

Seniors' Stories

Volume 4



FRONT COVER: OPEN CATEGORY WINNING ENTRY

Angus Lee Forbes

Ilona was named after her Great Grandmother, a truly great woman. Born in Hungary, she arrived in Australia during the onset of World War Two. Ninety years and four generations separate the two. Connected by name, both adore spending time with one another.

Acknowledgements

This collection of 100 stories is the fourth volume of Seniors Stories written by seniors from throughout NSW.

The theme of this year's edition was positive ageing 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 of Seniors Stories, as well as the many other seniors who contributed to the overwhelming number and quality of stories received.

Thanks also to contributing editor, Colleen Parker, Fellowship of Australian Writers NSW, and those involved in the design and printing of the book.





A message from the Premier

Welcome to the fourth edition of Seniors' Stories. The stories in this publication are a great example of the wisdom, talent and ability of our extraordinary seniors in NSW.

The theme of this year's book is Positive Ageing and the stories showcase the vast range of positive experiences and invaluable contributions that older people continually make to our society.

The NSW Government is not only focused on keeping older people socially connected, active and healthy, but also ensuring younger generations are able to benefit from your years of experience and contribution to community life.

Older people have an extraordinary influence on our community; they are the backbone of many of our voluntary organisations and play a vital role in our families and neighbourhoods.

Seniors' Stories is just one way of recognising and valuing the experiences of older people in NSW and building connections between young and old.

Congratulations to all those that contributed their stories to this year's edition of Seniors' Stories. It is a fine example of how older people are leading our state into a bright future.

Gladys Berejiklian MP
Premier

A message from the Minister



I am delighted to introduce the NSW Seniors Card Seniors Stories Volume 4 collection.

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

During the past year NSW Seniors Card holders were invited to contribute an original story based on the theme of positive ageing within the community, which is in line with the priorities of the NSW Ageing Strategy 2016–2020. I was fortunate to meet many of the authors at a workshop session, and I am thrilled to see the final product.

The 100 selected stories included in this book are truly extraordinary and we can all learn from the incredible tales of achievement, loss, creativity and connection. This collection of tales will not only make you laugh and cry, it will inspire, help build greater connections between young and old in our communities, and encourage older people to stay healthy and socially connected.

Whatever your age, I hope you enjoy and are inspired by the stories featured!

Tanya Davies MP
Minister for Ageing

Foreword



I was ten when my father said, "Congratulations! You're a published author!" We were reading my first acceptance letter in the Charlie Chuckles' children's page in the Sunday newspaper. The electric thrill of that exciting moment stimulated my life-long love for writing and naturally of being published.

Those of us who have something to say, a story to tell, a lesson learned that we want to share do so by writing. We create our thoughts into words to express those thoughts. As writers we choose those words critically, using imagery, strong verbs and good spelling, grammar and punctuation. We craft our sentences into meaningful stories to entertain readers. Of course there are no readers for our writing unless it has been published and circulated.

Writing and publishing is in my DNA, through my paternal side and as a school student always claimed 'composition' was my favourite subject. I made story books out of photo albums, submitted stories to workplace newsletters, published our children's sport reports each week and got a kick out of witnessing the children reading their 'game report' before the next game and seized all opportunities to be included in anthologies and my writing organisation's quarterly bulletin.

I made a career out of writing and learning the 'fineries' of production in the Corporate World. From a concept, to researching the topic, to writing up the prose, to desktop publishing the layout and graphics and to ultimately printing the finished product never ceased to excite me and whether it was my own work published or other writers, the pleasure was just as great.

I reached my ultimate goal when a work colleague and I teamed up and opened our own publishing business, *Parker Pattinson Publishing*. Together and for about 15 years, we published books for hundreds of self-published customers. Memoirs, poetry, novels, guide books were by individuals but many local councils used us for their suburb histories, their historical churches and/or parish histories, cemeteries, and iconic tourist drawcards, one being White City Tennis Court and clubhouse.

In this Volume 4, I hope that some of the writers are first-time published authors and in their senior years will experience for the first time, that magic thrill that I felt so many years ago and still cherish with each publication.

Congratulations to these authors for the variety of topics which display so many ways for seniors to age with a positive attitude.

Colleen Parker

Fellowship of Australian Writers NSW Inc



Contents

Out of My Comfort Zone		
Vivian Anderson	8	
Violet's Quest		
Helen Armstrong	10	
A Surprising Outcome		
Ruth Banks	12	
Age Does Not Matter		
Barbara Barrett	14	
Old Farts to the Rescue		
David Barrow	16	
A Positive Conundrum		
Joy Barrow	18	
Having a Go		
Margaret Bell	20	
The Song of the Violin		
Jean Bennett	22	
Volunteering in Cambodia		
Judith Bond	24	
A Quiet Achiever		
Nettie Brookes	26	
My Journey to Stroud		
Margaret Burfield	28	
Memoir – Life is what you make it		
Margaret Burnett	30	
Recycled Teenager		
Mandy Byrne	31	
Finding Olivia (and Nemo)		
Anna Campbell	32	
A New Beginning		
Noel Charles	34	
Another Brief History of Time		
Gillian Clarke	36	
The Gift of a Life		
Maryhelen Cox	38	
The Blacksmith's Youngest Child		
Winsome Cox	40	
I Can Die Right Now		
Annie Crawford	42	
My Bucket List		
Carol Cruikshank	44	
On the Three-Twenty-Four		
Julie Davis	46	
Reflection		
Jan Dawkins	48	
The Inheritance		
Graham D'Elboux	50	
Positive Ageing – A Paradox		
Fay Dooley	52	
The Story of Two Mates		
Pamela Dures	54	
A Worn Out Knee		
Barbara Edmunds	56	
The Old Time Composer		
Graham Elphick	58	
Fire in the Crystals		
Ann Eyers	60	
The Upside of Funerals		
Alison Ferguson	62	
The Power is Yours		
Nola Foster	64	
Positive Ageing		
Kathleen Gaukroger	66	
Setting Out		
Russel Gill	68	
Love Beyond Words		
Wendy Gordon	70	
Ladies Who Lunch		
Sandra Grant	72	
Bushwalking and Writing at 90		
Richard Grimmond	74	
Bowls for Seniors		
Mavis Gunter	76	
My Time Has Come		
Marianne Hamilton	78	
Lucky to be Alive		
Janice Harris	80	
Music Memories		
Betty Hayes	81	
I Could Write About...		
Hilary Heanly	82	
Finally, a Chance Encounter		
Allan Hull	84	
All Right		
Jane Irwin	86	
Where's Pollyanna?		
Barbara Jackson	88	
Passion		
Grace Jane	90	
Positive Ageing or is it Ageing Positively?		
Wendy Jannings	92	
My Days with History		
Connie Jones	94	
Arnie's Table Tennis Club		
Millicent Jones	96	
Be Prepared		
Robert Jorgensen	98	
On Becoming a Gym Junkie		
Pippa Kay	100	
Life: Layer upon Layer		
Maureen Kelly, OAM	102	

Sassy		
Pamela (Ferrari) King	104	
Party Pooper		
Ilona Krueger	106	
Her 'Reset' Life		
Cheryl Kuhne	108	
Positive Ageing My Way and poem How Grandmas Have Changed		
Jackie Laing	110	
Is Nana Too Old?		
Caitlin Larbalestier	112	
Who Will Inherit the Rolls?		
Ron Lemon	114	
Clara		
Wendy Levett	116	
So What Do I Do Now?		
Chris Maitland	118	
A Fulfilling Life with Asthma		
Anthony McPhee	120	
Positive Ageing or Positively Ageing Which is it?		
Lois Merriman	122	
Positive Ageing in an Aged Care Facility		
Jean E-D Mills	124	
You're Never Too Old to be Young		
Camille Mock	125	
It's Never Too Late to Start a New Life		
Dorothy Morgan	126	
The Window		
Pam Morris	127	
My Old Lady		
Jill Nash	128	
What's Positive About Ageing?		
Anya Nielsen	130	
My View		
Rosemary Nisted	132	
Positive Ageing		
Yvonne Norris	134	
Rain on the Roof		
Helen Nourse	136	
Moving with the Times		
Alan Organ	138	
The Joy of Living		
Faye W. Owen	140	
Shaking the Branches of My Family Tree		
Colleen Parker	142	
Giving Back to the Community		
Lorraine Penn	144	
Head for a Northern Experience		
Rosemary Peters	146	
The Billy-Cart Boys		
Robert Phillips	148	
What Does Life Experience Mean?		
Cathrine Plink	150	
Positive Ageing – Four Aspects		
Uta Purcell	152	
Gratitude		
Ramah Juta	154	
A Life Well Lived		
Morag Rasmussen	156	
Maybe the Best is Yet to Be		
Pam Reynolds	158	
Hello You		
Carrolline Rhodes	160	
Please Don't Dilly-Dally		
Cathy Robson	162	
Dogs and Dongles		
Joanne Ruppini	164	
New Territory for Old People		
Leith Russell	166	
The Point		
Janice Ryan	168	
A Reflection on Life		
John Sahyoun	170	
Youth is Wasted		
Christine Sales	172	
The Joy of Being a Senior Citizen		
Lorna Shumack	174	
Retirement, the Start of a New Life		
Christine Smith	176	
Life Be In It		
Jennifer Spruce	178	
The Keeper of Memories		
Robyn Squire	180	
She Could Have Danced		
Margaret Steinberger	182	
Never Give Up		
Diane Switzer	184	
Not Yet Forgotten		
Margaret Symonds	186	
I'm Running Away		
Franki Thompson	188	
Coffee with Sarah		
Walter Van Hoorn	190	
Kindee Bridge		
Barbara Orłowska-Westwood	192	
The Heart of an Ageing Volunteer		
Eunice Whitmore	194	
Slow Walks and Post-Polio Syndrome		
Alpheus Williams	196	
Positive Ageing – Ten Easy Steps		
Lyndell Robyn Winn	198	

Out of My Comfort Zone

Vivian Anderson

Picton

“What do you mean I must move?”

My son had been urging me to make the move to New South Wales after 47 years in Queensland. A lot of things had changed in recent years and I found myself alone ... well almost! My only living child, my son, wanted me to move closer to him and family which I believe to be very sensible after all. I went to Queensland with Hubby and our little girl in 1970, all of us really only babies, not knowing what the future had in store for us.

Soul-searching, agonising over making the right decision to leave and taking the plunge was a very hard phase of my life. After much deliberation, I decided my future belonged with my son and family. As I had not had a great deal to do with my son in the previous 20 years, due to the distance, I needed to spend time with him.

I called number one granddaughter, a real estate agent, and put my home on the market. It took six months to sell; during which time I must admit I did question myself. Many a time I doubted my decision until the crunch came and I signed my past life away, so to speak and had to clear out ‘unnecessary items’. I was moving from a large home to a 6 sq granny flat.

Sorting out my bedside tables, along with long neglected cupboards, I came across a bag of my love letters to my late husband. I managed to read a few only. It was the start of a very emotional time for me. *What do I do with them?* I envisaged someone tossing them into a mini-skip, down the track, when I died.

So, along with numerous personal effects, engagement and wedding presents, over 59 years ago, I made the choice that it was my prerogative to dispose of such, not someone else! Said items were mine and mine only. The relinquishment was extremely difficult; I was tossing away my past.

My favourite bed linen was given away, I wouldn't need so much later, along with my favourite kitchen utensils, knick-knacks, bathroom accessories, wall hangings, furniture and furnishings. No room in the granny flat! I culled my vast collection of photos and picture slides, some dating 1950 onwards. Actually, going through them was difficult but it was my obligation and prerogative. This was a very emotional episode in my life but this was my prerogative once again.

My circle of friends in Queensland was quite large. I had a lot of close mates to say goodbye to. My late daughter's two girls still lived near me; another reason not to move. Hubby and I reared these two lovely girls after their mother passed away and the wrench here, too, was very difficult.

I had to consider the fate of two of my pets; a retired greyhound and a cat which was a gift from my daughter 18 years ago. There was no question as to the fate of my third pet, she was definitely coming with me ... my prerogative. It was so hard to take the two pets to the RSPCA and part with them. I still feel them looking at, and for me, even now, but I know I had to do it. I was partially relieved when I found out that they went to excellent homes. The guilt haunts me still.

I have settled into my new home with my little dog and am now trying to find a new purpose in life, a new lease of life, a place in this community, a new meaning for my very existence. Yes I am still adjusting to being out of my comfort zone, hoping to establish a new comfort zone for the future ... it's my prerogative!



Violet's Quest

Helen Armstrong

Bundeena

"I'm broke and I'm bored," I grumbled to my neighbour, Frank. "The last power bill was a shocker."

"Try Friends of the Museum, Violet," he suggested. "They need volunteers all the time. And it also gets you in for free."

That sold me. Free entry.

Friends of the Museum welcomed me in. "Positive ageing, there's the ticket!" simpered Petunia, the FOM guide. "We like our more senior citizens to get involved."

I followed Petunia while she gave a talk about the exhibits. I could do that, Frank always says I'm a great talker. After the tour Petunia handed me the script, "Now you have a go."

I didn't do too badly, I thought, although I did direct one deaf old gent to the ladies loo by mistake. Oh well. I don't think he noticed.

Volunteering kept my costs down too. I'd empty my handbag and line it with serviettes before I went in for my free volunteer's meal. That way my free lunch could feed me dinner as well.

Then we got exciting news. A new exhibition, sponsored by the steelworks, 'metal in the olden days'; knights, chivalry, maidens in long flowing dresses. We'd deliver our talk in period costume and get paid! With the chance of a few pennies, my hand was the first one up. The only one up, really. I don't know why people are so reluctant to put themselves forward.

Downstairs I was measured for my costume. "No corsets, I hope," I told the wardrobe mistress. "I always felt claustrophobic wearing stays."

"We'd like to put you in something French, Violet," she said, eyeing me thoughtfully. "No corset though. In fact, we'll even give you some padding."

"I'm well-padded already," I laughed. They did like buxom women in olden times. I spent the next week dreaming about flowing gowns in luxurious silks and handsome men calling me *Violette*. I'd be getting paid for this! The others were fools for not volunteering.

On exhibition opening day, I was first one there. All my friends were coming and Frank from next door was bringing the lawn bowls team. What a lark!

"I am so glad you're helping out," the wardrobe mistress told me. "Some people are so stuffy about wearing a costume."

"I can't imagine why," I replied. "I love dressing up. You said you had something French for me?"

"Yes, it's all here. Gorget, vambraces, a cuirass with fauld, tassets and culet, cuisses, greaves and sabatons. And a gambuson to begin with."

"It all sounds delightful," I enthused.

The wardrobe mistress beamed at me, her willing shilling.

"Gambuson first," and she produced white quilted pantaloons and a quilted white overshirt. She even had a white quilted cap for me. "You'll find this very comfortable," she told me.

"All this white could look a bit dull," I commented.

"Oh, this won't be seen." She was enjoying dressing me, her star volunteer. "We've got stuff to go over the padding." She opened a chest and lifted out what looked like a lot of scrap metal. Where were the silk dresses I'd been dreaming of?

"Your cuirasse, my lady," said the wardrobe mistress as she produced two curved plates of steel with leather straps at the sides.

A suit of armour? They wanted me to wear a suit of armour while I did my talk?

"Where's all the French stuff?" I asked.

"Here!" said the wardrobe mistress as more metal clanged onto the floor. "The greaves go on your legs. The maille shirt goes under the cuirasse." She buckled it on and named each piece as she went. She really knew her stuff, I'll grant you that. "Your sabatons," she told me as she buckled a pair of metal things onto my feet, like stainless steel pixie shoes.

"Finally – the helmet." She lowered what looked like a stainless steel bucket over my head. I could see about as much as if I was peering through the letterbox slit in the door to spy on the postman.

I was beginning to feel claustrophobic and sympathising with sardines when she handed me one last thing – a huge sword.

I was sweating profusely soaking the padding. I bet there weren't many menopausal knights in the Renaissance. I was also cursing having taken my fluid tablets that morning.

I clanked to the main entrance to wait for my first tour. I was getting paid for this, I told myself grimly. There was quite a crowd, including Frank and his bowls team. It was tricky negotiating the corridors when I only had a letterbox slit view of the world, but I found that if I waved the sword in front of me, it worked like a blind man's cane. The glass in the cabinet must have been cracked already, it smashed too easily when the sword hit it. And the aisles are too narrow. I had the devil of a time with one woman who got cranky because I trod on a kiddie. The lad should have got out of my way. He must have seen me coming. Or heard me.

One thing I was very glad of – those metal boots are great when wading through broken glass. And armour's great for protecting you from an angry mother wielding an umbrella.

We will draw a veil over the rest of it, if you don't mind.

The exhibition was shut down. Unsafe, they said. I did get paid for the few hours I worked. I felt they should have paid danger money too. But they insisted that as I'd been the one wearing armour, I was not the one in danger.

They got me out of the armour just before the last ambulance left with Frank in it. They said he'd be okay, he just needed to be checked out. All that laughing is not good for a man's heart.

I've decided positive ageing is just too dangerous. Even with the free lunches.

A Surprising Outcome

Ruth Banks

Cromer

When I started voluntary work in Townsville, North Queensland I never expected it to help me get three, free cruises from Sydney two years later, but that is what happened. Even after retirement there are opportunities if you look for them.

Our son was about to get married in Townsville so when my husband was able to get full time work there, we moved to the tropical heat of North Queensland. This made quite a contrast from our lives spent mostly in England.

At first the novelty of living in the tropics and the arrival in the next year of my first grandchild was enough to keep me busy. I had reached retirement age and fortunately did not need to continue working. I was left mostly on my own when my husband was at work. However I wanted to meet people, make new friends and get involved in my local community.

So when I saw an advertisement asking for volunteers to help at the Red Cross Accommodation Centre in the grounds of the hospital, I applied. They needed volunteers to help book in people who needed somewhere to stay so they could easily visit their sick relations in the hospital.

These visitors staying at the Accommodation Centre were not ill and there was little to occupy them in between visiting their relatives in hospital. Sometimes they needed to stay at the Centre for weeks, in a city they did not know and without a car.

I realised that as an amateur self-taught artist I could offer to teach watercolour painting, to give them something to pass the time. The manager at the Centre enthusiastically supported this idea and helped me acquire paints, brushes and paper for my students to use.

I began offering weekly sessions in a room in the Centre and had many people of all ages and backgrounds join to paint pictures. In particular I found it fascinating to meet indigenous people from distant areas of northern Australia. I listened to their stories and so gained some understanding of what it was like to live in such remote communities. They often wanted to paint pictures of their own familiar landscapes to show where they lived.

I continued giving these classes on a regular voluntary basis over the next three or so years. I was not a qualified art teacher but learnt over time how to improve my teaching skills. I developed my own workbooks on the computer to teach students how to paint, which proved a valuable resource. I encouraged people of all ages and levels of skills to paint whatever they wanted, as I noticed how it seemed to help them relax and escape from their worries.

One year we all decided to go on a cruise from Sydney to Vanuatu. I discovered a painting class offered on board, so went along to see what happened. I became friendly with the teacher and asked her how she got the opportunity to teach painting on cruise ships, and what it involved. She was happy to let me know and gave me the name of an agent in Sydney who organises Enrichment lecturers for many cruise ships. I later found that if I was successful in my application she would be rewarded with a commission.

I applied, as suggested, on line. I submitted photos of my own paintings, gave details and references for my previous experience and explained how I would teach up to 40 people in one session to paint. The reward for me; free passage on the ship and a reduced passage for my husband, sharing my cabin. Although not at all an artist, he agreed to help me distribute paints and art materials during my classes. I purchased the art materials needed to teach a group of 40 and I further developed my workbooks so I could teach a larger group than ever before.

Our first cruise was a daunting experience. I had been told that if I was not competent or successful in teaching that I would be asked to leave at the first port of call and pay for my own way home. I had to take an extra suitcase of my art materials and hoped that I wouldn't run out of paints halfway across the Pacific where there was no chance of stocking up.

Once on board, the Cruise Director's staff showed me the restaurant where I would be teaching, for an hour every morning that the ship was at sea. The ship would provide me with tables and a bucket of water and that was all. It needed the two of us to set out the tables and prepare for any passengers who wanted to paint. As well as keeping them happy painting for an hour or so, we had to clear up when they left, which meant collecting the paint stained plastic plates used for mixing the colours, and washing them and the brushes, in the shower in our cabin. Overall it took all morning setting up art materials, giving the lesson, then cleaning up afterwards and preparing to do it all again the next day of the ship being at sea. I rested in the afternoons.

It was a great experience to teach on cruise ships. I was able to enjoy the free food and entertainment offered to all passengers and visited several ports of call in the Pacific Islands and New Zealand, as well as sailing around the southern coast of Australia. I met passengers from all round the world who seemed to enjoy my teaching, from the feedback I received.

I never thought when I was much younger that such opportunities and enriching experiences would be available, to those who look for them, even well past retirement age.

Age Does Not Matter

Teenager at 71 – just reverse the digits

Barbara Barrett

Byron Bay

“You’re really just a teenager,” announced our tour guide, as my travel companion nimbly descended a bamboo tower. Ever mindful of our safety, our protective guide climbed the recently constructed tower first. Proclaimed safe, we were invited to view the floating gardens of Inle Lake, Myanmar. It rewarded us with exceptional views of rows of plants with canoe channels, the expansive lake and mountains on the surrounding horizon.

Being pronounced ‘the group’s teenager’ was a trophy at the near completion of our tour. The suggested limit for the age group of the tour was 70.

I had explained to the travel agent that my friend was an exemplary 71-year-old. She climbed the Sydney Harbour Bridge for her 70th birthday and had been given a skydiving voucher for the previous Christmas.

Needless to say staying fit is on her agenda. Daily exercises after meditation, frequent walks and aqua aerobics are scheduled weekly.

Strength of mind is another of her characteristics. ‘I can. I will’.

Glenys revived skiing after a lapse of nearly 30 years. On Day 2 she waved to me with her stock (ski pole) after skiing over an embankment, indicating survival. As she slid head first down a slope on Day 3, I thought, *home time*. But NO! She encouraged me to take two aerial lifts up into ‘the white room’. As we approached the summit we had been observing the visual disappearance of firstly supporting intermediary pylons, then other circulating chairs, then the steel cables overhead, then even the connection of our chair to our life-holding cables. We disembarked and very slowly inched our way down the mountain. I had horrors of trying to discover and recover my friend from over the embankment. Halting and drawing breath at the base, she laughingly admitted to sticking closely to my skis, but had no regrets of the ordeal. I know that once determined, her mind is set.

Our first cultural travel expedition together, was to India, two years ago. ‘Our boys’ were off snowboarding, so we chose to find a warmer climate with an unfamiliar civilization to explore. On our first night our tour guide explained that in India one needs ‘a sense of humour’ and patience. We had already experienced both. A water leak from our ensuite toilet and a bed not serviced with fresh linen.

It wasn’t long before I added ‘courage’ to the list. While I closed my eyes in the taxi’s back seat, Glenys took photos from her front seat, as the car weaved its way in traffic going the opposite direction.

Our inquisitiveness got the better of us at 11.00pm in Varanasi, when explosions outside our window catapulted us out of bed. Fireworks outside our window lured us to reception. Management was hosting a wedding. Despite our attire, we promptly accepted the invitation. Imagine the amazement of our fellow travellers when we showed photos to the non-believers at breakfast the following morning. The vibrant festive occasion of an Indian wedding, if offered, is definitely not to be missed.

The following year we travelled to Vietnam and Laos. Being first to volunteer and experience the 'hidden entrances' of the Viet Cong tunnels was possibly not the wisest of Glenys' moves. Help was on hand to lift her out. I was thankful that she called back to deter me from exploring one of the tunnels. My size and agility would have made it difficult.

Having encountered the traffic in India, the traffic in Vietnam was manageable. We even attempted cycling on a food tour, without accident. I may have caused a few! Encouraged by our survival we ventured out together to explore the paddy fields enroute to the beach. Getting lost on our return only meant a slightly later dinner than anticipated.

This year's adventure took us to Myanmar. A 'Highlights' tour offering a sunrise balloon ride over the 3,000 temples of Bagan was an immediate magnetic attraction for my fearless companion. It was a highlight of her trip. I greatly enjoyed her stories, photos and watching the balloons in safety, floating over our rooftop where breakfast was being served.

After a guided bicycle tour of a few major temples, we hired bikes for our own day's discovery tour; well rewarded explorations despite the dust, heat and traffic.

A few days later our luxurious bus broke down – twice. 'Too much wine in the engine' was discovered to have caused the burning oil fumes permeating the bus. This investigation gave us time to stretch and limber with encouragement from passing traffic. The anticipated 9 hour bus trip through central Myanmar became extended further when at the foot of a 3,000ft mountain range the bus stopped *permanently*. A seatless village truck was acquired. Together we were crated and squashed in like sardines with backpacks under knees. Our group of twelve sang for an hour and a half helping to take our minds off the dust, heat, bumps and endless curves. Glenys' side had the additional discomfort of the sun on their backs. But she maintained her cheery disposition.

On returning to Yangon we joined locals on the three hour circle train. Watching the crafting of betel-nut wraps, the selling of a variety of wares from baskets or head-wear platters, in addition to a miscreant youth being pursued and caught by a guard proved a most valuable experience. Worth every cent.

From cycling, ballooning, hiking, paddling, seatless truck travel, climbing bamboo towers: is it any wonder that the tour leader christened Glenys the group's 'teenager'? With ages ranging approximately 40 years she was more adventurous and agile than most in our group. Her smile and laughter continuously emanating.

Glenys is just one of the exceptions where age does not matter. In her endeavours, her broadened horizons and positive attitude to life and living, she is a guiding light for young and old.

Old Farts to the Rescue

David Barrow

Mudgee

Working in a profession that one is passionate about can be both a blessing and a curse. While a fervent belief in the worth of one's contribution to others is immensely satisfying, the ever present danger is that work can become an obsession leaving little room for other activities; such as hobbies, sports and building post-work friendships. All help fill the days when retirement finally arrives. The all too familiar term 'workaholic' comes to mind. Such was my experience and I was ill-prepared for the transition with few interests outside of work. At an age when I felt I still had much to give, I was confronted by the seemingly impenetrable barrier prevalent among many employers who believe those of retirement age have little to offer. Such rejection is a bitter pill that can lead to well documented health issues. I was already on that slippery path.

'Why don't you try the Mudgee¹ Men's Shed', my wife suggested in response to my quest to find a meaningful and enjoyable way to allay post retirement blues. I was immediately dismissive, conjuring the image of a bunch of old farts getting together to fill the hours by telling endless war stories, jokes and tales of fiction dressed as fact and all under the guise of doing something useful?

With no better alternative, the least I could do was see if my imagined scenario matched reality. Traipsing through the superbly equipped metal and woodworking workshops the following Monday I was surprised to find not a soul at work. Moments later I came across the reason why. It was the morning tea break, an event that can last an hour, and around the table twenty or so members were engaged in animated discussion about world and local events and issues affecting one another. Humour and laughter punctuated the discussion and the enjoyment was plain to see.

By chance I had discovered the heart of the Shed; a supportive network of like-minded men who were determined to get the most out of life by sharing every day experiences and by helping one another with practical projects out in the workshops. Certainly, there was no shortage of rollicking tales and recollections of humorous life experiences, but digging a little deeper, it quickly became apparent why the Shed has proved to be a life-changing influence for many of the members.

¹ Mudgee is a small country town 260 kilometres NW of Sydney, NSW, Australia.

As a newcomer I was surprised by the egalitarian nature of the membership. Members come from all walks of life including fitters and turners, tradesmen, self-employed businessmen, consultants, mechanics, lawyers, teachers, merchant seamen, farmers and more. Collectively they bring to the Shed an immense range of skills and life experiences that are shared by the members; a rich resource that is capable of creating or fixing almost anything and providing support to weather the many mental and physical ailments common amongst retirees. And despite the broad spectrum of skills, experience and levels of education, members regard one another as equals. There is no hierarchy, just a common desire to share and enjoy what each has to offer. While most members are of a mature age, what counts above all is a willingness to engage with others, regardless of age or background.

Members cite a number of reasons for participating in Shed activities. Many of those retired have in common a need to feel useful or have a purpose in life and to continue making a contribution to society. Whether it be through creative Shed activities or the reciprocal process of supporting the mental and physical wellbeing of fellow members, the routine of attending the Shed twice per week restores a sense of order reminiscent of working days. Also it allows members to plan ahead with a positive attitude of achievement and anticipation. The camaraderie and mateship resulting from regular attendance and cooperation builds a fraternity of respect and understanding which is so apparent in the way personal and general issues are discussed with refreshing candour, often laced with self-deprecating humour.

Some members have joined to address issues of loneliness and isolation; a very common situation amongst farmers and one that can lead to depression, sadness and other health issues. Many have found willing listeners and understanding among the Shed fraternity that has helped to restore balance, hope and happiness.

And so it is time now for me to eat some humble pie. The Mudgee Men's Shed is not simply a bunch of old farts reminiscing glory days. It is a haven for those who seek friendship or a desire to build their sense of self-worth through sharing experiences with like-minded individuals. And yes there are a number of old farts present, myself amongst them.

A Positive Conundrum

Joy Barrow

Mudgee

I was thrilled to learn there would be a new volume of Senior's Stories this year. As I read the guidelines I smiled. The theme set for the short stories is Positive Ageing and I wondered if I was ageing positively or positively ageing.

Some mornings I leap out of bed ready to embrace the new day but there are others when I can almost hear my joints creak; struggle to stand straight; stumble to the bathroom and wonder what on earth I have become! Fortunately the leaping outnumbers the stumbling and I have a plan of attack to keep it that way, 'exercise, swim, walk, watch my diet and think positively.

On reflection my life has been blessed. I have led an interesting life, passed the promised three score years and ten have four grown children, five grandchildren and a healthy active husband. But how best may I gain satisfaction throughout these golden years?

There have been many lifestyle changes. I can no longer make documentaries but I have found satisfaction in writing. I don't dare to ski with too many broken bones to count, but I love the local Wellness Centre and the camaraderie and the exercises designed to suit my new hip, the knee replacement and the plate in my wrist. The bonus is I am not the oldest, or the creakiest, or the slowest and my ego is being stroked as I stretch and twirl and prance around without any inhibitions. Our soft cotton t-shirts and black leggings are so comfy and forgiving and there is not a cling wrapped Lycra body in sight. Best of all there's no competition. This is a time to keep our body and mind flexible, to meet likeminded women and to know we can participate without the need to show off.

I play bridge, it didn't come easily but I was determined to master this game, join a club, get a partner and exercise the side of my brain that could too easily become dormant. I love words and my life has been centred around writing scripts and books, playing scrabble and reading voraciously. But numbers I use only when needed. I have learned the basics, practised at my local club and now after a year I am so thrilled to occasionally come second or third. Not often but it's special and gives a buzz to my day.

My daughter, Niki and my daughter-in-law, Tracey have encouraged me to keep up to speed with modern technology. The patience they have displayed over the years has been inspiring. It is thanks to the girls that I have started a monthly e-magazine. I got tired of hearing the old story 'if only I had asked my parents more questions' so I resolved to ask people to write their stories for 'Fifty Five Plus'. The stories are wonderful and I am a firm believer that everyone has a good one to tell. I love putting the magazine together, finding pictures to suit and the thrill of getting ticks of approval on the website.

Since our local bookshop closed I have become a devotee of the e-reader. I read samples and if to my liking I download the story. The upside is I no longer have piles of paperbacks and in a small way I am helping the environment.

My husband and I have worked in many places around the world but being constantly on the move meant we often lost track of friends and colleagues. Nowadays with the advent of email and Skype we can keep in touch with great ease. Yes I know, letters are wonderful, but they don't get written often. People move and contacts are lost. Most of all with this medium I love the quick reply. No more waiting months for snail mail and answers to questions I've forgotten I asked!

Early in the morning my husband brings coffee, iPhone and iPad to me in bed. First I read the emails and mark those I will respond to later in the day. I check the electronic calendar, the weather and read the Sydney Morning Herald. Oh what bliss. A better start to the day I just can't imagine. A great advantage for me with the on-line newspaper is that I can use the cheat sheet to help get started or correct an error. As a beginner without this help I would have given up.

I have started to declutter and have learned how to use the local online buy, swap and sell. Just one picture taken with the iPad, a small description, the price and there on the web sit the items waiting for a new home. It gives me a great thrill to pass on treasures and make a few cents on the side. As part of the downsizing my husband and I organised a garage sale. It was as much a social event as a clearing sale. Friends and neighbours caught up, stories were swapped and the day flew by. At the end the little that remained in our garage was scooped up and taken to the local charity shop. I love walking through our now minimalised décor and seeing the shelves and bookcases trimmed down.

I go to bed early, awaken early, eat less, stress less, smile more and am quite content to spend evenings and weekends at home in the ambiance we have created for our retirement years. I enjoy life so much as a golden oldie and if I was asked the question of how I would enjoy being a teenager again I would shudder in horror! No way.

And so this is my life. Simplified, uncomplicated, transparent, enjoying the pleasures offered by friends and nature and finally learning how to say 'no' to all those things I no longer want to participate in. Okay there are creaky days, no denying that but the winner is within the philosophy of 'Ageing Positively'.

Having a Go

Margaret Bell

Tumut

Keeping fit and active, socialising with friends, and listening to beautiful music is my way of enjoying old age at age 93.

My life hasn't been easy. I came to Tumut in 1951 from Sydney. My darling husband, Bruce, was allocated a job as country representative for the Shell Company.

We had two daughters, aged two and six months and settled into this lovely, friendly town. Over time, we had two more children, another daughter and a son.

In 1959 my husband died suddenly with a coronary occlusion – a terrible loss to us all – he was such a wonderful husband and father.

The townsfolk were so helpful in every way. They knew I would be struggling financially and found typing jobs and book-keeping I could do at home. (Before I was married I worked in the Commonwealth Bank at Edgecliff for seven years, hence the office experience). This meant I could be at home with the children who weren't at school.

My family in Sydney wanted me to return there. We tried it for a few weeks, but we all missed our Tumut friends and returned home.

In 1964 I was offered a job as a pre-school assistant which, at that time, was being conducted in the Guide Hall. It was a perfect job for me – I have always loved children! We later moved to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, bought by a generous donor.

Many years later, an architect-designed building was built and I was still working there until age 73!

So, you can see, with all the ups and downs in my life I have always remained positive and kept the faith!

I have also suffered several bad falls over the years and am recovering now from one after three weeks in hospital – no bones broken, only bruising which is more painful!

I can't wait to get back to my "smooth move" classes – ever positive!



Pan

The Song of the Violin

Jean Bennett

Port Macquarie

"I used to play the violin when I was a girl," the older lady sighed, "I wonder what happened to it? I wish I could play it again."

"You still have it, Mum, look, here it is."

With reverence I drew the violin in its case from the shelf under her television. She'd placed it there when she moved into care. Mum had little interest in the recreational activities the staff offered, she enjoyed her time alone with her garden and reading. I'd recently returned from a trip to Gulgong, NSW and described to her the violin shop I'd found. An old farmer who had collected violins for over 30 years and his wife had set up shop in town when he handed their property over to his sons.

"I haven't played since I was at school," Mum insisted. "I wonder if I can remember."

"You played until you were over 80 years old, Mum, in a small ensemble which entertained older folks in care."

"Did I?" She looked at me in surprise.

"You stopped when Dad became sick. Let's look in your photo album. Wow, here you are with Joan and Gilbert, you played Second Violin and I think Joan sang. Dad took this photo during the Australia Day celebrations on the Town Green some years ago. I love your outfit, the black skirt, white blouse and red scarf. You look professional, Mum, like you did when you were a schoolgirl playing at The Sydney Conservatorium."

She chuckled, "Did you know your grandmother insisted I board at the Methodist Ladies College, Burwood? My older sister Jean and I travelled on the steam train to Sydney from Gilgandra when I was just 10 years old." Although I'd heard the story several times before, I loved to watch her eyes glow and her smile spread as she remembered when she began to play, 80 years previously.

"Miss Gilchrist was my teacher. She helped me choose this beautiful violin, I've always loved it."

I sat back and resisted the impulse to help her open the case. I couldn't intrude on her pleasure as she tried zips and clips with clucks and frowns. It took her some time but at last she could touch her friend once more. Her hands caressed the wood and the strings with a gentle pluck, then another. One of the strings had broken, "I can fix you", Mum told the offending A string and found another in a separate compartment of the case. She enthralled me with her tale of how Miss Gilchrist insisted she begin with gut strings made from sheep intestines, but these didn't like humid conditions. When she moved to Port Macquarie in 1960 Mum replaced these with synthetic strings and delighted to inform me that she could still produce the warm tones of the gut strings. "I don't like playing with the steel strings, dear, they make the music sound tinny."

She lifted the horsehair bow, rubbed it with resin and drew it across the strings to set them into vibration. I'm not certain she heard or saw me leave but I smiled, my cerebral camera 'clicked' to memorise the scene of Mum's joy with her violin tucked under her chin.

When I visited her again, the violin emerged from its case. "I've managed to re-string the A and I've tuned it myself, but I don't think the G is right."

"Well, isn't it a good thing I have my tuner with me, Mum." Mum's tuning was almost pitch-perfect, but yes, the G string needed a tweak.

"I'll do it dear," she insisted. "I've found some of my old music and tried a tune or two. My fingers are stiff, but I limber them up before I start and I can only play for a short time."

Mum needed time to play with her friend before she spent money on her music, or so I thought. Wrong again! Our next rendezvous was a trip to the local music shop. Initially Mum was overwhelmed by the drum kits, guitars, ukuleles and accessories but as we found the violin rack she smiled, focussed and bought a tuner. Graeme from the shop repaired her chin rest and demonstrated its use.

The song of Mum's violin would rise again.

Volunteering in Cambodia

Judith Bond

Campbelltown

Active, hard work, humbling and rewarding! Yes, Volunteering in Cambodia is all of that.

As a Senior Citizen, volunteering to teach English to students who live in a very poor lane way, is productive, profitable and fun.

An early morning cold shower before the Cambodian family wakes, a quick simple breakfast of banana and bread, the tuk arrives at seven thirty. The driver tries to dodge the pot holes and puddles from the overnight rain as he navigates his way, weaving between the trucks, cars and motor bikes.

After a forty-five minute tuk ride, the students at the school are out playing on the soggy, barren dirt. On arrival, a call is heard "welcome today".

With a beat on an old rim from a car, the noise is sounded to beckon students back into class. The children run to their classrooms, leaving their cheap, shabby thongs neatly lined outside their classroom.

Eighty children sit on plastic chairs, five or six in a row, at long wooden desks in one classroom. These children are receiving quality education in their own language. They are so keen to learn that they arrive at seven in the morning and study until eleven thirty. They go home for a quick snack lunch and return at twelve thirty, ready to commence the afternoon lessons until five o'clock.

On walking into a class room, the students stand and warmly greet in unison, "Good morning Teacher." They stay standing until told to sit down by their class room teacher. As a foreigner to them who speaks English, the children are so keen to hear and speak English.

I would greet the children with "Good morning Grade 4." With simple English and instruction commands, it is hands on head, hands on shoulders, knees and toes. We all happily sing the song 'heads, shoulders knees and toes...'. Oh, it is fun, as the students sing and participate in all the actions.

Cambodian schools teach by drill. The students copy form the board, write into their books, copy and write. A 'foreign teacher' comes and they sing songs, play finger actions and learn to count in English. Oh, the world opens up not only for the students, but for the teacher as well.

My lessons all spoken in English, include known and new action songs, reading a story, counting, colours, days of the week and prayers. The students are gaining confidence in English speaking. I smiled at one student who said, "Good evening Teacher", as they left for lunch! Teaching a craft lesson is an eye-opener for the students. Most of the children have never experienced the use of scissors, glue sticks, nor using textas to create patterns and designs. The children love the colouring, cutting and pasting. Art and craft lessons are not part of the Cambodian curriculum.

Samples of finished craft work are readily available to be seen by the teacher and students. This encourages their creativity to design their own unique work.

The finished craft work is proudly displayed on the class room wall. It is colour, it is their handy work and it brightens the dull walls. The children love to see each other's unique and colourful work displayed. It creates a good conversation in their own language.

The staff love practising their English with me at lunch time. They would ask how to say jam, autumn, Thursday, thumb, throw. Oh, our English language is so hard for Cambodian people to say. A teacher's comments to me were, "Thank you to increase to me, thank you for correct to me."

One parent shared that their child had learnt more in the first six weeks of school than in their whole life time of six years. The parents are happy as the teachers teach them well and their children are reading and writing faster. The parents did not have the opportunity to study, due to the Khmer Rouge.

A student commented that they have good explaining from teacher to students. Another child said that the school was near their house and they did not have to ride a bike for forty-five minutes on the busy road with pot holes to the government school. And when they arrive at the government school, either the teacher is not present, or they ask for money.

These students live in shanty like huts. The rain pours and floods the floor and their limited bedding of a mattress on the dirt floor becomes soggy wet.

It was either hot, humid and dusty or rain, puddles and potholes. Some nights it pours so heavily, that the main roads and lanes flood. The cities have no drains and no underground pipes to take excess water away.

It has been a privilege to return five times to teach English with Cambodian Care schools. The faces, the smiles will be remembered. I love it all!

I cherish the experience and memories. Volunteering is very productive and so rewarding, both for the staff, students and myself.

As an inspiring, not retiring, volunteer, I receive pleasure and enjoyment from blessing and serving others.

A Quiet Achiever

Nettie Brookes

East Maitland

HTC grew up in the Depression years, the youngest child of a large family. His earliest memories were that of hunger, never having enough food available in the family home to satisfy his needs. During primary school years he joined the local gymnasium, probably, initially, for something to do. But the gym instructor and his wife took the group of youngsters under their wing and became a shining light in an otherwise fairly dismal life. They not only taught the boys general exercise techniques, but total body understanding now known as yoga. They taught the boys the importance of nutrition and on an occasional weekend the wife would cook up a feast and, with parental approval, the boys were invited to the instructor's home for a huge lunch and afternoon tea. The instructor would talk about the different food groups, the nutritional value and the importance of maintaining a healthy body.

These concepts stayed with HTC for the rest of his life. He would rise early, exercising before breakfast while inviting his wife and children to join him. They never did, preferring instead to catch a few more precious 'z's'. He made sure his family lived well, always having enough money to buy quality healthy food. He ate until satisfied and rarely overfilled his stomach. He didn't smoke, but loved the occasional beer or glass of wine. And once a month on a Sunday, his day of rest, he would have no food, drinking only water and freshly squeezed fruit juice.

"Look after your body and your body will look after you," were his words of advice. This was the way he naturally lived his life: no pretences, no food fads, no working out or overdoing anything at all.

His friends and family joked about his lifestyle and he always good-naturedly, took it in his stride. It was part and parcel of a positive and appreciative attitude to life. He held his friends and work colleagues in high regard as they did him and

he became known as TC, Top Cat, the leader of the gang. To his neighbours he was the Lord Mayor of the street as everyone would call on him for advice. He was always there to assist in any task; he mended broken goods; he helped everyone who asked and through all of this he didn't seem to age.

He was just as agile and fun-loving as the younger members of the neighbourhood and could keep up with them all. He could dance and party until dawn and was the first one to crack a joke or sing a song. His positive attitude became a positive lifestyle blending naturally into a positive ageing.

He had a stroke at 90 while mowing the lawn and a year later he had fully recovered. Top Cat, like his namesake 1960's cartoon character, seemed to be ageless.

He went into nursing care while recovering from the stroke and maintained his morning routine by exercising with the nursing staff when they came on duty, doing their occupational health and safety stretching routine. The staff advised that as an aged resident in stroke recovery, he shouldn't be doing this, but who could stop him? When he was fully recovered, each day after morning tea he stepped out onto a grassy area, do a few exercises in the sun, then stroll around the aged care complex just to get the blood pumping and breathe in the fresh air. A number of elderly residents asked to join in, and he gathered a small group of friends, instructing them in exercise and breathing techniques. The group was becoming too big and he had to restrict numbers to ensure that everyone had space on the grassy area.

What a character he was. What a lover of life. He passed away at the age of 96, just shy of his goal of 100. He was the best advocate I know for positive ageing and an inspiration to all.



My Journey to Stroud

Margaret Burfield

Stroud

Soon after the turn of the century I left my last full-time job. I had been teaching physically disabled secondary school students at Balmain High School on the sloping, rocky cliffs overlooking the Parramatta River in Sydney. I thought this quite a strange venue to be educating wheelchair-bound young people. It had been a real pleasure teaching these small classes of students who enjoyed coming to school. In my role as a teacher there, one of the interesting opportunities I had in that final year was attending, not only the Olympic Games, but also the Paralympics with my students. It was quite an eye-opener for the students, as well as myself, to see how talented the Paralympians were.

I moved from Sydney that year to the sandy flats of Hawks Nest on the mid north coast of New South Wales where the soothing sound of the rolling waves was a constant in the background.

In the school grounds I left behind, I was quite used to dodging the wheelchairs of the students as they raced in one direction then another playing the way students do. In my new environment things were a lot more staid and any wheelchairs encountered were a lot more controlled and their grey-haired controllers much slower and more likely to have a conversation than let out an excited yell.

My move to Hawks Nest came about because I had a friend from Sydney who had already moved up there. He had been a good friend for about twenty years. With him, life was good. We went boating on the Myall River and out on the Myall Lakes. I was always delighted by the blue dragonflies which hovered over the water's surface. We regularly picnicked with champagne and prawns or very occasionally pulled in and lunched at the Bulahdelah Pub. We fished from our boat and sometimes managed to catch our own meal! I also took advantage of the lovely beach, often just cooling my feet wandering along the water's edge. I collected shells and experimented with making artwork using them.

I soon met other people and became a member of Myall U3A (University of the Third Age) and, before I knew it, I was in charge of keeping track of the membership and then became Secretary. Another member showed me how to use Microsoft Excel to keep these records. I took on all sorts of courses through U3A, including singing, art, history of film and we went to the theatre in Newcastle. I met many different types of people and enjoyed myself more and more. I participated in the U3A creative writing sessions and through these I attended the group of Writers at North Arm Cove and also joined in with a group at Stroud to do an interesting course. Life was getting so busy that one U3A member suggested to me that I needed a diary so I went straight over to the Newsagent and bought one. My diary has never been so full. With my mind becoming a bit forgetful, I consult it constantly.

I took TAFE computer and business courses, began to play golf and joined the local Bridge Club, never having played golf nor bridge and subsequently I served a term as Secretary of the Bridge Club.

It was suggested to me that there was a need for tutoring in the area. Before long each afternoon I had three or four primary school students who needed my help. I have found that the main thing individual students need is to be given confidence and I discovered I could do that well.

My friend and I by this time were renting a house in Tea Gardens and we decided it was time we bought our own place, but we wanted something a bit more spacious, not having encroaching fences all around us. One day, on a drive, we found what we wanted.

We bought two acres in Stroud with an attractive modern brick house surrounded, not only by grassy paddocks, but with its own little creek running across the block behind the house, complete with a wooden bridge crossing it. There were sufficient trees to make the view from the windows very countrified. As well, there were already a few lovely white ducks and some chooks. These not only looked attractive but also, usefully, laid eggs. Since then many of these have been taken by foxes or just died but in the natural course of events the ducks have also bred and we still enjoy them immensely.

At a point earlier in my life, I sat in a little café on the banks of the River Thames in Oxford, England, admiring and enjoying the ducks swimming by and thinking how wonderfully relaxing it was to be there taking in that atmosphere. Little did I know that one day I would be able to do just that in my own backyard or even from my lounge room window.

I have tutored a few students from around the Stroud area, this time expanding the level from just primary school students to young nurses, trying to cope with the maths of calculations for medications, to various university students and others trying to pass entrance courses to other areas of employment.

I have now joined the Stroud Writers' Group and really enjoy the company of the other members. I have also recently become a member the Stroud Community Lodge Board and similarly enjoy the stimulating company of the fellow members and am learning some of the ropes of running an organisation. I continue to play bridge at the club in Hawks Nest.

After we moved to our property in Stroud, my partner proposed and we were married in a beautiful ceremony in the chapel of his old school, The Shore School, North Sydney.

I have recently planted roses, which I have always wanted to grow.

I am really very busy and also challenged. Life is good and I enjoy living in my part of paradise.

Memoir – Life is what you make it

Margaret Burnett

Mudgee

There is a saying, *Life is what you make it*, which I think applies whether working or retired, but, after retirement, I travelled by plane to the Banff Centre in the Rockies in Canada. I had not travelled outside Australia by plane before.

My reason for the trip was to babysit my eleven month-old granddaughter, Aurora, for my daughter who was attending a music festival there. I did suggest someone younger should go, but, perhaps wisely was told: Someone younger would be unlikely to travel so far to remain put, to care for a young child, their desire would be to sightsee.

We were there during their autumn, a remarkable landscape. There was evidence of an Aurora, we met a lovely Canadian Indian man and the surrounding vegetation was a delight.

I was able to take my granddaughter for walks in the pram, one lady we met saying to her, “You are a lucky baby being taken for a walk in the mountains.”

My daughter was able to have a free day so we hired a car and with other young Canadian women, with whom my daughter became friendly, she drove us to wonderful sights. They drive on as we would say, ‘on the wrong side of the road’, so it was preferable to be driven by someone familiar with the road conditions. Lake Louise at Jasper Park, was a beautiful place to see and also of interest to a busload of Japanese tourists who arrived while we were admiring the beauty of the area and who surrounded the pram spending a considerable amount of time admiring my granddaughter.

We left Banff Centre to catch our return flight during a snowstorm. I was surprised to see front gardens covered in snow, yet on arrival back to Sydney we were greeted by an October heat wave.

I returned to central west NSW and renovated my old family home. At the time I only had one granddaughter, but now I am the proud grandmother of three granddaughters and three grandsons. I take an interest in their activities, which are many. I find myself in an ever-changing world environment, which, I try to keep up with, although I am now a resident in a nursing home.

Recycled Teenager

Mandy Byrne

Chain Valley Bay

Age crept up on me. Knees started aching, hands weakened and opening bottles and jars became a pain. Childproof containers were suddenly granny-proof.

My health deteriorated and it annoyed me that my body, which I have worn carelessly for over seventy years, decided to let me down. I was not ageing in a positive manner. Even though I tried to ignore it, my body demanded attention. I was very sick and ended up in hospital. They told me I had pancreatitis, irritated by my gall bladder. This organ was slowly disintegrating. How dare my gall bladder just give up and disintegrate!

After my operation I slowly recovered. I was determined to put this event behind me and get on with life. I didn't realise how tired I would feel. Bouncing back took me longer, now that I was older. I persevered and soon my daily exercises of walking and swimming became the norm again. I was in a positive frame of mind once more.

The worst part of ageing for me was when my husband died. It is hard enough when friends do it but when your husband or wife dies, it requires a great deal of fortitude to get on with living. When you have lived with another and been a part of a couple, life was wonderful. There was always someone to talk to, to lean on and provide comfort. After his death, I felt as if I had a hole inside me from which my feelings and personality slowly leaked. I was alone. Mentally I shook myself to get on with things.

In the over-fifties village where I live, there are always friends around to keep me company. Cultivating friendships, and helping others, is for me, community living at its best. This became my life. Some people can't live in close proximity with others. I am not one of them. For me, people are the mainstay of my life.

When I needed others, I found them there for me. The fact that I knew and mingled with these people before I lost my husband, made it easier to accept help.

This was how I met a man who doesn't believe he is ageing, just lucky to have more birthdays. He helped me back to full health. Then he proceeded to make me feel, not only well, but loveable once more.

I don't look in the mirror and see white hair and wrinkles. Inside I am still the person I have always been. Others will see it, if you let them. That is one of the joys of being with other older people. We are all ageing but we still laugh, plan, dance and live a full life. It was great to share myself once again. To be the person I want to be and have another see it and enjoy my company, as I do his. We feel like recycled teenagers.

I never expected to fall in love again. To have that joyous feeling surge through me was exhilarating. Don't tell me you have forgotten it? Rather like a flower that feels spring is returning, I opened my heart to this positive man. What he sees when he looks at me, I have no idea. What I see, is a kind face, twinkling eyes and a good sense of humour. He is someone who thinks I am just what he needs. Once again, I have someone to be with and to share my life. We laugh, sing off key and enjoy being together. Those extra pounds and stiff joints don't matter because I am loved and needed by another.

Falling in love is good for your wellbeing and state of mind. I read this in the Seniors Magazine, so it must be true. It is suddenly the music in my life that I want to dance to, sing out loud, and share with another. Life has meaning once again. It might embarrass your children and grandchildren to know Grandma says she is in love. Don't listen to them. You don't have time to waste. Never feel guilty about ageing in a positive manner.

Finding Olivia (and Nemo)

Anna Campbell

Yass

Finding Olivia is not easy. She is a woman who has little tolerance for new-fangled technology like television, the internet or smartphones and the only way of contacting her is by snail mail, even if she never replies. This makes tracking her down quite a challenge, especially as she's old (by local standards) and nobody I could contact in Suva knew whether she was still alive or *mate* (dead). As Nagigi is on the other big island of Fiji – Vanua Levu – I didn't want to go without knowing whether she was still there. After two months of getting nowhere, I was invited to go to Vanua Levu by four nuns from a local charity, who were running a workshop in Labasa. This is only a three-hour bus journey from Nagigi, so my best chance yet.

The first part of the trip was relatively easy, even though it was a twelve-hour bus-ferry-bus trip starting at 4.00am. It was a long weekend, so the ferry was packed. Those not eating spent their time sleeping, including my four companions, who stretched out on the vacant ferry seats as soon as we'd had breakfast. I really envy anyone who can sleep anywhere, anytime. Which is most of the local population! Even moving around on the ferry was difficult, as every bit of the deck was covered with reclining bodies, but I eventually found a seat and had time to reflect on my quest: finding Olivia.

My first visit to Nagigi was in 2003, when she had only just started her homestay initiative. It was very basic – no mosquito nets, no fridge, no electricity, no telephone and almost no furniture – and I was her third guest. Meals were also very basic; bread and jam for breakfast, rice or cassava for lunch and instant noodles for dinner, with an occasional fried fish and bananas or pawpaw if they were available.

Despite this, it was a fantastic week. Daily snorkelling visits to Nemo and friends in the lagoon, fantastic weather, and in the evenings, conversations with Olivia about ways of attracting more tourists, such as what foreigners said they wanted – authentic village life – but really wanted – all the comforts of home and good food. She was very impressed when we calculated that it was actually cheaper to invest in mosquito nets than buying mosquito coils, and even more so when I invested in her venture by donating three. I promised to help with publicity and she promised to implement some of the other ideas we had discussed.

With no phone, no internet and no replies to any letters I sent her, keeping in touch meant visiting Nagigi whenever I was volunteering in Fiji. Each time she proudly showed me the flattering comments in her guest book and we talked about other ways of making the guests' visits even more enjoyable. And each time I promised to come back soon.

But eventually my visits became less frequent, and now, seven years after my last visit, I hoped I'd still be welcome, even if I arrived unannounced. Luckily Olivia still had her stall in the Savusavu market and was thrilled to see me. It was almost time for the market to close, so we chatted happily while packing up her fruit and vegetables before heading to the bus for Nagigi.

Her blue house was almost as I remembered it, except for some damage from Cyclone Winston. Several windows were broken or missing and part of the guttering was dangling precariously from the fascia board. I was pleased to see that the mosquito nets were still in place; there was a fridge (functioning), grid electricity (also functioning) and a large screen TV that she couldn't afford to use. She also had a smartphone that she didn't use, I suspect because her eyesight was rapidly failing.

Olivia said she had diabetes and was not well, so her daughter had taken over the cooking. Mere was proud of experimenting with new recipes, something that Olivia had never been very enthusiastic about. I felt uncomfortable having the two of them watching me eat rather than sharing meals, but accepted that this was what Olivia preferred.

One of Olivia's many relatives had dropped off some fresh fish and as *ika vaka lolo* (fish in coconut cream with *roro*) is one of my favourite Fijian dishes, I was more than happy. The only thing I'd forgotten about was the roosters and their 4.00am crowing contests, followed by the twittering chorus of many types of birds.

I also re-visited my Nemo family, who had survived cyclone Winston, unlike the houses near the beach. It was almost a year since the cyclone, but most were still uninhabitable and families were sleeping in the ubiquitous blue tents, while doing everything else outside.

As well as coping with the heat, they also had to cope with the tropical storms, as I saw for myself on my last day in Nagigi. The morning had started off with blue skies, but by lunchtime it was as if all the storm clouds had decided to drop their payloads in the same place at the same time, unaffected by the gale-force winds.

The villagers took it all in their stride. Olivia's grandchildren were taking advantage of the torrential open-air freshwater shower, chasing each other in their natural state. Teenage boys were diving energetically into the waste-high lake that used to be the church lawn. Their parents had every empty container outside to catch the bonus rainwater, while I just stayed inside and kept dry.

I left Olivia in time to get back to my volunteering assignment in Suva by Monday morning, wondering if I would ever see her again. Fifteen hours of travel is a lot of thinking time. Time enough to remember not to sweat the small stuff and to admire Olivia for keeping her village homestay going despite cyclones, sickness and living in a very isolated part of Fiji.

A New Beginning

Noel Charles

Yamba

When I was no longer a member of the council of the city of Botany (37 consecutive years), I suffered a heart attack and had four bypasses. It was at a time when I had been doing a correspondence course in writing. It gave me a complete change of direction to what I wanted to do with my life.

I wanted to be a writer. That seemed simple enough as I always liked writing letters, but my tutor warned me that I may have to submit plenty of work and could possibly paper my walls with rejection notices before I was successful and this is the way it became until I noticed a request for poetry submissions for an American publication called The International Library of Poetry, why not have a go at this?

I may point out I liked poetry and all the nuns at my school were very good at teaching this. I had carried in my mind about four good ones so, in sending one of mine overseas, it wasn't as if I was not completely aware how hard it would be to achieve anything.

I decided I would write about an old man who lived in a shack beside an old clay road. It would be that he had a pile of pippa shells outside his place, that he was eccentric and, as it was a fictional piece. I needed a name that would capture the viewer who saw the title to then read it so I called it, 'The Patient Love', and the concluding lines were very sad. They fitted the poem and made it seem good to me and I quote them, *'The saddest thing was his note opposite her portrait on the chair I'm coming to you darling, just you wait and I'll be there.'*

What a surprise! I was informed my poem would be printed in a book called, An Endless Place. I was overjoyed at this even though it was in an anthology and would cost me money to purchase a copy. I could not contain my pleasure at showing everyone the lovely hard copy book, yet there was more to come. I had an entry form for the next publication, The Tide of Hours and I sent them a poem called, Goldie My Goldie. It was about our Labrador who my daughter and I held in our arms when the vet gave him his last needle. Poor Goldie, he always thought he was going to get a biscuit after his needle, but not that time. We left the surgery with lumps in our throats and tears running down our faces. The most loved dog in all the world just had to get old and his pain was our pain. He will always be remembered in that book.

Meantime, my love of poetry saw me writing and learning more. Year after year I went over to Tenterfield to learn and compete with bush poetry and I began saying it in various places until, finally, in one of the competitions I won on that weekend two 'Oracles of the bush' shirts and \$100 and I was getting more engagements and learning more.

It is something I work at and from time to time I have a little slip up which most times no one notices, but I am not happy with myself when I do this.

I have joined Toastmasters and also I'm on the committee of Yamba Country Music and at each monthly muster I usually say a couple of good Australian poems or ones of my own.

I have been line-dancing with my wife and some wonderful groups of women and men for the last twenty years and am also a member of the Seniors in Yamba.

In concluding, I have been to so many groups and organisations as their guest speaker, I have in my head forty-two poems I can recite and vary them around if I get invited back on a second or third occasion I only want a thankyou card to put in my diary.

People wonder how I can remember so much poetry but I do work at it but my wife keeps on saying I never listen to what she tells me to do. Heavens, I am 85 years old and can't be expected to remember everything – and I sometimes get away with that answer.

Another Brief History of Time

Gillian Clarke

West Haven

I have always believed that a good story needs an introduction, a middle part and an ending!

My introduction begins when I was born into a working class family in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, UK, in August, 1937 – the youngest of four sisters. Our family was relatively poor, but *we were never aware of that fact* because my amazing, creative mother could somehow make things out of nothing – *truly!* My mother was orphaned before she was a year old. In 1901, she and her three older siblings were placed separately with other relatives to be raised, Mum was obliged to leave school at the age of 11, to get a job in order to help to support her family. She had made good use of her short years of education because she had an excellent command of the English language and her handwriting was always better than mine – rats! I grew up with Mum's voice echoing in my head, *'You can do anything that you want to do if you just put your mind to it!!'*

Now I shall introduce you to an abbreviation – "I hear you, Mum! = IHYM!" Please note that well. How could you *possibly* doubt the word of a woman who had triumphed over such a rocky start in life? From Mum I learned the immense, lifelong value of resilience and the life-saving importance of having a sense of humour.

Fast forward some years and in 1960 I graduated from London University with a BSc, Hons, Mathematics and accepted a position as computer programmer at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough, UK – *neither* fields of activity were 'usual' for women in those days – IHYM!

So now we need to fast forward three and a half decades! By this time, 1996, I was living in Australia after transplanting my family, my lovely daughter and son, half-way around the world in 1974 to support my husband's career move. I was then a single person again and approaching the end of a satisfying 11 year 'later-life career' starting with the Department of Corrective Services, NSW and moving to the University of Western Sydney, Nepean. I was not apprehensive about retirement because I had always enjoyed many creative hobbies and so I looked forward to more time to play! I retired 21 years ago to this marvellous area on the Mid-North Coast of NSW and this is where my middle part really starts!

I played tennis, clogged (fabulous dancing with moveable taps on our shoes!) and square danced and I joined the Woodcraft Group at The Art and Craft Centre, Port Macquarie, where I happily made sawdust one day each week along with creating some lovely wooden items – IHYM!

When that physical stuff wore my knees out, I took up playing with the recently formed Adult Beginners Band in Laurieton, starting on the glockenspiel – fulfilling a long-held wish of mine to play music with a group of other people! In time, I graduated to the Camden Haven Concert Band where I still really enjoy playing under the leadership of our amusing, inspirational Musical Director.

For some years, from the age of 67, I served as the Band Drum Major whenever we marched in parades, striding right out at the front of the Band, waving the mace and issuing *cryptic* instructions in a loud voice – my mother would have just loved that! My worn knees eventually put a stop to that little caper – rats!

About six years ago – aged 74, I had the opportunity to start up a Handbell Group in Laurieton. I had long wanted to try playing handbells but couldn't find a group in my area to join because the nearest one was more than 200 kilometres away! However, I was offered the loan of a set of used handbells to enable me to start a group.

"I can't do that!" I wailed to my friends and neighbours, Eileen and Ken. Echoing my mother's words.

Eileen replied briskly, "Of course you can! – If you can't, who do you think can?"

Okay, I hear you, Eileen and IHYM!

So I bluffed my way through a training session and proceeded to gather together a group of likely candidates to ring bells with me!

Fast forward another six years and now my team of ten great, enthusiastic ringers gets so much fun from ringing handbells and much satisfaction from being able to bring the novelty, stimulation and pleasure of handbell music to so many people in our local community and even further afield. Although the group was started mainly for our own pleasure of making music with the bells, we now receive so many requests for performances that it is difficult to fit them all in. My team members are all seniors and do expect to be able to have a life as well as to ring bells, like going away for holidays, visit family and other frivolous stuff!

At 80, I am currently working on scheduling our performance dates this year to fit around my forthcoming second knee replacement surgery – I think that I have this sorted out now! We are currently adding some tangos to our musical repertoire with percussion effects added – *watch this space!!*

So, about now, I should be adding an ending – but *I can't* do that because I am still busy working on the middle of my story! I know that I am so fortunate to be living right now in this great country. With excellent care from my medical people, I have been able to stay very active and nobody has ever had the temerity to suggest to me that I might be too old to try the latest mad scheme that I have devised! Looking forward, I shall be watching for opportunities to try something new! I certainly won't be listening to any negative stuff. I shall be guided by that voice in my head – IHYM!

The Gift of a Life

Maryhelen Cox

Winmalee

It's a fact of life – we all get old. Each moment of each day of each year we tick off our time and indeed, what is the alternative? Not getting old is one of the biggest tragedies – a life cut short is the unkindest cut of all.

While it is not imperative that we have children, our children are nonetheless life renewing itself. Whether a delightful or frustrating experience, a child growing before our eyes is a marvel to behold. Crank the level up to the sheer amazement of witnessing our grandchildren's arrival and development and then time seems to be passing faster than we ever could imagine.

But some things can stop us in our tracks. The untimely death of a parent or a sibling or perhaps a friend could come in an accident, or to a disease or perhaps if one goes off to war. That premature death is the alternative to ageing and seems to be a final step along our road together. Are we ever prepared for that end? Especially when it abruptly throws our lives into chaos?

I first felt that experience in the mid-1980s with the birth and unexpected death of my first child. After an uncomplicated pregnancy and normal delivery, everything went dreadfully wrong at the very end. The baby went into distress, the delivery team fired into overdrive and a grey, lifeless little boy was delivered. He was unable to be revived and I was cast into the confusion of holding a silent little babe, now a rosy colour after the attempt of bringing him back – time stood still.

It was probably the most important moment of my life. I held my son knowing that the difference between life and death was one simple breath. If he would only breathe – if only those little eyes with the auburn lashes would open and look at me – then, only then would he cry and grow and live and *age* – but it was not to be. He would be forever young and would not play his innings in this game called life.

My husband and I were very conscious of a spiritual presence in the room with us – of an angel there to take our son and look after him in a better place. Thomas wasn't meant for this world yet he would forever live within me and influence me. I am certain that he is with my mother in Heaven and he is as real to me as his two sisters and his two little nieces.

Thomas taught me many things – that each and every child is a precious treasure; that a healthy birth is truly a miracle; that the compassion of people is amazing and that the love of God is a reality. These only touch on my life lessons.

He taught me that life is indeed a gift and that I should be grateful for each day and to try and live it well. Yes I often fail at this mighty goal but Thomas will come back into my thoughts and I will keep trying to honour his memory. He never got the chance to age and so I feel a responsibility to do so in a positive and respectful manner.

Ageing is a gift to be cherished and to be lived graciously and with gratitude. The gift of life is something to be thankful for and I thank you, Thomas, for teaching me that and more. Thank you that I could be your mum.



The Blacksmith's Youngest Child

Winsome Cox

Laurieton

Around 1900 my father purchased a section of a property in Auburn, fifteen miles southwest of Sydney, NSW. The property had all the necessary equipment and buildings needed to house his family and conduct his blacksmithing and carpentry businesses. The four-roomed home is where I was born and lived in until the day I was married.

The carpenters' workplaces included the circular saw set in the centre of a huge table. To the other side of the block was the blacksmith's section including the blacksmith's forge, anvil, oxy acetylene cylinders and other sundry blacksmithing equipment. These were all under a corrugated iron roof extending down the yard. In between this section and the paint shed was a huge open space in the middle where there was a huge circular iron plate flat on the ground and about one and half inches thick. This was enough to accommodate the largest wooden wheels used in those times on horse drawn vehicles. A length of iron was measured to fit the circumference of a wooden wheel, heated in the forge 'til red hot and was taken to the wooden wheel on the iron plate in the ground ready to attach it to the wooden wheel. This was an amazing spectacle to watch, three men with large long handled sledge hammers banging a red hot iron onto the wooden wheel, walking round and round hammering to fit the wooden wheel tempering all the way with cold water. The process took a great amount of time and energy and was extremely strenuous for the strongest of men.

The paint shed was the perfect place when cleared for family gatherings because the afternoon sun shone in from the west making it so warm and bright for Mothers Day and Fathers Day, for birthdays and family gatherings. The sun was high in the sky for Christmas, so it was in the shade for this event; a perfect venue for all celebrations. A long trestle would be set up and suitably decorated for each occasion. Adults played cribbage in the afternoon and the children played games or got up to mischief. On one occasion we got my nephew, Eric, to sneak some wine out for my niece and me. We were both aged twelve at the time. We actually got a little drunk and it was deemed necessary for June to stay the night, as it would be too difficult for her to walk home a few streets away. I never did that again.

My father always had a sense of humour, fun and adventure. He arranged for delivery of anything to be done if possible in school holidays. The back of the utility truck was filled with local children including some of my similar aged nieces and nephews. These expeditions were much desired. On one occasion with all the assembly aboard, a new milk cart was tied to the back corners of the utility by the shafts. A slight accident happened on the way. The milk cart was slightly damaged but no one suffered any injuries. I don't even remember if the police were called but it was a talking point for a long time afterwards, by all and sundry. It was always great fun when Dad stopped at Mr Rose's house in Park Road to get petrol, only one petrol bowser on the footpath, and free ice cream given to every child in the vehicle.

How my parents managed I do not know, but they were adventurous and had to do things that gave us good memories. Eventful memories are the best gifts our parents can give us. In the 1930s the aeroplane was the wonder of the world; people were taking joy flights at Mascot aerodrome. Dad loved anything new. One Saturday he took Mum, my sisters and me there in the old Overland truck to see these mechanical wonders. There were ladies dressed in maroon and light blue, the height of fashion stakes at the time, fashion made a big impression on me there and then. Sightseeing flights were offered. My adventurous father waited until what was supposed to be last flight of the day to get himself a cheap ride in the passenger compartment of the two-compartment dual wing open cockpit plane. On my father's return to the ground and being somewhat of a charmer with finances being as they were, he talked the pilot into taking his three girls on the same flat front seat which only had two seat belts, for ten shillings, the price each of a two passenger flight. The pilot warning him the seat belts would not be secured as they should be, but Dad was determined and away we flew. It was exhilarating. I remember seeing the Cooks River and market gardens. From that moment I was forever sold on air travel. I also learnt that you have to bargain for things in this life.

Being the youngest of seven children, I knew very little about my grandparents or their ancestors. I needed to know.

While I was very young I asked my parents, 'Where did our ancestors come from?' I was satisfied at the time to know they were from England, Ireland and Scotland. Family history has interested me since 1968 when my Aunty Ivy gave me the bible of my paternal grandmother.

In 2006 I took a trip to Northern Ireland after my husband of 56 years died. I attended an international genealogy conference and then researched more of my family history there. My research in Australia has continued ever since.

Now on my own, ancestry is my obsession keeping my mind occupied and alert. There is no end to this hobby; always something else to discover and surprise me. I meet a lot of people and my life is filled with like-minded interesting people, it has given me a reason to live a meaningful and positive life.

I Can Die Right Now

Annie Crawford

Bundanoon

I follow my vaporous breath into my son's shed. Fluorescent light casts weird shadows, marauding ghouls in the shambolic space. Tools in amorphous piles take it easy on the oil-stained work bench. Bikes lean, like old war veterans, on walls adorned with posters. Shelves bowing under Cosco stocks doze, enshrouded in dust.

I approach my son. Tentatively. We've always had a strained relationship. Though polite, silence screamed in the space between our conversations. If you could call them that. We just examine our feet awkwardly.

The cold is cruel, drifting up from the cement floor. I shiver involuntarily. While his wife and kids watch a movie in the warm house, I want to be with my son. You see, there is always the next moment. When you take a deep breath, close your eyes so tightly they almost pop out your ears and you visualise forgiveness as luminous as fireworks on New Year's Eve.

How much time do I have left with him?
I am seventy three and he is forty five.

He nods a subdued welcome, approaches the ancient, rusting Kelvinator and returns with a glass of white wine. He refills his and stubs a cigarette into a hideous glass ashtray, a cairn of butts. While he ignites another, the match fizzing to its death, I take a clandestine peek. His hair is the hue of burnt treacle. His forehead is traversed by worry tracks. His blue eyes are smoky-dull with sadness.

Small talk drifts towards the roof. Then, from out of nowhere, he starts. Staccato. Urgent. Hurting. Telling me how he has blamed me for leaving a suffocating marriage to live with the man I've been with for forty years. His vitreous pain is a soliloquy into the garish shed light. He tells me he once hated me.

I corral the crushing hurt.

And keep listening.

How could I have told my two young sons what really happened? Do you split them in half? Toxic courtroom battles would have destroyed us all.

My small sons were five and eight when the older one brightly announced, "You won't go to heaven, Mummy. You're an adulteress."

Their father's words parroted in innocence. Even now that memory can slice me into a million pieces. Late at night ... I am weeping at shadows on the ceiling.

I kept silent. For decades. Maybe, one day, my sons would see another truth. I had regular access and constant communication but the grief of not having them was never far away, taunting me with guilt and loss.

And one wintry Sunday afternoon they chose to live with my gentle farmer and me. Anyone who has experienced the anguish of not being with one's kids will understand.

And perhaps smile for me...

Traversing through a dark woods, I learned that all I could do was be me. And I like me today. I don't worry about the wrinkles parked on my face without a formal invitation.

Happiness is my GPS.

My son stares into the oracle of his glass. Is he searching for something? Are the answers in the shards of light in the wine?

He exhales a cloud of ice-white gossamer. And turns to me. Slowly. His eyes are dusky with emotion.

“But...but you’ve always been there for me, Mum. Haven’t you?”

In case the moment joins the predatory chill, I am silent. Just nod. My eyes fill with tears and his handsome, chiselled face blurs. He tells me he hated everyone: his father, his older brother and my husband. I know, for the first time tonight, that I was not the sole recipient of his ignited cannon of torment.

He then looks right into me. That place in us all, where, if you listen...shhhhh...like your ear to a shell, miracles live.

“And I’ve always been loved...”

This is that moment! I fear I might drown in happiness. My voice is filled with bubbles, rising from an underwater cave.

“I wish I could take back your hurt. I’m so...so sorry. I can only ask for your forgiveness. One ‘if-only’ has travelled in a pocket in my heart. It’s the chasm that’s existed between us. I’ve been waiting in the wings.

“I can die right now.”

His smile suffuses every corner of the shed. Straight white teeth glint and the small boy peeps through the adult he now is. Neither of us has noticed we are so cold we are turning blue.

My son has crawled through a jungle of hurt and blame. He now totes a Jungian kit bag of coping-and-moving-on tools.

That conversation is my Mt Everest.

I’ve had to wait till I am old...

My Bucket List

Carol Cruikshank

Lake Illawarra

Well, my good news is, one item will soon be off the list! I am finally doing a cruise on the Murray River. Five days of bliss, sitting on the deck watching the beautiful Australian landscape go by. Who cares if it is winter? I'll be rugged up in a blanket with a hot drink in my hand waiting for the next meal to be served. Tick!

The second item is less likely to happen unless I sell my house to finance it, although a reverse mortgage is not unheard of. I have long dreamed of trips on the Trans-Siberian and Orient Express trains – my favourite way to travel. However, I still haven't given up on that one even though I am fast approaching eighty. No tick yet!

My third wish formed at a young age watching the locals fishing off the rocks at Maroubra as waves crashed around us. I always wanted to catch a fish, cook and eat it. My childhood attempts with bread on a safety pin attached to string were obviously useless, but the seagulls enjoyed the free lunch. Over the years I had several opportunities to cross this dream off my bucket list while living in various parts of the world.

In Port Moresby I jumped at the chance to go fishing in a rowing boat, bobbing about in the bays and inlets throwing out fishing lines. As I lay groaning in the bottom of the boat, green with seasickness I caught nothing but a bad dose of sunburn. Didn't try that again.

Invited to friends' cottage on a lake in Northern Ontario, I was excited at the thought of fishing off the dock and finally caught a fish. As it was only about three inches long I was told to throw it back, much to my chagrin and the onlooker's amusement. But I do have a photo of me looking very happy with my fish on the hook.

My second Canadian lake adventure was an unexpected and totally new experience. I was invited to go to 'the running of the smelts'. I didn't know what that was, but envisioned something like the salmon jumping waterfalls in Alaska, or 'smelts' running along the beach in their new seasonal sneakers.

We arrived at the dark cold beach and made fires of old tyres. Various groups were dotted along the beach each with their own fire, like some prehistoric ritual, although there didn't appear to be too many virgins around to sacrifice.

I was handed waders and a net on a long pole and we sat on the cold sand until the cry rang out, 'The smelts are running'. *Where are they running to and why?* were my thoughts. Everyone plunged into the lake scooping up the tiniest fish I'd ever seen and tossing them into buckets. I didn't get in too far with my short legs and scrunched up waders so scooped up dead or stunned ones floating along the lake edge. They were then cooked on the fires. Tasted okay but I didn't bother taking my share home. I have since found out they are the same as whitebait here – those tiny fish with the accusing eye I see at the fish market.

When I got home and looked in the mirror I was horrified. I appeared as an escapee from the New Christie Minstrels from the tyre smoke. And all I caught was a bad case of bronchitis. No tick yet for my fishy dream.

I returned to Australia and moved to Lake Illawarra. At a seminar not long after arrival I met Kevin who had been a professional fisherman and inspector on the lake. After hearing of my unfulfilled wish, he offered to take me fishing.

“Wear something comfortable,” he instructed. I turned up at his home in an emerald green, terry towelling strapless playsuit circa 1975. Unimpressed by my sartorial efforts, he handed me a pair of those plastic jelly shoes in Barbie pink which didn’t quite fit, a bright yellow life vest and a red cap along with a four litre ice cream container which I presumed was for our catch.

As we pushed off in his tinnie spewing out a cloud of black fumes, he announced, “Start bailing, the boat has a small leak but we’ll be okay.” If bailing was a gold medal sport I would have won as I flung the rising tide out of the boat. Around the back of an island he trailed the net – a signal for every pelican and seagull in a ten mile radius to attend the buffet about to begin. “We need to hurry,” announced Kevin, “as I don’t have a licence and the inspectors might be around.” I figured the inspectors must be idiots if they couldn’t see the flocks of birdlife descending on us. As he pulled mullet from the net, I had one hand bailing and the other bashing the birds with an oar to stop them making off with our catch. As I tried to keep my sandals on and away from the fish flapping in the bottom of the boat in the rising water, I was more worried about the Fashion Police turning up!

We hauled in the net, headed for home and the fish were cleaned in the lake and cooked immediately – delicious. But I still hadn’t caught one and cooked it myself. I do have a fishing rod left behind by my brother, so if there are any volunteers to take me fishing that would be great. If you put the bait on the hook, gut and clean the fish, I will cook the catch in my father’s famous beer batter and provide the beer and chips. But still not sure if that gets a tick!

On the Three-Twenty-Four

Julie Davis

Woonona

Four carriages. Bummer. It'll be packed, standing room only to Wollongong.

No matter. Nothing can diminish the euphoria Hazel feels after a visit to the Art Gallery. Happens every time – the experience of communing with artists through their works. She leaves the gallery invigorated, restored and ready to take on the world. Today is no different.

They squeeze into the only two spaces available, hands grasping vertical poles and feet spread to maintain balance. Either side of them seated passengers avoid eye contact, wriggle self-consciously and focus on their devices. Two young Asian men rise, gesture a hand each towards their vacated seats. Larry and Hazel smile, gracious in their thanks.

'You people shouldn't travel in peak hour', rasps a loud male voice through the crowd of standing bodies. 'What're ya doin' anyway? Old geezers should keep off trains until workers are in their offices or've gone home.'

Silence.

Hazel places a plump soft hand on Larry's tense knee. Fear of confrontation spreads like an electric current through the compartment. Who will be galvanised enough to respond? Should someone call the guard?

The speaker is hidden from the view of Larry and Hazel who decide by osmosis not to react. Opposite, unseen by Larry and Hazel and next to Raspy Voice sit Bob and Heather, silver hair and lined faces marking them too as targets of his rancour.

Hazel fills the silence with an unspoken reply: I'll tell you what we've been doing – I've been to Artexpress. Awesome senior school artworks. Each Thursday Larry returns to his former workplace as a consultant. Lunches with colleagues. Last week. . .

What the disgruntled speaker cannot see is Larry's kindly demeanour. A tall man, shoulders slightly rounded. His head and face smooth, eyes conveying empathy. Hazel, deceptively docile, nestles her plumpness beside her husband. Skilled in social work, she feels able to handle any dysfunctional person, any confrontation. Perhaps not today with no back-up. Her elation melds into the subdued mood of the carriage.

Then a woman's raised voice: 'Yeah. No oldies on trains until nine or after three.'

Nothing. Not a sound. Hazel whispers to Larry, 'So what happened to encouraging older people to stay in work. What ...'

Larry leans close, 'Shh. They sound drunk. Keep out of it.'

The mass of commuters, like flotsam on a pond, shifts and shuffles to make way for luggage and travellers boarding at Wollongong, the airport link. Someone stands for the young woman with toddler in a stroller. She sighs a thank-you as bodies separate to make way for her. Larry smiles and wriggles his fingers towards the child who swivels his head to stare into a trousered leg beside him.

The protestors seem to have been muted by the mass of bodies around them. The crowd thins at Hurstville as suburban passengers alight.

'They're the ones that shouldn't be on this train,' Bob whispers to Heather.

Four of those standing, those without luggage, move to the body of the carriage. The protestors become visible to Larry and Hazel. An unkempt couple slumped against each other, eyes closed. Bob and Hazel beside them smile across at their fellow seniors. Larry raises his eyebrows and shrugs his shoulders. Hazel grimaces then returns their smiles.

An inner clock wakens the dozing couple before Sutherland where they rise and shuffle their way to the exit. Raspy Voice mumbles 'Catch an earlier train next time, old timers.'

And you catch a city train, mutters Hazel to herself.

Like a slowly deflating balloon the atmosphere in the compartment relaxes. Two of those with luggage take vacated seats, four remain standing, their attention devoted to smartphones.

'Copped a serve there mate,' Bob looks at Larry.

'Yes, first time that's happened.' Larry is pleased to hear his own voice.

'Don't I know you?' Heather leans forward.

'You walk your dog on Woonona beach, a daxie.'

'And you have the barking beagle.'

'Right,' chuckles Heather.

'Actually... ' Larry's eyes roll as Hazel, re-invigorated, launches her 'What do you think about asking Council to change the southern half of the beach to a green zone? Give the dogs a place to run, leash free.'

'Great idea. Would legitimise what's already happening,' Bob chortles. The child in the stroller stirs, falls back to sleep.

'I've already written to Council and had a reply. Policy is to be reviewed later in the year and they'll seek community input. Have to keep an eye on Council's website and Facebook page. That's the tricky part.'

Fellow passengers add 'Good on you.' And 'Need you older guys to keep tabs on things.'

Hazel could name many millennials active in social issues. But that doesn't mean we bow out, she thinks, amid continuing friendly banter.

The train has reached Thirroul where both older couples alight. During the eighteen minute wait for their connecting service the chatter continues. Larry and Bob compare notes on their respective Men's Sheds.

Heather answers Hazel's query on her volunteer job in aged care. 'It's one-on-one stuff. There are heaps of people not as active as we are, but their brains remain alert and curious.'

'And don't you think that's the key ... to the notion of ageing positively, I mean? Maintaining your curiosity?'

'Yes definitely... and that's what we focus on. Taking someone to a gallery exhibition, a concert, to a garden show – whatever – helping with family history research. I take my laptop on some visits and we google away. Sometimes we take a train to the city. It's really an easy outing if you choose your times.'

'Oh, I love the trip usually. Plenty of reading time, especially in the quiet carriage.'

The connecting all-stations service arrives. The conversation continues to Woonona where Larry and Hazel leave the train.

'See you on the beach,' calls Heather.

On the drive home Larry says 'You haven't said anything about your gallery visit.'

'Inspiring, as usual. Tell you more over dinner.'

Reflection

Jan Dawkins

Oatley

The scene outside her window of autumn leaves falling with the sun highlighting their colours of yellow and red encouraged Jen to put pen to paper. She needed to talk to someone to share her feelings but no one was around. Thinking back on her life, she recalled how she'd encouraged those who had come to her for help to write down their thoughts which was a way of releasing their feelings. So, deciding to take her own advice, words began to spill onto the page.

Letter to a younger self...

Dear Jen,

You're probably thinking, *what's this silly old twit writing to me for? Obviously, she's doing her usual thinking thing again.* Well you're correct. I've been thinking about what I wanted to tell you now that I'm growing older, whether you want to listen or not is up to you. I do appreciate you're still at school and your thoughts for the future are finishing school for the day, getting homework out of the way and hopefully being allowed to watch television. But at the risk of boring you I'll continue.

I remember in the younger years I didn't feel the need to listen to older people either. But lately I've been recalling the words Mum said to me in my later years, as I was trying to make her do things she wasn't capable of anymore. *'You'll only understand when you're where I am now.'* Those words are now my reality. On reflection of Mum's ageing: maybe secretly I didn't want her to get older. Maybe the way she lived in the older years wasn't the mother I remembered. But small things become great achievements as you grow older. Whether it's having the energy to mop the floor or go to the shops.

So, Jen never underestimate your daily achievements. After all Life is a Journey. Now there's a statement never heard before! All jokes aside it is a journey and most of the time we don't know where it will lead. It can change day to day. Remember when you were that little girl playing imaginary games in the cubby house, the world was full of opportunities. The dream was to become a journalist and travel the world. You even had a name for this famous journalist, Suzanne Forest. Or maybe an actress would be the way to go strutting across the world stage. Another thought was to be an archaeologist. Never in your plan was it to get married and have children.

Well now I'll tell you from the older self's perspective what really happened. I did travel and explore the ancient places of which I'd always dreamt. However, instead of the dream careers, nursing and social welfare were the reality. Sorry to burst your fantasy bubble kid! Do I have regrets you ask? I wouldn't be human if I said no, however, my life has been enriched by the people I've cared for and who have ultimately cared for me. If I hadn't got married I wouldn't have known a loving supportive relationship and the joy of my beautiful sons. Recently someone asked me, *'What is the most important thing in life?'* People, was my answer. People teach you the greatest lessons. People are there for you. People form the foundation of your life's journey.

I'm not going to pretend ageing health issues don't take their toll and yes, even though I still want to fly in my mind, the frustration of the body not co-operating can be a huge challenge. Sometimes life seems overwhelming and daily tasks insurmountable and there's no way out. However, I gain strength from the words an elderly patient said to me when I was lamenting turning sixty, *'How lucky you are to have had those years.'* Yes, she was right and I have to keep going every day to keep the years going. I can imagine you gasping at being sixty. After all, at your age anything over thirty is entering dinosaur years.

Anyway, the thoughts I'm passing onto you are: live every day, try to accept the things you can't change and always remember Jen, the adventures, the smiles, the memories and the love. Don't listen to those who want to stereotype you as part of an ageing population and a burden on society. Value the contribution you and the many others will have made in their lives to this society. Try not to listen to the negativity. I know it's hard to be positive at times but always keep an interest. Everyone needs a purpose in life. And a good laugh with friends is amazing medicine.

You can now breathe a sigh of relief as I'm nearly finished, just a few more tips. Cast your mind back occasionally when things get tough and remember that little girl in her cubby house and the enthusiasm for the future she held. Hold close to your heart and mind the wise words Dad spoke, *Years may wrinkle the face but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul.*

So, enjoy your youth Jen, spread your wings and fly and never lose the enthusiasm particularly when you get older. Sometimes I've found it's the only thing that keeps me going plus a very large dose of determination. Oh, and look after your health, it's your best asset. Never take it for granted, your older self, did, thinking I was indestructible. Don't make my mistake. And if something does happen never give up looking for the answers. In fact, never stop exploring Life's possibilities.

Now I'm finished. Take care of yourself.
Your older self.

Just as Jen put down her pen the phone rang. Picking it up she was greeted by a familiar voice.

'Hey, it's June. Do you want to meet up for coffee?'

'I couldn't think of anything better,' Jen replied.

Then returning to her desk, she folded the letter placing it carefully in her Precious Memories box determined to read it often to remind herself to stay positive.

The Inheritance

Graham D'Elboux

Woonona

It was the magpies that woke Arthur and he lay awhile listening to a sound that always reminded him of his days growing up in the bush. His bladder, full again, prompted him to swing his feet to the floor and to sit for a moment before launching himself towards the bathroom. His knees cracked as he stood and an unkempt head popped up from the other side of the bed.

"Are you alright Arty?" it said.

Arthur grunted before closing the door. His stream was weak and died out before he was finished so he waited a moment – it wasn't unusual for it to start again when he was halfway back to bed. His teeth smiled at him through the water in the glass as if welcoming him to another day.

At seventy three years of age Arthur and Daphne Potts were in relatively good shape. Arthur's days on the rugby field had ruined his knees and his enlarged prostate let him down at times but all in all they enjoyed life. Even more so now that Alastair had moved out. Alastair, their only child, had been a disappointment to Arthur. He had wanted his son to follow in his footsteps but Alastair had shown no interest in sports and had followed his own path. Now Alastair was forty and had only recently moved out. Even Daphne was pleased. It wasn't as if they didn't love their son; if anything, they loved him too much with Daphne cooking his favourite foods and following him around with a cardigan whenever a cloud went over; his father silent and critical. The boy was ruined.

"The bloody oldies drive me crazy," said Alastair Potts as he drained the last of his Pinot Noir.

His mate Neville Baxter gazed down at the pool below the windows of the Bondi Icebergs Club.

"I know what you mean," he replied, "my old man can't even use an atm. And as far as the computer goes he's hopeless. I don't know how Mum and Dad would cope if I weren't around."

At that very moment, at the other end of that famous stretch of sand, Neville's father Stan, was raising a schooner at the Bondi Diggers. He was with his mates from Vietnam and on this once a month day he felt just as he had back in 1968 when they had been shipped off together. There wasn't a full head of hair between the lot of them and time had stamped itself on their bodies but that didn't matter, for they only ever saw themselves as they had been back then. They had survived horrors that others could not imagine and their bond was unbreakable. Stan had just come from a computer course that he and Arty Potts were taking on the sly. He'd been all fingers and thumbs at first but now it was beginning to sink in and he was pleased with himself.

Back at the Icebergs, Alastair ordered another Pinot Noir before carrying on.

"I'm finding it a bit tough since I moved out Nev. I never realized how much everything costs, I mean the power and gas bills are horrendous. I don't know how I'd manage if I didn't take the washing back to Mum's and hit the old man for a dollar or two. It annoys the hell out of me when he complains about giving me a few miserable dollars." He paused to take another mouthful. "I mean, how do they think I'm going to survive?"

Neville said, "I thought your Mum and Dad were on the pension."

"Well they are but I'm sure they've got a bit stacked away. In fact, I'm depending on it."

Every morning at around ten, Arthur and Daphne drove to a beachside coffee shop and met Stan and Jill Baxter. It was a ritual that they had continued for years for they enjoyed each other's company and it was these simple pleasures that reminded them of days when things were tougher. Days when they put furniture on lay-by and paid it off at a few dollars a week; days when you waited for things you needed and got few of those you wanted. But they had survived and with retirement and the mortgage now paid, life was good.

Stan looked out across the Tasman before asking, "How's Alastair these days Arty? Neville tells me he's struggling a bit."

"Alastair struggles because he has no idea how to manage his finances. I blame myself I suppose."

"Have you told him of our plans?"

"No, I'm waiting for the right moment."

The following week Alastair and Neville arrived at the coffee shop – a surprise visit for Alastair to drop off a bag of laundry and to ask his father for fifty dollars. Arthur slowly removed his sunglasses and put them on the table.

"I'm afraid I can't do that son," he said. "And you can put that bag of washing back in your car because your mother's not doing it anymore. The gravy train is over. And while you're here I want you to go and run the mower over our lawn and keep tabs on things while we're gone."

"Gone? What do you mean gone?"

"We're off to America for six weeks – maybe longer if the money holds out. We thought it was about time we did something for ourselves and spent some of your inheritance. Your mum and I are getting remarried in Las Vegas."

Alastair was dumbfounded. Neville looked at his mother and father.

"You're not going of course," he said.

"We certainly are," said Stan, "I just finished finalizing all the arrangements on the net this morning."

"The net?"

"Got our confirmation emails today. It's amazing what you can do on that computer."

You could hear them laughing from down on the beach.

Positive Ageing – A Paradox

Fay Dooley

Port Macquarie

*Alone but not lonely, poor but happy,
vulnerable yet strong in faith*

What was I thinking, I'm sixty-five and stubbornness is no substitute for youth. If I thought nine months training would prepare me for 800 kilometres, I was crazy. From my first tracing of the Camino de Santiago, a demon emerged; its name O'Cebreiro. I have broken the back of the journey yet the devil taunts me. Pain feeds my fear; will 1300 metres of rough mountain track end my pilgrimage?

On this bright clear morning disheartened and pussy-footing along the ancient streets of Ponferrada I round a corner and glinting in the autumn sun is the romantic twelfth century Castillo de los Templarios.

Middle Age pilgrims were easy targets; bandits, no shelter no medical aid and haphazard directions caused many deaths. The Knights Templar routed bandits, constructed hostels and hospitals for exhausted and sick pilgrims. Today, Albergues replace Templars' hostels and scallop shells mark the Way; however, danger remains. Shrines and plaques memorialise modern day pilgrims who die along the Way.

Ballooning blisters, hanging toenail and bone ache force me to ask directions to the bus depot. Early next morning, five kilometres seems like fifty; I am relieved to bus twenty-four kilometres to Villafranca de Bierzo, but saddened that 185 kilometres to Santiago may be beyond me. As the bus rumbles towards O'Cebreiro, I am reminded that Camino is not about ego.

Lost without a clue, in a landscape edged by forest, I peer towards a disappearing horizon. Suddenly a young man of angelic appearance emerges. He strides through an endless grassy meadow towards me; lightly dressed, small bag slung across his body, guitar on his back. I ask the question "Do you know the way?" I'm very tempted to add 'to San Jose' but he is too young to know Burt Bacharach.

Caesar, well-educated and urbane walking with his wing man, is intrigued that an Australian woman is walking the Way. He is about my son's age and I easily slip into auntie role; he tells me to stop whinging when I complain that my walking notes are ambiguous. I hand them over, he reads and apologises 'this translation from Spanish to English is rubbish'. Caesar gradually tells the reason for his pilgrimage; he is bewildered by his second divorce, but his real heartache is the recent death of his father.

In a forest landscape the Iron Cross atop a rock cairn is a symbol of profound gestures; pilgrims tuck tokens, poems and photos of loved ones in the loose rocks. Scrambling up shifting rocks I place my small stone found at a shrine, close to the cross; smoke fills my nostrils, a plume rises from nearby bushes. Safe on level ground I spy a familiar face; a young Korean with wide smile emerges and reveals the smoke story; he has burnt twenty pages of his life story and is reborn. I am grateful to witness many extraordinary moments, some meaningful, some funny.

I descend bus steps to Villafranca de Bierzo; each footfall raw and burning, I clutch my guide book and follow scallop shells to Hotel Casa Mendez. My luggage waits and I'm pointed to steep stairs; the bed beckons but I grab my pack before I weaken.

Villafrance de Bierzo is bordered by steep gorges and the rio Búrbia. Stone houses hug the main thoroughfare, I hobble along dusty lanes, afternoon air cools my face, a young novice hurries past me towards the convent gate. I visualise winter, snow clinging to steep gorges and river rushing fast, a chilling sensation.

A hearty meal and wine brings comfort, but apprehension covers me like a blanket as I climb the steep staircase. I apply ointment and bandages, check the bus schedule for O’Cebreiro and try to sleep. I rise un-rested. Rain seems imminent; I stuff wet weather gear into my pack, pull on socks, tightly lace boots and step around the room. I’m not sure what decides me; sheer stubbornness or yielding to faith. Snacks, band-aids, water bottle, breakfast and I’m on my way to tramp 36 kilometres.

Wild country, prayer and solitude the pilgrim experience, no longer in control of anything except one foot in front of the other and that can be dodgy. Will I be able to keep walking with my blisters? A fellow pilgrim snaps a photo; my grin says ‘of course I’m being looked after’.

I know how many kilometres I cover in an hour but this is rough country. In the far distance I glimpse Caesar and his friend, too far to hear my ‘yahoo’; I increase my pace but the gulf is too wide. A pilgrim joins me; suggesting we take a short cut in a deeply forested valley. I decline and walk the designated road. Hills become mountains, the horizon a blend of greens merging into endless blue sky; nature my only companion and when a rustic bar appears, I have found a palace.

This bar is an oasis; locals drink wine and smoke endless cigarettes. All eyes upon me as I enter the dim interior; I’m past worrying. I want coffee, food and to check my feet, they seem to be holding up, which is incredible.

The landscape is wild; my finger traces the route, ‘how far to the top?’ Two fingers and a tap on a watch is my answer. The day is closing, I start, grateful to step apart from life to escape the humdrum and become heroic; arduous training, blisters, doubts and hard saved dollars this experience is worth it.

Tender-footed, muscles groaning, I dodge sharp stones and slippery gravel, loss of concentration will send me flying down-hill. My walking poles are life-savers. A light mist dampens my face; cool air starts my nose running. Pain is irrelevant, my will to keep going amazes me. Life will be a piece of cake after this.

A low stone wall means habitation, I hurry along. I must be delirious I hear Celtic music, pilgrims with bulging packs huddle in doorways. The air electric with excitement.

I made it!

The Story of Two Mates

Pamela Dures

Wauchope

It was 2013, 95 years since the end of WW1 and 95 years since Uncle Tom had been killed.

The only photo my husband's family had of Thomas Albert Dures 4788, 18th Battalion AIF was taken while he was on leave in England standing beside another soldier who was seated. On the back of this photo postcard was written, *To Dear sister Phillis, with love and kisses from your ever loving brother Tom and Wack*. But who was 'Wack'? Tom's family always wondered.

So at 75 years of age, I began the search to find more about what had happened to Tom just 3 months before 'The War to end all Wars' finally did end and to hopefully discover the identity of Wack.

The Battle of Amiens was 8th August 1918 and on that day Tom's life ended at the age of 23. That day was described as 'The Black Day of the German Army' by the German General Erich Von Ludendorff. And it was certainly the blackest of days for Tom's family.

My first step proved to be an excellent beginning to what became an extraordinary adventure into the lives of two ordinary Aussies and why they, along with so many others will never be forgotten. I emailed a copy of the postcard to the RSVP section of the Sydney Morning Herald, complete with the hand-written words on the reverse side, requesting if anyone could identify Wack.

Shortly after purchasing the Saturday Herald I received a phone call from a lady in Ingleburn. Estelle told me she thought the seated soldier was Reuben Allen who had returned home from the war and was quite an identity around the area. Always called, Wack, and became known as Mr Ingleburn.

She gave me the phone number of his daughter, Betty, who by coincidence lived only 25 minutes from our home.

On contacting Betty, her words to me were, "Wack was my dad!"

Can you imagine our excitement that after so many years, we finally and so easily, were on the road to discovery? She invited my husband, Ron, being Tom's nephew and me to visit her. She had her father's war diary, which perhaps could throw more light on these two young men's army service. The last entry in the diary however was dated May 1918.

Our meeting with Betty took place the day after the phone call. Not only did she have a diary, but also a book. *Campbelltown – World War One 1914–1918*, which featured, *The Ingleburn Boys*, a photograph of five young soldiers, two of whom were Tom and Wack. Strangely, Tom was from Carlton where his name is listed on the Hurstville War Memorial and the Primary School Honour Board. Later we learnt that his name is listed on the Ingleburn War Memorial and on the Honour Roll at the RSL Club. It seemed that these country boys had befriended the boy from the city.

In 1975 when Wack was aged 81, he wrote an account of his war experience in a magazine published for the opening of Ingleburn RSL Club. He described how he was sent to Amiens for NCO training and 'I handed my Lewis gun over to Tom Dures. While I was away, Tom was killed in the big push on 8th August'.

I kept in close contact with Estelle and Betty, who had known each other growing up in Ingleburn. We decided to meet and together with Ron's brother, Noel and his wife, Betty's son Mark and other family members we gathered at the RSL Club in Ingleburn where there is a wonderful display of wartime memorabilia. As we were leaving, Betty saw a small notebook written in her father's handwriting, opened at a page which read, *Heard Tom was killed in action on 8/8/18*. Betty was unaware of the existence of this second diary.

It was yet another coincidence that it happened to be opened at this page. This diary continued until he returned home to Australia in February 1919. Wack married his sweetheart. He died in 1982.

Our quest for more information led us to, Trove. It was here that we read the tributes placed in the Sydney Morning Herald by Tom's family over many years and one reading, *A tribute of love to the memory of Private Thomas Dures ... 'his sun went down while it was still yet day' from his loving friend Ethel*.

So, Tom also had a sweetheart. Later we were to learn that in 1925 Ethel married one of his friends pictured in the Campbelltown book. Now we knew more about the young man who enlisted in 1916, leaving Australia aboard the HMAT *Ceramic* on 13th April 1916 with his Ingleburn mates.

The research department of the Australian War Memorial is of course the place to start searching the war records. Red Cross eye witness accounts are available which told us that Tom was killed by 'friendly fire'. *He was hit in the head by a piece of shrapnel and died instantly*.

On 11th September 1919 a small parcel containing 1 bible, 1 YMCA wallet, cards and unit colours was returned to his grieving parents, William and Phillis. They never saw his resting place in France.

In 2008 Ron and Noel and their wives, together with our two sons and grandson, attended the First Anzac Day Dawn Service held at The Australian War Cemetery in the French town of Villers-Bretonneux'. We laid flowers, messages and mementoes on Tom's grave.

Thomas Albert Dures was remembered at the Last Post Ceremony at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra in August 2014. His story was read and concluded ... *Thomas's body was recovered from the battlefield and buried in the cemetery at Villers-Bretonneux where the Australian National Memorial now stands ... His name is listed here on the Roll of Honour along with more than 60,000 others from the First World War*.

The photograph of Tom and Wack was displayed at the base of the Pool of Reflection – two mates together.

A Worn Out Knee

Barbara Edmunds

Forster

Childless, partnerless and with zero interest in Rugby League I happily gravitated toward solitude. The task of making small talk at social gatherings simply became too onerous. Besides, work filled my days and provided me with the limited social interaction I needed. Always someone was finding love while someone else was losing it. My facial muscles worked overtime to assume the appropriate expression. We moaned about procedural changes and listened in trepidation to the office boy who practised his jokes on us in preparation for his big break. His sense of timing was non-existent ruining every joke. Work was the skeleton of my existence giving my life meaning and purpose.

December 14 was no different to any other morning except that I had a Doctor's appointment and Christmas was peeping around the corner. It wasn't Christmas which excited me but the prospect of two weeks' annual leave. I had a new Stephen King book which I planned to read in my favourite chair under the Ghost Gum. The overhanging boughs offered just the right protection from a summer sun hardwired to burn all it touched.

'The operation will have to be early February. Your knee is so badly damaged bone is rubbing on bone. If you fail to act you will be navigating the world from a wheelchair.' There was nothing particularly difficult about these words but I found them nonsensical as they tumbled from the specialist's mouth. Like many my age, arthritis was my unsought companion. My knee had been painful for a long time but my body was resilient in finding ways to circumvent the pain. None of it was good for my gait, nor my tendons and muscles, but, up until now, my body and I were united in avoiding the surgeon's knife.

'You will need to arrange for at least two months off work. You won't be able to drive for six weeks and you need to give yourself an extra two weeks to make sure your balance is okay.'

Two months! I had never before been off work for that long. I was galloping toward my sixty-eighth birthday and when told of my plight my employer suggested it may be a good time to retire. Once my knee was fixed I could enjoy living and see some of the world. It took me a long time to accept his decision was not made from malice. At the time I thanked him for his concern, while privately wishing him a long stay in hell. The skeleton of my life was broken.

February inexorably came. After the replacement I lived in the thrall of pain and endless bouts of rehab. At the end of the allotted two months I unexpectedly discovered I wasn't missing work. I started to fret that with recovery, loss would return to crush me. Instead I found pleasure in my neglected garden and in attempting to give the rather overgrown grass, not grand enough to be called a lawn, some structure. Pleasure turned to dismay when I finally realised my small acreage in Coolongolook was beyond my physical capabilities. Moving was inevitable. When I put my home of twenty-seven years on the market, however, I discovered others didn't love it as much as I did.

I had taken my ex-employer's advice and arranged a River Cruise with a girlfriend. With the departure date looming I decided to take the house off the market until my return. The day before it was to be de-listed a couple came for a viewing. Inured to negativity it took me a moment to understand they loved it. And hallelujah they were prepared to wait my return. My holiday was one of my life's highlights and for a moment I forgot the much anticipated boredom patiently waiting my return'.

But it wasn't there. Waiting instead was lots of packing and a new home to find. I decided on Forster. During my search I began to realise the lack lustre appeal of many of the places I visited and was at last able to find compassion for those whose negativity had previously incensed me.

Change is not my friend and I took a while to settle. Not long after I moved in I answered a knock on the door. 'Welcome. You must be exhausted. Come and have a cuppa with us.'

With those kind words from my neighbour I gradually acclimatised to a life lived in close proximity to others. While in this spiral of change I decided to further broaden my horizons and find a writing group. Words have always fascinated me. Their meanings are endless dependent simply on how they bump together then fall onto the page. I finally settled on *Scribblers* which not only encouraged writing but offered guest speakers skilled in the art of imparting knowledge. It met in Taree, a ninety-kilometre round trip, but I was used to travelling that distance when I worked.

Now was my time to see what worlds the words would weave for me. *Scribblers* proved invaluable'. Some of the members were published authors. Initially, awed by their prowess, I kept my distance. Gradually I understood that nothing I did would be ridiculed and I too began to read my stories at the meetings, honing my skills and gaining invaluable insights' Benefiting from renewed confidence I decided to supplement my monthly Taree rendezvous with the weekly U3A Writing Group in Forster. At least it was only a five kilometre round trip. There were no educational talks but the support was as abundant.

One day I woke, shocked to realise I no longer needed work to define my life or to fill my days. In retirement I couldn't find the lonely woman I dreaded would be waiting for me. Instead I discovered a woman blessed with companionship and standing tall with purpose. Most amazing of all was the knowledge that this new woman had her genesis in a worn out knee'

The Old Time Compositor

Graham Elphick

North St Marys

From an early age I wanted to be a printer. After reading about Johann Gutenberg, who invented single letter printing in 1440, I attended a printing exhibition in 1952 and immediately fell in love with the Letterpress concept. I finished school in 1957 and set about obtaining an apprenticeship, which I gained in early 1958. I joined a firm called, Craftsmen Typesetters, in Clarence Street, Sydney. I did my first three months in the printing trade as a messenger boy taking printing proofs all around the city, by public transport to advertising agencies and brought back copy to the print shop.

I was then given a mentor, a fully-qualified printing tradesman in the Composing Room and I was excited to be accepted as a junior printing trainee. I absolutely loved my job as a hand compositor, setting jobs by hand, in lead type, just like Gutenberg.

I spent my first three years learning to handset and make up newspaper advertisements and limited edition books and then two years learning machine composing on the Monotype Keyboard, which was a typesetting machine using single letters, with a set of seven, qwerty keyboards, which was a real challenge to use.

I did my Printing Trades Course (Graphic Arts) at Sydney Technical College, Ultimo, Sydney, and completing my Apprenticeship obtained my Trade Course Certificate in the Credit Grade, in 1963. I fulfilled my trade until the letterpress trade ended in the 1970s. I still managed my true love of the Graphic Art by buying a small hand-operated printing press and a rack of type cases with fonts of type and hand-set and printed letterheads, business cards and invitations by hand, in my little home print-shop. I printed in multiple colours, with each colour component printed separately, one day apart

for each colour. Printing was done in single colours and each separate colour on the job would have to be lined up exactly, otherwise the end result would be unreadable.

A compositor would be continually working out mathematical problems in his head, while setting up his job, which would give very great satisfaction when the job was completed successfully, and on time. While using my skills to keep on my printing dream, I also worked at 2 Camp hospital at Ingleburn, an Army Hospital. I started work as a dishwasher and then went onto the garden staff, working my way up to Head Gardener, which was another of my great passions.

In 1991, the Penrith Museum of Printing was opened and I immediately joined. It is a fully-operational print shop of the 1940s and to this day, I go every weekend, to handset type and follow my passion. I set up posters and in-house items, by hand, as was originally done by Gutenberg, all those years ago. I handset and print at home, on my old hand-operated press, so I am truly blessed by being able to still ply my old art form.

I love showing visitors our museum just how labour-intensive the old art of printing was, and telling anecdotal facts to the people, who are always truly amazed at the process of printing on our collection of old printing presses.

15

FLORIST



MATED
PAIR
GALAHS

9.30 am - 12
2 - 5 pm
THRU
SHOP
TO PLANTS

9.30 am - 12
2 - 5 pm
THRU
SHOP
TO PLANTS



Fire in the Crystals

Ann Eyers

Narrabeen

Great-Aunt Amelia and my little Nanna Gertrude, sat side by side, close together and upright, in well brushed black, fitted and shiny clothes. Their husbands stood behind them, arms folded across true hearts. Babes on knees and older children at their feet looked out warily, scratchy in their starched white.

In the bush camp of my grandparents in the first years of the 20th century, men cut out the timber, women polished dirt floors. Children followed the sound of the axe and saw to take lunches to their fathers in the forest. Families gathered around their fires to tell stories.

The bush photographer didn't come often or stay long but he caught glimpses of the lives of my people.

Years after this photograph was taken, the two little women sat side by side again. Amelia, blind by then, felt for her treasured crystal necklace.

"Take it will you Gert, I can't see it any more. I want you to have it." She wouldn't listen to Nanna's protests. The necklace passed from Amelia's misshapen and knotted hands to Nanna's equally work-worn hands. Contained in the crystals were many of the memories and stories of joys and heartaches the two women had shared beside their fire over time.

Nanna's eyes were crinkled by years of living outdoors in the bush beneath the sun. She'd been born into a family with strong attachments to the land and the sea. She married into a family of coal miners and timber getters. Her own children, including my father, were born in bush camps. After Dad died when I was five, it was the gnarled hand of that tough little bush woman which held mine and guided me forward.

She told me stories of bush dances, fiddlers around the fire, orphaned animals brought home from the forest, a brother bitten by a snake and another who was called to war. She fed me images of courage and determination.

In her words she was made of wire and whipcord, but I knew she was built of moral fibre as strong as steel.

"When I get married Nanna, will you come to live with me?" I asked as I approached my teenage years, unable to bear the thought of her not being near.

"We'll see what happens," she said.

Nanna did come to live with my husband, John and me after our marriage, until she was almost 88 years old.

It was Nanna who taught me how to chop wood for our fires, though she'd say with a smile, 'Give me the axe before you chop the legs out from underneath yourself.'

She was Little Nanna to many children, including our daughter, Bek and son, Mick. She became keeper of their secrets and supporter of their enterprises.

When we moved on to our first farm with a motley collection of horses and other animals, it was Nanna who hand-fed the new kittens and never told John or me of Bek's serial truanting or Mick's many unorthodox schemes.

While we fixed the windmill and made the condemned farmhouse habitable, Nanna searched for a china cup like hers and mine with a handle large enough for John's hand.

'Just because the house is falling down, it doesn't mean you shouldn't have a few nice things.'

Nanna made hundreds of cups of tea for John in that delicate white china tea cup. It acknowledged the importance of John's part in our tea and talk ritual. She always made sure everyone was 'given a fair go'.

While we were out walking one very hot day, two long-haired boys in a battered car stopped beside us to offer us a lift. I whispered to Nanna, "Are you okay to go with them Nanna?"

"It doesn't matter what they look like on the outside. It's what they look like when you turn them inside out that counts." she whispered back as she climbed into the old car.

The crystals slid against each other like falling tears as Nanna handed me the necklace when John's and my baby boy died. "It's time for the necklace to go to you now," she said.

As though the necklace had absorbed the secrets and energy from countless fires, lively lights emanated from each crystal. Fiery reflections played on surrounding surfaces, returning stories of past relationships and experiences to the then present.

Nanna loved a fire and all that it offered but it was the fire within her that carried the hearth and home to wherever she was. She always kept the fire alight, in the open air, in the hearth or in the crystals, demonstrating how important it is for me to feed my fire, to keep it alight.

I've worked in remote Indigenous communities where night's blackness is made familiar by a fire. One night, sitting outside in the cool blackness of the desert, with embers all that remained of the fire, I felt a presence join me. Not knowing whether it was perhaps a sleepless child or an animal, I said, "I know you're there, come on out." An old dog, disfigured by past battle scars crept forward almost to my side, to sit with me. I took unexpected joy from that moment, shared by us two imperfect creatures with the fire.

Although I carry my fire within me now I sometimes pass the crystals between my hands to remind myself of the power of the past, the good fortune of my present and the excitement of unknowns to come.

When my children and grandchildren say, 'Tell us a story', I look into the hearts and minds of Little Nannas and Papas around fires through time and space. They yield great riches of wisdom and joy for the sharing.

I must release the necklace and all it holds within it soon. When it is time.

The Upside of Funerals

Alison Ferguson

Eleebana

Ignoring Mitch's quick flinch, Sarah pressed her powdered cheek against his. 'So sad it's taken an occasion such as this to see you again.'

It was nice to see that my old friends had stayed true to their roots. Sarah's makeup had always been immaculate, even in those days of kaftans and sandals. Back then, Mitch's diatribes on the bullshit pretensions of the socially mobile had been legendary. Today, however, he merely smiled thinly, restraining himself.

They stood in the rose garden of the crematorium grounds, looking at the other mourners as they assembled. Each of the new arrivals tried to disguise their shock as each recognised another here and there, through the veil of years masking their old friends' faces. There wasn't to be a funeral ceremony but, after scattering the ashes, there would be a wake in the pub nearby. Later, there'd be plenty of time for them to catch up. Now, greetings were shared guiltily, as if it were disrespectful given the occasion.

Mitch looked like he'd been uncertain what to wear for a non-funeral. Being middle-aged hadn't stopped him from wearing jeans, but he'd selected his black ones and thrown on a dark brown leather jacket. It looked like the same one I'd clutched as his pillion passenger along icy winter roads when we were young and foolish. I never expected Mitch to make it past twenty, yet there he was, blinking in the sunlight, as if surprised to find himself still here.

Sarah's ex-husband was wearing a sharp suit, the backs of his trouser legs shiny with wear. Paul had been her high-school sweetheart and their romance survived their university years, only to falter with the arrival of children. By the look of his suit, Paul had come out the worst from their divorce settlement.

It was forty or more years since I'd seen any of them. There was Jack, with his new partner. The thin brittle wife I'd known had been replaced years before. The drunken intimacy of a night best forgotten lay between us. And there was Geoff, his bulk looming even larger, shuffling about, his characteristic gait now age-appropriate. And Lauren, affecting imperturbability as always, intoned the eulogy that I didn't want to hear. At least Cathy seemed to be enjoying herself. She surveyed the small group, her ice-sharp eyes noting all and her lips curling back with knowing appreciation of the absurdity of it all.

Mitch opened the tightly-sealed urn and tipped it through the thorns onto the petalled rose bed.

The smell was disconcertingly redolent of a barbecue. It made me think of that time we'd piled into the Kombi and headed out to the farmhouse of a friend of someone who none of us knew. We'd sat through the night drinking cheap flagon wine and smoking weed till dawn greyed the magic of the night into ash.

Here, surrounded by manicured lawns, there was something in the way they stood together, thinking about our fragile short lives that made sense of the daily struggle. The sound of soft guitar filtered amongst us. Mitch had tied his hair back, and begun to pick out sad notes on his acoustic guitar. It was good to hear his music again.

When he stopped, there were the sounds of throats being cleared and noses blown.

'Coming to the pub?' Paul asked Sarah. She looked grateful to be asked.

'You look like you could do with a drop of something,' Geoff said, giving Lauren a bear hug.

He was probably avoiding commenting on her eulogy, but she looked like the embrace was enough.

I watched them begin to leave, some headed to the pub, others back to their busy lives.

My ashes settled into the earth.

They, each a fragment of a once-shared friendship, were now scattering again into the air, swirling together for a moment in configurations of goodbyes, as if reluctant yet pleased in the end to leave.

I could not follow, but it had been good to see them all for one last time. They each hoped to see one another again, yet not on an occasion such as this.

The Power is Yours

Nola Foster

Terrigal

Standing on the side of the stage, awash with excitement tempered by a healthy dash of nervous energy, I reflected on the journey that led me to this moment.

Memories of my childhood and youth often evade me, despite a deep desire to recall my early experiences. The few memories that do surface are inevitably involved with performance, either real or vicarious. The concert that my best friend and I produced and performed in, held in Suzanne's sister's garage, singing with the church choir, being involved with costume creation and backstage dresser duties for my daughter's ballet concerts and her eisteddfod performances; I was always drawn to the performing arts in one way or another.

Of course, it could only just be on the periphery of life, never the focus. Time goes on, work takes centre stage until one day, you realise how quickly time is slipping away. Working and commuting leaves very little time for leisure activities. 'I have to do something just for me', I think to myself.

A small photograph in a local newspaper caught my eye. I read the accompanying article with ever increasing interest. A group of women, of approximately my age, belonged to a singing group and they were looking for new members. I cut out the article with every intention of contacting the group. Life got in the way as usual and several years passed.

One day I happened upon a work colleague who was looking very glamorous, beautifully made-up face and hair, and I couldn't resist complimenting her and asking her where she was off to.

"We have a gig this afternoon," she said.

Of course I was intrigued and questioned her further. She was a member of that same singing group that caught my attention so many years ago? And, even better, they were looking for new singers to join them!

This is it, I thought to myself! I'm going to do this. Despite all of the usual misgivings, 'am I good enough, will I fit in, etc.'. I went along to the next rehearsal and the rest is history, as they say.

I'd always loved to sing, but I'd never before experienced singing aCappella style, and the barbershop close harmonies were just amazing. Coastal aCappella chorus was just perfect for me. They belonged to the organisation, Sweet Adelines International. I loved the technical aspects involved in producing a beautiful, resonant sound. Who would have thought that a group of women, singing four part harmony with no instrumental accompaniment, could create such music?

When I reflect on that time, I was full of insecurities and yet being a part of the chorus and making music with them, was more important.

Over time, I became a little more confident and never lost the desire to keep improving. One of the most inspirational things was the growing awareness of how, regardless of their chronological age, every woman in the group was full of fun and a real camaraderie was evident. Not one of them fitted with the stereotypical image of 'an old woman', despite the majority being aged from mid-50s to 70s. I would look at them and think, this singing lark is keeping them young! I have known women who even in their 40s, already seem 'old'. It's a frame of mind, a way of thinking, just like the glass half full/half empty scenario. You can make yourself feel old by the way you think and therefore act.

The chorus would go out to dinner and after the meal, out would come the pitchpipe and just like that, we could make beautiful music! As long as we had enough singers from each of the four sections, we could belt out a song anywhere and the restaurants usually encouraged us, as it provides great entertainment for their patrons.

The highlight of the year for all Sweet Adelines is the annual convention and competition. Every May, around one thousand women come together to compete for the privilege of representing Australia at the International competition in America. No matter how small your chorus, you have equal opportunity to show the four international judges what you can do. There is a difference between being a choir and a chorus. A choir usually stands with songbook in hand and, however beautiful their sound, they are not quite as visually entertaining as a chorus. A chorus learns to perform the piece of music, often with planned choreography, having 'got off paper' to focus on performance. You can probably by now see why I was drawn to this particular art form.

Competition preparation is just so much fun, even allowing for the extra rehearsals, it doesn't feel like work, though a lot of work goes into perfecting as much as possible all aspects of the performance. Then the time comes, and we are one of perhaps 23 choruses from around Australia, all of whom have worked just as hard and had just as much fun, as we have. Though we are all competing against one another, the camaraderie and support for one another is palpable.

Then, with butterflies and fluttering hearts, we take lots of deep breaths, as our turn arrives to walk onto the competition stage. So many things to remember, but, once out there we immerse ourselves in the story of the song and give our gift of music to the audience. We might win a medal, we might not. We always strive to do our very best and I know of no other activity that exercises the mind and the body and keeps you young at heart, as much as singing with like-minded women.

Back home, back to rehearsal, new songs to learn and so it goes on. Thank the universe!

Positive Ageing

Kathleen Gaukroger

Port Macquarie

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?

Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take the whole day long?

From morn to night, my friend.

Christina Rosetti

Oh, yes, I am all for positive ageing, but I think that depends on the life lived before ageing caught up. I know I am a positive person, getting on top of trials and worries and everyone has those. But one has to be positive and carry on.

I am a member of a writing class at U3A (University of the 3rd Age) and with the help of the writing group, I have written my life story – everyone has one. With the help of my son, who inserted the appropriate photos and arranged for the printing, on my 90th birthday I presented each of my six children with a copy of my story in book form.

There are frustrations along the way and the only way to give vent to those is to another aged person who really understands; another, for example, who has also felt the frustration of handing in their driver's licence because their confidence had gone. So I now enjoy bus travel, and the occasional taxi, because I like to be independent. I long, though, for the physical power I once had. Nevertheless, I can still walk unaided and that is good.

I struggle with the computer and cannot keep up with technology, but being able to pay bills online is convenient and saves me going to town. Shopping by tapping a card saves me trips to the bank to get cash. I have a simple mobile phone which I prefer to use rather than the landline and it also allows me to send and receive text okay.

My first husband died at 48, after 27 years of marriage. I remarried and now my second husband is suffering from dementia and is in care. I feel blessed and secure that I still have a relatively sound mind and body and can live independently.

At 92 I'm going okay, I know I have to be positive. Visiting my husband in the hostel makes me realise that I have to keep my body and brain active. Being curious is a good thing as there are questions to be answered. Google has become a friend who answers all my queries. I enjoy being busy and my days are filled with various activities.

I object strongly to being patronised. I still have a brain and use it, but somehow the white hair and wrinkles automatically put us into 'ga-ga land'.

I wrote this poem some years ago and I still think it expresses how many oldies feel.

NOW

'You're doing well for your age'
I really do hate that phrase.
Am I supposed to disintegrate
when past the age of seventy-eight?

The sales person who deigns to smile.
I know what I want – I'm not a child.
Sale made – no plastic there,
People like me – everywhere.

A dental check – all's well.
Maybe brighten that smile – a sell.
Why? Dazzling white – a worn face,
Compatible? Not in this case.

Daily tasks exhaust – no power.
It's hard work to have a shower.
Dressing – now that's a test,
But I need to look my best.

I won't deny problems arise.
Now I know – being old and wise,
Why pantyhose is a big no-no.
Knee Hi's now the way to go.

I can no longer twist and bend
get both feet in and pull the end.
A contortionist – we see on stage.
Not for me – at my age.

Cooking, baking – time to stop.
The same goes for broom and mop.
But reflect – and turn the page
for wisdom gained – at every stage.

Setting Out

Russel Gill

Kilaben Bay

Some say that once you learn to ride a bike, you never forget. True or not, it took Jeff a few years to re-master his riding of motorbikes after a thirty-five year hiatus. For awhile, he had doubts that it was a good idea.

Before he retired, Jeff decided to test his riding memory. He chose to do it in seclusion lest he find himself a tad forgetful. In the last phase of his corporate career Jeff was an expat in Europe. He travelled a lot from his base in Stockholm. A short break on Sweden's largest island, Gotland, in the middle of the Baltic Sea, was easy to manage. There were not many people on Gotland and even less traffic. It really did feel like the middle of nowhere. What a perfect place to rent a motorbike for a long weekend.

First, Jeff had to convince the gruff Swedish fellow running the bike shop that he could ride. He kept quiet about the three and a half decade gap in his experience. His NSW rider's licence was still current and it was enough for the Swede to hand over the bike keys and the heavy two piece leather riding suit. As Jeff started to put the bottom section on backwards, the Swede approached with a quizzical, slightly suspicious look. 'No, no, turn it rounduh' he said with a sing song rising 'duh'.

Jeff managed to mount the bike in full leathers and ride out of sight without falling off. Phew. He pulled over to collect himself before setting out on the 3 day test of his riding memory. His solitary biking weekend was a success – the roads were mostly sealed, he had no spills, no more clothing embarrassments and no witnesses to his overly cautious riding technique. A seed of confidence was planted.

With retirement in Australia imminent, Jeff bought a second hand motorbike. He really didn't know much about modern motorbike models and had no one to ask, so he just followed his instincts – medium size, good brand. The bike he chose had been owned, but not much used, by a middle aged corporate type whose riding ambitions must have faded, for some reason. It looked the part. Hopefully it would do the job, and its previous owner's fading dream would not be contagious.

Jeff's first challenge was to bring the bike home – unfortunately in peak hour traffic through Sydney's cross-harbour tunnel. He set out nervously but arrived unscathed, in a lather of sweat and with the inside of his new helmet badly fogged from his breath. His older self, seemed to have more instinctive respect for safety than the younger one ever had. He no longer had that naïve invincibility of youth.

The moving tarmac seemed so close and the traffic so blasé about Jeff's fate. What to do? He practised riding often on the quieter roads near home but was still quite nervous at higher speeds, especially on corners. Jeff decided to join a club for mature age riders that he had found on the internet. They were mostly greying males – some retired, others not far off. They were drawn from all walks of life – from butchers to bank managers, computer engineers to school principals, public servants to privately wealthy business people. There were also a few women riders and several regular women pillions. All shared a taste for riding and a need for company.

Jeff found his own story to be echoed many times. Most had learned to ride motorbikes as teenagers. It was a cheap and fun way to get to Uni or to first jobs. They stopped riding in the middle years, when four-wheeled sensible transportation for families took over. In later years when the nest had emptied, it was time to play again. This time, the enjoyment of riding was the sole rationale. No one was commuting. Some spare money and free time meant they could do it on much improved modern machines, with some style. Group rides set out twice a week, usually 300 kilometres or so through Sydney's southern highlands, taking 4 to 5 hours with leisurely breaks. There was a group riding etiquette taken seriously, to keep them safely together. Jeff learned their impressive code, but it took a few rides to begin to feel comfortable with the pace. It was a 'Catch 22' – he joined the club to improve his riding but he had to improve his riding to keep up with the club. A bit more solo practise and some advanced rider training sessions built his skill and confidence. That effortless feeling of flying on two wheels gradually grew.

The club introduced Jeff to 'away rides' – thousands of kilometres taken over multiple days, staying in various country towns. This was the real deal, the fresh sense of adventure and challenge that he needed. They set out on the less travelled roads – the old highways and twisty country roads with panoramic views. They stayed in country towns each with its story of gold miners or explorers, settlers, bushrangers, artists, its war sacrifices and aboriginal roots. The best biker-friendly cafés, pubs and motels were sought from Tasmania to North Queensland and anywhere in between.

After 5 years or so, Jeff changed cities and left his riding group behind. His adventures are now confidently solo, 3 or 4 times a year, carefully planned in the spring and autumn Goldilocks' months. He often meets like-minded people at stopping points on the trips, many like to chat. But the riding is still the thing – setting out is always more delicious than arriving, anywhere.

Jeff smiles at his embarrassment when he recalls that Swede helping him to wear his leathers the right way around, in the middle of nowhere, on the other side of the world. Who would have thought that the seed planted there would grow so well?

Love Beyond Words

Wendy Gordon

Cranebrook

"You will have to go! You are driving me crazy!
I can't do this anymore!"

"If you do this once more, you can pack your bags,
walk out the front door and never come back!"

I could hear my shrill tones. I was screeching like a
mad woman! Irrational, yes! Impossible, even more so!

"Mum, you can't mean it! You wouldn't send
one of us away!"

Trapped! Guilty of being the wickedest mother ever!

Jonathan had been with us for three months,
a nine-year-old boy, the much wanted brother for
our third child, our only son, seven years old.

"Why have I not got anyone to share a room with?
You and Dad share a room, the girls share a room,
but I have no-one!" A child's perspective on justice!

So began our remarkable journey in fostering
a severely disabled boy, a child who could move
only one arm a little, who had severe intellectual
impairment, was technically blind, who had no
verbal language and numerous other medical issues.
But far worse, one who did not sleep, who laughed
like a maniac throughout the night, a child who
waited 'til I had just fallen asleep before starting
again. I was going crazy from sleep deprivation,
ageing overnight, always negative, dying within.

I knew his behaviour must stem from frustration.
I made two resolutions. This child would learn
to sleep at night. And we would develop a form
of communication.

Every day we nudged him awake if he napped.
And I realized it is very hard to laugh loud and
long at night if you are lying on your tummy! We
moved him into the lounge for night sleeping and
I began my training. I placed him on his tummy to
go to sleep and then later turned him onto his side,
a more comfortable position for him. Eight times
a night, every night. Gradually seven times a night,
then six ... and finally I only needed to say "If you
do this again I will turn you onto your tummy!" It
worked. As he slept better at night he was more
alert and responsive to his daytime environment
and experiences ... and was therefore tired at night
and ready to sleep. A year later he was an excellent
sleeper. Every night I would get up twice to turn
him, without him waking.

I learned that one does not die from exhaustion.

The second resolution was also progressing. I knew
he did not like oranges. So each afternoon, I helped
him to hold and feel an orange. I peeled it, helped
him to smell it, placed a small portion on his tongue
for a second, then gently held his head and helped
him to shake it, saying "No, Mummy.". Only six weeks
and I could ask him the question and be answered
by a slow gentle shake of the head for a 'No'
response. This was developed for other questions.
Saying yes was harder, but his beautiful smile was
sufficient. We could then ask about food, activities,
people and places.

I learned that 'Twenty Questions' is wonderful
for essential communication.

With limited use of his left hand he learned to touch
his bowl if he wanted more of his favourite foods.
That hand became quite quick, sometimes even
anticipating the question!

I was no longer the crazy mother, but one who sought to bring out the best in this dear child, so he could participate in a life as happy and varied as possible. His new supportive wheelchair improved his posture and comfort. He loved speed, so my son raced him around the house in his wheelchair. Outings gave him much joy, so we took him on long drives and walks in his wheelchair, so he could enjoy nature and its sounds and scents. He attended a Christmas party at Government House. A flight in a jumbo jet was organised.

He appreciated music of all kinds and had an incredible memory for pieces he knew. Our other three learned piano and he loved to sit with them while they practised, uttering a soft groan if they played a wrong note, crying if he did not like the piece, jiggling with pleasure if he did. He entered into the heart and soul of classical composers. If the piece used minor keys or expressed sadness, a tear rolled down his cheek. He would listen to all with rapt attention, a beautiful sight to watch him experiencing every emotion the composer had expressed.

We took him to the roller skating rink and our children would gain confidence on their skates by pushing his wheelchair, as their stabilizer. Soon other children also wanted a turn pushing Jonathan. It was lovely for him to be needed and respected for his role as 'support person'. The manager asked Jonathan if he would like a turn in the big rink. So out they went, Jonathan in his wheelchair, being raced around the rink by a speed skater. Hair blowing back, laughing with pleasure, round and round, excited beyond measure! His life became richer and fuller for his new experiences.

Jonathan's journey was often painful physically, but also emotionally – knowing he was different, sometimes not respected or valued by others. So we showed others how to treat him as a normal person, with feelings. We grew to love him dearly, as one of the family.

We received lessons in patience and endurance, lessons about unconditional love, about compassion, inclusion, that each person has value because they are a human being. He taught us the importance of respecting all people and not judging by outward appearances.

I learned that Jonathan was the teacher.

Jonathan will finish his life without ever speaking a single word. I will never hear him say "I love you too," when I tell him I love him.

I learned, without a doubt, that there is love beyond words.

Positive? Yes, wonderful positive growth, experiencing the power of reciprocal love in this one short gift of life.

Ageing? That's an all-of-life experience!

Ladies Who Lunch

Sandra Grant

Soldiers Point

It's a regular date; lunch with a group of ladies I used to work with. I retired seven years ago and missing the camaraderie of the workplace, I contacted Maria whom I had worked closely with and we arranged to meet for lunch. She arrived with Janelle, a part timer and in the months that followed we were joined by another newly retired co-worker. So we formed the Gang of Four and we have been meeting once a month ever since. The group can grow to include others we've worked with who may be on leave for a while or working part-time. Our Gang of Four has stretched to eight on some occasions. The only criteria to join us is that we don't get bogged down in 'work talk'. In the early days we sampled various cafés and food but as our 'meetings' can become quite raucous this big barn-like dining area in a popular pub suits us both for its location and atmosphere so it has become our 'usual place'. The food is not elaborate. The menu does not change much and there is rarely alcohol. Well, a glass of wine maybe.

I look forward to these dates. The conversation flows freely around families, holidays, special occasions and activities. Robyn, the 'queen of cruising' keeps us entertained with stories from her latest venture. Phones are passed around to show photos of graduations, grandchildren and holidays. We 'ooh' and 'aah'. Occasionally, we mention our past working lives but this is a small part of any lunch meeting. We tell stories and laugh, laugh and laugh some more. Our laughter is noticed by the staff and they often comment, "You ladies look like you're enjoying yourselves."

And we are! It is pure unadulterated friendship which began from a common workplace and now grows from sharing precious time together. As workmates, we seldom had time to find out each other's interests apart from a quick obligatory conversation after weekends and holidays. So this is retirement! The luxury of time to share with people and appreciate the unique qualities that we all have.

Lunch stretches to coffee, tea and some desserts which are cut into slivers to share. The socialness continues until finally someone makes a move to go; to pick up grandchildren from school perhaps. But before we move outside, we produce small diaries or phones from large handbags and the job of settling on our next lunch meeting begins.

We make our way outside, but unwilling to break this connection, the talk continues on the footpath. There is yet another story to relate. The act of standing up after a few hours of sitting seems to have jolted our memories.

Hugs all around (our lunch dates are always sandwiched between hugs) and now we really have to leave. I'm convinced that I feel and look younger as I head back to my car, due to the magic of laughter and friendship.

The hour drive home sees me savouring this time, recalling stories and laughing out loud at remembered tales. When I get home, I write up the next date on the calendar, which is already gathering bits of history; family celebrations, an exhibition to see, visitors coming to stay and a few days away. These special times are on top of my regular activities like golf, swimming, walks along the beach and an endless pile of 'must read' books.

We may be getting older but we are no longer shackled to busy work schedules. The family has been raised, the mortgage has been paid and now there is time to go to lunch.



Bushwalking and Writing at 90

Richard Grimmond

Port Macquarie

I was born in 1927 and celebrated my 90th birthday with my entire family in July 2017. In my birthday speech, I said that I have thoroughly enjoyed my 30 golden years of retirement, in which I have been lucky enough to tick all the boxes of things I wanted to do and all the places that I wanted to see around the world and in Australia.

If I was asked which retirement activities stood out above the rest, I'd say my bushwalking and my writing.

Although a keen bushwalker in my youth, there were only snatched opportunities during my working years for walking but in retirement I joined a group of day-walkers and walked weekly initially with a local Adult Education group, for many years. Then I became the Leader for another ten years and reverted to an ordinary member again until the present time. I still walk eight to ten kilometres every Thursday.

I have done a few major walks in my senior years; I walked in the Himalayas with Sherpa at age 65 and from village to village in the Highlands of New Guinea with a local guide at age 70. At age 75 I did some exploring and rediscovered the waterfall that John Oxley named Beckett's Cataract in 1818. Its exact location had been lost for 185 years. For that walk in 2003 I received a Heritage Award, which was presented at the State Parliament.

My most notorious walk was a 15-kilometre walk along the beautiful north shore beach, from Point Plomer to Port Macquarie, with my Thursday Walking friends to celebrate my 90th birthday! Of course the photo was in the local paper and it is well documented on the internet. I was proud of that one as it culminated a lifetime love for bushwalking. Actually, I was one hundred percent confident that I could do it on the day because I had walked 20 kilometres when training. I intend to do it again at 95 and also at 100.

My other standout retirement interest is my writing. I had always wanted to be a writer and retirement offered a golden opportunity. I thought that I would combine it with other retirement activities, so when my son and I went to the tip of Cape York by Mini Moke in 1987 I sent the story to *Caravan World* and my first article was published! I was thrilled.

Then, when my wife and I travelled to the UK and we went Bed-and-Breakfast with a hired car from Land's End to John O'Groats, my next story was published in *Caravan World*. This was followed by 'Motoring in Ireland' and later 'A Month in Tasmania' and so on until I had sixteen articles published.

This did wonders for my confidence and when our local Fellowship of Australian Writers (FAW) called for submissions for a book they were publishing, I offered some stories. Even though I had never been a member of FAW, they readily accepted my entries.

Over the years that followed they published three books: *People of the Two Rivers*, *My Wonderful Hastings* and *Beyond the Three Brothers*. I had five stories published in the first book, six in the next and three in the third; fourteen in all. I then felt ready to write a book.

My first book was *Mary's Secret*, followed by *Harriet's Boy*, then *Terrymidgee*. They were all self-published and given to friends and accepted by the local library.

Then I thought it would be an achievement to launch a book on my 90th birthday, so from January onwards I was up every morning at 6.00am racing the calendar to have it finished by July.

The title was, *I Went with John Oxley*. I remember as a seven year old, the first book I ever read was *I Went with Marco Polo*, as told by a young boy about my age. It was probably an abridged version. I was greatly impressed as I felt that I was with him all the way. I wrote my book in the first person as told through the eyes of a convict who went with John Oxley. I tried to imagine all the fears, anxieties and joys experienced by the men who went on his epic journey of exploration down the Macquarie River and across the mountains to Port Macquarie in 1818.

With 2018 being the bicentenary of his trip, I thought that it would be appropriate to launch it at this time. I had sufficient copies printed to give one to each of my grandsons, my three children and my brother at my 90th birthday dinner, as well as one each for the local library and Historical Society. I felt a great sense of satisfaction to be able to do so. At least it proved to my grandsons that I didn't have Alzheimer's.

I Went with John Oxley is now available on the internet, so the retiree who wanted to be a writer ticked another box.

What is there left to do? Memoirs, of course. I have already started to write my memories of childhood. I can clearly remember growing up during The Great Depression of the 1930s. I remember Kingsford Smith landing his Southern Cross at Newcastle. My High School years were covered by the War years from 1939 to 1945 when a Japanese submarine shelled Newcastle hitting the houses of my classmates, so I have plenty to write about. I will pace myself over the next eight or nine years and write a little each day.

And what am I going to call it, you may well ask? Well, I intend to publish it when I am 100 so I am going to call it, *MEMOIRS OF A CENTENARIAN!*

Bowls for Seniors

Mavis Gunter

Lake Munmorah

Harry walked smoothly out of his bowls game. His 90 years were not evident in his swinging gait and his loud metallic voice, as he laughed e-e-e – and stroked his hand down the bare skin of Pauline’s 92-year-old’s arm.

“I’ll carry your bag.” He took the bag before Pauline could refuse and followed her to her car giving a running commentary on how his vegetables are growing.

Each Friday he watched for Pauline to arrive. He hurried to the car door to help her out, so he could take her bag and carry it, all the time touching her arm and looking up into her face, telling her of the lovely pumpkins and beans he was growing for her.

Pauline felt uncomfortable by his fawning closeness, yet with him always there and helping her, she didn’t want to refuse his persistent attention.

The seniors organised their team for the weekly game of indoor bowls. This week Pauline, her eyes shining with mischief, stared Harry down before rolling her bowl across the mat.

“Come round, come round, damn you Harry I’ll get you,” she yelled as she watched her bowl. She humped her tiny body up and down, with frustration shining from her pale blue eyes as the bowl ran wide of the jack.

With the oxygen tube in her nose and one hand holding the portable oxygen cylinder she bent forward to release her next bowl, faithfully following it halfway down the green mat. She willed her bowl to successfully compete with Harry’s team.

Pauline’s eyes pierced into each bowl as she mentally guided either away or towards the jack. Her feet stomped in little steps as she swore at Harry and condemned his grandmother to a life of misery.

Game over, she hugged her friends and foes and invited them all to afternoon tea, of delicious cakes and tarts. Pauline always woke between 2.00am and 3.00am, so she spent the time cooking, lovingly making cakes for all her meetings. She was always popular and attended sporting and intellectual meetings, where the enjoyment of her cakes and her humour were anticipated with pleasure.

An independent free spirit, Pauline had been raised in an inner city suburb, spoilt as an only child, she ran away from home and married at 16.

She was an ethereal shade of purple from her shoes and lace stockings to her handbag, dress, jewellery, even her eye glasses and car. All systematically chosen to enhance her extraverted personality.

While Fred waited his turn to bowl he watched the body language between Pauline and Harry. His damp red hair fell over his 95-year-old pale watery eyes. That Pauline’s a good sort, he thought. I’ve had my eye on her for 12 months now and I don’t approve of that skinny little Harry intruding on her every minute and bossing her around. Next week I’ll carry her bag. I don’t know what she sees in him. I’m twice his size and better looking. He flexed his flabby muscles.

Due to his promise the following Friday after bowls Fred positioned himself near to Pauline’s side and grabbed her bag before Harry could push her way through the other members.

"Gimme the bags," Harry screamed in his old scratchy voice, "she's my lady and I always see her to her car."

A tug of war developed between the bald, fat perspiring body of Fred and the skinny stringy muscles of Harry.

Pauline stood back stunned and a little flattered at the struggle for her attention.

"What the hell do you think you're doing? You're ripping my bag." After pulling the oxygen from her nose, Pauline picked up the walking stick leaning against the table and proceeded to whack each one.

"Hey, wait a minute," Ron limped to the struggling pair and the whacking lady. He tried to get his stick from her flaying hands and got himself involved in the melee. "That's my best stick." He rubbed his pudgy hands over his bald pate to replace his flying strands of hair.

"You doddering old fools," a breathless Pauline yelled at them as she continued spanking. "Give me my bag and get lost. I don't need help from a fawning old codger. I don't need a fat, watery old pale skinned rake to protect me and I can defend myself however I please and with whatever I like, even, Ron, if it is your most precious walking stick."

She took her bags from the exhausted male's hands, dumped it on the seat of her walker with the portable oxygen machine, inserted the tube in her nose and wheezed her way out of the door.

My Time Has Come

Marianne Hamilton

Terrigal

As she handed over her credit card, Belle's hand shook ever so slightly. The veins were prominent and the fingers long. Long fingers meant things. What was it?

The skinny girl behind the counter, tats peeping from her sleeves, looked harried, as though her mind was elsewhere.

"Have a nice day" she said automatically.

"You too," Belle responded, just as perfunctorily. She wondered when everyone had become so deadpan and remote in their everyday responses. None of it seemed to mean anything.

Once she'd unpacked the few groceries and settled down with a cup of tea, she looked out at the garden. The daffodils looked lovely; faces bending downwards after the rain. In autumn the ashes, the oaks, the liquid ambers were morphing from green to yellow, russet, bright red and every colour in between.

When they'd first come to the mountains, the crisp clean air convinced them it was an idyllic place to retire. Derek spent his days birdwatching and Belle ran a little boutique selling imported knitwear and one-of-a-kind gifts. One day it was snatched from them as suddenly as the searing pain across Derek's chest. Fear and bewilderment crossed his face as the paramedics tried to stabilise him. Then they quietly manoeuvred him in on the stretcher. Belle was rooted to the spot. The older one took her arm gently.

"Do you want to come, love?"

She nodded and rode with Derek in the ambulance. She picked at a stitch that was unravelling on his sweater. She couldn't cry. Numbly she stared out at the black shapes of the trees flying past.

When her son Colin left after the funeral, she was alone. She had already sold the shop.

Once she took a brisk walk before dinner, now it was an effort. Cooking, once a passion, now was a bowl of soup or a sandwich.

Her friend, Doris succumbed to family pressure and moved into Morningside Glen – the residents had a musty slightly mothbally odour of old clothes. Belle hoped that she didn't smell like that. As for the dead eyes, the resigned hunch of their shoulders ... would that be her?



A little face appeared at the window. Could she be dreaming? She rose from the table.

"Mrs Leighton, Mrs. Leighton...are you there? Watch me!"

It was the slight seven-year-old from down the road. When she was out gardening, he'd come over, flexing his biceps and wanting to mow her lawn for her. He always looked needy, wanting someone's attention. Lost.

But she was tired now. It was hard to concentrate on what he was saying.

"Look..." He started to run up the incline of their street, dragging the cheap flimsy fluoro coloured thing with him. When he got to the top, flushed and excited, he was screaming at her to watch. He ran back down and the thing was suddenly airborne, trailing behind him. His little face was ecstatic.

"Look, look...! I'm flying!"

"I can see that..." the laughter just bubbled out of her – it sounded strange. As though it were coming from someone else. How long had it been since she'd felt real joy? When he finally came and put his arms around her, the shock made her recoil. It felt alien, someone hugging her like that. She picked up his kite.

"Don't you think you should be getting home now, Aiden?"

He brushed mucous from his dripping nose.

"Nah, Mum won't be home for ages. I go home whenever."

Belle frowned. She'd never met his mum Rochelle. She looked anxiously down the street. The sun suddenly was behind the clouds. How worried she was if Colin was even fifteen minutes late.

"Are you sure? What time does she get home from work? It's getting dark."

"I got a key. I just let meself in. Don't worry, Mrs. Leighton."

"I think you should come home with me. Then I can ring your mum."

He took her hand, almost too willingly, she thought. What about stranger danger?

After she'd heated up some soup and he was slurping it at the table, she dialled the number he'd given her.

"Hello? Look, it's Belle Leighton from number 44. Aiden is with me. It was getting dark..."

"Oh. Sorry. Could you...?" It was a small breathy voice.

"Listen, Aiden, your mother wants you home right now."

"Aiden?"

"Can't I just stay here? I like it here."

The tiny figure who answered the door had dark circles under her eyes. She looked familiar – yes, it was the new girl from the grocery store. She wasn't

grateful that Belle had brought her son home. She seemed embarrassed. Aiden slipped past her and turned the old television on. Realising she wouldn't be invited inside, Belle offered a smile and said, "Well, I won't hold you up then. I just wanted to make sure that he was alright."

"Thanks for bringing him home."

She was already closing the door. Belle wondered whether if she should keep an eye on the little guy. To make sure he was alright.

There was a timid knock at the door. That could mean only one thing. It must be Aiden.

"I'm coming..."

It was Rochelle. She held Aiden's hand.

"I was wondering if...if you would be able to watch Aiden for me. I got another shift...and I can't...leave him alone, the social worker said..."

Something shifted. Belle got up early every morning and took Aiden to school. She picked him up.

"Hi Aiden. Would you like some pikelets?"

"What's that?"

Rochelle began to rely on Belle more and more as the weeks went on. Belle planted more bulbs for the spring. Narcissus this time.

Occasionally fear entered her head. What would happen when she could no longer cope?

What did it matter? The past, present and future were one. What was more important was to live your life – the one life you had.

Lucky to be Alive

Janice Harris

Taren Point

I had a cough!

This cough annoyed me for several years. I'd be talking to someone when my voice would gag and I'd have to clear it.

In 2015 I asked my GP to send me for a chest x-ray. It came back that there was scar tissue on my right lung from smoking.

I am an ex-smoker and quit ten years ago. This year my GP said he was going to retire and to look out for another doctor, which I did.

On my first appointment with my new GP, I took my 2015 x-rays and told him about my coughing. He sent me for another chest x-ray which came back showing a 2cm tumour on my right lung.

Next I had a scan followed up by a biopsy and sure enough it was lung cancer.

In the meantime, I was playing in the club singles competition at my ladies lawn bowling club and amongst all this I had made the finals!

I was so excited about that while worried about my lung cancer.

Easter came and went. Another scan showed this was primary cancer and that was good news.

I won the Finals at bowls the next week, a third of my lung was taken out and the surgeon did the operation with keyhole surgery on April 24, 2018.

I was only in hospital for one week and I am like a miracle. No cancer has gone to my lymph nodes. I do not need radiation treatment or chemotherapy – only x-rays and scans for surveillance.

I am a very lucky person and I can't believe how fantastic and professional our doctors, surgeons, radiology departments, hospitals and nursing staff are. They are amazing.

Also a big thanks to my family, friends and all their good wishes and prayers. I am 74 years and I am going to be around for a while yet!

Music Memories

Betty Hayes

Hill Top

Throughout our lives, we collect many memories. As a child of the 50's growing up in a small country town of Mittagong NSW, I remember many a musical evening with my Mum on the piano playing many songs. Little did I know how important those evenings were.

Being part of a musical family was a blessing and I soon became aware of my ability to play tunes without reading the music.

In my teenage years of the 60's, I put this gift and knowledge of a myriad of songs to the test by playing 'old time dances', at weddings and parties. It was good to team up with my cousin on the drums, as the beat just enforced my love of music. The 60's had lots of great rock songs which I also included along with fabulous music from the old classics.

I remember getting a few looks of surprise when this young female came to play, but I soon proved I was able to make people dance and sing-a-long. I was excited and happy to be involved with such fun and sharing special events, especially weddings.

This chapter in my life came to an end when I married at the tender age of nineteen and raised two wonderful boys. It wasn't until after a divorce when during my second marriage that my love of dance music was rekindled.

I moved with my husband down south to a little 'one pub' farming area called, Blighty, not far from the Murray River – this was in the 1990's. Word got around the area that I could play piano and I was offered work to play at a local nursing home in Finley.

It was great to be able to use my talent again. This opportunity lasted sixteen amazing years. I was also involved with lots of other activities and was known as a Diversional Therapist.

Gentle exercise was an area I was interested in and through this activity I decided to create six sets of routines, to which I recorded dance songs to suit. I also included a bracket of sing-a-long tunes. My cassette was welcomed in aged care facilities and even today it is still being sold, but of course as a CD.

Just a few years later my husband died suddenly – but he made me promise to record another CD. He knew I would need my music to help me cope.

A lot of work is involved in the making of a CD – and I also included the words to songs, and suggestions of gentle exercises to the different beats. It was very satisfying work and I knew it helped in activities and brought lots of enjoyment to residents.

Throughout my time of working in aged care I have learned so much about human suffering and sadness – but it has been such a privilege to have had the opportunity to bring some happy times to so many wonderful people.

Music can open minds to memories of songs and words that have stayed with us for a lifetime. I have this happen with those who have dementia and it is such a delight when a song will stimulate and help with voicing the words – a smile says it all.

I returned to Mittagong ten years ago and have been working in several different aged care facilities for the last seven years. I love my 'Mini Concerts' now, and I try to involve as many residents as I can, but the music varies to suit the residents needs and abilities. We all need music and the joy it can bring – and to have fun.

Music has helped me so much in my lifetime and I am so grateful for all the opportunities that I have had to share my love and style of music. I trust I can continue for years to come, because I need to and it is my happiness as well.

I Could Write About...

Hilary Heanly

Stroud

It is 7.00am on the first day of May, 2018. I am in the paddock above our farm cottage about to put my booted right foot onto my fork, force it underneath a metre-high purple-top weed and, with as much oomph as possible, prise it from the ground.

The sun is just beginning to rise above the hill on the other side of the valley, its rays filtering through the branches of the large gum tree nearby. It is going to be a beautiful day. As I wield my fork I am pondering on the topic of Positive Ageing for my entry into the Seniors Card short story competition for seniors and wondering where to start and how to fit everything into one thousand words. I am seventy-nine years old. I have been positively ageing for quite some time.

I could write about my retirement in January 2006 and how my husband, Peter, and I moved from our idyllic lakeside cottage at Fishing Point to our oldest son's 1200 acre farm at Kars Springs, an area lying between Scone and Merriwa in the Upper Hunter. I grew up on a farm in the heart of Exmoor in South West England. I was excited at the prospect of returning to a lifestyle that I loved, that love being shared by Peter who had worked for my father for the first two years of our marriage. So many wonderful memories of our time at Kars Springs jostle with each other for supremacy. Foremost was the joy of sharing in the lives of Mark, his wife, Jenny, and four of our grandchildren. We helped with homework – or tried to! We undertook the school bus run. We shared meals and family Christmases. We mustered the cattle. I rekindled my love of horse riding and taught the children to ride and to milk our house cow. I sat on my mare, Storm, at the highest point of the farm as the setting sun cast a russet glow over the distant hills.

Peter and I renovated the old farm cottage in which we were living. We did everything ourselves, with occasional help from our four sons and generous friends. Because the farm was remote no-one ever came for the day. A visit always involved at least one night and frequently more. Over the years we held many parties; my 70th in 2009, Peter's 70th in 2012 and our 50th wedding anniversary in 2014. I remember family and friends coming from near and far to help celebrate those special occasions. The cottage paddock was dotted with caravans and tents, friendships were renewed and new ones formed, bonfires were lit; guitars played and songs sung under star-filled skies.

I could write about how in August 2014, Peter and I volunteered to be the support crew for the first leg of a fundraiser, being a cycle ride from Cooktown to Cape York, a distance of 893 kilometres along the red dirt Developmental Road. We drove along behind our stoic, frequently exhausted but always good-humoured cyclists, towing a camper trailer laden with provisions for this epic undertaking. Nine days later we stood together at the tip of Australia. My memories of that unique experience, which I wrote about in my first ever blog, are of trucks and cars covering us in clouds of red dust as they went past; floppy-eared Brahman cattle in shades of cream through to bronze standing at the side of the road staring at our small convoy in amazement, enormous anthills, welcoming roadhouses, river crossings, bush camp sites and generous travellers supporting our cause. Our cyclists went on without us to kayak across the Torres Strait and walk the Kokoda Track. We were so pleased to have played a part in this venture which raised over \$50,000 for the McGrath Foundation for breast cancer.

I could write about how in early 2015 Mark and Jenny decided to put their farm on the market. This unexpected news and the thought of having to leave the cottage which we had worked so hard on, left us initially a bit deflated but our positive nature soon resurfaced and we discovered a small 110 acre farm nestled in the beautiful Mill Creek Valley near Stroud. With an old 1930s farmhouse to renovate, fences to mend, weeds to eradicate, old cattle yards and buildings to repair and a garden badly in need of attention, we found ourselves busier than ever. I joined Stroud Writers, my first foray into a Writing Group. Stimulating meetings, friendship and encouragement are spurring me on to write my memoir.

I could write about my brother and sister in England making me a present of a return flight in June last year and how I hired a car from Hertz at Heathrow for a month, visiting family and friends, tackling the motorways and somehow managing to get from A to B unscathed. My brother owns the farm where we all grew up and I joined him and my sister there for three nights, sleeping in my old bedroom in our 600-year old stone farmhouse. We drove into Winsford, passing the church where Peter and I were married. We had supper at the Royal Oak where we held our reception. With narrow winding lanes, heather-clad moors, humpbacked bridges across sparkling streams, there is nothing quite like the Exmoor countryside.

I could write about my sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren and the joy they bring me.

I could write about belonging to Luminosity, doing cryptic crosswords, playing Scrabble and bridge.

I could write about the sadness I feel when I lose a family member or close friend, but I don't think about dying. I know how lucky I am to be healthy and able to look forward to the dawning of each day.

There is so much to write about positive ageing. I haven't even scratched the surface. I had better stop digging and start writing.

Finally, a Chance Encounter

Leading to a Positively Charitable Ageing

Allan Hull

Collaroy

What's Positive Ageing I wondered? The expression hadn't crossed my mind. Then again, neither had Negative Ageing. I had visions of dozens of interesting essays being posted to Seniors Card NSW by the Positively Ageing telling of marvelous deeds of charitable work and the giving up of much personal spare time for the betterment of others. I've been retired for 23 years and I can't say that personally I've done anything charitable other than giving monetary donations. Does that imply perhaps that my positively active, interesting ageing retirement has been incomplete, unfulfilled? I'm thinking so.

Some people's lives are very happily spent helping others or in the service of others for the greater good of someone, of something, some kind of positive input. Nurses, doctors, ambulance men, carers, charity workers and teachers all come immediately to mind. Of course there are many others. What about servicemen and women? Could they be included in that list? I spent my working life in

the armed forces, 34 years in total from age 16 to 50.

Doing charity work most definitely had crossed my mind from time to time throughout those 23 years of retirement. But I always seemed to be too busy. So doing something positive in the service of others, charity work for example wasn't high on my list. That is until now.

Twelve years ago my wife, Hazel, ran our guest house for 5 months of the year. Of our two daughters, one was living in Dee Why, NSW and the other in London. Neither had children. Hazel and I had been commuting to Australia for holidays from the UK for years.

"Allan", said Hazel out of the blue one day, "I don't think that our career minded, Alison in London will be having any children so can I suggest that rather than travelling to Australia every year why instead don't we try to emigrate to that marvelous country that we love so very much." She always did have bright ideas.

So, in 2008 we sold our guest house and prepared to emigrate. A year later we arrived in Australia on Contributory Parent Visas and immediately started looking for a home. Within 2 months of arrival three significant events happened: first, we put down the 10% deposit on a lovely apartment, then very sadly my wife was diagnosed with bowel cancer and last and to our absolute joy our London daughter, Alison, told us that she is pregnant with our first grandchild.

Happily, I now have two grandchildren in London and visit them annually as they do me here in Australia every Christmas. I say I and not we because my wife Hazel of 47 years died four years after being diagnosed and that was four years ago. During the four years of her illness I never left her side thereby not getting much chance to make new friends, get involved in any clubs or many social activities and even though I am an ardent golfer never played one game during her illness.

My wife was my life.

So, four years ago, still retired and on my own I asked myself the question. What should I do? Return to my friends and relatives in the UK? No never, Australia was now my home and in time hoped to become a very proud, privileged citizen. So, what to do?

Everything was quite confusing at first but I have always considered myself fortunate, my lifetime's direction continually being influenced by luck.

Chance Encounters; joining the Armed Forces on a whim after a Chance Encounter with a school friend who told me that he had just joined; joining as an electrician after being refused my first choice as a stoker because I wore spectacles, who knows how I would have fared as a stoker?

Then later, just by luck a Chance Encounter in finding my best mate secretly studying for a promotion and having not told me of his ambition to outrank me, which confused me, no angered me, and inspired me to greater effort resulting in my studying for promotions for the remainder of my naval career and eventually outranking him. Then, catching a glimpse of Hazel across the dance floor, thinking to myself that I will marry that beautiful woman one day and so I did and undoubtedly and by far the best of my Chance Encounters.

So now alone, would my luck with Chance Encounters continue?

A year after Hazel died I joined the local golf club. After a practise round and leaving the course, I got chatting to one of the members. In no time at all he invited me to play in his group and have been ever since ... we are best friends. Another positive Chance Encounter.

Then one day when reading the local paper and seeing my favourite word ... *free*, free what? Free lawn bowling lessons. I went along and in no time became a member. I really enjoy bowling. My Chance Encounter with *free* paid off.

Speaking to one of the members there I am asked if I have ever been to a Toastmaster's meeting. No, I hadn't but being inquisitive went to the next meeting. There I am introduced to another Hazel. After a few meetings I invited her out to the theatre. We now see each other regularly. She is a retired nurse and is a very charitable lady who is always helping others in any and every aspect of life.

She is right up there when it comes to Chance Encounters. What of our future?

Who knows? All I know is that watching her tirelessly, endlessly give of herself for others is so encouraging, adding a new dimension to my Positive Ageing?

I have turned the corner, the future is bright and now I'm excitedly looking ahead with my latest Chance Encounter knowing that she will definitely lead me to a more meaningful, worthwhile, Positively Charitable Ageing. Watch this space...

All Right

Jane Irwin

Bundanoon

Soon after my husband was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer, we went for a walk in the bush in our local National Park. Holding my hand, and looking into the trees at the birds he loved so much, he asked, "Will you be alright?"

"Yes," I said, "I will be alright."

"Yes", he said, "I think you will be alright."

Well, of course, I wasn't alright at all, when he died soon after.

How to describe the loss of dear husband, lover and best friend, after 35 years together? The sorrow, the meaninglessness in life, the 'lostness', the emptiness, the blankness of brain, the tears, oh so many tears, the memories jumping out unexpectedly and grabbing me by the throat, the dark sleepless nights, the eventual shattering realisation that he was never coming back to me. . .oh no, I was definitely not alright.

Mostly people were kind, oh, so kind. My family were quietly helpful and caring and God so good with His unfailing love. My part time job gave structure, the garden brought restoration through sunshine, fresh air and all things green. Daily walks in the country kept me going, music fed my soul. Reading stories of others who had loved and lost showed me the wretched universality of grief. I felt alone, but I was not alone. Others grieving had gone before me and others would come after me.

That first year, I was most certainly, not alright.

The second year I was still not alright (somehow it all seemed almost worse), although I felt that maybe the sun had risen marginally over the horizon by the end of the year. (It wasn't until five years had laboriously and endlessly passed that I began to believe that I was, in fact, going to be alright).

In that third year I decided to walk the Camino Portugues from Porto in Portugal to Santiago de Compostela in Spain (250kms), together with some friends – something my husband and I had wanted to do together. So that whole year, in my home town, I walked – and walked and walked – to get fit enough to keep walking into Santiago. It felt like an invisible cord was pulling me, ever so slowly, through yet another long year alone, literally one step at a time. Carrying my pilgrim pack, staying in pilgrim hostels, eating pilgrim meals, I finally made it to Santiago do Compostela, to be presented with my compostela or certificate. My name was written in mediaeval Latin, and then unexpectedly my husband's name was also added. He had walked with me all the way, in my heart, and in my mind. I was in tears again, but this time I was alright – well, sort of.

But would I be alright now I had no goal, no challenge before me? Travel adventures exploring new and different places, with new challenges and experiences have helped. Regular exercise with friends, along with the ubiquitous coffee, volunteer work, belonging to a loving and supportive church group, singing in my local community choir, stitching patchwork quilts, seeing my precious children and grandchildren, escaping into well-written books and coming alongside other grieving widows have all made a difference.

So, eight years on, almost seventy years old, am I alright?

Well yes, mostly, not always, I am alright. And I believe that my husband would also say to me "Yes, I think you are all right."



Where's Pollyanna?

Barbara Jackson

Kew

As a senior citizen, living in the wonderful country of Australia, I see life as a mixture of triumph and tribulation: *good fortune*, like being born into a loving family and *rotten luck* that can catch you anywhere. Life is about how you choose to deal with your circumstances. Let me tell you my story...

Born from a great love, following a hateful war that separated my parents for six years, I was the first child welcomed into my family for a quarter of a century. I was adored by two parents, four grandparents plus one aunt and uncle 'til I overflowed with love for all living creatures and developed a thirst for knowledge about my world.

So positive and happy was I, that I earned the nickname of Little Pollyanna.

Holidaying with friends and cousins, I learned to climb trees and fences, leap over creeks, catch beautiful green frogs and avoid snakes. Life was wild and wonderful and my grandmothers knew they would have more than a little trouble turning me into a lady.

However life has a way of knocking you around a bit. Pollyanna disappeared and so, after I had grown into a lady with a successful career and a good marriage, I discovered that losing my mother as a child did not in any way help ease the agony of losing a child when I was a mother.

Life is not only for learning but also for making decisions. I decided I would continue my life for my husband and children, who were also struggling and throw my energy into my family and career to ameliorate my grief. I learned that family must always stick together, that children are the most important thing in life, that it is very worthwhile preserving treasured friendships and that there are always others worse off than yourself.

While knowing that life is full of surprises and that plans don't necessarily come to fruition, I set new goals, to refocus my life. I included plans for promotion, travel and to continue my charity work and write *that* book one day.

Suddenly I discovered I was sixty two years old. A significant age to me as my father had passed away at that age and my mother much younger. I wondered how much time I had left in this world.

"Whoops! I had better find Dad's diary and write that book!" I said aloud.

In the old family kist, I found the diary which began on Dad's final flight for Bomber Command on the night of ANZAC day 1942, when his Wellington Bomber was struck by enemy fire, after it scored a direct hit on the target. The co-pilot was dead; the plane on fire, losing altitude as the pilot turned south into the Libyan Desert, hoping the surviving crew could parachute to safety. The diary, often carefully hidden in odd places, ended three years later when Dad, a guest of the Germans in Stalag 4B, needed to escape before the Russians arrived so he could return to England and finally to Australia.

For more than two years I researched and wrote, interviewed and wrote and with some help translated the small pencilled scribble of the diary into my computer.

At the book launch, the Deputy Mayor said that by publishing this piece of history, I had honoured my father, my family and my country. This remarkable story needed to be told and I was very pleased that I had achieved another goal. (*I love ticking boxes.*)

Amazingly, writing the book eased me into retirement from a very time consuming occupation, into the freedom that retirement brings. What joy to stay home and have a leisurely cup of tea, listening to the birds sing while watching the morning mist play around the alpacas in the valley, instead of rushing off to work.

Senior years brought splendid treasures like grandchildren and all the love and happiness they bring but there were decisions to be made. A large property with rainforest, creeks and waterfalls is wonderful to behold but there is maintenance and lots of it. When tiredness or health issues prevented the 'continual slashing-mowing-fencing-weeding of paddocks' it was time to consider that dreaded word *downsizing*.

Hubby and I, finally concurred and were quite surprised to find we adjusted well to our new 'in town' environment with nice neighbours, noises and a small garden. We also save twenty minutes on every journey we make, saving time and fuel.

At 'three score years and ten' I remain very grateful to modern medical science, including joint replacement surgery. As seniors today, we are not limping and suffering as our grandparents did. We can have new knuckles, hips and knees so we continue playing sport and volunteering to help others in our community.

Life is precious and we only get one body. I make sure I get daily exercise and eat a healthy diet of good food, some of it grown in my own garden and I promised myself I will never rush up or down stairs as my bones may be brittle and I don't want to test them.

Pollyanna has slipped back into my life and I have learned to be grateful for many things, like my children, friends and laughter, good books, a dog who loves me unconditionally, garden club and craft group where I meet new friends and learn new skills, a discounted coffee with my Seniors Card and a dear husband who has stuck with me for half a century.

They say that as we get older we become more aware of beauty. I'm sure it is true. I can see beauty in everything from grandchildren's toes, to my dog's perfect nose, clouds, seashells, and sunsets. At night, happy in my new home, I fall asleep listening to a large green frog singing to me from the birdbath near my bedroom window. I have named her Pollyanna!

Passion

Grace Jane

Laurieton

A *passion*, in my opinion, is essential to positive ageing.

What is *passion*? 'An intense desire or enthusiasm'.

I have certainly experienced the desire and enthusiasm, but not intensely. Inner peace has evaded me. I've always felt that something was missing. Searching and meditations revealed nothing.

I now realise I have been so blessed despite growing up during the war years in England from the age of four. I had a happy childhood, a wonderful wedding at the age of nineteen, the birth of my two dear children, all were highlights of my life which I treasure, but not passionately. I have always believed that everything that happens in life has a reason. This I have experienced many times in my 83 years. I have realised that what I thought at the time was a disaster, was really a blessing in disguise.

My first husband, Stan, and I met at school and dated until his conscription into the British Army in 1951 and he spent 18 months in Malaya.

Stan worked on building sites in London and owing to atrocious weather conditions was out of work for 10 weeks, this inspired us to emigrate to Manly NSW in 1963. Even emigrating to Australia, which was the best decision we ever made, was taken with the minimum of enthusiasm by me. I've often wondered if Stan hadn't been out of work for all that time would we have emigrated?

I've learnt that we have no control over all the events in our life. We purchased Stan's dream of a 28 acre hobby farm on the Central Coast, which involved plenty of work renovating the run down house, installing and fixing fences, cultivating the citrus trees, rearing 200 laying hens as well as working full-time in the building industry. He suddenly died of a massive heart attack at the age of 38 in 1972.

I remarried two years later, hoping it would fill the emptiness in my heart, but I was wrong. I felt stifled and had no time to be myself. We sold the 28 acres 13 years later, to move to Bonny Hills hoping to start all over again. Our volatile relationship had not improved and I made it known that if there was one more outburst, I would leave. After he had calmed down he began to fix a few jobs around the place and was easier to live with, but only two weeks after that, he collapsed and could not be revived.

Another two years and I met an interesting, recently widowed man who loved playing the clavinova, composing and recording music and was entirely different to the two manual workers. I enjoyed being involved with his music but did tend to forget myself again until he sadly died 13 years after meeting.

To reconnect with my family and friends, I took a six week trip to the U.K. as a single lady in 2011. I found it difficult travelling on my own but it was a great time catching up with all of them. Back home, after unpacking the car and enjoying a refreshing shower I felt the need to walk my usual track and took a few steps across the main road and I was on the pathway beside the pristine waterway of the Camden Haven River. I'd missed the early morning sunrises from my verandah and the sparkling ripples on this river meandering along and joining the ocean. Towering behind my home is the beautiful, impressive North Brother Mountain, one of three mountains in my area. The feeling of peace enveloped me and I knew then that I was home in this beautiful country. Taking in the beauty as I walked, I could not resist snapping photo after photo on my iPhone. A pod of flying pelicans caught my eye as they landed a few feet away to where a fisherman was cleaning his catch.

As I was soaking up the beauty all around me, watching the yachts and small vessels idly bobbing up and down, I somehow felt different. I believed straight away that the feeling of euphoria I experienced on this day would change my life forever.

I smiled and smugly thought, 'I have just experienced my first passion, – A Passion for Life'

I feel life is just beginning for me, so many things to achieve. One of my ambitions now is to live to be 100 years old to receive a pine tree and plaque donated by the Council to be planted in our local memorial park.

I amazed myself when I decided to hire a car after flying to Tasmania to visit my daughter in Queenstown. Landing at Launceston airport at 5.00pm, expecting a leisurely drive to Queenstown, I encountered a five hour drive on narrow winding roads, eventually arriving at 10.30pm, not even realising there was limited mobile phone access. I'm learning the hard way.

I booked in with a group going to Vietnam and Cambodia which changed the way I now look at life. I met such lovely people who showed no animosity after their dreadful past.

In my daily life I listen to children read at the local school and attend weekly Tai Chi classes which are helping with my balance and wellbeing. I love singing and started a singing group, and recently, after a 20 year absence, I rejoined FAW to fulfil my desire to write again. Have now joined a Probus club, meeting new people and enjoying a social life.

One very happy lady in the singing group remarked, she would show me how to have fun. It took a while, but now I can see the funny side of life and actually laugh and am having fun daily.

I also recognise that without all of my life experiences I would not be the happy, confident lady that I am today. Having believed that I could not live without a man to love and care for me I now know that I am the positive creator of my own life.

Positive Ageing or is it Ageing Positively?

Wendy Jannings

Willoughby

So what is all this positive ageing about and when is it supposed to start?

I am unsure what the answers are and so will leave the question for the reader to decide as to whether I am ageing positively or not.

At the age of 64, I quite unexpectedly became a widow and all plans made for retirement the following year to be with husband, went 'out the window'. It took a while to come to terms with the loss, particularly not having someone at home waiting for me. At times, some seven years later I think of how it might have been, but I do not dwell on such thoughts. Generally I am happy with my lot and I definitely am not looking for a replacement.

After the event, I found purpose in getting up to go to work. When the management team stopped private use of work vehicles, I took to cycling the 25 minutes to and from work on a bike left behind by one of the daughters who had moved overseas; work mates were in awe at me riding at my age. Being in good health and enjoying my job, I made the decision to retire when I turned 70 in December 2017, having worked 52 years in the same career. I had a wonderful send-off with speeches, generous gifts, kind words and sentiments. I do wonder how they are actually managing without me!

I don't miss work as such, but I do miss my work mates. Being the age I was, and being the worker who had been there the longest, everyone knew me and I knew everyone. I was a somebody, I was important; but in retiring I became a nobody which has been the hardest thing to get over. At work I was surrounded by vibrant persons, who kept me young, so when I attended my first seniors' variety concert earlier this year I freaked out... I was in a sea of older folk all like me; please note the word *older* and not *old*.

It has been my experience that there was a need to re-invent myself when moving from workplace to retirement. Life is so very different, priorities change; I can sit down at mid-day and read a book or I can decide to clean or not clean the house that day; I don't need to cram all into weekends any-more. For me perhaps this is where positive ageing comes into play – becoming your own person and to keep on 'keeping on' in mind, body and spirit.

So what have I done as I hurtle towards the end of my first year in retirement. Firstly, I took up volunteering, seven half days a month. The volunteer tasks I attend are well appreciated by the recipients. The volunteering situations are win/win, as I can perhaps selfishly say, that I get as much out of volunteering as I put in.

Riding a push bike to work each day kept me strong, in retirement I am hooked on cycling for fun during the week, I will continue as long as I can and move over to an electric powered bike when my puff runs out. Last month, two other mature ladies and I rode downhill for over 50kms on the back roads from Katoomba in the Blue Mountains to Emu Plains. What a blast!

When I read that new learning was good for the ageing brain, I sought out a second hand ukulele and started to teach myself to play. I progressed slowly, took lessons and then spent up big, buying a soprano ukulele from a music shop. What a joyful instrument, one can't be sad playing a ukulele. I now belong to a group of ukulele players who jam regularly and have appeared at local festivities.

There are so many groups of interest available. These groups don't come to you, one needs to make the effort and seek them out. I firmly believe that socialising is very important, otherwise one could find the only person to talk to all day was yourself, or that stranger at the bus stop. Mentioning socialising brings me to the story of a friend who in the first week after receiving her Seniors Opal Card, asked me to join her for coffee in Wollongong. This may not sound strange, but Wollongong is a two-hour train trip south for both of us. I asked why it needed to be coffee so far away in Wollongong, she replied because we could go for \$2.50 return and so we went.

Certainly it is not all plain sailing as I age, for instance – I can't walk as fast as my daughter any more, sewing needle eyes are getting smaller, without help I can't turn the mattress over and food packaging requires stabbing to open, but these are minor irritations and really don't matter. The benefits of age outrank the frustrations, such as going to the cinema is cheaper, getting my hair cut is cheaper and the senior NSW Opal travel card is not only coloured gold, it is gold.

Having mused over this piece, I have come to the conclusion that positive ageing is an *attitude* thing and one is only as old as you allow yourself to feel.

My Days with History

Connie Jones

North Haven

My marriage of twenty-five years was over. My days seemed long and empty and I felt depressed. One day I noticed a piece in the local paper about the Historical Society seeking new members to help in the museum. In my senior years at high school I had a charismatic teacher who brought our studies of European History to life. I loved to read historical novels. This might be an activity I would enjoy. The past always fascinated me.

A few days later I walked into the old two-storey building that housed the Port Macquarie Museum. I presented myself at the front desk and was soon whisked away to a dingy section behind some of the exhibits where shelves were crammed with rusty old tools, crazed crockery and all sorts of relics of past years. There was also a wardrobe of old clothing items.

Three friendly ladies welcomed me to the team that catalogued the artefacts. Those were the days before computers when everything was written by hand, firstly in a large register, then on cards to be placed in alphabetical order of both of the articles and their donors. Nearly every week there were new donations and often a fascinating story came with them. Some things had no relevance to Port Macquarie and crammed our overflowing shelves, later to be culled or sent to other museums. Eventually, it was necessary to build an addition to the original building and we moved upstairs to a larger store room with a special wardrobe-room for clothing items.

I didn't dream in those early days that I would spend thirty happy years working with pleasant people among the artefacts and thus learning much of the past of Port Macquarie.

This town had originated as a convict settlement in 1821 when Governor Macquarie was seeking an area too far from Sydney and Newcastle for convicts to attempt escape. After it was thrown open to free settlement in 1830, one of the former commandants, Major Innes, obtained a grant of land by Lake Innes and built a mansion on it.

I was fascinated by this story especially as I had viewed the ruins of this mansion, hidden under a tangle of lantana and thorny weeds on my very first visit to Port Macquarie. The museum contained relics from the mansion and a beautiful black satin gown from the 1800s which had a story connecting it to a girl who lived there between 1843 and 1848. She faithfully recorded the comings and goings of life there in her journal. It has been published in several editions. The Historical Society has copies of the original hand written diaries as well as water colour sketches painted by the then teenage girl, Annabella Innes. Annabella was the niece of the Major and together with her mother and sister moved into the mansion after her father's death. It was a life of luxury. The furnishings and fittings of the house were magnificent, with marble fireplaces, cut glass chandeliers, fine carpets, expensive furniture, pictures and ornaments. A large staff looked after the house and family. The stables could accommodate thirty horses. The garden was extensive and beautiful. From the journals we learn of the many and varied visitors who were lavishly entertained.

The Major made many land purchases and leases. Eventually, he had 31 properties, the town of Glen Innes being named after him. He borrowed heavily until drought and depression, together with the withdrawal of free convict labour led to bankruptcy. Everything had to be sold except the mansion. He finished his life as a magistrate in Newcastle where he died. Annabella met and married Patrick Boswell and went to live in Scotland. From there the Historical Society purchased a box containing her diaries and other items.

The house passed through several hands, gradually deteriorating. There was evidence of termite damage and in the early 20th century fire destruction, first by an arsonist, then by bush fires. Once the timber shingled roof was burnt and the interior laid open to the weather, almost complete destruction followed.

In 1985 there was a state budget allocation towards the preservation of the mansion. National Parks and Wildlife Service acquired the site. The extensive growth of weeds and trees has been cleared away, some walls shored up and board walks constructed. The remains of the stables are probably more impressive than those of the house. The Major imported the finest stock. National Parks conduct tours so that it is now possible to stand among the exposed walls and imagine life in that luxurious mansion in its heyday. One can view the lake and imagine that day in 1843 when sixteen-year-old Annabella Innes arrived and wrote how it looked *calm and bright in the glad sunshine*. This was but one fascinating story I learned during my happy time as a worker at the museum. The files revealed many more and inspired me to research further and write about them in booklets we published for sale at the desk.

When the museum had its 50th anniversary I wrote a book on the museum's history and of the building in which it is housed, the oldest commercial building in town. I joined the local branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers where I succeeded in winning prizes in their competitions with some of my historical articles.

I married a second time and moved to North Haven, south of Port Macquarie where I belong to the local Historical Society and take a keen interest in the history of this area. I have joined other groups and met lots of friendly people. I am a life member of the Port Macquarie Historical Society and receive email copies of their newsletter which always interest me. That little piece in the local paper that led me to the Port Macquarie Museum in 1978 resulted in many happy years of interest and of activity in my retirement that still continues to this day.²

2 Sadly Connie passed away on 10th August 2018 during the production of this book. RIP.

Arnie's Table Tennis Club

Millicent Jones

Kendall

"Hello there! Have you come to join us? I'm Mack."

"Oh Hello." She looked up. "Well yes." She hesitated. "Maybe. I was just watching to see how good you all were. I'm hopeless – haven't played in years."

"Oh we're all like that when we first start – but come and have a go."

And that's how it all began.

She'd seen an article in the local paper about this Friday group of table tennis players and been attracted by the fact that they made quite regular contributions to support Motor Neurone research. Jess' mother had struggled through the hell of this maniacal disease – unable to move, speak, eat, breathe and she was still coming to terms with the horror of those last agonising months. Couldn't bear to think of it really though to support the cause in some way had recently been in her mind. But table tennis? Oh well. She'd give it a go.

That first hit had been awful. Really embarrassing especially as most of the group seemed to be twice her age – well not quite after all she was 70 last year – but 70's – 80's. A few flipped around in bare feet and seemed pretty agile, they had some great rallies and lots of laughter. One old duck must have been nearly ninety but was incredibly sweet showing her how to hold her bat and where to put her fingers. Mack took her aside when there was a lull and a spare table (they had four tables set up in the main auditorium of the club) and gave her a gentle hit aiming the balls so she could hopefully get some back. Even so she thought I'm absolutely dreadful, no way I'm joining up. And I have to admit Mack was rather taken aback. Gawd... , he thought, she's pretty hopeless.

Jess had no intention of exposing herself to ridicule again but the following Friday morning she bumped into Mack in the street. Mack had no intention either of pushing her to join but before he could stop himself he smilingly said, "Ah. Great! Jess. Looking forward to seeing you at the club this afternoon. You will come won't you? If you're there a bit early you and I can have a hit up."

Now why did I do that he thought as they parted, she'll never make the grade. He shook his head in wonder. There must be some good reason. Jess was also at a loss. How could she refuse the guy when he was being so nice to her?

Things unfortunately didn't improve: she was utterly useless. Weeks and months passed and she just couldn't seem to coordinate – what's the point? She asked herself, unless it's the \$5 I put in their kitty each time we play. And she had to admit it was amazing how the money grew and how often they were able to make a sizeable contribution to help those suffering from this bastard disease. Stephen Hawkins would certainly approve. She also had to admit that it was a fun afternoon. Everybody was friendly, there was heaps of jolly banter, the exercise was excellent – she was beginning to feel quite fit – and they all enjoyed the coffee (or a wine) together afterwards. I suppose I'll soldier on, she thought.

Mack was having similar misgivings. He whispered to Bill that he just couldn't see them making a player out of her in a million years but s'pose we're stuck with her now.

Miracles sometimes do happen and slowly but surely Jess began to get a few balls back, much to the surprise of her opponents who were so amazed they often lost the point. There came the day when, rather than heaving an inner sigh of – “Oh, no, I don’t have to play with Jess again,” we were happy to have her share our game. Within the year she was hitting them like a pro and when a friend from another club joined us for the afternoon and suggested she play comp with his group, she jumped at the chance. She still turned up on most Fridays though many of us were feeling *our* game was now not good enough. She wouldn’t have a bar of that.

“Don’t kid yourself,” she said, “if it hadn’t been for you people and your patience my life would have gone nowhere. I was just so down in the doldrums and sorry for myself and you’ve made me feel on top of the world.”

Well let’s fast forward about six months. There’s a rather large, rather noisy gathering on the lawn outside the club. Balloons and streamers like a kid’s party are decorating the place and the late afternoon summer sun is making the champagne glasses glisten. Mack is calling for silence.

“Ladies and Gentlemen.” He cleared his throat. “I once wondered why I persuaded Jess to continue playing table tennis and now I know the reason. This is a spectacular celebration you’ll all agree because we are here to raise our glasses to her – hold them high everybody – Jess, who joined us unable to hit a ball, is now – is now, Ladies and Gentleman, the Over Seventy State Champion Table Tennis player.”

The evening air was filled with smiles and cheers and hugs and tears with bubbly brimming over.

Isn’t it crazy what turns life can take, even when you’re older – it’s just a matter of opening the door and walking through.

Be Prepared

Robert Jorgensen

Laurieton

Harold started as a labourer when he left school. His dad's friend worked at the local electricity depot. "Harold is a good kid," was as good a reference as the boy needed to get a job.

As a youngster Harold loved to climb trees. It was no surprise that he hankered to scale ladders o the top of lanky power poles. "No Harold, you must be authorised."

"How do I do that?" he asked.

"You need to become a linesman; go to the technical college they will set you straight."

As a qualified linesman Harold loved the work. Years went by and he became a leading hand on a line gang and it wasn't long before he applied for a position as Foreman.

Everybody knew he was foreman material right from the start. His passion for the work and his interest in having the best crew of men was obvious and he was well rewarded and respected.

I met Harold when he was in his mid-fifties. Mine was an office job and we were in daily contact. We worked well together for the next decade.

In those days, compulsory retirement could not be avoided; even for good foremen like Harold.

It was a great retirement party at the depot to wish Harold a long, happy retirement. "What yu gunner do mate?" a common question from the boys.

"No plans yet, probably find something I'm sure. I'd rather stay here with you blokes but they won't allow it," he said with a look of sadness in his eyes. Almost as if he saw retirement from his job as the end of his life.

It was tragic, less than two years later, to say goodbye to Harold in that final way. Such a large funeral. As with most funerals, you learn a lot about the deceased that in real life is often hidden or kept private. I learned that Harold had no interests outside his beloved work. The feeling among most of his colleagues was that he probably died from boredom. Surely it contributed greatly to his early demise.

This was a real wakeup call for me. At fifty-five years old, I too loved my work. Imagine how I felt when the politics of the day was strongly in favour of rationalisation and retrenchments. Was I likely to be grabbed by the claws of retrenchment?

I saw it coming. I had seen Harold going. What could I do? What *must* I do?

Some caring spirit urged me to get prepared for another job. TAFE teaching appealed.

My forty years of practical work experiences should qualify me as a teacher. I confidently told the TAFE lady that I could teach many subjects related to my working experiences.

She promptly reminded me that

- I would need to get a teaching methods certificate first
- If a vacancy occurred, I could then apply
- If successful, I may get some hours depending on student numbers etc.
- If chosen to teach, I would be required to follow a TAFE curriculum.

Okay I'll get prepared. After all I wasn't in the boy scouts for all those years learning the motto BE PREPARED for no reason.

As a Boy Scout I was sometimes asked, "What is the Scout motto?" I soon learnt the answer. The next question was "be prepared for what?"

Be prepared for ANYTHING was always the eager reply.

Now as a much older scout ANYTHING had arrived in the form of a memo from head office.

"A large reduction in staff numbers has been deemed necessary for the survival of our organisation. Consequently, voluntary retrenchment offers will be implemented before the end of this financial year. Please contact..."

Yes, I was one of the 'victims' and only a fifty-year-old chicken. 'Off with his head' they said and handed me my final lump sum payment.

Sometimes such events can be a blessing in disguise. With the assistance of my Boy Scout motto, ten hours per week teaching at the local college became a reality. I was delighted.

I saw it as a transition to *full retirement* whatever that means?

I even played golf in the other hours.

Ever since I can remember, I have enjoyed wood work. My father as a cabinet maker left me with the genes to be a woodworker. He taught me so many things during my youth and it was natural that woodworking became my main hobby.

Joining the local woodworkers Guild has led to some most amazing experiences. From making toys for grandkids to making musical instruments has been my passion and saviour. In forty years I have made more than eighty musical instruments.

In later years with new cataract replacement lenses, I sometimes need a magnifying glass but the desire to keep going is strengthened by the need to make just one more musical instrument. Learning to play some of the instruments has taken up a lot of my 'retirement' time. But more importantly, it has introduced me to some very talented musicians now added to a long list of friendships.

Violin lessons at my advanced age took me to places that still amaze me.

As a young boy of seven, I walked half a mile to the teacher's place and usually went home with a little gift if I had practised to the teacher's satisfaction. A barking dog between my home and the teacher's home was the reason that piano lessons came to a sudden halt.

It would take more than a barking dog to come between me and my musical interests now. There are plenty of musical instruments begging to be made. Sorry, I don't have time to retire.

If retirement is sitting down doing nothing, then it is not yet on my agenda.

Thankyou Baden Powell BP for that great motto be prepared. I confidently say that it has served me well throughout my life. None so well as that day when the claws of retrenchment threatened but did not conquer.

On Becoming a Gym Junkie

Pippa Kay

Hunters Hill

I blame it all on endorphins – those sneaky little hormones that make us feel good – because now I'm a gym junkie.

It started a few months ago, after a visit to my GP. There was nothing much wrong with me except I was a bit overweight and my cholesterol was elevated. She prescribed statins which made me feel awful, so I went back and complained.

"Okay," she said, "you can go onto a lower dose if you promise to diet and exercise."

I like a challenge. "I'm an expert on dieting," I told her. She didn't look convinced. "I've dieted all my life," I explained. "You name it, I've tried it. Low carb, high fat, 5:2. They work for a while, but then the weight creeps back on. I'm the classic yo-yo."

She gave me a sympathetic look as she handed me a referral to have my cholesterol re-checked in six months.

At the shopping centre later that day I looked through the windows of a new gym, and wondered if it might help. There were hot and sweaty people doing all sorts of ridiculous moves (such as chin-ups!), and the music was loud doof-doof.

I consulted Dr Google. Surely there was a magic pill I could take that wasn't a statin.

Dr Google took me everywhere, and I learned to distrust a lot of what he told me. However one form of exercise, HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) was positively reviewed on some reputable websites, such as Sydney University.

The plan is to work very hard for a short period of time, either with cardio or resistance based exercise. Those periods can be very short – half a minute – and then you rest for the other half of the minute. Do it again. And again. Then you move on to the next exercise.

I googled the gym I'd been walking past, and discovered its programs were based on HIIT. They offered a 'free' two week trial, promising to refund your twenty dollars if you signed up.

What could I lose?

I remember my first class. My trainer was a very fit man in his late twenties. There were no other grey heads. I tried to explain that I had trouble with my knees sometimes, and I didn't think I could do 'burpies', but he just told me to give it a go and see what I could do.

"Everyone works at their own pace," he explained.

The class started with a demonstration. A burpie, for the uninitiated, is a movement whereby one hunkers down with hands and feet on the floor, then gracefully throws one's legs out of the crouch to land in a push up position, then bounce back into a crouch, from which one leaps high into the air, tucking the knees up to the chest. Spectacular.

My burpie was not so balletic: from a semi-crouch (my back and achilles' tendons aren't as elastic as they were) I work my feet back until I can put some weight on my hands, do a 'girlie' push up, then I stagger back to the crouch position until I can take my weight on my legs, stand up slowly and do a little hop.

The trainer also demonstrated the box jump, whereby one does a flying leap up onto a box. After he demonstrated this, he told the class (looking at me) that if we couldn't jump onto the box, then stepping up is okay. Jumping hurts my knees so I step.

To get my money's worth during my free trial I did nine classes in the fortnight. I hadn't injured myself and felt much better than I had when I'd visited the doctor complaining about the statins, so I joined the gym.

I'm not the only one who couldn't do burpies or box jumps. We are assigned to teams of three or four and we work around a circuit, doing about 30–45 seconds of each exercise, resting for few seconds, before repeating the exercise or moving to the next station.

I'm teamed up with a couple of women who are over 50, and we have now become good friends, as we all struggle to keep up with the youngsters.

Meanwhile I continued consulting Dr Google, and learned about the importance of exercise as we age. In an article in Science Daily I read:

Numerous studies have shown that physical exercise seems beneficial in the prevention of cognitive impairment and dementia in old age.

And other articles agree. For example, Dementia Australia recommends aerobic exercise, resistance training, and balance and flexibility exercises.

How often have I heard stories of older folk losing their marbles following a fall or illness? A study conducted by The University of Sydney may explain why. The lack of exercise while the patient is bedridden means that the blood flow to the brain is decreased. We need to keep our strength up to prevent falls, and that means lifting weights.

According to a report titled 'Increasing Muscle Strength Can Improve Brain Function':

The key however is to make sure you are doing it frequently, at least twice a week, and at a high intensity so that you are maximising your strength gains. This will give you the maximum benefit for your brain.

I've been working out at the gym 4–5 times a week now for over six months. My doctor is happy with my cholesterol readings. I've lost five kilograms. I'm growing muscle instead of fat, and I can lift heavier weights now than when I started. I still can't do burpies or jump onto boxes though.

Yes, HIIT is difficult. I get hot and sweaty and I keep discovering muscles I never knew I had because they ache.

I'm the only grandmother at the gym and the trainer now calls me a legend. Definition of legend? A very old story. Hmm.

Life: Layer upon Layer

Maureen Kelly, OAM

North Arm Cove

A Danish pastry changed my life when I was widowed at the age of 55!

Like the pastry, since then I have added layer upon layer of experiences to my life in a rewarding and positive way.

In 1996, looking for new interests, I attended a breakfast to celebrate International Women's Day, admission \$25.

'Hope we get a cooked breakfast after this Danish pastry,' my friend remarked. I nodded in agreement.

We were never served the cooked breakfast, but I left the function very motivated and with an idea forming in my mind. Gathering willing friends around me, we formed a committee, joined UNIFEM Australia (now UN Women) and for ten years we served my much-anticipated cooked breakfast charging only \$15 admission and for the following ten years we have served lunch.

The change to lunch, (only \$25 in 2018) brought about because we were all getting 'too mature' to get up at 5.00am and cook breakfast for an 8.00am start. Ninety-eight guest speakers later (which includes 38 primary school students from local schools), my tiny rural community has raised nearly \$55,000 to help women in the Asia-Pacific area less fortunate than us. We've never served a Danish pastry!

I have been able to report each function in a news magazine I have written and published monthly since 1995. I was blessed with the support of my boss, the then owner/editor of the *Port Stephens Examiner*, who provided me with a light board and I learnt to cut, strip and paste in my editorials on A4, have it printed and delivered by volunteers free to every household in my village – circulation 280.

Being an absolute novice at the start and with only three pages of copy, I simply left the fourth page empty.

'You can't have an empty page, 'you have to put in a house ad.'

A house ad, what was that? I quickly learnt it was a filler added when there is no further copy. I never did that again.

There is nothing more exhilarating than interviewing a local who has achieved something exceptional like one very humble elderly resident who, two years ago was awarded the French Legion of Honour, or the story of a beloved cat missing for 12 days, spotted by a neighbour under a trailer, being reunited with its distraught owner.

Medal holders in my community – five in all – have given me a great opening line at various public speaking events. *I come from a village of swingers*, certainly grabs everyone's attention. In my case I am alluding to a person with one medal 'swinging' on their lapel!

I proudly state we have holders of the French Legion of Honour, Bravery Medal, Medal of the Order of Australia (AM) and two Medal of the Order (OAM) recipients.

What an achievement in a village of under 300 people!

My children, living overseas and interstate, never have to worry about their mother, in fact, my son once said, 'You are so busy, we will soon have to make an appointment to speak to you!' However, positivity reaches well into my family life and that of my grandchildren.

I was invited to speak to my grand-daughter's class, five and six-year olds, after receiving the OAM for Community Service.

Community Service – how do you explain that to five and six year olds?

'If you receive pocket-money for a job at home that is similar to working, however, if you do something to help your parents without being asked, no pocket-money attached – that is similar to community service,' I told them.

One little boy's arm shot up. 'You get medals for fighting in a war, don't you?'

I gave an understanding nod.

'What war were you in?'

I shook my head. 'None,' I replied, 'I am just trying to make a difference and if we all do that, hopefully, you will never experience war.'

Another memorable conversation.

My six-year-old grandson was lamenting the fact that both his grandfathers were dead.

'Do you think they are in Heaven and know each other?'

'Yes, absolutely,' I replied. He gave me a long, hard stare and said, 'you'll be dead soon, won't you?'

I returned his steady stare. 'Not if I can help it, Alex. I intend to be around for a long time and watch you grow into a fine young man.' Contented, he carried on playing with his Lego.

'Treading the boards' performing with the local community theatre group was another positive move following my retirement. I have organised or been involved in fundraising, associated with many productions. We donated the proceeds to Prostate Cancer, the Cancer Council and many other worthy organisations. Sadly, the curtains have closed on our thespian efforts now as we are all slightly more mature, and can't remember our lines! However, the sense of achievement remains with us and gives us great joy.

Standing on the verandah of Sydney's Government House prior to my investiture the Aide-de-Camp read out my achievements, Governor Marie Bashir commenting: 'I don't know how you fit so much into your day.' It was then it registered with me, yes I do achieve a lot, the catalyst; the Danish pastry eaten so many years previously.

Looking positively at my life as I age another year, I am thankful my journey has taken me along many paths of exploration and given me the opportunity to meet and write about so many interesting and amazing people. It has been humbling. Long may it continue ... the Danish pastry has a lot to answer for!

Pamela (Ferrari) King

Thirlmere

The black ball of fluff sat staring at me, eyes wide with wonderment at her strange surroundings. Her ears, flopped over at the top, would soon be pricked and alert. Was she missing her siblings? Did she wonder why she was here alone?

We called her Sara, but soon shortened it to Sassy or Sass.

She wasn't to be alone for long. In through the door came a galloping klutz, Fred, who knew how to get into mischief.

He taught her all she needed to know – how to con titbits from the table, how to remove the toilet roll from the holder and unravel it and, with a little teamwork, how to unlock the sliding door.

By the time she was a slip of a girl she was figuring things out for herself.

She slept in our bedroom next to the rooms occupied by our collectables shop. I woke one morning to discover she was cuddled up in bed with a large toy stuffed tiger.

To get to the toy she negotiated her way in the dark to the front room, carefully stepped over fragile objects and claimed her prize from the furthest corner, then made her way back with it dangling from her mouth.

After all that effort and no breakages, I couldn't take it from her. She slept with it for many years.

There were more cautious moments. We spent hours coaxing her up and down the back steps. Reluctant at first, she finally managed and, once mastered, did it in bounds.

Within a year she climbed anything and everything including the old car in the backyard. It was a favourite spot where she could stand on top of it and conduct noisy conversations with the neighbourhood dogs.

I was encouraged by her breeder to enter her in dog shows. When dogs are being judged in the show ring, each time they win in their class or category they return to be judged against dogs from other classes through to Best in Show.

Sassy proudly ran around the ring, standing perfectly for examination and giving the judge a gentle kiss on the hand. At least she did the first round. If she had to go in again the run around was less enthusiastic and she stood with one leg out to the side. It was a stance of boredom without kisses. She seemed to be saying, 'I've done this once. Don't they remember what I look like?'

At two she became a mum delivering a healthy litter of 10 puppies then went on to earn her Championship title before retiring from the show ring.

Sadly, her best friend, Fred and Beau, her handsome boyfriend and father of her pups, are no longer with us. We miss them very much and I believe she does too.

I remember clearly the morning I rose to let her out. She couldn't stand on her back legs. She dragged herself along the ground while I stood and screamed through my tears. "Not my Sassy!"

I sobbed as we led her into the vet, dreading the worst. A slipped disc and arthritis the vet announced. Injections and tablets would become part of her new regime.

Not long before she had undergone an operation for breast cancer and, more recently, she suffered a serious stomach infection. I owed the vet a small fortune. People told me it is time to say goodbye, she is 14 and lived a good life.

Then I thought. I am not young any more. I have pain and a chronic condition. I will also be on medication the rest of my life, but I am enjoying life. I have time to dote on my little granddaughter and enjoy activities the hustle and bustle of working life didn't permit. I am certainly not ready to be 'put out of my misery'.

I don't believe Sassy wants to end her life now any more than I do.

And so, each day, my beautiful Sassy and I take our medication. At times, we both hobble around with stiffness. Our exercise is gentler these days and we take interest in the world around us. Neither of us could run around the show ring even if we wanted to.

We are both happy and have a love and a bond that is very special. She is still the matriarch of our dogs but now is our time to leave the more energetic undertakings to the younger ones.

Party Pooper

Ilona Krueger

South Penrith

Madeleine slammed the phone down. 'Funeral insurance, my foot!' she yammered to nobody. As if her 70th birthday wasn't depressing enough. And lately there had been an overflow of junk mail about Senior's Medical Insurance, hip replacement on interest-free terms and even a full-sized packet of incontinence pads.

Every time she picked up a magazine, the word *youth* jumped out at her. Every time she switched on the television, a famous celebrity was proclaiming the merits of face cream that would miraculously reverse ageing, wrinkled skin. Prohibitively expensive, mind you, for the average pensioner, not to mention the cringe worthy, 'Because you're worth it.' Never mind that there would be no money for necessary medications, petrol for the fortnight or even the occasional coffee meet-up. Why were there so many reminders that age was eventually going to do her in?

She had often been accused of being cynical. *Ha!* Mostly from younger people whose silken tresses still bounced jubilantly and whose melodic laugh had none of that out-of-tune twang of pain in every bar. But even some of her cronies had told her the same: she was a negative misery guts, who always seemed angry, and that 'Mad' as a diminutive suited her much better than Maddy or Madeleine. *The nerve!* Well, maybe they had more money, larger extended families and fewer reasons to visit the doctor, she rationalised.

A friend had suggested a party. 'What's there to celebrate?' Madeleine had scowled. No, today was going to be an ordinary day, with the usual routine. She'd have soup for lunch, watch television and inane commercials, and perhaps have a nanny nap or two to rest her 70-year-old osteoporotic bones.

Madeleine sifted through the post, casting aside the spam. Some cards from well-meaning friends, she guessed. She saved them for later. The local newspaper with stories of success and people's involvement in the community, obviously without her problems and hardship. A small package, probably a gift. Likely a slab of chocolate. Comfort gift, no doubt. Not that her well-expanded frame needed more calorie-comfort.

Chores finished, Madeleine plonked herself into a chair and immediately the doorbell rang several times. 'Hold your horses,' she hollered, not bothering to muster the tiniest tone of friendliness. 'I'm coming. I'm coming!'

'Madeleine Martin? Sign here, please. Happy Birthday.'

With a forced smile, she grunted a constipated *thank-you*. She put the flower arrangement on the table. Must have cost a pretty penny. Wasted though. Cut flowers were dead flowers, only a few days off expiry.

She opened her package, searching for a card or a name. Instead of chocolate, there was a book, 'Positive Thoughts on Ageing', of all things. Who would send this? Probably a government initiative. Inside a small note. *Life is what you make it. Love you. NSW*

NSW! She'd guessed right. But 'love you', come on now. She threw it into the recycling bin along with the plastic bottles, glass and other paper waste accumulated over the week. What was it with this focus on age? It was being rubbed-in *ad nauseum* and she was in no mood for it.

Soon the phone rang again. Not another scam call! Madeleine brightened a little when she heard her daughter's voice. At least Cindi had remembered. A few words and niceties ensued and then Cindi was quiet. Madeleine detected some hesitance.

'What is it?' Madeleine asked.

'It's Glen. There's been an accident.'

'Oh no! What happened? Where?'

'No, not Glen. Nathan. He had a motor bike collision this morning and was rushed to hospital. Not sure yet how bad Nathan is but Glen is beside himself with worry. He asked me to tell you. He's driving to Newcastle and picking me up on the way.'

Poor Nathan, their one-time neighbour and friend of her kids as youngsters. Still best buddies now. They'd all played together and gone everywhere together. Many was the time when Nathan had stayed for meals, even sleeping over, feeling more welcome with them than in his own neglectful household.

Madeleine didn't know what to say. She loved that 45-year-old kid as her own. 'Mum...Mum...?'

'Yes, love?'

'Did you get the present he sent you?'

'Present?'

'Yeah, a book. He picked it out especially for you. He sent me the link to it on Facebook. It looks great.'

Madeleine was in shock. The book! Like a tramp, she scrounged through the bin, already on the kerb waiting for collection. She didn't care who saw. She found the book and held it to her chest. NSW... of course: Nathan Steven West. How stupid could she be?

She rang Cindi's mobile. 'Come and pick me up,' she said, hanging up, not waiting for a reply. In a few minutes, book in handbag, she had raked a comb through her hair, grabbed a cardigan and locked up the house. Outside she gathered a few sprigs of parsley, the first 'flowers' Nathan had ever given her and waited for Cindi.

No one talked much on the two-hour drive, least of all Madeleine whose attention was solely focused on her book, Nathan's gift. Silent prayers and tears flowed out of her heart. *Please God, let him be okay.* He was fighting hard for life and she'd had such an apathetic attitude about that which money can't buy: Time.

The hospital had good news. Nathan had suffered a broken arm and leg, some bruising, many stitches and a heavy concussion. Nothing that some convalescence and a stint in plaster wouldn't solve. He smiled at them dozily. 'I am going to be fine, Aunt Maddy,' he said.

'So am I, Nathan, so am I. As soon as you can cope with some dancing on crutches, I am going to have my belated 70th birthday party.' Cindi and Glen exchanged puzzled looks. 'After all,' she added, 'Life is what you make it.'

"To keep the heart unwrinkled, to be hopeful, kindly, cheerful, reverent – that is to triumph over old age."

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Her 'Reset' Life

Cheryl Kuhne

Kingscliff

She turned over the page. A slow but deliberate movement. Purposely pressing that page onto the next, she focussed on the date: the first day of a new month. May. It was in that moment she resolved to reset her life. Again.

Death is never easily dealt with, this she knew from her previous experiences. Death, and the grief that it brings, were also part of her life journey. She thought of times long ago and was surprised at the number of years. Could it really be thirty years since her father was diagnosed with cancer?

She remembered the months that followed his diagnosis, his resolve to make the most of his remaining time, the need to have everything in order and his almost obsessive desire to move her mother from the family home into a smaller unit. His strong, unwavering faith, the faith that upheld his passing from life. He was 65 and had just retired. She thought of the seeming unfairness of this but acceptance came.

Acceptance didn't come as easily however when seven weeks later her mother was diagnosed with incurable cancer – and died eight weeks later. Not only were both her parents now gone, but her family home had to be sold. She not only grieved, she felt cheated. Her mother was only sixty-two. A talented lady with a servant heart who had planned to resume her piano playing and drawing when she felt a little stronger after her husband's death. She resolved then to reset her life, to maximise any opportunities which came her way. Her ordinary life continued, sprinkled with the joys of watching her three daughters become teenagers, making their own way in life, through university, short-term jobs, and life-long careers.

Changes came when her daughters moved from home, to the city, and beyond. Making new lives, needing her less. Marrying. A time to reset because she knew about the Empty Nest Syndrome and wanted to defy it. Rather, she sought to find meaningful diversions to fill the mothering void. Not that she ever ceased to be their mother, she acknowledged that fact, and they did need her from time to time; mostly she was content to set them free in her love, knowing they would return.

Her husband, a farmer, was not always well. It was thought he was suffering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome but at that time there were no diagnostic tests. Both she and he had to reset their lives in tune with the highs and lows of the illness. Grasp opportunities; try not to feel disappointed when plans went awry. Eventually the physical work took its toll and he told her they would eventually have to sell the farm. This was a slow process, leasing the farm for three years, gradually disposing of the large items of plant, then later, the clearing sales.

The inevitable had to come and it brought grief. She also became apprehensive as to what the future would hold. Leaving the family farm settled by his great grandfather from Germany, moving from the home they had waited so long to build together, severing bonds with life-long friends, moving away from extended family, cutting ties with church groups and associations. This was a time to rethink and to reset. There was, she had to admit, an element of excitement in the unknown. Who would buy the farm? Where would they live? Would they retire into the town (this was expected) or would they make a complete break, even if only for a few years, in some yet-to-be discovered place? She had learned, and continues to do so, that change is not always easy. Change can unsettle, harden and bring its own grief.

Alternatively, change for her, also brought creation and consolidation. She eventually adjusted to moving interstate, to life by the sea and a different climate, to the challenges of building a new home, joining new groups and forging friendships.

She realised she had been reflecting upon aspects throughout her life as she turned that April page.

What she really wanted was to reset this current year: a year filled with hope and prospective joy. Her youngest daughter was finally pregnant, the baby due in June. The next month. What hope! What joy! She would have loved the story to have ended like that. But that's not how it was. Scans showed the baby had skeletal dysplasia (lethal) and was unlikely to live. A tiny girl was born at 23 weeks and lived for fifteen minutes. Hopes dashed. Joy lost. Immeasurable grief. And a grief revisited as she recalled her eldest daughter's first baby's birth, a big boy, her first grandchild, who died unexpectedly two hours after he was born.

She sits at her desk, blankly staring at the calendar, swamped by the grief that resurges and consumes. She sees how this grief and all of its accompanying emotions have affected her family. She wants to make it right. To fix it up. She is, after all, the mother: the mother of the mothers whose babies have died. This grief is exhausting and is wearing her down. Is there no escape? She wants to reset her life. To have peace return. This is her resolve.

I am she.

Positive ageing doesn't begin when one reaches retirement or becomes 'a senior'. For me it began when faced with the first life threatening illness, the first death of a someone special, the first disaster. It's when a choice was made to reset my life – to move forward with enthusiasm and an expectation of what the new future might look like, and hold. Positive ageing sees with gratitude the blessings to be found in each new day. It makes the decision to reset when challenged or beset. It moves with zeal to appreciate and take hold of the good and the bad and to appreciate both. And it rewards with satisfaction, contentment and peace.

Positive Ageing My Way and poem How Grandmas Have Changed

Jackie Laing

Kew

I was born in October 1942 in Surrey, England. Winston Churchill was Prime Minister and had been for the previous two years. King George 6th was on the throne and Britain was in the middle of World War Two.

The news of the day was filled with battles being fought, ships being sunk and soldiers dying, with all mothers, wives and families dreading the fateful telegram informing them that their loved ones had been killed or were missing in action.

Fortunately I don't remember any of this and if someone had told me I would end up on the other side of the world, my marriage would break up, I would remarry, have two children, three stepchildren and twelve grandchildren, become involved in horses and people with a disability it would seem unbelievable, but that *is* what happened.

In my seventy years and some months I have seen many new-fangled ideas come into shape. The mobile phone, computers, laptops and many labour-saving devices such as automatic washing machines and dishwashers. This means that retired individuals have more time on their hands and need a meaningful way to spend it.

My answer came 20 years ago when I discovered Riding for the Disabled, (RDANSW) and became a volunteer.

My first sight at RDA was a young woman who is a paraplegic being lifted from her wheelchair onto a horse for the first time. I don't cry very often but I cried that day and have cried a few times since at the determination and bravery of some of our riders.

I was asked if I would like to train as a coach. My first question was would I have to ride as I was well into my fifties and having come off quite a few horses, had no intention of riding again.

"Oh no," they said and enchanted as I was with the whole set up I didn't question the fact that you can't teach what you don't know. I believe that is called *blind faith*.

When I had been at RDA for a while one of the coaches asked me to go and trial a new horse with her. I felt extremely important. I knew very little about horses but quite a bit about disabilities. My background was an Associate Diploma in Diversional Therapy and a certificate in caring for young children.

The horse we went to see was a sixteen-hand gelding called Ben who appeared very friendly. The coach rode him for a while and said, "Okay Jack your turn."

"What?"

"Have a ride see how you go."

You know what it is like when you are new, you don't like to refuse do you? I tried of course

"I don't have a helmet."

"Use mine."

"He's a bit big and there's no mounting block."

"I'll give you a leg up."

I had nowhere to go.

I took the reins in my hand and was given a leg up as Ben just stood there. Unfortunately the horse was taller than we thought and I was heavier than the coach anticipated. I scabbled up on to the horse and immediately got cramp in my hip, and Ben just stood there. He did look round a couple of times with a surprised look that only horses can give. There were some children playing with their parents. I walked the horse over to them and they patted him quite happily. Needless to say, Ben was in and I was riding again.

The primary objective of rda is to provide people with a disability the opportunity to ride and enjoy all activities connected with horse riding. Riding a horse is therapeutic, recreational and fun. This then was the Association that I joined and it was to give me many happy memories.

Riding is done in an enclosed arena which has a mounting ramp to mount people who can't mount from a block. It is also used to mount people who are wheelchair bound. Lessons are a lot of fun. The coach of the day plays games like Grandmother's footsteps and the volunteers get into the spirit and try to make sure that their rider wins.

After a while I became President of the Kendall centre and my days were filled with riding, coaching, paperwork and dealing with Sponsors, volunteers, riders and horses.

Later I applied to become a Regional Representative. This meant that I oversaw four centres on the Mid-North Coast. If they had any problems they could come to me and each year I would visit the centre and do a check to make sure they were running efficiently. In 2012 I applied to become a Director of NSW. There are 40 centres in NSW and they vote the director's into office. To my delight I was elected and so started a new challenge in my life.

I was given the portfolio of Development Officer, this meant that if a new Centre started in NSW I would go and hold a Public Meeting to elect a Steering Committee who would facilitate the centre, with my help, to the stage where they could ride.

Another exciting event happened about this time. Riding for the Disabled NSW was invited to give a demonstration at the Royal Police Academy at Redfern. His Royal Highness Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall were visiting and had especially asked for us to give a demonstration of the work that

we do. The whole thing was very exciting. The bomb squad and the sniffer dogs came through, there was a helicopter flying overhead and the Royal Entourage was preceded by policemen on motorbikes and in cars. We were all given a quick lesson on Royal protocol and then we were on. The Mounted Police did a demonstration first and then we did some races and explained what we did and why.

In conclusion, little did I realise that when I attended a talk 20 years ago it would shape my retirement years but sometimes you just have to take a step in faith.

Have you noticed how Grandmas have changed?
They used to be gnarled and bent

They were always sitting and doing their knitting
and their 'get up and go' just all went.

Their clothes were drab in brown or grey or perhaps
an outdated tweed

You had to shout, they were deaf as a post and slow
was their usual speed.

My grandchildren look on in wonder as their granny
now gives it her all

You see I'm a grandma, I play ten pin bowls and
I have my own bowling ball.

A modern granny knows all the ropes they
read quite a bit you see

They know about diets and exercise and husband
replacement therapy

(Sorry HRT)

They drive their own cars, they walk with their dogs,
they wear shorts or bootleg jeans

And if they wish they wear them in pink or
a wonderful shade of pea green.

Yes! The modern grandma's in charge of her life
she golfs and rides horses I'm told

And don't ever ask her to knit you a rug she'll tell you
she will when she's old.

Is Nana Too Old?

Caitlin LARBALSTIER

Gymea

"You're too old Nana!" eight year old granddaughter, Charlotte, announced strongly with unsettling conviction.

I sat stunned into silence, feeling like a deer caught in a car's headlights as these stabbing words tumbled easily out of her angelic mouth. Thinking, she knows something I don't! Do I look old? Is sixty-eight too old to go to a writer's workshop; too old to learn something new? I just want to write my life's story. Maybe the workshop is only for proven senior writers, am I too old for the challenge?

If I don't feel old, then I must look old. Charlotte must see someone who is really old. Scary thoughts raced through my mind and quietly settled unsteadily into the now greying frontal lobe. Had I turned old overnight? Was my hair white, my face now heavily etched in wrinkles? Heart pounding, I glanced fearfully into the lounge room mirror of truth. Relief flooded through me, my hair was still dark, though a couple of white hairs stared defiantly back at me and there are no wrinkles. I still looked just as I did last night.

Coming out of my stunned silence, I heard my daughter-in-law admonishing Charlotte. "Telling someone they're old is not nice; I think you've hurt Nana's feelings, go and apologise."

Poor Charlotte rushed over and threw her arms around my neck. "I'm so sorry Nana that I said you're too old!"

"Thank you darling." I said, giving her a hug.

"You really don't look old Nana," Charlotte repeated. Not convinced I am reassured.

Very curious to know why Charlotte thinks I'm too old, I asked her. "I don't know how to say it Nana", she says.

"Just say what you thought," I said.

"I didn't mean to say you were too old Nana. I meant you're too old to write books. Only young people write books, old people wouldn't know what to write." Charlotte spoke with the confidence of an avid reader. I laughed, thinking of my crazy thoughts. Her mother reached for her Smartphone, saying, "Who's your favourite author Charlotte?"

"Mem Fox," said Charlotte with a confident smile that quickly turned to opened mouth shock, when her mother said, "Mem Fox is seventy-two-years old, four years older than Nana!"

Charlotte couldn't understand how such an 'old person' could write great children's stories. I quietly explained, "It's not how old you are, but it's the things you experience, your attitude to life and a good imagination that gives you ideas for stories." With a look of surprise Charlotte suddenly realised the older you got the more you did, so the more you could write about.

We talked about why I wanted to write a story about my life. So I could tell her how different my life was from hers, when I was growing up. A time when milk was delivered by a man with a horse and cart, how the milk was poured into a tin billy can at our front door; we didn't buy it from supermarkets because they didn't exist when I was her age. A time when toilets were a big tin can inside a little shed down the backyard and a man came every week to empty it and toilet paper was 'torn up' newspaper. She was open-mouthed with disbelief and horror at this tale.

I delighted in telling Charlotte about my adventures when I was young, some of which continue on through my life today. "Charlotte, I loved a challenge then and I still do."

I grew up in the city and had a fascination for horses, just as she does today. I wanted to learn to ride and to have a horse, which I asked for every birthday. My Mum and Dad thought it was unacceptable for nice city girls to associate with people with horses, unless you were rich and could attend exclusive and expensive riding schools at Centennial Park.

I told her about the horse someone put out to graze on the vacant block behind my house and how this small horse, with his shaggy coat and big sad eyes, was my dream come true. How I'd spend many happy hours hanging over the fence daydreaming about adventures we could have, talking to him and feeding him carrots, secretly picked from Dad's garden. I called him 'Horse'. We became good friends and he would trot over whenever he saw me.

How, one day when Mum and Dad were out, I worked up the courage to climb the fence and jumped onto his back. Horse and I spent a delightful afternoon together, but I made sure I was home before Mum and Dad. Secret rides on Horse continued for many months before he suddenly disappeared.

I still longed for a horse, but realised Mum and Dad were never going to relent so I had to find other interests. But each birthday I continued to ask for a horse and instead received all sorts of 'horse' trinkets. It became a long standing joke into adulthood to give me horse trinkets on my birthday. Mum finally relented on my thirtieth birthday and gave me a horse – a beautiful brown Royal Doulton figurine, my most treasured possession. Charlotte said it's hers when I die!

The story doesn't end here. For my thirty-eighth birthday I secretly took myself off for riding lessons and even bought a real horse which looked just like Horse. I called him Berocca. I continued to ride for another twenty years, entering carnivals and other events until Berocca sadly passed away. I still eagerly attend horse events that come my way and the horse stables at The Royal Easter Show are my first port of call.

While telling Charlotte the story of my lifelong love of horses, I imagined the young cogs of her mind whirring with thoughts of her adventures and am hoping she writes her own stories not only now, but continues to do so as she too gets 'too old!'

Who Will Inherit the Rolls?

Ron Lemon

Port Macquarie

I am the eldest of five boys who lived with our parents on a farm of about thirty hectares near Wombat, in South West New South Wales. The large 5-bedroom farm house named, Myola, was built in the mid-1930s and was renovated in the mid-950s.

Prior to renovations the pianola was the main source of family entertainment. The big influence on my love of popular music played on the piano was our mother, who was a self-taught pianist and played by 'ear'. She could listen to a popular song on the wireless, have two or three practise runs to pick up the tune and away she would go.

Nat King Cole's, *Rambling Rose*, was one of her favourites, but her repertoire was full of easy listening music. Mum's younger sister, Hilda, was an excellent pianist and played in a band during the 1950s at Wombat Memorial Hall. On occasions, Mum would fill in for her when the band took a short break.

My earliest memories of a player-piano would have been about 1952. In those times it was common for nearby farm families to visit and, mostly after dinner, a game of cards such as euchre or 500 would ensue for the parents while at any one time 7 or 8 kids gathered in the lounge-room around the pianola.

There was a large collection of pianola rolls stored in the nearby sideboard. One could tell who had been playing the pianola by the variety of music rolls left at the top of each row of rolls. While the adults enjoyed their card game, we kids would give the pianola a good workout. Our favourite singalong would have to be 'If you knew Susie', closely followed by 'Katie...K...K...Katie' or maybe even 'Daisy, on a Bicycle Built for Two'. The tempo varied according to the song, the faster the tempo the louder our voices became. Eventually an adult would intervene and tell us to 'tone it down' because we were interrupting their card game. Spoil sports!! I remember 'Susie' was so worn out the edges of the roll were frayed and a sticky tape repair job was in order.

I was very surprised when entering our newly renovated lounge room to find Dad, not Mum, 'tinkling the ivories'. It was a one-off and I never saw him or heard him play again. I was quite surprised at how well he played. It is a huge disappointment that neither I, nor my siblings ever learnt to play a musical instrument.

Mum would regularly buy new rolls for the pianola – whatever music was popular at the time. There was a particular song which featured on a radio serial called, 'Mickey'. It went something like 'Mickey, pretty Mickey, you're the only one that I adore... Mickey...pretty Mickey...you're the one that should be at the kitchen door'. One day I must have been fairly upset, and Mum recalled in later years that when I heard the song on the wireless, I would say, 'Please Mummy, no more Mickey'.

As we got older and left home for work and marriage/children, we looked forward to holidays and a return to the farm. Our children discovered the wonder of a piano where you did not have to use your hands to produce a tune. Our daughters, Rowena and Trisha, pedalled for hours on end. Trisha had trouble reaching the pedals. But where there is a will, there is a way. 'Alley Cat' would soon become the new 'Susie'.

With the passing of our father, Mum continued living on the farm, but eventually decided to sell and move in to town in the early 1990s. Of course the pianola moved (with some difficulty) also. By now the sideboard cupboard was bursting at the seams with old and new rolls. Christmas and birthday gifts for an ageing mother who had 'everything' were no problem as Neil Diamond's, 'Sweet Caroline' and other popular songs were added to the roll library. But as more years passed, Mum eventually had to move in to a retirement home and most of the house furniture was given away or sold off.

Over the years there was much jovial discussion about who should inherit the pianola. After much deliberation amongst the five sons, it was decided that Geoffrey, a father of four, would get the pianola. Ah hah! But no mention of who would get the multitude of rolls! After all, these were family heirlooms...used and enjoyed by all over the years. Would there be a major family dispute that could tear our close knit family apart?

Geoffrey owned and operated a little shop in a country village that incorporated a 'bottle-o'. Using his initiative, he produced a carton of cold ale and it became a unanimous vote, after half the carton had been consumed, that the rolls should accompany the pianola. (That story line may have been stretched a bit, but it sounds good to me).

If only that pianola could speak. Sitting sad and lonely in Geoffrey's lounge-room now his children had left home, music rolls in no particular order stacked on top, it would probably say, 'Play it again Sam'!

And today...many years later, I still miss the unique homely melodies that the old pianola produced... not with the push of a button on the remote control, but with a bit of pedal power. I wonder if Phil next door would listen to a bit of 'Winifred Atwell', or 'Jack Thompson Piano Hits' to go with his glass of Merlot?

Clara

Wendy Levett

Byron Bay

I would watch her plodding purposefully along the gravel road past our home in her sensible shoes, grey felt toque pressed firmly down over the tight silver bun and with the necessary 'good coat' over her plump little form. In winter the coat would be woollen, in summer something lighter, possibly gabardine, but always a good and respectable coat because she was going out. She was English, you see and even in this outlandish place you had to set a standard!

'Poor old thing', I would think, in my bubble of blissful young marriage filled with the joy of one little baby shared with the love of my life.

It was much later that I learned of Clara's story; how she, as a young bride like me, had ventured out from the other side of the world, from Kent, the garden of England, with her equally young husband, the two of them brimming with excitement and anticipation, to find a new life on the unknown other side of the world.

They must have felt it to be the end of that world when they arrived in the early 20th century at Stony Chute, a tiny, remote, barely inhabited settlement in the northern ranges of New South Wales. There were trees, certainly, dense Australian bush, grey-green, endless, friendless grey-green eucalypts, shockingly different from the lush green of oak, ash and elm she had known in Kent.

It was one of those trees that had taken the young husband from her, falling on him as he cleared the land ready for their first Australian home, just before their first little baby was born, so that Clara was suddenly alone.

Alone, but people were kind and a neighbouring family offered to take her in as their housekeeper where she worked unstintingly for years, while raising little Dorothy. She was so much appreciated that before her benefactor died, he set aside a small piece of land for Clara, building a little cottage for her at nearby Cawongla to live for the rest of her life.

She was still in the Australian bush, but Kent was a long time ago and there was a shop and a school, a little church and a smattering of people – 'so all one really needs', she'd said.

Then she began to take head-on the process of positive ageing. And that is when we got to know her and watch what would be a lasting example for us in our own life journey.

In her little garden which was next to our school playground, she planted and nourished all the vegetables she needed, making countless jars of preserves and pickles, simmering in a big flat iron pan on her old fuel stove. She doled them out to friends and neighbours and sold what was left over to support the local church. I guess it was the Church of England in those days and very dear to her heart, though just a tiny grey weatherboard structure on the hill and a very poor relation to the imposing stone structures she'd left behind.

As baby followed baby for us and my own parents had died, she 'took me under her wing' and taught me lots. I was continually inspired by the positive outlook of this lady who had 'done it tough' in her life.

She showed me that if I made a mess of my baby knitting then "Don't leave that mistake there! Take it out and fix it! Start again!"

“Oh no – it’ll do Mrs Haig,” (it was always Mrs – I could never venture to call her Clara though she was always that in my mind).

“No, it *won’t* do – that’s no way to look at life, child!”

She was treasurer of the P&C at my husband’s school and he would say that to get money for his various ambitious projects from his Treasurer was not easy, in fact a bit like getting blood out of a stone.

For someone like her who had known the meaning of real hardship in making ends meet all her life, this attitude was completely understandable, but a bit hard to cope with for a young man on his way up. However, it did make him realise something of what others had experienced in their lives and to have more empathy with them.

Clara was surely one of those special human beings, not famous or even widely known, yet able to rise above all the disappointments and even tragedies that life can deal out and make life worth living for themselves and in so doing shine a light for others as well, as she did for us.

Salutations and long life to positive ageing.

So What Do I Do Now?

Chris Maitland

Elanora Heights

I woke this specific Monday morning, much later than I have been accustomed to on weekdays over these past 50 years. The day finally arrived with a combination of anticipation and trepidation, so what do I do now?

My wife and I had enjoyed a normal weekend, much like so many in recent years. We caught up with the kids and grandkids on Sunday, good family fun.

But this Monday morning I am aware that everything has changed, I have no need to rise in a hurry. Friday was my last ever day of work ... roll on retirement, it's suddenly here.

I thought the bosses might give me the customary gold watch for my years of devoted service, or has that token retirement gift been upgraded these days, could it now be a laptop? Neither, they took me out to lunch ... a less tangible gift.

So what do I do now ... today, tomorrow, next week, next month, next year? Every foreseeable day is clear, nothing planned. What an adjustment this is going to be. I'm in the middle of a big 180-degree turn-around, from having to be somewhere at 9.00am every weekday morning and held responsible for my work output.

But now ... I don't need to be anywhere specific at any time. I don't need to answer to anyone, except maybe tell my wife where I'll be when I go out. It's not like I haven't thought of this moment, this day. No, I've actually thought about it constantly these past few years as retirement loomed large.

I could tag along and help my wife with the shopping, I wonder if she'd like that? I don't know, she's had a shopping routine for quite a while now, maybe we should just ease into that.

I tell you what, we could take in a movie at least once a week.

What about sport? I'm not too old to play sport, because there's always Lawn Bowls. It seems to be the fall-back game when the aches and pains become too much to swing a golf club any more.

A more sedate pastime? I have friends who play Bridge.

I guess I'll spend a lot more time on my computer, see what I can learn from Dr Google and Wikipedia.

Hold on, my wife and I have these matching brand spanking new Seniors Cards that allow us to get off and on trains, buses and ferries and go to lots of places for \$2.50 per day. So we've begun to take some varied excursion day trips.

I may do some with three of my cousins too – I was an only child so these three guys are the brothers I never had, also retired. We can take some trips by train, bus or ferry ... maybe even all three in one day.

Can't go too far east, although there's always a trip across the Harbour to Watsons Bay for a seafood lunch and then return by bus through Bondi.

Further afield, I haven't been to Kiama to check out the blowhole for twenty-something years. Even beautiful Gerringong with its rolling hills if you get really adventurous. That can be done; a train to Kiama, a connecting bus to Gerringong, lunch overlooking the beautiful Pacific, walk downhill to the station stopping for a beer at the pub on the way. Local train back to Kiama and connect to Sydney train. All in 8 hours.

Bowral in the Southern Highlands is an option, although maybe not in the middle of winter, it can get really cold there. Two trains each way, no hassle, they usually connect at Campbelltown.

Head the other way, a train to Newcastle, check out the changes. They're constructing a light rail, sound familiar? I still call them trams, can't bring myself to call it light rail. Free shuttle bus from the new Newcastle Interchange into the city. Last time I was there, Hunter Street had lost its lustre but there's a lot of activity, they're working on giving Newcastle City a heart again. Walk to Nobbys, check out the beach. The Hunter River is broadest here, it's their working harbour. There's a Science and History Museum. Stop for lunch at one of the riverside cafés before returning home on the train. All travel for \$2.50.

What about the Blue Mountains? Yes, even there, all the transport for \$2.50. Train to Katoomba, use the local bus to get to Echo Point and Scenic World. But if you want to get inventive with the itinerary, stay on the train to Medlow Bath first, take the \$10 guided tour of the beautiful old Hydro Majestic, originally built by the retailer Mark Foy. Local bus back to Katoomba still with time to take in the sights.

The daily seniors excursion \$2.50 rate actually extends to Lithgow, so we're planning to check out a museum there, catch the train back to Mount Victoria to grab some lunch and then return to Sydney by 5.15pm.

Sometimes you have to delve a little deeper into the timetable to make a trip work. We actually got to the NSW Rail Museum at Thirlmere by two trains to Picton, then a bus via Tahmoor to Thirlmere. Enjoy the static exhibits on any weekday, have lunch at the pub, catch a bus back to Picton and two trains to return to Sydney.

Yes, that first day of retirement is already a dim memory. So much to see, so much to do when you get there, and the capacity to travel so far and on so many forms of public transport for \$2.50 per day.

We enjoy the pub, club or café lunches, but for economy, you can take a sandwich. Then there's always the service clubs; Rotary, Lions, Apex, View, Probus. Make some new friends and help others.

Hey, this retirement caper is looking quite promising. Some days I even need to rise as early as I did when I worked.

A Fulfilling Life with Asthma

Anthony McPhee

Booker Bay

I became an asthmatic at 13 years of age. While this is a serious disease, after the next few years and despite a couple of serious, disabling attacks, it was just an inconvenience. I would just pop a tablet under my tongue and ten minutes later would have a racing heart and trembling hands but at least, breathing freely and I had the strength to carry on.

I never lost a day of school. I played league and tennis and was never hospitalised. Never did I realise that this would be a stroke of good luck which would lead my life in another direction.

My father was a school teacher and I just thought that I would be one as well. I was later rejected by the Education Department because of asthma. This was a kind of 'sliding doors' moment. Recall the Gwyneth Paltrow movie; a train door closes before she can board and her life then travels in another direction. The movie then depicts two different lives for her. The one where she caught the train has a bad ending, but because she didn't get on she had a better outcome.

This has been the same for me. I went on to have a wonderful career and business life, married a lovely lady, had four great kids and now eleven grandkids and live in a little-known paradise called Booker Bay.

Not only that, my brother followed in my career choice, as well as my eldest son. Yes, I may have done well being a teacher-but I just couldn't imagine being without my great family and lifestyle. Being a school teacher is a great career – I still think of my teachers with great respect and fondness.

The real beginning of my life's journey began when my father was moved to a small country town, Wauchope, and started as a sole teacher at Huntington. It was 1943, half-way through World War II. I remember 1945 when it ended. The school poured outside to form an assembly and the school bell rang continuously.

At 11 years-old I began working after school at a local Pharmacy washing bottles and delivering medicines. My first pay was a 10-shilling note. I remember well, the feeling and saved up for a push-bike.

I was to later work at the other Pharmacy and then a grocer shop, photographic business, menswear and then a timber-mill from the end of 5th Year for a couple of months. This experience in various jobs was positive for my future working life. Never once did asthma get in the way!

After completing my Leaving Certificate in 1955, I won a Teachers College Scholarship and found myself with a number of my fellow classmates invited to Sydney for an assessment on suitability, etc. I was given a form with a long list of questions requiring an answer in the form of a tick or cross. There were Epilepsy, Diabetes, Heart problems and-you guessed it – asthma! I put a no cross to everything and walked away. However, my conscience got the better of me. I asked for the form back and changed my cross to a tick. This was the 'sliding door' moment.

I was called out and sent to Macquarie Street and went through a thorough examination. Back in Wauchope, I received a letter saying I was rejected.

I remember my parents telling me later how dejected I became. For the first time, I felt helpless. How would I get a job anywhere as an asthmatic? It just seemed such a challenge. I had to reinvent myself. But help was on the way.

Word had got around town and my English teacher suggested, because I had also won a Commonwealth Scholarship, that I should do Medicine and become a G.P. This way I would be self-employed – but I didn't know.

Then one of the pharmacies I had worked at as a shop boy offered me the opportunity to become an apprentice Pharmacist. This way I could reinvent myself. I jumped at this opportunity and three years later I was a Pharmacist.

Two years later, a friend and I began looking to buy a Pharmacy for him. We found one on the North Shore of Sydney. However, the one we found he didn't quite like, so I decided to buy it. I hardly had any money... another challenge... but with the help of my parents, a bank, and my friend lending me 500-pounds I had enough 'fortitude' to buy it.

I sold it five years later and moved to the Central Coast, buying a Pharmacy and, fifty years on I now still work (for my son).

Please don't get the impression that I treat asthma lightly. People are still dying from this disease. However, if people with asthma adhere strictly to their G.P.'s instructions and Pharmacist's advice, the challenge shouldn't be so daunting.

I often ponder whether our journey is fate and has been planned for us. I believe our destiny is in our own hands and everyone has their own strengths – we just have to find and use them to the fullest. Everybody runs into 'brick walls'. In my case, many right through my life. I never do a 180° – I always do a right-angle turn, find a gap in the wall and press on.

While asthma played a big part in my early life, I was able to overcome this and lead a fulfilling life.

Positive Ageing or Positively Ageing Which is it?

Lois Merriman

Jindabyne

Well for me it is both. I can say without shadow of doubt I am positively ageing I can see it each time I look in the mirror which I try to restrict to 2 or 3 times a year. You see I don't need to look in a mirror to clean my teeth as I just take them out every night and drop them in a container to soak and next morning I pop them back in without looking. On the bright side I no longer have to spend several minutes twice a day bent doubled over a hand basin brushing furiously spraying toothpaste all over the basin and mirror.

I take my glasses off to wash my face and can't see anything further away than a foot so can't see the age ruts worn into my face, so called character lines. When I need to doll up to go out I can put my lippy on using a small hand mirror just large enough to reflect my mouth I really don't need to look to do this either. After 70 years I know where my mouth is but my hand shakes and I prefer not to go out with lipstick from ear to ear.

I don't need to look in a mirror to comb my rapidly thinning hair I know where my head is and my short cropped do, doesn't need styling. Sometimes I glimpse a stranger's reflection looking back at me in a shop window only to realise moments later that it is me, then I know it is time to go to the hairdresser and get a dye job. Oh the joy, I just lay back and get my hair washed and a scalp massage and have a lovely chat to the great lady looking after me. I even get a cuppa and a biscuit everyone is so kind to us oldies.

If I have to attend a function that I would rather not be attending I simply forget to put my hearing aids in and then I don't have to make small talk or listen to boring speeches and I have an excuse to leave early. Younger people expect seniors to be a little forgetful so I simply fulfil their expectations.

People of a certain age are also expected to have 'nanny naps', so each day I disconnect the front door bell, turn the phone ringer to silent and either sit in the lovely sunshine or in front of a cosy fire and pick my book up to read and promptly go to sleep for an hour or so. I wake up feeling refreshed then I make a cuppa and snuggle in the chair again and do some actual reading. It is fabulous to have the freedom to do exactly as I want when I want, some days I forget to reconnect the doorbell and turn the phone ringtone up so I have a few glorious days of uninterrupted peace.

I have the time to stop and smell the roses, this I do whilst I am either nicking blooms or a small piece to take home and try to grow. It is nice to be able to casually wander the neighbourhood taking slips from all the lovely plants along the way while the youngsters are out slogging away at their tedious jobs wishing it was knock off time. If I am seen by the gardeners they just smile and offer to cut me a bunch, nobody seems to mind an old lady helping herself to the flowers. I always thank them and tell them how their lovely garden just makes my day. I do so enjoy being retired.

I go to the local park each fair weather day, all the dog walkers and dogs know me and we spend time chatting and patting. I sit on a bench and watch the mothers and young children enjoying the playground equipment and have made some really good friends amongst them. I am often given cakes and sweets. I have been invited to birthday parties and even Christmas dinner as a stand in Granny which I always say yes to, sure beats doing the cooking myself. The children are so entertaining and loving, plus I always get given a plate of goodies to take home.

I love it when I am out with folk from a younger generation and I start reminiscing about my youth and I watch their jaws drop and I say, 'well kids I did grow up in the 60s and 70s. I don't remember a lot of it but I survived'. It is nice to blow people's minds every now and then and jump out of the pigeon hole they have put me in. Aaahhh memories, V8 cars, rock and roll and !! They were the good old days.

I puppy-sit friends' dogs and get lots of love, joy, bottles of red and chocolates in return – yum. So I can't touch my toes anymore and have given up trying to cut my toe nails so I go to the podiatrist once every two months and the alternative months I go to our day spa and have a foot massage and my toe nails painted. Foot massages are to kill for. No longer do I have to force my feet into pointy toed stilettos. Now I wear comfortable arch support flats which I can wear all day without any pain.

Yes I realise time is passing but I make the most of every day. I try never to act my age and almost never do what is expected of me, except of course unless it suits me. I have a good sense of the ridiculous and can see the funny side of most situations. I enjoy a good belly laugh. I keep my good memories and erase the bad, no point in dwelling on things that upset me. I have what I call convenient memory loss.

Positive Ageing in an Aged Care Facility

Jean E-D Mills

Thirlmere

After fund raising and donations from locals, plus a grant from the Government, a ten – room aged-care facility was built in the little town where I was born and raised. I was lucky enough to work there on the first day it opened when the new residents moved in.

Every Saturday when I worked day shift, a trio of residents sat in the corner of the dining room after breakfast and diligently went through the racing pages to pick winners. During my lunch break I would take their dollar each way bets and money to the tab. The horse races started at 1.00pm along with the shouting and cheering as each race progressed 'til the last race at 3.00pm when I collected their winnings or not. This activity occupied their minds during the week with boasting and teasing each other. What was positive about this was that all of them were wheelchair bound and yet this activity made them feel like they were riding those horses home. One of them was my first grade teacher.

Mrs 'D' had Alzheimers' disease. She had gone to sleep watching tv and one of the other nurses had turned the sound off. When I walked into her room a while later and spoke to her, she said, "I can't hear, I thought I had gone deaf!" Mrs D had forgotten how to walk and did not recognise the old lady when she looked at herself in the mirror and yet she knew she was not deaf! I think that is a positive!

Mr 'P' also had Alzheimers' disease and had forgotten how to walk and yet when I asked him to dance with me, I could waltz him wherever I wanted him to go and thank him for the dance afterwards. He would be beaming with pleasure. This man had been in New Guinea with my Dad during the Second World War. He was an excellent old time dancer.

Mrs 'S' was very depressed when she came in with a bad heart and brittle diabetes. She became the President of the Resident's Committee and thrived in

her new environment. It seemed she sent messages to me via mental telepathy whenever she had a major health catastrophe so that I was able to get help to her numerous times when I was on night shift and thus save her life.

Mrs 'K' was admitted following a stroke. She learnt to walk again by 'kicking the cat out of her way'. Positive for her; not so for the cat. Miss 'B' had lost her fiancée during the First World War and had gone mad with grief. She loved helping and confiscated all the clean linen when it was returned daily. She loved to fold it all up and put it away. In particular, she loved folding the 30 washers. By doing these jobs she felt useful and thus it had a positive effect on her and the other residents and staff. Mr 'C' had senile dementia and every day he badgered staff to go 'home'. I would walk him out the front door, around the side through the orchard and vegetable patch and then in through the back door. I do not know if he 'conned' me into taking him for a walk every day or if he had forgotten his plaintiff wish to go home! The positive aspect of this activity was that we got fresh fruit and he got his daily dose of Vitamin D plus the bonus of no more agitation for him or the staff. Last but not least of these ten residents was the ex-Lady Mayoress. All of us doted on her because she was one of those people who could light up a room with happiness. She oozed good will to all and sundry.

I trained to be a nurse in that aged-care facility after I retired which proves that it is never too late. It is about possibilities and no matter where you find yourself, in whatever condition physically and mentally, there can be positive outcomes. It was a privilege to work at 'Eventide' with some of the happiest people despite everything good and bad life had thrown at them.

You're Never Too Old to be Young

Camille Mock

Alfords Point

We all know that Jack and Jill went up the hill
Though Jack fell down and the water spilled
He never gave up, he never whimpered or cried
To mend his head, he took long bold strides

Itsy bitsy spider crawled up the water spout
It wasn't deterred though the rain washed it out
Determined to go on when the timing is right
Never faltered or paused, its goal within sight

Old Mother Hubbard's cupboard forever is bare
A cool lady was she, a lady devoid of all ware
Yet her life was not lacking, her cup's never empty
True, dog never got his bone, but love was a-plenty

Dear Little Bo Peep who had lost all of her sheep
Undaunted, resolute was she, not one to weep
She found them in the end leaving behind their tails
Yet, they were all present, come rain or come hale

Batman and Robin struggled with life's evil forces
Winning all battles, leaving behind abundant corpses
Whatever the ordeal, whatever the challenge they face
They never give up fighting, always giving to the chase

For what it's worth, let me share with you my thoughts
Being positive is a state of mind, this, it can't be bought
Learn to let go, say goodbye to anger and stress
For a more preferable outlook, the term is 'progress'

Thereby finding yourself having 'progressed' in life
More intricate lines appear, ageing spots running rife
Embrace what nature brings, embrace it with grace
You've made it in life, coming through the human race

And now it's your time to shine, to make sense of it all
You've done the hard yard, been there for the long haul
Sit back and relax, make each and every day count
Be optimistic and confident, positiveness tantamount

Life is what you make of it, make it full of life
Whatever the impending trial, whatever the strife
Don't let negative beliefs sneak into your brain
What's the point of it all? Look at it with disdain

Words are easier said than done, a little whisper in my ear
Yet words are powerful, trust the works of Shakespeare
The mind is an intricate vessel of intrigue,
a wondrous matter
Clear out all that's negative, don't listen to
constant clatter

There's so much goodness and beauty all around
Give yourself that spoonful of sugar and bitterness
will drown

You need not to look too far in order to feel good
Face up to the mirror, AND SMILE, all will be understood

When hateful thoughts abound and you sit
in utter gloom

When evil, dark, demonic urge creep in, all consumed
Throw a marshmallow in the bin, and in the meantime
Pick up that book of your favourite Nursery Rhymes

It's Never Too Late to Start a New Life

Dorothy Morgan

Kew

I climbed into my new car with my daughter at the wheel. Christine had flown down to drive me to her home in Northern Rivers. Cheerfully waving goodbye to my husband, whom I was leaving in Sydney, we drove north, into my new life.

Two months later I celebrated my 60th birthday, amongst Christine's family and friends, in her and Robert's home and property at Lennox Head.

An amiable settlement had taken place and I left my husband of 25 years in a much better financial position than when I met him.

Shortly after the purchase of the land, I moved into my custom-built house and wide back garden.

My two granddaughters helped me unpack and I was in by Christmas.

I woke next morning in my lovely mushroom pink bedroom, to the haunting sound of the Butcher bird. That family of Butcher birds was with me to the end.

How can I describe my absolute joy! I was going to have the garden I had always wanted, and I was going to grow Sweet Peas!

I spent twenty glorious years in that house. I landscaped and planted the semi-permaculture garden of flowers, vegetables and fruit trees, all mixed up together and I was very nearly self-sustaining.

I continued my life of entertaining and started voluntary work. At one stage I was working for nine different organizations. My great love was the Lennox Head Heritage Committee and over a period of a few years and in the latter part as Convener, we published five books on the history of Lennox Head. We held very successful Book Launches with all the old pioneer families in attendance.

For the latter years I was tutor of a Creative Writing group at U3A in Ballina and had a little class at my home base.

In 2016 I decided it was time for a move. I had seen all the families grow up and I wanted to be closer to my remaining sister in Sydney. I set about the personal sale of my house and changed my name back to my maiden name.

Now at the brand new Laurieton Residential Resort, I enjoy a lovely house and a friendly co-operative community.

Last year my Sweet Peas bloomed in my much reduced garden, but big enough!

Another new life at eighty one!

The Window

Pam Morris

Potts Point

There's my granddaughter, Nancy, running down the hall. I wish she'd wear shoes. The cold red tiles in the shape of bricks, run in a pattern to the front door. I keep telling her she'll get rheumatics when she's older, but she won't listen. So much energy. Did I ever have such energy? Yes, I did! She sings to herself as she plays games in the hall with imaginary friends. It's a pity she's an only child. I think she gets lonely. She seems to be bossing someone called Lesley around at the moment, telling her what to do and how to do it.

I remembered my own childhood in the slums of Birmingham. So different to Nancy's life in a small hotel here on the Welsh coast. My son, Jeff, daughter-in-law, Maggie, and I run the place between us and Nancy goes wild every October when the last of the visitors go and she's allowed to shout and run throughout the house, crashing up and down the three flights of stairs – something not allowed in the season between April and October.

I suddenly realise it's quiet. What's Nancy up to? I peek around the door into the hall where she's sitting on the floor, gazing up at a small stained glass window between the hall and the kitchen. The coloured glass pieces form a Viking ship on a green sea and the child is totally absorbed in the image. Her eyes are far away, her whole body relaxed and still. Where is she? Then she senses me watching and smiles up at me. I feel sadness and joy – my life almost over and no time to go where that ship might have been. Nancy's life just beginning, her imagination already germinating quietly in her mind and spirit into a desire for travel and adventure. She will do it for me.

For For For

"Nancy! You'll get rheumatics," my Gran was forever shouting at me. I remember the cold red tiles, the stairs with their wooden bannisters, topped at each turn with a round wooden ball. I was envious of the friends whose bannisters swept down in one flowing arc, allowing us to slide from top to bottom, squealing in delight.

Gran's hands were swollen with arthritis, the skin on her fingers cracked. She would put on gloves before bed, having slathered her poor hands with thick cream. I can still conjure up the smell of it in my mind, sort of vanilla.

Gran died. The house was sold. Mum and Dad moved on, spending their retirement years between Wales and Spain. I moved on too. I did all the travelling Gran hoped I would do. South Africa, Australia, America, Saudi Arabia. And now I'm older than Gran was when she watched me in that hallway, gazing up at the stained glass window, the sails of the ship a pearly pink, streaks of orange, blue and green in the sky and sea.

She was right about the *rheumatics* but now it's called osteo-arthritis. A new metal hip joint has given me a new life. I had the stained glass window shipped out to Australia and I smile as I watch the sun shining through it, sending colours across the floor. Now it's time to pack that bag again. The Bucket List will get another tick when I work as a volunteer in an African game park. And a photo of Gran and perhaps even Gran herself will be with me, as always.

My Old Lady

Jill Nash

Sawtell

It is a hot and sticky spring Saturday afternoon in Sydney. The effects of an early morning swim have long since evaporated. It's time to seek relief somewhere air-conditioned. Why not in the much-loved art deco Roseville cinema on Sydney's north shore? The Roseville Cinema used to be my local cinema, so my mind wandered back to the days of living directly behind it. I was recently widowed and had moved there from our remote, large and somewhat inconvenient property in Terrey Hills. I never really settled in Roseville, feeling out of kilter with the other residents. The cinema was a wonderful sanctuary.

Despite the humidity I decide to walk the two kilometres from my friend's house to the cinema. I have seen that the wonderful elderly actress, Maggie Smith, is playing in a film called *My Old Lady*. It could be a little too close to the truth for comfort. On the other hand, given the feisty characters that this fine octogenarian actress plays, it could be reassuring.

I amble along wide streets lined with sprawling, slightly ageing federation houses. It's jacaranda time and I tread carefully, trying to avoid crushing the fallen petals, the vivid blue now fading as they lie on the pavement. I'm lucky it hasn't rained for awhile, as this magic carpet could be transformed into a slippery death trap, causing a tumble. A broken or sprained ankle could land me in a cold emergency department rather than in the cool cinema.

I soak up the elegance of the houses and their beautifully tended spacious gardens. It sets the scene perfectly for the film to follow. Gardenias fill the air with their glorious perfume and the busy Chatswood traffic recedes into the distance as I listen to the birds and bees as they too enjoy the fragrant, colourful flowers and shrubs.

The interior hasn't changed a bit; it is familiar and welcoming. The stucco-ed walls, the patterned red carpet, the curved stair-case and the plaster ceilings belong to a different era. It, too, could be described as a little old lady, one which is still giving pleasure. I join the patrons who are enjoying the discount offered to us as NSW Seniors. Perhaps we are all seeking reassurance that there's life in us yet.

The film is set in Paris and is a warm and witty tale of a down-on-his-luck New Yorker, played by, Kevin Kline, who has inherited a grand old Parisian apartment from his estranged father. But when he arrives in Paris to sell it he is astounded to find that the apartment comes with a resident – a refined and spirited old lady, Maggie Smith, who is not prepared to budge. Moreover, legally she is not obliged to. Madame Girard is ninety-years-old and as the title suggests, it is she, who is the centre of this entertaining film. As a character actress Maggie Smith never lets us down.

I emerge, cool and content, and reassured that even a ninety-year-old has plenty of spark. I decide to retrace my steps of many years ago by taking the narrow path behind the cinema, down into the gully where the houses are camouflaged by many eucalypts and yet more jacarandas. I may even drop in on some erstwhile neighbours. I prepare to descend the stairs and come across my very own old lady. Her glistening white hair surrounds her handsome face. Clutching a bunch of papers, she bends over a stylish, silver-handled cane, hesitating before she takes a step. I ask her whether she has been to the film too.

"No," she replies, "I've been to a talk on Kipling."

"How interesting", I comment.

"Well, the problem was that I couldn't hear the speaker, so these notes are going to be very useful".

I ask her how far she's going and whether she needs help. She declines, although not very convincingly, so I decide to hang around to make sure she's safe. There are lots of dry, fallen leaves on the steep staircase she is planning to descend and although the path is paved, it is not well maintained and could be treacherous. For her, a handrail is essential and I can see many places where none exists. I gently put my arm under her elbow and sense that she relaxes as we strike up a conversation. Patricia tells me that she is eighty-eight years old and was a primary school teacher in a village about five miles from where my parents lived, in Sussex, England. I feel a connection.

We edge our way down the slope and pause before rounding the corner for the next descent. Chatting away, we reach the end, where we must cross the road. She leans on my arm, silently grateful. A car approaches, far too fast for the curve. I hear her catch her breath. When it has passed we make it safely across. We are now in her street. One of her neighbours is sweeping the path and we pause as she introduces me to her friend, Julian. We chat briefly and continue. It's getting late, and she is now exhausted. With English politeness she says she would have liked me to stay for a cup of tea. I still have a long walk so I decline, just as English. We say good-bye and I begin to retrace my steps, pausing as Julian thanks me for guiding his friend, Patricia to her home.

I hardly notice the jacarandas or gardenias as I walk the two kilometres back to my friend's house. I thoroughly enjoyed the film, but I am savouring my chance encounter.

Thank you, Maggie Smith, Madame Girard, who gave me the reason for seeking cool and enjoyment in Roseville Cinema. Through you I met Patricia and as far as I am concerned, it is she who is *My Old Lady*.

What's Positive About Ageing?

Anya Nielsen

Kincumber

While absentmindedly vacuuming near my open front door, I catch sight of someone's reflection in the mirror on the opposite wall. I peer at the woman's wrinkled, weather-beaten face and depleted mane, streaked liberally with threads of grey. Then I realise, I'm looking at my own reflection. It couldn't be me. I feel the same as I did 15 years ago. Why doesn't the mirror reflect that?

When I was 60 years young, I believed I still had what it takes to work another ten years. However, life sometimes throws a curve ball. For me it meant an unplanned early retirement. What could I do? The choice was mine, to beat my brow, or turn sour milk into strawberry yoghurt. At least I had my health, a supportive family and good friends.

I was unprepared financially for such an event. I had a mortgage. The important thing was to examine all possible options and act quickly.

While employers lament over the lack of talent, what they really mean is a lack of younger people with the experience of the mature-aged person. Friends suggested I lower my expectations and accept something at entry level in a different industry sector. This was not a viable solution as my overheads were high. What was I to do?

The buoyant Sydney real estate market allowed me to sell quickly and profitably. My son convinced me to join forces with him to buy a large property on the sunny Central Coast. He had been researching the area for some time and it seemed like a workable plan. We found a lovely house on a big block, not far from the train station, beach and good shopping centres.

This location allowed me to continue attending my usual concerts, film festivals and the odd lunch in the city. Sometimes I drove along the M1 to visit the friends I'd left behind.



As a surprise, my son bought a puppy. This dear creature was really a four-legged child, but I had all the time in the world to devote to it. Most mornings we walked on the beach. Other dog owners would stop to chat and exchange doggie news. Soon we were on first-name terms. The dogs knew each other and played freely along the off-leash strip. My friendships grew. We began having coffee at a dog friendly café, then beach bbqs to celebrate our birthdays. At Christmas, Santa joined us with little gifts for the animals. I had found paradise.

One night, my son arrived home earlier than usual. He bounded into the lounge room, where I was watching TV.

'I'm glad you're sitting down,' he grinned gleefully at me. 'I have some incredible news.'

'We've won the lottery?' I jibed.

'I wish,' he retorted. 'No, I've been offered a significant promotion.'

'Congratulations!' My cheeks warmed with motherly pride. 'Come on, tell me all about it.'

'Well – I'm to be made State Manager for the whole division.'

'Fantastic!' I beamed at him.

'But, the job's located interstate. It's permanent.'

Once again a curve ball had landed in my lap. We put the house on the market. It was time for him to pave his own way and for me to consolidate. I decided to downsize and move to an over 55's village.

For For For

In the gum tree next to my cosy cocoon, native birds twitter and squawk. Families of wild ducks cross the myriad of private roads in the complex. Ducks have no regard for traffic. Drivers gladly stop and wait for them to cross. I think that I'm as far away from the noise and madness as anyone could be, yet I'm not isolated. I can step outside my villa to natter with my neighbours who are gardening, reading or just enjoying the sunshine.

I've always wanted to learn mah-jong – now I play twice a week. There's a tennis court and swimming pool – neither of which I need to clean nor maintain. I can join in the many other activities at the clubhouse – or not. It's my choice.

Sydney friends visit me and stay a night or two – a sort of mini break. We laugh at how much more often we see each other, now that I've moved away. The slower pace of the coast helps me to relax. Everywhere I go I meet lovely people. Many are retirees like me, from Sydney. It's the best thing I ever did.

I've decided that getting older and leaving the workforce is like winning Tatts Lotto, except the prize isn't money, rather something worth a lot more – time. Now, I have the time to travel, delve into genealogy, take up line-dancing, volunteer at the hospital or write a book. The opportunities are endless and what at first seemed daunting, even frightening, became exciting and exhilarating.

Ageing is the process that results in a fine wine. Similarly with some effort on my part the result for me was very positive.

My View

Rosemary Nisted

Coffs Harbour

What exactly is positive ageing?

When does ageing start?

When does one start having to be positive?

Positive about what?

That I am ageing?

Oh dear do I need glasses now I am forty?

Am I ageing already?

Better be positive about this and realise that most of my friends need glasses for reading now. Life goes on without much change for a while after that. Then a few grey hairs appear. Okay, look on the bright side, a touch of colour and presto I can go blonde if I want to. Wow, this is fun, I look better than I have for ages.

Never felt better, menopause behind me and life is full. I still enjoy the company of men and they seem to respond in a positive way.

I play bowls now and croquette; it keeps me fit and people are very sociable.

We all seem to have the same small problems, a stiff knee here, a hip replacement there, but we are all positive we can still get about and enjoy our game. I have a friend who played golf, she got a hole in one on her ninetieth birthday. What a present that was. Everyone was thrilled for her and full of praise.

People are always feted for that achievement whatever age they are.

The thing about games is, you must never stop playing or you will lose the ability. Losing the ability to do things is one of the annoying parts about ageing, I think.

It's hard to be positive when your abilities start dropping off. As Voltaire said, 'Life is a shipwreck, but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats'.

In this context walking frames are lifeboats I suppose, so hey, just keep on singing.

We are all different of course, I was talking to my friend, Alice, about positive ageing and she said, 'Well, my teeth have all gone, my eyesight is not too good, my left leg doesn't work, my hair is falling out, I'm as wrinkled as a hundred-year-old tortoise and my titties are down to my knees. Yes, I am positive I'm ageing'.

'Alice,' I said. 'Really?'

So she slapped my arm and hooted with laughter.

Older people are often accused of being negative when they say things like kitchen gadgets were better quality years ago. They are not being negative, they're just pointing out an unpopular truth. They are quite positive they are right, and they are.

They also say they seem to be invisible.

Young people often talk over their heads and sales people tend to serve the person behind them at the counter. Well, that is the time to be positively positive and say firmly, 'I was first'. It can be exhausting, but it is worth it.

I have learnt to say, 'No'. This is a case where *no* is a positive. 'No, sorry Darling but I simply can't take care of the kids this morning, I am just off to my Tai Chi class and I can't miss that.'

But most of all I have learnt compassion and empathy. I can see more clearly the reasons behind actions, both good and bad. I understand there is another side. There is wisdom here not available to the young. This is a great gift acquired by the aged.

My sister says age is just a number; but I quite like the idea of numbers. I like the thought that at eighty-five I can still drive, and walk, and work in the garden. I think 'Wow, how lucky am I?'

If the time comes when I can no longer do those things, I shall have one of those electric mobility vehicles. Imagine, a scarlet one, with a little canopy over-head to keep the sun off and a jaunty pennant flying.

Yes.

Positive Ageing

Yvonne Norris

Lithgow

I was a very positive, optimistic young person. I woke each morning, showered, looked at my face in the mirror and saw my rosy cheeked clear skin, even white teeth and clear blue eyes. My hair was thick, brown and shiny. I could clearly hear the birds twittering in the trees outside my bedroom window. I was slim and my back and limbs were nimble. I felt refreshed after having a good night's sleep and was able, keen and ready to face the day's challenges. I was full of energy. Nothing was a burden. Family, home duties, long hard days at work for a fair day's pay were the norm. Catching a bus and train was the usual method of transport in those days as very few people could own their own car.

Meals were simple and easy to prepare. Week nights there was always meat and three vegies. There were chops, short loin, chump or pork and sausages, cooked in the frying pan with lots of fat and covered in gravy, or stewing chops or corned beef. Some people even ate tripe or lambs brains. The main course was always followed by pudding. They alternated between lemon meringue pie, tinned peaches and jelly or junket or apple, blackberry or mulberry pie, whichever was in season at the time. Homemade vegetable soup, boiled for about three hours and consisting of every vegie you could name, split peas and pearl barley and lots of salt was always served during the cold winter months. Sunday lunch was always a baked leg of lamb and baked vegies and pudding smothered in fresh cream bought that morning from the local dairy. Sunday night's tea was left overs; cold meat and salad. Families always sat around the dining table and ate their meals together. They conversed, communicated.

The laundry was always done on a Monday by lighting a fire under the copper and boiling the clothes and linen which was then put through a hand wringer and rinsed twice in cold water. The second rinse had to have a Bluo nob in it to keep the whites whiter. The neighbours would talk about us if our washing wasn't super bright.

The carpets were swept with a straw broom as there were no vacuum cleaners in those days and we washed and polished the linoleum floor covering by getting down on our hands and knees.

The children played outside with mostly homemade toys or rode their dinkies or bikes or played hopscotch or cricket on the road until someone called out, "there's a car coming," during the day and at night the whole family played, Ludo, Snakes and Ladders or Chinese Checkers. There was no TV or Computers or Mobile phones during those happy days. Life was positive. We all had jobs, a home and were happy to go to the movies or dances for entertainment.

However time marched on. Technology produced electrical home appliances, tv sets and electronic games. We were introduced to CD's, mobile phones and iPads. Everyone bought a car. Used 'Drive-thru' restaurants, Take-away and frozen food became available. My familiar country changed. The old ways were gone. Families lost the art of communication. They stopped sharing meals together and no longer played together. Not everyone had a job or wanted one. Not everyone could afford their own home. I had become sceptical and pessimistic.

Just after I celebrated my fortieth birthday my thoughts became very negative. I noticed that it was getting hard for me to read small print as my eyesight was deteriorating. I began feeling dizzy and the doctor said my blood pressure was too high and so were my cholesterol levels. The years had gone by and my teeth were as old as me so I had to lose some of them. I noticed too that I had to turn the volume on the tv up quite a few levels. I was beginning to feel the ravages of old age.

I am twice that age now and my weary painful old bones have osteoporosis. My skin is wrinkled, my hair is grey and thin I was beginning to feel depressed. *But wait a minute*, I thought one day, why am I feeling so depressed?

I wear glasses to allow me to see well.

My blood pressure and cholesterol levels are controlled by medication.

I have nice white dentures that are just like my own teeth and I have hearing aids.

Pain killers help lessen the aches and pains.

So what am I complaining about? I have a comfortable home and all modern cons, restaurant food if I don't feel like cooking, a loving husband and family, lots of friends, a car, happy social life, holidays. I feel well! I am vibrant!!!

Every morning I get up and get going. I don't have to wonder about anything so much now as anything I need to know I just Google on my new computer.

I am going to live a longer healthier life now due to modern medicine.

Life is great!!!!!! I realise now that ageing is a positive thing. We live and learn.

Rain on the Roof

Helen Nourse

Rivett

Volunteering as a guide at the local museum was the perfect way to spend one afternoon a week in her retirement, thought Kate, as she waved goodbye to the other volunteers who by habit enjoyed a coffee and a chat at the end of each shift.

Kate's love of history and a natural flair for storytelling made her a popular guide and for her the afternoons always flew by.

Jack, also retired, arrived one day as a new volunteer and it fell to Kate to show him the ropes and then have him shadow her on one of her tours just to get the feel of how things were done.

Over coffee afterwards both confessed they had little interest in caravanning around Australia or going on Pacific cruises. They discovered a shared love of similar books and films and though each of them had put their marriages behind them by divorce, there were wonderful grandchildren in each case and photos to share with pride.

Before long, Jack and Kate signed themselves on for the same shift each Wednesday and afterwards found themselves spending so long over coffee and chat that one or other began to suggest an early meal with a few drinks – evenings which were such fun that Kate inevitably drove home smiling and feeling content with her discovery of a true friend; a soulmate.

Curious girlfriends began to grill Kate: "So why are you spending so much time with this guy? Is there anything going on between you? Are you a couple now, or what?"

Tempted to reply "Mind your own business," Kate's standard answer was, "No. Nothing's going on. We're just very good friends."

After which the eyebrows were raised and an 'uh-huh' left in the air.

To be honest Kate herself wondered and fretted a little about the 'just good friends' status. She was a touchy-feely person and had come to fancy Jack physically as well as for all his wonderful conversation and stimulating company.

"Why don't you make a move then, if he won't?" came the rather blunt ultimatum from her friend Camilla.

"Hell no, Camilla. I might fancy him but he's never given any indication that he fancies me. What if he thinks I'm ugly and my coming on to him just turns out to be hideously awkward and completely ruins the most amazing friendship?"

"Well, I guess you'll never know then," replied the down-to-earth Camilla.

As summer slid into autumn, Kate's eye fell one day on an ad in the local paper for an open gardens weekend in the Southern Highlands. She'd always wanted to visit those stunning gardens and now they'd be at their best. She was pretty sure Jack would also enjoy the drive but then was pleasantly taken aback when he was not only keen on the trip, but suggested they stay overnight in order to be able to fit in visits to all the gardens over the two days.

"Yeah. Let's do it," he said. "I'll book the rooms."

Hmmm, thought Kate. Rooms, plural. Oh well. What did I expect?

That evening she called Jack with an idea: "Jack, I know of an old hotel near the gardens we'll be visiting. I stayed there once with friends and it's creaky and old-fashioned. The floors slope and the windows jam but it's full of character in a Fawlty Towers kind of way. How about we stay there?"

"I'm game if you are, Kate. Sounds like fun. Send me their number."

Balmy weather, magnificent gardens and yes, the truly strange and non-standard accommodation met all their expectations on the weekend getaway.

At dinner they tried to make sense of a bizarre menu that appeared to combine the worst of Asian, Middle Eastern and stodgy British cuisine. Equally bad was the service. A surly waiter glowered at their choices then whipped their plates away, their food barely finished.

A sad fireplace at the other end of the dining room gave off more smoke than heat while scruffy, morose local lads played a half-hearted game of pool nearby.

For Kate and Jack it was all classic Fawlty Towers and gave them cause to laugh all through the evening, eventually to escape outside for some fresh air before bed.

"No moon or stars tonight," observed Jack as Kate shivered in the icy wind that had come up suddenly from nowhere.

A quick kiss goodnight from Jack and a brotherly hug farewelled Kate as she unlocked her room.

It was then that Kate remembered some advice given, woman to girl, many years ago by her much loved Aunty Launa. "Kate, if you ever want a really good cuddle from someone you love, make sure it's a cold, wet windy night and the cuddle will turn into something even nicer."

Kate had laughed off this advice at the time, confident in her abilities to kick-start a cuddle in any young bloke she fancied, but now it echoed in her mind as the wind whistled outside and rattled her window.

Well, Aunty Launa, thought Kate. All your requisites for satisfactory cuddling are sure in place but the guy in question seems to have never been exposed to your advice. And she snuggled down into the surprisingly warm and comfortable bedcovers.

"Crack! Bang. Sploosh!"

Kate woke abruptly and sat up to find herself wet through.

Heavy rain was driving in through the now broken window. All her bedclothes were soaked and she squelched onto sodden carpets as she stood up, trying to work out what to do in this stormy disaster.

Her phone to the hotel desk downstairs rang and rang but to no response so Kate towelled her hair dry, wrapped herself in a dry gown and made the only decision possible.

A brief knock on his door elicited a loud, "Come in."

Jack's lamp was on. He sat up in bed, put down his book, opened his arms and said, "What took you so long?"

Moving with the Times

Alan Organ

Port Macquarie

It is not without some trepidation that we all must climb over that inevitable hill of youth and slide down the other side into the uncertain abyss of retirement and pending old age. Here we supposedly leave behind the worries of work and all the associated bustle of getting there on time, rain, hail or shine. As for myself, in that first six months of dipping a toe into what was said to be, the pond of leisure living, I became ever more negative as to what I should do with all this free time I now found on my hands. Each long day was a mix of semi-boredom and confusion, compounded by my dear wife's voice in the background urging me to find something worthwhile to fill my life. I was at that point consumed with self-doubt. The question that constantly nagged at me being, should I have stayed at work a little longer to pad my Superannuation?

The first decade of retirement went by with astonishing swiftness. There were enjoyable holidays with family and friends, but, basically, I mowed the lawn and kept in good shape a rather large garden. I also spent hours of pleasure playing a respectable grade of golf three times a week.

By now my ageing body refused to keep up with my overactive mind, which believed it lived in the body of a twenty-five-year-old. Slowly my fitness levels dropped to an all-time low. My doctor suspected my hormones were surely disappearing. So in a desperate effort to rejuvenate the struggling remaining few, I started a fitness plan of walking the streets early each morning. It came as a bit of a shock, so many people of all ages passed me by. A subtle reminder I was, what I was. An older senior citizen, fumbling along in the remaining years of his life, searching for a magical panacea to restore some degree of lost wellbeing.

Retirement, it has to be said, is a wonderful component at the end of our working lives. I looked forward to the day it would happen to me and hoped, with a bit of luck, I would achieve this special time in my life without attracting too many erroneous aches and pains, or something much worse.

'Flu shots and skin checks, to name a couple, are on the never ending list of medical maintenance, if I want to stay fit and healthy. When however, I find myself having to wait in the busy doctor's surgery, I always fill in my time by reading the same dreary magazines on what's happening with the stars in Hollywood, and how the modern Royals are rapidly multiplying. When tired of reading I always tactfully observe others waiting or arriving to see their doctor. Unfortunately, I know each of my visits are bringing me closer to that dreaded day when I will need to have a fitness test and the Aged Driver's examination.

Married, single or perhaps widowed, there comes a time, late in life when we realise, we have by the grace of God reached yet another significant milestone. My wife and I both felt this time had arrived and decided to kick start a new interest. It was suggested by friends of similar age, we should visit the local Senior Citizens Centre; where we were surprised to find everything imaginable is organised and duly laid on. Darts, bowls, cards, dancing and much, much more were available to be enjoyed, topped up with a hot cuppa of your choice served with an assortment of sweet biscuits. There was also the Annual Ball and the occasional Dinner Dance to get excited about.

We also learnt most Senior Citizens could dance very well and together as a group they were indeed remarkable to watch. For the newcomers who wished to learn, or those who wanted to brush up on their dance steps, there was always a Monday morning Beginner's Class. Here New Vogue was taught. A lovely sequence style of dancing, made easy by the calming influence of the teacher.

There were always, really nice people at these dances willing to help confused beginners like us. We became so excited at our first few attempts, we could not wait to return and learn more. The thing that really impressed us, the Senior Citizens were one big family and the camaraderie they shared, truly wonderful to see.

From experience, I can absolutely say, make an effort and don't be a wall flower by sitting at home wondering what to do. My wife and I lost too many valuable years doing just that? Get out and do something special at your local Senior Citizens Centre. Try the dancing, meet the people who will change your life for the better and, remember, the first time at anything new it is always going to be a trifle daunting. The benefits to be gained will, I assure you, outweigh any of the uncertainty you may feel. Keeping in mind, whatever it is you choose to do in your senior years, the others who now surround you, more than likely started from the very place you are in now.

The Joy of Living

Faye W. Owen

Laurieton

Two things lift my soul: the joy of knowing God and the blessing of music.

To live creatively, for me, is to pour out my heart in music.

Music fills my life. How can I be lonely or sad with such a gift? My violin is part of me . . . an extra limb, if you will. It cries out to me when it sits in its case and I yearn to open the case, pick up my beloved instrument and allow it to talk, to sing, to laugh, to dance, even to weep.

For all our feelings, our longings, are expressed in its Voice.

The strains of the violin can lift our hearts, our spirits to places of joy and delight; or can pour out our deepest sorrows and by so doing, lessen them.

Everyday concerns, fears, uncertainties, vanish in the wafting melodies and cadences of music.

We are transported to a higher plane, a different world. External pressures slide away. Life becomes enfolded in harmonies. What could be more creative than that?

Does joyful music not make you want to dance? Or beautiful melodic strains not lift your spirits to the skies?

Perhaps, you tell me you do not play, have never learnt, do not have a musical bone in your body?

Have you ears to hear?

Then music is at your fingertips.

Did you sing as a child?

Then music will stir your memories, renew your youth, if you open up to the creative spirit within you.

God's world is full of beauty and of sound. Hear how the birds sing, pouring out their hearts.

Hear the music of the waves as they roll upon the shore or crash like timpani against the unyielding cliff face.

Hear the drum-roll of the thunder, the staccato beat of rain on a metal roof . . . all music in their way. A babbling brook sings as it gurgles over rapids; wind in the treetops hums its song.

Music is all around us in this magical world. All we need is creative ears to transform our world from humdrum, to exciting, to delightful. No one is too old to enjoy this beauty, this creative wonder.

To be creative, we only need to cultivate the eyes and ears of a child.

But . . . music may not be your *thing*.

With a world full of beauty and wonder, there is so much to enrich and enchant us. So many other ways to be creative. No man need claim he is bored. All we need to do is open our creative minds to a wonderful world.

So many people cry out to be loved, encouraged. We can give of ourselves, creatively, to enrich other lives.

Or we may find our creativity in nature, bird watching, tending our garden. Or take up the brush to paint this amazing world.

Perhaps our bent is to use our pen . . . to explore our thoughts, or the world. Or to write stories or poetry or articles?

Or maybe we long to expand our knowledge,
stimulate our brain with a new skill, a new subject.

And how creative is it to read to a child, encourage
a child and help them to see all that is open to them
around us, give them eyes to see, to know that there
are no limits to their world? It is all there waiting for us.

The choices are endless.

Before us we have a rich treasure chest full of
fascinating gems, full of ideas, of endless exciting
possibilities, countless avenues in which to explore
our creativity.

For me, it is music.

We are all different, which is what makes life so rich
and full and vibrant. We only need to open our minds.
For every one of us there is one special way, perhaps
even many, to allow the bud of our creativity to
open into a beautiful bloom, a whole bouquet of
joyous growth in which we can age positively.

For myself, I happily quote Albert Einstein,
physicist and talented violinist:

*A table, a chair, a bowl of fruit and a violin.
What else does a man need to be happy?*

Shaking the Branches of My Family Tree

Colleen Parker

Port Macquarie

When I was a young child, I loved sitting with my grandmother listening to her stories. They were sometimes about her living in a hotel, entertaining in her 'front parlour' and driving a 'horse and sulky'. Sadly, I was unable to formulate the questions that in mature years prompted my curiosity.

Why did she live in a hotel and not in a house?

Where was it?

What was a parlour?

Did she drive the sulky herself?

These were just a few of the mysteries that stayed with me eventually motivating my interest in family history research when I retired and had the time.

Beginning with that dear maternal grandmother, Ethel Holland, I traced her parentage back to my great-grandparents, Mary and George Holland, then back a generation further to Mary's father, Thomas Owen, who in 1868, was listed as 'Owner and Licensee' of the Globe Hotel in Rylstone, New South Wales. The hotel was described in local flyers as 'residence and business'.

Grandma Ethel, at 22 and her brother, Albert, at 20 (a shadowy elderly figure I met at family gatherings when I was young), were left in a dilemma when their parents died. In that era of the late 1890s, for them to manage the family's Globe Hotel was deemed 'inappropriate'; so it was sold.

Grandma moved to Sydney to train as a nurse, later marrying my grandfather, Frank Massey, who was employed by the NSW Mines Department. Great-Uncle Albert meanwhile, graduated from Sydney University.

My excitement was suddenly stirred by yet another piece of surprising information exposing itself from an unexpected source. Using my mobile I phoned the Rylstone library to speak to a family history assistant: 'I'm researching my Holland family,' I said. 'My grandmother and her brother.'

'That's a coincidence, I'm writing the history of the town of Kandos and the Hollands.'

'My grandmother lived in Rylstone but told me once, that her brother had something to do with the Kandos cement works.'

'What's his name?'

'Albert Holland.'

A screech came down the phone, "What luck to speak to you! He's a bit of a mystery man. I've found that he visited the town frequently, but didn't live there. What can you tell me about him?'

'Not much.'

But now I too, am stimulated to find out more!

'Kandos is a mere seven kilometres from Rylstone,' I was told.

I added it to my trip plan.

When booking my room, it was the manager who took my call; I'd mentioned the reason for my visit. 'A Holland family member?' he said. 'We'll give you the *Presidential Suite*. A friendly welcome I thought.

On arrival I sat in the front parlour, imagining Grandma's world, wondering whether the ornaments on the timbered shelves had belonged to her, or to my great-grandparents, or – perhaps even Thomas Owen brought a few of them with him on the *Kate*?

Later, snuggling in the cosy bed in the high-ceilinged room, with its white crockery pitcher and bowl on the sideboard, I continued to muse on my ancestors who'd lived within these historic walls, feeling a flow of gratitude that now, in retirement, I can use the opportunity to engage in the pleasure of family research.

My head was spinning as I pieced together the disparate clues that showed me, eventually, the intrinsic value of Albert's life – as a pioneer in the development of Australia's infrastructure.

I learnt that when he was 29, Albert was granted the first lease in Kandos to mine for limestone. Its high quality, and possibly his brother-in-law, encouraged him to acquire further leases which developed as the Kandos Quarry. In 1913, he registered a public company: NSW Cement, Lime and Coal Company Limited. With the cement works came the demand for amenities to serve the working pioneers where the first land sub-division was auctioned in 1915. The town was named Kandos and the subsequent railway necessary to cart the diggings to Rylstone and on to Mudgee, enabled passenger transport access as well. The cement was first produced in August 1916 and recognised as the highest quality in the world.

The informative pieces of discovery were developing into an historical picture as I fitted them together. What a *bittersweet* predicament I thought, for my great-uncle to lose his parents before his twenty-first birthday yet putting his inheritance to such good use.

I'm proud that my family, through great-uncle Albert Andrew Holland's mining experience, contributed invaluable resources to Australia's growth. The township of Kandos gave purpose to an otherwise undeveloped land masse, even more significantly, his plant supplied the cement for Sydney's major building projects: the pylons of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the late 1920s; the Sydney Opera House in the 1960s and Sydney city's railway tunnel system, in addition to numerous homes and commercial buildings.

My immigrant Welsh ancestor, Albert's father-in-law, Thomas Owen, the single man who arrived in Sydney in 1852 could never have imagined that his daughter and her husband George Holland would give birth to a boy whose drive and initiative would impact with such forceful energy on our country's future.

And never for one moment did I think that my growing curiosity – to fill out my Grandma's sketchy stories – would induce me to travel to new horizons in New South Wales, there to meet enthusiastic country people willing to guide me towards the knowledge I needed, to search my family tree.

Such research is now an ongoing, joyous compulsion. I never know who I'll discover living in any of the twisting, inter-twining branches when tracing my ancestry. I am excited to shake another limb in the hope that another interesting relative will fall into my view though I don't expect to find one with such relevant heritage attributes.

What a blessing Family Research offers our ageing years when time is the most important ingredient required to do the searching, the excitement of travel to follow the snippets of clues and the inquisitive mind to follow the leads of information and to archive the results for our descendants.

Giving Back to the Community

And learn as much as you can

Lorraine Penn

Boambee East

What is positive ageing?

It is a state of one's mind and well-being.

For me it is all the above and more, like giving back to the community in which I live and to use my business skills and knowledge to assist others in the community.

Due to health reasons back in 2007 I retired early from a senior business management position and relocated to beautiful Coffs Coast with my husband. Moving from Sydney to Coffs Harbour was on my original bucket list prior to relocating, however it wasn't meant to happen for another five years.

After settling into my new location on the Coffs Coast, it took less than six months to regain my health and instil on myself an improved work-life-balance was vital and to research how I could give back to the community by utilising my business skills.

It didn't take long before I sourced and was offered a position as a non-executive board director for a vocational training company. A position held now for nearly ten years.

In the early stages of relocating I was approached to mentor women in business and young schoolgirls, something that continues to give me great pleasure, especially when the women mentored in business have become successful in their own enterprises.

Another awesome bucket list idea is to write my memoirs. A friend also residing in Coffs Harbour invited me to attend the Coffs Harbour Writers Group back in 2010.

It didn't take long before I could see the benefits of being involved in an aspiring writer's group where I could write and assimilate with like-minded writers, enjoy the skills learning experience and most of all socialise with other writers at Grassroots Writers Festivals in and around our region, including project managing in 2015, the first Grassroots Writers Festival in Coffs Harbour.

Over the past eight years of being an active writer, including being elected the President of the group for over four years, I have submitted stories for an across-the-continent blog www.bytestories.com also established the Coffs Harbour Writers Group website www.coffsharbourwriters.com and write stories for my own blog www.snipbitsoflife.com a compilation of my life's happenings. And continuing to write my memoirs, which is turning out to be extremely challenging and interesting. What do you include and how revealing do you go with some of the chapters, especially during my restless years?

My positive ageing strategies have included divorcing my second husband after coming to the conclusion that life wasn't meant to be so complicated with a man in denial of mental health issues.

Fast forward to now and I am enjoying my life's journey by having a positive attitude, enjoying the meaningful projects I am doing in the community and I acknowledge that 'life is education ... learn as much as you can'.



Head for a Northern Experience

Rosemary Peters

Tahmoor

"You've always wanted to see more of the Northern Territory. So I told Damien I would ask you two if you'd be interested in taking on the job. All you have to do is ring Tim on this number and he'll tell you what is involved," our oldest son told us over coffee.

We had retired three years earlier when living on the north coast of NSW, then moved to south western Sydney at a son's suggestion to help him establish a small farm.

Exploring Australia was high on the list but we were loath to commence a grey nomad existence. This task seemed ideal – a project on a cattle station to renovate a homestead now reaching its one hundredth year. Leaving our small home, located on family property, was no problem. We could be away as long as the job took, including travel and sightseeing. Both of us had often moved home, one from childhood, the other from early twenties. We agreed that people were the important thing, not the place or house.

Tim, the owner of Ambalindum Station, manager of Claraville Station, something like 250km square in size, was phoned, arrangements made and we were off. A drive from Nattai to Alice Springs, two days to gather supplies, before heading to the station, was planned. We pulled in to Claraville on time with no one to greet us, apart from the noise of an old four stroke mower busily tidying the front yard.

"You aren't supposed to be here 'til tomorrow!" called the young woman from the ride-on.
"Everyone was coming over to clean up before you arrived. We've had a mouse plague.
The house is hardly habitable."

"That's okay," we said. "Used to things like that. We are old farmers. We can manage."

Anne was the bore runner and a talented horse breaker. Later we learned that she had medals from Calgary. We had lunch under a tree, then set to work cleaning out mice from the homestead, skeletal to 'just alive', as plenty of bait had been spread. The van would continue as our home for a day or two.

That was our introduction to eight months of interesting, stimulating experiences. We repositioned a sagging ceiling measuring ten meters by four meters, four meters from the floor with at least a thousand screws, stripped old wallpaper, painted, repaired, tiled and concreted. The reason for renovation was that a young manager was being sought. The house needed to be habitable for a young family.

On days off we joined the lapidary club in Alice Springs finding garnets and iolite as well as visiting the Hart's Range ruby mine. We stood in for Anne when she was off duty, doing the essential bore run of over three hundred kilometres, because stock had to be watered, water had to be clean. Twice weekly this run was carried out. Troughs were swept clean, fuel tanks refilled, stock checked for injury or illness. Multiply this task by fifteen – the number of bores – and you will realise why it took from sun-up to sometimes after dark to complete the run.

We joined in cattle drives. My task was usually to prepare smoko and mid-day meals as everyone else was mustering. Friends visited, grandchildren came for holidays. We became great friends with the station people. One night came a call from Tim, "The cattle that weren't loaded on Friday and still in the yards. Well, trucks are coming in tonight to take them to market. We are still down near South Australia mustering. Anne will be there. Can you two help Anne and the driver load?" We did, got home at midnight with another new experience under our belts.

Settling back at home was rather dull. We went on line to see if volunteer jobs were offering. Because we had contacts through our church we applied for work with Frontier Service, gaining necessary clearance certificates. These positions to both help outback people in times of need and teams required to renovate hostels, or area service residences, filled our next ten years. Rockhampton, Mitchell, Coen, Atherton and Coonabarabran were some we visited.

As we both reached seventy nine we decided that maybe it would not be a good thing to turn up on an outback station with creaking knees, stiff elbows, or for that matter any other medical problem. My diabetes had been well under control. Our last trip was through South Australia to see Lake Eyre in flood and work at Mungerannie Station. Would you believe there was a rat plague due to excessive amounts of water and a good breeding season?

Through those years we continued to visit our four children in three different states and get to grandchildren's important events. When I retired I started patch working, my husband had both woodwork and lapidary as hobbies. We both read prolifically and I scribble about every type of situation.

My husband was diagnosed with cancer just a year after we had given voluntary work away. Our faith carried us through surgery, pain and trauma of his death. It continues to keep me growing old, I hope, with dignity and willingness to help others. My friends of all ages keep me in line.

My daughter and I are touring Cornwall and Wales in September, to celebrate my eighty-four years of life'. At sixty nine years we headed north and experienced everyday living of which we had only read. The glass is always half full, with God in control, it overflows'. Every age has blessings.

The Billy-Cart Boys

Robert Phillips

Cabarita

Old Jack was a fastidious kind of man who liked to start every new activity on a clean surface

This day, however, Old Jack did a double-take, for there, in the middle of his work bench at the Men's Shed, was a very large blue box. Most unusual for anyone in the Shed to breach the boundaries of Old Jack's territory. A note was attached.

Someone dropped this in. Do you want to have a go at it? Macca

He investigated the contents of the blue box: an in-tray, shaped like a seat, a set of plastic wheels, a length of plastic rope, lengths of heavy duty plastic, an opaque envelope which contained God-knows-what and a set of instructions on, *How to Build a Billy-Cart*.

He built his first billy-cart with Gary Carpenter during the school holidays. They used pieces of wood lying around the backyard, left-overs from when his father built the air-raid shelter. There were plenty of surplus prams in the district and they were pillaged for axels, brackets and wheels. Screws and rope were from Gary's backyard shed where the copper and wringer were housed. Old-man Thompson, next door, was a painter so he was good for some excess paint.

Decorated with victory flags, and decals designed for model war planes, the billy cart, called Billy, was launched down the Sturt Street hill, one of them driving, the other pushing like mad, before carefully, to preserve the balance, jumping onto the little platform at the back. The trams and cars on Anzac Parade at the bottom of the hill were avoided by a fairly dodgy left-hand downhill turn into the Holy Trinity Church driveway. The rector's son, Howard, soon found a mate to work with on another version of Billy and from these modest beginnings a network of Billy-Cart Boys was born.

This was the Eastern suburbs and if you weren't entrepreneurial, you might as well have left and gone and lived somewhere else. Whenever the billy-carts were raced the drivers had to dodge heaps of manure deposited by the cart horses. Over a peanut butter sandwich one day a cunning plan was formulated which turned heaps of brown gold into a river of silver sixpenny pieces.

Straight after school, the Billy-Cart Boys grabbed their carts and shovels and hit the road. The carts had been built so that the superstructure had a vegetable box on it, a removable seat within the box and a front panel that could be taken out for downhill racing or put back in for haulage work. The boys filled the boxes with manure and went from door to door selling the manure as fertilizer. They soon established a regular clientele.

About twelve boys would meet up in the churchyard, after their deliveries, and wash out the boxes, using the hose behind the church hall. When the boxes were clean enough to satisfy the hygienic standards of 11-year-old boys, part two of the get-rich-quick scheme was put into action. Three billy carts went to the Sturt Street tram stop and three to the Botany Street one. There the Billy-Cart Boys harassed alighting passengers and offered to haul their shopping home for them, at a modest price. There were some strange smells in the kitchens of Kingsford during that period.

Some of the profits were spent on mugs of chocolate milk at the local milk-bar where dreams of expanding the business were aired. It was much lamented that the manure supply fell short of the manure demand. However, the Billy-Cart Boys knew that there was a huge and reliable supply of manure in the stables at Randwick. At 6.00am one Sunday morning they converged on the residence of the manager of the stables and knocked on the door... again and again. A rag-doll of a woman, curlers in her bottle-blonde hair, dragged open the door and was taken aback to see a dozen shining little faces staring up at her.

"What do youse kids want?" she yawned.

"Please miss," said Gary, "can we go to the stables and collect the manure for our gardens?"

"Jesus," she exploded, and then turned and shouted up the hall.

"Hey, Greg there's some kids here and they want to go to the stables and collect manure."

"What?" came the reply, "Oh, for Christ's sake." A pause, then. "Set the dogs on them."

Kids running, billy carts flying, woman yelling, dogs barking...

Old Jack never built another billy-cart. His son would have loved to do it and deserved the chance, but Jack was always too busy, working hard and working long, trying to ensure his family's security and his own betterment. Sacrifices were made, often by those who had no say in the priorities he established.

"Smoko!" came the call from the Shed Coordinator. Strange the preservation of the workplace habit of tradesmen to refer to a coffee break as a 'Smoko', when no one at the Shed smoked.

Macca wandered over to his bench. *"Got the package, I see. Haven't done anything yet. What do you think?"*

"I think it's a load of junk that I wouldn't waste time on."

"Pity," said Macca, *"You know how Lorraine is a volunteer at the women's refuge centre, well, there's a boy there who could probably get a bit of fun out of it."*

"How old?"

"Ten or eleven."

Old Jack thought for a while. *"Well, might he be interested in working with me on making a billy-cart? I mean a real one with wooden struts and old pram wheels, if we can find some, and proper nuts and bolts and strong axels and..."* His eyes cast to the well-stocked shelves.

Macca touched him on the shoulder.

"Whoa back, Jack. Get rid of that crap and come and have a cuppa. Then we'll have a look at when the school holidays are on." His eyes twinkled.

"You never know, my grandson, Jamie, might also just be available."

What Does Life Experience Mean?

Cathrine Plink

The Entrance

Many people over the years have asked me what I mean by the expression *life experience*. This is a small effort to explain what I mean when I use that expression and to show what a positive effect it can have, even if a lot of my experiences have been negative.

My early years were spent moving from place to place with my mother. I never had a problem with that. Wherever my mother was, there was love and security. That was my first life experience.

Later when things changed for the worse, it was that love and the care of my elder sister that sustained me through the hardest times. The life experiences in the children's homes of the 1950 were harsh. Sometimes even now they torment me. Yes, having my mother's love kept me going, but the harsh times also taught me that life was not a soft easy place. It could be hard at times, and I had to learn to cope with that. That was a valuable life experience.

I won't bore you with lessons learned as a teenager. I think most of us learn those. Whether or not we learn to benefit from them is another matter. Early working life was an experience in itself. I learned that I was not, after all, cut out for nursing. I also learned that a young land girl can be vulnerable to a predatory farmer. I learned to run fast at that point. I only lasted there three weeks. Life experience, you betcha.

During my 20's and 30's I had more challenges in life as a wife, a mother and a worker. I also began to come into my own as a person. The lessons learned earlier began to kick in and help me move forward. It was a good time, and life's experiences were varied. As the children grew I learned a new lesson in life. The lesson of letting go. It's hard and I don't know if I've really learned that yet.

In my late 40's I went back to tafe to learn skills to get back into the workforce after some years as an 'at home' mother. I decided that I was going to really work hard at this and get my Advanced Certificate with distinction. Most of the others in my course were straight out of school. Some of them went to Year 10 rather than sit their High School Certificate. At first, I thought I would not fit in to this environment, but these kids amazed me. They were friendly, courteous, and fun. They treated me almost as one of them, except they also asked me questions about life and growing up. That's when my life experience kicked in. I think, at least I hope, I was able to help several of them with difficult questions, simply because I had lived through the situation or knew of others who had.

I found the work surprisingly easy for somebody who'd been something of a failure at school. I had made an aim to get 17 A's from 17 subjects but had to be satisfied with 13 A's and 4 B's, not bad for somebody who took 3 goes to pass the School Certificate.

Now I have once again left the workforce, this time as a retiree.

My life revolves around my grandchildren and my writing. I am still seeking new experiences. I know there are many more out there for me. I may be nearly 70 but I've still got a heap to learn from new adventures and I'll use my *Life Experience* to face any challenges along the way.



Positive Ageing – Four Aspects

Uta Purcell

Burradoo

Ageing happens from birth. It is a gradual and continual process that is unique to each person. Life moves speedily forever forward and becomes more complicated as time passes until it reaches its end and all at once it is very simple again. Worries disappear and the everyday necessities become someone else's concern. However, if life has been lived well and enjoyed, there is absolutely no reason why this should not continue to a mature old age. It might take a little longer to do things than before but continuing to do them, gives far more pleasure when they are accomplished.

Retirement means simply finishing with work, not with life and it is a glorious time of self-indulgence. Things that have been hovering on the horizon for years are now able to be tried out and explored. All those things that time constraints prevented can now be indulged in and accommodated into a new and exciting existence. Besides it is said, that time is like a suitcase that fills to capacity, without too much effort. So before too long decisions need to be made about what to leave out of the week's activities.

Life needs to be nurtured with physical, spiritual, creative and mental activities. They are all equally important and need to be included to live life well and to achieve a happy and balanced state of existence. Finding something to do in each of these areas will lead to a very happy and fulfilling life.

A physical life means moving the body to keep it strong and flexible. This can be done at any level and as long as some challenge is involved and fun is had, improvement will follow. As long as health issues allow it, the body is designed to keep moving. It is wonderful to see people of all ages enjoying physical activity. To hear a person in their 90s saying that they don't have time to talk because they have to get to an exercise class is exciting and what is even more exciting is that this is now becoming more common.

A spiritual life, be it religious or meditative can be of a great comfort in times of stress as it can help heal the spirit and let life renew itself with meaning and purpose. Finding beauty in the everyday and enjoying life's treasures can be both calming and exhilarating. Not everything needs to be explained or understood and an unquestioning, childlike acceptance of what life brings can help smooth the path.

A creative life leads to exploration and adventure. Trying new things just for fun can stretch the imagination and lead to all sorts of unexpected outcomes. The worry about succeeding has gone and enjoying the worlds of art, music, literature, dance are now pure pleasure. Try them all, find the ones that really appeal then go for it. Create! Create! Have fun!

A life of mental activity is an active life. Crosswords, jigsaws, puzzles, maths games, playing a musical instrument, learning a new language are all very beneficial for the brain. It thrives on learning new things. The brain has an amazing ability to build, maintain and repair itself. Its plasticity is phenomenal and it thrives on new challenges. An older brain is not necessarily an inactive one, if it is being challenged and used. Bookshops abound with self-help books on how to improve brain function, as does the internet. However one of the best ways to encourage mental activity is to socialize with friends over games such as scrabble, bridge or chess or to enjoy discussions on favourite topics.

As ageing cannot be prevented only modified by engaging in all of the above four aspects of life it may be necessary to change the idea of ageing, giving it a more positive appeal. Getting the most out of life at any age is important but this even more so as people get older. Everyone needs to be aware of their physical, spiritual, creative and mental abilities and work within their own comfort zones. However sometimes stepping outside these and trying something new can show amazing results for a population with an increasing number of elderly people.

Positive Ageing needs to be rebranded as Active Living to enjoy all the benefits available, ready to be indulged in by everyone at all levels of ability.

Gratitude

Ramah Juta

St Ives

The journey of my life has prepared me for positive ageing. I am a blended mixture of three countries. I arrived into this world when steam ships sailed the seas and communication was with airmail letters and telegrams. Born in sunny South Africa I was the 'brown' between the black and white.

Education was regarded as the gateway to success. My studies took me to the land of my forefathers. It was like going into the unknown. I survived, qualified and returned to South Africa. A few years down the track, the land of the kangaroo, koala and the didgeridoo beckoned. It required strength, determination and grit to settle into a new country. I had to write exams while my children started school. Surmounting problems prepared me for the future.

I was soon enjoying my profession and building a rapport with my patients. I shared in their joys and empathized with people I could not help. The journey of my professional life ended when I hung up my stethoscope. Parting from a profession that I absolutely enjoyed was difficult. My journey as a carer and grandmother began.

It meant dealing with two different ends of the spectrum. On the one hand there was a fragile female with fixed habits. She had occasional medical dramas and hospital admissions. On the other hand I dealt with boisterous children who were persistently hungry and needed constant attention. To give of oneself is a positive. It has been said that 'Charity begins at home.'

Time saw my life changing. Grandchildren started school and Mum passed on. The demanding process of downsizing and selling began. Moving to a new suburb was stressful and traumatic. It meant parting from familiar friends and relationships built over the years. I was grateful to Salvos who relieved me of my precious possessions. It was good to know that some other family would benefit. Life felt lighter with less paraphernalia. It was time for other interests.

I am still involved with grandchildren but have time for myself. Reading has always been my leisure and pleasure. I read everything from newspapers, magazines and all genres of books. It keeps me in touch with the world.

For physical and mental wellbeing, nothing beats gardening. One remains in tune with nature. What a pleasure to see the seeds sprout and reach the table as something edible. Vegetable waste recycled to mother earth enriches the soil and earthworms wriggle and squiggle. Propagating plants is a pleasure. Gifting a growing plant to friends and family is a great joy. Spring sees the flowers flourishing and vivid colours can elevate the mood. Summer arrives with its long days and tranquil evenings. The carpet of fallen leaves in autumn prepares me for winter. Soaking up the sun helps me to get my dose of Vitamin D.

I have been catapulted into the computer age. The days of pen and paper have receded into the background. Getting used to the new technology has been a bumpy ride with a few falls. All the same I feel insecure without my iPhone. Remembering PIN and passwords is a big problem. The ogre of dementia is always lurking in the background.

There is no shortage of activities for seniors. I used to be a Rotarian. Hopefully I can join a Probus group in the area. I look forward to the Sydney Film festival. It is a chance to view movies produced in different areas of the world. To learn about another country, its people and culture is stimulating. Sydney Writers festival, also showcases authors from across the globe.

I need to keep my brain and body active. Acquiring new skills is important. Attending classes to learn about Facebook and Pinterest has opened up a new world. I have connected with family around the globe. Venturing into the world of Belly and Bollywood dancing has been exciting. Yoga and Pilates keep my joints flexible and supple. An early morning walk is invigorating. I hear the birds twittering and the world waking up.

Listening to music is soothing. It elevates the mood and also has a calming effect. Music helps one to sleep. It is better than taking a sedative. Retirement is a good time to learn to play a new musical instrument. The keyboard has made my fingers agile.

Age related changes have crept up on me. My skin is riddled with wrinkles. Reading glasses have replaced the cataracts. Thankfully hearing aids are not decorating the ears. As one ages there will be a few hiccups with health. We are living longer. It is important to have a sensible diet, regular check-ups and to have the recommended adult immunisation.

As I grow older nostalgia sets in. I long for the sights, smells, fauna and flora of Africa. While my health is good I would like to go on a pilgrimage to my roots. If time, health and finance allow there is a whole big world to discover. It would be fascinating to visit Serengeti Park and interact with the Masai Mara people. Cruising is a comfortable way to travel but one does not learn about the customs and traditions of the local people.

Slowly but surely my social circle is shrinking. Many friends and family have passed on. I have become familiar with the final rites of different religions. It has been a signal to put my affairs in order. As a result I have made my living will. I do not want my daughters to make difficult decisions on my behalf.

The river of life has its ebb and flows. One has to be resilient, flexible and accommodating. Divine days are often interspersed with disaster ones. I am grateful for my roots and life experiences, as I glided through three countries. Age is no barrier to achievement. Warren Buffet still plays the ukulele and Mohammed Mahathir won an election at age ninety-two. Physical activity, music, dance, art, craft, creativity and travel are aids to positive ageing.

A Life Well Lived

Morag Rasmussen

Moss Vale

It was a balmy day in early June. We called it champagne weather with the heat of summer gone and the cool of winter yet to come. We were sipping coffee, sitting on our verandah watching the sunrise over the Coral Sea.

We had emigrated to Australia with our four teenage children some thirteen years previously and revelled in living in such a beautiful part of the world. Our children had left home to follow their own paths in life, and we missed them. We missed sitting around the dinner table for hours having discussions and debates. We missed the friends they brought home. Life was certainly very quiet without them, but we had been married for thirty happy years and were looking forward to the next thirty. My husband's smile reached his eyes as he said goodbye and left for his regular Saturday game of golf.

"Have a lovely day, darling," I said.

I busied myself preparing food for a party we were having that evening. The phone call came at midday.

"Your husband has been taken to hospital!"

The nurse approached me as I arrived. "I'm so sorry, he's gone."

I was shocked, bewildered, distraught. Everything was a blur after that. There were hospital sounds and smells, trolleys, nurses, a policeman asking questions, phone calls to make.

I was drowning in grief. A future without my life partner looked bleak and there seemed little to look forward to. I had a long period of overwhelming sadness which was so hard to bear.

Time is a great healer is a trite phrase but a true one. My heart was cracked but not broken, and gradually it started to mend. I learned not to let the pain of loss destroy the joy of life.

I moved closer to my children who were my greatest support.

I had no intention of marrying again, but I met this man! He was totally different to my late husband, just as loveable and in marrying him, I gained three stepchildren and we now have nineteen grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

We moved to the Southern Highlands on retirement and love it. I look forward to every day of my life. I'm not daunted by new challenges but embrace them. In the past year I have joined a writers' group whose ideas and talents never cease to amaze and inspire me. I enjoy Scottish country dancing, full of friendly 'young' seniors. I play Scrabble and belong to a book club. I continue to paint vibrant abstracts on huge canvasses, and I love to cook for family and friends.

I may have changed in body, but I still remain pretty close to who I was when I was young.

My motto? Seize the day!

I'm not the kind of granny with knitting on her knee
Watching daytime telly with endless cups of tea
I love to join discussion groups, book clubs are for me
When I sip a glass of wine or maybe two or three

Forget about the comfy shoes beloved of the old
I prefer my high heeled boots colourful and bold
Growing old so gracefully with hair of snowy white
Mine is still a glossy brown with not a grey in sight

I'd never go for bingo, to me it seems inane
Give me a game of Scrabble much better for the brain
Forget about the landscapes delicate and small
I paint huge vibrant abstracts to hang upon the wall

I like to cook delicious food for family and friends
Vegan or Paleo? I keep up with the trends
I have a loving husband and children I adore
Grandkids and great-grandkids who could ask for more?

As I approach my eighties I still have lots to do
New challenges to tackle new hobbies to pursue
I am the kind of granny who lives life to the full
Loving, living, laughing there really is no rule!

Maybe the Best is Yet to Be

Pam Reynolds

Goulburn

Looking back, it all began about a year before I actually left work. It became almost like a grieving process. I was going to be leaving a job, which I loved. I work from the heart, so had put most of my time and energy into something very rewarding. I think I focused on all the things I would be leaving behind and I was nervous about how I would meaningfully fill my days and, importantly, how we would manage financially. I worried about losing the friends I had made at work. Our jobs bound us together, but would those friendships be sustained outside the workplace environment? Probably not.

I asked many retired people what they did all day, but I never got a very satisfactory answer. Most were 'so busy' and life was 'pretty good', but they never actually told me how. It was all very vague and unsettling. I wondered if other people about to leave work felt like this.

It was a casual remark from a friend that changed everything. "Knowing you, you'll make a career out of retirement." It was one of those moments when you know, 'this will be okay. I can do this!' and so I became determined to make the next years of my life the best years.

I decided to approach this retirement 'thing' as a project and set out some strategies. First of all, I would brainstorm all the things I would like to do, given the opportunity of not working. Number two, I would research what other retired people do. None of this vague 'this and that'. I wanted to know day by day exactly what they were doing. Finally I would keep a monthly journal, just to stay on track and check my progress.

So on 1st February 2003, I started off with all sorts of ideas. A patchwork quilt, the material long ago pushed to the back of the wardrobe in a cane basket. Joining a meditation group. Starting the garden again after the drought. Sorting out boxes of old photos. Updating my computer skills and exploring the Internet. Doing a Reiki course. Tracing our family tree.

My research into other retirees led to some interesting ideas and I was able to add to my 'things to do' list'. The University of the Third Age (U3A) sounded like a wonderful way to share expertise and learn from others of different backgrounds. Some people were taking arts and crafts courses, there was travel for all budgets and many were involved in organizations such as CWA and Red Cross. An entry in my Journal for March reads: *Learning to relax and enjoying each day. Doing lots of spring-cleaning and maintenance jobs I have been putting off for years. Have finished a crocheted rug for a new baby, taught myself to play Poker Patience. Not missing work. So great not to feel tired all the time!*

It seems to me that a good title for a document about retirement would be 'No Expectations'. Society doesn't seem to have any rules about this stage of life. Whether you travel, throw yourself into some voluntary cause, do absolutely nothing – it all seems to meet with some kind of approval or perhaps total disinterest from younger members of society' This feeling that there is no structure to retirement is probably why we approach it with apprehension, but I now actually feel it is rather a comfortable place to be!

So gradually, over the next few months my life changed, I went from being this sometimes frazzled person who lay awake at night worrying about possible scenarios at work, who regularly darted down another aisle of the supermarket to avoid someone because she only had five minutes left in her lunch hour, who fell asleep watching the news at 7.00pm, too tired to try a new recipe and too busy to spend a few hours browsing in a bookshop, to someone who enjoys just having time to be, to sit in the sun with the dogs, watching tiny wrens building a nest in an old straw hat hanging on a peg on the verandah, who spends *all* day in town and lies in bed with an early morning cuppa, watching the sunrise through the window.

I've realised, too, that going to work is a great distraction. It forces us, in many ways, not to dwell on personal issues. When life becomes a bit complicated, we can always throw ourselves into the job, thus putting lots of things 'on hold'. When retirement comes these issues must be faced and this process may be uncomfortable.

I have attempted most things on my things 'to do' list, the material for the patchwork quilt is still at the back of the wardrobe in the cane basket – now with those boxes of old photos keeping it company. But new interests have emerged, too – things I would never have anticipated. To my delight and surprise, I have had a short article accepted by a magazine for rural women.

Retired people have the opportunity to contribute in so many ways to society. The wealth of their experience is so valuable. They have the luxury of time and quite probably have more patience. Listening to fellow retirees discuss the new skills they are acquiring, I have been amazed by their energy and their capacity to try something different. Bravo!



Journal entry for March 2018: *Fifteen years since those last days at work and started, what feels like, a journey' My husband and I are closer than ever and looking forward to what might be around the corner – living in the present, taking each day as a gift and finding an unsuspected treasure – peace of mind."*

Robert Browning's words to his beloved Elizabeth say it all:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made...
Robert Browning, from *Rabbi Ben Ezra* (1864)

Hello You

Carrolline Rhodes

Valla Beach

It has taken more than seventy years to grow into myself. At times I despair that it took so long, but there are mellow moments when I realise I had to live every one of those years in order to become who I am now.

When I was a teenager every other girl was prettier than I, cleverer, more adept at attracting the most desirable boys. Me? My eyebrows were too bushy, my armpits and legs hairier than anyone else's, my feet and hands too big and my chest was flatter than any other girl's. I knew with mortifying certainty that no one but me had been born so unattractive, so awkward, so wholly inadequate.

At twenty I married the boy I'd met when I was fifteen, but failed as a wife. I knew that if I had been better at it my husband wouldn't have spent so much time at the pub and although I struggled to lift my game, somehow I couldn't please him enough to stay home.

We have two children. My son tells me I have always been a good mother, my daughter compares me to the Wicked Witch of the West and declares me worse in every way.

I haven't seen my daughter in ten years. My husband has long been my ex.

In my early sixties I met a man who suggested we spend the rest of our lives in a house we would buy together. It was impossible to resist the intoxication that being desired induces, so I paid half the cost of a house I would never have chosen had I been house-hunting alone. Situated on a precipitous slope, it is badly built and the dirt road we traversed for five kilometres kept all but closest friends away.

Déjà vu didn't hang back though. It arrived within months and demonstrated with alacrity that as a common-law wife I failed as miserably as I had when I had been a legitimate one. If I'd been better at it, I am sure my new partner's pillow talk would not have included reminiscences about his ex-wife and frolics in their home's sunken bath, or the time one of their best friends walked in on them doing the deed, or the ...

Intoxication morphed into daily hangover.

When I moved out at sixty-nine, I couch-surfed at friends' houses and consulted lawyers. Then, settled into a new home. I started talking to the walls in my spare room, the one furthest from neighbours. Unlike Shirley Valentine, a Greek didn't wander by and suggest we shag, even though I kept a sharp lookout and made myself nice.

Repeated affirmations (*I replace anger with compassion and understanding; I let go of the past...*) became more drone than inspiration. Time passed slower each night, yet birthdays sped past: seventy, seventy-one, seventy-two...

But, as I got used to being alone again, the failed wife, the mother who didn't measure up, the woman who couldn't compare with the ex-wife, no longer stared back from mirrored wardrobe doors. In their stead was a handsome woman I didn't recognise. I gave her a little wave, glancing over my shoulder to make sure the neighbours couldn't see through lace curtains and into the room. *Hello you*, I mouthed and saw her wave back. *Hello you*, she mimed and I felt my heart soar.

Inspired by this new acquaintance, I began trying different ways with clothes and makeup, with scarves and in-your-face bling and felt like the teenager I once was. What suits? What doesn't? Does this go with that? Is this better? Do these pants make my bum look big?

Before I knew it, it was time to greet friends and family for my seventy-fifth birthday bash. Their reaction as they got an eyeful of the newly-designed me can be described as *wham, bam* and *just-look-at-you-Ma'am*. My dress was ankle-length, black and slinky, the heels high and around my head I'd wound a scarf the way insouciant style icons wear theirs, with some bling pinned to it for good measure. As I sashayed around the room, heart beating hard for being so publicly audacious, I told my guests I was dressed as the secret me.

'And why do you keep this glamorous self a secret?' was the common reply.

Why indeed?

Hello you, I say aloud, as I check my appearance before going out, knowing that women like Helen Mirren and Jane Fonda feel just as I do when they see themselves reflected back: striking, ageless, self-assured. Along with the bling and the heels and the expertly wound scarf, what I also see is a wicked glint in eyes that look straight ahead, that challenge rather than submit: I like the me I now see.

Bold.

Courageous.

Resilient beyond measure.

Hello you.

Please Don't Dilly-Dally

Cathy Robson

Kincumber

Do you still have desires tucked away in that secret little corner of your yearning heart?

Oooh sorry, I'm not talking about 'those' desires... cheeky! They are for you and your sweetheart! No, I'm talking about those desires where you end up breathing a defeated sigh and say 'that could never happen to me' or 'those sorts of things only happen to other people'.

Here is a slogan I have been reminded of, *If it can happen to me, it can happen to you!*

The wonder of miracles being that this fulfilled desire of mine happened the year I turned 60. Why don't you wander back with me a couple of years? I promise it will be a positive journey. You may even notice a spring in your step! Wouldn't that be nice?

The brilliance of autumn had arrived and we were living on the coast for a year. My heart was still longing for its country roots and no matter how hard I tried, the clear crisp air was what I longed for most. In my rural home of the previous seventeen years I enjoyed the privilege of being an artist and teacher with my own home studio. The joy of teaching, mostly senior ladies, the beauty that can be achieved with a paint brush and a little paint was so gratifying. I loved the challenge of proving their eternal words of 'I could never paint that' wrong!

Each week wonderful works of art were leaving my studio to adorn their own homes or as gifts for loved ones and even consignment work. The house we purchased on the coast suited perfectly to having its own home studio too, so plans were submitted to council, a builder was found and the work began. This is also where the frustration began! Councils can be so difficult at times – grrr!

Two years later I was still waiting for my cherished art studio to be completed, so instead of going stark raving mad, I decided to do something I had never done before. I enrolled in a creative writing course. Our local Community College had so many different courses to choose from, but writing was something I had always mused about. Maybe it was the thought of my dear Mum who had written her memoirs when she was eighty – five that inspired me. If the truth be known though, it had been suggested to me along life's journey of surprises, that I should write a book!

As each week passed, I became so in awe of the other writers who, like me couldn't wait for our writing course day to arrive. Our eager minds were never disappointed as we shared stories, opinions and life's lessons. Our undaunted teacher was very patient as he instructed us in the written word. Oh the challenge of trying to change the bad habits of years of grammatically incorrect thinking from a group of outmoded experts who were sure they were right! Who did change those grammar rules anyway? Thank goodness a mischievous sense of humour was always present in our classes! Homework was also stretching, where we were given assignments to be handed in each week. We were also to write another five hundred words weekly on a subject of our own choice, which was to be shared at the end of the course. Subjects were so diverse with a son writing down his father's poignant war memoirs. We all licked our lips as another well-travelled student wrote about her love of international cooking recipes. One brave man was writing about his harrowing years growing up in an orphanage. Heartfelt emotions filled the room as he shared.

I came to my not so friendly computer, to start my first collection of words. My mind was a blank and then yes, I had it! I could write about how much beauty there is in our world, despite all the destruction that is happening. Week after week stories of the grandeur of nature; faith; my life; poetry and quotes would come to mind and I would tap away, with the common theme being about a little bit of beauty!

When my work was finished ... yes my computer and I had come to an understanding, I wondered what on earth I was going to do with all those words after I had shared them with the class. Some of the stories were silly little ditties that I thought only I would be interested in, so I was content to leave my efforts sitting on the computer until my husband needed more space for his files. Well the most extraordinary thing happened. I was actually encouraged to see if my 'book' of short stories could be published. Amazingly, I was told it was a unique piece of literature suitable for a coffee table book and could draw the reader into seeing past the dark things of this world (and goodness knows there is enough of those) to something beautiful.

Well glory be! Can you believe my humble little book was accepted by the first publisher I contacted? Much to my surprise it was also selected to be a finalist in the inspirational section of the International Book Awards. I do hope this doesn't sound vain, but I still pinch myself every time I see my book on the shelf in a bookstore. Do you remember those mystifying words I said, 'If it can happen to me, it can happen to you'? I hope you believe this! Yes, grab those desires with both hands, raise them heavenward with an expectant heart and experience the joy and excitement that is there waiting to be found. And please don't dilly dally!

Recollections of a quote my sweet Grandma wrote in my autograph book when I was eight years of age – *Good, better, best. Never let it rest, 'til your good is better and your better – best!*

Dear Grandma, is that a cheer from Heaven I can hear?

Dogs and Dongles

Joanne Ruppin

Castlecrag

Mere children, the sales staff in the computer store, raised pierced eyebrows when Shirley and I entered.

'How can I help?' asked a boy child.

'Show us your dongles,' said Shirley.

We were beginners at laptop lingo ... dongles ended the day's excursion.

'It would be more fun vacuuming the ceiling,' Shirley grumbled when she arrived at my house for coffee. 'We were going shopping, not *computer* shopping.'

My daughter who is now my MOM – my Monitor of Madness, phoned then, cutting through the coolness. 'I'll pop over later,' she said, meaning she'd inspect my fridge for vegetables and my coffee cups for stains. 'How were the sardine sandwiches I left last week?'

The sardine sandwiches were mutating into a fuzz farm on the fridge shelf.

'I'm about to go computer shopping.'

'I'll come with you,' she said, 'but not today...'

'Shirley's coming...'

'Don't take Shirley computer shopping *please* Mum, anyone but Shirley. I'll come now.' Daughter's voice buzzed round my kitchen via the best mobile reception I've ever had.

Dog crept behind the sofa to howl. Shirley mimed the pair of us driving away very fast so I settled Dog on the sofa with the TV, binned the sardine sandwiches and we left in Shirley's car. We'd not cleared the street before we saw my daughter's car heading our way.

'Keep your head down,' Shirley ordered while she kept her foot down and raced away to the mall.

'We'll start with coffee since I didn't get any at your place.' Soon we were laughing and kicking off sandals to compare bunions as only old, old friends can. We agreed that if Shirley slogged around electronic stores with me, I'd consider joining her hiking trip to Utah.

'It'll cost a bomb. What if we break a leg?' I asked.

'Stay home then,' she said, 'but don't show me your photos.' Shirley popped the unused little sugar packets from her coffee and mine into her bag, as is her habit. 'I pay the same for coffee if I put sugar in it or not,' she reasoned. It always took her the best part of a day and fifty-six little packets of sugar to make a cake.

Soon we were mastering gigabytes and watching laptops fold themselves inside out and upside down into tablets. They displayed, Shirley noted, more muscle memory than her physiotherapist. Weight was important, it being a concept we could understand and a word we could spell, so Shirley worked her way along a line of laptops lifting one in each hand. At the end of the row where the laptops ran out and a line of shiny phones began, she paused.

Sales Boy pounced. 'Are you after a phone?'

'Perhaps,' said Shirley. 'We're going away.'

'Where to? What might you need?' he asked.

'YOU-TA,' she said, and he blushed. 'You-ta, Utah in the USA. We'll need excellent communication.'

For me to have Wi-Fi and for Shirl's camera to talk to phones and laptops we'd need *dongles* it seemed. Sales Boy suggested we return the next day or the next – any day but today – and speak to Maurice, the doyen of dongles. He walked us to the exit where the security guard poked at sugar packets in Shirley's bag.

'You'll get sticky fingers,' Shirley warned him.

With Utah in mind we eschewed escalators for stairs and climbed to another store where sales children were younger than Shirley's phone. A boy plugged in cords and thingummies. He proclaimed Shirl's phone too old for new tricks and he seized mine, introducing it to the laptops, speakers and thingummies on his shelf. They all talked to each other apparently, saying who knows what. When Sales Child was called away Shirley prodded my phone where it lay cosy up to its new-age friends.

'Where are you?' My daughter's voice called like magic through all the laptop and Bluetooth speakers along the row.

'Wow,' cooed Shirley, slapping my hands away from the phone when I moved to unplug it.

'I let myself in. Your *dog* has been *sick* on the *sofa*,' announced the speakers to the whole store.

Sales children stopped shuffling DVDs to listen.

'*Sardines* on cushions... he's ransacked the garbage.'

The sales children gathered round. Shirley raised an arm gesturing for quiet, glowing with the wonder of it all.

'Dog's GONE. I'm driving the streets searching.'

'Ohh,' went the crowd.

When my daughter broadcast that she'd missed a midday appointment with a blast of liquid nitrogen to remove warts, I ripped her from the shelf.

Shirl and I decided there was no need to mention the mall or computers or warts to my daughter. Instead I phoned her and said I'd been for a long walk.

'I'm afraid I'll get my story muddled,' I told Shirley.

'Make it an exercise in neuroplasticity,' said Shirley. 'Fact and fiction on different pathways.'

She stopped her car three blocks from my place to let me walk home in case my daughter was lurking and spotted the car. Howls filled the air.

'That's Dog,' said Shirley. And it was. He'd squeezed through a high picket fence to croon at a Newfoundland on heat.

'Come,' I hissed through the pickets. 'Come Dog.'

Dog wouldn't leave the Newfoundland. Shirley locked her car and joined me with about a year's stash of sugar packets. She laid sugar under the fence and when Dog came close for a sniff we reached through and squeezed him out through the pickets. Shirley offered to drive us home. Back at the car we spied Shirl's keys – locked inside.

No way would I carry Dog home after he'd had a sardine sandwich *and* sick attack *and* Newfoundland so Shirl and I walked the three blocks backwards, opening eighteen sugar packets between us and sprinkling them in his path. And throughout this exercise in agility and problem-solving and balance, our bunions crunched on the sugar. Utah would be a piece of cake.

New Territory for Old People

Leith Russell

Ladysmith

“Hop up in the truck! Time to go,” I call to the dog who is patiently waiting beside it.

Dogs spend a lot of time patiently waiting. The older they get the more patiently they wait. Bit like old people really. They are always hoping for an adventure to present itself. Are we?

Today we are; ready to go to work, leaving flocks of galahs, agile wallabies, the few grey brahmins and occasional buffalo in peace once again. I make a last check of our patch in this stretch of flat grassland dotted with woollybutts and bloodwoods throwing dark shade into the tall dry grass. The cooking fire is out under shovels-full of dirt. Our camping gear is all on board. The tiny settlement expecting us is less than an hour away. Katherine is six hundred kilometres behind us. Two hours north is the nearest town, Booraloola. We camp in the quiet uninterrupted landscape well in from the red dirt road. It certainly is ‘a road never crossed’ cept by folk who are lost’, plus only a few boats-full of fishermen travelling to the Gulf. We share the driving, but this morning it’s Dave who climbs behind the wheel and turns the key. Urr... Urr... again Urrr...No start. Flat battery. Looking at each other wide eyed and worried, momentarily paralysed, instantly we are reminded of how remote this is. A half hour walk out to the dusty road to start with. To wait there for hours, probably days, for a passer-by. No phones work here. Several little black children will be disappointed that KICS pre-school isn’t happening. KICS is Katherine Isolated Children’s Service. We are one of two teams taking mobile pre-school to remote communities and stations across 800,000 square kilometres of the Northern Territory.

The Toyota is well equipped for camping anywhere, which we do all week. Extra fuel tank, duel battery system, jack, spare tyres, winch and snorkel. How could anything go wrong? Behind us is a big trailer holding our camping gear, a water tank, a fridge and a light, run from a couple of deep-cycle batteries and so many wonderful toys! All we need when we set up pre-school is a shady tree and a tap. We have earnt some essentials since recently starting our job with KICS. Our first regular paid job for years. And we’re old!

Last December, both aged seventy, we became part of a phone interview at our own kitchen table. Four telephones, each hundreds of kilometres apart, four thousand kilometres away in the Northern Territory, caused us considerable anxiety, amazing though the technology was. “But we are not teachers!” I had said when Gill, the KICS manager, suggested the job to us.

“You don’t need to be. It’s more important that you can camp happily together, and can back a trailer! KICS encourages kids to learn through play.”

All things are considered, involving excitement and fear in equal measure, until we decide ‘yes!’

Why say no to an adventure?

But whatever are we thinking?

Now we have to promote our grandparent selves as the best play-group leaders, who won't get lonely or lost or broken-down, outback. We are speechless, scared and somewhat spooked to find we are successful. The job is for a whole year, based in Katherine, starting in March. Each week we hold four pre-schools in far-flung places between the Gulf of Carpentaria and the West Australian border, doing ten thousand kilometres a month, camping happily all the way. Returning to Katherine at weekends we do washing, re-supply ourselves and vary the trailer full of toys. Right now, from a stationery vehicle so far from anywhere, all the good things this job offers have momentarily escaped our minds. But Dave can fix anything, I remind myself. He is attaching the jump-leads to the starting battery; and then to the accessories battery: everything is flat, including Dave himself. Then we remember the two deep-cycle batteries deep down in the trailer. Not starting batteries, but worth a try.

Not all of the toys and gear are unloaded at every pre-school of course, but today we have to do just that. Onto the grass go all the boxes of art, craft, puzzles, wheel toys, easels, little chairs and tables and a net bag trying to contain a bunch of balls of all sorts, 'til at last the lid of the box below the floor reveals itself and the two batteries within. The first one reinforces Dave's belief that a deep-cycle battery is inadequate to start a motor. But 'hey, it's worth trying the other one before we repack all this gear'.

Lo and behold, it works!

"Don't turn off that motor whatever you do!"

Happy little black kids beaming wide white smiles are running to meet us, eager for play-dough, painting, party dress-ups and puzzles. Amazingly we are hardly even late. In no time there is a frenzy of enthusiastic little black arms and legs finding sparkles and stilettos; cutting, glueing, glittering; making masterpieces; shouting, running, and riding the little green tractors. Almost every day of our year here everything does go according to plan. We set up on green mown lawns at stations, on red dirt under spiky shade in communities. Sharing anxious responsibility and smiling satisfaction in our new situation. Peopled by black and white, young and old. Always an endless wild backdrop, from orange sandstone cliffs, dusty black-soil grasslands to red sand spinifex-dotted desert. All this because two old people did not say no to an adventure.

The Point

Janice Ryan

Milkers Flat

"I can't believe it is fifty years since I first saw you, sitting there, all alone, on the crumbling bitumen playground, sobbing as though your heart would break."

"My heart *was* breaking – ten years old and not a friend to play with! I was so glad you came over. Was it really fifty years ago? My goodness, that makes me feel old!"

"Not me. I still feel young inside. It's just ridiculous mirrors and shop windows that tell me a different story."

Jenny and Margo continued their reminiscing long into the night. The time between get-togethers often stretched to months, but it was never awkward when they saw each other again. They had shared in each other's joys and sorrows, achievements and disappointments, momentous occasions and domestic trivia. Their lives had been very different, but theirs was a connection that bridged – one being more affluent, only one being a traveller and one having a more high-flying career.

The next morning, as the sun slowly revealed itself between two nearby hills, creating a dazzling light show amongst the dew drops sparkling on the plants, Margo cradled a pottery mug of English Breakfast tea to warm her icy fingers. She inhaled the fresh country air and let it out to the beat of the condensing water dripping from the eaves. Her slightly watery eyes took in the small, spindly gums, the impressive chook house – lovingly labelled *Cluckingham Palace*, the orderly vegetable garden awaiting the removal of the last of the summer crops before soil replenishment and new season planting. Such a successful tree change, she thought. Jenny was certainly living a lifestyle craved by many.

Meanwhile, Jenny's sharp blue eyes were observing her friend – First thing in the morning, and she looks as stylish as a model from a 'mature women's fashion' catalogue.

"So, which of the many farm jobs have you chosen?" she quipped.

"Rake out the chicken manure, rip out the frost-frazzled tomatoes, water those poor struggling trees, or shoot one of those wretched kangaroos who smash into everything we plant or build?"

"I thought I might watch you bake a batch of your delicious scones, before eating too many of them smothered in your delectable raspberry jam."

Jenny grinned. She was delighted with the way her baking skills had developed in the few years since retirement had given her the time to do so. And cooking for someone who enjoyed food made with love always gave her the greatest pleasure.

As Jenny measured and sifted, mixed and shaped, cut and positioned, she and Margo chatted animatedly about their children and grandchildren. Their talk was light, cheerful and easy, until Jenny, having closed the oven door on the tray of scones, suddenly spun around and fixed Margo with an intense gaze.

"Mar, do you ever wonder what it's all about? I mean, why you are here ... what is your purpose?"

"Sorry, Jen. I'm not sure what you mean."

"Well, I've been wondering a lot, what is the point of ME? The kids are all independent and don't need me. I don't have a job, so I am no longer valuable to an employer. And I live too far from town to volunteer for any local charities. I can't help but think, if I wasn't here..."

She left the unfinished thought mingling in the air with the aroma of baking scones. Margo was appalled.

“How could you possibly think like that? James would be desperate with grief. As would your girls. And what about me? Who would listen and understand and always be there?”

The oven timer cut short their morbid discussion, and they set about whipping cream and setting the table, before calling their men to join them.

There were no further opportunities that day to continue their analysis of Jenny’s feelings. The Fearsome Foursome filled many hours wandering the local artisan market, testing the quality of the ‘best coffee in town’, then headed to bed early, exhausted by their big day out.

Margo and Glen had to set off early the next morning. As she hugged Jen tightly, Margo whispered, “Remember, you are special to many.”

Three days later, Jen read a somewhat mysterious message from Margo: *Lunch with friends on Friday. Can you come? I’ll pick you up from Central at 11.30am.*

Jen’s three and a half hour train journey to the city seemed to fly by, as she alternated between imagining what the day would bring and absorbing herself in the exploits of *The Hundred-year-old Man who Climbed out of the Window and Disappeared*. Margo collected her promptly, and she sank into the luxury of a BMW seat as they made the short journey to Bondi Junction. When they pulled up outside a modern block of apartments, Margo explained they were at her friend, Julie’s, home, and there were a few others coming as well.

Jen admired the sleek lines of the building, then the cheerful brightness of the apartment as they were greeted by a smiling Julie. Well, sort of smiling. Half her face did not seem to be doing much at all, but the crooked smile and brightness in her right eye clearly communicated that Julie was pleased to see them.

“Welcome! How lovely to see you again, Margo, and to meet you, Jen.”

After a warm hug, Julie explained, “Don’t worry about my face. I certainly don’t! It bothered me when I was 25, and a new mum who had a stroke during childbirth. But one of the great things about getting older, don’t you find, Jen, is that we no longer worry about the imperfections in our looks that we can’t change?”

Jen instantly loved Julie!

“Sandy’s already here, so I’d better check how much wine is left before I offer you some.”

A rich, throaty laugh from the next room indicated this was long-standing banter.

But before she could meet the other half of this comic duo, Jen’s usually silent mobile phone trilled. “Hello, Mum? I rang the farm and Dad said you were in Sydney. I am so glad! Tonight’s that show we booked months ago, and Abi’s been sent home from school a bit feverish. The tickets cost us a fortune, but I can’t leave Abi with a babysitter when she is sick. I would feel so much better if she was with you. I hate to ask, but do you think you could ... please?”

Margo had just enough time to enjoy a thoughtfully planned and delicious menu before announcing her departure.

“It has been so very lovely. But I really must go – my daughter needs me.”

Margo farewelled her with a knowing wink.

A Reflection on Life

John Sahyoun

Bulahdelah

The February afternoon was hot and steamy, the humidity emphasising our somewhat wrinkled skins. Three friends who had known each other for almost forty years decided that we would have lunch together to celebrate our respective sixtieth birthdays which had occurred at different times over the last few preceding months. It was a rare chance for the three of us to get together. In between our busy schedules we have difficulty in making the opportunity in just even briefly seeing each other. Living geographically apart made even a short get together a logistic nightmare.

I remarked in light initial conversation that our collective ages were one hundred and eighty years but each of us living a parallel existence. I'm guessing three times sixty would be more accurate. We laughed. Half a generation ago we thought – What is old? What is ancient?

'I thought when I was young forty was old and fifty positively ancient. Who would have thought that now that we have all reached sixty we don't consider ourselves old at all?' At least that is something we all agreed on.

After the obligatory conversation starters of what various members of our families were up to and our success or otherwise with diets and the discussion of government policy that affected people of our age such as

"I read that the government wants to put up the retirement age to 67. I'll only get to retire when I'm dead at this rate".

Our conversation moved on to our lives now. I asked the question, "Well, what did you learn from life?"

Our answers were somewhat different as were our lives. The three of us had been teachers. Two of us had married and had children. One was divorced and still working. I remarked that I was as busy as ever. The third was retired but consumed in renovating her new home.

We concluded that we are the sum of our experiences up till now, both good and bad, although my insight was much simpler

"Learn to keep your mouth shut." We laughed in agreement.

Looking at life years ago and trying to look forward you discover that the pathway is never the smooth experience you expect it to be. It's a roller coaster ride. Even looking at the past through rose coloured glasses at select experiences we laughed at our youthful ignorance at those things. We could have lamented our past 'if only we had done this or that' but we all agreed that life had overall been a positive experience and that we had lived long enough to reflect upon it.

I remarked that nowadays I don't have to prove myself with an inflated CV. I have enough experience and respect in my community that people only have to ask. At a time when most of my friends are touring the world, visiting wineries and seeing live shows I tell the numerous organisations I serve on "I've had enough. Time to take photographs and play some guitar."

"No you won't," they say.

Age brings us that irreplaceably factor. You bring a lifetime of experience to that point in time. You are valuable and needed.

Many years ago I was on a panel that were endorsing awards for things happening in schools. I was surprised that the chair was discounting those who were young and enthusiastic because they believed that is what we expect from them. What do we expect of those who are seniors? Do we become less enthusiastic and capable as we become older?

Inside my head I'm still a young man but my body tells me otherwise. They call us the 'baby boomer generation' but we're not babies anymore. Advice columns tell us 'sixty is the new forty, you are only as old as you feel, you should be eating this and that and exercise more.' It's a younger generation telling us how to live. But youth has a disadvantage, life is a great unknown for them with many possibilities but for older people it is a time of reflection, contemplation and derived wisdom.

But what of now? I guess the main advantage of growing older is that the three of us were comfortable in our own skins. Sure, life had taken us in many different directions but now we didn't have to worry how our hair looked, if we wore the 'in' clothes or who we hung out with. What was seemingly relevant in our youth has been surpassed by something better – just being happy to be who we are now.

The advantage of growing older is seeing the fruits of our life long journey. We can see how our children have been a reflection of ourselves and their children a reflection of them. When my mother died a few years ago I was accompanied by my cousin whom I went with to her mother's funeral a year before. With neither of us having any living parents, "We are now the lead generation," I remarked.

And that's not a bad thing. We all have our own families and they look to us for support. Our bodies may weaken but our minds are good and filled with the wisdom and knowledge only a lifetime of experiences can bring.

Our lunch and conversation ended. We cut our respective ways through the February humidity promising each other that we would do this again for as many years as we could. Our memories are behind us but our life is always ahead of us. And we were happy that we were still active and enjoying life, no longer having to think about the distant future but living life now for what it's worth.

Youth is Wasted

Christine Sales

Blacktown

"Youth is wasted on..."

Now, hold it right there.

How can anything be wasted if it has never been experienced?

Youth does NOT have the experience to know it's wasting whatever ... be it time, health, energy or a myriad of other 'things'.

Maybe that phrase should read *"Experience without learning is wasted on Seniors"*.

At one time in my life I was titled *Miss*, then I became *Mrs*, then *Mum*, now it's *Granny*, along with many other titles along the way ... such as *'you know the lady that does...!* or *that lady in the canteen*, or my name whilst a Brownie Leader, to the vets tending our many pets *Calvin's Owner* along with the various names attached to me whilst employed.

So many titles identifying me to a specific group and now in hindsight a minute number – omitted by the author ... were not very flattering.

I have shed many of those titles as my family has grown and taken on their own titles and as I have aged and moved forward with my life. I can definitely say I have positively aged ...!

BUT ... have I aged positively ... Hmm!?"

Let's sort this one out.

From being a rather reserved girl I started my 'after school years life' with becoming independent of my immediate family ... a shared flat with a friend, joining a bushwalking club with treks to the, beyond the black stump, areas, camping weekends away, taking myself on a couple of hitch hiking trips once around New Zealand, then around the Eastern part of Australia before moving on to the more convenient mode of transport, the Greyhound Bus, travelling around Australia, finding work in many an isolated area and from there venturing overseas.

Totally shocking the Oldies, such as parents who knew nothing about being young, marrying overseas, having my daughters overseas, then returning as a family to live our lives in Australia.

You can see now where the many titles I claim come into play.

With the passing of the years and the change in family life and commitments, time moved forward, sometimes in a plodding, let's get today over and done with way, to the extremes of a frenetic period where nothing stood still long enough to enjoy ... then there were the periods of time moving along the dedicated path of "day to day".

A true light bulb moment arrived unexpectedly. Perhaps during one of those day-to-day periods and the words snapping at my brain told me, *now is MY time*. We no longer have living with us anyone or any pet that makes it necessary for me to remain home-bound.

From that day, the realisation that life, be it calm or stormy, exhilarating or boring is still out there to be lived no matter what title I carry.

Not having a set-in-cement bucket list rather a long list of *I wish I had seen...or I wish I had done yearnings*, I have rectified this deficiency by taking all forms of transport and journeyed far and wide both with my Husband and on many occasions as a single traveller. Himself likes the heat, I like the cold which make our overseas holidays a tad difficult to organise so we each experience the middle of the road' weather and not one of the extremes.

Travelling by myself to such places as Patagonia, North Cape, Iceland, Greenland, Canada, Alaska and still I'm not done ... "where to next?" you may well ask

"Quite possibly Mongolia," will be my response!

I have re-learnt independence, challenged myself to learn new skills, thrown myself open to new friendships, taken on volunteer work, turned all my gained over the years experiences into new roles and ventures or I should really call them adventures.

I am happy with my life ... I am learning ever more and challenging my way of thinking into being more accepting of 'different ways'.

I have a loving, considerate family who indulge me and my choices, mind you, more often than not with rolled eyes and raised eyebrows!!!

Experience without learning is wasted on Seniors, does not apply to me. I have learnt from and applied all my previous titles and experiences attached to those titles into my now day-to-day life so, Yes

I am pretty sure...NO make that positively sure...

I HAVE AGED POSITIVELY !!!!!!!!!!!!!

The Joy of Being a Senior Citizen

Lorna Shumack

Laurieton

Positive ageing is a wonderful opportunity to express the joys of being a senior citizen and to me the most rewarding of the many things that keep coming my way is that precious thing called, *time*.

There were so many things I wanted to do but I needed time. I raised my two boys and held many exciting jobs during my working career and I have nothing to complain about, but what would I have to look forward to as a senior citizen?

My head could not fathom how I was going to be a fulfilled person in retirement but like I have done all my life, I just decided to simply offer my time to help others. Little did I realise that whenever I gave of myself, it was returned threefold, but of course I have only recognised that in hindsight. My circle of friends grew, my knowledge grew and my confidence developed so far that I was brave to try anything if I was asked to help.

Admittedly, I needed time so I could pace myself as I aged after so many decades of keeping to tight time schedules for starting and finishing working days. Some activities were morning, some afternoon and some middle of the day but time for coffee breaks with friends when we chose. Well that is how it has always been for me anyway. As recently as last week I challenged myself, took a risk, yes, but with that risk brought me the feeling of excitement which I enjoy whenever I decide to try something new.

I enrolled in a CPR refresher course. CPR stands for cardiopulmonary resuscitation which is an emergency life-saving procedure that is done when someone's breathing or heartbeat has stopped. This may happen after an electric shock, heart attack, or drowning. CPR combines rescue breathing and chest compressions. My refresher course went for eight and a half hours. I found it utterly interesting mostly because the course has had numerous changes since I did the last one many years ago.

My groups of friends come from very different walks of life, including those I met when assisting in three separate Information Centres which kept me in touch with the people in the communities in which I volunteered.

Also currently keeping me informed and learning I attend a local computer group whilst learning new technology and enjoying the company.

Loving music, like most of my generation, I am involved in two ukulele groups named Chums, Camden Haven Ukulele Musicians and Z Chords Conservatorium of Music, Mid North Coast, Port Macquarie. There is nothing like music for cheering us up, meeting new faces and going to new places.

How can life be boring? Wow, I just received a text to perform on our ABC radio Station, this coming Thursday. Now to tune up my ukulele!

Another activity I love is gardening, not just the beauty and colour of plants but the edible ones. I take time to taste and compare, discuss and exchange ideas including recipes, with friends. The pleasure I get from eating what I have grown myself is unsurpassable.

As I become more aware of the hours in the day, the importance of family and friends becomes a priority and friendships and family more precious and interesting as I watch the clock go forward.

Life is like driving down the highway, who knows what is around the curve? Take today for instance, I was thrilled to receive my Statement of Attainment from Pulsestart Training Solutions for my CPR refresher session which was an intensely concentrated effort but oh so worthwhile.

I said it before but it is worth saying again, what a joyous time of my life I am living by having been given the opportunity to age so positively.

Retirement, the Start of a New Life

Christine Smith

Goulburn

The time for dreaming of an unfulfilled bucket list was over. My partner, John, and I came to this conclusion after he battled his way through two cancers. Retirement was for living, not dying.

We had travelled overseas a fair amount after retirement, ticking one item off the bucket list of places to visit. We ventured on a three week visit to Canada which included a week's cruise to Alaska. This we did back to back with a river cruise Amsterdam to Budapest and then a further 6 weeks driving around Europe and the UK. On our return to Australia our bucket list began to grow even more, we were getting greedy for more adventures. Finding ourselves asset rich and cash poor, the decision was made to sell the house and look for cheaper housing to fulfil some of our travel wishes. We were not successful in finding our smaller dream home and so started looking further afield from city living. We found a 5-acre block of land just outside a large country town. The block was devoid of any dwellings and had just two bushes. Strange to say we downsized from a suburban block to five acres! Our home sold quickly and for more than we expected and so started our biggest post retirement adventure.

Standing on a cold windy paddock surveying a block of land for a house is not everyone's idea of house building. But if we were to fulfil our dreams, then all the building of the house had to be done by ourselves and to a budget. Our first project was to build an American barn, a third was for living and two thirds for storage of our furniture. We accomplished this without too much trauma and moved in. Family and friends were a little shocked to think that whilst we were in our late 60s we had bitten off a bit much, but gradually saw and appreciated our hard work.

Work is still underway and we have now both turned seventy. People we speak to about our project have difficulty in believing we are doing the work ourselves and not just project managing a builder and tradesmen. The local council building inspector was surprised when presented with our house plans all hand drawn. He hadn't seen the like for a long time. John has an engineering background and understood the building procedures. For me it was a case of learning new skills. We completed the foundations after a few traumas such as heavy rain falls and trenches caving in. What a day of excitement when the slab was finally poured. Walls have now gone up, roof erected, windows in place, nothing to stop us now. We have worked in the rain, wind and heat waves, but at day's end with a glass of red in hand, we can feel satisfied with a good day's work enjoying glorious sunsets and watching the farmer's cows next door. The house is almost completed with three rooms and a garage left to finish, whilst outside the rendering and painting will be completed once the winter weather has passed. We are proud of our efforts so far and more proud that we have passed each building inspection. No longer business suits and briefcases for John or office work clothes and high heels for me, but rather hi-viz, hard hats, and work boots being the order of the day. Whatever happened to smooth hands and nicely shaped nails?

Not only are we building a home for ourselves but have been busy establishing a park like garden, not an easy task to fill 5 acres. Six months prior to selling the home we started a plant nursery in our back garden. We took cuttings and seeds from our own garden as well as from neighbours and friends. These plants became the basis of what we have now established. The shrubs we started growing before moving here have gradually been released from their potting bags and found their way into garden beds and hedges. The trees which mainly started off as twigs stuck in buckets of sand or seeds, have developed and now stand firmly in the ground. Sixty line our long driveway, some of them planted by family and friends to celebrate my 70th birthday. Another forty form an avenue down to our dam. Tree planting by visitors has become a routine activity and a row of trees was planted to celebrate John's 70th birthday. Other species are in groups which when fully grown will look spectacular in their groves. To date we have planted just over 1,050 plants. Not an easy task when you consider the back breaking work to dig holes with an auger and further preparing the ground that has not seen deep moisture for years and has the substance of concrete without any goodness. Kangaroos and Hares have also been a battle. The trees planted mean the bird life has gone from nothing to 31 species. As well the eighteen fruit trees in our orchard have produced good fruit which this year we were able to bottle.

In between building we did take time off to have a few well-earned holidays. Our first deserved break was a three week tour of China and Tibet using the extra cash we received from the sale of our home. Several holidays have since followed including cruises around New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, Hawaii and Asia to name a few. We love cruising and find it the most affordable and relaxing way to travel.

We have also maintained a daily blog which shows the progress of both house and garden. This has been followed closely by friends and family both in Australia and overseas who wait eagerly for each instalment.

Retirement for us has been one long roller coaster ride, hard physical work has kept us healthy, happy and proud. We may not live to see our garden well established but others will benefit by our efforts.

Jennifer Spruce

Bobs Farm

The majestic gums amongst the bracken ferns stood straight and tall as a hint of daylight was breaking.

Briskly walking along the bush track with my companion named Buddy, a Kelpie Cattle-Cross, here and there a wallaby appeared, curiously watching amongst the ferns. Buddy knows they are out-of-bounds and the sand dunes and ocean are our way out through the back of our farm where my son, Julian, a fifth generation farmer, grows the renowned Bob's Farm tomatoes which he calls the *real tomato*.

At the edge of the gums which bordered the magnificent sand dunes we stopped for water and a piece of fruit and sat and took a break before ascending the steep sand dunes. I dug my toes into the sand to gain some momentum to reach the top, where the gale force winds left their mark.

The sun was just appearing over the dunes and I looked down to Stockton Beach – the most breathtaking sight. I looked with wonder at the rolling waves from Birubi Beach to Stockton Breakwater. I still love to catch a wave in at Birubi, although smaller now it still gives me so much pleasure to feel the salt on my skin and the soothing effect of the crush of water surrounding me.

This takes me back to my childhood days at Stockton, home from school, togs on, towel in hand straight over to North Stockton surfing beach. Needless to say, I was out with the big breakers, repeatedly dumped but back in again. No fear at such a young age.

I begin to reflect on why I am ageing positively in my 78th year. Seventy-eight, what a wonder? Such a delight to have had the experiences which have given me the strength to go on and enjoy all the beauty of where I live. To enjoy Mother Earth, who provides us with the joys of life.

I love to put my hands in the soil, a beautiful, rich, sandy loam with all the remarkable minerals which enhance my herb garden. Such a delight. Not forgetting my chillies which never cease to amaze me with their abundance of colours. They inspire me to sketch them on paper, painting their vivid colours – red, yellow, orange and purple.

As I head towards my 79th year, the fingers are bumpy with a touch of osteo but I keep them active, helping my son in his restaurant. I love creating and designing the salads full of colour. I also enjoy chatting to the interesting diners from all walks of life.

I have always wanted to write but there seemed to be too many other things happening, so I am having my first go at it. Reading a good novel is one of my favourite past-times. I have been known, on many occasions, to read through the night to the early hours of the morning until the book is finished.

I love the early history of the White Rose and all this entails. I feel there is a bond there as our ancestors hail from York and further back to the Vikings.

I reached Intermediate standard in my school and have felt many times I would have liked to have furthered my education, but the opportunity, as yet, has never arisen.

Positive ageing – would you say that has to do with appearance? When I look in the mirror and see grey hair or, may be silver, and consistently pluck grey hairs from my chin and eye-brows, and not forgetting my wrinkled neck, I still tell myself what a beautiful, happy, positive woman I am as I hum a tune or two. Not that I can reach the high notes any more but it still gives me so much pleasure to sing my favourite songs. I love live-theatre of any description and don't miss an opportunity to attend and relish the art of theatre.

Each morning I take myself to my 'spiritual' garden which I am creating with treasures from my friend's garden. A red table and two red chairs set under a fig tree with Jade and potted succulents and further landscaping to come. A hammock will have a special place to, perhaps, read a good book or take a gentle snooze. As I build this, this is where I meditate as the little wrens flit about and kookaburras in the pines let forth with their raucous laughter.

Yoga has come into my life and with just a little help I get up and down from the mat. The stretching is wonderful, especially for my long legs as well as the peace which is all inspiring.

My little 'Casablanca' is my caravan haven where my little black cat, Miss Sooty Spruce with her airs and graces, greets me every time I return home.

As I look back and reflect on these years, I feel such joy, knowing that love has given me the strength to age positively.

The Keeper of Memories

Robyn Squire

Wangi Wangi

I came to this country from China. Since then I have felt apart, frequently confused and homesick. My daughter has been often kind, often irritated and very often flummoxed with me. When I was still in China she missed me very much and wanted the children to have their grandmother around.

So now I live in a small house in their backyard called a granny flat. She has explained that I am a granny or grandmother in this country. I do not like these words. I am *wai po*, maternal grandmother. When I first arrived and they showed me the tiny house with the electric stove, television and warm floor I felt sad that I was not welcome into their house and did not want to stay in a place where I did not feel honoured. The children do not want to watch my television: it is too small. They do not want to play there: I do not have a Wii. I have asked many times about this thing but their explanation of a Wii confuses me. They have told me never to mention this when we are out.

My son-in-law has made much of my efforts to grow vegetables in the tiny garden but I often feel that they are not necessary. Sometimes, too, my daughter will say, exasperated, that she does not feel like having my vegetables that evening; that she has brought what she wants from the supermarket. I do not like waste so I cook my vegetables for lunch or pass them over the fence to the neighbour, whom I do not understand and who often appear confused. But they smile. It's enough.

The English language is difficult to learn and my age does not help, my daughter tells me. I must practise, she says, 'Start small. Say "hello, how are you?" and they will say, "Good thanks. How are you?" and I am to say, "Good, thank you."! She has explained that this is not an invitation to describe everything or in fact, anything in my life but just a polite greeting. Most people don't really care how you are, she says. Maybe it will lead to friendship. Often people stare at me even after I say it many times.

The children try to teach me English words all the time and usually they don't understand me when I speak to them in Chinese. My daughter tells them they must practise their Chinese with their grandmother, their *wai po*. The older children, eleven and nine, have little patience and very little time in any case. They both attend piano and violin lessons as well as swimming after school and on weekends. The younger child, Grace, now five, likes to play checkers with me and draw so we speak a little Chinese then. She is much improved. I think she loves her *wai po*. From next week I will take little Grace to school and pick her up every day.

When I cook the family dinner, a task I do increasingly, lately, the children are often very quiet and whisper to each other. Grace spits her food into her hand and runs off to the toilet. They eat so much bread which they take to school every day with something between the slices. My daughter says this is simply convenient and what the kids do here. When I made them dumplings to take instead they complained to my daughter. She did not show her respect for me but opted instead, to support the children in banning the dumplings from the lunchboxes. The children were teased, she said. I use too much garlic and sauce on the pork, I'm told.

At the supermarket things are still strange.
I grew up eating pork and, on occasion, dog.
My daughter has warned that I must never mention
eating dog in this country. For noodles, my daughter
takes me to an, Asian grocer. Now I take the bus by
myself to the Asian grocer. The smells there bring
back all my memories.

At the Asian grocer the kind lady told me to
preserve my memories. "Write them down," she
said. "Buy brushes to practise your artful writing.
Don't let any of your skills or life memories die."
At first, I stumbled and the artful writing was
without elegance. I again felt strange in this strange
land with my foreignness and my different skills.
The children slowly became fascinated as the writing
began to dance and flow across the large sheets of
paper. They try to copy the actions but they are too
tight in themselves, too set in their square letters of
the English alphabet.

For many months now I've practised my artful
writing and written my stories. My memories,
both terrible and wonderful come to me constantly
and I recall the barren, mountainous countryside
I was sent to during the Cultural Revolution, the
home that was gone when I returned to Shanghai
and my final posting as a teacher to an area near
Xian, where I met and lived with my husband for
twenty-five years before his sudden death. My
beautiful daughter, Ling Ling, went to Australia to
study and decided to stay. Then quiet retirement
and loneliness. My hand moves almost automatically
as I write my stories down. Sometimes I select a
story to tell to Grace in my mixed Chinese English.

My Cantonese and Mandarin dialects will stay alive
in my artful writing or calligraphy as they say here.

I am old and getting older. I see now that it is my job
to remember and record my amazing life and that of
my child and grandchildren. As the years go by and
the stories add up, I will be more and more useful.

As I have kept my memories safe so will I keep safe
the memories of my family. Because I am the keeper
of memories.

She Could Have Danced

Margaret Steinberger

Hamilton South

It's getting worse, Sally admitted to herself. Movements perceived in the periphery of her vision was more destabilising, more irritating. Thank goodness I'm sitting down, she thought. At least I'm still upright and can concentrate on the show.

Sitting in the theatre, carried away by the spectacle of the familiar musical before her eyes, she had been several times momentarily distracted by the movement. Nothing major, just noticeable, she told herself. She turned slightly and noted that the person providing the distraction was a girl, a very young girl in fact. She probably belonged to the woman sitting between them.

Sally found her attention was turning again towards the young girl, this time quite willingly. For what she could see was an eagerness to experience it all, a desire to catch every word, to see every action on the busy stage. The girl was fairly squirming with involvement. At one stage she turned to her mother with eyes that could only be described as shining.

Sally was torn three ways. On stage was the long-awaited performance of *My Fair Lady*, lavishly styled and big-budget, delivered with the panache, high production values and glorious song-making that were the hallmarks of the opera company's presentations. Nearby was a young girl, visibly entranced by what was happening before their eyes. And her own thoughts kept slipping back almost 60 years. Focus, Sally, she thought. One thing at a time.

Some of her opera-going companions had expressed surprise at her keenness to include the musical in her subscription list. She was a latecomer to opera; music and theatre had long meant much to her, but opera didn't appeal, a fact she found strange, for what was opera but musical theatre? As a newcomer she was still feeling her way, still trying to balance the desire to catch up on the tried-and-true classics and the experience of the delicious shock of the new. Not everything was successful or pleased her, and her understanding of why that was so was increasing. She knew *My Fair Lady* was a cash cow, the lighter, more popular fare which would bring in the crowds and provide funds that would offset the more risky costs of other repertoire. Many of the other, more experienced opera-goers in their group had clearly given no thought to it – choices, choices; it always came down to choices. But it had actually been the first one placed on her list.

A few people knew the story; it was unremarkable as a piece of memoir, but meant so much to her. As a nine – or ten-year – annoyingly, she couldn't remember which – she had holidayed with her family down south. It was one of their caravanning holidays, times designed to give the two girls experience of their country. Three times they had travelled thus, in a tiny borrowed caravan that had seemed quite well-appointed in the less demanding '50s and '60s. No doubt even then her parents had found it cramped and restricting, but it was what everyone was used to – and to the sisters, it was all rather thrilling.

For months beforehand, they had been aware that something was afoot. They couldn't have put it into words, but something was stirring. There were secrets in the household, secrets that somehow involved them, because it was clearly so important that their parents not let on what was happening. Then came the clincher: they were to take their best dresses on the holiday. This was definitely strange; while they often included visits to members of both parents' families that they had never met before, usually it was enough that they wore clean and relatively tidy versions of their usual knockabout travelling clothes.

Finally in Melbourne all had been revealed: they were to go to the theatre, a first for Sally. And so she was present at one of the first performances of *My Fair Lady* in Australia. And her life had changed; even as a nine – or ten-year-old she knew her life had changed. She didn't know how or why, but she knew it. She had been seized by the awesome power of theatre to entrance, to engage, transport and involve.

At that age she didn't know what to do about it. Indeed it took the shy and awkward girl a while to find out that she was to be no practitioner, but a searching and involved audience member. As she grew she had taken any opportunity – and they were few in her area and all amateur-based – to experience theatre, particularly musical theatre. As a teenager, she and friends would assert their growing independence by going to professional performances, and gradually she saw more. Adult life and travel had greatly broadened her repertoire, and she gained great joy in introducing others to the delights of live performance.

And here she was, having set herself up to be highly disappointed with the reliving of the experience – could any performance possibly carry the weight of her expectations? But this presentation lived up to her hopes, and more.

Wrenching her thoughts back to the stage, she was startled as a wave of applause erupted in the hall. It was half time; rather than follow her companions for the break, she would sit and quietly contemplate, she thought.

But then her attention was captured again by a disturbance of her peripheral vision. The little girl had turned to her mother, and breathed in hushed, rapturous tones, 'That was amazing!'

Sally struck up a conversation, learning that the little girl was seven. She shared her story with them, realising how lame it sounded. She reflected that, if it was the little girl's first theatrical experience, she had been given a life-changing experience; it was up to her what she did with it in the future.

Sally felt free to settle in and enjoy the second half. She was exultant – she had looked into a little girl's eyes and seen herself.

Never Give Up

Diane Switzer

Warrawee

My father, I believe, is one of the greatest examples of positive ageing as he has such a confident attitude, keeps fit to the best of his ability, is willing to give it a go and through sheer determination and hard work, has reached the ripe old age of 100.

Dad was born in Sydney, although his parents spent a lot of time at their property in Yass. His school life was spent in Sydney but owing to sickness, he left early in his middle teens, as he could never catch up with the schoolwork. He went onto an agricultural college where he learnt the basic fundamentals of farming. After six months of college he departed and travelled to Bourke to jackaroo on a number of large properties. The work was hard and tough out in the Australian sun and the harsh weather conditions, but he accomplished the tasks set for him.

With the onset of World War II, Dad joined the army and set sail for the Middle East. He was determined to survive, even though it was a dangerous location. He endured the unforgiving and challenging conditions of Syria and environs, and finally his regiment left the area to sail back to Australia. Upon arriving home, they were once again shipped off, this time to New Guinea, where fortunately the war was nearing completion.

Once back in Australia the end of the war saw him having a fresh start on a rundown property in the central west of New South Wales with his new bride. The acreage was swamped by rabbits and with hard work digging up burrows and poisoning, the rabbit population died down. Crops were cultivated; sheep and cattle were grown for food. Any life on a property is difficult owing to the inclement weather conditions, one minute too much rain, the next, no rain at all.

There is more to farming than just waiting until the lambs or calves grow big enough for the market. Sheep have to be shorn, dipped, drenched and the constant watch of crows when tiny lambs are born. It is continuous work and never stops from dawn to dusk. Paddocks have to be cleared, ploughed and the seed planted, then stripped and bagged or baled. It is never ending and hard to make a living. Dad was always trying out new ideas just to get ahead and make a better life for his family.

As he grew older, he semi-retired and not wanting to stop altogether, he bought a much smaller property and kept some cattle, which gave him an interest. He took up golf as he was no longer getting all the exercise he wanted. He did not stop though but kept busy with routine activities. Dad joined a gentle exercise class with men similar to his own age, although quite a bit younger. He has made good friends at the class where they have helped him mentally and kept him committed. He encourages the others to try harder and keeps them optimistic in their efforts.

To keep his mind active, he bought an iPad when he was well into his late 80's and took up a mind game program called Luminosity. It actually stretches the imagination and makes you think mathematically, logically and benefits the memory with concentration games aimed at his level or whoever is the participant. He is always determined to beat his previous score. He has shown other people this program, trying to talk them into 'having a go' to encourage their mental outlooks. Due to a war injury, Dad's balance is not good and last year he broke his hip badly and spent nearly a month in hospital. He was so determined to get home, he started physio as soon as he was well enough. Through sheer willpower and a strong attitude to get back to his exercise class and his mates, he endeavoured not to give up with his daily routine of exercising and keeping fit. He is now working out with them again, even though he has slowed down considerably. This has not stopped him even with his progression to a walking stick and a wheelie walker, he refuses to miss a class. My father has never given up hope after losing three wives and two children. He continues to strive the best way he knows how. He is an inspiration to all generations and has survived to his age because of his positive attitude and his 'get up and go' approach.

Not Yet Forgotten

Margaret Symonds

Moss Vale

Teachers expect they will be forgotten by their students the moment the young have wiped school from the soles of their shoes, but sometimes...

I will call him 'Hamish', not his real name but Scottish, appropriate for this story.

In the early sixties he would have been about sixteen, I was ten years his senior. I had been transferred from the Riverina to a high school in the Tablelands; Hamish was in my Fifth Year History class, intending to do Honours for the Leaving Certificate. I didn't feel qualified to tutor him at that level, my major areas of University study having been English and French, but I had been advised to study some History as well. 'They'll want an English/History teacher, dear, or French/German/Latin, but *not* English and French combined.'

Hamish, however, didn't seem to find me a problem; we had a lot of interests in common – the French language, music and, above all, all things Scottish. Each with a Scots background and each raised as a Presbyterian, we took part in the activities of the church youth association – especially the ceilidh dancing, both hopeful that one day we could visit the land of our ancestors.

At the end of that year we went our separate ways, Hamish pursuing his study of History, I teaching and occasionally doing some writing. Our paths were to cross once or twice in the coming years, during which we both married and divorced then married again.

In 1995 my husband and I visited parts of Scotland on an organised tour. We saw the usual tourist attractions then continued on to the areas I'd always wanted to visit, in which I hoped I might feel some communion with the ancient and the mystical, an aspect of human existence which has always fascinated me. Like many tourists I felt 'shiverings' at Culloden but in the Orkneys, and at the Scara Brae Neolithic village, I was aware of a powerful change in the ambient atmosphere. At the Ring of Brogar and other henges I embraced some of the gigantic standing stones, joining any ancestors who might have linked in a similar way with whatever spirits might once have inhabited those monoliths. I found this strangely thrilling, satisfying, a completion of a life search, a destination.

Hamish was to reveal later that he had had the same experiences.

Travelling further, I knew that I was now in a part of Scotland where the mysticism of pre-Christian times was still potent and apparent, as at Stornaway in the Outer Hebrides. I remarked casually to my husband that, at the time of my birth, the street I lived in had been named Stornaway Road; I had always treasured that initial, albeit tenuous, almost amusing, connection with my Scottish ancestors, unaware that the place name would one day be oddly significant for me.

Ten years later my husband died; now living in the Southern Highlands, I received a surprise call one night from Hamish. Identifying himself as my 'favourite pupil', he was happy to hear about my personal writing successes, then proceeded to tell me of his own literary and academic output since we had last met, including the fact that he had written and published some short stories and had completed a novel, which was to be the first of a trilogy, and to be in print the following year. I learned that he had pursued his interest in history, teaching at the tertiary level and doing research for his private writing; in addition he had spent time living in France, studying the language, both ancient and modern, in preparation for the writing of a fourth novel.

You can imagine the *frisson* I felt on finding that the trilogy novels concern a powerful wizard from Stornaway, one who inhabited henges throughout and beyond the twentieth century, who was 'steeped in the ancient mysteries of Gaelic lore' and who fought 'Dark Powers'. They captured my interest from the start because of the Stornaway connection, as well as the involvement in the mystic aspects of human life. They take the world through a momentous and credible, though fictitious, crisis to a resolution which is a major challenge to those few who survive.

Recently, Hamish sent me a draft copy of his yet-to-be-published fourth novel. In this book, the Stornaway wizard appears only briefly, but long enough to ensure a clever *segué* from the previous novels and their theme of ultimate Goodness. Otherwise, the book is a completely separate narrative, but still embodying the search for Truth. All four books are extremely readable, combining historical fact and fiction with scientific and mythological fiction.

Over the years I, also, have been writing and have published a novel and a book of shorter pieces – stories, poetry, plays and memoirs – a third common interest between the former teacher and former pupil. After fifty-six years he still shares his work with me. Ageing, he has made a contribution to literature, historical research and scholarship; ageing, and with my own achievements, I have been invited to enjoy *his* achievements as well, in the story of the parallel development of our two lives and of our friendship.

All people want to feel valued, to belong *somewhere* and to *someone*, rather than be gym junkie isolated. Looking back, I rejoice that I belong, admittedly in different ways, to my Scottish ancestors, to Australia, to my descendants, and, in a sense, to those I have taught. For about thirty-five years I endeavoured to do the best I could for my pupils: I am gratified that at least one pupil valued me to the extent that Hamish has done.

Few exciting things (other than delighting in my first great-grandchild) happen in my present day-to-day life so I frequently revisit my memories; surprise real-life encounters such as the recent chat with Hamish assure me that ageing is still, for me, at age eighty-two, a positive experience.

I have long retired from the classroom but thankfully I am not yet forgotten.

I'm Running Away

Franki Thompson

Gwynneville

You could have heard a pin drop. The silence was deafening. Compared to the usual chatter, which was often described as canaries in an aviary, the sudden quiet drew everyone's attention. All heads turned to our table and the curiosity of the coffee drinkers was obvious.

"What did you say, Ella, I thought you said you joined the circus?" this said with a chuckle from Beth, "What did you actually say?"

Beth leaned forward, causing Kelly and Maureen, to squash closer. Our Friday 'tribe' meeting was often unruly with several people speaking at the same time. So it was very unusual for one of us to be the centre of attention.

Our regular get-togethers varied from eight to twelve women, with the occasional add on when female friends or relatives were visiting. We each, for many different reasons, had come to cherish and be very protective of our weekly gatherings. They were a priority in our separate lives. We acknowledged our love and devotion to our families, but this was our time.

Two hours every Friday, in the middle of the bustling market place, we meet, baskets and bags bulging with the fresh bounty the local farmers offered. We sit, outside if the sun is shining and the breeze is kind, or cosily ensconced in comfy chairs in the depths of the coffee house if the cold sets in, and we bring our knitting, 'finishing' some multi coloured article for a lucky recipient – usually a grandchild, who we know will never be caught dead in it! That fact never dimmed enthusiasm for our efforts.

We arrange our shopping around our feet and proceed to catch up on the happenings of the previous week, the excitements of the coming week, and arrange little interludes in between to suit our different interests and time available. There was always something happening – a great new book to be shared around; a just released movie that would satisfy, three of us earnestly trying to learn French with very mixed results; the landmark moments in our families, new babies born to our children, and confirmation days; a new exercise class that promised to 'turn back time' (that one caused much merriment as we began to compete as to how far back we really wanted to go!); holidays planned and discussed with many recommendations; these things and more were the topics that went round and round the table with frequent interjections and much laughter.

The most appealing aspect of our connection is the unstinting support we offer each other, both moral and practical. If any of us need anything, there is always someone in the group that has just the thing to lend, or give, to get us through the tricky patch. Yes, our little group is an amazing collection of women who live busy and interesting lives and squeeze every bit of joy and happiness from each day. Our Friday gathering has become a time of friendship and fun. It is only missed by any one of us through the most dire of circumstances or of course the happiest of events when one, or a couple of us, take time out to holiday, travel or some other pursuit.

To have the chatter come to a sudden standstill was disconcerting to say the least. Beth looked me in the eye and repeated "Did you say circus or circuit at the gym?"

That brought a smile to my lips, "Well I guess I could do with a few more circuits at the gym, because yes, I did say circus." All eyes were on me now, the curiosity and disbelief, tangible.

"Explain yourself," Kath demanded. Always one to get straight to the heart of the matter Kath wanted details. Obliging her and satisfying the curiosity of the others I shared my story.

It was February this year, and I was having brekkie on the verandah, checking my emails. Having finishing that, I decided to have a quick look at Facebook to keep up with the doings of distant family and friends. I came across an advertisement asking women to join the circus. It said there were no barriers to participation other than you had to be over eighteen."

This piece of information caused some sniggers and muttered comments of 'Yeh, just' and 'and some'.

Ignoring the interjections I continued, 'I always wanted to run away and join the circus, but life didn't work out like that.'

Again some mutterings, 'Yes, kids, work, hubby!'

I continued, 'So I read the ad and started to daydream about spangled costumes, flying through the air on a trapeze, and all sorts of exciting adventures. Coming back to earth with a thump I read that they were looking for women to learn hula hoops, fire breathing, trapeze, tight wire, rolling, tumbling, and so many other circus tricks. Yes, all very glamorous but the reality of a seventy-year-old body made me sigh and reach for my cup of coffee. I almost had the cup to my lips when I spotted a small extra piece at the end that was calling for women to join the newly formed circus choir. I paused, and thought, well maybe no spangled costume but I definitely loved singing. A little nervously I put the feelers out and to cut a long story short, I have joined the Circus choir, and we have rehearsed, and have put on two shows backing the rest of the crew who do all those wonderful circus things.'

I sat back with a grin on my face remembering those exciting shows. Shows that held all the magic and glamour of my imaginings of a circus. There was a stunned silence and then the questions poured out – "What do you wear?"

"What do you have to do?"

"Are there any other old ladies in the circus?"

"Can I join?"

Oh, and yes ... spangles are definitely encouraged!

Coffee with Sarah

Walter Van Hoorn

Port Macquarie

After I parked my car, I walk up the path leading to the main entrance of the Home, where my mother has lived for the last couple of years. A nice looking three-storey building with big glass windows, overlooks a small lake, to the right-hand side of the path.

I liked the lake, its lilies with big yellow-white flowers and its reed-covered banks, and the group of trees and bushes in the background forming a serene impression. The birds and insects bring all this to life and the fragrance of the different types of flowers just made it irresistible.

I moved along the wide corridor, after entering the building, with its light and dark blue carpet and glanced at the nice paintings hanging on the walls, to the equally pleasing lounge where I usually meet my mum. I stared out through the sun-filled windows towards the lake, just to enjoy that view, before I looked to the comfortable arm-chair, always occupied by her.

But no Mum!!

Shocked, I searched around to see if she might be somewhere else. She is nowhere to be seen!

Standing there, somewhat bewildered, I heard this well-spoken voice behind me asking: "Can I help you? Are you looking for someone?"

Surprised I swung around, to find myself staring into two bright brown eyes in a friendly laughing face of an elderly lady, who had escaped my attention when I walked into this spacious lounge, absorbed as I was with the view through the enormous windows.

She wore an elegant dress with matching jewellery, a short cropped hairdo and a pleasant perfume. Her good-looks and healthy features needed little make up.

"Yes, I certainly hope so, I'm looking for my mother, Leone. Do you know where she could be?"

"Didn't they call you, she was taken to the hospital early this morning and eh ... you must be Johan, right? I recognised your Dutch accent immediately. Well, I'm Sarah, your mother is my dearest friend. I'm pleased to meet you at long last, as she's always talking about you."

"Hopefully not all the bad stuff," I said with a wink, shaking her outstretched hand gently, "And I am pleased to meet you too,"

"Oh, no, no, only nice things, she tells everybody who cares to listen."

I had not received a call, because I was away for my work and didn't tell the Home about it, as Mum was scheduled for treatment only next week. They must have forwarded her case.

Sarah excused herself and called a volunteer, who was just passing by, pushing a tea trolley, "Nelly, please give a cup of coffee to Johan here, thanks dear. You have your coffee first Johan, before you start dashing off to the hospital, it's too early for visiting anyway."

"I might give the hospital a call first, to see how things are, before I travel all the way to find her still under narcosis. By the way, I can't remember seeing you here before," I said, after receiving the cup of coffee from Nelly and thanking her.

"Is it not unusual," Sarah said, "while you visit your mother in here, I visit my son at his home on Saturday afternoons. He's away right now, that's why I'm here today."

"So, you and my mum met here?"

"Oh, yes, we play cards together and Bingo. And we quite often go for a walk in the park or do some shopping in the supermarket."

By now I was wondering how old this girl would be, and said, "I know it's not decent to ask a lady for her age, but ..."

"I'm really proud of my age," interrupted Sarah, "I'm eighty-three."

"Wow," I said, "And you still walk pretty good, heh? My mum is a good walker too, but she is a few years younger than you, being only, let me see now ... yes, seventy-six."

"I can't really complain, the doctor says I'm very fit for my age."

In the meantime enjoying my coffee, I asked Sarah what else kept her occupied during the day.

"We have many activities: books, newspapers and magazines naturally, crossword puzzles, other games, dance lessons, table tennis, snooker, lawn bowls, gym and we have the telly of course." Johan thinks, not bad!

"About twice a month we have a variety of entertainers like, magicians, choirs, comedians, singers and dancers and lots of music, usually in the evenings."

Sarah moved towards me and whispered, "I used to go bush walking and line dancing once a week, but that's in the past now. Bush walking, I really loved it, but it becomes a bit too much lately and the line dancing group lost its teacher, so that was the end of that."

She smiled, I thought she was reminiscing on the 'good old days' but, while she put her hand on my arm, she asked: "Did Leone tell you, that we will start playing Bridge? No ... she didn't?"

In a few weeks we will have the first lesson and she should be recovered from the operation by then. We're both looking forward to it."

"Well, well," I said, "Bridge, the Queen of Card games! It's not easy you know."

"Ah, that really doesn't matter, if it is too difficult for us, we can always drop out, but I have a good feeling about it, you see, we already play Canasta and 500. But she must have told you about our monthly excursions, surely?"

"She mentioned it only once, because it was on a Saturday, so I didn't have to visit her that day, but you say, it's on every month?"

"Oh, yes, once a month by coach from 8 in the morning till 8 at night, with morning tea, lunch and dinner in some beautiful and interesting spot, always very enjoyable."

"I'm really impressed with such energy," I remarked full of admiration, "I didn't realise that my mum was so active, she never said much about it. Gosh, that sounds very exciting, can I come too?" I asked her jokingly.

But she took it seriously and said pensively: "That would be great, but I'm sure the bus is always full, one has to be quick to book, otherwise you miss out."

I told her not to worry, I was only pulling her leg and as I finished my drink, I was ready to depart. "I have to call the hospital about Mum, hoping that all is well," I explained.

Getting up from my comfy chair I shook hands with Sarah, thanked her for the nice cup of coffee and the interesting talk and left.

Walking back to my car, not even noticing the beautiful lake and surroundings this time, I realised that the highly spirited Sarah, was without a doubt the best example of what in general is called positive ageing.

Kindee Bridge

Barbara Orlowska-Westwood

Port Macquarie

'You should write something for this competition', my friend said at the writer's meeting.

I shrugged my shoulders, 'I don't know.' I hesitated. 'I'd like to enter it but as you heard, the prose or poem needs to be based on local history. I, as a newcomer to this area, don't know anything about the history of this region.'

On the way home, my thoughts went back to the competition. It was a challenge and all my life I've liked challenges. What were my chances of finding something I could write about? I'd been here just over a year. The places, which meant something to the local people living in this area for many years, couldn't trigger anything for me.

But the thought about competition like a motif in a piece of music was coming back into my mind. Then, one day, I remembered a photograph of my husband Bill on the Kindee bridge. My friend had taken the photo when she went with Bill for a drive to show him the wooden structure. As a retired engineer he was interested in seeing this surviving suspension bridge.

Suddenly I felt excited. I opened my iPad, scrolled through the photos and there it was, the Kindee bridge spanning the banks of the Hastings River and Bill, a man of eighty-four, standing atop on the bridge. Both old and yet still living, functioning.

In the next few days that image filled my brain. I looked at the photo again and again until one day I felt a twinge, a spark of creative thought. Like a seedling breaking through the soil showing its first leaf, the poem started to take shape in my head. It would be about an old, unique bridge, the last of its kind in NSW and the old man, unique as an individual, the last in his family's generation. Both, the bridge and the man had been a miniscule part of life, as such. But it was a long way from the idea to the poem on the page.

The other members of my writing group had already finished their projects or were well advanced in their tasks. I was still thinking about mine. A week later looking again at the photo, I wrote the first line:

A man stands on the bridge

Then I stopped. What now? I needed images, similes and metaphors. They should apply to the bridge as well as to the man. It was supposed to be poetry not prose. After a few minutes I typed a few more lines.

*he leans on the rail
his hair grey as the wood
face leathered by sun, rain and wind
like the bridge, he is the oldest in his family
remembers...*

I stopped again. What could the old man on the bridge remember today from the past here, in this area? It had to be something historically true and significant, something that was related to the bridge, or passing over it.

I read online about the bridge and the region and learnt more about timber logging and wool shipping from Port Macquarie. Bullock teams were used to transport those commodities from the inland to the port. I liked the word 'bullocks', but could my man remember the bullocks? How old did he need to be now? I smiled to myself, he couldn't be over 100 years old, unless the bullocks had disappeared late, when he was still a child. Was it possible? Again, I looked online but there was no detailed information about bullocks in the Camden area. I saved my draft and called my local friend from Wauchope. She knew almost everyone around here. I asked her who could give me that information. Helpful as always, she told me the name of a man from the Historical Society in Wauchope.

The next day I called him. I thought, it must have sounded a bit silly when I told him, I was trying to write a poem about the Kindee bridge and I wanted to know about the history of bullock teams. According to him, the bullocks disappeared in 1941. Until then they were still working hard because of the war and the shortage of petrol for the heavy trucks. I said thank you to the man at the other end of a line and put down the receiver. Hurrah, I said to myself. My man still could remember the bullocks and be alive today.

From that moment it was just writing and rewriting those lines, looking for the precise nouns and verbs and getting rid of the unnecessary words. The poem was getting shorter and shorter but also tighter. When I was rewriting it, I had in my mind an image of a sculptor chiselling off superfluous layers of stone until what was left was true to his intended idea. After another two weeks most of the poem was on the page. I still didn't have the ending. It was an observation poem and as such needed to end with a summary, a general idea.

It took me another two weeks to find the right words to express my thought. But finally, it was finished. Just in time before the close of the competition.

At the launch of the anthology I was nicely surprised to learn that my Kindee bridge³ poem was highly commended. When I was collecting the certificate, I felt as if I belonged and Port Macquarie had now become my place.

Poem: inspired by a photograph of a man on the Kindee Bridge

A man stands on the bridge
alone, his hair grey
as the wood of the rail he leans on,
his face leathered
by sun, wind and rain,
above him the trusses
criss-cross the sky.
Like the bridge he is the oldest
in his family – remembers
the bullock drays, pack horses.
No one has kept the record of his daily life
no one knows how many people and carriages
passed over the bridge
yet
the man and the bridge
have been integrant parts
in the wheel of life.

3 Kindee Bridge was inspired by a photograph and a poem of an historical bridge in NSW

The Heart of an Ageing Volunteer

Eunice Whitmore

Castle Hill

For fifteen years I have lived happily in a retirement village where I have met and listened to amazing stories of lives lived. As I joined others in volunteering pursuits it occurred to me that, like me, maybe some of them were influenced by their school-teachers, pastors, or maybe it was just the way they had been raised.

In 1960, my husband and I, with a small son emigrated to Australia into a very different climate, in more ways than one. Scorching temperatures, sandy beaches with breath-taking views to replace the below zero temperatures of winter in London, accompanied by drenching rain.

When you have a sea-faring adventurous father who tugs and tempts his family with exciting tales of his travels into faraway places-experienced as a young lad so many years before, your emotions and sense of adventure are challenged. He never gave up on his dreams and succeeded in enticing 3 out of 4 married couples, to follow him to Australia. He stoically waited for WW2 to end. No regrets!

The war-time and post-war education equipped me well for the life I was to encounter. School days were a trial, until, on a special sports day, a teacher grabbed me and literally pushed me into a race with no time for excuses. As I sprinted my section of the relay, I had, what I have always called, (since the 2000 Olympic Games,) a *Cathy Freeman* moment when my feet grew wings as I overtook the field. What a feat! No longer was I the insignificant dot on the landscape from my teacher's perspective! I had beguiled my teacher as well as the opposition.

As a teacher in my chosen profession of Physical Education, I valued every single child whatever skills they offered. I only had my sporting prowess, but it sure took me places. I was keen to convert those years of study into something more practical.

After that life-changing event I began to love school and took great pride in the School House System where we were encouraged to emulate the lives and achievements of virtuous heroes, some of whom were – Jane Austen, Grace Darling, Queen Boadicea, Madame Curie, Helen Keller, Florence Nightingale. There were no film-star icons or pop singers, no sporting heroes, oh well, maybe a Stanley Matthews or two!! Apart from being encouraged to aspire to these selfless heroes, we were also encouraged to help whenever possible like when 3rd formers had an 'H' sewn on their tunics to depict that they were to befriend and assist the new first-formers to settle in to the rather frightening Secondary school system.

Community service started at an early age. We may not have been aware of the ramifications back then, but I have come to believe that the heart of a volunteer may be born when the school curriculum encourages these actions within its students.

I had completed 3 years full-time study – away from home after the war and there were many Military personnel who, with their families needed help. One of my first assignments was to rehabilitate limbless servicemen.

In the high schools P.E. was a compulsory subject rated highly in the curriculum and rarely did we see any overweight students. Posture and Deportment was paramount.

I had time to accomplish some personal goals before embarking on marriage and then later coming to Australia.

After my 3rd child turned 5, I resumed my career of teaching but chose to teach children with Special Needs. I had come a long way since the days of elite athletes. Living in North Rocks I was drawn to take a position at the Institute for Deaf and Blind children, first with hearing-impaired, then both sight-impaired and deaf/blind children. I was there for a space of 8 years before being offered a position to be with Blind Multi-handicapped children.

This was to be the first school of its kind in the southern hemisphere and was to be built at the North Rocks campus. I was to be part of a 4 staff team to pilot this project for 12 children from all over the State of NSW. Without this facility these children had never had the advantage of rehabilitation programmes and a challenge lay ahead, both for them and me. What an incredible fulfilling part of my career. The children improved in leaps and bounds as they were stimulated by equipment made by a group of Rotarian volunteers. I only had to mention a child's need and these dedicated men would do all in their power to create something extraordinary for them.

As I mentioned earlier I made the excellent decision to move into a retirement village and 15 years later I consider I am truly blessed to have met so many friends from all walks of life, many of whom volunteer daily to give quality and meaning to the lives of others less able than themselves.

I have accepted many changes as I have aged but the physical ones are the hardest – no more acute hearing or eyesight – and I would love to have the energy I had 10 years, even 5 years ago. However, I have come to believe that there is still value in just chatting to another solitary person or even writing a story as I am doing now.

One thing never changes though. It is the warm-hearted, dedicated, generous staff who come from around the globe to care for us as we age. Not only the staff, but the many volunteers who are blessed with generous hearts.

We salute them all.

Slow Walks and Post-Polio Syndrome

Alpheus Williams

Red Rock

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour
William Blake, Auguries of Innocence*

People wear knit caps, coats and scarves, steam puffs from lips as they trickle back towards the parking lot to the bus. On the dunes coastal spinifex shimmies with the onshore wind, long white lacy growth wafts like witches' hair. Connie, the park ranger, watches from the large window overlooking the boardwalk that zigzags out for more than half a kilometre down to the shore of Seal Bay. From the window she can see patches of vibrant coloured wildflowers growing close to the ground sheltered from the wind; wattle, bottle-brush, gum, grevillea and banksia. It is their time to bloom, grace and colour, strutting their stuff and showing off. They herald on the onset of spring but most of the tourists have come to see the seals and sea lions. The sky is soft and pillowy with grey blue clouds lifting and drifting away. The wind carries the barks of the seals and sea lions from the beach half a kilometre away and the sky is beginning to clear. The seals have whelped. The small liquid eyed pups shelter behind the dunes waiting for their mothers to return from the hunt.

The tour bus leader is rounding up the last of his passengers. The driver turns the ignition. The heavy thrum of the engine, a clarion call for straggling tourist to pick up their pace and board. The tour leader opens the door to the National Parks Shop and checks for stragglers. The shop has emptied.

"All gone," says Connie. The tour guide, smiles gives her a thumbs up.

An elderly woman enters. Her arms are wrapped around herself. Her face flushed with chill. She and her husband were the first to enter the park this morning a few hours ago.

"Phew. Cold!"

"You've been out there for a while," says Connie, "did you enjoy it?"

"Beautiful! That boardwalk is just wonderful. My husband's in his element. Can't tear him away. I'm waiting here where it's warmer."

Connie and the woman stand before the picture window. Their shoulders almost touch. A man with forearm crutches and camera appears on the boardwalk from where it was obscured by a dune. He stops looks over the safety rail where dunes rise to eye level, leans forward, and lines up his camera.

"What's he doing?" asks Connie.

The woman squints through the window. "Who knows? Whatever it is I'm sure it will show up in his camera. We've been here for less than a week and he's taken hundreds of photos. A wildflower, driftwood, a rock, a bee deep inside a flower petal, spider's web, a single bird feather. Things he sees that most of us don't."

"What does he do with them?"

"Stores them on his computer."

Connie smiles. Turns her head slightly.

"I know," says the woman, "weird, huh? He says it's about learning how to look at things."

The man stops again, lines up another shot. Connie and the woman face each other and smile. Connie likes her. The man looks up and sees them watching. He waves, his forearm crutch dangles from his upraised arm like a pendulum. Connie and the woman wave back.

"Wow! It must take a long time," says Connie.

The woman shrugs. "He's a polio survivor. The crutches protect him from falls. He only started using them a few years back."

"Polio?" asks Connie.

"Yeah. Young people don't know much about it anymore. Polio was a big thing before the vaccine. A children's disease. Sam got it as a baby, left him with a limp and a damaged leg but it didn't get him down. He led an active life. Skin-dived, fished, hiked, and camped. A few years back he was hit with post-polio symptoms. Pain, falls, fatigue. Times when he didn't want to get out of bed because he knew it would hurt."

"That's terrible," said Connie and she meant it.

"Wasn't nice. His GP didn't know what was wrong and neither did the neurologist. We researched it ourselves, internet, wrote letters and found it was post-polio and there wasn't a hell of a lot he could do about it. The more he fought it the worse it would get. The wrong kind of exercise would be like mass murder of nerve cells."

"What did you do?" asked Connie.

The woman shakes her head. "I was worried. Afraid it would get him down. He'd always been a fighter but now fighting was dangerous, would make it worse. He fretted. Said what was he supposed to do sit on his derrière and wait to die?"

"He looks happy enough now," said Connie.

"Sam does things differently. He says when you slow down, see things, think on things, immerse yourself in their beauty, celebrate them, it opens up a whole new world. His only regret is that he wishes he learned to do it earlier. He calls them slow walks and they taught him about what was really important."

"Well," says Connie, "there's some wisdom in that when you think about it, isn't there?"

"Hey," says the woman. "Who am I to argue? It's made him happy and really the pictures he takes have a special beauty about them. And I suppose he's just found a different way to stay in the fight."

Positive Ageing – Ten Easy Steps

Lyndell Robyn Winn

Chinderah

In the words of the Beatles song 'Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm sixty-four.'

Well, sixty-four is a distant memory for me (I just turned seventy) but I am proud to say that I am still fit, active and still very much needed (that is my opinion anyway) and of course well fed (even if I have to cook it myself).

Many times during the past years I have been known to use the phrase 'I think I'm getting old' and I guess most of us are guilty of that. One day when I had just stated this fact, my daughter Kerri said, "Mum you are not getting old, when you are seventy you can say you're old."

I recently reminded her of this remark at my 70th birthday celebration. Kerri laughed and said a beautiful thing, "Mum, we don't think of you as being old, we think of you as being just like us." *I guess that makes me around forty.* I wish!

Okay, so now I'm forty – something, so time for the power of positive thinking.

Although I have never been greatly concerned about ageing, my mirror now has more wrinkles and less hair (or is that me). This doesn't really concern me though, as I can walk away from my mirror and become magically forty – something again. This is a trick I learned some time ago!

Ageing and retirement come with their challenges but none more so than accepting the inevitable, and that in my case thinking I am forty – something at seventy – something is not easy. Like many seventy – somethings, I really do feel forty-something but let's face it, stilettos and bikinis are not flattering (or sustainable) for a seventy – something so here comes the solution. *My ten easy step guide to positive ageing.*

Step 1

Turn off all wake up alarms. I did this because I don't need them now because I go to bed so early that I am awake before dawn. Try it, I guarantee *you will feel more like forty – something before you know it.*

Step 2

Have at least one late night a week. I kick up my heels (not stilettos) and stay out until at least 9.00pm one night a week. The next day is my one sleep in day (*I need it*).

Step 3

Stay away from mirrors as much as possible. Nothing ages us more than our mirrors. If I want to know how nice I look, I ask a child. They are so dam honest in these situations. I soon know if I need to change my outfit! I remember asking my little granddaughter if I looked like I had a fat belly in a certain dress. Her very honest reply was "Oh yes Grandma, you should see it". *I rest my case!*

Step 4

Learn a new hobby e.g. bingo, or anything where everyone who is seventy – something, think and act like they are forty – something. Wow, what a hobby I found. Hula dancing! The only problem is I am supposed to get my hips to move like a forty – something but they keep reminding me they are seventy – something. I must say I am not the only one though! What a fun time we have laughing at ourselves (*before others do*).

Step 5

Become Smart Phone savvy. They are a great invention and a great way of keeping an eye on the family or friends. I know where they are every minute with the help of Facebook or one of the other many Social Media sites. My family thinks I am so clever, but they don't know my ulterior motive (I think you would call it spying). Smart Phones also come in handy if we get lost and let's face it, that is a regular occurrence that comes with ageing. Taking a photo of my parking space when I go to a shopping centre is a great way of ensuring I don't have to wait until the shops shut and everyone else has gone home to be able to find my car. *Don't laugh, I have known this to happen.*

Step 6

Watch a soapie every day. I actually start to think I am part of the show, usually Brooke Forrester from Bold & Beautiful because I love her clothes and she always seems to stay forty (forever). *Anyway, it is a great excuse for a glass of wine before dinner and makes the show more believable.*

Step 7

Go shopping regularly. I spend a lot of time in shopping centres. I visit all my favourite clothing stores and try on all the clothes I would like. I usually find that most of them don't suit me anyway and that makes me feel better and if I do find something I like, I just wait until it goes on special. Or better still, I take my kids shopping and tell them how much I 'love' the item. *It usually works and I end up with something new.*

Step 8

Take a holiday. There is nothing more invigorating than a great holiday to kick start that forty-something feeling again. Okay, my idea of a holiday is, time away from home (and housework and cooking), and getting waited on at some fabulous resort. Well, as I said, this is my 'idea' of a holiday but ideas don't always become reality when you are seventy – something trying to be forty – something.

I usually settle for a day of pampering with my family and this is as good as any holiday can get. It's not very obvious why I am there, when I arrive needing a new hairdo and looking like a seventy-year-old street kid. *It usually works though!*

Step 9

Learn to play a musical instrument. If anyone had told me four years ago that I would be playing a musical instrument and performing in concerts, I would have been very amused but, that is just what I now do. I have mastered the ukulele and am in the process of learning to play guitar. This is a great pathway to positive ageing.

STEP 10

This is the most important of all the steps. I never give in to the 'I'm getting old' syndrome and will always continue to be as young at heart as I feel every day.

The power of positive thinking is the pathway to positive ageing.



BACK COVER: SCHOOL CATEGORY WINNING ENTRY

Jess Turner

Pictured are my 92-year-old grandmother and myself. I decided to challenge our perception of the stereotypes: the senior generation is often associated with newspapers and books and bingo, and 21st-century teens are often associated with technology, in particular, the smartphone.



SENIORS CARD