

Seniors' Stories

Volume 8



FRONT COVER: ART OF AGEING EXHIBITION 2016

Louise Hawson

Rosemary Kariuki

I met “Big Mama Rosemary” when I was commissioned to photograph inspiring older people. This is a portrait I took of her outside her house in Western Sydney.

Rosemary is a survivor, having fled Kenya in 1999 to escape violence. Since then, she has dedicated her life to Sydney’s African community, helping women escape domestic violence and deal with financial issues.

Today, Rosemary is a highly respected community leader, working as a multicultural liaison officer for the NSW Police in Sydney’s Western suburbs.

It was an honour to photograph such a highly respected community leader who was recognised as a Local Hero at the 2021 Australian of the Year awards.

Acknowledgements

This collection of 100 stories is the eighth volume of Seniors' Stories written by seniors from throughout NSW. The theme of this year's edition is 'Celebrating Diversity', and each story reflects this theme in its own unique and inspiring way. NSW Seniors Card would like to thank the 100 authors whose stories are published in this volume, and the many other seniors who contributed to the overwhelming number and quality of stories we received. We would also like to thank Colleen Parker and the project team from the Fellowship of Australian Writers NSW Inc., Multicultural NSW for the translations, Art of Ageing Exhibition and NSW Seniors Festival images and those involved in the design and printing of the book.



A message from the Premier

Welcome to the eighth edition of Seniors' Stories, shining a spotlight on the wisdom, talent and ability of our extraordinary seniors in NSW.

The stories in these pages provide a unique and invaluable insight into the lives of our oldest citizens and the contributions they make every day to families and communities across NSW in diverse and sometimes unexpected ways.

These are stories that might otherwise be hidden away and lost. In preserving and celebrating them, we cherish and affirm the dignity of the storytellers too, passing on their legacy to current and future generations.

The truth is, our oldest citizens are an integral part of our community fabric – the backbone of so many of our voluntary organisations and the affectionate heart of homes, families and neighbourhoods across NSW.

The Seniors' Stories initiative is just one of the many ways the NSW Government seeks to recognise and value the experiences and continued contribution of older people in NSW, building connections between young and old, while helping older people stay active, healthy and socially connected.

This book offers a dazzling portrait of our State in all of its extraordinary diversity; a treasure trove of history, wit, wisdom and colour. I congratulate and thank everyone who contributed to its production, especially the many older citizens who have shared their stories.

I have no doubt you will thoroughly enjoy reading, reflecting, and learning from this year's edition of Seniors' Stories.

Dominic Perrottet MP

Premier

A message from the Minister



I am delighted to introduce the eighth instalment of Seniors' Stories and would like to congratulate each writer for their contribution.

As the Minister for Seniors, I am incredibly proud to undertake this responsibility and represent your voice in Government. Our community is stronger thanks to the contributions made by our seniors. When seniors are active and involved in the community, everyone benefits.

Seniors Card and Senior Savers Card members were invited to contribute an original story around the theme 'Celebrating Diversity'. We were overwhelmed by the literary talent of seniors across the state who submitted their stories.

Telling stories is an age old tradition in all cultures; it is how we pass down knowledge and history through generations. By writing and telling stories, we gain an appreciation of the diversity that exists in our local communities.

Seniors' Stories Volume 8 is just one way of recognising and valuing the experiences of NSW seniors and building connections between the young and old and encouraging older people to stay active, healthy and socially connected.

Whatever your age, I hope you enjoy and are inspired by this wonderful collection of short stories.

The Hon. Mark Coure MP
Minister for Seniors
Minister for Multiculturalism



Foreword

My name is Abla Kadous, and I am 73 years old.

I am the President of the Islamic Women's Welfare Association and have been volunteering in the Inner-West Sydney community for more than 35 years. I was honoured this year to be chosen as the 2022 NSW Senior of the year. I only achieved this award because I was able to share my story with others who valued it. Everyone's story should be valued in this way.

I have always believed that through writing and telling our stories, we learn so much about different people, their lives, their cultures and experiences. This is especially poignant this year, considering that the theme for this publication is "Celebrating Diversity".

Being a senior myself, someone who was born in Egypt, and migrated to Australia at the age of 19 with my parents and 5 siblings, I have so many memories to share with my 5 children and 12 grandchildren. I have done this for years, by telling them many stories of my time growing up in Egypt and what it was like to arrive in 1968 to Australia as an immigrant with little English and no knowledge of this new country.

Living in Australia for the past 54 years has made me understand that each individual is unique. Although we all differ along the lines of race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, political beliefs or ideologies to name a few, what I have learned is that this diversity enhances creativity and can change the way we think. Problems are more easily solved in groups by bringing together different opinions, knowledge bases and points of view, through reasoning and examining different perspectives.

Dr. Katherine W. Philips said: "We need diversity if we are to change, grow and innovate". Diversity is worthy of celebration as long as we work together to eliminate discrimination in all its forms, and recognize that despite our differences, we share one very important element: Humanity. Peace and Harmony will only happen in a community when our hearts say: "It's OK to be different".

I would like to congratulate everyone who has openly and willingly shared their story in this publication, and hope we can all learn something from the experiences shared.

Abla Kadous
NSW Senior of the Year 2022
Sydney, Australia





From the Editor

It is my pleasure for the fifth consecutive year to welcome you to another one hundred inspiring and entertaining stories within the Seniors Card publications.

Volume 8 celebrates the diversity all around us. Feedback I have been receiving was prominent in stating that this 'celebrating diversity' theme is the most difficult the authors have had to tackle. But tackle it they did!

The amazing successful writers in this Volume found diversity everywhere. They pushed the 'envelope' and wrote about diversity in immediate families, in their heritage, among friends, work colleagues, cultures, food, travels, plant life, celebrations, sport, birdlife and much more.

As your Editor it is my responsibility to ensure your reading pleasure is of the utmost importance and part of this was, my decision on how the stories are placed in the layout of the books.

In keeping within the 'rule' of fairness to all, I decided early in my tenure, to use the alpha order of the writers' surnames. But having done that once I chose to not use that plan every time because the repeat writers whose surnames begin early in the alphabet would always receive precedence with their stories appearing up front in each Volume.

The point of explaining this is because I hope it assists the Minister, and our elected members to locate the successes by the writers in their communities. I chose to place the stories in postcode order to group them for easy searching by the readers as well. We all like to look up our family members, friends and neighbours and possibly even link up with other local writers.

In celebrating our release from Covid-19 lock up, I am pleased that so many writers still spent time to write their stories and share them for our pleasure.

Colleen Parker



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Ana, Bianca and Stella

De Las Rosas

REDFERN 2016

Tentatively she looked through the side of the blinds. It was sunny, maybe that was a good omen. She pursed her lips with determination. Okay girl, you can do it. She exhaled sharply as she remembered the verse. She softly sang: 'Go on girl, you can do it, it's only life there's nothing to it. It's just seeing through it from the inside.'

From the inside... she pondered over this. Within her, she felt in her twenties with a head full of doubt, always the wavering. But inevitably her dare would always manifest itself. 'Okay girl, swing those legs and get up', she told herself. She moved like a Houdini act and managed to slowly pull away from the sheet and blanket. The pain wasn't that bad. She sat up and swivelled to the side. She rocked herself to get momentum. She was afraid that her legs would give way. She quickly looked for her mobile. Yes, it was near in case she had to ring her daughter.

As she rocked, she brushed away the fear of collapsing towards the floor. Once again, the song came to her, 'Go on girl you can do it'. She smiled. A moment later she was standing and now with mobile in her bathrobe pocket, she made her small shuffle towards the bathroom.

In her tiny kitchen she looked out her window towards the highest treetops to see whether there was any wind. She nodded, a good day for laundry. Through small steps she reached her green comfy armchair. Strong black coffee in her hand, she marvelled at the joy she felt.

Soon Bianca would buzz. Bianca was her angel who washed the dishes, vacuumed, dusted, and spoke to her about her hometown in the old country. As Bianca described the narrow streets of Roma, she roamed across the beautiful Italian city again; walking freely and strongly. But soon their cup of tea was over. Bianca held her hand tight and looked at her in the eye as she said goodbye. She appreciated this. Bianca was a woman who really felt from the heart, who listened and spoke carefully. She sighed. She wished she had been more like that in her life. But injustices had always raged any serenity away.

She continued reminiscing until the orange-hazed windows reflected the early evening. It was time. She turned on the television. She had seen the debate until late the other night. Today was the day where the NSW Parliament would pass or reject a precious piece of legislation. Bianca had helped her put on her favourite lavender dress. She was wearing her lucky colour. She turned on the national broadcaster and waited for any news.

She must have dozed off. She shook her head, irritated. She looked at the television but her glasses had fallen and she could not see the bottom of the screen. Finally with glasses prodded firmly back on, alone in her flat; she cried out. She couldn't believe it ... it passed! She grabbed her mobile and rang her daughter.

'Sweetie, it passed, it passed.'

'Yes, Mamma. I saw.'

There was a pause as she knew that her daughter was torn. For years she had always said, 'Mamma, I don't know whether I could do it. I'm not strong like you.'

To which she'd reply, 'Ah sweetie, you had me as a Mamma and you put me in my place many times. You're a bull when you have to, piccola ragazza.'

Her daughter had always said, 'But Mamma – this, don't ask me to do this.'

But after today, it was different. She wouldn't have to ask.

Her daughter broke the silence, 'Mamma, you know this law will take time.'

'I know, I know.'

'Anyways Mamma, the cancer is long gone.'

'Yes, piccola, but this brings peace of mind.'

The next night she celebrated with her friends: Steffan from Bulgaria, Winnie from Indonesia, her oldest friend Jack and Bianca. Every fortnight they came to her little flat and they dined and wined. Life went on. She became a loving Nonna and life was sweet and hectic.

Two years later the cancer returned. At first, she felt numb but a month later she made her decision. The most difficult part was telling her daughter. They cried and clung to each other for the longest time. So, she wavered. She paused and tolerated every thudding pain, every sharp pain that shrilled every cell within her. Her daughter saw this but felt helpless until one day by chance, she heard her Mamma's favourite song. It's only life, there's nothing to it. She wiped her tears away and called her Mamma and whispered, 'Sono, pronto.'

'Sono, pronto? Me too, sweetie, I'm ready too.'

It was like she imagined it. There was delicious food, great wines, and much laughter. There were her friends, her daughter and the little ones. There were flowers too; so lovely. One by one they left. Her daughter stayed with Bianca but only for a while. Bianca watched as her friend sang her favourite nursery rhyme to her daughter for the last time ... 'Brilla brilla piccola stella.'

'Stella my girl, when you see a twinkly star, think of me.'

Mother and daughter embraced for the last time. They traced each other's eyes, nose and lips, like old times. Then Stella squeezed her hand and left.

Bianca came to her bedside, she talked to her about her old Roma for the longest time until quietly, her friend Ana, passed away.

Five years later Bianca got ready to work thinking of what Roma story she would use today for her new Italian client. But her brain clicked, her heart wavered and she burst out crying.

On the other side of town, Stella was grappling with a daughter who didn't want to go to the audition. She sat her down and she put on Marcia Hines' song. That night Stella looked at the night sky and swore that she saw a twinkling star.

'Ciao, Mamma, ciao.'

Ana, Bianca y Stella

De Las Rosas

REDFERN 2016

Vacilantemente miró por el costado de las persianas. Hacía sol, tal vez eso era un buen presagio. Frunció los labios con determinación. ‘Está bien, niña, puedes hacerlo’. Exhaló bruscamente mientras recordaba ese verso. Cantó suavemente: “Vamos niña, puedes hacerlo, es la vida, no hay nada más. Es como verla desde adentro”.

Desde adentro... reflexionó sobre esto. Dentro de ella, se sentía con veinte años, con la cabeza llena de dudas, siempre vacilante. Pero inevitablemente su brío siempre aparecería. “Está bien, niña, balancea esas piernas y levántate”, se dijo a sí misma. Se movió como en un acto de Houdini y logró separarse lentamente de sábana y manta. El dolor no era tanto. Se sentó y giró hacia un lado. Se meció para tomar impulso. Tenía miedo de que sus piernas cedieran. Rápidamente buscó su móvil. Sí, estaba cerca por si tenía que llamar a su hija.

Mientras se mecía, descartó el temor de caer al suelo. Una vez más, le llegó la canción, “Vamos niña, puedes hacerlo”. Sonrió. Un momento después estaba de pie y ahora con el móvil en el bolsillo de su bata, hizo su pequeño recorrido hacia el baño.

En su pequeña cocina miró por la ventana hacia las copas de los árboles más altos para ver si había viento; y asintió: era un buen día para lavar ropa. A través de cortos pasos llegó a su cómodo sillón verde. Con un fuerte café negro en la mano, se sorprendió por la alegría que sentía.

Pronto Bianca tocará el timbre. Bianca era su ángel, la que lavaba los platos, aspiraba, espolvoreaba y le hablaba de su ciudad natal en el viejo país. Mientras Bianca describía las estrechas calles de Roma, ella volvió a vagar una vez más por la hermosa ciudad italiana; caminando libre y vigorosamente. Pero pronto sus tazas de té quedaron vacías. Bianca sostuvo su mano con firmeza y la miró a los ojos mientras se despedía. Ana apreció esto. Bianca era una mujer que realmente sentía desde el corazón, que escuchaba y hablaba cuidadosamente. Suspiró. Ella deseaba haber sido más como ella en su propia vida. Pero las injusticias siempre arrasaron cualquier serenidad.

Continuó recordando hasta que las ventanas con reflejos naranja revelaron el ocaso temprano. Era hora. Encendió la televisión. Ella había visto el debate hasta tarde la otra noche. Hoy era el día en que el Parlamento de Nueva Gales del Sur aprobaría o rechazaría una preciosa legislación. Bianca la había ayudado a ponerse su vestido color lavanda favorito. Vestía su color de suerte. Puso la emisora nacional y esperó alguna noticia.

Debería haberse quedado dormida. Sacudió la cabeza, irritada. Miró la televisión, pero sus gafas se habían caído y no podía ver la parte inferior de la pantalla. Finalmente, con las gafas firmemente en posición, sola en su apartamento; gritó. No podía creerlo ... ¡se aprobó! Tomó su móvil y llamó a su hija.

“Cariño, se aprobó, se aprobó”.

“Sí, mamá. Lo vi”.

Hizo una pausa, ya que sabía que su hija estaba emocionada. Durante años siempre había dicho: “*Mamma*, no sé si podría hacerlo. No soy fuerte como tú”.

A lo que ella respondía: “Ah cariño, me tuviste como mamá y me pusiste en mi lugar muchas veces. Eres un toro cuando hay que actuar, *piccola ragazza*”.

Su hija siempre había dicho: “Pero *mamma*, esto, no me pidas que haga esto”.

Pero después de hoy, fue diferente. Ella ya no tendría que preguntar.

Su hija rompió el silencio, “*Mamma*, sabes que esta ley tomará tiempo”.

“Lo sé, lo sé”.

“De todos modos, *mamma*, el cáncer se ha ido hace tiempo”.

“Sí, *piccola*, pero esto trae paz interior”.

La noche siguiente celebró con sus amigos: Steffan de Bulgaria, Winnie de Indonesia, Jack su más antiguo amigo y Bianca. Cada quince días venían a su pequeño apartamento a cenar y beber. La vida continuaba. Se convirtió en una amorosa *nonna* y la existencia era dulce y agitada.

Dos años después el cáncer regresó. Al principio, se sintió atontada, pero un mes después tomó la decisión. La parte más difícil fue decírselo a su hija. Lloraron y se aferraron la una a la otra durante un largo rato. Entonces, ella vaciló. Hizo pausa y toleró cada dolor punzante, cada dolor agudo que arrancaba cada célula dentro de ella. Su hija vio esto, pero se sintió impotente hasta que un día, por casualidad, escuchó la canción favorita de su mamá. ‘Es la vida, no hay nada más’. Se secó las lágrimas, llamó *mamma* y susurró: “*Sono, pronto*”.

“¿Estás lista? Yo también, cariño, yo también estoy lista”.

Era como ella lo imaginaba. Había comida deliciosa, excelentes vinos y muchas risas. Estaban sus amigos, su hija y los pequeños. También había flores; encantador todo. Se fueron yendo uno a uno. Su hija se quedó con Bianca, pero solo por un corto tiempo. Bianca vio cómo su amiga Ana le cantaba su canción de cuna favorita a su hija por última vez ... “*Brilla brilla piccola stella*”.

“Stella, mi niña, cuando veas una estrella centelleante, piensa en mí”.

Madre e hija se abrazaron por última vez. Se trazaron los ojos, nariz y labios de la otra, como en los viejos tiempos. Stella apretó su mano y se fue.

Bianca llegó al lado de su cama, le habló de la vieja Roma durante bastante tiempo hasta que, en silencio, su amiga Ana, falleció.

Cinco años después, Bianca se preparaba para ir a trabajar pensando en qué historia de Roma usaría hoy para su nueva clienta italiana; y su cerebro hizo clic, su corazón vaciló y estalló en llanto.

Del otro lado de la ciudad, Stella estaba lidiando con una hija que no quería ir a un ensayo. La sentó y le puso la canción de Marcia Hines. Esa noche Stella miró el cielo nocturno y juró haber visto una estrella centelleante.

“*Ciao, mamma, ciao.*”

Perceptions ... perceptions.

I live in a huge, three-storey house with double garage, a basement, and a billiard table of greenery, flanked on both sides by pockets of rockery ablaze with natives rolling down to the harbour side. Two large balconies on levels two and three afford panoramic views of the cobalt expanse, its sometimes Hokusai waves and colourful spinnakers and sails. I could be boringly or proudly descriptive but I'm sure you can picture the habitat.

Endeavouring to delay the ageing onslaught, I'd recently started attending exercise classes, after which the women adjourn for coffee and chat. A newcomer, I tend to stay on the periphery of the group but, trying not to upset the group dynamic, chip in, conversationally, occasionally.

'My mother celebrated her 85th birthday last week', proffered a woman. She inclined her head in my direction. After a quick sip of her cooling latte, her pal advised, 'Mine is 83'. A quizzical look arched its way down the table to bull's eye me. Others then volunteered their mothers' ages – all in the late seventies or eighties.

Perhaps I'm slowing down, but it took me more than a few seconds to determine that these were not boastful, informative snippets ... rather anglers' hooks on which to catch the salmon of knowledge of my vital, senior citizen, statistic.

Unwilling to be caught, I vaulted across the weir of their subtextual questions and feigned blank non-intuitiveness. 'Oh, my mother died some years ago,' was my seemingly disinterested response.

Some decades had elapsed since anyone had expressed interest in my vital statistics – descriptive, or otherwise. To be truthful, it was my corporeal ones that used to be of then topical interest. 'Here comes *The Body*', my male colleagues would call out, as I walked down a corridor overlooked by their offices. But that was in 1975 in downtown Sydney. It rather annoyed me later to see that Time magazine had borrowed my 'soubriquet' to dub a certain swimsuit model, the statuesque Elle Macpherson, in 1989. I was too modest at the time to determine why I'd merited such nomenclature, but a former female colleague informed me years later that it was because of my tiny waist and seemingly well-proportioned body – measurements of which I'd never taken. 32 – 18 – 32? I've no idea.

Later, those exercising women tacked in another direction ... that of my residential address. Having snared that locational information, one commented, 'Why we must share the same cleaner. I do believe. I saw her coming out of your gate, about three weeks' ago.'

'Indeed.'

As the weeks passed, I realised that, occasionally, a member of the group would host a drinkies' session. Before long, it was my turn and there they were swimming, maybe sailing, upstream – or through foreshore waters – to anchor at my abode. They seemed suitably impressed by my antique furniture – inherited courtesy of my English grandmother – and particularly enthralled by a huge period piece of a safe, which I'd purchased at a deceased estate auction years earlier.

'Great to have a safe place for your jewellery and other valuables,' Jennifer murmured.

I was unresponsive.

'I believe we use the same cleaner,'
Hyacinth volunteered.

'You were born in Dover, I hear,' another cheerful female
enquired. 'When did you arrive in Australia, Polly?'

Whereupon I supplied the date of and answer to this
oft-asked question. So many of my acquaintances
and friends were born overseas.

'Upkeep of large houses, not to mention Council
rates can be punitive,' opined Daisy – not looking
at any member of the group.

Meanwhile, I was enjoying participation in the class
and was confident my back-of-the-class flaccid arm
lifting, bending, hopping, pugilistic thrusts were
affording me temporary endorphin highs and,
perhaps, helping to tone – however marginally –
my lumps and bumps.

'How old were you when you arrived in Sydney?'
the wicket Dorothy bowled adroitly, some days later.
I braced, batted my eyelashes, coyly twisted my
ring finger – with my mother's sapphire encircled
diamonds – rotated my hips seductively and
pitched a googly.

'Oh, I was a sweet sixteen,' was my mendacious
reply, as I headed for the door.

Other questions followed regarding the ages
of my children, which seemed to stump them.
Determined not to be caught out, I didn't murmur
an acronymic AMA – though perhaps they might
have thought I was referencing the Australian
Medical Association and not that of my advanced
maternal age. Fortunately, descriptions such as
'geriatric pregnancies' are now obsolete.

'How old are you, ma'am?' asked Donna, my
Filipina cleaning woman, a few weeks ago.

I didn't honour her with a reply.

'Are you older than Mrs Dorothy,' she pressed.

OMG. Was she going to ask when I'd lost my virginity
next? Suddenly I needed to answer my mobile.

Intrigued, I pondered over these incessantly
probing, personal, heuristically quantitative
inquisitions. Innocent or devious? Ah ... Many
use their date of birth for their passwords – albeit
safe passwords – and couldn't help chortling with
glee. You see I am what's genteel-ly described as
asset-rich, liquidity poor. My bastard of a deceased
husband gambled and used our home as collateral
against his business loans and losses, leaving me
in a state of impoverished indebtedness. Sell the
house or negotiate a reverse mortgage were my
alternatives? A two-option bucket list. I chose the
latter. Later, I'd also managed to get a personal loan
and extension for both my credit cards.

My fire-resistant safe does not hold gold bars,
inherited jewellery, or ancient silver ... rather
stacks of RM deeds, promissory notes, outstanding
and unpaid invoices, copies of bounced cheques,
all locked away from the curious eyes of my
go-between, gossiping cleaner. Its combination,
initially, were my ex's mistress's vital statistics, which
I found on his mobile when he died. Recently,
however, I changed it to Donna's date of arrival in
Oz. I'd noted it when she asked me to witness her
signature on her permanent residency application.

Meanwhile ... I'm busy keeping up appearances.

The Inseparables

Maree Hamilton

PHILLIP BAY 2036

Slatted amber light edges between the wooden slats of the blinds. I raise my head and can scarcely believe that my orientation clock is reading "Sunday/Morning/7.43/July 7th 2021."

My head drops back to the pillow and I lie completely still. I breathe deeply-4 in, hold, 8 out, until I feel centred, and sure of the reality of myself.

Today is my 75th birthday. And I am alone but alive.

Heightened voices and noisy movement as hundreds of first years enter the Clancy Audition for the first lecture of History 1. In twos and threes they come, hugging, waving, yelling greetings, finding their way to the middle and back rows, animated and excited.

I come alone, knowing no one, but so longing to start this new incarnation bravely. I force myself to walk to the front row. There is a solitary girl three seats in from the aisle with the most stunning auburn hair. I move into the seat beside her and she smiles warmly. "Hi I'm Niamh. So glad you have sat here. I was beginning to sweat and regret my boldness." Her accent was as startling as her hair, a rich Irish brogue.

"Hi I'm Veronica. Glad to meet." My sentence remained unfinished as, a dark skinned girl who looked older than us, asked in clear but accented English. "May I sit here?"

Niamh and I replied in unison "Of course" and as she sat, I could not draw my eyes from the deep sheen of her straight black hair tied back with a piece of fabric matching her yellow and orange shalwa. She introduced herself as Pritel Jarvandah. We all smiled, shook hands and Niamh and I began a whispered introduction but the Professor stood and silence descended.

At the end of the lecture we made our way to the Library Lawn. We pooled our diverse homemade lunches, exchanging timetables and sharing something of our lives and agreed to meet in the same spot next day. Thus began the trio of *Inseparables* – Niamh born Donegal Town, July 7 1947, Irish Catholic who had immigrated with her family of seven, when she was 5; Pritel, Pakistani Muslim, born 7 July 1946 in Karachi, who arrived in Australia as a baby when father was sponsored under the Colombo Plan to do civil engineering and me, only child of solidly conventional fourth generation Presbyterian Australians, born Sydney July 7 1948.

"Hey did I get that right – that both of your birthdays are July 7?" I asked.

"Yes" they chorused.

"But mine is too – that makes us almost sisters."

For me, an only child, this revelation was so exciting, I could hardly contain myself.

As the weeks rolled from Term 1 into Term 2 our lunchtime meetings became sacrosanct – only disasters forcing any one of us to miss our shared multicultural smorgasbord, and the security, solace and frivolity our little triad provided.

On July 7 we each brought more plentiful and elaborate platters. As we celebrated noisily, all three of us noticed, and not for the first time, a quite beautiful girl with curly golden hair sitting alone a little distance away. Without discussion Niamh jumped up, walked briskly toward her and said, "Do you want to have lunch with us? It is all of our birthdays today, though we are different ages." The young woman's delight was clear. And as they crossed the grass Niamh was almost pulling her new recruit. Proudly, in her lilting voice, Niamh proclaimed "This is Debra."

Greetings were shared and then Debra queried quietly, "But how did you know that today is my birthday too?"

Disbelief is too weak a word to portray our emotions; but I'm sure I was not the only one to think that day, and often since, that we are blessed with a friendship of some magic or miraculous aspect. Hence the triad morphed into a quartet. And what an inestimable richness this has been for half a century.

Debra was born in 1949, the granddaughter of Lithuanian Jews who had fled the Holocaust and settled in Johannesburg. But by 1960 her family were so dismayed at the growing atrocities of Apartheid that they became emigres again and settled in Sydney.

Our little posse represents four faith traditions, originates from four continents, has hair of four different hues, with cultures and cuisine of great diversity and an extraordinary range of talents and interests. Debra and Pritel are lifetime vegetarians and teetotallers whilst Niamh and I have shares in the Australian Meat Board and drink more than enough to make up for the abstinence of the other two. Niamh and Debra are gifted musicians, whilst

Pritel is an astonishing artist in several mediums and I delight in writing. Our shared love of both tennis and choral music surprised us all early on, but both interests have been the source of wonderful competition, exhilaration and camaraderie down the years.

We graduated together jubilantly on April 2nd 1970, by which time Niamh was engaged and Pritel was booking her ticket to holiday in Pakistan. We solemnly declared that day, we would celebrate together every July 7 till we were 90.

We attended each other's weddings and godmothered each other's children. Careers took differing paths – Debra – Librarianship, Pritel – Law, Niamh – Teaching and me – Journalism. But we maintained our deep connection by thousands of phone calls and rejoiced and supported each other through joys and tribulations. Our shared lunches in all manner of venues, continued uninterrupted until 2020.

In December 2020, whilst holidaying in her homeland, Pritel died from Covid in hospital, in Islamabad.

On Easter Sunday 2021, Niamh was killed by a hit-run driver as she was returning from Mass.

Debra succumbed to pancreatic cancer last week, 6 days before her 73rd birthday. Bereft and stunned I grieve the loss of my sisters but give thanks for all that has been.

As Australians we are proud to encompass such diverse celebrations from many nations who have graced our shores for decades and introduced us to their culture and customs. Our demographic make up comprises a diverse indigenous population, a British Colonial past and extensive immigration that has continued to grow.

My parents migrated to Australia from Egypt in 1948, post World War II, which saw a massive change as Europeans from across the globe came to settle into a better way of life and raise their families in the 'lucky country'. I grew up in the 1950s and have witnessed many changes in the last 70 years. Although my parents were familiar with the English language, having worked with the British in their country, we spoke both English and Maltese, their native tongue, in our home. It was important for us to understand our heritage, religious beliefs, culture and customs whilst being proud to be Australian.

I recall our corner shop catered for some food staples my parents were accustomed to which pleased them immensely. Over the years these differences are no longer in evidence, and our large supermarkets cater for our multicultural society. We openly enjoy the tastes of a variety of foods.

As a school child growing up in the 1950s and 60s we were not concerned with race or nationality, we played happily together and taught each other new games and shared different foods without any criticism or prejudice. Going to each others homes, hearing a different language spoken and sharing a meal together was an education in itself. It taught me that heritage is indeed important and something to be proud of.

When I had my own children at school, Multicultural Day was a special celebration. All were encouraged to dress in their national costume and take in a traditional dish from their home country. A buffet was set up for all to share in the various tastes from around the world.

We are fortunate to have so many restaurants from all the corners of the earth to indulge our taste buds. Irresistible aromas drifting out as we walk past enticing us to share a meal. Italian, English, Irish, Greek, German, Hungarian, French, Lebanese, Indian, Chinese, Thai or Australian cuisine, to name just a few. How tantalising to walk into a restaurant that is adorned in the countries' national colours enthusing their culture and serving a sumptuous meal accompanied with an assortment of beverages.

Having now reached a mature age I can look back and realise how much richer my life has been in knowing so many friends from different parts of the world, learning a few words of greeting in various languages and broadening my views on life.

To say I have been fortunate to visit many overseas countries is an understatement. Sharing first hand in their cultures, foods and places of interest intrigued and thrilled me. I returned home with renewed knowledge having witnessed people in their own environment, accepting us into their homes and openly exchanging stories of their homeland.

Accepting our differences as well as sharing common interests has helped to unite and educate me as an individual and my understanding of peoples' perspectives on life has encouraged me to broaden my horizons and enable me to fully experience change along with acceptance. Diverse backgrounds are crucial to growth of personal relationships and community acceptance.

The integration of migrants in our country has ultimately established a successful multicultural community. All nationalities are included equally regardless of cultural or linguistic backgrounds and are united by a set of core Australian values. Regardless of race, colour or religion we are all Australians.

We are now a land of mixed marriages, as one in two families have one parent born overseas. These families are fortunate to incorporate both nations' cultural experiences and appreciate their heritage.

Australia Day celebrations bring together the many different nationalities that call Australia home. People parading their colourful and varied costumes, makes it an eventful day. Outdoor concerts, community barbeques and the famous fireworks all add to the festivities.

The Vivid Light Festival also incorporates live music and depicts many moods at Circular Quay and the Rocks. This year it launches with 'First Light', a celebration of our First Nation's culture. The Sydney Harbour Bridge pylons form a stunning backdrop, illuminated by 'Sharing the Same Life Essence' in celebration of the Gadigal people and Country.

Chinese New Year is another festival that we all enjoy, such colourful costumes and traditions are astounding. The decorations mainly in red are magnificent, fireworks light up the night sky and families celebrate with reunion dinners. The lion and dragon dances have such flair and buoyancy incorporating rich and colourful outfits.

Through others diversity we become more aware of our own and pride ourselves in understanding and accepting the diverse cultures in our land today. Our perception of others is crucial to our creativity and the reality within our lives.

In celebrating our differences and versatility our nation is one to be proud of. Australia is a multicultural nation with cultural diversity being our greatest strength. We are all Australians.

In the mid 1950s, we lived in the, white bread, suburb of Beecroft, in Sydney's northern and leafy suburbs. At the time, it was quite distant from the city centre, separated from more inner suburbs by a now lost and forgotten, green belt, that we now call Marsfield and North Ryde, where market gardens dominated the landscape. Venturing into the city was a major event and often meant dressing up for a Saturday night birthday celebration at my father's club, Tattersalls, where my parents often danced to the gentle 4 piece dance band, while we children consumed, pink lemonades, and finished a meal with ice cream and chocolate sauce, or was that just me?

We had moved from Brisbane via Hobart back to Sydney as my father's career developed through the Public Service.

My family was no different to many post WW2 families, and sought after that a home in the suburbs with land enough to bowl a cricket ball or kick a footie. Beecroft was ideal for this. A small, very much anglo Australian suburb with a public school, a small and friendly shopping centre and all the usual array of local community gatherings around fetes, sport and church. The white Australia policy was still very much law, so diversity was rare. Perhaps the only local ethnics were the very ebullient Sam and Joe Napoli, the fruit shop owners.

The house my parents bought was a typical, California bungalow, single storeyed with a wide L shaped front verandah and a tack-on open rear verandah, later converted to a family room and bedroom.

The block of land was huge and, as the house had not been lived in for a number of years, was totally with an over grown and unruly garden, on probably half an acre of land.

The task ahead to clear and maintain must have seemed daunting to my parents, but to the task they took. While my memory is lagging, old home movies show us all out on the front lawn digging, pulling and replanting until a later movie showed green lawns and neat edged gardens, and indeed, a game of cricket with my grandfather Sid, rolling the arm under, in fact, to my very unskilled 6 yr old batting technique.

To get to this stage, my father needed help and that came in the form of Frank Tolloca – a hard working Italian immigrant who, like so many of his countrymen, worked 6 and 7 days a week in order to get ahead in their newly adopted country.

Frank had no English and so brought his 7 yr old son Tony to translate for him. It's hard for me to fully appreciate Tony's language skill and family responsibilities, though I feel certain he gained confidence and assurity from holding that role. Through the day while our fathers laboured through an overgrown and neglected garden, Tony and I played games together until he was called upon to translate new instructions.

At Christmas, as a family, we were invited to their inner city terrace which seemed to be alive with both people and food ... strange food, foreign food, Italian food! I often went hungry at these visitations as my white bread world just couldn't manage the taste and visual differences.

Probably 4–5 years later, Epping, a neighbouring suburb with a larger retail base, expanded from its one and only restaurant, the Chinese, Wing On, to gain what some might have said was a rather sophisticated Italian offering – The Purple Gondola! I'm not exactly sure how Italian Chicken Maryland or Chicken in the Basket were, but they were on the menu! I'm assured by my older sisters, that there were also various pastas on the menu, and of course, premade Cassata icecream for dessert.

Ten years later, and University days saw cheap and cheerful group meals held at a variety of up and coming immigrant restaurants along Glebe Point Rd, that seemed to be a constantly churning mecca of international gastronomy, from Greek and Italian, to Lebanese, to Thai and Vietnamese to fusion and modern Australian which seems to transcend the best of so many cultural cuisines. Each was washed down with an equally cheerful local wine of either rouge or blanc colouration, and the cultural experience often expanded to imbibing the heritage beverage of the country involved – Retsina for Greek, Chianti or Prosecco for Italian, Sake for Japanese, Thai whisky, Tiger Beer or shots of a revered Cognac at a multi course Chinese banquet.

Little by little, and through time, our tastes evolved and appreciation of the shift from that typical '50's meat and 3 veg', where flavour was added with a Brown or Tomato sauce, to a fusion (got to love that descriptor!) of ethnic food choices, cooking styles and a pot pouri of spices and sauces that added a myriad of nuanced, and most importantly delicious offerings.

With these cultural immigrations, came a demand for food varieties unheard of 'down under' as our mother's constantly deferred to traditional recipes – my mother's curry was a good example of the use of Keen's Curry Powder and sultanas – the use of sultanas escapes me as I've never had an Indian curry with sultanas!

Today, my 30 yr old' something children have a wider and far more varied palate for tastes, origins and flavours and, often look on with jest as I might nostalgically call for the Cumberland Pork Sausages and mashed potato if we're at a pub for dinner. I still hanker for a good Sunday roast with baked potatoes and often despair the loss of the Little Eaton Place in Mosman and its renowned roast beef and Yorkshire pudding Sunday specials!

My base is still quite solid, but I love that, as a nation, we have wholeheartedly embraced the plethora of cuisines, flavours and customs that our immigrant nation has been lucky enough to richly enjoy. We really do have the best of, and the fusion of, global gastronomy!

The Gathering

Elizabeth Newman

STANMORE 2048

It started off peacefully enough. The bowl of still water reflected the sunlight, a lone bee buzzing lazily nearby where a clump of dandelions had sprouted along the path. The Indian mynas flitted in the treetops, secure in their territory while the pigeons flocked on the grassy mound searching for feed left by the afternoon picnickers. A lone jogger pounded the path, puffed up the hill and disappeared from view.

Suddenly the stillness was shattered by the streak of ginger that bolted into the middle of the grassy area. The pigeons up and flew while Honey ran and sniffed and stopped and looked and then ran back to urge on her human companion. Jane was following along behind, the thrower firmly grasped in her hand.

'Go', she called as she hurled the tennis ball to the far side of the grass with Honey in feverish pursuit.

But before Honey could claim her trophy, Blackie's pelt dashed across from the shadows of the bushes and interrupted the chase. Blackie and Honey romped together, chasing and leaping with joyful exuberance. Soon the two were three as another small dog, Poppy raced into the fray and joined the playful tumbling.

It wasn't long before all the regulars had arrived. From the youngest to the eldest, they gathered in the sunshine. Balls were thrown, leads tangled and the aroma of home-made treats sent the canine companions dizzy with desire. Some leapt, some sat, some twirled on their hind legs, but all were focused on the tray of veggie victuals brought by Poppy's humans, Dawn and her dad. One by one Dawn administered the sumptuous delicacies to her adoring worshippers. All received; the nice, the naughty, the noisy. It was Christmas Eve, and none would be denied.

Meanwhile the humans were celebrating with their liquid refreshments disguised as coffee or cordial. The chat and cheer abounded, while they kept an eye on their canine companions. Flo and Catherine, the eldest humans, were sitting sedately on the bench in the shade watching the spectacle. They came every afternoon, weather and legs permitting, to get their share of doggy companionship. Fin, the youngest and most nimble human was high up in the adjacent play structure watching out for the council ranger. He'd been provisioned with lollies and chips as payment for guard duty. They hoped, that today of all days, the ranger would not interrupt their party.

Mick and Li-Min were comparing Yum Cha restaurants and wondering why Phil, their mate was late, while Shelly and Dinh were bemoaning the price of petrol when Fin's piercing whistle signalled danger. Dawn's dad, who was bragging about her latest sporting triumphs stopped mid-sentence.

'Here Poppy', he strictly commanded and quickly collared her.

Jane followed suit by shaking her treat tin, and harnessing Honey when she obediently came. Kelly successfully crash-tackled Blackie, but Fin's sister was chasing after Scamp who had raced off into the bushes, no doubt investigating some scent or other. That dog would not have been out of place with a monocle. Scamp's lead was trailing behind him, but sister Sarah just couldn't grab it.

Mick and Li-Min exchanged a look and stood their ground as their dogs gleefully romped alongside the ranger, escorting him into the grassy area.

'Now I've warned you lot before', the ranger said as he strode down the path, his tummy preceding.

'And a Merry Christmas to you too,' Kelly muttered under her breath.

'You've got a perfectly good dog park over there,' the ranger gesticulated vigorously to the enclosure on the other side of the playground, 'but you keep allowing your dogs on the grassy area.'

All the humans chimed in as one, 'It's too crowded, there's no grass, they're all the big dogs.'

But before the ranger could reply, a cacophony of horns started up as 'late' Phil rode in on his wheelchair, his ageing, rescue greyhound trotting amiably beside him. Phil always sounded his horn when crossing the road to the park.

'Merry Christmas everyone.' Phil's grey Akubra was slouched low over his face, but his wide smile shone out as he casually said 'How's it going folks? Ah Russel, you've come to join us for our special Yuletide ceremony.'

'Now Phil, why haven't you got that dog on a leash.' Russel, the ranger was not going to be cajoled, even at Christmas.

Before anyone could answer, Scamp raced out from the bushes with a now very grubby and dishevelled Sarah running after him, her eyes glued to the end of Scamp's lead.

'Grab him, please!' Sarah implored and, in her hurry, she ploughed straight into the very long legs of Russel the ranger, fell back on her bottom and burst into tearful laughter, mortified with embarrassment.

'You alright Sarah? What did you do Mister?' yelled Fin as he hurtled to his sister's aid, oblivious to what had gone before.

'This is exactly why dogs need to be on a leash!' Russel's voice was adamant and rising in pitch.

But as though to outdo him, suddenly a tremendous ruckus of snarling and growling sounded from the enclosed dog park. Human voices could be heard commanding and calling, vainly trying to settle the pack.

'Now Russel, I think you're needed over there.' Phil's voice was low but commanding and with one finger he raised the brim of his Akubra and looked Russel straight in the eyes.

Russel looked around at the waiting group. The gentle dogs had gathered around the sniffing Sarah and were nuzzling and licking her so that her tears had turned to giggles.

'It's all right Russel, we'll look after her. We know it wasn't your fault.' The eldest, Catherine, cooed persuasively as she propped herself up with her walking stick.

And with that, Russel turned and strode off up the hill to where he was really needed.

'Merry Christmas everyone,' whispered Jane mischievously as she pulled out a bag of goodies from her sack. 'Anyone for Gingerbread? Suitable for dogs and humans!'

It all started that night, three years ago...

It was only one missile, but it shattered the evening silence and the front window into a crazy spiderweb of fractured glass. Johannes rose unsteadily from his armchair and carefully avoiding the glass strewn carpet, edged his way to the other window and peered out into the evening gloom. In the narrow street between the blocks of high rise flats, no one was in sight. He scratched his head to think why anyone would want to do such a thing. Surely he had no enemies. Yes he lived alone now and had these past 6 years since he lost Irmengarde but he kept to himself and was unlikely to raise the ire of anybody. In fact, he had become almost hermit like in an attempt to shield himself from the intrusive changes in the neighbourhood. The new families with their foreign food and strange customs, the different clothes they wore, the different speech, it was all too much for him. Easier to stick to the old ways, the familiar food and habits.

Johannes flicked on the lamp and went to look for the stone which had so rudely disrupted his evening. To his surprise it was not a stone at all but what appeared to be a large marble around which a piece of paper was tied. Intrigued in spite of himself, Johannes undid the string to reveal a crude note.

The two words scrawled on it sent shivers down his spine. Was it a genuine call to action or a hoax to lure him from his sanctuary? *Help me!* A simple message which sent distant memories reverberating uneasily. Johannes sank into his chair, his heart racing. Despite everything that had happened in the past, he could not let this cry go unanswered and felt forced to investigate. He considered the place where the marble had landed and calculated the projectory of its flight, coming to the astonishing conclusion, *that it had been thrown from above.* Turning the paper over he discovered that it had been torn from an envelope on which the number 306 could still be faintly read.

Embolded by curiosity as much as adrenalin, he pushed open the front door with its tarnished brass plate and ventured onto the street, all the while puzzling over the significance of the number. Suddenly, it occurred to him that it was most likely the number of the flat where the missile thrower lived. The buildings followed a simple numbering system with the flats on the ground floor like his, designated with the prefix '1', and the second floor dwellings being preceded by '2'. It became obvious that Flat 306 was on the third floor almost overlooking his. With his chest beating unbearably, he climbed the stairs and knocked on the door of Flat 306.

A woman called out: 'Praise Allah that you have come! I fell and injured my leg. It hurts so much. I am here alone, no phone reception and my son and his family have gone away for the week!'

Entering the flat, Johannes felt he was in Aladdin's cave. The bright room glowed with many colours and was bedecked with jewelled fabrics on the table, across the chairs and the window. For a moment he felt uncomfortable in this alien place until his eyes met Farah's soft smile. He stuttered: "You need an ambulance" and with a dexterity that surprised him, Johannes descended the stairs and called an ambulance from the phone box below. He returned to stay with Farah and while they were waiting, he found himself opening up to her, a well of loneliness surging within him, threatening to engulf him. Farah listened gently then in her turn told him of the struggles in getting to Australia and the peace which they had found.

In spite of her injury, Farah hospitably insisted Johannes help himself to the halva which she had been preparing before she slipped and fell. Johannes eyed the offering suspiciously before good manners compelled him to try it. The cake was delicious, like nothing he had ever tasted. A strange thought entered his head. How could he have lived so long in this place and never realised what treasures awaited. His thoughts were interrupted by noisy people rushing up the stairs and into the flat. It was Farah's son, Ahmad and children come to check on her. "Madar, when you didn't answer your phone yesterday we were worried and came back home". The children's striking blue eyes betrayed their anxiety. Farah was able to reassure them that the ambulance was on its way before explaining the presence of her good Samaritan. Smiles all round then. Ahmad offered to make some tea and returned with glasses of Beh Limoo and dates. Johannes hesitated before taking a tentative sip and discovering to his delight that the tea was very refreshing and to his taste.

The conversation and jokes were flowing freely until interrupted by the arrival of the stretcher bearing ambulance officers. After they had taken Farah downstairs, Ahmad turned to Johannes: "You have been a real blessing to us today, my friend. I am glad that you live so close by, just over the road. You must consider this to be your second home. You will always be welcome here. Our children will be the grandchildren you never had and you will be the companion my mother has been lacking". Hearing these words, Johannes heart was full. Not only had his eyes been freshly opened to a wonderfully different culture but he had embarked on a genuine, life long deep seated friendship.

A few months later Johannes plucked up the courage to knock on his neighbour's door where he received a warm welcome from a young Turkish couple. A new adventure had begun.

Opportunity from Crisis

Karen Masters

ARTARMON 2064

In 1956, a student-held revolt against the Soviets began a crisis that spread to Austria and Yugoslavia. After the borders closed, 200,000 refugees were resettled in 37 countries and as it happened, my stepfather was one of them. He and several friends chose Australia.

When he was younger, Attila had wanted to be a film producer, but with the student revolt in 1956, he fled Budapest along with 200,000 men and women. Leaving behind, families, friends, businesses, livelihoods, and material goods. 3,000 of these refugees migrated to Australia.

Attila ended up in Sydney. Physically, with its overly bright, wide sky, and warm climate, multitude of beaches and unique flora and fauna, Australia was so different he might have been on another planet. Culturally it lagged the rest of the world, appearing to be a colonial backwater, but he and his friends were welcomed, made to feel at home and soon they found their niche. They rolled up their sleeves and began businesses.

Then Attila met my mother, he hardly spoke a word of English, but it seemed that language was not a barrier. They both strove to bridge the linguistic divide. Most of his friends were older than Mum and their wives helped her to develop a sophisticated fashion sense. She bought a Hungarian cookbook and made such delights as goulash, stuffed peppers and cabbage, stuffed crepes, paprikas chicken and cauliflower soup. A local restaurant became a Sunday lunchtime favourite with its' European meals and enormous flavourful cakes.

The immigrant telegraph was where we found electricians, plumbers, builders, architects, lawyers, dentists, doctors, lawyers, and fashionistas. Everybody in the Hungarian community knew everybody else and if we weren't 'in the know,' we could easily discover skilled tradesmen. They lived and worked in cliques but also with and alongside most of the Anglo-Irish Australian populace. Their energy and drive to make a better life for themselves rubbed off on the rest and like the other post war migrants such as Greeks, Italians, Polish, and Chinese they brought languages, food, history, and knowledge.

I attended a multi-cultural primary school, and my best friend was a Greek Australian; born in Australia to Greek parents. I happily went with them to every wedding, birthday, easter and church ceremony in that big community.

One of my dearest friends emigrated to Australia from Hong Kong, his family have expanded and made successful livings as restaurateurs and food producers. Recently many people from all over the globe call Australia home and we are richer for it.

How things have changed since '56.

The blatant racism that was prevalent back then is no longer permissible. We encourage and embrace peoples of all races, creeds, and abilities.

Though fortunate to be raised in a multicultural household. I treasured the English heritage on my mother's side, but I was able to adopt the attitudes of those who were also fortunate to call this place home. Australia was a golden land of opportunity and the people who formerly faced disaster, helped the fledgling colony become what it is today.



The first time I laid eyes on her I knew there was something special about Edwina. Around forty years of age, she had enrolled as a mature-age student at university where she attended my post-graduate lectures in Economics.

There seemed to be an unspoken familiarity whenever we exchanged pleasantries outside the lecture theatre that left us feeling quite naturally comfortable in each other's company. So, one afternoon, it came as no surprise when she casually informed me that she was taking her mother out for an Indian dinner on the twenty-first of March to celebrate International Harmony Day, and if I would care to join them.

"Unfortunately, we're not allowed to fraternize with our students," I explained, "but thank you for the invitation, anyway. I hope you have a wonderful evening."

"Don't be silly," she whispered. "International Harmony Day is all about us bringing together our many differences. Remember the motto, 'Everyone Belongs'. We won't be fraternizing. We'll be celebrating!"

It would be an untruth to say that I was not inwardly thrilled when she so openly rejected my refusal to join them.

"Also," she added, "you could help us navigate our way through the myriad exotic dishes that the Maharajah's Table serves up. After all, you *did* mention your Indian roots."

That part was indeed true. Each year I introduce myself to my class by giving them a brief outline of my qualifications, professional memberships, hobbies and, of course, my ethnic background, having been born to Anglo-Indian parents in Calcutta and educated by the Jesuits before migrating to Australia in the mid-seventies.

"That's settled, then." She looked at me, smiling broadly. "We'll see you at seven. Maharajah's Table. Don't be late."

I was early. The dim lights and soft, caressing tones of an Indian flute accompanied by a sitar did little to calm my nerves.

When Edwina eventually arrived with her mother, I stood to greet them – and froze. The colour drained from my face as I held a chair to steady myself. With my heart pounding in my ears, the only words that filtered through were 'meet Helen'.

My dear, dear Helen. Lost to me a lifetime ago simply for being the daughter of a policeman, a drunken sergeant who one night bailed me up against a wall with a pistol pressed to my throat, threatening to blow my brains out if I again so much as laid a brown-skinned hand on his only child.

For Helen's sake and mine, I faded into obscurity.

And now she held my hand, locked her eyes on mine. Like dominoes flipping backwards, the years regressed ever so quickly to that summer when we met: she, an eighteen-year-old checkout operator at Franklins; and me, in my mid-twenties, pursuing a university degree and dirt poor. They were happy times, for sure, but poverty and a drunken policeman also ruthlessly inhibit preserving such happiness.

As if unaware of my initial reaction on meeting her mother, Edwina spied some members of her study group across the room and hastily excused herself to meet them, promising to be back in a few minutes.

"Robert," Helen half-smiled. "It's so good to see you after all these years. Tell me all about your family."

Sensing what she was alluding to, I held out my left hand. "See, no ring. Never was."

"Why?" she asked tenderly, leading me to an answer I knew she wanted to hear.

"Because I chose to cling to a memory."

Her eyes took on a faraway look. "We were forced," she said, "to travel different roads, you and I. My father was a domineering bully who controlled every aspect of my life, thinking I was unfit to make my own decisions. A hasty marriage lasted only a couple of years before ending in disaster. He ruined my life."

"I'm sorry to hear that." I meant it, for both of us had been robbed of so much. "Is he..." I paused.

"Dead," she said flatly. "Two years ago. And I never even shed a tear." Her mood suddenly brightened. "You know," she reminisced, "all those years ago when we were young and carefree, you told me you loved the name Edwina. It proved a good choice. Edwina has been my rock all these years."

"And did her father agree to the name, too?"

Helen's eyes bore through mine, searching out the very depths of my being, and in that silence telling me all that I needed to comprehend, for the heart knows truths that, even when left unspoken, speak the loudest.

I felt myself elevated to a plane the height of which left me light-headed and euphoric. I knew then, that the chemistry had always been there, lying in hibernation through those decades of unnecessary heartache.

I lowered myself gently back to reality.

"My retirement is not very far away," I declared. "Perhaps our best years are behind us and it would be foolish to pursue an unfinished dream so late in our lives."

Helen made as if to answer, but was interrupted by applause from the guests at a nearby table. A dashing young Australian man had just proposed to his Asian girlfriend, slipping a huge diamond engagement ring on her finger, to more applause.

Just then, Edwina picked her way through the seated diners, heading back to our table, and I beheld her radiance through eyes that had loved and lost and now could love once more.

"Does she know?" I enquired timidly.

"She's got your genes. What do you think?" Helen teased.

As Edwina settled herself next to me, she stroked my hand and gave me a smile that melted my heart.

It was at that moment clarity hit me like a brick. I leaned over, pulling Helen closer to whisper in her ear, "Most folk exchange rings as a sign of their commitment to each other. We have no gold wedding bands. We don't need them, for we have a treasure far more precious. We have Edwina."

Antiques made me quickly adapt to Life in Australia

Fan Zhang

CHATSWOOD 2067

On a sunny weekend, I walked slowly along the stalls at a Sunday Market in rural Australia. I stopped in front of a bric-a-brac stall with many old porcelain and silverwares.

I saw some silver-plated spoons in a basket and I bent down to look carefully. I found two spoons with British hallmarks. Amazing they are sterling silver, but only marked 50 cents per piece like a silver plated.

I took the spoons and said to the owner: "These are sterling silver. You are selling them too cheap."

The owner, a woman in her 50's, took these spoons and looked closely. "Oh yes, sterling silver! How do you know the English hallmark?" She asked me in surprise because I am a Chinese.

"I moved here from China for a few years and learned a lot about European antiques." I answered.

The lady handed me two spoons: "You can keep them if you like."

"How much?" I asked. "Fifty cents for each." The lady was smiling.

It's my turn to be surprised. I said, "Too cheap."

She said, "I have never seen a Chinese who understands English hallmark. I am pleased. Please keep them." I paid two dollars.

But is it two dollars? No, it's much more valuable in my mind. What an honest lady! What a kind Aussie!

Actually I have been a collector of European antiques for some years. It started with an interesting thing.

My family moved to Adelaide from Shanghai, China in 2007. We run a fish and chips shop at a hilltop suburb in southeast Adelaide. I could only understand a little English at that time.

One day a customer chatted with me. He had run an antique shop for over 30 years. This attracted me because I collected antiques in China, but only Chinese antiques. I used to be a director of a Collectors' Association.

The man said, "If you buy something from my shop you don't need to pay. I can buy food of equal value from you." Good idea, this is the old way of bartering.

I am excited to say, "Okay, today you don't need to pay for the food. You just keep the account. When I go to your shop, you tell me how much money I can use."

After that, he always gave me big food orders and I got many old items. We both felt like we were getting 'a free lunch'.

However, there were not many old Chinese items in his shop, so I started buying European antiques.

Any antique contains a great deal of historical and cultural knowledge. And the antiques from different European countries represent a variety of national cultures. These are all unknowns for me. From then on, I started a difficult journey to learn European history and culture.

I used to go to the various antique auction rooms and shops in Adelaide. I asked many questions like a schoolboy and I searched huge amounts of information on the web.

After a few years, we moved to Melbourne. I still kept going to all antique auctions, shops and fairs.

My main collection had always been European antiques, and I had become an expert on European antiques in my circle of friends. I had a collection of thousands of old objects from various European countries, which include porcelain, silverwares, clocks and many more.

We moved to Sydney in 2013, perhaps related to antiques, which was also an interesting story.

While living in Melbourne, we travelled to Sydney and visited the Sydney Antique Centre. There were 60 shops with a variety of antiques in the Centre.

A 1910 Chinese silver coin in a cabinet caught my eye. I told the middle-aged woman owner that I wanted to see the coin. She handed me the coin happily and cautiously. I held it and checked carefully with a magnifying glass.

After a couple minutes, I returned the coin to the lady. She asked me, "How is it?"

I thought for a while, said, "It's hard to tell you."

She said, "Don't worry, just tell me the truth."

I took the coin again and said, "It's a copy, not the real one."

She was a little surprised, "Can you please tell me why?"

I seriously told her five reasons why it's fake. She listened carefully.

When I handed it back to her, she stopped me and said, "You keep it". I hesitated, not sure what she meant. She went on to say, "It's free for you."

"No, no, you can still sell it here." I immediately refused.

She said, "I can't keep selling this fake silver coin."

"But I can't take this coin for free." I said.

She said sincerely, "You taught me a lot about coins today."

So I kept this fake silver coin with sincerity in mind. Someone told me, 'nice place nice people'. After one year, we moved to Sydney.

From Adelaide to Melbourne, then Sydney, European antiques have always been with me. In Sydney, I found more antique auctions, shops and fairs.

After I fell in love with European antiques, my English improved very quickly, and I also gained a deeper understanding of the history and the culture of Europe as well as Australia. Over the past 10 years, my wife and I have driven all over Australia and visited over a thousand towns and villages for our small fashion jewellery business. At the same time, I also admired the natural scenery and local customs all over Australia, and met many Australian friends. These are all thanks to studying the Antiques.

收集古玩讓我快速融入澳洲

張帆

CHATSWOOD 2067

又是陽光明媚的週末。我悠閒地漫步於一個澳洲鄉村週日集市。眼前是一連串攤位，各種商品琳琅滿目。一個舊貨攤吸引了我的注意。這裡擺放著不少看似老舊的瓷器和銀器。我停下腳步，目光隨即開始打量起來。

我看到籃子中有一堆鍍銀的調羹，於是便彎腰湊近，想看個仔細。它們中間躺著兩支調羹，背面打有英國印記。毫無疑問，這兩支調羹是純銀的，但是它們的標價才0.5元，就是鍍銀的價格。這讓我很是驚訝。

我拿起調羹，對攤主說：“這兩件是純銀的，你賣得太便宜了。”

攤主是一位50多歲的中年婦女。她接過調羹，眯眼仔細地翻看了一番。“哦，是的，這可是純銀的！你怎麼會認識這些英國印記？”她驚訝地問我。或許是因為她看到我是個中國人。

“我從中國移民來這裡已經有好多年了，也瞭解了很多歐洲古玩的知識。”我回答說。

“要是你願意，”女老闆把那兩支調羹遞到我的眼前，“它們就是你的了。”

“多少錢？”我問道。“五毛一個。”老闆娘面帶微笑地對我說。

現在輪到我驚訝了。我說：“這也太便宜了。”

她說：“你是我遇到的第一個認識英國印記的中國人。我很高興。這兩件就屬於你的了。”我高興地遞上2元。

但是，這僅僅是一筆價值2元的交易嗎？不是。在我的心中，它的價值遠遠超過金錢。這位攤主就像無數澳洲人一樣，如此誠實又是如此善良！

實際上，我收藏歐洲古玩已經有很多年了，而且這一切的開始還有一個有趣的故事。

2007年，我帶著全家從中國上海移民到了阿德萊德市。我們最初在阿德萊德東南部一個山頂郊區經營一家賣炸魚和薯條的快餐店。當時我只能聽懂一點英語。

有一天，店裡來了一位顧客。他開始和我閒聊起來，說他是一家古玩店的老闆，已經經營了30多年。這讓我十分好奇。我在中國就是一名古玩收藏家，但是只對中國的古董有所研究。我還曾經擔任過一個收藏家協會的理事。

這位顧客對我說：“如果你來我的店裡買東西，你不需要付錢。我可以來你這裡買同等價值的食物作為交換。”真是個好主意。這可是傳統的易貨方式。

“好吧，從今天開始，你來這裡買東西也不需要付錢。”我很興奮地與他達成了協議，“你記個賬，下一次我去你店裡的時候告訴我可以花多少錢。”

從那天開始，他總會來我這裡訂好多吃的，而我則是淘到了許多舊貨。我們倆人都覺得“這是免費的午餐”。

他的古玩店裡沒有很多中國舊貨，所以我開始購買歐洲古董。

其實每一件古玩都包含著大量的歷史和文化知識。來自不同歐洲國家的古董代表了各民族的文化。我以前對這些一無所知。從那時開始，我便走上了研究歐洲歷史和文化的艱難旅程。

我不斷走訪阿德萊德各個地區的古玩拍賣行和店

鋪。我就像一個小學生一樣，見人就提問。與此同時，我還在網絡上搜索研究大量的資料。

幾年後，我們全家搬到了墨爾本。我還是一如既往，不斷走訪古玩拍賣會、店鋪和集市。

歐洲古玩始終是我的收藏目標。在我的朋友圈中，我儼然已經是一名歐洲古玩收藏專家了。我有數以千計的收藏品，來自歐洲各個國家，包括瓷器、銀器和鍾錶等。

2013年，我和家人搬來雪梨定居。這次搬家也許還是與古玩有關，說起來同樣是一個蠻有趣的故事。

在墨爾本生活期間，我們常常來這裡參觀雪梨古董中心。中心匯集了60家商鋪，各種各樣的舊貨令人目不暇接。

在一次參觀中，一枚放在陳列櫃中的1910年宣統銀元引起了我的注意。我告訴中年女店主自己想欣賞一下這枚硬幣。她很高興，小心翼翼地吧銀元遞給了我。我把它拿在手裡，還用放大鏡仔細地查看了好幾遍。

過了幾分鐘後，我把銀元還給了店主。“覺得怎麼樣？”她問我。

我有些猶豫，想了想然後說：“不知道應該怎樣告訴你。”

她說：“別擔心，只要告訴我事實就行了。”

“這是件贗品。”我再次拿起銀元說，“這不是真貨。”

她聽到後有點驚訝。“你能告訴為什麼嗎？”她好奇地問。

我於是非常認真地列出了五個理由，告訴她為什

麼我認為這是一件“假古董”。她認真地聽著。

我說完後便把銀元遞還給她。她擋住了我的手說：“你把它留著吧。”我猶豫了一下，不知道她是什麼意思。“這個我送給你了。”她接著馬上說到。

“不行，不行。你還是可以賣這件舊貨。”我立即婉拒了她的好意。

她說：“我不會繼續賣這枚假銀元。”

“但是我也不能免費拿走這枚硬幣。”我表示。

“你今天教會了我很多有關銀元的知識。”她的話語中無不顯示著誠意。

於是，我收下了這枚假銀元，同時也收下了她的一份真誠。“真是好山好水養好人呢！”在一旁觀看的人們也對店主嘖嘖贊許起來。一年之後，我們決定再次舉家遷移，來雪梨定居。

從阿德萊德到墨爾本，再到雪梨，這一路上歐洲古玩始終是我的忠實伴侶。我在雪梨發現了更多的古玩拍賣會、古董商鋪和集市。

自從愛上歐洲古玩後，不僅我的英語有了突飛猛進，而且我對歐洲和澳洲的歷史以及文化有了更加深入的理解。在過去的十年中，我和妻子為我們經營的時尚珠寶生意開車走遍了澳洲各地，到訪過的城鎮和鄉村不少於一千個。我們在這些旅行中有機會領略澳洲各地的自然風光，體驗當地的風俗習慣，同時結識了無數澳洲朋友。這一切都要感謝研究古玩為我開啟的生活之路。

One day, my husband was yelling in the garden. I rushed out and saw him talking to two lorikeets, who were eating our persimmons.

"Hey, you can't do that, you silly birds."

I was not happy either as we had planned to use our persimmons as an offering to our ancestors during Lunar New Year celebration. We tried to shoo the birds away. To our surprise, the husband-and-wife birds showed no fear at all. They ignored us and continued eating. My husband started to shake a branch to scare them. They responded by jumping (not even flying of which I knew they were fully capable) up to a higher branch and started to eat another persimmon.

"Back then in Vietnam, a child would have dealt with these birds with a slingshot," grumbled my husband.

"Don't even think about it! Eating fruits is what lorikeets do, isn't it? Let me deal with this. I'll ask our neighbour, Suzanne."

When Suzanne heard my husband's complaint, she said to him, "Van, don't you remember our Vietnamese adage 'The nurturing land attracts birds'? Just like Australia attracts us, your home attracts the birds and they have chosen your home as theirs. It's a sign of good luck and they are a gift that nature has given you."

I bought Suzanne's idea straight away. Yes, each bird in our garden is a nature's gift.

My husband, however, was not so convinced, "But they are eating all our fruits." Then he turned to me. "I'll let you deal with your 'gifts'."

I agreed and got some bags to cover the persimmons and left some for the two lorikeets – everybody won. When the persimmon season was over, I started to feed the lorikeets with sunflower seeds. I eventually managed to have the lorikeet couple to eat from my hand. Then more and more birds turned up at feeding times. I found that having birds in your own garden was a great joy. It was relaxing, recharging and even meditating. My husband, nonetheless, seemed to be indifferent about these gifts.

His indifference changed one day while he was gardening. Suddenly, a lorikeet was jumping next to his legs while making "wish, wish, wish" sounds. The lorikeet was so persistent that my husband had to stop gardening for fear of harming it.

He called me for help, "Get this silly bird away from me. I can't do anything with this green thing hopping around my legs."

I was busy, so I asked my husband to feed the bird himself. Reluctantly my husband did. When I joined my husband, the second bird was also there. I convinced him to feed the two birds by hand. My husband did and to his surprise, only the male approached his hand while the female maintained a body length distance behind. The male picked up the seeds and then turned around and dropped them in front of his wife.

My husband exclaimed in delight, "Did you see that, the guy's trying to protect his wife?"

Then he looked puzzled, "But why don't they trust me?"

"Don't worry darling, they are just not used to you yet." I comforted my slightly too sensitive husband. "Keep feeding them and soon they will be your friends."

From that moment, we would spend time together feeding birds, sometimes up to forty of them.

“Hey, we have lots of gifts in our garden, darling!” My husband eventually admitted with a grin.

It seemed good words went around within our feathered friend community. One day last Spring, two husband-and-wife magpies approached us and started singing. I got them some minced meat. When I fed the female, she would not swallow the food, instead she asked for more. Then when her beak was full, she flew away towards a big tree nearby. We tried the male magpies. The same thing happened. After a little while, both birds came back to collect and deliver food again, and again. We then realised that the two magpies had babies and that they were getting food for their children. It was so astonishing and moving to watch the committed couple working hard to feed their young, without even once consuming the food for themselves.

Then a stranger thing happened. After several rounds of Uber’ing, the father came back first with a small ‘bag’ in his beak, he landed and dropped the ‘bag’ in the grass and started singing. Soon after that the mother came back with a second small ‘bag’, dropped it near her husband’s and then both sang together beautifully. I was totally puzzled with no idea what was happening. But somehow, my husband understood exactly what was going on (or so he thought).

He analytically explained to me, “Can’t you see that? They wanted to thank us for feeding their children, so they brought us a “Thank You” gift.”

A gift from birds? This was way too far-fetched to me. I got closer to the birds to inspect, I burst into laughing when I found out what ‘gift’ we were given.

I turned to my husband, “You can have all the gift. I’m fine without it.”

My dear husband, undeterred with what the ‘gift’ really was, continued with his analysis, “Don’t you remember the idiom ‘It’s the thoughts that count’ or our Vietnamese adage ‘It’s not what is given, it’s about how it’s given’? Whatever the two birds gave us doesn’t matter, what matters is they really meant to say ‘Thank you!’”

He then murmured, “This could be a good story as an entry for the Seniors’ Stories Volume 8 competition.”

“Really?” I protested. “You shouldn’t submit your first ever writing entry talking about two sacs of bird poos as a gift from your birds. It would be very weird!”

“Why not? You just don’t know anything about creative writing,” the First Year Senior (and Cranky) Citizen of Australia retorted.

Món Quà

Van Giang

LINDFIELD 2070

Bữa đó, vừa nghe ông nhà tôi lớn tiếng trong vườn, tôi lật đật chạy ra coi thì thấy ổng đang la hai con chim lorikeet¹ (két bảy màu). Hai con chim này đang ăn mấy trái hồng dòn của chúng tôi.

Tôi cũng không vui lắm vì chúng tôi tính để dành mấy trái hồng cúng ông bà nhân dịp Tết sắp tới. Vợ chồng tôi ráng xua đuổi hai con chim, nhưng cặp vợ chồng két này cứ tỉnh bơ ăn tiếp, coi vợ chồng tôi như không có ở đó. Ông nhà tôi liền rung nhánh cây hồng để hù hai con chim. Tụi nó nói chẳng những không thèm bay, mà còn tà tà nhảy lên một nhánh cao hơn, rồi tiếp tục cắn một trái hồng khác.

“Hồi xưa ở Việt Nam hả, chỉ cần một đứa con nít với một cái giàn thun là hai con chim này coi như vãn tuồng,” ông nhà tôi lầm bầm.

“Ông này, đừng có nghĩ như vậy nghen! Chim thì lúc nào cũng thích ăn trái cây. Thôi, để tui đi hỏi ý kiến Suzanne.”

Khi Suzanne, bà hàng xóm người Việt, nghe ông nhà tôi phàn nàn, bà nói, “Ông Văn nè, bộ ông quên câu ‘Đất lành chim đậu’ rồi hả? Thì cũng như nước Úc là đất lành nên tụi mình mới qua đây sống, mấy con chim chọn vườn nhà ông để ở là điểm tốt lành cho gia đình ông. Tụi nó là quà của thiên nhiên tặng nhà ông đó.”

Tôi nghe là khoái ý kiến của Suzanne liền. Chí lý, mỗi con chim trong vườn đúng là một món quà từ thiên nhiên.

Ông nhà tôi thì có vẻ nghe không lọt lỗ tai, “Từ từ rồi mấy con két này sẽ ăn hết trái cây trong vườn cho bà coi.” Rồi ổng quay sang tôi. “Tui để bà lo vụ mấy ‘món quà’ của bà.”

Sau đó, tôi lấy bịch giấy bao hết mấy trái hồng và chừa lại một ít cho hai con két – coi như ai cũng có phần. Sau mùa hồng dòn, tôi bắt đầu cho hai con két ăn hột hướng dương. Ít lâu sau, hai con chim này bắt đầu ăn thức ăn từ bàn tay tôi. Rồi càng ngày càng có nhiều chim đến ăn chung. Dần dà, tôi cảm thấy có nhiều chim trong vườn là một điều rất hay, nó giúp tôi thư giãn, phục hồi năng lượng và thậm chí như là tập thiền. Vậy mà ông nhà tôi vẫn cứ thờ ơ với những món quà từ thiên nhiên này.

Sự thờ ơ của ổng bắt đầu thay đổi nhân một buổi làm vườn nọ. Bữa đó tự nhiên từ đâu có một con lorikeet đáp xuống, rồi nhảy lòng vòng quanh chân ổng và kêu “quít, quít, quít”. Nó kiên trì hết sức đến nỗi ông nhà tôi phải ngừng làm vườn vì ổng sợ đập nhầm nó.

Rồi ổng kêu tôi, “Bà làm ơn đuổi con chim này đi chỗ khác cho tui nhờ. Có cái cục xanh xanh này nhảy lò cò quanh chân tui, làm cái gì cũng hồng được.”

Lúc đó tôi đang bận nên tôi nhờ ông nhà tôi cho con két ăn giùm. ổng miễn cưỡng nhận lời. Tới lúc tôi ra vườn xem thì con két vợ cũng ở đó. Tôi liền xúi ông nhà tôi thử cho hai con két ăn từ bàn tay của ổng. Khi ông nhà tôi chìa một nắm hột hướng dương về phía hai con chim, chỉ có con trống nhảy tới, còn con mái thì giữ một khoảng cách đằng sau con trống. Rồi con trống mổ vài hột hướng dương và xoay mình nhả ra trước con mái cho nó ăn.

Ông nhà tôi khoái chí kêu lên, “Nè, bà có thấy con chim trống đang cố gắng bảo vệ vợ nó hôn?”

Rồi ổng đổi giọng với vẻ lúng túng, “Mà sao tụi nó hồng tin tưởng tui hả?”

1 Chim Lorikeet hay Rainbow Lorikeet là một loài Két Bảy Màu sống ở Úc.

“Ông đừng có lo, tại tụi nó chưa quen ông đó thôi.” Tôi an ủi ông chồng hơi bị nhạy cảm của mình. “Ông cứ tiếp tục cho tụi nó ăn là tụi nó thành bạn của ông liền.”

Kể từ đó, vợ chồng tôi bắt đầu cùng nhau cho chim ăn, có khi cho cả đàn gần bốn chục con ăn.

“Bà nè, nhà mình bây giờ có thiệt nhiều món quà từ thiên nhiên hén!” Cuối cùng thì ông nhà tôi cũng chịu công nhận “quà” với một nụ cười tươi rói.

Hình như là “Tiếng lành đồn xa” trong cộng đồng bạn bè lông vũ chung quanh nhà tôi. Một ngày xuân năm ngoái, có hai vợ chồng magpie² tới chỗ chúng tôi và bắt đầu hót líu lo. Tôi liền lấy một chút thịt băm cho tụi nó ăn. Khi tôi đưa miếng thịt vào mỏ con chim mái, nó không nuốt mà đòi thêm. Rồi sau khi ngậm đầy thịt, nó bay về phía một cây lớn gần nhà. Chúng tôi cho con chim trống ăn thì nó cũng làm y chang như con mái. Một lát sau, hai con magpie quay lại xin thêm thức ăn rồi bay đi, và tiếp tục như vậy thêm nhiều lần nữa. Khi đó chúng tôi mới biết là hai vợ chồng magpie này có chim con và đang kiếm mồi cho con của tụi nó. Nhìn hai vợ chồng chim chăm con mà vợ chồng tôi hết sức cảm động và ngưỡng mộ, nhất là khi thấy cặp vợ chồng này không hề ăn một chút thịt nào.

Thế rồi một việc kỳ lạ xảy ra. Sau mấy vòng Uber³ thì con chim trống quay lại với một bọc nhỏ trong mỏ của nó. Nó đáp xuống rồi thả cái bọc nhỏ trên đám cỏ và bắt đầu hót líu lo. Một lúc sau đến lượt con chim mái cũng làm giống y như vậy. Cả hai con chim đồng ca một bài hết sức lạnh lốt và điêu luyện. Tôi ngạc nhiên quá chừng, không biết chuyện gì đang xảy ra. Vậy mà ông nhà tôi lại làm ra vẻ hiểu rõ ngọn nguồn của chuyện này.

Ông cặn kẽ giải thích cho tôi nghe, “Bà hồng thấy sao? Vợ chồng chim này muốn cảm ơn tụi mình đã cho tụi nó thức ăn nuôi con, thành ra tụi nó mang quà tới tặng mình.”

Cái gì? Một món quà từ cặp vợ chồng chim? Nghe viển vông như chuyện “Ăn khế trả vàng”. Thế là tôi bước lại gần hai con chim để tìm hiểu thêm. Sau đó, tôi phá lên cười khi biết được “món quà” chúng tôi nhận được là cái gì.

Tôi quay sang ông nhà tôi, “Cho ông hết món quà đó. Tôi hồng có cũng được.”

Ông chồng yêu quý của tôi, vẫn không nản lòng với việc ‘món quà’ thực sự là gì, tiếp tục giải thích, “Bà hồng nhớ câu thành ngữ tiếng Anh ‘Tấm lòng thành mới là đáng kể’ và câu ‘Cho cho không bằng cách cho’ của người mình sao? Hai vợ chồng chim tặng mình cái gì không quan trọng, cái quan trọng là tụi nó muốn nói ‘Cám ơn!’”

Rồi ông trầm ngâm, “Đây có thể là một cốt chuyện hay để tham gia cuộc thi Seniors’ Stories năm nay.”

“Cái gì? Tôi phản đối liền. “Ông đừng tính chuyện nộp truyện ngắn dự thi đầu tiên của mình, nói về hai vợ chồng chim ‘tặng’ ông hai bọc phân của mấy con chim con để cảm ơn. Nghe dị hết sức!”

“Tại sao không? Bà thì biết gì về chuyện sáng tác văn chương,” người Công Dân Cao Tuổi Năm Đầu Tiên (và Ưu Cần Nhân) của Úc, vạ lại.

2 Chim Magpie thuộc nhóm Ác Là. Loài chim này được đánh giá là một trong những loài chim thông minh nhất. Chim non, khi còn trong tổ, bài tiết ra những bọc nhỏ, sau đó chim cha mẹ sẽ tha bọc này bay đi và thả ở nơi khác để giữ gìn tổ chim luôn được sạch sẽ.

3 Uber là tên một công ty công nghệ cung cấp dịch vụ vận chuyển, bao gồm thức ăn, ở Úc, giống như Grab ở Việt Nam.

礼物

Van Giang

LINDFIELD 2070

有一天，我听到丈夫在后院里大声地叫喊着。我赶忙跑出去看，只见两只澳洲小鸚鵡正在偷吃我们的柿子，而丈夫正在生气地骂它们。

“嘿，该死的鸟儿啊，你们别吃我们的柿子呀！”

我也觉得很不高兴，因为我们已经打算在农历新年把柿子拿来拜祖宗。我们尽力地想把这两只鸟儿赶走。奇怪的是这对鸟儿看来一点儿也不怕我们。它们继续地吃着，根本就不理睬我们。丈夫拾起一枝树枝，用劲地挥向鸟儿。它们连飞也不飞，只是跳了跳，跳上了一枝更高的树枝去吃另外的柿子。

“在越南，孩子们就会用弹弓去对付这些鸟儿！”丈夫发牢骚地说。

“你想也别想啊！吃果子是鸟儿的本性，不是吗？让我来处理吧！我去问一问我们的邻居，苏珊娜。”

当苏珊娜听到我丈夫的抱怨时，她对他说：

“范，你忘了我们的越南格言‘肥沃土地吸引鸟儿’吗？像澳大利亚吸引了我们，你的家吸引了鸟儿，它们选择你的家作为它们的家。这是好兆头，它们是大自然给你的礼物。”

我真喜欢苏珊娜的这个看法。说得对！在我们院里的每只鸟儿都是大自然献给我们的礼物呀！

丈夫却不服气，“它们要把我们的果子都吃光了！”他对我说：“那你自己去处理你的‘礼物’吧！”

我找了些小袋子，把柿子一个一个地盖起来。剩下两个没盖的留给鸟儿吃。这不是两全其美的办法吗？

柿子成熟的季节过后，我就买了一些葵花籽来喂这对鸟儿。渐渐地，它们开始飞到我的手掌上来吃。接着，在喂食时候，越来越多的鸟儿也开始出现在我们的后院里了。这给我带来了一种极大的快乐。跟这些鸟儿在一起，我感觉得非常轻松，身心愉快，甚至进入了一种冥想的境界。丈夫呢，他反而还是无动于衷，毫不动心。

一天，他这冷漠的态度忽然被改变了。当他在打理院子的时候，一只澳洲小鸚鵡跳到他的腿旁，发出“叽叽”的叫声。这只小鸚鵡非常执着，丈夫怕伤害到鸟儿不得不停下手里的活儿。

他大声地叫我去帮忙：“快把这只傻鸟弄走。这只绿家伙绕着我的腿跳来跳去，我没法干活。”

当时，因为我正忙着，所以我就叫丈夫自己喂鸟。他不情愿地做了。当我去后院看他，第二只鸟儿也来了。我说服丈夫用手掌喂那两只鸟儿。他照做了，但奇怪的是，只有那只雄鸟肯上他的手掌，而那只雌鸟则保持着身体距离。雄鸟捡起葵花籽，一粒一粒地送到雌鸟的面前。

“哎呀，你看到了吗？这小子真会照顾‘妻子’呀！”丈夫高兴地说。

然而，他又感到迷惑：“为怎么它们不信任我呢？”

“亲爱的别担心！它们只是对你还不习惯。”我安慰着我这个有点儿过于敏感的丈夫，“只要你继续喂它们，它们很快地就会成为你的朋友。”

从那天起，我们开始一起喂鸟，有时多达四十只鸟！

“亲爱的，我们后院的‘礼物’可真多啊！”
丈夫终于欢乐地接受了。

大概好消息传到了我们这些羽毛朋友的圈子里。在去年春天的一天，一对喜鹊夫妇走近我们，开始唱歌。我把一些碎肉给它们。当我在喂雌鹊时，她不但不把食物吞下去，还向我讨求更多。在嘴里塞满后，她便飞上附近一棵大树。我们试着给雄喜鹊食物，结果也是一样。过了一会儿，这对鸟儿飞回来，一次又一次地接和送食物。后来我们发现这是一对有孩子的喜鹊，它们是在为孩子们送食物。看着这对夫妇辛苦地养活孩子，自己一点食物也没有吃，我们甚是惊讶和感动。

然后发生了一件奇怪的事情。几轮往返后，喜鹊爸爸先是嘴里含着一个小“包”回来，他落地后，把“包”丢在草地上，然后开始唱歌。不久之后，喜鹊妈妈也带着另一个小“包”回来，也把它放在丈夫那个“包”的旁边，然后一起唱着美妙的歌。我完全不知道发生了什么。但不知为何，我丈夫却完全明白发生了什么事（或者说他是这么认为的）。

他分析着向我解释说：“你看不出来吗？它们想感谢我们喂养他们的孩子，所以它们给我们带来了“感谢”的礼物。”

鸟给我们礼物？这怎么可能！我走近这两只鸟一探究竟，一看明白鸟给我们的礼物是什么，我就忍不住大笑起来。

我对丈夫说：“礼物都留给你吧，我不要了。”

我亲爱的丈夫不管眼前的礼物是什么，继续他的分析，还说：“你不记得‘礼轻情意重’这句话吗？不管这两只鸟给我们的礼物是什么，都是在表达它们的谢意。”

然后，他喃喃自语：“这故事可以去参加‘长者的故事’第8卷的比赛呀。”

“你是认真的吗？”我抗议道：“你不应该第一次参加写作比赛就说两包鸟粪是鸟的礼物，这也太离谱啦！”

“为什么不可以？你呀，就是对创意写作一无所知，”刚成为澳洲老年人的丈夫反驳道。

I am really into celebrating 'diversity'.

At the local pub with beer, Stanthorpe with a 'rough red', my son's place with a German beer (brewed in his backyard) and a crisp Riesling at my sister's restaurant Byblos.

I guess that says it all. A typical Aussie viewing diversity as it relates to our life.

When people ask me 'where are you from?'.
I answer: Delegate.

I love the quizzical looks that briefly flick over their faces. The world globe quickly makes a whisper in their minds. Not here.

Am I ashamed of where I come from?

Not at all (although many people would think Delegate would be the pits for being 'from').

I think the question is the problem. No-one seems to ask a blonde, blue eyed woman where she comes from. My ex-pommy partner never gets asked. Why me?

I found out about my family's origins when we moved to Sydney in 1966. I met my Uncle Tom and immediately saw he was a 'wog'. Heaven forbid! Up until that time, I had learnt to live with being called 'darkie'.

It would appear my background family come from Lebanon with a little mix of Finland to make it interesting ... during the 'Gold Rush'.

I questioned my parents and found out the existence of Lebanon. Education in Delegate was very basic. The local Catholic school consisted of two rooms. The 'big' room and the 'little' room.

Education by a couple of mean Irish nuns involved rote learning by writing out the Lord's Prayer, reciting the Ten Commandments and reading from the Catechism: Who made the world? God made the world. How many gods are there? There is but one God etc. And we had to locate and label all the main rivers in NSW.

We learnt Irish songs and Irish dances. Never sang, God Save the Queen.

For a long while I thought I was Irish.

But the nuns were too ferocious and picked on innocent me. Told me I was as bold as brass. So I stopped being Irish when my parents sent me to boarding school in Glebe.

There, I was failing miserably in being made into a lady, capable of being a suitable wife to a professional man. At one stage, I was marched off to an interview with Mother Superior who informed me I was like a girl from the back streets of Woolloomooloo. My parents were told that the school would not accept my enrolment for the next year.

I was enrolled in a school in Kensington and put on probation. There I found a population of girls that came from very diverse backgrounds and I was at home. When I informed them my Great-grandparents came from Lebanon, I was asked by one of the girls if that made me a Lesbian.

We didn't have google in those days.

At the end of my schooling, my parents decided to move to Queensland and I enrolled into University. There came the usual questioning, "Where are you from?" When I responded "Sydney", the effect was immediate.

I was given all the reasons why Qld is better in football, finance and fun. I found to my amusement I was considered to be a daring and sophisticated thing coming from Sydney. Perhaps that's why on my first date there I was taken to a strip club.

I was also introduced to the very big Lebanese community. And there I discovered my heritage.

They were brash, opinionated, fun loving, risk taking and don't forget loud. And very committed to family and each other. My unmarried older sister soon had a conga line of suitable suitors who would try to meet with my father to try and make an arrangement of some sorts. Funnily enough, I wasn't even considered at all.

Dad took to hiding in his bedroom until they were gone.

I feel privileged coming from such diverse backgrounds as Delegate, Sydney, Brisbane and Lebanon. Most of my family have made a pilgrimage to Lebanon. Except me.

I have done the travel bit to Europe, UK and America but now I just want to travel Australia because there's a large portion of the rest of the world here. People from every corner of the world come here and we meet them; share a drink of good cheer at the pub, beach, park bench or desert with backpackers, other travellers and locals. Attend a boisterous, laughing, singing, dancing Lebanese Wedding. Listen to tradies and labourers using broken English while sharing their food with each other at smoko. Talking of home where in another life they were pianists, doctors etc in places like Croatia, Serbia, Turkey, Syria.

What's not to celebrate with 'diversity'?

Despite an imminent expiry date planned, I am valiantly standing tall and grand with my roots embedded in the earthen vestiges of bygone indigenous peoples and immigrant settlers who have been laid to rest for eternity in my leafy cemetery locale. Nonetheless I aim to sustain my arboreal guardianship of this memorial park to my dying days. My leafy boughs will continue to deliver protection, solace, peace and shade the markers in this historic site.

However, I fear my demise is certain as I have a foot in, not only one, but many graves. Last week the local tree lopper and arborist, visited my spot, and after slapping me affectionately, painted a fateful yellow cross near to some nesting hollows on my broad girth.

I was seeded by a locally favoured *Corymbia aparreinja*, commonly known as a ghost gum, undoubtedly conveyed in the droppings of a bird. Today I have smooth bark of a graveyard pallor with towering limbs linking my roots in the earth six feet under to the hereafter above my treetops, and am proud that I am conveying souls of all faiths and cultures to their final resting abodes.

My longevity has allowed me to monitor burial ground undertakings over many decades. I have survived residential expanses, bushfires, damaging storms, kids climbing my boughs, deliberate ring barking and even insect infestation. I've witnessed many multifarious but unhurried and heart-rending corteges celebrating the traditional rites of wide-ranging religious and ethnic affiliations. Passing by my site on their final earthly pilgrimages these have commemorated European nobility, nudists, murderers, famous Olympians and sportspeople, politicians, local pioneers, petty criminals, well known writers and heroic military personnel.

I noticed that when this necro-boutique burial ground was plotted, an assembly of irenic religious leaders were each allocated a section of the cemetery. The leading two portions were Church of England and Roman Catholic, whose clerics, as with tradition, handled all funerals for decades as the site was then regarded as God's acre. So originally there was no secular or cultural options in this consecrated Christian church controlled burial ground, so families were compelled to adopt one or the other. But now there are many other subdivisions devoted to all community groups, albeit segregated, but this is only detectible above ground.

The grave digger tells me that today there are over 24 ethnic and religious groups which are represented in this microcosm of the local community. And so, my home is a cultural melting pot connecting all nationalities through the commonality of death and thereby serendipitously guaranteeing a spiritual bond for eternity.

When you scratch the surface, colour, creed and culture are not visually evident six feet under and is rarely apparent in the high percentage of identical grave inscriptions on factory produced memorials. *So, in my view there is no need for a diversity or inclusion committee here.*

I believe that here there are no socio-economic or cultural and gender barriers expressed, with no noticeable marginalised communities or people. So, death has been the leveller. And unless prejudiced attitudes are unearthed by the living, they stay buried for all time. Therefore, I am truly thankful that dead men tell no tales, or world war three could break out here in this cemetery. I wonder whether the rabbits are part of that conciliatory subculture silently digging their warrens undisturbed under faded and broken sandstone graves, hoping to resurrect mysteries secreted to the grave.

In contrast, it is interesting that privilege and power are shamelessly revealed in emotive memorials with sculptures and elaborate carvings and symbolic artwork. And I find irresistible the multitude of varied languages in the loving and quirky inscriptions reflecting the many cultural and religious beliefs of the living. The varied forms of architecture, symbolism, and the grave goods, all showcased in this picturesque funerary landscape do provide a kaleidoscope of colour, but are in my view, comparable and enduring expressions of camaraderie.

Following my graveyard watch, often the silent city comes to life in the daylight hours with visitors here for either commemoration, recreation or heritage purposes. This above-the-ground funerary behaviour of the living means burial and religious rituals change every day, but always reflect varied cultural and religious rituals. It is recognisable predominantly with the funerary practices of Jewish Holocaust survivors, Muslims, Italian Catholics and the Orthodox faiths, that each group highly respects and values each other. With delight I watch over the Feng Shui positioned Chinese burial sites with their joss papers blowing in the breeze, as wallabies steal the sacrificial fruit left for the ancestors.

Occasionally with great fanfare a chorus of bagpipes, a trail of motor bikes or a brass band pass under my branches to celebrate the life of a much-loved family member. When I go, I'll miss overheard discussions by wandering tour attendees, school students and children passing the time doing a nature trail, scavenger hunt or biographical study explorations. Locals sit under my gently swaying branches to share secrets and dreams, unaware of the noiseless undertakings of the cadaveric, animal, and botanical ecosystems all around. Clandestine meetings for exchange of drugs, local gossip, urban myths, or even stolen kisses, always entertain and mystify.

Oh no, already the tree lopper has returned with his chainsaw and woodchipper machine! But surprise, surprise, after running his fingers along my contours, he tells me I will have fresh beginnings. I will be rehomed and portions of me reduced to woodchip to mulch the new sprouting saplings that have risen from my exhumed root system. And my timber will be fashioned into cemetery park benches and picnic tables for all religious and cultural groups to share. So, the spirits of my fellow interred residents will be with me when I am reincarnated to continue to 'live' in my sacred home. And I will always nurture and provide solace to those who frequent this all-inclusive paradise.

A Special Day

Paul Tavuzzi

MOSMAN 2088

Sentimentality overtook him by the very essence of what made his country unlike any other in the world.

It was six o'clock, the start of a very special day. He recalled how much his country had changed in the last fifty years. A day well worth celebrating! He turned the bottle whilst holding the cork, knowing that this was the correct way to open a bottle of Prosecco.

Watching the bubbles rise to the top of the glass he contemplated on how those people of English speaking background could start the day with that insipid cup of tea. It was not even the case that the tealeaves did not originate from the British Isles but the fact that what purported to be a symbol of nationalism was actually stolen from China.

That sense of individuality and his ethnicity called on him to reverse the order of the day. Why should he wait 'til six o'clock in the evening to have an aperitif, why should one leave the best 'til last?

The kitchen was a gourmand's paradise. The large area where he prepared his meals left nothing to be desired. An eight-jet gas burner stove, along with two large ovens were the altars of his religion, with the built in cool room being the tabernacle of his precious alimentary supplies.

Starting with a traditional antipasti was the way of beginning any repast. Finely sliced was a must for any cold meats beginning with wild boar salami followed by San Daniele prosciutto crudo, culatello, porchetta, mortadella, cacciatore and coppa. A large selection of cheeses completed this course, consisting of provolone dolce, gorgonzola, fontina and pecorino. The homemade bread contributed to the start of another beautiful day.

With thumb placed in the middle of the punt he poured the last drop of the sparkling wine, its given name came from a suburb in Trieste in Northern Italy. He drained his glass as he prepared his first course which was normally a pasta choice.

He prepared one of the most popular dishes in the world best known as Spaghetti Bolognese, acknowledging that it was a misnomer as the true dish was not made with spaghetti but with tagliatelle. That pasta was among the many types in his pantry, surrounded by many others such as bucatini, conchiglie, rigatoni, pappardelle, orecchiette, fusili, risoni, strozzapreti, farfalle, and macaroni.

The sauce would be a rabbit ragu from one his grandmother's recipes. The beginning of this lunch would be complimented with a bottle of Amarone della Valpolicella one of the finest red wines from the Veneto region.

The large clock announced that noon had arrived whereby he needed to seriously think about his second course.

Paolo would prepare a large steak as served in the city of Florence, a hefty porterhouse cut known as Bistecca Alla Fiorentina. That carnivore's delight was grilled and dressed only with olive oil, a wedge of lemon and salt and pepper and served with a simple salad. No better wine could accompany such a dish as a fine bottle of Antinori Chianti Classico from the hills of Tuscany where the winery was founded in 1385.

He sat down for a moment's respite prior to preparing his favourite dessert. Paolo fell asleep recalling the recipe of one of his favourite dishes. This unique layered cake is made from finger biscuits, egg yolks, sugar, coffee, mascarpone cheese, cocoa powder and sometimes a liquor. Whilst it is acknowledged that this sponge cake was invented in the 1960s in the Veneto, Italy, rumours persist that it has aphrodisiac effects and was served in the brothels of Treviso. Tiramisu or, it's translation of 'pick me up' had obviously a variety of connotations of which Paolo was well aware. Also known as Tuscan Trifle it is believed to have been created in Siena in the 17th century in honour of a visit by the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

A strong coffee was needed to alleviate that cloud of alcohol that was now like a gauze over his brain. He would prepare an espresso, as it was not the done thing to have a cappuccino after midday. The ground coffee he used came from the House of Illy, again from that European entrepôt called Trieste.

Late afternoon he whisked the mascarpone and the egg yolks whilst sipping his coffee. His dexterity allowed him to prepare his dish in an inordinately small amount of time. His creation would have to set in the refrigerator for several hours allowing him to entertain himself in the interim period.

He knew the potent mix of his favourite cocktail by heart.

Just like many alcoholic concoctions its origins were always in dispute. It is largely accepted that the cocktail was developed from an Americano, which was two equal parts of Campari and red Vermouth, by adding gin. This is believed to be the creation of Count Camillo Negroni in 1919 at the Caffè Casoni in Florence. Then again some ardent supporters believe that it was conceived by General Pascal Olivier de Negroni, in Senegal in 1857.

Two hefty drinks along with listening to Pavarotti sing Puccini's *Nessus Dorma* would ensure goose bumps on his arms and tears in his eyes.

Paolo realised that he was having one of the best days in his life whilst eating his tiramisu. He was conscious of having made the right decision by starting the day with gusto, it would have been foolish to entertain such pleasure until late in the day. He was recollecting on how he had decided in reversing the order of the day whilst savouring that adorable glass of grappa.

A great sense of contentment swamped him and enhanced the pleasure he had given himself on such an auspicious occasion. It was a day that needed to be celebrated confirming the diversity of the ethnic makeup that made his country so unique.

It was January 26 ... Australia day.

The Anzac Day Service

Philip Immaraj

CROMER 2099

The flags, the ancient photographs, the medals, the memorabilia, the coarse uniforms and the military hats, all bring memories. Stories told every so often, stories never told before. Stories to ponder on and stories to savour and flavour. Deep, thoughtful, unstarling eyes delving into the horizon, searching for a face, a name, an image, a detail that eludes, twists away and slips back into the mirage that is there, but not!

As a chaplain honoured to conduct this service for the elderly, I always experience some poignant moments. Every person has a different response. One screws up his face in his strong Irish accent, "Please can y'git rid of that damned Union Jack ... Just brings back so many painful memories. Y'know I'll not be coming to the service." Yet, he hobbles in to the service despite the hordes of flags.

Another stares into your eyes and says with heart-felt emotion, that they will surely attend as their family had been there. As you wait patiently, they continue reminiscing about their father and elder brother leaving for the war. The scream of anguish and the pensive silence in the home when only the father returned. The joyful patter of their pet dog painfully disturbing the hallowed silence of grief marked eternally, in the mother.

Leathery ole' Bernie now deaf, talks of the drone of the propellers alerting the sirens before the ensuing scramble to the darkened or camouflaged safe-houses. The dreaded whistling whine, as the Japanese bombs dropped and as they exploded into smithereens with a deafening blast. A deathly silence, a pause, a waiting for the dust to settle in the large pit and the crumbling buildings crash to the ground as in a delayed-action movie. The rumble of the emergency vehicles as singular, stentorian voices bellow out orders and people emerge to search for life in the rubble.

She's looking out of the window, turns to me muttering, "Eh? What's that then – Anzac Day service? I can't hear too well now! I used to play the trumpet in the Air Force then. It was fun in the beginning. There were many incidents when it was not safe for us women while we trained but then we learnt to defend ourselves ... from the men. We played for all the ceremonies not just the tattoo. Then there were, oh, so many funerals, town to town ... so sad. It was hard after the war." This gentle whisper of a lady, hunched over her walker as she stepped forward at the ceremony, honoured to place a wreath among the tulips.

"What time is the service? Where is it at? Do I need my uniform and medals? I can't remember where my medals are. Maybe my daughter, Louise uh ... er ... um ... Emma has them. I should remember to wear them." "Young man – who are you? How do I get to my room? I should know, I was a navigator in the army. I should be heading home soon, good old Jill is waiting for me, hope she is not worrying. She does have the dog with her so she will be safe." Back in his room now he sighs looking at the clock, incredibly through the dementia mist, barks, "Service at 900hrs then! Righty O". With a click of my heels, I give him a salute. After a disturbed sleep, normal for his own army nights, sure enough he is there – rather tousled, ready to drop to sleep yet ready to lay the wreath: Lest we forget!

I daren't talk about it. I wonder, what people may think. You see my grandfather was of a German-Jewish descent but not Nazi. They weren't welcomed and never trusted completely. They were called names and ostracized by many who didn't know any better. It was so hard to get food or fuel or even groceries, so grew their own gardens. They had to send notes through us children to buy basic needs as their strong accents raised eyebrows. We children had to help out with everything those days and because we were teased endlessly at school, sigh! It was a tough life.

My parents had to leave our country as it was overrun by the German militia. They were not Jewish but things were chaotic, no semblance of a normal life so they left. All their homes raided and businesses destroyed with things stolen. They left behind ballroom dances with chandeliers and waiters serving. They hid in cattle trucks and walked miles to border towns and hocked their watches and jewels so they could get a ship to Australia. Why Australia? Because it was so far away from all the horrors of war and the traumatic nightmares.

The Anzac Service starts with everyone singing the hymn, "Abide with me" with a fierce intensity: *"The darkness deepens, Lord, with me abide, When other helpers fail and comforts flee Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me."* I remind them of the chaplains who stood praying in the trenches holding the hands of the dying soldiers.

I share a group photo of soldiers, saying every one of those men had a mother and a father and possibly brothers or sisters, aunts, uncles and nephews and nieces, who lost something in that war. Teeth clenched, biting lips, with the stoic staring stubbornly, yet a tear that itched so bad – made them blink. A quick wipe by those who were embarrassed to show emotions. Some brought out tissues to wipe their tears openly. Different ways to express the same grief. After the Reveille, they stand united shaking hands together sharing the biscuit – different but same.

What creates unity in a family, a neighbourhood, a community, a society, a nation that rips into each other when all's well? Why, O why, do we await a loss, a grief, a pain, before empathy and compassion kicks us in the guts, to create a solidarity of valuing lives in the image that God gave us?

La cérémonie d'Anzac Day

Philip Immaraj

CROMER 2099

Les drapeaux, les photographies anciennes, les médailles, les objets commémoratifs, les uniformes de gros drap et les casquettes militaires, tout cela fait revenir les souvenirs. Des histoires racontées bien des fois, celles qui ne l'ont jamais été, auparavant. Les histoires à méditer et celles, savoureuses, qu'on goûte. Regards profonds, dans le vague, et qui, à l'horizon, cherchent un visage, un nom, une image, un détail qui échappe, se dérobe et retombe dans le mirage, là, mais non !

En tant qu'aumônier honoré de conduire la cérémonie pour les anciens, j'ai toujours connu de moments poignants. Chacun réagit différemment. L'un, le visage fermé, dit avec un fort accent irlandais « S'il vous plaît, pouvez pas vous débarrasser de ce foutu Union Jack... ! Ça fait revenir tant de souvenirs pénibles. Vous savez, j'viendrai pas à la cérémonie. » Et pourtant, voûté, il s'y traîne, malgré la horde de drapeaux.

Un autre vous regarde droit dans les yeux et vous dit avec une émotion sincère qu'il viendra sûrement, car sa famille est déjà venue. Vous attendez patiemment et ils continuent à se rappeler leur père et leur grand-frère partant pour la guerre. Le cri d'angoisse et le silence pensif à la maison lorsque seul le père est revenu. L'agitation joyeuse de leur chien troublant douloureusement le silence sacré du chagrin de la mère, ancré en elle pour toujours.

Le vieux Bernie tout en cuir, sourd maintenant, parle du bourdonnement des hélices alertant les sirènes avant de la précipitation vers les refuges sombres ou camouflés. Le gémissement sifflant redouté, lorsque les bombes japonaises étaient larguées et leur explosion en mille morceaux dans un souffle assourdissant. Le silence mortel, une pause, l'attente pour que la poussière retombe dans le large gouffre et l'effondrement des pans d'immeubles sur le sol, comme dans un ralenti cinématographique.

Le grondement des véhicules de secours, tandis que des voix singulières de stentor, hurlent des ordres et les gens qui émergent pour chercher la vie dans les décombres.

Elle regarde par la fenêtre et se retourne et en marmonnant : « Eh, Qu'est-ce que c'est maintenant – la cérémonie d'Anzac Parade ? Je n'entends plus très bien maintenant. ! Je jouais de la trompette dans l'Aviation, alors. C'était amusant au début. Il y avait eu beaucoup d'incidents, quand nous, les femmes, n'étions pas en sécurité pendant l'entraînement, mais on avait appris à se défendre... des hommes. Nous jouions dans toutes les cérémonies, pas seulement pour le Carrousel. Il y avait, à ce moment-là, tant de funérailles, d'une ville à l'autre... vraiment triste. Ça a été dur après la guerre. » Le gentil murmure d'une dame qui avance, penchée sur son déambulateur, pour l'honneur de déposer une gerbe parmi les tulipes.

« À quelle heure est la cérémonie ? Et où ça ? Est-ce que je dois mettre mon uniforme et mes médailles ? Je ne sais plus où sont mes médailles. Peut-être ma fille, Louise, hum... oh... hum... Emma les a. Je dois me rappeler de les porter. » « Jeune homme – qui êtes-vous ? Comment, pour aller dans ma chambre ? Je devrais savoir, j'étais navigatrice dans l'armée. Il faudra que je rentre bientôt, ma bonne Jill m'attend, j'espère qu'elle ne se fait pas de souci. Le chien est avec elle, alors elle sera en sécurité. » De retour dans sa chambre, il soupire en regardant la pendule et, incroyablement, à travers le brouillard de la démence, il crie « Alors, cérémonie à 9h00 ! C'est parti ! ». Je le salue, en claquant les talons. Après un sommeil agité, normal durant ses nuits à l'armée, mais oui il est là – cheveux ébouriffés, au bord du sommeil, mais prêt à déposer la gerbe: N'oublions pas !

Je n'ose pas vraiment en parler. Je me demande ce que les gens penseraient. Vous savez, mon grand-père était d'origine juive-allemande, mais pas nazi. Ils n'étaient pas bienvenus et on ne leur a jamais vraiment fait confiance. On les traitait de tous les noms et ils étaient exclus par la plupart de ceux qui ne savaient pas grand-chose. C'était si difficile de se procurer de la nourriture ou du carburant ou même des produits de l'épicerie, alors ils cultivaient leur propre jardin. Ils envoyaient des notes par notre intermédiaire, nous les enfants, pour pouvoir faire les achats nécessaires, car leur accent fort soulevait les soupçons. Enfants, nous devons aider pour faire tout, à cette époque, et on se moquait tout le temps de nous à l'école, soupir ! C'était une vie dure.

Mes parents avaient dû quitter leur pays qui avait été envahi par la milice allemande. Ils n'étaient pas juifs, mais tout était tellement chaotique, plus rien ne ressemblait à la vie normale, alors ils sont partis. Il y avait eu des raids sur les maisons et les magasins avaient été détruits et cambriolés. Ils ont laissé derrière des salles de danse avec des lustres et des serveurs. Ils se sont cachés dans des camions pour bestiaux, puis ont marché sur des kilomètres jusqu'aux villes frontalières, troquant leurs montres et leurs bijoux pour embarquer pour Australie. Pourquoi l'Australie ? Parce que c'était le plus loin possible des toutes les horreurs de la guerre et des cauchemars traumatisants.

La cérémonie d'Anzac commence par l'hymne « Avec moi demeure » que tout le monde chante avec une fière intensité : « L'obscurité s'épaissit, Seigneur avec moi demeure. Quand les autres soutiens défaillent et que les consolations disparaissent, Toi l'aide des désespérés, Oh, avec moi demeure. » Je leur rappelle les aumôniers qui priaient dans les tranchées en tenant la main des soldats mourants.

Je montre la photo d'un groupe de soldats, en disant que chacun de ces hommes avait une mère et un père et, peut-être, des frères et sœurs, des tantes, des oncles, des neveux et des nièces qui ont tous perdu quelque chose dans cette guerre. Les mâchoires serrées, en se mordant les lèvres, avec un regard stoïque buté, et pourtant une larme qui démange – et leur fait cligner des yeux. Le geste rapide pour l'effacer de ceux pour qui montrer de l'émotion embarrasse. Certains ont apporté un mouchoir pour essuyer, ouvertement, leurs larmes. Façons différentes d'exprimer la même peine. Après le Réveil, ils se réunissent, se serrent la main et partagent les biscuits – différents, mais pareils.

Qu'est-ce qui crée l'unité dans une famille, le voisinage, une communauté, une société, une nation et qui fait se déchirer quand tout va bien ? Pourquoi ? Oh, pourquoi nous attendons une perte, un deuil, la peine avant que la bienveillance et la compassion nous prennent aux tripes pour créer la solidarité en chérissant la valeur des vies à l'image que Dieu nous a donnée ?

True Heart of Stone

Ann Eyres

NARRABEEN 2101

I strolled along the path around Circular Quay in a place called The Rocks, in Sydney Cove. I could see that the sun was catching tiny specks of light from the quartz within the dark gold surface of a sandstone rock.

Water in the Cove, made restless by the busy ferries and other water craft, slapped at the greying base of the glittering rock. I thought about the footprints, left over thousands of years, now beneath my feet.

The rock drew me closer, and closer, until I reached its heart which said,

'I see you're wondering how Sydney Cove looked and felt before your European grandmothers and grandfathers came to this place. You'd like to know how it changed after their arrival when they lived, worked and spent their time here. I think I can tell you because I am rock and I haven't moved from this spot for many thousands of years.

'First the Indigenous people came and for tens of thousands of years they nurtured the land and water to keep it healthy. I watched their bark canoes slip across the water's surface as they fished and moved quietly from place to place. Their small fires warmed me and their care comforted me.

'When prisoners came from England in 1788 with new beliefs and practices I couldn't understand them so well. They tried to find the harmony between land and water but some simply could not feel the rhythm.

'A grandfather of yours, a man named John, came from Cornwall with the first of the convict arrivals. He told of soft light, morning mists and sweet birdsong he'd left behind. He found the trees around Sydney Cove beautiful but they cast little shade from the searing sun as he worked like an ox felling trees and building huts. So strange and unique did he find the native animals that they appeared to him to be cut from some unknown fabric and clumsily pasted together. He sailed up the Parramatta River to farm land there.

'Joseph, a mariner, was another of your convict grandfathers. When he arrived there was a boatyard built beside the water near the rocks from which the old people harvested cockles. Joseph felt he understood the oceans that brought him here and he was keen to learn the lessons of the land.

'The newcomers didn't build canoes but much larger craft with sails that carried them out of the harbour mouth and up and down the coast to look for more rivers and new land for themselves.

'I watched as Joseph sailed off to the Hawkesbury River to settle and later I saw another of your convict grandfathers, Charles, jog off in a horse and cart to try his luck on the Snowy River.

'The ocean's tides still haul up and fall back against the rocks in Sydney Cove as they have over the thousands of years Indigenous people have been here. They've brought floods of folk from troubled places in other parts of the world who've sought refuge in our place. They've trusted us to care for them while they brought us a wealth of new values and ideas. Many still seek a welcome here.

'I saw your grandfather Asher off to the First World War and your father Stan off to the Second World War. I was one of 'the watch' in Sydney Harbour when the Second World War came here and a submarine blew up in the Harbour on the other side of the hill to where you lived.

'For the first fifteen years of your life I saw you travel often across the Harbour on the Taronga Zoo ferry with your grandmother Gert in her shiny black straw hat with the outsize pink rose. I didn't see you after that for about thirty five years until one morning in 1992 I caught sight of you as you ducked into the mouth of the passageway in The Rocks, playfully named The Suez Canal. I watched where you went as you scuttled up the hill, fully upholstered in your winter coat like the rats who brought plague to The Rocks in 1900.

'Eventually I saw where you went. It was the little row of terrace houses built in 1844 high in The Rocks where so many working families just like yours spent part of their lives before it became a museum. You worked there exchanging stories with local and overseas visitors. Did you know Joseph used to drink at a hotel on that site before those houses were built? I watched to see if you were going to pop out of that passage later on. Sure enough you did and I noticed you did so on many days for years after.

'Apparently change is coming again to Circular Quay and there's a conversation going on between the built and the natural environment. They say that there's an exquisite equation at work in nature which requires close observation. There can be catastrophic and everlasting consequences when the sums are not tallied correctly according to nature.

'Now that you're an old woman still searching for answers you've come back here like a hand to its glove. Both of us have seen many changes in this place and in the different people who've passed through it. We are still *the watch*.

'I'll wait here for you as you walk the old paths again. Keep looking for me on your return, even if I become hard for you to find.

'Please can you ask the people who now care for this place if they will clear and clean the land, air and water for the trees, birds, fish, and humans too. It's up to you and others like you to speak for me because it's only those who see me who can hear my voice.'

So I ask the planners, "Please ...?"

Why Me

Colleen Russell

AVALON BEACH 2107

Why Me?

I sigh as I close my phone.

Why me?

My daughter-in-law, Mai, is Vietnamese, a sweet person full of love and *bon amie*, and who can never say 'no' when help is required; her energy is endless and she seems to think that my energy is endless, too.

Her daughter's teacher is keen to introduce recorders into her class as an extra subject, but she first needs to calculate the amount of interest shown by her students. I play the recorder, so Mai wants me to take an hour to demonstrate the wonderful wide world of recorder to my granddaughter's young classmates.

I applaud the teacher's initiative, because the recorder has now been dropped from the busy curriculum in many schools.

I remember when all of the NSW State schools taught recorder to their young students. This was not only an early introduction of music to the children, but allowed enthusiastic students a pride in achievement. Later recorder players could move into the school band onto a saxophone, clarinet or flute, which could possibly further a career in music.

It will only be an hour out of my day, but beforehand I will have to take time to pull some music together that will not only interest the kids, but will also suitably illustrate the range of recorders and their diverse uses.

Thinks: I must remember to include the garklein, the tiny instrument, which is not well known and quite intriguing. I should also borrow a great bass, on the other end of the scale.

I'll have to make some phone calls.

But before I can start rummaging in my music books, my phone rings again.

It's my friend Judy, beseeching, 'Jack's parents are coming for dinner on Friday night. Remember that I told you that my mother-in-law is Hungarian and cooks the most delicious dishes. And me – I'm such a lousy cook and I want to impress them. Could you please make two of your fantastic quiches. Please. Pretty please.'

Okay! Okay! That means a trip to the supermarket for ingredients; more time out of my week.

Why me?

But I'm secretly flattered that Judy admires my quiches. I haven't made quiches for a while and these will have to be special – perhaps a bit spicier than usual, because I know that Hungarian people love spice. More time needed to search for my favourite recipe.

Thinks: At the same time, I should make a quiche for dinner tonight, as well as one for Mrs Wong, our elderly neighbour – a chance to say 'hello' and to see how she's faring.

My head's in the cupboard, my bum's in the air, when my phone rings again.

It's my niece, 'Dylan's class is staying the weekend at the Recreational Fitness Camp in your end of town – and it's his birthday. Can you do something?'

Dylan's Dad is Greek – very quiet, hard to get to know, but devoted to his family.

Now what does one give a twelve-year-old away from home on his birthday. Food! Teenage boys have hollow legs, don't they?

So, first up, I will have to trawl the local cake shops. It will be worth the effort to see the happiness on his face, when I roll up with the biggest chocolate cake he's ever seen. I'll bet he has lots of friends tonight! It's always so satisfying to give pleasure to kids.

Uh, oh! My dear daughter-in law is back. What has Mai volunteered me for this time?

The elderly rector of her small Asian church group has been asked by his congregation to deliver a special sermon on his retirement, the subject – *The Generosity of Spirit*. It's all written out and he needs someone to type it up for presentation.

'Do you have the time? Our rector would be so grateful.'

I've met the rector, and his wife. He's such a nice man, a gentleman of the old school. He suffers severely from arthritis and is now confined to a wheelchair, thus his early retirement. His wife, fusses over him like The Old Lady Who Lives In a Shoe, who has so many children etc etc ... they have eight children and twenty grandchildren. A beautiful and bounteous family!

'Of course, I'd be happy to type his sermon.'

The Generosity of Spirit.

Well, why not me?

I was, through quite unusual circumstances, a Celtic-heritaged, mono-lingual, Science teacher, teaching literacy in an Intensive English Centre.

For one life-changing lesson, I was teaching literacy and keyboard skills to Sudanese refugees, those of the bright, questing-for-knowledge eyes, and even brighter smiles. This group was a little advanced in their oral and written English skills, so I had given them the scenario that they had won a million dollars. Their task was to write a short story in Word, explaining how they would spend it and the reasons for their choice.

We were in the computer room, it was the early 2000s, before bringing our own device. I was moving around the room, checking or answering questions for word choices, spelling and grammar. Focused on 'the trees', I was paying little attention to 'the forest', the actual content, promising myself a joyful evening reviewing their stories, which I naïvely presumed would be of houses and cars and clothes and makeup. At one girl's story I was stopped, held almost paralysed, by the words on the page. I must have looked at her in disbelief, for she started to speak to me in halting English, which I have amplified below.

Akot was a child of ten (now thirteen) living with her mother and nine-month-old baby brother in a small village in South Sudan. Her father was away in the capital working to support them, there being little work available close to home. Her eight-year-old brother had, the month before, been captured by the rebel army, recruited as a soldier, under threats that his family would be killed if he resisted.

On this particular day, Akot's mother had travelled to a nearby village to trade for food for the family. She had left Akot with strict instructions that if she heard vehicles, she was to take her brother and travel deep into the jungle surrounding the village.

Trucks did come that day, rolling into the village so quickly that Akot just had time to grab Atem and run outside and towards the shelter of the jungle. But he was too big, too heavy, she too little, too slow. A soldier shot at them out of the window of a truck as it rolled past. Akot was knocked to the ground, hitting her head.

It was night when she woke. She came to awareness with a cold weight pressing on her chest. As she struggled to get up, she realised that the weight was her baby brother. He had been shot in the head and his blood covered her clothing and the ground around them. Akot had survived, it seemed, because her stillness and her brother's blood led the rebels to assume she was dead.

The village was quiet, bodies scattered around the huts, the neighbouring hut of her aunt and uncle deserted. Akot followed her mother's directions to leave, rather than wait for her mother to return. She carried her baby brother into the jungle, and walked for two days until she caught up with others who had fled the village. Here the women, including her aunt, eventually convinced her to give them her brother's body.

She cried most heavily here. She had abandoned Atem and let her mother down she said.

The group walked for weeks, sleeping hidden by day and travelling by night to avoid discovery, but they lost many along the way. Several of the men acting as scouts fell prey to the lions that roamed in the darkness. The few who died from the hardship of the trek the group buried, or covered as best they could to protect their bodies from scavengers.

Eventually the group reached relative safety in Uganda and were settled in a refugee camp. This had its own trials, not exclusive to Akot's story. Food often in short supply, water scarce, the contempt of the Ugandan soldiers who patrolled the camp, and for women and young girls, often something worse as they took the track to collect water. Akot was lucky, she said, that she was lighter-skinned and therefore worth more cows in marriage; the darker girls were the ones most often attacked because their families would be less likely to make complaint.

Akot and her aunt spent eleven months in the camp, for part of that time sharing their small food rations with another refugee in exchange for basic lessons in English.

The husband of Akot's aunt was a skilled worker who had already migrated to Australia. He was in the process of application for his wife to join him. When UNHCR put them in contact with each other, the application was extended to include Akot, and so she came to Australia and settled with her aunt and uncle near the school that hosted the Intensive English Centre.

Her story was now complete, so to the words on Akot's page that shattered my so-insulated bubble:

If I win one million dollars, I buy a plane ticket. I travel to Sudan and I look for the man who shot my brother. I know his face. I see his face in my eyes. I find him and I kill him.

Five months later, UNHCR contacted Akot's uncle with the information that Akot's parents had been informed of her whereabouts. They had been searching for their three children for several years. They were granted entry to Australia, and they were eventually reunited with Akot, learning then the details of Atem's death. The older brother's situation was still unknown. Although UNHCR was still looking for him, it was not considered likely that so young a soldier would have survived.

Akot did not win a million dollars, thankfully, but completed school and trained as a teacher. She married an engineer and they returned to South Sudan, where she teaches primary school, posting updates of her family for me on Facebook.

White, Brown or Black?

Lorraine Farah

BEECROFT 2119

Do you ever think of this question? I was born in Windsor, UK, from a German white mother and a Punjabi Indian father, in 1961. Windsor is a grand town where the Queen of England resides. When I was born, it was a very middle/upper-class of England and very white!

From a very early age I knew that I was different. People asked my mother if I was adopted when we were seen together. My father died when I was 18 month old, so all my childhood was my white mother with her brown daughter!

I'm the offspring of a bi-racial union which was not common in England in the sixties. White skin and brown skin was not to be seen, and certainly not to reproduce!

When I was seven, I was walking to school and a white boy, across the street, called out and said, "Hey chocolate face." I was humiliated. I recall the feeling today like it just happened.

I like to have the last word so replied, "Hey vanilla face". For some unconscious reason, I was not going to let him have the last word. After that, he never said anything to me again – maybe because I reacted and replied, or because I put him down (which I did, in the same way, he did to me!) or because I was a girl who responded in an unexpected way! I have never forgotten this exchange and the way it made me feel as I walked to my private, white prep school.

A few years later when I was 10yrs, we put on a school play, The Gingerbread Man. Guess who was the gingerbread man? You're right, me! The only brown kid, and a girl, in a very white prep school!

To be fair, we auditioned for the part, and I put up my hand to audition. We had to use our voice with emphasis, as it was a satire play. I could do that well. Deep down, I believed I was chosen because I was better on the voice and emphasis – and it was likely lucky I was brown! I wonder for just a moment, did my colour have any part in the decision?

I got the part, and I still remember the whole audience laughing when I said my famous lines, "And I'm the gingerbread man".

Did they laugh because it was meant to be funny at the point in the play, or because I was brown, or even because I was a girl saying I was a man? It was meant to be funny, and yet, I have always wondered to what degree my skin colour added to their enthusiastic reaction! I was the only coloured girl in this white prep school, playing a gingerbread man and again, I can still remember how it made me feel.

My mother and white stepfather emigrated to Australia when I was 13 yrs. My mother thought Australia was more accepting of multiculturalism. When going to an Australian country boarding school, full of true blue, country girls from the land, as a girl from Windsor, UK with a plummy English accent, my 'difference' moved to another place.

First, it was the colour of my skin in the UK, then it was how I spoke! I was asked repeatedly, "Say that again because you say it weird."

I couldn't win! My mother was horrified when I came home weeks later, with an Australian twang. My way to fit in!

Fast forward 40 years, my tri-racial children are often asked: "Where are you from?"

Like me they are not white, nor black. They are a gorgeous colour of brown due to my racial background and their father's heritage, from Lebanon, and yes, they are Australian, born and bred as Australians. I realized the world had not moved forward in 40 years from my experience walking to school in the 60s when my youngest came home from school, aged 5yrs and asked "Mummy, why are my hands dirty?" My heart sank.

What I had experienced when I was young, one of my children was experiencing in a different way, 40 years later, in a different country and again, at a fairly white private school! The pattern repeats.

"Why?" I asked her.

She said, "Someone stood next to me in the washroom and asked me why my hands are always dirty brown?" To this day, I see the face of the child who asked this question – she was 5yrs old. Is it her fault, was she wrong, or was she the product of a world where diversity is not appreciated? Maybe it's not taught at home, maybe not seen enough in the media, maybe not prevalent in society.

I told the class teacher. I asked that inclusiveness be added to the dialogue in the classroom. In 2005! I could do nothing more. Yet I could.

One day, as mothers waited at the school gate, I quietly approached the mother of this child and told her what happened. She teared up, apologized to me, rather too quickly, and said she would handle it. I could ask for no more, but we never really spoke after that, even though our children were in the same class for another 4 years.

Should I have said nothing and let it slide?
I chose not to.

I saw this same girl recently, a grown young adult at a party. She was 17yrs, pleasant, mature, polite, and yet I could not forget what happened 12 years ago when I said hello. Did she remember that day in the washroom? I'm sure not, because she's white. It was just a question for her, no malice intended, yet with an impact, she would never know.

Our family is a cocktail of cultural backgrounds that fits nowhere and yet fits everywhere!
We are Australian, with a wonderfully rich heritage of British, Indian, German, Lebanese, and Australian.
We are proud of who we are.

When The Moon Landed in Skopje

Emilija Todorova

RHODES 2138

I couldn't take it any longer. It was summer, school holidays, roses in full bloom, sour cherries beckoning, almost ripe. I should be outside, playing 'hosts and guests' with my girlfriends, or perfecting my bike riding or doing something equally important. Yet – as if my life depended on it – I was glued to the tiny black and white TV set in the smallest room of our house, the one I've always known as my father's room, although my laminated green study desk occupied a quarter of its space and I spent more time in that room than my father. (Four years later, after my father's death, the room became exclusively mine, but there was no joy in the newly gained status of a room owner).

That week, my brother, 16 years my senior, mad about all things science and in love with the whole of the universe, to its last undiscovered star and speck of cosmic dust, invaded the room without a drop of blood being shed. It must've happened overnight, while I was asleep, for I would've resisted the occupation with every means available to me, including my trademark kick in the backside manoeuvre.

Alas! When I woke up, newspapers were strewn on my desk and the floor had sunken below sea level under the weight of books in Russian, German and Serbo-Croatian on topics I was clueless about. For as long as I remember, our home was full of books, mostly my brother's. Books were arriving daily – in my brother's briefcase, by mail, in the hands of friends who had just returned from some place where only fat books lived. Once they took up residence in our house, they were making unexpected and sometimes inconvenient appearances in the pantry, under a pillow, in the shoe cabinet, on the toilet cistern, under one of our cats. My mother kept shaking her head, but literature can be obstinate and books continued to pop up everywhere. Especially over the past week or so.

At about the same time, my brother got possessed by a particularly boring variety of demons that made him speak incessantly, draw sketches, present and explain formulae to our discombobulated brains. He was dismayed by my ignorance, manifested in blank looks and stitched up responses to his questions about the material he had just explained. Like our mother, my brother was convinced that from the time one starts speaking – in my case at 8 months of age – serious education should commence. He was responsible for developing my numeracy skills and imparting knowledge of maths, science and philosophy.

My mother, on the other hand, took upon herself to introduce me to literature, music, arts, theatre and calligraphy. To balance things out, my father's only imperative was to protect me from any unpleasantness – which basically meant that there must not be any word or gesture directed at me that could be interpreted as a slightest disapproval. Because he had a full-time job, policing and sanctioning at all times the behaviour of others towards his princess was impossible, so he'd make a point of asking me every afternoon if anyone had done something to upset me during the day. Truth be told, I was a quiet and sensitive kid, easily upset by lots of things, but I never complained to my father, because it was easier to deal with these "issues" on my own, rather than see him genuinely agitated about the horrible "injustices" inflicted upon me.

But I digress.

It was a strange week, by any measure. The radio was on all day and I wasn't allowed to speak when the news was on. My father didn't bring home any papers from work, my mother seemed more pensive than usual and the demon wouldn't loosen his grip on my brother. The three of them would gather around the 14 inch TV screen as if under a spell and gulp every word of the news. I followed. I didn't have to listen very carefully (though I did), because my brother was going to brief me anyway, followed by my mother who would repeat the briefing in plain language. At night, I'd climb on the lounge in the living room and stare at the sky until my mother turned blue from asking me to go to bed. I saw a rocket being launched and I was hoping I'd catch a glimpse of it, despite my brother repeatedly telling me that it was impossible. Wallace and Gromit were not yet born, but even then the Moon looked like a wheel of cheese, just like those from the Shara Mountain. No matter how many times it was sliced, every month it renewed itself to a whole pie. To my brother's relief I already knew that the Moon is neither cheese nor pie, but my mother's literary/artistic influence could not be denied.

And so, Sunday arrived and the atmosphere in our home was palpably electrifying. I avoided getting near my brother for fear of being electrocuted. He was like a plasma ball (no wonder, Tesla was his idol), feverishly pacing, accelerating, then suddenly halting to re-read the papers or hear the news on the radio.

Salvation arrived that night, in the shape of a giant step for the humankind and an even greater leap for me. On the night of 20 July 1969 I welcomed the Moon to our home and my life. It was a part of us, no longer just a yolk in the sky. The world got brighter and bigger, yet its frightening vastness more manageable. I realised that humans are capable of unimaginable greatness and that vision and tenacity can help achieve the impossible. But most importantly, for the first time in my life I began to understand my brother.

Кога Месечината се спушти во Скопје

Emilija Todorova

RHODES 2138

Не можев веќе да издржам. Беше лето, училишен распуст, розите во полн цвет, вишните, речиси зрели, мамат. Требаше да бидам надвор, да си играм "домаќинки и гости" со моите другарки, или да го усовршувам возењето велосипед или да правам нешто подеднакво важно. Но - како животот да ми зависише од тоа - јас бев залепена за малиот црно-бел телевизор во најтесната собичка во нашиот дом, онаа која отсекогаш ја знаев како "соба на татко ми", иако јас поминував подолго време во неа од татко ми и моето биро со зелена ламинирана површина зафаќаше четвртина од нејзиниот простор. (Четири години подоцна, по смртта на татко ми, собичката стана ексклузивно моја, но во тој новоздобиеен статус на нејзин сопственик, немаше радост.)

Таа седмица брат ми, 16 години постар од мене, луд по сè што на кој било начин е поврзано со науката и вљубен во целиот универзум, до последната негова неоткриена ѕвезда и зрнце вселенска прашина, ја окупира собата без никаква борба. Инвазијата мора да се случила во текот на ноќта, додека сум спиеала, зашто инаку ќе пружев отпор со сите расположливи средства, вклучувајќи го тука и маневрот што беше мој заштитен знак: удирање клоца во задник.

Таксират! Кога се разбудив, моето биро беше прекриено со весници, а подот потонат под нивото на морето, притиснат од товарот на книгите на руски, германски и српско-хрватски јазик, на теми за кои ама баш ништо не знаев. Откако паметам, нашиот дом беше исполнет со книги, повеќето на брат ми. Книги пристигнуваа дневно: во актовката на брат ми, по пошта, во рацете на пријатели штотуку вратени од некаде каде што виреат само дебели книги. Штом

еднаш се вселеа кај нас, книгите имаа обичај да се појавуваат изненадно на неочекувани и понекогаш незгодни места: во оставата, под перница, во ормарчето за чевли, врз клозетското казанче, под некоја од нашите мачки... Мајка ми само одмавнуваше со главата, но литературата знае да биде тврдоглава и книгите продолжија да се појавуваат насекаде. Особено во последните десетина дена.

Речиси во исто време, брат ми беше опседнат од исклучително здодевен вид на демони кои го тераа да зборува непрекинато, да прави десетици скици, да ни покажува и објаснува формули неразбирливи за нашите збунети мозоци. Го нервираше мојата неинформираност, но најмногу од сè го ужаснуваше моето незнаење, манифестирано низ празни погледи и пелтечливи одговори на неговите прашања за материјалот кој штотуку ми го објаснил. Како и нашата мајка, брат ми беше убеден дека од моментот кога некој ќе прозборува - во мојот случај на осуммесечна возраст - мора да се почне со сериозно образование. Тој беше одговорен за развивање на моите математички способности и пренесување на знаења од природните науки и филозофијата. Мајка ми пак, презеде на себе да ме воведо во литературата, музиката, уметностите и калиграфијата. За рамнотежа, единствениот императив на татко ми беше да ме заштити од каква било непријатност, што практично значеше дека никој не смее да упати кон мене ниту збор, ниту гест што би можел да се протолкува како неодобрување, па нека е и најблаго. Бидејќи беше на работа по цел ден, не можеше постојано да патролира и да ги прекорува другите за нивното однесување кон неговата принцеза, па затоа

секоја вечер ќе ме прашаше дали некој со нешто ме вознемирил во текот на денот. За волја на вистината, јас бев тивко и чувствително дете, што лесно се вознемируваше од многу нешта, но никогаш не му се жалев на татко ми. Беше полесно сама да се справам со "проблемите" одошто да го гледам како се измачува заради страшните "неправди" што ми биле нанесени.

Но, да не застранувам.

Беше тоа, по сите мерила, чудна седмица. Радиото беше пуштено по цел ден и не ми беше дозволено да зборувам додека вестите беа во тек. Татко ми престана да носи хартии со сметки од работа, мајка ми беше позамислена од вообичаено, а демоните никако да ја олабават стегата врз брат ми. Тие тројцата, како маѓепсани, ќе се собереа пред 35-сантиметарското телевизорче и ќе го голтаа секој збор од вестите. Јас не морав да слушам многу внимателно, бидејќи брат ми и онака ќе ми објаснеше, по што мајка ми ќе го преведеше неговото објаснување на разбирлив јазик. Ноќе, ќе се качев на каучот во дневната соба и ќе сурев во небото, сè додека мајка ми не помодреше од викање дека ми е време за спиење. На екранот видов како полетува ракета и, иако брат ми рече дека е тоа невозможно, се надевав дека ќе успеам ја видам. Валас и Громит уште не беа родени, но и тогаш Месечината изгледаше како пита кашкавал, токму како оние од Шара. Сеедно колку ќе пресечеш од неа, секој месец се обновуваше во цела пита. На големо олеснување на брат ми, јас веќе знаев дека Месечината не е кашкавал, но поетското влијание на мајка ми врз мене беше неоспорно.

И така... пристигна неделата и атмосферата дома стана опипливо наелектризирана. Го избегнував брат ми на секој можен начин, од страв од електричен удар. Тој беше како топка плазма (ништо чудно - Никола Тесла му беше идол); трескавично чекореше од соба во соба, забрзуваше за потоа ненадејно да застане за да препрочита некој напис или да ги слушне најновите вести на радио.

Спасението пристигна таа ноќ во форма на џиновски скок за човештвото и уште поголем за мене. Ноќта на 20 јули 1969 ја пречекав Месечината во нашиот дом и во мојот живот. Таа веќе не беше само жолчка на небото, туку дел од нас. Светот стана посветол и поголем, но неговата застрашувачка огромност беше некако поподатлива. Сфатив дека луѓето се способни за незамисливи потфати и дека визијата и упорноста помагаат да се постигне невозможното. Но најважно, за првпат во својот живот почнав да го разбираам брат ми.

Redfern Story

Sally Lamont

NORTH PARRAMATTA 2151

As I watched ABCTV February 1999 at my Pymble unit, I saw an ad for CleanUp Australia. The thought hit me to clean-up Eveleigh Street Redfern that year, instead of my local area.

Knowing how hard getting Elders permission would be, I rang the home of our Aboriginal member of the Harbour to Hawkesbury Reconciliation Group. Brian was angry getting a call from me at his Central Coast home, rightfully so.

"Give me 2 minutes then hang up if you don't like my idea", I said.

He listened so silently, I had to ask if he's still there. "Have you told anyone else?"

"No."

"Well don't and I'll get back to you".

At that point, no compliments came from Brian. Permission was given and organising volunteers, trucks, needle dispensers, and bags started. Volunteers were tough to get with the mention of Eveleigh Street the first year. With a list of volunteer names, two Redfern Aboriginal men sat across from Redfern Station, Lawson Street, ticking off our names. Otherwise, we were rejected.

Thirty minutes into clean-up, TV camera crews and several police cars arrived in a hurry.

Beforehand, we volunteers were told to not answer any questions from strangers, no matter what the uniform. Instead, we were to send them to Brian, our single spokesman.

Which did not make these strangers happy at all.

Police cars remained on Lawson Street watching white skin men enter the grounds at the footpath to shoot up then leave. We collected several hundred used needles from that area. I saw overjoyed locals come to the grounds, bringing children and grandparents to happily, pitch in.

Several truckloads of junk (white goods, cars, mattresses, you name it) were taken from the grounds, making the area wonderfully tidy.

At 12.30 a loudspeaker told everyone to put down their tools and come to the BBQ. The feed (sausages, bread, toppings, salad, soft drinks) was cooked and served to us by the Redfern community. Everyone was in the happiest of moods, hugs everywhere. This day I got loads of compliments plus a manly hug from Brian.

This is how the first year of 4 years went. The Harbour to Hawkesbury Group was told on our final CleanUp Australia year, to not return because the community would arrange it in the future. I think about that February evening that brought on a bright idea and I feel so proud that I made a difference to the residential area of a culture I greatly admire.



We Are All In This Together

Therese Ricketts

BAULKHAM HILLS 2153

My heart sank with a dark, heavy cloud, Mum's nurse sounded unusually flustered as she explained with the best intentions of staying calm, there had been a fall and sadly Covid must keep me away.

An inaudible phone call filled with the occasional panicked voice and an odd groan are seared into my heart.

It was a crisp sunny Tuesday afternoon, May 2020 when a swarm of incredible, diverse angels, united in a peaceful manner and I was channelled through a maze of covid cluelessness, Mum lay in a warm bed, holding a stranger's hand ... afraid.

Covid protocols imposed a solitary passage to Emergency where strangers from all nations embraced hopeless circumstances.

Welcoming kind eyes, sympathetic smiles, a chair, tea and a cup of water sent signals of fear through my veins. The kindness didn't take away the overwhelming sorrow hearing the unforgiving news of my beautiful Mother's dismal prognosis.

She wouldn't make it through the night.

This couldn't be happening, my heart propelled adrenalin repeatedly through my shaking body, it was going to be Mother's day on Sunday.

My world began to spin in reverse, my brain clouded with clarity and confusion.

Weirdly, my body was fenced by an amazing collection of caring people who were all running on hectic from one calamity to the next and in contrast at the same moment there was a peaceful serenity with strangers that ridiculously made me feel safe.

I still had not been allowed to see Mum.

Complex covid hospital protocols were fresh and there seemed to be an expansive reluctance to follow strict new covid guidelines.

My brother waited anxiously in the Hospital's Emergency carpark, respectfully tolerant of new covid rules.

We all continued to stay composed, we wanted to scream while the world slowed to a pace where unnatural emotions brought a flow of trauma through our bodies and brains.

I was sitting in the Emergency Trauma Ward surrounded by strangers.

It was bizarre, no racism, no stereotypes, no judgement ... nothing but angels who unknowingly had created the perfect model of a diverse interconnected community and they were all looking after me like I was their family.

I still had not been allowed to see Mum.

The chaos of covid was cruel.

I watched the hustle from my lonely chair, clutching a cup of water that I could barely swallow ... and we all waited.

The young redheaded, fresh faced doctor managed to find the kindest words.

I could finally see Mum.

Mum was peaceful, I kissed her lovely face.

Clarity and vagueness are two clashes that grief owns. It's disorienting.

Mum looked beautiful.

I noticed Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Taos, Confucians, Tribals, Animists, Jewish and Atheists groups were all accepted with love and compassion in this diverse hospital community anytime of the day or night.

I welcomed the Catholic Priest who was almost as young as the fresh faced, redheaded doctor. I was happy to see a young priest who appeared to look uncomfortable or maybe it was me that was prickly and weird.

Stupid thoughts continually ploughed through my head during this painstaking night of hell.

Bless Clarity, she kicked in and enabled my foggy brain to regain direction.

Mum would be so bloody happy that someone remembered a Priest.

I didn't, shit who did?

Faith was so important to our Mum.

Did my brother set this up from the car park?

Maybe it was simple denial and my fog just got thicker?

The Priest sheepishly asked my name as he came into the trauma room and proceeded to slowly unfold, his silk, purple last rite garments over Mum and asked me if anyone else was joining, sadly, simply it had to be just me.

The Priest started the celebration of Mum's last rites, just the two of us and we said prayers together.

Unexpectedly, I heard my name and heard it twice.

Confused, I realised I was the one being given the last rites.

"Oh No!"

Blood rushed to my already traumatized brain.

I raised my hand like you do in a classroom, I figured he would see me as it was just two of us and Mum, not 30 kids.

Father didn't notice my hand in the air while

he continued to give me my last rites.

I was trying to think how I could navigate this dilemma without too much fuss.

Father still didn't notice my hand up.

I was thinking. Let it go!

NO, my brain was blaring. Mum was a woman of strong Catholic Faith and she'll haunt me if I take HER last rites.

While this was happening my brain was having small conniptions.

I'll have a clean slate if I let him proceed.

No!

I had to stop this, Mum would never forgive me.

"Father!" I yelled.

He was shocked and confused when I told him he was giving me the last rites. He had only been given my name on the piece of paper he was now quietly crumpling in embarrassment.

We both continued but ...

Death brings every emotion you can think of to a surface of bubbling uncertainty and I didn't expect laughter during Mum's last rites would ever be one of them.

I was fiercely trying to hold back laughter.

I felt like a 5-year-old kid,

I know if Mum was awake she would have been crying laughing too.

Later that night: Family were all eventually allowed in to say a really quick goodbye.

My husband, brother and I had the honour to be with Mum when she took her last breath.

Our Mum had the privilege of being surrounded by many angels who work in such a caring, diverse community of acceptance of religion, age, gender, race, social status etc the night she died.

Thanks to all the Angels at Westmead Hospital.

A Weird Mob

David Linfoot

CASTLE HILL 2154

I was born in 1940 and I have difficulty remembering when I began to realise that things were different for some people. I went to a public school and I do remember that some of the children in my neighbourhood went to another school that was next to a church that my family did not attend. Perhaps this was my first realisation of diversity.

During my primary school years, the post-war migration began and a boy called Rolf arrived at my primary school. He came from Germany and wore leather trousers. This diversity was certainly not celebrated by the pupils at my school. Children can be very cruel but I suppose that this behaviour is learned, most likely from their parents.

The novel *They're a Weird Mob* by John O'Grady, written under the pen-name of Nino Culotta, was published in 1957 and in a humorous way it highlighted the difficulties migrants (or new Australians as we called them) had in adopting to life in Australia. Maybe it was also pointing out the difficulty we old Australians had in accepting the new arrivals to our country.

Some diversity that we have learned from migrants has been good, particularly where food is concerned. When I was a child, spaghetti came mainly in a can with tomato sauce. It took a while for me to realise that pasta was really more appetising when it was served with a bolognaise sauce or as lasagne.

Communication is a very important factor in creating harmony. The many languages that exist in our world can create huge barriers between people, particularly those who choose to move to another country where the usual spoken language is different to their mother tongue. Young children are usually able to pick up a new language fairly quickly once they go to school but older people often struggle to learn a new language. Diversity of language is not necessarily a thing to be celebrated. Even those who have reasonable language skills are often at a loss to understand the particular idioms that apply in some languages.

Nino Culotta was very confused when he was told that it was his turn to 'shout' when he was at a pub. There are many terms that Australians understand which are quite confusing to people from other countries. I spent a short time as a volunteer teaching English as a second language to migrants. I usually commenced my classes by asking the students about words that had confused them in the previous week. One of them said that a friend had told him that a new car he had purchased was a 'lemon'. I am not sure that my explanation convinced my student that 'lemon' was a word used to describe a car that was a bit of a bomb. Maybe 'bomb' needed to be explained too!

I presume that all languages have traps for the unwary but as the only language that I can communicate in is English I don't really know if this is true. However, I am convinced that English must be a very confusing language for those of us who did not learn it as a child.

There must be hundreds of words that have the same spelling but mean quite different things. If I asked a number of people to write down what 'bark' meant, I anticipate that about half would say that it is a noise that a dog makes and the rest would probably say that it is the covering of a tree trunk. A few may even think of the Bark Endeavour which always confused me. I thought that it would make more sense if James Cooks' ship was a Barque!

We are a weird mob, or is it our English language that contributes to us being so strange?

I understand the problem that language diversity causes. When I travelled to countries where English was not widely spoken, I always appreciated being able to talk to English speaking people. It is therefore quite natural for migrants to Australia to want to speak with people who they can communicate with in the language that they understand best.

Diversity of religion can be a sensitive issue. As a Christian I try to be tolerant towards the beliefs of others. Some of these beliefs are quite similar to the beliefs that I hold but I find that I cannot agree with all the actions of some religions. The Christian religion can certainly be criticised for actions that do not follow the instructions given in the Bible. I am also concerned that there are so many Christian denominations. How strange that when I was young, a 'mixed marriage' meant a Protestant and a Catholic wedding. Yet, Catholics and Protestants are both members of a Christian religion. I could not support any religion that believes that it is quite right to commit murder and other crimes if it is a way to promote a religious belief.

Another issue which may be a sensitive one is politics. I am pleased that we live in a democratic country and that we can freely vote for the person who we want to represent us in our governments. If enough people support one political party a government can be formed in the name of that party. I don't like the way some political candidates are targeted by character attacks but I am quite happy to accept the will of the majority, even if most people decide that they do not support the party that I have voted for.

I am not really able to celebrate all diversity in a wholehearted manner. I certainly cannot celebrate the diverse actions of the person who broke into my almost new car a few years ago!

Some diversity is good, some can be tolerated and some is not good at all.

Books, books and more books

Ann Flegg

GLENHAVEN 2156

This is a story about my mother, Betty, who worked as an untrained librarian at Auburn Library from about the late 1940's to the late 1960's. It is also a story about our family, the diverseness of books, the different personalities of the people who regularly borrowed them, and their equally varied tastes in literature.

Mum began as a volunteer when the library was run by a small group of local residents, and continued on when the library came under the umbrella of Auburn Council. Years later, the volunteers were put on the payroll of the council and became paid workers.

I clearly remember Mum taking me to the opening of the library when I was about four years old. It had humble beginnings in one of the smaller rooms of the School of Arts where books were set out on trestle tables. I stood at the door holding Mum's hand and tried to make sense of such a vast array of books under the one roof. She took me across to a table of children's books, explained that I could choose one to take home, then when I had finished, return it and choose another.

The decision was overwhelming, but I finally chose a Beatrix Potter book, filled with text and the most beautiful coloured pictures of animals and pastoral scenes. I can see it to this day. At the time I didn't understand how this borrowing system worked, but I reverently cradled the book in my hands, knowing I must take good care of it.

That day was a momentous one for me and marked the beginning of a lifelong love affair with books of wide-ranging genres. It was also an important day for Mum because it was the day she signed up to be a volunteer librarian.

The library proved to be hugely successful, and in time moved to a much larger and more suitable space at the back of the School of Arts. No longer were there trestle tables, but special shelving and dividers to house the growing numbers of books. There were large, inviting tables where people could sit and peruse books at leisure, or consult reference books and take notes for homework. The library was always a busy but quiet place, and became an important integral hub in the community engendering a sense of pride.

In Mum's capacity as a library worker, she was frequently consulted for advice in choosing books. Matching a person to a book was quite a responsibility and one she took seriously.

Many people were a joy to help, having open and enquiring minds and were always open to suggestions. But some were difficult. They were set in their ways and had a narrow outlook on life. If a book wasn't to their liking they would take Mum to task, holding her somehow responsible.

The main things they were offended by were swear words, sexual references and perceived risqué love scenes. They would request that the offending book(s) be taken off the shelf. Mum would then explain that the library's policy was to only ever have approved books on the shelves, and what may be offensive to some may well be acceptable to others. If a book had been given the censor's seal of approval, then people had the right to choose whatever they wished to read. She would always offer alternative authors and try to smooth things over. Mum was good at that.

Over time she came to know and understand the members' tastes in books and was better able to steer them in the right direction. It may have been historical fiction, romance, adventure, war, biographies, autobiographies, or whatever else took their fancy.

Mum's job was greatly advantageous to my father, myself and my paternal grandparents. When a new book came in that Mum knew we'd like we were always first on the list to borrow it. Our reading was prodigious, and my parents and I read at any opportunity.

My father read as a form of relaxation whenever he could. Mum read while she was cooking, in the bath, on public transport, or whenever she had time to spare. I read voraciously and devoured one book after another. In those days we didn't have television and there were few organised recreational activities, so we had to amuse ourselves. Reading was arguably one of the most popular sources of entertainment and recreation.

Much to people's astonishment and perhaps disapproval, my parents and I read at dinner time. All three of us regularly ate our meal with our books propped open and considered this to be quite normal.

I'm pleased to say my choice of reading matter was never censored by Mum. She encouraged me to read whatever I wanted and to this day I thank her. My father didn't always agree with what I was reading, and I remember a few occasions when a latest read became a bone of contention between my parents. 'Peyton Place' was a perfect example.

Twenty years or so ago I went to my co-educational high school reunion. Mum had died twenty-five years before, and her name was mentioned during the night by some friends who were former library members, singing her praises. They had appreciated the help she had given them in choosing interesting books, and in locating appropriate reference books when they were given an assignment at school or at university. I felt proud that she made such an impact.

Looking back, the day Mum signed up as a volunteer at the library was a pivotal point in her life. Propelled from the role of housewife into a world of books, dealing with the public and the machinations of running a library, Mum blossomed and found her niche. And, along the way, greatly enriched the lives of adults and children within the community.

Thoughts of my childhood always create a warm, fuzzy feeling in my heart and mind. Precious memories of a childhood shared with my many and diverse neighbours. I was born in Durban, South Africa. My parents being of Indian heritage. Five generations who call South Africa home. I was born into a Muslim household, not that it mattered in the large scale of things. My parents were of working class. Dad had a small store in the city selling clothing and Mum worked as a sale assistant in a material store. We lived about 10kms from the city centre in rented premises. Our suburban yard had a double storey building and four small, tin shanty dwellings. The landlord occupied the upstairs part of the double storey building whilst we occupied the lower level of the building. Of course, we had separate entrances and were fully self-contained except for an external dunny that was located on the far end of the yard. We didn't have any electricity in the dunny and years later I found out that I even shared it with another species. Thank goodness I didn't personally witness it. I don't think things would have gone too well had I seen my slithery companions.

The shanties were occupied by two Indian families and two African families. There was a washing stone in the centre of the yard which was for common use. We had white neighbours next door. Essentially, we were one big, happy family. Not only were we of different racial backgrounds, spoke different languages, followed different religions and ate different cuisines; we were just people who shared our diversities.

The key to us living in harmony, despite our differences, was mutual respect and tolerance. The children shared food, played together and we were welcomed in every home within our yard. Everyone cared and looked out for the 'yard' children. We didn't care that we looked different or had different cultural influences; we embraced them all. We all celebrated festivals according to our religious beliefs yet we shared our celebrations and the special treats that are enjoyed during these festivities. Apartheid brought separation and segregation. Our innocent minds did not comprehend that we were living in a land of separation, of apartheid. We were not just people but people defined by our colour. Our close 'family' was being torn apart by the law of the country. Suddenly the realisation hit that we were only allowed to live in certain areas, visit certain places, not allowed to travel freely on public transport, we're restricted to schools according to our race. Beaches were segregated – this I found baffling. How did they separate the waters of the ocean for the different races? It was a conundrum. The life I knew as a young child was suddenly shattering in front of my eyes. My 'yard' family was pulled apart and lost forever.

We lived our lives in racial 'isolation' with the haves and the have nots. We started to lose our appreciation for diversity and embracing differences.

I moved to Australia in 1980. Once again, I started to realise the world was built on differences and we all have our parts and places in this world. Suddenly I was not isolated by race but immersed in a society that thrived on diversity and inclusion. We are not only talking about race but languages, food, cultures, traditions, celebrations, sexuality and presenting as one nation, Australia. My life is so much richer for it. I have re-learned acceptance, tolerance, appreciation and participation in a society that's rich in diversity.



Breaking the Ice

Anne B Udy

GALSTON 2159

Community, that's what Carol wanted—to be part of a community that was welcoming and full of variety.

A list of the countries represented in the suburb of Gravelton sounded better than a world tour. She was excited about the future she and Michael were entering into with the purchase of their new home. But by the end of the second month she had not found even one good friend. There was no warmth in any of her encounters with neighbours or those she passed in the street. Everyone was so involved with those of their own culture, they did not have any space left. Carol felt even their smiles were icy or perhaps there was a shield of ice separating her from people whose backgrounds were not Australian.

She did get acquainted with the Americans next door who complained that 'people here don't even speak proper English' and moved away as soon as they could.

A new family—the Webers— moved in. Carol baked a fresh batch of Anzac biscuits, took three limes off the tree and with her four-year-old, Joanna, went to welcome them.

The door opened quickly. "Oh, how lovely. Come in, come in." The woman's skin was a warm brown colour and her smile captivating. "My name's Kira." What a great welcome. I told my husband this would be a wonderful community.

Without comment on the last sentence Carol said, "We're so glad you're here. I'm Carol Carter and this is Joanna."

A boy about Joanna's size bounced into the room.

Kira took his hand and then Joanna's. "Joanna, this is Birrani, Biri for short. Birrani, this is Joanna."

Joanna, usually too shy to say anything, looked up at Kira and said, "Jo, for short."

The two children smiled at each other and briefly touched hands.

Kira turned to her son, "Birrani, say Hello to Mrs. Carter."

He looked at their visitor, "Hello, Mrs. Carter."

"Hello, Birrani, I'm so glad to meet you."

She turned to her daughter, "Your turn. Say Hello to..." She paused "Is it Mrs Weber?"

"How about Aunty Kira? I'd prefer that." She turned to Joanna. "We're next-door neighbours. That's almost family. Call me Aunty Kira."

Joanna looked up with a big smile, "Hello, Aunty Kira," she said softly.

"In that case," said Carol, "I must be Aunty Carol for Birrani."

The room was full of smiles. Carol felt her hopes coming back.

The two families got on well. The men helped each other at the weekends or had a beer and chatted on one of the verandahs.

The women tried to work out ways of breaking the ice and building community.

Kira's husband, Yarran Weber, got his surname from his German father. Because his mother died soon after his birth, he was brought up by his Aboriginal grandmother. He was a builder and came home one day with his ute full of outdoor play equipment. When renovating a house, he'd been asked to remove it all from the yard. "Keep it, give it away or dispose of it somehow." That was the way it was put. He brought a second load home the next day. He piled it in their yard and garage. Maybe he could sell it.

Kira thought they should keep it. She told Carol "This stuff cluttering up the place could help us make the community more friendly." Carol wondered what she meant.

"We could meet a need. Quite a few families here have children under school age," Kira said. "They probably can't afford to pay for childcare, but I bet they'd welcome a chance to have their child looked after at least one morning a week."

"What?" Carol asked.

"We could knock down the fence between our two houses, put up all this play equipment, and have a space to keep quite a few kids safe and happy."

"Oh, I don't know. Who'd look after them?"

"You and me in charge but I've a niece who's training in childcare. We'd offer it on a day when she could help and, perhaps, bring a friend from the course as well."

"Okay, let's try it," Carol said.

It took about a month to get the equipment in good order, demolish the dividing fence and put in a child-safe fence around the play area. Kira and Carol took their children on a walk and put leaflets in all the mailboxes.

There was an open day when anyone could have a look. Five families signed up their preschool children for Thursday mornings. But accompanying primary school siblings wanted a chance to have a go. That required a rethink.

Kira and Carol saw this could be a splendid way to get to know people. They decided that on Saturdays children could come if—and only if—an adult from the child's family stayed with them.

And they came. Every Saturday there were new people to meet. Carol and Kira sat and chatted with the mothers and fathers. By the end of three weeks there were eight children coming every Thursday and a Moslem family had invited both the Carter and Bailey families for a meal. When Carol went shopping there were multiple greetings and short chats.

Once the ice was broken, it just kept melting away.

Gravelton became known for its warm welcome to anyone and everyone.

On the Night of the Exhibition

Teklemariam Birbirs

MERRYLANDS WEST 2160

The exhibition will open at 6:00 pm on November 10 in Newtown. An estimated 150 people were expected to attend the opening night. Among them were Mrs Sabella and her husband, Mr Richard, who had been invited to the opening.

The gallery is full of paintings and sculptures and adorned with bright colours. Deep instrumental sounds were heard in the background. The room's light rested on the pictures and extended through the centre, giving it a unique look and illuminating harmony with the music.

Cocktails were left from the front door, with brochures prepared and placed on a decorative table next to the door. I dressed in traditional Ethiopian attire. Just in time, Mrs Sabella and her husband Richard appeared, and I looked at the other guests with them.

Standing at the entrance, I said, "Welcome."

Mrs Sabella turned around and introduced me to the guests with them. "My daughter Jessica and my granddaughter, Aida," she introduced me. After picking up a Cocktail and talking to them for a while, they began to look around the pictures presented in the gallery.

Mistre was one of the paintings on display in the gallery, with her children Abel and Aida hanging to the left and right. Underneath the stretched canvas, the note read, "Where is Mistre, the mother of Abel and Aida?"

A painting of my friend, Adal's was next to them. At the bottom of his, a note said, 'A true friend in times of trouble'. Mistre and Adal are part of my life, and I saw them as different because they were part of my work. Apart from these paintings, others were for sale.

Mrs Sabella, Richard and Jessica, didn't take their eyes off the picture. From a distance, I knew that they were talking about something big. Confused by what she saw, Jessica took the time to look at the images one by one. I wondered about it, but I thought it was inappropriate to ask them what had happened. Mrs. Sabella and Mr Richard spoke privately, close together. I was intrigued by what I saw. They didn't take the time to look at my other work.

Jessica called me from a distance waving her hand. Surprised and curious, she said, "My parents and I were fascinated by these images. We're amazed to see a picture of our friend Adal, whom we knew thirty years ago. We still get on the phone, and we are a family," she said, expressing her joy.

Mrs Sabella approached me and said, "Do you know Adal?"

"Yes! Adal is my friend," I said.

"So how come you don't know my husband and me? We're very close to Adal. He never talked to you about us?" She said, laughing.

"It's been twenty-nine years since I left Ethiopia. I don't know much. We haven't met since I left. I remember him in my work because I always remember the favour he did for me," I said.

"Adal is a perfect man. We have a special love for him," she said, looking to her daughter.

My heart was pounding. My mind filled with many questions, and my doubts grew enormously. I know that Mistre gave her newborn baby up for adoption. Although Adal handled the case, I do not know the details. Mrs. Sabella told me that she'd been working at a hospital on February 12. Mistre gave birth to her daughter Aida at the same hospital. Now Aida is the one I saw standing in front of me. My heart was about to explode.

Jessica walked around the gallery with her daughter to look at my work. When they finished, Jessica brought her Aida over and said, "I want to buy Mistre, Adal, and two other pictures."

"Those paintings are not for sale. The pictures are for the owners," I said.

They bought a bronze statue called "Mother Africa" and two other paintings and promised to come and take them on the closing night. They said goodbye to me. All the guests were very supportive, expressing their delight at what they had seen. A number of my paintings sold that night.

በኤግዚቢሽኑ ምሽት

Teklemariam Birbirsa

MERRYLANDS WEST 2160

ኤግዚቢሽኑ በኒውታዎን ኖቬምበር 10 ቀን፣ 6:00 ሰዓት ላይ ይከፈታል። በመክፈቻው ምሽት ላይ 150 የሚሆኑ ሰዎች ይሳተፋሉ ተብሎ ይጠበቅ ነበር። ከሚመጡትም ሰዎች መካከል ወይዘሮ ሳቤላ እና ባለቤቷ ሚስተር ሪቻርድም በመክፈቻው ላይ እንዲገኙ ተጋብዘዋል።

ጋለሬው በቅብ ሥዕሎችና ቅርጻ ቅርጾች የተሞላና በደማቅ ቀለሞች የተሞነ ነበር። አዳራሹም ለጆሮ በሚጥሙ ለስላሳ ጣዕመ ዜማዎች የተሞልቷል። የክፍሉ ብርሃንም እንዲሁ በሥዕሎቹ ላይ ፈንጠቆ በአዳራሹ መሃልም ዘልቆ ልዩ መልክ እንዲኖረውና ከሙዚቃው ጋርም እንዲስማማ እድርጎታል።

በመግቢያው በር ላይ ኮከቱሎችና በራሪ ወረቀቶች፣ በአቅራቢያው ካለው የጌጣጌጥ ጠረጴዛ ላይ ተቀምጠዋል። እኔም የኢትዮጵያ አገር ባሕል ልብስ ለብሼ ነበር። ከሰዓቱ ቀደም ብለው ወይዘሮ ሳቤላ እና ባለቤቷ ሪቻርድ ሲመጡ አየኋቸው። አብረዋቸው የነበሩትንም እንግዶች እንዲሁ አየኋቸው።

መግቢያው ላይም ቆሜ “እንኳን ደህና መጣችሁ” በማለት እንግዶችን ተቀበልኩ። ወይዘሮ ሳቤላ ዘወር አለችና አብረዋት ከመጡት እንግዶች ጋር አስተዋወቀችኝ። በመቀጠልም “ይህቺ ልጄ ጄሲካ እና የልጅ ልጄ አይዳ ይባላሉ” ብላ አስተዋወቀችኝ። ኮከቱል አንስተው ለጥቂት ጊዜ ከተነጋገሩ በኋላ በጋለሬው ውስጥ የቀረቡትን ሥዕሎች እየተዘዋወሩ መመልከት ጀመሩ።

‘ሚስጥረ’ የምትለው የቀለም ቅብ በጋለሬው ውስጥ ከቀረቡት ሥዕሎች አንዷ ነች። ይህችው ሥዕል ልጆቿ አቤልና አይዳ በእናታቸው ግራና ቀኝ ተንጠልጥለው የምታሳይ ምስል ነች። በሽራው ስር ግርጌ “የአቤል እና የአይዳ እናት ‘ሚስጥረ’ የት አለች? የሚል ማስታወሻ ስፍራል።

‘አዳል’ የሚባለውም የጓደኛዬ ሥዕልም አጠገባቸው ነበር።

በግርጌም የሰፈረው ማስታወሻ “እውነተኛ ጓደኛ በችግር ጊዜ” ይላል። ‘ሚስጥረ’ እና አዳል የሕይወቴ አንዱ አካል እንደሆኑ ይሰማኛል። እነዚህን ሥዕሎች ከሌሎቹ ስራዎቹ ሁሉ የተለዩ አድርጌ ነው የማያቸው። ከእነሱ በስተቀር በጋለሬው ውስጥ የቀረቡት ሥዕሎች በሙሉ ለሽያጭ የቀረቡ ናቸው።

ወይዘሮ ሳቤላ፣ ሪቻርድና ጄሲካ ዓይናቸውን ሳይነቅሉ ሥዕሎቹን አተኩረው ይመለከቱ ነበር። ከሩቅ ሆኜ ሳያቸው በአንድ ትልቅ ጉዳይ ላይ እያወሩ እንደነበር ተገነዘብኩ። ጄሲካ ባየችው ነገር ግራ ተጋብታለች። አንድ በአንድ ሥዕሎቹንም በርጋታ ትመለከት ነበር። የማየው ነገር ሁሉ በጣም ገርሞኛል፣ ይሁን እንጂ ምን እንደተፈጠረ መጠየቅ፣ አግባብ አይደለም ብዬ በማስብ ዝም አልኩ። ወይዘሮ ሳቤላና ሚስተር ሪቻርድ ደግሞ የግል ጉዳይ እንዳለው ሰው አፍ ለአፍ ገጥመው ያወሩ ነበር። ባየሁት ነገር በጣም ተገረምኩ። ሌሎቹን ስራዎቹን ለመመልከት ምንም ጊዜ አላበከኩም።

ጄሲካ እጇን አወዛዋዛ ጠራችኝ። በጣም በመገረምና በስሜት በተሞጠ መልኩ እንዲህ አለች። “እኔና ወላጆቼ በእነዚህ ሥዕሎች ተማርከናል። ከስላሳ ዓመት በላይ የምናውቀውን ጓደኛችንን የአዳልን ምስል በማየታችን በጣም ተገርመናል። አሁንም በስልክ እንገናኛለን፣ ቤተሰብም ነን።” በማለት የተሰማትን ደስታ ገለጸችልኝ።

ወይዘሮ ሳቤላም ወደ እኔ ቀርብ ብላ “አዳልን ታውቀዋለህ እንዴ?” በማለት ጠየቀችኝ። “አዎ! አዳል እኮ ጓደኛዬ ነው” ስል መለስኩላት። “ታዲያ ባለቤቴንና እኔን እንዴት አታውቀንም? ከአዳል ጋር እኮ በጣም እንቀራረባለን፤ እሱ ስለ እኛ ነግሮህ አያውቅም?” በማለት እየሳቀች ጠየቀችኝ።

“ኢትዮጵያን ለቅቄ ከወጣሁ እነሆ አሁን ሃያ ዘጠኝ ዓመት ሆኖኛል፣ አሁን ብዙ አላውቅም፣ ከወጣሁኝ ጊዜ ጀምሮ አልተገናኘንም፣ ሁል ጊዜ በስራዬ አስታውሰዋለሁ። ለእኔ ያደረገልኝን የተለየ ውለታ

ሁሌም አስታውሳለሁ" በማለት ነገርኳት።

"አዳል ፍፁም ሰው ነው። ለእሱ ልዩ አክብሮትና ፍቅር አለን" በማለት ወደ ልጄ ተመለከተች።

ልቤ ይመታ ጀመር። አእምሮዬም በብዙ ጥያቄዎች ተሞላ፤ ጥርጣሪዬም በእጅጉ ከፍ አለ። ሚስጥረ የወለደችውን አዲስ ጨቅላ ህጻን ለማደግ እንደሰጠች አውቃለሁ። ጉዳዩን ይዘት የነበረው አዳል ስለነበር እኔ የማውቀው ዝርዝር ጉዳይ አልነበረም። ወይዘሮ ሳቤላ እንደነገረችኝ ከሆነ፣ የካቲት (February) 12 ቀን በሆስፒታል ውስጥ ትሰራ ነበር። ሚስጥረ ልጄን አይዳንም የወለደችው በዚህ ሆስፒታል ውስጥ ነበር። አዎ አይዳ ማለት ይሄው ዛሬ ከፊቴ ቆማ ያየኋት ማለት ነው። እኔ ግን ልቤ ሊፈነዳ ደረሰ። በማለት አወጋችኝ።

ጄሲካ ከልጄ ጋር ሆና በጋለሪው ውስጥ እየተዘዋወረች ስራዎቿን ጎበኘች። ጉብኝታቸውን ሲጨርሱም ጄሲካ አይዳን ይዛ ወደእኔ በመምጣት "ሚስጥረን፣ አዳልንና ሌሎች ሁለት ሥዕሎችን መግዛት እፈልጋለሁ" አለች።

"እነዚያ ሥዕሎች የሚሸጡ አይደሉም። ሥዕሎቹ የባለቤቶቹ ናቸው" አልኳት። ከዚያም "እናት አፍሪካ" የሚለውን የነሐስ ቅርጽ እና ሌሎች ሁለት ሥዕሎችን ገዙ። የገዟቸውንም ቅርጽና ስዕሎች በምሽቱ መዝጊያ ላይ መጥተው እንደሚወስዱ ቃል ገብተው ተስናብተውኝ ሄዱ። የመጡት እንግዶች ባዩት ነገር ሁሉ መደሰታቸውን በመግለጽና በማበረታታት ድጋፋቸውን አሳይተውኛል። በዚህ ምሽት ላይ በርካታ ሥዕሎቹ ተሸጠዋል።

Trees Bring Us Together

Sue Thompson

EARLWOOD 2206

Culinary surprises, neighbourhood joys and Thursdays with Frank.

The Hong Kong Orchid Tree is glorious in flower and in Nepal its flowers are a delicacy as they are turned into Nepali pickle which is not pickle as we usually know it but let me tell you it is soooo unbelievably delicious.

A few houses down there is a superb tree, glorious when in flower. It's the house where lovely Frank used to live. Not long after I moved in to my house in 1998, I spotted an elderly neighbour heading up the street (it's hard to know what is up and what down when there is no hill but still one seems to be able to tell), with the impaired gait of someone who has lived life well, as I was getting ready for work at Police Headquarters which was then in College Street in Sydney CBD.

By the time I was ready to leave, he was at the bus stop. I pulled over and offered him a lift. He asked to just go to the train station if I wouldn't mind. A delightful polite, gentle man with kind eyes and a great open Aussie smile.

His name was Frank. As we drove along – "Where are you going Frank?" "In to town to meet my friends, we meet up every Thursday".

"Where do you know each other from Frank?"

"We were in the War together." I really like people and their life stories, not horrible people but nice people.

"Wow Frank. Where were you in the War?"

Frank was one of the "Rats of Tobruk" and every Thursday he and the other Sydney "Rats of Tobruk" gathered in that way that life-long friendships become so precious. I loved talking with Frank and really looked forward to our Thursday drives.

I convinced him that I loved taking him right to the door of where he was going and that it really was no trouble. He eventually believed me and I'd pull up outside Wynyard and off he'd go to see his mates. He told me his mates loved the fact that a young person was so interested in what they did in the War. I honour those with honourable lives of kindness, service and sacrifice. I am sure he loved the fact that on the way to Police HQ I'd drop off one of the Rats of Tobruk in town to meet his cobbers, his mates.

I really missed Frank after he died. I knew at some point later his wife died but thought maybe a family member still lived there.

Then recently, as the Hong Kong Orchid Tree spread its bounty of flowers to the sky and the footpath, my wonderful young Nepali friend of the last 4 years, reminded me as she does annually, that in Nepal these are a delicacy. We hovered, she asked if I might go and knock on the door and ask if we could please buy some. I can be anti-social as head nodding in conversations can trigger terrible migraine and I am definitely a head nodder of life (those of us who want to make sure that others feel appreciated and heard often nod a lot to convey this. We don't even realise until head nodding equals migraine. Trying not to head nod is like trying not to breathe).

We ventured to the door, knocked and met Frank's step daughter and she knew all about me. "You used to do Thursday mornings with Frank".

And so there was a lovely gathering under the glorious tree followed up the next day with flower picking. In Nepal it is rude to a tree/garden to pick from it at night when its energy is settling down for the evening and better to pick earlier. I got more of Frank's life story and found out he called the tree "Molly's Tree" as it came from his sister's tree on her property out of Dubbo where they grew up. My mum grew up in Dubbo too.

The next day we went back for more picking, COVID masks on, collecting flowery treasures for other Nepali friends, some who had not eaten the delicacy for 10 yrs whilst in Australia. She was going to make her friends delightfully happy as Frank and I did in our sharing.

Lives intertwine so preciously when there is love, kindness and understanding. Today there was chatting to the local kids too after being grilled by them as to whether we were allowed to pick the flowers. "Yes Karyn gave us permission".

"Okay if you know her name it must be okay." I had forgotten it's hard to spot a familiar neighbour when they are wearing a mask.

Then out came a parent to the front fence. We had chats on many topics, past jobs, area history, first houses in the street, sewer lines, the joys of historical plans and records, drainage easements etc. We discovered lots about each other in our gathering of social distance around the tree.

People who live in our street love living here. We love Earlwood's wonderful diversity and there is something lovely about living in a Crescent with river banks behind and houses built in the 1920s – 1940s when Earlwood was farmland, grazing land, poultry farms, great fishing and crabbing and prawning etc. I promised to share my forays into street history including old Water Board drawings of the houses etc.

The Hong Kong Orchid Tree had many a lorikeet above in her branches (eating the flowers, chattering and causing flowers to rain on our heads like blessings) and several people lazily chatting below and enjoying human connection while flower gathering happened and bags were filled. When it started to rain gently for the last 30 minutes, we still stood there chatting, enjoying our little piece of community, the rain and the connections.

Nowadays it is me who is older like Frank, enjoying my young friends. I think of the Robert Frost poem "Mending Wall" as I often do when chatting to neighbours over fences.

Andrea

Linda Harding

BEXLEY 2207

Friendship is a delicate thing when you are eight. Back in the fifties in Australia it was its own small world. We played elastics in the school yard, drew hopscotch on every flat surface, competed with knucklebones or marbles at recess and ate our Vegemite or jam sandwiches at lunch together (occasionally swapping a piece of Kraft cheddar for a sad piece of Devon or a scotch finger biscuit). Socially the expectations were very much the same everywhere; keep your head down, don't think too much of yourself, and avoid the bullies!

Then Andrea arrived! She was a blonde, blue-eyed German import with no sense of Aussie restraint and that meant trouble was about to brew. Her accent was strong. She pronounced her name with a guttural sound in the back of her throat that seemed to us like she was about to throw up. Such is the cruel sensibility of the ignorant child. I seem to remember being assigned to Andrea by a teacher. She was a new girl that had to be shown the ropes and I had a reputation for toeing the line with school rules.

We were chalk and cheese. She was an extrovert I was an introvert. She rushed in where I held back, she was desperately seeking friendship and I was incredibly shy. Yet I found her fascinating in a horrified way. We began to hang out together beyond the school's expectations. She stood up for me at times when the school yard cruelty spilled over in my direction. She had no difficulty delivering a swift uppercut to a tormentor.

She was just learning English, but it never held her back in expressing herself. She was loud. I distinctly remember my embarrassment one day as we entered the bus for an excursion. She yelled 'Ooww! Somebody trod on my foots!' as she made her way down the aisle. Someone had indeed trodden on her 'foots' but one was expected to take these things in stride and get the grammar right! When she was told to keep it down, and get a grip, she protested it was an unreasonable request. Looking back, it was. Who said you must keep everything low key? At the time I thought the humiliation was overwhelming.

Andrea was in my life for only a few months. She had hinted that life at home was not happy but I never did find out the whole story. Some things cannot be expressed in any language. She was there one day and gone the next, leaving me less embarrassed but poorer for having lost her big personality from my life. I wish we could meet again so I could apologise for the cringing of my eight-year-old self, so I could tell her that different is beautiful, she is beautiful.

Everyone needs an Andrea to unsettle the status quo, to embarrass them out of their comfort zone and to remember that there is no 'us and them,' there is only wonderfully, gloriously, us.



Ireland was Born in Me

Paul Barrett

PADSTOW 2211

In the early evening of 11 July 1924, in the darkened front room of my home in Hegarty Street, Glebe, I lay in bed awaiting my departure from this physical world. As a Catholic I have been fortunate that our local Franciscan priest was able to visit me earlier in the day and hear my confession and give me the Last Rites. As I reflect upon my life, I feel comfortable that when the time comes to meet my God, He will hopefully not judge me too harshly.

It has been an interesting life and although at times I have experienced the harshness and undeserved ill treatment by some people because of my national origins and religion, I have accepted it and utilized it to strengthen me.

I was born in January 1866 in Ballyconnell, County Cavan in Ireland. I was one of eleven children and although we were poor in material possessions like many of our Catholic neighbours, we were rich in the love we shared with our parents. My father leased a small land holding from an English Lord where he grew potatoes as his main crop. Historically, dating back to the reign of Henry the eighth, Ireland's land had been controlled by a minority of Protestant Anglo-Irish elite. My father told me that although in the majority, the tyranny experienced by his Catholic Irish ancestors, had moderated by the 1840s. Even so, they were still treated as second class citizens.

Just prior to my birth, in the period between 1845 and 1850, the potato crops in Ireland were hit by a crop disease called the "potato blight" and as this was the primary source of food, Ireland was plunged into what was later described as the "Great Famine". Our family struggled through this period and many of our neighbours and relatives perished through starvation. My older brothers travelled to Liverpool in the hope of finding work to help support the family, but they returned without success. One of my brothers said that at one factory he visited looking for a job, they had a sign posted outside which said, "Workers wanted – Irish and dogs need not apply." Disillusioned, he returned home. Later he and another brother emigrated with some of my sisters to New York. Although this physically separated the members of our family, we stayed in contact with each other by mail and where possible my siblings made short visits back to Ireland. The reduction of family members at home also assisted my parents to manage their limited resources.

In 1884, under a scheme called "assisted migration" I also said farewell to my parents, siblings and extended family and migrated to Australia. I was to be the only member of my family to move to this country and I have never regretted not following in the footsteps of my other siblings to the USA. I saw Australia as a land of great promise, and it has not disappointed me. I know that I leave my children and their children to a better future in this land.

My mother gave me a letter of introduction to a distant relative of hers living in Sydney with an assurance that they would look out for me but alas this did not eventuate. They were likely busy making their way in this new country and I suspect they did not want to be burdened by a newcomer from the "old country." I hold no hard feelings towards them. Sometimes operating on your own initiative makes you a stronger person, or so I have come to believe.

A potato farmer from Ireland does not have many skills to offer an employer but the one thing I was good at was working with horses. Not long after arrival I obtained a job working as a carter for a company owned by a fellow Irishman from Killaloe in County Clare named William Mealey. Sadly, four years after my arrival William Mealey passed away but thankfully his carting company was taken over by his wife, Mary Ryan, who was also an Irish immigrant from Clonaspoe in County Tipperary.

When I look back on these early days, I reflect on the fact that it was my Irish compatriots who extended a welcoming hand. In those years, although not so much now, there still existed the spillover animosity of the English Protestants towards the Irish Catholics. As I say, these days, Australia is such a mix of nationalities and religions that the binding glue that holds our society together is our Australian identity. I married my wife, Ellen Mealey, the daughter of my employer, in 1901. Ellen was born in Australia, as were my six children. My dearest Ellen used to say to our children, "I wasn't born in Ireland, but Ireland was born in me" and I would tell my children to live by their mother's words and to pass them down through the generations of our family to come. It is important to be proud of both where you were born as well as your heritage.

I have spent more of my life in Australia now than where I was born. My wife and I have lived most of our lives in the Glebe/Leichhardt area of Sydney which when I arrived in Sydney, used to be a largely Irish enclave but in recent times we have seen the arrival of some immigrants from Italy. I am sure they, like myself, will experience a degree of animosity from the ignorant minority but in time they will also be embraced as Australians. This is what future generations of migrants will also experience. Unfortunately, I will not be here to offer advice or witness this evolution of our society.

As I lie here in this darkened room with my dearest Ellen and children and the murmur of prayers in my ear, I am feeling satisfied and complete as I near the end of the journey from my Australian home to my eternal and spiritual home.

Families of Suburbia

Alison Miller

PANANIA 2213

Sitting at the airport, I remember my Nan going by air to New Zealand. It was around 1964 and I was 7. I had never known anyone to fly or cruise anywhere. Our holidays consisted of rented houses at Taree, Manilla, The Entrance and then our holiday of all holidays at the Florida Motel on the Gold Coast, Queensland (built on a canal and with a Car-o-Tel, where your car was parked right beside your unit).

But, Nan was going *overseas*! I asked Dad recently, "How come Nan went overseas? Was there a particular reason?"

"Yes, she probably got your granddad's insurance and I got shares in his bankrupt factory." he sighed.

On her return, she bought my sister, Lynda, a brown-haired, brown-eyed doll she called, Leat. She was the most unusual toy I'd ever seen. I got her very Caucasian, blonde-haired, blue-eyed twin, Maree.

Living in suburban Revesby, we personally knew no Asian or Islander people, nor had we ever seen any. I knew the Jajas and Hannas were from Malta and Lebanon, the most foreign, outlandish places I could imagine. They spoke in broken English and were very devout Catholics.

The only 'foreigners' I remember were White Russians, Latvians, Lithuanians and Polish. In post-war Revesby suburbia, they blended in. In fact, their super blonde hair made them memorable. They came from somewhere undefined to me on a map, with parentage that was both fascinating and confusing.

My friend Lois's father, an Italian market gardener, brought sheaths of gladioli to the nuns at school for the year's end. In faltering English, he surprised us by coming to our classroom in his work overalls, in a time when parents never approached the school directly.

The March family had 13 children, including eight girls: all immaculately dressed with beautiful, curly brown, waist-length hair. Their house, to my astonishment, had no doors with only curtains separating the rooms (perhaps for noise prevention). In contrast, the Grays always looked like they needed a good feed, wash and trim. Having had eight kids, seemed to have drained the colour from Mrs Gray and her children. Blue, watery eyes and mousy brown hair tied the siblings together. They seemed sucked out of any life in those around them and from each other. Their ramshackle house badly needed paint and tender loving care. It got a makeover once the kids left home. Their eldest daughter managed to pass the HSC, something most large families (of girls especially) didn't even consider possible.

My sister's best friend Karina at 14 had a stepbrother (who I quite didn't get), who at 18 was at uni (!), studying (!) and had his own room (!!), which we peeked at from his doorway. "Don't touch anything, he'll know!" Karina always whispered. I knew only one person with a double degree (??), who was way old (24) and living at home. Most of my Year 10 cohort got jobs or went to St Pat's Business College, unless they were in the 'A' class. There was no negotiating with dad, 'Year 12 was compulsory' and it was assumed so was uni. To have three daughters at university made other people breathe in noisily when they heard about it.

The most memorable family lived diagonally opposite us and were evicted by the Housing Commission. They were put out onto the kerb with all their worldly goods in tumbling piles. I peeked through our venetian blinds at Mrs McCann and her four kids sitting on four boxes, surrounded by bags and kitchen ware. Mr McCann was possibly the first person of whom we heard, to be banned from Revesby Workers Club, for gambling over his limit. They had just put in poker machines. I was both shocked and curious at their family's unspeakable misfortune. I think our church organised a food hamper, then afterwards the family silently disappeared from our lives.

The other person who mysteriously and sadly disappeared was a family's child, who lived around the corner. They had one son who was extremely smart and was at uni, completing his second degree. This confused me, as we knew no one to go to uni and certainly no-one who willingly did two degrees! Their other much younger son was, I assume now, intellectually disabled. I never knew where he went before he was eight. (He was never at school.) Mum said he pulled up handfuls of carpet. When he was eight (and not before) he gained a place (I assume) at a residential facility. He was never mentioned again as far as I know. It was never spoken of, or discussed, but I knew it was very unusual and sad.

Our suburban school life was very predictable. If we forgot something at home, we'd be allowed to walk home at lunch time, retrieve it and return to school. It was usually my hated Friday sewing kit that I forgot. No ringing mum on the phone, as we assumed she was a) home b) unfussed by this liberty and c) the neighbour who was home, had a key if she was out!

With Vanya... Or No Party at All!

Evgenia Klitsas

BRIGHTON LE SANDS 2216

"Mummy, Mummy," Valeria chanted as she hopped down the stairs into Vasiliki's arms. She was a cute little thing! Fair braids and eyes the sapphire blue of a lake. These days she was overly excited. It was her birthday next Sunday; she was turning six! Before long, she began swamping Vasiliki with her chitter-chatter in her usual chirping voice. "Mummy, today Miss Valoure taught us a new word. Diservity... drivesity... or something like that," she muttered. She then went on to tell Vasiliki – rather flatly – about a new girl in class; Vanya was from India. She dragged on in a voice as dry as dust, attacking Vanya's black as pitch hair and condemning the touch of brownness on her skin. Before Vasiliki could even utter a word, Valeria skipped off leaving her in shock. Was that her daughter saying those awful things?

Vasiliki had emigrated to this sunburnt country, abandoning all her consciousness of Greece. She knew what it felt like to be put aside, because you are different. In time, and after their first gruelling period of acquaintance, she had come to love her new homeland with its far horizons and jewel-sea. Always keeping Greece in her heart, she often told Valeria stories from the Ancient Greek Mythology and had instilled a love in her for the Ancient Gods of Olympus.

Then and there, Vasiliki felt the compelling need to do something drastic about Valeria's attitude towards Vanya. It was way over the fence! No, she was not too young! Had, of course, Valeria been some years older, she would have confronted her with words. She would have stimulated a thought-provoking discussion expressing her standpoint on the beauty of diversity and allowed for her daughter to delve deep into the reality of it and bring it to life. She would have shed light on the celebration of diversity, which signifies the understanding of the uniqueness of each and every one of us and acknowledges those distinctive variances and variations that may include our backgrounds, our personality, our life experiences.

However, at this point of time, Valeria was just a six-year-old girl, who apart from being charming... could also be wilful and stubborn. Vasiliki had a plan! Walking into the dining room she found Valeria, once again, relating the story of Vanya to her dad. The word – different – came up in almost every sentence of hers! Rather abruptly, Vasiliki interrupted her. "Let's talk about your party," Vasiliki voiced freshly. "Who are you inviting," she added sweetly.

"All my classmates!" Valeria yelled in excitement.

"Very thoughtful of you," her mum remarked tactfully. "That means Vanya as well!"

"No, no, not her!" Valeria bellowed, stamping her feet. Vasiliki simply ignored her and her crying and her screaming, as she did with her tummy-ache the following morning. "You listen to me! It will be with Vanya or no party at all!" She was determined. The following days leading up to her party, Valeria was not overwhelmed with excitement. She even kept her endless chitter-chatter under some control!

At long last, the big day had come! It was Sunday! Party day! Dangling strings of colourful balloons, curtains of dazzling fairy lights, a rainbow pinata, platters with deliciously smelling finger food and a garden nothing less than a wonderland! Valeria's dress was a subtle shade of pink with delicate white rosebuds. Vasiliki looked very elegant in her emerald dress and high-heeled shoes, which-in between us – were giving her quite a bit of trouble. Everything was in place, except for Valeria's cheekily enchanting smile. Ding! Dong! Doorbell after doorbell... kids came rushing in, carrying presents in bags and boxes of all colours and sizes. Valeria was the host of her party and she was to fulfil that role graciously. She greeted her friends and accepted their presents, letting out a short cry of joy upon opening them. Nevertheless, with every ding, dong of the doorbell, her heart fluttered and her eyes opened wide. Was it her? Was it Vanya this time?? she kept wondering. Ding! Dong! The doorbell interrupted her thoughts. Turning around... there she was! Vanya! In a cone shaped long skirt, in the most vibrant pink she had seen, standing bashfully under the fairy lights. What was she to do? Vincent approached from behind, almost startling her. "Come on dear, this young lady has been on pins and needles to meet you," he exaggerated.

Reluctantly Valeria neared Vanya and took hold of the present she was handed. Just then Vasiliki stepped in. "You've thanked Vanya, haven't you?" she inquired. Valeria looked into Vanya's eyes. She looked hard...almost piercing her way through. This time Vanya did not lower them. Instead, she let Valeria reach deep inside. Could she see how much she longed for her acceptance, she wondered? Could she see how much she wanted her approval?

"Thank you, Vanya," Valeria said and shyly took Vanya by the hand to the lemonade stand.

"Aren't you opening my present?" Vanya asked timidly. Without delay, Valeria did so. 'Tales from the Indian Mythology,' Valeria gasped! She, then, leaned close and laid a kiss on Vanya's cheek. It was the preciousness of that kiss that bound them together for life. Then and there!

"I love Mythology," Valeria added.

"I know all about Indian Mythology," Vanya remarked.

"Have you heard of Athena?"

"No, have you heard of Durga?"

"No, but let me tell you about Athena; she was the Olympian goddess of wisdom!"

"Wow! Well, that's like our Saraswati; she was the goddess of all knowledge."

"And Durga?" Valeria asked in curiosity.

"Durga was a warrior goddess, destroyer of all evil!"

"Hmm... That's awesome! Have you heard of Aphrodite?"

"No, no, I haven't," Vanya eagerly said.

"She was the goddess of beauty; born from the foam of the sea."

"How amazing! Have you heard of Vishnu?"

"Have you heard of Poseidon?"

"Have you heard...?"

"Have you heard...?"

Diversity was being celebrated!

Then and there!

‘Η θα έλθει στο πάρτυ η Βάνια ή δεν θα γίνει πάρτυ!’

Evgenia Klitsas

BRIGHTON LE SANDS 2216

"Μαμά, μαμά", φώναξε χαρούμενα η Βαλέρια καθώς κατέβαινε τις σκάλες και έπεφτε στην αγκαλιά της Βασιλικής. Ήταν ένα χαριτωμένο πλασματάκι! Ξανθωπές πλεξούδες και μάτια στο μπλε ζαφειριού μιας λίμνης. Αυτές τις μέρες ήταν υπερβολικά ενθουσιασμένη. Είχε τα γενέθλιά της την επόμενη Κυριακή- γινόταν έξι χρονών! Πριν περάσει πολύς καιρός, άρχισε να κατακλύζει τη Βασιλική με την κουβεντούλα της με τη συνηθισμένη κελαηδιστή φωνή της. "Μαμά, σήμερα η κυρία Βαλούρη μας έμαθε μια καινούργια λέξη. Διαφορότητα... διαφορετότητα.. ή κάτι τέτοιο", μουρμούρισε. Στη συνέχεια συνέχισε να λέει στη Βασιλική -μάλλον άτονα- για ένα καινούργιο κορίτσι στην τάξη, τη Βάνια, που ήταν από την Ινδία. Συνέχισε με μια άχρωμη φωνή, ψέγοντας τα μαύρα σαν πίσσα μαλλιά της Βάνιας και επικρίνοντας το μελαχρινό δέρμα της. Πριν προλάβει η Βασιλική να πει έστω και μια λέξη, η Βαλέρια έφυγε και την άφησε σοκαρισμένη. Η κόρη της να λέει αυτά τα απαίσια πράγματα;

Η Βασιλική είχε μεταναστεύσει σε τούτη την ηλιοκαμένη χώρα, εγκαταλείποντας κάθε συνείδηση της για την Ελλάδα. Ήξερε πώς είναι να σε βάζουν στην άκρη, επειδή είσαι διαφορετικός. Με τον καιρό, και μετά την πρώτη εξαντλητική περίοδο εξοικείωσης, είχε αγαπήσει τη νέα της πατρίδα με τους μακρινούς ορίζοντες και τη θάλασσα-κόσμημα. Έχοντας πάντα την Ελλάδα στην καρδιά της, έλεγε συχνά στη Βαλέρια ιστορίες από την Αρχαία Ελληνική Μυθολογία και της είχε εμφυσήσει την αγάπη για τους Αρχαίους Θεούς του Ολύμπου.

Αμέσως η Βασιλική ένιωσε την επιτακτική ανάγκη να κάνει κάτι δραστικό για τη στάση της Βαλέριας απέναντι στη Βάνια. Είχε ξεπεράσει κατά πολύ τα όρια! Όχι, δεν ήταν πολύ μικρή για να μάθει! Αν, βέβαια, η Βαλέρια ήταν μερικά χρόνια μεγαλύτερη, θα την αντιμετώπιζε με λόγια. Θα είχε υποκινήσει μια συζήτηση που θα προκαλούσε σκέψεις εκφράζοντας την άποψή της για την ομορφιά της διαφορετικότητας και θα επέτρεπε στην κόρη της

να εμβαθύνει στην πραγματικότητα και να την ζωντανέψει. Θα έριχνε φως στον εορτασμό της διαφορετικότητας, που σημαίνει την κατανόηση της μοναδικότητας του καθενός από εμάς και αναγνωρίζει αυτές τις χαρακτηριστικές διαφορές και παραλλαγές που μπορεί να περιλαμβάνουν την προέλευσή μας, την προσωπικότητά μας, τις εμπειρίες της ζωής μας.

Ωστόσο, εκείνη τη χρονική στιγμή, η Βαλέρια ήταν απλώς ένα εξάχρονο κορίτσι, το οποίο εκτός από γοητευτικό... μπορούσε να είναι και ιδιόρρυθμο και πεισματάρικο. Η Βασιλική είχε ένα σχέδιο! Μπαίνοντας στην τραπεζαρία βρήκε τη Βαλέρια, για άλλη μια φορά, να διηγείται στον μπαμπά της την ιστορία για τη Βάνια. Η λέξη "διαφορετική" υπήρχε σχεδόν σε κάθε της πρόταση! Μάλλον απότομα, η Βασιλική τη διέκοψε. "Ας μιλήσουμε για το πάρτι σου", είπε χαρωπά η Βασιλική. "Ποιον θα καλέσεις", πρόσθεσε γλυκά.

"Όλους τους συμμαθητές μου!" Φώναξε η Βαλέρια ενθουσιασμένη.

"Πολύ ευγενικό εκ μέρους σου", παρατήρησε διακριτικά η μαμά της. "Αυτό σημαίνει και τη Βάνια!"

"Όχι, όχι, όχι αυτή!" Φώναξε η Βαλέρια, χτυπώντας τα πόδια της. Η Βασιλική απλώς αγνόησε και το κλάμα και τις φωνές της, όπως έκανε και με τον κοιλόπονο της το επόμενο πρωί. "Άκουσέ με! Ή θα έλθει στο πάρτι η Βάνια ή δεν θα γίνει πάρτι!" Ήταν αποφασισμένη. Τις επόμενες μέρες πριν το πάρτι της, η Βαλέρια δεν ήταν και κατενθουσιασμένη. Ακόμη και την ατελείωτη φλυαρία της κρατούσε υπό έλεγχο!

Επιτέλους, ήρθε η μεγάλη μέρα! Ήταν Κυριακή! Ημέρα του πάρτι! Κρεμαστές σειρές από πολύχρωμα μπαλόνια, κουρτίνες από εκθαμβωτικά φώτα νεράιδων, μια πιναία ουράνιου τόξου, πιατέλες με υπέροχους μυρωδάτους μεζέδες και ο κήπος έμοιαζε με χώρα θαυμάτων! Το φόρεμα της Βαλέρια ήταν μια διακριτική απόχρωση του ροζ με ντελικάτα

λευκά μπουμπούκια τριαντάφυλλου. Η Βασιλική ήταν πολύ κομψή στο σμαραγδένιο φόρεμά της και τα ψηλοτάκουνα παπούτσια της, τα οποία -μεταξύ μας- την ταλαιπώρησαν αρκετά. Όλα ήταν στη θέση τους, εκτός από το θρασύτατο γοητευτικό χαμόγελο της Βαλέριας. Ντινγκ! Ντονγκ! Κτυπούσε συνέχεια το κουδούνι... παιδιά έμπαιναν ορμητικά, κουβαλώντας δώρα σε σακούλες και κουτιά όλων των χρωμάτων και μεγεθών. Η Βαλέρια ήταν η οικοδέσποινα του πάρτι της και έπρεπε να ανταποκριθεί σε αυτόν τον ρόλο ευγενικά. Χαιρέτησε τους φίλους της και δέχτηκε τα δώρα τους, βγάζοντας μια σύντομη κραυγή χαράς όταν τα άνοιξε. Παρ' όλα αυτά, σε κάθε ντινγκ, ντονγκ του κουδουνιού, η καρδιά της φτερούγιζε και τα μάτια της άνοιγαν διάπλατα. Ήταν αυτή; Ήταν η Βάνια αυτή τη φορά;" αναρωτιόταν συνεχώς. Ντινγκ! Ντονγκ! Το κουδούνι διέκοψε τις σκέψεις της. Γύρισε και... νάτην! Η Βάνια! Με μια μακριά φούστα σε σχήμα κώνου, στο πιο ζωηρό ροζ που είχε δει, στεκόταν ντροπαλή κάτω από τα φώτα της νεράιδας. Τι έπρεπε να κάνει; Ο Βίνσεντ την προσπέρασε, σχεδόν ξαφνιάζοντάς την. "Ελα, χρυσό μου, αυτή η νεαρή κοπέλα περιμένει πώς και πώς να σε γνωρίσει", είπε υπερβάλλοντα.

Με δισταγμό η Βαλέρια πλησίασε τη Βάνια και πήρε στα χέρια της το δώρο που της έδωσαν. Ακριβώς τότε μπήκε μέσα η Βασιλική. "Ευχαρίστησες την Βάνια, έτσι δεν είναι;" ρώτησε. Η Βαλέρια κοίταξε στα μάτια την Βάνια. Κοίταξε σκληρά... σχεδόν διαπεραστικά. Αυτή τη φορά η Βάνια δεν τα χαμήλωσε. Αντίθετα, άφησε τη Βαλέρια να φτάσει βαθιά μέσα της. Μπορούσε να δει πόσο πολύ λαχταρούσε την αποδοχή της, αναρωτήθηκε; Μπορούσε να δει πόσο πολύ ήθελε την έγκρισή της;

"Σ' ευχαριστώ, Βάνια", είπε η Βαλέρια και πήρε ντροπαλά την Βάνια από το χέρι για να πάει στο περίπτερο με τις λεμονάδες.

"Δεν ανοίγεις το δώρο μου;" ρώτησε δειλά η Βάνια. Χωρίς καθυστέρηση, η Βαλέρια το έκανε. Ίστορίες από την ινδική μυθολογία, ψέλισε η Βαλέρια και μετά έσκυψε και έδωσε ένα φιλί στο μάγουλο της Βάνια. Αυτό το πολύτιμο φιλί τις συνέδεσε για μια ζωή. Επιτόπου!

"Λατρεύω τη Μυθολογία", πρόσθεσε η Βαλέρια.

"Ξέρω τα πάντα για την ινδική μυθολογία", παρατήρησε η Βάνια.

"Έχεις ακούσει για την Αθηνά;"

"Όχι, έχεις ακούσει για την Ντούργκα;"

"Όχι, αλλά άσε να σου πω για την Αθηνά- ήταν η ολύμπια θεά της σοφίας!"

"Ουάου! Λοιπόν, είναι σαν τη δική μας Σαρασουάτι- ήταν η θεά όλων των γνώσεων".

"Και η Ντούργκα;" ρώτησε με περιέργεια η Βαλέρια.

"Η Ντούργκα ήταν μια θεά-μαχητής, καταστροφέας κάθε κακού!"

"Χμμ... Αυτό είναι φοβερό! Έχεις ακούσει για την Αφροδίτη;"

"Όχι, όχι, δεν την έχω ακούσει", είπε με προθυμία η Βάνια.

"Ήταν η θεά της ομορφιάς- γεννήθηκε από τον αφρό της θάλασσας".

"Πόσο εκπληκτικό! Έχεις ακούσει για τον Βισνού;"

"Έχεις ακούσει για τον Ποσειδώνα;"

"Έχεις ακούσει...;"

"Έχετε ακούσει...;"

Η διαφορετικότητα γιορταζόταν!

Αμέσως και επιτόπου!

Teresa and Aldo's Story

Robyn Schiralli

MIRANDA 2228

Teresa stood on the deck of the SS *Radnik* as it berthed into Sydney Harbour on a brisk winter morning in 1950. She was young, just nineteen, and filled with both excitement and apprehension at the new life she was embarking upon. Her husband, Aldo, had travelled to Australia ahead of her to ensure the stability of employment for him and secure somewhere to live with his new wife. It was an era of large-scale immigration, with many arriving from Europe in search of a better life. Whilst Teresa and Aldo, and many couples like them, anticipated that they would have much to celebrate in their new homeland, they were perhaps less cognizant of the value they would be infusing into the diversity of Australia for Australians.

Teresa was not as adept in the English language as was Aldo, however, with her husband's guidance she was determined to gain a rudimentary level of proficiency upon which to build. Years later she recounted to me her attempt to purchase clothes pegs from the corner store and the store owner's patience as she used a combination of words and gestures to communicate her needs. Over the years a friendship developed between Teresa and the store owner, who embraced the opportunity to learn more about *'the Italian lady who was new to the country'*.

It was a celebration for both ladies who complimented each other in vastly different ways. While Teresa's command of English strengthened through her regular conversations with the shop owner, an additional benefit of the friendship was their regular exchange of recipes. This, in turn, resulted in the expansion of the store's grocery line to include some Italian staples. Furthermore, the increasing number of European settlers to the area would have recognized this as a welcoming gesture and a sign of acceptance within the community. Within time, the infusion of a myriad of spices and pastas not previously widely used, benefited the palates of all Australians.

A significant event in the lives of Teresa and Aldo was the day that they received their official acceptance as Australian citizens. Teresa spoke of the immense joy she felt as she received her certificate alongside the small gathering of other applicants who were to receive their certificates. The diversity of cultures standing with her, beaming with pride and attired in their finest outfits, signified the status of the occasion as a celebration. It was also an important milestone in their new lives.

It did not take long for Teresa to secure employment, joining her husband on the production line of a well-respected Australian appliance company. They were soon able to buy their first modest home. They spent the weekends doing renovations and celebrated the fact that they were part of the Australian dream! Teresa supplemented her family's income with her dressmaking skills. News of the quality of her work reached her local church and as she wanted to give back to the community who had welcomed her and her family, Teresa generously made the local priest's religious garments at no charge.

Aldo's mode of transport for travel to work prior to Teresa joining the workforce was a bicycle. It served its purpose as a financially viable alternative until he was able to purchase his first four-wheel vehicle. Unsurprisingly, Aldo purchased a Holden FE; his pride and joy for many years and an Australian icon.

Over the coming years they welcomed the births of their three sons. They embraced the Australian way of life and their circle of friends grew. Barbeques at their home became a regular occurrence and, as a nod to her heritage, Teresa would always include a tray of lasagna or similar pasta dish. Aldo would take charge of the record player, ensuring his guests were entertained with a healthy mix of artists including Elvis Presley and Mario Lanza. He delighted in introducing some of the lesser-known Italian singers into his repertoire; a habit which was met with enthusiasm from his guests.

Teresa and Aldo, typical of their time, were testimony to the value of cultural diversity. During their lives they witnessed many positive developments within their community and the country in general. The availability of a wider selection of food choices, including pizza restaurants and the like, heightened the average Australian's culinary experience. Furthermore, their journey brought into reality a greater understanding of the world outside of Australia. It helped to increase tolerance for the beliefs and social practices of other lands. Prior to this time, knowledge of Europe was limited to that which was seen in movies and usually restricted to the depiction of famous city landmarks.

Both Teresa and Aldo found the transition from one country to another relatively seamless. They had been eager to adopt the Australian way of life and felt fortunate that their new homeland readily acknowledged and valued the positive aspects of celebrating cultural diversity.

From a personal perspective, it can be said that without diversity of cultures I would not have met my husband, who is the second son of Teresa and Aldo. Our marriage has produced two sons who, in turn, have gone on to marry partners from equally diverse cultural backgrounds.

As we reflect on the composition and inherent values of Australia and its people, it is apparent that the celebration of diversity, particularly cultural diversity, has played a significant role in enriching what is recognized as truly the lucky country.

My Family

Maggie Bailey

LILLI PILLI 2229

She was the daughter of a Jewish family and her name was Elisabeth. The family were descendants from the Ashkenazi Jews who settled through parts of Europe many centuries before, and her family had lived in the Rhineland in western Germany for many generations. Her family was educated and prosperous, but the political discontent and alienation of the Jewish people of the early 1800s was a worry to her father and he planned to leave their home. Many people left for France, but Elisabeth's father Franz, looked to the new world for a new beginning and began plans to move the family to Australia. The family prospered in New South Wales and established the family vineyards in the Hunter Valley.

She was the daughter of Elisabeth and her name was Amy. Intelligent and talented she wanted to be a violinist, but from a family of eleven children that did not seem possible when there was a war developing in South Africa, there was no role for women to study and her brothers needed an education. Amy's husband came from a family from the Isle of Wight with many generations of Anglo-Saxon heritage and her German background faded as she took on the role of wife and mother. She became the nucleus of a new family in a changing environment.

She was the daughter of Amy and her name was Dorothy. Quick-witted and intelligent, she often sought out new learning tasks and was a source of great help to her mother. She wanted to be a dress maker, but the Great Depression had crept over the country and there was no money for girls to be educated and everyone needed to work. Amy died when her youngest was 12 and the role of mother and housekeeper fell to Dorothy with no hope of being a dress maker. Dorothy's husband came from a family of Welsh immigrants and a much longer history of English ancestors some of whom were transported to Australia in days gone by. She became the nucleus of a new family with a new generation. She wanted her children to have more.

She was the daughter of Dorothy and her name was Ruth. Born into a working class family, there did not seem any future for education. However, she excelled at school, and was given further opportunities. She wanted to be a doctor and worked hard to support herself at university. She was close to Dorothy and attributed her opportunities and success to her mother, who grew up in a different era with different expectations, but was able to accept her daughter's ambition. She loved hearing the stories of mothers and grandmothers of the past, their dreams, their life stories and their legacy, for she felt these women had laid the path for her. Ruth loved cooking with her mother and learning the old ways from the mothers and grandmothers from time past. A particular favourite was Elisabeth's Babka, a delicious bun with cinnamon and spices.

She was the daughter of Ruth and her name was Ndoto. Tall and elegant she was proud of her heritage from French and African backgrounds. She spoke her father's languages of French and Swahili and a few European languages from her time at school in Paris. She studied molecular engineering and excelled in her field, as a research scientist.

Despite her success in international research projects, she still loved to come to her mother's house and remember the joys of her childhood. She loved to sit at her mother's desk where she always felt close to Ruth – her books on science and medicine, family photos and mementos, recipes collected from magazines, friends and aunties and her mother's journal. She used to read this as a child enjoying stories from Ruth's day – stories from her patients, sometimes of suffering and sometimes of triumph in the face of illness, snippets of family news or gossip, recipes and ideas. She loved the diversity of her family origins, their heritage and culture and their traditional foods which were now everyone's favourites. She wanted to add her father's African cooking to the family favourites.

While turning the pages of her journal she saw the draft of the short story her mother was entering into a local competition on the topic of diversity – "My Family" it was called. Ndoto felt a swell of pride that this was family.

A family of diverse origins and cultures, but somehow unified by the warmth and nurture as given by the mothers and grandmothers in this family.

She was proud of her family.

The Builder

Ross Walsh

MENAI 2234

He was devastated when he saw the 'For Sale' sign go up next door, although he knew it was coming. Good neighbours and good friends had decided it was time to cash in and finally get that beachside cottage up the coast they had always talked about.

But he couldn't blame them.

He resisted the developers sniffing around who wanted to buy both properties to build townhouses. This was his house, he had built it, and he wasn't moving. But he was worried about what would happen with next door. Maybe a duplex.

In the end it went to a young couple, so he was relieved, that was until the noise and mayhem of 'moving-in' day. So many people, so many cars, so much confusion. Was this the sign of things to come?

And what nationality are they? Certainly not real Australian, as there is a strange mix of Arabic and Asians in the assisting crowd. What a mixture.

He found out the following day when there was a knock on the door and there they stood. Him the Arab and her the Asian plus a kid. Turns out he is Mikael, but call me Mick, of Turkish descent and she is Kim of Vietnamese origin but who was born just down the road at the local hospital, as was the toddler who is an absolute cutie.

But Turkey and Vietnam, didn't we fight wars against them, and lose. Still these two seem really nice, Mick even follows the Dragons, and she's into the Swans, both of which are his teams as well. So he is happy.

For the next month or so there are the usual waves and brief conversations over the fence or when they cross paths out front or at the shops. Friendly but not too friendly. Then notification of the house extension was received.

The young couple want to put a few additional rooms out the back and need his approval. He gives this willingly, but then later regrets his quick decision making.

Mick is acting as owner/builder and has his cousins and a few mates around one weekend to get the build going. The noise, confusion and general disruption is many times worse than that painful moving in day. Our man just bunkers down in the lounge room and tries to watch the footy and races, which is very challenging with a full-blown work site in action just metres away. It wasn't a good weekend.

He popped his head over on the Monday morning to have a gander at the completed work and wasn't impressed. Mick invited him in to show off the completed piers which are his pride and joy, but our man had concerns they won't pass that afternoon's council inspection. He was right.

He hears raised voices for the first time, as Kim 'advises' Mick that he needs to get professionals involved as she wouldn't trust him to build a decent structure if it was made from Lego. Our man thinks she is probably right.

He catches Mick's eye later that day and offers to provide some assistance if needed as, after all, he was a fully licensed builder for over 30 years. Mick's mood transitions from depression to elation in a moment and soon Kim is out the back meeting their new consultant. She is very relieved!

Two weeks later new piers are passed by the inspector, one of our man's old mates, and work on the timber work has commenced. Friends and family are still involved but our man is the foreman, and everyone does what they are told. Our man feels alive again, for the first time since he lost his wife.

And the rewards he is receiving.

Kim is providing dinner a couple of times of week, dishes he can't pronounce but which taste great. And sometimes it's her mother or Mick's who knock on the door to deliver some fine smelling tasty offering as a way of saying thanks for all your help.

His mates start joking that he is putting a few pounds on, around the gut, from all this foreign tucker, which he knows is rubbish because he is feeling as fit as a Malley bull again being back on the tools. He knows they are just jealous.

The extension is soon finished and signed off so, of course, there is a huge party to thank all the helpers. Our man is the guest of honour. The party becomes a celebration when Mick announces that one of the new rooms will have to be a nursery, as baby number two is on the way.

Our man was looking for a bit of a rest after completing the extension, but one of Mick's aunties propositioned him into helping her out with a kitchen make-over. This keeps him busy for a month or two and earns him a few dollars on the side, plus too many meals and bottles of wine to recall. Then her neighbour needs advice on a pergola that is showing signs of tiredness. Of course he helps her out.

Nine months later and our man finally finds time in his busy schedule to go up the coast and visit his old neighbours in their beachside paradise. He even takes a friend with him, Mick's aunty who turns out to also be a widower. He tells his mates she is just a good friend which they laugh at, as they know his ute is parked outside her place from Friday to Monday most weeks.

He still struggles with the pronunciation of most of the dishes he now consumes but has become a bit of a connoisseur when it comes to kebabs, koftes and baklava. His favourite, however, is Kim's mother's rich Pho, which she makes especially for him. He just doesn't tell Mick's aunty this!

The New Girl

Christine Johnson

WYOMING 2250

New girl comes from a war-torn place. Her arrival, refugee rural resettlement. Everyone knows that. What they don't know is she thinks of her past as if sitting in an oasis, a garden with men, women and children lying under the palms. These ghosts lying in the shade are all that remain. Confronted by the rubble of a destroyed city, months in a crowded camp and now shifted into foreign, rustic emptiness, she clings to them.

At school she turns up wearing the standard checked uniform dress. The giveaway is the scarf wrapped around her head. She stands at the front of the classroom. The teacher waits until fidgeting stops. Students chant the ritual 'Good morning, Mrs Bates.'

'This is Amani.' Mrs Bates' eyes scan the room. 'In coming days let's make her welcome.'

Murmurs ripple as the new girl approaches her desk. The backpack strapped to her body attracts nudges – bomb rather than packed lunch?

The lesson starts. Freed from the threat of focus, she retreats; swims back and steps ashore in her private haven. She takes her place with the others, lying under the trees.

When the recess bell jangles out everyone spills from their desks, jostling into the sun-drenched yard. Boys forge ahead. Greg's cockerel laugh leads his mob, their massed breaking voices sounding like cracked china. Clever Tracy emerges next, surrounded by her coterie of girlfriends.

New girl arrives last. Hesitates. Strident sounds all around attack her flesh. She finds a spot to sit alone, at a distance on the library steps. Her shadow sits with her, the colour of a bruise, leaking uncertainty.

Tracy and her coterie approach. Greg and his mates follow.

'Did you see lots killed?'

'Greg!' This is Tracy.

The argumentative words fall close, like an exchange of bullets.

Tracy takes charge, her tone permeated with sympathy. 'Were you frightened?'

The question baffles. Sometimes in her dreams Amani breathes an air so dense with groans and strangled sobs it reaches out and chokes her.

Greg interrupts. 'Hey,' he says, pointing at the headscarf, 'do you wear that to bed?'

The boys laugh. A tussle and skirmish of assumptions follows.

'Will you have an arranged marriage?'

'Or work? Study at University?'

'How come you got away? Here, to our country?'

At this point Amani's heart beats faster while her blood freezes, wishing to run backwards, to avoid the pain at her centre. How to imagine so many who have died? Let alone understand why she is not amongst them.

She will never forget one old man. Thin legs and the threadbare coat he wore made him seem an ancient bird with fraying feathers. That time he came wobbling along the laneway on his rusty bike, heading for the main street. Crouched outside her ruined house in what remained of her doorway, terror beating like trapped wings in her belly, she should have stepped forward to warn him. But thumping fear demanded she survive. So, she watched. Sensing the rumble, he falters, and looks up – too late. A lorry full of soldiers travelling at speed smashes into him. The bike buckles. His body flies up, crushed. His brains spill onto the road.

After plying new girl with questions that never receive answers, most shrug, give up. A month passes.

'Hello.'

New girl looks up, startled. The other girl grins, eyes crinkling at the corners, dimple-craters in her suntanned cheeks.

'Can I sit with you?' She does anyway. 'You new?'

'Sort of. Yes.'

'Yeah, me too. First day.'

Amani glances at her. 'From overseas?'

The other girl laughs. 'Not me. Naradhan, know where that is?'

'No.'

'Yeah, well. Neither does anyone else.'

The two chew sandwiches eyes gazing at the drought-dry oval. The other girl breaks the silence.

'So, what do you play?'

Amani's brows arch, questioning.

'Sport,' the other girl grins.

'Nothing...' She sees the grin fading. 'Except—'

'Yeah?'

In the camp, a coach came. She trained us. Soccer.'

'Awesome!'

'Yes, the soccer team with girls. I liked that.'

'Girls' soccer—even better! Hey, what's your name?'

'I'm Amani.'

'I'm Samantha. Call me Sam.'

Sam arrives next day with the black-and-white ball. Amani looks at it and remembers a similar ball rolling over rough ground an entire world away.

She recalls bare feet racing on gravel. That, and cheap plastic sandals caught up in hot pursuit. One girl plays in socks. Another manages one-legged, on a crutch. Screams swell from the sidelines after a goal and then fade back into a chorus of urge-on chants. The ball's panels of light and dark breach columns of sunlight and stir up dust motes. The dust dances. Caught up by a hot breeze it whirls, escapes the high wire fencing of the compound; carries up and through all barriers to celebrate wild freedom.

And Amani senses a tingling beneath her skin. She no longer wants to stand in the shadows. When she runs Sam chases after. They weave and dodge, kicking the ball back and forth. Sometimes they stop, panting, feet apart and hands resting on knees, staring into each other's eyes like animals. No language, but determined to meet. Then the stillness between them breaks into peals of laughter. It rings out as their play continues.

Greg and his mob turn to see who is causing such a row. Tracy and her girlfriends huddle, looking on in amazement. Mrs Bates, on yard duty, strolls across. Greg moves to within earshot.

'Girls playing soccer, it's not right!'

'Why would that be Greg?'

'Footy, it's for boys.'

Mrs Bates gives a rare smile. 'Well, soccer may not cure the entire world's problems, but from what we're seeing here it may shatter certain boundaries.'

By the end of the week what has started with two playing soccer has grown – to become the beginnings of an enthusiastic girls' team. Mrs Bates causes a stir, putting herself forward as coach.

Amani has her first and closest friend, Sam. Inseparable, they do everything together.

Flower Power

Anya Nielsen

KINCUMBER 2251

A young girl, her copper hair in a perky ponytail, bounded confidently into the flower shop. She looked from side to side, her eyes wide, dazzled by the array of flowers.

'Good Morning,' said the florist, wondering if she was alone or had an adult in tow. 'Are you after something special?'

'It's my mother's birthday. She likes flowers.'

'What flowers does she like?'

'She says all sorts are beautiful in their own way. That's why she called me Rose and my two sisters are named Lily and Violet.'

The shopkeeper smiled at the candid words uttered by the girl. *Still a bud*, she thought, *but trying to open her petals*. 'Pleased to meet you. My name's Margaret.'

Rose walked around smelling the flowers. She stopped at the lavender. 'That one reminds me of my nana,' and after a long whiff of the old-fashioned tea-rose she said, 'and that one is my mother.'

'I can put whatever you choose into a nice posy,' said Margaret. 'What about a bunch of roses using every colour in the shop?'

'Mmm, then the others would feel left out.' Clearly, Rose was not comfortable with that suggestion. 'Can I have one of everything in the shop? Even that peculiar one that looks like a bird's beak.'

So amused by this clever young customer, Margaret laughed out loud. 'The one you call "peculiar", is a very expensive flower called Strelitzia, or Bird of Paradise and is often used in formal displays in the foyers of stately homes and large city offices. Why don't you sit and watch while I put some flowers together for you?'

The girl sat obediently on the chair by the counter as the flowers were gathered and placed expertly into a large bouquet. The florist wound a rubber band around the stems to secure the arranged bunch, then wrapped it all in marmalade coloured paper and finished it off with a bright apple-green bow. She lifted the arrangement for the girl to see.

'What do you think?' she asked, handing Rose the flowers.

'When I look at them they make me feel happy. It's like when I play the cello. On its own the sound is full of melancholy, and it makes me feel quite sad. But when I go to orchestra practice with the violins, drums, trumpets and piano; together we make happy music and I feel very cheerful.'

'Cello? You are a talented girl.'

'All these flowers with their contrasting shapes and sizes and colours. They're all so different, but when they are together they make me feel happy.'

Later that evening when Margaret relaxed at home, she reflected on the day. It had been inordinately busy. Many people, old and young had bought floral arrangements for gifts and cut flowers to take home. One customer stood out above the rest—the young girl, Rose. Margaret wondered if the child understood the depth of the concepts she had uttered. It set her thinking.

There are so many types of flowers, fragile and hardy, long-stemmed and short, aromatic and pungent, their colours and shapes diverse. The rose is formal compared to the daisy, but both are beautiful. Some flowers grow in pretty borders, others are seen in shrubs, some are used to make perfumes and others are used to make medicines. Not all have a nice garden bed to grow in and have to struggle in difficult terrain. They may need a helping hand, but all have a purpose, all have a place.

In that respect flowers with their infinite varieties are like trees, insects, animals, fish, birds, rocks and mountains—all of which have many varieties, are part of an ecosystem or have some other reason for existing. Many are part of a food chain and are reliant on bees for pollination, which in turn become food for animals that will then feed us.

Humans are the end-users of the chain and unfortunately can be the abusers of this infinitely balanced plan. People live in different places, speak in a variety of languages and most adapt to their environment. Certainly, plants and animals do the same. We are like the bouquet of flowers—size, age, shape and colour may vary, yet we are all alike. All of us need food, water, shelter, safety and a purpose. Singularly, we are limited in our endeavours but like the orchestra we can achieve much together.

We must welcome and celebrate diversity in all forms. It is this diverse nature; like the orchestra or the bouquet of flowers, which make the world a better place.

A Child's Journey Across the Sea

Lene Martens

GLENNING VALLEY 2261

As a small four-year-old girl who spoke only Danish, it looked terrifying – men painting other men orange and throwing them into the swimming pool. I had no way of understanding that this was a ritual when crossing the Equator and I feared this would happen to my own father.

In November 1956 my parents, my 1-year-old brother and I were sailing to Australia on the MS *Skabryn*, one of the last ships through the Suez Canal before the blockade. I remember little of the journey apart from the horrible taste of powdered milk, the Equator ritual and buying souvenirs from men in canoes in Colombo. The items were raised on ropes and money lowered back down if the item was purchased.

It was a long 6-week journey and for reasons unknown to me, we ended up having to disembark in Melbourne and take a very long train trip to Sydney. My parents had decided that life had better prospects in Australia, so this was a brave decision and quite a gamble to come to a place where we knew no one, had nowhere to live, no job and didn't speak the language.

We began life in Australia living with a Danish couple we had been put in contact with as my father was an engineer. We lived with them for a couple of weeks in a small house in Asquith, NSW. My father then found us accommodation in a kind local's garage which he converted into some sort of house despite the fact it appeared to be already home to the local possums who urinated onto our ceilings regularly. My parents left behind a suburban brick home to come to live in a garage in the bush at Asquith. My mother needed to learn to use a primus stove, which must have been a difficult challenge to say the least and my father needed to earn an income so got himself a job helping to build new homes in the western suburbs of Sydney despite the fact he knew nothing about house building. His solution was to simply turn up onsite earlier than everyone else to see how the work was done.

I was sent to school as soon as term started in 1957 and quickly fitted in while learning to speak English. I was fully accepted by the other children and teachers and was only aware of my difference when repeatedly asked to spell my name throughout my schooling and when revealing my lunch sandwiches which were made with black rye bread. Other than that, life was great. I loved school and did well in my studies, had lots of friends including a few others who had migrated to Australia from Europe. I was even chosen to play the Virgin Mary in the Christmas play and the Wattle Queen on Wattle Day. Considering I was not yet formally an Australian, this demonstrated the full acceptance by my peers which I enjoyed as a child.

Despite an interesting start to life in Australia, my father's belief that life would be better proved to be correct. He gained work as an engineer, my parents built their own home in Asquith and eventually the family became five and we moved house several times due to the fact that my father had itchy feet and was always on the lookout for an opportunity which might better the family's fortunes.

We moved to the Hawkesbury River in partnership with another family and built the marina boat hire there, then on to the Central Coast to build another three homes while my father worked as an engineer in a large American company and later in his own consulting business. More houses followed, after which time my parents retired to the Blue Mountains. Their 3 children had all been educated, gained employment, married and had children of their own, always grateful for the decision made by our parents to come to this country.

At 93 both of my parents are still alive and relatively well, with one in aged care and the other still independent at home despite her children's best efforts to get her to a more supported and safer environment.

I'm sure my experience is not very different to many others who have made the move to come to live in Australia. It's a rare privilege to grow up in this country which despite its flaws, offers opportunities and freedoms for those brave enough to venture here and work hard.

The Melting Pot

John Franks

WARNERS BAY 2282

When I was 20, *Melting Pot*, as sung by Blue Mink, was a catchy, tuneful song advocating racial and ethnic diversity.

Born in Guildford, a south-western suburb of Sydney, I was introduced early to an ethnically diverse community. Half a dozen of the local shops were owned by what we called New Australians. Five of the families in our small street were similarly described. In my family we were never allowed to say the word 'dago; 'wog' as being tantamount to a swearword.

We lived only a few kilometres from the Villawood Migrant Hostel and once I reached school age, a busload of children, mostly of migrants, arrived each day. I can't recall all the nationalities and nor does it matter. We were all mixed in together and, as far as I recall, treated the same. There was no ESL¹ or NESB² support. We all played and ate lunch together and occasionally shared food. I made friends with some and to this day, communicate with George W, a Ukrainian.

Those experiences were magnified when I moved to a single-sex high school in nearby Granville. Ethnic diversity was extended even further to include a boy of Chinese appearance, who was just another 'one of us'. We played rough games on a dirt playground including Branding and Red Rover. I will never forget the sight of two Polish classmates, Valdy, (a version of Walter) and Villy, (short for Wilhelm,) i.e. V v V, chasing each other and pelting a ball, stick or whatever was to hand, at each other and laughing uproariously when they made a hit. About that time I became very friendly with another Polish boy named Michael W. He was very clever, well-spoken without any accent and very independent. Uncommonly, both his parents worked. On occasions I walked three kilometres to his place to play. One day, I mentioned his family had an unusual car. Not a Holden, Ford, Morris or Austin. We 'mates' thought it so odd we felt sorry for him. I asked him what brand it was and he replied, "They're popular in Europe. It's a Porsche."

My first teaching post was to a country town with a significant Aboriginal population and a strong racist element in the 'White' community. I had to adjust my thinking somewhat but gradually I learnt to navigate my way through the prejudices. However, I was no race crusader and undoubtedly, I could have been more outspoken.

When I was posted back to Cabramatta West in Sydney, I experienced an explosion of 'Multiculturalism', the new buzz word. The school had two packed 'migrant' classes. The local high school was statistically the most diverse and multicultural school in Sydney. As Wikipedia asserts, 'Cabramatta was something of a *melting pot*.'

1 English as a Second Language

2 Non English Speaking Background

My next level of awakening was via a chance-in-a-lifetime meeting with a man who became my best friend for almost twenty years. Alistair (deceased) was the son of Scottish migrants who was able to explain in Scots(!) English the difficulties of 'being different' in school. He was dyslexic, but he was a brilliant thinker and acclaimed artist.

Most recently, my appreciation of ethnic diversity has enriched my life through travel. In a moment of supreme optimism, Carolyn, my wife, and I decided to go to Turkey. We were so entranced by Istanbul, Gallipoli, and Turkey's historic Aegean coast that we returned twice to travel along the Black Sea coast to the Kurdish region and within a stone's throw of Georgia, Armenia, Iran and Syria. On one occasion I had a twenty-minute conversation with an Iranian man in full Arab regalia about football.

On one trip overseas I was caught sneaking back to my room with a bottle of wine by Eric, a Chinese born Australian. In a prescient moment I invited him and his wife Pauline, to share the wine, a reciprocated arrangement whereby we alternated the cocktail hour between rooms for the remainder of the tour.

Discussions with them led to an invitation for us to join them on a family tour of national parks in regional China later that same year. At first we declined, as we didn't want to intrude, and, one holiday a year was our limit. Our curiosity and their encouragement got the better of us and we realised it was an opportunity of a lifetime, so we accepted. It was brilliant! We even added Xian and Beijing on our own; cities not on the original itinerary.

Other travel destinations included Russia, Ukraine Poland, Estonia, Iceland and Morocco. In Malta I recognised half the shopowner surnames from my ethnically enriched school days.

I know our lives and thinking have been augmented immeasurably by our contact and preparedness to embrace, ethnically diverse experiences.

It took a while, but I eventually realised that in the '*melting pot*' I was experiencing, people had the same ideals, wants and needs: family, food, shelter, work, creative interests and so forth. Occasionally clashes occur with customs and points of view but that can happen, with enlightenment, to all parties, within the most cohesive of families and friendships.

Now, in my retirement in suburban Newcastle, I take pleasure in a simpler lifestyle that includes gardening in what one grandchild referred to as 'Pa's forest'. (...mouths of babes...?) I often consult with my Italian neighbours who have the best garden in the street. Giuseppe's English isn't great. We chat. We each sip a glass of red. By the third glass of wine communication problems diminish considerably.

And it all started with my parents in Guildford, NSW.

Rewriting a Life

Jan Mitchell

RATHMINES 2283

Lydia nearly went home again. She hadn't brought paper and pen. *Stupid really, since it was a writing group!*

"Today's topic is, *Survival!*" June, the group leader announced. "You have twenty minutes to write and then we'll hear your stories."

Twelve heads bowed over their notepads. Some members of the group frowned, puzzled or sucked the ends of their pens while others scribbled furiously.

Lydia could hear the clock ticking. It reverberated loudly around the room that was otherwise, only filled with the sounds of breathing and the flow of ballpoint pens over paper. Occasionally, someone sighed and scratched out a word or two that disappointed them.

This was Lydia's first attendance at a writing group. She was unsure of what this exercise was about – of what was expected. The lady next to her, Josie, gave her some paper, and the woman across the other side of the table lent her a pen. Charlotte was on her name badge.

An idea popped into Lydia's head and she began to write, more ideas flowing as she settled in. She wrote about moving from Hong Kong to Sydney during the late 1990s when the Chinese took control of the island. She had been born there, educated and married there. Unlike her, Peter was Anglo. They'd worked in the same company.

When Peter was transferred to Sydney, it was the first time she had walked on foreign soil. Cruelly, the company hadn't given her a transfer. Now that she and Peter were retired, they decided to move again, north from the big city to live out their final years beside the lake, where Peter could indulge himself with his new boat and go out fishing.

At first, Lydia was at a loss with how to fill her time. Her neighbours rushed off to work every morning and she was dreadfully lonely without Peter. Friends she and Peter had made in Sydney had promised to come up to visit. It wasn't a great distance after all. When Lydia phoned to invite them, they had too much happening to be able to visit. She was desperate to meet new people, intelligent people like herself. Then she saw a notice in the local supermarket about the local writers and decided to go along to see if she would fit in. Lydia wrote about the depression she suffered after their move to Sydney. She described how she missed the familiar life of the bustling city of Hong Kong; how she frequently found herself wandering the streets of China Town, just to be near others who looked like her, tears of homesickness streaming down her face.

When Peter found her a secretarial position in the company, she was less miserable. The work was less exciting than her high flying finance job at home. Peter seemed to adapt to their new life so much better than she did. And he didn't have to deal with the racism that she felt every time she shopped.

Now, the move to their dream retirement home had brought back those desperate feelings of being dislocated from all that was familiar. To make matters worse, Peter suffered a stroke moving furniture into their new home and died in the ambulance.

Lydia was still pouring out her misery onto the sheet of paper when June called, "Stop."

Everyone put their pens down. What lovely friendly faces these people had. Most were grey-haired women, one had green dyed hair and of three men, two were bald.

"Who would like to read?" The leader looked expectant.

"I will," said Charlotte. Lydia listened to Charlotte's crisp story of a boating accident where, miraculously, after their tinnie sank three people had managed to scramble over rocks to safety.

"Next," said June, looking pointedly at the man next to Charlotte.

He began to read, stumbling over his own handwriting. He had written about his father surviving when a grenade had dropped into the war-time trench and killed everyone else.

The next member of the group read about her survival giving birth to her first baby alone in the outback. The next piece of writing told of surviving her years at boarding school with a bullying matron.

And so it went on around the group, everyone's story so different from the rest. After the person on Lydia's left had finished reading about her son becoming paraplegic in a car accident, June said, "Would you like to read, Lydia? Newcomers aren't expected to, but you may."

Lydia blushed at the attention. However, she felt her story was as much a survival story as those others. Maybe people would realise she was lonely and offer friendship? She swallowed hard and in a very small voice, began. As her story progressed and she gained confidence, people bowed their heads to hide their feelings. Empathy infused the room. When Lydia finished, everyone clapped.

"Well done."

"Thank you."

"Heartfelt."

"How brave you are."

Her head swam as the people around her exclaimed.

June clapped her hands. "Thank you for reading today, Lydia. It seems you are looking for a sense of belonging. Maybe you'll find it with our group?"

Lydia felt warmth suffuse her body. Maybe she would find a place here? She decided to return for the next meeting and bring money to join the group. Everyone was different and their stories so diverse, yet they were accepting of each other and, more importantly to Lydia, it seemed they would accept her.

When everyone had finished reading out what they had written, Lydia found she hadn't listened to any more stories. Her heart was too full of the friendliness she felt from the people in the room.

As everyone was packing up, Josie approached and invited Lydia to afternoon tea the following week. It was the start of a beautiful friendship, a long association with the writing group and a chance to explore in writing her feelings about calling Australia home.

Diversity at the Deli!

Alana Henderson

HOLMESVILLE 2286

Bob and I, baby boomers with rich and varied life experiences, invested in a caravan to give us relaxing weekends away from busy jobs. Travelling to many campsites we met people of all ages and many different backgrounds. We learned much from these other adventurers, from young families on holidays, 'drifters' who had discarded the shackles of convention, travellers from exotic countries, weekend warriors like ourselves, and grey nomads contentedly ambling on the way to faraway destinations.

We dared to see our weekend forays as places to explore, stories to share and conversations spent comparing and describing snippets of our lives with strangers that, for a moment, became friends. We met transient friends who we never saw again and others who we kept rediscovering as we moved around on our brief sojourns.

Unlike the belief often fuelled by popular media that the 'generation gap' is a negative phenomenon of distrust, we enthusiastically discarded the differences between us, the baby boomers, and the Gen X, Y, Z-ers and the millennials we met.

We had great fun learning new languages from the tech-savvy young, relentlessly tied to their phones and social media. We watched them with amazement when they fixed our temperamental wi-fi and devices as if the new computer age was part of their DNA. Differences in age, values and aspirations respectfully faded away from the moment like the light that secretly changed into warm and fragrant aromas on starry nights. Caravanning was the leveller that linked us with people we would otherwise never have met, lazily sharing a few drinks around the campfire, and watching the sun being slowly swallowed by the mountains or the sea. The frantic and hurried life of business was faraway, and time slowed to a crawl where we had time to savour and appreciate new experiences.

Initially, I often spent precious hours on Fridays, between serving customers in my business, making sure that our caravan was packed so we had all the comforts of home for the weekend. But as our confidence grew within this new culture, we were so enthusiastic about our adventure we often picked up the car keys and left for the weekend without packing much at all. 'Roughing it' became the norm. I was glad to leave the artificial business environment, for the natural environment where there were no expectations or judgement and where thongs and faded cotton shorts were 'de rigueur' for baby boomers, mingled with bare midriffs and bikinis of millennials.

When we arrived on site, I quickly learned to grab simple and healthy foods at local supermarkets or caravan park shops for our weekend menu. Assisted by my trusty 50-year-old pressure cooker which took up permanent residence in the caravan, I easily turned them into delicious meals in a few minutes. We had no affinity with the highly processed takeaway food chains that we found everywhere and frequented by the younger generations. Bob often remarked to other caravanners that I could "make a dinner out of a bay leaf" as the wafting smells of home cooking from our caravan was often a drawcard for new and old friends and neighbours.

Just as we marvelled at their expertise with technology, I frequently offered young caravanners ideas for simple, delicious recipes as a cheap alternative to their expensive takeaway diets. They were frequently amazed at how a few ingredients could be easily turned into delicious meals and treats that were cheap and delicious. How we relished that simple fare, drawn from my lifelong love of cooking that easily adapted to caravan life!

Our life experiences highlight the differences in norms, behaviours, and values of each generation. Bob had spent 25 years of his life growing up in a poor area of England before migrating to Australia as a '10-pound pom' after WWII. As a child, his resourceful mother fed her children at a time when food was rationed, and nothing was wasted. For example, he developed a liking for black pudding, a sausage manufactured from herbs and cereal mixed with the blood of slaughtered livestock. Bob's favourite Sunday morning breakfast in our caravan was traditional English/Scottish fare of black pudding, bacon, squashy tomato, runny eggs, and toast. Cooked on the barbecue, the black pudding took on a whole new flavour (and intrigue) for young breakfast visitors who had never heard of black pudding.

Other baby boomers often shared the same liking for black pudding, but young caravanners at our communal breakfasts were often repulsed by the idea – much to our amusement! Nevertheless, Bob became a 'connoisseur of black pudding', and eagerly sought different versions of this delicacy when we visited local shops.

On one trip, the generation gap reminded us that it is 'alive and well'. Following Bob's lead through a large supermarket to the delicatessen, I asked the young sales assistant if she had any black pudding. She looked at me with a blank face and said: "I'll check". I noticed that she went to two other sales assistants, both of whom were teenagers, and asked them the same question. They shook their heads though one spoke with her a bit longer. The young assistant returned to me standing at the counter and in a very serious but confident manner said: "I think you'll find black pudding in the bakery aisle."

We politely thanked her, turned away with a smile, and within a few steps collapsed with laughter. The generation gap was indeed alive and well.

In The Aftermath of WWII

Barry Collin

ELEMORE VALE 2287

As a little boy immediately after World War II, my neighbourhood was ever so slowly becoming a mixture of varying European ethnic groups who had escaped the horrors of war in Europe and were looking for safety and for peace. It was such a diverse range of cultures, languages and dress. My mother at the time worked in a wine-bar and regaled us with stories of her new immigrant customers who after a few wines danced and laughed in celebration of their new freedoms. For her these were happy and heady days.

However, though the war had finished, some of the locals kept the war bubbling along just below the surface. Some Australians who suffered during that horrible time could not leave it behind, so, there was still an undercurrent of hatred or, at the very least, social indifference against all things German and Japanese. As a side issue, people in discussion, were also talking about a strange new phrase that was getting traction, and that phrase was *'the Holocaust'*. I can recall that I wanted to know more, and I badgered my parents to explain just what people were talking about. Millions killed? That cannot be right! I really needed to know more.

I remember the sit-down with my father and the half-baked explanation. I say 'half-baked' because, just like the rest of the community at the time, he too was not fully aware of what was real and what was fantasy about the trials and tribulations of those of the Jewish faith in Europe during those terrible times. He talked of people being killed in their millions and bodies supposedly being consumed in ovens. What madness was this? Today, we now know that the total number who died in the Holocaust has been estimated at 6 million.

Dad also gave me a serious talk about a feud between 2 women further up the street just after the war that was subject to community debate and opinion. Firstly, there was a Mrs. Weber who was an ex-pat German who came to Australia, in the 1930s, still with a heavy accent, and who was treated with disdain by a select few. After all, she was German, and some said she had to pay a price for that. Nearby too was a Mrs. Aarons, the same age, and a Jewess. Mrs. Aarons at the time had recently found out that some relatives of hers in Europe did not survive the Holocaust. Dad said that Mrs. Aaron's tolerance for the German lady was nil, and it was reflected in her behaviour, which included shouting obscenities at her house and spitting on her front doorstep.

At the time I had a good friend by the name of David Engel, about my age, who was born in Australia, but of German parents who ran a corner shop in our suburb, albeit with limited English skills. I really enjoyed David's friendship especially if we were going on an adventure, because as an added bonus, he would just grab two ice-creams out of the shop freezer as we left. David was of true Aryan stock with the blondest of hair. Strangely it was always adults and not other children asking me why I associated with David, questioning that I never really understood. Many people in our suburb boycotted the Engel shop because of the war. Sadly, I lost contact with David when we were 12 years old, and we went to different high schools. I missed my friend with a background somewhat different to mine.

Beware if your name had an ethnic tone about it. People whose names had Polish, Hungarian or other satellite countries overtones, were all treated with some sort of suspicion until their bona fides were tested by all and sundry. That must have been a miserable time for a lot of our European immigrants. Sadly, some Australians chose to see that ethnic diversity that my mother seemed to enjoy at her place of work, as a threat to their own personal wellbeing.

Yee Tai was a friendly old soul. He was our local Chinaman who shuffled down our street once a fortnight with a suitcase on either end of a wooden pole located on his shoulder, selling pots and pans amongst other things. He always wore a black suit in all weathers, and it was very shabby with a worn shiny look about it. His black business shoes were down at the heels. He had a base shop situated nearby in a seedier part of town. A few years back I came across an elderly gent, who has sadly now passed on, who had personally known Yee Tai during WWII. Yee Tai had said something profound to him which I found of interest. When asked about the 1937 invasion of China by the Japanese, and the implications of it all, Yee Tai laughed and stated that the Japanese would run out of bullets well before China ran out of people. I suspect that there is some Confucian type of logic in what he said!

However, according to my father, despite his kindly nature and his age, Yee Tai was not immune to verbal attack. He was Asian, therefore by association, had to be somehow involved with the Japanese. He was abused on occasions by the ill-informed, and those hurt by those terrible times.

As a young toddler I was fascinated by Yee Tai, his perfectly shaped moon face always seemed to smile. Yee Tai, at the time, was the only Asian that I knew, and must have revered, for I know my mother told me that when he was due to come down our street that I sat in the gutter and waited for him, just to say hello, and to laugh at that special smile. Even at that age of about six, interaction with another ethnic group fascinated me just as it did with my mother at her place of work.

Celebrating Diversity in Retirement

Irene Lojszczyk

ELEEBANA 2300

Diversity unknowingly has pervaded our entire lives, from childhood through adulthood, particularly in modern working lives. Current generations have adapted to this with return to education, changes in employment and meeting people from different nations.

My introduction to diversity began at birth. My father was Polish and was taken by the Germans in World War II to Germany as forced labour. My mother was Ukrainian and was also taken by the Germans. When the war ended, they were placed in 'displaced people camps' throughout the country as they had no means or knowledge to make their way home. When America, Australia and Great Britain offered immigration for families, my parents were married and I was born in the camp. So began an adventure to an unknown country.

My celebration of diversity is based on what I am achieving in my retirement. My husband and I investigated and planned our options to create a fulfilling life. After he passed, I had to re-examine and make changes to these options. This resulted in a quest to seek new and diverse experiences as a widow, the decisions made were as follows.

My first thought was volunteering and I became more active with HMRI (Hunter Medical Research Institute), where I could contribute my skills in computing to a cause benefitting so many through research. This afforded the opportunity to public speak on their behalf about ongoing research, as well as meet new friends from a diverse range of education and culture. I assisted in preparation for evening lectures, making and serving refreshments and of course attended the lectures of the amazing research projects being undertaken and current achievements.

I joined a Probus Club and am currently Vice President. A wonderful opportunity to meet new people and be involved in outings and planning for events to suit members. New friendships evolved.

I joined U3A, an amazing organisation Australia wide, run by like-minded retired people wanting to lead an active life. I commenced assisting in Admin duties on a monthly basis, joined exercise classes, card playing groups and awakened a need to "keep the marbles rolling".

Next step of course, was playing Bridge. I attended classes to learn this intricate game and this again led to new friendships and encouraged mind and memory not to stagnate.

As a member of a bushwalking club, I learnt new skills, again meeting a diverse range of people, both ages and backgrounds and treasure the experiences they have led me on. This also led to an opportunity to explore walks in areas unheard of by me previously but in safety with a group.

I joined Friendship Force, an International Organisation with clubs around Australia. It started in USA by a minister who believed the hand of friendship around the world would contribute to a better understanding of cultures. I travelled to other countries where I was hosted by members and in turn, I hosted visitors in my home. What an experience, celebrating and sharing our differences, sometimes with translator to aid and of course making lifelong friends around the world.

Moving to a Retirement Village opened up another opportunity to celebrate diversity. I became the Secretary of the Caretaker Residents' Committee for six months. This gave me the opportunity to socialise and discuss day to day living, to learn new techniques in retirement and to share my experiences and thoughts. Happy hour meant new friendships, meeting people who had been judges, lawyers, engineers, teachers, doctors, builders, electricians, plumbers, office workers etc.

The Retirement Village has a community garden and having been an avid gardener in the past, I was able to contribute my knowledge and learn new skills from neighbours who had an enormous contribution to make, having also lived such diverse lives. This also afforded me the opportunity to attend Workshops and I have proudly produced a worm farm for the village and will share with other residents the benefits of this venture.

Diversity is inevitable throughout our lives and a conscious effort has to be made to celebrate it as it adds untold wealth to life and living. I believe I am achieving this.

Cieszymy się różnorodnością na emeryturze

Irene Lojszczyk

ELEEBANA 2300

Nawet nie zdajemy sobie sprawy, że różnorodność przeniknęła całe nasze życie, począwszy od dzieciństwa aż do dorosłości, a szczególnie we współczesnym życiu wypełnionym pracą. Obecne pokolenia przystosowały się do tego wraz ze wzrostem wykształcenia, zmianami w zatrudnieniu i poznawaniem ludzi różnych narodowości.

Mój wstęp do różnorodności zaczął się od urodzenia. Mój ojciec był Polakiem. Podczas II wojny światowej został wywieziony przez Niemców do Niemiec na przymusowe roboty. Matka była Ukrainką, którą Niemcy także wywieźli. Po zakończeniu wojny, ponieważ nie mieli środków i sposobności do powrotu do swojego kraju, oboje zostali umieszczeni w znajdujących się w całych Niemczech obozach dla wysiedleńców. Kiedy Ameryka, Australia i Wielka Brytania wyszły z propozycją imigracji dla rodzin, moi rodzice zawarli związek małżeński, w związku z czym ja urodziłam się w takim obozie. Tak się zaczęła przygoda do nieznanego kraju.

Moje celebrowanie różnorodności oparte jest na tym, co ja osiągam w wieku emerytalnym. Razem z mężem rozważaliśmy i planowaliśmy różne opcje, aby sobie stworzyć życie dające zadowolenie. Po jego śmierci musiałam powtórnie wszystko przemyśleć i wprowadzić zmiany do tych opcji. Rezultatem moich przemyśleń, już jako wdowy, było poszukiwanie nowych i odmiennych doświadczeń życiowych, a podjęte przeze mnie decyzje wyglądały tak, jak to dalej opisuję.

Najpierw przyszła mi na myśl praca jako wolontariusz. Zaczęłam aktywnie działać w Instytucie Badań Medycznych w Regionie Hunter (Hunter Medical Research Institute), gdzie moje komputerowe umiejętności w przetwarzaniu danych mogły pomóc w badaniach naukowych, z których tak wiele ludzi korzysta. Praca ta dała mi okazję do wystąpień publicznych w imieniu Instytutu na temat porowadzonych badań, a także do poznania nowych przyjaciół z różnych kręgów oświaty i kultury. Ponadto pomagałam w przygotowaniu wieczornych wykładów, przygotowując i serwując napoje i przekąski, no i oczywiście byłam na samych wykładach na temat aktualnie prowadzonych fantastycznych projektów badawczych i uzyskanych osiągnięć.

Dołączyłam się do Klubu Emerytów *Probus*, którego obecnie jestem wiceprezesem. To była doskonała okazja do poznania nowych ludzi i zaangażowania się w wycieczki oraz planowania imprez interesujących członków Klubu, a także do zawierania nowych przyjaźni.

Związałam się także z *U3A*. To jest fantastyczna organizacja działająca w całej Australii, prowadzona przez ludzi na emeryturze o podobnych upodobaniach, którzy chcą prowadzić aktywne życie. Zaczęłam od comiesięcznej pomocy w pracach administracyjnych, zaangażowałam się w zajęcia ruchowe, grupy gry w karty i wzbudziłam w ludziach potrzebę ciągłego utrzymywania umysłu w dobrej kondycji.

Następny krok to oczywiście gra w brydża. Chodziłam na zajęcia, aby nauczyć się tej zawziętej gry, co znowu doprowadziło do nowych przyjaźni i pobudziło umysł i pamięć, by nie uległy stagnacji.

Jako członek klubu wędrówek po buszu, nauczyłam się nowych umiejętności, co znowu umożliwiło mi poznanie całego szeregu rozmaitych ludzi w różnym wieku i z różnych środowisk i cenię sobie zdobyte dzięki im doświadczenia. To także dało mi okazję do poznania nowych szlaków w terenach, o których wcześniej nie słyszałam, a przy tym bezpiecznie wraz z całą grupą.

Zapisałam się do *Friendship Force* – międzynarodowej organizacji posiadającej kluby w całej Australii. Zapoczątkował ją w Stanach Zjednoczonych pastor, który wierzył, że podawanie przyjaznej dłoni między ludźmi na całym świecie doprowadzi do lepszego zrozumienia kultur. Byłam w innych krajach, gdzie zostałam ugoszczona przez członków klubu, a ja z kolei przyjmowałam gości w moim domu. Cóż to było za przeżycie dostrzegać i cieszyć się naszymi różnicami, czasem z pomocą tłumacza, no i oczywiście nawiązywanie przyjaźni na całe życie z ludźmi z całego świata.

Przeprowadzka do Osiedla dla Emerytów stworzyła jeszcze jedną okazję do celebrowania różnorodności. Przez sześć miesięcy działałam w nim jako Sekretarz Tymczasowej Rady Mieszkańców. Dało mi to okazję do spotykania się z ludźmi i dyskusowania o codziennym życiu, do zapoznania się z nowymi możliwościami życia na emeryturze i do dzielenia się moimi doświadczeniami i myślami. Chwile spędzone podczas *happy hour* oznaczały nowe przyjaźnie, spotkania z ludźmi, którzy wcześniej pracowali jako sędziowie, prawnicy, inżynierowie, nauczyciele, lekarze, elektrycy, hydraulicy, pracownicy biurowi, itp.

Osiedle dla Emerytów ma swój osiedlowy ogród. Będąc sama w przeszłości zagorzałym ogrodnikiem, byłam w stanie służyć swoją wiedzą, a jednocześnie miałam okazję nauczyć się nowych umiejętności od sąsiadów, którzy mieli ogromnie dużo do zaoferowania, ponieważ ich życie także cechowała duża różnorodność. To mi także dało okazję do chodzenia na „warsztaty”, gdzie mogę z dumą stwierdzić, że udało mi się stworzyć dla całego osiedla farmę dżdżownic (kompostownik ekologiczny) i będę dzielić się z innymi mieszkańcami korzyściami płynącymi z tego przedsięwzięcia.

Różnorodności nie da się uniknąć w całym naszym życiu i trzeba zrobić świadomy wysiłek, by ją celebrować, bo wzbogaca ona w nieopisany sposób nasze życie i to, jak żyjemy. Wierzę, że ja to osiągnęłam.

Colours

Diana Souter

CORLETTE 2315

White ... everything is white. White skin, white clothes, white shoes, white hair tied back with a white ribbon, white bread lunch sandwiches, white sun in a blazing white sky burning my little white feet on the scorching white sand. My eight-year-old self, dances down to the picnic beach through the heat of a 1949 Australian summer. The inland lake shimmers, the cool water invites me in to paddle. I meet my two girlfriends and we giggle behind our hands, pointing to another girl – black skin, black hair, black eyes and funny clothes. Mum says “Stop staring, they are harmless, they are Afghan people, from afar, brought over with their camels to our inland areas to settle and assist with the construction of roads and railways in the desert many years ago”.

Later on we motor past an encampment on the outskirts of town, I ask “Who are those dark people Mum, why don’t those kids go to school with us?” There is no answer. The colours change to yellow, brown, black, the sky to brilliant blue.

Red is the fury at my 10-year-old self, 70 years ago being marched off the school sports field by the headmaster for showing my legs, seething with indignation at not being able to play football with the boys. Today I clap happily as my 14-year-old granddaughter sprints past wearing skimpy green soccer shorts, whooping with joy and freedom. Soccer! No longer a boy’s only game.

At high school, girls with yellow flecked slanted eyes, lustrous black hair and smooth complexions provided curiosity and admiration. For their forefathers, yellow gold was the colour of their world and brown the colour of the earth they dug in two hundred years ago. How I admired their cleverly speaking in a different language. There was only one language in my family and that was proper English. People who weren’t born in Australia were deemed “Foreign”. But does the need to embrace diversity mean that our modern usage of language now is too relaxed, too colourful, often peppered with slang and foul swear words my parents would have me washing my mouth out with soap?

Black is different. Black skin, black hair, black clothes, the colour of exotic places and races. Traveling overseas, my 21-year-old eyes are opened to a previously unknown world of colourful exotica – faces, languages, customs, dress, food, oh the food!

My mature life takes on a more daring hue as I get an education previously thought unnecessary for girls and find myself in a management role in a large city council. “You will need to move the desks so that Linda my new secretary has adequate room to navigate her wheelchair around the desks” I say to the staff at my workplace. Eyebrows are raised, desks shuffled. Linda is no longer “handicapped” as before, but mobility challenged and a worthy participant in our workplace life. Workplaces now cater to a variety of ages, colours, sexes, size and shapes. It takes time to open people’s formerly closed eyes.

Luckily we no longer live within the strict parameters of a white world regime, as in George Orwell's novel "1984" with people who were coerced to look and sound the same, but in a joyous freedom of colour painted on a much richer canvas. Living without the parameters of fear of being different, we can be any colour, size and shape we like! As I think of government, I reminisce at the state of politics. It was exactly 30 years ago that I stood for parliament representing a very diverse constituency of over 60 races, colours and creeds and blessed the democracy that allowed them to vote for whomever they liked.

I decide to ignore the discriminatory practise of "Ageism" as I ready myself for an event, grey hair tinted to a fetching shade of auburn, flattering fitted clothes. "Is this lipstick too red?" I ask my new husband. Too late to fall in love, write a novel? Never! Now my 80 year old self celebrates that our society is not an all-white male or female, young or old, able or disabled world, viewed through the prism of prejudice and I am glad.

Yes, it is no longer either black or white, the colours of my beloved piano keys. As in the composing of a symphony or a sonata, all the keys, both black and white, high and low, soft and loud on a keyboard are needed to create a tune, a wondrous harmony; the sharps for the ups and flats the downs.

Today as I conduct my choir of "oldies" I note the joy on their faces; blue, brown, grey and black hair, pink cheeks, eyes shining, raising their voices together, singing with joy, songs from different countries and cultures – classical, folk, pop, and jazz. White is the colour of our shirts and black our pants as we celebrate our multi coloured world in concert. So we sing together about the rainbow hues colouring our lives. And I give joyful thanks for my long life lived to the fullest with colour, compassion, freedom and yes ... plain white!

The Owls Meet

Sandra Grant

SOLDIERS POINT 2317

I am looking forward to our meeting today. I have only known most of these people for a short while but in that time our connection has grown. I can now remember to ask after a new grandchild or a recent trip; sometimes a trip to hospital has occurred but mostly we are a healthy bunch and the discussion will be centred around our latest book. As a lifelong lover of books, I was overjoyed to be asked to join a new reading group. It was something I had wanted to do in retirement but hadn't actively searched for one.

That first meeting was two years ago and we have explored many books and found new friendships in that time. Our format has evolved. We started with book collections from our local library; a great resource for anyone thinking of starting a reading group. Unfortunately, the books we would choose would often be popular with other groups and we would end up with a novel which some of us struggled to complete. From our original group of seven members, we are now ten when we can all turn up. Of course, we were affected by the lockdown, like so many groups, but we continued to read and were able to stay in touch through the miracle of Zoom meetings. As soon as we were able, we met in the great outdoors. We are particularly lucky to live in an area with many beautiful bayside parks. We would arrive with our folding chairs and our thermos flasks and some baked goodies to share.

After that first year, it was decided that we would trial purchasing our books. This suits our members who download their books onto various devices. We could also suggest favourite novels to the group. This has led to reading of more current and topical novels.

To me the real value of our bookclub is the lively discussions that each novel generates. The choice of books is very diverse and often they're not novels that I would have chosen to read. It gives me greater insight when my views can be challenged by another opinion. It also provides a window into the lives and experiences that other people have faced, not just in the novels but also the lives of our members. It has reminded me of that old saying that you should never judge a book by its cover. For although we have all reached that "certain age" when we are no longer working and perhaps feel a little "redundant" in society, I truly value the diverse lives and often tough choices that these wonderful, resilient women have had.

Each meeting, each book reveals a little more about the reader. It is encouraging to see someone who joined as a reluctant reader becoming more engaged and offering her opinions more confidently.

We have explored new ideas and cultures through our book choices. I have learned about Indian and Asian issues that I was previously unaware of. I have discovered how the Oxford dictionary came to be published and have more appreciation for the abridged version that I bought when I first went to university over 50 years ago. The spine has lost its cover and the printing seems to have shrunk but it is still my constant companion when I'm trying to complete a crossword puzzle. Because of this particular novel, we compiled a list of words that have been lost from our language over time and I am now vigilant when reading to note new or unknown words and their origin; a good workout for the brain. I think about words that we use like "uncouth" and "ruthless" and wonder why we don't use "couth" and "ruthful" more. Why do we not call scoundrels "picaroons" anymore and doesn't the musicality of "crinkum crankum" make us smile. These are wonderful musings that can come from the deeper reading and discussion of a book.

We revisited a novel that many of us were compelled to study in high school, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and realized through fresh eyes why it had such impact when it was written and why it is a classic.

Because of another novel, I have a fresh appreciation of the trials of our pioneer settlers, particularly the females who ventured to this new country either willingly or not. All these experiences and adventures are available to us even when our own adventures are curtailed by pandemics or the limits imposed by age.

I have recently learned that a labyrinth is not the same as a maze. It was originally a type of path used for meditation purposes by many religious groups and I was annoyed with myself to realise that I had missed the opportunity to see the famous labyrinth in Chartres Cathedral when we visited. But, I don't have time for too many regrets as I have to get started on our next novel.

Finding Tops

Joyce Vernon

NORTH TAMWORTH 2340

Tapengwa ... his friends call him 'Tops'

We also thought this 11-year-old was TOPS.

The year was 2019 and we were staying at a large Lodge just outside Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe.

After a full day of safari into the NP the previous day, we had a quieter day looking around at local community projects. As we were driving out of the Lodge we saw a bunch of local people waiting on the main road. Amongst this group was Tops, who wasn't related to anyone or really with them. He held a white plastic bucket, covered with a cloth.

Our guide, Jabulani, pulled up the 4 x 4 bus and went to see what Tops was selling and enquired as to why he wasn't in school. He came back and explained that this was quite a sad story. He invited Tops over to show us the two types of 'bush fruits' he had in his bucket. One was dark brown, with shiny, smooth skin and tasted like chocolate. The other the size of a walnut, with furry skin and tasted like dried fig. Fortunately we didn't know the local name translated to 'snot fruit', until we had finished tasting the fruit! After chewing it for a while, it became very slimy.

Tops told Jabulani that he was selling the fruit to keep his family. He said he couldn't go to school because they didn't have the money to pay school fees. He lived with Grandma and seven other orphans. So this little guy seemed to be the family breadwinner. We gave him a lift nearer the entrance of the NP, where he thought he would have a better chance of selling his fruit.

Jabulani made a plan with Tops to meet up later in the day and we would go, with him, to his school to negotiate getting him back into class.

We continued on with our various community activities.

Jabulani and I went to a grocery shop in Dete, a small village, where we purchased some basic groceries for Tops' Grandma and classroom essentials for the boy.

After lunch we went to the place we had arranged to meet Tops, but he wasn't there. Armed with the shopping, we set off in the direction of the school, which was at least 15 kms away.

At a busy crossroads village, Jabulani found two uncles, who joined us in the bus and showed the way to Tops' school. Once at the school, Jabulani and I met the Principal and two staff in an office, while our other guests went on a school tour.

We could tell that the Principal and two other lady teachers were a little unsympathetic about Tops' situation. Their story was that he could not be expelled for non-payment of school fees but had been expelled for non attendance at school for 7 days in a row. That's the rules!

So Jabulani spoke in Shona and English. I pleaded, quoting the UN Rights of the Child. Moments like this we find ourselves pulling our big girl undies right up to the armpits and digging deep!

Amazingly Tops appeared; from where we don't know but he had his empty bucket. We calculated that he had travelled at least 40kms that day. There are few vehicles around there and the Safaris' Lodges don't give locals a lift in their 4 x 4s, so we think he ran and walked, with a hole the size of an orange, in his oversized sandals.

Jabulani asked Tops to sit on the floor at his feet. When we could see we were making some progress with Mr Principal, Jabulani spoke in Shona to Tops.

I noticed Jabulani touch his khaki shorts and also pointed to his bus (khaki in colour), then made an action of cutting his own throat ... at this the staff all giggled behind their hands.

Jabulani had told Tops that we had worked very hard to get him back into school. Jabulani told Tops he was an 'army man' and if he didn't go every day, he (Jabulani) would kill him!

That night we all said OMG that was tough, but as Jabulani explained. "This kid needs an education, we negotiated hard to get him back into school and he has no male role models in his life".

Jabulani told Tops that he could be a businessman on Saturday and Sunday, as he was obviously very good at that, but school the other 5 days and the Headmaster would take a photo every day and send to us, so we knew he was attending.

We paid his next term's school fees of US\$12. I bought him some school shoes in Zambia and Jabulani organised for them to get to him.

After we left the school, we took Tops and the two uncles to Grandmas'. Up and down creek banks, on a rarely used bush track for 5 kms, further on than the school, in the absolute middle of nowhere.

When we arrived, there was a bunch of kids, but no sign of Grandma. She came through the bushes soon after with a baby on her back and water bucket on her head. She had been fetching water for the family.

Poor Grandma, she must have nearly died when she saw an army coloured bus, full of white people and our wonderful local guide. She was overwhelmed and obviously very moved, when we presented the food. It was basic but must have been like Christmas, to this isolated family.

One of our group heard that this 'dumping kids on grandma' is quite common in Zimbabwe. The young people see better opportunities for themselves in the towns and cities and may send home money, once they get employment ... or may not! We just loved travelling there and this was a very special day interacting with the local community.

Diversity at its best.

A Lesson Learned

Gail Houghton

COONABARABRAN 2357

“Teacher! Teacher!”

What is it with these students? I was told in the job interview how respectful they were; the parents valued education, teaching overseas would be a dream, a doddle. *“Teacher, teacher”*, that’s all I hear. They know my name, it’s not hard to say. Some of their names give a callisthenic workout for your tongue. I’ve persevered. I’ve learnt, why can’t they?

Should I start calling out *“boy, boy or girl, girl!”*? What about just a point and say *“Hey you?”*

No, I could never do that, it would be too disrespectful and could even sound demeaning! I had expected better than this, what a letdown.

That was my initial reaction to working in schools in the Middle East. I wasn’t happy, the students were like sponges with learning, so keen, interested and full of life. There was just this one annoying habit, *“teacher, teacher”*.

I didn’t want to cause conflict or appear to be an ungrateful, whingeing ex-pat. I kept quiet, did my job, formed friendships with teaching staff, support staff and parents. The teaching was all it advertised to be, just fantastic! Professionally it was amazing and personally what an advantage to be in another country, on the other side of the world with opportunities to hop to yet another country for a weekend! Experiences most Australians would not be able to enjoy. Truly blessed. Surely, I could overlook my bias, or was it just arrogance, or maybe ignorance?

It wasn’t until I was working with the Yezhidi refugees on weekends that I was enlightened. They had fled ISIS bombing their village. Their English was limited, so when they began calling *“teacher, teacher”*, I didn’t seem to mind as much, just accepted the name.

Fund raising within the ex-pat community allowed a local teacher to be employed and school supplies bought, including a tent with a floor to hold classes. The Yezhedi had relocated to an abandoned hotel construction site when they fled from ISIS and came to the city.

I noticed the children were calling the local teacher by his given name, yet we were referred to as *“teacher”*. I kept quiet, not wanting to appear petty about such a minor thing. The focus was on the traumatised children and their families.

Their behaviour was not what I expected. We had to lock everything up after each session. Padlocks had to be put on the cupboards we bought to fill with the school supplies. If we didn’t resort to this, there would be no supplies to use for our next sessions. The trauma of leaving their home and all their possessions made them covet what was brought in for them. They would take any left-over materials and hide them. Unconsciously they worried these too would be taken away from them, just as ISIS took all they owned and all that was familiar to them. We hoped trust would be re-established in time and they would not feel the need to take these things. It would be a long journey though to any sort of normality.

I was abruptly brought to reality when a seemingly insignificant incident happened. I was sitting waiting to help with English lessons when a small boy came and sat beside me. He moved closer to me and put his hand in mine. There was a collective intake of breath when the older children noticed what he did. He looked at me and smiled, showing his gap-filled mouth just like any five-year-old. His attention was taken with the starting ball games and he dashed out to play.

The older children began an earnest conversation, when someone could translate and explain what had just happened, it was incredulous. We were hit with such emotion, there was not a dry eye. This little boy was running for his life with his older sister. She had him tightly by the hand as they ran. ISIS were shelling them as they were fleeing their village. She was killed instantly as they were running and in death her hand had gripped so tightly, it had to be prised open to release his hand. He was scooped up and dashed to safety. He had not held anyone's hand since that day. What an unimaginable event for anyone to experience, let alone a five-year-old child. What a privilege to be entrusted with this small hand.

The cultural differences these children showed in their learning and behaviours were made even more complex with the added factor of war. We needed to understand this, they behaved and learnt very differently from the children in the school where we were employed. Same country, same ethnicity but the traumas these children experienced were going to be with them for a very long time.

After many weeks of working with these children we noticed the local teacher was now referred to as "*teacher*". It was explained that the children finally respected him enough to call him teacher and not by his name. It all became clear, there was no disrespect amongst any of these children, just the opposite. They used the name of the profession, not the person as a mark of respect. It was unfortunate that this cultural difference had not been made known to us when we were employed. I was also glad I didn't make a fuss about the name as well!

I was privileged to experience first-hand another culture with my work over the years of my contract.

I would like to think the experiences of living and working for many years in other countries had allowed me to function with more empathy and understanding of those cultures. It is easy to criticise something that is different, easy to judge.

Many factors make us unique with our cultures, and sometimes circumstances exacerbate our differences. David Attenborough shows us how amazing the natural world is, nobody can deny that. People in their diversity and differing cultures are just as amazing.

Eleven Changed Lives

Lee Butler

DEEPWATER 2371

Achievement as a youth worker in a detention centre on the south coast still brings tears to the eyes of this ageing yet hopeful woman.

The challenge was to take 12 young people who were our worst re-offenders yet approaching 18 years of age and would end up in adult prison if they could not be turned around. The program was to run for one year, with a diverse group, mostly uneducated kids from street life, some were indigenous, only two were girls, the rest were boys.

I approached the TAFE college teachers to help design practical skill courses, and the business community to inform the teachers of skills needed to hire such kids. The whole community of Wollongong got behind the project with me, and we all went to work. The TAFE found funding for the project.

The hardest part was convincing these kids that they could choose to change their lives, this took weeks of overcoming mindsets and showing them others who had overcome similar circumstances which they came from, to succeed in various fields of endeavour.

It also took challenging their belief that they were just an accident of some random act of sex between two people. After showing them weeks of evidence to the contrary I asked them: "If you were created a unique and special individual, for a specific purpose, that has the blueprint inside you, would you want to know what it is?"

Being a voluntary program, one of the 12 pulled out at this stage, however, the others became committed to going through, and exploring if they could change their lives.

In "Opening your dream machine" one of the illiterate boys drew me an intricate diagram of a fishing trawler and stated, "I want to, one day own my own", I took his diagram to the harbour showing it to the guys on the trawlers and one owner agreed to give him a job if he completed certain skills.

The TAFE teachers incorporated those skills into their part of the program.

Another boy was extremely good with art, he was actually a graffiti offender. He was offered work at the art gallery to start as a cleaner, with an agreement to go to art lessons paid by the gallery.

The two girls went into the fashion industry, and ended up flatting together, and taking other street kids in to teach them things they learnt with me.

A few of the boys chose to go into the building industry as brickies' labourers, and one was able to get work with a painter as a labourer. Another few boys were into mechanical things so we found work for them with fixing lawn mowers etc, and one worked hard and ended up going to TAFE to become a mechanic.

One of the important modules I designed was a relationship module to equip them all to be able to get on with others very different to themselves. This was originally designed to help them in the workplace however, also helped them navigate romantic relationships as they entered society once more.

One of the girls said to me, "They talk about sex at school but nobody tells us how to handle our feelings the next day when the guy ignores us or tells us to piss off." So we talked about how we think differently, and they learnt all the differences between men and women, in every area of life.

Living skills were needed, basic hygiene, how to care for themselves. It was a delight to take them out shopping to buy their outfits for their job interviews and see them develop self respect as they encouraged each other with how well they "scrubbed up". They were so proud of learning how to do a resume and were about to have an achievement certificate to place in it.

We had so much fun doing mock interviews for jobs so they would feel more comfortable in an actual interview. One day we all ended up laughing so hard we gave up and went to lunch.

One of these kids towards the end of the year said to me, "I'm not scared of life any more, I really believe I can do it." And he did.

I shall never forget the award ceremony the TAFE teachers and business people put together for my kids. It was the first time they had ever been recognised for any accomplishment. To see their glowing faces and smiles was priceless.

The Program of Choice was a pilot program that was so successful it landed me into a meeting with the then Prime Minister's office to speak with Mr John Howard's advisors.

I wanted to design a program similar to this one, to go through the schools before kids were involved in bullying, offending, and becoming either street kids because of uncontrolled emotions and frustrations, or end up in detention centres where frankly not all youth workers even believe they can change. The Federal government was favourable to funding such a program if the states would come on board.

I went to the state governments who were in charge of curriculum development, and had huge slammed doors, the Queensland Labor government said I should try to see if religious scripture would introduce the program.

I went to see those who ran the scripture union and they said if they opened the door to something like this it could open the door for other religions besides Christianity into the schools, so it was 'no'.

So the Program of Choice was shelved.

However, I realised the importance of relationship education not just sex education. I went on to develop relational education which helped over 400 couples to navigate relationships out of difficult and sometimes volatile backgrounds.

I have written a relationship book not yet published, which would be great in high schools. Called "How to Love Someone Special and Be Loved in Return".

Is it time yet Australia?

It's Okay to be Different

Bev Maybury

BULAHDELAH 2434

Mrs. Riley owned the most delightful garden.

In her garden there were flowers of many colours which she loved but more than flowers, Mrs Riley loved trees.

Fortunately Mrs. Riley lived on a farm so her garden was very *big*.

Big enough to grow many, many trees.

Everyday Mrs. Riley walked through the trees, patting their trunks and talking to them as she passed.

Mrs. Riley didn't know that the trees also talked to each other; each claiming to be her favourite.

All except one! The tall pine tree which grew closest to the house which all the other trees ignored.

He was different from the maples, liquid ambers and the mighty oak tree.

And so the other trees didn't notice him while Mrs. Riley treated him in the same way she treated all the others, unaware of how sad and lonely the pine tree felt.

And then it was Autumn and all the trees began to change colours.

All except one! The pine tree remained tall and green while all the other trees' leaves were yellow, red, russet and brown.

And how the other trees laughed at the pine tree. All except the mighty oak.

And how the other trees teased him, saying that they were Mrs. Riley's favourites because of their beautiful colours while the pine tree just stayed green.

"How boring you are," they whispered as a cool breeze rustled through their leaves.

"How beautiful we are with our leaves of different colours while you just remain green."

The mighty oak tried to silence them and he said, "It's okay to be different."

But the tall, green pine tree believed the others and he became even more sad and lonely.

The leaves of the other trees gradually fell, making a carpet of different colours which crackled under Mrs. Riley's feet as she walked and talked to her trees each day.

The trees stood proudly, displaying their bare branches as the winter snow covered the ground.

Mrs. Riley walked through her forest of trees as the winter winds howled and she noticed that the tall green pine tree was different from his bare-branched neighbours.

Spring arrived and with it the trees produced new light green leaves to cover their bare branches.

All except one! The pine tree still had all his dark green branches.

The other trees teased him even more.

"How boring you are. While we have leaves of beautiful colours, you stay green.

"While we have beautiful bare branches to catch the snow, you stay green.

"While we produce beautiful new leaves you remain the same. You are just boring."

The mighty oak reminded the other trees, "It's okay to be different."

But the pine tree believed them and he became even more sad and lonely so summer rolled around. A very hot, dry Australian summer.

The trees in Mrs. Riley's garden drooped at the end of every day, longing for night to come so they could escape from the sun's hot rays. But the pine tree stood tall and green throughout each day.

Then, one afternoon as the weather was cooling, Mr. and Mrs Riley and their two children appeared in the garden. The children carried a large box between them and Mrs. Riley carried a small one. Mr Riley carried a ladder.

They approached the tall green pine tree and Mrs Riley said, "This tree is just right".

The children removed coloured balls and stars and lots of interesting decorations from the box and then everyone attached them to the tall green pine tree.

Mr. Riley climbed the ladder and placed a huge golden star right on the very top branch of the tall green pine tree.

Mr and Mrs Riley and their children stood back to admire their handiwork.

And then ... Mr. Riley touched a switch and the tall green pine tree was ablaze with light – Christmas lights.

The Riley family clapped their hands and laughed with happiness.

All the other trees in the garden were amazed – the tall green pine tree was the most important and beautiful tree in the garden at this time of the year.

The mighty oak told the other trees. "We all have a purpose. Ours is to show our different colours to the world in autumn while our friend, the tall green pine tree is needed to help us all celebrate Christmas".

And the tall green pine tree was happy as he heard the mighty oak say, "It's okay to be different".

I remember the first time I was caned in early primary school. It's not something I like to think about but has endured in my brain for my subsequent decades. I was about 7 years old at school and when I asked 'why' which in retrospect was pretty arrogant for the time I was told that because I didn't stand straight enough at the assembly.

In those days almost 60 years ago coming out of WW2 and other near conflicts it was about disciplining the body and exact allegiance to some goal or ideal. Our days were filled with the chant at assemblies, 'I honour my God, I serve my queen, I salute the flag'.

It may seem strange now but that's how life was then. It was as the past prime minister Robert Menzies said "British to our bootstraps" and of the Queen "I shall love her to the day I die". That was our cultural landscape, it was essentially mono cultural based on a European template and almost exclusively English of how things should be and a very narrow one in retrospect. Nobody really questioned why it should be otherwise. We feared the 'yellow peril' and questioned people who were not like 'us'. We found it odd when an Italian or Greek family set up a business in our neck of the woods.

Fast forward a few short years to the very early 1970s. It was the smell of salt that filled my nostrils and the taste of hot chips that filled my mouth. It was all about who was the most brown at the end of summer and nothing else. Gone were the daily chants of the empirical mindset of the time. What remained of Empire Day was now replaced by the Queen's Birthday weekend and if nothing else allowed us to destroy a couple a pile of clippings in a friend's backyard through the now long dated use of fireworks.

I think to a generation before me. My father and his eldest sister came to Australia on an Italian cruise ship to meet their first cousin. They had left a war torn middle eastern country for a better life here in Australia. But for them it was a very different world in terms of language and culture. My aunt remarked many years ago that in order to create many of the recipes she was accomplished to it was difficult to get the correct ingredients. She remarked that in those early days the only way to get olive oil that was essential for many dishes was to buy it in small bottles at the chemist. Nowadays you can buy the ingredients by the bucket load from virtually any supermarket!

They also experienced language difficulties. My aunt remarked that she would go grocery shopping and ask for items with a single word like 'biscuit'. I would laugh at this, thinking that it would seem very quaint given our current context.

I'm currently living in a small rural town about a hundred kilometres from anywhere. I can get a Chinese, Australian or Indonesian meal any day of the week. A generation ago I can recall a Chinese restaurant opening near me and I thought it was quite a treat. But no longer. Just about anywhere you can whet your appetite for any taste your heart desires.

I think the days of the bronzed chesty Aussie rising from the parched soil are honoured and remembered over and that's not a bad thing. We now celebrate a rich cultural diversity that continues to define the Australian character. I look at my son who has the genetics spanning half the globe and realise that this is our Australia now. Once to be feared but now celebrated.

Recently I read that 30 per cent of the Australian population was born overseas, each bringing with them a slightly different cultural background that contributes to our overall cultural matrix.

Some years ago when I was a teacher there were groups being formed to study languages other than English. I was interested in teaching Japanese which was all the go about thirty years ago. However, that group was full and the only one being offered was Chinese. In those days it was very much a minority language offering in schools. So, I took it up and ended up as an educational consultant in this field. Fast forward three decades and it is now the largest language group in the Higher School Certificate. Talk about a change in cultural attitudes in half a generation! That's the great thing about Australia – Not only do we embrace our cultural diversity but we also run with it to whatever outcome we can achieve!

Nowadays I can sit in the sun, enjoy the many advantages that having a diverse international cultural identity brings, thinking sipping on a wine from grapes sourced from more than a century old import and munch on my lunch that is anything but Euro-centric.

I look forward to the International day of the Country Women's Association where they encourage in young children an investigation into 'other' cultures that have contributed to our national character. Makes a great change from the usual scones, cream and jam in terms of food offerings! It teaches the up and coming generation about the diversity of our land and increases cultural awareness. More so with just about any other festival – they all raise cultural awareness, discourage racism and encourage unity.

As the Seekers sang many years ago 'We are one and we are many and from all the world we come... We sing with one voice, I am, you are we are Australian'.

Looking at the troubles in many foreign lands and their fighting about things long since abandoned, in Australia we celebrate the diversity that many different cultures have contributed in awareness of our unity and history to make this wide brown land the place it now is.

Light at the end of the Tunnel

Vicki Connell

HARRINGTON 2427

I'm sitting on my great grandmother, Ma Green's lap. Her hands are held up in front of her chest facing outwards. I'm clapping my hands together and then clapping each of hers in turn as we sing a rhyme about Miss Mary Mack. I'm four years old. Then, on the final line of the rhyme, I giggle as my tiny hands clap both her broad gnarly ones hard three times.

Ma Green is minding us as Mum has popped out to do some shopping. I love to hop up onto her lap and play these rhythmical clapping games. She interlocks her fingers together to make a church with her two fingers extended up to make a steeple whilst she chants, "Here is the church and here is the steeple" and opens her thumb doors so that I could exclaim at the finger people, "Open the door to see all the people."

My Ma keeps me entertained like this for ages. Then Mum appears at the back door, and I jump down off her lap and run away to play elsewhere.

Ma Green always wore dark clothes, a long black dress and coat, hat and gloves when she came to visit. She was a tall imposing figure, but never seemed frightening to me, only comforting. Her small round dark glasses were the only scary thing about her. They hid her eyes and, to me, they looked like two deep black bottomless holes. Mum said she wore them because she was blind and did not want to hurt her eyes. She was having a holiday at our house because "Aunty Ena, her daughter, needs a break" Mum said. They lived in Surry Hills in a tiny terrace house and we would often go and visit them there. I remember one Christmas time being very excited when she gave me a tiny cane doll bassinet which she'd woven. Aunty Ena had sewed the bedding and knitted dolls clothes for the baby doll. I've still got this wonderful basket.

For Ma Green's visits Dad strung up a rope along the path to the toilet outside so that she could feel her way there by herself.

When I was a child I often woke up screaming from recurring nightmares. I would run crying down the hallway and hop into Mum and Dad's bed. One morning, after one of my nightmares, Ma Green called me into the kitchen to sit up on her lap where we started playing our usual hand clapping games. After a few games she told me "That's all now", and I implored "Ma, one more."

"Alright then, one last game." She instructed me to put my hand into my pocket. "Now pull it out. What do you see?"

I opened my hand, looked at my empty hand and replied disappointedly "Nothing Ma."

She gently took my open hand and closed it into a tight fist. "Now," she said, "Look again."

I looked really closely and noticed that I could see a tiny pin prick circle of light at the end. "Now," she said, "Open your hand a little and you can make that little hole bigger. What do you see now?"

I was so excited; it was like looking through a tunnel. I could see our kitchen stove and then when I moved my hand telescope around the room I could see other things. Then I made the hole bigger and the objects became bigger. I enjoyed this game immensely. "I can make things big or small" I said to her.

She replied, "That's right, it's the same thing you see no matter how big or small you make it. Now, remember this, if ever you are sad, you can play this game. Close your hand up tight and have a look through it at that tiny pinprick of light and then make it bigger. Let the light that you see take away your sadness. There's always a little light which may makes your troubles easier to bear. If not, make the hole bigger and look at a bigger picture. Your troubles will not seem so bad then."

One evening as I was approaching fifty, I found that I couldn't drive at night anymore because in the dimmer light I couldn't see the traffic signs. Gradually I lost my peripheral vision and now all I can see is a circle of light, without the outer edges, like looking through a tunnel. It seems that I have Glaucoma like my Ma Green had. I was devastated at first to realise that I too would one day lose all my sight unless I had elective surgery which had not been available in my great grandmother's time. It was frightening, but through the process of waiting for the surgery and whilst I still had some sight left, I took the time each day to try and see that light at the end of my closed fist tunnel and imagine what it would be like to live without sight. Somehow it seemed to help me focus on the here and now.

I have recently moved with my husband and we have nature right outside our bedroom windows, a beautiful green tree filled reserve which backs onto the Manning River. I can hear the ocean and the water tumbling from the water feature outside my window; am learning to recognise different bird calls and I walk daily with my husband along the river path behind our home, discovering through my other senses all the joys of nature. I realise now that light is free, it doesn't cost us anything and when we are there for others to help them, in sharing that light we are giving light and freedom to ourselves as well.

I often think about my dear Ma Green. Although there was an absence of light in her life, it in no way diminished her capacity to bring metaphorical light into the lives of others.

Reading between the Lines

Lance Bowden

SMITHS LAKE 2428

"If that dreadful noise doesn't stop soon there will be no holding me back!"

The remark that carried a threatened tone, shocked me to my very core, while at the same time my sense of vulnerability intensified as the words rang out, and into my ears. Fortunately on this occasion, there were nine other pairs of ears that would witness my circumstances. I wasn't alone.

"You have five minutes. Five minutes to write a short story using this phrase, and your time starts now." The ping from the small pea inside the ceramic bell pulls me away from my fear.

Attending the local writers' group for the very first time, and feeling this challenge needed to be taken head on, I ploughed right into it.

Sharing a love of writing with strangers doesn't feel strange or uncomfortable at all, in fact it felt more like warm arms being wrapped around you after life doesn't seem fair. The relaxed nature within the group, as well as their respect for each other was evident around the large rectangular table. No more clearly was this observed than when the chairperson asked us one by one to read aloud our responses to the stimulus phrase.

Each of the ten responses were unique, not only in their writing styles, not only in the glimpse they provided into the backgrounds and life story of each individual, but in the reading aloud of their essay.

A small shiver made its way across my neck and shoulders as I was asked to read first. Was I being tested? No, of course not. Being the first reader was obviously out of politeness for the new guy to the group. Deep breath and I was sharing my first impromptu essay. A small but reassured clapping of hands followed. It was all the encouragement I needed.

When Jill, was asked to read her contribution she paused, and as she looked at her writing, tears moved quietly down her cheeks. The chair, speaking in comforting tones suggested that Jill's contribution might be read by Ros. Respecting Jill's situation, Ros read aloud what was to become one of the most articulated pieces of writing produced at the meeting. Jill's essay with cleverly constructed with a terrific twist in its tail. A respectful clapping of hands brought a reserved yet resilient smile to her face.

The question as to why Jill was unable to read her essay aloud lingered as a private thought. However, known to the group and not to the new guy at the table was the fact Jill had a form of autism which from time to time prevented her from presenting her work. Jill was managing her circumstance and the writers' group was supporting her endeavours to become a published writer.

Listening intently to Jill's essay was Greg, with his writing skills honed through exhaustive research and publishing historical non-fiction books. Kay, however was more about the now than then, with her experiences in conducting and collating interviews with couples and writing up her findings. Her love of books and her ability to review them became obvious during the afternoon. And Anne, with her background in international travel was keen to develop her writing skills and to publish.

Peter, a retired farmer, who wrote prose and poetry under a pseudonym had published a number of books. A quiet bloke whose mental health may well depend on unpacking a hard-won life working the land, through his writing; but this was just an observation of mine.

Marie held up several colourful and beautifully illustrated children's books which she had recently authored. The emphasis of her presentation was on the illustrative work of a colleague, who two years early, didn't have the confidence to undertake such a project even though her skill set was obvious to all, but not to the illustrator.

Rachael an established writer and great book reviewer, was the go-to person during the meeting for the minutes and organising guest speakers. Matthew, the chairperson, was an accomplished writer and author of thirty books over thirty-five years. Books penned by his own hand as well as books written in collaboration with primary school and high school students. After attending workshopping sessions, the student's produced their body of work for publishing.

Finally, Glenda was asked to share her essay on the theme. Before reading her essay Glenda was excited to explain that she had joined the writing group to learn how to become a better writer as well as a better reader. Glenda confided in the group that she had struggled throughout her life with dyslexia, then described how it impacted on her reading and what she saw; the playfulness of the letters and words and the movement of lines on the pages when reading. She apologised in advance.

The stillness of the air that framed Glenda comment was broken as she started reading. Glenda brought her writing to life, with the need to pause several times to prevent her words from scattering and changing the sense of what it was she had written and needed to say. When she had finished, Glenda receives an applause for her essay's content and the strength of character she had shown. I am sure Glenda will self-publish her family history. Right Greg?

As well, the writers group works collaboratively as well as independently. An outstanding example of a collaborative body of work was based on writers inspired by painters and painters inspired by writers. Working together they created the public exhibition 'Palette and Pen', a shining light in inclusiveness and an example to the broader community and to those seeking to write or paint.

I raise my reading glasses and congratulate the members of my newly found writers group for their meaningful and positive approach to diversity through inclusivity.

The Silk Weavers

Paul Hydes

KEW 2439

The view to the east was stunning, with serried blocks of vegetation stretching down the slope to the wetlands and the forest-clad mountain beyond. Early morning condensation meant that it was easy for Grace, the landlady, to see Andrew was at home, in addition to dozens of other silk weavers residing in gaps below the rail. Andrew was up there with the best of these artisans, she thought, sharing top billing with his friend, Gos. They each had their own style. Andrew tended to do his weaving in low profile locations, always with his primitive signature in the centre of the piece. Gos on the other hand was into major public space installations, often on the side of buildings, seeming to like nothing better than to catch the eye of people passing by.

She imagined they had disdain for other guild members, whose limited skills resulted in second-rate designs; enough to provide a meal but with no pretensions of artistry. Of course, there were exceptions, notably the youngsters who could produce phenomenal lengths of silk, using them to travel large distances and attain heights of up to 5,000 metres. They all had a vital role to play in the broader scheme of things but were under threat from the landlords of adjacent properties. These neighbours hated the weavers, bred in part by fear and lack of appreciation for their role in the ecosystem.

Grace knew that in earlier times, some of Andrew's related Australian species had been distinctly anti-social, causing havoc in the suburbs of Sydney for instance. They had created an atmosphere of fear, killing a few people unwary enough to get in their way when they launched sorties from their hideouts. Ways to control them and rectify the damage caused had been developed so successfully that there had been no fatalities for over 40 years. However, the fear remained and all members of the guild seemed to be tarred with the same brush, often treated to periodic extermination campaigns.

Unfortunately, the campaigns were indiscriminate, not just for weavers but also other insect life. Grace was afraid that the perpetrators seemed unaware of the positive contributions made by most of these artisans, failing to recognise the benefits of diversity in the ecosystems of the planet. For instance if insect populations dropped too far, pollination of human food crops would be effected in another monstrous 'own goal' for humanity. Her neighbours seemed to be driven by an urge for everything to be neat and tidy, a state of grace at odds with the natural world where disorder was the basis for thriving communities. It was as if they thought they owned the joint when the reality was that they were simply very temporary custodians.

Aesthetic considerations aside, Grace knew the weavers helped to control the number of insects, ranging from mosquitoes to cicadas in size. During migrations of termites, many of the homes below the galvanised fence rail trapped the flying fiends before they could damage her house timberwork. Their web silk was often harvested by birds to bind their nests together, the elasticity of the threads proving to be a boon for growing nestlings needing enlargeable accommodation. The weavers themselves were a menu choice for birds and skinks which patrolled Grace's property for an easy feed.

The weavers had evolved some interesting behaviours over the millennia, as one young lady noted while admiring a web on a visit to the site one day.

"Did you know the female St Andrew's Cross is the one that builds the web, Grandma?"

"No, Grace, I didn't. In fact I call this one Andrew."

"Well my teacher says the male is tiny in comparison and usually gets eaten when mating is over."

"Really! It takes all sorts I guess. Evolution is wonderfully diverse. One thing's for sure, I'll think differently about them and refer to Andrea from now on. How did that subject come up at school?"

"Oh, we do biodiversity modules. The last one was on spiders, flies and other insects. Did you know that Black Soldier Flies lay eggs in your compost bins and the larvae are Det-rit-ivores?" sounding the word carefully.

"I certainly didn't. I guess that means they help break down the compost?"

"Yep," said with all the confidence of youth.

"And their larvae are edible by humans!"

"Wow, did they have some for you to try?"

"No, but apparently they taste like mashed potatoes. We had a project where we had to count how many different species of one type we could find at home. You could choose birds but there wasn't much point for me 'cos the Noisy Miners beat-up all the smaller birds so we only see a few bigger ones like pigeons and butcherbirds. Not much diversity on the local bird front. So I chose insects and found lots."

"That sounds interesting. What did you find?"

"Heaps. There were eight different spiders for starters and one of those was an amazing Wolf spider, carrying about 20 babies on her tummy."

"Gee, that gives a whole new meaning to child-bearing doesn't it?"

"Sure does! And then there were five butterflies, four bees, some wasps and hoverflies and that's just the obvious flying ones. Once I started looking in the mulch there were oodles more so I found about thirty all up."

"Wow! I bet your teacher was impressed."

"Yep! Mrs Airey helped me identify some beetles I'd done drawings of. She's really cool. She said next time your parents feel the urge to 'clean the place up a bit', they might spare a thought for the spiders and other insects they're putting out on the street. We should celebrate diversity in the ecosystem and admire the artistry of the St Andrews Cross and Garden Orb Spiders; they may be some of the best friends we've got!"

"Well she's talking to the converted in my case. The thing is, we have to get the message out. I wonder if a publisher would be interested?"

The O'Malleys

Raylene Austin

KEW 2439

Jock strode through the door of the Shamrock, he thought he was early but Sean was sitting at the bar with a Guinness in front of him. The barman saw Jock and put a bottle of Belhaven on the bar for him.

"Sean, I didn't expect to see you this early," said Jock.

"I'm here because I've some sad news to tell you," mumbled Sean over his beer. "I won't be here for the next few days. Mary's making me go down to de City. Mick's son Liam is graduating from de Versity, Mary said as this is de first person in our family to graduate from de Versity we should be proud Grandees and be there to support him. De invite said that there would be a celebration at a restaurant after."

Mary had coerced Sean down to the OP shop to find him a suit. Sean wasn't too happy about that as he had a suit. The one he was married in and it had serviced him for weddings and funerals over the past fifty years.

Sean and Mary married in Ireland and immigrated to Australia in the Sixty's. They moved to the country where they raised their six children. The children now had their children. Mary knew all their names and birthdays, but it was too many for Sean to remember.

He worked in a white goods factory putting parts together, but his greatest love was his vegetable garden that included his much loved potatoes. They may not have had a lot money but the family never went hungry as there was always plenty of potatoes and vegetables on their plate.

Sean and Jock exchanged packages, vegies for Jock and shortbread for Sean. People observing the two of them would wonder how they understood each other. The Irish lilt and the Scottish brogue sounded gibberish to most but they had been friends for a long time. Since retiring they met Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at the Shamrock at four o'clock making sure they were home in time for tea.

"When are you going to the city?" asked Jock.

"Tomorrow on de morning train. Mary has already packed our bag as we are staying at our Mick's house. Mary's written down de names of Mick's flock so that I remember their names. You know I don't like change and I'm getting a bit fidgety about leaving home.

"You have to go if this is your first wee one graduating from university. What subject did he study?" asked Jock.

"Engineering, can you bloody believe that. Must have Mary's brains sure not mine. His Dad is a plumber and now he has created and Engineer."

"Aye! You must be very proud. Mary will have a tear in her eye at the ceremony," said Jock. "I look forward to your tales when we meet next week."

Sean and Mary were on the morning train. Mary had packed sandwiches and a thermos for the trip to the city. Mick met them at the station and loaded their case and the compulsory bag of vegetables into the boot.

The next morning was the graduation. Mary looked beautiful in her new dress and Sean complained bitterly about wearing a tie but he left it on loosening it every five minutes. When he saw Liam, all dressed in his cloak and hat he said, "I thought you were an Engineer not a bloody Priest."

Liam laughed, "Grandee, this is what all the graduates will be wearing and there's no way I'll be a Priest. My Mum and Dad curse me now for not going to Mass."

Off they went to the University. The Great Hall was crowded with so many people. When Liam received his degree, Sean let out a whistle and sang out that's my grandson and Mary feeling a little bit embarrassed hit him on his arm. After the ceremony the graduates threw their hats in the air. This amused Sean as how did they know which one was theirs when they landed on the ground.

The family gathered around Liam and photos were taken. Sean shook his hand and Mary gave him a hug and kiss on the cheek. Climbing into cars they headed off to the restaurant to celebrate Liam's achievement. At the end of the meal Liam was presented with a watch which was inscribed on the back, *'With hard work you can achieve'*.

Mick made a speech and thanked his parents for being brave enough to leave all they had known to migrate to Australia to make a better life and to raise their family.

"My Mum and Dad showed us that love is the most important thing in life along with family. My brothers and sisters have all gone in many diverse directions but we are still one family. I hope Liam that we have shown and guided you in your life that you will not only go forward but remember how you got there.

"A toast, to Liam the Engineer and to Sean and Mary for creating the O'Malley clan, cheers," said Mick.

Sean met up with Jock at their usual time the following Wednesday. They put down a few pints while Sean relayed the story of the trip to the city.

Every Tribe has its Elders

Bruce de Graaf

DUNBOGAN 2443

I come from a long time ago.

A time when our possessions were fewer and our life seemed to be simpler. Bindii Eyes were a hideous thing, drinking from a hose quenched a thirst, there were no fat people and there were no technological distractions.

There were only 3 regular TV channels. Well there were actually 4 but Channel 2 did not count because the ABC was for old people.

We were told to play outside and to only come in when the street lights came on ... this is the epoch in which I found skateboarding.

Skateboarding is a pursuit which has its roots in the sport of surfing.

Surfing relies upon tides, swell and wind direction, without these things, a beach quickly becomes a lagoon. During a time when the swells were absent, someone grabbed a pair of 'key adjustable' roller skates; separated both halves; affixed them to a piece of timber and voila, the skateboard was born.

I was 8 years old and I had been given a skateboard for Christmas 1969. The Warwick Bullet was the magic carpet that allowed me to take to the streets and discover the art of 'street surfing'.

Skateboarding is such an inclusive activity and even in my early days there were always others willing to give me tips to ride my skateboard better. In my mind this flashback was the rise of the mentor in my world.

Diversity exists in spades in the skateboarding world.

Skateboarding developed quickly beyond a fad, with the advent of urethane wheels in the early 70s. Out of this grew a real culture which was to be found in every suburb of Australia.

During this evolution the diversity of riding a piece of wood with wheels affixed showed more and more the way that skateboarders are an inclusive group with solid foundations in mentoring the young and inexperienced.

What is diversity though?

Diversity is the inclusion in all people, of all people, by all people.

Wikipedia shows:

The state of being diverse; variety.

"there was considerable diversity in the style of the reports"

The practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic background and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.

"equality and diversity should be supported for their own sake"

Over the next 50 years things changed a lot, but the more they changed, the more they remained the same.

The best known skateboarder is Tony Hawk, who along with the Bones Brigade and the Tony Alva crew pushed each other to the point that the skateboard was no longer just a street device but it was being used in emptied swimming pools, ramps were being built and these guys were getting air ... big air.

I missed this period. I am 7 years older than Tony and while he was skating, we were on our P plates and driving to the beach. The skateboard was always in the car in the event that there was no swell and then we surfed the playground of the Forest High School.

The skateboarding zenith bypassed us.

Life, however, became less simple and working for a living became a thing. Work was demanding, then the opportunity to procure a house almost bypassed me. Unable to afford Sydney, I bought a home in Kempsey NSW paying 19.25% interest to the United Permanent Building Society.

Fast-forward and I'm married. I sold the country property for a fixer-upper in Sydney's north shore and the wife and I were blessed with a baby girl.

Early in the morning I'd take our first born out to give mama a break, Brittany in the pram, Papa on the skateboard. This was the old DHD Saurus board my cousin Mark had, but it got us around.

Another daughter came along to close off the family numbers and as the girls got older, skateboards entered the family again.

We were, the three of us, happy to skateboard together ... mama, not so keen though.

One of the daughters once said, referring to skateboarding "Dad, we are so lucky that you love to do the things that we love to do." I had been thinking exactly the same thing.

We went on little expeditions with groups of people on skateboarding jaunts, finding new spots, carpark and the community feel was real. The whole time we were teaching and we were learning. There were young, older, girls from every walk of life ... girls from Uni and even some mamas.

The girls group which numbered around 20 called themselves "The Maidens of Steeze". We'd go to Pumpy, a place in Linden in the Blue Mountains where there was a lovely, bitumen, closed road to a Pumping Station ... the Master of the Hill event (MOTH) Downhill Race is held there.

At age 50 something I was involved with a group with no leader.

Sydney City Bomb Squad was a thing that just happened every Thursday evening where anyone and everyone would meet at Railway Square and we'd bomb hills, carpark and landmarks in the CBD of Sydney. I was the eldest in the group by up to 30 years at times.

I remarked to some of these young guys who had fathers my age, why don't you bring your dads along?

"Naaah, they can't skateboard," was generally the reply.

There was a real camaraderie among the group and they came from all over Sydney. On school holidays the numbers swelled, but always, the elders kept an eye on the young 'uns. The SCBS would go to a carpark, up we'd all go in the lift, and bomb (ride downhill at ludicrous speed) the carpark ramps to the bottom.

Living in the St Leonards area afforded me the opportunity to catch the train into the city to do business. In a business suit, the easiest way to get to and from the station was the skateboard.

Mid-fifties, in a business suit, skateboard in hand and I entered a lift then another person entered, pressed a destination button, sized me up and said, "Aren't you a bit old to be doing that?" He was a good 20 years younger than me.

I looked him right in the eyes paused, then finally said, "Every tribe has its elders."

He looked at me, smiled and said, "Good answer."

We were a Graphic Design studio of eight when, Elle, surprised us with an invitation to her Macedonian wedding.

Opening our envelopes, we voiced our delight. "I would love to come," said Diane.

"Me too," the rest chorused.

"Wonderful, but I need to explain that my culture celebrates weddings in our traditional way. There will be 450 guests at the Reception so I have arranged a special table for you, my Aussie work friends."

"Elle, that's so sweet of you," someone uttered.

"I want you to feel comfortable with my family and want my parents to meet all of you. But also, I don't want you to feel obligated to follow all the activities you will see my Macedonian guests doing!"

"Sounds intriguing," said Ken.

"It's on a Sunday," I remarked

"I don't even know 450 people," said another.

We met in the church carpark on the date and time on the invitation but were worried when the carpark was empty.

"Where are the guests?"

"Have we got the right date?"

"Is it the right church?"

We noticed people in the hall at the rear of the church and walked down to the door where we were welcomed with gushing bows and ushered inside. "This is the groom's breakfast, come in and have a seat at one of the tables."

"But we are guests of the bride."

"She'll be an hour, she's having her breakfast ritual at home."

"Do you mind us waiting here?"

"Drinks and food are on a table over there ... enjoy."

"The bridegroom is leaving for his shaving ceremony!" said the announcer.

Soft drinks, wine and plates of finger food were available so we dutifully 'tucked in'. "Mmmm Elle didn't tell us about this part," Todd said.

"I wouldn't have had my bacon and eggs for breakfast if I knew this was on," responded Ken pouring a 'red'.

We joined in the feast, comfortable among the friendly people. We questioned everything around us attempting to understand the traditions taking place. An hour later, the groom returned looking handsome and prepared for the symbolic separation from his family.

The bridegroom was flooded with well-wishes from everyone as his Godfather escorted him up to the church with some of the celebrators forming a short procession behind them and our group following up the rear.

"What a magnificent building," I whispered to my husband.

"There are no seats," whispered Brooke, "I'm used to seeing pews."

"Let's stand against the wall so we can get a close look at the altar."

A hush came over the church when Elle stood in the doorway. We were in awe seeing her radiance in her lace-bodiced bridal gown with full skirt and thick gold thread covering the join around her waist.

The bride stood with her handsome groom at the altar and the pair had gold crowns held above their heads tied together with ribbon. The happy couple circled the altar with the Priest reciting prayers and blessings for them. After three rotations they stood alongside the bride's parents for the few church guests to be greeted and kissed, as Elle accepted their gifts of money. She thanked each one and handed them to her mother, standing behind her with a small bag.

The conclusion of the ceremony was a handful of sweets thrown into the air for the children to gather and collect.

While the bride and groom drove off for official photographs, we drove towards the function room fatigued, recalling the morning's events. "What an unusual ceremony?" someone uttered.

"If you have *only* attended Australian weddings," responded another.

"I can't wait to find out what else will be happening," Diane's smile showed her excitement.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon, when the function room opened its doors and ushered in the guests. The steward showed us to our designated table adorned with two bottles of alcohol and snacks. The scene looked amazing and the buzz of the other guests grew louder as the numbers increased, until a sudden hush. Looking at the decorated archway entrance we saw the magnificence of the newly married couple standing there accompanied by the proud Godfather, adorned with a huge buttercup-yellow satin bow, tied around his upper left arm. He directed that a cage with two white doves be unlatched, allowing them to fly free. He then escorted the bride and groom to the wedding table, set up on a platform to enhance their view of all the guests.

The festivity continued with the pig dance, a ceremony in which piping hot, whole pigs stuffed with an apple in their mouths were displayed on ornate silver platters and with the steward's right arm raised and bent for the platters to rest at shoulder level. They manoeuvred their way around the room and served all the tables.

"How impressive," we agreed.

Much later, the bride and groom cut their massive wedding cake designed as a castle with bridge, then the groom swept the bride into his arms, carrying her to the floor for their first dance as the band began.

A \$5 note was placed on the drum ensuring more music for couples to join in and when the music stopped a guest placed a \$10 note, then a \$20 note and later \$50 notes continued to pile up, livening the music immensely.

We accepted small colourful satin, triangular scarfs with bells on them and joined the circles of happy dancers using them to keep the rhythm of the dancing.

The hours disappeared quickly celebrating this wedding with an abundance of love, laughter, joy, singing, dancing and food, creating memories to be cherished forever.

Hours later, Elle stood by our table thanking us for attending and said goodbye, adding a reminder that we had to work the following day and explaining that she must stay until the last guest leaves.

"Let's hope we don't have anything too difficult to design tomorrow," said Erica, "because I don't think any one of us will be up to it."

It is amazing the things one can recall about early childhood. Once upon a time, many years ago, when I was about four or maybe younger, I remember sitting on my dad's shoulders, slowly nodding, trying to keep awake, as he walked home from the local agricultural show. It was late, it was dark, it had been a long day. I remember the dust drifting across the main arena where cattle, horses and other beast were on show. The smell of hot, round jam donuts, rolled in cinnamon sugar, the smell of cow dung, pungent and slightly sweet and wafts of tobacco smoke from rollies.

Another time I remember sitting in the dicky seat of Dad's cloth-roofed old banger, heading for a relative's home several miles from ours, along a rutted dirt track. It seemed to take forever to get there and it was cold and wet in that dicky seat, even though I had an old army blanket covering me from the waist down. I was at the rear of the old Ford, exposed to the elements. The steady, light drizzle and the frequent potholes we bounced in and out of made for a memorable trip.

Fast forward a year or two and I can hear Mum yelling as though it was yesterday, "Get down from that bloody roof! Do you want to break your bloody neck? Gawd help me, bloody kids! Who'd bloody have 'em?" Mum didn't often resort to swearing, but she was making up for it that day, I can tell you. I don't recall how or when I got down from the roof, let alone how I got up there, but I am certain it would have been after Mum had cooled down a bit. She had a favourite thin strip of willow branch and I often found it swishing around my lower legs for no apparent reason. I was a fairly good kid, as best as I recall, give or take the odd incident. Anyway, I must have got off the roof eventually, probably after dark, and I didn't break my bloody neck either! *Memories.*

Another time Mum chased me around the back yard yelling blue murder. Something like, "Time you had a bath you little bugger!" And a few, "I'll give it to you when I get hold of you, you see if I don't!" Well, who was going to hang about to find out, so I just kept running until I brought her to a stand still, huffing and puffing and waving that thin strip of willow. If I listen carefully, I can still hear it swishing through the air in my general direction. I must have eventually been caught, because I remember getting dunked in the laundry trough, one of those old concrete things on a stand, and getting soap in my eyes, or was it my mouth? Anyway it was me that was yelling blue murder then! *Memories.*

We had a friendly postie, or at least he was friendly with Mum. I know he didn't like dogs or little boys. I remember we had this picket fence at the front of our home with a low hedge on the house side and a footpath on the other side. The postie blew his whistle after putting any post in the mail box at the front of a property in those days. We heard his progress as he came along the street. Mum rushed out to the mail box if she heard the whistle and waited for the postie to arrive at our house. She and the postie had a bit of a chat and a laugh, flirting, I suppose you'd call it, but I didn't know that then. All I knew was that he wouldn't get all the mail delivered if he stood yakking to Mum all day. Every now and then, so as not to make a habit of it, but to keep the postie on his toes, I crept along the hedge and let out a loud growl or two. The postie would leap onto his bike and peddle like mad down the street while Mum and I renewed our game of chasings around the front yard until one or both of us got tired. *Memories.*

The day I had my tonsils out, I remember being in this cream coloured bed in the local hospital. I was laying on this stiff white sheet (they were starched in those days) and the sides of the bed had a series of vertical bars that couldn't fit a head through. Well, you weren't supposed to be able to, but with a bit of effort I managed it. However, try as I might, I couldn't get my head back out, so I was stuck there until the nurse came along. I remember she tut tutted a lot, then went and got some block in a tan knee length coat. I think he was an orderly or something, but all he did was scratch his head and say, "Jesus kid". The nurse came back, tut tutted some more, then they both walked out of the room. As luck would have it Mum entered the room while I was still trying to free myself. I couldn't figure out why I couldn't get my head out when I could get it in between the bars so easily. Perhaps it was the way my ears are placed on my head. Anyway, Mum saved the day. With a, "Christ, what have you done now!?" and a bit of her shoving and me pulling we managed to get my head back to the right side of the bars. I think my ears and throat were a bit sore that day, but ice cream and raspberry jelly made it all worthwhile. *Memories.*

The Girl from Cabramatta

Sharon Kristoffersen

CULBURRA BEACH 2540

Growing up in Cabramatta, a suburb on the outskirts of Sydney in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, I loved belonging to a culturally diverse community. Despite being considered a working class area I felt rich spiritually.

Surrounded by neighbours who had left their homelands behind forever, I loved listening to their accents and being privileged to be offered food from their cultural backgrounds. No one spoke about the past, only the future, their hopes and dreams for their children in this, our lucky country.

Our home was built by my Norwegian father, a three bedroom white weatherboard on a quarter acre block. Back then the road out the front led to Italian, Greek and Maltese market stalls towards the base of the Blue Mountains. In the other direction, the train station 2 kms away and homes full of non-English speaking people starting new lives.

Life was full of possibilities, hopes and happiness. Away from WW2 these hardworking immigrants had survived death and left with just the clothes on their backs and a suitcase filled with photos and mementos from their past. They put one foot in front of the other and began new lives in a country called Australia.

My Primary School, Our Lady of Mt Carmel, Mt Pritchard, was full of non-English speaking students. I was inspired at six years of age to become a Year Two teacher because I wanted to help children learn to read, speak and write English.

Non-English speaking students were grouped together with one who could speak English. I was chosen to listen to the other children read and help them as needed. The nuns told me I would make a great teacher when I grew up because I loved helping others learn.

At twenty, I did just that! My passion to teach continued for many years. It was the only career I wanted and heart-breaking when ill health forced my eventual retirement in my fifties.

Now, at sixty six, I look back and wonder how the students turned out. Have they had good lives?

In my first year of teaching 98% of students in my Year Two class came from multicultural backgrounds. I learnt sign language quickly and various forms of communicating with my students. Often up late at night making pictorial posters with words to help educate my class.

Teaching students from so many diverse backgrounds, my life was enriched as I enjoyed hearing about their lives. It was an era in Australian society that I am glad I was a part of. My own family came from overseas. Their stories inspired me to always stand on my own two feet as they had done.

My grandmother, Rose, arrived aged fourteen from Tory Island, in Ireland. She travelled alone to live with her Uncle. Rose had a difficult life but died at ninety-three having stood on her own two feet always. Rose could not read or write and spoke Gaelic. She worked as a cleaner and provided for her four children completely on her own after my Australian Grandfather (descended from Lieutenant Colonel George Johnston) left her for another woman. Rose was pregnant with my mother Frances at the time. With three other children under the age of six, Rose set to work to provide and keep the children together. She did an amazing job with no family to help her in Australia.

My father was part of the Norwegian Underground. He was awarded two long overdue Bravery Awards in his 90s. He was just fifteen when he became part of WW2 and served time in a concentration camp before being able to work on a ship after the war. It travelled to Australia and my father became an "accidental" immigrant left behind when the ship sailed back to Norway.

My father met my Australian mother who worked in Immigration at Garden Island. They married, had three children then divorced twenty five years later. My father used to build huge cabin cruiser boats in our backyard! All by himself! While others dealt with the horrors of WW2 by drinking away their memories, my father hammered and welded steel boats late into the night, after working his day job!

Dad also had no relatives in Australia. My grandmother adored him. They had a connection. My grandmother often said she felt "all alone in the world" but with my father they shared lives lived in other countries and cultures before coming to Australia.

My father has been remarried for fifty years and I learnt early in life that standing on my own feet was the only way forward.

Now homeless at sixty six, I have spent the past eleven years living wherever I could find a place to stay. From sleeping in my station wagon in the Nullarbor desert, in a sleeping bag, on top of boxes which represented the remainders of my once successful career and life, to staying in a garage converted to a granny flat, to many other forms of accommodation including sleeping on sofas in other people's homes, caravan parks, numerous short term stays where owners needed to suddenly sell up or put their family in instead.

I am using my life experiences as a survivor of domestic violence to write a book to help others who suddenly have nothing due to financially controlling economic abuse from partners who take everything and feel no remorse. Urged by numerous victims of crime counsellors and social workers, my book will hopefully help save others before everything they ever worked for is stolen from them.

My resilient grandmother taught me how to be independent and strong if I found myself "all alone in the world" and no one understands except those who have lived through it and survived.

Domestic violence in my second marriage took my material possessions away but never my spirit and determination to keep going no matter what.

I learnt early in life from my culturally diverse neighbourhood and family that survival is always possible!

A verse from Corinthians impresses on me. 'For now, we see through a glass, darkly; but then face-to-face: now I know in part; but then shall I know as also I am known'. I have often thought this to be true of many perceptions we hold in our lives. It made me think of the women I trained from South Sudan. At first, I was looking at these women through the distorted mirror of my own culture and education. As I cleaned the mirror, I saw, albeit still imperfectly, who these women were, including their culture and diverse life experiences.

Twenty-three South Sudanese women sit up, backs straight in the Ex-Service Club's large training room. They are dressed in their finest outfits for their first day of 'school', some wearing pearls, another a retro gold lamé jacket suit and sparkling heels. Others in smart second-hand suits with 1980s shoulder pads. Their hands shoot up to receive their folders and pens and I am called with pride, "my teacher." Later, I find out many have never been to school in their own country. Ninety percent of South Sudan's women are illiterate due to decades of civil war, rigid gender roles and lifestyle restrictions.

To start the training session for Certificate III in Early Childhood and Care, I begin with an icebreaker activity. Click. Faces of my two Caucasian Australian children beam out from the Power Point. Pointing to them I share a little about myself, my children, and my family. "Your turn," I state in an upbeat voice gesturing to the first woman to begin.

"My name is Aduit." In shorthand she states: "My husband, he was shot." A shock wave bolts through me by the starkness of her statement.

"Oh, I'm so sorry."

"Next?"

"My children are in South Sudan. I had to ..."
(she pauses) "leave all behind." We look at each other, mother to mother, heart to heart, for a moment. Her head hangs and she bites her lips.

"That must have been so very hard," I falter, taking a sidelong glance at the beaming faces of my own children still on the screen. "Next?"

"Two children here, others died in camp. Lot of people very sick there. Been in camp long time." Faces shadow. Mine is overcast. Three women so far and I must get right around the room.

One day after a long training session I announce, "Time for a break. We all need to move. Can you teach me one of your songs and dances?" I unlock something.

The women jump up. In an animated celebration they form a circle, and begin to sing, clap and dance in time. The universe of this western classroom temporarily suspends its laws. Hips and breasts vibrate simultaneously. Blood colours cheeks, as smiles fan across dark-skinned faces. When I attempt to move my body like they do, they shriek and point, doubling over with combustible laughter.

The next week the women arrive at the course in their traditional clothes, complete with headwear and colourful kaftans. It's as if their dancing has been a watershed: Here in this western classroom, they and their culture don't have to be invisible anymore. They realise I want to embrace and celebrate their diversity.

Smells of smoked meat, pieces of charcoal chicken, aromatic spices of cardamom and cinnamon emanate from the training room. “Come, come,” they beckon me to join them at lunchtime passing me some rice and shared meat to place on the ‘kisra’– flat bread. Using our hands, we eat together with relish. No solitary students eating tidy cut sandwiches from plastic lunchboxes here.

At times little ones, too young to attend school, appear dressed in their best clothes. They run the length of the training room letting out squeals of delight. Two others sit on the desk, their chubby legs sticking out from nappies. It is clear all the women love children and accept each other’s with smiling kindness. Some of the women no longer have husbands and don’t have the luxury of placing their children into day care. I am learning there is a fine line between imposing western standards and meeting participants in an environment where they are comfortable, relaxed, able to participate and learn.

Unfortunately, the training is terminated part way through because funding for the women’s English classes have ceased. It is clear this westernised course design had an assumption of competent literacy skills. And cultural homogeneity.

I felt humbled by their achievements as resilient, resourceful women surviving famine and food insecurity, horrendous human rights violations, displacement, and bereavement on a scale I could hardly imagine. Humbled too that despite displacement, loss and sacrifice they could still show joy, inclusiveness and have big, bellied laughs.

Previously they and their children had to run for asylum, lived in overcrowded camps and had nothing except each other. Indomitable resilience and fortitude were necessary to immigrate as refugees and learn to function in our westernised society.

I paint an oil portrait of a South Sudanese woman. It hangs on my living room wall; the look of untouchable resilience and pride challenges me and the viewer. It is there to remind me that I learnt so much during the training: From that first day I stood there as their ‘teacher’ with my naive ‘ice breaker’ activity to the end when I had deep respect and gratitude for all I had learnt about the women’s lives, backgrounds, and their cultures.

Once long ago, old mirrors used to stretch one part or shrink another and gave a distorted and darkened view of reality. In a similar way, ignorance, stereotypes, and racist perceptions (conscious and unconscious) shrink the other and us. When we clean the ‘mirror’ of distortions we see humanity more clearly. When we embrace and celebrate diversity we move closer to an inclusive society and our world view is enriched.

Proud

Henri Rennie

EAST BALLINA 2478

I was born in Australia, but growing up, I somehow deeply knew that this wasn't my nationality.

My parents were both survivors of war, who had come to this country, like so many other people, in search of a better life: work, clear skies, health, respect.

Their values became my values. Their attitudes, my attitudes. As I grew older much of that changed. Their enemies didn't have to be my enemies, I realised. I tried to convince my parents that the world had changed, that this was a new country and a new time.

To their credit, they tried. It took a lot of years, though, for first-hand knowledge of violence, brutality, death, atrocities to be compartmentalised as 'the past', and to not flinch at the faces and voices of peoples who they recognised from the other side of a war.

I only had their stories, not my own recollections. The conflict was before my time and in another place. In my youth, there was only one side of the story told, at home and in the media. 'Balanced reporting' hadn't gained much traction, and wouldn't for several years. Enough for ideas and impressions to become hardened; attitudes and prejudices, too. It was the rapidly changing population of Australia that made the difference for me.

As a child, even as a young teenager, most of my social interactions were within my own circle, among my own kind. Those who didn't fit weren't invited in. They had their own circles, and I wasn't welcome there.

But eventually I went to work. Made it into University. And met people who weren't like me. Met them, and inescapably got to know them.

There was a lot of resistance to overcome in my own head. If you look for hostility you'll find it. Expect animosity and it will be there. It's easy to tell yourself that 'it's not paranoia if they really do hate you'. Okay, 'hate' may be too strong a word, but even supposedly good-humoured jibes about a "funny accent" can sometimes hurt.

It took a while before I started to see individuals as individuals. People as people, not shapes with visual characteristics that necessarily meant other, deeper, more intrinsic characteristics. People not like me could be good, funny, clever, charming ... nice, even.

And yes, they could be mean-spirited, violent, greedy or dull. Just like some people I'd grown up alongside. Quite a few, on reflection.

But all those traits, good and bad, weren't contingent on race. Upbringing maybe, just like I was a product of my upbringing. Sometimes people reacted against their family pressures. I had a close friend raised in a very wealthy, elitist family who shocked and appalled his parents and siblings by going to work as a trade union delegate.

So, I've tried, really tried, to not generalise or make assumptions. To treat people as I find them, the way I'd hope they'll treat me.

It took a few negative experiences, travelling and working, for me to realise that while I'm prepared to treat individuals as I find them and even to look for the best in them, there are cultures that I'm profoundly uncomfortable with and people within those cultures who perpetuate those things I find negative. The people who lurk behind stereotypes.

Australia gets accused of being a racist country. In some ways it is. Certainly, it's a country in which some loudly, aggressively racist people live and in which there is still some systemic racism. But there are many people here who decry that racism, and are trying to change those flawed systems. There's a lot of hurt in Australia, but there's also a lot of shame, and an appetite for change.

But Australia is an amateur. Asian cultures have a much deeper sense of 'self' and 'other'. Working in Japan as someone who isn't Japanese, there's much more politeness than you'll find in Australia, but it's a veneer. A foreigner, an outsider, is more likely to be sneered at, or mocked, behind their back than to their face. Respected to the extent of being valuable, or useful, and no more. Cynical? Probably. It doesn't make it less true, unfortunately. Certainly, that's been my experience as I've travelled and worked in Asia.

Again, some individuals have been terrific, among the nicest people I've met. The worst of them, truly awful. But the sense of 'otherness' felt ingrained into the institutions themselves, and into the fabric of society. The looks on the faces of people on trains. The second, not so furtive glances when walking around a marketplace or a shopping centre.

Maybe that's a type of paranoia. Expect the worst and never be disappointed.

It's made me more comfortable with Australia, though. There might be some individuals who I have a problem with – who have a problem with me, or my ethnicity, or my pride in my origins, but I've come to believe that they're a minority. Most Australians are pretty tolerant. Most jokes are meant to be funny, not malicious. Not everyone is treated equally, but it's getting better.

I am a proud Ileach man. My origin is Islay – an island off the Western coast of Scotland.

The Finding

Helen Kneipp

ELTHAM 2480

My scars always went a dark purple as they healed and those of my friends didn't; the lids of my eyes had a resident brown sort of eye-shadow; my skin was often a tawny brown even when I lived in the north of England; I had a dark line down my abdomen from my belly button, my friends didn't. My mother was quite dark and exotic looking and I asked her if she was Spanish.

"No dear, not really" she smiled. I was sure then that I must be adopted and pestered her about it.

"No dear, you are my daughter, you weren't adopted."

"But I *must* be," I insisted, "I look different from the other kids". But nothing, nad – no wonderful explanation about fabulous romantic origins.

I was twelve in 1964 when we emigrated to Australia. We were Ten Pound Poms coming to a land that had a White Australia Policy and took up residence in the north-west of Queensland in a hot dusty mining town.

We landed by boat in Sydney and of course made some friends during the three week trip from England and it was time to say goodbye. They put us on the train heading for Brisbane.

"See ya".

Being a little English girl, and unfamiliar with this particular form of saying goodbye, I replied, "Oh no, we probably won't ever see you again, Bye!"

They smiled quizzically and said, "Well, see ya anyway".

Worry and no small amount of concern crept in, "No really, we will probably *never ever* see you again".

It took me a little while to understand this, and I just had to let them say good-bye in their own rather odd way, as my parents watched on and quietly concurred.

The local Queensland kids called me 'lubra lips' meaning I had the lips of a black girl, which I had never particularly remarked on, but was true. Every child wants, in equal amounts to be both special and to be the same as everyone else and to fit in, by this stage I just wanted to fit in and very quickly. My mother insists that in the space of three weeks, I began to say "guddaay maate" and "see ya" with a strong Aussie twang and quickly ditched my strong northern England country dialect that no-one could understand.

So, bit by bit I became accepted, with my new broad Aussie accent and started getting interested in boys, swam like a fish, rode horses, played lots of sport and learned how to swear; all very important rites of passage.

Cut to some thirty years later and I am managing a pottery near the east coast of North Queensland and I hear from my Auntie in England that she has come into possession of the Family Bible from her Uncle. Bibles, apart from their regular use, were used to record the family tree and this one was a big surprise. Apparently, my Mum's grandfather, completely unbeknown to any of the family, was half African, from Luanda on the west coast of Africa! And there was a photo.

I was SO excited – YES, I KNEW IT!

There it was – the stuff that I had always known was true.

I told everyone who would listen, and even those who didn't – every friend, my kids, my parents – my Mum was delighted, and especially I told my African friend, who said, "And didn't I always know that! I bin calling you Sista for years."

It explained SO much to me – why my youngest brother has such African features; the reason my mother is so dark and un-English looking and has always loved African music and used to search it out; the reason my youngest son is so particularly dark and could be any nationality and has big lips too and my own fury from a very early age at any hint of racial prejudice in any way shape or form.

Sometimes you just get lucky and find out stuff that explains other stuff.

Understanding Mental Health (Our Community Together)

Chris Clark

GOOLMANGAR 2480

Hi reader, here is my anecdote of a life with a mental health challenge. I hope you enjoy the read, maybe learn a little and have a smile or two. I add that I live in the Northern Rivers so my writing is certainly poignant to the horrendous events suffered by so many over the past few months.

Straight to the nuts and bolts. I want to put a spotlight on Bipolar, a branch of mental health that is part of our diverse community who have differences ... not disabilities. Mental Health affects many around us without our being aware.

Bipolar, is depression, it's elation, it's solitude, it's crazy. It's literally a roller-coaster of emotions. It's extreme shifts in mood that can impact functions in everyday life.

Bipolar, is also known as, the 'Black Dog'. A perhaps appropriate term could be accredited to Winston Churchill. Yes he was bipolar. Mariah Carey, Carrie Fisher, Ernest Hemingway and countless others have lived with the 'dog'. It's worth a Google check, it will surprise you.

I was medically diagnosed late in 2005, so ongoing management has resulted in my bipolar being pretty much flat, just like the last 100 metres of the rollercoaster. But I have endured the euphoric highs (mania) and the plummeting lows (depression). I still have very clear memories; the ride has been horrific.

Growing up in the 70s and 80s life was simple in a small country town and little was known about the management or even identification of mental health issues. Trauma and trigger stressors with the resulting long-term impact to life was not fully understood. Broken legs could be fixed, broken minds not so easy.

I can recall during the first years after school, my mood changed often and overreactions occurred so I taught myself to focus on work and often worked alone. Working hard meant I didn't have time to dwell. I was driven to daylight starts and long days to function. It was exhausting but my brain stayed positive and not vulnerable to crazy thoughts. Generally, I needed to distance myself from the world to keep control of my emotions. I can still remember the comments on a difficult day. "suck it up princess" or "drink a cup of concrete and toughen up". People did and didn't care.

I learnt to survive on the positive, on the highs of setting, striving and achieving personal goals. I had unknowingly created my own personal mental health plan.

I had, to a degree, tolerant family and friends. Thankfully the people around me persevered in trying to understand moods and were accepting of my ever-changing personalities. I would exuberantly engage in conversations one day and say nothing choosing to be alone on other days. We were all frustrated when no-one knew why. I was known as just a loose cannon.

I didn't realise at the time but it was incredibly important to me that a couple of good friends remained close and were part of my life but, to be colloquial, 'stayed out of my face'. Just knowing they were there in the background was solace and I knew I could count on them even if I couldn't talk to them.

I was always looking for a solution or something to change my chaotic world. People were hurting.

Early into my 30s I was becoming increasingly volatile with extreme emotions. Physical relationships were occurring but emotional connections were not.

An adage was; *one day I could climb on a roof to fly and another I could climb on a roof and ...* . You get the picture. Some things I would do one day would horrify me the next. Crazy thoughts.

Engaging with the professionals had occurred irregularly over the decades leading up to 2005. Around 1998 to 2001 I worked with a GP in understanding my life's stressors, depression and how I reacted, then avoiding those stressors. We developed a mental health plan focussing on diet, physical health and time management. This planning gave me control and a pathway. Both I wanted and needed.

As I passed 40, I had to face a worsening reality. I could see a blackening hole growing in my life. I had to choose the way forward. Decision time. I will say that facing the black hole, then jumping over the darkness and not falling, took guts. I think it was one of the hardest times in my life. In 2005 the level of help I required was to become more specific and I started to visit a specialist. Together we adjusted my mental health plan. We added some regular chats, reviews and a few specific meds. Then balance started to occur. Once the mechanics were sorted, my life became more under control. My control. I guess my life isn't perfect, few are that lucky, but I appreciate that my rollercoaster is now boring and that's okay. I turned 60 two weeks ago, a crazy day where I was both sad and elated. I recognised I was getting older but also a great time to be celebrated.

Wash up: As you can see, I am happy to talk about my bipolar and mental health. I push now to inform people that asking questions about mental health is okay. Black holes can be jumped and if guidance is needed, look around for a safe hand being offered. There are many out there.

Every mental health challenge is different, everyone is different, different stressors trigger different reactions. Exercise and change of lifestyle may work for many and it did for me for such a long time.

I would like to recommend Australia's own mental health resource called Black Dog Institute. A world-renowned reference site. Their site explains terms and topics like depression, PTSD, anxiety and more. The information is factually honest and most importantly, in context and easy speak.

In finishing ... be safe ... and always smile.
From the Northern Rivers NSW.

An Honourable Epitaph

Martin Killips

BRUNSWICK HEADS 2483

I became aware of Australia's First Nations people when I was in England and five years old. My teacher, Mrs Waller, told us Captain Cook had 'discovered' Australia and casually mentioned, 'Aborigines' were already living there. This confused me. I assumed she meant the Aboriginal lives were of too little consequence to matter, visible but worthless. This ocular anonymity was familiar. I too was visible and felt worthless. However, that all changed one day in the late autumn of 1963 when I had just turned six. A visiting teacher entered our classroom with Mrs Waller and, noticing my sister and I, exclaimed, "Oh, you have some Chinese Children!"

Keen to hear Mrs Waller's response, I made efforts to look disinterested so she wouldn't notice I was eavesdropping.

"Yes, we have," she replied assuredly, "They've been here a year now but they're getting whiter every day."

I heard this and, on the instant, my mind resonated with a multitude of sweet and wondrous sounds. I was in raptures. It was such tremendous news. What I overheard explained everything. I had been born in Malaysia—which accounted for why I had dark skin. The longer I lived in England the whiter I would become. When I grew up I would be as white as everyone else. It was such a relief to know the stigma of being coloured was not going to last forever. I felt as if she had let slip a sorcerer's secret, one that would eventually permit me to enter the world of white people. A world where I could pass unnoticed and free of shame.

I don't recall what age I reached before I accepted there was no natural evolution into the white man's world. It wasn't a sudden realisation but more a gradual dawning until all hope had diminished. However, once acknowledging exclusion, once accepting I didn't fit in, I gravitated to other worlds or created my own. It is why I had fleetingly considered Malaysia and why, in 1993, I left the United Kingdom and emigrated to Australia.

I remember with great clarity my first day in Australia. Alert and energetic, in spite of the long flight, I was conscious I had left my previous life behind. I had swapped cool climes, lush meadows and weeping, grey skies for a 'sunburnt country', a flat land of brittle trees, dusty plains and immense blue skies. I had exchanged a thousand types of birds and mammals and insects which I recognised instantly and whose names I knew, for a thousand birds and mammals and insects I did not recognise or have the ability to name. I left behind a brother; a sister and both parents; cousins and aunts and uncles as well as my closest friends, cultivated over decades of shared experiences. I was free, yet entrapped by my own choices. I knew no one in Australia. Half of me felt in terminal decline and the other half felt I had been reborn.

Simple truths are often the most shocking. But there is also beauty in truth, both disquieting and sublime. I had transplanted my life from one side of the world to the other and it seemed entirely appropriate that my emotions reflected this polarised crusade.

I made my way slowly through Sydney Harbour's Royal Botanic Garden to Mrs Macquarie's Chair. On the cool stone, while camera wielding tourists swirled around me under a cloudless sky, I digested the panoramic beauty of the harbour, entranced by the chaotic disorder of the watercraft, scattered across the glittering surface, crisscrossing in an ecstasy of movement. Huge, imposing ferries bore their jolly cargo at tremendous speeds across the waterfront. So fast I fully expected them to collide into the dock each time they approached their moorings. The unfolding scene was utterly surreal and magical, but now part of my chosen reality.

My first seven years in Australia passed like an extended holiday. Perhaps it was the relaxed, outdoor lifestyle or the weather, for it was always warm, come rain or shine. There were no winters as I knew them; no scraping ice-ferns off the car windscreen before motoring to work in the dark.

Twenty-eight years have passed since I sat on the cool stone of Mrs Macquarie's Chair overlooking Sydney Harbour. During that period five ferries have collided heavily into their moorings causing injury, the surrealism has ended but the magic remains.

From knowing no one, I am now surrounded by wonderful friends from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. I am joyfully married to a white Australian! We've made two perfect young children and live comfortably in New South Wales close to the popular destination of Byron Bay with our boisterous rescue-dog, Magnus, and an enormous grey cat called Milo. Our house is built next to an immense fig tree at the foot of a hill that was once an Aboriginal trading site. If scratching away the surface anywhere, likely there will be ancient stone tools dating back at least 22,000 years. Once a year, Elders from the Bundjalung nation come to our garden and cut vines from the fig tree so they can pass on the skills of rope-making to younger generations. They leave in place any stone tools they disturb as a mark of respect to their ancestors.

I am now an Australian citizen. I no longer feel excluded because I lost my need for inclusion. I have lived for over sixty years between other people's worlds but no longer seek to squeeze into any of them. My home, my world, is at the foot of that ancient hill with my family and my friends and my occasional visitors. I am, as gene testing surely demonstrates to us all, simply a citizen of the world and as far as I am concerned, that is an honourable epitaph.

My Czech Grandma Tosner

Tracy Parker

UPPER CRYSTAL CREEK 2484

My Grandma Tosner came to England when I was about 7 years old. I remember very little, except that it had taken a long time to save enough money for her airfare, it took a lot of form filling to get permission for her to leave Prague, she was a brilliant cook (something my Mum could hardly claim as part of *her* resumé) and she gave my sister the most beautiful doll I had ever seen in my life. Resplendent in Czech National Costume with long golden locks and brilliant blue eyes, the doll was almost as big as Shelley and I wanted it with a vengeance! I waited in anticipation for my own gift and was shattered when presented with a delicate gold necklace on which hung a gold spider in a tiny gold filigree web, its body a red semi-precious stone.

The other thing I remember about Grandma Tosner is that she had a really, *really* fat behind. Little did I know at the time, but I was to carry forth fat-bum genes quite admirably in later years!

As guardians of small children, our parents had wisely decided against locks on any of the interior doors – including the bathroom. Knocking before entering a room was just not something we did in our house so I had seen both of my parents naked many times. Sitting on the bathroom floor and chatting during parental bath-time was quite a regular event, especially if you wanted to discuss a real problem as you had their full attention.

So on the day that I walked into the bathroom and caught Grandma Tosner bending over the bath stark-staring naked, I wasn't shocked at her nakedness just mildly surprised at the size of her bum. As she turned to face me, the look of horror on her face suggested to my young mind that maybe all was not as it should be. So instead of going in to wash my hands after visiting the lavatory as normal, I just said "ooooops sorry" and backed out.

Grandma Tosner, I may have neglected to mention, did not speak English. She spoke Czech, Yugoslavian and German. My Father could only converse with her in German. He was quite young during the occupation of Prague in WW11 when everyone had to learn German, so all these years later that was the only language he remembered. Which is why, as a small child backing speedily out of the bathroom and leaping for the relative safety of my bedroom, I didn't understand a word of the shrieking coming from Grandma Tosner.

Ten minutes later I was summoned to the living room where Mum, Dad and another new addition to my library of grown-ups, Auntie Gerte, were trying to placate a somewhat hysterical Grandma Tosner.

"What did you say to her?" my Dad demanded.

"Oh lord can't you get her to shut up," flapped my Mum, as I stared open-mouthed from Mum to Dad to that strange, plump woman flapping her arms in my general direction and gabbling in some strange language to my thin-as-a-rake, chain-smoking Auntie Gerte.

"Nuthin," was my sulky response.

Dad came over and bent down so we were looking each other in the eyes.

"Look sweetheart" he wheedled "She seems convinced that you've said something terribly rude to her".

"I went into the bathroom and she was just gettin' into the bath so I said oooops sorry and I went out again". I was getting teary now, this just wasn't fair. I certainly hadn't been rude to the fat old woman and they couldn't make me admit I had when I hadn't!

"She's convinced the child said something rude about her" Auntie Gerte waved her cigarette nonchalantly in my general direction.

"Noooooooo I did NOT!" I wailed, bursting into tears.

"Well if you're sure that's all you said," Mum turned to Dad in exasperation, "Just tell her she was mistaken ... and for God's sake calm her down!"

I was banished upstairs to my room whereupon I threw myself upon the bed and wept as if my heart would break. Bad enough that I had been wrongly accused; even worse they had chosen to believe a total stranger who couldn't even speak English over their own precious daughter. When sobbing loudly, *very* loudly; in fact the loudest volume I could manage without sounding like I was faking it – which of course I was – brought no comfort from downstairs, I took my revenge on my Mum's cactus plants lined up on the landing window sill. Carefully removing some of the longest quills from her favourite plant, I stabbed at the fleshy leaves until they bled thick white sap. The satisfaction of inflicting such damage on my Mother's prized possession was short-lived. As my vengeful temper subsided, the consequences of discovery started to dawn on me.

I spent the next several days in an agony of trepidation as I waited for my Mother's wrath to descend. She asked me once if it was I who had caused the scars on her beloved cacti. I looked her straight in the face and denied all knowledge. I knew she didn't believe me by the "humphhhh" of her reply, but no more was said.

Grandma Tosner continued to eye me suspiciously for the rest of her stay and I avoided going anywhere near her if I possibly could. However her visit remains indelibly printed on my brain to this day. For here I am, age none-of-your-business, can't remember where I put the pen I had in my hand 10 minutes ago; have whole conversations with people I meet in the street who seem to know me very well, but whom I would swear on a stack of bibles I've never met before in my life; seem to spend my entire life entering rooms and then wondering what I went there for – yet I can remember the fuss over Grandma Tosner's big bum as if it were yesterday.

Growing up White, Growing old Rainbow

Virginia Anne Woods

KINGSCLIFF 2487

I was born in 1959 in Sydney north-western suburbs and all the faces around me were white. Diversity was the different hair and eye colours. Many of my mother's cousins came from country western NSW and were redheads, drawn from the Irish ancestry pool from both sides of Mum's family for 3 generations in Australia before her. My father's family adding only a splash of German to the Anglo-Saxon pool.

Most of the people around me looked the same with these hair and eye colour variations. There was only English spoken in the streets and 'multiculturalism' was buying Chinese food for a rare take-away treat. My Nanna's favourite 'chicken chop suey' was probably not representative of the highest form of Chinese gourmet cuisine.

My Nanna worked in a laundry which was run by a Lebanese family, who were part of our Catholic community. As a pre-schooler visiting my Nanna at work, I have a memory of curiously walking up to a woman sitting at an ironing press, dressed all in black. She offered me a piece of bread; it was nothing like I had experienced in my whole 4 years. It was flat, white, with little bumps in it. I can still remember the taste, though I can't describe it. Strange and wonderful. I remember the sweet warmth and kindness of the woman.

The lives of Lebanese and Mediterranean people must have appeared strange to the adults around me. I grew up with these people being called names (which I now know are derogatory but at the time was 'normal') and they seemed to be the brunt of jokes with their winemaking in the backyard, smelling of garlic, and large families with grandparents all living together.

Gradually over my childhood the colours of the neighbourhood were changing. In the 1970s more families of different background were moving into our neighbourhood. My favourite family (who remain close) was the Furniss' and Aunty Klara (as she became to us) who was from Hungary. Her mother, Mrs. Zoltan migrated in the refugee program after WWII, with Klara's two sisters. I became interested in the delicious foods, especially cakes and biscuits, the language, and customs. Going into Mrs. Zoltan's home in Cooma, NSW, was so elegant with beautiful, embroidered fabrics, and hand-made lace. I was struck by the courage of their story of surviving WWII and their journey out of Europe to Australia, and influenced by the sweetness, humility, and strong faith of Mrs. Zoltan.

In the mid 1970s the local strip shopping centre became more diverse. John the Greek milk bar owner was joined by Tommy Fong the Chemist of Chinese background. By the late 1980s when the local GP retired, a doctor of Indian origin moved into the house and took over the practice. I found it strange, but interesting, that his elderly parents put their chairs out the front of the house, outside the fence on the street to sit during the day, watching us all go by. It was strange for our mostly Anglo neighbourhood, but when I went to India on my travels, I realised this was very natural to Indian people who spend a lot of time talking to each other in the street. A custom that connects neighbours. It felt like my world was broadening, changing colour, adding to my previous familiar black and white world.

Growing up through the 1960s–70s, ‘Aboriginal’ meant boomerangs, corroborees, people who went walkabout. The picture I got from those around me was they were ‘native’ people who couldn’t hold alcohol, were lazy, and unreliable. I lived with this version of ‘Aboriginal’ until I went to university. They were the invisible people. I knew there was an Aboriginal community in Redfern, but in 4 years of walking through Redfern to Sydney University I don’t remember ever seeing any signs of an Aboriginal person. I understood the stories I had about them when I learnt about ‘stereotypes’ in my psychology and sociology subjects. I was opened to seeing how my views are formed from the people I grow up around and my experiences, how they are all gathered into these beliefs that form apparent ‘truths’.

I was completely shocked in the 1980s to read Sally Morgan’s books: ‘My Place’, and ‘Wanamurrugunyah’, to learn the true history of the Aboriginal people of Australia and the effect of colonialisation on their culture and life after many thousands of years of living in this country. I wondered why I had not learnt about this at school. It was an opportunity to adjust the ‘stereotype’ I had learnt in my childhood, and I became more curious about this ancient way of living.

By my 30s I was becoming adjusted to seeing differences as interesting, and those old stereotypes might pop into my thoughts, but didn’t last long as I had these joyful, vibrant ways of seeing diversity. As I move through my seventh decade, my life has opened from a black and white view to a wide rainbow colour version of people in the world. Diversity now means many ways of being and living. My life is fuller, my vision broader, my way more generous and kinder. Fear of difference has given way to curiosity, that same curiosity I had as a 4-year-old sharing the Lebanese lady’s bread. I am filled with gratitude and warmth as I enjoy my falafel roll with humus and tabouli wrapped in flatbread now.

From the monochrome culture of my childhood to the multicoloured streets of our cities and towns across Australia, and places where I can embrace the most ancient of cultures in the world. There are mosques and churches of all denominations in many towns where people have sought space to find a peaceful life. Because in the end we all have one thing in common: a desire to provide a happy secure life for ourselves and our families. Let’s celebrate and enjoy the differences and honour the similarities.

Bird in the Wall

Heather Bitz

BULLI 2516

The discovery of termites in our newly constructed home created panic, that is my husband panicked, I watched on, not really sure of my emotions, perhaps the best description would be dread, laced with anticipation of disaster. So when termite treatment failed to eradicate the problem Phil took it into his own volition to get rid of the little monsters.

Discovery of their entry was first on the list. His first attempt of destruction, and with all his wisdom was extermination by fire, hence some petrol and a box of matches.

Problem was the nest was next to the gas hot water system, Oops!

Not a wise move [Kaboom] one singed husband, a blackened wall and a great deal of black smoke.

Not letting this little hair singeing event get the better of him, after all his body hair would grow back in time and a decent hair cut would give him a more youthful appearance, so unperturbed by this little set back he then travelled inside to tear down the walls.

To his horror he witnessed the carnivorous little blighters in their millions happily and industrially eating our home. On the advice of the local hardware man he poured, squirted and drowned the minute mongrels to oblivion with diesel.

I had been out at the supermarket while most of this annihilation was taking place, so by the time I got home the tearoom looked considerably different to when I had left.

It is difficult to say what horrified me the most, the missing wall, the stench of diesel, the mountain of dead and dying termites, or the fact that I had actually paid a pest control company to eliminate the wood gorging Labradors, a total waste of money as I could clearly see.

However a false sense of confidence came over me with the realization that the task at hand was now being carried out by someone possessed, nothing was going to stand in the way of my determined husband until the last termite dropped to the floor writhing in its toxic soaked grave.

My dedicated hubby ran up and down stairs every hour like a Kelpie bringing back the sheep. Religiously spraying more diesel [by this time I was considering a gas mask]. He squeezed through manholes and ceiling beams, diesel pump in one hand and a torch in the other, Tarzan had nothing on him my beam swinging gorilla. Reeking of the foul smelling liquid I was relieved that he didn't smoke, as he was not ready for cremation.

Not content he purchased a listening device which made him look like a deranged doctor searching for a diagnosis in the contaminated timber. The relentless hunt continued day and night. His restless dreams were full of wood munching beasts. He continued his pursuit as high as he could climb, searching through cavities (I suppose if he hadn't removed the wall we would not have found the gas outlet we had asked to be installed for the heater, as the plasterers had gone clean over the top of it, anyway with the current combustible situation a heater was out of the question).

My mother often said, things happen for a reason, so I look at it this way, if the insurance will cover the damage, and if I have a wall by winter I won't need to light the heater unless it is a particularly cold season, however if we are freezing our butts, I can turn on the gas and have my house rebuilt with a steel frame.

The following morning while working in the laundry I heard 'guess who' go downstairs, two minutes later *CRASH*. I charged down the stairs, there he was on the floor holding various parts of his anatomy.

Are you okay? Are you hurt? He had barely missed the glass table while tearing down the ceiling after climbing the aluminium ladder with the red warning sticker do not proceed past this step. Now I ask what should I have done? Fetch him a splint? Scream? I couldn't see any protruding bones so I eliminated the splint and went straight to the scream.

I carried the once practical ladder outside, it was difficult not to compare it to a pretzel, fortunately after a few bangs with a hammer it was almost as good as new.

Now one would think that was the end of the story, except for the bird in the wall, obviously because the door had been open while carrying out the mess and coaxed in by our peach faced parrot, who had survived the gaseous environment, a bird had flown into our recently modified room and was trapped in the wall. Phil mimed our parrot [an amazing mimic in a smelly flannelette shirt] he dutifully tapped the gyprock and declared the feathered visitor was so stupid because it could not find its way out.

As anyone would be, hubby was distressed to hear the prisoner's chirp becoming weaker, poor thing was obviously starving and claustrophobic, what to do?

IDEA! Disconnect the light fitting, place a honey seed block in the hole along with some water, then hang Julius in his cage to the ex-light fitting with the theory he would coax the ailing creature out.

ENTER the son in law "What's going on Phil?"

"There is a bird in the wall and it's getting weaker by the moment," was the reply.

"Are you sure?" questions son-in-law.

Phil taps the wall, bird chirps faintly back.

Son in law asks "When did you change the battery in the smoke alarm?" Son in law walks out falls down in hysterics.

RED is a charming colour but somehow looks better on an overcoat! Phil removes Julius from his status as lifesaver, then replaces the light fitting.

"Guess what I've done now?" he moans " I left the seed and water in the cavity, that confession left me with visions of rats infesting the diesel soaked rafters and what was left of my home. One may consider my reaction unfair, after all he had shown great diversity in a harrowing situation. And incidentally we are still married.

All My Friends

Yvonne Norris

SHOALHAVEN HEADS 2535

I recently met a lady from Finland, her name is Marjetta and I know we are going to become firm friends. Her entry into my life has prompted me to reminisce about people I have met from other countries during my long lifetime.

My first encounter with someone from another country was when I was a little girl just after the end of World War Two. She was a new friend of my mother's, and she came from a faraway place called the United Kingdom. I didn't understand why she lived in a tin shed when we lived in a big brick house until later when I learned that that she was a migrant and lived temporarily in a Nissan hut in an Immigration Camp.

Soon after, at school one day, the teacher introduced my class to a new girl and said that her name was Maria and that she came from a place called Italy and couldn't speak English. As children we were all agog at first to see a little girl who had darker skin than us and couldn't speak English, but we welcomed her and soon she became just one of us. Two Maori sisters from New Zealand, April and Monica, were the next two new girls to arrive in my class and they were darker skinned too but spoke English even though they sounded a little different. We were being taught that children and their parents came not just from where we lived but from all parts of the world.

I remember too that there was an Indian man who had a market garden near where my grandma lived and when I stayed with her while my mother went to hospital to have my baby brother he knocked on her door one day selling rhubarb and I must have been cheeky because he said he would tie me up with rhubarb string if I wasn't a good girl. I was always frightened of him thereafter but am sure Grandma knew he was joking. However, a big, loud Greek man called 'Con' had purchased the local fruit shop and I liked him very much because one day he gave me a big shiny green apple. Also, at around the same time, one of my aunties married a Frenchman. I was intimidated by him as he was a tall man with black hair and dark eyes and in a booming voice, used a lot of words that I didn't understand. I was disappointed one day to learn that I had said "no" to his offer of a sucette only to learn that he had been offering me a lollipop.

As I grew, more and more often I was meeting people from other faraway places. I had never been to a restaurant before but one Saturday night my parents took my little brother and me to a Chinese restaurant. I had never been anywhere like that before so was awed by all the lanterns hanging from the ceiling and a gold statue of a cat that was sitting on the counter waving one arm. The people working there looked different too as they all had black hair and brown eyes and they were not tall like Mum and Dad. But I thought that they were very nice anyway and the fried rice tasted really good, not luggy like Mum used to make.

The world was constantly changing, and soon I was old enough to leave school and go to work and understand by then, that Australia was a young country and still had a small population but needed to grow. To do this we needed lots of people including tradesmen, factory and office workers, and people from all the professions to migrate here to help us and to work and make a new life for themselves and their families. Soon emigrants from all over the world jumped at the opportunity to come and live in the lucky country.

So, when I got my first job in an office, some of the girls I worked with came from England and impressed me greatly by saying that they had seen our King in person at Buckingham Place in London. Another girl came from Holland. Her name was Anneke and she had blue eyes and fair hair and was very pretty. She talked about many different things like windmills, dykes and wooden shoes she called clogs and she became one of my very best friends.

Many more years have passed now and millions of people from war torn and other countries all over the world have migrated here. The ones that I have met and have formed the patchwork of my life have taught me and learned from me. They are like a beautiful bunch of blossoms, all the same, yet different, and I salute them all.

Teaching in the 1960s was more about conformity than individuality. Outside the classroom boys and girls lined up separately. Seating was assigned according to the 'seating plan'. The boys wore crisp white button down shirts tucked into grey shorts, and black lace up school shoes. Boys' hair was short back and sides. Girls had plaits or a short bob cut. Any hair below shoulder length qualified to be tied back. The uniform dress had to be to the knee and if too short would require the hem to be taken down during a lunch time detention. The class roll contained familiar names and a teacher never used a shortened or 'nick name'. The playground was segregated, girls had the seating areas while the boys had the playing fields. Everyone had a place and everyone knew their place. Life was predictable.

Fast forward.

My class roll has an extra column alongside the list of names for 'preferred name' and the choices speak volumes about their owner. 'Tank' is a tall and muscular Islander, known for his ability to mow down the defence of the opposing team and to withstand hard tackles on the field. 'Google' knows all the answers but is not always right, while 'Razor' refers to his ability on a scooter rather than to a blade. The girls are less into preferred names except for shortened versions of their originals. They are far more into hair-styles as their unique identity. There are several multi-coloured rainbow styles, a not so natural blonde, a bright red and an equally bright green. Three have tightly plaited and beaded hair, another has an undercut while yet another has entirely shaved her head. In contrast to these are two girls wearing Hijabs, who although are the best of friends, have totally different views of the world. One is already engaged to a man of her father's choosing and is excited about the upcoming overseas marriage, while the other

is a vocal member on the Student Council who attends Climate Change rallies and intends to have a career in politics.

Into this mix of individuals swaggered Geedi. Short and unbelievably thin with tight curled hair cut close to the scalp, he couldn't have been more different to the woman who accompanied him a few steps behind. She was tall slim and elegant, her bright flowing dress reached her ankles and her hair was tucked beneath a taaj decorated with shells. What they did have in common was beautiful dark eyes and a huge smile. She explained that she was Geedi's sponsor and that not a lot was known about the boy, who was now walking around the room giving two-handed handshakes to the boys but totally ignoring the girls. She placed his backpack, which she had been carrying, onto the floor. "He can have a problem with the status of women," she sighed.

Geedi had finished his rounds of the room so I invited him to sit anywhere he liked. He promptly sat himself cross legged on the floor in front of me. I suggested that he should sit at a desk but he shook his head. Ignoring this I moved to the back of the room then almost tripped over Geedi as I turned back towards the board. He had followed me and again sat at my feet. Then Razor stood and led Geedi to where the bag had been left on the floor. He pointed to the name Geedi that was printed on the bag and with a Texta he wrote on the nearest desk in large letters Geedi. That would always be Geedi's desk.

A few days later Geedi had his first encounter with acrylic paint. He covered his paper with bright colours. Thick bright colours! He scratched patterns into the paint then made handprints on the desk. Finally he used two hands to smear the paint together to make a thick brown sludge. He was annoyed that his bright colours had disappeared and demanded that I bring them back. I told him that it couldn't be done and that he would need to clean up the mess. He replied adamantly that men do not clean, that was women's work. Geedi defiantly folded his arms transferring the paint from his hands to his shirt. Battle lines were drawn.

The standoff lasted a minute before I heard a chair scrape on the floor. Tank was heading for Geedi. Surely not a fight. Geedi could fit under Tank's arm and was not built for combat. To my surprise Tank tossed the muck covered paper into the bin and began cleaning the desk. Geedi's mouth fell open, mine too.

Tank turned to Geedi and in his deep authoritative voice said. "Real men clean up their own mess, but I guess I'll do it for you until you 'man up' to your responsibilities and stop being a child." Stunned, Geedi picked up another cloth and began cleaning the desk, being careful not to wipe away his name. Tank smiled and put his hand on Geedi's shoulder. "That's my man" he said as they grinned at each other. I opened the class roll and next to Geedi's name I added 'The Man' in the preferred name column.

Today I am sitting under the Golden Arches minding an assortment of tiny shoes while Geedi and Tank supervise their children in the play area. The class holds this reunion every two years and the group has expanded to include partners and children. I am always invited and even the children call me by my preferred name – 'Miss'. Empty chip cartons and burger wrappers still cover the table when Geedi and Tank rejoin me. Laughing and slightly out of breath from their games with the children, they survey the mess, then, exchanging a grin they gathered it up. "Got to teach the kids about 'real men'" said Geedi giving Tank a high five. "Yep, that's my man" replied Tank as they walked to the bin.

When Jesus Moved to our Street

Judy Turner

SOUTH DURRAS 2536

'I had a dream last night that Jesus moved into our street at Number 16,' said Nan.

We always looked forward to hearing about Nan's dreams while we ate breakfast. She dreamt almost every night and told us that many of her dreams had come true.

'Like when she married me,' Grandad said.

Dad, my sister Emma, and I moved cities to live with Nan and Grandad after Mum died. Dad was in the Navy and away a lot. I realise now how much the sudden arrival of two small children must have disrupted my grandparents' lives, but they did their best to make up for the loss of our Mum. Nan cooked her special things and Grandad told his stories.

We were the only children in a street of old people, a mixture of Aussies and migrant Italians and Greeks. Then we had some new arrivals: a family from Lebanon and one from India, both with two teenage kids. 'Variety's the spice of life,' said Grandad.

On the afternoon of Nan's dream about Jesus, Emma and I were walking home from school when a battered camper van painted with flowers pulled into the driveway of Number 16.

Emma's mouth dropped open when a tall bearded man with long hair, loose clothes, and sandals stepped out of the van. 'You look like Jesus,' she said. 'Are you going to live here? My Nan dreamt about it last night.' Emma didn't pause for breath. 'I'm Emma and she's Judy.' 'I'm five and she's nine. We live at Number 12.'

'Pleased to meet you,' said the man. 'I'm Joshua Cummings. This is Maryanne and our baby, Lily.' A woman with brown hair, wearing a long dress and lots of bangles, smiled as she lifted a baby from the van.

Emma's head bobbed from side to side as she prattled on. 'I'm learning all about Jesus at school. You *do* look like Jesus. We go to the Catholic school. I'm learning the Lord's Prayer: Our Father who aren't in Heaven, hello be thy name...'

I gave her a shove. 'Come on Em. We have to go.'

'Can I take the baby for a walk?' asked Emma. She had a million dolls and was constantly taking them for walks in her toy stroller.

The woman nodded. 'Of course, Emma. We'll go together tomorrow afternoon.'

Nan wasn't at all surprised when we got home and blabbed out our news. She nodded. 'Told you so.'

'Joshua Cummings eh,' said Grandad, 'well, he has the right initials.' From then on, Joshua Cummings became JC.

We all watched Number 16 the following months. Eyebrows in the street shot up when JC stayed home to look after the baby while Maryanne taught at the local high school. JC spread soil and bales of hay around the front and back yards. He told all who made it their business to stop and watch that it was a 'no dig' garden. Old Mr Morelli, who grew the best tomatoes and vegetables in the street, shook his head in disbelief. 'Crazy hippy ideas.' Old Mr Paros, whose yard was filled with citrus trees and grapevines, vigorously agreed.

After a week or so, we heard banging from the back of Number 16. Emma reported that JC was building a chook shed and had fenced off the end of the backyard so the chooks could 'free range' during the day. Emma was beside herself. Not only did she have a baby to play with, but now she had chooks as well. She was down there every afternoon, and one day Nan told me to go and make sure Emma wasn't making a nuisance of herself.

I found her pulling on a pair of gumboots on JC's back veranda. 'Maryanne got me these to wear when I feed the chooks and collect the eggs, so I won't get chook poo on my shoes.' She picked up a basket and took off down the yard.

The chooks got all excited when they saw Emma coming. 'Hello girls,' she said. 'Here I am!' They all gathered about her, clucking, cackling, and nodding their heads. Emma took the lid off a bin in the chook pen, scooped out some feed, and threw it around. 'There you are, Henrietta. Some for you, Ginger. Good girl, Anna'

Each year on the second Saturday in December, Nan organised a Christmas party for everyone in our street. It was always in *our* yard, as we had the biggest back lawn. Grandad had never bothered about gardens, just mowed the grass Saturday mornings before he went off to the TAB. He said having only mown grass with no gardens kept the mossies away.

Mr Morelli and Mr Paros set up a spit in our backyard with half a lamb. They took it in turns all afternoon to baste it with lemon, garlic, and stuff. Mr El Din wandered into the yard and said the smell reminded him of his home in Lebanon.

Grandad cooked sausages on the Barbie for the Christmas party. Mrs Morelli baked delicious almond biscuits, Mrs Paros made baklava, and Nan did a big trifle. Mrs Singh arrived with a tray of curry puffs. Mrs El Din had a special dip. Others bought salads and things. We all wondered what JC and Maryanne would bring.

Maryanne brought a vegetarian frittata and JC had three loaves of freshly baked bread.

'Wot? No fishes?' asked Grandad.

'Sorry Bert, I'm saving the miracles till the 25th.'

JC and Grandad both liked a good joke.

Emma stood in front of JC, who was swaying slightly after a few of Mr Paros's homemade wines. 'I still think you look like Jesus,' she said.

JC grinned. 'That's because he's my brother.'

Emma nodded and climbed onto Nan's lap. She looked at JC. 'Will you please ask your brother to say hello to my Mum?' Nan made a funny choking sound. She hugged Em closer, burying her face in my little sister's soft brown curls.

It Takes a Small Town

Margot Hadfield

TERMEIL 2539

Medley, mixed bag, assortment, variegation – all these words are synonyms for diversity. They evoke positive images: an assortment of fine chocolates, for example, a mixed bag of sweets, a variegated leaf, a medley of tunes. Diversity in all its forms is a positive force, a force we should embrace and celebrate; it is, after all, the very foundation of our existence.

If you doubt this, go out one fine morning into a garden, a park or the bush. Observe the shapes and colours of the plants, listen to the calls of the birds and insects, and feel the life-giving warmth of the sun. Get down on the ground (if you can manage it) and grasp a handful of soil. If it is healthy soil, you will be holding in the palm of your hand possibly 100 million different life forms: microscopic bacteria, strands of fungi, protozoa, nematodes, arthropods and earthworms. These largely unseen creatures work non-stop to produce the rich soil which nourishes the forests, pastures and crops on which all animals and humans depend. Without this underground diversity, the soil would lose its fertility and plants and animals would fail to thrive, resulting in land degradation. Unfortunately, due to climate change and destructive agricultural practices, this is happening around the globe today. Scientists are worried about the lack of biodiversity threatening our future. We should all be worried.

Six years ago, being a keen gardener, I moved from the city to a block of land in the country, hoping to grow my own food and live more sustainably. I began learning how to regenerate the soil, improving its ability to retain carbon, water and nutrients and increasing its health and productivity. It will take the rest of my life to get it right, but I am excited by the challenge and look forward to the journey. With countless other enthusiastic gardeners and farmers following the same principles, I am cautiously optimistic we may be able to repair the damage to this precious resource.

It is heartening that so many people are keen to foster diversity in our natural environment. Now we need to turn our attention to celebrating the diversity of another vital resource: ourselves. During the tough years of Covid, we have forgotten that we need healthy, vibrant communities as much as we need healthy, fertile soil.

When I moved to the country, I brought with me the experience of thirty years of teaching. During my career, I invariably found the best schools were those that valued every student, regardless of their ability or background. You could always tell a good school by how they treated the students who struggled, whether due to learning difficulties, mental health or cultural differences. The acceptance of diversity benefited the whole school community, fostering an atmosphere of goodwill where students and teachers were willing to learn from each other.

Living in a small town is similar to working in a school. It is safe and familiar, but an energising variety gives the town life and character. Like an inclusive school, a thriving small town accepts all sorts of people and allows everyone the chance to be a valued member of the community.

Our country town may seem homogenous on the surface (especially when swamped by summer visitors). In reality, it is a medley of cultures and lifestyles. It is the First Nations *Yuin* people, sharing their stories and thriving despite enormous odds; it is the old settler families, whose names are found on streets and lanes; it is the descendants of the Italian migrants who arrived in the 50s and 60s to work in the fishing industry. It is the visitors who came for a holiday last century and never left; the young couples who moved from the city when it became so expensive; and the retired sea and tree changers (like me), enjoying the food and wine. It is the recent migrants from the Pacific and South East Asia who struggle to find employment and accommodation; it is musicians, artists and writers inspired by the natural environment; it is tradesmen, checkout operators, nurses and truck drivers who keep our services running. It is the members of the LGBTQIA+ tribe who add colour and life to community gatherings; and the weary young mothers and overworked teachers, raising the next generation of kids. It is the CWA, the RFS, the Community Centre, the Showground, and the 260 million-year-old mountain, Didthul, watching over the town from the west.

All this diversity enhances the positive energy in our community and makes me smile. You can learn so much from people who are different to you. For our young people to grow with confidence and strength, they need numerous examples of how people can live and thrive – yes, it does take a small town to bring up children. The narrow-minded ideas espoused by politicians and leaders who should know better will never make our communities stronger: only diversity can do that. Those who are suspicious or fearful of diversity would prefer that everyone resembled them and behaved and believed as they do. If this came to pass, our society would be like a monoculture: a vast field with endless rows of identical plants, artificially irrigated, drenched with chemicals and fertilisers, apparently healthy, but growing in lifeless soil.

As an older Australian, I have experienced multiple changes in my lifetime, most of them for the better. I have been lucky, but the next generations may not be so fortunate. The immense challenges facing us now demand courageous, creative solutions. We will need strong local communities and an assortment, a medley, a mixed bag of variegated people and ideas to pull us through. Let's hope everyone realises that, just like our soil, our strength is in our diversity.

Distance Partying

Pamela James

BOMADERRY 2541

March 30, his birthday had arrived! We were well and truly into lockdown, and I wanted to do something for him but didn't know what. It was six weeks since the family left for Adelaide. I remember clearly the day they told us they decided to move. I felt like a deflated balloon, for it had not taken long for them to secure a place in our affections. It was only a brief eleven months since they arrived from Iran, via Turkey and now they were moving again.

It wasn't unexpected as work opportunities dried up in our area after the January bushfires led to a down-turn in the region's economy. They came with great expectations as economic migrants, a professional couple with a nine-year-old son. But as time went on and employment was very difficult to secure, we sensed that they would move eventually to somewhere with more job prospects. But why did it have to be before Aria's tenth birthday?

We grew very fond of Aria and his mum and dad. The lad came each Friday afternoon for a music lesson and chat with me, an investigation and romp around the garden with my husband and then, most importantly, yummy cakes and biscuits for afternoon tea. So, we were planning to do something celebratory for this birthday to mark his move into two digits. On his ninth birthday, the family had not long arrived in Australia, and as they knew no one, it wasn't celebrated with anyone except mum and dad. It was with this in mind that we wanted this one to be special in some way.

Still March 30, and the day was moving on quickly with no bright ideas of what to do except a phone call to wish Aria a happy birthday. But that seemed too impersonal. There must be something better. I knew his mother would give him the present we sent. But even that seemed remote as we wouldn't be there to see his joy and help celebrate this special time.

It came in an instant while I was at the ironing board. Good place to get good ideas! *Let's try*

WhatsApp. Let's do a virtual party for him. What would I need? I set up a little table in the lounge room, spread a cloth on it, added a plate of chocolates and glasses with fizzy drink. But I needed a birthday cake. No time to bake one. So, I resurrected a date loaf from the freezer (the only cake I could find) and decorated it with a colourful ribbon around the edge, ten candles on the top and a Happy Birthday sign. I texted to suggest a time for the party and we were ready to go.

We were full of excitement, and when we connected, the reception on the screen was equally so. There was Aria beaming from ear to ear. We remembered him with this special gesture of love!

We lit the candles and asked him to blow them out. Of course, there needed to be a little help from us to achieve that. I played *Happy Birthday* on the piano and we both sang, my husband shifting the focus of the screen onto me at the piano so that Aria could see. Very keen to learn, he had spent many enjoyable hours on the old instrument trying to master the basic of piano playing. We chatted, catching up on our news, and he panned his iPad around to show the decorations his mum put up in their small apartment.

Virtual reality is never the same as reality, but that afternoon, it provided us with a way to bring a smile and a lot of happiness to a ten-year-old Iranian boy and his family, and to an aged couple who still miss them dearly.



I was seventeen and I was returning home to Melbourne from a holiday in Scotland.

Our family had migrated there three years before. I was travelling first class, courtesy of a wealthy uncle, on board the *SS Orion*. We were three days out from Tilbury and I was bored.

I was on the sports deck, leaning on the rail, looking out to sea, when I heard the click, click, clack of a table tennis ball. Turning around, I was greeted by a young Indian looking girl bouncing the ball up and down on the table. "Do you play?" she asked.

"I try." I replied, grinning at the thought of playing with this young thing.

"Okay let's try," she said. I was immediately interested. It was my first encounter with an Eastern girl, or any foreign girl for that matter! She had a lovely petite figure and was wearing blue pedal pushers and a light blue sweater. She wore her dark hair in a pony tail style. Her name, she said was Joan, Joan Marie De Silva to be exact, and she was from Sri Lanka.

We played for over an hour, laughing at our silly shots and praising the good ones. I was so intrigued with her sing song accent and her manner of speaking, for when she played a great shot she would exclaim, "Saw it Alistair." She was so easy to talk to. She explained that her maternal grandfather was born in Scotland and married a local girl. He owned a rubber plantation south of Colombo. We stayed with each other for the rest of the day and agreed to meet after dinner.

Just after dinner I was chatting away with my cabin mate, Arnold. He had my full attention until suddenly his attention was drawn elsewhere. I realised why when I heard the familiar sing song voice behind me. "Were you not looking for me Alistair?" I was momentarily stunned when I turned around. Surely this couldn't be the young girl I played table tennis with.

Facing me was a stunning raven-haired beauty, dressed in a black and golden sari. I could hardly hear her voice as she introduced me to her parents, explaining to them how my accent resembled her grandfather's and "what a good table tennis player Alistair is." I could hardly hide my embarrassment. Joan it turned out was eighteen; a year older than me.

Soon Joan and I were left to ourselves and I became completely relaxed in her company. She explained the bits and pieces of her national dress as we walked around the outer deck, finally stopping at the stern rail. This became a ritual every evening after dinner and, as I remember, the moon reflected off the ship's wake when we kissed for the first time.

Joan was an accomplished pianist and on several occasions she entertained in the ship's lounge in the quiet afternoons. I would just sit and listen, proud to be the boyfriend of this lovely young lady.

The days passed slowly at first. After all, we had over two weeks before we reached Colombo. We often compared customs, our ways of life, our schooling etc., adding to our interest in each other. We were very happy in each other's company. The last few days seemed to fly. We talked of writing to each other and of our future plans and careers.

Joan's mother invited me to dinner the day we arrived in Colombo. The ship wasn't due to leave until midnight. Joan's young sister and a few relatives had also been invited.

Well there I was, the guest of honour you might say. While the dinner was excellent and the dishes much different from anything I had tried before, with spices and curries all new to my Scottish taste buds, I felt very much alone, being the only European at the table. Although she was at my side all evening, except when she rose to play the piano for the guests, I couldn't help but feel so sorry that all this was coming to an end. Perhaps Joan, in her first letter to me, explained it so well.

"Well how did you like your first acquaintance with an eastern girl? Was I very different from what you expected? I will pop in and see you if I have the chance to visit your country.

How did you enjoy your last visit to Sri Lanka? You were feeling a bit strange weren't you? Did you think you were going to be kidnapped or something? Because there are usually such strange stories associated with the east.

"She signed off her letter "Bitsa" which was my nick name for her, referring to her ancestry; Bitsa this and Bitsa that.

Joan accompanied me to the tender, leaving her parents further up the quay and, as we kissed goodbye, I could still hear her tribute to me, as she played in front of all the guests, the beautiful "Some Enchanted Evening," for the last time. As she reached the last line "Once you have found her never let her go," she looked at me, smiling, and I knew how much our relationship, only a few weeks old, meant to us. Sadly I had to let her go. I was far too young to do anything else.

Confronting Diversity

Pamela Keenan

BEGA 2550

Just 3 days ago, I had the world 'sussed'.

I knew who I was ... could identify my views and opinions and valued the challenges from which these were shaped and emerged ... confident that (most) aspects of my personality and life were well defined ... And I could look back on my 67+ years with perhaps an air of arrogance and surety.

My father, a WW2 decorated hero and Mother, an only child of an educated woman who was widowed when my mother was only 2 years of age. Uncles and Aunts were seemingly absent; but then again this anomaly was never questioned. Both my father's parents passed before I was born.

Having made the decision to have my DNA submitted for screening, I 'knew' I would find a family history covering German settlement in Goondiwindi 120 years ago; English assisted immigration; some 'innerspring' relatives from Scotland; and possibly a few skeletons which would form an over-lunch story for my friends.

Of course I knew ... we all know our families and family history. Why would the people we love and trust most in the world ever be wrong, or (unthinkably) deliberately lie?

I was wrong!

Today, I write this story on uncertain ground. Not yet quicksand, but certainly a very muddy and murky base to say the least.

Through DNA, I found a Lebanese grandfather who did not marry, my Scottish grandmother. My mother is 'illegitimate' – an abhorrent label. Compounding this, my much loved maternal grandmother has no DNA relationship with me – somehow she adopted my mother.

I have no Germanic ancestry.

I have a father who was a bigamist, and who had a daughter who would be approximately 90 years of age.

I have distant relatives who owned coal mines on the Welsh border some 150+ years ago; quite simply, Industrial Revolution opportunists.

I have family with fraudulent birth certificates.

I have a paternal grandmother who was arrested (a few times), and seemed to have a very dodgy view of the truth.

I have more, the list of 'oddities' goes on ... but I have no desire to give focus on the negative.

Please understand, I am proud of my heritage. I embrace my Lebanese 'newness', and am keen to learn more about Lebanon and Syria. I am already looking into a family history in England, and have found a book written on my distant family dating back to the 1700s.

I have no interest in my father's indiscretions. He was a highly decorated veteran; a kind and gentle man who loved me dearly.

I understand that we are not perfect, we all make mistakes. We are diverse in how we behave, and how we react to a circumstance in which we are placed.

We speak of diversity as though it belongs to others. We assume that identity is clearly defined, visible, recognised and finite. We identify diversity based on our own immediate place in time.

Who are we to judge the differences or otherwise in others – as proven by my own experience? Identifying others based on our own identity is a nonsense.

Yet human diversity is a wonderful and rich repository of who we are and from where we come. It goes beyond faith, ethnicity, abilities, language, shape/form/colour – diversity is not that simple.

Diversity is not a visual aspect.

Diversity is not about differences: it's about similarities. It's about respecting individuals for who they are, the value of our relationship we share, and truly understanding that the world we share is shaped by natural diversity.

Now I come to think about it ... maybe I do have the world 'sussed' after all: although perhaps not in the way I expected.

The Russia I Loved

Trevar Langlands

CAMPBELLTOWN 2560

I have an enduring love for the Russia I frequently visited over the years because of friends I have made through my radio career. I love the magnificence of the churches, the cathedrals, the colours of their domes and the friendliness of the people with whom I chatted.

I enjoyed shopping in Buryat, Russia where the people are related by language, habitat and economic type to the Outer Mongolia, halakha people. Also, I purchased, a new phone sim-card in Krasnoyarsk Siberia and when I showed my passport, the young sales guy was particularly interested that I was from Australia. I was surprised, yet pleased, by his enthusiasm and shared with him our Anzac story. He listened to my stories then gave me his email address so I would keep in touch and send him more information in writing for his reading pleasure. "I like history of the Pacific region," he said.

I see diversity everywhere. My curiosity of needing to learn about how other people live is another reason why I am drawn to visiting Eastern Europe. I enjoy the music too which speaks all languages and I share the spirit and the emotions it generates and so enjoy concerts and ballet as well as social occasions with friends even if I don't fully understand their language.

I see how our modern Australian culture these days is diverse in many areas, none more so than in our restaurant menus. They use a mixture of words like, *entré*, *paté* and *sauerkraut*. I, just like most Aussies, have my favourites which are all easily accessible throughout the country: Italian, Greek, Vietnamese, Russian and Chinese restaurants and trying the chopsticks often results in frivolity.

When we visit art galleries, musical concerts and choirs, we are so familiar with the international works that we hardly notice they are created by overseas artists and because I particularly love listening to Russian music I recall the many visits I've enjoyed over the decades.

My ancestry background is from the eastern European nations so I feel many nostalgic emotions when viewing art works, listening to music and watching movies from my family homelands. At the same time I do not feel 'foreign' but in fact equally very much Australian as well.

I saw a great deal of diversity during my exciting trips to Russia prior to the sad current affairs and politics of today. Some colleagues find this surprising but Russia has at least 120 ethnic groups resulting in about 100 languages. I have friends from the Buryat people from the Siberian lake Baikal area, who run a small mini-market where I learned the Russian names for my goods and was welcomed and befriended by several members from the family groups.

My several visits to the Krasnoyarsk history museum, included a guided tour by a former Professor and meeting two female students, fans of *Lord of the Rings*, were keen to see New Zealand where it was filmed.

Displays of the various ethnic groups, drew me back with curiosity and pleasure. The museum of several floors included interesting arrays of clothing, tents and ornaments of indigenous groups, similar to some American-Indian styles. I have since learned that one group made its way during the Ice Age across from Siberia to what is now America, although it was not that at the time.

I am also keenly curious as to how so many people and countries in every corner of the globe have been diverse always, with their mix of dance customs, traditions, and language blend. I notice just how many languages are very similar to each other, the words are much the same, have similar meanings and it's surprising how many languages have western words in Russia.

A common example of this is where the cultures display a 'Sale' and 'Specials' sign. I saw 'burger, French fries, torté, airport, Bar, vodka, chips', all fast-food items that are recognisable the globe over. The word 'artist' means a performer, our pavlova dessert, a Christmas favourite in Australia, is from the famous Russian dancer, Anna Pavlova. Whether it is because it is made from a diverse array of ingredients with its sponge cake base, sweetened with a layer of jam, topped with sliced fruit and poured custard, before finishing with fresh cream and jelly, lends itself to the magnificence of the talented Pavlova or not, ... I don't know, but it is as popular as Pavlova was, in her day.

The Fashion World varies its fabrics to suit the weather of the countries of course, but it amazes me that the 'denim jeans' can be purchased in all countries, in all weathers and in all sizes and shades of blue.

We borrow other's diverse cultures for fashion, language, poetry and technology and they do too. That's how it should work for everybody. My German ancestors didn't dream that their grandson could ever pick up a piece of technology in Australia and speak to them direct, even see them on screen back in Europe, in real time. My Paternal heritage mix is Scottish, German, Polish and Russian with Maternal being Smolensk region, Russia before migrating to Poland and Germany.

My returns to Russia included my love of singing jazz songs in English in Russian establishments; a restaurant and hotel which were highly applauded by the Russian audience. And on the trans-Siberian rail trip, a three day experience I enjoyed the various topics of conversation. I found English and Russian passengers managed to travel together with very interesting results. Sitting in my cabin, my conversations with a Moscow businessman were just as rewarding for me as the conversation with the indigenous manager of the train restaurant, who shared his time over dinner with me. Chatting with two Russian girls who sold sweets and the papers on the train was different but wonderful as well, while they all loved listening to my stories about Australia. Whether deliberate or not, celebrating our diversity makes the world go round.

I look out of the window of my room in the nursing home and watch the colourful birds looking for seed, and marvel at the colours of the flowers and shrubs. I am old now, and cannot do what I took so much for granted in my youth and young adult life.

My mind drifts back to those early days, when I came to Australia to marry a man 20 years older than me. He was a widow, and had corresponded with me for two years before arranging for my journey to Australia. He needed someone for companionship and to look after him, and felt that having me live in as a housekeeper would set the neighbours talking, so we married a few days after my arrival in Australia. My English was not good, my native language being Chinese, and I found everything so very difficult, even though I spoke four other languages.

He was a kind man, and did what he could to help me but when it came to meals my cooking skills were sadly lacking for the Australian palate. My strengths in cooking were Asian, but he did not like this food, and I could not cook what he wanted – sausages, mashed potato and peas being his favourite meal, and I did not like to eat this 'foreign' food. Result was he went to Red Rooster for his main meal of the day, and I ate my friend rice and steamed vegetables.

Thanks to the kindly intervention of relatives and friends of his who gave me cooking lessons, I did master the basic skills enough to prepare and serve up good old fashioned Aussie meals, and even began to like some of what I had prepared.

I learnt to drive, and we discussed my having part time work which gave me 'my time' and I then worked for some years at a high school, organising the laboratory equipment for the use of students. I felt good about this, felt more like an Australian and my English improved. Coping with visitors was hard; making tea was foreign to me, as was trying to work out what to give them to eat. Most were kind and understanding, and gave me the confidence to keep going in this most unusual marriage. I was homesick of course, but decided to give my all to this man who had in many ways rescued me from a challenging and hard life in my own country.

Integration was difficult, the appliances used in the home, the cleaning products, using a sewing machine, 'bringing a plate' to a neighbour's celebration, getting used to so many things so completely different to my way of life, all presented problems, and often I wished I had never left my own country. But hearing of the political unrest there and persecution of citizens I appreciated that in Australia I was safe and had everything provided for me by my husband. So I endeavoured all the more to learn and to integrate with my new country and be thankful for my present situation.

His family was very much against their father's marriage to me. They had good reason I felt as the newspapers often carried a report of an Australian husband being murdered by his 'imported' wife, being pushed down a flight of stairs, or killed some other way (oh what awful accidents!) after having taken over all his money. However, over time they came to respect me, as I did them, and we had an amicable and rewarding relationship. They were interested in my previous life and the ways of my country, I was able to ask the ladies for advice on housekeeping and entertaining, and that time was so very pleasant to me, and I feel, for them also.

One thing they were interested in was Chinese medicine. I was a follower of this, and often was asked what a natural remedy would be for a certain condition. Exercise and diet were reviewed and so was the acceptance of my way of coping with ailments and what could be done to improve general health.

Gradually my circle of friends increased, but sadly my husband's health deteriorated and dementia began its merciless inroads into his brain. He was often so difficult and made things very stressful for me, but I always reminded myself of what he had done for me, and I willingly did all I could for him. Eventually he was hospitalised and then died without returning home. The family was there for me, and helped me in so many ways, and this was when I realized that there were now no barriers, that they totally accepted me for who I was, and I accepted them in like manner.

The years slipped by and I grew older and slower in movement. I still tended my garden, my precious mango tree, plucking the mangoes and ripening them in a sack of raw rice. I still drove, and often I would take some of the family to an Asian restaurant for a family birthday or celebration. Lovely times together, but as with all folk, old age eventually caught up with me, and so I moved to this retirement village.

The staff are pleasant and competent, there are no discerners of nationalities here, we are all treated equally and respected. And I am happy.

So as I look back on my life in Australia, I am thankful for the opportunities this great country has given me, and so very thankful to the man who rescued me, knowing that the cultural differences between us would be so great and difficult to work through – but we each respected and accepted these differences and were determined to make the marriage work – and it worked! So indeed I can celebrate diversity but accept that like most things in life, it needs a willing heart and open mind, and a giving of all to 'get there' in the end.

A Dinner Conversation about Beelzebub at the Beach

Alle Lloyd

CAMDEN SOUTH 2570

The scene was shot over the shoulder by the videographer. The shoulder belonged to a NSW uniformed police officer wearing an identifying tabard, which had Police emblazoned across the back and one shoulder of the front.

The officer was in the foreground back to the camera, so his cap and distinct, chequered band was visible, as was the stem of his sunglasses but not his face. He represented the Rule of Law, the creation of Law, its reinforcement and supremacy, the principle the Law applies to everyone equally, no-one is above the Law.

The police officer was directly confronting a rabid rioter, part of an unruly mob, who was being restrained by companions gripping his right shoulder and arm, because he was out of control, wild-eyed, baring his teeth looking more like a savage simian hooting and screeching, rather than a human.

The fact he was stripped to the waist and hairy added to the less than human effect but he was in fact very human, perhaps suitably dressed for a Sunday at the beach but demonstrating a fear and ignorance of the difference of others, and, a determination to assert his notion of entitlement through destruction and violence. The tendons and muscles of the fingers, wrist and right arm were tensed. The arm was drawn back, ready to brandish the bottle as a club, or, to throw the Tooheys New longneck he was clutching at his choice of target.

He was wearing military style camouflage trousers, which dropped below the waist revealing 5cm of red, white and blue underwear decorated with Australian flags with Union Jack and Southern Cross. The decoration did not include the Aboriginal flag nor the Torres Strait Islander flags, significantly.

As the videographer panned left then right, the camera revealed a m  le of men, some stripped to the waist, wearing Australian flags as capes, waiving Australian flags, carrying partially full beer bottles or beer glasses, dancing on car bonnets, jostling and shoving others, and, even chasing and assaulting people, because they looked unAustralian.

My mother, an English-History high school teacher switched off the TV. using the remote and then announced, "Dinner is on the table, kids. Time to eat."

There was no eating in front of the TV in our house in Cronulla. The dinner table was used as a forum for discussions of important ideas and topics, a safe place to voice opinions and to clarify them, a polite place where we were trained to listen to others without interjecting. We had even entertained Mr Elphinstone, the local communist candidate, at our table in order to discover exactly what Karl Marx's theories were.

My mother was proudly a fifth generation Australian, making me a sixth generation. My father was a world-travelled Englishman, born in Colombo to a Burgher mother and an English military man.

My mother's brothers, my uncles, had both married non-Australians, who loved Australia. They quickly became naturalised Australians: uncle John had married a Russian lady, who came to Australia via Harbin, China; and my uncle Ned had married an Irish girl with red hair from Dublin, Ireland. These in-laws added to our family and we considered all of their relatives our cousins.

It was no surprise then to find an international dinner that discussion evening:

Entrée: hummus dip, green olives, green pickled chillies, warm khabiz;

Main: Sri Lankan fish curry, raita, seeni sambal, lime rice

Dessert: tiramisu.

Mother began the conversation while we were eating with, "What did you notice about the last segment of the news tonight?"

"I noticed a lot of unnecessary aggro, because we have police and laws to settle grievances, grudges and complaints. You should not take the law into your own hands ever."

"I saw a lot of anger, violence and destruction and wondered why people do not first discuss what bothers them."

"I noticed it was mainly men. They seemed alcohol fuelled too. Probably lots of peer group pressure."

"I do not think alcohol and peer group pressure leads to logical, calm decisions at all."

"Well, I heard that trouble-making radio broadcasters had stirred up turmoil by calling the victims 'grubs' and actually encouraging victimization and tumult."

"I think the Australians present were guilty of what my history teacher calls stereotyping and generalising – scapegoating like the Nazis did to the Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, criminals and the disabled during WWII – only on a very tinier scale at Cronulla"

"Yes! We studied '*Lord of the Flies*' by William Golding and there are similarities, namely, the exploration of two kinds of leadership: the charismatic which appeals to emotive ritual and logical leadership which appeals to logic and consensual rules."

Mother added, "Do not forget that Golding was highlighting the notion that Beelzebub, symbol of cruelty and corruption (hence all the flies) is deeply rooted in every human heart taking little to reveal its presence. Cronulla was not always like this – most of the trouble makers travel here by train . It is easy to reach. In the 50s and 60s we had a migrant hostel here that enhanced the town: the Greek owned Kings Milk Bar, the Dutch owned Andy's Burgers , the Hungarian owned deli selling smoked fish roe for school lunches, sweet and sour rye bread , pumpernickel, roll mop herrings wrapped around pickles and Dobos torte, the Venetian greengrocer, the Italian owned café with the first Gaggia machine in Australia.

Austrian and Hungarian Jews surviving Auschwitz were fellow students. They had been tattooed on their forearms with numbers, not their names and their relatives had been executed, because they were different. Race is a social, not a scientific or biological construct. Protect the disabled, the poor, powerless, voiceless and helpless. A society will be judged by its care of minorities. I trust your future guardianship because this family has always been celebrating diversity – it adds to us, making our human Family bigger, diverse, and, better.

Variety is the Spice of Life

Annette Pearce

PICTON 2571

What was she thinking, putting a flyer on the library noticeboard? She hoped to meet women like herself. Senior, a little bit vintage.

As a relative newcomer to the area, there was little time to make friends. Six months from unpacking the necessities and nick-knacks of 48 years of marriage, her world imploded. Her husband collapsed on the 9th hole. Paramedics responded quickly but ...

A small memorial service was conducted 10 days later. The dream of grey nomading, buried with her husband. Her only child, Angus, wanted her to move back to the city. The semi-detached next door was coming onto the market. Nancy wasn't so sure her daughter-in-law was keen. If there were grandchildren, maybe it would be different. But continuing the McDonagh name was not their intention.

No! She was staying. The little cottage briefly shared with Jock held happy memories. It hadn't been easy in the following months. She got through the daytime without too many tears, but nights were tougher. Watching old movies held little joy, she couldn't play backgammon by herself, their night time ritual of chamomile tea in bed gone.

It was when feeling particularly low that Nancy reached out to a helpline. She chatted to a stranger, her grief spilling into the phone. She talked about things she liked to do, could do, by herself. What had happened to her younger self who loved to read? Truth be told her husband did not like reading and she had always chosen to do things that they both liked.

A book club! She would join a book club. Get back into reading, at night, to fill in the dark and lonely hours.

The smart white building welcomed her through its automatic glass doors. At reception, a young woman balanced uncomfortably on a stool, late pregnancy making it difficult to find her centre of gravity. Nancy asked about joining a book club.

"We have a modest selection of book club kits available, with funds allocated for expansion." Unconsciously rubbing her belly she continued. "Plans for an in-house group are postponed due to an imminent disruption in staffing. But I could help you start your own."

That's how Nancy found herself in front of six strangers.

With a deep breath she began. "Welcome everyone to the inaugural meeting of the Belford Book Club. I thought we might introduce ourselves. I am Nancy McDonagh, 65. I wanted to join a book club but found there was none. As my late husband would say, *If you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, walk down and strike a match yourself.*"

She turned to the elderly lady on her left, frail, pale and a little hunched. "Will you go next and we'll continue clockwise?"

"Okay dear. Hello my name is Harriet Cooper. I'm 84 years young. I've lived in Belford all my life. I remember when this library was a little weatherboard hall. The land and building materials were donated by a wealthy family whose only son didn't come home from the war. The men from the RSL built it 1948 I think ... no ... 1949. Miss Jane Douglas was the first librarian. A rather intimidating spinster but passionate about her job." Harriet's body may have showed its age, but clearly her memory was sharp.

Wearing a stunning saffron coloured Kurta, and crisp white capris, the next woman looked impeccable. Confidently she introduced herself. "My name is Ms Avni Patel" (the Ms was emphasised). "I was the publishing editor of a popular home magazine. I recently decided a tree change was needed and moved to Belford, working freelance. I was taught a woman never reveals her age, but I will admit to enjoying my fabulous forties."

Next to speak was a raven haired woman with eyes the colour of coal. "Hello. My name Sacha Zielinski, in age 26." She paused and looked at the modest ring on her left hand. "I engaged and waiting to marriage. I was hairdresser back home in Poland. I met a boyfriend when I was here doing backpack and fruit pick. Sorry my English not so good."

"G'day, how are you? My name is Sandra but I shortened it to Dee, after I fell in love with John Sanderson in 1977," the ruddy faced woman began enthusiastically. She chuckled. "Fast forward thirty odd years and we have five grown-up daughters. My husband and I sold the family butcher business, over in Ashby. You might know it? Sanderson and Son. John was sad, but none of the girls wanted to be third generation butchers. I for one could not be happier to hang up my apron, though he is a bit lost. I encouraged him to join the local mens' shed." She finished with a little wink. "That's where he is right now".

A petite woman blushed shyly. "Hi, I'm Melanie Brown, 33, and a single mum with two kids aged five and seven. I work morning shift in the kitchens of Belford Nursing Home. I have always loved to read."

There was a pause as Nancy checked her sheet with everyone's name. Last on the list – Chris T. She felt foolish assuming Chris was short for Christine.

"Oh sorry everyone, Christopher Turner here. I'm a stay-at-home dad, chief cook and bottle washer. I make a mean mac'n'cheese." Grinning as he held up two crossed fingers, "Me and Bluey are like that! Little Miss Four is at pre-school and the baby is enjoying some special time with his grandma. I'm looking forward to conversation beyond one syllable words."

Nancy looked around the room. One lady old enough to be her mother and others who might say the same about her. Then there was Chris, he was a surprise. Jock had been fond of the saying '*Variety is the spice of life*'. That's certainly what this diverse group had. Inwardly she smiled with anticipation. A new chapter in her life, new friends; one book at a time.

Do you notice how once you reach “a certain age” you are immediately categorized and described by members of the Government and Press as “Elderly” or “Aged” or some similar euphemism? Often the term is accompanied by a qualifier, such as “Fragile” or “Care”. It seems a huge, grey balloon suddenly descends and swallows everyone over sixty and we are all lumped together as though we have no individual identities. There we are, drifting around in our balloon, individually invisible, floating in and out of official consciousness as another problem to be dealt with.

If we travel we become “grey nomads” who invariably take up too many spaces in caravan parks. This rather amorphous grey balloon of travellers slithers around the countryside, looked upon with raised eyebrows by many other groups in the community. How many of them look upon us as individuals, all with different stories?

For individuals we are, with backgrounds and stories as diverse as any in the land and this is how we should be seen. You only have to read the stories in the Seniors’ Stories Volumes to have a taste of this incredible diversity. Stories that tell of Himalayan adventures or gardening discoveries, of lives spent in every corner of the world, of hopes and heartaches, disappointments and love, of triumphs celebrated and disasters survived. The more often we can tell our stories, the more clearly we can be seen and recognized as individuals. Storytelling is reaching out, communicating, creating empathy. This is who I am, these are the things I care about or fear or need. I am not the same as my neighbour down the street; hear my story and accept its uniqueness.

The Press prides itself on telling people’s stories, but so often these stories are clouded by that general greyness that pinholes us as “elderly.” I was once the subject of a local news broadcast: “*Elderly Lady Winched to Safety by Helicopter.*” The only part of that headline that was true, as far as I was concerned, was the ‘lady’. I roundly objected to being called elderly (alright, I admit I was of “a certain age” but I certainly didn’t regard myself as elderly) and there never was any helicopter to winch me to safety. In fact, rather than being saved, I was left to get on with it. But that wouldn’t have made much of a story and ‘the winching to safety’ was obviously a better hook for the headline.

It had been raining for days, 200mls on one occasion and 300mls a few days later. A mountain creek became a roaring river and we were fighting to keep floodwaters out of our home all morning. Exhausted with bailing, we finally called for help. This eventually arrived in the form of guys in utes, who drove straight on to the sodden grass so that their utes promptly sank and became bogged. After having spent most of their time digging themselves out, they suggested perhaps we needed a helicopter to take us to safety. To which we replied very definitely in the negative; we knew we were safe; it was only the property in danger. We were left with a few sandbags and the hope that the rain would stop soon. Imagine my surprise when a few hours later I turned on the radio and heard about the poor elderly lady. Nowhere in the subsequent story was there any mention of the “elderly man” who had been by my side the whole time. I guess it didn’t make nearly as good copy as “elderly lady.” And simply “lady winched to safety” wouldn’t have been as enticing either. Even though the story wasn’t true, it was a story, and comments on social media were prolific.

The one that touched me the most was: "Poor love. I do hope she's alright." That was certainly sending empathy, even though it was slightly misdirected.

We really do need to tell our stories, to share our hopes and desires. We are all so different, we all want different things, have different needs. We tell our stories amongst ourselves and revel in the interest, in the diversity we find. It is so much easier to relate to people when you know something of their story.

But we also need to spread these stories beyond our peer group and families, to make people and governments laugh with us, not at us, to celebrate with us and make them see us as people who have had enriching lives and who can further enrich the lives of others. Instead of being massed together in a cloudy oneness, we need to display the colour and diversity of our lives for all to see.

So, come on everyone! Out with your needles and prick that big, grey balloon and burst out of it! Then we can celebrate!

A Passing Shadow

Lynette Stary

BOWRAL 2576

There was great excitement amongst the Mayflower Botanical Society stalwarts. More than a year's planning was about to culminate in great celebrations for the sesquicentennial anniversary of the establishment of the towns pride and joy. Our Botanic Gardens.

From the humble beginnings of a bare paddock to a magnificent twenty first century array of floral colour, imposing trees that stretched high into the sky as far as the eye could see, shrubbery of all shapes and sizes with leaves big and small reaching out for any light the sun would gift them, in shades of green that no palette could ever replicate. Indeed! This was Our Botanic Gardens, and the whole town was bursting with pride.

A special day was planned to publicly recognize the efforts of the local community, but being the twenty first century there were also important considerations of branding and profile that would be freely bank rolled by a large PR and media contingent from around the country.

The usual dignitaries representing government would be there patting themselves on their collective backs and thanking patrons and sponsors. Then there would be acclaimed horticulturists representing higher learning and celebrity presenters representing all that is beautiful in a garden. But the guest of honour was to be Elise Fleur, Mayflower local who, for each of her eighty years had been a continuous card holding member of Our Botanic Gardens.

The committee approached Elise to say a few words of welcome and then plant a very special tree for future generations to come. It was widely accepted amongst the community that her botanical knowledge and appreciation was far beyond anyone who lived in the town, even though she had nothing to formally say so. No one was better qualified to present Our Botanic Garden and its inhabitants to the country. The committee was confident that Elise would do them, and the gardens she loved proud, so her only limitation was time because as much loved as she was, no one much liked to listen words that droned on endlessly.

Now Elise was quite taken aback that she would be invited to be a guest of honour. An aunt, now dead, of whom she had no memory, had signed her up at birth to the gardens for the term of her natural life. Without doubt that sentence was a wonderful gift that gave her years of genuine pleasure, and an appreciation of the senses and the unspoken. In her time, she had been wandering the paths of this garden for more than half its existence. A garden that in many ways replicated the ebbs and flows of the human condition, but just on a much slower time frame. The gardens were an innate part of her, but they certainly didn't define who she was. In reality, she was now an old woman. When she passed people in the street, to many she was a shadow, a waft of presence that passed and was barely noticed.

The day arrived. Perfect weather. Hand shaking and hugs. Beaming faces. Lights, cameras, action.

Elise rose to a rousing applause. She used the gardens to inspire her outfit and was a mass of colour that so accentuated her short grey hair. Her walking stick was entwined with honeysuckle and soft baby's breath. She felt anticipation from the committee and bored interest from those who had come along to join in the celebrations.

And so she began:

"Other presenters before me have already spoken of gardens, and the benefits they bestow upon community and on each generation and the importance of preservation.

When I wander Our Botanic Gardens I adore these amazing, diverse plants that live in a confined habitat, but I have an admission to make to you all here today. I only come to the gardens to spy on the human visitors not the botanical inmates.

You see, to me, the gardens represent so many things – celebration, beauty, love, happiness, sadness, history, colour, strength. These qualities I see every day in the people that walk through our historic gates, wonder at the timelessness and enormity of the garden, then throw a rug on thick, lush grass and simply picnic with family and friends.

I see parents, children, lovers, enemies, joggers and walkers, tourists, refugees, homeless, rich and poor, able and disabled. A mini cosmopolitan itinerant society enclosed within the boundaries of Our Botanic Garden. I see people sharing an environment where there are no physical or emotional walls. They are here to see and feel peace and beauty, and in doing so become part of that peace and beauty. I see people dressed in brilliant colours of their past. I smell sweet past homelands, and I hear melodic words I do not understand. I feel harmony amidst the differences we all have. It saddens me that the colours fade, the smells become acrid and that the words jar when we step back outside the gates of Our Botanic Gardens "

Elise could have spoken another five minutes, but her time was up, and she sensed the committee members beaming smiles had been clouded ever so slightly with frowns.

She was not sure how her talk was received, but following her address, she was pursued by all those PR and media types who had been there for the big day. One thing she was sure of was that even if she was around for the one hundred and sixtieth celebration, she would not be asked to speak. And as far as the media was concerned, she found it best to hide in plain sight, as a passing shadow, in Our Botanic Gardens.

Doodling Dames

Annie Crawford

BUNDANOON 2578

Hello! Welcome to our writing group. If I tell you we are called WRIOTERS, it may give you a wee clue.

We reside in the Southern Highlands. Right now the area is a kaleidoscope of autumnal splendour. Burnished copper, honeyed gold, shimmering Titian, majestic purple and homely browns. Early morning mists pirouetting in the valleys.

We gather in a 1900s, lady-of-grace weatherboard home. Come with me (the door is never locked) and take a seat. Visitors are so welcome. Maybe perch on that worn Chesterfield closest to the fire, now the days are tinged with the subtle stealth of winter. The aroma of coffee brewing on the Aga assaults the senses as does just-baked muffins. There is enough for you too. Please help yourself.

This residence belongs to Lydia, so let's start with her, eh? Lydia is a powerhouse of talent and experience. She's 73, has a youthful silver bob and dresses with flare and totes perfectly manicured nails. Never any jewellery. But shoes? Move over Imelda Marcos. She has an OAM for service to community and has held Very Important Jobs in a stellar career spanning at least five decades (at our age that sounds much better than fifty years). Her writing genre is diverse and her talent in constructing conversation is worth talking about. She belongs to another writing group and is delving into the complexities of a detective novel. I hope she'll show us when it's complete.

And she's funny and kind.

Sally is the widowed dowager of our small coterie. At 81 she's ever so spritely. She writes long-hand and in the boldest of font size. Most of her stories are autobiographical miniatures transporting us into a magical universe of thirty years in a far western town when married to the town engineer. We never cease to smile at the charming word pictures Sally scrawls across myriad pages of A4. We keep imploring her to make a book from these warmly rich anecdotes.

And she's funny and kind.

At 68 Freya is the child of our group. Of Nordic stock she is tall and slim with a Rapunzel mane of light-blond locks. She adores jewellery. Her extraordinary earrings dangle and delight. Her jewelled rings ambush light. She boasts a wonderfully chequered career including driving cranes in the Newcastle coal mines. How about that? She prefers animals to people (but she does love us!) and possesses two cats that are treated like the Queen of Persia. The ideas she pops up with, to the tune of every chosen topic, dazzle with incredulity. She traverses the world of Games of Thrones genre and I love seeing what she has written. Quirky. Druids, dragons and dungeons.

And she's funny and kind.

Now I'm last in line.

At 77 I'm second eldest. I love to write, as do we all of course. I feel safe to share my words with these women. I am able to proffer the sum total of my personality, often with a tendency towards the rude and the ridiculous. (Sally never lets a profanity pass her lips.) I try to make every moment count. I simply love people and am thrilled these ladies accept me as I am, as I do them. No need for apology or pardon.

And I hope I'm kind and make them laugh.

Would you like to know some of our topics?

We take it in turns to choose. Sally proffers four pieces of paper with the numbers Won-Too-Tree-For and we all take one. (We *can* spell!) The topics abound with diversity. Like we four, I guess. 'It Wasn't My Fault' 'It Was Icy' 'Murder Mystery Chapter One' 'One Two Three' 'Eulogy' 'Opposites Attract' '2060' 'I Laughed Till I Cried'. And photos and paintings.

Glad no-one's chosen Michelangelo's David.

And still Freya often takes us back to Middle Earth and the mysterious world of Merlin and Excalibur. Her dystopian stories leave one frightened in daylight.

We've been meeting fortnightly for three years. Every time we understand more and more about one another. It's like, in our removal of layer upon layer of delicate tissue paper, we're reeling in a fishing line of trust and confidentiality Love and mutual respect gather graceful momentum. We share our tears, fears and hilarity and our chest of secrets.

We are four tendrils of a sunlight-reaching vine.

And that is despite our political predilections. Percolate Conservative, Labor, Greens and Independent. We share our opinions safely and laugh over a second cuppa. Sometimes, the bubbly is opened, like today. Would you like a glass to celebrate your presence?

I'm here wondering? What words sum up our friendship? (One online dictionary touted 47!)

They would be kindness and humour.

We are four pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. All so at ease in the hammock of belonging.

The alchemy of difference.

Yep. Look up "diversity". Reckon we Writers are bang on the money!

Rice for Dinner

Meg Boland

QUEANBEYAN 2620

Auntie Mollie didn't have any children of her own, or any husband for that matter. In a way my siblings and I were her surrogate children. So when I had my first child it was Auntie Mollie who came to stay and be my support person for two or three weeks after the birth. In those unenlightened times it was unheard of for a husband to stay at home from work after the birth of a child, to bond with that child or, heaven forbid, to take on some motherly tasks. The sky might fall in! So on the same day that I came out of hospital Auntie Mollie's pale blue Ford Cortina pulled up outside our house and she descended with her small travel bag and multiple paper bags containing enough fruit, nuts, lollies and cakes to sustain us for a fortnight.

Now my husband, Djin, had grown up with his Chinese mother and sister neither of whom were shrinking violets. They knew their own minds and how to get their own way, but by our family's standards they were spectacularly quiet about it. I thought he would easily adjust to Mollie but he was rather overwhelmed by sharing his home with someone who bellowed sudden loud unexpected demands, often from another room:

"Has anyone seen my slippers?" or "I'm making a cup of tea. Any takers?"

Having come to look after me Mollie was bent on doing her very best to make up for the depredations caused by pregnancy and a baby who continued to feed off me. She was also determined that I be reintroduced to good plain Australian food rather than the very suspect Asian meals that I had been struggling so hard to master for the past year. So on the Sunday following my return home she prepared a roast leg of lamb with all the trimmings and I lay on my bed with an insatiable baby and savoured the aromas coming from the kitchen. A feast for the senses as well as for the belly. She prepared roast potatoes, peas, carrots, and, joy of joys, roast pumpkin, which I hadn't tasted since I had one of my Mum's roast dinners six months earlier. She had gathered mint from the patch beside the back steps and made mint sauce. And of course she had prepared a large jug of gravy from the drippings in the roasting pan. As in every well-ordered Australian household she carved the meat and served it and the vegetables onto our separate plates; none of this heathen habit of serving all the food in the middle of the table for people to grab at as they pleased. She and Djin brought the laden plates to the table with the jug of gravy and a smaller jug of mint sauce to share and we prepared to sit down. Then just as Mollie and I settled in, Djin picked up his plate and returned to the kitchen. We heard the fridge door open and then close again. Djin returned with his plate, but now, right in the centre of the plate and on top of the roast meat and vegetables, there was a large serving of cold boiled white rice from the store he kept in the fridge.

Auntie Mollie was speechless for a long moment, just staring at the travesty. When she spoke it was in a soft gravelly tone quite unlike her normal cheerful roar:

"Djin, you're not really going to eat that, are you?"

We ate the beautiful meal in silence, only interrupted by the sound of Toby, the dog, claws clicking on the wooden floor as he moved from chair to chair looking ever hopeful. Now and then Mollie murmured expressions of disbelief to herself, "Rice, cold rice, with roast lamb. No one would credit it."

Djin had the grace to look slightly abashed but said nothing in his own defence. What could he say that would allay her outrage? Maybe he heard the crashing down of sacred icons. When we were finished Auntie Mollie gathered the plates and returned to the kitchen, saying as she walked through the door:

"I've made pudding as well."

Some minutes later she returned with dessert plates and then a pie dish that she placed in the middle of the table with a serving spoon. As she scooped Djin's share from the dish of sweet, creamy, rice pudding with its golden skin, she announced quietly:

"See. I already prepared rice for you."

Not Everything is Simple

Kerrie Walker

CRESTWOOD 2620

Sometimes things can be very hard to understand. Be they words, concepts, imaginings or beliefs not everyone will understand them exactly the same way.

Experience, knowledge, and their interaction in the mind can change or alter a concept very quickly given the right circumstances.

Imagine a classroom for Year 2 students. It is a week after the start of the school year and the students are adjusting to the change of expectations at being in a Year 2 class. The weather is sultry and some of the children are thinking longingly of the school holidays so recent to memory.

"Today, class we will be divided into groups to talk about something," the teacher announced, her voice firm.

A small buzz of whispered conversation was quelled as she raised her hand. "I know it is exciting to be able to talk in class, but wait until you know how this is to be done. You will be in groups of five and we will all be thinking and talking about "Celebrating Diversity"." As she spoke, she wrote the two strange words on the white board.

There was a stunned silence as students turned to each other with their confusion apparent on their faces. What did the words mean?

"Now, I will quickly explain what is meant by those two words..."

A knock at the door interrupted the teacher who quickly answered. A hushed conversation resulted in a terse announcement. "I need to leave the classroom for a few minutes. Mr Ong will stay here while I am gone, but you could begin by discussing your understanding of celebrating diversity in the groups you were in last week," Ms Black said as she left.

There was a brief silence quickly broken by the shuffle of chairs as the groups obeyed the instruction under the critical eye of Mr Ong. None of the students really knew the new teacher who had only started at the school that year, but all were wary.

There was a quiet hum of conversation but one group were not happy, aside from the chance to talk during class.

"Why do we have to talk about words we don't understand?" was Mai's first question. Mai seemed to question anything, sometimes just for fun.

"I think they are more than words," Jess said carefully. "Words mean something, don't they?"

"Words are just words," jeered Jamal. "You use them to say things."

"But the things you say mean something," Jess persisted. "Words have to mean something or we couldn't talk to each other."

"Jess is right. You always try to take charge, Jamal," Mai said as she glared at Jamal. They were not friends.

As expected, Andrew decided to try to take over. "Look, I know what celebrating is. It is something religious. Mum said they went to a wedding and a celebrant married the people. Celebrants marry people."

There was a very short silence finally broken by the quietest member of the group. "You are wrong. My grandfather had a birthday party last week and we were told we were celebrating it." Iris sounded very sure of herself.

"A wedding, a birthday. That must mean a party. So, it's a party about Die Verse City?" Jamal crowed. "See, I worked it out!"

"But what is Dye Verse City?" asked Mai.

"Die means dead." Andrew was certain in his tone.

"Nup. My mum dyes her hair black," Mai said.

"It could mean both or neither," Jess said after some thought. "Verse. Isn't that like nursery rhymes?"

"Nursery Rhymes are for babies. I am not a baby," Jamal said angrily, taking it personally, as usual.

Iris spoke again, shocking the rest of her group. "Verse is also poetry. Remember we had to read poems at assembly last year?"

An ominous silence fell. No one wanted to remember about the poetry. They had been teased by the older age groups, but they had no choice.

"And a city is a large place where people live," Andrew said triumphantly.

"Wow, Andrew! No one else knew that!" was Mai's jeering comment.

He glared at her for a moment and then tried to pretend he hadn't.

"It's a party about hair or death which has poetry in a city?" was Jess's hesitant guess.

"Or is it a dead city which uses poetry to celebrate?" Mai seemed uncertain, for a change.

"They both sound weird. Why are we talking about weird stuff?" Andrew said loudly and was quickly shushed by Mr Ong.

The group was quiet for a few minutes, not wanting to be 'in trouble' again, but each of them appeared to be thinking. Jamal was frowning, Jess closed her eyes, Iris drew a picture, Mai stared at the board and Andrew was biting his pencil.

"I know. It makes sense now. It's not Die verse city, it's Diver's City!" Jamal exclaimed.

"Where's that?" Andrew seemed interested in the suggestion.

"I don't know, but maybe it's new and important? Maybe all the rich people live there and want us to cerebrate ... or something." Jamal was sounding increasingly unsure.

"Does this mean we have a party and invite people? Who do we invite?" Jess tried to lead them back to whatever the topic was. It wasn't very clear and the discussion seemed to be stagnating.

"Everybody! We invite everyone!" Andrew seemed to like the idea.

"Everyone? Who? How?" Mai asked with derision in her tone. "Where is this party being held?"

"Why can't this be simple? Why didn't Ms Black explain? I'm confused," was Iris's comment.

Just then, Ms Black returned to the room. Every hand in the classroom was raised. It seemed all the students were confused.

Ms Black looked surprised as even Iris had her hand raised. "Iris, what is your question?"

"Ms Black, we don't know what those two words mean."

After three attempts Ms Black said, "We want people to be happy they are different in their own way."

"I'm not," said Jamal.

Celebrating Diversity, oh yeah!

Humphrey Jansz

CLAREMONT MEADOWS 2747

It was an early morning arrival into Sydney. I felt weak but eagerly joined the throng heading past duty-free shops to the waiting immigration officials. I'd been overseas for a short trip and had taken ill. Down-playing my symptoms, I'd taken an earlier return Qantas flight and was back on Australian soil. I looked up to the 'Australian Passport Holders' sign and breathed a sigh of relief. Home!

Four years earlier, I'd arrived as an eager immigrant from Sri Lanka by way of a work stint in the Middle East. Working in the airline industry, I'd had opportunity to visit Australia a couple of times before. But this time it was for a permanent stay, the 'real deal'. I'd been picked up at the airport where I'd stayed on previous visits, by my uncle. I'd been mildly apprehensive but mainly eager and excited. The dream had come true and I was now a bonafide soon-to-be Australian citizen.

Immigration to a 'western' country had always been a Sri Lanka dream. Growing up, through school and later, we'd looked with envy at Sri Lankans who'd been 'abroad' to use the old British term for travelling overseas. A bookworm, I'd grown up immersed in the adventures of characters from the pages of Enid Blyton, G.A. Henty, Henry Rider Haggard, Stevenson and later, Conan Doyle's inimitable Sherlock Holmes. To my juvenile mind, these writers symbolised a marvellous foreign place from whence these stories sprang. There were others who also saw England and later Australia as places of opportunity where dreams could come true. And so, from the 1960s and on to the 1970s, the departures gathered momentum.

I vividly recall my mother opening an aerogramme, that splendid thin sheet of blue paper which enabled cheap overseas letter-writing. It was from her old school friend and former neighbour. The words my mother read still resonate, "*Dearest Eileen. Australia is such a marvellous place. In Sri Lanka, I often struggled to find breakfast for my children. Now, I ask my children what they'd like to eat.*"

One year after arriving, my Kenyan fiancé joined me on a three month marriage visa and the wedding day was set. Prior to her arrival, chance had taken me to visit a friend in Sydney who then offered me a job at his work place. We'd made plans to travel by coach to Melbourne.

A week before the wedding, sharp chest pains were diagnosed as a heart attack. It was a body blow. I was 34, fit and strong but tests showed that my cholesterol level was sky-high. The wedding was postponed but time was limited. My fiancé's visa was running out. So after, a short stay in hospital and the cardiologist's instruction ('no exertion'), we travelled by train to the city and then coach to Melbourne. Imagine the thoughts of commuters who saw my fiancé struggling with our suitcase while I walked beside her. "Typical bloody Asian couple – the wife does all the work."

We returned to Sydney but still had hopes of going back to Melbourne. My cousin took delight in saying, 'Remember, the best road in Sydney is the Hume Highway, to Melbourne'.

But hopes began to grow dim as the 1990 recession bit deep and eventually, the down-payment on a house confirmed us as Sydney-siders. I've never regretted the decision.

My Melbournian uncle visited once, in winter. On a crisp, clear blue-skied winter morning, he looked up, savouring the bright sunshine and said 'My gosh, we don't have winters like this in Melbourne'. Ha!

In the first year of our marriage, I was treated to several Kenyan speciality dishes of varied taste. I later found out that my wife would try a dish and if it didn't turn out as expected or was slightly burned, it was offered to me as a 'Kenyan special dish'.

Two years after my heart attack, a bypass operation became a necessity and there were a few mishaps. But I came through, much leaner, somewhat depressed but alive. I have unstinting praise and gratitude for my nurses and doctors, the hospitals I had to stay in and the general medical system in Australia. I very likely would not have survived if still living in Sri Lanka.

The year after, we were blessed with the arrival of a daughter. I had never been comfortable around children but all that soon changed. My mother passed away the same year and I cherished my daughter's arrival even more. Through her growing years, kindergarten, primary school, my wife taking her to Little Athletics and swimming, my appreciation and thanks for the opportunities and facilities in this country was a living substance in me. Here we were, from two different backgrounds, accepted and living the Australian dream.

One year, the brilliant principal of my daughter's primary school decided to have a cultural day to celebrate the different ethnicities in his classrooms. The day was a resounding success with food from several countries, colourful national dresses and even a Kenyan chakacha, a hip-swaying Swahili dance in which the principal wrapped a leso (sarong type cloth) around his waist and joined the ladies.

So here it is – a Sri Lankan of mixed English, Portuguese, Dutch, Sri Lankan lineage, marries a Kenyan of direct Yemeni, Indonesian and African descent, in Melbourne. They move to and set up home in Sydney. Their only child now works in the national capital of which fact, they are immensely proud. Their friends, including fair-skinned anglo-saxons, are scattered among the various ethnic communities that make up NSW.

Living amidst the many peoples that make up greater Sydney, they remember their backgrounds, think fondly of and regularly communicate with the families left behind. But they are Australian to the core.

And that's fair dinkum Aussie cultural diversity mate.

Harmony – a Blending of Different Notes

Wendy Gordon

CRANEBROOK 2749

I was very young and shy when my grandmother hosted a Dutch family with two little girls. She looked after them in her home until they settled into their new land and found a home and work. The children, Hannah and Ulla, had blue eyes and thick blonde plaits. With my freckled face and short straight brown hair, I thought they were the epitome of beauty. This was my first experience of diversity.

I read books about children in England, and some who travelled to France or other countries. To me, these children were exciting and exotic.

I studied French at school, and became a language teacher; I enjoyed learning about the French culture as much as my students did. I knew I would live there one day, and travel around Europe.

My opportunity arrived, and I enjoyed two years in France, experiencing diverse friendships with people of all ages. I enjoyed the different ways of life, the food, music, dance and history, as well as the variety of architecture.

As I visited many regions, my pleasure and delight were never quenched, just aroused. I could not get enough of this magnificent, beautiful country and its diverse people, with immigrants from many nations. France was a melting pot of humanity.

During my travels, I experienced many of those special “moments frozen in time” when I almost gasped with disbelief. Here I was travelling the world! Yes, this was me – seeing snow for the first time, skiing in the French Alps, hearing cowbells in Switzerland, exploring Austria only previously known from the Sound of Music. Yes – I was indeed in Venice, in Saint Marco’s Square, dining by a canal watching gondolas glide by, listening to and watching a suave violinist playing nearby.

The diversity of people and experiences within Europe constantly filled me with a sense of wonder and delight. I learned much. Above all, I celebrated the diversity of humanity and its ways of life.

During my travels I was enriched not only by people and cultures, but by landscapes, sea-scapes, and cityscapes, and by the diversity within the world of nature, which enthralled me. Birds, sea creatures and animals I had only read about – I was able to appreciate these now at close quarters.

The diversity of people, places, flora and fauna – more than one life-time was needed to experience everything!

I assumed my travelling days were over when I settled into marriage and children. But no. We had the opportunity to live and work in Saudi Arabia for two years.

Here was diversity indeed. Desert landscapes, with oases and date palms, caves, sand dunes, blazing heat and mirages. Such a variety of cultures within this exotic land – ranging from Bedouin nomads with their camels, to impoverished workers, to royalty enjoying splendid palaces adorned with marble and gold.

There were camel races with young boys as jockeys, the mosques and prayer calls five times a day, and our weekly treat of tantalising Yemeni chicken and rice with cardamoms and cloves, from the roadside stalls. There were the souqs (markets) with incense and gold, and aromatic spices, and foods imported from every country of the world. It was as if we had experienced the world of Aladdin with his magic lamp. What diversity!

The children attended an international school with eighty-four nationalities represented – what diversity to celebrate – and they did! International Day saw a wealth of variety in dress, dance, foods, music, and customs.

Our blue-eyed four-year-old son had straight silky snow-white hair; his best friend was a black African boy with fuzzy black curls. They would walk everywhere patting each other's hair – enjoying the difference. Our eldest daughter's best friend was the daughter of an Egyptian doctor – she taught our daughter some Arabic. The next daughter, aged six, had an American boyfriend. They held hands under the table when teacher Miss Pearl from Hawaii was not looking! Her other best friend was a Danish girl.

The children, now grown up, still frequently chat about the diversity of their experiences in this vastly different culture.

After returning to Australia it was not long before we entered a new and very different world. We undertook long-term fostering of a severely disabled boy. So much to learn. We all, children included, learned to value and respect people for who they are, not for what they can do. There is such a range of abilities within humanity, from those who are fully dependent right through to genius level. All are to be valued. Those who offered respite care were also extremely diverse, including several who were heavily tattooed, and had multiple piercings all over their bodies, and very colourful hair – long before these were fashionable. Without exception, all had hearts of gold.

Celebrating diversity? First let's aim for acceptance, respect and appreciation, valuing and caring for our world, the world of nature and animals, and the peoples of the whole world.

Let's learn to understand differences, whether they be in value systems, religion, politics, ways of dressing, foods, music, or any other mode of difference. I don't need to know or agree with the beliefs of others before I value them as individuals. It is not my role to judge; I have never walked in their shoes.

Let's focus on differences to appreciate and celebrate them, not to reject those who are different. Otherwise, how do we learn? How do we grow? A narrow viewpoint leads to tunnel-vision, boredom, judgmental attitudes and hypocrisy.

"You don't get harmony when everyone sings the same note." (George Couros). Ultimately, I look forward to a time when there will be harmony amongst people of all nations, where they will be an infinite variety of creation's glories – and diversity will be fully manifested and celebrated.

Dans l'harmonie ce sont différentes notes qui se combinent

Wendy Gordon

CRANEBROOK 2749

J'étais très jeune et timide lorsque ma grand-mère accueillit une famille hollandaise avec leurs deux petites filles. Elle s'en est occupée chez elle jusqu'à ce que la famille s'installe dans son nouveau pays, une maison, avec un travail. Les enfants, Hannah et Ulla, avaient les yeux bleus et de grosses nattes blondes. Moi, avec mes taches de rousseur sur le visage et mes cheveux courts marrons, je trouvais qu'elles étaient ce qu'il peut y avoir de plus beau. Ça avait été ma première expérience de la diversité.

J'avais lu des livres qui parlaient d'enfants en Angleterre, dont certains allaient en France ou dans d'autres pays. Pour moi, ces fillettes représentaient l'excitation et l'exotisme.

J'avais appris le français à l'école et je suis maintenant professeur de langue : j'avais du plaisir, autant que mes élèves, à mieux connaître la culture française. Je savais qu'un jour j'irais vivre là-bas et voyager en Europe.

L'occasion s'est présentée et j'ai aimé les deux années passées en France, la découverte d'amitiés différentes avec des personnes de tout âge. J'ai aimé les différentes façons de vivre, la cuisine, la musique, la danse et l'Histoire, ainsi que la variété des architectures.

Lors des visites de nombreuses régions, le plaisir et l'agrément que j'avais ne s'épuisaient jamais, je désirais toujours plus encore. Je ne me lassais pas de ce beau et magnifique pays et de sa population diverse avec des immigrés venus de beaucoup de pays. La France était le brassage de toute l'humanité.

Durant mes voyages, j'ai connu beaucoup de moments uniques qui restent « gravés dans ma mémoire » et j'avais presque du mal à le croire. Eh bien, je voyageais dans le monde ! Oui, c'était bien moi – qui voyais la neige pour la première fois, faisais du ski dans les Alpes, entendais, en Suisse,

tinter les cloches des vaches, explorais l'Autriche que je n'avais connu qu'à travers La Mélodie du Bonheur. Oui, je me trouvais bien à Venise, sur la place San Marco, en train de dîner le long du canal en regardant les gondoles glisser sur l'eau en passant, suivant du regard et à l'écoute d'un violoniste qui jouait une musique suave, près de là.

La diversité des gens et des expériences que j'ai faites en Europe, m'a comblé d'étonnement et de plaisir. J'ai beaucoup appris. Plus que tout, je me suis réjouie de la diversité de l'humanité et de ses façons de vivre.

Au cours de mes voyages, j'ai été enrichie non seulement par les gens rencontrés et les cultures, mais aussi par les paysages naturels, les vues marines et les paysages urbains, en même temps que par la diversité de la nature qui m'a enchantée. Les oiseaux, animaux marins ou terrestres que j'avais connu à travers mes lectures – je pouvais maintenant les apprécier de près.

La diversité des gens, des lieux, de la faune et de la flore – il aurait fallu plus d'une vie pour faire l'expérience de tout cela !

Puis, je m'étais dit que le temps des voyages était révolu, une fois mariée et quand j'ai eu des enfants. Mais non ! Nous avons eu la possibilité d'aller vivre et de travailler pendant deux ans en Arabie-Saoudite

Là aussi, on trouvait la diversité. Des paysages désertiques avec des oasis et des palmiers dattiers, des grottes, des dunes de sable, la chaleur écrasante et les mirages. Avec une telle variété de culture sur cette terre exotique – que ce soient les nomades bédouins, avec leurs chameaux, les travailleurs pauvres ou la famille royale jouissant de splendides palaces de marbre et d'or.

Il y avait les courses de chameaux avec des petits garçons jockeys, les mosquées avec, cinq fois par jour, l'appel pour la prière et notre délice hebdomadaire de poulet yéménite au riz, avec cardamomes et clous de girofle, acheté à l'étal, dans la rue. On trouvait, dans les souks (les marchés), de l'encens et de l'or, des épices odorants et des plats cuisinés du monde entier. C'était comme si nous faisons l'expérience de l'univers d'Aladin avec sa lampe magique. Quelle diversité !

Les enfants allaient à l'école internationale où étaient présents des enfants de quatre-vingt-quatre nationalités – Quelle diversité à célébrer – et ils le faisaient ! Lors de la Journée internationale, il y avait une grande diversité de costumes, de danses, de nourritures, de musique et de coutumes.

Notre fils de quatre ans, aux cheveux blond cendré, avait comme meilleur ami un garçon Africain noir aux cheveux crépus. La meilleure amie de notre fille aînée était la fille d'un médecin égyptien – et elle apprenait un peu l'arabe à la mienne. Notre seconde fille, de six ans, avait un petit copain américain. Ils se tenaient par la main sous la table, quand la maîtresse, Miss Pearl d'Hawaï, ne regardait pas ! Son autre meilleure amie était danoise.

Les enfants, adultes maintenant, parlent encore souvent de leurs expériences multiples dans cette culture si différente.

Revenus en Australie, peu de temps après, nous sommes entrés dans un monde très différent. Nous nous sommes engagés prendre en charge, à long terme, un garçon sévèrement handicapé. Il y avait tant à apprendre. Nous avons tous, y compris nos enfants, appris à valoriser et respecter chaque personne pour ce qu'elle est et non pour ce qu'elle peut faire. Il y a une vaste gamme de capacités, au sein de l'humanité, depuis ceux

qui sont totalement dépendants jusqu'aux génies. Chacun a sa propre valeur. Ceux qui offraient le service de répit, étaient, eux aussi, très différents, certains avec le corps couvert de tatouages et percé de toutes parts, avec des cheveux de couleur exotique – tout cela, bien avant que ce soit la mode. Et, sans exception, ils avaient tous un cœur d'or.

Comment célébrer la diversité ? Il faut d'abord savoir accepter, respecter et apprécier, reconnaître la valeur et prendre soin de notre monde, le monde de la nature, des animaux et des peuples du monde entier.

Apprenons à comprendre les différences, qu'il s'agisse de systèmes de valeur, de religion, de politique, de mode d'habillement, de nourriture, de musique ou de tout autre sorte de différence. Je n'ai pas besoin de connaître les croyances des autres ou d'être d'accord avec elles, avant de les apprécier en tant que personne. Mon rôle n'est pas de juger : je ne me suis jamais trouvée à leur place.

Intéressons-nous aux différences pour les apprécier et les célébrer et non pour rejeter ceux qui sont différents. Autrement, comment pourrions-nous apprendre ? Comment allons-nous progresser ? Une vision étroite ne mène qu'à l'attitude bornée, l'ennui, le jugement et l'hypocrisie,

« Ce n'est pas l'harmonie quand tout le monde chante la même note. » (George Couros). Pour finir, j'espère qu'il y aura de l'harmonie entre les peuples de tous les pays, où il y aura des créations glorieuses – et où la diversité se manifesterait pleinement et sera célébrée.

An Act of Zemblanity

Frank O'Brien

CRANEBROOK 2749

You stand on the bridge as the sky burns in endless arrays of double helix, red-black, yellow-orange, blood-bile. The seas writhe in anguish as you vainly attempt to expel the angst threatening to explode from your very pores. The only white in this tempestuous kaleidoscope is the noise, the noise of shattered mirrors reassembling only to again shatter once more. Your ravenous eyes scrape the surface of this too solid flesh which never forms itself into a dew.

Somewhere, on the reverse side, there are others, beyond your grasp (like you but in negative) clutching at the edge of verisimilitude. You know that they are there, it is their breath upon your neck, their fingers at your throat, your temples, digging into your mind.

You stand amazed; dazzled by the spin, every mile of the 1,000 mph.

Do they feel it to? You dare not turn to see...

"Eric! Come in now it is getting late."

"I will come in once Venus has set."

"And when pray tell, will that be?"

"Soon, mamma, soon."

"At least put on your coat."

Anna knew there was no point in pleading or cajoling, he would eventually give up and, for a few hours at least, re-join the human race. She trudged back up the path leaving her solitary son to his one true love, the stars.

Where are you? I know you are there. Just waiting there, beyond the Medusa Nebula. A mere light – year away.

At close to midnight, Eric packed up his Orion XT10 and reluctantly followed his mother into the house.

His dreams were full of spiralling galaxies, of singularities and red dwarfs. The breath of long dead stars blew cosmic confetti across the universe of his mind. His heart beat in time with something primordial, something from a time before time.

"Robert Franklin?"

"Present."

"Amy Kepler?"

"Here."

"Eric Korngold?"

"Eric Korngold?"

"Eric are you with us?"

Mrs Burnell knew the answer to her question, before she asked. Eric was in the room but that did not necessarily ensure his presence. She had met with his mother, who had already had him 'tested' – "IQ, off the charts", awareness of surroundings below par.

Eric was watching the shadows that travelled furtively across his peripheral vision. The 'others' were watching more closely as he entered his final years of high school, their voices, insistent echoes...

In the ensuing silence of the room Eric acknowledged Mrs Burnell. His hand, seemingly autonomous, gestured towards her while his focus remained fixed upon his latest space-time equation.

Mrs Burnell seemed satisfied.

"The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Kavli Foundation would like to award the 2017 Kavli award for astrophysics to Dr Eric Korngold".

In his dusty tuxedo, borrowed from a colleague, Eric made his way to the stage. His uncertain gait and habitual 'checking', as if being followed, was too familiar to the scientific community to raise attention. His ground-breaking work into Parallel Universes had assured him an unassailable place in the pantheon of theoretical physicists.

"Congratulations, Dr Korngold."

Eric accepted the award with his usual detachment, his head slightly cocked as if listening to a distant voice.

DR ERIC KORNGOLD Phd

The sign on the door seemed incongruous with the boyish-balding man behind the desk.

"Come."

You walk in, past the clutter of star charts, yellow-brown, grey-sepia.

The face follows you in but the eyes are fixed on a television screen where cascades of rolling snow alternate intermittently with ghosts from some distant moon.

You wait.

The eyes gradually focus and register your presence.

"Yes?"

"Dr Korngold?"

"Just a minute!"

He rises and adjusts the picture.

"Been meaning to get this fixed before the launch."

"Dr Korngold..."

He resumes his seat.

"I need to speak to you about the Centauri III probe."

"Yes."

"It is not going ahead."

The eyes widen while the ashen face crumbles.

"I see."

"The funding Doctor, your estimates were... how can I put this delicately?"

"Forty-two million short?"

"Well, Yes."

"Details Myron, merely details."

Eric slowly rose from his chair and stood gazing through the screen, his back to Dr Myron Collins, Director of SOSRI – Seven Oaks, Space Research Institute.

Centauri II, was now a blip on the screen somewhere beyond the Crab Nebula.

Eric knew that the funds were insufficient to mount a third generation of the Centauri probe but the 'others' did not. Their presence was as palpable now, in his 63rd year, as they were at 13.

Myron excused himself.

Somewhere, just beyond the surface of reality, they waited. A congregation of vapours, 'willow-the-wisps', cold breath, on a warm night.

Eric had come to accept their presence over the years and they had, in turn, recognized a sympathetic soul, lost but redeemable. They had long ceased to disturb him.

As he grew older the one time obsession with distant stars now seemed quite natural for the astrophysicist he had become.

Were he ever to explain his true motivation for astral research, his life may have drastically altered its course.

My Back Lane

Paul Ryan

EMU PLAINS 2750

“Pullar’s out!” shouted Mrs Bradford from the back gate. Her son Dennis and a few other boys were playing cricket in the back lane which ran behind the rows of semi-detached houses in our inner suburban street. It was the summer of 1963. I was a snowy-haired nine year old, and Geoff Pullar was an opening batsman for the visiting English team playing in the January Test Match in Sydney. It must have been a Saturday afternoon and Mrs Bradford would have been listening to the cricket on the radio. No one in our street had a television in those days.

The cricket game in the back lane was a democratic event from which no boy would be turned away. Girls didn’t seem interested enough to join in, although Dennis’s younger sister would often sit on the gutter watching with a detached boredom. Being the youngest, I would be sent down the lane about twenty yards to be back stop. My job was to stop any wide balls that missed everything – the batsman, the wicketkeeper and the wicket which was a dented galvanised garbage bin.

My suburb in those days, like most of Australia, was generally monocultural but there was a sprinkling of Greeks, Italians and a couple of families that I later understood came from the Baltic states. They were among the 1950s migrants to Australia, economic and in some cases political refugees making a new start. I would occasionally hear adults using epithets such as “Reffos” or “Ities”, but I didn’t know what they meant, and I like to think that those terms were probably used as crude descriptors rather than casual racism.

In the back lane though we were just mates, a diverse gang that came together because we liked cricket. George was the Greek boy who had little idea of how to play a straight bat. Nor could he bowl with a straight arm, although no one would call him out for “chucking”. George’s family lived three doors up and you could hear Greek music playing from their record player, their front door always open as you walked past. Mario was the Italian boy who lived next door and he taught me how to count from one to ten in Italian.

The back lane had a factory wall on one side and the grey paling fences that guarded our small backyards created this lane canyon for our games. You could slog the ball into the wall and if someone caught the rebound in one hand you would be out. Alternatively, you could pretend you were Benaud or Harvey and try to play a straight drive along the ground.

On the day Mrs Bradford told us about Pullar getting out, our game was in full swing. Being the youngest, I was fielding in my usual position, hoping that my patience and dedication might be rewarded with a bat or a bowl. Mark was batting, Mario and George were fielding close in, Dennis was wicket keeping and two or three others were further up the lane hoping for a catch. Dennis’s sister had gone inside.

"Can I play?" From behind me came a shy request from a boy I remembered seeing a few days earlier. He'd been bouncing a tennis ball against the wall of his verandah as I returned with some groceries from Mr and Mrs Romeo's corner shop. He was about my age, new to the street. I asked him his name and he replied "Matis". Dennis was the oldest at thirteen and the only one who owned a bat. It was "his game" and so I spoke up on Matis's behalf. "Yeh, he can field next to you at back stop," Dennis confirmed, and Matis joined me in that least glamorous of fielding positions.

"Did you say Matis?" I asked him curiously, thinking I'd misheard.

"Yes, my parents come from Lithuania."

"Do they play cricket there?" I enquired.

"I don't think so," he answered politely, "but we do play ritinus which has a stick and a ball, so it might be the same."

While I was getting to know Matis, Mark launched into a big hit. The ball rebounded off the factory wall, over the palings and into a back yard. We all held our breath and a moment later came the chilling sound of shattering glass. Mark froze in terror and the rest of us looked at each other, not knowing what to do.

It didn't take long before the back gate opened and a flush-faced man appeared, spluttering with shock and indignation. "What you doing? Why you do this?" I recognised him as the new man in the street and made an instant connection. This was Matis's father!

He looked at all of us individually and we waited for the verbal onslaught, but then he spotted Matis. "Papa, it was an accident. These are my new friends." In those few moments the man changed. Perhaps he saw his younger self in his son. Perhaps he remembered a time back in Lithuania when he swung the ritmusa, a curved bat not unlike a cricket bat, in a game of ritinus, whacking a ball around a field.

"Window break. I can fix. Friendship break. I cannot fix." He smiled and I thought I saw tears welling in his eyes. The man returned the ball and we continued the game. Mark rewarded Matis with a turn at batting. "You've got a good dad, Matis," Mark added in a mixture of relief and admiration.

I look back on those innocent days, six decades past, and celebrate that time of an Englishman with a funny name, when Mrs Bradford would run out into the lane with progress scores, when I could hear Greek music, learn simple Italian, and accept and be accepted by boys of rich diversity. Most of all I remember Matis and his father, and a strangely tender moment in a back lane.

You're My Sister! Aren't You?

Susan Cootes

EMU HEIGHTS 2750

She was not like my friend's sisters. They shared things: thoughts, clothes, ideas secrets, laughs, as well as disagreements and at times harsh words.

I don't remember sharing any of these things as a child with her. But then again there was an 8 year age difference. So maybe that was why?

She and I, to a degree, lived our own lives and I almost felt like I was an only child instead of a little sister.

However, in saying that, my life was regimented by her needs and wants. Not that that really bothered me. That was just life. For example, we only ever watched one TV channel when I was a kid because that is what she wanted. She didn't like the other channels. Also, every afternoon after school instead of playing with my friends my mum and I went to Bondi Junction from Bronte, where we lived, to pick her up from the small bus that transported her to and from her Special needs school. Even though I missed out on the usual neighbourhood play I could always find some adventure in that afternoon ritual.

Yes, she was different. Looked different. Spoke different. Thought different. But she was still my sister. Just a different kind of sister to what my friends had. But different was normal to me!

By the way, my sister's name was Barbara, although she always got Barb or Barbie, and she had Downes Syndrome.

My mum's life centred mainly around caring for Barb's wants and needs and church. I believe her great faith was the strength that sustained her in these endless tasks and challenges, all of which were always accomplished with great patience and boundless amount of love. Although Barb's needs were at times many and therefore requiring a lot of attention I never felt neglected. To the contrary, both my parents made a special effort to give me special time and attention that resulted in my never feeling like I was missing out or less important. It probably helped that I was not a demanding child. I just went with the flow. Que Sera, Sera. Doris Day had my motto down pat.

As I mentioned, life was not without its challenges with Barb and for Barb. Her need for absolute routine and her lack of effective communication skills often resulted in difficult confrontations. In later years she was to develop a love for the music of Johnny O'Keefe and Col Joye. She had to play their records every Saturday, no questions or excuses accepted if we wanted peace in the household. But a small price to pay and let's face it their music was good. Then there were health problems that because of her cognitive impairment could be exasperating. But this was life, and this was hers and our family's normal. Through all this she did make progress in learning and social skills. Sometimes two steps forward and one step back but tiny steps are better than none.

As I grew, I don't believe that I realised how my sister helped shape my life and personality and not in a negative way but for the better. I was to eventually work for over 27 years in the field of Special Education believing that my life experiences gave me an insight into this specialized field.

Barb, while at school, learned how to make latch-hooked rugs so she loved to make these and give them to friends and family. She asked for very little in life. On birthdays and at Christmas she was happy to receive anything, small or large, but more importantly she was always happier to give a gift. She would often wrap up one of her own treasures and give that to mum or me for no other reason than she wanted to give. She had, and I hope taught me, a true generosity of spirit.

She also had an amazing ability to see true character in people. All the gushy flowery falseness of some folk went over Barb's head and it was as if she could see the true character. Quite a gift!

My mum and Barb are no longer with us however towards the end of their lives they both came to live with my family and me. My mum by this stage was nearing 90 and legally blind and Barb who was nearing 60, also, almost blind and losing a lot of the daily self-care skills she once possessed.

At times it was challenging but mainly it was a pleasure. We as a family grew in patience, understanding and acceptance far beyond what we already had.

I had the privilege of speaking at Barb's funeral and my theme was that Barb's life despite its challenges was a life to celebrate. Yes, her life's journey was not the same as you and I but instead she hopped, skipped and jumped to her own beautiful beat. (With the music of JO'K and Col Joye echoing through.)

One of my final memories of Barb and I talking together was her saying to me in her sometimes difficult to understand manner was "You're my sister! Aren't you?"

I replied with great joy and pride, "Yes, I am Barb!".

The Button Box

Ilona Krueger

SOUTH PENRITH 2750

The other day nostalgia visited me. I sorted through greeting cards, hoarded for years, and memories of friendships flooded my mind. Simple moments are jewels, I reflected, as these make up the substance of who we are.

Later, I discovered a long-forgotten box, filled to the brim with a multitude of buttons, every single one different from the rest. Immediately my child-like pastime of rummaging through the medley bewitched me. I was entranced, lost in a potpourri of delight as I placed button after button on the table. Whichever way they were placed, each one added its own flavour, its own value and its own uniqueness to the *mélange*.

Some were large, some tiny, others were somewhere between. Some were flamboyant and showy, while others hid behind a simple *façade*, beautiful and perfect in their own way. Some were brightly coloured and others were paler. Even similar colours were different in shade, size and feel. There were some that instantly caught my eye, while others hid in the background, like wallflowers, too timid to be noticed.

I loved every single button, each for what it was. There was no battle for acceptance, no pretence nor apology. Some had sharp edges, some were mellow. Some were asymmetrical and others fully in balance. A few were discoloured and marred, yet had their own beauty, and yet others were wrinkled or even broken. Different compositions, different weights, different durances. Aged in antiquity or individually innovative.

I placed them in patterns sometimes grouping them according to size or colour or purpose, other times at random. The patterns were never the same. They overlapped here and there and each time the picture was different. Each placement had a different effect on the greater community of buttons. It was exciting. It was fun.

The diversity was amazing. The diversity was countless. The diversity showed me something about the world. Something about people.

I imagined all the other button boxes and the endless miscellany. Thousands and millions of other buttons, all special in their own way. All worth something. All with the ability to hold separate pieces of fabric together. Creating a bridge. Creating a meeting point. Creating solidarity. A relationship.

It got me thinking. What if we were the buttons? The links of a bracelet that could hold each other together, or stop each other from falling apart. What if we were points of contact that related to each other in our own remarkable ways? What if we were part of a huge human collage that was fluid, transient and forever changing? What if we made an impact in one tiny subset of space, a familiar niche of friends, family, neighbours and co-workers? What if there were many other such niches, all with their world of variety?

There are many niches. We can fit here, we can fit there. We can absorb the richness and diversity of others while adding our own to the mix. There is an infinite panorama of combinations. And infinite opportunity to overlap, to bring love and joy to the forefront, or perhaps to learn from each other's insights and experiences.

When all is said and done, it's the small things that count. Which one of us has not been touched by the handful of weeds lovingly picked and presented by a small child? Which one of us has not felt uplifted by a half-smile from a stranger? Which one of us has not shed a tear over the suffering of a stranger in another part of the world? Or felt angry about something that doesn't directly affect us?

I saw a man in a shadow the other day. Only for a fraction of a second and yet I remember the image clearly. His clothes were in strips. Not just a hole or a worn spot or dirty. But in actual shreds. He carried a plastic bag with probably no more than three or four things in it.

Because of the tiny time-frame in which I glimpsed him, I initially wondered whether he was real or just a flickering tangent of thought. I am sure he was real. He seemed destitute. Wealth hadn't crossed his path. Or maybe it had. What was his story? In his rags, he certainly didn't look like a celebrity. And yet, he was someone's son, worthy of recognition. He looked weak and yet he must have had the strength to carry on in the face of adversity. Was he educated? What were his skills? Who loved him? Where did his thoughts take him, day in and day out? I wondered who else had seen him or if they even wanted to. I wondered about self-seeking attitudes and the exponential entitlement proclamations where some people felt like they were more deserving than others.

So many questions, but no answers.

And that's the thing. We don't know the stories. We don't know the circumstances. We don't know the real person inside the deepest layers. Their sufferings. Their joys. Their mistakes. Their successes. But one thing for sure, we are all in the button box, thrown into vast diversity. And we all have to live with each other.

People can be broken and still go on. There can be many reasons. Some of us do not fit the formula. We feel out of place. Like a hairy wart on a smooth face. Like a fish in a sandpit. Like a dangling button, on a beautiful garment.

People can see but still be blind. People can hear but still not listen. People can say they love but nevertheless have a stone-cold heart.

I kept scrabbling around in the button box and the status quo changed. I pulled out a sad-looking one, scratched and cracked, battered by its surroundings, the colour worn off. I wondered about the tale it had to tell.

I thought: Which button am I? Which one are you?

The button box is a treasure for its diversity. What a great reason to celebrate!

Die Knopfschachtel

Ilona Krueger

SOUTH PENRITH 2750

Vor kurzem überkam mich Nostalgie. Ich sortierte die Postkarten, die ich jahrelang gehört hatte, und Erinnerungen an Freundschaften überfluteten meine Gedanken. Einfache Momente sind Juwelen, dachte ich, denn sie machen die Substanz dessen aus, was wir sind.

Etwas später fand ich eine längst vergessene Schachtel, die bis zum Rand mit verschiedenen Knöpfen gefüllt war, jeder einzelne anders als die anderen. Der kindliche Zeitvertreib, das Sammelsurium zu durchstöbern, zog mich sofort in seinen Bann. Ich war wie verzaubert und verlor mich in einem vergnügten Potpourri, als ich einen Knopf nach dem anderen auf den Tisch legte. Unabhängig davon, wie sie platziert waren, fügte jeder seine eigene Note, seinen eigenen Wert und seine Einzigartigkeit zu der Mischung hinzu.

Manche waren groß, manche winzig, andere dazwischen. Einige waren extravagant und auffällig, andere versteckten sich hinter einer schlichten Fassade und waren auf ihre Weise schön und perfekt. Einige waren leuchtend bunt, andere blasser. Selbst ähnliche Farben unterschieden sich in Farbton, Größe und Textur. Einige fielen mir sofort ins Auge, während andere sich im Hintergrund versteckten, wie Mauerblümchen, zu schüchtern, um beachtet zu werden.

Mir gefiel jeder einzelne Knopf für das, was er war. Sie mussten nicht um Akzeptanz ringen, sich verstellen oder sich entschuldigen. Einige hatten scharfe Kanten, andere waren glatt. Einige waren asymmetrisch, andere vollkommen ausgeglichen. Einige waren verfärbt und beschädigt, hatten aber dennoch ihre eigene Schönheit, und wieder andere waren zerkratscht oder sogar zerbrochen. Unterschiedliche Zusammensetzungen, unterschiedliche Gewichte, unterschiedliche Dauerhaftigkeit. Gealtert bis zur Antiquität oder individuell innovativ.

Ich ordnete sie in Mustern an, manchmal gruppierte ich sie nach Größe, Farbe oder Zweck, manchmal wahllos. Die Muster waren nie die gleichen. Sie überlappten sich hier und da, aber jedes Mal ergab sich ein anderes Bild. Jede Platzierung hatte eine andere Wirkung auf die größere Gemeinschaft der Knöpfe. Es war aufregend. Es machte Spaß.

Die Vielfalt war umwerfend. Die Vielfalt unzählig. Die Vielfalt eröffnete mir etwas über die Welt. Etwas über die Menschen.

Ich stellte mir all die anderen Schachteln mit Knöpfen und deren endlose Vielfalt vor. Tausende und Millionen anderer Knöpfe, die alle auf ihre eigene Art besonders waren. Die alle ihren eigenen Wert hatten. Alle hatten die Fähigkeit, Stoffstücke zusammenzuhalten. Sie bildeten eine Brücke. Schufen einen Treffpunkt. Sie schafften Solidarität. Eine Beziehung.

Das brachte mich zum Nachdenken. Was wäre, wenn wir Knöpfe wären? Die Glieder eines Armbands, die sich gegenseitig zusammenhielten oder vor dem Auseinanderfallen bewahrten. Was wäre, wenn wir Berührungspunkte wären, die auf unsere eigene bemerkenswerte Weise miteinander in Beziehung standen? Was wäre, wenn wir Teil einer riesigen menschlichen Collage wären, die fließend, vergänglich und ständig im Wandel ist? Was wäre, wenn wir in einem winzigen Teil des Raums etwas bewirken könnten, in einer vertrauten Nische von Freunden, Familie, Nachbarn und Arbeitskollegen? Was wäre, wenn es viele andere solcher Nischen gäbe, jede mit ihrer eigenen Welt der Vielfalt?

Es gibt viele Nischen. Wir passen hierhin, wir passen dorthin. Wir können den Reichtum und die Vielfalt anderer absorbieren und gleichzeitig unsere eigene in die Mischung einbringen. Es gibt ein unendliches Panorama an Kombinationen. Und unendlich viele Möglichkeiten, sich zu überschneiden, die Liebe und Freude in den Vordergrund zu stellen, oder vielleicht von den Einsichten und Erfahrungen der anderen zu lernen.

Letzten Endes sind es die kleinen Dinge, die zählen. Wurde nicht jeder von uns schon einmal von einer Handvoll Unkraut zutiefst berührt, die ein kleines Kind liebevoll gepflückt und uns geschenkt hatte? Fühlte sich nicht jeder von uns schon einmal durch ein halbes Lächeln eines Fremden ermutigt? Vergoss nicht jeder von uns schon einmal Tränen über das Leid eines Fremden in einem anderen Teil der Welt? Oder ärgerte sich über etwas, das ihn nicht direkt betraf?

Vor kurzem sah ich einen Mann in einem Schatten. Nur für den Bruchteil einer Sekunde, aber ich erinnere mich deutlich an das Bild. Seine Kleidung war in Fetzen. Sie hatte nicht nur ein Loch oder eine abgenutzte Stelle oder war schmutzig. Sie war wahrhaftig in Fetzen. Er trug eine Plastiktüte, in der wahrscheinlich nicht mehr als drei oder vier Dinge waren.

Aufgrund des winzigen Zeitfensters, in dem ich ihn sah, fragte ich mich zuerst, ob er echt war oder nur das Aufflackern eines Gedankens. Ich bin sicher, dass er echt war. Er schien mittellos zu sein. Reichtum war nicht in sein Leben gekommen. Oder vielleicht doch. Was war seine Geschichte? In seinen Lumpen sah er auf jeden Fall nicht wie eine Berühmtheit aus. Und doch war er der Sohn von jemandem, der Anerkennung verdiente. Er sah schwach aus, und doch muss er die Kraft gehabt haben, trotz aller Widrigkeiten weiterzumachen. Hatte er eine Ausbildung? Welche Fähigkeiten hatte er? Wer liebte ihn? Welchen Gedanken hing er nach, tagein, tagaus? Ich fragte mich, wer ihn sonst noch

gesehen hatte oder ob ihn überhaupt jemand sehen wollte. Ich dachte an die selbstsüchtigen Haltungen und die himmelhohen Ansprüche mancher Leute, die meinten, sie hätten mehr verdient als andere.

So viele Fragen, aber keine Antworten.

Und genau das ist der Punkt. Wir kennen die Geschichten nicht. Wir kennen die Umstände nicht. Wir kennen den wahren Menschen im tiefsten Inneren nicht. Seine Leiden. Seine Freuden. Seine Fehler. Seine Erfolge. Aber eines ist sicher: Wir sind alle in der Knopfschachtel zusammengewürfelt, in einer großen Vielfalt. Und wir müssen alle miteinander leben.

Menschen können zerbrechen und trotzdem weitermachen. Aus vielen Gründen. Einige von uns passen nicht in das Schema. Wir fühlen uns fehl am Platz. Wie eine haarige Warze auf einem glatten Gesicht. Wie ein Fisch in einer Sandkiste. Wie ein loser Knopf an einem schönen Kleidungsstück.

Menschen können sehen, aber dennoch blind sein. Menschen können hören, aber dennoch nicht zuhören. Menschen können sagen, dass sie lieben, und dennoch ein eiskaltes Herz haben.

Ich kramte weiter in der Schachtel herum und der Status quo änderte sich. Ich zog einen traurig aussehenden Knopf heraus, der zerkratzt und zerbrochen war, von seiner Umgebung ramponiert, seine Farbe war abgenutzt. Ich fragte mich, welche Geschichte er zu erzählen hatte.

Ich dachte nach: Welcher Knopf bin ich? Welcher bist du?

Die Knopfschachtel ist ein Schatz, weil sie so vielfältig ist. Das ist wahrhaftig ein Grund zum Feiern!

Harvard ex situ During Covid-19

Evelyn A Opilas

ROOTY HILL 2766

The year is 2020. Shock, horror, disbelief—a worldwide lockdown is upon us. The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus that results in the Covid-19 illness has imposed its unseen, unwanted, infectious presence. I am on enforced home detention, allowed to go out only for essential errands, with face masks a mandatory accessory. My son checks on my whereabouts like a parole officer would. No Masses to attend in person, no religious rituals, spiritual nourishment by remote control.

I had a Life B.C.E. (Before Covid-19 encroached)—community activities, international travel, train rides to Sydney for Mass at either St. Mary's Cathedral, St. Patrick's Catholic Church, The Rocks, or St Peter Julian's Catholic Church, Haymarket, long lunches with kindred spirits, and most importantly, precious time with my son Jops, granddaughter Heléna, and siblings Yvonne, Raoul, and Lorna and her family (husband Robert; daughters Mae and Michelle).

"Pause" clicked indefinitely as Australia locked down 24 March 2020. Life A.D. (After detention) seemed far away.

'Let nothing disturb you...' flashed the mantra of St. Teresa of Avila, the feisty 16th century saint and Doctor of the (Catholic) Church, who was also patron saint of the school I went to in the Philippines, as the reality of indefinite lockdown sunk in.

There seem to be two extremes that coexist in me as a result of my education at St Theresa's College, Quezon City. On the one hand, I learned to be idealistic, to subscribe to the Aquinian view of the true, the good, and the beautiful. On the other hand, having been freed to tangle with the world's seemingly flawed sense of what is true, good, and beautiful, I subconsciously developed a sceptical persona. My cloak.

Imagine a life nurtured, developed, honed at St Theresa's from Kindergarten to College—sixteen years of moulding, okay, brainwashing, as some of my former colleagues playfully suggested.

St Theresa's College on D. (Don Jose Severo) Tuazon Avenue was home, an all-girls convent school with St Teresa of Avila as its role model—*"Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. All things are passing away. God never changes..."*

The saint's refrain became *de rigueur* in my indoctrination. It would also help me deal with my sceptical reception of what would eventually be two years of isolation, strict compliance, and self-preservation during the pandemic.

One of my Viber chat groups provided relief when a former classmate, Sydneysider Alice Dimalanta-Jones, thoughtfully posted a list of free online activities to keep us busy while the lockdown malingered. Most of us were nearing, or in, our seventies.

"For our mental health and well-being," came the reminder.

Browsing the list led me to Justice, a free online course offered by Harvard University under a leading political philosopher, Professor Michael J. Sandel, which attracted over 400,000 participants worldwide. It seemed unreal that a brief stroll through the Harvard campus in 2016 would lead to study *ex situ* in 2020.

Professor Sandel reminded me of Sr. M. Christiane ICM, a Belgian nun who lectured in Philosophy and whose classes I attended at St. Theresa's for my Bachelor of Arts degree in the late sixties. Sr. M. Christiane had a passion for the philosophers Aristotle (Greek) and Immanuel Kant (German). She pushed my ability to reason to the point of restlessness (the "restlessness" would recur as I balanced motive, duty, purpose in some of my life-altering choices). I tried hard to understand her explanations of Aristotle's teleology and Kant's categorical imperative. Simply put, teleology focuses on how purpose can be found in nature while categorical imperative requires one to act according to a law one gives to self that it becomes universal law.

Those two semesters in Sr. M. Christiane's classes made me wonder what drove St. Theresa's College to encourage philosophical debate among her teenaged collegiates, most of whom giggled a lot over nothing and everything.

Professor Sandel's passion for political philosophy, as a communitarian philosopher himself, would resurrect Sr. M. Christiane's file from my cerebral archives.

"Philosophy estranges us from the familiar not by supplying new information but by inviting and provoking a new way of seeing but, and here's the risk, once the familiar turns strange, it's never quite the same again," the professor forewarned.

As I progressed through the self-paced course, I was introduced to previously unmet philosophers, including Jeremy Bentham, Robert Nozick, and John Rawls and their contributions to political thought.

I also had to post my comments on the discussion board and pit my brain with those of the other students from various countries, most of whom would probably be the same age as the younger members of my family.

The familiar names of Kant and Aristotle came up, too, and Sr. M. Christiane would have agreed with Professor Sandel that "Self-knowledge is like lost innocence, however unsettling you (may) find it. It can never be unthought or unknown."

The Justice course at Harvard reunited me with my Philosophy classes of long ago at St. Theresa's College, and made me realize I could still navigate education 50 years later, albeit in a different mode. Having been used to learning where a teacher towered over students seated on their respective desks, online learning gave me the flexibility of studying on my own terms—my time, my pace, my concentration span. I also passed the final exams comparatively well with 72 points, the required pass mark being 60 points.

"Simply to acquiesce in scepticism can never suffice to overcome the restlessness of reason." Professor Sandel's words nudged my consciousness.

The restlessness of reason afflicted me, an unwitting legacy of Sr. M. Christiane's passion for Philosophy as I faced the ramifications of Covid-19 in 2020.

Harvard ex situ sa Panahon ng COVID-19

Evelyn A Opilas

ROOTY HILL 2766

Ang taon ay 2020. Nabigla, kinilabutan, hindi makapaniwala—isang pandaigdigang lockdown ang bumalot sa atin. Ang SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus na sanhi ng sakit na COVID-19 ay nagpataw ng hindi nakikita, hindi ninanais at nakakahawang presensya nito. Ako ay napilitang manatili sa bahay, pinapayagan lamang lumabas kung kailangang-kailangan, inatasang magsuot ng face mask. Inaalam ng aking anak na lalaki ang mga lugar na pinupuntahan ko, na gaya ng ginagawa ng isang parole officer. Walang mga misa na madadaluhan nang harapan, walang mga panrelihiyong ritwal; ang nagbibigay sustansya sa espiritu ay sa pamamagitan ng remote control.

Mayroon akong Life B.C.E. (Before COVID-19 Encroached) o Buhay Bago Nanghimasok ang COVID-19 — mga aktibidad sa komunidad, paglalakbay sa ibang bansa, pagsakay sa tren papuntang Sydney para dumalo sa Misa sa St. Mary's Cathedral, sa St. Patrick's Catholic Church, sa The Rocks, o sa St Peter Julian's Catholic Church, Haymarket, maghaponing mga tanghalian na kasama ang mga kapalagayang-loob, at higit sa lahat, mahahalagang sandali kasama ang aking anak na si Jops, apo na si Heléna, at mga kapatid na sina Yvonne, Raoul, at si Lorna at ang kanyang pamilya (asawang si Robert; mga anak na babae na sina Mae at Michelle).

Ang “Pause” ay na-click nang walang katiyakan kung hanggang kailan tatagal habang ang Australya ay naka-lock down noong Marso 24, 2020. Life A.D. (After Detention) o Ang Buhay Pagkatapos ng Detensyon ay tila matatagalan pa.

'Huwag mong hayaang may makagambala sa iyo...' nagbalik sa aking alaala ang mantra ni St. Teresa ng Avila, ang matapang na santa noong ika-16 na dantaon at Doktor ng Simbahang (Katoliko), na siyang santong patron din ng paaralang pinasukan ko sa Pilipinas, habang unti-unting natatanggap ang katotohanan ng lockdown na walang katiyakan kung hanggang kailan.

Tila may dalawang sukdulang katotohanan na nabubuhay sa aking kaibuturan bilang kinahinatnan ng aking pag-aaral sa St Theresa's College, Quezon City. Sa isang banda, natuto akong maging idealistiko, umayon sa pananaw na Aquinian kung ano ang totoo, ang mabuti, at ang maganda. Sa kabilang banda, dahil naging malaya akong makipagniig sa tila maling pakahulugan ng mundo sa kung ano ang totoo, ang mabuti, at ang maganda, hindi ko namalayan na nagkaroon ako ng mapag-alinlangang katauhan (sceptical persona). Ang nagsilbing aking balabal.

Subukang isipin ang isang buhay na inalagaan, pinaunlad, hinasa sa St Theresa's mula Kindergarten hanggang Kolehiyo—labing anim na taon ng paghubog, o sige, sabihin na nating, *brainwashing*, gaya ng pabirong iminungkahi ng ilan sa dati kong mga kasamahan.

Ang St Theresa's College sa D. (Don Jose Severo) Tuazon Avenue ay ang aking tahanan, isang pambabaeng paaralang pinatatakbo ng mga madre kung saan si St Teresa of Avila ang huwaran ng paaralan —*"Huwag hayaang may makagambala sa iyo. Huwag hayaang may tumakot sa iyo. Lahat ng bahay ay naglalaho. Ang Diyos ay hindi nagbabago..."*

Ang refrain ng santa ay naging *de rigneur* ng aking indoktrinasyon. Nakatulong din ito sa akin na harapin ang aking mapag-alinlangan (sceptical) na pagtanggap sa pagbubukod ng sarili, mahigpit na pagsunod, at pangangalaga sa sarili sa panahon ng pandemya na bandang huli ay tumagal ng dalawang taon.

Isa sa aking mga Viber chat group ay naging daan upang gumaan ang aking nararamdaman, nang ang isang dating kaklase, ang taga-Sydney na si Alice Dimalanta-Jones, ay mapagmalasakit na nag-post ng listahan ng mga libreng online na aktibidad upang panatilihin kaming abala habang ang lockdown ay nagbabantag magtagal. Karamihan sa amin ay malapit na, o nasa edad na ng sisenta.

"Para sa kalusugan ng ating isip at kagalingan," ang siyang naging paalala.

Sa pagbabasa sa listahan, ako ay dinala sa Justice, isang libreng kurso sa online na inaalok ng Harvard University sa ilalim ng nangungunang pilosopo sa pulitika, si Propesor Michael J. Sandel, na umakit ng mahigit 400,000 kalahok sa buong mundo. Hindi ko lubos maisip na ang sandaling pamamasyal sa Harvard campus noong 2016 ay hahantong sa aking pag-aaral dito nang *ex situ* sa 2020.

Binubuhay ni Propesor Sandel sa aking alaala si Sr. M. Christiane ICM, isang Belgian na madre na nagturo ng Filosopiya, kung saan pinasukan ko ang mga klase sa St. Theresa's para sa aking titulong Batsilyer sa Sining noong huling bahagi ng dekada sisenta. Si Sr. M. Christiane ay marubdob sa mga pilosopong si Aristotle (Griyego) at Immanuel Kant (Aleman). Itinulak niya ang aking kakayahang mangatwiran hanggang sa punto ng restlessness o di mapakali (ang "restlessness" ay naulit habang binabalanse ko ang motibo, tungkulin, layunin ng ilan sa aking mga pinili na nakapagbago sa buhay). Sinubukan kong unawain ang kanyang mga paliwanag tungkol sa teleolohiya ni Aristotle at sa imperatibong kategorikal (categorical imperative) ni Kant. Sa madaling salita, ang teleolohiya ay nakatuon kung paano matatagpuan ang layunin sa kalikasan; samantalang sa imperatibong kategorikal, kinakailangang kumilos ng tao ayon sa batas na ibinigay niya sa sarili kung saan ito ay nagiging universal law.

Ang dalawang semestre ng klase ni Sr. M. Christiane ay nagpa-isip sa akin kung ano ang nagtulak sa St. Theresa's College na hikayating magdebate tungkol sa pilosopiya ang mga kabataang mag-aaral na sa kaunting kibot ay madalas humagigkik tungkol sa anumang bagay.

Ang pagkamarubdob ni Propesor Sandel sa pilosopiyang pulitikal, bilang isa ring communitarian philosopher, ay naging-daan upang muli kong buklatin ang file ni Sr. M. Christiane na nakatabi sa arkibo ng aking isipan.

"Inilalayo tayo ng pilosopiya sa pamilyar hindi sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay ng bagong impormasyon, kundi sa pamamagitan ng pag-anyaya na pukawin ang ating isip ng bagong paraan ng pagtingin; ngunit, narito ang panganib, kapag ang pamilyar ay naging kakaiba, hindi na ito magiging tulad ng dati," paunang babala ng propesor.

Habang sumusulong ako sa kurso ayon sa sarili kong bilis, nakilala ko ang mga hindi pa dating nakikilalang pilosopo, kabilang sina Jeremy Bentham, Robert Nozick, at John Rawls at ang kanilang mga kontribusyon sa kaisipang politikal.

Kinailangan ko ring i-post ang mga komento ko sa discussion board at makipagtagisan ng talino sa iba pang mga mag-aaral mula sa iba't ibang bansa, na karamihan ay malamang na kasing-edad lamang ng mga nakababatang miyembro sa aking pamilya.

Ang mga pamilyar na pangalan nina Kant at Aristotle ay nabanggit din, at si Sr. M. Christiane ay malamang na sasang-ayon kay Propesor Sandel na "Ang kaalaman sa sarili ay tulad ng naglahong kamuwangan, gaano man ito nakakabahala sa iyo, hinding-hindi ito maaaring burahin sa isipan o burahin sa kaalaman."

Ang kursong Justice sa Harvard ay muli akong ini-ugnay sa aking mga klase sa Pilosopiya noong nakaraan sa St Theresa's College, at napagtanto kong maaari pa rin akong maglakbay sa edukasyon makalipas ang 50 taon, kahit na sa ibang paraan. Palibhasa'y nasanay ako sa pag-aaral kung saan ang isang guro ay nakatataas sa mga mag-aaral na nakaupo sa kani-kanilang mga mesa, ang online na pag-aaral ay nagbigay sa akin ng kakayahang iangkop ang pag-aaral sa aking mga kondisyon—sa aking oras, sa aking bilis at sa itatagal ng aking kakayahang ituon ang aking isipan. Naipasa ko rin ang mga huling pagsusulit na may 72 puntos na kung tutuusin ay napakahusay kung ihahambing sa pasadong marka na 60 puntos lamang.

"Ang simpleng pagsang-ayon sa pag-aalinlangan (scepticism) ay hindi kailanman sapat upang madaig ang restlessness ng katwiran." Ang mga salita ni Propesor Sandel ay pumukaw sa aking kamalayan.

Taglay ko ang restlessness ng katwiran, isang hindi sinasadyang pamana ng pagkamarubdob sa Pilosopiya ni Sr. M. Christiane, habang hinaharap ko ang mga epekto ng COVID-19 noong 2020.



Life Journey of a Pakistani Scientist

Prof. Mohammad A Kamal

HEBERSHAM 2770

In the 1960s, a Pakistani family was blessed with a weak boy underweight.

Bypassing time, he was enrolled in a local primary school, where students were sitting on the ground in the classes. Along with the physiological growth of his body, there was intellectual nourishment as well, reflected by the completion of his Master's degree in Chemistry (with specialization in Biochemistry) in 1986 from the Chemistry Department, Gomal University, Pakistan.

On the basis of my first position in the M.Sc. (excellence in Biochemistry), as an adult, I received an award to serve as an accomplished Lecturer in the same Department for five years. Thereafter I was awarded a 5-year sabbatical overseas. A significant segment of my research career, 10 years, was spent within the Department of Biochemistry, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, elucidating the interaction of various chemicals and drugs (both anti-cancer and anti-Alzheimer's agents) on the key enzyme (acetylcholinesterase), which is fundamental to nervous system function and life.

Later on, I obtained a PhD in 1999 from the Chemistry Department, Islamia University Bahawalpur, Pakistan. My research output culminated in more than 600 publications in internationally respected journals. The research was pivotal in supporting the development of the novel drug, phenserine, from the laboratory to the clinic via collaboration with Dr Nigel H. Greig. He is Chief of Neurosciences section in the USA. This is exemplified by his pivotal involvement in the development of a new class of experimental drugs for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease as well.

One day, coming out of the Pakistan Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, I saw many people coming and going to the neighbouring new embassy building which sparked my curiosity to figure out the reason for public interest there. Inside, I found it was the Australian Embassy. At the counter, one lady asked: "How can I help you?"

Nothing was on my mind specifically, so when she repeated the question, I became nervous as a long queue of people was waiting to be served and everyone could hear the conversations. "Do you have some information about Australia?"

"Do you mean a package?" she asked.

"Uhm..., yes".

I was handed an A4 brown envelope (package) and asked to pay \$30 Riyals. I felt confused about whether to pay money because I was expecting free brochures and leaflets. Back in my car, I said to myself, "Why did I go there and waste money?" because I never spent money without good reason. At home, I opened the envelope and read the material. It included application forms for migration, but I put them aside for several months. Filling them out one day I lodged them by paying ~SR1500 as a lodgement fee and then correspondence was initiated with the immigration office in Greece.

I received advice to enter Australia before April 1998. At that time when we came here, the family missed Saudi Arabia, so after spending just one week, we flew back to Riyadh.

We again migrated to Australia after gaining a prestigious U2000 Postdoctoral Fellowship in the year 2000 that was awarded by the University of Sydney, School of Molecular and Microbial Biosciences. That three year highly competitive award supported 15 Fellowships from some 300 applicants through the world, and funded my research on "Inhibition of amido phosphoribosyltransferase by new antifolates: Design and mechanism of action of purine antagonists".

My research within the University of Sydney was focused on the inhibition of the rate-limiting enzyme, which catalyzes the first committed step of the *de novo* purine pathway. This is of critical and immediate relevance for the development of novel selective antifolate-type inhibitors as effective anticancer drugs.

I received a Hamdan Award for my original research article, "A new, simple and economical approach to analyze the inhibition kinetics of acetylcholinesterase using Tolserine" which was published in 2002. I have developed radically new techniques that define useful new kinetic parameters to quantitatively elucidate the interaction between substrates, inhibitors, and enzymes that others are now routinely beginning to utilize.

Such work is providing others the tools and knowledge to design the selective and effective medicines of tomorrow.

Regarding my international awards, they include "Young Researcher Award" for attending the first Forum for European-Australian Science and Technology Cooperation event in 2001; a competitive travel Fellowship from the International Society for Neurochemistry for participation and presentation of their research at the Xth International Symposium on Cholinergic Mechanisms at Arcachon, France in 1998 and a competitive Fellowship for the Third Regional Training Workshop on Plant Biotechnology at the Centre of Advanced Molecular Biology, University of Punjab, Pakistan in 1988. I was honoured as a member of the Australian Institute of Medical Scientists; The Royal Australian Chemical Institute Inc.; and the "International Scientific Advisory Board" of the International Institute of Anticancer Research.

In March 2011, I joined King Fahd Medical Research Center (KFMRC), King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia as a full professor resigning in Jan 2013 to accept their offer of Distinguish Adjunct Professor. During my stay there, I established a 'Research Group' of "Fundamental and Applied Biology Group" as well as the 'Research Unit' of "Metabolomics & Enzymology Unit".

I served on KFMRC Publication Committee (KPC) and was selected as a scientific member of Chair "Yousef Abdul Latif Jameel Therapeutic Applications in the Prophet's medicine". Moreover, still, I serve as a guest editor of various prestigious journals' special issues on an honorary basis.

No longer underweight and seeing Jesus Christ in a dream and a couple of visions as well I am nearing retirement and plan to serve in the real estate sector, as well as with community services as a NSW JP.

After reading my story, would you agree my life has been diverse?

Arcachon، فرانس میں Cholinergic میکانزم پر Xویں بین الاقوامی سمپوزیم میں شرکت اور ان کی تحقیق کو پیش کرنے کے لیے بین الاقوامی سوسائٹی برائے نیورو کیمسٹری کی جانب سے ایک مسابقتی سفری فیلووشپ اور 1988 میں سنٹر آف ایڈوانسڈ مالیکیولربیالوجی، پنجاب یونیورسٹی، پاکستان میں پلانٹ بائیو ٹیکنالوجی پر تیسری علاقائی تربیتی ورکشاپ کے لیے مسابقتی فیلووشپ شامل ہیں۔ میری بطور رکن آسٹریلین انسٹیٹیوٹ آف میڈیکل سائنسٹس؛ رائل آسٹریلین کیمیکل انسٹیٹیوٹ؛ اور انٹرنیشنل انسٹیٹیوٹ آف اینٹی کینسر ریسرچ کے "انٹرنیشنل سائنٹیفک ایڈوائزری بورڈ" میں عزت افزائی کی گئی۔

مارچ 2011 میں، میں نے کنگ فہد میڈیکل ریسرچ سینٹر (KFMRC)، کنگ عبدالعزیز یونیورسٹی، سعودی عرب، میں بطور فل پروفیسر کے جوائن کیا اور جنوری 2013 میں استعفی دیکر وہیں بطور امتیازی ایڈجنکٹ پروفیسر کی پیشکش کو قبول کیا۔ وہاں اپنے قیام کے دوران، میں نے "بنیادی و اپلائڈ بیالوجی گروپ" کا ایک 'ریسرچ گروپ' اور ساتھ ہی "میٹابولومکس و ایٹانالوجی یونٹ" کا 'ریسرچ یونٹ' بھی قائم کیا۔

میں نے KFMRC پبلیکیشن کمیٹی (KPC) میں خدمات سرانجام دیں اور مجھے چیئر (Chair) "ادویات نبوی میں یوسف عبداللطیف جمیل تھراپیٹک ایپلی کیشنز" کے سائنٹفک ممبر کے طور پر منتخب کیا گیا۔ مزید برآں، ابھی بھی، میں اعزازی بنیادوں پر مختلف ممتاز جرائد کے خصوصی شماروں کے مہمان مدیر کے طور پر خدمات سرانجام دیتا ہوں۔

اب میں کم وزن نہیں رہا ہوں اور میں نے یسوع مسیح کو خواب میں دیکھا ہے اور ساتھ ہی میں ریٹائرمنٹ کے قریب ہوں اور میں رٹیل اسٹیٹ کے شعبے کے ساتھ ساتھ NSW JP کے طور پر کمیونٹی خدمات سرانجام دینے کا ارادہ رکھتا ہوں۔ میری کہانی پڑھنے کے بعد، کیا آپ اتفاق کریں گے کہ میری زندگی متنوع رہی ہے؟

حاصل کرنے کے بعد آسٹریلیا کے لیے دوبارہ ہجرت کی - تین سال پر مبنی اس انتہائی مسابقتی ایوارڈ نے دنیا بھر سے تقریباً 300 درخواست کنندگان میں سے 15 فیلووشپس کو مدد بہم پہنچائی، میری تحقیق کی مالی معاونت کی جس کا عنوان ہے "نئے antifolates کے ذریعے amido phosphoribosyltransferase کی روک تھام کرنا: purine antagonists کے ایکشن کا ڈیزائن اور میکانزم"۔

یونیورسٹی آف سڈنی میں میری تحقیق کا محور rate-limiting انزائم کو روکنے کے بارے میں تھا، جو purine pathway de novo کے پہلے committed مرحلے کو برانگیختہ کرتا ہے۔ اس کا نئی منتخب کردہ -antifolate type inhibitors کی ایک مؤثر اینٹی کینسر دوا کے طور پر تیاری میں انتہائی اہم اور فوری تعلق ہے۔

مجھے اپنے اصل تحقیقی آرٹیکل کے لیے ہمدان ایوارڈ ملا جس کا عنوان تھا، "Tolserine کو استعمال کرتے ہوئے acetylcholinesterase کو روکنے کی حرکیات (inhibition kinetics) کا تجزیہ کرنے کے لیے ایک نیا، سادہ اور کم خرچ نقطہ نظر" جو 2002 میں شائع ہوا۔ میں نے انقلابی طور پر نئی تکنیکیں تیار کی ہیں جو ذیلی ذخائر (substrates)، روک تھام کرنیوالے کیمیکلز (inhibitors) اور انزائمز کے درمیان تعامل کو مقداری طور پر ظاہر کرنے کے لیے نئے مفید حرکیاتی پیرامیٹرز (kinetic parameters) کی وضاحت کرتی ہیں جنہیں دوسرے لوگ اب معمول کے مطابق استعمال کرنا شروع کر رہے ہیں۔

اس طرح کا کام دوسروں کو کل کی منتخب اور موثر دوائیوں کو ڈیزائن کرنے کے لیے ٹولز اور علم فراہم کر رہا ہے۔

میرے بین الاقوامی ایوارڈز کے حوالے سے، ان میں 2001 میں یورپین-آسٹریلین سائنس اور ٹیکنالوجی تعاون کے پہلے فورم میں شرکت کے لیے "ینگ ریسرچر ایوارڈ"؛ 1998 میں

نئی ایمبیسے عمارت میں آتے جاتا دیکھا تو میرے اندر عوام الناس کی وہاں پر دلچسپی کی وجہ جاننے کے لیے تجسس کی لہر پیدا ہوئی۔ اندر جا کر، مجھے معلوم ہوا کہ یہ آسٹریلین ایمبیسے تھی۔ کاؤنٹر پر ایک خاتون نے مجھ سے پوچھا: "میں آپ کی کیسے مدد کرسکتی ہوں؟"

میرے ذہن میں کچھ خاص نہیں تھا، اس لیے جب اس نے یہ سوال دہرایا، تو میں گھبرا گیا کیونکہ لوگوں کی ایک لمبی قطار خدمت کی منتظر تھی اور ہرکوئی ہماری گفتگو کو سن سکتا تھا۔ "کیا آپ کے پاس آسٹریلیا کے بارے میں کوئی معلومات ہیں؟"

"کیا آپ کا مطلب ایک پیکج ہے؟" اس نے پوچھا۔
"آہا... ہاں۔"

مجھے ایک A4 بھورا لفافہ (پیکج) تھما دیا گیا اور \$10 کے برابر رقم ریال میں ادا کرنے کے لیے کہا گیا۔ رقم ادا کرنے کے بارے میں میں متذبذب ہوا کیونکہ میں مفت بروشرز اور کتابچوں کی توقع کر رہا تھا۔ اپنی کار میں واپسی پر، میں نے خود سے کہا، "میں وہاں کیوں گیا اور رقم ضائع کی؟" کیونکہ میں نے بغیر کسی معقول وجہ کے کبھی بھی رقم خرچ نہیں کی تھی۔ گھر پر، میں نے لفافہ کھولا اور اس مواد کو پڑھا۔ اس میں مائیگريشن کے لیے درخواست فارم شامل تھے، لیکن میں نے انہیں کئی مہینوں کے لیے ایک طرف پڑا رہنے دیا۔ ایک دن انہیں پُر کیا اور SR1500 ~ درخواست دائر کرنے کی فیس ادا کر کے میں نے انہیں جمع کروا دیا اور پھر یونان میں امیگریشن دفتر کے ساتھ خط و کتابت شروع ہو گئی۔

مجھے ہدایت موصول ہوئی کہ میں اپریل 1998 سے قبل آسٹریلیا میں داخل ہوں۔ اس وقت جب ہم یہاں پر آئے، تو خاندان کو سعودی عرب کی یاد آنے لگی، وہاں صرف ایک ہفتہ گزارنے کے بعد، ہم پرواز کے ذریعے ریاض واپس آ گئے۔

ہم نے سال 2000 میں یونیورسٹی آف سڈنی، سکول آف مالیکیولر و مائیکروبیال بائیوسائنسز کی جانب سے عطا کردہ ایک پروفار U2000 پوسٹ ڈاکٹرل فیلوشپ

1960 کے عشرے میں، ایک پاکستانی خاندان کے ہاں ایک کمزور لڑکے نے جنم لیا جو کم وزن کا حامل تھا۔

وقت گزرنے کے ساتھ، اسے ایک مقامی پرائمری سکول میں داخل کروایا گیا، جہاں طلباء جماعت میں فرس پر بیٹھا کرتے تھے۔ اس کی جسمانی نشوونما کے ساتھ ساتھ، اس کی ذہنی بالیدگی بھی ہوتی رہی، جس کی عکاسی اس نے 1986 میں گومل یونیورسٹی، پاکستان، کے شعبہ کیمسٹری سے کیمسٹری (بائیو کیمسٹری میں اسپیشلائزیشن کیساتھ) میں اپنی ماسٹر ڈگری کو مکمل کر کے کیا۔

ایم ایس سی (بائیو کیمسٹری میں امتیاز کیساتھ) میں پہلی پوزیشن کی بنیاد پر، ایک بالغ کے طور پر، مجھے اسی ڈیپارٹمنٹ میں بطور ایک ماہر لیکچرر کے پانچ سال کے لیے خدمات سرانجام دینے کے لیے ایک ایوارڈ ملا۔ بعد ازاں مجھے 5 سالوں کے لیے بیرون ملک جانے کے لیے چھٹی دی گئی۔ میرے تحقیقاتی کیریئر کا ایک بڑا حصہ، 10 سال، ڈیپارٹمنٹ آف بائیو کیمسٹری، کنگ سعود یونیورسٹی، سعودی عرب میں، مختلف کیمیکلز اور ادویات (دونوں اینٹی-کینسر اور اینٹی-الزائمر ایجنٹس) کے ایک اہم انزائم (acetylcholinesterase)، جو نروس سسٹم کے افعال اور زندگی کے لیے بنیادی حیثیت رکھتا ہے، کیساتھ تعامل کو واضح کرتے ہوئے گذرا۔

بعد ازاں، میں نے 1999 میں اسلامیہ یونیورسٹی، بہاولپور، پاکستان، کے شعبہ کیمسٹری سے پی ایچ ڈی کی ڈگری حاصل کی۔ میرے تحقیقی کام کا نتیجہ بین الاقوامی سطح پر اعلیٰ پائے کے جرنلز میں 600 سے زائد پبلیکیشنز کی صورت میں ظاہر ہوا۔ اس تحقیق نے لیبارٹری سے کلینک تک ڈاکٹر Nigel H. Greig کے اشتراک سے ایک نئی دوا، فینسیرین (phenserine) کی تیاری میں اہم مدد فراہم کی۔ وہ امریکہ میں نیوروسائنسز سیکشن کے چیف ہیں۔ اس کی مثال الزائمر کے علاج کے لیے تجرباتی ادویات کی نئی قسم کی تیاری میں بھی ان کی کلیدی شمولیت سے ملتی ہے۔

ایک دن، ریاض، سعودی عرب، میں پاکستانی ایمبیسے سے باہر آتے ہوئے میں نے بہت سے لوگوں کو پڑوس میں

A Marriage

Pat Allen

SPRINGWOOD 2777

Rain clouds gathered over the ocean, but we continued to attach white Hydrangeas, pink roses and grey dollar gum to the gazebo. A gentle breeze moved white chiffon ribbons. This was a splendid location for a summer morning's wedding with the blue Pacific backdrop. We were on a grassy knoll on the escarpment overlooking the coastal plain. The panorama of beachside towns spread before us: Austinmer, Thirroul and Bulli, invited closer inspection. Long ago, the famous English author, D.H. Lawrence, had been impressed by these very beaches.

A shiny, blue coach arrived and about 35 Vietnamese women of all ages alighted. Most were elegantly garbed, some in shades of red and gold satin, others in blue and gold, with their black hair piled high and dressed for a special occasion.

They descended upon us, dark heads bobbing, and chattering with anticipation. I was relieved to find that they simply wanted their photos taken with the Pacific Ocean as background. We gathered the remaining flowers and ribbons into our car, pleased that there was still no rain or strong wind.

The conversation I'd overheard just a year ago between mother and daughter came to mind.

"Are you going to tell Gran about Binh?" Irene urged her daughter.

"Will I do it now?" Nina whispered in the silence.

"Tell me what?" I asked as I carried a tray of milky coffees to the table.

This sounded exciting and as grandmother, I would be sharing in whatever was their news.

"I met a young man at the Adelaide Conference."

"That's nice." I encouraged her to tell me more.

"He was game to ask me to go for coffee," Nina smiled.

I could see that there was to be more to this story.

"When will we get to meet this young man? I guess your parents have already met him?"

"We'll come to dinner sometime soon, Gran." It was a promise I rather expected from this dear granddaughter.

"He's an orthodontist," she added. "you know, a type of dentist?" and she paused.

"He is Vietnamese, Binh Dang," she ventured and waited for any reaction.

"That's lovely!" I knew that if this sensitive young woman was interested in the son of Boat People, that he certainly would be worth meeting.

Nina, herself a solicitor, was a First Fleeter from Irish Convicts, with her white skin, dark hair and blue eyes. A Celtic lass.

That year had passed all too quickly. Invitations from the Goode and Dang families went out and now we had what threatened to be a wet wedding day.

Guests quickly assembled and took their seats for the ceremony. The bridal cars had arrived. Nina's attendants prepared for her entrance on the arm of her tall and handsome, Italian immigrant father with mother on the other side. The music struck up and they began their procession on the red carpet, Nina smiling, her eyes dancing with excitement. Binh turned to welcome his bride. His black hair shone and dark brown eyes glistened with fresh, though unshed, tears. It was a precious and emotional vision we shared.

Rain still threatened but did not fall, and the breeze had dropped. Altogether, being mildly warm, it was much better not to be the expected hot, January day as forecast. The Minister read the Marriage Service, rings were exchanged, and a photographer recorded their signing of the register.

Guests met and mingled and, relieved to still be dry, we headed for the Reception following the Bridal party. That was when the sky opened and heavy rain fell for about 30 minutes. A perceptive and accommodating photographer was kept busy capturing precious memories. We were soon seated and set out to enjoy the sumptuous Vietnamese and Italian themed wedding breakfast cum-luncheon.

What a mixture of delights: oysters, prawns, smoked salmon, pasta, salads, and fish, washed down with beer and punch, wines and water. Parents from each family spoke of their delight at today's union. Binh and Nina expressed their gratitude for the unswerving encouragement from their parents and their appreciation for the celebration we were witnessing. We drank toasts with champagne, cheered the cutting of the wedding cake before dancing was led by the newly wed couple. Desserts of panna cotta, tiramisu and fresh summer fruits were offered, but few people needed much more feasting.

By mid-afternoon, partying wound down to the time of departure, firstly to send this much loved and loving couple off into married life with our blessings and best wishes. Though their two mothers shed some tears of joy, there were smiles and good vibes all round as Nina and Binh exited through an arched tunnel of friends' arms, who sang them on their way, "Wish me luck as you wave me good-bye ..."

We had become acquainted and blended, engaged with people from different tribes who now sought to become Australians. This truly had been a memorable Dang-Goode celebration!

You'd love it!

Rosemary Baldry

WINMALEE 2777

Millie immigrated to Australia in her sixties. She smiled remembering her hesitation when her daughter married an Australian. *He's kind, hard working and you're well-matched but why couldn't you have fallen for a nice English chap? Life would be so much simpler.*

Now sitting on the sunny verandah of her retirement villa waiting for her son-in-law, John, she was glad life had taken such an unexpected turn. She loved her life in Australia and particularly family Sunday lunches, a tradition she'd grown up with.

'Toot! Toot!' *Not like John to make such a row on a Sunday of all days!* Then she saw the 'P' plates and realised her grandson, Michael, was driving. He was out of the car, on the verandah in a few quick strides and giving her a bear hug. Almost as quickly her friends arrived to greet the young man they'd watched grow up.

Over lunch Michael told her he was going to Japan for his gap year. 'Japan? Aren't there other places you can go?'

'Lots of places, Nanna, but I want to go back to Japan. The two weeks I spent there in Year 10 whet my appetite.'

'I don't know much about Japan.'

'You'd love it! Mum and Dad are coming for a visit while I'm there. You could come with them.'

'No, not Japan! I can't speak the language ... what would I do all day and goodness knows what I'd eat.'

'I'm sure we could find you something to eat, Mum.' Her daughter was serving dessert. 'Let's talk about it. You don't need to decide now.'

2002 came too quickly and with it Michael's departure. Postcards arrived at Millie's retirement village showing Shinto shrines, ancient castles surrounded by cherry blossoms, and magnificent lush gardens set on lakes. Reading Michael's letters, 'My host family are kind and look after me well. Host Mum insists I keep my room tidy. Small houses here so everything has to be in its place,' Millie chuckled recalling her daughter's words, *wonderful son ... only failing is his untidiness.*

While Michael was away the family welcomed a Japanese exchange student. Millie took to him straight away. Koji was such a polite young man who put his hands together and bowed to her. One Sunday over family lunch Koji presented her with an exquisite hand-crafted invitation to a Japanese tea ceremony, at the school, hosted by the exchange students.

Millie loved the ceremony and especially the grace and quiet charm of the young Japanese girls who, dressed in traditional kimonos, served tea to their guests. The tea, different from her English breakfast tea, was not served with milk. She breathed in its clean, refreshing aroma and savoured its smooth, mellow flavour. The young ladies served delicacies which appealed to Millie's sweet tooth although she reluctantly decided one chewy rice cake sticking to her dentures was enough. After the ceremony some young people performed traditional dances while others played Japanese drums accompanied by bamboo flutes and oboes. Millie, entranced by the rich, clear, slightly ethereal sounds, applauded loudly and was disappointed when the performance ended. With the formalities over, guests mingled with the exchange students. Millie's face glowed with pride when Koji introduced her to his friends as 'Nanna Millie, my host Grandmother'.

A few weeks later over Sunday lunch Koji gave her another hand-written invitation. 'Well this is right up my street,' Millie clapped her hands in delight.

'No, no, not your street, at the school,' Koji hastened to amend any misunderstanding.

'Oh, my dear boy!' Millie giggled like a schoolgirl. '*Up my street*' means it's something I really like. I've enjoyed flower arranging all my life. Ikebana is a form of floral art I've never tried.'

The school followed up the successful ikebana demonstration by inviting the community to an origami workshop. Keen on any form of craft, Millie was rushing to catch the bus and slipped spraining her wrist. 'The pain in my wrist is not as sharp as my pain at missing the origami treat,' she told her daughter.

Time for the students to return to Japan approached and Millie, keen to repay their hospitality enlisted the help of some of her friends from the village. The students arrived at the village to an Australian afternoon tea hosted by Millie and her helpers. Bone china cups, saucers and matching plates waited on tables adorned with lace tablecloths and floral arrangements.

'Welcome! Everyone in the village is here and they've baked their favourite Aussie treats. Look! Lamingtons; pavlovas; scones ...' Millie's words tumbled so quickly, the students could hardly keep up. 'And Bill's going to show you how to play the gum leaf. He's brought plenty of spares.' It wasn't long before the sounds of music, dancing and laughter echoed around the village. The students loved 'playing' the pianola, pretending they had suddenly become gifted pianists.

As the afternoon drew to a close, Koji spoke on behalf of the students. 'I speak my best Aussie slang for you. Thank you for a great arvo, sorry we gotta shoot through. We sad to leave Straya next week ...' Students delighted their hosts by walking around bowing to each resident. Bob piped their guests out on his gum leaf accompanied by loud applause from their hosts.

Millie said goodbye to Koji over Sunday lunch but couldn't resist joining her family the next morning to wave the students off. As they boarded the bus, one of the girls handed her a red origami crane. 'Good bye Nanna Millie. Sorry you miss origami workshop. I make this for you.' Millie ran her fingers over the satin smoothness of the delicately folded paper. 'Please come visit Michael in Japan. I take you to meet my grandmother. She origami master.'

The lump in her throat made it difficult for Millie to speak as she hugged the young woman. Tears flowed as the bus pulled out. Millie waved frantically and called, 'See you in Japan.'

At least twice a year I get together with a most eclectic group of women. We are all migrants to Australia and are bound by our teaching careers. But we are all so different and from such different backgrounds that it is more than just a friendly group—it is a living, breathing experience in the vast diversity of people who have come from far away to settle in the same land.

We live in varied areas and take it in turns to go to one another's homes for our visits. This adds to the adventure of experiencing our different worlds. From the mountains to the coast—from the river to the inner west of Sydney we go on mini holidays into one another's lives. The food is different—the activities are different—the people around are different so each meeting is a cultural experience in itself.

Su lives in an artsy home with her animal friends. She is involved in bat rescue so we never know if a flying fox will be joining us. Her alternate lifestyle means we feast on food that is not the common fare. She organizes creative crafts for us to try as we discuss the world situation. Su brings the element of social justice to our group that always lifts our consciousness to a higher level.

We share the spirit of Italy with Carletta. She has a home on the river not unlike a Tuscan villa (not that I have been to Tuscany!) with an inviting patio that just begs for friends to gather. Good food, good wine, good conversation and good books are the foundations of time spent in her company. Carle always offers an intellectually and stimulating experience that lifts us out of the mundane. She lives life to the full and is rich in loving relationships.

Marysia has her finger on the pulse of so many things—she is probably the busiest person I know. She supports her local community as well as places further afield. Marysia's interests range from bush tucker talks to lunchtime concerts at the Opera House. She volunteers at a charity for the disabled and for many years has attended a self – enlightenment group. Maybe it is her Polish heritage that thirsts for constant learning. Her home is immaculate and reflects her eye for finding treasure. Oh, and she is a cracker jack and imaginative cook! No harvest of cumquats goes by unpreserved!

And then there is me. I am awestruck when in the company of these women and wonder what it is that I bring as the fourth corner of this balanced square. Perhaps it is my provincial lifestyle or sense of humour that is my offering to these splendid women. Coming to my home in the mountains means an escape from the hustle and bustle. I love when it is my turn to welcome the group.

Of course we share the pride and joy of our grandchildren. We compare travel stories—some being more extensive than others (Su can't always leave her bat pups). We delight in the travellers who visit from 'home'—places where we left a bit of our hearts. We understand what we have all been through to settle in a new land and that is the tie that binds. Plus we just have such a good time together—at the end of each gathering we are planning the next. Whose turn? It doesn't really matter as long as we can be together again.

The richness of these women transcends colour and ethnicity, background and accents. We all add our personal ingredients to the pot of friendship and we all are the more nourished for it. We are different people from different places who have come together to form a unique and cherished whole. We—and our adopted country are all the richer for it.



Next Door

Margarita D'heureux

WENTWORTH FALLS 2782

It was a bleak day in late June when the removalist truck slowly lumbered up Chalmers Road. It shuddered and rocked, brakes squealing as it reversed its huge bulk into the narrow driveway of No 77. The branches of the naked maple tree slapping its sides. Next door, Janice stood at the window and very carefully, with her index finger, moved aside the lace curtains just enough for her to view the scene next door unobserved. There was much gesticulating and shouting as the men pounded on the side of the van as it precariously edged closer to the wooden fence, its wheels scraping the sides. Janice breathed a sigh of relief and let the curtain drop.

The house next door had been a rental for years. No one ever stayed longer than 9 months, but with Ramya and her family it was different. Janice had been invited to celebrate Diwali with the family and had baked a cheesecake. She knocked timidly that day and was ushered in by Ramya's father.

'Come ... come' he said waving her in. He with his thinning grey hair and bad hips as he waddled down the hall. Janice followed the now familiar hall with the deity – Lakshmi in the corner; underneath sat a bowl of sand with half a dozen sticks of incense. Its perfume heady and sweet.

In the kitchen there was a clatter of pots and pans and a tumble of colour as women in bright saris jostled and elbowed each other. They ladled curry into serving bowls, fried the samosas until crisp and golden, placed the biryani onto large silver platters, and arranged cardamon biscuits neatly on a plate. Deepa, Ramya's mother, vigorously rolled the roti until it was a neat, round disc. She placed it on the hot griddle and her companion flipped it watching it fill with steam until it looked like a puffer fish.

Ramya had insisted that Janice, as the guest of honour, sat with her parents. The table was laden with rich aromatic curries, Tandoori chicken, smoke roasted in a Tandoor, prawn puri with a pickled mango marinade, vegetable koftas and Deepa's biryani.

'You know Deepa, your Biryani is the best!' Janice said. Deepa smiled. Her smooth, unlined face belied her 80 something years. Eyes bright, she leaned forward conspiratorially whispered, *'Janice, I will give you my family's secret recipe.'*

At midnight, Janice left, hands full with leftovers, enough to last a week, and the recipe tucked in her pocket. But soon after, Ramya announced she and her family were leaving to open a take-away in Lidcombe and within a week they had left. The house next door fell silent once more. Janice felt alone. Lonely.

Janice took another peek through the curtains. The truck was hard up against the wooden fence with the doors open. The tenants busy unloading a mattress, a battered fridge, and several steel drums. The tops of the drums hammered until concave. Its surface shiny with undulating mounds. One of the men placed the drum on a frame with oversized wheels and proceeded to hit the concave area with two wooden mallets with rubber tips. The music drifted up to Janice. Compelling and exciting. Rich and pure. Janice watched them wheel the drums up the driveway until they were hidden by the overgrown camellia hedge. The music drifted away.

The invitation, from next door, came 4 weeks later. Janice skimmed over it as she sat at the kitchen table. A celebration of some sort. A 'fete'. Whatever that was? Her hands shook as she replied. No one could replace Ramya. The day of the 'celebration' was cold, but bright. Janice heard their preparations as to where to put the bar, a sweep of the back deck and a quick mow of the lawn. The air heavy with the smell of fried onions, a spicy curry, and the aromatics of a roast.

Later that evening, Janice woke with a start. Next door, the music had ramped up. She wriggled her feet in pink bedroom slippers, pulled her cardigan tightly around herself and hurried through the kitchen onto the back deck. The house glowed orange. Every light on. Its warm glow punching out the moonless night. Someone had strung, haphazardly, a string of lights along the railing and up along the ceiling. In the garden, there was a group of men playing the steel drums. On the front, the name '*The Trinidad Renegades*'. The music gripped Janice pounding deep within her chest wall. She felt exhilarated and alive. Hugging herself tightly against the cold she felt the rhythm and unconsciously she tapped to the music, hips swaying. A man had draped, around his shoulders, the National flag in red, white, and black. He grabbed it with one hand and with swooping movements, like a swirling dervish, he waved the flag in front of the crowd. He moved forward, his movements slow with a rhythmic shuffle, the crowd moved back in unison. Trinette waved to her, beckoning.

Janice met Trinette and Marlon soon after the move. She was trimming the roses when they called out to her. '*Yuh must come and have a coffee sometimes you hear*'. Marlon was tall and thin with a large crop of black curls that seem too large for his thin neck. Trinette was beaming with perfect white teeth. '*Yes, of course*', Janice said and hurried inside.

'Come nuh, come and join de party', Trinette called out. Flashing her a big smile. '*De boys playing good calypso music*'.

Janice smiled. '*I am on my way*' and hurried next door.

Janice crawled into bed just on 3am that morning. Her bones cold and aching from the damp night air and her feet sore with dancing. She enjoyed the pigeon peas pelau with the pepper sauce, and the dhal puri but passed on the pig's trotters. But best of all, Trinette was staying. They had bought the house. And with that she was happy.

A myth is not a fairy-tale. It is a genuine attempt by our intelligent ancestors to make sense of the world they lived in, for example: Why are there so many languages in the world? Was there originally one language, given by God, or created by humans? The story about the ancient city of Babel, which the Greeks Hellenised to 'Babylon', is an example of a myth that seemed to explain why we all speak differently and cannot understand each other.

So a myth is not a falsehood although it is not true. Over time we modify it until what it tried to explain becomes closer to scientific reality.

The other day I left my house in the Blue Mountains to go to our little town's shops. We have one road in and one road out. We are surrounded by bush. This is Aboriginal Australian country, home to the Dharug people. Yet here I can go to the bakery and see Alex, the French baker, 'Bonjour Alex, ça va?' I say.

'Bonjour, ça va bien!' he replies.

So things are fine and I go to the small family-run Lebanese supermarket and see Sami, 'Mahaba, Sami, kif halek?'

'Mabshoot, shookrun.'

Tomatoes, I must get some so off to the fruit and veg. I see Stefania and say, 'Buon giorno, Stefi, come sta?'

'Va bene,' she replies.

Time for a quick beer and I see Bernie having an ale, 'Bernie, wie geht's'

'Es geht mir gut, danke.' A glass and then off with a friendly 'Tüss.'

On the way I call in to see my Israeli friend. She helps me with my Ivrit (Hebrew). 'Shalom, Esther, ma nish ma?'

'Ha kol beseder,' she replies.

It is so nice to have just a few words in different languages, as using them always brings a friendly smile.

Today we can celebrate the diversity of languages and enjoy their varying sounds and the cultures, food and music from which they have sprung. Herodotus called people who could not speak Greek 'barbarians' because their language sounded like 'bar, bar'.

Before Herodotus, the Father of History, or the Father of Lies as some say, there were the Hebrews. They believed that there was only one original language and all mankind used it. Because the Hebrews were telling the story then the original language was, of course, Hebrew! To explain the diversity they created the Babel myth: God got jealous of mankind's building activities and to get revenge on us He confounded our tongues so we could not understand each other and we scattered to different regions. Well, no real linguist believes that, but the myth served a purpose and made sense to the people who wrote and edited the Bible.

The idea that languages were somehow related appealed to Europeans of the Enlightenment. Their linguists realised that Sanskrit, Greek and Latin were similar in their vocabularies and grammars, just as most modern European languages, the descendants of the big three, are remarkably similar. This similarity was given the name, the Indo-European Family of languages.

In the mid 18th century the Berlin Academy of Sciences offered a prize for the best essay on the beginning of language, specifically to show whether or not it was a gift from God or not. People became excited over the possibilities but one hundred years later the Linguistic Society of Paris declared that finding the original human mother-tongue, *la langue maternelle, die Muttersprache, la madrelingua*, was impossible.

To compound this issue, as 19th century explorers and colonisers expanded around the world, it was soon discovered that the Indo-European Family was only one of many other linguistic families. People realised that all language families must have developed from a Proto-World Language. So the researchers tried to go back even further but the problem was that they could not find any evidence for this idea. The best that could be done was to hypothesise that human languages originated in Africa and began to emerge from that continent at roughly the same time as the human exodus began, the Out-Of-Africa theory of evolution, of about 150 to 200,000 years ago.

There is an interesting connection between human genomes and language. The closer we are in our DNA, the closer are our languages e.g. French, English, Dutch and German, as opposed to English and Chinese. A startling discovery followed; there were about 1200 African languages and the human genome variety amongst Africans is vastly greater than in any other social group or ethnicity. Another intriguing finding is that every human baby is born being able to produce the sounds of every language but as it grows and hears, usually, only one language, it loses its ability to make the special sounds required in other languages. That is perhaps why it is easier for pre-pubescent children to learn a foreign language than it is for adults.

A sad thing is the death of a language and we can't know how many hundreds of indigenous languages around the world have disappeared. Even the southern French *langue d'oc*, the speech of the troubadours, has recently disappeared. On a greater scale is the loss of Aboriginal languages. I have met some Dharug people but they only seem to speak English.

Linguists now recognise that languages are never uniformly spoken. We are familiar with dialects within a language but other factors can differentiate speakers: age, sex, education, profession, class and geography also affect any one language. This means that languages are forever changing and an old grump like me, who shudders at certain pronunciations or malapropisms, should shut up and remember that we don't speak the Old English of Beowulf or Chaucer's Middle English any more. It is intriguing to listen to young people speak.

Let's rejoice in the wonderful world of language difference and celebrate linguistic diversity. The myth of Babel has not gone away, we are still in the dark about language origins. So let's celebrate that ancient story of the Ziggurat of Babel.

Celebrating Cultural Diversity

Trevor Hibbs

BLAYNEY 2799

After Mum and Dad married and had Warren, they bought a lot of land in Hornsby Heights and moved there around 1950.

The original plan was a large four-bedroom house with a guest room. But my dad suffered a serious accident when he was supervising the construction of the Brooklyn Road Bridge. Hence to pay for all the continuing medical bills, they could only afford a much smaller two-bedroom house, built on a large amount of land of one acre, which we had a small poultry farm and grew our own fruit and vegetables.

There was a dairy farm across the road a Welsh family, with a creek running through it where we caught Yabbies, there was also a bull we had to watch out for.

There was a Turkey Farm next to the dairy farm, owned by a family from Czechoslovakia, and further up the road, there was a pig farm, owned by our local butcher whose family and he were from Austria. And next door to him, was a family from Russia, who had a geese farm.

Up next door and behind us, was a family from Poland, who grew potatoes for making Vodka. And right behind, lived our local Greengrocer who was Italian, with his Greek wife, and on the other side of us, lived a family from Ireland.

We did a lot of bartering back in those days, it was very much a country lifestyle and I loved it. When it was Christmas, the whole street came out and celebrated Christmas Eve, by setting up tables and sharing gifts and food.

We all got along so well, there was no racism or anything like that, we all loved and enjoyed the diversity of our cultures, and it the way it should always be.



When Bushwalking

Vicki Walker

ORANGE 2800

Warrumbah Bluff rose, a grey and white beast behind fringes of gum trees. A kangaroo grazed, joey's head peeking from her pouch. Kookaburras, currawongs and other birds flitted through palms and cycads.

Ferocious sun meant few bushwalkers were out in Carnarvon Gorge this afternoon; most walked early in the day. Edward Bonnington sighed and wiped his brow with a large handkerchief. He should have arrived earlier at his destination, having departed from Injune in plenty of time. He blamed the road leading in from the highway. Its deplorable condition meant that he could not accelerate at a decent pace. He sighed. *This heat is intense. Hmm... that palm is a most interesting, specimen of Macrozamia moorei, zamia palm.*...He drew sips of water from his canteen and strolled on.

Bob Johnson gulped his water, eyeing the scene. The sandstone showed amazing colour in the vertical rock face to his left. *Phew, it's hot, should've been here earlier. Ah well, need to let the kids have fun... best get on though. Only got today.*

Gagan Firth hitched his pack over scrawny shoulders, flicking his ponytail out of the way. *Hey man, heat's a shocker, bloody lucky I went up the gorge already... Man!* Gagan slurped his water and tramped on.

The track into the gorge crossed Carnarvon Creek via a series of stepping stones and wound up steep steps. Here trees and ferns cast shade over the path. Edward admired *Livistona nitida* or Carnarvon fan palms spotted along the way. Not his speciality but he was aware of their uniqueness and place in the fragile eco-system of the gorge.

Crossing the creek again, a sign directed him to a side gorge and the Moss Garden. Edward relished the coolness under rock overhangs as he climbed numerous steps. He noticed a different micro-site had developed below the shelter of tall cliff walls, where prevailed a moister environment. Moss-covered rocks appeared, trickles of water ran down slopes, racing to join the bigger creek below. After a while rocks and steps gave way to a timber walkway. A waterfall tumbled over a ledge into a pool, a lush green oasis, cocooned in moss and lichen and ferns. He sank gratefully onto a seat, sighing with pleasure.

Bob enjoyed his ramble along the creek, frequently splashing water on his face. *Clear as a bell, even tiny fish. Pity Ann isn't into bushwalking; doesn't know what she's missing. Ah, the Moss Garden, heard that's special.* He climbed the steps, soaking up the cool dampness. Out of breath he reached the garden and sat near Edward.

Edward inclined his head. "Good afternoon," he greeted Bob.

"Giddy, bit warm isn't it mate?"

"The temperature is on the upper side," Edward agreed.

Gagan maintained his slow, meandering pace, stopping frequently to gaze at the cliffs or sit beneath a palm. He'd drop into the Moss Garden, good place for meditation. Two men were there.

"Hey man, how you doin'? Cool place hey?" Gagan sat, cross-legged on the boardwalk.

Edward gazed at the young man. "It is a relief from this perpetual heat."

"We're the crazy ones," Bob offered. "Couldn't get away earlier, kids wanted pancakes for brekky, couldn't say no on holidays could I? Name's Bob by the way."

"Gagan," the young fellow said. "Yeh, hot as hell t'day, betta up at Big Bend."

The oldest stared. "My name is Edward Bonnington. You were in the upper gorge? Where did you sleep? There is no accommodation."

"Me tent," Gagan indicated his pack. "Gotta have time in the gorge. Didn't need it – too warm, slept in the amphitheatre. That's a buzz. Been in the gallery this mornin' – great stencils. Aboriginals knew what they were doin'. This place," he said, "somethin' to do with secret women's stuff."

"Interesting," said Bob. "I didn't know that. Heard about the stencils, so I'm heading there next."

Edward took a magnifying glass from his pocket and peered closely at the moss. "I prefer to note the species of moss and lichen here as I am a botanical scientist. In this gorge there are remnants of rainforest from forty million years ago, rainforest that has disappeared due to climate change. Some of these species exist nowhere else, it is an unusual site."

"Umm..." Bob said. "The moss and lichen make it green and lush, an enchanted place. My kids'd say fairies live here."

"Too right man," Gagan twisted. "Dreamtime tells of Mundagurra, rainbow serpent who made the gorge. 'Twas a spirit place."

"Their history goes back 20,000 years I read." Bob stretched his legs.

"Yeh man, long time. Stencils and art – 2,000 sorts. Pretty neat. Where you stayin' man?"

"Caravan at the resort. Been on holidays, head back to Brisbane tomorrow."

"I myself am at the Lodge," Edward peered closely at the lichen. "I require more comforts than your tent can provide young man."

Gagan laughed. "All I can do. No money man. Backpackin' me way 'round Oz."

"I'm glad I saw this place," Bob said, rising. "Better go, see the gallery. Thanks for the info Gagan. An unusual name."

"Means sky. Ma's bit of a hippy. Enjoy the stencils man."

"Thanks. Bye Edward."

Edward proffered his hand. "Travel with safety."

Bob left, leaving the others to silence. Gagan closed his eyes in meditation. Edward continued his study of the moss and lichen, taking detailed notes and photographs. He planned to write a paper when he returned to his office.

Hours later he finished and decided that he must depart if he wished to reach his abode before dark. "Farewell," he said. "I hope it will not storm tonight whilst you repose in your tent."

Gagan opened his eyes. "Ah that's cool man, used to it."

Edward departed, carefully negotiating the steps down to the creek. The heat was diminished; even so he would be more comfortable when he was in air conditioning. Odd young man, he thought, climbing into his car. It was strange the different people you encountered when you went bushwalking.

Achieve your Dream with Diversity

Barry Brebner

DUBBO 2830

Have you ever had a “dream” to travel and work around this great country we now live in; “Australia”?

Just think back, over recent years the number of caravans and motor homes you have seen driving through the area where you live. Where are they all going? Well many of them are travelling Australia filling the half a million jobs that occur each year across the nation. The diversity of jobs is truly unbelievable, suiting all age groups and providing a wide range of occupations and working conditions.

These days, employers are very keen to recruit seniors due to many factors including experience, reliability, work ethic and preparedness to tackle most jobs.

The tourism industry throughout Australia is a great example. Consider this! Every town and city in the country has a local caravan park. The jobs are varied and plentiful from managers to gardeners, office workers, receptionists, cleaners and maintenance staff just to name a few. Usually free camping spots are available for your caravan or motor home. Some people have travelled Australia for years doing this type of work and in fact have called “Australia” their home.

Below are true stories.

A married couple were leading a very hectic lifestyle. Both running their own business and not enjoying life as much as they would have liked. It was a bit like ships passing in the night. One morning it all changed when they discussed the enjoyable time they had on a caravanning holiday and they decided to hit the road and travel and work around Australia. Their first stop was Stanthorpe where they both worked on the grape harvest with the next stop Batlow in the Snowy Mountains region of New South Wales where they both worked in a fruit packing shed doing shift work due to the higher wages. Then it was Mornington in Victoria working on a cattle stud farm. This couple travelled Australia for many years and worked in all Australian States.

A mother, raising two daughters on her own, had to wait until the children were independent before she could obtain a campervan and follow her road to a dream. First stop St George in Queensland where within a day or two was harvesting grapes at a local farm. Then it was Mildura for the grape harvest as well as McLaren Vale in South Australia. From there it was Oodnadatta where booking into the local caravan park she was advised of the staff shortages at the iconic Pink Roadhouse and soon started work. It was here she had her first dealings with Indigenous Australians and learnt a lot from this experience. Alice Springs and the gem fields region of Queensland were her next ports of call.

After thirty years a couple who ran a veterinary clinic treating a wide variety of animals such as dogs, cats, cattle, horses, deer, alpaca, angora goats and poultry and becoming a little jaded, decided it was time to hit the road and follow their dream. They did. Leaving eastern Queensland they headed west and worked on station properties and also did some locum work as they travelled and visited many places across Northern Australia.

Another couple had two young children when they decided to "Follow Their Dream". The places they worked over several years were considerable and they never had difficulty finding work. He was a master in agricultural equipment and she was a nurse. The most interesting aspect of their story was in the development of their children and the use of the School of Distant Education. Both parents were involved in this aspect as both worked at different times. Being a qualified nurse she was a keenly sought after worker. The children's education was something special due to what they learnt as they travelled. Things like Australian Geography, Indigenous Culture, Communication aspects just to name a few.

With half a million seasonal jobs occurring each year for people wishing to follow their dream we need to look at some of the industries and locations around Australia.

Workers in the hospitality industries are required across the nation. Places like Airlie Beach, The Gold Coast, Harvey Bay and Cairns in Queensland, Ballina, Batemans Bay, the Snowy Mountains, Manly and Tamworth in New South Wales, Apollo Bay, Lorne and Warrnambool in Victoria, Kangaroo Island and the Fleurier Region in South Australia, Broome Margaret River, Perth and Kununurra in Western Australia, Alice Springs and Katherine in the Northern Territory as well as Devonport, Hobart and Launceston in Tasmania.

The fruit and vegetable industries are always seeking workers for harvesting and packing shed work. Some of the locations include Atherton, Emerald, Gayndah Stanthorpe, Tully and Yeppoon in Queensland. In NSW we see locations such as Bathurst, Bilpin, Coffs Harbour, Young and Tumut whilst Victoria has Bright, Mildura, Robinvale, Shepparton, Swan Hill, and Yarra Valley. South Australia has Berri, Loxton, Renmark, Waikarie and the Adelaide Hills whilst WA and the NT have Denmark, Donnybrook, Esperance, Manjimup, Margaret River and Darwin, Katherine and Ti Tree respectively. Don't forget Tasmania where places like Huon Valley, Launceston, New Norfolk and Ulverstone also seek workers.

Meat works are another opportunity for travelling workers with operations in Rockhampton in Queensland and Dubbo in New South Wales often looking for staff.

Cardwell in Queensland looks for people interested in the fishing industry whilst should you like picking flowers, you might look at Kumbia a small village near the Bunya Mountains not far from Kingaroy where rice flowers are grown for export.

Jobs are many and varied with only some industries and locations mentioned in this story. Should you be interested in travelling and working around Australia you need to do your homework? This story indicates the diversity of work which is varied and considerable whilst the diversity of locations shows how you can achieve your DREAM. Diverse Jobs and Diverse locations – it's a winner FOR YOU.

Remembering Lily

Pauline Kuhner

DUBBO 2830

Sometimes we talk about diversity today as if it is something new, to be embraced for the first time.

History has given us many lessons in diversity. One such lesson comes from the true story of the life of Doctor Lily Holt-MacCrimmon.

To bring Lily to life I'd like to share her story of courage, empathy, compassion, acceptance and professionalism.

Lily Holt was born in Melbourne in 1882, the fourth child of Peter and Elizabeth Holt. Lily's father was a progressive man. A furniture maker by trade and a pioneer missionary to the Victorian Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission. The family home was full of enlightened conversation and humanity.

Lily excelled in her school studies and went on to Melbourne University in 1901, continuing her medical studies there until 1905. She met the challenge of study in a male dominated field head on and did not look back.

In March 1906 Lily, then just 23 years old, sailed with her father Peter on the aptly named "*Medic*" from Melbourne to London to go on to continue her studies at the prestigious University of Edinburgh.

During her time in Scotland Lily and two friends ventured to the Isle of Skye for a short holiday. What a delight it must have been. The rugged landscape and crisp mountain air gave them the brief freedom to escape their studies and explore this unique haven of nature.

It was here Lily met local Neil MacCrimmon. Two adventurers, one of academia and the other of the seas. There was something magical in the air as they were engaged just three days after meeting. Lily had much to achieve before any marriage could happen and Neil did not expect a wedding anytime soon.

Lily graduated from the Edinburgh University in 1908. In a class of 64 students Lily was one of only 16 who graduated and the *only* woman to successfully pass. Many women followed her and the faculty, perhaps reluctantly, accepted the diversity of genders.

Nearly 17,000 miles from her Melbourne home, apart from her family, Lily's achievement likely went unnoticed.

Lily was immediately appointed Medical Superintendent of the Lingfield Colony of Epileptics in London, England. Female doctors at the time, regardless of their skills or knowledge, were generally restricted to treating small children, women or infirmed patients outside of the hospital system.

Sadly, Lily's father was in failing health and she left her position in London to return to Australia and to care for him. Peter died from Bright's Disease (kidney failure) shortly after and the whole family was devastated.

In December 1911 Lily was appointed Medical Superintendent at the Queen Victoria Home for Consumptives at Wentworth Falls, New South Wales. Neil had travelled to Australia and in July 1912, five years after meeting, they married in the Holy Trinity Church, Wentworth Falls.

On the marriage certificate their usual occupations were listed as Sawmiller and Physician respectively.

It was the Sawmiller's occupation that would take them to the Solomon Islands. Lily embraced and respected the local culture and her achievements and services are well documented in the archives of the Solomons. She embraced the opportunity to be a part of the cultural diversity of the islands and in a short time she was proficient in four local dialects. During their time here Lily returned to Newcastle for the birth of each of her four children.

The timber industry was suffering from the devastating trade and financial impacts of the Great Depression.

The decision was made to return to New South Wales to join the older children who were attending school in Newcastle. With the family together again it was time to find a new home.

In December 1931 Lily arrived in the small NSW town of Mendooran with her husband Neil and their four children. Lily's sister Hattie Bartells had also lived in the Solomon Islands with her husband James, who had died in 1928. Widowed and with no children of her own Hattie settled in Mendooran with the MacCrimmons.

Lily and her family were embraced wholeheartedly by the locals. The Mendooran CWA Hospital opened eight months after they arrived and Lily cared for her patients in the brand spanking new building.

The family settled into their new life and the children excelled at the local school. This small town was home to migrants from the British Isles, Greece, China, Italy and Germany who lived and worked alongside the local Aboriginal people. It was a small and harmonious community, unusual for the times.

The local newspapers regularly carried reports of Lily's patients. Babies born in Mendooran during her time were unknowing pioneers as very few newborns in Australia in the 1930s would have had a female doctor attending their delivery.

But like her father Lily would soon be afflicted by kidney disease. She sought treatment in Sydney, but to no avail. She returned home to Mendooran passing away in July 1935 in the very hospital where she cared for her flock.

Over the next few months Neil MacCrimmon and their four children were supported by the local community. They were surrounded by the love and respect of these people but without Lily the grief was profound. He made the decision to travel to his native Scotland to make a new home for his family without his beloved wife and mother of his children.

Lily's sister Hattie stayed in Mendooran. Heartbroken after the loss of her darling sister and dearest friend she could not leave and it was here that she passed away in 1960.

Lily and her sister Hattie lay beside one another in the Mendooran Cemetery.

Diversity sometimes has to grow from necessity and Lily's remarkable achievements are evidence of this. We should learn and celebrate the stories of our past.

The Wedding

Pamela Meredith

MUDGEE 2850

Burma, Myanmar, a wedding. Chinese Burmese bride, an Aussie groom.

We flew to Yangon, our family together. Stopover in Hong Kong, just a few hours so airport only.

Yangon family at the airport to welcome us and escort us to our accommodation. Very little English, the bride to interpret conversations. Smiles everywhere though.

Back to the airport later next day, farewells for now. Mandalay, what a romantic name, thoughts of days gone by, colonial history. A refuel stop only, nothing to see from the plane window, no buildings, a truck with a couple of chaps doing their jobs.

Flight on to bride's hometown, a shed where we missed customs, as our greetings with bride's parents, sisters plus friends too enthusiastic. Never mind.

A drive through the village to our hotel, opposite the family electrical business. More greetings. The hotel left much to yet be built. Comfortable though, mostly.

Across the road to the markets for a meal, not a white face in sight. Plenty of stares as we sat on boxes and ate food with a difference.

The day of the wedding, an early bicycle ride to the temple with the bride, not like any bicycle ride you can imagine. Steel frame bike ridden by a thin man dressed in shorts and singlet, thongs. A metal extension on each side with a slim cushion on a small platform. Ting, the bride, leapt up with ease, not me, bum first a half-hearted jump, unsuccessful, giggles then, which did not help, at last an effort, I sat without comfort. A jolting ride along the track, why did not I have a photo taken, no one could believe I managed to stay on board.

The prayers, flowers, a golden Buddha in recline, solemn, peaceful. Another bumpy bicycle ride back to hotel, prepare for the ceremony.

Two hundred guests at restaurant, no service, religious or other. Greetings, smiles and halting chat. Some guests came early some came late, they ate and were gone.

A General's wife must be invited, we missed her somehow. A political necessity. There was laughter and eating. Our table was filled with aunts and uncles, business friends. One nephew was told to sit next to me by his doting mother and speak English he was learning at school, a shy boy who had great difficulty understanding my Aussie English. Food shared, chop sticks presented with food, courtesy demands you eat.

Days of local people and places, a crazy evening with family, friends and neighbours, masses of fireworks to celebrate Thadingyut Full Moon festival set off along the street, noise, smoke, excited children, I'm sure the village had never experienced such enthusiastic foreign folk.

After a week or so time to leave. Tears for a final parting, I know I'll never visit this part of our family again. Fly back to Mandalay and hire car drive into the cool mountains of fame, an escape from the heat of the plains for colonial governors of days gone by and for us, not used to the steamy heat.

Finally return to the city of Yangon. A memorial visit with new daughter in law to the temple. Huge golden temple, Swedagon Pagoda, set in acres of grounds with seating under awnings, gardens, fountains, lawns, small sacred places with folk relaxing around. School boys climbing the dome in single line following a pathway invisible to those on the ground, to spread the dome with gold foil

I watched silent monks weave their orange robes on the looms set out in an open shed. Silent, except for the sound of the looms working.

An elderly gentleman greeted me as we wandered the grounds, I wore a stick-on label saying, "foreign visitor", the only pale person amongst the crowd, the label had fallen off my shirt and he, a professor of history, returned my tag, asked could he tell me of the ways of his people in worship. Please!

One of the most beautiful moments of my life as he blessed me beside a fountain flowing slowly from the temple centre. A simple blessing.

Final goodbyes at the airport.

Coming back to our culture, our habits, home, I hold dear the memories of a wedding in a land so unlike my own.



Mental health services and support contact list

Lifeline – 13 14 11

24-hour crisis support telephone service. Lifeline provides 24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services.

Beyond Blue – 1300 22 46 36

Beyond Blue provides information and support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health, whatever their age and wherever they live.

NSW Mental Health Line – 1800 011 511

A mental health professional will answer your call about mental health concerns for you or someone you are concerned about, including children, teens, adults and older people.

Carers Australia – 1800 242 636

Short-term counselling and emotional and psychological support services for carers and their families.

Head to Health – <https://headtohealth.gov.au/>

A digital mental health gateway funded by the Australian Government, containing a range of trusted mental health services and resources.

MindSpot – 1800 614 434 – <https://mindspot.org.au/>

A free service for Australian adults who are experiencing difficulties with anxiety, stress, depression and low mood. They provide an online assessment and treatment course, or also help you find local services.

Elder Abuse Help Line – 1800 353 374

Free information and support services for people who experience or witness the abuse of an older person.

Older Persons COVID-19 Support Line – 1800 171 866

The Older Persons COVID-19 Support Line provides information and support to senior Australians, their families and carers.

13YARN – 13 92 76

A confidential one-on-one yarning opportunity with a Lifeline-trained Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter who can provide crisis support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



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