

Issue 76 Winter 2017

Dialogue

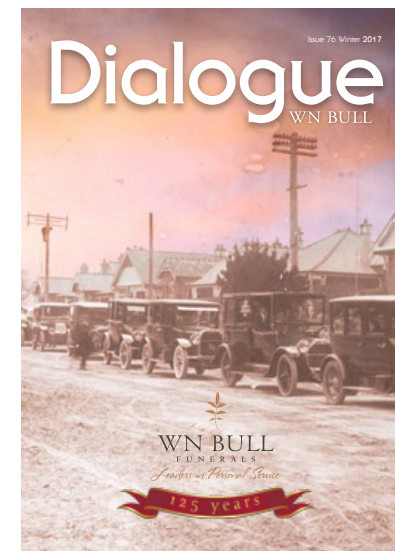
WN BULL



WN BULL
FUNERALS

Leaders in Personal Service

125 years



Editorial Office:

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

Member of InvoCare Australia Pty Limited
ABN: 22 060 060 031

Dialogue Publications
© 2017

ISSN: 1832-8474

Dialogue is published quarterly by

Dialogue Publications
- a publishing division of
WN Bull Funerals

Editorial Board:

Richard White
Patsy Healy

Production:

Phillip Pavich
Email: phillip@ridehigh.com.au

Copies of *Dialogue*
can be obtained by
calling (02) 9519 5344

Cover Image:

WN Bull Through The Years

Regulars

- 1 Editorial
- 20 Recommended Reading
- 24 Poet's Corner

Features

- 2 125 Years of WN Bull Funerals
The Cultural Significance of Funerals
- 6 Just When You Thought You Had It
All Under Control!
- 8 The Memorial Garden
- 10 The Best Seat in the House
- 14 Whole Hearted Living
- 18 An Afternoon with Lola
- 22 When 'Little' Things Loom Large

Editorial

This edition of *Dialogue* is on its last legs. By this I mean I have almost finished it. If you have ever been a distance runner, you would know the experience of your legs giving way, the finish tape in sight, and only prayers and last gasps keeping you going.

Last legs! You don't have to have been a runner to know this experience. It's the experience of having given everything, having nothing left and wondering if or how you are going to make it. It is an all-too-human experience.

This edition is full of 'all-too-human' experiences. In fact, that is what *Dialogue* is all about, stories and people who remind us of what it means to be 'all-too-human'.

The feature article on 125 Years of WN Bull is this editor's attempt to capture the cultural significance of a funeral company. 'Cultural significance' is a posh word for reminders of what it means to be all-too-human.

Steve Ross does this in his story about twenty years of faithful service and rich learnings on the staff of WN Bull. Rob Greenop's 'Best Seat in the House' is a reminder that there is beauty to be seen everywhere and being aware of this beauty, nourishing a capacity for wonder and awe, is what enhances our humanity.



Richard White

'Whole-hearted Living' stresses that 'last legs' and even crawling can be moments of deep humanity. Erica Greenop is at her imaginative best, ably assisted by Lola, in this playful adventure with words. The child in us and around us is so important.

Michael Mullins's blog about 'inurnment' is a personal meditation on dying and community, as much as a reflection on memorialisation and death. Thank you, Michael.

Then, there's Paul Cox. This contribution to Recommended Reading sets the theme for this edition. I very much enjoyed reading this book and will read it again. I thought so highly of Paul's book that I have already lent it to a friend, both sensitive and reliable, so I will get it back!

Marjorie Pizer has been a part of *Dialogue* for many years. I am very grateful to her daughter, Jo Holburn, for permission to continue to publish Marjorie's poems. I will write something on Marjorie's book collection in the Spring edition.

Wishing you warmth and blessing for Winter, Patsy Healy and all at WN Bull Funerals.



125 YEARS OF WN BULL FUNERALS

THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FUNERALS

written by Richard White

I have been associated with WN Bull Funerals since 2004, seven and half years as Director of Bereavement Services and the past six years as editor of *Dialogue* and more recently in the role of staff support. These thirteen years have been an experience of personal and professional blessing. While this is a personal reflection, I believe what I have learnt is something that has implications for the living of all of us, cultural significance or blessing.

By ‘blessing’ I mean something more than ‘luck’ and deeper than ‘good fortune’. A blessing is more like a gift, a grace, if you like. There is an element of something surprising and undeserved about a blessing which evokes feelings of gratitude and wonder, such important human experiences. Another way of looking at blessing when used in terms of work or employment situations is to contrast it with ‘occupational hazards’.

The occupational hazards associated with working with a funeral company are the inevitable shadow side

of the goodness that is present in any successful human endeavour; the limit or the edge that marks the moment or occasion where a good thing can deteriorate into something negative or destructive. In the funeral industry, this limit or moment, is when we think we have managed or tamed the experience of death.

On two occasions in my full time work at WN Bull Funerals, I took phone calls from people I knew who told me one of their children had died tragically. Unlike other members of staff who handle calls from distressed

families with professional compassion and courtesies, I was flustered by these conversations. I struggled to deal with my own reactions and to respond most helpfully to my friends’ grief.

These were early days in my time with the company and I did not answer the phone on a regular basis. On reflection, what I had felt as an inadequate response did not detract from my colleagues and I providing the sensitive and consoling funeral arrangements; on the contrary, what I felt as my lack of professionalism was and remains a salutary reminder that the death of anyone, under any circumstances is a mysterious and shattering event; one minute a person is ‘there’ and the next they’re not; a lifetime of relationships, of highs and lows, of kindness and coldness – all gone, but for the memories and regrets of those who knew them.

Care, compassion and personalised service are the blessings extended and the blessing elicited by and from the staff of a funeral company. And, the occupational hazard is that this service could degenerate into a job or standardised routine.

What preserves funeral staff from this occupational hazard is, in my experience, their own respect and awe in the face of death and the reality that human frailty and limitations ensure that mistakes and the unforeseen will always give that edge to funeral preparations as they do to

that fragile and wonder-filled experience we call human life. We cannot control life and we cannot control death.

Death is a mystery, the great unknown. We do in fact do everything we can to tame or control this mystery,

“ Care, compassion and personalised service are the blessings extended and the blessing elicited by and from the staff of a funeral company. And, the occupational hazard is that this service could degenerate into a job or standardised routine. ”



undermine its significance through down-playing its terrible finality, pushing it to the perimeters of our life and thinking. ‘Death happens to other people’ or ‘Death is the stuff of horror movies or quirky comedies’; in other words, we rob death of reality and the deceased person of dignity and value.

Some years ago I remember seeing a film called ‘The Killing Fields’ about the genocidal regime of Pol Pot in Cambodia. Over one million people were killed, systematically and cruelly.

There was a scene in the film, some years after the end of these murderous events, when a journalist stumbled on a mass grave on the bank of a river, a collapse of earth revealed rows and rows of human remains.

These were all people, I thought, persons with lives and feelings like mine. This scene has been repeated in real life in Rwanda, in the cities of the Middle East, in the market squares in Afghanistan. These are not ‘numbers’ or statistics, they are human beings. The death of anyone is always, in every case, for all of us, a significant event.

In the face of history’s massacres and in the face of our society’s efforts to sanitise or glamorise or sensationalise the deaths of the ordinary and the celebrity, we need to hold firmly to the personal character of death.

This is what I learnt every day or every week while working with WN Bull Funerals; this was the ‘occupational



bleasing’ that countered the hazard of a routine or inhuman detachment. That confusion on taking a distressed phone call from friends may have been a failure of professionalism; it was not a failure of humanity.

“ This is no easy thing and the qualities of respect and dignity in the face of the mystery of death requite more than a rational, common sense response. ”

That is the issue, how we preserve respect and awe on the death of every human being. It is impossible and undesirable to grieve incessantly and universally. What is possible and I would say essential, is to retain the capacity to let go of our certainties, to be nonplussed or

dis-comforted, if only for a moment or two, in the face of death. This is no easy thing and the qualities of respect and dignity in the face of the mystery of death requite more than a rational, common sense response.

There is a poem by Emile Dickenson that says something about the necessary approach to mystery.

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth’s superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind –

This poem has become a favourite of mine. The eccentric American poet has it right; Truth, with a capital ‘T’ is something beyond the limits of our language and explanation. Like Life and Death, Truth is untameable,

uncontrollable and something like Blessing, an inspirer of awe and gratitude.

This is why we have to ‘tell it slant’, to present or convey truth with gestures and symbols and ritual. A kiss or a hug have the potential to convey more than any words can say; the flag at half-mast or the candle in the darkness can ring with Truth. John Harris the former owner of WN Bull Funerals knew all this.

When John and Agnes Harris bought WN Bull Funerals in 1986, they came to Newtown with extensive experience of the funeral business. John was determined that this fine company would remain a distinctive and respected presence in the community. John’s designing of new hearses, stipulating tailor-made mourning suits and quality footwear for funeral staff and protocols and procedures training were all part of his vision.


This was not all empty show, a marketing tactic, although that was there too. I think John grasped instinctively the significance of these traditional symbols and the importance of the funeral ritual. These were all ways of ‘telling it slant’, of expressing awe and respect before the Truth of death and of the infinite value of every human life.

This is what I mean by the ‘cultural significance of funerals’ and how WN Bull Funerals continues to contribute to this culture. The familiar building at

164 King Street, Newtown, and the premises at Parramatta have become part of the landscape or city-scape. They are there for people to see, reminders of the reality of death



and the importance of funerals, faithfully for 125 years ‘telling all the truth’ and ‘dazzling gradually’ eyes that find death hard to face and impossible to avoid.




Put those you love in
the hands
of those who care

Of all life’s celebrations the funeral liturgy can touch us the most deeply.

We prefer to place our trust and reliance on those who have the skill and experience to plan a funeral that has meaning and dignity.

At least that’s what Sydney families look for when they choose WN Bull Funerals.

As the funeral liturgy expresses faith, it also contextualises the life of the deceased with traditional and contemporary elements.



WN BULL
FUNERALS
Leaders in Personal Service

(02) 9519 5344 | wnbull@wnbull.com | www.wnbull.com.au



JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU HAD IT ALL UNDER CONTROL!

written by Richard White

Train trips are worse than a plane flight; travelling alone you have no say in who sits beside you. At least on a plane, it's a relatively short flight, domestically; on a train, you can be trapped for hours. These thoughts crossed my mind when the woman who sat next to me on the night train showed no signs of reading and seemed friendly and interested – the worst kind!

For the next two hours, my book in the seat pocket in front of me, Rebecca chatted and questioned. She had also eagerly taken up a copy of *Dialogue* I had given her, to my pleasure and relief. And, she proceeded to read this back copy with genuine appreciation, from cover to cover.

Then, instead of talking about herself, Rebecca showed a disconcerting interest in my life. 'Tell me your life story, from day one!'

Not a dreaded 'life story'! In the confines of a train

carriage where, despite my croaky whispering, I know from experience, one can hear conversations from two seats away, in both directions.

Of course, I could have feigned shyness, indignation or whatever and cut this conversation off at the pass. But, it's not every day that I encountered an enthusiastic *Dialogue* reader, albeit a very new one. So, I ventured forth on a highly abbreviated version, ducking and weaving around details, dishing out the gist with an uncharacteristic absence

of details. In self defence and with genuine interest, I asked a few questions of my own. This was where the conversation took a reflective turn.

My companion was Dutch. At least, she was born in Holland and come to Australia when she was six. I asked Rebecca whether she spoke Dutch. 'That's a very good question', she said with some warmth.

“ We connected, her past, her childhood, became present, our present and these were precious moments for me, and, I think for her. ”

'My mother died some years ago, after developing dementia. I used to visit her and she had little memory of the past and was unable to relate to me in the present. However, she had a small children's book, in Dutch, that we used to read together.



I was unable to speak Dutch although I could understand a little. With my mother, I read and laughed at the stories, over and over. We connected, her past, her childhood, became present, our present and these were precious moments for me, and, I think for her.

When my mother died, I went on the net and bought a number of these children's book in Dutch. Then, I bought books for teenagers, more challenging ones. Now I am doing an online language course. I am coming alive to

my Dutch heritage.'

Rebecca spoke also of a time in the country town where she lived of a Harmony Day event, a celebration of the different cultures in the region. It was when her own children were young and both her parents were alive. The organisers, who knew her background, asked her to 'do something Dutch'. Her memories of Holland were vague, but Rebecca entered into the spirit of the day, making costumes for the children, even choreographing a 'traditional dance'.

Listening to this story of the migrant parents who came to a new country, moved around looking for work, I was struck by how important it is for us to connect with or to claim our past. There's richness in our memories, flesh and blood, courage, culture, history and deep springs of affection and wells of understanding.

The copy of *Dialogue* I had given to Rebecca was the one that celebrated 120 years of WN Bull Funerals. I had taken this copy from the archives at Newtown to prepare material for this year's celebration of 125 years since William Nugent and Mary Bull had started the company.

Initially, I had offered the magazine as an example of 'what I do in my retirement' and, of course, because I'm proud of my ongoing association with WN Bull Funerals and William and Mary's legacy.

I have shown people copies of *Dialogue* on many occasions (you only have to show a flicker of interest and you will have a copy sent to you or thrust into your hands); this was the first time someone had read an edition so attentively and appreciatively and in my presence.

Dialogue worked some magic on that five hour train trip home. The conversation before the lights went out was warm and interesting; the past came alive for Rebecca and for me and my life and I suspect hers expanded for a time as we breathed in the sounds and smells and shapes and people who continue to impact on our lives. All this was triggered by an anniversary copy of *Dialogue*. I even slept better in those few hours of darkness when time can drag and discomfort can grow.

Rebecca was continuing on to Melbourne and I was leaving the train at Cootamundra. I think I may have said before the lights went out and our conversation finished, 'You wouldn't be dead for quids', but maybe I didn't.

PS. As I was leaving the train, in the early hours of the morning, Rebecca handed me a small note, her acknowledgement of our brief encounter, mine is this article.

'... a chance meeting on a train.

Life is a wonder,

really . . .'

Yes, it is.



THE MEMORIAL GARDEN

written by Michael Mullins
PRINTED WITH PERMISSION

I spent the weekend staying with relatives in their home by the beach on the coast at Gerroa, in the Illawarra region south of Sydney. Yesterday I accompanied my cousin when he went to the Memorial Garden at his local church to carry out an inurnment.

I'd never heard the word before. It refers to the placing in a 'niche', or some other resting location, a person's cremated remains that are contained in an urn.

Following a ceremony at the end of Sunday Mass, my cousin dug the hole in the designated niche and put the urn in place before covering it with dirt and planting flowers over it.

The Memorial Garden was constructed and opened eighteen months ago. It is a variation on the form of the traditional labyrinth or maze and was inspired by the labyrinth in the Vatican Gardens.

It was suggested by my cousin's 91 year old mother, who had an urgent need to find the right resting place for

the cremated remains of her husband - my father's cousin - who died in 2007.

After the parish subsequently took up the suggestion and completed the design and construction, his remains were placed in niche 407. Adjacent niches are reserved for other family members and friends.

Yesterday I made a spontaneous decision to purchase niche 406, as I have become increasingly conscious of the need to specify what I would like done with my remains after I die.

Actually I've never had any particular wishes in this regard. For whatever reason - possibly to do with residual lack of self esteem - I've had an 'I don't care' attitude.

But increasingly I've felt concern for those around me when I die. They would be scratching their heads wondering what my unexpressed wishes were, and perhaps justifiably frustrated or annoyed that I had remained silent on the matter.

As of yesterday, this is resolved.

“ Following a ceremony at the end of Sunday Mass, my cousin dug the hole in the designated niche and put the urn in place before covering it with dirt and planting flowers over it. ”

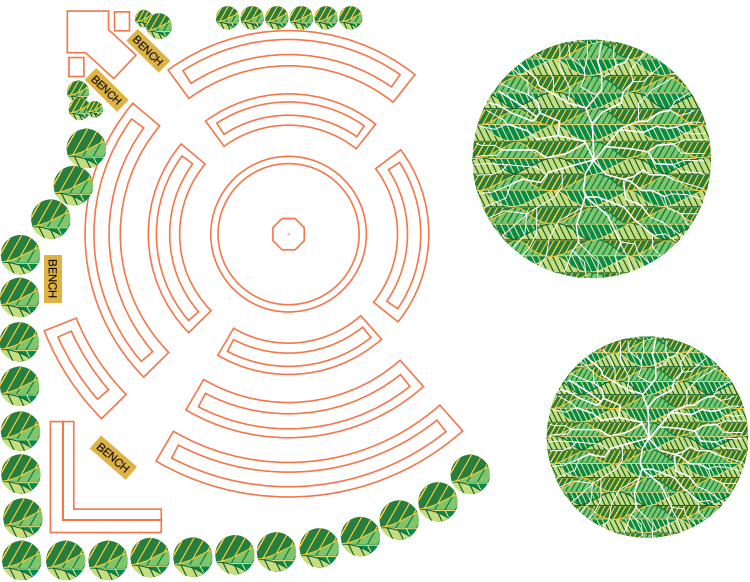


But it does cause me to reflect upon the changing sociological profile of the community and the reality that many people including myself no longer fit neatly with established church or other traditional rituals surrounding death and how they would like to be remembered.

I don't know how this plays out in practice. But I imagine that the circumstances for many people become awkward

when they have not expressed what they would like to occur when they die, and have never been asked. How do you pay respect to a person who was single or lived a life that was singular?

This happens to people at all levels, with many not part of a traditional family when they die. They may be comfortable with that - as I am - but there's no pro forma, and it's an



Development plans for the memorial garden

“ I imagine that the circumstances for many people become awkward when they have not expressed what they would like to occur when they die, and have never been asked. ”

important for us all to accept that we are worth remembering and to decide how we would like this to occur.



THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE

written by Rob Greenop

Recently, during a conversation with some young friends, one remarked how claustrophobic the pilot's seat in an aircraft must be, sitting up there for hours on end with nothing to do, nothing to see. It caused me to think that perhaps the important things in life, for many are the material objects surrounding them, such as gaming devices, iPads etc, rather than the beauty of living beings and the scenic splendour of nature itself. That remark, about claustrophobia, seems far from reality that I cast my mind back to remembering some of what I have seen in my lifetime.



Much of it has been spent in the air, either in the cramped cockpit of a military aircraft or in the relatively warm comfort of the flight-deck of a commercial airliner going from A to B. For earth-bound mortals the immediate horizon limits what and how far they can see, but staring through the cockpit windows high above the earth, the view of the sky above, the ground or sea below and the far distance can at times be quite awesome. It is when you catch a rare glimpse of the snow covered Himalayas and try to pick out the peak of Everest some 180nm to the north, or on a clear day, pass close to the active volcanos in the Halmahera Islands of Indonesia, perhaps fly over an electrical storm that goes on and on with sheet-lightning illuminating the clouds below in a ghostly fashion, or watch

“ It was like a poorly choreographed line of chorus girls without the music - quite fascinating to watch. We couldn't resist the temptation and flew between them for a close up view. ”

the incandescent trail of a satellite re-entry as it travels from one horizon to another, breaking up into many pieces - it is then that you appreciate that a pilot's seat up-front in the pointy end is the best in the house.

Distant mountains and volcanoes, satellites and sheet lightning are but a few of the many wonderful sights to be seen from the air. But it was usually the unexpected

that I found most unforgettable. In 1958, when I was in the Royal Navy, our aircraft carrier was in the Caribbean approximately halfway between Grenada and Trinidad. Another squadron pilot and I were heading back to 'land-on' after an hour's flying, much of it spent dodging round ominous looking cumulonimbus clouds towering way above us. Generally the weather and visibility below the cloud base was good, although from beneath some of the storms we could see rain showers and squalls, some of the rain turning into 'virga', the description of rain when it dissipates before reaching the surface. We rounded a particularly nasty looking storm cell to be confronted by another dead ahead, with of a line of six waterspouts directly across our path, curling and twisting as they descended from the cloud base to play on the surface of the sea below. It was like a poorly choreographed line of chorus girls without the music - quite fascinating to watch. We couldn't resist the temptation and flew between them for a close up view. I never saw such an unusual occurrence of weather again.



The northern and southern lights are events best observed from the air, where there is less pollution and the line of sight to the horizon is unrestricted. Seldom is the *aurora australis* or southern lights visible from Australian skies as the air routes across the continent are too far north. However, if one is lucky and flying perhaps across to Christchurch in New Zealand, far off to the south the lights may make an appearance, faintly glowing and pulsating in the dark sky.

In 1981, during a period of industrial turmoil many of my company's services from Sydney to destinations in Europe had been re-routed to cross the Pacific instead of flying over Asia; as a result, here I was over Canada instead of being somewhere over the middle of India. I was en-route from San Francisco to Amsterdam and to take advantage of the high latitude westerly jet streams,

after departure the flight headed north-eastward towards the top of Hudson Bay, then on a more easterly track close

“ To see it, the conditions have to be just right, the distant horizon clear of cloud and the observer wide awake and looking at the correct spot - not always easy after a long night of flying - to judge exactly when and where it would appear. ”

to the Arctic Circle before turning towards Scotland and on to our destination. During the hours of darkness, the *aurora borealis*, the northern lights, was at its best, the colour on the horizon glowing in green, yellow and blue hues with fingers of light twirling and flickering high into the sky. Sometimes the flickers gave way to whole sheets of a single colour lazily floating across from left to right and back again. None of my crew had ever seen such a magnificent display. That wasn't the only spectacular sight that night, for as dawn broke the overcast cloud beneath us cleared as the west coast of Greenland came into view.



Below the sea was covered in broken pack-ice and small icebergs, their surfaces glinting golden in the rays of the early morning sun. Inland from the coast the Greenland ice sheet stretched as far as the eye could see, one vast area of snow, the second largest snow-mass in the world.

Have you ever seen St Elmo's Fire, that visual display of plasma generated when an electrical field surrounding air molecules causes them to glow? It can be artificially demonstrated in glass plasma balls, filled with a special gas, which are often displayed in science museums or technology exhibitions. In an aircraft at high altitude and in cloud the visual effect is similar, but much more impressive. The first signs of St Elmo may appear as discharges of electricity emanating from the base of the

external windscreen wipers. These discharges then arc across and strike the corners of the front windscreens, before zigzagging in a random crazy fashion across the whole surface. At times the display could be quite intense.

This appearance of plasma is frequently accompanied by an eerie bluish light projecting forward from the nose of the aircraft, and a glance out of the side windows may show the rim of the engine nacelles glowing in a luminous light. The first indication that St Elmo is around usually has the crew fully alert for the 'fire' isn't always as peaceful and benign as it may appear. It could be a portent of things to come for at any moment the aircraft could be zapped by lightning, which isn't much fun at all.

Have you seen or heard of the 'green flash'? It's another of nature's phenomena that is rare to catch sight of. It is an instantaneous flash of light, lasting only milliseconds that can occur as the last of the sun dips below the horizon in the evening or when it first appears at sunrise. It is caused as the sun's rays pass through the atmosphere, which acts as a prism sending a green ray of light streaking skywards. To see it, the conditions have to be just right, the distant horizon clear of cloud and the observer wide awake and looking at the correct spot - not always easy after a long night of flying - to judge exactly when and where it would appear. I think that on the many occasions I sat staring at a brightening horizon, waiting for that moment to arrive, I was lucky in seeing the flash twice.



It is also what can be seen on and beneath the sea that can be so awe-inspiring. Many years ago, again during my Navy days, I was at 2000ft off the coast of Oman when I became aware that ahead of me, stretching about 3 to 4nms on either side, the surface appeared to be churning and boiling as countless pods of dolphins dived and breached the surface. It was impossible to estimate how many animals there were, but the number must have been in the thousands. Some weeks later I flew overhead a pod of large whales as they swam just below the surface. From the height I was at they could have been mistaken for small submarines. And there was the occasion over the warm seas off Sri Lanka when I witnessed a school of large manta rays as they swam out through shallow entrance of Tricomalee Harbour, perhaps heading off across the Indian Ocean to the annual gathering at Ningaloo Reef off Western Australia.

Water spouts, plasma, northern lights, pack-ice, living creatures in the sea are just a few of the many wonders of nature that I have been privileged to witness. So perhaps you can understand why a pilot's seat up-front in the pointy end of an aircraft *really is* the best seat in the house.



WHOLE HEARTED LIVING

written by Richard White

There’s an image I really love; when I see it or think about it, I’m pulled up short. It’s like the experience of walking through an art gallery, picture after picture on the walls, when one of them seems to leap out, grab you by the throat or the heart, and hang on, forever.

My image is a photo of a baby crawling down a dusty bush track; there’s a wide-mouthed look of delight on her face. I can’t forget it.

We speak of ‘belly laughs’ and ‘full throated chuckles’ as we try to describe spontaneous and whole-hearted enjoyment. These moments of delight or humour seem to burst forth from a deeper part of ourselves. Restraint and propriety fall away. In my photo of the small child, there’s a slightly mischievous abandon to the dust of the track and hands and knees rejoicing in dirt and wildness.

“ I’m sure I am not alone;
there’s a child in all of us
who recognizes fun and
life when we see it ... ”

To be alive like a child again! Josie, the child in the photo, awakens in me that feeling. I’m sure I am not alone; there’s a child in all of us who recognizes fun and life when we see it; who comes alive, even for a moment, and longs and longs for this way of living and being.

I am reminded of the life and poems of the Australian poet, Francis Webb. I have written about Francis before; I keep going back to his poems and his life, like the image of Josie.

Francis Webb was a difficult man and so was much of his poetry. He was difficult in and for himself, suffering for a good part of his life from a debilitating mental illness. However, this illness and suffering did not destroy that child-like spirit; it deepened and sharpened his longing for freedom and opened his eyes to the in-breaking of beauty, often in the darkest and most surprising places.

There’s a poem of Webb’s that is a favourite of mine, ‘Old Timer’, about a long-time resident in a psychiatric ward, where Webb himself was a patient. The description of life in the mental hospital has a familiar ring.

The poem begins with how the windows of the ward serve a sinister purpose; instead of letting the light in, the small, high windows restrict and limit the light and the outside world. I suspect cold and dark winters contributed to this sense of greyness and gloom. When this mood descends or envelops us, it is as if an inner voice is giving instructions –

Checkmate the sun, the cloud, the burning,
the raining,

Let deferential stars peep in one by one:

Sit, feed, sleep, have done . . .

Cut out the world, the seasons, the sources of delight; just go through the motions of living, ‘sit, feed, sleep, have done . . .’

The poet has the gift to capture the voice and the mood. It is an extreme situation he describes so starkly, but it is an all too human situation. Grief and sadness, depression and loneliness can conjure up these voices, negative and destructive. The unhappiness that can creep into our lives unbidden and often unnoticed can have the same effect; it eats away at our soul, narrows and clouds our life and we can find ourselves settling for the least common denominator – we survive and ‘let nothing start/ Old rages stirring in the dying heart’. But, in Webb’s case, there was one who stirred his lonely, greyish mood, the Old Timer.

We know little about this long-time fellow patient. His monotonous, nostalgic mutterings got under our poet’s skin. The ramblings about –

. . . children who loved him, Bathurst, Orange,
of green

Neighbourlinesses . . .

Then, there was his persistent cadging of tobacco, a life-blood, a release, a comfort. This old man waited patiently, strategically on Webb’s fateful, daily routines, always there, always asking, always in need.

Webb describes an intolerable situation. However, it is not so unfamiliar. The longing for peace, of sorts, even a dull, repetitious sort of living, is preferable to the heart-pain of loss and disappointment.

Busyness and distraction and all the projects and plans that occupy our lives can mask the singer’s question: ‘Is that all there is?’ Then, the threat to our preoccupation gets under our guard, someone whose neediness, blatant and unadorned, reveals the pain we have been trying so hard to hide. For Webb, an old man with tobacco-blackened teeth and a pipe clamped between them, was the most unlikely saviour.

. . . an ancient iron of unrest

Melted before his hopeful word of address.

Christ, how I melted! For healing and faith were ripe

As Bathurst opening the gigantic West

Or Orange golden as the breast.

‘Christ, how I melted! . . .’ It’s both an exclamation and a prayer, this outburst from the poet. The early part of the poem is about resistance and denial, a cold concentration on lifelessness. This was Webb’s solution to pain, to become unfeeling.

Maybe this goes some way to explaining the illness that plagued him all his life; Webb loved life passionately; was blessed with a fine sensibility and appreciation of music, art and the magic of words.

There is no solution to our sadness or our sickness except whole-heartedness. The baby on the bush track and the old man with his memories can trigger this truth, can ‘stir old rages in the dying heart’.



The artist in all of us is that part that is sensitive, caught up, held or transfixed by something or someone who is beautiful. For artists like Francis Webb that sensitivity is

“ The baby on the bush track and the old man with his memories can trigger this truth, can ‘stir old rages in the dying heart’.

”

highly tuned; for them everything and everyone is beautiful, unique and precious. The defences Webb wrote about at the beginning of ‘Old Timer’ – ‘checkmate the sun, the cloud, the burning, the raining . . .’ – do not work, nor do distractions, ambition, success or avoidance.

I have only been to Orange a couple of times, but Francis was a patient in the psychiatric hospital there. I’ve seen Mt Canobolas, just outside Orange, and know the story of it being the breast of a reclining woman. And, ‘Bathurst opening to the gigantic West’ reminds me of driving in the central west of New South Wales, coming over a ridge or through a cutting and seeing the plains stretching for miles, green with crops in the Winter and Spring and the straw-brown haze of Summers. These images for Francis Webb were for him the baby crawling down the bush track, a mind and heart stopping moment, images that transformed and enlivened. The mysterious thing is that the prompt for this remembering was an Old Timer; the sad, meandering, closely held memories of this old man, his neediness and his confusion, broke through Francis’ own sad meandering and ‘Christ how he melted’ and beauty broke in and the greyness gave way to ‘ . . . Bathurst opening to the gigantic West, or Orange golden as the breast . . .’

Celebrate the Memories of a Lifetime

Northern Suburbs Memorial Gardens and Skyline Function Centre, North Ryde



Chapels of Northern Suburbs Memorial Gardens

- Choice of 4 art deco heritage chapels
- Choice of 3 after funeral family meeting lounges
- Latest digital technology in chapels and lounges
- Concierge service
- Café

- Generous parking
- Visit Gardens daily 6.00am to 6.00pm and 6.00am to 8.00pm during daylight savings
- Visit Gardens office 8.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday and 9.00am to 4.00pm Saturday and Sunday



Visit the new My Memorial website for help with your memorialisation options.



Skyline Function Centre (Internal)



Skyline Function Centre (External)



NORTHERN SUBURBS
MEMORIAL GARDENS
AND CREMATORIUM



Collage Alphabet | created by Erica Greenop

AN AFTERNOON WITH LOLA

written by Erica Greenop

Lola is 10. We are doing alphabet sentences at the dining table, the sort of sentences where the first word begins with A, the second B, and so on to the end of the alphabet, then we begin with A again and a kind of story emerges. We write until we get stuck, and at that point we pass our piece of writing to the other person to continue. I tell Lola this is called *'sharing our collective genius.'* She likes that. We are allowed to refer to the Thesaurus to pick a random word when all else fails. And when we get really stuck we read out what we have written and then begin a new story.

We discover, as we go along, that some difficult letters turn out to be full of un-thought-of potential. 'J' for example. *'Jumping.'* *'Jellybeans.'* We find that if we include in our string of words a loose combination of verby words, and nouns proper and improper, adjectives, and adverbs, and plop in commas or full stops or exclamation marks every now and then, our strings turn into what sound like proper

sentences, even if they don't make sense. We decide it is a bit like the man on television talking about the financial market, you know, you listen to what he is saying and you haven't got any idea what he is talking about. Then we decide we can cheat a bit with the x letter. And the zed. And on other occasions, where cheating enhances the creative process. Then we discover we can make little

sentences that actually make sense and have an exciting element of serious nonsense about them. An example from the J, K, L M, N, O, P bit of the alphabet is this – "Jumping Kippers! Lordylord! My New Oven Pinged!" I created that brilliant piece of literary wisdom. Then we realise the start of our alphabet string gives us the idea of what might follow - these A B C words for example: "All Before Cornflakes." That was Lola's.

Purple Quite Revolting, Slipping Together Under Violet, Whooshing X-citedly. Yellow, Zooming Apparently, By Coming Down Evenly" etc etc. By the time we get to Z for the second time and begin again at A, Lola has run out of the niceties of grammar, and writes this: "Afterall, brilliant craons dimented evil frogs, gifted, hulariouse, idiotic, jump, kill lead, melted nymirislly." (Commas added by me. Spelling original by Lola.)

“ Then Lola suggests instead of random ideas we give ourselves a topic. ”

Then we thought we could use dialogue. This example starts with A and goes through to L – "Agonising," Bleated Cathy. "Delightful," Echoed Fran. "Gorgeous," Harry Interrupted. "Jellybeans," Kapitulated Lola. We cheat on the kapitulated. Kapitulated with a 'K' looks mysterious somehow. Sounds the same but looks exotic. A little bit Russian folk-dance-ish. Then Lola suggests instead of random ideas we give ourselves a topic. We decide on the theme of melting wax crayons, which we had been doing yesterday. So we combine our thoughts about melting wax crayons and watching them dribble down the canvas and telling the words of the story in alphabetical order: "Amazingly, Blue Can Dribble Endlessly Flowing. Green Has Ideas, Jumping, Keeping Lime Mingling Near Orange,

Pure Light
collection

Specialists in Funeral Stationery
Design and Printing

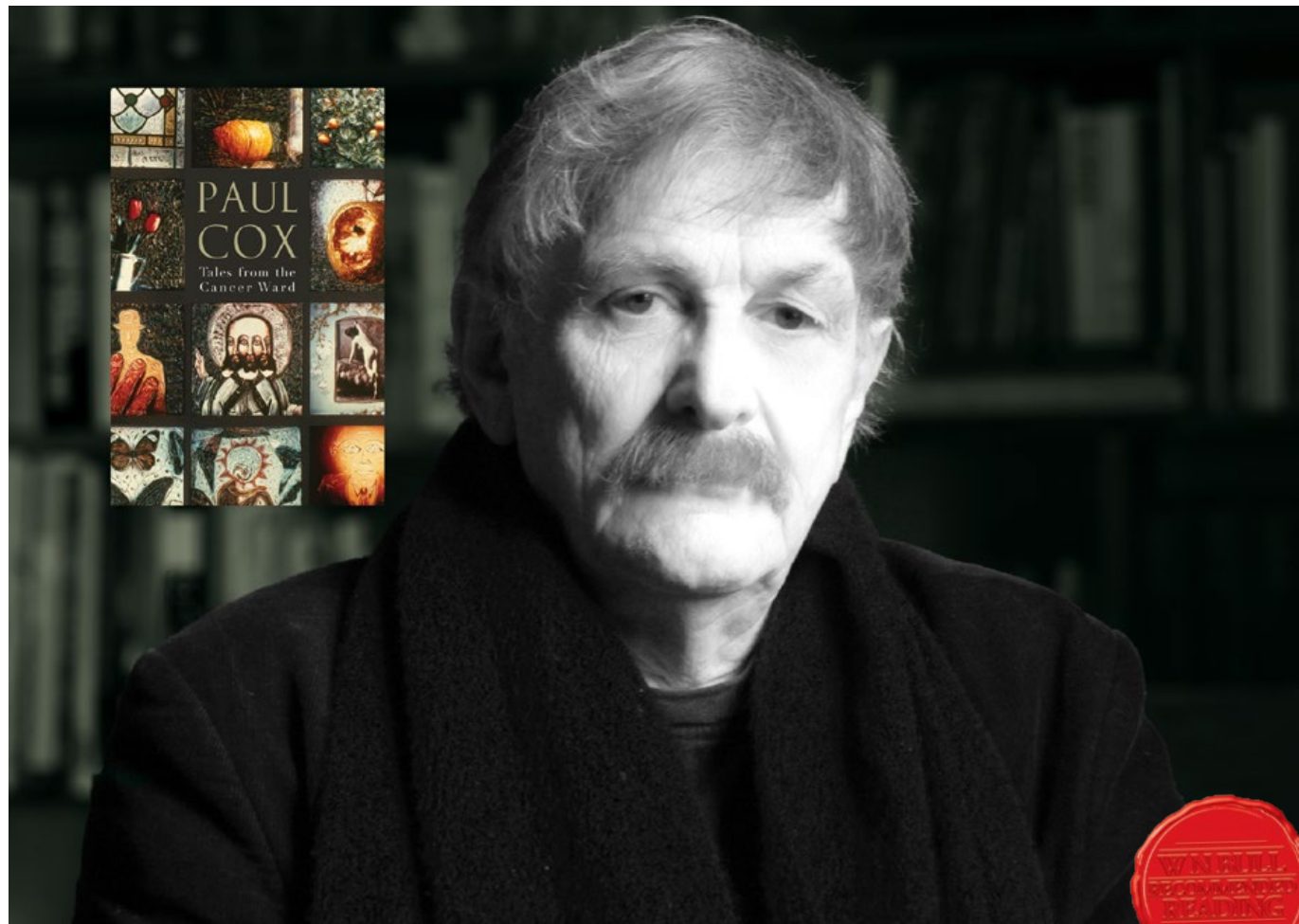
**Order of Service Booklets
Return Thanks and Memorial Cards**

Natalie and Cheryl offer a
personalised service to make this
difficult time a little easier for the family.

We will come to the family home to
assist with the order of service booklets
or memorial cards for the funeral.
We can also offer this assistance via email.

For convenience, we personally
deliver to the funeral director.

8814 7896 or 0431 360 404
purelight@bigpond.com



TALES FROM THE CANCER WARD BY PAUL COX

Reviewed by Richard White

This is the second time I have begun this book; it has also been on my shelf for some time, unread, waiting. I picked it up, a bargain, probably remaindered, a bit like many of Paul Cox's films – personal, truthful and uncompromising.

That's the word, 'uncompromising'. Paul Cox refused to pander to the commercial movie world or audiences craving excitement or sentiment. In this book, too, the legacy of his painful and solitary journey through cancer and treatment, there's an unflinching honesty.

This is a hellish journey, disrupting and disruptive, and the poet in Cox finds solace in Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, not in the hopes or the sympathy of family and friends. It is not solace he wants; it is reality, stark and unblinking, like the stars over his farmhouse in France at night, sharp and

faithful and beautiful.

In reading his story slowly, lingering and languishing, and hoping this companion-like reading will allow his life's work and vision to sink in. For, his dying seems so consonant with his life and work – a dedication to the ordinary, the inconsequential and the infinitely wonderful, whether Vincent Van Gogh or St Damien of Molokai, both subjects of his movies and his meditations.

Paul had no interest in success or money; he had little money for most of his life; was a public patient in his illness

and took waiting lists and a succession of doctors as the price to pay for his belief that universal health care was a right not a privilege to be paid for. The documenting of medical procedures, the wry and acute observations, are like the stuff of another film.

The hospital staff must have found his manner, though courteous, grateful and cooperative, somewhat weird, with him, and maybe some of the morphine, doing much of the talking. For instance, the dietician, a sweet, caring young lady, seemed enchanted as Cox presented her with a long, rambling monologue on truth, love and the universe. (From the Introduction by friend and journalist, John Larkin)

That's what this book is, a rambling meditation on 'truth, love and the universe'. It is also a sort of 'last will and testament', a gathering together of a life's legacy, flotsam and jetsam and treasures of a thoroughly lived life.

“ ...beauty in human life, is condensed in these twelve months of serious illness. ”

No wonder Paul Cox's films for the most part appealed to a select audience. He was an intense man, quixotic figure . . .

Death was your companion. You imagined the white light at the edge of the void. And you had your old corduroy jacket and your ridiculously long scarf and you and I looked at each other and smiled – philosophically, perhaps, or bemused, at this place in life where we had washed up.

(From the Foreword by the film critic Roger Ebert, himself ill with cancer, at an annual meeting at a cafe in Cannes)

He was indifferent, if not hostile, to trends and conformity; more of a John the Baptist type figure, an Old Testament prophet, than a sweetly engaging pilgrim or questor.

Paul would describe himself as an unbeliever and he was critical of institutional religion. However, one of his major works was a film on St Damien of Molokai, the nineteenth century Belgian priest, who worked and died in the island leprosarium in Hawaii. The cancer that threatened Cox's life was in his liver, his only hope, a

transplant. Friends prayed to St Damien on Paul's behalf.

Friends around the world prayed to Father Damien and are convinced that Father Damien saved me. They had such faith. ...In Belgium and Holland, family and friends also went to Father Damien, and in Hawaii there were many who never doubted Damien would save me . . .

There's a lot to be said for prayer – for creating positive energy. I believe in the unknown. I love the mysteries of the universe, am fascinated by all the things I don't know . . .

The miracle that was part of Paul's new liver (he lived another five years after receiving a liver transplant and the writing of this book) and recovery could have been distracting, which is the shadow side of the unexpected and wonderful. The transforming power, the triumph of life and grace, was something that was always there in Paul Cox's life, as it is in the lives of all of us. From the first moments of life, the gift and grace of existence, we enter into the 'unexpected and the wonderful'; the life, and the death, of each of us in a miracle, that is what *Tales from the Cancer Ward* proclaims.

A life time dedication to beauty and human life or better, beauty in human life, is condensed in these twelve months of serious illness. There is a reading back to his life as a child during the Second World War, in Holland, and a celebration of his three year old granddaughter, Arabella, in the present. Friends, movies, convictions and commitments are woven into a testament of living and loving.

. . . Maybe life just is . . .

Everything that happens. Like rainfall or snowfall or ice melting under the sun. It happens.

Birth and death are separated by a leaf falling in autumn, a cloud passing by, a bird in flight, a train hurrying through the night, a smile, a tear, the pain of too much tenderness.

Every day exhibits new facets of truth. New journeys into the unknown, the unknown and beyond. I've been very blessed and given another chance.

All I can say now is –

Life is beautiful.

WHEN 'LITTLE' THINGS LOOM LARGE

STEVEN ROSS REFLECTS ON
20 YEARS WITH WN BULL

written by Richard White



Sometimes one's calling in life is clear from the beginning, and it quickly becomes your life. Other times, you get there after years of doing other things – but the seed can be traced back to something small. 'It's the little things', people say. It is a principle that has rung true throughout Steven Ross's work in the funeral industry, including how it all began.

At the age of 12, Steve recalls, after visiting his grandmother in a Neutral Bay nursing home with his mother and little sister for almost three years, not being allowed by his parents to attend the viewing, or the funeral.

Other things remain vividly etched in his memory from that period in the late sixties, early seventies: feeding his mother's mum Alice, ice-cream with a spoon; the barely adequate, shared dormitory where Alice was accommodated through the final stages of dementia and Parkinson's disease – and over time, the wear and tear on his own mother, who worked full-time and could only visit her mum on weekends.

And just one other, little thing – the small, white, embroidered handkerchief folded in a triangle - his grandmother's favourite - that she always held during family visits on Saturdays, every week.

As a young man, Steven was an exemplary student. Still, despite his excellent grades, he was keen to leave high school after year ten. The only way his father would let him do that, was for him to choose a trade. Nothing really attracted Steve, but he settled for electrician, and was able to secure an apprenticeship. After the first year of the TAFE Electrical Trades Certificate, he was still uncertain about this as a career path; but in the second year his aptitude began to shine.

Steve went on to establish a successful, independent business as an Electrician, busy enough for him to put on another tradesman and one apprentice, servicing a client base all over Sydney. But by the late 1990's, after twenty years in that industry, and twelve as his own boss, there was a niggling sense this was about to change. At 37, the physical nature of Steve's work as an electrician was taking its toll – while the same time, there was a growing

awareness of what would represent meaningful work for him.

When his grandmother died, his mother had never forgotten how Alice had been prepared and presented in the Funeral Directors' chapel. In the clasp of her hands, her white, decorative handkerchief, folded in a triangle had touched his mother deeply. In hearing about this a

“ In these poignant moments, when people are at their most vulnerable, it is connection that counts, in a way that often goes beyond what words can describe. ”

few years after the event, Steve too had been struck by the level of care and sensitivity, and had wondered about who provided services of this calibre.

Who were these people in the funeral industry? What were they like, and how would it feel to do that kind of work for a living? He also recalls a comment from his mother after the funeral of her mother-in-law in 1992, about how impressed she was with the mourning car driver who looked after her on the day: “He couldn't do enough for me”, she'd said.

Also, as part of this same funeral, Steve, now in his early thirties, experienced a viewing first hand. In a funeral home chapel, garbed in her satin finery, his paternal grandmother lay in exquisite repose, white hair groomed and brushed back. It was a powerful moment he would not forget – “Could I do something like that?”

By early 1996, he had reached a crossroads in his career, and realised all those same questions were still unresolved for him. In fact, they'd never gone away. Now they motivated his next step. He made enquiries with several companies in the funeral industry, while managing to sell his business and its good will to one of his own employees.

His big break came in the middle of 1996, when he was appointed as a casual employee with WN Bull Funerals. As it turned out, this would be for only two months. 'Bulls' entered a very busy period, and well-respected owner of the company at that time, one of Sydney's premier Funeral Directors, John Harris, seeing Steve's potential, offered him

a full-time job. This was the opportunity Steve had been seeking, and he embraced it with enthusiasm.

The WN Bull tradition is well-known and respected in the funeral industry. Still operating from its original premises founded in 1892, at 164 King Street, Newtown, it is renowned for excellence – its professional and caring staff, attention to detail, and comprehensive services at all levels in the process of guiding families from the point of loss of a loved one, right through to the funeral and committal, or interment ceremonies.

In December 2016, Steve and WN Bull celebrated his twenty years service to the company and the industry. In that time, he has been privileged to gain extensive knowledge and experience in all facets of the business – first phone call, all hours transfers, arrangements, hearse and mourning car driving, viewings, vigils, conducting funerals and mortuary work.

By 1998, after little more than two years with the company, Steven had become an arranger/conductor, and by 2002 a qualified embalmer, responsible for countless viewings, body restoration/reconstructions and talking to viewing families. Add to this his appointment in 2001, as WN Bull's funeral staff supervisor; a position he has held to the present day, and his success story becomes apparent.

The funeral industry is steeped in history, and memories and stories abound. The ones that come quickest to mind for Steve involve connection with people. Of course, every job requires some level of contact with people, but the funeral industry is unique in this respect. Grief and loss mix with rituals of celebration and closure. In these poignant moments, when people are at their most vulnerable, it is connection that counts, in a way that often goes beyond what words can describe. As a profession, it asks something special of its own.

In early July 2017, Steven will leave WN Bull and his work as a Funeral Director. He feels the time has come to move into Aged Care services. All those years ago, his mother's anguish visiting her own mother in a poorly appointed elderly care facility, left a lasting impression. It is a new challenge, but again, one from the heart. For Steven Ross, the same 'calling' beckons, one that began with a simple, white embroidered handkerchief, and now wishes to go full circle.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank WN Bull under John Harris - InvoCare, and my fellow colleagues over the years, especially Patsy Healy who I have worked with closely throughout my service with the company.

WHO IS TO GO?

How do we know who is to go,
Who is to leave this world
Suddenly, unexpectedly or in long pain?
There is no saying who will be with us tomorrow
Or who will be bowed with sorrow.
O, while you are here,
Grasp life with both hands
And pour your passion into living,
For who knows when you or yours
May be snatched away,
Out of the toil and moil,
Out of our present existence.

Marjorie Pizer

Copies of
Marjorie Pizer's books
can be ordered from
Pinchgut Press
67 Diamond Street
AMAROO ACT 2914

Celeste

CATERING

— Est. 1991 —

ORGANISING THE WAKE

Delegate the venue, food and beverage arrangements to Celeste - one of Sydney's trusted Gold Licensed catering companies with 24-years' experience.

No function is too 'small' or too 'large' for us, ranging from catering for small groups to events for thousands of people, such as the Canonisation of St Mary MacKillop.

2-STEPS TO BOOKING A FUNCTION

(Contact Us 24-hours per day, 7-days a week)

- 1. Book a Function Room** - Phone (02) 9889 8455 to book your room and we will email you our Menus & Beverages
- 2. Select your Menu & Beverages** - Phone or email us to confirm your Menu/Beverages and number of Guests

ON-SITE FUNCTION ROOMS

Book a beautiful Function Room with Celeste at:

- Macquarie Park Cemetery
- Rookwood Catholic Cemetery
- Woronora Cemetery
- Liverpool Cemetery
- Frenchs Forest Bushland Cemetery

OFF-SITE CATERING

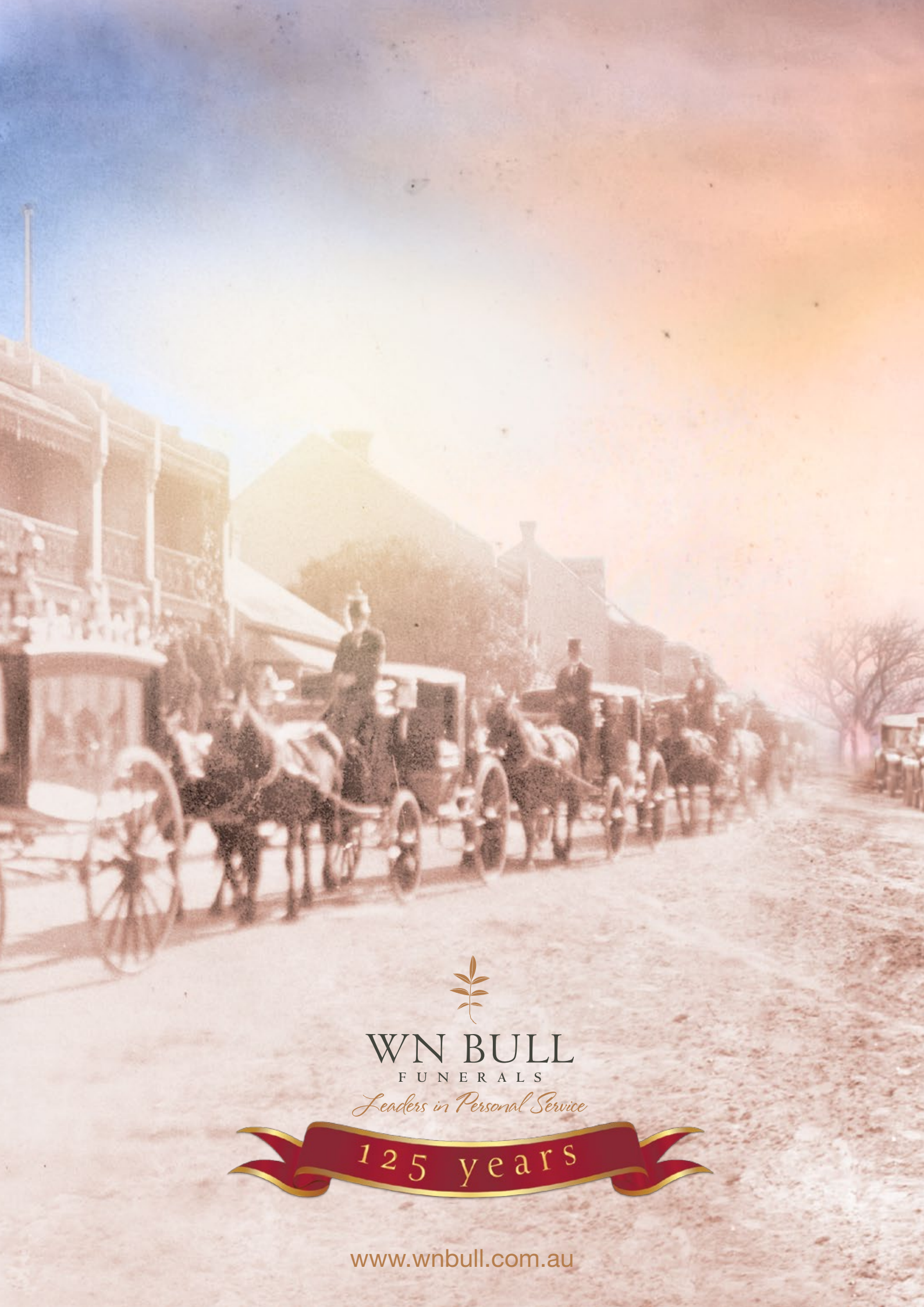
Celeste can also cater for Wakes & Functions at:

- Your Home
- Funeral Homes
- Church Halls
- Local Parks
- Any other venue of your choice



Phone: (02) 9889 8455 Mobile: 0438 126 125
Email: bookings@celestecatering.com.au
Web: www.celestecatering.com.au

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



WN BULL
FUNERALS

Leaders in Personal Service

125 years

www.wnbull.com.au