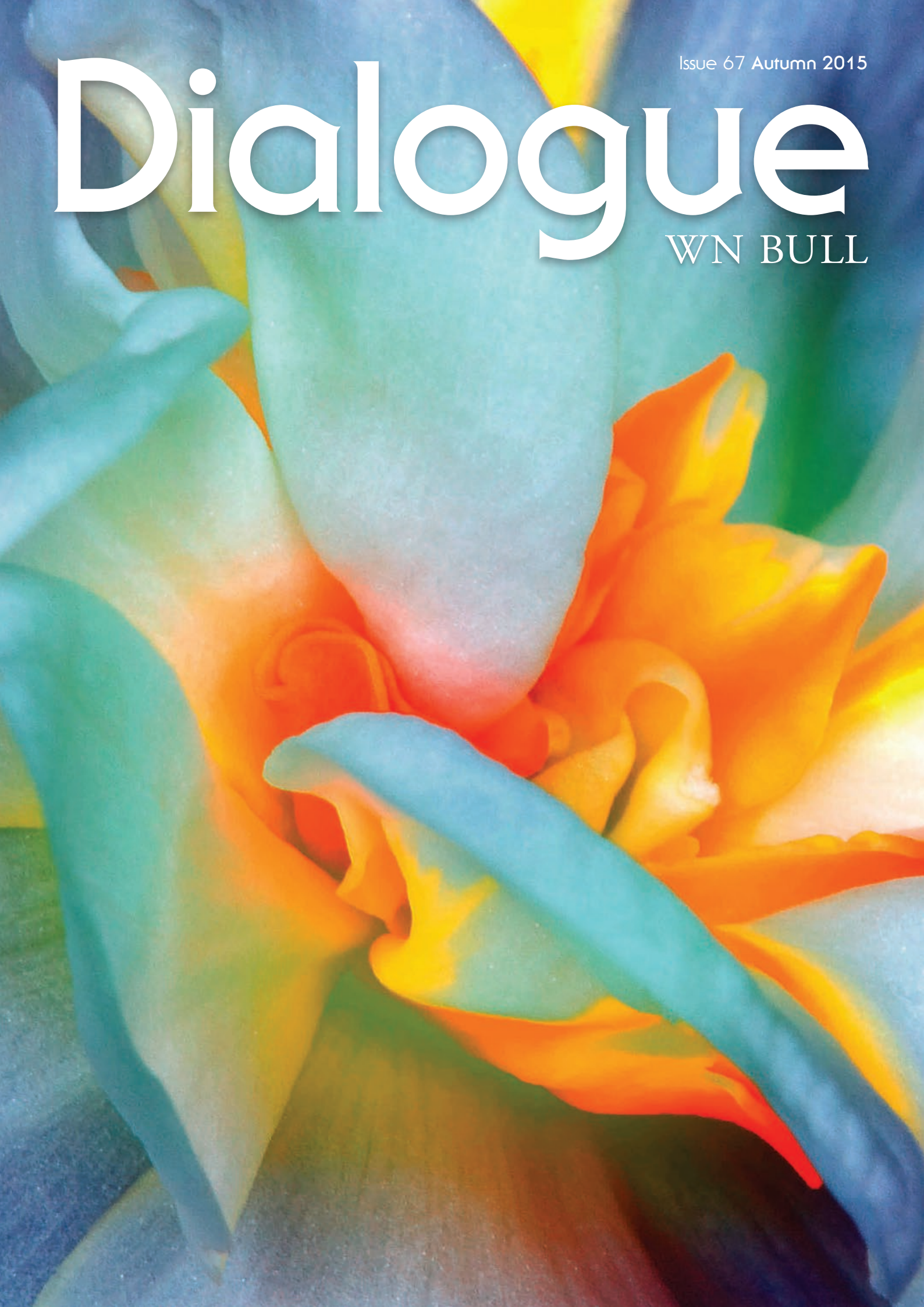


Issue 67 Autumn 2015

Dialogue

WN BULL





Editorial



Richard White

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Sigmund Freud wrote that there is some sort of psychological device in all of us that protects us against the reality of our own death. We can see this in young people; a recklessness and extravagance in living that leave little thought for tomorrow. In older people, it is more subtle; a surprise and shock that our body is becoming fragile, wearing down. But, like Autumn, an awareness of our mortality can add colour and depth to our living.

There is an autumnal feel to a number of the articles in this edition. Passion and idealism are so important for energy and enthusiasm, for changing and getting things done. 'I love teaching' was a statement that awakened hope in me. The conversation with Britt in the first article illustrates the critical point where enthusiasm and disappointment meet. The grief that ensues, like Autumn, need not be the end of the story.

Ray Chalouhe's article is a brave and honest reflection on his serious emotional problems. Ray describes a painful journey of discovery, familiar to many who have suffered as he has suffered. The darkness discussed can have within it the seeds of light, a source of hope for an individual and for family and friends.

Jenny Steinbeck and Joanne Wagg also write from personal experience. For Jenny, her children's leaving home is opening up experiences of loss and possibility. Jo reveals a loving and dedicated relationship with her patient. Both these women describe how people have become precious to them, children and patients, and the inevitable sadness that comes with changes to those relationships.

Even millipedes can claim our attention! Erica Greenop does it again and shows how the simplest of creatures can awaken compassion in us and care. There is a unity to life that Marjorie Pizer describes as 'The Great Symphony' in Poet's Corner and Anne Deveson relates in her book *Waging Peace*.

We are entering the 'dying of the year'. The sadness of conflicts is softened by Cecile Yazbek in her hope that the differences of 'chalk and cheese' can be overcome by this awareness of what binds us together, our common humanity. Rob Greenop's quest for his long-lost sister captures a loving persistence if not desperation, that is at the heart of the countless stories of family members separated by war or conflict or government policy.

So much of the articles, the enthusiasm, the compassion, the awareness, the sadness is summed up in the story of Rosemarie Say OAM. Like Britt, the teacher, Rosemarie loves her work with people with mental illness. She loves the people and hope shines in the relationships created and nurtured.

With our best wishes for Easter, from Patsy Healy and all of us at W N Bull Funerals

Editorial Office:
164 King Street,
Newtown NSW 2042
Phone: (02) 9519 5344
Fax: (02) 9519 4310
Email: wnbull@wnbull.com
Web: www.wnbull.com.au

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Editorial Board:
Richard White
Patsy Healy
Greg Bisset

Production:
Phillip Pavich
Email: phillip@depotspot.com

Copies of *Dialogue*
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calling (02) 9519 5344

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GRIEF COMES IN COUNTLESS WAYS ASK ANY TEACHER

written by Richard White

'I love teaching', and I love to hear someone say that. I have had good teachers over the years and I even hoped to be one myself. It's a combination of an untiring interest in learning and a desire to communicate this interest to others. So much of teaching is about being an enthusiast and others catching this enthusiasm. I was talking to a teacher like this the other day.

I met Britt as a fellow actor in a local dramatic production. I was very new to the game and Britt showed all the marks of the professional. She was the first to learn her lines, the first to show a real understanding of her character and, like all of us, willing to spend the time rehearsing and rehearsing and rehearsing. The only thing was, Britt was a full time teacher, of senior classes, at the local High School.

Anyone who has been in a class room, including a mature and insightful student, would know the demands of teaching. Not only is there the commitment to and

mastering the subject matter, there is projecting of one's personality, the establishing of rapport with students and the growing involvement in administration and accountability processes. And, all that you do and all that you are is 'out there' for people to see and critique.

Britt told me of being at the local supermarket and hearing comparisons being made between her school and another in the town. As often happens, there was a litany of positive comments about the other high school and negative stories about her own.

It was almost too much to bear, but Britt kept her cool. I could sympathise with Britt. The public school system takes a hammering in discussions among parents and often in the media. Knowing her school, aware of her own commitment to her students and to the quality of education, it was demoralising to hear this sort of criticism.

I know a little about Britt's school through our neighbour's son. We filled in for his grandparents on a

“ The nourishment and the soul slowly leach away; the heart, the enthusiasm and the passion begin to die. The teacher who inspired, who loved to teach begins to despair. ”

couple of occasions when they were away and we attended school functions. James came through those 'I hate school' years to graduate with good friends, with a considerable proficiency in music and with gratitude for the years he has spent at that school.

This is not to say I am an expert on the school or the young people who come out of it. I began writing about my admiration for teachers. It is a wonderful vocation. However, from the conversation with Britt, what has been for many teachers a rewarding career has become an administrative and bureaucratic nightmare.

Britt talked about changes being made in the public education system. These changes were not restricted to teachers. They are being impacted by a shift from quality of service to qualification and accountability. In the pressure to ensure the responsible use of public funds it is so often the 'foot soldiers' who suffer first - those on the front line, in the class room, who are asked to explain, rationalise and prove every detail of their practice.

There are all sorts of surveys and feed-back procedures now that aim to ensure quality of service. Testing and measuring have become the order of the day. All of which have their place.

The difference between 'quality' and 'qualification' and 'service' and 'accountability' could be categorised as the difference between the immeasurable and intangible and the quantifiable and demonstrable. Along with this there is the importance of the 'bottom line', saving measures, 'outsourcing' and short term contracts. This is the new language in teaching.

Of course, these differences can be exaggerated, but I

think there is a mental or spiritual attitude associated with quality and service that is often lost when the emphasis is put on qualifications and statistics. It is as if we have a desperate need for certainty when we begin to count and measure and compare. Such an attitude is destructive. Ask a teacher who spends more time filling in surveys and reports than talking and listening to students.

The nourishment and the soul slowly leach away; the heart, the enthusiasm and the passion begin to die. The teacher who inspired, who loved to teach begins to despair. 'Is it worth it? The hours of learning and discovering or preparing and creating?' Something begins to die when counting and measuring, accountability and qualifications become more important than the spark that fired the comment, 'I love teaching'.

'I love teaching' expresses the whole of a person and the completeness of a service. Mind and heart, enthusiasm and planning, responsibility and accountability are all one in this declaration. That intangible and immeasurable something that transforms us from within and the engagement with students that lights a spark in their lives cannot be contained or controlled, but it can be killed. It can die.

I hope Britt remains a teacher, that she continues to inspire and create. The grief she expressed in our conversation, the disappointment, need not be an end. We all know these experiences, the inevitable and challenging unhappinesses and dyings that are a part of life. Acknowledged as grief, a sense of loss of something precious, then the challenges and assaults on our dreams and vision can be embraced.



Instead of being the end of a vocation, grief can lead to a deeper awareness and commitment. It is the loving bit that survives, just as it is the loving bit that causes the pain. Our community needs teachers like this, teachers like Britt. Their grief needs to be taken seriously.

DARK BUT NOT LOST

written by Raymond Chalouhe

Rightfully said, I have struggled with emotional problems for many years. I have read and thought about better ways of thinking about my difficulties, tried and failed and tried again. This article describes an important part of my learning and the fruit of my struggling.

The power of positivity holds a much greater status in today's world than it has ever in the past. I would not negate this approach, but at times, when I fall into despair and my world seems to be collapsing around me, I feel powerless to bring order to my life. Despite any form of positive thinking or motivating myself emotionally, I am just stuck. It then leads me into my own mind to determine what is positive and what is negative.

Positive emotions are not always good. For example, consider a bad habit like alcoholism or smoking. We get a feeling from it which is pleasurable when it is a negative act we undertaking. Negative emotions are not always bad, either. Many people suppress or continue to avoid the unfavourable feelings, like anger, anxiety and grief.

In facing those negative emotions, it feels bad but we are doing ourselves a world of good.

The key to bringing order to my life, I discovered, was awareness. Monitoring my social conduct without criticism or judgement, I forged a very strong social identity which I use to engage people. In becoming lenient with myself, I found I could extend that leniency and consideration to others to begin to appreciate the wisdom of that which I had built mentally and emotionally. In all, as I honed my personality I began to see myself as a likeable and interesting person with a lot of "insight" as I was often told.

Still, my work did not stop there. I had achieved a sense of well being and the positive feelings were there more often, as congruent with my positive state of mind. I realised

though that it wasn't only about feeling good. The question of "What do I do?" began to guide the way and amplify my awareness to my daily conduct and behaviour.

I realised that I had much negative energy around my daily activities.

Of those to mention, include drugs and sex.

How could I justify to myself that I was a good and empowered individual if all I did every night was smoke marijuana and make a fool of myself with a friend. This is an easy one as everyone knows drugs cause major damage to the mind and body. I quit. I beat my habit of 3 years and never touched the stuff again. This is another example of what I stated in my introduction. Smoking marijuana felt good. Stopping it felt bad. Yet the motive behind each one was confused.

I had to realise that the effect of marijuana was bad and that stopping was good. A little rearranging of my thoughts and presto! Habit ceased, problem solved. This is what I mean about awareness. One must examine oneself thoroughly and make the changes in the thinking and habits by knowing what we are and what we do.

Sex is always a very difficult topic to approach. I will try to explain why I use this example in a positive way to further

“ The way I decided to beat this topic was first to feel my shame. What if all my family and friends knew that I was partaking in such a sordid activity? I would disappoint everybody. ”

our understanding of perfecting ourselves. As a young man, I never succeeded in having relationships with girls. There was one true love who left too soon and that was all I ever had to show for my relationships. Broken by grief, I tried to meet other girls and never succeeded. A common reaction. She took my heart and I never loved another.

Pondering my loveless existence and beginning to awaken to sexual feelings I had no idea that visiting a sex worker would be the worst decision I had ever made in my whole life. It started with a bit of fun and before I knew it, I was going regularly and then one day about 20 years later I looked back on this dark path and realised it had become my whole way of relating to women. I was crushed. I would never do things like that, I told myself. I would never take



drugs, I would never sleep with a sex worker. But it was true. I had done it and done it a lot! The way I decided to beat this topic was first to feel my shame. What if all my family and friends knew that I was partaking in such a sordid activity? I would disappoint everybody. The shame was strong. Here is another example of a bad feeling doing positive work. I felt so bad about myself, I repented to a priest and changed my ways and never looked back.

As I watched my life with a certain awareness, I realised our lives are akin to a story, the story of our life. If you were going to make a film, what would you as the main character be about? What kind of scenes would there be? What would your audience think? In no way am I saying we have to prove ourselves to others or hang our dirty laundry out all over town, but rather stand for something other people can learn from. I considered my movie. At first it was a pornographic video. Ceasing that and still not having defeated cigarettes, my life then would be a cigarette advertisement. I love my cd collection and listening to all sorts of music, thus I could be a DJ at a concert. I used to train a lot in my younger years with weight lifting, so my life could have been a Health and Fitness program. As a writer and artist, I would be a film about a starving artist (who hopefully comes good one day!)

In these examples, ask yourself, what movie do I want my life to be. You could be an at home mum looking after the husband and the kids and taking yourself lightly, you could be a family sitcom. If you are challenged with your finances, you could embark on a heroic quest to ensure your spirit never settles for anything less than abundance.

That would be a motivational and even a ‘feel good’ movie. Your relationships? A love story.

Of course, though, no one is perfect. When we slip up and get angry at a loved one or we don’t treat ourselves with the respect we deserve, it is only a temporary step back and we need to resolve the slip up by practising a greater compassion for those in our lives and ourselves too. Even

Again, most of our little ‘mistakes’ are nothing to let ourselves get upset about. If apologising fixes it, do so. If there is something you can do to make amends, do so. If there is nothing you can do, let it be and do not let yourself dwell on it to the point of anxiety.

It has been a long road for me, riddled with darkness and inner torment. I look back over the years and sometimes



For Further Articles by
Raymond Chalouhe,
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www.alivingspring.com



though, the fight or argument you had could be the dramatic touch of the movie as your audience waits eagerly to see how you resolve your problem. A lot of the little ‘mistakes’ we feel we make day to day aren’t really a big deal.

So you were a little inconsiderate towards a shopping clerk? It doesn’t really matter on a grand scheme of things. If you were politically incorrect at work, that is a bit more daunting, but offer yourself to stand up and apologise to any

“ And despite the past with all its hostility and hatred, I feel a vast kindness has come to visit me, closer than ever before. ”

one who took offence. Hopefully in a good workplace they will accept your apology. Still you then have to redeem by making it up in a way that is respectable. More dedicated work ethics... even more super customer service... aiding your fellow work members with assistance that can really help them...

want to laugh and sometimes want to cry. All along I have walked alone absent of the touch of love. The darkness no longer frightens me. In taking time to feel my negativity all squashed up inside, expressing it in therapy and reminding myself to “stay with myself” I feel that on the uncommon path I have traversed, all the battles I have faced have exposed me to the darkness til I knew that it did not have the power over me which I first thought it did. I am stronger for the experiences.

I continue to walk this path of mine, happier sometimes, lonely the next but at such points I begin to realise that I must go beyond my moods and how I feel and must become useful. Few scenarios scare me now. And despite the past with all its hostility and hatred, I feel a vast kindness has come to visit me, closer than ever before.

I will keep the light in my heart. I will not judge or criticise myself or others harshly. I will treasure those most loved in my life. I will be a part of the world with all the people that make it up.

I will continue upon my path until one day, with the hopes of not too far, my life may become blessed with the touch and love of my soul mate. Time is my ally as it moves me toward her more and more everyday. Finally, when we meet I would have forged the making of a good and decent man for her to love.

More so, a good and decent man, I will be, for the whole world to behold.



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THE EMPTY NEST SYNDROME.

written by Jenny Steinbeck

My second child, James, was leaving home. He had completed his HSC and was going to Canberra to study music. I was sitting outside, having a cup of tea, when I felt the tears coming. I went inside to get my sun glasses.

We have two beautiful children, my husband and I, and we love them very much. They have grown up quickly, too quickly. Or, I am growing up too quickly! I look at my parents and wonder whether they felt like I do – life is going too fast! I am not prepared for these changes!

For twenty odd years I have been caught up in wondering about and caring for my children. Certainly, I have had ‘work’ to go to over the years but Millie and James were a significant reason for getting out of bed of a morning. And, as they got older, if I wasn’t up then they certainly weren’t up!

I had my own interests, as well as work. I have always been a keen reader and a day rarely went by without time snatched for a book ‘on the go’. I always read the reviews in

‘Spectrum’ and kept up with current topics and authors. It was when Millie, James’ elder sister left home, that I noticed a change, in her and in me.

The young girl I had watched and worried about, scolded and loved was changing before my eyes. Before I was ready, she had grown into a young woman, with a mind of her own, no matter how scattered! She was ready to leave and experiment and learn and grow on her own, as much as she could.

Her father and I saw her choosing subjects and courses and changing and switching in the space of a year or so. There was one constant in all of this; Millie had always loved animals. She had been deeply attached to our two elderly dogs who proceeded to die in the couple of years

she had left home. The kitten she had brought home was bitten by snakes twice and managed to survive. Then there was the drama of Pedro, a chook bought as a chicken who surprised us by being a rooster! His grown-up cries upset the neighbours. Pedro had to go! We had to keep Pedro’s demise a secret as we knew Millie would champion him even against the unsettled neighbours.

Millie has come back to her first love. Academia has given way to dog grooming and a diploma in vet nursing. I continue to marvel and wonder at all that is happening to her and the choices she is making. There is a person emerging who is familiar in some ways and surprisingly different in others. Like the butterfly who bears no resemblance to the caterpillar, the adult child is leaving her parents behind in ways more significant than a mere change of address.

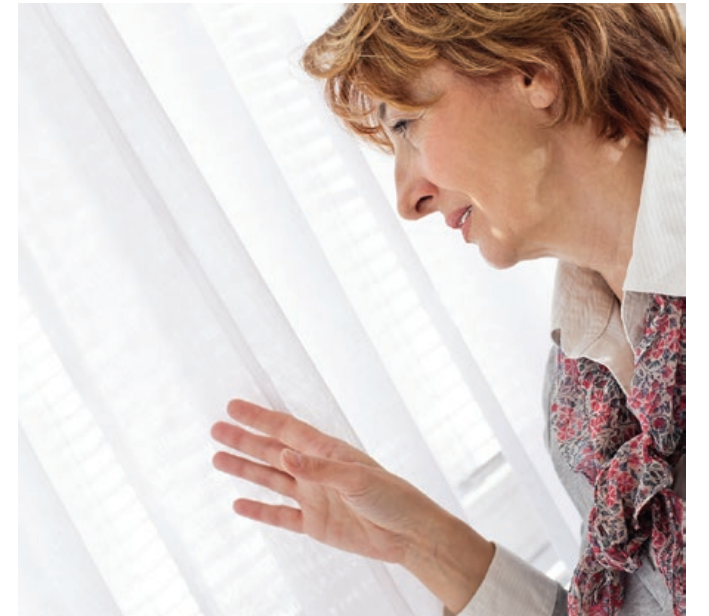
In my focusing on Millie I was caught by surprise by the changes in myself. For the past two years, since Millie left home, I have been unable to read. An occupation that I loved has dropped away. I am unable to concentrate and the interest and the passion are no longer there. I associate this change with my daughter’s going away to study. But, what does this mean?

The expression ‘empty nest syndrome’ sounds so clinical. What I am feeling is far more to do with who I am and how I live. I love my children and I grieve their leaving even when I know ‘it’s a part of life’.

“ . . . all I know is that there is something going on in me that needs to grow and learn, that is excited by ideas and stories. ”

Such knowledge is no consolation. A bit of me is falling away as they are taking flight. Their excitement is paralleled by my sadness and confusion. I can understand and to some extent rejoice in what is happening to them; I am confused with what is happening to me. Perhaps the loss of books is telling me something.

As I said above, reading was something I did for myself. I loved the books and the world of ideas. I learnt and questioned and was becoming ‘more knowledgeable’. I was nourished by my reading. It was something that sustained me through the crises and challenges of their school life, social interactions, illnesses and triumphs. I was there for them because I had discovered a way of being there for myself.



My reading was linked to living for and loving my children. As they are coming to need me less, the incentive, if not the desperation, of the time grabbed for reading has diminished. And, I was feeling doubly bereft until I returned to sewing. I decided I would make a series of star cushions, one for each member of the family, twelve all together.

The neighbours with whom we are very friendly were having a crowd of children and grand children for Christmas. We exchange presents for birthdays and Christmas and other occasions, usually something appropriate and simple. I am not a person who talks about the soul. However, as the editor of *Dialogue* has pushed me into writing this article, I have been forced to thinking about soul-stuff, as he puts it. I don’t know what he’s talking about most of the time, all I know is that there is something going on in me that needs to grow and learn, that is excited by ideas and stories. I love to read.

There is also something in me that takes satisfaction in creating things, looking at the things I have made. Those stars for the neighbours and their children and grand children were my gift to them at Christmas. They were also part of me and my affection for them.

The making things continues apace. There are countless cushions made out of tea towels and other creations all over the house. I enjoy doing this, making and seeing that I have made. Just as reading was something I enjoyed, so sewing is a relaxing, natural occupation. I love it, just as I loved the reading. What is going on?

I don’t know! I’m not good at putting words or labels on my experience. What I do know is that ‘the empty nest syndrome’ does not express what is happening to me now that both my children have left home. I am deeply sad when I discover the odd dirty sock behind a desk or recall battles about going to school. I miss them greatly. But, I’m wondering whether there is something of the butterfly in me also, something new and surprising growing. Who knows?



HOT CROSS BUNS FOR A FAVOURITE GENTLEMAN

written by Joanna Wagg

Morris was one of my favourite patients at the Medical Practice where I work as the Primary Healthcare Nurse.

I was saddened to hear that he died last week. I will miss his gentle smile and his kind words to me. I loved his gentlemanly ways, the wealth of life experience he held and which he shared in brief snippets at times, but not always.

I am very glad that I saw him a few times at home, towards the end, when he was being cared for - and surrounded by his family. His home was like Morris himself - respectable, elegant, smelling clean and inviting, but was unpretentious in any way. I felt privileged to visit him in his own home, to be welcomed and accepted in his own space.

I followed his younger son up the stairs to his bedroom. Morris was in bed and he had pain, which was being assessed and managed. I came to check his blood levels for Warfarin treatment and to give him his Flu shot. I offered,

what I hope, were comforting and helpful words, saying that the pain would gradually be brought under control with the new, stronger medication and that he would soon be able to get out of bed and go downstairs to join the rest of the family.

I urged him to ‘hang in there’, try to be patient and believe that things would get better. He offered very few words back to me, meeting my gaze with his trusting, but rather forlorn-looking, dark brown eyes.

He seemed to improve a little over the few times that I visited him. I caught a brief light in his eyes and the beginnings of a smile, as he started to improve. I gave him a little kiss goodbye, saying that I would see him next week. I don’t kiss all my patients – only the ones that I can’t resist!

I don’t know if this made him feel better, but it certainly helped me, to give him something of myself that showed how much I cared.

The last time I visited him, he put up with me sticking a needle in him, not once, but twice. I always feel for my patients when I need to hurt them in the course of my work. I apologized to Morris, praising him for being such a compliant and uncomplaining patient.

As a reward for his stoicism, I promised him that next time I visited I would bring him a hot-cross bun. I chatted away a bit, saying that perhaps I could find a diabetic version of a hot cross bun, in deference to his diabetic

“ Always a gentleman, he would sit patiently in the waiting room with his hat and walking stick . . . ”

status. On second thoughts, I decided that a bun would be OK, so I changed tack by saying “Actually Morris, a hot cross bun will be fine for you to eat, it won’t do you any harm at all. In fact it will be good for you, especially as



you like hot cross buns! It will make you feel better.’ I was assured that he would like a hot cross bun and committed

the plan to bring some next time I visited him, to memory.

I heard later that week that Morris was in hospital. I didn’t know any details, but decided that I would bring the hot cross buns with me to work anyway, and if all was OK, I’d bring a few to Morris, for him to share with the family. Sadly, I heard that he had died, after a fall and a short stay in hospital.

I apologise for not bringing the hot cross buns that day, but they weren’t forgotten. I was ruminating about what to do about my promise to Morris. A promise is a promise, after all. I decided that I’d like to write about Morris, a very special and much-loved patient of this Medical Practice. My own tribute to him and something that I hope gives you, his family, a bit of comfort and brings a smile at a sad time.

Always a gentleman, he would sit patiently in the waiting room with his hat and walking stick, until he was called in to have his INR test. I found it very endearing that he always reminded me that he couldn’t see very well, so I would take his arm and escort him proudly to his seat next to the INR machine. He would offer his finger, any finger I liked, he said, generously and without hesitation.

While we waited for the test to complete, we would chat about things and he would tell me a little of what had been happening in his life. He was not always very talkative, so I tried to draw him out a little, without being too tiresome. He was frustrated about the limitations imposed on him by his fragile health, but very accepting of the realities that his advancing age was dishing up to him.

When we were finished, I would accompany him out to the desk, while reminding him to look after himself until we next met. He always promised that he would.

I didn’t see as much of Morris over the last few months when he visited the Practice. I wondered why I didn’t see him, but realized that my workdays may not have suited him, so he came on my off days and saw somebody else. I kept an ear out for him, always interested to hear how he was doing. Occasionally I would see him, waiting patiently and I would make a point of saying hello and giving him a close-up and visible smile, as well as a friendly squeeze of his arm as I passed him. It is lovely to have these sorts of relationships with my patients and is part of what makes my work so satisfying.

Thank you Morris for all the little things you contributed to the relationship that developed between us – just by being yourself. Thank you for being a true gentleman, a true professional and man of great intelligence and accomplishment.

His was a life lived richly, with concern for the happiness and welfare of others. A humble and thoughtful man, who I do not pretend to have known well, but what I did know, I cherished.

As I pass your house on the way to and from my work at the Medical Practice, I will offer you a little nod of respect and a metaphorical squeeze of your arm, because I want to keep your memories and your many generous gifts to others alive and remembered.



THE MILLIPEDE

written by Erica Greenop

There is a millipede at the top of the wall in the area between the hall cupboards and the kitchen. It is working its way round the apartment, a drab little brown-red creature with an elongated cylindrical body about two and a half centimetres long and a lot of legs. As it walks, the legs seem to ripple, a wave-like motion like the hem of a skirt on a breezy day; and on it goes, rippling along upside down and goodness knows what makes it stick to the ceiling without falling off, past the halogen lights, past the fire alarm, round the corner into the kitchen, across the top of the cupboard where I have put all the things I don't need but can't bring myself to throw away.

There's a pair of pink porcelain Victorian vases in that cupboard which belonged to Rob's mother with fat round bottoms with painted scenes of shepherds and maidens, and tall chimney-like flutes. They are completely hideous. There's an old carved wooden lazy susan which I remember my parents used for their Sunday lunchtime curry parties when they lived in Hong Kong, with the chutneys and peanuts and chopped banana and sliced mango and cucumber and desiccated coconut in separate little

dishes that all fitted one into the other. I used to imagine what would happen if the lazy susan started going round fast, something like a 78 record on my HMV wind-up gramophone, and in my imagination the mango slices and chutneys would fly off in slow motion across the table to the bosoms and pearls and ties and pressed linen shirts, and lunch would be much more fun.

The millipede has stopped for a while; he is just there, stationary, at the top of the wall. I read that millipedes are

an ancient form of arthropod and with their relatives the centipedes they contribute significantly to the invertebrate predatory biomass in terrestrial eco-systems; but this millipede doesn't seem to have given himself such an important role in life. He is at the top of the wall for a couple of days, all alone, nothing to do with terrestrial eco-systems, and then he is on the move again. What a solitary quiet little life he is living. And then there he is, on the carpet, traversing the area between the hall cupboards and the kitchen.

“ He is very quiet. Not that I could hear him before, but he is quiet in the sense that he seems to have lost heart. I pick him up and he curls himself into a little spiral, all his legs somehow tucked in . . . ”

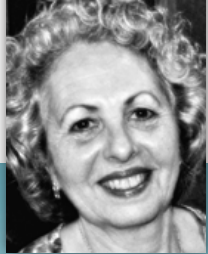
There are un-thought-of dangers in an apartment, and I can hear Rob with the vacuum cleaner in his study. It is one of those complicated pieces of space age machinery, made for people who know about engineering and design and rocket science and taking things apart and putting

them back together again. You can watch the fluff and dust whizzing into the transparent plastic tube arrangement central to this magnificent contraption, and it seems to me that in no time at all the fibres of our entire area of fitted carpet will be sucked up, along with my millipede.



He is very quiet. Not that I could hear him before, but he is quiet in the sense that he seems to have lost heart. I pick him up and he curls himself into a little spiral, all his legs somehow tucked in, defending himself maybe, but definitely not happy. I turn him over, and his legs are completely clogged with carpet fibre. In the scheme of things relating to our carpet it is a tiny amount of fluff, but in the scheme of his little life it is a fatal situation.

How stupid am I to think it is important to save him, but there is something in me that is drawn to helplessness and that is what I do – I carefully pick out the carpet fibre from between his legs and put him gently into the blue hydrangea pot on the balcony. I doubt he will survive, but in the evening, there he is, at the top of the pillar just by the pot, dangerously close to the spider's web. He is obviously a risk taker. And later on, rippling along shining red-brown in the glow of the balcony light there are dozens of millipedes, a whole community come to welcome him back, like a prodigal son, and the next day they have gone.



CHALK AND CHEESE

written by Cecile Yazbek

This morning I deleted an email invitation to watch a self-described harrowing video on children’s lives in the Syrian conflict. As I pressed the button, guilt, like a wisp of smoke passed my peripheral vision but I defended my need not to see. Every one of those children resembles one of my cousins or siblings; the sight of each face twists anguish into my gut. What did they do to deserve that? Why are they still there? It could have been me or my children. My cousins, whose mother came from Damascus, feel it keenly. But the chorus around me says, ‘they’re different’.

The question of their difference hangs around my kitchen while I knead dough for Lebanese thyme manoosh. How different from me are those people in that war zone? The fear on the children’s faces, the mothers’ tears, the old men’s resignation. I search for a fundamental difference between the people of Syria and myself that could make their suffering acceptable.

The idea of difference is a place where I get stuck. My thoughts swirl around my family: some race to accumulate

wealth, others are poor, some are gay, a couple have Down syndrome, some have very dark skin, some are pale: in such a large extended family, every variation sings its own note in our choir.

A few of us went out for lunch recently. On the train home, after a convivial outing, a South African next to me turned to the woman behind and blurted, ‘Are you Dutch?’

Probably accustomed to such questions, the freckle-faced woman laughed and said, ‘I’m Sri Lankan.’

‘Impossible,’ the blurter shrieked, displaying the usual ignorance of that little island’s long colonial history, where Dutch, English, Portugese and Indian planted their genes. She turned to the matron beside the Sri Lankan with a similar question.

‘I’m also Sri Lankan,’ she said.

‘You’re kidding me, aren’t you? You are like chalk and cheese.’

inquiry with others in the group prompting me to repeat my warning of her imminent scorching and ask her whether she understood. Her nod made me wonder what she professed to know.

The day ended in a rush of hugs as rain prevented long farewells at the station.

Diversity makes me feel less like an outsider, so I began organising these outings years ago. People from many parts

RIGHT AND BELOW

Za’atari Syrian Refugee Camp,
Jordan, 2013.

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‘Well, I want to know, who’s the chalk, and who’s the cheese?’ The dark one said, with a giggle.

“ . . . if I could say they have no desire for a life other than the present one behind razor wire, I’d have confidence in government ministers who say their punitive decisions are based on religious principles.”

Then we all laughed, except for the blurter who became even more anxious when I said to her in South African Xhosa, ‘Now you are burning.’ But she continued her line of

of the world with uncommon histories, frequent political opposites, some educated and some less so, small groups of strangers spend the day doing something interesting – cooking, travelling, conversing. We discover, after a short while together, how very much alike we are.

And this is a fundamental disturbance to me today. If I could find something deeply different about Syrian refugees, Ukrainian housewives, epidemic-afflicted Africans or the Tamil mother detained forever in Australia because of secret intelligence, I’d feel fine. If I could say that asylum seekers are so different they don’t feel pain, if I could say they have no desire for a life other than the present one behind razor wire, I’d have confidence in government ministers who say their punitive decisions are based on religious principles. But my little life in a diverse world tells me otherwise. Although I share genes with those warring and dying in Syria, my feelings of connection are much broader. Those who’ve travelled trains with me or cooked in my kitchens, agree with Maya Angelou that ‘we are all much more alike than unlike.’ We share pain, desire and needs, even with perpetrators who inflict harm on hapless others. According to main religious and humanist principles, we are all entitled to safety and access to the means of survival. In this time of cruelty, pain and indignation, keeping hope alive is a challenge.



ROSEMARIE SAY OAM A CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY.

written by Richard White

The actual citation for this Australia Day Award read: 'Medal (OAM) of the Order of Australia in the General Division. Mrs Rosemarie Edgar Say . . . for service to the community health, particularly mental health services, through chaplaincy and counselling organisations.'

When interviewed about the award Rosemarie said 'there were three things in life that drove her – getting rid of mental stigma, valuing volunteers and pushing for multi-faith training'. In another article, Rosemarie spelt out the meaning of these three aims.

"My passion as a chaplain is to foster in each person a *raison d'être*. To know that they matter to me, and they matter to God. To find meaning and purpose in their lives is hope for the future.

As chaplains, we ignore the labels and celebrate the humanity and uniqueness of all we meet. When a trainee asks me, 'what's wrong with that patient?' I say I don't know. My job is to look for what's right with that person and to validate that. We are all made in the image of God. As my brother, who is a psychiatrist, says, 'I don't call them patients; they are simply fellow human beings going through

extraordinary suffering.'"

Again and again in her interviews, Rosemarie spoke of the uniqueness of each person. There is an indefinable and infinitely precious self who is 'going through extraordinary suffering'. The reality of the person is never lost sight of in the ministry to their particular needs.

The above statement seems so simple, so obvious. However, in the case of mental illness, with diagnoses and labels, with behaviour that can be strange and frightening to us, too often the reality of the person is lost. Fear and an exaggerated desire to 'fix the problem' can reduce the individual to a case to be managed, not a person to be met.

This is not to minimise the complex and demanding needs of people and of situations. However, when Rosemarie speaks of stigma, she is highlighting a culture that has always surrounded the mentally or emotionally ill.

It was fear and ignorance that created the popular name for one of the first hospitals for the mentally ill, 'Bedlam'. Bethlehem Royal Hospital, the official title, near London, is now a highly respectable psychiatric hospital. Each major city in Australia has its psychiatric hospital and all of us would have heard the joke and the fear associated with Callan Park in Sydney and Kew in Melbourne. To suffer from mental illness is so often to bear a stigma.

Rosemarie speaks of a hope to remove the stigma associated with mental illness. Stigma is defined as 'a mark of disgrace that sets a person apart and that creates a stereotype that has negative connotations . . . ' So many people who suffer from any form of mental illness bear this 'mark of disgrace' and all it produces.

'My vision is the day when people can leave Macquarie Hospital (Rosemarie's place of ministry) without a label that stigmatises and discriminates against them. Stigma rises from fear, and fear from ignorance. Training people in Mental Health CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) equips them with understanding and confidence, and a real loving compassion for people who are marginalised.

After all, what is normal? Normal is just a cycle on a washing machine . . . We are all unique. It's not 'us and

“ It's the patients I work with – I love them. They have no layers. They are closer to God than I am – their spirituality is genuine. They are spontaneous and honest. ”

them' – we all walk what Andrew Denton calls 'the tightrope of normality', and anyone of us at any time can fall off."

Rosemarie's second source of inspiration is her work in training volunteers. 'Ossie Vollies' came to the fore during the Sydney Olympics. People would say this group of friendly, supportive individuals made the Games. Their spirit of welcome and tireless assistance created an atmosphere that made Sydney's 'the best Games ever!' But, volunteers have always been at work in our society and their contribution is longer lasting and more profound than a once-off two week event.

Rosemarie would say she could not do her work in the hospital without the volunteers who assist with visiting and spending time with hospital residents. As the title implies, volunteers are not paid. They choose to be with the people,

to spend their time freely and generously. Freedom and generosity are indefinable qualities but they are real and they are the reason volunteers have a unique contribution to make to our community, and to Rosemarie's ministry.

"Part of acknowledging people's humanity is to empower them. As pastoral carers we aim to give the hospital residents as many choices as possible. Morning tea is offered after Chapel Service – as would be normal in the outside community. And, 'would you like tea or coffee, milk, and how many sugars?' A contrast to my psychiatric nursing days decades ago when everyone was given sweet milky warm tea from a big stainless steel jug."

Again, it seems so simple, to treat people as human beings, to give them choices, to respect them. However, such human interactions are so often what are lost in the pressures of time and the demands of efficiency. It requires people who live from a spirit of freedom and generosity, who see with the eyes of the heart, as Rosemarie stresses, these are the people who make a difference. Volunteers are more than another pair of hands.

Underlying and running through everything that inspires Rosemarie's work is faith or as she puts it 'multi faith training'. Initially, I thought this meant providing training for volunteers that welcomed and included participants from a variety of religious traditions. I am sure this is the case, but it may not be stretching the point to say that 'multi faith' means more than this.

I think Rosemarie is referring not only to a religious belief but an embracing of different traditions, by the term 'multi faith training'. Such an acceptance of differences, a valuing of differences, seems important to meeting those suffering from mental illness. There is a melting of barriers, a hospitality that overcomes yet another of those element or categories that keep us apart.

Certainly there are differences, but instead of these differences being blocks to understanding and communion, they become gateways to deeper and deeper appreciation and wonder. Rosemarie puts this well when answering a question about 'what makes her work so special?'

"I look forward to waking up in the morning and getting to work! It's the patients I work with – I love them. They have no layers. They are closer to God than I am – their spirituality is genuine. They are spontaneous and honest. Their care and compassion for each other (and me) is humbling. They inspire me with their resilience and put my own life in perspective."

The categories and labels dissolve with this sort of faith (hope and love). The patients become the carers to the chaplain; the volunteers meet the Spirit in surprising ways and with extraordinary people. There are living meetings with real human beings. This is the experience Rosemarie is describing, an experience that goes beyond roles and expectations, religious traditions and personal limitations. 'It's the patients I work with – I love them. They have no layers . . . '

The citation for Rosemarie's award listed particular contributions, organisation, work, tangible achievements and length of service. All of this is important. However, from my conversations with Rosemarie over the years and seeing her with the people she loves, I believe her contribution and that of her volunteers is far more important than this.

“ ‘As chaplains we ignore the labels and celebrate the humanity of all we meet.’ Such a contribution ‘to the community’ cannot be measured . . . ”

‘As chaplains we ignore the labels and celebrate the humanity of all we meet.’ Such a contribution ‘to the community’ cannot be measured, except in the restoration, preservation and promotion of humanity in all its forms and expressions. Such a contribution is priceless and essential. Rosemarie's award is a valuable reminder of this.



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WHERE ARE YOU JANE?

written by Rob Greenop

I don't feel that I ever really knew my father – maybe perhaps as a small child up to the age of 4, but then the war came and our family was split up. From 1940 I rarely saw him and after peace returned my parents' marriage was no more and in 1947 he remarried. From then on I saw him for an outing every 3 months or so, but that was never enough to get to know him. As the years went by the 3 months turned into 6. I knew nothing about his new family and, as his interest in my sister and me seemed to wane, he became even more detached from my life.

It was 1955; I was 19, a brand new midshipman in the Royal Navy, and had not seen him for months when I was informed that he had had another heart attack and was dangerously ill in London. I was granted immediate leave and went to see him in hospital and was surprised to find his wife Ann and a little girl of about 2 in a pushchair by his bedside. It was a rather strained and embarrassing moment for all of us.

The following day he died and as he had never seen me in naval uniform I wore it to his funeral. It was a harrowing occasion for me; I had met none of the many people who

attended, only his widow, and no-one spoke to me. Quiet comments behind my back such as 'that must be the son' did little to put me at ease. I felt as though I was intruding and out of place among his friends. I left immediately after the service was concluded at the graveside. Some weeks later I received a small package from Ann containing a pair of his cufflinks. That is the sole memento I had of my father.

Well not quite, for he did leave me a half-sister. By 1999 Erica and I had been in Australia for 35 years, I had retired and began to write my memoirs and put together a family history. When I started I didn't even know my

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grandfather's name, but as my research progressed, more and more frequently I found myself wondering what had happened to that little girl in the pushchair. What was her

“ It took visits to London, spread over some years, and involved hours of poring through the volumes of records at St Katherines House . . . ”

name and where was she now? Did she have children? Although not part of my immediate family, we were related and had something in common in that neither of us had grown up knowing our father. Slowly I realised how important it was for me to find her. A few years earlier I had driven past the cemetery in South East London where he was buried and on an impulse went in to visit his grave and noticed that Ann had been buried alongside him; so what had become of my half-sister? The answers, if I could find them, lay in the UK and that was where my search for her began.

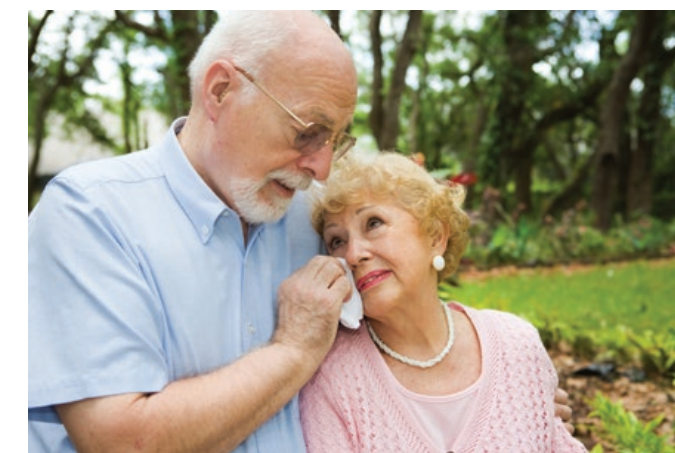
It took visits to London, spread over some years, and involved hours of poring through the volumes of records at St Katherines House in the centre of the city, before I found her. For those of my readers who had never visited St Katherines, the records were contained in volumes that covered three months of a year, each was very large and bulky to handle, weighed a considerable amount and needed a lot of space on the long raised tables to comfortably open up, with dozens of other people all trying to do the same. To say research there was a bit of a bun-fight would not be exaggerating.

Having found her name and date of birth my next approach was to start on the Marriage Records in the hope that she had married and I could trace her through her husband's name. Beginning when she would have been 20, I was on my 38th volume, had closed it up and returned it to its correct place on the shelves when something caused me to pull it out again and re-check what I had just read. I had had a sixth sense that I had missed something, and sure enough there she was, on the opposite page to the Greenops but entered under the name of Greehop. Her married name was McCrory, not too difficult to trace, so it was off to a post office to wade through all the phones books of the UK to try and find her and her husband James. But I was out of luck. None of the handful of McCrorys I contacted had ever heard of them. So what had become of Jane and James? Had they moved abroad, become ex-directory? Where were they?

Do you ever get illogical thoughts, sometimes quite improbable, when an idea occurs to you when you don't know where else to turn to or look? Mulling over what to do next I thought to myself that as my father had been a doctor, his second wife a nurse, my sister Jennifer a nurse who married a dentist, my sister-in-law and Erica were nurses - here I may add that when as a late teenager I hadn't the slightest inclination in pursuing a career in medicine - perhaps Jane had also become a nurse and married a doctor and if they had had children then both Jane's and James's professions would be on the birth certificates. Maybe I could find them that way.

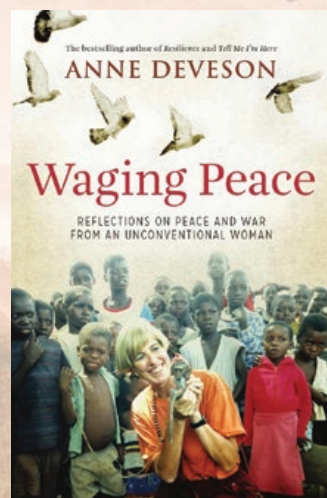
Back at St Katherines I spent many more hours going through the Births Records, eventually finding the names of two children and applying for a copy of the birth certificate of Madeline the youngest. Enclosing a self addressed envelope with the application it was then time for me to return home to Australia.

It was a few days later in Sydney when the envelope arrived. Opening it up with a strange feeling of excitement I found that my illogical intuition had turned out to be a reality. Jane was a registered nurse and James a doctor. That evening I rang the British Medical Association in London and was told that he was a resident doctor in the Douglas Hospital on the Isle of Man. Later it dawned on me that as the Isle of Man is not part of the UK its phone books are not kept by post offices in London.



It took 3 calls to the hospital before I finally made contact with James. My heart momentarily sank when he told me Jane was now his ex-wife, but lifted when he said he would let her know a half-brother who he had never heard about was trying to find her. Early morning 2 days later my phone rang - it was Jane.

This story has a happy ending. In 2009 Erica and I returned to the UK and travelled across the Irish Sea to Douglas to meet Jane for the first time in 54 years. I'm not ashamed to say that there were tears in my eyes when we met.



WAGING PEACE

written by Anne Deveson



There are two of Anne Deveson's previous books beside me as I write this review, *Tell Me I'm Here* and *Resilience*. One of these books is about her son, Jonathon, who had schizophrenia and the other a reflection on the triumph of the human spirit over the countless tragedies that are part of human life.

Anne is a journalist and her stories have that spirit of a 'personal account' and an attempt to 'present the facts'. They are a combination of experience and information, something seen-heard-and-felt and conclusions-to-be-drawn. *Waging Peace* is written in the same pattern.

"... I was nine years old and I wanted the war to go away. All I knew was that we had dug an underground shelter in our back garden, put up blackout for our windows and tried on gasmasks that made us look like invaders from outer space.

What I couldn't yet know was that this would be a war lasting almost six years and involving three-quarters of the world's population. Over sixty three million people would die and many more would be injured."

Anne begins her book with the description of her family in England gathered around the radio when Prime Minister Chamberlain announced that Britain was at war with Germany on 3 September, 1939. Her father was managing a plantation in Malaya, soon to become their second home when they fled the horrors of the bombing of England. Within a couple of years they would flee again, this time to Australia. War haunted her early life.

I was in my early twenties when the war in Vietnam was

gathering pace. I missed out on being conscripted and my interest was theoretical or ideological rather than personal. It was only in more recent years when I met Vietnam veterans, suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, that some of the emotional cost came home to me.

One man described dodging mortar shells in Saigon on the Saturday and returning to civilian life in Martin Place on the Monday. War is traumatic. It leaves its mark. As if we have not learnt anything, there are reports of soldiers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq with similar conditions to those returning from Vietnam. Alcoholism, homelessness and suicide are some of the effects and families are deeply affected.

War is hell. It destroys lives and lands and leaves a terrible legacy. Anne's father joined his family in Western Australia after escapes from Singapore and Indonesia, just ahead of the Japanese forces. Anne hardly recognized him.

The book unfolds with the telling of a life, a learning about the world and Anne's entry into journalism. In ways similar to her father, she keeps just ahead of the conflicts that have devastated our world for the past thirty or so years. Anne, too, was devastated, personally in danger, in Rwanda and Somalia, horrified by what she saw in Uganda and

Ethiopia, and professional enough to share her experiences with the world.

This is how Anne Deveson writes, and works. There are information and facts, as bald as "sixty three million people would die..." But, there is the inescapable personal element, Anne's story, and this is what allows information to impact on imagination.

"Every time I made a film in Africa there was always the chance that something untoward happening. Untoward is an old-fashioned word that mitigates against nastiness. Untoward is dignified, polite, contained. Unexpectedly landing on a bomb is not dignified or contained. 'Not very

“ War is what humans create when suspicion, fear, hatred, greed... rule in people's hearts. There is a poison that infects us and that either focuses a destructive intent or blinds us to the consequences of our actions. ”

sensible, old girl', my father said when he heard the news. Yet our plane did land on a mine and we survived."

I was drawn into the suffering of the ordinary people of Mozambique and Uganda, Rwanda and Somalia. There were reflections on colonialism and tribal conflicts but no righteous apportioning of blame. The emphasis was on the suffering of people, as witnessed and documented. The objectivity in Anne's hands evoked the compassion she herself was experiencing.

The book was on special. Perhaps it was not selling well. I bought it because I like Anne Deveson and her books make me think, or, better, they confirm and broaden what I already think – war and conflict are destructive of all we value in human life and the establishing of peace requires all the effort and ingenuity of which we are capable.

There are chapters on 'So Why War?' and 'So What is Peace?' But, I kept going back to the stories and the images. War is what humans create when suspicion, fear, hatred, greed... rule in people's hearts. There is a poison that infects us and that either focuses a destructive intent or blinds us to the consequences of our actions. Search my heart for the presence of this poison; that is one of the lessons I take from *Waging Peace*.

The book is inscribed to Anne Deveson's grandchildren, '... Live life generously, learn well, be kind' This sounds like a personal motto, a deep conviction. This is how the book was written, the spirit that imbues the author's life. It is also a remedy or protection against that poison that would perpetuate the conflicts described.

I am reminded of the 'Peace Prayer' of St Francis of Assisi,

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled, as to console,
To be understood, as to understand,
To loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
In pardoning that we are pardoned and
In dying that we are born to eternal life.

Towards the end of the book there is a reflection on a series of miracles where peace has dawned after often centuries of entrenched and bitter hatred. One of those miracles was the Good Friday Accord that saw a historic peace announced in Northern Ireland. Anne describes a visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Ireland in June 2012.



"... Queen Elizabeth II made an historic visit to Ireland when, dressed in green, she travelled in an open-top car, and shook hands with former IRA leader Martin McGuinness. McGuinness had been a senior commander in 1979 when a paramilitary group killed the Queen's cousin, Lord Louis Mountbatten... After three decades of bloody sectarian violence, ... the Queen is here, white gloves, hand outstretched to shake: look, children, this is a milestone, remember and put away your sticks and stones."

Poet's Corner

The Great Symphony

Looking back down the centuries to the beginning,
If there ever was a beginning,
I hear the great symphony of man and womankind
Playing and replaying its many themes.
Each generation produces its own melodies,
Sees them as unique, as dramatic, as never expressed
before,
And yet I hear the same themes, repeating and
repeating –
The terrible marches of war and slaughter;
The lullabies of lovers and of mothers and the newly
born;
The strong rhythms of the pioneers and the merchants
and the builders;
The excitement and the sadness of the young;
The disappointments of the old;
The rumble of natural disasters, of flood and famine,
Fire and earthquake;
And the slow song of death,
Singing its slow counter-theme below them all,
Singing and singing.
Each movement is the same and each is different,
And the heart is broken and the heart is fulfilled,
And the babies become men and women and have their
babies
And so it all goes on.
Loneliness and love, failure and success, loss and gain,
Pleasure and pain, again and again.
So it has been, so it is and so it will be,
The great symphony playing itself to itself,
Playing itself to us and to the universe,
Until the last syllable of recorded time,
Or playing, perhaps forever,
Because it is so true and so painful and so beautiful.

Marjorie Pizer

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