

PORT PHILLIP WRITES 2024



Stories and Poems

Gathered from the City of Port Phillip
Seniors' Writing Awards 2024



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Stories and Poems

Port Phillip Writes Stories and Poems celebrating 20 years of publication



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

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INTRODUCTION

by Wendy Priddle

Chair Older Persons Advisory Committee

It is with great pleasure I welcome you to the 2024 edition of *Port Phillip Writes*, showcasing Port Phillip's talented over 55's who submit their best pieces of poetry, fiction or non-fiction prose. It is a joy to celebrate the writers and their written works at the Port Phillip's Seniors Writing Awards, and we thank this year's 53 contributors for sharing their stories, perspectives and lived experience with us.

We older residents make up almost 20% of Port Phillip's population. The variety of stories and poems reflect the diversity of our community and this anthology is a heartfelt tribute to their creativity and wisdom.

Judging the awards is a big task and is done with the anonymity of the writer, so it is always exciting, once the decisions have been made, to discover the writers who have been awarded.

This year's judges were again Carmel Shute, co-founder and co-convenor of 'Sisters in Crime' Australia, Lois Best, past contributor to the publication and avid reader, writer and judge, and Nancy Corbett, poetry teacher at U3A and published novelist and creative writing educator (full biographies can be found on page 109). We thank them for their time, generosity and considered thoughts. We would also like to thank the judges for their editorial support for the publication.

Port Phillip Writes is funded by the City of Port Phillip. The continued support of this initiative reflects the value Council sees in sharing its older residents' creativity and lived experience.

Wendy Priddle
Chair Older Persons Advisory Committee

Fiction

IT MUST BE TIME FOR A CHANGE

By Lyn Allen

Shire Council CEO 'Chris', has been relentless towards me for 12 months, threatening, bullying, undermining, and now finally locking me in his office. 'Chris' the privileged white overweight, balding, middle aged man, who would be unemployable in the "real world". And now here we are again, both locked in his tiny, windowless, hot stinking office, whilst he berates me over and over again. As usual, I remained my calm self even when he hurls my employee file towards my head, yelling at me "you have crossed the line". Today this has now added to the build-up of the fractures of my mind and soul. He has finally broken me, and I am very sad.

Yes, I have become entrenched with the community of this island; I couldn't help myself. Working hard, caring for the elders, the younger residents with physical and intellectual disabilities. This unique community brings joy to my heart, love and laughter. Every day is a constant surprise; it is an absolute roller coaster ride of wondering what comes next.

Why has it come to this? Oh, I get it! On my one day off I would borrow the church van, make a picnic of damper, corned beef sandwiches, accompanied with water, cordial, milk, tea leaves and a billy. Taking the elders out to their country was the highlight of the week for me and perhaps for them also, freeing them for a few hours from the confines of what I would loosely term an Aged Care home.

Oh, the happiness it would bring I would see on their faces as I rolled up through the gates, tooting the horn of the van, whilst singing along to some random country and western song. I'm greeted with lots of chatter, smiles and excitement. We load everyone into the van, shuffling them around so the men and women aren't fighting or screaming at each other, and all passengers are comfy. Off we go on our once-a-week

road trip, whether it be out bush under the sheoaks, a tin shack outstation, the salt pans, the base of the majestic bright orange cliffs, the mangroves, the river, the beach or under a tamarind tree. Who cares? We are free for a few precious hours. Depending on where we end up, the mob are always keen to connect with their country, as they look to hunt and gather. They may swirl a handline to fish, toss a spear in search of mud crabs, gather native seasonal fruits, strip bark off trees to weave into dancers' hats, dig for fresh spring water at the base of the cliffs, whatever mother earth offers. We make a small fire for the billy tea, set out the rugs, damper and sandwiches. We sit in silence contemplating, taking in this magnificent country, their country, their land. None of us need to talk, as their country is talking to us.

This is my last trip, but it is not goodbye. I cannot say goodbye, as I shall shed endless tears. The island, the people, shall always remain deep inside my heart. Yet finally I have been broken by that white man.

It must be time for a change.

THE OUTER CIRCLE

By Peter Barry

Jennifer loved the joy and freedom of being alone picking blackberries on a sunny afternoon. It was a blessing to be nine years old and away from the ritual chanting and gongs and sheer hard work at the manse. The berry bushes were located on a steep slope, against the tall mesh fence surrounding the estate. Her basket was half full and there were dark stains on her overalls and around her mouth from sampling the berries, so ripe and sweet. Perfect for making jam.

Suddenly she saw a movement. A rabbit has been startled. It scuttled under the thorny brambles but appeared a few seconds later, on the other side of the fence, racing towards the forest. Jennifer was astounded. Nothing could pass through the fence. It was the secure outer limit of her world. She has only been outside the barrier fence once and that was only after she gashed her leg deeply three years ago and needed stitches.

She picked up a sturdy stick and explored carefully behind the brambles, pushing the thorny strands away from the mesh fence. She unveiled a large gap dug under the wire. It had probably been excavated by an adult wombat, she surmised. Jennifer was filled with a feeling of excitement tinged with fear. Should she tell one of the three guardians about her finding? More importantly, should she tell Broderick? She knew she should, but it was her discovery and her secret.

Then she heard that strange sound that she had detected on other occasions coming from that section of the forest, the eldritch melody wavering on the slight wind. For some reason the sequence of notes aroused feelings of yearning and loss, of hope and despair. She listened spellbound. It seemed like an invisible silken cord was pulling her towards the source.

As if in a trance she lay on her back and wriggled under the fence and strode through the shrubbery to the forest edge. She followed the lure of the sound until she came to a clearing. In the centre was an old house, small but neat. On the veranda sat an old man with a short white beard. He had blue twinkling eyes. He was using a sort of hacksaw to extract sound from a dark polished wooden box shaped rather like a woman. The box, propped on its metal rod, made those beautiful noises that filled Jennifer with joy and sadness.

At the old man's feet lay an old border collie; its snout resting between its front paws. Its eyes were opaque, its fur streaked with grey. Jennifer sat quietly behind a bush, entranced. Suddenly, the dog growled and stood up unsteadily and moved to the edge of the veranda, sniffing the air. The man stopped making the alluring sounds and looked out. He seemed to stare straight at Jennifer but did not address her. Rather he talked to the dog in a very relaxed voice saying, "I think it's time for some cake and lemonade. What do you think, Blackie?" He went into the house while Blackie stared out, unseeing but alert. A few minutes later, the man returned with a tray with two glasses of lemonade, two slices of lemon cake and two dog biscuits. He put the tray on a small table and spoke gently towards where Jennifer was attempting to hide. "If you would like some cake and lemonade, I would love to share it with you."

Jennifer emerged from behind the bush and tentatively approached the steps leading up to the veranda. "You can sit on the top step if you like. The dog won't hurt you. I'm all Bach and he's no bite." He gave a little guffaw and smiled at the girl. Then he leant down and gave her the lemonade and a bit of cake on a saucer.

THE OUTER CIRCLE (CONT.)

By Peter Barry

"My name is Damian," he said, "and this is my cello. I call her Princess."

They did not speak while they ate and drank. Jennifer stared at him shyly. Is this what it would be like to have a grandfather, she thought. She had been taught by Broderick that the outside world was full of black demons with red eyes. These godless creatures would snatch her soul and bite into her veins to inject the curse of non-belief. This man with his dancing blue eyes was clearly no demon. She felt so totally comfortable in his presence. She had no fear of him or his intentions. "Would you like me to play Princess some more?" Jennifer nodded. Damian sat down and pulled his cello towards him. He tightened the bow and started playing a gentle lullaby. It was so beautiful and soothing: mellow and restful. Jennifer sat facing the forest and let the music wash over her.

When the piece ended, Damian put down his bow. "I think it's time for you to go home now. Do you know your way back? I can come with you if you like." Jennifer nodded. "I'd like you to come. Can Blackie come too?" They walked together along the trampled path back to the forest edge. "I got out through that hole over there." She pointed at the breach in the fence. Damian asked, "Do you like living in that Commune?". Jennifer just shrugged her shoulders and said, "I'd better go otherwise I will get a thrashing from Broderick." Then she added, "Could I come another time to listen to Princess?" "Any time, dear girl, any time. Perhaps I will see you next week?" Jennifer looked dubious. "Maybe. I will try though. It was lovely and you're very nice."

Damian was looking forward to seeing Jennifer in all her shyness and wide-eyed wonderment the following Saturday. She did not show up. On Sunday, he took Blackie for a walk to check the gap in the fence. It has been solidly repaired. He never saw her again.

MY WORST NIGHTMARE

By Yvonne Bell

"So why did I think this was a good idea?"

One last thought before my mind mentally withdraws to a holding pattern of measured breaths and surreptitious swallows. In my leather sneakers ten little toes curl with aching precision.

My eyes follow her every movement as she circles. Instruments collected and laid in a neat row, the dentist flashes me a smile before masking up. I note the clenched jaw, and the frown lines.

She seems to be smaller, her hands more delicate as they hold that large silver syringe.

My toes curl again as the dentist probes my mouth with the needle. The painful prelude to her task today.

I pray she does strength training, and imagine her chinning the bar at the local gym.

With my yawning jaw open to an almost impossible angle, the dentist selects her instrument of torture and determinedly lowers it into my mouth. Her hand barely spans the levers, and I mentally groan.

With a firm crunching she grasps the offending tooth, then starts a head rocking series of maneuvers. It lasts for an eternity and I blink determinedly as tears form. A hurried swallow a gasp of breath. Lots of regret both for myself and the offending tooth. Oh my!

Next comes the repositioning of her feet, and the realignment of her body as she fights for better leverage. A sigh escapes her lips. The dental nurse flickers her eyes between my mouth and the dentist's glistening forehead. A bead of sweat gathers momentum and rolls into her arched brow.

I treasure the distraction...until she starts again.

But my head moves and the offending tooth does not.

In my mind's eye I see the crow bar I use to lever tree stumps from the earth, complete with a thunder like crack when the final root suddenly gives way.

Easy to tell I'm a farmer, and I really think this dentist needs a powerful miniature tractor with a good winch. I imagine it neatly parked in the drawer labelled 'Last Resort'.

I am given a quick reprieve as the search for another sized dental implement is conducted. Then back to work, her muscles flexed, we start anew. This time the nervous assistant is clamping my head with her hands and bust. I wonder if she has had a 'working with children' check?

Nothing, absolutely no result ... then slowly a buildup of faint crunching and tearing deep within my skull. The sound changes tone, the gloved grip tightens and turns incrementally. Then a hesitant rocking and suddenly the tooth releases from the gum.

But my dentist is still applying full pressure, her muscles fatigued and locking with the mammoth effort. The pliers rapidly fly from my mouth with the tooth held aloft, but smash into my front teeth as they exit. A flurry of gasps occur, and I feel a sizeable chunk of tooth fall onto my flattened tongue.

I gingerly extend it to the dental nurse and she scoops up the offending piece.

My tongue gently probes the sharpness of my smashed front tooth, and I feel the unexpected ire of the shocked and embarrassed dentist.

MY WORST NIGHTMARE (CONT.)

By Yvonne Bell

Even I am embarrassed for her. She stares pointedly at the assistant, her nose flaring, not wanting to make eye contact with me. Time stands still. No one breathes. It is all downhill from here.

A faint chiming pierces my stunned brain and I dissolve with a confusion of relief and laughter as my alarm clock rings ... and yes, here I am in my own comfortable bed all sweaty, tense and breathless. A tentative check reveal my two intact front teeth and no extraction.

When my thumping heart starts to finally calm and my breath returns to normal, I decide to send a brief email cancelling my dental appointment for tomorrow.

LAST DRINK

By Wendy Butler

She sat at the window watching the evening invading the village. There's nothing to see at this time. The neighbours she can glimpse from her vantage point are now inside their houses cooking meals and watching TV.

She should be cooking herself; the doctors have told her it's essential that she reach nine stone. If she doesn't, she'll be back in hospital. But she doesn't give a rats. She's not hungry and she hates cooking. Jimmy's not round today so there's no incentive to cook though the food's there.

She could switch on the telly. It's something to do to help pass the interminable night. She remembers the old times when she first came to the village 17 years ago, when everyone knew each other, when every night they all went to the Post Office Hotel round the corner and drank and laughed together. What fun it was. Now she doesn't know half the people here and the hotel has gone yuppy and the locals aren't welcome.

Thinking about the hotel makes her think about the bottle in the fridge. She sent Ray across the road to buy it. Just knowing that it's there makes her feel better. Having no drinks in the place was scary. It was the first time she'd been without a bottle for as long as she can remember. The doctor says it's the drink which has ruined her oesophagus, that a drink is a death warrant – but just one, she doesn't give a rat's arse if she dies.

PRIVILEGED REVELATIONS

By Ieta D'Costa

"To say no one had mentioned it before, is not totally accurate. Of course, I am aware of it-but that is simply not who I am..."

She had been doing the job for 12 years and knew it backwards. All of it that is, except for the latest online booking and filing system. She could have told them it was a ridiculous waste of time and money. The system cost \$80,000 and to date, untold hours spent reloading and sorting through the files that landed in hitherto unknown hieroglyphics. It was quite a task re-attaching renovation files, with the correct correspondence. For an Architect firm that prided itself on friendly, professional and efficient innovation, the new system seemed to have none of those features. The directors and managers searched and swore clicking and double clicking on innumerable documents, muttering that she should fix the mess. With her most contemplative, scathing look, she informed them that the next time the Project manager of the new \$80,000 system arrived, she would be sure to pass on their requests.

But that's a digression. Essentially, she considered she did an excellent job for an average wage. She was reasonable, rational and efficient. So, when Susan Foster rolled up last week, agitated and babbling incoherently, she did what she always did in these trying circumstances. She raised her eyebrows and examined the woman.

"Do you have an appointment, Ms ...?"

Susan (she found out the name later) slapped a paper on the desk between them.

"An appointment! That'll be right. And another few hundred dollars out the window. I've had it! I want my money back. I want my house as it was before you lot got your bloody hands on it! This invoice \$20,000, in total!! You think I'm a bloody bank?"

Susan's voice had risen several notches. The directors, managers and their hench people were stirring in delicious anticipation of a free theatrical spectacle. She was prepared. You don't last in this job 12 years without being able to deal with this type of riff raff.

"Madam," she said very coldly and slowly, "What is the name of the person you wish to speak to?"

Susan Foster's eyes bulged.

"I have been unjustly treated -"

"Unjustly."

"What?"

"The word is unjustly. However, I don't think you are using it appropriately."

"I know my rights! You can't treat me like this!"

She inclined her head. "Madam," she said, her voice icy, "what is it you want?"

"I want to be heard! I am sick of this run around. I called several times, been on hold for ages, and each and every time, I am told someone will get back to me at a suitable time and they haven't. Now I have this huge, huge, bill, for work that didn't even get finished! \$20,000!! The quote was \$5,000! Just 8 months ago! Even Centrelink says it looks like I got stitched up."

"Ah." She paused. "Centrelink." She dipped the word generously in treacle. Paused again.

"Madam." Steel of authority encased that word completely. "Based upon the stated sum, that being the only identifying factor I have at present, I recall such a debt notice was handed to the collectors 2 weeks ago. This occurred after several communications, via the telephone, email and most recently, the post. That's the policy. Housing

commission or not. You didn't pay your bill, therefore you accrued further debt, including the debt collectors fee."

"But- there's a mistake!"

"That's what they all say".

Susan Foster's face flushed. "They all say it do they? We are people, just like you! No! better than you. No one I know speaks to another person like you do! Correcting my words! And the way you say it, 'Centrelink, Housing commission'! I bought that little flat myself. A single mum with 3 kids and I did that! All I wanted was a wall knocked down so the dining and kitchen could be one, and plaster board dividing the big bedroom, so my daughter has a space from her brothers. That's not \$20,000! There's been a terrible mistake -"

"On that we concur. The error is on your part. Failure to pay. Failure to communicate."

Susan's face crumpled. She tried to speak. Failure. The word bounced around her head. She grasped the edge of the counter.

"Ma'am," a quiet voice reached her through intense fog. "Please come with me, I think the mistake is on our part ..."

Excerpt of disciplinary hearing 16 weeks later:

"To say no one had mentioned it before, is not totally accurate. Of course, I am aware of it-but that is simply not who I am.

Of course I have heard of racism. However, your suggestion that racism is evident in behaviours when you clearly mean my behaviour, is groundless. As to policies, may I remind you I am a mere secretary. I do not create policies. I do my job.

You say that they ... yes, ok, that Aboriginal people confront racism daily ... you may be correct. I have no way of knowing. I am not Aboriginal. I don't know if a person is Aboriginal or not. I treat everyone the same. I am certainly not racist. The fact is that despite several communications from the office over the specified time, there is no documentation of Ms Foster's reply. As per company policy, once bills remain unpaid for a month after the written warning, debt collectors were contacted.

Well yes. I do understand now, that in this particular instance, there was a software error which apparently had incorrect contact information for this person. I was completely unaware of that on the day in question.

Yes, I suppose it is possible that the calls that Ms Foster claims to have made to the office were entered into a different file. I cannot be held responsible for faulty technology. Rules apply to everyone. May I say however, I could see it coming. That system is a disaster."

JOIE DE VIVRE

By Helen Devereux

Enid Forbes Davis had lived an enviable life. Born into money, married for love; a carefree philanthropist, living in exotic locations all around the world. A life infused with beauty, culture and inspiration.

Everything was perfect until Claude decided to make an early departure leaving her widowed at 65. It was immediately after the funeral her son James moved back from Switzerland with his delightful wife Maddy.

"We are happy to be back in Melbourne mum", James told her, but she suspected they had only made the move for her.

For the next 16 years, she motivated herself to rise and shine daily with charity work. She enjoyed sponsoring children through UNICEF and had until a few years ago, visited developing countries to see schools built and wells dug.

In her spare time, she entertained friends and when bored, she tweaked the garden where the gardener had missed the odd snip or two.

Every Sunday without fail, James and Maddy came for lunch. Enid would plan the feast days in advance and meticulously ensure every garnish was precisely placed.

She had noticed after her 82nd birthday, James started hinting at the prospect of aged care. At first it was the odd brochure tossed on the sideboard saying he had happened across it. As each week passed, the pile grew, threatening to topple with the slightest breeze through an open window.

It was several months before he tackled a full-on conversation.

"Mum, there are some fabulous care places. With your substantial funds you can have the absolute best of everything. I only mention it because we worry about you being on your own."

Enid smiled warmly. "Thank you darling, I'll think about it. Now, I've made a dessert you will absolutely love."

End of conversation.

Just before Labour Day when shopping at South Melbourne market, Enid ran into Bruce, a good friend of James's. After a coffee and long chat, Enid returned home feeling quite burdened. Bruce had not intended any upset on Enid's part; he had quite innocently mentioned it was a shame James was not going to take up the offer of lecturing at the Sorbonne Université of Paris during the European summer. Enid hadn't wanted to appear ignorant of her son's plans he had obviously neglected to tell her about.

But why?

The more she thought about it, the clearer it became. His recent urging for her to consider aged care. The pile of brochures growing weekly was the obvious indicator, but more than that, a sadness lingered behind his eyes every time she dismissed him with some topic changing ploy.

The following Sunday, James added another brochure to the pile.

"Are you looking at them mum", he asked quietly, "please do". And then she saw the sadness, nakedly exposed.

Enid grappled with her feelings for several days before making a call and organising a time to meet a consultant.

She sat across from a handsome middle aged man with kind eyes and a comforting tone. Open across the desk were several brochures, with colourful photos and small print.

"This option," he added after a lengthy conversation, "could be perfect. The main room is large, two three seater couches and a dining table that seats eight. There are two

bedrooms, one with a king size bed. You have a private balcony . . . undercover that's a bonus, and of course your own bathroom."

Enid nodded.

"When you go top of the range as you are," he continued, "you really do get a very special room and facilities. And," he added, "every meal is a three course a la carte menu and . . ." he was going to embellish the topic when Enid raised her hand.

"Say no more. It is a yes. So what is available?"

He directed her gaze to one of the brochures. "This is probably the earliest date."

"Where do I sign?"

Enid returned home feeling lighter, even freer. She now had lots of organising to do and not a lot of time to do it in. A few days later she pulled out three large suitcases and selected only her favourite clothes. She spoke to the gardener and pool man and her neighbours. In fact she spoke to lots of people but decided not to announce her plans to James and Maddy until a little closer to the time.

The next Sunday James arrived sans brochure. She imagined he was thinking 'why bother'. Just another piece of glossy paper for the pile. She heard him release a defeated sigh.

Enid made the most delicious lunch, preparing all of their favourites.

On leaving she hugged them both a little longer than usual. "I love you two so much."

Enid contemplated telling James over the phone or via email. She opted for the phone.

When he didn't answer, she left a long voice message.

Hello darlings. It's just me.

Well, I've got news for you. Firstly, just letting you know we won't be doing lunch this Sunday.

I'm actually sitting in my new abode. Absolutely beautiful. Big bedrooms, living room, huge balcony and the most amazing views ... just fabulous.

What can I say. I'm being selfish I know, but I'm afraid darlings, I want to live my life my way, just as I hope you two will live your lives ... your way.

Life's too short to worry about an old fogey like me.

Better go ... I'm actually in Singapore and my butler just told me our ship departs in an hour ... I'm still on Melbourne time. (She laughed). We cruise from here all over Asia for about six weeks before heading to the Mediterranean and a further four weeks of cruising. Then taking the Simplon-Orient-Express to Paris, before heading to New York.

One day I'll do the aged care thing, but that day is not today.

Love you.

Oh ... and our next lunch will be in Paris, if you can spare a moment from the Sorbonne.

Find joy in everything my darlings, joie de vivre.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND

By Sandy Dobson

The friend request was a shock, I hadn't heard from her for about 30 years, I think, not since High School. She had a different surname, married I assumed, but I could still recognise her from her photo. She looked good for her age (45), same as me, but I think I look older. She is blond now, I'm still brown going grey.

The message was breezy, 'Hi, how amazing to find you! Hope you are going well. It would be lovely to catch up after all this time ...' etc. I hesitated before accepting the request, did I really want her in my life again? Not that I disliked her or anything, but we were never that close at school, just in the same friendship group. But I was curious, so I confirmed her request.

Her feed was full of photos of two dalmatians, a boat, an older man who must be her husband, overseas holidays. I didn't post much myself, just occasionally my own dog (a mixed mutt) and being at the football if the mighty Cats won.

Soon enough, she invited me out for lunch at a café on the beach near where she lived in Albert Park. I accepted, again mainly out of curiosity, even though it was a long train trip and then a tram. So I was there very early, plenty of time to check out the café and realise I was not at all dressed right. I hurried back to the main street; luckily there were a few Op Shops. I chose a large one; a young girl was hanging up dresses. I saw one I liked the look of and tried it on. It was black, filmy, floaty with pink and purple flowers and green leaves. The label had been cut out. It fitted perfectly and I honestly looked amazing! Next, I found some nude sandals in my size, only a bit worn. There was jewellery there but even I could see it looked cheap, and the dress didn't really need it.

I asked if I could wear the stuff I bought. They were surprised; I suppose people don't usually do that. Across the road was a Post Office, so I posted my clothes back home to myself to avoid carrying an Op Shop bag to lunch. I still had some time so went into a chemist and finished my look with makeup samples and a spray of the most expensive perfume they had. I hadn't worn make up for years; I'd forgotten what a difference it can make.

I arrived back at the café just in time. It was an attractive place, painted white, fairy lights inside and tables under umbrellas out the back, actually sitting on the sand. I felt confident as I walked in, like I fitted in now. She was already there, at a corner table. We waved, hugged each other. It actually was quite amazing to see someone after 30 years. Up close, she did have some wrinkles but was wearing lots of makeup.

She admired my dress, said she loved their stuff but wasn't it very expensive? I noticed that she now had a little bit of a posh accent. I just smiled. I remembered that money had always been a big thing for her.

The waitress brought menus over, some things I'd never heard of. What the hell was conchigli?

My friend ordered the salmon, I chose the fish and chips. She ordered a glass of rosé and so did I. The drinks were brought quickly; I'd never had rosé before. It tasted sour at first but then I got used to it.

We made small talk, chatted a bit about our old school friends. Neither of us were in touch with any of them anymore.

The food arrived, which actually WAS delicious, though quite expensive for the portion size. She ordered another drink so I did as well, and it tasted nice this time.

It was quite pleasant sitting there in the shade of the huge black umbrella, but I felt she was tense.

'So why did you really want to catch up?' I asked.

There was a pause, and then she asked how my brother Brendan was. I was surprised, said I didn't know she knew him. She admitted that she didn't.

She continued, 'I heard he went to jail for armed robbery or something?' I just nodded.

And THEN she said, to be honest, she was in a jam. In fact she was in danger, and needed a gun and thought Brendan might have contacts. She didn't have anyone else to ask, had no one to turn to.

I didn't believe a word of it, she wasn't a very good actress. Her words didn't ring true, she didn't seem desperate or scared. Whatever she wanted a gun for was not my problem. Maybe she wanted to knock off her rich husband?

I said sorry, but I wasn't in touch with Brendan anymore, he had made some bad choices in his life and I didn't trust him. Last I heard he was in Perth, and that was some 20 years ago.

We sat in silence, which became awkward. Then she asked, 'So you couldn't get in touch with him? I'm happy to pay whatever it would cost.' I just smiled and said no.

She looked disappointed. I think she was used to getting her own way, and using money to make sure she did.

I was annoyed. I finished my drink and said I had to get going. She replied of course, it was lovely to see me, we should do it again.

On the train back home, I realised I was going to be a bit late but Brendan wouldn't mind. I was sure he would tease me about the way I was dressed.

I wondered how long it would take for my posted clothes to arrive home.

MY NAME IS SAM

By Trevor Donohue

I know that dogs cannot talk or understand the true meaning of commands, but these are my thoughts. Possibly it is a dream that I am having.

I am a fine-looking dog; everyone assures me of that. I am friendly and in contradiction to my breed I love cats and small dogs. I am a Rottweiler. I may look fierce but that is my heritage. I was bred from a line of dogs trained to look fearsome. I once was, but things change if you are lucky. I was lucky. Not from the start. In my early puppy days, that is from when I can remember, my life was joyless. I was owned. That is I had an owner. But I was a free spirit and did not understand the way of the dog and human world. There was no cruelty in my upbringing, merely a lack of understanding of my needs.

In the early days I was given affection. This was replaced by inertia and neglect and finally intolerance. Dogs must live in a different world than my human masters and it was not recognized. As I grew larger it became a world that I did not fit into. I became big and powerful; I was limited in my space and environment. This was not recognized.

I was fed on scraps, and I was incarcerated in a barren place. A concrete backyard, without a view, nothing to stimulate my senses and I became surly. In my own way I became angry. I knew that there was more. Of what I did not know!

I viewed the world with suspicion. I growled at strangers, now I was a 'bad dog'. I paced endlessly. I resented other dogs with more freedom. I could hear them; I could smell them. But there was never any contact. My anger increased. But with my anger there was sadness. I did not want to become this dog. I did not want to raise my hackles and growl at strangers. There was something inside me that knew something. What if I were to bite

someone? It would be the end of me. Then everything changed.

I knew that my owners were unsure of me. We canines can smell fear.

Then he came.

This stranger who I disrespected.

Who approached me.

I showed a glint of teeth.

I gave a low growl.

Dog 2

His hand reached out and grabbed my snout. His fingers held my jaws closed. How silly was this. His fingers could not restrain me and in a second, I could bite and possibly attack him. I did nothing. This was something that would soon be my way. I could bite and I would bite. He turned his back to me and walked away.

Several days later he came back. With a lead attached he placed me in his car. I was not muzzled or restrained. I enjoyed the freedom of the car. I could bark and lunge at the half open window and threaten people on bicycles and when we stopped at red lights, I showed my resentment and anger towards bystanders.

He gave no reassuring words or commands.

What sort of a fool was this? Did he not see my potential for violence?

When we stopped, still on the lead I was led inside. There I was confronted by two cats. Neither showed fear, only curiosity. Surely this was a risk he had taken. Curiously I like cats, sometimes they had been my only companions. In the cold dark hours they had prowled around me showing complete indifference.

I was fed, something nice, something filling. Something I did not taste as it quickly disappeared down my throat. It was a habit that I never really changed. Food was to be quickly devoured. Just in case it was snatched away from me.

I was as usual put out the back of the house. But there was a warm blanket. The cats remained inside. In all of this time my new owner or carer did not try to communicate with me.

That was alright with me. I would soon show him who was boss. Over the next few days there were changes. We would walk, this time I was restrained by a steel choker collar and a sturdy lead. These walks opened up a whole new world. There were smells, how wonderful, I would roll in the lavender and smell the roses and scent where other dogs had left their traces.

Dog 3

People were scared of me. I smelt their fear and I would often lunge at them. The chain collar was hardly a deterrent. I am powerful and my neck hardly felt the restriction.

I made many enemies. I did not know it, but my new owner was losing patience with me. The neighbours threatened him, and he was told to get rid of me or they would call the police. I did not know this, nor did I care. Something had to change.

It did, we went to what is called a dog beach. Here dogs have their freedom and can run unrestricted in this area. I was not. I could only sit and watch. I was baffled, they ran free. They did not fight, (only occasionally) but I was content to sit and watch this strange behaviour.

Then there was the water.

It was strange. It was endless.

It tasted different from any water I had tasted.

On the lead I was allowed to walk in the water. I drank the water. It was unpleasant but to this day I cannot resist drinking it. I froth at the mouth, and it makes me look fearsome. Things began to change.

Sometimes I would be physically dragged out the back. But I persevered with him. I knew he would relent. One night he became tired of this and let me sleep inside. I am a good sleeper, and the cats were happy with me being in the house.

THE FRACTURED CITY

By Jane Grano

Done! The signature on the dotted line I recognised as mine yet not mine. Sandra would not have been fooled. The angular compressed letters, upright to the point of pedantry; indicative of a repressed personality, she said. Does our signature really give that much away? I doubt it. Or rather hoped it did not. Too late now. I should have tried to disguise my handwriting but then my alias only needed to hold until the morrow.

The morning was hard and bright as I left the headquarters of our nation's secret service. It had been some time since I'd last walked this broad and once gracious avenue. Those stately buildings of stone imitating those of the grand cities of the old world had been replaced with gleaming towers. Cold and unforgiving, no vines could ever take hold on their smooth surfaces. Having grown accustomed to the softer more diffuse light in the cooler climes of my exile, I had to shade my eyes with my hand from the piercing shafts of sunlight. I flinched as I imagined the accusation of treachery levelled at me by my former comrades in the diaspora.

My appointment with the leader of the small remaining band of dissidents was scheduled for 900 hours. The hour of his death and my, or rather my alias's, reconciliation with the new authority. To begin life anew under another guise that was the promised reward for my subterfuge. Infiltrate those with whom I had once shared a common ideal. No, goal. Ideal suggests something noble. Since Sandra's death, I had begun to question our ideals. For what had we sought other than to protect the once decadent and luxurious life afforded to those of us among the elite of this former colony?

Only an hour ago, the task seemed simple enough. The murder, the collection of relevant information. I was confident I could accomplish these tasks. But once the deed was done, to find a place for me in this new order no longer seemed so straightforward. Who would I be? How could I find a home in this city without qualities? The mirrored facades of the new buildings on both sides of the avenue reflected each other in an infinite regress, inducing a sense of vertigo. Could there be any reality in which to root oneself where all was just image?

Reality? I remembered those languid afternoons when we, the luxurious ones, sipped our cocktails and philosophised under vine-covered arched colonnades.

"These days information is seen to be even more fundamental than matter and energy."

"Are you saying that ultimately reality rests in information and not in the physical stuff comprising our universe?"

"Something abstract? In essence just mathematics?"

"Not quite, it must be physically embodied."

"And yet substrate independent."

I recalled this conversation as I approached the junction where the avenue forked into two narrower roads. Reflected in the facade of one of the buildings set at an oblique angle, I recognised the familiar arched colonnades. My handler had foreseen, as I suspected he might have done, that I should find the place I was seeking. The original must be nearby and those whom I sought must be hiding there. A foolish choice and I pitied them for making my task so easy.



However, as I came to the junction where the roads converged, I realised that I was trapped. The shadowy depths underneath the arched colonnades may only be illusory; yet they still held the memory of our intrigues, all the information of who we had been, of what we had thought and who we had loved encoded on the glazed membrane of the building ahead. The authority had been one step ahead all along. My alias had not held. And even under another name, I had no place in this new society. I was a condemned man as were those others who

may still be alive to preserve in memory what may have been left of our civilisation. Unless. I took aim at my reflection and pulled the trigger. The glass shattered and in the flying shards that whizzed past I saw fractured the images of all our memories, all the information that would have condemned my former comrades not destroyed exactly, but sufficiently disordered as to be unrecoverable. I was soon to die but at the very last I also knew, I had been no traitor.

TWILIGHT PIANOS

By Deb Hall

They had only been to the restaurant at lunchtime before, parking behind the row of shops in a carpark, accessed from the side street, opposite a small church. It seemed to have a wholly Asian congregation, and some of the churchgoers went to the restaurant after the Sunday service, mostly for the Hainanese Chicken. She and her partner were often the only non-Asians there.

She was curious about the pianos in a half-asphalted, half-overgrown patch, at the rear of one of the shops with a painted-over, barred back window. The trio of piano carcasses were left where they had been hauled from the shop and marooned in the unfenced area, to eke out the remainder of their days. Perhaps they had been too broken-down to repair and sell, or had become an anachronism.

They were in various states of disrepair. Their wooden cases were weathered to a pale shade of beige and, from the carpark, a short distance away, they looked decidedly cracked and dry. Although remaining upright, one appeared to be slowly collapsing from the inside out. Pieces of wood from the top of the case had caved in. The keyboard leaned drunkenly, and looked as if it could slide off the edge of the frame any year now. There were missing keys, like toothless gaps in a mouth of painfully gritted teeth.

All three pianos had their lids raised, with the rows of black and white keys exposed. She didn't know if piano keys were still made of ebony and ivory or were synthetic. She didn't know if there was actually a music store in front anymore. The relics appeared to have been left unclaimed for a long time, abandoned to their fate. She wondered if the raised lids were an added humiliation, the work of curious passers-by, or just local children seeking a peek under the covers.

The first time they went to the restaurant at night, a streetlight partially illuminated the

area, and the pianos lurked in the shadows. When they returned to the carpark after a sumptuous dinner, a gentle drizzle had begun to fall. It created a misty atmosphere and blurred the streetlight.

A tinkle of piano notes startled them. They stood, entranced, and listened to the music. Eventually they realized that the sound was coming from one of the defunct pianos, not from a nearby house. As their eyesight adjusted to the twilight, they could see some of the keys moving on the keyboard of the piano nearest to them. They were mesmerized by the eerie depressing and rising of keys, in the shadows.

Despite the frequent bum notes due to missing keys, the tune was recognizable as the syncopated rhythms of a ragtime piece. One of Scott Joplin's compositions. She knew that it wasn't one of his well-known pieces, but she couldn't quite place it. It took her most of the drive home to put a name to the tune that was going around and around in her mind.

It was "Sunflower Slow Drag" composed by Scott Joplin and his protégé, Scott Hayden, and published in 1901. It was a tune full of brightness, despite the old piano sounding tinny; it was gay and full of sunshine too.

As they watched the sequential movements of the piano keys, they observed some changes in the structure of the piano playing the tune. It appeared to shudder momentarily and then straighten up its frame and, some of the other pieces that had been askew, slid into their rightful positions. If not as-good-as-new, the piano had asserted some dignity.

The next time they went to the restaurant in the daytime, they noticed that there were a couple of straggly sunflower plants growing in front of that piano, tilting their faces to the sun, as if listening expectantly.

THE ADVENTURES OF A LEOPARD SEAL

By Jan Harper

They call me "Pardus of the sea," and I am a Leopard Seal. Last year I spent 12 hours on a Port Melbourne beach, but I was not fearful because I knew I was a match for both human and dog,

So how did I get to Port Melbourne from my home in Antarctica, 6,400 kms away?

I love Antarctica in the way that most creatures love their homes. I love the biting cold. I love dancing and doing acrobats in the sea. I love sliding across the ice. I love a good meal of krill. On special days I feed on delicacies like Antarctic fur seals, squid or octopus, or my special delicacy, penguin. Sometimes I lie asleep in the water until the noise of the penguins, as they dash past, wakes me. Then I quickly make a kill. My clever antics mean I can kill and eat almost any sea creature, but they can't kill and eat me. So, I am what scientists call, "least concern for extinction".

But fun! I might have had my fill of penguin, but I often gleefully cut off another young one and chase it back into the water. I'll do it over and over again, and often the little "dear" will succumb to exhaustion. Some say I am bent, but we Leopards all do it.

We are loners, tending towards solitude, except at mating time. While I am alone I stay underwater for as long as I can, and sing – the high double trills and the low descending trills. We are said to be, "The Acoustic Surveyor's dream".

Being independent, I crave excitement, so I have done a bit of travelling – to Macquarie Island, and to Elephant Island, which is home to (you guessed it) Elephant seals. Although I am 3.5 metres long, and they are bigger than me, I had no trouble overpowering one, as it was foolish enough to attack me.

I love Antarctica, but am curious about other parts of the world, and Australia was next on my bucket list. Another Leopard Seal had told me of his daring swim five years before, when he had entered Port Phillip Bay after hearing about a penguin colony there. However, after trouble on Brighton Beach he had decided to return home. I was anxious to taste those penguins.

On leaving the sea ice, making my way north, I was tossed around by the raging seas. As it got warmer, I gradually acclimatised, but as I reached the heads of Port Phillip Bay, oh, the shock of the warmth! How I missed the ice flows!

Most of the time I stayed away from the sandy beaches, because I sensed they were a hazard – subject to hot sun during the day, and a trap of curious humans and dogs. But I pursued my interest in penguins. To my surprise the penguin colony was in the busy suburb of St Kilda, at the end of a long pier, much loved by tourists. Ah! Penguins! My mouth watered! But when I eventually got there I could see why they were called Fairy Penguins – only a mouthful, whereas I was used to eating up to 12 large penguins in a day! I weighed up the danger, and gave it a miss.

I danced onwards in the calm water, dived under the Lagoon Pier, and floundered through the shallows to the sandy beach of Port Melbourne, ready for a good rest after my long journey. I could see great city buildings, wharfs and ships, as well as humans playing with their dogs on the shore. Getting up the beach was not easy because though in the water my hind flippers give me wonderful propulsion, I can't rotate them so struggle to move on land.

THE ADVENTURES OF A LEOPARD SEAL (CONT.)

By Jan Harper

Humans looked puzzled at my venturing so far. They failed to realise how menacing I could be, despite what looked like a grin on my face, and raced to their computers to find out what kind of animal I was. People in uniforms – fire fighters, police – gathered around, talking excitedly into their telephones. I just lay there, hardly moving, secure in my own strength, and in the fact that I was obviously viewed as a curiosity rather than a threat. If we had both been in the water, those humans would certainly have provided a good meal for me.

Pretty soon I could see that the humans were becoming quite agitated. But I refused to move. They had earnest conversations and erected a barrier around the beach. Those living in nearby dwellings peered through their windows, clicking their cameras. Wildlife Officers arrived. I just lay quietly on the beach knowing that I was too heavy to be moved.

I bided my time. At one stage I got a bit stiff, being more used to wallowing around in the sea, so I made little moves, but that only made the humans more agitated. “What is it? Is it dangerous?” they asked each other.

By nightfall only one Wildlife Officer remained. Soon, as darkness fell, he slept, so I knew the coast was clear. I padded back down to the water, and whisssh, I was on my way – straight out to the Heads, without loitering near the Fairy Penguins, past ships heading towards Port Phillip, along the coast of Tasmania, gambolling and cavorting, catching what I could to eat, dancing through the restless sea, further and further towards my own land, the beautiful shining ice fields of Antarctica.

I was home, my wanderlust satisfied. I thrilled at sliding along the pack ice. Under water, I listened with rapture to the songs of my fellow Leopards. I enjoyed a meal of young fur seals, but, yum, I especially relished a feast of penguins.

After a break I might tackle as far as South Georgia, where there are massive King Penguins. But venture as far as Australia again? Never.



TEA TIME

By Megan Jones

Tea was served at precisely 4.45pm on the dot. You had to be there on time or else.

The red and cream curlicue-patterned Formica table still dominates the kitchen, where we ate those meals. Now it is darkened by the shadowy twilight from nicotine decals on the ceiling and walls, fetid grime from the sixty-year-old gas stove and the grease splattered net curtains hanging on the small stuck-shut sash windows.

As I take a seat on a stool facing the kitchen doorway to the hall, I now understand the spatial tyranny suffusing my childhood.

Sitting at either end of the table was impossible. The free-standing stove blocks one end while the Westinghouse fridge blocks the other. With all seven family members tightly seated, the only way out of the room required my father to shift from his pole position in front of the exit.

This architectural pincer movement guaranteed nightly drama.

As I sit at what was my then appointed place, I stare at the bits of laminate prying little fingers had pulled from the aluminium table's skeleton. The ribbed metal belt that restrains the Formica is warped and pops away, revealing hidey holes for carcasses of carrots, sprouts and broad beans. These had been poked in there during the long silences while we waited for permission to leave the table.

Cigarette burns, where my father had placed his butt on the edge of the table, have embroidered black lace holes on the edge of the Formica. In some places they had burnt through to the plywood underneath. My father would sometimes forget to take a drag during his drunken rants about his parents, who lost the fortune he should have inherited.

Checkpoint Charlie served him well, providing him with a nightly opportunity to humiliate some hapless child.

As toddlers we thought this was a fun game.

"What is the password?" he would ask before we were allowed to leave the room.

"Please," we'd giggle back.

The game took on a more sinister turn as we emerged from our cute toddler cocoons.

"What is the password?"

"Please," we'd answer.

"That's not it."

The game would begin in earnest.

"Please, Dad."

"That's not it either."

"Dad, please may I leave the table?"

"Wrong answer."

"Dad, I've got to go to the toilet."

"Learn to wait. It will do you good."

"Dad, I need to do my homework."

"Serves you right. You should have done it earlier."

"But I had practice."

"Not good enough."

"Daaaaaaaad. Please."

At night given the chance to admonish, he would rant or slap or punish, whichever suited his mood. Sometimes he allowed one hapless child to pass, then tripped them up.

His constant refrain: "It wouldn't happen if you didn't deserve it."

This game continued until we backed down; vanquished. Only then, an exultant Luna Park smile would appear on his otherwise contorted face.

During these nightly torments my mother would mirror him, with glass of VB in one hand and Viscount cigarette in the other, watching, never saying a word to him. Her back closest to the dial up telephone.

Once we had been intimidated into silence, they would reminisce about their childfree time as expats in New Guinea after the war.

Five children and two adults sat in this cramped kitchen every night until the older girls left home.

My mother never once suggested we eat our meals at the formal dinner table, with its eight place settings, in the spacious alcove adjacent to the living room.

COMING BACK

By Belinda King

The young man who used to live on the corner of the street came back yesterday. He parked his car, pleased that he still had his blue resident's permit on the windscreen. Digging his hands well into his black leather jacket he began to walk slowly along his old street and hesitated to watch the man build the fence outside *his* neighbour's house. Actually they were no longer his neighbours. He didn't have a clue who his new neighbours were as the blocks were so big out where he was now he had never seen them.

He felt so comfortable back here. So comfortable but now so very uncomfortable as he could no longer just go inside *his* gate as his gate now belonged to someone else. The deposits of cigarette butts were no longer where he used to flick them into the gutter. The pigeon poop was not there either as his mother-in-law was no longer coming out into the street to feed them with stale bread. There was no longer the sweet aroma of lamb, tomatoes and olives cooking or his father in law's cigarettes, just a rather stale dusty smell of the building works opposite.

There was nothing left that registered his ownership. It was so peculiar that all the small inventions that had been created by his father-in-law, together with the house itself, the house in which he had lived for so many years was now owned by someone else. How could ownership like this just be transferred to strangers? How could ones' history pass over to someone else in what amounted to a mere financial transaction?

The gate to the old house now looked dead to him, whereas before it had always possessed an energy, symbolising the link between the inner and outer. The memory of how the gate latch felt in his hand, how the gate needed that certain slight lift to open elicited such a strong feeling of

familiarity. He knew he would never again have the experience of emerging publicly or submerging privately, both associated with the stepping out and the retreating from his domain. His private family life had existed behind this gate, his domestic life and everything he had known throughout his married life. Neither would he know a street life again and the greeting of familiar people passing and the observations and experiences of the incidental street happenings that made for good domestic conversation afterwards.

Having not really measured the value of these things whilst they were part of his life he had not expected to experience their sudden absence as a great loss. He gave up ownership so casually. Others hold on to their land for generations, knowing that once the land has their spirit it can't belong to anyone else.

He had a yearning to belong again, a wish that he could go back in time and make another decision. He looked again at the gate that so many relatives had passed through on Sundays when they would put the lamb on the BBQ, first richly marinated in oregano and rosemary. Trays of baklava would be resting inside until the fit moment to bring them out ... the time when visitors were really relaxed and warm like mulled wine. The smoke from the barbeque had always wafted over the fence giving an air of good times to those walking down the street on Sundays. It didn't matter to him now that the cooking had taken place under the clothes line, that people had to cram together on plastic chairs against the corrugated iron fence. This was the place for his engagement celebration, birthday parties, welcomes and going aways ... all fired with strong emotional overtones. This was the gate through which they had carried their new baby, the gate that he had

first entered when he first visited his wife, the gate through which the ambulance drivers took the old man through.

Now he stood outside the place and felt the spirit still there. The builders had already gutted the place. He could not enter. They were quick to move on it as if they wanted the spirit of the family eradicated. The new owners would not know that the old man had been grieved there. That it was to this place the family had returned from that last visit to the hospital. The new owners knew nothing of the olive trees planted in the street by the father. Knew nothing of how the father would pick the sage leaves from the plant under the olive tree to add aroma to his wife's cooking.

He stood there feeling bereft. His old neighbours came on to the street to talk with the fencer and saw him. He had been rough with them when they first moved in, surly that they had got the house so cheaply. He had threatened to cut their silver birch down before they even moved in saying that it might fall on their house. He was younger then and under the shelter of his father in law. He had even stolen their planks when they had boarded up the underside of their house to prevent cats from getting in. He hadn't cared about them, saw them as yuppies, people that he had never had anything to do with before. Wealthy middle class people who had benefited from the slump in the market and got a bargain. It was a bargain that he would never be able to afford as he had missed work, had played around at school, never managed any qualification and had slunk in under his in-law's protection.

But now he had the house in Eltham. It was a dream house with three bedrooms, large area of trees and his young wife walked around the rooms feeling glorious. He had to be happy as this was what they had strived for. But he knew he couldn't be.

SAN TEN ICHI ICHI

By Richard McClelland

The night had closed in like a curtain as they left the wharf. No moon lit their way and the cabin lights were off so they could better manage the boat channel. The dark seemed compelling.

They travelled like this for a couple of hours away from their island home.

Some time had passed when the sun rose feebly over the low horizon. A quick glance around the scattered islands behind them indicated they had arrived at their fishing ground.

The sea slowly emerged in the thin dawn light.

The sea was white. It spread like oil into a void between water and sky.

Jero stood transfixed on the deck of his uncle's trawler. In all his years of fishing for Hoki he had never seen a flat sea that was both lucid and glass-like, but opaque. As he watched nothing happened. No wind ruffled the surface. No swell lifted the boat. It felt as if it was sitting on a mirror. Then it lost way and drifted to a stop with the motor off in preparation for the day's fishing.

His uncle called from the wheelhouse. 'Jero! The trawl net!'

He heard the voice but faintly. Distracted, he scanned the deck forward to the Buddhist shrine. No incense smoked. Silence was the moment. The Buddha looked displeased.

Jero shuffled forward to light an incense stick. No matches. They were gone. Nothing.

Stolen again, Jero cursed softly, and reached into his jinbei pocket for the prized Zippo lighter. The bulky stainless-steel lighter had become a talisman. His strength in adversity.

When the incense was lit its fragrance hung listlessly on the deck. Only then did he allow his eyes to drift back to the sea, still trying to catch an understanding of the silence, the other worldliness that surrounded him.

Suddenly the surface erupted into a triangular sheet of flashing bodies. A school of flying fish broke free from some unseen underwater disaster. Their frantic haste followed by the usual long glide finally broke the moment. Jero returned to the boat just as his uncle called out again.

'Jero! Don't daydream. Your brother never did.'

Jero tripped as he went back to the trawl net which lay deck-dry, a mess of knotted cord strewn with seaweed fragments.

Mention of his brother did not concentrate his mind. Instead, he thought of his home. He named the scraps of weed for members of his family. Parents, two sisters and his older brother Ichiro. Ichiro who had taught him how to fish. Ichiro who also taught him how their uncle wanted things done.

Jero's mind dwelt on Ichiro as he worked the net to get it set before it could be cast over the stern.

Ichiro had walked these decks. But no longer.

Ichiro was married now, and a new baby was expected soon.

Ichiro had left the trawler to work ashore. He wanted each night to go home to his seafront shack and be with his new family. The pay was not as good as fishing, but it was regular. His wife and baby were to be his life now. How could that be, Jero wondered. Fishing is what you did.

Jero had worked down one side of the trawl net when his cousin Keji appeared. He looked at the sea and frowned. The horizon was lost now in an invisible light, and more fish were jumping.

'What's happening Namiko?' he asked, his weathered forehead creased with concern as he cast about.

Jero, or Namiko as his cousin called him, was vague. 'Something – but I don't know what. I think the fish do though. They know something.'

'Come on.' said Keji, 'Let's get this net out then we can get moving again. This sea is eerie!'

As they made fast the trawl lines, the boat lifted suddenly. A slight lift only; they both looked up and searched for the wave that had caused it. There was nothing to see except a faint line like a shadow moving incredibly fast back to Sendai, their home port, – the way they had come. The place where Ichiro now lived.

The net went out over the stern rollers and the boat began to move slowly forward as the motor came to life. At exactly that moment the radio screamed a Tsunami warning.

Today was Ichiro's first day at his new job on the waterfront.

THE NATIONAL SCHEME 2024

By Adam Thrussell

The wiry man with an easily perceived limp tripped over a weathered gutter near the corner of St Kilda — Brighton Road doing worse than the runners in the Big M Marathon 1981 Frankston to the Melbourne Town Hall, State of Victoria. The leading runner Andrew Hoyle was in very good condition after his diet of Gatorade Lemon-Lime sports drink tm and Stamina lime was observed by Adam with no TM symbols over his slight athletic body. Exhaling from his body concentrated breath, with the aroma of stamina lime tm with a trademark.

Thirty minutes later, observed Lindsay limping along wearing a weathered blue line Perry house t-shirt.

On an overcast day thirty-three years later, Lindsay tripped over the gutter near the corner of St Kilda Road-Brighton Road and Carlisle Street outside a Gift Shop.

The Council Worker having a conversation with Molly Meldrum about his Countdown television interview with Prince Charles. He was very nervous with the sub vocals with the uhs, therefore have a glass of water, please.

Molly Meldrum spotted the woman carrying a Hunters and Collectors vinyl record, with the title of Human Frailty from the gift shop, placed haphazardly the vinyl record on top of the fire hydrant, rushed to assist.

The man placed His copy of Power Without Glory written by Frank Hardy, not surrounded by litigation Lawyers to do with the court case.

Homework for the reader about the court case about the book, Power Without Glory about John West.

The man was observed to sprint to the assistance of the fallen person.

Lindsay was sighted to be in a stunned condition.

The man observed from the St Kilda Town Hall, wearing a weathered Hi-Vis safety vest.

The man pressed the keys on his Nokia tm mobile phone dialled triple zero number.

The panting ambulance man looking like Mark Beretta from the Channel 7 Sunrise program on His bicycle.

It was observed from the St Kilda Town Hall, the ambulance personnel Brett, Lindsay blood pressure which was 120 over 80.

You have very good blood pressure stated the Ambulance Personnel.

Lindsay was heard to say, because of my exercise, I enjoy sprinting over the pedestrian bridge over Dandenong Road, Windsor, State of Victoria, Australia, and Postcode 3181. With my Occupational Therapist Billie, breasts bouncing all over the place, I sped past Billie, got hit by a breast.

The two well built Ambulance Personnel like the Australian Rules Football player Tony Lockett weighted about 120 kilograms with no plugger pig in sight like on the Sydney Cricket Ground, SCG, Sydney Swans playing at home.

The Mercedes Benz ambulance right into the tree avenue, Commercial Road, Prahran to The Alfred Hospital, wheeled to the emergency department, taken to triage to be attended by a nurse looking like hot lips O Halloran from the television program, Mash.

The Nurse almost tripped over the whiz food processor, The Hospital Patient Service Assistant, PSA got hit on the head by a stray breast, with the nurse wearing a Berlei barely bra Tm encasing the breasts hitting Him in the forehead.

Exclaim, Bangladesh, that hurts more than a table tennis hitting the forehead.

From the view of the security camera, with the cloudy lenses, it was observed by the Security Staff doing the diabolical Sudoku Tm in The Age Newspaper.

Doctor Bill Smith performed mouth to mouth resuscitation on the Hospital Patient Service Assistant, came back with a feeble breathing, consequently two nurses sprinted in with a defibrillator placed the weathered mask on the PSA lazily the PSA came to reality, take your time to recover.

He was placed gingerly on the chair, while Days of our Lives was on the television screen.

Sharon wrote a note Lindsay will be admitted to the Alfred Hospital on Saturday, June 15th

For medical tests, with two plastic tubes put down his nostrils from an observation a very difficult procedure, Lindsay moving his head around.

Therefore put under general anaesthetic to cope with the painful procedure, the staff, very matter of fact, stiff upper lip, no other choice, Buckley or None.

Tony Holding send a SMS after the bowel operation for bowel cancer in May 2012.

Sharon picked up Lindsay from The Alfred Hospital, Commercial Road, Prahran, with the dark sky, with weather fronts from Adelaide, South Australia, plus from Bass Strait fighting a torrid battle in the atmosphere.

Weathers Gods, do not know who will win. Therefore battles of the sky on going upheaval.

A yellow-orange butterfly noticed a cockroach scurried across the carpet stopped by Sharon's black boot.

Lindsay walked into the lounge room, tripped over the frayed carpet headfirst into the two-seater couch.

THE PACKAGE

By Graeme Turner

The doorbell clanged. Not insistent, but there. Ned leapt from his lounge chair and bolted down the passage.

The package was big and bubble wrapped. Layer after layer was torn away. Yes, a coffee machine gleaming new complete with a parcel of disposable pods.

Wrapping lay scattered about the room like Christmas. Ned loved it. It was almost as though the final object was not the point, but the entire process of unraveling and unwinding. It was raising the curtain on a show. The production may be a disappointment, but what fun to ride the tide of rising excitement. He was thrilled to unwrap in an air of mystery iced with anticipation, teetering on uncertainty until he could discover the final gift. It could be the case, even, when his sister gave him the inevitable shirt; it would also be the paper, the transparent box, the cardboard stiffening the collar.

After firing up his new device, Ned added sugar to his brew, tipped from a sachet pilfered from a recent hotel.

It could be time for a walk, but first Ned needed to take his blood pressure tablet, deftly extracted from his blister pack. Yes, and he must deal with his teeth. A beautiful new bristly toothbrush was pulled from his box, like a small hygienic sword. And how could he forget his dental floss?

And wait. There was rubbish to be put out. Ned grabbed bin liner and ties from the bottom kitchen drawer. The bag was heavy with old plastic pill containers, tired tea bags, linings from cereal boxes. Never mind. It was all to go. The last drops of sunscreen were squeezed from its tube and Ned was set to leave.

He pulled the front door behind him with a final full stop clump. He was so fortunate to live only ten minutes' walk to his local beach.

The sand was almost deserted. Just a few relentlessly optimistic beachcombers determined to be here this late in the season.

The breeze ruffled his hair. Waves lapped, gentle and unconcerned. This was the spirit, to be so close to nature, so close to home.

Ned's feet set out on his usual route. He'd been here so many times before, always with pleasure. There was comfort in the well-worn familiarity of his path.

Something was different. He hadn't noticed it before. The sea was beginning to snarl with her white lips.

He looked down. He held no shadow. The sun had beaten a retreat behind a fort of cloud.

The sea was seething, green and angry. Ned scanned up and down the beach. The combers were specks on the edge of the world. But then Ned saw something else.

There was a thickening in the air like a small cloud, like a willy willy, a coming together of elements. The wind was rising, blasting into his face. Maybe Ned should head home. His tongue was leather. He craved another coffee.

The thing rolled closer. Ned could see it was perhaps around three metres high. It was heading straight for him.

He stepped to one side. The thing swerved. It seemed to be coalescing to some kind of body, a dark head, arms were appearing from air. Legs skated across the sand.

'What is this?' croaked Ned. Why was he questioning air?

The thing twisted and spun.

'I have come for you.' The words hissed and buzzed about his ears, not with the warm throat and lungs of an actual human, but with air which rasped, cold and dry.

'This is your time.' A dark patch bristled where a mouth should be. Were those hollows in air really eyes?

The sky was dropping, vibrating. It gathered about him in jostling granules.

'Who are you?' Ned revised his question.

'My name is not important, but you can remember me briefly as Michela Microplasticus.'

'What?'

'You with your love of junk and packaging, it is now time to pay.'

Ned blinked. And then he saw. The creature was composed of a mist, a cloud of spinning hurtling particles of plastic, rubbish ties, dental floss, blister packs, coffee pods.

The creature loomed. It exhaled with a hoarse cry. It enveloped him. Ned's skin burned. His eyes stung. Plastic grains scoured down his neck, under his arms.

'Your time.' The voice roared in his ears, all about him. Ned tasted polymers, polyester, PVCs on his tongue. His eyes saw through cellophane. His teeth were tangled with nylon.

In the fading gray light, Ned saw a cup. It brimmed and foamed. It was turned from wood.

Night clammed down like a rubbish bin lid.

Later that day, when the sun had resumed his forward march across a fragile blue sky, a beach comber was brave enough to return. She took in something; a couple of dark colored things resting on the sand.

Almost reluctant to venture closer, she, nonetheless, found herself drawn to these unexpected objects.

They lay, a pair of dress shoes, shining, polished, scoured as if treated with a magic cleaning cloth, completely fashioned from plastic.

Non Fiction

I WANTED TO CALL YOU ROMEO

By Danielle Arcaro

I wanted to call you Romeo.

I loved the sound of the name; it sang to me sweet and deep.

A strong name. A creative name. Different, but not too different.

I wanted Romeo.

"Romeo, Romeo, wherefor art thou Romeo?" The scorn fell on my expanding belly, mocking my choice, stifling your voice. You see, I knew you wanted Romeo too, we'd been using it in our quiet conversations for months. Those peaceful moments when I'd feel you stir and trace your arm, or perhaps an elbow, across the inside of my tummy. Gently, thoughtfully. "Hey Romeo, are you awake?" And in the hush I knew you heard me, that you whispered your answer into our blood, the blood we shared.

But the nagging worry wouldn't let me be. School-yard teasing, social humiliation, fraught relationships, and a lifelong curse. What mother would do this? What if you weren't a 'Romeo'? Maybe you would be a sport-obsessed Chad, or a peaceful Gabriel, a bookish Dorian, or a straight-talking Tom. What's in a name? Did the name shape your character, or was it the other way around? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell just as sweet.

Still, I held on: your name was Romeo.

Slowly, as we prepared for your arrival, for the time when our one would become two, the doubt stole in more convincingly. Once out, your safety was no longer guaranteed, you were about to become you, no longer me too. Were you Romeo? Could I protect you?

I relented; Romeo was a dangerous name, a plague 'on both our houses. I couldn't burden you with this expectation.

Except, you were already Romeo. It was too late, your fate was set in stone, cut viciously into your arm.

Instead, we named you Emanuel, son of God. I'm an atheist, but the melodic richness of this name seemed beautiful. It didn't occur to me that the expectation of being the heir apparent could be just as troubling as a cursed lover. I wonder why.

Everyone was happy.

Emanuel is your older brother's middle name, so when you separated from me, you joined him.

You declared your entrance into our world with a hearty, healthy bellow and the world expanded to fit you in. Lightning became brighter, the breeze lighter, laughter more nourishing and music more uplifting. Tears became weightier, the oceans angrier, pain cut deeper, and hatred burnt stronger. "Emanuel has arrived," you trumpeted, "hallelujah, make way!" And the world did.

I shied away when you were placed on my breast. My past experiences with feeding were of miserable failure and I was sure I would let you down too. "Make way for Emanuel". Even my body did your bidding, and, unlike your older brother, who had seemed vaguely perplexed about how this feeding business went, you knew exactly what you wanted, how and where to get it. We were in business, you, and me. In sync, two but still one.

They say your very body changes when you have a child, neural pathways that never existed now become superhighways as you think constantly about another being. Foetal cells cross the placenta into the mother, eventually taking up residence and becoming part of her, even moving back across into the next baby. These changes are permanent, no matter your age or your world (Callier, 2015).

You marched into our world with vitality, boldness and a quirky energy that defied constraint. You were a terrible sleeper. I ended up in hospital with you, unable to cope with the lack of sleep. "I'd wish you a happy Christmas," said the paediatrician, "but I don't think it will be." Arsehole. Surviving on alternating dosages of alcohol and caffeine, I struggled through days, walking through air thick like mud.

But you? You didn't seem affected, greeting me with smiles and squeals every time I struggled into your room, long before any 'normal' baby would wake.

"You've got 'one of those'," said the sleep consultant, she was no help. One of those? What does that mean? One of those precious beings that was too large for the world? Too awake to be asleep? Too alive to last forever? Burning too hot?

You grew to be a great Artist. Capital letter Art.

Your violin playing, initially cute and enthusiastic, transitioned into an earnest awkwardness in adolescence, eventually blossoming into a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the music's essence. Your entire body seeming to tip and lean into the melodies, pushing to find the extremes of its intent. I ached at your integrity and deep connection; you were vulnerable.

You drew eyes. I always found something slightly unsettling in those eyes. Something was missing, something your charcoal seemed to have chased on the page, something elusive.

Sometimes you just drew black. Lots of black. Blacks void of warmth or care. Voids in which a tiny figure crouched, crushed under the enormity of the blackness. I was scared by these drawings.

And ineffective words. Your words belied your naivety, immaturity sabotaging your message. You had a message. But you just couldn't get it out.

Not in time.

I have been thinking about Art. Literature, Visual Art, Music. Thinking about you, the curse of Romeo, the tragedy. It occurred to me that it isn't just in Shakespeare where these concepts ignite a wretched flame. There's the visceral agony of Picasso's Guernica with its disembowelled horses and frozen screams. The emotional desolation of Tchaikovsky's Pathetique Symphony, violins screaming in helpless loss. Is there some connection between great Art and Tragedy?

At 18, you'd become a modest man, a pleaser. The burrs of juvenile exuberance distorted into oddities, or entirely rasped off. Intensely aware of your failings, both imagined and mundane, you never thought you were great.

But you were.

Too great for this world. Too great for Art.

Your life an unfinished symphony. Tragedy.

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THE TASTE OF PARSNIP

By Irene Blonder

I have had a post-Covid blanket on my tongue for a while. Thankfully, I am now detecting a gradual improvement in my diminished sense of taste.

A few weeks ago, we had lamb and rosemary sausages for dinner, accompanied by the last of our home-grown silver beet, richly flavoured with olive oil, garlic and pepper. Chunks of steamed pumpkin and parsnip completed the colours on the plate. I tasted nothing of my sausage or of the silver beet. The pumpkin, my old favourite – nothing. Finally, one victory – I enjoyed the distinctive taste of the parsnip.

We know there are several areas on the tongue, each of which specializes in a particular aspect of what we refer to as taste. The sweet spot is a small circle at the front of the tongue, surprisingly modest in diameter given our common predilection for sweets. The edges of the tip, which partially encircle the sweetness receptors, specialise in saltiness, and, again, occupy a rather small territory. We recognize sourness with the sides of the tongue, the bitter taste with the taste buds at the back of the tongue, and the umami, the fifth sense – in the centre. Diagrams present this complexity in elegantly curved lines and floating colours which could be viewed as one of Kandinsky's colour studies. We also know that what we perceive as the sensation of taste is in large part based on another sense – the sense of smell.

My sense of taste is flawed. An old ritual made me aware of this several years ago. In Carlton's Italian café strip, I would sit down to a long black during my lunch break, relax and pretend to be in Rome watching the passers-by, before walking back to my office. On one such occasion I realised that I had not been tasting my coffee at all! It may as well have been hot water, if somewhat on the acrid side. I panicked – what was going

on? And how long had it been like that? My memory had accumulated a compendium of flavours over the years – so this must have been a new phenomenon.

To find out, I was soon in a neurologist's surgery, where I sniffed vials of subtly smelling substances.

Vanilla? Yes.

Cloves? Yes.

Almond essence? Yes.

Ten out of ten on smell, nil on taste.

A brain MRI followed. It showed no abnormalities or pathologies that could have suggested an explanation for the diminution of taste. This was a great relief, even though the neurologist was unable to offer any suggestion for improving my taste function. But the neurologist had not finished. He seemed puzzled by what he was about to report. Did I know that half of my pituitary gland was practically missing? No, I answered. And what did that mean?

Google says that the pituitary is 'a small pea-sized gland, found at the base of the brain.' Your pituitary acts as your body's master gland. It tells other glands in your body what to do'. Among other things, it tells your body to grow. If you are female, it tells your ovaries to produce eggs at regular intervals, enabling your fertility. I have not ever tested the last of these functions, but suddenly, as the neurologist was talking to me, something else fell into place. A revelation!

I felt a flush of intense emotion which took a moment to comprehend. Then I realised it was about my 'failure' to grow in my childhood, despite the courses of multivitamins, the carefully chosen nutritious food and the endless visits to paediatricians,

typically resulting in no answers but plenty of dire prognoses, which would leave my mother devastated, and me feeling that I was letting her down. As an eight-year-old I had spent weeks in hospital, being blood tested daily, fully measured, weighed and mapped. Finally, the neurologist gave me the answer and I had an impulse to take myself to Mum's grave to tell her. While her efforts to make me grow even just a little taller probably added up to something, it was certainly not to what she was hoping for, because my misshapen pituitary was a powerful force acting against her. Afterwards, I experienced a mixture of sadness and relief, a reflection on my mother's struggle and the fact that there was an answer, but it was not accessible at the time. These feelings persist.

And all that money wasted on contraception, while my pituitary was taking care of it all along.

As for my sense of taste, sometimes it goes underground completely, but most of the time there is some. The fact that I still cannot taste coffee does not stop me from continuing the ritual, and making a fuss if it is not served strong and topped with crema. I consume curry when my partner cooks it, but I mainly taste the rice. Textures ensure my enjoyment of food. Oddly enough, while I miss out on intense tastes – strong spices, coffee, garlic, chocolate – I enjoy the subtle ones of weak tea of any variety, poached egg yolk, raw oysters, brie, saffron, vanilla – thank goodness for these. And memory assists in reconstructing the delicious taste of ripe cherries or apricots and enhances the pleasure of consuming them even if their taste seems – well – diminished.

Following that dinner a few weeks ago, I was left with another question: why did I enjoy the parsnip so much? Since parsnip is not sweet, nor sour, bitter or salty – was the fifth sense, umami still working for me (par excellence), and can I conjecture that parsnip is the quintessential umami taste?

WE'RE GOING TO LONDON

By Jacki Burgess

I'd like to tell you this story. It's a true one.

'We're going to London to buy you some gloves,' my grandmother, Harriet, was told by her parents.

That must have been a real surprise for Harriet because she was only six, and even at just six, she would have known that London was a long way away from where she lived. She lived in Ballyvaughan in County Clare in Ireland with her large family and London was in England, and England was a long, long way away.

Her father was going to take her to London. But she didn't have to worry about leaving her mother, she was told, because she and her father were going to London with her older sister – and with a maid, too.

That was what she was told.

She must have wondered about the reason why they were going, but little children in the 1870s were used to doing what they were told, and she was told she needed gloves, so she was going to get them.

What she didn't know until later, was that the real reason that she was going to London was to embark on an even longer journey. A much, much longer journey – all the way to Australia.

Harriet was going to Australia because her aunt in Australia, whom she had never met, had sent letters to her mother and father in Ballyvaughan asking if they would send out a couple of their children to live with her in Australia.

The answer was yes. Harriet's mother had lots of children and Harriet's widowed aunt had none, so Harriet's mother had said 'Yes, have some of mine'.

The journey was long, and the chosen ones were two of the girls, aged six and seven and a half. They were to be accompanied by one of the household maids.

The journey was past Port Aden in Yemen and Columbo in Ceylon, as it was called and across the Indian Ocean to Fremantle.

That journey was going to take perhaps six weeks, but first, they had to travel in a horse drawn cart for two days across Ireland from Galway on one side to Dublin on the other, and then travel by boat to Liverpool then by train via Birmingham to London in England and then onto a tall-masted sailing ship.

The passengers in steerage on the clippers in the 1860s were crammed below decks with straw mattresses on lengthy bunk beds. There were few cabins, but as Harriet came from a fairly wealthy family, from one of the four biggest and best houses in the village of Ballyvaughan, she may have been booked into a cabin with her sister and the maid.

There were 87 passengers on the good ship, the Daylight from London when it sailed on August 16, in 1876, with Harriet, her sister and the maid.

The routine for those in steerage was simple. Up at 6 in the morning, do chores, help prepare the meals, wash the clothes, sweep and scrub the floors. Dinner was at 1pm and tea was at 5, with lights out at 10pm. Meals were salt meat, bacon, or herrings, with sauerkraut, potatoes, beans and peas. There were no tables or chairs for passengers in steerage on ships in these days, and far too many fleas, lice, rats and mice.

There might only be one toilet for 100 passengers, and so, in stormy weather, when the boat pitched and yawed in the high seas, the decks might be running with vomit.

The toilet was equipped with an unravelled length of rope which would be hauled in to wipe with, and then let back out into the sea to rinse clean.

Clothes might be rinsed clean, too, if there had been sufficient rain caught in buckets to be able to use some of it for washing. Drinkable water was a precious commodity and was used, far more importantly, for drinking and cooking, rather than for washing of clothes or bodies.

Finding space to do things was another problem. In steerage, each person only had a space about the length and width of a coffin, so all sorts of diseases quickly spread through the ships and one in five of the children who sailed to Australia, died at sea, with their bodies sewn up in canvas and then tipped off a plank into the sea.

But Harriet and her sister survived.

They survived the trip, and the sea sickness and the isolation, and the diseases and the anxiety and the shock of it all. They survived the realisation that they were never going to see their mother and father ever again.

And they survived the fact that their maid, given the task and responsibility of bringing two very young girls to Australia had, at the very first port of call, run off from the boat with one of the sailors.

At the age of six and seven and a half, Harriet and her sister had sailed the rest of the way out from Ireland to Australia, all by themselves.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ROGER

By Christopher Burgess

I can tell you a story about Roger. It's all true, but I've just changed the names to protect the innocent— and the guilty.

Roger Rollinson was a maverick and a mischief-maker. While the advertising industry has had its fair share of radicals, in Melbourne during the seventies, there was none as outrageous as Roger Rollinson. Roger would have wholeheartedly agreed with what a famous New York ad man once said: "advertising is still the most fun you can have with your clothes on". Naturally, it all depended on one's interpretation of the word 'fun'. Roger however, made little distinction between 'fun' and 'prank'.

At one agency where he worked, Roger thought it'd be a hoot to ride his recently purchased motor bike into the lift and right into his office. His fellow workers were suitably flabbergasted, as was his boss, who told Roger in no uncertain terms that no matter how talented he was, if he ever pulled a prank like that again, he'd be out the door.

Roger was soon out the door all right, but not as his boss envisaged. When Roger told him he was leaving, to work at Watson and Anderson, the boss instantly offered Roger a substantial raise. Roger was having none of it. He had been recruited as an art director by the best agency in town and wasn't about to be swayed by more money in his pocket. Watson and Anderson had the reputation of being a fun place to work, and according to Roger, if you weren't having fun, you were in the wrong occupation.

There was the prospect of working alongside some of the best talent in the business, on some of the best blue-chip accounts. Roger couldn't wait to get to work.

Working at Watson and Anderson was everything Roger hoped for. He was having the time of his life. No more rejections such as he'd suffered at the previous agency. Roger soon became the golden-haired boy: he couldn't put a foot wrong. Eventually, as a reward, Roger was made creative director.

One of Watson and Anderson's biggest accounts finally agreed to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars shooting a commercial in Brisbane. As it was Roger's idea, he got to go there on the shoot.

It was on the set that Roger met Michelle, the personal assistant to the film director. On his last night in Brisbane, Roger invited Michelle to go out for dinner. They eventually ended up back at his hotel. The next morning, Roger caught an early flight back to Melbourne. Once home with his girlfriend, he completely forgot about Michelle.

It was around this time that I was calling a few creative directors in town in the hope of showing them my work: Roger Rollinson was the only one who agreed to see me. He liked my work, but as I suspected, the agency didn't have a vacancy at the time.

A few days later in that morning's newspaper: "Woman stabs advertising executive" was the main headline

"At approximately six forty-five last night, a woman stabbed an advertising executive named Roger Rollinson outside the office where he worked. Unfortunately, paramedics were unable to save him, and he died at the scene. A twenty-three-year-old woman from Queensland, has subsequently been charged with his murder" said a police spokesperson.

Later, I found out about the circumstances surrounding the death of Roger Rollinson. There were dozens of witnesses who saw the woman stab Roger Rollinson to death,

including the victim's girlfriend, who worked for the same company as he did. She later told police she had absolutely no idea why the woman would want to kill her boyfriend.

According to a woman who had stopped to watch what was going on, said: "They were having a violent argument when suddenly, the woman takes a pair of scissors from her bag and stabs the man in the chest. It was horrible."

Another witness said: "One moment they were shouting at each other, the next thing, the man had collapsed to the ground. There was blood everywhere."

The assailant's name was Michelle Cullen. She was twenty-three years old and single. She worked for a film production house in Brisbane, where she met Roger Rollinson when he was in Brisbane to shoot a commercial. They had gone out to dinner, and subsequently had sex. When tests later confirmed she was pregnant, she was positive Roger Rollinson was the father. She wrote to him to tell him the news but got no response.

She was eventually able to speak to him. Roger denied it was his child and hung up on her, which made her furious. She was determined not to let him off the hook and decided to come to Melbourne to really have it out with him. She and Roger soon got into an argument about what he planned to do. She suggested they might get married. He kept saying it wasn't his child. He laughed and told her she was a fool, and besides, the child mightn't be his. She told Roger she could either keep the child, put it up for adoption, or have an abortion: either way, she needed money. Roger once again denied it was his child and wasn't going to pay anything.

She told police later that she couldn't remember why she packed a pair of scissors in her handbag, or that she had killed him.

How do I know all this? A few days later I got a call from the new creative director at Watson and Anderson's: They needed an art director — urgently.

THE BIRD

By Kerrie Cross

A Tawny Frogmouth took up residence. Of indeterminate sex, at least to anyone not an ornithologist, it appeared in the branch of a huge plane tree, a plane tree of no small controversy because it was established in the tiny rear garden of the house that adjoined the Victorian cottage Helen shared with her husband, an intelligent but at times irritable man.

The Plane tree had become a saga. Several years ago, when the neighbouring house was sold, it was rumoured that the new owners wanted to cut down the tree in order to build a garage accessible from the rear lane. Panic. The tree was beautiful. Helen's renovation with its high gabled window was designed to frame and centre this wonderful tree, a genus deeply regretted by local government; the cost of leaf sweeping, the complaints from allergy sufferers, yet, the shade, in those increasingly terrible summers.

The tree must stay and there was just one way to preserve it, a place on the local government register of notable trees. Duly organised, its girth measured, the tree still stands. Helen's husband still grumbles. The flowering phase is hell, the seeding phase invokes fury, the leaf fall is diabolical, that it sucks the life out of the soil is infuriating, that the citrus underneath will never yield incites disdain, but the shape and the shade are wonderful. The birds sing in its branches and in winter its magical tracery frames the sky.

The ubiquitous open plan living space at the rear of the house is where Helen and her husband breakfast together. "What's that in the tree?" she says, interrupting his reading. "A fat pigeon". "Hmm, I'm not sure", but now, wisely knowing not to prolong disagreements, silence, thoughtful silence, a mental note to keep watching. She was quite sure that this was not a fat pigeon but knowing of no other possibility, she held her peace.

Sometime later she noticed this 'fat pigeon' roosting close to the tree on the decorative timber gable of the neighbouring house. The strange bird was sitting just five metres from Helen's small rear veranda. It sat there all day, and the next and the next, eventually for almost two weeks. It seemed to have chosen this roost for its home. Of course, she did her research. She soon learned that it was a tawny frogmouth, not uncommon in urban habitats. She learned how, an otherwise defenceless creature, it relied on camouflage for protection. Such was its feathering that in a Paperbark tree it would be invisible. She learned its habits, that it went into a state of torpor, much like hibernation by day and searched for food, insects and small creatures, by night. Often mistaken for an owl, it was a very different creature, fragile claws, no talons, no killing beak, just an enormous wide mouth and a deep throat that could open wide to catch flying insects, a tiny hook at the tip of its beak in case a lizard or a cricket or mouse had to be helped inside. When afraid, it would tip its head up, lengthen its body and become indistinguishable from a tree branch about 40 centimetres long.

Over many weeks Helen became deeply attached to the bird. It was strange. They seemed to know each other. Occasionally she would notice that the bird had opened its eyes and was watching her, ever so briefly.

But inevitably, one morning, the bird was gone. She felt bereft. She was fearful for the bird. As the days passed, she tried to accept that it might be dead. Her grandson of few words, "Eaten by a cat".

With her grandson's dire prophecies in mind, she asked her neighbour to check for evidence, bones or feathers perhaps. No, there were no feathers. Relief. Then, one morning, the bird returned. Once again,

day after day, except to respond to the occasional threat, it sat unmoving. Just once, when the winter sun was strong, she saw it open wide its cavernous mouth to cool its body. Every evening, once it was completely dark, it set off to hunt. She never saw it leave. She never saw it return. She never saw it fly.

THE CROWS

One morning, when the sun was fully up, the sky a clear cloudless winter blue, a flock of crows descended. Terrifyingly they took up positions in the bare plane tree, filling the empty gable struts, forming a tightly packed row on either side of the roof gable, all looking down at the fragile, terrified bird. Many more found a place in the branches of the enormous plane tree.

Helen was astonished, fearful for her feathered friend. She watched as one of the crows, unaffected by the bird's defensive camouflage, swooped from the roof, clipping the bird with its beak.

What to do? The sight of such a large flock of crows in an urban area, all of which seemed focussed on a single defenceless bird, was frightful. This bird was her companion, it seemed to know and trust her. It needed her protection, she had to fight for its life.

What to do in this age but Google. For speed she asked Siri. 'How do you scare crows away?' Within nanoseconds an answer in the form of a YouTube clip, the sounds of a crow in distress with a classical music background, length of clip 9 minutes and 34 seconds. She played it at high volume.

There was an instant response as a few of the crows flew off and any potential for attack subsided. Helen's husband, ever practical and routinely scathing of her rush to Google, suggested the hose. On the highest possible pressure she sent jets of water up into the

tree branches. Within seconds, all the crows had taken flight. They have never returned.

The morning routine is a little different now. Helen smiles to herself as her husband remarks, "your bird is there". "Our bird" she says quietly.

LORIKEET

By Janine Drakeford

A flash of green caught my eye, contrasting with the dark wood of the gate in my high-walled garden. Moving to the glass door, I saw it was a rainbow lorikeet, foundered there. A small bird, a juvenile, its green feathers brilliant in their newness.

I observed the little bird throughout the morning as it made repeated attempts at flight, but it seemed hemmed in by the tall gate and walls of the courtyard garden. It tried climbing up on pots and furniture but was still unable to achieve the necessary lift. I worried what would happen to it. Was there any way I could help?

I made a call to the local wildlife protection hotline. An officer explained that this was a common occurrence in late spring, when young birds were still building strength in their flight feathers. He told me that the parent bird would most likely be nearby, watching over the fledgling. I could offer it some water but otherwise should leave it alone and simply enjoy its time in my garden.

The bird kept trying during the day. It would manage to climb onto a ledge or a ladder or the slatted garden seat, and flap its wings, but would then end up back on the decking.

The weather started to turn: black clouds forming and winds rising in gusts. Light rain built to heavy. Thunder rumbled and lightning split the sky. The lorikeet huddled under the garden bench in the corner of the courtyard, its head down against the heavy rain. I felt its fear, and anxiety, and longing. Careful not to startle it, I gently tucked some cardboard between the seat and the wall to shelter it from the driving rain. As darkness fell, I wondered if it would last the night.

At first light I hurried to the glass door to check on the bird and, to my delight, was greeted by the sight of it inching its way up the curved trunk of my golden ash tree. I silently cheered, urging the bird on. Yes, little bird, yes! Keep going! But after several attempts to reach the canopy, each time losing its hold, it sat on a garden ledge, exhausted.

We felt the same, that bird and me. I had been experiencing my own struggles in life. I knew what it was to try and try, to make some progress only to fall back again. Just rest there a while, little bird, I urged it. Just rest, then try another way.

After breakfast I took my dog for a walk.

On my return, I heard birds screeching and squawking. Outside the living room, a swoop of birds from the tree canopy. A flash of green. Then nothing. I searched the garden, the back lane, but the lorikeet had gone. Had that vulnerable fledgling been attacked by other birds? Or, helped by the parent come to show it the way, had it found the strength in its wings to fly? I felt a sudden sense of loss and prayed for the latter.

The little lorikeet's plight brought me a message that day. Had it survived? I'd never know, but its struggle, its tenacious determination to fly, gave me hope.

LOVE AND DENTISTRY

By Tim Galbally

My dentist reminds me of Zsa Zsa Gabor. I love her and I'm telling the world. I love her as much as I despise every other dentist in my life.

As my innocent childhood was winding down, so was the era of sadistic dentistry. I recall a Dr Blood and a Dr Savage. My first dentist however, was Dr Schmidt. He had strong, hairy arms, large hands and thick fingers.

My memory has never been great. My past is often a cloudy blur. Yet through the haze, like craggy mountain peaks poking up through the clouds, there are the intermittent, indelible images of visits to the dentist. I can see, feel, hear and taste every dental detail that has ever occurred in my troubled dental life. Every sensation has been drilled into my psyche.

I see the facial creases of the man who first put his hands inside my head, more clearly than I can visualize the mother who cradled me. The tantalising flicker of metal probes on exposed nerves feels as close to my senses as my god-mother's angora cardigan breast. The sight of bloodied mouth-wash swilling around a white porcelain bowl is as immediate to me as the cover of my favorite bedtime story-book.

When I see the headlights of a car, I see hours of surgery lights on white ceilings. The scream of a high-pitched drill can hypnotize me like the crackle of a Sunday winter fire. The smell of freshly-drilled tooth decay is as riveting as chocolate crackles at a school fete.

Such sensory impressions were uppermost when a toothache would collapse my world and sentence me to those dens of iniquity.

Strange then, that at the age of eighteen, I took a job in the sales department of a dental material supplier. What unconscious motivation led me to a position which forced

me to develop an intimate knowledge of all those instruments of pain?

Within weeks I was conversing with a whole new vocabulary of probes, files, forceps, grinders, drills, buffs, brushes, burrs, magnifiers, mirrors, cements, composites, putty, tapes, blades and syringes. I could rattle them off with glittering precision and lay them out carefully on the orders table like the Marquis de Sade before his afternoon session.

Yet as much as I celebrated these new skills, I could not walk comfortably by those shelves of gleaming weaponry without imagining myself at the receiving end of it all. Day after day I spent steeped in chilling images of cold utensils piercing, probing, drilling, digging, shaping and slicing. The hooks, blades and points taunted me as I crept around that warehouse of horrors.

Soon divine intervention lured me away from the grind of the Sales department. I fell in love with the girl from the tooth department. It was a brief and star-crossed affair. She was older and somewhat married. We convened secretly amongst the dentures and porcelains. It's likely that there are residents of Melbourne who still have false teeth in their mouths upon which our love was consummated.

Eventually the passion died with the novelty, as must occur with many inter-departmental dental flings. Yet I now appreciate the experience with her was a necessary karmic connection devised to heal the dental victim in me. Love was beginning to replace pain in my dental vocabulary.

Two decades later, I stumbled into Dr Zenkowski's surgery, feeling like a nervous adolescent again. This was my sixth visit. Was I scared? I sure was. I was scared she'd say my teeth were in perfect condition and that I wouldn't be able to come here anymore.

LOVE AND DENTISTRY (CONT.)

By Tim Galbally

On my first visit, Dr Zenkowski said I needed only three consultations. But at the end of the third visit, my jaw inexplicably developed a new pain. I had to make an appointment to see her again. That happened three times.

When I left home for the sixth visit, my wife offered me a little friendly advice. 'I'll produce a bigger pain in your jaw if you have to go back there for another visit.'

As I waited for Dr Zee to float in, I reflected on those first five visits. Sensory dental details now coalesced with adolescent fantasy. The crispness of her surgery gown, like a Marilyn Monroe dress. Her slender fingers, better suited for a nail-polish commercial than holding metal probes. Her make-up, reminiscent of Sophia Loren in a 60's Italian comedy. Her impeccable, impossible hair style could accompany a moonlit aperitif on a luxury yacht in Monte Carlo. Her voice ... pure Zsa Zsa.

'Good morneeng' she purrs as she dances towards me. 'And you are vell?'

'Very vell,' my mouth replies without consulting my brain.

She bends over me so that she can study my molars and I can study her chin.

'Zis von't hurt a beet.'

I have no defense against her archetypal charm. Nor would any man raised on a diet of advertisements and movies. I give thanks to a maternal God who has sent me something so powerful that can distract me from persistent predictions of pain.

It really doesn't hurt a beet.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF WILLIAM

By Bruna Galli

Almost fifty years ago I had asked permission for Toby to enter the William Ricketts' Sanctuary, dogs understandably, were not allowed. I returned some weeks later and spoke again with William.

I remember visitors wondering when he had lived. "Look, he's over there" I said. William, a man of slender build, ever with his green corduroy beret and thick woollen jumper. I called him William "No-one since Mother died has done so". Everyone called him Bill.

Some years later he called me to see a work – himself as a long-haired young man, a lyrebird resting on his left shoulder. The lyrebird is the totem of Mount Dandenong. The statue then stood in the hall facing the Crucifixion work – two Aboriginal elders with a young William and a host of dead possums strewn at their feet. I understand he meant the new work to be "the answer". I told him it was beautiful but not what he had meant it to be. From then on William trusted me to understand and to "tell" him.

For many years I would come late Sunday afternoons. He liked me apple strudel and the butternut pumpkin and cinnamon soup. It was something of a renewed heart-warming ritual ... the three of us drank a glass of Green Ginger wine, then William and I talked, my husband and my little boy listened ... and took no part in the conversation.

There was another inspiring ritual too: William would walk us through some of the many paths of the Sanctuary evoking memories and the spirit of his works. It was after the gates had closed and all the visitors had left.

William's mother is buried under the Aboriginal Elders statue, in the porch of the log hut – the shelter he built for his mother and himself. It lies on the left path of the Sanctuary ...

William's ashes were strewn on the Churinga under the great tree as he wished. He has been moved to see a mountain thrush sitting there. He gave me a beautiful photo of the giant tree and the bird of the Churinga.

I have so much more to tell of William and His Holy Mountain of Remembrance: he refused to call himself an artist. He spoke, not of himself but of his Vision to emanate from his "forest scene". These were his words.

AN INVISIBLE DISABILITY AND THE HUNGRY GAS METER

By Janet Gardner

Family photographs depict me as a healthy toddler who resembled Shirley Temple with cascading, blonde ringlets framing an angelic face with no hint of my disability, stuttering.

I can't remember not stuttering as a child which always incited mimicking and laughter from my siblings. As the youngest of six I so wanted to be heard and have my say. However, the frustration and humiliation associated with my stammer caused me to recoil into my shell, like a garden snail evading harm. Rarely did my brain and vocal instruments synchronize, except when I sang out of tune at Sunday school! I would either block to the point that I became mute, or sound like an automatic, machine gun, constantly repeating the first syllables. Thus, keeping everybody second-guessing as to what I was trying to say. My mother had tried to get help for my stutter when I was a toddler but was fobbed off by the GP who told her, "it was baby talk, and I would grow out of it".

As the youngest child I was obliged to run errands for my busy mum. One particular errand that induced both emotional and physical pain was being sent to ask neighbors for shillings to feed the hungry gas meter. I came to loathe the grey, metal, whirring, gas meter that lay hidden in the dark, under the stairs, which had an insatiable appetite for shilling coins. Twenty silver shillings equalled £1 and was legal tender in Britain until 1971. Our house ceased to function when the gas meter stopped whirring and its reservoir of shillings ran dry. My tongue and intestines would spontaneously tie up in knots at the mere mention of the word "shilling". Beads of sweat, the size of pearls, would erupt from my pores causing my ringlets to metamorphosis into a frizzy, busby and my face turned the color of beetroot. These symptoms manifested immediately as I embarked on my errand with £1 tightly ensconced in my little sweaty hand. As I walked slowly to our nearest neighbor, under

my breath, I repeatedly practiced the word, "shilling", before knocking on their door. As soon as the door opened I would get as far as "sh, sh, sh" before they reacted with a wry grin and laughter. The humiliation was unbearable.

Unfortunately, I didn't grow out of my stammer and when it interfered with my schooling. I was given an appointment with a Speech Therapist at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital in London. Mum could barely afford the train and bus fares. The excursion to London was an adventure for me. The Speech Therapist was a kind lady who spoke to me in a very slow, gentle, empathetic way, opposite to my exhausted Mum's communication style. The therapist made me feel special and relaxed. After doing breathing exercises she asked me to repeat the words 'sausage', 'sizzle' and 'apple'. Without hesitating I echoed them perfectly. The therapist turned to my Mum and said, "There is nothing wrong with your child's speech". My mother's demeanour changed immediately and outside the hospital I felt the full force of her hand on my bare legs as she bellowed, "little cow, you have been putting it on all these years". I was mortified, confused, and speechless for some time. My stammer would continue to negatively impact my personal, academic, and professional life. I was still stuttering in 1968, when I arrived in Australia as a '£10 pom' and a new bride at the tender age of 20 yrs. My stutter became extremely problematic in 1971 when, on the day we brought our newly born daughter home from hospital, my husband left for work and never returned home again.

Finding myself a single mother with no income, I quickly had to find childcare in order to return to work. Whilst working at Peter MacCallum Clinic, an oncologist was to play a very important role helping me manage my stammer and to reach my full



potential as a single mother and nurse. He organized and paid for me to see a psychologist whose theory was my very low self-esteem and suppressed anger underpinned my stutter. The oncologist and Gough Whitlam were responsible for me going to university both as a mature aged student and single mother to obtain a Bachelor of Education. University would prove as traumatizing as school. The first time I put my hand up to answer a question in a psychology lecture my stutter went into overdrive. The lecturer, a well-respected psychologist, walked over to me and said, "I will have none of that attention seeking behaviour in my class". I was totally humiliated in front of my peers. He also subscribed to the theory that low self-esteem and self-worth underpinned my stutter. Whilst, in time, this theory proved to have merit, the way he espoused it was both unprofessional and traumatizing.

As my confidence grew with my clinical and academic achievements, including being awarded a Kellogg Fellowship in 1982 to complete my Master's Degree in Canada, and obtaining my PhD in 2004, my stutter significantly diminished. In later life I looked upon it as my stress barometer! Over the years I have developed strategies that help reduce stress and allow me to stand up and speak in public. On reflection, had my mother not sent me on those torturous errands for those shillings to feed the gas meter, I may never have been able to present academic papers at national and international conferences. During my nursing career I developed expertise in incontinence management and when asked to present papers on this topic I would often use humor to deal with my nervous stutter. I would tell the audience that I suffer from incontinence of speech e.g. hesitancy, poor stream and they may, at the end of my presentation, think I talked a lot of drive! Getting the audience to laugh with me, rather than at me, enabled me to deliver my papers fluently.

I DON'T GIVE MY PEARLS

By Veselka Gencic

These nineties are really rude, every day their shadow sneaks into my life to steal some pearl from me. My pearls ... my memories. But I don't give them. Even the smallest, insignificant memory I don't give. Because if they steal my pearls, I will remain impoverished, empty, naked.

Just today I saved a little pearl, really small ... this gloomy day with low clouds and whistling wind wanted to steal it...

"I was maybe fourteen. The room I was standing in, was cold and dark. A small window covered with curtains barely let in a little light. Darkness loomed from every corner and everything seemed depressing ...

And outside... outside the sun played with the red poppies, danced on the blooming meadows, hugged the treetops. Outside everything was alive, flowering ...

Some excitement took me, I felt unknown emotions, and they dragged me outside where a beauty reigns. I felt a terrible need to run and I ran like an untied balloon carried by the wind.

I flew through the hall, slammed the door behind me, jumped the front steps, and hit someone right in the chest. An unknown young man was coming to our house, probably my brother's friend.

His eyes were like emerald lakes. Like green grass in a clearing. I didn't see anything else. I pointed my hand at my brother who was in the yard and ran.

I jumped over small puddles from yesterday's rain, green bushes and flowers, daisies and poppies, terrified larks flew out of the grass in a panic. I also saw a pheasant, but nothing could stop me.

It seemed like I was flying. As a child, I often dreamed of flying and it was as if I brought my dream to life. I was wild with happiness.

Down in the valley I ran to the brook. The water sparkled in the sun and floated lazily, carrying some fallen flower and leaf, somewhere far away. An overgrown bush cast shadows, somewhere the call of a nightingale could be heard, everything glittered in some magical beauty...

I was elated, excited, unrecognizably myself.

I turned around. Along the path I just ran, the unknown young man was coming. The same young man whose chest I hit when I ran out of the house, was coming. He was close, maybe he was running too. He approached with long strides, slightly bent over, arms spread out like a swallow's tail, he walked as if in a trance.

I didn't want to let someone or something to destroy these precious moments of awakening, magic ...Anything he would say to me would spoil my ecstasy, because words don't say anything, they can be empty, fake ... I didn't want anything to interrupt this precious moment my exhilaration of youth. I wanted this magic to last.

I once read somewhere: to love and not to belong, to be loved and to remain myself. In that moment, I didn't think about love or belonging, I was completely myself and only me.

I looked at him, but only his arms spread out like a swallow's tail. I didn't dare to look into his green lakes, they would have frozen me ... nailed me ...

I smiled ... no, I laughed and ran. I jumped into the brook, stepped over to the other side and ran on ...

He remained standing motionless, with frozen words on his hot lips, with his hands spread like a swallow's tail. And a lock of his lush hair seemed to flutter in disbelief.

And I ... I ran and danced with poetry of youths ...

So, I saved that little insignificant moment from oblivion today. This gloomy day wanted to steal it from me, but I don't give. Nothing will take away my precious pearls, my memories. I don't give even the smallest, most insignificant moments. Because without them, I would be impoverished, empty, naked.

I don't give.

ARGONAUT

By Michele Green

For fifty years I've held a fascination with nautilus shells, particularly the Paper nautilus or argonaut which is the female octopus who secretes the shell to use the house her eggs; other sea creatures inhabit these containers if vacant.

When living on the Bunurong Coast, south-eastern Victoria during the 1970s, I met some of the women who had originated from this area then resettled on the coast permanently.

The fact that each of them owned at least one Nautilus shell, usually displayed on their mantelpiece surprised me; in one case, all six or seven of them lined up in their delicate but splendid glory. For me it was akin to belonging to an exclusive club. Green with envy, I secretly coveted these marine beauties, or of owning at least one of them.

On reflection, these shells, empty having served their purpose, might be a metaphor for many of the women who lived in the area during the 1970s. They had reached 'the end of the line' once they were married, took their spouse's name and had given birth to their children. Fortunately that was not always the case because several went on to achieve expertise in watercolour, ceramics, chosen professions, and high level sports like tennis and golf, to mention a few.

The shells have a whitish-creamy coloured, delicate paper-thin spiral formation spanning more than an angle 160 degrees, and are no more than two centimetres in diameter. They are patterned with slight protrusions at regular intervals.

How had they come to be there? Not by ordering them on-line (no such thing in those days) and the owners were unlikely to have retrieved them from somewhere deep in the ocean.

Blow throughout the year in these parts, for the duration of six weeks the winds are even more intense. These fierce 'Mutton bird gales' occur during the months of October–November. It's in this period that the delicate 'egg houses' of these pelagic octopuses blew in from the sea and were regularly found at the water's edge. The long standing local myth is that these sea houses blow in every seven years, but this claim has been disproved by marine biologists and those fortunate enough to retrieve them at more random intervals.

The Greek word *nautilus* (*sailor*) was originally attributed to a type of octopus of the genus *Argonauta*, also known as 'paper nautilus', thought to use two of their arms as sails.

Centuries ago the shells were prized by many who came across them during the Renaissance and Baroque eras. These intricately structured ocean wonders were sometimes mounted by goldsmiths, then given added fixtures to create cups and other receptacles, showcased in cabinets.

The live argonaut octopuses are complex entities with many facets about their physiology. Because of the fragility of their delicate casing, some cultures like the Palauans, regarded them to be a symbol of a vulnerable character, believing that they could perish from a slight bump on ocean rocks and thus gave the name to someone who reacted angrily after being pranked.

Scientists underestimated the intelligence of these mollusks but through experimentation by setting a series of tasks to ascertain their capabilities, they have been proven incorrect. The creature's long term memory is unprecedented and their intelligence, robust.

Because of their limited functions of their pinhole eye, allowing only restricted vision of their surrounds, their sense of smell is more profound and active in the search for food and sensing their prey.

Unlike other crustaceans, the nautilus can withstand the removal of their deep ocean habitat to the water surface, without experiencing any harm to itself.

Within my memoir about coping with four children under less than four, *'Locked up and knocked up at Inverloch'* I realised that the Argonaut sea creature and I were alike. I also have similar traits to the only female Argonaut, Atalanta who accompanied Jason and her fifty male counterparts to the archaeological city of Troy, in pursuit of the Golden Fleece.

Abandoned on a mountainside by her father, disappointed because he had yearned for a son, this brave female warrior rose to dizzying heights, surpassing many of the great men of Jason's crew. Legend dictates that while she lay as an infant exposed to the elements, she was rescued by a sleuth of bears.

Atalanta's story is inspirational from which many woman of my era (on the cusp of the Women's movement), can draw parallels. I disproved my parents' low expectations of me. My successful professional career as a teacher and education officer, and the tertiary qualifications gained while in full-time work or at home with four preschoolers attest to my fierce determination and perseverance.

Like this cephalopod, my exterior is fragile. Though I suffer multiple health issues, my inner resilience is strong, nurtured and developed after leaving a long-term abusive relationship.

I have weathered the storms of being tossed about like a distressed yacht in an Atlantic Ocean tempest unleashing its fury, causing a turbulent mix of raging seas and thrashing waves, as in the wash-cycle of a giant machine for clothes.

Left abandoned countless times, I liken myself to the lonely sailor, trying to maneuver his craft away from rocks and steer it into safer waters, while out of radio contact or satellite navigation. Fear of failure or of perishing, he is kept afloat by an adrenaline enabling him to push onwards. His steely resolve is not to succumb to the angry seas but to survive the ordeal and sail homeward.

My long suffering solitude and lost identity for over ten years gnawed at my very core.

I am now someone who disallows my past to define me. My creative, cerebral and social activities in retirement give me a positive energy. My objective is to never allow myself to be devalued or disrespected by others again.

My eldest daughter has given me a beautiful nautilus shell, alas not a paper one. I hope that one day a paper shell will blow my way!

THE CURVE BALL

By Marika Hammarstrom

Life throws you a curve ball sometimes. In our case it was a cyst the size of a grapefruit in the brain of our 16 year old son. We were blissfully oblivious to the terror ahead of us as we were plunged into a new and unwanted reality. Would our beloved boy survive? He went from being a regular happy, healthy teenager to being grievously ill, within a few days.

Jeremy had attended a party on Saturday night. At dinner on Sunday evening he ate one prawn, put down his fork and said, "Something's wrong, I don't feel right". Upon questioning he couldn't identify how, exactly, he, "didn't feel right". (And somehow he didn't look "right" to me either). We put him to bed where he lay "shivering" lightly but said he wasn't feeling cold. No headache.

Party drugs, alcohol, allergic reaction to the prawn? (food allergies run in the family). We racked our brains for an explanation to this sudden, strange illness. We pressed him for details of the party. Had there been drugs circulating? No. Had alcohol been served since it was an 18th Birthday Party? No. Could someone nonetheless have spiked his soft drink with something? No. We had to ask. Teens will try things after all.

Our GP sent him for an MRI which revealed a massive (mind-blowing, the GP said, when he saw the scan) Arachnoid cyst. (An Arachnoid cyst forms between the layers of the meninges, membranes which surround the brain). These congenital cysts are quite common but often cause no problem. Unless they are large. And under pressure. And symptomatic. And thus likely to rupture, causing a catastrophic event. Tick all four for Jeremy. He was immediately hospitalised and assigned a neurosurgeon. His father, sister and I were shell-shocked. How could Jeremy be the sport loving, piano playing, friendly teenager one day and be seriously

ill awaiting brain surgery the next? Jeremy was calm and displayed a resilience I never knew he possessed until now, simply saying, "I've accepted that I have to have this operation, Mum". And he gently bumped my fist with his. I possessed no such resilience. I screamed and sobbed (when Jeremy wasn't watching). My fear that we would lose him was palpable.

Jeremy had a craniotomy and a fenestration of the cyst. The neurosurgeon put holes in it allowing the cerebrospinal fluid (or "brain juice", as Jeremy said) to flow through it. As I see it, the cyst which could have burst with immediate and catastrophic consequences has now been rendered safely burst. But that wasn't the end of our troubles; complications set in. The next day Jeremy developed a severe headache due to life threatening intracranial pressure spikes. As he was crying out in pain I wished I could have taken the cyst from him. Anything rather than see my child suffer. He said, "I wouldn't let you". He underwent a second surgery to fit a drain to siphon off "brain juice" as required to bring down the pressure. Our poor, poor boy. Yet he still offered me his fist to bump. A reassurance for me that he was OK? He could hardly eat or sleep. His temperature went up and down adding to our fear, in case he was developing a fatal meningococcal infection. He had a drug chart a mile long. He was sombre. Intensive Care is a grim place for a teenager; a grim place for anyone. He first bumped me. (And managed to spend a minute or so on his phone most days plastering his "progress" on social media).

His staples, 34 of them curving from behind his forehead and ending behind his ear and half shaved head, made him look like an extra in a Game of Thrones film. The wound was most impressive and went on social media also. The drain came out and we relaxed a bit

(too soon). A few days later he had a bleed into the cyst. This time his neurosurgeon and another one (two neurosurgeons have got to be better than one, right?) and his anaesthetist came running in to save him, performing surgery in the dead of night. I, who wants to believe in such things, wondered why the Universe was testing me so. My husband, who doesn't, just wondered what new kind of nightmare he was in. Jeremy, to our eternal relief and gratitude survived. We went in to see him at 2am, back in intensive care (for the tenth day). I asked him how he was. He fist bumped me.

After a month in hospital we were able to take our son home. Pale, tired, thin (10 kilos lighter) and covered in rashes from, who knows, drug side effects or sweaty hospital plastics, perhaps. His father shaved the rest of his hair off to even up his "hair style". His mood was weird. Traumatized and angry. Quiet and contemplative. His head hurt. Violent words and violent films were watched (I figured violence had been necessarily done to him. Maybe he was "getting it out of his system" by watching these action films. For my part, I dreamed of car crashes and avalanches and such-like catastrophes). Whilst it was good to be home and it was the first step towards recovery it felt scary to leave the safety of the hospital where medical assistance comes running in an emergency at any hour. Institutionalised? The outside world seemed a scary place.

This calamity changed us. We value each other more and treasure our families and friends who showed us by their generosity that they were thinking of us and wanted to help – dropping off cooked meals or sending presents for us and Jeremy. Simple things. But it humbled us. And we know that we are the lucky ones. Our son is alive. Some broken-hearted parents don't get to take their child home.

FREELANCING

By Lydia Kinda

I freelance as a barrister, teacher, company director and writer.

A freelancing barrister is something of a tautology as barristers are never 'employed'. They must be 'independent' and available to take any 'brief' a solicitor offers, the 'cab rank rule'.

In fact, a barrister must have both the skill and capacity to do the work. If committed to a two-week trial, I won't have 'capacity' for another brief. Some barristers manage both so perhaps I am just lazy.

I also teach graduate lawyers some of the skills they need to be 'admitted' to the legal profession by the Supreme Court. While I don't have a Teaching Diploma, I did undertake a Certificate IV Course in Training and Assessment some years ago to learn how to engage and inspire my students.

One important aspect of my students' training is teaching them their ethical obligation not to have a "conflict of interest" and reminding them that the legal profession is regulated by the Legal Services Board which receives complaints from solicitors' clients. Falling foul of the Legal Services Board could render their Law degree worthless.

I am also a director of a company which manages the Trust Fund for a small not for profit providing cheap rental accommodation. A lawyer is clearly a useful skill for a board member but over time my role has expanded to include much of the day-to-day administration of this charity.

I am also a writer. After both my parents died, I decided to write a memoir about my father's life. I had rarely discussed his life with him prior to his death and quickly realised how little I knew. I collated and copied my father's documents and photographs, started writing his story then stopped.

In 1994 I took a contract position in Carlton only two blocks away from the University of Melbourne (Unimelb) where my daughter was studying for an Arts Degree. I decided to return to study.

When I enquired at Unimelb to enrol in an Arts Degree, the 30 years since I had completed my year 12 studies made the university enrolment staff sceptical. They suggested I do my VCE or, as an alternative that I 'audit' a fee-paying course, sit the exams and use those marks for my application to VTAC.

In 1995 I enrolled in Beginners French and my employer tolerated me taking my lunch at the same time as my classes. I completed First year French with my best marks ever. When a friend told me of mature age entry for Law, which my daughter was hoping to transfer into, I applied for both Arts and Law.

In 1996 Unimelb increased the number of mature age law students and dispensed with the gruelling 3-hour Alsat entrance exam. You can't imagine my shocked surprise when, along with my daughter, I was accepted for Law but not Arts.

Unlike in Arts, I had no choice in my initial choice of subjects. Only once I had completed the mandatory subjects could I pick and choose. Although I struggled initially with what now seem to be simple concepts like *ratio decidendi* I persevered and also completed 100 points of French for my non-Law points. By December 2000 I had completed 29 subjects in all. Unlike my daughter I didn't pass with Honours but neither did I fail any subject. I graduated in April 2001.

Fortunately for my future career in Law career my employer decided to cancel my contract in late 2000.

I applied unsuccessfully for articles and instead completed the Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice at the Leo Cussen Institute. In hindsight this course, which included managing my own files and engaging with other "lawyers" was, I believe, a better preparation for any type of legal practice. I was admitted to practice as a lawyer in December 2001.

I was offered a job at a small law firm. With my new skill set I knew roughly what to do. The most important thing my Law degree taught me was how to think through problems, research and find solutions.

I used chronologies to isolate the problem and keep track of future events. Reviewing my career, I undertook a Meyers Briggs test which showed I had both teaching and advocacy strengths. I applied to the Victorian Bar Readers Course. As there was an 18-month waiting list for the Course I left for a holiday in Italy with my daughter.

My daughter and I had just returned from walking Rome in the heat of August to our hotel at the Campo de' Fiori. Still wet from a shower, I answered a call on my trusty Nokia mobile phone. A voice told me the waiting list for the 2004 September Readers group had collapsed and I was offered a place.

Over the last 24 years I have worked on my father's memoir using my legal training, research skills and creating a chronology to find the missing pieces of the puzzle. I researched the fantastic collection of books on Czech history Unimelb's Baillieu Library, Czech archives and the internet generally. I even followed 'in his footsteps' across Czechia, Hungary, Germany, France and Belgium.

I still freelance but have 'reduced' my workload in the Law, teaching and the charity in order to focus on writing and finally finish my father's memoir and hopefully write other stories.

So, still freelancing.

AUTUMN IN MACEDON

By Inge Kulmanis

A few very happy people climbed into the comfortable bus, driven by lovely, competent, helpful young ladies.

They share everything except for the actual driving.

The weather was sublime, Autumn is mostly the best time of the year.

Especially in the country, it was a fair drive to Macedon, and we admired all the trees along the way.

The “Beauty” that we encountered upon arriving was outstandingly magnificent!!

The road of “honour” was thickly strewn with leaves of all colours, yellow-red all shapes and sizes.

I kept bending down gathering the leaves.

We saw a “Bride”, they photographed her dancing amongst the leaves. Many people enjoyed it, mostly young people, and visitors from other countries. It was a Monday and I felt also like dancing but tried – unsuccessfully.

But admiring the shapes and colours of the leaves, my heart jumped!!

Oh what a beautiful day! Gathering all shapes and colours from the ground.

Eventually, we arrived at the “Café”.

Quite peckish!!

We had a choice, as everything was homemade.

Very many visitors felt the same. It sure was a very friendly and busy abode.

I ate the most delicious Quiche with Salad.

The staff were running, that’s how busy it was. Nevertheless, they were utterly obliging and friendly.

Mt Macedon in the background, we slowly meandered back to the Bus, and once again, we saw the “Bride”. And admired her. The Photographer offered to take a photograph of us. Everybody started to get tired. We were happy to return to our home on wheels.

It was a special warm sunny and delightful DAY!!

Thank you!

FINDING AGAPI

By George Kyriakou

Do you remember professor Julius Sumner Miller?

‘Why is it so?’ he would ask.

Have you ever had a ‘Why is it so’ moment?”

I have.

Allow me to tell you about one of them.

My older sister Agapi was nine years of age when she contracted measles.

My mother Eleni had left strict instructions with the family elders that Agapi was not allowed any solid food for twenty-four hours, water only. Tragically, the elders gave her food. Her allergic reaction to the food caused Agapi to fall into a coma.

Mother arrived home late from working in the fields. Her white purdah still covering her head, she found her beautiful child alone in a darkened bedroom, in a state of unconsciousness. Then suddenly, after three hundred and sixteen million beats, in her nine short years, her heart stopped beating.

“Oh no Agapi! No! God help me, no!” screamed Eleni, her daughter’s limp body lying across in her unwashed soiled arms, her blistered hands wiping away the flow of tears from her eyes.

Eleni went into emotional free fall. She had a mental and physical breakdown.

“Why did my sister die? Where’s my sister buried?” my inquisitive ten year old brain asked my mother. I suspected something bad had happened because she changed the subject.

“She was the most beautiful child, her pale blue eyes looked at you and glowed with love.”

“What happened to Agapi mum?” I asked again.

My mother’s way of dealing with the tragedy was to put it behind her, not pretending it didn’t happen, just not talking about it. It was brutally painful for her, devastating every fibre in her body.

In July 2016, I returned to my village in northern Greece in search of my sister’s grave. I met with Maria, the owner of the taverna, the local meeting place for the village.

“My name is George Kyriakou. I was born in the Kyriakou house up there,” I said, pointing to my childhood home. I told her that I was looking for someone in the village who could help me find my sister’s grave.

Maria asked, “What’s her name?”

“Agapi,” I replied.

“Wait here a moment.”

Maria returned with an elderly lady. This dear old soul had the most weather-beaten face I’ve ever seen; her wrinkles were deep and baked in by the sun, her veins in her hand were like ropes. She wore black clothing and a pair of old, worn scuffs. “Are you George from the Kyriakous?”

I nodded my head, acknowledging her question. “Yes, I am.”

“My name is Lena, like your mother,” she said to me. “I also remember your beautiful sister Agapi, your mother Lena, father Zhivan and all the Kyriakous. How can I help you?”

“I’m looking for my sister Agapi’s grave. Do you know where it is?”

“Come with me” she said.

FINDING AGAPI (CONT.)

By George Kyriakou

The grounds surrounding the two hundred and fifty year old stone built Assumption of Mary church were used as the local cemetery. Many of the headstones were over 200 years old. This frail old woman took me to the back of the church, stopped, and pointed to a spot about three metres from the east corner of the building. "Your sister Agapi is buried here," she said.

I was devastated. The spot she pointed to was barren, covered in pebbles, broken glass and weeds waist high. There was no cross or marker to indicate my sister, or anybody else, was buried there. Lena was however absolutely positive about the position my sister was buried, as there was a headstone nearby with the name of my Great-Grandfather Filko, who died in 1933, at 74 years of age.

"This is the area all the Kyriakous are buried." It was the family plot area.

I headed back to the taverna. Maria had a table for me in the courtyard, under the willow tree next to the river so I could appreciate the setting. The elation of finding my sister's burial site had a profound effect on me. For over sixty years I had harboured a desire to know what had happened to Agapi. In that moment I was overcome with emotion, erupting like a dormant volcano, and I sobbed uncontrollably.

I called my younger sister Sia. "I want you to do something for me. I'm leaving you €300 to arrange for a marble cross to be erected where our sister Agapi is buried".

Weeks later Sia telephoned me. In Melbourne it was miserable, cold, rainy Saturday night.

"Hi George, it's Sia." She was sobbing.

"What's wrong, has someone died?" I asked.

"No," she replied. "I've got something to tell you. You have changed my life. "

She told me that an unbelievable thing happened when the stonemason, Christos Setcos, had come to erect the marble cross on Agapi's grave.

"Christos asked me where I wanted the cross placed. I told him to place it about three metres from the corner of the church building."

Christos picked up his shovel to dig a hole for the concrete slurry for Agapi's cross. He had dug a hole approximately forty centimetres deep and sixty centimetres wide when his shovel created a spark after hitting something solid. He looked at the engraving on the revealed flat paved stone, and then stood upright. He had a fixed stare. "You'd better come and take a look at this Sia," he said.

'Agapi Kyriakou 1950' was engraved on the stone. We had finally located the exact spot of Agapi's burial headstone.

"After 66 years of searching we finally found Agapi. George you have corrected a wrong. This is one of the best days of my life."

A marble headstone is now erected exactly where our sister had lain buried and unidentified for such a long time.

My sister's emotional recollection of what had transpired, the elation and significance of the find, finally hit me. What I felt was incredible.

"Welcome home Agapi, welcome home my dear sister. I love you."

MY SUPER EYE

By Janine Mifsud

Do you remember your baby teeth? How excited you were if the tooth fairy rewarded you when you lost one? I can recall those days, maybe a little hazy now, but how dedicated I was to extracting those very teeth. Sometimes getting two little fingers around the base and just yanking the tiny bone-like structure or twisting it until feeling a small string clinging to the gum, finally placing a tissue around the now wobbly little pillow and with a final twist and a small amount of pull, holding this childhood treasure in my hands with pride.

The excitement, and it really was excitement, was then wrapping the prized tooth in a bed of tissue paper and placing it carefully under my pillow. It was worth it. Yes this process was worth it! Just to wake up in the morning, with heightened expectation and excitement to feel under my pillow and realise once again the tooth fairy had been. I was now sixpence richer.

Next it was getting the tonsils out. I don't know whether you've had yours out but it was a pretty common experience when I was a child. I can't really remember my time in hospital but I can remember swallowing the slippery jelly and half melted ice cream, sitting up in bed like a princess and receiving gifts because I had been such a good girl.

Childhood seems in retrospect to have been a series of visits to our local doctor to stitch up gashes in the leg or eyebrow, plaster an ankle, or fashion a sling. Then back to the doctor to have the stitches out or to remove the plaster. Always the same doctor, always the same clinic and always accompanied by mum and dad and always being given a treat for being brave.

Like many others in middle age, now it was visiting a variety of specialists and having bits and pieces extracted: a parathyroidectomy,

a hysterectomy, extracorporeal shockwave therapy to remove kidney stones, a variety of skin cancers (basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma). All those nasty malignant tissues gathered up in the scoop of a scalpel. Now recovery was home in bed alone whilst the family went out to work or school. Leaving the house with a few throw-away lines like: "You alright love?" "Do you need a cup of tea?" These salutary words were now my only compensation.

Old age is a whole new ballgame. I don't know if you have been down this path, but it's quite an interesting stage in life because now the medical profession starts to put things back into you. Recently diagnosed with cataracts and glaucoma, I had the choice to treat the glaucoma at home with eye-drops and not worry about the cataracts until they affected my lifestyle.

A year went by and on my next visit to the ophthalmologist the question was then repeated: "Is your lifestyle being affected in anyway?" "Yes," was my response, "I don't drive at night any more due to the glare of oncoming traffic headlights."

Before I knew it I was signed up for surgery and not only for cataracts but also for the glaucoma. A stent was going to be injected into the back of the eye to reduce pressure and save my sight. Fine I thought and then I was shown the pamphlet with a picture of the actual implant. I was speechless. Horrified, I stared at the stent. It looked like a huge metal space station; it was going to be injected into my eyes. I was going to look like some freakish humanoid – a walking transformer. I almost cancelled the procedure there and then until I was shown the actual size of the world's smallest titanium medical implant. It was the size of a speck of dirt.

The operation on my left eye was successful.

MY SUPER EYE (CONT.)

By Janine Mifsud

Only the right eye to go. A day of fasting, dilated pupils; awake during the operation, the sensation of the surgeon sawing inside my eye (that's what it felt like, first time around, possibly not the reality) and then waking up the following morning to see colours I hadn't seen for many years. I was now the proud owner of a new lens and a stent. From now on if I ever have to have an MRI I have to mention my implant.

Oh for my poor little body; but it didn't just end there. These additions to my head were going to have some friends. Not only would I have two super eyes but two super ears as well. Yes, you guessed it; I was fitted with two state-of-the-art hearing aids. Altogether these gems for my eyes and ears cost thousands of dollars.

I ask you what happened to the generous, kind, wonderful tooth fairy and the lovely gifts? It must be time for a change as all I'm seeing now is the Grim Reaper gobbling up the dollars in my self-managed superfund. But I can see you and hear you! That's my reward.

A.I.F. SERVICE NUMBER 3448

By Barbara Overbury

On the eve of Anzac Day, 2017, I was surprised by a caller seeking relatives of Robert Norman Nash who had died in France in 1918. She was pursuing a request from an elderly Legatee who had been given a medal and asked to find the owner's family. Eventually the caller tracked me down, and one medal was returned to his family, 99 years after his death.

Robert – always called Robin – was the second child and eldest son of the Rev. Clifford Harris Nash and his wife Louisa Mary Maud Nash (Pearse). They were a well-to-do family in Anglican colonial circles.

Robin was one of six children; his father had academic aspirations for him but he loved the outdoor life, the bush, and had no interest in schooling. The family story was that he was rebellious, handsome and wilful. He left school at 14 and was apprenticed to the Royal Australian Navy. Before that, according to his call up papers, he was a 'market gardener'. His enlistment papers were misleading: he gave his mother's name – Mary – (actually Louisa Mary) as his next of kin, said he was a Methodist (even though his father was an Anglican clergyman) and that he lived in Hawksburn. These were subsequently modified to next of kin being Rev. Clifford Harris Nash of Armadale.

Enlisting on 12.4.1917, he gave his age as 21 years and 3 months. Robin was actually 16 years and 7 days old.¹

Why did Robin's parents let him enlist? Why did the enlistment officer accept that the boy they had just signed up was only 16? Why were there no checks made?

A year after enlistment, on May 3, 1918, Robin was killed in action near Villers Bretonneux, aged 17 – recorded as 22 – after only four weeks in the trenches.

The response from the family is anecdotal. According to my aunt, when Grandfather received the telegram from the War Office informing them of Robin's death, he said to his wife, having told her of the telegram, "probably the best thing, really". According to family legend, this began a rift in their relationship that ended in unofficial separation.

This sentiment was echoed in the statement that Robin's father wrote for the Roll of Honour in the War Memorial Museum in Canberra:

Joined the Royal Australian Navy 25 Jan, 1916. discharge purchased 4 April 1917. Enlisted in A.I.F 12 April 1917.

"Thus the boy served his country almost continuously from the age of 14 years 9 months until his death in the front trenches holding the line at Villers Bretonneux".

In reality, Robin's war record is a list of misdemeanours.

He entered Broadmeadows Army Camp; by 21 June he had completed his training and embarked on the HMAT A29 'Suevic' bound for Liverpool.

Soon problems started. For his first misdemeanour, on the 20 September 1917, he was fined one day's pay for being absent from the 8pm parade in Wilton, England. The next charge was 13 October when he forfeited 7 days' pay for 'neglecting to obey Parade bounds and being in Wilton without a pass at 10.30'. The most serious charge, in November when he was sentenced to 90 days detention for 'insubordinate language' while at Codford. He unsuccessfully pleaded not guilty. Soon, he had forfeited another 113 days' pay. Although Robin had spent less than six months in Wilton, England, he sustained three charges, two of which were for A.W.L.

A.I.F. SERVICE NUMBER 3448 (CONT.)

By Barbara Overbury

One week before Christmas, Robin was marched to the AIF detention barracks where he stayed until February, 1918. The reason? Insubordinate language with the ‘Unexpired portion of sentence 9 days is remitted from 22 February 1918 for good conduct’.

In March he left Southampton to France to join reinforcements of the 14th Battalion, On 11 April he was arrested again, reason or penalty unknown.

By May 6, 1918, Robert Norman Nash (Robin to those he loved), was dead, ‘holding the line at Villers Bretonneux’.

From here, the trail goes to a few notes written by his mates after his death: “he was right alongside of me in the front line trench ... he was killed instantly by a sniper’s bullet ... I helped to bury him behind the paradon (sic) the next night. It was about 1/2mile from Villers-Brettoneux ... in front of two lone trees which stood (sic) one in each side of the road ... He was in B.Co. VII Platoon and only 17 years old. His father was a padre. We called him “Young Canon”. Inf. Pte.H F Hazlewood, 7585.

Killed 3.5.18. Nash was in VII Pltn. was killed by a M/G bullet through the head at Villers Bretonneux while holding the line. His father was Archdeacon Nash and I knew R. Nash well, he was my pal. Nash and Sgt Harry Brown of B. Coy. who was killed on the night of 2nd May were brought in together. I helped to get Harry in and saw both bodies ... they were buried ... at the cemetery at Bn.H.Q. (Chalk pit) Sgt. Guest J.A. 3401.²

Of these pieces of personal information I found, perhaps the most poignant and most suitable epitaph is ‘I knew R. Nash well, he was my pal.’³

Although in his will, Robin requested that he give the ‘whole of my Military Estate and effects to my mother for her use absolutely’ – the letter was sent to ‘Dear Madam’ – it was his father who signed for the Consignment from the Defence Department. Robert Norman Nash’s grave is now at the Crucifix Corner Cemetery.

So what was the estate? a wallet, religious book, two Stamps, piece of ribbon, lock of hair, photos, certificate, two discs.

Footnotes:

1. Enlistment papers” Australian Imperial force no.3448

2. The Australian Red Cross Society. Wounded and missing Enquiry Bureau File . 1914-1918 War.

3. Will of no. 3348 Private R Nash, June 15, 1917.

ON ST KILDA HILL: A SENSE OF BELONGING

By Phillip Schemnitz

I am a small boy in the 1950s, wearing short pants as I ride the tram into town with my Australian-born grandmother, Evelyn.

The tram climbs High Street, then runs down the other side to the pointy Junction Hotel. High Street forms the spine of the thriving centre of a once wealthy and beautiful enclave. Victorian shops sit cheek by jowl on both sides and the frenetic character of the narrow street thrills me.¹

This is my earliest recollection of St Kilda Hill.

It is a warm autumn day twenty years later when I return to St Kilda Hill on my bike. In the front garden of number 7 Crimea Street there is a tall, slender woman. I know immediately that it is my grandmother, although we have never met. She is younger than I am now and wears a cardigan over a floral summer dress and is chatting with a couple of her young tenants as she rakes up the rust-coloured leaves that have fallen from the maple tree.

My grandfather, Phillip, was in his eighties when they bought St Hubert’s, a Victorian Italianate mansion. So it was towards the end of their lives, not at the beginning, that my grandparents arrived in St Kilda via Camberwell and South Yarra.

In the 1920s, in the aftermath of WWII and in response to a shortage of accommodation, St Hubert’s was divided into four flats and given a new façade in the Arts and Crafts style. The architect was highly skilled and the building was deemed worthy of protection and rightly given heritage status. It remains intact.

My grandparents engaged Walter Burley Griffen to extend their house in Camberwell, so it seems they had a good eye for design.

Phillip and Margaret occupied the best flat, on the first floor of St Hubert’s and rented the others out to young people they treated as their extended family. Climbing stairs seemed not to present a challenge.

Grandma, I am your grandson, Phillip, I say by way of introduction.

Oh, Phillip! she replies in her lovely Danish accent. With tears in her eyes, she drops the rake and embraces me.

Come upstairs to meet your grandfather, he will be so happy to see you!

I follow her up the stairs on the north side of the building. At the top we reach a lovely portico with a large masonry column supporting decorative timber work. Margaret leads me into a large, east-facing room with a generous balcony overlooking the street.

Abu, look who has come to visit!

Even in his late eighties and into his nineties, my grandfather remains a big, strong man. He puts out his large hand I shake it. Phillip Schemnitz meets Phillip Schemnitz. For the second time today I feel my heart flutter, for I’ve been told as a child by Evelyn:

You’re not one of ‘them’, dear. You’re one of ‘us’. The Schemnitz family is from another planet!

So who am I? I bear the name of the extraterrestrials and part of me is imprinted with their genes. I need to know. This meeting is part of my search for identity.

You’ve got a grip like a lion! he exclaims in his thick Hungarian accent. And when I laugh, he says:

But a lion doesn’t have a grip!

ON ST KILDA HILL: A SENSE OF BELONGING (CONT.)

By Phillip Schemnitz

I have joined my grandparents again at their place on St Kilda Hill for what has become one of the regular dinners that have taken place since our first meeting. Stories have been told and gaps in their history I know only a little about have been filled. The bitter divorce of my parents and the court case that ensued has kept us apart until now.

Tsssk, goes the high-fidelity needle as it lands gently on the margin of the LP that my grandfather has carefully removed from its jacket and placed on the turntable. There is a momentary pause, then the sound of the wild and enchanting Hungarian Gypsy music that he loves most of all fills the room, indeed the whole building, for my grandfather is by now as deaf as a post.

After the music has finished, my grandfather, a mechanical engineer, who was born in 1885, tells me about his life. Soon after arriving in Melbourne alone via London in 1905, he read a German scientific magazine that described oxygen production. He quickly booked a working passage on a steamer to Germany to learn as much as he could and after this and many subsequent trips, he became an important player in the sphere of oxygen production and oxy-acetylene welding in Australia.

As an old man, however, my grandfather's main concern is that he has lost his driving license and as he tells me with a laugh: fish-biting and train timetables often fail to coincide.

My grandmother tells me she arrived in Melbourne from Copenhagen with her mother, as a young woman. Her mother opened a shop selling boiled lollies – the first of its kind in Melbourne. She was introduced to and married my grandfather, despite a difference in their ages of twenty years.

I loved my grandparents' European hospitality, their strong accents and their stories, rich in detail.

Most mornings I walk or ride past St Hubert's from Hillgrove, our house named after the farm on which Evelyn grew up. Because it's on a hill and we, our neighbours and the Council have planted a grove of Chinese Elms, it seems appropriate. I am reminded of Evelyn, Phillip and Margaret every day.

My long associations with this area and our closeness with our neighbours and friends in St Kilda, some of whom I've known for more than forty years, provide us with a sense of belonging and a deep connection. My family and I inhabit this place; that is to say that our notion of home extends beyond the walls of our house, as it does for many Europeans.

Footnotes:

1. The stretch of road formerly known as High Street that extended from St Kilda Town Hall on the corner of Carlisle Street to the south, to Fitzroy Street to the north was renamed St Kilda Road after the Victorian shops and dwellings on the west side were demolished to facilitate the widening of the road.

THE NIGHTRIDERS ALMANAC

By Jonathan Shields

I am a nightrider. I have been since way back. As a child I spent occasional spare hours at a nearby station watching trains. Express trains, local trains both steam and diesel. I was not however a natural train spotter equipped with a notebook and anorak, the type who really knew the difference between an 0-6-2 and a 4-6-2. For me the pleasure was in the dreaming rather than in the spotting. In the possibilities of unknown destinations rather than in the accumulation of the numbers that would let me lay claim to have seen every 0-6-0 diesel on the line.

As I grew older my train watching days were left behind. Few self-respecting fifteen-year olds could afford to admit to being train spotters. The alternative possibilities offered by a co-educational school, increased pocket money and the space at the back of the gymnasium gently eased my train watching aside.

In later years, study, college life, employment, marriage and family combined to ensure that my train watching days were behind me, but I did not mind because I had, by then, discovered a new and more enchanting mode of dream travel. One that could transport me far beyond the rain-soaked stations I had visited as a child. This new and exciting mode of dream travel came to me in the form of a slim red volume entitled Thomas Cook's Continental Timetable. When I bought my first treasured copy more than 50 years ago it cost me two shillings and six pence.

It was on my first few evenings at home with my new purchase that my serious night riding began. Within a week I had taken a train to Ulan Bator and then onto Omsk for a connecting train that took me along the golden 'silk' road to Samarkand and Bukhara. Then it was on, over the border to Tehran. The first of the Ayatollahs was still

languishing in Paris in those days, but not even he could have put a stop to my night rides. From Tehran it was on to Baghdad, across to Aleppo and a ferry to Istanbul.

My school geography lessons paled as I travelled to places that I told myself my teacher had not heard of. However, dream traveller I may have been, but these were no dream trains. They were real. There it was in black and white with all the authority and credence bestowed on them by the name of Thomas Cook. I had only to turn to page eight with its table of international time zones to know that from the time showing on my bedside clock an express was leaving Budapest for Rome and another from Geneva to Copenhagen. After my first few nights I was hooked. I still am.

Every year or so I hop online to purchase last year's summer edition of what is now known as The European Timetable (renamed after a staff buy-out of the venerated Cook's business). Old hands like me do not worry that it might not be entirely up to date, because many of the interesting provincial lines still operate as they have done for decades.

What has changed however are some of the lovely old named trains; The Mozart express no longer leaves Vienna at 8am each day on its way to Paris but the new high-speed network spreading across Europe has opened up many new and enthralling possibilities. I would never have dreamed of being able to take an early afternoon train from London to arrive, after a couple of changes, in Barcelona in time for dinner.

In my years of nightriding this book has told me how long to allow between stations in Berlin, and what visas I might need to transit Russia (in the days when one might do it). It has the ferry times along the coast of

THE NIGHTRIDERS ALMANAC (CONT.)

By Jonathan Shields

Norway and between the Greek Islands. If you were not keeping up with world events it would tell you that the town of Carlsbad is now known as Karlovy Vary and the that former East German town Karl Marx Stat has reverted to its former name of Chemnitz. This book has it all.

After a hard day working in the Garden or feeding the fantasies of some 'sleepover' grandchildren, what could be better than indulging a few fantasies of one's own. An afternoon cruise on Lake Konstanz perhaps, passing the castle of Schaffhausen, then across the lake to Lindau for the short ride into Munich and a wild night on the town.

I have travelled with refugees fleeing countries in turmoil and with migrants crossing Europe in search of work. On snowy nights I have travelled with mysterious and beautiful fur-clad companions. I have travelled all over, and still it goes on.

These days I am too old to worry or be coy about my night riding addiction whether it be with family, neighbours or colleagues. My wife is benignly tolerant, even amused by my travels, but I have to admit, she seldom waits up to see what time I get back.



MINOS AND THE CHRISTMAS CARD

By Georgina Tsolidis

The tram screeched to a stop in the middle of Elizabeth St, white dust clouding around the wheels. I was waiting on the other side of the road for the Number 57 which would take me home after a long day at work. I heard the deeply accented voice shout 'Meez, meez'. A familiar face leant out from the tram driver's cabin. It was Jean who I had taught several years previously. Most teachers who taught what was then called English as a Second Language (ESL), were women and we were all referred to as 'miss' regardless of our preferences.

The school where I met Jean enrolled mainly migrant students. The most recently arrived did most of their classes with ESL teachers for the first twelve weeks of their schooling, before being slowly integrated into mainstream classes. This arrangement was preferred by these students and the other teachers, who were not trained to teach non-English speaking students.

Jean and his family had migrated from Lebanon. He was one of four siblings. The family spoke fluent Arabic and French. It was my job to teach them English. Jean and his twin brother Joseph were the eldest, Mona came next and lastly, Walid, who was cut from a totally different cloth to his brothers and sister. His love was dance and with his teachers' assistance he eventually gained a place at the dance academy to study ballet. Like many of their classmates, this family had fled to Melbourne from war-torn Lebanon. For some of these refugees the trip had been straightforward. For others less so.

After leaving Lebanon, some of the boys I taught had lived on Athenian streets for long periods of time, faring as best they could on their own. As a result, they were very worldly for their age. They sat awkwardly behind school desks. Many had lied about their age so they could enrol at the school and

resurrect their interrupted educations. Some of them worked night shift in the local bakery making Lebanese pita bread to support their families. It was not unusual to see them succumb to sleep at their school desks during classes.

The school was in the inner city and some eighty per cent of the students in the late 1970s were migrants. These migrants came from Greece, Cyprus, the former Yugoslavia, Lebanon and Turkey. We had so many ESL teachers that they formed a type of 'mini-school' within the school. Many of the teachers were also migrants. We built the type of relationships with students that prompted Jean all those years later, to stop his tram, so he could say hello to 'Meez'. Students, curious about our backgrounds would sometimes ask, 'Meez what language are you?' The lines between Greek, Italian, Serbian and Lebanese, for example, blurred in a school and a neighbourhood where everyone came from somewhere else.

The majority of migrant students came from Greece. So much so that everyone declared Orthodox Good Friday a public holiday. 'Not worth coming Meez, too many Greeks stay home'. The Monday after was filled with plates full of plaited bread, twisty biscuits and red dyed eggs as the Greek students brought these Easter goodies to share with classmates and to give to their teachers.

The crackle of the intercom would signal that it was nearly lunch time. We steadied our classes for the invariably long and barely discernible announcements by the Deputy Principal. 'Could the following students report to the quadrangle for yard duty'. The list seemed to go on for an eternity. The mood of the hungry and now fidgeting students added an extra burden. The announcement was filled with names such as Aphrodite, Helen, Pericles and Con.

Greek students named after grandparents who were left behind. The students shared a name but no longer shared a family life with them. Invariably some names had been 'Australianised' with the ever-present Jimmy and Harry. The person on the intercom would stumble through the poli-syllabic surnames – Papadimitriou, Alexandropoulos etc etc. Every classroom erupted with laughter when the crackling intercom invited 'Minus Arse'n Knackers' to join the yard duty group. I still wonder whether this mispronunciation of Minos Arsenakis was intended.

The students at the school were ambitious and hard working. Their parents had migrated to offer them better opportunities. A cliché yes, but so real for these students, most of whom took this sacrifice very seriously. They were earnest. Some of course, were hard work for teachers rather than hard-working for parents. One parent teacher evening I overheard a student translating for his parents who understood very little English. The teacher had kept months of misdemeanours bottled up waiting for the opportunity to 'spill the beans' to mum and dad. To her surprise, the parents nodded and smiled through her diatribe. In Greek, Johnny was telling them how happy she had been with his progress. There was no budget for interpreters in the 1970s.

I was leaving the school at the end of the year. The students didn't know I would not be returning. Like all end of years, they came with cards and small gifts, usually boxes of chocolates. A card from a new arrival stated in wobbly script, 'I hope you are enjoyed and pleased this Christmas'. At so many levels, who could ask for more.

WHEN DID YOU BUY HERE?

By Noel Turnbull

After we moved to Port Melbourne more than half a century ago questions about where we lived prompted responses which illustrate the history of Port over those decades.

Initially, when asked where you lived, and you said Port Melbourne, there was a sort of sniff and a rapid change of subject. Years later when asked the same question and giving the same answer the response was “when did you buy there?” So, what happened and what changes has our community had?

After living in a small apartment in Prahran, and starting to think about a family, we decided we ought to move to somewhere else. Our initial plan was to move to the hills. So, one weekend – with the then huge Age real estate listings in the car – we headed out to look at properties. After a long day and a long drive back, we realised outer suburban life was probably not for us.

Back in Melbourne my partner picked up The Age again and started to look at properties for sale closer to the city where we both worked. After a while she asked: “What about Port Melbourne?” I knew where Port was, and remembered farewelling people going overseas on ships, but not much else.

But from after that day we have had 50 years of watching a community being transformed; making new friends; and getting immersed in local history, local politics and local sport.

All from a classified ad in The Age.

The ad was for two small adjoining cottages for sale in Ross Street. It looked interesting so we went to inspect them, made an offer; and bought them both – taking on the tenants in the adjoining house – planning to combine them at some stage.

Yet the smell from Lever & Kitchen was stronger at our end of Ross Street than the sweeter smell of the Swallow and Ariell biscuit factory at the other end and we started to look at other places.

While walking our young son in a pram my partner had frequently passed a large house in Evans Street. It was opposite the shunting yard, set back from the street, but still alongside the train line and the place where briquet’s were loaded and unloaded. Some years after the house came up for sale. We didn’t attend the auction at which – probably because of the awful state of the house and garden and some very active shunting work on auction day – it was passed in.

We had expressed interest beforehand but then decided not to go along and bid, thinking it would be beyond our means, and headed off for the weekend. In the pre-mobile phone days, the agent hadn’t been able to contact us after the house was passed in. He finally did on the Monday and asked if we were still interested. We were – and with a precursor of the now common help from the banks of Mums and Dads – we bought it.

From then – after a couple of major renovations and much breaking up of concrete backyards to make way for trees and greenery – we created a home.

It was a home from which we saw massive changes and many battles against many things. The plan to build Surfers Paradise by the Bay, complete with canals, at what is now become Beacon Cove unified the community in opposition. The community was saved by a credit squeeze which damaged the development’s viability. The later alternative of Beacon Cove was also regarded suspiciously initially but today it looks attractive and in scale with the community.

The beachfront high rise was another matter. But Australia’s removal of many tariffs and other protections destroyed many industrial uses – and Beacon the replacement apartments at least opened up much of the beachfront. All that’s left of what was there before is the Beacon and one part pillar of Centenary Bridge while Princes Pier is a spot for fishing and roller-blading while Station Pier is only active during cruise ship season.

Back then it would probably have been impossible to imagine the changes which would happen in Port Melbourne and the experiences they brought. Battles with developers and governments – some won some lost. It was as if every weekend we were out protesting and campaigning and every night at meetings planning campaigns.

When the Royal Yacht moored at Station Pier the noise of constant helicopter flights watching over the boat – perhaps fearful that we would launch cruise missiles against it – was unbearable. Complaints to the British High Commission were greeted with the comment that she was your Queen too and got the fierce republican response – “not mine”.

There were many other battles. A planned freeway along the railway line was scrapped, along with the Liberal Government which proposed it, and replaced by a park. The pallet operation closed as part of the national privatisation drive. One fight to stop the amalgamation of Port Melbourne and South Melbourne was won with the slogan – Vintage Port Worth Preserving. But then the later bigger battle was lost, and St Kilda become part of an even bigger mix. An industrial rail line along the Port Melbourne beachfront was scrapped after strong resident opposition. The train line initially stayed but its dogbox carriages were eventually replaced by the light rail.

Then there were the people – both old and new residents. Migrants working in the Fisherman’s Bend industries. People who had lived in Port for generations. Former and current waterside workers. The famous and the infamous. Workers riding their bike – proper bikes not the expensive modern versions – to and from work and around the town.

And even Council vehicles being pulled by horses refreshed at the troughs around the city.

As the old Aussie would put it – you wouldn’t have missed it for quids.

Poetry

THE BUSH BECKONS

By Dermot Avon

We drove on by the Corroboree Tree
 Round the bottom end of the lake
 As we made our trip into the bush
 To see how the kangaroos lay
 'mongst the Red Box and the Grey Gums
 Where the wallabies wallow all day
 Squizzy is an excellent guide
 Taking us on tracks that ain't on no map
 He knows where to look and when to abide
 Early evening. Crepuscular animals pop up
 Matters not if it's a possum or a sugar glider
 Standing still is a virtue in the bush
 Then we find a meandering bend in the river
 Where there's a beach of warm, comforting sand
 The sparse and dappled moonlight ...filters down
 between the towering, flowering gums
 And the whisper of the she-oaks
 Drifts. With the gentle breeze
 It reminds us of the wild river rapids
 Where the wandering stream meets the sea
 Tis a special place for the birds to nest
 To nurture, to feed and to breed
 A place of calmness, of reflection, of harmony
 Where butterflies frolic in the ancient ti-tree
 Driving back on the suburban roads
 On smooth bitumen by the Junction Oval
 I think to myself ...
 Why did I drive so far to the bush
 When there's so much nature. So close to home.

THE AGED TENANTS HUNG OUT TO DRY

By Neheda Barakat

I
 In their youth
 they pulped lemons
 on ridges of glass,
 gold bleach to
 de-freckle milky skin.
 freckles survive
 in folds of collapsed mouths,
 inflate over time
 ivory canines saddle
 pink gums.

II
 lolling flesh,
 chalk frames,
 limp limbs
 no longer peg to life,
 the aged tenants hung out to dry
 waiting to board
 the light train.

DERVISH

By James Cattell

‘Come child, come.’

In our cerecloths of ash.
We shuffle,
From our cities of ash,
Following arid paths,
Through cinder-strewn fields
And charcoal forests,
To the ashen pall
At our world’s edge.

‘Come child, come.’

But I,
I have heard another calling,
Borne upon a laughing zephyr,
That circles about me.
Lu Lay
Lu Lay
Sings this voice,
From behind,
From before,
From one side
To another.

I become spindrift
Within a surging air current
That plucks the singed threads
Of my winding shroud
To bathe me in new light,
To cradle me naked,
Then to re-clothe me,
Enrobed in clarity.

While,
Ever fainter,
Those who were once mine still call
‘Come child, come,’
As they trudge ever deeper
Into smoke haze.

But I!
I have new love now.
I dance to the caress of new calling . . .
Lu Lay
Lu Lay
Lu Lay.

WILD GOOSE

By Vicki Endrody

She stands in silence, with reverence, to greet the morning sun
Soft feathers stretched wide, to receive its gifts of warmth and love
Now, reaching upwards with graceful neck and wings
The wild goose offers thanks to the heavens above
Then, taking three breaths, deep and slow, the healing energy begins to flow
Breathe in a strong and healthy body
Breathe in a calm and peaceful mind
Breathe in a wise and discerning spirit
She took time for repose, time to nourish her being
Time to quench her great thirst and to forage for seeds
She took time to prepare for the journey ahead
To feed body and soul and tend to their needs
Gazing down, searching, in the lake’s mirror glass
There’s one, lone reflection to see
Gone now from her side, her lost, lifelong mate
Where, in this wide world, could he be
Remembering when they last flew together In formation, with the flock, they’d pressed air
Then a sudden loud bang broke the quietude
She turned to look, but he was no longer there
After bathing alone in the cool, cleansing water
The wild goose ascended the skies
With beating wings and aching heart, weaving between clouds drifting into her path
She’s yearning to find where her great love now lies

CONFESSIONS OF AN OP-SHOPPER

By Lee Hirsh

If I buy from the op shop I can find a bargain or two.
 This is what I like to do!
 Bric-a-brac, trinkets, knick-knacks too, tempt me to buy.
 It's then I get the urge to splurge!
 Applying to my mixed media, hoping it to be a pleaser.
 Adding some paste and using your waste to give it another dimension.
 Bits and bobs, odds and ends.
 I have the insight to create a piece of art.
 I challenge myself to pursue.
 Hoping that someone else will admire it too.
 Fashion is a passion, whether it's vintage, old or new.
 I cannot get enough!
 My wardrobe is to mix and match.
 Paisley, floral, checks or stripes, muted or brights.
 Geometric, abstract designs too.
 I like to buy from the old to the new.

FOREVER URBAN

By Russell James

For too long have I been hesitant
 Feelings of mine to openly vent
 I do not love a sun-burnt country
 Let it go green from a soaking rain.
 I'm no fan either, of a sweeping plain.
 I know that sounds so un-Australian.
 Words that belong to some strange alien
 Before you disown me I have this to say.
 I am a city boy, both born and bred
 It's their images living inside my head.
 The narrow lanes, some cobble-stone lined
 Where I can go to be wined and dined
 The crowning of St. Pat's and of course St. Paul's.
 With lofty steeples that above you do soar
 And around which cold winter winds do roar.
 Some people pine for a coastline or valley
 They shy away from the sight of an alley
 A seaside vista, or one of hill and dale
 There they find peace, one that's enduring
 Give me a streetscape, that's far more alluring.
 Part of Bourke Street has morphed into a mall
 I didn't see that coming, no not at all
 Now it's all musical, with buskers galore
 Yet trams trundle through it with barely a care.
 You will need to watch out, to be fully aware.
 As for Fed. Square, I think it wrongly maligned
 For odd angles and buildings misaligned
 I like its contrast to straight city grids
 Huge screens beam out to give our spirits a lift.
 Yet sadly fell silent for a certain Ms Swift.
 We boast about a river that flows upside down
 Although some visitors can't hide a frown
 It is the venue for the birdman rally
 When competitors will try to take flight
 And Grand Final day, punt a ball out of sight.
 Like all great cities we honour tradition
 Such as Christmas lunch at Sacred Heart Mission
 We parade down Swanston Street to celebrate Moomba
 Past steps under clocks where often we gather
 Nearby is Chloe, sending young lads into a lather.
 If there be one truth that I have found
 It's that my roots lay deep in urban ground
 There remains a last statement to be proclaimed.
 It's aimed at John Denver, and I refuse to be coy.
 Everyday I thank God that I'm no country boy.

NOSTALGIA

By Aziza Khamlichi

In the cradle, a baby girl, most cherished.
After many boys aplenty finished.
Sugar, spice, and full of grace.
In love and safety. She holds the embrace.
Spring
Blossoms of youth in orchards wide,
Siblings' keeper, with hands tied.
Confusion, resentment, innocence lost,
Vulnerability felt, at too high a cost.
Summer
School's end, a fledgling's flight,
To distant dreams, out of sight.
Whispers of freedom, so sweetly heard,
Youth's elixir, in every word.
Love's dawn, under skies so vast,
On sandy shores, footprints cast.
A family blooms, hearts entwined,
In blessed union, joy is defined.
Autumn
An empty nest, the children flown,
A life's work, fully grown.
A fruitful end, to toil and strive,
Sailing gently, feeling alive.
Grandchildren, stars that brightly gleam,
Sharing tales, a living dream.
Glorious feelings, in their glow.
Life's tapestry, in them, we sow.
Wisdom's age, love's enduring flame,
Passion's ember, a steadier aim.
Marriage, a fortress, time-tested, strong,
In wisdom's embrace, we belong.
Winter
The final day, memories cascade,
No looking back, no need to evade.
A soothing breeze, the soul's caress,
An angel's call to eternal rest.
In silence deep, life's curtain falls,
Yet in the hearts of those it calls,
Life dances on, a timeless song,
In every beat, we're carried along.

THE ONES WHO GET AWAY

By Shirley Leitch



They don't take the balanced view
The ones who get away
Don't take the good with the bad
The rough with the smooth
Or look for the silver lining.
They just run
Or skip or dance
Down the driveway
Out into the road and round the corner
Until they are gone.
They never look back
The ones who get away
No pillars of salt
Just dust sparkling in the sunlight
Kicked up by their departing heels.

FRENCH LESSONS WITH BRUNA

(FOR DR. BRUNA GALLI)

By Barbara Anne Magee

"Ah, le beau monsieur!"
 "Ah, la belle madame!"
 Bruna greets us at her front door
 With her usual grace and charm.

She ushers us down the hall
 To the lounge-room, where coffee's prepared,
 Apple strudel still warm from the oven...
 No effort is ever spared!

To warm up we start with a sing-song,
 Joe Dassin's "Les Champs-Élysées",
 We sing with great gusto (not always in tune!),
 "Now let's start without further delay!"

Our weekly dose of Albert Camus...
 The Plague, The Outsider, The Fall,
 His cadences so lyrical
 Never fail to delight and enthrall.

"Jean-Paul Sartre is rather depressing,
 He's all right once in a while,
 Could we please postpone till next week?"
 The others concur with a smile.

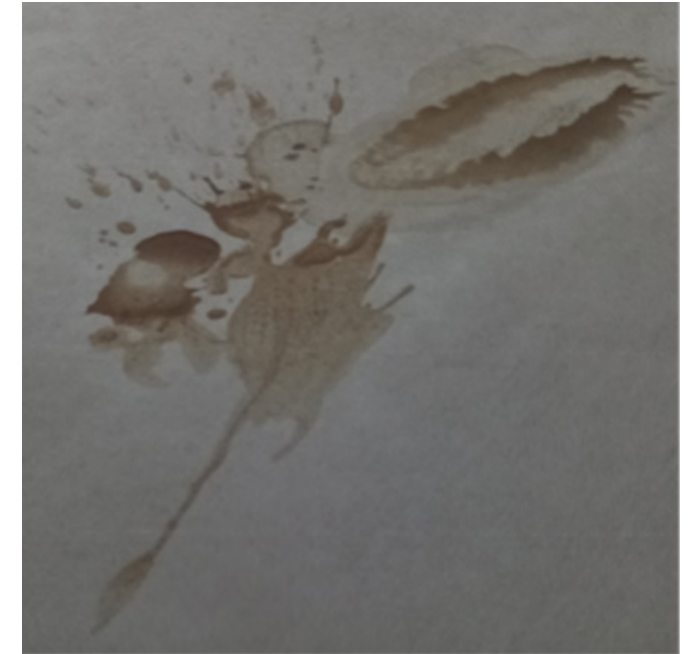
"Oh, we forgot to do grammar!"
 "Quel dommage!" we lament, eyes SO sad,
 But with Bruna's warmth and sense of fun
 Even GRAMMAR isn't too bad!

As we leave we are showered with gifts...
 Strudel, orchids, verveine,
 We wave goodbye to our generous host,
 "Au revoir! A la prochaine!"

NEW ARTISTIC SKILL

By Anna Rogalina

Young Wind was a sporty one.
 In the morning he went for a run.
 After he decided to have more fun
 And painted clouds near the Sun.
 When soon they started to fly,
 He was glad their reflection to see
 In the mirror on the top of the sea!
 By passing the line of green palm trees
 He greeted them with a light cool breeze.
 On the way down for a while he was still,
 When he saw on a table a fresh coffee-spill.
 He started to blow from left to right
 Till the good picture on the wet table
 Appeared so beautifully bright!
 The Wind enjoyed his new artistic skill
 By making a lovely flower from the spill!
 P.S. You have to see it to believe it



THE THOUGHT OF THE RAIN

By Caroline Sargood

The thought of the rain
Hangs strong in the air now
Drifting across from the hills in the North
The smell of the wet with it
Tentative, teasing, coming and going, venturing forth.

And now the air's swirling
The yellow dust's curling
Lifted aloft on the thermals below
Feel the air wet now, colder and dark now
The lingering sun setting mountains aglow

Then rain falling steadily, hissing and keening
Sweeping across, relieving despair
Feel the earth's welcome, the hope now of greening
As the ground opens up
And sends thanks to the air.

CLOUD

By Clemens Unger



It is said that
bodies are made mostly out of water;
so I find myself wondering,
what is happening to it once we're gone?

Are we turning into raindrops,
hanging heavy
glistening in the sunlight
on the tips of leaves?

Or into a murmuring creek
winding its way through a meadow
chasing towards the sea?

For me,
I'd wish to become a cloud,
drifting in the winds,
changing shape in the thermals,
surveying the land from above,
eventually dissolving,
into the blue sky,
on a perfect day.

THE WORLD'S IN A SPIN

By Andrew Vella

The world's in a spin. Where can we go? What do we do?
Who do we love? Some people stay true.
Asteroids orbit round. Comets loop past the sun.
A dream, loud noises at night, nowhere to run.
Swearing, fights on the street. Soldiers fight wars.
The humane ones with good hearts fight the good cause.

The world's in a spin, remotes fly drones.
So many walk on through life glued to their phones.
Artificial intelligence closely tracing our moves.
Our truth slowly slipping through the cracks and the grooves.
Technology changing racing ahead super fast.
Will Satellites crash down from the first to the last?
Hackers and scammers, how can we break free?
Should we walk through a forest to absorb what we see?

The world's in a spin, will it come tumbling down?
Fresh news every day, wear a mask with a frown.
Violent crime anywhere, moonlight and day.
Happy homes torn inside. Do we go? Do we stay?
All different faiths must show that they care.
How long will it take to answer this prayer?

Climate change, how can we react?
Nature degrades a new focus, we need to enact.
View of the city, what am I doing here?
Crowds gather in protest for those living in fear.
Blinded by sunlight, dumbfounded by greed.
Can we all work together to mend all earths' needs.
Like a grain of sand on the point of a pin.
Will we sit on our hands? The world's in a spin.

There's hope and there's faith, charity too.
People's lives miraculously saved by what angels do.
True to our purpose, where everyone learns.
Writing this poem as this planet turns.
The bible says Jesus will come through our greatest trial.
Holy spirit touches our soul, never astray.
The world spins around just one turn every day.

THE COCKY ON THE MALLEE

By Roderick Waller

I dragged me back, turned me out and upside
down, coaxed me into city life, though one
month on I turned and ran back to my run
on the Mallee scrub. Took to the woods for

possum and bark to feed my wife and thirteen
kids. Sheep dying on the bank of the dried-
up dam, goannas stripped their flesh in their
dying breath. Gathered the moss in the dry

river bed to keep old Bess from dropping
dead. Hired me mallee rake for a tanner
a day to settlers clearing paddy melon
and Salvation Jane. My wife churned butter

dawn to dusk to hold off famine in our
wattle-bark hut. Bone-brittle cattle livers
Patterson Cursed and half-clothed sheep strangled
by Bathurst Burr died like flies in the papery

wind. So I rolled me swag once again and
beat to town to the fog and the malarial
swamps, broke rocks in the quarry, dug tracks in
the roads, caught between the devil and the

mud-cracked road. Oh I miss the musk of the
Mallee scrub, hoot of the owl and the scream
of the fox, sparrows, and rabbits stripping
the corn, the dingo ravaging my flock,

droving the long paddock for a stem of
grass, dust storm and fire that threatens the home.
Oh I miss the musk of the Mallee scrub
the thick of the fight. For I'm challenged to

grow bigger than myself, tame adversity,
grow fuller pride in that, learn humility
in the vagaries of nature, all she'll
throw at: the fields are swept clean as a yard

the wells are salted and the river
sucked dry, so we tighten the belt, wait we
must for the ocean winds to send rain-bearing
clouds, either that or we'll perish, succumb

to skeletal bones. We stare long at the
purple banked horizon, forked lightening
strikes blinding, but not one drop of rain
falls. So I stripped the Mallee for tannin

at a penny a yard, trapped a possum
for threepence for the fur on its back and
shot a dingo for a shilling for its tail and
scalp. What's left of the flock and the herd I

drive to the market town to pocket a
few shillings for their bony-scarred hides. My
wife made rabbit stew on the mallee charcoal
fire, fed the guts of possums to the bacon

swine. The kids ran barefoot, no place for school,
learning the ways of the world on the mallee
scrub. What little is left goes on the government
tax, sixpence a square mile for the vermin

fence. We dammed the river to conserve the
pools to our downstream neighbours lament. But
when push comes to shove it's all we can do
to live from hand to mouth on the Mallee

scrub. So I dragged me back, turned me out and
upside down, coaxed me in, but me, the wife
and kids fell to the tally of the Mallee
ghosts in the years of the federation drought.

But I dragged me back, turned me out and
upside down, as the tears vaporised in the sand,
and skin scrawled in the dry west wind, and
hearts bled for strength under the merciless
southern sky.

I cried: Come child to the mossy bank by the
shrunken river
bed, grip with me the drill to the artesian
sea. Come wife, draw the pail for we must drink
or die. Come boy, flex your arm, push with all

your might. For if bedrock struck we must dig
again and curse the water diviner's
wand. The dirt's turned to dust, our mouths gone dry
so strain the sap from the peppermint, fill

THE COCKY ON THE MALLEE (CONT.)

By Roderick Waller

the muslin bag with the morning dew that
the drillers may moisten their throats and sweeten
their breaths to drill again to the
artesian well. The sheep bleat forlorn,

the fox's angry bark echo our elegy,
sparrows scrap for cocksfoot seed, thistle bleeds
the bovine, Salvation Jane drove Bess insane.
So come on son, put your back in it, on

a prayer, a whim and the diviner's wand,
we'll hit the artesian well. Come wife,
squeeze the rag of morning dew. Come lad flex
the muscle in the western sun, we'll drill

for water til Kingdom's Come. We'll take you
to the fight til you succumb to sovereign
rights. The paper wind darkens the east, the
ground cool but hard cracked dry. Come wife,

join hands at the drill, now't to lose, we're all
worn out. Prayer, whim, and wand again
have failed, so come on boy let's dig
the grave for our tears have vapourised in

to the ground, our skin scrawled in the dry west
wind, bled for strength under the southern sky.
The years flashed by; the kids flown the nest
I laid my wife to rest, her heart worn out.

And I took to the road, slept under the stars,
my bedpost the gum, the billabong my bath.
Til when my legs gave out I
moved to the town.

Except for the willow that waves to the
trains, the aspect is of iron and slanting
rain. My hope was for a view of the deep
blue sea, but I accept the brave willow

and bid her adieu. For the time is approaching
when I'll be laid in the ground and two copper
coins will cover my eyes. Except for the
roses that wave gaily in the street, the

walk is tiresome, grey, and mundane. My hope
was to walk in meadows, along languid
streams, but I bow to the brave roses and
bid them adieu, for the time is approaching

when I'll sleep in the ground where their perfume
cannot go. Except for the love that rained
down on me, life was toil, trouble, and pain.
My hope love's caress would never

cease but I thank the kisses bestowed
on me and bid them adieu for the time
approaches I'll be laid in the ground
to be with me wife under the Mallee scrub.

ACLAND ST.

By Eva White

I've recovered my good spirits, street life does that for me
A hot chocolate, a book, a photographer snapping my picture.

It doesn't take much to chase away the demons
Alone at home they pursue me, amongst people they flee.

Iron grey clouds blanket the sky, a hot January wind blows
The palm trees of St Kilda wave crazily.

The cheerful crowds eye luscious cakes in the windows
The young man on crutches with one and a quarter legs breaks my heart.

IN THE WARREN OF A MACHINE

By Lucy Wilks

I, an error,
am the malfunction
of your verification code.

I, invalidated,
am a disabled device
whose screen freezes your touch.

Once I translated
each inscrutable pixel
into potsherds
thrilling to your digging stick.

Once my hot-carrier diode
kept constant
your diffusion coefficient
like the night-watch of a gendarme.

No weapons-grade plutonium
could be as potent
as your indulgence
of my breakdown.

Nor RP7 lubricant enough
to soothe the squawk
of rust on rust,
of my bones in your annals.

For I, an outage,
consume with an uptick
your vintage connectivity,

As you, my virtual server,
revel in the firewall
of my attenuated bandwidth.

Author Biographies

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Lyn Allen

I have lived in the COPP since the early 1980's originally living in St. Kilda and am now in Port Melbourne. I am retired enjoying my free time embracing the area where I live, from lawn bowls, yoga, gym, walking along the beachfront and local areas.



Danielle Arcaro

Danielle was raised in the beautiful countryside of Gippsland and, after a stint in Europe, moved to South Melbourne. A musician and educator, Danielle has performed across the world. After losing her son, Emanuel, Danielle now advocates for complex-youth mental health. She lives with her family, a percussionist, a double bassist, violinist, cellist, and an atonal cat.



Dermot Avon

Dermot has worked around Port Phillip for many years. He is an active volunteer with the Port Phillip Men's Shed. He is a pretender who can't quite master the English language.



Irene Blonder

Irena Blonder is a long term a resident of St Kilda. She has a PhD in philosophy. She has worked as an academic, a public servant and in small business. She has published book reviews, articles and chapters in books. Apart from writing, she enjoys visual and performing arts, and bushwalking.



Christopher Burgess

Chris Burgess worked in advertising as an art director and then as a copywriter. This was in London during the 'swinging sixties' and subsequently in Melbourne and Sydney. He resolves never to own a motorbike, especially after a hair-raising experience as a pillion passenger.



Jacki Burgess

Jacki has lived in Port Phillip since 1993, first in St. Kilda and since 2011 in Port Melbourne. She says one of the differences between the two places is that when you walk around the streets, in Port Melbourne there are more smiles, and more dogs.



Neheda Barakat

Neheda Barakat has Lebanese heritage and has lived all over the world. She grew up in Armadale but made a sea change when she moved to Port Melbourne three years ago. She has a Masters in Communications (Distinction) and is a Creative Writing Diploma drop-out! She has a love affair with the craft of writing but doesn't necessarily find it easy.



Peter Barry

Peter is a retired General Practitioner. He spends his time between his local Melbourne apartment and his home in Marysville. He is interested in literature, music and politics. He attends classes at U3A Port Phillip and is treasurer of the Probus Club of Port Melbourne.



Yvonne Bell

Yvonne has had an interesting career in teaching, beef farming, horticulture, and the manufacturing industry. She continues farming and beekeeping. A Jack of All Trades, writing is one of her many hobbies.



Wendy Butler

Wendy is a reluctant 80-year-old, who has been writing since she arrived in St Kilda in the year 2000. Her themes have progressed from stories set in the Holly Wood and Gatwick private hotels to stories about ageing. My stories are about ageing but rarely about aged care.



James Cattell

After studying law, philosophy and art in New Zealand, James moved to Australia in 1979. He has since earned a vicarious living through sculpting and painting, and his works may pop up in unpredictable places. Now in semi-retirement, he is re-exploring language as an art form.



Kerrie Cross

Kerrie Cross is a retired health and human services planner and administrator who has lived for many years in Albert Park. The craft of writing for business and pleasure has been a lifelong interest and a source of pleasure. In 2023 she collaborated with the local gardener and veteran professional runner, Les Williams, to write and publish his remarkable story, LES.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Ieta D'Costa

Ieta D'Costa is a retiree who has derived much pleasure from joining the creative writers group at Port Phillip U3A and can highly recommend it.



Helen Devereux

Helen has been writing on and off for years. She loves the challenge of telling a short story with twist. One day she hopes to have enough stories to fill a book.



Sandy Dobson

Sandy has lived in Port Melbourne since 2015 and loves her daily walks along the seawall. She worked in the city, then from home, and is now retired. She enjoys travel, movies, books and Nordic Noir on SBS. Sandy lives with her son and cat.



Tim Galbally

Tim Galbally is a long-term resident of Melbourne, and a lover of its libraries. He is a husband, father, grandfather, psychologist and an active member of local, diverse communities.

He enjoys arranging words to describe his experiences and the things he loves.



Bruna Galli

Bruna Galli came to Melbourne with her parents at the age of ten. She graduated from the University of Melbourne, and completed a doctorate at the University of Clermont-Ferrand, France. On returning to Melbourne, Bruna became a part-time tutor at the Council of Adult Education, and at Deakin University.



Janet Gardner

HIGHLY COMMENDED – NON FICTION

Janet Gardner resides in public housing with her dog Ella. Despite suffering complex health issues, she remains strongly committed to social justice and positive ageing through membership of the Older Persons Advisory Committee. Janet continues to enjoy music, writing, card making, croquet, line dancing, swimming and meditation.



Trevor Donohue

Trevor Donohue has been writing short stories and novels over the last 40 years. Four of his books have been made into Talking Books for the Blind. Despite having 14 books in the State Library he likes to keep a low profile. Sam the rottweiler passed away recently, arthritis a contributing factor.



Janine Drakeford

Janine has over 40 years' experience as a publisher and consultant editor.

She established the independent publishing company, Benchmark Publications, and successful children's list, Windy Hollow Books, many books receiving prestigious literary awards. In 2020 she retrained as an Integration Aide, and currently works part-time in a Melbourne primary school.



Vicki Endrody

Vicki is a retired teacher who now focuses on her own education, attending several Port Phillip U3A classes. She enjoys the calming practice of Tai Chi, the joyful sound of the ukulele, meditative watercolour painting and the sometimes frustrating, but ultimately rewarding process of creative writing.



Veselka Gencic

Veselka spent most of her life in Serbia. After graduation she worked on popularising astronautics and space research. She published a monograph of the Yugoslav Astronautical and Rocket Society.

She lives in Garden City. She likes writing, traveling, nature and a long walks by the sea.



Jane Grano

HIGHLY COMMENDED – FICTION

Jane Grano recently moved into Elwood in 2022 from Blackburn. Professionally, she has worked as secondary teacher of English and German. During her career, she also spent time teaching English in Germany, Spain and Chile.



Michele Green

Having lived in Central and South Gippsland for thirty-five years, Michele Green now resides in Port Phillip. She is a member of the U3APP's "A community of writers" which meets each week of term at the Mary Kehoe Centre. Writing, watercolour and reading are just some of her hobbies.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Deb Hall

Deb Hall is an avid reader, writer, beachcomber, jazz aficionado, model ship builder, croquet player. Born in 1957 in Melbourne, Victoria. Has published poetry in magazines and anthologies, and published short stories in anthologies, and articles in hobby magazines. Has lived in St Kilda for forty years.



Marika Hammarstrom

Marika is a proud resident of Port Phillip since 2001. She loves the beach and Gasworks Arts Park. She swims laps at MSAC and practices yoga at U3A Mary Kehoe Centre. She is an enthusiastic library-user and local caf-sitter. She lives with her husband and two cats.



Jan Harper

MAJOR PRIZE - FICTION

Jan Harper (OAM) lives in Sandridge Bay Towers, Port Melbourne, and last year wrote its history– from sugar works to starch factory to living units. She was a Sociologist, working in the areas of women and health. Her involvement in the Women's Movement was in writing non-sexist children's books.



Aziza Khamlichi

Aziza Lived in the UK where she had various professions: Nursing, social Work, Interpreting/ Translating. Then Counselling /Advocacy. She retired as a civil servant. She moved to Australia after retirement to join her daughter. She enjoys her love for languages and writing. She volunteers as a photographer for Port Phillip U3A.



Lydia Kinda

Lydia Kinda has mostly lived in Melbourne. She currently works as a Barrister at the Victorian Bar, teaches at the Leo Cussen Institute, is a director of a not for profit and writes for pleasure. She has two children and 4 grandchildren and loves to travel.



Belinda King

Belinda King has lived in various locations in the city of Port Phillip most of her adult life. She has raised and schooled three children locally and has relished watching her six grandchildren exploring the local parks, playgrounds and beach. She has retired from work as both a psychologist and international aid worker having worked in Serbia, Sudan, Timor Leste, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. Belinda likes to observe the small details in happenings around her which can feed her imagination.



Lee Hirsh

I am a self-taught, legally blind prose writer and contemporary mixed media artist.

With my creative writing I often like to use rhyme – to create a beat to my sheet.

I have had various works published.



Russell James

Although a teacher of accounting (now retired) I have long held an interest in English Literature, especially the singular story-telling of Wodehouse and Conan Doyle. I have tried my hand at short stories but this entry represents my first foray into the medium of story telling in verse.



Megan Jones

Megan Jones has lived in Port Melbourne since 1990. Her family has lived in Port since the 1880s; and founded the Liardet Street Cinema in 1905. She is a member of Albert Park U3A writers' group guided by Michele Green.



Jnge Kulmanis

Jnge has been a of Port Phillip for 43 years. She absolutely loves Port Phillip. They help her with social support and when her husband was alive, they helped him with the Midweekers. Now, Jnge spends time sitting on her walker along Elster Creek to observe the birdlife.



George Kyriakou

Born in 1944, George moved to Australia with his family, from Greece, in 1951. In 2022, he joined Hazel Edwards' (AOM) program, 'HOW TO COMPLETE A BOOK IN TWELVE MONTHS'. He has self published his memoir, 'IFTHESHOEFITS', and written two children's picture books and several short stories.



Shirley Leitch

HIGHLY COMMENDED - POETRY

Shirley Leitch retired just as the pandemic hit Australia. After many years of writing non-fiction, she had planned a return to creative writing. While most other plans were torpedoed by COVID-19, she is grateful that this option may even have been aided by lockdowns.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Barbara Anne Magee

Barbara Anne Magee was born in Launceston and studied literature and foreign languages at the University of Tasmania, Hobart. She trained as an English and French 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.



Richard McClelland

Richard is a retired health care worker and ex-serviceman. He lives in peace beside Albert Park Lake where he first learned to sail over sixty years ago. He writes all forms, fiction, non-fiction and poetry.



Janine Mifsud

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



Phillip Schemnitz

Phillip Schemnitz was born in Melbourne of Australian-born parents. His four grandparents were each from different places and spoke many different languages. He is a lapsed architect and a writer who has lived with his Italian-born partner and their two sons, on St Kilda for the past thirty years.



Jonathan Shields

MAJOR PRIZE – NON-FICTION

Educated in the UK, Jon migrated to Melbourne with his French wife in 1976. He worked in Property, Planning and Project Management in the Public and Private sectors and has just spent two years exploring Australia. A Port Melbourne Resident of 23 years



Adam Thrussell

I know Vincent from Toastmasters, an international organization about public speaking. Also like competitors in the Big M Marathon 1981 Frankston to Melbourne Town Hall. As a photograph illustrated, I ran in the event taken by a fellow school border along St Kilda Road, Melbourne with a limp.



Barbara Overbury

I moved to port Melbourne in 2001 from Gippsland where I had been teaching for many years. Robin Nash was my father's eldest brother.

I was an English teacher and have always loved stories of "little" people.

Although my grandmother lived with us for many years, she never spoke of Robin to anyone, and it was only long after her death that I came across his life's story.

I love writing, particularly about outsiders or misfits.



Anna Rogalina

Anna has lived in the City of Port Phillip since 1992. She is an art teacher and very much a people's person who does a lot of voluntary work in the community. Anna enjoys writing where she creatively expresses her feelings and emotions.



Caroline Sargood

Caroline grew up on a remote farm in beautiful East Gippsland where she grew to love the countryside, and still does. After graduating as a Social Worker, she has lived with her family in Elwood. Now retired, she continues to spend as much time as she can outdoors.



Georgina Tsolidis

Georgina Tsolidis has worked in education at a range of levels. She was a secondary school teacher, a consultant with the Department of Education and worked in policy and research. She worked in universities for many years. She lived in Elwood in the 1970s and returned in the 1990s.



Noel Turnbull

Noel Turnbull is retired. He has been a journalist, political staffer and established and ran Australia's biggest PR company. He is a former City of Port Melbourne Councillor and co-author, with Nancy U'Ren, of A history of Port Melbourne. He has been involved in community activities for many years.



Graeme Turner

Graeme has worked in journalism and theatre. He has published poetry books and conducted writing workshops. He has featured in other publications and on radio.

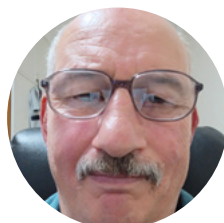
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Clemens Unger

MAJOR PRIZE - POETRY

Clemens was born in Germany and migrated in 1996 to Australia. He has a lifelong interest in nature and has more recently begun to write poetry. Clemens works in Port Melbourne and lives with his family in Mornington.



Andrew Vella

Andrew Vella has been writing poems for over 45 years and his writing styles are based on poems for the new age, bush ballads, and "non rhymers." Originally from Frankston, he has lived and worked all over Australia but is now settled in South Melbourne.



Roderick Waller

Roderick Waller Yorkshire born came to Australia in 1971. He has worked with farmers in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Thailand, and in outback Australia. He has lived in Port Phillip for 10 years and writes to stay sane and chipper. He enjoys walking, watching clouds, listening to birds, and playing banjo. His creed is: speak once, listen twice.



Eva White

Eva White has lived in St Kilda for 30 years and loves it. As well she has spent lots of time in New York where she grew up. She has had many stories published in Australia and New York, including in the NYTimes.



Lucy Wilks

Lucy Wilks was born in Melbourne in 1960. She has lived in the City of Port Phillip since 2007. Her work has appeared in journals in Australia and the US. Lucy enjoys walking, bird watching, and bluegrass mandolin.

INTRODUCING THE JUDGES

Carmel Shute

Carmel is an historian by trade and taught history, politics and feminism at four different universities.

She has also worked as a union organiser at the ABC and as a media officer at the City of Port Phillip, other local governments, and the trade union movement. She now runs her own PR consultancy, Shute the Messenger, and is trying to retire.

In 1991 Carmel helped found Sisters in Crime Australia, which celebrates women's crime writing, and has been a national co-convenor ever since. In 2016, the Australian Crime Writers' Association presented her with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Carmel has lived in the St Kilda area since 1985 and has been active in a number of local organisations.

Lois Best

Lois is an avid reader and writer. Over the years, as an English teacher, she has had the opportunity to co-judge several writing competitions, most recently the Future Leaders Writing Prize in Victoria.

She is also practiced at proofreading having taught writing skills, and edited and/or corrected the resulting writings.

One of her favourite editing tasks in the 90s was assisting a Chinese friend with the English translation of "Chinese Cultural Relics" when she was living in China and learning Mandarin.

Lois believes that English is a complex language and such fun to work in!

Nancy Corbett

Nancy currently teaches the *Appreciating Poetry* and *Writing Memoir* classes at Port Phillip U3A.

She is a published novelist and poet and an experienced editor. She takes great pleasure in encouraging other writers to find their voice and tries to live by the example of poet Mary Oliver, who said *Pay Attention. Be astonished. Write about it.*

