

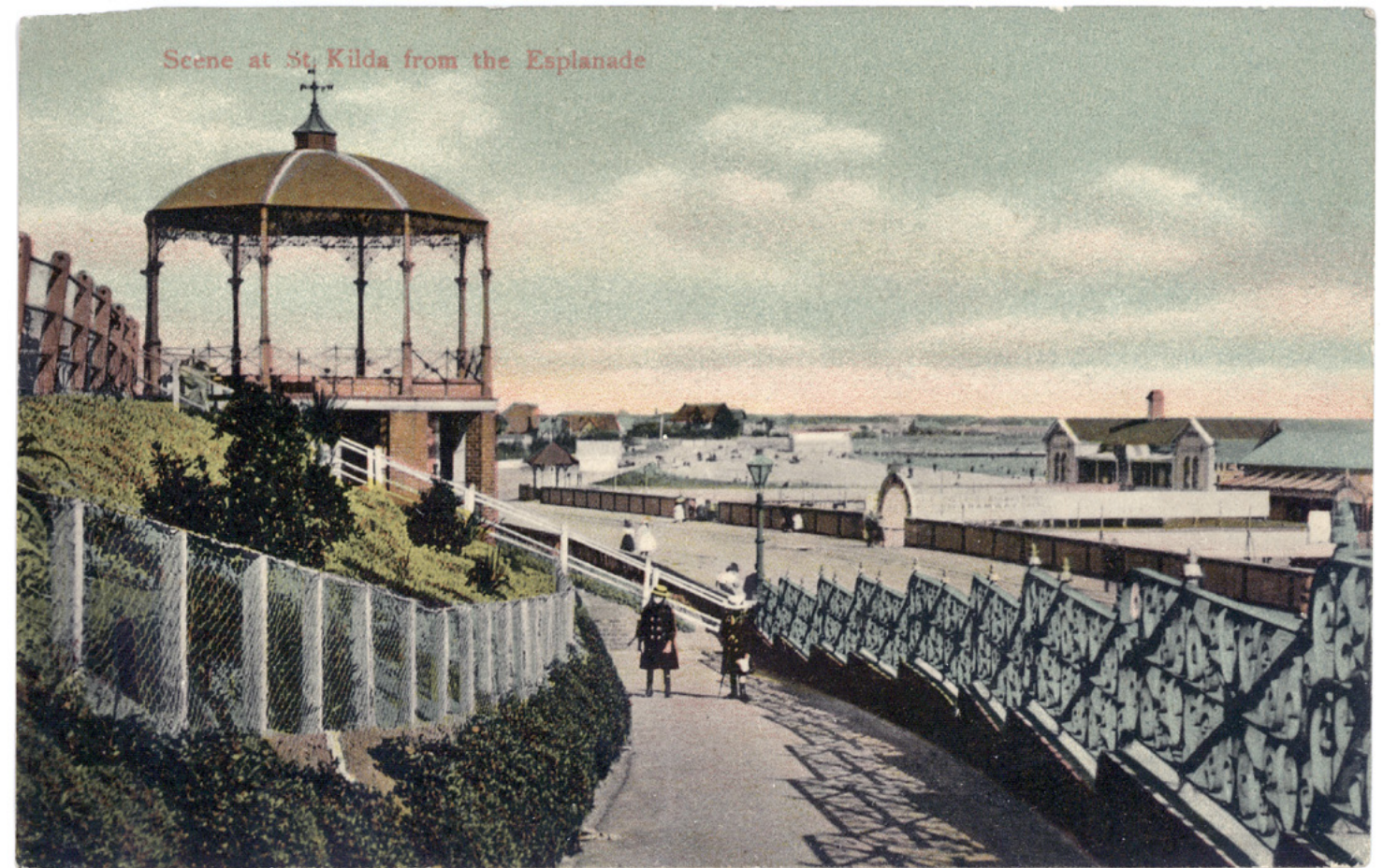
PORT PHILLIP WRITES 2025



Stories and Poems

Gathered from the City of Port Phillip
Seniors' Writing Awards 2025





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FOREWORD

by Louise Crawford

Mayor City of Port Phillip

Welcome to Port Phillip Writes 2025!

It's with great excitement and joy that we welcome you to this year's edition of *Port Phillip Writes*—a celebration of creativity, storytelling, and the vibrant voices of our over-55 community. This annual showcase brings together poetry, fiction, and non-fiction prose from some of Port Phillip's most talented and thoughtful writers.

We're thrilled to honour the 44 writers who have generously shared their stories, perspectives, and lived experiences. Your words inspire, entertain, and connect us—and we thank you for being part of this beautiful tradition.

This anthology is a testament to the richness and diversity of our community. Each piece is a window into a life, a moment, a memory—and together, they form a heartfelt tribute to the creativity and wisdom of our writers.

Judging the awards is no small feat! Each entry is read anonymously, making the final reveal of the winning writers all the more exciting. This year's judging panel brought passion and expertise to the task:

- **Carmel Shute**, co-founder and co-convenor of *Sisters in Crime Australia*
- **Lois Best**, past contributor, avid reader, writer, and judge
- **Dr Jane Sims**, researcher and educator, past editor of *Australasian Journal on Ageing*.

We are grateful for their thoughtful insights, and editorial support in bringing this publication to life.

Port Phillip Writes is proudly funded by the City of Port Phillip. Council's continued support reflects the value placed on celebrating the creativity and lived experience of our older residents—and we couldn't agree more.

So, settle in, turn the page, and enjoy the journey through stories and poems that will make you laugh, reflect, and maybe even shed a tear. Happy reading!

Proudly Port Phillip

Cr Louise Crawford
Mayor, City of Port Phillip

Poetry

THE FAB FOUR

By Helen Devereux

You hear them spoken, although not as much any more,
Those who understand their meanings, are older for sure,
Can you get me the thingamabob from under the sink,
You know the thing you use to get rid of the stink.

Words without equal, true Aussie slang,
Invoking that glorious drawn out Aussie twang,
They are useful and helpful to the ageing mind,
When the word you seek, you just can't find.

Thingamabob, thingamajig, thingummy and thingo,
Like John, Paul, George and Ringo,
The Fab Four that help in all situations,
They even work in quotes and citations.

I *thingo* therefore I am ... Descartes would be proud,
Houston, we have a *thingummy* ... Apollo 13 out loud,
May the *thingamajig* be with you ... in Star Wars they say,
The only limit to our realisation of tomorrow will be our *thingamabobs* of today.

A thingamajig can be food, clothes or anything uncertain,
A thingamabob can be a button, a spade or even a person,
Thingos are things, said in the plural,
When more than one thing is lost in the neural.

To describe a thingo, takes time and thought
Such a skill, is not easily taught,
You can't just say thingo, without words to enhance,
the Red thingo, Big thingo, not left to chance.

More words to describe the thingo, are always needed,
Than the thingo itself, if known, would be conceded,
You know the rock thing you use, to scrap skin off your toes,
The humble pumice, is now a thing of poetic prose.

They are heard in shops, and cafes all around,
Or from an Aussie, on some foreign ground,
Looking at sushi, he says to his wife without fear,
I'll have three of those thingos, the message is clear.

These words, we never write, in an email or letter,
Nor in a text message, where fewer words are much better,
Spoken in the moment our gray matter starts to quiver,
When mouth and mind misfire, and our brains fail to deliver.

Oh Fabulous Four don't die out in this generation,
Live on, play your roles with much veneration,
You help us in times when words fail to appear,
When those little gray thingamajigs just disappear.



WIND CIRCLES

By Marian Webb

The wind quickens the trees
twisting the gleam in little circles.

The trees
shuffle their heads full of green
friction of leaves.

The wind shifts
all around the world
in miraculous rings.

Here it shivers on Melbourne
chilled in the melting Antarctic.

The grass mutters, the guttering groans,
bird whistles displaced
from wall to gate.

The wind is discontented.
It cannot stand in any one place
for any length of time.

It stirs the pedestrians' minds to flight,
it whips up sagas with twisted plots
and impossible endings
then begins again.



LIFE IS LIKE A BOOK

By Mal Dougherty

Part i

Life is like a book, don't judge it by its cover
The cover is but the start of the story

Part ii

Birthmarks, burns, scalds, scars, a loss
These are physical outward signs of the life you live
Most will be accepted or assisted as the need requires
Others may also have scars not seen,
The mind and heart are but a start
Share the story of the scar
Don't hide that scar, you'll be better by far.

FAR, FAR AWAY

By Vicki Endrody

It was a world far away from the lives they once lived
And every day wrought a new type of hell
Weak from starvation, from disease and exhaustion
All knew, if pace slowed down, they'd be beaten as well

Shamed and dishonoured by their capture
They must humbly now bow down to the emperor's will
To work at speed, at any cost, to meet his deadline
Not one was spared and no one cared that they were ill

These prisoners of war, many young, Aussie blokes
Built the Burma-Thai rail to serve the Japs
Slaving through the heat, they toiled to clear the dense jungle
Hauling sleepers and heavy iron to lay down tracks

Came monsoon rains, with more misery and pain
There was mud, miry mishaps and manifold mould
Wracked by dysentery, malaria and ulcerous, vile sores
Health was ruined and precious few survived to grow old

With gaunt, skeletal bodies they paused to bury their dead mates
Each man left wondering if they would be the next
A battered, old bugle blew the mournful Last Post
As those tortured souls were finally laid to rest

Far away, back home, with no chance to say goodbye
A mother sobs for her lost son with ragged breath
Many years down the track and the jungle has crept back
To now reclaim, what history has named - the railway of death

YOUR HUG

By Veselka Gencic

Your hug was not love,
 Love comes and goes.
 Your hug was not lust,
 Lust flares up and goes out.
 Your hug was an eternal flame,
 that lived to warm me.
 A mystery that couldn't be seen.
 Your hug kept me safe,
 Nestled in serenity,
 Your hug was my happiness,
 Your hug was me.
 Your hug...
 Your touch...
 I miss you...
 Miss you...much.

ACLAND STREET

By Richard McClelland

A gritty wind sneaks round the corner and our legs,
 Cooling the ambience that belongs to night,
 To shadows and the masks of play,
 A place of solemn stories and their hopeful games.

Our morning is a cool, a shadowless grey.
 We watch each other's eyes
 And barely glance at others on their way along the street.
 But over there is one.
 A proper strutting soul.
 With curate's pride and head held high,
 A measured step and purposeful,
 She walks out, turns deliberately to leave the toilet.
 (Can pigeons read?)

Undoubtedly a woman.
 Has she, her toilet done, decided to ape the people,
 Walk the street,
 Pout and preen?
 No, she is a home builder.

We watch, then turn to one another,
 Resume the coffee and the talk.
 We chose our words.
 While solemnity is funny,
 our mirth is stifled by neat feathered order
 All framed in tiles and bluestone.
 To build and walk and then return on wing,
 To flutter momentarily then rise to build some more.

We watch and talk,
 Compare our own adventures.
 Avoid abrasive twigs,
 And feel the warmth of trust together
 Having thus completed coffee.

So on this cool St Kilda street,
 We talk the talk, she walks the walk,
 Our paths have crossed today

ELEGY WRITTEN IN A CITY ARCADE

By Barbara Magee

Haven of wonders in The Block Arcade,
 "Dafel Dolls and Bears" brought such joy,
 With gollies, teddies, plushies galore
 And every description of toy,
 An oriel window beside the front door
 Held porcelain figures exquisite,
 Children's eyes watched this scene, wide with delight,
 Growing larger and rounder each minute!
 Grown-ups stood, entranced, mobile-phones taking snaps,
 Indulging their "inner child",
 Nostalgia transported their minds far away,
 Aches and pains now seeming quite mild,
 The dolls came in china, vinyl and wood,
 Adorned in fabrics divine,
 Some sturdy for children to "chuck about",
 Some destined for cabinets fine.

The shop is now gone, and I must accept
 That change is part of life,
 And The Cat in the Hat is still here, bold and cheeky,
 (Not causing TOO much strife!)
 There are tableaux of dolls taking "high tea",
 The Tapping Man's such a treat,
 So the Block Arcade still retains some traces
 Of the whimsical, charming and sweet!

DANCING PRIZE

By Anna Rogalina

When I decided to attend the Seniors Festival Lunch
 I didn't think I would enjoy that event so much!
 Friday's morning was rainy, windy and grey
 But noon was sunny and I started on my way!
 To see happy faces in the Town Hall was so good
 I smiled back and that improved my mood!
 When soon music began to play
 I had the pleasure of dancing with Ray!
 We moved together as if we were one,
 The time flew by and we had a lot of fun!
 Dancing was a joy for many, not only for us
 But when at the end we were rewarded,
 That took us very much by surprise!
 A pair of Red Shoes was a great prize,
 But pity, because it was not my size!
 Anyway, my dancing partner Ray
 Was good and simply Made my Day!

GOD'S COUNTRY AUSTRALIA

By Maria Sarikizis

For the love of travel a young man sets out to sea.
 A small passport in his torn pocket, a small bag of clothes.
 Inspired by tales told to him by old seamen he kisses his mother perhaps for the last time.
 He travels for the unknown island he believes it is at the end of the world
 Faith, ambition, adventure are in his blood.
 He dreams of wealth, fame, success, a happy life.
 He prays to gain strength on his journey in the never ending sea.
 Strange birds glide over the small ship.
 The young man catches a green small branch dropped from above.
 'Is this a sign?' he asks. 'Is this God's way?'
 My faith has made this happen.
 ALL will be well.
 I have arrived in God's country!

A DEDICATED COMPANION - ODE TO THE RUCKSACK

By Rob Thomas

You endure and suffer, despite my lack of care and attention
 You support me on our joint endeavours without complaint
 You have kept me safe
 Your pursed zipped lips keep private affairs and possessions safe
 No gossip or cheap talk from you is a certainty for sure
 You are worn and frayed from the adventures of life

We have travelled many tracks together
 These shared journeys connect us chronologically, physically and emotionally
 You have been a close witness to my life
 Experiencing various loves, family events and destinations

Recently I recall, with distaste in my own shallowness, how I no longer wanted to be with you
 You were causing me pain and unhappiness
 I could no longer look at you with pride, but more with heavy resentment
 As I lifted and dragged you for another day on the up and down journey of life

Your resilience continually impresses me
 You have survived the permanent scars caused by the mechanical functionality of airports
 Wild scrub and rough paths have bruised and battered you
 You tolerate these necessary burdens with focused purpose
 You have provided me with confidence when going is tough, but of late you have lost your edge.
 Uncharacteristic slippages and frailty are evident with age
 My confidence in your support has been tested on recent journeys
 When we buckle up tightly together, the same assuredness we both had when younger is missing

You should feel proud and satisfied – you made it to journey end once again
 Your loyalty, your strength, your tolerance
 And your uncomplaining companionship do not go unnoticed
 I must show you the care and respect that you deserve

Old friend, we each have had the backs of the other for many years
 But you are not so dependable now
 Buckles slip, worn handholds break, zips fail to grasp, and stitching fails
 Visible scars and repairs mark your past weakness, and my past carelessness
 Your parts are no longer as taut, and you are less reliable
 Walking with you is no longer free flowing as it was on our early adventures
 Our journeys together are now less comfortable
 Repairs and body work adjustments can only go so far
 So much of your functioning exterior has been replaced, or repaired
 Your youthful image is now scarred and worn

A DEDICATED COMPANION - ODE TO THE RUCKSACK (CONT.)

By Rob Thomas

While your robust inner strength and desire to support remains intact
You are no longer reliable, and your functionality is weak
You take the joy out of our travel adventures
I try to look past these blemishes, but no longer can
Sadly, there will be no more shared life journeys
A future of less travels and a different role is your next destination
The shed of “useful stuff” is your new, permanent, home, my dear friend

So it ends - we now take different roles, you and I
My travels will continue with a newer model who I will have to build trust and rapport with
A younger, more contemporary option beckons as a preferred companion for the future
Old friend and trusted companion, pleasant memories remain
We will be connected forever, if not physically, definitely in spirit and soul
Our joint journeys together will never be forgot

We were definitely not fleeting encounter travellers
We were connected as one for many, many days and years
Memories, and the odd image, remain
You are remembered fondly even though your future lies in a dark and dusty shed

MICHAEL BURNE; BLIND BOUNTY FIDDLER

By Graeme Turner

I’m there on that deck,
feel on my skin how the sun
withdraws her hug.
My eyes swathed
in an always mist
I’m here to follow his order
for me, it’s clear.

Just to play
this violin,
my bow to twang
arrowed sounds.
To keep his crew bouncing,
jump jigging
every day at four.

That’s all he wants of me...
Just stringing tunes together
to keep them happy.
After all, they think
I’m just not fit for anything more.

He blisters words,
scoundrels, mongrel’s curse.
But not for me.
His curses pass me by.
I’ll just pull up another jaunt, another prance,
not fake
but reel.
To hear those feet, clump out
against the thump of sea
in its unseen green.

Gulls may wheel, squeal.
But I don’t see...
Just trust
In one solitary command
‘Just play.’

Now there’s a scuffle, a rumble of feet below
There seems to be an incident
A rattle
of voices
The Captain’s bundled up on deck.
Not Happy.
Banging the mast, bellowing his lines
More roar than words
that no-one hears

They’ve toppled him
In the longboat.
They’ve claimed the ship.
He’s pleading for more food,
even the grudging gift of yarns.
And just a map
and yes, a sextant.
Something more than faith to cream the way.
A cry, like an albatross, is gulped by the gurgle
of waves, tossed
by a careless wind.
In their victory, their gain of wheel,
this new crew has forgotten me.
Left me in this rocking,
tiny wooden shell.
Lashed alongside this groaning, timber whale.

How can I live to my name?
Do more than fiddle.
While the Bounty burns,
She will always continue
to flame her path
to breadfruit and flowered hair.

I can’t shin a mast,
reef sail,
even command a helm.

All I can do is wait
and simply play spear melodies
to echoed boards.
Hope that sometime soon,
I can land
An almost perfect cadence.

GUARDIAN

By Clemens Unger

I like to walk in the forest
 Feel the serenity
 Usually, I find a tree that speaks to me
 I marvel at its energy and strength
 My hand touches the bark
 Its texture speaking through my skin
 I wonder what lies beneath
 The unseen, cavities, hollows, roots
 Another world,
 Hidden...
 Only visible to those with imagination.
 I wonder what the tree has seen
 Joy and tragedy
 A first kiss or a breakup
 Season after season
 Year after year
 Even century after century
 Those are the special ones
 Here before me
 And long after,
 Hopefully...
 Keeper of secrets
 Home to the unseen
 I give the tree a hug
 Silly to some
 Meaningful to me
 I walk on
 Energised

BEAUMARIS BEAUTY

By Andrew Vella

Remembering fishing trips with friends.
 Hiring a boat at Keefers', catching flathead.
 Now I'm seeing a pelican perched on the
 Pier light pole at the motor yacht squadron.
 Looking back at the cliffs that are around me.
 Hues of light, brown, red and ochre.
 In random, jaded, eroded magnificence.
 Traditional country of the Boonwurrung people.

Inspired artists, the Heidelberg School,
 First met here and brushed it out on canvas.
 Sunset, walking the track through the beach scrub.
 Views out over the bay, where tones of grey,
 Orange and purple reflect with ripples
 Running across the ocean to the Mornington Peninsula,
 In an unearthly painted splendour.

Watching a possum run across the pool fence,
 Fairy wrens flicker in the trees.
 Magpies sing by the bowling club in spring.
 Black swans dunk heads in the sea at Ricketts Point.
 Silver gulls sit on the sand in flocks with the sunbathers.
 The Beaumaris Hotel with its grand old facade,
 Been there once. People dwell there now.

The home suburb of my sister and brother-in-law.
 Here, where they raised my niece and nephew.
 Sitting on a park bench at The Concourse,
 Thankful to them for my transition back.
 Dog sitting, walking the dogs past gum trees,
 On nature strips, then around the football oval.
 Beaumaris beauty, creative sparks, Beaumaris by the bay.

Fiction

STIR FRIED

By Alison Dods

Quietly I slip my phone back into the side pouch of my brown leather handbag. Quietly I pick up my small sharp kitchen knife and quietly, purposefully, I begin again slicing the red capsicum diagonally into thin strips. I am pleased they look exactly like the glossy photo of the 'Easy Chicken Stir Fry' recipe I have torn from the Good Weekend magazine.

He is gone. Passed. Really gone.

I think of the giant Buddhas in Afghanistan, blown up and crumbling heavily. Sandstone crashing, smashing to rubble, hard to earth. That news footage was appalling, mesmerising. Ancient monoliths felled. Gone. No longer there. Just a solid empty hillside cavity of nothingness. Crazy! Is this what I should be thinking about? Focus!

Step 2

Heat oil and gently saute onions, ginger and garlic together.

Look at me. I am so well prepared. Even on a Sunday night. All part of this new plan to organise my chaotic eating life into a regular week. Lurching from one day to the next, making lists, all good intentions but too regularly a sad empty fridge. What is a f*#king regular week anyway? I reckon I am yet to experience one. Even signed up for fresh home delivery – fantastic but work dinner, admittedly well diarised in advance, and one rather nice undiarised Tinder date – not only blown the budget but I had a bin full of 'out of date' super healthy food. So stocked up at Coles for this week and topped up from the local organic fruit shop. I am not usually so careful about following recipes, tend to free range a bit but tonight I am trying.

Step 3

Add capsicum and celery. Cook until slightly soft. 5 minutes.

Trudy was reasonable on the phone, considering our dismal history of conversations. Tried to break the news gently, as they say, but she has been around a long time. Trudy knows things. Trudy has seen things. Funny she didn't say much after delivering the gist of it – but then neither did I. I suppose she expected me to ask – where? How? Christ, why didn't I? That would be normal after all. I now know nothing. I still know nothing. Was he ill or maybe it was a terrible accident? Trudy must think it wasn't normal too but still -it isn't! What is f*#king normal? Cancer, most likely that would be it. Never really looked after himself. Booze. Cigarettes. Bad diet. Yes, I reckon cancer... Wonder how long he had known it was terminal. I have always hated that word, terminal. Sounds like someone has bought a ticket and is waiting at the bus or train station. Ticket sure would be one way. Black humour – love it. Black, yes – shrouds are white – be much better if they were black.

The onion has changed to a clear colour. Might just turn up the gas a bit.

Step 4

Remove vegetables from pan with a slotted spoon. Set aside. Add chicken to pan.

Christ, I haven't seasoned or cut up the chicken. OK. I'll turn down the heat – no actually I'll take the wok off the burner while I prepare the chicken.

So, I am officially an orphan. Half an orphan at six and now I have the full title at 39 years of age. Woo hoo! Surely this occasion should be notated (as Trudy would say) with an alcoholic beverage. Lucky my sad fridge

condition is only relevant to food. Ah ha! Jock's birthday bubbly. Icy cold. I choose a glass, my favourite, and fill it to the brim. No annoying little white scratch marks on my glassware. I do not like limits. I have encountered many – limit and expunge I say! Cheers to Cutting up chicken thighs.

I will just heat up the wok again, get those chicken pieces sizzling.

He was a bastard. An ugly, mean, uncaring, controlling bastard. How did Trudy stay with him? Did I miss something nice wedged between the rough of "grow up, life's tough, stop sniveling, make sure you smile for Jenny, Liz, Sarah, Trudy, or...", rub it hard till it stops hurting, meet pain with pain girl – hot water for sunburn, just press harder on that scraped knee. I'll only pay half the first week rent then you're on your sweet malone missy".

A second toast! Yeah, he was right, life is tough. He got that one right. The miserable unloving prick.

Wish I had a brother or sister. He always said it was lucky I didn't. My experience is just for me, mine alone. I am unique. Numero uno. I am an only child who is now also an orphan. If I could remember Mum. I think that is what I called her – maybe it was Mummy. Always at the hospital and the lino, eucalyptus smell in the lifts. Did she cook chicken in our kitchen? I don't know. I am an orphan who knows nothing. I didn't even ask about the funeral. Suppose Trudy will cover the costs. I sure can't contribute on my wages. Why should I anyway? Funeral will probably be in Coffs Harbour. The Big Banana city. Big bastard buried in the Big Banana city. Sounds right. Couldn't get up north quick enough. That's what he said. Sun, the good life, just take off, what he had always wanted to do – leave all the shit behind. Yeah, he had a great way with words.

Step 5

Return vegetables to pan. Mix one cup of stock, one teaspoon each of soy, fish sauce and cornflour together. Add to chicken and vegetable mix. Cook a further 2 minutes until slightly thickened.

Suppose I could ask for a few days off work. They wouldn't argue. He is – was my father.

Step 6

Spoon mixture over cooked rice. Garnish with parsley and grated lemon rind.

Step 7

Scrape entire plateful into rubbish bin.

Step 8

Open second bottle of birthday bubbly.



THE MAN ON PAGE 84

by James Cattell

I am well aware that I am a fiction.
Not a particularly important one at that.

I appear once only in the second paragraph
of Page 84 of a book whose title and author I
do not know.

On this 84th page I am described as
'An unremarkable man in a worn brown coat
seated on a bench clutching an umbrella.'

That's it, just 15 words.

A man, a coat, an umbrella.
Not a lot.
The coat is brown and worn but the umbrella,
my face, hair, age, expression . . .
So much is left out.

Had I held a sandwich, or if there was a
satchel beside me on the bench, I could be
assumed to be some low-level office worker
on a lunch break.

Had there been a bottle ensconced in a
brown paper bag . . .
Well at least I can be grateful this is not the
case.

Readers hurry past, impatient to follow the
central story which I feel I am not part of.
None pay great heed to this 'unremarkable'
character with his worn brown coat and
umbrella seated upon a bench in the second
paragraph of Page 84.

It's not a bad page.
Page 84.
Just not a place to linger.
Nothing of note occurs.

It is not even a complete page.
A chapter's end. Page 84 has no words for at
least a third of its length.

And Page 85 is blank, along with Page 86,
except for a tear caused some time past by a
clumsy hand.
Thus I live facing an ivory desert defiled by
an unnerving fault line.

Page 87 seems to feature a dog. I hear it
barking occasionally, the bark of a largish
dog.
Not a threatening bark, more an
announcement of existence.

In quiet moments – though all my moments
are quiet – I imagine this dog strolling back
through the sentences of Page 87 to cross
the snowy expanse of Page 85 and 86. He
carefully avoids the perilous crevasse to
arrive companionably at my side.

The heroes of this book, if they exist, and I'm
convinced they must, avoid Page 84 whose
only inhabitant is this unremarkable man
seated on a bench in a worn brown coat with
an umbrella.

What does this umbrella signify? Am I a
cautious soul or has an inclement forecast
occurred on an earlier page?

And this worn brown coat, like all coats,
probably possesses pockets.
One day I may have the courage to search
these for objects that might explain my
presence in this book.

However I hesitate, wary of further
disappointment.

So little of me is shown that I am free to
invent my own story.

Just imagine I could travel to, let's say, Page
139, and there meet a girl of indeterminate
features working in a bakery.
Where I enter to purchase a pastry.



I pass my time with thoughts such as these.

I don't complain. What would be the point?

But I do wonder.
Could it be that some time the author of this
book will pass over this page?

This is unlikely, of course.
My creator has certainly moved on. To literary
success? Or failure?

But if by chance we ever meet . . .

I will say,
'Please explain why I am here.
What is the purpose of the man on Page 84?

The man on the bench,
Clutching an umbrella,
Wearing a worn brown coat.

Do you remember him at all?

That man on Page 84.

COFFEE AND BAKLAVA WITH THE THREE FATES

By Fredrika Apokidou

In Greek Mythology, the three Fates are sisters who assign individual destinies to mortals at birth. Their names are:

Clotho - the Spinner, the eldest of the three - represents the present; she spins the thread of life, destiny in other words.

Lachesis - the Alloter, the middle sister - represents the future; she measures the thread of life spun by Clotho, and decides how many years of life are allotted to each and everyone.

Atropos - The Inflexible, the youngest of the three - represents the past; she cuts the thread of life with her sharp scissors, terminating the lifespan for each mortal. Whoever the thread is attached to, dies.

Amazing collaboration between the three sisters: Clotho spins the thread, Lachesis measures its length, and Atropos cuts it. In other words, Atropos makes the final decision as to how long each of us can live.

What about the household chores, who does them, I wonder...I hope there is collaboration in that respect, as well...

When I was a little girl, I thought that Fate was the name of a bad woman who lived in a cave high up in the mountains. She had come to our house one cold winter night and took my Mum away, to Heaven.

I'd heard my maternal grandmother and her friends saying, for instance. "My daughter passed away and left four young children behind. "Fate had so willed it" or "it was destined to happen" or "it was poor Paul's fate to have been born blind..."

What about my own destiny? I'm 86 years old. How many more years are left for me, before Atropos decides to kick me off? I really want to meet her and ask her. I need to know her thinking behind the decisions she makes for each and every one of us. Is she doing it for fun, or what??

Over the last few months I've been overcome with curiosity in regard to finding out where the three Fates live, so I could pay them a visit. I specifically want to meet with Atropos, have a discussion over a cup of coffee and a piece of baklava, for God's sake...

I finally set out one sunny day last week carrying an oven dish full of sweet baklava - "she might have a sweet tooth" - I thought. I crossed seas, walked through forests and mountains, searched caves, and...there I was: I finally came across an impressive palace in which the three Fates lived. A palace? Was my eyesight blurred again? Maybe my optometrist was right when suggesting I needed cataract surgery... What a pity, though... Atropos wasn't there. She'd been out and about checking her list and determining whose turn was next. Had she been there, she might have enjoyed my delicious homemade baklava with her coffee and might have come up with the decision to spare me a few more years!!

In the meantime, I take every day as it comes and make the most of it. I keep looking after myself and others, if I can.

Above all, I thank Almighty God for allowing me to still live in my own home, until Atropos knocks on my door carrying her sharp scissors... No coffee and sweets for her this time, though...Bad luck!!

THEY SHOULD HAVE CALLED ME HANNIBAL

By Ieta D'Costa

Hannibal is a good, strong name. Not a bit like piss weak Robbie. They should have called me Hannibal. I'd probably have a ton of friends and not just from my year, probably from all over the country. I'd be on TV, inspiring people to do great things like Hannibal did. Imagine crossing the Snowy Mountains with 37 elephants. I'd take over New South Wales and Queensland. There's a lot to be said for getting rid of Queensland. Mum says she's happier living in Victoria, and I think it's OK too. When Dad sees my flyer on skin cancer, he's got to see he'll definitely get one of those cancers in Queensland. It's actually disgusting they advertise it as the sunshine state when sunshine causes cancer. And because Dad does all that surfing and sailing, he's definitely going to get the most horrid one, and die. I've tried telling him swimming is better than surfing, as most of his body would be under water. He plasters that sunscreen stuff, but they have microparticles, actually, I think they're nanoparticles, and they're probably in his bloodstream right now. I bet they cause cancer too. How is it I can see this so clearly, and they can't? Even mum, who is usually sensible, thinks Dad should go if he wants to. Get the hell out of my life before you bloody wreck it, is what she said to him this morning. Then she rushed out to her car and kicked the tyres cos she forgot her keys. That's what she said when I asked her what she was doing. I wasn't spying. Really. You can't help hearing them, they talk so loudly. I heard the door slam, looked out the window and there was mum laying in on the tyres.

Adults must have been different in Hannibal's time. Hannibal and my dad have some things the same. They both got married and had a son. Hannibal married a Spanish princess and then conquered a whole load of Spanish tribes. At first, I thought his wife would have been mad with him, but there's nothing online that says that, so she must have been OK with it. He definitely didn't waste his time surfing. I am not going to Queensland, or surf, or get a cancer and die like my dad is planning. I've thought a lot about Hannibal. Wars are definitely not a good thing but think of this! Over 2000 years ago, Hannibal had 20000 people follow him from Carthage all the way across France and over the Alps. The Alps! Much higher than the Snowy Mountains. Dad says he must have been a nutter, driving people and elephants

and horses to their deaths just to surprise the Romans. But it's not true that elephants died in the Alps. They were very thin when they got to Italy, but they did survive. I think Hannibal took care of them. He had people build special roads made of stones for the elephants. In the mountains - you got to say that's awesome. I know people died on his side, but many more died on the Romans side. And the Romans thought he was really cool. Even Scipio, the evil Roman general, admired Hannibal. When mum said Hannibal was criminal psychopath, dad threw a tea towel on the ground and said it sure wasn't him that took me to the Anzac dawn thing, sticking her grandfather's war medals all over my jacket. I thought mum would whack him. She rushed up to his face, like really up to his face, and said she did not support wars, she supports her family, and not some lunatic like Hannibal who basically murdered thousands of Phoenicians and Romans for the sake of an empire! With never a thought of his wife and child. I explained that Hannibal wife didn't complain, and his son was a general too. Mum went silent. Then slowly, like I was a 2-year-old, she asked where his wife's thoughts and words were recorded. Honestly, I did look online, there's nothing, just his wife's name. I told mum that. Mum doesn't usually sneer, but for sure she did a gigantic, evil sneer. Then dad told her not to get stuck into me, I was just a kid. That seemed to set mum off again. It's not like I needed his help. If dad was trying to help me, he'd not go to Queensland. And then, they completely forgot I even existed and yelled their heads off. It's useless trying to reason with them.

That's the thing, I realise now. Adults were different 2000 years ago. They had really good ideas. They made plans and stuck to them. When things got tricky, did Hannibal turn back and go surfing and yelling? No, he got his army to build a path out of stones in the Alps. And all the elephants got down the mountains. In winter! I can't waste any more time trying to get mum and dad to be sensible. Hannibal's great trek is really, really, important, especially for my mum and dad. You got to plan. And you can't give up. I have got to get the great trek drawn before the sun goes down. It's what he'd have done. They really should have called me Hannibal.

DREAM VIEW

By Marilyn Fahey

Her new unit was everything the Agent had promised. The high location gave views on three sides. The rear view looked to the north, the front view was of St Kilda Beach, to the west a view of the bridge and a port busy with cruise and cargo boats as well as glimpses of the City of Melbourne.

The side window had the additional attraction of looking directly over the penthouse floor of an elegant block of units. She was congratulating herself on her purchase when she noticed the occupant of the penthouse unit opposite, little realising that this stranger and his daily business were to become of increasing interest to her.

Her first glimpse of him was on the patio of his penthouse. He was of medium height, with a well-shaped, semi-bald head, a fit sixty plus man with an open face, bright eyes and wide smile. Working quietly in his outdoor kitchen this totally unknown man had familiar features which stirred her memories. She was transported across the metres that separated them in space and back through fifty years in time. In that long ago time she had been the loving concern of her father. The unexpected sight of this stranger tore aside the thin tissue in which her treasured memories were securely stored.

Her father had been one of the first truly feminist men, he had loved her mother as much for her weaknesses as for her formidable strength. Her mother had returned his love with admiration, respect and trust. Together they had created a seamless match. There had never been any discussion about the division of labour in the home of her childhood, both her parents seemed capable of performing any task necessary to make the house run smoothly and to ensure that their children felt wanted and valued. Thus she was to indulge herself with memories of her father and to recall how she had sought his replica in her

own relationships with men. She began to fantasise about this quiet and competent man who seemed to manage his isolation with comfort. He was not only the image of her father but would also have his most endearing qualities.

God what was she dreaming of, she chided herself, not her father again. She could not believe that here she was, yet again, busily converting this hapless stranger into her dream of a companion. Sternly, she reminded herself that her father fantasy had led her into making some disastrous decisions in her life.

Well what did it matter, who would ever know, she could dream a little. So the not too close, one sided, relationship began. At first there was just an occasional glance out the window, sometimes she would see him sometimes not. He would often breakfast on the terrace and she would have an imagined conversation about the activities she had planned for the day. Once she was on the roof of the apartment looking out at a yacht race when she turned to see her dream man watching also. She hoped that he had got a good look at her and that he might be interested.

Yes, things were moving apace in her fantasies until reality intruded, for two days his terrace door was closed and she had not seen him either inside or outside. She decided to wait until evening, if no lights came on she would go over and knock on the door. Not sure of what she really wanted to happen she was relieved to see his house light up and that he had company, a couple and their small blonde child who sat on the couch and snuggled into his side. Two encouraging sights, he was well and his granddaughter loved him.

His visitors stayed for several days and then disappeared, alone again he seemed happy to resume his solitary life. She decided that if an opportunity arose she would take advantage

of it but she was not going to contrive a meeting. As the days passed she had reason to curse her repressed behaviour as the vainly hoped for 'natural' event did not occur nor did a 'near natural' event which could provide her with an opportunity to meet this man. Running out of time and ideas the fates intervened, driving out of the car park, she saw something caught by the wind was dropping from the penthouse terrace. At last, she wished for natural event.

Validated as a concerned neighbour she knocked on the door of the penthouse to restore the flyaway towel to its rightful owner. Wanting to appear cool, she turned her back to the door and looked at the view trying to calm the volatility of her emotions.

She turned as the door was opened by a stunning looking, thirty-something, blonde woman her hair still dripping from the shower standing before her. Weakly, she handed over the towel unable to say anything more than

"It blew down to the car park." She muttered turning to escape as quickly as possible.

Well what did you expect she chided herself, with a wry laugh of self-depreciation at her collapsed fantasy. Later on she couldn't resist a further look, there he was sitting comfortably on his couch, the young and beautiful woman hovering around him as they talked together with great animation.

She decided to make a surprise visit to her daughter in Albury. Thus she did not see a handsome young man in snazzy sports car come to pick up the beautiful blonde girl. Nor did she hear her say, "Go on Dad what have you got to lose? I've seen you looking at her. She seemed very nice when she came to return the towel. Just go in and thank her and ask her in for a drink. It's time you started to live a little."

AN ACCIDENTAL FRIENDSHIP

By Lee Hirsh

My friendship with Eileen Perkins began in the most unlikely place, the Royal Adelaide Hospital, on New Years Day 1991 when we unexpectedly shared a ward. Eileen was there having a hip replacement, and I was there following a horrific car accident. My car accident took place in Kangaroo Island with my family, my husband Jonathon, my son Jeremy, who was eight years old and my daughter Melanie, who was six. We were travelling through the island and were the only motorists on a long unsurfaced road, with no soul around. Jonathon was driving erratically, zigzagging on the unsealed road. I was unaware that he was driving this way to avoid the protruding roots of trees. The car finally went out of control, and we hit a tree, the front window was badly shattered. My daughter Melanie was sitting in the front seat next to her father, rigid with shock. I was in the back seat with my son Jeremy.

The unexpected impact flung me backwards and forwards. I had no control of my body, tossed around with a roly-poly effect. I struggled to regain my composure and sit upright but managed to utter a short, pained sentence "What's going on? What is happening?". No sooner did the words come tumbling out of my mouth than my body reacted with uncontrollable vomiting, and I was riddled with pain. All the while Jonathon was bellowing "Get out of the car! Get out of the car!" repeatedly.

By this time the children were screaming and crying, and I found it difficult to get out of the car due to the pain, nausea and shock. Finally, in between the children's hysteria and shock they repeated, "Mum is vomiting and can't stop!" Jonathon by now was furious and frustrated with my reaction. He pulled me out of the car and down onto the gravel road, shouting continually. Jeremy and Melanie, in between their own

emotional reaction and seeing the state I was in, became overwhelmed. I am not sure how long we were out there. The minutes ticked by. Finally, a woman in a four-wheel drive, stopped and got out of her car to inquire about our misfortune. "Where are you heading? What has happened to you all?". Jonathon explained in an abrupt tone, "We are heading towards the National Park."

The woman offered to take me to the Park Ranger's office and said "If you are lucky the Ranger's wife may be there, she is a trained nurse. I can send another car for you and the children to join your wife at the National Park." I finally managed to stop vomiting and as we drove away, I heard more tears and my children asking, "Where is Mum going without us?". As luck had it, the Ranger's wife was there. She bound me up to keep me upright, and rigid, concerned I may have had a spinal injury. She contacted the Kangaroo Island Country Hospital and gave them details of our accident and my condition. After some time, I was told that they would send an ambulance for me. Unfortunately, it took more than two hours to arrive.

By the time my family arrived at the National Park, I had reached my destination by ambulance. I had felt every bump, and the unevenness of the road's surface seemed to make the pain worse. Well at least the vomiting had finally stopped. The staff at the Kangaroo Island Hospital made the decision to organize a helicopter to airlift me to the Royal Adelaide Hospital. Exhausted, hungry and full of pain, I arrived at the ward at around 11pm. I had been poked and prodded for what seemed to be an endless series of x-rays and scans. Morphine had to be injected every two hours for the pain, finally they told me I had fractured my collar bone and cracked multiple ribs.

As the pain became more tolerable, I requested to talk with my family still on Kangaroo Island. Staff wheeled in a red pay phone for me to use and I realized I had no coins to make the call. The patient in the bed opposite me, Eileen, offered, "I will lend you money for a phone call dear." Her generosity allowed me to speak to my husband and the children. The separation anxiety took its toll on all of us. I was very emotional, lying in bed feeling vulnerable and alone after the ordeal, crying myself to sleep. In the early hours of the morning Eileen began asking me about myself in her soothing voice. Quietly sharing about our lives and families. Her company was easy, and the conversation flowed. Despite our significant age gap and differences, we seemed to naturally connect. This was the beginning of our accidental friendship.

We both observed the cold and unempathetic responses of my husband and her daughter. This strengthened our decision to stay in touch with weekly letters and occasional interstate phone call. Eileen would ask "I hope you can read my handwriting" and I would giggle as it was beautiful copperplate script as if from another era. I looked forward to receiving her weekly letters. I confided in her about my troubled marriage and she shared with me the difficulties she experienced with her daughter. Eileen had a beautiful philosophy on life and always encouraged me "don't let it make you bitter". We exchanged gifts and photos; one I cherish is a fridge magnet she sent with the words: *A friend is one of the nicest things you can have and one of the best things you can be.* Our friendship was warm, and it deepened over twenty years of correspondence.

I found myself calling Eileen when a letter did not arrive, as it was very unusual. The phone number had been disconnected. I was aware she lived alone with no family. It was a loss beyond words to not have closure. She was a mere 98 years young when our friendship ended abruptly in 2012.

THE OPPORTUNITY SHOP

By Megan Jones

The air in the charity shop is thick, close, and heavy, with the scent of a plug-in gardenia air freshener and the long-abandoned stories of its shared past.

An elderly shop assistant, dressed in a vintage Chanel pink and white bouclé suit, scrutinised a tall, young woman in a red and brown boatneck dress, striking a pose in front of the large public mirror.

"No dear, I don't think that is your colour," the assistant said.

"You are a Summer; brown is not in your colour wheel."

The customer stared at the willow-thin old lady.

"Lady, what makes you the expert?" she retorted, flicking her beige blonde bob to dismiss the busybody.

Only when the customer spoke did the shop assistant understand her faux pas.

Edna was embarrassed that she had singled out a trans woman for attention. Seconds later, the customer walked out of the store.

"If you don't mind me saying so, Edna, that was none of your business," the store manager, Kate, said, raising her eyebrows.

Edna blushed.

"Have you ever considered how trans women learn about fashion?" Edna asked. "Most women learn fashion from their mothers or women's magazines. Trans women must miss out on that early learning," Edna proffered, dusting imaginary lint off the counter.

Kate slammed the till drawer and pivoted towards her colleague.

"One of my nieces has transitioned. I can tell you, Charlie knew she was a girl from the get-go. She learned how to dress in the same way as all girls do. No girl takes advice from

their mothers or dead trees," Kate added reprovingly.

"I do hope I haven't driven her away," Edna said, smarting from Kate's passion.

"I hope you haven't either," the manager said, lips pursed, focusing on an approaching customer.

Edna thought about what Kate had said.

As penance, Edna combed the donation bins to find suitable outfits for the trans woman in case she should return.

Weeks later, while unpacking a Country Road bag crammed with donations, she found the perfect dress: a sky-blue Diana von Furstenberg confection in jersey silk, featuring a draped neckline and a wrap waist. It was a simple dress with no adornments to age the design. It was perfect for the customer she had lost.

She negotiated with her boss to buy the dress for \$30 without revealing its purpose. She hoped the customer would return to the store. A few nights later, while tidying her wardrobe - a task she often did for comfort, Edna reflected.

Clothing is as much about self-discovery as it is about fabric.

Exploring her closet reminded Edna of her daughters, Fanny and Hannah, when they were young. They would rummage through Mummy's antique camphorwood box, try on her jewellery and dresses, and spritz French perfume.

Both live overseas now.

Fanny lived in Paris, where she worked as an accountant at Dior. Hannah had moved to England with the man she loved. Neither daughter had produced grandchildren. She rarely saw them, except for occasional FaceTime calls. The arthritis was her excuse.

While putting her things away, Edna spotted a rectangular leather purse with a shoulder strap in a slightly darker shade of blue than her dress. Its structure held a quiet elegance, resonating in Edna's expert eye.

The week before Easter, she heard the hangers clink softly and saw the woman she'd been thinking of, moving through the athletic clothing rack.

"Excuse me, Miss. We spoke the last time you were here. My name is Edna, and I want to apologise for being rude to you," she said, not giving the customer time to dismiss her.

"Would you mind waiting a moment? I have something for you," Edna pleaded, her voice rising at the end of the sentence.

The customer stopped fidgeting with the rack and watched the shop assistant dart towards the staff room. A few minutes later, she returned, holding a soft, silky blue dress with a matching handbag.

The customer's eyes grazed the vibrant vintage dress and purse.

"My name is Molly," she said as she took the dress from Edna. The floorboards creaked beneath her feet as she went to the changing room. Moments later, she twirled in front of the public mirror.

"It's a Diana von Furstenberg," Edna whispered. "A classic."

"I remember my first time wearing this American designer—how the fabric embraced my body, so different from the stiff, constricting suits of the 1950s. It was liberation, long before Women's Lib," Edna explained.

A familiar ache pulsed in her hands as she marvelled at the woman in the dress. Old age be damned, she thought. The minute she got home, Edna promised to call her daughters. There was no real reason why she shouldn't fly to visit them.

The customer adjusted her cleavage, glancing at her reflection.

"It's lovely," she murmured.

Edna smiled.

"Some things are worth it."

"There's no price tag," the customer said, before turning towards the changing booth.

Edna was jolted back to reality.

"For \$25, I will throw in a matching handbag," she said, handing over her vintage purse.

"Are you sure?" the customer queried.

"The dress is perfect on you," Edna smiled, thinking of her daughters' delight at her visit.

Molly modelled the dress for her housemate Zara in their Fitzroy Street flat as they raised a glass of prosecco to celebrate the treasure trove.

"I can't believe the old lady in the Op Shop thought this dress was me!" she exclaimed.

"Feel this leather, Zara. Soft as butter," she purred, passing the bag to her friend.

"I went along with the dress charade, hoping she'd throw in the bag. And she did," Molly giggled.

"It's a genuine Yves Saint Laurent. I spotted it immediately. I reckon I can get \$2500 on eBay for the bag alone and a couple of hundred for the dress. It is a Diane Von Furstenberg, don't you know."

"Don't be mean, Molly. That old lady was very kind to you."

Ends.

"SHE MUST BE A SPY!"

by Chris Kealy

They came in the dark when Lucy and I were in bed. We heard the car sneaking up the gravel driveway, then hushed voices. Mummy appeared at the door dressed in her hat and coat and carrying her handbag. The two men had dark coats and hats and said, "Mrs Black, come with us please". Doors closed on this large, heavy, black saloon car as it glided down the driveway.

"Nurse, nurse! Where is Mummy?" Lucy cried. Nurse came into our room, turned on the light and told us that Mummy had to go to Queen Street as Daddy had an accident and broke his leg. Lucy started wailing and Nurse comforted her. After cuddles and hot chocolate, Lucy and I fell asleep.

I woke early to hear the car on the gravel and peeked through the curtains. I saw Mummy getting out of the car carrying a box that looked like a typewriter. She came into the house quietly.

When we were having breakfast, we asked Mummy about Daddy. She looked tired and worried and told us he would be alright. She said she would be having a sleep while we were at school.

Nurse collected us from St Kilda Park Primary and we rushed home excited to see Mummy again. But alas! She was not at home and had left a note to say she was visiting Daddy.

Later, the telephone rang, "dring-dring" and it was Mummy telling Nurse she wouldn't be home that night and would stay in the city to be near to Daddy who had had surgery.

Our routines had changed. Where was Mummy and who were those men, I wondered? As we walked up Grey Street to our home near to the top of the hill, I started looking at the cars to see if I could spot the one with the two men in it. Our home is very large and has gravel out the front with two

entrances so that the car can drive in one gate and leave via the other. Daddy parks his car in the garage beside the house.

Can we go and visit Daddy in hospital please? No, said Nurse, children aren't allowed into hospitals. Just wait until Mummy comes home and you can ask her questions.

Over dinner, we listened to Mummy saying that Daddy was in good spirits, his leg was in plaster, suspended in the air by wires so that he couldn't wriggle around, and that he might be home in two weeks.

Mummy, do you have to go out at night anymore? Can't you stay and play with us? I'm tired now children it's been a big day.

That night while we were in bed, Lucy asked me why did Mummy have to go out at night? I didn't tell her what I saw the other night but I told her now about the men in big coats and hats.

In my fitful sleep, I heard that same noise on the gravel. The car engine was very quiet. I peeked through the curtains and it was the same men, waiting for Mummy to come outside. Good evening Mrs Black! We'll be needing your help tonight. Have you come up with anything yet? Mummy murmured something and got into the car with that strange looking square box.

Nurse came and woke us for school and we went downstairs expecting Mummy to be there. My heart sank. Where is she I wonder? Nurse, did Mummy go out with those men in the black car?

Yes Teddy it was an emergency and Mummy had to go into the city again. Did she go to see our father? I'm sure she would do that... now hurry along, we need to start walking to school. We stepped onto Grey Street and, after passing the Nun's house, I saw

that black car with Mummy in the back seat. No children! Come on! You will be late for school. You can see Mummy later.

We have a beautiful old school with a church like steeple and huge playing fields behind it. It is on Fitzroy Street and lots of our classmates live in these magnificent old buildings on the other side of the street. Their parents must have lots of money!

The teacher collects my homework and calls me aside. "Teddy this is not what you usually do, did you rush it or is something worrying you?" "No Mrs Fletcher, I'll take more time tonight".

When the bell rings, children rush to go home. Nurse is waiting for us and doesn't seem as cheery. We each take her hand and walk past all those mansions between Fitzroy and Gurner Streets. We cross the road there and bow our heads at the Sacred Heart Church. Then we walk in the sun along Grey Street until we reach our home which is called "Eildon Mansion". Maybe we are rich too!

We race inside to find Mummy who is talking on the phone and waves to us, signaling that she needs to talk privately. Maybe she and Daddy are talking; maybe she is talking to those men, maybe...Oh I give up I don't know what she is doing. All I know is that she is not herself. She has a stern face, she doesn't smile and throw her head back laughing. She seems so busy we don't sit on her knee anymore.

She joins us for afternoon tea then disappears upstairs for a rest. Lucy plays with Nurse, we go outside to throw the ball and I climb my favorite tree. I walk past the garage and Daddy's car is there. But what is that in the second garage? My goodness it's that black car that comes to pick Mummy up

in the night! I must keep watch tonight. Will I tell Lucy that I think our mother must be a spy! No I'll wait, watch, keep notes, and get some proof first!

TOMORROW NEVER COMES

By George Kyriakou

No matter how many times you dream the same thing, it always takes you by surprise. My recurring dream was relentless. At least once a month for eight years, over and over, the same dream came to me. We all have dreams. But why is mine in black and white?

Our old weatherboard house seemed muzzled. Something strange is going on.

Empty black plastic hangers, in a dark empty space, were all that was left in the bedroom cupboard.

I call out to my stepdaughter, "Mandy, can you please ask your mother to come to our bedroom for a minute?"

Andrea looked angry with me. Both hands are on her hips. Her blood-shot Bette Davis eyes looked as large as hubcaps on a sports car. Her hair is wispy. Her body wasted. Her fourteen-year battle with cancer had taken its toll.

"What do you want? Can't you see I'm busy?"

"When are you leaving?"

A pause...then she blurted, "Tomorrow."

I glared at Mandy who was about to leave, "Were you aware your mother was planning to leave me?"

"Yep."

"How long have you known?"

Andrea clumsily pushed me in the right shoulder, "Leave my daughter out of this."

Mandy was shocked to find out that I had stumbled across their secret. She was staring at me, her hands up to her face, covering her mouth.

I pumped angrily for an answer, "So, you've known all along?"

"Yeah. I've known about Mum's plan for some time."

"For how long has this charade been going on?"

"Dunno exactly, but, I reckon about six, or eight months."

"So, I presume you know why, or whom?"

"Yep.... It's my ex-husband Lynton"

"Mandy, shut up. Don't tell him any more," shouted Andrea.

My brain was like a piled stack of books in a busy library, "But isn't Lynton the father of Rachel, your youngest granddaughter?"

"You know damn well know he is. What is this? A guilt question to make me feel bad? Well, I've got news for you. It doesn't make me feel bad at all, as a matter of fact, it makes me feel good. Get it through that big, fat, skull of yours. I'm leaving you"

"But why, Andrea? Why, are you leaving me?"

Andrea gave me a remorseful look. Her face and only her face, was vivid red.

In a calm, clinical voice, she said, "Because, I don't love you. I've never loved you. I married you for the security you could provide for my daughter and me. I had planned to leave you a long time ago, but my illness forced me to change my plans. I fell in love with Lynton during the many times we visited Beechworth to see Mandy and my grandkids."

I was completely blindsided, I had no idea this was happening. It sounded like an episode from her favourite daytime serial, *The Bold And The Beautiful*.

"Are you saying that you're leaving me, for a person who is thirty-five years your junior? The father of your granddaughter. The person who's spent time in prison for drug trafficking and domestic violence and goodness knows what else. Is that right?"

Andrea was upset that I had forced the issue.

"You bastard, I'll never forgive you for this. I'll be glad to get out of here, and never have to see you again."

Towards the end of my monochrome dream something strange happens, every single time. A violent thunderstorm sweeps through the valley and strips millions of blossom petals off the trees. But the blossom and only the blossom is in vivid red.

My pupils are darting around like ping-pong balls in a cylinder vacuum cleaner. I screamed loudly, "Why is this happening? Why do I keep having the same dream?" Sure enough, tomorrow came.... Andrea left. Just as she said she would. She didn't even take a backward glance. Or shed a tear.

I find myself in a strange place. Why am I here? I'm dressed in a dark tailored suit, with a crisply ironed shirt. I'm in a sombre room, full of sombre people, dressed in sombre clothing. But strangely, all of the icons of Jesus are vivid red. Paul McCartney's song 'Yesterday' is playing in the background. "Why she had to go, I don't know, she wouldn't say. I said something wrong, now I long for yesterday."

A casket, covered with white roses, slowly rolls down the stainless steel tracks towards the sliding doors of the cremation chamber.

Then the song stopped.... I suddenly realised. I'm at my wife's funeral.

Andrea didn't leave me under the circumstances of my reoccurring dream that had hounded and terrorised me, for so long.

I didn't say, or do anything wrong. She left me because it was time for her to go.

This was the only course Andrea's illness could take.

Andrea left me because she died.

JUST ANOTHER GIRL

By Jill Lever

Our bus driver is so broad, he's almost square. It's thirty-five degrees but he's wearing a dark suit, white shirt and tie. His meaty hand swings my suitcase effortlessly into the luggage space and, with a cursory glance at my ticket and passport, he nods towards the steps.

'Can sit anywhere.' Naturally, I ignore this, find my reserved window seat and politely gesture for the occupant to move elsewhere. He's wearing those white ear things and pretends he can't understand but I hold my ground and he shifts, reluctantly, across the aisle.

I am vindicated at the next stop when new passengers find everyone in the wrong place and the better seats taken. By 'better' I mean the ones furthest from the toilet cubicle which is already giving off a disagreeable tang. Surely people can travel a few hours without needing to relieve themselves? I blame the giant water bottles that young people clutch like security blankets.

We waste ten minutes on disputes while the driver refuses to intervene, even though it was his cavalier attitude to seating protocols that caused the problem. The bus suddenly lurches forward, forcing the last people standing to plonk themselves down wherever they can. My handbag has successfully deterred anyone from taking the seat beside me. Most passengers immediately pull out phones but I intend to look at the scenery otherwise why leave home at all?

We slide out of the commercial centre and meet the City's workaday face. Not here the UNESCO-listed castles and museums or the latest glass temple to capitalism but squat Soviet-era apartment blocks, a BMW showroom, a rusty children's playground beside a drive-in McDonalds, petrol stations, a laundrette – the usual, charmless urban sprawl.

We are soon speeding along a two-lane highway through open countryside. It is sparsely populated - an occasional farm, red-roofed hamlet or onion-domed church providing a picturesque touch. We rush past great fields of sunflowers, their open faces turned eastward, greeting the morning sun behind us. Field after uniform field.

The Japanese couple in front of me chat quietly. A polite people. Behind me a family, spread over several rows, engage in cheerful shouting. I have mastered the basic greetings plus 'please', 'thank you', 'excuse me' - I do think travellers should make the effort – but can't tell whether they are speaking Hungarian or a Balkan language. 'The Balkans' has a romantic ring for an historically troubled region. 'The Balkans generate more history than they can locally consume'. That's one of Churchill's witticisms. My old history teacher used to call them 'The Bloody Balkans'. I don't know if that was a quote or an opinion. Odd what random things one remembers.

I pull down the window shade slightly blurring my view. Sunflowers give way to hectares of thick forest in full leaf with every shade of green above and deep shadow below. You could almost believe in trolls and fairies. I'm drowsily drifting off when we swing right and make a previously unannounced stop at a service station. I expect the driver to indicate how long we are going to stay but he alights without comment and goes into the cafe. We troop after him but I stay near the doorway where I can keep an eye on both the bus and the driver who is soon tucking into a gargantuan breakfast.

Some inexperienced passengers relax enough to order coffee only to be caught off-guard when the driver, having demolished his food in minutes, jumps aboard and starts the engine. There's a mad scramble and I'm half convinced someone has been left behind

in the bathroom. We are moving again but crawling forward into a slow-moving line of merging traffic.

There is another service station – twin to ours - serving eastbound traffic on the opposite side of the road. A four-wheel drive, black with tinted windows, sweeps too fast into its car park stopping some distance away from other vehicles. The driver jumps out and hurries towards the shop. Another fellow, wearing one of those heavy leather jackets ubiquitous among Eastern European men, opens the passenger door to shout something after him. No response. He too steps out and jogs a little way after his friend. He twists briefly to lock up. I notice that the driver's window, facing directly towards me, has been left open.

A bare foot appears. A leg. A shoulder. A young woman, just a girl really, eases herself out and drops to the ground. Shorts. A singlet. Long dark hair. She crouches low, creeping alongside the car. There is nowhere else to hide. The leather-jacketed man is returning and he has seen her. She starts to run but he's quicker. She resists but he twists her around easily. Opens the back door. Shoves her inside. The driver is returning and, at a gesture from his companion, hurries forward. Is he laughing? It's a black box again. They start to move. I strain my neck to see the number plate, but they're gone.

Our bus continues gliding forward. I shout at the Japanese couple. 'Did you see that?' They look alarmed. I turn to the family. The daughter says she speaks English but she can't understand me and is embarrassed. Her father teases her and hands me a phone with the translation screen open.

I hesitate and look down the bus. Everyone is dozing, looking at screens, reading or chatting. The black car must be kilometres

away, every second widening the gap. They'll think, 'This older woman. The heat. The glare. She's probably confused.' They won't want to speak to the unhelpful driver, to delay their journey, to inconvenience everyone. And what will the police say? 'Do you expect us to pull over every black four-wheel-drive in Europe? It was nothing. Enjoy your holiday.' Or maybe they will finger the greasy notes they receive to look the other way.

Thousands like her, after all. Just another girl.

SCHOOLIES IN BYRON

By Janine Mifsud

Maisie's phone kept pinging. Dozens of messages of congratulation and photos from the wedding. She'd look at them later but now, whilst her husband of two days went for a pre-breakfast jog, she went for a walk.

Ten years had passed since she'd been to Byron. She wasn't even sure she'd remember the house but there it stood beautifully preserved: the little picket fence shining with a fresh coat of paint, the grey wooden panels of the exterior in excellent condition, the garden alive with vegetation and colourful floral displays. She glimpsed the sunny glass-enclosed front veranda where they'd shared bottles of bubbles.

For a few minutes she closed her eyes and listened for those girlish voices of the past with their endearing contraction of names and replayed the scene...

"Your turn Suze."

Suze shut her eyes and took a screwed-up little paper from the bowl. The eight girls had already paired off and awaited their fate. There were three bedrooms... a chance to get the double bed with ensuite, the bunk beds, two singles or the dreaded pull-down sofa in the lounge room.

Jacquie grabbed the note, hugged Suze in a massive embrace and squealed at the top of her voice. "We've got the main."

She felt a little sheepish realizing the worst hadn't yet been selected.

Maisie thought at the time she and Nic deserved a room; after all they'd done the research, found one of the few decent properties left for schoolies and Nic's dad had even paid the bond. She'd remained silent. It wasn't in her nature to put herself forward.

'Oh! Jules why did you pick that one?' wailed partner Andy. Maisie remembered sighing with relief; whatever happened now she knew that she and Nic were assured a room.

The cool air of the autumnal morning put a little zest in her step. Two doors down triggered another memory of that summer in Byron, this time of loads of boys squeezed into a small cottage with the surf and boogie boards gaily abandoned on the front lawn: the beers and the raucous laughter of those young men barely out of their teens, so much bravado. She remembered her first love Timmy V. At the time she didn't even know his last name, but she certainly got to know him on those few weeks in Byron.

They were both swats or nerds as she'd liked to describe herself. Too busy studying to have time for a relationship. Mutual friends had tried to pair them off during their Year 12 journey, but neither was interested, keener on getting top results rather than the angst of the dating perils.

Maisie amusingly reflected that she and Nic had the girls all organised. Each pair was to prepare at least one meal during their stay. A kitty had been set up. Such stark contrast with the boys' ad hoc arrangements of beers, nuggets, fish fingers, frozen dinners and Macca's. They'd all been invited over for a barbie. She couldn't recall if they'd ever got to eat anything. All she remembered was the camaraderie, the laughing, the teasing, the jokes, the horsing around, the freedom of no more school. It was infectious.

A little further in her walk Maisie smelt and almost tasted the tang of the sea, heard the waves crashing on the sand, remembered those languid heady days at the beach. She also recalled her pasty complexion, the result of hours studying at her desk, and the sensation of pain as she dealt with the

sunrays beating down on her unprotected skin. She remembered too the boys dropping down beside them tossing out their towels with childish enthusiasm and bursting forth into the sea with their surf boards tucked under youthful arms. Timmy V had gamely plonked down beside her determined to start a conversation. She'd tried to appear calm but couldn't help feeling a few bubbles of excitement as he flicked little water drops on her back.

Back at the rental, the bathroom was in great demand with eight girls all trying to get showered and dressed at the same time. What a nightmare! Maisie couldn't quite believe her courage on insisting they have a system. They had use of the bathroom in alphabetical order.

The night was almost a blur... first dinner and drinks at the local pub, more drinks at the bar, then on to a couple of nightclubs after that. Lots of singing, giggling and dancing in the street; hanging on to each other the girls didn't know how they managed to find their way home.

The hilarity continued next day when the boys decided to make a midmorning call. Screaming 'don't come in' from Jules and Andy in bed on the lounge sofa. Then a male voice yelling 'I want to speak to Maiz'. Maisie recalled the bed hair, the mascara-streaked face, the puffy cheeks and blood-shot eyes.... no way was she answering the door. 'Come back in an hour,' she'd responded.

Things seemed to go from bad to worse she recalled, as Timmy V ordered them breakfast at a local takeaway and discovered he'd lost his wallet and credit card; too embarrassed to ask Maisie for money he'd phoned a mate for a loan. She in fact was so hung over that all she could sip was a glass of orange juice. Reliving the moment Maisie laughed out

loud. Timmy had sat there in the gaudy café and munched on a hamburger. And they'd talked. These were happy memories.

Maisie reflected on the young naïve girl she'd been at schoolies when she'd first experienced a sexual attraction to an adolescent teen. A boy she had fond memories of so long ago.

So much life had happened during those intervening years.... not always easy.

Lost in her reverie, she was surprised that she was already just doors from the small boutique hotel where they were staying. Chuckling to herself, she decided this time she could manage more than a glass of orange juice.

GRANDPA'S FOOT

By Alistair Pirie

Why do I feel sad Foot mused sitting in the sunshine near the pond, Grandpa snoozing comfortably nearby.

What's wrong? Everything seems perfect. Then it dawned. He was missing Other Foot, his lifelong companion. Wherever could it be? Other Foot's shoe and sock were sitting where it should have been but no sign of Foot. I know I will retrace my step.

Hopping up he hopped to the pond where he had been last. There he engaged Swan in conversation. Have you seen Other Foot? No Swan snapped back. I don't have time for questions. Fancy losing Other Foot it added. If we Swans lost a foot we would realize straight away and snap it back on. You sound as though you have been laying around without realizing you were missing a foot.

That's alright for some, Foot snapped back, we don't have ugly webbed feet you can't miss. Foot continued on his way. Skirting the pond he hopped up the slope. Reaching a clump of trees, spreading shade he decided to have a rest. Foots are not the smartest but he had enough sense to make sure he was resting in the shade well concealed. He had heard of foots resting in full sun snapped up by hungry kookaburras.

Rested, Foot hopped up and continued along the path which ran downhill.

Presently in his hopping he bumped into something solid blocking the path. He inched carefully around the object which had sides branching upwards, with a soft rubber middle. Hopping past, it had a cushion on top. Gazing upwards Foot was surprised hearing sobs.

Whatever is the matter?, Foot asked. Boo hoo came the heart-rending reply. I was so enjoying my visit to these beautiful gardens. Now I am stuck here. My attendant ran away,

something about not being paid to work past three, whatever can I do? I can't go anywhere without someone pushing. Foot's heart melted. I am only a little foot but I will push you, there is nothing to fear. Thank you, the boy replied between sobs. Alan's the name, pleased to meet you. Foot set about pushing Alan. First he lined his toes up behind the wheelchair commencing to push. Pushing, panting, and flexing his toe for extra leverage but he couldn't make it move.

Foot decided to try Archimedes leverage he had learnt about in school.

If I brace myself against the ring pushing hard I should be able to get it to turn. Arranging himself behind the ring toe firmly planted on the ground commencing to push. He pushed and pushed, finally the ring started to turn. Slowly at first, then faster, lent impetus by the slope. Yeow help, Foot screamed, the chair was not only moving but also spinning on its spot. Before it could be stopped it had turned completely around. Shocked Foot wondered what to do next realizing the task might be beyond him.

His gloom was interrupted by a warm female voice. Can I help, it enquired? You need a good pushing companion. Grabbing the handle, holding firmly, she spun the chair around, it was now pointing back down the path.

Great work on the turn, Foot exclaimed. Let's go, she ordered, to the pond. Family groups picnicking, children running about playing. Excited children running alongside, calling please Miss can we have a push too? We will be careful Miss. Oh well you can, be careful with Alan, remember he can't swim, stay clear of the lake. Yes Miss, no worries Miss, was the confident reply as she handed control to the children. The excited children pushed off entering into animated conversations with Alan.

The children failed to see how close to the edge they were getting. Too late, help yeowe splash! Alan's wheelchair, together with a smattering of children, fell into the lake disappearing beneath a circle of ripples.

Help, everybody called. Whatever can we do? Standing in a confused huddle peering, where everybody had disappeared. They were startled by loud honking and, what's wrong can we help? Foot was surprised to find grumpy Mr Swan and family waddling towards them as fast as their large web feet would allow. Summing up the scene instantly, the whole flock plunged into the lake disappearing beneath more ripples.

The stunned onlookers watched, further roused by a frantic yapping followed by a white flash. A stumpy legged terrier, one tooth protruding from its panting mouth, raced past. Leaping into space it went sailing out over the water intent on joining the rescuers. Splashing down, a huge spray of brown water erupting. The spectators, including leaping Patch, expected him to sink bravely helping in the rescue. Instead, much to everybody's surprise, his body refused to sink bobbing right up again like a cork. You could tell by his demeanour that he was severely embarrassed.

Distracted attention was snapped back to the drama by the swans breaking the surface each holding a spluttering child firmly in its beak. Depositing their burdens they dived again looking for Alan.

Meantime, Foot thinking quickly hopped off to ask a workman if he had some rope Foot could borrow. Yes, the workman agreed. Hopping back with his rope standing by ready to help as big swan broke the surface honking loudly. Found them but they are too heavy to lift, any ideas? Yes, Foot replied, take this rope, tie it around them so we can

pull them up. Another problem, the rope's too short. Just a moment. He tied a loop in one end throwing the untied end to the swan lassoing Patch's one protruding tooth with the looped end. On a tugged signal from the swans, Patch swam over to the bank close enough for Foot to loop the rope around his big toe. Everybody pulling it didn't take long for a bedraggled Alan and wheelchair to emerge from the muddy depths.

Celebrations all round, Alan was saved.

Other Foot was later found taking swimming lessons.

THE FAERIE

By Phillip Schemnitz

As soon as she came through the door, I could tell by the way she walked and the way she dressed what she would want from me. I was grateful that what she wanted would not require me to sully the machine I had just cleaned, but what she desired was more complicated than any other elixir I had dispensed that day and because it was getting close to the end of my shift, a sigh escaped my lips.

Through lips brushed with cherry, she uttered the words I expected, as if in a dream.

Hi (her voice was as whispery as her appearance and as high as she would be if she stood on her tippy-toes.)

I'd like a large, half-strength, soy chai latte. But please don't make it too hot, she pleaded, bringing her pale hands, with their long fingers, together in the manner of a person praying.

The words uttered, her hands still held in prayer, she gazed at me, waiting for a response.

That will be six dollars and fifty cents, please.

I felt sorry to have put a price on such a thing, for it brought her back to earth too suddenly and producing her credit card, she waved it like a wand over the screen on the little eftpos machine, which pinged.

And where will you be sitting? I asked.

She surveyed the café in the small country town, almost empty by now.

Over there, she pointed with an index finger, marking the air as if with a piece of magic chalk.

She had chosen the little round table in the window, known as *the marble*, despite it being white granite, not marble. I had held my tongue over this, knowing that to call it *the granite table*, might lend it an association with graves, tombs and cemeteries. I knew that patrons came for their coffees to escape thoughts about such things.

Like a faerie, she moved lightly over to the table and took up her position facing me. There she would wait expectantly, not looking at her phone like most people, but gazing into space. I thought of Woodstock, of the smell of jasmine and what was that fragrance that would have filled the air as Janis or Jimmy played? It came to me: *Patchouli*, with its pronounced sweetness and notes of musk.

From the row of six jugs hanging from hooks on the wall, I took the one marked *SOY*, a strange word, it occurred to me - a mixture of sorrow and joy.

I spooned the sweet, sticky mixture of leaves and spices into the jug and from the kettle that I had boiled, I added enough water to cover the dark mound. I let it steep for a while, then poured in the soy milk and stirred it with a long-handled spoon and let it sit again.

Next, I used the wand on the coffee machine to heat the milk. There was a gurgling sound as it formed a vortex and gradually began to caramelise and I touched the side of the jug with the side of my hand to test the temperature. It must not be too hot for faerie lips (whereas some of the regulars requested coffee *as hot as magma*.)

The smell of star anise, cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon wafted out of the jug and when it was ready, I poured it through a small strainer into a large grey vessel the size and shape of those aluminum ones in which milk-shakes were served in milk-bars across the country.

I sprinkled magic chai powder on top, placed it on a saucer with a silver spoon on the side and like an offering, I carried it across to the faerie, who clasped her hands together again, this time in thanks.

By the time I had returned to my place behind the counter, she was bringing it to her lips and closing her eyes as she took the first sip, like a bee sipping nectar from a flower.

And in my mind, Jimmy Hendrix and Janis Joplin took the audience to a higher place and I stood there in a purple haze, thinking of things long past that I would like to have seen and experienced, but could only imagine.

TEN GREEN BOTTLES

By Susanne Sweetland

"Ten Green Bottles hanging on the wall!" The gum tree park echoed to the sound of young voices raised in this happy song. I could see the children easily from where I was, although a swift flowing river parted us.

I was on a hike with my friend Sandra when we first heard those happy voices. They were children from the town nearby, in which I lived, about four miles away from where we were then standing.

They were evidently enjoying a picnic when we saw them. They were perched on a fallen tree trunk and beside them were tins and baskets — which we supposed held food.

There were four children; two boys about ten years of age, and two girls about one or two years younger. They looked so happy and carefree that I rather wished we could join their picnic, but the bridge that joined the other side of the bush was two miles away too far for us to fit in crossing it to them, as time for our scheduled walk was running out we could not waste any time, so we waved cheerily and continued on our way.

As we tramped on through the thick undergrowth on the bank of the river, I looked over to the other side, and there above the trees I thought I saw a mist, but Sandra told me she was certain it was smoke.

Thinking it was just from a little burn-off, we thought no more of it until thirty minutes later I saw flames above the trees and something told me the fire was out of control.

My first thoughts were for those young children we had seen. I conveyed my thoughts to Sandra and we unloaded our packs and tried to hurry back to where we had seen the children.

The fire became more evident as we hurried, and now we could see the flames amongst the trees and not only above them. The fire was moving quickly and was fanned by a strong southerly breeze which had sprung-up.

We reached the spot opposite the children, but I could see nothing except the enormous flames and thick blue smoke. It was then that Sandra saw them appear — they were moving near the bank and as they saw us they began calling for help and waving their arms in uncontrollable terror.

I have never seen such desperate, pleading children. They wanted us to help them — but what could we do? The bridge was two miles away and there was a swift flowing river between us which we couldn't have crossed even if we could swim.

We called back to them to get into the water and cling to the banks, but the little girls couldn't swim and were too frightened by the thought of the deep, dark water; and the boys would not budge because of their devotion to the girls.

The fire by now was within a few yards of the group — there was little else to do but go down on our knees and pray for their safety. When we rose again they were gone and the fire was at the edge of the river.

It was a good twenty-four hours later before their young, charred bodies were found huddled together. They were in a semi-circle, and as we looked, a frightening picture painted itself in our minds, of the children huddled together to protect themselves from a most horrible death — by fire!

EIGHT BALLOONS OVER ALMA PARK

By Adam Thrussell

With the weather Gods fighting above in the dark grey sky over St Kilda junction. A wet crow in an eucalyptus tree, saw an Irish Woman by the name of Eugenie swept by a torrent of water going faster than the St Kilda football centre line.

Therefore the St Kilda Junction was a lake of muddy water.

The magpies in Alma Park, St Kilda were watching the rain pouring from the dark grey clouds overhead.

Adam 's helper Gary, under the National Disability Insurance Scheme, NDIS. He stated with a loud voice witnessed by the spiders in the bathroom.

'A big shame, we can not go shopping today, because of the biblical volumes of rain can not get to the shops in Commercial Road, Prahran.

A cockroach watched Children in Inkerman street lounge room watching Gene Wilder in the movie, Charlie Wonka and the chocolate factory.

Their Mum tripped over the side table, copies of Bay City Rollers vinyl records with the tartan skirt, distracted by the sight of Gene Wilder, she is madly in love with Gene Wilder.

Therefore two dark overhead days later, the Australian Air force helicopters Boeing Ch-47 Chinook, were providing supplies like John West cans of tuna, apples from Hardcourt, State of Victoria, confectionary from Cadbury dairy milk chocolate™, Allens jelly beans™, Party Mix™. Adam has a weakness for these, his Mum Patricia mentions eats too many of these.

A Parliament of Magpies observed overweight Children could not walk home, were a mass of body fat from Alma Park to the nearby street, Inkerman street.

Their Dad picked them up in his discoloured Rover Discovery™, playing the Hunters and Collectors song January rain from the album Human Frailty on the Cd player, with the line limes and bitters going down the Esplanade.

Their Dad rang Adam on his Nokia mobile phone observed by a Murder of crows in the backyard eating the discarded take away food from McDonald's ™, that Scottish Take away food restaurant, with the golden arches in the Esplanade, St Kilda.

The Boys wearing Paul Mc Cartney t-shirts 2024 tour of Australia.

A Parliament of Magpies were laughing at watching the Boys walking up the pedestrian bridge over Dandenong Road, Adam was leading the group, taking two steps a time. He was thinking slower than the St Kilda centre line.

Consequently, the Boys were puffing away.

Therefore, one of the Boys collapsed, at the base of the stairs with the strong wind blowing from Alma Park.

The Boy was not breathing, the heart had stopped.

A Parliament of Magpies watched as Adam dialled 000 on his Samsung mobile phone™. 'Have the ambulance please to Alma Park East, near the pedestrian bridge, Windsor, a suburb of Melbourne, State of Victoria.'

Adam placed his dry mouth on his mouth, performing mouth to mouth.

Two Paramedics with big pectoral muscles, looked in better shape than Victorian Football League, VFL player Mark Jackson, remember the jumper number 25, a quiz about the number later on.

A question, what was VFL Player Mark Jackson, jumper number?

The Boy slowly gained consciousness.

Adam gave a big cry of relief witnessed by a Parliament of Magpies. Eight hot air balloons, with their yellow, orange fabric shining in the autumn sunshine flying overhead.

Non Fiction

PARENTING & POSTE RESTANTE (OR TRAVEL SURVIVAL BEFORE PHONES GOT SMART)

By Jon Shields

PART 1 Parenting

My parents knew next to nothing about parenting. How could they. Neither had really experienced it for themselves.

In 1919 when less than a year old my mother was left in the care of an austere grandmother ("what can't be cured must be endured") living in the equally austere Orkney Islands. Her father, a demobbed naval doctor, had left with his new bride to take up a public health position in Shanghai.

She was reunited with her parents at the age of five after a passage out on the P&O accompanied only by her 19-year-old aunt. In Shanghai she was raised by an amah (a local Chinese nanny) followed by primary school, ballet classes and meals taken with the domestic staff: to be presented briefly to her parents when bathed and dressed ready for bed.

For my father it was a similar, if less exotic, routine. Raised with his younger sister by a devoted Scottish nanny, chauffeured to school, and like my mother, presented to parents when homework was done and he was ready for bed. Both my father and my mother, however, excelled academically and duly 'escaped' their comfortable 'middle-class' homes to university aged 18 and 16 respectively. There they met and married without ever returning to live in their parental homes.

Once married and absorbed in their careers, their acknowledged lack of any experience of warm family environments with games laughs and cuddles in no way diminished their determination to raise a very large family of their own.

All five of us children enjoyed happy and boisterous childhoods with life lived on the street with the numerous other baby boomer children of our neighbours. At home, our parents were kind and engaged with our interests and schoolwork despite their busy working lives. However, like our parents, we were also cared for in our early years by a succession of nannies, housekeepers and au pairs. Reading was a serious and encouraged activity as was lively discussion, but in almost every respect we were treated by our parents as little adults, games yes, but cuddles or demonstrative displays of affection were rare.

My brother described our upbringing as one of 'benign neglect' although one suspects that a good few 'middle class' English childhoods might have been similar. And so it was that once we were 14 years old, an age unthinkable to parents today (who have been persuaded seemingly by all media that the world is a sinister and dangerous place especially for children), both my brother and I were allowed, even encouraged, to set off alone or with friends (and with forty pounds in our pockets) to explore the world without any adult supervision. To stay in youth hostels, to try French cuisine in 'Routiers' (French truckies cafes) to hitch hike and to buy cheap student rail fares and hopefully experience the kindness of strangers.

PART 2 Poste Restante

And so, for the next several years throughout my teens, either with friends or alone, I explored France and much of central and Balkan Europe enjoying many memorable adventures. I developed an insatiable appetite for the natural beauty of mountainous landscapes, glorious coasts, and fascinating islands, and a sense of awe at wondrous Baroque cities, their museums and provincial towns with their narrow laneways and intimate squares with dappled sunlight shining through leafy plane trees.

I also developed of a love of simply sitting and watching, of testing my shaky language skills, but most of all of luxuriating in the offered warmth and kindness of strangers.

All of these travels took place long before the era of mobile phones and even credit cards at a time when any international phone calls had to be operator connected. To keep my family informed on my travels a postcard or two would be written each week which, with luck, might reach home before I returned.

The postcards would never tell of any of the accidents, close shaves or more hazardous misadventures that inevitably occurred on these travels. These would be saved to be related at the dinner table on return. Thus, my only need for communication with home was for real emergencies ie: the need for more funds.

This brings me to a nostalgic hymn of praise for **two** of the now much diminished services offered back in those pre-smart phone days by International postal services across the world. **The reverse charges phone call** and **'Poste Restante'**.

It was only twenty or so years ago that the main post offices in any sizeable town or city in almost any country in the world were grand, often palatial, buildings matched in grandeur only by town halls, major government buildings or the head offices of major banks. These post offices would often have a dominant clock tower and an ornate interior hall with numerous business counters along each side and in each of these grand halls, at least one of the counters would be labelled 'Telephone & Telegrams' and another would be labelled 'Poste Restante'.

Nowadays, very few of these wonderful buildings remain as post offices, they have either been converted into restaurants or taken over by international fashion chains having lost many of the ornate features and the character that made them such treasures.

But I digress. A 'reverse charges' call had to be placed home to secure financial assistance. I well recall the operator asking whoever answered the phone whether they would be willing to pay for a call from, say, Dubrovnik...a weary sigh would follow with an affirmative response...and so it would be that a week or so later at either the same or another central post office I would join the queue of mostly young and hopeful travellers at the Poste Restante counter and present my passport.....to emerge minutes later clutching a crisp new five pound note.

Benign maybe, but not neglectful.

WELCOME TO THE ABATTOIRS

By Greg Seibre

I had been pestering my Father for months to help me get a job at the Angliss & Co. abattoirs where he'd worked in administration for twenty plus years. My doggedness had finally worn him down.

He must have sensed my apprehension on the first morning walking through this house of carnage as I was beginning to realise what I had got myself in for, but I am certain he also knew that this was going to be a lesson in life for me. He was so right.

As we walked through the bowels of the many different rooms my eyes were popping out of my head.

I saw huge steer and sheep carcasses being pushed along rails on dangerous looking hooks and more men with tattoos than I had ever seen in my life.

My father walked me up another set of stairs and opened the door to the Offal Room. This was the closest thing I could ever imagine to a scene from hell.

I gasped in horror because it was a huge factory space with concrete floors awash with blood and multiple chutes coming out of various parts of the walls. Steam came off the floor and various plastic trays were full of sheep body parts and large carriages full of trays were being pushed around the rooms. There were varieties of different shaped entrails rolling down these chutes which were washed by steaming water and at the end of the journey they plopped onto steel grates which had small shower heads above them which were there to wash any excess blood off the organ.

Around the whole room there were elevated platforms where dozens of men stood dressed in white overalls, white gumboots and white hair nets, armed with scabbards full of various knives and sharpening steels.

Their job was to slice any diseased section off the organ and place it into plastic trays, lift them up when full and place them onto movable carriages which held 20 of these crates. When the carriage was full, they were pushed into the freezer rooms awaiting shipment for export.

There was an incredible cacophony of noise of clattering steel, of men yelling in foreign languages and the most intense odour of blood and gore and flesh.

We walked into the office of the foreman Frank Malcomson. "G'day Bas, is this your young fella?" as I had been taught to do, I put my hand out and smiled, "Hello Mr. Malcomson I'm Greg Sebire."

"Hey Greg, young fella are you listening?" Frank had been trying to get my attention, but I was in some sort of trance as I took in my surroundings, my senses seemed to be working overtime as I had never seen anything of the like in my tender 14 years.

I tried to focus on what Frank was telling me as I changed into my white uniform which made me look identical to the fifty or so blokes who had already been at work since 7:00 AM.

Frank decided "Well young fella, I'll start you on the hearts. Come over here and I'll introduce you to Stan Cadge" We climbed up 6 steps and there on the platform was an ancient looking bloke with four days growth of white stubble, one eye partly closed and a permanent scowl on his face.

Frank yelled "Hey Stan this is young Greg, Basil's son. He's going to be working here for the next few weeks during the school holidays. I want you to show him how to pack the sheeps' hearts".



I put my hand out to introduce myself to Stan but he continued his job washing the hearts, briefly looked at me and scowled "Ya little f%\$#in' c*&t".

Stan's job consisted of picking up the hearts, squeezing them to pop out any blood clots stuck in the ventricles, rinsing them under the hot waterspouts, putting them in the white tray, walking down the 6 steps with the tray, placing it in the movable cage then returning to his workstation and repeating the task all day long.

After observing Stan perform this function I stood at my platform and watched the hearts tumble down the chute and land on my tray. I sheepishly put my forefinger and thumb around the first one but was unable to grasp it and it slipped from my fingers.

I had managed to pick up ten hearts in about half an hour before Frank came over to me and said, "Well young fella, I think we need to show you how to do this job properly."

Frank grasped both my hands and thrust them into the steaming mound of hearts, he clasped my fingers around each of them and squeezed the hearts and out popped

a clot of blood which had congealed whilst I had been contemplating whether I could pick them up. We then rinsed them under the showers and put two in the tray. Frank did this a couple more times, burying me up to the elbows in the steaming pile of hearts. By the time I had done 10 hearts I realised it wasn't as bad as I had initially thought.

I hadn't spoken to any of the other workers for the whole day but about 3:30 I felt a tap on the shoulder and turned around only to see Stan wielding what I was later to discover was a pair of sheeps' lungs, one of the few parts of the beast unsuitable for human consumption.

They were two large triangular shaped organs with the consistency of rubber sponge but permeated by blood vessels and were joined at the top by the windpipe which resembled a piece of garden hose.

Stan swung the garden hose, and he screeched with laughter as the lungs disintegrated across my face.

It was the only time I had seen his face show anything other than a scowl as he yelled, "Welcome to the abattoirs!"

A ST KILDA TALE

By Irena Blonder

This is a story of a changing neighbourhood.

My little street is lined with modest Edwardian houses, all nine of them. The four on the west side have frontages with enough space between the picket fence and the house for a small garden, or even a car. On the east side, they have enough space only for a patch of greenery. These houses, however, are rewarded with long rear gardens reaching to where once there had been a bluestone lane servicing the sanitary needs of the households. The one posh house in the street is on the east side, and it also has an unassuming Edwardian front, but it has been reimagined at the back with an elegant double storey construction which reflects the Buddhist leanings of the then owners. A stone carving marks the transition from the long corridor, lined with designer wallpaper, and with rooms opening to one side, to the new part, where a statue of the Buddha resides in the lightwell. There is still a manicured, deep garden.

One day the house was sold. The new owners fitted the style of the house. They moved in, parking their Audi in the street. Immediately to their left lived Brian, a long-term resident. Once a footballer, then a manager of a pub in Richmond before they all became gastropubs, he was now a grizzled old man. I saw him often enough when he was fiddling with his precious veteran burgundy Holden, his ancient German Shepherd keeping guard. You could think the three of them were of equivalent age, when counted in human years, car years and dog years. We nodded, but we never spoke. Neither of us seemed interested in conversing. I never even learned the name of the dog.

We met the new neighbours - Liz and Clemente - at a welcome drink in the house owned by another couple of long-stayers, Rosita and John. Rosita had been living

in the street for nearly as long as I, and John had joined her - when? Rosita and I have had a solid relationship of friendship and trust, sustained adequately for many years by nothing more than a chat every so often, a casual drink or a dinner twice a year, and taking care of the mail if required. Liz and Clemente seemed considerably more glamorous than Rosita and me, not to mention our respective partners. Outgoing, they generated a new level of social interaction. Roughly the same age, in our different ways we complemented one another despite our differences. Liz offered vivacity, and Clemente - the charm of 'la bella figura'. It had an effect on me - I developed more interest in what was going on in the street. Soon an easy friendship flourished. Our mutual engagement grew with the arrival of Covid, and lockdowns which brought us close, with masks on and observing distancing rules. We formed a community with its own patterns.

This story goes back to the early days. Soon after they had settled in, their Audi was stolen. Clemente knocked on our door, asking whether we had noticed any unusual activity. We had not. You could say this was a case of a ritual greeting to new residents in this part of town, still a mix of the old - sometimes troubled - population, and the new gentry. I felt vaguely apologetic on behalf of the neighbourhood.

The car was found, without much damage.

One evening, my partner and I arrived home at dusk, and we immediately noticed a young man in a hoodie, a cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth. He was closely examining Brian's Holden. With the memory of the theft of the Audi still fresh, I started feeling anxious, both about the car and about Liz and Clemente's property, since the Holden was parked in front of their entrance.

They did not seem to be at home - the house was in darkness.

How should we react? We tried the traditional approach:

'Are you right, mate?'

'Yeah, I like the car, I wouldn't mind buying it.'

'Hmmm. I don't think it's for sale.'

The hoodie was undeterred, but we had no excuse to linger. We went inside and I peered from the front window every few minutes, hoping to be discreet. He was still there, still circling the Holden. It was now dark, but I could just see the glowing tip of yet another cigarette.

I turned my attention to dinner but moved the edge of the blind in the front room one last time, hoping not to see the hoodie again. But now I am alarmed! I see the glow of a cigarette on the porch of the posh house. We do not even have the phone numbers of the neighbours yet, but I feel very protective and responsible. It is a quick decision now - we call the police who arrive promptly.

In another few minutes we get a knock on the door - it is a puzzled Clemente, wanting to thank us for our vigilance, but curious as to what had triggered it. Despite appearances, they were home. He tells us that the cops had a good look around and did not find an intruder at the property. Now we are relieved but puzzled too. What had just happened there? The hoodie had dissolved into thin air. Was he planning to steal the car, or break into the house? Or was he just taking the evening air on their porch while finishing his smoke? Was he there at all? Of course, he had enough time to wander off between my call and the arrival of the police, having satisfied his innocent curiosity.

Clemente turns to go home. His parting words fill me with a feeling of sheer foolishness: he adds that they have an overnight visitor, reassuring us that she did not see anybody either while enjoying her evening cigarette on their porch.

I AM OTHERS

By Trevor Donohue

I am others as I would be myself. This may sound unreasonable but it is true. I am not only me but I share the roles of others. I do not know where I am going. That is the whole point of the exercise. We do not live in a precise world. It is always changing and we, ourselves, bring out these changes.

There is always an escape mechanism. Drugs? Excuse me I am laughing. They change us. We do not change. Alcohol, a temporary stop gap. Then a repetitious escape up a blind corridor. Religion? Whatever turns you on. I may genuflect, go down on my knees and transmit my energy onto a different plane. I may study; spending my life time searching for life after death.

Move over dinosaurs and insects and the beautiful birds in the sky. Our pets, our dogs and cats and others who have brought so much into our lives. We are all going to heaven when we die. 'We are all going to heaven.' What a great title for a song. Heaven will be a little cramped.

Then, this is the crunch line; we can live today.

LIVE... what a glorious concept, missed by so many.

Appreciate what we have. You want to throw all of this away? Give it to me. Let me enjoy what you are throwing away. I will glory at your sunsets. I will bask in the moon. I will share the raptures of looking down at your newborn child. Oh please do not waste these beautiful things. I will not be greedy. I will just take a little here and there. It will not be missed. I will store all of these precious memories and when I die, as I must, until my last breath I will savour what now; you long for. Those lost wonderful moments.

You may deprive me of these times. Keep them for yourselves. I do not mind. I can move on. There are so many who do not know what they are throwing away. I can even catch discarded moon beams. The sigh of the forlorn lover, the change, as she turns around and smiles. Capture the aura of the love of the child and mother who pass me by. Not knowing that I am sharing their moment.

To share this magic is good.

We can all do this. It does not take practice to live a wonderful life. To take, we must also give. Be gentle with others as you would be yourself.

There will be storm clouds. But there will also be cleansing rain. The sun may not always shine, but it is always there.

The moon is its reflection.

FINDING ELWOOD

By Robyn Ellis

It was a cultural backwater when I moved there.

In fact I didn't even know it existed until one of our cafe regulars confided 'saw this cute flat in Elwood, only \$65 a week, could be good for you!' Till then I'd been looking in Fitzroy and Collingwood. Living alongside edgy arty types appealed - and there were lots of workers' cottages and double storied terraces on rental rotation. But my limit was \$70 a week and I'd found nothing.

I had the instant knowing when I checked out the flat. Being on Broadway, I thought the address sounded grand too. It boasted a wide tree lined street with lots of Art Deco and post war flats and houses. What became mine, was a charming ground floor flat with bay window, chandelier and two sets of lead light double doors into the lounge, tiny kitchen, two bedrooms, a sleepout, pleasant garden, and a garage at the back.

I signed up, which was timely as I wasn't yet 'showing'. Back in the early 80s attitudes were loosening, along with moral standards - but I assumed, to an estate agent, business is business. Though I'd be ok to pay the rent, the sole parent's pension would be my bread and butter money. I knew I'd have to relinquish my part in the Blemishes partnership - which did happen when I got too fat to fit behind the counter. But I agreed to continue supplying cakes - people were going crazy for moist carrot, banana, or poppyseed cake.

After H was born, my old HR Holden Station Wagon ferried at least two dozen cakes weekly to Blemishes in Richmond and Rhumbarella's in Fitzroy. In addition, I baked twenty cakes in the wood fired oven at Potts Bakery in Gertrude Street. Life as a single mum was working out. I'd make the cake batters when H was sleeping, so when she

was awake, I'd just have to bake them, two at a time. Then I got funky with an off-beat cake decorating business. I called it Megastars, designed a fancy business card and got orders galore.

Around that time, Elwood was starting to get funky too. Friends and acquaintances were moving in, either buying a house or flat, while others rented. In my block of four, there were now three other sole parents with kids! Some locals thought our block was a women's refuge! Artists and musicians were now living around the corner and near the canal. Along with big sister St Kilda, Elwood became a who's who of Melbourne's R'n'B, rock and rockabilly musicians. H's Dad was one of them. He was an excellent rhythm guitarist and singer. He'd been in several bands and became quite recognisable having done *Countdown* TV appearances. In fact, the Saturday night H was born, her Dad's band had to blow out three gigs, including the graveyard shift at Inflation. The whole band ended up at the hospital. When H finally arrived, they were downstairs in the waiting room, handing around cigars and swilling a bottle of champers.

It was so convenient having H's Dad nearby. He would drop by to visit H, sometimes at odd hours, like on his way home from the graveyard shift, still coming down from a party drug- extending Easter greetings at 6am. One time he joined us at the beach still dressed in dark glasses and last night's black. He became an invaluable support when I needed to make a delivery or do stuff. H had regular bouts of bronchitis, so some mornings I'd ring him, and eventually I'd get a 4 am too-many-cigarettes-Jack-Daniel's agreeable grunt and then I'd drop H at his. H loved her Dad's music. When she was 3 years, he introduced her to his cool new band. The four attractive gals singing

up front, invited her up on stage and she danced for the audience. That band became well known and toured nationally.

A friend from further down Broadway rented our garage for his musical bits and pieces. When H was to start at Elwood Primary School, his kids kindly took her along on Day 1. He became one of Australia's leading film score composers. But there were quite a few kids at the school whose parents were becoming known- actors, comedians, artists - even an ABC newsreader!

But Elwood was becoming sought after, proximity to the city and beach. Property and rental prices skyrocketed. Sole parents and sessional musicians struggled to pay the rent. I found local part time work in the emerging community sector - firstly the Playgroup Association, then at Scottsdale a supported residence, auspiced by St Kilda Baptist. Though having the sleep out, meant we could take in a boarder. One was a drummer, another a French teacher. This led to H, at 8 years, asking to take Alliance Francaise classes in Robe St.

H was such a bright spark, at 11 years, she won a scholarship to a nearby private school. Her Dad and I were so proud! But she continued to blow us away, winning state French awards and ultimately becoming school dux!

Years raced by, eventually I made a career in the not-for-profit sector, decorated hundreds of zany cakes, married late, lived overseas and was back living somewhere else. H completed a double Arts Law degree and later Masters at Melbourne Uni, worked in a local law firm then headed to the UK and established herself in an international law firm, until she made her way back as her Dad became more ill.

H wanted to set herself up in a flat and initially considered Brunswick or Carlton with edgy, socially active types. She found something almost straight away and asked me to come and check it out. I gasped as I walked through the established tree lined courtyard and entered the charming ground floor Art Deco flat- original features with bay window, two sets of lead light double doors leading into the lounge room, two bedrooms - and within a stone's throw of Elwood.

NURSES ARE BORN AND NOT MADE (FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE)

By Janet Gardner

I dreamt of becoming a nurse from the time I believed in Santa Claus. A nurse's uniform was always top of my Christmas wish list and Santa Claus always delivered! I ate Christmas dinner dressed in my blue nursing dress, protected by a white apron with a printed fob watch on the right corner of its bib. I never needed a paper hat or a plastic toy from Christmas crackers because I had my white nurse's cap with a bright red cross on the front and a red stethoscope that hooked around my neck. I was on duty from dawn until dusk, applying bandages and plasters to my dolls and family members. My nurse's bag also contained a plastic syringe that I used to give my dolls their vaccinations, rewarding their bravery with a lolly, which I ate!

There was never any doubt what I was going to be when I grew up. The only problem was that you had to be eighteen to begin your training and after Dad's death, when I was fifteen, Mum couldn't afford for me to stay at school. However, at aged sixteen I read an advertisement in the local paper for a bridging Cadet Nurse course. It involved attending a Technical College two days a week to study maths and related sciences, plus three days of paid, clinical practice at the local public hospital. I didn't sleep for a week when I received a letter granting me an interview with the Matron.

I dressed in my Sunday best for the interview, arriving fifteen minutes early. I sat outside Matron's office in a state of panic. Suddenly, from inside the office, came a booming voice, with a lyrical Irish accent, "Janet Marshall, enter!" I opened the door to find sitting behind a huge, polished wooden desk a petite lady dressed in a navy, long sleeved dress with white starched cuffs, collar and apron that was secured with a gold fob watch and black belt fastened with a huge, ornate, silver buckle. On top of her

head was perched a white, frilly cap that was secured by a starched bow under her chin. Her booming voice was disproportionate to her small stature. Matron fired off a volley of questions relating to why I was pursuing a career in nursing and what personal qualities did I think I needed for the role. After struggling to fluently articulate my answers, I was then marched out of her office to view a typical ward. Matron shouted, "Janet Marshall, if you want to be a nurse you are going to have to learn to walk faster!" Suddenly my jellied legs broke into a sprint. I was ecstatic when Matron sent me off to be measured for my uniform – a canary yellow dress, black stockings and shoes.

My first clinical placement was in the outpatients' clinics. This is where I lost my innocence and grew up fast. Wednesday mornings was surgical out-patients clinic where patients were predominantly men with bowel problems. I had nightmares about this clinic. My duties included showing patients to their cubicles, asking them to get undressed from the waist down and to put on a gown. I then helped position them on the examination table so their heads touched their knees and their buttocks hung over the edge. Not a pretty sight! I had never seen a naked male buttock or penis before, causing my face to turn beetroot with embarrassment. I also had to prepare the instruments needed for the examination that were just as grotesque as some of the buttocks on display. They included a proctoscope that looked like an eight-inch metal penis with a handle, which was used to examine the rectum, and a sigmoidoscope, a twelve-inch, rigid metal tube that had a balloon to inflate the large intestine and a light to help the doctor see inside the bowel. The final torture weapon was a ten ml glass syringe with a large bore, three-inch needle filled with phenol oil, which was used to

inject the haemorrhoids that hung like a bunch of grapes from their hairy buttocks. My role was to assist the doctor whilst letting the patients squeeze my hand until I was in as much pain as they were.

On completion of the Cadet Nurse course, I was given a proper nurse's uniform that came in an old, battered, brown, laundry case with my name on it. It contained a purple striped dress, starched white cuffs, collar, belt, apron and cap, plus a navy Burberry raincoat and matching hat that I proudly wore over my uniform when I travelled home.

I moved into the Nurses' Home when I entered the Preliminary Training School (PTS) that involved eight weeks of theory before being let loose on the wards. My room in the Nurses' Home was located next to the Hospital Mortuary and I would often be woken by the mortuary bell that rang each time the night porters delivered a deceased patient.

When I migrated to Australia in 1968, I had only completed two years of my training but thanks to Gough Whitlam I was able to undertake Australia's first Diploma of Nursing Course, after which my nursing career took off. I eventually completed a B. App. Sci., (Ed.) that enabled me to teach nursing. In 1982, I was awarded a Kellogg Fellowship to undertake a Masters of Health Care Practice at McMaster University in Canada.

On my return, the Commonwealth Government appointed me to set up the first multi-disciplinary Geriatric Assessment Team. I was also responsible for development and implementation of Australia's first domiciliary, incontinence nursing course and service. My thirst for knowledge continued into my 60s, when I completed a PhD in Nursing at Monash University. However, regardless of whether I was teaching, managing or

engaged in research, I strongly believed that one needed to maintain clinical competence.

I consider myself fortunate to have had the privilege of spending my life working as a nurse, a job that I believe I was born for.

RUNS BY THE RIVER

By John Gascoigne

October 1996

I was into my second decade of cricket umpiring and the pall of rain that usually soaked into the season's second day of Melbourne club matches was absent. Raining out of the first scheduled day was a given.

And I was at Como Park, my favourite ground, rarely less than lush, being settled in an amphitheatre that was once a swamp. Umpiring at square leg, you can look up at the grass embankment, beyond it to historic Como House, while watching dogs at play, necks stretched skyward as they chase fantails from acacia to oak.

And there's the manic cairn terrier, which runs half the length of the pathway from Williams Road to the rounded, flat-topped pavilion, eyes fixed on its owner in the shortening distance; on the man who sees none of the doggie marathon or its arrival, so that his pet looks rather silly, staring up at each of its owner's companions as though wondering, why did I bother?

Thus entranced one day the previous summer, I counted twelve dogs playing on the lawns above us, a virtual cricket team at least as fascinating as the one in flannels.

I always loved umpiring South Yarra -- the Yarras, immortalised in the enchanting book *The Vincibles*, by rusted-on Yarras batsman and cricket writer non-pareil Gideon Haigh. Loved them because, bless them, their batsmen when I officiated weren't terrifically good at, actually, batting.

So their run chases fell short, or the targets they set weren't quite sufficient, which meant a little longer for the post-match ale and an exit with time for dinner and a night out.

The park's pocket handkerchief dimensions require neighbouring ovals to overlap, each one reduced by a quarter 'bite' taken from its original shape. So the Yarras' history is sprinkled with cases of minor, collateral strikes against players unaware of an approaching ball, until struck.

It's just another Como quirk, whereby shouts of 'Look out!' can be precursor to a painful blow when matches are concurrent.

Again, this year, South Yarra's score (81) was nowhere near enough for Highett in the South A1 competition of the Victorian Turf Cricket Association.

From my first visit to Como when the clarion-voiced, vowels-rounded actor Rod Mullinar showed me the way to the Art Deco pavilion's cornucopia of cholesterol, fresh fruit and everything between, there's been no question about which club kitchen 'rules'.

Now the sonorous Mullinar tones that in winters past introduced Saturday night football on the Ten Network, had given way to the quieter captaincy of Pete Macaulay.

After tea, Haigh was keeping his club's scorebook on the balcony when he saw the ball being tossed to a bean-pole bowler in the opposition. Haigh doesn't recall the identity of the bowler who was about to etch his nickname, 'Dizzy', into Yarras' history.

This 'Dizzy' had been pegged to Jason Gillespie, the Test match champion, also with long hair and lanky frame whose moniker, in turn, was tied to US bandleader John Birks 'Dizzy' Gillespie.

The Dizzy now on display is one of the characters in Haigh's book. On this hot day, the bowler remembered, painfully, that he'd left his tube of goanna oil — for a sore back — in his trouser pocket.

The revelation arrived as Dizzy reached the top of his run-up, wheeled around and began his charge towards the batsman and the Yarra River.

If his run-up was noticeably quicker than usual, it was because the oil had leaked from its tube, seeped through the fabric of his pants and on to his cojones. In wracking pain, the bowler sprinted over the bowling and popping creases, past the stumps and down the wicket.

Two startled batsmen stared at his backside as he crossed the boundary, then Alexandra Avenue, leapt down an embankment and plunged into the Yarra.

'He reappeared about fifteen minutes later,' Haigh recalled, 'soaked to the skin but greatly relieved.'

In fact, there's a whole cast in *The Vincibles*, its title a parody of Don Bradman's unbeaten 1948 team in England. Courtesy of the book, I later become familiar with some of the cast's nicknames.

And around the time I spoke to him, Haigh had been beaver away in the Yarras' thirds, compiling his highest club score (92).

On my most recent Saturday at Como, because of rain delays, visitors Highett passed their target then chose to play on for a further hour in pursuit of infinitesimal bonus points, which release gridlock if teams' points are equal at season's end.

So we played on until 6.33pm. Shortly before stumps, as cars' headlights chased each other between the oval and the river, it occurred to me these motorists must be thinking: good God, they've started night-time cricket in Melbourne.

It was only happening because the lights atop four towers were 'beaming' a sulphuric haze. With an over to go, I asked the batsman at the bowler's end if he wouldn't mind stepping aside as he was casting an interfering shadow over the area of his partner's gaze.

Another rarity: this day I acceded to four LBW shouts. The fact I heard not a murmur of complaint after any of the rulings made me wonder whether Cricket Australia's *Spirit of Cricket* charter was penetrating the noble game's soul and 'fair play' lexicon.

ATACAMA

By Jane Grano

As I scrutinized the face of Miss Chile, I could see she was no doubt deserving of the title. The structure of her face was beautiful, with finely chiselled cheekbones. My imagination added dark liquid eyes to those empty sockets, fleshed out the lips, and restored the lustre of the now dull black hair—still hers, despite the passage of several hundred years. I took her out of the Gustavo Le Paige Museum and saw her with her tribe, running free against the desert of her home. What had been her hopes, her feelings so many centuries ago? Was it not an affront to her dignity to have her mummified corpse placed so immodestly on display for the appraisal of some alien from the twentieth century? I felt a sense of vertigo—to be looking at a face so recognizably human from so long ago.

Time and space, the twin coordinates of reality, are oddly subverted in the Atacama, the driest desert in the world. This is a landscape stripped to its bones. Without the flesh of vegetation to soften its severity, the purity of form is laid bare. Light moulds the land, alters the perception of distance in its shifting angles. In La Valle de la Muerte, The Valley of Death, nothing lives, not even the smallest microbe. And where there is no life, what measures the passage of time? The surrounding peaks, the conical forms of the volcanoes, seemed frozen in a timeless clarity.

In front of me, a towering dune cast its face deep in shadow, while to the right, peaks of pink rock caught the fierce sun. In the shade it had become chill, yet still hot under the direct glare of the sun. The valley slipped away interminably, its depth of field distorted in a way that unsettled perception, lending the landscape a dreamlike quality.

We reached Valle de la Luna shortly before sunset, scaling the ridge of a soaring dune for the best vantage point. As the sun

slipped below the horizon, it staged a final performance, illuminating outcrops of rock in brilliant orange and pink, while the spaces between lay in deep shadow or faded gently from rose to dove grey. The western horizon burned red before its glow was extinguished. To the east, night had already fallen, yet the desert sands still reflected a residual light, the land beneath transformed into undulating waves of mother-of-pearl.

Driving through the desert is never monotonous. The unexpected constantly intrudes upon the vast stillness. In a deep crack in the plateau, the branches of poplars protruded just above the plain—bare now, save for a few tattered yellow leaves, a fragile gesture toward seasonal change in a landscape otherwise indifferent to time. Further down, we entered an inverted world of fruit trees and moss, a hidden oasis nourished by a meagre stream—the lifeblood of the village of Toconao. Even the air here was different, moistened with cool green scents.

At 300,000 hectares, Salar de Atacama is the third largest salt flat in the world. Its cracked surface glistens with the residue of crystals. The lowering angle of the sun played tricks against the slopes of the surrounding mountains, foreshortening some distances while extending others.

In the centre of the salt flat, a lake lay in perfect stillness, Flamingos waded in its shallows, their long legs slicing through the illusion of the sky submerged below them. High white clouds slowly turned pink, and then, with the sudden intensity only desert light can summon, the sky and lake ignited as pink turned to red. As the fire faded, the lake's surface dulled to a metallic sheen, and the flamingos took flight, gliding over the ashen landscape towards the distant smudge of mountains.

At three in the morning, bundled against the cold, we set out for the Tatio geysers. The drive was a slow ascent through an unfinished world of pale, half-realized forms. The outside temperature in the village hovered around zero, but at our destination, it would drop to minus fifteen degrees. At an altitude of 4,500 metres, the geysers at Tatio are among the highest in the world. To see them at their best, one must arrive before dawn, before the sun's warmth disperses the steam.

At 6:00 a.m., the first puffs of steam rose from the fumaroles. The desert cold stung our faces, and we huddled near the geysers, drawn by their warmth but wary of sudden scalding eruptions. As the sun rose above the mountains, the geysers exhaled in unison—a sharp hiss of steam rising into the thin air, shrouding the valley in mist. Faces and hair became damp, the cold laced with a subtle moisture, until at last, the sun's warmth seeped through, dispersing the vapour. Another bright morning on the altiplano had begun.

I was sad to leave the Atacama when, just after dawn, I felt again how the immensity of its silence stretched time itself. The barren fluted cone of Volcán Licancábur had been my constant companion, an ever present form in the landscape. And then, just outside Calama, the bus turned a curve, and it was gone.

OPENING THE GLADSTONE BAG

By Deb Hall

I used to sometimes look in the dark and dusty corners of op-shops, on the off-chance of seeing a Gladstone bag like the one my dad had when I was a child.

Perhaps I thought that finding a Gladstone bag would provide me with a portal, potentially, to whatever my subconscious craved, or maybe I just wanted to touch that sturdy leather one more time and feel a connection with my long dead father.

Dad used to take his lunch to work every day in his Gladstone bag. I was always eager to greet him when he came home. I remember his broad-knuckled hands unfastening the metal clasps of the bag to extract his newspaper. Sometimes he brought home a small present for me, a pad of scrap paper from the printing company he worked at.

Blank paper to draw on or write on was a precious gift. Writing soon became as necessary as breathing for me. It was my way of deciphering the world. It was how I explained me to myself too.

The Gladstone bag was a talisman. Maybe the leather itself was a fetish. I loved how tactile it was. As a child, I always enjoyed getting new leather school shoes too, even though the breaking-in process was painful.

The Gladstone bag was sturdy. It was made of dark brown leather with a subtle, textured pattern, and it had brass-coloured fittings. Anyone could see that a lot of craftsmanship had gone into it. Things were made to last in those days.

Once, in an op-shop, I caught a glimpse of an item constructed of dark brown leather, up on a high shelf. I had to stand on tiptoe to reach it because I am short. I am so short that I joke about having to stand on a chair to reach puberty.

I never told anyone about the much blacker joke played on me, behind the short person's self-deprecating humour. By the age of twelve, I dreaded the changes my body was making. I suspected there was something different about me, knew that being a girl felt bad enough, felt wrong, and knew I didn't want to become a woman. I realized it was inevitable of course.

It was the late 1960's. Times were changing and things were improving for women; nevertheless, the idea of equality was a pipe dream. I envied the way men could move about freely in the world, without restrictions, without a care, and that they could take so many things for granted. But I didn't want to be a man either!

I wanted to renounce adulthood altogether, and disavow myself of the inherent responsibilities. I didn't like my choices. I didn't know where I belonged. I felt utterly alone in my strangeness. I didn't believe that I belonged anywhere.

Fortunately, I found out about the existence of lesbians, in theory, early on, albeit as a freak show in a psychology textbook, and realized I did fit in somewhere, even if it was with a maligned minority of a tribe. Finding other lesbians, in practice, was a whole other story.

I reconciled the process of growing up; it happened naturally while I miserably lagged behind, and then caught up with myself in a rush of libido. I cannot deny that I have had a lot of pleasure from this body, although I have ignored and avoided society's expectations as much as possible.

I have lived inside my head and voyaged within the realms of books. I have found safe harbours within the confines of their covers. I've tacked between their words, always

taking squint-eyed distrustful sightings to navigate this sea of hidden reefs called life.

When I dragged the object out of its hiding place, it turned out to be a leather satchel like the one I had in primary school.

I recalled how proud I was of that satchel. It had been purchased for me from a local bootmaker and shoe repairer. I can still recall the bouquet of the bootmaker's shop and workroom too; all of the leather goods and pieces of leather had a special redolence. In those days of hand-me-downs, it was grand to have something new. I treasured that satchel.

Dad's old leather jacket from his motorbike riding youth had hung in the garage, gathering dust and cobwebs, for as long as I could remember when I was young, until my older brother somehow acquired it. I don't know if he asked for it, or if dad offered it to him. But I know I was jealous.

It wasn't really the jacket but all that it symbolized, all of those male privileges and all of that male swagger. I remember my dad showing my brother how to use saddle-soap or leather-cream, to rub into the ancient, cracked leather, to restore it and make it supple once more.

I became supple too. I learnt to bend around people, not get too close to them. I could hide in plain sight, because most people only see what they want to see or expect to see. I survived. I developed a finely-tuned radar and unerring instincts.

I always recognize the dangerous ones, the ones to steer clear of. I avoid those who wouldn't understand me, and seek out other outlaws.

A DAY AFTER THE WAR - THE PSYCHOLOGICAL GEOGRAPHY OF CONFLICT

By Ali Keshtkar

A day has passed since the ceasefire between Iran and Israel took effect, and I find myself attempting to emerge from the inferno of the past twelve days, striving to prepare for the return to my previous routine.

During these twelve days, my daily life and thoughts were utterly disrupted. As the bombings commenced, it felt as though I were suddenly in the midst of the bombardments in Tehran, with bombs exploding right beside my home. Even the missiles striking the heart of Tel Aviv's residential areas pained my heart.

For a long time, I had reduced my political activities concerning Iranian politics. After three decades of continuous and persistent struggle yielding no tangible results, I began to feel like the most ineffective element in Iranian politics, with influence comparable to my power over the rain or snow, or the Earth's rotation. Therefore, I focused my political engagement where it could be effective and where I could witness the outcomes of my humanistic political practices: within Australia's democratic society.

However, the war thrust me back into the heart of Iranian politics, into the core of society, and into the very areas being bombarded day and night. It propelled me into the homes of each family member, relative, friend, acquaintance, fellow citizen, and "compatriot."

I had never used the term "compatriot" before, as I did not believe in it. Since being forced to leave my country and being expelled from my homeland, the concept of "homeland" lost its meaning for me. I came to believe that "homeland" was a hollow and meaningless concept, and if a living space were to be called a homeland, then I am a citizen of the world; the world is my habitat.

But all these beliefs and formulations were upended during this twelve-day war.

Suddenly, "homeland" took on meaning for me, not as a sacred concept, not as a privilege, not to justify national superiority. "Homeland" became tangible through the people I knew by face, name, and reputation; people with whom I shared life experiences; whose feelings, emotions, thoughts, and ideas I understood.

"Homeland" became my family members, my friends, and all the people I had interacted with throughout my life, with whom I had shared life experiences. People whose names I know, who they are, their memories, where they went to school, how they laugh, why they cry, how they suffer, how they fall in love, and how they expressed their love and affection to me.

"Homeland" became all the people, whose feelings and emotions I comprehend, whose thoughts I grasp. "Homeland" became a place with civilization, humanity, and civility, the fabric of a familiar society being torn apart before my eyes under the bombers and drones.

"Compatriot" became "human" a human like myself, a human like you, a human with all human characteristics, with all dreams and aspirations for a better life; a human with fears, screams of terror, hopelessness; a desperate human, a human on the edge of the abyss, a human who suddenly had the gates of hell opened upon them.

The bombings also bombarded some concepts in my mind.

Concepts were constantly being destroyed and reconstructed in my mind.

Time itself was bombarded under the bombings. The past and future were destroyed.

What existed was only the present moment. What's happening now? Who is alive? Whose home has not yet been destroyed?

Life only made sense in this very moment: "right now."

This caused me to constantly be in the present moment, but not in Melbourne in the heart of Tehran, Shiraz, Mashhad, Mahshahr, and even Tel Aviv and Haifa, wherever bombs and missiles were destroying homes.

Internet outages severed my connections with family and friends in Iran.

For a moment, it felt as if I were living in a cemetery's silence, and everything was dead. Yet internet outages did not disconnect my mind from Iran for a second.

My routine daily life in Melbourne merged with the eventful life in Tehran.

My work, classes, friends, hobbies, studies, and research projects were all affected by war-torn Tehran under bombardment.

The bombings also disrupted the traditional political alignments between the opposition and the regime.

The wartime atmosphere among Iranians created a deep and widespread rift: supporters of the attack and war, and opponents.

This itself became a more destructive psychological war and bombardment.

You had to prove you hadn't become a regime supporter, or you had to prove you supported saving and liberating people from attacks.

But both sides called each other traitors, regime supporters, and sellouts. The atmosphere was not one of wise political debate.

It was an atmosphere of war, hatred, and enmity, a war in spoken and written language. The smell of hatred and animosity was everywhere.

It seemed people were no longer human; they no longer had human characteristics that allowed them to think differently or feel differently. People had become angels and demons.

They had become dishonourable, regime mercenaries, traitors, foreign agents, and spies.

The war also destroyed "friendships" and "companionships."

And now, a day after the ceasefire, the public opinion among Iranians is still trembling from the explosion of bombs. A thick cloud of dust still covers everything.

Here, in Iranian public opinion, the ceasefire has not yet been established. Nothing has returned to normal.

And the war and bombardment continue with the same intensity...

Ultimately, this reflection illuminates the complex geography of political belonging in a globalized world. The assumption that physical distance necessarily translates into emotional detachment, or that cosmopolitan ideals can fully supersede particular attachments, proves inadequate when tested by crisis.

The reconstruction of "homeland" as a network of relationships rather than a territorial entity suggests new possibilities for understanding political community. Rather than viewing diaspora engagement as necessarily backward-looking or parochial, it might be understood as prefiguring new forms of transnational political solidarity based on shared experience rather than shared geography.

The challenge moving forward is to develop political frameworks capable of accommodating these complex loyalties while maintaining commitment to universal principles of human dignity and democratic participation.

CORELLA'S CHAOS AND OLIVE TREES IN ALBERT PARK

By Aziza Khamlichi

As dawn broke over Albert Park, the sun gently rose over the olive trees, standing tall with branches heavy with ripe, multicolored olives, ready for picking by the community, enthusiasts, and olive lovers alike.

Suddenly, the air filled with a deafening screech as a flock of corellas descended from nowhere. They perched haphazardly on the olive trees, causing the branches to sway under their weight.

A wise old olive tree, proud and stoic, sent a serious warning with a reverberant voice to all the olive trees in the area.

"Good morning, trees! We all look marvellous, so lush and bearing a good harvest this season! The invasion of corellas may strip us bare, destroy our fruit, and leave us vulnerable. But take courage! It's all part of the cycle. Don't worry! The wind will scatter your leaves and seeds. The earth will absorb them, and soon you'll thrive anew."

The younger trees murmured nervously, unsure whether they could withstand the onslaught. But the old tree wasn't backing down.

"Stay resilient," she ordered.

"And good morning to you, olive trees!" squawked the bold leader corella. "You look so inviting. These olives you've got are a treat!"

The words sparked a heated debate among the trees and the corellas.

"Life was peaceful until you corellas arrived. Your boisterous cries shattered the morning calm as you descended in droves, perching on our branches and shaking us senseless," the ancient tree scolded.

The lead corella flapped his wings and retorted,

"Oh, come now. We're just helping with the pruning. Think of us as your friendly feathered gardeners!"

"Gardening? Is that what you call it?" groaned a nearby tree, watching as leaves rained down to the ground. "You leave us bare and tangled!"

The flock laughed mischievously. "It's all part of the cycle, dear trees!"

The next day brought another feast. The self-proclaimed leader of the flock plucked an olive and tossed it playfully. The other corellas followed suit, their relentless clipping sending leaves and olives cascading to the ground.

As the days wore on, the corellas continued their raucous cropping. The trees had had enough.

"Stop this madness!" shouted the ancient olive tree, her old branches trembling with indignation. "You treat us as if we're here solely for your amusement!"

The standoff escalated. The old olive tree wasn't ready to concede. She summoned the wind to her aid, her branches swaying fiercely. A sudden gust caught the arrogant leader off guard, sending him tumbling off his perch. He landed on the ground with a startled squawk, glaring up at the tree.

"You've crossed the line now. If we don't prune, who will? Besides, we leave you stronger in the end, don't forget that!"

The flock grew quiet for a moment, pondering the argument. Some of the younger birds began to question their actions. "Maybe we have been a bit rough," they admitted, nibbling on olives guiltily.

The corellas and the trees fell silent, considering the sapling's words. The leader shuffled his claws awkwardly.

"Well... I suppose we could be more mindful," he muttered.

The old tree nodded in agreement, her branches relaxing.

"Perhaps we've forgotten what unites us. But if we agree to respect each other, we can coexist."

The trees sighed collectively, knowing this lively invasion was part of nature's strategy. Though the pruning left them frazzled, they secretly appreciated the company and the role they played in nurturing the park's ecosystem.

And so, a truce was born. The corellas agreed to prune with care, and the trees promised not to call on the wind in anger. Though far from perfect harmony, the park began to feel a little more balanced. After all, even the most unlikely friends could embrace their differences.

EL GRECKO

By Marina Kirby

At the tender age of twelve, my grandfather ordered my father to find a job. Being one of nineteen children, the family desperately needed financial support. They lived in a two-room mud hut in Famagusta, Cyprus. My father already had work experience, having left school in third grade. He used to run errands for the British soldiers stationed there in exchange for food.

Before leaving for Australia, he and his mates would swim near a supply ship, which was often targeted at the beginning of the Second World War. One day, while swimming, a German aircraft appeared and began machine-gunning the young swimmers. Dad and his mates had to dive deep into the ocean, holding their breath for as long as possible to avoid being shot. This wasn't a problem—they were all skilled abalone divers. Luckily, no one was injured.

My grandfather died a week after he had instructed Dad to go to Australia to live and send money home. In those days, travel to Australia was by ship. His ship, *The Largs Bay*, was a cargo vessel and had to stop at many ports along the way. Of course, my father—being athletic and handsome—won the hearts of many women by climbing the mast and diving into the deep waters. He later discovered the water was full of sharks!

They sailed to Australia via Egypt, stopping at Port Said. My father was devastated to leave his beloved Cyprus, his family, and friends, and he was overcome with emotion and tears as he walked onto the plank to board the small boat that would take him to the large ship.

On arrival in Egypt, they were taken to a seedy hotel and, in my father's exact words, "We stayed in a place where the ladies of the night were practicing one of the world's oldest professions!". They were called back

to the ship, reluctantly. He was with two young Cypriots when a gang of four men approached them with knives. My father had a scarf his mother had given him, and he wrapped it around his fist in order to punch them. One came at him with a knife that had a six-inch blade. Dad extended his fist and, with a mighty kick, grounded the first man—then punched another in the face. After seeing that, the four attackers ran away.

The Largs Bay then sailed to Aden, the next port of call. About two hours after exiting the Suez Canal, the ship caught fire! The crew worked for three hours trying to extinguish the fire, but to no avail—the passengers had to be evacuated. They were approximately one hundred kilometres from the port. People were loaded into lifeboats, with women, children, and the elderly evacuated first. Families were split up, confusion was high, and panic spread. The fire worsened because the cargo ship carried many Volkswagens, which helped the flames spread dangerously.

No one was allowed back to their cabins, and since Dad had been showing off diving, he only had his swimwear on. They were in the lifeboats for hours, heading toward Mitsiwa on the coast of Eritrea, a British colony at the time. Eventually, they were taken to an RAF base at nine o'clock that night.

It took six weeks for the ship to be repaired. When finally allowed back on board to retrieve their belongings, they discovered everything had been stolen!

My father said Asmara was one of the hottest places on Earth. At midday, you couldn't walk down the street because the asphalt would melt the soles of your shoes—they would stick like glue. With no money or possessions, they had to walk everywhere.

After six long weeks, the burnt-out cars were finally unloaded and the ship sailed to Aden for repairs. During this time, my father and his mates were walking the streets when they heard a man speaking with a Cypriot accent. His surname was Nicola, and it turned out he was my father's second cousin. He welcomed them into his home.

The next morning, a limousine arrived and took them to a clothing shop, where the cousin bought new clothes for all three of them. He ran an import-export business and wanted my father to stay in Aden.

Over the six weeks, my father joined them on many trips. He saw Port Said, Asmara, Somalia, and Dubai. For a country boy, it was an amazing experience for him and his two mates. Being a talented soccer player, my father spent three weeks teaching the locals how to play. They called him *El Greco*—"The Greek One." Everyone wanted him to stay, but the heat was unbearable, reaching 40 to 50 degrees Celsius every day.

Finally, the ship was repaired. They sailed to Sri Lanka and then to Colombo, where the poverty shocked my father. He couldn't believe how poor the people were. He bought *bababas* (a fruit similar to bananas) for them over the three days, using money given to him by his cousin.

From Colombo to Fremantle, my father kept entertaining people by doing handstands and playing games.

From Fremantle, they spent three days in Adelaide, then sailed to Melbourne, and finally took a train to Sydney.

What an amazing, eventful, and educational journey over all those months. After leaving his homeland, who would have ever thought such an adventure would unfold?

Footnote:

My father went on to become a first-class special signalman, manning the boxes at Spencer and Flinders Street stations in the days before computers. It was manual labour—he had to pull massive levers to shunt the trains onto the right tracks. He also became a union member and mixed with the likes of Gough Whitlam, Bob Hawke, and Simon Crean. Later, he represented Australia at a railway conference in Cyprus.

All in all, I am very proud of his achievements—not bad for a boy who only went to grade three.

MY BEAUTIFUL DUCKS

By Inge Kulmanis

Erna and Elvis, they live on the island in the Elsternwick Lake (Elsternwick Park). When I visit, I sit on my walker and call them by their name!

Elvis and Erna, where are you?

Slowly, slowly they emerge from the island, their little heads wiggle! They cruise past me, then turn around and because they are much lower than me, they put their heads to one side, then gaze at me with one eye looking into my eyes. It's a beautiful feeling to be gazed into my eyes by a duck. Love and kindness are everything!

Sometimes a gentleman called Andrew visits the Park. I know him for years, he used the Community Bus when he lived in Pine Street. Now he lives in Brighton. He tells me that he looks for me, but many times we miss each other.

Erna and Elvis are back and cruise around in front of me, then vanish on the island. Elvis is a white duck and Erna is a brown speckled duck. The grey heron comes past. I used to see him along the Elster Creek and he would come and walk alongside of me.

Now I just sit on my walker and enjoy sunshine and all the other birdlife swim past and the cormorants fly past and many other birds. The coots swim around!

What a beautiful day.

THE DAY I MET PARKINSON'S

By Warwick Lloyd

One would think a heading like that was in reference to meeting a friend. Yet, as you'll learn, Parkinson's is anything but.

What I was in for was a hell of a ride with a bastard condition which steals the marrow from your bones.

In 2016 I headed to the office, yes we had offices back then as opposed to mainly work from home today, it was like any other day full of meetings, punctuated with lunch el-desko and a medical appointment with a neurologist at the end of the day.

I was asked to have an MRI scan ahead of the appointment so we could talk specifics. Leading up to this most mornings I awoke with my whole body shaking and it wasn't voluntary. So, I was keen to get some advice beyond Dr Google.

The neurologist placed the scans on a lightbox and stated I'd had a series of ministrokes which were related to a much wider condition known as Parkinson's.

Well, my whole world came crashing down at that point and my mind turned to thinking the worst. Would this shorten my lifespan, would the tremors get worse, would a cure be created in my time on earth. Thoughts were racing ahead. The neurologist added, as movement disorder was not his specialty, and I was to be referred to a Parkinson's expert.

On the tram back to the office I must have looked very pale as the other passengers gave me a wide berth.

I managed to get an appointment with one of Australia's leading neurologists yet had to wait it out for three months as he was so busy. In the interim I joined Parkinson's Victoria as well as some relevant online groups to learn as much as I could on the road ahead.

Initially I was prescribed various medications to address the symptoms which included tremors, interrupted sleep and restless legs syndrome. Socialising became an issue as my confidence took a hit.

Fast forward nine years and post a successful operation called Deep Brain Stimulation or DBS for short where electronic wires touch trigger points on your brain, Parkinson's and I are coexisting, there are good and bad days.

On a good day I feel unimpeded with few symptoms, on a bad day my leg muscles ache, my voice becomes thinner whilst talking, basically under pressure to take on the challenges of the day.

There is a saying "there by the grace of God go I" as compared to many others with health issues, I'm not complaining.

And a well-known musician James Reyne sings "every day above ground is a good day" – I reckon he's right.

THE CENTRELINK CARD

By Robyn McKenzie

So many of them looked for it but none of them found it. She was the only one who knew it was there. It was in her handbag where she had always put it, wasn't it?

They looked everywhere for it. Ten places in total. In the red gym bag and the carry-on wheelie bag which had been hurriedly packed while she was in hospital, in her pants and jacket pockets, in her purse, in her documents folder, between the couch cushions, under the couch, on the kitchen table, in her car. But nobody could find it. She couldn't tell them because she had lost the power of speech. She still had movement in her left arm. She waved her arm in the direction of her handbag. She became frustrated with all of them and then she just stopped worrying about it. It wasn't that important if they couldn't get the pensioner discount rate for each medical appointment. She would be dead soon anyway.

Nine insignificant numbers in three sets of three digits with a space in between, a capital letter at the end, her name and an expiry date. It was so important to the medical centre receptionist, to the GP, to the My Aged Care intake worker, the palliative care team, all the paper pushers.

The in-home private palliative care nurses, like her, didn't care. They were only concerned about what she wanted, this moment, this hour, this day. They knew how to read her. They knew what was important. And they understood that what mattered today might be entirely different to what mattered yesterday, an hour ago or even tomorrow.

On the eighth day after being discharged from the hospital, it became important to her to find it. It was just out of sheer bloody mindedness. She was always so careful with her belongings, her cards, all her earthly

possessions. So they looked for it again. They rifled through her handbag. They turned it upside down. They tipped everything out. Sunglasses, reading glasses, car key, tissues, lipstick, one dollar coin for the Aldi trolley, a garden club name badge, a pen, mobile phone, scraps of paper, a shopping list. She kept gesturing towards the handbag. They still couldn't find it. What was that line she read in one of those self-help books once? The definition of madness is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.

She didn't know she only had another seven days to go. But she knew the clock was ticking. What was the point? How could that puny credit card sized piece of laminated paper be so elusive? She was so good at crosswords and solving problems. This was no Agatha Christie murder mystery. She always figured them out. Not only did she guess the murderer: she frequently identified the victims early on.

In the hospital for six days. Then they sent her home. What would happen next? Multiple neurologists and neurosurgeons estimated weeks to months at best. Five neuro specialists in total. Radiotherapy and chemotherapy would only potentially slow down the fast-growing tumour. A four-centimetre glioblastoma.

Three days to go. Hallucinations, delirium, agitation, no pain, thank God no pain. Loss of function. Loss of bodily functions. Sedation. Does she know if the mystery will ever be solved? They no longer care about looking for it anymore.

The two daughters sit with her. They moisturise her hands. They play her favourite music. They talk about all the times she raced them in the car to catch the school train. They were always so slow in the mornings.

She had to get them to school and she had to get to work. They wonder if she can hear them. They laugh about the time they couldn't find the cat only to find him shivering in the fridge feasting on leftover roasted chicken. They used to call themselves the three musketeers. They had so many adventures together over the years. They cry. They kiss her. They hope she knows how much she is loved.

Three weeks later she finds it. The daughter. The one who left it to the others while she snuggled with and spent every moment with her. She finds it in the lining of the inner handbag zip up pocket. Three weeks between diagnosis and death. Three days of sedation. Three weeks later. Three sets of three. Nine insignificant numbers.

SEVENTY MILES FROM THE SEA

By Georgina Tsolidis

My partner is English. We met on one of his regular trips to Australia. He would visit for professional reasons and to catch up with family members who had migrated here. He would return to his home, a narrowboat on a marina in the heart of England. I was due to travel for work and decided to meet him there for my first encounter with the canals and their narrowboats. Despite photographs and his detailed descriptions, nothing prepared me for the experience. The surprises began at Manchester Airport.

Australians are used to arduous trips when visiting Europe. My journey was typical. Firstly, the one-hour trip to the airport, if the traffic is moving swiftly. Then the mandatory two-hour wait to board, followed by the seven-hour flight to Singapore. Changi airport prompts spending sprees imagined as compensation for the numbness created by squeeze seats, and the plastic tasting food. Travellers reeking of perfume sampled, but most often not purchased, enter the cabin for the thirteen-hour stretch to England. After more alcohol than is sensible, fitful sleep and mediocre film viewing we disembark bilious, feet swollen, and tempers frayed. This time I would avoid Heathrow and its incessantly moving security monitors, reminding you that modern-day travel is a risky business. Instead, I would disembark in Manchester, which I imagined would be a friendlier destination.

The shift in time zones deceives you about the actual hours spent travelling since leaving Melbourne. Custom queues imitate your fatigue – the more tired you are, the slower they seem to move. There would be many such queues given I was travelling to three different countries. I stared at the crowds through sleep-deprived eyes and was relieved when it was my turn to approach the desk. The blonde woman behind the glass

window began the ritual quizzing. Why are you in Manchester? Who are you travelling with? How long will you be staying? Then came the seemingly innocuous question that caused all the fuss. What will your address be whilst in England? I had no idea! 'A narrowboat on a canal', I stammered. Where is this canal? 'Hmmm, not sure', I replied. Who owns the boat? 'My partner,' I stated sheepishly. How long have you known him? This was getting worse with each question. 'Several months', I stated with the full awareness that my whirlwind romance was morphing into something completely different in this woman's imagination. A mature woman enticed overseas by a man she barely knew to stay on a canal somewhere in England. I'd never seen myself in this light. My *sojourn* on the canals was a recreational break during a professional trip. I was accustomed to travelling alone and making responsible decisions. Suddenly, I felt very silly. The blonde woman behind the glass window looked at me with both suspicion and pity. Where is this man? 'He's waiting outside,' I replied. 'To take you to a boat,' she retorted. There was a very short moment when my partner crossed my mind's eye running towards me waving an axe. What was I doing? How far are canals from anywhere where I can hail a taxi or catch a bus or train? Are there people nearby and if so, what type of people are they? Questions began to flood into my mind. The final indignation came when the blonde woman behind the glass window, explained in tones normally reserved for young children, that in England, unlike Australia she intoned, you are never more than seventy miles from the sea. In Manchester this distance is reduced to thirty miles, she added. I imagined my axe-torn body bobbing these thirty miles out to sea. I remained unclear whether she was worried for my safety or whether she suspected I was part of an elaborate people

smuggling scheme. In the end my passport was duly stamped, and I was let into the country.

My partner was the only person left in the Manchester airport arrivals hall. He had worried patiently as all the other passengers alighted and drifted passed him. He had checked the flight list and knew I was on the plane and thus could not understand what was taking me so long. Perhaps I was ill. Perhaps I'd changed my mind and was hiding in a toilet waiting for him to leave. Like me, he hadn't foreseen that a narrowboat on a canal doesn't constitute the type of address that satisfies officials. (Since then, I have chosen to use my niece's London address when filling in such paperwork.)

Climbing into the car I was relieved, and images of axes and bobbing bodies dissipated. I was looking forward to my new adventure. The sun was shining through the windscreen, and the views of the English countryside reminded me of what a relatively 'ungreen' country Australia can be. The hills rolled out in front of us and the sunshine sparkled on luxuriant, chocolate-box scenes, snapshots of what awaited us on the canals. We drove through the Derbyshire Peak District towns of Matlock and Buxton. In approximately two hours we reached the marina on the Trent and Mersey Canal, in a village, coincidentally, almost exactly seventy miles from the sea in either direction. I smiled to myself as I remembered the airport and the blonde woman behind the glass window.

Coincidentally or otherwise, every immigration check for the rest of my travels was long and complicated. On arrival back in Melbourne, I was taken out of the queue by an officer who quizzed me. When had I migrated to Australia? When had I become an Australian citizen? How long had I been outside the country and for what reason? His stern

questioning went on and on. He met my discomfort and disbelief with a description of the situation as 'very serious'. At one point, a switch was flicked and my inquisitor smiled and with a flourish stated, 'Welcome home.'

Author Biographies

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Frederika Apokidou

Frederika Apokidou was born on the island of Cyprus and migrated to Australia with her three young children in October 1974. She's been happily living in the City of Port Phillip for the last 42 years, enjoying swimming and walking along the beach, as well as to the beautiful Botanic gardens.



Irena Blonder

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



James Cattell

HIGHLY COMMENDED – FICTION

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



Trevor Donohue

Trevor has been writing short stories and novels over the last 40 years. Four of his books have been made into Talking Books for the Blind. Despite having fourteen books in the State Library, he keeps a low profile.



Mal Dougherty

The author is a grumpy old man and getting older. 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.



Robyn Ellis

Robyn thinks she's a good person. Remembers your birthday. Sends a card. She prizes integrity. Loves a challenge- proved it bringing up H, being PA to Rev Tim Costello and marrying a different Reverend in later life. Currently she passes most days in the vibrant community of Alexandra, Victoria.



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.



Helen Devereux

MAJOR PRIZE – POETRY

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



Alison Dods

MAJOR PRIZE – FICTION

Alison is an avid reader who has sporadically dabbled in writing over many years. She has a great love for words and is a current member of two book clubs.



Vicki Endrody

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



Marilynn Fahey

A long-term resident of the City of Port Phillip (CoPP) and very happy to be here. Marilyn enjoys delving amongst her memories of 83 years, 60 years of which have been lived in CoPP. There have been many, many changes to this area, some she does not appreciate, but overall she appreciates living here.



Janet Gardner

Janet is 76-year-old retired nurse who arrived in Australia from UK in 1968. Her nursing career was severely impacted by a spinal injury result that resulted from a workplace injury. In 2003 Janet was awarded a PhD from Monash University for a thesis on chronic pain, something that she continues to live with every day.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



John Gascoigne

John, author of *Over And Out* (Penguin, 2002), was a Bendigo Advertiser feature writer, penning over 1,000 stories. Forty of these were published in *Nuggets: Golden and Human* (Brolga), capturing the spirit of Victoria's goldfields and community life.



Veselka Gencic

Veselka spent most of her life in Serbia. After graduation, she worked on popularising astronautics and space research. 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.



Jane Grano

Jane has worked as a secondary teacher of English and German and is now retired. During her career she lived in Germany, Spain and Chile. From a writing perspective she has been especially inspired by the landscapes of Chile. Since moving to Elwood in 2023, she has become a keen, if somewhat erratic, croquet player.



Chris Kealy

The 40 plus years living in St Kilda, exposes her daily to the many diverse cultures and backgrounds of people, celebrating a history of accepting difference. So much is on offer in this municipality which makes living here ideal for Chris. She wouldn't live anywhere else!



Aziza Khamlichi

Aziza is a retiree. She derives pleasure from taking part in the community writers and French classes. She leads an informal Arabic class. She enjoys volunteering as a photographer for the U 3 A.



Ali Keshtkar

Ali is a 61 years old Iranian-Australian writer, refugee, and long-time human rights advocate. His work draws on his experience as an exile and former political prisoner, exploring themes of identity, memory, and resistance. Now based in St Kilda, he writes to give voice to the silenced and honour the struggle for justice.



Deb Hall

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



Lee 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.



Megan Jones

Her family has lived in Port Phillip continuously since the 1870s.



Marina Kirby

Marina's lifelong passion for writing shines through her poems, stories, and countless handwritten letters—especially during the pandemic. Her son often jokes that when she passes, Australia Post might go bankrupt from the volume of letters I've sent!



Inge Kulmanis

Inge lives on Ormond Road. She loves to write stories and has been involved in the writing competition since 2005. She is now 90 years old and finds it quite hard now to get around. Port Phillip's social inclusion program gives her the opportunity to still see places and enjoy life.



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 12 months'. He has self-published his memoir, *If the shoe fits*. Since then, he has written two children's picture books, several short stories and two murder mysteries.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Jill Lever

Originally from England, Jill settled in Australia in 1999. She has had nine plays performed and one children's book published, *The Worm Who Knew Karate* (Penguin). Now retired from a business career, Jill writes, acts and directs in community theatre, plays saxophone and sings with Melbourne Soul and Gospel Choir.



Warwick Lloyd

Warwick is a resident within the City of Port Phillip and comes from a creative orientated career. His work for this year is a personal story broaching the subject of Parkinson's. Whilst the content is short this hideous neurological condition does not go away.



Richard McClelland

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



Alistair Pirie

Alistair is a St Kilda resident writer and sculptor although since moving down from Castlemaine he concentrates more on writing. His long-standing background is as a lawyer graduating from Melbourne University. His story *Grandpa's Foot* is set in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens.



Anna Rogalina

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



Maria Sarikizis

Maria is a 77 years old and originally from the Greek Island Kos. Her mum and three siblings arrived in Port Melbourne November, 1954. Travelling on the *Italian Castle Felicie*, it took 30 days of travel. Maria attended Dorcas Street State School in South Melbourne. After school she went on to work in special schools supporting children with down syndrome and loves it!



Robyn McKenzie

Having just commenced her third act, Robyn plans to spend it being a writer. Who says you can't start a writing career in your 60s? Most days you will find Robyn writing in her favourite Elwood café pretending not to listen in on the conversations going on around her.



Barbara Anne Magee

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



Janine Mifsud

Twenty years retired now and enjoying a life of family, friends and hobbies: walking; writing; water aerobics; yoga; reading; sewing; quilting and socialising. Time to reflect on past employment and be glad that life isn't dictated by deadlines but by personal pursuits dedicated to pure enjoyment.



Philip Schemnitz

Phillip was born in Melbourne of Australian-born parents. His four grandparents were each from different places and spoke many different languages. He is a lapsed architect and a writer who has lived with his Italian-born partner and their two sons, on St Kilda for the past 30 years.



Greg Seibre

HIGHLY COMMENDED - NON FICTION

Greg is a semi-retired IT executive who has always had a passion for reading and writing. He has not had anything published previously but his creative writing tutor suggested this competition might be a good vehicle to test his skill in writing about his interesting work experiences.



Jon Shields

MAJOR PRIZE - NON FICTION

Greg is a semi-retired IT executive who has always had a passion for reading and writing. He has not had anything published previously but his creative writing tutor suggested this competition might be a good vehicle to test his skill in writing about his interesting work experiences.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Susanne Sweetland

Susanne grew up near Bairnsdale, retired 5 years ago after the last 25 years in Arts Philanthropy. She spent 2 years as a Governess near Longreach and 3 years on her husband's 'posting' to New Delhi.



Rob Thomas

Rob is transitioning to retirement. He is now exploring and experiencing new ways to stay occupied physically, spiritually and intellectually. Hence this entry into the local writing cauldron.



Adam Thrussell

Adam presented in the year of 2024 *Port Phillip Writes* with the written entry: *The National Scheme 2024*. The judges loved the dry humour. An example reference to Ian Molly Meldrum interview with now King Charles on the ABC TV program *Countdown*. Adam, draws his inspiration from the local area, stay tuned.



Andrew Vella

Andrew, born in 1961, began writing poetry in 1978 after family trauma. Inspired by the Riverina landscape, he later lived in country towns for 25 years following a back injury. Now based in South Melbourne, he continues to enjoy life and write poetry.



Marian Webb

HIGHLY COMMENDED - POETRY

A long-time resident of Port Phillip, Marian Webb received the Claypots Gilgamesh Award 2008 for her book *Moon Haiku* and subsequently published *Dreams* and *Hours and Days*. She has appeared in online and print magazines and has performed at local venues Claypots and Neighbours café.



Georgina Tsolidis

Georgina has worked in education all her life as a secondary school teacher, researcher, policy analyst and academic. She has been connected to Port Phillip since arriving in Australia in the 1960s. She continues to travel to England and has become an adept narrow boat traveller.



Graeme Turner

Graeme is a published writer and poet. He has worked as a journalist on the newspaper *Reveille* and an online publication *Divine* and with numerous other organisations. He currently interviews writers and poets on his Spotify Podcast titled *Words with the Wolf*.



Clemens M. Unger

Clemens is a poet who lives in Mornington and works in Port Melbourne. Originally from Germany, he migrated to Australia in 1996. Clemens draws inspiration from everyday moments, memory, and place. He shares life with his partner and has three adult children. His writing reflects connection and belonging.

MEET THE JUDGES OF PORT PHILLIP WRITES 2025!



From left to right: Dr Jane Sims, Lois Best and Carmel Shute. July 2025.

Now in its 21st year, the Port Phillip Writing Awards continues to be supported by dedicated volunteer judges who spend hours reading, discussing and selecting the most outstanding pieces for recognition. Thank you to our fabulous judges this year.

Carmel Shute

A historian by profession, Carmel has taught history, politics, and feminism at four universities. Her career spans roles as a union organiser at the ABC and media officer for local governments and the trade union movement. She now runs her own PR consultancy, Shute the Messenger, while attempting retirement.

Carmel is a co-founder and national co-convenor of Sisters in Crime Australia, an organisation celebrating women's crime writing. In 2016, she received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Australian Crime Writers' Association. A proud St Kilda local since 1985, Carmel remains deeply involved in community life.

Lois Best

Lois is a lifelong reader and writer with a rich background in English education. She has co-judged numerous writing competitions, including the Future Leaders Writing Prize in Victoria. Her proofreading and editing skills are finely honed from years of teaching writing and assisting with translations—including helping a friend translate Chinese Cultural Relics into English while living in China.

Lois delights in the quirks and complexities of the English language and finds joy in working with words.

Dr Jane Sims

With over 20 years of experience in gerontology, Dr Jane Sims is a respected researcher and educator in healthy ageing, particularly in promoting physical activity among older adults. She has authored numerous publications and served as an editor for the Australasian Journal on Ageing.

Jane is also a passionate community advocate, having served on the Older Persons Consultative Committee and the Seniors Festival Sub-Committee in Port Phillip. A voracious reader of fiction and non-fiction, Jane is currently learning Spanish and Italian—though she admits it may be a while before she tackles a novel in either language!

Stay tuned for the announcement of this year's winners in October. We can't wait to celebrate the creativity and voices of our senior writers!

