



PORT PHILLIP WRITES

Stories and Poems

Gathered from the
City of Port Phillip
Seniors' Writing
Awards 2023



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Stories and Poems

Port Phillip Writes Stories and Poems celebrating 19 years of publication



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INTRODUCTION

by Wendy Priddle

Chair Older Persons Advisory Committee

It is with great pleasure I write the foreword to *Port Phillip Writes*, the annual publication now in its 19th year, showcasing Port Phillip's talented over 55's who submit their best pieces of poetry, fiction or non-fiction prose. It is always a joy to celebrate the written works and writers at the Port Phillip's Seniors Writing Awards, and this year it is bigger and better than ever.

We thank the 49 writers who submitted their pieces this year. This figure is much higher than the 27 writers submitting last year which is very exciting indeed. In fact, of the 49 writers, 25 are submitting pieces for the very first time.

With such vibrant storytelling, *Port Phillip Writes* makes the perfect coffee table book for the members of the Port Phillip community. The variety of stories and poems reflect the diversity of our community and that words can paint a picture for the readers to see.

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 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 at the end of this publication). We thank them for their time, generosity and considered thoughts in the process of awarding the prizes.

We would like to thank the judges also for their input into editing, in particular Nancy who dedicated significant time to editorial support for the publication. Also, we thank Luky Annash for the images supplied to make this year's edition colourful and vibrant.

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

Wendy Priddle
Chair Older Persons Advisory Committee

Fiction

THE MATCHMAKERS

By Helen Devereux

Ann and Lee met at work and within months were good friends. It was a rainy Tuesday lunchtime when their conversation shifted to ageing parents.

"I wish my father would meet someone, it's been five years since mum passed," stated Ann. "Well, I have the opposite. It's my mum who is alone after dad died," responded Lee.

It was some weeks before the idea to get the two of them together blossomed. Ann showed her father Reg photos of Lee's mother Rose and vice-versa.

"He says he's too old for a blind date", Ann informed Lee. "Of course he isn't. Never too old to find love." Lee said "Mum's quite cagey about the idea. She's worried because she has false teeth". They laughed. The matchmakers didn't give up and a few weeks later Ann had convinced Reg to send Rose an email.

Dear Rose,

Our daughters seem to think we have a lot in common and are a match made in heaven. Thought we should humour them by pretending we are meeting and hopefully they will let the idea go. What do you think?

Yours sincerely,
Reg

After some days of contemplating the right words, Rose responded.

Dear Reg,

Thank you for your interesting email. I think you might be on to something. Lee is at me every day asking if I am going to meet you and I would like to put an end to her badgering. We could say we are catching up Friday for a pretend coffee and see if that satisfies their match making plans.

Yours truly,
Rose.

Reg, who normally didn't care much for checking his emails paid more attention that week and was quite excited when a further response from Rose came through. He responded immediately.

Perfect. A pretend coffee next Friday. Perhaps you could tell me a few things about yourself so I have something to tell my daughter when she asks ... which I add, she definitely will.

Rose laughed. She responded with a few of her interests in playing 500, going to the botanical gardens with a good book, St Kilda pier at sunrise, BBC historical dramas and a love of Japan.

Reg was surprised at how much they had in common. He enjoyed playing 500, loved walking his dog through the gardens and one of his holiday plans was to see Japan.

How about we tell them we met at the tea rooms at 10am? To make it convincing, say I was a few minutes late and we sat outside because of my dog. By the way, his name is Dolby.

Ann and Lee were thrilled their parents had finally met and seemed by both accounts to get along. "Mum said your dad is delightful. She thoroughly enjoyed catching up", reported Lee. "I'm so excited," Ann said. "Dad seemed quite keen. I could hear him smiling on the phone."

Reg wrote to Rose that week. *It seems our plan may not have worked as well as we thought. Ann keeps at me to know when we are catching up again. Thought we might tell them we are having lunch. After that we could say we just aren't right for each other and leave it be.*

Rose responded *Good idea. Another pretend outing and we can tell them we aren't suited. That should keep them off our backs.*

Ann and Lee were disappointed on hearing their parents had not hit it off on their second meeting and reluctantly let the matter go.

Reg wrote to Rose. *I think we have silenced our match making daughters.*

PS. Attached is a link to a wonderful youtube video about Kyoto. Thought you might find it interesting.

Rose responded and added *Was hoping you could advise me on growing pumpkins.*

And so began a daily correspondence between them. It became their daily highlight and quickly went from one email to several. It was a written conversation about everything from gardening to world news to how to get a stain out of a shirt. The one thing they never raised was the prospect of actually meeting. Why spoil a good thing?

Several months later, Ann and Lee were invited to a Saturday seminar on property investment.

"I thought I would bring my father along", said Ann. "That's funny, I plan to bring mum," said Lee. "It may be awkward, given they didn't ... you know, work out."

Ann picked up her father and began the hour's drive to the peninsula. They were only a few streets from home when she mentioned Lee was bringing Rose. Reg immediately called out "Turn around, I need to go back, I forgot something."

Lee sensed the urgency and returned Reg to his house. "I won't be long", and he raced inside, changed into his best jacket and shoes, splashed aftershave all over the place and gave his teeth an extra good brushing.

An hour later they were seated in the auditorium. Ann looked up to see Lee and Rose squeezing along the row towards them.

"Of course you two know each other" said Ann as she sat down next to Lee and let Rose take a seat beside Reg.

Rose looked visibly shaken. "Yes ... yes, of course" she stuttered as she nervously took her seat.

"Hi Rose", said Reg. "Good to see you again". He winked.

"Reg", she whispered, her heart pounding in her chest. "So we meet at last."

Neither could remove the smiles from their faces all afternoon. After the presentation, Reg and Rose couldn't wait to get home and email each other.

Hi Rose,

I don't know what to say. You took my breath away. By the way, I was thinking of doing a pretend cruise around Japan in September. Separate cabins of course. Couldn't think of anyone I would rather do it with, but you.

Rose didn't need to think. *Nothing would make me happier. PS. Great aftershave.*



FOREST FRIENDSHIP

By Peter Barry

It was a shock to learn that the Jennifer's breast cancer had recurred with a vengeance five years after her initial treatment, with secondaries showing up in her bones. There was a three further difficult and painful years leading up to her death, with recurrent hopes of a cure constantly dashed. Graham still recalled all too clearly those excruciating last months when he carried the Jennifer's ever-lighter frame upstairs to the bedroom each night. On several occasions, he was aware of the egg-shell-thin bones breaking even as he held her in his arms.

After the funeral, Graham had turned more and more to the solace of painting. He had dabbled with brushes and paints before his retirement a year after the funeral, but now he was free to fully indulge his hobby. He mostly enjoyed painting landscapes and had a particular enthusiasm for depicting trees in considerable and painstaking detail.

Even before Jenny's death, he had indulged himself in solo camping trips in the state forest near Eildon. He had found a secluded spot in a scarcely discernible track leading away from the forest road. About half a kilometre in, he had discovered a pond with water lilies in a patch at the edge, croaking frogs, dragonflies and warbling birds in the undergrowth. The pond was surrounded by seven magnificent mountain gums with smaller trees growing between them. He visited this secret location three or four times per year, spending a week or so creating an image of the pond and the trees in different seasons, different light conditions, different weather and from various perspectives. He completed the paintings at home over the subsequent weeks.

Graham had a collection of around twenty such paintings stored in his garage. The latest depiction was displayed on the wall of his living room only to be relegated to the garage when a new one was completed. Friends and family were curious as to where the pond was to be found, but Graham was vague and cagey about this, giving only a rough indication of its location.

On his latest trip in late Autumn, Graham was shocked to find that large white crosses had been painted on all his trees and many others in the surrounding forest. This was a desecration. These giant trees were his friends. He had even given each one the name of a dwarf from the Snow White fairy tale, assigning each name as he felt best suited the personality of the tree as he conceived it. That night he drove into town and visited the local pub. He asked about the white crosses and his worst fears were confirmed. The marked trees were those that had been slated by the forestry commission for felling and transport to the sawmill. This outrage, which to Graham was tantamount to murder, was scheduled for two weeks' time.

Graham felt bewildered and desperate. He knew that he had no hope of influencing the forestry commission whose processes and decision making was lost in a hopeless maze of bureaucracy. He would have to act alone and quickly. He set to work the next day, stating on Doc, the largest of his trees. He carefully blended paint to match the varying colour and texture of the bark. With meticulous effort he slowly obliterated the white cross. It was not simple as even small discrepancies of colour or sheen gave the game away. It took nearly two days to get the first tree right. Though he was a perfectionist Graham had to accept some little blemishes as there was a deadline to be met.



At the end of the second day of working on obliterating the white crosses, the weather closed in. He should have headed off home, but the matter was too urgent. He shivered in his tent as the rain beat down and the cold winds blew. After two days, the sun came out and Graham set back to work. It was easier now that he had mastered the technique for this unusual challenge, and he made good progress.

He became aware of the cough when he reached Sleepy, his fifth tree. By the time he reached the last tree, the one he had designated as Sneezy, he had a raging fever, a hacking cough and increasing disorientation. He felt he had not done a particularly good job on Sneezy, but he was now somewhat delirious. He hastily

dismantled his tent, stowed his paints and equipment in the car and drove somewhat erratically back to civilisation.

In hospital, he was put on powerful antibiotics for pneumonia, but his fever did not abate, his breathing worsened and he deteriorated rapidly over the next three days. On the last day, as he lay there breathing stertorously, he imagined himself lying in a little boat in the middle of his pond beneath a blue sky on a sunny day. As he drew his last breaths, the trees slowly bowed to him from around the edge of pond, their leafy heads blending together to form a canopy above him and increasingly blocking the light. He drifted languidly into the darkness feeling warm and rewarded and totally loved.

HOW TO HAVE A HOLIDAY WITH KIDS

By Neheda Barakat

1. Calm rides your voice as you trumpet 'it is that time kids.' They procrastinate over favourite flannel night dress. As you open the beechedwood draw, you notice serrated lines on those hands. It's all that dish-floor-bath-showers-shopping-food-clothes-hair-pets-washing that has to be done with "can't be bothered to put on gloves" attitude. The bed, two steps away for big feet, more for little feet, is awaiting jumping jacks to slip into the lullaby pouch. You cradle the little body into your arms, you remember when it was in your pouch as you surrender it to the woolly womb. The little face looks at you, waiting with luscious eyes, resisting the need for lashes to lock. You draw a deep breath.

2. With an exhalation, you begin the other nightly ritual:

Daphne, the dolphin, had by now made friends with the little boy. As it had done for the past three years, Daphne swam in the shallow waters not far from where Taj was playing in the sand. It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining, the leafed umbrellas of the palm trees shaded Taj so that he didn't get too hot or worse burnt. Daphne noticed the talk that was going on; the trees with the breeze, the birds with seeds, the shells with the shore, the sea with the sand, the flowered people with the tired people. And the kids? Well, they had a language of their own, not many could speak it. Their imaginary friends did but they got into trouble when they talked, laughed and cried with them. Daphne decided to get closer to Taj, she wanted to tell him that she can speak kids language. Daphne started to whistle. Doughy hands with puffy fingers continued to speculate with the sand, nature's mumble filled those snail patterned ears. Daphne whistled louder. Taj looked up he could see his imaginary friend but it wasn't talking. Taj continued to look around he looked at the tree, he couldn't understand what it was saying, he couldn't understand what the bird was saying, the shells were too busy sleeping, the sea was making waves, and the flower people were singing. Who could it be he wondered?

3. By this stage, serenity prevails. You are engulfed in the breeze, salty air, the hush of the tropics, the scent of the frangipanis, and the melodious voices of the flowered people. You wake up to find that you both have fallen asleep.

In their slumber the kids continue with their holidays.

LIFE IS A GIFT

By Nic Cecic

It was a gunmetal grey day as a cold front had penetrated the gap between the Grampians and the Arapiles. Jock McGhee stood as still as a granite statue totally oblivious of those around him. He wore a Churchillian heavy black coat and a darkish bowler hat. He could have been mistaken for an undertaker. His outer demeanour matched his subdued inner world. His hand slowly slid into the coat pocket and his fingers lodged onto a cold metal object.

In slow motion he withdrew a pistol. A life of endless under-achievement was reaching its end game. Holding the weapon tightly, his whole life flashed before him. One memory refused to move, causing him to re-visit the event in his mind. It also involved a gun. Farm boys in days gone by were encouraged to go hunting for kangaroos in order to provide meat for farm dogs. One late afternoon, Jock and a mate, Tom, armed with Jock's father's 303 rifle, set off for where the wheat paddock merged with the timber line. They planned to wait for dusk when kangaroos ventured out of the bush and into the more open paddock where grass was more readily available.

The youths settled behind an ancient tree stump about 100 metres from a fallow strip of paddock. Tom produced a cigarette he had rescued from his mother but before he could light it, Jock informed him kangaroos can smell lit cigarettes from two kilometres away. A flock of white cockatoos appeared out of the blue and landed near the newly plant wheat. "Good!" whispered Jock, "The other animals will think it is safe to enter the paddock as the cockatoos wouldn't land there if it was dangerous." Timing was critical as twilight never lingered long and when dusk died, so did target visibility. Fortunately, several kangaroos bounced out of the cover of the bush and into the open. Jock lowered the heavy rifle, a notorious shoulder

destroyer, if not handled carefully and firmly. He sighted the biggest roo and steadied to press the trigger, but in that same split second the cockatoos arose abruptly in a cacophony of screeches. The fired projectile ripped into a cloud of dust and far beyond.

Did it hit anything? The boys thought not but they trudged towards the light forest growth to check. Not far into the bush they were surprised to see what looked like a petrol tanker. On closer observation they reckoned it was more likely to be a milk tanker. Truck drivers on their journey between Melbourne and Adelaide often pulled into a side-track to have a quick nap. As they neared the tanker, they were shocked to see a jet of white liquid spurting out of side of the tank. It smelled foul; it wasn't milk! Red signage informed: "Pesticide Transport Vehicle". The 303 bullet had punctured the tanker! Not thinking, Jock poked his finger into the leaking hole and shouted to Tom to wake the driver. However, no amount of urgent loud banging on the cabin door could rouse the sleeping driver. "He looks drugged or drunk!", shouted Tom. "Get me a stick to block this puncture hole", cried out Joe, but to his horror, his now swollen finger wouldn't budge. With quite remarkable presence of mind he uttered firm instructions to his mate: "Tom, run back to the farm...get them to ring the Country Fire Service....and, and, Tom, hide the bloody rifle.... We were bird watching.... We don't know anything!"

Jock waited an eternity for the CFS to arrive and was pleased his father wasn't on fire duty that week. The volunteer crew pumped the pesticide from the tanker into an empty fire brigade water tanker. Jock's swollen finger was released from captivity and first aid administered. Police were called to deal with the driver who continued to sleep throughout the drama. It was the local newspaper

LIFE IS A GIFT (CONT.)

By Nic Cecic

that first declared the two boys as heroes who had saved a local creek and numerous downstream properties from untold environmental damage. Jock was described as exceptionally brave as his quick-thinking action was reminiscent of the legendary Dutch boy who poked his finger into a leak in a dam wall which saved the whole Dutch nation from a looming catastrophe. Of course, nobody ever discovered whose bullet pierced the tanker. "Could've been anybody," it was said. Jock's fame was short-lived but with two reminders: his scarred finger and a serious name change. Henceforth, townsfolk called him "Plugger". "Are these memories some sort of a swan song?" Jock asked himself. The memories confirmed to him that nobody knew what could happen when a gun was fired!

Other memories flashed by Jock's mind but now the loaded gun in his hand demanded more of his attention. Tension was building; he could feel it in his nostrils. He wanted to seek relief by sneezing but remembered his grandfather had once told him, "Son, never sneeze when holding a loaded gun." A wry smile was quickly shunted aside by a gun demanding action. "You must do it... get ready....do it!" Jock grimaced, raised the gun and that scarred finger pulled the trigger! Bang! Jock felt his head travelling in space. He counted the fleeting seconds... 10, 11,12,13. A lady's voice intruded: "Mr McGee, you are bleeding!" Before he could answer, a loudspeaker announced, "The Winner of this year's Stawell Gift by a head is Ben Jones at 50 to 1." "You are bleeding Mr McGee. Are you alright?" asked the same lady. Jock lowered the Starter's gun and turning to the enquirer reassuringly stated, "Yes, all is well, thank you. It's only a blood nose. The tension really got to me!" Jock had 50 reasons to feel very well. When later asked by a reporter,

"Plugger, you are a kangaroo shooter from way back, what was it like firing the Starter's gun?" Jock winked before he replied, "It was a bit nerve racking but it was also a privilege. Life is a gift!"

MAKING THE FIRST MOVE

By Kathy Childs

I dream of country towns and friendly meddling neighbours; of local pubs with ornery old men and gossiping women; of birds that land and sing and the only noise on a lazy afternoon is the baying of the cows.

I am empty. There is no nourishment in my inner city neighbourhood. I have dwelt here for twenty years and the names of those who live here often escape me. Gone are the days of a quiet cuppa on the front porch. We all sit out back now, hidden from the day to day, never exposing our own lives or intruding in those of others. We are a private people.

I used to stroll to the local milk bar for my paper. Twenty years the same couple have run this shop and I do not know their names. Through the plastic door strips I have watched their children grow and they now tend the till. I fear there is no money in their children's legacy; an IGA has opened up the road and the supermarket remains lit and open all night. I no longer need to visit for my paper, my phone supplies the daily update, but I buy my bread and milk there out of loyalty to the family that works long and hard to stay afloat and still I don't ask their names.

Town planning has rezoned us; history is bulldozed. We have monumental apartment buildings and townhouses stacked together where a single family home once stood.

I wake each morning to the sound of nail guns and saws. Time is of the essence. No lazy concrete mixers turning, the liquid sloshing and grinding inside. The trucks arrive, large angry tumblers with colossal pipes that funnel the wet cement into the foundations and driveways. The metal frames are erected in a day, cranes hoisting them high in the air to settle in their allotted place. The teams of tradesmen are like ants crawling over the work site – no one stops for

long, they scurry in and scuttle out, ticking off this job as they are directed to the next. An independent trade must keep moving.

Sunday. No building. No school bells. Just the echo of yesterday's lawn mowers shouted down by leaf blowers, high-pressure cleaners and chain saws ridding the backyards of unsightly trees and replacing them with paving and the simulated green of plastic grass.

Our ramshackle old wooden fence has surpassed my husband's handyman skills. The slats have been nailed on so many times that there are holes in the holes and the rusted nails will no longer grip. I have three quotes and I knock on the front door to my right. He is pleasant, and cheerful and agrees that a new fence is inevitable. I remain on the front porch for the entirety of this discussion, there is no suggestion that I enter his domicile. He suggests politely at the end of our conversation that it would be easier for me to email any future questions and timelines, let him know by text when the funds are required, it will save me the trip. I no longer need to traverse the seventeen steps to the house next door - think of the time this will save me.

New neighbours. An Australian couple with a Jack Russell. Given the right owners he may grow to be a pleasant family pet. These are not the right owners. An open gate is the signal that dog walking has commenced. It does not require human intervention. The gate is shut in the evenings and the dog locked outside baying at the possums that traverse the fence line. I suggested they could bring their dog inside as a courtesy to those of us who cannot sleep due to the intermittent barking. Apparently his barking does not keep them awake. It is not their problem. So each night as the dog howls I don my dressing gown and bang on their

MAKING THE FIRST MOVE (CONT.)

By Kathy Childs

bedroom window - just to let them know I am awake - I do like to share. Three nights later they have a change of heart. The dog now sleeps in a box in the kitchen and the night is quiet once more.

I washed my car yesterday. Stood in my driveway, dressed in shorts, t-shirt and thongs with a soapy bucket and a hose. How long since I have allowed myself this simple pleasure? Stroking and caressing my old car with a soft chamois, rinsing away the soap suds and following their journey to the storm water drain.

Seven people walked past my front gate while I soaped and rinsed. I turned and smiled at each of them, nodded, and commented on the weather. Only one elderly couple returned the greeting. In quiet moments I do sometimes wonder at the disregard and isolation and that comes with busy inner city lives. A nod and a smile and twenty years pass. I am as much to blame as they are.

One gentleman, well dressed in chinos and loafers, stood outside my house for a full five minutes talking impatiently on his phone while he waited for his dog to defecate on my nature strip. He averted his eyes when I threw a smile his way and offered him a plastic bag. He turned his back to me, his mind obviously on more important things than cleaning up after his dog.

The new townhouses across the road have their first occupants. A couple from India and a middle aged woman from Austria. The Indian couple drops by bearing gifts and stops for a chat. I invite them in. The Austrian lady stops to admire my roses, and asks for a cutting, then smiles and invites me over for a glass of wine. Perhaps we can create our own inner city community if that is what we want. It just takes someone to make the first move.

SUMMER

By Ieta D'Costa

I have not thought about my name for years. There was no need to. Quiet and candlelight have been wonderful companions. The little flames speak to me, offering flickering reassurance. They see me; I am here. I can lie in any position, and read hoverbooks, my body fully supported and pain free. Adaptable page light and font, what a luxurious joy! And music. The cello in particular. There was a time I played the cello, by running a horsehair bow across four strings. Now I have come out from my living quarters, some of those ancient memories surface. Not so ancient, really at sixty. It is being the oldest on our world, that makes it seem so. That and the way 4526.210 looked – no, sounded – well not quite sounded. Voice inflections have improved, but not to encompass incredulity. 4526.210 stopped walking. That's how I knew how strange it sounds today. To hear of an individual playing a non-virtual instrument. Having to explain how people used horsehair, and then horses... animals. It was a different time.

4526.210 asked if I would speak of my life to the world. Historical records, he said (there it is again, my binary gendering!) was one thing, 'lived experience' quite another. Could I share that with the world?

It was delicately put. Could I? I have been by myself for over half a century. And yet not alone. The consciousness connects the world, and filters determine when and which consciousness I engage with. There's no need for identification, plant, animal, mineral, those old classificatory systems! The bioneural interface is beautiful and seamless. A bit less so for me than all Numbers. My human parts accommodate most networks if I remain within gravity and radiation-climatic controlled areas. Numbers move freely, by atomic translocation or actual walking. I cannot get into the suit

I would need to withstand the radiation outside. The compression and pressure of gammanian suits is too much for my skin and joints. A legacy of the solar storm the year the world lost half its atmosphere. And that storm, the result of a different human legacy. I was 6 then. No one else survived it and for several years after, it looked like I would not either. It took 50 bioneural circuits to get me able to stand, and then more to be able to think, to hear, see, all the things I took for granted a long time ago. I don't want to look outside, even virtually. I remember how much like Venus the world looked before I went inside- or my impression of Venus. But enough of that.

What shall I say to the world about my 'lived experience'? Something about those... yes-fruits. What it felt like to see and smell and taste a strawberry, biting into a plum or that most wonderful thing... began with M... Yes! Mango! The juice running down my chin! Fruits caressed by summer when there were summers.

That used to be my name, Summer. Before I became 1.0, for the first circuit-adaptive human. Apparently, humans used to be fearful of Artificial Intelligence. They thought cold, calculating robots would destroy the race. Turns out, humans didn't need any help on that score. Numbers tried many bioneural interfaces to resuscitate humans. I am the last one. Before I join the others in the eternal lost summer of Earth, I will speak of summer, of fruits, of the smell of cut grass. And that once, there were names, like Summer.

HOPEFUL EXPECTATIONS

By Alexandra de Fircks

Hope clutched the plastic bag closer as the wind attempted to pry it from her grasp. Her hair had wafted across her face and was stuck there. She tried to blow it away, but it stayed under her nose, tickling her top lip. She sneezed. She moved to the side of the footpath, stopped, put the plastic bag between her feet and found a tissue. Keeping warm was an effort, she thought as she zipped her jacket to her chin and vigorously rubbed her hands together.

Winter was not her favourite season. The grey skies depressed her and the sharp mix of wind and cold always caused her nose and eyes to stream. It was an ugly look. She blew her nose, sniffed, picked up the plastic bag and continued toward the tram stop. She saw a tram at the stop before hers and began to run, gulping in the icy air with every stride. She saw the puddle but not in time to miss it. The water crept into her boot. Coughing, spluttering and squelching, with nose and eyes flowing, she made it to the stop just as the tram pulled up.

It was uncomfortable to stand in the crowded tram looking and sounding ill. She wanted to assure everyone that it was just the cold weather which gave her flu like symptoms, but instead she kept her eyes on the floor. She could feel people moving away from her, even if only to shuffle along a few inches. With one hand gripping the plastic bag and the other steadying herself as the tram hurtled toward the city, she found it difficult to blow her nose and wipe her eyes, but at least her cough had stopped.

Hope got off the tram in the city and stood for a minute or two to get her bearings. Her destination was in an arcade which she had never been to but had often passed. The entrance to the arcade was off one of Melbourne's famous laneways. She navigated through the coffee drinkers, smokers and groups of tourists pointing excitedly at the

cityscape around them. She hoped they were appreciating the architecture as well as the graffiti. Her plastic bag hit someone's chair and she apologised as she backed away into a table. It wasn't her day. Hopefully that would soon change. Though it pained her to think that the only way for change to happen was to rid herself of the last of the inheritance she had received from her mother.

The arcade was beautiful. She took a moment to appreciate the curving architecture and mosaic floors on which her boot was leaving damp patches. Out of the wind it was almost warm and she paused to unzip her jacket while pretending to look at one of the window displays. Taking stock of her reflection, she dragged her fingers through her wind blown hair and adjusted her jacket.

Her destination was on the first floor and she made her way up the narrow, wooden staircase. A few of the steps creaked when she landed on them. She had to hold the plastic bag in front of her so that it wouldn't bang against the wall. She gripped the brass handrail, not only to steady her but also to help pull herself up. Breathing heavily, she hoped her cough wouldn't return.

Hope saw the shop almost as soon as she arrived at the top of the stairs. It was opposite and to the left of her. The shop window was horizontally lined with glass shelves and each shelf was crammed with anything and everything to do with stamps. There were old albums, opened to random pages, magnifying glasses, long metal like objects which looked like large tweezers, and strange squares with measurements printed around their edges. In the corner of the lowest shelf an odd looking doll like figure of an old man swayed back and forth as it examined a large stamp through a magnifying glass.

She stood fascinated in front of the display before pushing an imaginary hair from her face and entering the shop. A voice from beyond the door at the back of the shop asked her to wait a minute.

Almost exactly a minute later an elderly man walked from the back room to the counter. He looked at her, "Can I help you?"

Her palms began to feel damp and the plastic bag almost slipped from her grasp. "Ummm, I called yesterday," she said. "I have some stamps to sell."

"Well," he sighed. "Let's have a look then."

She placed the plastic bag on the counter and began to remove its contents. She thought, not for the first time, that she should have sorted the stamps but it had all seemed too hard. As the jumble of stamps spilled out, she tried to tidy them. When she had looked at them yesterday, they had promised so much. Bright colours from all over the world, collected by her mother who had had a number of pen pals over the years. Now the bright colours looked dim and not as appealing. But still... perhaps there was at least one which was worth something. Perhaps enough to pay the bills. Hope held her breath.

The man glanced down at the mishmash of stamps with an experienced eye. He didn't touch them, he simply scanned them quickly and took a deep breath before looking up at her.

Hope knew what he was going to say before he opened his mouth. A single tear began to roll down her cheek. This tear had nothing to do with the weather.

ANGEL

By Sandy Dobson

She was shorter than me, a slightly rounder shape and walking ahead of me at the same speed, so I didn't pass her. She was wearing grey tracksuit pants and a white, fairly thin shirt. She had very long wavy hair, dark brown and was wearing white earphones. These details just registered automatically with me, but I was not really that aware of her at that time.

I was enjoying the walk along the seawall as I always do, the fresh air, the ocean, being mobile and healthy. I was heading towards St Kilda, and had just passed the playground that jutted out onto the sand. The sky was grey and darkening, but my weather app had said no rain. I was wearing my long puffy jacket, and a beanie with ear flaps, because it was cold.

My thoughts were just drifting along pleasantly when she suddenly turned around, smiled at me and walked back past me in the direction we had come. I noticed then that she had large pale grey dreamy friendly eyes, and that she looked a bit familiar. She was, maybe in her 30s? I also registered that there were a few drops of rain, which were increasing. So I turned around too. I was in the process of taking my beanie off so that I could put my hood up, when I noticed she had stopped under a palm tree and was pulling a thin transparent rain jacket out of her pocket and was putting it on. We smiled at each other again, in the shared experience of adjusting to the unexpected change in weather.

As she walked ahead of me again, I wondered if I did know her. Did she live in my apartment building or did I know her from somewhere else? Was that why she kept smiling at me? Or was she just an ordinary but friendly person?

Anyway, I continued walking in the slight rain and went back to my own thoughts. But also, at the back of my mind an idea was forming, that, if the opportunity came up, I might just say something to her, maybe even make a new friend/exercise/walking buddy.

She picked up speed, the rain was getting heavier, and she must have been getting cold in her shirt and thin jacket.

Anyway, the incident was almost over before it happened and certainly before it fully registered with me. But she had an altercation with an elderly couple coming the other way. They were not that old really, maybe in their 60s or early 70s. They were neatly dressed and looked like they were retired and had young grandchildren. They looked like nice people and maybe a bit "well to do". He had almost white hair and she had darker grey hair in a short but stylish cut. The woman had stopped and looked a bit alarmed, and the man was saying, "Get f#%&ed!" My 'friend' was also saying, "Get f#%&ed, f#%& off!" and was giving him the finger. I thought of The Angel's song. *

I was startled. I wondered what could have happened? Did they know each other, or did they somehow crash into each other? I hadn't been paying attention, and was really curious about what could have happened and why. It was so sudden, completely out of the blue. I thought of catching up and asking her, and my instinct was to be on her side. But what could have happened to cause such a reaction? Maybe they were relatives of some sort?

And, this was the perfect excuse to strike up a conversation with her. She took a detour off the path and turned onto the pier. I could have followed her. I could have struck up a conversation. I could have asked her what had happened.

But, I didn't do that. I kept walking on the path.

Why didn't I talk to her? I was about to. I'm confident enough to talk to strangers. I'm not really sure. I definitely would have, if not for the "incident". Maybe that made me a bit unsure, a bit wary.

Later, I was glad I had made that decision. What if she was unstable? What if nothing had happened to cause the incident? The way she had smiled at me was nice, but actually a bit unusual. I will never know what caused the "incident", it will remain a mystery.

Unless we meet again.

* The song goes "Am I ever gonna see your face again?" and the reply shouted out by the audience is "No way, get f#%&ed, f#%& off!"

MONKEY BOY

By Deb Hall

He was standing on the pedals and pumping hard. He leaned over the handlebars, straining forward. He was riding hell-for-leather. He wasn't wearing a bike helmet and, looking back, I don't think he had on any shoes. The weirdest thing, the thing that had caught my attention, was the large, stuffed, toy monkey draped over his handlebars. When I say large, I mean tall; even bent at the waist, the skinny monkey's dangling legs were just about trailing on the road.

The young fellow was so focussed on getting to wherever he was going that I wondered if he even realized his passenger was practically dragging on the ground. As he rode past on the other side of the road, I remember thinking that the monkey's legs could easily get caught up in the spokes of his front wheel and cause him to crash and be catapulted over the handlebars.

After he'd disappeared into the traffic of the nearby intersection, I wondered where he was taking the monkey. He might have bought the monkey for a younger sibling, his girlfriend, his boyfriend, or his child but I had a hunch that it was for him. It certainly looked as if it would be a dependable companion, and a bit cheeky into the bargain.

It made me smile, that's for sure. I imagined him arriving home, leaping off the bike and, in his haste, dropping it to clang on the side path. I see him hoisting the monkey over his shoulder in a fireman's lift and heading down the side of the house, ducking under some overgrown shrubs, to reach the back door. He is fumbling with his key in the door. The door is sticking a bit. He puts his other shoulder against it. It budes and he and the monkey just about fall through the doorway before he rights himself.

The kitchen is shabby but neat and clean. He yanks out a chrome-legged chair from under the green Laminex-topped table and seats the monkey, carefully bending its long legs to accommodate it, before easing the chair back in. He has seated it at the head of the table. I wonder if that is intentional. Despite being somewhat droopy, the monkey appears to be master of all it surveys.

Next, he busies himself making tea. He fills the kettle. He grabs a box of matches off the bench next to the stove and lights the gas burner under the kettle. He spoons leaf tea from a metal caddy into an actual tea pot. It even has a tea cosy.

The knitted cosy is striped in various shades of orange, with a row of brown monkeys around it, each monkey holding onto the tail of the monkey next in line. It reminds me of the children's game consisting of a barrel of different coloured, plastic monkey shapes, where you attempt, one-handed, to pick up a series of monkeys, by scooping each one up with the limb or tail of the one before it. The winner is the one with the longest chain of dangling monkeys.

The monkey-themed tea-cosy makes me wonder if he has been hankering for a monkey for a long time. Perhaps he has been scouring op-shops all around his neighbourhood, convinced that he will know the monkey that is right for him, when he sees it.

While he waits for the water to boil, he gets out two mugs from the cupboard. Yes, two. He takes a milk carton out of the fridge and pours some into a jug. He places the jug on the table, along with a sugar bowl.

The high-pitched whistle of the kettle suddenly shrieks like a banshee. Even the monkey looks momentarily alarmed. The young fellow lifts the kettle off the stove, pours boiling water into the teapot and replaces its lid and tea cosy. He turns off the gas.

He brings the teapot to the table and sits down, diagonally across from the monkey. He pours tea for them both and adds some sugar and milk to the mug he sets in front of the monkey, and milk only for himself. He already knows that the monkey has a sweet-tooth.

I deliberately leave them here in this cosy tableau of taking tea together. I feel warmed by their contented companionship.

The odd things I observe. The private moments I witness. The snippets of stories in the streets. I never know how it ends. I cannot follow the protagonist's home or else I would be a stalker instead of a writer. I can only pursue the denouement in my imagination, create my own ending for the strange scenario.

Life is for the curious.

WHAT IS SAID IN THE RSL

By Megan Jones

Jean Williams flinched when her husband slammed the front door on returning from his weekly session at the local RSL Club.

"The bastards," he shouted as he tugged at the fridge door handle and grabbed a cold VB.

"I am never going back to that place again," he said, taking the bottle opener from the notions drawer next to the sink.

"Why? What happened Jack," his wife said, prizing the bottle opener from his shaking hand, and opening the long neck brew.

"I thought we were done with this shit," her husband said, pulling out a chair.

Jean reached back for an ashtray before remembering she'd given up smoking.

"Some blow-in bastard told me we'd had an easy war," Jack said, lifting the bottle and swallowing a mouthful of VB. "He said my war was like working for the State Electricity Commission: safe, easy and comfortable.

"White Coolie. War Wreck. That's what he called me. Then he said the Government was right. We didn't deserve any commendation medals," Jack spat out, attempting to disguise his tears by focusing on his thumb peeling the label off his perspiring bottle of VB.

"I threw my glass at his face. I missed. It hit him in the chest. It was half full, too," he added, to lighten the mood.

"I am never going back there again. The Returned Soldiers' League doesn't want us."

Jean could not remember a week in the ten years since the war when her husband had not trotted down on Saturday afternoon to reminisce with his mates. Unlike his neighbours in Farrell Street, Jack held no truck with the myriad Port Melbourne pubs or the footy club or even the bowling club.

During the week Jack Williams worked as the head store man at Helena Rubenstein's Cosmetics factory in Montague, the centre piece of this major Melbourne manufacturing hub; long since gentrified.

One of his appointed tasks at the end of the day was to rifle for contraband in the handbags of the factory girls, who turned out the lipsticks, powders and creams. The girls were allocated a personal quantity of product each fortnight but many of the employees managed to secrete extras on their person to sell at the South Melbourne market, Saturday mornings.

Management had chosen Jack for this task because he was the only one the factory girls allowed to touch their things without the usual effing and blinding.

They knew he'd had a bad war; slaving as forced labour for the Japanese Army. He had been captured by the Japanese at the Fall of Singapore, put in Changi Concentration Camp and then, because he'd survived that hell, was transported to Thailand for the construction of the Burma Railway through 400 km of virgin jungle and hills. He survived. More than 2,800 Australians, 13,000 other POWs and 90,000 forced Asian labourers, didn't.

Jack kept working despite the agony and the days off work, the direct result of wartime starvation and malnutrition. Ten years after the war his tropical ulcers still flared up to eat at his skin. Bouts of Malaria frequently reoccurred as did the amoebic dysentery. He had chronic worm infestations that nothing could remove, as well as various neurological syndromes attributed to chronic vitamin deficiency caused by the wartime hellish conditions. Jack and Jean had no children. Experts blamed chronic vitamin B deficiencies on the Beri Beri he had contracted as a POW. Jean, who admired her husband's fortitude, never complained.

She continued working in the Kayser Lingerie factory in Richmond as the manager of the embroidery team although it was unusual for a married woman to work after the war.

Her highly skilled job afforded the luxury of a baby blue Morris Minor.

Her husband, already frail and thin from his war injuries, stopped eating after the incident at the RSL Club. For days after he refused to get out of bed or go back to work.

Out of desperation his wife called one of his Brigade buddies. They had served together in Singapore until its fall to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. Both were captured and survived both Changi and the Burma Railway. Brian, disabled by the deplorable POW conditions, lived in a nursing home in Ballarat at the age of 47 years.

"Brian, something's wrong with Jack," she said, sitting at the telephone seat table in the hall and cradling the Bakelite phone headset with both hands.

"I'd like you to come and talk to him," she pleaded, rubbing her forehead with her left hand.

"I wouldn't ask except I think you are the only person who can help him," she begged, twisting the telephone cord tightly around the fingers of her left hand.

Jean took the Friday and Monday off work to collect his friend for a return visit to Melbourne for the weekend.

Before she left, Jean had stocked the fridge with prime steak and longneck bottles of VB and Stout, knowing the bottle shop would be closed by the time she got home.

After they'd eaten their steak and mash, the two comrades sat in the court yard near the outside dunny, necking their respective beers; their faces mingling with overhanging sunflowers.

"I call them Jack's beanstalks," Jean would tell anyone who'd dropped in.

In the kitchen Jean, clearing up, was eavesdropping.

"You know what hurt me the most? More than the name calling?"

"What could be worse than that mate?" Brian said as he stared at Jack, waiting for the response.

"He said it in front of the whole bar. And, do you know what? Not one of them RSL blokes stood up for me. Not one. The Bastards.

"Here's me drinking with them every week. And they don't say boo to this blow in," Jack finished the bottle in one gulp.

"When I threw my beer in his face, they asked me to leave. They escorted me off the premises, as they called it and threw me out into the street."

"I felt so ashamed," he said, silent tears falling.

His mate banged his fist on the table and shouted.

"It is not enough the Japs humiliated, tortured and shamed us. Our own Government refused to acknowledge us when we came home. Now our so called army mates are adding insult to bloody injury."

"Bugger the bastards," Jack shouted.

"Yeah, bugger all of 'em," his mate echoed.

POSEIDON'S OARS

By Phil Kafcaloudes

Hard as day.

Everything today was hard as day. The sun burnt and his clothes were just wrong. They stuck and sweated and smelled, he didn't know like what, maybe old wet blankets. This was not a smell that he minded usually, but today he felt it.

Even the oars, those friends who saved him in that storm last week when they had pulled him through. On that day they had insisted on keeping the boat steady and level without a creak of complaint. Today they complained and there wasn't a drop of a storm.

Kas never seemed to get closer. He couldn't pull as hard as he normally did. His vegetables seemed to stare at him. Those tomatoes.. he knew he should have put a lid on the box. It was too hot they seemed to say. We'll be ruined in this sun.

Michael pulled against the oars, who seemed to be letting the god Poseidon himself suck them down. He pulled harder, but the god would not give them back. Was it a premonition? Should he just turn back to Kastellorizo? Call it a day. A bad job. He could sell the vegetables back on the promenade. Not for as much, but they would pay something.

He had never turned back before. Not ever. Once he left the island with his stock, he always made it to the mainland. Four miles. The first time he did it, he felt like an Olympian. His classmates were jealous, like all Greek boys. If they had a boat they would have be able to row to Kas, no trouble, they said. One or two tried to do the trip, just to show him up, but gave in before even getting half-way. Their boats leaked they said, or the coast guard told them to get back. That's half the trick, Michael would say. Getting past the Turks.

They stayed jealous, and Michael did the trip every week and returned with more money than any of them had seen in a bunch. One night someone, probably one of them, tried to burn his tomato vine by throwing lime on its leaves, but he was too quick and rinsed them off before the plant was ruined. The tomatoes that week were the biggest and brightest he had grown. That was a best of revenges. Better than throwing a rock through a window.

Still Kas stared, still no closer. He had worn his body to tears many times on these trips, but his mother's smile and his father's hand on his shoulder took away the pain. Today it was a new feeling, like a disappointment but not that. It was as if all this work every week was for nothing, and he felt a parents' smile would never be enough again.

There was Toula of course. Toula made the trips good. Toula and Ilanthe. Bored wives of Turkish something-or-others who had bought his vegetables and then took him to their breasts. But even this palled after he told Ilanthe that he loved her and she laughed. He still saw Ilanthe after that but he didn't love her anymore.

For the rest of his life he could never work out how the thought came to him that day, on that boat. He didn't know how he knew of Australia. He knew it was further than Athens, but he didn't even know which way it was. But there, in that heat and that sweat and over those complaining tomatoes he knew Australia was to be his life. It would be only him, no brothers, no mother. He would farewell his rock of a home; he would say goodbye to the priest who always chastised him for not taking up the calling. Maybe the priest knew something of Ilanthe. Chastisements and fear. It seemed to him that this fear was spreading all over the island; the fear that there was going to be

change coming to Kastellorizo, a bad change. Fears beget rumours. Or the other way around. The rumours were that a new type of Turk was coming and that it would follow that this kind of Turk would run Kastellorizo all different. Maybe those little boats that tried to get to Kas would be confiscated; maybe their sixteen-year old captains would be jailed with Turkish apes in Kas. Too many maybes.

Kas was finally coming closer. There was a mottle of red at Kas on the promenade. He wasn't sure but was that Ilanthe on the shore? Or was it Koula?

Michael pulled in his oars and sat, his little boat grateful for a rest in the fight against Poseidon. Michael stared at the woman who was waiting for him. His tomatoes were wrinkled already. That had never happened before. Could it have been one of those things, a sign? His mother believed in these things. Maybe he did too; he never thought about them before.

Michael picked up the box of tomatoes and really meant to throw it overboard. But it was a glance at the crinkled faces, his children. He put down the box gently and turned around. He then started gently rowing the boat back to his home. He didn't look to the woman, not once. The boat was going stern first, but to Michael on that steaming day it seemed the right thing to do, to go backwards, and the boat was happy to go this wrong way. He hardly had to row. It didn't even seem that hot anymore.

He never took his eyes up to hills of Kas in any of the weeks until he left on the steamer for Fremantle. As he passed out of Kastellorizo harbour, he allowed himself one last look. It was too far to see of course, but he was sure he saw a red dress on the Kas promenade.

THESE WRINKLED HANDS

By George Kyriakou

"HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY DEAR STANLEY.
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU."

Colourful ribbons, streamers and helium balloons filled the Jackson home. One large one, strung across the room, said, "Congratulations on your 90th."

"Why can't Grandfather have 90 candles?" asked Oliver.

"The cake can't hold that many and he would never be able to blow them all out," replied his father, Derek

Oliver Jackson watched his grandfather being pushed to the table in his wheelchair. His Grandfather, once a tall handsome man, with jet-black hair, and sparkling ocean blue eyes, was now frail and stooped. His strong jaw line was accentuated by a life long lived. His old cardigan was laced with 'senior' food stains. He stood, hanging on to one arm of the wheel chair to blow out his 9 candles.

Sitting, with his hands folded in front of him, Oliver noticed how wrinkled his grandfather's hands were. His dark blue veins were bulging with blood being pumped throughout his frail body.

Stanley Jackson lived in an aged care facility.

"Grandfather, can I come to visit you next week?"

"Visit me?" said Grandfather. "I never have visitors."

Derek looked at his father and said, "I visit you twice a week but you don't remember"

Oliver caught the number 78 tram along Chapel Street to visit his grandfather as promised.

"Do you know where your grandfather is?" asked the receptionist.

"Yes I've been here with my parents," replied Oliver

Oliver knocked on the door.

"Hello, Grandfather. How are you?"

"Much better for having seen you, Oliver," said Grandfather Stan, with a grin.

"Would you like one of my chocolates, Oliver?"

"Yes please, Grandfather. That would be AWESOME."

Oliver asked curiously. "What sort of work did you do when you were young?"

"Oliver, I had to leave school at thirteen. I had to get a job because my family needed money to survive."

"What sort of work Grandfather?"

"Shoveling coal in a coal mine. I was paid two pounds, six shillings per week. That's around \$6 in today's money."

"WHAT! For the whole week?" Oliver couldn't believe it.

"YES, for the whole week," said Grandfather. "My hands were blistered badly, and often became infected. Some older men used to urinate on my blistered hands to prevent infection."

"YUCK"

"It helped. There were no medical facilities underground in the coal mines."

More stories followed:

"When I turned 18, I joined the air force and became a fighter pilot."

"Did you fight in WWI?"

"No, not during WWI. I was only a young boy then. I was one of the few Australian pilots, to fight with the British, during the 1956 Suez Canal conflict."

"DID YOU KILL ANYONE?" asked Oliver, staring, anxiously waiting for his grandfather's answer.

"YES, Oliver, I did. Let me tell you, it's the most gut-wrenching thing these hands of mine ever did. But, if I hadn't allowed my hands to do that, I wouldn't be here today telling you about it."

Tears flowed out of Oliver's grandfather's blue eyes, running along the crevasses of his weathered face.

After an hour, Oliver said, "Grandfather, I've got to go now. Would you like me to come back next week?"

"That would be wonderful, Oliver. I look forward to it," replied his grandfather.

"Oops, I nearly forgot your gift. I made you a number plate for your wheelchair. I'll put it on before I go."

At home that night, Oliver said, "Dad, I saw Grandfather today and found out lots of things. Can I go back and visit again?"

"Absolutely, Oliver, your grandfather needs company to keep his mind active," replied his father.

"I'm writing a story about old people. Can you take a look at the questions and let me know what you think, Grandfather?"

"Sure thing Oliver. I'd love to read what you have written. You mightn't know this, but I wrote two books. I can't remember their names, but one was about my life in the air-force, and the other about my great-grandfather, who was a general in the Australian army."

"ARE YOU FOR REAL? Grandfather, that's FANTASTIC!"

"After the Suez War, I became a carpenter. With these hands I built my own home, hammering thousands of nails into freshly

sawn timber. See these fingers? They're injuries due to building accidents. With these hands I forged a life for your grandmother and our children, your father, Derek, your Uncle Charlie and your Auntie Stella. These hands held your Grandmother Elizabeth as we walked down the aisle to get married. These hands. stroked the face of the love of my life, before she passed away. My hands are old and wrinkled, but when I held her hands they felt tender, soft, and as smooth as silk."

"What kind of job do you want to do with your hands Oliver?" Grandfather asked.

Oliver wasn't sure. What he wanted to do though, was help people.

Oliver liked hearing Grandfather's stories, even when he repeated bits, or mixed up names. Later, when Oliver was bike riding with his brother and sister, he told them about their grandfather's wrinkled hands.

"Our grandfather has done so much with his life. When I grow up I want to do something important with my hands. Not all old people are boring. You just have to ask them the right questions and listen."

Oliver's father woke him up. "I have some bad news. Your grandfather Stan has just been admitted to hospital. Apparently, he got up during the night and had a fall."

"How is he?" Oliver asked, with tears splashing on his pillow.

"Not good, Oliver, but before he went to hospital, he told me how much he enjoyed your visits."

Oliver's AWESOME Grandfather died at the age of 95.

Many years later Oliver qualified as a surgeon, using his hands to mend patients. And he kept his grandfather's number plate on his bike to remind him of a life well lived.

GETTING LOST

By Felicity May

Trevor smashed his way through the dense undergrowth, cursing loudly, shocking even the squawking parrots who kept a safe distance while gazing down at this far from polite intruder stumbling into their domain. He reluctantly faced the inevitable, he had taken a wrong turn, he was lost. What was I thinking of?

Yes, I know, I was ruminating over the argument at the pub the other night. Telling myself, of course, that I was in the right ... as I took a wrong turn. Self-righteous anger blunted my senses. It's so important not to make an error out here, once lost, well ... every bushwalker knows this. The parrots cawed loudly, in unison.

He glared up at them. "Yes, you all have it so easy, sitting high up on your branches with a bird's eye view." Laughing a bit to himself, at least they know what they are doing!

Scanning the mosaic patches of grey sky through the trembling leaves, Trevor continued on, searching for a way out of the forest. As he stumbled through the undergrowth, flying debris battered his face. The leaves on the ground began to swirl as though in a circular dance, colliding, entwining then falling, only to be swept up again as the wind changed direction. Lightning crashed, thunder rumbled in the distance.

While peering over the rocky edge, high above the river below, his foot slipped. Trevor felt himself falling, falling, into a dark vortex, down, down. No way of stopping himself, as he disappeared, over the edge.

Pain thumped through his body as Trevor slowly emerged back into consciousness. Trembling with relief, muttering, "I am safe, safe, on this beautiful riverbank, how lucky am I?" He gazed at the pristine waters, as

yet uncontaminated by mankind, flowing unhindered towards the sea.

Insects buzzed around him, curious to taste this new food source. Ants crawled over his legs seeking a shortcut to their long winding route to their nest. Shimmering blades of grass providing shelter for so many, the trees sharing their root systems, somehow making better sense of their own natural world.

Trevor lay still, grateful he had not smashed his head on the rocks. His right arm was broken perhaps, he seemed miraculously ok. What had happened, an almost fatal slip. His thoughts flitted to the argument at the pub. Politics, society, the environment, 'footie', the local council ... It had got quite heated.

Gazing at the iridescent colours on the rocks, as the sun's rays struck their wet surface, Trevor continued to muse... as a bright light distances the shadows, perhaps truth, obliterates deception. But then, perhaps it depends on who is shining the light and on what or where. He surmised, controversies are inevitable, especially over a few beers at the pub.

Just managing to pull himself up, Trevor stood still for a while, impressed by the purposeful nature of the gravity driven flow as the river swirled around the rocks, making its way to the ocean.

As he neared the shore, Trevor breathed in the warmer air. It began to rain, large drops of water refreshing his face as he looked upwards to the sky. He moistened his lips with the pure water, sensing its life-giving properties as it fell to the earth, bringing life to the forest and all that lived within in it.

Finally reaching the ocean, hot and weary, Trevor stripped off his clothes. It seems he had not broken his arm after all. He stood for a few moments, gazing at the vastness

of the ocean. Stepping into the waves, he slid his body into the cool refreshing water. Plunging further downwards towards the depths, tiny fish encircled him as he looked around, immersed in the experience of the last few days.

The argument with his mates had stirred him up. He would return to the pub and buy a round of drinks. Trevor amused himself reflecting, perhaps human nature thrives on controversies. As the pristine stream flows from the mountain top and merges into the salty sea, perhaps so do we, sitting around the bar, exchanging views. One way or another, achieving a refreshing intermingling of perspectives.

Back safely in the bar, Trevor and his friends grinned at each other as they raised their glasses to one and all. He smiled, knowing the parrots were cackling in agreement.

CHATTER IN THE GARDEN

By Vicky Pectorious

'To be or not to be...' He mumbled.

'That is the question.' It was an unconscious reflex; she did not know why she felt compelled to complete the sentence. She turned around to look at him and was overcome with pity. He was an indigent creature, sad, pallid and languishing. He seemed to blend with the cloudy and grey day. She decided to cheer him up.

'Are you a Shakespearean scholar?' She asked.

'Hum!' Was his response.

'Are you a tortured soul?'

'Why?'

'Because, you are quoting Hamlet.'

'And?'

'Hamlet was a tortured soul; he considered death and suicide; his uncle supposedly killed his father.'

'Hum!' Again that sound, he looked poorly, so sad, he obviously needed a friend.

'I was talking to myself' He said looking away.

In that moment the sun came out warming the garden.

'I think, therefore I am.' She said in a gay and flirting tone as she whirled and flapped around.

'Ha! The French... Descartes I think.' He responded and looked at her intensely; she must be French he thought.

'But, oui c'est Descartes'

'I see... and you do have a name...French?'

'Oui, it is Abeille.'

'Ha! Abeille, tell me Abeille, do you think?'

'Yes, I do.'

'How do you think?'

'How do I think?' She responded in teasing and engaging voice.

'I don't know; are you looking for a theory?' She fluttered around for a moment and eventually decided to sit.

'Can you provide one?'

'I like Descartes that is why I quoted him.'

'Hum! Too complex; do you have a mind Abeille?'

'I certainly do.'

'And does your mind generate ideas?'

'Yes, it does.'

'What motivates those ideas?'

'My destiny; I have a mission in life.'

'Tell me about your role in life.'

'I am an ecologist and...'

'Hum, what is ecology?'

Is he serious? She wandered but decided to answer him.

'Ecology is the branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings.'

'Hum!' He studied her whilst moving on his seat and trying to accommodate himself in a more comfortable position.

'I see, but what do you actually do?'

'My most important function is to find certain raw materials.'

'How do you go about it? Do you surf the net?'

'No, no, I am a field researcher.'

'I see..., where from do you obtain your raw materials?'

'From nature, in the wild.'

'How do you decide where to go or what are the best areas for your search?'

'I am instinctively drawn to some areas.'

'That does not involve thinking.'

'Yes, it does and furthermore I have to decide when to go.'

'Why?'

'The weather affects my findings.'

'How?'

'Well spring is the most favourable time. I love spring, the air is fresh and clean, the environment is bursting with life and the entire animal kingdom awakes to mating. Summer and autumn are all right but spring is the best time for me.'

'What about winter?'

'Winter is a no-no situation.'

'What difficulties do you encounter?'

'Adverse atmospheric condition, pollution, bush fires storms and cyclones affect my work.' She felt he was more interested in her conversation and perhaps seeing her in a different way.'

'Is there some special equipment to help you in your research?'

'Yes, ultraviolet, patterning, odours, even electromagnetic fields.'

'I see, and once you have found the raw materials what happens?'

'They are extracted and transported to our depository.'

'Are there losses in the transportation process?'

'Yes, there are always losses but the spill over effect is highly beneficial to the world at large.'

'Hum!' He paused to consider if he was going to continue talking to her. She was full of herself.

'Once you have the raw materials delivered, is there a manufacturing process?' He decided to continue his inquisition.

'Yes, yes of course. Some of my peers are responsible for processing the raw materials into the finished product. We have a highly sophisticated system for storage and a special workforce making sure the product is kept at the right temperature.'

'At present we are producing three times the amount we require.'

'I guess you are going to tell me that you offered the excess production to the world at large free.'

'We do, yes we do.'

Yes, he thought there it is again: that tone, teasing, enticing, she is very conceited.

'You're very sociable.' He thought he would humour her.

'Well, I am a social being and my relationship with the team is important for the success of our product.'

'And very confident.'

CHATTER IN THE GARDEN (CONT.)

By Vicky Petorious

'Hey! My mother is a queen!' She was flapping again.

She suddenly felt uncomfortable he was looking at her in some special way.

'What do you call your product?'

A cricket appeared roaming about and he was immediately distracted. The cricket sat in front of them and all his attention was now diverted to the cricket.

'It's ho...'

But before she finished the word a flash crossed her eyes. Suddenly the cricket was not longer there and he was gulping and licking his lips.

'What was that?' She cried.

He had lashed out his long tongue, sucked the cricket and swallowed it on a great big gulp.

She was first shocked, then disgusted and ultimately appalled.

'How disrespectful!' She shouted.

'How can you be so rude to swallow the poor cricket like that, in front of me?' She was incensed. Then fright took over her.

'I am going!!' And flew off in a terror.

'Good, go away. Why would I want to speak to such a frivolous creature?'

He started to move away from the background of a tree trunk into the tree foliage. His pale and pasty look, progressively obtained colour as he moved. Once comfortable in his new spot he mumbled.

'To be or not to be... a flirtatious bee... Hum! I think therefore I am... a powerful emerald green chameleon!'

A KANCIL, A DRAGON AND A DRONE

By Irene Ritchie

There was once a funny little mouse deer called Kancil. He lived on the island of Java in Indonesia. He was a very clever little fellow because even though he was small, he was very smart and could always find a way out of difficult situations especially when big hungry animals came along.

One day he was on a deserted island as Indonesia has plenty of those and they are nice to go and relax on. Kancil jumped into the water to have a swim because it was very hot and he loved to dive in the water. A strong current tipped him over and before you could say huley hulim, Kancil found himself washed up on another island. This was no ordinary island. It was Komodo Island, the home of the Komodo dragon and there was a huge ginormous dragon heading his way.

'Oh dear, oh dear! What shall I do? This dragon is huge!' Kancil proclaimed. He knew he couldn't outrun the dragon. He knew he couldn't fight the dragon. But maybe, just maybe he could outsmart the dragon. He began to dig, one hole and then another.

'What are you doing mouse deer?' growled the dragon in a low voice. 'Digging up my island?'

Kancil didn't answer but kept on digging. He found a plant and put it on top of the hole and smiled. He found a shell and put it on top of another hole. He was very serious now.

'Hey Kancil you are messing up my island,' said the dragon angrily.

Kancil was happy the dragon was distracted so far. What next?

The dragon came closer and flicked his long tongue at Kancil. 'Mm exactly are you a deer or a mouse?'

Kancil jumped up and began to dance on his hind legs.

'I'm getting very hungry mouse deer but I'm confused. I like to eat deer but mice don't satisfy me at all. Can you be more deer than mouse?'

'I am much more mouse than deer, Dragon and not worth eating,' stated Kancil confidently.

At that moment a drone flew overhead buzzing with lights flashing.

'Dragon that drone is here to report that there is no more water left to drink on the island except for one pond. And that is for me.'

'Come come Kancil. Any water on this island belongs to me. But let me get onto that drone so I can ride away to an island that does have more water. How do I catch it?' asked the dragon.

The drone flew back and forth with a camera taking photos.

'I have an idea!' exclaimed Kancil. 'Let me jump on your neck, dragon, and I'll catch the drone.'

The dragon put its head down meekly. Kancil couldn't believe his luck. Kancil jumped up. He could see a pond nearby.

'Hey dragon, would you like a drink from the pond first?'

'Mm I am thirsty but no tricks Kancil. I've heard stories about you and I believe you are a trickster.' Kancil actually has a reputation for tricking the tiger, crocodile and various sorts of monsters and getting away with it.

'Actually,' said Kancil, 'you go get the drink and I'll catch the drone for you.'

A KANCIL, A DRAGON AND A DRONE (CONT.)

By Irene Ritchie

Bzzzz Bzzzz went the drone past them.

'All you have to do, Dragon, is walk straight ahead, turn right, turn left, go down the hill, then walk up the next hill and turn right and before you can say huley hulim, you will be drinking from that pond.'

'Kancil I don't believe you,' said the dragon.

'Just do it Dragon and when you get back I'll have the drone ready for you.'

The dragon was convinced because he was so thirsty and headed off carefully following Kancil's directions.

Kancil began waving madly at the man on the hill far away controlling the drone.

'Help! Help,' he yelped. The man saw the little animal in distress and lowered the drone.

Kancil ran to it and jumped aboard flying high in the sky. He flew over the dragon and called out to him.

'Dragon, there is only room for one animal on this drone. See you next time.'

The dragon looked up incredulously and roared loudly when he realised his dinner was flying away and that he had been tricked by Kancil.

GRASSED UP

By Peter Thorne

My neighbour Madge is moving house. For the first time in her life. She has never left home and she has never married. When her father returned from the war, damaged in body and mind, Madge and her mother cared for him until he died. Then Madge looked after her mother to the end.

Now in her late seventies and still single, her interest is in the neighbourhood and in tending her small, productive garden. She supplements her pension by supplying her friends and neighbours with her crops.

Madge is a well-loved identity, particularly among the locals who have stayed on in our long-term family homes, despite increasing gentrification and the consequent rising rates. She makes her deliveries, door to door, towing her trusty shopping jeep. Meals on Wheels has cars, but Madge covers only a small area, and I know she looks forward to the social contact and the frequent invitations to come in for a cup of tea and a chat.

Hilda, who suffered badly from arthritis, was very dependent on Madge and became her closest friend. Hilda owned a large house with a big garden, much larger than the former worker's cottages occupied by Madge and most of us neighbours.

We all knew that Hilda's main ambition in old age was to ensure that her ne'er do well brother, Phil, would never inherit it.

She told us all:

"If I go first, the house will go to Madge. It's all in my will. It's the least I can do to keep her good works going. I expect she will make good use of it and of the larger garden."

Recently Hilda died. Her lawyer informed Madge that, indeed, the house would be hers after probate. However, in the meantime, we noticed that the house was

occupied. It soon became clear that Hilda's brother Phil had moved in. Then came his mates. They were mainly large blokes who came and went, at all hours, on great noisy motor bikes. It seemed that they intended to stay indefinitely, regardless of Hilda's will.

After a while, the nearest neighbours were certain they were cooking up meth and selling ICE and other softer drugs. We were all horrified. But we were all much too frightened to confront Phil and his big bikie mates.

So, the community turned to Victor. Victor devotes much of his retirement to watching crime shows on TV. Consequently, he is considered the local expert on police procedure and law enforcement.

At a secret neighbourhood meeting Victor proposed the solution:

"They call it 'covert surveillance'. We'll set up a close neighbourhood watch, very discreet of course. Our mobile unit can use their dog walking as cover. We'll form the PPP – the Pensioners Private Patrol."

"But what if Phil and his mates ever find out who grassed them up?" asked Madge.

"When the time is ripe, we call the drug squad anonymously," Victor replied.

"We do that by phoning my brother Sid. He lives in Wangaratta. Sid phones the tip-off to the Melbourne police from the public phone box outside the Wangaratta post office. No one will ever trace the call back to us. It's not likely Phil and his mates will get bail, but even if they do, they will never dare to come near the place again."

The PPP swung into action. We, and our dogs, all became fitter as we took our turn making frequent reconnaissance trips as part of the PPP.

GRASSED UP (CONT.)

By Peter Thorne

Meanwhile, Madge still had the German binoculars that her father had brought back from the war. She lent them to Fred, who lives across the street from Hilda's old home. Old Fred suffers from insomnia, so he was only too happy to help. He kept a detailed logbook of the pattern of nocturnal comings and goings opposite.

We put in weeks of close surveillance and held frequent covert meetings while waiting for the word from Fred. At last, Fred told us that all the signs were that Phil and his gang had a large shipment ready to be dispatched.

Victor immediately phoned his brother in Wangaratta; Sid made the anonymous call to the police in Melbourne. Shortly after, we all had the satisfaction of seeing Phil and his mates hustled out of Hilda's house, into waiting paddy wagons and hopefully, out of the neighbourhood forever.

The locals are very grateful for all Madge has done for us over the years. So, we've all rallied round – we are busy cleaning up Hilda's old house and preparing it for Madge to move in.

The larger garden will be a great place for her growing activities. She says she might even set up hydroponics in the basement. Norm, who is a retired electrician, has offered to lend her a hand with that. It would ensure continuous comfort for us locals during the winter months. Now that the competition from Phil and his mates, has been eliminated, Madge could increase her supply. I reckon she would need to improve her distribution system though.

She may even need a larger shopping jeep.

A DEAD BODY NEAR A PILE OF WOOD

By Adam Thrussell

On a typical day in St Kilda, a sunny day with the wind blowing from the south, with the weather front from Bass Strait battling with the hot wind going past the cities of Adelaide and Geelong.

Adam was putting his washing on the clothesline, careful not to drop the tea towels on the concrete surface. If that happens, he gets very angry.

Looking to his left, he saw a motionless body near a stack of fence palings.

He moved quickly into his unit, fast as running the Big M Marathon 1981 Frankston to Melbourne Town Hall, and almost tripped over the carpet.

He rang the emergency number 000. "This is Alda speaking, do you need the Ambulance, Fire Brigade or the Police?"

"Alda, there is a dead body, therefore I need the Police, please."

"What is the address please?"

"The address is Westbury Grove, St Kilda East, State of Victoria."

Senior Sergeant Andrew was eating a hamburger with the lot. The beetroot fell on his French dark navy trousers, while Senior Sergeant Michelle was driving the car.

The car radio was playing Gary Glitter tune, 'Leader of the Gang' on the Melbourne Radio Station, 104.3 Gold Fm.

Senior Sergeants surveyed the scene, scattered around were Gary Glitter albums which were 'Be-bop-a-lula' and 'The Leader Rocks on!' Over the body was the album by Mark Holden which was, 'Encounter'.

There was a dark blood stain on the body, with a pile of red fabric, wearing a Clem-Newton Brown T-shirt, the past Liberal candidate for the State of Prahran.

The forensic boys looked over the scene with their hands, wearing gloves. Therefore, took the blood stains, clothing samples and the vinyl records.

The forensic team in the laboratory detected the blood sample was O negative and the vinyl records had fingerprints. The fingerprints were not very clear, therefore probably could not be used as evidence.

They could find a match for the blood sample. They checked the knitwear with Ansett of Seymour, Australia and it matched their knitwear range.

The Senior Sergeants drove to St Kilda listening to Mark Holden playing the song on the radio, 'Never gonna fall in love again', the lyrics : "Never gonna fall in love again, I don't wanna start with someone new-ee."

The Senior Sergeants knocked heavily on the dark wooden door, with the Gary

Glitter tune, 'Rock and Roll' playing. Can you see where you call in the juke box hall? When the music played and the world sang rounds. No sorrow base.

The Sergeant was throwing their arms around dancing to the tune.

"Aaron Smith, we are Senior Sergeants Andrew Smith and Michelle Brown. We are taking you to the St Kilda Police Station, under the charge of murder. "

"Yes, please get away from the music of Mark Holden and Gary Glitter."

(Sources were from online music written by Mark Holden and Gary Glitter.)

FLAME

By Roderick Waller

Way out in the bush, it's dry as a moth ate rattan chair. We sat on the rail of the gate, saw the plumes of smoke rose on the ridge ten miles west, brought its flame from the back of the stark plains, six by ten tall flames. They flick, set a burn on the pines. Whoosh they go, halfway up the hill. I round on Sue, 'Clear 'aint it. We get the hell out or stay put, take our luck, chance it will burn us, house, and all.' I get in a state, nerves edgy, feet click, and hands twitch. Her milky voice retorts, 'Wait, the wind could swing.' Dry leaves writhe on the gum tops down in the creek, there's smoke in the air, eyes wet, stung lungs. 'A flake of ash, we're off!' my lips ugly, I lean 'gainst the roo bar. 'Don't trust that mad flame, it's like a wild bull in a yard.' Her torso talks an iron-bar, good with sense. Me, I gets lost when things go bad, brain noise shuts my head.

The sky north is red, gray, clouds of leaves reel in the haze, the flame smokes out their damp. Flocks of birds whirl in tight rings. Squawks rise out of them; we see burnt flesh out of their wings flush down, birds scorch, scream half dead. I stamp and moan, smoke plumes. I watch the mill vane swing north then south. The ground's burnt black on the ridge. Our sheep, a mile up, burn, bleat, die, I bet. I grab a stick, hit the tank, a sad tinny clang. 'Dry as grandma's wrinkles, three years. Sue slumps: her thin shoulders droop, her old dress on years of wear drags in the dirt, her hair in a bun, wisps of white show. I kneel in the dust, tears dam up. We load up the bed, food safe, chairs; the moth ate lounge, pots, pans, boots, shirts, pants, a few prints, the dog. The tires squelch, the springs taut, low, the load ten feet off the dirt, ash settles on my arm. I scratch, stretch, put an arm round her waist. She looks up at the tall frame of me, pats my bald patch, smiles a pen-line, plants a kiss on my stubbled cheek. 'Hit the road then you old git.' She's calm,

got a straight brain on her. She pulls out her black and crimson scarf, blanks her mouth and nose, clamps her battered green straw hat over her ears. My foot down, the hub caps screech in the sand, the Ute whips on a coin. The load shifts side to side. We get up the road a bit, all bumps and jumps and shunts. The bed rocks, birds flap wild on the gray gum tops. We drive east the sand trail, shed tears.

'Stop a bit.' She says, gets out, waves our bit of a house we slept for near ten years. The back time we built it, axed trees, split logs, drove nails, brushed on a spit of paint. The cot I spent days on, skinned with a jack knife for a kid that never came, with a big sad thought. We bought sheep in Porriecan, found Jess in the bush, a poor stray pup. We slugged to grow veg. raise lambs and Sue spruced up the hut to make a sort of home, a turn from ugly stuff to a bit nice, way she worked on me first time we walked out.

'Come on Sue', I call. She gets in, a wry wedge for a mouth. 'That's it then.' I bleats. We bump, groan, and grind off the ditch side of the fence, sing to bury grief.

Sun-up we drive out of Porriecan, cool hour of the day. News squarks out the radio, the sun'll burn at a full borne scorch. We wind the glass down, feel the bliss of a tepid breeze. A few miles up we set the milk tin on a bit of flame and pour leaf tea and a gum leaf at the boil. We munch on grits. Her cheeks glow pink. We race the sun heat. Round noon I throw swags under a gum. A Ute pulls up, 'How is it, friend?' the man thrust out his head, worn like an old beech nut. 'Take a drink?' I blow on the twig, get up the flame. 'Like I will.' 'You from round here?' I asks when we slake our thirst. 'A contractor.' he grunts from the hollow in his brown face.

'Any shearing, these parts?'

'You may be in luck. Hal Wig starts in a few days. I'm a man short.' He eyed me up slow. 'I'll have a word.' He comes over with the big man. We lean 'gainst a rain tank in a line of shade. 'Pete's the name, my wife, Sue.' A tough grown handshake felt right. He speaks soft and calm. He runs a keen eye over me, there's two rams in the pen. 'Let's see you shear.' He makes that soft smile. I'm on the stand, check the comb gear, oil the blade, drag out a ram and get to work. I feel a bit stiff but soon get in the swing, long blow down the sides, down the belly, short cuts round the neck, down the legs, make good time. I push him 'tween my legs, stand up, arch my back, feel beads of sweat. I swipe a look at Hal. 'Keep that up, you're on.' Sue lights up the smile only she can do.

Shearing done we high tailed back, certain the lease was razed. But the flame had stopped shy of the hut. There's a faraway sweet voice on my ear. Sue presses her warmth on me. 'Hey Pete, storm broke the drought I reckon.' She pulls my dark hand on her grown belly. We look out at the morning sunshine over Porriecan Valley; smile at the dew on the flame trees.

Non Fiction



THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

By Sylvia Hall

I sat holding her hand. Her skin was soft, warm and as familiar to me as my own. My older sister sat in a chair the other side of the bed while my brother and younger sister stood, quietly chatting a little further away.

Early in the day, she had been agitated and restless, fighting the unknown process that had begun in earnest. An article I had once read stated that some people needed "permission" to let go, so, although I hardly had authority in the matter, I brushed the hair back from her forehead and told her she had been a wonderful mother to us all. That she had been a tower of strength, a caring provider of all that we had needed. However, it was now time for her to relax. Nothing needed doing, no one required anything from her. She took a deeper breath and sank back into the pillows.

Then, as the summer evening sent long shadows across the room, she was resting peacefully with her eyes almost closed and her laboured breathing slow but regular.

At some time earlier, my dearest friend had phoned to check with my sister if it was all right for her to come and join us. Jen and I had been inseparable as children from the age of 7 years. Now as middle-aged women, we had shared half a lifetime of laughter and tears. Some spiritual connection always alerted the other when one of us was sorely in need. So now, Jen had found another chair and sat beside me with her arm around my shoulders. She had come to say her own goodbyes to the woman who had stepped in and tried to fill the void after her own mother passed away when she was only 12 years.

I guess when your emotions are on overdrive and every fibre in your body is acutely aware that an unforgettable moment in your life is taking place; you can tap into deeper feelings. I was warmly aware of the connectivity to my siblings, but it also felt deeply personal. I felt like I was travelling with my mum. Although I knew there were several of us in the room, it felt like it was just she and I.

Memories came to mind of things she had taught me, the many things she had told me and all the years of living we had shared. Our intertwined hands connected us on more than a physical level. She was giving me the last of her strength to keep going without her.

I was always close to her. As a small child, I was a bit of a sook really. On her return home after she had been in hospital for a couple of weeks following a back operation, I wouldn't let her out of my sight. But she was an instinctive mother, and knew that she had to toughen me up a bit if I was to make my way in this world. She would make me stand at the gate, screaming my head off, while she calmly walked to the shop at the corner of our street and returned. Eventually, I again trusted that she would come back. However, even as an adult, I wanted to live near her. Often described as a typical "Pisces", I know I can be over sensitive at times. I needed regular doses of her practicality to keep me grounded and counteract my airy-fairyness.

Somewhere around 9 p.m. my brother and younger sister stopped speaking and moved quickly towards the bed. They had heard the last breath. It was only then that I realised that although I was still holding her hand, she was no longer holding mine. Jen's arm squeezed a little stronger, reassuring me that I was not alone, nor ever would be.

The day was drawing to a close and she had done it. She had lived her 86 years her way, with strength, determination, empathy, positivity and humour. And now she had passed peacefully and with dignity to the next realm.

Not everyone gets the privilege to be with a loved one at the end of his or her life. And not every life ends in such a tranquil and beautiful way. The experience, while deeply moving and sad, was also extremely positive for me. Well-done mum. You're a very hard act to follow. However, I will go on and try to make you proud of me. Till we meet again on the dark side of the moon.



REMEMBERING FATHER BOB

By Barbara Magee

Father Bob Maguire was an extraordinary person. He is very well-known for the work he did in the community, for looking after the poor, and all those who were “down and out”, whom he referred to as “the unloved and unlovely”. My own experience of Father Bob, however, was as a parishioner.

One of his many memorable qualities was his wacky sense of humour. While highly educated, the self-described “larrikin priest” would always drop his “aitches” and would frequently finish a sentence with “Isn’t it?”. He delighted in using malapropisms, so that his speech would be peppered with phrases like, “When I was studying at the cemetery”, and “So put that in ya dairies!” If anyone responded in kind, he would growl! Father Bob’s church-services were fun, so much so, in fact, that they were attended by non-Catholics, as well. As a result of this, Father Maguire, when saying “The Lord’s Prayer”, wouldn’t stop after, “And deliver us from evil”, as is the Catholic tradition, but would continue with, “For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.” He would then yell out, “And that was for the Protestants!” He used to tell me that I had become a Catholic “by osmosis”!

It didn’t take long, however, for newcomers to realise that behind all the buffoonery was a deeply-religious and compassionate person. This led him to draw very moving parallels between events in the New Testament and current affairs. One Sunday, many years ago, he gave us an A4 page that was a photo of an injured Iraqi boy lying in a hospital bed, his beautiful dark eyes brimming over with suffering. Father Bob made the comment, “Look at those eyes, that’s Jesus crucified on the Cross.” Sometime later, he gave us the same A4-size photo, with another photo on the reverse side, one of the same boy, with prosthetic limbs, playing football. Father Bob said, “That’s the Crucifixion on one side, and the Resurrection on the other.”

Another of Father Maguire’s great strengths was his very unusual ability to “translate” the New Testament in a way that made it easier to understand, remember, and most importantly of all, to put into practice. He would say, “It’s not enough to want “Jesus to ‘ave ‘ere”, meaning, to think about Jesus and his teachings only while you were in church, “ya gotta ‘ave Jesus to take away as well.” He would simplify the values of the New Testament in a way that made them easier to aspire to. For example, “I make it my No.1 rule not to ‘arm anybody”, and “The way to get to ‘eaven is to make friends.”

At one of the services at Mary’s Wayside Chapel, Father Bob told us, “Now YOU do some talking, I talk too much”, to which a visiting priest from Sydney replied, “You could never talk too much, Bob!”

I have all of Father Maguire’s interpretations of the weekly Bible readings (as they appeared in “The Southerly Buster”) stored in a file. He can’t speak to us in person anymore, but what a wonderful legacy he has left us!

After the Final Blessing, Father Bob would sometimes imitate Spike Milligan’s injunction to his studio audience after an episode of “The Goons”... “Now get out!” Parishioners would leave the chapel laughing. When feeling happy and relaxed, it’s so much easier for us humans to do what Father Bob did so brilliantly himself, “putting Gospel values into practice”!

FORGOTTEN LETTERS

By Grant Aldous

Perhaps he was ignoring them. He could not but see them as they sat on kitchen bench for several days. Crumpled, faded and torn, the aerograms were constrained by an elastic band which was perishing. These thin, lightweight pieces of foldable and gummed paper had been brought from Sydney by the recipient, a natural hoarder. Decluttering his study, he found them, knowing that over many years they had travelled with him from Adelaide to Melbourne to Sydney. He thought now that they should be reunited with the writer after some 50 years ago.

"You can do what you like with them," the recipient told the writer. After a few days the author found time – and perhaps the nerve (what would they contain?) to read them and consider the contents. Sitting on the couch, he put them in chronological order. Most had been typed; the others hand written. He began to read.

"Not bad", he would say to himself having read a sentence. Adding at times to himself, "I do like that description." In one, he particularly liked his recounting of attending a football match between Arsenal and Chelsea. He told his sports-mad mate: "The yobbos and the yahoos were out in force. The St John's ambo blokes ran a shuttle stretcher service as police carried out bloody bodies each time a goal was scored".

He found the missives to his former flatmate informative and entertaining and contained no dark shadows. Sometimes he would find his memory tested. Who was Pam that I invited to a dinner party? Where was the flat where a group of Melbourne girls lived? Whatever happened to Marilyn and Colin? Did I really do that? he would ask himself.

In two letters, he provided details of two dinner parties: the so-called Italian inspired menu – fried mussels, chicken cooked in brandy with green peppers stuffed with a cheese mixture, and stewed apples filled with mixed fruit. The other - avocados filled with fresh fruit laced with kirsch, pork fillets flamed in brandy and covered in a cream and French mustard sauce, plum pudding followed by a selection of Norwegian cheeses. Finding these bills of fare, he had to phone one of his then house mates who was at these parties (her husband was then working night shifts). Known as Memory Bank, she recalled the functions. Having considered the meals, the writer asked himself how he could afford to provide these dinner parties given his limited income in costly London. Perhaps lean weeks followed.

The correspondence ended with the writer's return to Australia. Having finished the last letter, he thought that these were good records of some of his time in London. However ... he wondered what reporting would occur now. Most people don't write letters nor keep diaries. How will future historians record history with words and documents of the masses? Emails cost nothing and are immediately transmitted to the recipient and often are then deleted. Emails and social media by nature are not expansive, with details of events often being minimal.

Although the flimsy aerograms were a record of fun times in swinging London, they really meant nothing to him now and were unceremoniously ditched in the recycling bin.

VANISHED INTO THIN AIR

By Lyn Allen

They were here, I am sure they were here, I even put them there, or did I?

Gawd...it's part of my wind down routine, take off my jewellery worn that day and place it into the small pottery stands that sit on my dresser. There it all is; earrings, locket, watch, bangle, medic alert band, along with the other bits and pieces worn previous days, but my bracelets are not there. Where are my precious stone and rudraksha bracelets that mean so much to me? Invariably on my right wrist, there to touch and spin around giving me hope, healing, energy, love and truth.

The search begins, I doubt whether I'll be able to let it go until I find my cherished stone bracelets.

Could I have left them at work, no I don't wear them at work or the gym, so rule out those two places. What did I do, where have I been, where did I go yesterday as I back track in my mind, mumbling to myself, whilst still searching the surface of the dresser including the assortment of little handmade boxes.

So desperate, I am now resorting to my secret hiding places, even though I know they would not be there. My undies drawer stashed in my panty liner box, what's this? It's cash; 300 Euros, 120 British pounds, excellent, I had forgotten about that stash, scouring other secret places, but nowhere to be found.

OK Lyn, return to yesterday, the last time I wore them...first up the morning Church jam making session, I may have taken them off to pick and prep up the fruit, left them on the bench. Then off to visit Nola, my stepmother, what did I do there? I cooked up an early dinner then washed dishes. Maybe I took them off there, called Nola, no not there. Off to the Church kitchen, no not there, perhaps the library even though I never went there

yesterday it was the day before. I am that desperate, trying all avenues that I know deep down shall get me nowhere closer to the search for my bracelets. I feel naked without them.

I am not religious nor a Catholic but I now start praying to Saint Anthony "please Saint Anthony lead me to my lost bracelets, I promise I shall never forget where I have placed them ever again"

Weeks go by; those bloody bracelets are still on my mind.

I don't believe it, I finally tackled an overflowing basket of ironing and there they are in the pocket of a dress that has been through the wash.

Now it all comes back to me. Yes, I did take them off at the sink at Nola's and put them in the pocket of the dress I was wearing that day. Since when do dresses have pockets!

The bracelets and I are united again. Sometimes things don't vanish into thin air... there is always hope.

THE LAST STRAW

By Christopher Burgess

The following is a true story: the names have been changed.

For over forty years Jack Drummond ran a small smash repair business. In that time Jack had been called out to hundreds of car crashes. Every time the phone rang, Jack knew there had been a car accident. He would jot down the address then get into his tow truck. Jack had no idea what he would find once he got to the site of the crash: it could be just another repair job, or all too often, serious damage to life and limb. With more and more cars on the road, the greater the likelihood there was that there would be accidents. The more accidents, the more work that came Jack's way, the number of cars in his workshop waiting to be repaired, attested to that.

Jack Drummond took great pride in ensuring his truck was in perfect working order: after all, as the owner of a tow truck, he never knew when he would be called out. So, every night before shutting up shop, Jack would check that the tank was full, that the engine oil was at the correct levels, and the lights and windscreen wipers, were functioning properly. That he had both a reflective jacket and a weatherproof anorak in case it was raining, as well as a hard hat, gloves, and flashlight, and logbook to record each incident. He also carried a large broom to sweep up broken glass and other debris.

"Drummond Smash Repairs" was established by Jack's father, Graham Drummond, in the early sixties and was located on a street that had, over the decades, become a notorious black spot. Jack had lost count of the number of single and double car crashes he had to attend, three of which proved to be fatal. One such fatality happened right outside Jack's garage. It was at night when it was raining heavily. An elderly man was trying to cross the street to get to the Milk Bar next

to Jack's garage. Traffic was heavy in both directions. The man reached the centre of the road, then instead of waiting for a break in the traffic, began to walk along the line of traffic rather than across the road. Jack was in his office when he heard the screech of brakes and the sickening sound of metal hitting flesh. The old man was killed instantly.

One night, Jack had been about to close up for the night, when he received a phone call that was to turn his life completely upside-down. As Jack suspected, there had been a car crash: a serious one according to the voice on the other end of the line. It was raining heavily, turning the streets greasy and treacherous: it was the kind of conditions that Jack's father referred to as "tow truck weather." Thankfully, the accident had happened just down the road - he would be there in minutes.

The crash had happened at an intersection. Jack had parked his truck as near to the scene of the accident as possible. There was a fire engine and two police cars. Despite the ceaseless rain, a fireman was busily hosing down the road around the crash site. Several pedestrians were standing under an awning, watching what was going on. In the middle of the road were two crumpled vehicles, Jack immediately recognised one of them – a bright orange Datsun, it had been in his workshop for minor repairs only a few days previously. A policeman had finally managed to prise open the driver's door with a crowbar, just as Jack got there. Jammed against the steering wheel was the crumpled body of a woman Jack Drummond had known all his life – it was his mother. She was dead.

Jack Drummond never got behind the wheel of his tow truck again.

WHAT A COINCIDENCE!

By Jacqueline Burgess

Everyone has the experience of coincidence, unexpectedly bumping into a friend a couple of times in a week, say, or hearing from someone just after you had been thinking about them.

Coincidences can be large, or small.

One such for me, was when I was seated at a rather formal social gathering of people at a large apartment complex into which my husband and I had recently moved. I was looking at the fellow diners all of whom knew each other much better than I did, when someone slid into the chair next to me and said, 'I am your cousin's cousin'. I did not know her at all, but apparently, we had met once when I was a child perhaps sixty-five years previously, but still she knew who I was.

She is living a dozen flights above us in our apartment block.

Another time, I visited Margaret, a friend in Toorak, whom I had known from my very first day at school in Melbourne. She was in a group of women friends, one of whom I instantly recognised. It was Di, who had been my neighbour when we had moved from Melbourne into our first house in Sydney, and we had become good friends as she had introduced us into the street which was blessedly full of same age children. Her house was perhaps a dozen metres above ours, in the rocky, hilly landscape of inner Sydney bayside, and she had hung over the fence to call down to me to tell me that Gough Whitlam had been sacked. She had been with me when police from Interpol came to tell me that my husband's mother had been found dead in her home in London. Considerately, the police had knocked on her door to ask Di to accompany them when they gave me that startling news.

I had lost touch with Di when she had moved away from her house next door, but now, a couple of decades later, in another state, here she was at my friend Margaret's house. Margaret, I was told, had known my friend Di since they were both about ten years old. They were playmates then, as they lived a couple of streets away from each other and had resumed their friendship when Di had returned to Melbourne, but we had never previously met in Margaret's company.

But my most extraordinary coincidence was again when we were living in Sydney. With our young children at the local school, I had volunteered to be the secretary on the parents' committee. Caroline, the president on the committee asked me to lunch at her house one day, a thoughtful invitation, as we had only met a few times.

She was a very keen photographer, she told me that day. She said she wanted to show me a book of her very special photographs. "I don't show this to many people", she said, "but I want to show it to you. These are my best photographs. I have photographed in all the countries in the world, except the South Americas," she told me.

I thought that might be somewhat of an over-claim, but Caroline undoubtedly would have travelled to a great many countries and seen millions of people in her life and in her travels. After all, in our lifetimes, all of us will have seen millions of people, passing before our eyes and some of them do make a strong visual impression.

These were the people Caroline had photographed.

I started looking through the book. It was large and very well presented, with black and white glossy ten by nine-inch prints, one per page.

WHAT A COINCIDENCE! (CONT.)

By Jacqueline Burgess

On about the third page there was a photo of an encounter which Caroline had photographed in London. “That was at Speaker’s Corner”, she told me. I knew Speaker’s Corner, having lived in London for three years after leaving Australia. London was where I had met and married my husband.

The central focus of the photo was a short, stout and determined older woman who was bearing down on a tall, skinny, formally dressed, dark-skinned man who perhaps was a migrant from Jamaica. He was looking decidedly taken aback at the prospect of what seemed likely to be a confrontation.

Of all the millions of people in the world, the very focus of that photograph Caroline had taken, was my short, stout mother-in-law, carrying the handbag we had given her before we left England to live in Australia, perhaps a decade earlier.

HOME COMING

By Rumi Commons

When I was stranded in Japan because of airport closures during Covid crisis, I was delighted to find a small apartment on a mountain top, looking down at the Pacific Ocean across a lush and fragrant bamboo bush. It was in Atami, a country town renowned for its natural hot spring, situated two hours from Tokyo by a slower local train.

It rained pitter patter for three days and nights in early July. Nearly noon on the fourth day, Atami residents’ mobile rang out the danger. Minutes later, an avalanche of muddy water swept 80 people downwards to the sea, burying hundreds of houses, cars, and trees, leaving a bare strip of orange coloured soil on Izu-mountain. Many anxious hours and days later, 26 bodies were dug out of whiffy dirt by hand shovels under the sweltering heat of Japanese summer, before bulldozers were brought in. One is still missing after two years search on land and at sea.

Three apartment blocks shared our ten-seater shuttle, climbing up and down the breathtakingly steep roads to the station. Our trusted drivers were aware of the past landslips, which had been reinforced by steel sheets. The shuttle was cancelled on that day after my son had left. Taxies and busses were out of service, so I just prayed that he would stay where it was safe. A resident found a muddy trickle in our property. Earlier than expected, my son returned saying, “Boss drove me up, so I didn’t have to climb up the slippery path.” The three-storey shopping complex in town was packed, like a rush-hour train, with people trying to buy electric generators and foods. Hotels took in people who had unfortunately lost their home.

The mudslide was on the other side of Atami. We soon learned that there had been a large-scale illegal dumping and landfill where residents complained about the smelly streams. Town clerks, who hold privileged

positions, while others work in seasonal jobs in tourism, seem to be trained to avoid issues. I have experienced this in person, as I made complaints regarding pedestrian safety where a large cherry tree branch blocked the path. And, an enormous sex-shop sign on the town’s major highway, and an unsafe building frame discarded half way through the construction. They had varying polite excuses for their inaction, “There is no law or penalty provision,” being their favourite.

Though I look Japanese, after 40 years in Australia I may think like an Aussie. While I studied law, law reform was an important component, and I was amazed that Japanese people accepted the “law” as something that cannot be changed. They tend to make decisions for obligatory rather than rational reasons. Japan may seem a modern democratic country which is expected to play a role on the world stage, but there remains feudal like culture that guards its bureaucratic system.

My Tai-chi teacher and her husband were from Tokyo like me. She made it her daily routine to walk along the panoramic path, looking down the sea. She set out in a light drizzle that day, before realizing that she had a wrong pair of walking boots for the weather. “I went home to change,” she said. “Hearing the awful noise, I turned and saw a wall of a brown wave swishing down my walking track. If I hadn’t come home to change the boots ...” She looked pale and shaken. Her fishmonger friends, who lived along her walking track, lost their son that day. A few months later, my Tai-chi teacher and her husband moved back to Tokyo.

Tourists were not allowed to swim that summer, but the locals got down to the beach at dawn before the inspectors’ arrival. I was careful to wear a swimming cap, goggles, and, footwear until I got to

HOME COMING (CONT.)

By Rumi Commons

the edge of the water. I floated immediately to avoid standing on bare feet. Though they cleaned all the debris on beach daily, in the lukewarm water among purple and white zebra fish, I saw the same patterned spectacles on sand. Then, I saw a facemask whirling like a jelly fish nearby, and I didn't go back to swim for a week. I didn't like the thought of accidentally touching a slippery bone in sand.

I loved living in Atami. The sea and the bush, the old and the new, like Port Phillip. Covid was less menacing than in the metropolis. Residents came from other parts of Japan and were open to discussions. I was pleasantly surprised that the locals accepted me as another local, which made me feel guilty when I was leaving. Although I had told everyone that Australia is my home, people started to believe that I might be there for good.

We returned home in December 2022, when Covid became under control. My husband picked our son and me at Tullamarine, but he missed the Todd Street freeway exit and we were lost in the city. Melbourne seemed quiet at night and looked the same as before, apart from a few strange buildings. When we arrived at our Port Melbourne home, I dragged my case weaving through an overgrown courtyard.

Inside, swinging down from the ceiling were grey cobwebs, and white dust covered clutters, recalling the "Sleeping Beauty" movie. I found my slippers and pink toothbrush where I left them two and a half years ago, but the cupboards were chock-a-block with toilet paper.

As I had perfected the art of decluttering, through living in a compact apartment in Japan, I threw away ten empty shampoo bottles in the bin. Sadly, on the following day,

I found them all back in the shower recess. "There is a bit left at the bottom Mum," our daughter said.

A few months later, my jaw muscles stopped feeling "pulled" from having English conversations. I walk to the gym with my husband and the passers-by say hello. Without the face masks, we can see each other's smile.

TIME TO COMPARE AND CONTRAST

By Marilyn Fahey

I will be eighty two years old this year, that is, of course, if I outsmart the Corona virus and various other ageing frailties. My family and friends frequently enquire how I cope with living on my own; well, to be quite honest, nothing much has changed. Of course I miss taking long awaited holidays, I am not ready to risk totally unknown environments just yet. I also miss trips on the community bus but generally I choose not to get out and about much. All in all, my daily activities have not changed significantly.

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

The most essential but totally tedious was the daily round of washing and drying of nappies for a two year old, a one year old and a newborn baby. The daily grind of pre washing up to 20 nappies per day, then putting them into a gas fired copper to be boiled until they were freed of any stains using a block of Velvet soap, which I had cut or shaved into the boiling water. Then the use of a trusty copper stick to lift them out of the boiling water into the first rinse of cold water then through the hand wringer into the second rinse and so on and so on until they had been rinsed and wrung out at least four times.

Here you must understand that I was trying my best to follow my mother's instructions, well not quite the same, she who must be obeyed mandated six rinses, a feat beyond me. Then carting these very heavy loads out to the clothes line to hang them out as early as possible to give the wind a chance to dry them out so that I would have enough nappies to get us through the next day.

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

This was a daily routine which could not be left to another time when I might feel like doing this boring task again. Of course, you will appreciate the fact this included looking after my very young children and making sure they came to no harm in my absences in the laundry and at the clothes line (thank God and the ABC for Playschool).

Why am I recalling this incredibly boring pressure to do my duty? No I don't feel sorry for myself, well, just a little bit. Rather I am amazed that I did it at all and that I followed the instructions given by my fastidious mother and mentor. Truth be told I had no other choice as I had neither a washing machine nor a clothes drier and I knew zilch about disposable nappies then.

My primary reason for recounting this turgid tale is not to pat myself on the back (well just a little bit) but to recount a scene I saw on a television news report about the hardships being endured by the people in war torn and financially bankrupt Lebanon. The camera panned homes which had been bombed beyond being safe to live in and noted that the currency rate was on a precipitous decline. The video then switches to a security camera in a pharmacy where a young man is holding a gun on the shop owner and holding out a plastic shopping bag whilst gesturing to the wretched man to fill his bag. Regrettably, I speculate that he would be after drugs! Both men have desperate looks on their faces as the shopowner reaches under the counter and pulls out a large parcel which he places in the plastic bag being held by the gunman. To my utter astonishment

TIME TO COMPARE AND CONTRAST (CONT.)

By Marilynn Fahey

the gunman seems to be gesturing a type of apology (possibly there is a tear in his eye) to the shopkeeper who places a large package of disposable nappies in the bag and the gunman takes off to the wretched world he and his baby most likely inhabit.

As I contemplated the differences in our lives I could not help feeling so sorry for both men in the news report, the young fathers desperation to obtain disposable nappies, a 'luxury' often wished for by me and the shopkeepers risk of being shot.

By comparison my seemingly primitive method of obtaining nappies for my babies in a pre disposable era seems absolutely nothing to complain about. I can only thank my lucky stars that I had the health and strength to undertake my daily chores in a safe and peaceful Australia in the sixties.

THERE WERE THREE IN THE BED AND THE LITTLE ONE SAID, "ROLL OVER"

By Janet Gardner

From the time I was born in 1948, my sleeping arrangements have been unconventional. My cot was the bottom drawer from the chest of drawers in my parents' bedroom. I was the youngest of six children and the only planned conception, with the family GP promising to arrange long term care for my Nana Marshall upon my arrival. Whilst my birth had relieved my mother of caring for my paternal grandmother, her respite was short lived, as she later had to make room for her own mother, Nana Wilkins. I never understood why the responsibility for looking after Nana Wilkins fell to Mum, given that out of all her ten siblings, she had the least room and the most mouths to feed! It resulted in the three youngest kids, Gillian, Margaret and myself, having to share not only a double bed, but our bedroom with Nan. My three eldest siblings slept in other rooms in our corner, two story, three-bedroom Council house, which was built, post-World War II, on an estate in Dagenham, U.K., primarily to accommodate Ford factory workers.

Nana Wilkin's silhouette mimicked that of an aging Queen Victoria. Her long, fine, salt and pepper colored hair that she wore twirled like a cinnamon scroll on top of her head cascaded down to her waist when unpinned. Her thin, round framed spectacles perched on her Roman nose, partially concealed her left glass eye. She had lost her eye as a result of diabetes. She occupied a single bed positioned in the corner next to the bedroom door, which faced the small, square paned window and the double bed that we three shared. The bedroom overlooked our small, wedge-shaped back garden and the parallel washing lines of our neighbors. As the youngest I was sent to bed first, which meant I got to sleep against the wall, then Margaret was in the middle and Gillian on the end. Blankets and eider downs were in

short supply and in the winter Mum would throw our winter coats on top of the bed for extra insulation. If we didn't synchronize our turning over the coats and bedding would slide off onto the linoleum floor, resulting in our bodies being exposed to the cold night air and also, in my case, the damp wall.

I didn't mind having to go to bed first. This was the only time I truly had to myself. It was when I could imagine all possibilities, be it exploring my bodily changes, trying to read out aloud without stuttering and when that failed, singing the words like a lark. Unfortunately, the only reading/singing material I had was the Bible, with religion playing a dominant role in our everyday lives. I recall, at aged five, my mother's Baptism when thinking the minister was drowning my mum, I ran and jumped into the holy pool after her!

Many things changed when Nan took up residence in our bedroom. The first thing that comes to mind was the smell. Our boudoir reeked of TCP, which was an antiseptic solution that Nan almost bathed in! It had a pungent odour that reminded me of the dreaded school dentist. One thing she did bathe in TCP each night was her glass eye, which stared out of a chipped, china cup that sat beside her bed. It was always a source of great amusement when she sometimes confused it with her cup of tea that Mum would dutifully deliver to her bedside each morning. We would also burst into fits of laughter when Nan would frequently unwittingly put her glass eye in back to front.

There wasn't much to laugh about when Nan came to bed each night. Life as we knew it stopped as soon as she was bedded down for the night. She demanded total darkness and silence that meant we couldn't read, talk or listen to our favorite music being played on the new station, radio Luxembourg.

THERE WERE THREE IN THE BED AND THE LITTLE ONE SAID, “ROLL OVER” (CONT.)

By Janet Gardner

Our feeble attempts to devise means of reading with torches, or whispering were always thwarted even though Nan was half blind and somewhat deaf. Getting caught always precipitated a bout of uncontrollable giggling, which would crescendo with Nan’s persistent remonstrations that invariably ended up with her hollering out, “Ruth, come and tell these girls to be quiet”. Then we would hear the stairs creak, the brass door handle rattle and turn, before Mum burst into the room. The immediate silence was only broken by Mum’s verbal tirade of threats, all of them having undesirable physical and nonphysical consequences, if we were not immediately quiet by going straight to sleep.

I didn’t have my first solo sleep experience until I was eighteen, when I started my general nurse training at Oldchurch Hospital, Romford, U.K. The hospital was an array of dreary, old, red brick buildings, having been a workhouse in its previous life. It would be the first time that I not only had a bed to myself, but my own room. Initially this was to be a profoundly lonely and terrifying experience. The latter was compounded by the fact that my room in the Nurses’ Home was situated next to the mortuary. At night I would be awakened by the mortuary doorbell being rung each time a deceased patient was brought for storage in their refrigerators. As I was yet to be personally confronted with a dead body and to observe and smell a postmortem, my imagination used to run wild each time that mortuary bell tolled. Each night before retiring, I would inspect every possible hiding place in my room to ensure that I was the only occupant. I came to relish my autonomy and privacy but initially, I not only missed my siblings’ bodies that used to keep me warm at night, but also their conversations and laughter.

IMPY

By Veselka Gencic

The evening was beautiful with a gentle breeze. A few small clouds danced in the sky. The silence was disturbed only by children’s laughter in a nearby park.

I was sitting in the yard with my favourite book, but I wasn’t reading. I enjoyed the tranquillity.

Two small rainbow lorikeet parrots landed next to me. They seemed to be expecting something. I slowly got up and brought some sunflower seeds from the house. They began to peck at the seeds.

That’s how it started. Every day more and more of them came and after a week my yard was full of playful beauties. I installed the bird feeder and bought sunflower seed.

But it didn’t last long. Long billed corella appeared, first one, then a couple and then finally a whole flock. A war broke out between them. I got two more feeders and bought a bag of sunflower seeds. It became my daily duty, morning and evening.

My attention was drawn to the behaviour of these birds. It is incredible how similar their behaviour is to humans. Love, tenderness, tolerance, but also arrogance, greed, envy. Some birds graciously allow all the others to eat, even other species. One beauty, I named Apollon, would never start to eat until his partner landed on the feeder. Some of them patiently waited on the sidelines to see if they would get any seed. But some birds fight frantically to eat more. One of them was so selfish that he constantly flew from feeder to feeder chasing away all the birds. He wanted all the feeders for himself. I called him Joe.

The young birds didn’t know how to peel the seed, so they gladly took the bread.

But one of them caught my attention the most. I called him Impy. This parrot ignores the feeders totally and only want to eat from my hands. He comes with the other birds, but instead of going to the feeder, he usually stands on the grass next to me and wait for me to give him a handful of seed. The Impy would grab my hand with its claw and hold it tight while eating.

If I didn’t notice him right away, he would “remind me” by biting my leg. The problem is, that he doesn’t have real sense of how hard he bites me and that “reminder” is not gentle at all. Sometimes I had to put a band-aid on my leg. With him I always have to be on guard. Sometimes I think that he bites me hard on purpose. I don’t know if he loves me or hates me. Maybe I am just a good provider of food for him. No affection at all.

His behaviour is a mystery to me.

I wouldn’t tolerate this kind of behaviour in humans, but this bird...

Our relationship is strange. I forgive him everything. Bent over, I always wait patiently for him to eat the last seed. But even then, I have to be careful because an empty hand is sometimes rewarded with a bite.

I never punish him. I can’t. When he looks at me so innocently...

Over time he learned not to bite me so hard, at least not so often.

Impy’s behaviour does not deserve a high rating, but I love this bird. Although I still have to use a band-aid from time to time, I would be very sad if Impy stopped coming.

I would miss him a lot.

THREE CAPES TRACK

By Raymond James

I was told the 48-kilometer Tasmanian Three Capes Track wilderness walk over 4 days was a great adventure holiday to experience spectacular coastal scenery and the wonder of nature. I researched online, pondered and discussed this possibility with a friend with whom I previously walked the Tasmanian Overland Track in the distant past some 40 years ago. This may have been a mistake, as he said we should immediately commence planning for such a trip. I was not ready at that time for such a strenuous walk.

Due to government restrictions to protect this precious natural environment the number of new hikers starting off on this track are limited to only 48 per day. I managed to book about 6 months ahead for this popular walk. This lead time I thought would be needed to train and prepare for the 48-kilometre wilderness walk over 4 days plus to recover from leg calf and knee injuries. My physiotherapist recommended a rehabilitation and walk training program for me. Started off the training by putting on a trusty 40 year plus backpack loaded to over 12kg and I walked for one hour on flat ground. I realised from this initial walk the extent of strengthening needed to build up to 7 hours per day of pack walking on the Three Capes Track hilly terrain. I trained up to 3 times a week.

Fortunately, with months of persistence and hard training, the body was able to cope with a 5-hour training pack walk which gave me confidence I was close to being ready.

The scenery during the 4 days walk was spectacular. There were magnificent views looking over the vast expanse of the ocean, and we could see the massive waves impacting against 100-metre-high cliffs. At other times, we were admiring dense forest with unusual local ferns and fungi. The track passed through many amazing unique local environments.

When walking to exposed cliff top viewpoints we could feel the extreme force of the roaring forty wind. On one occasion I could barely keep upright while walking to the lookout. During this 4-day walk the rain was not as prolonged and as intense as I remembered during the last trip 40 years ago when at times we were completely soaked by the rain.

Staying in huts each night was a welcome refuge from the cold rainy weather. My pack was lighter this trip as there was no need to carry a tent. The huts were designed architecturally to blend into the environment and had cooking, sleeping and heating facilities, but no showers or lights in the bunk rooms.

I appreciated the walking track which had been constructed through the wilderness, apparently taking two years to build. There were kilometres of elevated timber board walks which stopped track erosion from the many walkers passing through each year. It was different from my walk 40 years ago when I had struggled knee deep through muddy sections of track. In other sections of track local stone steps were formed to assist walkers to traverse the hilly terrain, which was excellent.

Towards the end of the 4-day pack-walk, I was very tired, but at the same time it was an exhilarating experience to be in nature's wonderland. I was grateful to have safely completed the walk and for a moment, I felt 40 years younger. The good memories of the experience will remain with me for the rest of my life.

CHARCOAL CASSEROLE

By Aziza Khamlichi

Every Sunday, the vibrant South Melbourne market bubbles with smells and tastes. It is abuzz with laughter and colour.

But nothing compares to the hour before closing time, when everything comes alive. Crowds from different cultures collide together and gyrate around stalls, seeking bargains.

The vendors sing and shout, trying to outdo each other. Their calls resound above our heads. Just chaos!

"Half price sour-dough bread, doughnuts, and hot cross buns!"

"Ten dollars a tray of sardines, salmon, and prawns!"

"Three bags of organic vegetables for two dollars, hurry up! These are the last ones!" Customers push each other, snapping up bags full of dull, almost expired goods. I pick a bag, I look at it.

"Come on lady, it's very cheap!" The greengrocer hands me three bags.

"Ready for the bin" I murmur under my breath and walk away. I inch my way towards the florist. "Three bunches for five dollars!" I take the irises, they may last for a couple of days.

I go to Mahmoud the Egyptian's fruit and vegetable stall, we exchange greetings in our Arabic tradition. Here I can squeeze, touch, and smell. I am eager to sample and taste fresh figs, grapes, and ripe peaches. I feel like I am back home in Morocco at the Medina Souk.

Mahmoud goes inside the store and brings the best for me. He knows exactly what I like: quinces, artichokes, okra, the biggest pomegranates. Often, he will add a bunch of spring onions, garlic, or fresh ginger for free.

Since I moved to Australia from the UK, I have learned to call courgettes, zucchinis. Peppers, capsicums and aubergines, eggplants. I like the sound of those old words, but the new ones taste just as delicious.

When I get home, I spread my bounty on the kitchen bench, I see it. My mother's warm, delicious casserole takes shape over these colourful ingredients. I have known my mother's recipe for decades!

I put on Cuban music and pour myself a glass of pinot. I put my apron on and start cooking. I chop the vegetables to the rhythm of the music, and I dance.

In a big pot, I brown the meat and shallots in salted butter and a little extra virgin olive oil. I add grated ginger, fresh turmeric, and a clove of garlic. Next, all the vegetables go in the pot. I salsa sidestep around the kitchen bench to add black pepper and salt for seasoning. The casserole is simmering with joy. Satisfied with my labour of love, I breathe in. The aroma fills the kitchen.

I increase the gas for the last five minutes to reduce the sauce as I have always done at this stage, I go to my herb garden. I need fresh herbs for the perfect finishing touches before I switch off. When the casserole is just right, I will mush some for my baby grandson, who just started on solids. I can blend some for my friend with a broken jaw; she can have it as soup with a straw.

"Smells good," my neighbour says from over the fence.

"I will give you some; I am cooking plenty," I say.

Following my culture of cooking with love, sharing is also a passion of mine.

CHARCOAL CASSEROLE (CONT.)

By Aziza Khamlichi

We carry on chatting away about the weather and everything going on around Albert Park while I pick bunches of coriander, parsley, rosemary, and thyme. The lemon verbena is particularly fragrant today.

Suddenly, a rancid, burning smell. The fire alarm is deafening.

"The casserole is burning! SUGAR!" I shout after dropping the herbs and flying into the kitchen."

Oops! All gone. Smoke clouds the stove, there's a blackened mess in the pot.

In a panic, I pick up the burning pot and put it in the sink on top of a wet dishcloth. I run cold water over it until the smoke subsides. To destroy the evidence, I put the pot with its charred contents in a black garbage bag and drop it in the big bin outside. No more evidence. I come back into the kitchen to silence the alarm, I open the windows to get rid of the smoke, whirling dishcloths overhead. Finally, the smoke alarm is silent, but the smell of burning casserole hangs in the air.

To disguise the lingering burning smell, I get a saucepan and boil freshly ground coffee, a cinnamon stick, half a lemon, and half an orange. I light scented candles in every room, I can almost hear my husband say "You are always burning things". I smile, remembering other charred pans from very long ago. I finish the rest of my drink, grateful for the bargains and bounty of the South Melbourne market. There are lots more ingredients remaining. No good crying over a charcoal casserole! Like the French say, "à refaire." I start again.

This time, I put on some classical music. I have lost the mood and the dance moves.

I plug in the digital pressure cooker, I drop all the ingredients in at once and set it to casserole.

As the digital pressure cooker clicked off, Anna walks in. "Grandma, something smells so good. I am starving!"

"Vegetarian Casserole is ready, darling; cut yourself some olive bread while I serve you." Quickly, I fished out a hunk of lamb from the pressure cooker.

"What is that?" Anna asked.

"Just the bouquet garni, my darling, my own fresh herbs from the garden tied in a string".

"Forgive me, Anna," I whispered to myself but the protein may put some colour in her cheeks. She has been looking rather pale since she became vegetarian.

UNDER THE PERSIMMON TREE (EXCERPT)

By Marina Kirby

My refuge as a 1st generation migrant

It was under the persimmon tree that I first learned to astral travel. The tree was my father's pride and joy. Throughout the years, until high school, the tree was my refuge, far enough down the backyard to mute the sounds of my parent's arguments. The leaves held together my sanity; the branches provided stability and shelter.

Sitting under the tree, my mind rose above the garden, into the soft foamy clouds. I saw my backyard as a bird might see it. Soaring above Melbourne and visiting places that I had only seen in my encyclopedia. My heart would lift and I would fly. The tensions and turmoil would evaporate and I would be so wonderfully free.

From the age of three I lived in an old Victorian mansion in Camberwell. The house was divided into many small rooms for each family. There were three kitchens and only one bathroom with a laundry and toilet outside. We were tenants, and this kind of living arrangement was quite normal in the 1950s.

As an only child with both parents working several jobs, I was what was called, a "latch key" kid. I was fortunate to be entertained, by the never-ending procession of ever-changing tenants. Eventually, Dad purchased the house from the landlord for 12,000 pounds via lay-by. Yes, no bank, no interest, no middle man!

My mother the chameleon

Mum devised many unusual stories about her upbringing which changed constantly. Her tales included that her parents had been killed in a motor bike accident and being abandoned by a rich French lady, who came to Australia to quietly give birth and left her Italian leather wallet holding French Francs

with exquisite marcasite jewellery which I still have to this day. Another tale was that she was left at an

orphanage surviving off bread and dripping and raised by strict, abusive nuns.

Based on the information from mum's stories we believe Mum was abandoned and left in the Peoples Palace in Sydney where she was adopted. This was a Salvation Army home for unmarried pregnant women to give birth and then have their babies adopted out. Grace Tabulo and her husband Guiseppe never had children, but they took my Mum from Sydney to live with them. Grace had a home in Kew known as the The Fairyland Cottage, which still exists to this day. The Fairyland Cottage was often presented in local papers and neighbourhood children visited with donations of broken crockery used to decorate the fairy garden.

Her "chosen name" was Beppina De Moncereau, however, she chose to call herself Beppina Tabulo after Grace's husband. We have since found out that her first name choice, was a fictional character from the book – *The Count Of Monte Christo*.

Sadly mum said Grace was abusive and cruel to her, locking her in a cellar at night that was filled with antiques and spiders. Years later when I saw the plans, there was a bomb shelter beneath the cottage, so this part of the story could be feasible. Today we would say she suffered from PTSD and severe anxiety that lasted throughout her

life. There is also no record of mum ever attending school.

Life dramatically changed when Guiseppe was killed by a car whilst driving his horse and cart during his delivery round. Mum always spoke highly of Guiseppe and her love

UNDER THE PERSIMMON TREE (EXCERPT) (CONT.)

By Aziza Khamlichi

of the Hawthorn Football Club as he would take her to the Glenferrie Oval to watch the games. Mum continued her passion with Hawthorn until her dying day.

The Fairyland Cottage continued to thrive. Grace went on to live into her eighties. A newspaper displayed photographs of her on the roof of her cottage putting up Christmas decorations at 82.

In those days, it didn't seem to matter about the legalities. We have no documented knowledge of my mum's true name, birthday or nationality; however, the electoral role confirms her at The Fairyland Cottage address, at 14 years, employed as an usherette.

Relentless hours were spent researching her origin. Finally Human Services issued me with a certificate saying Alien, a *persona non grata*. Mum could never get a passport and because of this only received a pension three years before her death.

Dad migrating to Australia.

In contrast to mum's mysterious identity, my father Andreas was born in 1929 in Rizokarpaso, to parents who had nineteen children, thirteen boys and six girls, including three sets of twins. Dad was child number thirteen, named Andreas Nicola, he was born in the state of Salamis, later renamed Famagusta by the Turks. Life was difficult, with poverty and food shortages.

Dad was only educated to Grade 3, as he was needed to work to help support the family. At that time Cyprus was ruled under the British, and many English and United Nations Peacekeeping troops, kept Dad busy. Barefooted, he would run errands from one camp to another, earning small amounts of food for his troubles.

My Grandparents grew tobacco and I have been fortunate enough to travel to Cyprus as an adult and stood in those fields. When the depression came, my grandparents moved to Leopetri where the family was in the business of dyeing soldiers, and traditional clothing. They lived in a mud hut, without running water or sewerage. My Grandmother was known to plough the field with her donkey, only days after each birth. Many of the children died in infancy from malnutrition and disease.

Dad's brother Uncle Theos migrated to Australia in 1947, about the time my grandfather passed away. Before his death, he called upon Dad and said that "he had always been the black sheep of the family" and it was now his turn to support the family. It was decided that Dad should migrate to Australia.

TO BE CONTINUED

DON'T PAT THE DOG

By Warwick Llyod

There's plenty going on in Fitzroy Street night and day. It's one of those streets that you only have to say its name. "Oh, you live in Fitzroy Street" or "wow that's cool, what a great place to live, so central". And everyone has a story to tell about their experience on the Street or have heard something worthy of telling.

A person who has only a few dollars in their pocket can be walking the Street adjacent to a multi-millionaire heading to one of their favourite exclusive restaurants or into the Alex Theatre to see the latest offering recently played in London.

Only a couple of months back over 100,000 people watched The Grand Prix within a short stroll of Fitzroy Street. A very rich persons' sport, broadcast to the world.

I've lived above Fitzroy Street for the past 7 years and still call myself a newbie. I say above because we, my partner and I are 7 floors up, close enough to feel the vibe yet high enough to shut ourselves off from the madding crowd when we want to. My Mother lived in Fitzroy Street again above the Street for 23 years and believes it was the buzz of the Street and the friendliness of the locals that gave her a life span long beyond the norm. Yet apparently according to a recent survey only 5% of visitors to Fitzroy Street were actually from St Kilda.

This to a large extent answers my own observations that it's a place to wine and dine, party or be entertained yet not necessarily where one lives – unless you're in your twenties when 24 x 7 is the go.

Year by year the Street is beginning to change as developers put their stamp on gentrifying the place. A year ago, the Pride Centre opened – a magnificent building and a testament to modern architecture. The

old Chemist on the corner of Grey Street has moved and the beautiful building has been restored to its former glory. And there is good old cheap and cheerful Banff, over 40 years in business where the storytellers gather every night.

One such storyteller who we will call Stan is a musician who plays his guitar in local establishments and is paid in grog for his services. One night I went to see Stan and asked him the origin of his song "Don't pat the dog". Stan smiled and reflected on a night he was strolling along Fitzroy Street, over refreshed, only to be confronted by two police walking with a beagle on a lead. Stan bent down to pat the dog and the beagle went crazy. Reminds me of that song "who let the dogs out?"

You see Stan's pockets were full of green leaves – the ones you smoke and he was arrested on the spot. Alas the rest is another story.....

There's Rosco the teetotaller who will swap stories all day long or in fact tell his story all day long and he even brings his own teabag along to save on beverage costs.

There's Pete who seems to have a chip on his shoulder and by the loudness of his voice demands to be listened to, because he knows best.

As Eddie Murphy says in the film "Trading places" everyone has a story and in Fitzroy Street nothing surprises.

There are the characters like the businessman who lunches at the local Chinese restaurant Mahjong whilst his driver dutifully waits in an \$800,000 Mercedes Maybach out front.

The fellow who practices his bagpipes in the local park and has become the local real estate agent – blowing his own pipes.

DON'T PAT THE DOG (CONT.)

By Warwick Llyod

My partner was confronted by a woman demanding her earrings or she could “f... off” – my partner responded “I’ll f... off then”.

And there are sad ones where a woman was dragging her mattress and bags along the street in the rain.

The Street has no counterparts anywhere in Australia. Sometimes it’s compared to Kings Cross, other times, Oxford Street, Darlinghurst. It is neither and has its own persona.

Streets and suburbs continue to evolve and Fitzroy Street is doing just that. It has its Paris end and the antiquated street lighting and old trams amplify that, a look back to another era.

From sunup where one will see every type of dog being walked amongst the twirling plane tree leaves to sundown when bar doors open and one will witness the excesses of life.

It is a Street which sometimes challenges one’s senses, yet one I’m proud to call home.

I DO LIKE A PARADE

By Richard McClelland

I do like a parade! the colour, the movement, the people. The choice is ours! Moomba, Anzac Day or the Midsumma Pride March. Which will be yours??

Mine is Anzac Day.

What is better than The Shrine against a salmon dawn? The strident bugle or the wistful pipes?

And then the parade. An ocean of white caps roll as the Navy passes. Banners that herald all sorts of people and battles, and the flag waving children. The parade moves with the march of feet. Eager and in-step; a military precision of the Royal variety. But then the drumbeat becomes tired and maybe monotonous, funereal even. Does war deserve such spectacle?

Soldiers have marched these streets e’er long. Brighton Road as St Kilda Road was called then felt the tread of the Emerald Hill Volunteers Rifles and the hooves of the cavalry that formed the attached Artillery Corps. In those days the military occupied all the land to City Road and Moray and Park streets. From the lake to the foreshore the military had made their mark. There was a shore battery at the end of Kerferd Road or Military Road as it was originally called. The Butts railway station that is now called Albert Park serviced the rifle range facing the beach. The park itself was used as a shooting range and training ground as late as the 1950s.

Our colonial calm was disturbed by fears and rumors of invasion. Gold in piles of bullion was threatened, so the rumors ran. Plans were laid for a ring of forts to house gun emplacements that would extend from St Kilda to Williamstown and to include Sandridge - nowadays Port Melbourne. Two Russian ships appeared in the early 1860s

after the Crimean war of 1854. Then in 1865 the America ‘raider’ CSS Shenandoah sailed in unannounced. The American Civil war had commenced in 1861 and this ship was purported to be collecting bounty for Confederates, who were friends of the Russians and enemies of the British!

That the intrusion of international conflict should disturb the tranquility of Port Phillip Bay, has a familiar ring today.

“They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old.” We remember them in this parade, and the buildings and the relics add poignancy to that memory. The bluestone beauty that is Victoria Barracks was built in 1858 and the captured guns belong to later wars where our fellows fought and nurses nursed.

But no defensive wars were fought here. There was of course a problem in the goldfields at Eureka, but the British regiment was used to quiet the ‘riot’.

The men and women of Port Phillip went overseas to do battle, to fight their wars.

Walk the streets and parks of Port Phillip. See the memorabilia ‘midst the stately trees. Wander the worn paths around The Shrine where poppies lie scattered still among the autumn leaves. Higher up the hill the eternal flame gives warmth and school children noisily clatter up the steps.

They leave as a quieter mob.

In 2023 “Abide with me...” is sung. A solemn plea held close within, that recalls our vulnerability through a hymn to sleep our restive heroes. Those are they who began to fight the foreign wars, first in South Africa and they continue today. They rallied in days gone by and marched the paved streets onto the docks and waiting ships at Station Pier

I DO LIKE A PARADE (CONT.)

By Richard McClelland

and the New Railway Pier or Prince's Pier. Some took their horses with them. None of the horses and many of the men were never to return.

We will remember them.

Watch the parade, look at those marchers and you will see that soldiery is no longer men's business, it is shared like the comfort of security we all enjoy through their effort. All is equal in war.

Be still the drums of war.

Soften the tread of youth to hold the peace.

Lest we forget.

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH MY HEART!

By Janine Mifsud

The first time it happened, I was decked out in blue gauze booties, white gauze cap, my own undies and two flimsy hospital gowns undone at the back. The second time, I was allowed to keep my socks under the booties, had my wedding ring taped, no cap but wore a hospital gown under a starched, well-washed white robe.

Both times I was tagged with two self-adhesive identification bands, one on each wrist with name, date of birth and number of locker location. Both times I was laying on a trolley outside the operating theatre as a cannula was inserted in my arm.

The first time - primed, primed and ready for the procedure - I lay alone in the cramped corridor awaiting my turn. *Waiting... and waiting... and waiting...* I was next in line.

Now the questions: "Any chest tightness? Any difficulty walking? Any shortness of breath?"

Stupidly, in hindsight, I'd answered YES! Minutes went by. I wondered about the person before me. *How were they faring? Were they okay? What was taking so long?*

Emerging through the operating doors and surrounding me in my lonely nook, a faceless group looked down. They were garbed in green, masks obscuring facial features, only the eyes revealing emotions.

"So sorry, Janine, we can't proceed."

Flabbergasted, confounded, confused and trying to raise myself from my bed to understand the logic I squeaked, "What? Why?"

"We can't afford to take the risk."

"What risk?" I asked, uncomprehending.

"To your heart. With the answers you've provided we can't take the risk of you having a heart attack on the operating table."

"Why would you possibly think that?"

"The symptoms you mentioned indicate we need you to have your heart checked before we'll go ahead. Sorry."

Sorry! I'd waited months for a Bronchoscopy, months to find out if I had cancer or not. I wasn't about to let go without an attempt to change the decision.

"Of course I have difficulty with breath, tightness of chest and walking; my lungs aren't functioning properly!" I pleaded.

Peering down on me as I lay stretched out on the trolley, cannula still protruding from my arm, I could see the sympathy in their eyes, but resolution also. I was patted gently on the arm as the surgical team, a sea of green and blue, retreated beyond the doors. Within seconds I was wheeled down to recovery, given a cup of tea, a cold collection of sandwiches straight from the fridge and sent home.

I was in shock. What had just occurred? Nothing! Clothes back on, out the door and home within minutes.

Frustration, anger, a frantic call to my beautiful, sympathetic GP. She consoled, calmed and immediately arranged a CT angiogram.

There's nothing wrong with my heart. I knew it. The angiogram proved it. Queued in the waiting room once again, I was whisked through the doors to the Day Procedure Suites. I knew the drill: height; weight; current medications; previous medical operations; illnesses; Covid status; and finally temperature and blood pressure

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH MY HEART! (CONT.)

By Janine Mifsud

checks. All boxes ticked, I made my way to a minute cubicle to disrobe. I took a seat on a cold brown vinyl recliner with a pink cotton blanket to keep my legs warm and was finally escorted to the gurney.

Déjà Vu.

The second time, mentally prepared, I waited outside the operating theatre with the cannula in my arm ready to fight; I wasn't going anywhere until I had my Bronchoscopy.

Excitement grew as the anaesthetist introduced himself and discussed the risks before I signed a consent form.

"Possible damage to teeth, a split tongue, cut lip, collapsed lung, a bubble of air beyond the lungs which would need a surgical procedure to dissolve. Any questions?"

I refused to be frightened; I just wanted it over. Before I signed, I did have to throw in "You know there's nothing wrong with my heart".

The doors, like the gates of heaven, opened welcoming me into the land of modern medicine. Salvation was finally here. Whatever happened when and if I awoke, there would finally be a diagnosis.

Lights shone brightly, machines buzzed and whirled all around me. I even recognised a large image of my lungs featured on a monitor at the back of the room. Five in all stood at the ready: two nurses either side of my head, the anaesthetist hovering over my arm, the surgeon at the foot of my gurney watching proceedings and a technician observing my lung monitor.

I knew what was going to happen. A tube would be inserted into my lungs via my nose or throat; a biopsy would be taken and my lungs would be washed in a salty solution.

Questioned again: "What is your name? What is your date of birth? What is the procedure you are having done today?"

Surely they knew me by now! I was the person they'd rejected. The disappointed person they'd returned home, the person who didn't have anything wrong with her heart. I answered all questions, humorously adding "all present and accounted for".

It was explained that my mouth and throat needed to be anaesthetised before the drugs were injected into my cannula.

The assisting theatre nurse clamped a snorkel-like apparatus over my nose and mouth; the sponginess could be felt on my skin and the smell was something I'd previously encountered. I was told to breathe deeply. Breathe deeply?? Didn't they understand that the reason I was here because I couldn't breathe deeply?

My eyes began to shut of their own accord as the last words I heard were "Dream of something pleasant".

And I thought, *there's nothing wrong with my heart. I just need answers.*

ACCEPTANCE

By Elizabeth Quinn

When I was in my tumultuous teens and twenties, I assumed my life would be on an even keel by the time I was 'old'. But somehow I am now a senior with the mindset of a 17-year-old and a strong sense that time is running out. It's an uneasy combination.

Maintaining a youthful optimism in the face of an increasingly recalcitrant body and the inexorable ticking of the clock can be a challenge when we don't have religious faith.

My fifties were a time of change, of upheaval and ultimately of growth. I was seriously injured in a car accident and left my marriage. I not only survived; I thrived. I moved into an apartment, found a new job and went back to university. Like Muriel Sharp's Miss Jean Brodie, I considered myself a 'woman in my prime'.

Turning sixty a few years ago held no fears for me. The car accident a decade earlier had taught me how lucky I was to have reached such an advanced age. But this last year has tested my natural optimism. The loss of my mother was the catalyst for an extended period of overseas travel and – on my return to Australia – a move to another suburb. It has been an unsettling time that has left me feeling vulnerable. Losing my last surviving parent has removed the comforting buffer of an older generation and brought me face-to-face with my own mortality. And unlike the wheel of fortune that spun in my favour in my fifties there is no escaping it.

As we age, we have to work harder at keeping a sense of who we are; that we matter, despite our diminishing physical and mental capacities. This is especially the case when we believe that we came into the world alone and will leave it unaccompanied and forever. It was the natural conclusion of a child brought up without religion. The God of other people wasn't ostracised in my home; it's just that no one thought to invite her in.

Death was not something my family discussed; there was a prevailing expectation that everything would work out in the end. When my father's end was imminent, my mother told me, 'He won't want to let go. He is more attached to life than I am.' In typical Dad fashion, he took charge and neatly checked out on the morning he was destined to move to a nursing home.

My mother lived another seven years. She continued to enjoy her garden – the tending of it, the sitting in it and then finally, the sight of it through her window – as her world shrank to one light-filled sunroom. She too chose her moment of departure: on the eve of her admission to a palliative care home. In death, as in life, she caused minimal trouble.

There are some things I can do to extend my life and its quality – exercising both mind and body, tending my relationships and engaging with the world around me – but it has only just occurred to me that I may not achieve all my life goals. And I'm working my slow way towards acceptance, using my parents as my role models.

They lived without expectation of reward in an afterlife. Family, lifelong friendships, gardening, the music of long-dead composers, the Victorian west coast: these things were – and are – reward enough. They lived long and mostly happy lives doing the things they loved to do with the people they cared about, secure in the knowledge that everything would – and did – work out in the end.

MITZI SORTS OUT ST KILDA

By Brenda Richards, OAM

We had been living in a boarding house in Elwood. It was a friendly place, and included another single mother and her child. We helped each other with child care and making clothes. Then it was closing down so we had to move. We rented an old Edwardian house in Acland Street. We spent the rest of the year settling in to this new place. It was exciting. The beach was a highlight especially when Father Xmas turned up.

A month later, it was time for Mitzi to make another exciting move. She was about to start school. The nearest one was the Sacred Heart in Grey Street, which was just up the road. I was told it was run by a Father Bob-type, who took anyone. I didn't personally follow any religion and was consoled to hear that they took all comers. We'd give it a try. Mitzi had already started reading. Winnie the Pooh was her favourite. She was so excited. Starting school meant that she was now a big girl. We made the short walk together in the morning, with Mitzi clutching her lunch in her new school bag.

Life was exciting. She was growing up fast and would chatter away like a little magpie on the walk home. She had much to tell me. And she also had some questions. One question came out of left field. "Where did I come from, Mum?"

I took a deep breath. Surely it was a bit early for that question. The shock must have shown on my face.

"No not that!" she added. "Where was I 'borned'?"

I breathed a sigh of relief. "You were born in St. Kilda, dear."

"No Mum. I can't be 'borned' here. I have to be 'borned' somewhere else. Everyone is. Like Mary Lou comes from India, and Betty comes from Greece. I have to come from another place."

"Well you didn't. OK, you were actually born in the Children's Hospital, but you came home to St. Kilda." She looked disbelieving.

"But if we trace back we can find relatives from lots of different places. They're part of you and you're part of them." I listed them for her.

"You've got ancestors who came from Ireland, England, Denmark, Holland, Germany, Poland and part of Asia. You've also got Aboriginal relatives as well as Chinese ones who came out here during the gold rush."

Mitzi was happy. She was like everyone else.

In a way she was right. We are lucky to be part of the broader world picture. I think this is one of Australia's, and especially St Kilda's, strengths. Because we have contact with so many different people, we learn early on that being different is not something to worry about. Along with our differences, we have much in common.

We are part of families that in most cases are trying to raise them in a unique climate. We are indeed the lucky country. Mitzi gave me her wise look.

Mitzi loved school and joined in everything with gusto. She had no problem with reading as she had been doing this since pre-school, which gave her a head start.

But sport was a different matter. She had been an active child, but as she grew older, physical differences started to appear, that alas, removed some of the earlier advantages. My little girl remained a little girl. Her legs forgot to grow, as did her general body height.

Her new friend Sara was learning swimming. Mitzi happily joined in and soon became competent. One problem stood out when she was on the starting blocks. She was the shortest swimmer there. When the whistle blew, they all pushed off together. When she came up after landing in the water, she was nearly a body length behind the others. They all powered ahead, leaving her in their wake. However, her competitive spirit remained.

She was cheered when she finally reached the end of the race. She waved bravely in acknowledgement, but I knew that the smile covered the pain. Then Sara came to her rescue.

"You keep entering in sprint races. You'd be better in land racers, especially in long-distance ones, like marathons. Then size doesn't make such a difference. Its stamina over a distance that counts."

At last, Mitzi had found her niche. She won a number of races, and proudly brought home some medals to decorate her sports jacket. Finally, she represented her school.

Then one day at the swimming pool, Mitzi watched as some young swimmers teased a dark-skinned woman who had brought her children to the pool for swimming lessons. While the woman waited for her children, she waded into the warm hydro pool where she could still keep an eye on them. She also tried to swim. She moved her legs up and down on the spot, while her arms moved from side to side in a clumsy version of breaststroke. Some children laughed at her, and one of them said "look at fatty," within her hearing.

Mitzi went up to her and told her that she was doing very well for a beginner and then showed her how to make her arms go out wider. Every week, Mitzi would get in the

hydro pool with her new friend, who was a quick learner. They eventually did some laps together in the main pool. The woman told Mitzi that she was a doctor, and had come from India, and she'd never had the opportunity to learn to swim.

She thanked Mitzi for helping her. Mitzi thanked her for letting her learn how to teach swimming.

They met up regularly at the pool and ended up having a milkshake together at the end.

Two Australians from opposite ends of the world, with nothing previously in common, either in age or experience, formed a strong friendship.

ONE BOY'S DREAM

By Susanne Sweetland

My sons always told me not to bother to come and watch their sport, but like all Mums, I knew they enjoyed me being there. On that Friday afternoon it was very cold so I wore a thick coat and gumboots, and sat on a wooden seat as misty rain started to fall.

I was to watch the House football finals. My son is in the boarding house team against a Day Boy eighteen. Around the ground there were a few other parents, House and Sports masters.

The two teams arrived on the field amidst much shouting and encouragement. They stretched their arms, touched their toes and bent from side to side — all raring to go!

The whistle blew for the start and I searched for a blue number fifteen guernsey. How did that little boy with the dimple on one cheek, grow so quickly to six foot two? I felt so proud when I spotted him. I got very excited and found myself clapping good marks and silently instructing — ‘don’t hold the ball, get rid of it,’ and similar.

A man sat down beside me and I glanced his way briefly. Somehow it seems natural for men to barrack out loud and this man seemed to know all the Boarders names and was verbal with his encouragement, using their names. We both got very excited about a ‘blue’ goal, so I assumed he was more interested in the Boarders team.

My son Chris played well and I saw him glimpse across at me and I foolishly gave a little wave, which as I should have expected, got unacknowledged.

Half time arrived and supporters walked over to the teams, as well as the man from my seat. Of course Mums would be out of place during the pep talks, so I stayed on my seat. The game restarted and my seat companion returned and we made eye contact. He smiled, “Your son a Boarder”? I nodded “yes”. “Well, they should win today, they are hungry enough!” I knew he didn’t mean for food, and I added “keep hungry” to my silent coaching!

At three quarter time, my companion said “It means a lot to me for the Boarders to win, are you watching a son?”

“He is Christopher in number fifteen”. I wanted to add “that one, see the tall one, the quiet-natured one, the caring one, the one I am so proud of”.

The man and I smiled at each other when we found the Boarders had won. The hooter went “HOOT” and we had done it! Now I saw Chris look over my way and wave. I turned to the man- he looked so emotional, tears in his eyes and I had realized he had been quite quiet towards the end of the game. He pulled out a handkerchief to blow his nose. “I’m so pleased,” he said as he wiped his eyes. We shook hands and he walked towards the boys.

The flag bearers led the two teams in procession across the park and back to the school grounds.

I returned to my car and went to my accommodation to prepare for dinner. On House football finals night there is a traditional Dinner and parents of the winning and losing teams are guests. More parents can attend the Dinner than the match, so I caught up with some friends.

Following the main course there were speeches. The Headmaster made awards and then handed the Perpetual Cup replica to Jamie Curtis, Captain of the Boarder’s winning team.

When the clapping had subsided, this thick-set, good looking boy of just eighteen took the microphone. There was a roar of approval. When Jamie had finished his necessary thank-you’s, he paused; it was obvious from looking at his face that there was a great deal of emotion welling up.

“Winning today was wonderful. As the Captain, I am particularly thrilled, and proud. Everyone tried their best. It was a great win for the Boarders, but there is a sadness too!” He paused again, longer this time.

“When I came to this school as a Boarder, I was only eleven and pretty small. I was very shy and homesick. For quite a while I was very lonely too. Until David Fletcher became my friend. He had started on the same day. We went to our first footy practice together and he told me how one day he wanted to be Captain of the winning house team. He told me his Dad had been, and he wanted to be like his Dad!

We became friendly rivals, but ‘Davo’ was a natural. We all knew that. Each year he was the best player of his age, a great leader and Captain. Everyone simply expected he would achieve his goal!

But late last year Davo and his mother were killed in a Land Rover accident on their farm near Ballarat. We were all devastated. It wasn’t until, some months later, I went to stay with his family, and slept in his old room, and gave his Dad a hand just like I had when I’d been there on so many holidays, that I accepted he was gone. I lost, we all lost, a very special friend, a great guy!

So I want to say, ‘Davo’, if you can hear me” — another pause, tears now rolling down his cheeks, “I’m here because you’re not. We had this win for you today mate, you inspired us, you made us hungry, and Davo, we miss you mate.”

Everyone was quiet. Jamie held up the Cup replica, and said, “Thank you for supporting us today Mr Fletcher, and I want you to put this with Davo’s other awards.

Then, the man I had shared a seat with stood and clapping began. He embraced Jamie and shook his hand and he turned to the Headmaster, “I am very proud to know this young man and his friends”. He slowly walked back to his seat.

I went over to him and we hugged. He said, “I’m sure I wasn’t much company during the game today, but I wanted his old team to win, just for his sake”.

SCHOOL'S IN

By Patricia Thornton

The box had been sitting on the shelf for years. She thought it was empty, waiting to be some day filled with chocolates. Lifting the lid she had a surprise. An old photo of herself, short black tunic and white shirt. Was I ever that young? she thought. She looked about the same age as the 50 children in bathers holding their swimming certificates. On the back was written *St Kilda Sea Baths 1955*. Rummaging through the box there was a Department of Education letter. "Report to the St Kilda Sea Baths At 9.00 on February 10th". What a great experience that was! she reminisced. The wise words of an old teacher came back to her. "Remember you know more than they do." Control or class management she learnt. Happy days! Oh she was cold in that short tunic. Showing her legs on the tram caused strange looks in the 50s.

April came, what was to be her next adventure? And an adventure it was! She was directed to report at a consolidated school in the Otways on Monday. Accommodation was arranged with the local butcher. He would be at the station to meet the train. Young teachers were bonded to an agreement which meant they could be sent to fill in vacancies for 2 years after graduation.

On Sunday afternoon she took the train. The platform was bare. It was dark and cold when at last she saw a man approaching. "Are you the new teach? Jump in the ute, chuck that stuff on the floor". The drive was terrifying as he only had one headlight and appeared to be drunk. She was relieved to reach the house and the welcoming woman who had prepared a wonderful meal. Her bubble soon burst when she was ushered into the room she was to share with a 3 year old.

At school the next day the very grumpy headmaster delivered her to the classroom. "The fire will be lit every morning by Bob. He will leave 3 pieces of wood which will last the day." Then he left, slamming the door. This was a consolidated school built around the original little classroom, which was a National Trust heritage building. Hers was that classroom.

The little grade 2 class was waiting in line for her. She had found an old Work Program and had a very rough idea of a plan for the day. First they had morning talk as they got to know one another. What a lovely little group they were, farm kids mostly. One rode his horse to school piggy-backing with his older sister, others walked long distances. Mums didn't have 4 wheel drives then to do school runs.

She loved teaching her class. After about a month everything changed. Winter was biting, everyone had chilblains and candle sticks from their cold little noses. As she marked the roll she asked "Anyone seen Tommy today?" "He probably had to catch his cow. She's a real bugger that one." A few minutes later a very wet bedraggled Tommy arrived. He was barefoot with his shoes tied together and slung around his neck. A hessian bag worn like a poncho, was his only protection from the weather. He was drenched. There were some clean dry clothes in the room behind the blackboard so she sent him there to change. The children often brought wood from home so that day they had a roaring fire going. She draped the wet clothes over the fire guard and the class had a lovely working morning. It was a cosy classroom with that quiet buzz of learning she loved so much. At morning recess there was a break in the weather so the children went out to play.

She was sitting in the staffroom when she heard the cry. FIRE! A roar of the siren, then the Principal on the speaker telling the teachers to take their classes to their stations immediately, with their rolls. She was called to the Principal's office. "Do you know what you have done?" he yelled at her.

"What happened?" She was told very tersely that a hessian bag had fallen into the fire and the front of the building was burnt out. The listed building around which the school had been built was beyond repair. She should have checked the fire before she left. A child must have knocked the fire guard as he left the room.

"How could this happen? The fire is only meant to heat the room. That is why you are given only 3 pieces of wood. Explain to me what happened. Why was the hessian bag near the fire?" He was shaking with rage, his fist inches from her face.

She told him how Tommy had come late for school because the family cow was missing. He was shivering with cold and was wet through. She asked him to change into some spare clothes, putting his wet ones on the fire guard to dry. This explanation caused a fit of apoplexy. His ruddy face turned purple.

"What did you do? Taking off a child's clothes? What sort of a person are you?" The door opened. His secretary, wife entered the room. "Come on Jim, it was an accident".

What was her fate?

The secretary returned with the news that she was to catch the train to Melbourne that night. The Education Department requested her presence at Garfield P.S. the following day. The butcher's wife drove her to the station and the 3 year old came too. She was unhappy to lose her roommate.

The fire was never mentioned again and there were no consequences for the young teacher. She'd only known her class for 5 weeks but she'd learnt a lot from them.

How hard their lives were in this farming community. They were strong and resilient and also kind and caring.

Garfield, Wonthaggi and then Mildura... exhausted.

Year's end.

She had begun her journey to become a teacher.

PATHOS AT THE FOOTY OVAL

By Georgina Tsolidis

'You lot are bloody pathetic – bloody pathetic!' These words stayed with me as I rushed home. 'Mum, what does 'pathetic' mean?' Her answer, like the father from the film, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, began by linking 'pathetic' to the Greek word 'pathos'. This didn't get me closer to understanding why the huddle of football players was being described in this way by their coach.

We had migrated to Melbourne in the mid-1960s. I was attending Oakleigh Primary School, and was one of the first of what was to become a large number of Greeks. Later that year I had to sit next to Helen who spoke no English. The teacher expected me to translate the lessons for her. My mother wrote one of her many stormy letters to the school, suggesting that my education should not be compromised because the school lacked teachers fit for purpose. I no longer had to sit next to Helen but spent the rest of the year shifting uncomfortably under her steadfast stare.

We rented a house from the son of a recently deceased woman. He was capitalising on the influx of migrants needing somewhere to rent. The house had not changed over the decades. A small water-heater above the bathtub, cajoled by a lit match, would groan into action and heat the water as it was used. Damp ran down the walls and mingled with the silvery snail trails that criss-crossed the threadbare carpet. It was decorated with bunches of amber roses and, like the rest of the house, had experienced much foot traffic and neglect. The lino and Laminex in the kitchen were cracked and worn. The cupboards had once been a glossy yellow. A briquette fireplace was the only source of heating until my parents bought a portable kerosene heater. Its glowing red cylinder lay in ambush for unsuspecting flurries of synthetic fabrics, which were popular for

children's nightwear at the time. An outside toilet and the laundry, with its copper boiler and hand operated mangle, were connected to the house by a squeaky wooden veranda. None of this was familiar to us.

Our street ran parallel to Dandenong Road, near the corner of Warrigal Road. This was a busy intersection but still approachable. To get to school I had to cross the lanes which skirted the monument to the unknown soldier with his bent head and digger's hat. After a while, the neighbours asked my mother if I could take their daughter to school with me. She was deemed too young to negotiate the crossing on her own. Her parents were like none I had met before. The father was a jazz musician, and the mother was exotically beautiful. He always seemed surly, and she unhappy. They had lifted some floorboards and lined the hole with plastic. Consequently, goldfish swam in their lounge room. I remained in awe.

In the sixties, Oakleigh was somewhat bohemian. One element of the expansive Boyd family lived in the street behind us. I remember meeting some of them when I was invited back to their house by my blonde school friend. There were writhing, clay sculptures around the lounge room but other than this, it all seemed familiar rather than famous.

At school I played kick to kick in the playground with a boy who was to become a very famous footballer. Many years later, someone suggested that I should think twice before showing off about my experience, because he was never known for his kicking accuracy. Now I watch the young women umpiring AFL games and playing in the AFLW and contemplate the choices which my generation was denied.

I spent Saturday afternoons riding around the new neighbourhood on my bicycle. This is how I had discovered the football. The footy oval was between my school and the library and next to the old cemetery. Before it became a carpark, you could meander through the cemetery, which smelt of the freesias that grew between the headstones.

You entered the oval through a turnstile gate embedded in a high brick wall. On the other side of this wall was an expanse of iridescent green grass, a low fence and the grandstand. The purple and gold shield identified the Oakleigh Football Club. In my duffle coat and suede desert boots I would ride my bike to the ground each wintry Saturday afternoon to watch a game I didn't understand but grew to love.

At the sound of the siren, you could climb the low fence to stand behind the huddle of footballers attentive to their coach's half time talk. On this occasion his talk was a derisive description of everything that was going wrong. The pounding purple veins that rose to his jaw line, his withering expression and sheer contempt for his 'pathetic' charges was evident. I can't remember if his mood affected the match outcome.

The same supporters appeared in the crowd each week. Serious footy people. I would stand behind a line of 'football grannies', it seemed safer than near the clusters of men with their Eskies full of beer, shouting loudly. These three or four older women wore tartan pleated skirts. They sat on foldable picnic chairs. They sipped tea poured from metal thermos flasks. They ate cut sandwiches and offered each other freshly baked biscuits and cakes from waxed paper parcels. They covered their knees with fluffy woollen travel rugs, and they knitted, almost in unison. The knitting needles moved without so much of a glance in their direction. The balls of

wool unravelled as each of the suspended garments grew longer. These 'football grannies' spoke passionately about the play, about the umpires and about their own team. They sometimes spoke in terms that, today, would no longer be acceptable.

'Mum, why did the granny ask if the footballer sat down to piss?' There was never going to be a Greek derivation for this supporter's lament and pathos.

Poetry

THE SONG OF THE SEATURTLE

By James Cattell

After a day of smoke and dust claimed Earth Turtle.
Sea Turtle called to Sky Turtle,
Whose mirror shell flickered over sea swell.

'My love, My love,
There is just time
For one last song.

A song to stir ululating kelp forests.
A last song to echo in encrusted marine caverns.
Just one last song amongst the stromatolite beds.

A song at journey's end
To guide forsaken sailors,
To mourn subsiding islands.

A last song
To console the restless drowned.

A last song before you,
My beloved,
You, with your gentle light,
Flee before the fury
Of this last day's radiant fire.'

Alone,
As dawn seethed,
Sea Turtle looked towards
The incandescent horizon.
The rolling waves,
The roiling kelp,
And
Uttered one expiring note
Of one final song.

'Oh', sighed Sea Turtle.
'Oh,
How beautiful it all is.
How beautiful.'



RETIRED TO DO NOTHING

By Mal Dougherty

Retiring to do nothing
 Straight away after retiring I started doing nothing
 Ah, nothing my favourite word
 Nothing
 Then along comes something
 Something, I'm already doing something, nothing
 First there's waking
 Then eating
 Then walking
 Then coffeing
 Then chatting
 Then, oh damn again there's something
 Reading
 Cleaning
 Washing
 Drying
 Oh now I'm off swimming
 Driving
 Shopping
 Unpacking
 Cooking
 Phoning, again damn chatting
 What, who needs something
 Helping
 Volunteering, which can be defined sometimes as working without someone paying
 Ah finally heading home to just do nothing
 Beseech me again, there's something
 Cooking
 Eating
 Dishwasher stacking
 Damn it, first it needs emptying
 Now to do nothing
 Noooooo, along comes something
 Reading
 What now, holiday planning
 Enough, enough
 Maybe a little bit more reading
 The phone is ringing more chatting
 Finally sleeping

And they asked what I wanted to do when I retired.

NOTHING



A POLLY'S FOLLY

By Dermot Avon

Flags and banners swaying in the breeze
Voices singing to the march
Generals and Colonels and polliès
Watch killing with ease
Troops dropping like autumn leaves
There is nothing noble or glorious about battle
And troops dying in battle

Enemies approaching with victory on their minds
Their stars and stripes shining in the sun
They know we'll be the last to run
With eyes glowing, guns cocked
Now each sees whose muscles are locked
Officer calls "Fire
Aim at enemy's head"
More troops are dead
There is nothing noble or glorious about battle
And troops dying in battle

Dead soldiers lie there at an officer's scene of glory
Legless, armless. The injured crawl there
Is this noble? Or is this gory?
The officer rides past ever so high
Watching as young troops die
There is nothing noble or glorious about battle
And troops dying in battle

Guns are loaded.
Officer calls "Cease Fire"
Giving rise to a plume of smoke
The officer can't see how many are dead
He begins to choke
He has no glory
The flags and banners fly no longer
Filled with holes and gathering dust
The politicians at last have lost their lust
There is nothing noble or glorious about battle
And troops dying in battle

BEGINNINGS

By David Emblin

Knowing where you come from
Is to know who you are,
Indigenous Tribal member
Or Settler from afar;
Castle, cave or log hut
Peasant, Trader, Czar
We all have our beginnings
In a place we know as home.

Travel is at the heart of change
New places, people, learning,
For everyone old and young
But for the past they may be yearning;
Move forward and work as one
When in our hearts memories are alive,
With confidence, respect and understanding
A new future will unfold before us.

Every emerging generation knows
That starting anew can be hard,
When memories of old, are told
But beginnings are exciting
As you progress year by year
into a future filled with
Hope, Sharing, Trust and
True Friendship.

JO'S REVENGE

By Vicky Endrody

This is a tale that's not so uncommon
Yet still, it's depressingly sad
It's about choosing a partner who seems perfect for you
Then discovering they're inherently bad

Jo was a smart, kind and pretty young girl
Who thought she'd at last met her match
Lachlan was charming, so handsome and funny
On the surface he seemed quite the catch

They searched for a flat and moved in together
At first all appeared to be fine
He romanced her with flowers and restaurant dinners
And he'd order expensive red wine

Leopards, however, can't change their spots
And soon Lachlan's true nature was seen
He was selfish, conceited and sleazy
And his habits were certainly not clean

He started to ring her quite often to say,
'No dinner, I'll be working back late'
Another excuse, which he frequently gave
'I'm at the pub having drinks with a mate'

When out in a group he'd drink too much beer
Then start leering at females and flirting
It caused Jo great shame when he acted this way
He never noticed how much she was hurting

With every deceit came more doubt and concern
He was slowly eroding her trust
At night, in her bed, Jo cried bitter tears
She felt her heart starting to rust

When caught out in a lie, he'd pathetically cry
'I'm sorry, forgive me, I'm weak'
Jo gave in, forgave him, she thought she could change him
But some things you just cannot tweak

He said brazenly one day, 'There's a boys' weekend away'
But she easily saw through this ruse
It was time to take action, no more excuses
And no more emotional abuse

While Lachlan was away, Jo cleaned out the flat
Taking furniture, TV and such
Just a single bed and *Heinz Soup for One* left –
Indeed, 'twas a delicate touch

In a well thought out gesture, before leaving forever
Jo wrote out this note and it said

'Once a cheater, always a cheater
You couldn't lie straight in your bed
My love for you Lachlan has long gone
Your behaviour has earned my disgust

P.S. I'm leaving you, you loser, so you can just –
EAT MY DUST!'

A VIEW FROM MY BEACH CHAIR

By Michele Green

38 in the shade
hot sand
singes exposed toes
striding through
the tea-treed path
to the ocean:
promise of respite

Feathery clouds
span azure blue sky
picturesque
against the backdrop
of Eagle's Nest and
green pastures
stripped of long
grasses for hay

Wet sand glistens
from receding waves
of incoming tide
Gulls stare
at lazing sun-seekers
pleading
for a morsel
of their snack

Togs stretch taut
over bodies
altered by
drawn out lockdowns
and comfort food

Squeals of delight
and shock
emerge from
warm torsos
plunging into
ice-cold surf
- everyone wanting to
escape the heat

Skimmer-boards
glean foamy shallows;
boogie boards
dump their bearers
on the shore

Leashed dogs pant
desperate to be in water
no dog park today
Toddlers in rashies and sun-hats
clutch wee handfuls of wet sand

Large flabby bottoms
and oversized bellies
wobble out
for their annual dip

Bikini-clad girls
parade their slim figures
eyes watch
them prance
through swells
and dive like dolphins

Teenage boys
self-conscious
straddle white caps
then go incognito
into deeper waters

Pot-bellied men
top-heavy
with stick-insect legs
struggle to keep balance

Oldies, past their prime
less confident in
currents
and undertow
content to get wet
relish the enjoyment

UV protectors,
cabanas and beach tents
are pitched
at safe distances

Salty air and stench of
rotting seaweed
assault the nostrils;
crashing waves
and laughter
fill the air -
a perfect beach-weather day
draws crowds
to the Ozone Street beach.

REMINISCING

By Lee Hirsh

We strolled hand in hand along the sand
My father and I, me, merely five
His hand enveloping my chubby little hand
His other hand holding a tennis ball.

With his attempt to teach me how to catch and throw
However, this was not always so!
We were unaware of my vision impairment
I would often stumble and fall,
Trip over the flotsam and jetsam and discarded waste that did not make it into the bins.
Often these finds found themselves in my pockets, or in my non-dominant hand
They were going to become my first works of mixed-media art.

With his compassion and my naivety, unable to articulate that I could neither catch, see or throw.
We always made time to share our passion for ice cream, regardless of rain, hail or shine.
He was a child immigrant, English not his first language,
He would converse with me in rhyme most of the time.
He was my hero, he was my dad.

I rarely felt sad when we spent time, just us two.
As we walked together, almost every week-end, our bond became so strong.
Even after all these many years, I can still feel his hand holding mine.
His touch has always meant so much.

LIBELLE DRAGONFLY

By Jnge Kulmanis

The name says it all!
I asked my Dad, why
didn't you call me
Libelle?
It's such a beautiful name.
He answered, we call you Jnge.

But why?

Because your Mum and me!
We were reading
a book together.
The author was called
Jnge Kerr. A Swedish author,
therefore your name is
Jnge

My parents loved each other very dearly.
Libelle in my language
Dragonfly in English
My story about the dragonfly
Watching the dragonfly
dancing about in the air,
along Elster Creek

It's a magnificent
part of the world
I relax and sit on my walker
88 years of living
has taken its toll,
physically not mentally.

Relaxing and spending afternoons
watching and observing the birds,
insects such as the Dragonfly
and of course the trees and the flowers.

Relaxing in the shade.
A glorious day. Life is precious.

THE HUB OF THE CITY

By Marygrace Levakis

I went into the country to find out if it is beautiful and peaceful as they say it is.
And I discovered indeed it is.
It truly is beautiful and peaceful as they say it is.
But I missed the buzz of the city and the joys therein.
The numerous exciting individuals there are to meet.
The numerous and varied ethnic personalities.
So, I thought to myself, how I wish I was in the hub of the city.

I cycled about the countryside, past hills and creeks, numerous grasses and trees.
Farmhouses, windmills, water tanks, cows, dogs and sheep.
But no one soul did I see, so I thought to myself,
How I wish I was in the hub of the city.

A country bloke asked me
To go for a bush walk and I agreed.
But instead of walking along a dirt, bush track, we clawed along a cliff wall.
And as I clung on a crevice with one foot and one hand while the other hand madly waved ahead
I thought to myself, how I wish I was in the hub of the city.

Henry Lawson and the Banjo found the country inspiring, exciting and inviting.
So, I thought to myself.
Perhaps I haven't given it a fair go.
So, I decided to join an organised bush walking group.
It was wet, muddy and slippery.
And the tour was rushed.
I didn't even have time
To glance from side to side.
Like I do on a touring bus.

Just looked straight ahead.
Sliding down the muddy, dirt track, in order to keep up.
And several times I landed on my thumbs.
The branches of small bushes and trees brushed past, scratching my legs and arms.
And masses of mozzies, flies and leeches latched onto practically every inch of my exposed skin.
So, I wearily thought to myself,
How I wish I was in the hub of the city.

INSPIRATION

By Anna Rogalina

Nature's art and life display

I am observing every day!

Many forms of active life and art

Very pleasant for my eyes and heart!

Early birds are leaving trees

To greet, by singing, morning breeze!

The clouds float above the bay

And wind is speeding their way!

Young rain gone for short fast run

Is getting ready to have fun!

Soon after, rainbow appears to see

The sun, that's diving to the cooling sea!

When stars and moon on dark sky shine

They make the view of night divine!

Nature's display so real and bright

Inspired me some poetry to write!

Author Biographies

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Grant Aldous

Grant is a former journalist and lives in Port Melbourne.



Lyn Allen

Lyn has lived in the COPP since the early 1980s starting in St Kilda and now in Port Melbourne. She is semi-retired and enjoying free time and embracing the area where she lives, from lawn bowls to walking the beach and local areas.



Dermot Avon

Dermot has worked around Port Phillip for many years. He is an active volunteer with the Port Phillip Men's Shed. He has had a keen interest in poetry since high school.



Jacqueline Burgess

Jacki has lived in Port Phillip for many years, first in St. Kilda and then in Port Melbourne. She has written hundreds of ads and press releases, including some which won awards. She is very happy with her weekly volunteering days and enjoys reading, always non-fiction.



James Cattell

MAJOR POETRY AWARD

After studying law, philosophy and art in New Zealand, James moved to Australia in 1979. He has earned a vicarious living through sculpting and painting, and his works can be found in unpredictable places. Now in semi-retirement, he is re-exploring his early love of language.



Nicholas (Nic) Cecic

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



Neheda Barakat

Neheda 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 and is a Creative Writing Diploma drop-out! She has a love affair with writing but doesn't necessarily find it easy.



Peter Barry

FICTION AWARD

Peter is a retired general medical practitioner. He spends his time between his local Melbourne apartment and his home in Marysville. He is interested in literature and politics. He attends German classes and the writer's group at U3A. He is treasurer of the Probus Club of Port Melbourne.



Christopher Burgess

For over fifty years, Chris has worked in advertising. First as an art director and later, as a copywriter. He has won numerous awards for both his art direction and copywriting skills. Chris has also had a few of his stories published. When not writing, Chris loves to read.



Kathy Childs

Kathy delights in writing short stories – some light and fanciful, others dark and disturbing. Kathy has won a number of short story competitions, and has been published both online and in print. Her first novel 'Puzzle Me Dead' is a psychological thriller set in Port Melbourne.



Rumi Commons

Rumi is the founding member of AtPort Writers Group at Port Melbourne. She is the author of a speculative non-fiction Kicho & Nobunaga and its revised and expanded 2nd edition. Both were published under her pen name Rumi KOMONZ (pronounced in the same way).



Ieta D'Costa

Ieta has recently retired and is pleased to have joined U3A and discovered the joys of writing, Spanish and even some exercise, as well as meeting new people and chatting.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Alexandra de Fircks

Alex is a writer and family historian. She blogs about family history on www.alexdefircks.com and has been published in Ancestry, the magazine of the Genealogical Society of Victoria, as well as in short story anthologies. Alex is currently studying a Master of Research in Literature and Creative Writing.



Helen Devereux

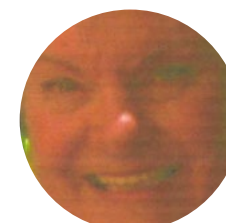
MAJOR FICTION AWARD

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 has always wanted to get something published, and this is her very first attempt. Sandy lives with her son and cat.



Marilynn Fahey

Marilynn is a long-term resident of CoPP and is very happy here. She enjoys delving amongst her memories of 82, most of which have been lived in CoPP. There have been many, many changes observed in this area, and most are real improvements that give a promise of an exciting future.



Janet R. Gardner RN, Dip.Nsg., B.App.Sci. (Ed), M.H.Sci., Kellogg Fellow, PhD.

Janet is a 74year old, retired nurse who arrived in Australia in 1968. Her very successful nursing career was tragically cut short due to a workplace injury. In 2003 she was awarded a PhD from Monash for her thesis on chronic pain, something that Janet continues to live with.



Veselka Gencic

Veselka spent most of her life in Serbia. After graduation, she worked on popularising astronautics and space research and in her work, she met many astronauts, cosmonauts, and research scientists. She keeps her rich experience in written form. After retirement, she came to Melbourne and now lives in Garden City. She likes painting, traveling, nature and long walks by the sea.



Mal Dougherty

POETRY AWARD

The author is a grumpy old man. Secretly he loves life and being part of the community. His community is made up of family, friends and others he meets along his journey. There are no strangers, just friends he hasn't met yet.



David Emblin

David is a retired Primary School teacher. Born in London, he has lived in Melbourne's Western suburbs and currently lives in South Melbourne. He has always enjoyed putting words to poetry and songs for birthdays, weddings and special occasions for family and friends.



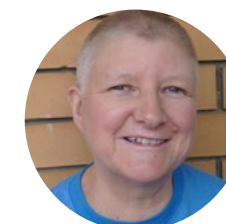
Vicki Endrody

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



Michele Green

Michele grew up in central Gippsland and has resided in Port Phillip for over twenty-five years. An avid writer, particularly since retiring six years ago, she is a member of U3APP's 'A community of writers'. She enjoys writing short stories and has recently tried her luck at poetry,



Deb Hall

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



Sylvia Hall

MAJOR NON-FICTION AWARD

Sylvia is a septuagenarian, wife, mother, grandmother and more. She was born and raised in the City of Port Phillip and is proud of her red and white heritage. Her favourite places are the beach and South Melbourne Market. She enjoys travelling but feels happiest at home.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Lee Ruth Hirsh

Lee is a self-taught, legally blind prose writer and contemporary mixed media artist. With her creative writing she often likes to use rhyme – to create a beat to her sheet. Lee has had various works published.



Raymond James

Ray has lived in the City of Port Phillip for more than four decades and is a retired Engineer. Current interest includes U3A activities, travelling, writing, photography and keeping fit.



Megan Jones

Her family has lived in Port Phillip since the late 1880s. Megan enjoys writing stories against the background of its colourful history.



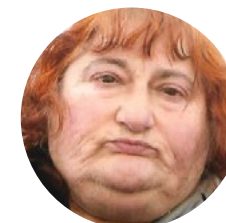
Jnge Kulmanis

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, 'If the shoe fits', and written two children's picture books, and three short stories.



Marygrace Levakis

Call it poetry, call it writing, call it performance. Marygrace loves doing it all. Mary is now 75 and has been writing, performing and entertaining since the age of 21.



Dr Phil Kafcaloudes

Phil is a writer and broadcast journalist who presented the breakfast program on the ABC's Radio Australia for nine years. In 2011 his novel Someone Else's War, was translated into Greek for Europe. In 2022 the ABC published Australia Calling, his history of Radio Australia.



Aziza Khamlichi

After her retirement from the UK, Aziza made her home in Melbourne to join her daughter and grandson. She had various professions: a nurse at 20, a social worker at 30, an interpreter/ translator at 40 and finished as a public servant at the age of 60. She enjoys her love of languages and writing, also volunteering for Port Phillip U3A as a photographer.



Marina Kirby

Marina, having a thirst for knowledge, writes non-fiction documenting her travels and exploring family history. Her father was one of nineteen siblings – leading to a wealth of interesting and varied stories. Marina has penchant for writing letters and loves to send greeting cards – sending over 160 every Christmas!



Warwick Lloyd

Currently President of Rotary Port Phillip, Warwick is an active member of the local community. He is also a passionate writer and has written this piece on his observations of the boulevard in the heartland of St Kilda, Fitzroy Street.



Barbara Anne Magee

NON-FICTION AWARD

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



Felicity May

Felicity was born in Victoria. The family moved to England, returning to Australia in 1975. Felicity has lived in Elwood for the past 39 years. She is a retired Social Worker and a member and volunteer at U3A Port Phillip. Felicity continues to appreciate the allure of creative writing.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Richard McClelland

Richard is a retired health care worker and ex-serviceman and lives in peace besides Albert Park Lake where he learned to sail more than sixty years ago. He writes fiction and non-fiction in both the short and long form, and poetry.



Janine Mifsud

Janine 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!



Maria Victoria (Vicky) Pretorius

She was born in Spain and now living in Australia for over fifty years. Her working life had been in the Insurance Industry, between rising five children and obtaining a BA in History and Masters Degree in law. She now enjoys writing and her grandchildren.



Anna Rogalina

Anna has lived in the City of Port Phillip since 1992, when she left Ukraine for Australia. Anna is an experienced education teacher, and she is very creative and a multi-talented person too. Anna enjoys writing poetry and short stories in which Anna expresses her feelings and emotions as well as art, craft and photography.



Susanne Sweetland

Susanne retired four years ago having enjoyed twenty five years in Arts Philanthropy. She grew up near Bairnsdale, spent two years as a Governess near Longreach and three years on her husband's 'posting' to New Delhi. She has an adventuresome spirit, keen to learn how things work 'behind the scenes'.



Peter Thorne

Peter migrated to Australia from England at age eight. He spent his boyhood in country Victoria before moving to Melbourne. His working life was spent as an academic at the University of Melbourne. Peter has lived in Albert Park for over 30 years.



Elizabeth Quinn

Elizabeth was a caterer for 25 years before becoming a freelance writer in her late forties, graduating from RMIT's Professional Writing and Editing course in 2019. She is working on a cooking memoir titled 'How to enjoy your own dinner party.' Elizabeth moved to Port Phillip in September 2022.



Brenda Richards OAM

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



Irene Ritchie

Irene was a history, politics and Indonesian language teacher. She has co-authored six books of Indonesian folk stories. In 2015, Irene received a Seniors' writing award from the City of Port Phillip for an article called 'A Kooghoupf Adventure.' She is married with two children and two grandchildren.



Patricia Thornton

Patricia spent her working life as a teacher, firstly in the country, then in secondary education. Later she requalified as a Teacher of the Deaf and worked teaching speech and language. After she retired, she learnt navigation and spent 22 years with her husband boating Australia. She has lived in Port Phillip for the past 10 years enjoying a diverse urban lifestyle.



Adam Thrussell

Adam loves Women who are intelligent and have personality like my friend Alda. His passions are exercise, public speaking, cooking, reading and history. In 2019, Adam received an encouragement from Valid Victoria, title of the piece Sunrise over Alma Road, St Kilda, State of Victoria.



Georgina Tsolidis

Georgina came to Melbourne age 10, from Zimbabwe, with her family of Greek origin. She became a secondary school teacher, consultant and senior policy advisor with the state government. She worked in universities, including as a Professor of Education. She has published widely on multiculturalism. She is a keen AFL supporter.



Roderick Waller

Yorkshire born and bred, long time resident of Port Phillip. Retired agricultural economist. Writer of short stories and poetry. Two sons; an artist and farmer, daughter travel guide in London. Favourite proverb: ships in a harbour are useless.

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.

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* class at Port Phillip U3A.

She is a published novelist and poet and an experienced editor. Although this is her first year of involvement in Port Phillip U3A (having moved back to Port Melbourne just one year ago) Nancy taught Creative Writing classes for many years in other parts of Australia.

