

Issue 70 Summer 2015

Dialogue

WN BULL



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Mother Mary and Holy Child

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‘The Sounds of Summer’ according to the ABC advertisements are the cricket commentators in full flight. Then, there’s all the other sport and the tiresome repeats on television. There are also the festivals and leisure, beaches and reading. The light and the superficial can take the heat out of these Summer months . . . or can they?

Time with family is not all ‘beer and skittles’ and holidays can be time when our inner worlds begin to stir. As Patsy Healy describes ‘moments’ can stay, linger in the corner of our mind or heart and reveal treasures of feeling and understanding. This is the theme, too, of Erica Greenop’s wise and insightful article on grief and remembering; the past as lovingly re-collected and as comfort and nourishment for the present.

Cecile Yazbek shares a cri de coeur, a cry from the heart, as the first and foremost human response to the suffering of refugees. This piece is a personal introduction to Cecile the author of *Voices on the Wind* reviewed in Recommended Reading. Only someone capable of being moved by the lives and needs and struggles of others could write this story of the Lebanese in South Africa at the beginning of the last century.

Rob Greenop, like Cecile, is a gatherer of trinkets and treasures of the past, in this case the story of a cousin who died in France in 1916. These writers show us how listening to or collecting these tokens or whispers, can enrich our lives.

Richard White’s article on children was inspired by a photo of an almost two year old grand daughter on a swing looking out to sea. Was she really gazing, still, rapt at that vastness? Where do our images and experiences of children lead us if not beyond the sights and sounds of Summer into mysteries and wonders? Isn’t this what Christmas is all about?

Domestic violence casts a pall over our country. At least one woman a week in the course of the year has died at the hands of a man she knew. There is ‘sadness upon sadness’ but is there even in these terrible and recurring events possibility of hope?

Deb Moyle has written for Dialogue a number of times before. Deb writes from her own experience. This reflection illustrates a possible way of moving beyond the stuck-ness that can mar our conversations particularly with those closest to us.

Hannah Bowden has a way with words. Her poem is a capturing of those moments before sleep and an affirmation of life.

With best wishes for Christmas from Patsy Healy and all of us at WN Bull Funerals.



MOMENTS THAT STAY AND UNFOLD.

written by Patsy Healy

For all of us who work at WN Bull Funerals there are moments that stay with us. In talking with Richard White the other day, I spoke of my experience conducting the funeral for Mr Curtis Cheng, killed as he was leaving work on Friday 2 October, 2015. His funeral service was held at St Mary's Cathedral on Saturday 17 October.

For two weeks after the funeral I was still unsettled. The shocking circumstances of Mr Cheng's death, shot by a fifteen year old boy, had an impact on the community of Sydney and far beyond. Unbelief, anger and fear were among some of the reactions. Deep sadness and compassion for this man and his family grew as the story was told. When we were asked to assist with Mr Cheng's funeral, I knew we were to be caught up in an event of ever-widening significance.

Every funeral carries with it a great sense of responsibility. I explain to people that with important family events, like a wedding, a significant birthday or any other celebration, there is ample time to prepare. The planning,

the preparation and the activity are the loving response to an event or people who are dear to us. We want everything to go well.

In the case of a funeral, there is all of this care and intention and more, but in a very limited time. I keenly felt the weight of expectation and responsibility. Mr Cheng's funeral would be a precious time for his family, a public opportunity to honour a loyal and much respected colleague and an occasion to pray and reflect with the faith, love and hope that are stronger than the hatred and fear. Everything had to go well.

Part of me knew all would go well. There is a wealth of experience among our staff and familiarity with the

protocols, procedures and relevant personnel and all this meant we would work well as a team. There was also the fresh memory of this man and the manner of his dying that infused our thinking and planning. The meaning of his life and death grew on us all as we spoke with his family and understood more and more the impact of his dying. This meaning spilled over into the images and moments from the day of the funeral itself.

Archbishop Anthony Fisher made St Mary's Cathedral available for Mr Cheng's funeral. Mr Cheng was a Buddhist, not a Catholic. But religious differences were not barriers; humanity and deeper meeting points of faith created a unity. It was an image of inclusiveness and hospitality that stayed with me from that Saturday morning. I was reminded of something that happened during the siege at the Lindt Cafe in Martin Place.

Numbers of people came into the Cathedral during that time of tension and concern. St Mary's became what it really is: a sanctuary, a place of peace and somewhere to find quiet and comfort when violence seems to rule. Richard reminded me that this was how churches were seen in Medieval times - sanctuaries where the sword and men-at-arms were halted at the doors.

Before the ceremony began, I was standing by the hearse near the door of the Cathedral. A young woman came up to me carrying a bunch of flowers. She asked me whether she could give them to Mrs Cheng.

“ St Mary's became what it really is: a sanctuary, a place of peace and somewhere to find quiet and comfort when violence seems to rule. ”

As we stood there, this woman explained that she had been in the Lindt Café during the siege. She was held hostage and was a witness to those deaths and distress. This was the first time she had left the house since the siege. She felt deeply for the Cheng family and wanted to express to them her sympathy. I assured her that her flowers and condolences would be most welcome and took her to meet Mrs Cheng and her children when they arrived.

These are some of the moments from the funeral that have stayed with me. If I were to ask my colleagues who assisted with Mr Cheng's funeral, I am sure they would have their own moments. I realise how important it is to tell these stories and share these impressions.



We are privileged people, working for a funeral company. I never tire of telling people this. However, we suffer the same 'occupational hazard' of other busy people, in other occupations and professions, where the demands of the job can prevent us experiencing the moments.

However, Mr Cheng's funeral and the spirit of the man and his family blessed me with these memories. The meaning of that day in October continues to unfold. I feel there is much more to be discovered.

Let me finish with the words of the Prayer of St Francis of Assisi read at the service by Reverend Dan Connor, NSW Police Force Anglican Chaplin.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
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 be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.



GRIEF AND REMEMBERING

written by Erica Greenop

There is something about remembering that is unbelievably precious - all the stories that stay with us forever, memories of the realness of the people we love, their characteristics, funny ways, endearing habits and annoying habits, moments of surprise, or simple moments that would normally pass us by but that are full of some special thing that helps us live from the level of our deeper selves. They don't have to be perfect, these memories, these bitter-sweet gifts, but through them we can keep our spirits open when life seems most difficult.

It is difficult to believe it is nearly summer again. It has come around again so soon – the blossom on the gum trees, the day coming early, the darkness coming later, the cockatoos who get earlier and noisier just because summer is nearly here, hydrangeas in their pots having flowers again. There is this feeling of renewal all around us, and sometimes, even though we know it – we can see and smell and feel it – inside ourselves we aren't part of it. There's that

all alone feeling, as if life is going on all around and inside us there is longing and missing and sad painful emptiness in our hearts.

We can't talk about remembering without being touched by the grief of losing someone we love. Grief reminds us about being human, the fragile nature of our own existence, being this unique only one of who we are, and yet being so small in the vastness of the scheme of things.

In these early days everything reminds us of our sadness. We miss them so much, they aren't here, we can't just call them or kiss them goodnight. We miss the ordinary things - they aren't there in the kitchen filling the kettle or turning on the radio in the morning. We can't ask them to do any of the things we have always asked them to do. We can't do anything for them, all the things we did – perhaps during a long illness – that told them we love them. We can't go back and sort out an old argument. Inside us there is grief and it can feel frightening and isolating and un-like anything else we have ever known.

When someone we love dies, things change forever. Life is different. Our world changes. Our priorities change. We are changed. We don't just get over it. Grief doesn't work that way. It takes time to adjust to their absence. It takes time to adjust to the change in ourselves, this separation from who we used to be. Our families change, friendships

“ Through remembering, stories re-emerge, the wonderful narratives that tell the life and the history of a loved human being . . . ”

change. People cope with our grief differently, react to us differently. Sometimes we want to surround ourselves with people and activity, sometimes we want to be alone in quietness and private sorrow; and sometime we feel isolated, people move away from us, they can be at a loss to know what to do with us and our grief, they don't know how to make it better and don't know what to say. Unless people have visited this strange detached painful confusing space, they simply don't know what it is like. Grief more than anything reminds us of the frailty of being human. None of it is easy. Grief is exhausting. It depletes us. It takes us on a roller coaster ride, to the highest euphoria and we are ready to take on the world for a moment or a day or a week or so and the next moment the tears well up and spill over in a great flood of sadness.

I think I am trying to explain grief as if it is explainable, as if we can capture grief in words, when really only the individual can know their own grief. But we all try. It is important to find words.

In the early days we need to find ways to just get through each moment; we need to know what we can do and what we can't do, discover ways that help the emotional chaos settle or make the grief pain manageable, something that will stop this feeling that we are consumed by something we

have no control over. We need to find ways that work for us as individuals, ways that help the recovery of our body, our spirit, our thoughts and our emotions, and gradually, very gradually, we come through.

Sometimes it is helpful to hear someone outside our own experience tell us that what we are feeling is not unusual. For a while there is an unreal feeling, as if, contrary to all rational thinking, a loved person will be back - just come back, you've been gone long enough. It can be one of the things of grief that pulls us in all directions, sometimes comforting, sometimes fearful. We hear the car in the driveway or the call in the night or feel the touch of a hand on our arm, we leave the clothes in the cupboard, the books by the bedside, see him in the next carriage in the train or in the car at the traffic lights or there she is sitting in her favourite chair in the late afternoon sun. Or something blows us away and we go to share it with them – come and look at this – the moon through the skylight or the afternoon clouds piling up behind the city like great towering pink cauliflowers. It may take many years to get used to the fact that a loved person has gone. And grief returns, even years later, the sadness and longing and missing, when something happens and we are reminded of a loved person's absence – a special piece of music or a favourite tune, a graduation, a wedding, or Christmas, and they are not here, and we are reminded all over again.

As the early days turn into months there is so much in us that longs for and is strengthened by a continuing connection with a loved person who has died. We need to relive the memories, to remember and cherish the moments



of awe or peace or beauty, or togetherness, moments of surprise that open us to different possibilities, or simple moments that would normally pass us by.

Through remembering, stories re-emerge, the wonderful narratives that tell the life and the history of a loved human being, the realness of the glorious untidiness of life. We all have our precious memories and our most precious memories and over time they bring comfort and healing

and new understanding. I remember the way my mum used to set the fire in the winter, leaning forward with her toes in her shabby old slippers and the fire would crackle and



flame up and sparks would stick like dots of starlight to the soot in the chimney.
When others are remembering the big events of a life, the big achievements, we remember the magnificent ordinary simple things of a person's life we shared, things that reach straight back into our memories and re-connect us with our loved person, things we didn't think were important at the time - like shabby old slippers and dots of soot glowing in the chimney - things that make us deeper, wider, better, and life – or our own tiny piece of it – becomes kind of more substantial. Memories give us things to hold for ever

“ Memories give us things to hold for ever that deeply matter to us, and they have this magical quality of becoming more important as time goes by. ”

that deeply matter to us, and they have this magical quality of becoming more important as time goes by. Just simple things that grow better with the telling and more beloved

with the years. I read these words written by that wonderful poet Anonymous, someone who so well understands grief and remembering.

For as long as I can I will look at this world for both of us..
As long as I can I will laugh with the birds,
I will sing with the flowers,
I will pray to the stars – for both of us...”

Remembering brings a shift in our grief, a bitter-sweet almost physical feeling. It is just about impossible to describe the feeling of something so precious being remembered so deeply. It moves us. It completes something. Remembering helps things settle, become more manageable, even in the early days of sadness and missing. It helps us move towards that blessed time when grief returns less frequently and feels somehow *gentler*.
Remembering brings comfort and healing and lets us keep forever the tiny things of a precious life. It helps what is past move with us and through us into the future, *the sense we have of the human spirit as always existing**. It nourishes us again and again when we feel so depleted, reconnects us when we feel adrift, helps us smile again when we thought we never would.
There's something about remembering that is unbelievably precious.



Source of Inspiration
*Jeanette Winterson 2011
Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal? Vintage Books

An advertisement for Ray's Florist. The background is a close-up of light purple roses. In the foreground, there is a large, vibrant bouquet of red roses. The text "SPECIALISING IN ALL ASPECTS OF FLORAL DESIGN" is written in white serif font across the middle. At the bottom left, the website "www.raysflorist.com.au" and the phone number "9737 8877" are displayed in yellow, along with the address "Unit 2, 71-83 Asquith Street, Silverwater". At the bottom right, the logo "RAY'S FLORIST AND GIFTS" is shown in yellow, accompanied by a small yellow rose icon.

An advertisement for WN Bull Funerals. On the left, a woman with short brown hair, wearing a dark suit and a patterned tie, stands outdoors with her hands clasped. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene. On the right, the text "Put those you love in the hands of those who care" is written in a large, bold, yellow font. Below this, several paragraphs of text describe the services. At the bottom, the logo "WN BULL FUNERALS" is displayed in white, with the tagline "Leaders in Personal Service" in a script font. The contact information "(02) 9519 5344 | wnbull@wnbull.com | www.wnbull.com.au" is shown in white at the very bottom.



FINDING HOPE

written by Cecile Yazbek

I woke coughing, like so many others this winter, and not feeling one hundred percent. I made a cup of tea and returned to my warm and cosy bed with three pillows at my back and one at my side. But when I saw the television news, my comfort quickly turned to tearful distress.

Millions move around the world every day. At present, I have friends travelling in Asia, Europe, North America – hopping from one comfortable bed to the next.

“ They carry their children above their heads or push them into the arms of strangers. ”

I also know directly of a little family: father, mother and two-year-old who left their home, such as it was, in a slum in Central America. Stripped bare for the pilgrimage

of hope, they progressed from one country to the next, relatives sending money to them week by week. Anything of value would have been lost in rushing rivers or to watchers who’d pounce when the travellers became exhausted or confused. For some weeks, they hopped and skipped when their ‘transport’ told them how, when and where to move, how, when and where to hide – days of separation, detention, picking through dense jungles with other desperadoes. Someone even stole the little child’s shoes off her feet while they slept sheltering under trees. Wild places so threatening, fear descending in numb silence, the destination grew closer and the challenges tougher. They fled a secret war, their country reduced to penury by a bigger power, punishment for a wrong alliance more than half a century before.



“ Governments need the will to empower our care agencies with the capacity to meet people at the edge of these disasters before they set off on hazardous crossings. ”

I got up to make another cup of tea. The blank face of the television sulked in the corner of my room. I could no longer face the thousands of Syrians sleeping on the streets, their corpses in shipping containers and trucks.

I turned the telescope around to look deeply into my body cosseted in bed, to realise these are my genetic kin flailing in mortal combat with the angel of death raining bombs down on them. They are not so different from the little family traversing American jungles with hundreds of other families. I feel the burden of privilege of my survival and my comfortable situation.



My country of adoption joined with others willing to bomb the life out of ancient cultures and civilizations, killing hundreds of thousands in the name of implanting western liberal democracy in feudal tyrannies.

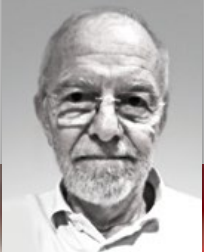
Years later, fear is rising again, shattering our moral compass, drawing my adopted country once more to the edge: planning to drop bombs on a country already reduced to rubble, its people running, swimming, falling, drowning, suffocating, as glimmers of hope for safety propel their flight. They carry their children above their heads or push them into the arms of strangers.



Many among my friends are first generation, like me, in this country of our adoption. Some have real-life brothers and sisters carrying their children across battle zones. They have experienced the devastation of those bombs, losing their countries, homes, families, and in some cases, parts of their bodies. We, who are distant from conflict, lose hope in alternatives as governments stifle our souls with fear, preaching war as the only response to those wielding swords that maim and kill. We fall prey to dehumanising labels in a discourse designed to make us feel entitled to safety and comfort and others less so. Our own comfort and safety then preoccupy us. Gibran, in *The Prophet*, wrote that ‘our lust for comfort kills the passions of the soul’ – compassion, empathy and generosity being major casualties of a self-centred life.

From our deep unconscious where fear is killing compassion, ‘mother ocean’ delivers dead children. *Everychild*, our hope for the future, washed up on the seashore.

The suffering of all, not just those carrying cute children but also grandfathers and grandmothers, young men and young women, is equally important. Governments need the will to empower our care agencies with the capacity to meet people at the edge of these disasters before they set off on hazardous crossings. Working together to provide shelter and safe passage will rekindle hope and make space for political negotiations towards peace. Above all, no more bombs in our name.



GARNET

written by Rob Greenop

This is a not a story about a token of love or affection, a garnet given to a sweetheart, but about a young man who gave his life for his country, dying in 1916 on the battlefields of France nearly 100 years ago.

It is about a cousin I had heard little of until one day, when researching some of my ancestral roots I came across the family of great-uncle Arthur Greenop, who had named all his children after gemstones – there was Ruby, Pearl, Garnet, Coral and finally the youngest, Jasper. Giving his children names like that one could have expected that Arthur may have been a merchant in the precious stones or jewellery business, but he was, in fact, a successful solicitor in the City of London.

As a small boy back in 1946 I had been taken for afternoon tea with ‘aunty’ Coral, as I was told to call her, afterwards remembering nothing about other members of her family, her brothers or sisters, what they had done with their lives, what had become of them. After that visit ‘aunty’ Coral retreated back into the obscurity of ‘distant relative-ship’ and was quite forgotten by me for well over half a century.

Earlier this year Erica and I visited the Australian War Memorial in Canberra to see the special exhibition



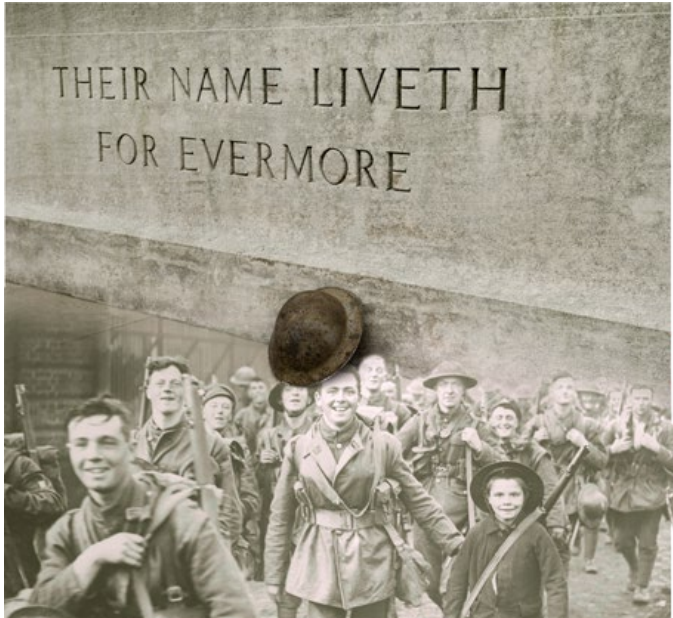
commemorating the centenary of the First World War, 1914-1918, the ‘War to end all Wars’. The exhibition featured many graphic photos, items of military equipment, soldiers’ personal effects recovered from the battlefields but, most impressively, expansive dioramas depicting the appalling conditions and hardships that troops in the mud-filled trenches had endured. Some years ago I had read Les Carlyon’s *‘The Great War’* and on returning from Canberra I pulled the book from my bookcase and re-read some of the history. It set me wondering if any of my past family had been involved in the fighting on the Western Front and on searching the internet I came across the record of Garnet’s death. He had been killed during the early offensive of the Somme.

“ It was a day of carnage, a day that saw countless thousands of young men lay down their lives at the whim of incompetent generals. ”

Perhaps it was when witnessing the emotions and memories surrounding the 2014 centenary events that I realised I had no details or history about Garnet and his ultimate sacrifice. It set me wondering what had had happened to him, where had he died and if possible to find out a little more about him. I had had three uncles and a god-father safely return home after the Second World War and it saddened me to think that Garnet had not survived his war. That he had lost his life upon that notorious battlefield gave me a need to know more about him. Somehow it seemed important.

Garnet Arthur Claude Greenop, the eldest son of Arthur and Claudine, was born in 1894 in South London. In 1912, at the age of 18, he left Charterhouse School and was articled as a law student to his father in the City. Many years later, following Garnet’s death his younger brother Jasper took his place in his father’s firm. In September 1914, following the example of other patriotic young men Garnet enlisted, as a private, in the London Rifle Brigade and in November was sent to France. He was soon commissioned and, as a 2nd lieutenant, transferred to the 172nd Battery of the Royal Field Artillery Regiment. For the next 18 months he saw action at various locations along the Allied lines. Towards the end of June 1916, his battery of six guns was in the proximity of D miun, a few kilometres behind the front, in preparation for the massive offensive that was planned to break the stalemate that existed between the Allied and German forces.

Preceded by an intense barrage of artillery fire that continued for a week, in which Garnet’s battery would have played a major role, the main battle commenced on 1st July, with the troops in the trenches being ordered ‘over the top’. Sadly that day goes down in infamy with the highest recorded loss of troops in any one day



ever. It was a day of carnage, a day that saw countless thousands of young men lay down their lives at the whim of incompetent generals.

A week later, on Saturday 8th July, Garnet was killed. The records do not say exactly where or under what circumstances. He now rests in the Hamel Military Cemetery at Beaumont-Hamel in the company of nearly 500 other fallen heroes. He was just 22 years old.

Arthur, like so many other fathers, must have been devastated on receiving the news of the death of his son. His grief could only have been deepened six weeks later when his wife, Claudine passed away. Perhaps she died grieving for her Garnet.





- CHILDREN -
ICONS OF INNOCENCE.
written by Richard White

An icon painter once explained to me that this traditional style of religious painting was intended as ‘a window to reality’. The icon was not simply an image; it was an entree to the mysteries of life and the spirit. To speak of children as ‘icons’, then, is to see them as taking us into another world, to places we have forgotten or never known, where innocence and new life speak of beginnings and promise and . . . wonder. The poet, Francis Webb, captured something of this experience in his poem, ‘Five Days Old’.

CHRISTMAS IS IN THE AIR.

You are given into my hands . . .
To blown straw was given
All the fullness of Heaven.
The tiny, not the immense,
Will teach our groping eyes . . .

Francis held a baby in his hands, as many of us have. He was not a father and was not to become one. He was a poet, someone acutely open to the mysteries of life, its mysterious suffering as well as its mysterious beauty. At this moment, the child he held took him out of the world he knew to another place, one for which he had longed and searched, discovered and celebrated in his writing and seemingly lost and clouded by his life-long illness.

“ The world of the
asylum and of his
troubled mind were
a far cry from the
moment of kindness
and wonder when
this baby was
entrusted to him. ”

Francis suffered from a mental illness. He spent much of his life in and out of psychiatric hospitals. This poem was written after an invitation to share Christmas with the family of his doctor while recovering in a hospital in Norfolk. The world of the asylum and of his troubled mind were a far cry from the moment of kindness and wonder when this baby was entrusted to him. This is a poem about Christmas and about children. Webb carried the burden of mental illness and the gift of understanding. I wonder about his doctor inviting him to his home for this family celebration. It strikes me as a strange thing for a psychiatrist to do: taking one of his patients into this traditionally family gathering. Then, on top of this, to entrust a new born baby to a man who was so unwell. But, ‘Christmas is in the air’ and strange things can happen.

‘You are given into my hands’ and the miracle begins to unfold. It is not simply that this experience produces a beautiful poem. Francis’ response to the child and to the kindness and hospitality, have about them a ring of truth, deeper than this particular event - ‘the tiny, not the immense/will teach our groping eyes . . .’ I keep repeating to myself those lines, ‘the tiny, not the immense’. Francis was fully aware of ‘the immense’. While an illness like his can turn you in on yourself and fear and anxiety can reduce everything to one’s own pain, the enormity of hopelessness is overwhelming.



“ Poems are more like
‘songs without words’;
the sounds and images
conjure and evoke
rather than declare or
make statements. ”

‘Think Big!’ is the temptation of the well as it is of the sick. More income, more power, more guns, more bombs and all will be well!

The world has not changed so much in two thousand years and conflict and injustice are still with us. For the mentally ill, the temptation is to retreat further and to hide and Francis certainly struggled with this. Then, just before Christmas, he was given this baby to hold and the poet took over.

“ The child becomes for him ‘an icon of innocence’ and a ‘window into reality’.”

Poetry is not explanation and analysis; it is hinting and hiding and suggesting. Poems are more like ‘songs without words’; the sounds and images conjure and evoke rather than declare or make statements. So Francis took inspiration from the gift given him by this family at Christmas. Gratitude and wonder took over.

My friend Kerrin is not a poet. Far from it. But I remember him phoning me after being present at the birth of his daughter, “Whitey! Whitey! I can’t explain it. I couldn’t speak for days!” It is that feeling of fullness-to-over-flowing-ness, an experience that can leave us speechless and overwhelmed.



The photo of Josephine Isabella on the swing does this for me. They are moments that hold us still, that let thoughts and feelings and images arise.



The poet or the musician can express such moments in song and in sound. For all of us, there is the chance that the baby held, the child loved, ‘the tiny, not the immense’ will take us somewhere else. For that moment, we will leave ‘the immense’, the troublesome, the demanding, the fearful. We too will become children again and truth and goodness and love will be real, possible and what our ‘groping eyes’ so long to see.

Christmas is in the air.
You are given into my hands
Out of quietest, loneliest lands.
My trembling is all my prayer.
To blown straw was given
All the fullness of Heaven.

The scene in the stable and the baby in his arms merge and meld. Francis’ life and world, illness, confusion and longing are illumined on that Christmas in Norfolk in 1958. The child becomes for him ‘an icon of innocence’ and a ‘window into reality’. They continue to have this power and Christmas is a reminder of this.

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WN Bull Funerals engages Celeste Catering to provide the services outlined above.



THE DEFAULT POSITION OR SADNESS UPON SADNESS?

written by Richard White

My computer offers me a ‘Default Position’. It’s very tempting to accept this offer: an automatic, predictable, unerring response to the pressing of a button. I can take or leave such an offer from the computer; it is not so simple with emotional reactions or responses.

For a number of years I worked with groups of men who had been violent or abusive in their relationships. Part of the program involved men describing occasions when they had been abusive. Often, the ‘explanation’ for their behaviour included the expression, ‘she knew how to press my buttons’. The violence that ensued was ‘automatic, predictable and unerring’ – the man’s default position. The aim of the course was to draw the attention of the individual, and the group, to the language and beliefs used to explain, if not justify, destructive actions. Taking Responsibility was the name of the program and taking responsibility entailed acknowledging the harmful and controlling nature of violence and abuse and refusing to

behave like this in the future. In place of default thinking, the men explored ideas and actions that developed their sense of power and control over their moods and reactions. The individual in the programme, with the encouragement of colleagues, could come to this realisation: there was no excuse for violence and abuse and he had the where-with-all to change. The program ran for twelve weeks. Men who were sufficiently motivated to enrol for the course usually came to accept that their behaviour was unacceptable. With mutual encouragement and direction, ways of talking about their partners, greater understanding of themselves and confidence and friendship with others in the group led

to change. For the first time for years there was hope for the men and for their families. Then, something discouraging and very sad happened.

For almost everyone who begins the program there comes a point of crisis. Significant personal change does not come simply or quickly. Tiredness, stress, alcohol or some other factor or event triggers the default position. The reaction is again, automatic, predictable and unerring. The result this time, however, is more shattering and demoralising. When the first tentative building of trust occurs there is a fragile, cautious optimism. The man can grow in confidence with the enthusiasm and support of the group. His family who may have suffered for years are still wary. Gradually and because of a history of affection and intimacy that may have survived all the suffering, hope can grow. In this context, the outbreak of temper and violence is devastating.

“ Not only did a new outburst of anger shatter the fragile trust of others in the family, it also reawakened feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. There was grief-upon-grief when the progress achieved and the distance covered seemed lost forever. ”

Over the twelve weeks of the program there was ample time to grow in awareness of the nature and impact of violence on members of one’s family; there was ample time to commit to a change of behaviour. There was, however, ample time for a falling back into old patterns, the dreaded default position. For men who were genuinely committed to change, the experience of ‘falling back’ was devastating. Not only did a new outburst of anger shatter the fragile trust of others in the family, it also reawakened feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. There was grief-upon-grief when the progress achieved and the distance covered seemed lost forever. ‘I am hopeless! I can’t do anything!’ was the cry.



When the men in the group encountered their ‘default position’, the event had an impact on all the people in the group, including the leaders. For the other participants, there was something very unsettling about these accounts of failure; for the facilitators, this was the moment of reality. The honeymoon was over and the real work began. Feelings of grief and helplessness can serve to perpetuate destructive behaviour. Grief in all its forms can do this. The sense of loss blocks out the light. The theme of responsibility suffers and with this the willingness to keep to new patterns of thinking and behaviour. Nevertheless, such an experience is critical for taking the next step. This aspect of relationships is explored by many. For example, beneath the humour of Charles Schultz’ *Peanuts* cartoons there is this message of necessary disillusionment. Each year around the start of the football season in the United States, there would be a familiar encounter between Lucy and Charlie Brown. Lucy was self-centred and predictably cruel in her relations with other characters in the series, particularly with the hapless Charlie Brown. Charlie, who had difficulty getting anything right, would practice his place-kicking with Lucy’s assistance. Each time Charlie came in to kick, Lucy would hold the ball upright and at the last moment, pull it away. Charlie would fall on his back and Lucy would laugh. And, each year, Lucy would promise that this time it would be different and each year the same thing happened.

Charlie continued to trust Lucy and she continued to pull the ball away. Charlie never learned and Lucy never changed. The difference between the cartoon characters and men in a behaviour change group is that these were cartoon characters; they felt no real grief, no deep helplessness. Their predictable antics, their default positions, had no saving grace, whereas even the first suggestion of sorrow



“ Instead of running away from the default position, a person can choose to turn and face it. This can be a most painful moment but it is a different pain from giving up. ”

and awareness of hurt done has potential. It is a very delicate moment; a man could collapse into destructive patterns of old or he could enter into the experience of helplessness that is the default position. This is a subtle but very real distinction. We all may recognize those moments in our lives when we were tempted to give up. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins described them as ‘carrion comfort’, a wallowing in the corrupt and energy-sapping temptation to despair. This is the grief-upon-grief, the sadness that sours and infects and undermines our loving and our sympathy. This is what giving up does. Surrender, on the other hand, has a quite different feel. Instead of running away from the default position, a person can choose to turn and face it. This can be a most painful moment but it is a different pain from giving up. It can involve a level of sorrow, an awareness of harm done, that is much deeper than the glib apologies of a life time. Such admissions and experiences of shame seem to cut

and carve and hollow a self that has been protected and hidden for years. The ‘good guy’, the image that all of us develop and present to the world can lose its controlling power. Slowly, but surely, the control a man has so often tried to impose on his wife and family, and on himself, is revealed for what it is: an attitude and set of beliefs that have become destructive and cruel. With this surrender and all the pain it entails, there can be a glimmer of hope and new life. This hope is not spectacular. There are no fireworks. It is more like a small shift in language, like the shift from ‘giving up’ to ‘surrender’. In place of ‘I controlled my temper’, there might be ‘I saw for the first time the fear in the eyes of my son’. One man I knew wrote a note to himself, ‘I will not run away from the pain’ and carried it in his wallet for years. Surrender leaves open the possibility of acceptance and the openness to support and an ability to receive affection. In place of entitlement, the source of so much conflict in relationships, there can grow an awareness of gratitude. With all of this the dreaded ‘default position’, that demoralising ‘automatic, predictable and unerring’ response, never goes away completely. But, it loses its destructive power and that sadness upon sadness is gradually replaced by the thought that there is such a thing as ‘Good Grief!’

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THE
AWARENESS WHEEL
written by Deb Moyle

If you take the time to reflect on something that is bothering you, you may be surprised at what you discover about yourself. A helpful tool to encourage you to dig a little deeper into your internal world is something called the "Awareness Wheel". The wheel has 5 segments as follows:




To demonstrate its usefulness, I will use an example, a discussion I had with my 83 year old friend Renee, who couldn't understand her adult daughter and was hurt by her perceived indifference. I helped Renee use the **Awareness Wheel** to reflect on her **issue** which was that whenever she rang her daughter to tell her she was having a 'bad heart' day her daughter would dismiss her by saying, "Mum, I just don't want to hear about it." Renee had a stroke many years earlier and believed that a second one would kill her. Having a nursing background, she was well aware of the possibility. Unfortunately, her daughter had heard this perceived complaint many times before.

I SENSE

01

“Okay, let's break it down” I suggested. “When you have this issue, what are you **Sensing**? Anything with your 5 senses? What do you see, smell, hear, touch or taste?”




“When it happens I feel physically bashed around, nauseated, weak, breathless and it's an effort to walk.”

I THINK

02

“Okay, and when this happens, what are you **Thinking**?”




“I am thinking ...Is the place tidy? Can I stagger to do the dishes? If I die I have to be fresh to donate my body to science so I hope someone comes in soon after. If I'm not fresh I want the cheapest non-funeral cardboard bag and I want to be buried standing up in the grave - less polluting, recycled ...Shit, I don't like the feeling of being so unwell... I won't do anything... I don't want any help. I will have some alcohol to settle the fibrillating. ...I think about how little medicine knows about people and the problem of dying...”

I FEEL

03

“When you have these thoughts, how do you **Feel**?”




“I feel YUK; frustrated, disassociated, alone, stubborn, determined, misunderstood and unsupported.”

I WANT

04

“When you have these feelings, what are you **Wanting**?”



“I want to die and get it over and done with. I want the kitchen to be clean. I don't want to die in the shower and waste water. I want to be alone. I want to die gracefully. I want my jobs completed, for everything to be neat and tidy and organised when I go. I want people to speak nicely about me and I don't want it to be a shock for other people.”


“ I want people to speak nicely about me and I don't want it to be a shock for other people. ”



I DO

05

“And finally, when you want these things, what do you **Do**?”



“I sit or go to bed and wait to see what happens. I have some alcohol, a gin & tonic, to feel better and more comfortable. I go to the bathroom. I don't want any accidents.”

I took notes and when Renee finished exploring the issue I read it all back to her. “Wow,” she said, “*I didn't know all of that was going on for me. That is amazing.*”

As a result of completing all segments of the Awareness Wheel, Renee had greater insight into herself.

"What will you do now with the issue?" I enquired.

“I don't know,” she reflected.

“Maybe you could share this insight with your daughter,” I suggested.

“ A year or so later Renee died peacefully at home with her daughter holding her hand. ”

Renee chose not to talk to her daughter about being hurt by her seemingly uncaring response to her health. What she came to understand was that her intention for sharing that she had a bad heart day was to protect her daughter from the shock of death, if and when it happened. She saw this as a fruitless endeavour and chose instead to connect with her daughter in the present.

A year or so later Renee died peacefully at home with her daughter holding her hand. She was surrounded by her loving children and grandchildren. They did not call an ambulance. When the doctor signing the death certificate challenged her daughter about this, she told him that she simply respected her mother's wishes. Renee's daughter then called the university and Renee's body was collected for science, just as she had requested.

Renee was one of a kind and those of us left behind admire and miss her terribly.

If you have a problem you are struggling with, maybe you could explore it in the same way with a trusted friend or counsellor. Sometimes we are too close to a problem to see the best solution.



VOICES ON THE WIND

BY CECILE YAZBEK

written by Richard White

In an earlier book, *Olive Trees Around My Table*, Cecile Yazbek wrote in the Prologue, of ‘... the scenes and pictures from my South African childhood that would not rest, or allow me to rest.’ *Voices on the Wind* has about it that similar urgency, a story that has to be told.

It is an urgency that is primitive and instinctive, gut-wrenching and viscerally compelling. There is that same setting and inspiration, Lebanese and South African. These two cultures and histories merge and intersect in the fictional account of Edmond and Lily Khalil’s family at the beginning of the last century. The story is told through Eva, great grand daughter of Lily and Edmond’s youngest daughter, also Eva. It is the modern day Eva who comes to listen to the ‘voices on the wind’.

The title suggests things heard or half heard, snatches of conversation and stories, whispers and ghosts, spirits and hints. We all have these ‘voices on the wind’, the personal and family histories that have their origin before we were born but which shape and infect the way we live now.

Cecile’s book is about listening to the ‘voices on the

wind’. It is about letting the past, history and genealogy, reveal a little more about her life. However, in writing about her life and a world so different from mine, she sets in motion a stirring that both engages me in her story and reveals more of the mystery we call ‘life’.

It’s a cliché, the expression, ‘mystery of life’. But, it’s more than this. That pulsing, interesting, threatening and exciting thing I call ‘my’ life, is very limited. Beyond the walls of my interests and concerns is the vast and limitless world of others. Out there are so many more ‘pulsing, interesting, threatening and exciting’ worlds. To enter those worlds, to leave aside my preoccupations and biases, I need to be stretched, dragged, enticed. I’m reminded of a machine I encountered when doing a speed reading course, a tachistoscope.

A tachistoscope worked by projecting words or sentences onto a screen. To help increase one’s reading speed, the words or sentences became longer and the time they were displayed, shorter. The aim was to broaden the viewer’s perceptual range, to take in more and so to read more quickly.

Voices on the Wind did something like this for me. It made me aware of my ‘cultural and historical boundaries’, of the beliefs and practices I considered normative. It also began the process of stretching and broadening.

There’s a scene early in story where Lily, the young wife of Edmond Khalil, has just given birth to a still born and disabled child. This event is a climax in a series of disorientations and dislocations. Lily had been married at thirteen to a man much older than herself; she had left the warmth and comfort of her home in Lebanon and transported to a world of strange languages and exotic cultures and now she has failed in her role of wife and mother. There was no one and nothing to comfort her. She was confined to bed in her grief.

The black servant girl came into Lily’s room, bringing breakfast. The language barrier as well as caste divisions prevented intimate comforting. But, Ellen, the servant, ‘this day wore a black shawl and headscarf, sorrow etched on her dark face, since her little girl had died from measles.

“ The mystery of life lies beyond such narrowness; it is an ever-expanding and all encompassing understanding and compassion. ”

This was the closest Lily came to communicating with Ellen ... but women and mothers met without words in those places of grief and loss.’

The food Ellen had brought in was another barrier. Instead of the ‘familiar olives, white cheese and Lebanese bread [there was] a plate of steaming white porridge, toast, marmalade and the strongest black tea ...’ As the writer puts it, ‘foreign food could not nourish her body seared by grief.’

It was food in the shape of a sheep’s head that was to mark the end of Lily’s burdensome grief. There is a description of the sheep’s head being boiled in a mixture of cinnamon sticks and pimento berries, the flesh being picked off then placed on a huge mound of rice and brown onions, ‘the two eyes on the edge of the platter’.

I have come some way from the days of ‘meat and three vegs’ and I only rarely, when home alone, treat myself to a pie, mashed potatoes and peas. Middle Eastern food is only one of the delights newcomers have given us. But, it is not only the variety; it is the enjoyment and companionship and comfort of food that stretches our narrowness. Cecile’s book is, fittingly, full of descriptions of food. Religious traditions and political convictions, too, are tested and sifted.

In the early years of last century, the Lebanese in South Africa were in danger of being classified as Asiatic/Indian and as such unable to own property. Edmond and his confreres, with the assistance of priests from their Lebanese/Syrian church presented a case for the community being judged as ‘white’ for the purposes of the developing discriminatory policy of the South African government.

‘The advocate for the Lebanese/Syrians asked the judges and lawyers whether they believed Jesus was a white man ...’ He went on to point to the men in the gallery of the



court who shared the same cultural origins and language of Jesus. ‘These people fought with the Crusaders against the Turks, defending the Christian faith with their life’s blood.’

Thus, their Christian beliefs became a defining and separating reality for Edmond and these Lebanese newcomers to Africa. The black South Africans became disenfranchised and oppressed in their own country. A faith based on inclusion, compassion and ‘life to the full’ became a cornerstone in the building of walls and barriers.

With respect for history and the ethics of story-telling, Cecile describes and does not judge. However, the realisation of the ways individual and communal lives are surrounded and cramped by those walls of self-interest and concern was for me a pervading and underlying theme. The mystery of life lies beyond such narrowness; it is an ever-expanding and all encompassing understanding and compassion.

It is mysterious, too, how reading can provide an entree to the otherness that is life. What happens as one listens to ‘things heard and half heard, snatches of conversation and stories, whispers and ghosts, spirits and hints’ is that walls surrounding us open a little and some of us leaks out and some of the other leaks in.

This change or conversion need not be spectacular although shocks and traumas can bring about change. The characters of Cecile’s novel, the world events, the timeless human tragedies and triumphs all combine and interweave. Listening to the voices on the wind does that and life and more and more living is the result.

Poet's Corner

End of the Day and Hints of the Morning

The night frogs sound like sheep outside.
Rain finally came and broke the building heat
like a child's tears before bedtime.

Pillows propped into every fold as the pills take hold,
still and final peace, this day;
a lifetime for the bugs that fly towards the light -

A light that reminds me to wake in time for life.

Hannah Bella Bowden



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