

PORT PHILLIP WRITES

Stories and Poems

Gathered from the City of Port Phillip Seniors' Writing Awards 2022



Yacht, St. Kilda 4/20

Daubman/63.



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Port Phillip Writes Stories and Poems celebrating 18 years of publication



Aerial view of Port Melbourne looking north east towards Melbourne, 1983, Port Phillip Collection

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A condition of entry was that all contributions are considered for publication.

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Printed by Highlight Printing Pty Ltd

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INTRODUCTION

by Freda Erlich, Chair Older Persons Advisory Committee

It with great enthusiasm I write the foreword to Port Phillip Writes, the annual publication now in its 18 year, showcasing Port Phillip's talented Seniors who submit their best pieces of poetry, fiction or non-fiction. It is always a joy to celebrate the written works and writers at the Phillips Seniors Writing Awards, and this year it is in person!

We thank the 27 contributing writers for the 42 submissions that make Port Phillip Writes the perfect coffee table book for the members of the Port Phillip community. The variety of stories and poems reflect the diversity of our community and that words can paint a picture for the readers to see.

Judging the awards is a big task and is done anonymously, so it is always exciting after the decisions are made to discover the writers who have been awarded.

This year's judges were Carmel Shute, Co-founder and co-convenor of Sisters in Crime Australia, Sheila Quairney, member of Council's Older Persons Advisory Committee and Amanda Wilson, Port Phillip Council Librarian. We thank them for their time and considered thoughts in the process of awarding the prizes.

We would like to thank Edward Burger for editorial support in the publication for this year's submission and the Port Phillip Arts and Heritage team for the images supplied to make this year's edition colourful and vibrant.

Port Phillip Writes is funded by the City of Port Phillip. The continued support of this initiative reflects the enthusiasm of the Older Persons Advisory Committee and the City of Port Phillip.

Freda Erlich
Chair Older Persons Advisory Committee

CAKE

by James Cattell

This boy has come to our house
 On Sunday.
 A cake sits cooling.
 A cake with caraway seeds.
 I don't know why I baked it.
 Except it is a Sunday.
 That is what I do on a Sunday.
 I won't eat more than a slice or two.
 No visitors come any more.
 But today, this boy has come to our house.
 He could be one of my son's friends,
 In a tee shirt with amusing words,
 In clean jeans and runners,
 Carrying a ball
 To play
 On the field outside town.
 Tall, awkward, with shy eyes.
 He could be calling for my daughter.
 Bashful, holding a small wrapped gift.
 But he isn't.
 He doesn't wear an amusing tee shirt
 Or clean jeans and runners.
 He shuffles in the doorway
 In huge boots
 And a dirty uniform.
 He doesn't hold a ball
 Or a small gift.
 He holds a gun.

This boy, who has come to our house,
 He could be any boy,
 Like the ones who laugh in the cafes,
 Like the ones who play music or dance.
 But he isn't laughing.
 There is no music in his voice.
 He is yelling.
 This boy who has come to our house
 Sat in a schoolroom,
 Like our schoolroom,
 Waiting for the bell
 So he and his friends
 Could go to the field
 With a ball.
 He went to his mother
 For comfort
 When he felt lost.
 I wonder
 Should I offer him cake?
 I think he is going to kill me,
 This boy who has come to our house,
 Who is yelling, frightened, lost,
 In his big boots and dirty uniform.
 Yes, he is going to kill me.
 But before he does,
 I shall smile at him.
 I shall offer him
 Cake.

GEORGIA ON MY MIND

by Megan Jones

If you play your cards right, a trip to the US of A might materialise, my editor said, flicking a cardboard Frisbee on to my keyboard. I was hooked before I picked up the postcard plastered with pictures of beaches.

I was writing for the Sunday Press at the time, a *red top* that only dealt in death and misery, justifying its nickname The Sunday Depressing.

The return address was Georgia State Penitentiary. It was signed Robert Dobbs. He requested the paper track down a family named Galloway who had chaperoned him when he visited Melbourne as a seaman on his way to Vietnam in 1968.

"It was the happiest day of my life," he wrote.

In the days before Port Authority employees came to work armed in black and reflector sunglasses, members of the public queued on weekends to inspect visiting ships. During the Vietnam War, US Navy warships would regularly visit Station Pier on goodwill tours to win the hearts and minds of Melbourne allies. Local families were encouraged to enter a ballot to adopt a sailor for a day. Teenage girls were particularly keen for their parents to do their duty.

The postcard said the family had lived near the Port.

He thanked me for reading his postcard, ending with the words, I am in prison for murder.

My adrenalin rose. I raced for the phone book. I would find them the usual way, through the White Pages. If I'd published his request, some enterprising journo from a daily paper would have followed my lead and written the story first.

Half an instant coffee later, I found them. B & M Galloways, Port Melbourne.

"Madge Galloway speaking," a female voice answered after the third ring.

"Mrs. Galloway, I am a journalist with the Sunday Press. I am looking for Madge and Brian Galloway who lived in Port in the late 1960s."

"That's us. What's this about," she demanded.

"Do you remember an American seaman by the name of Robert Dobbs? I believe he spent a day with you sometime in November 1968?" I prompted.

"That's so long ago, dear. I can't remember what I did yesterday let alone what I did 30 years ago."

"I am sorry to hear that. He remembers you," I replied.

"Really?" She sounded surprised.

"I've received a postcard from him. He wanted me to contact you. He said he'd met you straight from his ship docked at Station Pier," I begged her to remember.

"Now you mention it. I do remember an American serviceman. Um...don't remember his name. Why are you interested? Is it for the paper?"

"Yes, we are really interested in doing a story," I responded, talking over her before she could say no. "Before we do the interview, I was hoping you might have a photo of seaman Dobbs. It might be helpful for our readers to see what he looked like as a young man."

The story would be prioritised by the editor (and the US wire services) if we had a photo of the prisoner as a young man.

"No dear, we didn't take photos in them days, only ones of the family."

"Oh."

"We didn't think it was appropriate. You know?"

"No. I don't think I do, Mrs. Galloway. Why was that?" I urged her on.

"You know," she muttered, nodding into the phone. "We were expecting a white one, weren't we? The navy shoulda told us what we were getting," she grumbled. "We wanted a nice boy we could take to my sister's. She was doing a roast and all the trimmings. Well, she said she wouldn't stand for it which forced us to change our plans.

"At first we didn't know what to do," she sighed, recalling the difficult decision. "We couldn't send him back until 7pm so we decided to drive him to the Healesville Animal Sanctuary. We'd never been there before," she said, with an uplift at the end of the sentence. "We had a very nice day despite getting the wrong one. They must have given him Aussie money because he paid for our afternoon tea."

"Can you tell me anything else about him?" I begged.

"Nah, sorry dear."

I could hear laboured breathing while I twirled my biro.

"Did anything happen at Healesville that might have stuck in your mind?" I queried, urging her to continue.

A minute of dead air.

"Well, there was one thing," she said, lighting a cigarette. I could hear the phosphorus match strike and flame. "We went for afternoon tea at the Pavilion; Brian had barged ahead bagging us a table. I followed, but the American stayed outside. God knows why. I went back out to fetch him.

"What are you waiting for,' I yelled from the step. 'Aren't you coming in?'"

"Ma'am, are you sure it's alright for me to come in?"

"He called me Ma'am like I was the Queen. 'Course it is,' I replied. 'Get in here or your tea will get cold.'"

She inhaled smoke, while I thought about Robert Dobbs' happiest day.

"Did he ever write to you from Vietnam?"

"He mighta done but I can't remember." She stabbed the cigarette out in an astray. "We drove him back to ship after that."

I thanked her and said I'd be in touch.

That night, I stayed late at work to call the penitentiary in Georgia.

"Sorry Ma'am. We don't let our prisoners talk on the phone. No Ma'am. Not even to Melbourne, Australia. No Ma'am. Have a nice day Ma'am," answered a prison officer, splitting his vowels into two syllables – a Southern Drawl. The real McCoy.

Next day I dropped a green and gold postcard with a picture of a Melbourne tram into the external mail. It was addressed to Robert Dobbs, Georgia State Penitentiary.

"Sorry Robert, I was unable to find the kind family you remembered. Best of luck."

CAMIRA

By Roderick Waller

Kelpies, whistled to leap on the woolly backs, dispersed the crush at the troughs. Stan the cook clambered into the work-truck, drove away from the salt flats as the western sun glimmered on the desert plain. Lance saddled up. The men followed, as the sun arced its descent, and a slight breeze blew wisps of salt. The horses needed no encouragement to go home. In high spirits, the men raced each other, jumped the cattle grids, spat, shouted oaths. When the riders came to the last cattle grid, Cliff raised his arm. He pointed to the south-east; two fingers pressed his lips. He'd spotted a mob of brumbies. 'Whoa.' Cliff small-voiced, slapped a hand on his belt. Lance eyed a stallion pawing the dust, nostrils glaring. 'I'll tell the boss okay to come back tomorrow, muster them.' He grinned.

Dawn next day, Lance and the men cantered five miles toward Lake Frome. They slowed to a walk, ceased chatter. Cliff said the mob would be close to the water tanks. He pulled up suddenly. 'There! See 'em? Out north.' He whispered. 'Dying for a smoke, Lance.' Lance passed the pouch. Cliff was a horse-whisperer. Lance wanted Cliff comfortable. A chill breeze blew over the plain. Cliff sniffed the air. 'Wind from the west.' He turned to Lance. 'Gotta get downwind of 'em.' They turned to the south. A mile downwind, the mob were hidden back of a patch of sandal-wood scrub, and foraged saltbush. 'They'll come for a drink, then push them west. Stevie, Barry take the north, Kelvin the right, me, and Cliff behind.' Lance whispered. The mob stood at the troughs; the stallion's ears pressed back. The men waited for Cliff's signal. Lance eyed the stallion's shiny, sleek flanks. Three mares guzzled; two foals stamped in the trough. 'Two old dames, slab-sided, scrub-scratched mongrels, no good.' Cliff said. The horses drank their fill and the men waited.

Lance whispered. 'Into the fray. It'll be a ten-mile hard run to bring them home.' They spurred the horses, and headed the mob west, fast, and furious. The wild horses kicked up a dust storm, out-ran the riders, at times out of sight, the riders pushed on, strained every muscle. The mob slowed, the foals fallen back, the stallion and mares foaming. The riders drove them into the horse yard at the homestead.

The next morning, Lance brought a lunge rope to the yard, and slung it round the stallion's neck. As it reared the men tied the loose end to a yard post, watched the fight between the horse and the post until the stallion, choked, and exhausted, fell. Stevie jumped in, held his head, and knees on his neck. Kelvin passed the tail between his legs, knelt on his rump. Lance covered his eyes with hessian bags. The men released him. He bucked and reared, all eighteen hands, with legs that could break a man's. The men nailed two top rails to the yard.

The boss's eyes twinkled, flicked bushflies away. 'Took all we had to keep up. I'll call him Hurricane?' Lance queried. 'Could ask the men for an aborigine name.' the boss said quietly. 'Hey Stan, what's the name for the wind?' Lance looked across at the cook. 'Camira.' Stan snorted. his belly on the rail.

As the sun dipped below the plains, Lance removed the hessian bags with his stockwhip and lassoed the lunge rope around Camira's neck. The stallion frothed, and circled, stampeded, braked, then circled, one eye on Lance, the other maddened. For an hour, they encircled, in a battle of wills. Camira slowed to a walk, occasionally snorted, and swung his magnificent head. Lance had learnt from Cliff how to feel into the horse's mind. Camira stopped; his ribcage fluttered. Lance slowly walked up; fingers

caressed the lathered neck. He whispered low notes, soothed, broke through to a vestigial harmony; Tabula Ras. Camira's body shuddered at the touch, but Lance stroked and soothed, until the metastasis slowed. Inch by inch, Lance positioned the saddle. When Camira felt the weight, he bucked and kicked at the rails. For three hours he threw the saddle and Lance put it back on. They lunged for an hour, stopped occasionally, and Lance stepped up, stroked and soothed. In the evening Lance removed the saddle, and left saltbush and water in the yard.

The yellow sun peeked over the range as Lance stepped in the yard. It seemed Camira had regressed, and eyed Lance madly. Lance sang low notes. He positioned the saddle and very slowly, tightened the girth strap. He felt him tense, one more notch, tensed, then relaxed. It seemed both minds knew the Modi operandi. He gently lowered the bridle over his handsome face, juggled the bit into his mouth, tied the reins to his shoulders. Let the stirrups hang loose. And then they lunged for an hour.

In the afternoon, the stockmen gathered at the yard, sat on the rails, watched intently as Lance lifted his leg over Camira. It was hot, and not a wisp of wind. Lance gently got in the saddle. For half a minute it was still. Camira shook his head, his mane ruffled, a reverberated snort, he stared at the dust, eyes gleamed in fury. A gentle tap on the flank, and they careered round the yard. Camira bucked for all he was worth. Lance hung on, the reins loose, and the men cheered. They came to an abrupt halt. Camera's nostrils frothed, slathered in sweat, his heart thumped. Lance had broken him. A huge cheer went up as Lance and Camira walked through the gate out toward Lake Frome. The boss nodded and the stockmen mounted. The stallion calmed. On the plain, Lance gave him his head. Cliff yelled and in the shred of night-air the stockmen broke into a gallop. Lance didn't need spurs. Camira flew like lightning toward the grid, while Lance, breathless, excited, gulped the cool wind.

SANDCASTLES

by James Cattell

I have heard of empires and dynasties that have survived decades, even centuries. My reign? It has lasted a single day. Actually, not even that – a tide. If you have a few spare minutes, the short history of this kingdom will not take long to relate.

It was born encircled by children’s laughter. This sun-drenched morning, my realm rose in a series of buttresses and turrets clustered around a central tower. From this tower I could gaze across the shimmering sand to a reef of rock pools and beyond to a gentle sea.

Gems in the form of coloured pebbles, sea glass and shells adorned this palace. Around the castle walls, seaweed gardens sparkled and a moat encircled. Discarded ice-cream sticks served as bridges, and twig palisades and limpet shell houses provided shelter for the peasantry.

Things remained thus for three, maybe four, wondrous hours while we inhabitants basked in the day’s warmth, soothed by the music of lapping waves and distant melodious chatter.

The first sign of calamity occurred shortly after noon, when a white-faced councillor announced the approach of an enormous beast who, having broken loose from the chain that restrained him, was curiously sniffing the palace walls. He inspected and licked a field of seaweed, then lost interest, turned away and ambled off. Our relief, however, was short-lived as he doubled back, lifted a hind leg, and released a torrent of urine, decimating an outlying turret and flooding a small settlement.

The second assault occurred about an hour later, when a gigantic multi-coloured sphere smashed away much of the seaweed side of the palace, destroying the banks of the moat and the bridge that served the main gate. Next, a careless foot kicked away the last remaining buttress, and shortly after I was approached by a shaking vizier who gestured in panic at the advancing sea.

The sun is lowering now. The trades and farmers fled first, followed by the courtiers and sycophants who decamped loaded with the treasure that once adorned these magnificent walls.

I stand in the crumbling tower. It is my duty.

The day cools. Children are summoned. Towels, blankets and picnic paraphernalia are packed and umbrellas folded.

I am alone now.

The sea nibbles at the foot of the crumbling edifice, and from the rock pools three armoured monsters advance with clicking claws and a menacing sideways shuffle.

The sun meets the horizon to create a glorious fiery band
while I wait and remember.



Tall Ship "Dar Młodzieży" leaving from Princes Pier, 1988, Port Phillip Collection

CAPTAIN GOOGLE

by Helen Devereux

Retired Captain Fred Halifax was always true to his word. One evening he made a flippant bet with his daughter Daisy that if Donald Trump became President he would go on Millionaire Hot Seat. He never imagined for one moment he could lose and six months later found himself in the hot seat opposite Eddie McGuire.

Fred was contestant number three of six. The first contestant answered two questions correctly then passed. The second contestant answered incorrectly.

When Fred took the hot seat, the million dollars had reduced to \$500,000.

"How are you feeling Fred?"

"Good thanks Eddie."

"Fantastic. Who's with you today?"

"My daughter Daisy." Fred turned in his seat to look at her in the audience.

"Hello Daisy," said Eddie, the cameras panning to Daisy. "How do you rate dad's chances?"

"He is amazing. I don't think I've ever asked him a question he didn't know the answer to. That's why we call him Captain Google."

The audience laughed.

"In which American state would you find Mount Rushmore? A. North Dakota, B. South Dakota, C. North Carolina, or D. South Carolina."

Fred felt it was expected he hesitate before answering. "Don't rush your answers dad," Daisy had coached him while driving to the television station, but it felt odd so he answered immediately. "Lock in B. South Dakota."

"Correct for \$5,000."

The next question appeared. Fred didn't hesitate with his answer. "Lock in C. Platoon."

"Don't want to think about it Fred?" questioned Eddie.

"No, lock in C."

"Correct for \$10,000."

The next question wanted the title to a song Fred had never heard. What had Daisy said? "It's good to pass and go back to the circle and wait for your turn again. If you don't know the answer, don't guess, just pass." Fred passed and returned to his seat.

The fourth contestant was a young woman with a delightful smile and a happy disposition. "Hello Indira ... please get comfortable," Eddie urged, noticing her shaking legs.

"Thank you Eddie."

"You're a librarian who reads a new book every week."

"Yes, I love to read."

"Well at that rate, you'd have read the whole library."

Indira laughed nervously.

"So Indira," Eddie continued, "if you were to win tonight, what would you spend the money on?"

She looked shy, lowering her head and biting her lip. "Well Eddie, my husband and I want children, but unfortunately we need a little help. So absolutely, no hesitation about it, we would try IVF."

Eddie smiled warmly. "Well all the best to you." He repeated the music question, secretly hoping the delightful Indira would know the answer.

Indira hesitated and then answered the question correctly.

Indira passed on the next question and walked back to her seat by Fred. They exchanged a warm smile.

The fifth contestant was knocked out and the sixth and final contestant answered several questions correctly before passing. The first

contestant returned to the hot seat. A wrong answer saw Fred back in the hot seat again.

"Okay, let's go Fred Halifax from Brighton playing for \$100,000 with just five questions remaining."

Fred waited until the burning line was halfway across before answering. "Lock in B."

The next question seemed too easy. Fred wondered for a brief moment if he was overlooking something. He cocked his head slightly to the side. "Lock in D. Slovakia."

Eddie turned to the two remaining contestants. "Indira and David, you are both still in with a chance."

Fred had answered correctly again.

Eddie read out the second last question.

Fred knew the correct answer was B. He was about to lock it in when he caught a glimpse of Indira. She looked excited for him, happy even. She would use the money for IVF. Fred thought about Daisy and his other three children and what joy and meaning they had brought to his life.

He feigned a confused look. "Not sure about this Eddie. Ah ... lock in D."

Eddie looked visibly surprised. "Lock in D?" he confirmed.

"Yes" responded Fred firmly. "Lock it in."

"Sorry Fred."

They shook hands and Fred left the stage.

Indira took the hot seat.

"Well Indira, one question left and \$50,000 up for grabs."

Fred was watching off stage. He crossed his fingers in his pocket. He knew the answer but would this young woman know it?

"Oh my goodness," Indira said hardly able to contain her excitement. "I know this. Lock in A."

"Are you sure Indira," asked Eddie.

Yes she is sure, thought Fred. Good girl. You've done it.

"Yes I am very very sure," confirmed Indira.

Eddie paused, building the excitement. "Indira you have just won \$50,000. That's fantastic. Good luck with your IVF."

They hugged.

A few minutes later, Eddie went out of his way to locate Fred. "I think we both know you knew the answer to that question," said Eddie.

Fred looked genuinely surprised Eddie would voice his thoughts so blatantly. "I don't know what you mean," said Fred.

Eddie smiled, "You know, she might have got it wrong."

Fred extended his hand. "You do a good job Eddie. It was a pleasure to meet you," and moved away quickly to meet up with Daisy. On the way he came face to face with Indira, still shaking and smiling after her win.

She hugged him with her smile. "Thank you."

"No need to thank me", said Fred, wanting to get away from the studio and all this praise.

"Yes," Indira said. "There is a great need to thank you."

18 months later Daisy called her father. "Dad, you need to watch A Current Affair. There is something special on."

"Daisy, you know I don't watch tabloid television."

"Well you need to make an exception and watch tonight."

At 7pm the program started. It played a short taster of the segments for that night. One of them was about a young woman who had won \$50,000 on Millionaire Hot Seat and had just given birth to twin girls by IVF.

Fred smiled. Job done.

THE MAP HORSE

by Deb Hall

He was headstrong yet responsive. He wasn't always amenable to being ridden. I knew which tree he favoured and could nearly always find him in the shade there. Observing him from a distance, he appeared contemplative. I very quickly realised that if my walk across the paddock towards him seemed long and arduous, then I most likely wouldn't get close no matter how far I trudged. Other times my feet glided effortlessly across the paddock and, when I reached him, he would permit me to mount him and would do my bidding.

The best rides were when I gave him his head and hung on for dear life. I certainly could never be described as a natural or graceful rider. I would clamp my legs around his girth, lean over and place one arm around his neck and twist the fingers of my other hand into his thick mane. I hadn't actually fallen off but had come close to it a few times. In those instances, it seemed that the horse sensed my unease and would slow his pace and steady me until I regained my balance.

He was a horse with a map on his flanks. The map stretched all of the way from his hindquarters to his jugular groove. To be precise he was a horse with two maps, one on each side, each flank, and they were very different maps. But before I describe the cartographer's work, I should tell you about the horse. This is how I remember him.

In different lights, the horse appeared various shades of light golden through to a creamy colour. The former is typical of palominos and the latter a pinto colouring. He especially resembled a pinto from a distance, when the blurred map could be seen as the coloured markings of a tobiano pinto or the painted pony favoured by the Plains Indians.

I tended to think of him as a painted pony because it fitted with my idea of the horse's hide being a canvas for the painted map.

When my bare feet slapped against the horse's sides, against the maps, I felt as if I might be altering the maps, shifting fault-lines, changing the topography. I imagined my heels toppling mountains, splashing in lakes, dipping in seas, making waves. Geography rippled with the horse's muscles. When the horse's flanks began to steam with exertion, I imagined lush tropical jungles proliferating instantly on the map, hosting colourful birds and butterflies.

The horse was unlike any horse I had seen before. He seemed somehow to embody different horse breeds, like an equine changeling. He was as short and stocky as a Przewalski's wild horse, and as tall as a Clydesdale, one of the strongest of the heavy horses, yet with all of the grace and agility of a Lipizzaner from the famous Spanish Riding School in Vienna. Mostly though, he appeared as a rangy painted pony with the stamina to trot across endless plains.

Whenever I approached him, he loomed high above me, and it seemed an impossibility to actually mount him and ride him. Yet the moment I spoke gently to him and stroked him, he became more approachable and accessible. I found myself putting my foot against his foreleg for leverage and hauling myself onto his back as if it was the most natural thing in the world for me to mount and ride this horse, and ride him bareback into the bargain.

He was a horse for and from the ages. Sometimes he wore a shaffron on his head and a crinet to protect his neck, armour from mediaeval times. Otherwise, he was completely unfettered and unencumbered.

I often wondered who the cartographer was who had plied their skills to depict these mysterious regions. Just occasionally, I doubted whether these lands existed, and thought that they were simply conjured from the illustrator's imagination. I hadn't travelled the world so I couldn't really be sure one way or the other.

I knew that the various geographical features were all landscapes that existed somewhere on Earth. There were mountains, lakes, deserts, jungles, rivers, rainforests, seas, oceans. It was just that the juxtaposition of them seemed a little odd at times. I knew, though, that some areas that are deserts today were once forests. The world had appeared very different in previous geological eras and had been populated by creatures that fill us with awe now. Some changes had been wrought by cycles of climate changes, such as Ice Ages, and some had been caused by humans.

Mostly when I think about the horse, I choose to remember him standing in the shade of his favourite tree. I cling to that memory. Other memories I have of him are too difficult to encompass because my rational mind rejects the reality of them. They are more like half-remembered dreams or hallucinations.

The last time I rode the horse, he cantered easily through a secret fissure in his paddock. It was invisible to me until I felt the change in air pressure, as I imagine would happen in an airlock entry to a submarine or a spaceship, and for one moment I felt as if my chest was being crushed and I couldn't breathe. Then we were on the other side and I took a huge gulp of fresh air and gazed all around me.

He took me into other realms on that ride. I could hardly believe my eyes. It was so surreal. I still cannot be sure whether it really happened or if I imagined it all. I recollect the feelings I experienced more vividly than any details of the sights I witnessed. I was equally exhilarated and terrified. My eyes couldn't take it all in. At times I thought that it must be paradise. At other times I thought it must be a lost world for restless souls.

THE CHIMNEY THAT WENT UP IN SMOKE

by Jan Harper

“One People, One Starch” read the advertisement, pronounced by a luscious female figure draped in a red Australian flag. Gus saw this advertisement everywhere and felt pride in belonging to the workplace responsible for Star Starch.

The year was 1907. Gus had worked in the factory in Port Melbourne for nearly eight years. He would have been in trouble if he hadn’t got that job. Times had been tough in the 1890s. He had lost his previous job, and things had been pretty desperate. But his luck had turned when Robert Harper took over the large factory complex on Beach Street, Port Melbourne in 1899. Gus had risen at dawn and been third in the long queue for a job. He had been one of the lucky ones.

Gus took some pride in working in what was, at the time, the largest industrial complex in Melbourne. Its great brick chimney acted as a landmark from the Bay, the local fishermen claiming, “If you can’t see Harper’s chimney, you’re in trouble.” Its products were many – from Rolled Oats to Custard Powder, Jelly Crystals to Canary Food – all made from different sources of starch. No grocery shop was without a host of Harper products.

Gus’s work, however, was confined to making Star Starch. Laundry starch was an important product for the upper classes. He knew because Myrtle, his wife, took in laundry weekly from a Toorak household. He’s seen her mix a thick white paste from granules of raw starch and cold water, then add boiling water to cook the starch to a smooth clear jelly. He watched her dipping the client’s table linen, shirt collars and petticoats, then, once dry, dampening them, rolling them tightly, and later pressing them to a polished finish with a very hot iron. The starched garments not only looked good with their extra body and gloss, but the starch resisted soiling. Of course, Star Starch was insisted upon, described in all the advertising as, “The Best in the World”.

It was indeed “The Best” because it was manufactured from rice, with smaller starch granules, rather than from corn or potatoes, which were generally used elsewhere.

Gus worked in the starch mill, where he and his workmates crushed the rice and extracted the starch with a caustic soda solution. Gus was unhappy since the caustic soda that slopped on the floor rotted his boots, sometimes within a month – boots he could ill afford to replace. He then washed the slurry through fine sieves to remove the fibre, adding bleach, preservative, fabric softener and blueing before placing the product in special drying rooms. Drying occurred through fires in the engine house, where the heat was intermittent and debilitating for Gus. But smoke went up the great chimney stack to let the world know that the plant was in full operation.

Gus took pride in his job, yes. But pride does not always result in contentment, and he and his workmates found much wanting in their employment. There was such a small reward for such hard, long hours.

Mr Harper, despite his wealth, public largesse, success in politics, and strict religious observance, did not extend his munificence to his workforce. In fact, he was a *sweater of labour* and respected his workers very little, apart from seeking to ensure their salvation. When Mr Harper looked at him with his drooping left eye, Gus could tell he believed that men were not equal. Wealth and conditions at the factory were top heavy, to the extent that working conditions had recently been the subject of examination by the Victorian Industrial Appeals Court.

Gus was one of the employees who was brave enough to give evidence to the Appeals Court. He told them he worked day shifts for two weeks, 54 hours weekly, then night shifts for two weeks, 63 hours weekly. His pay: 32 shillings and sixpence a week. He confirmed there was no sick pay and he struggled to work when sick in case someone else took his place. Like all the employees, he was required to take three weeks unpaid holiday leave each year at times when work was slack.

Even with Myrtle's small contribution, the family was badly stretched. Gus gave evidence to the Court that he paid six shillings a week rent for a two-roomed cottage with a lean-to. A penny in the gas meter gave four hours of light.

The Company, while not disputing the pay and conditions, replied that other firms in the same line of business paid similar or lower, claiming that criticisms became particularly rife during Robert Harper's electoral campaigns. They pointed, as an opposing argument, to the Company Picnic, held annually on the Plenty River, with staff and their families conveyed in 26 horse-drawn vehicles. There were marquees, a Scottish band, a merry-go-round, a Punch and Judy Show, dancing on the green and sports. But Gus felt this was no sop for the daily grind to put food on the table. "One People, One Starch"? Gus grew more sceptical of the claim of the striking red-clad woman in the advertisement.

Though he turned a blind eye to the men's working conditions, Mr Harper was scrupulous about their religious observance. Every week or two, he would question Gus about his church attendance. "Did the girls go to Sunday School?" he would ask. A little prayer would follow, in which Gus was asked to join.

Not content with spiritual guidance, Mr Harper took a great interest in the charitableness of his employees. On payday he expected each of them to contribute any loose pennies to the "Hospital Box", and it was a brave man who failed to let Mr Harper hear the click of his coins in the box.

The next time Gus saw the red-draped woman in the advertisement, he sacrificed a ripe tomato from his family's dinner and tossed it straight at her.

A BLOSSOM IN TIME

by Aziza Khamlichi

I am a 35-year-old cherry tree. I still remember the day Martha bought me from Eden Nursery. She chose me from so many fruit trees. She was attracted to my pink blossoms. She cradled me like a baby in her arms. When Martha got me home, she noticed that I was very parched so she immediately watered me. I felt refreshed as the water reached my young roots.

Martha decided to plant me in front of the house. This way she could enjoy the colour of my blossoms during spring. She encouraged her son and daughter 5 and 7 years old to help plant me.

Martha attended to me over the years. She fed, watered and talked to me about her ups and downs. So, I listened.

Every springtime the passers-by marvelled at my beautiful blushing pink blossoms and took photos. I attracted lots of buzzing bees. They made honey and helped me to pollinate my blossoms. The eggs in the bird nest hatched and flew away. In December I produced cherries in abundance. Martha was so proud of me.

"I am going to put a net over half of your branches. This way we can share with the birds," she explained to me gently. "You are the best cherry tree in the neighbourhood. Look at your fruit. So red, big and juicy. You give me so much joy."

Every year Martha filled pretty baskets with my abundant yield of fruit. She delivered them to the neighbours just in time for Christmas.

Martha made jam and glacé cherries for her cakes and liquors for special occasions.

Martha worried about me during the Melbourne's windy winter days. But I knew how to survive. I swayed with the wind like I was dancing.

I was so well looked after. Martha pruned me in time and checked and saved me from all the parasites. I felt safe.

Martha and I aged together.

Now the children have grown up and the grandchildren are picking my fruit, climbing and swinging on my branches as their parents used to do. At my age now, I feel the weight and my branches creak.

I have become fragile and have lost half of me during a windy day. Martha had a fall. She couldn't look after me anymore. She forgot to talk to me.

Martha went away. The people that moved into Martha's house didn't want me. "This tree must go. It's obscuring some of the sea view," I heard them say.

I felt so sad. Soon I felt a sharp pain. Someone was driving a massive nail into my trunk. "This should do it. Let's watch the cherry tree die," they laughed.

"No, please wait. You will love my blossoms in spring and my juicy fruit in summer," I pleaded.

But they didn't hear me – not like Martha and I communicated.

"I will not die! I will survive until the Summer. Then you will look after me when you taste my fruit," I tried to bargain with them.

The new owners checked me for any sign of decay. "The bloody tree is not dying. In fact it is budding." They sounded very disappointed.

A few weeks later, just when I started to blossom, they poured something burning down my trunk and around the base of my old roots. The pain was unbearable. But I resisted for Martha's sake.

Then they chopped me. I had to go.

One of the neighbours was horrified. She had known me since Martha planted me and had enjoyed my beautiful blossoms and her share of my fruit every year. She alerted the Port Phillip council, who started to investigate. Knocking door to door. Nobody admitted to poisoning or chopping me.

"The new owners!" I screamed again and again. But they didn't hear me like Martha did.

My roots still survived, and in retaliation they went rampant through the house. They lifted the water pipes and ruptured the gas pipes. The house was on fire.

Martha's ashes nourished the soil around my leftover stump, and I began to grow lush green shoots.

KALEIDOSCOPE

by Felicity May

Breathe, breathe, head tilted way back as my eyes scan the mosaic patches of blue sky, shaped by the trembling leaves. Beneath my feet, a thick mound of leaves works its way downwards, enriching the soil below. In Japan they call this 'forest bathing.'

Where am I? Not in Japan but standing under that so magnificent Moreton Bay Fig Tree, on the Dickens St side of the St Kilda Botanical Gardens. Encircled by its outstretched branches, I walk around the massive, elephant like trunk, wondering how many others may have sought refuge here in times past. Secluded, safe, yet so accessible.

I wander on through the park and walk down the road and around the corner. Where am I now? Trams clang loudly, as locals and visitors criss-cross the street. Others sit, chatting, watching, waiting, only they know what for. Ahh, the give-away, the cakes. Beguiled and confused, tourists stop and stare, seduced by the colourful array of Continental cakes and sweets on continuous display in Acland St, since the opening of Monarch Cakes in 1934.

On I go, now in my car, turning left. Oh good, the lights are red. Where am I? I am waiting at my favourite traffic lights, my attention captivated by the view across the road. Palm trees, elegant but somehow also comical, line the paths alongside the velvety green grass. Their ruler straight trunks, stretching upwards towards the sky before breaking out into more frivolous, feather shaped fronds. Glimpses of the sea, the horizon, framed by a glowing sunset or perhaps grey threatening clouds. Is there a more beautiful traffic light stop I wonder, as the lights change and I drive on, turning right.

Where to next? Of course, where I always go. I turn the corner into Pier Road muttering, is the tide in or out? Reluctant to ruin the surprise, I do not check my phone for tidal times. Yes, yes. My heart jumps a little, never tiring of the sheer vastness of the sandscape, visible for just a few hours as the receding waves reveal an Arabian like desert stretching far into the distance. Rays of sunlight glisten, as they strike the surface of the shallow pools of water. As the sea flows gently in multiple directions, ripples of water create folds or ridges, leaving intriguing, chaotic patterns in the sand. Worm casts, imprints of other sea creatures dot the surface, giving hints of the richness of life under the sea, when hidden from our view.

Then, there is that black Kelpie. He just never gives up. Time and time again he enters the sea, this time, this time he will catch a seagull. But the gulls seemingly bored with the game, take off and then settle again tantalizingly near, reigniting Kelpie's ambitions, yet again.

Alongside the breakwater, the yachts shift with the rhythm of the sea, their masts creating a pattern of straw-like sticks, manmade objects that fit seamlessly into the seascape. Then there is the sky, never the same. Wind and moisture determining the shape of the clouds, as they block or reveal the sun's radiant glow. Words cannot describe what my eyes see, the vastness, beauty, mirrored elsewhere around our planet, earth. Yet it is just ten minutes from my home on traffic laden Brighton Road. Breathe, breathe, now the air is salty, a refreshing wind caresses my face.

I drive home, but no, somehow my car is taking a different route, turning right again. Screams of excitement from Luna Park vibrate through the air. If I am lucky, I may catch the Skydivers dropping from the heavens onto the grassy foreshore. I never tire of watching, wondering if one day, I might join them.

I continue driving to Point Ormond, unable to resist the temptation of catching the afterglow of the sunset. Walking up the hill, I stand together with many others of like mind. Eyes gazing far out to the gently curved horizon. Port Melbourne, the city skyscrapers, a distant tanker, recede into the distance as the sky radiates with an exuberant crimson glow. Breathe, breathe, wind rustles through my hair.

Walking down the hill and past the Point Ormond kiosk where on a sunny day I meet with friends, chat, have a coffee, I never cease to marvel. I mutter to myself, "look where you live. Look where you live, how lucky am I!" As I twist and turn my imaginary kaleidoscope, a different mosaic lights up, illuminating the intrinsic allure of St Kilda and its surrounds.

I respectfully acknowledge and give my thanks and gratitude to the Yaluk-ut Weelam Clan of the Boon Wurrung.

TWENTY TWENTY TOO

by Lois Best

The deadline for this entry is looming.
It's the 29 of July 2022 tomorrow.

At the beginning of this year, some wag suggested we don't get our hopes up too high. "After all, listen to its sound", they said, "2022. It sounds awfully like 2020 too."

I'm sure you can recall that 2020 was a bit of a bummer. Sadly, it proved to be a prediction for the first half of my year. It started off okay but by mid-year, to quote my late mother, "my get up and go has got up and went".

Can I string words together coherently?
One way to find out. Let's go.

One morning in mid-June, I find myself staring into my bedside cupboard. It's not a cupboard I go to often. Why am I here? I have absolutely no idea. This event feels separated from reality. Am I looking for something? I have no idea. It strikes me as hilarious. Defeated, I laugh, close the door, and go and put the kettle on.

Hmm, I'll have to change the way I make coffee today. On top of the cupboard incident, I'm clumsy. Over the past few days, not only have I tripped up the stairs, dropped various foodstuffs and utensils, and lost my ability to spell or type accurately, I have broken my three-cup plunger. I hit it on the tap which accounts for the crack in the lip, but why is the bottom cracked as well? Again, no idea.

I hardly have the energy to go food shopping. I am glad my Albert Park Village shops are in easy walking distance, but to go searching for a replacement plunger – not yet. Maybe I can judge one sixth of my six-cup plunger to make a halfway decent cup of coffee!

Sipping my *successful* coffee, a memory creeps in. At some stage this morning, to save going to the shop, I thought to check if I have more face cream. I keep that kind of thing in my bedside cupboard. There's the explanation. Thank goodness.

You see, on the 1st of June, I tested positive for Covid-19. The Alfred Covid Clinic monitored my symptoms via mobile phone and assured me that I was not too bad. I found that reassuring, as did my daughter, Christine, who was coping with her daughter, Ella, in the same condition.

Between us we discover that Covid brain fog is real. One day Ella asks her mother if Picnic at Hanging Rock took place at Uluru! Well, they're both rocks, right?

I get back from the shop one day with diced dates. I didn't know they existed. I was aiming for pitted dates, but the words didn't register in the supermarket! Fortunately I find this funny too.

Several weeks go by. My week of isolation is long over but I'm no longer sure what day it is. They replace me at work and at U3A.

One morning I wake up feeling so bad I do a RAT. A solid line appears next to the C. My addled brain sees C for Covid. Panicked I text my children a photograph with, 'Oh no, look at this, why am I positive again?!'

Christine texts her brother to reassure his that she's got this, then she calls me. "Um, Mother, that solid line means *negative*."

My poor brain. It takes a while to understand, and even longer to calm down. It's C for Control, not Covid. That's good news.

It seems I have progressed into the vague territory of "Long Covid". What is it? Nobody really knows. What to do about it? Nobody really knows. But the doctor does warn me to expect at least three months of it.

Some days I can get out of bed okay and can shower and get dressed. Some days I only manage to get dressed – other days, especially those cold, gloomy days, I give up and stay in my PJs and only venture from my bed for comfort stops and food.

Eventually, I manage to go out two days in a row to do things that have been planned for months. I pay for that by having to sleep for the next two days.

The best thing about these long sleeps is the entertainment. My Covid brain produces surreal, movie length, vivid, technicolour dreams. I'm usually in an unfamiliar building with lots of people both familiar and unfamiliar.

In one such adventure my family and I are putting our things into cupboards in a huge house. The owner's things are still there. Suddenly we remember we are meant to be checking the place out, to decide if we will move in, not actually moving in. The owners will be back soon. We quickly start gathering our things.

A knock on the door proves to be my ex-husband. Again. Has he not learned from previous dreams that he is not welcome? Does he not understand 'shove off' delivered loudly in Aussie vernacular? Language I would never use when awake!

This time before he leaves, he flashes his trademark cheeky grin then turns on the sprinkler in the rose-covered archway so that I can't get out the front door without getting soaked. Typical!

I storm back into the house and am entranced by the sight of granddaughter Amy, towering, statuesque, dressed like Elvis in a white jumpsuit with a belt embossed in gold. Of course.

I frequently wake pleasantly bewildered and thoroughly entertained. I'll miss that if this goes away when I get better. And I am getting better. Finally there are more ticks than crosses on the Daily Achievements chart that I've been keeping for four weeks.

So if you're reading this it means I made the deadline. And trust me, I will be feeling extremely pleased about that.

MUM AND MRS SHADBOLT

by Christopher Burgess

I hear screams and I start to run, my schoolbag thumping against my hip, and above me someone shouts out and I look up and see old Ma Cartwright leaning out her window pointing at me and she says "It's her kid", and the old hag who lives in the same crappy building I live in, tries to stop me and I jump over the low front wall and nearly trip over a baby carriage that's been dumped in the front garden and the screaming is much louder now and I can see two shapes wriggling around like fishes behind the frosted glass and I fling myself into the hallway and my heart is beating like a drum and it's hard to see what's going on and there is Mrs Shadbolt who lives on the floor below us, trying to stop my mother going up the stairs and Mrs Shadbolt grabs my mum's overcoat and my mum loses her balance and topples backwards and lands on top of Mrs Shadbolt who starts cursing my mother and I rush over and kick Mrs Shadbolt as she tries to free herself but my mother is much bigger and heavier than Mrs Shadbolt who is as slippery as an eel and is on Mum in seconds and I try to push Mrs Shadbolt off, but my schoolbag gets in the way so I rip it off and begin thumping Mrs Shadbolt and call her all the names I can think of and she stops and glares at me and grabs my mum by her hair and my mum lets out a terrible shriek and clutches at the banister and Mrs Shadbolt tries to pry Mum's fingers loose and I keep on thumping Mrs Shadbolt and I hear a door bang open and the sound of footsteps rushing down the stairs and it's Mr Shadbolt and the stink of beer and cigarettes on his breath makes me feel ill and I notice bits of food stuck between his teeth and he needs a shave and he pulls his wife off my mother and shoves her up against the wall and he looks at what his wife has in her hand. "Good God, Doreen", he shouts and starts shaking her like a doll. "Look what you've gone and done you stupid cow" and Mrs Shadbolt slaps her husband's face and flings what she has in her hand on the floor. "You were the one who sold her the rug" screams Mrs Shadbolt, "so don't blame me" and Mr Shadbolt slaps his wife, and suddenly there is a loud banging at the front door and a voice shouts "Police" and Mrs Shadbolt takes a cigarette from her apron pocket and Mr Shadbolt tells his wife to let him do the talking and opens the door and two policemen come into the hallway and ask what's going on, and Mr Shadbolt tells the police that it was just a dispute between his wife and a neighbour. "He's a liar" I shout. "She attacked my mum and pulled her hair out" and a policeman turns and looks at Mrs Shadbolt and asks is that true, and Mrs Shadbolt says it was an accident, and I pick the clump of my mother's hair off the floor and show it to the policeman who goes pale. "Keep your eyes on these two" he tells his partner. "You're not going to believe what he tells you, are you?" snaps Mrs Shadbolt, and Mr Shadbolt tells his wife to keep her big mouth shut, and Mrs Shadbolt lights her cigarette. "She's the one who told the cops, you moron" says Mrs Shadbolt and Mr Shadbolt slaps his wife and she slaps him back and the policeman pulls them apart and instructs his partner to take them both outside and the policeman asks my mother if she needs a doctor and my mother nods and soon a doctor appears. "Who's been hurt?" the doctor asks and the policeman points to my mother and the doctor examines my mother and proceeds to dress the wound and then helps her to her feet and we get my mother upstairs to our flat. He gives my mother some tablets to ease the pain and tells her it's not as bad as it looks, and her hair will eventually grow back. He gives my mother his address and phone number and tells her to call if the pain gets worse, but I don't tell him we don't have a phone. The doctor picks up his bag and disappears outside. I ask Mum if she would like a nice hot cup of cocoa and Mum says yes and by the time I take it into her, she is asleep, and I get undressed and get into bed but then I hear Mum begin to cry again, and I can stand it no longer, and I crawl into bed beside her and lie there awake.



Park Towers Housing Estate, South Melbourne, 1969, Port Phillip Collection

PICKING UP PLASTIC

by Jacki Burgess

I know that I run the risk of being seen as an eccentric old lady, but I find it really nerve-jangling to walk past a piece of plastic and not pick it up.

These pieces of plastic I then deposit in the nearest bin in order to minimise the chances of that bit of plastic ending up in the gutters and being flushed into the sea. We live a block away from the sea and virtually any walk I take will end up with my depositing half a dozen or so pieces of plastic into whatever rubbish bin I next walk past. And I bless my pocket-sized bottles of hand sanitiser.

So at least those bits of plastic will not be among the eight million metric tons of plastic that flow into the sea each year.

The floating island of plastic in the Pacific apparently contains 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic and is three or four times the size of France, or 1,600 square kilometres.

It's enough to make you ill. It certainly makes the fishes and the birds ill.

So I do my tiny, little, infinitely small gesture to help minimise the problem. I started doing it when I walked past a floating, winding strip of plastic wrap that had obviously dropped from a nearby industrial bin. I walked back, picked up the plastic, put it in the bin and two steps further on there was a bright, shiny two dollar coin the footpath – which I also picked up. Virtue rewarded, I thought smugly.

From then on, there seems to be a million or so face masks waiting to be picked up, floating through the streets, countless lids, bottles, plastic wraps and items of all sizes and shapes, and several billion tiny, indestructible polystyrene balls.

I've picked up other things too. I picked up a wallet in a supermarket one day, and being extremely respectful of the owner's privacy, extremely honest, and extremely naïve, handed it into the supermarket office without even opening the wallet to look for the owner's name. When they took the wallet at the office, to my surprise, I was told that if the wallet hadn't been claimed within four weeks, I was entitled to come back and claim it.

So, after five or so weeks, I enquired there. 'No, it's not been collected', they said. 'Not yet collected' they said again after another week or two. Then, next time, a little delay and then 'Oh, yes, it has been collected', I was told. Perhaps not by the owner, though, I've always felt.

My children found a handbag once in the grounds of the church next door and brought it in to show me their find. I checked the contents of that bag and discovered the owner's name in an empty wallet and contacted her. She raced over to collect it, exclaiming 'My world is in that handbag.' And she gave lavish quantities of chocolates to my children in gratitude.

I was walking through a supermarket a week or so ago and saw a crumpled, crunched up bit of plastic on the floor. I picked it up and it turned out to be a \$20 note.

That reminded me of an earlier occasion when my husband and I had been walking down the street towards St Kilda beach and I moved a lengthy branch off the path, which had fallen across the street in the recent storm, as it was a potential nuisance for any passing walkers.

When we came to the end of the street, there was further evidence of the storm in a mass of twigs, branches and green leaves that was blocking the gutter and preventing the storm water clearing into the drain.

My husband started to clear away handfuls of leaves and branches, and he was the obvious cause of the conversation between a couple of men who had rounded the corner, which I saw but couldn't hear.

There was something about the pair that made me feel a little uneasy, but then one of them walked over, bent down and pulled something from my husband's grasp. He continued his conversation to his mate, 'And he doesn't even know he had a \$50 note in his hand.'

My husband had not seen the \$50 note among his handful of leaves. Nor had I. But the men walking by had.

'Just a minute,' I said, and went to claim it.

'No,' he said, 'We need it more than you do.' Well, he did, I thought, as I watched them walk off up the street.

One year, on Clear Up Australia Day, I didn't arrive at Catani Gardens till the participants were heading off home, so as a self-imposed 'penance' for my late arrival. I vowed to pick up every single cigarette butt I came across. I must have picked up hundreds of butts there ... as well as a gold ring, partially buried in a sandy path. A jeweller told me it was worth a couple of hundred dollars.

Another beautiful piece of jewellery of two interlocking silver rings caught my eye. I found it lying on the ground beneath a tall plane tree. It was from Tiffany's.

Another time I picked up something else eye-catching from the road. A multicoloured flash had caught my eye from a square-cut stone that was held in place by a minute depression in the asphalt.

I picked up the stone, and when I got home, googled 'how to tell a diamond from a zircon'.

I didn't find the jeweller-approved way of identifying it, so I tucked it into a little transparent bag, put it into a drawer, planning to continue my research later on.

Trouble was, I could never find that bag or the square-cut diamond – or zircon – again.

But keeping an eye open for plastic and other things is a good habit to pick up.

THE LOST DOCUMENT

by Lois Daley

For a long time my late brother John Daley and I believed we were perhaps “illegitimate”. I was born in Port Melbourne in 1936, John in 1939.

Growing up here we never thought about our parents Jessie and Albert’s marriage. There were no photos of where and when a marriage took place nor was it ever discussed with us. Maybe it was held at a Registry Office in the city we thought. Religion never played a part in our lives and we did not attend any church.

In 2021 I decided to follow up on part of the family history my brother had started of our ancestors in 2013. They came from Norfolk in the UK and Askeaton in Limerick Ireland and arrived here in Sandridge in 1844 and 1866 by ship, where both families settled.

I spent time in my search and was able to obtain from the Victorian Births, Deaths and Marriages details of their marriage on 21st September 1935 at Holy Trinity Church of England in Bay St Port Melbourne. Their marriage was conducted by the Rev. Edward Finnie (Clerk in Holy Orders) with two witnesses present.

My only wish was that I could have told my late brother John about not being famous as an illegitimate boy of the Borough where he was born and grew up and loved.

For me, each day as I put on my mother Jessie’s engagement and wedding ring, I will think of her and my father Albert with the love of a daughter who is blessed to live in her birth home with its wonderful memories and where her beliefs were shaped.

NO PICNIC

by Michele Green

The dark night sky fading, I pulled into the carpark of the Lancefield football oval, the launchpad for my first ever hot air balloon experience. With the promised warmth of a late spring Saturday, early morning mist began to rise amid the sun's rays.

My heart rhythm had accelerated, my sweaty palms still clung to the steering wheel and my stomach churned like an old washing machine. I quizzed myself: 'What am I doing here? How did my kids talk me into this?'

A typical Melburnian, I emerged with handbag and mandatory umbrella from the cosy warmth of my car into the cooler regional air.

The pilot, barely out of pubescence, beckoned me over to the larger-than-expected wicker basket. His cockiness didn't inspire confidence but I had to trust the reputable company and their unblemished record of successful flights. I nodded politely to the three other passengers, a young couple and an older gentleman, as the pilot Craig introduced himself to us and we to each other.

We climbed on board. Craig measured the air temperature, wind velocity and our combined weight, then fired up the burners that would shortly take us to an optimum height where we could feel a connection to the glorious landscape.

'You'll get glimpses of lavish lifestyles as we glide over the Macedon Ranges and see the townships of Woodend and Romsey – ample opportunities for photographic moments, and there'll be hot coffee and fresh croissants once we set our course. We'll land on the Hesket school basketball courts where you'll have a glass of champagne, then taken by minibus back to the oval. Any questions?'

Everyone was mute. All first-timers.

Propane-fuelled flames, roaring like Merlin's dragon and feeding the rainbow-coloured envelope, transformed it from its limp self into a formidable shape. A sudden jolt. We were airborne. Fear and exhilaration. Never a good traveller, queasiness soon overwhelmed me. I rubbed my ginger bracelet.

'Perhaps a hot drink and something in your stomach will help,' suggested Ray, the older man, passing around the provisions.

The bird's-eye view of grapevines, rows of olive trees, clusters of dense bush, horses, cattle and sheep grazing, was a sight to behold. My adult children had given me the perfect gift.

Minutes ticked by. Without warning, the balloon dropped altitude at vertical speed. Craig panicked, pulling on the cord that releases hot air rather than maintains the propane jets. The balloon was flying rogue and dangerously low. Our craft, losing its stability, headed towards the mamelon, Hanging Rock. Too late to veer in another direction, inevitably we'd crash into the landmark. We braced ourselves for impact.

In shock, conscious, minor lacerations and abrasions, we breathed a collective sigh.

'We've landed,' announced the pilot. 'Not on the basketball courts, but near them, eh?'

Predicting a dire outcome, a helicopter hovering in the local area had contacted emergency services. Fire trucks and ambulances were on scene.

Plucked from the basket by paramedics and firefighters, we had to flee the likely explosion.

THE PINK PUSSY CAT

by Michele Green

Tuesday night was slow.

Sister Stella, as part of her parish duties, was rostered for St Mary's wayside chapel two nights a week, from six to ten o'clock. A member of the 'Company of Jesus', she loved the diversity of people she encountered in her mission: the down-and-outers, ex-prisoners, pensioners and the well-heeled.

Directly across from the chapel in Park Street was the 'Pink Pussy Cat', one of three venues for gentlemen's comfort in that street. Stella got to know some of the sex workers there. Members of the sisterhood, Sally and Goldie, frequently dropped in to share a cuppa, knowing they had a sympathetic ear in the nun who dressed in civvies and was grounded. Kelly, the manager of the thriving enterprise, also enjoyed Stella's friendship.

That particular night, very few had visited the chapel. Stella decided to close early and head back to the nuns' quarters in Bank Street, when she got an unexpected call:

'Hi Stella, it's Kelly from across the road. I wondered if you can help us out.'

Stella froze. She nearly dropped the phone.

'Surely she can't be asking for a favour I could never honour. Doesn't she know about our three vows – chastity, poverty and obedience?'

The madam continued: 'Josie hasn't turned up for her shift, so I'm going to have to step in. Could you find it in your heart to work on reception until 2 a.m. when Babe comes on? I'd be ever grateful.'

Stella regained her composure and sputtered: 'Oh, I ... er, suppose I could. I was just about to go home.'

She locked up. She braced herself, never imagining that she would set foot in a brothel.

Behind the reception desk was a long corridor leading to eight rooms. A warm glow of soft lighting and the sensual aromas of musk and sandalwood almost made her dizzy; she was only used to the simmering incense of a smoking thurible for Benediction.

Kelly hurried through her list of duties: answering the phone, greeting the customers and putting fresh towels outside each door every twenty minutes. 'Oh, if you get bored, there's a bottle of nail polish over there, so you can treat yourself and paint your nails.'

Stella looked aghast at the counter to see an enormous glass jar, filled with an assortment of coloured condoms next to an appointment book, then remembered where she was.

Kelly waved 'Goodbye' to the now crimson-faced nun and scurried down the corridor.

A pang of unease suddenly hit her. 'What will Fr Bob say when I tell him what I've done?'

Calls and customers came in thick and fast, so she cast her doubts aside.

Soon she got into a rhythm. 'Hello Pink Pussy Cat, Stella speaking...'

When Babe came in to start her new shift, a bottle of bubbly was popped, glasses filled.

'Let's toast Stella. What a star!'

She decided to confess to Fr Bob. He replied: 'We're all in this together!'

TEENAGE TRAGEDY AVERTED

by Deb Hall

Part way out along the pier, they stand on the edge, looking down into the water and casting glances at each other. Who is going to make the first move? Their shoes and clothing are in a pile at their feet. The two teenage boys are both wearing what appear to be black swimming trunks, but might be underwear. There the similarity ends.

One boy is short and chubby, although he doesn't realise it yet. He still thinks he is an Adonis, a perfect example of his species. His chest is too well-fleshed and he puffs it out. His stomach bulges over the waistband of his trunks, and the top of his bum crack is visible. He has a movie star head of hair, thick and black and slightly curly. The other boy is taller and leaner with lank straight hair, and he is not as self-possessed. I suspect he will follow the chubby boy's lead.

As I walk towards them, I debate with myself whether or not to warn them of the dangers of diving or jumping off the pier. Their friend is nearby, hunched inside his hoodie, a boneless creature slumped on the wide concrete kerb on the other side of the pier where there are railings. He is endeavouring to appear disinterested, but he is eyeing them sidelong, waiting for something to happen. He reminds me of a puddle of jellyfish slowly evaporating.

There are signs, with illustrations, telling people not to dive or jump off the pier. The boys could be fifteen or younger; they could be eighteen. I presume they can read or at least decipher the pictures. Regardless of their age, I doubt if they would take any notice of me if I told them that the water is shallow and they could break their necks.

I imagine the chubby one floating facedown, limbs dangling, his head at an odd angle, and even more of his bum crack showing. His hair curling, like a wet spaniel, as his life drains away.

They are posing and posturing and trying to drum up the courage to act. Chubby says, "We could do a handstand." Lean mumbles something in reply. I say "Good morning" as I pass by, just as I do with anyone. Technically, the sun has not yet risen but the morning is awash with first light. The sea is murky and it is impossible for them to gauge the depth or see the sandbank.

I continue out along the pier and greet a few fishermen trying their luck. At the kiosk, I turn onto the wooden jetty and then stop at various points to look at moored boats and watch a Little Pied Cormorant fishing. The cormorant is having more success than the anglers. I sit on a bench for a while and enjoy the morning. I can see that the teenage boys haven't launched themselves yet. I figure that the longer they defer their dive or their jump, the less likely they are to actually do it.

By the time I walk back along the pier, I think their bravado has deserted them. Then I hear Chubby say to the seated friend, "No, we're not going to climb up this ladder, we're going to the one over there." For a moment it seems they are going to dive off the pier, but then they gather up their bundles of clothing and start walking towards the shore. I wonder if they have aborted the mission or if they are planning on entering the water from the shore. Either way it seems that the headlines have been altered to "Teenage Tragedy Averted".

THE HIDDEN CITY

by Roslyn Jones

The sky is black and the wind is freezing on this winter Wednesday in Melbourne

Out of the office doorways and gloomy lanes the shadowy figures emerge

Some have their beloved dog, others carry their possessions in brightly coloured shopping bags, and still others shiver in thin coats and blankets

All have something in common – the need to seek out a hot meal and warm bed for yet another lonely night. This is the life of a homeless person in our affluent city of Melbourne

Those who have been lucky enough to be guided down a path that produces secure employment and opportunities brush past these shadowy figures as they race to the pubs and restaurants or just travel home to their warm and loving environment

Who are these forgotten people? Is it by choice or unfortunate circumstances that see them in the hidden city situation, day after day and night after night

All of these men and women belong or belonged to someone once! They are somebody's mother, father, son, daughter or other relative or friend

Do we think about them and worry about their existence or are we just too wrapped up in our own 'fortunate' lives to care anymore?

Ask yourself this question when you count your blessings each night in your warm and comfortable homes

Could you cope living in the dark and gloomy hidden city, losing all self-respect while fending off the vermin on the streets as you lay down on your precious pieces of cardboard and rags?

Life is difficult at the best of times for all of us, but over the last couple of years, with the global pandemic, it has become an even more miserable existence for all those living on the streets

In the City of Port Phillip we have homeless people living near the beach and in the back streets who would once have been both successful and respected members of the community

How do we allow these situations to flourish under our noses and what can we do to give these vulnerable humans back their self-respect and confidence?

Yes we know addiction and mental health issues contribute to the vast majority of these cases, however "there but for the grace of God go I"; we should not be so quick to judge

I personally know of a gentleman who was forced out of his home by a jealous and bitter partner and was penniless and lost his job as a result of his ongoing nervous state

As a result of this he ended up living on the streets estranged from his family, with no further contact – how does this happen?

Loneliness is also an enemy of the homeless, so before you finish reading this story please give a thought to the Jacks and Bretts and Michelles and Kylies who are sleeping rough in this bitterly cold winter, and remember that a quick chat and kind word can make a world of difference to a lonely and displaced human being

Be kind!

WAITING GAME

by Inge Kulmanis

If you are old!
It's time for you to wait,
because you live alone,
you have plenty of time
to wait around.
Everyone knows that.
You are slow!
You cannot hear well
or see well!
You walk with the aid of a walker.
If it's cold
it's harder to venture
out for a walk.
Your brain is active,
your feelings as well.
Your heart ticks furiously
but nobody hears.
It's an unheard and unseen waiting game.



THE AMAZING ELSTER CREEK

by Inge Kulmanis

My visits here are daily.
It is intriguing and exciting.
Changes occur constantly.
This tiny little leaf falls onto me.
It's green and pointy.
I have to hold onto it, but it breaks.
A dandelion, lush and yellow,
grows in front of me. I am tempted to pick it,
then butterflies fly onto it and drink the nectar.
Never mind, I will send my son some seeds.
The wind is blowing gentle cool air around me.
The sun is shining and gives me warmth.
It's peaceful and tranquil – quiet.
The leaves glide down one by one –
gumleaves, colourful or dry and yellow,
but the shape of each gumleaf is different.
I am sitting beneath the sheoak,
observing this delicate nature-play.
Grey herons – just two of them – fly past.
Sometimes they walk past me, but not often.
Birds in abundance.
Now the wind has arrived, real strong.
I like it – nature at its best.
Hello little mudlark, where have you been?
Are you reincarnated? Maybe?
The smell is quite pungent
from all the grass, leaves and trees!
I love where I live!

THE SHIP PARTY

by Mary Grace Levakis

Glasses tinkle

While females giggle

Their fancies tickled

By a sailor joke or two

IN THE FLOATING BAR ROOM.

Records spinning

A musical revival

Of Elvis, Jagger

Beatlemania

“Love, love me do,”

IN THE FLOATING BAR ROOM.

“If music be

The food of love

Then come girls,

Take a feed.

Here’s everything

You need

And all for free,”

IN THE FLOATING BAR ROOM.

THE BALLAD OF THE PANTALOONS

by Mary Grace Levakis

Now, what would you do
If your panties absconded?
Would you keep
Retail stores in business
and keep buying more?
Therefore keeping thieves supplied
With silk, rayon and cottontails
To keep their derrières warm?

Or would you
Break into your piggy bank
And rush
To the local electrical shop
To buy a tumble dryer?
Well
That's what I did
So
I don't need to worry
NO MORE!

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT WEDDINGS

by Warwick Lloyd

A distinct buzz surrounds the preparation of formal weddings no matter what the culture. You know the ones where no expense is spared on flowers, the entertainment, the quality of the beverage packages, the bridal parties' outfits etc etc.

Having just been interstate for a few days, and thanks to Covid rules being relaxed, we were able to stay in an inner-city hotel. Oh the joys of travel again.

I'd forgotten what it was like to sit in reception and witness the comings and goings of a big hotel. The one we were staying in was built in 1927 yet, despite its age, had a sense of the grandiose and a natural warmth about it.

We were in Canberra and I was advised by a local that, due the proximity of Parliament House, the hotel was a renowned meat market on weeknights for aspiring public servants who consensually were climbing (some sleeping) their way to the top.

However, our time in Canberra included a weekend, and due to the time of year, was a popular wedding time. There was to be one on the very Saturday night of our stay. We were sitting with a bird's eye view in the foyer.

Throughout the afternoon there was a flurry of activity. First a large function room had been set up, with tables of ten made up with the heavily starched white tablecloths. Then through the front entrance came what appeared to be a professional wedding planner, clipboard in hand, all of twenty-five yet the sense of purpose of a woman many years older. Then came a fellow carrying or staggering under the weight of a three-tier cake, perfectly created with lashings of icing.

However, the real icing on the cake was the appearance of two young women, dressed in silk dressing gowns and pink slippers, running through reception with fresh makeup on, heading for their hair to be done.

Next, we watched as the function room was dismantled and furniture was reassembled in the rear external courtyard. There had clearly been a late change of instructions from the organisers to switch locations. They must have done this without consulting the weather watch as showers and cold temps were forecast.

On the hour of six the theatre was set with circa 100 guests seated ready for the one-off show. Hotel staff were busy ferrying blankets out to cover frozen knees whilst waiters circulated with trays of bubbles.

A nervous looking bride arrived with an even more nervous father by her side and the wedding was underway.

Then just as the couple were about to exchange vows the heavens opened up and mother nature turned a moment of beauty into madness as everyone scrambled back inside.

We lost sight of the bride and groom and surmised they confirmed their marital status somewhere in the hotel. Meanwhile thirsty wet guests still took advantage of the free bar.

I asked myself whether the marriage was a little tarnished by this start? Not a chance. Love is love.

However, I do wonder where that couple is today and whether that huge investment for just one day was worth it. It's certainly a wedding I will not forget.

PEEL THE ORANGE

by Warwick Lloyd

Having recently acquired and restored a dingy called a Moth, which probably stands for “Mother of the hellraisers”, I am able to personally attest that these boats are very tricky to sail. They look beautiful standing still yet they can dismiss your sailing prowess very quickly. So much so that after three attempts to sail her, I had the men in the rescue boat come and assist not once but three times. And I can tell you having the rescue service do their stuff directly in view of the Clubhouse and its members, standing on the Club’s balcony, really put a dent in one’s pride.

My Moth is named Frog and to a large extent she had been behaving like a leap frog with me – bucking me off as she saw fit. Whatever confidence I’d had in my sailing ability was diminishing rapidly.

I thought sailing was meant to be a bit of fun in my retirement years, not a soaking in the lake on a weekly basis. Yet what could I expect from a craft that is akin to an old Ferrari on water – all sail and a small timber surfboard for a hull.

However, in reading the Club’s newsletter, a potential solution was staring me in the face; I could buy another class of dingy – one that was far more forgiving. And there she was sitting in the For Sale section – a yacht called Orange Peel, a Sabre.

The theory was to learn on the Sabre and apply those learnings to the Moth when I was good and ready. The bonus was that the owner was content to see the dingy stay at the Club and prepared to offer a test sail to ensure I was completely satisfied. So, on a recent Saturday, with some assistance from Members, off I went. Whilst it wasn’t a pretty sail, it served its purpose, and I’m now the proud owner of a Sabre.

I look upon my new acquisition as somewhat symbolic. The symbolism is in the word “Peel” – a protector of what’s inside, and that’s the warm feeling she gives me. The outer peel of the orange protecting its contents, somewhat like a mother protecting her own as opposed to a mother rejecting her own like a Moth does.

Yet in saying that, I’m very fortunate to be introduced to both classes of dingy and the people who take on the challenge to sail them.

Having subsequently invested both time and dollars in a series of lessons, I felt competent in entering Orange Peel in a race. As I gingerly navigated my way to the start line, mindful of keeping clear of the regular sailors who take racing very seriously, it was a thrill to compete.

It seemed an eternity to reach the first mark as the wind was very weak. Just as I was rounding the buoy, the wind dropped out all together and Orange Peel started going backwards. I remembered a comment in one of the lessons: Always ensure you’re moving since the Sabre will stall. Too late for me as the last of the competitors overtook me.

To my relief the Race Officer called the race off as the forecast was no wind.

To this day my record remains unblemished as I’m yet to enter another race. No hurray, yet sailing is now a joy and a passion.

ANNA'S LOST POEMS

by Barbara Anne Magee

"Anna didn't participate this year", the email read,
"Something's wrong, it has to be!" my inner instinct said,
"Writing is her passion, her raison d'être, her life,
For her to not contribute, she must be in great strife!"
Her number dialled, I waited, with quite some trepidation,
"Hello?"...her prompt response exceeded my expectation,
"Just ringing to see how you are", I offered, endeavouring to stay calm,
"I'm well", she said (my friend's warbling tones so pleasant to hear... such balm!),
"You didn't participate this year in 'Port Phillip Writes'", I replied,
"I SENT!" her startled voice, so shocked, in Russian accent denied,
"But Cathy didn't receive your work...it must have got lost in the mail!
Don't worry, Anna, I'm sure that the problem will be solved in every detail,
Put on your mask, come down to my flat with your poems, as soon as you can,
You know I love your writing, of your work I'm your greatest fan!"
Anna on my doorstep with her poems, and CHOCOLATE and WINE...
Never had my work conditions seemed so very fine!
I typed and sent to my son, so attentive, who changed to the format desired,
Then sent to Cathy, liaison officer, of diligence much admired,
"Of course we can include Anna's work!" her response to me a godsend,
And so this angst-filled tale concludes... with a very happy end!

CAT ON A MISSION

by Barbara Anne Magee

I'm a cat on a mission, and
no-one can stop me,
I'm going to do it, so there!
I'm determined, invincible, brave
and strong,
And those are the facts laid bare!

I'm not just a couch-potato,
Contented with treats and a pat,
I'm not just your average moggie
next door
Or a common alleyway cat.

"And what IS your mission?"
I hear you ask,
"Never you mind!" I reply,
"Ask no questions; you'll get
told no lies",
I always respond, with a sigh.

I'm a cat on a mission, and
no-one can stop me,
I'm going to do it, so there!
I'm determined, invincible, brave
and strong,
And those are the facts laid bare!



ME AND BERT NOVEMBER 12, 2021

by Janine Mifsud

I was feeling a little guilty; I hadn't caught up with mum for about a week. I practised what I was going to talk about because these days mum's topics are rather repetitive. Not her fault. You see Covid and its isolation have meant a prison mentality for mum. She lives alone, is quite deaf which means no phone calls and she uses texting as her main means of communication.

Warwick, my gorgeous and very patient younger brother, was her bubble buddy and went daily to provide mum with some company but I'm sure he too would have found topics quite limiting.

Pre Covid my mum's life was very full. She went twice weekly to MSAC for supervised exercise (she could even lift weights way beyond my ability) and then continued on with her gym buddies for a coffee at a local coffee shop. Friday night was spent at the St Kilda RSL where she'd catch up for a drink with friends before returning home by tram at around 8pm. During the week she'd visit the city to either do her banking or wander the shops checking out the latest fashions. She loves clothes, shoes, bags and jewellery. She's always taken great pride in her appearance.

Covid robbed her of all that and as a consequence her life has become quite small. Visibly it is quite clear that this once very house-proud woman is finding looking after her apartment either too tiring or difficult. She has her favourite light brown leather Moran recliner near the window in viewing distance of the TV. On either side of her chair are two coffee tables spilling over with her life's daily activities. We're talking three sets of optical glasses, a couple of packets of eye drops, a variety of tablets, bills, magazines, cups, nail polish, nail polish remover, emery board, ipad, iphone, kindle and these are just a few of the items on view. I couldn't help but tell mum she was turning into old Miss Haversham glued to her chair soon to be surrounded by cobwebs and dust.

I'm very proud of my mother. At 97 she is very independent, sometimes too much for her own good, but she never complains about her health or has expectations that my brother and I should be at her beck and call. Covid, however, has been her nemesis -whether it's Dan Andrews fault or some other poor sod trying to manage the pandemic, she's not forgiving. The negativity gets a bit waring at times but it's understandable when for the last two years she's been isolated in a two bedroom apartment with very little means of communication.

That's where I come in.

ME AND BERT NOVEMBER 12, 2021 (CONT.)

by Janine Mifsud

It's Friday 12 November and I texted to say I'd be arriving at 10.30 for a cuppa and a chat. I'd planned to tell her about how embarrassed I'd been whilst waiting and waiting and waiting at the Dermatologists to have stitches removed from my calf and had inadvertently texted the receptionist with a sad faced emoji and the words "still waiting". This text was meant for my husband. I was also going to discuss my daughter's (and naturally her granddaughter's) 50th birthday celebrations. Lots of topics to discuss; I was well prepared.

With an hour's parking limit, the kettle on and a few biscuits on the plate, I went to sit adjacent to my mother ready to spend a pleasurable sixty minutes chatting. However, with eyes riveted to the TV and reading the teletext below mum was spell-bound watching Bert Newton's funeral.

Competing with the program's volume I tried to engage in conversation but to no avail. I sat through- the eulogy, prayers of the faithful, listened to the singing, observed the masked celebrities in the congregation, heard mum make the occasional comment about Pattie, Lauren and the beautiful grandchildren, stating that she's known Bert all his life.

Time was marching on in terms of my meter but mum sat mesmerized, faithfully following every little detail. I tried to catch her attention but could see that the response was not overwhelmingly in my favour. I mentioned around about communion time that I would be going soon before I got a fine. Reluctantly mum turned from the TV and said (not necessarily in a mean way) "I wouldn't have suggested you come during the funeral if you're not interested. You know your brother and Julie are watching it."

With that I gave her a hug, waved goodbye and I left.

Although a decade between us Bert and I shared a birthday and every year, on July 23rd, without fail, mum would say "It's Bert's birthday today". If I didn't know any better I'd swear Warwick and I had an older brother who was being buried today. Farewell Bert!

THE BIRTHING TREE

by Janine Mifsud

The Aunties held hands and danced around the tree. To outsiders it looked like a corroboree -women in painted faces, young girls with bare legs and shoeless following in the footsteps of their elders in reverential silence. Dawn was just hinting its approach with tendrils of pale pink gradually deepening to a brilliant azure. They'd walked for many miles, these women of the land, across the scorched earth still cool from the previous evening, their objective now directly in front of them.

The tree loomed large with its bulbous base, fat and grainy at the bottom and tapering slowly up into the sky. Each of the years was marked by protruding rings of various shades of brown. The bark was coarse although the image from a distance seemed to suggest the opposite.

It was the trunk that held the gaze of these dancers, the shape almost mirroring the body of a pregnant woman. For thousands of years they'd come here and performed the ritual. The same place, the same tree, the same dance. Nothing changed, only the generations of women. Their ancestors before them had taught them the spiritual link to this site; their predecessors had fought the tree's extinction. It was a constant battle against the white mans bribes to part with their sacred inheritance for the sake of progress and development.

Searching the faces of their elders, the young girls tried to understand the significance of the dance. The earth felt good under their feet as they continued their rhythmic movements around the tree; the feeling of togetherness, comfort and protection was imbued in their souls from an early age and "on country" was their home.

The chant began slowly, almost like a whirring sound graduating to a hum resembling the buzz of a swarm of bees passing by. The children weren't frightened, merely mesmerized by this tribe of women who were their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts; a sisterhood of women combined in a performance to awaken the spirits necessary for the creation of life.

A crescendo was reached before the sound began to subside. The tree was ringed by the dancers, hands held, heads bowed and invocations delivered.

The sun had almost risen now with the pink of dawn fading behind the majestic rocks of the Pilbara. The vibrant rays vividly enhanced the molten colour of these great outcrops and the shadows from the mighty gums threw their arms sparsely on the sunburnt land. The women knew it was time to leave.

The Aunties gathered the group around them as one of the elders, using strands from the sinewy wild grasses reaped from ground, taped a tiny yellow twig to the underside of the Boab branch in recognition of the new birth.

With grace and dignity, women and children alike slowly and solemnly made their way back through the landscape to begin another day.

IT ISN'T EVEN FRIDAY!

by Heather Moore

"Go to the chip shop with your dad."

"Chips! Its only 4:30, and it isn't even Friday!"

I'm in the front seat of the car next to dad. I love these rare moments alone with him. Tonight, I'm not in the back seat gazing out at the familiar shapes and colours of my small world. Tonight, I'm special.

In the chip shop, ignoring the rabble of teenage boys playing the slot machines, dad sells our pile of Geelong Advertisers, the perfect broadsheet newspaper for "repurposing" as packaging for bundles of hot, crispy, golden fish and chips. On the journey home I proudly cradle our warm package with its delicious unmistakable smell. A responsibility I take very seriously.

With chips eaten too fast in my excitement, my routine is upturned yet again.

"Now quickly, go and change into your Sunday dress."

My Sunday dress! My beautiful dark red crushed velvet dress with the white Peter Pan collar. Another "hand-me-down", of course, but Auntie Mel has good taste. Complete with black patent leather shoes and white socks with their delicate gathered lace trim and a large bow in my neatly brushed long blonde hair, I'm ready.

Bundled into the car, we set off. The familiar streets of Geelong behind us, I recognise the Princes Highway. We're going to Melbourne. I keep watch for the familiar lights of the fairy castle, which mum, as usual, points out is the Altona refinery, sparking musings from dad on the wonders of the production of the fuel powering this very car carrying us through the darkness to who knows where.

Flemington Road, awash with its familiar eerie orange light, guides us to our destination.

I can see the bay! We continue, as the silver streak of moonlight on the water follows us to the lights of St Kilda.

Bursting with anticipation, in the sparkling crisp night, I hold dad's hand as he guides me through the sweetly perfumed crowd. Clutching my ticket, I can't see past the shuffling legs. Suit pants, fashionable heels, everyone is in their Sunday best. And there it is, huge and ornate, this is no shabby church hall with rows of pews facing a heavily curtained stage. What is this place? Wide-eyed, I follow the uniformed boy who takes us to sit amongst seats oddly arranged in a semicircle around a blank space.

Lights dim, we sit in total darkness, all is quiet, I grab mum's hand. "Ladies and Gentlemen, Children of All Ages..." A loud swoosh, bright lights, luminous colour, loud music and a line of beautiful people swoop and glide around the arena. It's like being swept into the fantasy castle of Disneyland, my favourite program, which I watch every Sunday night, stretched out on my tummy on our faded lounge carpet before our equally magical black and white TV. We are in St Kilda at the St Moritz Ice Show. Princesses and princes speed by, twirling, spinning and dancing right into my heart. I believe they can fly. I am transfixed, transported into their perfect world.

But, of course it ends, and wearily, still with stardust in my eyes, I slide into sleep on the back seat of the car, lulled by the hum of the engine and the happy chatter of mum and dad.

I stir when I sense the motion of the car driving over the gravel and pot-holes of our back lane. And now, for the finale to my perfect night, I pretend I'm still asleep and dad carries me to my bed.

THE PROBLEM WITH BEING IRIS

by Heather Moore

Iris Jean Thompson

Three words that encapsulate her Scottish and English heritage.

Wendy, Maisie, Iris. It was important to her mother, in naming her three daughters that they had names that could not be shortened. I suspect that this was because she, Elizabeth Joan Wylie, was known all her life as "Doll", because her older brother, on first sight, exclaimed that she looked like a doll.

Curiously, she gave them all middle names beginning with "J" – Joy, Joan and Jean. Was it evidence of a lack of imagination, or another agenda? Maybe a nod to her heritage. Those questions will remain unanswered, as, like many others, they didn't ask, and now it's too late.

Worse than ordinary, her name is frustratingly common. OK. There were pages of Thompson's in the now defunct phone book. Not unexpected. As for Iris, apparently Iris was very popular in the 50s. But Iris Jean Thompson? On numerous occasions she is asked, most often in medical settings, for her date of birth to distinguish her from others on their books. Even her local pharmacist has one. They must be a very unhealthy lot!

On one occasion she received an outrageously high electricity bill. Trying to remain calm and reasonable, she phoned the provider and was told it was for her beach house.

"I don't have a beach house"

"Yes, you do."

"No, I don't have a beach house, I never have."

"Yes, you do. It's your house in NSW."

"I don't have a house of any kind in NSW."

"Yes you do." He was adamant. "Is your name Iris Thompson, Iris Jean Thompson?"

"Yes."

"Date of birth 15.11.1960?"

"1960? I was born in 1950, you have the wrong Iris Jean Thompson."

When she told her partner, her response was, "Good to know there's a spare Iris ten years younger with a beach house".

Originally, she was to be named David Thompson, even more common I suspect.

Throughout her childhood her parents repeatedly told her that she was not a mistake, certainly not a menopause baby. They had two daughters, ten and eight years earlier, but her father wanted a son, who was to be named David. Despite the fact that her mother had a heart condition from a childhood illness, and had been told that she wouldn't live past 40, she gave birth at 40.

"It's a girl!"

THE PROBLEM WITH BEING IRIS (CONT.)

by Heather Moore

So much for David. Their 50/50 gamble had not paid off, as in those days a baby's sex remained unknown until they arrived.

Hearing the repeated telling of the story of how she came to be in the family, as children do, she took it to mean that not being the boy they wanted was her fault. She was a disappointment, a burden on her mother, and responsible for her unhappiness and ill health. So much so, that at the age of 23, when her mother died, she believed that the burden of raising her was the cause of her mother's death.

She carried this belief that she was unworthy and not good enough into adulthood, and finally through therapy, came to understand that this was at the root of her self-effacing people pleasing habits. Years later, talking with her father, he was shocked that she had felt this way and affirmed that they both had always loved their baby girl.

She still believes that her name is plain, boring and unimaginative. At one point in her 30s, instead of Iris, she was calling herself WYLIE, her mother's maiden name, but she spelled it WILEY - like a fox.

So she remains Iris Jean Thompson. Not just the name she was given, her name, and there's nothing boring about her.

COMING FIRST

by Brenda Richards

The family moved in from the farm so that the children could finish their schooling. The oldest girl, Adele, attended teachers' college and became a teacher. The next child, Jack, started a degree as an electrical engineer. Then Adele got married. This meant that she had to resign, as was the case with all married women in the Public Service at that stage. It also meant that her parents had to pay back the bond that was still owing for her training.

Jack then left University, despite doing very well, to help the family finances. There were still children in the family to finish High school.. He became the youngest t Newport Power Station.

Was this a pattern developing? Mary, the second youngest child broke some more barriers. What job would she pick?

Mary loved Maths, and thought working in a bank would be fun. She was used to regularly putting her threepence pocket money in her school bank book.

Alas she was informed that it was not to be. No women were allowed to work in a bank.

Then she had a stroke of luck. Mary's father was not only a friendly fellow, he was a not only a good Golfer, he shared the local championship with the local bank manager. They discussed Mary's problem. Surprise, surprise, Mary got a job as a bank clerk. This was of course on condition that it only occurred in his Bank in Kyabram, and there would be no advanced to a higher position.

She proudly remembers an early meeting where a group from a number of Banks were welcomed as

"Gentlemen and Miss Scheffer"

Another memory was during her first fruit picking season. The Bank would always open 2 hours later on a Friday, which was pay day, and pay in those days was in cash. The back wall of the Bank was a wall of people. Unfortunately, despite being one of his best workers, in time it became clear that there would not be any others, and no there would be no advances available. Nevertheless, she had the honour of being the first female employee to ever work in the State bank. That honour cannot be take away. It still stands today.

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Kyabram is a seasonal fruit picking town, with examples of women heading

to warmer climate off -season to experience warmer climates. Doubtless inspired by the Cane cutters who head south to Victoria at the end of their cutting seasons.

With her friend Lorraine, she headed to north Queensland, where she got a job on the newly opened resort on Hayman Island. A fellow worker showed her his pet. Doesn't everyone keep a pet Python in their room? Then she found that she had her own pet dangling over her bed like a chandelier. But wait. What sort of monkey has 8 hairy legs? If nothing else, it reminded her that there were worse things than ones that buzz, making sure she kept her mosquitos net in place

Then further north. The new Inlander Train had recently started travelled out twice a week to Mount Isa and back. This meant more jobs in the cafeteria at the base where it left from Townsville. Mary got a job there.

COMING FIRST (CONT.)

by Brenda Richards

A chance came up for her to fill in on a train journey. Yes you're right. It wasn't the Inlander, with its modern showers include. It was on an older one that only went as far as Cloncurry and back. This was the town where "Flynn of the Inland" started up the Flying Doctor Service. Unlike the flash new train, there was no washing facilities on board. Mary and her co-worker decided to start up their own.

In the central area where they sold refreshments, two large basins rested against gigantic windows that over looked the vast expanse of land stretching unending to the horizon, only disturbed by the odd Brolga. They cleared all the passengers out of the area and filled their new bathtubs with water. Then they luxuriated in the magical feel of the precious liquid.

Then the train slowly came to a halt. Oh no. What were the chances? There were gangers on the line. They were standing on their shovels, clapping and whistling as the two girls came into view. The two girls tried to hide themselves with tea towels.

Mary didn't quite make it to 'The Isa', but she did star in her own travelling strip show, albeit unwillingly.

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Trying a different track, As the northern heat rose, Mary headed to Southern climes. She landed in Melbourne, where she found a friendly Boarding House in Wordsworth Street, St. Kilda. Just within the Sounds of Luna Park, near the Beach.

Here resided a friendly, multicultural mob who often had a get together when they finished work at the end of the week. It usually included a guitar or two, along with some superb singing – along with the other sort.

One of the Boarders, Noel Gherardi, was from New Zealand. Noel tapped into Mary's spirit of adventure when he tried Stock Car driving, and encouraged her to enter a 'Powder Puff Derby' which was a race for women. Although she made a valiant effort, she did not finish it. She decided that it was not her thing. But she did, however, end up marrying Noel in the local Sacred Heart Church. They settled in a unit nearby.

When her children grew up and left home for their own adventures, Mary met her second partner, Martin, while dancing in a folk dance group. They met at the teacher's studio in Beach Road. They later performed with the group at a function in the St. Kilda Botanical Gardens.

Mary had found her place. Living in St. Kilda meant she could virtually travel the world without leaving home. And she still holds the record as the first Female Clerk to work in the State Savings Bank of Victoria.

YO-YO MA – A DOG WITH ATTITUDE

by Brenda Richards

WHAT A WONDERFUL SIGHT
IT WAS WIGGLY AND WHITE
AND FUNNY AND FURRY AND CUTE,
AS IT WENT DOWN THE STREET
ON ITS WHITE WIGGLY FEET
DRESSED UP IN A WHITE WOOLLY SUIT.

'WHAT IS IT?' SAID LUCY
'I DON'T KNOW', SAID EM
AND MATTHEW JUST STOOD LOOKING
WISE.

HE SCRATCHED HIS BOTTOM
AND RUBBED HIS EAR
'WHATEVER IT IS, IT'S GOT EYES.'

THEN EMILY THOUGHT-
THEN THOUGHT SOME MORE.
WHICH EMILYS LIKE TO DO
'I KNOW,' SHE SAID
'I'VE GOT ONE NEAR MY BED,
ONLY MY RUG IS FURRY AND BLUE.'

LUCY EXCLAIMED
'BUT RUGS DON'T HAVE FEET
AND HE'S GOT SOME
UNDER HIS HAIR.
I THINK HE'S A HUGE HAIRY CENTIPEDE,
COME OUT FOR
A BREATH OF FRESH AIR'

MATT GAVE A SNORT
'THAT'S ONE CRAZY THOUGHT.
IF YOU WANT TO KNOW
-JUST ASK ME.
IT'S REALLY A BONZAI SHEEP
THAT'S HAD
ITS LEGS CHOPPED OFF
AT THE KNEE.'



ALONG CAME SARA,
TALL AND PROUD,
AND FOUND HER PET
HAD ATTRACTED A CROWD.

'YOU NAUGHTY BOY,
I'VE LOOKED EVERYWHERE-
UP THE RIVER
AND DOWN THE SQUARE,
AND I'VE CALLED
YOUR NAME VERY LOUD.'

THE FLUFFY WHITE THING
HUNG DOWN HIS HEAD
AND PUT A HAIRY WHITE PAW
TO HIS EAR.
HE GAVE A SIGH,
AND FROM HIS EYE
THERE SQUEEZED A SHINY TEAR.

YO-YO MA – A DOG WITH ATTITUDE (CONT.)

by Brenda Richards

'I'M GOING TO SEND YOU
STRAIGHT TO BED'
THREATENED SARA
WHILE LOOKING QUITE GRIM.
THEN EMILY SAID
'WHATEVER HE IS
YOU SHOULDN'T BE
GROWLING AT HIM.'

I HEARD YOU CALL IT A YO-YO,
SAID MATT.
THAT'S A THING
ON THE END OF A STRING.
CAN WE BOUNCE IT AROUND
AND UP AND DOWN?
IT'S ONE OF
MY FAVOURITE THINGS.

'IGNORE HIM' SAID LUCY
HE DON'T MEAN TO BE MEAN,
SO YOU DON'T NEED
TO LOOK SO APPALLED.
BUT WHAT SORT OF
ANIMAL IS HE?
AND WHAT IS THE NAME
HE IS CALLED?

'A LITTLE DOG, HE IS –
A SHITZU - BICHON FRISE MIX
WHO ESCAPED OUT THE GATE
CHASING AFTER SOME STICKS.'

I'VE BEEN SEARCHING
ALL DAY AND ALL NIGHT.
I THOUGHT HE WAS STOLEN
HE GAVE ME A FRIGHT.
BUT NOW HE IS HERE
IT'S ALRIGHT.

DID YOU SAY SHITZY BICHOO
– THAT'S GROSS
NO WONDER HE RAN AWAY
THAT'S NO NAME FOR A DOG-
OR EVEN A FROG
AND HE ONLY WANTED TO PLAY.

HE'S NAMED FOR A FELLOW
WHO PLAYS THE CELLO
HIS ANCESTORS CAME
FROM AFAR.
ONE PART IS CHINESE –
ANOTHER IS FRENCH
HIS NAME IS
YO-YO MA.

THEN LUCY INTRODUCED HERSELF
AND ADDED
'THAT'S EMILY AND MATT.
I HAVEN'T A DOG OR EVEN A FROG
BUT I HAVE GOT FRED THE CAT.'

'I'M SARA' SAID SARA
'I'M OFF TO WORK
AND I'M ALREADY LATE,
YOU KNOW.
I'M A FLAUTIST
IN A BIG ORCHESTRA.
THE WIND SECTION'S
WHERE I BLOW.'

'AND YOU GET PAID FOR THAT?'
ASKED MATT
I THINK THAT IS TOTALLY COOL.
I DO IT FOR FREE
AND YOU SHOULD KNOW
I'M THE BEST FARTIST
IN MY SCHOOL.

'PERHAPS YOU SHOULD
SET IT TO MUSIC,
I'VE GOT JUST THE RIGHT TUNE
FOR YOU
IT'S THE STORY OF
A MONSTROUS BIG BATTLE,
THE 1812 OVERTURE'.

THEY ALL STARTED SINGING
AND DANCING
AND YO-YO JOINED IN WITH A BARK,
HE WIGGLED AND SLIGGLED
WHILE THEY JIGGLED AND GIGGLED
AND RAN ROUND AND ROUND
IN THE PARK.

NOW EACH NIGHT
THEY ALL PLAY WITH YO-YO
WHO SHOOS AWAY SADNESS AND FEAR
AND FEELINGS OF BEING LONELY
JUST QUICKLY DISAPPEAR.
IF SOMETIMES YOU'RE FEELING
QUITE SADLY
AND YOU DON'T KNOW
WHICH WAY TO TURN
JUST THINK OF A WIGGLY
SQUIGGLY WHITE DOG

AND JIGGLE AND GIGGLE
AND JUMP LIKE A FROG
WHILE PRETENDING THAT
YOU'RE A SUPER STAR.
JUST LIKE THE FAMOUS
YO-YO MA

THE WINTER SUN AND ELLY

by Irene Ritchie



It's nice to be out in the winter sun
On a blue and a green kind of day
The puffy clouds are grey and white
And the dog demands a play
We head to the gate, the one at the back
Elly knows which way to go
She pulls and whines for me to open
And we're on our way so slow Elly is a dog who is very old
She is now in her fourteenth year
She has opinions and lets us know
She's an animal who knows no fear.
The park is so beautiful in winter time
The trees so bare and brown
The animals run and walk and hide
Elly wears her winter gown
She runs, she sniffs, she walks with joy
Relishing the freedom she craves
To go where she likes and see where she goes
As an old dog she always behaves
She runs to a couple hoping for food
Alas there is nothing for her
Still she gets a good pat and a big hello
After that bath she has beautiful soft fur
A dog is a leader who loves her pack
She's loyal and patient and true
She appreciates all and enjoys her life
And I envy her perfect view
We learn a lot from the pets we keep
Their enthusiasm, wisdom and acceptance
They know so much more than we imagine
I love to be in her presence.

ARTWORK DISPLAY

by Anna Rogalina

There are many pieces of broken glass on the seabed now.

Once, there good life turned bad, but they don't remember, how.

People drink from the pretty bottles an expensive wine,

Enjoying at the parties that were just divine!

Soon after, they dropped them into the sea,

No one was able these bottles to see.....

When strong waves and hard rocks ended the bottles' happy past,

The piece of broken glass went down very fast....

.....THEY COULD NEVER DREAM BEFORE,

YOU CAN SEE THEM AT THE ECHO ART EXPO!



YOUNG AT HEART

by Anna Rogalina

When I had an unexpected phone call
I knew nothing of the caller's goal!
I'd been asked to help a student and I said 'Yes'
By answering questions about the writing process!
Writing poetry and short stories is 'My cup of tea',
But when they mentioned a Senior writer,
I started to laugh, thinking 'Why did they call me?'
I accepted the invitation, it wasn't hard,
For I will participate in the interview as 'Young at heart'!
....That conversation put a smile on my face
And will be remembered as pleasant with no stress!

BARBERS VERSUS HAIRDRESSERS

by Liliana Siani

“Dear friends, have you ever noticed the difference between a barber shop and a hairdressers’?”

Probably you will ask me:

“Both, barbers and hairdressers cut peoples’ hair. Where is the difference?”

Well... let us start with the barber! When a man enters the shop, the first thing he notices is the comfortable chair he will sit on when the barber cuts his hair.

After having greeted the barber, our man takes off his jacket and hangs it on the coat hanger on the wall. Then starts looking around. On the walls there are shelves with different brands of shampoo and bottles of various colours generally acquired by the young either for fun or the parties they go to.

Some have a different colour of brown and black used by the old men who wish to look younger than they are! Our man takes the daily paper that the barber has placed on a small table and starts reading the news, mainly politics. They are the usual things politicians promise, but often never delivered when elected.

Blaming the opposition who tries to stop each and every thing they want to do for the good of the people and the nation.

As our man has finished with the newspapers, starts looking at the many magazines on the table full of semi-nude girls who seem ready to jump out of the paper and on his arms.

After a while, picks up the sport magazines, with all sorts of information on tennis, football, swimming, a well-known Olympic champion found using drugs, dishonest referees, a champion of time past who died at the age of 90, the next Olympic games and many other things he already knows.

At this point our man looks around and notices that next to him there is another man with a boring look on his face. They look at each other and smile, then one of them breaks the silence.

“What do you think of the great champion Cesarion, who for the first time has won the bike Tour de France?”

Smiling the other man replies:

“I am sorry. I don’t follow the Tour de France, but I am a fan of the car races. Those Italian cars like the Ferrari, that drives me crazy with their beautiful red colour that looks like a flying rocket whizzing under our nose.

1

How exciting it must be for the driver when he is first to cross the finishing line! Let alone the common man who watches such a jewel up close instead than on TV.”

At this point the two men stop talking, look up to see if it’s their turn, but it’s not! The barber is still cutting a youngster’ hair who wants them down to the neck, despite the advices of the barber that, doesn’t see kindly a man with long hair.

The two resume their conversation, a bit of this, a bit of that, until finally it ends with the global warming problem.

The first man says: “Things are going bad, not so much for us, but for our children, let alone grandchildren, great grandchildren etc...”

“Dear friend, I too am worried.” Replies the other man. “Our politicians don’t care much about it, because after a period of years they will no longer be in politics and the hot potato passes to their successors!”

BARBERS VERSUS HAIRDRESSERS (CONT.)

by Liliana Siani

"My dear man." The other replies. "You are right. Everyone talks about it, but no one does anything, starting with us! We, the citizens are the first to throw plastic bottles, plastic bags, all sorts of rubbish and the many things we don't need that end up in the sea where most of it is swallowed by the fish."

"Yes! Often, they find whales, dolphins and other fish whose cause of death is the stuff in their stomach that we, humans carelessly throw away ending in the oceans and rivers." Replies the other man with an angry tone of voice.

Finally, the barber has finished with the young man, who smiles as he looks at himself in the mirror. Pays the barber and leaves whistling while thinking:

"To night at the dance, organized by the City Council, the girls will notice me ... and maybe I will be able to conquer one!"

The barber watches him go, then turning to the two men says:

"Youth! In my days my father used to cut my hair. It's true, the world has changed!" In saying so let's out a long sigh, turning to the two men asks:

"Which of you is first?"

They look at each other, then one says:

"We didn't introduce our selves. I am Robert, and you?"

"My name is Albert. If you don't mind when we finish, we can go to the pub near-by for a well-deserved drink. What do you say?"

"Good idea replies Albert." The newly friends shake hands. Meanwhile the barber studies the head of the first man whose top is bald, only a strip of hair exists at the back of his head.

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"It won't take long. "Thinks. Then turning to the two says:

"Gentlemen, you are the last customers. If you don't mind, I will join you for a drink. After a day's work I deserve a little rest and a nice cool glass of bear."

A while later the three leave the shop. Whistling a happy tune, walk to the near Pub forgetting the problems of the world!

THE HAIRDRESSER

by Liliana Siani

The hairdresser' shop is a different matter. When the client enters, near a corner she sees a table with the phone on one side, a beautiful bouquet of fresh flowers on the other, the appointment book in the middle and the cash register next to it. A large mirror takes the whole length of the wall, under it is a bench to put the bag and... lots of magazines. They are fashion magazines, interested in gossip, the grand ladies of the high society, the off-springs of royals showing off their children while they are watching a parade, that is to remind their subjects that they have not forgotten the people! Famous and non-famous actresses, models (whose faces are eternally young thanks to a lot of Botox!) going to famous horse races, theatres, fashion parades, the many awards for the best film, the famous night of the Oscars in Hollywood where the most handsome actors, beautiful actresses, directors etc... show off their expensive clothes made by the world-famous tailors and couturiers.

In most hairdresser' shops, generally there is a manicurist ready to make of the common housewife ruined hands, (due to their washing and scrabbling) a decent pair of hands for a very special occasion. The hairdresser politely asks the lady to take a sit. The lady sits, while the hairdresser stands behind checking her hair. Couple of minutes later with a big smile asks: "What should we do today? Cut, colour, permanent etc..." Off course, all this is a formality given that having known the customer for years she already knows the answer.

The lady looks at her, then shaking her head replies: "Goodness me, no! No colour, no permanent, just a simple cut!" So! Our hairdresser takes her client to one of the washbasins and massages her scalp as only they know how. Meantime they talk about this and that, their children the many problems of the modern age like drugs, divorces, politics etc... "how is your son doing in school?" Asks the hairdresser. "Last time, you told me he isn't interested in studying." With a long sigh the lady replies: "My dear, it's not his fault. (It's never their fault!) It's the others who incite him to go with them to the movies, parties etc... and if he doesn't, they drop him!

The hairdresser answers with a long sigh: "My dear, the times are no longer what they used to be. At the age of 18 their parents buy them a car. They, seat behind the steering wheel and start speeding as if they were great car drivers in a race, forgetting the many dangers, the other drivers and vehicles." The hairdresser replies: "When we were young the bicycle was the only vehicle we had, to own a car was for rich people!" The conversation goes on touching different problems of our modern era like the problem of the elders. "How is your grand-mother, she must be getting on in years."— Asks the-hairdresser."

THE HAIRDRESSER (CONT.)

by Liliana Siani

"Yes, she is almost 95, thanks to modern medicines and a healthy diet, in five years she will receive the famous queen's letter!" "Oh yes! Wouldn't it be nice!" Replies the hairdresser while at the same time eyes a customer entering the shop. Excusing herself, goes towards the lady. Accompanying her to a sit says: "Please make yourself comfortable, I have almost finished." "Don't worry, I have to make an urgent phone call." Answers, while putting her hand inside the bag, pulls out a gold-lined mobile. Dials a number and starts talking, talking, talking and laughing.

The hairdresser looks at her and thinks: "What would she have done when this devilish thing, the cause of so many incidents, that people are so stupid to use while driving, didn't exist? I will never buy a mobile for my children. They can use the phone at home to call their friends. But... on the other hand, it's a great invention! The problem is the people who miss use it. In the meantime, she has finished with her client, takes the money, hands her the rest and writes the date for the next appointment, in her book. They say goodbye, the client smiles as she glimpses herself in the mirror before leaving. When she arrives home the first thing she does, is go to the bathroom take the comb and combs the hair her own way!

POLICE COMMUNITY YOUTH CLUB

by Neville Smith

There is a place in Inkerman, not far from Chapel, an innocuous place, yet once inside it becomes apparent that PCYC is an icon of the community.

The Police Community Youth Club has a fascinating, and a Port Phillip unique, history, as is stated by word and picture henceforth.

In this era many are involved in running the activities of the club. Upstairs, in the office is the spearhead, Christine, driving the figure eight activities of the club, a power not to be denied.

Downstairs, at ground level, includes a fully equipped weights and aerobic training facility, also the boxing ring and associated punching bags and skipping ropes.

Add to this the personal training area and the circuit class floor area and the basketball court upstairs, a formidable space is had for the benefit of the community.

We have Donnie, the Gym manager, Lee, personal trainer and class instructor, Dennis, another personal trainer, and maybe the longest running professional in Australia, is well renowned and, as such, puts the Aussie Rules legend, Ron Barrassi, through his paces. And let's not forget the personal training prowess of Eugene.

There are many others including the Canadian young lady, Brooklyn, running fitness classes and on the reception desk is Olivia and, at present touring Australia, is Geordie.

We must mention Gary a long-term associate of the club, another story by itself.

Then there are the trainees, Nev's aged group, Bruce, Mike, Rob, Doug, using the equipment in the never ending venture of fighting the ravishes of age, so far doing well.

Talking to Jason, having been absent for some time, his excuse was valid, he had the LAZY virus and stayed away so that others in the gym would not catch the virus.

Then there is Dion, who, when asked why he is training, answered "for the Mirror" not many men would admit such, yet there is doubt, and that he does have other more pertinent motives.

Oh! Never should the lady who thumps away on the big boxing bag with hand and foot, what a powerhouse, pity anyone try to steal her handbag.

The value of the PCYC is it is for the young through to, dare say, the old, and many of many ages do attend.

So may the word spread, so that many more benefit from such a wonderful facility.

Oh! Let's not forget the recently donated and opened, "Olive's Lane" coffee shop, operating in the adjacent decorated lane.

The thing is, do not pass by, drop in and have a coffee and a chat. Maybe even consider joining the club for healthy life giving activity. Maybe even consider a donation.

PURDY ISLAND

by Peter Thorne

"Drugs?" called Don.

This summer, we sank our principles and installed a coffee machine, after carefully calculating that our yacht *Mirrabooka's* power system could cope. Don, a confirmed black coffee addict, had taken on the role of boat barista.

"White for me," I said.

"White for me too," said John.

"A long black for me," said Liz.

"My usual flat white," from Julie.

Don replied, "OK, that's two black and three white".

Coffee in rough seas seems to stimulate sea sickness, but today with a steady northeast wind, the seas were slight. Anyway, we were already in sight of our overnight destination.

It was the second day of our voyage from Hobart sailing to Port Davey in the Southwest wilderness. We were rounding the bottom of Tasmania and heading for Purdy Island in the Maatsuyker group.

Purdy island is rarely visited, because its only anchorage is a small bay opening to the southwest. Here, in the Roaring Forties of the Southern Ocean, the worst weather comes from that direction. It can blow over 80 knots and, in those conditions, no southwest facing anchorage would be survivable. Today, with a rare, gentle north-easterly wind, I thought we would be safe overnight, once we found our way into the tiny cove.

We carefully navigated the offshore reef and entered the bay. Liz steered us in, and I dropped the anchor. Don and Julie stowed the sails while John lowered the dinghy.

I decided the anchorage was secure enough to leave *Mirrabooka* unattended and agreed to join the crew in a quick trip ashore.

John ferried us across, taking a couple of trips, thus limiting the number of passengers in the dinghy, to minimize the risk of capsizing if a rogue wave entered the bay. The water looked very cold and anyway the presence of seals around the islands often indicates that sharks are also lurking close in.

The walk around the island took us less than an hour. There were no paths, but it was easy going. The vegetation, clearly battered by frequent gales, was low and much of the surface was rock. There were plenty of seabirds and stunning views to the rest of the island group and to the mainland, about ten miles to the north.

We returned to the yacht and gathered in the cockpit for a sundowner. Clutching her gin and tonic, Liz asked: "So why is this called Purdy Island?".

I said: "Well apparently it was named 'Perdu', for some reason, by one of the French explorers who visited around 1800. Probably Nicolas Baudin, or perhaps one of the smaller exploring parties that Bruni D'Entrecasteaux or Huon de Kermadec despatched from their base in Recherche Bay. However, it's not mentioned in any of their journals.

"The theory is that the early sealers and fishermen just anglicised 'Perdu' to 'Purdy'. The island seems to have a bad reputation back in early colonial times. Some escaped convicts made it here. There were accounts of individuals just disappearing during those escapades. Cannibalism was suspected.

"Since then, the stories of people vanishing and theories about the French use of the name 'Perdu', persist. The belief is that a person, and all traces of them, can disappear and are they completely forgotten by their companions."

"But how can that work? If they are totally forgotten, how can anyone ever know they have disappeared?"

"It's said that their absence is only realised once their companions have returned to civilization and other people ask them about the missing person. Or perhaps, much later, some event or objects prompt the memories."

"What about the traditional owners, before the French?" asked Don.

"The south coast tribes knew of it. They visited the islands of the Maatsuyker group in their small canoes. But apparently, during their first south coast overland trip, Truganini told George Robinson that the locals always avoided this island.

"Anyway, they are old legends, I doubt anyone has been here for ages. It is never visited, because its rarely safe to land, given the prevailing southwesterlies and the swell. The sustained easterlies we have had since we left Hobart are rare down here in the Forties. Of course, it's not on the line most yachties take from South East Cape round to Port Davey. Furthermore, it lies inshore of the Maatsuyker light, so it's not on a shipping lane."

The anchorage was quiet overnight. There was only an occasional quiet splash on the rocky shore as the odd surge, probably the remnant from some distant gale down in the Southern Ocean, made its way into the bay.

By the morning the wind had gone south-easterly. There would be ideal sailing for our next leg to South West Cape and up to Port Davey.

We finished breakfast and prepared for the trip ahead. I shouted: "Well it looks as if we will have another fairly quiet day. Is anyone else ready for drugs?"

"Yes please."

"Count me in."

"Coffees for everyone coming up then" called Don, "So that's two blacks and two whites."

"Right oh. Next stop Port Davey." I said.

SUMMER

by Patricia Thornton

I am 11 years old. My Primary Final Exams are over and I'm no longer a child or so I think. Boarding school next year but now I'm free to roam on my bike with my best friend Mary Gallagher. The river calls as we ride to the town beach, a big sand bar in the bend on the river. With our bathers under our dresses, a quick whip over our heads, the dress lies on the sand. Our friends splash and try to dunk us as we dive in. A burning sun on our backs and the cool water on our bodies are deliciously sensuous.

On the cooler days we have, 'scintillating adventures' as Mary calls them. Like finding caves when we ride across the paddocks looking for butterflies. The caves have funny drawings on them. There are chalky stones around so we improve them and do our own masterpieces. Maybe one day an archaeologist will discover our work. The caves are our secret and we never tell or ask anyone about them. We feel a strong presence there. Maybe we are intruding on something mysterious.

Riding across the bridge to the next town we stop and help ourselves to oranges in an orchard. Sitting in the shade we squeeze the juice into our mouths, then turn the fruit inside out and enjoy the pulp. To this day I enjoy an orange eaten this way, bringing back memories.

Wind on our backs and plaits flying we ride fast, no hands, standing up and with our feet on the handlebars as we steer down hills. We are aware that change is upon us but we don't allow it to destroy this Summer holiday.

Sunscreen wasn't a thing then so Sunburn was inevitable, Mum's solutions were cold tea or cream off the top of the milk, when milk came in bottles with the cream on the top. These were the only salves for our burnt skin.

Summer lasted forever then. We always had 2 weeks in Sydney where we stayed with our cousins. It was a penny bus ride to Bondi beach and my cousin Marg was in charge. She was told to ask a man to help if anyone was in trouble.

I loved the water - still do and was adventurous. I remember many times being sent ashore by a man saying "Too dangerous girlie. Take a smaller wave." We body surfed like Uncle Charlie taught us. I can still hear his booming Irish brogue yelling "Take it It's a good one" and then "You're great me girl" when I took the wave to shore .

The pillow fights at bedtime were very serious. Girls versus boys. There was never a declared winner because our parents always intervened. I wonder why? Maybe because our pillows were all made with feathers. What a mess when they blew apart!

It is 2021 and I'm in Sydney. We are all here. My son and daughter and their spouses and my 2 sisters. My grandsons and girlfriends add their youth and banter to our Xmas cheer. I am staying in Balmain with Marcus and Miranda. Luisa and Andrew have the good bed and I have the pull- out sofa. The widow's bed I call it laughingly. However, I am very comfortable.

The talk drifts to Nelson Bay. "Is the high tower still there, the one

my brother jumped off. "My cousin dared him and I was very proud that he pulled it off. The beach inspector grabbed him and yelled at him "You're not 18 are you mate." Well it was obvious that the skinny little kid was not. He would be 13 next month. The tower was pulled down soon after - very dangerous at low tide.

I really enjoyed going back in time and reliving the past. The suburbs Bronte Clovelly, Rose Bay, Bondi and Vaucluse are still very familiar and have beautiful memories. A swim in the Dawnie Pool in Balmain, although it is renovated, has the same ambience and I was that 11 year old again.

Christmas Day was not a traditional one with roast turkey and plum pudding. Lunch was Paella made in a proper paella maker. What a paella it was- king prawns, scallops, fish, baby octopus and clams. All bought at the Sydney fish market over the Anzac bridge. We drank sangria as we watched it cook. The feast was accompanied with delicious salads. An offering of fruit salad and yoghurt was desert.

Panetone and champagne were offered later. I think this feast was very relatable to modern Australian cuisine. How blessed I am to have such a wonderful family. I look back to that day many years ago when my children were 17 and 15 and I was a 39-year-old widow. The fear I had that I may not be able to be there for them. The future was a scary place. I am so proud of the family we achieved together, just sad that their father hasn't been able to be a part of it.

My emotions, a sense of guilt that I am here alone to have the love of these lovely people and the fun I am having, seesaw between sadness and joy. My children and grandchildren sense my mood. "A toast to Claudio and Brian. Raise your glasses. To Dads." "To Papa and La Normandie" Thomas calls. Now everyone is being toasted. Tears are rolling down my cheeks. They are happy tears.

SHOPPING WITH LULU

by Patricia Thornton

My head is spinning

My feet are sore

It's only the beginning

Can I do this any more

Daughter shopping is fun

But do I still have the strength

We've only just begun

She's looking for dresses with a long length

She has six over her arm

I'm to give my opinion

And do no harm

To our beautiful friendship and happy union

The first one she tries on

Fits well and looks lovely

"Looks great luley"

The mirror tells hers she looks ugly

My boobs don't look right

And what about my bum

Is it too tight?

Please look again Mum

All six others are tried

They looked great but another defeat

On to another store My feet are fried

Where is a seat?

Oh bliss to sit and wiggle my toes

Dresses are tried on and discarded

Up and onwards she goes

When is coffee time I wonder

Oh!! with a pink dress she is rewarded

If I don't have some caffeine soon I'll go under

The drug kicked in so back to the fray

A handbag was found to go with the dress

Hooray Hooray

Luisa in her new dress looked elegant and graceful

And pleased at last

Mum I'm so thankful

That our shopping days are not in the past

Lunch at our special place sitting comfortably in the sun

Chatting and laughing. We're had fun



Former Port Melbourne Fire Station, 1979, Port Phillip Collection

MANDAGERY

by Roderick Waller

Joel was the working manager of Mandagery, originally taken up by a returned soldier after the first world war, a soldier settlement block offered by the government for services rendered. It had been abandoned several times, each successive owner having given up on the desolate winds, the sandy soil, and the loneliness. A hundred miles northwest of Sydney and fifteen miles from the city of Parkes, the farm, forlorn at the end of a dirt road, wobbled on six hundred acres, hidden at the foot of the heavily timbered Bundog hills. Eric, a Pitt Street farmer had seen in Joel a young energetic man eager to work his first property alongside his devoted wife. But Joel and Sandy had misgivings the first night, as the wind whistled down from the hills, rattled the tin roof, set the dog to a howl. But then Joel was an optimist.

Joel and Sandy (and a baby on the way), lived in the one-bedroom colonial cottage. A rusty, termite infested shed housed sacks of sunflower seed, shelves of nails and bolts, barbed wire, and hand-tools. A tractor, plough, set of harrows, a seed box, a bulldozer, and a ten-ton truck, were parked randomly in the yard. A set of steel cattle yards and race brooded, unused and unwanted, behind the shed.

'Can you do anything with the place?' asked Eric.

Joel forged ahead, cleared bush with the ancient Allis-Chalmers bulldozer on the rise at the top-end, thick stands of ironbark and gums. Joel got to work. He won a contract with a local council to provide fence posts. With chainsaw and axe he felled and debarked ironbark, hot, hard work. For ten days he slogged, under the summer sky to fill the contract of one hundred and fifty posts, five feet, minimum of a foot diameter at the base, and eight inches at the top. He manhandled each post onto the ten-tonne truck. Alone in the bush with the cockatoos and wallabies, Joel had never been happier.

Shorthorn cattle wandered uncontrolled. He fixed the fences of the three lowland paddocks, separated the bull from the herd, and calves six months old, sucked at dry udders, weaned from their mothers. He rotated the cattle, allowed paddocks to recuperate, where patches had been grazed to the roots. He brought in the vet, signed up for tuberculosis testing of the herd. He sent ten fat steers to market. He sent Aberdeen Angus steer to the local abattoir (meat was part of the deal), and retained the hide, had it tanned, and placed it, pride of place at the hearth. Eric was not pleased. Jovi the angus had been the family pet.

A hundred acres of level land, buttressed on the hills by thick bush had been cleared by the previous owner. Eric had decided to plant sunflower. Caught unawares of Autumn's arrival the country turned cold and Joel fed the stove and fire. Resolved to sow sunflower, he went to bed early. The next morning, he ploughed in earnest, fearing the onset of rain. But he couldn't outwit the vagaries of the weather and during a shower the tractor sank to its axles. The paddock had turned to soup. Joel drove the dozer to drag out the tractor and bogged the dozer, brought the truck to tow out the dozer and bogged the truck. it looked like a parking lot for obsolete machinery, the kind of line-up at a farm clearing sale. But Joel was unperturbed.

It was two weeks before he could stand upright in the paddock. Though the boss was rattled, impressed by the ironbark contract he purchased a new, big, shiny bulldozer. Joel woke to the yellow monster, the size of the cottage. It was adorned with handles and pedals so numerous he stared in horror for hours. When he plucked up courage, he motioned forward, and the massive tracks rumbled over the moist dirt to the paddock of dismal bogged machinery. Gingerly he stepped on the soil. Seemed to have dried up. but the great dozer sank and sat almost sheepishly at the end of the sad line.

Waiting for the soil to dry out, Eric and Joel went to a closing down farm sale. Eric bought three hundred pigs, boars, sows, gilts, piglets, porkers, and weaners for a song. Joel built shelters with iron pickets, corrugated iron, and cyclone fencing. The day arrived and Joel pushed up a makeshift ramp with the now released bulldozer from the soup paddock. Sounds are crisp and clear in the bush, but Joe and Sandy slept blissfully that night, content at the new venture ahead. When Joel walked jauntily to inspect the new arrivals, he was mortified to see his enclosures flattened and devoid of pigs. Three hundred pigs lost in the hills at the back of Mandagery. It was a sad day and Joel and Sandy brooded, not least of all at the distress when Joel would have to break the news to Eric.

But Joel bounced back. We'll start a goat enterprise and buy two Angora goats. He tethered the new acquisitions securely, and bought a spinning jenny to make angora sweaters. Joel had a déjà vu experience. Happily he strode out to the enclosure, saw two stakes flattened, and ropes bitten through. The goats had heard the clarion call of the swine and fled to the hills. Sandy groaned at her poor husband. 'The hills are alive to the sound of grunting and bleating.'

Eric rightly figured the livestock should be cared for within the farm boundary, and after a 'man to man', Joel stepped down. Sandy looked pitifully at her husband as he spoke. 'I'll apply for my old position at the bank, and we'll be right as rain.'

The end.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

by Shi Jing Wang

The morning clouds did not foretell anything ominous but the day still turned out dangerously wrong. It was my turn to muster the flock for the whole day so I got up early. The sheep outside were already up, stretching, shaking heads and sneezing, some moved further grazing as usual on a warmer than usual winter day. Keeping an eye on them, I went through daily routines including collecting my leg-cuffed horse from a distance. About an hour later, after a big breakfast, I was galloping to chase the disappearing sheep with a lasso pole in hand.

Experienced shepherds drove flocks to areas of lush or nutritious grasses in snow season. I hardly knew the surroundings so could just follow the animals. Slowly the herd spread out into long lines leisurely moving forward and I thought they could have ingested half-full tummies by sunset. I came off the horse and sat on the snow. It was a time that I normally read or wrote letters but not in below minus 20 degrees temperature. I walked behind the sheep and heard their grazing sounds. All was peaceful, the patchy white pastures, the grey surrounding hills and the gloomy sky, but nature had its own designs.

Early afternoon I suddenly felt a chilly gust and noticed flying snowflakes as heavy clouds gathered. The quick temperature plunge alerted the herd. They congregated and went in the windward direction. Soon the flakes grew bigger, the winds screeched wilder and the animals moved faster. The falling flakes and the dancing ground snow blown up by the winds seriously reduced visibility and made it look like evening. It was the "whitewinds"! What should I do in the middle of a snowstorm? I knew I had to bring the sheep home safely no matter what! But home, where was home? I did not have the faintest inkling where I was, a shiver running down my spine. I was not counting on my yurt mates for rescue as they would have no idea where I was and would definitely have got lost if they had ventured out for me. Overcoming the panic, I intuitively felt staying put would be the only thing I could do, and I needed to save energy to last as long as was possible.

I quickly rushed to the lead sheep, rounded them up to stop them from drifting downwind. We all knew rounding up and herding a sheep flock against headwinds in winter was hard and this was in the middle of a blizzard. I was in full winter gear: sheep-skin robe, trousers and fur hat, and reckoned I could survive at least one day without food. All I had to do was to guide the sheep home and keep walking to maintain my body warmth. The snowflakes that pounded on my face were like dozens of sharp tiny needles and I had nothing to shield me from them. The strong gusts pushed me backwards, so I had to walk sideways. The sheep must have felt the same ferocious snow powder and gust forces, yet they virtually stood still. I untied the closer end of the leather strap to turn the lasso pole into a long whip and waved it over them as I walked from one end to the other behind them. I kept edging on and repeatedly dusted the frost on my eyebrows and eyelashes and the snow from my face. I did not feel hungry nor tired though breathed heavily as I treaded slowly in the snow in my clumsy felt boots. But ideas like what I should do if the storm still did not ease in the following morning flashed through my mind again and again.

I had no idea how many hours had passed until suddenly I heard a dog's barking faintly in the roaring winds. A smile, I could not help to hold, sprang up! Ah! Finally, I knew the direction to head to! The winds were still howling at extremely high pitches amid the snowflakes' thick air and the herd was still reluctant to move on in the darkness. Exhilarated, I felt hope for ending the ordeal before the storm subsiding.

I heard the barking again and later smoke and yurts vaguely appeared in the distance as we inched in. Once the sheep saw the shelter, I urged my horse home ahead of them. Much to my mates' great relief, I stumbled into the yurt and embraced the warmth and the calmness though the piercing gust whistles were still echoing in my ears. I took off my fur headgear and felt numbness on my ears and my cheeks smarted. I did not realize that they were frostbites because my ears were completely covered by the fur hat with only my lower forehead, eyes, nose and mouth exposed. What I did not know then was that I should have rubbed snow on the affected areas immediately. But instead, I was so desperate to warm myself up that I went closer to the stove telling them that our dog was my saviour and gobbled up their leftover dinner. The next morning, I noticed the skin of the affected areas had turned dark and even more so days later. Fortunately, the impacted skin did not blister and in a few weeks scabbed. It took a long time for the new pinkish skin to become normal.

My mates knew I hopelessly lacked any sense of direction so reckoned I was very lucky. They assumed that the flock must have roamed north in the morning and I easily could have had to spend the whole night in the wild open. That was my closest encounter with a life-threatening scenario and the moment when I resorted to human instinct to survive. Enduring below minus 40 degrees severe weather taught me how to be a stronger person. Making the best of whatever life brings, even the adverse ones, is one of the lessons.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Lois Best

Lois Best discovered the joys of Port Phillip some years ago when visiting her daughter and granddaughters here. She has settled now, volunteering at U3A Port Phillip and still teaching part-time. Originally from WA she doesn't always enjoy the Victorian cold, but the village feel of the area suits her lifestyle.



Chris Burgess

Chris used to earn a living writing advertisements. He is currently writing a memoir to give to his children, to explain to them how difficult life was for him and his mother during the Second World War in London, in contrast to his children's lives growing up in Melbourne.



Jacki Burgess

Jacki has worked in the Port Phillip area since 1989 and lived in St. Kilda from 1997 and then in Port Melbourne from 2011. She enjoys the similarities and the differences between these two suburbs and relishes the varied beauty of these seaside areas.



James Cattell

After studying law, philosophy and art in New Zealand, **James** moved to Australia in 1979. He has earned a somewhat vicarious living through painting and sculpting, and many of his creations pop up in unpredictable places. Now in semi-retirement, he is re-exploring his early love of language.



Lois Daley

Lois was born in Port Melbourne in October 1936 in the home of Crichton Avenue where she still resides. At 16, she was a bookkeeper at Balm/Dulux Paints, trained as a nurse at 30, an occupational therapist at 50 and retired at age 70. Lois engages in ongoing learning at U3A, sings in a choir and always a community activist. She loves gardening, live theatre and walks alone Sandridge Beach. She lives a blessed life.



Helen Devereux

Helen attended a Port Phillip U3A Creative Writing class and re-ignited her passion for writing short stories. She enjoys the challenge of telling a story in just a few words.



Michele Green

Michele has been a resident of the City of Port Phillip for twenty years. She belongs to 'A community of writers' at U3A Port Phillip and enjoys writing short stories. She has written an unpublished memoir of living in South Gippsland for ten years and a few pieces of poetry.



Deb Hall

Deb is an avid reader, writer, beachcomber, jazz aficionado, model-ship builder, croquet player. Deb Hall was born in 1957 in Melbourne, Victoria. She has published poetry in magazines and anthologies, and published short stories in anthologies, and articles in hobby magazines. She has lived in St Kilda for approximately thirty years.



Jan Harper

Jan lives with her husband Brian in what was once Harper's Star Starch Factory in Port Melbourne, the subject of her short story. Long retired from University administration, she sometimes paints, sometimes does research on anything that interests her, goes to exercise classes and jazz venues and is passionate about sustainability.



Megan Jones

Megan's family has lived and worked in Port Melbourne since the 1880s. Her great grandfather opened one of (if not the) first picture palaces in Bay St, Port Melbourne in 1905. She enjoys writing stories about the quirky bits of local history that have intersected with her own family story.



Roslyn Jones

Roslyn is a resident of Port Melbourne which provides a lifestyle she really enjoys. This is her fourth entry in these writing awards and she is grateful for the opportunity. In addition to writing she has a busy life with family, exercise, theatre and travel again!



Aziza Khamlichi

Aziza was born in Morocco and lived for many years in England. A former Nurse, counsellor and Interpreter/Translator. After retirement, she grabbed the chance and has now made her home in Melbourne.



Inge Kulmanis

Inge was educated in Switzerland, working extensively with children and adolescents in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. Upon retirement enjoying concerts, writing and spending time with her family. She has 10 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren. Two grandchildren are teachers for primary and secondary schools.



Mary Grace Levakis

Call it poetry, call it performance, call it writing, I love doing it! I am now 74 and have been entertaining and performing from the age of 21.



Warwick Lloyd

Warwick Lloyd is a former marketing executive and resides in St Kilda. Recently appointed President of the Rotary Club of Port Phillip, Warwick believes his 3rd career should be helping others.



Barbara Anne Magee

Barbara was born in Launceston, and studied literature and foreign languages at the University of Tasmania, Hobart. She trained as an English and French teacher, but was unable to pursue her career due to health problems. Barbara is a very proud mother and grandmother, and a happy owner of three beautiful cats.



Felicity May

Felicity was born in Sandringham, Victoria. The family moved to England during her childhood. She returned to Australia in 1975. Felicity has lived in Elwood for 38 years. She is a retired Social Worker and a member and volunteer at U3A Port Phillip. Felicity only recently discovered the allure of creative writing.



Janine Mifsud

Janine has enjoyed varied career paths: Secondary School Teacher; Real Estate Consultant; Manager of Programs for Youth at Risk; Manager of Psycho-Social Programs for People with Mental Illness; Director of a Travel Agency...and that now gives her plenty of material for her writing workshops!



Heather Moore

Heather, a St Kilda resident since 1984, proudly calls herself a local. She has had a lifelong love of photography since her father gave her a Box Brownie. This year she has begun watercolour painting at Port Phillip U3A, which she loves. She studies French for brain exercise.



Brenda Richards OAM

Born in Kyabram, **Brenda** worked on the itinerant track before settling in St. Kilda 60 years ago. She is a founding member of Council for the Single Mother and Child. Brenda worked for 25 years as a Psychiatric Social Worker. She was inducted into the Victorian Women's Honour Roll in 2011.



Irene Ritchie

Irene Ritchie was a history, politics and Indonesian language teacher. She has written extensively for various magazines on travel in Indonesia. Irene has co-authored six books of Indonesian folk stories with Eddy Pursubaryanto, from Indonesia. In 2015 Irene received a Seniors' writing award from the City of Port Phillip for an article called 'A Kooglhoupf Adventure.'



Anna Rogalina

Anna has lived in the City of Port Phillip since 1992, when she left Ukraine for Australia. Anna is an education and experienced teacher and she is very creative and multi-talented person too. Anna enjoys writing poetry and short stories in which Anna expresses her feelings and emotions as well as art, craft and photography.



Liliana Siani

As a young girl **Liliana** migrated from Italy to Australia, worked as a clerk at the State Audit Office (top of Collins Street now a museum) for seven years. In the year 1979 returned to Italy (Rome) and worked as a bookkeeper and secretary for eighteen years 1981-1999 in FAO United Nations. Her hobbies include travelling, reading in general with an eye to history and archaeology.



Neville Smith

Nev is an Eclectic Bloke, still Active, Writing, Running, Dancing, Sports coach.



Peter Thorne

Peter migrated to Australia from England at age eight. He spent his boyhood in country Victoria before moving to Melbourne. His working life was spent as an academic at the University of Melbourne. Peter has lived in Albert Park for over 30 years.



Patricia Thornton

Patricia is a resident of St Kilda, the best place to be. Patricia has moved around a lot in Australia and always finds herself returning to St Kilda. St Kilda is home. She loves swimming, reading, book club and family is close by and that's another reason why she loves St Kilda.



Roderick Waller

Roderick, Yorkshire born and bred, is a long-time resident of Port Phillip. Life has been spent as a farmer and agricultural economic consultant in Asia and the Pacific. He is a contributor to Fishers of Pen poets, South Melbourne, Roomers writers, Elwood, U3A writers, Middle Park, and Writers Victoria, Melbourne. He is at ease in classic literature, meaningful conversation, and pickin' banjo.



Shi Jing Wang

Shi Jing was born in Shanghai, grew up in Beijing and sent to Inner Mongolia to be a herdsman in 1968, one of the 17 million "sent-down youths". He taught in secondary and tertiary institutions in Melbourne and Hong Kong and is a writing course member in U3A Port Phillip.