

# Weaving Words

Burnside Writers' Group 2019

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Burnside Writers' Group  
Burnside Library  
Burnside South Australia 5065

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## Introduction

Another Burnside Writers' Group Anthology provides our readers, new and old, in all senses of the words, with works that speak to the diversity of interest our members express.

From our inauguration and as time has passed, each member in their own way has grown as a writer and, as life has brought the inevitable changes, so has the writing developed. Styles and subjects have broadened the scope of the contributions. We offer a world of fiction seen through different narrators, personal experiences recounted, as well as poems, to speak to the heart. Humour, reflection, memoir, travel and the freedom of fiction all come together in this anthology.

The group meets to share knowledge, give feedback about each members' writing and to celebrate the variety of our experiences that present as words on the page. We offer one another the camaraderie of similar interest and the opportunity for feedback of our work from those we trust.

Every writer needs readers, be that family and friends, or a wider community. Through our relationship with the Burnside Council we have been able to provide our anthology to that wider audience.

We have read to patients in a nursing home, given books to residents of other nursing homes and have read to

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members of the Burnside community at our launches in the Burnside Library. Our Anthologies are available for borrowing at the Library.

Thank you to all our contributors who have helped make this Anthology possible and for those members who have provided their additional help: Iris Rowe's beautiful art work and Don Sinnott's proof reading.

This Anthology has been made possible by the generous Burnside Council's Community Grant.

Editors Edie Eicas and Christine Christopoulos

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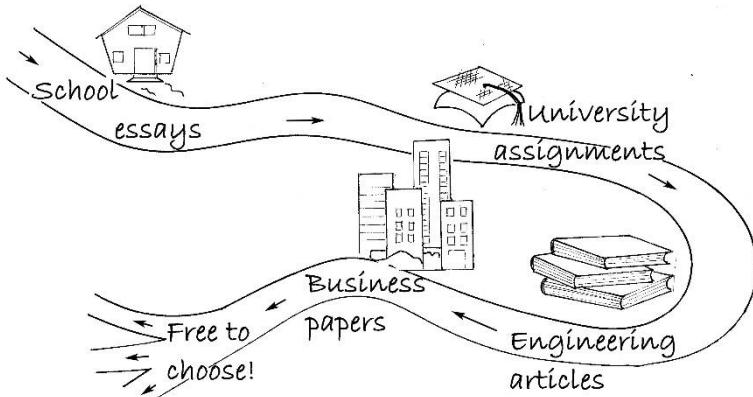
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## Don Sinnott



As an engineer I am a great lover of diagrams. I tried to pass on to my children a strategy of ‘first draw a diagram’ when I was asked to help with their maths and physics homework. Pretty much to no avail! But for me, a diagram is the best way of showing my pilgrimage in the writing craft.

I have travelled the writing road prescribed by my education and employment and now I am freed to explore many more options and genres. What a joy that is!

## The Day It Came Crashing Down

The call from Davis Thompson, the Security Manager at the defence facility where Cliff worked, was unexpected. After the preliminary pleasantries were exchanged Thompson got straight down to business. ‘Cliff, I’m conducting a quarterly review of security management for project Poseidon. Could you drop into my office tomorrow at, say, 10 am for your review?’ Cliff knew his diary was clear for the next morning so readily agreed.

Cliff regarded the Security Manager, despite the slight menace attached to his title, as a reasonable man and respected him for his common-sense approach. He was rigorous without being overzealous, as some security people of Cliff’s experience had been. Cliff, meticulous in his time management as in all things, noted the appointment for tomorrow in his diary – it would be just a short intrusion into his day. With the rest of tomorrow clear he should be able to finish his antenna design for Poseidon, the highly classified defence project he had been assigned to. That should tick some boxes for his next performance review.

Next morning Cliff’s knock on Davis Thompson’s office door was greeted with a cheery ‘come-in’. Thompson gestured to the chair opposite his desk and reached for a file. ‘Thanks for coming, Cliff. I need to go through a review process with all staff having top clearances on Poseidon and today’s your turn.’ Thompson’s smile seemed slightly forced and Cliff tensed just a little: surely this was a routine review, as he had gone through three months ago?

Thompson went on. ‘I see that you were in Poland at a conference last month. I need to ask if any matters arose that I should note on your file. No approaches that made you feel uneasy, no questions about your work that seemed

intrusive? The conference was not work-related so I don't expect there would be, but, you know, these days, security agencies overseas track people working on defence projects, so they'd know you were out of country...' Cliff understood that the ball was now in his court.

"The conference, yes, it was on genealogy. I took time off and funded my own travel, as you would be aware.'

Thompson nodded. Of course he was aware, and had a note to the effect on the file open before him. Cliff had done the right thing and advised him in advance of his intended overseas travel, as any staff with a high security clearance were required to do.

There was a silence that Cliff felt obliged to fill. 'I'm working on my family history, just a hobby, and my grandfather came from Poland. So, the conference not only gave me some clues on how to develop my family history but was also a good opportunity to pursue some facts and figures about Pa's homeland. I managed to fill in quite a few details about his extended family while I was there.'

Thompson seemed to be only half-listening and his smile had slowly faded. 'So, genealogy is a hobby? Do you have any other hobbies?'

Cliff began to feel that this interview was taking an unexpected turn. Clearly Thompson had no interest in the overseas conference or its subject. Cliff, more puzzled than concerned, responded, 'Hobbies? Well, apart from sports, I have a long-standing interest in photography. Dabbled in black and white processing as a kid but now it's all digital and Photoshop...'

Thompson cut in, clearly not interested in photographic technicalities either, his manner now professional and targeted. 'Let me relate a case that will affect

## Don Sinnott

you. In strictest confidence, you understand?' Cliff nodded dumbly, aware that colour was draining from his face. There was some serious intent to what he had expected to be a routine review.

'Last month a Jeremy Carter approached an *Advertiser* reporter with an envelope stamped SECRET. Inside the envelope were photographs of the electronic circuit boards from Poseidon module V279 – the module number is clear in the photos. Carter reckoned he was offering the reporter a hot story and his asking price for the photos was \$10,000.'

Cliff was struck dumb, his face suddenly pallid and hands clammy. Thompson's eyes missed nothing of Cliff's discomfort as he continued. 'Reporters don't dare deal in this sort of material, so he alerted the police who arrested Carter and searched his house. They subsequently contacted us – would've been better if they'd let us do the search. Carter's story was that at a meeting of the Imagineers Camera Club a fellow member had left a folder on a vacant seat.' Cliff started; he was a member of that club.

Thompson noted Cliff's reaction and went on: 'Carter said he was seated nearby and noticed there was an envelope, protruding slightly from the folder. He said he leaned over and extracted the envelope. He expected a preview of photos for the club's usual show-and-tell session. He was surprised to see SECRET stamped on it and even more surprised to see what was inside it. I doubt this story and we will be interviewing Carter ourselves to check it out. But I've ascertained you're a member of the club.' He paused to extract a manila envelope from Cliff's security file and slid out of it a series of colour photographs.

Cliff instantly recognised the photos of assemblies from the Poseidon module V279 for which he was

responsible. Thompson's next words rocked the already shocked Cliff. 'The photos bear unique identifying codes on their reverse and these correspond with those registered as issued to you.'

Cliff's throat felt constricted; he struggled to respond. 'Yes, I'm a member of that camera club but I don't know anyone named Jeremy Carter. I would if he was a member. I'm the membership secretary. I certainly recognize the photos – I've got a complete set locked in my filing cabinet – or it seemed complete last time I looked. I would never take any off-site. How could this Carter person get the photos? From my cabinet? Impossible...' He realised that he was panicking, and his words were tumbling incoherently. Thompson's face was impassive, but Cliff saw on it an unvoiced 'Of course you would say that.'

Thompson observed a professional silence. Cliff was not inclined to break it. Eventually Thompson continued evenly. 'I'm sure you realise the significance of what I've told you. We need to make further inquiries and I'll need your cooperation in conducting them.' Cliff opened his mouth to assure his cooperation, but Thompson waved him silent. 'You must also realise that we must immediately bar you from access to Poseidon, suspend your clearance and have you leave this plant until the matter is resolved. One of our officers will accompany you back to your office to retrieve your personal effects before he escorts you off-site and collects your entry pass.' Cliff was incredulous as Thompson concluded. 'I sincerely hope we can clear you of what are potentially serious charges and that you can return to work here. Do you have any questions?'

Questions? Cliff had a myriad. But he was in no condition to frame them, shaken by the realisation that he

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was facing a potential end to his career as an electronic engineer. That might be the least of it – he could be facing a conviction, even jail. How could this be? He could only shake his head weakly and utter, ‘No’ in a voice he hardly recognised as his own. Thompson indicated he should go, and he struggled to his feet in a daze. A grey-suited man met him outside the office. Cliff had never seen this man before but he had clearly been deputised to see him back to his office and thence from the plant.

The two of them walked in silence back to Cliff’s office. ‘I have some personal papers in the filing cabinet,’ said Cliff. ‘Can I retrieve them?’

The be-suited man was gruff. ‘No. We need to check the cabinet contents and prepare an inventory.’ He put his hand out and Cliff fumbled in his pocket for the cabinet key. ‘If there is anything of yours inside, not work-related, you will receive it in due course. For now, you can collect only personal items.’

Cliff cast his eyes around the office and dumbly stuffed into his briefcase his lunch box, the framed photo of his wife, Jenny, who smiled at him from his desk every day – she wouldn’t be smiling when she learned of today’s events – his fountain pen and the ‘certificate of meritorious achievement’ that hung on the wall. He turned to go with the security man.

Five minutes later he was outside the plant as the taciturn security man unclipped Cliff’s pass and turned on his heel back through the door.

*This is the opening for a mystery novel currently in work. Many twists and turns await Cliff as he tries to clear his name.*

## Lament of One Well-Bred

I'm quite proud of my parentage. Or perhaps I'm better called a joint venture. In any case, that name etched onto my deck sets me apart from cheap store brands and foreign knock-offs. I'm a genuine Briggs and Stratton, so give me the respect a well-bred lawn mower deserves.

Not that I get much respect from Dave. He might be my owner – after all he did shell out the cash at Bunnings – but he should be reported to the mower protection agency for the way he treats me.

Dave shows no respect for my noble name, drives me mercilessly into that tough paspalum that's invading his patch of grass, leaves me with mouldering grass clippings all over my deck and jammed up underneath. And when was the last time he changed my oil and checked my sparkplug? I've got a good mind to hold out and refuse to start next time he drags me from the shed and starts to haul on the starter rope. I love to see his red and perspiring face when he has to work at it. But I usually relent after a dozen pulls and kick over. By then he's just about spent anyway, and liable to give me a kick, along with some language that I, as a well-bred Briggs and Stratton, don't appreciate.

It is nice to feel that throb as I start up, the cool fuel flowing into my cylinder, the warm blue-tinged exhaust pumping out to the side. Quite sensuous, really. Then there's the joy of slicing into a verdant lawn as the work begins. Not that Dave's ill-bred weed infestation warrants being called a lawn. And I wish he'd get rid of that bloody dog: it's no fun mincing its turds. I stink for weeks.

Life's certainly not meant to be easy for a mower, even a Briggs and Stratton.

## Emigration of a Highlander Family

Angus McDonald, my maternal great-great grandfather was a Scottish Highlander from Sutherland Shire. His way of life as a tenant farmer and herdsman was radically upended by changes to farming practices in the late eighteenth century. Monied landowners, in search for greater agricultural productivity, moved from a feudal system of small-scale tenant farming of their estates to large-scale sheep farming, unleashing a process known historically as the *Highland Clearances*.

One of the few options available to displaced and evicted former farmers was emigration. Australia and Canada were favoured destinations and Angus, caught up in this social upheaval, was among a second wave of Highlander emigration. He, his wife and their 11 surviving children left their beloved homeland in May 1853, bound for Melbourne under an assisted migration scheme.

Conditions that steerage class immigrant passengers endured are unimaginable by those of us who travel the world today in the relative comfort of jet aircraft. But this obviously highly self-sufficient Highlander family survived the four-month journey aboard the full-rigged ship *Australia* without serious incident. There was great rejoicing when the first call of 'Land ahoy' came from the ship's watch as the Otway ranges at the southern tip of Victoria came into view. The south west coast of Victoria is aptly dubbed the Shipwreck Coast and the Captain of the *Australia* navigated this stretch of turbulent sea with great care.

The heads that guard Port Phillip Bay were the next hazard to be managed. The opening is narrow, with very strong tidal flows. Frequently, when an ebb tide sees the

contents of Port Phillip Bay pouring out through the constricted opening, a south westerly wind creates a sea against the outflow. A wall of water results known locally as ‘the rip’. This fearsome maelstrom has brought many ships to their doom by forcing them onto the rocks lying either side of the navigable passage. In the year before *Australia* probed this passage the migrant ship *Isabella Watson* was wrecked, with the loss of 72 lives.

A skilled captain would choose his moment, trying to confine his vessel’s passage through the narrow opening to the short period of relative calm between the bay’s furious outpourings and inpourings. But steering in turbulent seas was always chancy, and, with variable coastal winds, an unwieldy sailing ship could easily drift onto uncharted rocks, the captain’s skills to no avail against the forces of wind and sea.

It was a tense time as the *Australia* picked its way through the heads, its officers trying to banish thoughts of the *Isabella Watson*. Whether by sound navigation or good luck, *Australia*, with its band of expectant migrants, passed through safely, to face a further challenge.

The ship had suffered an outbreak of what was then termed *coastal fever* (cholera). It broke out late in the voyage and spread rapidly among the confined steerage passengers. Once inside Port Phillip heads, the ship took aboard a pilot who, alerted to the outbreak, demanded the ship fly the chequered yellow/black flag denoting contagion and stand off Point Nepean Sanitary (quarantine) station.

The ‘station’ existed in name only at that time; when the *Australia* hove to and discharged its passengers onto the beach, the first order of business was to stitch sailcloth tents

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for crude accommodation on the beach and along the ti-tree foreshore.

Some passengers were seriously ill, and a number died in the two months before the fumigated *Australia* was permitted to sail for Melbourne, carrying those passengers clear of cholera to their destination in their new land. Angus and his family were not aboard on this final leg of the voyage. Tragically, the eldest daughter died of cholera soon after landing and not all the other children were well enough to sail by the time the ship resumed its voyage. Angus's family opted to remain in the Point Nepean area for some years, some finding work during the building of permanent structures at the quarantine station, before crossing the bay and becoming successful farmers on land they, and not a Scottish laird, owned.

Many memories have been preserved of this epic – a descendant has in his keeping the small sea chest Angus and his family brought with them into *Australia*'s cramped steerage deck as the family's only 'carry-on' baggage, while a small tombstone at Point Nepean is an enduring reminder of the perils that early immigrants faced.

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## Wadi Rum

I saw David Lean's 1963 Academy Award-winning film *Lawrence of Arabia* as a teenager. My principal memories of the film are of Peter O'Toole's masterful portrayal of T. E. Lawrence, a British intelligence officer turned Arab-revolutionary leader, and Lean's beautiful cinematography of desert scenery. Jordan's Wadi Rum was Lawrence's desert base and recruiting area for successful campaigns in 1916 – 1918 against the Ottoman Turks. It was to Wadi Rum that our mini-bus had taken us as part of a tour of Jordan earlier this year.

Memories of *Lawrence of Arabia* seemed to hover over Wadi Rum and infect it with a special magic. The magic was soon dispelled; the 'soft-adventure' tour we were on deliberately threw in some discomfort and challenge. In groups of four, we were bundled onto crude seats on the open trays of Toyota four-wheel drive vehicles, to be driven at some speed across the desert into the face of an icy wind. We had been warned to rug up against the cold but had little to rug up with – we are cabin-baggage only travellers and the few pitiful layers we could don were poor insulation. Mercifully, the vehicles stopped frequently and we could do some vigorous climbing of rocky outcrops and sand-hills to restore some body warmth.

The next day added a further dimension: as well as another chilly open-air four-wheel drive spin we had a 40-minute camel ride, before regaining the comfort of our mini-bus. Mounting the camel, clinging on as it lurched to its feet and accommodating its disconcerting rolling gait, were only the initial challenges. For me, the saddle was impossibly broad, leaving my legs feeling spreadeagled, seeming to

Don Sinnott

threaten a groin injury as souvenir of the ride. The last few hundred metres, with the salvation of our mini bus in sight, seemed to last hours.

Wadi Rum retains its *Lawrence of Arabia* magic for me, but I don't recall noting Peter O'Toole with goose bumps or suffering camel saddle-sores.

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## Independence Day

The small, soft hand slipped easily across my palm, pleading to be folded by my fingers in a reassuring grasp. He seemed to need that enfolding of hands with grandpa today as the rowdy crowd of older kids in the playground roistered around. The playground was usually a favourite with my little grandson, but he preferred it when it was his private domain without competition for the swings, the slippery-dip, the whizzy... Today, the competition spooked him.

‘Would you like a go on the swing, Ronan?’ A firm shake of the head was the only response. There already was a girl on one of the swings – too close. ‘What about the slippery-dip?’ He looked over at the spiralling steel structure that was a source of glee on previous visits. It was crowded, screeches of delight echoing in waves as child after child flew down the glazed slope. Another shake of the head.

## Don Sinnott

The excursion was going badly. I glanced at the whizzy, now under the control of some confident lads intent on flinging three squealing girls from the spinning deck. It seemed pointless to ask about this option; we moved on, his hand clutching tighter.

The flying fox was vacant! 'Come on Ronan, there's no one on this.' A moment's hesitation and the clutch of that small hand eased, slightly at first then completely. He offered no resistance as I retrieved one of the flying fox seats then lifted him and eased him down. With his legs straddling the dropper I gave a thrust to his back. He was free. 'Hang on!'

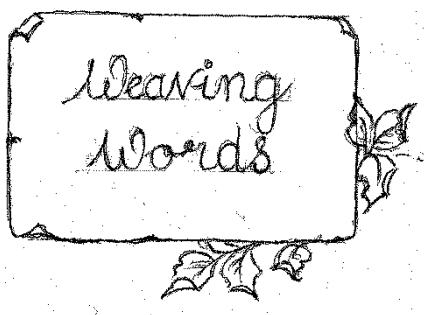
He did, a smile spreading over his previously impassive face. The runner whirred down the cable until Ronan's whoop of delight as it crashed into the stop at the end and the seat swung wildly.

'Another one grandpa!' as he dragged the seat back up the rise. No more handholding. Independence had come at last.

Anne McKenzie

## Anne McKenzie

My interest is in life writing, using my family history and my previous work as a child protection social worker for my inspiration. I write prose pieces (some humorous), short stories and poetry. As a member of the Burnside Writers' Group I receive support and constructive feedback for my writing. Having this audience is wonderful.



## The Cherry Tree

Like me, the gate is almost unhinged. It leans against the fretting brick fence where shivering autumn leaves shelter from the blustery wind. I make myself go in.

The front yard is uninviting. A skeletal cherry tree stands alone among the grass-strangled leavings of some renovation project. Warily, I pick my way in.

The building, a single-fronted Victorian style cottage, seems to sag tiredly between the burly concrete office blocks on either side.

As I step onto the tiled front verandah, I can hear the murmur of voices in the front room. The urge to slink away is strong. I reach for the brass doorknocker but it slips from my grasp and hits the strike plate with a pathetic dull thud. I have to do it again; as if I want to be answered. This time the voices stop—but then they go on. *Surely I don't have to do it again?* After what seems an eternity, a fresh faced young woman opens the front door. She is carrying a small tomahawk.

‘Axe murderer?’ I say, stepping back and raising my hands in mock surrender.

A flush appears on her face and spreads to her neck and arms as she looks down in horror at the axe in her hand.

‘Oh, no, I’m not a patient,’ she says. ‘We don’t see...I mean...I was out the back chopping kindling for the fire. I heard the door. Sorry. I didn’t want Doctor to have to answer it. She’s just finishing up with someone. Come in, please. I’m Diana. You must be Jill?’

She waves me in with the once again forgotten axe.

I’m left to wait in a small alcove off the long narrow passage—visible to everyone. There’s just the one chair and

## Anne McKenzie

a small book case. The magazines are disappointing, not a single decent celebrity gossip issue. The one book is about Lithuania. *Maybe she's Lithuanian? Valionyte? Could be. I wonder how you pronounce it. So what do I call her anyway? She probably gets "Doctored" to death. I'm not going to call her that. Perhaps, her Christian name? Seems a bit familiar. I won't call her anything, that'll have to do.*

'Hello,' she says, startling me from my reverie and extending her hand to shake mine. 'I'm Victoria Val...'

I miss the name again.

'Do come in. I'm sorry but everything's a mess and we'll have to meet in the sitting room today. They're still working on my office.'

She is tall, elegant and angular, with long blonde hair that frames her face. Her voice is deep and soft. I like that and I like her smile.

The room is cluttered. Every available space has been crammed with boxes, books, paintings, lamps and other soft furnishings—the contents of her under construction office, I presume. On top of the tallest pile of boxes is a half-empty toilet paper roll. For some reason it is oddly reassuring and keeps snagging my gaze. *Perhaps it's the familiarity of chaos?*

There is a smouldering wood fire in the grate that does little to warm the room.

The soft white leather lounge chair half swallows me as I sit where indicated. I feel big and awkward, small and exposed. My arms and legs seem to be poking up at all angles.

She flows lithely into the chair opposite, relaxes back into its obvious welcome softness and pulls a crocheted rug across her knees. I want a rug to hide beneath – all except my

## Anne McKenzie

eyes, that is. I want to be able to look out.

Cocking her head slightly to one side and smiling again, she looks at me expectantly. She is asking why I have come.

*Well, I'm a complete and utter mess, surely that's obvious? I'm in love with someone who doesn't love me – again. My mother's not speaking to me. I'm depressed and lonely. I feel like a child masquerading as an adult woman. I just want to be happy and loved.*

I try to speak the words but they can't seem to force their way past the painful lump constricting my throat. Tears bully their way forward and begin to tumble down my face. I rummage in my pockets. They are empty. I haven't brought any tissues. She gets up, goes over to the toilet paper roll and tears off several sheets, folds them into a neat pile and then offers them to me in her upturned palms. I see an image of the Madonna. *For heaven's sake, what am I doing? I'm an atheist after all!*

'I do this for the children,' she says, still standing there, 'when we've run out of tissues.'

I can't bear the gentleness and begin to sob.

She starts to speak again. For a long time I hear only the sound of her voice. After a time I find myself answering questions, even volunteering information.

'Tell me about your earliest memories of your parents,' she is saying now.

My heart thumps. My earliest memory is of the day my father left. I was four years old.

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It is a bitter winter's morning but in the kitchen it is snug – the wood stove has been going since dawn. A big old grey cat, his belly full of milk, has stretched out on the hearth and

## Anne McKenzie

is purring contentedly. The wireless is on as always in the mornings. A little girl and her grandmother sit in silence at the kitchen table. The girl is toying with her bowl of porridge, building lumpy mountains and then smacking them down with the back of her spoon.

‘Don’t play with your food, child, eat it,’ the grandmother says in mild reproof. ‘And take your feet off the spindles, you’ll break that chair.’

The grandmother nurses a cup of tea and every so often looks down the passage towards the bedroom. At least the shouting has stopped for now. She reaches for her cigarettes and lights up another one, coughing as she draws in the welcome nicotine. She wishes she hadn’t come but family is family after all.

*‘On top of old smoky, all covered with snow, I lost my true lover from...’* Burl Ives croons from the wireless.

‘Nan, Nan, Smoky’s song! It’s Smoky’s song!’

The girl gets up from the table, singing along. She runs over to the wireless and then to the now sleeping cat. She tries to embrace him and then drag him closer to the wireless.

‘Come on Smoky, it’s your song. You’ve gotta do it.’ His resistance is Gandhi-like. He knows he has size and weight on his side. She accepts her defeat with no ill grace.

‘Mum, Mum, it’s Smoky’s song,’ she calls out as she heads off down the passage in search of her mother.

‘Sweetheart, come back here, don’t go bothering your mother just now...’

It’s too late, the child has gone from her – and now her daughter and her son-in-law’s shouting has started up again. The neighbours will hear every word; she covers her

ears to no avail.

'I never wanted children, you knew that,' he says.  
'And now you're bloody pregnant again.'

'Praise the Lord and call me Mary, another immaculate conception that of course you had nothing whatsoever to do with.'

'Well, you're a nurse; I thought you'd fix things. And while we're at it, I'm sick of that smart mouth of yours.'

'So you're leaving us, just like that. Always the path of least resistance Tom, that's you. You're weak and spineless. I should've listened to my mother. She couldn't understand why I ever wanted to marry you. Said you were such a miserable bastard.'

'Thank God, I'll be finally rid of that interfering bitch too. Why did you bloody marry me then?'

'Because I felt sorry for you. More fool me.'

'You will be sorry now...'

The girl hesitates outside her parents' bedroom door, scared by the shouting but wanting her mother. Hot tears run down her cheeks. She stands on tip-toes to reach the door handle and pushes the door open.

Her parents are on the far side of the double bed. Her mother is kneeling down with her head in her arms on the bed, sobbing. On the bed is a leather suitcase. Her father is standing by the suitcase with a strap in his raised hands. In those few slow seconds an image of her father beating her mother is burned onto her retina and into her memory. As one, they both look up and see her trembling and tearful in the doorway.

'Get back to the kitchen,' he shouts.

She can't move.

'Don't speak to her like that. You're scaring her, you

bastard.'

Her mother gets up and hurries over to her, wipes both their tears with her hands and then gently leads her from the room.

In the kitchen, the grandmother, weeping now, hugs her daughter and grandchild.

The father strides into the kitchen, the suitcase and a rifle in his hands. He puts down the suitcase and releases the safety catch on the gun.

'Tom, no, please, no...' the mother says.

He glares at her and then marches to the hearth, grabs the protesting cat by the scruff of the neck and takes it outside.

They hear a gunshot – and then, a second.

They are still standing transfixed when he returns to the kitchen.

Piddle is dripping down the girl's legs into a widening puddle between her feet.

'You'd have never looked after it,' he says to the woman.

He picks up the suitcase and leaves, slamming the screen door behind him.

\*\*\*

'So, how did it go?' my friend says, as our coffees arrive.

'It was awful. I totally embarrassed myself. I cried about everything – even telling her about the day my father left – and that's such ancient history. I don't know if I can face her again.'

'I bet everyone cries. What did she say about that day, about your father?'

'She said, "Well, at least he didn't shoot you".'

## Anne McKenzie

‘What, that’s all she said? The bitch! And you’re paying for this? What did you say?’

‘Nothing. It kind of took the wind out of my sails. I thought she’d say something about how awful or scary it must have been for me.’ *Wait a minute. I get it now. She was inviting me to see the events of that day as a survivor, not as a victim. She must have thought I was a right twerp when I just looked at her blankly.*

‘Did you ever talk about that day afterwards, with your mother or grandmother?’

‘No, it was never mentioned again. He was never mentioned again. My mother threw out all her photographs of him and cut him out of those she kept.’

‘Did he beat your mother often, before that day?’

‘I don’t really know that he ever did beat her. I mean that morning that’s what I thought I was seeing – him standing over her with the strap in his hands, her on her knees sobbing. Yet I never actually saw the strap fall, never saw a blow of any kind. Maybe it was just a strap for the suitcase? Or the belt for his trousers? But the memory is what it is. Do you know what I mean?’

‘Like once when I was just a kid and my grandfather sat me on the back of an old sow. I remember that pig as huge and not me as little. No matter how I try I can’t shrink that pig – and I can’t add to or alter my memory of that other day either. He was hurting her, though – and she him, too, for that matter... You know, it’s the only memory I have of him – no tickling games, no fun bath times and no cuddles. Nothing else.’

‘Did you ever see your father again?’

‘Yes, I did – but only as an adult.’

‘So? What was he like?’

Anne McKenzie

‘He was...a miserable bastard.’

We both laugh.

‘So, are you going to continue seeing her, “the bitch”?’

‘Well if I do, I’ve at least got something to call her now, thanks to you. Shall we have another coffee or do you have to rush?’ *Nice sidestep girl. But are you going to keep seeing her? Yes, it’s very painful – but you must admit the bloody woman’s made an impact already. You’re even dreaming about her.*

\*\*\*

I dream it’s a glorious day and that I’ve come early for my appointment. The front door is open but she’s not there yet. I sit on the edge of the verandah to wait, watching honeyeaters feed from the masses of pink blossom on the cherry tree. Someone touches my arm. I look up. A little girl has come to wait with me. She sits down beside me and leans her head against my shoulder. I put my arm around her. Soon the warmth of the sun makes us sleepy and our eyes close. We don’t hear her approaching footfalls. She sees us and smiles.

‘Let’s go in now,’ she says.

## **Friendship**

Love me  
and  
let me be fallible.  
Trust me  
and  
find me your forever friend

\*\*\*

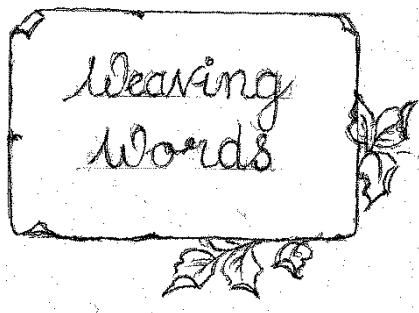
## **Riches**

Vision is so overriding  
I close my eyes to see  
to ferret from their hiding  
riches other senses bring to me

## Roger Monk

There is no path, writer.  
Paths are made by walking.  
Others may follow, and make it a path,  
But your feet showed the way.  
It was your journey, writer. \*

*\* With apologies to Antonio Machado*



## There's a Name

I have a number of friends called 'There'.

'Hello, There,' I say, wracking my brain to remember who There is.

'Ah. There you are.' I say, seeing There coming towards me.

"There is a green hill far away, outside a city wall", wrote Cecil Alexander when he couldn't remember the word Golgotha.

'There, there,' we comfort, trying to remember their name.

'There! There,' we shout, pointing at what they can't see there.

'There's no one there.' We mess with the language when There isn't in a place where There is supposed to be.

I really envy people who can remember a name without hesitation. Once they've heard it, it slides into a file in the brain, waiting to spring out at any required moment.

But, it doesn't always work. I had a university lecturer friend who had a cement memory. At the beginning of every year, he memorised the names of every one of his students and was very proud of the fact that, if a student asked a question or contributed to a discussion, he could instantly name him or her. He was almost infallible – except when he got one wrong right at the beginning of one year.

'Yes, Peter?'

'Umm, my name's John.'

'What? Have you changed it, Peter? Why change it?'

'I didn't. I've always been John.'

'Make up your mind, Peter. We can't have you changing it willy-nilly every few minutes.'

Roger Monk

‘Well, I’m John. Always have been and always will be.’  
And twenty minutes later John answered another question.

‘Yes, Peter? What do you think?’

And because the cement told him that the student was Peter, he was always Peter, right through the year.

He even passed the final exam as Peter, which rather worried John.

\*\*\*

## The Garden

*An attempt at free verse.*

Matted elm leaves abandoning all hope.

Naked sticks of unashamed winter.

Glorious nightshade in purple velvet,  
tall as six year olds and just as deadly.  
violets scuttling over bare ground,  
covering the sins of summer.

New boy on the block: feijoa, name still attached,  
where once a paperbark, now stacked firewood.

A rock unearthed, spade annoyer put aside,  
a stepping stone in the making?

Red diamantina, summer leftovers, waving  
stop signs, ignored by frost and sleet.

Memories of salvias, eye catchers long gone,  
worn out by flamboyance and upstart showing off.  
Snail shells piled in corners, funeral pyres,  
Slain by small blue pellets on warmer nights.

Roger Monk

Wet bricks for sliding on, sloped to kill unwary.  
Wisteria peering overhead, curled purple lips.  
Summer hedge of vigour, slowed to nought,  
from rampant shooting fighter of a thousand cuts.  
Blueberries where white dabs of blossom hung,  
Winning birds with waiting eyes, first in line.  
Lemon tree stalemate, refusing to play,  
Galls arising from the branch. No game at all.

Shy clivia clumps brightening through the straps,  
Surprises least expected from the shade and damp.  
Lonely, single, desert pea, dead if pampered,  
Challenging 'roo paws for the oos and ahhs.  
Tattered, vined glory rags on twister lines.  
Heated chillies, burning yellow, red and green.  
Upturned mushroom birdbath, now forgotten,  
Once the saving soul for singing neighbours.

Thistle do, the mites of down now standing firm,  
Now giving in. Thistle out to swell the limpy heap.  
Grasses still but not asleep. Waiting on their backs,  
Waiting, ever waiting for the coming turn.  
And over all, with verted bones of seeming dead,  
but slightly budding in the winter sun,  
The golden elm, heat shield and master of it all,  
surveyed in my front garden, much alive.

## Population

It has been decided that the greatest problem facing the world today is overpopulation.

Some is due to better health, some to selfishness, some to modern medicine, some to religious reasons and some to stupidity.

With a smaller population we would not have man-made climate problems.

With a smaller population we would have a greatly reduced refugee problem.

With a smaller population we would have greatly reduced starvation.

With a reduced population we would have fewer and smaller slums.

With a reduced population we would have fewer developers.

With a reduced population we would have fewer cyclists.

With a reduced population we would have fewer emails.

With a reduced population we would have fewer jet-ski boats and riders.

With a reduced population we would have fewer hoon drivers.

With a reduced population we may – just may – have one or two fewer politicians.

And now that I have solved the problems of the world, I shall go in due course and leave the few of you who are left with one fewer grump.

## A Tale of No Stories

I had this idea, you see. Brilliant! Came to me at about 2 a.m., just as I was turning over. And for once, I had a pen and paper beside the bed. Meant to be, I thought. I'm usually a mile from a pen and by morning all I can remember is that I'd had an idea.

But this was different. So I switched on the bedside light and scribbled down a few words. Just enough for me to remember in the morning. Then I went straight back to sleep.

But in the morning, I looked at the piece of paper and couldn't understand a word. What on earth? Someone else's scribble about someone's something or other? I had breakfast and took another look. It hadn't changed, of course. I just hoped it had. *Sipre bisan & cnes gl.* What the hell did that mean?

I tried to put myself back into the middle of the night, and nearly dozed off. I tried putting other letters in between them, like *Slinpre san clney glu*, and other combinations, but they didn't make any sense either. I left it and went to work.

Walking back from lunch, I saw the chap from the office who has the job of meeting new clients in different places around the w... Of course! That's what the words meant. *Singapore businessman and Chinese girl*. It was so obvious! A story about – yes – like the one in the street – goes up to Singapore and um, what about – meets this – should make a great yarn. Married of course, but – hmm – and the lips of my imagination began licking themselves – and then stopped, hesitating. No! That won't work – what about – Ah, I'll think of something. Usually do. These middle-of-the-night ideas are just great!

## Nine-Tenths of the Lawn

‘Hey!. Get that dog off my lawn!’

‘I beg your pardon? Who do you think you’re talking to?’

‘I’m talking to you, lady. Get that stupid dog off my lawn.’

‘Stupid? She’s not stupid. She’s Sweety-pie. My Sweety. My Sweety-pie and she’s lovely. You’re the stupid one.’

‘Ah, hell! It’s a bitch, is it? They’re worse than dogs. A quick squat and half the lawn’s dead in a fortnight.’

‘Rubbish, you silly man. Sweety-pie wouldn’t hurt a fly. Never killed a lawn in her life. Get a grip on yourself you rude man. Nasty man. Nasty man. Don’t you listen to the nasty man, Sweety.’

‘Well, I’ve got news for you, madam. Your stupid little bitch is a bitch. And bitches kill lawns. Now get it off?’

‘Such language in front of Sweety-pie. Wash your mouth out. And mow your lawn closer. Poor little Sweety-pie can’t sit down for a second because of the long grass. Prickles her little bottom. You’re an animal hater, you are.’

‘Aw, hell! Look lady, I’m not an animal hater and I don’t mind dogs – except on lawns. You must know that there’s something in bitches... um... water that kills lawns. So get it off, please.’

‘Certainly not. You’ve made poor little Sweety-pie quite upset. She’ll have to sit down for a while to calm down. Now go away. Nasty man. Go away!’

‘Go away? Go away? I live here you silly... and your dopey bitch is on my lawn. You’re the one to go away. If you don’t move her I’ll have to turn the ho...’

Roger Monk

‘Ah! Hell! Now she’s squatting! Your bloody dog’s squatting! Squatting! Get it off! Get it off! Now you’ve done it you...’

‘Where’s the hose! Who moved the bloody hose?’

## Robert I Schmidt

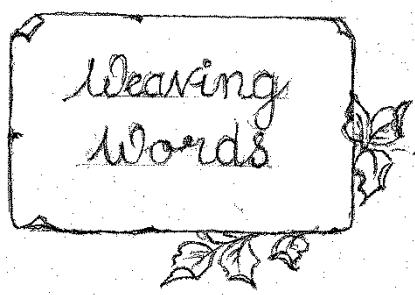
Working in the clerical section of a timber, joinery and hardware firm for thirty years was not inspiring for creativity. It wasn't meant to be.

My Auntie Wilma, a talented and very funny writer, inspired me, at nearly sixty, to try my hand at writing.

When the small writing group at CLUB 68 folded, it was suggested, to my luck in 2015, I joined the fairly new Burnside Writers Group. The then leaders Helen and Iris welcomed me in; as did everyone else.

I like writing about annoying little things that happen to all of us and over time and have developed a fairly self effacing, humorous writing style.

Having real problems with technology, guess who still writes with pen and paper? Special thanks to Anne McKenzie for typing my anthology contribution this year. I hope everyone reading the anthology enjoys it and of course, all my quirky stories. Have a little chuckle



## The Bra Shop

I am with my wife Jane recently in the underwear section of Target, Unley. She wants Bras. Up and down each aisle we go for several minutes. Already it seems like hours. Eventually she has a selection and disappears into the change rooms.

Now I didn't want to sit on the chair outside the change rooms; ladies going past, looking at me; frowning 'Pervert'. I'll check out the men's shirts at the other end of the shop. Can't see any I like though.

Decide to go to the toilets, even though they are in the adjacent Unley Shopping Centre.

Coming back fairly quickly, going up and down every aisle. Jane is four feet eleven inches in the old scale and I'm used to her being totally hidden. Often find her in the last aisle. No sign of her.

Realising there are ladies of all shapes and sizes looking everywhere for different reasons from me. Must wonder at this poor chap, going up and down aimlessly.

Giving up, I sit again on the chair outside the change rooms. All the doors inside the rooms are locked. Jane's got to be in one of these rooms. Can't exactly knock on each door, can I?

One by one the doors open. Ladies not looking remotely like Jane appear who I'm sure are thinking, 'Who are you? Pervert?' I'm not sitting here anymore; I'm probably looking like a not quite reformed peeping tom.

Taking off roaming the shop Jane and I connect. Now I'm the villain. 'Why couldn't you sit and wait outside the rooms,' she yells. What us chaps go through for our beloved. Or am I the only mug on this planet?

## The Charming Little Old Lady

I was on my way for happy hour at the Avenues Tavern, Stepney one Friday afternoon. Rather than leave my banking for later that day, I decided to do it at the Commonwealth Bank on the Parade before the pub. I drive round and round before finding a park.

Leaving the car park and striding onto George Street, I see a fair way ahead of me a little old lady pulling a shopping cart. In moments I catch up to her. Didn't want to be rude and push past her. I follow her walking gently as we turn east and up the Parade. Of course, she turns into the Commonwealth Bank, past the greeting concierge, towards the one and only teller. I am starting to feel doomed as I shuffle in keeping my distance from her.

Then out comes a bag of coins. Don't even think they are sorted. The teller starts shuffling coins onto a weighing machine. Now for crying out loud there are provisions for four terminals. Two terminals are blacked out. Never seen a teller in the remaining terminal. Are we not in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Occasionally the lady turns round, gently smiling. I smile back. I stay calm. Not going to turn into a homicidal maniac. Am I?

As minutes turn to hours – well not exactly -the perspiring teller balances the final coins, and then stamps the passbook.

The little old lady thanks me for my patience, not seeing the knife behind my back – I'm joking, of course. The relieved teller also thanks me for my patience.

Now it's my turn. I do the banking for four family members, and all have passbooks. Who then turns into a silly old bugger? A queue grows behind me.

## I'm in Bed You Clot

My bedroom clock has inadvertently gone onto a twenty-four hour cycle. This is alright if you are a mathematical genius like me.

This morning I wake with a start, the dial showing nineteen forty-seven. I'm late for the Heart Foundation Walk. Jump out of bed, quick Wheatbix, a poor shave and into the shower. Rush, rush, rush. Then I madly look for my glasses, and keys as I get dressed. Into the car. On my way. Gee the sun's low in the sky this morning. Reaching Osmond Terrace, the road is completely blocked near the school. I bang my fist on the steering wheel. Must be an accident ahead. I won't make the walk. The walkers leave nine-thirty sharp from the Avenues Shopping Centre, Stepney.

I like MMM radio in the morning but what are Roo and Ditz doing on the radio, they finish at nine? Must be a program change.

Cross Magill Road, nine twenty-nine on the car clock. Reach the car park, jump out of the car and into the shopping centre.

Too late, everyone's gone. I've missed the walk. Strange though, everyone's gone out of sight in one minute.

I try to ring my walking mate, Steve, taking four minutes to get through. 'Where is everyone,' I yell. 'In bed. It's eight thirty you clot.'

You see my bedside clock was really seven forty seven, not eight forty-seven as I thought. I'm an hour early. I've finally gone mad. The next hour is a whole new story.

## The Walk ‘Take Two’

All alone outside the Avenues Shopping Centre. Now I have fifty-five minutes to kill. Could have gone to the local cafe with the curious name ‘Drunk’n Coffee’. Think it was open. Chill out, relax.

No. Decide to take some clothes for dry cleaning; all the way to Burnside Village. Then it’s inch my way along Osmond Terrace again. Pass school kids being dropped off for classes.

Arrive at the Village Car Park, it’s deserted for once. Everything’s going to plan. Walk from my car, looking straight ahead suddenly my feet fast forward as if water skiing on concrete, and giving up the rope. Go flat out on my posterior. gingerly getting up I’ve skidded on a giant oil slick. Miraculously no broken bones, just a grazed elbow. Fortunately, my dry cleaning was in a bag protected.

I climb the stairs gingerly. Go into Tip Top Dry Cleaners. ‘Gee you’re early,’ the shop attendant says. Didn’t say a word. Not sure what she thought as I went out the door with giant skid marks on the rump of my jeans.

Back to the car past two giant skid marks. Running early now, I’ll have a quick coffee at Dulwich Bakery. Quietly sipping on my coffee thinking about how lucky I was. Then, looking at my watch. It’s nine-twenty, not much advanced on an hour earlier.

Rush to the car. Along Osmond Terrace again, and then hasten into the shopping centre: ‘Take Two.’ Sure thing, the walkers are striding over Nelson Street already. I manage to catch Steve. ‘Where’ve you been,’ he says. ‘When you rang earlier went straight to Drunk’n Coffee, could have had a coffee together.’ Curiously, not a word said about my ability to tell time or my bum.

## The Detour to Nowhere

I was on my way to a specialist in Gibson Street, Bowden. Arriving at the street I'm greeted with a Road Closed sign. The detour points me left or north. No road on the right.

Driving my Suzuki in the direction (left) I'm told I enter a large empty car park, with no roads leaving from it. There is a parking machine though. Ignoring it I u-turn, arrive at Gibson Street again. No turn offs on the way. Damn. Another U-turn. Arrive at the car park again.

Get out and put a few coins in the machine. At this stage thinking have I time to limp up Gibson Street to the specialist with my dicky knee.

Now this stupid machine doesn't want to give me a ticket or spit my coins back. I'm running out of time. Think of kicking the machine. No one is watching.

In the car again, back to Gibson Street; must be more than one way to skin a cat.

I know. I'll go back to Port Road in the west; my only choice. Amazingly my Sat Nav app is working. Doesn't give road blocks though.

Go into another major road, then zigzag more back streets of Bowden and then, as if by magic, Gibson Street appears and no detour signs. There are the specialist's rooms. I'm saved. A miracle really. I get to his office, just fifteen minutes late.

Luckily, he's also late. The secretary gives me a coffee. Must look like I needed it.

When I went I asked the specialist how he finds getting here. 'With difficulty,' he replies.

## What a Day!

### Part One: Not another Ticketing Machine

My wife Jane and I saw an advertisement: 'Enjoy a meal. Watch the sunset from Mount Lofty.'

It sounds good; we'll see it for ourselves.

We travel a very winding back route from suburbia up toward Mount Lofty. It's a week or so before the 'Tour Down Under'; there are cyclists, often two abreast, all the way up the long hill.

I crawl slowly waiting for a signal to pass the cyclists. Meanwhile hoping a cyclist isn't careening down the hill the other way.

Get to the turn-off into the summit. Turn the wrong way. A U-turn. Meet the cyclists again all stationary at the entrance. Nice navigational skills that guy has, I bet they are saying to themselves.

Arrive at a fairly deserted car park. In the corner of my eye I see a ticketing machine. Worse, signs everywhere. 'Take a ticket at all times.' Get close to the machine: Minimum \$4. No notes. Searching. Almost no coins in my pockets. To make me feel worse someone gets out of their car, puts money in the machine and takes a ticket.

Then coming from behind us a voice, 'I'm not putting \$4 in that thing.' A lady comes alongside us. Now we're all looking angrily at the money grabbing inanimate object. The lady says, 'Follow me, live dangerously.'

We leave the hapless machine, arriving at the summit to see a beautiful sunset. However, the restaurant and toilets are closed. Jane and I are starving and needing amenities

## Part 2: Why Can't I Find a Servo?

Jane and I go back to the car, no food, no toilet; but hey no parking fine.

There is a hotel at Crafers, near the freeway turn off. We've enjoyed a meal there before.

Zoom, straight over the top of the freeway. You guessed it, past the turn off to Crafers.

Then a sign: Belair 11 Kilometres. We've eaten at the Belair Hotel, lovely place. If we move, we'll be there in time to eat.

Of course, who doesn't check the odometer reading at the sign?

Then Jane starts up. 'You're over thirty-five kilometres! Too fast for that bend.' Over and over again.

We continue on this tight winding road. I'm thinking a long 11 kilometres.

'Must almost be at Belair,' I say to Jane.

She replies, 'Think the sign for Belair was 5 kilometres ago.'

'What do you mean?' I yell. 'I'm starving and busting.'

'So am I,' she retorts.

'Thought you were navigating,' I scream.

'Thought you were watching the odometer,' she screams back.

Now we give up on pubs. Must be a servo somewhere.

Next thing another sign. We're heading for Clarendon. We don't want to go to Clarendon.

There's a road to the right, do a fast turn, slightly speeding, not knowing where it leads.

'Now you're trying to kill us,' she yells.

Robert I Schmidt

‘Do you want me to have an accident in the car?’ I yell back.

We go over a hill. Then a panoramic view of the city-lights. Only at this moment we are not sight-seeing. We reach the Southern Freeway driving for a while, then onto Marion Road. Reaching an industrial section.

How long can we hold on?

### **Part 3: Let’s Go Down to the Beach**

Finally a servo in the distance. Are we saved? We pull into an On the Run servo in a fairly deserted area of Marion Road. I stop the car alongside the bowsers, actually the one furthest from the toilets. Jane gets out of the car, runs to the Ladies like I’ve never seen her run before.

For reasons only known to me or my brain I put \$7 worth of unleaded in the Suzuki. Maybe I feel obliged to buy petrol before using the facilities. Who knows? I notice it’s a bowser you can use with an app, whatever that means. You know me – not technical.

As I make a rush for the men’s my phone lights up. Pay \$7. I make a silly wave as I pass a bemused attendant.

Jane and I come out much relieved. I pay the money to the attendant, mumbling something about paying it the old way with my card.

We still haven’t eaten. Not sure we were hungry at that moment. Who wants servo pies after what we’ve been through?

Then I say, ‘Let’s go to *Wok in the Box* Glenelg on Jetty Road, have a beach adventure. Nothing else can go wrong Jane.’

She grumpily replies, ‘So you say. Let’s go to

Robert I Schmidt

Marcellino's in Glenunga.' (This is only a few hundred metres up Portrush Road from where we live. Closes midnight.)

'All right, if you insist,' I say, giving in.

We make our way onto Oaklands Road towards home. Not a lot of dialogue on our final journey. Very quiet. We arrive at eleven pm, an hour to spare. We enjoy our pizza with the lot. I even have a glass of wine.

Nothing can go wrong this close to home surely?

\*\*\*

## The Appointment

Recently my wife had an appointment with a specialist. We wait over half an hour before she is called. The appointment, scheduled for an hour, goes even longer.

I sit outside waiting, waiting and waiting. There are *National Geographic* magazines on the table in the corner. Am I desperate enough to read them? Nah. On several occasions I think my watch has stopped. No, it has progressed two more minutes.

Eventually the secretary, with a strong English accent says, 'Gee you're a patient fella.'

'Yeah,' I reply, battling sleepiness.

Moments later Jane magically appears. The appointment is over. Then the drama.

'The fee is three hundred and fifty five dollars, you get one hundred and eighty back,' the secretary calmly says.

## Robert I Schmidt

‘Put your credit card in this machine, press credit or savings, then savings again, the gap goes instantly back on your card.’

Instantly the account is approved but the Medicare claim declined. Stupidly I think it goes straight back to my passbook.

‘You don’t have savings on your card.’

‘Well, no.’

An argument ensues as to getting my refund back. At one point she says, ‘I’ll say this one more time about getting your money back from the machine.’

I turn to Jane to whisper, ‘She knew how to charge it in the first place. Why can’t I get my money back?’

‘What did you just say?’ the secretary says. She is staring right at me now. Minutes earlier I was a hero, now I’m looking at eviction.

The secretary goes on to say, ‘I will need to ring Medicare. You may as well go.’ Hastily we retreat, not looking back. Days later the gap magically appears in Jane’s passbook. Not game enough to ring the lady to say thank you.

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## A Nice Sunny Day

A few weeks ago, after a series of medical scares, I decided it was time to make a new Will. Several trips to town then on a nice sunny day, time to finalise it with the lawyer.

After seeing the lawyer I go to Vodafone Norwood as I need to put \$30 credit into my prepaid mobile.

After parking my car, I walk into the shop. Going up to the counter, greeted by a nice, middle aged lady.

While I give my phone number and, Pay Wave my credit card, she brightly says, 'Nice sunny day.'

'It is,' I reply

Very friendly she asks, 'What have you been up to?'

'I've just finalised my Will,' I say slightly grinning. With that, I'm thinking she will say, 'Mind if I serve another customer now?'

Instead she asks, 'Which company did you use?'

'Scales and Partners.'

'Are they any good?'

'Well they are cheap.' Quite a conversation now.

'Hmm, I'll keep that in mind. Should do my Will.'

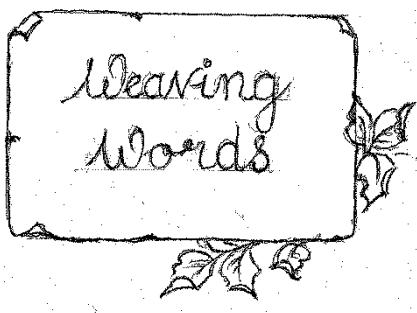
With that we exchange friendly goodbyes.

Now as I go out the door I think, I have the lawyer's card with my name on it, should have slipped it to her. I wonder if lawyers give a spotters fee? Hmm, I think not.

## Maarten van de Loo

As an agronomist, employed by a multinational company, I worked on research and development of agricultural chemicals. From basic laboratory research (and one patent) to field research and product development, I progressed to the management of regulatory affairs before retirement.

Many years of active volunteering followed in an endeavour to give something back to the community. Drawn by the outdoors again I took up bushwalking and writing, including my WWII memoir.



Maarten van de Loo

## 60 Years

Sixty years of wedded bliss,  
how the time has flown!  
Days, years, decades,  
sped like shadows past  
oh! we find however we have grown  
little that will really last...  
but one thing stands for life, for sure,  
that is tender love and patience pure.

Separated at times by work or other  
no matter what, there always was that trust;  
so we never worried or had to bother  
because eternal love and patience pure  
stand for life for sure.

Now in our twilight years,  
no matter how we hobble:  
upright, buckled, fast or slow,  
time for love to grow  
for one thing stands for life for sure,  
that is tender love and patience pure.

## Boots

‘Boot science’ has indeed come a long way! We have seen the evolution of the hiker’s boot. Just consider the past, the middle of the last century.

As an infantry man on Dutch National Service (1950-52) I did not like them: those boots...lumps, failed clogs. Infantry marched long distances in those years. And, when there was a rifle company of some two hundred men on the march, they could be heard from far away, attracting the flirting girls...why? Loud marching songs and the overbearing clatter of spiked boots on asphalt...really?

Yes, those boots were bad! Made of solid leather uppers and heavy, thick leather soles spiked with iron, the heels were lined with an iron “horse shoe”. When they were issued, it went a bit like this: “Hey man, what’s your size? Try this. Size near enough? Off you go...next!”

So, we just “licked” our blisters after a day’s march until sufficient callous had moulded the foot to fit the boot.

It is different today! Blisters only occur in dictionaries and history books and the boot is moulded to fit the foot. So, when I bought my HiTech boots at Snowy’s I just marvelled at the design and when the shop assistant still sensed some doubt, the solution came without hesitation.

‘Take them home and walk indoors a day or so and if not okay return them,’ she said.

So, I hobbled from one end of the house to the other and back, to the bewilderment of my dear wife suspecting some restless quirk. They fitted from day one perfectly, and still do today. However, wear has caused the tread and thus slip resistance to diminish, which can be a problem on wet trails in winter.

My friendly local cobbler proudly showed me his \$200 boots and tread. 'No,' he said, 'you can't repair or replace the tread. It's bin time!'

Consign my *old faithfuls* to that undignified destination only for having lost their bottoms. No way! But now what?

Hoping that the *Neanderthal Newsletter* might give a clue, I read several back issues and bingo! Our veteran Bob Doolittle seemed to hit the nail on the head in his article: "Re-soled boots, an alternative to new boots". Rossi, the boot maker, had replaced the sole of his Rossi boots. A great cost saving when the uppers are still in good condition. But, Bob cast some doubt on Rossi's service for boots from the competition. And indeed. "Hi Tech no! We don't touch them!" Meaning "we don't love them". But still loved by Snowy's of course so I made phone contact.

'Yes, we can help you. You need *Yaktrax*.' From their description I gathered they offered a contraption not dissimilar to the iron spikes one fits when about to walk Fox glacier in New Zealand. They were a bit different though; a spike-less coil design made with high strength, abrasion resistant 1.2 mm steel coils held in place by poly elastomer material. They were fitted to my boots in a jiffy. Great, I thought, and then thinking aloud I could see potential weak spots where the elastomer would come into contact with hard surfaces e.g. rock or gravel.

'Really designed for the snowfields,' the salesman said. To which I readily agreed. But where is the snow in South Australia?

But wait! Even before I could flash my charming smile, the price had dropped by 10 %. The deal was done. I

## Maarten van de Loo

glanced at the sales docket: a VIP discount. We parted amicably, me happy with my enhanced status in life.

Now to the question of boot weight. Did you realise that if you have the average stride of 67 cm, you take 23,880 steps to complete a walk of 16 km. If your boots weigh, say 500 grams each you will have moved 11,940 kilograms – that is close to 12 metric tons – at the completion of your walk. If they weigh 600 grams each you will have shifted 14,328 kg (more than 14 metric tons) So, for every 100 grams in boot weight your load difference is 2,388 kilograms. Keep this in mind when you replace your worn-out remnants... unless you want to be a weight-lifter.

## Meeting the High Flyers

It is 1970 and as a family, we are camped in Harrietville (Victoria) which serves as a base for a climb to Mt Feathertop summit.

The children, being too young to join me but protesting loudly, stay behind with their mother. The track is well defined – ‘you can’t miss it’ but I still arm myself with map and compass and set out on my ascent to the 1922 metre high summit.

In the middle of the Alpine forest, while absorbing the sight of the beautiful vegetation hey, what is that sound? A bus? Right here? That can’t be! But wait the bus stops and now I hear a chainsaw. That is more likely but very curious. I decide to investigate and wander off the track, ever so slowly so as to not to disturb whatever it may be. And there it is: a lyrebird dancing on the mound calling a mate. Tail feathers unfolded, turning around while charming and mimicking. In his trance he does not notice me. Mesmerised, I sit and watch: would she come? This is an unforgettable scene and I want to etch it into my memory forever.

Only when the lyrebird takes a rest do I decide to move on, ever so slowly, back to the track. Having found the path, I resume my hike to the cone-shaped summit, the last 200 metres above the tree line. Having reached my destination, I sit down in awe, my eyes fixed on the beautiful world below me. It is a warm sunny day without any air movement. Two butterflies come fluttering by. Where to? I stand there transfixed until they disappear in the wide space before me.

An unforgettable experience.

## Those Stiletto Heels

Burnside Village Shopping Centre is the place where the well-to-do shop, meet and parade their latest fashions. The shop windows compete in who shouts the loudest for special (expensive) deals. While waiting for a friend I decide to buy a coffee at Cibo and sit in the area behind the shop, observing the passing traffic: the young, very young and not-so-young. And, the experience is most entertaining. Why?

I soon realise that stiletto heels are common as a status symbol and that they come in all shapes, widths, heights, colours and noise while on the march. Well, that is enough, I decide, and I'd better concentrate on what propels these shoes. But alas, distracted, I look again around me and observe the floor immediately behind the coffee shop. Hey that is a planked floor, the gaps between planks being a few centimetres. Weird, I think.

Still shaking my head in bewilderment, I am distracted by a young lady walking past. She is of course on stiletto heels but, alarmingly, they have the diameter of the largest nail in my workshop. I am flabbergasted at how she manages not to topple forward and keep upright as she walks on the planked floor and that the heels miss the gaps!

What to do? Shout or behave myself? But act fast! I decide to behave myself and watch in agony.

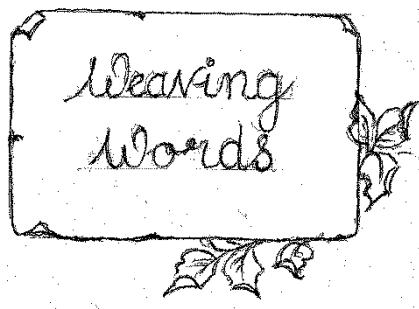
Phew she reaches the other end and is still upright.

I relax and drink my coffee. That made my day.

## **Gail Orr**

I write like someone else might use a camera. I want to capture a moment in time with words. I want to emphasize what I value or that element of life that's important to me at that time. I may want to convey a feeling or portray a time and place. The elements of the story in a lived experience drive me to write.

Poetry is a wonderful medium to me as it holds the discipline of distilling an idea and bringing alive its essence. I'm often accused of being esoteric but I love exploring language techniques such as alliteration, onomatopoeia and metaphors, to name a few and observe the imagery created.



## Some People Collect

Some people are collectors and some people are not. I love my early childhood literature and take pride in my picture book collection. I let go of Roger Hargreaves's, *Mister Men* books, some time ago but remember them fondly. They were stories of fun loving, bold little characters, all drawn as geometric figures brimming with primary colours bringing the text to life. Who could forget names like Mr. Silly, Mr. Happy or Mr. Strong?

At Christmas time anyone involved in early childhood learning must have surely clutched with joy and delight the Jean Chapman's anthology called *The Sugar Plum Christmas Book* and read short stories like *The Pink Sugar Mouse* or the *Silvery Spider Tree*.

The *Velveteen Rabbit* has a special place in my heart. A wonderful metaphor of love sits steadfastly in the pages – a love that is understanding and oblivious to the shabbiness of a favourite toy. This story illuminates another theme real versus what is not real.

Have you read the *Whales' Song* by Dylan Sheldon with illustrations by Gary Blythe? The story is told to Lily by her grandmother and a wonderful poetic rhythm runs through this book. Beautiful images of the whales dancing in the moonlight stay with children and create a reverence for these amazing ocean creatures.

Mem Fox has written prolifically for young readers. My pick is one of her first picture books – *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*. Through sharing a collection of strange and memorable treasures Wilfred Gordon helps restore some of Miss Nancy's memories. It's a moving narrative one that I've shared with relatives caring for a loved one with

## Gail Orr

dementia. I think it's a powerful reminder that time shared with another person simply, and with an open heart, can hold great healing; even if only in that moment.

*The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst explains 'people who love each other are always connected by a special String made of love'. A picture book with a message of reassurance and transformative power for children and grown-ups experiencing grief and loss. Its tenour is no one has to be alone if they discover the power of their invisible string.'

What are some favourite books on your shelf that you read to your grandchildren?

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## Rocks and Pebbles by the Sea

They've been there days, months, years, centuries.

Worn down by the elements:  
wind and water, sand and sea.

They don't need admiration or attention,  
they continue rolling with the rhythm of life.

Stop, see how they're shaped,  
their colour and form  
some large with lichen growth  
others silken smooth.

Steadfastly they offer their gift  
one generation to the next.

## The Black Book

I'm in Copenhagen and just off the Strand when I see a specialty stationary shop full of interesting pens, papers, art supplies and much more.

I'm drawn away from the street kerb to the window. Possibly in there is some treasure or inspiration for art and craft activities with my grandchildren, then aged two and four. I step inside. It has that lovely papery smell of a freshly stocked art supply storeroom at the beginning of a new school year, lovely; open with creative possibilities.

I survey the shop further and note its wares stacked with precision. I'm looking for mystery and magic to spark tiny tots' imagination and this seems elusive. I'm distracted as my eye catches a shelf filled with black moleskin diaries and address books. They look so classic, sophisticated and classy. Wow a keepsake to take home! I survey the shelf for some moments before I move closer and pick up one of the address books. I love the feel of the moleskin cover and as I thumb through the pages I note the neat indents holding the letters A to Z.

I want this and justify my need of such an attractive item. I've a tatty old address book at home. I've had it for years and it's filled with crossings out, white out and white labels over old to replace new addresses. Truly, it's an archivist's nightmare.

*Crikey – aren't we millennial and "tech savvy" – addresses are conveniently kept in an I-phone, where with minimal fuss we can delete and update to our heart's content.*

I make the purchase. I couldn't talk myself out of the black, moleskin address book. It's a wonderful memory but where are my names and addresses? In my phone of course,

the address book is still as virginal and as beautiful as the day it was bought.

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## **Small Miracles**

The greatest water  
starts...as small streams  
trickles in the outback creeks  
drops in galvanized gutters.

The brightest sunset  
starts...as the sun  
gives up its struggle  
and surrenders to the moon's cycle.

The wonderful rainbow  
starts...as refracted fragments of light  
a spectrum of colours  
to delight us.

Each life  
starts...so small  
wonderfully created  
struggling to be  
breathing, breaking ground,  
individually powerful, precious and unique.

## Mumma, Can we Move House

Griffin saw it first, water running down the wall. Little soft ripples formed behind the stove and soon morphed into bigger streams. It was early morning as the household gradually grasped the gravity of the situation. Rescuing is second nature to Felicity, my daughter-in-law; rescuing the banana birthday cake she cooked the night before was a priority as was grabbing buckets and towels to contain to the water. Preparing breakfast was now a low priority. The kitchen wall behind the stove was fast becoming a waterfall and the light fittings joined in spilling forth even more water.

In Copenhagen, if maintenance is required you ring the 'body corporate'. In this four-story apartment small matters that could be 'nipped in the bud' often took an inordinate amount of time and persistence to have fixed. This was no small problem. It was dangerous. The stove protested and blew a fuse. Great no power! All the electricity needed to be switched off.

The children were scared and huddled closer together saying, 'Can we move house, Mumma?' The adults' stress was increasing too. It had been some time since the call had gone to the body corporate.

Felicity said, 'Typical! Right, ring the fire brigade!

I was sure we would need to vacate the apartment any time soon and I jumped into packing my suitcase pronto. However, two fire engines and five burly firemen arrived. Now things were happening. In the apartment above the dishwasher had flooded. The firemen were cheerful and efficient and dragged a suction hose upstairs.

Damien and Griffin went upstairs to see the collateral

## Gail Orr

damage. Lily, the elderly resident was distressed but most grateful for being alerted to the situation. She was starting to grasp the repercussions below in our apartment.

With the situation in hand, Griffin, Saffron and Lotte looked more at ease and reassured and were able to get ready for school. Before the children left the apartment the firemen gave each a memento of their rather tense but exciting start to the day. This was a replica fireman's hat, perfect to show their classmates and relay the story that made them late that morning.

It would take my son the rest of the day fielding electricians and the body corporate representatives so that by evening the apartment would be safe.

So who was to be the recipient of the banana birthday cake? My husband Lyndon. It was a birthday he would never forget.

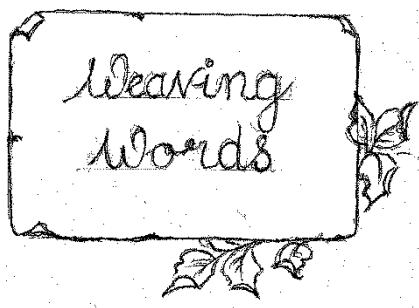
Gweneth Leane

## Gweneth Leane

I love to write. It is both creative and a way of expressing myself.

To write in the first person is fun and to put myself in the shoes of my characters and feel what they feel and do what they do takes me around the world.

My characters are my alto-ego



Gweneth Leane

## Mice Plagues and Flat Tyres

Three couples and seven kids and Mike, twenty years old, headed for Alice Springs to do the tourist bit. Our camping styles were varied; Bruce and I slept in the Land Rover, Ray, the youngest slept across the front seat and Mike on the roof rack on the Land Rover. Basil and Joy had a roof camper on their car and John and Liz enjoyed a tent with a floor in it. Liz believed she was creepy-crawly free. But, her city bred sensibilities would be tested severely later in the trip.

At Kulgera on our way to Uluru, we refuelled. A mice plague raged throughout the area. There were a number of ways and means used to deal with the mice. One was to tie a piece of string to the neck of a bottle with a piece of cheese dangling on the free end. The bottle was secured over a drum of water. The mice would run along the bottle to reach the cheese, slip off and drown. We learnt how many mice filled a gallon bucket.

When Mike struck a match and threw it into a forty-four gallon drum used as a rubbish bin, it exploded with a roar, and flames leapt metres into the air. I was reminded of the film, *The Towering Inferno*.

As mice poured through the perforated holes in the makeshift bin, Mike snatched up a near-by axe and tried to slaughter the terrified rodents. The implement was too unwieldy and he missed more than he hit. His antics caused a laugh while the younger children found branches to whack the mice; but the numbers remained undented.

Reaching Coober Pedy bound for home after spending several days at Uluru, the general consensus was John and Liz would follow at their leisure and we, the other two families would move on to Kingoonya and camp.

## Gweneth Leane

Darkness was setting in and no John and Liz. We began to worry. Had they struck trouble? Did they decide to stay another night in Coober Pedy? We should not have left them.

Every traveller that arrived was asked, 'Have you seen an Englishman, his Australian wife and three kids driving a Holden sedan and trailer?'

'No,' was each traveller's reply.

We spent an anxious night. Next day a service bus pulled into the petrol station at Kingoonya and we questioned the driver.

'Yes, I dropped the bloke off at his camp 50 miles out from Coober Pedy. He suffered four blow-outs. The driver of a semi-trailer gave him and his four tyres a ride back to Coober Pedy. This morning I put him and his four new tyres on my bus and dropped him off at his camp.'

John had hidden his car behind some bushes well off the highway and Liz and the kids had spent the night in the bush miles from anywhere, alone.

When packing up to move on, a nest of baby mice was discovered under Liz's mattress and almost had Liz in hysterics but, at the challenge of camping alone in the Australian outback with three kids, she didn't turn a hair.

What a gutsy lady!

## The Legend and the New Chum

‘Mrs Carpenter can sure cut apricots; sixty trays in an eight hour day.’ That’s all I ever heard. I never met this awesome woman but she was a legend in the Berri-Winkie area for cutting the most trays of fruit in a day.

A tray is about 3ft by 2ft and is supported on two planks. The buckets of fruit are placed on the left hand side for ease and speed for grabbing fruit. The knife is a short, curved, sharp pointed blade.

The cutter snatches the fruit in the left hand, slices the blade across the stem to cut the little membrane and release the stone which is flicked into a bucket at the feet of the cutter. The fingers of the left hand spin the fruit around much like a spin bowler, so the point of the knife slices the apricot in half which is then placed in meticulous rows until the tray is full.

The fruit must be flat so the juice when sulphured doesn’t spill out. The dried product must be bright red or orange, and sweet. A tray of halved fruit in neat, tightly packed rows is a beautiful sight. Good cutters take pride in their trays of perfectly cut fruit.

‘Of course, Mrs Carpenter grew up in the cutting shed. That’s why she’s a good cutter. She started when she was young,’ I kept hearing. ‘You can’t cut apricots unless you started as a kid.’

The story continued, ‘Mrs Carpenter slips the stone. It’s not a good idea though; the blockers take a dim view of such practises because it breaks the cup and lets the juice run out. The fruit is spoilt and the price is lowered.’

## Gweneth Leane

I was one of the army of house wives and kids that moved out onto the blocks at harvest time to make money. Why couldn't I be a gun cutter? True, I was a Johnny-come-lately, but it couldn't be all that hard.

I signed up with my three kids at a small shed next door to where I lived. I reached 40 – 50 trays a day and then the season finished. I had learnt how to slip the stone without damaging the cup and my trays were picture perfect.

The next harvest I signed up at one of the biggest sheds in the area. There were ten acres of apricots to be cut and dried. This was my year; the kids were bigger. I introduced them to the cutting knife and showed them how to cut. The first couple of days I fell short of my tally. I needed to cut a tray every five minutes. I paced myself by my watch; soon the sixty was a daily tally.

I had arrived as a big gun cutter. But I was not a legend, Mrs Carpenter was a pioneer settler; she continued to be the stuff of legends. I was the wife of a lowly block hand, the new kid on the block.

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## The White Out

I couldn't believe my eyes, overnight a snow-fall had produced a whiteout. Snow was up to the eaves of the houses and cars standing in driveways were mere humps. It was beautiful but I was worried, my husband Ben, hadn't come home. He'd gone out to buy a paper after last night's evening meal and when he hadn't returned, I presumed he'd gone to his mate's place rather than try and get home before the

freeze set in.

He hadn't been able to get very far before becoming frozen. There he was standing statue-still at the gate. I was frantic at seeing him frozen stiff.

I raced upstairs to get a better look at what was happening in the street. Peeking out between the bedroom curtains, my eyes grew round with horror. The neighbours' were held like statues, snow-bound. Had they been overcome by the icy cold? These people had lived in this town all their lives, they would not be caught in a freeze. I was puzzled. Was it some sort of gas that had escaped from nearby factories? Had all our wood fires combined to produce a deadly carbon? I didn't know.

Hurrying downstairs I tugged at the front door. It came open and I was half submerged by an avalanche of snow. Scrambling over the snow,

'Ben,' I screamed.

Why hadn't I check to see where he was? I berated myself. I shook him. The snow fell off him. He continued to stare into the distance unheeding. I tried to move him inside and thaw him out, but he was snowed in. I found a shovel and began to dig. I cleared his feet and he fell over. Struggling I pulled him inside over the mounds of snow. I stoked up the fire and turned up the heater.

'Ben, wake up, you're melting all over my good carpet. What happened to you?' I sobbed as I dried him off, changed his clothes and laid him in front of the fire, piling on blankets and doonas and surrounding him with heat bags.

Outside, the sun shone, the thaw had set in. Nobody was moving. Silence hung over the street. No dogs barked or

## Gweneth Leane

cars zoomed past. The town was dead. I woke up when Ben complained, 'Move over, you're pushing me out of bed and it's cold.'

'You're all right,' I shouted. Relief flooded me, I covered him with hugs and kisses. I promised him breakfast in bed for a year of Sundays. 'What's the matter with you, woman, let me sleep can't you? I got a big day on the golf course tomorrow.'

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### **The Yellow Top**

Oh look, Betty, that yellow jumper will match my yellow shoes, I'm going to buy it. If it fits.'

I caught Betty's hand and dragged her through the door of the boutique.

'Can I help you?' a silky voice spoke at my shoulder. The sales girl reminded me of a Barbie Doll, she was so perfectly dressed and made up.

'Certainly. I would like to try on the yellow top in the window, please'

I looked at my image in the mirror. 'Wow! Don't I look glamorous. I'll buy this.' I felt I could stand next to the sales girl now.

'You won't be able to eat for a week. You might even loose the roof over your head,' Betty warned me when she caught sight of the price.

'I don't care,' I shrugged. 'You'll lend me enough to get through to pay-day, won't you?' I gave Betty a sweet smile to soften her.

The yellow jumper was wrapped and I danced out of the shop. I intended to go to the Maid and Magpie that night

## Gweneth Leane

wearing the yellow jumper and my yellow shoes teamed with a long black skirt.

I stepped on the bus and put my parcel on the seat beside me while I checked my make-up. When I went to pick up my parcel it was gone.

'Who took my parcel?' I yelled. The bus was packed with commuters. I brazenly looked in as many bags as I dared.

'Did any of you see who took it?' I asked angrily. I was met with blank stares. Here was my bus stop. I could see I would never get my top back. I would not be wearing my yellow jumper after all.

When I got home I could smell burning in the back yard; there were my yellow shoes, a smouldering pile of blackened leather straps. I looked around to find the culprit.

The neighbour's head popped up over the fence. My dog escaped through the fence and found your shoes lying on the veranda and began to chew them. My son was afraid you would kill the dog, so he lit a fire to burn them so you wouldn't find out.'

A scream of anger and despair split the air; my precious shoes were ruined. I didn't have a top or a pair of shoes, but I did have a credit card that would take a year to pay off. To keep a roof over my head I'd have to go and live with Mum and Dad.

I rang Betty, 'What am I going to do?' I sobbed into the phone. 'I'm broke, homeless and naked.'

'Don't be such a drama queen. I'm going on a holiday to Bali tomorrow, you can flat-sit for me.'

Gweneth Leane

## **The Iron Fist of Drought**

Back and forth the rocker swung like a pendulum  
Murphy sat in blue despair, he'd failed to keep the trust  
the iron fist of drought gripped fifty thousand hectares  
he reached out for his trusty gun

The water dried to blood red mud  
carcasses rotted on the banks  
the stench of death filled the air  
black crows and eagles gorged could hardly fly

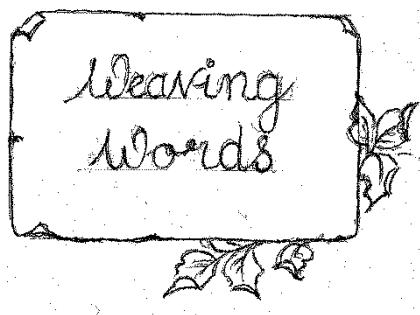
The moneylenders threatened to foreclose  
their jowls of fat shook with glee like a gobbler's wattles,  
Murphy's heart smashed to shards, he was a broken man  
at his shoulder waited the spirit of his ancestors

Storm clouds bubbled into black mountains  
brassy skies turn funereal grey  
Murphy stood, his rocker stilled, the gun back on the wall  
rain drummed a tattoo on his roof.

## Edie Eicas

I'm a poet who constantly fights with ideas and the blank page while looking for the most succinct words to string along a line in order to express my reaction to a scene, a feeling or incident.

An observer of the world around me, I look for insight into the psychology of people, their motivations, through their behaviour and want to reflect back my observations. Using people and objects as inspiration for my poetry, I explore the world and sometimes find within my writing, a reflection of my philosophy.



## Louche Lips

Cut from Ruth Park's Surrey Hills mould  
she swore like a trumper, her descriptions colourful;  
the expletives cannily placed to offer insight,  
her take on life her neighbours.  
She filled the air with non-stop sentences  
allowed no gap for air, or response.

A local character, her life trawling op shops  
she collected the obscure, the unwanted to hoard  
fill her life with display: a sign of her loneliness.

No longer tethered to a job, her job  
now one of ribald entertainment;  
a comedienne offering her audience  
a risqué view of the world;  
all bitchiness and cutting evaluation  
a woman before her time,  
her life a refusal to be contained  
yet, a pigeon hole left many to disregard the message.

Once the liberation of language by women  
was frowned upon leaving only,  
the loose language to register,  
the wanton words to create a target,  
make women ready for condemnation,  
leave no interest in content, humour or insight.  
Just the rigid rules of female engagement  
leading to rejection.

Hers a life of defiance  
there were none who could corral her spirit,  
deny her, her right to speak;  
a bohemian bent she relished her position  
believed a soap box suited her.

Her familiarity with wayward words  
provided easy instant interjection,  
the flavouring of sentences a practised art,  
a delicious comedy.

Time's animal uncontrolled eats  
beliefs, worries, standards, uproots power;  
hers a small stage now given over  
to younger women where,  
the whole world becomes their stage  
and language *their* metier;  
now women's humour steps forward laced with  
louche words.

## Rotten Apple

It continues to amaze me that  
no matter how many times  
the walk sign button is pushed, it still works.

And yet, Apple with its billions of dollars,  
its designers and technology,  
always has a queue complaining about their products.

## Modern Icon of Compassion

Tight designer gym wear slim,  
up-market sneakers all on trend  
the compulsory phone expensive;  
a walking conversation the goal  
to get there no matter what the frustration.

The branded pusher recognised by those in the know;  
all matching co-ordinated colours  
an Instagram image. The white rag flag draped  
over the opening the baby obscured,  
no eye contact, no acknowledgement,  
no mother's face to face the  
uncertain world, no reassurance,  
no chance for attachment.

A baby cries, prisoner behind a curtain;  
no hand no gesture, no eye contact,  
the requisite child a future dollar's security.

The world contained in high-end plastic;  
designer rags become an internet sensation.

## Kintsugi

*the art of embracing damage*

The bowl rings like a bell,  
clear clean complete the sound;  
the finger's flick tells the story:  
precious the object saved, protected,  
life lived behind glass to be admired;  
priceless memories stored within.

The plate, a family residual slips,  
slivers sit scattered  
fragments lie littered on the floor,  
deny the whole, bring grief;  
an object of memory now shattered like family,  
broken edges, pieces abandoned discarded,  
memories half remembered now rejected,  
no longer savoured in the telling;  
no longer important.  
The life lost blurred.

The pot broken sits silent waiting;  
material culture demands its place,  
finds another philosophy that allows  
the damage, does not seek the new;  
a replacement to deny imperfection.

Re-constructed, the patchwork  
pieces held together by resin;  
the grip holding creation's gift

Edie Eicas

those lines of painful fracture now dry,  
find the addition of red paint,  
a reminder of the bleeding heart.

The paint, an undercoat for the gold dust  
dusts the joins in celebration,  
the healing hands that find the strength  
to repair, find beauty in imperfection  
recognise the trials and tribulations,  
the scars that mark life and healing;  
if only recognition grips,  
understands the circumstances  
that set the object to break,  
finds time to mend the cracks,  
acknowledge repair,  
refuse the shame that hides damage,  
understands the events of life mark wear;  
accepts change.

The repair, like the repair of a heart  
broken open to reveal the lie,  
sits open to life's scrutiny:  
the ideal of perfection  
the illusion of love  
of false beliefs hidden deep.

The object broken, reassembled,  
finds a different beauty in transformation.

*Kintsugi*: the art of embracing damage.

## Father's Day

I can't believe it's Father's Day again. As I'm getting older it seems like life is speeding up and slipping through my fingers. Funny how you forget certain things and then out of the blue something jolts your memory and you're propelled back to the moment as if it was yesterday.

The kids will most probably ring as they do. One early one late; they've always had different rhythms to life, the lark and the owl. When we were young, my brother and I were much the same; our worlds were always different. Funny how things seem to repeat themselves.

We're doing the usual Father's day Penny and I, lunch with my dad but this year I feel very different. I can't put my finger on when things started to change but they have. My father now confined to a nursing home once anchored the family, but as life and memory slips from him, so too our rituals, and in some ways I lament the loss of my old self, the one who knew his place.

The customs instilled in me by my father that determined my life, are slowly losing their grip. They were the rhythms the family lived their lives by. He was determined we would subscribe to certain rituals and repeat them no matter what. He needed order and control.

The year structured, we kids had no opportunity to holiday away with other families if a special occasion happened to fall within the frame of time away, as family was too important.

Two New Years: Rosh Hashanah and January, we needed to fit in and yet not forget. My mother knew the rules, and in her role of set designer and cook, prepared the stage.

My father loved the opportunity to hold the limelight.

## Edie Eicas

He would dress for the occasion as my mother set the stage complimenting each season with flowers and determining the food. My father had his outfits.

Hair slicked down with his Californian Poppy oil, his formal suit for special occasions or his casual attire that even extended to a Hawaiian shirt, all tropical colour, would be his costume for our family play and the requisite photographs. My brother and I are recorded to show two boys dressed identically in short pants, but whose differences are identified by the looks on their faces. One filled with laughter the other frozen in a scowl.

The threads that tied us together as a family were the rituals from the old country. My parents, survivors of the Holocaust clung to the known, and food transported my parents back to their roots anchoring them in both joy and loss.

My mother's anxiety dominated the kitchen in those times as my father judged her against an idealised memory of his mother's cooking. The damask tablecloth, the polished silver, the candles and special plates all constructed the tone of the formal occasions while the BBQ in the garden offered her respite and allowed us our casual wear.

My brother and I were navigating through the last of our teen years and while I conformed, my brother sought to determine himself against my parents; especially my father. It was Father's Day and he wanted to spend the day with friends on the river, and my father had, through his fury, put an end to my brother's independence but, had not stifled my brother's resentment.

My father, thrown by my brother's angry rebellion, could not settle into his routine. My mother anxious to avert

## Edie Eicas

any further out bursts, crashed around the kitchen, her concentration elusive as she kept her ear tuned for any eruption.

The day darkened with tension and small things began to irk all. My father, dressing but unhappy about his tie, harassed my mother. He sought the perfect choice to match his shirt; as if by some magic this perfect combination of shirt and tie could return all to our ritual.

My mother no longer lost in the familiar rhythm of cooking could not pace herself, and found her timing elusive. Nothing seemed to jell and her co-ordination around her menu was slipping, adding to the day's anxiety.

The special day's routine no longer a meditation that offered comfort for either parent, also affected me deeply and I tried to placate my mother by offering help. Peace at any cost was my modus operandi. Offering to serve the chicken soup while she attended to the brisket, I took the pot from the stove and misjudged my anxiety and its weight. It took but a second and the pot slipped, the boiling soup splashing over my legs. My scream made my mother turn in fright just at the moment she pulled the roasting tray from the oven. Splashing hot oil over her hands and adding her scream to the cacophony drew my father and brother into the kitchen.

Lunch now on the floor, my father hysterical sought a target, someone to blame and turned on my brother. His rage was deadly. Words of hatred poured from him and if looks could kill...

Both my mother and I spent Father's Day in the emergency department. One disaster after another, and when we returned from the hospital, my brother was gone.

## Edie Eicas

The scars a lasting memory meant the rituals became even more rigid as if to ward off deeper memories and fear. But, as Yom Kippur came around each year, I began to recognise how my brother had become the scapegoat for my father's fears. My brother carried my father's sin of anger and hatred and now my father, as time was running out, in the ritual of atonement desperately sought forgiveness from a child who'd fled and never returned.

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## Gold Box

*Catherine Opie Tate Modern*

The photography of things intimate  
a last image: Elizabeth Taylor's dress  
pale yellow silk crepe de chine,  
soft the fabric, luxurious lustre, perfect daytime  
or eveningwear lies folded, ready boxed;  
V neckline low empire line bow,  
a nod to Napoleon's lover Josephine,  
the dress fit for a queen, Egypt's Cleopatra.

A cinematic life pictured,  
public record always on show, now clearly on display.

The gold box waits coffin like:  
cellophane window an open casket;  
the dress glows in that last dramatic exit,  
the body absent.

## Learning to Float

She swam over the line of waves and back behind the breakers away from the rocks; the crashing sound and the current testing her reminding her that nature's power was relentless. As she moved away from the shore, the smooth rhythm of her circling arms and the tempo of her breathing reassured her place in the sea.

How could things have gone so wrong? Unable to comprehend what had happened she had, at the concern and persistent request of her friends, finally gone to speak to a psychiatrist. She had come to his office clothed in depression and appeared unable to recount the recent past without a flood of tears; the sobs betraying the depth of her emotions leaving her body wracked as she mined her subconscious for her history.

In reflection, she must have appeared hysterical in her inability to stay focused and tell a coherent story. But over time, the disjointed narrative that tumbled from her mouth had begun to coalesce as the analyst led her to a form of understanding and acceptance.

In the gleaning of the events that had marked her, the analyst noted her allostatic load, the number of stressful events was beyond the normal and recommended medication. But, in refusing to use drugs, she fought with him and in supporting her argument researched and found that exercise was a means of regaining wellbeing and so, had gone back to swimming.

In the water, the meditative laps allowed her to finally loosen the hold of her obsessive thoughts and direct her energy into perfecting her movements. As she concentrated on her breathing and co-ordinating her body to provide the most ergonomic glide through the water, she at last lost herself in flow.

## The Poverty of Profit

Paddy's Market, Australian souvenirs:  
bags, tea towels, boomerangs; commercial production  
a mass market 'Made in China'.  
Spruikers spruik their message to pained white faces  
facing economic downturn;  
stunned consumers wander the aisles  
all cheap colour and consumption;  
a panacea for worrying news.

The top tier another tax break while  
unemployment hounds the rest;  
the Party line: get off your arse,  
accept a lower wage, work harder, change your job.

As the Bank reduces its staff, offers a line to India  
or the Philippines to attend: their *valued customer*,  
the CEO's salary perks shares and bonuses,  
nets them a nine million dollar  
take home pay to spend on foreign shores,  
buy another property or, 4WD for wife and kids.

Poverty is who you don't know  
the connections you never made,  
the school you never went to,  
the parents who couldn't escape:  
the downward spiral.

## Love's Letter

I send cards to you,  
painted flowers, pictures of pairs,  
people cats mother and child;  
airmail my noughts and crosses,  
the simple signs of love.

I add the origami flower  
folded small; my prayer for you.

With each fold's addition  
a tiny word, the text my heartfelt hope.  
Like petals opening, the reveal my gift for you  
and, in the moments of writing and folding,  
I enclose my heart to you.

Each word unique, each sentiment a reminder:  
care, compassion, communication, support  
no matter my physical absence.

My handwritten message  
an aide memoire of how love shows itself;  
the flower's centre a heart's slow disclose.

My token paper flower, like life's guarantee:  
here today gone tomorrow but,  
we live in memory.

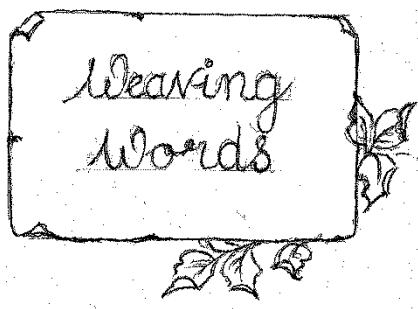
Iris Rowe

## Iris Rowe

As a foundation member of Burnside Writer's Group since July 2013, I have participated with enthusiasm, pride and respect.

While being part of this vibrant group of writers I have been inspired, captivated and motivated and encouraged to be true to my own voice while writing family history, short stories and poems.

Accolades to the Burnside Writers' Group 2019-2020



## Fishing 1944

Quietly perched high on the grassy edge of the river bank it seemed a long way down to the shadowy, deep silent waters flowing below us. There are big fish down there we know; hungry fish, but they are wary of a free break-fast hanging on the end of a shiny hook. The big ones nervously lurk silently in the dark shadows where they are difficult for us to see. The little fish are inquisitive, darting to and fro into the shallow sunlit water where mud banks are visible at the river's edge.

While we watch, two, then three little bream playfully dart up to the bait, tug on the line, followed by another tug as they daringly play becoming reckless as more baby fish join in the game. The line goes slack, now a stronger tug – the line is taut for a moment and then slackens. The little fish play like children learning a new sport, they get a taste of the red meat fixed to the hook; greedily they squabble.

‘Got one,’ Graham yells, swinging the bamboo rod high and back behind him – a flash of silver as the fish lands on the grass – thrashing about wildly, desperately trying to free itself from the painful hook; it becomes weaker but still struggles. Holding the flapping fish with one hand, Graham removes it from the hook and triumphantly drops it into the damp sugar bag.

Grinning broadly, he re-baits the hook, swings the rod high and forward; the line sinks into deep water.

“This time I’ll get a big one.” Graham boasts. The fish are hungry; caution is forsaken. The fish circle in closer, hastily snatch at the bait, tug and pull – the line goes taut and the battle begins; another fish is captured.Flushed with excitement, Graham hauls it in, swinging the rod high and

## Iris Rowe

fast, landing the suffering fish in the tall grass.

My line remains slack in the shallow water. The fish are not interested in my baited hook. Bored with fishing, I move back from the riverbank and dreamily begin picking blue tussock flowers and shivering grass. Admiring my posy I am oblivious to the others still fishing.

Betty has her line in deep water, she feels the urgent bite and jerks the rod, the pull is strong; she's hooked a big bream. Swinging her rod in the air with the gleaming fish flying high and wide behind her, the fish thumps and bounces hard against me twirling around and around me its prickly fins attacking my bare legs. I'm frantically screaming and trying to escape the monstrous fish.

Now I'm sobbing hysterically – Betty doubles over with laughter. 'Caught a fat-head – not a flat-head – a fat-head.' She splutters and gurgles gleefully at my predicament.

Coming to my rescue Dad warns us to keep quiet before we frighten all the fish away.

## Uninvited Visitors 1933

Wispy blue smoke curled and twisted its way into the evening air, announcing to no one in particular that they had arrived. Leslie had waited five years to bring his bride to the cottage he built on his own property.

Valerie happily unpacked then prepared their first meal in their own little paradise. After the long journey in the Overland buckboard travelling along lonely and rough bushland tracks, they were ready for an early night and undisturbed rest.

As night settled, Leslie blew out the kerosene lamp and as the cottage was enclosed with comforting darkness, they were blissfully unaware of stealthy movements lurking in the bush close at hand. Was it shadows or forms with eyes, watching, whispering while waiting to make their move?

Resenting these new-comers, the shadows became forms and moved closer; they were the rightful owners of this land. Their ancestors had lived here for countless generations, enjoying their freedom to come and go as they wished without fear of being disturbed. What right did these intruders have to disrupt the peace? With so much change, the bush was being ruthlessly destroyed; it was unsettling. Something needed to be done.

Uninvited and under cover of darkness, they came closer, moving quietly amongst the shadows until they reached the cottage. They waited, listening; all was quiet, not a sound from within. Nodding to each other, they sprang, one after the other, gaining a foothold on the rugged veranda post; then with a mighty leap they were up higher, frantically clinging to the guttering for a moment before scrambling

## Iris Rowe

onto the iron roof. They silently paused while gaining their balance.

High above, the drifting clouds parted and the moon shone serenely down upon them as though giving her seal of approval. Stirred with excitement and oblivious to danger the moonlight frolic began.

Back and forth they raced, pausing briefly to teeter on the edge of the gable while applauding each other with their ghostly 'Cha-cha-cha!'

Again and again they chased each other, the iron roof rumbling in thunderous applause beneath their pounding feet!

Startled and disturbed from sleep, Leslie sat up in bed muttering, 'Remind me to set the possum traps.'

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## Time 1920s

He carries no watch in his pocket  
he knows the time of the day  
by the birds chirping before dawn  
and the eastern skies clear silver light

He knows the time of the day  
by the brightness of morning sun  
as it rises each day, lifting higher  
and higher way up in the sky.

When shadows grow shorter beneath his feet

Iris Rowe

and the sun beats down upon his head  
he knows it's noon, in fact twelve o'clock  
time to rest and munch, on thick crusty bread  
and drink cool water from old canvas bag  
hanging in shade of gnarled gum tree.

As shadows grow longer, his arms and back ache  
while swinging the axe, from dawn until dusk  
time to be heading right back to the shack.  
Golden sun is fast dropping beyond the blue sea  
calling birds flying now, home to their nests.  
Time to gather some kindling and sticks  
the fire to light, blue smoke soon arises  
then kettle to fill from rain water tank.  
Kerosene aroma, as lantern he lights  
lest he's found fumbling midst shadows of night.

Tummy rumbles now pacified  
and quieter grows as he tucks into stew  
and mops his plate clean.  
Shadows have deepened in strong violet hues  
his world wrapped in darkness.

Night skies are lit with stars overhead.  
Tis a glorious sight as he bids all 'Good-night.'  
It's bed time he knows, his rest will be sweet.  
He has no need to look for a watch.

## Bike Ride 1950

Peddling barefoot downhill with the wind whistling in my ears, my excitement urging me to peddle faster. Dodging the wash-outs and keeping to the ridges, I'm managing well, careering down the hill, round the big bend; no cars coming – but I'm going too fast!

Trying to slow down, jamming my foot on the front wheel, I'm now wobbling dangerously... My heart is thumping and I hear the deafening crunch of gravel under the wheels. Around the second bend I'm screaming... The cows are crossing the steep washed-out track. No brakes.

I crash broadside into the young steer—a heavy thump! The bellowing beast staggers for a moment or two before lumbering off the track and joining the unconcerned herd.

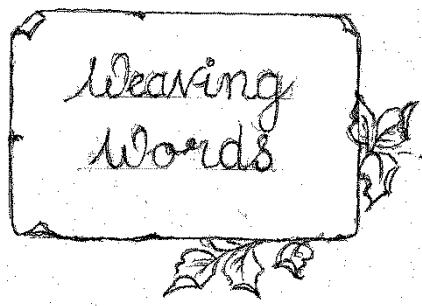
I'm floundering in a crumpled heap on the rough gravel; the bike is thrown beyond me, off the track. My knees and hands are grazed, blood oozing amongst fine gravel sticking to my torn skin. Red faced, I clamber up and shakily collect the bike; my leg hurts but I can still walk – my pride is in tatters.

Quickly looking around – there's no one in sight, so no one saw it happen. The steer seems none the worse; it's cropping grass with the rest of the herd. Dabbing at my wounds with the hem of my dress I wheel the bike down to level ground before riding it home. I will tell my story the way I want it to be heard and demand, 'Why hasn't someone fixed the brakes?'

## Georgette Gerdes

I don't claim to be a great writer, but I try hard and am greatly encouraged by the members of the Burnside writers group. My copious offerings of random nonsense the group all seem to like.

I also play Irish music on accordion for dancers, festivals and medieval fairs. I write poetry, memoir, opinion pieces, and currently, more politically flavoured offerings as there's a great deal to be concerned about in the world today. I hope you enjoy my bits. Some of the poems are dedicated to my in-laws in Ireland whom I greatly admire and love. I send blessings and happiness to you reading this anthology. Wherever you are I hope you are having a delightful day and if not, know things will always get better. Irish music definitely helps!



Georgette Gerdes

## The Thin Blue Line

*The plea of a primary school striker to our right wing, greenie hating, climate change denying politicians from government sanctioned curriculum learnt in the classroom not 'brainwashing, lies and manipulation' by the evil left*

Burning, burning, burning,  
Mother Earth is burning.  
Her icy mantle liquefies  
bears starve and seas rise.

Burning burning burning,  
the Barrier Reef is burning  
febrile brow, sweaty seas,  
whitening fingers  
shaved trees.

Burning, burning burning,  
scorched red land is burning.  
She thirsts for water in the dirt,  
farmers and the third world hurt.

Burning, burning, burning,  
the Amazon is burning.  
Mountainous flames burn with haste,  
a black desolation in its wake.

Burning, burning, burning,  
Pacific islands learning,  
the sea will soon submerge their homes,  
the Global community will not atone.

Georgette Gerdes

Burning burning burning,  
coal fired stations burning.  
Billowing gusts of greenhouse gasses.  
Politicians' lies hoodwink the masses.

Burning, burning, burning,  
children sleeping turning.  
Nightmares in their restless beds,  
future uncertain, full of dread.

Burning, burning, burning,  
Mother Earth is burning.  
Precious wildlife in decline  
the consequences we must define  
of fossil fuels of coal and mine,  
our planet Earth is out of time.

What more is needed as a sign  
it's time for deniers to resign  
for doing nothing is a crime.

Protect her armour – the thin blue line.

1.5 degrees is still too high.  
Believe the science.

Fight for your Mother.

Georgette Gerdes

## Aunty May – a Eulogy

Light flits across the room like butterflies wings.  
Washing hangs in the conservatory.  
Soft carpet underfoot,  
statues from the Philippines on the mantle-piece.  
May was once here,

pottering, watching TV,  
rushing to catch the dart,  
chatting to neighbours in Kaftans

going to her clients' houses comforting  
accompanying those afflicted with dementia,  
ensuring safety for the confused  
and wanderers.

Busy were her days and nights  
a life of service.

Sprightly, animated and cheerful  
full of infectious energy;  
chatty was her nature  
with stories of lands afar,  
Dublin's wealthy and politicians,  
an inclination to name drop at times.

She would arrive from Dublin like a whirlwind,  
a two hour bus journey away,  
full of stories whilst helping in the kitchen.  
Bustling, industrious, lively

We miss these times and treasure them.  
May...  
may you now be at peace in the light,  
your soul soaring free through the cosmos.

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## **The Legendary John Meade**

John Joseph Meade was known in the town  
as *Browser*, you know for his driving prowess;  
slowly, slowly he would proceed down the road,  
as if the sword of Damocles hung down.

But faithful and sure,  
he was there without doubt  
at airports and bus tops  
despite round a-bouts,

despite Nazi parking inspectors,  
women, direct from the camps  
or new fangled traffic lights  
and dimly lit lamps.

Rain or snow, sleet or hail,  
he would be there without fail  
a heart kind and wise yet,  
full of mischief, humour and music too.

## Georgette Gerdes

John is a character  
revered by the priests,  
for his unwavering support  
his faith is complete.

Greek philosophers keep him company  
and poems of old,  
from his days teaching Latin  
with students so bold.

Full of energy and might  
John loved to walk  
through forests, by lakes, to plays  
and music festivals by night.

He studied with the kids  
a student of life,  
completing diplomas in his 80s  
without any strife.

Dear John you amaze us  
and we love you so,  
we appreciate your gifts to us  
and we hope that you know,  
  
how wonderful you are  
in every way;  
you give us roses in December every day.

## Mammy Meade

Loving wishes from a child  
the eldest daughter of a father;  
distance doesn't dim the love  
nor diminish admiration either

Chips sizzle on the stove  
Mammy Meade prepares a feast  
within a catholic rustic cove  
bruised by merry children and faeries.

Cats and birds swarm for morsels.  
Mother Mammy's heart is full of gold.  
Four and ten hours she spends cleaning.  
Diligence spears the Irish cold.

Families adore her  
while the Devil abhors her.  
The garden thrives in her presence  
though damp with dew and revellers.

Old age manifests unkindly  
so in the moonlight, we wish  
Mammy Meade would grow wings  
to visit the Australian Spring.

Much love from all of us  
though miles away 'tis true,  
we dearly love and miss all,  
and thank you for being you.

## Papa

As the wise clock struck 10am,  
you would emanate the kitchen to your reserved seat.  
Your wife and warm Weetbix would you greet.  
The world your oyster, you took to the park.

Autumn leaves scatter in Killykeen  
on freshly cut grass and gravelly paths

Flowers sung praise over long lion days.  
The clock was ticking but your health was okay.  
Wisdom of skilled writers nurtured your veins.  
The world was astounded once you prevailed in haze.

Long tailed ducks bob and dive  
in the sparkling waters of Lough Oughter

What are words but things that describe  
but cannot portray your darling eyes.  
For our petty fancies, you provide  
comfort, feats deficient of vice.

Sunlight radiates from amber glass  
onto quiet contemplation at Drumcor Church

The jury waned, as did your audible rage.  
Carers it seems, have your wife estranged.  
Regardless, our love will forever stay  
the world seldom formed such a gem as you.

## In Paradesium

Angels' melodies waft upwards  
to ceilings vaulted and magnificent.  
Glittering kaleidoscope lights  
shadow the ancient brickwork.  
Stained glass Saints; precious jewelled colours  
loom to vertiginous heights,  
meticulously saved by parishioners  
from German bombs.

Choir boys', priests', curates' footsteps echo  
through stony fluted corridors and  
up steps by tombs of centuries old black princes,  
for this is an ancient place.

The organ reverberates  
intricate tunes boom  
through stillness and solitude  
from the heights to the depths,  
the quiet place below,  
the crypt with its baptismal fonts  
and gold treasure the exquisite lady chapel.

Candlelight flickers  
Our Lady sits with Jesus graceful contemplating  
the praying pilgrims and tourists.  
The silence is thick and musty as  
12th century stones hold the foundations  
of this architectural masterpiece.  
Canterbury Cathedral,  
in paradesium deducat Angeli

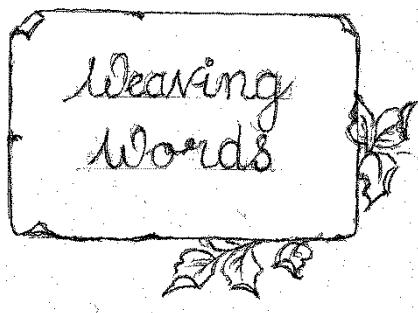
Nell Holland

## **Nell Holland**

Writing has given solace when times are hard and added joy when the world's been a delight. It underlines life's milestones, showing who I've been and who I am.

All of me is contained and exposed in my prose though clothed in imagination, and when word-pictures tumble around in my head, they spill on to paper through my fingers.

I can imagine few things in life that give greater delight than seeing my words in print. However, a log fire, chocolate cake and a glass of wine can come pretty close on a cold day.



## Remembered Sacrifice

There is something indefinable about emotions created by wonderful scenery. I was reminded of this recently when I walked the fields of my childhood and saw the English countryside in springtime glory. I'd forgotten how May blossom can cascade into bluebells and buttercups in the hedgerow below, and forgotten too, the perfection of daisies and primroses marinated in perfume from the lilac trees. Sadly, we eventually lost the need to transfer each vision to the permanence of a photograph, because even the best ultimately becomes familiar.

On the journey we met old friends and delighted in being with people who know us well. Vintage memories were rehashed and new ones created. Explanations were superfluous because we're all part of the same unfinished story. Breathtaking natural splendour may be unnoticed after a time, but the beauty of friendship will always ignite us with something hard to express and even harder to imagine losing. Unlike anything else, the joy created by meeting true friends never fades. We remember each other at times of celebration and have never forgotten the time we were young, optimistic and felt there was nothing that couldn't be achieved.

Jim Green probably felt like that when he was 28 and volunteered to fight in the Great War. He was a collier from my hometown until he joined the army and was elevated to lance corporal.

On the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, Jim and thirteen other men from my town were killed in combat. It was the greatest loss of life in a single day that my little Derbyshire town, Belper, has ever recorded.

## Nell Holland

Those men ultimately became war statistics, and few people remembered the faces behind those numbers until very recently.

The people in Belper held many events in 2018 to mark the centenary of the First World War's end, and one of those was a musical called *The Fourteen* which culminated with actors carrying pikes which were then stored in a rack. Each pike was fashioned so that as it was positioned they created a vision; the face of Jim Green.

The image was unique and Andy Mayers, the creator, was asked to construct a permanent version. Today in the Belper Memorial Gardens, the commissioned sculpture called *Sacrifice* shows Jim Green's face, as he was when photographed proudly wearing his army cap.

When I was last in Belper I attended a concert which culminated in the song *Only Remembered*, created for the film *Warhorse*. Words that were written by Walter Pepper another Belper man, to his wife on the 30 June 1916 the day before he was killed, were also recited during the production.

Jim Green had lived a life of toil and would have daily walked to the colliery across those same fields that I walked on my last visit. However, Jim probably rarely had the time to indulge in the delight I found in springtime splendour. But he, like me, would have treasured the value of good friends, and perhaps found their proximity some comfort in his last moments. He would have never believed a memorial would be created depicting his face, so that everyone could look at him, reflect and remember all the young men who gave their lives for us.

The sculpture is stunning. It portrays something heartrending in its simplicity. Jim and his fallen comrades are

Nell Holland

remembered for their courage, honour, dignity and ultimate sacrifice. Will we be remembered in a hundred years – and if so – for what?

“Only the truth that in life we have spoken,  
Only the seed that in life we have sown.  
These shall pass onwards when we are forgotten,  
Only remembered for what we have done.”

*Only Remembered*, Horatius Bonar 1870

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## New Beginning

We walk with bowed heads, like monks in contemplation of their prayers, and carefully watch where we put our feet. Our house is in disarray with scattered newspapers resembling oversized confetti littering the floor. Shoes are missing, slippers look nibbled and the TV remote control is in pieces. Soft toys, chewed cardboard, underwear and a cushion are trip hazards in the hall.

The garden looks dreadful with holes in the lawn. Is the brushwood fencing looking fragile, or am I imagining that its base looks suspiciously insecure, whereas only yesterday it looked stable? Pot plants are on their side; the hose-pipe leaks like a colander and the Bird of Paradise has been brutally pruned with torn off stems littering the path. The cherry tree appears ring-barked and the succulents are shredded. The flowering narcissi and daffodils have been flattened as have the beds of violets, along with the rocket plants that a few days ago looked so well.

A friend, in a show of irony, presented me with Frank Muir's children's books about *What a Mess*, and I confess that the subject of the narratives looks like the source of our problems.

The cause of it all sprawls in his bed in unconscious abandon, wrapped in a roll of toilet paper; head resting on a clothes brush. He looks gift wrapped and beautiful, the colour of warm toffee and twice as sweet. We realise that we probably won't be fit for visitors for at least three years, because we have a new puppy and the future looks busy.

Six months later and the puppy is still creating havoc, but a Sunday newspaper magazine article caught my attention and while the dog destroyed the Business Review pages I

took time-out to read the article. Elizabeth Blackburn has apparently unlocked the secrets of ageing. Her study found that life factors and stress can shorten lives by impacting on our telomeres. These are at the end of our chromosomes and she describes them as akin to the plastic tip of a shoelace keeping genetic material from unravelling. This seemingly leads to premature ageing, disease, and a weakened immune system.

My husband and I, in between preventing the dog from devouring the remaining newspaper, were discussing this news without any real comprehension of Blackburn's work. Nevertheless we were trying to understand what she was revealing about tetrahymena cells and biomedical innovation. My daughter, who'd been listening with bored exasperation to her parent's confused conversation, decided to take the dog for a walk in order to have a more peaceful Sunday afternoon (her words).

When she returned we were still hypothesising about stress and worry. Being the Sabbath, my husband decided it was appropriate to refer to the Biblical passage where Luke quoted Jesus as saying, *Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life... can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?*

"There you are", I said triumphantly 'Even Luke told us not to stress'.

My daughter, barely holding on to the wriggling puppy, mud splattering her trousers and jacket and her hat falling off, stood pink cheeked and breathing heavily from her perambulation. 'Did I hear you mention someone said we shouldn't stress?' she asked. 'Well, all I can say is that whoever wrote that has never walked an Irish Setter!'

## Billy

This wasn't the best of holidays – and she'd never wanted to come in the first place! Maddy surged with resentment at her parents who'd deprived her of the chance to be with friends before everyone set off for different universities. They'd put the 'guilt trip' on her by saying they were going to miss her when she left to live in the Eastern states, and reluctantly she'd given in. How she regretted it now. She knew she was behaving badly, but in a perverse way it made her feel better to make everyone else feel bad. Maddy knew it upset her parents but couldn't stop herself being unpleasant and spiteful. If she hadn't been coerced to join them on this European trip, she'd have been happy.

The debacle began less than an hour after they arrived at her aunt's Belgian home. Maddy tripped over the metal shoe scraper at the front door and careered onto the cobbled pathway outside. The bang on the head rendered her unconscious, though by the time the doctor arrived Maddy was awake but found she couldn't see. The terror was indescribable. Investigations showed no damage but the vision loss persisted. The doctors insisted her sight would eventually return and the best thing for everyone was to carry on as normally as possible until it did. Maddy thought she overheard a whispered conversation about 'hysterical blindness', but her parents were in denial when she asked.

Her mother had always wanted to visit the war cemetery at Tyne Cot, hoping to locate the grave of a distant relative who'd died in the Great War. So, not being prepared to leave Maddy alone while her uncle and aunt were working, her parents decided they should all go. The sun was shining

and the day warm and an outing would be good for Maddy.

It wasn't long before they all realised the futility of Maddy wandering around graves she couldn't see and it was a relief when her father suggested she sit in the sun until they'd completed their search. Beginning to feel too hot she thought if she was cautious, she might feel her way between the headstones until she found somewhere cooler. She moved carefully until her foot caught on a grassy mound and she pitched forward. In the briefest of seconds she thought this was a re-run of her previous fall, but before she could panic, a firm hand gripped her arm and a voice said, 'Steady on girl. You were nearly a goner.'

Maddy was startled. 'Oh! Are you Australian too! I didn't know anyone else was around.'

He laughed, 'Just us. You're lucky I'm here, or you might have made a right mess of that frock you're wearing. My mates are over on the far side waiting for me, but come into the shade for a while. You look about done in and they won't mind waiting.'

When he'd found a cooler area for her to sit down she realised her back was supported by one of the gravestones and felt uneasy. 'It seems disrespectful to use this to lean on. I think I should move.'

'Nah,' her new companion said. 'Everyone here was once a young lad like I am. They'd be pleased to think a good looking sheila like you was sitting with 'em. I know I am.'

Maddy laughed at his flattery; told him her name; that she came from Adelaide and was staying with relatives who lived nearby. She explained about her blindness and why she was waiting for her parents.

'I come from Bollon, Queensland. It's peaceful there

## Nell Holland

and we've a place near Wallam Creek. My mates persuaded me to come over here with them but I never knew I'd miss home so much. I'm called Billy, by the way.'

Conversation was easy and they discovered they were both 18. For the first time in days Maddy felt happy and enjoyed the relief of letting her face relax into a smile after days of holding it in a scowl.

'You know what I look like. Describe what you look like, Billy.'

He chuckled, 'My mates call me Billy the Kid cause they say I've a baby face, but I reckon I look older than you. I betcha you don't spend much time outside. I work the land with Dad and the sun can be something fierce, but I love working with the old man and when I'm not working I'm hunting in the bush for kangaroo.' He laughed, 'They don't feed you 'roo out here, more's the pity.' Another self-deprecating laugh before he said, 'You can tell I don't ask much from life.'

She talked about going to university in Melbourne and told him she couldn't wait to enjoy the freedom of being away from family. Billy said he was surprised she didn't value the lifestyle she had. 'Family's everything to me,' he said. 'Don't you like your parents?'

'They're fine really, but I just want to have some adventures without Mum and Dad watching me all the time.'

Billy was silent for a few moments before saying, 'Life's the adventure, Maddy. Live each day while the sun shines. Storms come fast enough.'

'You sound like an ancient oracle, Billy. We're still 18 and have years of sunshine ahead of us.'

Before he could reply, a shout warned Maddy her

parents were returning.

She asked Billy to stay and meet them. 'I'd like them to see the kind stranger who stopped my second fall in a week!'

His warm finger brushed her temple. 'Sorry. Better go and find the lads before they miss me. But don't worry about your sight. It'll be back before you know it.'

When they arrived her mother exclaimed, 'Oh, you've moved.' Then gave a sharp intake of breath and said, 'Good heavens! You're by his headstone.'

Maddy turned her head sharply in the direction of her mother's voice and felt an odd sensation in her head at the point where Billy's finger had touched. Her hands went up to her face in shock. Staring at the words on the headstone she realised her sight had returned with all the clarity she'd had prior to the accident.

'Private Thomas Williams from Bollon in Queensland.' Her mother read out, before looking thoughtful and saying 'They tell me family called him Tom and friends called him...' Before she'd finished speaking Maddy had whispered in amazement, 'Billy the Kid.'

## **Chow Kit High Tea**

The atmosphere in the room was thick with the heady scent of sandalwood and roses, the smell of cooking from the kitchen below us and the traffic fumes outside. Perspiration beaded my skin and trickled down my back. I felt drugged by the heat. The temperature was barely improved by the lengths of batik hung across the room, lazily drifting in whatever small amount of air came through the open window. No expensive air-conditioning here.

The tropical sun shimmering through the material made patterns of scarlet, orange, brown and green over the young women sitting cross-legged on the floor, creating a surreal tableau. This was their home. They were all the family that each could rely on. To be working here was to be declared an outcast, for this was a Chow Kit whore house.

The girls making a circle around me were chattering in a mixture of Malay and English, eating a variety of small sticky cakes and sipping drinks containing bubbles of barley through small pink straws. I'd had this drink before and not found it refreshing so I'd taken my own bottled water with me but I'd joined in with eating one of the luridly striped *kueh* and wondering, yet again, why they were so popular. The dense texture, bright colours and over-sweet flavour made me feel as if I was trying to chew flavoured play-dough. Not something that rested well in my stomach, particularly in this hot room, but I was privileged to be there and would have eaten anything they gave me. I was determined to try as far as possible to blend into the group.

I was here as the companion of Lanna, a Chinese

photographer and film producer who knew the working women in Chow Kit well and had been photographing them for a magazine article.

Lanna's mother is English but has a Chinese husband and lives in Borneo and as we had known each other for some years, she'd asked Lanna to contact me when I was in Asia.

I was living in Kuala Lumpur at that time and Lanna took it upon herself to make sure I got to know the real Malaysia and didn't become a 'lady who lunches' like many ex-pats who are accompanying spouses. She thought I'd enjoy meeting some of KL's colourful characters and when she suggested I accompany her to the brothel in Chow Kit I didn't hesitate. The choice was a Chow Kit house of prostitution or meeting some European friends for high tea at the Shangri-La hotel. It wasn't much of a competition.

'Cendol-lah!' was the cry from Tini, a young transvestite who swept into the room holding bowls of the shaved ice concoction and put them into the middle of the circle where it was quickly eaten by everyone. *Cendol* is a favourite dish of mine and a wonderful palate cleanser after the glutinously sticky *kueh*. I devoured it with delight.

The girls were all using fans in a futile attempt to keep the heavy air in motion around their faces, and pulling the dampened front of their *baju kebaya*'s away from their bodies.

'Aah, too hot-lah.' Tini remarked, and without hesitation she stripped off her blouse and bra and unselfconsciously sat down next to me, exposing her remarkably faultless and very large bust. This was obviously not an unusual occurrence as within seconds the others all followed suit, breathing sighs of relief. The room was

## Nell Holland

immediately alive with nipples and breasts of all shape and size; all looking impossibly perky and perfect in ways that challenged Nature. The term defying gravity was just one of the thoughts that crossed my mind.

‘Come Lanna. Come Nell,’ one girl called, ‘take off. It too hot?’

With some hesitation Lanna slowly followed suit, while trying hard to keep her arms folded across herself. I was determined to melt before exposing my own imperfections and shook my head vigorously at the group.

As Lanna removed her bra Tini gazed in horror at Lanna’s very normal chest and said, ‘Lanna! Your titties so saggy. They no good-lah. No worry girl. I give you name of Singapore doctor. He fix you up proper and you look good. Like me.’ She shook her breasts to demonstrate how good they were, which gained much laughter from the other girls as Tini’s secret weapons bounced freely with a life of their own.

A red-faced Lanna grimaced in embarrassment and said, ‘I don’t need titties for my work Tini.’ She waved her Leica at the group and said, ‘Just need camera.’

Tini was unimpressed and began discussing the work the particular surgeon had done for others in this house of supposed ill-repute. What that doctor could do with many parts of the female anatomy, as well as turning male parts into female parts, was one of the most impressive conversations I’ve ever had the luck to eavesdrop on. Imagine having high tea at the Shangri-La and missing out on such unique information!

It was a hot afternoon with the kind of steamy dialogue to which most people are never privy and the Chow

## Nell Holland

Kit women couldn't have been kinder. They allowed me into their environs and behaved just like any other group of twenty-year-old-something friends.

Tini wrapped me in a big hug when we left, crushing me into her squishy, impressive bosom that must have been modelled on the air bags from a *Kancil*. To cement our friendship she even gave me her business card, and like any other new acquaintance, she asked me to call her back anytime for another visit. I was really touched.

Unfortunately, my purse was stolen some days later. I never knew who the thief was but when they took my purse, they got more than they bargained for. Along with a few hundred ringgit of money, they also took my credit and business cards.

They must have raised an eyebrow at one of the cards there. Not every *orang puteh* would be carrying a card that proclaimed the owner was representing the sex workers of Kuala Lumpur.

## Rossana Mora

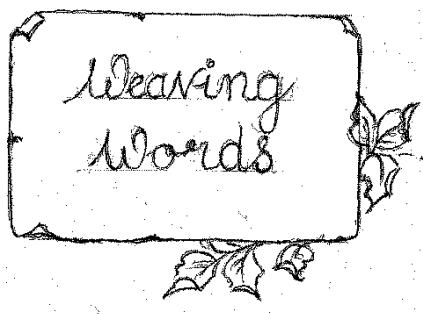
I see life as an endless learning journey.

Where everything we learn, matters and matters the most when we put the knowledge gained into practice.

At the Burnside Writers Group, I learn, practice and grow.

The group inspires me by giving me the opportunity to ride with them and develop a sense of belonging.

I would like the reader to simply enjoy my writing by feeling it while immersing themselves in it. If it brings a smile or a gesture even, I will have achieved my goal.



Rossana Mora

## Bubbles

I need to hurry up! Jump into the shower and get ready!

The warm water falling off my body feels amazing. This was supposed to be a quick shower, but it isn't. It feels so good. Any excuse is valid for me to stay longer; shave a bit, perhaps underarms as well as other hidden parts.

Come on! Rinse quickly! Rinse and get ready!

The jazz music sounds so beautiful. I don't want to hurry up.

Imagining a fire and some bubbles, is what gets me moving.

The plan today is to catch the bus to Stirling and have lunch there. I'd better hurry up.

Comfortably sitting next to the fireplace, bubbles in hand, I feel warm, cozy and happy.

I look through the big window. Life goes on, even though mine seems to have come to a full stop.

A pram; two prams; two ladies. I assume two babies too. The ladies seem to be in a hurry. Are they exercising or just heading somewhere to have lunch? Who knows?

A family is also walking by. So many kids, my gosh! Six. Why aren't they at school anyway? Who knows?

The beautiful old tall trees standing before me, almost naked, exposing a special beauty in each of those branches, seem to be reaching towards the sky in a pledge for Spring to come. The look gorgeous.

Slowly, taking the time to savour each bite of my food, I sip on my champagne. I feel that refreshing and micro-exploding sensation going down my throat once more.

What else can anyone ask for? The Adelaide Hills,

delicious warm lunch, a nice fire and bubbles. Beautiful, cool and intoxicating.

Oh my gosh, my bus!

I just missed my bus back to the city. All because of that second glass of bubbles. I guess now I need to sacrifice myself to a third one.

\*\*\*

## Mirror

The noise of the alarm was so loud it was impossible not to hear it. It went on for a few more seconds and then she turned it off and got up.

Her room looked very tidy, even the recently used bed, almost as if no one had slept there.

She walked towards the mirror, looking at her reflection. She looked a bit tired, but make-up would conceal that. She forced a smile.

In the shower the smell of the new herbal shampoo brought thoughts of her childhood, her mother, father and siblings. She remembered those family times with nostalgia. Back then, *she mattered*. She was always told she was the lucky charm of the house. Her siblings and she would play and play after school until mum called for dinner when dad arrived from work. Before going to bed she would use that herbal shampoo. She loved the fresh sensation and the long-lasting smell of it.

What to wear today? She wanted to look professional,

## Rossana Mora

spotless, empowered. She wanted to make heads turn when walking into the office today.

It had been several days since she was last there. No calls, no friends, nothing. She hadn't been there, and it seemed no one cared.

She was on the final make-up touches when while looking at the reflection, she could see another self, lying in bed. She narrowed her eyes and frowned slightly. She looked again. Her reflection, the one in bed, smiled at her. It was a soft, but very kind smile.

'Good try,' the reflection murmured and closed her eyes.

She turned around slowly just to confirm she was there, lying in bed, waiting.

She looked at the clock. She couldn't say how long it had been since the alarm went off; time made no sense.

She saw her reflection fading in the mirror.

Slowly, she crawled back to bed, in pain, defeated by depression once more.

Next time. Hopefully, next time; she mumbled with teary eyes.

## Clare

I was seen with four men today. We were all wearing black garments and helmets, looking rough. We all were riding motorbikes to Clare. The bikes that are so noisy they annoy everyone: Harleys, they call them.

I decided I wouldn't make any assumptions about the day and I wouldn't care if anyone else did. We were just a small group of people travelling by motorbikes. Just four men and me stopping at country pubs for a drink to ease the heat and the stiffness of the ride.

At the start, I was sitting at the back of my partner's bike, trying desperately to hold onto his body. After the first half an hour, I was able to relax and to change position.

It was unreal riding at 110 kms per hour at times and with no more protection than a helmet. What if I fell off? Would my arms break? Would my legs break? Would anyone stop and help us if we had an accident? Anxious, I decided to change position again and relax even more, telling myself nothing bad will happen.

Feeling the wind coming through my visor I lowered my head instinctively, to stop my helmet sliding off. Bending forward to help break up pressure of the wind I saw nothing but the road but felt more comfortable.

Finally, after a few more catastrophic thoughts, I was able to release a hand and tighten up the helmet.

I stretched the other hand and changed my sitting position growing more comfortable. I turned my head slightly to look at the countryside. It was beautiful and colourful; rugs of crops painted green, orange, yellow and brown all arranged masterfully; pieces of art of the everyday country road.

I hugged my partner, not just to hold onto him. This time, it wasn't need; it was the sole pleasure of putting my arms around him. I pressed my chest against his back firmly as if telling him, 'I am here.'

Immediately, I felt his hand on top of mine, caressing it despite the gloves responding, 'I know, and I love it.' That little action made me smile and I felt even closer to him. I let my chest rest on his back for a while. The noise was loud, but no words were needed between us.

We stopped for lunch in Clare. We ate plentifully and we talked and laughed. The men were my partner's friends from an old job. They were kind and sweet. I learned they are older than him, in their early or middle sixties, some still working, some enjoying their grandchildren, and they just ride for the pleasure of it.

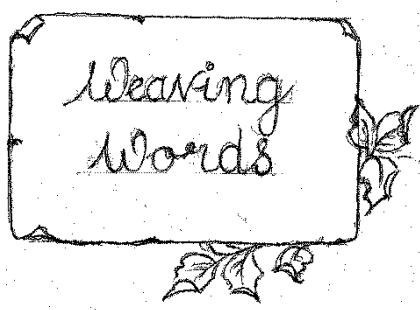
A phone rang loudly and one of the men said, 'Oh no! Calling again?' His face reflected disappointment, but he took the call quickly and with a nice soft voice he said, 'Hi Princess.' We all laughed at the sudden switch of attitude but went quiet immediately so he could continue the call with his wife.

No assumptions today. Just four men and me on motorbikes riding to Clare.

David Hope

## David Hope

In the past writing for me was work – essays, contract bids, academic and technical papers. Now it is creative, challenging and fun: trying out new genres, learning new skills for personal rather than professional use. For fiction, telling the story well. For non-fiction, making it live on the page. For poetry, letting my feelings speak.



## ‘And...’ said Admiral Crichton

Fleet Co-ordinator James Jefferson interrupted the planning session, saluting briefly. ‘Admiral, there’s a problem with EF61. And it’s going to jeopardise the Zeta Omicron 3 project. The EF61 propulsion unit did not achieve full thrust. It’s in low earth orbit instead of lunar orbit.’

‘And...’ said Admiral Crichton.

‘EF61 cannot engage hyper drive in low earth orbit. It has 80% of the settlers on board. More specifically, all of the female settlers are on EF61. Without those settlers the mission is compromised.’

‘And...’ said Admiral Crichton.

‘The Chief Engineer for EF61 advises that the propulsion unit can be repaired promptly, but additional fuel supplies will be needed for the propulsion unit to lift EF61 out of low earth orbit to lunar orbit.’

‘And...’ said Admiral Crichton.

‘No tanker ship is available for at least two weeks.’

‘And...’ said Admiral Crichton.

‘The fleet orders are very specific – the fleet must enter and exit hyperspace as one unit to avoid the possibility of collisions which crippled the last attempt to populate Zeta Omicron 3.’

‘And...’ said Admiral Crichton.

Jefferson hesitated momentarily, ‘Admiral, I will arrange with the commander of each ship in the fleet to organise extra training sessions for the settlers to prepare them further for settling on Zeta Omicron 3.’

‘And...’ said Admiral Crichton.

‘The crew of each ship will undertake routine

## David Hope

maintenance of each ship while the fleet awaits departure into hyperspace. Every ship's system will be thoroughly tested.'

'And...' said Admiral Crichton.

Jefferson saluted. 'Admiral, the fleet will enter hyperspace bound for Zeta Omicron 3 in sixteen days.'

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### **Doubt to Dawning**

Clouds gather oppressively, light dimming;  
where once was joy, now growing, doubt and fear;  
is it my making this deep, grim glooming?  
Deeds undone, words unsaid for one so dear?

Darkness descends complete, my soul lies slain;  
I am alone, lost, hurt, broken, squandered;  
grieving I ask, in the depth of my pain,  
am I to blame for love now gone, wandered?

How can I answer? Reflection needs light.  
Yet, in my despair, from within, a spark;  
loved yet lost, not once, that is my plight;  
still I lived, live again, out of the dark.

My spirit prevails, reborn, tempered, true  
uplifted to face love's trials anew.

## Living the Dream

Tony and Aileen were a young married couple living the dream in a new house in Salisbury East. They had two children, Tony junior and Rachel. Tony senior had his own small business mending radiators on Main North East Road. Surrounded by a number of used car yards trade was good and regular. Aileen was able to be the stay-at-home mum she wanted to be.

There was only one fly in the ointment. Tony liked a punt. It was part of his dream. Every Saturday morning he would study the racing form and, telling Aileen his picks as he left the house, head off to the races. For interest, Aileen listened to the horse races on the radio as she enjoyed her Saturday with the children, keeping track of Tony's picks and feeling good as his horses came home well.

Trouble was, when Tony got to the track he often, too often, changed his mind on what to back. Often, too often, his new selections were duds. Arriving home at the end of the race day he would confess that he had lost money rather than won it. Often, too often, this caused tension and arguments.

'OK, Aileen, I will stick to the picks I tell you I made,' was Tony's constant refrain.

'But you never do!' became Aileen's inevitable retort. The temptation was to try and do better the following week; chase the lost money. But, temptation won, unlike Tony. His promises to stick to his picks evaporated when at the track.

Their arguments became more strident, particularly as money became tighter and tighter. Aileen watched in despair as the sacrifices they had made to establish their home were jeopardised further every week.

## David Hope

"Tony, we will end up on the street if you don't stop losing money every week," she said time after time.

Tony would make his promises to do the right thing and while he intended to keep his promises, he never did.

Aileen felt more and more powerless to influence Tony and steer him to a better path.

The children were too young to understand the nature of the arguments but they felt the tension as the arguing, broken promises, tears and tension escalated.

Tony borrowed money fuelling further disputes and discord. And, in the days before credit cards the interest rate on short term loans was iniquitous. Before long, Tony was deep in debt and declared bankruptcy.

The nice new house was lost. Fortunately, the business survived but, through the bankruptcy period, tension continued. For three years, Tony and Aileen could not make basic purchases of furniture and other necessities that needed a capital outlay. Needing finance for major purchases, friends and family were drawn into being guarantors.

The arguments diminished but the tension continued as they worked hard, and made more sacrifices, to recreate their dream. It was a long haul made longer by the stigma, even when the bankruptcy period had ended.

Over time, and with a great deal of effort, Tony and Aileen recovered from their loss and eventually owned their own home. Unfortunately, in the long-run, their marriage failed and, while not the sole reason, the years of lies, broken promises, tears and penury over Tony's gambling took their toll. Tony still has a punt but, as a pensioner, he keeps it well within his financial capacity.

### **Marree Haiku**

Marree mystery  
man in the desert plain  
who created you?

### **Cassini Haiku**

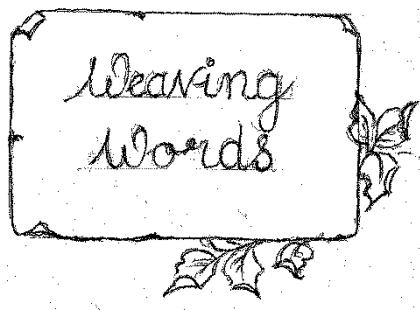
Cassini you flew  
to the edge of our system  
bringing us insight

## Lawrie Stanford

My writing tends to focus on the idiosyncrasies, peculiarities and vagaries of everyday human behaviour presented with a touch of whimsy and humour. This is what you can expect in the next few pages. In return, I hope you can relax and have a laugh – especially if you recognise yourself in some of the passages.

Something special about the Burnside Writers' Group is the positive, supportive nature of its members. They also encourage experimentation and variety in style. In this way, we all grow and develop in our writing. In this year's Anthology, I have tried some writing that is not my usual style.

Please enjoy.



## One Wish

A maiden of years well advanced  
was rich but sad and lonely.  
She spent a large sum on a genie's lamp  
while thinking it only baloney.

High hopes then carried her home  
to see just what it could do.  
Once indoors, she rubbed it with vigour –  
a genie appeared as it promised to.

'I am the genie of the lamp,  
by the Aga Khan I am anointed.  
But you only get one wish from me  
so take care lest you be disappointed.'

So she thought about it carefully  
but the choice was really quite easy –  
'I want a virile, sexy, young man  
so I feel passions somewhat sleazy!'

Just then, the woman's cat walked by –  
he went by the moniker 'Tom' –  
so the genie knew that he fit the bill,  
and the job wouldn't take too long.

So with flourish and with fanfare,  
in an awesome, bewitching display,  
Tom was transformed to Adonis  
Her wish was to come into play.

Athletic, rippling muscularity,  
tall and lithely, before her he stood,  
dark hair, blue eyes, a piercing smile,  
and loin cloth just concealing manhood.

Now she, was stunned into silence  
as Adonis joined in the affray,  
he gently nestled her in his arms,  
as her knees began to give way.

Secured in his arms very tightly,  
her body pressed against his flesh,  
he leaned over her to whisper –  
she felt his warm breath, so fresh.

She swooned in total surrender,  
in love, this man must be tutored,  
when he whispered his sorrowful message  
'I'll bet you're sorry now, you had me neutered!'

## Hoard

I am a self-confessed hoarder of bits'n'pieces. In my garage, there are no less than ninety-seven jars and four drawers of bits'n'pieces. The items range from left-over nails and screws to off-cuts of everything conceivable for use in a garage.

While hoarding gets a bad rap through obsessive-compulsive collectors, my hoarding is logical and practical – it's to save bits'n'pieces for future use.

From my collection, the very item needed for a DIY repair job is often close at hand. When this happens, I celebrate the foresight that led to it being available as well as the savings in time and money to purchase the item new.

Fast-forward to a move our family made from Adelaide to Canberra.

For practical reasons, I had to dispense with many garage bits'n'pieces when we moved. One thing I didn't dump was an old milk-bottle carrier. Many years ago, these were placed outside your front door for a milkman to replace with full bottles. With the advent of milk in cartons, and the ease of purchasing them from local supermarkets, home delivery of milk ceased and milk-bottle carriers became obsolete. But, one never knows how items like this could be useful in the future! So I held onto it.

While unpacking in Canberra, I reconsidered the choice to save the carrier. I bundled it up with a few other items and donated them to the local charity Op-Shop.

The day after doing this, I discovered that Canberra still had home-delivery milk services.

In an urgent retreat to the Op-Shop, I shelled out five dollars to retrieve the milk-bottle carrier!

## Picture Perfect

My wife, Mary, describes her philosophies on life through adages. The adages are prominently displayed around the house or will be quoted appropriately.

At times, when some of my foibles surface, the adages are close at hand to temper them. This means Mary avoids intervening directly in my behaviour but defers to an age-old piece of wisdom by a nameless oracle whose insights are self-evident and unarguable.

When I am being a pedant, Mary will point to the relevant poster in the house which reads 'Life doesn't have to be perfect to be wonderful'.

Feeling nostalgic when I recently retired, I constructed a picture gallery covering my study wall. The display was acclaimed by family and friends – and Mary. It would be small-minded of me to suggest to Mary that the gallery's effectiveness was achieved through a fair degree of attention to detail, or, in other words, the previously mentioned pedantry.

The gallery's design attended to balance and proportion, straight lines at the boundaries, perfect verticals, consistency in the gaps, placement by size and colour, as well as a balance between history, heritage and personal memorabilia, interests and achievements.

When Mary retired, I offered to construct a photo gallery over her desk in the study. She agreed with enthusiasm. It was inevitable that the exhibits included her philosophies on life and, of course, 'Life doesn't have to be perfect to be wonderful'.

Based my own gallery, I calculated this project would take a day's work. Towards the end of the third day I was losing my patience.

By this time, in a frustrated state, as I was framing up 'Life doesn't have to be perfect to be wonderful' the glass in the picture frame cracked. The crack was obvious, running all the way from the top of the frame to the bottom. It occurred to me that the cracked glass was the perfect illustration of the fact that life, and framed photos, don't have to be perfect to be wonderful. This supported the strong resistance I was feeling to spending more time repairing the damaged glass.

When Mary spotted the cracked glass, she pointed it out. Fearing a request to spend more time on the project, my reply was that I had done this on purpose to emphasise the adage in the frame.

'Oh no!' she said, 'that won't do, this photo gallery has to be perfect!'

## Hog Bay, Kangaroo Island

Blue sky,  
vast umbrella.  
White clouds:  
fluffy cotton balls,  
drifting.

Sunlight  
off water's surface glints;  
hypnotic, dazzling.

Water:  
crystal-clear, shallow,  
vision unhindered,  
sand grains,  
seaweed threads,  
foraging crabs.

Lazy waves:  
ripple forms,  
rolling, lolling.  
Languid passage to shore,  
no hurry.

Boat:  
lounging on water's surface,  
resting from labour,  
waiting to be called again,  
rocking gently.

My body:  
outstretched,  
secure on pitted deck,  
absorbing warmth.

Eyes:  
peering over bow,  
gazing aimlessly.

Mind:  
half-conscious,  
thoughts incomplete,  
adrift.  
Slumber.

Surrender.

## In Deep Water

### *The Calm of Hog Bay*

We had sailed to Hog Bay from Adelaide the day before. Mark, who owned the boat, was Captain, and Peter, a friend of us both, was First Mate and I was the relatively inexperienced crew member.

In Hog Bay, we lounged and rested, swam, caught whiting and savoured the cooked flesh. The day was topped off by wading ashore and strolling to the 'local' to wash down our catch.

Evening included planning the northward journey home; across Backstairs Passage, into St Vincent's Gulf and on to Adelaide. Mark mumbled vague concerns about unfavourable conditions brewing in the area.

We set out the next day with good sailing winds from the south-west that provided steady passage and we hoped to dock before the anticipated bad weather.

Within hours however, conditions changed. The wind swung to the south and strengthened. Lanyards clanged against the metal mast and the sail flapped ineffectively with the wind blowing directly behind us.

We jibed, zig-zagging to catch the wind. Before long, the wind became so fierce that in full sail, the boat was difficult to manage. It was too late to attach the spinnaker but we reduced the area of sail by furling in its lower section.

These tactics calmed the boat's behaviour but slowed us down. While we were now in St Vincent's Gulf, we were still some distance from our destination. Some nervousness began to set in and the mood became more subdued and concentrated. Mark's mumblings of the night before were proving correct.

### ***Gulf Storm***

There was a science in dealing with the ten metre waves pushed up behind us.

Mark steered up the back of each wave at right-angles to their fronts. As the boat reached the crest and transitioned into the shelter of the wave's face, the respite from the wind meant the boat could be steered at an angle down the wave. The angular path down the wave face reduced the risk of her bow ploughing into the trough below and in the shelter provided, her side-on orientation to the direction of the wind meant she wouldn't be capsized.

Mark strained to hold fast to the tiller in the cold, wind and wet. He beckoned me to take the tiller while he sought a hot coffee in the cabin. I abandoned my work of securing equipment in the cockpit and started steering.

At first, surfing the wave fronts was exhilarating. My nervousness was pushed aside while I revelled in the task. But my inexperience meant I didn't appreciate the importance of precise timing.

Transitioning too late to the angular surf down one of the waves was a fateful mis-timing. Perched on the wave's crest, the boat was exposed side-on to the howling wind. With the additional push of the wave's crest as the wave tumbled over, I felt the boat lean wildly as it was laid flat on the downward slope. Smack! The mast and sail hit the water.

In that moment, I felt myself being violently ejected from the boat, head-long into the churning sea. The shock of ice-cold water rushed over me. The ocean pulled me in and tossed me around. My vision was blurred and I tasted salty brine.

Within what seemed like minutes, but was more likely

seconds, my life-vest burst me through the water's surface where the cold, moist air I gasped chilled my lungs.

I looked wildly for the boat and my mates in time to see the mast and sail lurched up as the boat righted itself with a whimper and a tired sigh that seemed to spell resignation that the howling wind and crashing waves had defeated her.

Untethered from the boat, I watched as the wind carried her away.

### ***In Deep Water***

A dark fear descended as I realised that the boat was getting out of reach. My heart pounded and a tightness formed in the pit of my stomach. My bowels spasmed. The thought of being abandoned in the vast, angry sea set my nervous system alight with chaotic pulses of alarm.

My thoughts turned to the likelihood of being in the water for some time and the implication this carried.

Instinctively, I searched the surrounding waves to see if there were any fins cutting the surface.

As minutes passed and nothing critical had occurred, I set to work gathering the boat's flotsam that surrounded me, while trying to keep the boat in sight amid the churning waves.

With my eyes closed against the sea spray, my father's face swam before me.

At that time, he was the commander of the SA Police Special Tasks and Rescue Group. If I was to be lost at sea, and a rescue operation mounted—I was going to be even deeper water!

That thought clung with tenacity to the edges of my awareness.

### *The Ending*

Hopes of a more immediate rescue flooded back as I saw Mark and Peter emerge from the cabin and they started man-overboard procedures.

At the base of the mast, atop the cabin, Peter kept sight of me between the rise and fall of the waves. Mark brought the sail completely down and released the outboard motor which was tied to the stern's railing.

Mark and Peter regained control of the boat and with the motor running, they manoeuvred over to me. To my gratitude and relief, I was hauled back on-board. There, we excitedly congratulated ourselves for managing the crisis then settled down to motoring the rest of the way home.

Hours later, in relief and exhausted silence, we limped into harbour and safety.

As I headed home from the harbour that night my final, tired thought was that my ol' man would never get to hear about this incident!

## **Point Labatt, Eyre Peninsula**

Sea green-blue,  
tantalise,  
vision splendid,  
feast for eyes.

Water rolling,  
crystal blue,  
cresting white,  
pure of hue.

Rocks of brown,  
sand creamy white,  
seagulls cry,  
seals lounge in light.

Sunshine's warmth,  
thoughts of leisure,  
reclining on beach,  
summer pleasure.

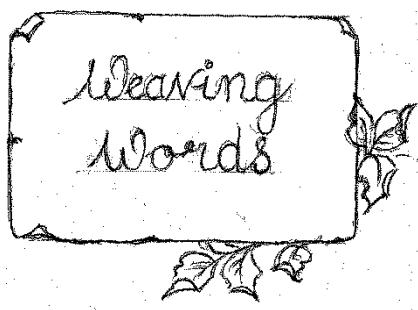
John Brooking

## John Brooking

I was born in London in 1927 and migrated to Australia with my family at age 11. My earliest writing skills were honed in my years from teenage to early twenties in radio in Melbourne. With increasing age I gradually became, as I like to think, more eclectic in choice of style. I wrote for diverse audiences, children as well as adults.

I've tried for variety in the submission of my poems: some are deliberately conservative, others ring of modern purpose; some are comedic, others reflective. That is why I have chosen *A Potpourri of Poems* as my title and I hope the works I have put together will at least give you variegated reading.

Bon appetit.



John Brooking

## A Potpourri of Poems

### Liberation

There is passion in the pulpit  
there are icons on the wall  
to tell us our humanity  
is sorrow for us all.

Now comes the radiant sunbeam,  
here steals the teasing wind  
to whisper in our church today  
that none of us has sinned.

And with me sits my dear one  
her face so close to mine,  
her honey hair cascading,  
her eyes with depths that shine.

The earnest choir all rise at once  
to praise strange realms above.  
I can't give in to fears of sin  
when I'm so full of love.

John Brooking

## Hugs

Oh hugs just like drugs are addictive,  
they pull you in from the cold.  
Also I think they're predictive,  
of happiness when you are old.

## Premonition

I saw an aged man today  
his clothes were tattered quite.  
In his hand a scythe he held,  
his face was drawn and white  
he caught my arm and called my name;  
I turned and tried to flee.  
He said, 'I have to go, my friend,  
but I'll be back. You'll see.'

John Brooking

## Relating (1890)

She waves away her ‘gooseberry fool’\*  
and glides to the piano stool.  
‘Miss Tortel,’ I’m about to say,  
‘please let us sing a roundelay  
to keep our party bright and gay;  
and blithe we’ll be this Christmastide  
like girl  
like boy  
with dancing heart  
for in this way true love does start.’

\* *Dessert comprising crushed gooseberries.*

## Relating (1987)

I really do not see the point  
of offering Bennie my last joint  
he’s brought out something from his car,  
he’s going to play on his guitar.  
His nostrils both are looking red,  
he snorts cocaine at night in bed.  
He sits close by me as a rule  
tonight he thinks I’m just a fool;  
this party’s really not that cool.

John Brooking

## Buddhist Monk

Buddhist monk stands silent,  
smiles,  
quiescent posture, timelessness.  
Saffron robes, shaven head,  
brown skin and teeth irregular.

I see deep brown contented eyes.  
Enlightened eyes?

Buddhist monk with saffron robe  
sitting smiling, in the now  
in this one moment  
as if all the fret of time  
and suffering  
has been eliminated.

Buddhist monk  
seems to have thoughts  
of serene emptiness  
he moves on.

But something elusive stays  
I think this Buddhist monk  
knew something mysterious,  
something powerful.

Something I desire.

John Brooking

## How Esau Lost His Birthright

### *From the Bible for Beginners*

Esau, trampling through the field  
to yearnings for hot food did yield,  
saw Jacob one day, quietly seated  
with lentil potage, nicely heated.

It was a shame he chose to stop.  
Those hunger pains made Esau swap  
his birthright for his brother's soup.  
The folly to which men will stoop!

As Isaac aged, he lost his sight.  
He murmured, 'Well, it's only right  
to give my blessing to my son.'  
(By which he meant the elder one.)

'Now, Esau come,' he called, 'Please rise.  
Bring me that venison I prize.'  
The lad stood up with honest cheer  
and took his bow to hunt the deer.

Rebekah then, with accents sweet  
told Jacob they must use deceit.  
She fled to find some savoury meat.  
He felt his young heart skip a beat.

John Brooking

The scheme Rebekah had in mind –  
oh what a way to treat the blind!  
Two kids were fetched and choicely cooked,  
and poor blind Isaac – he was rooked.

As mother with a crafty look,  
pulled Esau's raiment off the hook,  
and hissed, 'Wear this. Without his eyes  
your Dad will fall for this disguise!'

Then, bearing meat, young Jacob came!  
The old man called *his brother's* name,  
'Is that you, Esau? I'm not sure...'  
And Jacob quietly breathed, 'Oh Lor!'

Although at first it seemed quite scary  
young Jacob's arms appeared as hairy  
(Wrapped in the hirsute hide of goat)  
This – and the smell of Esau's coat –

Meant that old Isaac, *sans* both eyes  
failed to discern his son's disguise  
and that sly son, ne'er once confessing,  
wrongly obtained his father's blessing!

John Brooking

## Lord Fentonby

### A Medieval Fable.

#### Part I

Oh noble earls and barons bold,  
the hearth is warm, the graveyard cold  
and often I hear counted tales  
of how you quaff your meads and ales;  
although the noisome banquet hall  
has food and music for you all,  
the minstrels in your loft above  
play on with skill, but naught for love.

While meadows, forests, dales and hills  
may threaded be with tinkling rills,  
and all supporting cattle fat,  
there's bloodied sward where poachers sat,  
where quick your minions took their lives  
and made poor widows of their wives.

And hard the fate one day will be  
for Milord Duke of Fentonby  
whose archers for their bloody sport  
aimed vicious barbs no poor men sought  
to massacre infirm and lame,  
all in your lord's most hated name.

A priestly presence yet unknown  
with seeds of promise yet unsown,  
does tarry where they need him most,  
his strong arms elevate The Host  
and there his flock, all bowed, devout

John Brooking

allegiance show and never doubt  
before the chancel, dimly lit,  
Christ's mercy shields them as they sit.

That priestly man was called Guy Xavier,  
the poor he loved and loved their Saviour.  
Certain ways and means had he  
to snare and conquer Fentonby.

He knew a weaver, name of Wroth,  
true miracles wrought he in cloth,  
or else with other weavers made  
fine valances of light and shade.

In distant climes and days gone by  
Crusaders both were Wroth and Guy.  
A Holy War they fought, these men,  
against the threatening Saracen!

One distant day in Palestine  
a tapestry of strange design  
was placed before their marvelling gaze,  
and truly it did much amaze.  
In this rich cloth of weird design  
entangled filaments did shine,  
and Wroth the Weaver conjured then  
rare secrets from the Saracen  
and hid them in his weaver's heart:  
dark secrets of their magic art.

Wroth lived not far, by Merlesby Hill  
his weaver's loom was thrumming still;  
he met the priest one shadowy night  
and said, 'What you have heard is right,  
my cloth will lure with patterns wild  
a soul unsaved, a heart defiled.'

Guy Xavier smiled, 'God's troth' quoth he  
'I'll buy one for Lord Fentonby,  
whose walls, I trow, adorne'd are  
with weavings rare from near and far,  
whose pride will ever seek the test  
of being told he has the best.'

Forth went the wise priest with his gift  
it took him all his strength to lift  
as, placed athwart the wagon's girth,  
it trundled ominously oe'r the earth  
down rutted roads, past meadows wet  
an errand Guy would ne'er forget;  
'twas watched with awe by folk ill-fed  
and through the postern gate was led  
by guards who knew 'twas for their lord:  
Lord Fentonby, here comes reward!

John Brooking

## **Lord Fentonby**

### **A Medieval Fable.**

#### **Part II**

The years can't dim the holy truth,  
'tis tongue-told folklore now forsooth  
from pastured plains to distant sea,  
estates once held by Fentonby  
have passed long since to better men  
who hold no cruelty in their ken.

What did take place that fateful day  
which now seems many years away  
that caused Milord, his long hair streaming,  
to race, then totter, clawing, screaming  
like a blinded tortured ghost,  
and limp and race from door to post,  
and scream among his turret towers  
while servants feared those godless hours?

Unfurled and spread out on the floor  
the valance was observed with awe,  
its woven depths all blazing red  
with bloodied bodies of the dead.

A very vortex out of hell  
the twisting column rose and fell,  
the room was filled, as all could see  
with victims of Lord Fentonby.

Then those who looked with awe could see  
the damn'd head of Fentonby;  
in truth he had been well dispatched  
no body to that face attached!

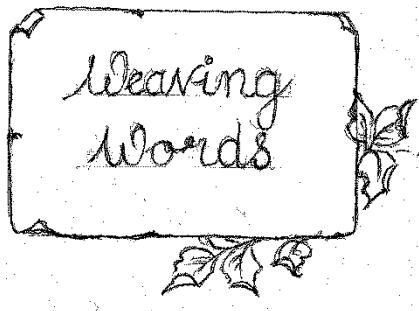
Then upwards soared most poisonous fire  
a scarlet scourge from Satan's pyre,  
and all the castle of Milord  
was vanquished every bank and board,  
every rampart, arch and stone  
engulfe'd was, and overthrown,  
and it was there for all to see  
their God's revenge on Fentonby.

Now gone the coarse and crooked lord,  
no more the blood to smear the sword,  
no more a bondsman in disgrace,  
no more a woman's frightened face,  
no soul, no one, no more need be  
in fear of cruel Lord Fentonby.

Karen Agutter

## **Karen Agutter**

There are many things in my life that I am passionate about. Family, of course, but I also love history, reading, and words in a more general sense. My writing is inspired by, and often combines my passions. I enjoy the challenge of trying to bring the past to life or attempting to describe emotions and nature, even at the risk of verbosity.



## The Anniversary

Ten years ago today two new phrases entered the vernacular or regional Victoria. A handful of words that have the ability to divide a life into two halves, and yet also bring people closer together. Words that simultaneously convey both pain and hope. Two variations of three small words that bookend so many conversations and that then, as now, offer an instant explanation, an unwritten understanding: before the fire/after the fire.

The physical scars of Black Saturday are easily measured in contrasting images: lush green rainforest transformed to a monochrome, 'ground zero' landscape. Today, despite nature's best efforts of recovery, the blackened trunks and dead Mountain Ash remain as constant reminders. Ten years on, the physical structures have been rebuilt, but something, or someone, is always missing, and it is these deeper scars that are harder to capture. Harder to understand, to rectify, to heal.

My family was lucky. Although dad would disagree and argue that knowledge, past experience, and preparation played an enormous part in their survival. We measure our before and after not in the deaths of immediate family, as so many do, but in the more insidious consequences. My brother, a life-long member of the County Fire Authority, was at the fire front leaving his wife and family to 'stay and defend'.

After the fire, he accompanied the identification teams. He has never returned to his former self. Like so many, his family is now divided by divorce. Within weeks, my mother showed signs of memory loss and the early stages of

## Karen Agutter

the dementia that has now taken her from us. And still, especially on anniversaries like today, my nephews and niece, just young children at the time, remember the friends they lost and show signs of the survivor guilt that still haunts many of the residents of the fire affected areas.

Today, ten years on, I am grateful. I am grateful for the family I still have, scars visible and ongoing. I am grateful to all of those who helped in so many ways and on this, the ten year anniversary of Black Saturday, I offer my profound thanks to the volunteers and professionals who continue to work in community centres, in men's sheds, in schools, across the fire impacted communities. Although, the phrases, before/after the fire, will always be a part of the language, increasingly they have become words of recognition, remembrance and healing.

*Written on 7th February 2019.*

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## **Liminal Imaginings of an Earlier Era**

In the distance a tractor hums, its constant purr only occasionally disrupted by the sound of a car speeding up the hill towards the nearby township of Castlemaine. Nearby, the blackbirds risk a quick peck in the freshly dug earth, seeking insects to temporarily quash the hunger of their young. The sun gently warms the air and the perfume of the nearby citrus tree floats silently on the breeze, trailing white petals in its wake. Ethereal spring gently returning winter to its rest.

Exhausted from my attempts to reclaim the garden

of the old cottage I lean softly back against the dry-stone wall. Spring's sensory lullaby entices me towards slumber. In this liminal state, neither truly awake nor asleep, a murmur of new sounds drifts toward me. Distant voices, the intermittent clang of metal on stone, the rocking of wooden cradles moving rhythmically to and fro.

A scene, like an old black and white movie, flickers across my closed eyelids. Centre stage, the river, no more than a series of shallow pools, services the needs of the miners. To the side of the works, small, freshly planted poplar trees peek out from above their wire guards and two young girls run between them, their long dresses dragging in the muddy tailings. Across the long wooden bridge, in the emerging township, figures move between the buildings and tents. In the distance, a man, stooped from the weight of the load he bears on a pole across his shoulders, struggles uphill towards the Chinese settlement.

My head suddenly jerks forward and as I raise my face, I again feel the warmth of the spring sunshine. In front of me the leaves of the towering poplar trees seem to shimmer as the breeze exposes their silver-white undersides and the river, its flow buoyed by thawing snow, moves rapidly past. Beyond the decaying bridge, the ruins of a once thriving community are scattered across the hill and the bitumen road inclines sharply as it passes the heritage listed Chinese cemetery.

Quite alone, to the tune of the tractor's hum, I return to my gardening.

## **Green Cape Lighthouse**

I sit facing east, anticipation keeping the worst of the cold at

## Karen Agutter

bay. The storm of the previous night no more than a memory. Below, the waves dance, their elegant lacey crinolines glide back and forth across the rocky foreshore. The ocean, uncharacteristically calm, far from its name and reputation: Disaster Bay.

As the starlight dims and the luminescence of the moon fades, a soft pink glow warms the headland, banishing the darkness. For a moment the world stands still, basking in the beauty of nature, rejoicing in the pre-dawn light. Peace. Absolute calm.

The transformation comes quickly now. The silence shattered as a cacophony of gulls rise to greet the new day. The soft light is banished by the iridescent ball of fire on the horizon. The sun shines resplendent, haloed by pure white light. The water seemingly divided by a river of molten lava.

On the headland the lighthouse reflects the sun's emergent rays. Soft pink. Warm apricot. Shimmering white. Growing in dominance with the light. Glorious. Proud. A monument to the ingenuity and determination of early settlers. Today, its only light is that cast from the reflection of the sun on its magnificent facade.

## A Convict Ancestor

*This is a snippet from a much larger work based on my family's history. My aim was to integrate the facts contained within archival documents (court records, contemporary newspapers, convict indents etc.) into a narrative, rather than simply provide a list/tree of names, dates and other information.*

Woolwich, England, 24 October 1833

Although the moon was barely waning the river was dark, hidden by the heavy clouds that had dominated the day. It was 4 am, low tide, and the 260-ton *Justitia* rocked gently on its moorings on the Thames. No longer seaworthy, for almost ten years the hulk of the ex-navy ship has served as a floating prison, holding the men who had been sentenced to transportation to Australia. However, the hulk's rhythmic motion offered no comfort to twenty-one-year-old John Gundell.

All around him hundreds of men, locked in cells across three decks, had succumbed to the sleep of the dead, exhausted from twelve hours of hard labour at Woolwich Warren (the Royal Arsenal). Each cell held up to sixteen prisoners, more than twice the number they were designed for, and even John's short five-foot two-inch frame did little to help him settle in such gross overcrowding.

Although his body ached, John, a ploughman by trade, was not tired enough. Nor was he, as yet, immune to his surroundings. He had been transferred to the hulk from Hertford Gaol just three days before and the stench of the bodies packed in around him – many diseased and barely alive – penetrated deep within him and made it difficult to breathe.

## Karen Agutter

Gaol fever (a form of typhus) and dysentery was rife. The mortality rate averaged thirty per cent.

The coarse slop clothing he had been issued was already stiff from dirt and sweat. The chains around his ankles dug deep into his flesh, wounding him and making infection even more likely.

John's stomach lurched and grumbled. The mouldy hard biscuit and Thames water they had been given the night before had done nothing to staunch his hunger or maintain his health. His mind was drawn back to the geese he had stolen, his mum, brothers and sisters around the table. Hearty food, so scarce since the death of his father months before. He gazed at the tattoos of an anchor and a dog on his left arm remembering past times ...

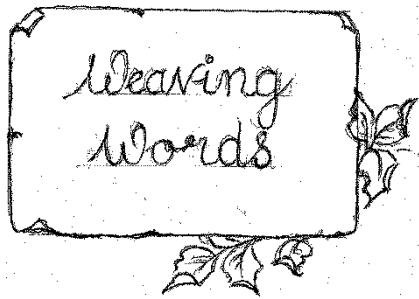
[John's time on the hulk, the 'voyage to nowhere' as it was often called, continued until April 1834 when he was transferred to the *John Barry* for the four-month trip to Van Diemen's Land.]

Christine Christopoulos

## Christine Christopoulos

I am constantly writing, even though words do not always make it onto paper. Everyday life presents me with opportunities for stories and opinions, but not necessarily the occasion for putting pen to paper.

This year has been my *Annus Horribilis*; my time has not been my own and creativity has been sucked dry. But, I console myself knowing that the words and ideas are circulating in my head or, have tucked themselves away in a convoluted brain fold somewhere ready for that moment when ideas, creativity and paper will come together again.



## Words

Cyclophosphamide. Carfilzomib. Dexamethasone. Words that were once a foreign language - meaningless, unpronounceable, threatening - now slip easily from my tongue and take their places in my new lexicon: the language of Cancer. There are many more words in my new lexicon; they are easier to pronounce, more recognisable. We have a second new lexicon: the language of Renal Failure. Haemodialysis. Peritoneal dialysis. Fistula. These words sit amongst every day words - kidney and toxins and phrases like controlled fluid intake. Acronyms abound in both lexicons - AL, ESKD, CAPD, APD...

With each new procedure and each new explanation come more words to be added to the lexicons - after being “googled” for definition and meaning.

But the technical terms for the diseases – without more ordinary words – do not convey the devastating effect the diseases impose on a person’s lifestyle.

Haemodialysis really translates as: Gone are the days of “I’m just going up to the golf club for some putting practice” or “that tree needs pruning”. Days of joyful sunshine are now spent in rooms with strangers all tethered to machines that beep continuously. No sooner does one patient’s machine issue its sing song summons to a nurse than another one calls. Nurses move confidently from machine to machine, responding to the silent words flashing on the touch screen. With a simple tap on the screen the beeping stops; an IV bag is removed, a drug inserted into a line, blood pressure taken. After listening to this orchestral arrangement over the past three weeks we no longer look at each with eyes wide

Christine Christopoulos

open reflecting unspoken words, “What’s gone wrong?”

The sessions always finish with words that I stumble over because like too many I am a fence sitter when it comes to God. After every session though I am on His side as I pray, “Please let this work.”

Christine Christopoulos

## **Greek Holy Water an Indian Saint and Lourdes**

*Wodka Gorbatschow* the label reads  
an interesting souvenir from a trip to Greece.  
But why? I thought but did not ask.  
It's Holy Water the answer  
as though she could read my thoughts.  
A smile of thanks,  
I hope not condescending.  
Use it make his coffee.  
Recoiling briefly I agree.  
Thoughts of dead goats in the bottom of some mystic's well  
displaced the image of roiling Greek coffee,  
heat kills bugs, my comfort my hope.  
*Science will prevail.*

A man of science of logic,  
of deep faith announces:  
My wife's great great aunt Mariam Thersia  
mystic religious; a saint to be proclaimed  
the Vatican will be my forum for prayers to her God,  
and for you my patient.  
*In case science fails.*

A pilgrimage to Lourdes for out man of science.  
In that shrine crowded with prayers of intercession  
he will offer one more.  
*In case science fails.*

