

# PORT PHILLIP WRITES

## Stories and Poems

Gathered from the City of Port Phillip Seniors' Writing Awards 2020





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Port Phillip Writes Stories and Poems celebrating 16 years of publication



Lesley Greagg taken on her 93rd birthday on the 26 October 2019 by Alison Blakeley

Disclaimer

The contributions in ‘Port Phillip Writes’ were all submitted as entries in the 2020 City of Port Phillip Seniors’ Festival Writing Awards.

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

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# TRIBUTE TO LESLEY GREAGG

by Freda Erlich OPCC Chair



Lesley Alison Greagg  
26 October 1926 – 25 June 2020

It is with very sad hearts that we acknowledge the death of Lesley Greagg in June 2020.

Lesley was our Port Phillip Writes guardian, who has 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.

We pay a special tribute to Lesley, a dedicated and passionate resident and inaugural member of the City of Port Phillips

Older Persons Consultative Committee (OPPC) for the past 20 years, Councils peak advisory body for older residents. Lesley voluntarily contributed and advocated in every way she could, including attending monthly meetings, participating in sub-committees and when needed presented at Council meetings to advocate for older residents of Port Phillip.

For the past 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.

The photo on the front of this publication was taken at the 2015 Writing Awards Ceremony held at the St Kilda Library and shows Lesley's earnest and dedicated concentration in making every ceremony the best it could be; entertaining, amusing, warm and generous, thus making every writer feel valued.

We miss you greatly Lesley and thank you for all the hard work you gave freely to the City of Port Phillip's Older Persons Consultative Committee and the Seniors Festival Writing Awards: Port Phillip Writes.

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

And in closing I wish all our writers past and present well and urge you to keep on writing and improving and entering. And if you haven't entered for a while or ever, why not start now for next year?"

This publication and all to come will be dedicated to the memory of Lesley Greagg.

# INTRODUCTION

by Freda Erlich OPCC Chair

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 16th year.

We thank the contributing writers for the 2020 edition for their memories, stories and poems. This year we had 56 entries from 36 entrants (ten men and twenty-six women). Each writer is limited to two entries. It is lovely to see works from previous entrants and new entrants being published for the first time.

We also acknowledge the many writers and poets who have contributed to all editions of Port Phillip Writes. On this 16th Anniversary of the publication we especially acknowledge the contribution of one writer who has entered every year, Brenda Richards, and we thank Brenda for her enormous contribution to the Seniors Festival Writing Awards.

As always, the topics chosen by this year's writers are varied. Many chose to write about being in the City of Port Phillip in the time of COVID-19, the impact and observations of what it is like to be in a Pandemic as they witness themselves and others trying to manage these unprecedented times. During this time it has also sparked memories of people's lives impacted by events beyond their control, in the 50's polio kept most students away from school for a year, other stories evoked memories of when we were not locked into a 5km radius and could wander out to the outback. There are stories about pigeons, cats, possums, a strange occurrence in a museum and many more adventures.

Judging the awards is always difficult and done anonymously so it is a surprise after the decisions are made to discover the writers who have been awarded. This year's judges were Scott Steensma an esteem judge for many years, Anna Horgan English teacher and Linking Neighbours Seniors Register member, and Nicholas Green, writer and member of the Older Persons Consultative Committee.

We thank them for the care they took and their patience and good humour, they kindly gave their time for free and brought their knowledge, insight and passion to the project.

This year we would also like to acknowledge the writers who have died in the last year who have been regular entrants to the Writing Awards over the past 15 years. They include;

Alex Njoo a St Kilda writer and member of the Older Persons Consultative Committee who entered many poems and stories and who often read at the awards ceremony;

Manwel Cassar an Elwood writer and artist who entered his poetry in Maltese and English and often read his works at the Awards in both languages.

Colin Jones a South Melbourne writer whose entries included many an adventure of the sea with Australian Navel stories. Two of Colin's stories were included in the first Port Phillip Heritage Speaking Stories in 2015.

Patricia Convery a St Kilda writer who entered many a story including the story of Tilman Gloystein the original architect for the St Kilda Botanical Gardens, this story was included in the second Port Phillip Heritage Speaking Stories in 2016.

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

Thank you to Readings in St Kilda who have continued to contribute donating a voucher for the awards and the Lions Club of Port Phillip for their donation.

Freda Erlich  
OPCC Chair

## PORT PHILLIP, OUR CITY (IN VERSE)

by Bob Croker

'twas in the year of eighteen fifty  
 We branched out on our own  
 And told them up in Sydney town  
 No more our chaperon  
 There were others here before us  
 With skin a different hue  
 Billabongs and bush tucker  
 But now so very few  
 The big ships sailed up the bay  
 A harbour of delight  
 Timber hulls from skilful hands  
 By those old 'shipwrights'  
 There was lots of gold here in Vic  
 In those early days  
 And many miners started off  
 From right here in our bay  
 It was not all just swamp and sand  
 We had neighbours too  
 Tents made up in Emerald Hill  
 As together we all grew  
 St Kilda was another  
 Growing all the time  
 And since we've been together  
 A bigger stronger line  
 Culture and refinement  
 And workers who create  
 A little bit of everything  
 Our door ever open, never shut the gate  
 Our locals as we know them  
 Are bread and butter people  
 Where a handshake means everything  
 Sometimes immemorable  
 Proven self sufficient  
 We never have looked back  
 And today just look where we are  
 The leaders of the pack

## HAYCARTING

by Roderick Waller

In 1956, eager, carefree, innocence in flush of  
 evening dusk, joy of haying the summer rye,  
 raking, tying sheaves, stacking into stooks.  
 The Clydesdale clopped, pulled the dray-  
 cart, crossed the stream to the hidden ley of  
 laughing kids and folk The pitchfork taller than  
 the boy, though he mastered it, broke it to his  
 will pitching the sheaves to the stacker boys,  
 the cart filled twelve feet deep.

The old grey stood, stubborn, careless, her  
 face deep in the nosebag, giant ribs puffing  
 in and out, a few glad snorts, a clear mist of  
 breath. The reinsman under the elm, his tea  
 a cheese and pickle sandwich his dear old  
 mother made 'This, the last load', he sighed  
 'been a long, hot, dusty day'.

The dray-cart stacked high, not one more  
 sheaf could be pitched, 'all done!' he cried.  
 Then the pitchers and stackers climbed  
 on, hay-stalks between their lips, the dray-  
 master whistled his going home tune. The  
 kids played, the women sang soft songs,  
 sun's shadow closed in. Mites and insects  
 buzzed aloft, a pheasant screeched, a pigeon  
 cooed, a blackbird sang its evening song,  
 the entourage clipped on, old grey nodded  
 rhythmically, knew this her last walk of the day.  
 Her dinner awaited in the stable, a hose down,  
 fresh water then gulped down from the sweat  
 of work, these thoughts picked up her gait.

Passed over the tadpole stream, the painted  
 caravans stood long-side; the gypsy woman  
 waved as she washed her pots and pans,  
 and the brown moustached, gold-ringed  
 men looked idly on. Passed by Bluebell  
 Wood, the kids fell silent, heard of the mad  
 witch lived there.

Passed the stocks, not so long ago, a  
 punishment for theft, the guilty arms and legs  
 locked in where decent folk threw insults and  
 rotten fruit at the thug or tart condemned.  
 And just by there the old tramp stayed in his  
 cobbled-up hut, a strange old rascal, some  
 people said a wizard, and mothers warned  
 their children 'stay away' on pain of 'off to bed  
 without your dinner'.

Excitement peaked as they entered the  
 gate, at the great hay barn they stared. Old  
 grey made a vigorous stamp, quickening her  
 hooves, saw the end of the work-a-day. Then  
 eerily quiet went the kids and mums as the  
 dray-master backed up the dray, Brass tackle  
 and leather, and harness, undone, clattered to  
 the ground; old grey shook her frame, saliva  
 dripped, she gave a short sharp neigh, then  
 led away to her dinner and a fresh straw bed.

Mums and kids and men pitched the sheaves  
 to the stackers, right up into the corners of  
 rafters, pushed, sweated, screwed up faces in  
 this last burst of work. The little ones sat in the  
 corners, gradually filled up the barn with sweet  
 hay sheaves for the milking cows through the  
 long harsh winter nights and days. Then all is  
 done, the moon a soft white rose, chatter died  
 down as they wandered home, the boss waved  
 'cheerio, see you all upon the morrow'.

Scratched limbs, hair full of hayseed, happy  
 kids felt joy for the day, not seen as work, just  
 another form of play, and the prospect of a  
 shilling to spend in the lolly shop down in the  
 village square. Tired Mums gone home, knew  
 their husbands waited their tea, kids home  
 from school, homework hidden, watched the  
 newest black and white TV.

She shrugs, it's her lot, 'never mind I'm tired,  
 I'm young and strong', knows it'll be midnight  
 before her work is done. 'Never mind, thank  
 God, we've a roof and good food and a  
 husband no drunk, and kids that pretend to  
 be good'.

As she knelt to pray, her husband snored in  
 secret dreams, she thanked God for a day of  
 sunshine and fresh air, and wage at the end  
 of the week, which she'd already spent on  
 the Saturday market and bags of sweets for  
 the kids. 'Give me strength Lord, so tired, my  
 bones ache to sleep.'

She slid on to her side of the roughhewn  
 bed, glanced once at the black curly head of  
 her mate, smiled. Her soul surrendered; her  
 eyelids dropped to dreamless sleep.

# ME AND MY FITBIT

by Sheila Quairney

This time last year, I lived in a happy bubble. I believed I was an active person who slept the recommended 8 hours a night and burned a respectable number of calories every day.

I now know better. The painful truth of my sluggish, piggish, insomniac lifestyle is revealed relentlessly to me every waking minute.

And the reason? I have bought a Fitbit. And I am its slave.

The device almost never leaves my wrist. It is my constant companion, closer to me than my partner.

The communication is remorseless. It's always sending me messages – sometimes positive, sometimes gently admonitory.

Such as: "Well done! You've walked the length of the London Underground", or: "Congratulations! You've climbed the height of the Eiffel Tower". I feel an absurd sense of achievement and award myself a double chocolate Tim Tam with my coffee.

Or more sinisterly: "You haven't moved in the past hour. Get on with it!" So I rush down Cruikshank Street and out onto Lagoon Pier and back – phew! Another 3000 steps clocked up for the day.

It knows my every move and how many calories I've burned off – but luckily in these days of the waist-expanding Covid diet, not how many I have consumed.

It's the first thing I consult when I wake up. The Fitbit's assessment of my night's sleep can plunge me into gloom, or catapult me into gleeful smugness.

Oh no! I thought I had a good night's sleep – but alas, I only scored a Fair, and was apparently awake for 1 hour 13 minutes in the night. I am distraught and immediately start to feel exhausted.

Or – I feel really groggy – but lo! I had 58 minutes deep sleep and was rated Good! And got a star! I should feel refreshed....I'm starting to feel better already. Especially when my partner finds out that yet again, he's slept 3 minutes longer than me and only got rated Fair (that's life, I tell him smugly).

I reluctantly tear it off my wrist to plunge into the shower, then quickly strap it on again, anxious to have every move recorded. I wait until I'm slumped in front of the TV or laptop to recharge it so that it won't miss anything.

Only 9000 steps and it's nearly 10 pm? Quick, run up those stairs a few times again to reach the magic 10,000 step total. But oh dear! That's raised my resting heart beat to dangerous levels. Time to sit down again and do some calming deep breathing.

And the joy of the exploding rocket throbbing gently on my wrist as I reach that magic five figure number.....ecstasy. I glow with pride, knowing that it's happy with me and I can rest easy for the rest of the day. Until it all starts again at midnight.

Truly, you're never alone with a Fitbit.

# TUNING THE GALLERY

by Deb Hall

The art gallery was quiet and fairly deserted; my preferred state for anywhere I roam. I'm not fond of the press of humanity at any time, and certainly not when I am looking at art.

It was late autumn. A cold wind bedevilled the streets of Ballarat. It may have seemed mild to the locals, used to bitterly cold winters, but I was glad to be indoors.

Upstairs amongst the more traditional paintings, a repeated pinging noise intruded.

"That piano's annoying", said my partner.

"Is it a piano?"

I was surprised. Despite loving music, I do not have a musical bone in my body, not even one of those small bones in the middle ear with the name that calls to mind a blacksmith sweating over his forge.

It was a piano tuner at work, which explained the repetition. We came upon him, immersed in the innards of a piano. He reminded me of a vet, shoulder-deep in the rear end of a misshapen, mahogany dairy cow.

As I strolled around the room, I surreptitiously studied him, this technician of musical instruments, this perfectionist of sound. He perched sideways on the piano stool, leaning in under the raised lid, hitting a single note over and over again. I wanted to ask him if it is necessary for a piano tuner to be able to play the piano to do their job, but I didn't want to break his concentration.

In the sombre, high-ceilinged room with its dark wood trim and the heavy gilt frames of the oil paintings, the pinging of the piano was shrill. I dislike those ornate picture frames; they try to deprive me of my enjoyment of my favourite paintings. The frames play a different tune to the honest melody of the pictures; ostentatious and hypocritical; the frames are at odds with me.

The piano tuner's hitting of notes had been perfunctory, almost robotic; he seemed morose.

I wondered if he was jaded with his work. Then he launched into a lively tune and he came alive with it. He swivelled around on the piano stool to face the keyboard. He sat up straight. He smiled and nodded his head with the tempo. To my untrained ears, the tune sounded like a jig or a hornpipe. I stopped to listen and my foot, of its own accord, began tapping in time with the music.

A loud, drawn-out Moo-oo resounded through the chamber. The tuner glanced up, a little furtively I thought, and continued playing; if anything, he increased the tempo. He hunched over and concentrated on the keyboard.

Then there was a discordant creaking at different locations all around the room. There were some scratching noises too. Hot on the heels of those sounds came a louder rending and tearing. I stared at canvases ripping open, cleaved asunder, flapping from their frames.

That wasn't the strangest thing. I soon realized that the ripping of the fabric was caused by hooves and trotters and beaks. The animals depicted were emerging from the paintings to romp around the room.

There were plodding cows rubbing sides with each other, high-stepping horses shouldering the cows aside, pigs stampeding, poultry scrabbling in maniacal motion. I turned to find my partner with her back pressed to the wall, wide-eyed and staring fixedly at the chaotic scene.

The animals were cavorting crazily. They weren't paying attention to where they were going. They were bumping into each other, bouncing off walls. At first they seemed to be ignoring us - we had gone unnoticed in the wild joy of their unaccustomed freedom - but then they began to make sport of us.



## TUNING THE GALLERY (CONT.)

by Deb Hall

A piglet, squealing excitedly, ran between my legs and almost knocked me off my feet. A donkey nudged my partner's shoulder as if trying to coax her away from the safety of the wall. A horse leant down and rested his head on the tuner's shoulder and gave him a playful nip on the arm with his big buck teeth.

The farmyard noises were ear-splitting. Amid the neighing and shrieking and squealing and squawking and mooing, the piano tuner stood up and played a Jerry Lee Lewis type run of chords loudly. That riff boomed around the gallery and for a moment the animals stopped in their tracks and quieted down.

"Help! Help me round them all up and get them back in their pictures, or there'll be hell to pay!" shouted the tuner.

We were stunned; nevertheless we complied. He came out from behind the piano and slammed the lid down. The three of us formed a ragged line at one end of the chamber, with our arms outstretched, and began shepherding the animals toward the burgundy coloured walls. I observed the animals, one after another, leap and scramble up onto their respective frames, hesitate for a moment and then merge into the paintings.

As the chamber cleared, the tuner resumed his place and began playing a languorous piece of classical music. It was soothing and calming and our collective pulses slowed to a normal rhythm. The music flowed beautifully; it had begun quietly but it gradually climbed to a crescendo. As it ascended, I saw that the canvases were miraculously healing themselves. Soon, all of the rips and tears, all of the gaping holes, had vanished.

The tuner gathered up his tools into his Gladstone bag and turned to us. He cleared his throat.

"Thanks for your help, I'm sorry you had to witness that spectacle", he said and hung his head.

"Has it happened before?"

"Yes, many times at these regional galleries, where there are a lot of rural scenes. I can tell you, the first time it happened it was nearly the death of me, I was so scared." He appeared shaken even now.

"You poor man, I reckon you could do with a drink. I certainly need one."

I turned to my partner who maintained a shocked silence.

"How about a stiff drink, love?"

She nodded and the three of us, like shell-shocked soldiers, trooped down the broad curved staircase, and headed for the nearest pub.

## BECOMING MOLLY (INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS)

by Janet Gardner

I haven't seen Bluey since we were brought here after being picked up by a lady driving a white van at Point Cook. It was getting harder to keep up with him, given that his legs were twice as long as mine, and my tummy was so sore. Bluey saved my life. He helped me escape from the man clad in a dark grey uniform with a peaked cap displaying what looked like a pair of angel wings. However, he was no angel. He communicated through his boot that have left lasting impressions on both my tiny body and psyche.

When I first arrived they gave me a real working over, sticking instruments in all my orifices that caused me some distress. The people in green put me to sleep in order to repair the damage done to my tummy by my previous master. Also because of my reputation as a slut mutt, i.e. one sniff of my crutch and I was on my back, they procured a surgically induced menopause. I just hope that those horror sweats that the old bitches complain of do not plague me. I am also a bionic bitch now because in order to curb my wandering ways they have implanted a micro-chip in my ear so that big brother can locate and identify me wherever I may roam. However, it did come with a free tattoo in my ear!

Since I have recovered from this health makeover one of the ladies in green has taken quite a shine to me. She takes me to the large exercise yard where we play lots of games together. According to the mutt next door there is a method in her madness in that I have to convince her that I am a socially, well adapted pooch that is submissive rather than aggressive and show no signs of PTSD or STDs! If I fail in this endeavor then I will be moved from my present suite to the Red Room where I would be administered the Green Dream that would put me to sleep permanently. Hence, I am very anxious to win the heart of the lady in green!

Every day we are allowed visitors. People of all shapes, sizes and colour come in and eye-ball us to see if we are suitable to become their family pet. For me they have to smell right and speak nicely before I roll over and let them tickle my tummy! Yesterday a couple paid me a visit, she had more curls than me, and he barely had any! They smelt good but at first were hard to understand. She was making all kind of verbal noises at me but in a nice soft voice. He, on the other hand, whilst he spoke using normal words I almost needed an interpreter due to his broad Scottish accent. I had an incline that I didn't quite fit his macho image but his misses and I were confident that he could be brought to heel. His bicycle calves suggested that his idea of walking the dog was more akin to running a marathon rather than my kind of dog walking, which suited my 6" legs. It would require my, "I am sitting here until you pick me up and carry me home", tactic in order to remind him who is the leader of the pack!

I didn't sleep well last night. I was sure they were going to take me home after my Oscar winning performance. The mutt next door again reminded me that you are only given a relatively short period of time to find a new owner before being moved to the Red Room.

To think I may not live to celebrate my first birthday – I need a Valium!

"Hello Molly, we have come to take you home" said the lady with the curly hair! I must be dreaming – no, there's that bald headed Scottish, fitness fanatic and his holding a purple harness and lead. The curly headed lady, who he called Fuzz, picked me up and wrapped me in a fluffy, pink bunny rug bordered in soft pink taffeta ribbon. Perhaps I have died and gone to heaven! No, I was alive and overnight I had become Molly and was leaving by the green door to live in Eltham. I never did see Bluey again. I hope he didn't exit through the red door to green dream heaven.

# LIFE IS A JUGGLE

by Lois Best

'Well, juggling chainsaws is obviously out,' thought Flo as the colourful beanbags plopped at her feet. 'For both of us, I reckon,' chuckled the obviously novice juggler next to her. She was also awkwardly retrieving beanbags.

Flo realised she had, once again, voiced her thoughts. She'd been doing that ever since this pressure from her children. The three of them cheerfully bandied around suggestions like: you're not getting any younger; downsize; the new retirement village looks lovely; at least have a look. Which is how she has allowed them to deposit her here at the Open Day, having "fun".

'Is it just an old age thing, or stress I wonder?' Flo thought as she glumly returned the beanbags to the basket.

'What, voicing your thoughts?' Came the reply. 'Stress, I reckon.'

Damn, another thought, aloud.

'Now, and this is real speech by the way, I need you to explain why you think that ... stress, I mean. Do you want to give this juggling lark away and go get a cuppa?'

'Yes, most definitely. And I think tea's the strongest stuff on offer, so that'll have to do. I'm Meg, by the way.'

'Nice to meet you.' Flo really meant that. 'I'm Flo.'

As they picked up their coats and bags they both spoke at once, 'My children are saying...'

They looked at each other with surprise. 'You first.' Said Meg.

'They think it's time I "downsize"...' she shocked herself by using air quotes. 'I know they mean well.'

'Same' giggled Meg, 'but...'

'I'm not ready,' they chorused, laughing.

That felt so good. It was such a long time since Flo had laughed so easily. She knew her children were right to be concerned about her but maybe a good laugh is the tonic she needs.

Children become independent, grandchildren grow up and they all shift their focus. Partners and old friends pass on. Or they do this, downsize and move into a retirement village on the other side of town. You lose touch and aloneness turns into loneliness. This gradual, inevitable, change has left Flo weary. She despaired as her legs got heavy and her walk became more of a shuffle.

As they strolled to the dining hall, Flo and Meg remarked on the beautifully manicured garden. Not a leaf out of place.

'Nice looking,' observed Meg, 'but too manicured. I love...'

'...wild gardens,' again they chorused the same idea.

As they neared the dining hall they heard it; 'Clickety clicks – 66; Legs eleven...' they looked at each other and read their mirrored horror.

'Bingo?' they whispered. 'Not yet.'

'Did you notice that Café outside the gates? Let's go there instead.' Meg suggested.

As they slowly walked along the pristine path they discussed their various ailments – Flo's dodgy shoulder, Meg's dodgy knee. Flo's failing hearing, Meg's failing eyesight. Their heart, their lungs, their hair – until breathless with laughter, they came to the conclusion that, together, they actually make up one very functional human being. That's the answer. Let's do something about this together, we don't have to obey our children. They excitedly discussed possibilities in their newly discovered dual-thinking fashion.

Walking out the gate felt like freedom. And despite the wear and tear, Flo felt her steps become decidedly jaunty.

# A POLICEMAN'S LOT

by MHVD

Today blue is the chosen colour,

I wear my tools about me, including my friend S&W,

The 15 hollow men I dread that I will have to send,

If so, then one not so hollow will be dead.



# INTRUDERS IN THE BUSH

by Roslyn Jones



Photographed by Darryl Kirby

*Have you ever felt that you shouldn't be somewhere - witnessing something so mystical and special that it left you spellbound?*

This is a story of a magical finish to an extraordinary day in the outback!!

It began as an excursion to a tiny deserted town in outback NSW, which had once been a thriving gold prospecting area however was now home to less than 80 people and some well preserved and interesting buildings.

However, to us the most important building on a scorching hot day was the historic pub, and the ice cold beverages, great hosts and pub tucker waiting for us!

Sometime later, feeling fully refreshed and water bottles refilled, we were ready to face the blast of furnace like hot air as we left the pub and piled into the vehicle to further explore the area.

Depot Glen, Poole's Gravesite and Sturt's Cairn beckoned so off we went, relishing the air conditioning on the drive to the area some 21 kilometres away on a very rough unsealed road.

Depot Glen was the base camp for six months for Charles Sturt's 1845 inland expedition party. They were stranded for six months due to severe drought until the rains finally came, when they were able to break camp. James

Poole was second in command to Sturt and sadly passed away just before the camp moved on. He was buried beneath a beefwood tree nearby and a monument erected.

We decided, probably foolishly, to walk up Mt Poole - how hard could it be after all??

The temperature by this time was just on 50 degrees and I was still in recovery from a broken ankle!! Although at the time we thought we'd never get to the top it was a really worthwhile experience. We were greeted by a great view and were able to inspect Sturt's Cairn.

The very wise Charles Sturt had directed his men to build the cairn stone by stone to keep them sane and all survived bar the brave Mr Poole. A truly uplifting and thought provoking visit.

The downward trip presented a few challenges but eventually we completed it and piled into the car for the long trip home!

Around 100 kilometres from Mt Poole we had a minor setback, or it would be minor in the city anyway!!

Yes you guessed it! - two flat tyres on the four wheel drive vehicle as a result of all the very rough gravel roads we had been travelling on. What to do in this remote country? That's where our great friends came into play.

As we were only 20 odd kilometres from their homestead on a remote sheep station we limped on. As we drove down the driveway we realised just how late it was as all was in darkness. In true bush spirit our friends came out and notwithstanding the fact that Matt was recovering from a kangaroo flying through his windscreen a few days prior, we sorted out the tyres and with the aid of some refreshing ales and wines plus an impromptu Nut Bush dance on the deserted road we set off again. By this time it was midnight!!!!

Around an hour later this extraordinary day became both magical and mystical. As we came over a hill we were confronted by the sight of a very large dam with thick mist encircling it all around and hundreds of kangaroos and wallabies drinking at the dam edge. They turned at the noise of the vehicle and actually stared us down!! Our engine was cut and headlights off and we became one with nature as we relished this beautiful and once in a lifetime scene, and delighted in our luck at being there as 'intruders in the bush' with these wonderful animals.

We watched on for quite a while and then most reluctantly slowly moved away and headed for home, arriving around 3am!

This scene and experience some 20 years ago is one none of us will ever forget and never likely to replicate, - a truly memorable end to an extraordinary day in the Australian outback.



Photographed by Darryl Kirby

## Mount Poole Cairn Plague says:

The cairn on Mount Poole was built by the men of Charles Sturt's Central Australian Expedition during their forced stay at Depot Glen between January and July, 1845, due to drought.

"To give the men occupation, and to keep them in health I employed them in erecting a pyramid of stones on the summit of the Red Hill (Mount Poole).

It is twenty one feet at the base and eighteen feet high....I little thought when I was engaged in that work, that I was erecting Mr Poole's monument, but so it was, that rude structure looks over his lonely grave and will and for ages as a record of all we suffered in the dreary region to which we were so long confined".

(Charles Sturt)

# ALWAYS THINKING

by Warwick Lloyd

From an early age I was always busy. I started Kindergarten at three and a half which was younger than most. On day one with much excitement and a few tears my Mother walked me to the local Kindergarten in Kingston Road Hampton.

Being day one there was much excitement and lots of noise. So, after Mum left I thought right I'm out of here and will go visit her. So, I bolted over the front fence and walked home.

Well I actually beat Mum who was shocked to see me out front of the family home. I was promptly delivered to the Kindergarten for the second time, much to the relief of the teachers and was quite content. You see it wasn't the notion of attending Kindergarten that made me escape yet checking on Mum.

My big Sister Janine kept Guinea pigs in a wire cage. Often it would be placed on the backyard lawn where they could munch on the grass. I never really liked guinea pigs mainly because they were so timid, always twitching their noses and as soon as you approached their cage, they would scurry into their little bedroom.

I thought would guinea pigs continue to stay close to home if they were released. So, one day after Janine placed the hutch on the lawn, I set them free. Well the two guinea pigs bolted for the neighbouring fence, ducked under the palings and were never seen again. Sorry Janine yet they did look happy.

As I grew up my parents would progressively give me odd jobs for pocket money. Our home was situated on a large block with the back garden containing two areas, a section which was partially paved with planter boxes and a hedge separating another parcel of

land sporadically maintained and where our garden shed was located.

The land behind the hedge was quite unkempt and my task was to tidy it up. This I figured was going to take a lifetime as the weeds were deeply routed and a foot high.

I thought about speeding up the clean-up process, then a flash of inspiration, I'd burn all the weeds back to the bare dirt by using a flame thrower. You see in our garage was a long-stemmed metal sprayer for spraying fruit trees with poison for fruit bugs. If I filled an open bucket full of petrol and lit the end of the spraying rod I could spray the weeds with flame. Brilliant.

So, I went to the family Holden and removed petrol from the fuel tank using a garden hose and sucking til fuel flowed into a bucket. I placed the spray rod hose into the bucket until petrol was seeping out. Then I did the unimaginable I struck a match.

Well the spray unit became an instant torch of flame and the more I squeezed the trigger to extract more petrol from the bucket the further the flame went. Little did I appreciate this was absolute insanity as the consequences could have meant serious burns to myself.

I then headed to the patch of land I was to work on and began to spray a naked flame on everything in my sight. I did this until the fuel ran out. I heard Mum call out for lunch and headed inside to take a break pleased with my mornings work. I didn't discuss my progress as I wanted to surprise my Parents.

At the conclusion of lunch I headed back out beyond the hedge. To my horror the flames had continued to burn in my absence and were licking the side paling fence separating the neighbours on two of three sides. Faaark!

I thought for a few minutes and then had an idea. I grabbed a hammer and climbed a few fences and began strategically removing palings from neighbours property's so I could replace the burnt ones. Just a paling here and there so it would not be too obvious.

I spent the next hour or two removing and re nailing palings. Job done it was time for the big reveal.

So, I invited my parents to take a look at my handywork and whilst they acknowledged the challenge had been accomplished, they were deeply concerned at what could have happened with the flame thrower.

I packed up all the tools and headed inside for a rest then the doorbell rang. Neighbours were standing at the front door demanding their palings back. Faaark!

My parents ran a wholesale confectionary company from home with a small warehouse to store the lollies and a couple of commercial vehicles for delivery. I helped Dad replenish the stock in the vehicles ready for delivery the next day to schools and milk bars. There was such a variety of lollies, big boss cigars, humbugs, bananas, false teeth, chips, Twisties, red skins, snowballs and so much more. Often, I'd squeeze my hand into a carton of lollies to strategically remove one or two pieces and shove them in my mouth.

I've always sort popularity and had this idea I'd knock of a box or two from the truck to share with the local lads. I didn't see it as stealing more sharing my good fortune at having access to treats.

So after school one evening with a box of bananas I met the boys in a laneway behind a small group of shops in my street. They were delighted and my popularity soared.

On arriving home Dad received a phone call from the local milk bar owner, a customer, who was none too happy his sales on confectionary were taking a nosedive.

Dad directed me straight to my bedroom where he removed his belt and smacked my bottom. It was the only time he ever took this action and I applaud him for making me not forget never steal from the hand that feeds you or anyone else for that matter.



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# THE LAST DINNER PARTY

by Alison Hill

I wanted everything to be perfect and as I straightened the cutlery, David attended to his wine opening ritual. He jokingly said that I should be more like the wine. I thought he was complimenting my red hair and full-bodied curves, but when he used the term “Hostess Neurosis” I knew he meant that I should breathe, like the decanting Shiraz. Maybe I was slightly frantic, but I hated to feel unprepared and the cream still hadn’t been whipped. I calmed when I remembered that the Taylors would be late. Simon and Louise were always late.

Twelve years ago, when the children had moved away, David and I had sought a smaller home and moved to Port Melbourne. Leaving the inner suburbs was liberating, and we rejoiced in the peace we felt when looking out over Port Phillip Bay and its miles of white sandy beaches. The water had its moods but whatever face it showed, we were always mesmerised. We loved watching the dogs and volleyball players, the swimmers and the sand-sitters and from the first day we became regular walkers. Either hatted against the sun or donning coats and gloves, we promenaded along Beaconsfield Parade from Station pier, where the Spirit docked, to Fitzroy Street and back. We would smile and nod to other walkers and over time they became familiar. Slowly, the simple greetings to Simon and Louise grew to become coffee chats, and eventually, shared dinners. They were now our dear friends.

Samantha and Alan, friends from our children’s school years, made up the six. We shared a love of food and wine, and the regular gatherings provided stimulating conversation, punctuated with frequent laughter. This Saturday’s dinner party was keenly anticipated because it would be our

first in months. The Government had relaxed restrictions which had been set in place to control the Covid pandemic. The possibility of more controls loomed, but for now we could meet together and enjoy wine, beef bourguignon and each other’s company.

Seated around the table, glasses of wine in hand, we began to relax into the evening. By mutual agreement we’d decided that there would be no talk about the Pandemic, no statistics recited and no mention of empty supermarket shelves. We wouldn’t speak of the stresses of working from home or the spectre of unemployment. Discussions of closed restaurants and the failing economy, were taboo. The virus had dominated our thoughts and caused too much fear and tonight we wanted to lose ourselves in ‘normal’.

Alan talked all through entree. Shot by painful shot, he regaled us with a marathon description of a 2018 golf match. Like all courses throughout Victoria, Albert Park Golf was temporarily closed and he was frustrated. Samantha, who’d heard it all before, sought distraction and engaged Louise in chatter about thwarted holiday plans and the ins and outs of her neighbours’ divorce. Simon looked bored and was unusually silent during Alan’s monologue. He seemed barely able to conceal his frustration and drank determinedly and without pause, reaching the bottom of the second bottle in record time. Feeling uneasy, I glanced towards David and saw in his eyes, his shared concern. Something was off kilter and the fun was missing.

Simon, who delighted in a good debate, would often dominate a conversation. He was passionate but didn’t accept other opinions easily and wasn’t always

a fair fighter. He’d wax lyrical on his pet topic, Save Albert Park, and was nearly unstoppable when fuelled by red wine. If we’d heard it once, we’d heard it a million times. “I was there at the beginning....” and “back in ‘96....” and please, don’t let him start on about the Kennett years. Things heated up and the room felt too small, too crowded. Simon unleashed and having worked his way through the Grand Prix protest, was now on the topic of recycling. Apparently, Victoria’s plants were laughable. He paraded his opinions as if they were facts and littered his arguments with generalisations. He bullied Alan out of the conversation and I tensed, hoping he’d soon run out of steam and we could move to safer ground. Thankfully I knew that David, a natural diplomat, would attempt a conciliatory manoeuvre. Normally he’d smooth troubled waters by introducing the topic of Aussie Rules football. Footy, the great social leveller, united Australians and most people loved to air their views, but Covid had infected that too. This year’s AFL season had been stymied, and the spectator-free matches lacked passion. There was little intrigue to be found and I doubted the footy would save us.

The evening lost direction and hurtled out of control, quickly and disastrously. Alan was peeved that no one was riveted by his third golfing anecdote and Louise and Samantha had taken strong and opposing views about assigning blame in the neighbours’ divorce. My attempt to lighten the atmosphere with cinema discussion proved to be ill conceived. The award-winning movie I offered up for conversation provoked strongly voiced opinions and thinly disguised insults, concerning morality and status. There was to be no redemption.

Perhaps we’d forgotten how to socialise or maybe the pressures of the past months had simply bubbled over, released by the warmth and wine. Covid isolation had forced us to become more self-reliant and more self-motivated but perhaps it had also made us more selfish. Our social tolerance registered barely above zero.

In the end, they left before dessert was served. I hadn’t even sliced the tart when a sudden and heavy silence fell. Pale and shocked faces looked from one to the other in fearful disbelief and without a word our guests rose in unison, collected their coats and headed for the door. The dinner party was over. It was not Simon’s overbearing manner, Alan’s pedantic prattle or even the ladies’ simmering hostility that caused the party to implode but rather a small sound that was almost missed. It was June, 2020 and someone had just coughed.

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# THE SHED

by Alison Hill

I was ready with five minutes to spare and I stole a moment, with coffee in hand, to peer through the steamy kitchen window, to the forest beyond; my overgrown suburban backyard. The pale blue shed, overgrown with ivy and its paint faded and peeling, stood defiantly amongst the clumps of grasses. The ivy had chosen a meandering path and had climbed onto the wheelbarrow propped against the shed wall, and up to the window ledge. It travelled briefly on the glass pane and then ascended again, to the fibro roof. Here the leaves turned to greet the sun and then the ivy crossed to the east wall where it fell to earth again, a waterfall of green.

I rarely ventured into the shed. Its gentle facade belied the menace that lay within. My shed was home to two large possums and like belligerent tenants they would look upon my intrusion into their lair with black eyes, reproaching me for disturbing their daytime slumber. These squatters intimidated me with their judgmental gaze but were just one of several deterrents. I suspected that vermin called my shed home and there were definitely spiders. If I did venture into the shed I inevitably returned with numerous cobwebs caught in my hair. Looking like a haunted bride, wearing an eerie, tattered veil, I emerged silent and terrified, wondering if the architects of my ghostly headdress were hitching a ride in my hair.

My fear of the dangers that lay within the shed heightened. As the years passed, the spider and possum empire grew more powerful and kept me away. Several months passed before I reluctantly and warily entered and when I prised open the door on its rusted hinges, a chilling screech escaped, warning of my trespass. The hairs on my arms stood to attention and I found myself, holding my breath. Only an unavoidable errand could force me to venture into the darkness of the shed. I would never run the possum and spider gauntlet for idle curiosity.

The shed was the repository of all things discarded, forgotten or broken. Tax time rolled around and I remembered that somewhere, I had a hole punch. I rediscovered the disused VCR player in the hall closet and recalled that I'd stored the tapes elsewhere. I knew these missing items were languishing inside a ripped cardboard box in the shed.

The birthday cake recipe called for a special tin and I felt a vague tug at the edges of my memory. I'd owned a heart-shaped cake mould once. Perhaps I'd tossed it into a St Vinnies charity box and someone else was now baking with it. But I wasn't fooling anybody. I knew it was in the shed. With a sinking heart I conceded to the inevitable. I would need to breach the castle walls. With a heavy sigh and summoning courage from deep within, I dressed in ceremonial attack clothes. I donned old jeans, tucking them into my socks at the ankles to keep creepy-crawlies out. Nothing but solid boots would do and, unless I wanted to be the bride of the spider king, I would need a hat. Carrying a torch, I set out on my dangerous quest.

Once the bastion had been stormed and I emerged, insect-free and triumphant, the shed became my friend again. It was a charming addition to the backyard and lent a subtle sense of purpose. I enjoyed living alongside my possum neighbours and felt a landlord's benevolence in providing them a warm and safe home. The shed declared that this was how a suburban backyard should look. Its very presence suggested that DIY projects could be accomplished and the possibility of productivity pleased me. Gullible backyard visitors were hoodwinked by its facade of usefulness but I knew the truth and felt guilty. My poor, tired shed was capable of so much more. I was embarrassed by its wasted potential.

I hadn't entered the shed in weeks but today I smiled upon it and felt surer, less daunted by its dark collection of webs and broken promises. I no longer felt humbled by its quiet judgment because the day had arrived. Today I was storming the castle for the final time. Peter the Possum Man was due to arrive in a few minutes bringing with him the cages to capture and then relocate my furry neighbours. I'd booked the handy man, John-with-the-trailer to arrive at midday. Together we would sort, throw and recycle. We would drag boxes full of trash and memories and toss them on to the discard pile, destined for the tip. I'd purchased several cans of insect spray which promised instant death and a six-month bug-free holiday. Today I would wreak havoc and claim victory.

Once the shed's defences were torn asunder, I would rebuild. A new hardwood floor was being laid and I had bought rugs in bright colours. Insulation and plasterboard would line the rough timber walls and small gaps would be sealed, fortifying my fortress against marauding spiders. Paint in a soft clotted-cream colour would brighten the walls and I'd bought a candle which perfumed the air with jasmine fragrance as it burned. I'd purchased soft pastel cushions and the electrician was coming to wire the shed for light, heat and WIFI. I had a small coffee station which I'd set between the easy chair and bookcase. The workbench would be resurfaced in laminate and would finally earn its name and find its purpose. The shed would be transformed and I resolved to redefine our torrid relationship. I'd matured and rid myself of prejudices born from vermin and today I'd start afresh. I was intent on becoming a friend of my shed and had planned long hours in its company. Today, finally, my shed would realise its full potential. Today the shed would become my new studio.



# 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF COMMUNITY BALL DEDICATION

by Anna Rogalina



Anna at 40th Anniversary

## 40th Anniversary of Community Ball

Is a great event for all,  
Whose heart is still young  
And spirits are spring and sprung!  
Who likes to dress up and to go  
Where they can be a star and to glow!  
When popular music does go  
To try their feet on the floor,  
As well, as they did long ago,  
With new steps they didn't before!  
To see old friends and meet some new,  
To share late news and jokes to crack a few.  
And to enjoy drinks and delicious food  
The celebration is good, as their festive mood!

# BROKEN TULIPS

by Anna Rogalina

It was one of the scorching days of Summer, some time ago. The idea to walk after sunset promised to bring relief, that was so needed to prevent another sleepless night. I met my neighbour-friend Clara in the foyer, and we went towards Albert Park, walking and talking as usual. The night was hot and quiet, and a light cool breeze was a pleasure to feel. With time, the night was getting darker, and we decided to cut short our way back.

When I heard a noise from the road, we were near South Melbourne Community Centre. I looked in the direction of the noise and my attention attracted something like a big black rubbish bag, that was rolling around in the middle of the road! It was strange, I thought, for there was no wind!

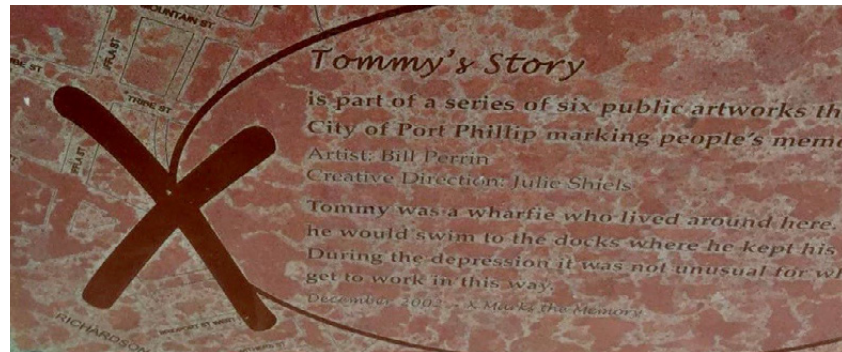
We made a couple of steps in complete silence, when the sounds repeated. We stopped, for I started to get curious and wanted to come closer to have a look at what was making those strange sounds. Clara decided to wait for me on the footpath, because she had heard nothing. So, I moved towards the bag to satisfy my curiosity, but stopped in shock and disbelief to see a man who was lying on the road, unsuccessfully trying to get up! His speech wasn't clear, but I recognised in him my neighbour from the eleventh floor George Heywood. I called Clara, and we helped him to get up and took him to Park Towers. Even though it was very difficult, for he couldn't walk, we brought him home safe and sound! Security helped him to get to his flat.

Later he said, that he was on his way back home, after attending the funeral of his best friend. He didn't drink much, but in the hot weather he started to feel unwell and didn't remember what had happened to him after he got off the tram.

The next day, when I saw George, he was holding a pot of tulips but looked sad. He explained to me that it was a present to me, but they were broken by the strong wind and he didn't know what to do. I told him not to be upset for I would cut tulips and put them in a vase. He looked at me and laughed happily!

# TOMMY'S STORY

by Aziza Khamlichi



Photographed by Aziza Khamlichi

I like walking along the beach from Port Phillip to St Kilda Bayside. There is so much to see and experience; the sounds, the smells, the sights and the people. It is a time to think, reflect and remember. No two days are the same.

As the seasons change, I watch the long days getting shorter, the luminous deep blue sky changing with new bobbing clouds; the sea so calm, slowly begins to come alive as the days shorten and winter nights are noticeably longer. The cool breeze is welcoming and revives my soul as it ruffles my hair gently and I have an overwhelming feeling of memories from the past.

I am taken back to when I was a child growing up in Morocco. It was spring and a quick shower had moistened the parched, musty earth. The vapours evoked an intense fragrance. I remembered the smell of lemon and orange trees ripe with blossom and fruit mingled with lavender. The scented roses and jasmine buds conjured up the heavenly perfume of nature. The crispness in the air delights me and makes me feel alive as I continue whistling and strolling at my leisure through Middle Park. Suddenly I am rudely interrupted: "Aziza watch it," I warn myself as a young man, with his head still down, almost bumped into me. We both said "Sorry" simultaneously. This gave me the giggles as we looked like we were dancing,

trying to avoid the collision. I watch as he walked away, with his head still down, as he concentrated on his phone. He nearly did it again as he walked towards a lady pushing a wobbly pram with her dressed up poodle in it. This made me laugh out loud. I watch him, his head still down and engrossed with his mobile phone – in a world of his own – other people trying to dodge him. Eventually he veers to the left, crosses the main road and disappears. A true traffic hazard.

I see grand-parents with children savouring ice-cream or chasing sea-gulls. I feel envious. Then I am struck by this sudden pain as I remember the precious moments I spent with my grandchildren in the UK in 2019, I miss them terribly.

There is movement all around me – a trail of joggers being encouraged by their trainer as the strugglers try to keep up; dogs pulling on leads to get free to tumble in the sand or wade in the water; many cyclists and scooter /skateboard riders float along as well. Tourists in shorts are clicking away on their cameras and young parents push their babies in prams or strollers. This is a joyful scene made even more beautiful as a flock of noisy rosellas make a racket. I hear other birds singing and try to search for them in the tall palms. I attempt to mimic them but fail miserably.



Photographed by Aziza Khamlichi

Then I see it. On the Sea Wall. On the weathered stone wall. I stop motionless. I look at this exquisite work of Art. I cannot believe my eyes. I am mesmerised.

"Amazing," I say to myself. "Who has done this and Why."

The bronze sculpture depicts corduroy trousers, a shirt and waist coat. Also a cap, and boots and socks. I linger in front of it. Approaching near I squint my eyes and at close range I marvel at the reality of this work of art. I focus and concentrate on the perfect details; becoming more and more engrossed, I couldn't stop myself from reaching out and touching it and my fingers run over every smooth supple fold. It was like a magnet.

The glossy sheen on the boots and the socks are slightly tarnished by the passing of time and the sea air. They seem so refined and moulded together. They tease me and tempt me to lift them. I admire them, if only they weren't stuck to the wall and weighed down by a brick. "This is perfect," I say to myself. I try to work out what is going on here. I wonder what the story is behind this genius artist.

I search for a plaque and there it is, very faded, I pause and shake my head. If I hadn't looked hard I would have missed it. It gave a short version of the story but I had the urge to find out more about Tommy who owned these clothes and the artist Bill Perrin who had created this artwork. I needed to satisfy my curiosity. Walking home later I decided to do some research.

Apparently, the story goes something like this; During the Depression in 1930 there was a local bloke named Tommy who was so poor that he couldn't afford public transport or a bath. Each morning he would strip off his clothes and leave them on the beach with a brick on top and a note saying, "Back in 5 minutes."

Then he would swim to his workplace further down the bay where he would put on his work clothes. After a hard day's work, he would take off his work clothes and leave them on that beach overnight and swim home.

I imagined that if I waited 5 minutes Tommy would appear out of the water. He would be young and handsome; beautifully tanned with a strong and muscular body. He had to be strong otherwise he wouldn't have been able to swim in all weathers, particularly during the winter months.

So now I have to be satisfied with just touching his cold metal clothes whenever I pass on my excursion through Middle Park and I say "Hello Tommy. I wish I had had the pleasure to have known you and known more about your life."

This rare piece of Art is so poignant.



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# MAGNANIMITY

by Barbara Anne Magee

I was seated at a chessboard opposite my six-year-old grandson.

"I won't win," I said. "I'm not good at chess."

"You might," he replied. "I'm playing my easiest!"

The game didn't last long.

"Oh well," he said, smiling benevolently. "At least you're good at languages."

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# "WHERE IGNORANCE IS BLISS..."

by Barbara Anne Magee

As a child, I was very pleased to learn that my father's full name was Keith Handel Jones. He explained that my great-grandfather was christened Edgar Handel Jones, his middle name being in honour of the composer. After this, it became a family tradition for some male babies to have 'Handel' as a middle name. This has always seemed very romantic to me, and amusing, also, as my father, with his characteristic sense of humour, once commented, "It's a name that opens many doors!"

During the lockdown, the surreal nature of our day-to-day existence compelled me to listen to my CDs of The Goons, to watch my DVDs of Monty Python, and to read the nonsense verse of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear.

All was well until I was halfway through Lear's poem, "The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò". The Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò, who lived on the coast of Coromandel, came across the Lady Jingly Jones on one of his walks, and proposed marriage to her. The Lady Jingly Jones answered that his proposal had come too late, as she already had a husband in England, who loved sending her white hens from Dorking. And what was her husband's name? To my horror, I read,

'Mr Jones - (his name is Handel, - Handel Jones, Esquire, & Co)'.

Was my great-grandfather's middle name really in honour of the great composer, or were his parents, Thomas and Sarah Jones, a pair of wags, who named him after the Handel Jones in Edward Lear's nonsense poem? My great-grandfather was born in 1848 in Glamorgan, Wales, when Lear was 36 years old. Had Lear written and published this poem in neighbouring England by then? It doesn't bear thinking about!!! I could do further research, but "where ignorance is bliss..."!

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# AGEING, IN PORT PHILLIP

by Bob Croker

As I have to, in reality, accept the fact that I now have eighty nine years showing on my 'clockometer' I also have to answer my own question, what am I doing here, where am I going and who, how and what do I present to those important and close to me?

I am very fortunate as my mind is still active, but I do have a problem in that my body and working parts are not on the same level. Being totally honest this is why I decided to try and write this story. It is a challenge, something I need, but if it falls together nicely as I hope it will, it may be of interest or helpful to someone else in or approaching a similar time frame in life.

Where to begin, retrace a little and go back or jump right in and start with today? Yes that's how we'll go. It is not possible for anyone to completely plan for old age, too many factors, health, financial position, family support and unknowns but the one certain factor is, we all have to face it and must learn to accept and handle it in our own way. Those who still have a partner to share life with are the envy of others who may have a partner that is in poor health or is in care and others still who are left on our own.

Whatever the case it is not easy to accept but like many things in life there is no alternative. We have to adjust and hopefully learn to cope and enjoy the balance of time left and allocated to us, to stay on this earth. Pride sometimes has to go if a situation arises when we need to accept help, and on some occasions when we actually have to ask for help! Never easy.

Problems, expect something here; aches, back, neck, head, eyes, hearing, memory, vascular, and more. Sounds frightening I know but we have all learnt to be a bit resilient by this time with the term 'old age'

and you will cope. Leakage, not something we discuss whilst having a coffee or around the table but it happens to a great many in the higher years group. Frightening no, there are simple and ready aids available and no need to be ashamed, just learn to speak and ask about it openly to rectify the matter, it doesn't make you different.

What's hard? Yes here is a point every older person will answer the same way. Loneliness, some more than others may handle this problem better and you are lucky if you are in this group. If not however, be prepared for some difficult periods.

Families, all families are different in their approach to having an older member in the group and within each family some members cope or respond in their own way. Just because we are old does not give us the right to say we expect special attention because we did certain things for them in earlier days. We did those things because they were our children and we loved them.

In many cases as we reach the higher levels of 'old age' our children are grandparents themselves, with additional loading of their own time. If they are still working they will be very busy keeping up with the pace today or even trying hard to improve their own position before reaching this next age group or stage of life, that I speak of.

I am always delighted to hear from a family member asking if I would like to share a coffee with them, or join them on a little outing or can they just come and visit and have a chat, perhaps tell me about their new job or travel experiences etc. This is my most treasured time when someone can spare a little time. I place no expectations on any one here but fully enjoy such company when it happens.

There are many things we can do to help ourselves for both men and ladies, there is Mens Shed, Life Activities Clubs, Choirs, Writers groups and COTA with a wide range of programs for all. Just hunt around, you may be surprised what's there. Something will suit you.

I am not fully computer literate, I can send an email or receive an email and perhaps tackle a limited search, that's about it. But there are many opportunities available in this area, positive in nature, a broadened knowledge, new ways of communication, study and research all interesting with many doors to open. If you are not at a level that allows you to participate and utilize this big sphere, give thought to joining a class and learning early. There are several around, like U3A, and other community groups that are simple and good. I left it too late!

I have been happy and fortunate to be able to enjoy some of these facilities within our City of Port Phillip and if someone reading this can also get something positive out of it I would feel good about that.

Just remember that one day it maybe you and if you can think about and prepare yourself, even a little, it may be easier when that time comes.

Happy late years to all.



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# COUNTRY LIFE – FROM A DISTANCE

by Bob Scheffer

I just got a letter from my friend Suzie in country Victoria. Yes, a real letter with stamps and a handwritten address. Mail like we used to get not so long ago. The letter was a bucolic missive giving me an update on how things were going on the land. It may as well have come from Mars. As I have long lost touch with the agricultural planet, I gave her a ring to have a few things clarified.

'Hello Suzie, loved your letter. Forgive my ignorance of all things rustic, but Hey, there seems to be some bizarre activities in your part of the world. You mentioned rounding up a mob of 'Dorpers?' You've got Dorpers? We've Dorpers here too: You know, Kids who steal cars and drive through red lights at high speed and people who won't wear face masks. Don't tell anyone I said it, but the biggest 'Dorper' of all is that bloke in the White house. Really? Dorpers are actually sheep with black faces? I'll leave that one alone.

While we are on the subject, fill me in on this 'mulesing' thing. I read somewhere that this involves cutting away an area of skin around a sheep's bum. Tell me this is something you made up just to scare the children? You do this on your farm? No kidding? I'm glad I'm not a sheep.

Don't hang up yet, I've got more questions. I'm really interested in country life but find it hard to get my head around the more arcane practices that you take for granted. There are lots of things I don't understand. What's that bit you wrote about 'First cross, autumn drop, un-joined heifers,' and 'selling over-the-hooks' for a gazillion dollars a kilogram?' You understand all this weird stuff but find it too complicated to explain to a layman like me - fair enough!

I was somewhat startled to read that you sold a truck load of Char ladies to the abattoirs. How distressing for them. Wouldn't a less severe disciplinary action be warranted for whatever duties they failed to carry out? Oh, they're not Char ladies; but Charolais: a big, sandy-coloured cattle of French origin. Glad you cleared that up!

Thanks for being so patient with me, it's a credit to your country common sense. But as an animal-lover it concerns me that you have Belted Galloways on your property. I hope this is not true, as I would have to report you to the RSPCA. I don't hold with people belting any creature (assuming a Galloway is a creature?) but, if they're a family of Irish people, maybe the police should be involved?

Stop laughing!

I'll change the subject. What's the weather like up there? I can relate to that. 'Freezing cold and a Sheep grazer's alert has been issued.'

Sheep grazer's alert? Is this where the poor sheep stand out all night in the snow, rain, hail, sleet and frost while the alerted grazer warms his un-mulesed bum in front of a roaring fire. That seems a tad unfair?

So, what's on the to-do list this week? 'Castrating the little piggies?' Don't tell me anymore, I don't want to know. Change of subject again. Tell me about your new tractor. The photo you sent is amazing, I mean, can you actually drive that thing? It looks as big as an Aircraft carrier. I remember when tractors were human-sized, red or blue machines that putt-putted leisurely across the paddocks, giving off a heady aroma of diesel and freshly-turned earth? Your new

behemoth looks like you need a degree in aeronautical engineering to pilot it? I'd become a gibbering idiot trying to figure out how to open the cabin door.

Your farm sounds like a science lab with all the computer programs, soil and herd monitoring, chemical sprays, feed additives, crop protein levels and countless other hi-tech gadgetry, so necessary for today's farmers. Even Einstein would struggle a bit. Has the man in the Akubra hat been replaced by a farmer in a white coat?

While we are on matters scientific, your previous letter detailed the crop fertilizer program, where you pour mountains of ammonium nitrate onto the crops.

I care for your personal safety. Call me mister worry-wart, but isn't this the same stuff that blew the crap out of Beirut? Just thought I'd mention it. Hope I don't see any mushroom clouds towering over the waving canola fields any time soon.'

Suzie! Are you still there? How are your new neighbours? The one's on the four hectare hobby farm breeding Tarantulas for the hip restaurant market. You said they had a mass break-out recently? A word of advice. Check your bedding nightly and cover your boots with cling wrap. These 'Life style' farmers will grow anything to capture a niche market, so you're likely to encounter all sorts of exotic creatures roaming the district, including new-age humans.

Lastly, just a couple more bothersome questions to enrich my knowledge of all things rustic. The papers and TV are forever banging-on about whatever it is that you lot do with water (wash in it I hope?) Something called the 'Barmah Choke' gets mentioned a lot. I'm gobsmacked that you actually throttle a small country town. What else do you choke? Water, you say! Nothing to do with wrestling holds or kitchen utensils; Well blow me down, I told you I knew bugger all about the bush, but with your gentle guidance, one day I might just become a farmer.

I've gotta go now, lovely to hear from you. Thanks for clarifying a few of those niggling points about life on the farm. Bye!

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# FRED AND POSS

by Brenda Richards

‘They have to be put down,’ Leo heard the owner say. He watched the little kittens scrambling over each other. One little fellow was trying to climb up the wire door to escape. ‘No.’ He scooped it up. ‘You can’t kill him. I’ll take him with me.’ He headed down the highway like a man on a mission in his ‘white van man’ – or maybe he always drives that way. He began to regret his hasty decision.

‘He might be just a baby, but he nearly drove me mad. In between eating and sleeping, he would jump up on the dashboard and stare at the road ahead, blocking my view. I’d put him back in his box, but before long he would jump up on the dash again. He thought it was a game. I pulled into a truck stop for a sleep and woke up to find him using my head for a pillow.’

The odd couple arrived at my place. Leo opened his strong carpenter’s hands to reveal his furry friend, announcing, ‘Here, I thought you might like this.’ ‘No I don’t,’ I replied, picking him up. He called in the next day to check how his protégé was going. ‘Have you named him yet?’ adding ‘Fred’s a good name.’ The kitten blinked at me in agreement. I now owned a cat called Fred.

There was the usual visit to the vet, who announced he was half Siamese, half Burmese and half alley cat, which made him a cat and a half. We registered him at the council. With Fred looking his regal best, they labelled him a Burmese/Siamese cross.

With two strategically placed slabs of wood in the cumquat tree near the front gate, Leo built him a split-level apartment. Freddie soon accepted ownership. Pedigree or not, he was certainly regal, as he daily sat and surveyed his domain from his tree. As he grew, so did his bunch of followers.

He was a talker. Then he was given a title - Lord Frederick.

Jodie, a homeless young woman sleeping at the back of Christ Church, would regularly walk past. Fred called out hello, and their friendship went from there. She bought him a little toy. He introduced me to her. She eventually managed to get into local housing, but never forgot Fred. She would go out of her way to still visit him.

Evan, a local musician, always stopped to chat to Fred, whether day time or after finishing a late night gig. Fred knew his footsteps, and would sing out to him before he got close. Evan is also a brilliant photographer, so we have some wonderful ‘Fred’ photos. Many other life-long friends also commented on his ability to pick them out and miaow ‘hello’ before they got level with him, no matter from which direction they came.

Anne-Marie would sit in ‘Fred’s chair’ on the veranda and quietly sing to him with her beautiful voice, and Macey over the road drew pictures for him.

A grandmother visited with two small boys from the country. Their mother was seriously ill in hospital. We chatted, while the little boys spent most of the time talking to Fred. They watched people interacting with him. On returning home, they told the teacher that they’d met a cat who spoke every language in the world. They also confided that Fred told them their ‘Mum’ was going to get better. And she did.

Fred also had a job. A teacher from the nearby International school, would bring down Asian students to meet him. Many had never touched a cat before. Fred would come down from his tree and slide under the gate, to meet them. The teacher would help the students as they tentatively put out a hand and touched his back. Then, as he did with old friends, he would roll over so that they could give him a gentle stomach scratch. When he put on weight as he got older, some helpful soul made a hole in the gate for him to push his way through.

Fred not only loved people, but he also liked animals. Rats and mice were notable exceptions. As a jungle cat, his main food would have been small things inhabiting the floor of the forest, so birds were ignored, apart from the two doves who inhabited the back yard. They would confidently walk into the house through his cat flap and eat his food. He quizzically stared at them, from a safe distance. Maybe he thought they were feathered cats with sharp beaks. He also shared the cumquat tree with Poss, a little ringtail possum.

Inevitably, Fred got old and lost mobility. He then spent time out the back in the afternoon sun. His friends missed him. When asking after him, they would add that they loved him. One old man reversed this. He was always on his own. With a thick European accent, he asked ‘Wo is he?’ then proudly confided, ‘He loffs me.’

I felt proud of Fred. What an achievement – to make a lonely, isolated person feel they were lovable.

Fred died shortly afterwards, aged 19, and is buried under the cumquat tree. But his spirit is still around. He also left me Poss as a legacy. Times became tough. Poss ate the skins off the cumquats on the tree. He also stripped the leaves from the jade plant and then ate all the geranium flowers. My garden was reduced to bare sticks with roots.

This was too much. I bought possum repellent and started spraying. The label said it was not harmful to possums. Then Fred’s words rang loud and clear in my head. ‘No. You can’t. He’ll die with nothing to eat.’

Now, nightly I place lemon skins in Fred’s tree apartment. Poss loves them. Fred still rules the roost.

Mikey drew his picture on the wall so that his presence is still around.

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# MISSING SHANE AT THE SHOP

by Brenda Richards

May there always be a Shane at the Shop. Shane exchanged many stories with me over the years. Story tellers need someone to listen to them and to exchange ideas. That's how we build communities. Will Covid-19 kill them off? Figuratively, if not literally. We are in lockdown. In many cases this means locked out. Shane is now silenced. But it won't last forever. Hopefully we will get through this pandemic, as humans have done over previous centuries, but it will mark many lives for generations to come.

If it hadn't been for one pandemic, I would not be here. An ancestor in Northern Europe, returned from a compulsory stint in the navy in the late 1880s to find that his children, a two year old toddler and the baby he had never met, had died when the 'Great Diphtheria,' which particularly threatened young children, swept through the country. His wife never recovered from this tragic event which she had battled on her own. And he had difficulty with this terrible loss. He was consoling himself around the port of Bremerhaven, when he was 'shanghaied' onto a sailing ship heading for Australia. He jumped ship in Melbourne, some months later. At least five generations have since been born in this new country, so some unexpected bonuses also occurred as far as current descendants are concerned.

What will be the wanted and unwanted consequences when we 'come out the other side?' Will the 'new normal' be better or worse? Or a combination of both? There are numerous predictions of some of the likely changes that will occur, but nothing is set in concrete. We had been moving towards on-line interactions before Covid arrived. With the pressing need to socially distance, these changes have accelerated. Now even more of what we had done in a face to face

situation has, by necessity, has been moved to online interaction. As with any change, there are winners and losers.

In this age of tweeting and texting, everything is short and sometimes sharp. The message is not designed to last. While we may be having more interactions, in most cases they are not meaningful in the broader sense. In many cases they don't have the capacity to respond to emergencies, which can often be solved by a quick dash to the corner shop. That's where Shane lived. He listened to my stories and I listened to his.

Story tellers connect us with the real world. They tell us who we are. We need them, and they need people to hear their stories. They are a necessary part of a community. When we shop at the local market, we not only buy goods, we often exchange ideas and discuss experiences. This also occurs at the local shopping strip and the corner shop up the road.

I met Shane at the shop on the corner. I told him my stories. That was because he looked like a teddy bear I once had. Actually, that's not true, because I never had a teddy bear. But I did have a doll a nun made me out of an old black stocking. It only had one leg. I never knew if that was because the nun only had one stocking or if she didn't know how many legs real people had, because hers were always covered.

I loved that doll. It helped me get through the war and being separated from my parents. It wasn't easy. It was a dangerous time. Who knew when a whole mob of airplanes would bypass Melbourne and Sydney and bomb our small country town off the map? It could happen. That's when you need a good doll.

There were other problems. The convent was full of kids. At the time, I had a German sounding surname. Even worse, I had straight dark hair cut with a fringe, strange looking eyes and a speech impediment - I couldn't pronounce the letter 'r'. I looked and sounded a bit Japanese. Who were we fighting at the time? Bingo. The Germans and the Japanese. I made the perfect six-year old enemy.

I used to sit on the fence watching people go by. A group of local kids would come past singing anti-Irish ditties, about us 'sitting on logs, eating maggots out of frogs.' I can still hear them. I would throw stones at them. That's what you do when you don't have any other weapons. But it wasn't all bad. I was a good shot even then.

Then Shane told me that he got bullied at school when they found his father hadn't gone to the war because he was too old. He said he got even, because he later developed muscles and became a good football player, so they had to barrack for him instead of beating him up.

Then I told Shane about the miracle that happened to me. A girl who was in the nasty teasing group, came passed on her own one day. She had brought me a red icy block. It tasted wonderful. How good was that?

I hope when Covid-19 is history, and lockdown is over, there will still be people around like Shane to tell stories and listen to others. These interactions give our life meaning. Online interactions don't build a community. They don't have the necessary heartbeat. We will need a supportive community, as we are likely to go into a difficult period with high unemployment. And sadly, the burden of grief will still sit on many shoulders.

'Shane at the shop,' in his own way, helped me deal with earlier episodes in my life. We all need a Shane. And a good teddy bear.



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# THE FERRIS-WHEEL

by Deb Hall

It was getting cold and, since the fairground had closed down for the night, the darkness had become a presence surrounding her. There was some ambient light from the nearby road but it was feeble and only served to make the darkness loom like a huge, sleek, furred fox with glittering eyes, watching her. She told herself she wasn't afraid. She told herself that the night fox was a benign creature.

She didn't really know why she had done it, something to do with her ten-year-old self's desire for independence she supposed. She knew that she had wanted the ride on the Ferris-wheel to go on forever; she felt elated up high, and the view of the world was much better than down below living with her warring parents. At first she just planned on stowing away to get another ride for free but then she didn't want to leave.

When the ride stopped she crouched down and squeezed beneath the seat in the car she inhabited alone. The pimply-faced operator was so busy trying to chat up teenage girls, that he didn't check each car properly as it stopped for the passengers to alight, before shifting the Ferris-wheel to the next position.

Her parents looked for her all over the fairground when she failed to meet them at the designated spot, and then they sought help from the staff. As soon as a staff member notified management, they called the police.

Even when she saw the uniformed police scouring the grounds, she remained hidden. If anyone had bothered to look up, they would have seen her peeking over the edge of a car two-thirds of the way up the Ferris-wheel. Her parents weren't able to tell the police which rides she had gone on; they had given her some money and told her to go and have fun, but to be sure to meet them by the ticket kiosk at 7.30 pm.

It was 11.30 pm now and the fairground was deserted and locked up securely. She had needed to run on the spot a few times to keep warm. When she was busting to pee, she pulled her shorts and underpants down and squatted, and tried to pee between the slats of the floor of the car. She mostly succeeded.

It felt peaceful. There was a skinny arc of yellow moon and she gazed up at it; from her vantage point it seemed closer than usual. She observed an occasional dark cloud scribble a ragged line with its 2B pencil across the surface of the moon and then, much later, mist blurred the outline and she thought it looked as if it had been smudged with pastels or crayons.

She was getting thirsty and hungry; the hot-dog and can of coke she'd had earlier were a distant memory. She reckoned that she could still smell the fried onions on the hot plate and the frankfurts in the steaming urn of water at the hot-dog stand below.

As the night wore on and her stomach rumbled more, she contemplated the degree of difficulty of climbing down the framework of the Ferris-wheel to reach the ground. Out of all of her friends, she knew that she was the best climber. She was small but wiry.

She hung out over the side of the car and examined the way the structure was put together. She gauged the distances between various struts and reckoned she could clamber down if she held her nerve. Her car wasn't right at the top so that meant less height to negotiate.

She decided to attempt it. She tucked her tee-shirt inside the waistband of her shorts so that it wouldn't catch on anything. She stepped up onto the seat and swung her leg over the side of the car and perched there for a moment. The unbalanced car lurched and

her stomach lurched right along with it. She waited until the car stopped swinging. Then she took hold of the frame with both hands and swung the other leg over and stood on the nearest strut. She paused to make sure she was balanced and then inched along it until she reached the next lot of uprights and cross-pieces and climbed down to the next piece of geometry.

She resolved to just think of each section of the framework as a shape from an imaginary meccano set, and simply scale one triangle at a time without thinking about where she was in relation to the ground or the sky. In this way panic couldn't set in.

By the time she had climbed most of the way down the structure, she was feeling the strain in her legs and arms. She clambered into another car to sit and have a rest. Then she tackled the remainder of the descent. Just as she got both feet on the ground, a beam of torchlight blinded her.

"There you are, you monkey", said the disembodied voice behind the torch.

"You've led everyone a merry dance but I had my suspicions that you might emerge from some hidey-hole sooner or later."

The night watchman took her to his "office", a shed, and made her a mug of hot chocolate. He dropped three marshmallows into it and she was amazed.

"Get that inside you while I call your parents", he said.

She hung her head, feeling shamefaced.

"Don't worry," he added, "They will be relieved and you won't get into trouble."

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# THE BLUE AT THE END OF THE STREET

by Erica Murdoch

I sit in the outside dunny. Possums scuttle overhead. They live in the passionfruit vine curling across the roof.

The wind blows the door open and the air whooshes in. There's been a cool change, I can smell the salt air. I can almost see—the blue at the end of the street.

There's a bang on the corrugated iron fence behind the thunder box.

'Jimmy, you there?'

I'm here, with my bum over the deep hole. 'It's me. How'd you know?'

'No light in your mum's room,' says the voice of Stan.

He lives 2 houses down toward the corner of Pickles Street.

'Your mum's going to bed earlier and earlier,' says Stan.

I pull up my britches. 'She goes when the kids go. She doesn't like sitting up without dad.'

There's silence on the other side of the fence. Then the question.

'Heard from him?' His voice lowers a bit.

Dad's at the goldfields - Coolgardie. He went a few months ago with his brother- saying, 'We'll be millionaires by 1903.' Mum had just sniffed at this. Dad's not much of a letter writer. One time he wrote it was just some dirt red dirt in an envelope. He'd scrawled a message on the back saying that there might be gold inside. We looked but couldn't find any. It's funny seeing dirt that colour. Mum said it was a waste of a stamp.

Stan taps the fence. 'You coming out? The others are there.'

It's these nights that we all go out. Mum calls it truanting, but it can't be as we're not at school at night. Down the front to Port Phillip Bay. Night time is our time down there. It's when things happen. We can jump on courting couples on the sand down St Kilda way, go for dark water swims and look out at the outlines of ships anchored out deep.

'I'll be a minute.' I go in the house. Mum's fallen asleep in her chair and in her hand, is Dad's latest letter. I take it from her fingers. Her nails are broken from tending the vegie garden; that had been dad's job. My two little brothers are asleep in mum's bed - they've been there since dad left.

Out I go. Our yard is small—you can cross it in 10 steps. Into the lane through the hole in the fence and there's Stan picking his nose. He wipes it on the fence post. There's fence posts all over South Melbourne covered in little dobs of Stan's green snot.

Six months ago, dad walked out through the back gate as the kids were crying so much by the front door. He'd tried to whistle and joke but they were bawling like calves.

We stick to the back lanes crisscrossing the main streets. All the better to hide down. We're only a few blocks from the front. It's nice to think that there's nothing out there except water and sky and birds, even at this time of night.

We're at the beach. No breeze now. Stan points at a little pinprick of flame. 'Over there.'

The tide is out and they've lit a fire on the wet sands. There's Billy and Toss, and his little sister, Jess. She's all of six.

'What's she doing here?' I ask as I sit down. The sand is wet under my bum. 'No place for girls.'

Toss shrugs, 'Didn't want to leave her home, dads blotto.'

Toss's dad is a legendary drunk. Wouldn't want to live with him. Jess is clutching a doll and sucking her thumb. They don't have a mum anymore.

We put our hands to the flames. It's a driftwood fire with a few sticks scrounged from somewhere. Our faces are lit up. Jess falls asleep; her head in Toss's lap and her eyelashes flicker. Probably dreaming of her mum. Toss gnaws on a hunk of bread and Billy digs in the sand with his toe. Can't do much with Jess here.

'Let's play hide and seek,' proposes Billy. He hates sitting still for long.

'What? There's nowhere to hide,' protests Stan.

The beach is as flat as a board stretching out into the darkness to St Kilda. Towards Port Melbourne way the sand fades out to the docks.

'We can dig holes in the sand- they don't have to be too deep. I've done it with my cousins down in Sandringham.'

'What about Jess?' I say. 'She can't do that and she's asleep anyway.'

Billy shrugs. 'Leave her here. We won't be going far. We'll have to go further in though as the sand is too wet to dig here.'

We take off our threadbare jumpers and cover Jess up. At least she'll be warm. Off we go. In pairs, Billy and Toss go off to hide first. At least we can sit with Jess. We sit with our backs to the shore looking out to sea. They have ten minutes to dig a hole.

The wind picks up. We find Billy and Toss in their barely dug holes- it was easy enough, they giggle loudly.

Then it's our turn to hide. Loose sand makes its hard to dig anything deep especially in the time limit; none of us have a watch so we have to count to 500. Back and forth we hide and then seek.

And Jess still sleeps on, her thumb in her mouth and still hanging on to the doll.

'She'd sleep through anything,' says Toss. 'You have to in our place.'

But none of us notice something is changing. Not until Toss turns around from a triumphant finding of Stan and sees in the dim light, the water seeping over the sand where Jess had been. Toss screams and flounders through the water looking for her.

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# HARD TIMES (A TRUE STORY – SORT OF!)

by Geoff Barkla

Geoff and John are lifelong friends. Two years ago, John's wife Lyn, died, and John has been on his own since. Every Friday, they meet for a "catch-up" at their local pub.

Seated in the corner, John furtively looks around to make sure no one else is listening, and says to Geoff –

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course you can."

"Well, it's been quite a while since Lyn died, and while everyone's been terrific and supportive and helpful and all that, I'm on my own a lot of the time, so to speak."

Accustomed to John beating around the bush, Geoff eyeballs him.

"What exactly are you trying to say?"

After an embarrassing silence, John blurts out –

"I've started having feelings."

Geoff looks at him quizzically.

"Feelings. What kind of feelings?"

John hangs his head in shame.

"You know – feelings."

Geoff grins, just managing to stifle a laugh.

"Oh. Those sort of feelings. Self medicating not working then?"

To save John further embarrassment, Geoff continues in a hushed voice.

"Maybe you need some strenuous exercise to take your mind off it. How about coming to the gym tomorrow and we'll see if that helps?"

John frowns, not too sure.

"I've never been to a gym. What do I wear?"

"Shorts or track pants, t-shirt and sneakers. I'll pick you up about 9.30."

Geoff points to his empty glass, indicating the conversation's over.

"Problem solved. Your shout."

The next morning, Geoff and John walk towards the main entrance to the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre. Albert Park Lake shimmers in the background as joggers, displaying various degrees of athleticism, go around the track bordering the lake. A young couple kiss and cuddle affectionately, totally oblivious to everything, including the swans waddling across the road, holding up traffic. Geoff is wearing a smart Adidas tracksuit and flash Nike runners. John wears baggy white shorts, a t-shirt with 'Annie's Veterinary Practice' and a cow on the front, discoloured white Dunlop Volleys, and black socks.

Entering the lobby, John gazes in awe at all the shops and commercial enterprises – Sir Albert Café, 2XU, Speedo, Melbourne United Shop, MSAC Creche, Lakeside Sports Medicine Centre – to name a few.

"Not exactly how I pictured the local gym."

"Wait til you see the swimming pools, badminton, volleyball and squash courts, the table tennis tables and basketball stadium, not to mention the yoga studios and "Wellness Centre."

"Wellness Centre? Jeez, is there anything they haven't got?"

Geoff says quite proudly –

"They haven't got a bar or pokies."

"Pity. I'll probably need a drink after this."

They walk up the stairs and check-in with a young super-fit gym attendant who looks dubiously at John's attire. Geoff nods in agreement.

"I know. He's from the country."

In the change room, Geoff and John choose a locker each, and shielding himself from John, Geoff surreptitiously writes his locker number on the palm of his hand. They head towards the main exercise area and pass three women of various ages, each performing a different yoga pose – "Downward Dog," "Shoulder Stand" and "Warrior Two." John's jaw drops.

"I don't have to do that, do I?"

Geoff grins.

"Let's warm up first."

Geoff commences some bends and groin stretching exercises. John copies him, but is distracted by a young woman next to them doing a full back bend, her hips thrust forward and clearly outlined through her reinforced leopard print tights. Geoff says –

"Gotta get the blood flowing."

John tries not to stare at the woman, and says through clenched teeth –

"That's not my problem."

Geoff just grins.

"Now twenty minutes on the walking machine."

Picking one, John gingerly steps on and Geoff sets it at a leisurely 3km per hour. John looks comfortable, until Geoff says –

"Now 5k, medium elevation. Go!"

Geoff increases the speed and elevation. John hangs on grimly as Geoff starts running slowly on another machine.

In front of them, John notices another young woman going full bore on a rowing machine, with a V-shaped sweat stain appearing just below her pants top. Quickly looking the other way, he sees another young woman on a step machine, her backside jiggling and breasts moving up and down in time with the motion of the machine, all clearly visible through her skin-tight lycra clothes. Suddenly, another young woman gets on the walking

machine next to John, and starts running at a fast pace. Her ponytail swings wildly from side to side as spectacular breasts develop a momentum all their own.

John starts to really sweat. Trying to not be too obvious, he glances sideways but slips, inadvertently pushing the speed lever of his machine forwards. The machine responds immediately as John hangs on, desperately trying to keep up, but sliding further towards the rear, banging his "nether regions" painfully on the fast moving surface. Geoff yells –

"Let go! Let go!"

John is literally thrown off, narrowly avoiding major damage to everything but his pride.

As John struggles to get up, people crowd around trying to help, and the young woman with the "swinging ponytail" gently places her hand on his forehead and innocently asks –

"Are you alright? Is there anything I can rub?"

John collapses as the song "Another One Bites the Dust" blares over the PA system. Geoff helps him up and laughs.

"Gotta keep your eyes on the road, mate." Dusting himself off, John looks shattered and croaks –

"I don't think this is working."

Geoff nods.

"I think you're right. Time for a hot shower. Or maybe a cold one."

John sighs with relief as Geoff playfully puts an arm around his shoulder and they trudge off, with John walking decidedly bowlegged. Geoff whispers in his ear.

"Now comes the hard part."

"Oh, no! What's that?"

"Remembering your locker number!"



# "ROSALIED"

by Geoff Barkla

Geoff and John are lifelong friends. Four years ago, John's wife Lyn, died, and he's still on his own. Jen, Geoff's wife, is particularly worried about how he's coping, and one night over dinner, raises the subject with Geoff.

"You know, John does need to meet some new people. I remember Lyn saying he used to dance a bit, maybe we could go with him the first time, help break the ice."

Geoff shrugs his shoulders.

"He needs something, but why do we have to go?"

"Because he's your best friend, and you don't have that many."

Jen, Geoff and John walk up the stairs of an impressive Victorian style building. Jen is dressed in a beautiful red dress, hair coiffed, impressive cleavage, and high heels. The other two, not so chic. Geoff whispers in her ear.

"You look absolutely stunning."

A large flashing neon sign indicates the entrance to "Rosalie's Dance Club." Walking through, they enter a large room containing a dance floor lined with small tables and chairs, a DJ platform, large video screen and a bar.

About a hundred people are seated around, with many more women than men. Geoff says sarcastically –

"Jeez, the old Town Hall Dance has come a long way. Nice to see our taxes at work."

Jen ignores him as an immaculately dressed middle-aged lady beckons to her from a table near the entrance.

"Hi, I'm Alice. Don't get many threesomes. Is this your first time?"

"What, as a "Threesome?" Hope I'd do better than these two."

Alice laughs, and points to a book on the table.

"Register your details for the mailing list.

Admission's free for first timers and drinks at bar prices. Enjoy."

They find a table as Geoff looks around the room.

"Well, the quantities there. Not so sure about the quality."

Jen replies sarcastically –

"And they wouldn't be saying that about you two?"

Geoff ignores her and heads off towards the bar.

"I'll go and get us some drinks."

Suddenly the video screen lights up and the "Andre Rieu Orchestra" appears on screen as the DJ announces the "Viennese Waltz." Jen looks challengingly at John.

"How about showing me what you've got?"

John gets up and bows.

"Would Madame care to dance?"

He takes Jen in his arms, leading her very professionally through the Waltz. Jen is impressed.

"Wow. Lyn said you could dance a bit, but I've never seen you do it."

John is quietly pleased.

"I hate to say it, but dancing was the one thing I was better at, so we hardly ever went."

Jen looks a little misty eyed.

"She always was a bit competitive, but I do so miss her. Could be your chance to shine."

They sit down as Geoff returns with 3 glasses of wine and says to John –

"Thanks for loosening up the old girl for me."

Jen just shakes her head.

"You've got such a way with words."

Quickly sculling his wine, Geoff drags Jen onto the dance floor, leaving John sitting alone looking extremely self-conscious.

An attractive woman holding a drink appears, and introduces herself.

"Hi, I'm Rosalie. I couldn't help but notice that you seemed a class above the others during the waltz."

"It's been a while. I'm a bit rusty."

"Nothing that a bit of oil won't fix."

She downs her drink and leads him onto the dance floor as the DJ announces the "Tango."

They dance so well that most of the other couples on the floor stop to watch. When the dance finishes, they both join Jen and Geoff at their table.

"Hi, I'm Rosalie. Don't know his name, but your man can dance."

"Jen and Geoff. Is this your club?"

"Most of it belongs to the bank, but I do run it. Don't make much, but it keeps a lot of people happy. Well, I better get back to it. Enjoy."

Rosalie leaves as Jen queries John.

"You did introduce yourself, didn't you?"

John's brow furrows as he tries to recall, while Geoff pats him on the shoulder.

"You could be in with a chance there. Rosemary likes your feet."

Jen touches John's arm as she corrects Geoff.

"It's Rosalie, and she seems very nice."

The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra appears on the video screen as the DJ announces, "Ladies choice for a medley of Two Step, Quick Step, Modern Waltz and Disco." Three women quickly descend on John, and totally ignore Geoff. John goes with the first one and the others immediately leave. Geoff, clearly peeved, looks at Jen.

"Well."

"Well what? It's a ladies choice!"

A very stylish looking woman approaches them. Geoff watches expectantly, but she ignores him and looks directly at Jen.

"Hope I'm not interrupting, but would you care to dance?"

Jen quickly takes her hand, grinning.

"I thought you'd never ask."

They head off. Geoff gives her "the finger" and is left on his own. After a short while, John returns and looks around.

"Where's Jen?"

Geoff shrugs.

"She got a better offer."

Another woman approaches John and leads him onto the dance floor. John gestures apologetically at Geoff as Jen reappears at the table and whispers.

"Don't worry. Your day will come."

"That's it. I'm out of here. Wonder boy can look after himself."

Jen indicates to John that they're leaving and John waves back, but keeps dancing. Jen grabs Geoff's hand and pirouettes.

"Cheer up. Look who you get to go home with!"

They head out the door. Geoff casually puts his hand on Jen's bum as they descend the stairs.

Jen is in bed as Geoff enters from the bathroom and slides in. In the darkness, they kiss and cuddle. Suddenly, the sound of something running across the roof reverberates through the bedroom ceiling. Jen laughs, imitating Dame Edna's (Barry Humphries) voice, and her hand moves under the bedclothes.

"Hello possums!"

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## A GREAT DESTINATION

by Graham Lewis Fricke

Sixty years ago, I was 24 years old, having been born in late 1935. I had obtained a law degree at Melbourne University, a masters degree at the University of Pennsylvania, and had taught at law schools in Melbourne and Tasmania. My first wife had just lost a baby in Hobart, and the acute disappointment associated with that event was offset to a small degree by the consideration that it enhanced the prospect of my returning to Melbourne to become an articled clerk. I needed to do that in order to qualify for practice as a barrister. Becoming an articled clerk would be difficult, for I could not expect to earn more than 15 pounds a week, about a third of my income as a lecturer.

I joined Slater and Gordon, and supplemented my weekly pay by writing a series called 'Test Your Judgment' for the Australasian Post. I managed to survive that year, and became a barrister, articled to Richard McGarvie, in the following year. Seventeen years later, I was appointed a Queens Counsel, and four years later was appointed to the County Court.

I enjoyed my twelve years on the bench, and, to my surprise, found that I had more leisure time there than I had experienced as a busy barrister. I was able to write and publish ten non-fiction books over the next thirty years.

I married my second wife about 30 years ago, and we lived in a two-storey home in Hawthorn for a couple of decades. Our home was in an attractive location overlooking the Yarra River, but it was large and burdensome to look after. It was also somewhat remote from enjoyable social facilities. So we sold it and looked for a home closer to such facilities. We found a home in Southey Street, Elwood which seemed to meet our needs: a single storey home with ready access to Acland Street and other lively venues.

We have enjoyed our life in Elwood. It is generally tranquil, but we can easily walk or drive to restaurants and other venues. Even during the coronavirus pandemic, we can relax and pay occasional visits to children and grandchildren. Now that the restrictions imposed at the start of that epidemic have been relaxed, we can revisit the library in Carlisle Street. We have made good friends in the neighbourhood. We have ready access to medical facilities. We can walk or drive to the beach at Elwood, and join those who stroll along the adjoining path. We can even visit the penguins at St Kilda beach.

Life, especially for one who was born in Northcote in the 1930s, is good indeed!

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## A PLEASANT LIFE

by Graham Lewis Fricke

My 84 years have been well occupied for the most part. Almost eight decades have been spent in Melbourne, with occasional visits to overseas locations. I have lived in the United States for about two years, and resided in four Australian capital cities for six months or more. I prefer the climate of Brisbane to that of Melbourne, but otherwise enjoy life in Melbourne, the city of my birth. The year and a half that I spent in Hobart as a teacher was pleasant, although its climate was no better than that of Melbourne.

I have resided in a number of houses in the Melbourne area, and they have progressively improved in quality. My childhood was spent in a two-bedroom weatherboard house in Northcote, where I was consigned to the front veranda for sleeping quarters. Some privacy was achieved when my father installed a coloured canvas blind between the veranda and the street, but that did not reduce the chill in winter.

Upon my return from Hobart, my wife and I rented a flat in South Yarra, before purchasing a home in Prospect Hill Road, Camberwell. It was a pleasant home, although it was close to a railway line. We later bought a two-storey home in Kinane Street, Brighton, again close to a railway line. I later lived in a home on several acres in Langwarrin. It was a pleasant life, although travel to the city was demanding.

My second wife and I bought a home in Coppin Grove, Camberwell, and lived there for several years. It was a commodious two-storey home which overlooked a large sloping garden and the Yarra River. But, after our children departed, it was larger than we needed, and its maintenance was a problem. So we looked for somewhere closer to the city, and eventually found an attractive single storey home in Southey Street Elwood.

We were very lucky. Although it is closer to the city than our Camberwell home, it enjoys a surprising tranquillity. The birdlife is enjoyable, and there are pleasant parks in the vicinity. We are within walking distance of the beach and the Elwood Canal. We had reservations about being surrounded by three storey flats, but we have found their occupants to be friendly and helpful neighbours. Our block is deep, and my wife enjoys being able to do some gardening. Southey Street winds like a tropical river. Its serpentine quality has two advantages: It deters some drivers from using it, while it forces those who do use it to drive slowly.

Before the current coronavirus pandemic, we could enjoy sunbaking and swimming in summer, and we can still stroll along the path adjacent to the beach. We look forward to the end of the pandemic, when we will be able to enjoy restaurants in Acland Street, Glenhuntly Road and Carlisle Street.

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## FURTIVE LOOKS

by Grant Aldous

Furtive looks. A nod. A few whispers. The imperceptible exchange of money. Then, almost magically and unnoticeable, the passing of a very small packet. Trained to be observant, this is what I saw on a crowded Port Melbourne bound tram on a wintery Sunday evening.

For some reason this memory of the previous football season returned to me one morning as I sat reading a newspaper. The tabloid was bereft of real sporting news other than what would normally be irrelevant pieces for a normal AFL season. But this was not a normal season or normal year. With a pandemic having savagely struck Melbourne causing a lockdown, times were different - no football, no other contact sport, only horse racing.

On that dark evening aboard the 109 tram, the journey had the markings of the usual after-football match trip home - friendly banter between the teams' respective supporters, chatting about the thrilling last quarter when Melbourne held on to luckily beat Carlton.

Leaning on one of the side cushions in the middle of the gently rocking tram was a man who stood out from the crowd – he bravely sported an Essendon jumper.

At the Clarendon Street interchange a couple pushed on. Except for her pink puffer jacket rather than the mandatory Melbourne-black,

the woman could have been merely a face in the crowd. Somehow, she found a seat. However, her partner was not so fortunate, drunkenly swaying and slurring his words. Somehow, he parked himself next to the wizened-faced Essendon supporter. The two men acknowledged each other – not as friends, but as acquaintances - and exchanged a few words. Surely the meeting was not coincidental. Had a phone call been made for the hook-up?

The swaying man awkwardly moved to the woman. After a nod and a glance to the Essendon supporter, she opened her purse and slipped some money to her partner, and who then moved gingerly across the tram.

With another nod, the money was passed and a very small plastic packet was swapped. At the Graham Street stop, the three alighted into the damp night, with the streetlights making them ghostly figures as though they were part of a Clarice Beckett tonalist painting. The couple went one way, the Essendon supporter opposite direction. Had a drug deal? Possibly? Had other passengers witnessed anything? Probably not.

With these fleeting thoughts, it was back to the sports pages for stories that did little to sate my desire for seeing action on the footy field. Damn you, COVID-19.

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## MY LIFE IN CITY OF PORT PHILLIP

by Janet Gardner

The City of Port Phillip (CoPP) became my home in 2014. Aged 66, I considered myself as damage goods, past my used by date, abandoned by my family and teetering on a cliff's edge, about to fall off onto the growing pile, of homeless older Australian women.

I had arrived in Australia in 1968 a \$10 Pom at the tender age of 20, already married and leaving behind my Mum and five older siblings. My future, as a daughter of a process worker in post war Britain offered, at most, a life of factory, office, retail work, nursing and marriage. I started nursing as a Cadet Nurse aged 16, commencing my general nurse training 2yrs later. Australia afforded me the educational and professional opportunities both here and overseas that allowed me to have a very rewarding and successful nursing career until a tragic workplace injury in 1989.

In 2004, after my 2nd husband of 27 years moved in with a neighbour, I ran away from the family home in Eltham with Molly (our 10 year old Maltese x rescue dog), and rented a unit in faraway Mentone. My first husband had left me the day we brought our new baby home from hospital in 1971. When I turned 65 my Workcover payments ceased and my unit was sold. Three weeks before I had to vacate my rental unit and after another long, unproductive day of doing the rounds of the crisis housing organisations, I decided to visit the DHS office to see where I was on the public housing waiting list. A young man, who looked like he should be sitting behind a school desk rather than an office counter, incredulously told me that I had already been offered a property and I had until 5pm tomorrow to accept it! He told me the property was in the CoPP, and following a phone call, handed me the address and said be there at 11 am tomorrow to inspect it!

My emotions rose and fell like the waves on the bay as I navigated my way to the property. My pain and anxiety prevented me from jumping out of the car when my eyes feasted on a small complex of single storey, brick units in a beautiful garden setting. Unit 3 was situated next to the community garden. The entrance had a raised garden bed on one side and a beautiful tree shading the kitchen windows on the other. The lounge/dining room was filled with light by 2 huge picture windows that also framed the front and back gardens. Off the bedroom was the combined toilet, walk in shower and laundry that had all the safety features for an aging tenant with a disability. The air was a cocktail of new carpet and fresh paint odours, confirming the recent refurbishment. The complex was in walking distance of shops, healthcare, beach, botanical gardens and all forms of public transport. I cried tears of joy.

My new neighbours reflected the diversity of the general community and living in public housing had not been their intended destination either. For many, English was not their first language which, combined with aging/disability made navigating their way through life, especially DHS and Centrelink, even more troublesome. When I first arrived I drove a car, was the only resident with a computer, dog and a nursing background. It wasn't long before I became their advocate, helping with communication, transport and health issues. Molly became everybody's pet, lapping up the extra attention, pats and treats! Not only has this community given my life purpose, but has enriched my life, by them sharing, their food, cultures and life skills.



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## MY LIFE IN CITY OF PORT PHILLIP (CONT.)

by Janet Gardner

Molly played an important role in helping me rebuild a new, meaningful and purposeful life in CoPP. It was on her walks that we discovered what CoPP had to offer and found a local dog friendly cafe/wine bar. It was there where we connected with our rich, diverse community and developed wonderful friendships that formed a support network. It was where you went to feast not only on coffee, food and wine but also on conversation, debate, counsel, quizzing and music. The friendships formed here have been truly tested in the past year and now I consider them as family. After a car accident in 2019 and before I was diagnosed with a broken hip, I couldn't mobilize they organised an electric mobility scooter for me, plus looked after Molly for the 10 weeks I was in hospital and rehab. They have also allowed me to maintain my Vipassana meditation, an important part of my pain management and emotional wellbeing, by making it possible for me to attend my annual 10 day silent meditation retreat at Woori Yallock.

Having no wheels forced me to explore more local resources and activities and CoPP's Linking Neighbours Project has provided me with both affordable activities and transport. Last September, Molly, aged 16 was diagnosed with cancer and I had to let her go, she was able to be euthanized at home in my arms, with the physical and financial support of one of these special friends. When the time was right they also helped me find Ella, my new rescue dog, arriving just before the COVID-19 virus.

When I was rescued at the 11th hour from living on the streets by being allocated public housing I achieved the trifecta in social stigmatisation. Already falsely labelled a malingerer and addict due to my Workcover and chronic pain treated with opioid history, I now was labelled a loser by some members of society by virtue of my landlord. A term that encompasses images of people whom are lazy, uneducated, dirty, have mental and/or addiction problems. Society's perception of public housing usually include high-rise, concrete jungles or poorly maintained properties located in undesirable suburbs. I may be poor due in part to being born female in 1948 with late access to Superannuation and being cut down in my prime due to a work place injury and two failed marriages. However, I have been a hard worker, take pride in myself and home and I am certainly not uneducated having been awarded a PhD in 2004. I am very proud of my home and feel privileged to live in the City of Port Phillip.

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## JARRYD\*

by Janine Mifsud

Jarryd\*. His name was Jarryd. Not a common name. Not a name chosen without thought. Jarryd was a name that had been pondered over, considered, maybe even researched in the myriad of name books available to parents of a new baby. Jarryd was a name that held promise and hope for the future.

He sat hunched over in his seat, his great army surplus jacket grubby and torn, an assortment of odd plastic bags lay at his feet and a tattered box of dominos clutched in his hand. His head held low, bowed over with the obvious weight of his worries. Others around seemed wary of his very existence as though sitting next to a homeless person could be contagious. He raised his eyes and saw me clinging to the overhead rail loop as the Number 16 tram rattled its way along the track. He took in my plight and leapt from his seat encouraging me to sit down. The tram was packed to capacity which is not unusual for the Number 16 - a tram designed for a population whose numbers don't exist anymore. There were many young people on the tram who could have come to my aid. Many who just sat there engrossed in their mobiles, eyes fixed firmly on the screens in front of them.

"Thank you," I said. "You are a true gentleman".

He smiled as he once again gathered all his worldly belongings around him. He had a gentle, sweet smile. Pleased, I think at the praise... a compliment he wasn't use to receiving.

"I am Jarryd. My name is Jarryd." "Mine is Janine," I said whilst extending my hand to shake his. I looked into his face noticing the warmth in his green eyes. He could have been called handsome given the chance, but he had a series of cuts above his lip and several near his right ear. If I didn't know better, it could have been done shaving. My guess was that it was a result of a fight or a fall. Jarryd proceeded to tell me his story, glad to have someone to listen as all other heads turned away, obviously not prepared to engage with a person of his ilk.

He lowered his head once again. Displaying a light-brown head of hair needing a good wash. He rubbed his hands together and I couldn't help noticing that his nails were bitten to the quick. I once again thanked him for his kindness in giving me his seat. He proceeded to show me the boxed game of draughts and asked me if I could play chess. "I get the characters mixed up," I confessed. He said he had friends who played chess, but they were all dead. "How sad," I replied, knowing the response was inadequate but not quite knowing what to say. The floodgates then opened with this confession of loss.

"I'm a drug addict," said Jarryd, assuming I would be surprised by the admission. "All my friends are dead. I've been clean for ages but it's in your system, it's in your thoughts, it's in your blood, you can't get away from it. It's an addiction." My poor reply of "It must be so hard" going almost unnoticed. He looked me in the eye: "I have parents. I haven't seen them for a long time. I've been locked up. I have mental health problems. I don't trust the government." Once again, he said, "I don't trust the government." "What about Sacred Heart Mission?" I asked. "They're good," he replied. "I had this lady who tried to help. She said come with me. She gave me clean clothes, she gave me food, she gave me somewhere safe to sleep. I stayed clean for a long time. But once it's in your system you can't get rid of it. I feel so guilty. I just left. Those nuns at St Vinnies, they tried their best." He sat with his head between his hands looking bereft, no longer wanting to engage in conversation.

"I was born in 1981," he said before hopping off the train at St Kilda Junction. All his worldly wealth clutched to his chest.

"Goodbye Jarryd," I whispered to myself as I watched this young homeless man disembark from the tram to an unknown future. He could have been my son this boy who someone not so long ago had named Jarryd.

\*Name changed to protect privacy.

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# SOUVENIRS

by Janine Mifsud

To say I dislike shopping would be an understatement. I loathe shopping. My daughters even refuse to go with me anymore as I take ages to make up my mind before a purchase of any kind and I have a terrible reputation for returning goods once they've been purchased. On the other hand, if huge sums of money are to be exchanged - like buying a house or a car- I have no problem at all!

However, my Achilles Heel (and everyone must surely have one) is souvenirs. What do you mean, I hear you ask? Yes you heard correctly. Souvenirs of all descriptions have made their way back to Australia from my many travels: either in my suitcase if fragile, or carefully wrapped and stored in the plane's overhead bin or shipped home if too large.

I'm sure I have the biggest collection of gemstones and jewellery imaginable. Citrine from Brazil, Ammolite from Canada, Star Ruby from India, Moonstone and Sapphire from Sri Lanka, a miniature Faberge Egg pendant from Russia, Pearls from China, purple gold from Singapore, gold cartouche and Lapis Lazuli from Egypt, a diamond from Amsterdam and a watch with numerous crystals from the Isle of Capri.

And if you think that's not enough, what about the huge ceramic tureen from Sicily, the glass vase from Malta, two rugs from India and Turkey, numerous pairs of leather shoes and a leather jacket from Italy, thousands of scarves (slight exaggeration) from all over the world. And it all began in Bali!

Bali, I can hear you exclaiming! Yes Bali. Our first trip overseas in 1974 was to Bali. We (meaning Alex my husband and I) felt liberated. Our three young daughters were left in the care of their doting grandparents for one whole week and we were free to enjoy the excitement and experience of travel. And that's when it started. The souvenir collection. The chance to bring back something of

significance, something that perhaps could only be found or bought in the country of origin. So in Bali it had to be batik.

Naturally, it had to be silk in Vietnam. Who could resist a silk suit after watching those little moths all cocooned in their white thread? Who could resist when the eager shopkeeper pointed out how many cocoons needed to make a scarf? Not me that's for sure.

And then it became icons. Promises of protection, love and every emotion you could desire. A trip to India would never be the same if you didn't allow yourself to become a captive of their many thousands of gods. The choices were fabulous. There were gods for happiness; Ganesh the elephant god - remover of obstacles, the patron of arts and sciences, the diva of intellect and wisdom. And even more in South America where you had the wealth of worship from the days of the Incas. Must have a pendant representing the sun god and naturally another one of the wonderful earth goddess Pachamumma.

Lately however, the collection has taken on a rather bizarre turn. It possibly started in Egypt after we were taken to a shop specialising in oils. Not cooking oils but oils that could be transformed into perfume if you added a little water. Fragrances that maybe you would pay hundreds of dollars for elsewhere but here, according to the knowledgeable and definitely not biased salesperson, would only be a fraction of the cost. Again, according to the very wise, knowledgeable salesperson, many of the oils had therapeutic qualities. A bonus given the price. A bargain if you bought four bottles as the generous salesperson would throw in an extra one for free.

And then it was Morocco's turn. Argan oil. Have you heard of it? It is sold in Aldi and other supermarkets here in Australia as shampoo. But I was the lucky one. I was able to buy the pure 100 percent cosmetic Argan

oil in Marrakech. Escorted down the narrow alleyways of the souk, past salespeople trying to lure me into their stalls to buy yet another rug, alongside a huge variety of gleaming pots and pans, past leather goods (still not buying) past rows and rows of every size and variety of dates conceivable, we came to a shop with a glass front. We were whisked upstairs where we were greeted like long-lost family by friendly staff wearing white lab coats. Very surgical, if you get the picture. A glass of mint tea was offered whilst the head whitecoat delivered his spiel. Yes, we were very fortunate (he explained in elaborate detail) to visit this particular laboratory as they produce the best cosmetic Argan oil in Morocco. Not only is it anti-ageing but therapeutic as well. It treats scars, acne, eczema and psoriasis. "Great!" I said and promptly purchased three bottles.

Now you think I would have learnt my lesson. I don't look any younger and all my ailments haven't been cured. But there's hope. A recent trip to Sri Lanka saw me return with the rejuvenating, age-defying elixir of all that is natural and nurturing, a combination of aloe vera and sandalwood both purchased separately and both promising renewal. Who could not be tempted on a visit to the "Royal 100 Spice and Herbal Gardens" when a doctor (I'm not sure what type) was on hand to provide a personal consultation and explain the properties and benefits of each herb. Miraculous, amazing. A must-have at any price.

I now gaze at these pots and potions stored in my bathroom cupboard. I chastise myself for wanting to believe in a promise. I laugh when I remember my first application of the pure organic aloe vera; my face turned a ghastly shade of green and I couldn't wash it off. I know I'll probably still be tempted by what's on offer in these lands from far away. But that for me is the magic and absurdity of travel. A collection of souvenirs providing a lifetime of memories.

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# MONA MOUSE

by Jnge Kulmanis

Mona Mouse fell into a trap  
and ventured to the Dentist chap  
He put her in a great big chair  
and gave to her some smelly air.

Mona Mouse then fell asleep.  
She ended up in a great big heap  
The Dentist helped her off the floor  
And she looked like a mouse no more.

Mona Mouse didn't like the place  
she ran away and he gave chase.  
The Dentist dragged her back again.  
She was so cross, she spat in vain

Mona Mouse sat in the chair  
the Dentist wiggled in despair  
How could he treat this little mouse  
or should he take her into his house

Mona Mouse was angry  
the Dentist he was hungry  
Twelve hours, had passed  
and he didn't want to fast.

But Mona Mouse ran under the house  
she only was a little mouse  
she hated him, he hated her  
The cruelty in the Dentist chair.

Then Mona Mouse knew what to do  
She went to a Dentist mouse she knew  
He told her to nibble an apple a day.  
Then her horrid toothache would go away.

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# TIME TO REFLECT

by Jnge Kulmanis

Elster Creek and Elwood Beach are a  
constant flow of inspiration. Living in  
Ormond Road for the last forty years, was a  
very lucky choice to make.

The community – the Port Phillip Council  
have helpful people, and when my husband  
and myself needed all the help we could get,  
it was available.

The Burra Club, the Midweekers and the  
Library. My husband used to tell me, that he  
did not need to go and I would say, "But the  
people will miss you!", his face would light up  
and he would smile.

The community bus with all the lovely drivers,  
gave us help and even today after all these  
years.

Guess what, the help is there for me and  
of course everyone else. How lucky we  
are to live in such a helpful and caring  
community. Especially now, in the difficult  
of circumstances, with the Corona virus  
– COVID 19. Older people and the total  
community are receiving help.

I receive phone calls and we talk and  
laugh, and we have a phone meeting with  
five people for one hour, it's inspiring and  
entertaining. We go for short walks with one  
of our helpers and enjoy the sun, birds and  
conversations.

Elster Creek, gives us an opportunity to relax  
and observe nature at it's best. Autumn, with  
all the leaves changing colours. The children  
running with joyous laughter sounding out,  
amongst the dogs bouncing and barking.  
This is Elster Creek. Along the path at Elster  
Creek, we have the most interesting native  
herbs and flowers growing, if you meander  
slowly and take time to observe it.

Reading books, sitting on my walker or on  
a bench or just relaxing, listening to the

multiple sounds of the birds. Sometimes the  
white Egrettes or grey Herrons stroll past  
along the waters edge. Not long ago, I saw  
two black Swans slowly swimming along in  
the narrow Elster Creek and probably flying  
to the lake in the Elsternwick Park.

Elwood Beach is another very beautiful walk  
and you can watch the children playing in the  
sand.

Sometimes pods of Dolphins appear and you  
can spot them in the water.

This important time in our life with distance  
and observing radical cleanliness at all times,  
gives us the opportunity to stay healthy.  
Lucky, we live in Australia, the land with  
space. Many times in our lives we work and  
have a family.

Rush, rush, rush.

This time we are forced to contemplate and  
observe our surroundings N A T U R E as it  
is important for our existence on this small  
planet Earth.

Forty years of living in Elwood and sixty-two  
years of living in Australia.

Using a campervan and exploring the  
country for two years, has given me some  
great insight and appreciation of this vast  
Island in the Southern Hemisphere.

Wandering along in Cooktown and the  
Kimberley's, Broome, the Bungle Bungles,  
Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Uluru, Albany,  
Esperance and the Nullarbor.

I could write a book, if I had time and  
willpower. Of course music is a great  
inspiration. It's Ludwig Van Beethoven's  
250th Birthday.

Classic FM, is my constant companion,  
especially in the mornings.



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# THE BENCH PART 1

by Julie Butcher

Cathy had invited us to bring a chair and a glass of something special, to join a small gathering of neighbours near her street corner.

We gathered around the community bench for Bruce, in memory of his late wife Susie.

Although not closely connected, we sat for a while in comfortable harmony, and then Bruce dashed back home (across the street) for his guitar. He wanted to share a little song "Susie Sue" he had written for Susie's funeral. He ended the short session with his rendition of "Wake-Up Little Susie" – the Everly Brothers classic –also played at the funeral. Apparently that brought the house down!

It was not a late night – the invitation had stipulated 'from six until eight' – yet I was deeply moved by the depth of fellowship generated.

At some stage during the evening Cathy made mention of how often the street bench under her veranda had brought people together. She finds it interesting to watch people using it, and she regards it as a community asset.

I want to know more about this bench.

It is a crisp, Saturday morning and Cathy and I are sitting on the bench enjoying extra-large coffees, while musing about this special seat.

A passing neighbour stops for a chat and later Cathy informs me that he has an actor-daughter who is currently starring with Tom Hanks in a movie being made about Elvis. The daughter is going to play the role of Priscilla Presley. Naturally, I'm impressed.

Back to our chat: Cathy tells me about Alma, an elderly lady once living nearby who would often sit at this corner while waiting for the community bus.

And she recalls how sometimes people would stop at the bench on their way back from the local hotel, at all hours of the evening, and she could overhear all sorts of conversations from within her bedroom – only a few feet away. "I've had to get up and ask people to move on when they've been too loud." She laughs, as she recalls herself saying, "Look I'm really sorry, and it sounds like you are having a lovely conversation, but I'm trying to sleep!"

Mostly, people don't realise she is just a wall away from their in-depth, and sometimes drunken, conversations.

She had shared a scary story at Bruce's party, and I ask her again about that time she intervened when she thought a girl out front was in trouble.

"Oh yes, it was a Sunday afternoon and a youngish couple were having quite a heated conversation from this bench. Mostly, he was yelling at her. Then he grabbed her handbag and took something from it. He was calling her all the names under the sun. She was a pretty, young girl, in her late teens, I guessed. I became aware of her because – sitting at my desk, I can see much of the street – I noticed she was asking for her bag. He did throw it back at her. Then he stormed off down the road. She was about to follow him when I came out. And I called out to him, 'You shouldn't talk to her like that.' And of course he ignored me. So, I said to her, 'Are you ok?' She started crying. She looked embarrassed when I said, 'Look, you don't need to be spoken to like that. I just don't want you to go after him. Are you able to get home?' It looked to me like he had taken money from her bag. She told me she wouldn't follow him. That she had another way to get home, and so she went off in the opposite direction.

"Yes," Cathy reflected, "that was quite confronting."

I then felt compelled to recite my own story of the corner bench.

I had not so long ago found a little old lady leaning against the house across the road from where we sit now. She was clearly out of sorts. I asked her if she needed help. She said she'd probably drunk too much coffee that day. Had overdone her exercise. Just needed to rest awhile. I quietly guided her over to the bench. It was a hot, humid day.

Cathy nods knowingly. We sit in quiet contemplation. Then I ask her,

"Didn't Forrest Gump once sit on a bench when he opened that box of chocolates in the movie? And now look, we have a connection (tenuous as it is) with your neighbour whose daughter is now working with Tom Hanks!"

"Yes," she conjectures, "we're all connected somehow."

If our celebrated bench could speak, I wonder what it would say to this.

Since that wake, where about eight households sat with Bruce, this bench epitomises a kind neighbour and a growing group of engaging people.

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# THE BENCH PART 2

by Julie Butcher

Cathy and I are still sitting on the bench outside her house, rugged up in the cold morning air, enjoying our coffee and chat about the bench. Some friendly neighbours walk past and quip, "Is that the chat seat?"

Cathy tells me one of the most frequent users of the bench was an elderly gent called 'Sid.\* She doesn't think he was homeless even though he was regularly seen pushing an old, supermarket trolley, loaded up with his worldly belongings, around the neighbourhood. He would do a circuit ending up, midway through the morning, to sit on this bench to drink several 'longnecks' of beer, before lying down and snoozing into late afternoon.

Then he would discard the bottles into the agapanthus in the front garden and make his way back to wherever he spent the night. "I was forever picking up his bottles, but he never asked for money or troubled me," she said.

She was aware that he might have had a 'nature-pee' before he limped off into the sunset. He never caused her any harm and she never felt in anyway threatened by him. She knew he felt comfortable there.

A few years after she'd moved in Cathy had the house and bench painted. She asked the painters to carry seats from her back yard to the front so that Sid might have somewhere to sit while the paint dried.

The house had been a shop. It has a bull nosed veranda running a third of the way around it, and a wooden-slat bench on cement struts that commands a prominent position between the two front veranda posts. According to a neighbour, the house was a mixed business until circa 1970.

Cathy had recalled growing up in an old country town where some of the shops had cylindrical bins with holes patterned in them. She came up with the idea that if she could fix some bins close by, Sid would have somewhere to leave his rubbish. "I sort of fancied if I could get one attached to a veranda pole, to make it look like an old shop, it would give Sid somewhere to put his bottles." Thinking this was a great idea she rang the Port Phillip council.

She didn't give her address; just mentioned that she was enquiring about the prospect of getting some community rubbish bins installed near an old style park bench. She soon discovered the cylindrical type bin she was after was no longer available.

The council officer, however, was interested in the fact that this bench still existed in the neighbourhood. Cathy quickly realised it was the council's intention to take her corner bench and she was thankful she had not disclosed the location. "I twigged when the council officer said all those benches should have been removed and they must have missed this one. The officer was of the angle: 'the way to solve your problem is to remove the bench so the old guy can't sit there,' and I said no, that is not the problem. The bench is a community asset.

If you knew how often it is used ..."

"Please forget I called," Cathy then requested, deciding she would find another option.

It was then she noticed her neighbour had a recycle bin between their two houses and so would ask Sid to leave his empty bottles there.

Sid was not a talker, but he would acknowledge Cathy with a sort of grunt. So one day when he was there with his bottles, she ventured, "Sid, could you put your bottles, when you have finished with them, into the recycle bin?"

She gave him a demonstration of sorts, suggesting it was just to protect the plants. He sort-of-said yes, and from then on he put the bottles in the bin.

It was just a way of life, Cathy reminisced. "I remember one day getting a photograph from one of my neighbours. 'Here's a picture of your boyfriend, on the bench, (ha-ha),' but it just didn't bother me. Everybody knew Sid would sit on the bench, drink from his bottles, then go to sleep in the sun."

Sometime later, after Cathy had taken an extended holiday in the United States, she noticed Sid wasn't around. It coincided with a social gathering at her house – might have been Christmas Drinks – when another neighbour approached her and said, "While you were away I did you a favour."

"Oh, what was that?"

"I told that drunk to go away and never come back."

Sort of stunned, she quietly asked, "Why did you do that, because you didn't do me a favour? I don't know his story but he wasn't doing me any harm."

The neighbour claimed that Sid used to 'piss on the tree and scare his grandchildren.'

To this day Sid has never come back.

"I have thought about that story," Cathy tells me, "with my neighbour ostensibly doing me a favour, but I think more like working on his own conscience about seeing somebody around that made him feel uncomfortable. I'm sure it was not about his grandchildren."

Nonetheless, Sid found another bench. He still drinks his beer and sleeps in the sun. He still recognises Cathy with a grunt when she walks past. He never asks her for money.

While we reflect on this, Saturday walkers continue to pass us. Some stop and chat. Others nod and smile. It's quite the community corner where our eminent bench brings joy and comfort. It deserves a long life at this site.

\*(Not his real name)

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# THE WATCHER

by Kerrie Cross

She was born curious; a watcher, a starrer. Her mother's voice, still heard; "Don't stare Helen". But here she was, 75 now, still staring. Seventy-five, now truly elderly, no let out from the label. That is how it is.

She hated the labels, starrer and elderly both, but elderly was the worst. It was like a luggage tag on a package to be sent off somewhere, soon perhaps and by what method of transport. That was the scary bit. Would it be a hideous and painful journey or a merciful step into Dr Who's time machine, just one step and off. She knew the destination, primitive thoughts of heaven and hell had been dispatched along with all literal religious belief by age 30. No, the destination was known, oblivion, just like a general anesthetic but with no awakening.

What was left to do in life? How to pass the time, what to do whilst waiting for the inevitable? Of course she had friends, she had family, she was a carer, accepting but fearing this role also. That damnable fear, fear that lurks throughout life manifesting as general anxiety but no, now so close to the end, emerging starkly as undisguised, well founded fear.

She seemed unable to take much comfort in memory even though her memory held a rich store of treasure. Isolated in the time of trial that would become known as the second great pandemic, the gift of time and quiet was wasted. It was a strange phenomenon. So many of the people with whom she talked as together they emerged like hibernating moles from their burrows, spoke of being enervated, unable to concentrate, even to read.

She could read. She devoured books, anything; fiction, biography, history, travel but the tasks that she had longed for time to complete were untouched. Those tasks required that Pandora's box be taken from its shelf and opened. The photos and the other kept things, things that must be decided, things to be given, things to be destroyed. Was it simply that this meant facing the end or was it the fear of pain.

She tried hard to motivate herself, she made a plan, she invoked her inner critical voice, all to no avail. That year, the Christmas before the crisis, she had written a circular letter to just a few friends. She knew these letters were generally loathed and she who had not always had wonderful years especially loathed hearing from friends with perfect marriages, high achieving trouble free children and travels to exotic and wonderful places. Her 2019 letter was brief, warm and at times funny but a line within it saddened and worried some of her friends. It was the line 'The 70s are a time of reflection, rumination and regret' She knew that once she opened up the photo files from the beginning of the 21st century, the boxes of pictures from the late 20th, the kept things stored in plastic boxes on the high shelves of her cupboards, frightening feelings would emerge and overwhelm her. Regret, especially regret. She knew it would open up to anguish, for her the most painful of all her emotions.

So what to do. For now she simply added a new anxiety, that of dropping dead and having her children or others discover private letters, painful thoughts scribbled in one or other failed attempt to keep a diary. She continued reading and did nothing.

Nothing that is except for a daily walk with her husband to pick up a takeaway coffee and to sit in the nearby park and watch. "Don't stare Helen" again, that critical voice. To stare is a harsh verb, it implies intrusion and invasion. To watch is kind. A watcher cares, a watcher has compassion, a watcher is simply curious. Curiosity is innocent, suspicion, as she would come to learn, is dangerous.

She watched the passing parade of people taking their allowed and distanced daily exercise. She mused about how her suburb had changed since she bought her small home 25 years ago. Smiling at the recollection of her anxiety about the cost of it, the expense of the renovation and wishing she had been brave enough to buy big and bold where capital appreciation would have been immense rather than merely huge. Those damn regrets and recriminations again. A bit braver and she would have had room to take the family in when they arrived from overseas for those rare and so precious visits.

Sitting on her front verandah in the locked in days she met people who had been strangers, engrossed in their own lives they knew nothing about each other. Now, people reached out to one another, eager for a conversation. Most, like herself, long term residents, familiar faces who had never exchanged more than a shy or preoccupied hello now shared their life stories, their joys and sorrows. So many, like herself had children who had married away and grandchildren they rarely saw.

At the end of her street was the heart of the village. In a modern metropolis there are few true villages. This was one such. Not only was it a highly desirable suburb with wonderful public schools but it had become a popular weekend destinations for urban tourists. On Saturdays and Sundays it became an unfamiliar, less pleasant place. The shopping strip became a show ground for exotic European motor cars, cars with notes, offensive to her but music to the ears of the young and wealthy she supposed. She began to avoid the village at weekends, fetch the papers and lie low.

She knew that those of her generation were not merely the watchers, they were also the watched. Watched by the young, always on the lookout for a house that 'might be coming up for sale', progress towards the nursing home or the cemetery quietly and hopefully observed by the real estate agents who were drawn like flies to the area. Most were young, they could wait.



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# ADIOS VIDA DE MI VIDA ADIOS – GOODBYE LIFE OF MY LIFE GOODBYE

by Liliana Siani

Manolo was a Mestizo. Handsome, tall, black hair and black eyes. Born in Argentina from a Spanish father and Indian mother, abandoned by his father, he had been raised by his maternal family with many sacrifices.

Isabella was born in Cordoba, Spain from a noble and a wealthy family with a huge ranch in Argentina. The family loved to spend their summer holidays in their ranch far away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

Isabella and Manolo knew each other from childhood. Manolo's uncle was a cowboy, when he didn't take the herds to the far away markets for sale, worked to fix fences, brand cattle or round up the herds, taking young Manolo with him to learn the trade.

Isabella and Manolo who had never given a thought to their social status, when young used to play together. But... slowly their friendship turned into something more serious! Manolo's family who had noticed the change had warned him that Isabella was not for him and in time it would lead to trouble.

But...we all know how lovers are!

Isabella's family had decided not to take her with them to Argentina, hoping they would forget each other. But crying her eyes out she said, "It's useless, I love him, and we want to get married!"

The situation was desperate. The two lovers met in secret and decided the only way out for them was to elope!

So, they did!

They spent a few days in a nearby village until Isabella's family thanks to the usual spies, found them. The shame of the escape had to be cancelled with marriage. Theirs was a simple ceremony. All the young couple wanted was to be together.

Manolo had worked as a cowboy for a few years and knew very well how their lives differed from that of normal people. Out on the pampas the food was always the same, so were the long hot days on horseback, with the sombrero protecting them from the hot scorching sun, where dancer, dust, heat and thirst were the only companions.

To pitch the tent at night, the poncho wrapped around their shoulders was the only way to keep warm. Their only pleasure was looking at the sky and starrng at the billions of stars which lit the black sky and the Milky Way.

On the day of the departure everything was ready, cowboys and the herd. Before leaving Manolo was called by Isabella's father, who giving him a pat on the shoulder said, "Dear Manolo, this time 'you' will be the one in charge of bringing the cattle to the market. It's a job of great responsibility and as you well know, it's not only being behind the herd but you have to keep an eye on the cowboys as well!"

Manolo was surprised by so much trust, bring a herd of cattle for hundreds of kilometres, the danger of crossing rivers, tracking down lost cattle and injured animals, look after pregnant cows and in some cases help them deliver their calf, was no easy matter. Not only that! The herd had to be driven through rivers, across the pampas, make sure nothing was lost or left behind. Like the wagon full of supplies with the cook always ready to feed the hungry cowboys.

But... that's not all, there was always the danger of thieves, men who make their living stealing someone's else's herd, was a big responsibility. But... let's not forget the quarrelsome cowboys, rough strong men whose only valuables were their horse and the knife used for defence and cut the meat to be roasted in the open, was another matter.

He had to make sure they wouldn't fight, gamble, steal from each other or avoid difficult and dangerous jobs where one can easily lose its life.

But... whatever the circumstances he would never leave the herd!

Holding Isabella in his arms Manolo said, "Mio amor, don't cry! I'll be back and show your father that I am capable of his trust! ". In his heart, he wasn't so sure about his future. He had witnessed firsthand what happened to the cowboys who dare stand up against the patron! What would happen to him a poor cowboy who dared marry his beloved Isabella?

The cowboys were waiting for the family to wish them a safe journey, and so was the priest of the local church, with the holy water ready to bless them.

Isabella was crying, while he was trying to console her saying, "Mio amor, don't cry! I'll be back!"

But in his head, he doubted it! His only consolation was that Isabella would never forget him, because he would live in the new life she was carrying. Holding her tight he could feel his child kicking as if to say, "I am here daddy, I love you, come back soon!"

Holding the two to his heart, with tears in his eyes, his last words to his beloved wife and child were, "Adios vida de mi vida adios!"

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# MAX PABLO AND PRINCE QUETZAL

by Liliana Siani

Max Pablo lived near a tropical forest in the faraway land of Mexico. Every day after school he walked to the edge of the forest, where his animal friends waited to play with him. There were birds, butterflies, lizards and many other brightly coloured creatures.

One day, while playing, he heard a sweet, sad sound coming from a nearby tree. Max Pablo looked around to see which bird was singing with such sadness in its heart. He did not have to look far, perched on the branch of a tall leafy tree, was the most beautiful bird he had ever seen. Its emerald, golden green feathers shone when touched by the rays of the sun filtering through the trees. Its beak was yellow and its chest bright red. His tail of a bright blue and green colours was more than half a metre long, elegantly curving at the end.

Suddenly, with a flurry of beating wings eyeing Max Pablo the bird said, "I am Prince Quetzal! I am the king of birds, the bird of kings and emperors. My feathers are the most beautiful of all America. A long time ago, they were used to adorn the heads of the Aztec Emperors."

"Why are you sad?" asked Max Pablo

Once I was a happy bird, living with my beautiful bride Princess Aztec. But one day, after gathering leaves for our nest, I returned to find it empty. She'd been kidnapped!"

"Who took her?" asked Max Pablo

"The birds of the forest who had seen it all told me she had been kidnapped by two horrible men. One of the men had a nose as big as a potato, the other had feet as big as an elephant. In my desperate search, Bill the parrot told me the two men were poachers who capture endangered species.

Prince Quetzal's eyes filled with tears. From under his wings pulled out a handkerchief and noisily blew his nose.

"My dear boy," continued the prince, "luckily Bill the parrot, saw the two men in Santa Dolores, a town nearby. He followed them to a dark shed where he saw my beloved Aztec alone in a small cage. My angel, she hates being alone!"

The prince once again blew his nose.

"Max Pablo," he said. "I have watched you in the last few days and I know you love animals. Will you please help me save my princess?"

Max Pablo was surprised, that the bird knew so much about him, and nodded yes. The prince flew off, circled over Max Pablo's head a couple of times, then gliding gracefully, landed on his left shoulder.

"Max Pablo," he said hopefully. "You must help me free my princess before she dies, of sold to some evil merchant who buys endangered species."

"Prince Quetzal," replied Max Pablo, "We must find where the princess is kept. Then, we can plan her escape."

Max Pablo put the prince into his bag, and quickly took off for Santa Dolores. The town's square was full of people, selling, speaking, fighting, wandering around, and in some cases, spying! Max Pablo saw a group of peasants raising their voices. In the middle were two of the ugliest men he had ever seen!

"What a sight!" he thought. Shaking, frightened for himself and Prince Quetzal, who nervously kicked inside the bag.

The first man in the middle of the circle was short, with a huge, round face and a big potato nose in its centre. The other was a tall and skinny, wearing shorts that showed an ugly pair of legs and two feet that resembled those of an elephant.

Max Pablo thoughts went to Princess Aztec and how frightened she must be!

"No! No!" Elephant feet was saying, throwing his sombrero onto the ground. "She is worth more, much more. We have risked our lives to capture her. She is a very rare bird indeed. As rare as the money in my pockets." In saying so, turned his empty and torn pockets inside out.

Potato nose agreed. "uh! Yes, very rare, very rare indeed! We have risked our lives!"

The two men soon left the angry group. Max Pablo followed then down a land to a wooden shed. The two men went inside growling. Through a broken window Max Pablo looked into the shed. He saw a tiny wire cage. Inside it crouched sobbing Princess Aztec.

At the sound of her cries, Prince Quetzal could wait no longer. Struggled to get out of the bag, sat on the windowsill and sent out a sweet call. A few seconds later, Max Pablo heard a mellow call, Prince Quetzal and Princess Aztec had found each other!

"Prince Quetzal, you distract them while I'll run inside and rescue the princess," whispered Max Pablo.

To attract the two men's attention, the prince started pecking the windowpane.

Seeing another beautiful bird, the men sneered.

"Another bird to sell!" Elephant feet yelled.

Potato nose and elephant feet jumped up, opened the door, and started to run as fast as they could after the prince, who was flying in front of them. They ran through valleys, forests and over mountains. Prince Quetzal was taking them further and further away from his princess.

Max Pablo opened the cage and gently put Princess Aztec into his bag. Then ran at neck breaking speed back to the forest. Before dark Prince Quetzal was reunited to his beloved princess, exhausted but happy. The prince and princess rested for a few days perched on a tree branch, never leaving each other's sight.

When the day to return deeper into the rain forest in the mountains arrived. Chirping sadly the birds circled Max Pablo, then resting on his shoulder, rubbed their beaks on his cheek. Prince Quetzal plucked the most beautiful feather from his tail and gave it to Max Pablo. Then the prince and princess flew away. With tears in his eyes, Max Pablo watched the two birds until they disappeared over the horizon.

But what happened to potato nose and elephant feet?

I was told by Bill the parrot that they were so busy running after Prince Quetzal, that they entered an enchanted forest, kingdom of the evil witch Totec. The witch held them prisoners for a long time, until they both forgot where they came from and what they had intended to do...

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# THE 2020 CHALLENGE

by Lois Best

To call 2020 a challenging year is an understatement to say the least. This year my August birthday party took place at lunch time EST via the video conference platform, Zoom. This accommodated both the time difference and the fact that both places have pandemic lockdown restrictions.

Invited to join the Zoom party were two households in Albert Park a suburb of Melbourne, and one in Bellevue, a suburb of Seattle. Of course we were all available on a Wednesday, at lunchtime, because we're all working, and my granddaughters schooling, from home. During this fun party we also discussed more serious topics and one exchange went something like this.

My daughter (Albert Park): Have things settled down in Seattle?

My D-in-L (Bellevue): Which part? The civil unrest or the pandemic?

We were so astounded that these are things we have to deal with in 2020 that we really didn't get to a definitive answer.

At other times to help myself get through this weird year I am reading, a lot. Some of the most important books I have read are written by Indigenous writers in Australia. They all reinforce that the Black Lives Matter Movement is one of the most important events in 2020.

These impressive books include: Dark Emu, Bruce Pascoe, essential information; Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save The World, Tyson Yunkaporta – that stretched my whitewashed brain; The White Girl, Tony Birch – I lived in that time, I know that heartrending story! And The Yield by Tara Jane Winch – which deservedly won the 2020 Miles Franklin Award.

It was while reading The Yield that I felt I started to understand something important and this poured out – I call it Endless:

There is something hovering, just beyond my awareness.

It waits, this great knowing, this great understanding

Then it floods.

*Everything always was and always will be.*

It's deep, it's profound.

I need to understand it to heal.

It's not tangible

It's not money or fashion or diamonds or gold.

It's deep, it's feeling, it's spirit, it's listening, it's dadirri.

Deep listening. Really listening.

It's feeling. Really feeling.

It's hearing, it's feeling, mother earth, in pain

A pain that must be healed, understood.

Why are we here?

It can't be to hoard the most money, the most possessions.

Surely it's to understand that we don't cease to exist just because we die.

Our spirit, our electricity, our qi, goes on and becomes...

Becomes what?

Becomes something else.

The interconnectedness of everything

And the spaces between.

Animal, vegetable, mineral, the air.

The atmosphere – that's not nothing, it is part of everything

Everything is part of everything, there is no separation

There can be no separation

Because

Everything always was and always will be.

Endless.

Life. Death. Transformation.

Life. Death. Transformation.

Endless.

I guess you could say I am using this challenging year to challenge myself - my beliefs, my prejudices, my white privilege, my culture. I'm learning the meaning of the (Ngan'gikuranggurr and Ngen'givumirri) word 'dadirri' (da-did-ee) – deep listening, listening to the world. I'm listening to the opinions of friends and family, trying out these ideas and getting their perceptions. I don't know where it will take me. In fact, only time will tell where the 2020 challenge will take any of us!

So, raise your glass and here's to 2020 with all its challenges...



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# FEAR 1937

by Lola McHarg

The air under the blankets was stifling, panic stricken she had thrown them over her head when the sound first woke her. Now curled up with her knees near her chest, hands under her chin and her heart beating hard, she strained to hear the usual night noises. The horse clomping down the street, the milk bottles clinking as the milkman ran down the driveway under her open window. The all-night tram in Carlisle Street, the first train at the station and the mournful horns of the ships in the bay.

She turned on her back keeping her knees near her chest but now they protruded into the room and she imagined a monster ready to pounce on them. She could not straighten her legs as she imagined a large snake coiled in the bottom of her bed.

She remembers that afternoon at the Lorne strawberry farm. She stood by her father's knee while he fed her plump strawberries thick with clotted cream. "Open wide my darling", he had laughed. She wished she had her own plate where she would have squashed the fruit into the cream to see what colour that made.

She was a small, thin child with scrawny plaits looped up to tie with bows above each ear. She was unusually dressed in a dirndl skirt, and an embroidered bolero over a white frilly blouse.

The blonde woman in the basket chair so close to her father pouted, "Not so many Felix. The child will be sick!" But she was not her mother.

And then, oh and then she remembered earlier tonight. "Oh no, no, no. Mummy! Daddy!" She stood at the crack of the kitchen door, shoulders shaking with silent sobs. Her father stood with his back to the door and over his shoulder she could see her mother's face wet with tears and contorted with rage. "She's a hussy!" her mother hissed. "I won't have you seeing her, send her back to Germany." Her father's reply was muffled. "You are not to take Lotte to visit her." Her mother's voice rose, "You are not to take Lotte to the Robe street flat! Do you hear me Felix?" Her mother grabbed her father and shook him. Lotte saw her father raise his hand and she fled back to bed.

Now she opened her eyes and the terror of the night sprang at her. Dark shadows in the corners, the streetlights making angry eyes of the wardrobe handles, the tree branches outside seemed to be reaching for her. She leapt from her bed, sobbing she clutched a pillow to her face and ran. Down the long hallway avoiding the grandfather clock, past her father's empty bedroom and at last to the sunroom where her mother slept warm and where Lotte was safe.

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# THE ST KILDA BOY

by Lola McHarg

Walking along Carlisle Street to the skate-hire opposite the National Theatre he runs slightly in front of me. Every few steps he leaps high, arm outstretched in an imaginary slam dunk.

Mouse, a small friendly man lives above the shop with his dog. A great favourite with the locals he is frequently seen around the streets always on blade skates and the dog always with a bright bandana around its neck. My grandson is soon geared up with skates and protective padding Velcro-ed to knees, wrists and elbows, plus a helmet. He loves it! Of course he does!

Mouse recommends lessons and a trip to the skate supply shop in Fitzroy street. After a couple of lessons the Instructor asks him to join a speed skating team which he declines. He skates down long stone stairways, jumps from heights and grinds on every possible surface. His mother attaches a notice on the floor of his wardrobe "DO NOT GRIND HERE."

He frequents Prahara skate park, Riverview skate park on the Yarra and the huge skate barn in Cranbourne where there is a large foam cube filled pit for the skaters to jump, fall or somersault into. He wears his blades on the bus and tram trip home from school. He gate crashes the blade hockey match in the carpark behind Luna Park. Intrigued by this small cheeky brown boy the young men pass him a hockey stick "where 'ya from" they ask. "I'm a St Kilda boy!" as he darts in to steal the puck.

When I was his age I loved to roller skate and he makes in-line skating look so free, easy and fun so I contact the Instructor for lessons to celebrate my birthday. On the last lesson we leave the Pit in Albert Park and skate through the streets to the beach. I am singing "skating through St Kilda with the warm wind in my hair" a nod to Marianne Faithfull's song about Paris.

Channel 7 contact us and we meet them in the carpark of St Kilda Hot Sea Baths. While I gear up they film him speed skating and performing his repertoire of tricks. Then he takes my hand and we skate towards the camera. He is nine and I am almost 70.

I have achieved my goal. I give away my skates and swim at MSAC, walk around Albert Park Lake and frequent the PCYC Inkerman Street gym.

He plays football at the Peanut Farm behind Luna Park and basketball at MSAC. He discovers the golf course in Albert Park and the driving range. He starts at a secondary school which bans blade skates.

At the bottom of his wardrobe his dusty skates lie forgotten on a yellowing sign "DO NOT GRIND HERE."

**Epilogue** - Balaclava – 20 years later. "In The Year Of The COVID."

We live in adjacent streets but cannot meet. I walk laps of my balcony and exercise to music. I miss him and watching him play local footy.

He is a shift worker. In his downtime he cycles, runs and exercises in local parks. He is blade skating again.

My grandson texts me.

"Tough times don't last.

Tough people do."

I laugh.

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# THE MUDROOM AT 67 DEGREES SOUTH

by Maggie Moran

I felt very blasé every time I thought of a zodiac.

No, not my star sign but those black rubber boots that energetic and scientific people dash around in doing important work!

That could be me when I finally reach Antarctica.

To tell the truth, I had never actually seen one, in the rubber so to speak.

On the G Adventure ship, we had marched past one on the way to lifeboat safety drill. Small and slippery was my observation.

Then the mysterious Mudroom was mentioned.

In my ignorance and lack of thorough research, I thought Antarctica was mostly composed of ice and snow. So where did a mudroom come into the picture?

The deliciously mellifluous voice of Alex came over the intercom saying

“All the Adele group report to THE MUDROOM for boot fitting. And please put on thick socks and tops for under the red outer coats to be also given out now.”

Adeles were cute penguins I mused and wondered how they would react to 124 humans in red jackets!

Hurrying down several flights of stairs to the bowels of the ship we discovered THE MUDROOM.

It turned out to be a rather cavernous metal chamber where, apart from staff, were lined up hundreds of pairs of black rubber boots. Clumsy and not at all glamorous, I fumbled until I hoped the ones I had chosen were the right fit. Stomping, a bit like an old farmer Brown, over to the pile of red jackets, Gerard said “Small, I suspect “with a definite twinkle in his eye.

I was to encounter that twinkle several times!

Then I had to take all the kit off again and hang it on hooks under my allotted number.

009.

Innocuous you might think, perhaps even a lucky number! But not by the rather startled look my identity photo indicated.

Back upstairs in the Discovery Lounge, which thankfully housed the bar as well, a lecture on the dangers our shore trips presented to the environment if we did not clean our boots properly. Seeds, plant life and particularly guano could bring contamination to the pristine environment.

The sticky penguin poo nearly made me gag the next day when we landed and walked very carefully through the penguin colony. Specific pole markers guided us through the fragile area, carefully avoiding penguin paths and gatherings of the feathery creatures. It had been an exciting ride on the zodiac, though I did hold onto the rope draped on the side. That such small and delightful creatures could shoot a line of poo so close to our feet was a remarkable feat.

I wondered why it was pink initially, then later varying shades of grey, brown and black. The amazing Gerard told us it was their main food, krill. How it could transform into such a disgusting smelly pile was a mystery? Some very funny young thought it a grand idea to slide in it on their bellies.

Back on board I scrubbed my boots as best I could with brushes and the mandatory walk through the tray of disinfectant and I emerged and thankfully headed to the bar. I was sure my boots were spotless!

Sipping gratefully on my G&T I heard an announcement.

“Would 009 please report to the Mud Room for boot re cleaning!”

Ribald laughter followed my hurried exit.

And the next day “Would Margaret from 407 come down to the MUDROOM and swipe back in so we know she is not going to be sleeping with the penguins!”

I swear I did swipe and after that “TO THE MUD ROOM” became my friends’ catch cry and my nightmare!

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# TIME TO COMPARE AND CONTRAST

by Marilyn Fahey

I will be eighty years old next year, that is of course if I outsmart the Corona virus.

My family and friends frequently enquire how I cope living on my own, well to be quite honest nothing much has changed.

Of course I missed a long awaited cruise but unlike many others I received a full cash refund. I do miss trips on the community bus but generally I did not get out and about much. All in all my daily activities have not changed significantly.

With the single exception that now I am watching far too much television. Recently I saw an unsettling news broadcast which made me think of a time long ago, the 1960's. Then I believed that I was sorely pressed by the endless and boring tasks required of me.

Most essential but tedious being the daily round of washing and drying of nappies for three babies. The daily grind of prewashing 20+ nappies per day, then putting them into a gas fired copper to be boiled until they were freed of any stains by a block of velvet soap, which I had cut /shaved into the boiling water. Then the use of a trusty copper stick to lift them out of the boiling water into the first rinse of cold water through the hand ringer into the second rinse and so on and so on until they had been rinsed and rung out at least four times, here you must understand that I was trying my best to follow my mother's instructions, well not quite the same, she who must be obeyed mandated six rinses. Then carting these very heavy loads out to the clothes line to hang them out as early as possible to give the wind a chance to dry them out so that I would have enough nappies to get us through the next day.

Often I would have to rush out and unpeg them all if there was a sign of rain and bring them inside to be taken out again, if the weather permitted, or to drape them around the heater to dry enough nappies - for my babies to wet them again.

This was a daily routine which could not be left to another time when I felt like doing this boring task again. Of course you will appreciate the fact that looking after my very young children and making sure they came to no harm in my absences in the laundry and at the clothes line (thank God and the ABC for Playschool). Why am I recalling this incredibly boring pressure to do my duty, no I don't feel sorry for myself - well just a little bit. Rather I am amazed that I did it at all and that I followed the instructions given by my fastidious mother and mentor. Truth be told I had no other choice as I had neither a washing machine nor a clothes drier.

My primary reason for recounting this turgid tale is not to pat myself on the back (well just a little bit) but to recount a scene I saw on a television report about the hardships being endured by the people in war torn and financially bankrupt Lebanon.

The camera panned homes which had been bombed beyond being safe to live in and noted that the currency rate was on a precipitous decline. The video then switches to a security camera in a pharmacy where a young man is holding a gun on the shop owner and holding out a plastic shopping bag whilst gesturing to the wretched man to fill his bag. Regrettably I speculate that he will be after drugs!

Both men have desperate looks on their faces as the shop owner reaches under the counter and pulls out a large parcel which he places in the plastic bag being held by the gunman.

To my astonishment the gunman seems to be gesturing a type of apology to the shopkeeper who places a large package of disposable nappies in the bag and the gunman takes off to the wretched world he and his baby most likely inhabit.

As I contemplated the differences in our lives I could not help feeling so sorry for both men in the news report, the young fathers desperation to obtain disposable nappies, a 'luxury' unknown to me and the shopkeepers risk of being shot by comparison to my seemingly primitive method of obtaining nappies for my babies in a pre-disposable era.

Add to this incident a recent massive explosion in Beirut and I can only imagine the compounding distress of all the players in the previous news report. I can only thank my lucky stars that I had the health and strength to undertake my daily chores in a safe and peaceful Australia in the sixties.

May we recover from our present travails and create a better future for us all.



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## SILENT TOWN

by Mary Grace Levakis

Horses shod with rubber  
Peoples boots are too  
Mufflers on car engines  
Motor Mowers – True  
Chorus  
What a sleepy town it is  
What a drowsy Town  
And what a rowdy dance it is  
As dusk bounds around

The dogs and cats  
Birds in the Trees  
Have a siesta  
All day you see  
Chorus  
What a sleepy town it is  
What a drowsy Town  
And what a rowdy dance it is  
As dusk bounds around

Men play with cards  
Nothing to say  
Women sit and knit  
Pass the time away  
Chorus  
What a sleepy town it is  
What a drowsy Town  
And what a rowdy dance it is  
As dusk bounds around

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## THE ROOSTER

by Mary Grace Levakis

The rooster cried  
“Cockadoodle Doo”  
I’ve got – one hen  
But she wont do

The rooster cried  
“Cockadoodle Doo”  
I’ve got – two hens  
But they wont do

The rooster cried  
“Cockadoodle Doo”  
I’ve got – three hens  
But they wont do

The rooster cried  
“Cockadoodle Doo”  
I’ve got – four hens  
But they wont do

The rooster cried  
“Cockadoodle Doo”  
I’ve got – five hens  
But they wont do

The rooster cried  
“Cockadoodle Doo”  
I’ve got – six hens  
But they wont do

The rooster cried  
“Cockadoodle Doo”  
I’ve got – seven hens  
But they wont do

The rooster cried  
“Cockadoodle Doo”  
I’ve got – eight hens  
But they wont do

The rooster cried  
“Cockadoodle Doo”  
I’ve got – nine hens  
But they wont do

The rooster cried  
“Cockadoodle Doo”  
I’ve got – ten hens  
I’ve got – ten hens  
And all they do  
Is peck – peck – peck!  
Now, no-one can hear  
Me Cockadoodle Doo.

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## THE CHILDHOOD GULAG

by Megan Jones

*Snippets of conversations overheard while exercising in Port Melbourne during horrid Covid lockdown.*

Why can’t you keep quiet? Why can’t you speak up? Why can’t you stop talking while I’m on the phone? Why can’t you keep your opinions to yourself? Why can’t you speak your mind? Why can’t you think before you speak? Why can’t you just listen? Why can’t you do what you are told? Why can’t you pay attention? Why can’t you pay attention when I’m speaking? Why can’t you stop annoying me? Why can’t you give your brain a rest? Why don’t you think? Why don’t you stop thinking and start doing? Why can’t you eat with your mouth closed? Why can’t you breathe with your mouth closed? Why can’t you be like your cousin Jessica? Why can’t you go read a book? Why can’t you stop reading and be useful? Why can’t you sit still? Why can’t you behave yourself? Why can’t you behave like a lady? Why can’t you be yourself? Why can’t you stop eating so much? Why can’t you eat what’s put on the table in front of you? Why can’t you leave the cat alone? Why can’t you leave well enough alone? Why can’t you feed the cat without being asked? Why can’t you do your homework without being asked? Why can’t you stop what you are doing? Why can’t you come first in class? What can’t you stop being so competitive? Why can’t you do better? Why can’t you leave your homework and help around the house? Why can’t you sit quietly and read? Why can’t you stop reading and do what I say? Why can’t you do what I say, not what I do? Why can’t you mind your manners? Why can’t you mind your own business? Why can’t you keep your nose out of it? Why can’t you show an interest? Why can’t you show some compassion? Why can’t you stop daydreaming and get on with it? Why can’t you use your imagination? Why can’t you shut the fuck up? Why can’t you go outside? Why can’t you sit inside? Why can’t you sit still? Why can’t you come inside when I tell you to? Why can’t you stop whining? Why can’t you stop answering back? Why can’t you stop that child crying? Why can’t you stop being lazy? Why can’t you stop being argumentative? Why can’t you learn to behave? Why can’t you stop crying? Why can’t you stop asking questions? Why can’t you stop picking your nose? Why can’t you drop dead?

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# DESERT DAYS

by Nadine Watson

Another grey Melbourne morning. Drizzling, damp, pale light. She shuffles to the door in her old sheepskin slippers, her dressing gown half buttoned up, her hair awry and grey. Stiffly, she picks up the morning paper lying rolled up in plastic wrap in the driveway. While sipping her black tea, she browses through the paper looking for the 'Personal Notices' page, then following the rows of Funeral Notices with her index finger. No, no-one she knows today.

What day is it anyway? Turning back to the front page, she reads: Friday. It used to be her shopping day. She'd drive to the market early, when it was still cool and quiet. Although, that was later. First, when she arrived in Australia, she had been shy and diffident. A young migrant bride, too embarrassed to say anything in a language she was only just learning. She'd preferred shopping at the local supermarket then: neat rows of food, wrapped in polystyrene trays. No need to speak to anyone, just pick up what seemed right, checking the price. Like today in a way. Doesn't speak to anyone either. Nothing much to say. Now, she only walks to the small local supermarket at the end of the street when she'd run out of baked beans, creamed corn or canned peaches.

Since Jack died, there was no-one left to talk to. Except Melissa. Bless that girl.

After lunch, lying down for a rest, she remembered her early days in Australia. Empty days. Lonely, depressing. Nothing to do but wait for Jack to come home. Desert days she called them. Empty, hollow, desolate from start to end. Years later, after Rosie had gone, she'd again felt that leaden weight of their emptiness. Like now.

But happy days? She had known many. With Jack first, before the children came. They had a great routine in the morning. She'd wake up early, brush her hair and pin it up, put on her pretty French dressing gown, make breakfast. Jack would be in the shower singing on top of his voice. Then they would discuss his day, where he would be, what farm he would be visiting for new crop trials. He'd kiss her goodbye and, the next minute she would return to the silence of the empty house. She filled her days the best she could. Just before Susie was born, she learnt to drive again. A taste of freedom regained. A chance to get out of that detested furnished rented house and see other faces, hear people laugh and talk.

Paradoxically, after Susie was born, she felt even more alone than before. The demanding, screaming little bundle sucked up her entire energy. It was like being emptied of all identity, all sense of self. It was horrid. Sometimes, when her cries were too loud to bear, she'd scream back at her, sometimes shaking her out of despair at feeling so powerless. At other times, she wanted to run away, escape that life. All she could do was to run to the end of the garden, by the back fence and stand there, holding both hands over her ears to block out the unbearable sound. At the end of the day, Jack would come home, kiss her, make her laugh again. Oh, how they loved each other. Why was it then, that years later he became such a dreadful man? At the end of his life, he barely spoke to her. Sometimes a few words like crumbs off the table. When did it happen? After Rosie died. That's when it started. He blamed her and secretly she blamed him. Boxing Day.

Nearly fifty years ago. Christmas was never the same after that. The young policeman at the door. She hadn't gone to the morgue. Jack did. He'd been given a bag with Rosie's clothes and shoes, all soggy, smelling of river water.

For weeks, months, time stood still. Days dissolved into nothing. They just flowed by like flotsam down the river that took Rosie. But life went on. Daily shores and caring for her other children kept her going. Susie had been so clever, winning a scholarship to university and becoming a fine teacher. That's before things went wrong. To this day, she cannot think about it. Suicide is such a coward's act. But her second daughter, Jo, was different. Bright and pretty, a bit of a tomboy. Artistic like her father. She hadn't been a disappointment. Unfortunately she lived in Sydney now and rarely rang. But, her real blessing had been Jim. Her pride and joy. The sunshine of her life. He was such a cheerful boy. They understood each other so well. Didn't need words. Shouldn't have had a fourth one. When Rosie came along, they knew from the start that something wasn't right. Sleepless nights, endless visits to specialists and finally the knowledge if not the acceptance that she would never be like her siblings.

The alarm clock made her jump up. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Why? Did she have to do something? Couldn't remember. Anyway, time to do some baking. She'd promised Melissa some shortbread for when she'd drop in after school. Such a nice girl. The Millers moved in next door about 6 years ago. They first met when

Jack died. They had been so kind, ringing an ambulance, offering her a cup of tea. Ever since, Melissa had been her friend, visiting her a couple of times a week. They got on really well together. Time to put the tray in the oven.

Now she remembered! The alarm. It was to remind her to take her pills. Ah well, she'd take them now. Couldn't remember if she'd taken them at breakfast. Never mind, better now than never.

5 o'clock.

'Hello Mrs Wilson. It's Melissa. Can I come in?'

No answer, only a strong smell of burnt biscuits.

'Oh dear', Melissa thought. 'Mrs Wilson forgot to turn the oven off again'.

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# XDOOM AND GLOOMX POSITIVITY IN PORT PHILLIP

by Neville F P Smith

2020 the year of the virus does not get me down, I fear not, no and I dare this year to get me down.

So I awake and hear the rain, the rain does not dampen my day, oh! No, I rise up with a smile and take my morning exercise in Alma Park, even though there is a need to avoid the many dogs taking their masters for a walk. I keep my eyes wide to absorb the green green grass and the trees so magnificent.

Then another day comes and I awake to the skies blue, such true blue caressing Port Phillip, who could not feel joy full to the bream to be alive and well, so I celebrate with a big smile, then my wanderings lead me to the St. Kilda Gardens to allow my senses to be overflowed with the glory of nature. My nature is full of the positivity we may all gain from the joy of nature.

The morning duty to my physical and mental health is enhanced by the coffee from Truffles at the corner of Punt and Balaclava roads, a quick uplifting chat to Jareck, Hobos, Laura or Meire, and I skip out cheerfully to isolate at home, happy to self indulge with a simple breakfast, and a video of choice.

Time alone is fine, even comforting, at my seventy years of age, as the stresses of my life are behind me, wishing simply to live a simple existence with simple pleasures.

The video and rest takes me out of a reverie of my lifetime to a stretch in my favourite armchair to read, at this time it is a book about the lives of the Ancient Egyptians, they are described to have had a most positive three thousand year era.

The daily chores call upon me with no regret as they get me out to the big world

and the streets of Port Phillip, though not so busy as in earlier times, yet the walk to the supermarket, to pick up essential supplies including a bottle of white wine, where I get to mix with many people, a bit like going to the footie, and to the Sacred Heart Mission to pick up lunch, where Robi, one of the volunteers, demands I sing for my supper, which I gladly do. A wonderful job is done by the mission and the volunteers, whom I heartily congratulate.

The day is flowing and I need lunch followed by a short meditation, then it is time to sing, I vocal train by doing scales with my keyboard, hoping not to disturb my neighbours, no complaint as yet, then I sing to backing music, Classical, Irish, Musical and Popular selections. What an uplift an hour of song does, no doom and gloom, no not in this heart.

Ah!! Time has come to open the bottle of white wine, and for my daily time on the computer. A number of projects are a foot, primarily to finish the re write of my movie, a task of fifteen years. This movie tells the tales I experienced on a golf course in Sydney where I worked as a ranger.

Many famous persons appear such as Bob Hawke former Prime Minister of Australia, Kerry Packer, the famous Australian businessman and Greg Norman "the Great White Shark" golfer.

I am eight to ten days from completion, the lockdown has induced my coming to the finale, more positivity.

And positivity goes on as I am now in a strong and committed habit to write, a task I wish to continue from my tender seventy-three years to, well you know what, no need to mention doom and gloom here.

I aim most days to write for the duration of the bottle of wine with the intent that the next writing session I delete the writings of the second half of the bottle, these writings normally come out rubbish.

Then it is 'The Chase' on channel seven to challenge my general knowledge, a worthwhile endeavour to keep the brain plastic and alive.

Talking of such I have forgotten to mention that each two days I practise some Classical Barre Exercise on the balcony and the other days meet a running partner to do some sprinting as I am in the ABC RN Sporty Fitness Challenge, which is coming to the end the end of August. My challenge is to sprint sixty meters in 9.5 seconds, I add a very ambitious aim, however another positive experience.

The day is uplifting and exhausting so to relax I cook and listen to the radio, mostly ABC RN.

Cooking I like to do and of course to consume. The day comes slowly to an end with some television till an early to bed beckons, and that is ok as rest and sleep is the order of the isolation and from which health and longer life will pursue.

Another positivity is that most days are very much alike and drift from one to another, the effect of such and of the lockdown is that time slows down to a snail pace, stress is naught, finishing each day with a smile of fulfilment and arise each day with a smile of expectation.

I live, I am free within my mind, I am Positive.



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# THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY

by Nicholas Cecic

For many years it was at mealtime, as he sat down at the head of the table, that Branko was always reminded of his great misfortune; he had produced three daughters and no son! How would he find husbands for them? Dowries?

Yes, one could have the horse, another one of the cows. Perhaps, for the third, a goat or several pigs. He was brought back to earth when suddenly a large roast chicken on a carving board was plonked in front of his nose. His heavy thoughts had produced feelings of abdication and today he acted on them, saying for the first time ever, "Zlata! You carve the roast chicken!" His eldest daughter arose.

Zlata, thinking, "This must be some kind of rite of passage", smiled, stood up over the chicken and with a large carving knife delivered a hefty blow severing the head and served it up to her father saying, "Father, for you, the Head of the Family, goes the head!" Two more clever slashes and her siblings are informed, "Sisters, you are now of an age when you need to think about flying the coop, a wing for each of you." Next the two legs are separated with the announcement, "Tomorrow I leaving home to travel and I will need legs". Finally she passes the remainder of the chicken to her mother with the words, "For you, dear mother, this body as gratitude for your body which has produced three, healthy and strong young women!"

The next day Zlata set off on her travels and her legs took over hill and dale, over mountains and through valleys, until she reached the rich farmlands of the Danube. In need of income she took a job as a servant for a wealthy couple who paid poorly but money was money and she needed it. The impressive farm property

stretched for half a kilometre in every direction. A limestone wall enclosed the main residence, staff quarters and farm sheds, as well as a large adjacent orchard which contained all manner of fruit trees. When the trees were in fruit a guard would patrol the orchard at night to discourage nearby villagers from pilfering. The property was well known and admired, but not so the notoriously mean owners.

Zlata was one of several employees residing in the staff quarters. One young man took her fancy, the happy traveller who entertained all with his humour, his songs and his stories about his adventures. He was liked by all except the jealous landowner and his constantly complaining wife, Zlata, who served their meals had noticed their antipathy towards the young man but one night she was horrified to overhear a conversation where the pompous landlord stated to his wife, "We will get rid of him for good!" "How?" asked the wife. "Tomorrow night I will send him to the orchard to get red apples but during the day I will give orders to the guard to shoot on sight any night-time intruders". "What a splendid tragedy! You are so clever", cooed the wife.

The concerned Zlata spoke to the young man and informed him not only of the insidious plan of the murderous couple but also of her plans to thwart them.

"I will pick the apples this afternoon and hide them for you near the house. Do not enter the orchard at all but wait a while before presenting the apples." The next night the young man is summoned and ordered to fetch red apples from the orchard for the lady of the house. Fifteen minutes later he returns with a basket of red apples. The young man is dismissed

but the owner and his wife are shocked and furious. Zlata, hiding in the background, hears the husband say, "Tomorrow night, he will fetch brown pears and I will have two guards with guns and orders to shoot anyone who approaches the pear grove!"

Zlata again informs the young man of the new plot as well as her counterplan. The young man is again summoned and told, "My dear wife is desperate for a brown pear. You need to go to the pear grove in the southern end of the orchard and fetch some brown pears. When the young man returns with brown pears, the owner is absolutely furious and storms out of the house blaspheming and yelling, "I will show those sleeping, cheating idiots!" Sadly, as he approaches the pear trees, two guns are fired and his body jerks into the air and then lands heavily like a bag of potatoes.

Even more sadly, the rich man's wife, who decided to help her husband abuse the guards, in her fury, undeterred by gunshots, followed the husband into the pear grove. Two more gunshots ended her rich but miserable life. Zlata and the young man heard the distant gunshots and realized what had happened. Zlata says, "I think it is a bad time, but a good time to leave. But first I will show you where the key to the strong room is kept. They will not need money where they are going but you need to be compensated for the near loss of life!"

Not long after two dark figures on horseback left the property quietly with saddlebags loaded.

# A WALK IN THE PARK OR MYSTERY WALKING

by Patricia Thornton

Iron spikes surround each of the fence posts and gates to the park. They are weather worn and some of the them have blunted over time. Some are missing. The children loved to count them but lost interest when they reached a gate. Entry depended on where the car was parked. Sometimes they rushed through the gate. At other times it was very selective. "Let's go to the giant hedge. Quick. Run! Last one's a rotten egg".

"NO I want to see the ducks on the lake first." Somehow, they all agreed on a route. The favourite was the giant hedge first. A roll on the lawn, tumbling, hand stands and arm wrestles and then a race to see the rose garden behind. Who will be first to sit in the rotunda?

THEY LOVE THE ROSE GARDEN especially when the flowers are in bloom. The aromas are gorgeous and it is easy to encourage a walk around the plants taking in the beautiful colours and fragrances.

"That one smells like my Mum. She always puts perfume on her wrists and behind her ears." "So does my Nana but hers is different. She only has Channel No 5 and it has a lovely smell, I like snuggling into her." "What about aftershave. That stinks when my big brother uses it my Mum says." This space quietens the children and they enjoy sitting, or looking for bees and other insects. Sitting on the well-placed benches encouraged conversations. They were soon talking to a couple seated nearby.

Time to move on and a race to the back fence, taking different paths. Looking for the tallest, the fattest tree or the oldest one. "I'm trying to find the really special ones." The conservatory is always interesting. They love the big plants, the tropical ones, trying to pronounce some of the unfamiliar names and renaming them.



St Kilda Rain Man, designed by Corey Thomas and Ken Arnold and installed in 2005. Rain Man fountain is solar powered and uses recycled water from the pond below.

Big fat lolly face or Auntie Annie's legs and other nonsense names which evoke peals of laughter.

"Race you to the lake, the seat near the umbrella man." I'm first! I'm first! as they shuffle and push one another to claim the honour. "Look ducklings and a Mother duck. She's showing them how to get in out of the water. If you sit on the seat they come to you because they think you'll feed them. Rain man is solar powered through the pin on his umbrella, did you know?" THE GIANT CHESS SET is through that secret path. The chess pieces are huge and those old men love playing. If you bring your own set you can play on the small tables.

Chasing through the paths, changing routes and playing hidey and racing one another back to the car the children were exhausted. What a beautiful asset these wonderful gardens are for St Kilda. Watching the seasons change with the plantings, the trees in Autumn, Winter, Spring, and Summer showing the time of the year. Praise to the volunteers who work year-round to help maintain them and to have the pleasure of having such a lovely place to work in and enjoy.

This was the site of an old gravel pit which a farsighted counsellor in 1849 urged his fellow counsellors to aside for public gardens. The State land department had to agree and in 1859 the area was fenced but it wasn't till 1907 that donations of money and plants and landscaping began the real work of establishing this wonderful and well-loved St Kilda landmark. The paths which radiate from the central lake create a sense of mystery because there is always something around the next corner.

Registered with Heritage Victoria, the gardens have 810 mature trees 8 of which are on the major, significant trees register. There are also local indigenous plants. In Summer the gardens are full of picnickers enjoying the lawns and the seating. Wedding parties like to use the setting for photos but weddings aren't allowed. Apparently there is an abundance of wildlife but of course the possums and owls are only able to be seen at night and the gardens close at sunset. However the bird life is abundant during the day to hear and see.

A walk in these gardens is a fantastic way to clear one's head. To hear the children playing, riding around and the sounds of guitars strumming and just seeing people relaxing is good for the soul. The beauty which surrounds one lifts the spirits. It is a place for all seasons for reflection and of course exercise. I feel a sense of ownership. These are my gardens which I am beside and stroll back by pleased to share with others but to be respected because of how significant they are to our community.

The old wrought gates announcing in large letters in an arch around them 'The ST KILDA CITY GARDENS' invite me to a mystery walk. What birds will I see today? What flowers are in bloom and how have the trees changed since my last visit? My favourite umbrella tree is almost bare of leaves and the old men are playing chess noisily. Oh! and there is Mother Duck heading for the lake ducklings in tow. I will walk to the other side and stroll back to my car to see what I will see.

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# STEPHEN AND DUCK

by Patricia Thornton

I remember that day vividly. Chickenpox, measles and mumps were rampant but worse was a polio scare. It was the 50's and I was a new young teacher in a consolidated school in country Victoria. That clear-sighted day of my memory was a Friday. The news in the newspapers all week had been about 2 polio cases at the Children's hospital. Radio talkback was full of the horror stories of the lives of polio victims. Warnings had been issued about sending children to school if they had flu-like symptoms.

"Do not put your children on the school bus if they are unwell." was the message from the Education Minister. Contagion from the "childhood diseases" on school buses was rife. I don't believe that they were ever properly cleaned. Just a quick once-over with an old straw broom was considered adequate. Children with any of these infections were forced to stay home for 10 school days from the start of the disease. Our classes were becoming depleted but mostly in the younger children. Every year there were outbreaks and there was immunity developing.

All of these infections began suddenly. A child may have been put on the bus not discernibly unwell but during the day a rash may appear or a small posture or a swelling in the neck would indicate one of these diseases. Teachers would place the child in the 'sickroom' and it would go home as usual on the bus on the end of the day. The infection rate of the previous week was so high that the bus drivers who were private operators were considering refusing to do the school runs. Except for the few students who lived in the town they all travelled by bus sometimes for up to an hour each way.

The fear in the community of polio or "Infantile paralysis" was extreme. It was after all, only about 10 years since the 40's when the parents were witnesses to that terrible epidemic. Schools were closed for about a year then and there was clear evidence in communities of people lamed because of polio. One of the mothers still wore a metal calliper on one leg and the other was 5cm shorter because when she was 10 she contracted polio and spent a year in hospital.

The Principal spoke on his public address system. "Good morning teachers and children. The school timetable will be followed as usual for those students who are present." This was followed by a scratchy old recording of The Colonel bogie March, a signal for the start of the school day.

There wasn't a child in sight in my Grade 2 classroom. Just as I was about to wander off to see the state of affairs in the rest of the school I walked Stephen. A sturdy, strong, healthy 7.5 year-old, a town boy. "Good Morning Miss I brought Duck for morning talk. He imprints me. He thinks I'm his father. Is the bus late today? Miss!!" "You are my only pupil to-day. Tell me about your duck."

He sat cross-legged on the mat with duck at his feet and I sat on that little infant chair. How awkward that was! Where did I put my long legs? I had to tuck my dress around them for modesty and at the end of the day my knees ached. Of course teachers had to wear dresses and high heels in the 50's.

"About my duck. When we got him he was an egg. It was fertilised so I watched him crack it and he came out all pink and slimy.

Then he was a fledgling and he grew and got his feathers. Now he's my best friend. He won't make a mess Miss. Mum makes me clean up after him."

"That's good", a weary reply. "So what are we going to do today?" I sighed. Up he got, went to my desk, Duck following and returned with the timetable. Studying it carefully he announced importantly "after morning talk we have writing, then reading and maths. This afternoon" "That's enough Stephen and Duck. We'll have different lessons today. I really want to find out what's in those cupboards under the blackboard. The classroom was left in total chaos after the senile Miss Igston resigned. We can do reading and writing and maths while we do it. I'll explain how."

So reading was trying to read and sound out the titles of books chucked blissfully at the cupboard. Counting the pencils and pieces of paper, boxes of chalks, paints and brushes and other art supplies was maths. We observed all the bell times recesses and lunch time. Stephen and Duck were thrilled to play footy with some older boys. He talked all day long about his family and how he was worried about his granny who had a sore leg and he had lots of questions from the books he was handling. Picking up one he sounded the word E.G.Y.P.T. It made no sense to him. How insular we were then!

That day in 1944 I recalled. The Principal called my brother and I. She told us we must meet our father at his office. So hand in hand we raced to the bank. My big strong father was in tears as he told us that my beautiful cousin Madeleine had poliomyelitis and was very ill and mum

may have to go to Sydney. I didn't burden Stephen with the news that my cousin died 3 days later but if she had survived, she would have spent her life in an iron lung. There are still 2 people in the world living in an iron lung after that pandemic.

Now according to his timetable Art was now scheduled. He chose yellow, green and red paint and Guess What! He painted a very fine duck. I asked what he would call his beautiful painting. In careful black letters he wrote DUCK by STEPHEN. He was very well pleased with his effort.

"Home time Stephen. That's the bell. Have a good weekend."

"Good afternoon Miss". He came for a hug and whispered, "This has been the best day of my life. Will anyone else be at school on Monday."

"Maybe."

Disappointed he ran out of the room. Duck wadding, flapping and hurrying behind him.



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# HAROLD'S DREAMING

by Roderick Waller

'hey cous' What you doin'?' Harold was crouched by the blue bush, sitting lonely on the saltpan. He'd driven down to Frome to check the mill.

'just passin' the time, Harold.' Jimmy crouched in the shade of his horse. 'in the dreaming, I takes off runnin' over Frome, see our family.'

Harold woke from the dream, startled by shrieks of a flock of white cockies. He stared, came round, muttering, Christ, gotta' get moving. A solitary cockatoo lost, screeched, a dog yelped, the ranges and desert unfolded their silence.

Harold rode south on an Arkaroola mare. Jimmy is calling, and the family are dancing on the salt pan.

An eagle had hovered at two pm; two hawks screech at four; he dug in the spurs, dashed to the home paddock, took off the sweat soaked saddle and whistled the black gelding. Gotta' get to Jimmy, he mumbled, spurred Jummy across the grid, and galloped to the Frome. A tiny cloud peeked; vermilion, orange, and green streaked the sky. The spear man, sat by the Frome gate, jabbed the salt

'I got somat' you want?' Harold sat cross-legged at the fence.

'Nope.' The spearman jabbed the spear. 'down at the birth ground chief askin' for you.'

Harold sat sideways, digging his knee in his face.

'long dream ago, brudder; he old now, more than a hundred dreams, you first born. Only right you go.' Spearman went on; spat on the salt.

Harold snored in fits and starts, leant against the fence. He shook, his eyes stung at the fiery haze of the salt pan.

'Hey, where you go?' crouching, wandering out onto the pan; walked in circles; closed his eyes; the spearman is rattling the boomerang. He wobbled back to the gate; grasped the fencepost in fright; fumbled in the saddlebag for the flask, took a deep drink; spat and retched. Deep red streaked the lowering sky, the Flinders' heat undiminished. He sat a moment, then dug the spurs, 'jump, Jummy.' galloping over the salt pan, east to the family hills.

Pushing up his hat he stared down at the rock-pool, blue bush, and withered acacias, family sat around the charcoal fire. An ancient man sits apart on the yellow sand smoking a pipe, swaying his belly. The spearman dances out on the fringe. Jummy chews lichen in the sandstone rock, the sun cools at six pm. Harold slowly walked down to the camp,

'he come, he come.' The spearman sang in a dervish dance. The old man slaps his belly and chants; held out his hand to Harold. 'you come back, boy!' rattling his broken teeth.

'don't know you, old man.' Harold stuttered. The family crouch; eat snake meat and witchery grubs. The women suck blue bush leaves.

'I knows you before you were born.' The old man keeping his face to the ground.

Spearman shuffled over, 'sit, eat. You home.'

The old man chattered, 'Them men take you when so high.' He pointed to a withering bluebush seedling. 'That tribe bone you

down and work you. You got no peace.' Harold's memory flashed back thirty years, hauled on a horse by a big white fella. Harold slumped in the sand.

'cover him', the old man barks at a woman. 'rub that lizard oil on im'' Bright stars, an arm away. the stillness impenetrable.

A tiny cloud sits smug high up the grey dawn. Harold stirred, 'jeez; where the hell' mumbled, stared at the rock pool; not a soul anywhere; no charcoal embers, no footprints. Jummy munched on blue bush, he mounted, his sad brown eyes glazed; then blazing up the hill paused at the ridge. Jimmy walked slow along the dingo fence of the Frome, for holes, eyes keen on the salt pan for tracks.

At the Balcanoona gate he leant against the post, sliding small bony fingers along the fence. Harold appeared, ghost like in the distance, the shimmering sun haze opening a path. They crouched by the gate, smoking. 'you been over the ridge?' Jimmy spits. 'what you see?'

'notin'' Harold's face hung, solemn.

Jimmy stroked the leather belt, 'you see this here on your way through?'

'nope, hey that's the Jack's' Harold rose unsteady.

'we leave it here?'

'you take it' Harold mounts.

'best leave it here.' Jimmy tied it back. A lonely puff of wind whistled through the windmill vanes; a cloud of salt flushed over the pan. 'gotta be a reason.'

They rode opposite directions, unsmiling, a lick of fear on both men's faces. Harold turned back to the gate, untied the belt, and spurred Jummy; walked into the homestead

yard under the falling sun.

'I got the jack's belt, boss.' Harold whimpered.

'where?'

'at the Frome gate.'

'what you doing there?'

'Jimmy calls me. He witness me and the belt.'

Two days later the moon's faded to a dull crescent, high grey clouds skittish, It was two am; commotion in the yard. The boss woke with a start at the noise in the generator shed, an instance of desert silence, then a creaking inside.

The boss snarled, 'Stand back.' thundering at the locked tin door, smashing it open.

Harold's swinging from a rafter by the Jack's belt, his feet twitching, his eyes dying.

'Christ!' the boss lunged, cut through the belt lowering Harold to the dirt floor. Metho bottles, oil cans, iron tools litter the small shed. There's a gash three feet up the tin wall. The sergeant turned to the boss, 'jeez been a fight; footprints through the gap'

The doc looked up 'Suicide, sad business! yep, poor Harold, lost his mind.'

'any news on Jack?' the boss asked.

'nothing. Just rode off and disappeared, you say?' the sergeant replied.

Jimmy and the spearman galloped into the green cracking dawn. At the Frome fence the big roo meditated on the law of the land: The Guyani family and her land-spirit Jimmy share the Frome lease on the Flinders. She drank from the trough, Jimmy waiting his turn.

# TOWERS AND TENEMENTS

by Ros Collins

Is there a difference between towers and tenements – or what New Yorkers call ‘projects’ in Harlem? One way or another, they’re all what we once called ‘Housing Commission’ flats, now made to sound more up-market as ‘social housing’.

My mother was born in 1894 and until she was nine lived in Charlotte de Rothschild Dwellings in Flower and Dean Street, London. It was the site of some of the worst slums or ‘rookeries’ in the East End, a dangerous place where in 1888 Jack the Ripper had traumatised the community. At the end of the nineteenth century, impoverished migrants fleeing pogroms in Russia and Poland, walked up from London Docks to find new homes in an environment straight out of *Oliver Twist*. It was a time when Victorian philanthropy and business joined forces to solve social problems.

My family always referred to them as ‘the buildings’ and years later in the 1940s my great-uncle lived in a similar ‘estate’ called Dron Buildings: he would be astonished to read today’s real estate sales’ spiel for his former home, now renovated beyond his wildest dreams: *Situated on the Ground floor of this sought after period mansion block built in 1922 is this charming two bedroom flat. The property comprises of two well-sized double bedrooms, modern kitchen with ample storage and work surfaces, contemporary style bathroom and large reception room leading to a stunning south facing garden. A ‘steal’ at £500,000+*

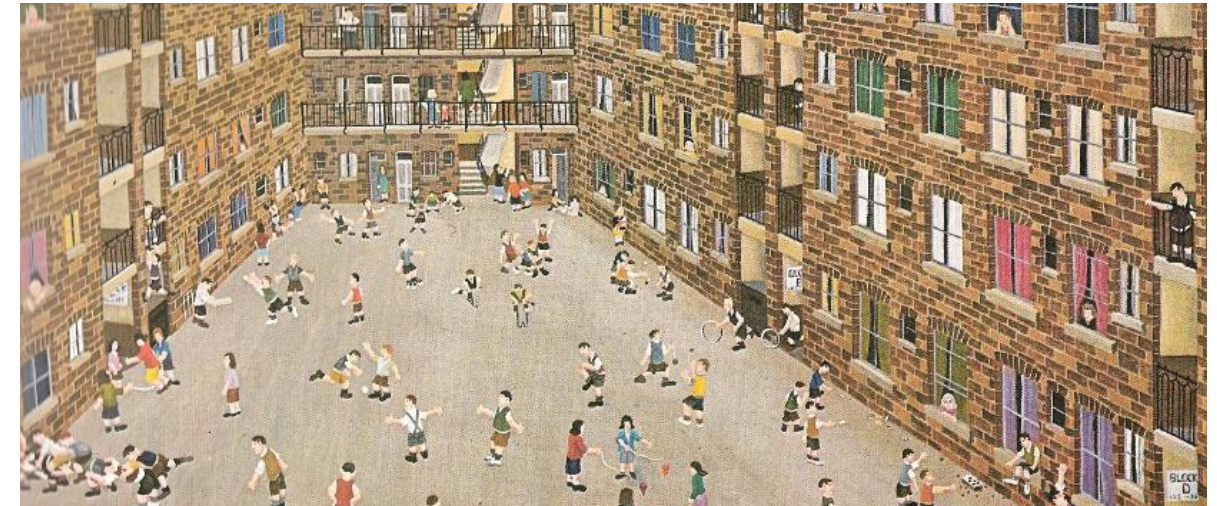
Most of the migrants were desperately poor Jews, and community elders were anxious about the physical and ‘spiritual’ destitution of the newcomers. Philanthropy and business: somehow it all had to come together. Baron Nathan Rothschild founded the Industrial Dwellings Society (1885) Ltd. as a philanthropic model dwellings company. The aim was to provide ‘the industrial classes with commodious and healthy Dwellings at

a minimum rent.’ *The Board considered that ‘many investors will be found willing and even anxious to contribute their capital towards a scheme, which while yielding a moderate and safe return, will largely tend, not only to improve the dwellings of the poor, but also reduce the high rates now paid for the minimum of accommodation.’* Of this, Rothschild himself subscribed £10,000, and paid for the site of the company’s first project to be known as Charlotte de Rothschild Buildings, after his mother.

My mother lived there from 1894 until about 1903. The family occupied a flat on one of the upper storeys and rents were fixed at no more than 5 shillings per week. The children played in the courtyard and my grandmother would send a basket of food down on a rope. The polluted air of London’s East End gave the children chest infections and my mother was detailed to take them to the great London Hospital in the Mile End Road. ‘Who’s in charge here?’ asked the doctor, and was astonished to be dealing with a nine-year old: she was the only English-speaker in the family. ‘Tell your parents to move these children to cleaner air or they will die,’ he said. So they moved to Cardiff in South Wales.

Many of the model dwelling societies are now closed or have been subsumed by larger organisations, but some, such as the Peabody Estate have been renovated and warrant heritage status for their architectural value. The idea of a ‘moderate’ rather than exploitative return for investors seemed to work. The marriage between philanthropy and business was a success.

The Housing Commission ‘towers’ of Melbourne – including those in Port Phillip – were built after the war to alleviate the chronic housing shortage and to clear some of the worst slum areas, often home to impoverished Catholic families. The intentions were good and the building



Charlotte de Rothschild Dwellings. Painting by John Allin published in *Say goodbye: you may never see them again*. Published by Jonathan Cape, London 1974, p/b 1983. Text by Arnold Wesker.

standards sound. Later there were discussions about residents having the option of buying their flat once they got on their feet financially. As gentrification of inner city suburbs increased the towers have become something of an eyesore, but it would have been too expensive to demolish them. So there they stand, looming over the chic cafés and boutique clothing stores.

Enter the migrants and the disadvantaged. And of course the developers, few of whom would share the philanthropic values of those long-ago Victorians in London. Most don’t feel it’s their responsibility to deliver affordable housing. The ‘moderate’ return that Rothschild and his committee advocated has little appeal in our greedy society. Some international cities insist on a percentage of social housing as part of every development. Our local councils are easily pressured to relax requirements.

When the lockdown came for Melbourne’s towers and we learned about large migrant families crowded into tiny apartments, I remembered my mother describing their furniture, ‘mostly orange boxes’ and how hard it was for her father working in a sweat shop sewing men’s caps. I thought of his

wife, my grandmother who had no access to contraception and the nine children who were born.

I’m reading a book (*The Force* by Don Winslow) about the New York police and the communities centred around the ‘projects’ or tenements in Harlem; there are copies in Port Phillip libraries. It’s hair-raising stuff and readers need a strong stomach. I am reminded too that in New York one may take a tour of the Tenement Museum on the Lower East Side and see recreations of the homes and stores where migrant Jews sold pickles and herring and Italian ‘godfathers’ received petitioners.

I’m a Pom. My husband, Australian-Jewish writer Alan Collins came from Bondi. He admired Ben Chifley and often referred to him in his books – also in Port Phillip libraries. I thought I’d check out this Australian prime minister about whom I know very little, and across the decades his words ring with sincerity: *I think if you see something that’s wrong and you see an injustice that needs to be righted and you believe in it then you must follow it through to try and change it.*



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# THERE IS NOTHING LIKE A PORT

by Sheila Quairney

There's nothing quite like living in a port. That sense of boundless horizons, ships large and small from far flung places, the opportunity to leap on a boat or ferry and visit somewhere new – Port Melbourne has it.

Of course, ports nowadays are distant cousins to their 19th century counterparts – it's all about containers and trucks, electronics and robotic handlers. There are no wharves busy with spices and exotic produce, or thronging with dock workers. There's very little noise or bustle, but also very little dirt, and lots of hard hats and safety regulations.

But however sanitised and remote the 21st century dock – and container port – has become, a port is still a place where the imagination can leap.

Walk along Port Phillip Bay from St Kilda to Sandridge and just see all the reminders of, and links to, our rich maritime heritage.

There are the many and varied sculptures- including the sailor waving goodbye and the clothes and boots left by an anonymous swimmer. There are the old wharf timbers forming part of the promenade wall carved with the dates and stories of their history. There are the piers past and present, some rickety, some splendidly modern, and the ghostly pilings of the old Princes Pier reaching out into the sea. There are the lists of immigrant ships and the stories of some of those voyages, full of intrepid and hopeful settlers from the other side of the world.

And there's even the splendid Planetary Walk which was one of the first trips I had on arriving in Port Phillip – those scaled sculptures of the planets placed carefully along the seafront at appropriately galactic distances from each other. I'm sure that

idea was inspired by the sense on the Bay of infinite horizons stretching beyond our experience and our little port, a different sort of reaching out across the world.

It's not all about container ships, of course. We have – for the next 12 months or so – our lovely Spirit of Tasmania ferry, linking us to our neighbours across the Bass Strait. Even if that trip is currently out of bounds, the bright red presence of the ship alongside the pier reminds us of possibilities, of opportunities. Wherever you are on the Bay, it stands out as a landmark of Port Melbourne.

We have marinas, and yacht clubs, and the St Kilda Ferry. There's the lighthouse and the two beacons, built to guide incoming ships across the treacherous bay. And my favourite, the Westgate Punt, plodding across the Yarra River to the old port of Williamstown.

Seaside towns on their own can be quite sterile and static places – beaches and sea but not much sense of movement or purpose beyond the foreshore. Ports are not always pretty places, but they perform a vital economic function and there's always something happening.

Not everyone will share my love of ports, and ferries! Not everyone loves being on, or in, the sea, even if they like walking by it. But I believe that everyone can be inspired by what a port represents, and can understand how places like Port Melbourne have been both safe havens and the starting point of new lives and adventures.

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# NEIGHBOURS OF MINE

by Veselka Gencic

Ten years ago I lived in one of the remote suburbs of Melbourne. My street was short, with beautiful houses and many trees. All front yards were full of plants and flowers. Nearby was a little park. Just across the Park there was a little lake. Nice and peaceful.

As newcomer I was interested in everything. It was different environment from that where I lived before; different kind of trees, different kind of birds, little different people.

I was mostly interested in people.

All of my neighbours were very kind. They usually greeted me with a smile, said some polite remark about weather or just said: Hello. I liked all of them. But my next door attracted my specially attention.

They were a young couple with a two-year old child. The husband was a little bit fleshy. He usually wore simple clothes, pants and white shirt. He always greeted me with broad smile. I liked his smile.

The young woman was not an especially beautiful, but in some way she was attractive. She liked to wear a big men's shirt and leggings. Her hair was lush and beautiful, without any clasp, fluttering. She had the most beautiful eyes I have ever seen.

Every morning when the husband went for a work, a young man would come to her. Sometimes the two of them would meet at the door. They would greet heartily, exchanged a few words and went about their business. I thought he was her brother. On one occasion when we talked, I mentioned her brother but she corrected me: "He is not my brother but a friend".

The friend wore an old fashioned suit. He was slim and tall. His eyes were dreamy and he usually greeted me without smile, just wave with hand. He always looked absent-minded.

Both of them, father and friend loved the child equally and devoted their full attention and love to the little one. They took the child in the kindergarten or for a walk or just played in the back yard. The child embraced and kissed both of the men in a same way, with too much love.

To tell the truth, I have never learned who actually the real father was. And maybe they didn't know either. Sometimes I saw them all together in the park. The whole family was a bunch of happiness, the child ran from one to the other and they were embracing and laughing.

I admired my neighbours. I never found out the real truth about the essence of their relationship but I wanted to believe it was true, true deep love. Their faces showed nothing but inner peacefulness and harmony, without jealous and possession. I didn't know for how long it would last but I enjoyed in their happiness.

Watching their idyll, it was as if I had revived the heroes of the movie: "Gloomy Sunday", which left a very deep impression on me. Of course, in another environment and in other condition.

I moved to another suburb long ago. Every so often I see couple quarrelling, on street or in the shop, and I couldn't help but think about that couple, actually triple and their subtle happiness. I loved them.

Love has its mystery, its delights, its ups and downs, its beauties... a thousand stories in one word... a thousand words in one glance. Love is endless beautiful maze where only some people find the right path.



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# PIGEON FANCIER

by Warwick Lloyd

Most people associate pigeons with City statues, pigeons sitting aloft and doing what they do all over them. However, from my early teenage years, I was fascinated with these intelligent flying machines so much so I became an owner and even experimented with racing them.

I reckon I was about 14 when my parents took me to a farm in the outskirts of Melbourne owned by a mate of Dad's called Harry. I was introduced to Harry's son who bred and raced pigeons and was fascinated from that minute onwards. I even bought two of his birds and brought them home.

First step was to make a home for these feathered friends so I took a hammer to Dad's timber tool shed and ripped the face of it, replacing timber palings with wire netting. Then I repurposed the timber slats as perches where the pigeons could stand. Now I had vague knowledge if I homed these pigeons for a short while then they would in turn treat the coup as home. So, I let the birds into the sky only to fly to their home on the farm and never to be seen again.

Not to be put off I then sort to buy some local birds and I managed to find a neighbour nearby who was also into pigeons so I turned my pocket money into buying a couple of his racing pigeons. I figured if they didn't return to my place it was only a quick walk down the street to retrieve them. I also did a little homework and found there was a pigeon racing club in the very suburb and they met reasonably often in an old scout hall.

Now at this point I must commend my parents as being highly supportive of all of my plans and hobbies, and would drive

me and often attend where I needed to go. In this case it was Dad and Son off to meet the pigeon racing team – a more interesting group you'll ever meet. That is if you don't meet people very often.

Anyway, we got the general gist of how this sport was conducted and what we'd need to buy to compete. We also came home with a sandbag size sack of pigeon seed – enough to feed the Bayside population of pigeons.

I'd kept the two racing pigeons in their coup for about three weeks which I learned was the minimum time they needed to call the place home. So, on one balmy afternoon after school I came home and released them. They flew into the air and circled the coup a couple of times and then headed for the nearest electricity wire for a well-earned rest. I did know from my racing studies it was very important to keep them busy flying like strength conditioning. So out I'd trot to the street armed with a pocket full of stones to dislodge them into flight mode. To my amazement the birds circled the house a few times then returned home to our place – hurray.

It was about this time the Melbourne Show was about to be staged and I knew they had a pigeon pavilion and judging for prize winning birds. I managed to talk Mum into taking me along who was interested in seeing the country women's work with baking and quilt making. Well we arrived at the Show and first up headed to the pigeon pavilion – there was all sorts of birds ranging from racing birds to show birds such as tumblers, pouters and fantails – truly fascinating. It was so entertaining we spent the entire evening in that pavilion till closing time. Alas Mum didn't get a chance to see the Country Women's Assoc stuff.

Never mind I thought.

The next weekend I was in construction mode and decided to build a 3-metre tree style home for a couple of white fantails I had planned to buy. These were all show these babies and would be let out of the coup to strut and parade themselves up the pole. A more picturesque setting you'll never see – at least I thought. And so, I did buy some flashy fantails who looked right at home.

Then it was off to the races. One of the breeders from the racing club would take the participating birds in a wicker basket and drive a couple of hundred kilometres away and release them. I had two birds to enter and the idea was they would head home and as soon as they arrived, I would take the birds across to the nearby neighbour to have a foot ring entered into a special clock which registered the time the birds arrived home. Prize winners would be the first three home.

Well on this bright Saturday I waited excitedly and to my surprise after a few hours one of the birds flew back to the coup – I raced it across the road. I reckon an hour later the second bird arrived home and I repeated the procedure.

That night the results were advised and my first pigeon was a prize winner – it turned out to be quite a star. And for all those people who had invested in flocks of potential racers they would wonder what was the secret to success.

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# THE GARDEN IN LOCKDOWN

by Zoe M Hogg

Never have I spent so much time observing the day by day progress of the garden. It all started when a bluebottle fly with one wing was scrambling around on the leaves of a Goodenia ovata next to my garden chair. Due to lockdown I was spending a lot of time just sitting in the winter sun and enjoying the gradual growth of plants.

I marvelled at the many shades of green and the way they changed when the winter sun shone through them. Being winter, the sun was at a very low angle.

The grey green leaves of the shrub Erimophila divercata with its pale purple flowers was in striking contrast to the large bright green leaves of the Goodenia ovata with its bright yellow flowers.

The kangaroo grass has broad dark green blades which show 3 different shades of green when the sun shines through them. It also has large seed heads with wispy spikes coming from the tops.

The common tussock grass is more delicate with very fine blades finishing in a cluster of delicate tiny flowers. There are many more blades in the clump and they are yellowy green.

The water lilies were growing more leaves and the frogs were jumping among them. The frogs croak madly every time a plane goes over and even more crazily when it rains in the evenings. The female frogs live in the flower beds until they consider it time to produce tadpoles.

Cascading down the fence was the Hardenbergia violacea with its long threads of purple flowers, echoing the native violets hiding at the base of the grasses.

All was happily thriving in the garden except for the Blue bottle fly with one wing. He, (I will give him a gender but he may be a she) was slowly making his way around the large leaves of the Goodenia and trying to get to the flowers for a sip of nectar. He would take the occasional hop from one leaf to the next but having only one wing he was very unbalanced and kept falling over. A fly with both wings knocked him off a leaf but after a while he bravely made his way back up to the flowers.

I really did not expect him to survive but there he was next day in the sunshine working his way around the leaves.

He jumped onto some freesia leaves and walked to the end of one, then jumped onto the next and next until he got to a flower for nectar. Unfortunately he made a wild leap above the pond and fell in. He grabbed a waterlily leaf, and wet and dishevelled worked his way to the edge of the pond and dried off in the midday sun.

The following day he was climbing up the tussock grass and sat at the top among the tiny flowers for a long time. Eventually he decided to come down so carefully slid down the stem into the base of the plant and disappeared.

Later in the week he was seen climbing around the kangaroo grass and balancing on top of a seed head.

One afternoon he was halfway up the water tank when he took a wild leap onto the freesias below. His balance was getting very good and he was later seen hopping from one blade of grass to the next and not falling over.

He decided to have a good clean up in the sun, so sat on a large leaf carefully scratched each leg with another, then lifted his wing and scratched underneath. He finished by gently swinging a leg on each side of his body over the top of the wing and body and smoothing everything down.

Life expectation of a fly is around 3 weeks so I do not expect him to be around much longer but it has been a wonderful experience watching this brave little creature making the most of his situation.

The garden experience continues with tiny spiders swinging from one blade of grass to the next with the sun glistening on their delicate threads of web.

# BIOGRAPHIES FOR AUTHORS



**Alison Hill**

**Alison Hill** writes contemporary fiction for her own interest and amusement. She is an unpublished author with no writing credentials, and a retired anaesthetist. She lives in bayside Melbourne and is an avid observer and collector of the fascinations of daily life.



**Anna Rogalina**

**Anna Rogalina** has lived in the City of Port Phillip for more than two decades. 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 feeling and emotions.



**Aziza Khamlichi**

**Aziza Khamlichi** was born in Morocco. At the age of seventeen went to England to work as a nurse. She qualified as a Counsellor, Interpreter/Translator.

Aziza had the courage to immigrate again to Australia after retirement to join her daughter and help look after her grandson.



**Brenda Richards**

**Brenda Richards** was born in Kyabram. She 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.



**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.



**Erica Murdoch**

**Erica Murdoch** is a Melbourne based writer, tour guide and graduate of RMIT's Associate Degree in Professional Writing and Editing. Her writing has been published in The Saturday Age, Weekend Notes, The Music, RMIT Catalyst and other publications. She blogs at <https://thepelvicfloorcoffeclub.com>



**Barbara Anne Magee**

**Barbara Anne Magee** was born in Launceston, and studied foreign languages and literature 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.



**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 mental fabrication company. Opportunity for Bob to be involved in the building trade followed and presented him the chance to travel overseas. 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.



**Bob Scheffer**

**Bob Scheffer** moved from the country to St Kilda 60 years ago to work at GMH, first as a tradesman, then as an Illustrator. Later on he worked at the Sacred Heart Mission until his retirement. Bob is a keen painter, drummer and bird watcher, he also enjoys going fishing.



**Geoff Barkla**

**Geoff Barkla** is 75 years old, married with 3 sons, and a resident of the City of Port Phillip for over 20 years. He retired from full time work in 1999 and his hobbies include "charitable" works, movies, theatre, TV, house and garden renovations, and staying alive (especially now!).



**Graham Lewis Fricke**

**Graham Lewis Fricke**, born 5 December 1935. A.L.C.M, LL.B. (Melbourne); Dip. Crim. (Melbourne); LL. M. (Univ of Pennsylvania). Current residence: 46 Southey Street Elwood. Marriage 1, Judith Rushton, 1959; Marriage 2, Toni Ladanyi, 1990. County Court judge, 1983-95. Author of 10 non-fiction books, and reviews in Law Institute Journal.



**Grant Aldous**

A retired journalist, **Grant Aldous** lives in Port Melbourne.





**Janet R. Gardner RN**

**Janet R. Gardner RN, Dip.Nsg., B.App.Sci. (Ed), M.H.Sci., Kellogg Fellow, PhD.** Janet is a 73 year old retired nurse who arrived in Australia in 1968. Her very successful nursing career was tragically cut short due to a workplace injury. In 2003 she was awarded a PhD from Monash for her thesis on chronic pain, something that Janet continues to live with.



**Janine Mifsud**

**Janine Mifsud** is a member of U3A Port Phillip Writing Group. Her varied career paths include: Secondary School Teacher; Real Estate Consultant; Manager of Programs for Youth at Risk and Long Term Unemployed; Manager of Psycho-Social Rehabilitation Programs for People with Mental Illness; part owner and Director of a Travel Agency.



**Inge Kulmanis**

**Inge Kulmanis** was born and educated in Switzerland. Now retired she still loves to write and has ten Grandchildren and four Great Grandchildren. She loves Port Phillip's Social Inclusion, because it gives her the opportunity to go out and also attend courses. Port Phillip also provides the community bus and daylinks.



**Lois Best**

**Lois Best** discovered the joys of Port Phillip some years ago when visiting her daughter and granddaughters here. She seems to have settled, still teaching part-time and volunteering at U3A. Originally from WA, via many 'homes' in Australia and abroad, maybe this is the end of her wandering lifestyle. She likes the people, the 'village' feel and the fact that 2020 has created an even more cohesive community.



**Lola McHarg**

**Lola McHarg** is St Kilda born. Her maternal grandfather an English Remittance man. Her grossvater a Czechoslovakian musician. This grandfather taught Lola to play dominoes and chess. Lola spent time in a feminist graffiti gang. Hopeless with a spray can but with a great "lead foot" she drove the getaway van. Today she leads a quiet life in Balaclava.

**MHVD**

**MHVD**, having been brought up in a loving family and been taught to respect others. I went on to travel and work extensively overseas furthering my respect and appreciation of others. I now have a loving and caring family myself. A day came in my life when I was confronted with almost ending another's life which has haunted me since as life is so precious.



**Julie Butcher**

**Julie Butcher** has lived in Port Phillip since 1999. She lives with her husband Marcel, and their dachshund Otto. She reads widely and enjoys the test of writing non-fiction. During "normal times" she would be working as a volunteer for 'The Biography Program: Beyond Words' and playing golf.



**Kerrie Cross**

**Kerrie Cross**, now retired, trained as a social worker. She initially worked in country Victoria developing community programs in the field of child abuse and neglect. She later had a long career as a senior administrator in community and health services in country Victoria, Melbourne and the State of Qatar.



**Liliana Siani**

**Liliana Siani** as a young girl migrated from Italy to Australia, worked as a clerk at the State Audit Office (top of Collins Street now a museum) for seven years. In the year 1979 returned to Italy (Rome) and worked as a bookkeeper and secretary for eighteen years 1981-1999 in FAO United Nations. Hobbies are: Travelling, reading in general with an eye to history and archaeology.



**Maggie Moran**

**Maggie Moran** lives in Elwood but is known to frequent Ciccolina's with her overseas buddies. Country born and convent educated, she is wife, mother and grandmother. And she is teacher, librarian, house renovator, artist, book reader and friend to many. And perhaps much more!



**Marilynn Fahey**

**Marilynn Fahey** lives today on the street where she was born. A happy circumstance which she hopes will continue for many years to come as her lifestyle in the City of Port Phillip is hard to beat. A previous entrant to the competition Marilyn gains great pleasure trawling through her memories and hopes the readers enjoy them too.



**Marygrace Levakis**

**Marygrace Levakis.** Call it poetry. Call it musings. Call it performance. She, Marygrace, enjoys doing it and entertaining others. Now at 72 years young, she has been writing and performing since the age of 21.



**Megan Jones**

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



**Nadine Watson**

**Nadine Watson** was born in Belgium after WW2 and her native language is French.

She has been living in Melbourne for 50 years and is now a freelance translator after having had a career in education for over 20 years. She is married and has two adult children and 5 grandchildren.



**Neville F P Smith**

**Neville F P Smith**, Nev has transitioned thru life from active in sports, to a professional sport and fitness coach, to a masseur, to a professional acro dancer, to a show business promoter and now to writing.



**Ros Collins**

**Ros Collins** is the writer of two books, *Solly's girl* (2015) and *Rosa: memories with licence* (Hybrid Publishers, 2019). She is a professional librarian and was director of the Makor Jewish Library. Ros is currently working on a new book based on characters from Alan's 19th century ancestors.

Photographed by Simon Schluter



**Roslyn Jones**

**Roslyn (Rozzi) Jones** has resided in Port Melbourne for over two years and in this COVID-19 year she is very grateful to be there! Born and raised in Ripponlea she loves the area and has made many friends. This is her second year entering these awards.



**Sheila Quairney**

**Sheila Quairney** moved to Australia from the UK in 2018 to be with her partner, Brian. She lives in Port Melbourne and is happily retired. Her interests include singing, walking and grappling with cryptic crosswords. She runs relaxation classes, and attends a creative writing course, at U3APP.



**Nicholas Cecic**

**Nicholas Cecic**, a retired primary school teacher and social worker, lives in salubrious Elwood where the blue waters of the bay echo the beauty of the Dalmatian Coast from whence his ancestors came.



**Patricia Thornton**

**Patricia Thornton**, a resident of St Kilda, the best place to be. The year 2020 has been a dreary and anxious one for all of us but unfortunately not easy for Victorians. First the dreadful bushfires and now Covid19. She find herself repeating the old saying in her head, "Everything will be alright in the end. And if it's not alright it's not the end." So hopefully we will find our new normal soon.



**Roderick Waller**

**Roderick Waller** was born in Yorkshire in 1948, trained as an Agricultural Economist, and is divorced with 3 children. He was diagnosed with alcoholism in 1984. His interests are nature, farming, writing, play 5-string Banjo and he began writing poems and short stories in 1996, unpublished. Member of Roomers Writing Group since 2016.



**Veselka Gencic**

**Veselka Gencic** was born in 1937. She graduated with a Bachelor's 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.



**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 of which this entry is one.



**Zoe M Hogg**

**Zoe Hogg** lives in Middle Park is a keen observer of nature, grew up in England with a mother who took her to the countryside to document and observe plants and the creatures around us. Zoe is a member of Earthcare St Kilda and ran the penguin research team for many years. She is also a friend of Westgate Park. Her garden is a very small pocket of local indigenous plants that provide a haven for the local frogs, skinks and passing birdlife.

## VALE LESLEY GREAGG



L to R: Sherridan Green, Lesley Greagg, Laura Cattapan 2016

Over the last 10 years Sherridan Green Community Development and Liaison Officer has worked closely with Lesley Greagg to deliver the Seniors Festival Writer Awards and would like to say "Thank you Lesley! It has been a pleasure".



