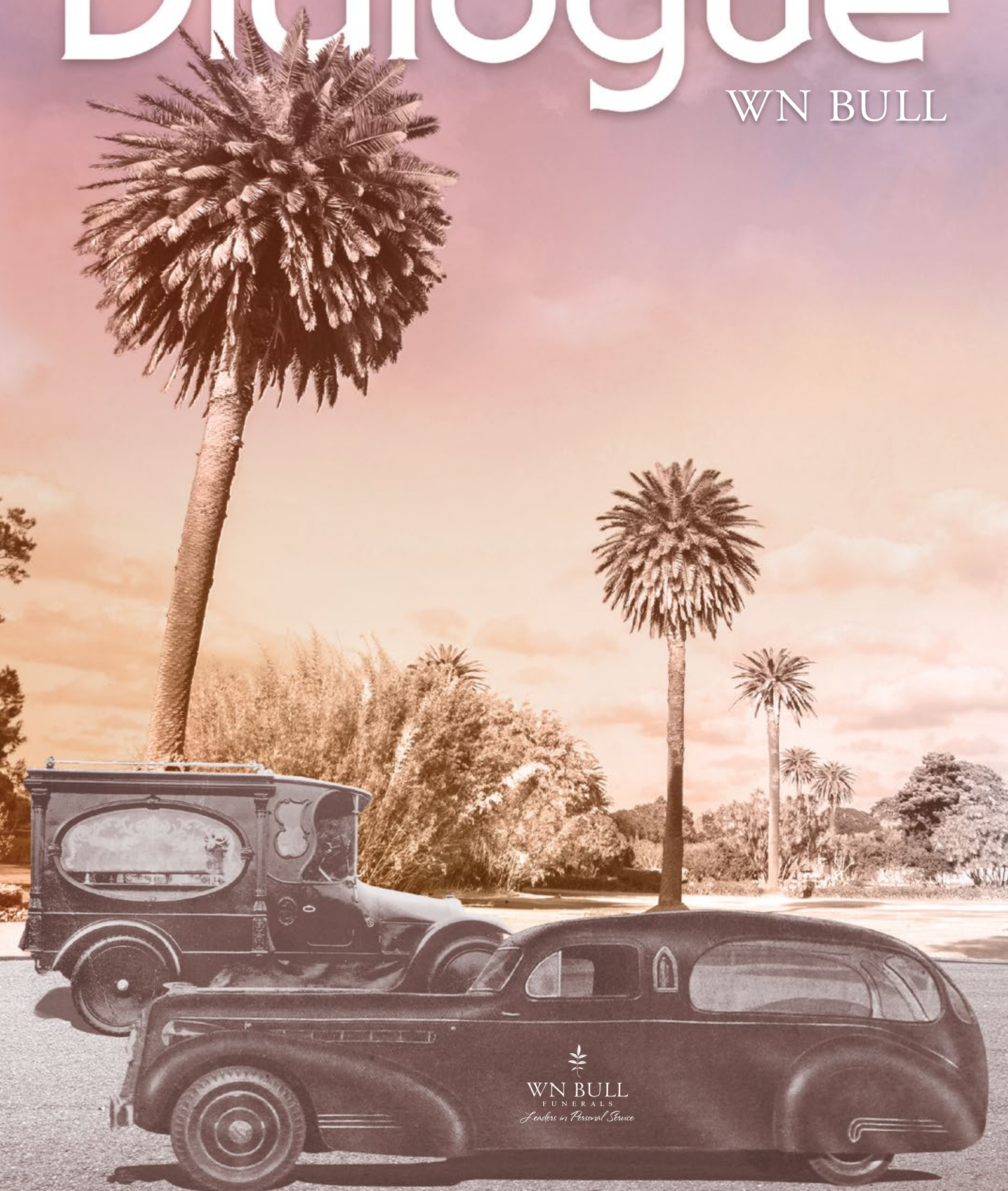


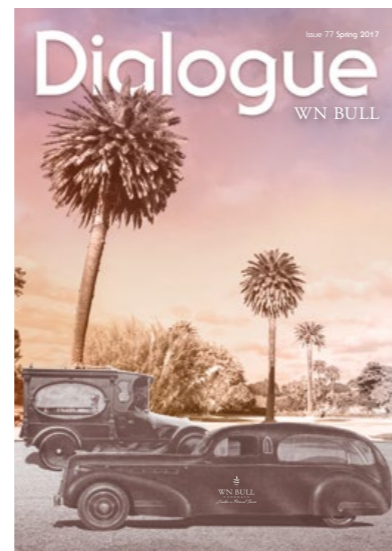
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Dialogue

WN BULL



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FUNERALS
Leaders in Personal Service



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WN Bull Through The Years II

Regulars

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

Features

- 2 125 Years of WN Bull Funerals
- 6 Further Reflections from the Frontline
- 10 When Sadness Comes
- 13 The Story of Marley
- 16 'When Grief Turns to Life ...'
- 18 The Truth

Editorial

Proof reading is one of the editor's last tasks, at least this editor. It comes when I am impatient, wanting to get it all done and off to the printers. Today, for whatever reason, I moved more slowly, relishing stories and words, and grateful for writer's skills; the minutiae, the undotted 'i's' and uncrossed 't's', hummed a cracked but tuneful song.

Spring is in the air. There are promises of new life and largesse, even when we are stuck with the day-to-day, boring or troubling details. Even Sadness can ignite and inspire newness, as Richard White maintains. And, Rob Greenop's kindness has a persevering hopefulness about it, in his gentle encounter with Marley.

Stephen Denham contributes his second article to *Dialogue*, with his piece on 'Further Reflections from the Frontline'. The editor apologises to our readers for failing to attribute to Stephen his article on Steve Ross in the previous edition. Stephen's reflections are an encouragement to look again at the details and practicalities of the funeral experience as well as the emotional impact.

We continue to celebrate WN Bull Funerals' 125 years of service to the people of Sydney. The sweep of history fills in a little of the story but more importantly gives a sense of continuity and promise for the future.

Erica Greenop takes the Truth to task in her own inimitable style. Or, better, the Truth prompts a passionate account of the importance of imagination and words in the weaving of magic and wonder, indispensable in the living of a truly human life.

Both William Edmunds and William Lynch are writing about hope. For William Edmunds, nature and poetry are the inspiration and focus for his reflections; it was his own experience of illness that drew out the best from William Lynch in Recommended Reading.

Marjorie Pizer continues to bless this edition with her 'Winds of Change' and plea that these inevitable and countless transformations 'treat us gently'.

Patsy Healy and all of us at WN Bull Funerals wish you a hope-filled and inspiring Spring.



Richard White



125 YEARS OF WN BULL FUNERALS

written by Richard White

Celebrating a mile stone is one thing; taking the past glories into the future is another. William and Mary Bull began their funeral company in 1892. William was descended from a member of the New South Wales Corps who had journeyed to Australia as part of the protective troop guarding political prisoners. Mary was from Irish Catholic stock, come to the New World for a new life.

The funeral company they created was closely associated with the Catholic Church. ‘To provide a reverent and dignified Catholic funeral’ was the goal; the respectful burial of every person in the community, rich or poor, was the taken-for-granted consequence of this aim. While William Nugent’s name was the signature of the company, the couple’s grandchildren recall that Mary was the practical and driving force. Father Patrick Corbett

C.Ss.R, a grandson of William and Mary, son of their daughter, Kathleen, noted
Certainly my grandmother seemed to be the business mind behind it all. My grandfather used to work for another funeral director, then he went out on his own at her instigation. She was the driving force behind all that.

The late Father Edmund Barry, son of Gladys Bull, remembers ‘Ma Bull’ as a genuine matriarch,
In my memory, whenever she went out she was always in black clothes, with black lace gloves, a hat and a walking cane. She was a very regal person. Pa was a much gentler, warm-hearted sort of guy. They called him ‘Billy Bull’.

“ The first motorised hearse in Sydney was operated by WN Bull in 1914 and in 1936 ‘WN Bull Funerals acquired a beautifully designed Rolls Royce hearse, specially equipped to meet Catholic requirements, the finest in Australia’, as one newspaper reported. ”

When William Bull died, his funeral was a tribute to his warmth and generosity. As well as family and friends, there were thirteen funeral companies represented, the names of some of which are still familiar – Wood, Coffill and Co, T J Andrews, Joseph Medcalf, Charles Kinsela, W. Carter . . . Along with the identification with the Catholic community, WN Bull Funerals gained a reputation for development and innovation in the funeral industry. The first motorised hearse in Sydney was operated by WN Bull in 1914 and in 1936 ‘WN Bull Funerals acquired a beautifully designed Rolls Royce hearse, specially equipped to meet Catholic requirements, the finest in Australia’, as one newspaper reported. In December of 1938, WN Bull Funerals was the first company to adopt ‘dignified white uniforms designed for Australian conditions and used by staff in the summer months’. The spirit of the founders persisted after William’s death in 1932 and Mary’s in 1939. In 1942, Mr John Quain assumed management of the company after the death of Gregory Bull, Mary and William’s son. The family continued to maintain an interest in the board of the company into the 1940’s. Personality and inspiration matter in business. John

Harris, with his wife, Agnes, in many ways creative successors of William and Mary, was a firm believer in ‘personality and inspiration’. John loved telling stories about Reg Ansett’s modest beginnings in the Western District of Victoria where his family originated. He would also regale listeners with the history of Sydney Meyer and the personal stamp he put on his business. ‘Visions are caught, not taught’ was one of John’s lines; he caught the vision of William and Mary Bull and carried it forward. When John and Agnes Harris purchased WN Bull Funerals in 1986 there was need for some renewal. John and Agnes had conducted their own funeral business in Wagga Wagga prior to being invited to take over WN Bull. John and Agnes brought to this well known Sydney company the energy and practicality reminiscent of its original founders. John Harris had a long term involvement in the funeral industry having learnt his trade with Tobin Brothers in Melbourne. John had a fund of stories and he spoke with affection of the different Tobin brothers and their contribution to the company. When John and Agnes were leaving Melbourne to begin their business in Wagga, Leo, one of the brothers, took John aside and showed him the company’s top-of-the-range coffin, ‘That’s yours, for when and where you need it’. The coffin accompanied John and Agnes and their family to Wagga and occupied a prominent place in a spare



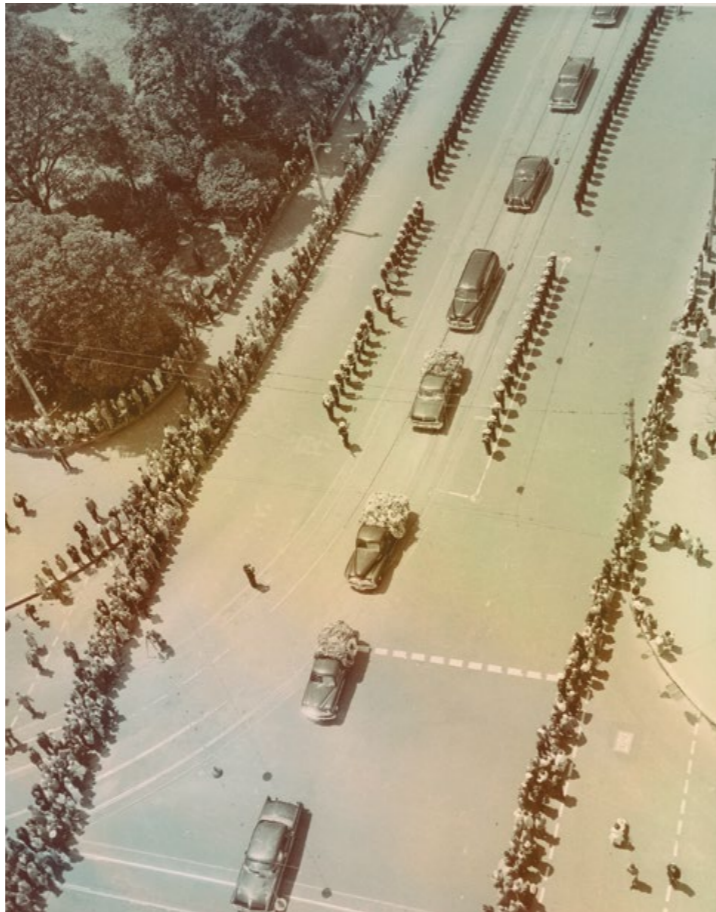
room until required. When the Bishop of Wagga died in 1968, John and Agnes’ funeral company was asked to conduct the funeral for Bishop Francis Henschke; they had the appropriate coffin.

John had a sense of history and a strong feel for style and ceremony. Instinctively, he saw the importance of ritual and symbols and continued the strong Catholic tradition of WN Bull Funerals. However, the reputation of the company spread beyond the Catholic community.

By word of mouth or from attending funerals conducted by WN Bull Funerals, more people came to appreciate the quality of service provided. The company was engaged to arrange the funerals for Sir Roden Cutler, the Governor of New South Wales and for Dr Victor Chang, pioneering heart surgeon. The familiar premises in King Street, Newtown and the new office in Parramatta saw a growing number of people from all walks of life seeking out WN Bull’s services.

Patsy Healy, the present General Manager of WN Bull Funerals, has administered and conducted funerals within the living tradition of William and Mary Bull and John and Agnes Harris. Patsy has her own memories and stories,

(cont’d)





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.

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I remember the many funerals from our chapel at Newtown when the family of the deceased person gathered on the pavement and a stately WN Bull hearse pulled out into the traffic and for a moment the busyness stopped.

I am proud to be part of WN Bull Funerals and to share in this company’s contribution to the ‘life and death of the people of Sydney’.

“ People speak of buildings or businesses that have been an ‘institution’ in the life of the community; such a description could be applied to WN Bull Funerals. ”

I am grateful, too, for all the families I have met and served over my twenty six years with the company.

They are privileged moments ‘when the busyness stops’ and we gather to prepare and remember and celebrate the life of someone who was much loved and

sadly missed. There is a special closeness that comes and I will always treasure this.

I am grateful, too, for all the people I have worked with over the years. That the reputation of WN Bull Funerals has developed is due to the attention, the compassion and untiring work of many people. The tradition of William and Mary lives because our staff are the people they are.

WN Bull Funerals has always had a close association with the Catholic Church. I have worked closely with priests and religious sisters and brothers to conduct funerals for members of religious orders and clergy. I am grateful for the friendships we have formed in our work together and for the encouragement and support my colleagues and I have received.

In 2010, John and Agnes Harris retired and WN Bull Funerals was bought by InvoCare. Patsy Healy has worked closely with InvoCare management to ensure that the vision and service of 125 years will endure.

People speak of buildings or businesses that have been an ‘institution’ in the life of the community; such a description could be applied to WN Bull Funerals. The role of such institutions in our society is to remind us, with affection and gratitude, of the value and significance of the service they have provided. The celebration of 125 years of WN Bull Funerals is an expression of this ‘affection and gratitude’.



FURTHER REFLECTIONS FROM THE FRONTLINE

written by Stephen Denham

When one of WN Bull's favourite sons, Steve Ross, talked to me about his twenty years at the forefront of the company's services to people experiencing loss and grief, and how he came to work in the funeral industry, I was completely absorbed. And when he asked me to write his story for publication in Dialogue magazine, the privilege wasn't lost on me. As the result of those discussions, the piece 'When Little Things Loom Large' appeared in the Winter Edition.

Speaking to Richard White recently about that article, we realised there was more to say. I am a firm believer in the value of the 'team', in all spheres of life and work. Of course, it is well known that many hands can make light work, as we say, but there's a deeper aspect. For me, being part of the WN Bull funeral crew, and spending close to four years at the frontline of funerals conducted all over Sydney was a growth experience on different levels, and one worth sharing.

Funeral staff supervisor and my immediate team leader, Steve Ross, set a high mark in how to go about this all-important line of work. When Steve retired from the funeral industry in July 2017, his words to all of us at his farewell, certainly struck a deep chord. He said that when he joined WN Bull in 1996, leaving his successful electrical contracting business at the time, he had brought with him his 'tools of the trade'. These he aptly described as, 'a good work ethic, dedication and commitment to the job at hand'.

Having worked closely with Steve at WN Bull, I saw firsthand that alongside all the practical and technical skills indispensable to the funeral trade, there are personal qualities that probably cannot be taught, yet for the client can mark the difference between the ordinary and the exceptional. It goes without saying, that this 'toolkit' of attributes, that Steve brought with him when he started at 'Bulls', were not only essential to making a real difference for families, but personal capacities that evolved and deepened over his two decades of service.

In my own working life prior to employment in the funeral industry, I'd spent many years in office jobs, including the public service, small business and the corporate world. I'd tried quite a few different occupations. In 2013, I left another desk-bound job, with no real idea about what I wanted to do; guided only by the renewed conviction I was a 'people person' who needed to work in 'human services'.

Steve Ross's story resonated with me. I too had begun my career with a solid traineeship. Just out of school, learning to become a draughtsman with one of the top structural engineering firms in Sydney, I showed enough potential to have good prospects in that field.

But the world of engineering was not for me, and I set my sights on the humanities. Five years later I emerged from university with a psychology degree; but this did

“ ... this unrelenting, daily exposure to death and grief may affect its dedicated staff, particularly if their own needs are not recognised or addressed in some way. ”

not easily lead to employment. Competition for the few psychologist jobs available was intense, so I took the line of least resistance. As a graduate administrative trainee in the NSW Public Service, I had no idea at the time that I had just jumped on a seemingly endless treadmill in search of whatever it was I was meant to do with my life.

More recently, after another stint of several years at the computer interface, I began to look for a job based on face-to-face engagement with people. I recall one day gazing out across my workplace at that time, which consisted of



hundreds of workstations in a vast grid of identical rows. This was 2012, but it could have been 1962 when pop artist Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* stunned the art world, different images with the same visual impact of de-personalisation.

In the Summer edition of *Dialogue* (Issue 74, 2016) in his story, "On the Frontline – The Funeral Staff", Richard White describes one of his group sessions with the WN Bull crew, exploring the more personal side of being a funeral professional, away from the public eye, the lights and ceremony, the focus on ritual, symbol and attentiveness to everyone present at the church, chapel or graveside.

As a part of life, death generates an unceasing demand for funeral services. Richard raises the question of how this unrelenting, daily exposure to death and grief may affect its dedicated staff, particularly if their own needs are not recognised or addressed in some way. It may lead to defensiveness, detachment, an 'out-of-sort-ness' - not to mention, "an inability to express or speak of this confusion".

Along with Richard, I feel it is important to acknowledge that funeral staff are not invulnerable; and that there can be a place for vulnerability within professionalism, even on the job. Some of the most moving experiences at funerals occur outside the church or chapel after completion of the Mass or service, just before the coffin is fully placed inside the hearse, prior to departure for the cemetery or crematorium. At this point, the priest or celebrant may invite family and friends to come forward to touch the head of the casket, sprinkle holy water, or to say a prayer or farewell.

During this parting ritual, we funeral staff, standing at the raised rear door of the hearse, holding the coffin within reach of mourners, have a direct view of the faces of the deceased's family and friends. As tears flow, and people embrace and support each other, you may feel similar and

compatible emotions. In this special once-only moment, it is quite possible to shed a tear, alongside people you do not personally know, for someone you never met or knew. In this moment of loss, the boundaries come down – between staff and client, among family members, even the crew – and we experience a shared humanity.

In Richard's discussion with WN Bull's funeral crew about their on-the-job experiences, the importance of 'presence' in the role was mentioned. By maintaining this important aspect of being there for a family on the day of their loved one's funeral, staff vulnerabilities can be expressed, even valued, amidst the inevitable contingencies that arise. Vulnerability can be a strength, one of the vital 'tools of the trade'. Again, it comes back to what Richard refers to as the need to allow for the conversation, "... defensiveness leads to isolation, conversation creates community".

The poet John Donne expresses this common denominator in the area of life and loss, "... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for me". This is a deep reflection on what we ordinarily might call 'camaraderie' which, in funerals, involves much more than just 'going through the motions'. We are moved by the plight of others because, at the most fundamental level, we are all connected.



For me, the little thing that years later, suddenly 'loomed large' when I too stood at the career crossroads, was linked to my family's loss of my brother in 2010. Over twelve years, he beat bowel cancer - but the consequences of his treatment were finally too much for his body. The representative from the funeral home we engaged, who

“ But the funeral industry goes about its work discreetly and quietly. The measure of funeral professionals is their ability to be 'invisible'. ”

was the first point of contact with my family, left an impression that lingered – care and sensitivity, blended with professionalism. Like Steven Ross, the question left in the back of my mind, unspoken, and not something I could act on at that time was, "Is that something I could do?"

Today's technologically driven world of accelerating change is impacting industry, corporate and business operations. Many traditional lines of employment and the careers they once offered have either been made redundant, or revised to incorporate new 'superior' processes and infrastructure. The way we do things has changed, and is forever changing. More and more, information and services are becoming accessible over the airwaves, seamlessly and invisibly, using the latest devices.

At first glance, funerals may present as one of the more resilient traditions when it comes to technological advance. The day when the transfer of a deceased person to the care and custody of a funeral home and its premises might happen at the push of a button may seem far-fetched, or futuristic. However, this is not to say that funeral services today, cannot utilise ways of freeing up time and energy to focus on the most important aspect of its work - the interrelationship of human beings, face to face, heart to heart.

On the one hand, occupational health and safety awareness can lead to improved infrastructure to minimise the risk of injury and fatigue to employees – more advanced, ergonomically improved equipment for transport, weight-bearing, storage and so on. Staff training in correct posture, lifting, carrying and are all worthwhile developments in today's workplace. Also, as in other industries, there are new technologies emerging which facilitate the access, transmission and confirmation of information critical to

servicing families at every stage and point of contact, ensuring that everything runs smoothly and effectively up to and including the day of the funeral.

None of these developments necessarily pose a threat to an industry proud of its tradition of compassionate, personal and professional funeral services. After all, it is people who carry on the traditions of great funeral homes. In his anniversary piece, "125 years of WN Bull Funerals – The cultural significance of funerals" (*Dialogue*, Issue 76, Winter 2017), Richard describes the period of John and Agnes Harris's ownership of WN Bull Funerals – 1986-2010 - as an example of how an understanding of past and present can be aligned, to take a great tradition into the future. Based on John's appreciation of the symbolic significance of funeral, ritual and everything else associated with the process, Richard observes, "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".

With the greater demands of an ageing and increasing population, and today's changing expectations of what service industries can or should deliver, it is worth exploring how funeral staff can benefit from what technology can offer. Even here, we can learn from history. No one would seriously suggest going back to horse-driven carriages over motorised hearses, or manual-only operations in funeral homes without hydraulic lifting devices.

But the question remains of how to embrace change and transition, without losing the personal touch. Adopting new methods and streamlining processes can be time-consuming in itself, especially while flaws are identified and rectified. The funeral home tradition is grounded in the personal qualities, experience and skills of its own people in looking after its client families. But there is also the need to understand what employers and employees themselves, as professional service providers, can do to avoid burn-out and achieve longevity in this rewarding, fulfilling career choice.

In the field of psychology, the need for its professionals to regularly undertake one-on-one de-briefing sessions is a given. But the funeral industry goes about its work discreetly and quietly. The measure of funeral professionals is their ability to be 'invisible'. Understandably perhaps, the tendency to 'soldier on' without fuss can be hard to resist, or even something the 'troops' are proud of in a culture that implicitly reinforces this - as 'just part of the job'.

In her 2015 book *Conversations About Death*, Sally Cant offers a wealth of invaluable, practical advice to everyone dealing with death and grief in some way, either professionally or personally. She quotes author C S Lewis, describing the dissociation that can occur when one is experiencing grief as, "... like wearing an 'invisible blanket'. Sally notes how important it is to surround yourself with people who will assist and support you, "This may be formally, informally, socially or professionally. Your

wider community of family and friends will hopefully be there for you when you need them".

At WN Bull Funerals, I experienced a little of what it means to bring your own individual "awe and respect" about death, as Richard White describes it in his Winter Edition article, into the care and support of families suffering the loss of a loved one. As a mourning car driver, and quite often the first and last person on the day of the funeral to have contact with the deceased's family and friends, I came to appreciate the wide spectrum of individual emotional responses to death.

Travelling to and from the funeral or wake, people could be silent or boisterous, moody or flippant, philosophical or sentimental, grief-stricken or happy-go-lucky. It was best to gauge my passengers first - what kind of person or family they were, and what they were feeling - before engaging with them in some way. As always, this was both the challenge and the reward.

You can feel an ambiguity and uncomfortableness that enters this line of work; but when the duty and the mystery are both embraced at the highest level, it is a calling that never smacks of the routine or habitual. No doubt, society still has a way to go to free itself of the taboos and inhibitions that surround the end-of-life conversation, or to even begin to grasp what the poet Kahlil Gibran is trying to express when he says, "And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance".



As a reality of life, it may seem ironic that death should still so often be a no-go zone, a topic to be avoided. And yet this is the challenge facing the funeral industry and one the staff of WN Bull Funerals will encounter and manage on a face-to-face basis every day using their 'tools of the trade' - personal qualities and skills; helping families on this 'frontline' behind the scenes, where absolute certainty meets the unknown.



WHEN SADNESS COMES

written by Richard White

Sadness is so important. I realised this after watching a movie with two of my grandchildren. The film was called ‘Inside Out’ and was an animated treatment of our emotions, or better, Emotions. The animated characters are the ‘inside’, personified emotions in the life of a little girl.

There is a control centre where Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear and Disgust operate the controls in turn. The outer world, the little girl’s joy in her family, her home and school is the context or playground for her emotions; each event or

interaction calls into play the appropriate feeling. In this inner-and-outer world at the beginning of the film, Sadness has no part to play. Sadness is the ‘wet blanket’, the one no one invites to the party. Then, the family moves

from the much-loved home town and school and life, and feelings, become more complicated.

My granddaughter was sitting on the edge of her seat. She is a bright six year old, curious, a reader, with some of the complications that go with being a child. And, she’s too small for the theatre’s seats; she has to sit forward to keep it down.

This forward sitting and total absorption struck me. Could Amelie, my granddaughter, understand what was happening in the movie; more importantly, could she begin to understand what was happening inside her? What was going on in that little person, intent and caught up in this story of another little girl?

As the story unfolded, as stories do, Anger got a look in when the changes in the main character’s life began to bite. The new house was in the city, without the rambling garden and friendly neighbourhood of ‘home’. School was different, too, none of the old friends and the sport she loved. Her world and dreams were falling apart. Pain and Hurt and Disappointment and Anger were taking over the controls of her inner world.

In the confusion and hurt, the little girl in the movie decided to run away, to go back to the home and world she knew. She made her plans, stopped talking to her mum and dad, bought her ticket and made her way to the bus depot. It was at this moment that Sadness came to the rescue.

“ The tears were there but they were warm and alive, no longer bitter and isolating. ”

The losses and grief of moving home had aroused feelings of pain and isolation, but then Sadness emerged and called forth memories and images of connection and love. Memory or re-membering took the little girl back to past happiness and the people and circumstances that were part of this happiness.

As she sat in the bus, waiting to leave her unsuspecting parents, Sadness began to work her magic. The Hurt and the Anger began to lose their grip; Love and Gratitude, Affection and Happiness came back into the picture. The tears were there but they were warm and alive, no longer bitter and isolating. She got off the bus and headed home, to that welcome and familiar embracing that are at the heart of all our home-comings.

What a clever film! Sadness, the ignored and shunned one became the hero. All this may have been lost on

Amelie, sitting there, balanced and absorbed. But, I can see her still as I am writing, a little girl who has also moved house and home for a new life, tossed about by Emotions she has been unable to understand.

That moment in the film has become precious to me and maybe, maybe, it will become precious to my granddaughter. And, it is Sadness that took me back there. There’s a story by J D Salinger that comes to mind when I think of ‘Inside Out’.



‘A Perfect Day for Banana Fish’ is a short story about one of Salinger’s characters, Seymour, who had taken his young nephew to the movies. There was a scary scene and the boy crawled under the seat. Seymour reached down and put his hand on his nephew’s head. Later, he swore there was a scar on his hand from this moment, something he called ‘a scar of blessedness’.

We are used to discussion about psychological scars or traumas; we have all heard about PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This is the condition arising from the persistent and insistent impact of a past shock into our present life and activities. The pain and the fear and the disruption of the past continue to infect and disturb our present. In Salinger’s story there is the suggestion that past happiness, moments of affection and connection, can have a similar, lasting impact.

There can be ‘scars of blessedness’ every bit as powerful as PTSD. This isn’t a question of wishful thinking or of always looking on the bright side. Scars of blessedness have about them that sharp edge, the cutting deep that pierce our defences just as the shocks of terrible loss can do. Scars are the connecting point between our past and our present; because they are ‘of the past’ they inevitably have the feeling of loss about them; they are tinged or protected by Sadness.

That is how Sadness works and how it is. That moment in the theatre with Amelie cannot be repeated. It was there, then, only now recaptured or recovered. It is a moment of affection and preciousness; my granddaughter is growing up and I am growing older. The moment, like everything

“ For, Sadness is the colour and flavour of deep remembering. The moments and the people are not lost; they are preserved, etched into the fabric of our lives. ”

in one's life, slips away and is gone. There is nothing and no one I can hang on to forever . . . unless those moments have left an indelible mark on me, like a scar.

Sadness was and is the hero. For, Sadness is the colour and flavour of deep remembering. The moments and the people are not lost; they are preserved, etched into the fabric of our lives.

What Sadness does is to bring these people and events to life, here and now. We may have buried them, avoided or forgotten them – ‘that was then, childhood crushes or friendships, days of wine and roses’ – all gone, dismissed or dis-remembered. Then, something happens; a thought, an image, the feeling of loss or fleetingness that comes as we age and that feeling rises and those blessed scars claim our attention.

The thing is, we usually don't have to do anything about this Sadness or the people or events it brings to mind. Sadness is a quality of being, a deep, rich part of ourselves. It is as if the narrow, controlling, protective part of ourselves falls away, for a moment or for always, then our lostness, forgotten and forsakennesses, come to the fore.

There may be tears and that special pain that only Sadness brings, but we will be more alive, more grateful and truly blessed.



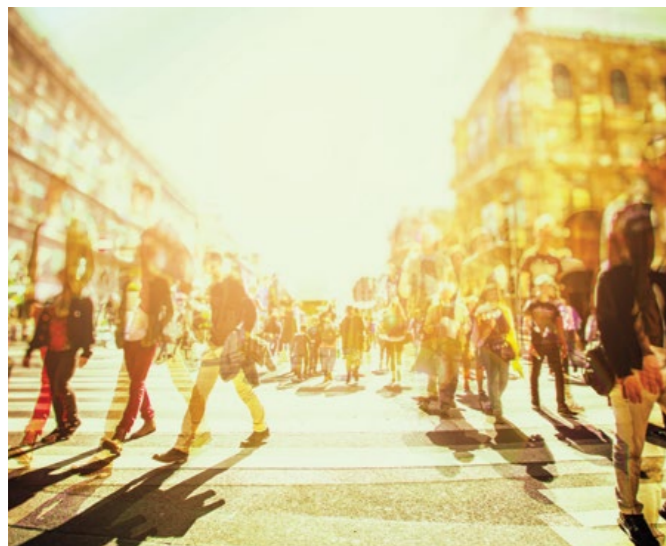
THE STORY OF MARLEY

written by Rob Greenop

As usual on an afternoon at about 3.30 the pavement opposite the station in Grandview Street was noisy with the students from the local private schools, milling around waiting for their buses. It was very crowded – a great social meeting spot at that time of day.

My business was at the printers and on entering I noticed a young woman standing at the end of the counter, facing the back office. Through the glass partition, I could see Jeff, the manager busy with one of his many machines. Shortly

he returned and giving a friendly nod of acknowledgement in my direction he continued serving her. Jeff and I go back some time, as over the years he has printed several books that I have put together.



On hearing the door close behind her the woman had turned in my direction. About twenty-five, maybe thirty, she was plainly dressed with a back-pack on the floor beside her. She looked gentle, no make-up. She carried a white cane. She was blind.

I wondered what on earth she was doing in here. Whatever Jeff was printing I doubted whether she would be able to read it. I never did find out what it was.

He returned to the back office and she moved towards me.

"Hullo" she said, "what's your name, do you live around here?"

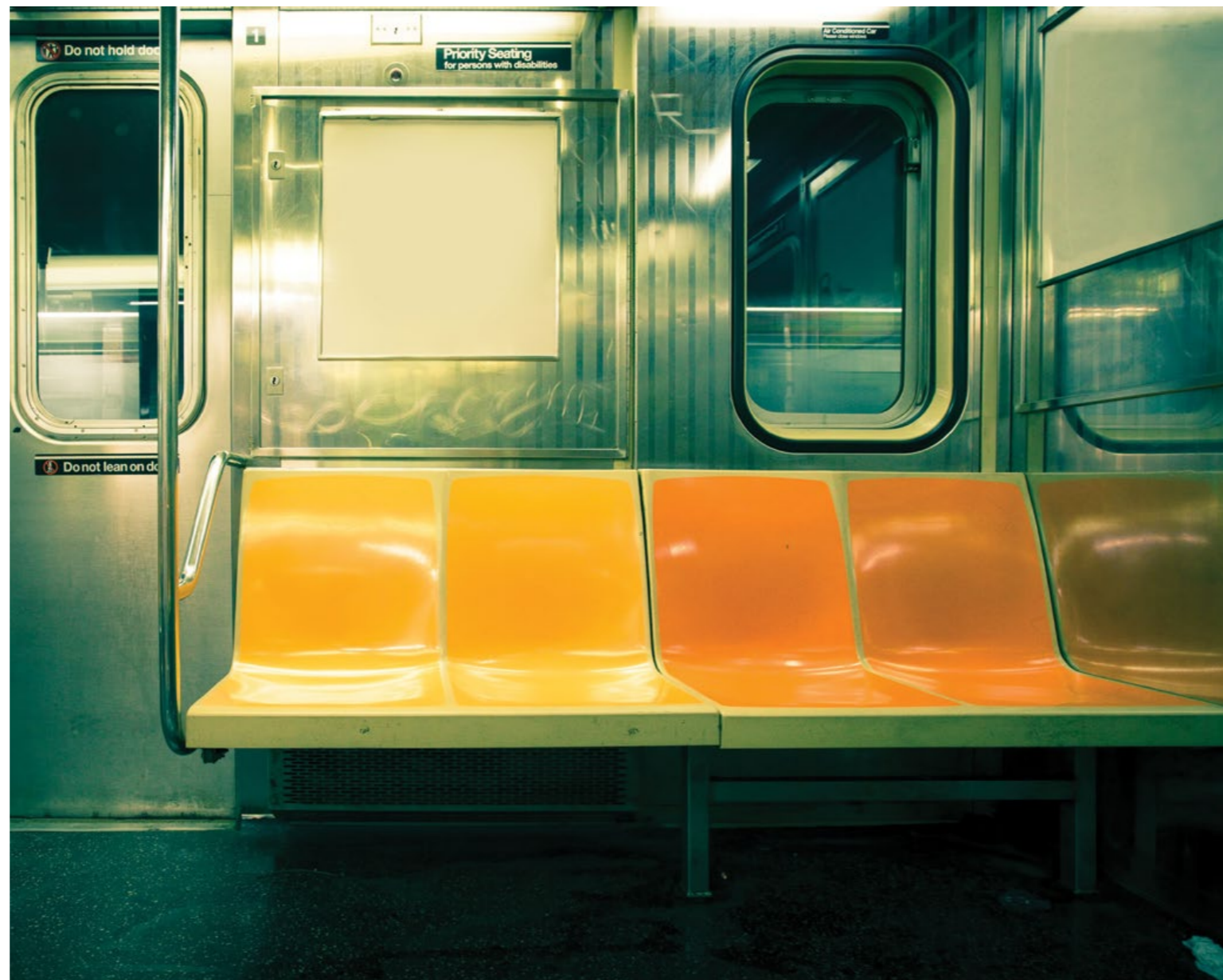
I answered and on hearing my English accent she continued.

"How long have you been in Australia – I'm from New Zealand."

She was quite engaging and began to tell me about herself. In the space of three or four minutes much of the

“She tucked her hand under my elbow and we crossed the road and up the thirty-three steps to the overpass, and then down the twenty-seven onto the busy platform.”

events of the past few days came pouring out. She was over from Auckland, staying with a friend, but today she was on her own. She had been dropped off here in Grandview Street and was now off to the city. Sadly, it appeared her



visit was not going too well. What she was going to do in the city I never did discover.

When the time came for her to go, I saw her out of the office and made sure she was heading for the pedestrian crossing to the station. I wished her luck. Her name was Marley, an unusual name and one that I had never come across before.

My business with Jeff was quickly completed and when outside I could see her slowly making her way, her cane sweeping from side to side as she went. The noise from the young people ahead of her must have been disconcerting. I watched for a few seconds, seeing the difficulty with which she negotiated the hazards of a rubbish bin and a seat by the bus stop. What would she do at the crossing? Would anyone assist her, would anyone care? Nobody seemed to be paying her attention.

I turned and caught up with her and tapped her gently on the shoulder.

"It's Rob, from the printers – we were talking a few minutes ago – can I help you across the road, perhaps to the station – would you like an arm?" I remember many years ago being told never take a blind person by the arm. Always offer them yours.

"Thank you," she replied. "I'm feeling a bit lost – uncertain where to go."

She tucked her hand under my elbow and we crossed the road and up the thirty-three steps to the overpass, and then down the twenty-seven onto the busy platform. There is no lift at Pymble. I took her Opal card from her and scanned it just as a train to the city arrived. Slowly we made our way across to a carriage and after warning her about the step, helped her inside. We were the last to enter.

We stood by the open doors and I looked for a seat in the area by the interconnecting door between carriages, opposite to where stairs go either up or down into the two main compartments. But the train was crowded and all

these seats were taken. Nobody moved or paid us attention. No seat was offered – it was as though we weren't there.

I spoke up in a loud voice. "Would somebody please assist us, this lady – perhaps find her a seat?"

Still nobody moved. An elderly gent about my age seated in the far corner sat upright and glanced around at his fellow travellers. A mother with a son of about ten, two teenagers engrossed in their smart-phones, a businessman in his suit clutching a briefcase, a workman reading his paper, others. I got the impression that Marley and I were an embarrassment, that we were invisible. Suddenly I felt quite angry at the indifference of these people to someone with a disability, a sight impairment. Didn't anyone care?

“I got the impression that Marley and I were an embarrassment, that we were invisible.”

I couldn't abandon her there, not on her own, standing. If I couldn't get her a seat soon, the doors would shut and I would be on the way to Gordon.

I repeated my request louder, more urgently, accusingly. "A seat – please!"

One or two faces looked up and then turned away. Others didn't even move.

It was then that the elderly gent, walking stick in hand stood with difficulty and beckoned us over. Someone standing beside us took Marley's arm and escorted her further into the carriage. I hurriedly got off and, just as the doors were closing behind me, I heard her call goodbye and thank you.

I slowly returned to my car and sat for a while, thinking of that young woman and how I had been able to help, and of the old gent who had given up his seat. At the same time, I felt even more anger towards those on the train, the young, the fit who had turned away with complete disregard for us. Couldn't they read the sign in front of them asking them to give up their seat to another in need?

Marley came into my life and out again in the space of a few minutes. But she left me a lasting impression of gentleness and acceptance and that was what touched me so much.

'WHEN GRIEF TURNS TO LIFE ...'

written by William Edmunds



The other day I was doing some weeding. We still hadn't had much rain, but the heat had yet to hit; there were those hints of Spring, budding and leaves. At the end of a bed of roses, there was a bare patch, interspersed with weeds. We had planted a rose there the previous year, but it had died. All that was left was a grey, lifeless stick and the label: Rose Floribunda, 'Satchmo'.

Then, I looked again. Next to the what-had-been the rose stem, there was a small, bright leafy bud. Could it be that 'Satchmo' was still alive? Could it be that there was life when the dry lifelessness proclaimed 'finito'; fierce Summer and harsh Winter had done their worst and our efforts at watering and nourishing had been in vain? Or, had they?

It is still too early to tell and I am reluctant to dig down a little and see if this brightness is connected to the deadness. I'm watering and weeding and fertilizing. Who knows?

Who would have thought my shrivell'd heart
Could have recover'd greenness?

These are words from George Herbert's poem, 'The Flower'. George Herbert lived in the sixteenth century, a time of great literary ferment, the time of Shakespeare and Milton and the King James Version on the Bible. He was a successful scholar and held distinguished positions at Cambridge University.

George Herbert had 'lived the dream' as they say today. But, he turned his back on all this, was ordained a priest in the Church of England and became an ordinary pastor of the parish of Bemerton, dying of consumption three years later, just before his fortieth birthday.

'Who would have thought my shrivell'd heart ...'

Who, indeed? Who would have thought that 'Satchmo' had any life in him/her? This is a deeply human question and one that we ask, consciously or unconsciously, through all our life, of ourselves and of everyone and everything that seems to wilt and fade and die.

This dying is so 'in your face', as the most recent images from Las Vegas or conflicts in the Middle East or devastation of hurricanes confirm. More importantly, this dying is in our hearts. It has the power to spread and infect and kill or ... to soften and grow and to teach.

Dying is deadly when it insists all is over, there is nothing left and there never will be anything left, or living. This is the thought that seeps and sours our life and our relationships. It is the thought or conviction that colours and distorts our seeing and feeling and thinking. In one of Graham Greene's novels there's a good example of this 'souring'.

A man is in the dock awaiting sentence for some crime or other. He looks around and sees an expression on the judge's face; his spirits fall. What he sees is pity.

Pity is a caricature of the truly human response, compassion. To pity someone is to say, 'it's all over; there

“ Compassion can
flower into something
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isolating reactions. ”

is no hope; you are finished'. It is easy to confuse pity and compassion; in both case our hearts are moved; we can make sympathetic noises even resolve to do something, only we don't.

Compassion, on the other hand, has a similar emotional reaction; we are still moved by the pain or circumstances of someone, even for ourselves. We know what 'shrivell'd' hearts are. Like the flower in Herbert's poem, we know what it is like to 'go quite underground', to feel a terrible hopelessness for someone else or for ourselves. But, there's something or someone that tempers the hopelessness and keeps alive a flicker of life.

'Who would have thought ...?' Wonder! That's what keeps us going, that keeps us hoping and believing. Compassion can flower into something else; there is a companioning part to it; pity and self-pity are distancing and isolating reactions.

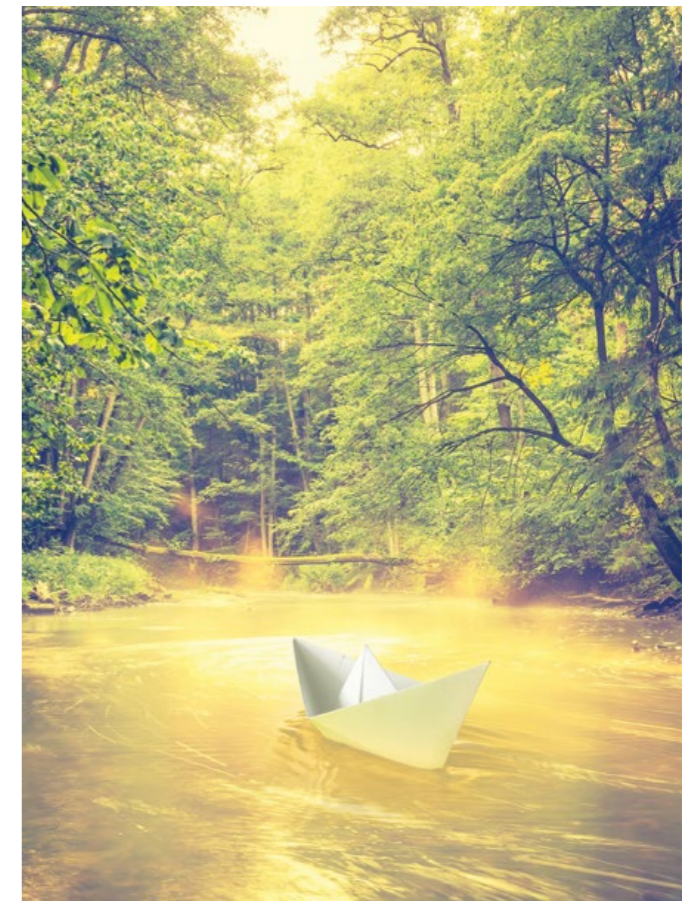
When we think of someone close to us who has been ill or lost or addicted or mentally unwell, we can experience all of those pitying and compassionate reactions. We can become impatient and defensive in the face of their pain and despair as well as feeling deeply for them. There's a battle within us, as well as within them; we are so tempted to give up.

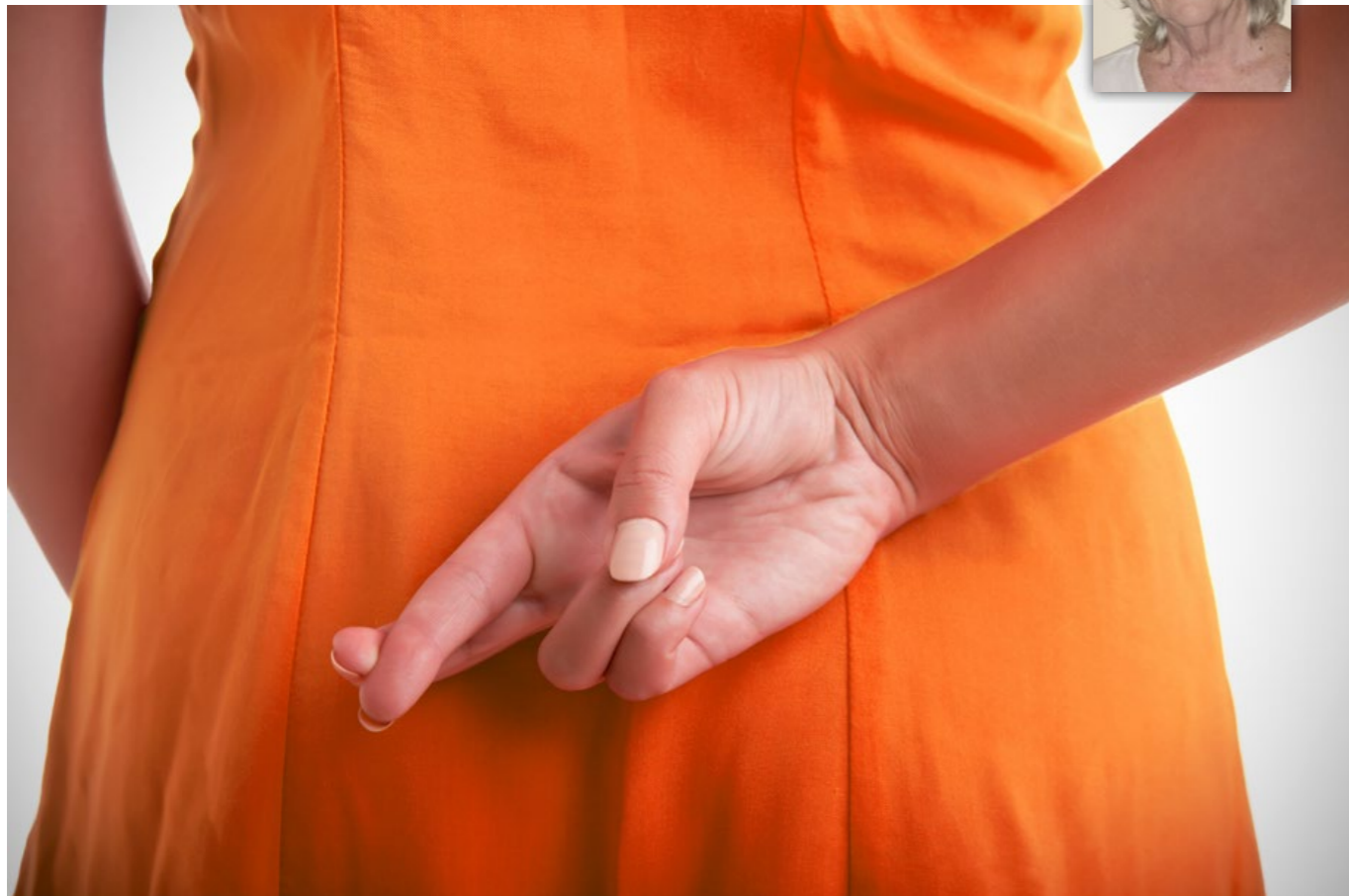
Now and again, in small ways and large, a change occurs. It may be a note in someone's voice, a kindness they recall or express, a flicker of humour or a smile and something moves in us. 'Who would have thought ...?'

George Herbert had a way with words. He had an ability to capture in a line or two, as well as a complete poem, a miracle in the ordinariness of things. For him, it was a flower, for us it might be that kindness or flicker of humour. We recognise it most where we least expect it, where our fears and preconceptions are overthrown, where miracles happen.

'It's a wonderful world ...' Allowing wonder room to grow means we allow ourselves to do the impossible, feel the deep pain of grief and loss, the darkness of depression and helplessness, the desperate caring and loving of others and to believe in life.

Herbert never 'conquered' his 'shrivell'd heart', never became perfect in his praying or his writing. But, wonder and trust and amazement grew in him, and gratitude. His grief opened into life as ours may very well, too.





THE TRUTH

written by Erica Greenop

'Writing is about honesty. It is almost impossible to be honest and boring at the same time. Being honest may be many other things, risky, scary, difficult, frightening, embarrassing and hard to do, but it is not boring. Whenever I am stuck in a piece of writing, I ask myself, "am I failing to tell the truth? Is there something I am not saying, something I'm afraid to say?" When the answer is yes, the writing shows it. There is a softness, a tentativeness, a rot to it that telling the truth instantly dispels. Telling the truth on the page, like telling the truth in a relationship, always takes you deeper.'

Julia Cameron – *The Right to Write*

DOUBTS, MISGIVINGS, SUSPICIONS AND QUESTIONS

I am not entirely sure I agree with Julia Cameron. I am not sure telling The Truth on the page *'always takes you deeper.'* That sounds like a sweeping statement to me and I am suspicious of sweeping statements. They don't reach all the bits that are sitting there in the corners of a good story. I am not sure that without The Truth creative writing and relationships share the same fundamental failings. I am troubled by Julia's thoughts. She makes The

Truth sound un-pitifully virtuous. Something you should have for a better life. The sort of thing you should do. You don't mess with The Truth. It has become untouchable, like the ruler of its own kingdom, puffed up and not listening to all the doubts in the world around it. I am a little bit threatened by the notion of The Truth. Perhaps I am missing out on deeper things if I don't have it. Perhaps what I tell on the page will never go deeper without it.

MY HUMBLE OPINION

It is a personal opinion, very humble because basically I am one of those tentative people, but while we need facts – which I suspect are something to do with The Truth – to give authenticity to our writing, I don't think they have little around-the-houses-by-ways you can let your mind and heart wander among, little holes along the way you stumble into, plop a new idea into, something deeper just around the corner that you can fall into, become lost



What is this thing called The Truth that takes us deeper and dispels unwanted softness? Who put it there? Who decided what The Truth is? Do I want it? Where do I get it? How do I recognise it? Is it mine? Or yours? Is The Truth the collective condition of not telling lies? Not even little

“ Is The Truth the collective condition of not telling lies? Not even little porkies? ”

porkies? Do we need to tell The Truth just because it is there? Is it black and white, the metaphorical colourlessness of unchangeable phenomenon? The sort of thing we don't argue with? What does it do to *our* truth, our originality, our individual uniqueness? Our curiosity? Creativity? Our imagination? Our dreams? What about our *'little bit off in our own world'* kind of truth?



And what about too much truth? The sort of too much we can't absorb? The sort of truth it is much easier to not believe?

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in, engulfed by, where you find something of yourself in the depths that you have never noticed before. The Truth seems to be the domain of great un-wandering un-plopped un-stumbled un-tentative un-lost minds who think in facts and logic and provable details and correctness. I have a sinking feeling, one of those pit of the stomach feelings, that The Truth might trap me and I would – to quote Mary Oliver – ‘be fettered to a thousand notions of obligation.’

“ I’m not saying you can go along re-inventing things that are the truth of our universe. ”

I have a feeling that there is a something else-ness that won’t be trapped or shaped or pre-determined, that takes us deeper than The Truth. I’m not saying you can go along re-inventing things that are the truth of our universe. You need to get it right, when you are writing. You need to be authentic with the detail or you will lose your reader, the one you are hoping to capture and hold and fill with the magic or your words. It doesn’t work if you describe a long summer evening after the sun has gone and the sky spreads itself in deep layers along the slow golden horizon the other side of the English Channel – the image is glorious in your mind – when the fact is the sun sets in the west, the other direction, behind you, across the flat scrubby coastal plains of England.

AN EXAMPLE

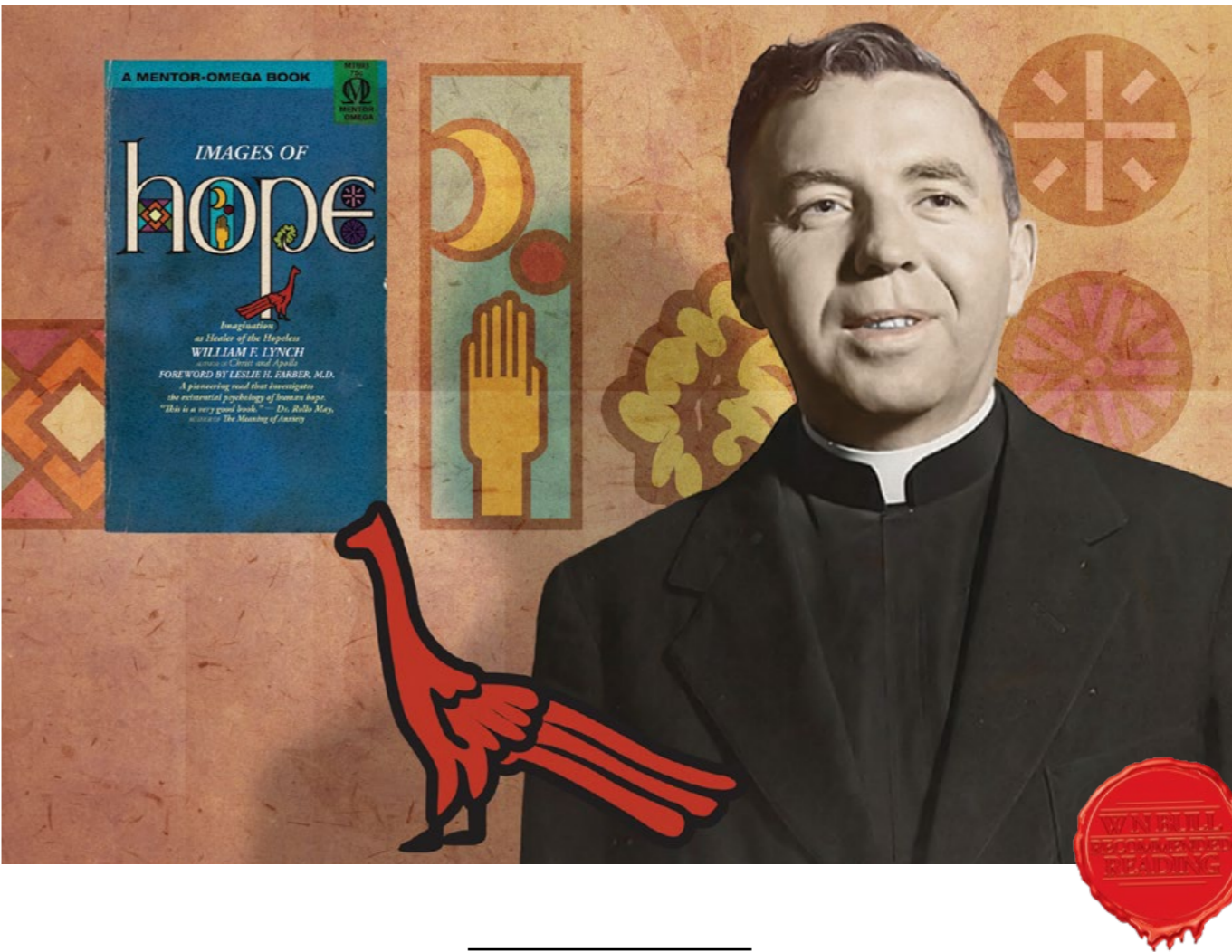
So I ask myself, because I have already exposed my opinions and therefore my mind and even the embarrassing childishness of my thoughts – what do I lose by not serving or following The Truth in its accepted form in creative writing? Or alternatively – and much more exciting – *what do I gain* by not serving or following?

Take my poem about a fuchsia as an example. Would its ‘*crimson fluttering and petal skirts*’ dance in the reader’s imagination if instead I had written about four long slender petals and four shorter broader petals? What would happen to the ‘*cerise and vermillion cascades and ruby splashes and hot magenta*’ if my poem told the reader that the pigment in flowers that gives them their blue or red colours is called anthocyanius? And what would happen to ‘*scarlet stamens like dangling legs and blobs at the end of the dangling bits that look like little socks*’ if I had carefully described the sac-like part of the stamen, the anther, located at the end of the filament where pollen is produced?

All these descriptions would be honest, correct, authentic. They would be in accord with fact and reality. They would be faithful to the original standards of botanists and scientists. They would be The Truth. And completely without magic.



So I wrote about the ‘*spilling purple and precocious colour*. I put my fuchsia on the dresser between the antique box with mother of pearl inlay around the keyhole and the polished silver mugs and it was as if Bernadette Bassinger from *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* was sitting at lunch between two old ladies in a retirement village’ and my fuchsia and I did a bit of liberated off in our own world childish something else-ness rejoicing.



IMAGES OF HOPE
– IMAGINATION AS HEALER OF THE HOPELESS –
BY WILLIAM F LYNCH

Reviewed by Richard White

My desk is unaccountably cluttered. Not that I don’t know how the clutter happened; it is more that this accumulated mess of papers and books has suddenly begun to make sense! On my right, resting on note books and scraps of paper is William Lynch’s *Images of Hope* and on my left, on a similar small mountain of ‘stuff’ is Erica Greenop’s latest collection, *All Before Breakfast; A – Z for Grown-Ups*.

William Lynch’s book is about the imagination; Erica’s is imaginative. I need *A – Z for Grown-Ups* to be able to really understand *Images of Hope*. Imagination is about letting go of the tightly held, even desperately held, certainties of life and allowing possibilities to blossom, bloom, luxuriate and grow.

My copy of *Images of Hope* is a battered paperback. There are pages that have come loose from their binding;

I’m a bit concerned that this much-loved little book will fall apart before I do. For, I keep reading it, hoping (!) that I will become wiser and surer in my hoping, more able to explain and share this central experience of living.

The sub-title is ‘Imagination as Healer of the Hopleless’ and the book is written out of the author’s experience of mental illness. William Lynch knew, first hand, what it is like to be stuck in that dark place, mind whirling and

grinding, unable to move or to think, to feel or to touch; images of demons and deserts and nowhere to turn, no one to comfort.

Lynch was a writer and a thinker; he wanted to use his experience to plot the way out of this desert. This literary skill enables the writer to present clearly and simply the basic principles of mental health, the meaning and nature of hope.

I am tempted to list these principles, to outline the plan as set out in the book. However, I know that would be cheating. The reason I keep reading this book is because I share the author's desire to understand and communicate, to heal myself and to help others to heal. I also know that I cannot give what I do not possess; unless the book has begun to make sense in my life and my dark moments, then my words or efforts won't ring true.

So, I think of what happens when I have a conversation with Erica Greenop. I tell Erica that when I talk with her I go ever so slightly crazy, crazy in a good sense, 'like my imagination has been let off the lease'. I don't know whether it's osmosis or contagion, but for the length of an email or the space of a phone call, I think differently and write differently.

“ But, once I can name my demon for what it is, this absolutizing thing, there is the possibility of saying ‘No!’ to it. ”

There's fun and frolic and flights of fancy, strange connections and 'soundy' words; all that editorial seriousness and concern for deadlines evaporates; anything's possible. This is what is happening at the moment when I was stuck with *Dialogue*, time for this edition running out, not enough material, the usual writer's block and a cold to boot.

William Lynch and Erica to the rescue! Lynch writes soberly and truthfully about hopelessness and the need to acknowledge the condition. Failure to acknowledge this experience leads to over-compensation and avoidance. Hyper-activity, doing things to avoid really thinking or feeling, or escaping into yet another book or distraction rather than fostering stillness, that's what ignoring hopelessness can do. That's what I was doing recently and what I have often done throughout my life.

Then, Lynch writes about the importance of mutuality; hope is not a solitary act or virtue, the 'toughing it out' of the Superhero. Hope is the acknowledgement of our need for help, of our dependence or inter-dependence.

Reaching out or looking out can be so hard when we are ill or in pain. There is a tendency to retreat and to hide. We can curl up in our unhappiness and confusion and close off from others and the world. This is such a dangerous position; this is where our own mind creates monsters and breeds thoughts of 'certainty' and those 'nevers' and 'always' that lead to despair.

Lynch calls this 'the absolutizing instinct'. That children's rhyme catches the spirit of this mood: 'Nobody loves me, everybody hates me; I'm going down the garden to eat worms. . . .' I know what this means, from my own experience and from listening to others.

This is when hopelessness and helplessness combine and the instinct is to curl up and die. It is when the terrible possibility of suicide becomes real.



Recognizing the 'absolutizing instinct', like acknowledging hopelessness, is so important. When our thinking is askew, it can be difficult to break out of the day-to-day paranoia that says 'nobody loves me, everybody hates me. . . .' But, once I can name my demon for what it is, this absolutizing thing, there is the possibility of saying 'No!' to it.

John Keats termed a phrase, 'negative capability' with reference to Shakespeare; it was the writer's recognition

that none of the words he could think of was the right one for the expression he wanted; he did not yet know the 'right word', but at least he could exclude the ones that did not fit. The same could be said for words like 'nobody' or

Then, in Lynch's schema, there's the importance of 'wishing'. We may have heard of the 'bucket list' or the 'wish list', of things we would like to do before we die. Lynch's wishing, as I understand it, is not like this.



“ Wishing means reaching out, imaginatively, into the future and choosing, concretely, day-by-day, in the present. ”

'everybody' or 'never' or 'always'. Hope means that there is the possibility of 'someone' or 'sometimes'.

This hope of possibility is what enables us to 'choose not to be' or to cry out like the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins,

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast
on thee;

Not untwist – slack they may be – these last
strands of man

In me or, most weary, cry *I can no more*. I can;

Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose
not to be . . .

These words, like Lynch's book, have been a talisman over the years. Recognizing and naming despair as 'carrion comfort', dead and decaying meat, lifeless and unnourishing, deprives it of its seductive comfort. It is a 'reality check', a glimmer of genuine thinking in the place of spurious fantasizing.

Wishing is about where we put our heart or better, where our heart puts us. It is about recognizing what we deeply, truly desire, long for. Wishing means reaching out, imaginatively, into the future and choosing, concretely, day-by-day, in the present. Wishing is about wanting and acting; it is also about seeing and loving. There is the world of difference between wishing and mental manufacturing, between imagination and fantasy.

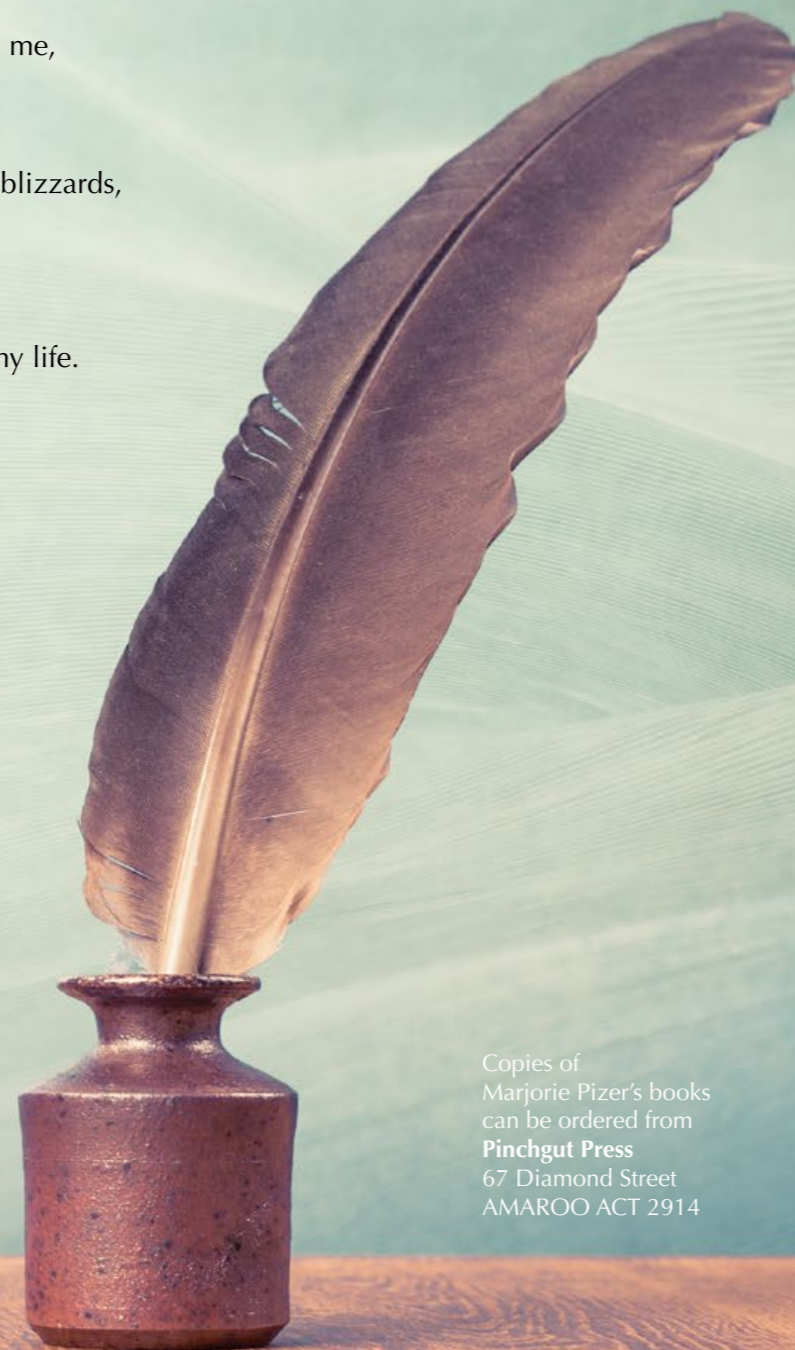
When my imagination is 'off the leash' it is out to play. But, this playing is not mindless and irresponsible; it has a purpose and direction of its own. As I sat at the desk this morning, with the theory of the imagination on my right and the active imagination on my left, something happened to the 'stuckness' I had been experiencing.

I am not sure what happened and so I will keep reading Lynch's book, probably for years to come. But, I do know that a cloud lifted and things became possible, a couple of old friends smiled kindly, from left and from right, reassuring and tolerant of one who describes himself as a 'slow learner' but who seems to 'get by with a little help from his friends'.

WINDS OF CHANGE

The wind off the sea is whistling around the corners of this house
And I am upset by its whining.
It tunes in to some disturbance within me,
Some change a-coming,
Some fear, some inner quivering
That I do not understand.
O wind, you remind me of mountain blizzards,
Deserts' sandy blasts,
The honing of wind across prairies
And the hot breath of the outback.
O winds of change,
Treat me gently as you pass through my life.

Marjorie Pizer



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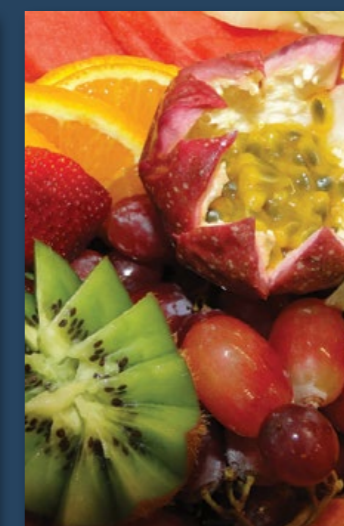
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