

Issue 73 Spring 2016

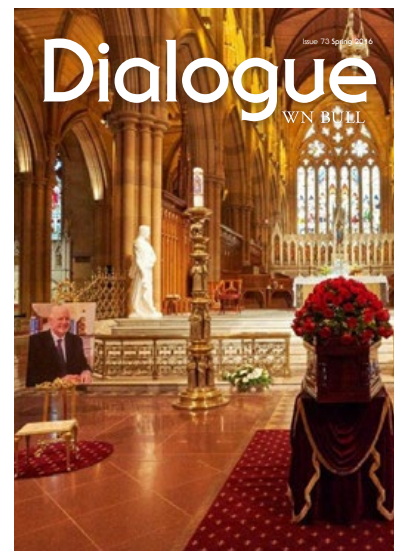
Dialogue

WN BULL



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Issue 73 Spring 2016



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Cover Image:

Funeral of John Harris
Steve Turner

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Why Bother?

Editorial

There's a novel by Graham Greene, *The Burnt Out Case*. It's about a former architect, a successful man, on one level, a wasted, selfish man on another. He ends up at a leper hospital in Africa, a man who has lost any feeling for life.

The term 'burnt out case' was used by the doctor in the novel to describe people who have contracted leprosy but have lost any sense of feeling in the course of being 'cured'. Greene's character, living and working among the lepers, begins to regain his feeling, for other people and for life. Our Spring edition is about this regaining and reliving, in our sadness and in our gratitude.

There's a line towards the end of the opening article in this edition about the author's experience at John Harris' funeral as 'deeper than distractions and more real than our thinking'.

The author is describing the impact or the feeling of grief that is below our level of awareness; it is as if there are rivers of emotion within us that do not always come to the surface. The ritual, symbols and ceremony of a funeral can tap into these deeper parts of us, bringing surprise and comfort.

Lisa McCarthy and Elisabeth Tyc both work for WN Bull Funerals. Through their different personal and professional experiences they have found their way to working closely with bereaved people and families.

Rob Greenop's article seems to break the mood of this Spring edition; this is a story of a young navy pilot and his adventure in Africa. However, the youthful enthusiasm and impulsiveness is the refreshing contrast to Graham Greene's narrative; here there is life lived to the full and perhaps Greene's character was catching a glimpse of this possibility in his work among the lepers.

Dialogue is growing up! Or, at least, getting older, and key personnel from InvoCare, Greg Bisset and Fergus Kelly and WN Bull's General Manager, Patsy Healy, hosted a celebratory dinner for the editor, our graphic designer, Phillip Pavich and some of our contributors. We are deeply grateful to the generosity and skill of our many writers over the years.

'A Short List of Gratitudes' is the title of Erica Greenop's contribution. There's a line from a psalm, 'Taste and See the Goodness of the Lord', and I have always been struck by the encouragement to 'taste and see'. This is another example of tapping into the life and the feeling that is 'deeper than distractions and more real than our thinking'. Erica's 'short list', so lovingly described, can inspire us to begin our own list.

Michael Mullins has written the Recommended Reading for this edition. Michael makes an important distinction between an autobiography and a memoir; the former can so often become a list of things we've done, a memoir is more the people and events, recalled lovingly, that have made us the people we are. Lucy Palmer's *A Bird On My Shoulder* recalls, savours and holds those feelings of loss and joy and humour and allows the person she has become to be present to us readers in our different but similar becomings.

Finally, there's that 'Muddy Hole' and a dead kangaroo. I was surprised at my reaction to the death of Big Boy. Perhaps that is what this Spring edition is about, surprise at the burnt out cases that begin to feel again. Then, there's the wonder at how much and how many we have knowingly and unknowingly come to love and to grieve.

Wishing you a rich and heart-felt Spring from all of us at WN Bull Funerals.



Richard White



JOHN HARRIS' FUNERAL

A MOST FITTING CONCLUSION

written by Richard White

A good funeral is like the good essay we used to write at school; it has a beginning, a middle and an end. The beginning, for me, was as I boarded the early morning train from Cootamundra to Sydney, at 1:35 am on Friday 16 September.

Beginnings can start at any time, on any day. It is where we are going that creates a beginning, the destination that gives meaning to every step. And, I was going to John Harris' funeral and in the early morning cold and sleepiness, there was an undercurrent of thoughts and memories, gratitude, sadness, respect . . . all the emotions and bits and pieces that make up a connection with someone.

“ There is a part of us that clings to the fresh and the warm, the memories and stories and humour . . . to the very end. ”

I wasn't aware of all this, of course, neither as I claimed my seat by the window nor, later on as I sat in St Mary's Cathedral and watched events unfold. There were individuals praying quietly, probably a daily ritual; tourists with cameras and curiosity, wandering and Patsy Healy and funeral staff and church officials arranging and checking and preparing. So much happening, part of the beginning, and me, sitting, watching and slowly others joining me.

When the Mass began, the distractions came and went. I listened to Peter Harrington's eulogy, an affectionate and respectful description of John's life. John had appointed Peter as the Director of Bereavement Services, a position he held for fifteen years. It was an important and distinguishing feature of WN Bull Funerals. With John's encouragement, Peter developed the service, both as a grief support offering for clients and grief education in the wider community.

I drifted away again, seeing whom I could recognize among the congregation and clergy, making mental notes about individuals to catch up with after the service. Then, there was the placing of the pall.

There is a ceremony at the beginning of Catholic funerals, where the coffin is covered with a white cloth, a symbol of the garment a child was clothed with at baptism. As I understand it, this dressing of the baby is about assurance and blessing of innocence at the beginning of their Christian life; at a funeral, there is a similar 'assurance and blessing' and a welcoming embrace, at the end of life.

I remember once dressing a still born baby, in the mortuary at Newtown, with Steve Ross, WN Bull's embalmer. When I had visited the parents of the baby, they had given me a bunny rug to put around their son; I can still see Steve wrapping the small body in the blue rug and placing him in the coffin. It was a moment of tenderness

and I spoke of it with the couple after what was a very sad funeral.

Patsy helped John's children, John jnr and Carmel, draw the pall over their father's coffin, with their mother, Agnes, watching from the front seat. It was another moment of tenderness. The distractions had retreated again.

The middle of the ceremony was a bit of a blur. There were the familiar prayers; Mark, from WN Bull whom I was sitting with, had a wonderful singing voice and I enjoyed listening to him as I mimed the words of the hymns as I usually do; the beauty of the Cathedral, much admired by the tourists, the colour of vestments and candles, the dignity of clergy and servers all washed over me. I was there but not thinking, in that 'automatic pilot' state where it is enough to be still, comfortable and allow those feelings and sadness, memories and pictures, to settle, quietly. Before I knew it, we were coming to the end.

I was sitting at the back of the reserved section with WN Bull staff. In the space before the steps up to the altar, John's coffin stood, covered during the ceremony by the pall. It was time to begin the inevitable and final journey, the moment when the beauty and the stillness give way to stark and unavoidable reality, procession from the church to the cemetery.

The end is 'stark and unavoidable' and I know how this can be the moment of greatest sadness for families and friends. There is a part of us that clings to the fresh and the warm, the memories and stories and humour . . . to the very end. Those final prayers, the blessing and the incense, solemnly, prayerfully bring us back to the truth. John has died; he is not here. It is here, at this moment, that the faith of people is most tested, where hopelessness and hope, loss and love and the end of life and the flickering promise of new life are inseparably connected.

After the prayers and the blessing, Patsy and Carl Breust, one of the WN Bull staff, returned to the top of the coffin the abundant, extravagant, extraordinary deep red rose covering. The flowers held my eyes. Then, with a precision that was a oneness of common purpose and care, the funeral staff transferred John's coffin to the trolley for the procession to the hearse. Again, Patsy and Carl, solemnly, as they have done so many times before, turned the coffin and the final hymn began, 'How Great Thou Art'. Mark ensured this traditional song would ring in my ears, rich and melodic, a fitting conclusion.

I tried to explain to a friend the impact on me of this funeral. I kept coming back to something indefinable, something I could not put into words. It is not the first time I have felt like this and I wonder whether this experience of 'a bit of a blur' is something we all feel when in the middle of great sadness or great joy, too much to take in. Is it like a good essay, as simple as that, with a beginning, a middle and end, satisfactory and memorable like all good things, 'deeper than distractions and more real than our thinking'?



JOHN HARRIS: THE HAZARDS AND BLESSINGS OF THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR

written by Richard White

John Harris, the owner of W N Bull Funerals from 1986 – 2010, has died. John had what we would call ‘work experience’ with a local funeral company in the Western District of Victoria in the early fifties. His involvement with death and funerals was a life time interest. He would have known what was required when news of his death was announced.

For the family, for Agnes and the children, John jnr and Carmel, there would be the experiences of grief and loss that are particular to every person’s experience of death. Our reactions and responses are all different; John would have known this. He had taken that phone call, the news of a death, many times. He knew the importance of being professional, of providing the most practical assistance to a family, reassuring and competent.

For, death is a chaotic experience. No matter how prepared, the finality of death, the ‘ceasing to be’ is something we can never anticipate. The patterns and connections, often of a life time, are shattered, never to be repeated or re-established. Grief reactions so often mirror these shatterings, with unsureness, agitation and confusion. John knew all about this.

John completed his apprenticeship with Tobin Brothers Funerals in Melbourne. He spoke with humour and

affection about the four brothers, Leo, Phonse, Thomas and Kevin. This business had established itself in the Catholic community in Melbourne in 1934. There was a tribal feeling of security and difference in those days. So, having ‘one’s own funeral company’ was important for Catholics, a place of safety and familiarity when safety and familiarity were so important.

Familiarity and a sense of belonging can be the ‘first straw clutched’, the initial comfort when confronted with need to prepare a funeral. It was no idle thing that funeral premises were often called ‘funeral homes’. This was another element or symbol that could lessen that fearful loneliness that can accompany grief. John had a strong feel for the importance of symbols and establishing and maintaining of connections.

John’s library was peppered with books on the Kings, and Queens, of Business. Coco Chanel was there, along with Sidney Myer and Reg Ansett, the exotic and the local. There was a well used copy of Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Death was a personal, unsettling affair; it was also a business. It was the symbols and the ritual that preserved the business from the crassly commercial.

That’s what symbols and ritual do; they hint at and suggest something more than the obvious. Even when we are involved in the ritual, the preserver of symbols, we are often unaware of their significance. We think we control

“ The meeting point of the grand and the simple, the funerals of the mighty and those of the ordinary, was the conviction of the value of every human life. ”

and manipulate with our gestures and movements but we are servants of something deeper. John Harris sensed this.

The story John told of his first funeral in Wagga was of a family tragedy where there was little money. John and Agnes made no profit; not a promising beginning and yet a most promising beginning. Care for the dead and for their families is always more than a commercial transaction, always more. And, the ordinary and simple, the absence of frills, is the touchstone and the infallible guarantee of the real and the genuine.

John’s vision, his love of the adventure of business, seemed to lead him away from ‘the ordinary and the

simple’. When he left Melbourne, John told the story of Leo Tobin giving him a ‘top of the range’ coffin as a gift. This precious coffin remained in the front room of their shop-front business in Wagga for some years. Then, the well-known Bishop of Wagga, Bishop Henschke died.

Years before, John had been involved in the preparation and conducting of the funeral for the Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix; he knew about church protocols and procedure; he was more than at home in the ceremony and limelight. Bishop Henschke’s funeral was the beginning of funerals for many prominent people.

What did it mean, this love of drama and colour, the glistening hearses he had designed himself, the tailor-made mourning suits, the highly polished shoes? When John and Agnes bought WN Bull Funerals in 1986, they inherited a well known family business, similar in origin to Tobin Brothers in Melbourne, but older and grander, as only Sydney businesses can be. Staff jokingly spoke of John making WN Bull the ‘David Jones’ of funeral companies.

When John employed Patsy Healy twenty five years ago, he found an ally and successor. There was the shared vision, a dedication to quality service and a respect for tradition; there was, too, that underlying and fundamental conviction about the human and spiritual importance of funerals. This was a business, certainly, but it was more than a business.

The meeting point of the grand and the simple, the funerals of the mighty and those of the ordinary, was the conviction of the value of every human life. John Harris only attended one funeral when I was the funeral celebrant. It was one of those simple, ordinary funerals where I used a reading from a poem I often used in non-religious funerals. It included the line, ‘not people die, but worlds die in them’.

John commented on those words as we travelled back to Newtown together. Funerals were his life or better funerals and all the associated mystery and procedures, the attention to detail and the uniqueness of every death, all of this threw light on his life, on the lives of all of us.

There’s an occupational hazard of working in the funeral industry; it is that practical demands and the outer show can distract from a sense of awe. The occupational blessing which can preserve this business from the caricatures and criticism so often levelled at it, is the realisation, brought home again and again, that ‘not people die, but worlds die in them’.

John Harris for all his success and prominence was a very simple man. Ask his family, ask Patsy and people who worked closely with him. He had his enthusiasms and his quirks, a love of pigeons and greyhounds being a couple. He was a dedicated smoker and a loyal and loving husband and father. He inspired affection and admiration.

For those of us who knew and loved him, found him exasperating and talkative, a great teacher and a warm, generous human being, John Desmond Harris will be much missed, fondly and often recalled and a enduring reminder that ‘not people die, but worlds die in them’.



LISA MCCARTHY & WN BULL FUNERALS THE WORK I'VE ALWAYS WANTED

written by Lisa McCarthy

When Richard White asked me to write about my journey to W N Bull Funerals, I found myself thinking about who I am as well as what I have done. I cannot separate my family life from my work experience. I have three children, three stepchildren and four wonderful grandchildren.

I have always been interested in the funeral industry from a very young age but was unable to obtain work within the industry initially due lack of life experience.

On leaving high school I worked in the clothing industry, had clerical jobs, hospitality at Regent Hotel Sydney. Whilst working I continued to study and achieved the following:-



Diploma in International Travel Consultancy, Automotive Workshop Skills, Computers, Career Education for Women, through Department of Education Autism Awareness, Child Protection, Asperger's Disorder and Adolescents, Linking

“ It is an absolute privilege to be invited into someone's life whilst they are at their most vulnerable. ”

Pedagogy with Quality Teaching, all the while applying for positions within the funeral industry. I did some unpaid work experience for Olsen's Funerals at Sutherland. They were unable to offer me any work at the end of this time.

When White Lady Funerals came to Sydney I applied and was successful in gaining a position; I finally had the opportunity I had been waiting for. Training was on the job and I was able to learn all aspects of the industry from transferring of deceased from place of death, funeral assistant, driving hearses, family car driver and then conducting funerals. Then it was time to learn how to arrange funerals, taking that first call from families and meeting with them in order to arrange a funeral that best

reflects the life of their loved one, whilst respecting religious and cultural aspects.

Having a young family and working in the funeral industry proved challenging so I made the decision to leave my dream job, with the hope that I would one day return.

I began work at Leichhardt High School during which time I completed a degree in Early Childhood Education going on to work at Earlwood Children's Centre.

In early 2007 I went to work at the Department of Forensic Medicine at Glebe, this gave me an incredible insight into what happens when a person dies unexpectedly, in accidents, suicide, or if there are suspicious circumstances surrounding a death. All of these deaths are reportable to the State Coroner. I was able to work closely with Police, Forensic Pathologists and many other health professionals as well as assisting families.

“ I feel it is important to treat every grieving family as though they are the only grieving family. ”

I again sent out resumes hoping to secure a position within the funeral industry; I felt very fortunate to have a meeting with Patsy Healy at WN Bull who encouraged me not to give up on returning to the industry.

So I moved back into education at PLC at Croydon. However, due to ill health I was forced to leave work. After two long years out of the workforce I was finally looking to return, when I saw an ad online for Funeral Arranger in Newtown. My mind quickly thought of Patsy and WN Bull and made application. I was successful and began work with WN Bull in August 2015.

I am often asked do I like my job and without hesitation I say of course I do. It is an absolute privilege to be invited into someone's life whilst they are at their most vulnerable. To be able to provide comfort, support and guidance through probably one of the most difficult times of their lives is incredibly rewarding. I feel it is important to treat every grieving family as though they are the only grieving family. Empathy, dignity and respect always remembering that everyone is someone's loved one.

Despite the long hours and challenging nature of the work, I can honestly say I have found my niche here at WN Bull and will continue to learn whilst working alongside a wonderful group of people with the support of my loving husband and family.



THE MOUNTAIN 1958

written by Rob Greenop

Towering above, as though one could nearly touch it, was the majestic peak of Mawenzi and, in the far distance, Kilimanjaro itself.

In 1938 Ernest Hemingway, in his short story *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, wrote

‘Kilimanjaro is a snow-covered mountain 19,710 feet high, and is said to be the highest mountain in Africa. Its western summit is called the Masai ‘Ngaje Ngai’, the House of God. Close to the western summit there is the dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude.’

It was early May, we were in Hongkong and Mike and I were mulling over what we could do when our ship was alongside in Mombasa the following month.

“Ever climbed a mountain Rob?” he said. I had a quick think back to my early childhood when occasionally I would walk up the Wrekin near Wellington in Shropshire - some of the locals thought of it as a mountain, although at only 1335ft I had my doubts - when I remembered I had climbed Helvellyn in the Lake District. At 3120ft it certainly qualified. “Yes, once” I replied.

Mike often came up with some unusual ideas so I was a little wary. Together in the past months we had embarked on some strange ventures and I wondered what he was about to suggest this time.

He continued. “How about we organise a party and go up Kilimanjaro. It’s just over 19,000ft high, three days up and two down, should be able to do it if we can get the time off”.

My mind flashed back to when I had read Hemingway’s story many years ago and I wondered where he got the idea of the leopard from. Perhaps we should go and see.

And so the ‘Great Kilimanjaro Climb’ plan was hatched. Before leaving Hongkong we wrote to the Tanzanian authorities, who coordinated the employment of guides, cooks and porters for climbing parties, seeking their advice. We explained the only way we would get permission from the Navy to do the climb was under the guise and rules of ‘expedition training’, where all activities, physical exertion and costs were met by ourselves.

On arrival in Singapore, our next port of call, we received the Tanzanian reply that was quite deflating. Our intention to dispense with any form of local assistance by carrying our own gear, ie do it under our own steam, had not been viewed favourably - the authorities obviously wanted little to do with us and offered scant guidance. Between the lines one could read that they considered a party of naval personnel, accustomed to living at sea level, who proposed climbing to the top in three days and back down in two, without guides and porters, quite irresponsible.

Not to be discouraged we went ahead anyway with our planning, chose five other stalwarts to join us, got as fit as possible, accepted offers of the loan of boots, tents, packs and sleeping bags from the ship’s marines, evaluated the



nutritious content of tins of food, organised tickets for the trip up-country through the Naval Attaché in Nairobi and were ready. A few hours after arriving at Mombasa our party caught the overnight train to Moshi, from where our climb would start.

Shortly after dawn we arrived, were picked up and driven to a hotel from where, after a hearty breakfast and a last minute check of our packs, we set out for our first day’s ascent on the mountain.

Leaving the comforts of modern civilisation behind, we entered a different world as the track, busy in the early morning with ox-drawn carts and locals all keen to greet the strange ‘Bwanas’ carrying their own packs, wound its way upwards. Soon we were wending our way through plantations of bananas, corn and maize, the track

slowly narrowing to a path. All signs of habitation were left behind as the plantations gave way to a rain forest of dense undergrowth and towering trees, covered in moss and suffused in moisture in the hundred percent humidity. As the ascent steepened conversation seemed to dry up as our sea-level-accustomed lungs began to work overtime.

“ We explained the only way we would get permission from the Navy to do the climb was under the guise and rules of ‘expedition training’, where all activities, physical exertion and costs were met by ourselves. ”

The filtered light scarcely penetrated through the dense canopy above as the sound of the steady drip, drip, drip of water broke the eerie silence. We had been told there was a remote possibility of sighting colobus monkeys or hearing the cough of a leopard, but with our puffing and panting any self-respecting animal would have been miles away by the time we passed by. The only coughing we heard came from our own party.

It was late in the afternoon when the path widened into a clearing and before us was Bismarck Hut, now known as Mandara Hut. At the end of the first day we had climbed to nearly 9,000ft. It had not been our intention to use the huts but realising there were no other climbers there, and the ground soaking wet, the idea of pitching tents was quickly abandoned. Enthusiasm for a night under canvas had rapidly disappeared. Without more ado we made ourselves at home, consumed some of our rations and turned in.

In the early gloom of the following morning we resumed our upward trek through the rainforest, the trees tops still obscured by the mist and low cloud. Suddenly, as if a curtain was drawn aside, we broke clear of the tree line and before us lay open moorland, covered in grass, heather and exotic plants, many up to 6ft tall. Towering above, as though one could nearly touch it, was the majestic peak of Mawenzi and, in the far distance, Kilimanjaro itself, its unchanging snow-covered cap and glaciers glistening in the early morning sun. It was an awe-inspiring view and provided a tremendous boost to our spirits dampened by

the persistent wet of the rainforest. By mid-afternoon we reached Peter's Hut, now known as Horombo Hut, at the 11,500ft level, still feeling surprisingly fresh. The weather remained fine and with clear skies above it was decided to push on for another hour, make camp and spend the night under the stars at a spring marked on the map as the highest water source on the mountain. Our tents and much of our spare food were left behind, cached close to Peter's Hut. Nightfall saw us at 13,000ft, huddled round a fire of heather and scrub roots trying to keep warm in the already freezing temperature. By morning everything was frozen solid, boots, food, bodies - there was even ice on the inside of the rain-proof covering of our sleeping bags.

Having topped-up our water supplies at the spring we shouldered our packs and followed the track towards a saddle between the two mountains. As the ground became more stony and eroded, the moorland vegetation gave way to an alpine desert habitat, much of it carpeted in small ever-lasting flowers. Some of these I picked on the way down and managed to keep safe until returning to England.

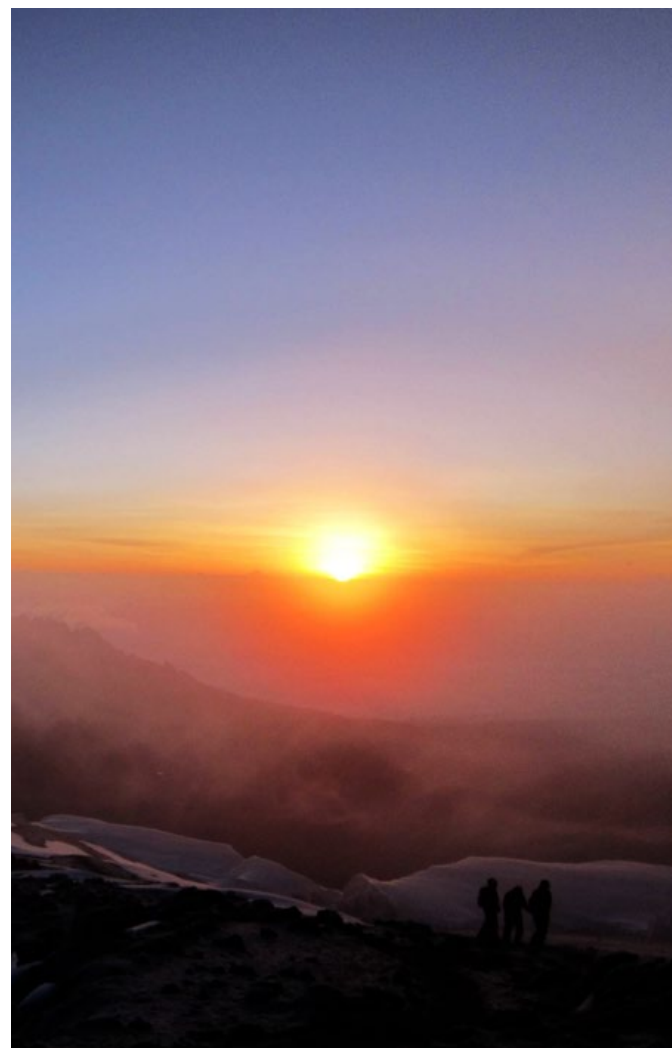
“ They say that from the summit of Kilimanjaro can be seen one of the greatest sights in all of Africa. ”

For over thirty years at my mother's house they lived up to their name, still retaining much of their vibrant colour.

At the eastern end of the saddle at 14,500ft the track crested. Opening out in front of us was the panorama of the face of Kilimanjaro and the path that led to the summit. There remained a fair distance to go and more climbing ahead to reach Kibo Hut by late afternoon. We had now been walking and climbing for two days, had seen only one other party on the mountain and were feeling extremely tired. The effects of the change from sea-level to 15,400ft since leaving the ship in Mombasa Harbour, the lack of any acclimatisation on the way up and the effort of carrying our own packs were taking a toll. Knowing that our climb recommenced at about 2.00am the following morning we turned in early, packed like sardines on a rudimentary platform which served as a communal bunk.

In the freezing black of night, cold, stiff and sore but looking forward to what lay ahead, we set off by torch light in single file, finding our way up the scree-covered slope towards Gillman's Point over 3,000ft above us. As the angle of climb steepened the going became extremely tough, with

every two steps of forward progress followed by sliding back one. After struggling in this fashion for three hours the party was strung out with two members turning back following the onset of altitude sickness. As the sky to the east lightened the rest of us pushed on but at just under 19,000ft, feeling extremely light-headed and nauseous I slumped down beside a rock.



They say that from the summit of Kilimanjaro can be seen one of the greatest sights in all of Africa. It is the sunrise over the peak of Mawenzi that lies a few miles to the east.

I hadn't made it quite to the top, but I had seen that special sunrise.

Author's Note: Today's support for a 'trekking' party climbing Kilimanjaro - on the same route we took, now called the Marangu Route - consists of one guide, one assistant guide, three porters per trekker and a cook. Horombo Hut has comfortable facilities and accommodation for one hundred and twenty trekkers where a two day acclimatisation rest is planned on the way up.

During our five days on the mountain we saw only about a dozen other people. How things have changed.

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.

Wednesday 9th November, 2016 commencing at 6.30pm.

Refreshments will be served at the conclusion of the service.

For those wishing to attend: RSVP ~

Wednesday 2nd November, 2016

Ph: (02) 9519 5344

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WN BULL
FUNERALS

Leaders in Personal Service



Left In view
Jo Wagg, Leigh Bowden,
Fergus Kelly, Phillip Pavich
and Michael Mullins



Michael Mullins, Adam Perrett, Deb Moyle and Richard White

I met Penny Ryan and Adam Perrett under the sad circumstances of the death of their baby, Max. We stayed in touch and Adam and Penny wrote two articles for *Dialogue* about Max and their second and third sons, Harper and Monty. Penny took the photos at dinner to celebrate *Dialogue's* anniversary.

Jo Wagg has written a couple of articles, also, one on caring for her son, Tom, whose disability made life very difficult for him growing up, and for the family. Deb Moyle's reflection on the effects of unacknowledged grief was a moving and insightful treatment of a very painful experience. Leigh Bowden, like Jo and Deb, wrote

of her own experience, living with the ongoing impact of a cerebral haemorrhage.

These stories, and those of other writers, like Cecile Yazbek and Madeleine Pizzuti and Wendy Starkie, have contributed greatly to *Dialogue*. It is the human experience that inspires and illumines our lives; it is the personal story that rings true and real.

Erica Greenop has contributed from her own experience and delightful imagination and is a faithful and generous contributor. Rob Greenop, Erica's husband, a former RAN and Qantas pilot, continues to reveal the drama and the uniqueness of every human story.



Greg Bisset, Rob and Erica Greenop

THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF DIALOGUE

written by Richard White

Dialogue was the brain child of John Harris, another of his innovations. John described the creation of *Dialogue* magazine as a 'lifting of the veil' on the funeral industry.

Initially, the magazine was produced in-house; John wrote all the material, did the photocopying and stapling of a modest number of copies. Re-reading those early editions, we can see John's interests and enthusiasms in evidence - church affairs, descriptions of particular funerals, stories about WN Bull staff, innovations and developments in business and the importance of funeral ceremonies. However, soon the pressures of 'production' became too great and John let the magazine lapse, for a time.

When I joined WN Bull in 2004, John asked me to help re-start *Dialogue*. He decided that this time he would engage professional publishers and approached Catholic Communications. John and I would work on the material and every two months visit Polding House in Sydney and

check proofs and photos. It was perhaps not a coincidence that the first edition of the new venture featured the funeral of Pope John Paul II.

John's eyesight was deteriorating and gradually he handed over responsibility of writing and editing to me. However, he did not cease to suggest, encourage and promote and recommend improvements including the paper quality and increased pages.

Phillip Pavich was the third graphic designer we met at Catholic Communications and the one who became our long term and present designer. I was always looking for writers as well as material and some of our early contributors were people whom I had met through celebrating funerals.



The 'drama and the uniqueness' are what is to be found in every life and celebrated in every funeral. In so many different ways, *Dialogue* illustrates, comments upon, illumines and reveres this 'drama and uniqueness'.

Michael Mullins, former ABC journalist and editor of the online magazine, *Eureka Street*, responded to my request for some comments on *Dialogue's* practical role in a large organisation. Michael spoke of the connection between the human qualities of *Dialogue*, including the quality improvements John Harris made ten years or so ago, and a willingness to choose WN Bull Funerals when needed; quality and generosity, as well as humanity, can help create a relationship, significant in the making of choices.

As editor, I am grateful for the continuing support from the present owners of WN Bull, InvoCare, and in particular to Greg Bisset, Chief Operating Officer, Patsy Healy, General Manager of WN Bull and Fergus Kelly, Chief Marketing Officer.

Above Left Rob Greenop,
Erica Greenop, Jo Wagg
and Fergus Kelly

In View Michael Mullins,
Deb Moyle, Richard White,
Patsy Healy and Greg Bisset



A SHORT LIST OF
GRATITUDES
AND VERY SHORT
STORIES TO EXPLAIN
WHY MY LIFE IS
MUCH ENHANCED
BECAUSE OF THEM

written by Erica Greenop



Empathy

Silence. The place you can hear the universe sighing and the earth spinning and the pennies dropping. Stillness. Where there’s room for what has gone and whatever else might be possible, where the story rests for a while and thinks quietly about itself and deeply understands itself and knows it has been heard and is calmed. The sort of calm that brings comfort and healing and lets us keep forever the tiny things of a precious life. The sort of understanding that 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.

Family

Our son made pancakes for breakfast at the weekend, with maple syrup. At the edge of my pancake was a little gathering of bubbles all with tiny rainbows loosely held together with the batter. I cut it off and held it up to the window and it looked like a wing off a lacewing moth. My grandchildren gathered round and we looked at this magical little piece of pancake batter with air bubbles and rainbows and Lola said it looked like the loopy bits at the edge of her mum’s knitting, and Charlotte said it looked like an insect wing or maybe sun through the fir trees or maybe a leaf skeleton. Mem put her arms round my shoulders and kissed the top of my head.



Awe

That evening after the bushfire the sky was like smoked salmon, not pieces, the whole sky, smoked salmon; and later on the moon was mottled and fuzzy and so near I could almost touch it.



Friendship

My glorious old friend is sitting in her peacock chair on the front veranda. She is wearing her pink sandals and her favourite purple cotton dress with the pink and green paisley pattern which comes nearly to her ankles and I am fearful that one day she will catch her toes, coming down her front steps, in the hem, and not be able to stop herself falling and I imagine her lying in the hydrangeas in the front bed until someone comes across her by chance, the postman, or the Easy Care gardeners or her Italian handyman who spreads his hands and shrugs his shoulders and says things like “It’s uppa to you”; and if he had come across her lying in the garden bed at the bottom of the steps he would have run to her with his face worried and his hands outstretched and said “whatta you do, Mrs Patricia, in the hyder-ange?”

Home

The kitchen was at the back of the house, down one step from the dining room. The ceiling was low, made from rough hewn wooden beams felled centuries ago from the local woodlands and hedgerows. “Mind your head,” we used to say to visitors, “careful as you go through the door, be careful, mind the step.” Tall people would stand slightly hunched over in the kitchen. My uncle Ted was unusually tall; he was a Londoner and had been a warden on Tower Bridge during the Blitz so he knew about danger but we always said “mind your head, be careful,” just in case, and he would stand in the kitchen chatting to my mum with his hands just above his head flat on the beams of the kitchen ceiling.

The key to the kitchen door that led into the back garden had a crumpled label dangling from it and a message that read ‘kitchen door’. The key never went anywhere except

the kitchen door keyhole, so I used to imagine the label was to make it feel special, as if our funny old kitchen door key had an enchanted other life and if you turn it, on the other side of the door there would be magical things; and in the long light of summer evenings when my uncle Ted was down from London he would go outside into the garden hunched over as if the ceiling was still pressing on the top of his head, to look at the apples hanging on their branches and smell the air and listen to the night bird singing.

Human kindness

In January 1991 a green and black storm raged through Sydney. Our beautiful garden was destroyed. The top 60ft of a gum tree speared through the roof of our home in Wahroonga, down through Rob’s study into the sitting room below. The impact shattered all the joists in the roof. Torrential rain poured through the hole.

People came to help. Friends. Friends of friends. There was so much goodwill we could hug it. Someone brought tarpaulins. Someone helped move the furniture. Someone brought pies at lunchtime to feed us all. A friend brought roses from her garden and a crystal vase and put them on the table among the pies and the destruction all around.

Humour

It’s Saturday. We have finished lunch. We are reading the paper, us two old people sitting at the dining table with the winter sun streaming in warming our backs. I am busy with the cryptic crossword. Rob is looking at Non Sequitur and the Wizard of Id and Zits; and I didn’t know, until today, that he reads ‘Your Stars with Lilith.’

Rob is 80 this week. He looks at what is in store for him under his Leo star sign. He reads it out to me, indulged by the glittering promise of his stars for this August week. And maybe because of the glitters, and maybe he is temporarily blinded, or maybe he can’t believe his luck, or maybe it is just another way of keeping hopes alive, he inadvertently slips the letter ‘t’ into the key word ‘genial’.

This week, according to Lilith, and assisted with a Freudian slip-in by the temporarily blinded suddenly hopeful Rob, the week of his 80th birthday is going to be ‘a galactic blockbuster week of genital gusto.’

Imagination

It is 2015. I am walking along the South Bank of the River Thames. it is June. The sun is shining. It is nearly 60 years since I was in London by myself, walking along the banks of the river Thames. It is a little unreal, one of those pinch-me days. It is low tide. The sand at the edge of the river looks like wet gold dust. The golden-ness of the sand surprises me.

I am looking in from the edge of this moment to things that have gone by. It is 1919. I am still, in case the moment passes and the image flies away. My mum lived here, as a child, just down the river from where I am standing, along the river towards the East End of London, St Saviour's Dock on the south bank of the River Thames. She was the oldest of 7 children. Little Johnno, her youngest brother, was a cripple. If you could locate her home on the pages of history you would find it among rows of 3 storeyed terraced Victorian dwellings just east of Tower Bridge. There are factories and tanneries just across the river, docks and warehouses and overhead walkways and acid yellow air, and soft foul-smelling brown silt at low water that swallows the sky and the reflections and the river sounds and piles up into mud banks at the edges of the river –
and I can see myself standing there imagining.



Memories

It is dawn. Behind the rooves and chimney pots of the village the sky is yellow-white. We get on our bikes and cycle through the narrow streets, out the other side of the village to the beach road and the fairway where the mushrooms grow in circles in the grass. It is just a little bit magical. I can feel it.
“Only pick enough for our breakfast” says my mum. She is careful to tell us to not take too many mushrooms. My mum’s best advice is always a mixture of folk lore and common knowledge. She is busy now, sitting on the pebbly beach at the edge of the long grass, setting the Primus. I can smell the lighted match, the tiny flicking sulphur smell of early morning and fresh air that reminds you you are hungry. I can hear the flame popping and hissing on the burner assembly and the chattering sounds of the pebbly beach as the waves come in and go again. My mum puts a dob of butter in the frying pan, sets it on the flame, swirls it round. Her face is gold with morning light. “I am sorry for all the people who have never smelled dawn mushrooms in hot melted butter” she says. It’s like a little prayer. We tear pieces of bread from the loaf, fill them with hot buttered mushrooms and I will remember this moment for ever.

My Own Space – My Study

You’d think I was a child entering a forbidden place, the way I open the door of my study in the morning - carefully, so the stillness isn’t disturbed, a feeling that in there is some magical thing and if I am careful and creep in so it doesn’t notice, I can be part of the magic. I pull back the curtains and the sunlight streams in and settles on the floorboards like a bright yellow beach towel and I open the window and the pink roses growing up the outside of the house fall into the room on to the window sill as though they have been waiting all night to come in and I can feel myself loving this room in a way you can love things and they are part of who you are not just where you live.

Silence

I had a dream last night. A ball room full of beautiful people, dancing, playing, floating. Standing now, listening, spellbound. The musician is wandering among them. He bows to the ladies. He plays a note, a single note, for each one. “This beautiful note just for you. This sorrowful sound for you my lady. This gentle note for you. This discord for your husband. This birdsong for you. This river flowing. This breeze. This sound from the skies for you. This one from the forest.” He comes to me. “This silence for you.” He smiles and moves on. How beautiful is the silence.

Writing

Sometimes my best scribblings appear when my life is wobbling along on the edge of disaster. Rob was in hospital for a second back operation. In the evening, when I got home, my whole world was a bit unreal, a bit insecure, so I wrote a poem. It’s how I cope. I am sure, hidden in its nonsense, there is a message of hope.

It is darkening, this day, coming into night
Its yellow parchment sky curling at the edges
And if I put paper weights or a pile of books
At the corners
It will stay flat for a moment
And be full of silver plane trails, like snails
Flying across the parchment, and I love to think
That snails can fly



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MY JOURNEY TO WN BULL FUNERALS

written by Elisabeth Tyc

I learnt early on the value in being able to help someone who is going through a tough time in life. After experiencing some life adjustments and working through them, I found myself, with the knowledge and experience gained, helping others in similar situations. I found that it was greatly rewarding to help other people work through the challenges they encountered and watch them grow and get stronger.

One of the most profoundly impacting funerals I attended was that of a colleague, who triadically lost her three children. I was struck by the way her support person was able to comfort her and thought that I would like to learn how to do this.

After I was made redundant from my Admin based job, I commenced work at the local pharmacy as this was close to my children's school. Here I learnt the importance of taking note of what was going on in people's lives. The personal interaction and interest in their lives clearly made a big difference to many of them. Most customers were elderly, some young mothers, and I found that some of them would come in just for a chat and sometimes, if they had lost someone, for the comfort of someone holding their hand. I learnt that it is not only OK, but important to ask how they are coping and let them take their time to tell you how they are really feeling or coping.

At this time I also undertook a counselling course and found myself most interested in grief counselling. I began working as a volunteer at the Calvary Palliative Care Hospital in Kogarah.

“ . . . I am still amazed every day, when meeting with families, what a privilege it is to be able to support someone at such a difficult time . . . ”

My volunteer work at Calvary was very special to me as it just seemed such an immense privilege to be able to sit with someone at this stage of their life. I found that although we were taught how to give patients a gentle foot or hand massage, which certainly helped them relax, it was often the conversation that flowed that made the most difference.

Patients could speak about things they wanted to discuss that they may not have been able to say to a family member, for fear of upsetting them. For those who had no family or were too far away for regular visits, these conversations were also important; I believed no one should be alone at this time.

When I was transferred to work in the community it was different, as in this situation I got to know the family

or carer and had to win their trust. I found that the carers also looked forward to my visits each week, as this was a change to their routine and also gave them time to follow up on something they wanted to do; sometimes they also asked me for a foot rub!



I never set out to work within the funeral industry, however I was looking to move on from the pharmacy when I saw the job advertised; it seemed the next step for me. Thankfully WN Bull employed me and I am still amazed every day, when meeting with families, what a privilege it is to be able to support someone at such a difficult time and to ascertain and arrange what might be the most suitable funeral, one that is reflective of their loved one, ranging from a small service in our chapel, in a church, outdoors or repatriating overseas.

No two days are the same.



JUST A MUDDY HOLE. WHY BOTHER?

written by Richard White

The neighbours invited us down. The scrubby, lower third of our land adjoins our neighbours' five acres. Over the past four years, a large, old kangaroo named 'Big Boy' by the neighbours, has grazed and rested and lived in and between our two properties.

The other day the neighbours came home from shopping and Big Boy had trouble getting away from their car; he stumbled, fell and could not get up. Our friends called a vet who said he was too old, muscle wastage and needed to be put down.

They called the police and Bruce, the digger driver. The young policeman arrived, with two of the vets; it would be a professional, humane killing.

Jenny, our neighbour, was upset. For those years, Big Boy has been a part of all our lives. He arrived scratched, bleeding and unsteady on his legs and he stayed. The locals said it was a mating thing, a male thing, and he was worsted. Nothing for it but to go away and die; but he didn't. The vets estimated he lived two years longer than the average eight years for bush kangaroos. He thrived in this accidental sanctuary.

He would often suddenly appear. He took up residence one morning, sprawled on our back lawn, about fifteen metres from the door. Comfortable, lazy or just tired, he ignored me as I walked past him to get wood for the fire. Jenny and her family described similar experiences.

“ We did slow down; we supervised and assisted his dying and his burial. We planted a tree and later had a drink in his honour. ”

Grandchildren came and went and on instruction called out 'Happy Birthday Kang-gar- oo!' The two year old practiced 'boing-ing' on the driveway resulting in cut knees; but no tears as this might upset Kang-gar-oo.

Jenny heard the first shot, then a second. She knew it was coming and had stayed in the kitchen until it was all over. She was upset but grateful to the police and to the vets for their ministrations. Then, there was third shot. She rushed out.

There had been no serious complications. The vets explained his heart may have kept beating even though he was dead. The policeman was only making sure. He met Jenny as she came down to the corner of their yard where Big Boy was lying. They both acknowledged that this had been a sad event, a loss for those of us who had known and welcomed Big Boy and an emotional moment for the outsiders called into this circle of affection and care.

When I arrived down, the digger had been and gone; there was just a muddy, soft expanse where the burying had occurred. We have had plenty of rain and the mud was no surprise; it was just that I was struck by the brown, sticky soil, glistening in the late afternoon sun. About seven of us gathered around, neighbours and friends, and we planted a silky oak in the middle of that muddy clearing.

It's funny; the image of the hole or, better, where the hole had been, has stayed with me. Bruce, the digger driver, said he had never buried a 'roo before, 'plenty of horses and cows and whatever, but never a 'roo.' A first for Bruce, and for us.

Living in the country, you see dead animals all the time, roadkill, a general, anonymous, clinical-sounding description. Kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, foxes, the odd cat and nondescript messes of fur and bones that could have

been anything. Whoosh! We fly past with hardly a thought. Big Boy and that muddy hole have slowed us down.

I was at the butcher's the day after all of this. They were cutting up some neck-chops for me, out the back. To pass the time and probably because it was on my mind, I made reference to a 'funeral' the day before.

'Oh, Big Boy!' one of the women said, 'I saw the story on Jenny's Facebook. Isn't that sad?' There followed a conversation about the kangaroo, his adventures, our involvement and the impact of his death.

I thought about it later. What are we doing! There's an abattoirs up the road, 'processing' so many sheep and cattle for domestic and overseas markets; as I said, roadkill and animal collisions are just about every day events and here we are, in a butcher's, expressing sadness at the death of an old kangaroo!

I'm still not sure what to make of it. But, something happened when Big Boy died. We did slow down; we supervised and assisted his dying and his burial. We planted a tree and later had a drink in his honour. We lost something; we felt the loss and we held the feeling, that so-easily-lost feeling, the little grief that grew from the presence and gift of that wild thing who made his home among us.

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A BIRD ON MY SHOULDER

A MEMOIR BY LUCY PALMER

Reviewed by Michael Mullins

Lucy Palmer tells other people’s stories for a living. As founding director of TheMemoirMakers.com.au, she has helped her clients bequeath their story to future generations as a possession more valuable than material inheritance. She has done the same for former Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan, as ghost writer for his memoir *Playing the Game*, which was published earlier this year by Queensland University Press.

Now she has recorded her own story. It is a gift not only for her own family but for anybody who has grieved – or is grieving – a loved one, which is effectively all of us. Its focus is meeting and marrying and – after only five years of marriage – grieving her partner Julian Thirlwall.

To understand *A Bird on my Shoulder*, it’s worth noting the difference between autobiography and memoir. Autobiography is a chronology of our life in a manner as objective as we can manage. A memoir, on the other hand, is a poignant and often humorous interpretation of an event or sequence of events that made us the person we are. It

is the meaning we have found in our own lives through making sense of what has happened to us.

It’s not surprising that Lucy has enjoyed a professional and personal friendship with Caroline Jones since working alongside her at the ABC nearly 30 years ago during the heyday of Caroline’s radio program *The Search for Meaning*. Recently Caroline attended Lucy’s book launch and wrote a review of the book in which she observed that ‘like its author, the book has become [her] good friend’. That is testimony to the fact that – like our children – our story begins with us, but has a life of its own.

There is a depth – and indeed a sacred quality – to stories that come from the heart and have not been created merely for a commercial purpose. But that does not take away from the entertainment value of our stories that can use devices such as self-deprecation to offer insights into who we are. Lucy relates advice given to her by her best friend Mary-Louise during the early of her courtship with Julian in Port Moresby: ‘You’ve got to get rid of that dress... It makes you look like a sofa.’

“ Lucy has a certain self-awareness of these assets bequeathed to her, and is determined to use them to help her and her loved ones get ahead and work through life’s adversities. ”

Lucy’s story is at once grounded in the school of hard knocks and an openness to surprise. We get an insight into this when her superficially hard hearted father visits from England and unexpectedly bonds with Julian, even though their personalities could not be more different. Lucy observes later in the book: ‘The people I have loved who have left this physical life have become a part of me; I carry them, embody them.’

Lucy has a certain self-awareness of these assets bequeathed to her, and is determined to use them to help her and her loved ones get ahead and work through life’s

adversities. The most difficult of these is the subject of the book. That is Julian’s terminal cancer diagnosis just five years into their marriage, and the challenge to their young family of his slow physical and mental decline.



Always in command of the moment, Lucy is not one to be intimidated, even when she visits the ‘unnatural scene’ at the funeral home to see Julian’s body. She senses ‘life moving slowly in the presence of death’, but also a certain quirkiness. Julian is lying in his coffin, adorned with clothes and accessories with his characteristic fastidiousness. Lucy gets it into her head that it’s not quite right that they have him lying there with his shoes on. Mary-Louise is by her side and squeezes her arm. Lucy is ‘transfixed by the absurdity of it all; the quietness, the awful piped music, the contrived stillness’.

It is as if the funeral directors’ gaudy sideshow is actually a careful orchestration of deliberate inadequacy on their part that is meant to give strength to the grieving

“ Lucy is not one to be intimidated, even when she visits the ‘unnatural scene’ at the funeral home to see Julian’s body. ”

family. The effect is to put us in charge of the main game, to challenge us to find a determined peace in a space that for most people is beyond words. *A Bird on my Shoulder* is testimony to the fact that Lucy has a rare ability to match that peace with words.



STRENGTH

Inside
I am making myself strong.
I am weaving bands of steel
To bind my soul.
I am knitting stitches of suffering
Into my hands
To make them strong.
I am strengthening my mind
With the warp and weft
Of weariness and endurance.
I am binding my faith
With the bonds of psalms and songs
Of all who have suffered.
In time,
I will be tempered like fine steel
To bend, but not to break.

Marjorie Pizer



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