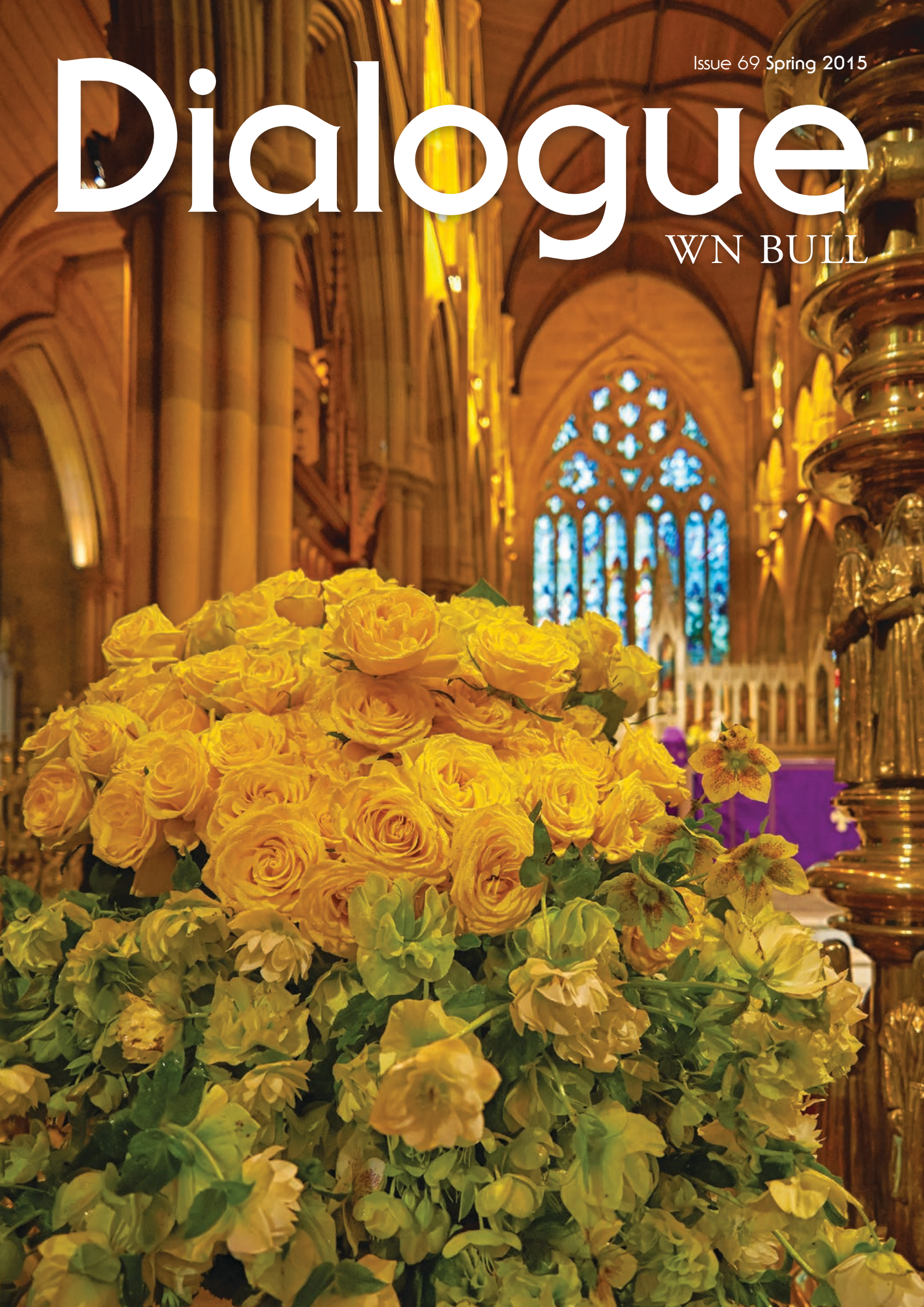
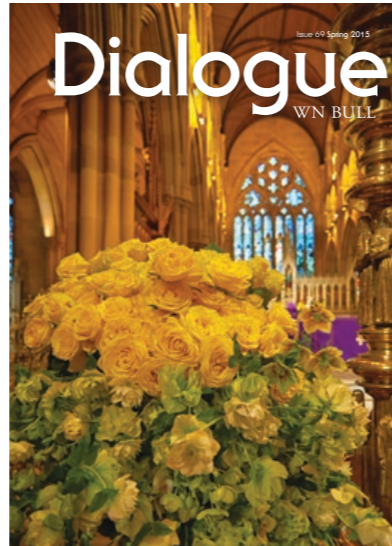


Issue 69 Spring 2015

Dialogue

WN BULL





Editorial



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There is so much life around at the moment. We at *Dialogue* continue to advertise the magazine in terms of the seasons, Summer, Autumn, Winter . . . Spring. Each of these annual events has their own particular feel, their own particular truth. But, they are all part of a whole where cold and warmth, life and death, dusty brown and vibrant green each contribute to the completeness we call Life. The articles in this edition of *Dialogue* form part of this completeness, an embracing of all we call Life.

There are the very personal stories of illness and disability and loss. Vianney Hatton outlines the parallel journeys through physical illness to deeper understanding and gratitude. Jeannie Walker tells a similar story, human and familiar, of vulnerable beginnings to life and the wisdom and deep appreciation of maturity. Patsy Healy's story is of friendship and tragedy and the bright miracle of sunflowers.

There is a 'coming homeness' or a rediscovery of roots, the wellsprings of affection and sorrow and memory, that make the telling of stories so important to us. Erica Greenop's 'My Soul Place, A Pilgrimage' expresses in a literal homecoming the return to self and soul that was at the heart of our other writers' accounts.

'Why Is It So Hard To Tell You How I Feel?' takes us to a disturbing place. However, again, there is an embracing or meditating that reveals the seeds of life and of hope and humanity that find their expression in Spring.

Rob Greenop's lost-and-found must ring a bell for all for us who have books we cherish and precious memories they evoke. Recommended Reading is another example of a book that stood on a shelf until its title brought it to light

and to life. *De Profundis*, 'out of the depths' describes so well the movement from Winter to Spring and, the unity of Winter and Spring.

Finally, there is the account of the new office of WN Bull Funerals on the Central Coast. Preserving or promoting a tradition is the theme of the article. I want to finish on a personal note, a poem I wrote the day before I took our dog, Mate, to the vet for the last time.

'They Come and Go, Mostly Go.'

Life is cheap. Another thirty or so die,
In the Aegean on the way to Greece.
Our dog is dying and he too will go.
Nothing special about this, dust
To dust and all that, the eternal cycle
Of life and death, it's as it was and
As it will ever be. Why then this sadness?
At times, a gut-wrenching lament?
It may be that life is such a
Many-faceted thing, full of familiarity
And wonder like a dog's last slow
Walk around the garden and pausing
Breathless between two blossoming trees.

With best wishes this Spring.
Richard White and all of us at WN Bull Funerals.

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*Floral tribute at the State Funeral
for Bart Cummings* by Steve Turner

WN BULL FUNERALS

EXTENDING TRADITION TO THE CENTRAL COAST

written by Richard White

'There came a new king in Egypt who knew not Joseph.' (Exodus 1:8) This was a verse from the Bible that my Hebrew teacher noted as significant. He implied that this ignorance of past goodness or blessings inevitably led to disaster. It was a piece of popular wisdom, something from the history of the Jewish people that seemed to ring true again and again. It sounded like Tradition, with a capital 'T'. My conversation with Haydn Donnelly kept coming back to tradition.



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Haydn is the inaugural manager of WN Bull Funerals' new office on the Central Coast. Haydn is not new to the funeral business. Twenty years ago he began his working life as a Monumental Mason/Funeral Conductor in Gunnedah, a regional town in north western New South Wales, the home of Dorothea Mackellar author of 'My Country', about seventy kilometres from Tamworth.

Like many young people, Haydn left the country town to begin work in Sydney, with a funeral company in the western suburbs. There followed a number of positions in funeral work including coordinator and area manager. Eventually, Haydn accepted the role of manager focusing on community relations with the Invoke company, Guardian Funerals. It was while in this personally satisfying role that Haydn was offered the position of manager of WN Bull's new office on the Central Coast, which brings me back to Tradition.

Haydn did not know a great deal about WN Bull Funerals. As part of his induction to the company he spent time at the Newtown office with Patsy Healy, was part of the team on funerals and even had a conversation with John Harris the previous owner of the company. As Haydn explained, all this was important in discovering what made WN Bull unique, its history and tradition, particularly its relationship with the Catholic community in Sydney which goes back to the vision of William and Mary Bull who founded the company in 1892.

Most recently, Haydn went with colleagues to assist Patsy with the State Funeral for the famous horse trainer Bart Cummings. This was an impressive experience. St Mary's Cathedral was full of family, friends and the general public. The choir provided beautiful music. There was colour and ceremony and dignitaries. Family and friends spoke movingly of this well-known and popular figure.

As Patsy and staff have done before, they contributed to the smooth running of the event, but they did so much more.

“ WN Bull Funerals prides itself on 'attention to the details' of the Catholic tradition. ”

Preservation and celebration of the tradition require two qualities in particular, faithful and respectful attention to detail and an understanding of the belief and meaning beneath the ritual. And, if the understanding is missing, then religious ceremony like any ceremony is in danger of becoming an outward show or a casualty of unnecessary and meaningless changes. . . 'there came to Egypt a new king who knew not Joseph'.

Tradition, known and understood, preserves the meaning.

WN Bull Funerals prides itself on 'attention to the details' of the Catholic tradition. They have a reputation in this area. In my seven or so years with WN Bull I came to appreciate that this exposure to the Catholic tradition led to understanding of respect for the body of the deceased person and a belief in the infinite value and undying dignity of the human person.

“ This traditional ceremony, a reminder of the encompassing love of God, was rich and alive and full of meaning . . . ”

I was at the funeral of a religious brother, Frank Flynn CSsR, a member of the Redemptorist community at St Clement's, Galong. Frank was seventy nine and had spent over fifty years working the farm, caring for the sheep, during the years when the farm was fully functional. Frank came from country Victoria, Rochester, and was 'a man of the earth' as a colleague described him.

At the ceremony of the laying on of the pall, the covering of the coffin with the white embroidered cloth, a number of thoughts ran through my mind. Four of the staff performed this ritual for Frank, the manager, the community cook and one of the cleaning staff and one from the dining hall, all women.

Frank was a diabetic, over weight and with numerous physical weakness. The body that had served him so well during his life was breaking down. All of those women, Sue, Linda, Redeen and Kathy had cared for this big, loveable man. This traditional ceremony, a reminder of the encompassing love of God, was rich and alive and full of meaning by the reverence, affection and sadness with which these women tendered their last duty of care to Frank's body.

Many of the prayers and much of the ceremony made mention of 'eternal life'. Such an expression remains a mystery, beyond our experience. What tradition does affirm and what was evident in Frank's funeral is a belief in the undying goodness and spirit of this man, and according to the tradition, of every human being.

There is an expression I saw once on a bereavement card, 'nothing is lost and all in the end is harvest'. The traditional Catholic funeral ceremony is an expression of this belief. Keeping this tradition alive, making the meaning available for generations to come has been part of WN Bull's role in the over one hundred years of its existence.

This important role has now been extended to the families of the Central Coast. From my conversation with Haydn Donnelly he sounded grateful and enthusiastic also to be entrusted with being part of preserving this tradition.



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ANATOMY OF A RECOVERY

written by Vianney Hatton sss

Now that the chemo-therapy has finished, we can look at what it all means. My name is Vianney and I am a religious sister living in Sydney. In October, 2013, I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, bone cancer, so I am an elderly woman living with cancer, but still an active retiree. This is my story.

On October 8th, 2013 I got out of bed and could not take weight on my right leg. With no improvement in the next couple of days I was advised to present myself to the local hospital to get a walking aid. The attending doctor in A&E, Accident and Emergency, also ordered an X ray. Some irregularity in this image made him arrange a further bone x ray, for the next day, at a nearby clinic. The resident doctor spoke to me after this and advised me to see my General Practitioner as soon as possible. By now it was necessary to enlist the help of my family and religious community for transport and other needs. We began to talk together about what all this might mean.

In the next week, I was sent by the GP for further tests to verify what already seemed to be a diagnosis of multiple

myeloma. On the Monday of the following week, with the results of these tests, my very caring doctor talked to me about the consequences of this diagnosis. We are talking about a serious illness, he said. He told me he had booked me in for an appointment with an oncologist for the very next day, Tuesday.

My Community Leader came with me to hear the opinion of the haematologist/oncologist. He was very reassuring and confident that my condition could be successfully treated. I would not need to go to hospital and he had a team of nurses and doctors whose skills he praised and commended. He confirmed that all the tests showed I had a cancer called multiple myeloma. Multiple myeloma is a blood cell (plasma cell) cancer. The bone

marrow produces excessive amounts of abnormal plasma cells which can be carried in the blood throughout the body. Sometimes a tumour can form in the bone or soft tissue.

Next step...come to the Cancer Clinic at Sutherland Hospital on Thursday.

On Thursday morning I got out of bed and could not take weight on my left leg. Walking was getting very difficult. At the clinic I was seen by an assisting doctor who felt I needed to be admitted to hospital, an idea I resisted. At 4.30 pm the oncologist told me I was being taken to St George Hospital for an MRI. The next five hours were traumatic and I survived them alone with no family or friend to share the experiences.

The MRI revealed two lesions, one in my spine and the other in the pelvic region. There was also some spinal cord compression. The radiation oncologist, in consultation with the treating oncologist, insisted that radiation treatment begin immediately....we're talking 9.30pm!! Over the next week I had six radiation treatments and several other tests which revealed the cancer was in other parts of my body. However, I was able to walk with a frame when I was discharged from the St George Hospital.



“ Bit by bit I have progressed from mostly lying on my back to sitting and standing and walking. Now, I use a walking stick when I leave the house. ”

Chemo-therapy treatment began at the end of November. As pain persisted I was admitted to Sutherland Hospital for two weeks, with just enough time to get home for Christmas. However, pain and discomfort reoccurred and I began a period of hospitalisation that took me again to the local hospital, then to Calvary Hospital for two weeks for pain management and rehabilitation and to John Paul Village for respite care. After six weeks I was very happy to come to my apartment home at the beginning of March.

Over the period of twelve months I had eleven cycles of chemo-therapy and regular visits to the oncologist. At critical times I have had more radiotherapy. My very attentive general practitioner visits each month and monitors what is happening for me. My apartment has been furnished with helpful aids and I am assisted by a carer who comes to my home for a few hours three days a week. Bit by bit I have progressed from mostly lying on my back to sitting and standing and walking. Now, I use a walking stick when I leave the house. Because of a setback connected

with cataract surgery I spent four weeks in hospital in July. Because of a dental issue I have another appointment next week with the radiation oncologist and I have just had a bone marrow biopsy. Clearly, a certain amount of treatment occurs when different issues present themselves.

So what can be learned from this experience?

THE CHALLENGES

The news of my diagnosis shocked my family and friends. I seemed to go along day by day with what was happening, but my family, community and friends were pulled into a whirling vortex that called for immediate and sudden acceptance. Everything happened so quickly and demanded immediate response.

Just to manage at home I have had to accept help: for domestic matters, for transport, for social engagements. Although I had been living alone for many years and our way of religious life encourages us to love and embrace solitude, it presupposed a level of independence which I had now lost.

My body shape and image has changed: because of the kind of medication I am taking. I have put on weight and I have acquired the so called “moon face” because of the steroids. I look in the mirror and say: “where is Vianney?” .

My daily schedule had to change: No longer could I go for bracing walks nor swimming and exercise at the leisure centre. Nor could I do well the tasks my role in the community demanded, instead I find I tire easily and have to rest and lie on my bed in order to have enough energy for the needs of the day.

My prayer life took on a different shape. For many

months I was not able to go to daily Mass and we created Communion Services at home. Personal prayer was full of tricky questions. Reading and music had no attraction for me.

In general, when I was in hospital, I experienced competent and attentive care, but long periods in hospital are not conducive to good health. At times, in

“ My home, surrounded with leafy greenness, has become a place of delight and welcome to my friends and an environment for the nurture of body, mind and spirit. ”

hospital, I seemed to lose a sense of belonging to any empowering group and I began to become melancholy and even depressed.

THE JOYS

My family, community and friends have been tremendous in their care of me. My brother has been the one to take me to every chemo therapy session, my sister-in-law visits each day and attends to all that needs doing. My religious sister is with me each day, morning and evening, and I am able to live a community life with her. Dear friends visit regularly, others speak often with me by phone and text. Priest friends come to pray with me and accompany me on my spiritual journey. I am alone at other times, but never lonely.

The rituals and rites of the church have been a source of comfort and healing. Both in hospital and at home I have received the anointing of the sick. The celebration of the Eucharist here in my home has enabled me to join with my family and friends in the liturgy that is so important to me.

After many months of disinterest, I have returned to the joy of reading and listening to music. In prose and poetry I find empowerment and food for my soul. Music, especially classical music, speaks to my yearning for beauty and calms my spirit.

The lady who is my caring agent has become a friend and I can rely on her for assistance. I have learnt to ask for what I need and accept that I must do this with modesty and humility.

Although my role in the community has altered, I am learning to pray with St Patrick: “I have not laboured in vain and my pilgrimage was not for nothing”. W.H. Auden has another lovely couplet which has been nourishing my soul also: “If equal affection cannot be, Let the more loving one be me.” I am growing in the conviction that even serious illness cannot prevent one from loving.



My home, surrounded with leafy greenness, has become a place of delight and welcome to my friends and an environment for the nurture of body, mind and spirit. Alert to events occurring in the world I can take an interest in global realities and allow them to become a part of my conversation and my prayer.

RECOVERY

So, can I say I have recovered? Have I shared with you a piece by piece look at a recovery? Rather I am on the way.



Perhaps this is a picture of what I was once or a version of what I am and long to be. For me, every day is gift and I pray it may be so for us all.



AND NO, YOU CAN'T BORROW THEM. SORRY

written by Rob Greenop

I am a pragmatic person so my wife Erica tells me. For me everything has to be there for a reason; I like to dot the 'eyes' and cross the 'tees' – usually there is little room in my life for something that cannot be readily explained. I say 'usually' because even I admit that there has to be the odd exception. The following story is about one of them.

I like books. Over the years I have collected hundreds, given countless numbers away and kept those that have a special meaning for me. But what is it about a book that sometimes so fascinates the reader to the extent that it remains in their mind for so long and they treasure it? Is it just the story line, perhaps that and when they first read it, maybe its size and cover, how a book was acquired?

Reading Richard White's Editorial in a recent edition of the *Dialogue* where he remembered lamenting to an elderly gentleman that 'I would read a book and love it, but felt that I could not hold onto the content and the magic', stirred up memories of my own. These were of a book that

many many years ago was handed to me one afternoon by my mother.

Have you heard of Marguerite Steen? She was a British writer, born in 1894 who, in 1941, wrote her most famous and lengthy work *The Sun is My Undoing*, the first of a trilogy of novels about a Bristol shipping family between the 1760s and the 1940s. My mother had finished reading it and most likely in an endeavour to improve my teenage intellect suggested I might like it. I was about sixteen then, my head full of adventure stories, of the exploits of war-time heroes and not in the slightest into anything that could be described as having a classical or historical nature. It is over

850 pages long and it was quite a feat for me to get through it, but by the end I was enthralled at the length and depth of her story. It became my favourite book of all time.

I never forgot it. Forty years passed and then one day, in an old bookshop in Berrima, I came across and bought the second book in the trilogy, *Twilight of the Floods*. Not long after, when in London, I asked my mother if she still had the copy of *The Sun is My Undoing* as I would like to read it again. Unfortunately she had lent it to an elderly

“ As I got closer I noticed that all the books were paperbacks except for one in the middle of the bottom row. Reaching down I picked it out and at first could not believe my luck. ”

friend who had died before returning it and it was now lost. I was disappointed but spurred on to somehow somewhere, track down another copy, I rang Foyles the famous London bookshop. The helpful person who took my call advised me that the book was no longer in print and the only way I would find one, if I was lucky, was possibly in a second-hand bookshop. This was, of course, before the advent of the internet and Amazon Books where most old books can now be found with a few clicks of a computer mouse.

Some months later on a damp Sunday afternoon, once

more in London for a short stay, I wandered up Charing Cross Road to continue my search for the book. To this day I'm not sure why but for some reason I was drawn to a narrow passageway between tall Victorian buildings, lined with the occasional art gallery and small exclusive boutique shops. I remember one in particular that had in the window a single regency chair covered in red velvet and alongside, propped up on a gilt easel, a painting of a hunting scene, with stags and whippet-thin dogs – both chair and painting being around £12,000 each. But what drew my attention as I got near the end of the passageway was a shop with what appeared to be a small rack of books at the entrance. As I got closer I noticed that all the books were paperbacks except for one in the middle of the bottom row. Reaching down I picked it out and at first could not believe my luck. There it was, a slightly battered edition of *The Sun is My Undoing*, but nevertheless still in one piece. It cost me 55 pence.

Why had I set off up Charing Cross road on a damp afternoon? Why had I turned down that narrow passageway, there were many others that up till then I had ignored? And why had that book been the only one to stand out in that small bookrack? I have no idea. It was though it was just waiting to be found. When I read it for the second time it had lost none of its magic.

It was perhaps five or six years later during dinner at our house with our friends Hal and Mary that the conversation turned to books and I told the story of my enjoyment at reading *The Sun is My Undoing*, the loss of my mother's copy and my search for and success in finding a replacement. They were both intrigued, so much so that by the time they left for home they departed with my precious book and that was the last I ever saw of it. I knew where it was but following Hal's death and Mary's 'downsizing' when she moved to an apartment it somehow got lost along the way.

More years went by and I had found the third book of the trilogy, *Phoenix Rising*. Whenever I had the opportunity I would browse through old bookshops, scanning the shelves, always in the hope that one day *The Sun is My Undoing* would be there. I never gave up looking. And then one day there it was.

Erica and I were in Castle Hill in an antique shop that we had visited on many occasions. It stocked mostly china, jewellery and general bric-a-brac, with a small room at the rear devoted to paintings, some furniture and old books. Over time the owner's interest in literature had waned, so much so that on that afternoon only a scattering of books remained. Erica and I were on opposite sides of the room and I called to her to keep an eye out for my elusive book. In a quiet voice as though she was afraid it would disappear into thin air she whispered that she was looking at a copy at that very minute. I don't think I have ever suffered from larger goose bumps.

So, after about fifty years, at last I have my trilogy. The books remain under close guard in my study and no, you can't borrow them. Sorry.





PUBLIC AND PRIVATE GRIEF

written by Patsy Healy

There are many privileges in being a funeral director. I am thinking of two in particular: the intimacy that death and sadness often brings when barriers and reserve melt in the pain of loss and the awe that spreads like ripples through one's being when tragedy spills over into miracles of kindness, creativity and gratitude. These two experiences, intimacy and awe, were part of my involvement in a ceremony for the late Sister Philomene Tiernan rscj, one of the victims of the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine in 2014.

I am blessed in being able to call Philomene a friend. As a member of her order's leadership team, Philomene would contact me when one of her sisters had died. We would discuss funeral arrangements and the details and nuances that would make each funeral unique, a tribute to the deceased sister and a consolation for her companions.

The initial reports of the crash of the Malaysian plane impacted on me as most tragedies do; another loss of life on the other side of the world, a news report, background noise to the busyness of family life and managing and

involvement in a funeral company. Then, there was that phone call and everything became devastating, personal.

Shock and disbelief were my first reactions. This was no longer 'background noise'. The woman I knew, admired and called a friend had died, suddenly, tragically. What is more, as the reports came in not only was her death and those of so many others an act of war, but the bodies of these people were scattered in fields in the middle of a conflict.

The details that came in over the next days and weeks added to the horror. There were recriminations and turmoil and images of wreckage and sunflower crops. What had been an event 'over there', became something that impacted on my own life. Memories of conversations and humour and appreciation were mingled with those television and newspaper images. My friendship with Philomene made the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 real. I will never forget it. I will never forget her.

“ On their last day, they returned to the site with a large suit case and they went to work. The two journalists cut enough flowers with their seeds to fill the case. ”

Just on twelve months after Philomene's death, remains of her body were brought back to Australia. There had been much grieving for her family and her religious sisters over that time. People talk about 'closure' and the difficulties that arise when someone is missing, presumed dead, or there are difficulties in completing funeral arrangements, for whatever reason. The ceremony for Philomene, at the Sacre Coeur sisters' cemetery, where I had been so often, was not about 'closure'; it was about friendship, respect, reverence and . . . miracles.

The Fairfax journalist, Paul McGeogh and the photographer, Kate Geraghty had spent two weeks in around the area when the Malaysian plane was shot down. Paul McGeogh wrote of his turmoil where his professional objectivity was being undermined by a strong personal response to what he saw. He and Kate Geraghty looked at the wreckage scattered among the sunflower fields. They saw carnage and they saw 'nodding flowers' and they thought of the families of the thirty eight Australians who had died.

The area they visited was a war zone. On their last day, they returned to the site with a large suit case and they went to work. The two journalists cut enough flowers with their seeds to fill the case. They were either unobserved or ignored in their task and they then drove back to a Ukrainian controlled city and flew back to safety.

Paul and Kate collected the seeds and had them flown



back to Australia. The article Paul wrote for the Fairfax press, just before Christmas, related the incident; it also gave details for families of the victims to make contact and receive a packet of sunflower seeds from the fields where their loved ones fell.

“ I am in awe at the way the ugliness of war and the sadness of death were overcome by the faithful . . . ”

There were sunflowers for the funeral service for Philomene. As I had done with my WN Bull colleagues many times before, I performed my role as funeral director and as a friend and mourner for Sister Philomene Tiernan rscj. I am deeply grateful for the privilege of being part of this ceremony. I am in awe at the way the ugliness of war and the sadness of death were overcome by the faithful and loving celebration of a life and the kindness and ingenuity of Paul and Kate.



WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TELL YOU HOW I FEEL?

written by Richard White

‘What do you feel about that?’ This was a question a neighbour asked me over a cup of tea on our return from a visit to Poland and Ireland. The particular event I had been describing was an excursion to Auschwitz, the former World War II concentration camp, about eighty kilometres from Krakow, the city in which we were staying. How *did* I feel?

The question threw me. He had not asked me what I thought about this place; a place of so much horror which was turned into a museum immediately after the war. He had asked me what I felt. I stopped and thought. I was unsure about how I felt.

This uncertainty was so different to what I felt about an incident that occurred the morning after my visit to Auschwitz.

It was just after six on Saturday morning. It was bright and sunny in our room but my wife and I were still asleep in our bed.

We were staying in a one room studio apartment, on

the top (4th) floor of an old apartment building in a narrow street just off Main Square. It was a small room, with a bathroom off the entry landing; a kitchenette concealed behind folding cupboard doors; a small dining table with two chairs; a desk on which there was a TV and a double bed, tucked under the sloping ceiling and beneath one of the three skylights. It was white and clean and tastefully decorated. The door into the external corridor was only about three metres from the end of the bed. Although we attempted to keep the space neat and tidy the desk, beneath the TV, was covered with brochures, souvenirs and some of our personal belongings.

So, as I was dozing on this beautiful morning, I opened my eyes to see a man standing near the desk at the end of the bed. It took me a moment or two to realise he was going through our belongings. He wasn’t supposed to be there. What was he doing there? “Thief!” I yelled out and he quickly turned and ran. I raced after him, yelling, “Stop! Thief” and ran down the four flights of circular, stone stairs and out into the street. The intruder had disappeared and the few people out there had not seen him.

I returned to the apartment to find that my wallet had been taken along with my wife’s phone.

On this occasion I knew exactly how I felt. The adrenalin was running. I did not have time to think. I just reacted. It was a spontaneous, impulsive response. It is only now that I have time to reflect on these two events that I am wondering about the feelings associated with them.

There was a sense of outrage or violation on seeing the man in our room. We were fortunate we only lost a wallet and a phone, not passports or other valuables. We were fortunate that neither of us was hurt. I was probably fortunate I could not run any faster. Heaven knows what might have happened had I caught up to the younger, fitter man desperate to escape an outraged grey haired foreigner yelling at the top of his voice!

All this is hindsight. The moment was the important thing. Tradition has it that we respond to danger with fight or flight or paralysis. In my case, it was fight **and** flight. I

“ There is something at the core of us, deeper than our physical life, that we cannot and must not ignore. These dramatic examples, from the extremes of life and death, throw my experience into the shade. ”

have not analysed my reactions too closely. But, if I were to reflect on my feelings at the time, I would say that outrage at the injustice of it all was dominant. It was a violation; an assault on the space and the possessions of my wife and me. I was intent in protecting or defending something, and someone, precious to me.

Visiting Auschwitz was completely different.



Above The apartment in Krakow

I am not Jewish or Polish, a gypsy or a homosexual. I am not sufficiently disabled to warrant arrest and imprisonment and extermination as the first inmates of Auschwitz were. While I have seen ‘*Schindler’s List*’ and read ‘*The Diary of Anne Frank*’ and numerous books on the Holocaust, I have been aware of a bewilderment and wonderment at the nature and scale of persecution that produced Auschwitz and the other camps. How could this happen?

‘But, how did you feel . . .?’ As I walked around the barracks and the displays of shoes and hair and suit cases; as I saw the notorious sign, *Arbeit Macht Frei*, (‘Work Brings Freedom’) over the gate of the camp; as I looked at one of the cattle trucks on a siding in Birkenau extermination camp I did not feel ... well, anything. I did not find myself distraught or weeping. I felt more like an observer, present but detached, interested but not involved.

Does this mean that any question about feelings would be the wrong question?

In a very personal and reflective account of life in Auschwitz, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1959) by Doctor Viktor Frankl, the author listed the initial reaction of new inmates to the camp.

Apathy, the blunting of the emotions and the feeling that one could not care any more, were the symptoms arising during the second stage of

the prisoner's psychological reactions, and which eventually made him insensitive to daily and hourly beatings. By means of this insensibility the prisoner soon surrounded himself with a very necessary protective shell.

“Meditation allows the truth and reality to become personal, a matter of life and nourishment and illumination.”

I am not sure whether my experience of walking around the camp was one of apathy. I am sure I was feeling but I was not aware of the feelings. Maybe there was something of that 'necessary protective shell' softening or delaying the various reactions; some sort of diluting or measuring out of feeling according to one's capacity to bear it. A page or two on from Frankl's observation about apathy he wrote about the pain of humiliation and insult being far greater than any physical blow.

Another classic treatment of life in Auschwitz is Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* (1993). A memory I have of this story is of an immaculately attired SS Officer walking through the muddy streets of the camp and throwing Levi to ground and walking over him to avoid getting his boots dirty. The original title of his book, *If This Is A Man*, was an affirmation of humanity, dignity and worth of the people who were reduced to shuffling, emaciated skeletons.

Both these men, Levi and Frankl, write of the anger, the hurt and the indignation that arose when there were affronts and assaults on their inner being, value and worth. Not even a 'very necessary protective shell' can ward off these attacks, nor was it meant to.

Frankl records a life-threatening encounter with a camp guard when the insults hit home and 'blood rushed to my head because I had to listen to a man judge my life who had so little idea of it . . .' It is the flight, fight or paralysis syndrome again.

There is something at the core of us, deeper than our physical life, that we cannot and must not ignore. These dramatic examples, from the extremes of life and death, throw my experience into the shade. However, the spontaneous response, regardless of the risks involved, does tell me something about a primitive, affirmative and revelatory feeling essential to the experience of being a human being. I deny or neglect this reality at my peril. My feelings of outrage and injustice are a manifestation of this reality; they may also be a key to the question of my

neighbour, "What did you feel about Auschwitz?"

I think I felt helpless, overwhelmed and unable to respond. What I wanted to say was not so much what I felt as what I remembered. There were images that will stay with me, and I have heard other people say similar things.

The piles and piles of shoes is an image often commented on. Then, there is the collection of crutches and prosthetics of all sorts and sizes, the relics of those first exterminated, 'the blind, the halt and the lame'. Or, there are the ponds beside the wreckage of the crematoria, undisturbed since the war, that contain the ashes of countless victims of the fires. All of these are the stuff of meditation.

And, meditation is different from information. Auschwitz is full of 'information', physical evidence and documentary explanation of what went on there. This information is important but it does not necessarily get to that mysterious core that is revealed when injustice and violation is personal.

Meditation is more like poetry: the realisation that all facts and information can become symbols, images and hints that connect and convey, rather than state and define. Meditation allows the truth and reality to become personal, a matter of life and nourishment and illumination. The distance between the lives and deaths of the people in the camp is closed.

The feeling that accompanies this meditation is not easily defined. It is a little like stillness, at-one-ness, community and gratitude. That such feelings can arise from the bleakness of a concentration camp is hard to believe.

Frankl certainly describes such experiences, a humanity and meaning that triumphs over destruction. All I can do is to finish with a few lines from a poem I came across called, 'What is Prayer' by Imtiaz Dharker. It arises from the images of that pile of shoes, men's and women', glamorous and pedestrian, children's shoes and sophisticated shoes, all covered with dust and signs of decay, the shoes of thousands and thousands and thousands of people . . .

The place is full of worshippers.

You can tell by the sandals

Piled outside, the owners prints

Worn into the leather, rubber, plastic,

A picture clearer than their faces . . .

What are they whispering?

Outside, in the sun,

Such a quiet crowd

Of shoes, thrown together

Like a thousand prayers

Washing against the walls of God.

A Remembrance Service for the clients of WN Bull



Client families of WN Bull Funerals are invited to attend a Remembrance Service to be held in the Northern Suburbs Memorial Gardens and Crematorium, North Chapel, 199 Delhi Road, North Ryde.

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MY SOUL PLACE A PILGRIMAGE

written by Erica Greenop

It is late evening. The sky is pink and still and the light is slowly disappearing across the flat coastal land of Kent. I am sitting in a comfy chair in the window of my room at the Bell Hotel in Sandwich. This is the village my mum came to when she retired from Hong Kong, all those years of being an expat, living in apartments when she yearned for a garden, living in Hong Kong when she yearned for England. She came here, to Sandwich, a mediaeval village on the South East corner of England, what is now known as the most beautiful restored mediaeval village in England.

I thought I would be sad, or melt, or simply dissolve in an emotional puddle, going back to the home my mum bought to retire to, the historic Canterbury Gate House. But I didn't. I was 11 when we moved here. I believe this is the place my soul stirred, that wil-o-the-wisp feeling that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. My thoughts take me on a slightly haphazard ride when I think about souls,

to the unquantifiable part of ourselves that is the caretaker of the wisdom of the ages, to something that has a deep connection with a place or a homeland or a time, or that recognises something deeply of itself and connects with it again or some people would say has been here before, or an illusionary notion we provide ourselves with to explain things we can't explain, or the home of ethics and morals

and goodness by which we are able to order our lives; and I wonder if my soul connection with the old house is because this place was my first home where my family was all in the same place at the same time and in some sort of harmony and holding on like crazy to the harmony as it slipped away and my mum got sick and died and the scatteredness started again. And maybe the idea of soul is a movable concept of the individual who owns it; for me something resident or is it dormant that understood who I was and dug its toes in and felt a kind of child-like unspoiled courage that didn't know what it couldn't do and ultimately guided me in my life's work; the kind of wakening that helped me recognise in others what it is like to be lost; the wakening that knows there is a way back to peace or is it equilibrium or something of ourselves we put away because we don't know how important it is until we lose everything else.

An English maritime pilot, John Clandillon Baker and his French wife Rosine, now own the Canterbury Gate House. They love it, have restored and extended it and poured their hearts and souls -and I am sure their bank accounts - into

“ My oldhome and all its history has been found again and loved again and lived in differently. ”

it. I want the world to know. This old house didn't die, although it became very sick and old and uncared for, and delicate and fragile, just like people in their own piece of history, lost for a while and forgotten and then found again and everyone feels the reverence all over again.

The old house looked nearer the road than I remembered. The field we used to own - with its meadow flowers and the mown bit in the middle where we played badminton, the May bush at the edge where the summer night bird sang and the poplar trees that moaned in the winter wind and the blackberries that grew along the flint stone wall - is now occupied by the council fire station. The fire station required a line of sight up and down Ash Road, so the old front wall was moved back 10ft, rebuilt brick by brick, flint stone by flint stone, the ancient mounting block from the Canterbury wall was re-positioned, re-set into the new wall and it isn't that the house is nearer the road, it is the road that has encroached 10ft towards the house.

The front door knocker is still there, the elaborate brass knocker on the Georgian front door. The front room where my mum lay in her coffin is a beautiful light room, the afternoon sun streams in the side window. I used to sit behind the curtains in this room, pretending I wasn't here. The kitchen has become a kitchen dream. My mum would

have loved it, different from the antiquated kitchen she worked in. This is a French woman's kitchen, a creative space straight out of a kitchen designer magazine. A tall black grandfather clock with gold numbers and a cut-out piece in the clock face with a sunny face telling us it is daytime, stands between the bench tops and the door to the outdoor courtyard.

How can I write about the spirit of a home, without sounding needy, without sounding as if I am trying to create a memory that I wished had been there but wasn't. My old home and all its history has been found again and loved again and lived in differently. I went into the bedroom where my mum died. Here is the little window by her bed my dad opened to let her soul fly away. It is a beautiful room. Her soul would love it. It would come back to visit, look into the windows and love what it has become and fly away again at peace this time. I went into my bedroom, the chimney breast behind my bed that was warm in the winter and the snow piled up on the window sill, and it is someone else's bedroom and a precious space done differently. And the beautiful garden, the ancient walls and the lawns beyond and the apple trees, the walnut tree out the front and the grass growing tall beneath its low branches and the roses on the walls and the squirrels that seem to ripple along like little rippling squirrel waves and the doves on the roof and the birds flapping on the seed trays.

Dusk has turned to night since I have been sitting here, and this mediaeval town is quiet and I cannot describe this sense of love and awe and re-visiting and completion. I think this is what pilgrimages are all about. My old home,



with its creaky stairs and low beams and its velvet curtains and firesides that took ages to warm has become a beautiful place, a magazine version of a restored historic home; and what makes it so special and takes away any sadness I might have had, is how it is so loved. And now there is darkness outside and the quiet is ancient and I am at peace.



LIVING WITH A DISABILITY

written by Jeannie Walker

"It's called 'spina bifida'." The doctor who had just brought me into the world at Lismore Base Hospital in 1938 was referring to the growth on my back at the base of my spine. My parents were alarmed and saddened. "There is, now, an operation that can be done, but I don't know how to do it. The only doctor I know who does it is at the Children's Hospital at Camperdown in Sydney. I must warn you if you decide to proceed your little girl might not live, she might not walk, she might have deformed legs, she will be incontinent, she might have a damaged brain." And I was that little baby.

In later years, I have been amazed that they decided to risk undertaking the surgical procedure. My father and my uncle wrote notes that they put under the Lismore Bank of New South Wales' door to the bank manager, requesting that he honour any cheques written with regard to the operation.

My father organised for the Brisbane-to-Sydney plane (it was still the early days of Australian aviation) to land in a paddock at Alstonville, near Lismore, to collect my father, with me in a clothes basket, to take us to Sydney. At one stage I turned blue, so the pilot went further out to sea to take the plane lower. When my father and I arrived

at the hospital in Camperdown, my father had difficulty remembering what the final decision to call me had been. I was named 'Jean Margaret Walker', and the surgery on my 'spina bifida' growth occurred ten days after I was born.

I did survive. I did have damage to my right leg, but the cameras clicked when I took my first tottering steps. However, I have always walked with a limp. My brain seemed fine as I began school, first at Kempsey, and then at Lindfield Public School.

I enjoyed school, but wasn't a brilliant student. I was a sunny child, so when I was teased in the playground, "you wear nappies, baby, ha, ha", it didn't affect me, but when I told my mother, she burst into tears (the only time I ever saw her cry). I asked her not to cry, "mum, it's true, it's OK", but I suspect my father spoke to the headmaster as the teasing never occurred again.

It must be so difficult being a parent of a child with a disability. My mother put much energy and emotion into organising my life so that I could live as normally as possible. I later saw one of her letters to my father, overseas at the time, which detailed how she had made bloomers for me "to wear at the school sports day". Needless to say I came last in my race, but I participated enthusiastically in the tunnel ball team. No Paralympics in those days.

My parents sent me to Mrs Molesworth's tennis school up the road after I had had more surgery on my leg when I was aged eight (how I hated Camperdown hospital that time! My mother was only allowed to visit for one hour a day, and when she would leave I would cry, only to be scolded by a nurse who told me that "H-W-" in the bed



“ Looking back over my life, there were two major events that turned my life around. The first was the sudden death of my beloved mother when I was in my late twenties. ”

next to mine was worse off because she had polio. I knew that, but I also wanted to say "but I am me and am upset". Children's hospitals have come a long way since then, thank goodness.)

So there I was on the tennis court at about aged ten, and I LOVED it. I could hold my own against most

competition, especially as I perfected my backhand to be as much like Ken Rosewall's as possible. I played tennis all through my high school years, much to the detriment of my scholastic studies, as I would hit up on the tennis wall during lunchtime rather than do my school work.

I scraped through the Leaving Certificate and got my first job, believing I would soon get married with a loving husband and beautiful children, as occurred in all the books I read. Marriage didn't happen, and these days I am pleased it didn't, given the physical problems I would have had. I travelled to Europe with my brother, heading along the youth hostel/campsite route, and working in London with the BBC with my good shorthand and typing.

Looking back over my life, there were two major events that turned my life around. The first was the sudden death of my beloved mother when I was in my late twenties. She died of a heart attack and I was the only member of the family at home that evening. I grieved deeply for her for two years, and the sadness abated to a dull ache over the following years.

ACROSS AND ABOVE

On holiday in Western Australia, 2010
With my father in Sydney's Macquarie Street, off to a doctor's appointment;

My father allowed me six months or so off work, and then suggested I should get another job. I joined the Australian Broadcasting Commission as a shorthand-typist and left some twenty-five years later, having worked there as a news typist, a researcher, a producer and finally in the ABC's radio archives.

The second major event only lasted a few hours, but it turned my thinking around. I had gone to Sunday School at our local Presbyterian Church and then on to the Presbyterian Fellowship, a group of about one hundred teenagers and young adults, girls and boys, experiencing the four-square programme of Worship, Study, Service and Recreation. I made some wonderful friends there and had a great time. I gave my life to Jesus at a Fellowship camp at Yarramundi when I was eighteen.

After my mother died and the many in the fellowship group had married and moved away, I felt alone, but by this time I realised I was going to be the only person who would put a roof over my head, so I saved my money and bought a unit in North Sydney.

When I broke my arm in 1990 I went to find a local church and walked into St Thomas' Anglican Church at North Sydney where was a Prayer Book service, a choir and fine preaching. One evening, one of the young ministers preached on 'The Will of God'.

I had always had this deep inner yearning that if Jesus were here today, he could heal me.

received so many blessings during my lifetime, especially with two wonderful parents, doctors and nurses (my 'angels'), life in a peaceful country, and what I call my security: 'a roof over my head and a pillow under it' – and I was alive! That evening I was healed, mentally and spiritually. And all this was 'the Will of God'.

I'm now in my twilight years and can look back over my life with a deep sense of peace. I am not a saint – I still wish I had not been born with a physical disability. But I am not the only one in the world with a disability. So many people have physical or intellectual disabilities, either present with them all their lives, or which they acquired more recently.

No one is free of hurdles to overcome as they proceed through life's journey. And I think back with deep thanks to all those who have journeyed with me, who have shown me great kindness and understanding and friendship.

Recently, when I broke my hip which led to my walking with a 'wheelie walker', the kindness shown me by strangers and acquaintances as they helped me up gutters and on to trains makes me glow with gratitude. My life has been full of blessings. I am so glad my parents chose to give me this wonderful life I have lived.

“ No one is free of hurdles to overcome as they proceed through life's journey. And I think back with deep thanks to all those who have journeyed with me, who have shown me great kindness and understanding and friendship. ”

A long discussion with the minister occurred after the service as to whether my disability was 'the Will of God'. No, it wasn't, but other events in my life were.

I left the church that evening with my thinking totally altered, to a positive outlook, not a negative one. I had



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DE PROFUNDIS

BY OSCAR WILDE

written by Richard White

‘De Profundis . . . out of the depths . . .’ is the title of a book by Oscar Wilde, Irish playwright, author and celebrity who died in 1900, it is also the first line of Psalm 130. I picked up the book earlier in the year when I was preparing to give a talk to each of the churches in our country town. I wanted to say that people who prayed the psalms needed to cry from the depths of their hearts and shout at the top of their voices.

‘De Profundis’ and ‘Alleluia!’ are the cries wrung from or suddenly released from people who enter fully into the pain and the wonder of human life. Oscar Wilde was one of those people.

This small book, ninety two pages in my edition, is a long lament and revealing exploration. Wilde was the famous author of witty and humorous plays like ‘The Importance of Being Earnest’ and ‘Lady Windermere’s Fan’, a disturbing novel on evil and corruption, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and touching parables such as *The Happy Prince*. He was at the height of his powers and public acclaim when he met Alfred Lord Douglas in 1891.

‘De Profundis’ details an intense, destructive and disastrous affair. There is something of the Greek tragedy about the relationship. Wilde was obsessed with Douglas and in thrall to the younger man; a classic case of co-dependence; a narrative of manipulative violence and pathetic compliance. The climax or low point of the relationship was Douglas’ persuading Wilde to sue his father for libel.

Wilde lost the case and the Marquess of Queensberry, Douglas’s father, took Wilde to court on the charge of immoral behaviour. Wilde was found guilty and sentenced to two years hard labour. This book was written from prison and opens with bitter, querulous reproaches by the author.

Our ill-fated and most lamentable friendship has ended in ruin and public infamy for me, yet the memory of our ancient affection is often with me, and the thought that loathing, bitterness and contempt should forever take the place in my heart once held by love is very sad to me . . .

Douglas never visited Wilde in prison and never wrote to him. He offered to sell to a newspaper some of the letters he had received from Oscar and without consultation with Wilde had planned to dedicate a volume of his poems to his former lover and mentor. Wilde was deeply hurt. The book recounts numerous, continuous, outrageous, exploitative and ungrateful behaviour on Douglas’s part.

From a psychological point of view, this is a beautifully written account of a co-dependent relationship or emotional fusion where one or both parties lose their sense of self or sacrifice their sense of self. But, this is not simply a treatment of ‘fatal attraction’.

Oscar Wilde comes through these pages as more than a wit and a dandy; the love he spoke of above included a commitment to self knowledge and self sacrifice, as well as self indulgence.

I remember seeing the film version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* many years ago. The main character is a

“ Like the psalmist before him, Wilde experiences the worst that life can offer. He cries out as so many have cried before. And, there is more than a hint also of that shout of wonderment and joy . . . ”

successful, wealthy young man, splendid in appearance and style. His superb portrait captures this splendour, until something strange begins to happen.

Dorian trifles with the affection of a young girl and then abandons her. On looking at his wonderful likeness a day or so later, he notices a change in expression. There’s a harshness there, the beginnings of a smirk where previously there was delight and openness. Over the years and with other cruelties and neglects, the picture becomes more distorted, more . . . ugly. However, Dorian himself strangely retains his good looks; he banishes the portrait to a disused, out-of-the-way room.

‘The Happy Prince’ is probably on u-tube; I first heard it



on the radio. It’s the story of a statue in the centre of a town, a magnificent statue, gilded and bejewelled. A swallow lands on the shoulder of the Happy Prince one day who reveals not contentment with his splendour, but sadness at the poverty and suffering of families in the town.

Together the Prince and the Prince strip the statue of its wealth to feed and comfort the poor. The swallow delays her flight south for the winter and dies at the feet of the now denuded, leaden lump that was the much admired statue.

In the course of *De Profundis*, Oscar Wilde is stripped of his trappings of success and achievement. He is acutely aware of his own faults and weakness. The author of *Dorian Gray* knows the difference between kindness and cruelty, self expression and self indulgence; he knows also profound sorrow and contrition. His glorious life is reduced to a mere cell, solitude and disgrace.

However, it is ‘from the depths’ or in the depths that the seeds of truth and insight in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Happy Prince* reach fruition. Like the psalmist before him, Wilde experiences the worst that life can offer. He cries out as so many have cried before. And, there is more than a hint also of that shout of wonderment and joy, the ‘Alleluia’ that is an affirmation of the reality of goodness and the truth that is only discovered ‘in the depths’.

Behind joy and laughter there may be a temperament, coarse, hard and callous. But behind sorrow there is always sorrow. Pain, unlike pleasure, wears no mask . . . There are times when sorrow seems to me to be the only truth. Other things may be illusions of the eye or appetite, made to blind the one and cloy the other, but out of sorrow have the worlds been built, and at the birth of a child or a star there is pain.

Poet's Corner

The Beauty of Things

I can get drunk on the beauty of things –
 Sunsets and the sky by night,
 The colours of leaves, the taste of cheese,
 The tints of earth and trees.
 I can get drunk on the shimmering water of lakes,
 The blue and green of the sea,
 On a beautiful face,
 On the shape of a shell,
 In close talk with someone I know well.
 I can get drunk on beauty almost any time I please.

Marjorie Pizer

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