

# Turning Leaves



Burnside Writers' Group 2017

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# Turning Leaves

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## Introduction

The members of Burnside Writers' Group have been sharing their creativity for the past four years following the Group's inauguration by Helen Anderson and Iris Rowe.

We have seen changes as members joined and left – a number after achieving their writing goals, including publishing their works. Those who remained have had the opportunity to grow as writers through feedback and the support of the other members.

## Turning Leaves

We move through memoir, travel writing, fiction and poetry as we give expression to our ideas, observations and emotions.

What we seek to do is to bring life onto the pages and give the reader a window through which to reflect on life, laugh out loud, and perhaps reminisce.

We are free to write as we wish. But occasionally we set a challenge for the Group and we work to a writing prompt. Scattered throughout this Anthology are some examples of stories that were written to the prompt: *You find a bottle with a genie in it. What three wishes would you want granted?* As you will read, our writing styles are as diverse as our interests.

This is the Group's second Anthology.

Christine and Edie, Co-ordinators and Editors

If all the earth were paper white  
And all the sea were ink  
'Twere not enough for me to write  
As my poor heart doth think

John Lyley, English Poet and Playwright c.1554-1606



## Iris Rowe

Writing memoir for my children enables me to re-live many treasured memories that if left untold, will be lost. Growing up with five siblings on an out-back coastal property on Kangaroo Island, when the world was struggling to rise again after the devastating effects of the Great World Depression, then during and after World War Two, we learned true values in life while compromising and improvising.

I now live in Wattle Park and enjoy researching family history and sketching illustrations to enhance my short stories.

## **Man and the Moon**

### **Kangaroo Island 1946**

Scotty paused for breath, his fork load of food poised in mid air, his blue eyes flashing. A slightly built man but Scotty was adamant.

‘Man will get to the moon!’

‘No,’ he won’t, it’s impossible,’ Dad quietly interjected.

‘No, of course he won’t,’ we children chorused, backing up Dad. After all, Dad knew everything didn’t he?

‘That’s right. It’s ridiculous, man will never reach the moon,’ Graham threw in quickly.

‘Children! Keep quiet and eat your food.’ Mum was looking in our direction, subduing us into silence. We knew that look!

‘Yes, he will,’ Scotty repeated, his face growing a shade redder as he again began explaining all the reasons why man could and would reach the moon.

‘Man is inventing many clever things, we’ll all live to see the day when man lands on the moon. History tells us that in 1903, Jules Verne wrote articles showing that physical space exploration was possible,’ Scotty paused, watching Dad for reactions.

Dad’s eyebrows shot up but he kept his eyes on his plate as he enquired, ‘Tell me, who is Jules Verne?’

‘Oh, he was French. In 1865 he wrote the novel *From Earth To The Moon*.’ Scotty was on the defensive now as he continued, ‘The Society for Studies of Interplanetary Travel was founded in 1924.’

## Iris Rowe

'By the Russians, I believe.' Dad was now interested. Exchanging knowing looks, we children cupped our hands over our mouths, stifling giggles while avoiding eye contact with Mum.

I was thinking, why does this funny little man believe such silly things?

Mum's disapproval of our giggling hung heavily in the air.

Peter, the shy apprentice carpenter, said nothing as he scraped his plate clean.

Scotty had still more to tell us. 'On May 10th, this year, the Americans had their first space research flight experiment, and then on May 22nd, the first U.S. designed rocket reached the edge of space.'

Scotty was gaining ground now; the American's explorations surely held weight.

'What's that got to do with man getting to the moon?' Betty was being cheeky. Silence while we cast cautious looks at Mum – but Betty always got away with things that would have been better left unsaid.

Every evening this conversation continued. Scotty had all the knowledge, answers and reasons but we were not convinced. It seemed of little value but provided lively entertainment. No one could shake his conviction.

Dad was more interested in the price of wool, fat lambs and how he was going to pay for the house extensions. Mum seemed to be taking Scotty's information with more consideration, but then – Mum was a schoolteacher wasn't she?

## Iris Rowe

To us children there seemed to be some mystery attached to Scotty. We privately talked together about him and wondered why he left his home in Scotland ten years before and came to live in Australia; then settle on Kangaroo Island? A carpenter by trade, he owned the big rambling timber and hardware shop in Kingscote. His wife Lidia was shy and a little different. She avoided contact with the locals and so kept to herself, but Scotty was a happy man and was always whistling or humming to himself while he worked.

Dad employed Scotty and Peter to build the new roof on our extended farmhouse. When the roof was in place, Bob, another workman, arrived to plaster the new rooms. The three workmen slept on folding stretcher beds in the wool-shed and had their meals with us. They went to bed by lantern light, and were up early. We guessed they wouldn't need alarm clocks when the roosters started crowing at daybreak followed by the bellowing of hungry calves kept yarded behind the corrugated iron walls of the shed!

Mum was always up early and when the men arrived at the kitchen for breakfast, the kettle was boiling and a large pot of porridge was simmering on the back of the wood stovetop.

We children had to keep the wood box filled and carry buckets of water inside from the cement tank, feed the hens and help with the milking. We had no electricity; everything was done the hard way, by hand. With three extra men to cook for there was no time to be idle.

The only means of communication was by party telephone line, which connected to the other districts through the Exchange. When stormy weather blew the lines down or

## Iris Rowe

branches fell on wires, we were temporarily isolated from the outside world. We had no wireless. Our nearest neighbour, who was one mile away, had a wireless; the school teacher also had a wireless. The mailman delivered the *Chronicle* and the *Island Courier* once a week so we were able to keep up with limited world news. It's little wonder that the idea of man reaching the moon was unthinkable to us.

Scotty no doubt, thought it was time we were enlightened on world events.

During early December, the house extensions were completed, the workmen left and we began enjoying the comfort of our larger home. Little further thought was given to those nightly discussions about man reaching the moon. Anyway, why would anyone in their right mind want to get to the moon? It seemed like misguided research that had no merit at all. We kids had more important things to think about.

The space research continued, unheeded by us.

We were happy in our own world. We loved watching the stars and the moon by night, awesome in the place where the great Creator placed them. The moon is always in its place and phase for which it was created: to be a light to rule the night while keeping the balance of tides and waters in place. Every tree and plant is guided by, and grows according to, the phases of the moon. The animal and bird kingdoms understand the language of the moon.

After busy days, when the sun went down and darkness covered the face of the earth we would venture outside and cast our eyes towards the heavens. We loved looking at the

## Iris Rowe

moon: it seemed to have protective powers. On a cloudless night, the full moon is romantic, beautiful and magical. As the full moon waned, we beheld the wonder of the myriad of stars.

Man in his hunger for knowledge, power and fame is never satisfied. The space research and explorations continued during the following years and as we read the newspaper reports, we reminded each other of Scotty and his conviction. On 22 July 1951 USSR sent the dogs, Dezik and Tsygan, into space.

I wondered why anyone would do such a cruel thing.

On 4 October 1957, the Soviet's Sputnik 1, was launched and began sending signals from space. Many other missions -- Soviet and American -- followed this event until finally, man reached the moon.

On 29 July 1969, the American Apollo 11 landed on the moon and Neil Armstrong took the "Giant Step For Mankind". Televisions were set up in classrooms and public places and the world watched as this great event happened before our eyes. Armstrong became the first human being to step foot on another world - the moon. He was later followed by Edwin Aldrin. Armstrong and Aldrin walked around for three hours collecting samples from the lifeless, dry and dusty surface of the moon.

The whole world was watching in awe and amazement!

Today, in July 2017 we celebrate the 48th anniversary of Apollo 11's splashdown back to earth.

Yes, man did finally get to the moon and Scotty was still alive to celebrate the occasion. Scotty was right, but in all the

Iris Rowe

excitement we didn't give any thought to the animated conversations around our evening meal table during early summer 1946. Then we all thought it was an exaggerated theory and that Scotty was a funny man with crazy notions!

*To behold the beauty of the moon,  
One must stand upon the earth.*

*Iris Rowe. 2017*

## **Never Talk To Strangers** **Kangaroo Island 1946**

Perched high amongst the dark green foliage of the pine tree my two brothers, younger sister and I, lazily wonder what to do to amuse ourselves. The air is heavy, hot and still, not a breath of wind to cool our sweaty bodies. We have no energy.

Wild bush birds quietly sheltering above us are silent, gasping for air with gaping beaks. Tick-tick beetles and cicadas are the only creatures with enthusiasm, constantly ticking and performing their hot weather serenade.

Lucerne tree seedpods crack, splitting open, scattering shiny black seeds onto the dry dusty earth below. The farm dogs lie panting in the shade, their pink tongues lolling.

From somewhere in the distance a different sound is alerting the dogs; we hear a low 'woof'. They sit up with eyes to the East. We climb higher in the tree trying to see what's happening. A motor car is approaching, slowing down at the top of the hill. It changes down into second gear and a strange black sedan appears around the bend, cautiously negotiating

## Iris Rowe

the steep, rough washed out track as it makes its way down hill.

The dogs are barking, the car is slowing down and turning into our place. Now it's coming along the clay road, changing into low gear and is grinding its way up the steep hill and pulling up in front of the sheds.

Laddie gives a warning 'woof' and settles down while keeping an eye on the stranger.

'Whose car is that?'

'Don't know. Let's go and watch!'

Scrambling down from our perches and crouching low to the ground, we scurry to the pine trees close to the house. Clambering up amongst the branches we watch from our hiding place. A portly man dressed in a dark suit is getting out of the car. Carrying a large black case he walks up the path to the front door.

'No one ever uses our front door,' Graham whispers.

The man knocks on the door and stands quietly waiting.

'Mum's sleeping in the bedroom, she won't hear him.'

'Keep quiet,' I whisper back.

'He's still knocking, Mum's not coming.'

'Who's that man?' Brian whispers hoarsely.

'He's probably a salesman trying to sell table-cloths and things, I bet.'

'Yeah, but Mum's got no money.'

'He's got a red face.' Brian continues.

'Yeah and he's fat!'

The man is looking around while wiping the sweat from his face with a handkerchief, his face growing redder while we

## Iris Rowe

watch and whisper. Again, he knocks on the door. He seems to be there forever.

‘Wish he’d go away,’ Raelene ventures.

‘Shush be quiet, he might hear you,’ I warn.

Laddie’s still watching – his nose resting on his paws.

The man turns around, picks up the case and slowly walks down the path to his car and drives away.

Hot and grimy we scramble out of our hiding place.

‘Glad he’s gone, I’m so thirsty, I need a drink of water.’

### **The Rusty Nail Kangaroo Island Childhood 1940s**

Searing pain stabs my foot, my body jolts in shock. Lifting my right foot, a piece of board from the sheep yard railing hangs heavy from my bare heel. Yanking at the weathered board while yelping with pain, the rail falls, a puff of dry dust balloons around my dirty feet. A dark blob of oozing blood appears around the puncture in my heel. I hadn’t seen the broken railing with the protruding rusty nail that was hidden in the mixture of dust and sheep manure.

Hobbling across the yard and away from the milling mob of sheep, I climb over the fence and head towards the house. Mum is not home; she is in Adelaide.

Grabbing the bottle of iodine from a top shelf, I dash outside to the cement tank, wash the painful wound under the running water, tip the bottle up against the wound and hold it there until it stings. Don’t cry – only “sookie babies” cry!

The more it stings the better, the iodine is getting into the deep wound and fighting the germs. It will be better in a few days.

Iris Rowe

## The Kitchen Window

### Kangaroo Island 1950

The welcome warmth of spring weather had brought a plague of unwelcome blowflies. More than usual had made their way into the farm house kitchen and Valerie found them annoying as she prepared lunch. Bloated blowflies settling on plates and food were the bane of her day. Above the tiresome buzz, a different sound coming from the direction of the window arrested her attention.

Thump-thump! What was it?

Thump – against the window, there it was again, Thump!

Feeling frustrated with the wretched flies buzzing about, she turned towards the window. Her heart leaped and then missed a beat as she stared in horror at the black monster. The belly of a big five footer, Joe Blake, was pressed against the window; its evil head darting from side to side and forked tongue flicking.

Again it struck at the window while bewildered blowflies safely buzzed on the inside of the glass pane.

Valerie took a deep breath and closed the window firmly.

Iris Rowe

**Ode to the School Gramophone**  
**Kangaroo Island 1944**

Ye old gramophone in polished wooden box  
with trumpet majestic in handsome dark blue  
you had pride of place as we gathered around.

Proudly you waited while records we found,

the handle was wound

then needle so carefully placed  
on wobbly and fast moving track.

The magic began as the music played  
while a jolly man's voice so happily sang  
such funny old songs, that we loved to hear  
we danced around, all laughing with glee.

**Farm-yard Awakenings**  
**Kangaroo Island 1952**

Roosters crowing, sparrows chirping  
sunrise lighting eastern skies  
farm girl calling to the herd.

Strawberry, Patches, Maisie, Daisy.

Shiny buckets hang on she-oak bough,  
milkmaid singing, cows are soothed.

Cows are patted, praised and thanked  
with bales of hay  
to munch and crunch.

Iris Rowe

## **Southern Surf**

Dreaming on the soft warm sand  
beneath a cloudless sky

I am transformed  
as though into some other realm.  
I hear sweet sounds  
as strains of music from the depths,  
set free – to play within the rolling surf.

Waters clear as crystal  
rising from the deep,  
playful waves are racing past  
now lifting higher, curling, rolling,  
sweeping near  
crashing foam and spray upon the shore.

Crying gulls are swooping, gliding,  
settling on the moving tide, paddling,  
strutting on the glistening sand,  
reflections keeping pace.

Joyful children, running, laughing,  
chasing  
illusive, lacy foam and waves  
claiming treasured shells from tangled seaweed,  
building castles in the sand.

Young surfers revelling  
can't resist the spell of challenging swell  
triumphant  
catching just one more breaker,  
now gliding into shore.  
The taste of salt upon their lips,  
dishevelled tumbling in the surf,  
wind-swept, sun-burnt,  
beneath the summer sun.

Iris Rowe

## Journey of Trees

A thousand trees and more  
stand tall and grand on windswept hills reaching for the sky  
from gullies deep, growing wild and free  
defying winds and storms.

Unrestricted hosts to cockatoos and lorikeets,  
bush birds feasting unafraid, on blossoms, buds and nectar  
sweet.

Safe sanctuary for feathered multitudes,  
restful shade for earthbound creatures,  
who've never seen nor heard  
the sound of ringing axe nor e'en the voice of man,  
this paradise – untouched by hands of man.

Strange sounds and voices never known before  
in this wild rugged land  
they felled the trees, with cruel blows,  
such agonising sounds;  
the crashing down of wounded dying giants.

Men hewed them into logs, bound them fast with chains,  
they loaded them on sledges.  
While bullock teams, so strong and steady  
hauled them slowly through the bush,  
on rough and bumpy track  
from lofty hills to ocean shore,  
where pounding waves washed on the glistening sand.  
They bound and tied those logs to rafts,  
and towed them to the ketch.

Iris Rowe

Another journey then began,  
to Moonta Mines on distant shore.  
The wind did blow, the sails unfurled,  
    the sailors sang,  
while sea birds wheeled and cried.



## **Helen Anderson**

The need to make a place where budding writers could share their writing and experiences in a safe and inspiring environment, prompted me to create, with Iris Rowe the Burnside Writing Group. Through respect we have grown as writers exploring and sharing our knowledge and interest.

I have always been a thinker and a planner. These qualities have fed the passion for expression and have translated into writing for my family. I have published a number of books and am in the process of writing my partner's story, which began in South Island, New Zealand.

Everybody has a story and time is limited. Get that story on paper: make it a good read. The time is now.

Helen Anderson

## The Magic of the Mountains

### An Excerpt

#### Chapter 1

At the breaking-down bench two six-foot diameter saws screamed into life. The sound of the saws cutting through *rimu* and *miro* and other native timber could be heard for miles along the valley, marking the day's start at the Inchbonnie sawmill. The crude mill structure gave little protection from the intense cold and rain. The chilling winds lashed sleet into the men's faces. They would be soaked to the skin before the day was out.

A lad of sixteen complained, 'Why do I have to work so hard? I can't keep up with the others.'

'You don't have to keep up, Boy; you have to do more than that, because you're my son,' came the reply.

The lad felt his spirit ripped away. 'I hate this job,' he mouthed and looked to the mountains for help – but only saw ominous clouds and driving rain surging through the valley. There's no relief from this torture, he thought. Yet he worked on, enduring another soul-wearying day.

The only reprieve came when the stop-button was pressed and silence fell inside the saw mill. In the distance a steam whistle blew. Men, soaking wet from the pelting rain sloshed over sodden ground to the rough-sawn lunch hut. The hut was blanketed with moss but had a pot-belly stove inside to warm the damp air. The men took lunch boxes from their tucker-bags that also carried dry clothes for the end of the day.

## Helen Anderson

The women who supported them would dry the sodden mass of work clothes dumped in the washhouse at night. Did that thought console the men? Something clearly did – the men bantered with the camaraderie that can spring only from deep respect and family ties. Then, comforted by food and familiarity, they dashed back to their work.

The Inchbonnie mill was owned by two men, Frank Faulkner and Daniel Anderson, friends since schooldays who had five sons between them. The two Faulkner boys worked in the bush and the lad and his two half-brothers worked in the mill. The five boys, although forced to work together, got on well enough. They had to – their fathers saw to that.

On the lad's first day, he was picked up from his home in the small town of Kaiata. The F100 mill-truck stopped outside the house just after six in the morning for the forty-mile drive through Kumara, Greenstone and Mitchells to Inchbonnie for a seven-thirty start.

Sawmills were familiar to him. He had shadowed his father from an early age and as a child had stacked sawn timber for a shilling a row. But, this day was different – he was going to work at the mill against his will now, and he felt embittered.

His first task was at the docking bench, where he dragged freshly milled boards to the saw to cut off the jagged ends. All day long he had sawdust in his eyes, splinters in his hands, the reek of green timber in his nostrils and the shrilling of the saw assaulting his unprotected ears. And, the rain never stopped them working. The wetness of their long woollen over shirts weighed on their shoulders as the day wore on.

## Helen Anderson

The lad was taught how to class the timber; to separate the heart and the sap, and he learned how to grade and stack timber by separating the clean timber from the timber with knots and other faults. Grading and stacking mattered – because his father tallied the day's cut. His father wrote on white pine tally boards with hard black pencils – paper was useless in the relentless rain. Then each evening, at home, the total tally was transferred into railway tally-books and the pine boards were scrubbed clean ready for the next day.

The lad often helped the men on the breaking-down bench, where they used brute strength, iron bars and winches to manoeuvre the huge logs so they could be cut into manageable pieces for the smaller breast bench saw.

One day, a log was dislodged at the breaking-down bench before the call was made to jump free. The log went thundering down the skids, but the lad had sensed it early and jumped, quick as lightning out of its path. That was close. Far too close, he thought, as he glared back at his half-brother.

Feelings were tense for a long time until one day, his half-brother called out to him and pointed down the road. 'Have a look at this, there's a log coming up the road!' They both laughed at the sight. The log, easily twelve feet through, dwarfed the tip-truck.

'What a log!'

'What a tree!'

They both stopped work to watch it being unloaded onto the skids.

'It'll never fit under the roof,' the lad said, pointing towards the mill. 'I'll cut a slab off the top,' he said as he went to fuel

## Helen Anderson

the two-man Disston chainsaw. He struggled back with the machine and gunned it. He had it screaming at peak revs as they sliced a great slab from the massive log.

'It'll fit under there now,' the lad said with a lopsided grin.

\*

A100 horsepower electric motor drove the mill and thick belts criss-crossed to pulleys that drove all the machinery. The lad was shown how to mend the belts with binder twine and a sack needle, yet he found a better way that kept them tracking straight.

He was often told to repair the wooden race that brought water to the centre of the mill from the snow-fed creek a mile up the valley. The water lubricated the saw and took the sawdust to the heap.

Every week he loaded the railway wagons at the mill siding by hand – then he found a better way that took less than half the time. He wrapped the rope around the whole load, put makeshift skids from stack to wagon, and pulled the load with the tip-tuck from the other side of the rail tracks. This method had its danger, and he had to keep alert in case a train was coming.

The lad also helped the bushmen. He would see Frankie, the head of the tree-felling gang, walk up the mountains with a two-man chainsaw on his shoulder and a tucker-bag on his back. Frankie would hack away at the damp mossy understory of vines and saplings. The lad had never before seen a man who, with one swipe of his five-pound axe, could slash through three-inch saplings. The lad struggled to keep up with just his own tucker-bag and a kerosene tin of fuel.

## Helen Anderson

The gang hacked their way through the bush, cutting all millable-sized trees. The conditions were harsh and the lad did not want to be there, yet in his first year, he learned most of the millwork, all except the sawyer's job. He secretly admired that job. The sawyer set the pace of the mill.

\*

The mill mostly cut *rimu* for house building, but also *kahikatea* which were usually the tallest trees in the bush; their heart timber was used for fence posts and the non-tainting, odourless sap timber for butter boxes. By chance, the men found the sap removed the dark ground-in timber stains on their hands.

The oldest trees were *matai*, some over 1000 years old, and their timber was sought after for flooring; then there was *miro* with its beautiful figured straight grain. Its reddish, sappy juice under the bark healed the workmen's cracked hands and if unable to move their fingers in the morning, they could do so with ease by the end of the day when they were cutting *miro*. They called it miracle *miro* juice.

When the saws were silent, the lad heard the sounds of the bush. A breeze moving in the canopy sounded like the trees whispering, and a strong wind made the giant trees talk. Little brown frogs whistled in the swamps nearby, and native birds – the tui, kea, bell bird and wood pigeon – called to one another.

He saw the stony creeks where brown trout would lie in the shallows and the sun's rays slanting through the foliage magnifying the beauty of the giant tree ferns. He saw hillsides ablaze with the brilliant red flowers of the *rata* tree and, the

## Helen Anderson

white clematis vine that thrust its way to the top, covering the canopy like a recent snowfall.

The sights and sounds of the bush touched his soul – he gained inner strength from the trees that for centuries had stood tall yet were created for human enterprise. He loved being close to nature knowing that the trees were God's creation. He knew also that milling ravages the bush, but its nakedness would be covered in time – nature would bond trees to the earth again.

## Chapter 2

Inchbonnie, in the Rotomanu valley, could never be called a town – rather, it was a rural locality. Dairy farms, a primary school, railway siding, sawmill and five mill-houses sat comfortably within the West Coast region that stretched for 360 miles from Karamea in the north to Haast in the south, squashed between the Southern Alps and Tasman Sea.

It is a region of wild seas and rugged coastlines, even wilder rivers and glaciers, rain forests and towering mountains, coastal plains and fertile valleys. It has a raw, dramatic beauty all its own, with annual rainfall of over twenty feet.

In the early years of colonisation, few Europeans risked their lives on the untamed Coast. It was the Maori who traversed those Alps making soft trails with their sandalled feet, leaving little impression on the alpine wilderness. They were content with the rich bounty of streams and lakes as they looked for greenstone in the South Island rivers.

When searching among rocks dislodged by floods and earthquakes, they found gold – yet the soft, yellow metal was

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ignored. For them it offered little use or value. But word travelled fast. Frenzied gold rushes were sweeping the world as thousands of desperate men sought to free their families from crippling poverty. In the mid-1860s they flocked to New Zealand's West Coast and it became the new frontier.

These desperate folk led the charge to work the alluvial deposits in that isolated place. Then came the scramble to build supply lines. Ports were built in sheltered river outlets which were safer for ships bringing people and supplies to the settlements of Westport, Greymouth and Hokitika. However, the rivers were shallow or formed sandbars and many ships were wrecked.

In 1865, the same year that gold was found on the West Coast, Thomas Brunner, an Englishman of Swiss descent, navigated the Grey River in search of good agricultural land. He saw something sparkling. When he investigated he found hard, glossy, black rock – coal. The coal was of unusually high quality and mining began in earnest. Soon the Brunner Mine was established.

Thirty years later the Brunner Mine became the site of New Zealand's worst mining disaster. On the morning of 26 March 1896, an explosion deep within the mine killed 65 miners, almost half of the underground workforce. Two men sent underground to investigate were found unconscious from “black damp”: a suffocating mixture of nitrogen and carbon dioxide. Bodies were carried out but the noxious gases took their toll on those in the rescue parties; many collapsed and had to be carried out, yet all surviving workmen were located and brought out of the mine.

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A folk song was written for the workmen in the Brunner coal mine and for the 65 men who died in the mine that day.

### **Down in the Brunner Mine**

They work in the heat and the coal black dust

Sticks to the skin like a burn'd pie crust

We curse each day that the miner must

Go down in the Brunner mine.

Down at the face of the Brunner mine

Two hundred feet by the survey line

There's never a sign of sun and sky

Down in the Brunner mine.

The miner's breath comes short and hot

He's using all the breath he's got

Whether it's good for his lungs or not

Down in the Brunner mine.

A sound that'll creep through the miner's soul

Is the shake and rattle and down she'll roll

A hundred feet of rubble and coal

Down in the Brunner mine.

A cave-in'll give us a shut down day

But that'll never make a miner gay

For the trembling earth speaks Judgment Day

Down in the Brunner mine.

<http://folksong.org.nz>

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Coal mining continued, and with the high demand for timber support structures in the mines, as well as for housing, many sawmills sprung up close to native timber stands. Men also worked for the railways; clear felling, cutting sleepers and track laying.

Coal mining and sawmilling were both dangerous, backbreaking work. For most of the men the only requirement was muscle power – plus the will to work.

\*

With a rise in traffic to the West Coast a more suitable pass was needed to connect to the east. Arthur Dobson (later Sir Arthur Dobson), an English-born pioneer surveyor, mapped a route and a road was built over the Southern Alps to Christchurch – a distance of 156 miles, called Arthur's Pass.

Then, within a few years the port towns of Westport, Greymouth and Hokitika began to thrive. Gold had strengthened the economy, which in turn supported the development of coal-fired steam engines for the railways. Gold gave these towns life: coal and timber kept them going.

When pioneer farmers settled in the Rotomanu valley they met the hardships with stoic endurance as they cleared the land to carve out a life and a living – yet even the isolation could be tragic. It shaped them though, to be strong and determined, to be always ready to help a neighbour, to accept difficulty, tragedy and grief – and go on.

The valley opened up when the rail line was taken through to Otira at the foot of the Alps. Settlers relied on the goodwill and understanding of the train driver, who would stop at each

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property to bring goods and good cheer. The forty-mile trip took nearly four hours – but the service enabled them to stay.

At Otira, rail passengers would transfer to Cobb & Co. stagecoaches to cross the treacherous mountain pass. Coaches had to be specially built to cope with the rough track and the thirteen river crossings – but the Coast was accessible.

Otira began as a tent city, when 600 railway workmen and their families settled in to embark on the mammoth task of constructing a tunnel through the mountain. A small coal-fired power plant was built to provide power for the town and the construction work. Then World War I drained away the men – some dying on European soil, some returning home but too damaged to return to work.

It seemed impossible to pierce that mountain – yet determination and necessity, saw the five-mile Otira tunnel finally punched through in 1918 and an electrified rail line (to avoid problems with toxic fumes) opened in 1923. The new rail link with the east was a major development for the West Coast. It was also, at slightly over five miles, the seventh longest tunnel in the world.

Since those heady gold rush days and after World War I, the West Coast was slower to develop: its isolation and low population impacted on government funding decisions, so new bridges and roads took years to build. While waiting for construction, rivers were crossed at fords or spanned by swing bridges suitable for foot traffic only. They were built quickly and cheaply for schoolchildren and farmers to share.

The dramatically winding Crooked River, a natural barrier to the north, ruled the lives of the Rotomanu valley residents

for close to 100 years, until a second bridge was built in the mid-1960s. Finally, there was direct access to Greymouth, the hub of the Coast.

The other river in that valley is Taramakau River. From its source high in the Southern Alps it carves a rugged path to the sea south of Greymouth. It had a history of flash flooding when millions of gallons would thunder from the mountains, pushing in its wake uprooted trees, massive logs and boulders. This meant the Rotomanu valley was not safe from the river until a stop bank was built.

\*

A contractor came to the sawmill one day and asked, 'Can I use your hut for storage?'

'What for?' the lad asked.

'Gelignite.'

'No way mate, not in our lunch hut. What do you want to do with it?'

'Blast rock for the stop bank.'

'Yeah? I know where there's a granite outcrop near here', the lad said. 'I'll show you, let's blast it now. No good storing the gelignite, let's use the stuff.'

After they stacked several boxes of gelignite in a cave-like opening beneath the outcrop, they fixed the detonators and ran the fuse out into the paddock.

'Will it stay alight?' the lad asked.

'Good question. Let's not stand around to find out. Come on, run.'

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They kept running until it blew – rocks rained from the sky. The contractor grinned broadly, slapped the lad on the back and said, ‘What a blast!’

‘Who the hell’s that?’ Yelled Frankie. ‘Why so damn close?’

At the mill later that day, he asked, ‘Who’s been blasting around here?’

The men laughed and nodded towards the lad. ‘He’s been trying to blow up the whole of the West Coast.’

\*

After the stop bank was built, there were times when those in the valley feared it would not hold. After several days of solid rain, the lad went to investigate – a few miles upriver the water swirled high under the rail bridge at Jacksons. He heard the roar of the Taramakau upstream, as if it wanted to rear up and devour the valley.

Frightened – he sped back to the mill, rounded up the men and they made a dash to safety. On their way home, while most of the rivers were swollen, they could get through but, the backwash of the Grey River at Stillwater was raised high and only the tops of the bridge’s guard rails showed.

‘Well the bridge is still there,’ the men chorused.

‘How do we know?’ someone said.

They paused at the water’s edge. The floodwater was not flowing so they decided to give it a go.

The lad’s half-brother geared up and waded into the flooded backwash to check out the bridge while the lad prepared the vehicle for high water. He put a wheat sack over the radiator, removed the fan belt and greased the leads to the spark plugs and distributor.

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'Don't go so damned fast,' the lad heard from the back seat as he started into the water.

'Listen you lot,' he yelled back, 'how many times do you think we've been through water deeper than this?'

The lad kept his eyes on his half-brother still wading through the water until out the other side.

His brother was beckoning, as if to say: come on lad, come on, you'll make it through.

'We've made it,' the cry rose from the bedraggled men as the truck chugged from the water.

It was the end of another wet day.

\*

To this day the Coast is a harsh place to live. When the passes over the Southern Alps are closed because of landslips or heavy snowfalls, or when rivers are flooded, there is the same sense of isolation the early settlers faced.



## Maarten van de Loo

I do not lay claim to being a regular author, but after several requests, I agreed to write my WWII biography/personal memoir. Some pressure had resulted from the fact that WWII history was not generally known by this generation especially that very close to Australian shores. Thus, I relived my past as a young boy, a Prisoner of War of the Japanese during the occupation of Java in the years 1942--1945.

My book: *The Search for my Father, ex POW 2226 Remembers* was published in 2016 and finds acclaim among those who want to know more. Now in my twilight years I no longer desire to dwell in the past, but prefer to focus on the things that are good and enjoyable today, including the beauty of nature and the creatures that dwell in it.

## My Garden Friends

Garden friends I have many. Foremost is the magpie. Ever so trusting, ever so generously warbling, never swooping when I am near the nest of young chicks because he knows I am their friend. When I turn a sod he jumps in and looks for worms. Step aside old chap so I don't harm you.

Always waiting for the curtains to be opened in the morning and the chicken bones to be presented for his breakfast. Have we forgotten him? He will let us know, looking in through the low level windows and calling out.

Then there is the old male koala, stately marching up from the back garden and on his way to the female that has fled him and now sits in the very top of the gumtree. On his amorous approach, he gets a firm sweep of her extended claw and then retreats to a nearby observation post.

But my best ally is the fox. Yes...the fox. In the absence of chickens, he ate the possum that ate my apples. The skin and entrails were left below the apple tree for me to clean up. A welcome is extended to him as long as I grow apples.

A kangaroo was a very rare daytime visitor, having left a nearby nature reserve in search of a different diet. He is still coming back at night, leaving his footprints.

And I nearly forgot to mention the old male koala that fell out of the gumtree, landed with a thud and grunt like a lawnmower. Surely, he should have sensed he was walking on a dead branch which gave way and crashed with him. He survived.

Maarten van de Loo

## **Jack-in-a-Box**

A busy shopper in Adelaide City has not had the opportunity to search for a loo and finally, on the way home, he crosses Victoria Square in Wakefield Street. By now he is full bottle, like a boab tree.

Sneak into the Hilton Hotel? Um...perhaps...a friendly Jack at the door? But what is that aluminium clad cubicle in the Square centre? Worth having a look. Hey, it is a loo! Right in the very centre of Adelaide!

Get in there and shut the door. Firmly.

Wow! Music starts to play. No, not Beethoven, thanks – give me a Mozart sonata he mumbles while getting on with business. And while still doing his duty a voice says, 'Don't forget to flush please.'

You bet! Just wait and mind your own business.

Having obeyed, the voice says sternly, 'Now wash your hands.'

Oh come on, where are YOU hanging out Jack? Are you the King of this throne?

Having washed and dried his hands he steps out into free space greatly relieved and looks again at that box.

Thanks mate! That luxurious loo in the right place at the right time.

Now he knows what he paid his City parking fines for.

Future shoppers, don't look for that refuge, it ain't there anymore: too uncouth for a self-respecting City like Adelaide.

## **Bandicoot**

Bandicoot oh bandicoot,  
where are you hiding ?  
Come out, come out  
and show your snout  
I am law abiding.

Bandicoot oh bandicoot,  
where are you, now I'm here?  
A long search, long time no see  
give me the joy of meeting me  
come out of hiding, I hold you dear.

Some people call you just a rat  
but that's unkind 'cos you are a species rare  
a species many haven't met  
have nothing to compare.

I know, I know, I should just sit  
be patient, quiet, and don't move.  
This is your hunting ground and every bit  
is yours and in your groove.

Bring out your friends, parents, babies and the lot  
enjoy your habitat, allow me in this very spot  
your movements are a joy to see  
as long as I move not.

And when you try to talk to me  
what pleasure that would be.  
I know you're shy, your sparkling little eyes  
will have to put me wise  
'cos I have lost my capacity to hear  
what you try to tell me but I hold you dear.

As you fossick, search and scramble  
for a bit of food to eat  
hop and jump around,  
till next time we meet.



## Elizabeth Guster

I have always loved writing. During long Adelaide summer days in school holidays I would sit on top of the grapevine trellis, eating grapes and writing 'school stories'. I wrote stories and poems for *Possum's Pages* in *The Sunday Mail* and for the *Argonauts* on *ABC* radio.

At University I discovered the challenge and pleasure in essay writing; not to mention the fascination of researching Greek and Roman history and Art History. An honours year followed and I then started a Ph.D.

After thirty years in Canberra we returned to Adelaide, and to my joy, I saw a notice about a new Burnside Writers' Group and immediately joined; four years later I'm still a member.

Elizabeth Guster

## The Olive and its Oil

### An Excerpt

The whole Mediterranean, the sculpture, the palms, the gold beads, the bearded heroes, the wine, the ideas, the ships, the moonlight, the winged gorgons, the bronze men, the philosophers, all of it seems to rise in the sour, pungent taste of these black olives between the teeth. A taste older than meat, older than wine, a taste as old as cold water.

Lawrence Durrell, *Prospero's Cell*.

In 1987, after more than two years of research and writing, my work in the Classics Department at the Australian National University on a doctoral thesis titled *The Olive Oil Industry in Greek Antiquity* came to an end with the thesis uncompleted. However, my interest in all aspects, ancient and modern, of the olive and its oil had grown exponentially as I worked. I took part in my first olive oil tasting; much of my cooking became centred on olive oil, and I researched the rapidly expanding information on the health-giving aspects of olive oil.

This unfinished dissertation remained in my mind over the following years: sometimes I contemplated returning to university and completing the work, and sometimes I thought that I could turn the subject into an interesting book. But other things intervened until, after almost thirty years away, my husband and I returned to live in the perfect Mediterranean climate of Adelaide, South Australia. I found that I was seeing olive trees in gardens, olive trees as hedges,

## Elizabeth Guster

olives as street trees, olive plantations in the parklands, and feral olive trees throughout the Adelaide Hills. My thoughts turned more and more to a possible olive publication.

On a flight to Paris years later, I fell into conversation with my neighbour. He was a film journalist, on his way to a European film festival, and as we talked during the long flight, I told him about my unfinished thesis. His enthusiastic reaction was, 'What a fantastic topic – you should do something with it, make it into a book.' Over the years my husband, my daughters, my son and friends had been telling me the same thing; but it was my travelling companion and his enthusiasm that tipped the scales. I decided to go ahead and write this book.

As I researched the topic, I not only returned with interest to my former academic work, but also found that the more widely I read the more fascinating mythologies and traditions and facts associated with the olive I discovered. This book thus goes beyond the thesis topic of the olive and its oil in Greek antiquity. Today olive oil production has spread far beyond the Mediterranean – to over thirty countries in all, including not only Australia, but also China, Taiwan, Russia, USA, Norway and Switzerland.

\*

Native to the Mediterranean area, the olive (*Olea europaea L. sativa*) is a long-lived, slow-growing evergreen tree, and, along with crops such as wheat, grapes, citrus fruit and figs, is perfectly suited to the physical and climatic characteristics of the area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Olives thrive on long hot summers and mild rainy winters, and can survive well

on hard stony ground. The buds appear in spring, followed by clusters of small creamy fragrant flowers. The fruit, which begins to ripen in the autumn, is green at first, changing colour gradually through violet to dark red, to purple and finally to a blackish purple when it is ripe. On a breezy day a plantation of olives with their green and silver leaves flashing in the sun and the branches heavy with green or purple olives, is a sight not easily forgotten.

The olive is distinguished by its longevity: olive trees can survive for centuries, perhaps for thousands of years. It is thought that in Italy there are trees from the Roman period still producing viable fruit. In addition, because of the olive tree's remarkable ability to rejuvenate, it has gained a reputation for immortality. Even when the tree has been burnt to the ground new suckers will grow from the charred and blackened root bowl, and because it is an evergreen tree, the olive's appearance seems unchanging through the seasons; characteristics that have added to its significance in religious rituals from pagan to Christian over thousands of years.

Cultivating olives and processing them are ancient skills: the Mediterranean triad of olive oil, bread and wine were the first foods manufactured in Europe. There is archaeological evidence that olives were cultivated and pressed for oil in the Jordan Valley from around 3500 BC. From ca. 3000 to 1200 BC the manufacture and trading of olive oil became a major factor in the economy of Minoan Crete. In Egypt olive branches were discovered in the tomb of King Tutankhamun who died in 1326 BC and for the four hundred years from

1200 BC to 800 BC, the Phoenicians traded olive oil throughout the Mediterranean.

Olives were eaten widely in classical Greece and Rome, and olives and olive oil were important trade commodities for these great civilisations. Olive leaves formed the victors' crown in the ancient Olympics, and while olive oil was a major constituent of the diet of Greek and Roman citizens, it also provided light. Aromatics were added to make perfume, and it had essential roles in cult practices and death rituals.

The rich traditions and symbolism of the olive, bridge thousands of years from prehistory to classical antiquity to today. References to olive trees and olives abound in classical literature and in both the Old and New Testaments, and so important is olive symbolism to Jewish history and religion that today the emblem of the State of Israel displays an olive leaf wreath around the Menorah.

Although the trees have been cultivated since the early nineteenth century in Australia, olive oil was used mainly for pharmaceutical and industrial purposes until the mid-twentieth century and even later. 'Buying Olive Oil in Australia' is the title of an addendum written by journalist Rita Ehrlich to the 1988 first edition of Anne Dolamore's book *The Essential Olive Oil Companion*. This addendum begins:

Olives grow well in Australia, particularly in the southern half of the continent, where all the fruits of the Mediterranean flourish. But olives are scarcely grown for their oil, and the domestic production of olive oil is very limited indeed.

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Since that was written a sea change has occurred. In recent years there has been a huge growth in the numbers of Australian olive growers and producers of olive oil and olive recipe books can be found in every bookshop and the health promoting properties of the Mediterranean diet has long been recognised; olive oil is one of the major components of this diet.

Today olive oil is valued because of its high mono-unsaturated fat and polyphenol content: studies have shown that it can lessen the risks of high cholesterol and inflammation as well as being linked with a lower risk of breast and some other cancers.

There is enormous interest in incorporating olive oil in the diet for the delicious flavour it adds to foods, from salads and sauces to savoury dishes, and even cakes and biscuits.

Here in Adelaide I can visit the markets, my local supermarkets and delicatessens and see a wide range of extra virgin olive oil bearing labels from most states of Australia. Table olives too proliferate: olives stuffed with anchovies, with feta cheese, with sundried tomatoes or pesto, as well as olives with herbs, olives with chilli – and beautiful big black Kalamata olives swimming in golden olive oil.

People form groups to gather olives from nineteenth century olive groves in the parklands and in the Adelaide foothills; they pickle their fruit or take them to local processors to be crushed for oil. For a weekend's pleasant work they are rewarded with their own delicious eating olives and olive oil.

## Samuel Davenport

### A pioneer of the olive industry in South Australia

Samuel Davenport was an important pioneer of the olive industry in South Australia. His interest in olives began with his early travels in the south of France for the sake of his health: he had dived into an icy-cold river in England to save a man from drowning, and it was feared that he may have been affected by consumption, or tuberculosis.

He stayed for two years in the warm climate of Montpelier, a centre for wine making and the culture of vines, olives and almonds. His brother, returning from a visit to Australia in about 1840, reported that the South Australian climate was admirably suited to invalids and urged Samuel to settle there. Samuel took this advice, and arrived in Adelaide in 1843. By this time it was recognised that the South Australian climate was admirably suited to oleoculture as well as invalids. It was reported in the *Adelaide Observer* of 19 August 1843 on page 5 that: ‘... the olive is now ascertained to bear fruit plentifully in these Colonies...’

In 1846 Davenport purchased a property, Gleeville, close to Adelaide. E. R. Simpson notes that the first record of Davenport planting olives on this property is a sketch in a notebook dated June 1852 showing olives growing along the edges of plots (Simpson E R, *Beaumont House*, 83).

Davenport later purchased nearby Beaumont House. He had earlier provided Bishop Short, the previous owner, with olive trees. Davenport clearly showed his interest in aspects of

## Elizabeth Guster

Mediterranean living when he added an Italianate veranda to the house. He then must have felt the effect was complete.

He grew grapes as well as olives and established wine cellars and an olive oil processing plant on a hillside on his property. He continued with his olive plantings for many years and experimented with numbers of different varieties. In 1864 he planted 'Davenport Olives' from truncheons of Blanquette, Verdale, Bouquettiere and Salaren sourced from John Bailey's Hackney garden, and in 1883 he imported Temprano, Sevillano and Lohayme from the estate of the Duke of Wellington in Spain as well as another eight varieties from Montpelier. In addition, he planted trees from Spain at Palmer, near Mannum on the River Murray. This grove is now heritage listed.

Beaumont House is now owned by the National Trust of South Australia and remnant trees from Samuel Davenport's original olive grove still stand in the grounds. Two years ago Merilyn Kuchel, the Head Gardener at Beaumont House, visited heritage groves on the Murray River and was advised to prune the 150-year old Beaumont trees hard to improve the quantity and quality of the fruit. This has been entirely successful.

When the Beaumont House Garden was opened to the public for the South Australian Open Garden Scheme on the last weekend in September 2017, Beaumont House olive oil from the old trees was sold for the first time in many years.

Christine Christopoulos



## **Christine Christopoulos**

The written word has enthralled me since I was a child. At University I combined my other passion, research, with writing. A career as a lawyer taught me structure but stifled creativity. Now I am retired I revel in letting my imagination run free as I write short stories, memoir and reflective pieces – my legacy to my daughter and two granddaughters.

Christine Christopoulos

## Defence of the Olive Tree

I stand tall and proud  
Rooted in 10,000 years of heritage

### **Look at me**

My trunk gnarled like an arthritic hand  
My leave's dark green, sage green  
So many greens all lined with silver velvet  
My branches a symbol of peace  
My purple fruit plump succulent inviting

### **Taste me**

No, not that plump succulent fruit straight from the tree  
Too bitter for the tongue  
Cure it, wait patiently, then enjoy its glorious taste  
Crush the bitter fruit  
Extract my oil, silky smooth  
My leaves a soothing tea

### **Touch me**

My bark rough  
Cut my bark I will not bleed  
The cut reveals my prized wood

### **Dwell in me**

In the heat of the day sit in my cooling shade  
I am an amazing tree.

Christine Christopoulos

## **Homage to the Olive**

### **Greece – Two Little Boys**

Greece in the early 1950s: a tiny village, Aris, in the south west of Greece, with the magnificent mountains of the Peloponnese its backdrop. George, his older brother Tony, his mother Penelope and his father Spiro lived in a crumbling two storey stone wall structure. Built into one wall was a wood oven.

Baking day: flour, which the villagers had milled themselves and water and yeast were pummelled by Penelope into rounds of dough, left to rise, then placed in the wood oven. The little boys waited patiently for the bread. Finally Penelope removed the bread, held the loaf on her ample stomach to steady it and cut thick chunks of the soft, hot bread. The boys' eager hands grabbed the bread and they scurried barefoot along the rough road to a rundown makeshift shelter built of straw and mud bricks, crafted by the village men: The Olive Oil Factory. Inside Spiro was working his shift.

A donkey walked slowly around a slab thick with a pad of olives. With each step the crusher squeezed drops of oil from the olives. The dark oil, green and gold, oozed into a vat.

The boys handed the chunks of bread to their father. He scorched the bread over the pit fire and dunked the pieces ceremoniously into the oil before handing a piece to each of the boys. The thick, sweet oil dripped down their fingers and under their chins.

Christine Christopoulos

## **Australia – Two Little Girls**

### **Georgia**

Afternoon tea time: George has ladled some of his home grown, home cured olives into a small white bowl. The dark purple Kalamata olives are slick with olive oil.

Georgia looked at the olives and reached for the bunch of dried oregano hanging from the ceiling in the kitchen, admonishing her grandfather, 'Papou, good olives always have to have some dried oregano. You know that?' She sprinkled the dried herb over the olives.

George picked up the torpedo shaped bread he had just finished baking. The dark brown crust crunched as he cut into it. Steam rose from the soft dough.

Georgia picked up an olive, rolling it around her mouth as she drizzled olive oil over a thick piece of bread.

George looked at Georgia. 'Did I ever tell you the story about my mum and her bread and the olive factory?'

'Yes, Papou,' in a tone that said: There's no need to tell me again. I've got it.

### **Charlotte**

Another day; another afternoon tea: Charlotte, not fussed about oregano, carefully chooses the plumpest olive from the bowl. Bringing it to her mouth she hesitates. I know that she's thinking: time to play the Olive Pip Game. George taught the game to her to as soon as she was able to put an olive in her mouth and not choke on it. The game – How Clean Can You Get the Pip – is now a ritual.

Charlotte puts the olive to her lips, licks the oil then pops the olive in her mouth. Her cheeks suck in and out working at the flesh.

## Christine Christopoulos

She rolls the olive around inside her mouth carefully manipulating it with her tongue over her teeth. Minutes pass. Movement ceases. She seems satisfied that she's completed her task. She reaches her fingers into her mouth and extracts the pip, examines it, turns it around, examines it again, frowns and pops it back into her mouth. Her tongue and teeth work the olive pip more fiercely. Another minute passes before she removes the pip from her mouth, peers intently at it, then holds it triumphantly in the air and cries out; 'Papou, look!'

George takes it from her, holds it to the light as though judging a fine wine, then announces, 'Well done. Clean as a whistle. Another 10 out of 10.'

Charlotte beams.

### **The Future – Maybe?**

Fifty years from now I picture the girls, with their grandchildren at their sides, reminding them that good olives always need oregano, playing the Olive Pip Game and asking, 'Did I ever tell you the story about my Papou's mother's bread and the olive oil factory?'

Christine Christopoulos

## Ingenious

'What do you think I am? A bloody genie or somethin'? Pat me and I'll give you what you want?'

'No darl. Course not.' She smiled up at him. 'Anyway, it's Buddha you pat. E's got a big round belly. Not like you with your six pack. You pat Budda's belly for good luck. Genie's are different ...you massage them gently.' Very gently.

'Please honey. It's just one little wish. You should see it. It's beautiful. It's sapphire blue. You know, like my eyes. And it's got all these beautiful sparkly little diamonds all round it. It is so, so beautiful. Please, please.'

Her hands moved slowly over his bare chest. She tickled her fingers over the bulging mound of his flabby white stomach and rested them on his navel. 'Please. The girls will be so jealous.'

Her lips moved to his chest and her tongue fought to find a patch of smooth skin. God, I wish he'd wax.

'Aren't genie's supposed to grant three wishes?' he panted, as she ran her finger around the edge of his navel.

'Yeh.' Images of the matching sapphire and diamond drop earrings and his and her Mercedes floated through her mind.

'But we'll worry about them later.'

Christine Christopoulos

## **A Bowl of Soup for your Soul**

This story is based on the life of my Great Great Grandmother. The dialogue is, of course, made up entirely and I cannot claim that the following scene took place – it just seems possible that it did. Personal records of the Irish are very poor for many reasons. Information about the Potato Famine is voluminous and there are numerous theories about the cause of so many deaths and the role of the British in what some argue was genocide.

### **1852 County Kilkenny, Ireland**

Ann had been awake for sometime before the sun began its journey up over the hills. The diluted rays of spring sunshine inched through the opening to the cottage across the rough dirt floor. The rays would never stretch far enough to heat the windowless cottage. The turf fire was all they could rely on to do that. But it struggled to warm the air, competing with the gusts of cool breeze coming through the opening to the cottage. The opening wasn't grand enough to call a doorway; no door stood there, just a rough opening, the lintel so low that everyone who entered had to crouch and shuffle.

The smell of death, more pungent than yesterday, hung heavy in the foetid air.

There was movement from a bed of straw by the hearth. Gathering her skirt around her she squatted next to the bundle of rags on the straw. It stank of rot, decay and piss. And god knows what else.

Under the rags Ann's father, Laurence, stirred. She touched his shallow and gaunt face. He was not yet awake. She found a loose rag; spat on the edge of it and gently tried to wipe the stale vomit and

## Christine Christopoulos

bloody sputum from his whiskers, yellow with age. There was nothing she could do about his stained jacket; he had no more clothes.

Mangy chickens pecked around the edge of the straw bed. The pig, its skin thickened by parasitic rings, stuck its snout between the stick legs of the chickens.

‘Get out!’ Ann shrieked.

The chickens squawked, scattering through the air into the laneway. Responding to a kick in its ribs the pig tip toed behind the chickens.

She threw a piece of turf into the hearth. Sparks flew; the fire spat and hissed. The sweet aromatic scent of the turf refreshed the air but was soon no measure for the dank smell of rot, animals and the smoke. She pulled the corner of her apron to her streaming nose and eyes.

Laurence stretched his arm across the top of his rag covers reaching for something that only he could see.

‘Mush.’ The word, barely audible, hissed from his parched throat.

‘Da, don’t. You need your strength.’

‘Black mush.’ Laurence croaked. He shook his head as if trying to rid his mind of the catastrophe: of the withering leaves freckled by spores, the fungus sending tendrils through the creamy white potatoes below the ground, of the desperate digging in the clay in the hope that somehow the potato had survived and the despair when the potatoes turned to liquid in his hands.

‘Mush.’

Ann’s eyes followed her father’s fingers. Fissures ingrained with dirt that no amount of washing would ever remove crisscrossed them. He curled his arthritic fingers into his palm; pain etching his face. His nails were split and yellow.

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‘Oozed...’ his chest heaved as he gasped for breath. ‘Round me fingers.’ He plucked at her shawl, without the strength to drag her closer to his face. ‘Remember?’

The putrid smell that enveloped Laurence repulsed her. She wanted to ignore his feeble attempt to draw her closer. Instead, she leant over him and whispered in his ear, ‘Yeh Da, I remember.’

Turning from her father she elbowed the backside of her sister Mary, still curled up on her straw. ‘Git up you stupid girl.’

‘Leave me alone.’

‘No. Git up. Now!’

Grabbing a pail, Ann looked back at her sister, ‘I’m goin’ to get ‘im some water.’ And then ordered, ‘Put a turnip out for ‘im. I’ll give it to ‘im when I come back.’

The clean, pure spring air swept over her face and filled her lungs as she stepped into the laneway. To the right, the lane went for miles between low undulating mounds of rock and dirt to Thomastown. The other direction led them over the hill down to the village. It was a more familiar route and on Sundays had been busy with people going to church. The priest had died, but the people of *clachan* had still gathered for some time every Sunday for prayers. But no longer.

She walked in a patch of grass growing along the laneway in defiance of the rocks and mud, and wriggled her toes on the dew drenched grass. She could almost hear the long ago sounds of the *clachan*: carefree children squealing with the fun of chasing the animals; adults, on Feast Days – days of brief respite from their travails – jiggling around to a piper’s tune and the sweet tone of Michael Morrissey’s fiddle.

Once there had been six cottages in the *clachan*, spilling over with families. Now only Michael Morrissey, his wife Jane and Ann’s dying

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family remained. Jane was virtually dead – with grief. Her five children had all died.

Measles, cholera, or starvation fever had killed off the *clachan* people. If disease hadn't weakened them or killed them then the bailiffs would evict families to die in some other godforsaken place. She looked to the ruin of the cottage where Catherine Walsh and her family had lived and remembered Catherine's screams as the bailiff drove her from the cottage. She had pleaded with the Bailiff, 'Where can we go? Where can we go?' And shoved her wailing child at the Bailiff, crying, 'Man, have you no pity?'

The bastard just sneered. 'I don't care about your black potatoes. The land lord wants his money. You didn't pay. You go'. And he made sure they did, dragging furniture from the cottage, throwing their pots and pans into the laneway. And then his henchmen pulled the straw from the roof of their wretched cottage.

There was no time for more memories – they were too painful.

Her father needed her and her useless sister wouldn't be able to manage for much longer without her. She scooped water into the wooden pail, curved her body under the lintel and shuffled back into the cottage. 'Give me the turnip.' Ann put her hand out. Mary glared sullenly as she passed the chipped plate balancing one turnip. Ann sat on the floor, pushed her thumb into the turnip. It yielded under her soft touch and broke into pieces. She squashed a piece between her fingers and bending over her father, she gently pressed the creamy mash to his lips.

'C'mon Da, open up.' She pleaded.

He shook his head, and pursed his lips.

'C'mon Da – please.' She implored as she pushed the mash between his lips.

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Slowly he relaxed his lips. The tip of his tongue tentatively prodded at the mash. He took a speck into his mouth, swallowed, then pursed his lips more fiercely and rocked his head again protesting at the intrusion into his dying body.

He thrust his head up and shouted at Ann, 'It'll 'appen again. Go. Go. Go.' He wheezed with each word until the effort of talk and movement defeated him.

'We can't do that Da.'

'You can!'

'But Da...'

Laurence interrupted her. 'I'm goin'. Mam's gone – Padraig, Bridget, Ja...' He sighed. 'All gone.'

Ann didn't need reminding. Each night she prayed for their souls – seven of them gone. She saved special prayers for the last child and her Mam. She could still hear the screams of her mother that woke her three winters ago. She had watched helplessly as a shrivelled child, born too early, slipped from her mother's emaciated body. The babe took one breathe, then no more. Her Mam drew only a few more breaths.

There was no dignity in their burial; no money for a coffin, the ground too cold, too solid to dig a proper grave. Laurence, Ann and Mary had carried the bodies to the lime pit safe from the dogs and rats.

'Da, shush – don't waste your breath.'

The day lengthened as Ann kept her vigil over her father.

Mary, wringing her hands, looked to Ann, 'What can we do?'

'What do you think you should do?' She could barely control her irritation. 'Get more turf. Go visit Michael Morrissey. Let 'im know what's 'appening. Get some poteen from 'im. It'll 'elp Da with the pain.'

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‘Proddie bastards.’ Laurence called out. He flayed his arms defending his honour and his faith. ‘Proddies – wanted my soul for a bowl of soup.’ Ann gently lowered his arms and stroked his face.

‘I was no souper.’

She stroked his face, ‘I know Da – you were no souper.’

‘I was no...’

‘Shush Da.’

‘Weeds...’ He drew a deep breath. ‘Weeds – better than selling your soul.’

Exhausted Laurence gave up his fight against the Proddies but moved fitfully, mumbling incoherently.

Mary, stumbled into the cottage, the turf piled high in her arms. ‘What’s ‘e on about?’

‘Battlin’ demons, Mary. Battlin’ demons.’

‘Did you go visit Michael Morrissey?’

Mary dipped her head avoiding the challenge in Ann’s eyes.

‘Didn’t ‘ave enough room in me ‘ands,’ she whimpered. ‘I’ll go.’

Stillness settled in the cottage. Minutes later Mary returned. ‘He ain’t got any poteen left.’

Ann turned away. How am I gonna keep him quiet now?

‘Bloody Brits!’ Laurence yelled with more strength than she thought possible. Ann gently pressed down on Laurence’s pugilist arms. He struggled against her. ‘Corn – animal food!’

‘Hush Da.’

Corn. We didn’t know what to do with it. Mam would grind it and grind it again but she couldn’t get it right. No one could. I can still feel the grit in my mouth. We kept eating it. It made us feel full – for awhile – and made us forget the guts ache that would come and the shit that would follow.

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Ann lifted her father's head gently. Laurence cried in pain. 'Sorry Da. You need water.'

He struggled against the pressure of the mug on his lips, but yielded as she gently encouraged him, 'You need it Da; you need it for your strength.' He swallowed feebly.

'Da that wasn't enough. 'ave more.' She tried again. The water dribbled down the sides of his mouth, rivulets through his whiskers. He shook his head and refused to take more.

' 'ere Mary, take it away,' handing the mug to her sister.

'But Ann if 'e doesn't drink 'e's gonna die.'

Ann snapped, 'Mary, Da is dying. 'e's gonna die today.' How could that stupid girl not know? She's seen enough death these past years.

'Sweet Jesus, not today. Da! What are we gonna do?'

Michael Morrissey appeared in the opening. 'Sorry I ain't got no poteen. How's 'e goin'?'

'Not good. Not good. 'e won't make nightfall.'

Michael sat on his haunches and peered at his friend. 'Is nightmare will be over soon. God only knows when ours will be,' he muttered, then left quietly.

The roomed darkened as night set in; the faint glow from the hearth the only light. Laurence had not succumbed. He had not moved for hours. The death rattles began. Gurgling sounds rolled up his chest into his throat; his breath at times shallow, at times almost nonexistent, then, when they thought he'd taken his last breathe, the gurgles would begin again.

Mary's eyes widened with alarm. 'What's 'appening. 'e's hurtin'?' She clutched her sister's hand.

'He'll be right Mary. 'e don't know what's 'appening. 'e's goin' to God – and Mam.'

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Ann dug deep into to her apron pocket where she fingered her most precious possession, Mam's rosary beads. 'C'mon Mary,' she murmured. 'Let's say the Rosary – the Joyful Mystery. 'E's goin' to God.'

She brought the rosary beads to her mouth, kissed the small roughly hewn wooden crucifix and made the sign of the cross touching her forehead, her heart, each shoulder and then joined her hands, her fingers pointing skyward to God.

'Our Father...' she began.

The air cooled around them but the rhythmic movement of fingers over beads and the hypnotic sound of the repeated prayers – the belief that God was with them – transcended their physical discomfort. As they finished the last decade of the Rosary, Ann brought her father's hands together as if in prayer, and looped the beads around his hands binding them together.

By morning Laurence was dead. No tears were shed; death all too familiar.

Michael Morrissey helped them carry Laurence's weightless body to the lime pit. Climbing the hill the breeze rustled the curls escaping from Ann's kerchief and whispered in her ears the ghost of her father's words, 'Go. Go. Go.'



## **Nell Holland**

I write for the delight of creating stories on paper, and the occasional thrill when someone shows pleasure with what I record.

Life has delivered me multi-coloured layers of experience. Different countries, employment and emotions have combined to create a wealth of tales for me to cut from my life's tapestry.

Fortunately, the narratives have a way to go because my cloth is still developing. The bright threads of my cloth show ever brighter against the dark ones and there are stories still emerging in the pattern. They just wait to be told.

Nell Holland

## **John Butterfield Approves**

If you have ever lived in Victoria you may know the place that the locals used to call ‘Dog Town’ and within it is the little area called ‘Cut Paw-Paw’ where we once enjoyed a lovely old home.

The house had been ‘done-up’ after years of neglect and we bought it just after the renovations were completed. I remember wandering through the rooms, enjoying the original lead lighting patterns in the windows; touching the deep cedar wood on the fire mantels; looking into mirrors that were part of the original house and wondering about those faces that had reflected before mine. What had they looked like, and would they have liked us?

The renovators left behind a leaflet for us with photographs of the house ‘before and after’ renovations and included an old photograph of a young man standing outside the gate, looking up at the house. We were told this was the original owner, John Butterfield.

In the first weeks that we owned the house, I remember feeling like a stranger who’d been granted access to a lovely place of which I wasn’t yet part. Houses take a while to get to know their inhabitants, and this one was keeping itself a little aloof. I kept waiting for the feeling that this place was part of me, and me of it.

About two weeks after we’d moved in, the doorbell rang and I discovered a tall man on the doorstep, wearing an old-fashioned stovepipe hat, long black coat with tails and carrying a wreath.

'I'll put the wreath on the doorstep and the mourners will be here shortly,' he said in a solemn voice.

My face must have looked a picture of confusion as I said, 'I'm sorry. I have no idea what you mean.'

Immediately looking embarrassed, he apologised and said, 'I'm so sorry. I believed the family had been in touch with you, but obviously, they haven't. This is very awkward, but I'm going to ask you to pull the curtains as a sign of respect.'

He explained that the local custom was for funeral processions to leave for the church from the last house that had been occupied by the deceased, and that John Butterfield, in his hundredth year, had died in a nursing home but requested that his cortege leave for the church from this house he had so loved. I obviously had no option other than comply, but it was a strange feeling to withdraw into the house knowing that my front door was going to be decorated with a funeral wreath, and the presence of a traditional undertaker who would be waiting for the family mourners.

Within the next half hour, from behind the nearly closed curtains, I saw a hearse draw up in front of the house and a group of mourners gather around. One young man leant on the gate and looked around the garden which was a picture of colour from scarlet roses forming a hedge along the fence. Just as the undertaker picked up the wreath and walked down the path to the gate, the man lifted his head and looked at the house with a smile. In an instant, I recognised him from the sepia photograph, and funeral or not I rushed to open the front door so I could see him better.

## Nell Holland

By the time I was outside, the undertaker had joined the mourners who'd begun their walk to the church, and the smiling man was nowhere to be seen.

Feeling bemused, now that my morning had taken on a surreal element, I wandered back inside, lingering by the old mirror in the hall. And as the house settled around me, it felt good to know that John Butterfield at last approved.

## Heft

Cumbria in England has had human settlement for over 5,000 years and inhabitants variously consisting of Celts, Romans, Angles and Vikings. They've made wise farmers – and produced such clever sheep!

Generations ago Cumbrian farmers, taught their ewes that their wild, unfenced land had unseen boundaries they should not cross, and now the local Herdwick sheep never wander from their grazing fells. Unbelievably, the ewes genetically transmitted that knowledge to their lambs so the flocks remain safe in their dangerous environment. The local expression for this behaviour is *heft*, describing sheep keeping to where they belong.

The word 'heft' has other definitions such as 'size' and 'hoist' but there is something in the Cumbrian *heft* evoking intuition and continuity.

## Nell Holland

I believe we humans also pass on similar genetic information in our psyche. How else could we retain that feeling of instinctive familiarity when in the place that initially held our DNA?

Some call it home-sickness while others call it *heft*, carrying a sense of being where we are through choice, and not because of impediments. It leaves a hollow throb in the deepest part of us that time never subdues.

I only know that I *heft* to my origins when I return to my birthplace and experience an aching; intuitively felt but never satisfactorily expressed, signifying my connection. However far I wander and whatever domicile I find, 'home' is always etched on my heartstrings and will always be found in the deepest part of me.

Like the Herdwick sheep, I *heft* without fully knowing the reason.

Nell Holland

## The Mad Hatter (with apologies to Alice)

I nearly died because of a song  
that the Queen of Hearts thought was wrong.

So she stopped the time at 6 o'clock,  
and said she preferred to give me the shock  
of a very final decapitation,  
to mark the day of her celebration.

So I stay here – ever having tea,  
and we swap riddles – the March Hare and me.  
But there's never an answer to the riddles we cite  
'cause the White Rabbit constantly runs through the night  
to tell us again that he's always late.  
(I wonder the fate of his important date?)

There are 364 “un-birthday” days  
and I count only one when I can laze  
and enjoy my very own birthday event.  
I wonder if the Queen will at some time relent  
and allow me to move on past 6 o'clock?  
Though tea's good with Alice, who's in her best frock.

The Queen of Hearts says I murder time.  
Perhaps she thinks my verses don't rhyme.  
But see my hat – and see the label –  
only 10 and six for you to be able  
to buy and wear this impressive bonnet  
then *you* could write the very next sonnet!

Nell Holland

## **Big Sky Country**

There is a ranch in Montana that I visit in my mind. I travel the road from Noxon and cross the old truss bridge, which demarcates what for me is the link between real life and magic.

All the troubles, noise and bustle come to an end as I leave the river behind, and my heart leaps at the expectation of what is around the many twists in the road ahead. There is no tarmacadam here, just pebbled stones lying pale against the borders of harebells and milk vetch edging my route. And of course, it's always July, with the sun shining on the Ponderosa pine forests and a lone golden eagle drifting overhead as he rides the thermal updrafts.

I can still feel the wonder that hit me as a thirteen-year-old boy when I turned that last bend and saw the ranch for the first time. As an only child, my joy at seeing my cousins was indescribable and Uncle Bill, Aunt Jude and Mom and Dad were thrilled to see each other too.

We three boys were the same age. Jim and Joe, non-identical twins, were born a couple of months before me and when we were together we simply became 'the Sheridan boys' as our fathers were brothers. We hadn't seen each other since they'd moved here from Memphis a year ago, and when Dad stopped the car, Joe pulled open my door and we all three fell on each other like noisy, boisterous puppies let off the leash.

I've relived that moment thousands of times with a happiness that would turn that golden eagle green with envy.

## Nell Holland

We'd been there a few days and I was settling into the pace of ranch life as if I'd been born to it. Jim and Joe had hardly changed and Jim still took the lead with Joe and me trailing after.

We had crazy days exploring the forests bordering the property and spent time doing all the wild things that thirteen-year-old boys do when grownups are not around. Joe climbed a pine to see how high he could ascend before he lost his nerve, but we urged him on until a branch snapped and he fell heavily. He was lucky the branches slowed his fall and he landed on a grassy mound.

We rushed over but Joe was already whooping with bravado while still flat on his back.

'Hey,' Jim said, 'that was awesome. Try it again.'

Joe pushed himself onto his elbow and said, 'No way. You're going next time Jimbo.'

Jim suddenly froze. 'What the heck's that by your hand?'

Joe looked, and began scrambling away before realising the snake was dead. With a flick of his hand he threw the snake at me, yelling with laughter as it hit my chest. That poor snake was just a baby of little more than twelve inches, but we had great fun using it as a projectile until Jim tossed it away.

When we got back for lunch we told Uncle Bill's friend Wayne about finding the snake.

'Saw a live one a couple of months ago,' he said, gesturing with his can of beer towards a lone pine bordering the meadow. 'I was down there with Pete from next door; mowing the grass. When Pete decided he needed a pee he went over to that tree, and as he was watering it, I saw a rattler

## Nell Holland

on his way towards him. ‘Bout four foot long and lookin’ serious.’

He lifted the can for another swallow as Joe said, ‘So what happened?’

‘Well,’ said Wayne. ‘Pete couldn’t do much. He’d got his right hand steadyng him on the tree and his left hand holding his necessities, so I took a shot at the rattler. Right between Pete’s legs. Got it, but put a hole in Pete’s trousers.’ He swallowed again.

We waited, but no further conversation came from Wayne. We looked at each other and I asked, ‘So what did Pete do?’

Wayne squinted at us and said, ‘Not much. More than pee, though.’ We gasped in shocked amusement, and then laughed aloud while Wayne looked on laconically and finished off his beer. One moment we were young boys and the next we felt we were being allowed into the secrets that men keep. When I remember those times they can still make me smile.

The young ‘Sheridan boys’ are now senior citizens and we meet rarely, but my first Montana holiday remains a golden haze that recalls the magic of being young.

I wonder if Pete ever knew how much we’d laughed at that story, again and again. We never knew if it was really true, and none of us ever had the courage to bring up the subject with poor Pete.

Nell Holland

## A Celt in Adelaide

It was St Patrick's Day and my Irish friend asked me to write something with a Celtic flavour that was relevant to Adelaide. I'd just been listening to music that had been written and performed by a man who at one time called himself a "local", and decided that this was a more interesting subject than a pint of warm green beer from the pub.

If you know any Irishmen, you'll know that they are dreamers, fighters, stubbornly opinionated and doggedly determined to have those opinions heard. Singer-songwriter, Paul Kelly, with Irish blood in his veins, embodies all that Dublin's River Liffey characterises. Dark, deep, meandering but never halting, Paul is a rare, raw treasure producing powerful words and music. He is the source of some jolting poetry like *Deeper Water* and to listen fully, one will feel a catch in the throat as Kelly invites us into some private spaces of his life.

With a career spanning more than thirty years, his words are never less than honestly direct, fiercely offered and powerfully performed.

Gough Whitlam made headlines in 1975 when he poured dust into the hands of Vincent Lingiari while handing over the leasehold title of Daguragu to the Gurindji people. But Paul's words have since shown us the occasion's true impact, and have kept that instant of history alive. Every time we hear the words that he wrote in the song, *From Little Things, Big Things Grow* we think about their meaning.

## Nell Holland

Even when scripting something less political, as in his song *Bradman*, his passion cuts like a Gallowglass sword. He speaks of Sir Donald being 'like a tide' of powerful talent and that 'fortune used to hide in the palm of his hand'. Those same words could equally be used to describe Kelly.

His lyrics jar with sincerity and insight, and to listen is to be swept along by his unyielding beliefs that allow no space for contradiction. His words will be his legacy and just like Ireland, Paul will continue to provoke, inspire, motivate, infuriate and astound, but ultimately his lyrics and music will endure.

St Patrick himself would be proud to acknowledge him as one of his own, and so should everyone in Adelaide.

## David Hope



## **David Hope**

I was born in Sunderland UK and brought up in Edinburgh, emigrating to Australia with my family at 16. My writing has largely been technical papers and manuals. I joined the Burnside Writer's Group to become a more rounded writer as I want to write a book on the River Murray, its people and places.

David Hope

## **Boarding School Can Be Fun**

Wow! The internet is a wonderful thing.

There I was, checking out some maps of Scotland through the National Library of Scotland's website and I stumbled across the name Lendrick Muir School.

One thing led to another, and I am looking at the school's website and seeing names that I've occasionally thought of in the last forty years and immediately it brought memories rushing back. I went to Lendrick Muir, then called Naemoor, in September 1959, leaving in January 1965.

Papa Morrice was the maths teacher. It was unlikely I was one of his favourite students. Something to do with flooding out his schoolroom by turning on the taps in the maths lab then being unable to turn them off again.

The favourite trick we played on Papa was during winter making the little hill up to his classroom a very slippery slope by pouring water over the snow and watching him slip and slide on his backside.

I don't remember Papa too fondly, even though he did give me 100% for arithmetic five times in the first three years I was at Lendrick Muir.

I have good memories of Sammy Sims, the French teacher, who was a wonderful person and an excellent teacher. Our favourite ploy to distract Sammy was to try to get him to tell "war stories" – as we had been told he was a spy for Britain during the war. He tried many different methods to get us to learn French and the one I liked best was cricket. He would split the class into two – batters and bowlers. The batters read

## David Hope

the French text aloud and the bowlers tried to correct the pronunciation. It was fun, but it was also educational.

Another fond memory is Maurice Bridgeland, who taught English and History. Maurice had a hockey blue from Cambridge so we all loved him for that alone. Two things stick in my mind about Maurice. He wanted to know why I was not doing history. I told him I was hopeless at it. My last history exam in third year – the first exam I ever studied for in my life – yielded 14%! He told me he was going to be teaching Australian and New Zealand history and that he thought I would enjoy it and encouraged me to join his class. He was right!

The other memory is of a summer holiday where I cycled from my home in Edinburgh to Powmill, where Maurice lived with his family. He put me up for the night and I awoke to the sound of classical music being played on his gramophone – old 78s being played with a high-fidelity needle. And, I have a vague memory that his wife, Ruth, had to sew the seat of my pants as I had worn them through.

James Haig was the science teacher. He took over from Mr Grieve, the Headmaster, who once drove me home to Edinburgh in his Jaguar when I had jaundice and what a consternation that caused on the council street where I lived.

I think that Lendrick Muir was James Haig's first teaching appointment. He was young and some of us were well versed in shenanigans. I remember one hot summer night when we got up after lights out, got a trolley from the kitchen, and were 'surfing' down the hill from the maths/science labs on it.

## David Hope

That was not enough! We then got the school Land Rover, which was always parked beside the coke bunkers to one side of the back door, and started doing the same thing – pushing it up the hill then jumping in and freewheeling down. We must have been making too much noise as we saw James's light go on. So we parked the Land Rover at the steps to the back door, put the trolley on the tyre on the bonnet and fled into the night! He was a good teacher, all the same, but I am sure we tried his patience.

I remember Mrs. McGlennan well; she was the geography teacher when I was in Fourth form doing geography with two Fifth formers, Kenneth Dick and John Sturgeon. I was 14 and they were 17, and happy to bully me – not seriously, but some days were worse than others. Anyway, we were in class one day and I was sitting in the middle. Kenneth and John had hold of one arm or hand each and were giving me a bit of punishment to the extent that I cried out. Mrs McGlennan kicked us out and told us she was never going to teach us again – which sounded OK to me at first, but eventually we had to make abject apologies or there would be no sitting for 'O' levels.

Mr Kerr was another favourite – although I doubt if I impressed him in woodwork. However, his great claim to fame was cricket and he introduced us to the six-a-side cricket competition which we played on the long summer evenings. We played for the Kerr cup and I played in the winning team in 1962 and 1964. Sadly, over time and many moves, I have lost the two medallions I received for the victories.

## David Hope

Mr Kerr used to take the second eleven cricket team away and act as one of the umpires. I remember one match well. I was captain of the second eleven and I did not use a box when batting as I found them too uncomfortable. Of course, the inevitable happened and I received a blow in the midriff, whereupon Mr Kerr called out – “Count ten and hang on to them!”

\*

When I was in fifth form – 1963/64 – I had a crush on Maxine Lightfoot in fourth form. I remember getting into trouble for cuddling her in the recreation area. It was all very innocent, but unfortunately not viewed as such. During the 1964 summer holidays we went out for a while. Maxine was from Kirkcaldy – I visited her there and she visited my home in Edinburgh. However, Maxine had left school at the end of summer term as had Ross Cowan, who was also from Kirkcaldy, and they took up with one another so I lost my first real girlfriend!

We four fifth formers – me, David Angus, Barrie Webb and Ross Cowan – shared a dorm with Billy Young, who was a fourth former. Billy had the key to the sports room. We had to convince him quite strongly at times to use it because it opened other rooms with things we wanted. Nothing terribly bad! However, I do remember that fifth form had the last lesson on Fridays in the science lab and it was our duty to lock up – but we usually left a window open. Our favourite trick was to make our own fireworks. We used to take the long tubes that the physics thermometers came in and pack them

## David Hope

with our homemade gunpowder. I remember us sneaking out one night along the path to the summerhouse and lighting these fireworks. David Angus went to kick one out of Barrie Webb's hand and only succeeded in kicking it into his face and burning his eyelashes. We had a lot of explaining to do to Matron over that!

All in all, I had a great time at Naemoor/Lendrick Muir and I developed from a very naughty boy to become a better citizen.

David Hope

## **Three Wishes – Maybe!**

‘So I can have anything I want with the three wishes.’

‘Well, not quite, there are conditions.’

‘Conditions? Conditions? How can there be conditions?’

‘The main condition is that you may wish for anything you want except to hurt other people in any way.’

‘Well, that seems reasonable?’

‘And it extends to not using what you wish for to hurt other people or the granted wish will be revoked.’

‘But what if someone becomes jealous? They will be hurting. Does that revoke my wish?’

‘No, jealousy is self-harm and you cannot be held responsible for that.’

‘Can I gift a wish to someone else?’

‘No, but you can wish for something for another person. But be careful, wish for something you know they want, not something you think they want.’

‘Any other conditions?’

‘Yes, you may not wish for something that breaches the laws of physics. So, no time travel, flying unaided or the like.’

‘That’s it?’

‘No, there is one more. You may not wish for anything illegal, like drugs, or the performance of an illegal act.’

‘That’s it?’

‘That’s it!’

‘OK! Here goes then ...’

David Hope

## Tall Tales

Why did I have this Walter Mitty moment? Yes, Sue was attractive and I thought that chatting with her would while away the long hours of the flight. But the tall tales I told her – a farrago of half-truths and outright lies to make myself more interesting to her! What was I thinking? Well, I'm not sure, but clarity of thought was definitely lacking.

Sue was so interesting to talk to: her life experiences and the many exciting assignments she'd had encouraged me to tell even wilder tales. As we shared thoughts and stories I could feel myself falling for her. Such a witty, charming, warm, bubbly personality – so full of life and joy. It was heady! It was exhilarating!

Sue clearly enjoyed my company as much as I enjoyed hers. We exchanged contact details as the plane was on its final approach into Sydney. We would catch up with each other soon, very soon.

Walking into the arrivals hall I realised with a jolt that the tall tales I had told would come back to haunt me. Over and over again this thought ran through my head, my anxiety increasing with each iteration.

As I walked on I noticed Sue engrossed in conversation with a friend. Then I heard her friend ask, 'How was the funeral?'

Funeral? But, she was on a business trip, was she not?  
It was then I realised her tales were as tall as mine!

David Hope

## **The River**

The river wends its wondrous way  
Ceaselessly flowing day by day  
Violent torrent, slow meander  
Sometimes modest, sometimes grander  
Creating cliffs, red, yellow, grey  
The river wends its wondrous way  
Joined by others, swelling, changing  
Slowing, widening, ever ranging  
Through the rapids, water raging  
By quiet pools mankind engaging  
The river wends its wondrous way  
Altering course as banks decay  
Rain, sun, wind and moonlight dapple  
Copes with all, a daily grapple  
Water moving without delay  
The river wends its wondrous way

## **Home**

clear blue sky, red sand  
heat shimmering in the air  
Australia – my home



## **Gail Orr**

My trips between Mount Gambier and Adelaide in the 90's inspired me to write the stories in this Anthology. They help me recall and reconnect to my deceased husband, Rex, who was as passionate about cars as he was about me, I think!

We were proud owners of older vehicles; a Jaguar, a Citroen and a number of recycled Renaults, each with its own identity.

That chapter of my life lives on in my memory and I have gained great joy in documenting these stories.

I have an active retirement and enjoy morning walks in nature and I am involved in a women's choir on a weekly basis. My family and extended family connections are a treasured part of my life and I hope they enjoy these stories.

Gail Orr

## The Ritual of the Gloves

My husband and I lived in Mount Gambier for almost ten years. During this time we made regular car trips to Adelaide. There was a stable of older cars at home that were always requiring mechanical attention of one sort or another. So before any long distance travelling, 'car prep' was a fundamental requirement.

At one stage we owned three cars; two older Renaults and a vintage Jaguar. We also had two engines – one of those engines was there for a complete re-build of the Jaguar, the other, a Renault engine, was for spare parts – or 'in case'.

When all the cars were out of action, and there were times, it was especially frustrating. It was then I was grateful that I enjoyed walking and we lived close to Mount Gambier's main street and business centre.

It was often a race against the clock to make a vehicle road worthy for a pending trip. As a departure loomed the activity in the garage increased to meet a particular deadline.

The day arrived. The car was packed and as the engine warmed it was then the 'ritual of the gloves' began. What do you mean you might wonder? Let me tell you! Until the large capable hands of the driver were encased in soft brown leather, each finger stroked into place ensuring the fit was comfortable on each digit and until the leather was smoothed over the hands and the wrists buttons were secured, we were not ready.

I admired this endearing habit and although I knew we would sail through the countryside easily and at some speed, I

## Gail Orr

was not worried. The gloves reminded me that driving was serious business. It was taken on soberly and I was safe in Rex's hands.

There were many exciting, exhilarating, tiring, tedious and interesting trips – perhaps I'll tell you one or two.

## Lights

Whenever Rex and I drove from Mount Gambier to Adelaide there was always “a ready bed” for us at the home of our dear friends, Neil and Charmian. They welcomed us time and again after our long journey with food and wine or, if we arrived later in the evening, then it was a chat and a cuppa.

During the ten years living in a regional city, our travels were many and for various reasons. In 1996, the year of my fiftieth birthday, we had many memorable trips to town. My friends had clubbed together to give me a subscription to the Australian Chamber Orchestra. I was able to enjoy my birthday very month that year.

Coming to Adelaide for Rex's health checks were hard. He braved and fought cancer for many years: his bladder cancer was a serious challenge but, his battle against Non Hodgkin's Lymphoma failed and it was that disease that caused his death.

I remember one important health trip travelling late afternoon though rain and mist until the evening sleet set in. However, this was a breeze compared to what was to come.

At twilight, we stopped at Tantanoola for petrol. It was there we realized we had no car lights! You need lights for

## Gail Orr

night travel, don't you? The RAA couldn't help us until the morning. What to do? Rex was due at the hospital for a procedure early next morning.

Well normally, we would book into a motel and travel next day but we were under time pressure. I was perplexed when Rex left the car and approached a parked truck. On speaking to the driver Rex returned to the car announcing that it would be fine because we would follow the truck and his lights into town.

My panic button pushed; we pulled out quickly to shadow this helpful driver and his truck. I protested loudly and emphatically saying, 'We could be killed.' Repeating this over and over seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Finally, Rex looking exasperated replied, 'We will be, if you don't stop panicking.'

After three more tedious hours following that truck, we made it.

A trip never to be repeated quite like that, but never fear there were more adventures to come.

## The Adelaide Wedding

Adelaide was the designated spot. Planning a wedding with the bride & groom in Sydney and me, the mother of the bride, in Mt Gambier, was proving a significant challenge.

The bridesmaids lived in Adelaide and it was my task to meet them and shop for the dresses. I did this at the other end of a mobile phone as the bride lived in Sydney. This was the

## Gail Orr

nineties; mobiles were the size of bricks but consultation and deliberations were achieved.

Weddings are always a lot of fun but arranging them long distance less so. We continued planning over the next few months.

The colour theme was red: red roses, jewellery of red garnets and red wedding cars. Gold accents were added as one hundred red and gold balloons filled the church hall where afternoon refreshments were to be served.

Back in Mount Gambier, 'car prep' was in progress. We had two cars to drive to Adelaide to accommodate guests and manage the essential running around. My husband, Rex, and I finally arrived in Adelaide after the usual five hour journey.

We had booked the Country Women's Association as our home away from home for all the last minute nuptial preparations and hosting. I had a speech to finish, the bride and her wedding party to settle, guests to meet and greet and much more.

We made numerous trips to the airport in the Renault and Citroen to welcome interstate folk. We didn't give it much thought until Rex's brother announced how proud he was of us both managing – NOT THE WEDDING – but the cars. Yes, the Renault starter motor was hot-wired and our Citroen, pride and joy that it was, had 4 of its 5 gears working. We could drive forward but only forward!

By now you may have guessed it, yes, we had NO REVERSE GEAR!

Oh joy! The blessing was at least our cars were not the wedding cars.

Gail Orr

## Heavy Transport

Leaving Adelaide in amongst a solid stream of heavy transport making a dash into the last of the evening twilight was always an exciting jostle.

I could breathe a sigh of relief on turning off at Tailem Bend to drive the Dukes Highway.

I had a few more hours of travel before reaching my destination. As time went by the transport and traffic seemed to settle into a rolling pattern – relaxing into its own rhythm.

I was on this road every week. However, after my long drive I would meet my husband, Rex, who had been working in Bordertown. Then, he would take over the wheel, driving late into the night until we arrived home in Mount Gambier.

The Citroen was a very easy car to drive. However, maintaining speed without cruise control was tricky and demanding. If you slowed down for even a minute, a presence, with dazzling bright lights, could suddenly loom in your rear vision mirror.

The defensive driving course I had taken proved very helpful and I remembered the drill. Look behind, look ahead, look to the side, look ahead long view and short view, and then repeat.

One night I was driving a long stretch and a large semi-trailer consistently crept up on my vehicle even though I was maintaining the speed limit. The truck was still pushing up my back when finally in an aggressive gesture, ‘he cut my road’ and passed.

As a consequence, I swerved to the roadside. I turned off the ignition, and stopped to calm my un-nerved and shaken body.

On reaching my husband, and describing my experience, his explanation was enlightening. The creeping behavior was ‘truck body language’. His vehicle was most likely empty and all he wanted to do was ‘go for it’ no matter what. I was meant to allow him to pass right from the start.

Well, well!

What a heart stopping experience but at least I learnt another mystery of the road.

## **The Bonnet**

Autumn light was fading to dusk as I left my tutorial to jostle with the stream of trucks about to make the eastern states their destination.

I was on Glen Osmond Road and about to pass a popular motel when I heard ‘it’.

There was a loud bang and an ominous sound of metal hitting metal. My car came to a stop and could only limp forward with a scraping and scouring sound.

Foreboding thoughts rose into consciousness. I left the driver’s seat to check the car. Moving to the front of the Renault I saw what resembled a three-corner tear in an old pair of jeans ripped by a large nail: this was replicated in the car bonnet.

## Gail Orr

I was standing in shocked silence until I thought to ring my husband. Rex would be awaiting my arrival in Bordertown that evening.

'Well you won't be going anywhere tonight,' he said while he calmly encouraged me to book into Jackson's motel. Calls continued between us making arrangements. The RAA attended and pushed the car into the safety of the motel car park. Then Rex reassured me that in the morning, his mechanic friend at Chateau Moteur would look at the car.

I slept fitfully that night wondering what had really caused that metal tear. Of course all was revealed in the morning after Chateau Moteur examined the problem. One of the blades in the rotor fan cooling the engine had flung a metal piece off and at such force it had penetrated the bonnet causing the three-corner tear.

Wow!

How fortunate was I that the bonnet contained the damage and that the blade had not landed in the middle of my windscreen. I was extremely grateful for the lucky escape and had yet another opportunity to further my knowledge of maintaining older vehicles.



## Robert Schmidt

I have resided in Adelaide for sixty four years. I worked for Otto & Co. for thirty years: which included a stint as an accountant. In 2012 I joined Club 68 (now The Cottage). I didn't think I was creative but I became a part of their inaugural writing group; their laughter at my writing was a great encouragement and as a result I sometimes performed my writing at the Wildwood Gallery. I also joined a fitness group and soon after ran my first City to Bay Fun Run. I'm also a part of St Peter's Heart and Soul Walkers' Group.

In 2015 I joined the Burnside Writers' Group. They soon liked my writing with its wacky sense of humour: the subjects were often autobiographical. In a gentle way the group helped refine my writing and still do.

## A Fond Memory of my Brother David

In the 60s the Blancs were family friends living in Sorrento near Melbourne. My older brother David had a brief relationship with one of their daughters, Mavis. It was the time of National Service. Mavis would get on a plane full of soldiers in Melbourne and if one sat alongside of her they would often ask, 'What's your name?'

She would reply, 'Blanc. Mavis Blanc.' Often a peaceful flight followed.

At Adelaide airport David would greet her and they would drive off in my brother's trusty VW Beetle called Fifi, with me in the back seat not sure where Mavis was staying. My brother and Mavis were about eighteen and I was twelve.

Often they would go to the drive-in. Mum insisted that I chaperone them. Not sure that my brother was happy with the arrangement, but what could he do? That was the deal.

When we got to the drive-in I was promptly bribed with cash to go to the kiosk to eat and drink to my heart's content.

'Don't come back while the movie's on.'

So there I was sitting alongside a big speaker in the kiosk eating popcorn and drinking Fanta. Now I wasn't stupid. I knew what they were up to. I reckon I saw much more of the movie than they did.

After the movie there was feverish activity going on in Fifi as I approached, but order was restored by the time I reached the car.

Usually it was a very quiet drive home. When we got there Mum had supper waiting. And I knew it was 'mum's the word' about what had gone on.

Robert Schmidt

## Bring Back Mobile Free Dating

I was having a cup of tea at the café the other day when in walked a strikingly attractive young lady. She sat by the window not far away and looked nervously around the café. Then out comes the obligatory mobile and she furiously starts texting.

An equally attractive young man appears and she lifts her head from the phone and waves. He joins her. He embraces her. He goes to the counter; collects coffee and cakes. Returning to her, they briefly converse; then, two mobiles appear. Down go their heads and they furiously start texting, barely taking time to take bites from the cakes; they are oblivious of each other.

When I was young and lucky to get a date, it would have been mortifying for the young lady to get the waiter to bring two phones to the table and have her dial her girlfriends.

While I can imagine her telling them what a lovely guy she was with, more likely she would have been wishing I'd tell my mates what a gorgeous date I had. Actually, you usually waited until you said goodnight before dialling your mates.

Returning to the present it is soon time for me to move on. Looking over my shoulder, I see they are still peering at their phones; besides them, their half-eaten cakes.

I understand you're not hungry when you're in love. However, I'll never understand young lovers texting away instead of looking into each other's eyes like we once did.

Robert Schmidt

## Fact Check What?

My friends of the Burnside Writers' Group, you may remember my writing on the young loves communicating through their mobiles on a date. When I mentioned this to my mate Steve he said, 'Oh, they were probably fact checking.'

'Fact checking what? It was a date,' I retorted.

Recently my friends Steve and Alex have bought the latest phones with all the whiz bang technology that goes with them.

They have, you guessed it, joined the "fact checking" craze.

You can't open your mouth without Steve and Alex saying in unison, 'Well let's fact check that.'

Once upon a time people admired what was in your head.

When someone said, 'Sergeant Peppers', I'd say 'Let me think...that came out on the first of June 1967.' Now everyone taps furiously on their phones. 'You're wrong,' someone would say. 'It was the second of June.'

It's not what's in your head now, but who has the fastest fingers in the west.

I digress for a second. Where are the police when you need them? The other day, at the lights, I saw this guy furiously tapping on his mobile. He stopped for a second when he saw me glaring at him. The lights turned green, he screeched the tires and zoomed off up the Parade. Fact checking I guess.

Back to my friends Steve and Alex: you're thinking if you can't beat them join them Robert. That might be so, but then you will have three blokes fact checking and not much conversation.

And too bad for the joker who's the slowest tapper in the west or the east for that matter. Guess who that might be?

Robert Schmidt

## The Strange Contraption

It was 1973. Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* was on the airwaves. Dad had given me a revolutionary pocket calculator for Christmas, the first one of my friends to get one. I thought I ruled the world.

I had gone for a run; the next thing bang, crash wallop. I'd kicked a mysterious metal ornament down the road, its lid flying off.

Out popped a ghost like figure. I'm terrified.

'Stay calm,' he said. 'I'm a Genie. My name is Mark. Mark Zuckerberg. One day I will rule the world. No one knows me now, but with this phone in my hand there will be a process where anyone can communicate with anyone else in the world, anytime, anywhere. Maybe I'll call the process Facebook. Cool name don't you think?'

Still terrified I replied, 'Don't know. Anyway, only God can connect anyone to anyone in the world.'

'OK, you have three wishes,' he said.

'First can I have one of those contraptions?' I asked.

'Sure, here's a prototype.'

'Second, can you show me how it works?'

'Easy.' He diligently showed me: everything going over my head.

'Third. Can you keep coming back to show me?'

'Sure, your wish is my command.'

Then he said, 'At the moment I'm a Genie. Soon I'll be born a human being, like you, only smarter. I'll be in my

Robert Schmidt

twenties when I perfect it, you'll be my first Facebook contact.  
So keep that phone!'

With that he vanished.

Flabbergasted I thought, did I just imagine all that? Maybe it was in the gutter all along.

I was still shaking when a stranger came up to me and said, 'You look like you've just seen a ghost.'

'I did. Thought I kicked an ornament and then a ghost by the name of Mark appeared sprouting some bullshit about everyone being connected to everyone else. Next thing this contraption is in my hand. Actually, it's too much to take in. I must need a holiday.'

The stranger said to me, 'If it's too much for you, then I can take it off your hands.'

I shoved it into his hand hastily walking away.

History changed forever in 1973.

## The Unlikely Guests

It was a very cold showery night in May on the occasion of my cousin Karen's sixtieth birthday party: her journey into senior citizenship. On inviting me, only two requests – bring your own drinks and dancing shoes.

The party at Glandore was under a very big marquee. Gathered were a kaleidoscope of society including cousins, neighbours, friends, church goers and many more. Karen has been a meteorologist, successful musician and even has a theological degree through the Lutheran Church.

## Robert Schmidt

At first people mingled, stuffing themselves, until gradually they were one-by-one coerced, encouraged or blatantly dragged onto the dance floor. The music, from an invisible source, was strictly 70s disco. Not sure how many times I heard *Funky Town*. I had hidden myself inside the house with a bottle of wine sharing it with my ninety year auntie Wilma.

By 11pm people were leaving the party when Karen came and dragged me to the dance floor. I was doing an appalling John Travolta impersonation when at about 11:30pm in through the front gates came an apparition, three uniformed cops. One calmly asked, 'Whose party is it?'

My cousin nervously said, 'My – my sixtieth.'

'Having a good night?'

'Well yeah.'

'Don't want to be party poopers – can you please turn the music down?' Their almost ghostlike figures became quite friendly, briefly mingling, declining a drink though. Then we exchanged goodbyes and out through the open front gate the cops go.

We look at each other flabbergasted. What a noisy, rowdy, unruly bunch of senior citizens we must have been.

Robert Schmidt

## **Mug of What?**

After an appointment recently, my wife Jane and I had lunch at the Lunch Club Café Unley. We enjoyed our meal and at the end, Jane said, ‘Can you get me a cappuccino dear?’

‘OK, I feel like a mug of coffee myself,’ I replied.

Going to the counter, the middle aged owner smiled and I said, ‘Can I have cappuccino ’n a mugaccino?’ Not sure what I wanted. Also, when nervous, I speak quickly.

‘You want a cappuccino,’ he replied.

‘No, I want a cappuccino ’n a mugaccino.’

‘Wait a minute,’ he said starting to frown. ‘Do you want one drink or two?’

Frowning back at him I thought it was bleeding obvious. It had already been a tough day and I didn’t want to get into an argument over a cup of coffee.

‘Can I have a cappuccino and a mugaccino?’ Now as slowly as I could through gritted teeth.

‘Oh I get it,’ he replied. ‘You want two drinks not one.’

‘Yes!’

‘You want two drinks, a cappuccino in a small mug and a second one in a big mug. Why didn’t you say that in the first place?’

Thinking hard for a few seconds I said, ‘Well yes.’

Believe it or not I started to smile. This major order was resolved.

Getting back to my chair, Jane frowned at me. ‘What took you so long, dear?’

‘Oh please, don’t start...’

Robert Schmidt

## Your Euro What?

My day of surgery had arrived. My friends David and Meredith collected me at 6:30am to go to St. Andrew's Hospital. I was having a brand new prostate procedure called an Urolift. My mate Steve said it sounds like an act from Eurovision.

I thought I would go under the knife soon after 7am. I was wrong. The admitting nurse told me to get into one of those back to front gowns. 'Get into bed. Put the telly on. Relax,' she said. I put the TV on to hear the latest fake news about Trump, then re-runs of Four Corners and Australian Story. I kid you not, I fell fast asleep.

A male orderly appeared at the end of the bed waking me. 'Time for your op, it's 10:45am.' He whisked me through the corridors like he's training for the novelty bed push for the City Bay Run. I was then put onto another bed to be greeted by the surgeon and the anaesthetist. The latter gave me a jab and I was out to it.

I wake, look at a big clock it's 12:15pm. Feeling not too bad; that was a breeze. I'm whisked back through the corridors by, let's call him Stirling Moss.

After a nice lunch, Dr Wells my surgeon appeared. 'As long as you can pee into a bottle we'll let you go home. Don't worry your urine will be red and no running for two weeks.'

Not long after, I thankfully wee. A nurse rushes in, and grabs the specimen. 'That's the clearest we've had all day,' she says in excitement – like they'll give me a prize.

She appeared again and said, 'Get dressed. Your friend will take you home in thirty minutes.' Make that five. David's at the door.

'For crying out loud, where are my socks?' Hunting high and low they're found and I'm out of there.

Wouldn't you know it. The next day I'm walking around with odd socks, another odd pair still in my case.

## **The Most Satisfying Run**

It's the morning of 20 August 2017; my third Adelaide Half Marathon is finally here. It's actually a relief it's arrived what with the difficulties of the past year; the passing of my brother in April and then prostate surgery in June, making training intermittent.

My taxi arrives at 6:45am and speeds its way through the Adelaide streets until we arrive at War Memorial Drive. The air is still and the sun peeps over the distant Adelaide Hills as I join a steady stream of guys making their way to the toilets. I lose count how many times I go. Hope I don't need to go during the run.

Eventually, at 7:45am on the dot we go under the arch and we're away. I zig zag amongst other runners soon looking for the 1km sign.

This year though, there are only three signposts: 5, 10 and 15 of the 21.1km course making it hard to tell how far I have to go, or check my time for that matter. So annoying!

The wind picks up from the north, the further we go the more it continues to strengthen. I grab my cap. We climb the

Robert Schmidt

streets of North Adelaide. It's hilly! It's agonising! The kilometres slowly go by as we run through the Botanic Gardens, then along by the Zoo. Suddenly I stop. Am I on the course?

A middle aged lady sings out from behind me. 'Keep going we are nearly there.' Pant. Pant, 'Wow, this is the prettiest course I've ever see, picture perfect.'

As she passes me I see she's wearing a T-shirt with *The Great Wall* on her back: a tourist, I think.

'Well yeah,' I pant my exhausted reply.

Finally, the Adelaide Oval appears and I run around the outside reaching the northern gates. Through I go and circle the inside of the oval. I go under the arch feeling triumphant but in tears and grab my medal.

And guess what?

I didn't need to go to the toilet once during the race!

Roger Monk



## **Roger Monk**

I am a former banker, academic and Riesling maker, and now a crime writer, book editor and Riesling drinker. I bring my snippets of writing to the Burnside Writers' Group to keep the creative department of my brain active between books.

Roger Monk

## Jogging

Cold.

Wet gusts on huddled arms,  
Stiff legs and cracking knees,  
Plodding up hill.  
Shapes pre-dawn becoming things,  
Dogs and speeding track suits,  
Clouds of breath.

### Jogging

Hot.

Stomach cramped and heavy,  
Sweaty forehead, burning feet,  
Can't go on.  
Rounding aching corners, gasping,  
Eyes blind and body red  
Slowing down,  
Hurting.

Home,  
Staggered last few steps,  
Done it! God, it's over!  
Feet like lead,  
Pouring sweat in chilling streams,  
Burning sore and shivering.  
No more until  
Tomorrow.

Roger Monk

## Throw it Out!

If it's getting in the way,

Throw it out!

If all it does is sit there,

Throw it out!

If it's sticking in your craw

And not wanted anymore,

Then my advice to you is

Throw it out!

If it's being such a pest,

Throw it out!

If it's slowing up the works,

Throw it out!

If there's no room in the lockers

And the drawer's already chockers,

Then my advice to you is

Throw it out!

If it's squatting up in Google,

Throw it out!

If it's sleeping in Safari,

Throw it out!

If it's clogging up the Spam

or pastes a printing jam,

Then my advice to you is

Throw it out!

Roger Monk

If it's just where you don't want it,  
Throw it out!  
If you can never find it,  
Throw it out!  
If it's taking too much space  
Or it's in the wrong damn place,  
Then my advice to you is  
THROW IT OUT!

Roger Monk

## Sanka

Some time before last harvest, we drove into the mid-North and stayed with Hugh and Margaret, both veterinary surgeons but semi-retired and only helping out during the busy times of neglected Christmas presents and gone-mad viruses. Up the main street and then that familiar turn to the right and the old stone house with directors' chairs in the lounge. Nothing seemed to have changed. But we were wrong.

There at the gate was a new dog, a young, rather handsome border collie instead of the old collie that had almost tiptoed about the house with arthritis. This one danced at our feet and raced us to the front door and back a hundred times as we pulled our cases out of the boot and struggled down the path to the verandah. She was overjoyed to see us, although we had never met before, and we were so certain that she had known we were coming that we thanked Hugh for asking her to watch for us at the gate.

They had had her for some months, a refugee from a family that had had to return to the city, where border collies were not exactly the best pets in confined spaces. Margaret had named her Sanka after the old American coffee advertisements, and like the coffee, the dog had kept them awake all night. She came instantly when called. Bright as a button, with every sign of Hugh's sure hand guiding her passage through adolescence.

It was a lovely evening so we ate outside, and then Hugh announced that it was time for Sanka's run...and would we like to come along?

Of course! We had been cooped up in the car for some hours and Margaret's excellent cooking begged a stroll. The dog was put on a lead and we wandered down the street until it became a country road and then a track between paddocks over low hills. It was not quite dusk, balmy and mild, and we stretched ourselves and smelled the wheat and barley beside the track, already turning from green on its golden journey to curing and, eventually, the harvester. We chatted with Hugh, rejoicing in the old stories and times, and bringing each other up-to-date about family and friends. We laughed, kicked the odd stone and picked a head of barley.

Suddenly, at a corner, Hugh stopped and told Sanka to sit. He bent down with his head close to hers. 'Go up that track,' he said, pointing, 'then across that bare paddock with the tree in it. Then up the little road to the left until it meets the rough track with the gorse bushes on the corner. Then follow it over the hill as far as it goes, turn right past the dam and come back down the road that they've just graded to the beginning of this track. Follow it back to us. We'll wait here for you.'

Sanka looked up at him and almost seemed to nod. Hugh undid the lead, pointed again, and away she went, flat out up the track. Before long, she was just a moving speck against the grass, and then she disappeared altogether. We looked at each other and grinned, but Hugh wasn't smiling.

'Should take her about fifteen minutes,' he said, looking at his watch. We, too, checked the time, going along with the joke, and then we wandered about, watching the birds heading home and listening to the tiny rustlings in the roadside grass. Except for a crow calling in the distance, all was quiet.

Roger Monk

It was that time of evening when the breeze stops and the air seems to pause, waiting for night.

‘About a minute, I’d say.’ Hugh said suddenly, again studying his watch and turning to look up the track. A glance at our watches and we, too, turned, partly humouring him and partly curious. The seconds went by and then, yes, there *was* something moving away up the track. A few seconds later and we could just make it out: a black and white dog racing towards us. We found ourselves jumping up and down and calling out, laughing and grinning as Sanka covered the last few hundred metres and flew into Hugh’s arms, slobbering and panting.

‘That’s amazing!’ We shouted. ‘Incredible! So clever!’

‘How on earth did you train her to do that? Must have taken ages!’

‘Ah, well,’ said Hugh, putting her down and patting her, ‘I didn’t have anything to do with it. That’s the way she always goes.’

Roger Monk

## Just for a Second

Dal was having one of his good days. All too often the blanket was heavy around his mind and he knew very little, sitting all day staring and weeping, his face blank and set, his eyes unseeing.

But not today. Somehow, today was different...clearer. He rocked in his chair, picking at the acne on his face and muttering. He felt hot, but didn't want to take his jumper off. He wanted to look out the window but that would mean leaving the chair. A tear ran down his face, but he didn't notice; tears were part of being here, being alive.

He scratched himself and wanted to go to the toilet...to let go. No! Mustn't! Have to leave the chair. He felt hotter and more uncomfortable. Tears came quickly and he sobbed as he rocked from side to side.

They came to get him an hour later. He crouched back and hid his head, but they pulled his fingers away from the sides of the chair and lifted him up, talking, coaxing. One stayed behind to clean up, and the other led him down the passageway.

Shuffling along in his slippers, Dal watched the other's shoes flashing reflections on the polished linoleum and he hated the clacking noise and the movement. He pulled back even more, feeling the grip tighten and begin to hurt. Anger flared with the hurt, and his eyes bulged as he struck out with his free arm.

But the other was too far in front and Dal's arm fell to his side. Frustration took the place of hurt, and the blanket closed

## Roger Monk

over him again. He stumbled to his knees, but they dragged him up and on. Tears started, and he sobbed quietly.

His mother looked up as he was led in. Her eyes saw his ugliness and for a second her face showed distaste. Then concern took its place and she spoke earnestly with the woman in the white coat. The woman shrugged and replied.

Dal saw his mother's look and it hurt before he fully took it in. It must be Visiting Day! The day he'd been looking forward to for so long. But they hadn't told him; hadn't warned him. It took a while to sink in – his mother was here! Here! At last! He made to take a step forward, then stopped, frowning. Why hadn't they told him? Why hadn't she written a letter to him ... to let him know? Why didn't she care?

He stood there, shoulders slumped and arms hanging down, listening to them but not hearing. Not understanding. Why didn't she love him? Why leave him here? Why couldn't he go home? Home with her? With her arm around him? Why? Why?

He tried to think of what it must be like to be loved, to be touched, and he looked up, his eyes moist with tears. Anger welled up and he clenched his fists and threw himself at her, begging her in a low, strangled moan. He reached her and flung his arms around her neck before they could get to him, but then they had him and were pulling him away, forcing his arms out and behind until the pain came through to him and the moan became louder and sharper.

He kicked at them, struggling to break their hold and to reach her again, to feel her really there, but they held him and forced him back. Through the pain and hot, stinging tears he

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heard the shrieks but didn't connect them with her. Why? Why? Please! Please! He begged for her, mouthing the words through the saliva, not understanding. Never understanding.

Dal sat in his chair, rocking from side to side as he frowned to remember. What had she felt like? Had she felt good? Like the place where there were no more worries; no more being alone, no more tears? Like rolling into a ball under the blankets at the bottom of the bed? It ran through him and over him, and he grasped it to him, his arms wrapping themselves around it.

Just for a second.

Then the memory slipped away and he let his arms fall. A great emptiness enveloped him and the blanket closed over. He stared, unseeing, at the floor and the tears sobbed out, running down his face and disappearing into his jumper.



### **Anne McKenzie**

I am a retired social worker whose writing often addresses child protection themes. I write poetry and prose and am learning the craft of short story writing. I am an avid reader.

I grew up in Western Australia living in both Perth and in rural areas of that state. I have lived in South Australia for more than thirty years.

Anne McKenzie

## **Dust Storm**

It's the unexpected silence and stillness that's your first warning – gone the ceaseless chatter and calling of birds and insects, the slither of snakes and lizards in the grass, and the restless stirring of the trees in the hot morning breeze. Every living creature has stopped and is looking to the far westerly horizon where a dirty red smudge in the sky is the only sign of the dust storm to come. Then all panic into action to find shelter.

We bring in the washing from the clothes line, stow away garden tools and toys left lying where they fell, shut and lock doors, louvres and windows, stuff old towels under closed external doors, and cower inside nervously to wait it out. Soon the sunlight is choked out by the rolling coppery cloud. Inside the dust still finds us and clogs our nostrils and our eyes. The wind shakes the house violently, trying to prise it free of its desperate grip on the earth. We close our eyes.

Then the wind dies away and the rain and hail come. The first few drops ping on the hot corrugated iron roof like stray rifle shots, then they beat down rat-a-tat, like machine gun fire, and finally as if the whole jack booted heavenly army is thundering down onto our roof. We peer out the kitchen window watching white ice tennis balls bounce as they hit the ground.

Then, just as quickly as it comes, the rain fades away. There is a moment of silent and stunned relief. The sky clears to its best faded denim blue and again the sun burns down. The thirsty earth quickly drinks the last few muddy puddles. Then all life moves again.

Anne McKenzie

## **Counselling**

It is the child  
Who brings the woman  
To this room  
Though she rarely enters herself,  
Prefers to stand outside,  
Wistfully gazing in,  
Face pushed flat against the windowpane,  
Or to cheekily ring the doorbell  
And scurry away giggling

It is the woman  
Who struggles  
To fill the silences  
In this room,  
Who feels stripped bare  
Naked and afraid.

Who wonders why she keeps coming  
But knows she can't stay away

It's the woman  
Who wants the child  
In this room  
To go up to the mother  
And sit on her knee,  
To have her kiss better,  
To band-aid her heart  
To hold her close in enveloping arms  
And murmur her name

It is the child,  
When the woman leaves,  
Who clutches at her sleeve  
'But I don't want to go!'  
Who stamps her feet  
And refuses to get in the car  
Who pouts  
'Don't care anyway,'  
Who wakes her at night  
With tears and bad dreams,  
Who whispers the secret longings  
For the mother

It is the woman  
Whose arms ache  
With this longing,  
Who weeps for the child,  
For she is this motherless child.

## That Bloody Dress

My mother has prepared me well, recounting a story of humiliation on her first day in a hospital as a young trainee nurse: she was sent to get a set of Fallopian tubes from the equipment store. So I have to say I'm half expecting something the like to happen on my first day as a student social worker, at the Royal Perth Hospital.

Two fellow students, Dan Lockwood and Margaret Carson, are also to be based at the hospital and, on our first day, the three of us have to report to the Chief Social Worker, Mrs. Ruth Tylor.

Dan is the class hunk and about my age, just twenty-one. Margaret is much older and has worked as an unqualified welfare officer for many years. I'm infatuated with Dan, he with himself and Margaret with God.

We're ushered into Mrs. Tylor's office and directed to the chairs placed in front of and to one side of her desk. Mrs. Tylor, who I think is ancient, but is probably only in her mid fifties, is wearing a twin set, tweed skirt, stockings that remind me of the bullet proof tights we had to wear in high school, and brown brogues. Her hair is pulled back into a bun so tightly it seems to have stretched the skin of her face taut. There is no welcome and no greeting. Facing the gun barrel of an advancing enemy armoured tank wouldn't be more intimidating.

'Let's get started,' she says, after asking our names and having looked us over, clearly finding only disappointment.

What we are to learn that morning addresses just two themes. First, our behaviour is not ever to embarrass her. Second, in the hospital, the Doctor is God and we are there to

do God's bidding without question, and in a suitably humble and obeisant manner.

I'd wanted to look my best on this significant day, so I'm wearing my twenty first birthday party dress. It's only the second time I've worn it. It's wool; cream-coloured, with three quarter length sleeves, and it opens right down the front.

As Mrs. Tylor drones on – and I drift away imagining that first romantic candlelit dinner with Dan – I feel a movement at my breast. I look down just in time to see a single gold metal button tumble downwards and fall to the floor with a loud clunk.

I go scarlet.

Mrs. Tylor stops speaking. Her eye has caught the movement and her ear the noise. She bends down and retrieves the button from near her desk where it has rolled.

'I believe this is yours,' she says, with a withering stare, her gaze taking in my gaping dress.

One hand covering my breast, I stand up, step forward and accept the button. As I return to my seat, I catch a glimpse of Dan and Margaret trying to stifle guffaws.

The droning begins again. Some of the hot colour is leaving my face.

Oh, no!

Another button from the same vicinity begins its descent.

This time I'm all action. I grab for it as it falls – but, to no avail. It clunks to the floor.

Mrs. Tylor stops speaking. The room is achingly silent. I want to die. I immediately convert to Catholicism and begin fervent prayers of supplication. I vow to stop raiding my father's drinks cabinet and to give up all earthly pleasures.

Mrs. Tylor bends down, retrieves the button and holds it out to me, a pained expression on her face.

Still clutching at my breast, I step forward and accept the button.

Behind me there is strangled coughing from Dan and Margaret. Rest assured I will kill them later *and* the manufacturers of this bloody dress.

Back in my seat, I assess the problem logically and calmly – obviously an inferior quality cotton thread has been used to hold the heavy metal buttons and it's giving way when put under stress; and no, I'm not that well endowed. I have a solution. I hunch my shoulders inward and my arms forward to reduce the strain on the upper part of the dress. I have to concentrate on doing this and so I hear next to nothing of what Mrs. Tylor is saying. I can't take any notes anyway – I don't have a free hand. I've even had to tuck my notepad under my arm.

Clunk.

Gone from the belly this time.

Oh, God, no! This time it's actually rolled under her desk.

I feel sick and the room is spinning.

Mrs. Tylor doesn't stop speaking this time. She just looks down and, then, disdainfully uses the toe of one of her very sensible shoes to hook the button out towards her. She picks it up and offers it to me in the palm of her hand. Still hunched over, and trying to clutch my gaping dress closed with just the one hand, I step forward and take the offering.

Clunk.

There is no God. I always knew it.

I spring from my chair and scrabble on the floor to retrieve this one myself.

To my left, Dan appears to be having a coronary but, frankly, I don't give a damn. I hope it's an agonizing death he suffers.

Back in my seat, I now not only hunch my shoulders inward and my arms forward but also press my thighs together, too – all the while still trying to hold the dress opening closed. I now appear to be suffering severe spinal and hip deformities.

Clunk.

Please? No more.

The room is silent again. I can't move. Mrs. Tylor's eyes rake over the front of my dress. She leaves the latest fall where it lies, gets up, goes to a grey steel locker and withdraws a white hospital coat.

'I think that perhaps you had better put this on now,' she says.

I comply meekly but then discover to my horror that the coat has no buttons either. Surely she doesn't mean me to put it on backwards, like a hospital gown, open at the back? No. She hands me some detachable buttons and pins to attach them.

Dan has to excuse himself to go the toilet. I hope he doesn't make it. I hope he pisses himself stupid. I feel Margaret is overdoing the coughing now, too. So I fix her with a death ray glare.

I fumble trying to get the buttons on, all fingers thumbs, until finally I have it done. I button up the coat and slump back in my chair, chaste but exhausted.

It looks like I might have to crawl under Mrs. Tylor's desk to get that other button from my dress. I'll need it later.

'Miss McKenzie!'

Oh, God, what now?

'Miss McKenzie... I said that if you're decent, now, perhaps we could begin our tour of the hospital?'

## Forest Fantasy

Like forest vines  
Grown long entwined,  
We lie together,  
As near to one  
As two can be,  
Our selves  
Lost  
In this new wholeness.

## Dream

Last night  
I dreamed of you:  
You were in my arms,  
Soft  
And warm,  
But as I moved  
To hold you tight,  
The dream  
And you  
Were gone.

## **Allowed**

A kiss is allowed  
In greeting  
Or farewell  
But steel the heart,  
Quell the tumult within,  
The longings  
Lingering lips would tell,  
The trembling anticipation  
Touching hands may spark,  
The coursing shock waves,  
And the body's aching essence,  
For only a kiss is allowed.

## **Three Wishes**

I wish I had a magic wand  
To right every wrong,  
To give everyone  
Their heart's desire,  
And when of that they tire,  
Their next longing too.

Anne McKenzie

## **Starlight**

Star light, star bright,  
first star I see...

I still remember that night –

the open fire,  
the mulled wine,  
the easy conversation,  
and, when it was so late,  
you saying, 'Stay, if you want.'  
I remember the starry night sky  
that bathed the bedroom  
in such a pale and tender light.  
I remember the McCubbin print

above the bed,  
the shy undressing,  
and the creak of the pine floorboards  
beneath our bare feet.

Most of all,  
I remember the loneliness of your bed,  
where naked desire,  
urgent for your touch,  
withered away.

I remember, too, your fortress back,  
and the long sleepless journey through darkness  
to dawn eyes that wished me gone.

I remember the joyless breakfast  
and the cold dismissal from your door,  
as final as an execution.

I remember you asking,  
'Why do you stay?'

Why?  
When you don't love me?  
We both knew why—  
Love and longing  
are their own invitation,  
and hope has no pride.

Star light, star bright,  
first star I see tonight;  
I wish I may, I wish I might  
have the wish I wish tonight.



## Don Sinnott

I've always written. Most of it in officialise, as befits a life in the public sector, or in that arcane style prescribed by science and engineering research journals. Now (almost) retired, I have rediscovered the joy of writing in different styles for different audiences. My first book, ghost-written for a Sudanese refugee, challenged me to adopt a style that might plausibly be his, with short sentences, limited vocabulary and no fancy grammar.

Next was a much more formal book – a dual biography, *Radar Men*, self-published last year and achieving modest sales. I'm now having a go at historical fiction so watch this space.

Don Sinnott

## Malcolm and Steinbeck

Malcolm, tall, ramrod-erect, precise of speech, was a lecturer in English at the Melbourne Teachers' College. More significantly, he was the father of my new girlfriend. I faced him, callow youth and nerdish engineering student that I was, with trepidation.

After a few meetings, I felt I needed to impress. I had recently read *East of Eden* by American author John Steinbeck; maybe I could impress this man of culture with a little name-dropping during conversation.

'So, you found Steinbeck interesting,' came his response, 'have you read any other of his works?'

I was instantly undone. He had exposed me as a one-trick pony. 'You should try *The Grapes of Wrath*,' he continued, 'let me lend you a copy.' A well-thumbed copy emerged from his study and I felt as if a homework assignment had landed on my lap.

At our next meeting, he wasted no time. 'How did you go with Chapter 7 – the used-car salesman chapter?' I fumbled for an answer – the chapter is a vivid monologue of a hard-driving car salesman frantic to unload his stock of wrecks onto drought-ravaged farmers desperate to walk off their dust-bowl Oklahoma farms and head to California. The frenetic monologue style of the chapter contrasts starkly with the measured third-person narrative pace of the rest of the book.

I replied, honestly, that I found it a vivid interpolation. 'Hmm,' said Malcolm, 'my college class could not get their

heads around it, felt it out of character with the rest of the book, thought Steinbeck had gone off the rails at this point.'

He clearly liked my answer more than that of his college students. We discussed other parts of the book and I felt that I had passed a test. Within two years he was my much-loved father in law, but I don't think the Steinbeck test had anything to do with it.

## The Camping Bug

Campers? We've always been campers.

As a relatively penniless 25-year-old graduate student, married with two little kids and in the US for a precious few years on a studentship, camping was the only family-holiday option. And holidays we intended to have during our US sojourn, road-tripping across as much of this land of the free as our budget and Volkswagen bug would carry us. Five-star accommodation would have been nice but if it had to be camping, then so be it.

A \$50 Kmart canvas tent, forever known as *the green tent*, a camp stove, a frypan, a few billies, and blow-up beds were essential equipment, along with a folding cot cum car-seat for our baby girl. With our clothes, a few day's food supplies and a stock of disposable nappies we were set for roaming far and wide. We four slid into the Volkswagen, along with as much of our camping equipment as would fit, the rest lashed onto the car's tiny roof rack. It was a tight squeeze. At one camp-ground in South Carolina a traveller from a massive Winnebago came up to me to offer a congratulatory

## Don Sinnott

handshake: 'I would never have believed you could cram so much into a VW.'

In those years our camping was born of necessity but we caught the camping bug. Back in Australia the *green tent* (yes, we shipped it home) saw further service with our by then enlarged family of four kids, although the camping gear was permitted to expand to fit the spacious boot of a Holden Kingswood and a rather larger roof rack. The green tent was quick to erect and robust in any wind short of a hurricane but there its virtues ended. It was a tight squeeze for the six of us and, among other shortcomings, it was notoriously prone to leak. In the half-light one early morning, after a stormy night, as we dragged sodden bedclothes out to dry on a fence, the lady declared that she was finished with tent camping (or words to that effect – more colourful language was used) and we needed to raise our accommodation standard to that of the group of camper trailer owners we had now joined for our weekends away.

With such peer-group pressure there was no alternative; we duly raked together our funds and bought a camper trailer that would sleep six. This was the 1970s – early days in the evolution of fold-down camper trailers and we soon discovered that the design of ours could aptly be described as "experimental". Over the years, some design features showed up as failed experiments, but we coped with recurrent repairs and enforced modifications. Having the entire chassis separate from the wheels on a remote road in far north Queensland was the most significant failure but a versatile outback welder came to our rescue, as did a professional welder some years

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later when, in the Pilbara, the drawbar began to crack alarmingly.

We loved our much-repaired little camper trailer, warts and all. To enter it and catch the familiar smell of its canvas was to relive years of wondrous free-camping family road trips. Twenty years on, with children grown up, we sold the camper trailer and wept as its new owner drove it, but not its memories, from the driveway.

And yet we still camp. After a brief interlude with a fancy new designed-for-two caravan, we decided that this style was not for us. We have returned to our roots in tent-camping road trips. Our now-spacious tent, and all the equipment seen as essential for camping, fit into our SUV with a similar degree of difficulty we met when cramming our US Volkswagen 45 years ago.

This present tent doesn't leak, as did the legendary *green tent*, but it too is questionable accommodation when the weather is threatening, or cold, or the task of setting it up just seems a bridge too far after a day's driving. Then we change the itinerary to include a motel or cabin stopover.

Some of our friends – well, most of our friends – can't understand why we choose to tent-camp on our road trips. But we do. One day we won't, but for now we continue to be happy campers.

Don Sinnott

## The Board Dinner

The menu offered by the exclusive restaurant may have been limited but each dish was high art: a careful interpretation of traditional Italian cuisine. Neapolitan specialities dominated the menu, with delicate miniature adaptations of traditional pizza showing how far mass-produced Australian pizza had departed from its traditional Italian roots. The group of Board members dined well, their experienced palates finding no fault in the chef's creations. The expensive wine, including imported regional specialities Anglianico and Fiano, flowed freely.

It was an established custom that the Board would meet for dinner the evening before their quarterly meeting, but the party could not run too late – tomorrow's business needed clear heads. At 9pm the Managing Director produced his company credit card to clear the bill and the high-spirited group scrambled to their feet, a little unsteadily, to walk the short distance back to their hotel.

A wet and cold night in Melbourne discouraged dawdling. With just a light rain falling, the group hunched into their coats as they crossed the rain-slicked road to the cover of shop-front verandas, secure in the knowledge that, from this point on, their route would be under cover.

Another had also found cover from the rain. The group almost stumbled over the blanketed figure on the pavement against the wall. He had pulled a thin blanket over his head so only an outline of a human body showed, with a cardboard coffee cup, a McDonald's chip bucket and a meagre collection

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of belongings stacked nearby. ‘Watch out!’ one of the Board members called, ‘Don’t trip over him.’

Another attempted to joke as the group walked around the prone figure, ‘Hey Charles, maybe you could offer this guy your hotel room and get yourself a bigger one – you were complaining about the size of it.’ They laughed, or at least most of them did.

One felt a pang of sympathy for this homeless person. No comfortable full belly for him tonight, no warm room, no king-size bed with smooth sheets. The one who sympathised shrugged – nothing I can do – and passed on with his companions.

First world collides with third world on the streets of Melbourne and who cares?

## **Cambodia’s Joys and Terrors** **From Anchor Thom to Pol Pot**

For Australians, tourism in South-East Asia is an attractive option: getting there involves only a short and relatively low-cost flight; the people, culture and food are welcoming and you can stay in good-quality hotels for a fraction of what a comparable quality hotel in Europe or America would cost. So, it was Cambodia for us frequent-traveller foursome, looking for an overseas adventure on a budget.

From the Cambodian town of Siem Reap it’s a short trip to see renowned Khmer architectural wonders, which no tourist in Cambodia should miss. Among the wonders are bas-reliefs on the walls of the ancient capital of Angkor Thom recording

twelfth-century warfare. The invading Cham soldiers are depicted with short earlobes, while Khmer defenders have elongated lobes. The ancient sculptor's sympathies are clear: the invaders are being repelled, faces contorted in fear and pain, while the Khmer defenders are going about their business with grim-faced efficiency.

But Cambodia's modern history cannot be depicted by pictures of its ethnically distinct soldiers repelling invaders. No picture could convey the brutal butchery of its own people by others of its own under Pol Pot. At the many so-called Killing Fields bleached skulls and shattered bones tell of indiscriminately-slain people who were never soldiers. Such a grim scene would open for us at our next stop.

Nara, our local guide, meets us in Phnom Penh. He has a much longer name but he is Nara to us westerners. Today, not far from the city, we will be introduced to one of the Killing Fields of Pol Pot's murderous era. The atmosphere in the mini-van as we set out is sombre; we feel we need to know about such horrendous recent history but we have no illusions that it will be a pleasurable morning of tourism.

Nara twists in his seat beside the driver to speak to the four of us. 'I need to tell you my story,' he begins. 'In 1975, I was eight and living a happy family life in Phnom Penh. Then one day trucks with loudspeakers drove through the streets telling us that the Americans were about to bomb the city. We must leave – straight away – but just for two days. They said take nothing with you.'

He pauses to control his emotions. 'It was a lie. There was no bombing. We could not return. We were forced by Pol Pot's thugs to be slave labour for years in prison camps,

## Don Sinnott

producing rice that was exported while we endured beatings, torture, starvation. Or died.'

He goes on, his tour group silent as the mini-bus pulls into the grounds of what had been a place of mass murder, now a tourist destination. It is one of the hellish Killing Fields, with partially-exposed human bones and skulls, evidence of inhumanity and cruelty on an incomprehensible scale.

We are left stunned. We had heard of Pol Pot's atrocities but to see the evidence is overwhelming. Nara's ultimate survival – he was one of the lucky ones – casts a faint glimmer of humanity on the scene of devastation. Is Nara's new life as a tourist guide cathartic: does this recalling of terrors to a new group of tourists each day slowly erode them, or must he carry with him memories that haunt him forever?

It is a quiet trip back to the hotel. Not all tourism is a joyous experience

Don Sinnott

## My Country

Dorothea McKellar's *My Country* appeared early in the Victorian school reader of the 1950s and the pages tended to fall open at this favourite poem. Its easy cadences, strict rhythm and simple rhyme seeped into the pores of even the roughest and toughest of my schoolboy mates. We learnt it and recited it in class as our catechism: 65 years later I can still recall slabs of it word-perfect. Yet it spoke of an Australia that for most of us was as unseen as the Britain with which it contrasted 'my country'.

I could only imagine a 'green and shaded lane' of England but nor had I any experience of the poem's 'land of sweeping plains'. My personal country, as for most of my classmates, was the gritty streets of Moonee Ponds: a grid of poorly maintained asphalt roads fronted by simple wooden houses quarantined from each other by high paling fences. If there was ever a land of sweeping plains underneath this we knew nothing of it.

I think, now, that the poem's sentiments struck a chord in us as a simple and unconscious act of nationalism with which we could all identify, no matter where we happened to have been born. Although we recited the national oath every Monday morning and promised to 'honour the king' we relished the thought that we were somehow different from the poms, with their 'green and shaded lanes' – not that we had many poms in our school. The poem told us that our Australia was different from a mythical land called England, and to be different was a great thing. But it stopped there –

## Don Sinnott

other countries were just ‘other’ and if it happened that you came from one of these ‘other’ places then who cared, so long as you were a good bloke.

In those immediate post-war years, most of my mates were migrant kids from many war-devastated lands of Europe. There was much unselfconscious national labelling. Names like wops, wogs, dagoes, balts and ruskies echoed around the playground. These names conveyed little or no offence – a kid would feel no greater degree of opprobrium for his national tagging as for his footy team preference. There was never any doubt that, no matter where we came from, we were all in this land together; we could all call this land ‘my country’ and all of us had every right to be here and to make our way in this land.

Today we seem to have lost something.



## Gwen Leane

I began my writing career in the 1970's when I enrolled in a creative writer's course through TAFE gaining a Pass 1. I studied by correspondence at Australian College of Journalism and earned a Diploma of Freelance Travel Writing & Photography. Submitting work to short story competitions, I found myself the recipient of three firsts and two second places. I have had work published in numerous anthologies, articles published in *Town & Country Farmer* and *Grass Roots* magazines and worked for a brief period as a journalist for the local Port Augusta paper, *The Transcontinental*.

I have self-published two biographies and as an editor, helped three people to write their memoirs. Also, I have contributed to projects sponsored by ABC Open.

Married for sixty-five years; I am wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother.

Gwen Leane

## The Subterfuge

The match flared into life. Jacki McIntosh pushed it into a pile of leaves and twigs. Blue smoke lazily drifted upwards. She coughed.

‘Come on, burn,’ she cursed leaning down blowing into the smoking debris. She coughed again to clear her lungs of the acrid smoke. A flame licked up through the sticks into a blaze; she piled on more wood to feed the hungry flames.

Jacki stood, her breath caught in awe, as the last rays of the sun turned the salt lake into a sheet of orange fire.

‘Come on, girl. Don’t stand there dreamin’,’ the old man growled. ‘It’ll be dark soon. We gotta get the camp set up before dark.’

‘OK Dad.’

Jacki turned to the Toyota truck and hoisted out their swags; next the folding table and chairs and finally the icebox with the foodstuffs. She glanced toward the lake; the brilliance was dying just like her hopes of getting a life for herself. She glanced behind at the dunes. They too were a fiery red lit by the sun’s dying rays. A lone dingo stood sentinel on top of the highest dune. His yellow coat burnished gold. Jacki marvelled at the magnificent creature; its head raised proudly as its nose studied the air.

‘Stop driftin’ around like a lost pup,’ the old man grumbled. ‘I gotta mend the fence before that dingo gets through. Heaven knows how many others have before it. Get the damper made and the stew heating while I check the fence

for holes up ahead. I should shoot the bugger to make sure he doesn't get through the fence.'

'Yes Dad!' Jacki sighed. It was easier to acquiesce than to fight his authority. For as long as she could remember she had lived with the old man; as she thought of him. He was a boundary rider along the dog fence that ran five thousand kilometres across Australia providing a barrier between the dingo and the flocks and herds of landholders in four states. According to the old man, her father had given her to him to look after until he returned from sheep shearing in Queensland. But her father had never returned. The old man had inquired extensively as to how her father had disappeared, but a blanket of silence hung over his whereabouts. So the old man took over her care.

She supposed she ought to be grateful to the old man for giving her food and clothing, even if it was boys' clothing. She had never worn a dress in her life. Everyone thought she was a boy. The old man said it was safer that way and she had accepted what he said.

The lake was no longer on fire but a dull grey. Like my life, she thought. If only... But what did she long for? The emptiness of her life stretched before her. The teachers of School of the Air urged the old man to let her go to University and study, but he refused on the pretext her father might turn up looking for her.

The fire had died to a pile of fiery coals. The damper in the camp oven buried in the coals browned; the stew simmered on a grid over the embers. The evening hush was broken by the howl of dingoes in the dunes sending shivers up her spine.

## Gwen Leane

The girl lit the pressure lantern, and a pool of yellow light ballooned around her, making the night even darker.

Where was the old man? He should have been back by now. She stirred the stew and took the damper from the coals. The odour of baked bread filled the night air, and Jacki felt ravenous. Breaking off a piece, she dipped it in the stew and ate the morsel. It was delicious; she wanted more but decided to wait until the old man returned.

Unease filled Jacki over the failure of the old man to return. She climbed the nearest dune to see if headlights were flashing but the night was dark and silent. She built the fire into a massive blaze so the old man could find his way if the vehicle had broken down and he was on foot. Time passed slowly, and still, he hadn't returned.

Taking up the lantern and a gun, her heart racing, Jacki set out on foot along the fence-line in search of the old man. Where was he? What had happened to him? Had he ran off and left her? Jacki began to wonder what she would do without him. She realized he'd been a buffer between her and loneliness. She'd been wrong to want to get away from him – he was her safety net.

Jacki called out; her voice became lost in the vastness of the desert. A dingo howled close by, and she put the lantern down and fired at two eyes. The shot filled the night and then was lost in the silence. Snatching up the light, she kept calling the old man's name as she ran.

Did she hear a voice? To get an idea of where she was Jacki tried to remember what the land looked like in daylight. She called again. Yes, that was a voice. It was weak and held fear.

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Hurrying as fast as she dared, Jacki came to the Toyota. She could see where the old man had patched the hole and then walked on along the fence line. But where was he?

‘Dad! Where are you?’

‘Here, girl quick! I’m stuck.’

Jacki lifted her light in the direction of the voice. There was the old man up to his waist in a morass of mud left by a recent flood.

Horror gripped Jacki. She froze.

Two things woke Jacki from her freeze, several sets of eyes shining on the edge of the light and the old man’s complaint, ‘Come on girl, get me out of here.’

Jacki lifted the gun and aimed at the nearest pair of eyes and fired. ‘Got ya,’ she muttered. ‘Bloody killers.’ The eyes vanished, and a body thrashed in the bushes in its death throes. Now to save the man who had saved her.

Reaching over the sides of the Toyota, Jacki grabbed a rope; coiling it into a noose she threw it at the old man. It fell over his shoulders. Tying it to the truck she started the engine and began to ease the old man out of the morass. He lay on firm ground so still. Fear had left Jacki, she was conscious of the needs of the old man. She had to save him: he who had saved her. She owed it to him.

Taking the last of their water she washed the old man’s face. It was deathly pale. She dribbled water into his mouth; he gave a feeble swallow. Heartened she trickled more water into his mouth – a stronger swallow, he opened his eyes and looked at her. She put her arms around the filthy form and

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hugged him. Tears of thankfulness dripped onto the mud-caked face.

‘Come on; we’ve got to get you into the truck and find help for you.’

‘I’m OK.’

‘No, you’re not!’ Jacki looked up; in the east, the sky paled. It would be dawn soon.

Out of the gloom, truck lights broke the darkness.

‘What’s happened here?’ Jacki recognized the voice of the young roo shooter, Snow Costello, who worked on Sunset Station. Snow’s stare of disbelief when he saw the mud-caked man and the girl sent Jacki’s senses into overload. Her hat had fallen off revealing a cap of curls and the muddy man’s shirt had fallen open revealing a soft curvaceous body. There could be no doubt she was a girl. She snatched at the shirt to hide but Snow’s eyes had registered her feminine form.

‘What’s happened?’ Alarm threaded through his voice as he took in the situation.

‘Dad was fixing the fence when he slipped and fell into the patch of quicksand in the wash away,’ she explained.

‘I’ll call the Flying Doctor on the wireless radio to meet us at the homestead.’ Snow took control as he climbed from the vehicle. Together, he and the girl hefted the old man into the passenger seat of the Toyota.

‘Are you up to driving to the homestead? It’s only a couple miles away. I’ll follow. Gotta get my quota of kangaroo carcasses into the chiller before they go rotten,’ Snow’s attitude had changed now he knew Jacki was a girl.

'I can drive,' Jacki flared, annoyed at Snow talking down to her. 'Do you think Dad will be all right?' she added in a subdued voice.

'You bet. Joe's a tough old geezer. The Doc will fix him up,' Snow looked at the girl again.

'You are a girl!' Snow was still bemused he could not get his head around the fact that Jacki, who had been a boy, was now a girl.

'So what!' Jacki snapped on the defensive.

'Everyone believed you were a boy, it's a bit of a surprise. How did the old man keep your identity a secret for so long?' He puzzled. 'Of course. Your name, Jacki. It could be a girl or boy.'

'Dad didn't want anyone to know I was a girl because he thought I wouldn't be safe out here.' Jacki stole a look at Snow; he was certainly OK to look at. Everyone said he was a decent bloke.

'What was he going to do when you grew up?'

'I dunno. I want to go away and get a job somewhere. I hate it out here.'

'Bet you're pretty under all that mud.'

Just as they took off towards the homestead, the sun broke across the dunes, and as they recrossed the Lake, the salt-encrusted surface turned into apricot brilliance at the dawn of a new day.

Had Jacki but known, it was the beginning of a new life for her.

The subterfuge was over.

Gwen Leane

## Where is My Boob

Where is my boob?' I looked with consternation as my granddaughter Natalie pulled a pair of bras from the shopping bag in which she had brought a set of clothing for me.

I'd spent two days in the hospital with a gastro bug and felt that to go home fully clothed rather than in pyjamas and dressing gown would help my self-esteem considerably.

Natalie continued to unpack the bag: petticoat, skivvy, skirt, and jacket followed – but no boob. I had visions of going home only half a woman, and that did not please me. It was one thing for me to know I was half a woman but I didn't want the rest of the world privy to such knowledge.

Natalie reached into the bag again and came up with another bra. 'My boob! There it is', I cried wanting to kiss both Natalie and the boob. The missing prosthesis insert nestled cozily in the bra cup. I could now go home a whole woman – at least in appearance.

A year previously, I noticed my boob misshapen. I registered the change and thought it was my imagination and decided I was paranoid and would refrain from feeding the paranoia. Another warning sounded when reading an article about changes occurring in a boob. Obtain advice *immediately* the report read. With many apologies for my vivid imagination, I presented to the local General Practitioner for an examination. I discovered the changes were real and I was not suffering from an overactive imagination.

A rushed visit to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woodville and one mammogram later, with my support team of husband

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and daughter, we sat in the office of the Oncologist to hear the news. The misshapen boob was cancerous. A box of tissues appeared in front of me in case of tears. Bewilderment at the speed at which everything happened kept the tears at bay. It was hard to come to terms with the news, I kept saying to myself, I've got cancer, I'm on death row.

The Doctor assured me that the cancer had not spread, and a lumpectomy was recommended although radiotherapy would be required. The assumption was that I would opt for the least invasive procedure with radical surgery the last option.

Why did I choose radical surgery rather than the lumpectomy? The statistics for the recurrence of cancer after radical surgery was about 1% compared to the much higher percentage from a lumpectomy. At age seventy-eight, I felt life was more important than an hourglass figure.

My husband was blunt, 'Get rid of it; it wasn't any use to you when feeding your babies, so get rid of it.' With inverted nipples there was nothing for the babies to latch onto. I ought to have accepted I was not a Jersey cow. Being a dairy farmer, my husband's comments were not insulting. He wanted a wife, not a Barbie Doll. Having radical surgery would give me a better chance at life.

A lumpectomy meant I would have to spend six weeks in Adelaide for treatment which meant living away from home. Home was three hundred kilometres away, the tyranny of distance a strong influence on my decision.

After the mastectomy, medication was necessary to suppress any female hormones my aged body might produce.

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There were side effects. The hot flushes returned in full force. It was a small price to pay for a second chance at life.

As an aspiring wanna-be model I was no longer in the market. The effect of gravity on my body drew everything south. If I had been a younger woman my decision might have been different: the issues that I felt were unimportant now might have been relevant to a younger woman. Life was more important than looks and body shape. So I surrendered my boob.

I said goodbye to my boob in 2012. The operation was scheduled for one day and the next day I was back at my daughter's home. Recovery was a piece of cake. I couldn't believe how pain-free I was. I was visited daily by a nurse from the *Hospital-At-Home Care* to dress the wound for a week. Later, returning home, life in the country resumed its normal round as if nothing life threatening had happened.

It is six years since I discarded my boob; I am in remission and this chapter of my life has successfully closed. Of course, there are annual check-ups. I have had six wonderful years extension, I'm dreaming of another decade or two.

Why didn't I have a breast reconstruction? In the brief interim waiting for the operation, every one of my contemporaries who had chosen a breast reconstruction suffered pain and infection, so I said, 'That is not for me.'

How can I bear to look at my mutilated body? I don't see it as mutilation I see it as a gift of life. The loss of a boob is more a badge of honour. I had taken a hit from cancer and repelled it.

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Losing a boob is supposed to leave a woman experiencing a significant loss of self-esteem. I waited for the feelings of depression and loss, and not being attractive to my husband to overcome me. Nothing happened. I wondered if I was human.

My husband assured me that as a person I was more important to him than my body. He did not fixate on my boobs. With such positive male affirmation, how could the psychological aspect touch me?

I admit though, when preparing to leave the hospital after recovering from my gastro bug, I did feel I had lost an old friend, even if it was only the silicone prosthesis.

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## My Three Wishes

I chatted with the young woman packing my groceries. We exchanged the time of day, asked after each other's health, and because life had turned into a lemon and the young packer seemed interested and kind, I couldn't help but share my woes when she asked, 'Have you seen the Cheng-Fu Show?'

'No, I haven't. I wish I could though, my friend said it was magical.'

'Why can't you?' She asked, sympathetically.

'Can't afford to. I lost my job because I broke my arm and had to be off work for six weeks. It's annoying. Work's hard to get at my age... My daughter, Fiona was in tears and angry with me: she wanted to go on a school camp, but I couldn't afford to let her go.' I remembered where I was and felt terrible about confiding my woes to a stranger. 'Oh, I'm so sorry for being a worry wart. You get everybody's woes. How do you sleep at night?'

'I sleep very well. I stuff the problems into a bottle,' the young woman giggled.

'That is one way of dealing with problems. Maybe I should try,' I replied without humour.

Later, over dinner, Greg, my husband, put his hand into the breast pocket of his jacket and pulled out two tickets. 'My boss gave me these. He said he couldn't use them and knew you enjoyed shows like this. So he wanted us to have them.'

'What are they for?' I wanted to know.

'The Cheng-Fu Show.'

'That's so generous of Paul.'

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Excitement bubbled up, and I could've kissed Paul had he been there. 'I can't believe he would be so generous to pass on two tickets to the Show.'

'Yes. Paul's not generous in giving away too many freebies,' my husband said, his mouth full of food.

The next day when I dropped off my daughter at school, one of the mothers approached me. 'I know you work for the used car firm, but the steel fabricators on the main road are looking for someone to head their sales department. I think it would just suit you. The pay will be excellent for the right person. You wouldn't be in the market for another job?'

'As a matter of fact, I am.'

'If you're interested call the manager.'

'Who shall I say sent me?' I stared at this woman as if she were a genie. There was something about her...

'Jeanie McCready. Tell the manager that Jeanie McCready sent you.'

I had hardly entered the house when the phone rang. It was my Mum.

'Hello dear. How are you?' Her voice was full of cheer, something I was a bit short of lately. 'I know you're finding things tough, so I've sent you the fees for Fiona's school camp.'

I remembered at that moment where I'd met Jeanie McCready – the supermarket.

Jeanie, genie, no! Surely it's an overactive imagination.

I hurried to the supermarket to thank her, but when I asked for Jeanie McCready, the manager said, 'Who? Nobody of that name works here.'

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## A Well Kept Secret

My Aunt Meg sat hunched over her plate at the dinner table, stuffing food into her mouth like there was no tomorrow.

Later, when Aunt Meg had gone home. I complained to my mother, 'She eats like a pig.'

Aunt Meg lived next door to us, because as Mum said, 'She is all by herself and needs someone to help her.' She ate with us often.

Mum and Aunt Meg were as different as dogs and cats. Mum was slim, energetic and wore tasteful clothes with minimal makeup. Aunt Meg was overweight and wore her clothes two sizes too small; with the result she kept tugging her skirts and blouses down to cover grossly flabby limbs. Her make-up was towelled on.

'She can't help it, she does try very hard to lose weight,' Mum excused Meg. It was the first time I'd heard Mum support her sister's eating habits. 'It might be a good idea for you to mind your manners when she visits us in future.'

I was stunned at Mum's change of attitude. She usually joined Dad and me when we mimicked Aunt's speech and eating habits behind her back.

Aunt Meg visited two days later. 'I wish I could be slim and elegant like you Enid,' Aunt Meg sniffed discontentedly, tugging her dress down only for it to ride up above her knees again. Aunt Meg was conscious of her appearance but seemed unable to change. 'I use make-up to hide my wrinkles because I'm getting old. Enid, you're older than me but look at you, so

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young looking and no make-up. How do you do it?' Aunt Meg ran her hand across her cheeks.

I wanted to say, 'Lay off the makeup because you're old,' but I didn't dare speak out. Aunt Meg looked like an overblown rose and Mum a delicate bud.

'Where is Meg?' asked Dad one day, 'It's a wonder she can't sniff us eating our quiche.' We were sitting out on the patio having a snack.

'Aunt Meg can sniff food from a mile away,' I giggled.

'It's a good thing I've a good job as I'm helping to feed Meg and her appetite,' Dad snorted.

We all turned, surprised, at the sound of a footstep behind us; it was Aunt Meg. She was wearing her Basset hound expression. I smothered a giggle, but Mum and Dad looked ashamed. Aunt Meg had been crying; her makeup had run down her plump cheeks leaving her looking like a clown.

'What's the matter, Meg?' Mum asked her distressed sister.

'My little dog Fifi has died. What am I going to do?'

'Well, it's only a dog,' Father stated manlike.

'But Fifi was my only friend. She loved me,' Aunt Meg wailed, the tears flowed in rivers down her cheeks.

'Come and sit down and have something to eat, you'll feel better,' Mum said, serving up a massive portion of quiche.

Dad and I gasped at the size of the piece, but Aunt Meg polished it all off and sighed, 'I needed that. I do feel better as you said, Enid. Well, I'd better be off and get ready for funeral service this evening.'

Turning to Father, Aunt Meg commanded, 'Doug you come over and dig a grave for Fifi and, Enid, you and young

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Jessica come over at 6pm for the service and after that we'll have a wake.'

Father obediently dug the grave, and at 6pm Mother and I went next door. We stood around the little grave as Father lowered the small body wrapped in a blanket, into the hole. Aunt Meg cried loudly causing the neighbour's dog to howl in sympathy. After Dad read a prayer, we four trooped into the house to celebrate Fifi's life.

The table fairly groaned at the amount of food on it, and Aunt Meg ate and ate until the table was empty.

'I feel better after all that lovely food,' Aunt Meg burped.

'Why do you eat so much, Aunt Meg?' I had to ask at last.

'Eating makes me feel happy. It's all I have.'

'But you have us.'

'That's what you say to my face, but you laugh at me behind my back, and that hurts. So I eat to stop worrying.'

Dad and I looked at our feet, ashamed at how we treated Aunt Meg.

Later, when I was getting ready for bed, Mum confided in me, 'It's true when Aunt Meg was a child, and anyone laughed at her or teased her, and she would cry, my Mum would give her something to eat to stop her crying, so now when she's upset, she eats to get over it.'

'But Fifi was only a dog,' I puzzled.

'No Fifi was more than a dog. Fifi represented her stillborn child.'

'But how come?' I stuttered, 'She's never married.'

'You don't have to be married to have a child,' Mum looked sad. 'Her friend Adam Scott took advantage of her.'

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Today was the anniversary of her baby's death, and in celebrating Fifi's death, she is celebrating her baby's passing under the cover of Fifi's death.'

'But!' I was stunned.

"The shame of a child born of rape is too much for her to bear. It's a secret between you and me," Mum's face was hard and her eyes cold and challenging. "This episode is over, do you hear me?"

## Georgette Gerdes



### **Georgette Gerdes**

My interest in writing is lifelong. My personal and work experiences as a GP have a great influence my writing. I love the communication of ideas and emotions that writing facilitates. I am also a busy mother and when not writing, play Irish music on the piano accordion.

I write prose, historic fiction, memoir and poetry and my special interest is neurologic music therapy. I enjoy hearing other writers speak about their work and like the collaboration of the Burnside Writers Group for its stimulating content and collegiate support.

Georgette Gerdes

## **Mother**

The missing limb never grows.  
The grand old tree is left gnarled and aged by the weather,  
    wisely watching silently,  
        swaying,  
        rustling,  
leaves flickering in the sunlight.

I look at her plaque on the path.  
    All that is left.  
Words are too painful to express.

A koala walks past.  
Life can be funny.  
    So can death.

## **Kuitpo Forest**

I remember I hid down behind the log, picked up a stick and pretended it was a cigarette. I watched my breath, white and frosty in the crisp air. Smoking without the lung cancer. I waited, my heart racing. They would be coming soon to find me, but my hiding place was perfect.

The sunlight beamed between the stately trunks. The pine trees were aligned proportionately, each equidistant to the next, noble and dignified. They stood to attention, a wooden army, lofty and imposing.

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*Swish, whoosh, swish, whoosh*, the sounds of the forest whirled about my ears. An orchestra of rustling pine needles jostling, whistling. Noisy. Yet quiet. Still, yet moving.

Creatures lingered in the grass amongst the leaves. Ants made their busy tracks over sticks and prickles to hilly homes. Magpies chattered and crows barked in undignified tones. It was thriving, buzzing with life.

I sat crouching, laughing to myself. Pleased. I hadn't been discovered yet. I tingled with exhilaration. Where were they? They were taking their time!

Eventually I came out from the best hiding place in the world to find them. The sense of achievement for my cunning soon abated. Seconds of panic extended to a lifetime. Was I alone? Lost in the woods?

'Mum? Dad? Where are you?'

I was a small child in a vast, whispering place. Dirt bikes growled in the distance. Peering through the trees I caught a glimpse of Mum's baggy blue anorak.,

'Mum I'm here!' I ran towards her. She was weighed down with bags of pine cones for our fire. Relief. I'd been found.

I realise now the stroke of genius, hide and seek was a very effective way of getting a moment's peace. But, in this day and age a veil of fear quashes reason and I'm afraid my children are ignorant of the wonders.

But hey, there's always next weekend.

## Tales from Cork City—a Travelogue

‘Echo, Echo, Echo.’

The shouts of the newspaper seller can be heard from outside the post office, mingling with the sounds of jazz and folk music from wandering minstrels. The sounds provide a bubbling background buzz against the bustling crowds and busy shoppers. Business as usual with a capital B in Ireland’s second largest city: the beautiful Cork.

There’s the ‘Hi B’, a tiny pub known only to locals: it’s up a steep staircase and is the size of a bedroom. The landlord is famous for his cranky outbursts and an aversion to canoodling. Jazzy music, from his own collection, immerses the Murphy drinkers (Cork’s own famous stout) on tattered red leather chairs. It’s an intimate place: dark, cosy and very Cork. A ramshackle collection of books is above the bar with a disparate gaggle of spirit bottles vying for space. Alongside heavy, red curtains, the walls are adorned with caricatures of famous people, handrawn by an elderly local artist and signed by many of the celebrities. The smokers hang about in the narrow doorway outside; and on the floor above, with loud and unabashed laughter and shouts, is a throng of drinkers. It’s a thriving bed of cheerfulness and elation, the *craic* is certainly here.

Cork is cool. Not hip. Not quaint like Galway. It’s incredibly cool. Sidewalk cafes. International languages. Students, Musicians, Artists; all attracted like magnets to the narrow streets with rambling shops and famous landmarks like the English Market. Previously only the English were

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allowed to frequent the Market selling the hard earned produce of Irish farmers too poor to keep or purchase any of the meat themselves. The butchers there now sell traditional Irish delicacies made of offal, such as *Crubeens* (pigs trotters) pigs tails, tripe and *Drisheen* (Cork sausage made of beef and sheep's blood) – the only products affordable to the Irish in times past.

The English Market even had the pleasure of hosting a visit by the Queen on her first historic visit to Ireland in 2012. She was greeted with great warmth and enthusiasm by the Corkonians, keen to show off their jewel in the crown: a silver lining that remains from harder times. It's a very cosmopolitan place now with exotic cheeses from France, sweets from Greece, local meat, fish, and fresh vegetables. The aromas of rustic cooking and coffee fill the corridors under high archways while all manner of people purchase the delights from the surrounding local farms. (Farms with ultra green fields and cows with the largest udders you've ever seen!)

Lining the meandering laneways of Cork are all manner of restaurants, outdoor cafes and shops. Old fashioned sweet shops are tucked amongst wooden toy shops, alongside Hickeys the haberdashery and Finn's Corner selling school uniforms. There's the lovely Everyman Theatre with its historic wooden interior and ornate seats contrasting with the modern Triskel, a renovated Baptist church, where classical music concerts are held.

Amongst the streets are remnants of Cork's previous form as six separate islands. Remains of bollards for anchoring ships can be found in the Grand Parade. The *Lovely Lee* (as in

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the famous Cork song) peacefully encircles part of the city and occasionally floods. Looking out above the river is the Four Faced Liar, named so because the times on the clock faces of St Anne's church in Shandon are never correct.

The infamous Shandon Bells in the clock tower can be played by children and tourists, annoying the neighbours.

Probably the most attractive aspect of Cork must be its inhabitants. Their lyrical Irish lilt is unmistakable. It is fast with a sing-song quality and upwards inflection. Cork people are also fiercely proud of their city and county. In fact, many espouse that Cork should be an independent country! Known as the rebel county, it was, since the 9th century, the site of many uprisings, and was made more famous by Michael Collins, the Irish revolutionary leader of the Irish Republican brotherhood.

Corkonians have a great sense of humour, a generosity of spirit, friendliness and a quirky eccentricity that seems to have disappeared from Western countries. They have no need for Blarney Stones. The gift of conversation and animated story telling has been passed on from generation to generation. Long into the early morning they revel at weddings, christenings and wakes enjoying each other's company and singing Irish ballads.

Having lived in Cork city for three years, I may be biased; however, to visit is a privilege, a treat, and a must for anyone enthusiastic about love, life and happiness.

Georgette Gerdes

## Three Wishes

Gene genie if you could grant me three wishes what would they be?

Wow! That's a hard one. Well, there are the usual wishes that are altruistic: world peace, an end to poverty, sickness, famine, torture, human trafficking, slavery and the death penalty; an end to global warming, creating more habitats for polar bears, restoring the Great Barrier Reef and preventing floods and natural disasters. Finally there's an end to human cruelty to others, inequality, intolerance, racism and bigotry. All very noble.

But what do I really wish for? If I search into the depths of my soul, the answer is clear. My first wish is that my children can grow up to be happy, healthy, well adjusted members of society. The worry for a parent when their child is sick or unhappy is intolerable. The well being of my children I think is my only wish, everything else is secondary.

My second wish would be that I live long enough to see my children grow up, be a grandparent, and be of assistance with their own children. My parents died in their 50s. I married and bore children without them. It was a great loss.

My final wish is that my marriage survives in the long term. The divorce rate in Australia is high. I hope not to belong to that statistic. Life with children, money and work pressures puts a strain on marriages. I hope that my marriage can stand the test of time like my parents' and grandparents' marriages did.

Although my wishes do not reflect improving the community they are based on an intimate desire for security, stability, health and longevity. My daughter says these are

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boring and unimaginative but I would rather be earnest and honest. Life is short. We should all evaluate and reflect upon it.

In psychology there is an exercise where you imagine waking up one day and everything is perfect. The aim of therapy is then to try and realise these goals. Do we really need to imagine a genie to grant us wishes or can we just make them happen ourselves?

I think I'll make a start today.

Thank you gene genie.



### Frances T. Croft

I am an inaugural member of the Burnside Writers' Group and during this time I have published two novels on Amazon. *Ghosts Across the Valley* is a romance and *The Girl on the Cliff* involves two spirits from the 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension.

Both had been in draft mode for many years. This group provided me with the support I needed to publish my two novels.

I suggest that if you want to write, pick up a pen or type it on the computer. The main thing is to start writing. Joining a writing group provides encouragement and support.

## Tom's Garden

Tom rubbed his dirty fingers on his shorts and stood up. He'd planted the seeds in rows. 'Now, all you have to do is grow,' he said, walking away.

'Grow,' muttered the seeds. 'It's too early. We must sleep a little longer.'

'I've done it,' bean called early one morning. 'Look at my first shoot.' No-one answered.

'Here I am,' green-pea called, shaking the dirt off his light green shoot. 'Look!'

'I see you,' bean laughed. 'That's your first shoot, but I was here before you. You're second in the garden.'

'Burp,' cried carrot.

'Crackle,' coughed onion.

'We're here,' pumpkin and tomato shoots shouted, as they shot through the soil.

Suddenly the ground began to shake and shiver. Small pieces of dirt rolled over the ground towards the edge of the garden.

'Help, help,' cried the baby shoots. 'We'll be smothered!'

Bang! Thump! Shiver! Thump! Crackle! Hump! Shooooosh! Lumps of dirt rolled everywhere. 'I've arrived,' potato called loudly. He shook his long green leaves and stared round the garden. 'How did you like that?'

'We didn't,' the baby vegetables answered.

'You nearly smothered us as you came through the ground,' bean said sternly. 'You should be more careful.'

'I'm sorry if I frightened you,' potato grinned. 'It was a good show. I like the sound of the soil being pushed about. Where did I come? Was I first, second, third, fourth, fifth or sixth?'

'You came seventh,' green-pea said politely.

'That means you were last,' onion called, stretching his long green head.

'At least I'm here.' Potato opened his leaves to let the sun warm them. Deep underground little potatoes would start to form. 'I may be the last to come through, but I stay in the ground the longest.'

The carrots, onions, green-peas, tomatoes, pumpkins and beans laughed. 'We wouldn't like to be without you.'

'Shush,' onion called. 'Tom's coming. Stand tall.'

'Mum, my seeds are through,' Tom yelled. He knelt on the ground and counted. 'You are all here. Now, please grow.' He sat back and watched.

'Let's please him,' carrot called, so softly that Tom didn't hear. 'All together now! One, two, three!'

The vegetables took a deep breath and up went their stalks and leaves. Up and up they grew.

'Mum, come and see,' Tom shouted. 'My plants are growing! I saw them.'

'No more,' puffed potato. 'No more. I couldn't.'

'No more,' cried bean and green-pea together, 'we couldn't.'

'No more,' sobbed carrot, 'I'm growing too fast.'

'No more,' wept onion, 'I feel ill.'

'We're exhausted,' pumpkin and tomato whispered.

## Francis Croft

'Mum, look, they've grown!' As they looked, the baby plants dropped their heads. The effort had been too much, much too much.

'Tom, get some water,' his mother said quickly. 'The sun is wilting your plants. They'll need some sort of shade. You must give them plenty of water and keep the area free of weeds.'

And Tom did just that. He was so proud of his garden and everyone who came admired the healthy plants. And at night, if you listen very carefully, you might be able to hear the plants whispering amongst themselves, 'It's fun being in Tom's garden. He looks after us.'

Francis Croft

## A Divided Land

While the spirits danced  
Deep in the forest  
Two lovers  
Stood near the magic stones.

Separation the only way  
He to another country  
She staying at home  
With tears mingling  
They hugged for the last time.

He broke apart, and left her  
She sank, sobbing to the ground.  
Alone he boarded the ship  
One last look at the land he loved.

There she was, a small bag in her hand  
He waved and stood still  
She hadn't seen him.  
Again and again he waved  
A sigh of relief.  
Here she was.

He opened his arms  
And they stood as one  
While around them  
The spirits wove their magic.

## The Silent Guards

Trees, tall with heavy branches

Standing guard

Either side of the path

On the ground

Large puddles

After overnight rain

Mist soft and delicate

Wrapping itself

Round the land

Ahead two figures

Cloaked by the mist

Stepping away

No birds singing

The trees still

Silence pervades

Trees, tall with heavy branches

Standing guard

Either side of the path.

## The Girl on the Cliff

### An Excerpt

Tai Shan, from the 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension, entrusts 15 year old Stuart with Ephlyn, also from the 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension, and charges him with teaching Ephlyn the skills he needs to clear his aura. While Stuart helps Ephlyn he practices his art, which his parents have forbidden him to do. Both learn valuable skills but not before danger looms and lives are threatened.

...Stuart shuddered when he heard the first notes. 'Tai Shan, I don't know how I can help Ephlyn. You must choose someone else.'

'The Inner Council has chosen you and that decision hasn't been taken lightly.'

'What does Ephlyn have to learn?'

'That is for you and Ephlyn to decide. One thing he does have to do is clear his aura which instead of being white has a background of various colours. Auras change colour depending on the activity the person is involved with.'

'However, Ephlyn's aura must be white so that he can survive in our dimension. He is a talented young man, but he needs to learn certain skills before he will enjoy being with us.'

He paused. 'Please materialise Ephlyn.'

'Here I am Tai Shan.'

Stuart gasped. Standing beside Tai Shan was a tall, young man about twenty years of age with fair hair. He was dressed appropriately for the physical world. His blue eyes sparkled and his aura was full of multi-coloured splotches.

Tai Shan laughed kindly at Stuart's reaction. 'Yes, Ephlyn is a handsome young man.'

'Please Tai Shan, take me back with you.' Ephlyn looked around. 'I don't like the feel of this place.'

'This is where you must stay until you have learnt what you need to learn,' the Being said seriously. 'Here is a bracelet. Wear it on your arm and when Stuart doesn't need you or you are anxious, press it and you will be with me.'

'And one other thing. If you and Stuart decide you both need time out from each other, press the bracelet. And Ephlyn, if I need you, I will activate your bracelet with a sound that only you and Stuart can hear.'

'Ephlyn, as I said, this is the best place for you to learn what you need to know. But it will be your choice as to whether you accept each challenge and more importantly, succeed.'

'Where do I start Tai Shan?' Ephlyn asked anxiously. 'I don't know anything about Stuart. He mightn't like me and I might not like him.'

'I wouldn't worry about that,' Tai Shan answered. 'We have chosen Stuart very carefully.'

'Excuse me Tai Shan, will anyone else be able to see or sense Ephlyn?'

'A few people will be able to speak to and see him. Others may sense his presence, but it will depend on the ability and interest of the person involved.'

'Please Sir, may I tell my sisters about Ephlyn and what's going on?'

‘You will have to decide those matters. Ephlyn, you are now in Earth time and you’ll need to adjust the watch I gave you.’

‘A watch?’ Stuart asked, in amazement. ‘A watch?’

‘Of course,’ Tai Shan replied. ‘Ephlyn will need to get used to time on Earth and he’ll need to know when to meet you. Time in our dimension is very different and a watch will help him adjust. Stuart, I suggest you review your day’s activities with Ephlyn. That way he’ll learn a little about you.’

‘How do I learn about him?’ Stuart asked, pointing to Ephlyn who was looking at the floor.

‘You won’t, not really. He’s been through many experiences and lifetimes before he came to the 5th Dimension, but as I’ve stressed he hasn’t learnt some of the vital skills needed to feel at ease with us. Ephlyn, I’m never far away. Goodnight.’ He waved his hand and vanished.

‘Well Stuart,’ Ephlyn said, ‘you’re younger than I am. How old are you and why were you chosen? I must be wiser than you if you’re still living on Earth. I don’t want to stay here cramped up in this room. I didn’t ask to come here.’

‘And I didn’t ask anyone to bring you here either.’ Stuart glanced at the clock and saw that time had stood still while the Lord of the 5th Dimension had been with him. Stuart gazed at the handsome, almost arrogant young man.

‘Since you’re here, we’d better make the most of it. I’ll tell you what happened today. Please sit down.’

Ephlyn hesitated. Should he rebel? No. Tai Shan had said that if he didn’t try he could be banished from the 5th Dimension for ever. Slowly he sat down and faced Stuart.

‘My parents will be back before long. They’ve taken John Pickering, my father’s business colleague, to the airport. My light must be out when they return.’

‘You can turn it off now. I’ll create sufficient light for us and it won’t be seen outside your room.’

‘You could?’ Stuart laughed. ‘Thanks. You might be useful to me after all. I’d better start at the beginning. We shifted to Bridgewater nine months ago because of the business opportunities for my parents. My mother fell in love with this two storey house which has been built on one of the western hills. Did you see the hills and the city?’

‘No, we came straight here,’ Ephlyn snapped. ‘Tai Shan did ask me if I’d like to see the city before I came, but I said I didn’t. I’m not going to stay long so I didn’t see the point. Go on, you haven’t even started to talk about what you did today.’

‘Do you really you want to know?’

‘No I don’t, but Tai Shan will expect me to listen,’ the spirit muttered.

‘You are quite right Ephlyn,’ Tai Shan called. ‘Carry on Stuart.’

‘This morning I was looking at my latest sketch of a bird in full flight.’

‘You were what?’ Ephlyn asked. ‘Did you say sketch. You mean you actually draw things?’

‘Yes I do. And I have twelve-year-old twin sisters Lisa and Diane. They are almost thirteen.’

‘Did you say twins?’

‘Yes I did. Lisa came and told me Mrs Taylor, our housekeeper, was ready to take us to school.’

‘Where were your parents?’

‘Attending a breakfast function in the city.’

‘Well go on.’

‘I locked the sketch in a drawer and hid the key.’

‘You did what?’ Ephlyn stared at the teenager.

‘I locked the sketch in a drawer and hid the key.’

‘Why?’

Stuart sighed. ‘That’s another story. After that things went from bad to worse. On the way to school a tyre on Mrs Taylor’s car got a puncture and we were late. And after interval I received my midyear report.’

‘Wasn’t it good?’

‘Parts of it were very good. I excel in English and art but as for the rest?’

‘Aren’t you going to tell me?’

‘Not at the moment.’

‘What about sport?’

‘That is my worst subject.’

‘You’re not serious are you?’

Francis Croft

## The Flower

Once a flower  
Part of a beautiful whole  
Now on the ground  
Drifting, the life force gone  
One of nature's flowers, no longer.

The flower  
Where does it go?  
What does it feel?  
Does it know  
That life's ending?

Yes, the flower  
Is gone, but the life force remains.  
Next season or whenever  
Other flowers like the one  
Just gone will reappear.

Nature's beauty  
In all it's glory will return  
To grace our wonderful world  
Not complaining  
Just being, accepting life as it is.



## **John Brooking**

I was born in London in 1927 and came to Australia with my family at the age of 11. Three years later I began work as an office boy at Radio station 3DB, Melbourne.

I spent many years writing for radio until I married. Then I undertook University studies, graduating in Social Work and Education. I later became a lecturer at the University of South Australia, and then established a Child & Family Centre attached to the Psychiatry Department of the Adelaide Children's Hospital. Later I was appointed Superintendent of the Centre.

What joy writing has been throughout my life! The urge to write has never faltered. I find the power of words seductive and a cause of endless fascination.

## Bric a Brac

Bric a brac! Bric a brac! So soon a Life's flowering  
Is spread upon tables for History's devouring.  
Such solemn old ladies (I don't know their names)  
All black bombazine in their broad oval frames;  
For love or for money what quaintness endures  
In time-tinctured pages with last century's cures.

Bric a brac! Bric a brac! Witness the stares  
Of those around tables all covered with wares,  
While that sepia picture a dandy discloses  
With boater on knee, and most cocksure of poses!  
Ah! In every parlour 'midst porcelain and plush  
Surely his ardour made coy ladies blush!

Bric a brac! Bric a brac! Lockets and laces  
Postcards that faded with our Empire's traces,  
Gaudy moustache cups rim-chipped but so bold,  
Brass tongs and coal scuttles that fought against cold!  
All buried away in collectable corners,  
A shop for past dealings; a place perhaps for mourners!

## McSweeney the Genie

McSweeney, the midget who sat muttering to himself, was Irish: a leprechaun of mixed descent – half leprechaun, half genie. His dark hiding place within a dented Georgian teapot was uncomfortable. And his mutterings went like this:

‘Came down here I did from County Kerry. Here I am in a London flea-market, on a cheap stall run by a vulgar Cockney!’

He’d come to London because he’d arranged a reunion with his Genie half-brothers who lived in the exotic Middle East, but wars and uprisings had scuttled their plans.

The owner of the stall, Bert Sproggins – being a bit psychic on his sober days – had spotted the leprechaun in his hiding place. After hooking him out, he had demanded the granting of three wishes. A refusal might bring a cracking down of the teapot lid and concussion of the midget.

Sproggins wanted:

1. A posh yacht, better than the Queen’s vanished *Britannia*.
2. A smart uniformed crew.
3. A ‘hot’ and sexy actress who’d be tempted by a tropical cruise and would turn up with all the necessary cash.

The way the wishes were granted show you should never be uncivil to a leprechaun-genie.

We now move to 18 Lambeth Avenue: Sproggins’s home.

## John Brooking

The yacht was superb, white, and huge. It bashed down on Sproggins's house from above. Dust, rising from shards and beams and the spread of shattered masonry, besmirched the pristine white of the yacht's officers' uniforms.

They waved their fists. They were Bulgarians. No one understood English.

Freshly arrived, the sexy English actress was soon yelling at her camera crew. Her eyes flared with disbelief and fury.

The tallest officer shouted, 'G-n Anglichanin, che ste nagore por ekata bez ore!'

That is Bulgarian for 'Mr. Englishman, you are up the creek without a paddle!'

John Brooking

## **Homage**

Bill Gates is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me to sit down on my agreeable chair,  
He leads me beside placid screens,  
He restores my broadband,  
He leads me to bright places  
For his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the Valley of Scam,  
I fear no virus,  
For you are with me,  
Your cursor and your links –  
They comfort me,  
You prepare a monitor before me  
In the presence of less informed nerds.  
You anoint my screen with rapidity.  
My surfing prospects overflow,  
Surely data with topicality will follow me  
All the days of my life  
And I shall surf in the house of Bill Gates  
Forever.

John Brooking

## Viewpoint

We know you have no sight, my love  
Of sky clear blue or cloud above,  
But what do you see in your mind,  
You who are beautiful, and blind?

Do words have joy and meaning  
Do feelings have a form?  
Are voices genuine-seeming  
And our caresses warm?

Or can your heart, alas, detect  
In voices dull and circumspect  
The trivial or the less sincere  
And then what images appear?

I find it hard to learn, my love  
But let there be unfurled  
The banner of my loving you,  
Oh let me know your world.

John Brooking

## To a Quill Pen

What! Still stand you, you sturdy feather!  
So old, aslant the pitted leather,  
Your pewter inkstand often sought  
Upon that lady's davenport.

And what once wrote you in her hand?  
A letter from this far-off land  
That told of grief and fear and doubt  
And fever after years of drought.

What think you of those rough-hewn years?  
Her hand that shook, her falling tears  
As she reviewed the path she trod  
To one small grave: "This child with God".

And all our hustle shan't eclipse  
Her boundless sorrow, prayerful lips;  
Her courage, joy, achievement too  
For I see her through seeing you.

John Brooking

### **Samson and Delilah**

Now Samson was a captive made  
By Philistines he'd not obeyed,  
And there seemed scarcely any hope,  
For he was bound with thongs of rope!

The Philistines stole up with swords,  
But Samson's might was of the Lord's,  
And buoyed by strength and greatly vexed,  
He stripped his bonds with muscles flexed!

Those bonds at once became as flax,  
They dripped away like melted wax;  
And Samson with a warlike cry  
Espied a jawbone lying nigh.

It was the jawbone of an ass  
And mighty things then came to pass,  
He plunged among the Philistines,  
And broke their skulls and ribs and spines.

That jaw, set whirling by his strength,  
Did kill a thousand men at length.  
He felt he'd passed a mighty test.  
He sat and had a little rest.

Hot and thirsty from that slaughter  
He called to God to give him water,  
And this with speed became the case,  
For God did make a hollow place.

John Brooking

And water gushed and Samson drank,  
'Twas good to have the Lord to thank;  
Samson then, so runs the tale,  
Became the Judge of Israel.

For twenty years he held this post  
In legal matters, playing host,  
But then a dreadful fate befell.  
(A shame, for he had done so well.)

In Gaza, Samson hoped one day  
To find a chance for carnal play,  
And took a harlot in the town,  
And paid her for a nice lie down.

But that night, by the city gates,  
Some vengeful plotters and their mates  
Saw Samson strolling in fine mood,  
And captured him with violence crude.

Their captive they reviled with scorn,  
And snarled, 'We'll kill him when it's dawn.'  
Imprisoned thus our Samson lay,  
But long before the break of day

He rose to smite each city gate,  
And hoisted them, despite their weight,  
Upon his shoulders: then he walked  
To Hebron's hill; his captors gawked!

John Brooking

‘Our gates are gone, our captive too?  
The cry went up and soon all knew  
Of Samson’s flight o’er dales and hills.  
(Houdini never had such skills!)

’Twas after this great escapade,  
Our hero found another maid;  
In Sorek Valley dwelt this Miss  
Who proved to be his Nemesis.

Delilah was this famous lady,  
Whose ways, I fear, were highly shady;  
Her charms had Samson quite besotted.  
Behind his back she grimly plotted.

The Philistines made their request:  
‘Seduction is what you do best.  
With him stirred up in passion’s throes  
His secret urge him to disclose.’

She said, ‘He’d offer up at length  
The secret of his hideous strength.  
Just wait around, or best, lie low.’  
Then straight to Samson she did go.

And then with tears, oh *boo - boo - boo*’  
Delilah made her final *coup*,  
She gazed at him with moistened eyes,  
‘Oh tell me where your secret lies?’

Imprudent Samson thus was led  
While lying down upon their bed  
To yield the secret of his heart,  
Of his ill fate this was the start.

He smiled, 'I am a Nazarite.'  
She sweetly answered, 'Is that right?  
Exactly, dear, what do you mean?'  
And then came the betrayal scene...

He said, 'A Nazarite takes care  
No scissors ever cut his hair.  
Delilah, if I should be shorn,  
My strength, my power, would all be gone!'

Oh, foolish Samson, for next day,  
Delilah gave the game away.  
She told the Philistines she knew;  
They paid her cash, and said 'Go to!'

Samson still was at his ease,  
She soothed his head upon her knees,  
And when his eyes were closed in sleep  
She gestured, so a man did creep

To shave off swiftly Samson's locks!  
He had the mother of all shocks:  
Poor duped, depressed, benighted lad,  
What happened next was really sad.

The Philistines – no great surprise –  
Rushed in and gouged out Samson’s eyes.  
’Twas no surprise, for cruel they were.  
Oh did Delilah’s conscience stir?

And then to Gaza he was hauled  
All manacled and badly mauled,  
And thrown in prison, blind and thrashed.  
No wonder that his hopes were dashed.

He felt beaten, he felt ill.  
They made him work a heavy mill,  
And in due time, though it was slow,  
Poor Samson’s hair began to grow...

The Philistines obeisance made  
To their God, Dagon, for His aid,  
For making ‘Slayer’ Samson theirs,  
Thus answering devoted prayers.

They all grew then the worse for wine,  
Their celebrations going fine.  
They said, ‘Fetch Samson, for we ought  
To have him here for merry sport?’

They brought him from his prison cell,  
They mocked his name, they mocked it well,  
And Samson stood, a silent giant,  
Quite blind – but seething and defiant!

John Brooking

The Philistines and all their lords  
And women, too, were there in hordes.  
Inside a mansion, this cursed crowd  
Mocked captive Samson, coarse and loud.

And to a lad with whom he stood,  
He said, 'I wonder if you could,  
Just guide me where the pillars are,  
For just a few more steps, not far.'

Many were above his head,  
Upon the roof. (They'd soon be dead.)  
Two pillars went up to the ceiling:  
He grasped at both, indignant feeling

And then with anger he blew hot.  
'Dear God,' he said, 'let's kill the lot.'  
To which his Lord did give assent.  
The final minutes Samson spent

His soul was offered up in trust,  
Then all was rumbling, death and dust.  
The mighty mansion fell down flat,  
So all were killed, and that was that.



## **Edie Eicas**

I collected eclectic experiences: hippie in the USA to business woman and company director in Australia. Seeking a different career experience, I became a Jungian Astrologer looking to myths as a means of understanding archetypes and life scripts. Then, needing something concrete to anchor myself in, I made short films. Looking for structure, I went back to the University exploring Cultural Theory and Feminism.

From the intellectual to the practical meant a Masters in Art. Not one to stay long in one area I went back to writing, which led to editing Friendly Street Poets and now Burnside Writers.

Edie Eicas

## The Language of Flowers

I knelt, picked purple violets  
my small fingers enough to poke through the wires  
pluck those miniature purveyors of perfume.

I leant across the fence nipping the tops of stock  
their colours a pale profusion  
their scent a spice searched for through the years.

I collected spring's colourful offerings:  
sweet peas, their pastel colours an inducement to:  
scent the house with the promise of change.

I picked fallen frangipanis  
cream and yellow stars placing them in a shallow bowls  
to float and waft their summer fragrance.

I cut old fashioned roses  
their myriad colours inviting deep breaths;  
nostrils flaring vibrating with base notes;  
savouring deep velvet reds.

I bought poppies, the petals trapped in their capsules  
the sun seducing them to: languidly open,  
free their vibrant display.

I knelt, brought flowers to your grave  
tears filling the vase each season's display  
reminding me of you.

Edie Eicas

## **Love's Illusion**

I stayed because you were my partner,  
but, I wasn't yours.  
Too enamoured of love, I loved blindly  
denying your faults: our incompatibility.  
We were not a team, and yet,  
those moments of union: fleeting, had power.

Romance, the teenage escape  
the fiction resided deep,  
desire driving me back, enticing me to believe  
that, love conquers all.

False hope nurtured by the Christian tenet:  
turn the other cheek, do good to those who hurt you.  
An old belief passed through generations  
too naive to see: dependency.

The gift of age. It's wisdom  
rents that veil of illusion.  
It's knowledge garnered in the face of shame  
opens eyes, gives power to move,  
take steps, sever the tie, seek a different story.

Not the familiar  
disguised, parading as love:  
narcissism that takes and takes  
but has no room for love.

Edie Eicas

## Toy Boy

They've done it again. Why do they tell me six thirty and then not turn up? And why do I live my life by the clock? God I hate this part. I look so desperate.

Lucy walked through the Friday night crowd of eager drinkers and party people. The noise was deafening. Music, clatter and chatter. You have to be twenty and able to lip read to get anywhere here. The *In Crowd*. Suits and blondes. At least I fit that description: blonde. Ok, was once blonde. Though the suits are only boys – and the blondes – well, they're all young and oozing sex. Ah, so manifestly desirable. Think I'll go home. What am I doing here? The question repeated itself as she pushed through the bar.

Moving into the next room, she found another cavernous opening with more of the trendy youth of Sydney working their way through their weekly quota of alcohol. It was Happy Hour. Her frustration and depression grew. The labyrinth of bars propelled her forward and she fought her way through a group of beautiful people only to confront stairs. She realised she had more to reconnoitre.

Mounting the stairs she saw a hallway of glass partitions dividing rooms with a bar at the end. That's it. After this I'm out of here. Turning, she ploughed through the rooms pushing through the groups of hot bodies playing pool and the exuberant drunk onlookers. No one waited for her.

Lucy began her descent but half way down the stairs she met a group of rabblerousers as they ascended and squeezing up against the rail she waited petulantly. Just as the wave

## Edie Eicas

moved past and she was about to take another step she looked up into the eyes of a straggler.

Not the baby blues but pools of liquid brown met her gaze. He was her age. Handsome and had hair. A sudden explosion: a frisson of interest, his eyes flickered with desire offering a promise: sweet seduction. His assessing smile stated she'd passed muster. Self-conscious but appreciative, she smiled back as they passed each other; giving him "the look".

Oh, he's delightful. Just what I need. He's perfect.

Back in the maelstrom, a smile played on her lips reflecting the compliment paid. She moved more confidently as she searched for her friends. Finally, at a corner of the front bar she noticed them, glasses in hand laughing at the attention from a group of men who looked like under-aged drinkers and someone's son.

Watching, she saw easy companionship and an intimacy that made her feel left out. With lips pursed she joined the group.

Her friends laughed and welcomed her asking her why she was so late? 'You missed your chance. The boys looked after us and got us a drink while we were waiting for you.'

Me? Late? Angry at their assumption she directed her smile, heavy with derision, at the young men. 'Thank god for mummies' boys.' Her judgement meant to condemn and punish her friends, shame and divide the group and disallow the boys an entré.

Embarrassed, the women eyed one another. With eyebrows raised, they gave the young men shoulder shrugs meant to convey apologies and distance them from Lucy's

sullen display. Tension stopped the conversation and with the energy dampened, the men took their cue, closed ranks and moved into a huddle.

Turning her back on her friends, Lucy leant over the bar and tried to catch the eye of the barman. Her back turned, the women whispered, announcing “a mood”.

She could feel eyes looking at her but she flipped her chin up in defiance. She wasn’t going to show them she cared.

A voice broke into her thoughts. ‘Makes you wonder if it’s you or them,’ he slurred.

Shielding herself from his unwanted intrusion she waved at the barperson in the hope she’d be saved. How dare he talk to her? She could feel her shoulders tense as anger flooded her body.

Undaunted by her rejection he continued. ‘Sometimes I feel invisible. Nobody would care if I dropped dead. They’d just walk over me.’

Lucy turned, glaring at him. ‘Excuse me. I’m trying to get a drink,’ she snarled.

‘Can’t even get a drink to see off the week from hell,’ he added.

Turning away she muttered a dismissive, sarcastic, ‘Sorrieee.’

‘Is that sorry about the week or sorry about not being able to get a drink?’ He persisted, leaning onto her.

She turned shrugging him away.

‘It’s not polite not to answer,’ he said peering at her.

‘I guess sorry for both then.’ Oh god! Doesn’t he get it?

‘That sounds half hearted. You don’t mean it.’

Oh, shut up. 'Do you think you're the only one who has hassles?' she replied hissing at him.

Caught, he turned. 'Ok, I'll tell you my troubles if you tell me yours.'

A disparaging look brought her reply, 'I don't want to hear them.' Oh god it's a pity party.

'That's honest. Ok, I'll only tell you the ones I can bear to listen to myself.'

She glared at him. 'Look, I'm busy. Go away.' Teeth clenched she hoped he got the message.

'Is that a brush off?'

'Yes.' Now almost shouting at him.

Lucy looked up. Standing at the end of the bar she saw the man who'd smiled at her on the stairs – Mr. Brown Eyes – and her heart gave a leap. As their eyes locked, he raised his glass.

What? Does he think I'm with...? Couldn't. I wasn't chatting him up.

The man's face was blank – not that inviting look from the stairs. He turned away and moved into the room to disappear into the crowd.

I'll go after him. Tell him...

The voice from her side interrupted her thoughts. 'Well, seems there's nothing left.'

Lucy turned to the Toy Boy, a different set of eyes. 'No, that's not true,' she said. 'We need to work together and catch the eye of the bartender. I need a drink.'

...anyway, he was too old for me.

## Medusa

Medusa, caught between childhood  
and the flowering of woman  
on that liminal step, not yet ready to step  
through to adult responsibility  
that flush of youth, that purity, that slate so clean  
the skin so soft, still smelling of a child's.  
Poseidon sees and so his temptation.

Passion whipped the broiling sea not for him restraint,  
not for him a moral code to tether his desire  
Medusa's innocence too much: chastity the prize.

Standing proud the stallion rears seduction is the sport  
Poseidon now in mortal form words as sweet as honey,  
romance the lure the lines are set, the hook:  
her imagination.

Poseidon plays with dreams of love pulls the tide of longing  
words as weapons shake the world  
with powerful masculinity.

Steps Medusa beyond the door, Athena's temple waiting.  
With practised hands and pounding foam  
Poseidon stirs the girl, her chastity's forgotten.  
From child to woman the tide has turned;  
now sex the exploration.

The air pervades with evidence  
no longer perfumed by sweet innocence  
the churning fluids of experience  
mark the temple now debased.

Athena enters left of stage  
her altar smeared she's not amused  
Goddess of War a storm enraged.

Here Poseidon shows his colours  
not for him a confrontation  
hides his face amongst the waves  
and sinking deep he disappears,  
the sea his liquid transportation.

Athena's temple no longer chaste  
defiled Medusa takes the rap  
seduction's jettison left to face  
the rising tide of righteous anger now displaced.

Athena's hissing accusations  
finger pointed hatred's poison poisons hope  
the curse not to the perpetrator  
but delivered crashing down  
to the child whose voice is lost  
Athena's wisdom has no place  
as vengeance finds its target.

Shame is now a resident delivered to an innocent  
the gods have used another pawn  
the thought too much to contemplate  
His and Hers the game of power, disruption of a life.

Betrayed,  
poor Medusa victim of deceit  
and nature's cruel intention  
the tide has turned, the golden child her fate:  
Athena's intervention.

Now Medusa soiled and banished  
guilt the weight that binds her;  
but here Medusa in depression's depths  
finds a greater wisdom, shields the world;  
lives a life internal. A cave her home  
her bloom, a hidden resident.

Here darkness hides amongst the curls life's mark  
unwanted power: Athena's hissing snakes.

Athena's greatest gift: the lie of masculinity  
war another foolish lure champions the warrior  
to seek the challenge to behead  
Medusa hiding in her cave,  
the Gorgon's power to enslave.

This world unknown the depths are dark  
no signs to navigate, no gift of wisdom to the young  
the trials all repetition.  
Athena's power not theirs to have  
precaution never taken.

The windows to her soul tainted full of fury  
Medusa's eyes turns heart to stone the cycle to complete.  
Now poisoned filled with anger  
freezes those who look upon her  
she sculptures them in stone.  
Medusa's cave is history,  
a temple to the memory,  
of ego strong yet rotten  
thus the young man's folly  
dust to dust the victory.

Another land another story no choice against a king  
a mother's fate there's no protection  
against another's rearing lust so prayers for intervention.

Here the story takes a twist  
Athena seeks redemption  
shares the secret of success  
another gift is given:  
her shield, the mirror to that soul  
offers Perseus protection.  
Look deep upon the face but only in reflection.

Edie Eicas

Don't look into the Gorgon's eyes,  
resist every temptation. And when you see  
the Gorgon's shape, raise the sword and claim the head  
its power for your use.

Athena's place not one of grace the girl again betrayed  
the sacrifice Medusa's, denied: a victim's rage.  
The severed head a gift, Perseus empowered.

The Gorgon speaks through history and stops another rape  
but in her death a birth occurs; it's Pegasus who's freed.

When woman's condemnation marks another soul  
it leaves an innocent to carry a head of hissing snakes  
then creation's story's dampened and Poseidon's seed  
unripened, Medusa trapped, depression's hook internal,  
imagination thwarted, the poet's muse denied,  
no voice to speak of women,  
no sound to drown the drone,  
of men whose rights are written in the frailty of stone.

Now on the flight to freedom the flying horse informs  
the cost to women of seduction when fury fills the soul.  
Now springs a place of wisdom, the lesson hard to learn  
no need to hurt another, no hate, discrimination,  
the severed head, a laboured birth,  
the flying horse escapes  
no longer trapped by anger  
finds a place amongst the stars.

