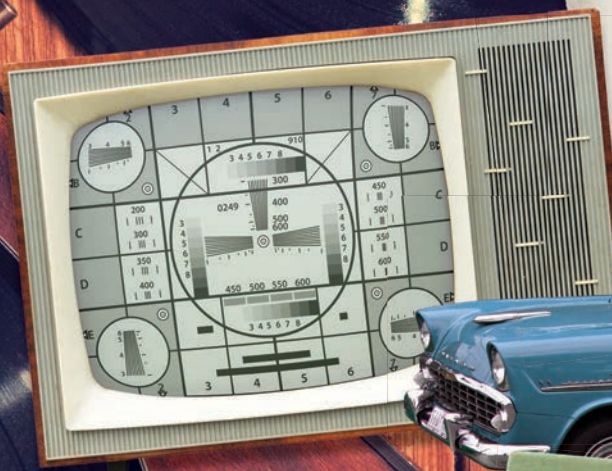
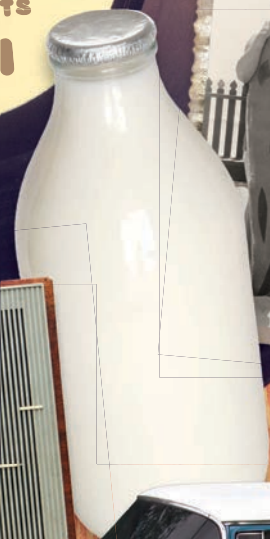




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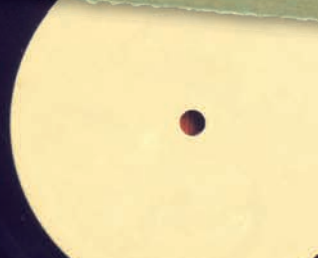
Seniors' Stories

Royal Easter Show
ADMIT ONE
SYDNEY SHOWGROUND



BILLY THORPE AND THE AZTECS
Daddy Cool
LA DE DAS
Madder Lake
.....
SUNBURY
.....
THREE DAY PASS \$6

JANUARY 29TH, 30





**Seniors
Stories**
Side A

Foreword

Life is like a camera,
Just focus on what's important and
Capture the good times,
Develop from the negatives
And if things don't work out,
Take another shot

-Unknown

A heartfelt thank you and congratulations to all those who submitted their stories and were chosen to have their stories published as part of the

NSW Seniors Card VIP Story Telling Event March 2014.

Thank you also to:

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The Night the Empire Struck Back – by Allan Edwards.

Back in the 1950s when I was growing up in the Sydney suburb of Revesby, one of my favourite times was the night which celebrated Empire Day. The name was subsequently changed to “Commonwealth Day”, but we always knew it as “cracker night”. Like most kids of the day, I looked forward to cracker night for most of the year! The night itself was exciting, but so too was anticipating its arrival. The weeks leading up to the event were taken up with preparation, and huge bonfires sprang up in just about every park and vacant lot in the district. As soon as fireworks appeared in the shops, they were bought. And every penny of my pocket money was spent on just one thing — ‘crackers’.

In our house, part of this anticipation involved taking a nightly inventory of the ever increasing arsenal. Fireworks were spread out on the bedroom floor, in almost ritual fashion, and counted. Each was carefully examined, then put safely back in the box.

I shared a room with my brother, who was also fascinated with pyrotechnics. We would frequently compare our individual caches of explosives, occasionally swap, and always dream of the big night to come. His favourites were the thunderously noisy tuppenny bungers and I preferred the less explosive, but still exciting, penny rockets.

The bedroom was long and narrow, about three times longer than it was wide, and our beds were on each side of the room, against the longer walls. Although little floor space existed between the beds, each had plenty of room underneath. More than enough to store a big cardboard box full of crackers, plus room to crawl under and hide.

Uncle John visited the night before cracker night, and he brought us each a big bag of fireworks. I opened mine with delight, but my brother was at a friend’s house so his bag could not be opened until he came home – or so I was told! When she tucked me in for the night, Mum put my brother’s bag of goodies into the box under his bed.

As I lay awake in the darkened room, my curiosity grew and temptation quickly got the better of me. By the light of a small torch, which I held in my mouth to leave both hands free, I eased my brother’s crackers out into the open. The contents of his box were similar to my own, with some

variations. Prominent were my brother's prized tuppenny bangers, strings of tom thumbs, sparklers, long crackers which shot balls of coloured fire, and a box of 'special matches'.

As I opened the bag Uncle John had brought, the light from my little torch unexpectedly glowed orange before flickering a few times, and then went out; the batteries were flat. I then remembered the special matches. Each was a little longer than a normal match, but the stick had a thicker coating for about three quarters of its length.

The struck match flared into life, burned with a brilliant emerald flame, and produced plenty of light for me to look inside the bag. I needed to hurry though as it would burn for only about a minute. I nervously held the top of the open bag, and the lit match, in one hand. This allowed me to see inside the bag and rummage around with my other hand; it was also a pretty dumb thing to do! When I saw that the top of the bag was alight, I panicked and dropped both the burning match and the bag into the box of fireworks.

The next few minutes were spectacular, although I didn't appreciate the display. Dad appeared in the doorway to find me cowering under my bed with penny rockets and flaming coloured balls ricocheting about the room.

Dad's quick thinking, and a bucket of water, saw the disaster extinguished. So too was my desire for any future involvement with fireworks. Fortunately, the damage was minor. There was a dirty wet patch on the carpet, a few scorch marks on the walls and ceiling, and a curtain which had been burnt by a captured rocket. My box of fireworks survived but, of course, they now belonged to my brother.

Cracker night came and went, my brother graciously offered me some of his newly inherited 'penny rockets' to fire but, for some reason, participation had lost its appeal and I could only watch and wait for it to be all over. I'm afraid that I would never again be able to view fireworks with the same youthful enthusiasm.

A House, a Son, and his Mother – by Bev Holmes.

This is a story of a terrace house in Erskineville and the lives of our family who lived there from 1979 to 1998.

First a picture of the house – it is placed at the end of a row of terraces on a corner and was once a corner shop, closed by us on the day we moved in. The shop was your original corner store complete with Streets Ice Cream painted around the doorway, and a Marlboro Man poster on the wall for which we received \$50 rent per year. We renovated (slowly) over the years, turning the shop section into two bedrooms, what had been the storeroom into a third bedroom, and fixing the existing remaining bedroom. We bricked up what had been the roller front door of the shop, right on the footpath and created an oblique wall. The only way into the house was through the back door, and this was through the bathroom, toilet on one side and shower on the other. This section was never renovated!

The entire house was about five metres wide and, entering through the bathroom, you then climbed one step and diagonally traversed the kitchen. Climbing a further two steps you walked down a long hallway where all the rooms led off on the right, with the hallway eventually opening up into the closed shop area. We bought it for \$40,000 and sold it 15 years later for quarter of a million – still needing a great deal of work. We installed a new kitchen ourselves, knocking down a fireplace in which an old stove had resided. We raised three children there who grew into adulthood, plus we ran the local church youth group which involved the house being full of young adults twice each week. And I worked at the local Catholic primary school as the secretary, often bringing home children whose parents weren't able to cope. At times it was a very crowded house indeed!

Our three children consist of two sons and a daughter, the two sons from a previous marriage with a 10-year gap to our daughter. The storeroom mentioned earlier was an exact cube shaped space – three metres wide in both directions and three metres tall (terraces have high ceilings). In it we built triple bunks using the wood from the shelves in what had been the shop. Our daughter (only two years old at the time) resided on the bottom bunk, the eldest son in the middle and the youngest (and most agile) on top nearest the ceiling. They each had a curtain across their

bunk which offered privacy and a bookshelf built into the head of the bed with a lamp. Pullman-coach-like, very cosy yet at the same time very serviceable. This arrangement served us all well whilst we renovated other rooms for everyone.

Our eldest son turned 18 and finished high school and then went to Surfers Paradise for schoolies week before looking forward to university in the New Year. He shared his accommodation in Surfers with two girls from school, both named Fiona, and they met up with several others whilst there. On his return home he resumed bike riding and listening to his music while the rest of the family went to work or school.

One day we both went grocery shopping and as I was unpacking the purchases he sat on the top of the two steps leading into the hall from the kitchen and said he had something to tell me.

He stumbled and was lost for words, unable to verbalise his thoughts. I helped him out with suggestions, all the while unpacking and putting away.

“Have you failed your HSC somehow?”

“No, Mum.”

“Have you run up a huge debt on one of our credit cards while away?”

“No, Mum.”

“Have you got one of the girls pregnant?”

“No, Mum.”

“Have you got both of the Fionas pregnant?”

“No, Mum.”

“Have you robbed a bank and now have a police record?”

“No, Mum.”

“Well what else could it possibly be?”

“Mum, I’m gay.”

Footnote:

We were shocked, we got over it, we love him, we support him and even marched in the Mardi Gras together two years running.

He went to university, moved out into a flat which he shared with his brother and today is a very successful businessman in his mid-forties. He still lives in Erskineville in a terrace house he's renovated!

Our old house recently came onto the market and we all went to view it on open day. It hadn't changed a bit – no additional renovations had been done, not even the bathroom! The real estate agent asked our daughter if she'd like to buy it as she was in the market for a home of her own at the time, but she said "No, my Dad said to leave it well alone!"

Something Borrowed, Something Blue – by Charmian Powell

I'm a 16-year-old rebel in a borrowed wedding dress being married in the living room of my family home. I can hear the murmur of the celebrant and my father's watery grief. I have disappointed him. My eyes are lowered in shame and they sting with the salt of my own withheld tears. It's 1966.

Curiosity momentarily nudges aside my humility and permits a sneak peek that fields a wink from my groom. His winks are dangerous, seductive, and seem obscene in this setting. I blush and hope my father doesn't notice.

Later the Kodak Instamatic snaps will reveal a stocky 18-year-old army recruit standing proudly in his khaki dress uniform and gleaming spit-polished shoes, his painfully thin bride pale-faced in shoulder-length veil and knee-length white lace dress lent by a neighbouring newlywed. Her pointy toed sling backs with kitten heels are new (she will carry a life-long passion for new shoes). Her four-month pregnancy is not yet visible. Family and guests are gathered on the porch in the rear of each shot. The groom is the only one smiling.

It's not all doom and gloom. Mid-ceremony, cuteness illuminates the room as my toddler brother returns from the toilet and stands in front of the celebrant still hitching up his pants. My Baha'i parents are supportive and caring. Their love for me is unconditional. In a different family maybe I'd have been forbidden to be married in 'virginal' white, or worse, been secretly packed off to the unmarried mothers home in Sydney with my absence explained away as "she's just gone to stay with an aunt for a few months".

At the reception, out of respect for the caterer, I manage to consume one of her cabanossi, cheese, vivid green and red cocktail onion toothpick creations which she'd artfully poked into oranges nestled on lacy white paper doilies. I politely decline 'Pigs in Blankets' and 'Devon and Mash Roll Ups' circulating on Tupperware trays. A five-hour car trip down the Old Pacific Highway to Sydney later, my morning-sick body rebels at my good manners and, the first half hour of our one-night honeymoon, I spend throwing up in the sink of our dingy Kings Cross hotel room – the remainder of the night recovering from knocking myself

out on the glass shelf above the sink during a spectacular bout of retching gymnastics. Clearly my karma bill had been delivered hours earlier with the long distance telegrams. There is no period of grace as I fall with a thud into payback time.

Two weeks later I'm vomiting in a cupboard sized loo throughout the long bus journey delivering me to our new home in a picturesque village tucked under Victoria's Dandenong Ranges.

We settle in to a traditional Aussie Army married lifestyle. During the day my new husband attends the army medical school on the outskirts of our village. Most evenings he fronts the bar with his army mates in one or other of the three town pubs. He revels in the camaraderie and large measures of beer and Vat 69 until he is drunk enough to stagger home. Before long the village grapevine is ripe with the news of my husband's bid to increase his social life by sharing his sexual prowess with various females at the army base.

I'm somewhat overwhelmed and anguished by these arrangements and realise my childhood dreams of marriage and a darling baby boy have morphed into nightmares. I don't know what to do. I am a child bride expecting a child. Our darling baby boy arrives and two more follow.

I raise my boys alone from when the youngest is aged two. Happily, they one by one became engaged, then married and then parents.

I rejoice that my granddaughters have entered a world free from the stigma and shame once associated with single pregnant women and young girls of my era. Regardless, they better be warned, single parenting ain't for the faint hearted!

Josie and the Lamb Cutlets – by Diane T Brown

When I was growing up, like most Australians our family dined on an evening meal of meat and two or three vegetables. Usually our meat would be lamb or mutton, which was cheap and plentiful. For variety there were different cuts and ways of preparing the lamb: short loin chops, chump chops, cutlets, roast leg, lamb stew and so on.

For special occasions, such as Easter or Christmas, we might have a leg of ham, which Mum would cook in the outside wood fired copper for hours. The aroma of the salty delicacy would float through the backyard and the children would wait with great excitement for the pork to turn into the Easter ham. Even in a family of seven the expensive leg of ham would last a week or more past Easter Sunday. There would be cold ham salads and ham sandwiches for lunches; Mum rationed it out and wasted nothing.

When one of our backyard hens got past its prime, and stopped producing eggs, there was a roast chicken (or 'chook' as we called it in those days). Mum would pluck and clean the chook and I would complain, "Yuck! That smells awful!" Then she would stuff it with homemade breadcrumbs and spices. As I watched her stitch up the chook with a needle and thread I knew we were getting closer to enjoying a tasty, mouth-watering, golden roasted chook.

We lived in a country town surrounded by sheep stations and one day my brother, Graeme, went to the stockyards and brought home a newborn lamb. Lambs born at the stockyards usually didn't survive as they were left behind when the sheep were transported from the stockyards in trucks or trains. Our whole family took to caring for the little orphaned lamb we named Josie. Mum would mix up powdered milk which we fed to Josie in a beer bottle with a teat on it. Josie became our much loved pet.

One day Josie got out the front gate and was chased by dogs. She ran, head first into the front fence, was partly paralysed and unable to walk. Mum said, "Where there is life there is hope" and Josie lay in the backyard being hand fed until she recovered. She could walk and run again but her neck and head were crooked. She looked a little funny but we were all glad she had survived. When she outgrew our backyard Dad took her to a sheep property out of town where she would have more

space and feed. We visited her a few times. She always recognised our car and when we stopped beside the fence she would leave the flock and run, with her crooked head tilted sideways, to the fence for a pat.

As we lived in a country town, our meat often came straight from a sheep property. We would share a sheep with our neighbour, Mr Harris. He was born and bred in the country so it was natural for him to slaughter and skin the sheep.

He kept the sheep skin as payment for his trouble and our two families would share the meat. Often we would arrive home from school and see a half side of lamb hanging under the back veranda waiting to be cut up and refrigerated.

I never thought of Josie as something we might eat until one day there was a whole sheep carcass hanging under the veranda. I questioned my parents, "Why have we got a full sheep this time? We never have a full sheep. That must be Josie!" Soon all the kids were upset and refusing to eat any of the meat. None of our parents' explanations could ease our fear it was our pet, Josie. In desperation, Dad packed us all in the car and took us to the sheep property. As usual, Josie, with her distinctive posture, came running towards us for her pat. Back home we enjoyed our lamb cutlets, secure in the knowledge that Josie was grazing safely in her paddock.

Sailing Around the World – by Don and Gera Fussell

It all started when my father was diagnosed with bowel cancer in 1978. A few months later and after an operation to remove part of his bowel, it had spread to his liver. Back then they didn't do transplants, so after chemo and a lot of suffering he died in 1979 at the age 68. He had been a hard worker all his life, had immigrated to Australia in 1952 from war torn Europe, and had retired just a year before.

It was then Don (my husband) said he wanted us to retire early and enjoy our life before something like that happened. So plans to make ourselves financially secure were put into action through hard work and planning.

It was about seven or eight years later he started talking about going cruising in a sailboat when we did retire. He'd been a dinghy sailor with our son but wanted to plan to buy/build a keel yacht. I was not keen, especially after he told me of all the bad things like storms and the things that could go wrong. He never was a good salesman. I was also very involved in work and loved what I was doing. He felt that seeing the world whilst having your home with you was the way to do it. I, on the other hand, had always wanted to tour through Europe in a campervan for six months or so. So there was definitely some conflict.

However, he eventually won me over and we bought a second-hand yacht and planned to go to the Whitsundays for our long service leave for approximately three months in 1988. We didn't understand that to go to sea in a yacht requires equipment and preparation of the yacht that takes serious money. And then the yacht would still not be the right one. So with some more financial planning (on my part) it was decided to do it right; sell this one and build the right yacht.

So after four years of having the hull built and brought back to Sydney for fitting out by us, S V Sir Swagman was launched in 1992. The kids were all brought up and our youngest had just married. So in the first year we went to the Whitsundays and back and had decided that, if all the alterations we had to do to make it "just right", were right, we would cross to New Zealand from Hobart, Tasmania with some newfound international friends.

It was “just right” and 1994 was spent sailing from Hobart to New Zealand, thence onto Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu and New Caledonia before returning to Brisbane at the end of the season. We had to go back to Sydney by car to paint one of our two rental properties which kept us in food and so on. Don by this stage said he might like to do the Whitsundays once or twice more, invite some friends, and then put the boat on the market. I said “What? We didn’t do all that work for just a couple of years, I haven’t had my money’s worth yet!”

And so it went. After painting the rental property, back to the boat in Brisbane, and work, work, work to prepare for another ocean crossing in the Darwin to Ambon Cruising Division race to Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and finally to be in Phuket for Christmas. We spent an additional season in South East Asia where, with a whole lot of other yachts, we became part of the community of Kampung Baru up in the Lumut River in Malaysia. We were all invited to a local Muslim wedding.

We left Phuket at the end of 1996, on New Year’s Eve, to cross the Indian Ocean to Sri Lanka, The Maldives, on to Oman, then Yemen where we stopped at Al Mukalla and a couple of days later at Aden before venturing up the Red Sea. We were also sailing in company with good friends John and Ros of Tarka IV.

The places we stopped at in the Red Sea were Eritrea, still war torn and rather sad, Suakin in Sudan, a town which was one of the last places where slave trading was carried out, then on to Safaga in Egypt where we hopped on a local bus to go to Luxor for a couple of days. The way we saw the places through the Red Sea could really only be done by doing it this way, by yacht. We arrived in Israel at the end of April 1997.

We spent three years in the Mediterranean and wintered in places such as Turkey and Barcelona, where in both places we became part of the local community, they practising their English on us and us practising our Spanish on them. Whilst in Europe we also bought a very small campervan and travelled throughout Europe. We went as far north as the Arctic Circle into Lapland, as far west as Ireland and as far east as the Czech Republic. All in all, about 24,000 kilometres. We’d bought the van from a yachtie, owned it for a year and then sold it on to another yachtie. So I also got my wish of touring through Europe in a campervan.

We crossed the Atlantic in the year 2000 and spent Christmas and New Year in Martinique with about 50 other yachts. A beautiful place to visit. We even spent some time in Trinidad experiencing the carnival.

Then the Pacific, but we first had to go through the Panama Canal. We then sailed on to the Galapagos Islands, a veritable paradise. We spent two to three weeks there.

The longest passage was to come, 21 days at sea to reach French Polynesia, such places as the Marquesas, Tuamotos, Tahiti and Bora Bora, before setting out again for Samoa. It all went well with good winds and comfortable sailing.

We finished our circumnavigation in Savu Savu, Fiji on 19 August 2001 (our 40th wedding anniversary) where we had gone in our second year of cruising. After that it was a rush to get home as our daughter needed us. She was giving birth to her third child and, not having been around much for the other two, I was determined that this one was going to be mine. And he is. We still have a great relationship.

We slid into Pittwater with the sunrise casting a shimmering golden reflection across our wake. We motored up to Towlers Bay on a beautiful spring day in October 2001. And that ended a wonderful period of our lives together.

People often ask us “where was the most beautiful place?” That’s really hard to answer. Every place has its beauty and excitement.

Since arriving back in Australia, we’ve seen a bit here too. After selling the boat, we bought a Toyota 4WD and decked it out for outback travel. We’ve crossed the Simpson Desert three times, once following the track that Madigan travelled with a camel train in 1939. There were few tracks there and we navigated purely by GPS. We’ve also gone around Australia crossing to Western Australia via the Anne Beadell Highway (a two-wheel track for most of the way). However, there’s a lot more to see.

So now we’ve explored the United States. Last year we bought a 35-foot Winnebago with a little Hyundai trailing behind. We’ve explored Western North America, which takes in the beautiful spots of Canada, and after four and a half months left it with a yachtie friend at their property in San Diego. This year, in fact 1 May, we are returning to explore the East Coast.

We may take it a little easier after this year, but then again, who knows what might turn up.

The Eudunda Adventure – by Eric Cowled

On a dark night in August 1944, in the course of advanced flying training at the Royal Australian Air Force station, Mallala, South Australia, I was scheduled to perform a number of take-offs and landings, (what we called “circuits and bumps”) in inclement weather, with an instructor on board to educate me in the special techniques required to cope with adverse conditions.

A weather system was approaching from the west and as soon as we took off for the first circuit, we realised we were in for trouble.

Moments after leaving the ground we were in thick cloud. It was too dangerous to descend through the cloud, so we decided to climb above it and fly east in the hope that it would soon run out, then get under it and fly back to Mallala. We eventually came to the edge of the cloud bank, but its base was so low that it would have been dangerous to fly below it.

We circled around with the lights of a town below us trying to decide what to do. Because the night’s flying had been planned as a circuits and bumps operation only, we had no radio on board, no direction finder, no maps or anything else to help us find either our base or an alternative airfield.

Suddenly the lights of the town below began to flash. We watched the flashes and they spelt out in Morse code the name EUDUNDA.

We appreciated very much the efforts of the people below to help us in our hour of need, but knowing where we were was not a lot of help, so we continued to circle, trying to work out what to do next.

At this stage the instructor advised me that he had a special wish to survive the situation because his wife was about to give birth to their first baby. I had no such circumstance, but I was certainly in favour of getting back on the ground in one piece.

Suddenly, a row of car lights appeared below all heading in the same direction. We were later to learn that some resourceful person had deduced that we wanted to land and had gone to the movie theatre and

asked all present to drive their cars to the racecourse where they would use their car headlights to enable us to land.
We continued to circle.

Before long the cars had lined up to form an effective flare path, illuminating ground that would obviously be flat and, hopefully, suitable for a landing.

We performed a standard left hand circuit and made a final approach.

We had decided that, in view of the unknown firmness of the surface and the short length of the flare path, a belly landing would be the safest.

Everything went well until we were a few feet above the ground. Due to the intensity of the car lights and the fact that the ground we were flying over had recently been cultivated, depth perception was difficult and we hit the ground about 20 metres short of the racecourse fence, ploughed through it and carried it with us to a grinding halt in front of the line of cars. However, it was a good belly landing as belly landings go.

Our rescuers were very excited and pleased that their plan to save our skins had worked out so well. The local publican, who had organised the rescue, invited us all to his pub for a celebratory drink. Everyone thought it was a great idea.

The Eudunda people were eager to hear first-hand news of what aerial combat was really like. For me there was a kind of duty to give them their money's worth, tempered only by modesty, which I sometimes do not have a lot of, together with continual diligence to avoid saying anything that could infringe security.

Eventually it became late and people started to drift off. The instructor and I were shown to comfortable bedrooms and slept soundly.

We were awoken early next morning by the arrival of a truck from Mallala Air Force Station, loaded with a variety of spare parts, lifting gear and other equipment for use in repairing the aircraft so that, if possible, it could be flown out.

It had been decided that the instructor would stay at Eudunda until the aircraft was ready to fly but, in order to avoid interference with my training, a car would be sent from Mallala to drive me back to base.

About 11 am somebody announced the impending arrival of the car. It drew up outside the entrance to the pub and, to my delight, out stepped the prettiest little blonde WAAF transport driver you ever saw.

I could hardly believe my luck. The publican, as is sometimes said in detective novels, “summed up the position at a glance” and said to me, “Don’t leave just yet, wait until I come back.”

He then disappeared into the pub and re-appeared a few minutes later carrying a cardboard box containing two cut lunches, a bottle of good white wine and two glasses. What a resourceful, thoughtful, imaginative man!

I thanked him sincerely and off we went.

It was a beautiful spring day with no sign of the clouds that had nearly brought about catastrophe the night before. Our journey took us through the picturesque Barossa Valley wine country. She was a good driver, good conversationalist and oh so pretty!

Not far along the way we found a side track leading down to a creek lined with willow trees. On a grassy knoll in the shade of a giant willow, we addressed ourselves to the cut lunches and the bottle of good white wine.

I was reminded of Omar Khayyam:

Here with a loaf of bread beneath the bough

A book of verse, a flask of wine and THOU!

In our case, poetry reading was not on the agenda and, as I suspect with Omar Khayyam, the food and wine soon became of secondary interest.

One Needle in a Haystack – by Gary Newman

Back in 1969 I was on holidays in Darwin and whilst strolling along Nightcliff Beach something caught my attention in a rock pool. It ended up being a large corroded bullet casing so I rolled my sleeve up and sifted around deeper and found four more corroded cartridges and two bullet heads in the sand.

Also what my hand latched onto appeared to be a flat rectangular piece of coral but, when I pressed against it, it didn't break. This intrigued me and I started to scratch away at the surface. A chunk of coral-like substance broke away to reveal a letter that was back to front, which appeared to be stamped on brass.

So as not to damage it by scratching any further, I waited to get back to Sydney to clean it up with a wire buff. Cleaning the front surface proved fruitless – it was just too corroded away, so I started on the back because the letters were stamped on – the indentation of the letters finally appeared – naturally back to front. I then had to hold it up in front of a mirror to reveal what was printed. The secret was revealed – an American dog tag from the war which read:

JAMES B. WALSH

32504260 T42 43 A

BROOKLYN N.Y.C.

Now this may not bear any significance to some people but I thought that, to the owner or next of kin, it may prove priceless – a true hidden treasure.

So here I was in Australia – about to embark on finding a needle in a haystack on the other side of the world that would eventually take me 15 years to unravel.

I thought the obvious thing to do was to write a letter to that address, I also addressed it to 'The Occupier' as well, but alas the letter was returned – unopened.

This wetted my curiosity as surely someone must live at that address, even though after all these years it was unlikely to be the Walshes.

So I next visited the Mitchell Library in Sydney to start looking up maps of the area. Map upon map, year upon year kept showing me that all around that address was a park called McCarren Park and, although the library didn't have a map for every year, it did reveal that on an older 1934 map that the address did exist then, with no park in the vicinity, which proved that around 1939 the house must have been demolished.

The park was built on the whole of the block – on both sides of Bedford Avenue, from number 1 to number 98, so I thought that the search would end here.

This really disheartened me as I was putting all my efforts into locating this mystery owner.

I then decided to contact the American military, time went by and numerous phone calls were made to various departments, both in Australia (the American Embassy in Canberra) and in the United States, but most were very vague – not revealing many clues at all.

Some departments even wanted me to send the dog tag over to them for safekeeping in the event that, if it were ever claimed, then it could be handed back to its rightful owner. But I knew that if I had done this it would definitely be the last I'd ever hear of the matter.

Months and years dragged by leaving me so frustrated, although from time to time becoming enthused by pieces of information that would eventually dribble through until, one day, I was put onto a retired Australian soldier – a Mr Ray Cooper, who was high up in the Australian Military Historical Society (who incidentally received an Australia Day Honours Award from the Queen, for his near lifetime services to the military).

This chap is now deceased but, following up on his many leads to the Consulate General of the United States of America in Sydney and the General Services Administration – National Archives and Records Service in St. Louis, Missouri and Washington, DC and finally to the Veterans Administration in Buffalo, New York, that I finally received confirmation of a living relative – James's sister, Margaret Walsh who lived in Lisle, New York.

Well at that time I couldn't put pen to paper quick enough, but in the meantime Margaret's letter had arrived, as she in turn had been notified by the authorities but upon reading it my heart sank – James had died only less than three years earlier on 5 January 1982 aged 71. He was an army corporal in the Signal Corps at the time and his job was to decode messages.

Although I was sad at the time, I was also upset at all the departments which may have been able to speed up the locating process by a couple of years, that would have enabled James to at least hold his dog tag before he passed away. Then again, my wife Anne suggested that when the World War II ended James probably stood up there on that Nightcliff headland and threw his tag off saying “I hope I never see that bloody thing again” – we will never know.

I am a Victor – by Geraldine Koh

This story is not about studies based on theories of how the brain works when dealing with change or theories on the process of decision-making. It is not about overcoming extraordinary challenges, how I conquered Mount Everest or won an Olympic gold medal. This story is about your daily struggles and how to overcome them through your choices.

It is about learning to make the best decision for yourself. It is about helping you to accept your personal challenges and learn how to overcome them in a practical way. It is about sharing my insights with you and making you more aware of how you can empower yourself to take better control of your life through your choices. It is based on my experience, on how I turned my circumstances around from being a victim to becoming a victor, and the lessons I learnt while going through this change. The lessons which inspired me to change my outlook on life and empowered me to live a life that is purposeful, self-fulfilling and content. The lessons that inspired me to write this story.

I am a victor because I choose to take full responsibility for my life and not blame others for my misfortunes. I accept the fact that change is a constant in my life and the more effective I am at dealing with change, the more control I have over my life. I believe I have full power over my choices and can choose to lead the life I want for myself.

I will tell you how you too can choose to be a victor.

For more than half a century I lived a life believing I was a victor until I suddenly found myself a victim in a violent situation. I was completely caught off guard. I could not believe what was happening to me. I had never felt so lost and helpless before. Surely I could get out of this situation, I thought to myself. I had faced many challenges in my life and had always managed to find solutions to overcome them. I was sure I would find a solution and take control of my life once again.

Days, weeks, then months went by and I was not able to find a solution. I started to get angry and frustrated. I could not believe how helpless and lost I began to feel. I started to get confused and totally lost confidence in myself. It was absolutely frightening. I fell into a depression but was not aware of this at the time.

Eventually I agreed to seek professional help.

After only one session, granted it was almost a three-hour session, the penny dropped for me. I left the session full of confidence and was ready to rebuild my life.

Since my discovery I have grown from strength to strength.

The 3R Process

I will share with you the process that got me from being totally confused to being self-empowered, a practical process which you will find easy to follow and highly effective for managing change. A process that is practical and applicable to your everyday life and in every situation.

The process is made up of the three R's:

- Reflect – R1
- Renew – R2
- Rebuild – R3.

Reflect – R1

R1 calls you to reflect on your life. Through a therapy session I was lucky to realise I had many achievements from as far back as I could remember. When I recalled the milestones and how I got to them, something in my mind just clicked for me. I started to look at myself from outside in. I looked at this pathetic person, me, and thought, “what have you done to Geraldine?” I felt both sorry and sad for this person. Then I started to focus on the achievements throughout my life and the sorry and sadness turned into anger and determination. I was angry with myself for letting this person become so helpless and lost. In that split second I decided to snap out of my wallowing and made a commitment to myself that I would take control of the situation, and my life.

Renew – R2

R2 requires you to develop goals that will help you achieve your vision. I wrote my vision boldly and began to set goals to help me achieve my vision. I made immediate goals to get me out of the current situation and put me on track towards achieving my short-term goals. I then added to these goals detailed steps on how I needed to achieve them and timelines of when I should be aiming to achieve them. I researched how,

where and from whom I could get helpful information that could help me achieve my goals and realise my vision. I compiled all the information from R1 and R2 and was ready to rebuild my life.

Rebuild – R3

Naturally, you will continue to face challenges, except this time you will be able to make choices with intent to help you overcome these challenges. Armed with my personal life guide, I was ready to embark on a new journey. As I continued to choose intently, I started to see my life turn around for the better. I started to grow in confidence and started to feel more in control of my life. I started to get less agitated and much calmer when situations did not turn out the way I wanted them to. On reflection, I also realised I was the only person who was hurting when I held on to grudges. It is better to forgive and let go as soon as possible.

Nothing in life is definite except death. Therefore, I keep reminding myself that my personal life guide should be flexible. I have and will continue to face challenges that will require me to reset my goals and reroute. I now have a clear vision for my life. The challenges will continue to come of course. Only this time I am more ready for them.

Ian M Fraser

I am writing this on an iPhone (no mean feat!) in South Sumatra, Indonesia having just spent the morning enjoying tea with a family in a very large, mostly teak, family home built over 250 years ago by Yemini Arabs who migrated and settled in this part of Indonesia. They have lived here, in a tightly bonded enclave, ever since. To this day their traditions survive and shape their lives in most ways.

Imagine – well before Captain Cook first sailed into the southern hemisphere, these people travelled the region more confidently and maybe brushed the Australian coast on occasions.

It has been fascinating eye-opener to get to know the history of this family and experience some of their impressive houses.

After that rambling introduction, I am writing to enter the storytelling competition – but to tell another story!

I would like to tell a story about an amazing man and true adventurer (when adventure meant adventure) and a solo journey made by one of my parents' neighbours. A man who, throughout his life, was interesting in many ways and always stood out, without being known to most – even by those he lived among.

The story I want to tell is about my parents' neighbour on the Central Coast, in the small, once fishing village weekender hamlet of Killcare, near Gosford in NSW.

My grandparents (Tom and Martha-Jane Fraser) settled there and, I think, had the first, or one of the first, cars in the area.

My father (Charles Fraser) grew up in Killcare – and each generation of the family has owned a house there – as I do now, as well as my son and daughter.

For many years my parents (Charles and Thelma, who lived in Sydney but spent weekends in Killcare) had a neighbour, Oskar Speck, who was born in Germany around 1907 – some records say 1910. In Germany, I think he was something like an electrician (remember how little electricity would have been around at that time) and a (failed) businessman!

But mostly he was a keen outdoors man.

I think he was truly an unsung adventurer.

When he was around 25 years old – in 1935 – he lived in Hamburg, Germany. He was an accomplished kayaker; he put his Pioneer brand collapsible (folding) kayak into the river and paddled it to the Mediterranean and onto Australia via the Suez Canal, changing to the Gulf of Bahrain after Bedouin tribesman started shooting at him. From Bahrain he followed the coastline around to India – he had to stay near the coast – and so had to paddle around the Bay of Bengal and on down to the Malay Peninsula, island hopping then to the Indonesian archipelago where he stopped in Bali for some time.

The house he eventually built in Killcare has a slightly curved roofline which he adopted from Balinese and other Asian-styled houses.

Leaving Bali he paddled through the eastern islands of Indonesia and around the northern coast of Papua and New Guinea (avoiding the shorter southern coast route because he had been told the locals were keen cannibals).

He eventually arrived at Thursday Island at the tip of Cape York on the Queensland coast after seven years of travel over an estimated distance of 50,000 kilometres in a kayak which, if it capsized, could not be righted at sea. And he said he could not swim (which I think is totally wrong).

Arriving at Thursday Island he was promptly arrested and slapped in a detention centre. Remember it was 1942 and he was a German national and World War II was raging and the recent HMAS Sydney sinking was still raw in the Australian mind.

Apologies for not expanding to the full detail here but in my telling I will give more detail of his life in, and escape from, the boredom of detention and his subsequent recapture and removal to a more secure South Australia alien remand facility where he learned about opal mining.

I will tell of his release after the war and efforts to go opal mining – his realisation that life underground and in the hottest remotest part of Australia did not suit his softer country and water-loving spirit. I will tell of his settling at Killcare and becoming an opal cutter and polisher, working from the home he was building, on acres of coastal bush land. I will tell of his slow conversion of it all to more formal feeling gardens through his

love of gardening and the (still) beautiful home he created, which enjoys a commanding position in Killcare.

His continued slightly bohemian life style.

I will tell of his long relationship with his partner, Nancy, an Australian nurse, and how they never married until he was very much older and near dying. He died in about 1990 (I will know the date). How she outlived him. How he owned the most amazing real estate on the Central Coast, including 600 acres of Box Head, the northern headland defining Broken Bay and facing Palm Beach, the northern most beach suburb of greater Sydney. Can you guess at the value of such land today?

How he left Nancy, by then his wife, all his property, having no Australian family and having lost contact with all his German family.

When Nancy died, again without family, she left all the property to the gardener.

All in all a truly amazing life!

It has been the subject of three television documentaries by ZDF (the German public broadcaster) and there is a small display of his memorabilia, including 13 minutes of surviving home movie of his travels, in the National Maritime Museum in Sydney.

An amazing life by any measure, the moral of which could be: life is definitely about the journey – not about getting there – and the possessions we amass on the way are just more baggage.

Dedication – by Ian Jacobs

Dedicated to Uncle Bob Waterer, who has the will and pride to promote his Garigal ancestry.

Secreted in the folds of hidden valleys, stigmatised and shut out from a disdainful world, the few and disparate Garigal tribes were pressed in to colonial control to survive beyond their prehistory. Before pharaohs and emperors, the Garigal domain from Narrobine to Barenjuel and beyond was marked by natural features all connected in the threads of Garigal beliefs. Their lives were understood in song, dreamtime and features on the landscape surrounding what we know now as the finest piece of water, Pittwater. Their introduction to colonisation brought death through disease and ignorance – festering pox sores that ooze despair and the authority of the musket. No sunburnt country. All gone, all gone, to the sky. No more Daramallan or other gods, just silent places of the ‘devil devil’. Their land that we now call home has scattered memories of their being. We are left a heritage of camp sites, shells, bones and rocks engraved like eulogising tombstones but not intended for the dead.

The warp and weft of history employs our past to sanction and celebrate “I am, you are, we are Australian” to the sterile cheers of those indifferent to the conquest. But, for the vanquished and dispossessed Garigal, there has been no wealth for toil in their land bound by sea. Indeed their sustaining land was stolen in a collision of cultures rarely understood as a tragedy and forgotten and displaced by progress. A sense of shame relieved by drifting defences of ‘that was then and this is now’ never excuses the termination of the Garigal. Certainly the tides of our losses are often sanctified with ‘lest we forget’. This sacred sentiment is often reserved to those fallen in defence of their land but there are no memorials to remember a Garigal fallen. All gone, all gone and the bare threads of their existence may be seen as you pass by their ghosts.

A scarified and manly warrior, Willeemerin, took up the fight and speared Governor Phillip, the leader of their enemy, but spear barbs were no match for lead shot and traditional medicines were no use treating new diseases. One by one the warriors and their clan fell to sickness and abuse. The survivors were scarred not by initiation but by pox sores and the trauma that their world was lost. They became refugees in their own land, their own church and their own world. Some were resilient in

adapting but their destitution was nothing but a likely cycle for poverty. Many drifted and some partnered the invaders and some hung on to a tenuous life on the fringes fed by falling crumbs. Some like Bowen, son of Bungaree, became a respected local enterprising fisherman, trusted tracker and well-travelled adventurer. He was Oxley's ambassador to the Murray, land to the north, and he sailed to the El Dorado of San Francisco in the gold rush but misfortune saw five of his Pittwater mob succumb to drowning and disease. His family and clan clung to ways of the past but were victims of a criminal modernity and one night on Bushranger Hill he was shot in the back, murdered by an escaped convict in a hate that's unclear.

Peppered remnants of the Garigal eked an existence in outskirt camps where 'bull' and lice and dogs and flu mixed in toxic ways, 'where sick at heart around us die'. Some drifted to missions such as Sackville, up the Deerubbin, but these places were little more than hidden charnel houses and recruitment agencies for local farmers. With no title to land, no rights by law and no prospects of regaining the past there was no future and they vanished quietly, gone without lament, slipping to their heaven. Gone as a measure in the natural world where the fit survive, or so they say. Gone as a consequence of progress and purged from a landscape needed to be farmed.

For millennia the Garigal history had unfolded, and suddenly and irretrievably ended with little recognition. A shame to be forgotten, excused as collateral loss in the march of progress and victims of ignorance and indifference. History is more than a good story, it is a lesson to analyse and decide on what is right and wrong and what is good and bad. And what we learn guides our future. I'm sure that my parents who served in World War II may not have realised that their war, on one level, was a fight against racism and aggressive imperialism. These same forces lead to the loss of the traditional Garigal.

Our best kept secret of Pittwater has more stories of a past we will never know. We can only speculate on why a people disappeared so swiftly and so suddenly from a land that held such importance and a love we cannot understand. From this ether of more than a century a new clan has emerged with the discovery of their Garigal ancestry. Lost documents, stained by time and held by those stained by prejudice reveal the threads to be retied. The story of Garigal individuals taking up partnerships with colonists has rare beauty and the offspring of those unions were often kept hidden for fear of separation. But the hidden have revealed a strength and resolve to tell a story and retie the threads

that recognise a Garigal presence. The earth holds many splendours but Garigal bones remind us that their past has been buried with little account. It's only now that the descended threads of the Garigal have revealed a story of survival and success.

Glossary:

Bull was an intoxicating colonial brew.

Narrobine was the Garigal name for Narrabeen lagoon.

Barrenjuel was the spelling of Barrenjoey, made by Larmer, an early surveyor.

Deerubbin was the Garigal name for the Hawkesbury River.

My First Steps in Australia – by Jan Kmenta

After a dangerous escape from Czechoslovakia in September 1949, I spent more than a year in various refugee camps in West Germany. At that time camps were being disbanded and all refugees had to decide whether to be repatriated or emigrate. For the Czechs, emigration was the only acceptable choice because being returned to Czechoslovakia would have led to being imprisoned by the communists in power. The only countries open to general immigration after 1948 were Australia and Venezuela. For most Czechs the English-speaking Australia was preferable.

The office of the Australian immigration commission was adorned by a large poster showing a burly man carrying a bundle of sugar cane with a proclamation “Australia: there is a man’s job for you!” Making it clear that what was wanted were our muscles and not our brains. We were committed to two years of indentured labour. My question about a possibility of a university scholarship in Australia was received with a wry smile, but I was given the name of a professor at the technical college in Ultimo who offered to help students coming to Australia.

The ship I travelled in left Bremerhaven in December 1950 and arrived in Fremantle a month later. It was a so-called liberty ship used for the transportation of US soldiers from the United States to Europe during World War II. There were only three cabins on the ship, each for 500 people. Upon landing in Fremantle we were transported to a former military camp in Northam. What seemed strange at that time was being given a pamphlet advising us that sexual intercourse with Aborigines was against the law and subject to severe penalties.

The camp was located within walking distance from the town where the only attraction was an outdoor cinema. In the camp we received a weekly allowance of five shillings, which was enough for a pack of tobacco and a cinema ticket.

After about a month in the camp we were flown to Sydney where the labour shortage was apparently worse than that in Western Australia. Our new location was a small place near Picton called Three Oaks where we were assigned to work in a nearby stone quarry. The work was hard and boring so I devised a strategy of being the last one on the truck transporting us to the quarry, and being the first to get off and pick

the smallest hammer on the tool truck. At the quarry I mostly hid behind a boulder where I could hardly be seen by the two Australian supervisors looking down on us from the top. Finally the supervisors woke up to my ploy, fired me and sent me back to Sydney. I was probably the only worker in Australia who was ever dismissed in those times of extreme labour shortage.

As soon as I got to Sydney, I went to see the technical college professor – a pre-war refugee from Vienna – who welcomed me with open arms since he needed an assistant to do the statistical calculations for his research. Having finished two years of statistics at the technical university in Prague prior to my escape, I had no difficulty in passing the required examination and I was offered the job. With the offer in hand, I went to see the employment officer in Sydney who sternly told me, “Who do you think you are? Cushy jobs like that are for Australians” and sent me to a metal-stamping factory in Balmain. At that point I really felt utterly miserable about Australia!

During my time at the factory, I tried to arrange the continuation of my studies started in Prague at the University of Sydney. Since my English was very weak I had to learn the language as quickly as possible, which I did in less than a year. What was important and a blessing was that the University of Sydney was running parallel evening courses, mainly but not exclusively for ex-servicemen. What also helped was that I was able to exchange my factory job for one at the TB hospital in Randwick. There my job was to empty and steam-boil bed pans, which I could do in less than six hours and thus have a couple of hours to study.

Sydney at that time was very parochial and dull compared with Europe. There was a prevailing working class mentality, with drinking and gambling as the main sources of diversion for many Australian men. There were few signs of culture or intellectual pursuits and the closest one could get to a non-Australian cuisine were the Chinese restaurants in Dixon Street. New Australians, as we were officially called, were not very much liked by the locals and incidents of outright hostility such as “why don’t you speak bloody English” or “we don’t rent out to foreigners” were common place.

The one big exception to all that was the University of Sydney campus where one’s ethnic origin and foreign accent were of no relevance. All that mattered was one’s capacity to learn and enjoy the life of the mind. There were several Czechs taking university courses at that time and all of us had to work during the day to survive. During our leisure time there

were cafes at King's Cross open till late and volleyball at Rushcutters Bay on the weekends.

Some of the above views and impressions picture the first steps in Australia as somewhat grim. I should, however, also stress that throughout that time I never regretted exchanging the occasionally harsh realities of life in Australia for living in oppression – or worse still incarceration – in Czechoslovakia.

Since then, Australia has progressed tremendously in all aspects of life and it is now an integral part of western culture. This was apparent to me immediately when I returned to Australia after many years in the United States, when at Sydney Airport I heard over the loudspeaker a voice making an announcement with a notable foreign accent!

Jenny Shute

My story is how I spent last year.

At the beginning of the year my daughters finally convinced me to join Facebook (which I now love) but had avoided for a long time. Having done that I decided, not as a New Year's resolution but just for the fun of it, to do something new and different each month for the rest of the year. It didn't have to be anything dramatic or earth shattering just new to me.

I started off by writing a letter to the editor of the Telegraph, something I had never done before, then one day I was in the library and there was a notice by a professor wanting people to take part in a survey for her thesis, another first for me. From then I was on the lookout all the time for something new and different, I did a cooking course and tried Laughter Yoga but unfortunately the course kept getting cancelled (I must have been the only person in need of a good laugh). I also went for a prayer walk around our area, which was very uplifting. I think the highlight was going to a charity breakfast for Alzheimer's Australia, where the guest speaker was Ita Buttrose, who was so interesting and inspiring.

The year continued on, I had some Facebook comments published in an overseas magazine (definite first for me) and gate crashed a stranger's wake (not quite as bad as it sounds). The only thing I did chicken out on, although I did enquire about it, was auditioning for a part in a local drama group, they were doing Calendar Girls, which was a bit too much of a challenge! I finished off the year by giving a farewell speech in front of 250 people on behalf of all the women in our church for our minister – very much out of my comfort zone but I got through it.

So that is the story, nothing dramatic or earth shattering, but it was my story and I thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of looking for new and different things to do and take the plunge out of my comfort zone every so often.

The Kibbeh Basin – by Jennifer Jacobs

Mum turned 84 the other day and to celebrate she gave something away. This is nothing new, she's always trying to palm off something onto me. Ever since she moved into her flat, she has nowhere to put all the stuff from the old house, so each time I visit I come away with bags of crockery and bits of furniture. But this time I was stunned.

"Come on, I've got something for you," she said and she motioned for me to follow her as she wobbled off down the hall behind her walking frame.

She had it out on the kitchen bench waiting for me. She wouldn't look at it, just turned her head away and pointed at it as if the sight of it offended her.

"This is no good for me," she said, "You know I can't handle it anymore. You take it."

We both stood there not saying a word, her with her eyes fixed on the floor and me gazing at the enormous butcher's basin. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to take this from her or not to take it. If I took it, I'd be saying "You're a useless old woman. You can't even do what you did best. So you might as well give up." But then, if I didn't take it, she might be insulted. She was offering me the closest thing she had to a family heirloom.

In the end I took it. I got around it by saying that she could just use the little bowl instead and how that would be more practical because there's only her and her carer to cook for now. And I could use the big one for when the family came over for Christmas and Easter or even just for all of us at home, because the kids love kibbeh so much. She knew I was full of bull, trying to make it easier on her. She knew as well as I did that I had no intention of standing in the kitchen cooking for three hours, preparing food that has a higher cholesterol count than a dozen battered savs.

I took the basin home and stuffed it into the top shelf of the pantry, underneath a pile of old placemats and carry bags. It came out once last year when we took the kids camping and needed something to have a wash in. I looked at it, all cracked and chipped and full of dirty, soapy

water and bits of grass and felt guilty using it like this, when back in its day it was the most important thing in the kitchen.

When we were kids, Mum and Dad took us to Saint George's Antioch Cathedral every Sunday morning for the 10 am service. This ran for two hours, so before we left home, Sunday lunch had to be prepared. Mum and Dad got up at 6 am to get the kibbeh started. My brothers and I hung around the kitchen in our pyjamas, eating labne and zahte on hot buttered toast, watching Dad hack away at a leg of lamb. He worked in small, strong strokes, cutting away every ounce of fat and gristle from the meat, hissing between his teeth when he came to the sinewy bits. When there wasn't a skerrick of meat left on the bone he called out to the other side of the kitchen, "Mama, you ready?"

"I'm ready. I'm just waiting for you," she'd always call back.

She'd have the hand-grinder set up for him on the edge of the kitchen bench, with newspaper under it to protect the laminex. Then the ritual began: he ground the meat, then ground it again and handed it over to Mum. She put it in the basin, added spice, onions and cracked wheat and kneaded it with iced water until it was smooth. Then back it went through the grinder twice again while we kids waited close by like puppies at dinner time, our pieces of bread held out until Dad put a dollop of the heavenly food into each one. Kibbeh eaten raw like this, with a drizzle of olive oil, was as smooth and fragrant as a fine pate, but I never ever told any of my friends at school that I ate raw meat. Dad said it wouldn't be a good idea.

"The Inglese," he said, "they're different. They don't know food like we do. Just say you eat meat loaf at home. That's all they understand."

After she put some of the kibbeh aside to be eaten raw, Mum spread the rest of it into baking trays, covered it with slabs of butter and baked it for lunch. Soon, the whole house was filled with a spicy, buttery aroma that spilled out into the backyard.

Before too long a head full of pink and blue rollers would pop over the side fence, and Mrs Finlay would sing out, "That's an exotic smell, Mrs Melick. What are you having for lunch?"

The Finlays had lived next door to us for 12 years, but Mrs Finlay was still Mrs Finlay to Mum and Mum was always Mrs Melick to her.

“Just meat loaf, Mrs Finlay,” she’d call back, with a smile and a nod to us, and we’d smile with her, knowing our secret was safe.

The Finlays never found out what it was we were cooking. Maybe if they’d been a little friendlier, Mum would have sent a plate over the fence for them to try. But old Mr Finlay had some strange ideas about us. He reckoned he caught the boys snooping around his backyard and disturbing his chooks one night under the cover of darkness. He wrote us a letter all about it, signed it “An Anonymous Resident” and mailed it to us from a post office four suburbs away. We all cried laughing the night Dad came home from work and read it out to us.

As annoying as Mrs Finlay was, she was a pushover compared to Elizabeth Johnston at Strathfield Public. Every Monday lunchtime she made a point of leaning over my shoulder and checking out my sandwich of leftovers from the weekend. Then she’d go back to her little clutch of friends and they’d all whisper to each other and stare at me. One Monday she couldn’t hold back any longer. She sauntered over to where I was sitting.

“Watcha got in ya sammich, Jenfa?” she asked me, swinging her beautiful blond head around to make sure she had an audience nearby.

I stared right back at her and took my time. I could hear Dad’s voice in my head as if he were sitting right next to me in the playground. “Don’t tell the Inglese anything, you hear? If they ask you what you are, you say, ‘I’m Australian. I’m Australian and my Mum and Dad are Australian too.’ You’ve got nothing to be ashamed of.”

I stuffed the rest of the sandwich into my mouth, gave it a couple of chews to wet it nicely and took careful aim. “Meat LoaFFFF!” I shouted. Little bits of kibbeh sandwich sprayed out all over Elizabeth Johnston’s starched uniform and clung in soggy globs to her pretty, freckly arm.

“Filthy wog,” she muttered and turning on her heel, stormed back to her corner with her pony tail swinging furiously behind her.

I felt great after that. I’d put her right back in her place without giving a thing away. Dad would’ve been proud of me. All of my friends understood exactly what I was going through that day, even though I was the only Lebanese amongst them. Julie was an Iraqi Jew, Dom was Italian and Christina’s family was Greek. But we all had our secrets. We each had a kibbeh basin at home, something that made us feel special.

Last week, for the first time in years, I made some kibbeh. Not so much because I wanted to eat it (all that cracked wheat and onion can do things to you – they always said that the Lebanese army was “powered” by it). No, it’s not so much the taste as the smell of it that I missed. I hadn’t smelt a tray of kibbeh cooking for too long, now that Mum’s given up doing just about everything, apart from sitting and watching Foxtel. She’d have an angina attack if she saw how I made it – I chucked the whole lot into the food processor, turned it onto high and left the room for four minutes. And I couldn’t come at using all that butter either, just a spray of extra virgin olive oil, so I knew it wouldn’t taste like the real thing.

I often wonder what I’ll do when I get too old to care about anything and possessions are nothing but a nuisance to me. What special family relic could I pass on to my daughters, children of the disposable generation where everything comes fast and it’s the end that matters, not how you got there.

I’ve got a few ideas. There is the food processor, but I don’t think either of the girls has seen me actually using it, definitely not when I make kibbeh because I’m so quick.

Then there’s their brother’s kitchen knife – the first one he sold us when he switched from being an astro-physicist to a knife salesman. But the girls say that Adam’s personality took a nasty turn at that point in his life, so maybe the knife wouldn’t be such a good idea after all.

High on the list would be the fridge, the only thing in the kitchen the girls have physical contact with. Contact is always brief, but frequent: short, violent attacks on its contents at any time of the day or night so that nobody wants to sit down and eat a proper meal because they’re always “full”. We use the fridge door as a whiteboard, too. It’s packed with love notes, phone messages, baby sitting reminders and dentist appointments. Yes, the fridge would be a great thing to leave them, if it wasn’t already dying a slow, smelly death.

No, I think that when all is said and done the one precious thing in our home that everyone would like to have to themselves is my old black handbag. Over the years, it has become the centre of our household, my most desirable possession. If you dropped by my place any morning at eight when all the kids were still at home, you’d know why:

“Mum, can I have the car keys?”

“They’re in my bag.”

“Have you got a few dollars? I’m a bit short.”

“I’m not sure. Check in my bag.”

“I can’t find my lippy/mascara/mobile/blush. Have you got any?”

“In my bag.”

Yes, that will be it. I’ll leave it to the lot of them and they can fight over it.

The Patriotic Fervour of Empire Day – by Joan Craymer

In the 1940s and 1950s all NSW primary school students owned a Phillip's School Atlas with much of the world shaded in a reddish pink to display the size and influence of the British Empire of which Australians were then proud to be a part. Patriotism was still fashionable and political correctness had not yet begun to attack our national persona.

We could be proud of our British heritage without being considered either racist or blindly submissive to Britain. Yes, there were stories of shabby treatment of our Aussie soldiers during those far off wars fought by Britain; however, the reality was, those soldiers were there because they believed in the empire, and had close family ties to the 'motherland'.

When my brothers and I were at school, Australian children celebrated Empire Day on 24 May, the birthday of Queen Victoria who had been dead for around 40 years by the time we were born. This celebration was aimed at teaching school children the history of the British Empire which was said to be so large "the sun never set" on part of its territories somewhere in the world.

Empire Day was great fun, with the morning spent reciting poems and singing patriotic songs like Rule Britannia and Land of Hope and Glory and dressing up in the national costumes of all the countries of the far flung empire. A half-day holiday would then be benevolently declared by some local 'deity'. There was also much time wasted before the actual day practising the traditional tableaux where all the representatives of the countries of the empire assembled on stage, in carefully rehearsed poses, to show the strength and cohesion of the empire.

The star of the show was always Britannia, who came on stage first and took up her position, upon a raised platform of some kind, while clutching a shield with a representation of the Union Jack, and a kind of three-pronged pitchfork as her props. She was usually swathed in a white bed sheet and on her head she wore some mother's effort at reproducing a centurion's helmet.

Our mother patiently created national costumes as required, out of cast-offs, leftovers and crepe paper. My first outing as an inhabitant of the

Empire was as a Scottish lass, where I had to hold hands with a boy called Luke and be part of the tableaux. My brother was a Welsh boy and, to set off his costume, our mother fashioned an impressive tall hat from cardboard painted with tyre black.

For my final patriotic performance enacted at high school, I was dressed to represent Australia and held the place of honour beside Britannia herself! I went on stage dressed in black leggings and a tight black jumper, with black gloves and socks and all visible pink skin blackened with Nugget's boot polish. To complete my Australian Aboriginal costume, my blonde Anglo Saxon hair was stopped with a wig of wild black hair made from thin strips of recycled black fabric. I carried a full-sized New Guinea native spear which was a wartime souvenir given to my father by the friendly New Guinea natives during World War II.

The declaration of the totally unexpected half-day holiday was the signal for the strangely dressed make-believe empire dwellers to rush home for a hurried lunch. Then all the kids in the street would meet on one of the vacant blocks of land to finish dragging fuel to the top of the bonfire they had been working on for days – or sometimes weeks. Plans for guarding the finished mound of everything combustible against premature lighting by kids that lived in the next street often resulted in sentries being put on guard each day after school at bonfire sites all across the country.

These measures were necessary because there was great rivalry between the different groups of bonfire builders. My brother confessed, with a twinkle in his eye, that he and his friend lit the fires of rival gangs whenever they had the chance. "It was a case of get them before they get you," he explained. To light the targeted bonfire without getting close enough for detection and capture by the owners of the fire under attack required careful planning. A cloth that had been thoroughly soaked in kerosene, then lit and fired from a bow and arrow was my brother's preferred method.

By twilight time on Empire Day, with tea having been gulped down in all the surrounding houses, all the local kids would be standing as close to the fire as the adults would allow, ready for the conflagration to begin.

Tom Thumbs on long strings, double bangers, sparklers and a modest stash of Catherine wheels and jumping jacks – and perhaps for some lucky kids – even one or two rockets, were let off by eager children supervised by paranoid fathers who no doubt remembered the escapades of their own misspent youth. Our parents really didn't

approve of sending money up in smoke, so we bought our own fireworks from our meagre pocket money. We had a wonderful time until the last unignited Tom Thumb was tracked down and set off. There would even be a further hopeful foray the next day just in case one or two crackers had been missed!

What great memories the patriotic fervour of those Empire Days of early to mid-20th century childhood invoke. The end was foretold when Empire Day was renamed Commonwealth Day in 1958 to reflect the changed relationship between Britain and its former dominions, while allegiance to Britain became increasingly unfashionable.

Australia discarded God Save the Queen in favour of Advance Australia Fair in the early 1980s and banned the lighting of fires. Soon the fun police decreed fireworks were too dangerous and the memories of Empire Day gradually faded.

Sadly, new generations of Australians will not know or understand the simple patriotic joys of those, sometimes politically incorrect, celebrations of the first half of the 20th century.

The Wardrobe – by John Treggoning

While travelling along the Cumberland Highway though Cabramatta in recent weeks I noticed an old wardrobe residing on the western verge beside the footpath. Likely the owners of the dwelling behind this now forlorn and lonely piece had decided that its time had come.

I expect this lovely old walnut brown, three-door friend had been replaced by other storage, which likely would not enjoy the years of faithful service, as this solidly crafted piece. Its simple design included hanging at both ends and a set of four draws centred to the width and height with shelves above and below, typical for its 1950s era. Examples in my parents' home were modelled on a design from the extensive Anthony Horden's catalogue and crafted by Mr Glasson, just across the highly productive Chinese gardens in nearby Arncliffe. I recall seeing similar pairs of wardrobes occupying the rooms of extended family members and being in those days more than adequate to accommodate one's complete apparel.

For a gentleman's ensemble would always include a brimmed felt hat and winter overcoat and items of clothing and footwear could be identified as 'good' and 'everyday' wear. Indeed, your 'good' apparel would likely only include single examples of bespoke main items to be worn on specific or special occasions. Whereas 'everyday' wear, while still limited in number, comprised the clothes you wore to and from your place of employment. An older and more heavily repaired set of cloths were reserved for the weekend lawn moving and household chores.

In today's social, highly mobile and more disposable society our personal wardrobe is very much fashion dictated, more easily identified with the seasons of the year and the personal activities we pursue in our business, family and social lives. Lives manipulated by the 'want' necessity of caring for, shopping for, and storage of these items. The once weekly wash, accomplished with copper, concrete tubs, hand ringer and cross arm clothes line with its essential clothes prop, have all been replaced by another suite of energy consuming appliances to process the increased volume of apparel, a process which in some households has introduced personal phobias in an attempt to manage this part of living. The once familiar bar of Sunlight soap and 'blue bag' has been replaced by shelves groaning at the volume of cleaning products, essential we are told, by marketing campaigns for our busy

lives. This increase in possessions brings with it an increase in packaging which once a 20-litre metal garbage tin, the occupants of a chook house, productive backyard gardens and an incinerator comfortably accommodated. Our limited space has now shrunk to placate multi-coloured, plastic wheelie bins which are collected and removed from our personal space, at great expense, to ever more remote sites and where this residue of society remains as a legacy for future generations.

The demand for apparel has spawned new business and employment opportunities, sometimes to the betterment of those involved, and sometimes to the detriment. The activity of collecting old clothes for reuse in the making of paper has been replaced by retail outlets through which charitable organisations are able to fund their support of those less fortunate in our society. And to accommodate this stuff we need ever increasing storage solutions and houses into which these containers are installed.

Some would long for the more constrained, and simpler, times represented by 'that wardrobe'.

Jack – by John Taylor

From its nest, and not knowing why,
It tumbled earthward from way up high.
Cascading on branches all the way down,
To finally land on soft, grassy ground.

A fall so precarious, desperate and long,
Terrifying for a bird so soft and young.
How could it survive such an amazing fall?
It had no cuts, scratches or bruises at all.

Sporting transparent skin and a little fluff,
It was clearly made of much sterner stuff.
With a beak too big and eyes to match,
Its claws immature, yet ready to scratch.

Raised in warm, gentle, inquisitive hands,
Wrapped in a hanky with a few torn strands.
Rushed home and through the front gate,
Its destiny now sealed to a boy, like fate.

Begging wood and nails from his Dad,
The boy made a box from what he had.
Lined it with old pyjamas of flannelette,
To keep the bird warm and save it yet.

Now to feed it, an eye-dropper was found,
Warm milk it was soon swallowing down.
The boy knew it needed something more,
So searched for worms to satisfy its craw.

It survived the day and then through the night,
The sound in the morning was bound to excite.
Raising its head, as if too large for its neck,
It squawked for food or whatever it could get.

The bird was a Jackdaw, the boy named it Jack,
It might be a girl, but he didn't worry about that.
As the days wore on, stubble began to grow,
And a big round belly that really did show.

Affections obvious, they were quick to grow.
With the only mother this bird would ever know.
Jack grew stronger and began to stand,
But at first only with a steady, caring hand.

During holidays before going back to school,
The boy learned to imitate the Jackdaw call.
Jack would run from the gate when beckoned,
On that familiar sound, not wasting a second.

He was never more happy and secure,
Than when the boy was close and near.
As feathers grew, so did the boy's pride,
They shared something warm, deep inside.

Without mature feathers Jack could not yet fly,
So from a shoulder he watched the world go by.
Learning to balance with the boy on his bike,
So in the village they were quite a regular sight.

Head under the boys chin to give it a rub,
Was this a Jackdaw's version of a hug?
Mischievous and learning fast as Jackdaws do,
Waiting for his chance to undo the lace in a shoe.

The day came when Jack was encouraged to fly,
Tempted to leap off a gate that was not too high.
Being left there alone with his friend still in sight,
Responding to the call, on his first faltering flight.

A few yards of flapping frenzy you might say,
Then on the ground running the rest of the way.
One more day was all the time that it took,
Then Jack was flying high, just like a rook.

School started at the end of that summer,
The boy's heart was torn and in a dilemma.
But no choice was given and it had to be done,
The boy went to school and Jack went along.

In the playground the assembly whistle blew,
The boy raised Jack's feet and up he flew.

It seemed by instinct Jack knew what was to happen,
The boy went inside, with Jack on the window tapping.

At break the boy was impatient to be outside,
Jack soon on his shoulder and not just for a ride.
This bird was intelligent, did it really miss him?
Or did it simply want to rub its head under his chin?

On leaving for home Jack was nowhere to be seen,
So the boy called, and looked for a sign to glean.
In less than a minute, at head height Jack appeared,
Screeching, flying fast towards the boy he revered.

Then on the shoulder, after giving the chin a few rubs,
They set off for home and to find Jack some grubs.
This ritual was repeated every single school day,
While children looked on, neglecting their play.

Trouble was brewing for this contented pair,
Not everyone was happy and didn't really care.
Being fascinated by things all shiny and bright,
Jack liked to hide them out of everyone's sight.

One day the boy awoke all covered in spots,
The doctor came and said it was Chickenpox.
So in bed for many days he was obliged to stay,
And Jack on his window ledge waiting to play.

On the fifth day Jack was there no more,
The boy wondering, what was the score?
Frustrated, unable to go out and search,
From his window, calling Jack home to his perch.

In a village, news on the vine travels fast,
But his mother waited till the spots had passed.
"Mr Spalding" had hit Jack with a lump of wood,
No good reason, simply because he could.

Now the boy is grown, but still can't understand why,
This man would destroy his bird and its wonderful cry.
But when he hears a Jackdaw calling on the wing,
It becomes 'his' Jack calling back to him.

Joining the Army – by Noel Welshman

Three weeks after the Japs entered the war and four sweltering days after Christmas 1941, the three hired buses carrying the 100 conscripted odds and sods (including Ernest West), whose divine, if reluctant, mission was to swell the ranks of the militia's 17th Infantry Battalion, climbed up the steep hill from Roseville Bridge towards Frenchs Forest.

The red-headed man next to Ernest was studying a photo. His mouth was closed grimly as he looked at his wife and children.

Some medical examination wasn't it?" he said bitterly. "Eh! Oh yes," Ernest replied and added, "but it's a nice day for it."

"I haven't noticed," the man responded sourly.

"Nice kids you have," Ernest said politely.

"Yeah. But what will they be like in a couple of years' time?" he answered angrily.

Ernest decided he was getting nowhere and went back to reading the morning paper.

The Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, today issued the following New Year's message in which he appealed to the United States for help – "Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom."

"Did you read what Curtin said?"

"I'm not interested in anything that socialist Prime Minister says," the man replied rudely. They continued their journey in silence through the endless eucalyptus trees which dominate the Australian bush. Soon after passing a cluster of Casuarina saplings growing in what appeared to be a dried up swamp, a uniformed soldier sitting behind the civilian driver, and wearing the black over green colour patch of the 17th, indicated to the guy to slow down and then pull over to the dirt and gravel strip on the side of the road. Rows of tents could be seen at various locations through the trees.

“De-bus!” roared a voice as it walked along the side tapping on the windows.

“De-bus? What does that mean?” the red-headed man sneered. “Why can’t they speak English?”

Ernest was too busy stepping across some thorny, dying blackberry bushes, which seemed to recently have been sprayed with weed killer, to try to answer the unhappy man.

“Follow me!” ordered the voice as it strode forward in the blazing heat to a clearing among some Paperbark and Golden Wattle trees. Ernest noted that the owner of the voice was a sergeant.

The recruits struggled through the scrub and then passed a small cleared area which appeared to be an open air lavatory comprising a dozen or so pans. A soldier was sitting on one reading a newspaper and nonchalantly enjoying a smoke. He almost fell off backwards when he sighted the sergeant but recovered quickly and, after hastily hoisting up his trousers, disappeared into the trees. Soon they arrived at a recently graded flat area devoid of grass.

“Halt! Form three lines facing me!” the voice with three stripes directed. The men scrambled into the requested number of lines with the assistance of two NCOs. “No talking in the ranks,” shouted the sergeant. “The CO is to address you.”

Two officers appeared. The elder, who had several strings of ribbons on his uniform, looked at the drafted men for a couple of minutes and then said something to his partner, who shook his head from side to side sadly. They gave the distinct impression that they were disappointed in what they saw.

It might be difficult for some of us to know what to say to a reluctant group joining an establishment in which we have great pride. The commanding officer did not find it a problem at all. His address was brief and cogent. “Well, men, you are now members of the 17th Battalion. I don’t want you to cause any trouble because we know how to deal with trouble-makers. If you work hard we will make soldiers of you. There will be no leave for four weeks. There are women around this camp. I strongly advise you, for your own sakes, not to have anything to do with them.”

Whether his final remark was intended to be fatherly advice, or whether it was simply that he did not want any venereal disease-ridden men in his outfit, is a matter of conjecture. In the context of the rest of his address, it was probably the latter.

That night, lying on his pailasse inside their tent, Ernest reflected on his situation. The five other men seemed to be asleep. They had rolled up the sides and pulled up the flaps at the front and back to let the breeze in and now the pleasant familiar smell of the bush came to him. He sat up and looked outside where the moon was shining brightly through the trees. This area was well-known to him as the church youth group had often hiked to Frenchs Forest.

One of the men had asked a corporal for a lamp.

“There aren’t any. Anyhow, you’ll be glad to go to sleep as soon as it gets dark”, he had replied patronisingly, with contempt for their rawness.

The transformation from civilian to soldier, for Ernest, seemed complete. It was good that the camp was only seven miles from his home and he wondered what his mother and father and brothers and sisters were doing. Was it only yesterday that he was a civilian on the beach? This was the first time he had ever been away from home without some of his family. He had experienced a superior feeling when he had been allocated to E Company – the Vickers machinegun company, but now he felt a little homesick. A bugle played Lights Out. He listened to the beautiful notes and then lay back and rested his head on his kitbag. He closed his eyes and that institution known as ‘The Army’ quietly but firmly tucked him into itself.

Humble Beginnings – by Kathy Rozmeta

In my early years of teaching, we coined a name for a competition that was born at one of our Friday wind-down sessions at the pub.

It was called “my fence is rustier than your fence” and came out of a spirited story telling session, fuelled by wine and the joy of being free of our job for two glorious days. One hapless fellow quite seriously shared his story of childhood poverty. Not to be outdone, his mate enthusiastically joined in with “you think that’s bad” and trumped that story with his own saga of poverty and added some neglect for added impact.

Teachers back in the ‘60s were often working class kids who won scholarships to uni or college. The rich kids (at least the bright ones) never chose teaching as their first choice. So outdoing each other with the rusty fence stories became a fun way for us to share what were really great stories of humble beginnings.

I remember a scene from TV depicting three young cops. The rich white boy says, seeking sympathy: “My maid used to lock me in a cupboard”. The pretty white girl cop says “Wow. You had a maid?” The poor black cop says “Wow. You had a cupboard?” It was like that.

I thought anyone who lived north of Sydney Harbour had no right to join in our game. One poor fellow tried to apologise for coming from affluence, and feebly offered “but my father drove a bus ...” He was met with sneering contempt and, anyway, he had a posh accent so had no hope, not with rusty fences.

At teachers’ college, students came from all over. Some, like me, came from the inner city or surrounding suburbs. The rich kids from Palm Beach had failed uni and this was their last resort. There were a few bushies too, from weird sounding places like Turlinga and they weren’t from money. Back then, coming from suburbs like Glebe, Paddington, Leichhardt and Balmain was something to be a bit ashamed of.

My college was walking distance from Glebe where I lived with my parents, being only 16 when I started. I had grown up vaguely aware of uni students – exotic creatures who dressed in black and sun-baked on

the corrugated iron laundry roofs at the back of the terraces. I thought they were strange and interesting, just not of my world.

One day, our Ed Psych class was viewing a school pupil doing an IQ test through a two-way mirror. He was from Glebe Public and very bright. There was general surprise from the class, expressed by one chap (from Revesby), "Amazing. He's really smart for a kid from Glebe." They knew I lived there but assumed I was renting. No one actually lived there, did they?

A friend of mine who came from Balmain had a party trick. When he received an awkward or condescending response to where he lived, like "Oh, I hear there are some nice areas of Balmain", he liked to say, "Yes, there are, but I come from the slummy part." How times change.

Is My Life Fated? – By Tam Loc John Duong

Life is beautiful, but is it fated or a sequence of coincidences?

As a man of technology and sciences, this is a question I have pondered for many years; and now as a 70-year-old man I still don't have the answer, even though fate seems to have appeared and directed my life.

But first let me introduce myself: I was born in Qui-Nhon, a small town in the central region of Vietnam and grew up in Saigon when my father got attracted to the bright lights of the biggest city in Vietnam.

As young as I can remember, I knew that I wanted to fly overseas and I also understood that the only chance of that happening for me was to get a scholarship. This desire grew stronger each time I saw in the movie news a group of young students waving goodbye to their families and boarding a plane for an overseas scholarship. That was why, without needing much encouragement from my close friends, I hurriedly submitted my application for the Australian Colombo Plan Scholarship (CP) after my high school graduation.

That was when fate made its first appearance to me. When the Australian Embassy in Saigon set the date for the English test (for the eligible students) to select the successful candidates for the scholarship that year, it was on exactly the same date and at exactly the same time of the entrance exam for the Saigon Medical Faculty. Since I was in the eligible lists for both exams and could only sit for one, I had to make a decision. Now what did I do? I let a coin decide my fate and it told me (three times) that I would go to Australia. To challenge fate, I decided to skip the English test and sat for the medical faculty entrance exam. But, just when the exam was about to start, I found out that the Australian Embassy had moved the English test to another date so that all eligible students (including me of course) could sit for it.

When I was awarded the Australian CP Scholarship a few months later, my father encouraged me to obey my fate and take up the scholarship, even though I had been studying medicine for nearly two months.

Fate appeared again when I was in Australia.

One evening, I did something that I had not done since leaving Saigon two and a half years before – going to visit a female student. But that evening, despite my reluctance, I followed a few friends to visit Anh, a Vietnamese student who just arrived in Sydney that morning, and I fell in love with her at first sight. Since I was the very first young man who showed very special interest in her, Anh allowed me many opportunities to spend time with her. After nearly a year, Anh decided to publicly go out with me. (I still wonder, as a young man shy of rejection, how I could approach Anh if I did not pay her that special visit on her first evening in Australia.)

Again, two years later, when I just passed all my final exams for the Bachelor of Engineering degree and would be told if I could remain in Australia for some post-grad studies or be sent home like most Colombo Plan graduates. It was right at that time, Anh's grandfather, who had been in good health and with no history of illness, suddenly passed away and, as a custom that a lot of Vietnamese families follow, Anh would have to get married within three months of his death or would have to wait more than three years before she could marry.

Anh's mother discussed the situation with my parents, who by that time already knew about my engineering graduation and felt that I was a grownup who should get married. The two families then rushed ahead with our wedding and the celebration party, without us knowing about it until we received their letter and photos of 'our wedding' (without us, of course). Even though we knew that they could not have informed us earlier even if they tried, because our families did not have a phone, we still thought that the families should at least have tried to inform us before the actual event. Anyway, we were ecstatic that we had been married (and hurried with our 'real' wedding in Sydney).

But fate really showed its presence three years later, in 1975, when the Communist Army took over Vietnam and formed a new government that temporarily cut all ties with Australia and America.

Bob Hawke, on behalf of the Whitlam government, informed the students at a University of NSW assembly that all Vietnamese CP students would soon be sent home as an Australian goodwill gesture to the new communist government. Anh and I, after many years enjoying the freedom in Australia, the human equality, the good education and health system were worried about the future of our two-year-old daughter, Jacqueline. We even considered the option of leaving her in Sydney with her Australian foster parents.

Suddenly (fate?), in the form of the Governor General, kicked the Whitlam government out, the first such political event in Australian history, and the newly elected Fraser government soon announced that we would be granted refugee status if we applied for it.

I went out and got a job, happily settled down, raised our children, and now occasionally look after our grandchildren, enjoying each of my senior days, and my beautiful life in Australia.

If you say that I have a blessed life, I would whole-heartedly agree, but deep down in my confused logic I wonder whether “blessed” means I have an archangel watching over me, or whether my life had been scripted before I was born, or whether it is just a series of wonderful coincidences.

The Fisherman – by Martin Mcgrath

As a boy he had learned to fish in the harbour in Brindisi, Italy. Now he was an old man living half a world away in Sydney, Australia where he had brought his young bride on a big white ship in 1950.

“It will be a better life,” he had said. “We will have a big house and many children.”

Now, each morning, alone, he took the train from the suburbs to the city and walked slowly down to the harbour. He walked under the bridge at the southern pylon and around to the wharves at Walsh Bay. In a hessian bag he carried lines and hooks and sinkers, and a sharp knife. Every day he wore the same clothes: a clean white shirt buttoned at the collar and at the cuffs, long trousers and brown leather sandals with no socks. On his head covering the few grey strands that clung stubbornly to his scalp he wore a soiled and faded baseball cap bearing the insignia of the New York Yankees.

His skin was brown and lined and toughened from years working in the sun. His big eyes sat deep in their sockets, shaded by thick black eyebrows. His hands were big and still retained the strength of a young man.

There were no wool bales, or steamers or labourers on the wharves anymore. Behind their grey, weathered façade, the sheds had become offices and apartments with glass and stainless steel. Bitumen and concrete had been laid over the planking. Old photographs hung on walls showed what it once looked like. Rusted machinery was displayed like grotesque pieces of modern art. The moorings outside the apartments were full with bright white boats, bobbing up and down on the swell. Sometimes they would rock from side to side in the wash from a ferry or from the huge freighters or tankers that moored further up the harbour.

Pier Two had not been finished. The sheds were empty. Each day he walked slowly to the end of this pier and set his things down in the morning sun and then he took off his sandals, rolled his sleeves up to the elbows, and his trousers up to his knees. On the end wall of the shed were displayed two signs. One simply said “No Fishing”; the other warned of the risk to health of eating fish caught in the harbour. Some

days he stared up at the signs, but his mind was muddled and his eyes were bad, and he simply turned away and began baiting his hooks. He would sit with his feet dangling over the edge of the pier and call softly to the fish to come to the feast.

In the evening, as the sun was fading, he would carefully pack his things and any fish he caught into the hessian bag, roll down his sleeves and trousers cuffs, put on his sandals and walk slowly back under the bridge up to the railway.

Sometimes others would come and fish, but they never disturbed him and left him to his spot. Mostly, though, he fished alone. He would fish every day whether sunny, rainy or cold, but mostly he liked the days he could feel the warmth of the sun on his skin.

After many months, another fisherman came to the wharf. He was younger than the old man but still of an age when a man may want to spend his days in quiet pursuits. He too had learned to fish as a boy, but in the Mekong. During the first days when he came he fished around the other side of the shed out of sight of the old man. But on one day it was raining. He saw the old man took no shelter from the rain, so he took an umbrella and held it over the old man's head. The old man was touched by the kind gesture and motioned to him sit by him under the umbrella. The next day and all the days after they sat and fished together.

They tried to converse, but the old man found it more and more difficult to remember the English words. The Italian words came easily. The younger man didn't seem to mind. Even though he spoke English well, he began to converse in Vietnamese, as he enjoyed the freedom of speaking in his native tongue. So they carried on their conversations, one in Italian, and the other in Vietnamese.

The old man spoke of his days as a young man in Brindisi, and of taking a basket with wine and bread into the hills and sitting with a young girl under a tree and falling in love. The younger man spoke of setting off from Vietnam in a small wooden boat with a tiny, foul smelling motor. It was crowded with mothers and fathers and children and babies. How they were tossed around like sea trash on the ocean until the fuel and water ran out, and then they drifted for days until they scraped to a stop on a reef. Many, including his wife, didn't survive, but he and his boys were picked up by a navy ship and taken to the mainland.

At times the old man would go and lie in the shade of the empty shed and sleep. The younger man watched his lines.

One day some boys came onto the wharf riding skate boards. They rode close to the old man while he lay in the shade and shouted at him, making fun of him. The old man awoke startled and confused. The younger man ran to see what the commotion was. He shouted at the boys.

“Leave him alone,” he screamed waving his hands at them. “Can’t you see he is an old man?”

Sometime later the younger man brought a young boy with him.

“This is my grandson,” he said with a beaming smile.

The older man grinned at the young boy and patted him on the head. The younger man made gestures with his hands, pointing to the boy and then to the old man. A sadness came over the old man and he simply shook his head.

He was silent for some time and then he said softly, “I had a son, but he died at birth. After that my wife could not have children,” and then he added in a whisper, “and now my beautiful bride has gone, too.”

After that the old man did not talk much. The younger man seemed to understand.

On a bright morning in December the two men found their way to the wharf was blocked by a barricade and two men in uniform.

“You can’t fish here today,” said one of the men.

The wharf was no longer empty. Moored along its entire length was a gleaming white ship, with a bow that rose up like a giant wave and tapered down to a rounded stern that sat low in the water. On top of the ship sat a large grey dome. It reminded the old man of the ship that had brought him here over 60 years before. In fact it was the pleasure yacht of a famous and rich man, in town for the New Year’s celebration on the harbour.

The two men stood in silence staring up at the great ship, and then the younger man took the arm of the older man to lead him away.

“Come, my friend,” he said. “We will fish on the next wharf.” But the older man stood steady and did not move, his eyes fixed on the great white ship. So the younger man left him and went to the next wharf. The older man stood in the same place for some time looking up at the ship, at the gangplank and the boxes being taken on board and at the two painters slung over the side touching up spots on the hull.

When the younger man arrived the next day there was a great commotion. At the end of the wharf, at the spot where they usually fished, there was a police car. It was empty but with its lights flashing red and blue. The younger man was scared; he had learned not to trust police, but he was worried the old man might be in trouble. He walked carefully around the shed to the wharf on the other side and made his way to the end where he could stand inside the empty shed and peer out through the gaps in the timber cladding.

It was the old man, and he seemed to be the cause of the commotion. He was sitting in a chair on the open deck at the back of the great ship. He wasn't wearing his fishing clothes, he was wearing a brown suit buttoned tight at the waist and a floral tie and brown shoes, and on his head was a grey felt hat.

Resting on his knees was a small leather suitcase and he was rocking back and forth in the chair and muttering to himself in his language.

Some crewmen were standing around and the policemen were talking to the old man but he couldn't hear what they were saying. He left the shed and crept around the outside till he was near the police car. He could now hear them, but he was out of sight.

“What's he saying?” said one policeman.

“It's Italian,” said a crewman.

“You speak Italian?” said the policeman.

“No! But one of the painters is Italian.”

The painter was sent for and he made his way nervously onto the deck.

“What's he saying,” said the larger of the two policemen.

He listened to the old man.

“Sto andando a Brindisi,” muttered the old man. “Ho un biglietto.”

“Says he’s going to Brindisi,” said the painter. “Says he’s got a ticket.”

The old man reached into the side pocket of his jacket and pulled out a small black and white photograph and handed it to the painter. It was creased and some of the edge was missing. It showed a young man in a fine suit standing next a young girl in a white dress with a long veil. She was holding a small bouquet of flowers. The young man looked like the happiest man alive.

Boarding School – by Mei Mei Cheng

When I was seven years old, I was sent to a boarding school, which was the only private school in communist China. The school was located outside Beijing (about the distance of the Blue Mountains to Sydney). Originally the school was built for orphans by a past government and charity organisation and established in 1920.

Most of the students there were the children of communist government officials. It's a privilege to study there but I didn't like the school at all because I'd rather stay home with all my friends and play games, have proper meals and be looked after by maids. I was so young then, one of my few memories was one Sunday afternoon my father took me to the school and I hung on to his coat and wouldn't let him go. I wanted to go home with him. I cried very loudly and, no matter what my father said to me, I just wouldn't let him go. Then he slapped me, handed me to the teacher and left. Many years later my mother told me that at that night my father cried; he felt terrible for what he did to me. Since then he never hit me again, even if I did something very naughty.

I constantly complained to my parents about the meals at school: the rice wasn't cooked properly, the meal would be cold when it was served. After Year One my parents decided to transfer me back to the local premier school. I was so happy.

My family was living in a big compound with several other families. Most of them were artists. This compound was a Catholic convent belonging to an American church (in 2005 a priest paid a visit there) which had a big front garden and small garden at back, also one small courtyard on each corner. Between the gardens was a big hall above the basement. I think it must have been the chapel. We had white and purple lilacs, grapevines, mulberry trees, pine trees and a lot flowers. There were about 12 boys and girls the same age. It was like a paradise for us (I have to say it was a paradise in China then).

In the morning we left home together for school, swapped snacks on the way and chatted and laughed (it was only a 15-minute walk). After school we went to the movies together and played hide and seek. There were lots of places to hide, especially the basement. We had lots of children's books, comic books, Andersen's fairy tales, Snow White, Cinderella.

All the girls wanted to be princesses; we made a lot of jewellery with beads and pearls. We used cardboard to make tiaras and painted them in all colours and wore our mothers' high heels and silks. The memories of my childhood are filled with innocence and happiness.

The government transformed the hall into a studio and the whole roof was built of thick glass to let the natural light through. Every day my parents and other artists all came to paint there, mostly sketching or using oil paints. There were lots of plaster statues. They also hired different models. The professors from Russia often came to teach and hold a conference.

I remember one day a nude male model walked out of the studio (he forgot to put his clothes on) to have a break and sit under the sun. All the maids who looked after the kids and did the housework for our parents laughed and ran away. Thinking back, the only reason this purely artistic organisation survived under a communist government was that they wanted to show the whole world that they were a civilized, democratic government.

When the Chinese Cultural Revolution started in 1965, we were the number one target. No family escaped torture or the labour camp and one lady committed suicide. My father became very ill in the camp and died soon afterwards.

The memories of my teenage years were filled with confusion, sadness, and broken hearts.

The Family Weekended – by Paul Mckenzie

My earliest memory of fishing was in the late '50s when the family used to go on fishing trips to the South Coast where we had a shack at Bombo, and I mean a shack. It was the size of a normal family room and privacy was in the way of sheets placed in the room. Everyone slept within arm's reach of each other and the room had a sink and kitchen table and chairs which had to be removed when everyone went to bed. It was situated north of Kiama near the disused quarry close to Bombo beach.

The spot where my family had its makeshift holiday home is now affectionately known as "the boneyard" to surfboard riders. When board riders surfed it in the '70s and blokes rode the left hand break, they used to call out "boney" as it had a naily reef which usually cleaned up the unsuspecting surfer. When I surfed there in those days I often heard this call. However, this is not the reason for the naming. Legend has it that a number of cows strolled too close to the edge of the bluff and fell in and were subsequently eaten by sharks. Hence the grizzly name.

For the family to get to this location in the 1940s and '50s we had to catch a steam train which left Hurstville Station and proceeded to Kiama Station. It took approximately two to three hours. Poking my head out the train window I can remember getting cinders in my eyes whilst proceeding through the tunnel between Otford and Stanwell Park.

The holiday retreat was an old rough shack which was a disused railway property. Dad worked for the railways in those days and they allowed employees to stay there. The shack had no toilet facilities so a hole was dug on the beach and a steel drum placed in the hole, and a makeshift curtain put around it for privacy.

For lighting the shack had a carbonate light and a tank which supplied water. My cousins, Robert and Michael, used to venture up to the railway line to gather this material which gave off a gas suitable for use in the makeshift lantern. Robert told me that it was just as good as an electric light.

For food Dad rowed the old clicker wooden boat out through the channel to sea and set lobster pots and used to fish with hand lines.

It was unusual if he did not return with a catch of some description. We also netted the bay from time to time with other relatives who visited and sometimes got a good catch, which we shared with our neighbours, Pat and Mary, who lived in a tent on the beach.

I remember being with Mum one night catching a crab from Kiama Station. To get to Bombo beach we had to travel through the blue metal quarry which is now utilised as a water treatment plant. However, it is still there today and is a fitting backdrop to past excavation activities supplying much of the road material to Sydney in the early part of the 20th century.

Anyway, as we proceeded through the quarry we could see all these red eyes staring at us. They were in fact water rats that lived in the quarry. It was like a scene from a horror movie.

Dad used to have a pet tarantula in the corner of the shack. The animal was as big as a mouse and Dad used to put the critter on this hand, let it crawl over him and put it on the table and feed it mosquitoes. This formed part of our nightly entertainment as there wasn't much else to do except play cards.

One night, Robert, who was about nine years old at the time, walked straight into the cob web and he nearly died of fright as the critter landed on his face. Everyone thought it was a great joke. Another time a cattle tick became embedded in Robert's ear and Dad used hot oil which he poured into the ear to kill the tick. When we reached the doctor to treat him he said that he had not seen anything like it. The tick has swelled up to four times its normal size and had to be extracted. The doctor told my mother that Dad's procedure would be placed in the medical journal because, to the doctor's knowledge, it had never been previously performed and possibly saved Robert's life. Robert vowed never to return to Bombo.

The trips to Bombo, however, were quite adventurous. There was never a dull moment. One night Dad decided to row to Kiama and go to the pub there. The row was about two kilometres each way. Late at night whilst rowing back he was capsized by a freak wave at the boneyard and he and the boat were washed ashore; I feel he was quite lucky to survive given the rocks and reef that ran along the cove and the fact that he was drunk. Another incident involved a relative not securing the boat properly. It drifted away and later washed up on Minnamurra Beach which is three kilometres away. The boys were told to go and get it and

row it back to camp. Dad's respect for the sea was paramount after the incident and warned me of its dangers during my childhood, adolescence and adult life.

In the late '50s there was a fire in the shack and it was burnt to the ground.

Cold Showers, Fog and tradition – by Paul Stevens

Midnight. Perth airport, about to board what is known as the “red-eye special”. Yet another monotonous plane journey for business purposes alleviated just a little in that I am returning home. I hastily buy a book without noting the author. Well into the writer’s story of travel tales and self I realise that he was describing the same school as I attended 45 years previously in the 1950s. His writing about his schooldays is exceptionally bitter. I reflect high above the Nullarbor that, while my memories are far from happy, I can smile, even chuckle, about my time as a boarder on a scholarship for quote “scholars from poor families” at an English public school founded in 1541 where most of my fellow students were sons of well-to-do’s. The adjacent cathedral owned the school, also the appalling slums on one of its boundaries.

It was a spartan life in very cold dormitories. Pre-breakfast runs followed by cold showers were the norm – and, in that climate with skies often resembling prison blanket grey. Some boys maintained an unrelenting enthusiasm for all this gung-ho and participated energetically in mock battles on army cadet exercises. Clearly they believed what we were frequently told that all this was character building. I was never convinced.

Cadet corp leader Sergeant Major Barrat (retired) did grievous harm unwittingly to the manner of speaking the English language. He doubled as gym instructor. Any detected mimicry brought devastating punishment and pubescent muscle stretching agony. Equally discomforting but in a different way was the practice of having to attend Sunday afternoon high teas in various masters' homes accompanied by vinyl classical records. Culture of a different kind could be found at a certain shady cafe down the back streets of the town where I ineptly flirted with the ladies of the night. The return walk outside curfew hours required stealth and rapid sucking on peppermints to hide evidence of a few cigarettes.

A maharajah's (nabob's) son was a 'fag' with me. He cleaned the monitors' shoes imperfectly, for which I was blamed and caned! In fact, school was a relentless series of injustices.

At my boarding house there was a collegiate spirit among my fellow residents about coming last. Whatever the sport, we never seemed to

make it off the bottom rung in the various competitions. In fact our annual performance in PT garb on College Green in the shadow of Worcester Cathedral drew the largest crowd of amused, often convulsed onlookers. We bore this with fortitude, nobility and resignation.

Mr Knight succeeded the alcoholic Mr Peddar as housemaster and appointed a comely matron in her late 20s. Mrs Knight revolutionised the annual school play and upset the burghers of Worcester by having us perform Julius Caesar in World War II apparel.

There were no quiet times living among 35 under-18 residents other than compulsory study periods and during the Sunday night radio serials of Journey into Space and Dick Barton – Special Agent. I often retreated to the library where entering the thick, centuries old wooden doorway disturbed not only the silence but also the dust of ages. And that was before one selected a leather-bound book from the shelves.

Many of my fellow students were sons of those administering the British Empire in various colonies and returned from vacations with tales of faraway places. I, by contrast, lived in a council house 10 miles away and went to work on farms for one shilling and sixpence per hour or, in season, picking fruit for two shillings a crate. The empire collapsed soon after I left school.

I acquired a tandem bike, painted it black and yellow and made my first endeavour at entrepreneurship by charging for a ride to and from the boathouse along the towpath. I was loaned to the Royal Blind School to cox their rowing team. Here my voice projection developed, and I can still reach the back of most large halls without a microphone when I give speeches. The blind rowers needed to hear the voice of the cox continually for their sense of direction, balance and rhythm.

I ponder the legacy of being taught Ancient Greek and Latin. Years later I discovered that I could translate the antiquarian tombstones in Greece yet was unable to ask the way to the trains.

I think of Professor Nathan who advised me to go into human resources management as I was good at history and therefore understood people! Thirty seconds of career guidance that actually worked out well. Nathan knew that I would not succeed in the exams necessary for progressing in my first career choice – becoming a naval chaplain. His teaching of history always captivated the class's attention by tracing the course of

European history by tales of monarchs and generals illustrated by who slept with and begot whom.

I went back decades later and sat comfortably alone within the gravity and tranquillity of the 12th century school hall listening to echoes of assemblies past, speech days, recitation contests, the singing of Jerusalem to close each term, and of course Saturday night movies. The latter were stringently selected – no bare flesh, inevitably British, usually black and white with themes of right prevailing over wrong, for example, Jack Hawkins, John Mills, Captain Hornblower RN.

The temporary screen was in front of a vast religious fresco severely defaced by Oliver Cromwell's Puritan soldiers circa 1656 but compelling in its damaged state.

I recall the regular appearance of a lone figure swathed in woollens alongside the playing fields and rowing course. He was unable to participate because of his asthmatic condition so it was decreed that he should attend every sport as a spectator winter and summer. His attendance marked off accordingly. What stupidity!

As the red-eye special landed in the Sydney pre-dawn half-light I realised that sad, forlorn looking spectator on the side of the playing field was the writer of the book I was reading, the renowned author Jonathan Raban.

My World has Changed – by Ray Grindley

I'm sometimes told by my family that I'm a hoarder, a charge which I, like all real hoarders, firmly deny. A collector and a keeper of records, our custodian of family history, am I. I have boxes of treasures containing the evidence of things I've done and places I've been since early childhood. Phases of life, life-changing, life-saving experiences.

My treasure trove of things historical comes in handy from time to time, like, when I was asked to prepare an address for a church gathering in connection with the Women's World Day of Prayer a few years ago. I was asked to speak on the theme of the work of brave women in bringing peace to troubled lands. You see, I had spent a year in one of the lands featured in the true stories of women's ministry as peacemakers. That place is Bougainville, New Guinea.

My heart aches when I recall the pain and hardship endured by the people and the island I dearly love. I was there in a time of peace, in 1968 and 1969 – a tranquil period sandwiched between the horrors of World War II and the decade of bloody warfare we know as the Bougainville crisis. During my volunteer year I had the privilege of sitting down with the villagers, listening to their stories, learning of their culture, and recording it on paper, film and audio tape. Amongst my treasures were two boxes full of notebooks and letters I'd written and documents I'd collected during my year there. With my photos there was enough to write a book or two.

Twenty years after my time there, a crisis began which caused the death of thousands of Bougainville's people (some estimate 20,000). Their fight for independence from New Guinea, the cruel six-year blockade imposed by the government and the civil war resulted in many thousands of human casualties and the extensive destruction of the island's infrastructure and townships. The village women, tired of all the killing and the hardship of warfare, played an important peacemaking role. However, there still needs to be healing of the land and its people.

Soon after my marriage in 1971, I was reviewing my photographs and notes of Bougainville when I realised I had a story to tell. Their world was changing, rapidly. I prepared an audio-visual (slides with taped commentary) for the 1971 Sydney International Exhibition of

Photography. I called it “My World is Changing”. But the trophy I won is not nearly as significant to me as the story behind it.

In 1968 the Teop people of north Bougainville were living in a period of peaceful growth. After centuries of strife and division they were enjoying the prospect of educational, economic, political and social development and the promise of a brighter future for their young people. Their world was changing. In 1971 I did not realise how prophetic was that title.

Nor did I realise what change the people had wrought in me during my year spent with them. In hindsight, I’m not sure whether I should regard that experience as an epiphany or a catharsis, but I know that I returned to Australia in July 1969 with a heart that had been healed, a renewed confidence and sense of purpose, and an inner change which profoundly changed my future forever.

I had come to serve them, but had been ministered to by their love. They had no idea of extent of the good they had done me. Let me explain.

In my 20s I had friends who were girls, but none to call my girlfriend. For a decade, right up to my late 20s, I reasoned that the problem was within me, believing that I most certainly was not a gift to womanhood. I recall a phone call from a bubbly young lady who had been delegated the task of arranging a meeting with me in the city (business of course). Since we had never met, she asked me how she could recognise me.

“Are you tall, dark and handsome?”

Since I was very short, fair-headed and very plain looking, I replied honestly, “Just the opposite.”

She groaned.

All that changed in 1964 when I met Joan. For 18 months I enjoyed a relationship which was warm and wonderful, pure and deep. But, suddenly, in August 1965, tragedy struck, and within a week Joan died. I was devastated, lost, and full of grief. My friends, many of whom were girls, tried to help me and comfort me with closer friendship, but I was inconsolable, convinced that I would remain forever single.

Then in March 1968 the strangest thing happened. I received an international telegram inviting me to fill an urgent vacancy on a mission

field in the British Solomon Islands. It was a strange request, oddly worded, yet it seemed so right.

In June 1968 I left home for my year of voluntary service. On my way there I was surprised to learn of a late change of plans. I was now being appointed to Bougainville, New Guinea. The result of that decision was a life-changing period of healing for me. I fell madly in love with the people called Teops. They accepted me at once as a close friend. They shared with me their lives and their culture. They treated me with kindness and dignity. Without them ever knowing my inner pain they did me a powerful lot of good. And at my farewell I was paid a huge compliment when their spokeswoman said in pidgin these words: "Em e no lik-lik man, nogat! Em e bikpela man tru!" (He's not a little man; no ... he truly is a big man!)

I came back to Sydney a changed person. I was ready to discover love again. Within six months I began a relationship with the lady who became my wife, Lyn, with whom I will happily spend the rest of my life. We have two sons and five grandchildren, whom we adore.

I Remember When – by Ron Atkinson

Ah yes, I remember the first stereophonic sound broadcast. I was in my mid-teens and our next door neighbour was into electronics. Wow, his room was full of all kinds of electronic items and dazzling gizmos. They were very mind boggling to me; I had no idea what they were or how they worked, and they looked very strange.

One day he invited us in to hear a stereophonic broadcast. We were only used to rather scratchy 78 LP records on pressed vinyl or listening to our radio set or, if your family could not afford one, the soft volume of homemade crystal radios. So, what is a stereophonic broadcast we asked? He then tried to dazzle us with science about hearing a train roaring across the room! I was sure he was pulling our leg because how could you hear a train run across the room.

So, at the appointed time we ventured into his room and were told where to sit, not just anywhere, but in that particular seat, which we did, with many questions floating around our heads. He then explained that he had two radios, one in each corner of the room opposite us. He then tuned them to two different stations, which of course sounded silly as both stations were obviously transmitting different programs.

However, at the appointed time both stations transmitted the one program and, after a brief explanation of what stereophonic was, started the stereo broadcast. To say we were amazed would be an understatement. The two DJs were on their own channel and talking to each other as if they were both in the room with us. They then played various sounds and music, where you could almost visualise the orchestra being in front of you and the different musical instruments in different parts of the room. And yes, we had the steam train, whistle blowing (and scaring the life out of us) roaring from one side of the room to the other. Boy, were we mesmerised, he then went on to tell us that music records would soon be stereophonic. Well, did he really mean that? I don't know. Yes, this was in the 1950s.

Next fantastic invention he introduced us to was television --moving pictures in our lounge room. Now come on and pull the other one. Our next invite was to go and have a look at his brand new television set. Wow again, it was a huge cabinet with knobs across the front, a cloth

grill at the bottom and this small, slightly oval rectangular glass 'window' in the centre at the top.

This was a couple of weeks before the first TV transmission, but that did not stop him from turning it on and after a few minutes (for everything inside to warm up) we were able to see a test pattern and some music. Wow! For two weeks we would go and watch this test pattern and listen to the orchestral music playing. Our enthusiasm was obviously building up and eventually on 16 September, 1956 we were greeted with the face of Bruce Gyngell with the words "Good evening, and welcome to television." This was Channel TCN-9. The show, which only went for a few hours ended with a mummy kangaroo putting her baby to bed with the words "Goodnight, this is Sydney tonight."

So with that I will say "Goodnight, this is Sydney tonight."

Supermarket – by Ross James

I recently had the misfortune to have to drive my wife home from the hospital after she had broken her leg. She gave me a list of items to pick up from the supermarket while she waited in the car. My well established skill of finding steak for a barbeque had not prepared me for the challenge I was about to face. First on the list was “ploughman four seed bread”. Being an engineer, and trained to think logically, I decided to try the aisle marked “Bread”. After searching every shelf twice, I gave up and asked someone. I was directed to the furthest corner of the supermarket where this particular bread was hidden. Silly of me to look for bread under “Bread”.

Next on the list was a block of cooking chocolate. I had no trouble finding the row of chocolate blocks. After searching every shelf, and finding no sign of the item, I gave up and asked someone – row 8 with the “cooking” items. Silly of me to look for chocolate under “chocolate”.

Next was a jar of red berry jelly. I searched and found packets of jelly crystals. Surely jelly would be all together. After finding no sign of the precious jar, I used my newly acquired logic and searched other rows. I finally came across mint jelly. I had to be getting close. Diligent searching of the surrounding area failed to reveal the elusive item. Again, I finally asked to be told that it was in a completely different section, but out of stock.

Sweetened condensed was my next challenge. It was unfortunate that she'd written milk on the next line – it took me a while and much row scanning before I associated them. Anyway, milk couldn't be too hard. I'd passed the milk containers earlier on refrigerated shelves and quickly returned to the area. I found full cream, low fat, calcium enhanced and so on, but no sweetened condensed. You guessed it – I asked and was directed to a different area. Silly of me to think that all milk would be together.

OK – on to 200 grams of Feta cheese. I eventually established that cheese is located in three different areas, though within swearing distance of each other. This one was over the counter, but I was now faced with the dilemma of selecting Danish, Italian or Greek. I told the girl behind the counter that she now had as much data as I had been given, and between us we had to process the data to make a decision. I

finally selected the cheapest (and on later tasting, found out why it was cheapest – it could have been rock salt).

Moving on to instant coffee (I don't drink the stuff, and know nothing about it). However, I had been wise and had asked my wife for a brand. I had no trouble finding this one, except that there was Natural, Blend 43, Gold, Regular, Strong, and whatever other endless variations they had dreamed up. More decisions.

Remember my wife who was still sitting in the car with the broken leg? She rang me to find out if I'd fallen under a trolley an hour ago. It was then that I looked around, and saw that, like me, most men by themselves were pushing a trolley with one hand, and talking on the mobile with the other – I can guess who was on the other end. We both came to the conclusion that it was better to starve than continue the ordeal, and I escaped to the nearest checkout.

Is it just me, or is location of supermarket items some sort of new art form? I'm now studying meditation as a way to prepare myself for the next attempt.

Suchitra (Ruby) Shome

I think, this incident had happened in 1970. I had arrived in UK 1968 with my two-year-old daughter from India. Before I had left India, I used to work in Imperial Tobacco Co. as a shorthand typist (this profession is a thing of past now). To give financial support to my husband as he wanted to study, I had no choice but to start looking for a job. I have found one in Chancery Lane not far from Liverpool St Station) as an invoice clerk (I was very poor in maths, but was desperate to get a job) and used to commute from Romford, Essex. When my would-be boss Jerry Cunningham asked me after the interview, "What name do you like to be called?" I had replied "Ruby" and he had asked me, "How does the job sound to you Ruby?" I could not understand the ABCD of my future job but I was so desperate I replied, "It sounds OK to me."

I got the job and, within six months, I became the leader of the whole administrative section. I had three employees under me, a typist (Mili), a despatch clerk (forgot her name) and my assistant Anne. Not only that, I got a salary increment and instead of working 9am to 5pm, I used to work 10am to 4pm. Since I had joined Cleaners Ltd. they had started making profit and started to get new cleaning contracts. It was quite a big cleaning company but the clerks in the invoice department did not take much initiative to pass the files to the credit control department so the money was blocked.

One morning, I was boarding a train at Romford and my handbag fell off on the platform from my shoulder. The guard shouted at me and said "When you reach to your destination, you will find your bag on the other end."

The bag was there and though I did not have much cash or any credit cards (not sure whether the cards were available those days), I was so pleased and grateful to the staff for getting back the bag. It happened 44 years ago! I can't remember the date or the month, but still I remember how helpful and kind the people were.

In this modern world, we have got everything, in fact, too many of everything. Instead of one TV, we have three or four TVs in one household.

There is no shortage of material things, but there are so many things are lacking, for example, love, gratefulness and appreciation. We have become self-centred and only know I, ME and MYSELF.

All in a Day's Work – by Ruth Zeibots

In 1963–4, as a secretary minding my own business, on my way home from work, I witnessed and assisted in the birth of a baby.

This happened on Parramatta Road, Lidcombe at approximately 5.30 pm. I can't recall which month, but it was warm weather. An ambulance, conveying a woman to Crown Street Maternity Hospital, was involved in an accident as a result of a car not giving way to the ambulance which had sirens blazing.

I happened upon the scene, where upon a garage mechanic stopped my car, yanked open the door and asked me to come and help a woman in great distress in the back of the ambulance.

When I entered the ambulance the woman was hysterical, mainly because her husband was unconscious on the seat beside her. She kept asking if he was dead. I kept assuring her he wasn't as I could see his chest heaving. It was an unbelievable scene, with the driver, having been thrown through the windscreen, unconscious on the roadside.

People had gathered by the time the first rescue ambulance arrived to take the unconscious driver to hospital. Paramedics from a second ambulance freed the husband from a grid between the cabin and back section. He was by now bleeding from the mouth. This left me with a mother-of-two informing me the baby was close to delivery. Not having had any experience in delivering babies I banged on the inside of the back door to inform the master of ceremonies, the mechanic, to get a doctor there ASAP. I knew of a doctor in John's Street Lidcombe and told the mechanic to phone him if necessary. Within a minute the doors opened once again and standing there was a well-dressed young man informing me, "I'm a doctor, can I help?" To this day I never found out where my good and reliable mechanic found such a treasure.

I nearly head-locked him into the ambulance and, after three contractions, he delivered a very healthy baby boy, the mother's third boy. That was the only time she cried. I think she was wanting a girl. The doctor cut the umbilical after much deliberation, wrapped the baby in sterile paper supplied by a paramedic and handed him to me. I dare say I would know how to cut an umbilical, but only if I was stuck on a desert island with the patient.

After this I very shakily stepped down from the ambulance and told the MC of the good news, to which he shouted out to a by now 100-strong crowd that had gathered, "It's a boy!"

I would dearly love to meet my Parramatta Road baby, who by now would be about a young man about 49 to 50 years of age. I got to know his father through a work colleague in Grand Avenue, Granville. He recovered and worked for the Shell Oil Company in Granville. I have since had three children of my own, two girls and a boy, but my baptism of fire to motherhood will never be forgotten.

Discovering my Australian Past – by Renee Sue Ruffle

A chance conversation with my cousin, who was visiting from South Africa in August 2013, set off an amazing sequence of events that led to the discovery of several previously unknown Australian ancestors of ours, who had settled in Australia almost 200 years ago.

This is my story.

Elizabeth is my mother's sister's daughter, or my first cousin. Over dinner we were chatting about our British ancestors and Elizabeth mentioned that she had some interesting family photographs to show me. There was one in particular that caught my attention; it was a rather stern photograph of our maternal fourth-great grandfather, Raven Moore Mason, taken around 1870. Elizabeth believed that Raven had some connection with an Australian company called Mashfield Mason.

I got straight onto the internet and we found the name Mashfield Mason, but to our utter amazement Mashfield Mason wasn't the name of a company, it was the name of a gentleman who had lived and worked in Sydney in the mid-1800s. We were now hooked! Could Raven Moore Mason be his son or perhaps his grandson? This had implications far beyond anything we'd anticipated. We were like two schoolgirls squealing with delight at the thought of possible Australian ancestors that nobody knew about.

It had taken us most of the evening to find this small glimpse into our past and we realised that learning more about our mysterious forebears was probably going to be a lengthy and protracted exercise. But I promised Elizabeth faithfully that I would continue my search after she returned to South Africa and I would keep her updated about my findings.

This promise was to take me on an extraordinary journey...

The internet is truly the ultimate source of information and my excitement grew as I continued my research. When I discovered a marriage notice in the online archives of the Sydney Monitor and Commercial Advertiser dated Monday 17 August 1840, I knew I was onto something big. Mashfield Mason and Ann Bailey Moore were married by the Reverend

William Cowper at St Philip's Church in Sydney on the 15 August 1840. Raven Moore Mason? There had to be a connection.

I barely slept that night and the following morning I was on the phone to St Philip's Church to find out if they had any birth, marriage and death records from the 1800s. They did, and a few days later I was sitting in St Philip's Church, wearing the required white gloves and poring over the original records of the marriage, births and baptisms certificates of our newly discovered Australian

The original marriage certificate of Mashfield Mason and Ann Bailey Moore was there and baptism records showed that Mashfield and Ann had had two children – a son Raven Moore Mason, our fourth-great-grandfather, born on the 7 May 1841 and a second son Arthur Brookland Mason, born on the 17 November 1842. Mashfield and Ann Mason were indeed our fifth-great-grandparents!

In later research I found a notice of the birth of a daughter but there were no records of her beyond her birth notice and I wondered if she had died.

I asked the curator if I could see further records from the early 1800s as I wanted to find out more about Mashfield and Ann. Were they both born in Australia, or had Ann come with Mashfield to Australia and married him here? Or perhaps Mashfield had met her in Sydney? There were no records of the birth of Mashfield Mason but the birth certificate of Ann Bailey Moore was there. I couldn't believe my luck! She was the daughter of Joseph Moore and Ann Bailey Moore and she was born on the 24 June 1822 in Sydney.

This intrigued me; so where were Joseph Moore and Ann Bailey married? St Philip's had no records dating back earlier than 1820, but I was advised that I could go to the Mitchell Library in Sydney where all records since the First Fleet were available for research. By this stage I was beside myself; I had now traced our Australian ancestors back to the early 1800s. What other exciting information could be lurking in the dusty library archives?

That weekend my patient and accommodating husband Steve and I caught the train into Sydney to visit the Mitchell Library. I wanted to look for possible records of Joseph Moore and Ann Bailey's marriage. After a couple of hours I'd found nothing, but what I did have with me, from an earlier internet search, was a Mitchell Library document, which

mentioned an archived box that had been presented to the library in October 2003 by a lady called Mrs Nerida Hooton. I later found out that her maiden name was Moore.

I enquired about this box and was directed to the building next door. It was here that I had one of the most enthralling experiences of my life. The box contained two beautiful leather bound ship's logs kept by Captain Joseph Moore, a whaler who had initially come to Sydney in 1812. Other documents in the box told how Joseph and Ann had married in the parish church at St Mary Whitechapel in London on the 19 February 1812... and that's why there were no records of their marriage in Australia.

Apparently Joseph had left his new wife in England and had come to Sydney for the first time in 1812. He had gone back to England only to return to Sydney in 1820 with his pregnant wife Ann and two young sons, Henry and Joseph. A third son, Anthony, was born four weeks after their arrival in Sydney, on 14 September, 1820 and was christened by the Reverend William Cowper on the 8 October 1820. And two years later Ann Bailey Moore, their first daughter and our fifth-great-grandmother was born in Sydney.

What a treasure trove of information. Here were my sixth-great-grandfather and mother and they had settled in Sydney! We took copies of the contents of the box and by this stage I was determined to find out anything and everything about our forebears, the Australian Moores and Mashfield and Ann Mason.

My search uncovered records of Henry Moore, Ann's brother and my fifth-great uncle who became one of Sydney's leading merchants and ship owners. Henry, together with his father Joseph Moore, had bought the wharf at Millers Point, which, for 60 years was known as Moore's Wharf, and was the scene of much activity in the sailing ship days. Henry had also become the first agent for P&O Lines in Australia.

Mashfield Mason, also a merchant, was a partner in Thacker, Mason and Co and probably met Ann Bailey Moore through her brother Henry. These men became part of a select group of wealthy merchants and ship owners in Sydney during the mid-1800s. Mashfield was clearly a well-respected member of the early settlers in Sydney and was appointed the secretary of the new Union Bank of Australia on its formation in 1838.

My continued journey took me to the terraced house where Mashfield and Ann Mason had once lived in Upper Fort Street, which is now under the Harbour Bridge. I was treated to a fascinating guided tour around this elegant Georgian house by the present owners, who are currently renovating the house to its former glory of the mid-1800s.

From what I can gather, Mashfield and Ann Mason and their children left Sydney for England in 1845. And what a strange coincidence that I, their fifth-great-granddaughter, should now be living in Sydney, just a few kilometres from where they had once lived.

My cousin Elizabeth is thrilled with my findings and reckons I'm a real sleuth. This has been an extraordinary journey, where events that happened almost 200 years ago have been brought to life.

I recently discovered ancestry.com.au and I'm now on a mission to find some of our distant Moore family members. Captain Joseph Moore and his wife Ann had 13 children, so we must have a good number of Australian Moore relatives somewhere in Australia... perhaps even in and around Sydney.

I came to Sydney eight years ago, and somehow it felt like home. I now understand why. And I became an Australian citizen without knowing that I was already a dinky-di Aussie from way back.

I feel truly privileged and delighted.

The Uniform by Christine Glover

We were a group of six gorgeous young girls, in love with fashion, music, the '60s revolution and all it entailed. These were times of change and our generation, more than any other, heralded a freedom of expression unsurpassed.

From the '50s to the '60s fashion took a quantum leap toward androgynous chic. Unisex was born with an explosion of leading designers emerging from London. Inspired by the young girls on the Kings Road, designer Mary Quant popularised the street fashion with the mini skirt, hot pants and patterned tights. The mod look was both practical and liberating. Vidal Sassoon's outrageous asymmetrical, geometric cuts complimented the new wave of emerging styles while doe-eyed boyish model Twiggy epitomising the Swinging Sixties. When the young model Patti Boyd was cast as a schoolgirl in the Beatles' A Hard Day's Night she stole George Harrison's heart.

During my time at a girls public high school in the western suburbs of Sydney our uniform became our protest banner.

The uniform dress code was regulation navy blue box pleat tunic and gloves, white shirt, ankle socks and black shoes. A maroon beret or black velour brimmed hat in winter, a straw brimmed panama hat in summer.

We idolised our mod geography teacher who was a dead ringer for Jean Shrimpton. She became our role model much to the horror of the head mistress who was a staunch conservative. To our head mistress, the uniform was the symbol of character and decorum. For us, the uniform became the symbol of self-expression and rebellion, with the classrooms and playgrounds the battlefield on which we stood flaunting our defiance of authority. We stood at the barricades of the school fences proud, beautiful and unique. Any new rules the school authorities put in place around the wearing of uniform were used as ammunition for our creative style.

Our tunics became shorter with the belts worn loosely around our hips. We replaced our regulation shoes with shiny black tap shoes tied with large ribbon bows. Our velour hats were worn pulled down around our ears and our berets at a perilous tilt to the side. White ankle socks were

replaced by vogue knee-high, ribbed and textured leggings. We wore our hair long with our fringes as a refuge, horned side bangs caressed our jaw bones and our heads were crowned with a short defiant tuft of hair. Enforced rules around the uniform could not suppress our attitude, "We are the now." We were the new generation and we would not be uniformed.

I am now in my 60s and teach yoga at a co-ed selective public school, curiously the same school where my former head mistress served for many years. Students wear their uniform as prescribed but many parade their individuality. I see knee-high Doc Martin boots worn through summer, rainbow coloured dread locks and nose piercings, fringes that reach chins, quirky hats, and skirts on boys and girls. I smile.

The Ramp – by Andrew Clifton

The boat ramp is forever lost to me. Saturday mornings discussing the latest in sailing techniques, the pros and cons of this or that outboard, the general camaraderie of the like-minded. All gone!

I pretty much don't work anymore. She does. So I do more around the house than I used to, as I should. I admit that ironing and vacuuming are not high on my list of accomplishments but I am useful in the garden. I do make a pretty good fist of cooking. Pretty happy with my veal scaloppine a la marsala (I substitute sweet sherry because I don't mind it as a tipple) and there is acclaim in the neighbourhood for my crème caramels. There is also the washing. I don't mind it too much. The machine makes it easy and I can usually get through the paper quite thoroughly including the quick crossword as the machine does its thing. The cryptics beat me still and I have to wait for her to come home and rescue me.

So, off to the line with my basket of goodies and a feeling of smug self-satisfaction about a job soon to be well done. Now, while it is true that She is no longer a spring chicken, She is still a fine-looking woman and it is a truism of the modern older woman that her under garments, while no longer necessarily excitingly, tantalisingly sexy and a thing of mystery, do remain skimpy! Ethereal, modest-sized things with only a little bit of substance. How the hell they do the job I have no idea. But no matter. By their very nature they are inclined to become tangled and knotted in the process of washing. They must be sorted and put straight before applying the peg else one invariably stakes them through the only substantial part of them. The substantial bit is the bit that most needs to dry. If you just whack a peg on the flimsies the chances are you'll get the substantial bit. No good. You hafta sort 'em!

So imagine my feelings of terror as I glance through the sheets and the shirts and the shorts and notice the bloke over the back fence with a look of utter dismay of his bachelor dial. Here am I wrassling with Her smalls at the clothes line. Trying to be efficient and not labouring at the task. Trying to get them on the line as quickly as I can for even I, after 43 years married, am not entirely comfortable with such intimate contact with such intimate articles. It is after all not manly to fiddle with your missus's knickers. My Dad would have said, "Leave them son, that's best left as women's work." What? Wait until She comes home and then

hand them and her gin and tonic to her and tell her to deal with them herself! Come on! Still worse, how can I stop and say to my observer, "Ah g'day. Yeah, well, they are tricky little devils to hang out aren't they?" He's not going to go for that is he? Would you? I say nothing and peg on as best I can. But wait. Then comes the fearful dawning, how is this going to go down at the table of knowledge at the boat ramp? What might he say to the gathered Rhodes scholars and boat yard professors at the ramp? How am I going to defend myself in that forum of machismo? What possible defence can I offer against a clear cut perception that I muck about with my wife's undies at the clothes line? What would Howard Jacobson make of that? Oh the injustice! I understand the glee club are advertising for members. Maybe they won't have heard. Maybe I can stand right at the back and not be noticed.

I did so love the ramp.

Fast Food, Think Outside the Box – by Anne Rays

When I was young, from the age of six, I came home from school to an empty house and fast food was a quick snack after you'd changed and before you went out to play. A slice of bread was great, but the loaf had to be sliced with a big bread knife then spread with butter and jam. The other choice was a piece of fruit, quick and nutritious, and out to play.

In later years, much later, a husband, three kids and three businesses later, I had to rush home from work and create dinner in 15 minutes. Jamie Oliver's 15-minute meals hadn't been created but I would rustle up a feast in 15 minutes with meat and three vegies, often stir fried in the frying pan to save washing up. Sweets, when we had them, were fruit and ice cream or custard in the winter.

Later again, when the kids were gone I could serve up baked beans and fried eggs on toast in the four minutes it took Peter to feed the dog and cat, both Jodie's.

Fast food changes with every generation. Laura at two and a half calls it "emergency food" when Mum hasn't got time to cook. When Dylan (10 months) is hungry, crying, he gets a plastic bag of mash cold and sucks it out of the bag himself and he's happy.

Jake, my 10-year-old grandson, sometimes gets his own porridge for breakfast. It comes in a packet which he empties into a bowl, half fills the packet with milk, stirs, and puts it in the microwave for 90 seconds Voila, breakfast is ready! No soaking oats overnight, no dirty pot to scrub – just more rubbish!

Now that's the biggest problem with fast food! The box is left outside! Sixty per cent of rubbish found around Warilla Beach – and I've done the research personally so it can't be disputed, is from fast food and drink containers. McDonalds and drink containers are the worst and are found most days after people have enjoyed the evening watching the moonlit beach and dumped their rubbish out the windows. There are bins there, so there's no excuse but to me that's the biggest problem with fast food! The pollution that is created by all the packaging! Tons of it!

Now outside! The absolute best is s-l-o-w food! There's nothing better! First collect the firewood – enough for five or six hours. That involves exploring the surrounding bush and clearing a fireplace. Next, the challenge – we have a one match challenge so whoever's lighting can only use one match! Paper is OK.

In between time, we have cut up the makings of a hot beef curry with herbs and plenty of vegies and placed them in the camp oven.

To cut a long story short, we relax around the campfire in our comfy chairs, watching the camp oven making sure the coals are not too hot. We watch the light fade, stirring occasionally and put another log on the fire. The birds call goodnight. The stars appear twinkling one by one. I forgot to mention the beer – which is consumed along the way to relax and celebrate another successful day. Three hours later, feeling very mellow, we gorge on the absolute best curry. We gaze into the fire and enjoy the peace of the fire crackling and the stars twinkling. We watch the flickering flames gradually die then cover the embers with sand and to bed. It's been a great day!

S-l-o-w food! It's the best!

My Life in Song – by Anne O’Sullivan

The joy of becoming a senior was highlighted by a series of songs from my favourite boy band of the ‘60s – The Beatles – as I celebrated a special milestone recently.

Yesterday, With a Little Help From My Friends, A Hard Day’s Night, Do You Want to Know a Secret, The Fool on the Hill, Eight Days a Week, Act Naturally, Let it Be, Will You Still Need Me, will you still feed me When I’m 64!

Where DID those years from 1964 to 2014 disappear? It really seemed like only Yesterday that I and three young friends rode our bikes around to the various outlets collecting memorabilia of our favourite Beatle.

My Beatle was the very dashing and handsome rogue, Paul. There was no way that I could or would Act Naturally or Let it Be, for that matter, when he appeared on television or in a magazine. My poor perplexed parents and teachers (nuns at the local convent school) did not understand the craziness that went with such adoration.

I did make it to London in 1969 to walk across the famous zebra crossing in Abbey Road and my heart still flutters (or murmurs) at the sight of Paul serenading me after all these years! Those early carefree times set me up for a fantastic life of travel, adventure and a ton of fun.

The words that really capture the essence of our ‘love affair’ come from his song Things We Said Today where he takes a look into the future of a love story and is very nostalgic expressing the passing years. It finishes with “Some day when we’re dreaming, deep in love, not a lot to say, then we will remember the things we said today.”

Thanks for the memories Paul.

How I Embarrassed Myself Before the Queen – by Bob Maynard

It was in England in 1953, in an era before the international year of something or other and when nobody really cared whether it was the year of the snake, horse or goldfish, when the Queen visited my home town. She was definitely not the first monarch to visit the town as another one visited 887 years before, in 1066 in fact.

The Queen had only been ‘coronated’ for about a year when she was invited to attend a pageant to be held at the Central Cricket Ground in Hastings, Sussex.

At the time I was attending infants or junior school, or at least it was in my early years of education, and all similar scholars were to attend the said pageant to welcome our noble Queen. The young lasses were to be dressed as fairies, when that word only had one meaning, and the young lads were to represent elves. All well and good, but due to the post-war shortage of cloth, the costumes were assembled using that most versatile material, crepe paper.

So I was decked out in a green crepe paper costume consisting of a gnome style hat, tunic and shorts, and sandals adorned my feet – without socks. We young students lined both sides of a pathway with an elf next to a fairy all the way down the turf which led to the recently refurbished and painted pavilion from which the Queen was to observe the afternoon’s proceedings. Each student also had a small basket filled with rose petals that we were instructed to throw at the Queen’s feet, the petals not the baskets, as she was to slowly and gracefully make her way down the path accompanied by all the town’s officials in their splendid robes.

As can be imagined, the ever efficient organisers of the whole event required us youngsters to be in our position in our lines two hours before the arrival of the special guest. This was fine, but being a small boy with the need to visit the lavatory occasionally created a problem. My request to be excused was refused point blank, no doubt our supervising teachers expected a mass exodus if such leave was granted.

Thereupon, with such a need to leave, I wet myself.

Readers may recall the material that my costume was made of, consequently I was immediately not only highly embarrassed but also sporting a pair of streaky green legs. My recollection of the event does not include whether her Majesty witnessed the mishap or whether she would have been amused, but I tend to think that my misfortune occurred an appreciable time before her entrance.

No doubt the rose petals in my basket were sodden as well, probably through the tears that were now streaming down my face, and my memory of that fateful afternoon does not include my actual tossing of the petals.

The aftermath of my unfortunate experience was that my wonderful mother met me at the gates to the cricket ground and escorted me home by trolley bus, still with my colourful legs and wearing the sodden shorts. We certainly did not have a car in the early '50s and the buses were the transport of the majority.

The patch of turf that was involved in my incident never recovered and for many a year afterwards the cricket outfield was slow at that point. Maybe that is the reason the Hastings Central Cricket Ground is now a shopping centre.

Hello from Heaven – by Christine Bannigan

My husband and I made a pact that whoever died first would find a way to contact the one still here. We would communicate across dimensions.

Eighteen months later Phillip passed and I was left with my grief – empty and alone. If you've been there you'll know what I'm talking about. You think you'll never get over the loss, never laugh or love again. But we were sure that death was only a physical separation. It's not the end. It's the doorway to a different kind of relationship. And this way of thinking plugged me into the sunny side to death. It helped me appreciate that we could stay in touch and, because it exists outside physical limitations, love never dies.

I was taking the left turn into my street, when a voice told me to walk straight ahead – so I did. My thoughts were on the previous Christmas, 12 months earlier. It had been the last one Phillip and I had shared and the memory was still fresh and sweet.

A man sitting on a bench watched with a steady gaze as I approached and, as I drew level with him, a gentle smile spread across his mouth. I noticed his soft eyes. They were delicate pools of love. He spoke tenderly:

“It doesn't seem like 12 months ago, does it?”

Astonished by such an appropriate interruption to my thoughts I asked, “What?”

“Last Christmas of course!”

I smiled and continued on my way knowing that Phillip had stepped into my physical world. The man on the seat was the same body shape, age, voice and had the same loving smile as my husband. I didn't look back; I didn't need to. It wasn't meant to be permanent. I knew he was enjoying the memories with me, and he wanted to tell me that he was with me in spirit.

When he was alive, Phillip loved helping me shop for clothes – to give a male viewpoint on what did, or didn't, look good and I loved having him there. One time he found a two-piece outfit with a swirling skirt and fitted

top that he insisted I try on. As I emerged from the fitting room wearing the outfit, I was met with a playful fluttering of eyelashes, a cheeky grin and an exaggerated wink. It was his quirky way of showing unqualified approval.

After his death I remember walking past a boutique one day when an invisible force took me by the shoulders and guided me into the store. I chose a purple two-piece outfit from the rack and, without checking the size or price, I took it to the fitting room. This was not a garment I would normally have noticed but it suited me – the perfect size, colour and fit.

The sales woman carefully folded the garment between sheets of pink tissue paper and slid it into the bag. Then, out of the blue, I recalled the other two-piece outfit Phillip had chosen for me. It was similar in style to this one, and I realised he was still helping me shop for clothes.

A friend came to stay for a weekend and, over dinner, we chatted about matters close to our hearts. Every time we mentioned Phillip's name there was an unexpected response from within the house. Lights flashed, doors slammed, things fell off shelves and we girls laughed, "Okay, Phillip, we know you're here."

We chatted till late but eventually we began to fade so Jane took herself off to bed while I locked up the house.

There was a smoky form that was Phillip's shape and height standing outside one of the security doors. I recognised him and said, "Hello it's you. You don't have to wait to be invited in."

But he didn't move. I held the screen door open for him and expected the smoky form to walk past me, but he zapped into a ball of light and flew past me. This friendly ghost was a joker and had me laughing when I least expected it, but this was nothing compared with what happened next.

I went to bed and, as I was sinking into sleep, the light came on. I leaned over and switched it off but it happened again. Then he communicated telepathically – asking if he could lie with me.

It was such a beautiful gift to fall asleep in his arms and feel him in physical form again. And, for that night, we were in Heaven on Earth together.

The next morning at breakfast I shared what had happened the night before. Jane fell silent for a while then she spoke quietly, "Thank you for telling me that, because I've had a similar experience." I thought I was going insane.

After they split up, her ex-partner had come to her in his energetic form and, like me, she had felt the physical sensations of his body close to hers.

While at a party I was sharing with friends about the funny ways Phillip says hello to me. I spotted a pack of Angel Cards fanned out on the table and noticed that one of them was askew in the otherwise symmetrical circle of cards. I picked it up and read it. "Hello from Heaven" was the message.

Later that evening friends were hugging each other as we prepared to leave. There was a couple at the party that I didn't know, so I didn't give it a second thought when they left without saying goodbye to me. But I was intrigued when the man returned from his car as if he had forgotten something. With arms outstretched he came towards me and, without saying a word, he hugged me, ran his fingers down my arms and squeezed my hands. Phillip was the only person who had ever done that to me. Hello from Heaven indeed!

Technology or Love? – by David Znider

Growing up in the 1950s was so much different to our grandchildren who are growing up in the ever changing, fast paced lifestyle of today.

I can remember as a little boy, a special night out for our family was all the four children in my family having a bath, then putting on our pyjamas and slippers and dressing gowns and we would all hop in to our FJ Holden and Dad would drive us all, with Mum sitting in the front seat, two suburbs away to a little electrical shop on the main road that was closed for the night. In the display window of the shop that showed the electrical products that you could buy there in the shop was this bright, strange looking box, standing on four legs called a television set, which was either displaying a test pattern on the screen or entertaining us with black and white images.

Joining us in this amazing sight were many other people and families just as amazed as we all were, all crowded around this window staring intently at the same screen. After standing for a while, then we would all hop back into the car and head off home to bed, reflecting on this great new invention that we all had seen that night.

At home our usual family entertainment was either playing board games like Chinese checkers, Draughts, Snakes and Ladders or Ludo. Years later the board game Monopoly came in to our house and we would spend hours and hours buying and selling real estate or utilities trying our hardest not to go bankrupt. If nothing else, I think that all the transactions relating to paying and collecting rent from the other players really assisted us in our maths. Mum and Dad did have a wireless and a phonogram that played these huge vinyl records at a speed of 78 rpm, but as kids we weren't really interested in these electronic devices, we would be too busy exploring the local creek, kicking the footy around or playing hide and seek.

However this new invention called a television set soon was introduced to our home and family and social life.

We were the first family in the street where we lived to have this new form of entertainment and this brings back many memories of our mother going back and forwards from the living room to the kitchen serving cups of cocoa and cups of tea with scones and cakes to the

neighbours and guests who had come in to the living room to view our television set.

As time went by more and more people in the street purchased their own sets and our visitors became less and less until life eventually was back to just our family in the living room, drinking our Cadburys Bournville Cocoa, toasting our crumpets and bread on the grill of the kerosene heater for an after dinner snack while we watched shows such as Gunsmoke, the Alfred Hitchcock Hour and Mitch Miller and his band entertaining the viewers.

I can remember as a child being horrified watching a western on the set, when a cowboy was shot and fell off of his horse, but being comforted by my father reassuring me that he wasn't really dead, that this was not real and nobody really dies in the making of these Westerns. Phew! That did make me feel better at the time.

Back in the '50s the images on the screen were in black and white, but my good friend two doors up from us who stayed with his grandmother in her house occasionally, well she had a coloured screen on her television set.

I remember being in the lounge room with my friend where the television set was and a salesman coming to the door offering her the opportunity to have a coloured screen for her set, the latest thing that everybody should have. She did indeed purchase one. This was so different to today's screens. What this cutting edge new technology of the time was, was a screen covering made of three colours of something like cellophane.

This film like covering was divided in to three parts made up of three colours. The top colour was blue, the middle green and the bottom colour was red, but that was it; the images were divided into three colours only. This concept I guess worked in theory if the picture showed a nice blue sky above and rolling grasslands below, but when the images were of a stormy night of a boat in the ocean, the red water at the bottom and blue skies above did seem a little out of place, but it was something different and captured our attention for a little while. Strangely I don't think that this coloured screen idea took off as it was the only one that I can recall ever having seen in my life.

Back in the '50s and '60s growing up then is so different compared to living in 2014. But looking back and comparing my years as a teenager

to those of my grandchildren growing up now as teenagers themselves, over all of those years, technology may have changed our lives and we think that we can't live without our remote controls, power steering, iPads, smartphones, Twitter, computer technology and so on, but we did back then. That is not to say that my life then was any better than a young person's life today is.

The very important thing I believe is that life really isn't about things and having the latest updated version of what is popular at the time, but the importance of life is exactly the same today as it was when I was growing up, the most important things in life are timeless. Love for your family and friends and one another never changes no matter what period in history you are looking at, relationships are what really matter.

So in this ever changing world that we need to keep up with and embrace, let's not forget to embrace the other things that really matter to us – our family and loved ones.

Francine Dessaix

My story is about an adventure I had in Nepal in 2012.

My friends were off to Europe but I had been where they were going. For some reason I got it into my head I wanted to see Mt Everest. I had done a skydive the previous year for my 60th so I wanted to keep the momentum going. This was in February of 2012.

So I started investigating the means of doing this. Well, was that an adventure in itself!

I wanted to go high into the Himalayas and the best trek seemed to be to the Gokyo Lakes at about 5000 metres and more if you climbed the Gokyo Ridge to view a close up of Mt Everest.

Once I started my four to eight-hour training walks with a backpack I began to get an inkling of what I might be in for and I wondered what on earth I had committed myself to and was I a bit insane.

I had microsurgery on my ear in April, ending up with a session of Bell's Palsy, and I started to worry I wouldn't make it for the trek in October, especially as by June I had overdone the 'trekking' and my knees gave in.

The massage therapist said I had done too much intense walking and should have started training a year earlier, but I hadn't had the slightest notion then of going to the Himalayas.

All worked out in the end and, after walking for a week in a part of the Swiss Alps and then meeting up with my friends in the Greek Islands I finally arrived in Kathmandu with another friend who was a seasoned trekker.

Kathmandu is a story in itself.

The Gokyo Lakes trek was awesome and when I look at the photos I can hardly believe I actually trekked so high along such narrow trails on the sides of mountains.

The experience of meeting Sherpa guides and porters, and yaks and donkeys on these tracks and suspension bridges 100-plus metres above the rivers is unforgettable.

The Gokyo Lakes area is stark, rocky and cold as nothing grows that high up and is uniquely beautiful for these characteristics. The lakes themselves are a beautiful green colour, which I was told is the colour of glacial water. (I did suffer a bit in the cold with the Raynaud's that I have as part of the Lupus problem I have).

I also had the dreaded altitude sickness and wasn't allowed to climb the ridge at 5 am to view sunrise over Mt Everest. But, later in the morning, I felt well and decided to see how far up I could get and the cook had to come with me for safety. I met the others coming back down and they cheered me on to keep going, which I did for another hour until the wind started and the clouds come over.

Time to descend.

I was so happy to climb at least two-thirds of the ridge and though I missed out seeing the sunrise I had seen Mt Everest from other vantage points along the trek.

Anyway, this didn't seem so important anymore – the seeing of Mt Everest! It was the trek itself, the feeling of fitness, the incredible views, the Sherpa people and their really good sense of humour, the Buddhist temples, the meeting of yaks, the fresh air, the walking – all this was the significant experience. So what about Mt Everest! It wasn't the best looking mountain there as it turned out.

Ama Dablam was. It looked like a sitting bear watching over you as you walked.

I wasn't the oldest. A couple from New Zealand were in their early 70s as was a couple from Western Australia. Such an inspiration to keep having adventures.

Lesley Hayes

Everyone told me that I would have too much time on my hands when I retired.

Before I retired I was aware that there were plans to replace the old Windsor Bridge with a new bridge. I had just accepted that this decision had been made for the good of the community and was a fine example of forward planning by the powers that be. After I retired I decided that I should maybe check out these plans just to see what the new bridge would look like. I was horrified to discover that this 'replacement bridge' had been planned with no regard for the historic values of the oldest town square in Australia, Thompson Square, Windsor. It would be the equivalent of putting a highway through The Rocks.

I didn't know what to do but I wanted to do something so I joined a group of local people who were equally appalled about what was going to happen. In most cases the only thing this group had in common with each other was a commitment to save Windsor Bridge, and thereby save Thompson Square. However, this proved to be an advantage as we all brought different skills and together we began to work towards stopping the desecration of Thompson Square. We felt that the government should save the money they had set aside for the replacement bridge and use it to build a Windsor bypass. As time went by and we dug deeper into the government's plans we found that the National Trust, NSW historical societies, heritage groups, and independent consultants employed by the Roads and Maritime Services all agreed that going ahead with the replacement bridge would be detrimental to Windsor.

This small community group met every week and developed a strategy, and as part of that strategy we decided to occupy Thompson Square, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Together we decided that we would occupy in four-hour shifts, that is 42 shifts a week, and each shift would have to be manned by two people for safety reasons. Of course for this to happen we needed a roster and we asked the community to help us man the tent – volunteers came from all sorts of places and all walks of life. We set up our tent in the corner of Thompson Square, with two chairs and a table out front and, as passers-by approached us, we explained what was planned for Windsor and sought their support.

We collected signatures by the thousands and we held several rallies, all to make sure the government would be aware that there was strong feeling against going ahead with the replacement bridge.

At first we were often yelled at as cars roared past leaving a spray of obscenities in the air to drift towards us and, on a number of occasions, eggs were thrown at us but as time went by more and more people became aware of just exactly how inappropriate the government's plans for Windsor were, not just for our generation but for future generations. We have been labelled "tree hugging lefties", we have been accused of being Labor "operatives", we have been told that we should stop wasting our time and "get a job". I have also met some amazing people and learnt so much about the history of this beautiful town. Overseas tourists cannot believe that our government would act so recklessly with our heritage, and people returning to visit the Hawkesbury are eager to share their memories of growing up in Windsor, and they are often saddened by the thought that this replacement bridge will change the whole character of Windsor irrevocably.

Together this community group has managed to occupy the square now for 230 days and still going, 24 hours a day, in all sorts of weather from freezing cold to swelteringly hot, without a break. Surely this must be a record of some sort. Behind the scenes people with skills in research, law and media relations are working tirelessly to find a way to stop this bridge project, and the tent stands as a public symbol of the cause.

I have learnt so much about the power contained in people who get together on a common project to fight for what they believe is right.

Everyone told me that I would have too much time on my hands when I retired – they were so wrong.

Nickname: “Calamity Jane” – by Lyn Mantell

Growing up on the farm posed many obstacles for someone as clumsy as me. Because I rarely wore shoes around the farm I would constantly get something in my foot, which Mum would have to remove (burrs, glass, thorns and so on). Dad nicknamed me “Calamity Jane” because I was always hurting myself one way or another. I remember wearing thongs and falling down the stairs. When Dad told me to put on a pair of proper shoes, he found that didn’t work either because I then fell up the stairs. I guess Dad didn’t help my lack of confidence either. I remember carefully carrying a jug of milk to the table intent on not spilling it. When Dad said, “Don’t drop that jug,” I immediately dropped it, milk covering the kitchen floor and Dad going mad at me for being so clumsy.

Mum would be constantly telling me not to swing on the kitchen cupboard doors. But I didn’t listen and one day the whole cupboard came toppling down on top of me. I can still see the devastation around me as I sat waiting for an outburst from Dad. I think Dad was in shock at what could have been the outcome if the table had not broken the cupboard’s fall, for he only commented that I was lucky just to have a small cut. Mum’s dishes didn’t fare as well though, as there wasn’t one cup, saucer or plate unbroken. Having no money, Mum had to go to the local store to buy more and have the shop owner put them on her account. How I must have worried Mum and Dad with my misadventures.

My misshapen little finger is a permanent reminder of an incident involving my cousin, a tomahawk and a wooden chopping block. As a young girl apparently I ignored the warning not to place my hand in the way while my cousin was using a tomahawk, results being I lost a small piece of my little finger. As my cousin said before he died, “Lucky I was a bad shot, or I would have really been in trouble.” Although I have no memory of this happening, I can still see me in my Mum’s arms as the bush nurse cut off the piece of finger hanging by a thread.

Chasing my cousins through tall grass and around a giant rock near my Nanna’s place saw me come to grief with a rotting stick in my leg. An operation on my leg and time in hospital was the outcome of this escapade. As I was wheeled to theatre I can remember a boy in my ward asking the nurse where I was going and she replied, “to see the dog”. It just so happened there was a dog barking outside at the time. I

can still remember the after effects of the ether used as anaesthetic back then. For someone who loved ice cream it was cruel not to be able to eat it without throwing up. My reward for being so brave was a lovely doll Mum and Dad bought me.

Climbing was one of my passions as a child, whether it was rocks, trees or the rotary hoe in the shed.

Dad's revamped target for the rifle range didn't fare too well as I slipped, landing a 'bullseye' feet first through the target. With Mum's words ringing in my ears "wait till you father gets home", I can remember lying on my bed crying my eyes out. And what was Dad's response to my misadventure? He merely said "accidents happen". By this stage I think Dad would never be surprised at any disaster I could create accidentally.

Yet I didn't need to be the creator of my own misadventures. I have a round white scar on my neck, compliments of another cousin and his slug gun. According to my older sister he wasn't shooting at me, I just happened to get in the way. My sisters have on numerous occasions indicated in a nice way that I was a nuisance little sister. If I was in trouble with Mum she would send my sisters to catch me and I became good at dodging and weaving.

To Dad's way of thinking I was his Calamity Jane, but I prefer my reasoning for my childhood disasters – I was a tomboy and things just happened!

A Five-Year-Old Child's View of the Beginning of World War II – by Frances Davidson

I was born in 1935 in Plymouth, a naval port in Devon, England. I will start my story when I was five years of age. The year was 1940 and World War II was approaching. I was an only child then. My sister was born five years later. My parents and grandparents lived in the same house, and at that time my life was effortless. I had cousins living not too far away. My mother had four sisters and with the cousins I never felt lonely.

The first I was aware of my life changing was when I was told we were building a shelter at the bottom of the yard "because the Germans were enemies and would be sending bombs to kill us". In the shelters we had beds and tins of everything. Night after night we spent in the shelter, except for my grandparents. They obviously found it more secure in their own beds. When we had an unexploded bomb drop in front of the house one night and leave a huge crater in which a vehicle had dropped in, my father and my four uncles agreed the children and the mothers should leave and we eventually evacuated a few weeks later to a village called Challaborough, a few hours away from Plymouth. Our dads stayed and worked. One uncle was away at war.

We all lived in two houses and because of the relaxing life we enjoyed it. I know we children did. After settling in we were off to school. We had to walk approximately two miles to school, which included a hill with many scattered rabbit warrens to negotiate. When we reached the top of the hill, it was an amazing sight over the other side. First was the village, Bigbury on Sea, which housed our school, then a glorious beach going out to sea about one mile to Burgh Island. It had residents and a hotel and a "beastie" – our name for it. It was a huge metal machine with large wheels which transported people to and fro during high and low tides.

The school was quite small, and taught children between the ages of five to fifteen years. Every afternoon we played on the beach. Looking back I don't think we learned very much!

One afternoon, as usual, we took time to get home and we had the biggest fright of our young lives. Half way down in the rabbit warrens we heard a plane's engines and, glancing up, saw a German plane coming over the top of us, presumably on its way to Plymouth to drop its bombs.

We managed to dive into some warrens and it opened fire on us, and thankfully carried on. We twice miraculously had a Frenchman arrive on our beach after rowing across from France! We stayed in our rented houses for a few more years.

It was many years later myself and cousins realised we had been so ignorant of what had gone on during those first few years of the war, even to the point of not recognising one of our mothers lost a husband on HMS Repulse whilst we were at school. Her heartbreaking cry went on for days.

That is not the end of the story. My husband was in the Royal Navy and in 1966 was appointed to the HMS Repulse building in Barrow in Furness as the engineer officer. What a coincidence!

Gratitude – By Paul Kraus

It is good to be able to share my story, especially as during my life, from the very beginning until more recently, many events mitigated against me ever becoming a 'senior.' I was born in a Nazi labour camp in 1944 and, had my mother not escaped before the SS arrived in April, 1945 our chance of survival would have been almost nil. My father had also been incarcerated in the infamous Mauthausen Camp and spent seven months after liberation in an American hospital coaxed back from starvation. Against all the odds they were reunited and we became a family.

My parents had attempted to flee the Nazi menace from 1937 onwards but could not raise the 'landing money' for Australia or anywhere else. However, their earlier dream was realised when in 1948 they were accepted as refugees by the Australian Government. The journey to Australia was marked by a hellish voyage on a Greek hulk called the SS Derna, which made headlines on arrival in Melbourne because of its insufferable conditions.

As for most refugees the early years were tough. Work for my parents was long and hard and for me, 'the reffo kid', I found school humiliating and intimidating. The highlight of my first decade in this country was on 24 January, 1955 when as a family we became Australian citizens – a nationality for which we were all proud and grateful. I left school early and went to work, later becoming a mature age student at Macquarie University and followed by post-graduate degrees at the University of Sydney. I worked for many years as a history teacher and also wrote text books.

At the age of 52 in June 1997 I was diagnosed with the asbestos related cancer mesothelioma. Due to extensive spread of the cancer I was given only six months to live. While the medical profession gave no hope, my wife and I had a strong background in nutritional and complementary medicine and from the day of diagnosis began introducing lifestyle changes such as a vegetarian diet, juices, supplements, meditation and exercise designed to give my body the best chance to fight this disease. Early scans showed marked deterioration so the regime was intensified and we were delighted when a scan in early 1998 showed marginal improvement. I maintained the new regime strictly for about 10 years

and now, almost 17 years on, the mesothelioma is now behaving in an indolent fashion, a far cry from the early days.

I had always loved writing and with forced early retirement I was given the opportunity to concentrate on this creative art. I wrote six books on healing and prayer and, to my delight, they were published commercially. My book *Surviving Mesothelioma and Other Cancers* has given me the opportunity to share with other sufferers practical advice and hope in the face of serious illness. I am no exception in the need for encouragement. Two years ago I was diagnosed with aggressive prostate cancer, but as my mesothelioma is the rarer form in the abdomen I was reluctant to have a prostatectomy. As a result I have again pursued complementary therapies and have managed to control this illness. Even the prostate cancer receded in importance when in January last year I had surgery for a massive but benign brain tumour. It took six months to recover well enough to again put pen to paper. The joy of being creative, as well as helping others, has helped me to remain positive and optimistic at times when it was not easy to be so. It is important to harness our healing emotions, which is the focus of my most recent book.

While life has had its challenges I am very grateful to be reaching my three score years and ten late this year and I am so thankful to have outlived my prognosis, giving me the opportunity to see our sons married and the birth of five beautiful grandchildren. I hope to be able to attend seniors' events for many years to come.

I Remember When – by Peter King

I remember Phar Lap, Peter Pan, Bernborough, no not the horses but the boats we used to race down the sewer. I remember cracker night, combat, the cubs, hoola hoops, mud pies, the sun and the mirror, blue bags and camp pie. I remember those early days living in Alexandria, not the trendy suburb it is today but just that working class inner Sydney suburb, selling newspapers around Bourke Road, Peter's ice cream, CIG, the wool sheds. My first real job while still at school – bone carting.

We grew up playing in the street, just wide enough to park a car on either side, not that many of the residents had a car in those early days. I know of only one neighbour in the street who had a home phone, she was very popular and took messages for everybody else.

A punt? I think I started at about eight years old. The local SP bookie, 25 cents each way so and so, all up such and such, and so on, if any, each way something else. "Who won the Melbourne Cup, Mr Hawke?", we exclaimed in primary school; "gee gee" was the reply. "Oh c'mon Mr Hawke, please tell us who really won the Melbourne Cup?" Again "gee gee", only to find out when we got home that the winner was Gatum Gatum.

I remember bimbo, porky and the rest of the clan. The early days at Harold Park trots; I started going to the trots at about the ripe old age of 13, my older mate (15) and the rest of used to stand outside the gate and approach the first older gentleman, "excuse me mister would you be my Dad?" so we could get in (children under 18 accompanied by an adult). When my best mate was 18 and I was 16, well then he was my Dad (lol).

Cards – I was bought up on poker, euchre, crib and five hundred.

You've heard of Peter, Paul and Mary. Well it was Peter, Paul and Angela. Me, my best mate and his first girlfriend. Well it was us two and then his girlfriend. The three of us went everywhere together. It's funny to think back on it now but I felt sorry for poor Angela.

My beloved Rabbitohs: Johnny Sattler, Bobby McCarthy, Ron Coote, Dennis Pittard, Michael Cleary, Eric Simms and so on.

Those early days at the St Peter's two-up trap. Bill's milk bar at Newtown, and my first girlfriend, Denise.

The fads – The Beatles, jelly crystals, yoyos.

The cars – FJ Holdens, Mini Minors, the Charger

The cigarettes – Capstan, Lucky Strike, Camel.

The alcohol – Tooths KB, Reschs pilsener, Millers. A little later on it was Black Tower and Ben Ean.

The rats – the Eastern Suburbs railway was being built and we had an influx of the giant rodents. The pitter-patter of feet in the ceiling each and every night whilst watching TV.

I hated the Davis Cup then. Every summer around Christmas, the heat and the tennis. Black and white TVs: The Jetsons, Dobie Gillis, Lost in Space, The Fugitive, The Twilight Zone and The Outer Limits.

Friday nights: Cheetahs nightclub, the Coogee Bay Hotel, the White Horse Inn. Before that bingo and pool. The music of the '60s and '70s – The Beatles, The Hollies, Creedence, soul music, and the Jackson 5, Saturdays at Coogee beach, surfing on the rubber mats for hire, playing handball, and the blue bottles. Well my mate Bobbie got stung by blue bottles one day at Coogee. He still had the scars across his stomach a week later.

The city: Coles cafeteria, the lottery office, double decker buses, the Manly ferry, the zoo.

To my beloved grandparents, Ruby and Bob, how could I ever forget them.

Those were the early days as a kid, some of my best memories.

My Uke, Luke, and Me – by Lyndell Robyn Winn

I am the perfect example of a 60-something who, against all odds and I must say sometimes against all evens, set out to master a musical instrument which I affectionately named Luke (the ukulele). Having no knowledge or understanding of music, this presented as a real challenge, not only for me but also for the ears of my family. After purchasing a \$49 ukulele that came with a very attractive carry bag, instruction booklet and tuner, I was ready to rock 'n' roll. Well I thought I was anyway. How many of us have purchased a musical instrument and expected to play like Beethoven the first time we picked it up. My confidence was quickly shattered when I saw the expression (or lack of) on my husband's face.

OK, so it was going to take me two goes to get it right!

Step 1 - Hold instrument correctly – this means, you have to work out which end gets plucked and which end gets strummed (getting good at the terminology hey!).

Step 2 – Tune the thing – this means use the tuner to remove the scalded cat and ka-plunk sounds. This was a real challenge as I didn't really know which string did what.

Step 3 – My first song – yeah right! He's got the whole world in his hands – he sure did and I am sure he didn't know just which country the sound was coming from.

Step 5 – Time to get serious about all this but now we were heading off on an around Australia journey and I was sure there weren't too many ukulele teachers in the Outback.

Off we go, me, my uke Luke and my very patient and, thank goodness, partially deaf husband Ross. The confines of our caravan proved to be a bit of a problem, but the ever patient Ross, just kept giving me those "ouch my ears" look every time I missed a note and encouraged me to keep trying (preferably outside the van). I soon got the message and decided to inflict my musical talents on the general public. Well, surprise, surprise, they actually liked my music. Go Lyndell! Now for the next challenge. Can you play another song for us, Lyndell, was the request? Terror, terror, what do I do now? I only know one song and, after

listening to He's Got the Whole World in His Hands 20 times, my adoring public was soon looking for a more exciting repertoire.

How do I get out of this one?

My solution proved a huge success. I got every member of my audience to make up a verse for the song and they loved it, but I must say some of the verses left a bit to be desired, for example, "He's got Kevin Rudd in his hands". They could have at least used the current Prime Minister's name (if they knew it).

As the miles passed by, I practiced daily and soon Luke (my uke) and I were becoming a sweet sounding team and less likely to burst eardrums or attract grimaces from Ross or my adoring public. A second song and then a third joined my repertoire with the help of some very good tutorials on the internet. Relying on battery power sometimes made this process difficult while we were travelling but once again my determination kicked in and I gradually began to feel at ease with Luke.

Arriving home after seven months on the road heralded the "OK what I do now?" syndrome. The solution, join a ukulele club, and this I did. Although a nervous wreck, I entered the room on my first club meeting, thinking everyone else would already be Beethoven, but I was wrong and felt very comfortable in their presence (and they even played He's Got the World in His Hands. Whew, what a relief! From then on, there has been no stopping me and, as a result, Ross now plays the ukulele (named Duke) too and we have a lot of fun learning new songs together.

I guess the moral of this story is – it is never too late to try something new, but be sure to prepare for not only encouragement but some well-meaning criticism along the way. Remember, you are out there and that is all that matters. There is a uke named Luke waiting for us all.

Kandos, the Bush Spirit – by Terry O’Sullivan

Kandos is a rare 20th century town in NSW. It started as a private village in 1914 to house the workforce for a new cement industry. For almost 100 years, the town thrived on the back of this industry. It was something of a shock when Cement Australia announced the closure of the works.

There was immediate concern about displaced employees, but many were able to take advantage of opportunities in the coal mines. People outside the area asked whether the town would survive the loss of the industry.

The pride of belonging in country towns finds expression in many ways. This was demonstrated in 2010 by a committee of women who determined to showcase the local gardens – the Kandos Gardens Fair. They identified a variety of suitable gardens, attracted several sponsors, and developed activities to ensure the success of this event.

The Gardens Fair in October, 2010 was supported by Angus Stewart, celebrity presenter of Gardening Australia, Leah Finney from Hunter Valley Gardens, and local lyrical poet Terry Yates and included a garden party fashion show. The event was an instant success and received the Mid-Western Region Council’s Australia Day Event of the Year Award.

The Kandos Garden Committee opened another nine gardens in November 2011. The event now included gardens from Kandos, Rylstone and surrounds. Angus and Leah returned, together with Fiona Ogilvie (columnist for The Land), who held a Recording your Garden writing workshop. Local artist Judi Martinelli demonstrated art in the garden. The committee organised art, writing, music and poetry again in the gardens in 2013 and the event will continue on a biennial basis.

While Kandos was coming to terms with the closure of the Cement Australia plant, Centennial Coal announced the impending closure of their Charbon mine. There were more cries of doom, but the community would meet this challenge head-on.

Assistance came from an unexpected quarter with a group of 40 artists coming from Sydney for the inaugural Cementa Contemporary Arts Festival in February 2013. The artists filled the town with art projects, including sound, sculpture, installations and performances over a very

successful four-day event. Planning is underway for a biennial event in April 2015, which will feature “collective landscapes” by 27 local artists.

Quite separately, two Kandos women organised a Bob Marley Festival in February 2013. Errol Renaud and the band Caribbean Soul came up from Sydney and captivated an audience on the green lawn adjoining the Kandos railway station. Energised by the dancing in the street, they booked a group called The Pigs for a Rocky Mountain Hoe-Down in October. The Bob Marley Festival will be back on 22 March 2014.

While the cement industry is no more, Kandos is planning centenary celebrations for the long weekend in October 2014. Just three hours from Sydney, Kandos enjoys affordable housing and a marvellous lifestyle. Visitors are welcome, but you are welcome to stay!

My Adventurous Life – by Snehalata M Joshi

I am a citizen of Australia who has come to Australia at the age of 62 from India. I never dreamt of settling in Australia at this age of life, though I am an optimist by nature. I like to take challenges in life, which I have really tried to do throughout my life. I was born in the year 1943 in India to Indian parents who had married by choice when in India.

Mother was from Mumbai and father from Bangalore, South India. Both were of different castes, so marriage was not allowed by the caste system prevailing in India. However, having this background, my parents believed in giving me a good education and opportunities to have good future. Father had a job in British India and mother too was educated. They gave me a good education by enrolling me in one of the best schools in Mumbai, namely St Columba Girls High School, which was run by Scottish mission. It was having a boarding for girls whose parents had transferrable jobs. My parents allowed me to travel from Mumbai to Bangalore by train which took 36 hours of time for travel. In India a girl at the age of 12 years would not be allowed to travel alone by train in the years 1952 onwards. I visited my parents in three holidays. It included experiences of reserving railway tickets to catch a train in Mumbai.

This background shows readers my varied experiences at a young age which made me take my own decisions. Decision-making is a very important skill in life. Along with that also I learned about managing funds, adjusting with peers and independent study habits. I could excel in studies too.

I wanted to stay with my parents as I used to miss them a lot, but my father insisted that I should stay in the boarding school. The school was known for its discipline and good academic results. I joined Wilson College for University Education which was again a branch of the Scottish Mission School. I must mention that seeds of secularism were sown during the educational process, which has developed secular attitude in me. I met a boy, Madhu, who was the son of my father's friend. We fell in love, leading to our marriage, which our parents were very happy to celebrate with Hindu customs. Since we both were very young and had to settle, our financial condition was not very good. My husband was working and I was at home. My son was born in 1964 and daughter in 1968. I was purely an Indian housewife who could not work

as both the children were young and women did not work, unless needed. However, I believed in rearing my kids myself.

Suddenly an opportunity came and we went to another state and city where my husband got a job and we stayed with my in-laws. A desire to study further was ignited in me and I got an opportunity to study. I started securing distinctions in the education courses, namely, Bachelor of Education, Master of Education and PhD in Education. I was lucky to get the best PhD guide who was an international figure. He was my mentor. I got fellowship awards and I was always alert to my children's education. I learnt to drive vehicles like scooters and cars. My husband Madhu encouraged me. In the '70s girls in Baroda, my city in Gujrat, were not permitted to ride scooters. But I had to learn as we stayed very far from my university. It was again a challenge. I joined the university as a lecturer in education at the age of 32.

Before that I was appointed to a primary school with 2000 students. The very first day I joined the school, the trustees informed me that the two lady supervisors who were running the school had submitted their resignations. They were also disturbed. But I accepted the challenge and allowed them to accept their resignation. Naturally, the other staff were happy and they supported me and we started running the school well. Within one year I was selected as a university lecturer. It was again a challenge for me. I took the new position and work started. Within three years I was promoted to the position of senior lecturer. This was followed by a professorship. I could develop the faculty and brought in good research grants. I got opportunity to visit Australia through attending an international seminar, which led me to encourage my children to permanently settle in Australia. I visited the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Singapore.

On the home front, my son became an engineer and my daughter graduated too. They both fixed their marriages and we celebrated the weddings together. At the university, I was given position of dean of the faculty and my name was discussed for the vice chancellor's position. But something novel was to happen. My children with their families decided to migrate to Australia. This made me think about the family. Yes, my grandchildren needed us in the new country. Madhu and I decided to concentrate on the children. We left everything back in India and came to Sydney. A new life started. I got a job at the University of Western Sydney as an associate professor. New work, new rules and norms and a new drivers licence and finally we were all settled in this nice country.

Now we are senior citizens and look forward to enjoying life. We both travel a lot, taking advantage of the Seniors card. We travel in and around NSW on the card. Now we are waiting for our pension.

Many people our age who visit Sydney ask us whether we both like this country and we proudly tell them that "we are very, very happy".

This is my story.

Gloria Chambers.

Hi! My name is Gloria Chambers and I'm 64. This is my story.

In 2010 I moved into a unit across the road from the house I grew up in for the first 19 years of my life. It was upon the insistence of my daughter-in-law. She told me that I was not getting any younger and it would not take too much to maintain it.

After being there about two months, I went across the road (with muffins in hand) to ask the owners if they would mind my looking through to see how the house had changed. The gentleman that owned the house was pleased to let me look through. He showed me all through, he even took me out to show me the back yard. How it had changed. I think everything had shrunk.

When I left, thanking him very much for his time, he followed me back to my unit, talking the whole time. A week later, he was back knocking on the door to ask me out to a James Morrison concert. Who could say no to James Morrison? So on 9 April we went on our first outing. He never stopped visiting me. On 9 October 2010, my man took me to a quaint little country hotel for lunch. After lunch, he got down on his knee and asked me to marry him. So, on 9 April 2011 we married in an open-air ceremony.

I have done so many things for the first time since I have married my wonderful husband: flown on an aeroplane, been on a riverboat, travelled on the Indian Pacific and visited Adelaide.

So it looks like I will be living the rest of my life in the house my mother brought me home to from the hospital. The one thing that sticks in my mind is how in heaven did my mother bring up the 10 of us in such a small two- bedroom house?

The picture of my house was painted by my neighbour Stan Hickson as a thank you for the cakes I cooked for him and his wife. They are in their 80s.

How I Became the Shortest Airline Hostess in the World – by Carol Cruickshank

1962 – Goroka, in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Arriving at the airport on a Sunday morning, driving past several tin sheds and trade stores, I was already going through severe culture shock. The 12-hour flight from Sydney to Port Moresby, a long wait in the heat at the airport and transfer to a wartime DC-3 had made for a long night and day. When I asked where the town was, the answer “you just went through it” filled me with dread. Oh god, I’m stuck here with no way out. Many of the locals were waiting for the plane to unload as it brought news from the outside world – Saturday newspapers. The tradition was to pick up the paper and head for the golf club, sit on the veranda with a pie and beer and watch the women golfers hit off on the first tee, and then five holes later, trying to avoid the sand traps each side of the green in front of the onlookers. Raucous yells of encouragement echoed down the short fairway as they hit off. Months later when I had succumbed to the only entertainment in town, playing golf, I hit into the sand for one and finally got onto the green for 13, to much male merriment as I literally hit up a storm.

As there was no road to the coast at that time all food, mail, building materials and vehicles were flown in, Goroka having the fifth largest number of air movements in the southern hemisphere. Qantas had given up all their air routes on the island and Trans Australia Airlines and Ansett Airlines were in competition for the money making flights, both with ‘terminals’ in Goroka, leaving the smaller airlines with the not so profitable runs. Papuan Air Transport (PATAIR), which I had worked for in Port Moresby, was having a difficult time, as was Territory Airlines (TAL) in Goroka.

Before I could get over my jet lag and become acclimatised to the high mountain air, I was offered a job with TAA, handling reservations, secretarial work, ticketing and generally keeping the airport manager, three traffic officers, and the native cargo boys in line. In spite of having already worked in the aviation industry I was terrified of flying, and had had three close shaves flying in various aircraft. At one point PATAIR was the only airline in the world with no aircraft, all having crashed, burnt or disappeared, but that is another story.

My boss decided I couldn't work for an airline and not like flying and thought aversion therapy was the order of the day. The phone would ring early morning, demanding I turn up at the airport and fly to Bulolo to pick up a load of timber, which I would sit on for the return flight, or sit in the tail of an empty Bristol freighter swinging in all directions, or in the co-pilot's seat in a pre-war Canadian single engine Otter as it did the 'milk run' through the mountains, with me white-faced and hysterical, and other 'interesting' aircraft.

It certainly wouldn't be politically correct these days, but at that time coffee was the main crop in the mountains, and rubber and copra plantations in the Rabaul, New Britain area. The system was that 35 natives from the Highlands would be flown to Rabaul on a DC-3 under a two-year contract, supplied with their rations and accommodations and given their pay in a lump sum on return which enabled them to buy enough pigs to buy a wife. The natives from New Britain would come to work on the coffee plantations under the same system. The mountain natives covered themselves with pig fat to keep warm and wore only feathers in their hair and neckpieces, a woven g string at the front, and 'arse grass' (long leaves) at the back. The whole village would turn out to say farewell, with much wailing and tears.

There was no wall lining in the DC-3s, and the seats were sling style along the wall, so it was whatever class is several levels below economy, to say the least. Lunch was in a box containing a chicken leg, sandwiches and a cake, with the hostess serving lemon juice to them individually – more than supplied these days on some budget flights I've been on.

My boss decided I should have a Cabin Attendant's Certificate so I could be hostess on these flights, in spite of a very weak stomach and fear of flying, but I thought what a great way to see parts of New Guinea that I hadn't seen before. The next DC-3 that landed was piloted by a tall rangy laconic Chips Rafferty type who was asked to put me through the paces for my certificate. He strolled out to the plane with my five feet nothing, short legged body trotting along behind trying to keep up. In a typical Aussie drawl he started my training.

"This is the oxygen for pilot and co-pilot, the passengers don't get any. If you crash and can't get anyone out of the plane door or the tail has dropped off, kick out the window here and throw this rope down and they can slide down the wing. But for Christ's sake, make sure the propellers have stopped turning or they'll all get chopped to bits."

And he signed the form. Unfortunately I don't have a copy of the certificate to prove that I once was indeed, the shortest airlines stewardess in the world! No first aid training, no trial run with the rope (hard to find volunteers for that endeavour!). Where were the occupational health and safety people and the unions when this was going on? Not to mention a psychiatrist for me.

A week later I headed out on my first flight, sitting in the jump seat behind the pilot with the door to cabin closed. As the passengers became more terrified, the smell of pig fat and fear intensified. Thirty-five sick bags were used, nearly causing me to join them in emptying our recently eaten lunch. When we stopped to refuel in Madang I was certain half of them were going to jump ship! Me with them. A video of them disembarking when we finally arrived, green-faced, dripping fat in the heat, each carrying their empty lunch box and full sick bag, arse grass very wilted, would have been a sight to behold. The hostess not in great shape either, waiting for a ride into town for my first visit to Rabaul, with its volcano eternally belching sulphuric bad egg smelling fumes, a reward for the six hour plus flight.

The captain called me over. The weather was closing in at Madang airport where we had to refuel en route home, so we immediately loaded the returning 35 natives and off we flew back to Goroka. The hostess was not happy! However, the crying and excitement of the villagers welcoming home their sons after two years absence was very moving.

I took to my bed for two days to recover and declined any future labourer charters, only 'hostessing' on flights to mainland towns for sports events and weekends away. In time I realised that flying low on small aircraft was a wonderful way of seeing that spectacularly rugged country and meeting the territory characters in the small villages with their hair-raising airstrips ploughed at steep angles into the mountain side. But I swore once I left the country I would never again fly in small planes, a pledge broken very few times in 50 years.

The Story of Some Friends of Mine – by David Foster

"Come on girls, I want you to pack the things you need in your school bags, only the things you need," my Mum called to us in a low urgent voice. "Then I want you to hide them under your beds." Oh my god, I thought to myself, is this really happening? "Jimmy and Jo are coming over tomorrow and we're going to have to be ready to go with them to a new place." Yes, I realised, it really is happening but do I want to happen like this? "We're leaving your father." Leaving Dad! I knew it was inevitable but I wasn't ready.

I was 15 years old and my life was turning a corner that I probably feared it would but never really expected to happen so suddenly. Even though I loved my strangely distant father I knew that things at home between Mum and Dad could not go on as they were. In a peculiar way I was excited but full of dread all at the same time. I was being forced to make an on the spot choice between life with my morose and self-absorbed father or a new and less stressful life with my bright, brave Mum and my clever older sister, who had the magic knack of making things always turn out for the best. I began packing straight away, my decision was made but deep down I felt like a traitor to my father who I knew needed help.

There was, in my soul, a well of sadness for my father who always seemed to be detached from what I had learnt from others were the basic elements of what constituted normal family life: sharing, caring, supporting, belonging and, even sometimes, loving. What I was to find though, in a fairly short space of time, was that in spite of every bright and lovely thing to come my way I was inextricably genetically linked to my father and I shared the gene of his solitary nature. Like him I began to invest more trust and love into my relationships with animals than in relationships with my fellow human travellers. This inherited characteristic of my father's affected many relationships that I would later stumble through.

There we were leaving my Dad. And, adding dreadful weight to the luggage we were throwing together, was the heavy baggage which each of us carried within us regarding our Dad. The weight of our secret fears and misgivings was enormous as we put the material things we needed together and then began the wait for our would-be rescuers, the

Hannans. Mr Hannan and his wife were family friends, well, more friends of Mum's than Dad's. He had an incandescent smile and was always funny which we loved when he visited our rather humourless home. The Hannans were particularly fond of my sister Kay, who even at the age of 17 seemed to know so many people and know so much more about the outside world than I did.

When the Hannans arrived Mum was ironing, she was behaving as if everything was quite normal. Later on I recognised this behaviour as Mum's way of dealing with stress; she would enter a kind of unconscious and withdrawn state when reality was too hard to deal with. At that point Mum had been to see a doctor because she felt that she was entering a state of severe anxiety and depression.

The doctor told her that she was in fact on the brink of a nervous breakdown and warned that if she didn't separate from her mentally abusive husband he'd be visiting her in a psychiatric institution. Mr Hannan immediately recognised the state Mum was in and told her as gently but as urgently as he possibly could to get the sheets, throw them on the floor and hurl everything into them. He then bundled the items up in the sheets and ran down the stairs with them and stuffed them into his car. We then scrambled down, jumped in and were sped away to our secret apartment. Mr Hannan helped Mum up the stairs with all our worldly goods, wished us well and was gone; and there we were, standing in the living room of an old flat with a new life in front of us.

We were scared and a bit shattered, but somehow we all felt that a tremendous weight had been lifted off us and when we looked around and then at each other we began laughing and crying all at once.

The Things we do for Love – by Malkit Banwait

It was a hot summer's day. I'd just come home after a winning game of golf, sat down, opened a bottle of cold beer when my teenage daughter, Amrita, caught me in a good mood. She walked across, sat on my lap, gave me a big hug and said "Daaaaaaaad." Straight away I knew she wanted something and a voice in my head said, "Quick, hide your credit cards!"

"Dad," she said. "Yes" I replied. "Do you know what's happening at the end of this year?"

I said, "Let me guess. You'll be in Year 10 and surprise everyone by coming top in your School Certificate."

She jumped up and said, "Why is it that Indian parents are always talking about education?"

"Because that's the way I was brought up," I said.

"Well that was your generation and now it's my generation. Now try again, what else?"

"I give up, you tell me."

"See, I told you last year and you've already forgotten. Dad, it's my Year 10 formal!"

"Oh yes," I said, but really having no idea. Having done my schooling in England in the '60s, I never heard of school formal till I came to Australia. The closest I got to a formal was stopping at a motorway cafe on the way back from university graduation ceremony and my Dad saying, "Since you did so well, you can order whatever you like!"

I was in for a surprise when Amrita said "Dad, if you really love me, you have to do two things. One – buy me a dress. And it has to be the prettiest dress in the whole school."

I said, "Amrita please ask your Mum. You know that I have no idea about dresses." She said, "Exactly, that's why I want you to come with me."

“Two – you have to organise a car, not any common limo or hummer like everyone else has, but something different. My friend Stef and I want to go in style.”

That’s when I realised that school formals are just like a weddings. You’ve got the dress, the car and the stressed father. I had to call upon all my project management skills managing multi-million-dollar projects to make sure that this project didn’t fail. I setup a project team involving my wife and two sons and, of course, a risk management plan.

The car was the easy part. I have a friend Dave who owns 10 Caltex franchises and gets a new luxury car every year. This year he was getting a BMW convertible. So I asked him if he could drive us to the formal. He said no worries.

The dress was another story. Amrita came home one evening crying. “What happened?”

“I don’t like the dress Mum bought me. See I told you she would buy a cheap one.”

“How cheap is it?” I asked. “\$700,” she said.

“What?” I screamed.”

“Dad that was your generation and now it’s mine. “I don’t like it,” she insisted, “and I want you to change it.”

Eventually the big day arrived and everything was running late just like a wedding. On top of that it was Sydney Friday afternoon rush hour. Dave arrived with his sparkling new open top Merc.

As I was getting ready, Amrita asked, “Dad where are you going?”

I said, “With you of course.”

She said “Dad, you can’t come with us. What will my friends think? ‘Amrita’s Dad just borrowed his friend’s car.’ ”

“Amrita, my friend is not a chauffeur and I’m going with him, so there!” So Dave and I sat at the front with Amrita and Stef at the back, both checking their hair and makeup every two minutes. When the venue, Le Montage, came into sight, Amrita shouted, “Stop the car.”

I said, "Now what?" She said, "Dad, can you please get out." I said "What?" She said "I don't want my friends to see you. I'll be so embarrassed. Pleeeeease! If you love me." Dave looked at me and nodded, "Just do it."

"But Amrita it's about to rain and I don't have my jacket with me," I pleaded.

"Here, take this," she said and threw me a flimsy umbrella from a \$2 shop. Dave smiled and whispered, "The things we do for love." And the three of them drove off leaving me standing in the rain. Eventually I made it to the venue all soaked, hid behind a tree discreetly taking a look at Amrita and other girls from Tara. They looked so elegant and beautiful in their glittering frocks. It was just like Hollywood Oscars night.

I arrived home, worrying about my teenage daughter's first ever big night out. Would she be OK, would someone spike her drink, would some boy take advantage of her? I did what I normally do when I'm stressed, poured a scotch over rocks, put on my favourite song, The Things We Do for Love, by 10cc and slid back into my recliner. So ladies and gentlemen that, is how I survived my daughter's Year 10 formal.

That night I'm not sure who slept the least, I worrying about Amrita OR her dancing the night away! I was woken the next morning by sound of my phone ringing. "Mr Banwait, all the parents have taken their daughters home, Amrita is the only one still here."

When I went to pick her up I realised I need not have worried. She said, "Dad, I've had the most wonderful time of my life. You're the best Dad." She then sat on my lap, gave me a big hug and said "Daaaaaad, you still love me?"

I said, "Of course." "Then guess what's happening in two years?"

Let me see, "Is there a Year 12 formal?"

Europe on a Tandem and a Shoestring years? By Lorna Brindle

About eight years ago, I met up with a rather charming Dutchman, who, in conversation, mentioned he was looking for someone to cycle from the Black Sea to the North Sea (along the Danube River) in the coming Northern summer. I immediately put up my hand. Why not? I thought. I had been doing a bit of cycling, even if it was only an eight-kilometre 'round the block ride every few days, I was fit enough. Ha! Not fit enough to keep up with the Dutchman.

Plan A. Further training was required, and a new (second hand) racing bike was acquired for me to train on to increase my speed. I also adopted a definitive 'can do' attitude as I increased my daily cycling to 30 kilometres to increase my fitness – still not fast enough for the Dutchman!

The launch of Plan B was required, the purchase of a tandem cycle. Suddenly the outlook was brighter. I would be able to keep very close to the Dutchman and the objective was now within reach. Europe, here we come!

Excitedly, we prepared for our trip, daily rides on the tandem increased our awareness of each other on the bike, and allowed us to custom prepare the tandem, making it as comfortable as possible. It was also necessary for me to prepare my bottom for increasingly longer hours in the saddle.

We had calculated we would need to spend up to five hours, (with breaks for morning coffee, lunch, afternoon tea), in the saddle over most days, travelling an average of 70 to 80 kilometres a day, in order to reach the North Sea in the allocated time, using camping, cheap accommodation or website accommodation via couchsurfing.com where ever possible.

We had four panniers on the tandem, one each for clothes, two for cooking and spare parts, and the tent was tied on behind me.

What we hadn't factored in was the extreme heat in southern Romania: 42 degrees C at 7 am, in the shade, and the amount of water we would need: five to six litres daily! There were also few or no clean camping

grounds in that part of the world and, surprisingly, there was no electricity in the cheap hotel we stayed in for our first night after being on the tandem. So, no electricity to run the air conditioner and no water in the taps. We had to take water from the toilet cistern and boil it for a much needed pot of tea!!

We carried two five-litre bottles of water strapped to the tandem and we overcame the lack of camping grounds by 'wild camping' on the banks of the Danube, with a refreshing swim in the mighty river before preparing dinner at night, apart from a couple of nights in paid accommodation to recover from the heat, and a journey by train to get us out of the heat of the day. Air-conditioned comfort, or so we thought. Unfortunately, the train had to travel so slowly due to the HOT rails there was not enough speed to run the air conditioning. The guards had to prise open the carriage doors so we could breathe air, albeit hot.

On other days we would leave early at 6.30 am and cycle through the morning, only stopping for well needed drink stops, before coming to a standstill for about three hours in the middle of the day, heading off again for another couple of hours cycling, looking for a campsite at about 5pm.

We were not sorry to leave Romania and the heat behind. Our ride took us through parts of Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary and Slovakia, 'wild camping' most of the way until Austria and Germany where the camping grounds were much more user friendly.

We created a lot of interest along the way, as tandems were few and far between, bicycles being far more popular. People would stop and chat to us, and in Serbia were happy to buy a cold beer at 9 in the morning! We opted for chocolate milk, or something closely resembling it. In other places it was a coffee and a cake, people were just so friendly.

We passed through some beautiful cities: Belgrade, Budapest, Bratislava, Vienna and Linz before leaving the Danube behind at Passau, in Germany, to head north to Holland and the Dutchman's family.

An incredibly wonderful journey clocking up some 3000 kilometres over two and a half months, with the tandem coming through admirably, never letting us down. There was always a cycle shop close by for repairs. And, of course, we came through admirably ourselves; we

stayed close to each other, we stayed friends, we had a fantastic experience.

That was eight years ago. Now I am close to retirement age and have been fortunate to continue to have many cycle rides long and short with the Dutchman through Europe, New Zealand, Australia, Cuba, and New Caledonia. Long may it continue.

What can I say? I guess, "You are never too old to try something new."

70th Reunion of Evacuees from London in WWII – by Cass McHaffie

On 1 September 2009 the 70th Reunion of the Wartime Evacuees was held in St Pauls Cathedral London UK.

It was a lovely day but a very strong breeze was blowing, so the fly past of the Lancaster Bomber airplanes was cancelled.

Brian and I joined the queue of hundreds waiting for the doors to open. TV journalists from all over the world were interviewing the crowd and a great feeling was present with people talking to others in front and behind them. We all wore labels as can be seen in the photograph of Brian and I, which had our name on them and where we were evacuated to.

People were constantly checking each other to see if they could possibly know someone. As there were 2000 of us there it would have been a miracle to have this happen but we still checked!

The whole reunion was so well organised as we slowly entered the cathedral with our tickets which unknowingly were colour-coded as to where you sat for the ceremony. Such a wonderful surprise we received when led to our seats which were under the enormous dome at the front of the cathedral. The atmosphere was awesome and the sun shining through the stained glass windows made it extra special.

Several people gave their recollections of the war years from 1939 to 1945 when the evacuees were sent out from war zones to the country areas to stay until the war ended. One such person was from a family of seven children and he spoke of being fortunate to be billeted with a childless couple, who grew to care for him so much that, at the end of the war, they asked his parents if they could keep and educate him.

This they agreed on and visited him during this period to see him eventually going to university and becoming a very successful businessman. As a mother, I can imagine the courage it took to give a son up, but also the unselfish attitude she must have had to give him this chance in life.

Some remembrances were funny and gave us a laugh, but we now understand also the feelings of some people when told they had to have evacuees they did not want.

After the service, we had lunch in the Crypt restaurant, with many more conversations of our remembrances. It was a very nostalgic day, which will stay with us forever.

My nephew Dave and his wife Kath took us out to Bletchley. This is where the Enigma Machine was centred during World War II. This was a wonderful visit and a beautiful day. On the way back to Dave and Kath's home we were given a lovely surprise being taken to Stanwick in Northamptonshire where I was evacuated for four years.

We visited the local pub, the Duke of Wellington, hoping to see elderly citizens, but they were all too young to remember evacuees! I stopped outside Stanwick Church and was taking a photo when I became aware of two young boys watching me. I asked if they were local and, as they were, I told them of my stay in Stanwick when I was about their age.

Imagine how I felt when asked by one of them if the church was there when I was living there.

Upon checking the internet, I found that the church dates back to the 13th century!

Primary School in the 1950s by Barry Collin

There was a darker side to children's education at the Cooks Hill Infants & Primary Schools in those days and I will relate it to you as I saw it then and editorialise with what I know now. The Australian Government in the 1940s and 50s had 2 entrenched policies, a White Australia Policy and an Immigration Policy. The first one kept the Asians, as well as Hindus and Muslims, out of Australia, and the second opened the door for Europeans who wanted a second chance in life after the ravages of the Second World War. The immigrants came mainly from Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Germany, Holland and a host of other minor countries. Most came with nothing, and Australia had to be better than nothing. With Newcastle being the centre of Australia's heavy industry and with the BHP Steelwork's willingness to expand and therefore needing extra cheap labour, many of these families were moved to the Hunter Valley. All were initially placed in the Greta Migrant Camp and then transferred to the camp in Mayfield, where they were processed for available jobs, if any, and placed in rental housing within Newcastle. Cooks Hill, being the seedier part of Newcastle, was an obvious choice for their housing, and many were moved into our area. Their children went to our school.

For us Australian kids, there were only 3 types of children. Us who were born here with names like *Smith*, *Brown* and *Jones*, aboriginal kids who we assumed lived in gunyahs in the desert with dingoes and alcoholic parents, and wogs (no political correctness in those days). So with that narrow single mindedness, we stood by and watched these wog kids try to fit into our lives. Every couple of months, the Headmaster stood on the dais at assembly and say something like the following:

"Children, we have some new children that we would like to introduce to you. Maria and Giuseppe will be in Miss Slater's class, Luigi and Spiro are to be in Miss Mathieson's class, and Franz will be placed in Mr Boreham's class. Please make them feel welcome."

And that was it! Thrown in the deep end with no English skills, no support, and to be baited by all and sundry.

There were one group however, who were not referred to as wogs, and they were the British. Geoffrey (I will only use first names here) was our very first English boy in our class, and the first time he opened his mouth to speak we knew we were going to have trouble because we could not

understand him. You would have expectations to understand the English, but he came from somewhere in England which had an accent that beggared belief. The thing about it though was that whilst we had to ask him 2 or 3 times to repeat himself, he was doing the exact same thing to us! He wasn't a wog, but by crikey he wasn't too far off! And he insisted on being called Geoffrey. Geoff was just not good enough! Geoffrey turned out to be a half decent bloke and a wizard at marbles, always managing to skilfully relieve all of us of our marbles with a politeness not normally experienced in our neck of the woods. I was intrigued when he told me that his family came to Australia on a ship for £10. In my naivety I told my parents that Geoffrey's mum and dad were using a pretty nifty travel agent. They just smiled.

For kids from Britain, adaptation to school life was relative straightforward. The same could not be said for the non-English speaking children. There was a cruelty in placing children in a classroom without any English skills and expecting them to perform. I now believe that the teachers of the time were ill equipped to handle such situations and just carried on regardless. If you asked Fritz "*what is 2 plus 2?*" he looked at the teacher with a blank stare, amidst derision and laughter. Of course if he had been asked "*was ist zwei und zwei?*" then I expect that he would have shouted out "*vier!*" at the top of his voice. But he was never asked that. I might also add that these kids were in most cases one year older than us and I expect that was to help them adjust better because of that additional 12 months maturity. It did not. If the classroom was not bad enough, the schoolyard was a whole other matter, with baiting being the order of the day.

A boy in my class by the name of Spiro was the exception to the rule. Very Greek, but he had 3 things going for him. Firstly, he came to Australia to live with his grandmother who had been living here already for a while and had good English skills, which rubbed off onto him in a short while. Secondly, he was good at all athletic type events and was a sports hero for the school, and finally his last name had been anglicised which would fit into the *Smith, Brown* and *Jones* category. I look back and salute the ingenuity of his grandmother and the name change. He was not a wog, but one of us. Go figure out the basis of some persecutions!

Of course over time, these children learnt basic English skills the hard way, and today my hat goes off to them because of that. It was not just poor English skills that were an issue. Clothing was interesting with some German boys wearing leather shorts, and some girls wearing

strange dresses. However these kids could outshine us all on school dress-up days! Food was another peculiarity with sandwiches being replaced by a piece of cheese and a hunk of salami sausage. Speaking of sausage, some kids had black sausage which I was told was made from blood. Well, I just would not believe that! And with a touch of sadness I will tell you about the little foreigners who had no food at all. Some kids did not have lunch, and just sat there until the eating part of the lunch break had finished. They survived on the free government milk issue. Their parents were poor so they went without a meal. One kid told me in halting English that his dad was a Baker, but could not get a job in that field because he could not understand English and was considered unemployable even though there were jobs to be had. He was trying to support a wife, several children and his own parents on virtually nothing. I shared my lunch with that boy next day. I asked my mother to make me an extra sandwich so that I could give it to this boy each day, which she did willingly. She always made a jam filling for him as she thought that he needed lots of sugar to sustain him. It became a kindness that other mothers did as well. At last, some sort of acceptability.

There was the time when an adult female relative of one of the migrant children came to the school and caused me to notice something about her. She had long sleeves on, but when she extended her arm for some reason or other, her sleeve rode up to expose a primitive tattoo on her inner arm consisting of a series of numbers. I had never seen a tattoo on a woman before so it certainly grabbed my attention. An explanation was given for this by my parents. It was an explanation that I did not fully understand for years to come.

By the time we reached sixth class, the migrant kids who had been with us for a year or two had been allowed to integrate, which was rather big of us. They were just children who had had a terrible beginning to their lives, which was something we were slowly realising. Sure they had funny names, accents and ways about them, and their English skills were not the best. They were probably still seen as wogs, but then again they were our wogs and that was the difference. I recall an issue outside of school where a migrant kid from our class got into some sort of fracas with some kids from another school when we gathered in the local park.

The Cooks Hill boys banded together to ensure that he left the park unmolested. They were looking after their own, which was a momentous step in the right direction. I asked one of 'our wogs' once what was the best thing about Australia. *"Running water so we do not have to go to the village well anymore, and of course flushing toilets."* Things that we Smiths, Browns and Joneses took for granted. It's funny the events that you remember.

A RIGHT ROYAL WELCOME by Clive Hitchen

Tuesday 13th April had to be a special day.

The Duty Clerk, keys in hand, dutifully led us through the creaking corridors of Oakley Court toward our suite. The ambience seemed to blend a richness of history together with conjured visions of the quintessential haunted house.

“Sir, you have experienced a truly memorable welcome” the Clerk whispered respectfully, having been made aware of my arrival experience. I say respectfully, since he spoke as if to avoid invoking the restive spirits lurking in these dark panelled Oakley halls.

Unknown to us beforehand, we learned on arrival that this stately Windsor Manor House was the site for filming several of those old classic horror movies that were the nightmare material of my childhood. I must concede the ease with which my imagination could sense a Boris Karloff lurking the stairwell shadows, or hear chains clink amid the groans of our ghostly hosts despite it being only the noon hour. It was after all, Tuesday 13th April, a very special day.

My wife and I were led into our well-appointed room that overlooked a beautiful courtyard with manicured lawns that rolled green around the spring flowering beds and pathways to the gentle bank of the upper Thames.

I pondered again on the events surrounding that surprising welcome.

We had departed Dulles at 9.45pm on British Airways Flight 216. My head at that time was still spinning with images of American history mixed with the landscapes of Washington DC.

Foremost were the Smithsonian aeronautics, refreshing my love of aircraft acquired in earlier engineering days at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation in Sydney. In the encapsulated security of a Boeing 747, I had paused to reflect again on the wonder and majesty of flight, its grace, its precision, its accuracy, its use of the natural elements that surround us.

As we neared our destination, somewhat sleepless but wearily relaxed, these thoughts coalesced with anticipation at the richness of history and new panoramas of wonders awaiting us in England, the land of my father's birth.

I may pause in my recollection to say that the BA Business Class service was excellent, quietly attentive without being intrusive and did much to ease the rigours of that Atlantic overnight to our 9.10am arrival at Heathrow Terminal 4.

Formalities efficiently completed, baggage not so efficiently fought for but nonetheless collected without incident, my wife and I then ventured to the arrivals concourse and eventually found the Swan National agent to organise pickup of our rented Granada.

Naturally, the Swan depot was 2 miles from the Terminal and naturally, we would have to wait at a specific point at a specific time for the Swan shuttle pickup to transport us to our Granada and naturally of course the pickup point was the needle in the haystack.

The day had turned sunny outside the Terminal. It could perhaps be considered mild by north European standards, possibly bracing by English standards, but absolutely freezing by Sydney standards. Undaunted however, we pressed on with stiff upper lips chilled by the wind.

Notwithstanding some navigational errors and redirection with an overloaded, recalcitrant baggage trolley that insisted on terrorising those who dared to cross its path, we eventually did find our nominated pickup point. Naturally, it was clearly marked 'Swan National Shuttle Pickup'. We could now put the cut lunch and compass away. It was quite clear that we would most definitely not after all, be lost in the mores of the Heathrow.

In order to present a professional 'non-ocker' image on arrival in this greenest and most hallowed of lands, I had chosen to wear a business suit and tie under my newly acquired Saks Fifth Avenue overcoat bought in New York earlier in our journey. My wife was also warmly and fashionably clad to repel the icy cold wind that was tearing at our residual tolerance.

Adjacent to our concrete covered pickup point was a tall column with a triangle of sunshine just large enough to accommodate one human

being. My wife and I began a shared ritual as we waited for our shuttle, three minutes turn about each in the sunshine to try to warm up just a little. It was my turn. As I stood luxuriating in that square metre of sunshine, the frequent roar of jet engines turned my thoughts again to the wonders of flight, its grace, its precision, its accuracy and its use of the natural elements that surround us.

And then it happened! ...that truly memorable welcome I mean.

Head, ear, neck, chin, shoulder, shirt and suit endowed with a most classical of English welcomes. Truly a wonder of flight, delivered with absolute grace, meticulous precision and with an unerring accuracy, a product of the natural elements that surround us.

The Clerk politely coughed to reclaim attention from the momentary mental vacation my reverie had induced. I discreetly handed him his gratuity. As he took his leave I replied, "*Buckingham Palace must be commended for sending such an impeccable emissary to convey this right royal welcome.*" You see, I prefer to think that this pigeon who bore a pelican size missile inventory, was an eminently well fed and superbly trained member of the Buckingham Palace staff. The Queen, who was in residence, must surely have sent this ambassador to ensure a truly memorable welcome to England.

My wife extracted a change of clothes from my suitcase as I made for the shower.

May I add that our (not uncommon) welcome to this wonderful land of history and tradition was followed by a memorable visit that blended an enjoyable mix of business and pleasure.

This, not just at Windsor's Oakley Hall (where we did in fact manage to avoid the ghosts) but in the many wonderful places and with many people we were so privileged to visit and meet.

Footnote:

The above amusing events did in fact take place on Tuesday 13th April 1988. We will again visit England and Scotland, where my paternal grandmother was born and lived until her marriage to a Lancashire lad. In 1912 with my father as a babe in arms, they migrated as a family to this other incomparable land called Australia.

Army Vet – Action by Jeff Ireson

Some years ago I spent approximately three years with the Australian Armies 1 Commando Company. This story is from an exercise that I was on.

We were in an area that was used both by the military and the general public. To get to our training area our transport in trucks drove through the public area and across a small part of a river crossing by weir. On the public's side of the river was a small sandy beach and was often frequented for barbeques, picnics etc.

This particular weekend while we were on training we learnt that a transition company (new guys) of 1 Commando were coming into the area. It was decided to set up an ambush as they crossed the weir and made their way up the small hill on our side. The plan was, people placed in strategic positions along the track with blank ammunition in weapons, two people to hide at the bottom of the hill near the weir with dummy hand grenades. These were round filled with powder and a fuse lit by a match (they went off like a large bungler). On one side of the hill I was positioned ready to chop down a small tree to fall in front of the truck with troops in it to stop it, I had the tree chopped so that on command it would only take me about one to two chops with my machete. Meanwhile two other of our guy's had two bottles of fuel to make Molotov cocktails to throw in front of the truck for a bit of realism. Meanwhile a family arrived at the little beach set up their barbeque ,the kids went in for a swim while dad started cooking. I thought to myself this is going to be interesting as they had no idea we were there watching them.

Next thing the trucks with the new troops slowly made their way down to the river and started to cross.

The two guys with the hand grenades jumped up and threw them into the back of the truck, instant mayhem. The other guy's opened up with their weapons with blank rounds, more panic. Then it was my turn to chop the tree and stop the truck from trying to escape up the hill. Well, instead of one or two chops it took about six, and the tree fell onto the bonnet of the truck, the two Molotovs were thrown and went under the truck and luckily rolled out from under and exploded down the hill. Meanwhile the driver looked ashen white. In an instant the family on the

other side had partially packed up and took off probably thinking WW3 started leaving some of their belongings behind. The exercise from our point of view was successful, but the other guys were really dirty on us. All's fair in love and war.

DOING TIME by Tony Jarrett

SAN BLAS, MEXICO

October 22, 1969

We were heading south with the idea of being in Guadalajara in time for the Bull Fighters show down between Mexico's top Matador and the highest paid Matador in history, the great Spaniard El Cordobes at the Progreso Plaza de Toros.

Keen to get back out to the coast for a few days before the fight, we discovered a small dirt road leading out of a little town called Tepic that we were told lead to an unpopulated area on the coast known as Playa De Los Cocos. It was about 20 km away.

This seemingly disused dirt road wound through barren countryside and without sighting another car, we finally descended from the hills and emerged at a beautiful, desolate beach lined with palm trees.

There wasn't a person or a hut to be seen anywhere and I was feeling unsettled about pitching our tent in the middle of nowhere. There were tyre marks on the track, so we made our way further along heading north.

After about a kilometre, we came upon a camper van and met Garry and Sheryl, two croupiers from Las Vegas. They were nice enough folks, so we asked if they minded us pitching our tent a few hundred metres further along the beach looking out to sea. The scene of the so called drug bust, Playa De Los Cocos

It was comforting to have someone else around and Gary and Sheryl told us they were big fans of the local Los Cocos weed, which explained their presence in the middle of nowhere all the way from Vegas.

The heavy jungle and the hill side that ran up behind us was surely the place for a Mexican Drug Lord to hide a few dope plantations.

At about 11.00pm on the second night, we were awoken by five sweaty, unshaven men with torches, standing in a semi-circle at the front of our tent, rifles at the ready.

These men told us in broken English they knew we had drugs and they were going to search for them.

Good luck.

It turned out two of them were from the Mexican Interior Ministry Intelligence Unit and the others were Immigration and local Police.

They were deadly serious and it was a very frightening experience.

After an hour of searching the tent, our bags, the car, under the car, the carpets, the spare tyre, inside the stove and the lantern, they miraculously “discovered” a plastic bag of local dope complete with cigarette papers and matches right beside a palm tree barely two metres from the front of our tent.

How amazing was that? I wonder how that got there?

Whilst poor Kate stayed behind with Gary and Sheryl who I believe the Federales had confused with us, I was thrown into the back of a grey open truck with a guard each side of me and whisked off fifteen kilometres further north along the beach to a small coastal town called San Blas.

Wearing all I was allowed to take, swimming trunks and a T- shirt, the truck entered San Blas Prison through a large set of heavy high iron gates.

The prison was in lock down and I was marched across a large dirt exercise yard and taken directly to one of thirty odd cells that surrounded it.

The cell was cramped and it stunk. It already contained four sweaty, smelly, dirty prisoners all of whom desperately needed a shower, a dentist, a hygienist and a change of clothes.

There was no toilet in the cell, you peed or poohed in one corner of the cell and from the disgusting stench, several had done so already.

I sat bolt upright throughout the night way too frightened to sleep as the prisoner directly opposite me sat staring and smiling at me suggestively.

I was equally determined that none of the fattest most blood thirsty mosquitoes I had ever seen, circling the bare light bulb above, was going to inject their filthy disease ridden blood into my body.

The collective high pitched screaming of this mosquito squadron was deafening as they took it in turns to break away from flight formation and dive like Stuka's to suck on the blood of the hot sweaty bodies below.

Over the years prisoners had written words of encouragement in excrement on the filthy walls in a variety of international languages: "Expect five years". "You will die in this place". "Pay up and save yourself". "Get ready to die."

It was a very long night and I was very frightened.

Around 6.00am the next morning, they unlocked the cell door and prisoners emerged from their disgusting environment to the marginally fresher air of the exercise yard.

Here we had open pit toilets and prisoners lined up to take turns to squat over one of six open holes in the ground while the others watched.

All I had in addition to my swimmers and T-shirt was my father's watch and later that morning, one of the heavies approached me and gestured that I take it off and give it to him.

I pretended to not understand, but when he was joined by three mean looking compadres I reluctantly handed it over

The next day Kate had finally persuaded Gary the Vegas Croupier to drive her the fifteen kilometres along the beach to the township of San Blas where I was being held.

Gary was reluctant and would only agree to drop Kate on the outskirts of town from where she set out alone to find someone who might be able to speak English and help our situation.

In the meantime, I watched as local prisoner families brought in a saucepan of food and passed it through a small opening in the prison gates. The prisoner took the new sauce pan and handed back the empty one.

When the heavy who had absconded my father's watch walked towards the prison gates with his saucepan, I knew the watch would be inside and if I was ever going to recover it I needed to act now.

Throwing all caution to the wind, just as he was about to pass his saucepan through the small opening in the prison gates, I lunged at it and as it hit the ground the lid flew off and I was horrified to see that there was nothing inside.

Late in the day, standing in the open yard amongst all these men in these disgusting conditions, sunburned, unwilling to drink the filthy water and dreading another stifling hot night in the cell with the mosquitoes, Smiley and his stinking filthy sweaty mates, Kate arrived at the gate waving a piece of paper for my release.

It was an extremely emotional moment.

She had found a shop keeper who could speak English and he had taken pity on my situation in San Blas Prison and agreed to take her to the Prison Commissioner and see if they could negotiate my release.

It turned out the Prison Commissioner was at home ill, but with Kate's persistence they drove out to his hacienda to meet with him.

The Commissioner was not too ill to return to the prison and sign my release papers when it meant an under the counter payment.

He even gave Kate a receipt!

Walking out through the heavy iron gates of San Blas Prison was one of the happiest days of my life and having slung the heavy to give me my father's watch back, I was even happier.

San Blas Prison. Mexico. What a dirty, stinking, filthy hole.

El Cordobes won the bullfight in Guadalajara.

Riley's Through the Red Centre 2013 by Janelle King

Our Riley adventure started in Adelaide on 2nd August when we met some people who we travelled with all the way to Darwin, on the bus tour to Victor Harbour. We had spent 10 days before this after leaving Sydney on a Houseboat on the Murray River, then onto Murray Bridge.

We enjoyed the 2013 Riley Rally, tasting wines in Barossa Valley, Burra sightseeing before arriving in Port Augusta. I remember Leigh at the farewell dinner mentioning the flies in the Outback, I must say he was correct. We 1st came in contact with them at the Painted Desert.

After leaving Cobber Pedy we headed on the 1st of dirt roads (as we were driving a 4WD towing a camper trailer) not far out we had a flat tyre.

We stayed the night Arckaringa Station, with all the flies before dark and at sunrise, we were happy to leave. Then up the Stuart Highway, to see Uluru, The Olga's next stop Kings Canyon and quick walk around the rim just before sunset. Next day we went the back way to Alice Springs on the Menindee Loop Road, visiting Albert Namatjira's former home, before going into Palm Valley.

The last photo shows how good the road was, driving over rock creek beds, we had a problem with the brakes.

Thought we would stay the night at the Devil's Marbles, we got a quite a surprise that there were about 50 vehicles staying the night, we were lucky it was a full moon.

After leaving Daly Waters, we saw sign to Elsey Station. Visiting the site of the old station, billabong and cemetery, we learnt this was the home of the author Jeannie Gunn who wrote We of the Never Never based on her experience here.

Enjoyed a few days in Katherine, spoilt by the local car club, we were off to Kadadu, where we spent a nice day with a WA family (Richard & Kay and Robyn & Matthew) 4x4 driving at Twin and Jim Jim Falls and the following day with Bill & Karin from New Zealand.

The Riley's thorough the Outback was coming to at end, spending the last few days in Darwin, once again being entertained by the local car club. It was farewell to all our new friends.

We spent the next 2 weeks driving across the Savannah Way (dirt road) thorough Roper Bar, Butterfly Springs, saw the Lost Cities, stayed at Lorella Springs, onto Burketown, down to Cloncurry, Longreach and to Lightning Ridge where we stayed with friends at Sheepyards Opal Mines.

We had a very enjoyable trip, it is great to catch up and meet so many Riley members.

Bloody Easter by Richard Osborn

(The Battle for Hermies - Easter Monday 1917)

It is July 2013, I am back in the Somme. Ninety six years and three months since my uncle, Raymond Osborn, was killed in action - he was only nineteen. From where I am standing I can see the village of Hermies clearly, nothing but flat terrain in between. Behind me - a couple of kilometres back, hidden behind the sunken road, lies the village of Beaumetz-les-Cambrai and my uncle's grave. It was close to their where they commenced their attack. The village of Hermies was their objective - a strategically important German stronghold and the only obstacle between the Allies and the Hindenburg Line.

It is so quiet. There is no sign of bygone conflict or carnage. Surely I must be in the wrong place. Even after midnight no tormented souls stir in these fields to haunt the living. *I wonder, where are all the ghosts of the soldiers of the Somme?*

In the distance a farmer is on his tractor operating a sprayer. He is the only other living being. It is warm, I am wearing a t-shirt. Vastly different conditions to the sleet and snow that Ray and his mates faced that night. At first glance these fields give no clues to their dark past. They've been ploughed and sowed a hundred times. The trenches have mostly been filled in. The sunken roads remain but even they have been smoothed by time.

There are pieces of twisted metal protruding from the earth. I pull at a rusty piece and it reluctantly releases its grip. I imagine it to be the bipod off a Lewis gun. But later when I check references I am sure I am wrong. It is twisted beyond recognition. I place it at my feet. There are other pieces of metal around. Too much, I think, to come from fractured farming equipment. I am told these fields still harbour large amounts of ordinance. The bodies of dead soldiers too are scattered under these fields - men who will never be claimed. I wonder if the farmer on his tractor ever thinks about what lies beneath his soil. The intense artillery bombardments killed many soldiers and had the knack of supplying them with an instant grave in the soft earth. It was the reason that so many bodies were never recovered.

I love the bright red fields of poppies. They turn the landscape into a Manet painting. There is something else which makes this canvas unique, splashes of white litter the landscape. They are small cemeteries contrasting with the red flowers and green fields. Around here they appear to be everywhere. Boutique cemeteries - each containing perhaps one to two hundred graves. All in pristine white. All a credit to their carers who work for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. It is these clusters of immaculately kept and pure white grave sites dotted throughout the fields of the Somme that make it like no other place on earth.

Small villages also dot the land. Pockets of houses all with church spires watching over them. From a distance they look perfect. It is only when you get close you can see the poverty. They appear to be locked in time - still in shock. Most of these villages were razed to the ground and new residences which sprung up ninety years ago, handicapped by a lack of funding, are devoid of personality having been erected in sorrow out of necessity. Today they have the added burden of a century of neglect.

The larger towns have moved on. Some like Cambrai, Bapaume and Peronne have an air of prosperity, refusing to be locked in the past. But still they benefit from the past and their only tourist attraction - The battlefields of World War One.

On the road leading into Peronne a huge statue of a digger reveals the high regard the French had for the Australians. And still have. In the main street on the side of a public building is a small plaque which was erected only fifteen years ago. It passes off for a street sign – one of those cute French blue and white ones. It's a clever play on words - *Roo de Kanga 1918-1998*, and underneath is printed *We do not Forget Australia*. It brings a tear to my eye.

I am looking for somewhere to stay the night. There is no accommodation that I can find in Hermies or Beaumetz-les-Cambrai. Matter of fact I can't even find anyone to ask. So I drive into Cambrai and book into a modestly priced hotel. It has a large dining room and by the time I sit down the room is full. There's a group of forty Brits, quite elderly, on an organised battlefield tour. They are in fine form. A group of half a dozen burly truck drivers talk overly loudly at a table next to them. I get the impression they don't like the Brits. This makes for a fairly boisterous room. There are two young girls waiting the tables with an older woman buzzing around overseeing things. They are friendly and unflustered by the cacophony. It must be normal. I order the set menu

with a choice of main. I choose the pepper beefsteak. The entrée is terrine and salad with toast. Then the main arrives. It is a huge slab of meat covered in what I recognise as a pepper sauce. It is difficult to cut through, and I don't think the problem is the knife. When I finally penetrate the slab it is a bright crimson colour like nothing I have ever seen before. It is absolutely uncooked. I look again at the menu board. Definitely bouef and no mention of tartare. I look towards the Brits. It seems they have chosen the chicken. The girl is nearby so I point to the raw innards of whatever this is. She looks back at me – it obviously looks normal to her - so I gesture that I can't eat any more (I have had almost none of it) she nods and takes it away. Now I wait for desert which is pomme tarte. I order another glass of house red. Five minutes later the slab is back. What have they done to it? I can't see any difference. I nibble at the edges. I can't eat it. It must be cheval. I read recently that the French were accused of packaging horse meat and passing it off as beef. I think I must be at the source.

Next morning I return to the Cross Roads Cemetery at Beaumetz-les-Cambrai. I have been here three times now. It is a lonely place. The wind rustles through the few trees. I doubt there could be a quieter resting place for the fallen.

Thirty of the men buried here were killed on one day - Easter Monday, 1917.

On previous visits I have been alone but today there is a Welshman, probably in his forty's. He tells me he comes from a small town which lost two hundred men in the Great War and his quest is to visit all their grave sites. He pauses and looks away as he is overcome by emotion. He apologises, although there is nothing to apologise for. It is an overwhelming place.

We part company, he to locate another small cemetery, and me to walk the route Ray took before dawn on that fateful morning.

Now I am more convinced than ever that the Somme will always be locked in time in 1914–18. It will always pay tribute to the Australians and will always be the burial place for more Australians than anywhere else beyond our shores.

When I'm 64 by Sheldon Ross

Abridged version featuring several true life experiences

In October this year I will be 64, an age referred to in The Beatles song "*Will you still need me, will you still feed when I'm 64*". In my 64th year I can put my hand on heart and say 'truly I've had a wonderful and blessed life', never the less a life filled with its usual ups and downs. I have travelled to many parts of the world, including my emigration from England to Australia in 1982, arriving on the eve of Bob Hawke's Election victory and Australia's wining of the Americas cup.

Yes the early 80's were a time of new beginnings for many down under. None more so for one coming from England under the stewardship of Iron Lady Prime Minister Maggie Thatcher, unto the laid back ways of a larrikin Bob. I thought for sure 'I had landed in the lucky country'. I was here when Australia celebrated its Bicentenary and even played a part in the opening event of Darling Harbourside the same year.

During my 32 years in Australia I have lived in 3 States; Victoria, NSW and QLD and, like many, witnessed the rise and fall of our Aussie entrepreneurs. As fate would have it one day I found myself seated beside Alan Bond on a flight from Adelaide to Perth several days after he had been released from jail. I will never forget the moment when he handed his business card 'a plain white card that read 'Alan Bond Business Consultant'. I in turn handed him mine 'CEO of St. Dalfour Australia,' yes the Tall Poppy Syndrome was alive and well.

In 1991 I left the shores of Aussie for 5 years and took up a role in countries deemed to be war zones of the 90's. From South Korea and Pakistan to Sri Lanka and even a cross border visit to Afghanistan. I've been shot at, tear-gassed, survived a hotel bombing and even a life-threatening encounter in Afghanistan. This adventure over, I returned to Australia in 1996 hoping for a somewhat more peaceful life. Yes, I have experienced many great moments in my life, but it has been said by many a good man 'the best is yet to come'.

And so it was in 2004 on the eve of *Seniors Week* and an event being held at Sydney Town Hall became the setting for a very different kind of adventure. I had not previously ventured into the Town Hall before which was strange considering I had lived in Sydney for nearly 20 years.

And yet this would become the backdrop of my most memorable experience ever.

It all began on the morning of March 15th as I had set out in the early morning peak traffic on a journey from Merrylands in the west to St. Leonard's on the North Shore a journey of more than one hour.

Having stopped at the office to gather relevant materials, I continued my journey over the Harbour Bridge arriving at the rear entrance of the Sydney Town Hall. And to my utter surprise I found the only free parking space in Sydney, a story in itself... and 'I would not see my car again for more than 2 weeks'. Once inside the Town Hall and while waiting for other colleagues to arrive, I decided to ascend the sweeping Marble staircase to the first level, an ascent that was to become symbolically significant.

Now at the time Sydney Town Hall was under renovation with some areas inaccessible. Having located the site of our presentation booth, and still alone, I walked across to the opposite staircase, in a kind of mirror reverse action to my ascent.

Looking back, the 30 minutes that followed seemed liken to the antics portrayed in Louis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland'. But for me there was to be no Mad Hatter's tea party or fanciful talking animals. Instead there were to be moments that, when placed together, would certainly appear to be liken to a piece of fictional literature.

For as I commenced my descent down this magnificent stairway, I began to consider the history of these stairs and how they would have been stepped on by many from around the world, peoples from all walks of life, dignitaries, politicians and perhaps even Royalty. Step by step these thoughts rebounded in my conscious state.

Then suddenly I was struck by a pain in my chest, one which at first caused me to stumble. I managed to regain my balance and just as I did the acute pain returned more pronounced than before. Then my left arm began to numb, as a cold, clammy sweat formed on the back of my neck and with 10 steps still to go. I instinctively knew my situation was dire.

With none else around me I felt so alone, when out of the ETHER came a voice, a voice that seemed to calm me, one that replaced the unrestrained fear which had previously taken control. At first, I thought

this was a hallucination, brought on by my circumstances, but then I heard it again, this time more calming than the first.

Without realising it, I had reached the final step and somehow this milestone seemed a positive outcome. Still physically unaided I walked to where I parked my car, where I came across the security guard who had checked me in earlier. As he looked towards me he observed something was wrong and asked me, "Are you alright". My response to him, "I believe I am having a heart attack, do you know of any medical clinic near here?" Surly anyone else might have suggested I call an ambulance. But he went on to advise me of one situated below in The Town Hall Shopping Arcade.

I thanked him and with my life seemingly ebbing away I preceded to walk the 444 steps (later retraced) when again the voice returned this time saying 'Walk with me', this occurred 3 times. Walk with who? I thought at the time. Today I believe 'by the Grace of God' I managed to reach the clinic. Once there I walked up to the counter hastily advised the receptionist of my condition, my name and then there was nothing not even my Medicare card, as I began to fall in what seemed like slow motion. The receptionist whom I later discovered was named Rosa, miraculously reached me before my head hit the concrete floor.

As she caught me my conscious life began to fade into darkness, no sound, no feeling, just nothingness and yet it's very strange, because I can remember the darkness. Then out of this dark empty space came a flash of bright light and the darkness was gone. What was happening to me? Was I dead? Was this heaven? What happened next I have mostly kept to myself, however the outcome in what I call a heavenly place was to bring me back from the edge. Then as my eyes opened I heard a voice say, "He's alive, alive".

Post script:

Yes I survived and underwent quadruple bypass heart surgery. The following year I shared my story with the media and at public gatherings.

I have been a NSW Senior's member for 9 years and today I responded to an invitation to enter the 2014 writing a story competition.

I wrote this abridged version of my full story 9 years and 11 months from, my Near Death Experience.

On the 1st anniversary of my heart event I was again invited to a live interview broadcast on Senior's Week with John Stanley on 2UE. This year is my 10th Anniversary of survival during Seniors Week

During these years I have donated much time motivating others that "Health is Wealth" And how precious is this life we are given.

In all of this I am just an ordinary guy, whose life experiences have been more than blessed.

I am so delighted Seniors found the synopsis of my story acceptable, its seems so connected, for it was on the first anniversary of my survival I joined Seniors NSW.



**Seniors
Stories**
Side B



Life is like a camera,
Just focus on what's important and
Capture the good times,
Develop from the negatives
And if things don't work out,
Take another shot



– unknown

A heartfelt thank you and congratulations to all those who submitted their stories and were chosen to have their stories published as part of the **NSW Seniors Card VIP Story Telling Event March 2014.**

Thank you also to:
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