

# Memoir to Manuscript & Life Writing At Longbeach Place 2013



With Tutor Mairi Neil

## *Foreword*

Here is a small selection of stories produced by some students who attended the memoir classes at Longbeach Place this year. To speak in superlatives, they are wonderful, varied, entertaining, educational, and inspiring stories, reminding us of the diversity of Australian society.

I hope others will consider putting pen to paper; transferring memories to manuscript. If we don't record our stories who will? The prism of individual experience can help us understand the world, generate ideas, and often help us put historical events into perspective. Writing stories can be cathartic, therapeutic, and fun. By understanding each other's journey we can become a more compassionate caring and more knowledgeable society.

These stories are a selection of pieces triggered by various lessons at Longbeach Place. Lessons designed to inspire creative writing whether memoir, autobiography, biography, or life stories. Writers worked on pieces in class and at home. They tackled subjects using poetry and prose, they learnt techniques to improve their editing skills, and add colour to their writing. Most of all they laughed, shared knowledge and memories, and of course finished tasks.

The writers have chosen to record their memories, to consider the legacy they want to leave, and the knowledge they want to pass on to the next generations. They want to answer the questions they wished they'd asked their own grandparents and parents! Reading the stories, we glimpse just how rich and varied life experiences and family history can be.

Happy reading!

*Mairi Neil*

*Tutor*

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## **My Baptism Certificate**

**by Sue Vissaritis**

It fell unnoticed onto the carpet. Slowly opening the aged brown paper, careful not to further damage this old document, which was torn along the fold lines, I read the details, trying to find clues to the early years of my parents' lives.

The Greek heading translated to "Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia & New Zealand" and "Certificate of Birth and Baptism".

The faded English handwriting a scrawl, alongside written and printed Greek words. Spelling errors were forgiven as it confirmed the obvious details, when and where: January 1958 at The Holy Church of Saint George, the corner of Lygon and Queensberry Streets, Carlton.

A church no longer there.

It commenced services in 1956, the year of my birth, serving the area's post-war Greek migrants for a decade. There are the names of my God Parents and I conjure vague childhood memories of people I have no connection to or longer see.

Researching the history of The Holy Church of Saint George, I discovered after the church premises in Carlton were rented from 1956 until 1966, there was a move to their own purchased premises in Thornbury. The committee meeting minutes from the 12th January 1966, describes the decision to move.

*"The following Sunday the St. George Church in Carlton will conduct its last service. Due to the committee's endeavours a church has been purchased in Thornbury for the amount of 8000 Pounds with a deposit of 4000 Pounds and the balance to be paid within five years at an interest rate of 6.5%. Mr. Bossinakis moved that Messrs Elefantis, Raftopoulos and Kenos visit the church and that the agreement for purchase be finalised. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kenos and passed unanimously."*

Operating from the corner of Martin and Armadale Streets, Thornbury, the church later relocated to its current site at 66 St. David Street. Purchased in the 1970s, it still serves local parishioners every week.

Born at the Women's Hospital in Grattan Street Carlton, I was baptised about one year later - also in Carlton. My parents lived locally in Fitzroy as many migrants did in the fifties, but soon moved away to South Melbourne during my early years, Windsor for my early teenage years and later settled in Mentone. I lived in those homes and others around Melbourne but moved to Cheltenham over a decade ago. I returned to Carlton in my forties to work at the University of Melbourne, travelling there almost daily for fifteen years. At the time it seemed I had turned full circle.

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Nowadays, visits to Carlton are for social reasons, so I stare at this document hoping it will offer me more. And it does. I fold it and notice handwriting on the reverse side. Almost illegible and the spelling questionable. I don't understand the words but recognise my dad's writing. He has now passed away.

I look closer - it reads:

**UNETED WOOLL**  
**Milli 211 Sturte**  
**st South \_\_\_\_”.**

My interest reading investigative novels kicks in. Finally, I know.

**United Woollen Mills**  
**211 Sturt Street**  
**South Melbourne**

The words on the back of the document has triggered memories of dad, cigarette in hand, sitting at the kitchen table, relentlessly looking through every inch of the classifieds. He has noted the job location for himself, or for mum on the nearest piece of paper at hand!

With four (later to be five) small children all under the age of five, both my parents in their mid twenties and without a formal education, had a desperate need to work. I don't recall either of them actually working at the woollen mills, but recall a string of jobs in other local factories. On one occasion a few years later, I visited mum in the Kellogg's factory, amazed and frightened at the clunking sounds of the machinery, so loud it was impossible to hear a person speak unless they shouted. I wondered how mum could work there day after day, week after week. In hindsight, I appreciate what a far cry from their origins and Greek island life.

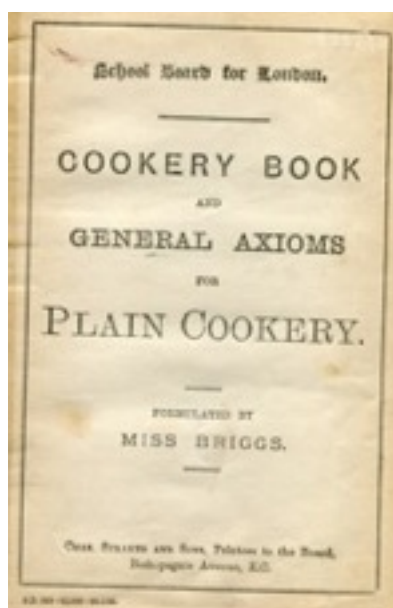
This piece of paper represents two sides of my parent's life. The front, the official side, symbolises my mother's strong religious faith, which has been her main support for almost sixty years during hardships as a young mother raising five children in a foreign country. The other side represents the migrant dream – the opportunity to make some money for the better life they expected to eventually have in Australia.

## **Recipe Books, Family History & Coins**

### **Betty Nelson**

There is more to life than eat, work and sleep. Spare time between these necessary activities is not to be wasted so I have tried many extra curricular activities over the years, very few including exercise in any form. Over the years I have tried yoga, tennis, golf, squash, woodwork, Hobbytex, painting/sketching, cooking classes, meals on wheels, committee membership at Kindy and School, coin collecting, knitting, sewing, quilting, crocheting, calligraphy, photography, pottery, Book Club, shopping (for fun – not for necessities) and writing.

My greatest obsessions over the years, however, have been collecting recipe books and family history, and coin collecting is not far behind. If a close friend or relative travels overseas they know there are two things they can bring back for me: foreign coins and recipe books from the countries to which they have travelled. My daughter's partner, when work took him to Johannesburg and wandering through a street market, bought me a copy of a nineteenth century English recipe book. I was overwhelmed with his thoughtfulness. I have received recipe books or recipes from England, Canada, Italy, Scotland, Denmark, Austria, New Zealand, South Africa, and various States of USA. I have copies of recipes from as far back as the 17th century. Frequenting Op and Second Hand Book Shops I have purchased books covering most of the 20th century. In my possession I have hand written recipe books which belonged to my grandmother, mother and second-cousin who was a cook and housekeeper for a family in Toorak. These books are a delight to read but seldom do I cook any of the recipes. Would you really like to know how to cook sheep's heads or lyre bird? And have you ever used elephant garlic?



The inside cover of my grandmother's school cookery book "Instruction in Cookery – Book of Receipts and Axioms" printed in 1890.

For many years my brother's wife worked on the

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family tree, however my sisters and I had no interest in her past-time. When I retired and discovered the Internet I also became interested in family history – not names and dates but professions and life styles. Is there a stronger word than obsessed? If so it would describe me as I spent hours and hours in front of the computer tracking down John and my ancestors. My greatest delight was finding the National Library of Australia's TROVE website. Through TROVE I discovered many incidents that brought my ancestors to life. Great grandfather was a witness for the defence at a murder trial on the gold fields in the 1860's. John's paternal great grandfather's defamation case appeared in newspapers all over Australia in the late 1800's. A great uncle died in a dentist's chair. John's maternal grandmother's half brothers were mates of the Kelly Gang. My grandfather reported to police that an assailant had attempted to rob him when he was delivering groceries when, in fact, he had actually fallen off his cart into the mud. Another ancestor had been accused of sexual assault in the late 1800's; the case was finally dismissed but following this incident he and several of his brothers moved to Western Australia and either became butchers or famers in outback regions. This website is certainly a treasure TROVE.



My great grand-parents: Catherine Luke from Tavistock, Devon, England, and Jep Jespersen from Schleswig, Denmark

One Australian relative, a journalist and feminist in the early 1900's, founded the monthly magazine *Woman's World*. Her brother, an architect, was a well known acoustic consultant to theatres following the arrival of "talking pictures" including the Tivoli and the Rivoli in Camberwell. Their father had been a missionary in Madagascar. John's maternal great grandfather came from Scotland with a small fortune which he invested in land and failed because of floods and fires. He then married a young girl some 25 years his junior and moved to Hobart town where he worked as an overseer before returning to the mainland to take up farming in the Mansfield area. So many stories to tell.

Danish ancestors migrated to California and were pioneers of San Luis Obispo – one of their descendents became a United States Senator. There were policemen and law breakers, farmers and cabinet makers, soldiers and sailors, copper miners and gold miners, grocers and butchers, ministers and missionaries. Saggars from



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Middlesex, Mumfords from Essex, Lukes from Cornwall, Albachs from German, Jensens, Jespersens and Kronborgs from Denmark, Delaneys and Nelsons from Ireland, Frasers from Inverness, Andersons from the Isle of Skye. They travelled to all corners of the world – Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA, and Madagascar. The more unusual the surname the easier to track down but in Denmark Jensen is as common as Smith and Jespersen is among the 20 most common names.

I also came across and met my father's half brother and his daughter with whom I have continuing contact. Through the ancestry website I came across John's cousin's daughter. John's cousin was a war bride and moved to the States in the mid 1940's. Contact was lost over the years but I saw a familiar photo on the ancestry website and further investigations showed that it was put there by John's second cousin. We now have a long distance email friendship.

It is easy to get side tracked with my research when I discover perhaps the ship an ancestor travelled on to migrate to another country or to sail off to war; where was the ship built, was it a barque, a steamship, foreign built, is it still in existence, can I find a photograph? What did a professional mole catcher do? What is the history of the surname? Which parts of England or the world did the Cornish copper miners move to? Some made fortunes and their descendants lost them.

I have produced family histories on all four sets of ancestors and have ready for print Part 2 on each. When I think that I have completed my research something sets me off again. The 'fun of the chase'.

One of my favourite books is one I produced incorporating both family history and food which I called The Family Stewpot. If my daughters ask for a particular recipe, I say, 'Try the Family Stewpot, I'm sure you will find it there.'

Coin collecting commenced as a small child when our grandfather allowed us access to his collection of old English coins – farthings, ha'pennies, florins, and Australian commemorative coins. If Mum was short of a quid she would take a purse full of crowns or Canberra florins into Melbourne and cash them in at a profit. Luckily enough some crowns remained so that each of our grandchildren has one and I still have a plentiful collection of Canberra florins. Over the years I have kept every foreign or shiny dollar and two dollars coins I have received in my change. My friends know to collect them for me as well especially on overseas trips. Since birth I have given my grandchildren the current year's set of Australian mint coins and hope one day they may enjoy their collections as well. A hobby passed down from generation to generation.



A 1937 Commonwealth of Australia 'One Crown' (5 shillings or 50 cents).



## **Half-Uncle Bill**

### **Betty Nelson**

When our mother died in 1985 a psychologist suggested to my brother to make contact with our father's side of the family. We had seen our aunt very occasionally over the years but were only vaguely aware that our father had a half brother. Through our aunt, Ron made contact with Uncle Bill and his third wife, Josephine, who lived in Tasmania. We also discovered that we had two half first cousins.

My sisters and I were busy with our families and work and, as these members of our father's family had, to our knowledge, never had contact with us we didn't show much interest in our newly discovered relatives.

In 2006 our brother died a couple of months after his 70th birthday. At that time I was in the middle of compiling a recipe book/family history called *The Family Stewpot*. Not knowing much about our father I decided to write to Uncle Bill asking what he could remember about his older half-brother. A couple of months passed and I thought that he didn't want to bother with us when I received a letter in the post, written in a very frail hand, explaining why he had taken so long to reply. He very kindly filled in some gaps for me and we phoned each other every couple of months. I finally decided I should meet my uncle and John and I headed to Hobart for a "get to know you" weekend.

I wasn't brought up to be demonstrative with my feelings but when we entered Uncle Bill's house I surprised everyone by bursting into tears of happiness.

Uncle Bill was able to recall some kind gestures made by our father to his much younger half-brother. One occasion occurred after our grandmother died and the proceeds of a house she inherited from our great-grandfather were divided between our father and our aunt but her illegitimate son was to miss out. Our father gave one third of his inheritance to Uncle Bill and said if our aunt did the same, the proceeds would be divided evenly. Unfortunately our aunt didn't have such a generous disposition but Uncle Bill was overwhelmed to receive the portion our father gave him.

After his first wife died, Uncle Bill married and divorced his second wife. He then met Josephine and when she moved from Victoria to Tasmania he looked her up when holidaying there. Even though they were both in their sixties they were able to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary as they both lived to their 90's. Uncle Bill referred to her as 'the love of his life' and she, in return, called him her 'toy boy' as she was 5 years his senior. They died within a few months of each other in 2010

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Uncle Bill had 'inherited' an enormous amount of old family photos. He very generously gave many to me to scan and then pass on to his daughter who I met up with in Perth. These photos enabled me to continue my research into the Jespersen family history. I was even able to trace family friends and find snippets of information about them on the TROVE website.

Many times we regret the questions we didn't ask our parents and grandparents, so I consider myself very lucky to have got the opportunity to find many answers through my 'long lost' Uncle Bill.



## **Second-Cousin Eileen**

### **Betty Nelson**

Our second cousin, Eileen, was the only member of our father's family we saw on a regular basis.

After WW2 she spent a short time living with us before becoming a cook/housekeeper for Mr. and Mrs. Louis Nelken at their home, Cloyne, in Toorak. Mrs. Nelken was the daughter of Sir John Madden and the family was part of Melbourne high society. Eileen was well thought of by Mr. Nelken and "Madam" and they allowed us to visit her at their home and play in the garden. I even spent a holiday there sleeping in the Maid's Wing which was above the more prestigious Butler's quarters. We were so impressed by the stories she told us of the celebrities she met at parties hosted by the Nelkens especially during the Melbourne Cup season - members of parliament, actors, socialites and even the Archbishop of Melbourne. Occasionally she even got an autograph for us.

Married at 18 and separated long before we knew her, she had been a 'plane spotter' at Warrenbayne during the war. Our father's first cousin, they had been close and reading his letters to her whilst he was serving in the Army gave me an insight into the personalities of both of them.

Eileen was always generous to us and when she visited she would often buy a 'family brick' (block of ice-cream) – Neapolitan, of course. This was a luxury and having only an ice-chest, the 'brick' had to be eaten in one sitting – this took no effort for two adults and four ice-cream loving children. Sometimes we would meet her in the City and she would take us to Russell Collins for lunch. This was very upmarket for us as we usually went to Coles Cafeteria. At Russell Collins our meal would be served with buttered and rolled brown bread and for dessert we would have chocolate snowball cake – a bit like a lamington split in half and filled with ice-cream then topped with cream and chocolate sauce!!

One very special birthday gift from Eileen, I well remember. It was the late fifties and rock'n'roll was in vogue; the gift was a layered stiff net petticoat with coloured ribbon edging to wear under a full skirt when we went to the local Life Saving Club dances. How special I felt when I spun around and my beautiful petticoat could be seen by one and all.

Eileen was a wonderful cook and would make me a special fruit cake for my birthdays. She also made my wedding cake and paid to have the wedding cake iced with a friend, a florist, providing fresh flowers, matching my wedding bouquet, to place on each tier.

She was 'loud', 'gravel' voiced, loved her ciggies (Craven A and Turf) and a gin and tonic or soda which came in a siphon (how exotic), quite the opposite to our

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Mum who was quiet, unassuming and a non-drinker. We loved Eileen dearly and always looked forward to her visits. Although older than our mother we were never asked to call her Aunt or Mrs. Coke – she was the only adult we called by first name which made us feel quite important. She shared every special event in our lives except Christmas Day when she had to work.

Maybe we were brought up without our father, but his cousin Eileen, certainly put in a good effort to fill the gap.



## **Validation**

### **Eva Fabian**

As adolescents we gauge our place in the world through feedback. Positive feedback is validation, negative is criticism.

Positive feedback gives confidence, makes our lives a pleasure to live, makes us aware of our potential and opens the road to experimentation.

Non-validation is crushing; a negative feeling. It takes enormous strength to turn non-validation into positive by examining the situation and turning it around to make it be useful.

I had one parent of each philosophy, a validator and a critic. My Mum was the critic, she saw the glass half empty, and was always striving for perfection. It took me a long time to work out that perfection is unattainable. Brought up never to praise a child, she brought me up the same way. It was hard, never feeling good enough.

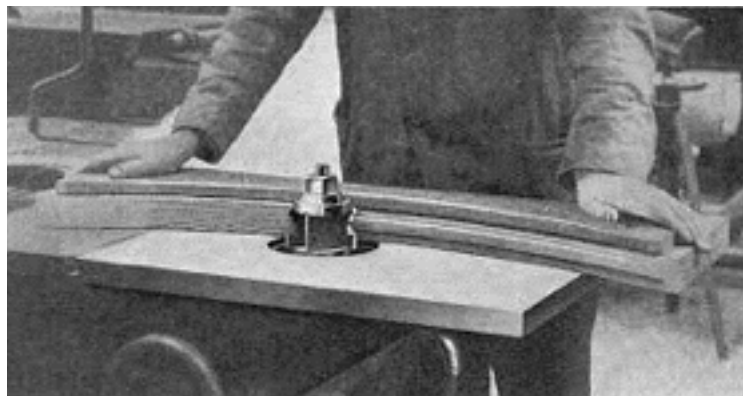
My Dad, however, paid me a big compliment once. We weren't close because he worked long hours, making furniture. But one day, when I was about fourteen years old, I was in our furniture factory after school. My Dad demonstrated his new toy, a spindle moulder.

This machine shapes the edge of wood, like an upside down router. There is a large square metal top, with a drill bit in the centre. The shape of the bit determines the design on the wood. However, it spewed out a lot of sawdust, which went everywhere, including into lungs. Dad was trying to work out a way of catching the sawdust and linking this to an extractor.

I just happened to have seen such a device and began to describe it. Dad was silent. I thought he'd dismissed my design. Then he asked me to draw it, which I did. I left the factory because I had a date with the television — Leave it to Beaver.

The next day I again went to see Dad in the factory after school and — Presto! — there was the extractor. Just like I drew it.

That is validation.



## **A Bald Request**

**Mairi Neil**

John glanced over the top of his newspaper and smiled. Gentle rain pattered on the tin roof of the veranda. Goldie luxuriated in the warmth of the summer evening, her breathing synchronised with the soft rhythm of the rain as she sprawled at John's feet. Every now and then, she punctuated the air with a snore and twitch of long hairy legs. Did she dream of chasing sparrows and rock pigeons from her water bowl? Or maybe she relived running from side gate to side gate, guarding her territory from passers-by.

I interrupted the idyllic scene. 'The old girl spends a lot of time sleeping and snoring now,' tapping my husband's shoulder I said, 'could do with some company to perk her up.' John, looked up from his cryptic crossword, lips pursed, eyes wary. He knew me too well, his response abrupt, 'we don't need another dog while we have Goldie.'

At the mention of her name, the old dog's snoring ceased; one ear stood erect like a sentry on duty. I handed John a mug of tea and paused in front of his Jason recliner, 'Anne and you have Goldie. MaryJane and I don't exist when either of you are around.'

John removed his reading glasses and placed them on the coffee table with his pen. Relaxed and comfortable, he said, 'well we bought Goldie for Anne to ease the pain of Orla's premature death. MaryJane was a baby so Anne naturally assumed ownership.' He massaged Goldie with a slippered foot, 'and I feed the old girl. Of course she's going to stick close to me, like Orla before her!'

Whack! Whack! Goldie's tail a metronome as the wooden floor vibrated.

'I understand all that and a pet is a wonderful way of coping with grief.'

'Agreed,' said John, '... and when Goldie dies we'll obviously get another dog.' Goldie quivered as if understanding every word. Her tail flopped still. Quick to reassure, John said, 'a long time off, I hope.' He sipped his tea and picked up the spectacles to resume his evening ritual but I was determined. 'Grief isn't just about death John. MaryJane's best friend is moving to the country next week.'

Half-listening, John mumbled, 'so?'

I could feel my cheeks flame. Exasperation crept into my voice, 'Emma's been part of MaryJane's life since they were babies. Don't you remember how important your first best friend was? MaryJane is devastated.'

For a moment, John closed his eyes. I imagined an image of Emma and MaryJane holding hands and giggling merging with a recollection from his own childhood as it was with mine. I remembered John describing the pain of saying

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goodbye to his school friend Danny; being dragged by his stepfather into the family car while told not 'to blubber like a baby'.

I watched embarrassment stain his face. Defensive about underestimating MaryJane's impending loss, he said, 'and she'll still be sad even with the distraction of a puppy.'

'Not a puppy exactly... '

John chewed his bottom lip, Stared at me, as if trying to fathom what was coming next, knowing he could never second guess me. He put his spectacles away in their case with deliberate care. Snapped the case shut, folded the crossword page into a manageable rectangle and let the rest of the paper crinkle to the floor. A startled, Goldie jumped up, assumed her ready- for- anything pose. John patted the dog's head, 'good girl.' His lips twisted into a wry smile, 'you're right, we both need to be alert,' then grinning at me he added, 'but not alarmed, I hope?'

Heavier rain drummed on the roof. Resident possums foraging in the fig tree elicited a low growl from Goldie. A train rattled past in the distance; car tyres swished on wet streets. John's sea blue eyes glistened. 'You always have marvellous timing, my love. Plying me with a drink before introducing some controversial issue. Now you hover like a cat watching cornered prey.' I shuffled uncomfortably as he added, 'And I don't like the sound of *exactly* - in fact I don't like the way this conversation is heading.'

I picked up the abandoned newspaper and began to smooth and fold it methodically. 'It's just that I saw in the local paper that the young girl who assists the vet is...'

John interrupted, 'She's always appealing for a home for unwanted pets. I don't want some traumatised animal here.'

Rolling the newspaper like a baton I waved it in the direction of the chair, 'John!' He flinched as I scolded, 'Goldie was from the pound.'

Goldie placed a protective paw on John's knee. He rubbed her chest. She snuggled a wet snout between his leg and the arm of the chair, waited for her fur to be ruffled in favourite spots. Contrite, John said, 'but she was a puppy love...' I finished the sentence, '... who had been mistreated.'

'Oh, all right what's this dog's story.'

Taking a deep breath, I said, 'Well he's...'

A memory stirred; John interjected while vigorously rubbing Goldie behind her ears, 'I remember this one appeared like a cross between a Labrador and a giraffe. Never seen such long legs on a pup.'

I grinned. 'And once the markings developed we realised she had Rhodesian Ridgeback...'

'As well as Lab, plus Whippet, or Greyhound,' added John, 'a real Heinz 57 variety.'



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I steered back to the subject, 'this little fellow is purebred.'

John almost spilled his tea. 'A pedigreed dog abandoned?' He glanced at the scar on his wrist. Shuddered at the memory of his six-year-old self bitten by the German Shepherd trained to be a guard dog. His stepfather mistreated the dog and it became aggressive like its master.

'He'll be pugnacious. I'm not having an angry dog here.'

I kissed his forehead, lightly stroked the scarred wrist. 'Darling, when you hear little DJ's story you'll weep. I know you worry about Goldie's arthritis and I've seen your eyes tear up when you look at her and realise she's over twelve - which in human years is 61,' I smiled and added, 'almost ready for the pension.'

The rain had stopped but the air hummed with insects of the night. Goldie fidgeted; John squirmed and blustered, 'that's because her farts are getting worse as she gets older. If she flopped down near you and let one go your eyes would water too!' He brushed dog hair from his trousers, 'little dogs are generally house-dogs. We'd need to buy more plug-in air fresheners — extra expense on top of dog food!'

The love accumulated in our twenty years together shone from my hazel eyes as John's lips twitched, and he held back a smile. I sensed victory; felt muscles loosen as tension eased from my neck and shoulders. In a matter-of-fact voice, I said, 'yes, he will live inside most of the time because he doesn't have any hair.'

John's recliner whipped upright with a loud metallic click. 'You want to adopt a bald dog? For goodness sake, no wonder he was abandoned.' He shook his head in disbelief. 'Who'd want a deformed dog? Or, was he burnt? Darling, please don't tell me you want to take responsibility for an injured dog that's going to cost a fortune in vet fees!'

At her master's raised voice, Goldie shook her rear. Her tail wagged erratically, she pranced around, paws tapping and scraping on the decking. John reached out to calm her. I moved out of the way of the lethal weapon Goldie's tail had become, my voice soothing as I repeated, 'calm down old girl.' In a harsher tone I said through gritted teeth, 'panic over, John? May I please continue with some facts?'

'Well, you nodded your head when I asked if the dog had been burnt.'

'I know, but that isn't why he's bald. His breed has almost no hair - another reason why I think this dog is meant for MaryJane with her asthma.' I lowered my voice, 'the little fellow was deliberately burnt with cigarettes. He's been starved and left out in the cold.'

John exploded. 'The cruelty of some people sickens me!' He shook his head, bewildered. 'And why pay a lot of money for a pure bred dog and then ill-treat it?'

Muted singing from crickets and soft crackling from the overhead light the only intrusion as we pondered humanity's capacity for brutality. I assumed John thought again about his stepfather and the German Shepherd when I saw him shiver. He often recalled his stepfather's anger.

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John had unwittingly poked his finger near the German Shepherd's nostril. Chained and angry the dog attacked. What followed still haunted John. His mother's panic, her attempts to stop the bleeding, her worry about infection. His stepfather's fury. 'The dog has tasted blood, he'll have to go.' His stepfather's shocking solution.

John remembered his crying ending in a scream as the bullet from his stepfather's hunting rifle shattered the whimpering dog's skull. The silence that followed like a signal to his mother. She sobbed for a long time. John often wondered if that was the moment she realised she had made a mistake remarrying.

I remembered the early days of Goldie's settling in. How we had to lift her over the threshold because previous owners had chained her outside and punished her if she tried to enter the house. Goldie never made a sound for days and we thought it unusual until we found out she had been debarked. Both John and I agreed 'somewhere there's a vet that should be struck off.'

Goldie inveigled her furry body between us. The reminiscing and silence discontinued by John's curiosity, 'This dog is naturally bald, you say?'

'He's a Hairless Chinese Crested Temple Dog,' I said. 'They look like those gremlins in the Disney movie: hair on the head, and around the ankles. Miniature Shetland ponies... that's how they're described because they trot and hold their head high like a show pony.'

'To some people perhaps. In fact, one of them was voted the ugliest dog in the world.' I smiled and shrugged, 'but they're loyal, sensitive, territorial, and highly intelligent and like nothing better than to curl on your lap like a cat.'

At the mention of cat, Goldie bristled. We laughed. Our stroking hands and comforting noises provided immediate reassurance to the old dog. John's blue and my hazel eyes a twinkling mirror match as the pulsating warmth of Goldie reinforced the joy she brought to our lives.

A light drizzle massaged the roof; the scent of wet grass filled the evening air. John whispered, 'and when do we pick up the four-legged Yul Brynner?'

### **Goldie and DJ**



## **A Honeymoon for Ten Quid**

**Trish Locke**

Picture late 1960s: Australia is promoted heavily in the British Isles with a poster advert showing a family on the top of the poster all dressed in rainwear holding umbrellas with sad faces, and then same family depicted on the bottom of the poster, upside down of course; all dressed in summer clothes with happy smiles. A new country with lots of jobs on offer and sunny skies; all for ten pounds!!

At this time my soon-to-be husband and I were struggling to achieve our dreams of finding meaningful jobs with good prospects and the hope of one day owning our own home. As luck would have it, the Australian Manager of the company my soon-to-be husband was working for in the UK, made a visit to the Head Office where John was working. To cut a long story short, he said if John came over to Melbourne he would have a job for him. So the die was cast.

We applied to Australia House and after filling in a million forms, having a medical and an interview, we were accepted. However, when this was all going to happen, they couldn't tell us, it could be sooner, or later! We were told that we would be given a choice of either going by ship or flying, the latter was only a very recent introduction at the time; this was June 1968.

We went ahead and continued with our jobs at the time and planned our wedding. It was scheduled for the 23rd November. The letter from Australia House arrived on the 9th November. We were given the choice of sailing in the December with a big BUT, we would not be in the same cabin, John would have to share with five other men and I would have to share with five other women and the journey would take six weeks. The other choice was flying to Melbourne on the 24th November. No prizes for what we chose.

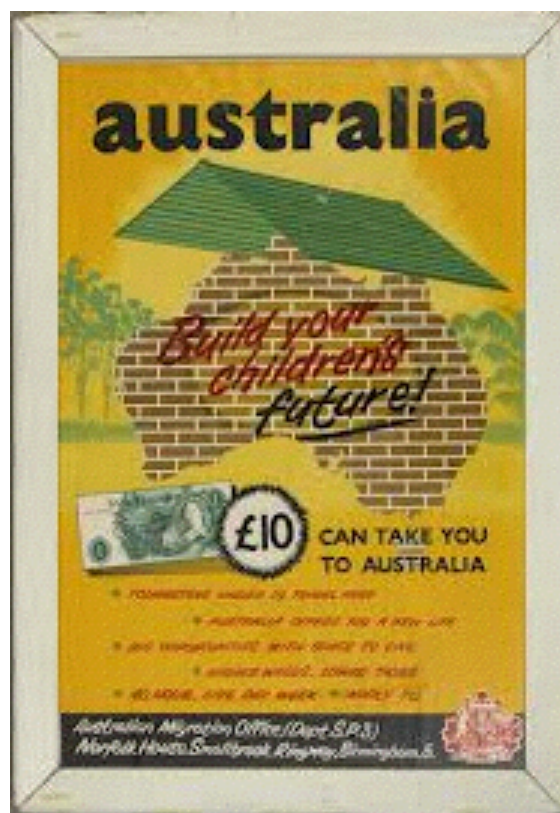
Our afternoon wedding turned out to be a farewell party as well. What a weekend. We had a grand day mixed with much emotion on many scales. Getting married is emotional in itself, but knowing that we were also saying goodbye to loved ones and friends, at the same time, for who knows how long, put a whole new perspective on it.

So with smiles and tears we waved our wedding guests farewell and headed for the airport hotel. The step we were taking affected us in different ways; because I had moved around England and overseas in my childhood quite a lot due to my father being in the British Army; the trip was not so daunting for me, but for John who had lived in the same place all his life and apart from a holiday in Italy, had not been out of UK. Half way through the evening he started to have cold feet! He wrestled with whether he had made the right decision. I managed to reassure him that if it didn't work out, we would just get on a plane and fly back home again,

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but if we didn't go, we would probably regret it for the rest of our lives, wondering whether it would have worked. I think my positive spin on the move, helped him go with it. I think if I had been sceptical or not keen, we would have turned around and gone home there and then.

Our families came to see us off at the Airport on the Sunday... more tears and smiles. However our British Airways 707 finally spirited us off from our native soil and deposited us in Australia 36 hours later; arriving 26th November 1968... all for the princely sum of Ten Pounds.



## **Memories of holidaying in Malaysia as a teenager in the Sixties**

**Trish Locke**

During my early teenage years, my parents lived overseas in Malaysia as my father was in the British Army. As a consequence I was sent to boarding school in England and would fly out to see my family twice a year. As soon as the term finished, I would make tracks to the airport by train with my passport and ticket clutched tightly and a bit of cash that I was handed out to me by the nuns at the very last minute, with strict instructions not to lose it. When I think back to the fact that I was only 13 and travelling to London on my own, this would appear to be quite daunting for my age but to actually have to make my way to the airport to catch a plane to the other side of the world is quite amazing to me now. However I never thought it was a big deal at the time.

In Malaya my parents lived in a beautiful house with folding doors, which opened up wide to the garden, so that it almost became one. I never minded the heat or the humidity, I loved it actually, though I didn't like the bugs too much. However, sleeping under mosquito nets was fun and kept the bugs at bay. The noises at night were wonderful, croaking frogs in the monsoon drains, and the orchestra of insects and a million little sounds, which made my imagination run riot.

I spent my holidays going shopping with my mother in Singapore, or swimming in the pool at the local naval base and eating steak sandwiches for lunch. What luxury. While I was there I was introduced through my parents to the younger members of the Sultan of Johor's family and they in turn introduced me to a very different lifestyle from a convent boarding school. They would take me along to many of their celebrations and dances and lots of wonderful restaurants, which served amazing food I had never experienced before. Before each meal they would pass round a rather grand silver jug to pour over one's hands to ensure they were clean before eating, because cutlery was not used. The jug would return at the end of the meal to clean your hands again. I was always treated with enormous respect by all these young Malaysians and they made me feel very welcome; a wonderful cultural experience for me.

All army personnel living overseas in Malaya were allowed to have help in the house, which the Army provided. We were extremely lucky to have a cook, gardener and housekeeper who was called an *amah*. We loved them all dearly and when it came time to go back to the UK, all three wanted to come with us.

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On one of my sojourns back to Malaya, we went on a trip to Port Dixon, which is on the west coast. We rented a lovely home on the beach. I thought I was in paradise. You would step out of the house straight onto the beach, and the water was so warm. There was an abundance of fresh fish and fruit, the like of which I had never seen and there was a small village within easy walking distance to indulge in other tempting food. My sister and I spent endless hours on the beach and the whole family had the most wonderful relaxing holiday ever.

However my mother was always keen on doing some educational trips as well, so I was taken to a rubber tree plantation to see how the latex was harvested. This hands-on experience gained me lots of brownie points with my Geography teacher. We also went to a biscuit factory. On the day we arrived they were trying out a new machine. Much to their embarrassment on the first run all the biscuits came out burnt, guess we were lucky we did not understand the language; they were not happy. The third trip was to a Cotton Wool Factory, masses of cotton wool balls abounded along with rolls, tips and wipes; however at the end of the trip they very proudly gave us a parting gift of a packet of sanitary pads; enormously embarrassing for a thirteen year old. However, my mother thought it was a huge laugh and told everyone she could about it, on the return home!

Going back to school was very hard, as I so loved these trips to Malaya. At the airport, my mother would tell me that I would be fine, and back before I knew it. No sooner had she said this when she'd buy flight insurance from the automatic machine because 'it was necessary just in case the plane went down'... so reassuring!



## **There is Beauty in the Everyday**

**Shirley Hynes**

I am lucky to be a person who looks at the world from a positive viewpoint. I see the glass half-full, a trait I inherited from my mother Phyllis. She had every reason to be a glass half-empty person because of what she had to deal with in her life, but no, my mother just kept on smiling through everything. There is beauty in a smile from someone you love, and her last conscious act was a smile.

Surely, because of this inherited trait, the people I have gathered around me are generally glass half-full people too.

Take Helen for example. I remember her arriving at my house one afternoon last year and looking towards the west, she said, 'Quick, get the camera, look at the orange rose-hips of that tall rose against the dark clouds.' The sight lasted just a moment. No time for the camera before the thunderstorm hit us, but the memory of that glimpse of beauty still resonates.

Wherever I have lived – and I have moved on average every seven years – I have created a garden. Needing the security of things I've planted, to grow in the ground, or in pots around, or in the house. I needed to save seeds, swap cuttings, watch for the signs of new life as buds and new leaves appear. There is joy in bringing a little seedling or a fragile cutting to life. The pleasure of watching things grow, a balm to the soul when life brings its challenges.

My life is arranged so that I am constantly alert to the possibility of beauty, in the natural environment, and as I go about daily life.

In my home, I surround myself with possessions imbued with memory: my photos, paintings and prints, china and other objects reminding me of who I am, and of how I got to be the 'me' of today. An Unexpected Accolade.

I have ABC Classic FM playing on the radio, creating beautiful sounds and there is usually a flower or a pot plant in the front room and in the kitchen/office. The fact that sometimes, the house is a bit untidy, doesn't detract from my feeling that there is beauty in my surroundings.

I welcome the little opportunities for joy in the everyday. The pink orchid in bloom, the unexpected contact with an old friend, or the tight hugs of my two grandchildren when they arrived back recently from overseas.

As I write now, in bed at nearly midday, with the pot of tea empty at my elbow, the piece of writing I am working on completed, and the rest of the day beckoning, I know I am truly a lucky woman.

There is great beauty in the everyday.





## **I am a Tulip Tree**

**Shirley Hynes**

I once lived in a garden in a small town in the country. My friend Marchie planted me in a spot near the back door a very long time ago. Marchie looked after me well, she watered my roots, sheltered me from possums when I was little, and planted small plants nearby to keep me company. Over time, I grew so big that Marchie couldn't reach all the way around me. My branches grew towards the sky, except for one lower branch, that bent once in a storm and I could never straighten it again. That branch became a perch for cats, and children, who would climb up and sit comfortably in the bend.

Marchie left the house one day and I never saw her again. Other people came and lived in the house. Different people at different times. Some of them even admired my beautiful spring finery, the little green and apricot tulips that bloom at the tips of my branches every spring.

A family moved in and the woman really loved me and my beautiful tulips. Every spring, she'd invite all her friends to a tulip tree party under my branches so everyone could enjoy the sight. The woman loved me in the autumn too, when the tulips were gone and my large green leaves turned to gold and brown, and dropped onto the grass below. She showed her children how to play in the leaves, to pile them up into a crunchy pile and jump right in, to roll and giggle and cover themselves, in crispy brown leaves.

The family doesn't live there any more. They left one day and all around me were noisy machines, and workmen pulling down the house that had always stood beside me. They put up new small houses where the garden had once been, and covered everything in concrete.

I am not there now. I am a cloud, remembering my time in Marchie's garden surrounded by my friends: the roses, azaleas, lilliums, lilacs, fruit trees. They are clouds too. The family who last lived with me, and loved me, are long gone. I wonder if anyone remembers me?



The tulip tree, *Liriodendron tulipifera* — known as the tulip tree, American tulip tree, tulip poplar, yellow poplar — is native to eastern North America. It can grow to more than 50 m (165 feet)

Around 1978, the writer met Miss Sadie Marchant, (known as “Marchie”) then aged in her 90s. Marchie said she had planted the tree during the Great Depression of 1929-1934.

## **My Life of Pets**

**Toula Nikolaou**

‘That duck that Naso ate.’

‘Why do you remember the saddest things?’

‘What about the happy things? Your life with George, for instance. How good he was to you.’

‘Yes, I know.’

‘I always thought Dad could be so cruel when he wanted to be. Why did Dad want to eat my duck? How could he do that to a child?’

Ruth looked at the photo, ‘You were such a pretty child but you could be so naughty. I can still remember your teary little voice. “You’re eating my duck. Daddy said that she was mine.” ‘

‘Although I can rationalize a lot of what he said and did, when I think of Dad, I realise he often had a peasant mentality - especially when it came to animals. There was Nina, my pet goat. Dad and the plumber ate her. Then there were those pigs he had fattened up for Christmas. One of them died when he stuck them in the boot of the car. But what he did to Polly the pointer dog takes the cake. He told me that she was mine but in a strange sort of way he took her away from me...

‘But now I have what I want. Three beautiful cats and a dog of my very own. Three, oh so very different cats. Naso is my big one, bushy, brown and white. Always strolling along, going his own way. Naso with his favourite sleeping places and with the manners of a lion. Of course, he’s named after Dad. He’s sort of like him - makes his own rules and runs the house. Lordly, oh so lordly.’

‘Then there is Sam, lovely, warm and caring. Always wanting to crawl inside the covers, purring, always purring. Black and white with large green eyes. Always hungry, eating anything and everything.’

‘And Flower is my baby. She has always been my baby. Bushy tail waving in the wind.’

‘But best of all was my Irish Setter, Lani. Placid, loving, chasing the sea gulls along the sea shore. Running till there was no wind in her lungs. Running back to me with a smile on her face.’

‘Now I have another Irish Setter named Kara but she is so different to Lani...

‘I want her so much.’

‘But you must remember she is not like Lani. All dogs are different. Each has their own personality.’

I didn’t believe her. Lani was the best. Sometimes I feel like giving Kara away. Deep down I knew that I couldn’t replace Lani yet I bought another Irish setter. As

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soon as Lani died, I bought another.

I thought I had made the worst mistake of my life but gradually I have come to love her although she is the opposite to Lani. She is wild and wilful. Stressful yet so endearing. Coat golden, lustrous dark flashing eyes. It is a constant battle to hold her. She is so vexing but I love her.

‘How are the animals?’ he asks. ‘They’re okay.’

‘Kara? Is she good?’

‘Yes, always.’

Poor George. I want him to be restful so much. To not be in pain. He is always in pain and yet he asks me about everything. I want to take away his pain. I want him to be like he used to be. Well, and in control. He has nothing now. I want to see him at peace.

‘How is the dog? Has she grown?’

‘Yes, she’s big now.’

Poor George, he didn’t deserve this. Why? There is no answer. Just regrets at what could have been.

I must get on with life. Say goodbye to George and get on with it.



## **Homage to Lani**

**Toula Nikolaou**

**A**bout dawn she awakes  
**B**owling me over  
**C**annibalising her food  
**D**ependent  
**E**yes large and dark  
**F**earing nothing with me beside her  
**G**aping mouth  
**H**urrying, she is hurrying  
**I** love her  
**J**ourneying down life's track together  
**K**ennel - no kennel for her  
**L**ani, my beloved dog  
**M**arching beside me  
**N**o chain for her  
**O**pen, so open. Her face reaches out in time  
**P**anting. I want more she says  
**Q**uiet time? There is no quiet time for her.  
**R**unning, jumping then  
**S**tanding tail erect with feathers hanging, long coat flowing golden  
**T**ongue lolling, wet, scrumptious  
**U**nder her bed she hides. She thinks I do not know  
**V**acuum, there will be a vacuum when she goes.  
**W**ith pain I will miss her so  
**X**mas is all love for Lani. All the time I will  
**Y**earn for her - she is the  
**Z**enith of my love and I dread when I will lose her forever.



## **Look Don't Touch**

**Toula Nikolaou**

The small blue flower waved in the wind. 'Don't touch it.'

'But why not?'

'Well, you may destroy it if you handle it. Look but don't touch!'

I still think about those words. Mr Marriott was a wonderful teacher I had for grades three and four.

'See, look at the colour. That's a very rare orchid that only grows in this area.'

'Can I pick it?'

'Of course, not. If we went around picking rare flowers there would not be any left. Always remember look but don't touch.'

I often went with my sister and brother to the swamp at the back of Carrum to collect tadpoles. They were funny little things that we put in a jar with water and watched them grow. From strange small things without legs they gradually became frogs. 'See, look how it swims,' said Mr Marriott with a laugh. 'Soon it will be a shiny green frog.'

How I adored him. 'Mr Marriott are you going to have lunch with us in the shelter shed?' 'Of course, we have so much to talk about.'

Mum loved animals. I was allowed a room in our house for my collection of frogs and tadpoles. When they grew I would put them back in the swamp. I had moths and caterpillars, that I fed with gum leaves. The eggs would hatch and ever so slowly they'd evolve into beautiful Emperor Gum Moths with wonderful spots of colour on their wings. 'Mum, will I always collect insects and animals?'

'Of course, you will.'

'Do you think I love all the animals in the world?'

'What a silly thing to say!' She laughed and said, 'When you grow up you might want to work in the zoo.'

'That would be lovely. Do you think I could get a job in the zoo?'

'You can try.'

'Mum how come you love animals so much?'

'I think I get it from your nomo (grandpa). He loved animals too.'

'Oh, Mum, I do so love Mr Marriott. He takes us to the bushland in Seaford and Carrum and we find wonderful flowers and insects.'

I was talking to my sister, Dora one day and she told me that she could hardly wait for Mr Marriott to be her teacher but unfortunately he was gone when she reached grades three and four. I will always remember Mr Marriott because he gave me the wonderful gift of looking but not touching. A gift of love for the natural world, which I still have to this very day.

## **Back to the good old days**

**Janette Cora Morris**

We had a gramophone with a handle as a child  
His Master's Voice branded on the lid showed  
a Jack Russell dog with its floppy brown ears.  
If you used force to wind the handle on the side  
This megaphone would dislodge from its cabinet.



Our collection of 78rpm records consisted of  
*How Much Is That Doggie in the Window,*  
*Did You Ever See A Dream Walking?*  
*Que Sera Sera Whatever Will be Will Be* or  
Jim Reeves singing about *Old Shep*, the dog  
Who died and went to the great sky above.

The records were protected in brown paper packets  
The hole in the middle displaying a label with  
the song title and artist's name.  
The records were stored in a wire magazine holder.

An electric record player was the highlight of our lives.  
A turntable that held six records at a time  
Dropping down one by one as each record finished.  
The lighter 45 and 33rpms replaced the 78rpms.

Rock n'Roll came via Buddy Holly, Chubby Checker  
and The Big Bopper along with beehive hairdos and bobby sox.  
We became very American looking like extras from  
Happy Days, the television series.  
We swung our partners square dancing and I always lost mine!

A cheap game in my childhood was to collect stray dogs.  
Flea them and put the fleas in a jar of water while  
Counting which dog had the most.

The dogs were put in a shopping jeep to go to  
the North Melbourne Lost Dogs Home. Not having a car,  
We got on the train at South Yarra Station, or a lady dog lover

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Would drive us there as we put up with their barking.  
I rounded up those dogs like a cattle-dog rounds up sheep!

We had outside toilets, chickens running free and no hot water taps.  
Bread and milk delivered by horse and cart,  
No shampoo just good old Velvet soap.  
No washing machines or dishwashers or air conditioners.

The moral of my writing today is:  
*What you don't have, You don't miss.*  
A simple life is not complex - except nowadays  
You can choose from twenty-four flavours of ice cream  
Not just the three I remember - strawberry, vanilla or chocolate.  
But twenty-four flavours - WOW!





## **Endurance - The Human Spirit**

**Janette Cora Morris**

They say when the road gets rough you must get tough  
Geographical magazine articles are full of achievements  
People reaching mountain tops, sleeping in tents,  
surrounded by blizzard snow. Well let me tell you what I now know...  
Men and women with one or both legs amputated  
Thrilled when fitted with a new prothesis. Strapped to their stump  
They're mobile at last. With uninhibited joy they wiggle their rump.

No discrimination between man, woman, or child  
There are strokes that affect the brain and more  
Humbling to witness sweat and tears, to be the same as before...  
The dedicated physios encourage by praise and  
Patients' spirits uplifted me. It takes guts and determination as  
Occupational therapists use their skills for muscle stimulation.

Kindness and tears clears away fears, the anger and frustration.  
A bloody clot strikes at anytime with results beyond imagination  
To be robbed of walking and talking a devastating situation.  
Weeks pass and with relieved sigh I see a vast improvement.  
We feed ourselves and push wheelchairs on our own  
Alive and fighting how our independence has grown.

My perspective on life broadened to look beyond self  
It's all about health, only a sprinkling of wealth  
Unforgettable memories of rehab struggles, our wellness by stealth.  
We laughed together bumping wheelchairs 'til some needed repairs  
We shared fruit and newspapers in friendly morning calm  
Spreading honey on toast for those with one arm.

To help someone in need such a satisfying deed  
And what a wonderful gift being able to walk again  
Free of the rotten brace that became quite a pain  
Now a smile on my face, shattered leg trauma barely a trace  
Down to the beach I'll go, beloved dog in tow. No more woes  
As I breathe fresh salt air and feel the sand between my toes.

## **What Next?**

**Janette Cora Morris**

Blow me down, this incident makes me frown.  
A double whammy for this dear granny.  
Golf Links Rehabilitation Frankston my home since a broken leg  
But constipation from medication may be the explanation  
For faeces in the bowel causing obstruction.  
Ordered off the bed because I'd been discharged  
But bugger me, I'm in agony.  
Doctor diagnosed, 'An umbilical hernia strangulated.  
Get this woman an ambulance. An urgent case, any delay a disgrace.'  
Zoom zoom and Ambos taking observations  
While asking why I wore odd shoes (as if one foot had swollen to amuse)  
Too sick to explain, I let them think I'm insane!  
In Emergency x-rays taken to clarify the situation  
With I.V. Drip inserted I knew they were not fakin'

Up to the Theatre in a hurry to cover my earrings with tape  
'To prevent infection'. Yet metal leg brace with months  
Of exposure ignored. Don't its germs need detection?  
A voice said, 'We may have to cut the bowel.'  
Gosh! I shivered. Wanted to gag. A fractured leg - now a colostomy bag?  
How could I be so lucky? Must determine to be plucky.  
Operation over. Straightforward and no complications.  
Except bellybutton and me severed relations.  
I apologised for vomit, diligent nurses made no comment.  
Just washed me clean with compassion and understanding  
It goes with the job, this skilful people handling.

My pain couldn't be ignored so medication given  
Time to stare at the small scar on my belly  
Now tender and swollen like gooseberry jelly.  
Recovering as well as expected in respite care  
Luxurious Bayview Waters Oliver's Hill  
After multiple ordeals I rest and snooze there.  
Playing carpet bowls in a wheelchair just what I need  
Loving attention, laughter and fun - I'm grateful indeed

## **Moments to Remember**

**Janette Cora Morris**

They say life has never been as good since sliced bread. Dragging a long knife through a large loaf of bread, the slice was never even, the bottom piece always thick, the top thin. But there is nothing like a hunk of bread stabbed with a fork, toasted over an open fire, and spread with salted mutton fat so the oil runs down your chin.

\*\*\*\*

My Mum's dentures always seemed to break on a long weekend when no dentist could be contacted. The glue, Tarzan's Grip was used to seal the plate as a temporary fix but led to toxic stomach poisoning!

A week before my wedding, that same Mum singed her eyebrows and side of her hair by lighting the gas oven. The flame from a small explosion caused the fire to reach her face. She could have been blown up and the bride's mother absent from the special day. Mascara great camouflage so the photos turned out all right.

Unlike my photos when I was bridesmaid at my friend's wedding. An egg-shaped lump appeared on my forehead after bumping into a post just before arriving at the altar behind the bride. All eyes were not on the bride but on me as the lump kept growing and my eyes filled with tears. I could hear giggles in the background from so called friends.

\*\*\*\*

When employed as a night nurse in a low care aged hostel, I remember Bruce, a resident in Room 60, who rang an escort agency. A lady with dark flowing hair, high heels and a black fur lined coat pressed the night bell at 11.00pm. Trying to be diplomatic, I explained that Bruce was in no fit condition to require her service. Hardly able to walk because of fluid in both legs and sky-high blood pressure, Bruce was 88 years of age.

The lady turned nasty demanding a service fee and return taxi fare. To be free of the confrontation I rang the matron who lived on the premises. She paid all the expenses and gave Bruce extra medication to sleep and settle his desires. Bruce had been found on the bed holding a horse whip - well, he was an ex-jockey who hadn't ridden in years!

When I was seventeen years old and a trainee nurse, I had the first of many mishaps. I mistook a facial shave for a pubic shave. The patient was having a

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prostate operation, so I took it for granted the shave was for that area. I wanted the floor to swallow me as I stammered through my explanation as to why his face was still covered in whiskers.

In another dreadful situation, if I was alone with matron in the lift, I got nervous and always broke wind. This continued from the last floor where I was on duty, to the ward where she was heading. I didn't think she was aware of my reaction until one morning I was introduced to her by the changeover nurse. Matron remarked, 'Yes, we met in the lift. She has a terrible gas problem and may have to see the staff doctor.'

I broke wind louder and longer in front of her. Are these moment to remember or forget forget?



**Illustrated by Jan Morris**

## **Early Days in Australia**

**Mairi Neil**

The word Anzac was a new word to me in 1962, when I arrived in Australia, at nine years of age, from Scotland with my family. We came to stay with an unmarried cousin of my father's, Catherine McInnes of the Australian branch of the clan. Aunt Kitty, as we were encouraged to call her, was in her late sixties. She lived a reclusive life after the death of her ninety-two year old mother, Hannah the previous year, and it must have been a shock when our family of eight exploded onto the scene.

Her ancient neglected weatherboard house in Croydon sat on the corner of Lincoln Road and a selection of potholes called James Road. Kitty's outings, apart from shopping, were to the Croydon Presbyterian Church, Country Women's Association meetings in the church hall and regular visits to donate blood to the Red Cross in the city. When my parents, a tempestuous Scots/Irish couple arrived with six boisterous children, ranging from three to thirteen years of age, her ordered solitary lifestyle changed forever.

Local children had declared Kitty's rambling dilapidated house haunted, however, the setting of unkempt bush block, encompassing a disused sawmill and overgrown orchard was ideal for the release of stored energy after our month's journey on P & O's Orion. Like Apaches in the popular Hollywood Westerns, we whooped and cavorted free from the confinement of small cabins, narrow corridors and the crowded decks of the migrant passenger ship.

At Croydon, we climbed trees, staged plum and apple fights, searched through remnants of sheds and chicken coops, discovered deserted bird nests and fox dens, blue-tongued lizards and grumpy possums and enough discarded rubbish from the turn of the century to keep the Antiques Roadshow in relics. We built escape tunnels and stockades to resemble those in Combat, a favourite TV show about a platoon of American soldiers winning the Second World War in Europe. We acted out escapes from Colditz, and for a change of pace ran make-believe wagon trains, or pretended to be the Lone Ranger or Wild Bill Hickok. The shadow of World War Two and the influence of early Scottish television evident in our games.

The old house provided a daily escapade outside, and inside it promised a fascinating adventure of the mind and soul. Gloomy timber walled rooms a grim contrast to the wide-open spaces and subdued colours of the garden of Australian bush and imported fruit trees. The 12' x 16' lounge-room, lined with brown-stained weatherboards crammed with dark cedar furniture that hadn't felt the thrill of polish for a long time.

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It included a huge dining table sitting on blocks because of three broken castors, two lumpy shabby sofas huddled in a corner, horsehair interior leaking onto the bland brown linoleum, and an enormous sideboard taking up most of one wall and overflowing with ornaments, crockery and other paraphernalia of indeterminate origin. This room out of bounds to us but we often used it as a shortcut to other parts of the house when playing hide and seek, or crept in to peek at forbidden treasures when adults were busy.

Aunt Kitty retreated to the lounge room each evening, to listen to programs on a valve wireless, which squatted on the mantelpiece, above a fireplace flickering flames, even in summer. Placed at the centre of the house, the dark and cold room had one window, and this overlooked a tumbledown veranda, crushed by the weight of ivy. The tall and narrow sash window jammed shut, its cracked pane held together with discoloured sticky tape. This reminded my parents of the tape to prevent windows breaking from the German bombers that blitzed Scotland, but never reached Melbourne. The atmosphere of neglect pervading the property nowhere more evident than this once splendid room. The ramshackle veranda on rotting stumps sagged against the side of the house, allowing minuscule natural light to penetrate the lounge room. Overgrown honeysuckle and out of control jasmine provided a haven for mosquitoes and a thick blanket of greenery blocked out natural light as it trailed along the roof and curled around windows.

A naked drop-pearl light bulb, suspended from the ceiling, its flex covered in disintegrating cloth, provided an inadequate 15-watt glow. The bulb a survivor from between-the-war years, the same vintage as the patched dull brown linoleum. The world of television did not exist for Aunt Kitty and was too expensive for us. We were thrilled when she invited us into her sanctuary to listen to the radio, or hear stories of the McInnes Clan in Australia. By the glow of red gum logs, we heard tales amply illustrated by artefacts and pictures adorning the walls, or crowding the sideboard.

There were poison-tipped spears from New Guinea and other islands to the north of Australia; hunting boomerangs from Central Australia and nulla-nullas fashioned to kill. Exciting fodder for our imaginations. Two huge blown emu eggs sat in patterned porcelain—to us they were dinosaur eggs. Cassowary and peacock feathers protruded from dull brass vases, mother-of-pearl shells gleamed and a single large conch shell still whispered the sound of the Pacific Ocean when held to your ear.

Aunt Kitty fascinated us to silence with tales of brave Captain John McInnes from the Isle of Skye, travelling many times between Europe, the Americas and Australia until going down with his ship, the clipper Cadzow Forest.

Relatives we had never met stared from behind ornately carved wooden frames, pioneers and adventurers who had made Australia home. However, their attempt

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to establish a dynasty failed with childless Kitty and her older brother, Jack, who married a woman long past childbearing age. Their younger sister, Jessie had one son but he would not be continuing the McInnes name. An older brother George, stood resplendent in his army uniform in a picture frame hung prominently above the sideboard, and flagged by two poison-tipped spears. The familiar Aussie slouch hat, set at a rakish angle, adorned with the rising sun Anzac Badge worn by World War One diggers.

‘That photograph was taken prior to his departure for Gallipoli,’ whispered Kitty. Although ignorant of where that was, we recognised the finality and pain in the sentence. We didn’t ask where George lived now.

He smiled from another photograph; this time dressed in full Highland regalia: kilt, sporran, beribboned bonnet, sgian-dubh\* – a picture postcard Scot we knew all about from watching shows with Sir Harry Lauder singing ‘Stop Your Tickling Jock’ or Andy Stewart from The White Heather Club singing while his kilt swayed.

‘Why is he dressed as a Scottish soldier?’ I wondered aloud. ‘Was he in a Highland Regiment and fighting for Scotland?’ My eyebrows knitted in consternation. ‘Where is Gallipoli, Aunt Kitty?’

She smiled, and with the patience of a teacher said, ‘Gallipoli is a long way away in a country called Turkey,’ and then proceeded to talk about Scotland as ‘home’. She said it was important to keep our culture alive. George had borrowed the outfit from his best friend, another George who was a piper in a local Scottish band. Kitty’s voice softened at the mention of the other George and she twisted the shiny Celtic friendship ring on the third finger of her left hand.

‘George Martin was my fiancé. We got engaged before they set off for their great foreign adventure.’ Her mournful face stared at the photographs imprisoned behind carved frames. ‘Neither of them returned home. Your Uncle George took ill on the troopship, along with hundreds of others. Taken ashore and hospitalised in Constantinople, he died from enteric fever. He was only nineteen years old like most of the others in the Anzac Campaign.’

I held my breath, could feel my brothers and sisters tense. The spluttering and wheezing from the fire ceased, the flames appearing to freeze. Kitty stared into the fireplace as if alone. ‘My fiancé George survived Gallipoli and fell wounded in a great battle in France beside the River Somme. Taken to England he was recovering ... until the flu epidemic.’ A tear glistened at the corner of her pale grey eyes or it may have been a trick of the light. She straightened her shoulders and said, ‘he never returned home.’

Sadness hung in the room, suspended from the cathedral ceiling like a dark cloak, ready to smother happiness and laughter forever. We had learned enough



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history at school, albeit about the more recent Second World War, to know that soldiers died far from home and the grieving lasted a lifetime.

Fortunately, we could always rely on my young brother, Alistair, to do or say the unexpected. His six-year-old voice began singing the popular Scottish song '*Donald Where's Your Troosers*', quietly at first and then raucously. It was a childish response to the photograph. He hadn't absorbed the poignancy of the story but his uninhibited singing drew a twitch of a smile from sombre Kitty, which gave us permission to laugh.

I never forgot the story of our ANZAC or Kitty's Highland laddie and after some research discovered George Alexander Mc Innes fought at Gallipoli and was evacuated in that famous night time withdrawal of Australian troops. Taken to Greece, he was transferred to Alexandria where he did indeed die in hospital of 'the enteric'.

Captain John McInnes went down with his ship off the coast of Portland Oregon in 1896 and features large in *Light the Binnacle*, a book by a sailor who served under him and admired his seamanship and humanity. It was published by his grandson.

\*sgian-dubh - a ceremonial Highland dagger worn in the sock.

### Roll of Honour - George Alexander McInnes

Service number: 2657

Rank: Private

Unit: 6th Battalion (Infantry)

Service: Australian Army

Conflict: 1914-1918

Date of death: 15 December 1915

Place of death: Egypt

Cause of death: Illness (Enteric fever)

Cemetery or memorial details: Alexandria (Chalby) Military and War Memorial Cemetery, Egypt

Source: AWM145 Roll of Honour cards, 1914-1918 War, Army



## **Taken for a Ride**

**Mairi Neil**

Saturday morning  
no school - hurrah!  
Cold linoleum  
surprises bare feet,  
but outside,  
concrete path  
toast warm.

The sunlight  
filters through  
Jasmine clinging to  
verandah posts,  
tiny rays dance on  
honeysuckle leaves  
hugging rickety gate posts.

Long grass trembles  
near the Clydesdale's  
swishing tail.  
The milk horse  
waiting impatiently  
while bottles clink,  
empties slip into crates.

Eight pints  
left in the only shade  
beneath the letterbox.  
Halters jangle  
dust swirls as  
the horse shakes its head,  
snorts, and snickers.

We are the last delivery  
The milkman nods  
and I climb onto the cart.  
'Home,' he commands,  
reins loose across knees.

Dust scatters and swirls  
from the unmade road cart creaks,  
bottles and hooves clatter and thud  
The five-minute bone-shaking ride  
to Croydon Dairy  
more thrilling than Luna Park's  
Big Dipper.

