



seniors' stories  
2015



SENIORS CARD



# seniors' stories

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## 2015



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# Acknowledgements

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*Seniors' Stories* is a collection of 100 tales written by seniors from across the state of New South Wales. The theme of this year's stories is 'Wishes'.

NSW Seniors Card would like to thank all those who drew upon their creativity and personal experiences to contribute to this year's volume of *Seniors' Stories*. Thanks also to those who attended and took part in the Seniors Card Story Telling Event 2015, held 20th March at Sydney's City Recital Hall.



*Irena Dobrijevic reading at Story Telling event*

# A message from the Premier

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This book of stories published by NSW Seniors Card is a great example of the talent, experience and wisdom of NSW seniors. I congratulate each writer for their contribution.

Our community functions better thanks to the contributions made by our seniors. When seniors are active and involved in community life, everyone benefits.

The NSW Government aims to help you stay active, healthy and socially connected, at the centre of this agenda is the NSW Ageing Strategy, which is a whole of government approach to planning and service delivery, that

is helping us to build age friendly communities, assist all people to plan for their futures and to take advantage of the benefits of living longer.

This year, the Government will release a refreshed Ageing Strategy to guide our focus over the years ahead and to ensure that we are delivering the services that our seniors want and need.

Seniors make an exceptional contribution to our community, playing a vital role in our families and as the backbone of many voluntary organisations and local neighbourhoods. To assist seniors, the NSW Government is expanding our hugely successful Tech Savvy Seniors program, delivered in partnership with Telstra to hundreds of new locations across NSW. We are also expanding NSW Seniors Card over the next four years to deliver even greater benefits and opportunities to seniors.

Again, congratulations to the seniors who contributed their stories to make this publication.

Enjoy.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Mike Baird". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mike Baird  
Premier

# A message from the Minister

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I am very pleased to introduce the NSW Seniors Card *Seniors' Stories 2015*.

NSW Seniors Card is our most widely used service for NSW residents over the age of 60. In addition to NSW Seniors Week and the Premier's Gala concerts, this book is a way of recognising our seniors.

As part of the 2015 NSW Seniors Week, NSW Seniors Card invited members to contribute an original story around the theme 'wishes'.

We were overwhelmed by the number and quality of stories submitted by our seniors.

The best 100 stories were selected with help from the Australian Writer's Guild, with selected writers and guests invited to read them at an event at Sydney Recital Hall on World Storytelling Day on 20 March 2015.

Publishing these stories is a great way to showcase the writing talent of seniors and provide an insight into their lives and of older Australians across NSW. Telling stories is an age old tradition in all cultures, it's how we pass down knowledge and history through the generations and how we gain an understanding and realisation of the diversity which exists in local communities.

Seniors' Stories are just oneway of recognising and valuing the experiences of NSW seniors and building connections between the young and old.

I hope you enjoy the stories featured, no matter your age and encourage you all to write and share your stories.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Ajaka". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Ajaka MLC  
Minister for Ageing

# Foreword

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*Jackie French*



**S**tories matter. Humans are the only species that tells stories: long complex stories that tell us where we have come from, or can inspire what we may do next.

A decade ago, talking about writing, I casually mentioned that in my first job after school I earned \$19.50 for a six-day week, with overtime, while a man doing the same job got \$160. The kids were horrified, almost unbelieving. 'And married women weren't allowed to teach', I added, 'or be a permanent public servant...'

We forget how much the world has changed in our lifetime – and our children and grandchildren, and their grandchildren, will only know if we tell them.

I'm lucky. I come from a family of storytellers. 'Tell me about when you were a little girl, Grandma', we'd ask. She'd also tell us about

the stories her grandmother told her, which took us back to the early days of the first NSW colony, all in a story. I knew our nation's history better than most of my primary school teachers because I had been told stories, like the tale of the baker's horse who delivered bread to hungry families in the 1919 influenza epidemic when his owner was too weak and ill to help, and only one member of the family strong enough to make the bread and pack it on the cart.

I have collected stories all my life, and they return, slightly or greatly changed in the books I write. But stories about the past are important for another reason. The world changes. A hundred years ago kids as young as nine worked in Australian factories, sleeping on dirt floors, usually dying before they were 20. The Federation Child labour laws changed that. Stories show kids they we can change the world – and they have. They show that there will always be disasters, bush fires and wars, but that even when bad things happen, there is good around us too and people who will try to help. And stories simply from the imagination teach us how others feel, because for a short time, as we read, we are that person.

Yes, stories matter. But stories from those of us 'in the afternoon tea of life' – or even on the way to a very nice supper – are from those who have the experience to know how much things can change, because we have seen how much has changed. We have an (almost) lifetime of knowledge to impart. Every story is a gift from us to everyone who comes after.



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# seniors' stories

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adventure





# A pilgrimage walk

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by Peter Anthony Bugler

In the spring of 2014, my partner Janelle and I embarked on a long held bucket list wish, a pilgrimage walk along the coastline of northern Spain to the pilgrimage site of Santiago de Compostela, the third largest such site in Christendom. Following is an extract from a daily diary entry tracing our travels.

*Day 17: Comillas – San Vincente de la Barquera*

We enjoy our breakfast at an outdoor café, watching as the weekly markets set up in the main square. We pay the bill and the owner asks if he can stamp our credentials, or pilgrim passports. These passports are stamped daily and on reaching Santiago de Compostela we will present them to church officials in order to receive a certificate acknowledging our pilgrimage.

This is part of the rich symbolism etched into the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage. It is considered auspicious to stamp the credentials of a pilgrim, to be a part of the process. We feel very privileged to be on this journey.

We buy some treats for the day ahead at the market and set off on what promises to be a delightful trip. Between Comillas and San Vincente de la Barquera, The Northern Way runs entirely through the National Park of Oyambre. We will walk through wetlands and marshlands of high ecological value later today as we approach San Vincente de la Barquera.

But the trail out of Comillas takes us initially away from the coast and we stop at a

café in a hilltop village with the snow-capped peaks looming ever closer on our left. We sit outside the kitchen window taking in the spectacular scenery, while our host makes us *dos café con leche* – two milk coffees, and hands them through the window to us. We wouldn't wish to be anywhere else in the world at this moment in time.

We walk through another tiny village and the local baker is on the morning bread run, delivering loaves of fresh bread to outlying homes and farms. We flag her down and buy a loaf for our morning tea. The bakers are more than happy to stop and do business with pilgrims.

In such circumstances I hold out a handful of coins, and without fail, the following scenario plays out: the person who I'm doing business with, whether it is a shopkeeper or someone on the trail, will take an amount of coins, they will always show me what they have taken and, voila! Everyone's happy!

We gradually descend from the ridge running parallel to the ocean and are now walking on a path through what appears to be an enormous expanse of tidally exposed sea grass which the abundant bird life and sea life obviously thrive on. This estuary, along with other vast wetland areas we passed in Hondarribia and Santona, is a spawning ground for the sea life that provides the centuries old fishing fleets right along this stretch of coastline with their livelihood. It is a very low tide and the exposed sea grasslands



stretch far into the distance toward the snow-capped mountains to the south.

We see our destination ahead; yet another town with a glorious medieval past. The town of San Vicente de la Barquera has a rich history as a major maritime trading and whaling port, as do many of the towns along this stretch of the coastline. We cross one of the longest bridges in this part of the world which spans the width of the estuary. We pass an elevated fortified castle right in the centre of town, and we reach our elevated abode to find that we have an amazing aspect across this vast expanse of waterways.

We slip into our après Camino sandals, do our usual afternoon orientation walk back to the port and happily settle in for an hour of indulging in gourmet seafood tapas treats and a glass of wine in convivial company.

We put our traveller's hats on for a late afternoon of sightseeing and head directly to the castle which caught our attention as we walked into town. The heavily fortified castle is strategically placed at the main fork of the estuary, facing seawards. It was the King's residence back in the day, dates back to the 13th century and overlooks his former domain for as far as the eye can see – both seaward and inland. The king of the castle here would have been a tough nut to knock off his throne back in the day.

The sweeping views from the castle are arguably the most spectacular we have come across on our journey. The tide is much fuller now. Below us the fishing fleet is moored

around the port area, and looking inland the estuary stretches south to the snow-capped mountains we have walked alongside for the past three days. We wander around the perimeter of the grounds of the castle and there are absolutely beautiful panoramic views in every direction. Again we pinch ourselves to ensure we are really here right now.

In the past three days we have walked from Santillana del Mar – regarded as the prettiest, best preserved medieval village in Spain, rich in history – to Comillas, a wonderful seaside university town, and today we have enjoyed a most enjoyable day of walking through a national park to this medieval fishing port steeped in maritime history.

Is it any wonder that we live in the present tense and that we walk and talk one day at a time. Why wouldn't we when there is just so much to take in, so much to soak up?

### *Postscript*

After six truly memorable weeks, trekking more than 650 kilometres through four provinces on three different Camino routes, we walk into the pilgrimage site of Santiago de Compostela, and to achieve such a long held bucket list wish was such a wonderful life-changing feeling.

# Adventures of a boy and his horse

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*by Eric Cowled*

Back in the 1920s, tractors capable of reliable operation in the sandy regions of the South Australian Mallee were scarce and expensive, so large Clydesdale horses were used to pull farm implements. Good riding horses were needed to muster the work-horses, round up sheep and transport children to school.

In those days, the heads of young boys were filled with stories of cowboys and Indians riding magnificent horses, or knights in shining armour surging into battle on their chargers, or galloping at breakneck speed over hill and dale to rescue beautiful damsels in distress.

Learning to ride was a boy's top priority. First there was Venus, a quiet old moke used mainly to draw the family sulky. Then there was Polly, a cute little chestnut who carried me to school while I was in second and third grades. The problem with Polly was that her gallop was little more than jumping up and down in the same place – a far cry from my dreams of how my horse should gallop. I longed for a real horse, fast and powerful, that would enable me, in my imagination at least, to experience some of the feats of my heroes.

My wish was granted on my eighth birthday. My parents presented me with Silver Bell.

Initially a dappled grey, Bell followed the habit of her kind in progressing over the years to a lustrous snow white. She was well built with long legs and the fine pasterns of good breeding and she had a beautiful face – as horses' faces go.

These attributes were complemented by a wonderful, viceless personality and, most importantly for a young boy, she could 'go like the wind!'

A frequent farm duty of mine, even while I was still at school, was to fetch the work horses from the home paddock where they were turned out to feed on grass at the end of each day and then drive them to their stables, where they would have waiting for them a good feed of chaff and oats, which they preferred to grass, to give them a boost before being harnessed for the day's work.

The routine was to saddle Bell and gallop past the orchard, through 'the gap' – a narrow entrance guarded by two huge Mallee trees – out into the paddock, find the work horses and move behind them ready for the homeward run.

As soon as the horses saw Bell and I they would stop feeding and prepare themselves for a mass gallop to the stables.

One crack of my stock whip and we were off.

Imagine 15 or so large Clydesdales surging forwards at full throttle with Bell and I urging them on, their hooves striking ground made rock hard by early morning frost. My mother was to say that the impact of their thundering hooves shook the ground as they passed 100 metres away. It made a wonderful sound.

Not so wonderful was the freezing cold air whistling passed my ears, but that early morning gallop was an exciting experience to which both Bell and I eagerly looked forward.

Most girls came to school in sulkies, but boys thought it was tough to ride horses, so after school mock battles, races, jumps, polo and other games on horses were the order of the day.

Watching the movie cowboys had taught my friends and I a lot about riding, we could leap into the saddle and gallop, Red Indian style, clinging to one side of the horse so that from the other side it appeared to be riderless. Our horses were not simply modes of transport, they were our pride and joy and the source of many an adventure, some quite dangerous.

I never had a fall off Bell but was twice knocked off her back. Once struck by the branch of a tree which Bell was able to pass under but not me and once by colliding with a fencing post.

In the latter incident we had been to a neighbour's house on some errand and on the way home had to skirt a paddock with a strainer post at its corner, the top of the post being knee-high to someone seated on a horse. Bell was hell-bent on one of her homeward bound agendas and while galloping downhill towards the post she miss-judged the turn and although I pulled strongly on the outside rein I was unable to correct our trajectory.

At the last second or so I could see what was going to happen and tried to swing my leg clear but it took part of the shock. Both Bell and I finished up on our backs kicking our legs in the air, but neither was seriously hurt,

although during some changes of weather I still have a rather painful knee.

One stormy day my father and I were out near the centre of a 400 acre paddock loading a wagon with Mallee stumps when a loud clap of thunder spooked the horses harnessed to the wagon and they decided to bolt. Within seconds the six-horse team was heading towards the horizon pulling the half empty wagon at a cracking pace, a great danger to themselves and anyone or any thing that got in their way. Fortunately I had ridden Bell to the paddock. I leapt into her saddle and we took off in hot pursuit.

There is no bravery in this story – I was Buck Jones on Silver and the cameras were rolling.

With Bell's superior speed we soon overtook the wagon, pulled close to the near side lead horse so that I could grab his bridle and pull the team around in a wide arc. After a while they tired, slowed down and eventually stopped.

I am not sure who enjoyed that adventure most, the horse or the boy. Probably the boy due to the accolades he later received for doing something that was just a heap of fun.

# Be careful what you wish for

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*by Carolyn Thrum*

Travel is something I wish for continually and this trip was a wish come true.

They say life imitates art and I don't think I could have painted this picture without the reality of experience. Imagine, India 1990, a group of 15 people embark on a five week study tour with their fearless leader: a well seasoned Indian traveller and lecturer in Indian history. On a shoestring budget, as a number of the group are students, we set off on Indian Airlines. Excitement builds as even the internal space of the cabin is decorated with a frieze of costumed dancing girls.

No one can prepare you for India – the smell of rotting vegetables, the vast hordes of humanity and the noise. Still groggy and tired we step off the plane at Delhi at 5am and skirt around and over bodies sleeping on the platform. Cabs take us to the budget hotel. I agree to check us in (my husband and 10-year-old son, the only child on the trip) while they take a look around.

When they return, a half an hour later their faces tell it all. 'What's the matter?' I ask. A few of the 15 faces turn towards them.

'I think we'll have breakfast out,' they respond.

'Can't we eat here, we're so tired,' I moan.

'If you want to share your breakfast with rats. When we looked through the glass walls of the restaurant the place was teeming with them. They were racing across the floor and tables even swinging from the lampshades.'

We tentatively make our way to our rooms. The rooms are clean but no one feels like lying

down. Huge black birds circle outside the windows. The shower is a large bucket and a smaller scoop. If you want a shower you ask for a bucket of water, soap up and use the scoop to rinse off. I'm beginning to wish I hadn't come.

We set off on a mad race to a dinner destination at 6pm on the other, older side of Delhi. This is a terrifying experience, cars bikes and tuk-tuks fly in all directions across expanses of roads at frightening speeds. The restaurant has more than 100 tables and the waiters commit your order to memory, no paper and pen or electronic device and no mistakes.

From Delhi we travel up to Mussoorie by bus and arrive on a snow covered hillside. This is where the British escaped from the heat in summer. Our problem is that it is winter and our leader appears to have forgotten to book us in. The hotel is closed up for the next three months. He haggles with them and they finally agree to open up for us. The hotel is freezing. We look at each other in despair. We are allocated rooms, no extra amenities. One couple check their room and arrive back demanding a different one. The problem is the tapeworm in the toilet.

That night after dinner we drink a lot to dull the senses then put on all our clothes and bundle into bed together. The next day we buy a small radiator that we leave for the hotel owner after our next two nights.

But interspersed with the horrors are wonderful sunny sightseeing trips to all the usual places, the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, but plenty of stories have been written about these wonders.

Our leader is a wealth of knowledge on the history and culture to the point where the guides at some of the monuments ask him to move on as other tourists keep joining our group. They are losing their livelihood.

Group travelling can be difficult. We all enjoy each other's company for the first week. Then splits occur and we find ourselves in groups of four or five. Our bus driver and sweeper are nervous driving at night because of pirates. They ask us to be at the bus by 3pm. We don't leave until 5pm most days as one or two couples ignore the warnings. Imagine waiting on a bus for two hours for a couple of people. What are you going to do to them? Well they are lucky to be alive, but probably more due to the skill of the drivers facing on-coming trucks on single lane roads than murder by fellow passengers.

Train travel back to Delhi from Rajasthan is interesting. We were actually booked in first class carriages that have tiered bunks for us to sleep overnight. We sleep well; the slow rattle of the train does the trick. Imagine my surprise to find two Indian men crouched on the end of my bed in the morning and many others in the carriage.

I also have plenty of 'poo' stories – overflowing toilets etc. but will refrain from going into those here.

This story hardly covers five weeks but I would do it all again tomorrow. It is a wonderful, interesting country with such a rich culture and happy friendly people who have nothing but give everything. What an amazing

experience for a 10 year old too to see children working, moving stones on one corner and on the next corner, privileged children in school uniform. He is a man now but still remembers the smell of cardamom, burning bodies on the ghats and whole families enjoying a life spent cooking, bathing and sleeping on the footpaths.

# Bog trotting

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*by Greg Lodge*

The lure of long distance walking in the Scottish countryside consumed me. I longed to stride through the blooming heather on the hills of my ancestors. I wanted wind and rain and the history of the rough track. I wanted Scotland in my veins.

And so it was that I set off with my friend, Tony, to walk across Scotland – from Portpatrick on the Rhins Peninsula in the west, to Cockburnspath on the east coast. We were living the dream, but sometimes unforeseen challenges arise which can spoil or enhance the experience. In this case it was bogs! I'd walked across England so I knew about hill walking and bogs, and just as well because the Scottish peat-bog is something to be reckoned with! Tony and I chose to treat the bog-trotting as a necessary and enjoyable part of our adventure.

When you walk in the high bog lands of Scotland, the hills are alive with the sound of squelching!

The Southern Upland Way tracks across the Borders District of Scotland via the Galloway, Lowther, Ettrich and Eildon hills. These are high hills much covered with peat. Black, wet, muddy, oozy peat will suck you down and absorb you like a sponge. It hides insidiously under moor plants to surprise the unwary or careless walker. With rain the danger is multiplied as flooding covers the saturated peat. Tread very, very carefully or in you'll go and peat bogs can be up to several metres deep!

Bog-trotting is a hazardous pastime. Peat land is covered with moor plants which grow thickly atop the bogs. Lumpy and clumpy

they hide the danger beneath. The narrow track is often hard to distinguish as the plants lean across it, further disguising what's below. Adding to the dangers are deep sheep and cattle footprints that must be avoided at all costs. One wrong step and you could be in it up to your knees.

The moor plants masking the bogs are many, including grasses, sedges, mosses, cotton grass, bracken, crowberry, spear thistle, heather, sphagnum moss and hogweed. Many of these cause severe itching so wearing long trousers for bog-trotting is essential.

One rule I keep is that if I want to look at scenery, I stop walking. Another is to never stray from the bog path (such as it is, if you can see it). Concentration is constantly needed to step on harder patches of track or to cross particularly boggy spots by treading on the more solid, larger grass clumps. With the meandering track being so overgrown and hard to follow, I tended to put one foot directly in front of the other, necessitating good balance. This is where a walking pole is so useful! The pole steadies your balance, it's a brake for going downhill, it can help push you uphill, you can use it for swatting insects, it's a weapon against wild animals and you can use it to scratch your back!

Always on our journey we followed the thin track, mostly up seemingly endless hills, but water was ever near – burns, lochs, lochans, rivers, the Water of Trool. Through Holm Wood by the Water of Minnoch we wound our way past ancient oaks beside the River Cree along a mossy carpet between the purple heather.

Walking in the marshy environment for long hour after long hour, wearies the body, for even in the hills there is no rest from the peat bogs. They defy gravity and are there on every uphill, downhill and flat. But sloshing in the hills has its merits despite the pain, for the view from the hill is better than the plain.

Frequently Tony and I would stop, just to look and listen. The sound of wind, sheep bleating, the cry of a hawk, a vole scurrying in the heather, a chirp, a chirrup – all reminders of life to be experienced and enjoyed. Even in the bogs I had a feeling of effort well spent and a freedom of spirit that satisfied and inspired.

Hill walking and bog-trotting is good for the soul!



# If I had a dream

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*by Brother Gregory McCann, MSc*

I was an eight-year-old boy and I was standing beside Auntie Alice's bed. She was dying.

'What do you want to be when you grow up, Gregory?' she asked with a kind, yet gravelly voice.

'I want to be a lay-brother, Auntie,' I replied.

Her eyes opened, she lifted her head, looked at my Mum who was close by, looked at me and said in a slightly higher pitched voice, 'Oh! Oh dear! A labourer! Why do you want to be a labourer?'

'Not a labourer, Auntie,' said my mother, 'a lay-brother. He wants to be a monk and live in a monastery.'

A few days later Mum pulled me aside and questioned me again, 'Why do you want to be a lay-brother? Why don't you go all the way and become a priest?' I remember my answer, vividly. 'Mum, if I become a lay-brother I will have gone all the way!' At that moment my dream actualised. I knew that what I wanted to do was ride a motorbike around Papua New Guinea and repair the broken machinery on the various mission stations scattered around Milne Bay. My Uncle was teaching in Milne Bay as a lay-brother and he shared many wonderful and exciting stories with me about his life on the missions. I wanted to go there!

Mum died in a car accident in 1961 when I was 15. I finished my intermediate certificate and applied to join the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Many people opposed my decision, but my Dad stood by me. On the 24 January, 1962, aged 16 years, I entered

the novitiate at Douglas Park and started my new life. I told everyone, 'I want to go to the missions!' but they trained me to be a cook and I must have done a fairly good job at that because after two and a half years of learning to be a brother (the term 'lay' was dropped by then) I was sent, over the next ten years, to various monasteries and boarding schools around Australia as a cook. I thought, 'I'll never get to the missions!' During that time as a cook I did a course in mechanics and taught myself the guitar. I also resurrected an old army jeep and repaired an old motorbike.

In 1972 I was asked to teach and to be boarder master in a school in Darwin. I had no training as a teacher and I had no academic qualifications but I was in charge of 80 boys between the ages of eight and 18. I was also a class teacher and discipline master for the college and religious co-ordinator. 'I'll never get to the missions now', I thought. Then, at Christmas time in 1974, a girl came into my life. Her name was Tracy – Cyclone Tracy. The college was wrecked so for the next three years I was sent to study at a teacher's college in Western Sydney. I returned to Darwin. Now I was qualified as a high school teacher, but I kept telling anyone who wanted to listen, that I wanted to go to the missions in Papua New Guinea.

My big break came in 1980. The appointments for the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart came out and, because of my teaching qualifications, I was sent to teach at a high school in Milne Bay. I was so excited. My dream wasn't fulfilled, but it was getting

closer. I was given a motor bike and spent many hours riding around the jungles of Milne Bay. I was particularly interested in following the history of our Australian troops who managed to defeat the Japanese in this area during World War II. We had many mission boats at that time, and the students would travel to the high school from all over the province. I often accompanied them as a supervisor but they actually supervised me! They are a very caring and loving people. I became familiar with boat travel and began to make many friends all around the province of Milne Bay.

One day in 1982 the bishop came to the school and during his visit I complained to him that there were thousands of young people in the villages who didn't have the opportunity to receive a secondary education. He said to me, 'I don't want you teaching in the school anymore. I want you to go out and travel around the province and work with the young people. Live in the mission stations for a few months at a time and help the priests by cooking and repairing their generators and outboard-motors and teach the youth. Help them in any way you can.' I had my toolbox on the back of my motorbike. I put the bike on the mission boats as they came and went and travelled around the whole province for the next three years.

My dream came true!

# My Kimberley challenge 2015

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*by Helen Janet Esmond*

One minute I was in my pleasant suburban home feeling comfortably retired, checking my email on my laptop, the next minute, in came an email from Professor Tim Flannery – *the* Professor Tim Flannery, famous palaeontologist who was Australian of the Year in 2007, prolific author, star of many TV documentaries with John Doyle.

Why? Because, with thousands of others, I had helped fund a new Climate Council after the incoming federal government abolished the Climate Commission. We gave our own money to fund the work because we think it really matters. The council, led by Professor Flannery, publishes factual information to all about the impacts of the earth's changing climate, especially on Australia.

The professor was inviting me and 16 other early supporters of the Climate Council to spend several days with him in winter 2015 at the remote Mornington Nature Conservancy in Western Australia's Kimberley region. A 'trek' was mentioned. I was dazzled by the chance to visit remote Australia and to be taught by a man who is extremely learned about the history of our continent and the natural world, a gentle man whom you would not be afraid to ask a question of.

I am a 65-year-old city slicker. The idea of wilderness appeals strongly to me but I have spent all of my life in the city. My knowledge about nature comes from watching TV from my armchair, but sometimes a TV image has a huge impact. I once saw an extremely rare film of a snow leopard living in the rocky

Himalayan Mountains in freezing cold. I remember a moment when the snow leopard looked straight into the camera lens through a curtain of falling snow. I felt transfixed by its beauty and power and wild simplicity. There is a kind of nobility, purity and dignity in wild creatures, large or small. I wish I could meet the gaze of the snow leopard without being ashamed of the wastefulness and greed of my first-world way of life – my prodigal use of water, food resources, and my burning fossil fuels for the many comforts I enjoy daily.

When that email came, I thought, 'If I don't say yes to this terrific opportunity, I might as well lie down and die now, because I will have already given up on truly living my life'. There were of course, fears. There still are. How will I get fit enough to enjoy walking through rocky terrain in hot weather? I'll be travelling for 11 days in possibly testing conditions with a number of unknown people. I imagined trailing behind fifteen 30-something fitness instructors doing this Kimberley trek in between cycling across Cambodia and climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro. But the electrifying email issued an even bigger challenge: could I pledge to raise \$6000 to support the work of the Climate Council?

In late November 2014, it seemed there was a long time to go before 30 June 2015. Help and advice was promised. I accepted the fund-raising challenge. I knew I was going to have to abandon all shyness if I was to raise this amount of money. I'd have to rack my brains to work out how to do it. My best chance was to start immediately.

The first thing I did was organise a 'movie and meal' deal with a restaurant beside Roseville cinema. Five family members plus five friends agreed to come. I made \$5 per person. One of those people was me, but hey! Socially, it was pleasant. I had family and friends mixed together in very new combinations. They got on okay. \$50 in the kitty! Only \$5,950 to go.

I discovered I could buy bulk movie vouchers 10 at a time and make a small margin by charging \$5 extra on tickets. Buying \$100 worth of movie vouchers felt extremely hazardous. January is a good time for quality movies fortunately, as lots of adults are on holidays. My loyal relatives and friends came again. Some brought their friends.

I assembled a 'bring and buy' stall in my garage. I got out from under my bed my prized collection of cards featuring photos of the Harbour Bridge. Books, DVDs, plates, scarves, recipe books, tea cosies and Christmas ornaments we were given. People actually enjoyed browsing this crazy jumble, even though it was January and hot in the garage. My friend Val donated a shoulder bag with lots of different pockets. I bought it – great for vouchers and change on movie days!

I organised a home play-reading featuring *The Importance of Being Earnest*. My sister Christine spent 90 minutes making cucumber sandwiches for a splendid afternoon tea then put in a stupendous performance as Lady Bracknell! Everyone helped on the day in different ways, and we were all happy together. It was a raging success.

My friend Gillian had a brilliant idea: a one-off book club meeting. She invited her friends, I invited mine. Strangers recommended books to one another with great enthusiasm. One lady sacrificed her beautiful Lake Eyre book to the stall, raising \$20 in one hit. A former colleague donated \$2000. 'I believe in you and I believe in the cause,' she said. How energising that was!

In mid-March my sister Wendy, my daughter Clare and my daughter's half-sister Laura will be playing and singing to provide 'An Afternoon of Delightful Music' at my sister Christine's retirement village. Ticket sales have already raised about \$1000. I know everyone will feel good listening to the music together.

My campaign has already raised nearly \$6500, but long before I get to the Kimberley I have been richly rewarded by accepting the fundraising challenge. I am deeply touched by the brilliant support all my friends and family have given. I have discovered many Australians know that our beautiful planet is under threat because of human activity. Our wish is to take care of it.

# Shallow crossing

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*by Bev Marks*

We know about wishing from a very early age. Mr Disney gave us a Snow White who sang wishes to lure her Prince Charming, and of course there was Pinocchio, who wished upon a star to become a real boy.

Growing up we found that some wishes work and some don't. It was no good wishing for a big brother if you were the eldest, but perhaps a little will brother will come along and turn out to be better. As a teenager, long, straight, magic silver hair was my number one wish. Well it took a long time for that wish to come true, even if at 68 my magic silver locks are shorter than I hoped for then.

We've all heard about the miracle of walking on water and so when we drove across the water at Shallow Crossing on the upper reaches of the Clyde River on the NSW south coast, we should know that something amazing is going to happen.

The old proverbial kookaburra sitting in the gum tree has his eye on our sausages, spitting away on the gas stove by our river bank camp. We are starting to feel a belonging to this wonderful piece of Australia. Well the next morning he is letting us know who belongs on this spot. He splits his sides laughing at us trying to sleep in at 6am! Just as well we want an early start anyway.

The river is like a sheet of glass as we slide off in our newish kayaks. After dreaming of such adventures through life's ups and downs, the Big R – retirement – has actually allowed us to take the plunge into this world of escapades!

All is quiet except for the soft splashes and drips of our paddles. A blue dragonfly lands on the nose of the kayak and settles down to hitch a ride. The plate of glass we are paddling on begins to transform before our eyes. Now we are floating in a jelly mirror. The sky above is the sky below. The forest above is the forest below and here we are floating with our upside-down mirrored selves right through the middle of it. Flashes of vertigo pull you into the sky below.

An intriguing curtain of mist hovers ahead at the bend with dark shadows falling from the high forest banks. We are entering into another world.

No Harry Potter when we emerge into the light again. More jelly mirrors winking with diamonds. Time for a reality check with a nice cuppa as we squeeze onto a mossy bank. Push off, a bit more paddling and up the rapids we go. A bit of grunting and a lot of laughing and we are on the other side. Explorations lead to another rocky tumbledown. Back downstream we go, maneuvering through the rapids. What a laugh!

The wall of mist still lingers and coming through it our eyes are mesmerized by this amazing mirror world.

It's a miracle, really.

# Exercise and self discipline

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*by Patricia Pears*

I had been gradually recovering from a fall and I wished I could find the self discipline to tough it out through the lingering pain to do more exercise. Sometimes I looked enviously at other residents of the village walking their dogs. They walked along so neatly. But I have a cat.

They say exercise is always more fun when shared with a friend. And if that friend happens to have four paws, green eyes and purrs, it can become quite competitive.

My cat, Cloudy, has which is still pale grey and is blue and grey on top. She's a big bundle of fur now. I do wish she would stay inside the retirement unit in accordance with the rules here – one animal only. Dogs must be on leads, cats must remain inside.

On a very cold afternoon, I was just leaving to visit Gordon at the nursing home, when I saw Cloudy's enquiring, face peering in at me from outside the window. She'd got out again.

The rules are tightening here at the retirement village, about cats being kept inside. So, I hurriedly opened the front door for her, foolishly expecting her to gratefully return to the warmth inside.

But no. She whipped away - off in a flash, through the jaggedly pruned bushes, I could see her crouching, tail twitching, watching, waiting happily for me to play chasings. Just as I reached out for her - she took off like a furry rocket. Joyously she dashed down across the steeply sloped grassy area, then paused to let me catch up.

Still coughing from a virus, I did my best. Cloudy tensed eagerly as I reached out. Then

sprang away again like a coiled spring. She looked back occasionally over her shoulder with a catlike grin, to see what was keeping me. Once again I trotted off and around the steep slope of palm trees. My fingers briefly brushed fur as I caught up with Cloudy, then off she slithered yet again.

Once before Cloudy had escaped outside and I was caught trying to run after her - in my dressing gown and fluffy slippers. Meanwhile, Cloudy's tail whipped back and forth - gaily anticipating the next round of cat vs. nana. This happened several times. Just as I was close enough to reach out – off she'd dash. At one stage she teasingly rolled onto her back wagging a paw at me. Then did a fine somersault and nearly tripped me.

Several watching Rosedale residents laughingly applauded. Cloudy acknowledged with a fast circuit of honour on the grassed section near the creek. Grimly, and out of breath, I plodded back to the Unit to try bribery. I rattled and crackled the packet of Kiblets to entice her inside.

But cats have an inbuilt body clock and Cloudy just knew this was a trap. Dinner was not served until 4.42pm. Besides, it was never Kiblets then, it came out of a tin. She ignored the Kiblet trap and found some special grass in which to roll in ecstasy and scratch her back.

The score was now cat: 5, nana: 0. With the watching residents now sitting down outside their units, anticipating some senior fun, I heartily wished I could sink below the expanse of grassy lawns.



For the sixth time I puffed my way down around the palm trees and across to her. I even took off my red cardigan and tried to sweep her back up the hill towards home. She turned to briefly wrestle the cardigan's sleeve - then darted up and away yet again. This time she rolled deliciously in my neighbour's iris garden. But the neighbour was not amused and angrily shooed the cat away.

However, Cloudy was now closer, up near my unit and its invitingly open door. She stopped, clearly making the decision on whether to dash off or go inside. Like a fisherman, I suddenly cast the red cardigan over her then swept up the now hissing, furious loser safely within. I then carried my protesting bundle thankfully back inside.

Next day I rang the Heart Moves classes at Rosedale and said I wished to join. It suddenly seemed so much more calm and inviting.



# Wishes of a digger: Jack's story

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by Baldwin Groney

I heard the booming voice of the captain. '10 minutes till I blow the whistle boys. We'll show the Turks how Australian men fight!'

I thought, 'Artillery's been bombing the Turks for hours but now that it's stopped'. They know we're going to attack. We'll get the signal and hop over the bags. We'll make a run for it. I hope I can find a tree or a ditch for cover. It's going to be hard to get through. It's probably like a moonscape in front of us. Everything's been blown away by the artillery. Not going to be easy!

I wish I was back on the farm! I was happy there! Why did I leave all that? I remember now. The country needed us. We have to help Mother England fight our enemies. We are part of the British Empire. It's for King and country. We're family. Except our pollies said that the enemies would surrender quickly. Wishful thinking. Not happening like they said, that's for sure.

We're going back and forth. We try to take some trenches from the Turks and then they take them back. I wanted to play my bit for Australia of course and also see the world. It's pretty boring shearing sheep. Could see them in my sleep! Now, I couldn't get closer to see the world! I'm knee deep in it. I hope Gallipoli isn't the last place in my travels.

Just right now, before the assault, I can see my whole life playing in front of me. All the good years on the farm as a Jackaroo. I think of my family. How upset Mum and Dad were to see me leave home to go to war. This necklace I wear around my neck was given to me by Lucy

Jackson. We had something going on, Lucy and me. I was going to marry her. I wish I had! I asked Tom, 'If I don't make it, can you send this cross back to my folks in Dubbo. He replied, 'All right, all right, Jack. Don't worry, you'll make it!'

I do worry. I'm a brave soldier but with this next battle, the odds are stacked against us. I'm just a farm hand from Dubbo, not a smart officer, but I can see it, plain as daylight: it's a hopeless situation. The Turks have the high ground. They're hiding at the top of the ridge with machine guns. We've only got our 303s and we're charging uphill. I wish we could have the advantage of better terrain and weapons.

Then Tom said, 'When we run, let me get over the trench first, then follow me'. Tom's older than me. I turned 19 today. He doesn't want me to get hit on my birthday. But I can stand on my own. I'm an Australian soldier.

Then, I hear Tom and my mates. They started singing, softly at first but more loudly, wishing me a happy birthday: 'For he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow'

Then, I heard the captain blowing the whistle. Tom climbed over the trench and said: 'Jack, follow me, c'mon Australia!' I climbed over as well. 'Australia forever!' I shouted.

Lest we forget.

# Wishing well

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by Bill Munro

I will never know who gave me one of the greatest presents I have ever received. It was a few days shy of my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday and I was in a mountain hut in the South Island of New Zealand. I had been dropped off by boat at the south end of Lake Rotoroa with the intension of traversing the Waiiau Pass and heading out towards the Lewis Pass. From there I would be able to catch a bus back to Christchurch and my upcoming birthday party which I had been warned not to miss.

The rain had started about an hour before I had reached the Blue Lake hut where I was to stay overnight. It steadily grew heavier, beating an increasingly more urgent tattoo on the tin roof. I had a lot of tramping experience and I knew that if the rain kept up in this manner I could be facing major problems. It is a fact that drowning and not falls are the most common form of death a tramper will face. In an amazingly short period of time, dry-creek beds can become raging torrents. Land slips can temporarily dam water that will come cascading off mountain sides. When they eventually burst under the pressure they release a devastating body of water that will take all in its path.

I decided to stay one extra day in the hut to see if the rain would stop and allow me to continue. If the rain did not ease, and I was to make my party, I would have to retrace my steps down the banks of the West Sabine and cross the Travers Saddle walking out to St Arnaud and a bus. In bad weather I wanted to take a route I knew.

In an effort to stave off cabin fever, I read anything and everything available, even the washing directions for my sleeping bag – three times! A previous tramper had left a Readers Digest compendium of condensed popular books. I received my present as I finished the last story. Someone had scribbled on the inside of the book cover these words: ‘You are only old when all your achievements are in the past’.

The next day I struggled to keep my footing while negotiating cascading waterfalls that were spewing water into the river below. Where there had been a dry path only two days before, fast flowing streams had to be crossed with care. As I troughed through, the words I read scrawled in that book cover echoed in my head.

Some 20 years later, I found myself following a friend as his form disappeared in the growing dark and rising freezing mist. We were on the slopes of the upper Khumbu Valley in Nepal. Hugh, a veteran with over 200 days in the Himalayas had shortly before started to display the signs of severe altitude sickness. We had no alternative, we had to lose height, and do so as quickly as possible. Our party of three gathered at the top of a pass surrounded by the shrines for climbers and Sherpas that had perished on Everest. As I steeled myself for what would be a stiff test, my new mantra resounded in my head: ‘You are only old when all your achievements are in the past’.

Two years earlier, I left a secure, well-paid, job. I had worked hard after retraining at the age of 50. A few months before I had sat by my mother’s bedside as she came close to death,

my own mortality brought home to me in her failing breaths. I was unhappy. It is too easy to blame someone else: a job, whatever external agency, or combination of the two. We each build our own prison and I was staring out from mine wondering if this was how I would spend whatever time I had left on the planet.

In a moment of courage, or stupidity, I walked away from my secure, hard won job at the age of 59. I stuck a swag into a station wagon and headed bush. The following months saw me travelling around the state, looking up old and making new friends, experiencing country towns and seeing some amazing sights.

In Dubbo, with the encouragement of a friend's wife, I wrote a play, my first attempt, and entered it into the Short and Sweet Festival. It was later to be produced in Sydney and I, a theatre lover for years, was to have one of the best weeks of my life witnessing talented actors and a director breathe life into my words and idea. What a buzz.

I drove, via Hay and Mildura, to Adelaide, returning through the Grampians and a stop in Melbourne. In Melbourne, for the first time in 12 years I put on my chef's whites, and worked in a kitchen at Flemington Racecourse during the Melbourne Cup Carnival. A punter since youth, to stand outside on the terrace and watch one of the greatest races in the world gave me a lump in my throat.

I title this piece *Wishing Well*. Please do not spend your time wishing for external forces to change your life, rather look within yourself. You may bring about a series of events that far

exceed what you are wishing for. Of course a lotto win would be great, especially now that my weekly spending is less than what I used to happily pay for a dinner.

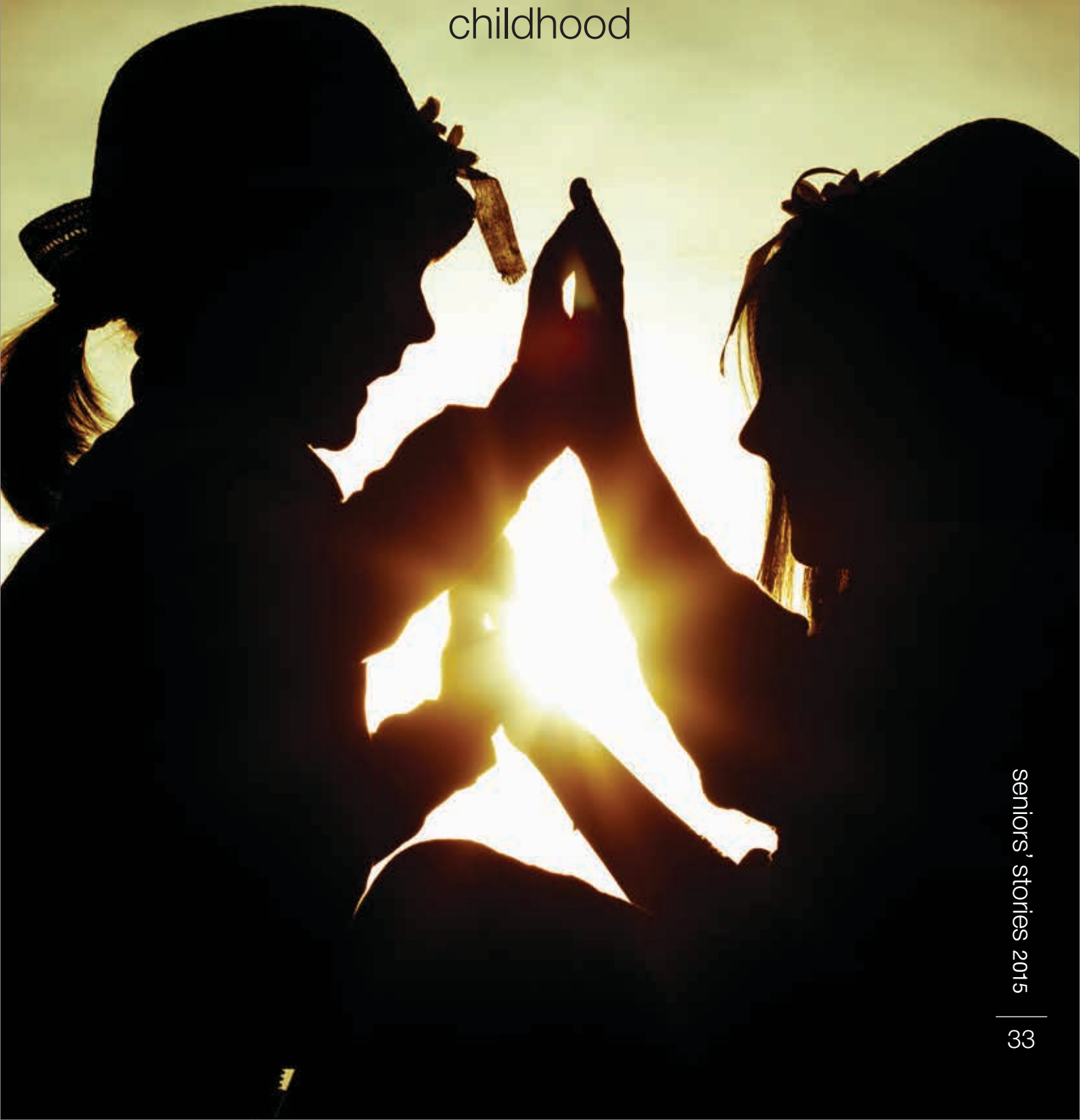
Back in Nepal, we descended successfully. My friend recovered quickly and we spent another nine days walking in that wonderful land. What is next for me, who knows, but I do know one thing: 'You are only old when all your achievements are in the past'

Wish well.

seniors' stories

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childhood





# A wish or a prayer

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*by Venette Hedges*

When I was nine years old, growing up in the tiny rural village of Kendall, I fervently wished for a bike for Christmas. Not my sister's second hand bike, not the old rusty bike I had inherited from the tip, but a brand new shiny bike, all of my very own – one that I wouldn't have to share. Despite going to Sunday school, despite having a father with a strict Salvation Army background, I did not pray for a new bike. I just wished for one.

Every time the chain came off the rusty old bike, I wished.

Every time I fell off the rusty bike, grazed myself and got grease up my legs, I wished.

Every night as we said Grace at the dinner table I added a big wish to the prayer.

Christmas morning dawned and there was no bike: no new shiny bike, no second or third-hand bike. I was shattered, privately disappointed, but being a stoic baby boomer, we didn't tend to complain too much, but just got on with it. I recall heading to the outback dunny to have a secret tear and complain to the 'wish fairy', but, on my return no bike had materialized. So much for Santa Claus and wishing for a special Christmas present!

However there was a twist to that Christmas Day. After all the presents were distributed, I was led on a hunt – the prize at the end of the hunt was a brand new shiny blue bike! My pride and joy. All my wishing was worth it.

I rode that shiny blue bike everywhere. To the river to swim, to school, to my friends, all around the village of Kendall, and because now

I had reliable 'wheels', I was permitted to go beyond where I was normally allowed to go. In the blink of an eye my faith in Santa Claus and wishes had been restored.

Fast forward many years later to when I was a young mother having my third baby. She was rushed to the children's hospital in Sydney, gravely sick with a lung complication. Did I wish, or pray for her to survive? I prayed. I prayed and prayed, to a deity somewhere.

When I was diagnosed with central nervous system complications due to Lupus while my children were at school, did I wish they would keep me alive until my children had completed their education, or pray? Pray of course.

Wishing seems to me something we do when we are little children with the innocence and purity of childhood. As we grow, mature and experience some of what life throws at us we toss in a few prayers as well. Somehow they seem to carry more weight, and are less self indulgent!

A wish is granted; a prayer is answered.

# A life without wishes

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*by Tam Loc John Duong*

For monks who master meditation, leading a life without wishes isn't a big challenge. But since I'm not a trained monk, going through life without having any wishes hasn't been easy. If you think it's strange for anyone to force himself into that practice, it might surprise you more when I tell you that decision was made by a little boy, a five-year-old child.

Maybe you'd understand me better if I describe the event that has shaped my life at a very young age. Firstly, a little background. It was 1950 and my family had just happily settled down in Saigon after running away from war-torn central Vietnam at the end of World War II, but not before getting robbed at gun point by a heavily armed brigand while renting a place in an unsafe suburb many kilometres outside Saigon.

With a house full of people and a neighbourhood full of kids my age, I only felt comfortable and happy when my three-year-old brother Khuong was around me. I had always followed and let Khuong, although younger, be my leader, to come up with games to play, with roles to act out, and even with ideas to resolve conflicts with other kids.

Khuong was smart, sweet, polite, kind and he loved me. He always made decisions in my favour: letting me choose my favourite role or position, always joining or quitting games with me, and even stepping in to help me or protect me.

One after my grandfather scolded me for accidentally breaking a little branch of his bonsai, Khuong decided to scissor the thing

down to its root, openly protesting against my grandfather's love for his plant more than me, his grandson.

Khuong was not jealous with me even when I got something and he didn't. Like when my mother could only buy a pair of wooden clogs for me. Khuong would really have loved to have a pair too, but he quietly accepted our mother's decision. I knew that because each morning he got up early to polish my clogs while I was still sleeping, and I knew he was not jealous because he quickly brought the clogs to me and lovingly put them on my feet when I got up. In those days, I was a happy, contented little boy because I had Khuong.

Then one day, Khuong got sick. Initially he had a come-and-go fever, and we still played some games together. Soon his fever got worse and mother made him stay in bed. We still talked, cuddled and played with my clogs. But then he vomited a lot and eventually there was some blood in his vomit and his stool. Our father was overseas, working aboard an international ship. Even though short of money, mother took Khuong to a doctor, whose expensive shot and prescription did not improve my brother's condition.

I still joined Khuong in bed and held his hands, but he had no strength to hold mine – he just lay there, his eyes closed, his breathing soft. I quietly wished Khuong were well again, playing games, singing lullabies and walking in my clogs.

A few days later, when our father finally reached home, they rushed Khuong to the



doctor again. On their return, while they were carrying Khuong in, Mum told me to stay away from him because he got a very contagious disease. I watched Khuong's lifeless form from afar and felt very sad, very lonely.

About 8pm that evening, I suddenly heard mother's heart-wrenching scream, she was crying, calling, howling my brother's name. Father rushed to my brother's bed. In the chaos, fear and confusion that followed, I somehow learned that my brother had died – like those crickets that did not move. That was all I knew about death.

From a distance, I sat staring at my brother's bed, until someone put me to bed, a strange bed – the first time I had slept by myself.

In the morning, mother was still sobbing her heart out. My father rushed away and came back with a little wooden box. Soon he carried the box out, while someone was pulling Mum away from her clinging to the box. I did not see what happened but knew that my brother's little body was in that box.

My mother collapsed at the front door, crying, sobbing. Her voice was hoarse. Her call of my brother's name was a faint whisper, a muffled sound. She was still there crying when father came back, without the little box. He sat down, hugged Mum, and suddenly he cried, his face distorted, tears streaming down his sun-burnt cheeks. I also suddenly burst out crying, louder and louder.

We cried for a long while, at times both of them hugging me. During the following days my mother continued to cry.

Many months passed. Father had to be away on many more overseas trips. Mum was still very sad, still crying, especially when I asked her, 'Will Khuong come back sometime later?' She told me he would never come back, and when I repeatedly told her I wished Khuong would come back, she hugged me tightly and soulfully explained to me that most wishes would not come true, that some wishes would never come true – wishes like mine. Mother told me to try to be a good boy and not waste time on wishes.

From then on, I tried to please my parents, and that meant I pushed away any wish that entered my mind. It was not easy but I got better control over the years. I've worked hard for things that could be realised by my effort; if anything is beyond my capability, I let it be.

I've achieved what I could with my life, and happy with my decision for a 'wishless' life. But lurking in the back of my mind, there's a silent murmur, 'Why did Khuong have to die so young? I wish...'

# Childhood wishes

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*by Rhonda Byrne*

‘How does it work?’ three-year-old Paige asked, handing me the doll I had just given her to play with, during a visit with her Nanna, my cousin. When I showed Paige how to move the doll’s legs and arms up and down, twist its head from side to side and open and close its eyes, it dawned on me! This was a child of the 90s, and my demonstrations didn’t come anywhere near what Paige was expecting from a doll.

As a child of the 90s, Paige would grow up with dolls that perform. Dolls that walk, crawl, cry and speak. She could choose from dolls that drink from bottles, eat from spoons, then either have doll size potties to sit them on, or a wet nappy to change. Some of the dolls Paige would encounter would have hair that grows or changes colour. Other dolls might come with a complete wardrobe of clothes and a variety of accessories necessary for the raising of a doll in the 90s.

How limited must that 30-year-old doll seemed to this child of the 90s. Little did she know that, when given to my daughter, it was the latest in technology. Its body made from soft plastic resembled skin to the touch, and had hair that could be washed, combed and styled.

Growing up during the war years (that’s the Second World War!), owning a doll of any shape or form then, was considered a luxury. One of my dolls was a large celluloid model whose life had started out, I now suspect, as a model for baby clothes. This doll had a rather unsightly lump on the front of its head, resembling a large mass of congealed blood. It was, in fact, a very clever repair, although horribly misshapen. Still, I loved Betty,

and managed to keep her affliction almost concealed beneath a collection of bonnets and sun hats. These were, coincidentally, provided by Paige’s great-grandmother, my aunty, who always seemed to have a baby on hand, and who passed on discarded items of baby clothing that fitted my less fortunate doll.

My greatest wish, as a child, was to have a doll with hair. Unfortunately, these were either too expensive or too difficult to acquire all those years ago, as I was never to have one of the store-bought variety.

Once, however, my father attempted to grant my wish. With short pieces of hair, saved from one of my haircuts and masses of glue, my father proceeded to give one of my dolls the longed for tresses. It turned out rather like a crew cut wig that had been dipped into a pot of glue – stiff, hard and wiry! I was never very fond of Topsy after that. My little black doll just didn’t look right with its cap of auburn red hair!

As my cousin and I sat chatting, watching Paige with the doll, I couldn’t help wondering where dolls were headed in the future. How much further could technology take them? Could it be that all the technology of the 90s would lose its charm as the dolls of that era break and cease to perform their expected activities? Perhaps dolls of the future will return to what they used to be – just that – dolls!

I contemplated how Paige would explain to her little ones what her dolls used to do, while trying to demonstrate the activities they no longer perform. I could see it so clearly: a doll that once walked, with legs now stiff and

difficult to move; a doll that once had hair that changed colour, now locked into one dull unchangeable hue; a doll that used to speak, able to utter only unintelligible sounds; a doll that once sat proudly on a potty, now hopelessly incontinent.

Not unlike what we grandmothers can expect by then, I suspect!

# Finally, a wish come true

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*by Zainab Julius*

I was born in 1949, on the seventh floor of a building, in the city sea port of Durban on the east coast of South Africa. I had six siblings and we all lived in a two-bedroomed 'flat', as it was known, opposite the biggest mosque in the Southern Hemisphere (at that time). The building was predominantly occupied by people from an Indian background and as I grew up, I could speak some Gujarati as well as understand the Afrikaans language, but English became our mother tongue.

When I was seven years old, my parents bought their first house about 10km outside the city. It only had one bedroom, but we had a lounge in which two brothers slept. By this time I had another little brother, aged four. My eldest brother had started teaching, the second eldest was in an apprenticeship and my sister was working in a shirt factory. This meant that things became easier financially on my dad who had been working alone as an upholsterer in a furniture factory.

There was a time where I remember my parents running a canteen by a sports field. Poor Mum! Besides having to see to us and cook and clean up all week, her weekends would be taken up cooking big pots of food to be sold at lunch hour, as well as making doughnuts (or koeksisters, as they were known to us co-called Malays), instead of having a well-deserved rest. But it was done to make ends meet.

Although the house was crowded, there always seemed to be space for someone else to join us. On different occasions we had other

family members from Johannesburg and Cape Town come to live with us whilst doing an apprenticeship of sorts. The dinner table always had an extra plate in case anyone popped in while we were eating. This happened often, as the result of the aroma of Mum's delicious cooking spreading outside practically shouted, 'come and eat!' There was always enough food for everyone.

Every Saturday, Mum would be mixing a huge basin of koeksisters ready for sale early on Sunday mornings. This time we were living in a community which was predominantly occupied by Catholics so as soon as they returned from mass on a Sunday morning they would be queuing up to buy Mum's delicious koeksisters. The mothers would always say, 'Oh, thank you Mrs Peck, you've saved us from making breakfast on a Sunday morning'. Very often they would pass by after church on a Saturday night and smell the koeksisters and come and ask Mum to sugar the koeksisters for them, resulting in Mum having to make up a whole new batch for her Sunday morning customers!

Our playground was the street. Of course, at that time there were not as many cars around as there are today and people tended to drive slowly so we were quite safe playing in the street. Mum was very strict and we were only allowed to play where she could see us. All our friends would come and join us in the street.

When I was 16, my parents decided to undertake their pilgrimage to Mecca. Just three months before they left, my brothers said that they could not be responsible for a teenage

girl and requested that Mum and Dad take me with them. As it happened, they had to travel by sea, so I was fortunate enough to experience my first ever sea voyage on an English liner, the SS Kenya. What a wonderful experience! I saw Mum and Dad's hard work pay off because there was no cooking or cleaning or work of any kind for them to do. They were served breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner and if they wanted, late night snacks! For three whole weeks! And I was lucky enough to reap the benefits as well.

I had a ball because there were lots of young ones on the ship so we played table tennis and all the other deck games together. My only regret was that I could not swim in the pool. I was on a sacred journey and by no means was I allowed to wear a bather to swim in. However, one day we figured out a way that I could get into the pool. I was passing by the pool and it just so happened that someone bumped into me and I went flying into the pool! Boy, did I take the opportunity to enjoy my swim, clothes and all! When I got out, everyone was clapping because they thought I could not swim!

So it was that I had three weeks of bliss on a passenger liner, travelling up the east coast of Africa. Transporting cargo as well meant that we stopped at every port along the coast and were able to see each place while the ship was being unloaded. The only port we were not allowed to disembark at with our South African passports was Dar-as-Salaam, because they were against the apartheid

regime. We continued around the Horn of Africa and docked at Aden before passing through the Suez Canal. How amazing it was passing through the canal! It seemed to take forever because the ship had to pass through slowly. Absolutely beautiful! We could see the Egyptian coast on the left and the Sinai desert on the right. This is when I wished that when I had children I would take them on a sea journey one day.

Lo and behold! Twenty five years later, my husband and I travelled with our four children on the Achille Lauro from Durban to Freemantle, Australia to our new home. A wish come true. I only hope my children will look back on their trip in such awe as I did so many years ago.

# From wishes to reality

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*by Luise Cottis*

When I was young I wished I was not an only child. I also wished I didn't have a foreign name. I wished I didn't have to always spell my name for everybody, and even today I wish my parents had given me an easy first name so I didn't have to explain it to everyone. So, I was determined that, when I grew up, I would marry a man with an Australian/English surname and to have several children.

I was born in 1940 in North Queensland where my Italian father had a wine business. This took him to many Italian farms in the district and, as he could speak English, he often interpreted for them in business and legal matters.

After Japan bombed Darwin on 19 February 1942, the Brisbane Line was proposed and many of the Italian community north of Brisbane were interned as Italy was still fighting with the Germans – but that's another story! My mother, being Australian, and myself were sent back to her town of origin which was Sydney. And there I grew up, went to school and married. I always longed for a little brother or sister, but the war and recovery years interrupted that.

Being Italian, my father (and mother) enjoyed coffee, but in those days it was not a popular drink. For years my mother and I used to go into Sydney city and 'do the block', including the Strand Arcade to buy the coffee – freshly ground! I can still remember the aroma – delicious!

That foreign surname haunted me all through school. Because of it, I was given the

responsibility of looking after a new girl from Latvia! Her mother worked in an embassy and when she suddenly stopped coming to school and I enquired where she was, I was told her mother had been sent back to Latvia suddenly. Many years later I found out that my teacher's husband had been killed in Italy during the war and that was why she gave me a hard time!

I did grow up to see old wounds healed, to see immigration bring acceptance of difference, adding cultural richness to Australia. Sadly, however, it has not always brought peace.

My first wish came true, I did marry a man with an English surname and I also had more than one child. Four, in fact. When our second child was born prematurely and died soon after, I was devastated at the thought that my little son might end up like me – an only child. So my husband and I decided that we would adopt if there were no more children of our own. Happily, we had another three children. But I must say, there have been moments when I was glad that I didn't have the childhood squabbles they have had!

But I am always glad that my wishes have been answered and have enriched my life and that of my family.



# Just once. I wish just once...

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*by Kelly Connor*

If you walked past her you wouldn't look twice except perhaps to smile at her sweetness, her concentrated effort, at how she blends into the ambience of the beach. She's a little small for a six year old, but not enough to cause concern.

She sits on the shore; splay legged, knees bent, feet tucked up beside her bottom, engrossed in a game of her own devising. She seems oblivious to the breaking waves that crash and pound only a metre from her. Most of the waves fail to quite reach her but some make an extra effort and impinge upon her game, loosening the shells from the pattern she has so carefully created.

Unperturbed, she simply reaches out to collect the escaping shells from the receding water, quietly returns them to the same spot and resumes the game. Never once does she look up. The ocean, the sand, sky, people, trees, the streetscape across the promenade are non-existent for her. Only the shells warrant her attention.

From the shade of a nearby sun igloo, Linda's mother watches her with a heavy heart. Not once in six years has Linda ever turned to seek out her mother's face. Never has she offered her mother a smile, nor a single moment of recognition. Robyn hates the beach, or, more precisely, she hates being on the beach even though she loves living in a house that overlooks it. Having a child whose only moments of enjoyment and engagement occur in this wretched place seems immensely unfair.

Not for the first time, Robyn ruefully considers whether she should just leave, well,

not leave exactly, but depart her post for an hour or so. Indulge in the freedom of reading a newspaper in a cafe or browse the dress shops. A couple of weeks before she got as far as the promenade where she sat on a bench waiting to see if Linda would realise she wasn't in the igloo. She watches and waits in vain for an hour before resentfully returning.

'Just once, I wish just once Linda would let me know I exist,' thought Robyn, 'then everything would be manageable.' Robyn knew the dangers of letting herself go too far down this track. It took her straight into a quagmire of doom, resentment, self pity and misery from which it became more and more difficult to extricate herself. The mantra that had become her lifeline leapt into her mind: do what is possible, stick to the practical, accept what is given, and know it has meaning.

She takes a deep breath and calls, 'Linda!' No response. 'Linda come here, you need more sun cream.' Linda lowers her head further into the game, her upper body now almost level with the sand. She seems to be having a secret whispered conversation with the shells. Robyn is onto her feet and has taken the five strides to Linda before realising what has happened. It's not until she feels herself roughly yank Linda to her feet that she becomes aware enough to gain some control over the blind rage that has consumed her.

Robyn knows she is rubbing the cream too vigorously. She can feel the sand mixing with it and knows it will hurt. But, hell, she talks to shells, and never utters a word to me. 'Do



you want to get burnt!’ she bellows. Without waiting for the answer that never comes, Robyn stumbles back to the igloo blinded by burning tears. ‘Oh God, oh God’, she flings herself down, stuffs a towel into her mouth to stifle the sobs and weeps silently, until, from somewhere unknown and unbidden, she hears the words that always save her: do what is possible, stick to the practical, accept what is given, know it has meaning.

# The library, books and happiness

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by Xiao Lan Ke

I work in a public library. I always enjoy the library opening when suddenly the library becomes alive. Returning; borrowing; reading; studying; computing; requesting; phones ringing; people talking; children laughing; staff working. In my eyes, these events are like the first movement in the symphony of the library!

Gradually, everyone falls into position. The old people quietly read on the comfortable sofa. Little kids have a great time singing songs and listening to the stories. Some children are quick to get their favourite books and some are just browsing, taking books at random from the shelf, glancing at a few pages before switching off and picking up another. 'How lucky you are!' I think as I look back my childhood days in China.

It was in 1966, I graduated from primary school. In this year the Cultural Revolution began. In the beginning, part of this movement was against tradition and culture and around the country millions of books were burned. My father was a Chinese literature teacher. Over a long time he collected his favourite novels and classical book like *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Journey to the West* - books which had to be destroyed at once. This only left the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao and lots of empty bookshelves. Many years later, Dad talked to me about it, sighing deeply. He said he didn't have time to sigh about destroying the books at that time, another struggle would be coming up very soon.

I grew up during the Revolution. At that age I was crazy about literature. Most books

were burned, schools and libraries closed. Where could I find a book to read? I never missed an opportunity to read a newspaper, even wrapping paper! I begged to borrow novels from my friends, my neighbours and anyone I knew who kept books at home. 'I can read ten lines at once, may I borrow it for only one night please!' When I got a book I always read it during night by the light of a kerosene lamp. 'Lay aside your book, it's bedtime,' Mum persuaded. 'I will,' I'd say, but mum didn't insist.

One summer day, I went out as usual to wait for my mum on the way back home from her school. I saw mum carrying something and walking at a fast pace, her face beaded with sweat. 'Mum, what are you carrying?' I pointed at it, wrapped in newspaper in a net bag. 'We will talk about it later at home,' Mum said softly.

When we were back home, I was too impatient to open what she had. 'Oh, where did you find those?!' I said as I unwrapped the books. I was delighted and shouted, jumped up and down. 'Shush, could you please keep your voice down!' Mum said as she put her arm around me. I raised my head to see the happiness in her bonny and bright eyes. I can't remember the exact date but I will always remember this moment.

'Mum, how did you get these?' I held a book but I still wanted a clue. 'Do you remember Ms Lin?' she asked. 'Library lady Lin?' I responded. Mum nodded. 'Yes, every time I see her she is always smiling,' I said. 'She is a very kind lady, and has let me borrow books

for you, but you need to keep it secret. Don't take the books outside please,' Mum stressed.

It turns out that mum and dad talked a lot about my reading. Mum had talked about my crazy reading to Ms Lin. She understood exactly what it means to read at my age. As she was a school librarian, she allowed my mum to borrow books for me, secretly. Many years later mum and I recalled this experience. We still remember Ms Lin fondly.

Time can't erase my wonderful memories of Ms Lin and Mum's school and the school library, which is a famous school in my hometown. There was a well stocked library in the school, especially in Chinese and foreign literary classics (translated into Chinese). The school was situated at the foot of a hill and beside a river, and the school library has set on the hilltop. There are 198 stairs from the foot to top. Mum carried the books in and out time and time again, up and down the many steps.

In the later period of the Cultural Revolution, the school and library were reopened again. I used to follow my mum to the school library. In the library I felt great pleasure – I was just like a duck in water. I enjoyed selecting the books I liked. I dreamt one day that I would work in a library like Ms Lin so I could read books help people.

I became a voracious reader of all kind of books. For quite some time, I was enthralled by foreign classic novels. The first foreign novel I read was Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. Then I read Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and

Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In those days of hopelessness, there was no TV, no radio, no movies and no way to connect to the outside world. Those books opened a window on the world for me; they were like an oasis in a desert. I learned from books to build up my firm belief in life: faith, justice, love, kindness, hope and to be optimistic about the future.

The Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. Since then, great changes have taken place in China. I got a chance to study in a university. This was the first time for me to leave my hometown. Many years later, I left my motherland to come to Australia. I moved further and further away from my hometown, and came nearer and nearer to approaching my teenage dream. In Australia, this beautiful country, my dream came true. Now I am a 'library lady'. I enjoy working in the library every day. I read what I want to read every day and every time I hear children call me 'library lady', I feel proud. I feel as if my mum and Ms Lin are smiling at me from heaven.

# Tree top wishes

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by *Trish Rogan*

Before the self-absorbed years of my adolescence, I spent my 1950s childhood in a tree. Not all the time, you understand, but often enough to establish a comfortable dream world in its welcoming branches.

The tree, a silky oak, towered at the bottom of our garden in view from the kitchen. I'd hear too often Mum's strident demands from the window, 'Get out of that tree, young lady. I don't know how many times I've told you!' I would scramble down and spend a few minutes hiding beneath the camphor laurel before resuming my perch. Up there, I was the princess of all I surveyed. The Tucker's backyard, bare of children, made me envious as I knew they'd be inside watching that new phenomenon, television. Conversely, I was eternally banished to the backyard for my good health.

The Latimer's back fence met ours and I would strain to see any activity on the other side of their garage. In the late 40s they'd obtained a piece of land through a government grant and built the small, fibro garage on the site and lived in it with baby Kevin. I watched their foundations being laid, the framework timbers erected and the brickwork of their three-bedroom home rising in uneven stages.

Mum and I felt sorry for Mrs Clark, our other neighbour, because she had very thick ankles plus she was married to Mr Clark who was known as the neighbourhood pervert. He spent many nights up his willow tree in the corner of his backyard staring into the bedrooms and bathroom belonging to the Tucker family who tended not to pull down their blinds. Dad

wandered down one night and called out a gruff 'Hey! What are you up to?' Mr Clark nearly fell out of the tree but recovered enough to tell Dad he was looking for snails. For years afterwards Dad would enquire if he was getting on top of the snail problem.

It was at the front fence during a social interchange with Mum and Mrs Clark that I announced that my biggest wish in life was to work at Woolworths and have 15 children. In sharp tones, Mrs Clark enquired about a husband to father all these offspring but my imagination had not included such a creature. Mrs Clark eyed me with distaste when I said I didn't want one and she advised my mother to have a chat with me.

When I was about ten, the public housing authority built two houses whose back yards abutted our side fence. The residents were of a type I had not encountered before. Their properties were full of interesting clutter and rusted corrugated iron sheets which formed crude shelters for their chooks. The people were rough in their manner and abusive towards each other. Police cars would turn up from time to time and I would watch entranced from my camouflage among the branches until Mum ordered me down. I thought this unfair since she had her own spying position through the venetian blinds in the side windows.

Her main interest, however, was at the front of the house where the street provided rich entertainment – a pastime she and her friends enjoyed before the daytime soaps captured their attention. The people opposite

our house had a violent relationship which was unusual in that the woman was the aggressor. Side by side, Mum and I would watch through the slits in the blinds as the husband staggered down the street off the bus after work and a drink with the boys.

'He's for it now', we would mutter as he swung in the metal gate, the squeak of it announcing his arrival. Like clockwork, Mrs Cawley would emerge from her front door, screaming abuse as he attempted to wheedle his way in the door.

One day by sheer bad luck we missed a major event. Mrs Cawley reached the end of her very short wick and aimed an air rifle from her front porch at Mr Cawley, singing at the front gate, and shot him in the left eye. He was missing for a while but eventually reappeared, sporting a patch, and their rows went on as before.

I grew tall and the silky oak tree no longer seemed an appropriate haven as I entered my teenage years. My thoughts centred on pinups of television stars and makeup or going to the movies to see Cliff Richard and Elvis Presley. I never did work at Woolworths, instead entering the world of big business as a secretary. As for those 15 children, I had two, and I even had a husband to go with them!

# Wishes

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*by Annette Watson*

There are many things that get me going. It can be a smell, a word, perhaps an article in the paper, a picture. But some days I just wish that I could go back in my short history and sit down again with my parents and grandparents and truly listen to what they were telling me.

What stories they could relate about life as they lived it: riding around in a horse and buggy; giving birth on the kitchen table with only the local midwife assisting; endlessly standing in queues trying to find work during the depression. Is this really the way I would have wanted to live? Would I have been strong enough? How did they cope? What inner fortitude did they draw on to not give up?

As a child I saw their lips moving, I heard their words, but I didn't really pick up on their message. What stamina and resilience they had as they never gave up even as they went through war, famine and truly hard times.

Of course they had happy memories that they shared with me and this was when photos were dragged out of shoe boxes and stories were told with a lot of laughter and innuendos that as a child I didn't appreciate or understand. Oh, how I wish now that those photos had stories, names, even dates on the back of them. Today they are lost in time, just smiling happy photos and lovely family picnics. But who are the people in these photos? Where were they taken? This important information is gone forever.

I considered my own early days tough. I had to help my mother boil the copper and slap the washing through the wringer, trying not to mangle my fingers as she turned the

wringer handle. There were nightly expeditions to the outside toilet in the middle of a bitterly cold Melbourne night, trying to avoid the red back spiders and using a square of newspaper because we couldn't afford toilet paper.

I really do wish that I had paid more attention when watching my mother sewing up a dress for me on her Singer treadle machine. She was so clever! I would describe a dress I had seen in a shop window and within a few hours she would have cut out a pattern from newspaper, cut the material and sewn up the seams ready for me to wear that night. How I wish I had her talent! Perhaps if I had listened and watched more carefully I could have done the same for my children. I will never know.

But I believe wishing isn't enough and that having regrets is a waste of time. It is up to me to learn from the past. I have taught my boys – now men – how to sew on buttons, how to iron and even to cook survival meals. Most of all though, I have gathered up all the photos I can find, thrown away the shoe boxes and labelled all the photos with names, places and dates.

My most recent act was to research the family tree and place it, along with all the family photos into albums to hand onto the next generation. Hopefully when I am gone, someone in my family will say 'Thanks Mum'.

# Wishes and dreams

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by Barbara Higgins

I remember always clinging to Mum's skirts, or Dad's forefinger, a shy and pretty dependent child. I always looked up to my four dear sisters and brother ahead of me, watching them with admiration. They all turned out so different, each with their own exciting life pathway. I wondered which of my siblings I would be most like. What would be left for me to do? I wished for a happy life, but a life in which I contributed in some special way to society as I considered everyone in my family did, each in their own way.

My dad, a respected pioneering paediatric surgeon (one of Australia's first), had dissuaded me from following in his (and also my brother's) footsteps, saying that firstly he worried that it might be difficult for a woman to be simultaneously a good doctor and a good mother (such was the attitude in the 60s). Secondly, he said that a doctor had to keep studying for the rest of his career and Dad didn't think I was 'perpetual student' material. He knew me well!

Well, bless me if I didn't have the most interesting, privileged and special, independent life I could ever have dreamt up! Before I knew it I had a degree in Microbiology, but very early in my career I became involved in the immunology of blood groups – a blood bank!

You see blood banking made its *début* during WWI when doctors and nurses worked out how to keep blood in bottles, unclotted and transportable to the battlefields, where nursing sisters matched donor with patient. In the early 70s, all of the hospital blood banks in

Sydney were run by nursing sisters, but where I worked, the sister running the blood bank laboratory eloped with one of the pathologists. The second in charge (who is still a dear friend of mine today) told her boss she felt it was time to get a scientist into their laboratory. I had been employed across the corridor by the same boss, not for my experience but for the scientific training of my mind, and the dear man invited me to see how exciting a science hid behind these doors. I was instantly sucked in!

I was asked to educate myself by attending conferences or courses, internationally and at home and to purchase whatever it took to be up to date. Not only was this job hugely rewarding, but it was scientifically fascinating and all the time rapidly developing and evolving. It wasn't long before we needed to appoint and train 24-hour staffing and when a new blood bank lab was built I was invited to have a huge input into its design. I was in charge through the advent of computers and the conversion from old, manual techniques.

My subsequent department head was a brilliant transfusion specialist. He contributed to scientific journals and textbooks and became world renowned, inspiring anyone who crossed his path and here was I in his influence and teaching, even involved in some of these papers myself. To him the patient was our *raison d'être* and we were invited to sit in on ward rounds and identify our tests results with actual people, lying in their beds.

We began sharing our knowledge, questions and experiences amongst other hospital blood



bank technicians. One of the great joys was to be able to share my acquired knowledge and experience and teach my 'trade' to young scientists and technicians at TAFE and even to our own trainee doctors. It was thrilling to see the contagious excitement in the eyes of the young transfusion scientists as they heard about our real-life experiences and the thrill of what they could do to help their patient.

My boss even took me to a teaching hospital in Saudi Arabia where he had been invited to help train their pathologists. What an experience that was!

I had become Miss Independent. I had my own little cottage, a busy social life, a broken heart to mend and lots of other things to do, with always the support of my loving family and beloved dog. But in my late forties, I realized I had become married to transfusion medicine. However, much to my great astonishment, at the tender age of 53 I surprised myself and everyone else around me, by marrying a man instead of my job! It remains the best decision I ever made.

This wonderful man came with a ready-made young family, three little girls (plus Chloe-dog and Sooty-cat) whom he was raising himself, alone. I love to relate that we met by accident in the street. We discovered we had much in common and though I always enjoyed and admired him, the more I got to know him, there came a time when I hated to say goodbye to him and his family at the end of each weekend. There was a simple solution and so we tied the knot. Yes, best decision I ever made.

He has truly become my best friend and he had constant moral support through the rigors of parenthood. Now, retired and in my late sixties, I have even become a grandmother without ever having been a mother. What joys and blessings have been bestowed on me, simply through the grace of God.

Have you ever looked back on your life and seen purpose through scary change – a sense of an overall 'grand plan'? Well I certainly do. Funny that!



seniors' stories

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coming to Australia





# A wish fulfilled

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by Alfred B. Baumann

The greatest wish in life must surely be to be successful. Success means different things to different people: money, recognition, fame, the ability to help others and the freedom to follow one's inclinations. And last, but not least, the satisfaction that one has done the best possible without impinging on others. In the case of a migrant it also means having been a good ambassador of one's country of origin.

Life is binary. A fork in the road points either left or right. Choose one and your fate is sealed. So choose carefully – Lady Luck plays a big part.

Growing up in a small country, I felt uneasy sitting in the school library, reading stories of cowboys and the Wild West. If I wanted to free myself of the shackles of living in a narrow-minded small place and live in the wide-open spaces of Texas, I had to improve my English.

For me, the answer was to apply for a pen pal in an English speaking country. This inadvertently sealed my fate and I ended up with a wife in Australia and with plenty of wide-open spaces thrown in.

According to the rules, pen pals had to be between either boys and boys, or girls and girls. The fact that I'm male and my female penfriend was Jean, should have led to some questions being asked at the agency in Switzerland. But they obviously mistook it for the French male name which is spelled the same but pronounced differently. If they had realised, my life would have taken a different turn.

On one sunny day in 1958 I disembarked from a boat at Fremantle and had my first

Australian meat pie. It seemed about twice the size of the ones I was used to.

To me, coming from a 48 hour working week, life in Australia seemed like a permanent holiday, with the sun shining every day and where nobody took work too seriously. There was plenty of overtime available and everybody had heaps of money. These were the days of the Snowy Scheme and *They're a Weird Mob* – a story describing aptly those optimistic days.

Like every migrant I started earning my stripes by sweeping the floor, then progressing to toolmaker, design draftsman and engineer, with a stint at a poultry farm thrown in. This multi-faceted career compares favourably with the rather boring careers of my professional colleagues in Europe, stuck in their jobs for life. For this I am thankful. It has certainly added spice to life.

My early floor sweeping days, a bit degrading at the time, gave me time to bring my English up to scratch, especially by talking on the phone, which was to be the ultimate hurdle. It also gave me the opportunity to study the idiosyncrasies of my Australian co-workers. This came in useful in later, more professional positions.

I always found my Australian co-workers a pleasant lot, compared with some migrants who seemed to lack a sense of humour. One should not generalise though and the mixture of our population has changed drastically over the last 50 years. Regarding that sense of humour, things have become rather serious here lately and we need it more than ever.

So for the last 25 years we have been running a cattle farm, my Texas dream – although on a smaller scale, coming true. These years have been among the happiest in my life.

Also having successfully brought up and educated a family with no involvement in drugs, booze, crime or relying on the government gives me great satisfaction.

To conclude, I must say that, as a migrant, Australia has given me a good life and allowed me to grow roots, which should say it all.



# Migrants tales and wishing well

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*by Shereen Khor-Nga*

‘Why don’t you go back to China?!’ A menacing voice attracted my attention as I was browsing the shop windows in Eastwood one busy Saturday afternoon. I turned around to find, in front of the Nab ATM, an Aussie man hovering over a young Chinese mother with her toddler in tow, shouting and jabbing his finger at her.

A few onlookers had started gathering around them as I approached, all eager to help diffuse the unpleasant situation. The young mother was obviously traumatised: in tears and struggling with a few words of English that weren’t making much sense. The man, meanwhile, kept going:

‘Why aren’t you speaking English? If you can’t speak English, you should go back to China where you belong.’

‘You can’t say that to her’, a young lady with an English accent intervened.

‘Oh, you’re English, you’re alright, you can stay’, the man replied.

‘We are all immigrants; this land belonged to the Aborigines. No one has the right to ask anyone to go back’, I intervened.

I proceeded to comfort the Chinese mother and advised her to walk away from the threats of a bully obviously venting his anger on any easy target in his path.

This sad episode reminded me of many more incidents on buses and trains, street corners and shops, where immigrants/tourists speaking little English have been snubbed, abused and traumatised, with little or no ability to verbally defend themselves. Sadly, such

episodes are widely reported overseas, painting a selectively one-sided ugly image of Australia.

I have borne witness to, and intervened/diffused such unfortunate incidents not just from Sydney to Tasmania, but as far away as Italy and Canada.

So when I saw a call in the local papers for volunteer bi-lingual tutors to teach English to migrants at the Uniting Church Eastwood, I answered. And there, I discovered a world where many Aussies work tirelessly towards multicultural integration and harmony in the community – a beautiful side of Australia worth promoting to counter the racist image that some unfortunate casual incidents have imprinted.

The ESL (English as a second language) tutoring community is a world unto itself: men and women, the self-employed, retirees and ‘in-between-jobbers’ volunteer their time and skill, either through one-to-one home visits or through church and charities. They put together curriculum and activities to teach new immigrants, not just conversational English, but survival skills and what-to-do essentials in their daily lives. In so doing, these immigrants find friendship, help, emotional support and a community that cares and to which they feel they belong.

It is traumatic for a new immigrant, with little language skill, to try and start a new life in a new country. Worse still, if one is being targeted by a local simply for looking different, having a different skin colour and speaking little English.



For those who had escaped war and terrorism in search of a safe haven in Australia, imagine how shattering that new experience must be – to be made to feel they are unwanted lesser-human beings! Many of these immigrants come with specialised qualifications and skills that could benefit Australia immensely – but the language barrier keeps them off the employment radar. A sad loss all around.

At a TAFE tutors workshop, I learnt that many volunteer tutors find their service rewarding not just in their ability to help, but in having an opportunity to learn about the cultures of their students. Sadly, funding shortfalls are always a hindrance and a worry. The state government's planned funding cuts to TAFE means such useful and inspiring workshops and training classes may have to be axed. Submissions have been made to keep the classes going – we hope the government is listening.

So, as a fellow human being, I sum up my wishes and plea in one poem:

### *Ode to Many and One*

Black, white, yellow or brown – we are all humans, you and I;  
We have no choice in our birth place, no say in our birth right;  
Those born lucky, thrive; those less fortunate, struggle to survive;  
So why discriminate and vilify? As one people, we have no right!

Buddhists, Muslims, Christians or Jews – so many are different to us;  
Why can't we accept, respect, co-exist with peace, harmony and love?  
We come into this world, by chance; we walk our human journey, just once;  
So let's lend a voice, make a difference and make it better for everyone.

# My wish to come to Australia

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by Cass McHaffie

As a child I remember my father telling me of his 18 months in Australia. His story went back to 1912 when he was a boy of just 17 years old when he applied and got a job on a ship owned by the New Zealand Shipping Company Ltd as a warehouse boy. After a voyage of 56 days, the ship reached Melbourne and my father disembarked with many other young men to work in the Victoria region. For about 18 months his life was far from easy, but he was happy, until he received news one day that his mother was very ill. I regret that I did not ask him how he received the news.

Being one of 10 children, my father felt he had to return to England to help and support them. Sadly, his mother passed away shortly after his arrival, aged 47. His father remarried so his family would have someone to care for them all.

When I went to college, the geography lessons were all about New Zealand and Australia and I formed a wish to one day visit these countries. I dreamt that one day I would see what my father had seen so many years before.

It was very cold in the UK in the winter of 1964. I was had a husband and two children and we decided that it was time to make the wish that we both shared come true – we would ‘give it a go’ and move to Australia. My father had passed away in 1957 at the age of 63 and so was not alive when we emigrated.

This year we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of arrival in this Australia. During our first 30 years we lived and worked in Adelaide but in 1995 we decided that we would move to New

South Wales to spend our retirement and fulfil our wish to explore a new place. Our children are still in Adelaide, living happy and successful lives.

Recently I have decided to look into my family history. It has been a wonderful eye-opener to find details of my father. I learnt that he was registered on a ship called the *Kaikoura*, which left the UK on 6 May 1912, just before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday which was in August of that year. I cannot help wondering what his wishes were when he arrived in Australia and what might have been, had his circumstances been different. When the First World War began in 1914 he joined the army and he married my mother in 1920 when the war was over. My mother was not interested in travelling away from England so that may have been why he did not return to Australia.

As his children, we are forever thankful that our wishes came true. I will not say fulfilling them has been easy, but having to strive and live our dreams is what life is all about and I believe it makes us appreciate what we have achieved.

The advice I gave to my own children, and now give to my grand children is: live your dreams.

# Building a future

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*by David Lysons*

Just picture the scene: 1947, a mid-week morning in a little village in Cheshire England, south of Manchester. School children playing in the village school playground. It must have been a Tuesday in the second week in July because it was sunny. From around the corner and stopping outside the school came a bus chassis, stripped of its body, and a driver sitting on a wooden seat wearing pilot's goggles as there was no cab or windscreen. Watching agog was a little lad (me) with his mouth open at this fascinating contraption. The driver turned out to be a friend's father who was a mechanic who converted old buses to trucks. There was a great shortage of trucks as a result of the war.

I fell in love with this contraption and decided I was going to make such things. I also made up my mind to get away from bombed out Manchester and the frightening bombers and spitfires constantly on the prowl from Ringway Airport, now Manchester Airport.

I was born, it is thought, with a twisted bowl and had constant stomach ache and diarrhoea. By the age of eight my health was improving and by 10 I was cooking with gas, thanks to my mother's nursing (she was a decorated war time nurse). School was hard as I'd missed so much due to sickness, but at the age of 14 I won a scholarship to a technical college and by 17 I was a student engineer going through the hoops of heavy truck and bus manufacture and design for the then big UK truck company, Fodens Ltd. My wish to design trucks was coming to fruition. Alas the

company is no longer operating but has left a fine history.

In the early 1960s they were having trouble getting competent engineers to work in South East Asia (although they would be based in Sydney), so I applied. It would also get me away from what was still the grotty old Manchester struggling to completely recover from the devastation of the war. When I was initially interviewed for the position the general service manager said, in a broad Cheshire accent, 'bloody 'ell lad, nobody's asked to go there since before the war'. I got the job.

I had to finish my studies and take periodic service tasks to get a feel for things around the UK, Portugal, France and the Faraka Dam project in Northern India. This was 1965. I arrived in Sydney Christmas 1966 on a two-year contract. It was a great job for a single bloke: company flat at Manly, salary, car and sensible expenses.

By that stage, our English vehicles generally were losing their sparkle in overseas markets by not keeping up with the times. We needed to rethink what we produced, so with an old drawing board, slide rule, a major workshop facility and small assembly plant in Perth I hit the road with a small group of practical engineers.

The first problem tackled was that the rear suspension produced far too a harsh a ride, so we took it to bits and redesigned it by softening the springs and relieving the leaf ends with slipper facilities. It was a great step forward but I was deemed presumptuous for challenging

the factory whizz kids. However, when the British Army ordered 1100 medium mobility trucks with this suspension, trucks which saw admirable service in the Falklands and the conflicts in the Middle East, I was given a model and a gold pen by the sales department and told to keep quiet.

I worked there for six years before I decided it was time to move on. I was offered a position running the assembly plant in Perth to build the then new concept Mercedes buses for Perth transport authority. This was some time before Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide had them. More of my wishes were coming true about making and to some extent designing heavy vehicles – getting away from what to me was the nightmare of Manchester – and I was being paid for it. But there was more to come.

With the engineering team I had, we were able to produce numerous vehicles under the Foden name. These were quite successful, much to the Foden factory's chagrin. My dream to make and have some design involvement had come to fruition. The down side of these endeavours was that it undermined a stable family life and I ended up single, with a substantial monthly maintenance overhead and living a single life until I found my feet again and a new partner.

On the second day after arriving in Sydney, I ended up in Rose Bay on the harbour. There were two Sunderland flying boats moored at the sea plane depot, which I'd always wanted to see. It was great to see them taking off and landing on the harbour among all the other

craft. I felt what a great place Rose Bay would be to live. Now guess where I reside? I'd like to say that when I met my current partner she lived in Rose Bay and I made my mind up to be with her there and then, but it didn't quite work out like that. However, the story of that fascinating meeting will have to wait for another time.

# The runabout

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by *Richard Vincenti*

Every young man dreams of owning a boat. At least, all those I knew. A fishing boat, a sailing boat, or even a speedboat. 'I wish I had one of those powerful beasts, with huge outboards that could tow skiers. That would be the go', I thought.

Before migrating to Australia, I enjoyed spending my weekends rowing, sailing dinghies, or cruising the delta of the Paraná River and the River Plate of Argentina, so now with the beautiful Sydney beaches and so much open water to enjoy, the pressure was on. I had a plan. Get my boating license and keep my eyes peeled for an opportunity to buy a boat. What I did not have, though, was the definition of 'the right boat'. Wasn't a boat a boat?

Eventually, at a dealership in Bankstown, I located that 'right boat', a fifteen-foot, fibreglass, open runabout with a forty horsepower outboard engine. White hull, yellow deck. It looked good, and more importantly, I could afford it. And, I loved it! The first run was on one of those gorgeous Sydney summer days, from a boat ramp in Lilli Pilli, where the Georges River meets the bay. With my wife, two small daughters and a group of friends, we cruised all day. 'This is the life', I thought.

This went on for several weekends. However, I became a bit bored with the routine and I felt a new location was required. Bonny Vale, in the Royal National Park seemed just right. On the second outing to Bonny Vale, I decided to take my young family for a spin around the bay. The day was bright and inviting, the sea seemed so calm and riding the waves

out to the more open expanse of sea was a thrill. After motoring around for a while I looked at the distant beach and decided it was time to head back and turned the boat towards land.

I tried to keep up with the waves, but the small forty horsepower engine could not keep up with the rising swell. The small boat drifted back into the trough between the waves. At first I didn't worry because I could catch the next wave, but no, the same thing happened again and again. Each time the troughs were deeper and the waves higher. I figured out that it was critical to keep the boat facing the oncoming waves or there was a risk of capsizing.

As the boat settled into each trough, it was like being in a valley between huge mountains. This was not how I had imagined it. The engine was working flat out and I was not making any headway. Did I wish this upon my family? I looked at my family and my mind started working a million miles an hour. Did the children have their life jackets on? Yes, but what good would that be anyway. Did I have enough fuel in the tank? No idea. I had a spare jerry can, but refuelling would not be an option in these conditions.

When I did catch a glimpse of land, everything seemed so far away, then the wave passed and we were in the shadows again, at the bottom of another trough. I kept looking at my young family, wandering what I got them into. What stupidity made me risk their lives like this?

I'm not a surfer but did do a fair bit of body surfing now and then, so imagining I was trying to body surf I considered what I

could do with a boat. I throttled back and let a wave move on. Then another, and another, until I saw one I liked. As the crest of the wave caught up with the boat I opened up to full throttle, the boat surged forward and kept up for a while, then the wave passed, so I throttled down and waited for the next wave.

With a glimmer of hope, I looked down at my family huddled at the front of the cockpit, and tried to smile reassuringly. I repeated the process several times, until coming up onto the crest of a wave the beach looked somewhat closer. I felt hope and after what seemed to be an eternity, I finally caught several waves one after another. Then, finally, the tiny boat surged forwards into bright sunlight, no longer falling into the trough between waves. Before I knew it, I was steering the runabout through surf and into the calm waters of the bay and the safety of the boat ramp.

Once the boat was loaded onto the trailer and in a safe parking spot, I decided to check the fuel tank. Less than a litre remained. I looked back at the sea and then at my family and silently gave a prayer of thanks. For weeks, I berated myself, unable to sleep thinking about the stupidity of the situation. My mind filled with dread as I went over and over what could have happened, that day. It was a miracle we survived.

We never took the boat to Bonny Vale again. Occasionally, we cruised the Georges River and the beaches close to Lilli Pilli and Bundeena. That winter I advertised the boat for sale in the Trading Post and sold it. My friends and I no longer dreamed of owning a boat. Been

there, done that, though not very well. My wish came true but not as I had visualised it.



# From England to Australia

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*by Diane Switzer*

I have wished for many things – some came true and some did not. One of my greatest wishes will never come true. I wish I could have met my two great-great-grandfathers, Cornelius and John. What interesting and industrious people they must have been!

Cornelius was born in Halifax in West Yorkshire, England, and had six brothers and two sisters. He was an engineer by trade and was involved in the cloth weaving industry. One of his brothers stole gold from a bank in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, and was assigned to life imprisonment. He was held for some time in the Justitia prison hulk before being transported to Tasmania. Another brother, Henry, stole a quantity of books, given seven years for his pilfering and sent to Australia. It is alleged Cornelius came to Australia because of his brothers' transportation.

In 1838, after his wife's passing, Cornelius sailed to Sydney with his daughter where they caught a coastal steamer going to Melbourne. He became a successful timber merchant in Flinders Street, but the partnership dissolved after a few years. He bought land at Diamond Creek/Hurstbridge where it is said he employed his book loving brother, Henry. Gold was discovered in this area but there is no information of Cornelius being involved in the gold rush. Henry stayed on.

Cornelius married his second wife in Melbourne and in 1856 they travelled further into Victoria, purchasing grazing land in the Romsey/Lancefield area. He became a Justice of the Peace and was the first chairman of the

Lancefield Roads board. Cornelius continued to buy and lease land throughout Victoria and into New South Wales at Howlong. He set his sons up with land purchases in Victoria and New South Wales. Cornelius spent his final days at Heatherleigh in Toorak Road, Melbourne.

My other great-great-grandfather, John, was born in Footscray, Kent. He had three brothers and a sister. John was a builder and contractor, having worked for Sir Joseph Paxton on the Great International Exhibition in London in 1851. Hoping to make money in the building trade, he sailed to Melbourne in 1856 on the 'Kent'. He built the nave of St Patrick's Cathedral, the Melbourne Jewish Synagogue, various churches and the Ballarat Gaol.

He left Melbourne for Sydney to further his career in the building trade where he made inroads into the development of Sydney. His buildings included St Mary's Cathedral, the General Post Office, the Garden Palace in the Botanical Gardens, the building for the Great International Exhibition in Prince Alfred Park, the Public Lands Office in Bridge Street and many others. John travelled to Tasmania and New Zealand building his masterpieces. It is rumoured he built the Abbey in Johnston Street, Annandale to entice his wife Eleanor, who had returned to England, back to Australia. She died in England and John married his second wife in Sydney.

John became Lord Mayor of Sydney in 1886 and introduced wood blocking on Sydney streets. His other talent was bowls and



he had one of the finest bowling greens at his home in Annandale and was president of the New South Wales Bowling Club for 27 years. He spent the last of his days at Kentville, his home in Annandale.

My great-great-grandfathers left their families in England to make their way to an unknown country. What amazing stamina and resilience, and how enterprising they must have been. These two men had such wonderful, yet different, lives as they strived to be pioneers in their own way and be a part of building Australia. How amazing it would have been to talk to them about their life.

# A new life in Australia

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*by Glenys Hurley*

My mother used to say my name should have been 'I wish'. I always wanted something to happen or to go somewhere or to be different, so after leaving school at 14 and doing office work for a couple of years, I applied to join the Women's Royal Air Force and should have travelled to the north of the country from my home in Somerset, England. However, my family and friends all thought it was a bad idea and I had a few doubts about what I would actually be doing. Surely not more typing, or as my father implied, 'the cookhouse'.

At the eleventh hour I abandoned the idea and decided to visit a relative in London with a view to moving there to find work, preferably in the theatre. I had been involved with the local entertainment group and loved acting and dancing. After living with my aunt and uncle in London and working again in an office, I felt I was back to square one with no involvement in the theatre at all. Life was a financial struggle to pay the rent and survive.

My long-time boyfriend was urging me to marry him and move to the countryside to start afresh, so in September 1957 we married and relocated to Chertsey, Surrey, where I found myself still working in the same boring office environment. I became pregnant and for the next six years enjoyed the arrival of four beautiful babies, all born in various counties of England and Scotland where we relocated to employment and new horizons. During these years I had many dreams of visiting other countries – somewhere warm and a free lifestyle.

We were living in a small country village in Wiltshire, struggling financially, working long hours. My husband worked during the day as the farm carpenter and I worked nights at a hospital. No holidays, outings or anything to look forward to. The newspaper arrived one morning and a huge advertisement caught my eye: 'Australia needs you'. After much persuasion, my husband reluctantly agreed to apply. We were welcomed with open arms and became 'ten pound Poms' in September 1970, arriving in Perth WA with nothing but our clothes and some carpentry tools for my husband to find work.

We settled in and made many mistakes, but I was very happy and felt that this was what I had been looking for. Freedom from gloves, scarves, hats, wellington boots, constantly trying to dry the washing and stay warm. The children went barefoot with just shorts and shirts and loved their new way of life. However, my husband was not so happy and finding the building industry just too hard. He took employment in the mining industry in the North West and that effectively ended our relationship. He was away from us for a year and found the single lifestyle suited him, found other interests, stopped supporting us financially and we were abandoned.

That phase of our lives was not easy but what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, and we certainly proved that to be true. I found work in three different areas to fit in with my children to make sure I was always there for them. The best job I had was as secretary

to the principal of the local primary school, three days a week. I in that role for 12 years. At the same time, I packed groceries at the local Coles Supermarket on Saturday mornings and Thursday nights. I also had another great job as cashier at the swimming pool where my children learned to be great swimmers and enjoyed every minute. We loved the beach and sports and my daughter loved dance class, finally choosing dance as a career.

During this time I had a great social life within the sports clubs and school activities and became secretary to the progress association, little athletics and soccer club, where I trained a girl's team.

Finally, I met a wonderful man whose family had returned to the UK as they were not able to settle in Australia. He took us under his wing and we have been together ever since. We have a lot in common and although not always easy, we have remained good friends and my children regard him as their dad. We are now grandma and grandad and also great grandparents. I am content and proud of my family who have all survived the dramas to become hard working responsible adults and are now coping with their own families and dramas.

I am forever grateful for having found someone to share my life with and believe that all my wishes have come true.

# Wishes do come true

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by Wendy Mason

From the time I was first married, or even before, I always wished to live in Australia. In the beginning it was more of a pipe dream, but as the years progressed the yearning for Australia got stronger. I first sent for the emigration papers when my eldest son was only a baby. However, the obstacles put in my way – mainly family – saw the idea abandoned and the papers consigned to the rubbish bin. When I next gave thought to making another attempt the obstacle was my husband, who wasn't the slightest bit interested in moving to Australia. For ten years my wish for a life in Australia went on the backburner.

In 1976, I again brought up the idea of emigrating to Australia. My husband, Richard, still wasn't enthused. Undaunted, I again sent away for the papers. When they arrived I couldn't fill them in fast enough. For the first time in almost 20 years the application was completed and posted off to the Australian embassy in London. Australia was on an active recruitment drive for British people to emigrate and I felt that was a good omen. While waiting for an acknowledgement of our application, I gathered as much information about Australia as I could, studying all the different states that made up the vast country and how they differed in their way of living. When our family application to emigrate was accepted in December 1977, I was over the moon and by this time Richard had come round to my way of thinking.

The following is the prologue of a self-published book titled *Wrong Side of the World* I wrote a few years ago for my grandchildren.

The seat belt sign flashed on. I felt the nervous rush of adrenaline take hold. It had been a long and tiring 27 hours since we had left London's Heathrow Airport, not helped by the fact that Richard began throwing up as soon as the Boeing 747 had lifted off and commenced its powerful surge skywards. British Airways Flight 001 had brought us almost halfway around the world to Australia in the quest for a new life.

As the aircraft began its gradual descent through the thick clouds Richard retched yet again into another bag. I prayed that we would land quickly and that his misery would cease. A grinding noise alerted me to the lowering undercarriage. My pulse quickened. I gazed out the window just as the last of the clouds vanished away in wisps. In the rapidly lightening dawn sky, the landscape below began to take on shape and form. Little ants seemed to be moving along narrow grey ribbons criss-crossing here, there and everywhere. I glanced at my watch – 6 o'clock. The morning rush hour traffic was already underway.

The Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House came into view. I urged Richard to lean over and take a look. He wasn't interested. Our sons, Reg and Ian, had moved into the empty row of seats behind us earlier so that they could watch our descent. Apart from Ian, who had gone on holiday to Jersey with Nana and Grandpa Gibbs when he was about

seven, none of us had ever flown before. I wanted to remember every detail.

I saw roofs, some large, others small. A few were absolutely enormous. They had to be factories. They were all colours: white; green; red; blue; black. The forest of greenery everywhere struck me. I had never seen so many trees in a city. Small and large green carpets were dotted here and there. I realised they were playing fields. Swimming pools. Every house seemed to have a swimming pool. Would we ever have one in our new home, I wondered.

The plane throttled back hard. Richard heaved again and I cuddled him as best I could. Poor guy. It had been a real tough journey for him, but he still managed a wan smile as I helped him to get more comfortable. My gaze went back to the window. The cars were larger now, scurrying along the various roads and highways in all directions. The aircraft continued its descent and I saw the airport buildings, the control tower. My excitement (or was it apprehension?) increased.

There had been many times when I had wondered whether my dreams of living in Australia would ever come to fruition. Now the reality was only minutes away. There was a bump, then another, followed by a screeching sound. The Boeing was on the ground. We seemed to be hurtling along the tarmac at breakneck speed, but gradually the plane slowed, eventually coming to the end of the runway, where it turned and crossed to another flight path and slowly taxied its way

to the internal arrivals terminal of the Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport.

The surrounding scene was one of frantic activity. Cars, vans and trucks were rushing in all directions. Trolleys loaded with luggage headed towards planes waiting to depart. Qantas, British Airways, KLM, Singapore Airlines, Malaysian Airways, South African Airways were all preparing to fly passengers thousands of miles in different directions. Catering trucks loading meal trolleys. Giant pipes hooked up into the planes' jumbo bellies pouring in the thousands of litres of fuel required for their long haul flights. Planes landing, planes queuing on the tarmac, planes taxiing for take-off, planes everywhere. Surely I was watching a scene of chaos and confusion, an accident waiting to happen. Apparently not! There were no alarm sirens or fire engines. This was a normal everyday occurrence in a busy international airport. Our plane was turning into its bay. Amazing that such an enormous machine could perform such intricate manoeuvres in such a confined area. I became aware that the plane had rolled to a gentle stop.


As I sat waiting for the seat belt sign to go off, I said a silent thank you to the person upstairs for our safe arrival. I was sure He would be listening. There had been many times during the last nine months when I had considered giving it all away and settling for the life I already had, but somehow the lure of greener pastures had been stronger than my doubts and misgivings. Now I was finally here on Australian soil, eager and ready to

begin my new life with my husband and two children. Gazing through the window once more I saw that the sun had risen in a cloudless blue sky, highlighting the buildings on the eastern perimeter. Even at this early hour of the morning the Australian sunshine seemed much brighter than its British equivalent.

Finally, on the 21 April 1978, after many setbacks, my long held wish to live in Australia had become a reality. My family and I became naturalised Australians in 1981.

When I set out on this venture all those years ago I thought I was putting the wheels in motion for a new life in a new country. After living here 38 years I now believe that I was, in fact, coming home. I have found a greater affinity with my adopted country than I ever knew in my native Wales.



A photograph of a person with a backpack standing on a dirt path, looking up at a tall waterfall cascading down a lush, green forest. The waterfall is the central focus, with water falling into a pool at the bottom. The surrounding vegetation is dense and vibrant green.

seniors' stories  
experience

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# Classic Australian story

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*by Brian McHaffie*

My wife and I migrated to Australia in 1965. We were lured here by the offer of the trip for ten pounds. At the time we were in a state of flux due to our local council in England putting a compulsory purchase order on our house which we owned. This meant that we could only sell our house to the council. We were angry with the government at this time as loans for any purpose were not allowed – including mortgages. With the money from the sale of our house, plus the mortgage would could have otherwise received we could have bought the house of our dreams.

We had two children, a girl aged seven and a boy aged four. My wife and I were both keen to travel and felt quite well off after our house sale. We therefore came to Australia sponsored by the South Australian Housing Trust who guaranteed us a job if we bought a house from them. Our intention was to stop for five years and in this time see as much of Australia and New Zealand as possible.

We flew out on one of the last of the Comet 4s, which was quite an experience. We stopped at Beirut; Karachi; Bombay; Singapore and then Darwin. We then went on to Melbourne and then on to South Australia where we bought a house. After working for a year we had our first holiday. We purchased a 1956 FJ Special, borrowed camping gear and off we went, my wife, two children and I.

Our first stop was the Grampians in Victoria, where we hoped to see Australian wildlife. It was summer and quite hot. In fact, it was a fire risk day but we weren't used

to the dangers this posed. Driving along the road I spotted a small path off to one side and thought it might be a good idea to travel down it a little way in the hope of seeing some wildlife. After a short distance, common sense suggested this was not a good idea so I stopped and engaged reverse with the intention of reversing back to the main road. Reverse gear did not work. I also quickly found that first gear did not work either.

I decided that if I drove down the hill then eventually I would find a flat section where I could turn around and with a bit of a run get enough momentum to drive up the hill. We drove a long way down the hill before I saw a path to the right with a section at the bottom where I could turn and then come back up the hill before re-joining the main path.

I positioned myself and then drove fast at the slope but stopped two feet from the top. After rolling back down the slope, I tried again with to a longer run up, but with the same result. Getting desperate, I tried a few more times and nearly burnt out the clutch before concluding that we had to walk out of this place. We were not in a good situation as it was very hot and we could see a glint from the fire watch tower and knew it was from the fire warden's binoculars.

We all wished we would get out of this without further problems. After trudging up the hill we eventually reached the road. We were all dirty, hot and sweaty and so relieved when a car came along, especially as it had S.A. number plates. We flagged it down and could

not believe it when it just sailed past. This was in a time when people did not even lock their cars so they had no reason to fear a family in trouble. That is when we made another wish relating to them.

Along came a member of a road gang driving a water truck. He said he could not help but he would tell his foreman who had a four-wheel drive and may be able to help. After a short time this man appeared and we explained our problem. He picked us up and took us to the workers hut and suggested to my wife that she and the kids should have a shower and a cup of tea as the workers would not be back until later. Meanwhile he would go with me and try and recover the car.

It was nearly five miles until we reached the car. I had placed rocks under the back wheels as the FJ was notorious for not having a good handbrake. We attached a tow rope I had in my boot from the four-wheel drive to the FJ chassis. 'Okay,' he said, 'just put the rocks under my wheels to stop me dragging back and take the brake off and put the car out of gear'. I did this and he started to tow the car. Suddenly the rope broke – the sharp chrome bumper had cut through it.

The car started to roll backwards. I was behind it at the time and tried to stop it but soon realised I could not hope to hold such a heavy vehicle on a severe slope which was gathering speed. I ran out from behind the vehicle and tried to open a door so that I might jump in. I had the door open and was about to

try to get in when the wheels hit a rock and the car swerved off the track into the bush.

I had had a pretty rough day so I wearily strode up the hill. The foreman was waiting for me at the top of the hill and he was rolling a cigarette. He looked at me thoughtfully, licked the gummed edge then said, 'I really thought you were gone there'. He then commenced to smoke. At this totally relaxed comment I realised what he must have seen and just burst out laughing. I really had just met the laconic Australian I had read about but seldom met.

We proceeded to tow the car back to the workers huts and I was now okay as I could drive the car in second gear easily on the flat road. I offered this gentleman a reward but he refused. However, he did ask that if I found anyone else in trouble, he would feel rewarded if we helped them as he had helped us. We cannot remember this man's name but will never forget the way he helped us and we wish he has had all the luck in his life.

Incidentally we did see all the local wildlife during our stay and we are still here 50 years later.

# Pinch me, it's all going off! and it's wonderful

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*by Sheila Gibson*

I'm a believer. I know the story about rubbing Aladdin's lamp and the fulfilment of the three wishes. I know about the wishes that come with blowing out all of the candles on a birthday cake. Walt Disney encouraged me to wish upon a star and promised that my dreams would come true. Yes, I was taught about wishes early in life, and why should I ever let that go?

Wishes are full of hope in the world of fantasy. They encompass one's dreams, one's flights of fancy. Wishes live in one's heart. Wishes are not centred on needs and they are more flimsy than wants. Wishes are to be found in luxury, extras and surprises beyond reality. Somewhere hidden in wishes there is a measure of magic.

So what have I ever wished for that actually, really and truly, magically and surprisingly came true? Only if you have been in Sydney on New Year's Eve will you guess my wish!

One deep yearning of mine was to experience the sparkles and explosions in the Sydney skies as I sang Auld Lang Syne. To hear the thunder of the booms, to smell the gunpowder, to sigh 'ooh' and 'aah' with lots of other spellbound and appreciative people. Most years the closest I came to this experience standing in a park near home, straining to see whatever spectacle flashed above the tree line. A few times I queued up for hours in the hot sun, squashed alongside other hopefuls, some of whom brought along battery-operated

radios to keep us all entertained as well as their food and drink hampers.

Then one year the genie in the lamp or the birthday wish fairy or Tinker Bell wove some magic in my direction. I won a voucher for ten people, as well as myself, to occupy a prime position on the Sydney Harbour foreshore for the whole on New Year's Eve and one didn't need to arrive before 6pm. Our allotted space was reserved and the numbers were restricted to avoid a crushing crowd situation.

The evening was glorious. The harbour was an exciting spectacle. I had no idea so many craft would be floating around, lit up to match the class of the rest of the evening. The blackness of the night enhanced the magic of everything around us. There we were, close enough to smell the gun-powder, to be overwhelmed with the booming, and to voice our ecstasy as the sparkles exploded all around us. It was, indeed, a sensory over-load. It was a dream come true. And that was only the 9 pm fireworks accounted for!

We stayed on for several more hours just because we could. We had a magical winning ticket. We danced under the glitter ball. We bought pancakes for supper. We made new friends. After all, everyone in our small enclosure had been a winner of a ticket. We held our breath as we noted the glory of our Opera House lit up and hosting other people partying away. We too were among the elite that night, not that we were snobs or suffered

from envy every other New Year's Eve! We noted that palm trees looked so different by night. Was this really our Sydney?

Finally the count down to midnight took place and the night sky exploded again and again, with glitter, colour and constellations beyond our simple imagination. It was indeed breath-taking. The water-fall effect cascaded off our 'Coathanger'. The special feature of a beating heart was finally revealed to all spectators, right across the world, if they were awake and tuned in. But there was a small sadness beginning to creep into our minds – soon it would all be over. All good things come to an end, but our dreams did come true that night.

If a genie out there feels I am worthy of one more wish, please, could you search planet Earth and fulfil the wish of one more simple soul like me? Let someone else experience the magic. Let them catch their breath as their wish comes true.

Thanks Genie, Walt, Tinker Bell, the Birthday Fairy, or Lady Luck!

# The greatest gift of all

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*by John Orme*

I met my wife, Peggy, in the late 60s and we were married in 1970. I knew at the time that her eyesight would eventually deteriorate to the point of blindness, but being young we would deal with the present and raise our little girl. As retinitis pigmentosa can be hereditary, we decided to stop at one child.

In 2005, my wife was listening to the radio one day when she heard the plight of a young mother with three toddlers awaiting a kidney transplant. Due to a lack of donors it was only a short few months later that the sad news that the young woman had passed away was announced. Later that same day I was sitting at the kitchen table, finishing off some company business on the computer, when Peggy sat down and stated that she would like to donate one of her kidneys. 'Good', I said, 'put it on eBay – we could do with the money!' She gave me that stern look, which translated to, 'shut up, John.' I asked her if she was serious. After losing a couple of her older brothers to cancer she hoped she may be able to save the life of someone else.

So began the journey. The initial enquiries led us to the Royal North Shore Hospital where we had discussions with renal specialists who then referred Peggy to numerous other specialists – even a shrink, to see if she was of sound mind! The process became a three-year saga and I think a lesser person would have given up. Even I expressed my concerns: what if something were to happen to her one remaining kidney? She told me that she had a

wish to make her life count for something so I had to respect her wishes.

We found out there was woman in her early 60s who had been undergoing dialysis for the last eight years and was hoping that someone somewhere could donate a kidney as she was deteriorating and would not last much longer. In May 2008, after a couple of false starts, the phone rang and we were informed that they had found a recipient for my wife's kidney that matched all the criteria, including blood and tissue type. So, Friday 9 May at Royal North Shore Hospital, just two days before Mother's Day, a kidney was removed from my wife, placed in a six-pack cooler and rushed to Westmead Hospital where it was implanted into this sick woman.

It is now seven years later and both are doing well, although Peggy lost a breast to cancer in 2010 but has since recovered. They will never know each other but they can communicate through a third party by letter which they do at Christmas. So it was a successful wish and a story about an ordinary person doing something extraordinary.

# Unspoken wish

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*by Wendy Chamaoun*

Although it was more than 20 years ago, I remember the precise moment that I breathed to an invisible audience that I just needed to get away, away from Australia. Somewhere, anywhere – away from the shores of my country and the bounds of my life.

I was cleaning house at the ungodly hour that workers sometimes do and I was exhausted from handling the many details that ending one life and beginning another entails. After 14 years in an emotionally and physically violent relationship, I had ‘pulled the plug’, called it quits and ended the pretence that it would ever change. I found myself in the midst of the excruciating extraction from the double life I had developed. While friends may have suspected, only the neighbours truly knew the about the public mask I wore which was increasingly difficult to maintain.

Had that moment been captured on screen, a viewer would see a tired woman, old before her time, physically shaken with the hyper-vigilance engendered by habitual fear. Limb and facial muscles twitching uncontrollably and shoulders crumpled with the hopelessness of lost dreams and the ignominy of now public failure. This shattering had beaten me in ways I had not previously experienced. The foundations of my world had collapsed.

My sensible self reminded her fanciful sister wryly that the getaway she pondered was the type of impossibility contemplated only by the most foolish. How could she ignore only having a part-time temp job, a distressed eight-year-old son, a potential relocation and a bank

balance totalling \$132? Entrenched sensibility overcame the rebellion of the moment and I, wisely, kept vacuuming. Escape was not realistically on my horizon.

Just over two weeks later, I arrived home from work to hear my phone ringing. When I answered, the gentleman on the end of the line checked who I was, identified himself, and said, ‘Congratulations! You’ve won second prize in the Credit Union’s thirtieth anniversary member draw. You have won a trip for two to Los Angeles, seven night’s accommodation near Disneyland and \$400 spending money.’

Despite the excitement, I confess that it took my sensible, school teacher mother to take my doubts in hand. Mum pushed me into overcoming my inertia and helped me organise what became a four-week holiday of a lifetime. The child in me asserted itself and I joyfully careened through the delights of Disneyworld, spent Christmas Day at the Main St parade and cheerfully queued to enjoy Disney’s most popular attractions.

Of course we also enjoyed all that Hollywood can offer to wide-eyed tourists. We even hired a stretch limousine for a day to take us to the John Paul Getty Museum where I eye-balled Van Gogh’s painting, ‘Blue Irises’, which had been something of a celebrity in its own right in Australia at the time. In the following two weeks, we toured the national parks in the winter of the West Coast and immersed ourselves in the magnificence of a Grand Canyon under a stunningly white carpet



of snow. We were unimaginably refreshed while our souls healed and we smiled again.

I have now retired, my son is grown and my mother has departed this world. My life and his were made safe by the horrible upheaval that now seems a lifetime ago. I have enjoyed many wonderful trips both within Australia and beyond. None, however, has been nearly as special as the one which fell out of heaven as the perfect antidote for a tiny family struggling with heartbreak.

# We danced in the springtime

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*by Imelda Gilmore*

I finished feeding him his dinner, spoon by spoon, patiently allowing him to take the spoon when he wanted to, even when he used it to heap a pile of peas and mashed potatoes on top of his fruit and ice cream.

With the meal successfully consumed, it was time to take the next step of helping him into his room and in the right position to lie down on his bed for a rest. I marvelled at how a function that I took so much for granted – sitting, lying, head on the pillow, legs up on the bed, getting comfortable for sleep – had become a task that was now beyond his capabilities. Not only was he no longer able to understand the instruction, but he was totally unable to complete the simple step of lying down without someone moving him into the right spot and then positioning him on the bed.

As I gently guided him towards the bed, his feet got ‘stuck’ and I realised that I needed some way of starting him moving again. After a minute or two of unsuccessful attempts at persuasion, the thought popped into my head. ‘Let’s dance?’ I asked, and raised my arms to the familiar position.

His demeanour changed in a split second. My sweetheart was no longer stooped over, head down. He lifted his head and shoulders and stood tall, like a strong, young tree, raised one arm, gently sliding the other around my waist. He started to hum ever so softly and began to sway. There was a softness in his eyes as he looked down at me, caressing me with a look, making me feel cherished. For a brief 30 seconds, he was really back in my arms

– swaying, humming. We were back in the days of lingering springtime, gently swaying like saplings in the breeze. As we swayed, I gradually nudged and guided his feet in the direction of the bed. And as suddenly as it occurred, the moment was gone.

He was now in the right spot for me to help him sit, lower his head to the pillow and swing his legs up, as I had done on countless other days.

The moment was gone, but oh how those 30 seconds made my heart sing! As I walked out of the nursing home, alone again, I thanked God for the gift of such a moment. It was a moment loaded with all the love that is trapped somewhere in his beautiful, young mind. The sky was somehow bluer and the spring blossoms seemed to sing along with me as I walked to my car. Alone again, but somehow not alone.

The longing for just a glimpse of the relationship we once had was so beautifully fulfilled, even though it was so brief, creating another memory for me to cherish and share with my family and friends and encouraging me for the days to come.

Footnote: My husband, Graham has lived with young onset dementia for several years and has been in residential care for 18 months. He is about middle stage seven and his only remaining life skills are walking and feeding himself with difficulty. The recognition of loved ones and his connection with me is mostly gone, as are language skills. Graham recently turned 67 and we have been married for 44 years.

In our courting years, ballroom dancing class was one of our regular activities, which we both enjoyed immensely.

# Winning the marble game for Sarah Neil

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*by Jennifer Neil*

In the boys' playground, children flicked marbles in a dusty circle. My sister and I, a pair of identical, red-headed, freckled-faced twin girls, won the lot. We had a large bag of all the boys' marbles and felt incredibly proud of ourselves. We were about to go back to the girls' playground when we were stopped in our tracks.

One of the defeated boys danced around the circle, red-faced and angry, singing out in a loud voice, 'The twins are adopted, the twins are adopted!'

There was absolute silence, all the kids staring, waiting in anticipation. Then, as if an invisible thread joined us, my sister and I flew at the boy, hitting him with the bag of marbles. He fell to the ground shrieking in a high-pitched voice. All the other boys ran away in fright. Ann, my twin, and I headed back to our playground. I started that day a happy eight year old but finished it as a dysfunctional adoptee. I can remember this episode as if it was yesterday, yet it was 77 years ago.

We walked home in complete silence; we did not mention the word 'adoption'. My brain had turned to golden syrup. I was walking through this sticky mess blotting out all thoughts. I felt like crying but no tears came, I felt confused and angry. Was this true? Were they not our parents? Were we orphans? Who is my mother? Where is my mother?

We stood nervously at the bedroom door. Thelma, the woman we thought was our mother, did not look up from her book. I do not know who ask the fatal question but one

of us eventually uttered, 'Someone at school says we are adopted', half hoping she would not hear, just in case it was true.

She put the book down and nonchalantly looked at my sister and I. 'Yes you are', she said.

'We adopted you in Scotland.' Then, as if to justify this bizarre statement, added, 'Your mother died in a car crash and your father could not look after you, so we agreed to take both of you,' with the word 'both' heavily emphasised.

'Now go outside and play before it gets dark,' she said, with a sort of finality in her voice.

I felt a rage inside my head and wanted to scream out, 'What was my mother's name? She must have had a name?' But I could not open my mouth to say anything. I walked out of her room feeling sad and bewildered, Ann never said a word. I do not know to this day what she was thinking. Perhaps, like me, she was numb.

I spent the rest of my life thinking and looking for my mother. I never believed she was dead. I found her in Scotland when I was 45 and it was a wonderful wish come true after so many years. My mother was 84 years old when I was finally able to look my mother in the eyes and feel at peace. She died a year later, but meeting her remains the best experience of my life.

# A life in cricket

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*by Noel Pettersen*

All my life I've had a love affair with cricket. Not the hit-and-run versions played these days, but the traditional test matches that have captured sporting attention since England and Australia began their long rivalry with the bat and ball last century.

My father served in the air force in Darwin, Port Moresby and other parts of northern Australia. My earliest memories are of him building our house in East Bankstown (now Greenacre). He was a skilful worker, having learnt various trades in WW2. He would ride his pushbike along Roberts Road with timber balanced on one shoulder, guiding the handlebars with his free hand.

Sadly, my father died as a result of illnesses carried over from wartime at the young age of 47.

My father introduced me to the love of cricket. He played in the Saturday afternoon competition at Parry Park, Lakemba. I would follow him down the hill carrying whatever gear he allowed. Often I would get to take a six-stitcher ball home to practice my leg spinners.

Graham Thomas, who later scored a double century for NSW and opened the batting for Australia against the West Indies, also played in the same team. He was just a lad in shorts yet he could hook the ball cleanly over nearby Punchbowl Road. Dad told me 'that young Graham will play for Australia one day'. I met 'young Graham', now in his 70s, at a social event recently and reminded him of those nurturing days at Parry Park back in the 50's. He recalled them warmly.

Around a decade later, Dad decided to pad up once more and commenced playing in the Moore Park competition held between government departments each Saturday morning. The standard of cricket was usually high, with regular grade players scattered amongst the teams such as the Electricity Commission, Education Department and Petty Sessions.

I was playing school cricket then and recognised as a promising leg spinner. I even took six for three, including a hat-trick against Bankstown Central. On Saturday mornings I would jump in the front seat of our ugly, brown coloured Vanguard and drive out to Moore Park with Dad. Handy with tools and with a logical mind, Dad seemed to be always tinkering on the Vanguard in our garage, which he built with a hole in the ground to allow him access under the car.

At Moore Park, I would wait eagerly for the toss. I would cross my fingers that Dad's team was batting first and watch proudly from under the old Moreton Bay figs, hoping he would get amongst the runs. I also liked to help out in the field for either team if they were short on fieldsmen. I would dash about like a skinny rabbit in my Dunlop Volley sports shoes. No Adidas or Nike runners to prance around in back then.

So it began. One sunny November morning in 1960, Dad finished his game at Moore Park and we dashed to watch the West Indies play a star-studded NSW team at the nearby SCG. The thrill of walking into the

ground for the first time still lingers, even though the stands have changed markedly over the years. Richie Benaud captained NSW, which included Alan Davidson, Neil Harvey, Norm O'Neill and fast bowler Gordon Rorke, making a comeback after a bad bout of hepatitis.

Frank Worrall skippered the West Indies team and I was star struck as Wes Hall and Tom Dewdney tried to make inroads into the NSW batting line-up. But O'Neill and Harvey were on fire that day and rattled the pickets with wonderful, free flowing shots. Later, Cammie Smith, the dashing batsman for the West Indies, did the same thing against the strong NSW attack. He flayed Davidson all over the ground, much to the delight of patrons on the famous Hill where we were sitting enjoying a packed lunch prepared by Mum. I resolved to walk out onto that ground as a player one day.

Life moved on. At Punchbowl Boys High School I played with lightening fast bowlers Jeff Thompson and Len Durtanovich (Pascoe). Both later represented Australia and, needless to say, we easily won the competition. It came at a personal price, however, because opposition teams were dismissed so quickly that I never got a go with my spinners.

Thereafter I lived in the bush for a time and enjoyed every minute. Cricket was on my agenda and I re-invented myself as an opening batsman, just like my father. Later on my own son would become an accomplished opening batsman, much better than myself or my father.

From those early days being dazzled by the flair of the West Indian side and then glued to every test series I could see on limited television coverage, I yearned to somehow reach a level that would get me into representative teams and of course, onto play for Australia. In short, it didn't happen.

Then I wanted to be like Alan McGilvray and commentate at beautiful grounds around the globe. Ridiculous as it seems, I would practice in my car, trying to match McGilvray's mellifluous tones. But I didn't become a commentator. Richie Benaud nailed that job.

There was, however, one great lifetime test cricket wish that was satisfied. A friend lent me his SCG member's ticket and I occupied the bar between the dressing rooms as England played Australia. Geoff Lawson cleaned up Gower and Border scored a ton, while I sat mesmerised by the passing parade of cricketers from earlier eras.

Best of all, I somehow ended up in the dressing rooms after play, where I revelled in the sights of gear strewn around as players packed up their kits for the day and headed off to their hotels. Security would never allow that to happen these days.

So I didn't get to play on the hallowed SCG turf but in other ways a special wish had been fulfilled. As someone once said, 'Life is too short to be serious.'



# Wishes do come true, you just have to believe

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*by David Leslie Jackson*

I was born in Windsor as an evacuee from London in 1939 and I was brought up in Cwmfellinfach, Wales. In 1945, my father who was with the SAS, brought us kids (three boys and a girl) a pictorial knowledge set of encyclopedias. Looking through these books, I came upon a picture of enormous statues out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean – my first introduction to Easter Island. I was six years old and I made up my mind that I would one day visit this mysterious island.

My father transferred to Australia in 1951 to assist in the setting up of the SAS in Australia. They needed experienced men to train others to enter the unit. We first moved to SA, then on to the Booregul army camp in NSW. My dream was getting closer. When I was 16 and working in Newcastle, I would look across the Pacific and feel Easter Island getting closer. Then Dad's unit was transferred to WA and the dream faded again.

I married in 1967 and transferred to England, but I wasn't there for long as the company I worked for moved to Victoria. I joined the West Australian government as a district officer of native welfare and we were appointed to Mullewa near Geraldton. Three more postings and three children later, I eventually secured a position as a councillor in Perth with the sexual diseases clinic. We travelled a lot by Caravan and a few trips overseas. We made trips to Cairns with the kids but from WA you always go inland, not to the coast.

Three kids at private schools put paid to my 'wish' list, but by this time I had every book that was ever printed about Easter Island and had worked out how they carved these figures and why. My friends all knew of my obsession and would ring me when a program would come on TV. They were always waiting to see how long it would take for me to mention Easter Island. Then in 1993 I started to have epileptic fits. They found a meningioma in the temporal lobe and after many tests decided it was too dangerous to remove it. They then discovered that I had myeloidfibrosis (leukaemia of the bone marrow). At this stage I was given three years. I was then retired and I thought that was the end of my wish list. I was offered a radical form of treatment that only works for 20% of patients and I grabbed it.

My wife Margaret was teaching and we sold our home in the city and moved to the coast at Warnboro, where she got a position and we started to live again. Margaret made a decision that now was the time to go to Easter Island, mainly to get it out of my system and I guess she wanted to see what the fuss was all about.

I needed to organise the trip as I had loads of medication and there are restrictions on how long you can stay at the Island. The planes come from Tahiti and then travel on to Chile, three days later they return and you have to board and return to Tahiti. I received permission to stay for nine days and we bought gifts from WA

tourism to give to the Mayor of Easter Island as a thank you.

In December 1997, we flew to New Zealand, then on to Tahiti where we spent Christmas on the island of Mooruea – a lovely spot to spend Christmas. We then flew on to Easter Island. From 20,000 feet we looked down at this speck in the ocean and thought, ‘he’s not going to land there’, but he did. When I stepped off the plane it took all my will power not to kiss the ground.

The next morning we walked from the hotel and were looking, looking, looking for the statues, disappointed that they were eluding us. We turned the corner into Hanga Roa, the only town on the island, and I saw not one, but a group of four statues. Then I kissed the ground!

The people of the Island are wonderful and very friendly. The mayor was so thrilled with our gift of tapes for the school he gave us a tape of the island in return. There are over 2,000 statues on the Island and at least 400 under the sea. My theories on how they were built and why went out the window with just the wonder of it all.

I brought a statue back, along with other permissible items so I could always feel closer to the island. Later we did take a trip on a ship that was to call in to the island but it just sailed past and went on to Bora Bora, much to my disgust.

My wife Margaret has been my rock throughout this illness and since coming back we moved to the East Coast. I have had my dream and look forward to the next one.

# Wishes that came true

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by Irena Dobrijevič

On 17 January 2012, I was rushing to an appointment with my Neurologist. I'd become increasingly concerned about my forgetfulness, a couple of months prior, I had routine tests to rule out Alzheimer's. I was to see the doctor to get the all clear. I'd become aware of all the publicity for early detection and could never understand how to distinguish the difference between natural age-related cognitive degeneration as opposed to full on dementia, especially in the early stages.

With a copy of his report in my handbag I left his office in shock. Included in the document he wrote: 'Magnetic resonance spectroscopy showed mild neuronal loss in the posterior temporal lobes, consistent with Alzheimer's disease. Hence, early Alzheimer's disease is the most likely diagnosis.'

I couldn't absorb what he had said. My brain was numb from overload. I was trying to process everything all at once but couldn't. All my thoughts were tightly tangled. Walking home I called my daughter and then I called my lover. My daughter, together with her husband and two young children, immediately came to my place where we drank several bottles of wine and cried. My lover, on the other hand, left me.

As a clinical psychologist my daughter took control and within a few weeks she had arranged professional support and we started to discuss how we'd manage the future. Because I was in the early phase I was glad to have time to consider the situation, especially how to cope with the later stages. I promised my daughter that I would have made some decisions by the

end of May. We were coming into a busy social time with all the family's birthdays, including my four grandchildren's, not to mention Easter.

Meanwhile, I had another project that I was determined to complete before I totally lost my cognition. I wished to document my 1993 experience of establishing an Aboriginal Art Centre on Elcho Island (a remote Aboriginal Community in the Arafura Sea off Arnhem Land). Because I wanted to have the book ready for publication in 2013, which was also the art centre's 20-year anniversary, I only had a 12-month window to record the story.

I started writing. This wasn't easy but with the help of Google and an electronic thesaurus, I could find the words that eluded my brain and gradually, with sheer grit and determination, the word count grew and grew and grew.

Sometime in June my daughter came to see me and over a cup of coffee gently brought up the future. Having had time to carefully think about all the alternatives I had decided on a 'peaceful exit', but I was too afraid to discuss it with her. Amongst considerable other material I'd seen Sir Terry Pratchett's, *Choosing to Die*, as well as reading Dr Philip Nitchke's, *The Peaceful Pill Handbook*. I so much wished I didn't have to have this conversation. I wished we could pretend I hadn't been diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

Nevertheless we did have the conversation. In response to her 'which nursing home' question, and after I thinly replied that I would prefer not to be here rather than end up like

that – to my amazement – she immediately relied that if that is what I finally choose to do, she'd accept and respect my decision. I started to cry. However, she made it very clear that she could never discuss anything like that with me or have anything at all to do with what I was planning. It was against the law and she would be prosecuted. I understood completely. With this huge weight off my shoulders I proceeded to plan my exit alone. At that point I didn't realise what a lonesome and frightening journey it would be.

Preparing for my exit, together with writing my Elcho Island story, was something I urgently had to arrange before I lost my cognition. I found a way of getting what I needed and once everything was prepared I experienced an enormous sense of peace. Now I was in control, not the Alzheimer's. I chose my exit date but kept on writing.

By the end of the year I had finished the first draft. On the same day, I met a new man. I told him upfront about my diagnosis and my exit decision but it didn't seem to faze him. The following year, 2013, was spent getting ready for publication. The book launch for *White Woman Black Art, My Year on Elcho Island*, was held on 19 September 2013. This wish had come true.

Because it took longer to publish than I expected, my exit date had passed and I set a new date for the following year.

More than two years had passed since I was told I had Alzheimer's and by this time many of my friends started to doubt the diagnosis,

especially as I had just written and published a 120,000 word book. I believed my cognition had improved because of my Alzheimer's medication and because I'd been rigorously exercising my brain by writing. I discussed this with two other specialists I saw on a regular basis – my immunologist as well as my thoracic Physician. They too were doubtful of the diagnosis and when I further discussed it with my thoracic physician we decided to pursue a second opinion. I made an appointment with another neurologist who was of the opinion that I did not have Alzheimer's and I should immediately stop taking Aricept.

Could it be true? Was it a miracle?

All of a sudden I had a future. I had to rethink the rest of my life. Yet, I couldn't help but wonder which one of the two neurologists were correct. As advised, I immediately stopped the medication and because I didn't regress, I was hopeful. But it wasn't until a few months later when I underwent extensive cognitive testing with yet another and third Neurologist that I was certain I had been misdiagnosed or a miracle had occurred. My cognitive rating was 97%. I did not have Alzheimer's. All my wishes had come true.

# Wishful thinking

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*by Diane Campbell Orton*

I've always had an active, enquiring mind and been eager to discover what makes us tick and what makes the world go round. But, regardless of all that I'd learned during my life, it's a fact that for most of my almost 80 years, I've wished I were different. I've wished others were different, or had behaved differently. I've wishing things in general were different.

I was 51 years old when a friend told me that it was okay to be me – the person I really was, rather than the person my parents or husband wished me to be. What a shock to the system! Up until then, I'd worked so hard at trying to be what others expected of me and I'd been desperately unhappy for much of my life. At age 53, I decided to leave my husband and I began learning to be me.

Among other things, I read loads of books about how to manifest what we wish for. They ranged from Napoleon Hill and Wallace Wattles, to today's 'experts' on the power of positive thinking and manifestation. I became quite good at manifesting.

For years I kept a '108 list' – a personal wish list of what I wanted to have or do and how I wanted to be. It included everything from 'moving house to beautiful Pearl Beach' and 'financial prosperity', to 'being free of mosquito bites' and 'having comfortable feet'. This list is one you read each morning or evening, crossing off what you no longer wish for, and then adding new items in order to keep the total at 108. But it can't be used in regard to other people and I still had many 'agendas' or wishes for others people.

A turning point came for me early this year when I did an online three-day retreat. Ah! The wonders of modern technology! Over a period of a week, I sat at my computer in my free time and joined a small group of men and women on retreat at the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland.

Like so many people these days, I'm aware of the benefits of meditation, of mindfulness, of being in the present. In fact my favourite sayings include 'the greatest way to freedom is to feel your feelings' and 'the present is the best gift of all'.

But I'd previously thought of meditation as being something to do from time to time. I laughed along with the leader when he said that someone's goal was 'to get to the present moment', and someone else said, 'I was in the present moment yesterday'. The calm, enlightening sessions included a number of questions and responses, some of which were most relevant to my situation and relationships. It was suggested that we stop wishing, stop trying to change things and just bring our attention to where we are, even if it's not what we want. We should aspire to become curious about everything we are experiencing and looking at each moment with gentleness. Noticing, but not giving attention to our mind, as it tries to find solutions to everything. So simple, so easy, and so empowering.

By the end of this beautiful event, I no longer needed my 108 list and I no longer had agendas regarding other people – whether they were family or politicians or those we hear

about in the news. I've stopped anticipating what I might say or do in coming situations.

It's often said that we should be careful what we wish for, as our wishes may come true. But for me, all my days of wishful thinking are now quite definitely in the past.



# Gallipoli 2014

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*by Anne Cheetham*

In April this year, my partner Graeme and I travelled to Turkey to attend the Anzac Day Dawn service at Gallipoli. This trip has been on my 'bucket list' before bucket lists were invented. It was also our 60th birthday present to each other.

Some of my most vivid memories of growing up in Gunnedah were the Anzac Day marches. As a student of St Xavier's and St Mary's, I participated in these marches. I still do. Often it felt like weeks beforehand we were practicing marching, instructed by members of the local RSL and I especially remember Mr Roy Law. My grandfather Charles Richardson and father Ray Richardson always participated in the Dawn Service and march on Anzac Day.

My grandfather was a World War I veteran. His records from the National Archives of Australia show that he enlisted on 22 April 1915 and embarked on 28 July 1915. On 4 December 1915 he arrived at Anzac Administration Base at Mudros on the island of Lemnos just off the Gallipoli coast. He remustered as a driver in the Australian Artillery 39th Battalion, served in France and Belgium and returned to Australia in March 1916.

Before our trip, Ron McLean from the Gunnedah Historical Society provided me with a list of soldiers from the Gunnedah district who died at Gallipoli. With assistance from the Australian War Memorial researchers, I was able to find all their names which were either on a headstone in a cemetery or on the wall at the Lone Pine Memorial (I had a photo taken next to each of the names). Listed on the

Lone Pine Memorial are Private John Thomas Elsen (Baan Baa), Private Colin Patrick Mackay (Currabubula), Private Archibald Anderson Rathie (Mullaley) and Private William Henry Bayly (Gunnedah) with a headstone at Lone Pine for Private Albert Howard Anderson (Boggabri). Private William Herbert Miller (Boggabri) is buried at Shrapnel Valley and Trooper Walter Thomas Watt (Tambar Springs) at Shell Green Cemetery.

Twenty eight of us travelled on a group tour spending four days in Istanbul and six days on the Gallipoli peninsula. We were extremely privileged to have Ashley Ekins, Head of the Military History Section at the Australian War Memorial, as our tour guide. The majority of us were Australians, as well as two New Zealanders and one 'Pommie' who was researching Field Marshall Lord Birdwood for a PhD at Kings College, London. Coincidentally my father's middle name was Birdwood, named after the same general.

During the six days on the Gallipoli peninsula we toured many battlefield sites, memorials and cemeteries. Ashley Ekins' exceptional knowledge of the Gallipoli campaign enabled us to try to understand and experience the conditions under which the campaign was fought. Thousands of Australian, New Zealand, British, Indian, French and Turkish soldiers fought and died in this area. Some of the battlefield areas and cemeteries we visited included Ari Burnu (where the Dawn Service was held until 2000), Beach Cemetery (where John Simpson Kirkpatrick, 'the man



with the donkey', is buried), Shrapnel Valley, Suvla, Hill 60 (where Hugo Throssell became the only Australian Light Horseman ever to win the Victoria Cross), the 4th Battalion Parade Ground, Shell Green, Chunuk Bair, Cape Helles, Krithia Battlefields, Achi Baba and Lone Pine.

As part of the official ceremony at the Lone Pine Memorial on Anzac Day, I was privileged to lay a wreath in memory of my grandfather. Four days before Anzac Day I was interviewed by Hayden Cooper – a Middle East correspondent with the ABC regarding my reasons for visiting Gallipoli. This was featured in the 7.30 report on ABC TV on 24 April.

Other highlights were the many guided walking tours. These included a tour of the 'old Anzac' front-line positions from Lone Pine to the Nek – the site of one of the greatest tragedies in Australian military history. The view from the top of Plugge's Plateau was our first introduction to the steep ridges and rocky outcrops of the area. We walked down Bolton's Ridge and Artillery Road but the most rugged and exhilarating walk/climb/trek was from Chanuk Bair down along Rhododendron Ridge to the northern outposts. The ruggedness of the terrain, the steep ridges, the small landing beaches, the trenches still visible, and the many cemeteries scattered in such a small peninsula area are not given justice from photos. A visit is necessary to really appreciate what really happened.

The whole experience was definitely an opportunity of a lifetime, although there

was a very sad reason for being there. The site that saw so much horror from 25 April 1915 to 9 January 1915 is a quiet, beautiful, green landscape. The peacefulness of the Dawn Service on Anzac Day was respectful and silent with an eerie feeling, even though about 5,000 people were present. The gentle ripple of the Aegean Sea on the sand at Anzac Cove from midnight to the sunlight dawning over the Sphinx will always be remembered. Emotionally it is difficult to put into words how I felt. However, the playing of our National Anthem 'Advance Australia Fair' at the Dawn Service certainly made me feel proud to be an Australian, even though a teary and emotional one.

# Dancing in Lapa

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by Kathleen Tuziak

*Ageing can be cruel. As the longed-for retirement arrives and the list of hopes and wishes is starting to emerge, fate often strikes without warning. This story is about an incident in the life of a widow who long grieved the loss of her life's companion of over 40 years of marriage.*

*She missed him incessantly. She also missed their planned travels together and she missed their uninhibited dancing. She knew she would never contemplate having another partner in life. She would never dance again.*

*In her attempt to regain some sense of balance in the lonely years ahead, she decided to try to do some of the things they'd wished to do together. Without a partner there'd be no dancing. But she could travel. She travelled solo, embracing the lonely challenge of fulfilling their retirement wishes. She went to South America.*

People were standing back, gaping upwards at the crazy man. It was a part of Rio renowned for drugs and crime.

He was young. Mid-20s. Age is hard to tell with these bronze-skinned, sun-hardened Brazilian guys. Muscles were conspicuous on his thin sinewy body as he swayed and thrust to the loud rhythms pounding from the stereo he'd set up. He was a third of the way up the famed Lapa Steps that reached steeply skyward through the Lapa favela hillside in Rio de Janeiro. He was sweating, naked above the large leather belt that held his dirty blue jeans to his skinny body.

On his belt a plastic bottle was attached. And in his left, outstretched, swaying arm a

beer stubby held the liquor he needed to keep him hydrated. His dilated pupils gazed fixedly above the gathering throng below, and across the houses, towards Copacabana beach in the far distance.

The Lapa neighbourhood of Rio is a mix of bohemian artistic culture, local pride with an underbelly of poverty and crime. It stretches flamboyantly into the hills above Rio. In 1990, a famous local Lapa identity, the artist Jorge Selarón, began to tile the dilapidated steps outside his house in the blue, green and gold colours of the Brazilian flag. His tiling became an obsession, gradually reaching to the top of the gigantic hill. Selarón had to sell many of his paintings to fund the ever-growing project.

Visitors soon came to see this emerging staircase curiosity. They started sending tiles from countries all over the world to be included in this strange vibrantly colourful masterpiece of over 250 steps.

To the world he seemed a flamboyant, humorous, charismatic identity. But, tragically, Selarón was diagnosed with terminal cancer. This was compounded by a growing depression he suffered, ironically, from his famed achievement. Notorious for tiling his Escalada, Selarón felt that his paintings, his true talent, were never valued the same way.

Selarón was found dead on January 10 2013 on his famous Lapa steps. His body had burn marks. Suicide was suspected.

Leading a group of tourists, the multilingual guide told Selarón's story to his mixed group of Brazilians and a few foreigners. He gave the

necessary warnings: don't stray from the group; don't carry valuable; beware of dangerous possible gang members; stay safe!

The eldest of the group was in her late 60s, wearing a black cotton shapeless long dress. She wore a knee bandage and cut-back sandals to be able to manage her arthritic joints on the steep staircase. For a while she stayed with the camera-clicking tourists as they posed and draped themselves across the dazzling tiled artwork. Very few ventured any distance up the staircase.

The young Brazilian man looked threatening and dangerous as he repeatedly danced the same steps with flayed arm movements over and over across the wide area he'd chosen. He seemed to be setting a territorial barrier between his private world and the tourist intruders. It was 2 o'clock. He had been there all morning, consuming his alcohol and other delights. Only a fool would take their chances with that madman in the distance. The tourists stayed in the safe zone of the lower steps.

The old woman quietly edged herself away from the other tourists, moving higher and higher up the staircase to within a few steps of the wild-looking dancer. She crept quietly sideways, out of the range of his flailing arms. Once away and above him, she looked down the escalada. There below was the dancer, beyond him the tourists. On the street at the bottom of the staircase, there was a police car, apparently called in to deal with the dancing troublemaker.

The woman felt an adrenalin hit, an exuberance of pride looking down on the world below. She was no scaredy cat. She had already travelled solo around Peru and Bolivia, ignoring all the friendly warnings about altitude sickness, crime and road dangers. Standing high above the stairway scene she laughed openly at the antics of the distant small gyrating figure of the dancer. She started to feel brazen.

In slow careful steps she moved downwards until just behind him. She started miming his actions, lifting and waving her arms and stepping out to his foot movements. Then she stepped down to his right side. The more she copied, the more he moved. And the closer they got. They waved and stomped and bumped together, dancing about in wild abandonment. Then, one at a time, the cameras began to turn away from their posing-model subjects and started filming the crazies dancing on the staircase.

Soon another woman started to dance on the step above the two crazies. And the music kept pounding. And more people began to climb further up the steps to join in with the dancers. And the steps began to fill with a dancing crowd enjoying the madness of the moment. This was Brazil. This was Rio de Janeiro in all its danger, humidity and warmth.

The police down below, armed and ready, discretely put their batons away, slipped into the police car and drove quietly away.

# The special wishes I want to share

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*by Colleen Marie Donohue*

Firstly, let me clarify the term ‘ANZAC’ – it means Australian and New Zealanders fighting together under one commander. Australians and New Zealanders often fought side by side, each under their own commander but they have only fought as ANZACs under one commander twice: firstly at Gallipoli WWI, and secondly during WWII in Greece and Crete.

After fighting in the Middle East, Australian and New Zealand forces landed in Greece in April 1941, totally exhausted. They were totally outnumbered: two divisions (one New Zealand and one Australian) against 10 divisions of Hitler’s dreaded elite.

On 12 April 1941, Australian General Blamey combined Australian and New Zealand divisions into one ANZAC corps under one commander. They fought many battles in Greece: Veve, Veria, Aliakmon River, Servia and Olympia Passes, Pinios Gorge, Thermopylae and Brallos Passes, among others.

In each battle they were undermanned, under equipped, under constant attack by the Luftwaffe and had none of the promised heavy equipment and air cover. Many were killed, maimed, or taken as prisoners of war and spent horrid years in German camps.

After Greece capitulated, ANZACs were evacuated – most going to Egypt, some to Crete. More battles, more horror. The Germans attacked Crete with a parachute landing so it was critical for the ANZACs to hold the Maleme, Rethymnon and Heraklion airfields. Allies/ANZACs had to defend three airfields;

the Germans needed to win only one. They won Maleme, though not through the fault of the ANZAC soldiers, but the wrong placement of troops by the commander in charge.

An unusual incident occurred on Crete. During the battles, the local civilian population (men, women and children) joined the fighting with whatever they had: pitch forks, axes, shovels, guns, kitchen knives, etc. This was the first time this had happened and it really upset the German invaders. Eventually Crete capitulated and most of the ANZACs and English were evacuated.

Those left behind became prisoners of war and faced along, hard march over the steep mountain range to the camp. My father and others escaped from the camp and got into the mountains where they remained for almost two years. They lived in caves and other kinds of shelters with no income, food, clothes or medical facilities. They sometimes briefly stayed in homes of villagers high in the mountains. They helped and worked with local people, caring for their sheep or took whatever other jobs there were.

The people of Crete supported them as much as possible but they themselves had very little and were trying to survive under German occupation. They paid an enormous price for supporting and helping the escaped ANZACs. Villages were burned and bombed, and there were mass murders of whole villages.

My father never spoke of the horrors of war, only about how amazing the people of Crete were in supporting the ANZACs who were

left behind after the evacuation. The following is an extract from a letter he sent to the United Nations and Sydney and Greece newspapers in 1944 describing the people of Crete:

'I would like to stress the point, that apart from their outstanding courage, their unselfish devotion in sharing their limited food which necessitated themselves and their families going hungry for long periods was truly heroic.'

As an unrealistic little girl my 'special wish' was to thank the villagers for helping and supporting him and the others, thus saving their lives. If the Cretan people had not done so, my father and many other ANZACs would have died, hence I and my descendants would not have been born. I felt that I owe my life to those brave people who supported him and the other Australians all at great risk and consequence to themselves. My wish was to be able to write and thank them. I then realized I couldn't write in Greek and they couldn't read English. I felt very distressed that I was unable to express my appreciation to these wonderful people.

In 2004 my husband and I were going to Europe. As a surprise he had found and contacted people in the relevant village and had a bronze plaque made to present to them, expressing appreciation for what they had done for ANZACs 60 years before. To my utter surprise, we landed on Crete and were met by about 20 people from the village, many who had known my father.

Thanks to my wonderful husband, my wish has come true. I was able to personally thank these people for saving my own father's life, and

also the lives of many other ANZACs. We have returned to Crete four times and are thrilled to have met and thanked these wonderful people for the sacrifices they made to help and save ANZAC soldiers over 60 years ago. We are delighted to now see the plaque proudly installed in the village square for all to see.

My current wishes are to add to the story of that ANZAC corps that fought so bravely at Gallipoli. I wish that all Australians know about the second ANZAC corps that fought so bravely in Greece and Crete during WWII. I also wish that everyone learns of the people of Crete who saved so many ANZAC soldiers who sadly had been left behind or had escaped from the prisoner of war camp after the formal evacuation from Crete during WWII.

In an attempt to fulfil these wishes, my husband and I have recently given presentations to several interested groups, including Probus clubs and U3A.





seniors' stories

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family





# A belated wish for Jimmy

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by Robert Sayers

It is 1969 in suburban Sydney, when I receive an unexpected phone call from my mother. The line from Cobar echoes, as though Mom is inside an empty water tank. 'Hello son, Jimmy's in trouble again, can you go and see him? He's in jail.' Mom's voice is so calm she could have been asking me about the weather.

'In jail? Where? What's he done now?' I shake my head in disbelief. 'Something to do with a girl in Cobar, they reckon he attacked her. He needs you to go and see him in Long Bay. He says he wants a guitar and some cigarettes.' I shake my head some more.

'I'll put Bill on, he knows more about it. Talk to you later, son.' Mom finishes and leaves me with the hollow tank noise.

'G'day, how ya goin' Robert,' says Bill. 'Yeah, Jimmy got put away for attacking a girl in town one night, they reckon he hit her with a piece of three by two,' Bill continues.

'Did he admit it?' I ask.

'Nah, you know Jimmy, reckons he never done it, but he was pissed at the time, could hardly stand up when they found him.'

I imagine Bill with that silly grin on his face, as he always did when he conversed with Mom's kids. 'He can't hold his liquor, that's his problem, and he thinks he's tough, but he couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag,' Bill says. 'His record didn't help him, you can't go round trying to punch out the local coppers and get away with it for too long.'

My eyes are rolling, my mind trying to take this all in.

'Visiting is on weekends, we thought as you are in Sydney you could go and talk to him, he listens to you,' Bill finishes.

'Yeah, sure,' I say as the noisy line goes dead.

On the long drive over to Long Bay jail I reflect on Jimmy's short but tortured path through life. He was what most parents called 'difficult'. He was always in trouble. Matches had to be kept well out of reach of his prying fingers as he loved to light fires. I remember Mom hurling a saucepan of water on the burning rug in the living room. It wasn't actually on fire but smouldering and giving off plumes of smoke that stung my eyes.

'I've told you to keep the matches out of his reach! How many times?' Mom was scolding me, as the culprit sat on an upright chair, head down, his left thumb embedded in his mouth, legs swinging back and forth, back and forth in a continual monotonous rhythm.

Because of his difficulties he spent many more years than is usual sleeping in a cot with full sides up. 'For his own protection,' Mom would say.

I had visited him when he was in the Morisset Juvenile Detention centre, for repeated stealing offences. 'They didn't need 'em,' was Jimmy's explanation. Not long after his release he was placed in the Callum Park Mental Home because of his behavioural problems, including attacking the police. I visited him in both institutions where his only requests were for cigarettes. 'Tobacco 'n' papers is best, 'cos I can make more,' he would say to me.

Sitting in front of the glass that separates me from Jimmy in the visiting room, I re-appraise my younger sibling. He looks much older than his 22 years. His greasy black hair is long, and lank, hanging over his forehead. I catch his eyes for an instant before he lowers his head. His eyes are dull, vacant.

'Jimmy, what have you done?' I say to the top of his head.

'Nuffin, I didn't do nuffin. They reckon it was me....I didn't ...not me,' he mutters, his head still bowed. His large rough hands are clasped tightly in front of him on the table.

From the slight rocking motion of his upper torso, I knew that he was swinging his legs back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, beneath his chair. 'Did ya bring some cigs?'

I felt at the time that a guitar was out of the question. Now I wish that I had made the effort and given him something to cherish, something to steer him away from a life of crime and violence. Tormented by inner demons and repetitive movements, he remained illiterate and surly. I wish I could have done more for Jimmy.

*This story is an extract from my self-published book 'Reflections', a memoir of my childhood as a child migrant in the 1950s.*

# A tearful border crossing

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*by Helen Hasan*

My oldest daughter, Suzanne, turns 40 this year and she has just lived out a dream she had for most of her life. When she was five years old, our family lived with my in-laws (her grandparents) in Amman, Jordan. My husband, Saleh, worked on a UN project there for a while and it was a rather stable time in the Middle East. Our youngest daughter, Sanna, was born while we were there.

At her grandparents' house, Suzanne became great mates with one particular cousin, Yasmin, whose mother was also a foreigner. The girls communicated in a strange mixture of Arabic, English and Turkish.

Back to Australia and 20 years went by during which Suzanne vividly remembered her days in Amman, and her friendship with Yasmin in particular. Letters between Saleh and his family often exchanged photos of the girls growing up on opposite sides of the world.

When Suzanne married, she and her husband started to plan a visit to Jordan, but their hopes were dashed when Saleh told them that his parents were very upset that Suzanne had not married a Muslim. It was okay for their son to marry someone, i.e. me, outside the faith, but not for a girl!

Over the last 15 years many things changed as both girls were busy having their own families. Although born in Jordan, Sanna was too young to remember the country, so Saleh took her with him on a most successful family visit. Not long after the visit both of Saleh's parents died. More recently, Saleh

also passed away after a slow decline with Alzheimer's.

I work as an academic and last year I had a paper accepted for a prestigious conference in Israel. I told Suzanne that I would take the opportunity to pop across the border and visit the family in Jordan, whom I had not seen for years. Suzanne immediately declared that she wanted to come with me. The younger generation in Jordan are now more open and Suzanne had begun to connect with some of them on Facebook.

Then she also wanted to bring her oldest boy (eight), incidentally named Jordan. Next it was suggested that her second son, Cooper (seven), come as well. So, there we were at Sydney airport, the four of us saying goodbye to the youngest boy, Hunter, who was only three years old and who stay home with his father.

Arriving in Tel Aviv early in the morning we dumped our bags at the conference hotel. Our first wish was to catch a train to Haifa where Saleh was born and we had an exciting day, walking around the ruins at Acre where we spoke to some friendly Palestinian families who still live there. Then after the conference we caught a taxi to the Jordan River and crossed the border at the Allenby Bridge. The Jordanian immigration officials were greatly amused by my red-headed grandson named Jordan and helped us contact Yasmin, who gave us directions to her place.

When the girls met it was as though they had never been apart. The boys quickly broke the ice with the rest of the family and, although

few speak English, we all got along just fine. Saleh's youngest brother, Noor, had often walked Suzanne to school when she was five and he became our designated driver. We visited the families of all eight of Saleh's brothers and sisters. We also had wonderful outings to Petra and the Dead Sea with many of them. Suzanne made a list of around 50 of her cousins there and the large hoard of their children.

All too soon, Noor had to drive us back down to the Jordan-Israel border for our return flight back from Tel Aviv. It was an emotional goodbye, having had only 10 days to catch up for the last 35 years. However plans are now being made to return once Hunter is old enough and we can save up enough for the flights. Meanwhile, we all keep in touch on Facebook.

# Family reunion

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*by Lydia Mamtschak*

I was two years old in 1944 when my parents packed what they could carry, closed the front door of their luxurious apartment, picked me up in their arms and set sail on a stormy sea from Ukraine. I was born in the middle of World War II, in the city of L'viv, sister city to Vienna and capital of a western province of Ukraine called Galicia. Our escape from Ukraine to Austria was not to be an easy one under wartime conditions but having a two-year-old child to succour compounded the situation. Since this is not the crux of my story, it is suffice to say that we arrived at our destination of Vorarlberg in the very western part of Austria after our escape from a German concentration camp in Strasshof. The Germans incarcerated not just Jews in concentration camps, but also Ukrainians who served as forced labour in the performance of many menial jobs for the 'Fatherland.'

Not all Austrians were Nazis; many hated both Hitler and Soviet Russia. My father could speak German and with the help of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration found living quarters for his family with an Austrian lady whose husband was conscripted by Hitler to fight the Russians on the Eastern Front. Frau Sonderegger rented us her attic with a tiny attached kitchen. My father had to find a source of income from which to pay for our tiny living quarters but this was soon achieved as Austria experienced a great shortage of man power (most strong and healthy men were conscripted into the German army).

Father found a job with the textile wooden mills in Vorarlberg which turned wool into yarn, primarily for the production of army uniforms but also for civilian use. Father's income from this job paid for the rent of our living quarters and the surplus for paltry food which was sold only on ration cards. We saw very little milk, sugar, butter, bread, meat, eggs or fresh fruit during our five year stay in Austria. We supplemented our meagre diet by picking wild strawberries, blackberries, mushrooms and walnuts in the forest nearby. Our main source of protein was from horse meat, which was sold in the village once every two or three weeks.

Five years' influx of refugees from war-torn East Europe soon filled Austria to its capacity and we were asked to leave. We could not go back home as repatriation meant immediate death or banishment to some gulag or concentration camp in Siberia or Kazakhstan. We could choose to relocate to Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay or Australia. My parents chose Australia as it had the best options for resettlement.

On 21 July 1947, the Commonwealth Government of Australia entered into an agreement with the United Nations International Refugee Organization (IRO) to resettle a predetermined quantity of displaced Europeans into Australia. Under this agreement, the IRO undertook responsibility for the provision of transport and the care of the people until their disembarkation in Australia. The Commonwealth selected



people from Europe and was responsible for their reception in Australia, placement in employment and care after arrival.

We arrived in Sydney by ship on D Day, 6 June 1949, under cover of the night. Immediately on disembarkation we were transported by train to Bathurst to a disused army camp of fibro huts which was to become our home for the next two weeks. It was freezing cold and even snowing but we left our warm clothes behind for the needy as we were travelling to a sub-tropical country. Following two weeks of sorting out, mother and I were transported to Greta – a woman's camp for displaced persons – and my father was transported to Chullora – a similar camp for men. Father was given a job of repairing damaged train seats at Redfern Railway Yards, while other men were to build the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Scheme. Some were also nominated to build Warragamba Dam in western Sydney and others to work in the sugarcane fields in Queensland.

Five years had passed before we obtained our Australian citizenship. Father had a Ph.D. degree in law, could speak English fluently as he learned the language in the old country and in addition could speak Russian, Polish, Ukrainian and German. He had high hopes of obtaining some position as an interpreter or a position where his law and language skills could be put to good use but it was not to be. Australia only needed physical labour and so father's academic documents were useless.

Mother was a primary school teacher who could also speak English but her qualifications were also invalidated. Both my parents both worked in factories to make a living and to provide a new lease of life for me. Both died prematurely from life's very demanding path.

On 24 August 1991 Ukraine became an independent state for the first time in 70 years. I could now meet my only existing family in L'viv also for the first time. My wish to visit the city of my birth cannot be accomplished as my lower back problem precludes me from travelling that far but I did meet up with my cousin, in my own house, here in Sydney. My wish came true!

# If you wish upon a star, it makes no difference who you are

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by Sally James

‘Wishing’ is a familiar word to all of us. As humans we are always wishing for things to be better, brighter, bigger etc. in our lives instead of being satisfied with what we have. From when we are small we wish for more, eg a bigger doll or train set for Christmas or our birthday. As we mature our wishes change – in our teenage years we wished for things like lots of cool friends and acceptance from our peers. Then when we married and had children of our own, naturally we wished good fortune, good health and happiness for them. As seniors we often wish we’d made different choices on a variety of things during our lives.

One of my strongest memories of wishing for something was when I was about 10 years old. My teacher asked our class to write a composition entitled *My Three Wishes*. I wrote I only had one wish: that my mummy was alive. My mum had died when I was three months old. I have a brother and sister a few years older – both of whom I love dearly. Plus I had an amazing daddy who, after our mum died, was left to care for, nurture and raise three children under the age of four in the 1950s. This he did with love and compassion, unselfishly. This he did without help from government pensions, etc. which are paid to the parents of today.

My composition was written in the mid 1960s when most mothers stayed home, looking after the family and homes. I just wanted to be like everyone else in the class. When I was invited to my friends’ homes after

school their mums would have homemade cake or biscuits waiting for them. I loved going to these homes to enjoy these treats, because at my home I needed to fend for myself. Plus I’d need to get things ready for the evening meal, like picking and shelling peas.

My dad would cook when he arrived home from his work as a builder. I also started doing the washing, ironing and grocery shopping from around the age of 12. Many of my friends liked coming to my house to play as we could do whatever we wanted without adult supervision, like jumping on the beds. A common human trait is we often want what we haven’t got. The grass is greener on the other side of the fence.

When I had my own children in the 1980s, naturally one of my wishes was to be a stay at home mum, and this is exactly what I did. It wasn’t easy as my husband was retrenched from his job when our children were fairly young and due to a health condition he was unable to return to full time employment. By this time many mothers had jobs outside the home. Not having a role model to learn mothering skills from my motto has always been to trust my instincts and ask myself what I’d wish for at each stage of life, then apply it to my children. This has worked very well for me over the years.

Our children loved the fact we were home when they came home from school and their friends liked coming over too. We did lots of activities and played many games in the garden

and house with them. Our children didn't have much money to spend or do lots of extra activities outside school hours. They have both grown up to be well adjusted, responsible adults with very successful careers. I'm so pleased I was able to fulfil my wish of being a stay-at-home mum.

Now I've reached my 60s, I realize I'm very self sufficient thanks to my wonderful father who always made me stand on my own two feet. While I still wish I'd been given the opportunity to know and learn from my mother, I'm extremely grateful I experienced a slightly different upbringing from the norm of the 1960s. I do wish my loving dad hadn't had such a hard and sad life. He never remarried and always put his children first. If my mum hadn't passed away when she did my entire family would have had very different lives, wishes and dreams.

Our wishes are usually governed by our circumstances and experiences throughout our life. I believe we should be more thankful for what we have in our lives. Wishes can be wonderful especially when they come true. However, we must remember not to wish for too much and be grateful for the many blessings we've been given.

# My story

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by Mike Feeney

I was nine days short of my second birthday when, along with my seven-year-old sister and two brothers (five and three years old) I was summarily removed from my home in the west of Ireland and ‘warehoused’ in orphanages and Industrial Schools. The year was 1951. I would not see my sister, Anne, for another 12 years, but even more tragically, I would never see my mother again, although she would live and suffer for another nine tragic years at the hands of my alcoholic, violent father. She was 38 years old and had borne 15 children (nine of whom surviving infancy) when she died in 1960.

Perverse as it may sound, I consider myself the lucky one of that ragged quartet in the court on that day in 1951 since I had no memory of my mother and her suffering and so adapted to my circumstances in ‘care’ for the next 15 years. Upon release into the real world I struggled to assimilate with life in reality but endured and forged a moderately rewarding life before emigrating to Australia in 1974 with my sister Anne. It was only when I returned to Ireland in 1987 for a short holiday with Anne and my brother Patrick that I learned of the miserably wretched life endured by my mother.

Scalded by revelations too painful to bear, I decided to write a story of my years of seemingly blissful institutionalisation and the six years following my release. It was, I suppose, a memorial to my mother, a tribute to my siblings and to the decent people it was my good fortune to encounter in the basically loveless apparatus that was the Catholic care

system. The story was self-published last May and is titled *Lost Between Two Shores* – a reference to my sense of confusion after 15 years of rigid control and indoctrination by nuns and Christian brothers.

During the course of writing my story – which required much fossicking and research – I lamented the total absence of any photographs of my mother. None of her eight siblings had one. In my memoir I referred to ‘that place in every child’s heart that is reserved for his or her mother, lying empty and fallow’ where I was concerned. I sent copies of the book to relatives in Ireland and England and to some of the people who, through kindness, had touched me indelibly.

The timing of the book’s launch coincided with the visit of English relatives of mine to our home town in the west of Ireland in September 2014. They were researching their side of the family and brought a plain box of family photographs with them. They had read my story and gave the photographs to my cousin Martin to peruse, and there, amid the pile of images was a photograph taken in 1935 of my grandfather surrounded by six of his children – one a shy 13-year-old girl. That girl was my mother. Although late in the evening Australia time, my cousin emailed the image to me from my home town.

Sixty three years after the abrupt and somewhat callous removal from my mother’s arms I sat transfixed before the image I’d longed to see. To say it was a wish come true is to devalue it. It was the culmination of a

yearning that, as the years passed, just grew and grew. To quote Neil Diamond in his song *I am, I said*: 'there was an emptiness deep inside that wouldn't let me go.' That emptiness is gone, my heart is no longer fallow for there is someone residing there – a shy 13-year-old girl who became my mother.

A surprising footnote to my story occurred in 1998 when, returning to Ireland to live for about three years while researching for the book, I decided to change my name by deed poll to that of my mother, Feeney. The date was 17 April 1998 when the High Court in Dublin legally sanctioned the name change. By an amazing coincidence that was the date in 1951 when I had effectively ceased to be my father's son; the date when I was removed from home because of his wanton cruelty and dereliction as a fit parent. Forty seven years had elapsed when I'd made that fateful decision to honour Sara, my mother, by taking her name. I pray I do her justice.

# My wish for children

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*by Katherine Muirhead*

In the summer of 1973, I spent three months on a camping trip in Europe. The only form of communication during this trip was post and halfway through my travels, at a pre-determined poste restante office in Italy, a letter awaited me with dreadful news. About a fortnight earlier my mother had died unexpectedly at home in Australia. Completely shattered, and with little desire to return home now, I decided to go Britain.

My mother had handed me something when she kissed me goodbye at Melbourne airport, something she said might be helpful if I was ever in need. I stuffed it in my pocket without giving it another thought, until that moment.

I grabbed this last tangible vestige of my mother that I kept in my wallet. It was an address of old friends of my mother who lived somewhere in the middle of England. Who could they be? I wrote to them out of curiosity. A warm and welcoming answer came almost immediately.

Hubert and Elsie Jones met me at Northampton railway station. They were more my grandparents' vintage than my mother's. Although sad at my news, they were eager to hear about her life in Australia. We swapped many years of family stories. Hubert told me about life in Kuantan, Malaya, where he and Elsie had met and befriended my mother in 1946. They regaled me with tales of thieving monkeys, elephants in musth, truculent cooks, raging monsoons and a fearsome tiger.

Apparently, the big cat had begun to frighten nearby villagers. It must have been very old, ill or injured to have become such a threat. The rubber plantation manager gathered a few local tappers to go with him on a hunt. They found a fresh spoor and followed it through the dense elephant grass. As the tiger's scent became stronger and its presence almost tangible, the hunting group fell silent. As the manager pushed aside another swathe of tall grass, he saw, with great fright, the tiger lying at his feet – dead!

He turned to show to the men but they had vanished! Frightened when they felt danger too close, they had soundlessly scampered up some nearby trees to hide in the lush, tropical canopy. Hoping to alert his fellow hunters, the manager fired three shots into the air. Thinking it must now be safe, the brave team all hurtled back down. When they came upon the scene, despite being assured to the contrary, they were convinced the manager had killed the tiger. Then, as was the custom, they hoisted the big cat on a pole, the manager on their shoulders, and marched their trophy to the Sultan (of Pahang) – the hapless tiger's owner.

I was shown a photo of the group with the vanquished tiger at their feet. The man with the gun was my father. No one believed that the tiger had already died from wounds and starvation.

I never knew my 'hero' father. In July 1948, he was travelling through the Cameron Highlands on his way home when he and his party were ambushed by Chinese insurgents.



The Malay driver, an Indian doctor and my father's Co-Manager were found by the jeep, shot dead. But my father was missing. Hubert Jones, a tin miner in Pahang at the time and friend of my parents, spent the next 12 months trying to find him.

Eventually one of the plantation workers, who was a terrorist sympathiser, led Hubert to the place where, apparently having tried hard to escape, my father had finally been killed and crudely buried in the jungle. The only identifiable item (all others having been stolen or removed) was a pair of shorts that my older sister's Amah (Malay nanny) had darned. At the time of this discovery and identification, I was four months old. My father had been missing for almost exactly a year – we never met each other but I have always felt a great connection to him since finding out about his story and his character from Hubert. He had a great sense of humour; he loved horses and was a superb rider; he was enormously brave and resilient having spent a large part of the Second World War as a prisoner of the Japanese, slaving on their 'death railway' from Siam (Thailand) to Burma – and he adored my mother.

Hubert was the only person who had ever told me a story about him. My sister and I were actively discouraged, by elderly relatives, from ever asking about our father. They said that it would be too hurtful for our mother. I'm so glad I still had the piece of paper she had handed me the day I left Melbourne and that I had taken the trouble to contact Hubert and Elsie.

This story made me feel, for the first time in my life, more connected. It gave me a part of my family I had never known – the most important part. My father was an only child whose mother had died when he was three. His British father had retired to South Africa and I never met him either so there were no people who could, or would, talk to me and my sister about our mysterious, missing father.

My wish is that all children who want to know who their biological parents are should be legally able to access this information. I also wish that all people who are sperm donors or surrogate parents should be prepared and willing to meet their biological offspring if that is the wish of their child. Knowing who your biological parents are is of overwhelming importance to a child. Withholding such information, for whatever reason, can be emotionally disturbing, destructive, and can have long-term negative consequences for some.

# Success is hard work and love

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*by Carmel Lamaro*

My early years were hard work and lots of study and examinations. The only thing I wished for was to pass my exams. When our first son, Damien, was born I very quickly learnt what it meant to wish. Just 24 hours later I was told he would not be fed. I let my wishes be known in the form of a command – yes, he will be fed. Two days later that wish was followed by another – he will be treated.

Over many years of raising our very sick, disabled child there have been many wishes: wishes that he would remember to breathe; learn to eat; learn to sit up; learn to move. And we have always been thankful for every wish granted.

He had emergency surgery at eight weeks. A lack of care at the hospital meant that the problem reasserted itself after five days. I picked him up and took him home from the hospital. It caused a great fuss but this was my baby and nobody was going to treat him so badly.

My husband and I had assumed we would be supported in our desire to raise our boy. How wrong we were! Fortunately, though, there were some who believed in what we were doing: parents, family, a few close friends and some members of the public.

I was totally unready for the abuse I received when I took him out. Perhaps it was just as well that was not for several months. That abuse continued for years. People would say that he looks, walks, speaks and holds things differently, so why is he here? During those first years he learnt much from his younger sisters and brothers. He learnt that

sitting up was fun and that moving was even more fun – but that took two years and a lot of hard work.

Sadly, some members of the medical profession were quite unable to cope with treating this child. They did not share our joy at his progress, and kept warning us that he wouldn't live. Fortunately, others saw a small child, a needy child and helped a great deal. At two and a half we were told, 'Get rid of him! Put him in a home! Forget you ever had him!' This mother and father would never forget a child who desperately needed their help. Our longing for his independence simply increased and our desire to help became stronger.

Physiotherapy was a large part of his life. I became an expert, as did his father. When he was still unable to walk at three years old, we found him a bike, no pedals, but his specially made boots made great brakes! He walked – sort of – at five years old. At six, he started normal school on trial and was encouraged to stay. That is until a new principal arrived two years later and on day three of the first term I was in her office being told to, "Take him out of MY school". I refused and reminded her that the school belonged to the children and the community. To say the least I was not popular. Interestingly, though, one of our greatest wishes was realised. Many of those resisted our boy and our efforts on his behalf sided with us. Suddenly more began to realise what we were up against.

There were several surgical occurrences which were never easy and always extremely dangerous. One of his many problems was his

eyesight. We searched and found the best man in the business, the late Professor Fred Hollows. He talked to him the same as he would any other child. Later on, he beamed with pleasure when Damien called out, 'There he is, Mum. Just over there'. It was from further than he had ever seen before!

Damien went on to high school and apart from one incident in Year 9 when we were informed that his specially made boots were not shoes and were brown when they should be black! He had with him a friend from primary school who, I believe, kept an eye on him. His friend was about twice the size of Damien who had not grown normally. He was, and still is, short.

We were asked what he would do when he left school. There was never any doubt in our minds that he would get a job. And indeed, he did. When one seeks normality for a child there is much hard work for all concerned. He, his siblings and we, his parents never let up. But there were some things I never envisioned.

He came home from work one day and announced he wanted to work for the police. That had never been one of my wishes! 'No', I said. 'Leave him be', said his father. He went to work for the police and after the first 20 years he was awarded a certificate for long service.

Another aspect of normality is to own and drive a car. When I mentioned his dream to Professor Hollows, he turned to Damien and said, 'Put a flag on top so I can keep well away from you!' What great help that was! The car arrived some time later. Yes, he had his license,

after three tests, and would we like to come for a run?

Damien responded to our wishes in a way that changed us forever. We fought, worked and longed for him to be accepted into a world that, when he was born nearly 50 years ago, believed he should be 'got rid of'. He is now married, owns a home and still works for the police. He is still disabled but that no longer seems to worry many. He is, as they say, a great bloke.

That was what we wished for.

# Sweetheart, the days are so long

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*by Joan Hughes*

My father has been dead for over 12 months. He died in a nursing home in 2013. He was a great man and father with a zest for life a great love for his family and friends. He began his work life as a blacksmith and left school at the age of 10 to work with his father in a job that he both loved and hated. He loved telling dirty yarns and he started by sharing daily stories with the local tradies. Even when he was 90, he would tell us one of those gems, his eyes would light up and there would be roars of laughter as we waited for that punch line that we had heard dozens of times before. These are now told with great pride by his son, daughters and friends.

I will always remember him coming home after work and, even though he was filthy from the daily grind of the furnace and soot, he would scrub his hands immaculately clean and give us one of those tight hugs I miss so much now. As he aged, his second wife found it more difficult to care for him in their home and he went into a nursing home. As sad as it was for him and his family, we felt confident that the care would be adequate considering the circumstances.

Upon reflection, I wish my husband and I could have cared for him at home but we were thousands of kilometres apart and immersed in our own lives. At the time Dad went into the nursing home there was only one bed available in a dementia care unit. Dad was old, frail, had poor sight, was hard of hearing and a bit incontinent, but there was nothing wrong with his brain. The nursing staff would often remark

on what a gentlemen our father was and how easy he was to care for. He was forever grateful for anything that they provided because many people in the nursing home had such high care needs and there was not enough staff to spend quality time with Dad.

His physical and medical needs were well catered for but the thing he missed the most was that basic human need of meaningful daily contact. He would have been thrilled if just one person could have sat with him a couple times a day to share a laugh and have a chat about the things dear to him. This would have broken up the day and the routines of care. The thing that crushed my heart was often when I would greet him and ask him how he was going he would say, 'Fine, but sweetheart, the days are so long.'

As our population ages, so does our need for more and different levels of care. There needs to be a much higher focus on emotional support integrated with providing for peoples' physical, intellectual and medical needs. There are so many older lonely people out there, who are at a stage where they have lost their partners, their friends and their time is running out. We need as a society to provide different ways to keep older people emotionally and socially well. There is so much value in spending quality time with older people and sharing those stories, doing things together and laughing together. To break up the days with pleasurable activities makes those lonely days not so long. My father taught me the wonderful value of laughing and sharing stories with others.

In the afternoon on the day that Dad died, I made the decision to volunteer in a local nursing home. I made a personal commitment to spend time with an older person, to do things with them that my father yearned for, that regular contact to share stories and laugh together. I was matched with a dear old lady, who like my father was frail and unable to live in her own home anymore. After we got to know each other, I asked her one afternoon how her day had been, and holding my hand, she replied, 'Joan, the days are so long'.

# Truly great wish

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by Marilyn Mercer

Catherine was born in Cork, Ireland in 1777. We know little of her life before an arrest for rebellion at the age of 16. In December 1793, she was sentenced to seven years transportation. She was now a 'political convict'.

After about 18 months in prison, Catherine began the 186-day journey from Cobh, Cork, on a boat called the *Marquis Cornwallis*. A writer of the day described this group of 152 males and 70 females, aged from 12 to 65, as 'refuse and sweepings of the Irish jails... perhaps as desperate a set of villains as were ever sent from that or any other country'.

It was surely an eventful passage. There was an attempted mutiny on board amongst the Irish convicts. Most of the convicts were members of the secret society of dissatisfied tenants who had banded together to defend themselves from the ravages of their landlords. They were known as 'The Defenders'. We can fairly assume that Catherine was among this group.

Twenty of the female convicts were flogged for planning to poison the crew. Fortunately Catherine was not amongst that list. Maybe she wasn't involved. Maybe she was more favoured by Captain Hogan or others. Maybe she was thought to be too delicate.

On 11 February 1796, 152 males and 70 females arrived at Port Jackson and placed in government service. Eleven men died, seven after the uprising.

Six months after the ship arrived in Sydney, Catherine gave birth to a son, William, on 14 August 1796. He was baptised at St Philip's Church, Sydney on 21 August 1796. Taking

into consideration the date of the birth and the length of the voyage from Ireland, the baby would have been conceived during the voyage.

It is hard to imagine what life was like on board for this 16-year-old girl. The men outnumbered the women by more than two to one. She probably had to contend with seasickness, topped off with morning sickness. If she was a Defender she would have been arrested for fighting for the rights of her family. Thus she must have loved her family dearly and would have been missing them dreadfully.

The baby's father is recorded as William Flint. This man is not listed as a convict on the ship, so unless he was a crew member, or perhaps a passenger, it appears that Flint was a fictitious surname. If the latter is the case, then perhaps the pregnancy was a reflection of the rebelliousness and conspiracy on board.

By the end of that year, things were looking better. On 4 of December 1796, Catherine Neil married William Shaw at St Philip's Church, Sydney. Both signed the register with an X. One NSW BDM record shows her name as 'Katherine', the other 'Catherine'.

Catherine's husband, William Shaw, had arrived as a government servant with the Third Fleet on the *Atlantic* in 1791. He had been arrested for 'feloniously and burglariously breaking and entering the dwelling house' at Brentwood. The trial took place at the Old Bailey and he was convicted of burglary, despite not being able to be identified in court. He was a sawyer by trade. Little William Flint



then took the name of William Shaw, after Catherine's husband.

On New Year's Day 1799, their daughter Catherine was born at their residence at Dawes Point, Sydney Cove. It is a pity that there were no fireworks – they would have had the best view!

Even as a young married mother of two, Catherine was not tamed. On 13 April 1799, at Dawes Point, Thomas Laycock lodged a complaint against Catherine 'for decoying away his servants from their duty and being an idle disorderly character and a person of notorious evil name and conversation. Ordered to be passed to Toongabbie and not suffered to return under any pretence whatever on her part under pain of the more severe sentence of having her head shaved and wearing an iron collar'.

She may have had a trip to Toongabbie, with four-month-old baby Catherine in tow to cool off, but she was back at Dawes Point in 1800.

By 1806 they had had enough of city life. Maybe William wanted to get his wife away from bad influences. He rented four acres of land from Jonas Archer at Rickaby's Creek, Windsor for two pounds per year. Finally, the family four were off stores with wheat, four hogs and some grain in hand.

Marsden's Muster of 1806 showed Catherine free by servitude, married in NSW with two children.

In the *Sydney Gazette* of April 1806, one finds a notice placed by William, cautioning that he 'would not be responsible for any credit given to his wife Catherine Shaw'. Wow!

All was quiet for the next few years. Then, on 6 June 1813, she died in Windsor at age of 36 years and was buried in St. Matthews Anglican Church yard. Catherine is number 88 in St Matthew's Burial Register.

Was she Catherine or Katherine, Neal or Neil? What is important is that she was my great, great, great, great, great grandmother. And now, as a great grandmother myself, how I wish I could sit and talk with this remarkable lady today. I am just sorry that this wish cannot fully come true but I was lucky to have talked with my great grandmother and grandmother, and with their stories and imagination, they have somehow almost made it come true.

# A writer's story

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by Fay Nguyen

Fay had started to spend some time writing. And the more she wrote, the surer she felt about the unfolding journey. After half a year of filling blank sheets with the flowing ink of her fountain pen, she one day dared to declare to herself, 'I am a writer'.

But no sooner thought than the world of work and family, resenting this declaration of independence, came fighting back with competing claims on her time and responsibilities. So she took to carrying her notebook around with her everywhere, eagerly seizing five minutes in the playground or the luxury of a doctor's waiting room.

Then, even those stolen moments evaporated. Her mother embarked on the long trip half way around the globe and came to stay for a while, wanting to spend time with the black-haired grandchildren she barely knew.

The first week was overpowering, her mother so daunting, so strong. She wanted to talk all the time, about her life and her way. No more trips alone. No opportunistic half hours between responsibilities. No space to think. The times that she was free were the times she needed to share with her mother, to be in her mother's world, receiving over and again that problematic message, 'Be like me'. So they talked instead about the past and she began to jot down notes, make connections, listen and learn.

The last weekend was dull and grey, the children fidgety and wanting to reclaim their own lives. So she took her mother on a long drive in the rain. And they talked, more deeply than before. Fay looked with gratitude at her

aging mother and said, 'If you could wish for anything in the world, what would it be?'

'Oh, to win the lottery and give you three girls beautiful homes of your own', came the response.

Fay was touched, but at the same time deeply saddened. 'No, no', she said, 'For you. What do you wish for you?'

And the old woman beside her crumpled and sobbed, 'Oh, I couldn't dare say what I wish for'.

And Fay sat helpless. All the magic powers in the world couldn't make that unspoken wish come true, couldn't bridge the distances that lay between them. If she turned back the clock, how far would it need to go? Back, past her marriage to a man from another land? Past her father selling the family home in the city by the sea to follow the nomadic call of his career? Past her mother leaving the conservative comfort of her parents' home to marry the bright young engineer? Back even to his mother, born into a Victorian England, where generations were on the move from one outpost of the empire to another, right back to the steely-eyed great grandma Gray.

For Fay was part of them all. Part Gray, part Spoor, part Edgley, part Nguyen. And her mother was and had always been a home and family builder – living alone now, but pouring out her love across a distance of miles and years as warmly as across the space between the two front seats of the car.

There were no more words to be said, so they drove back through the rain, together, to the place that one of them called home.

# Finding family

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by James Carroll Reon Billington

My story began in 1943 during the Japanese attack on Australia, when my mother, arrived in Sydney from Canada. She lived in an apartment in Victoria Street, Potts Point and worked at Burt's Milk Bar in Macleay Street when Kings Cross was ground zero for the allied forces taking R&R. My mother, Kaye, and her group of friends lived a very bohemian lifestyle; her basement apartment in what was called the French Quarter was party central.

When a group of US airmen arrived at one of these gatherings, Carroll, a very handsome flight lieutenant, was immediately attracted to Kaye. The chemistry was electric. However, a very brief love affair was over when Carroll's tour of duty ended and he was recalled to the USA. When Kaye later discovered she was pregnant, she was faced with that very confronting dilemma that was socially taboo in the 40s. The love child arrived in 1944 and lived his first five years in the vibrant atmosphere of Kings Cross.

Due to my mother's ill health I moved interstate with 'family' and began a utopian existence at the foothills of the Victorian Alps. School holidays were catch-up time in Sydney with my mother. Answers to questions about my heritage were always vague and brief. I learnt more from my mother's girl friends who told me about my parents 'raging love affair' and that my father did not return after the war. This response was to be the pattern for the rest of my life. On my mother's deathbed, she would not reveal anything about either side of the family.

While I go by my mother's maiden name, a couple of years ago, my daughter, who is a singer/songwriter, adopted my father's surname for her stage persona.

I realised then that I should find out about our family history. Even though I had several photos and a birthplace (a small town in Texas), there was scant information available. I found a snippet on the internet under 'Pacific Wrecks'. *The Amarillo News* in Texas reported a reception for a returning flight lieutenant who survived a crash landing in the ocean off New Guinea while on a test flight. That was it. No more.

A year later and a wealth of information had become available on the Internet. During a conversation with a friend, the subject of my heritage came up and it was obvious the time was right to follow up. My wish was to make a connection with my father's side of our family. My friend developed excellent research skills during her career as a schoolteacher and made it a mission to discover the mystery of my background. She gathered information from the internet including local newspapers in Texas, Facebook, school records and much more, then engaged the support of her octogenarian mother, a librarian who had solved numerous heritage requests from others. Together they traced my background to 1813.

More importantly, we discovered the existence of relatives living in Texas. We sent several emails seeking confirmation that there may be a family connection.

A month went by with no response. Then on Friday 6 March this year, the day I turned 71, we received an email from a cousin seeking further details.

My wish for a connection has come true.

# The power of a wish

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*by Linda Combe*

We wanted children so much that when our first daughter finally came along after nine years of trying it was like a miracle. So in a way, that was the first big wish that I had that was fulfilled. She gave us so much joy when she was a baby and showed how clever she is by learning very early to talk in sentences. Her father used to lay her on his stomach face down and pat her back for ages when she was upset and all but inconsolable. We both carried her around in a pouch till she was nearly one, and I breastfed her contentedly way past the usually accepted period of about six months.

So, 'Ichi Ban' (Japanese for first child) as we nicknamed her after a little t-shirt her aunty gave her, had loving parents who kept her close to them constantly. Then, in 1987, just after she turned one, I started hearing everywhere about the big preparations that were being made for the celebration of the bicentennial of the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney the next year. I don't remember what started my thought but it went something like: 'Wouldn't it be lovely to have a bicentennial baby!' I continued to breastfeed, so we were not outwardly trying for a second baby, as nursing was thought to be a good contraceptive. However, that subconscious wish never went away.

We could not have been more surprised when in about October of 1987 we were told that I was pregnant with our second child. My wish had come true and I felt blessed that wishes really could come true, if you wished them hard enough and often enough.

Ichi Ban took great interest in my swelling tummy and came with us to all the pre-natal visits. January 1988 in Sydney was filled with flags and banners and my two sisters and I took the little girl to La Perouse to witness the entry of the tall ships into Botany Bay. Australia Day 1988 was a very exciting full day that started in the early morning.

Perhaps my first daughter only remembers vague impressions of policemen on horses towering above her, or collecting shells with her aunty on a sandy beach. In my mind that day communicated a sense of excitement and anticipation to the unborn child growing inside me. She, for she was a second daughter, our 'Ni ban' (Japanese for second child), couldn't wait to be born when the time came in May.

My labour only lasted an hour and a half and we did not believe the midwife when she told me the baby was crowning while I was having a hot shower to relieve the pain of the contractions. Our second child showed many differences to her sister, but together they made up the family we had always wanted to devote our lives to nurturing.

This is a personal story. However, by telling it, I would like to communicate to others that it is not a naïve and childish to wish and hope for things you really want. I have a feeling that what you sincerely create inside your emotions and thoughts directs the way outer objective reality unfolds. I hope any person that has deep wishes will feel very optimistic that they can come true when they read my story about our bicentennial baby.

# Finding Private Malone

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*by Maree Callaghan*

I never knew my paternal grandparents, my father said that he was orphaned around WWI, and was subsequently reared by relatives. His childhood was a 'no go' area and never discussed. In 2012, my cousin Robin and I decided to check if our shared grandfather was a Gallipoli veteran. As it transpired, he was not.

We logged onto the Australian War Memorial (AWM) website and found our grandfather's service record, which not only told us that he had returned from the war, but mentioned a letter to the army from my father, Terence, in February 1933. It was written 15 years after the war ended. Puzzled, we asked National Archives Australia to obtain a copy of the letter, and so the search began.

Family marriage and birth certificates stated that the Irish/American (England born but USA migrant) John Malone married Australian Grace Parnell in Sydney, in 1909. Four children were born in their eastern suburbs home: Grace, Terence, David and Hazel. Baby David died in August, 1915, and John enlisted two weeks later. He left Australia on 2 November 1915 and was based in France.

Grace died in April 1919 in the Spanish influenza epidemic, with the AWM website showing that John arrived home from Europe weeks later. The trail ended there, with no record of his remarriage, death or anything else. The Police Gazette showed that on 29 December 1920, extended family reported him missing. John had seemingly abandoned his family and disappeared.

We checked burial records in Australia and found a John Malone in Darwin in an unmarked plot in Gardens Road Cemetery. Not imagining that this was our grandfather, we checked all of the John Malones on a digitalised newspaper website and found 21 articles in national newspapers about a John Malone as a 'victim of one of the most brutal assaults in Northern Territories history', in November 1935.

Wanting to rule this John Malone out, we approached the Northern Territory Library for any record of a John Malone and discovered a number of charges for drunkenness. An offence in 1929 saw him described in court as a habitual drunkard, 'accustomed to bush life'. The electoral roll listed him as being camped at Vestey's Hill (Darwin) from 1931-1940.

We contacted NT genealogical groups, Darwin Council, police, the territory administration, museums, unions, anyone we could think of. There was some difficulty in obtaining documentation. Darwin RSL advised that their records were destroyed in the 1942 Darwin bombing and whatever was left anywhere else was blown away in Cyclone Tracey. Nonetheless, we obtained a man's death certificate which did not mention his second name, marital status, children, nor DOB, but the place of birth reflected that written on our known 'real' grandfather's marriage certificate: Liverpool, England.

The mortuary report from Northern Territory Archives Service outlined his tragic and horrific last days. He was 'emaciated', and



his meagre possessions were listed as 'one hat, shirt and trousers, pair of old tan shoes and a singlet', and their destruction by incineration. His pension was received at Darwin Post Office because he had no fixed address. Surprisingly there was a mystery son mentioned – a John Malone in NSW, who we have been unable to trace. Perhaps John married again.

We hoped that this man who lived and died so tragically was not our grandfather.

Breakthrough – April 2013.

National Archives discovered a file relating to our known grandfather, John Thomas Malone (service number 2731), and had it cleared for access. The file included a letter to the army from his Newcastle-based daughter, Grace (my Aunt), and her sister Hazel in 1932, seeking his whereabouts and a reply that they had had no information or contact from him since 31 July 1919.

The file showed that before he 'abandoned' his children in 1920, John had attained a few months' work in Barraba on a government-funded scheme and as a Sydney builder's labourer until the end of 1919. It included proof that Darwin John was service number 2731, an invoice for the burial of a destitute man named John Malone in Darwin on April 10, 1941, including a letter from the Northern Territory Administration mentioning that John had been certified as 'permanently incapacitated for work' in March 1936.

Our conclusion is that John Malone returned from WWI with shell shock (post traumatic stress disorder). We cannot grasp why else he would leave NSW for Australia's then most remote area, abandoning his children, family and friends. He lived a hermit-like existence in a shack with a sand floor in Darwin until his death and led a lifestyle fuelled by alcohol. John was assaulted and near killed in

1935 by fellow drinkers, no doubt a by-product of his lifestyle.

We visited John Thomas Malone's unmarked grave in Darwin in May 2013. As we separately searched Gardens Road Cemetery, a yellow butterfly appeared near my cousin, 100 metres away, then flew to where I was standing next to his grave, circling me and the grave several times, before disappearing. Symbolic perhaps?

Although our grandfather's life was disturbing, we are proud to have found and laid claim to him 80 years after our parents' separate attempts to do so were unsuccessful. I submitted a successful application for a Department of Veterans' Affairs Office of War Graves memorial, and in late January 2015, his new grave was finalised.

The poignancy is that in spite of the fact that John left his children, they went looking for him more than a decade later. Had they found him, John's life may have been somewhat different than how it transpired. Hopefully our family's search of more than 80 years sends a powerful message to any similarly lost fathers and sons.

We continue to search for this man's birth family in the US and UK and his alleged NSW second son, John.

We are grateful indeed to the minister, the Department of Veteran's Affairs, Office of War Graves and indeed the Australian Government for honouring a commitment made decades ago. The saying 'Lest we forget' obviously still has real meaning in Australia.



seniors' stories

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hope





# If wishes were horses beggars would ride

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*by Gillian O'Doherty*

I was born a year after the second World War in a council flat in the White City estate, Shepherds Bush, London. A child of working class Londoner's, I knew what it was to wish for things. Rationing was still a fact of life and so wishes centred mostly around food, (I did not have a decent steak until I came to Australia) clothes and toys.

My poor father, possibly tired of my chatter, dreaming and wishing, one day said to me, 'you know that if wishes were horses, beggars would ride.' That had the desired effect, as I became quiet and started to ponder about the beggars, visualizing them in their rags and wondering what kind of horse they would ride and where they would ride to.

Really, I was lucky being the last of four children in that my wishes were granted as much and as often as possible. I remember the joy of the Christmas when my parents gave me a second hand bicycle. Dad had repainted it black and found new tyres. I rode everywhere on it.

As I grew older my wishes changed from the longing for that new dress, coat, shoes, to having an interesting job, (one did not have careers then): travel (Paris, New York, all around the world); Tony, Ron, or Paul ringing me, and getting married; owning my own home, (not a council one) having children; being able to sing in tune; oh and most importantly being small and petite with long blonde curly hair and blue eyes.

Later on I came to enjoy being tall with dark brown hair and eyes. Tony, Ron and Paul did call me, but I ended up meeting and marrying my handsome Australian, having four lovely children (and four grandchildren), my own home in Sydney and travelling both in and around Australia and occasionally back to the U.K.

Life however has a habit of not quite granting us all our wishes, or screwing up our wishes. I could have, for instance, done without my youngest daughter having Down syndrome or my husband developing prostate cancer in his late 50s. It would also have been even more wonderful to have both of my sons twins survive, instead of one. However when a wish comes true it makes it even more precious.

Do I still wish for things, most definitely! Every time I buy a lottery ticket I wish for millions, so I can have my children in the homes they desire, support my favourite charities and can cruise back to England, over to Canada and back home to Australia, where I can celebrate my birthday on a warm summer's day instead of a cold damp London winter's day (another of my childhood wishes granted). For the moment though, I must admit I am really quite happy to just enjoy being able to walk, and not wanting to ride.

Except I do still wish I could sing in tune!

# Some wishes don't come true and others do

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*by Beth Crawford*

As an only child my greatest wish was for a baby brother or sister. Persistently asking my mother if we could have a baby always resulted in the same answer: wait until you have your own.

My husband and I married at 21 and 23 years of age so we hoped to be young parents and have four children, but babies weren't forthcoming. Tests proved there was nothing wrong with either of us and I was told I was probably too anxious. Although I wished for a baby constantly, nothing happened so we decided to adopt a baby. On the day the man came from the Child Welfare Department to interview us I had morning sickness. Could I dare hope to be pregnant? The morning sickness continued for four months when Child Welfare came back to inspect our house. I was five months pregnant and huge. He took one look at me, realised I was obviously pregnant and informed us that he would keep our name on record for the future.

After being married for six years and nine months, our daughter was born a perfect, very happy child. A wish had come true and we were so happy! I thought another pregnancy would occur soon after, but no, more wishing had to be done! Two and a half years later our second daughter arrived. How lucky were we to have two gorgeous children of our own after all the sad times of envying our friends with their children. One friend actually had four children while we were trying to have one! Not fair!

The years flew by and our first daughter got married in her late twenties, so we hoped grandchildren would surely come along soon. Would you believe they didn't want children? Not more wishing? Luckily they changed their minds and when they had been married seven years our gorgeous grandson was born followed two years later by our beautiful granddaughter.

Our second daughter was married in her thirties. She has always loved babies, was a fantastic babysitter and became a paediatric nurse. Once more, but in more earnest, the wishing started again. On a visit to Vietnam I even climbed very high steps to a fertility temple to pray for my daughter! After five IVF treatments she became pregnant and when they had been married seven years, a precious baby boy was born. He is now six years old, very social, happy, but an only child who loves babies. And his wish? To have a little baby brother or sister!

His wish, as my first wish was, is not to be, but happily my other wishes did come true. But I do have one more: could my husband and I stay around to become great grandparents?

# The little chair

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by Paul Stevens

When Alice went to Wonderland she took a bite from a piece of cake. All of a sudden she grew very tall all the furniture around her appeared very small. I'm prompted to recall this story as I look at the miniature chair – the seat just 10 inches high – confidently used by my beautiful granddaughter, Rose, when she comes to stay. At 16 months she has graduated from the restrictive, but safe, high chair and now simulates the adults as she sits proudly up to the low coffee table. 'I can do this as well', her firm expression conveys challenging any disagreement.

This little chair prompts me to refresh my knowledge of the early childhood stories I related to her mother nearly 40 years ago, and the ones my grandfather told me more than seven decades ago. *Cinderella*, *Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby*, *Red Riding Hood*, *Jack and the Beanstalk* and many more will need to be revisited, refreshed and memorised. I will enjoy that. There is no doubt my repertoire should include fairy stories – most containing the magic of bringing wishes to fruition, if one is very, very well behaved and polite. Mischievous behaviour, however, carried out with an engaging, heart-warming smile would of course be forgiven.

At present she is easily entertained by taking off my nose and my ears and putting them back at the end of play just as countless grand-dads before me have gladly tolerated from their progeny. We also have these nonsense conversations that only she and I understand as she strives to form her first

words. Any mature-age passer by would smile indulgently if they overheard. At least I like to think so. Rose and I know what we mean.

Rose will be ready soon for these stories so I must not delay my preparation. She will either cuddle up on my lap passively or squirm around as children her age are prone to do if disinterested and seeking other distractions. So the challenge for me is clear. Story telling is much more personal than passively watching *In the Night Garden* together on TV. My quest will be to make her experience more engaging – get in early before I loose out to an iPad for kids and these precious opportunities lost. Perhaps I will live long enough to be able to introduce Rose, as my granddad did to me, to those timeless favourites of my childhood, *The Swiss Family Robinson* and Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*. Or she may prefer *Peter Pan and Wendy*, and later, *Ann of Green Gables*.

But I should stop planning her future here. Put aside my silent wish list for her. She will go on her own journey. Her resilience, energy and bright nature are already clearly evident. Her multi-tasking behaviour is well established as she persists in picking up not just one item, but three, whether kitchen utensils or toys. Shuffling around wearing my slippers precariously on her tiny feet. My role is to be one of those who love her, who catch the tears, laugh with her at her excitements, share her wonderment at her new experiences, and just be around when needed. I do hope the little chair will be occupied again soon.



# The power of wishing

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*by Lynette Skinner*

I sat in the darkened nursing home room watching the unresponsive face of my elderly mum. My thoughts danced around the power of 'wishing' and I questioned myself on what outcome I would wish for mum right now.

Wishing for something good to happen is a concept we are introduced to early in life, usually when told to make a wish before you blow the candles out on your birthday cake, or when looking up at a bright star-lit night, repeating the mantra, 'star light star bright, first star I see tonight'. Most wishes are for good and happy things to happen to us or someone we care about or love. However, mum always warned us that wishing had consequences so 'be wary what you wish for'.

I recalled wishing for a Barbie doll when I was about nine – not just any Barbie doll but one with a fairy princess dress. I remember being a bit disappointed when Santa brought me a Cindy doll instead, which was a cheaper version of a Barbie and also did not come with the princess dress.

For Christmas when I was 14, I wished for one of the new Chrysler Mini transistor radios that were all the rage. They came in different colours and had a wrist strap so you wouldn't drop them. I knew they were expensive and doubted mum could afford to buy one for me, but that didn't stop me from wishing. Christmas morning, mum handed me my first present, and when I opened the present to find the much longed for transistor radio, I was thrilled that my wish had come true.

I remember the first time I fell in love at the age of 14, when a boy walked into my maths class. He did not return my feelings then but when I was 16 we began moving in the same social circles. I wished and wished that he would ask me out. He finally did and we are still married 43 years on.

Of course not all my wishes were granted. I did not grow taller, did not get big boobs, nor did I end up with waste length blonde naturally curly hair. It was padded bras and perms for me, but I learned to live with it. And there is the dark side to wishing too: we have all wished for some relatively minor hardship on another so we can benefit, such as such as hoping for a rival to trip before the end of the race so we can cross the finish line first.

We were not raised to wish bad things on others, but sometimes human nature comes into play and we just can't help ourselves. In my case, I went to high school with a girl who had been my best friend since we were five years old. Ann was tall, thin, and blond and came from a wealthy family so immediately became one of the exclusive elite. Sadly, she turned into one of those much admired and untouchable bullies we all come across at some time in school. Ann directed much of her unpleasantness towards me and I could never really understand why, other than the fact that she knew me so well and felt assured I would not fight back.

There were times when I childishly wished for something to happen to her that would stop the bullying. I wanted her to pay in some way for the hurt and humiliation she was

causing me. When I heard she was moving to another school I felt my wish had come true and the relief for me was immense. Nearly 30 years later I met an old school friend and as we reminisced, Ann's name came up. I discovered that she had died in her early 40s and upon hearing this news I immediately remembered my unkind wish made when I was 14. I recalled mum's words about being 'careful what you wish for', and even though I knew that there was no way my wish had contributed to Ann's early death, I could not help but momentarily regret my angry wish made many years before.

My thoughts returned to Mum and the precipice on which her life was balancing and I continued to wonder about the power of wishing. As an intelligent and worldly adult, I knew that wishes have no power and should be relegated to childhood and that nothing I could wish for would change the outcome for mum. However, if I could make one last wish, would it be that mum return to me so I could spend more time with her, more time to tell her how much I loved her? But the real question was, what would mum wish for? Would she want to continue to live with the dementia that had taken her independence, health and ability to communicate and walk?

I could not get past the fear that I may make a wish which was for my benefit and not Mum's. With her warning to be careful what I wished for echoing in my head, I was not brave enough to make a wish and decided to let God, fate or nature decide Mum's fate. She passed away peacefully in the early hours of the next

morning, and even though it was hard to let her go, I knew in my heart that her wish for herself had come true.

You never know, maybe there is a power in wishing that transcends common sense, rational thinking and science. That simple act of wishing gives us hope that good things and happiness can come our way by the power of our thoughts. I will continue to tell my grandchildren to make a wish before they blow out their birthday candles and to wish on a star. What harm can it do?

# Wishes and positive thinking

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*by Marion Woodnutt*

Have you ever wished for anything that ended up coming true? I certainly have! It's called the power of positive thinking. It's not necessary to keep thinking about it – I just wish and forget about it and when I need it (even then I don't always remember the wish), it turns up. There are so many examples – where do I start?

One day when travelling south, I wished to live in a house with the ocean on one side and quiet water on the other. My twin sisters had come from Europe accusing me of not taking enough care of my widowed mother, whom I had looked after for the past 4 and a half years, without any help from them. I felt devastated, where and who could I turn to? Out of the blue I got a phone call: 'Marion, how would you like to live in this house, I'll introduce you to the owner and you can take it from there'. After some negotiations, I lived for the next seven years in the most beautiful and magical place with the ocean on one side and Pittwater on the other – the cottage 'Doo-Mee' at the base of Barranjoey Lighthouse, Palm Beach, NSW.

Taking a walk in the park near the Sydney Opera House, I saw a tall ship sailing in the harbour. 'Oh, how I wish I could sail on her!' I thought to myself. Not long after I came into \$4,500 – the most money I had ever had – and didn't know what to do with it. Being a Scout Venturer leader, I knew a boy's father who was in finance and so asked him, 'Where should I place this money?' I was shocked when he said 'My honest advice is spend it!' I had no idea what to spend it on, having saved every penny

for my children's schooling but that is another story. I spent four and a half months sailing around the Pacific on a tall ship called the Eye of the Wind. It was a special experience and taught me a lot of life's lessons.

My husband had traded me in for a younger model after seven years of marriage, leaving me with three delightful children who helped me to grow up and keep me sane. The eldest wished to go to a good school where students wore hats and gloves. I wished I could do this for her, knowing children had to be signed in at birth, and I said I would try. I took off to my old school OLMC Parramatta and, lo and behold, the headmistress, now a nun of the convent was a girl from my old class. My daughter did her HSC there, went on to university and is now an international lawyer.

The deputy head of the state school that my sons attended told me: 'All you mothers think your children are little swans, well I'm sorry to have to tell you that they are nothing but ducks. Don't expect a five for their school certificate as they haven't got a chance in hell.' I could see the great gap between what my daughter was achieving and what my two sons were getting, so I wished for them to get into a private school. Please don't get me wrong here, state schools are good if you are in the higher grades but get into the lower grades and there isn't such a good chance. Well, there wasn't at this school – especially with the attitude of that teacher, anyway.

I couldn't change schools unless I changed my address, which at that time was out of the

question. The brother school to OLMC was St Josephs College at Hunters Hill, I asked if they could take one boy and the other boy the following year. The answer came back: 'Seeing as they are brothers we have decided to take both boys at the same time.' I was so excited that I had got them in but how was I to pay for their board? I just wished for it to happen and didn't worry where the money was to come from but had the belief that it would come. Sometimes it came on the last day of payment but it always came and sometimes from the most unlikely places.

What do I wish for now? I wish that more people believe in their own ability and that they understand that they have the power to make wishes come true.

# Hope for the future

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*by Pam Extrem*

This is a truly remarkable little story about a young man with cerebral palsy and epilepsy. Shane was born 36 years ago into a family of five children – four boys and one girl, Shane being number four in the family. At a very young age, Shane was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and epilepsy, which in a sense didn't really matter as he was always treated no differently to the other members of the family. Time was always taken to do what was necessary for Shane to fit into the running of the household. Shane would go off with his brothers and sister to play, always those few steps behind everyone else, but having a go.

Throughout his school years, Shane attended a special school, participated in the Special Olympics, went to sporting events, outings was always supported and managed each endeavour with keen interest. From the time Shane left school he always wanted to work. He attended sheltered workshops where he learnt to do several jobs working to his ability level. Shane is a good worker and is always keen to go to work.

Gradually over the years, as one's family does, they all started to fly the coup, getting jobs and marrying and raising families of their own. Shane could see his brothers achieving in their goals and always talked about getting paid work and looking for a girlfriend to settle down with.

Shane is registered with various employment agencies, and he has been given a couple of little jobs to do, but due to his disability has not yet managed to get a job, but volunteers a few hours a week at McDonalds,

which he is very proud to do and has a sense of achievement, and hopefully one day may lead to paid work.

Eventually Shane was asked if he wanted to live in supported accommodation of his own and decided to give it a go and from that moment on he didn't look back. He moved forward, just as his brothers had previously.

One of Shane's greatest wishes was to find himself a steady girlfriend, just as his brothers had. To his delight, nearly twelve months ago in walks Sherrie, a beautiful young lady with Downs Syndrome. Boy did those bells ring! Shane would follow Sherrie around and Sherrie wanted to sit near Shane whenever she could. They eventually exchanged phone numbers and the conversations started at their day programs. Eventually the phone calls started and Shane wanted to ask Sherrie out for a coffee. She was invited around to his place and then Shane was invited around to her house and met her mum, dad the rest of the family.

He was going on outings with the family and Sherrie and Shane have become such a beautiful young couple, wanting to spend more and more time together demonstrating a beautiful blossoming relationship. It is just lovely to watch them together, growing closer day by day. The way they speak to each other and show respect for each other sends warm comfortable feelings through everyone in contact with them.

Sherrie is such a beautiful young lady who has a caring and supporting family behind her, as has Shane. It is beautiful to watch this

relationship grow and my wish is that with the support of their families their these two young people will be given the opportunity to take this relationship to wherever they want it to be and that they are given every opportunity available to them to have a healthy relationship and live a beautiful life.

It is lovely to see the love grow between them. Sherrie is very open with her mum and talks about Shane and Shane is the same with me. They both want to see where this relationship will lead over time. With as much support as they need, I believe this will happen. How beautiful is it to see these two young people given the support they need to develop their relationship. I watch and feel the excitement in Shane as he gives Sherrie some flowers or some chocolates. For Shane and Sherrie to be able to go out on a date together, to go to a dance together, to go out to dinner together, and ultimately Shane giving his heart to Sherrie.

I am so proud of these two for giving it a go and for the support and of the love their family, community and the professional support that they are given. For the support from staff from the house where Shane lives now, and for both families to be on board with everyone to support these two beautiful people where needed, and the communication that is happening to allow these two people to take the relationship to wherever Sherrie and Shane might like to take it. They are very much in love and Shane is a very lucky young man to have a lovely young lady in his life.

Sherrie is an artist and she has painted a pair of hands – one of her hands and one of Shane’s hands and put them over a heart and written: ‘Dream everything is possible’. It is such a beautiful painting that expresses how she feels.

Sherrie has always wanted a boyfriend and Shane has always wanted a girlfriend. Now this is happening and my wish is for this to continue and that these two young people live a happy and fulfilled life for as long as they want it to be. A mother’s love is unconditional and this wish is mine as it would be or most mothers. Particularly for those mothers who have children with special needs, these hopes are the same as those I have wanted for all of my children.



# Thoughts on wishing

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by Susan Horton

Today is the last day for stories with the theme *Wishes* to be submitted. In actual fact only a few hours remain to the deadline. I wish I did not procrastinate the way I do otherwise this task would have been completed some time ago.

In this context, wishes are linked to choice and self-motivation, similar to wishing one could lose weight. All the wishing in the world will not change a thing unless one is prepared to take the steps to attain these wishes.

Wishes are part of our daily lives, from 'with best wishes', to 'make a birthday wish'. The connotation of these wishes is that the recipients have a good life with health, wealth and happiness. These wishes suggest fate, or a higher force, is summoned to look favourably on these people.

Children are taught through fairy tales that magic wands make wishes come true. This prepares us for those rocky times ahead when wishes become a synonym for hope. Hope can make life bearable; without hope there is nothing.

Only time is needed for some wishes to become a reality. As a child sitting in the train travelling to the city with my mother and sisters I clearly remember I wished my legs were long enough to touch the floor.

We all wish for time related events to occur: Christmas to come early; for a child to return home from a distant place; for the end of daylight saving (this was a particular bug bear of my husband); the end of winter; the end of term. In a way, our wishes are wishing

our lives away and we can discover when it is too late that we wish to have that time again that we wished away.

Making wishes is a positive way of setting goals. Over the years, before I could afford to travel, I collected articles on places that appealed to me. I placed the cover photo for an article on Dalkey, a suburb of Dublin, above my desk with dreams of visiting this place. The purpose of my first overseas trip was to visit our son in Yorkshire, but Ireland was also on our itinerary, especially Dalkey where I took my own photo of this lovely place and we enjoyed a Guinness or two. Since then, I have used this wish system to make other wishes come true – Bhutan, China, India and Uzbekistan are some of the places to which I have travelled.

Wishes can remain dormant, even forgotten, for many years, but they still influence our lives. As a child I loved going to the Blue Mountains for holidays with the mist, tall trees and bird song. This magical place was so different to the red brick suburbia of Sydney. Apparently, my childhood wish was to have my own place, with a creek, as told by my mother some thirty years later when we purchased a mainly natural bush property with a creek.

I guess there are those who have evil wishes to do harm to others and the world in which we live. However, my wish is for positive wishes and their power for good.

# Wishing beyond the grave

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*by Terence Joseph McCauley*

Sharon was born in 1949. She and her two older brothers grew up in a housing commission house in suburban Sydney. There was really nothing spectacular about the way that Sharon was brought up, except perhaps that she was taught to always maintain self respect and to always take pride in everything she attempted. This naturally flowed to having respect for others and thus to her caring and giving nature. Don't be mistaken, anyone who took Sharon for being a fool was a fool, but she was always ready to help anyone in genuine need.

As Sharon grew through puberty, her caring nature made her wish that she had someone who needed all the love and nurturing she was holding inside. She married when she was 17 and within three years she had two sons on whom she could dote, and that she did for the next 20 years or so.

Early in 1990 her sons left the family home to make their own ways in the world. She continued to love and care for her sons as best she could with them living apart and she continued to completely spoil her husband, but she now wished that she had others who could benefit from her caring nature.

One morning, as she was walking along Clarence Street in Sydney, she almost walked past Red Cross House, but a sign outside the building compelled her to enter. Before she returned to the street she had been accepted to perform two days' voluntary work each week.

Sharon soon realised that she so enjoyed the voluntary work that she was wishing for more. She approached the NSW Cancer

Council and was offered a further two days voluntary work each week. Because of her involvement at the Cancer Council, Sharon was invited shortly thereafter to participate in meetings of the Cancer Support Group at Mount Druitt Hospital, and that in turn led to her performing other voluntary work at the hospital as well. It seemed that for Sharon, all of her wishes were coming true.

Then, around the turn of the millennium, Sharon was diagnosed with chronic kidney failure. This, however, could be controlled by medication and so she was able to continue her life as normal, including the voluntary work that she was enjoying so much.

In January 2005 Sharon suffered a heart attack necessitating double by-pass surgery, and because of further damage that the heart attack caused to her kidneys, she also had to commence dialysis treatment. Fortunately, Sharon was found to be a suitable candidate for peritoneal dialysis, which she could perform at home. Although this meant she had to go through the procedure four times each day, it still left her with the freedom to be able to live a comparatively normal life. Thus, after an appropriate period of convalescence, her hope to resume her voluntary functions was realised.

But life really isn't fair and in 2007 Sharon suffered a punctured lung which led to her contracting pneumonia and peritonitis. In 2011, her gall bladder ruptured causing her to contract peritonitis again, as well as golden staph. Later in 2011, an artery in her right leg needed to be unblocked and this, in turn,

resulted in her suffering from gangrene. In 2012 she contracted whooping cough, in 2013 it was pleurisy and in January 2014 she again suffered a bout of peritonitis.

Sharon's greatest wish now was that her life would take such a turn that once again she would be able to do something to benefit others. But when life wants to be unfair, it can really be unfair. In October 2014 Sharon was diagnosed as having cancer of the bladder and the liver. The prognosis, the doctors said, was that she had weeks instead of months.

Now, as death looked her in the face, Sharon said that she wished that she could be an organ donor, but it was unlikely be an organ left in her body worth transplanting.

Sharon passed away on the 23rd November 2014. Early the next morning, Sharon's family received an urgent phone call from the Lions NSW Eye Bank, where the doctors thought that Sharon may be a suitable donor for corneal transplants. Permission, of course, was readily given for the transplants to proceed if suitability was confirmed. Subsequently the family was informed that two corneal transplant recipients had benefited from Sharon's donation and, in addition, the sciera (the white part of the eye) had helped another recipient through reconstructive surgery. Now three people can see the world through Sharon's eyes.

How proud and how happy Sharon must now be, knowing that even from beyond the grave, her final and her ultimate wish has come true.

seniors' stories

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humour





# Gulabaloo

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by Edward Mieluk

Lying in RNS Hospital with a broken neck at 59 years young, reflecting on my life, I wished that I could fulfil a life-long passion of becoming a music star. After a full recovery I started singing and playing guitar for whoever would listen. I discover new experiences when I perform and I want to share some with you. I hope you enjoy my story called *Gulabaloo*.

This is a true story I tell no tales  
About a duo at the Tamworth Country  
Music Fest  
It's the biggest show in NSW  
That put this dynamic duo to the test

It's 2009 and our first year here  
We knew something strange would happen.  
But nothing prepared us for what would appear  
From all this musical distraction

As country music beginners first busking  
in this town  
We took my baby amplifier and speakers  
Concerned that the Council would shut  
us down  
If we played like loud attention seekers

Brushing flies while wiping eyes  
We were ready to compete  
Looking for a shop to busk outside  
On Tamworth's famous Peel Street

When a shop agreed, with amazing grace  
We went to stake our rightful claim  
But there sat a stocky aboriginal face

Fair go for land claims mate, but this just  
wasn't the same

When the shopkeeper came out to mediate  
The aboriginal guy had gone  
Leaving behind his CDs to communicate  
That he'd be back to sell them later on

There was no disguise to the shopkeeper's  
surprise  
About who's who at this country do  
When she said, 'do you know who is this guy?'  
Realising we didn't have a bloody clue

She said, 'you must be strangers to this show  
It's Mark Atkins who's performed for  
the Queen  
If you're gonna busk here you ought to know  
He's the greatest aboriginal performer  
Australia's ever seen'

Trying to contain myself I said 'Who cares!'  
Just as Mark came out the door of an  
upstairs place  
You see, Mark's sister has a shop upstairs  
And not able to busk at her door, he occupied  
our space

Now our good friend Mark suggested a  
compromise  
Saying 'As you're new here let's both busk at  
this shop  
And share in the prize  
But feeling a bit humble, we moved to the  
shop alongside



Well we tried to busk, but there was no relief in sight  
Because on the other side sat this kid called Bryan  
Playing his double neck guitar . . . . alright  
Relaxed as if he wasn't even tryin'

And talking about this kid called Bryan  
I was told that I should know  
That on T.V. Bryan Browne became world renowned  
As a child prodigy, on the Tommy Emmanuel Show

We were feeling pretty shaken  
To be busking alongside such talents  
Concerned that our duo might be mistaken  
For someone playing pretty rotten

Well we busked like that for the rest of the day  
With Mark singing through his didgeridoo  
And me waving compliments to Mark & Bryan as they play  
While we played our brand of music that I call 'Gulabaloo'

Performing alongside such talent we really tried  
But you couldn't hear your-self so much as scream  
With a didgeridoo and double neck guitar on each side,  
A whip cracker opposite and an Elvis impersonator in between

The next day we went to the Song Writers Quest  
With writers sharing with us what they know,  
About writing songs that have stood the test  
And about what inspired them to have a go

From this humble beginning at the Country Music Fest  
We went home grinning from ear to ear  
And although we were the talk of the town, I must confess  
My imagination is inclined to exaggerate . . .  
after a beer

# All about falling

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*by Yvonne Norris*

This story is not about falling in or out of love, falling from grace or falling for a joke. It's about falling from ladders.

It all started one cold, wintery day last year as I was sitting in my lounge, resting for a while and warming myself by the log fire. As I looked around the room, firstly to the brick hearth and then up to the wide paned window, I noticed that the glass needed cleaning. Not being one to sit down when something needs doing, straight away I went and got my little ladder, Windex and cleaning cloth. I stepped up on the top step of the ladder, sprayed and wiped until I was happy that the glass was gleaming in the weak winter sun.

Then, as I held the Windex in one hand and the cloth in the other I stepped down backwards and instead of my foot resting on a lower ladder rung it slipped onto the side of the hearth. I was immediately thrown off balance and felt myself starting to fall. As I juggled my cleaning tools, I somehow managed to straighten up and place both feet on to the carpet but had somehow gained momentum. I pirouetted across the room like a fat old ballerina. I finally managed to still myself, and though I felt quite sick, I was grateful that I hadn't broken any bones.

The next falling experience I had was not long after that as I was trying to retrieve some blankets from a high, built in wardrobe. Once again I was up on my little ladder. I had climbed up on to the top step but still needed to reach as high as I could. As I did so, the ladder moved slightly on the carpet

and I over compensated again. Both of my arms automatically spread and lifted like the wings of a bird. I wobbled from side to side trying to save myself from falling. I envisioned myself falling into the mirrored wardrobe doors and going down a hole just like Alice in Wonderland. Eventually I felt myself falling and thought that this time I would break an arm, leg or hip. 'Nooo!' I screamed, but then suddenly the breath whooshed out of my lungs and I felt something soft beneath me. I lay there for a while and then realised that I had fallen onto the bed. I was OK again.

Not long after that, the woman who owns the holiday house next door to me, called from her Sydney home to tell me that she was coming to stay there for a few days. I have a key to her house so thought I would go in and turn on her refrigerator so it would be ready for food storage when she arrived. She has a large two door refrigerator and the power switch is high up on the wall at the back of the unit so once again I needed my little ladder. I reminded myself what had happened with my ladder earlier so I very carefully placed it against the bottom door and gingerly stepped up to reach the switch. I turned on the power and heard the gentle hum of the motor.

As I stepped backwards my right foot got caught in the rung of the ladder. I panicked and grabbed the refrigerator's top door but it swung open and I was swinging there like a monkey until I felt the whole thing start to tip over. Luckily at that point I was able to untangle my foot and regain my balance. My leg hurt but I

was able to straighten up and finally step down.  
I have been three times lucky so my wish is that I  
am smart enough to never climb a ladder again.

# Never fall in love with an appliance

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*by Carol Cruikshank*

As a youngster, the only item in our home that could be called an 'appliance' was the old iron my mother used. The mid-fifties saw our first fridge, a Silent Knight, replace the old ice box. Our first washing machine (second-hand) arrived after my mother wrecked the gas copper by forgetfully left washing boiling away for three days, turning it all into a pile of red ash.

The floors of our large flat were all covered in linoleum which required sweeping five times a day to stop dunes building up from the sand constantly blowing in from Maroubra Beach. On Saturdays the hall runner was sprinkled with wet tea leaves and swept up with a straw broom. My father was from the Irish old school where the daughters did the household chores from an early age, and with no running hot water, doing dishes for our large family took forever.

After leaving school I worked at NSW Hoover sales and service, so eventually all of our appliances were made by Hoover and Sunbeam, due to my staff discount. There was a floor polisher for the acres of linoleum, a vacuum cleaner for when we finally got carpet, a twin tub washing machine, a steam iron which we all loved, and finally a larger fridge with a freezer shelf as our family grew.

Leaving home and working in Papua New Guinea was a whole new lifestyle. We all had houseboys to do the laundry, cleaning and cooking if required. I pity the poor women who married a man who had been single for any length of time up there as they never lifted a finger to look after themselves.

I then moved to Canada where the appliances were all huge and the chest freezer could have held a dead body (in fact one did in the suburb where I lived), and a buffalo could have been cooked in the ovens. The apartment buildings also all had laundry rooms with coin operated washers and dryers. This might be time to confess that I discovered the Australian shilling (worth about ten cents) was the same size as the Canadian twenty five cent piece. I guess it wouldn't have taken them too long to find the guilty party, but I was just a poor immigrant at the time.

Eventually, when I owned my own unit, I yearned to get a dishwasher and finally rid myself of the nightmares about mountains of plates to be washed and would lie in bed plotting how to fit one into my small kitchen. Often at midnight I would get up and move the fridge and freezer around and eventually I realised that a portable dishwasher would fit at the end of the counter, the hoses could reach the taps and the fridge would fit on the opposite wall next to the chest freezer. I happily purchased one with a fabulous wooden butcher's block top. Hooray! I really enjoyed entertaining from then on, but had to leave it when I returned to Australia twenty five years ago.

This story was going to be about the joy and of finally again having a dishwasher in my life for the past five years, after twenty years of hand washing dishes, pots and pans.

However, recently the input hose to my dishwasher sprung a leak, flooded my kitchen and filled the bottom shelf under the sink with

water, slowly causing the floating floorboards to live up to their name. The last couple of months have been spent dealing with two different insurance companies, assessors, builders, carpenters, plumbers, flooring suppliers and cabinetry makers as the kitchen, living room and dining room floors have all had to be lifted and replaced and cupboards repaired.

Sorry dishwasher, you are no longer my true love, after so much wishing and longing, as this is the second time you have caused me this problem. Fickle love, yes, for I am now in deep admiration of my refrigerator.

Dear fridge, why have I ignored you for so long? Chugging away night and day, while the temperamental dishwasher is only used a couple of times a week and then just sits there, waiting to spring leaks?

You were centre of my life and I hadn't realised it. There are magnetic bits all over to which I have attached clues about my life: whole set of Scrabble tiles spelling out words, encouraging people to sit and have a drink, leave quietly, drink tea, etc.; a fabulous Leunig cartoon; a fortune cookie message from Mesa, Arizona circa 2005 saying, 'Your sense of humour will enable you to glide through life's difficult periods' – so true recently; an invitation to a party; a shopping list; reminders; a magnet that says: 'Don't Disturb – Having a Stress Attack', given by a friend; list of garbage days; inspirational messages; etc. etc.

So I confess the true centre of my universe is my Kelvinator, and my special wish now is long may she last!

# Norwegian secrets

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by Helen Nock

Ever wished that you had 'gone' before you ended up over three hours from a toilet? Ever wished that you could speak Norwegian? Ever wished that you had done your homework before setting out on an unknown journey?

It had been a cold, sharp, beautiful February day in Narvik, Norway, but I had to turn my mind to the next leg of the trip south to Oslo. In the first instance, that meant a four-hour bus trip to Fauske.

I wished I didn't have to leave this fascinating place so soon. Perched well above the Arctic Circle, on the shores of the great Ofotfjord, Narvik was a true frontier town, and for the lone traveler in the 80s it possessed a mesmeric quality. Was it the deep dark harbour, the sprawling iron ore port, the massive mountain backdrop, or the black and white landscape? Was it the shops with their strange weather fighting weapons, protective clothing and snow-shoes? Was it the lovely little catholic nun who chatted about the world, then gave me a leaflet with the location and times of every church mass held in the whole of Norway? Who knows. But I do know I left my run to the bus too late to attend to basics, like having a last minute smoke and a trip to the toilet. Not to worry, I thought, I could go on the bus when things settled down.

The first part of the bus route doubled as a week-day commuter service, which wound its way through numerous little settlements delivering Narvik workers back to their outlying homes. Although mid-winter had passed, snow still lay thick on the houses and

gardens and in the fading afternoon light the frozen footpaths shone like mirrors.

However, I was starting to wish that the regular commuter stops would cease so I could deal with what was now becoming an urgent matter. After an anxious hour, the incidence of stops eased off and I hurried to the back of the bus to a familiar angled door tucked in behind the last seat. But there was a hitch. It was locked.

Jiggle, jiggle, jiggle. 'Oh no! Don't tell me.'

I looked down the aisle and caught the driver's eye in the rear view mirror. Jiggle, jiggle. 'Hello, excuse me,' I implored. The driver returned a blank look then went on driving. I wished I could speak Norwegian. Meantime, an avenue of curious faces lined the aisle, watching to see what would happen next. Jiggle, jiggle, jiggle. The door wouldn't budge. 'Hello, excuse me,' I repeated. I wished they wouldn't stare or that they'd give me some sort of acknowledgement. There was nothing to do but sit down and work on plan B. How I wished there was a plan B.

As daylight was now pretty well extinguished, I even contemplated leaping out and squatting behind a snow clad hedge at the next stop. 'No,' I thought, 'Don't do that, the bus will leave without you.' Had I really been reduced to this? Was the timetable the only impediment to such behaviour?

By now I was in serious strife, so I returned again to the back of the bus to the scene of my shame. All faces followed in eager anticipation. I didn't let them down. Jiggle, jiggle. 'Excuse



me', I said. Jiggle jiggle. 'Hello...' nothing! The driver ignored me, but the passengers, though silent, showed acute morbid interest. Oh, how I wished I could speak Norwegian, or Swedish, or Russian. How I wished someone would speak English. How I wished I'd gone before I boarded the bus. How I wished I'd planned this trip better. 'Why do they have a toilet if they won't let you use it? Why don't the others want to go?' Still seeking plan B, and contemplating the hours left in the journey, I thought I'd have to wet my pants. 'No, don't do that – ever!' I thought. At least my self respect was still intact.

The avenue of curious faces continued to form at the slightest movement from me. And there were plenty of slight movements. I had stopped jiggling and started wriggling. How I wished there was room to pace up and down, or to curl up and cry. How I wished that wretched door would open.

Then, we stopped at a ferry terminal. Of course! You need to cross the fiord! This was the ferry from Kjopsvik to Drag across the Tysfjorden. That's why the trip takes so long! Our bus disappeared into the belly of the ferry, and we passengers went up on deck. Eureka! This is where you go to the toilet. This is where you have a smoke. This is where you drink coffee. This is heaven. And much to the disappointment of the other passengers, a great calm descended on the wriggling, jiggling foreigner in their midst.

After the crossing, a blizzard set in, but the bus ploughed on to the next town. Then, parked by the curb amid the driving snow and wind,

and in the glow of a street-light, the secret of the locked toilet was finally revealed. Through the window I looked down and saw the driver access that space from an outside door.

I wish I'd known that!

# Princess sunflower

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*by John Dillon*

Once upon a time there was a young boy named Yomo. Yomo lived in a tin shack just outside a big city called Osaka in Japan. He lived with his parents but his father was confined to bed and his mother was also ill. Life was very hard for the family and they were very poor. With some help from a kind neighbour, Yomo managed to get a job as an apprentice gardener in the emperor's garden, which was near his home. This meant he was able to help support his family.

This garden was very special. The emperor had created it for his beautiful daughter, Princess Sunflower. However, the garden was created without soil and earth, but made of rocks and the surface was covered with stone of many colours. There was a rock pool with shimmering koi fish, lazily swimming round and round. Cascades of waterfalls fell to the ground surrounded by flowering trees and bushes. The whole garden was a delight to see. Princess Sunflower loved to walk through her garden, but she knew there was something missing.

One day as she was walking in the garden, Princess Sunflower had an idea. She told the emperor that the garden needed a centre point. She wanted a sunflower growing out of a shallow bowl to be placed in the middle of the garden. The emperor called his gardeners together and asked them to plant a tall sunflower in a small stone dish. This was a huge challenge for the gardeners and they scratched their heads as they thought of ways to do this task. There was no soil and the sunflowers they practised with were more than a metre in

height...they just kept falling over. They tried supporting the flowers with fishing line but they kept walking into it. The wind blew over the sunflowers and they died. All their attempts failed. The emperor was getting angry because none of his gardeners could perform this simple task.

Yomo enjoyed working in the beautiful garden even though the other gardeners bullied him. They often turned hoses on him or put snakes in his bed of rags in the gardener's tool shed where he slept. Yomo listened to the gardeners as they discussed their problem. But no solution could be found. One day the gate to the garden opened and in came a donkey and cart. On the cart was the biggest sunflower the gardeners had ever seen. They were dismayed. There was no way they would be able to get this sunflower to stand up in a shallow stone bowl.

That night, Yomo gave the problem a lot of thought as he lay in his rags. Then he had an idea. In the middle of the night he got up and found a drill in the tool shed. He went to the place where the sunflower would be placed and he drilled a hole in the stone floor. The stem of the sunflower was 10 centimetres thick so he made sure the hole was wide enough, and deep enough, to allow the roots and the stem to go through. Then he found the dish that the emperor had provided and carefully drilled a hole in it wide enough for the sunflower to slip through. He put the sunflower carefully through the bowl, and lowered it down into the precious, rich soil beneath the stone. He

watered it thoroughly and then he looked at this work...success at last! The sunflower stood tall and proud in the small bowl. He crept quietly back to bed, no-one had heard him, or seen him. What a surprise everyone would get in the morning.

The following morning the gardeners were astonished to see the sunflower, in all its glory, smiling at the rising sun. The emperor and Princess Sunflower came into the garden and the princess smiled happily to see her sunflower moving gently in the breeze. She clapped her hands with delight. The emperor asked the head gardener who had managed to create this wonderful sight, the head gardener was pleased with the praise and he said, 'I did it'. But when the emperor asked him how he had done it, the head gardener went red in the face and could not answer. The emperor was angry with his lies and sent him away, never to return. He turned to the assistant head gardener and asked him the same question. The assistant head gardener also claimed that he had done it so that he could become the head gardener. But the emperor soon discovered that he, too, was lying and sent him away.

Princess Sunflower called out to all the workers: 'Who has done this marvellous thing?' They all looked at each other with puzzled faces. At last, Yomo raised his hand and said, 'I did it'.

Everyone laughed and laughed, but Princess sunflower gently asked him to explain. Yomo went over to the sunflower and carefully lifted the bowl to show the stem

neatly reaching into the rich soil beneath the ground. Everyone gasped in amazement and the emperor clapped him on the back and said, 'Well done, Yomo, well done'.

Yomo was well rewarded for his clever idea. After Princess Sunflower heard about his family she made sure that the emperor promoted him. He was given proper clothes, rather than rags, slept in a real bed. With increased wages he could help his parents and, when he was old enough, the emperor promised that he would be trained to become the head gardener.

Princess Sunflower was very happy when she walked in her garden every day, and always looked at the lovely sunflower as it smiled at the sun.

# Some wishes do come true

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*by Ronald James Langley*

It was the week before the start of the Christmas holidays in 1960. My cousin and I had just celebrated our fourteenth birthdays and were so looking forward to the break from school. The neighbours were not as enthusiastic because we always made sure we had fireworks left over from Cracker Night, from which they had only just recovered.

We took great delight in blowing letter boxes to smithereens, especially the ones that had just been replaced. One of our greatest delights was to twist the wicks of two bungers together, light it and hurl it into a chook roost after the poor birds had settled down for the night. There would be a great deal of squawking and feathers flying everywhere, not to mention the loud, expletive laden threats made by an irate neighbour as he stormed out of his back door. It took the poor chooks weeks to recover and start laying again.

Our parents had had enough of our antics, the regular complaints from the neighbours and the recent visit from the local police – I think that was the last straw. We were summoned to the lounge room. Dad was stern faced. ‘Your reign of terror has come to an end. You are going to wish you had never blown up Pop Burns’ chooks’, he said, staring directly at us. Mum, Uncle and Aunt all nodded in agreement. Continuing he added, ‘One of his bloody chooks died of fright’. We tried desperately hard not to laugh at this piece of news and were doing okay until we saw a slight smile appear on Mum’s face as she turned away from us to conceal her amusement. It was all too

much for us. We broke out into uncontrollable laughter, turning away from one another to regain our composure and then turning to face Dad again. He was not amused.

It only took the slightest sideways glance at one another to set us off again. This time we were doubled up in pain, barely able to catch our breath and with tears running down our cheeks. ‘The chook died of fright!’ my cousin gasped. Mum, Aunt and Uncle had to leave the room, as they too were having difficulty in containing their amusement at the fate of the poor old chook. Dad turned to follow them into the kitchen from which emanated muffled hysterical laughter. Dad could be heard reprimanding the others, ‘This is serious, they are out of control. It’s time they were taught a lesson.’

As punishment, we had to spend the whole of the holidays working as ‘lolly boys’ in the George St. theatres. Uncle had arranged for our placement through an associate of his. We soon discovered this associate was a hard disciplinarian and stood for no nonsense, especially from two brats like us. It didn’t take too long for us to regret our past behaviour. The first two weeks of weaving our way through the holiday crowds in the theatre, using our heavy trays as battering rams, were hell. However, things were soon to get a whole lot better.

The meagre pay helped, but best of all, the depot was housed in the Tivoli building on Hay St. At the end of a long dark hall on the ground floor was a mysterious bright blue door, we could see bright light shining from beneath the door. There was a short, well dressed little

man standing adjacent to the door. 'What could it be?' we asked ourselves. We began pestering the older lolly boys to tell us what lay behind the blue door. Eventually Georgio, the senior lolly boy relented, 'I'll see what I can do...come in early tomorrow'.

Our shift started at 12 noon, so we arrived at 10am and eagerly awaited Georgio's arrival. Georgio entered the doorway, rushed past us and beckoned us to follow him down the hallway. 'Quick you two, we don't have a lot of time', he said. As we neared the blue door we could hear the busy hum of many voices and there was a hint of perfume in the air. Greetings were exchanged between Georgio and the little man. 'These are the two inquisitive ones', Georgio said as he reached to open the door.

The door was flung open and we were assaulted with a cacophony of noise, light so bright that it took some time for our eyes to adjust and the air was filled with an overpowering mixture of perfume and cigarette smoke. Our senses slowly adjusted to this new environment. We soon discovered we were in the Tivoli dressing room. It was the stuff of all 14-year-old boys' every wish and dream. There were people rushing hither and thither, everyone appeared to be talking at once, feathers and sequins were everywhere and there was bare flesh! I truly believed I'd died and gone to heaven. Georgio guided us from dressing table to dressing table, at each we were greeted with exaggerated hugs and kisses.

A bell rang, and a distant voice announced that there was 10 minutes before the start

of the show. This appeared to be a signal for pandemonium to take hold of everyone in the room. 'Right you two, time for us to leave', Georgio said as he ushered us towards the door. Upon returning to the depot, we immediately signed up for the next school holidays.

Our conversations were somewhat limited for a considerable time after our Tivoli visit, our parents and neighbours were very pleased with our changed behaviour and Pop Burns was pleased his chooks were laying again. We never told our parents the reason for our enthusiasm to work every school holidays. Our days of blowing up chooks and letterboxes were over.

# A lesson in spin recovery

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*by James Walsh*

'Twas a sunny September day as the Robin 2160 levelled out at six thousand feet above Sydney. In the right seat, retired Wing Commander Lowell Cruise was addressing the pilot thusly:

'Now, I want you to recall from my extensive and thorough pre-flight briefing what the aircraft will do during each phase of the spin you will shortly enter. Any fool can spin an aircraft without understanding the aerodynamics of the process; my fools know exactly what they are doing every second they are doing it!'

'You weren't in sales before this job, were you?' inquired the fool, unwisely.

'One more crack like that, Walsh, and I'll have the contents of your stomach in this bag before you can say mercy messa! Now then, what speed do we enter the spin at?'

'One point one VS [Velocity at Stall]'

'That's one point one VS, sir!'

'One point one VS, sir!'

'Right. And why don't we merely let the machine stall and then enter the spin?'

'Because we are flying precisely, and we will deliberately stall the aircraft by rapid-back movement of the stick immediately prior to kicking in full rudder.'

'And then?'

'And then, after one complete turn, we apply full opposite aileron and hold while the spin stabilizes.'

'What happens after the spin stabilizes?'

'The airspeed reduces to eighty knots or less after the nose pitches up and both wings stall.'

'And why does the aircraft slow down?'

'Because of the change in momentum of the lift molecules bouncing off the underside of the wing.'

'Who told you that crap?'

'Umm . . . You did, sir . . . ow!' responded the fool as the dipstick descended sharply across his right wrist.

'Always remember,' intoned the captain, emphasising his remark with a wave of the dipstick, 'that in addition to expertise and thoroughness, what distinguishes the Sydney Aerobatic School from others of its kind, is the caring relationship between instructor and pupil.'

'How could I have forgotten?' muttered the pupil, shaking his right hand to relieve the pain.

'Now then,' continued the caring instructor, grinning happily, 'and how do we recover from the spin?'

'I let go of the stick, grip the instrument panel upper edge firmly, and kick in full opposite rudder until the spin stops.'

'And what happens to the pitch as the spin stops?'

'The aircraft pitches down sharply.'

'Why?'

'Conservation of angular momentum.'

'And the formula?'



‘Umm... I... I’ve... er, forgotten’, replied the fool, rapidly folding his arms to protect the wrists and holding the stick with his knees.

‘And what the bloody hell do you think you’re doing?’

‘I always think better when I’m relaxed.’

‘Are you relaxed now?’ inquired the captain as he clipped the dipstick back in its place behind the seat.

‘Yup.’

‘Then get your hands back on the controls and let’s get this over with!’

And so it came to pass that the Robin span precisely as the instructor said it would. Moreover the recovery was quick and easy, with nothing left to do but restart the engine as the plane recovered from the dive.

# The world record that never was

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*by Peter Murphy*

On a warm Friday night in the summer of 1960, a skinny teenage boy stood on a starting block of a 50-metre Olympic swimming pool in Coolangatta, unaware he was about to create history.

Peter Murphy was one of six boys competing in the 14 years and under freestyle final at the annual championships of the Twin Towns amateur swimming club. The starter's gun fired and the boys flew off the blocks as one. It was neck-and-neck for the first 15 metres until Pete literally lifted out of the water and, like a swift-river tinny, motored to the finish in a world record of 16 seconds flat. Unbloody-believable!

The spectators and other poolside competitors couldn't believe what they just witnessed, not to mention the stunned club officials. An excited Pete surged high in the water, celebrating by pumping his fist in the air, knowing he had swum a special time. It was a time that no Olympic champion in decades to follow came within cooee of equalling.

But something wasn't quite right with this astonishing time set by this unassuming catholic boy, and the pool-end timer for Murphy's lane knew it. 'You're disqualified!' he yelled and simultaneously pointed and frowned with rebuke at a wide-grinning Pete, who thought he had just clocked the fastest 50m freestyle in the world for any age.

Too right Pete was disqualified, and he was fully aware he'd cheated. It wasn't planned, yet he seized the moment to celebrate with the gusto of exuberant youth. You see, Pete had

outside assistance from a brilliant swimmer capable of speeds of up to 30 knots – a bottlenose dolphin by the name of Bobo.

An explanation is required here. The swimming club's home base was the then nationally famous southern Gold Coast tourist attraction, the Jack Evans Pet Porpoise Pool, located at the internationally famous Surfrider Beach, Snapper Rocks.

The entrepreneurial Mr Evans set up his marine mammal entertainment facility in the mid 50s, under lease to the Gold Coast City Council. He was the first person in Australia to train a captive dolphin to perform leaping, diving and fish-catching aerobatics in man-made facility for the purpose of public entertainment. That dolphin was Bobo. Soon after, other sea dolphins were captured to join Bobo in the Pet Porpoise Pool. One was named Booboo, another Fifi. They were all Jack's 'pets'. He truly loved them.

Bobo was befriended by Pete when he trained at the pool after school. He would call Bobo to the side of the pool to pat and rub him on the head and belly and occasional give him a little fish to eat, sneakily stolen from the mammal food fridge. The friendship blossomed and whenever Pete arrived at the pool, either for training or to compete, Bobo would sense his presence.

And that's what happened on that warm Friday night of the 1960 club championships. When Pete hit the water in that 50m final, Bobo came up under him and Pete grabbed his dorsal fin with his left hand, and while

pretending to stroke the water with his right hand, his slick mate pulled him to the touch wall in record time. 'Bobo was always the star of the show at the Pet Porpoise Pool, but he didn't take a bow this time,' Pete recalled.

'When I celebrated my win, I saw him pop his head out of the water a little ways down the pool and I could swear he winked at me.

'He was the king of the pool and all the other dolphins mimicked what he did when he was performing his wonderful feats. He was the teacher,' he added.

'What a marvellous creature. He gave so much joy and excitement to tens of thousands of people who went to see him, Booboo and Fifi perform in such a confined space.'

Pete now has misgivings about keeping these extraordinary marine mammals in captivity to be trained to perform at public shows at seaquarium theme parks around the world. Research shows there are more than 120 of them throughout Asia, across Europe, the Americas, Australia and England.

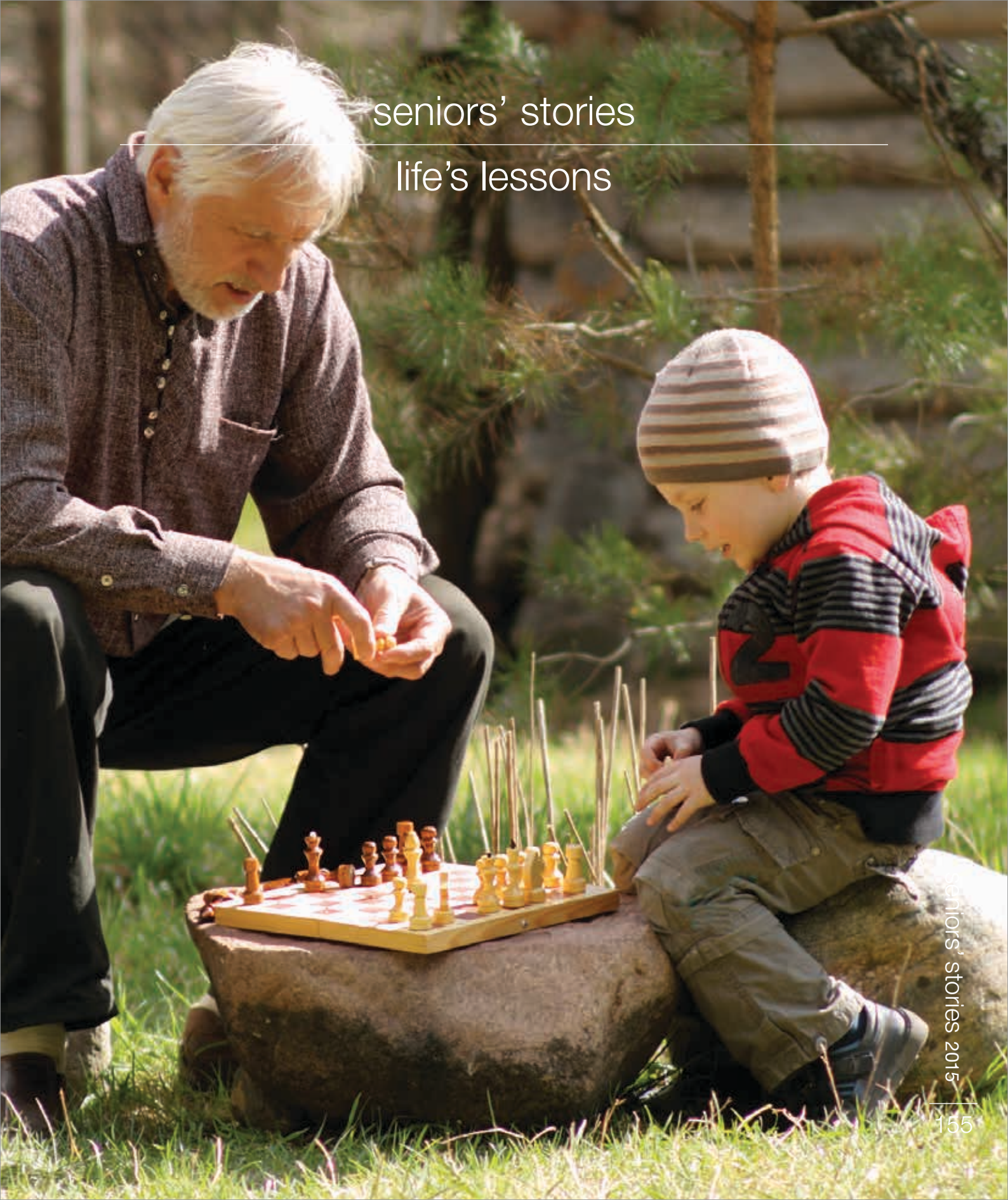
'I truly wish they could all be set free to frolic around in their natural playground – the sea,' the Tweed Heads retiree and best-selling author said.

'I know these seaquariums are marvellous tourist attractions and provide fun for all the family, but it's a shame that these beautiful intelligent dolphins and orca whales have to live in such confined spaces for years and years. It must be stressful for them at times.'



seniors' stories

life's lessons





# Be careful what you wish for

---

*by Elvira Bardon*

Myrna stood at her parents grave, a breeze smelling of wet eucalyptus leaves accompanying her thoughts. Memories, regrets, unanswered questions, bewilderment and despair – a gigantic kaleidoscope of images fusing and circling out.

She remembered the day her father died. He was away on a rare week's break.

Myrna was watering the garden when she saw the flowers on the magnolia tree. Unbelievable! Seven years since they planted the magnolia grandiflora and these the first bloom. She stood under the beautiful tree and saw two immaculate white buds emerging from the glossy deep green of the leaves. What a lovely surprise to welcome father back.

Myrna remembers her thoughts at the time. She had felt so sorry that the day her dad left she had being delayed at work, missed the train and could not be home in time to say goodbye. She particularly wanted to see him before going because she wanted to apologise for the previous night's argument. She had been unreasonable and said things she really did not mean. She knew how disappointed he had looked.

Myrna was looking forward to clear up all misunderstandings and the unexpected surprise of the flowers seemed a good omen.

Then the phone call. A massive stroke. Did not suffer. A good way to go. He would have hated being disabled. And so on, so on and on. Almost identical meaningless words told to her just six months ago when her mother had an infarct while she was teaching at the local primary school.

'A beautiful death', 'doing what she loved'. What about those left behind? The numbness, the sense of a different gravitational system, no balance, nothing is solid ground, all is shifting in some nebulous universe where all the laws have changed, where the silence is deafening and the tears dry.

She knew all about sudden loss: the impotence, the inability to fight, the nightmare quality of losing all in an instant, so unfair, not saying goodbye, not healing old wounds, no opportunity of expressing love, gratitude. The nothing of nothingness.

The familiar chest heaviness and the prayer wish: 'Please don't let me have a sudden death. When my time comes, let it be a predictable death.'

Myrna's friends were always uncomfortable when Myrna talked about her wish to have some warning, a slow disease that gave time to answer questions, resolve and organise, with closure, bucket lists, romantic farewells and opportunity for the family to 'mourn in installments'.

Seven years ago Myrna was diagnosed with breast cancer. Two years later the cancer spread. One month ago Myrna was told to put her affairs in order because options for treatment had been exhausted. Myrna's wish had been granted, but she had not anticipated the infinite sadness of looking at her grandchildren and knowing she will not see them grow up. Will any of them remember her?

The powerless anxiety of thinking and fantasizing who would take her place in her



husband's arms and passion. Who would be there when her children need a mother's strength?

The irrational anger and hostility towards those healthy people, even friends, who dare complain about pitiful trivia.

The depth of the pain of saying goodbye to the simple beauty in her life: the laughter of her grandchildren; the late night jovial tete-a-tete with her children; that cheeky message in her husband's eyes; the delicious tingling on the feet while feeling the sand claimed by the wave; the velvet- soft bark of her favourite tree, inviting touch, giving warmth; the unexpected surprise of seeing an elusive blue wren playing; the melancholic sound of boat masts on late summer sunset.

Myrna wishes she had not wished.

# Eros

---

by Philip Porter

*The wish permission to live fully after the death of my father.*

She straightens the stubborn folds  
in the shirt she is ironing and eyes  
the pile of other people's mess she  
knows will never, never disappear.

She is alone, for the second time.  
Nana is visiting to help her through  
her loss. They keep company with grief  
not each other. A large unimposing

woman, nana speaks the bastard  
Greek of refugees who fled  
Anatolia in the 20s. Forever  
displaced, forever collecting

misery even when there is none.  
She sits and sits and sits in a large  
lounge chair that could be the vehicle  
that brought her here, across ten thousand

miles of sea and land, from the Middle  
East and the middle-ages to her daughter's  
council house of dreams.  
Nana tugs relentlessly at the black

scarf she has worn since the accident.  
Her black and gold rosary hangs,  
exhausted, across her thighs. Since her teens,  
when she had learned to wail at strangers

funerals, her life has been measured  
in crocheted doilies and miserable  
events. She has lost the art of quantifying,  
categorising pain.

It is all cataclysmic spoiled food, a death  
in the family, war, it all rates 10.

Mildred, no longer a wife but a widow, helps  
her mother down the narrow hall  
to her bedroom where a candle throws  
licks of light across the silver encrusted

icon of Jesus, the king of suffering.  
'Come in' it sneers at the learner  
widow, 'join your mother.'

Its spell and Mildred's emptiness  
are broken by the careless crash bang  
of the front door slamming.

I am back from a Friday night's  
marauding reeking of the cheap  
scent of poor girl's sweat  
and Avon calling make up.

I make her a cuppa, in her best  
Royal Dalton, we know this is  
the last of our late night chats.  
She looks me up and down.

A soft, long, mother's smile all the way  
from Smyrna creases the edges of her face;

'Horepse pethi mou  
Horepse'

– dance my son  
dance.

# Growing with grace and ease in our refining years

---

*by John Harradine and Maxwell Ball*

The collage of our lives is coloured with many challenges and blessings, some ordinary, some extraordinary. We are a couple in our refining, not declining years; two men that are in our 20th year together at ages 67 and 65 with five straight sons between us – the Gaydy Bunch.

Between us, the challenges of our collage man: adoption, including finding Maxx's biological mother but with no permission to speak to, or see her; squatting for the first 20 years of my life with eviction threats; a life threatening car accident for Maxx and motor bike crash for me; my experiences with family alcoholism, violence and suicide attempts; divorced parents on both sides, ourselves and some of our children; a full term still born child (it took me nine years to find his grave and have it named – that search changed the system as a result); leaving our children; parental loss early and later in life; strained family relationships at times; the death of long term close friends; retrenchment; business failure; financial loss from superannuation fraud; living off a mortgage in our mid 60s; stroke and spinal damage; not to mention coming out in our mid to late 40s and again in this way now. Just your everyday stuff, eh!

Our blessings are varied and many: two good marriages of 20 years to great women and the raising of five children. Successful business lives for a long time - me in the professional services space internationally, and Maxx in

his own business. We've enjoyed in middle to upper middle socio economic lifestyles for the most part and generally manage our health well (with some hiccups). We have some wonderfully supportive friends - our chosen family, and wonderful relationships with our children. There have been some amazing travel experiences around the world and we still have an intimate life. We cruised on the harbour on our 27-foot Bayliner sports cruiser for many years and had great times, especially on New Year's Eve with friends. We have belief in what's possible for us and above all our commitment to ourselves and each other grows stronger every day.

So how did we get here? A willingness to keep adding to our collage and not be a victim to our setbacks; an attitude of gratitude with some pity partying along the way to keep us balanced and centred - we need both ends of a battery, positive and negative, to have it charged up; a sense of deep loving of life and for each other, notwithstanding societal opinions; the capacity to find a gift in everything; the willingness to dance with our inner demons, and there are many, individually and together; faith in our capacity to meet what is presented to us in life; resilience to get up one more time than we fall; forgiveness of our judgements on ourselves and others, all judgements do is hold us hostage to our story.

Setting ourselves up to create a new part of the collage every day is what it is about and

sometimes that may be a challenge. The gift in that, is we go on, for what else are we to do. It's in the 'how' not the 'if' that we can find our joy in each moment. Most of all an enduring sense of humour is needed. Thank you Mum!

Today we live in a modest three bedroom renovated unit in a lower North Shore suburb which we bought 18 years ago for much less than it is worth today, still with a mortgage, offset by a part pension and a small income from one of us working part time.

When we bought the unit we had been together for eight months, had a difference of opinion, well, an argument – a fight, one of many, which we resolved by buying a fixer upper place together, agreeing we would give the relationship 12 months and if it didn't work out, sell the place and make some money. We renovated the unit and agreed that if one of us disagreed with an item or inclusion the answer to it was 'no' – the unit took us seven years to renovate! We are still here in our 20<sup>th</sup> year with a little help from counselling along the way. Well, maybe more than just a little help!

Maxx has had a recent health setback, a silent stroke two years ago and a serious spinal operation. A hip replacement is likely to follow - par for the course for many people our age. I just keep running around the tennis court! But it shows after I've played, sometimes for days.

There is nothing we go without and we are optimistic about our future and at the same time we can see some financial and potential health challenges ahead, but they

are ahead, they are not here and now, so enjoy the moment. What's that poem? 'The past is history; the future is a mystery; now is the present which is why they call it a gift.'

What we wish for is what we already have: each other, our children and their significant others and family, some amazing friends, a place we both love living in and knowing who we are and content with that, warts and all. Even though there is financial pressure to keep working, I would anyway. It's about putting back as well. What we wish for others is that they know who they are and find inner contentment with themselves and their loved ones. Having it all is loving it all!

Our vision of the future has us recovering from our financial setbacks. We still enjoy travelling, even at this age, especially to the Mediterranean and visiting the USA where two of our sons live. 'Life's a banquet and most poor fools are starving to death' – a quote by Aunty Mame.

Acceptance of what is and following our hearts is how we live our lives to the best of our ability as it unfolds. It doesn't matter what happens to us in life; what matters is what we do with it!

# I wouldn't wish it any other way

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*by Juliet Hutchins*

I have only two memories of my mother. When I was very little a piece, of coal spat from the open fire, Mum was nursing me on her knee, and the coal burned into my foot. She flicked it away quickly but I still bear the scar today. The other is of us four children receiving a quarter piece of apple from our mum, running off to play while Dad sat with her in a place where she was always in bed. Later I would realise it was a hospital bed and my Mum had died from Leukemia, only 31 years old. She left behind a grieving husband and four children, aged two to nine years.

We had tough but good childhoods and we all stayed together as Dad remarried. So many times through life I wished I had a mum to share my life experiences with, all the good and bad times. I knew it was a wish that could never be realised as she was in heaven now, but I've tried to imagine what she would have been like. Mum's siblings were a remarkable presence in our lives, trying to fulfil the wishes of their sister to see us raised well and as happy as possible.

Life progressed as one would imagine – schooling, then finding jobs, dating and finally marriages. Then along came another generation. Many happy years followed as cousins welcomed new cousins and our families grew – years when it was often commented, 'your mother would be so proud of you all.'

My first child, a girl, named Tania was born in 1973, a very healthy little redhead, much like her father Terry. In 1975, I was pregnant again but threatened to miscarry in the early months.

Bed rest was ordered and how I wished and prayed for this little life to hold on. After a few days all was well and things progressed as normal. Joanne was born the most petite and beautiful child.

The girls grew and enjoyed an early childhood in rural surrounds. I would watch as my girls and the neighbours kids would run down the hillside paddocks. Joanne ran like the wind, easily home first every time. It was in these early years I realised I had a tomboy in Tania and a princess in Joanne.

Soon there was school on the horizon for them and as they grew I loved them more every day and never lost sight of what my Mother had missed. I wished her there as I was flying blind with my two little charges. I would think what if the same happened to me as did my mum and hers before her? I couldn't bear to leave them nor did I want a life for them without a mum like I'd had.

In one particular year Joanne was to start school and I would turn thirty one, the same age Mum died. I became very frightened and found myself dwelling on this and many times very tearful. I prayed or wished, 'let me stay with my girls and I will do or endure anything.'

Four months later Joanne became seriously ill and was diagnosed with a rare condition called dermatomyositis, a degenerative muscle disease. My little princess who could run like the wind and wanted to be a ballerina could not carry her own body weight as her muscles slowly wasted away.

Life changed for all of us as I spent many months with Joanne in a Sydney hospital while her condition was managed. She had to endure so many tests and drugs and I knew I had to stay strong for her. This disease stayed active for nearly seven years during which time there were numerous relapses resulting in time in hospital. So together we embarked on the life of chronic illness and all that it entails. Joanne and I were rarely apart. She attended school but needed assistance as now she was confined to a wheelchair.

I didn't say the words out loud, 'be careful what you wish for', but I did think it.

So we lived the best we could under the circumstances. It was a good life, we had been fortunate in many other ways. So much had to be done, but with a positive attitude it all seemed to work out.

Joanne had a twelve month intensive rehabilitation session when she was about 18-years-old. This did not, in the end, result in her being able to walk again, but she gained so much faith in her abilities and a lot of independence. She finished her HSC with an excellent mark. She did volunteer work in Sydney for many years while finally obtaining employment as a communications officer.

We did it all, even several overseas trips. I was determined she would have everything other able people would enjoy meanwhile she indulged herself as any princess would with fashion and all things beautiful.

I wished so often that she didn't have to endure her hardships but nothing would stop

her. She was an inspiration and befriended so many people in her short life. Joanne passed away suddenly in June last year, 33 years to the month after my wish to continue my life with my family.

Now my wish is, 'Mum, look after my little girl'.



# My wish for a better world

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by Lynne Chevor

What an achievement! To reach retirement and become a senior citizen in the greatest country on Earth! Yes, I had many wishes in my childhood as an inner Sydney, working class child from a background of second generation Chinese migrants, wishing to learn more of the world, my part in it and the answer to the age old question, 'what is it all about?'

I have been fortunate to have been born and raised in Australia in an era when life was simpler, less complicated and less hostile than today. Most of my wishes have been fulfilled, although sometimes it's true that one should be careful for what they wish for.

It's been a long and somewhat difficult journey. In my early teens, the desire to travel to Paris, learn French at the Sorbonne and discuss philosophy at the cafes, got distracted by a Hong Kong architecture student in my matriculation year. I wanted to study architecture but he said women get nervous breakdowns from studying like this, so I assisted him in his studies, working on his building models long into the night, and I became a reference librarian instead.

Travel always interested me so I paid for my then fiancé's first trip home after eight years away and my first trip to Hong Kong on a student charter trip in 1971, after which I intended to travel onto Taiwan and Japan. However, his family arranged our marriage within 17 days in a Buddhist style Chinese banquet wedding, expecting me to be the dutiful, obedient wife and bring home a baby after six months for them to look after. At the

time I was naive and only expected marriage and family. My husband, being an ambitious businessman, didn't want children yet, and his large family migrated to Australia to work with us in the restaurants he established. The stress of the business world and restaurants saw us divorce after seven years and I started dreaming.

I had always wanted to go to university, so during the required year of separation before divorcing, I became a mature age student at Macquarie University, studying French and Chinese languages in the hope of becoming a French/Chinese interpreter. But academia was unsuitable for me as it required more discipline than I had, so after a year I left and worked for a merchant bank in the administrative area. The end of a relationship motivated me to travel to New York with the hope of working at the UN or continue working in the merchant banking field, but love again intervened prior to my trip and I returned to Sydney, via London, Paris and Athens after five weeks instead of the intended six months.

My desire to be creative and write a biography entitled *Unbound* of my hard-working and long suffering mother was difficult as I believed one needed more hope and optimism when writing about life, so trying to be creative in the business world motivated my working life for the next 35 years until retirement.

I fulfilled my wish to have a child, not with my husband but with a man whom I thought had strength and spirituality, but really was

selfish and otherworldly. My hope for my son to be independent, self-sufficient and happy seems to be on track, even though there are occasional teething periods.

I am now married to a strong, Aussie man with a bush background and farm on the mid north coast with cattle, pigs and trees. There is more light ahead, metaphorically speaking. My answer to the age old question 'what is it all about' seems to becoming fulfilled. I hope to explore more of the world and reinforce my belief that life is part physical and part spiritual – combining mind, body and soul.

I would like the world to be in a better state and, as physical and spiritual beings, we have to learn to respect each other and look after the earth if we are to survive. Education and empathy are part of the solution. I hope that our generation can engender some wisdom and common sense into current and future generations, not to always follow the rules, but to believe in your intuition and develop your conscience and awareness. The threat of terrorism, waning economies and global warming is ever present and I wish that our leaders, society and community can steer us through these troubled times.

# Please bring flowers

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by Jenny England

It's Saturday morning. I am curled up on my lounge in my pajamas perusing my local paper. A fresh breeze from the balcony is keeping me cool. I've flipped through the local news, quickly glanced at a few ads and have now reached the classified section, more specifically the death notices: an ideal place to observe some of the essential issues of life.

I scan the names. No-one I recognize, not today anyway. I hastily collate the ages of the recently departed and am relieved to find the largest group has passed away in their 80s with the second largest group, in their 90s. Into these groups I also include any references to great-grandmother/father (and occasionally grandmother/father). These figures seem to confirm the significant increase in life expectancy over the last 50 years, and align somewhat with national statistics collated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. I relax a little. I have only just entered my seventh decade.

There are a few notices that mention the cause of death. However, further down in many of the notices where the funeral arrangements are being outlined, often the words 'in lieu of flowers' appears, then, 'please consider a donation to Alzheimer's Australia', or 'The Heart Foundation', or 'The Cancer Council', or one of the many other worthy disease fighting research related charities. But something bothers me here. I ask myself: when did we decide to stop adorning funerals and houses of loved ones with flowers in times of mourning and choose to instruct others to make donations instead?

I tear myself away from the comfortable lounge and turn to Google for help. According to a number of websites, flowers have long been associated with funerals, to signify beauty and love and as a symbol of immortality – the transitory nature of life. Further investigation takes me to Wikipedia. Here I am informed that the phrase 'In lieu of flowers' has been included in obituaries and funeral notices for over 100 years. Further along it adds that currently up to 80% of these also include a similar directive.

From the very moment I was diagnosed with cancer nearly four years ago, my thoughts turned to the inevitability of my eventual passing. For comfort and faith in this troubling time I referred to *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Then I was able to unwind and let the future take its own course. The prognosis for the particular type of cancer wasn't reassuring and every visit to a medical practitioner since my treatment keeps reminding me of that fact.

'Are you still here?' Although not specifically articulated, it seems to be a common sentiment behind questions raised at each half-yearly check-up. 'I certainly am', I always reply with my body language, hiding my obsession with death and funeral notices in newspapers behind a wry smile.

Despite the medical profession's statistical analysis of my odds of survival I continue to maintain enough fine health to continue to ponder my mortality. It bothers me no end that flowers are no longer seen as an integral part

of the funeral service and grieving process for family and friends. While I have no objection to anyone making a donation to a worthy cause on my behalf on my passing, I still fancy flowers at my funeral, lots of them. I've told this to everyone close to me. So central to and highlighted in my future funeral notice will be the words 'please bring flowers'. While I will not be there to enjoy them I am savouring the thought already, in the here and now.

# The wish

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by Denise Alice Nisbet Wallis

As a child I lived in a tiny fibro house on a dirt road in Toongabbie; today I'm typing on an iPad with a view of Brisbane Water from my bedroom window. You already have an idea of the changes I've seen in my lifetime! Wishes? Oh, I wish and wish I could see the changes that will affect the world over the next 70 years! Will they be as great and exciting as those I have seen in my lifetime?

When I was very small my family lived in Toongabbie. The Toogalal were unhappy that Europeans had settled there and a hero named Pemulwuy persuaded local tribes to initiate a campaign to oust these newcomers. Aboriginal folk were mystified by us – the harshness with which some members of our tribe treated others, our custom of land ownership and farming.

We used trains, buses and trams to get around as few people owned cars. A trip to the dentist (a Dr Teeful, which I thought it hilarious) was a bus trip to Toongabbie station and a steam train to Granville. I'd leave the window open so I could smell the smoke and steam and the cinders flying by. Change for the train to Central and then another bus ride across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. I would sit at the top of the double-decker bus so I could see everything: a sleek grey transport ship owning the water; a sailboat bobbing nearby like a puppy begging for attention; the green and yellow ferries ploughing purposefully between North and South shores.

I remember the feeling of flying high between the arched struts overhead, the road disappearing under the bus. This was high

adventure. We went to David Jones for a special lunch and I always had a meat pie and peas. I was then allowed a book or two: *Ben and Bella on the Farm* – red-cheeked, tubby figures, happy with their fruit trees and farm animals. Later, I became an Enid Blyton fan. Now we read on electronic devices, even the children. One click and you have a brand new book. What a miracle.

Travel has changed, certainly. Going to Adelaide by train was an adventure. The train sat in the station blowing little puffs of smoke, our excitement puffing along with it. Our sleeper car had a beautiful wood interior. There was a little loo and pull-down sink, bunk beds looking neat and clean. We boarded, waving goodbye and blowing kisses. Watching the countryside flow by, the gum trees silvered by a full moon. The outback kids came to watch the train pass, hanging barefoot on the fence, waving and waving. There were horses and sheep in their paddocks and a few dogs with them – such a different life from mine. I wanted to be one of them instead of an ordinary city girl. Nowadays a train trip is a sort of holiday; most people fly.

After school I went to my aunty's house. Her neighbour had a sulphur-crested cockatoo in a cage. The parrot was a great mimic. The phone would ring and the cockatoo would call out, 'Mrs G, you're wanted on the phone', sounding just like the neighbour. Aunty would always run out to get her phone call.

My cousin made billycarts and we'd whizz down the footpath on them, hair streaming

out, trying madly to steer a straight line. Laughing and frightened at the same time. Then we'd lug the billycart back up the hill and do it all over again. What a thrill. Billycarts are part of Australian history. A quote from the Sydney Morning Herald, 1932: 'The serenity of Elizabeth Bay has been seriously disturbed by the heavy holiday traffic of billycarts'

And the Women's Weekly: 'Police, who have received numerous reports of robberies, have been surprised to find that numbers of thefts have been committed by boys who wished to assemble billycarts'. A billycart was heaps more fun than the motorized play toys children have today.

The biggest changes in my lifetime have been in transport and technology. Who would have believed it? Instead of sailing boats or steam ships, we fly for convenience and go on cruises for holidays. These lovely cruising ships! The sense of space and light and luxury. Cheerful smiling staff, white linen and silverware on the tables in the dining rooms, lovely ballrooms, the big theatre, beautiful decks by the swimming pool or sauna, comfortable cabins with a towel sculpture made each evening by the cabin attendants. Oh, it is lovely.

What beauty and change and growth will happen in all the years to come? I wish I could go on this journey. To know what happens tomorrow, and the next day, and the next? I can't even begin to imagine.



# Well, I never!

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*by Lyn Taylor*

I am an only child who married an only child. And, as fortune would decree, we had an only child.

Considering the slings and barbs I've faced, I think I've coped reasonably well with the hand that fate dealt me. At the time, I didn't fully understand that the generation coming out of the Great Depression thought only children were spoiled. I believe that we handle things the way we do because we don't know any better.

Mainly, there were no trailblazers in my childhood – no big brother or sister to warn me of the downsides or the joys of the various activities ahead: school, Sunday school, guides and everything that happened before I started work. I queued up for many strange activities. I would eventually find some joy in my blunders and can honestly say that it all worked out reasonably well. I don't think I could have represented the school in anything other than the sack race and softball anyway! I was very lucky to pal up with three girls in my first year at high school and we have remained in touch ever since. We went everywhere together, so we became known as 'the terrible four' – in those days that expression had friendly connotations. These days it would mean we should be avoided at all costs. Because of these friendships, I find it difficult to imagine what the bullying problem is today. We would have defended each other vigorously whatever the situation!

My work and early married life were splendid and, in no way, hampered by the lack

of siblings. Benefit could have been gained by a brother with attractive mates – in personality and habits only of course! And plenty of extra siblings would have been useful to flesh out the wedding party! My husband and I would have loved a big family but it just wasn't meant to be.

It has been the later years that have given me cause to lament the lack of family. My parents and in laws, my husband, plus an aunt on my mother's side all died. This left me with my only son who was in the Australian Defence Force. Not only was he rarely at home, but he wasn't going to give me grandchildren! He assured me it wasn't because of his childhood or our parenting. It was because he thought children were a nuisance. I couldn't think of a strong argument against this one.

My ordinary health has given me some lonely moments, and, at times, I was a little melancholy when I would have appreciated being with a close relative or someone who may have felt it was compulsory that the 'old girl' have company. I have hopefully survived that segment of my life and look forward to being the very best Nanny Lyn ever for my three grandchildren under four years of age. As I said, we just never know, do we? My son thinks he invented fatherhood after he met the perfect mother for his beautiful nuisances!

# I wish I could have grown old with you

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by Colin Begg

With the loss of my life-long friend and lover and a stampede to maturity, I have come to accept the cards I've been dealt. I've seen a number of dear friends leave this world far too soon. Before they could understand the great satisfaction and freedom that comes with ageing – satisfaction in raising a loving family and the ability to do what you want to do, when you want to do it.

When we learned of your diagnosis, your courage to tackle those difficult decisions was nothing short of amazing. How does one face the prospect of living with a terminal disease? 'Easy,' you said, 'just get on with life.'

To honour your advice, I've done just that: I've sipped espresso in Assisi; I've wept tears at Gallipoli Cove; I've seen the Northern Lights in the Arctic Circle; I've eaten frikadeller smorrebrod in Denmark, fine chocolate in Zurich and bean soup in Hanoi; and I've driven around Australia. After all, you told me to keep on travelling. Your sage advice was, as usual, thoughtful, thorough and therapeutic.

When I now look back on our first tentative discussions after your diagnosis, I wish every person on this planet would think about and document their wishes for terminal care treatment – home, hospice, residential aged care facility or hospital. The professional care, the passion and the support of palliative care and end of life care doctors and nurses can vastly improve the quality and span of your life. They provided us enormous reassurance, as we faced and fought your disease as a team. That care allowed you to fulfil your wishes.

Yes, we were scared. We were anxious. We were worn out. But with the help of the palliative care angels and our family, I think we managed to meet all your wishes. And yes, I am eternally grateful for that precious time together when we could have those difficult conversations about our respective futures.

I've tried hard not to become a grumpy, old widower, but I'm not sure I've succeeded terribly well. Sometimes I think I can be just a little forgetful. But then again, some of life's experiences are just as well forgotten; others can be enjoyed over and over again. And, eventually, I think I remember most of the important things.

I am so blessed to have lived long enough to have (slightly) more than one chin, to see my hair turn silver and for my belly laughs to be forever etched into deep lines on my face. So many people I knew never had the opportunity to savour these experiences.

As I get older, it's easier to be more positive. I care less about what other people might think, say and do. I don't judge myself and I try not to judge others. I don't question myself as much as I used to, but I've even earned the right to be wrong sometimes – not that I'd admit it too often.

I miss you every minute of every day and I wish I could have grown old with you. I like being old. You would enjoy it too. While I loved my previous life, I now accept my current life. I have learned lessons from your passing that I have put into practice. Everything has been thoroughly thought about, talked about

and documented for when I too finally fall off the perch, the timing of which is entirely out of my control, so again, why worry. 'Just get on with life', as you said!

# I am a wish winner

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by Coral Myers

This is a true story, I hope you enjoy it. I was inspired to write it when I read *I Am a Victor*, by Geraldine Koh, downloaded from last year's wonderful stories. Geraldine's story is of her process from being totally confused to being self-empowered by the three Rs: reflect, renew and rebuild. My story is about my process to winning which is made up of the four Ws: want, wish, work & win.

I was born in a small country town in NSW on 16 September 1934, the youngest of my father's 12 children. His first wife died giving birth to their last baby who was taken to be reared by the maternal grandmother. As was quite common in those days, my father remarried and three more baby girls were followed. I am sure my mother loved my father, it seemed everyone did, and I'm sure my father loved my mother. We were raised in a happy home with music, singing and laughter. Even though my early years were spent living through the Great Depression and the tragic years of World War II, my memories are of fun and laughter.

Dad used to take me and my sisters, Elaine and Dawn, with him when he was shearing sheep, probably to give my mother a little respite. We three children would happily sit in the front of the truck with dad who taught us songs and poems. He paid us tuppence a day to jump up and down in the wool bales. Very few farmers had wool presses in those days.

Elaine and Dawn couldn't wait to go to the little town store to buy lollies, ribbons or books. But no, not me! Although Dad bought

me lollies anyway. I was very happy to keep my money, content to know that one day I would be able to buy something I really wanted and wished for. I would spend time counting it and trading it back to dad for silver money so I could play with it. The shillings were mummies, the two shillings daddies, the sixpences little girls and the threepences baby girls. The pennies were soldiers, the halfpennies little boys and the farthings baby boys. I made cots, trucks and furniture from empty match boxes.

Sadly, my father died on the 30 December 1940 when I was six years old. This didn't seem to affect me at the time as his death and his funeral were not explained to me. I just knew something was wrong and wondered at my mother's tears and why she was always dressed in a black dress and when we went out her hat was covered with a black veil. And why did my teachers quietly hug me when they welcomed me back to school and have tears in their eyes? I thought he must have been away at the war, as were most of my school friends' dads. No one seemed to have a daddy. Or perhaps he had just gone droving or working on another property as he sometimes did.

I still think of him often and sing the songs he taught me. In time, most of my stepbrothers and sisters left home. The girls worked as housemaids and the boys worked on various farms and later some joining the military services. My father died intestate and in debt, having built a large house to fulfil the needs of a large family. My mother decided to leave our country home and moved to the city to be

close to her parents and relatives. I remember we walked to the railway station, my mother carrying one suitcase and we three little girls carrying a parcel of clothing, perhaps a much loved ornament, a book or a toy, wrapped in newspaper.

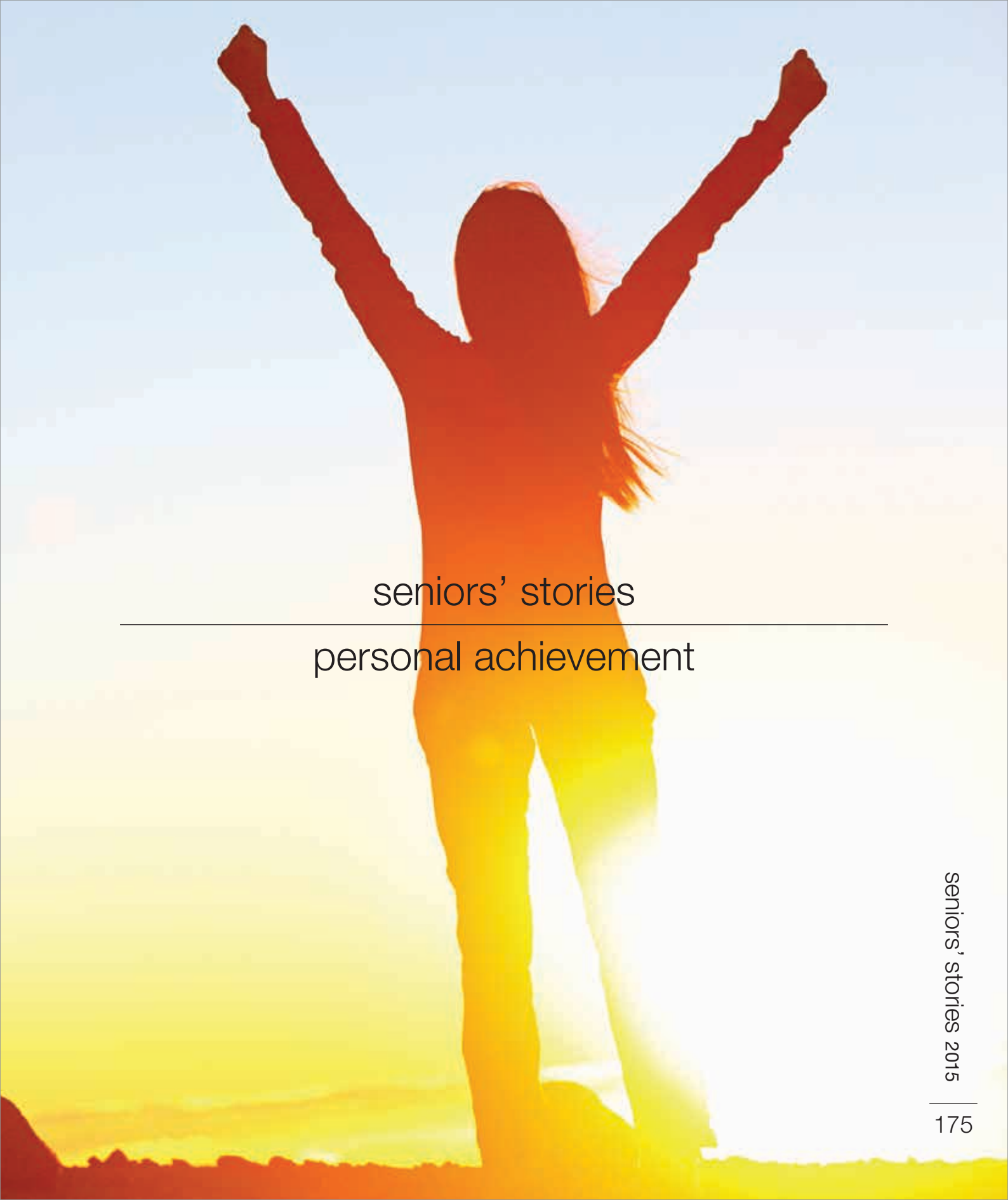
Mum had only one wish and that was to work to be able to build a little house for us. I was aged about nine then and she found employment and worked so hard until her wish came true. My mother made sure we had high levels of education, piano and even dancing and elocution lessons (coming from an outback farm we really needed these lessons) on her days off she went to a business college to learn typing and bookkeeping and also speech therapy to overcome her Australian outback accent. My sisters and I admired her and acknowledged and appreciated her ways. I started working on weekends and school holidays when I was 12 years old.

I have had a wonderful life. I have not missed out on anything I wanted or wished for. I enjoyed working to achieve it. I met my beautiful husband Bruce when I was 13 years old and he was 17 years old. We married four years later. He was truly a wonderful man – a real gentleman and a gentle man. Unfortunately, he died of a massive stroke in 2008. We had been married for nearly 56 years. We had everything we had ever dreamed of, three healthy children of whom I am very proud. We loved moving about and owned beautiful properties, holiday houses, cars, boats, caravans, overseas holidays, cruises. Amazing,

but true! We had everything we wished for. Everything life had to offer and most important of all, eternal love.

Alas, with the loss of my soul mate, and most of my family and friends for the last seven years, my life has been clouded with grief, depression and loneliness as well as the miserable medical problems of old age. However I am now inspired to want, wish, work and win to adjust to my circumstances and live to appreciate all the good things life has to offer.

So, thank you Geraldine Koh for your inspiration and thank you the Seniors Card team for the opportunity to tell my story. I wish you all a happy, healthy life!



seniors' stories

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personal achievement





# The 1957/58 rowing season

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*by Steve Roll*

As a young boy I dreamed about being an Australian international, not in anything particular. It wasn't even a definite wish – just a vague dream.

In May 1952 I started rowing at Leichhardt Rowing Club. I enjoyed it so much that I stuck with it and achieved reasonable success. Five years later in 1957 I was selected to represent New South Wales in the Australian Eight Oar Championship which was held in Brisbane and we finished second.

Shortly after at the Leichhardt Rowing Club annual meeting, I was elected club captain. I thanked the members for their confidence and told them that my priority for the season was to win the state premiership, and that I would do whatever it took to achieve that end.

I was a reasonably competent second grade sculler at that time so I started in the first grade singles races, as well as any other possible events, to get more premiership points.

Our club senior coach, Eric Longley, approached me and told me that he wanted to select a club eight for the NSW Commonwealth Games test race in October and that this crew would only race in eights and in no other boats. I could see his point, and the premiership was drifting away from us, but the men he wanted had done good service for the club over the years and deserved the opportunity, so I agreed.

Eric also then told me that he wanted me to stroke the crew. I told him that I felt I had to race in as many events as possible for

premiership points, so I declined. Eric then became the state selector and I was offered a seat in the state crew – again I declined.

I was selected in a club four to contest the State Fours Championship over 2000 metres in December while on the same day, the State Singles over 2000 metres was run. I took part in, and won, both events – the first time in the history of NSW rowing that this had been done.

In early 1958, I was selected in the club crew to contest the State Three Mile Championship on the same day as the Three Mile Single Sculls. I protested the selection. It was one thing to compete in two 2000 metre events, quite another to do so in two three milers (5000 metres).

I remember being told: 'Remember that you said you would do whatever it took? This is what it takes; we don't have anybody else with enough experience to row three miles.'

I was hoist by my own petard, so, against my better instincts, I took part. The combined contests were gruelling, but with a lot of effort and pain, we claimed first in both events – only the second time in the history of NSW rowing that this had been done. The state eight trained on, and Peter Evatt injured his back, I was offered the seat and again declined.

The crew then went to Ballarat, won the Australian test race and became the Australian eight for the 1958 Commonwealth Games. One of the crew, John Gray, then developed appendicitis and had to withdraw. I was offered the seat and, though I was very reluctant to do so, I declined. Peter Evatt recovered from his

back injury and we combined to win the State Doubles Championship in March 1958.

The winning of the State Three Mile Singles made me the state sculler for the Australian Championship at Penrith in May 1958, and I won this event by five lengths. However, this win did not result in my selection to the Games team as the Australian sculler. The Olympic silver medallist in 1956, Stewart MacKenzie, had already been selected and I knew of this beforehand so it didn't bother me.

For me, the end of a very successful season, I thought. The club had won the premiership, we had eight of our members on the Commonwealth Games team and eleven of our members had achieved State representation. Personally, I had won five state and one Australian championship.

On the Monday night after the Australian Singles I was in my father's shop helping out with my elder brother when the phone rang. It was Harold Alderson, President of the Australian Commonwealth Games Federation. He informed me that the bow man of the Australian pair, Jim Chapman, was unable to go to the Games and his partner, Kevyn Webb, wished me to take his place.

I was shell shocked. However, in those days there was very little support from the government and the responsibility for raising funds for any overseas trip fell on the sport, who in turn passed it on to the team members.

Most of my family were gathered around me as I stood with the phone. 'Dad, can we

raise enough money to send me to the Games?' I asked my father. My brother, Frank, yelled out. 'Yes! Yes! I'll raise the money to get you away!' And he did. So, at Lake Padarn, North Wales, on 22-7-1958 my team and I competed and won bronze.

My vague dream had become reality.

# A rugby dream come true

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*by Chris Lloyd*

All my school days I was an avid St. George rugby league team fan. Growing up in the St George area, footballers were my heroes: Gasnier, Provan, Raper and Brian 'Poppa' Clay. I grew up wishing I could play alongside them. I ran around my backyard, pretending I was a half-back like Billy Smith, feeding scrums by throwing a football against the base of our Hills Hoist and sprinting from the backyard to the front yard pretending, I had skipped away from the scrum, beaten the cover defence and would score in the corner of the front garden. Red and white was a part of me and all my friends and all our families.

While I only played league at high school – and not very well – we had a fantastic P.E. teacher named Jack Danzey, who was playing for Balmain at the time – a real footballer. Our lessons, summer and winter always ended up in a game of 'touch' on the bitumen surfaced playground. We all loved it and Mr. Danzey (as we had to call him) played with us and taught us so much about the game.

In 1965, when I was an apprentice electrician, one of the tradesmen I worked with lived near me and offered me a lift to work each day. His name was Hal and he was a bit of a hero where we worked as he was playing on the wing for the Dragons.

In the second year of my apprenticeship, Hal decided to get me to play league and with some coaching from him and (I suspect) some behind the scenes negotiating I found myself playing C-grade (under 18s) for the local team, Ramsgate United. Their strip was identical to

the St. George one and I was so proud to be wearing such magnificent colours. My wish was closer to coming true.

Ramsgate was a very strong club and had won many premierships against our greatest rival, the famous Renown Club. Everyone wanted to play for either Ramsgate or Renown. The match of the round was always played at Jubilee Oval, St. George's home ground, on a Sunday, and we would get changed in the same dressing rooms as our heroes. Each time I got to play at Jubilee Oval it was like going to church.

Unfortunately, I was an average player in a team of champions, many of whom the following year went on to play with the Dragons. In a season of twenty-or-so games I played only one in the run-on-side and a half-game from the bench. But we won the competition and at presentation night I was presented with my premiership blazer with the record of the deed emblazoned on the pocket.

I felt a bit of a fraud but the club president, Ronny Hayes, pulled me aside on the night and reminded me that it was a team game and by being a reserve everyone knew that there was someone wanting their position and so they played better. I am not sure how true that was but at the time it cheered me up.

The following years 1967-68 I went up to the Ramsgate B-grade side (under 21s) and got a few more starts but was never good enough to be a regular run-on player.

At the start of the 1969 season I was determined to be a better player. We lived next to Bexley golf course and each night I

would take my border collie Bruin and run laps around the golf course.

When training began I was fighting fit and I set myself the task of being a first-pick in the Ramsgate B-grade team. I was playing in the centre in those days; my dream of being a halfback had faded with an inevitable teenage growth spurt that brought me up to 6 feet tall. Halfbacks in those days were short and nippy, and built like tree stumps, so it was the centre for me.

One of my Friday afternoon drinking mates was a young up-and-coming referee in the St. George District. He suggested I try-out for the St. George President's Cup team (under 21s) and get fit enough for the trials by training with the district team. In those days if you were a registered junior you just turned up and asked for a trial.

On Mondays and Wednesdays I trained hard. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I went down to Jubilee Oval where I got to run around on the hallowed turf, chatting with other young hopefuls and playing touch football with the gods: Raper, Smith, Hawthorne and others. We did conditioning work under Kenny Boothroyd and sprint work under Cec King (Johnny's dad), and the third grade coach, Brian 'Poppa' Clay.

My football skills improved, as did my speed, strength and fitness. Trials for us lower graders started early but when they were over we got to hang around and watch the first grade and we didn't have to pay to get in! Eventually, if you were good enough you would move up

through the trial teams and maybe make the third grade run-on team, which I managed to do in the last trial against Cronulla.

After this trial match the club gradings for the season were announced at training, Tuesday night, pinned to the notice board in the visitors' dressing rooms under the Jubilee Oval Stand. With my heart in my mouth I looked for my name and found it down the bottom in the 'to train on' section. The chairman of selectors, Bill Summerell, called us over and told us that to 'train on' meant we were in the mighty St. George Dragons team.

I realised as I stood outside Jubilee oval on the cooling autumn night that I had made it. I didn't last long in the show. Good enough to make it; not good enough to stay. But what a time it was – a wish come true.

# My story

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*by Faith Gibson*

A child of the depression, born in February 1931, I was christened Faith – a sure sign of my mother’s desperation as she struggled to make ends meet with my father unemployed and two other small children to feed. I was raised in Melbourne to where my parents had moved hoping my father could find work after the family property was repossessed by the banks and my parents learned to cope with having ‘come down in the world’, an experience which cast its long shadow over my early life.

When a family relative offered Dad a job on his wheat farm we moved north to Tamworth and we children enrolled in the local one teacher school where fun and freedom prevailed and lessons made little impact. After a year, my father, a most un-mechanical man became a Singer sewing machine agent and we moved to Moree where the family fortunes slowly improved and values of thrift and hard work prevailed. Ours was an unpretentious but hospitable home where my parents did the best they could for us three children. As the youngest, I think I got the best deal and the best education with my final two years being spent at Armidale High School, a mind stretching, immensely enjoyable environment where I learned that most things, but not everything, was possible provided you worked hard.

I had hoped to become a doctor, a wish frustrated by an otherwise laudable school that permitted a science teacher to refuse to have a lone girl in his physics class and by so doing preventing me from entering medicine. Instead

at 17 I set off to Sydney University on a public service cadetship by which I was contracted to do four years of arts and social work followed by five years of indentured labour in the then NSW Child Welfare Department. This turned out to be a sensible, if challenging career choice that I never regretted. Uni was marvellous fun, child welfare work mind blowing and life expanding. I eventually bought my release from the cadetship by swapping my public service super of \$99 for a final ninth year of freedom, a move that enabled me to become a research assistant and later a social worker in the remedial education centre at the University of Queensland.

All young Australians then, and probably now, wished for overseas experience and I did too. A Fulbright scholarship in 1958 took me to the University of Chicago for postgraduate studies in social work – a truly life changing year that I intended would be followed by taking up a recently awarded three year doctoral fellowship. Unexpectedly I met an Ulsterman, an economics student, Norman Gibson from County Fermanagh in Northern Ireland and changed my plans. A whirlwind romance, a small New York wedding, an unforgettable honeymoon in New England and setting sail for Ireland began the next phase of my life when Norman taught at Queens University, Belfast and I worked as a psychiatric social worker.

After a time in Manchester we returned to Northern Ireland in 1967 to share in the foundation of the New University of Ulster



which later became the University of Ulster. On the beautiful north coast we raised a family and lived through 'the Troubles' which engulfed Northern Ireland and ruined so many lives over some 35 years. My husband and I wished, longed for this strife torn country and all its people to live in peace, to cease to feel threatened by others who happened by accidents of birth or life to hold views different from their own. Norman, a university leader, played an active public role as a sane liberal critical voice in this bitterly divided country. This inevitably brought its share of threat and criticism, but many courageous friends who also struggled to hold the middle ground.

After raising three children, all of whom sadly left Northern Ireland as so many middle class children did in those troubled years, I resumed an academic and professional life, returning to teaching, research and writing and eventually becoming a professor of social work. Many opportunities came my way to participate in health and social services policy development and research, and especially to advocate for better recognition of the needs of older people, particularly those with dementia and for the wider use of reminiscence and life story work as valuable techniques for enriching the lives of people of all ages. The Reminiscence Network Northern Ireland, of which I am the founding president, is continuing to help to make these simple creative approaches more widely used throughout the island of Ireland.

Active retirement brought many chances to continue our academic and community

interests, to visit family members living abroad and to participate in cross-community peace building efforts, still much needed in a country deeply divided by differences of religion, politics and for some, limited life opportunities. Then came a time of increasingly demanding caring responsibilities when towards the end I wished my beloved husband of some 56 years would die and so be released from the awful diminishment that Alzheimer's inexorably brings and as I doubted my own capacity to cope with the long haul this wretched disease inevitable involves. There is unfortunately still no easy way through this journey of dementia and Norman's last months were terrible for him and taught me much about myself.

Last year with the conferment of an honorary doctorate of the University of Stirling my absence of a PhD was made good – although some may say I became a doctor the easy way and certainly had gone about it the long way round and taken my time to get there! After Norman's death and an absence of nearly 57 years last November, I returned to live in Sydney, joining two of our three children and all four grandchildren who were already well established here and doing well.

Now at 85, two wishes remain – to find new age-appropriate ways of contributing to my family and hopefully my local community, and finally that I, and others too in later life, each in our various ways, may come to find 'peace at the last'.

# My 60<sup>th</sup> birthday wish

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*by Boni Maywald*

In May 2013, I made a special wish on my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. About 30 friends and family were with me, and helped blow out the candles on a beautiful choc-strawberry cake. Since that day, they have also helped to see my wish come true.

The wish was for a chance to help Australians better understand the impact of World War I. To do this, on my sixtieth birthday, I launched a mini social movement and called it 'PeaceKnits' (not to be confused with the 60s 'peaceniks' movement!).

My wish was for any friends, family and others with an interest in helping with PeaceKnits, to meet once a month. Since May 2013, we have been doing this – meeting at our cottage for a chat, to knit, write and prepare for a one day PeaceKnits pop-up event that would take place in April 2015.

Incredibly, the wish has grown with friendly support so that we now have 42 major pieces of knit art and word art about the year 1915. These will be on display, plus a range of all-age interactive writing and craft, as part of our free open cottage garden pop-up event.

Our first joint effort was to knit a seven-metre high Lone Pine pole cosy. This will be mounted on an unused utility pole in our cottage garden, and after the event will be left on the pole for birds to nest in.

We have hand-knitted 100 wash cloths, as was done to send to Australian soldiers sent to war. These have been made into 'one giant washcloth for mankind' to display on the day. We have also hand-stitched 100 potholders, to remind us of the women who were left to

manage on the home front. And, yes, these have been made into 'one giant potholder for womankind.'

We have made a photo quilt to help tell the forgotten story of the 1200 women from all sides of the war who went to The Hague in 1915 to call for more peaceful ways of settling international disputes.

We have made a blackout curtain in the design of a rose window to remind us of all the people and built structures across Europe damaged from aerial bombings.

We have been told incredible stories from 1915 that have changed families' lives. We have seen a pair of mittens that were sent to Martin Collins in 1915 on the Western Front. He valued them so much for helping him get through the severe European winter in the trenches, that he hand stitched his initials on each mitten. They were returned to his family, as part of his few belongings, after his death during the war.

One of our regular knitters was born in Amsterdam in 1940, in occupied Holland. Her story, and those of other Dutch and Belgian women, have filled our monthly chats with the realities of war for families and communities as well as for enlisted personnel.

With only seven weeks now to our event in April I have to type last minute arrangements with one hand as I recently broke my wrist. All the large displays have been made – thanks to the efforts of many – so in spite of injury, my birthday wish will come true.

On 11 April, we will remember the ongoing impacts of past conflicts and help ourselves and others better understand how to work for sustainable peace.

# My dream job

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*by Maxwell R. Watson*

I finally had the perfect job for me, though it had taken more than 30 years and a good deal of wishing and hard work.

I began as an apprentice electrical fitter – work I truly hated and I always wished for something better. Following this, I moved into the sound industry, and while this proved to be very interesting, it was also underpaid. So, once again I changed career decided to and fulfil a life long passion to be a minister of religion.

After serving at several churches over a 20 year period, experiencing some very tough times as I did so, I resigned, certain that all would be right in the end. Ultimately it was as I landed a position leading an international children's gift project with an international aid organisation. I found myself flying to various exotic locations around Asia, talking with our country local partners, all the while managing a project that had been in the red, financially, for six years. The chairman of the board of directors told me that I had full authority I just had to complete the project within the budget provided.

I had a warehouse and manager in each state. These wonderful people had been treated poorly and significantly undervalued in the past and they also wished for a wage that reflected the considerable amount of time and effort they expended in serving the organisation. I arranged for them all to come to Sydney so we could get to know each other and allow me to make it clear that I was not going to bully or undervalue them. We had a wonderful time and we went our separate ways safe in the knowledge that I was not just

on their side, but was going to do my best to make substantial changes that would benefit everyone.

I was fortunate to meet a couple who were interested in our work and also happened to be very wealthy. After a few meetings, getting to know me and hearing my stories, they offered to help. This came in the form of goods and warehouse space which made what we were trying to achieve that much easier.

I had more than a 30 cubic meters of stuff to unpack, sort and distribute around the country. It was wonderful to have so much but it also highlighted a big problem. While I was the national manager, I had a personal assistant and by the middle of the year I had two, but I did not have a warehouse person – I was doing this work myself. No, I didn't have the time to carry out that all important role, but I really enjoyed moving the pallet loads of stuff from one place to another, packaging and sending, loading and unloading trucks. I loved it. My problem was that the task was much bigger than one person. I pleaded with the new executive director to let me have this extra worker, but he refused. So I continued to work the 15-hour days, seven days a week. I was determined to turn this project around.

I fostered a wonderful relationship with the international head office in the United States and those guys bent over backwards to help me. It was not uncommon for me to be in my office at 7am and to phone the international director or his second in

command. They were both supportive, helpful and encouraging.

The gift boxes we provided to the needy were distributed across the world in the months of December and January. I went from New Guinea to Indonesia to Thailand, Cambodia then on the Vietnam. It was exhausting as well as demanding. When all the dust settled and I was sleeping in my own bed again, we tallied everything up and I had done it, the project had made the budget, for the first time ever in Australia and a turning point for the project. The board of directors were impressed, but not sufficiently impressed to give me the staff I wanted for the following year.

The second year began much the same as the first year did, with me working far too many hours. However, this year I had been proven successful and the guys in the U.S. were as happy for me as I was. They even admitted that they thought what I had achieved would have been impossible. In this second year I was expected to travel even more, including meeting the teams in each country to debrief on their effort and help them reach a higher level of sustainability. It was during this process in Cambodia that I suffered a massive stroke.

That night I was flown to Bangkok and was admitted to the Bumrungrad International Hospital. I was there for a week as it took time to organise both the flight home and for further care. When I flew back to Sydney I was transported to Westmead Private Hospital, where I stayed for two weeks before being moved to a rehabilitation hospital. I never

regained and use of my left arm and my left leg is not much use. Although we wished for a better outcome, the result is that I suffer from left side paralysis.

However, life goes on. I wish to live a full life, enjoying my family and pursuing my passions of writing and painting.

# Perchance to dance

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by Elizabeth Peterson

‘Has good sense of rhythm – enjoys these games,’ wrote my kindergarten teacher in her firm copperplate hand on my first report. How I loved the sounds of music – always joyfully dancing to radio or gramophone, despite my knock knees and flat feet.

Rejecting medical advice to have my legs broken and reset, my parents enrolled me in weekly ballet lessons held after hours in that small school. Our teacher was a petite lass from the local ballet academy. As we bounced around the big classroom doing *pas de chat*, lumpy navy uniforms tucked into bloomers, black slippers tied on with cotton tape, I fervently wished I could be a ballerina, dressed like Miss Carole in pale blue tunic, pink tights and shoes.

A year later, knees now knocked into straight submission, Mama and I went to enrol in the academy’s Saturday morning classes. Wide-eyed, I watched the big girls, in pale blue tunics, pink tights and pink shoes ascending crabwise the stairs from the change rooms below the hall. Soon I would be one of them!

But oh! My distress and disbelief when at home my mother unwrapped the parcel of prescribed clothes – shades of the Imperial Russian Ballet! I burst into tears and disappeared under my bed, followed by the cat. This 1950 version of the leotard was a long-sleeved, pointy-collared white cotton blouse that fastened between the legs, garnished with a floppy black sateen bow at the neck. Over this went black sateen pantaloons, pleated into a triangular yoke front and back. In this imprisoning rig-out

we lay on our tummies rocking to and fro like grounded swing-boats – very challenging and humiliating for chubby little girls. Was this really ballet? Was this what I had wished for? Would I ever be one of those slender big girls in blue limbering up on the stage?

Later that year I broke my arm and thankfully gave up the class, but not the dream of one day wearing pink tights and shoes and a pale blue tunic. I read and reread my next-door friend’s precious copy of *Ballet Shoes* and haunted the world of the Fossil sisters.

When at 18 I started work in a large city office, a couple of us decided that ballet lessons would do wonders for our figures. But despite renewed visions of filmy blue tunics, soft pink tights and shoes, we found ourselves thumping across the splintery floor of a Rowe Street studio in regulation black Helanca tights, leotards and black shoes from Salvio’s tiny shop in Wynyard concourse. After only a few lessons it was evident that the teacher barely tolerated beginners and we dropped out, consoled ourselves with ice-cream cake at Cahill’s and put on weight.

But the black outfit wasn’t to lie inert for long and soon I was striding up King Street each week to Modern Dance where in a mixed class we worked barefooted under the severe but twinkling eye of Miss Jean who kindled creativity in her students. She showcased us in a dance inspired by an Epstein sculpture and subjected us to exam terror: theory paper in the stifling silence of the Mitchell Library and performing our own choreography before



Terence Hunt of the education department. And flat feet or no, I attained credit level with favourable and encouraging comment.

Yet, now into my twenties, I still yearned to perform real ballet and rise effortlessly on my toes like Posy Fossil. The urge to rescue, along with a pair of pink soft shoes, a pair of pointe shoes from a bargain bin outside Joan Barrie's ballet wear shop could not be subdued, and reader, I bought them. They were rock-hard and, covered in pink glaze kid. I probably did my back no favours by wearing them when no-one else was home, clomping around and trying to lever myself up while hanging on to doorknobs and dreaming impossible dreams.

The soft pink shoes sprang to life during my London working holiday where at weekly evening baroque dance classes in a grimy hall they steadily lost their lustre. I regretfully dyed them black as directed for the teacher's recital where we danced minuets and pavaues in long bunched skirts.

Retiring at 55, I investigated square, courtly and belly dance – all thoroughly enjoyable as exercise and recreation, but I still hankered after ballet. Starting with classes at the local leagues club, where the standard was somewhat haphazard as teachers came and went, I moved on to the local evening college and from there to a nearby ballet school which eventually offered daytime classes with a highly-qualified teacher. And then we moved away.

When we had settled in to our retirement village I began scanning the phone book and internet for adult daytime classes. Nothing.

And then one fine day I found in the local paper a little ad for a new ballet school: a minimum of three were needed to run an adult daytime class. I crossed toes and waited. Soon came the glad tidings and although one dropped out after a term, Sue, 20 years my junior, and I have carried on, relishing every moment of our weekly lessons under Miss Megan's gentle guidance.

Astonishing our families, we've memorised performances for our two minutes of fame in two end of year displays, sandwiched between the tiny tots and the teens, and have just started our third glorious year. And so at 73 my childhood wish has come true – Anna Pavlova's understudy maybe not – but my feet have visibly developed something of an arch and I've finally danced in a pale blue floaty gown, pink tights and soft pink shoes!

# From suit to safari

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*by Robert Lewy*

I have lived in Australia for over 35 years and have recently become a senior-citizen. This amazing country has been very good to me. I've raised a family and enjoyed everything Sydney and Australia have had to offer. Yet, there has been a restlessness within me, ignited by my wish to return to Africa and once again experience the unique offerings of her great national parks.

I first visited the Kruger National Park in Southern Africa when I was four years old. My first recollections were of a vast and wild place that stretched to eternity and was filled with huge animals that were only ever seen in storybooks, children's fantasies and dreams.

My father was a particularly keen amateur photographer and in the school holidays he used to take us on safari at least twice a year. I remember well the clickety-clack of his old cine camera and the many hours he spent manually editing his film strips. How times have changed and how wonderful is today's technology. My father recognised this and he embraced the new technology and bought the first generation video cameras with the accompanying editing software. He would sometimes become frustrated and once he even threw his computer into our swimming pool. He endured, however, and eventually mastered this mind-boggling new age technology at over 80 years of age.

As a child, I took our regular safaris for granted but, looking back, it was during those wonderful journeys that my deep love for the African bush developed. The spirituality,

colours, sounds and smells germinated in my thirsty, inquisitive mind and much later, almost surreptitiously, flourished into a passion and deep desire to soak up the awe-inspiring African bush once again.

I left South Africa in 1976 during the darkest period of apartheid and built an incredible life here in Sydney. I no longer thought about Africa and for me, the transition was complete. I even supported the Wallabies! My thoughts about returning to South Africa changed, however, when Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1993. He visited Australia in 1994 and presented his vision for a new South Africa and a new world on the steps of the Sydney Opera House. He was beyond inspiring, how a man who had been in virtual isolation for decades could have such worldly, forgiving and contemporary views without any trace of personal bitterness truly makes him a saint in the world's eyes.

I used to dream at night of being back in the African bush and seeing lions, leopards, elephants and rhinos. It almost seems obsessive and self indulgent as there are far more important issues to contemplate in today's complex and confronting world but they were my dreams and I was determined to bring them to reality.

In 1995 I returned to South Africa with my English wife and visited the country of my birth for the first time since 1976! At the time I had a successful corporate career and owned a prominent executive search company.

I wore a suit and tie and travelled to my office in the city every day. Money, ego, a good job. Life was good.

I retired from my corporate role three years ago and guess what? I now run and coordinate safaris in Africa. I am living my dream. I am also sharing my dream with my kids and family who also love Africa. I also take other Aussies who would never go to Africa on their own. I have even visited with my mum who was 86 at the time and she wants to go on safari again for her 90<sup>th</sup> next year!

It seems unreal but I feel more vibrant at 60 than I did at 40. Come to think of it, I'm even happier now than when I was in my 20s. I have lead 10 safaris in South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe in the last four years. We have travelled through swamps and deserts. We have seen highly endangered species in their natural habitats and have shared our photographic knowledge with new friends. We support a local charity with a percentage of our revenue and that feels good too. In short I am living my dream. Wishes do sometimes come true.

# The making of a model maker

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by Stavros Adamantidis

I was born of Greek parents during World War II in Alexandria, Egypt. We used to live right on the beach promenade, in an apartment on the fourth floor. Every night, the breaking waves would lull me to sleep. It took me a year before I was able to sleep without the sound of waves here in Australia.

I guess I first got interested in model making when my grandfather started fiddling around with some old cardboard, flour and water glue. He took that piece of cardboard, some wicker and some newspaper and there we had it! A three-masted square rigger! All of a sudden I was on that boat, sailing the seven seas; I was Sinbad, Odysseus, Jason, Hornblower.

Those little cardboard boats that my grandfather made created a strong bond between us. He loved the sea, the old man. He used to go with his mates in an open boat out to sea in the Mediterranean, sometimes two or three days at a time, fishing. All they had was a timber dinghy holding three or four people, oar-powered, armed with a couple of fishing rods, and some bait.

I began my model making when I made a cardboard submarine. I coloured it dark blue and I was very proud of its sleek shape, periscope, bow-to-stern wire antenna, deck gun and realistic proportions. I always wished I could make a 'real' model.

When I retired, I thought it might be an idea to look up ship model making. The opportunity came when *Bourke's Backyard* screened a show about a model builder from

Sans Souci who had dozens of models in his home, some of them four metres long. They all looked so beautiful and appealing and left me dazzled. The detail was superb. I wondered how I could make something like that – a thing of beauty that would last forever.

Knowing of my wishes, my family had a brilliant idea. 'Why don't we get you a model kit for your birthday?' And they did. It was the Juan Sebastian el Cano, a four-masted schooner, the training ship of the Spanish Navy. That was my first real model. It was fascinating, with its little boats and davits, air vents and square rigging. The learning process was in full swing. Hull shapes, names of masts and yards, planking and double-planking, blocks, sails and running rigging, varnishing and painting, decking and fittings.

When it was finished a sense of accomplishment overtook me, but I also had a desire to build more. Model kits seemed expensive. Maybe I should make one from scratch. A couple of planks of barbecue wood I found gave me inspiration. With a little bit of shaping and veneer planking, maybe I could make a ship after all. So I looked at how ships were built in the old days and I found that they were built in proportions rather than measures.

There was a relationship between the length of the ship, its beam and the various masts. The parts that made the masts and the yards were represented as a proportion of those measurements. The result was a cute little ship, cc early 19<sup>th</sup> century, built in the British code

of proportioning (there is also a French, an American and a Swedish code).

It was Christmas and time for another present, so I wished for a kit of the Golden Hind, of the Tudor era. It opened a new world of exploration for me. The rigging, the ratlines, the crow's nests, the deadeyes and the belaying pins all had to be exactly right.

When I sort of mastered this, after a long time and a lot of effort, I thought to myself that it might be more of a challenge to build the next ship from scratch. As long as I could get the plans for it, I felt that this would be more satisfying than just buying a kit.

I still had to purchase the canons and other furnishings that I couldn't make, such as the deadeyes, blocks and stanchions. Making the keel and the bulkheads by myself was to be doing things my way. It was also fun finding the right materials and trinkets at places you wouldn't imagine they could be.

So thus, I have constructed three ships. The first one was a xebec, a pirate ship from the Mediterranean Barbary Coast of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a highly detailed and decorated model. The second was a modular Greek trireme of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. The third was a Chinese pirate junk of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with walnut planking and red sails. At present I am working on a model of an American whaler from 1841, the Charles W. Morgan.

It was fortunate that I was invited to exhibit in the ANMM during the Wooden Boat Festival 98. There I met people with similar interests, who persuaded me to become a volunteer. I'm

glad I did it. There, I was able to help other people who wanted to build ship models.

I always had an affinity with the Maritime Museum ever since it was being built, when I was involved through my job, in determining the then new project's communication needs. And now I wish that more people would try to be part of a similar great institution and part of the family of volunteers and friends that I have made during the last 16 years or so.

# The time of my life

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*by Jackie Katz*

In June 1996, my wish was to live long enough to receive my Seniors Card. I was almost 44 and had recently been diagnosed with bone metastases after breast cancer for which I had been treated just one year earlier. I didn't think I would make it to 50 – 60 seemed like an impossible dream.

My story began several years earlier after I had seen a programme on television about Camp Quality, an organisation which arranges holidays for children with cancer. The very next morning I rang the Camp Quality office to volunteer but was extremely disappointed to learn that they had a waiting list of over 200 potential volunteers. My name was added to that list. Three years later in January 1995, I finally reached the top of that list and was invited to be a companion to a child attending junior camp the following April.

After attending a training day, I became more enthusiastic than ever and I could hardly wait to meet my young camper. At my first meeting with Danny and his family, we got on like a house on fire. Together we planned what we would take to camp, the fancy dress costumes we would make to wear to the cartoon night, our travel arrangements and much more. We met again on two occasions before camp and each time our friendship grew. The big fear was that Danny might react badly to his treatment and be prevented from attending camp. However, fate intervened – Danny didn't get sick, I did.

Following a routine mammogram, I received a call-back letter to attend a follow-up

appointment on the Thursday before Easter. After nine x-rays, half an hour of ultrasound and what seemed like hours of questions, I knew I had a serious problem. When I was told to return for a biopsy the following Tuesday, I was faced with a real dilemma. Camp was due to start on Easter Monday and I had waited a long time to get there. Yes, there would always be another camp next year and yes these tests were very important. Sure, if I couldn't go, Danny would be assigned to another companion, but we had established a great rapport in the short time we had known each other. The bottom line was that I really wanted to go to camp and not even the threat of breast cancer was going to stop me from going. So I convinced the doctors that I would have the biopsy the following Friday on my return from camp.

This turned out to be the best decision I have ever made. I spent four wonderful days at camp with 42 amazing children and their companions, simply having fun. Together we did craft activities, had fire engine rides and pony rides, and even a ride in a hot air balloon. There was a puppet show, a magician, a karaoke night and a dress up night. For four days I was almost able to forget my problems and enjoy all the activities at camp, but most importantly in those four days those children taught me more about living than I had ever known before. They showed me how to make the most of every minute. It was then that I realised that no matter what was in store for me on my return, I would get through it.



Five days after the biopsy, at 43 years of age, my cancer diagnosis was confirmed. I had two lots of surgery, six weeks of radiotherapy and six months of chemotherapy. I did not react badly to any of the treatment, which was a real blessing as I ran my own small secretarial service and was able to continue working right through the treatment. That was so important as it gave me just a tiny sense of being in control of a life that had been turned upside down.

On 9 November 1995, I had my last chemo treatment, cracked a bottle of champagne with the staff in the clinic and was ecstatic that this whole nightmare was finally over. Less than four months later following investigations for lower back pain, I was told I had secondary bone cancer and required further treatment. That was when I really discovered the 'black hole'. I thought my life was over. I thought I had done everything possible to prevent this from happening and started questioning whether I had wasted my time with chemotherapy. For the first time since my initial diagnosis, I became very angry and depressed. However, with support of family, friends and support services, I dug myself out of that black hole. I attended my second camp and kept reminding myself of Danny and the other amazing children I had met through Camp Quality.

Throughout the journey I learnt an awful lot – about myself, about other people, and particularly about life and living. I learnt how to make the most of every minute and to not let trivial things upset me. I learnt how to fulfil

my dreams and goals. Travel became a very important part of my life and I have been very fortunate to be able to share many wonderful holidays with family and friends. I have continued my involvement with Camp Quality and I do voluntary work for both the Cancer Council and my local cancer support group. All these activities give me a real sense of purpose.

So to achieve what would be seen as routine for most people – obtaining my Seniors Card – is in fact for me a dream, a wish come true. I still catch up with Danny regularly and now my wish for him is that he stays well and happy and is able to get his Seniors Card in 34 years time.

# To become a personal trainer at the age of 65

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*by Paul Pervan*

I had always had an interest in sport and all that's involved in the training of athletes and those who just wanting to keep themselves fit. In fact, I had set up a fully equipped gym in my basement garage for training family and friends. I wanted to become a personal trainer with the full range of qualifications and the necessary insurance required.

I knew this was typically the domain of the young, yuppie brigade who wear tight leggings to show off those shapely legs and butts and train at Fitness First. But then I realised that this does not have to be their domain alone. Us older Australians also want to look good, impress our grandchildren and kick the dependence on those pills we're given to keep us standing upright.

After retiring last July after working in the insurance industry since 1966, I wondered if it was possible to attend daily classes and complete all the assignments and challenges necessary try to attain the qualification of personal trainer. I hoped to specialise in training those over 50 years of age.

It is one thing to wish to become a personal trainer and quite another to get off one's backside and get studying all over again. I would be joining 18 to 25 year olds at the Australian Fitness Institute.

I hadn't caught a bus all my working life, but limited all-day parking at the institute, catching the bus was the order of the day. Attending the daily classes was okay, but keeping up with

students who were 40 years my junior was quite another challenge. We had to complete the full range of exercises, including stretches, core control, weight training, cable pulling, boot camp routines, lunges and burpees.

The beauty of the whole thing was that the students did not realise my full age of 65 and thought I was still in my early 50s. It may have helped that I acted as stupid as they did and went along with all their pranks. It was great fun and I embraced the entire process so not to disappoint.

And then for various reasons, one-by-one our class of 14 started falling by the wayside. After four months of intense work, only four of us managed to qualify, with me the oldest by some 40 years. To their credit, the younger students were great in accepting such an older class mate and ended up voting me as the 'energiser' of the course. It was a thrill being so appreciated.

Now I can officially embark on my journey as a fully qualified personal trainer in my fitness training business. I have my first clients and they have taken their first steps to getting fitter, looking better, eating a little more wisely and reducing those tummies.

Come on older adult Australian's – lets get fit, eat and drink a little wiser, watch those waistlines and say goodbye to those pills!

# To colour their lives

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*by Lynette Mantell*

I thought there could never be a more self-satisfying moment in my life than seeing my first paintings exhibited at the local show. But I was to experience a far deeper sense of pride, self-satisfaction and achievement when another wish came true.

The opportunity to learn to draw and paint never arose until I was in my 40s. Looking around the studio, on the first night, I saw paintings of still life, landscapes and portraits, among others. 'I wish I could paint like that,' I thought. Starting by drawing bottles, I soon challenged myself to draw and paint everything from still life to landscapes. When I started to experiment with pastels, I fell in love with colour all over again. After eight years of art lessons and hours spend at the easel every day, my wish to paint like those other artists had come true.

When reading the 'position vacant' for a children's art teacher I remembered my high school wish to become a teacher. With a letter of introduction and program for the first term, I accepted the enrolments to my art classes. As I spoke to parents and children, my enthusiasm and anticipation of sharing my love of art dissolved any of my fears. I was about to embark on one of the most rewarding times of my life.

Descending the steps to the basement gallery, I could see the walls come alive with colourful paintings, inspiring me. For the first term I persevered with the materials provided by the art society, although the children had to work at card tables. How could these children feel they were art students while the

room felt so much like a school classroom? For the younger children this was not a problem as they could stand or sit to produce their masterpieces.

I can still recall the astonished look on my students' faces when they entered the room to the sight of easels everywhere. Their excitement and enthusiasm was the greatest reward I could have asked for. Working at their easels, I could see the creativity of each student as their personalities shone through in their work. As they stepped back to assess their artwork, there began an interaction of positive feedback – they had become art students.

Introducing them to the use of pastels inspired many beautiful works of art which won awards at the local shows. How could I not get emotional to see one of my students with a smile on her face, standing in front of her pastel drawing displaying a 'highly commended' certificate? This was just the beginning for this young girl. She went on to win a third place award the following year, and first place the year after that. Many of my students went on to exhibit award winning art at exhibitions, and their acknowledgment of my small contribution to their success fills me with pride. My life is richly coloured with the satisfaction I gain from sharing with others. If sharing my love of art has helped colour their lives, then I have truly been rewarded.

My wish came true; I am a teacher (of art).

After seeing one lady's self-satisfaction when she went from drawing stick men to drawing three-dimensional figures, my wish

now is that fellow seniors can colour their  
worlds with self-satisfaction while walking the  
path of life's challenges. This small poem is my  
reflection on how I embrace life:

*Fun in Art*

A pencil and a sketch pad  
Are all you need to draw.  
Never think your art is bad,  
Just persevere and practice more.

Don't listen to what others say  
About the painting you have done.  
It's how you feel inside each day,  
Knowing you found it so much fun.

# I wish I could speak all the languages of the world

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By Sylvia Liu

I made three wishes when I began to understand my life and I often repeat them in my heart. All three did come true, but at different stages of my life and in different ways. One of them was to have a profound impact on my life and the way I see the world and my passion in connecting people and cultures. This is my story.

I wished I could speak all the languages in the world because I have always been interested in how people relate to each other. I often thought, 'If I could speak different languages, I could connect with lots of people around the world'. I knew it was a silly wish, but somehow I just kept on wishing. When my other two wishes came true years ago, I gave up on this one and started three new ones.

About one year ago, I suddenly realized that my 'deleted' wish did come true, but in an entirely different form. It validated the direction I was taking with my life and what I was doing. I was elated, I felt empowered and I found purpose in my life.

In September 2010, Oscar of Harris Community Centre invited me to start a Tai Chi class at the centre. I refused out of respect for the Tai Chi teacher I was working with at another community centre. Nine months later, Oscar's persistence and my Tai Chi friends' support touched me, so I started a three-month fusion Tai Chi trial workshop. Almost four years later we are still going strong and we have become a happy multi-national family. Members come from many parts of the world, including

Chile, Greece, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Maori, New Zealand, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, and the UK, etc. We have teachers, musicians, actors, artists, builders, reiki practitioners and adult students in our group.

I created 'Fusion Tai Chi', which is livelier, fun and easier to learn. It is suitable for all ages as compared to the traditional Tai Chi which always conjures up images of old people moving in slow motion in the park. Fusion Tai Chi is a contemporary interpretation of the ancient Chinese philosophy of *yin* and *yang* (meaning balance and harmony). I teach Tai Chi through a series of mindful and graceful movements with disciplined breathing powered by *chi* (energy), controlled by *yi* (mind), and accompanied by music of different genres and tempos. It is my way of sharing my culture and my Tai Chi learning experiences with people who are open minded and health conscious.

In September 2011, Evgueni of Ultimo Community Centre asked me to start an English class there for a group of seniors who do not speak any English. When the class first commenced, I was never sure who would be coming the following week. Because the classes were free, there was neither commitment nor team spirit. The vast gap in students' level of English skills made it impossible to run a normal English class. Therefore, I took a different approach -- we engaged in activities that encouraged team building, fostered friendship and gave members a sense of belonging and security.

The turnaround point came after the day I took the group on an educational field trip visiting Centennial Park and Nielsen Park. We played like children, shared food, exercised, danced and sang together. We practiced laughing under the sun by the beach. Everyone had to say something in English and laugh loudly in front of my video camera. Many members told me that they had never been to such a beautiful and natural environment, even though some of them have been in Australia for over 20 years.

It has always been my belief that for people from different cultures to become comfortable with and accepting of others who are different, they need to first go through a learning process. It is also necessary to provide a safe environment for people to practice what they have learned, interact with each other and work together with a common goal. Therefore, apart from the two programs I run on a weekly basis, a regular cultural exchange and social activities were organized to enhance each member's learning experience. It took another 12 months for the English speaking and non-English speaking members to start interacting with each other comfortably. Now, members socialize with each other, help each other, perform and laugh together.

In March 2014, I was invited to an awards ceremony at Parliament House to receive the Seniors Achievement Award. I invited members from our Fusion Culture Group and community centres which continuously supported our activities to attend the luncheon and award ceremony with me. Everyone was proud, happy

and united. The second defining moment was our Mandarin debating team winning the debate against the Sydney University debating team at the Living in Harmony event at Lower Town Hall in 2014. The topic was: 'The generational and cultural gap is not too wide to be mended.' Our three debating members did an excellent job working together.

The journey with my Group over the past three years was filled with excitement and new experiences. Members now have a sense of purpose and pride, which will sustain them for a long time and propel them to move out of their comfort zone and take on challenges with confidence. Some members are already doing volunteer in different areas. In 2014, we gave many free performances at various locations, including Lower Town Hall, Rosehill Racecourse, UnitingCare and Anglican Care aged care facilities, community centres, and a school.

When I look back, everything happened quite accidentally and coincidentally. I did not make a conscious choice to become a volunteer and I never wanted to be a teacher. I believe it is my wish to speak all the languages in the world that granted me the capacity to read and understand people. It gave me the ability to communicate with those from different cultures, to connect, motivate and empower them to be confident, enthusiastic, independent, happy and giving. I feel so privileged. Because of this experience, I am more humble, tolerant, patient, and always try to see the best in others.





seniors' stories

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what might have been





# A wish come true

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*by Judith May Lund*

As a child I frequently had a dream that I was walking along the main street of my home town when an earthquake would shake the ground and large fissures would open up, criss-crossing the street. The cracks rapidly became wider and wider and it was increasingly difficult to find a secure place to jump to. The situation would rapidly deteriorate and I was always desperately wished that I could take off like a bird and avoid falling into the expanding crevasses between the remnant blocks of roadway. The dream always ended with my wish being fulfilled as I took off into the sky, but the elation was always dampened when I woke up, shaken, frightened and wondering what the dream was all about.

I never told anyone about this dream or the wish connected with it – it just seemed to be an unexplained part of my life.

But then the dream stopped. I was in my third year of a science degree at university. Following much debating and discussion with friends, I discovered a whole new space to live in. Looking back I realise that, up until then, I had been consumed by thinking about myself and how I fared in other people's estimation. I always felt under scrutiny and that I lacked the wisdom and courage to set and pursue goals. It was emotionally consuming and limited my ability to succeed.

Then one day while reading the Bible, I felt as though God was saying 'I love you, I value you, and I accept you just as you are on the basis that my son Jesus died for you. Your falling short of my standard has been dealt with

by Jesus through forgiveness and your lack of wisdom will be dealt with by my guidance and strength'.

This hit me as real and hugely significant. The realisation so impacted me that it was like taking off into a new space – a space clearly bounded by two great guidelines: 'love God with all your heart and mind and soul', and 'love your neighbour as yourself'. But there was freedom within that space to develop the gifts and abilities I had been given and to grasp the opportunities that might arise. It was a very liberating space to find myself in and felt like I had indeed taken flight, but this time I did not wake up shaken and frightened.

After success in my studies and experience in research and university teaching in Australia, I had the privilege of spending 16 years teaching in universities and sharing in the lives of many wonderful people in Indonesia. The space that I had discovered is not limited by geographical borders – it is a faith space defined by ethics. At a later date, with my husband, I had the privilege of working in Tanzania with subsistence farmers and then later again teaching in a university in the same region. My work in Australia has also been varied, ranging from running the family farm, to working as a research officer in western NSW on the restoration of semi-arid rangelands.

Now in retirement, I contemplate the eternal dimension of this space – to me it will not be a new space but an expanding continuity – as I experience God's love and righteousness in Jesus now, the eternal space will be marked by lasting security and framed

100% by God's compassion, righteousness and justice. Indeed an expansion to look forward to.

My wish, portrayed in the repetitive dream of my childhood, to find a safe and secure space to live and work in, has indeed been fulfilled in a wonderful way. And I am thankful for each opportunity that has crossed my path.

# Boy overboard

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*by Mark O'Rourke*

Many years ago a friend and I undertook an odyssey by rail and ship to Adelaide. Our itinerary took us by train to Broken Hill with a two-day stopover followed by a narrow gauge train journey from 'The Hill' to Adelaide with a change at Terowie into a broad gauge train. Three gauge from Sydney to Adelaide in the days prior to the introduction of the standard gauge in 1969!

Our return journey from Adelaide was by sea on board an Australian owned interstate passenger vessel, one of several such vessels operating from Cairns to Fremantle in those days, prior to the popularity (and affordability) of air travel within Australia.

Passenger vessel departures, both overseas and local ships, were adorned with paper streamers thrown down from the decks of the ship by departing passengers, to their well-wisher friends and relatives on dockside. As a keen amateur photographer, this performance had always intrigued me and as an observer at many sailings I had attended over several years I was keen to photograph it from the deck of a ship. At last this was my golden opportunity.

My intention was to take up a position towards the bow of the ship from where I could view the streamer action along the side of the vessel and take a series of three or four pictures as the ship moved away from dockside. I wanted to capture the breaking of the streamers as the gap between dock and ship increased.

In the event, I took three planned pictures and while I was thus occupied with my camera, a young lad on the dock, holding streamers

connecting him to his ship-board mother, either lost his grip or his streamers snapped and in his excitement he ran across the dock to catch his streamer and plunged right over the edge in the ever-widening gap to the water below.

Much excitement and activity ensued, including a rescuer diving over to help the lad. As the ship moved away they could be seen clinging to the horizontal timber at water level beneath the wharf. Word spread among the passengers that I had been seen taking photographs during the incident and the lad's mother approached me to ask if I had caught the moment on film. In those days we did not know what lay hidden in the camera till the film was processed back home at a later date. I told her I did not think I had and I failed to take her name and address, just in case.

That was a big mistake because I had in fact caught the lad in the second photograph, in mid air between dock and ship. I subsequently visited the shipping office to ask for the lady's name and address and was politely told that no such incident had ever occurred in connection with any of their vessels and they knew nothing whatsoever about it.

So I was never able to send her a copy of the picture and I'm still wondering, to this day, if the 'lad' is still alive and I'm so sorry I did not get the family name and address when his mother approached me. I sure wish I had taken the lady's address!



# Golden wishes

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*by William Hoyles*

Moving into a new house is always a challenge and one can almost guarantee that there will be some surprises. But the expectation that one might discover gold on the property would be a fanciful wish – especially if your house happens to be located in the Inner West of Sydney! But it happened to us.

My wife and I moved into our new house when we were 39 years old. It was the dwelling that we had always wished for, in a Parkland Suburb and close to all amenities. It was truly a place to call home and one in which to raise our young family. A delay in the travel plans of the family that was selling the house meant that we got to know each of them by name. We also knew that they were migrating back to the Turkish area of Cyprus to bring up their son and daughter.

They left Australia and just one week after we moved in, the hot water tank located in the outside laundry suddenly decided to die. Not an expense that we had wished for, of course, but it did give us an opportunity to relocate the replacement tank to the outside of the building which resulted in increased storage space in the laundry. All that was needed to finalise the improvement was to demolish the hollow brick base on which the old tank stood.

Even for someone of my limited ability in all things practical this was an easy task, so I used a hammer to remove the bricks, and a dustpan and brush to clean out the muck that had accumulated. That's when I literally struck gold, in the form of a large, solid gold signet ring with a solid gold Turkish coin as

its centrepiece, lying buried in the dust. I am somewhat large but the ring fitted me perfectly. However, keeping it just didn't seem right.

One didn't have to be a rocket scientist to know that there might be a connection with the previous owner, but we had no forwarding address and no means to contact them so the ring went into secure storage with a vain wish that one day we might be able to reunite it with its rightful owner.

Fast-forward to our retirement almost 30 years later – empty nesters still living in the same house, relaxing on the front veranda, reading a book and occasionally watching the world go by. Suddenly a swarthy, solidly built man in his mid-thirties walks up the front path. He obviously hasn't noticed us but then stops when my wife asks, 'Can I help you?'

'I'm terribly sorry, I didn't see you,' he said, 'it's just that my family used to live here, and I was hoping to get a couple of photos of the front of the house to send back to my father.'

Needless to say it was the young son that we had last met as a boy, who had moved back to Cyprus with his family, but who was now grown up and living back in the Lucky Country. Our wish had come true.

I invited him to wait for a few minutes while I retrieved what was probably his inheritance. To say he was gobsmacked is an understatement. He recognised the ring as one that his father had lost twice: once in the back garden where he had luckily managed to find it, and the second time was a total mystery – until now.

One sometimes entertains the thought  
in one's dotage that one might take up  
prospecting with a metal detector and find gold  
– but it's not often that one finds gold and then  
wishes that one could give it away. However on  
this occasion it was quite simply the right thing  
to do – and it felt good.

# Reflections on a wish

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*by Anne Powles*

Forty two years ago I gave birth to a baby boy whom we called Max. He was more than eleven weeks premature. The doctors at the hospital were frank about his limited chances of survival, although no reasons could be found for his prematurity. Anyway, I did not have to be told that the odds were not in his favour. He was quite big for his stage of gestation and male – these were two factors which, statistically, did not bode well. Although I am not a theist, the intensive care nurses, who were nuns, asked me if they could have him baptised as they did not think he would survive. For their sake, I gave my permission as I did not want them to suffer.

But he was a gutsy little boy and he fought hard. At one stage, angry at the presence of tubes to assist his breathing, he removed them. The doctors replaced them, taped them to his chest and then, surprised and quite admiringly amused at his ability and deliberate efforts to search them out and try to remove them again, they brought me to intensive care to witness his efforts. As time passed we all grew a little more hopeful.

My dearest wish was, as does not need spelling out, that he survive. I had undertaken a course of study the year before and was half way through my Diploma of Education. I had made enquiries as to how this could be continued and childcare. But could I do this and also look after a new premature baby who would need special care? On the other hand, if he did not survive, would I be better to continue with this degree for my own emotional support? I had until the 31 March to make my decision.

I decided to defer and informed the university of my decision. How could I make a decision that might imperil this heartfelt pass the care of this special baby over to any one else later, even temporarily?

Early on the morning of 2 April I was informed that he had taken a turn for the worse and died during the night. Of course life goes on. Later, with enthusiasm, I finished my diploma, taught in schools, undertook further education and worked in other areas with children as I went on through life.

I took great comfort from my other three wonderful children. They were later joined by another baby brother. I was both amused and saddened by a discussion between the two older two children, eight and six years old, as they watched their new baby play with his toys. He was a beautiful little boy and is now a wonderful man with children of his own, but then was only about nine months old. One said, 'It is such a shame Maxie died. They would have had a lovely time playing together.' The other said, 'But he would not have been born if Maxie had not died.' Another unanswerable conundrum – what would life have held if he had lived?

But every year, at this time, I remember the great depth of feeling with which I wished, 42 years ago.

# The dream and the snake

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*by Lesley Van Biljon*

Since my mother died, I always wished I could still have some kind of contact with her. I was an only child and she had been both a parent and my closest friend. This is my story of that wish coming true.

One morning, some months after my mother had passed away, I awoke with the clearest memory of a dream – but this was no ordinary dream – this was a waking dream, an emotionally charged event that stands apart from the rest of your day. Each waking dream in our life is like a letter from our future, giving us personalised advice from the spirit of ourself or others.

In this dream, my husband had woken, risen from the bed and walked to the window. As he stood, eyes cast to the sky, my deceased mother opened the bedroom door, walked over to the bed and slowly lay down next to me. No words were spoken. We both just lay side by side looking up at the bedroom ceiling. It was then I noticed a large snake coiled around the ceiling beam. I called out and the snake went limp and fell onto the foot of the bed with only the bedclothes separating us. My husband, hearing my cry, turned, grabbed the snake by the tail and thrust it against the frame of the door, killing it instantly. I awoke, but even though I was alone, the dream stayed with me.

I was a licensed real estate agent and later that same day, I was at my desk when a gentleman walked into our office and asked if I could list a block of land for him as his circumstances had changed and he no longer had any intention of building on that plot.

I did the paper work, he signed the agency agreement and I assured him that I would drive up to the block, take some photos, and we would commence the advertising campaign. Later that day, I drove away from town and headed up to the hills to have a look at this new listing. I drove my car onto the block, and with my camera in hand, started walking through the thick but low scrub towards the end of the escarpment with the intention of taking photos of the outstanding views this block enjoyed.

Making my way to the edge, I was unexpectedly distracted by a rustle in the grass a few meters in front of me. Then I saw it – a mature eastern brown snake. We lived on a rural property and had numerous encounters with snakes, but I have always had respect for this particular species, notorious for its speed and aggression throughout its habitats. The eastern brown is considered one of the world's most venomous land snakes and responsible for more snake bite deaths than any other in Australia. The normal venom delivery is around 4mg, but the potency of this venom means that even this tiny amount is enough to bring about paralysis, kidney failure and severe internal bleeding. There have been cases where victims have died at the scene in a very short space of time.

Without taking my eyes off the snake, I watched it make a right hand turn and disappear into the surrounding bush. Feeling shaken and very nervous I commenced immediately to walk backwards towards my car,

my eyes never moving away from where I had seen the snake.

By the time I reached my vehicle, and with no further sign of the snake, my heart was beating a little slower and I started to regain my composure. I still needed to get my photos, so, without wanting to re-enter the area where I had spotted the snake, I decided instead to stand on the floor of my car, camera in hand, arms resting on roof and try to obtain some kind of elevation so that I could at least give any potential buyer some idea what the outlook was from this lovely block of land.

I stood there for a minute or two, snapping away until I felt satisfied I had some suitable pictures before I turned to climb back into the car. Just as I lifted my foot off the door edge, my vision focused on the earth below my feet, and there it was – curled up no more than 15cm away from the open car door in a striking position. The neck straight up from the coiled body and mouth slightly open with a tongue moving ominously and terrifyingly in and out of that vile chamber.

If I had taken any time at all to consider my circumstances, I know I would have frozen. The slightest movement can cause them to attack, their strike being quicker than the naked eye can capture. In those terrifying moments though, I thought of none of these things. Without taking so much as a breath – I twisted my torso around, while at the same time throwing my legs into the air, falling backwards into my car - somehow slamming the door behind me. I looked back down at the snake

through the safety of a closed window and it was still in the strike position.

To this day, I do not know how I avoided been bitten by that snake. It obviously followed me back to the car, positioned itself close enough to attack and took up a strike posture, all while I was stood there, unaware of its presence. So what happened to make the difference between me dying that day or living to tell of this extraordinary and horrifying experience? If I hadn't looked down I would have most certainly stood on the snake and without question my life would be no more.

So why? What happened to me that day? I believe I was saved by my mother's spirit. She came to me that morning in a dream, a dream about a snake. I believe it was a warning and she walked by my side that day. The snake appeared to be in a trance like state, perhaps put there by a power – a power too strong and mystical for any of us to really understand. My belief is unwavering; I was blessed by heavenly forces and the protection of a parent who still looks out for me, even from afar. Wish fulfilment? Absolutely!

# The fall of Hong Kong

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*by Paul Atroshenko*

The Chinese say that the number four is unlucky. I was four years old in Hong Kong when the Japanese occupied that British colony, soon after the start of the war in the Pacific. The British had known that sooner or later Japan would enter the war, but, as the Brits were fully occupied defending England itself from the Nazis, they had few military resources to spare for the protection of colonies like Hong Kong. As it was, the defenders of Hong Kong fought valiantly for several days before surrendering.

Before the Pacific War, my father was employed by a company which had constructed air raid shelters for the British government. The company had carefully selected a good shelter for the families of their employees, on the island of Hong Kong. We were evacuated from Kowloon to Victoria Island. Before that evacuation, I had seen what I thought was a British warplane being shot down by a Japanese Zero in a dogfight. This must have impressed me greatly as I had reason to recall that event soon after with considerable effect.

After the surrender of Hong Kong, the Japanese quickly began the process of deciding what to do with the European population they had captured. I was only four years old but I still have vivid images in my mind from that time.

We were taken to Shell House on Victoria Island for processing. I recall a large room filled with nervous Europeans, several in uniform. Reports had filtered through that the Japanese had committed various atrocities such as bayoneting wounded soldiers in hospitals.

What happened next I recall only vaguely, but the story was told to me later by my parents and confirmed by several others who were at Shell House at that time.

A day or two after Christmas, a squad of Japanese soldiers led by an officer carrying a large samurai sword burst into the room. The soldiers seemed to be a little drunk, perhaps having celebrated the fall of Hong Kong. They were furious that the British had resisted effectively for 17 days and seemed to be in a mood for revenge. Just as it seemed likely that a massacre may occur right there and then, I apparently walked up to the Japanese officer in charge and said to him, 'Japanese plane go up, English plane go down.' I had remembered the dogfight which I had seen a few days before.

The Japanese officer was delighted. 'Sodeska!' he exclaimed. He then put me on his knee, patted my blond head, and barked out an order to his troops. Two of them left the room and returned soon after with three gigantic walking and talking dolls which were presented to me. They had taken them from a department store which had been full of Christmas gifts.

When the Japanese left, many of the British in uniform came over to me and also patted me on the head. They believed I had helped to avert a massacre of the civilians of Shell House, and they politely ignored the fact that I may have belittled the British Empire and its air force, which was close to treason for a little British chap like me.

Shortly after, two of the dolls given to me by the Japanese were taken by other, bigger



children. I quietly wished that the Japanese would return to kill these nasty, thieving bullies! There is little mercy to be found in the heart of a swindled four year old.

The Japanese sent all the British to Stanley, which became a prisoner of war camp. Those Europeans who belonged to neutral countries were allowed to remain free in Hong Kong. Some Americans were sent to the USA in a prisoner exchange, and among them were friends of our family. Since my mother, father and brother were stateless aliens, they were freed. Although I was a British citizen, having been born in Hong Kong, as a four year old I must not have been considered a security risk by the Japanese and I was permitted to remain with my family. Years of hardship and danger had begun.

There is an embarrassing postscript to this story. Much to my father's dismay, when I was little my mother had insisted on giving me the nickname of 'Pussy'. He had lived in America for 10 years and knew what the word pussy stood for there. Many years after the war, well-meaning strangers would come up to me on the Star Ferry or on a bus, address me as Pussy, and thank me for my treasonous act in Shell House. It was mortifying.

# The tunnel

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*by Danny Wells*

Sometimes in your life you make wishes when things aren't going your way. Sometimes it's when your luck has deserted you, and sometimes it's when you really want something to happen. Mine was the latter.

In 2011 I was diagnosed with terminal cancer. At no stage have I ever said, 'Why me?' Nor have I ever wished that I wasn't diagnosed with this mongrel disease – it is what it is. After a lot of treatment, the doctors decided that an operation would be required. Although I would be close to being the oldest person to undergo this kind of surgery, because of my fitness, they would give it a go. As there was an 80% chance of me dying during the procedure they left the final decision up to me. But really there was no choice and a date was set.

Following a 10 hour operation, I opened my eyes. I had made it. Tubes hanging out of my body everywhere, bandages, machines beeping and most of all, friendly faces smiling at me. After eight days in intensive care I was transferred to a ward. How lucky can you get depends on a lot of things, and my luck was in. The sister in my ward was a young woman who came from the same small village that I grew up in. She still saw my mum, brother and sister. Knowing what I had been through, and knowing that I wasn't out of the woods yet, she kept a close eye on me. I'm glad she did.

One Monday she came in to check on me. Her first words were something like this: 'You bugger! Why didn't you buzz?! We have to get you to ICU! You're going to die if we don't hurry'. With that there were bells,

buzzers and people running everywhere. I then did something that I don't remember doing. Between her hitting the panic button and me being loaded onto the trolley, I sent a text message to my darling wife saying goodbye. Why I did it, I don't know, but she still has that message stored on her mobile. This is when the tunnel came into my life.

I knew I was drifting to somewhere, it was in a space I had never been to before in my life, and for the first time I realised that someone or something was controlling my destiny. For the first time in my life I felt as though I had no control over what was happening to me. Then a deep tunnel appeared – a peaceful place. Dark, but not frightening, with no lights at the end or along the way. Just a black tunnel. I wasn't scared, I wasn't disorientated and I felt very much at peace. With all that in mind, I knew as soon as I entered that tunnel what the outcome was going to be. The first thing that came into my mind was, 'you bloody ripper, no more pain'.

As I drifted further down the tunnel the strangest thing started to happen. You may remember the old shooting galleries where the targets used to pop up, well suddenly there were faces there – first my wife, my mum, my children, my brother and sister, grandchildren and all my good friends. It was surreal. I then had a crushing realisation that I was never going to see them again. I would not have the kisses and cuddles that I loved, ever again. That's not what I wanted. That's when I made my wish.

I'm not sure who to, more than likely to God, but I wished and wished that this journey would end – not because I was scared of dying, but because I wanted my kisses and cuddles again, I wanted to hold my family again and tell them how much I loved them all, probably because I may not have told them enough when I could have.

The next day I opened my eyes, not knowing what I would see and wishing that the land I'd arrived at was the one that I knew. I found my darling wife smiling down on me. My wish had come true. I know there will be people who read this will think that it is a lot of superstitious nonsense, and that's okay because this was a moment in my life that only I know to be 100% true but I am sharing it with you because, in that moment, it did not only give me life, it gave me hope and that's what I wanted to share.

Since then I have had another operation, with no problems. I have also had a problem with my blood that prompted my oncologist to ring and explain that some indicator had reached a level that showed I should be dead. Me, dead? How dare he! Did he honestly think that I would give in to this mongrel disease? No way. I'm here for the long haul.

I really don't know how much longer I have on this planet, but whatever time I have it's all because of that one wish that came true. I can assure you that some wishes do come true.

# A wish to tell Lorna

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*by Anne Owers*

After 92 years, she said it was enough – not once, but each time I visited. My visits were often, and my face studded with tears, but she couldn't see that. My mother was not only confined to a wheelchair but was now nearly blind. Sometimes living is hard, but dying can be too, it seems.

My childhood was full of vigour and joy. We grew up in the suburbs. Newly-released land was allocated to the returning soldiers, of which Dad was one. Our home, built on 12 building squares – the maximum allowed, due to limited building supplies – was a mansion in my eyes. I was named Grace and was the first baby born to my mother and father after two still births.

Sixty years ago, small hospitals didn't have the capability to adequately deal with difficult child births. Even a cord around the neck of a newborn could prove too much for these tiny facilities and mothers of that era knew that not all pregnancies ended in joy.

As I watched Mum deteriorate day by day, I wondered if that 40-year training in nursing was now able to help the very one I loved most. Sometimes I played music and sometimes we walked miles to pass the time. I read and talked constantly to avoid the very question she would ask me each time I visited: 'Will you help me die?' The tears would well, as they do today. I could do nothing. I was so skilled and had so much of knowledge and medical experience, but how could it help me respond to that question?

To begin my visits we would talk about her fashionable rose garden, planted with love

and boarding the well cropped cutch lawn that dad tended on weekends. Walking around the garden was an amazing experience. We all knew the plants by name and each season watched them bloom, often picking big bunches to put in Gran's treasured crystal vases to brighten the lounge room for the occasions when visitors were expected. The house was full of warm smells from the bright yellow kitchen and at the allotted time hot scones would arrive with special strawberry jam.

These are the memories I talked to Mum about – stories from my young days, to relieve her sadness. Was it pain? Was it depression? Many of her generation were long gone. We attended many funerals over the years and saw so many special friends and relations depart our world. Of my mother's friends, the only name I knew was 'Lorna.' I took Mum, a WAAF during World War II, to many meetings and marches when she could no longer walk. April 25 was about one of the only events that stirred her soul as she still longed to be part of the remembering on ANZAC Day.

Mum died just when I thought I could no longer witness her pain any longer. A wave of illness swept through her nursing home, and with great gratitude, she could finally rest. My days were once again filled with other activities and time seemed to move on. My mum was resting, but I wanted to find her friend, Lorna.

Later that winter I attended a young friend's baby shower. It was a beautiful occasion and I felt like the light of life was again shining. I stopped in an unfamiliar shopping area on my

way home to collect some shopping for a quick dinner. It started to rain so I needed to be quick – I never liked driving in the rain, especially in winter. Kneeling down to the bottom shelf I found the packet of soup I needed and pulled myself up, nearly knocking over a tiny lady who had appeared from nowhere. ‘Grace?’ the lady said. Lorna! It was my mother’s friend!

That was the day my wish was granted and I could finally say I had helped my Mum in a way I knew I could.







3490 FACS 130715

ISBN 13: 978-0-9924253-3-3



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