or elects to self-destruct. The mark for environmental stewardship was F minus.

After a fun-filled night the gods reconvened. There was no doubt that introducing a human species into the planet earth experiment was not going well but there was still time to prevent immolation if smarter people managed to get control. If all else fails and the human race is unable to save itself then the gods concluded that they would need to have a sixth mass extinction and start again. They were disappointed but agreed to defer a decision until their next meeting in 2050.

KAKARIKI

by Bob Croker

Yes 'Kakariki,' that's what I repeated to my friend, a keen and experienced sailor and yachtsman who has sailed around and across our bay for many years. 'Never heard of it,' he replied. 'I'm not surprised,' I said, 'few people have.' I then told him it is only one of more than one hundred and thirty sunken vessels that lay in the sands beneath the benign blue water surface we see most days across our Bay.

Our Bay, Port Phillip, is not just one Bay. It is composed of many bays from Canadian Bay at one end to Hobsons Bay our end. It is many things to many people, with entertainment strong at the St Kilda end, sports and outdoor activities around the Lake in Albert Park, and many active areas of marine participation and manufacturing as we move to the Port Melbourne end.

There are really no ends to our bay, it is alive and abounded across the areas mentioned, these areas being the 'limbs' whilst the Bay itself is the 'heart'.

I was born and educated in Albert Park and can still remember as a young boy, about seven years (circa 1937) one clear summer evening my father standing on the beach with me near Victoria Ave. He pointed across the waters of the Bay to a barely discernible dark object protruding just above the waterline and saying to me 'that's part of the wreck of the sunken ship *Kakariki*.'

The Kakariki, travelling from New Zealand to Yarraville, collided with the SS Caradale as it departed Melbourne for Sydney on 29th January 1937. With a cargo of ore and timber, the Kakariki sank quickly with the loss of five lives. Attempts made to salvage her were unsuccessful and in 1940 she broke up.

The entrance to the Bay, 'The Rip', is widely recognised for the serious dangers it presents to ships entering the Bay. There are also many sunken vessels on the outer side to prove its notoriety. The first ship to cross the Rip and enter the Bay was The Lady Nelson, a British naval ship on 5th January 1802.

Melbourne was not established until many years later, in 1835 with the arrival of John Batman followed soon after by John Pascoe Fawkner. (*A separate story*.)

One hundred and eighty-six years later, the Port of Melbourne is by far the largest freight terminal in Australia. The biggest commercial vessel to enter the Bay has been the freighter OOCL SEOUL in 2018, measuring 325 metres in length and weighing 105,000 tonnes.

Cruise ships and naval vessels visit the Bay regularly, which are also very big and always attract large crowds of spectators when they are in Port.

In my younger days at Albert Park, I like most of the other boys dived and swam regularly from the Kerferd Rd pier. We were most surprised one day, while just standing on the pier talking, to see a big stingray. Some nearby adults also watching said it was three to four feet across the body. It swam parallel the length of the pier, turned and swam back out to sea. I never saw or have heard of another since in that location.

Another Bay experience I recall from my teenage years was running along the beach at Port Melbourne when a small penguin popped out of the water directly in front of me, looking exhausted. It was obviously lost and also very fortunate as two caring local ladies walking nearby picked it up tenderly and said they would take it to animal

care and ensure it would be looked after properly. (*There is a penguin colony at St Kilda, it must have missed the turn off.*)

I have heard the question asked when discussing the Bay about whether there has ever been any shark attacks, and the answer is yes. There are seven known recorded fatal attacks within the Bay, possibly more not recorded. These known attacks have been listed from Sandringham through Mordialloc and up to South Melbourne, but none in most recent years.

In earlier days the shoreline of our Bay boasted two popular structures, these being the Albert Park and Middle Park sea water baths. Some patrons used the baths because of fears of shark attacks and others because the privacy of individual dressing rooms within the baths proved attractive.

There were odd occasions, when given a little extra pocket money, we did go to the baths not to use the rooms but to hire a blown-up tyre tube to use in the waves. A car tube was three pence (a trey) or a bigger truck tube was six pence (a zac). We could sit or hold on to the tube, sharing and bouncing in the waves all having great fun.

A rather fond memory of the Albert Park baths was that my father loved mussels and I often took with me a bucket and an improvised hook and swam around the extremities of the baths and hooked and scraped the mussels off the supporting pylons. He was always very pleased when I came home with mussels in my bucket.

On one occasion however I recall quite graphically swimming around a pylon to the inside face when I came across a Blue Ringed Octopus. I didn't stop to say goodbye because without knowing too much about them I knew they were not to be messed with and made a quick exit from that area. Further study proved me right as they are one of the most venomous creatures in the sea.

With a population now of over 110,000 there will be some who also recall early days in the community but there are far more who have taken up residence in later years and that is where there are many stories yet to be told of our City of Port Phillip.

I look forward to reading them.

Kakariki is a common bird in New Zealand often referred to as a Parakeet.

THE 11TH HOUR

by Kerrie Cross

A Tall Poppy

Strong; yet so easily crushed.
Fragile; broken by a glance, a whisper, a heart.
Brilliant; shining, asking to be picked.
Discarded, crushed.

This tall poppy,
Dark centred,
Intensely, luminously velvet, mysteriously black.
Tiny filaments sitting there, waiting.

The finest silk,
The most wondrous colour.
Reflecting sunlight,
Yet so quickly burned by it.

Gorgeous, heart-lifting poppy, Enjoy your day
in the sun.

Les Williams, a man about whom much could
and should be written, and perhaps will be,
is the 65 year old, small, weathered man who
is pouring love into the previously tired and
neglected St Vincent Gardens in Albert Park
Melbourne.

Weathered because he has trained and
competed as a professional runner since he
was discovered as a schoolboy. He is still
running, not from, not to, but for the sheer joy
of it. Every day, morning, and night he goes
for a run. Les is a well-oiled machine, like a
clock or a locomotive, faultlessly coordinated.
Les will run for ever.

With almost as much passion, hard work
and dedication, Les planted the poppies.
His dream was that they would flower in full
glory for Armistice Day and that they would
be surrounded by a display of yellow and
blue pansies. Not so easily coordinated, the
weather was unkind to Les; cold, wet, and
sunless, the early spring failed to wave its
wand over his display. The pansies bloomed,



became infested with weeds and died off
rather dismally; then, just as the gardens
supervisor decreed that it was time to pull
up the plants and prepare for the summer
display, with just one burst of sunshine, the
poppies flamed into momentary glory.

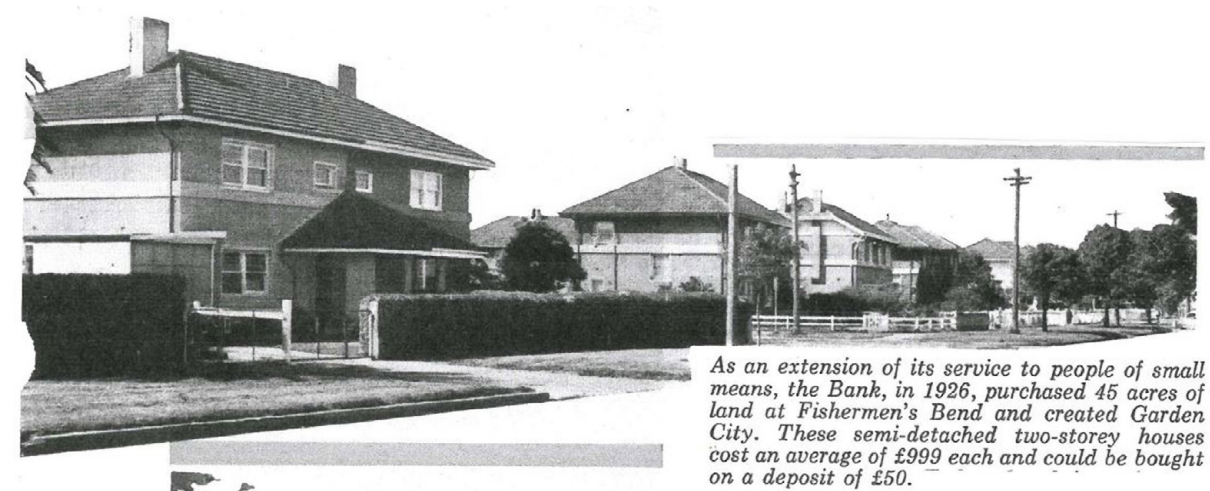
At the 11th hour of the eleventh day of the
eleventh month:

In France, in Belgium, poppies in abundance;
athletes and gardeners, tailors and artisans,
builders and bakers, poets and musicians; tall
poppies among them. Cut down and left in
the earth.

Lest We Forget.

GARDEN CITY RESERVE – A HAVEN IN TIMES OF NEED

by Lois Daley



As an extension of its service to people of small means, the Bank, in 1926, purchased 45 acres of land at Fishermen's Bend and created Garden City. These semi-detached two-storey houses cost an average of £999 each and could be bought on a deposit of £50.

This piece of land bordered by Beacon Cove Road and Crichton and Tucker Avenues in Port Melbourne is nearly 100 years old and looking splendid and is a listed part of our heritage history.

It is a monument to the local Council, State Government and State Bank of Victoria of their day in the 1920's perhaps the likes we may never see again.

Geo Emery, the then Manager of the State Bank went to Letchworth in the UK in 1926 to see what a garden city could look like.... on his return the bank purchased this new acreage now known as Garden City to build homes for families who could find a deposit of 55 pounds and pay a mortgage (1000 pounds) over 25 years to SSB Credit Foncier.

Only families could purchase a home, it was not for investors. This was a dream come true for many....a home with a backyard to grow vegetables, and fruit trees and even have a garden shed and enough ground for their children to play.

The blocks were among the biggest to be offered in those days. These lucky residents formed a group called The Garden City Progress Association and set about designing the reserve for their families. It was seen as a model village and was the biggest development in Australia of its day.

Today, in times of the pandemic it stands with its safe boundaries for families to gather with their children for fun and relaxation in these worrying times. This wonderful precious piece of land is loved and appreciated by many people far and wide.

THE LITTLE ASSASSIN

by Trevor Donohue

He knows that I know.

I am quite sure of that now. How could he help but know as he reads what I am writing? The time for pretence is over. Let the battle begin. I visualise a small demonic aviator at the controls of a complex machine that he ineptly manipulates. Certainly, he has gained some control and is slowly progressing as he acquires more information on his environment.

I have speculated how he gained access in the first place and I can come up with no positive explanation. Does he seek to escape? The earplugs that I need to sleep were dislodged this morning. It may have been a fit of petulance on his part or it may have been a serious attempt at escape. I fear that over time he has expanded, and escape is impossible.

Ah that's better. I've turned off the screen of my computer and I am typing directly into the hard drive. Oh great, my left eye just blinked out. The cunning little bastard has reduced my peripheral vision. A hard whack to the side of my head has brought me back to focus. Now would you like a couple more?

I tried drowning the little beast. Held my head up/side/down in a bucket of water for an hour. Couldn't hear a bloody thing for a week afterwards. How do I get on with my life?

Look, I know that this sounds a little far-fetched but I am not responsible for my apparent actions.

It isn't me you see. Visually I am no longer under control.

I thought that I had blacked out. Not so?

I have been accused of several indiscretions that I do not remember. There are creditable witnesses to these events, so they are probably true. I will record all my thoughts so that I will again learn to take control.

In the meantime, take care.

THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

by Trevor Donohue

He was there again this morning.

As clever as usual, he mimics me to perfection. Who is he? Why does he torment me? I do not like him. I do not want him in my life.

Yesterday there was no reflection in the mirror. It was a worry until I realised that the door to the cabinet had been left open. A silly mistake that made me smile until I closed the door and for a moment glimpsed his mocking expression.

I have another mirror. It is set in the wall adjacent to the cabinet. Closing the door, for a moment, the two images collided, providing an infinity of mirrors, each one with a different expression.

Lately I have been receiving mail addressed to Anton Miraz. There is no one by that name at my address. The letters are always handwritten in a spidery scrawl. There is no return address. I am tempted to open one of them to find out more about this person. In the meantime, they are stacking up. There is an accumulation of dust on earlier letters. I cannot remember how long I have been receiving them.

She doesn't write anymore. Most mornings I wait for the postman. For some reason I am either too early or too late. There was another letter in my letterbox. It was addressed to him. This Anton Miraz.

I do not leave the house. I will redirect the letters and leave them in the letterbox. This is the best way to remember her.

The days are a haze, dull around the edges. I never sleep, yet dream, fragments of remembered incidents that may or may never have happened. They say that no one has ever died of a broken heart, and then what is death, this creeping malaise that saps the life from me?

Oh horror, what wickedness. I have opened one of the Miraz letters. He accuses me of dreadful things. The letter is vile, vindictive. I would never have hurt her. These lies, these insinuations, are unfounded.

I will flee from this Miraz.

Escape the poisonous putrescence that seeps from under her door. I will be free.

Free to spend my time with you.

My new friend.

BROWN SHOES

by Veselka Gencic

It was Friday. A few passers-by hurried down the street to escape the scorching sun. Two young girls laughed waiting for the green at the traffic light. Somewhere on the corner, a brake squeaked.

I entered the bank. I needed some cash.

Only one counter was open. Behind the counter sat a young woman with long curly hair. She had beautiful lips with discreet lipstick. I liked her.

There were only a few customers waiting.

The first in line was a short man with haircut the style of Boris Johnson's and in tee-shirt of indeterminate colour. Muscles on arms and broad shoulders, he could be a woodchopper. His short cargo shorts used to be blue. He held three documents in his hand and turned them over and over, fidgeting all the time.

Behind him stood a man with glasses. His pants lined up in a flawless line. Some small chain hung from his trouser pocket. On his white shirt was a tie; he probably came from some office. The sleeve of his right arm only was rolled up. The left sleeve probably covered some tattoo, a memory of a failed love. His beautiful long fingers held a large envelope. He stood completely still.

Third in line were brown shoes. I did not look at who was the owner. I wasn't interested. My eyes were fixed on the brown shoes. More precisely, a few centimetres away from the shoes. There was a 50-dollar banknote on the floor.

I looked around. Apart from those standing in line, an elderly woman was sitting in the corner of the waiting room. She was completely uninterested and seemed to be dozing off.

I bent down and picked up the banknote with my thumb and forefinger, and waved it left and right. Nobody looked at me. I slowly approached the other side of the line and waved with it again. Nobody looked at me.

Smiling, I peered into the face with flawless pants but his left shoulder shifted slightly forward to protect him. I also waved at the elderly woman sitting in the chair, but she didn't look at me.

I knew there were cameras somewhere, so I waved the banknote at all the corners. Nothing happened.

I was confused. Maybe they see me out of the corner of their eye, but they don't like me. And maybe they think I'm crazy so they won't interfere. I stood in the middle of the waiting room completely ignored by everyone, still holding a banknote high. I was afraid to put it in my bag since they could accuse me of stealing.

There was a small chair by the door. I don't know why it was there. I sat on it and put my little hat on my lap. My hand was sweating so I dropped the banknote into the hat.

New customers entered, but they didn't interest me. I waited for the three in the line. One of them was a loser. The one who lost would surely notice that I was holding his banknote.

The guy with Johnson's hair finally made his way to the exit. With one hand he pushed the documents into the back pocket of his shorts and with the other he took out the sunglasses. The door opened and he stepped out.

He didn't look at me.

A few minutes passed. Flawless trousers headed for the door. He held a cell phone and was already talking to someone with a seductive smile on his face. He didn't look at me either.

The elderly lady got up and walked slowly to the door. Either she forgot the counter, or she didn't intend to do anything but stop by for the shade. When she was next to me, she bent down, looked in the hat on my lap, and said: 'O dear, someone was very generous.'

'Oh, no, no, Its...' I wanted to explain but she was already outside. She didn't look at me at all.

I was waiting for brown shoes. He must be my loser.

A soft female voice came from the counter: 'Next one please.'

Finally, the brown shoes were coming. They walked lightly, like a gazelle. When the shoes were next to me, they stopped. That's it. I knew. For the first time I looked up at his face, waiting. It was a very beautiful face, freshly shaved and slightly darkened by the sun. I couldn't see his eyes from the big sunglasses. I thought he would talk to me; I thought that's why he stood by me, but I was wrong. He was busy putting money in his wallet. I finally decided to ask him if he might have lost this banknote.

'Excuse me, sir, maybe it's you...' Before I finished the shaved face quickened his pace and went out into the street. The door closed silently behind him.

He didn't look at me.

Slowly I got up, put the 50-dollar banknote in my wallet, placed the hat on my head, and went outside. I no longer needed to withdraw money.

I was very happy with this culture. Really.

SURF BUDDIES

by Michele Green

A golden hue emerges above the horizon. Sunrise. The sun's rays bring warmth and bright light to another mid-summer's day. My mate Tom and I waste no time. School holidays mean serious surfing. Waxed boards tucked under our arms, we mount our bikes, and ride out of town.

We plan to stay all day so we chuck bread, chips and a couple of bananas into an old school bag. The coastal road, along the Bunurong coast, takes us to our destination, past Eagle's Nest to the top spot for local surfers, The Oaks. The surfing grapevine says the waves are rolling in there today. Beginners beware. They're big buggers, not for the faint-hearted. We're a little bit fazed. We've been riding waves since we were tackers, but not for long in the big stuff. It's just on twelve months we've been coming here, to this place.

Perched high on the road above our planned location, we peer down at the roaring seas below. Angry today as they come into the bays from Bass Strait. Adrenaline surges through our veins. Impatient to get started, we use a bicycle lock to chain the old two-wheelers and scale down the staircased slope. We zinc up our faces and shoulders, hide our gear then paddle out to the deep, seeking the rides we're always dreaming about.

Time is forgotten. Hours go past. We forget to check tide times and weather conditions, but we're not bothered. It looks perfect out there. What could go wrong?

In sapphire seas and white capped waves, we pass the rocky reef that is just visible at high tide and the marker for more dangerous waters. Our flexible bodies chase anything rideable. We're stoked to be getting some fantastic rides. Highly charged and highly competitive, we urge each other to take incredible risks. We have FOMO if one or

the other gets a better wave. Where we are is normally a 'no go zone' in the surfing fraternity. If we're not careful, we'll pay the ultimate price.

I look over to see that Tom is in trouble. Real trouble. His board has taken him straight into the reef. He doesn't see what's coming as he crashes head-first into the protruding rock. He is knocked unconscious, with one of his feet still attached to the leg rope of the back half of his shattered fiberglass board that's barely keeping him afloat. I am in shock. I freeze, not knowing what I should do. 'Hey Tom, Tom, tell me what's happened?' He is unable to answer.

Some common sense and first-aid knowledge kick in. I struggle to drape his body, a dead weight, over my long board, then frantically paddle into shore. His forehead is bleeding profusely and I reckon he's suffering from concussion, with extensive cuts and bruises to his body. I need to get help ASAP.

Once I get him on the dry sand, I place him in a coma position. I scramble though our belongings and shake out his mobile phone. I call 000.

'What's your emergency?' inquires the responder.

'Ambulance. Right now.' I am put through to the ambulance call center.

'Is the patient breathing?' asks a female voice.

'Yes, but he is unconscious. I think he has a severe head injury and lacerations to his head and body. I can't tell if he has any fractures anywhere, but given the impact, he may have. Please help. We're down at The Oaks.'

'An ambulance is on its way'; her voice is reassuring.

I am a bundle of nerves, but I try to keep calm for my mate's sake.

Ten minutes limp by at a snail's pace.

'Where are they?' I mutter to myself, impatient, when suddenly a loud siren is audible at the top of the rise. I keep Tom warm, but he is still out to it. His pulse and breathing are OK but not robust. It's going to be a job to get him stretchered up the endless wooden stairs to the waiting ambulance in the carpark. Hopefully three of us should manage.

If a local shows up to help, that'd be a bonus.

'What's the patient's name?' asks one of the paramedics. They place him on a gurney. 'Tom, can you hear me? Tom? Tom?' No response.

I tell them what happened only thirty minutes ago. I'm still in shock and feel a little woozy. They tell me it's a normal reaction and to take some deep breaths. They need my signature before proceeding to the local footy ground, used sometimes as a makeshift helipad.

'From there they'll 'chopper him to the Alfred. They'll put him in an induced coma,' the more senior ambo informs me. 'A trauma team will be standing by to treat him. Don't worry. He's in good hands.'

I contact his parents before he's in the air. Grateful for my help, they'll meet him at the hospital, an hour and forty-five-minute road trip away. Meanwhile, I hitch a ride from a friend whose Kombi will take our bikes and gear back to town. My mate's mum puts a mug of milky sweetened tea and some biscuits in front of me. They're just what I need to settle me down.

After a three-week stint in intensive care, then transfer to a ward, Tom is still recovering well in hospital, his sense of humour intact. He

has a wide scar across his forehead and his left arm is in a splint for two breaks. Luckily his fractured skull does not require surgery to alleviate the swelling on his brain. The doctors are confident he'll regain all function and will be able to start the new school year.

He decides to give surfing a rest for a while ... and, if he ever does get back to it, he'll avoid the more dangerous haunts. I'll be checking weather conditions before I go out on a board again - and, when I do, never alone!

BECOMING AN ISLAND

by Deb Hall

I cannot speak for anyone else but I know it took me two full days to completely comprehend that we were adrift. I was all at sea emotionally but I'm talking about the bigger picture, the fact that the land we stood on was no longer attached to the continent; it was floating, albeit sluggishly; it was underway to who knows where, with an indeterminate number of reluctant or ignorant passengers, aboard.

It took more than a few days to determine the area encompassed. It seemed blurred at the edges, given the nature of the rending and wrenching that had occurred and, as a consequence, everyone was dazed and shocked. We knew which way was up but our field of vision, our sense of perspective, our spatial awareness was flawed, out of kilter, awry. We were unable to work it out. Most people huddled in their dwellings, which remained largely intact, although some houses and blocks of flats closer to the edges had collapsed and been swallowed by the sea.

I have always been a great one for walking, to explore, to calm my overactive mind, to work through problems or simply dissolve them into thin air. Now I walked this way and that until I came to a succession of dead ends, places where the land dropped away and I was confronted by the limitless sea. In this way I learned that part of St Kilda was an island.

The chunk that had broken away stretched from Queens Parade in the north, Barkly Street in the East, Kerferd Road in the west. It included Albert Park Lake in its entirety. In the south we ran right down to the shoreline. Our island had torn away some of St Kilda Pier when it set sail, not the main concrete section but part of the wooden planked jetty.

I marvelled at the sections of tram tracks in Fitzroy Street uprooted by the force of the upheaval. There were also stretches of tram line that appeared weirdly unaffected. I figured it had happened late at night after the trams stopped running, because there were no trams or light-rail vehicles stranded on the tracks or derailed beside them.

We had no running water, no sewerage, no electricity, and no gas. By the time we realized our plight, nobody had any cell phone service either. I had never owned a mobile phone so the lack of proximity to phone towers didn't bother me. Others were bereft. They were used to living their lives at a remove, using their phones as a barrier to reality; they were all recluses in their own way yet feeling as if they had the world at their fingertips. At least the toppled power poles and fallen power lines were not live and dangerous.

It was the time of year when the Grand Prix Corporation were building various structures in the parkland around the lake and on the lakeside roads, in readiness for the Grand Prix. Many of the corporate marquees were erected too. I noted, with satisfaction, that after the news spread, or the realization dawned that we were afloat, local homeless people gravitated to the lakeside and took up squatters' rights in the snowy-white marquees.

There were various construction vehicles there too. In the ensuing days, an enterprising chap managed to get one of the excavators started and dug some latrines in the park for the use of passengers aboard this strange craft. He also took homeless people, perched high on the vehicle, for jaunts around the lake.

I wondered what class we were on this strange vessel. We certainly weren't First Class or even steerage, but I rejected the idea of us being convicts shipped away for our crimes. If we were rejects, we were hapless souls. We were more like naive tourists embarked on the wrong conveyance, having failed to read the signs. I suppose you could call it the cruise of a lifetime.

After the initial shock had worn off, people took different courses of action. Some attempted to go about their daily lives, pretending that nothing untoward had happened; they were in denial because the reality was too threatening to face. The other group were busily networking and making plans, checking the available food and water supplies on the island. They held meetings where they talked about organizing and rationing supplies, and formed subgroups to assist with the distribution.

I didn't have a foot in either camp. In my usual independent manner, I had been figuring out things for myself. I had been acquiring food and drink without the assistance of any half-baked committee. I had been stocking up in the certain knowledge that sooner or later people would panic and start looting shops.

I owned a compass so I was able to ascertain the direction we were heading, that's if my compass hadn't been thrown-off by any kind of interference. As far as I could tell we were heading south-south-east. I doubted if we would bump into Tasmania but we could eventually make landfall on one of the small islands off the coast of New Zealand, or even touch on the mainland. I wasn't optimistic though.

I didn't know if we were the only ones in transit or if other parts of Australia had broken-off. Maybe the entire landmasses of our known world had subdivided and were now adrift, jostling around the oceans like dodgem cars.

It has been two weeks. I believe our island is becoming submerged. It is gradually sinking. Every day I notice more land has been encroached upon. I have decided that it is time to place my small journal in a wine bottle, cork it, and toss it into the sea. Perhaps somebody in some far-flung place will find the bottle one day and be amused or disconcerted by its contents.

WHERE THE WAVES START

by Deb Hall

I want to go to where the waves start. I don't care how long it takes. It could be my atheistic pilgrimage. I think that the waves' journey begins a long way off across the sea, across the ocean. The waves follow each other into shore. None of them want to be left behind, marooned out at sea. Sometimes they skitter quietly, playfully onto the sand, lapping the edges of the land. Sometimes they mutter and swirl and grumble and groan, as if it is too much effort to heave themselves ashore. Then, the shoreline seems to creak in sympathy.

Sometimes the waves wheeze and the gulls take fright and scramble into the air. Sometimes the winds and currents conspire to create much bigger waves. They rise and thunder and gallop white spume towards the land. They charge and pound and batter the shoreline. They stake their claim on the land and, when they recede, they can carve a channel, or create a steep, overhanging shelf, or simply commandeer a bushel of sand, or level a child's sandcastle with their sleight-of-hand.

I can stare at the waves for ages. I can become mesmerized by them. Even when I am not planning on walking out along the entire length of the pier, I still feel a compulsion to venture a little way, to where I can see the waves surging beneath the pilings of the pier. I stand above the sequence of waves. I gaze at them rising and surging; I feel their soothing power, the solace and familiarity inherent in repetition.

I know that sometimes the larger waves, those waves with a different character, emanate from heavily-laden container ships coming up the bay. Their wake sends a freak wave to gallivant and usurp the established pattern. But there are other sources, and I want to go to where the waves start.

I ponder the origins of the waves. I imagine a gigantic mill wheel, way beyond the horizon, out in the far reaches of the ocean where no human has ever sailed. I envisage a highly-skilled crew of playful dolphins that take turns in turning that wheel to create the waves that come to my shores.

The wheel is massive, made out of a very hard stone, yet despite its size, the complement of dolphins shifts it effortlessly. Sleek and sinuous, the dolphins move in perfect synchronization; they leap out of the water to push the wheel with their beaks. The wheel has a series of buckets within its circumference, and the dolphins nudge the upper edges of those cavities to manoeuvre it. The buckets scoop up an enormous amount of water and then, as the wheel rotates, upend it to form waves. The other dolphins can be seen swimming around, twisting and turning and cavorting in the mill race at the base of the wheel, where the turbulence is strongest.

Walking along the shore at low tide, I study the well-defined ripples left in the sand by a fast-flowing receding tide. I feel the power of the waves, the sea force that has hard-packed the sand here, and I sense its vibrations through the soles of my runners. Most of all, I observe the flotsam and jetsam strewn along the beach.

Amongst the seaweeds, seagrasses and pebbles, there are a myriad of shells and sponges, small sea creatures or fragments of them. I know that in the summertime I might see large dead jellyfish washed ashore, those transparent ones with a distinctive formation of aqua coloured organs, like a four-leaf clover, visible through their blubber. Soon, they evaporate into a mere smudge on the sand. I might spot the buoyant, plastic-appearing, dried air-bladder of a porcupine fish, or the vaguely horseshoe shaped jelly

blob which is the egg-case of the sand snail. Sometimes I nudge something with my foot to separate it from the seaweed to ascertain what it is. Sometimes I stoop to examine an object or pick it up for closer inspection. Walking the shoreline, head bowed, I commune with the wonders of nature.

Some mornings when I am out for my early walk, I happen upon the rare occasion when the moon has rolled out a roadway of moonlight on the dark surface of the sea. It is a full moon so it has considerable power. It can alter my state of mind, rejig my mood. Sometimes my brain is sloshing around in my skull, seemingly directionless, but then something can pique my interest. One particular morning, the moon galvanized me, swung my compass needle, and provided a fine new heading for me to set sail along.

The illuminated roadway was a broad, rippled, sparkling swathe. I gazed at it and felt that I could stroll all of the way out to where the riding-lights of dark ships lie in the channel, without getting my feet wet. Naturally I would be hesitant at first, prone to tiptoe, but soon I would stride out confidently. Perhaps I would saunter past those ships and continue into the darkness beyond and venture all of the way to where the waves start.

I continued on my early morning walk with a smile on my face at the thought of setting off on that fanciful tangent. The light was growing in the sky as I reached the pier and I thought I saw a dead or stranded whale in the shallows beside the pier. It turned out to be a huge-girthed segment of tree trunk. Nature had carved it to resemble the humped mound of some dead sea creature's back. Each time I am at the seashore, I see something different. There is endless space, infinite variety in the moods of the sea and sky, the array of clouds, and the treasures of the seashore.

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT MATTER!

by Roslyn Jones

How does one become a better person in a world of COVID-19 worry and multiple lockdowns?

It's so easy to be negative and miserable, but it's way easier just to smile at each and every one you meet on the street, on the beach and in your apartment building – hold the door open for them and give them a friendly greeting (behind the mask eyes can still smile and a head nod is good too)! It costs zero but it could mean the world to that person and help them get through another tough day.

Reaching out to family and friends more often than ever and thinking of ways you can help them get through – everyone has their own private issues and worries – worries that most people just keep to themselves, and indeed bottle up, particularly in our lockdown world.

Today the sun is streaming through our apartment and it makes you feel lucky to be alive and well – the birds are singing and people are out and about on their permitted activities. From time to time someone smiles at you above their mask – one thing the masks have been great for, apart from their important function, is keeping us warm during these winter months!

I'm about to do some baking to share around and that in itself gives me the incentive to get through yet another day in lockdown. Our home is spick and span, cupboards sorted and there's a large bag of goodies ready for the op shops (when they reopen).

Time now to reflect on our wonderful community here in Port Melbourne – every day there are examples of people reaching out to others, and help is always available.

Help can come in many forms, such as leaving a basket of lemons or herbs outside with a note to help yourself, or an offer to shop or cook a meal for an elderly or isolated person.

Sometimes just turning up at the door with warm scones is enough to turn someone's ordinary day into a real 'feel good' day – also simply having a chat over the fence can be an important tool to break down isolation in these difficult and challenging times.

Paying it forward' at the local coffee shops, in the hope that someone will know that others care when they receive their no cost coffee.

I am grateful to live here in Port Melbourne and indeed Melbourne.

Many many holidays and activities have been cancelled over the last two years, and close family live in regional and outback NSW, so we're missing them greatly. My main joy comes from knowing they are all safe and well.

My husband and friends to walk with and the many takeaway lattes have been a blessing – (thanks to all the hardworking cafes and restaurants providing this service) – you've been awesome.

The wonderful Port Phillip Bay on our doorstep – how lucky we are to have this free entertainment each and every day – always something to look at and enjoy.

How have I become a better person ??

I've learnt to be completely non-judgmental (still working to perfect this to be honest)!!

Trying to keep in touch more often with family and friends – and I don't mean a text ! Telephoning is so much better and FaceTime is good – but only when your hair is washed and lippy applied!!

Baking for others (I must share around the lockdown kilos), lending books and supplying recipes.

Understanding how difficult it is for the shop assistants trying to help us put dinners on the table and still smiling when people are worried and grumpy.

Criticism is a 'no no' now – if you feel inclined to do so try walking a mile in someone else's shoes – it works!

To say heartfelt thanks to our wonderful health care providers is not enough – they deserve every accolade bestowed upon them for their dedicated and tireless work I am in awe of these real heroes performing their duties every day in order to heal and protect their patients.

Finally – Starting each and every day with a grateful heart for what we have, and not what we want has become my mantra, and I intend to remember this when we return to a more normal existence

Take care, keep smiling and stay positive!

ACQUAINTANCE

by Aziza Khamlichi

It was one of those sunny days with blue sky in Albert Park.

Layla decided to take a trip to the city.

On her way to the No 1 tram, she saw people happily walking, all wearing cheerful clothes. Smiles and greetings were shared and acknowledged. This was shortly before the outbreak of COVID-19. As soon as she stepped on board the tram, she looked around for a seat. A gentleman shot her a smile, revealing his brown teeth. He patted the seat next to him with slender beautiful hands and long dirty nails.

“Come lady, sit down,” he invited her. He was well spoken, but very smelly.

She hesitated for a few seconds. The passengers’ eyes were on her. Embarrassed, and not wanting to offend him, she took up his offer.

“Thank you” she said, avoiding his gaze.

Trying to hide, she took her book from her bag and buried her head in it. She started reading, to avoid a conversation.

“What are you reading lady?” He got closer to look at the title.

She couldn’t hold her breath for long. His pungent smell was overwhelming.

“Ah, *The Power*! I read it. It is a page turner. Naomi Alderman?”

He gave her a concise summary in an articulate manner.

“It is about gender imbalance. Women, with a flick of their finger, they could kill. I don’t want to spoil the ending for you,” he continued.

This took her by surprise and got her attention -This man was clearly well educated. She looked at him properly for the first time. Despite his greasy blond hair and unshaven face, she saw a handsome man with intelligent eyes.

He offered a sticky hand for an introductory handshake. Reluctantly, she took it. Making sure the contact did not linger. Out of respect, she hesitated to wipe her hand on her dress.

“You look Lebanese.”

“Middle Eastern” she replied.

He switched into an almost perfect Arabic conversation.

Astonished, she found herself responding to his open-ended questions. He did it tactfully and in a respectful way.

While he barely disclosed anything about himself.

“I am a philologist.” he said proudly.

“What is that?” Layla asked, ashamed of her ignorance.

“I study the history of languages and enjoy looking closely at literature.”

Engrossed in conversation, she missed her stop.

“Good to meet you. I have to get off” she said in haste.

“Have a nice day.” His melodic voice and bad smell followed her as she made her exit. He could easily have been a radio presenter or done voice-overs, she thought to herself in amazement!

Two weeks later, after their brief encounter, a book under her arm, she proceeded towards Station Pier.

The same gentleman was sitting on the sand. He was bending over paper. Crayons spread out in front of him. He was sketching the docked Spirit of Tasmania.

“Hi” she waved with a friendly smile.

“Hello” he said in his mesmerising voice.

She sat next to him admiring his work. He looked different and smelled of aftershave.

“Fancy meeting you here” she said cheerfully.

“I was hoping to see you. You told me you come here often”. He looked at the book under her arm.

“Still reading *The Power*?”

“No.” She replied, “I lost the book on the tram on my way home the day I met you.”

“Shame. I wanted to debate the position of women with you as the novel unfolded.”

He stretched his hand to take her book. She noticed clean and beautifully manicured nails.

“Ah, you are reading French this time - Albert Camus. I remember reading this book years ago.”

In perfect French he summarised the book and discussed the author’s philosophy in depth. Eventually she made her excuses and started to walk away.

“Hope to see you again” he said, getting back to his drawing.

She felt a strong connection to this person. They didn’t make any plans to meet again. But they did, the following week, in the same place.

He greeted her warmly.

“Well look at you! Beautiful teeth!” she remarked.

“Just came from the dentist” he answered with a thumbs up.

“Good hair cut! Your beard is gone!” She looked at him from head to toe.

“It was free.” he boasted.

“I love your shirt.”

“Yep. The lady in the Op Shop was very kind. She gave me things. She said it was designer stuff I told her I know.”

“You are looking so well” she complemented him.

“I am not homeless. I have a room in a hostel. The people there are noisy. They fight a lot. I would rather roam the streets and sleep in St Vincent’s park or on the beach.”

Suddenly COVID-19 hit. She didn’t see the gentleman during the lockdown. At the end of the lockdown she saw him, sitting on a bench in Clarendon Street. All dishevelled, in a tattered track suit, dirty, and wet. Eyes closed, head bent and nose running.

“Three dollars please” he begged, with a sniff and a croaky voice.

NERVE PAIN

by Inge Kulmanis

10.6.21
Never underestimate!
It flits along into you
Just like lightening
It's fast and furious
And takes your breath away
I still don't understand exactly
the start
and end
of it ...
It's just mighty powerful
It renders you useless
mentally and physically.
Just in this minute,
I am at peace!!
Outside, the clouds are grey,
white and blue
It's evening and the
streetlights are beaming
Bower trees minus leaves are
outside the windows
A few cars are gliding up and
down the streets
It is winter time at last

11.6.21
A new day has begun
The sun shines bright and
sparkles.
Hopefully my time is ending
with all this gruesome pain
The nurses are patient and
understanding
Kate comes and visits:
hopefully I can make it for
another walk

12.6.21
Annelise is sitting beside me.
It's calming and we're looking
at the news.
Angel nurses I call them,
dedication is the word.

No. 72 tram rolls past.
The lockdown almost gone.
Life has totally changed.

13.6.21
From Port Phillip help is
received.
Now I'm slightly dizzy when
everything went rather well

14.6.21
This morning I could hardly
breathe.
Without the nurses
I would not be here
They guide when pain takes
over!
Then gently take you by the
hand and bring you back to
bed.
*Patrick left that morning and
flew back home.
The helicopter flew to far
away Mildura, up in the North
Victoria it is a large state

15.6.21
Not a special day

16.6.21
Trying to deal with nerve pain

17.6.21
Same as above

18.6.21
Getting better with sleeping
and walking

19.6.21
Having a special, good day
Annelise gave me the movie
Tracks to watch
Now, I am spent from a
lovely day.



REFLECTIONS

by Inge Kulmanis



Evening Light
Barren Trees
Sleepy Minds
Soon the Spring will arrive
All the Blossoms
will revive
all the sleepy minds
"Rejoice"
The Spring
With all its splendour!
The sun is stronger,
The birds start to nest
The ducks swim
patiently close together
Magnolia bloom
Oh joyous Spring
You're almost here
a few more days
and we rejoice!

ANNIE AND ME

by Mary-Grace Levakis



Have a look at the photobooth photo of Annie and me. Guess who's who? I adored Annie and congratulated Mum and Dad for having the perfect baby, the perfect child. She was without a blemish and everyone adored her. Her life seemed sunny. Except towards the end of course; she overdosed on pills.

Before one solves a problem, one has to be a bit of a detective. I will never stop wondering what happened to Annie. As a child she was always happy, with a smile on her face. To see my baby sister was a joy. She was intelligent and mature. The only black mark against her was her habit of reprimanding people for their wrong doings.

When Annie died, I cried every day for a month, and soon afterwards suffered a stroke. My heart was broken.

Annie had worked as a doctor's receptionist and one day rang me from the surgery crying.

I don't know what's happening to me!

She blurted this repeatedly. She was distraught. I didn't know the reason. Annie stopped going to work.

"Did a client give you a hard time?"

"No." She was well liked by everyone.

"Was it the doctors?"

"No." She was given a raise for her efficiency.

I was bewildered by her behaviour. "Whatever it is" I tried to reassure her "you can overcome it." And why shouldn't she? She was, after all, at twenty-six, a sensible young thing.

After consulting Dr Oliver, he urged me to encourage her to return.

"To forget." he said. Forget what?

It wasn't Dr Oliver who depressed my sister. He cared about her well-being. All her co-workers did and hoped she would get better soon and return to work; they all missed her.

Was Annie pregnant?

"No," she said, but one of her co-workers was. Annie had intervened, counselling her and calming her down.

One day at a railway station Annie got the shakes and tremors. Andrew, a railway employee, kindly put his jacket around her and took her home. When they arrived at her house, her housemates chased him away, not permitting him inside the house. Who was he? He could have been an axe murderer for all they knew. But Annie spoke of him in glowing terms.

And when I met him, to say thanks for looking after Annie, he chastised me for not looking after my sister better.

"She's your sister" he said.

I asked Annie to stay with me for a break, to get away from the chaotic share house which seemed to depress her. She did, but I still couldn't get through to her, couldn't uncover the source of the pain.

JUST SAYING

by Warwick Lloyd

We've lost a whole generation of speech, with much of our vocabulary off like a bucket of prawns in the sun and unlikely to return. Replaced with words like OMG and other acronyms which say it all – WTF. And even the work environment has changed, as many declare "I WFH".

Even today the Premier announced a continuation of lockdown for COVID and commended the people who had been in "iso".

So, what sense do we make of all this? I'll give you my two bobs worth. The reason we have moved on from slang or colloquialisms is a combo of not invented here – the next generation wanting their own dialogue; we in Australia are a mix of ethnicities and languages. Plus, and this is a big one – we live in the digital world where texts rule and social media channels like Twitter only take 150 characters – therefore words are squashed to fit.

There's a water safety commercial on the TV currently that uses the line "she'll be right" – I'm not sure a high percentage of the people who that msg is intended for would even know or recall the origins of that Aussie expression. It's just not in our day-to-day language anymore.

A whole bunch of expressions have simply disappeared. Once an accomplished sportsperson would be described as a bobby dazzler rather than champion or super star. If they showed dash on the field, they were off like a bride's nightie. If they were persistent then they were going at it like a bull at a gate. If they didn't feel well, they would be as crook as Rookwood which is a NSW cemetery. If you'd had too many beers down the pub, you'd be Adrian Quist.

And along with rhyming slang disappearing, swearing seems to have become mainstream. Rather than beautiful words it's come down to the most simplistic of conversations – "f" this and "f" that. Once people would take pride in refraining from using a swear word, yet not today. People would once swear under their breath, yet today you can be on a packed train and someone on their mobile would swear like a trooper without any sense of concern for others. Even programs on the Government owned communications network are filled with expletive content. And AAMI commercials will make reference to cars breaking down "up Ship Creek".

There was once a government run censor who would police inappropriate language in the media, yet today they focus on far more serious content like pornography. It appears language is as liberal as we want it to be. There is no going back as new words will continue to emerge, likely to be made up of letters and symbols, and the Oxford Dictionary will be about as relevant as a street directory.

If we lament the way we used to communicate, that's like crying over spilt milk – it would be like turning back time. Who would have thought we'd have Apps called TikToc or digital currency called bitcoin? For that matter what will the study of literature be like in the future? It might sound crazy yet there may even be a virus called COVID 19 – nah that would be OTT.

MY GOLD CAN WAIT

by Warwick Lloyd

That's what I told myself as I was omitted from the hockey team to represent Australia.

You see I'd been training to play first grade for 8 years and dreaming about competing even longer. My parents had sacrificed everything to make it happen for me, selling the house in Rosebud, moving to Canberra so we'd be close to the Australian youth training program. I'd even been gifted with a sports scholarship to go to Peninsula grammar. Nothing was left to chance; I was destined to be an Olympic star.

I can recall my dad standing on the sidelines each Saturday morning during my school years, yelling words of encouragement. Rain, hail or shine he was my rock.

So where did it all go wrong when I started training in Canberra? Well, telling the coach his job would be toast if he didn't give me a role in offence rather than defence in my first week of joining the team was probably not a big idea. I put it down to others not sharing my view of my own capabilities. Self-belief after all was key to realising one's dreams.

I'm not usually an outspoken person yet I found growing up I'd let others force their decision on me without consultation and I wasn't about to let this happen without having my say.

From the day I made my comment the coach gave me short shift and I needed to turn things around if I was to keep my spot on the team. So, I set up a meeting one on one where I planned to apologise to Coach Smith. The coach agreed to a meeting only if the team captain could also attend. Little did I appreciate any negative comments would be now heard by two people rather than the coach alone. Two against one.

The coffee meet-up day had arrived and the first 5 minutes of discussion was cordial enough. Then Coach Smith went for the

jugular and said my attitude was a real problem for both him and the team. I looked to the captain, who to my surprise sided with Coach Smith, stating my ability to be a team player was impaired by my inflated view of myself. Basically, I needed from here on in to keep my mouth shut and do as they say.

Well, I was not going to take this from two people whom I now had little respect for, even if it meant waving farewell to my chance of representing the country. I just said "shove it".

So why had I been so bullish about my own talents. The reason was for years I had been bullied at school, called a sissy and basically threatened. I'd fought every inch of the way to be a success and there were always barriers. My family had done their bit and I was not about to throw in the towel now to appease anyone. I was going to stand up for myself no matter what the consequences.

I left the training camp that day and months later watched the hockey final on the TV. The team put in a big effort yet lost the game. I knew I would have made a difference and proceeded to go out and paint the town red, rather than green and gold.

Fast forward two years and I was chosen to represent my country in Paris. By coincidence I bumped into Coach Smith again in Melbourne's CBD. The coach stated he was no longer involved in hockey, having hung up the boots. He apologised for the way in which he had dealt with me, particularly taking offence with such an innocent comment I'd made about his own decision-making capability.

The way I look at it now is it was a lesson learned; good things can come from lousy situations and bullies don't win.

MY "FOREVER HOME"

by Barbara Anne Magee



This is my "forever home",
It's where I'm meant to be,
No more the lonely streets to roam
For breakfast, lunch, and tea,
Here I know I'm specially treasured
Far deeper than the sea...
More than ever can be measured,
It's where I'll always be.

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

by Barbara Anne Magee

Will I, or won't I? The temptation is strong
To move all these oranges further along
Till "thud!" when they finally land on
the floor,
But this is just something my mum will
abhor,
Fruit that is bruised doesn't taste nice,
you see?
And my mum likes fruit that's fresh from
the tree,
So, will I, or won't I? The question remains,
Worrying, niggling at, addling my brains,
All this discipline act... but her smacks
never hurt,
"You'll get into trouble!" ... all these
menaces curt,
They're just empty threats she repeats all
the time,
So, I'll simply ignore it, go ahead with
the crime!

THE PROMISE

by Janine Mifsud

“Nordic Blonde”. The package held so much promise. Gentle on the hair, easy to use, no yellow or red - just a beautiful shade of pale-blonde hair and a bargain at only \$17.00.

I usually travelled into the city to the Melbourne College of Hair and Beauty, a training college for aspiring beauticians and hair dressers, for a cut and a colour. I like the idea of helping the students learn their craft. It must be still the teacher in me remembering that often the only way to learn is by doing. Anyway, I have been attending the College for a number of years now. The students come from many different ethnic backgrounds with their ages and experiences just as varied. Some are straight out of school and wanting a future in the industry, others are doing refresher courses, having either pursued different careers after their initial training and now wanting employment as hair dressers; more still are on visas hoping to get jobs here in Australia before returning to their home countries.

I love the buzz of the place. I love the fact that I’ll be there for over three hours or more with someone tentatively cutting little strands of my hair and then calling the trainer over to check on the progress. I love the way the student pulls each little strand through the cap before they bleach and colour my tips. I love the fact that I never know from one visit to the next what my hair will look like before I leave.

But back to “Nordic Blonde”. I’m standing staring and debating as I gaze at the packet. I can’t go to The Melbourne College of Hair and Beauty because it is closed. Closed due to COVID. I don’t want to consider going to a local hairdresser. They’re still open at the moment because they’re exempt from lockdown during Stage Three. However, I don’t like the idea of someone being so close to my body especially when I’m being so good and staying out of harm’s way.

I succumb. I purchase the package that holds so much promise. I’m sick of this mousy brown hair with the highlights almost grown out. I’m also sick of the fringe that is now brushing my eyelashes.

My purchase goes into a bathroom cupboard and it remains there within eyesight for two weeks during which time I read and reread the instructions. Four steps and 45 minutes later I should have beautiful, silky pale-blonde flattering hair, perfect for an ageing face. I’ve never done this before, especially to a whole head of hair. I feel rather hesitant until I stare morosely into the mirror at my mouse- brown hair.

Woo, wait a minute! I’ve got to do something with that fringe and the rest of my hair is also looking pretty unkempt. It’s been months since I’ve had a haircut. I decide to give myself a trim. Scissors. I’ve got two sorts, one’s for quilting and one’s for cutting paper. I grab both and also a small hand mirror so I can see the back of my head. Have you ever tried cutting your own hair? Well I can now tell you from experience you can’t hold up a mirror and cut at the same time. You’ve just got to grab a chunk of hair and cut. That’s what I did. Just picked up clumps and chopped into it and felt to see if I thought it was the same on both sides. I picked up layers on top and tried to hold them evenly between my fingers as I’ve seen the professionals do and attacked it with the quilting scissors. My description for my very own creation, my very own style, could safely be called an “urchin cut”.

Now onto the dye. I mixed the two packets of blonde booster and bleach into a plastic container which held the unifying ingredient. I shook the bottle with enthusiasm and excitement. That gorgeous young thing advertising the product looked so happy and attractive. I could see myself in the next hour transforming from a brown little mouse into a blonde elf.

The process was quite easy. Wearing plastic gloves, all I had to do was squeeze the solution onto my hair and leave it on for 45 minutes.

I placed globules of solution on my gloved hand and lathered that into the back of my head, hoping I had a good coverage. It was all guess work.

Surprisingly, after 15 minutes I could see my hair was definitely lighter. I couldn’t see too much though because the solution covering my head was purple. But it was underway. My renewal was only minutes away. With plastic gloves, I washed my head in the sink, a towel draped around my shoulders as I still needed to towel-dry my hair before I added the toner.

I lifted my head from the sink, a quick glance in the mirror revealed the reality. “Nordic Blonde” was a fake. This was “Icelandic Orange”.

My hair was bright orange! Shocked, I prayed the toner would make a difference. Three minutes. I had to leave it on my head for three minutes.

Three minutes is an eternity when you’re hoping for a miraculous change.

There was no change.

Days have now passed and with the use of silver-blonde shampoo and conditioner, the orange has turned to muted gold.

So next time you’re in the supermarket, know not to believe in Mr Schwarzkopf and all his promises. When you look up at the myriad of dyes on sale and spot “Nordic Blonde” know you’re actually buying “Icelandic Orange” instead.

Be happy in the knowledge it’s only a couple of months between a good haircut and a bad one but who knows how long for a colour to grow out. Smile and before you know it, you’ll be back at The Melbourne College of Hair and Beauty or your favourite hairdressing salon.

BOASTS AND BRAVADOS

by Maggie Moran

We laughed so loudly.

Eggy bread had to be turned into toast!

How?

There were forty of us on the bus and now it looked as though we were stuck in the old Yugoslavia for days, if not weeks.

And we had to eat.

Our Contiki bus or heap of rubbish covered in peeling paint, had finally given up any attempt to take us on to Greece.

The last shift of the gears had been the death knell.

It had been making strange, grinding pitiful moans for the last several days. Even to my completely unmechanical ears.

Yesterday the driver Hans had had to wave smoke away to inspect under the bonnet.

This was my epic 1973 European camping adventure.

There were many epics on this trip

First was putting up a two-man tent. Never was a girl guide!

I had flatted before but had never had to buy food for forty. Daunting to say the least and dealing in foreign currencies as finance was not my strong suit.

Growing up in a family of seven, bills were usually put behind either the plaster statue of the Sacred Heart or the picture of the Virgin Mary.

Picking tins of food by the picture on the label was fraught with danger and a hail of bitter recriminations of the unfortunates on cooking duty at the time.

Thankfully my turn had been in France and I dredged my school girl memory and that's where the eggy bread saga began. But it was

challenge to be creative with 10 tins of pickled beetroot. This is long before MasterChef!

Secondly the toilets.

In reality squat boxes. We all supposed practical if kept clean. This camping ground had clearly never heard of this concept. I shan't spoil your dinner by a description but merely to say a visit was a negotiating feat that would make the United Nations proud. Holding one's breath and draping jeans around one's neck featured. We did spare a thought as to the diseases we could catch but thankfully being young and invincible...

One evening, there were excited murmurs.

Men.

35 of us on the bus were girls all in our early twenties.

Then the excitement turned to trepidation.

Army uniforms. Inquisitive visitors. Apparently stationed nearby.

Quickly we all found something vitally important to do on the bus which necessitated the door being closed.

Disappointment all round really.

Lastly the mozzies.

Enormous and vicious and unrelenting.

They buzzed, nose-dived, snuck in under anything to bite anywhere.

It was not long before we were all covered in spotty lumps. And of course, the hopeless shop had nothing to sooth our painful wounds. There were some competitions held to compare colours and sizes but sadly I have no photo proof.

Fortunately, a new, a very loose term, bus arrived, and we did eventually make it to Greece.

THE WAITING ROOM

by Maggie Moran

Let your imagination run wild!

Now pull it into a waiting room. Where are you and why?

For me it opens a Pandora's box and propels me into a world I never expected to experience and if the truth be told, I never wish to traverse again.

I had no idea there were so many varieties in the world.

After the initial shock of my breast cancer diagnosis, which I still feel is immersed in an aura of the unreal, I entered a new stratosphere.

After my initial appalling experience at St Vincent's BreastScreen it was a blanket of comfort that wrapped around us as we entered the waiting room at our local doctor. We are now in St Kilda. Grey walls and red chairs and well-worn carpet.

The L shaped area wore a slightly shabby air and as usual the magazines were hopelessly out of date. I slumped into a chair and waited. I didn't really want to go in because I wanted everything to go away!

However, the lovely Paul ushered John and myself almost immediately into his office. Paul was sort of smiling and tapping away on his computer with his chunky fingers and they fascinated me as I felt they were thinking too. He talks but I don't really listen. Comforting murmurs as names and contact details were exchanged.

Moving on to the next appointment and here I was struck by wondering who could have thought puce was a pleasant colour to place behind a selection of gold framed pictures. And red chairs again. There must have been a special advertised in the waiting room journal, I mused. The rooms for both the surgeon and oncologist were situated in a converted

weatherboard in East Bentleigh. Lovely staff who tried reasonably successfully to calm my jangled nerves. And John manfully trying to get his head around the next hurdle in our lives. I felt I was almost comatose with fright.

But again, Paul had recommended well. Chilton exuded an air of confidence, experience and sympathy. And a lovely gentle quietness. Scans looked at, breast examined and plan prepared. I registered from a sort of remote distance and tried very hard not to cry. My hand was shaken and a warm smile bestowed.

Next was Cam.

I have come to think of him as my Viking Biker. Bald head, red and grey beard and a booming voice. Such a contrast. As a team I knew they worked well together. In all my visits over the next year, the walls stayed the same and the peeling patch near one of the pictures grew steadily bigger.

Next, feeling as though I had cancer stamped on my forehead, I walked into the white and sterile world of medical imaging. Bright lights, funky furniture and up to date magazines. The chairs were comfortable and the soft music wafted and subdued chatter filled the room. When it was my turn, I went in through the doors boldly marked with danger signs. All the plaster people went through another door. My door was not for the healthy masses.

6 am. Then here was an urgency to our seemingly endless trip along Centre Road to Mulgrave private hospital. Next procedure was removal of right sentinel node. Advised not to do any Googling, I vaguely knew where it was and vaguely hoped I wouldn't miss it too much. Decided that if I was going to get through this nightmare, humour had to be involved.

The hospital reception waiting room exuded a cheerful air with a colourful bunch of flowers

THE WAITING ROOM (CONT.)

by Maggie Moran

threatening to fall over the bench. Handed a thesis sized sheaf of forms, I tried to balance it on the arm of a blue chair this time. Glancing out of the window into the crisp morning I hoped my answers would be the same. I laboured. Having already done this and posted as requested, I was a trifle annoyed that I was already lost in their paperwork. Several other early birds wrote steadily too and there was an air of anxious concentration. Dredging 70 years of medical history is daunting and I felt the chattering birds outside were laughing. This was particularly disconcerting when trying to manage the concertina folds of paper which threatened to engulf the man two seats away. In retrospect I feel the whole world knows every aspect of every internal and external organ of my being.

Next waiting room off the rank is Holmesglen Day Infusion Centre. This would be my regular watering hole for a year. The magnitude of this did not disturb much, as my mind and body were coping barely, minute by minute. Infusion had previously meant tea to me, but now the sinister world of chemical cocktails was its new persona.

The tiny room where I met Rani was perfect for the next rather dreadful hour. I didn't have to wait long for her, but the extra-large box of tissues spelt a challenging session. I left with a pile of leaflets, a head full of facts and a snotty nose.

The next day I was back.

Shona on reception presented me with another sheaf of papers and forms but it was done with such a genuine smile of welcome that I managed to fill in and chat as I sat in reception. Comfortable chairs and tasteful pictures made the small area take on the air of a domestic lounge. The newspaper was there too and I tried to interest myself after

the drudgery of form filling, to challenge myself in footy tipping. This is not an intense passion with me and I really don't follow a team but just to see if I can beat the experts.

Subsequently I have walked through those doors 23 times, admired Shona's engagement ring, admired her wedding dress and watched her belly expand with her baby. She knows it's a boy but I will catch up next week and hopefully someone will have a name and pictures. It was interesting when COVID came as I had to be temperature checked, personal details taken and sit outside with the great unwashed. Here the spectrum of the sick was much more visible. It's a good job I like talking or the sadness could be overwhelming.

Three different beanies had to be chosen for the three Gated Blood Pool Scans as gear off the top half was necessary and turbans have a habit of falling off. I think Cabrini wins the most cramped and depressing waiting room award. We are not talking of the new and amazing part. We are in the dungeons of the old. With a canula in my arm and clutching a gown tightly around me as it was cold, I squished into one of the six seats in a tiny room. Here everyone looked much older and very unwell. Heads and bodies drooped and not without cause. Fishing and racing car magazines were the order of the day and I was bored in a minute.

I found it was impossible to bring my copy of War and Peace and concentrate! So, I engaged the most likely in conversation. Success. Gradually the drooping heads lifted and the backs straightened and even a cautious smile appeared. Suddenly it was my turn for the procedure and I think I left them all in a slightly better frame of mind. Or least I was and mind games are so

important in this journey. It's too easy to be sucked into bubbles of fear as well as the waves of pain and nausea.

At Peter Mac in Moorabbin another waiting room awaited. I would be here for 16 days in a row for radiation. After gasping at having to pay \$18 for car parking which I discovered did not go into the hospital coffers, I was only to be there for 2 hours. Wishful thinking, I suspected, but it turned out to be true. Leonie brightened my visits. She was the perfect receptionist. Knew and remembered my name from day one. Her curly hair changed colour every few days and she matched it with the most creative glasses frames I've ever been privileged to see. Sparkles, patterns every hue of the rainbow and she wore them with panache. And on Cup Day, the long reception counter was decorated with a startling variety of hats. The glorious and ridiculous confection which perched precariously on Leonie's head made tears run down my face. This waiting room was different again. Large, comfortable lounge chairs and subdued lightening. A very complicated jigsaw puzzle sat in the corner and remained unfinished for my entire stay.

Did all this comfort mean waiting was interminable? The clientele here was a very different mixture. Men mostly older and as you would expect, all shapes and sizes. After waiting there, you then had to go when collected by the most delightful caring gang of chatterers. More disrobing and our gowns, coloured depending on your illness, were to be kept for the duration in a neat cupboard.

So, all equal again except the guys all were reduced to undies and gowns. It was too cruel to embark on a study of legs but it was tempting!

And now I have reached the end of my treatments; I will not miss those waiting rooms, but I am eternally grateful for their existence.

TURNABOUT

by Barbara Overbury

Turnabout is the story of one boy in my year 7 class. He's small, fair-haired, untidy dirty and hungry.

I don't know who was more miserable - he or I (him or me)?

He was my introduction to the school: after 5 years on contract tutoring at a teachers' college, I was being bitterly initiated into secondary teaching again- at a tech. For 5 years, the teaching rounds had been part of my life; and I had felt a sense of unpleasant stale nausea as I sat at the back of classrooms to 'crit' student teachers- the smell of teenage boys - unwashed and sweaty.

Yet here was I, full time, caged up for 6 hours x5 days with those same adolescents. And he was the smelliest of the lot. Lost as I was, and abandoned, he frequently came to school crumpled and dirty: dad spent most hours in the pub and "turnabout" hung around after school to get a lift back to the farm. Mum had disappeared only months earlier, fed up with the struggle to live with a drunken husband and his brother, so "turnabout's" scrumpled hair and spotty jumper were part of the process of abandonment. We had that in common; he abandoned by his mother, I by the college I had tried so hard to please.

And mutually we were drawn to each other. He hated the other teachers, glaring bitterly at them through his straight fair hair, shouting obscenities or throwing bits of wood or metal: but when not too distraught or riled by other classes, for me he calmed, sat close by, and while others worked, he played. Played the games of childhood he'd lost long ago - forgotten or uncherished. Played with paper and pens, drawing, drawing for hours - cartoons, faces, journeys. Where others wrote stories of pets, the Roman Empire, Pyramids or 'my day at the seaside', he drew pictures - of animals, Disney characters or even minute unfinished patterns that dissolved into nowhere.

He had plenty of time to recharge his batteries in my classes. For one, I let him do as he pleased. The other - well, the majority of that group were so unruly that a quiet kid in the corner went unnoticed. After all, there were a pair who enjoyed chancing each other with Stanley knives, a tall angry youth whose habitual response of sullen aggression and vitriolic language occupied a large amount of my time and of my capacity for fear. Periodically I took pity on the group of 5 shy girls and spent some time with them. Of all that class of 19 students, 4 years later, in year 11, only 2 girls and 1 boy remained.

But he has gone. Moved out of my mind, along the conveyor belt called time - or years end, or parental caprice - or what you will.

Before he went, he left me a gift. Near the end of the year, when all my stuffing had gone, and I was merely hanging on for the end of term, I resorted to using jelly snakes to keep the class's attention. John in particular was addicted to the snakes - red ones. When I had a story reading session, a process which calmed some of the restless ones, he would stare at the jar, counting the number of red ones left. Then, when he had remained calm for a whole session, his joy was great as he received the reward - a red snake. Often in his lesson he would draw these snakes, curled and friendly in their jar.

One day there were no more snakes left. He didn't seem worried, being content for once to listen to the story. Soon he became restless. With no snakes to occupy his drawing, he took my hand and started drawing. At the end of the story, having left my hand in his for about 10 minutes, I looked at it.

He had given me a gift, in red pen:

"Hello, Mrs O,

John"

SHARING

by Sheila Quairney

One seed, two lives.

But very different stories.

It happened on a long, sticky languorous summer's evening. When the setting sun painted its colours of crimson and gold across the darkening sky and the birds sang themselves to sleep.

The seed was planted.

It lay quietly undetected, buried deep in the dark and the warm, safe, secure and sheltered from harm. Free to grow, and develop, and mature.

Or so it thought.

Time passed.

Then something strange started happening to the seed. A minute shifting of cells, a sensation of schism. One seed became two. Two tiny clumps of cells fighting for survival, and sharing the nourishment. But they were not equal. The split had created two seeds of different sizes. Let's call them Alpha and Beta. And Seed Alpha was determined to keep it that way.

As the months passed, the seeds started to develop at different rates. Seed Alpha was greedy for nutrients and got bigger and bigger, while Seed Beta was smaller and unable to fight for what he needed. He just didn't grow. In any respect. Seed Alpha didn't care. He didn't want to share. He wanted to be the biggest and best.

The day came for the seeds to leave the darkness of the familiar womb and to make their way out into the light. As waves of movement propelled them forward, Seed Alpha seized his moment and pushed his way out first. A healthy and robust baby. There were cries of exhausted delight.

Many minutes later, little Seed Beta followed. There was silence.

Two babies. A shared past. But a very different future awaited.

Seed Alpha stayed at home with his mother and got bigger and stronger.

Seed Beta stayed in hospital and battled to survive. He got weaker and weaker.

Eventually he gave up.

Now Seed Alpha was the only baby, much loved and cosseted and worried over. He would lie in his cot and watch the patterns of light dancing over the ceiling and the curtains fluttering in the summer breeze. He was picked up and cuddled, over and over. The parents loved their living baby and they rejoiced in his size and strength.

But strangely, he wasn't happy. There was something missing, a part of him that should have been there but wasn't. And never would be. And it was his own fault. For taking, not sharing.

As the years went by, he came to realise what he had lost. He sought out other twins to befriend and his sense of loss became more acute.

Now he is married. It's a beautiful spring evening, their birthday. He sits under the cherry tree planted in memory of Seed Beta and toasts his tiny, missing brother. He makes a vow. Then he seeks out his new wife. And the cycle of life begins again.

ONE SMALL FRIEND

by Brenda Richards

My friend has lived in St. Kilda for 60 years. I was a small child when we met. She understands me.

The world was in upheaval. The First World War had ended, and survivors returned home, bringing the 'Spanish Flu' with them. This was one of the deadliest pandemics in human history, infecting a third of the world's population. The death toll is estimated to have been between 20 and 50 million people. It was devastating.

Stories of these times portray women as homemakers in aprons, cooking, cleaning, and bringing up children, while the men were busy working hard to provide for them. But the war changed that. The Australian workforce was depleted, as the men, and some of the women, had gone overseas to fight the necessary battles - and the occasional unnecessary ones. At home, women took on jobs from which they had previously been excluded. They 'manned' organisations, including ambulance services and the Woman's Land Army. They also kept the factories going, along with the country in general.

The returning soldiers now wanted their jobs back. Attempts were made to remove women from the workforce. Married women had to resign from the Public Service. But it was not that simple. The flu, followed by the Great Depression in 1920, affected employment. Jobs were scarce.

When Mum met Dad, she was a teacher in the mountains, and he was a saw doctor in the local mill. Then his job disappeared. Mum was the lone breadwinner. Marriage would mean no-one was working. The alternative was to delay marriage. This meant delaying babies.

I arrived when they were in their forties. I was the third. The first child was born crippled. There were two more after me, and a miscarriage at 50. Health problems and life-threatening accidents complicated matters, as World War Two loomed. They needed help.

Mum was one of eleven children. Their mother died when Mum was nine. There was not much modelling of parenting, which may be why the children grew up to be independent. Mum's two youngest sisters remained single.

The one constant in my life was change. My parents bought a shop, where they both worked full time, making and selling pies. Different people assisted in my care. Figuring out their rules was a problem. Everyone was kind. They would anticipate my needs and provide them forthwith. This didn't require talking to me, except to tell me what to do. I always did as I was told, as I wanted them to like me enough to keep looking after me. But if they didn't tell me not to do something, I assumed it was ok to do it.

I was four, and due to start school soon. Someone noticed that I didn't talk. I pointed at something and it was provided. But speech was considered a good thing to have when starting school. I was given a medical check-up.

"She knows how. She's decided not to. She's an elective mute. Don't give her things when she points. Make her say what she wants."

On starting school, my speech was minimal. What did people want me to say? I sat on the tank stand at playtime and watched the other kids. They knew what to do.

The Second World War was causing more upheaval. I spent a short stint in a boarding school. Again, everyone was kind, but focused on physical needs, not having discussions.

The war ended and the school closed. The family were trying to buy a farm, so we could all be together. In the meantime, I would stay in the city with Mum's younger sister, Mais, who was a milliner and had a small shop. There were two small rooms at the back to live in.

Mais complained that there was not enough room to swing a cat. I showed her that there was. Puss said nothing, but Mais did.

"Aaaargh. Put the cat down," she yelled.

I was allowed to play in the back yard, which was surrounded by a high corrugated fence, but not to go out the gate. She hadn't said I couldn't open it. I slid back the bolt and pushed hard. The gate moved slightly. I didn't have the strength to hold it open. It swung back. My hand was caught in the ragged tin edge. Blood was everywhere. It really hurt. I cried.

Auntie Mais came out and cleaned up the mess. Did I get sympathy for my mangled hand? Not for a minute.

"I told you not to go out the gate. Stop sooking."

This wasn't the time to say I wasn't going out, just looking.

Then Auntie Mais had a good idea. I needed some responsibility to keep me busy. She gave me money to go down the street and buy something for tea. Wow. I was a proper person at last

At the shop, they had jars filled with lollies in the window, but I wouldn't buy them. The meal had to be healthy. Then I found the peas. They were in tins. I'd seen peas growing. The pictures looked the same, and they were shelled. I bought two tins. We could have one each. Near the till there was a tiny white cat statue. I had some money left. Auntie Mais would love it. I hurried home happily.

Something went wrong. Auntie Mais frowned a big frown. She said we needed more than peas for tea. I gave her the little cat, explaining that it was a present. She went very quiet and held it in her hand, looking at it. Luckily, she remembered she had some eggs.

"We can have sandwiches to go with the peas."

Then amazingly, she asked me to look after the little cat for her, adding that it would like to have me for a friend.

And I've still got the little cat as a friend. She is as lovely as ever. Although her nose is chipped off.

LINE OF CONDUCT

by Anna Rogalina

Once I went to Pocket Park,
On a lovely sunny day,
With a friend of mine
To table tennis play!
The crow that sat on the tree
Looked so happy to see me,
Her friendly and loud greeting
Put a smile on my face,
I was at the right time,
In the right place
To do something good
For my body and mood,
The crow enjoyed the play
By counting our score,
But soon I realised
It's not what she was there for,
We were ready to finish the play
When the crow rapidly flew away,
I was taken by great surprise
By what I saw with my own eyes!
As the visitors just looked back,
She pinched from their table their snack!
I saw the crow start to fly,
But she didn't say to me, "Goodbye",
Her line of conduct was the reason
I didn't ask that crow, "Why?"

HOME HELP

by Anna Rogalina

In February, when I had a nasty fall,
Speedy recovery wasn't a reachable goal,
Rehab. sent a career to lend me a hand,
I was ready to meet her as a good friend,
I opened the door when I heard a knock,
But what I saw put me in great shock,
A heavily-pregnant lady, mother of two,
Asked politely what I'd like her to do
To help, for I had injuries from my fall,
I was speechless and couldn't talk at all!
I let her in to have some rest...
In her situation, it was the best,
I was on crutches, wearing a brace,
Thinking of how to put it in a phrase,
I've had so many funny moments in my life,
But, if she needed, I couldn't be her midwife!

TALES FROM AN AIRBNB HOST

by Rosemary Rule

Guests No 1

It's 8pm, a summer's evening, the doorbell rings. I see two people who don't look much like the profile photos, but assume they're my booked guests, unlock the gate.

Hi, I'm Rosemary, come in. We shake hands awkwardly.

Sorry but how do I pronounce your names? High-young and Heng. Welcome to Port Melbourne. Are you here for long? Those suitcases look heavy.

One week.

Please follow me up the stairs. Their cases bang up each wooden step; I'll check for damage later.

I silently practice their names, speak slower; Australian isn't easy. In the spacious guest room, they drop their cases.

What are your plans for tomorrow?

Great Ocean Road trip.

It's a long way so leave early. Would you like tea or coffee? Come downstairs when you're ready, I'll show you around.

Perching on kitchen stools, the talk's stilted. Heng works in a Seoul museum, it's their first overseas trip, first time using Airbnb.

I don't ask why so much luggage, or about their driving experience.

They tram into the city, go shopping, returning with bags of chocolates, biscuits, shampoos, tins of Milo.

Friends say we must buy in Melbourne these things and we will like. We want to try many western foods; hard to find at home and cost much, High-young explains.

Next day they head for the Great Ocean Road, return at night fall, too tired for tea or talk, disappear upstairs.

I worry about luggage weight limits, customs inspections; remember Airbnb is about providing hospitality.

Cases bump out the doors; hands shake goodbye. I head upstairs, open the window, change the sheets, vacuum, replace the tourist maps.

Guests No 2

Twenty-four hours later the buzzer rings, I welcome the next guests.

Hi Gordon and Barbara, good to meet you, where did you come from? Shepparton. Welcome; please follow me.

Gordon, that's an enormous suitcase, would you prefer to leave it here and take the smaller bags upstairs?

Is this the same man from his Airbnb photo? Less hair, looks older, walks stiffly, is vague. Barbara, the talker, not the luggage carrier, resembles her photo.

Gordon won the Masters mixed doubles tennis comp. in Shepparton, she relates.

Congratulations, what an achievement. I'm struggling to match the man with his tennis title.

Barbara is glamorous. Layered blonde hair, blue eyes, pretty face, wears a tight top, short skirt, high heels, red nails. Is that why she doesn't carry cases?

Do you play tennis?

Heavens no, I watch from the sidelines, cheer the boys on, organise drinks with the girls afterwards.

TALES FROM AN AIRBNB HOST (CONT.)

by Rosemary Rule

Reach the guest room. Perhaps you'd like a cup of tea or a glass of wine?

Thank you, definitely wine.

Sitting at the table, I sense Gordon's not following me; is it his hearing? I speak slower, trying to picture him on the court. Was his partner an ace player?

Barbara's chatty, tells me about her mother who recently died at 101 in an aged care home, mentally alert.

In Perth now, she explains, there's a lot of coloured people. Mum and I got upset when one of them came into her room. They're South African coloureds. It's amazing how many have been allowed in isn't it Gordon.

Is this the time to show them the photo of my black, Kenyan family? I'm a host, offering hospitality, not personal or political opinions.

Later, on my Airbnb page, Barbara and Gordon write me a glowing review of their stay; want to return. I'll likely decline their request, for family reasons.

Guests No 3

'How are you? Is everything for bath available in your house: towel, soap, shampoo, brush, toothpaste? Do we have to prepare these ourselves?' emails potential two-night guest, Jecky.

I provide everything.

Another message: 'For my friend, you have a separate bed or couch?'

Jecky, a Chinese businessman with a PhD in international law making his first visit to Australia; request accepted.

A week later and on time, Jecky and another tall man, wheeling bulging suitcases, arrive.

'Hi I'm Rosemary, welcome to Port Melbourne; you must be Jecky? What's your friend's name?'

'Wemm did you say? Sorry I don't understand, can you spell it? Wen-ming? Ok, got it, thank you; come in.'

I show them the guestroom, the mattress set up on floor, towels, tourist maps, the kitchen, bathroom.

Jecky's English is impressive. When I ask Wenming if he'd like some water or a cup of tea. Jecky cuts in, explains he has no English. 'Hot water please, then we go out'.

Taking their Myki cards, the 109 tram timetable, they head for the city.

Not late, back soon.

I waken at 2.30am. The lights are still on; guest still out. By 6am, its dark.

'Did you have a good night, see much of the city?' I enquire next morning.

'Yes, very good. We went to Crown, eat, drank there'.

'You mean the casino? You were there all night?' I can't hide my disappointment.

'We stayed there'.

'Jecky, you know that the casino always wins? I hope you didn't lose too much money'.

I've overstepped the host line but am dismayed they'd spend eight hours of their first overseas trip, first visit to Australia, in a casino!

Jecky breaks into my thoughts. 'It's OK Rose-merry, he says rolling his r's, we visit city square today'.

Returning at 6.30pm, insist on having their photo taken with me, they head back to Crown. I don't check the lights.

For breakfast, they drink hot water for breakfast. We shake hands and go our separate ways.

Jecky writes his review:-

'She handed her house key unsuspectingly and lent her tram card to us, which let us very easy to go everywhere. She really made us being at home. It is a perfect experience and has turned into beautiful and precious memory for us for our first coming to Melbourne.'

I strip the beds. Is there anything more an Airbnb host can wish for?

by Neville Smith

Each day progresses with watching movies, both for relaxation purposes, so imperative at seventy-five years of age. Also, for research input, to add to life experience, to facilitate the man's movie writing ambitions.

Nearing the end of a day, the end of a week, the end of a life, the man takes on a daily celebration of that life with a glass or two of wine, as he cooks his night repass, and devours the wonders of Luciano Pavarotti, Andre Bocelli, Jesse Norman, Emmet Cahill, and many more delivering cosmic vocal sensations.

Nev sez

GOOD ON YA'S

by Neville Smith

A poetic tribute
Port Phillip is full of Good on Ya's
Many Good on Ya's on Carlisle
The Library, the Salvos
Many Good on Ya's on Grey
The Sacred Heart Mission
Many Good on Ya's on many streets
Many unseen yet known
Many Homeless on many streets
Needing the many Good on Ya's
The Good on Ya's needing the Help of Many.

IT'S A (RESCUE) DOG'S LIFE

by Josie Speranza



Josie Speranza and Daisy

I'm a rescue dog and this is my story. I was adopted last week by Josie and Greg, a couple in their 60s. I'm so thankful. I'm five years old but I've had many homes. I just hope that this is my forever home now. I really want them to keep me. I really want to be part of their family.

Some people think I'm still a little bit naughty, but it's just me being me – I'm a fox terrier cross and I am incessantly curious – it's in my nature. I'm really trying to be good because I don't want to be given up again. That's why I haven't barked yet. It's five days... I don't know how long I can keep up this goody two shoes behaviour – I'm a dog for goodness sake!

I'm trying so hard not to annoy my new family. Oops... I know I shouldn't be sniffing the rubbish bin or hanging around the kitchen or jumping on the sofa or scratching at the wall or.....thank god they didn't

see that! I really am trying to be good but when they get upset with me or raise their voices or try to measure me with the metal tape measure (they want to find me a nice new bed) it sends a shiver down my spine and I run and hide under the kitchen table. It brings back bad memories. I still have nightmares.

My new humans are just so funny! They're trying so hard to make me feel welcome. They play with me, they take me for walks four times a day, they try to teach me new tricks (but I still don't get the idea of fetch!). It's May 2020 and I love this lockdown in Melbourne as I get to spend so much time with my new family. They're home all the time and I'm the centre of attention! We do lots of things together. We dance around the house to '80s music, we meditate together, we watch TV together and I even help out with Zoom video calls!

I hear them call out the name "Poppy", which was only given to me a month ago by my foster parents, so of course I forget and don't respond. Now they have changed my name to Daisy to make them feel better. I pretend that it is my name, and their eyes light up. Sometimes I forget, but then I remember again, that, of course, Daisy is not my real name. I don't want to remember my real name anymore. That's part of my past life. It hurts too much when I think of all those years of abuse that I suffered at the hands of that horrible human being.

As a pup I was adopted by Mary, a lovely woman, and she gave me to her mum as a present. I loved living with Brenda, but when Brenda passed away, Mary took me in and that's when my life became unbearable. Mary was now married and she had a husband who abused her and abused me. It all came to a head a month ago. Another day, another

IT'S A (RESCUE) DOG'S LIFE (CONT.)

by Josie Speranza

row, but this one day was worse. He tried to strike her on the head. I dashed to her side to protect her and barked my lungs out. With all the force of his anger he threw me against the wall and I slumped to the ground. The pain was excruciating. Mary screamed and tried to pick me up but he grabbed me, drove me a few blocks away and dumped me on the side of the road. I can't remember what happened after that. The next thing I remember I woke up in Pets Haven Veterinary Hospital and I was now a tripod. My broken leg had been amputated at the hip. They said that they had no choice as the patella on my right hind leg had been broken.

Then a wonderful foster family took me in for three weeks and nursed me back to health. But they couldn't keep me as they already had four dogs. I was taken back to Pets Haven. After a restless night in a cold dark cage, with other dogs barking around me, I couldn't believe my luck the next day when I met Greg and Josie. I couldn't contain my excitement! I wanted them to like me, so I jumped up on them, licked them to death and wagged my tail so much that I almost got RSI!

Fast forward four weeks... I'm now running around Hester reserve here in Port Melbourne, sniffing all the bushes, revelling in the delightful smells, leaving secret wee mails in selected spots and covering them up by scooping dirt on them with my front legs. Once again, I'm free to be me! I love my new life! It's such an amazing feeling to be part of a loving family again!



Josie Speranza and Daisy

JILLAROO

by Roderick Waller

Clara removed the deer-hide glove. The agent barely touched her proffered hand, his grip tentative, as if her fingers were porcelain "I want the job." She looked the little man in the eye.

"I'm 25 years old. Used to hard slog." She met his gaze, forced a smile. The man hesitated, then slid the contract across the desk, "you're the only applicant." He said, "One month's trial. I wish you luck."

It was dark when Clara stepped off the coach. Four hundred miles from Adelaide to the Northern Flinders Ranges She'd enrolled at university, got pregnant, married, graduated with an accountant's degree.

The manager of Balcanoona was curt. "Room's on the end, across the yard." In faded dungarees, with an old rucksack on her shoulder, she crossed over, her flip-flops smacking the dirt. The rough horizontal boards of the long building etched in the night. She counted eight doors along the wooden veranda. She fell on the iron bed, woken by white light through cracked glass. Her back was sore from the lumpy mattress. She dressed in the jeans, cowboy shirt, RM Williams boots and gloves she'd purchased the day before.

The manager spoke at breakfast, "Overseer will tell you what to do." Wick sat next to her. Two children sat opposite, smiled at the pretty woman next to them.

The woman followed her to the quarters. "I'm Henrietta, the governess." Clara shook the small, pudgy hand. "Call me H., everyone else does." She held on to Clara's hand, "So beautiful."

Clara spoke, "Thank you. So, how did you come to be here?"

H. pushed her shoulders back, "An affair went wrong!" she voiced mirthlessly. Clara let her hand fall, felt a well of pity.

The overseer's old-young voice cried out, "Cistern's flooded. Fix it."

"I'm used to being a handyman." she replied.

She knocked on the tin door of the ablution block, knocked again, then stepped inside, and gagged on the stench. When she'd screwed the cistern float back into position, she put on rubber gloves and gave the whole place a thorough mop and disinfecting. This is my shower and toilet too, she muttered to herself.

She crossed to the horse yard. "Got you a nice, quiet mare." Wick tapped the horse's flank with his whip. The mare reared at the fence and somersaulted Clara onto her back. "She's flighty alright." Clara uttered through clenched teeth. She recalled her teenage years, riding with her grandfather's stockmen on the plains out of Hay.

He spat on the dust. "Muster after lunch."

Clara walked over to the yard. The horses were bunched under a gum. She came to the mare, stroked her withers with her gloved hand, pressed her cheek to her muzzle.

"Saddle-up!" Wick ordered. Six stockmen tightened girth straps, adjusted bridles, reins, and stirrups. The riders trotted east to Lake Frome. Late afternoon they walked into the Frome yards, twelve miles from the homestead. The men slouched, the horses panted. The men sipped slowly from the waterbags. The horses drank noisily from the troughs.

JILLAROO (CONT.)

by Roderick Waller

A campfire burned low on the saltpan, the billies sat lifeless in the ashes, the dogs licked the bones from the cook's tent. The men talked in whispers from their swags. Clara tried to listen but gave up.

Wick, grim faced, pointed, "Across that grid, there's a hundred wethers. Bring them in!" Clara jiggled the reins. "Hey, wait!" Wick turned to a stockman. "Go with her. Don't want to send out a search party." A rider trotted up, his kelpie ahead. "Keep on the fence, I'll go round." The man rode off in a cloud of red dust.

She reined in at a solitary acacia, nudged the mare into a pencil line of shadow, inhaled cooler air. She listened intently to the silence. She gazed at the vastness of the plain. A hawk glided high in the dazzling sky.

Suddenly sheep burst into view. The rider, his kelpie on the flank, shouted, "Stay behind, shunt the stragglers." Suddenly, the wethers in the lead swerved. Clara galloped past the man and drove the mob back to the fence.

"The lady did a good job" the rider muttered to Wick. That night Wick called out to the cook, "The girl will do the washing-up." Wick mumbled "Hut's over there." She faced him, "No. Thanks all the same." A sharp pain woke her. She peeked over the swag, watched Wick's steel-capped heel on the hard saltpan, "Afternoon." Wick sneered.

A wind vane had loosened overnight and jammed the pump-rod. Two men gripped the iron crossbars, tightening bolts. A whirly wind from Lake Frome rose up. Salt stung Clara's eyes. The vanes creaked. Salt stung the men's eyes. One man lost his footing and fell on the saltpan. Clara grabbed the wrench.

Wick shouted, "Get down from there before it falls." The man on the tower growled at Clara, "Grip the nut, lady."

They descended. "Pretty gloves" the man sniped.

"Oh!" Clara cried, seeing blood on his palm. Clara took off her gloves, "None on mine."

One day, Wick announced "I'm finishing up. A month's notice." The manager took Clara aside, "You like to take on the job?" Clara was stunned, "I'll think about it."

Why stay? I'd be overseer. Why leave? for my son. She was calm at breakfast. "Sorry Boss, I'm leaving."

"There's a coach tonight." Clara noticed the disappointment in the manager's voice. He carried her rucksack to the gate. "You proved yourself." Wick murmured.

The sun dipped below the hill. In the half-light, a flock of white cockatoo screeched, startled by the rumble of the coach as it pulled in. The coach swung out and she watched the cockatoo jostling for space in the thick blue gum. The coach slowed at the creek. They waved. Clara recalled the flap of canvass at camp at the Frome sand pan. The coach dipped and cranked across the creek.

The End.

MENYAMA MUSTER

by Roderick Waller

The Cessna plane veered and bucked in the potholes on the grass air strip of Menyama, sub-district of Morobe District, Papua New Guinea. Joe the lanky Texan patrol officer greeted Hilary, the agricultural officer.

"You want the mare and foal?" asked Joe. "She has a bit of a temper". A bay mare stood in the yard, her foal, four months, leant against her flank.

"Yes, of course Joe!" Hilary slapped his shoulder. "I'm taking a week's vacation and coming on foot."

"You are mad."

Hilary laughed, "Want to lose weight."

On the outskirts of Wau, Hilary watched John pluck a damaged bean from a bush. "At least give it some thought" John said, his frail body bent. They walked between the rows of cocoa bushes. Charlie, John's son was tall for fifteen, muscular, wore a permanent scowl.

They met at the bar, "Okay, I'll take him."

John drove them down the winding, twisting lumber road to Bulolo. Hilary and Charlie followed the river, passed a rusty dredger, squat in the middle of the river. Ancient as I feel, Hilary thought. Charlie's youthful limbs strode out. At least I don't have to look at his miserable face, Hilary decided.

The foothills rose gently. The track petered out as they came to a ravine. Charlie squatted, said nothing. He was starting to rattle Hilary. They clambered up a rocky waterfall, into the rubberwoods.

Hilary pulled aside twisted liana, hanging from branches of Eaglewood. Their boots thudded, snapped twigs. Frogs and cicadas called each other. A bird of paradise screeched, flashed its plumage,

splashed emerald, ruby, and sapphire. Dusk descended on the forest, the montane thickened with Kwila trees.

They lost the track. Charlie sprang, his sharp eyes picking up the track. "Good job." Hilary stopped for a breath. Charlie went ahead, oblivious of Hilary's existence. Hilary cursed at the leeches that sucked through his thick socks and cursed the torrential rain. The gloom turned to darkness, the moon barely penetrating the canopy. Hilary groaned with hunger, sweat stuck to his clothes. 'We'll camp here.'

'Open those beans, I'll get a fire going.' Hilary picked out dry sticks from under the stump of a giant mountain ash. Charlie stared out at the dark. Underneath the stump, Hilary crawled into his sleeping bag.

It was dry and cool in the dawn. The canopy of Redwoods and Southern Beeches blocked out the sky. A solitary sunbeam lit up mosquitos dancing at the waterfall. Hilary splashed his face; Charlie snored. Hilary stirred the embers, made coffee. Charlie's cup untouched, Hilary kicked his leg. "Up!"

'Ugh!' Charlie glowered. Klinks pine, and Alstonia replaced the thick Reds and Beeches. Level with the plateau Hilary saw Joe at the end of the airstrip.

Joe, the Kiap, a lanky Texan greeted them "You got here" he drawled, breaking his solemn face. They walked over to the corral, the foal and mare, flighty, sharp, circled the yard. Joe's southern drawl rent the air 'They'll quiet down.' The mare snorted.

Hilary turned to Charlie, gripped the bridle. "See you, Joe, we'll get on, before the rain." They paused at the ridge. "Watch out, Charlie." Hilary slipped on the damp leaves, mud, and jagged stones.

MENYAMA MUSTER (CONT.)

by Roderick Waller

The sun's rays splintered the canopy at noon. "Take a rest." Hilary sat against a boulder. "Ever do much riding?" he asked.

"Used to." Charlie half-turned away, threw a pebble at a tree

"We get back, how about you break in the foal when he's grown?"

Purple clouds cracked and burst. They came to the stump. "Hobble the mare, Charlie" Hilary said as he untied his boots, his socks streaked with blood from leeches. At the waterfall he wiped dried blood from his ankles.

"Do it yourself!" Charlie stammered. Flushed, Hilary hobbled the mare. He ate a can of cold beans, drank long at the cascade, slept soundly.

At Bulolo nursing post Hilary disinfected the leech wounds. "Hey! Let me." Charlie swabbed the deep cut on Hilary's foot where he'd slipped the day before. "Does it hurt much?"

"Yeah, think it's festering."

"I hate my dad drinking."

"He went through a lot, Charlie."

"Yeah, I know, all the same though..." he mumbled.

Charlie led the mare along the river. Hilary limped with the foal, her legs buckling sometimes. They reached the logging road. The foal nuzzled up to the mare. "You ever ridden bareback?" Hilary asked.

"Hold onto my waist" Hilary tapped her flank. they cantered up the winding road. They stopped for the foal, her spindly legs askew, her belly thumping. They heard the roar of the river below. Around the steep

curve a logging truck, grinding its gears down, threw out stone chips. Hilary, Charlie, and the horses hugged the rock wall. The mare got jittery, and the foal trembled. "That was close" Hilary sighed. Charlie went very still. Hilary suddenly realised Charlie's mother was crushed under a truck wheel on this road.

"Hey, wanna' take the reins?" Hilary asked.

"Okay." Hilary smiled. "Jump on." Hilary got up the back of him, circled his arms round Charlie's waist.

At the yard, color rose in John's cheeks. "Dad that was a buzz!" his son exclaimed. John gave Hilary a hug. He walked up to the mare. Her ribs swelled from the gallop. Hilary stroked her mane. He was glad Charlie came, a life in resentments. Hilary thought, looking back at his own tragedies and how he was helped, how friends had stirred up fresh life, helped suck out the rage at the loss of his own mother. He walked over to the mare, spoke softly, "We got to learn to stamp out your rage, Madam. And I have to learn some horse-sense".

Postscript. Five years later, Hilary got a letter from Charlie, "Dear Hilary, I'm a social worker. Weekends I ride the annual muster of brumbies in the high country of Victoria, Australia." Charlie.

The End.



Stubbs' Baths South Melbourne, 1940s, Port Phillip Collection

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Lois Best

Lois Best discovered the joys of Port Phillip some years ago when visiting her daughter and granddaughters here. She has settled now, volunteering at U3APP and still teaching part-time. Originally from WA she doesn't always enjoy the Victorian cold, but the village feel of the area suits her lifestyle.



Chris Burgess

Chris Burgess grew up in London. He was a copywriter at an advertising agency. Chris met his wife, who was an Australian, in London. They moved to Melbourne in 1968. They have three children, seven grandchildren and one great grandchild. They like to travel when at all possible.



Jacki Burgess

Jacki Burgess has lived and worked as a copywriter in Port Phillip for many years, writing mainly about real estate, but together with her husband Chris, wrote a book, which was translated for use in Thailand and which subsequently lead to a series of a dozen in the same format.



John Craven

John was born in Euroa and educated at the Higher Elementary School. He left the family farm and came to Melbourne to work and study. His career was in veterinary research. Now retired, he has fun trying to improve his writing skills in the Port Phillip U3A writers group.



Bob Croker

Bob Croker, born in Albert Park attended Middle Park Primary and South Melbourne Technical for his education before completing his apprenticeship as a Coppersmith with a local metal fabrication company. Before retirement bob spent several years in the Security industry and his combined working life has given him well grounded and broad life experiences. He sees writing of many of his travels as something he can pass on and share with family or others interested.



Kerrie Cross

Kerrie is a Tasmanian, professionally trained in Social Work, in particular the development and management of family support services. In the second part of her career she worked as a senior administrator and board director in health and human services in Victoria and in the State of Qatar.



Julie Butcher

Julie Butcher has lived in Port Phillip since 1999. She lives with her husband Marcel, and their beloved dachshund, Otto. During "normal times" she would be playing golf, and working as a volunteer for The Biography Program: Beyond Words. She is an active member of U3A Port Phillip.



Nic Cecic

Nicholas (Nic) Cecic, a retired social worker, lives in salubrious Elwood. He loves to stroll to the Point Ormond Rotunda to sit and stare as gulls glide over a serene sea and dogs frolic in the silver sand. The seeds of stories are scattered by a fresh breeze.



Cristina Ceddia

During the last two years **Cristina** has participated in on-line learning courtesy of Covid-19. Optimistically she wrote a screenplay which she is hoping to call 'Playing to Win,' she is looking for a Producer. While 2020 was challenging after the devastating fires of 2019, nobody could have imagined 2021.



Lois Daley

Lois was born in Garden City, Port Melbourne in the house where she still lives. She went to J. H Boyd College until the age of 16 and then became a bookkeeper at Balm/Dulux Paints. Lois retrained as a nurse at 30 and Occupational Therapist at 50, retired at 70. Lois sings in a choir which she loves as well as ongoing learning at U3A. Always a community activist, Lois enjoys gardening and live theatre as well as walks on the beach with her dog.



Trevor Donohue

Trevor describes himself as being macabre. He sees life through shades of darkness. There are the bright lights that penetrate the gloom. He can be jovial and funny and easy to get on with. He can be grim and difficult to understand. Many of his stories come from the Id of his mind.



Veselka Gencic

Veselka Gencic was born in 1937. She graduated with a Bachelor degree at Belgrade University. In 1997 she migrated to Australia and lives in Port Melbourne. Her hobby is painting and writing short stories. She published one monograph in Serbia.



Michele Green

Michele is a resident of the City of Port Phillip for 24 years. A keen writer, she completed a Diploma of Professional Writing and editing several years ago and belongs to three writing groups/organisations. She has spent half of her life in various parts of Gippsland and still frequents the South Gippsland coast.



Deb Hall

An avid reader, writer, beachcomber, jazz aficionado, model-ship builder, croquet player, **Deb Hall** was born in 1957 in Melbourne, Victoria. She has published poetry in magazines and anthologies, and published short stories in anthologies, and articles in hobby magazines. She has lived in St Kilda for approximately thirty years.



Jan Harper

Jan Harper is an elderly woman in body, but not in spirit, who lives with her husband Brian in Port Melbourne, overlooking our beautiful Bay. During the first lockdown they walked in different Melbourne parks and gardens each day and wrote a "Covid 19 Diary" - 60 parks in 60 pages - which they later had printed. It included information about each park, photos and artwork.



Inge Kulmanis

Inge Kulmanis has been a resident of Port Phillip for 41 years. She absolutely loves Port Phillip! When her husband was alive, they walked every day along Elster Creek- when the weather permitted and sat on a bench, observing the birds, especially the blue Wrens.

May it continue to grow.



Mary Grace Levakis

Call it poetry, call it performance, call it writing, I love doing it! I am now 73 and have been entertaining and performing from the age of 21.



Warwick Lloyd

Warwick Lloyd is a resident of St Kilda, a former advertising executive and currently community chair of the Rotary Club of Melbourne South. A bayside boy who recently has captured his memoirs both personal and career in a series of short stories. Warwick is an award winner from 2020.



Megan Jones

Megan Jones Megan's family have lived in Port Melbourne since the 1880s.



Roslyn Jones

Roslyn Jones grew up in Ripponlea and attended Ripponlea Primary School. She then travelled with her family to Hong Kong for three years which was a wonderful experience. Living in Port Melbourne she enjoys family activities, keeping fit, crafts, reading and travelling (when allowed again)!



Aziza Khamlichi

Aziza was borne in Morocco and lived for many years in England. A former Nurse, counsellor and Interpreter/Translator. After retirement, she grabbed the chance and has now made her home in Melbourne.



Barbara Anne Magee

Barbara Anne Magee was born in Launceston, and studied literature and foreign languages at the University of Tasmania, Hobart. She trained as a teacher, but was unable to pursue her career due to health-problems. Barbara is a very proud mother and grandmother, and a happy owner of three beautiful cats.



Janine Mifsud

Janine Mifsud has enjoyed varied career paths: Secondary School Teacher; Real Estate Consultant; Manager of Programs for Youth at Risk; Manager of Psycho-Social Programs for People with Mental Illness; Director of a Travel Agency...and that now gives her plenty of material for her writing workshops!



Maggie Moran

Moving 4 years ago to leafy Elwood, I feel enveloped in shade and light, sea and sky, parks and paths. So much to be happy about and now in lockdown, my friendly caring neighbours are a constant joy. They have inspired me and encouraged me through the toughest time of my life.



Barbara Overbury

Barbara is a retired teacher/teacher librarian having taught in many schools around the state and overseas. Barbara is 79 years old, and enjoys good health, loving the convenience and beauty of Port Phillip and its surrounds. She also appreciates all the services that the Council provides for older residents.



Sheila Quairney

Sheila lives in Port Melbourne with her partner, Brian. Since arriving from the UK in 2018, she has thrown herself into local life and is now a cryptic crossword addict. She longs to get on a plane to visit her family and finds writing therapeutic, distracting and satisfying.



Brenda Richards OAM

Born in Kyabram, **Brenda** worked on the itinerant track before settling in St. Kilda 60 years ago. She is a founding member of Council for the Single Mother and Child. Brenda worked for 25 years as a Psychiatric Social Worker. She was inducted into the Victorian Women's Honour Roll in 2011.



Josie Speranza

Josie Speranza lives in Port Melbourne with her husband Greg. They live next door to her mum. She's 61 and was born and bred in Port. She loves everything about Port and feels very lucky to live in such a great place!



Roderick Waller

Born in Yorkshire. Emigrated 1971.
Career: jackaroo, agricultural officer PNG, Agricultural Economist, UN and Vanuatu.
University lecturer. Interests: writing, poetry, banjo playing, photography
Member: roomers writing group, Elwood, U3A.



Anna Rogalina

Anna Rogalina has lived in the City of Port Phillip for more than two decades. A former teacher, she is very much a "people person", who does a lot of voluntary work in the community. Anna enjoys writing in three languages, where she creatively expresses her feelings and emotions.



Rosemary Rule

For 11 years, **Rosemary Rule** has called Port Melbourne home.
After a long career as a journalist and publicist, she quit paid work at 70 and uses her energy, passion and professional skills to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. She also reads, swims and makes cumquat marmalade.



Neville Smith

Nev is an Eclectic Bloke, still Active, Writing, Running, Dancing, Sports coach.

THIS PUBLICATION AND ALL TO COME ARE A TRIBUTE TO LESLEY GREAGG

We would like to acknowledge the hard and enthusiastic work of Lesley Greagg who died on the 25 June 2020. Lesley was our Port Phillip Writes guardian, who guided the Port Phillip Writes from its inception in 2004 when it was initially titled Port Phillip Reflections. As part of the 2007 Seniors Festival there was no Port Phillip Writes activity programmed. Lesley along with many of the contributors strongly advocated for the value of such an initiative to be included in the 2008 program, therefore this activity was reinstated and titled Port Phillip Through My Eyes. From 2009 onwards the Seniors Festival Writing Awards has proudly been a permanent feature in the Port Phillip Seniors Festival Program, with the publication titled Port Phillip Writes. Copies are located at the Victorian State Library and Canberra Archives, as well Port Phillip Library Services.

For 16 years Lesley managed the judging of the Writers Awards and also supported Council with proofreading and programming the awards ceremony. Lesley cherished being the 'Mistress of Ceremonies' for the Writing Awards Ceremony, a role she took very seriously and proudly and eloquently read many of writing contributions.

As Lesley would say, "There is so much talent in the City of Port Phillip!



Image Lesley Greagg

