

Dialogue

Issue 78 Summer 2017

WN BULL



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The Adoration of the Magi
Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi

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Editorial



Richard White

There was an old Jesuit priest, still teaching physics into his nineties. His students claim that each year he would make this statement when he came to the section on electricity and before handing over to a younger teacher: 'There are two things I would like to say about electricity – it's very mysterious and it's very dangerous'.

Well, there are three things I would like to say about Christmas: 'It's all about stillness and compassion and remembering.'

That traditional Christmas hymn, 'Silent Night' opens with those familiar words, 'Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright . . . ' The only thing is that 'all is not calm, all is not bright'. There is the deep agitation and sadness surrounding death or conflict or that restless agitation we all experience at times, perhaps especially at Christmas. On top of this is the noise and the pressure to buy and to celebrate! Where is the silence, where is the calm?

In the midst of this edition of *Dialogue* there is a strong sense of compassion and humanity. It is there in Jesse Campbell's story about hurrying and impatience and a blessed encounter waiting for a bus; it is there in Jo Wagg's faithful remembering and in Erica Greenop's superb piece about becoming a grief counsellor.

I've tried Tai Chi, Yoga, Mindfulness and even thought of smoking at one stage, to calm down and be still. Bits and pieces of these, apart from the smoking, have probably

helped; but the most stilling and calming moments have come with meetings, remembering, being with other people. And, by 'meeting', I mean more like listening as Erica describes it, letting go and letting the deeper parts of others and myself emerge.

Some of us get this stillness by writing, as Rob Greenop obviously does; maybe Marika Gubacsi's recollections of conflict and fleeing her own country, full of compassion for the suffering of others, held her still, in awe and remembering.

Even the loss of memory and our inevitable declines, can have a mysterious quality, a special beauty, as Maurice Whelan's poem shows. For, stillness and compassion put us in touch with our humanity, which is what the Christmas story is all about. In obscurity and littleness, faithful and ordinary, light and hope shine brightly.

We can dare to celebrate, as we have this year, with the 'faithful and ordinary' work of WN Bull Funerals and the dedication and compassion of our General Manager, Patsy Healy. As W H Auden said so well,

. . . through this tohu bohu comes a voice
Which utter an absurd command – Rejoice!

Wishing all our readers, a calm, blessed and joyful Christmas, from all of us at WN Bull Funerals.



CELEBRATIONS IS THE WAY TO GO!

written by Richard White

This has been quite a year for WN Bull Funerals. We have celebrated 125 years since the founding of the company by William and Mary Bull.

Given the close association of the company with the Catholic Church, it was appropriate that this occasion be marked by a Mass of Thanksgiving. The Mass was celebrated at St Mary’s Cathedral on Wednesday 18 November. The main celebrant was Father Pat Corbett CSsR, the grandson of William and Mary Bull.

On Friday 10 November, Patsy Healy, General Manager of WN Bull Funerals and a member of our staff for over twenty five years, was invested as Dame of the Order of St Sylvester by Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP.

This honour was conferred on Patsy by Pope Francis for “the outstanding Christian witness, dedication and dignity which she provides” as a funeral director and General Manager of WN Bull (which recently celebrated 125 years of service).

Meanwhile, the work of the funeral company goes on. The daily, faithful response to grieving families and the careful attention to detail and the coping with the stresses of the work and the inevitable challenges of preparing a funeral are the taken-for-granted of this essential service.

For 125 years, with the ups-and-downs of any company, WN Bull Funerals has been there. Those of us who have been part of this history know what is involved beneath and behind and before the glossy, well-appointed WN Bull hearse arrives at the church or funeral chapel. The ritual and the ceremony flow smoothly because of the good-will and professionalism of a team of people.



We know, too, that the encouragement and inspiration to provide high quality service comes from the stories we have been told and the standards that have been set. A

number of our current staff had the privilege of working with John Harris. John found in Patsy Healy a woman of integrity and capacity to continue the tradition that he, in turn, had received.

“ A number of our current staff had the privilege of working with John Harris. John found in Patsy Healy a woman of integrity and capacity to continue the tradition that he, in turn, had received. ”

In the midst of any worthwhile enterprise the day-to-day is the focus of attention. Success and achievement become evident over time. Moreover, without the ordinariness,



Clockwise from over page
The 125 Year Post-mass celebration at Cathedral House, Patsy with Staff at the Mass of Thanksgiving, Agnes Harris and Family, Father Pat Corbett CSsR, grandson of William and Mary Bull, with Patsy Healy
Images Giovanni Portelli Photography



the fidelity to the mundane, there would be no success, no achievement.



However, a time comes when we need to acknowledge and celebrate and honour people and institutions that have been a source of blessing to us. The ordinary and the mundane ‘break open’, as it were, the spirit that has nourished the ordinariness is let loose; the goodness and generosity and compassion are revealed. There comes a time when – Celebration is the Way to Go!



“ As the official citation noted: “She has enhanced a sense of the sacred when directing the funerals of people from all walks of life, some of whom who had held prominent roles in society.” ”



Clockwise from top
Patsy with husband Richard and daughters Chloe and Siobhan, Patsy Healy with Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP, Patsy with Staff at the Mass of Thanksgiving, Father Pat Corbett CSsR, grandson of William and Mary Bull.
Images Giovanni Portelli Photography



‘I WAS THERE!’ STORY OF A REFUGEE.

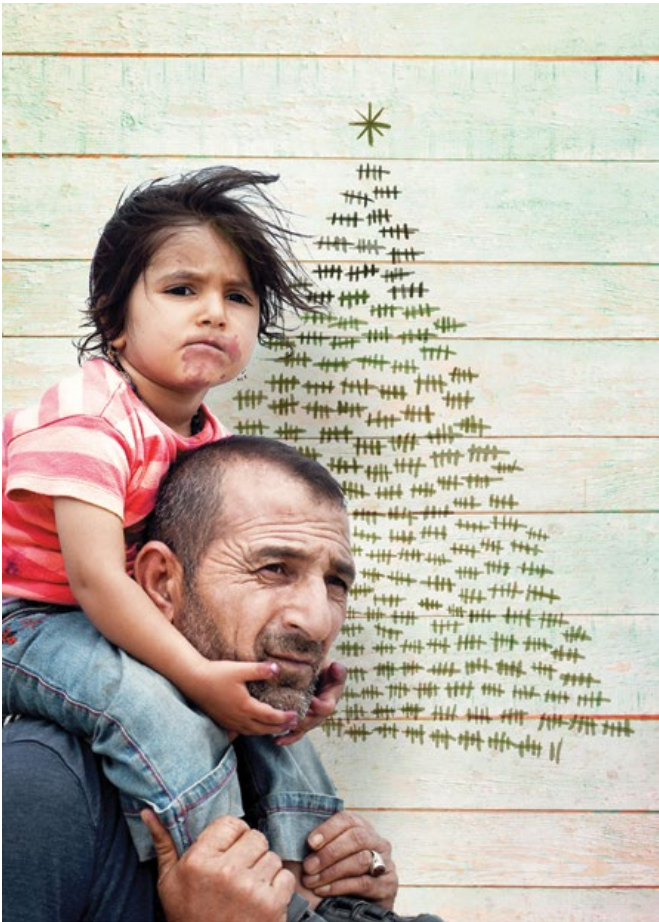
written by Richard White & Marika Gubasci

Being There is the title of a 1979 movie starring Peter Sellers; ‘being there’ or ‘I was there!’ is the cry of Marika Gubacsi in the article that follows. Marika’s claim is the ‘being there’ is vastly different from hearing the stories and seeing the pictures; ‘being there’ means being part of the story, an actor for whom the story has become part of their life.

‘I was there!’ is a cry from the heart. There’s a latin expression, *cor ad cor loquitur*, ‘heart speaks to heart’. This expression suggests a level of communication beyond words and ideas, even beyond the sharing of experience. Heart-to-heart implies a closeness or intimacy that we humans rarely experience, especially in our social or public lives.

“ ‘I was there!’ is Marika’s cry; ‘I am here’ is the cry we hear and see on the faces of refugees in the news. ”

The second part of the heading for Marika’s piece is ‘Story of a Refugee’. In these last months of the year, refugees have been very much in the media. There have been photos and there have been stories, arguments and counter-arguments about Australia’s treatment of refugees. Simply put, and, by ‘simply’ I mean simplistically, the contrasting positions are stated as: the strong, practical policy makers versus the warm-fuzzy-do-gooders. ‘I was there!’ is Marika’s cry; ‘I am here’ is the cry we hear and see on the faces of refugees in the news. The importance of Marika’s story about events in Hungary in



1956 is that pain and horror and fear are at the heart of every refugee’s story. The cries of the refugees through the years is that is that their stories may be heard at that deeper level where, *cor ad cor loquitur*, heart speaks to heart.

MARIKA’S STORY: REMEMBERING THE 1956 HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

Sydney, 23 October, 2006

Here in St Mary’s Cathedral I gathered with so many Hungarian people to remember the events of fifty years ago. There was the Archbishop of Sydney, Archbishop Anthony Fisher, the Hungarian chaplain, Father Steven Bakos, the Presbyterian minister, the Lutheran minister, all in their forties or fifties. I closed my eyes, listening to the talks, thinking about the reality of the stories. How would he know what happened! It was fifty years ago. You were hardly born! I felt like screaming out loudly: it is not true; it was not like that.

I know because I was there!! When I finished the HSC (back in Hungary fifty odd years ago) I was not allowed to attend university. As a twelve year old, I had not signed the government petition asking children to support the execution of the Hungarian Archbishop, Cardinal Mindszenty. I couldn’t do it. The school authorities informed my parents that I was no longer eligible to undertake further studies. Then, the unbelievable happened; I was offered a position as secretary to the Chancellor of the University of Technology, Professor Imre Voros. I accepted and worked during the day and attended lectures at night. I was half

way through a degree in engineering when strange things began happening.

It was 22 October, 1956. I met Miklos, my boy friend and later my husband and told him of my anxiety of what was occurring at the university. Students were running around aimlessly. There was something in the air.

The next day, 23 October, the Chancellor told me to get ready and meet him at the entrance of the University. There, when I arrived, there was a bustling, excited crowd of students and lecturers, some carrying guns, others waving flags. We pushed out into the street, heading towards Joseph Bem Square...



I was there when the crowd gathered in front of the Parliament House. I heard the speeches and the demands for freedom and democracy and the end of Russian communist control. I was afraid and unable to contact my parents; I backed out of the crowd and headed home.

Later I heard the sound of gunfire; the army had been called out. Hundreds of people were killed. The Hungarian Revolution was well and truly on! The rest is history.

Next morning I went to find some bread but all the shops were closed. There was no public transport, no services of any kind, no people on the streets but dead bodies everywhere. I quickly ran home and decided to stay indoors. Miklos arrived later in the day with some bread.

He had distributed food to others who were trapped in their homes, narrowly avoiding being shot.

The next day I decided to go to work. The front door of the University was locked but I entered through a side door. There were farmers from the country bringing food and supplies for the students in the buildings. I made my way through to the front foyer to a horrifying sight.

There were hundreds of lifeless bodies piled up on the beautiful marble floor, students, lecturers and workers. I collected my belongings and left crying.

The revolution continued with more deaths and the complete disruption of life in the city. Then, on the morning of 4 November, Russian tanks arrived. The revolution was over, the brief moments of excitement and freedom crushed.

Miklos was wanted by the authorities and had to leave Hungary. He came to see me before going. I took a gold chain with a little gold heart and gave it to him. I promised I would pray for him. A last embrace and he disappeared from my life. I went to a small chapel down the street, hidden from the public, and sat there crying and praying.

Later that day, I had a phone call from Miklos. It was too dangerous for him to escape, the borders had been reinforced. I thought he had come back for me!

“ A last embrace and he disappeared from my life. I went to a small chapel down the street, hidden from the public, and sat there crying and praying. ”

My father had contacts at the American embassy and they agreed to assist us to cross the border. My parents paid a considerable amount of money for this arrangement. On 24 December, Christmas eve, early in the morning, we left. My parents were heartbroken but we promised to help them out too.

We walked sixty kilometres across the border and arrived in Austria! It was Christmas Day, 1956. We were two of the thousands of Hungarian refugees to start a new life in freedom.

This is my recollection of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. I was there!



THE
DELIVERY DRIVER
written by Jesse Campbell Brown

Let me begin by saying I made it. When I was invited to a gig by a friend, I leaped at the opportunity even though I had never heard of any of the bands on the bill.

It was to be an evening of prog-rock - a genre I mostly associate with technically brilliant musicians who look and perform like, from a young age, they spent hours upon hours sitting in a bedroom practicing and practicing, only to, when thrust onto the stage, realise they are a little uncomfortable on their feet as it implied they ought to perhaps rock back and forth a little to the music, which in turn implies identifying which time-signature or polyrhythm to sway or rock to; and also that all these people looking at them is *nothing at all* like the solitude of the bedroom and it was better to just pretend the audience isn't there. This may be unfair, but the stage was like fruit bowl - all pear shapes and peach fuzz faces.

I have been a stay at home father for over nine years for two happy and healthy kids. My wife works long hours with lots of travel, so, like many others before me, I do not get out to see bands as often as I used to, nor as often as I would like.

For me these days, to get out of the house and shoot the breeze with a non-family member was like Eldorado: its existence only rumour or myth.

But this is not a story about watching live music. Though she was a little late getting home, my wife was around that evening, so I took the opportunity to accept the invitation and get out of the house. Showered and dressed with headphones at the ready to provide suitably

loud and wonderfully obnoxious musical accompaniment for the long schlepp into the thick of the city, I quickly said my farewells to my pyjama clad kids, stooping to kiss two freshly bathed foreheads.

"Right, see you in the morning" I said, and as I was turning the door handle to leave, two little arms grabbed around my waist for one last cuddle. My nine year old son held me tight, lifted his feet off the floor and hung there, pulling me to a stop with his full body weight. This is a fairly regular occurrence, and generally I would play with him a little, but today - right now - I was anxious I was running late. I suppressed the urge to explode in frustration and anger at the little person dangling from my midsection, and patted him down.

"C'mon, mate - down please," I growled.

"Okay," came the disappointed response.

Public transport nearest my house favours the nine to five commuter, and I was acutely aware that this would be working against me this evening. I had checked and rechecked the bus timetable and all possible route options for the various connections to get me to the city on time, and knew that if I left *now*, I would make all of the fastest connections.

So, I thanked the disappointed little person abruptly, shoved the little red earbuds into my ears and walked out the door to a blistering soundtrack, into the dark, immediately both regretting the way I had handled the situation, and cursing him for lovingly jeopardising my long journey to good times with old mates.

“ I wouldn't have heard it anyway....I was able to maintain warmth from my seething anger at the horrific injustice of my situation. ”

Perhaps if I had not had the volume up so high, I might have heard it approaching, and been able to move a little quicker. But sure enough, when walking down the steep and winding road from the house, only a mere ten metres from the corner where the bus stop was, the brightly lit bus thundered past so fast I knew I wouldn't even catch it at the next stop if I went at a full run.

I felt another swell of anger, and cursed, the screaming music in my ears echoing the screaming in my head.

The next fastest option was a walk all the way back up the very steep hill, past home, to another bus route. The



option after *that* involved the longer wait of twenty minutes for the bus, but I needed only to cross the road. So, I made my way over to the other side of the street and waited.

I checked my watch. And waited. Few minutes later, checked my watch again. And waited.

In warmer months I might have been able describe the subtle feeling solitude and isolation by mentioning the rhythmic chirrup of a lonely cicada, or a single frog's croak, but right now it was just dark and cold. And besides, I wouldn't have heard it anyway....I was able to maintain warmth from my seething anger at the horrific injustice of my situation.

After checking the travel app in my phone, I was relieved to discover that the bus was imminent, so I redoubled by efforts at staring into the dark, willing it to arrive, the music in my ear a suitable soundtrack.

Another ten minutes later with nothing passing me other than a frigid breeze, I checked the app again. Imagine my surprise as I discovered that the bus was apparently on time, and had in fact arrived just five minutes earlier. If I were a less observant person, I might not have noticed that, at this point, that meant the bus had already stopped to collect me and I was happily winging my way to my destination in warmth and comfort.

The muscles in my forearms burned, I was clenching my fists so solidly. There were sparks behind my eyelids; they were squeezed tightly shut in frustration.

I might have lashed out at the perspex covered ad of the bus shelter if I wasn't resolute in avoiding physical pain wherever possible.

It took a few moments to collect myself again and

reassess my options. The lateness of the hour made it an even unlikelier possibility of getting a bus from here and still making it on time. But this is not a story about missing a bus.

The music warming my right ear was replaced with the cold of the winter air as I pulled at the earbud and let it dangle, tethered by thin red cable to its companion in my other.

The approaching headlight that had just appeared over the hill in the distance had attracted my interest. It was just one. I wasn't sure if it was a car with a broken head light or a motorcycle. It was moving slower than the speed one might expect a car traveling this minor suburban thoroughfare to be going, and it was weaving. From one side of its lane to the other it went, hedges and fences lit up in the dark, first this side then that.

"Would you look at this idiot" I growled to myself, momentarily slipping off my glasses to rub the condensation from them with the tail of my black shirt.

I could make out the sound of the scooter's tinny engine, and it grew louder as it approached. I could make out a pizza shop logo on the side of the large white box perched behind what I now assumed was a delivery driver. The driver seemed to be enjoying the swaying of the scooter, almost leading the movement with his head, and I found myself smirking at this display of mildly irresponsible driving. After all, it was dark, the roads were empty - why *not* enjoy it a little?

I was momentarily bemused that when the scooter came to a sudden and almost accidental halt before me, the driver's head and body jerking forward and continuing

to sway slightly.

"Oi, mate," he called out, in a drawl. He hadn't made eye contact, so I assumed that he must have been talking to someone on an in-helmet device.

"Can you look up this address on ya phone for me?" he continued in his slow and thick Australian accent, and though he still hadn't made eye contact, I suddenly realised he was talking to me.

"I'm bloody lost, but it's got to be around here somewhere..."

"Um..." I said, pulling out my phone, and glancing up the street again - God forbid I should miss the bus helping this slightly reckless pizza guy. "No problem".

He read out the address from a crumpled scrap of paper pulled from his jacket pocket, and I entered the details. I watched him as the map and directions appeared on the screen, and briefly wondered why a person employed to deliver pizzas wouldn't have their own device for situations such as this. It was dark and the trees still cast shadows with the light the street lamps threw, but I could see that the young man, cleanly shaven, had an expression that seemed to mix boredom, resigned apprehension, and quiet determination. I was quite taken by his very forward manner, and impressed by his comfort in asking a stranger for directions, since this is not an everyday occurrence anymore.

He still hadn't actually looked at me, and was still swaying rhythmically from side to side.

I then had a minor epiphany, as if previously unconnected parts of my brain had slipped wetly to coil against each other, and I could now think clearly. I realised that the reason for the scooter weaving strangely down the street wasn't just to better see the house numbers, and possibly not even just playfully antisocial driving; and that the continued swaying even while stationary, which I had momentarily considered to be the result of music in his own ear, now appeared to make sense: the delivery driver couldn't help but sway this way and may very well have had a condition - Cerebral Palsy, perhaps?

"Here you go" I showed him the screen. "You must have missed a turn up there somewhere. It's a couple of blocks back that way."

He appeared to take it in, though I still can't be certain he actually saw the map at all, but either way this seemed to satisfy him. Still swaying and rocking, he thanked me in a sort of off-hand way, muttering about making a bloody mistake and that he thought as much, and, as if to take advantage of the direction of the next opportune sway, suddenly cocked his wrist on the throttle, and was thrust forward to the lion-cub roar of the scooter engine, head almost snapping back from the inertia, into a U-turn.

I watched with a curious mix of genuine admiration and mild horror as his little red tail light arched from one side of the street to the other, back up and over the hill, out of sight.



The polished wooden box, his shiny new forever bed, is lowered creakily into the ground by the funeral parlour’s grim system of levers and straps. The last of dear old Uncle Phil is put to rest beside his sister and her husband, my parents. They had frequently laughed and joked about the peace and quiet that would endlessly be theirs, when they were laid to rest together in this specially chosen spot. Uncle Phil could talk tirelessly and I imagine that the promise of eventual peace and quiet would have been very attractive to my father, easily worn by a droning, albeit well-informed voice.

Spring birds chirp happily and buzzing bees fly purposefully amongst the graveyard’s perfumed roses, lavender, peonies, jasmine and other olfactory delights, next to St Alban’s Church, Koonya. Brother, sister and husband would surely be happy with the warm spring sunshine streaming through the clouds onto family members assembled at Uncle Phil’s burial site.

A few people throw clods of earth or flowers into the

dark earthy pit. I find this offhand tossing and throwing rather aggressive and unwelcome as a final act of farewell. Far preferred would be a sprinkle of glittery stardust or a gentle puff of dandelion clock, with its forever wishes floating down, or even a few rousing ‘Hip Hip Hoorays’ to congratulate the buried person’s final disappearance from life’s stage (a curtain call or two would also be quite acceptable).

I turn and stride purposefully towards afternoon tea at the Rectory, my parents’ much loved country bolt-hole, glad the simple ceremony is over. It doesn’t feel right. I missed my mother’s funeral a few weeks ago and thought that it had not impacted me. I am keen to continue this self-deception and confrontation of the presumed emotional turmoil, stirring deep within.

We were in Scotland when we heard from my older brother in Hobart that Mum had departed from her mortal coil. It had been expected and anticipated for a while, but we had decided not to defer our trip because life goes on for the living, even when others die. We were travelling with our daughter Eliza and her partner, taking in

“ Maybe he was just ready, too early of course, but ready nonetheless for the end of this and the beginning of the next, his eternal life. ”

the beautiful Scottish countryside, the blue lochs, rugged mountains, purple heather and prickly thistle.

My father had had a deep abiding love for all things Scottish, having had a Scottish mother, and Scottish cousins he visited in his youth. Being on Scottish land and breathing Scottish air felt like the right place to be, if not with my family of origin, when my mother died. We were with our beautiful daughter, so keenly missed since she had been working in London. She had fulfilled most of her travelling dreams and had happily met her Australian partner, so all was going well for her. But I missed her so!

The conflict of dampened emotions surrounding the death of my mother, was kept under control while I was with her. Being a loving mum came easily to me when there were no other considerations, except our immediate comfort and surroundings. We saw kilts like the one Eliza’s grandfather proudly wore on special occasions, bagpipes played by kilted and fully decked-out Scottish band members, dry, difficult to eat oat cookies and solid pink Edinburgh rock, sent for Christmas from our Scottish cousins to faraway Tasmania. Scottish accents confounded our ears and we developed a new empathy for the sturdiness required to survive a highland winter, even during summer. Scotland the brave. Tasmanian weather had nothing on the Scottish variety.

Death came ferociously to my father, over ten years ago. He had made what seemed to me to be a surprising choice. As a medical practitioner, he would have known what his erratic bowel symptoms pointed to in a diagnostic sense. Being a true believer in the Christian faith, perhaps he left his fate in the hands of his maker. Perhaps he was comforted by his own quixotic denial, but even in my distant, disconnected and uninformed state, I don’t think that would have been his modus operandi. Maybe he was just ready, too early of course, but ready nonetheless for the end of this and the beginning of the next, his eternal life. Acceptance could have simplified the journey.

He was the first to inhabit his allotted spot in the cemetery awaiting the arrival of its inhabitants down at Koonya. I watched his burial with a detached air. I wasn’t accustomed to such ceremonies, hadn’t been to many burials or funerals. It felt a bit like a circus act, but there was no ringmaster to guide the audience or explain the bizarre nature of interment of dead bodies, covering them with earth and placing a headstone with all the relevant details. Everybody dies, but this funeral behaviour isn’t standard practice in many places. But truly, the idea of cremation is no more acceptable to me.

My parents made the excited discovery of their own little piece of paradise, on the Tasman Peninsula, when my father took his pioneering flight to Cambridge Aerodrome (the original Hobart airport) from Victoria,



answering the call for a new country GP. The early 1950’s in unsophisticated Tasmania was to be quite a shock to the London-trained, St Bartholomew’s Hospital medical practitioner and his young wife, a nurse from the same hospital.

The doctor’s residence at Premaydena was at least three hours’ rough drive on dirt roads, south-east from the city of Hobart, with its rich convict history, genuine friendly

Tasmanian people and rather quaint, uninitiated way of life at the time. Although it was fast and exciting after the bush isolation that my parents now knew, most commodities other than the basic necessities of life had to be shipped from ‘the mainland’, the other larger island to the north of Tasmania.

My parents’ love for the Tasman Peninsula was cemented in the five or six years they lived there. It was possibly the happiest time of their lives. The two older boys soon had two new sisters and life was busy. They became deeply embedded into the local community. It must have been quite a wrench to move to Hobart, but the growing family needed ready access to education beyond the primary years and more facilities than the Peninsula could provide. Their connection with the Peninsula remained tight and integral to them until the end of their lives.



It doesn’t seem all that long ago that my husband Michael and I were standing in a different garden, at Woodbridge, about 40 minutes by road, south of Hobart. But that’s just our age talking, because it was over 20 years ago. The memories, however, are bright and intact. Michael’s parents, Wally and Von had built their dream house upon their own ten acre piece of paradise and had retired there. They named it ‘Wahroonga’, Aboriginal for welcome.

I had grown to love the Woodbridge house and garden; it was more home to me than Koonya, where I tended to struggle with difficult emotions of sadness, loneliness and grief. But this day there was a problem at

Woodbridge. Grandma Marjorie Harris, Von’s mother, the family matriarch, had chosen this particular week to die. She could have died at any other time; there had been no hurry or urgency about it.

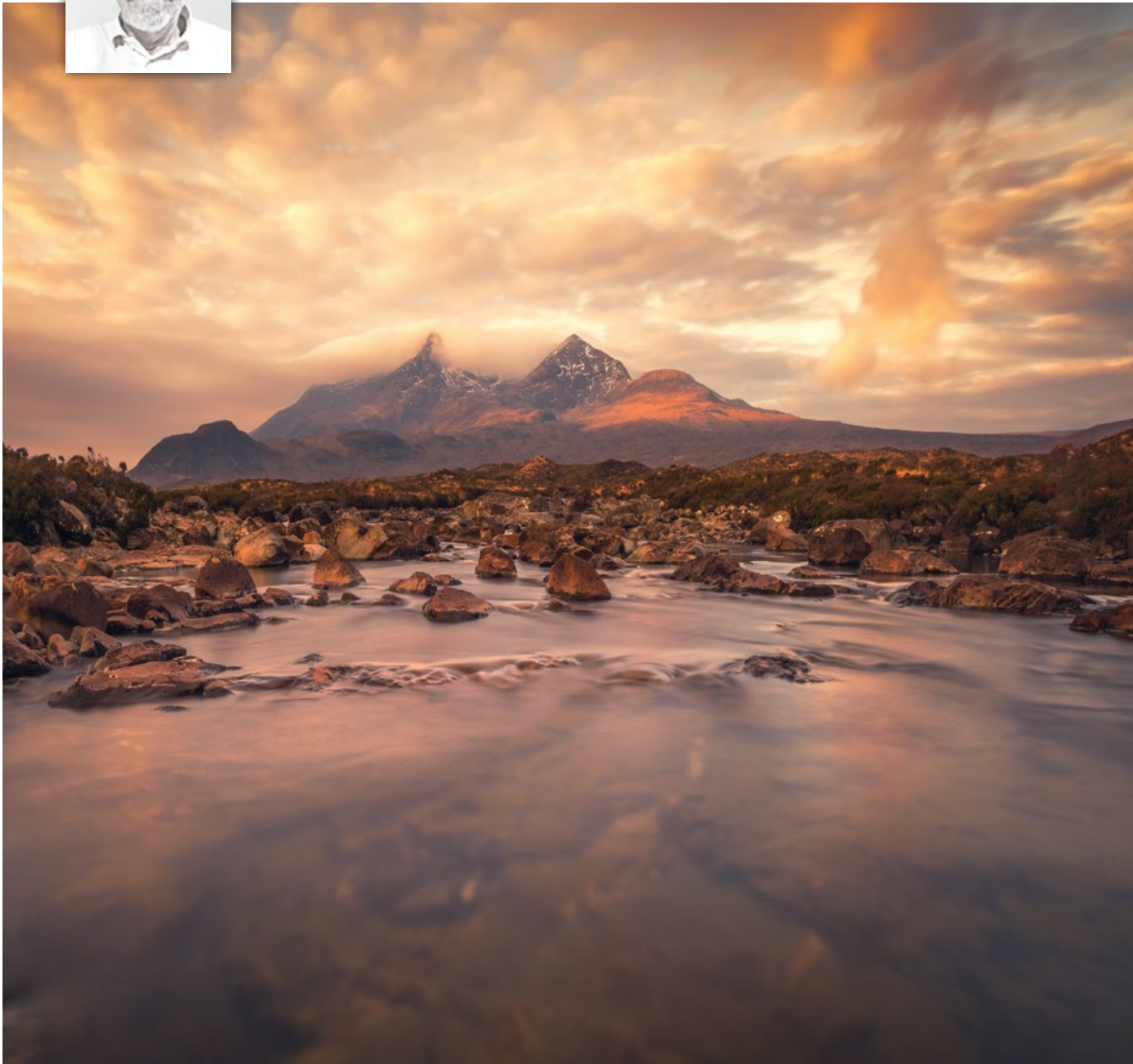
“ I like to think that some of the ashes would have blown on to the mountain range evocatively named Sleeping Beauty... ”

Von was furious with her mother for upstaging her carefully laid plans. The interstate members of the family had been summoned, briefed and provided with an agenda for the days surrounding Christmas, including a wonderful combined family photo, with the newly defiant, ageing Grandma Harris the centrepiece. It would make a perfect addition to the assorted family photos adorning the walls of their Woodbridge home.

Von had been busily preparing enough food for a small army. The Wagg and Harris wider families had hearty country-working appetites and would be sharing several meals, including Von’s resplendent Christmas lunch, morning and afternoon teas and after Christmas lunches, as well as New Year celebrations. It was to be Von’s *piece de resistance* and a family gathering like no other. Grandma Harris had, true to form, stepped in and caused a ruckus with her daughter, a mistake for which there could be no forgiveness, no fight of words, no favouritism from Grandad Harris when it was most needed for Von.

Significant is the memory of Von’s portentously spoken words, as we stood enjoying the Woodbridge garden that Christmas-time afternoon, when Grandma Harris was in disgrace for her thoughtless untimely demise. Von’s simple words, spoken with a convincing finality ‘We’re next’ (meaning herself and Wally) have remained with me, taunted me, because, of course, she was right. They were next.

First Wally, who died with a broken heart for his sweetheart who no longer knew him, and finally Von, mother of four fine sons, succumbed to her creeping dementia. Their ashes have been scattered in selected well-loved places, including the wild Tasmanian waters of Mountain River, near Grove, and upon the fertile winter slopes of Mount Wellington, magnificent backdrop to the city of Hobart. I like to think that some of the ashes would have blown on to the mountain range evocatively named Sleeping Beauty, their DNA forever inextinguishable and everlasting. That would fulfil their dream for eternity.



A WALK TO THE OTHER SIDE

written by Rob Greenop

This is a story of a walk across Northern Scotland in the summer of 1955, when roads were few and far between and the air still crisp and clean. It was a walk that has remained etched in my memory for over sixty-two years.

Our ship was passing between the Inner and Outer Hebrides, heading for Kyle of Lochalsh, the small town on the mainland from where, before a bridge was built, the ferry ran across to the Isle of Skye. Sub-Lieutenant



Julian Oswald called the cadets and midshipmen together to announce that whoever wished to volunteer would be disembarked there to find their way on foot across Scotland to Invergordon, the small town on the Cromarty Firth on the east coast, where the ship would pick them up. He would lead and all we had to do was follow him and tramp across approximately eighty miles of country in five days, making sure we arrived before the ship sailed for Bergen in Norway, its next destination. Oswald was our divisional officer and mentor and was regarded with great respect by all in the gunroom. In later years our judgment proved well-founded when as Admiral Sir Julian Oswald, he was appointed to the position of First Sea Lord of The Admiralty and Chief of the Naval Staff. Later he rose to the highest rank in the Royal Navy, an Admiral of the Fleet.

“ We were ferried ashore, leaving the ship to weigh anchor and head north, round the top of Scotland to a rendezvous on the other side of the country. ”

The prospect of exchanging our cramped quarters aboard one of Her Majesty’s old training ships, where thirty-two of us slung our hammocks in a confined space way below decks, for the fresh air of the Scottish

Highlands, sleeping in a tent under the stars, was too good an opportunity to be missed. Knowing absolutely nothing about what lay ahead I put up my hand.

And so early one morning a few days later I found myself standing at the top of the gangway, one of a party of twenty, packs on our backs heavy with tents and food, ordnance survey maps covering the route to be followed, in hand about to set off on our great Highland trek. We were ferried ashore, leaving the ship to weigh anchor and head north, round the top of Scotland to a rendezvous on the other side of the country. In order to get there on time the aim was to walk a minimum of sixteen miles a day along narrow roads, over grassy moorland and through timbered countryside. Little did we know how tough that was going to be.

It was the middle of June and the weather was clear and warm. Initially we followed the railway line from Kyle of Lochalsh as it curved round the southern shore of the Inner Sound, until a more direct route saw us winding our way



through the valleys of the Western Highlands. Late in the afternoon we reached the southern side of Loch Carron and camp was made close to Attadale, a place marked on the map for no reason other than the fact that it was a railway station. ‘Station’ was quite a grandiose word for Attadale, for all that was there was a very short platform and small open hut with a bench seat. The name was painted on an old piece of roughhewn timber and nailed to the side of the hut - there was not a soul insight. The only inhabitants of Attadale were the myriads of midges which nearly ate us to death. Progress that day had been good but we knew that ahead the going was to be much more taxing.

“ ...our chances of getting to Invergordon before the ship sailed were looking slim. ”

We woke with aching backs and legs, to the sound of birds calling in the early dawn and the smell of damp heather in the air. That day, the party slowly spread out and split into groups of three or four as we walked along narrow single-lane roads and tracks devoid of traffic. Where it seemed the route would be shorter we deviated across gorse-covered mountain sides, with the going often quite difficult. Occasionally our efforts were rewarded with the sight of wild deer in the distance or the sudden flight of grouse or pheasants hurrying to get out of our way. We passed through small hamlets of stone crofter-cottages, some with one or two ancient locals sitting outside, but many deserted with missing roofs or just rubble for walls, legacy of the Highland Clearances of the 18th and 19th centuries when many tenant-farmers were evicted by their landlords to make way for sheep grazing. That night we again camped under the stars beside a picturesque loch that reflected the images of the surrounding craggy peaks. Our friendly midges had accompanied us everywhere.

By late afternoon of the third day we reached Achnasheen, not even half way across to our destination on the east coast. My three companions and I realised that we were running far behind schedule, to the point that our chances of getting to Invergordon before the ship sailed were looking slim. With the road and tracks ahead continuing to wind and undulate across barren areas of moorland, and with a long way to go, the following morning we displayed excellent initiative and caught the only train of the day to Garve, the next stop about sixteen miles to the east.

From there we followed a path heading east along the southern side of the loch until it turned towards where it emptied into the Black Water River. The going became easier as we descended through timbered countryside, following the river to Rogie Falls where salmon were leaping on their journey upstream to spawn. It was a place to stop and bath our blistered feet in icy mountain water and reflect on our days of freedom from Navy life. We dallied longer than we should have, knowing that the remaining miles to Invergordon entailed a return to civilisation.



Our last night was spent in Dingwall in a camping ground surrounded by lights, disturbed by barking dogs and the noise of an occasional car, and late on the fifth day we made our way onto the wharf in Invergordon to wait for a boat to take us back to our floating home, anchored just outside the harbour in the Moray Firth. Later that evening as the ship headed into the North Sea, even after a hot shower and a meal that hadn’t been cooked over a small primus stove, I don’t think any of us were happy to be back onboard.



REFLECTIONS

FROM A RETIRED GRIEF COUNSELLOR

written by Erica Greenop

It was back in 1989. I was at College, doing the Grad Dip Counselling and Applied Psychotherapy, formalising my years of being a volunteer in palliative care, and working as a trained volunteer for a grief hotline. Learning theories and academic wisdom. Learning the complex collective and individual psychology of human beings, the gifts to make use of, obstacles to be reckoned with.

And yet, it seemed to me, when it comes to helping it's not some special learning, some special skill. It's a kind of consequence of something much deeper. I could feel it. I devoured the words of Ram Dass, his book *'How Can I Help?'* All that beautiful listening he wrote about, the kind of listening that seems to dissolve barriers between people. It spoke to me, confirmed to me the importance of 'connection' when people are adrift and their world is changed forever and grief aches in the depths of their beings; and in there – and absent-mindedly I pat the place where my heart lives in my body – in *here*, I sensed

the corrosive pain, its fearful silence, the loneliness, the isolation. The helpless cry to a distant empty moon. Grief counselling made so much sense to me. The essential ingredient of compassion. The multi-layered processes of empathy and the wonderment of where they took me. As if in collecting the stray, mismatched, apparently inconsequential bits and pieces and thoughts and feelings, helping it all settle, helping it feel understood, helping the person turn silence - that aching void where the only voice they hear is their own – into words, there seemed to be a healing power. Again, I could feel it. A



living breathing piece of who we are. Grief counselling touches the deeper part of our selves, Things come together. Life's energies. Outside influences. Step by step. Things become possible again.

“ I used to visit her. Just sit quietly with her. She could hardly speak, but one day she tried, at length, to communicate with me. ”

Grief counselling is how I made use of my sense of who I am, that sensitive child, all those years ago, who worried for the birds on winter nights when trees were bare and frost formed along branches and meadow grass was white in the moonlight, worried for the goldfish when the pond froze over, that lost look in their eyes; and the adolescent me who knew the aching sadness when a



beloved mum dies; and there's part of me that has come to know the settled feeling, the all-inclusive feeling of order and harmony and completion, when things come together and loose ends find their connections; the part of me that

wanted to help people be brave enough to keep going, find re-creation within themselves, find courage to look at their changed world, open their eyes again, see themselves still alive and functioning in it. Sometimes I questioned the universe. Things we don't know. Things we don't have to know. Things we can't order and control. Things that don't have answers. I keenly felt that ragged sense of un-finished business, being allowed for a tiny fragment of time into the world of another human being, being part of their process, and having to let go, having to live with not knowing what happened beyond this moment. Trusting. Letting go. Not knowing. And yet, there was always this feeling of a deep sense of *unity* with things. I noticed things that wouldn't ordinarily happen but they do, the mystique that sits on the continuum somewhere between the vast unknown and plain old everyday providence. I heard things, saw glimpses into another level of human consciousness. It moved me. And I questioned how is it that I loved this work when there is so much suffering in people, so much grief which disintegrates peoples' lives and loves and beliefs. I think I have always had this feeling, that if we connect with people, that sort of connection where people *feel* it inside, we make the world a better place. Just for a moment. It's as if we give people this moment to own, a little piece of life that is their own returned to them. All the ordinary unspoken things of life which are so important. And after all the years that have gone by, all the study, the teaching, the experiences of working with people who are grieving, a frail elderly lady is very present in my mind. I was a volunteer in palliative care. Miss Jackson had motor neurone disease. She was dying. She was sort of crumpled, bent over as she sat there in her invalid chair, strapped in so she didn't fall forward, her back hunched over, head on her chest, arms hanging. I used to visit her. Just sit quietly with her. She could hardly speak, but one day she tried, at length, to communicate with me. Her voice came out all wrong and I couldn't understand what she was saying. I felt helpless and sad. She was using up the fragile remnants of her fading energy to tell me something and I couldn't understand. But it was important. So I sat on a low stool beside her, my piece of paper and biro at the ready, and she spelled out her message - "in your travels around this hospital, have you by any chance come across my African Violets?" Letter by letter. So eloquent. And of course there they were, on the window ledge up there where she couldn't see them. So I fetched them and put them on her lap and she looked at them from the sideways turn of her head, for ages, just looking, and then she said *'aren't they beautiful'* in her funny croaky voice, and she wept, and we sat together and something truly amazing had happened. It's that sort of thing. A tiny ordinary moment that changed the direction of her world and mine.



THE WEEKEND

BY BERNHARD SCHLINK

Reviewed by Richard White

There's a pattern to my reading. It has to do with moods, too; the reading for distraction and excitement; the reading for learning and understanding and the reading for inspiration.

By 'inspiration' I mean more than uplift or edification. Inspiration has to do with that sense of reality and humanity that includes the dark and limited, the broken and mistaken and . . . the possibility of healing and forgiveness. When I read the blurb on the inside cover of *The Weekend* I was sold.

. . . in his most important book since *The Reader*, Bernhard Schlink probes the shadowlands between guilt and redemption, present and past, experience and youth. In haunting prose he distils both the pain of a nation and the abiding possibility of hope.

This is a hard back-back copy, a bonus, from an Op Shop. Small, compact with the front cover intact. It looked a quick read, instant, fast-food inspiration. But, it did not work out that way.

My desire for the 'quick fix' was frustrated. I had that momentary sense, early on, after intermittent dipping-into, that this was a 'serious' novel. By serious, I mean a book that has a convoluted plot, obscure twists, exaggerated characters and has won the Booker Prize or the equivalent. I wanted inspiration but not too much thinking.

It took me more prolonged reading periods for the unfolding of characters and plot to reveal people and a world that were distressingly familiar.

Schlink's earlier book, *The Reader*, involves a meeting point between the horrors of Nazi Germany and the relatively naïve and innocent present. *The Weekend* is about another encounter between youthful ideals and activism and the tired experience of twenty odd years later. The novel's characters lived in the time of the violence of the Baader-Meinhof movement; they wondered whether anything could be salvaged from their living or experiences.

. . . the old days – the more time he spent with his old friends, the more clearly he remembered what he and they had wanted back then, the more alien the past became for him . . .

“ The awkwardness and blindness of a life, clumsily and selfishly lived, would clear and someone might emerge from the shadows. ”

That one's life would slip away like that. He tried to remember his childhood, his school, his first marriage. He assembled images, events, moods . . .

The focus of the gathering is Joerg, one of their group who had taken the anger and critique of society to a chilling extreme. He had murdered four people in his terrorist rampage. After twenty three years in prison for these crimes, he had been granted a pardon; the weekend reunion was to help Joerg re-enter the world, to begin life again.

'Youth is wasted on the young', according to George Bernard Shaw. All that energy and enthusiasm and so little wisdom; the wisdom may or may not come with the living of a life. And, if wisdom does come, it is like the experience of love or grace, glimpsed not grasped, fleeting and tantalisingly real like reading a good poem or sitting quite still with a dog at your feet.

Schlink's book was inspiring in this sense. It took me to a mellow place where the past seeped into the present, like grace or love, fleetingly. I sometimes had this experiencing with families preparing a funeral.

People would describe to me the person who had died. The stories would come, scattered, disconnected like those pieces of a jig-saw puzzle. Sometimes, not always, someone would hold up a piece, an event or an

attitude that was their key to the story. Or, bits and pieces would cohere and a face or even a soul might appear, for a moment.

Then, something very strange would happen. The hints and those sharp edges, the hurts and the disappointments might soften, for a moment. The awkwardness and blindness of a life, clumsily and selfishly lived, would clear and someone might emerge from the shadows. Perhaps there might be forgiveness and healing, for a moment.

Nothing can change the past in *The Weekend*, but everything and everyone can be part of an inspiration, of a becoming a little more human, for a moment . . . or, forever? There is a quotation from W H Auden that says this well –

Beloved, we are always in the wrong,

Handling so clumsily our stupid lives,

Suffering too little or too long.

Too careful in our selfish loves:

The decorative manias we obey

Die in grimaces round us every day.

Yet through their tohu-bohu comes a voice

Which utters an absurd command – Rejoice!



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NORTHERN SUBURBS
MEMORIAL GARDENS
AND CREMATORIUM

Dear Richard,

Thank you for the magazine. I didn't know such publications existed. A very well produced document. It reminded me of a movie we saw a few years ago about a newly unemployed cellist who takes a job with an undertaker preparing bodies for funerals. He became a most sensitive presence and created the same sense that your magazine does.

[The editor had asked the letter writer to send an article for *Dialogue* and he replied.]

Why don't I just send you a few poems and you can see if any fit? I start with this one.

My mother developed dementia and I wrote this for her. Well, it became a poem for my brothers and sisters because while I did get back to Ireland and read it to her, her mind was mostly gone. 'Shangana' was the name of our farm which bordered the river Barrow in County Laois. The poem was published in my first poetry book, *The Lilac Bow*.



SHADES OF LIFE

I see it clear as summer morning sunlight
streaming through the open windows of my adult years.
I see the fields of Shangana in all their seasons:
the freshly-turned brown earth of spring
the rising green shoots of summer
the golden barley swaying in the autumn breeze
the cold wet earth of the year's grey end.

I look into the face of each of you my children
And in your eyes I see writ large
chronicles of lives lived and living
I see the peace and pain
that is the lot of each and every life
of yours and mine.
Inside my fragile mind there dwells a vast ocean
of memory
that all the streams of years
of time and place have filled.

Last night when I was sleeping
a storm passed by
trees were felled
the Barrow burst its banks
the outer regions of my thoughts were all submerged.

Pity me then
But I forbid you to make me an object of your pity
I have lived a life of which I am justly proud
and if you are at a loss with me
remember this
all you need to know already has been learned.

Remember my child when you were a babe
I sat with you and in silence held your hand
your face
your eyes
words and thoughts
and the great span of life
were beyond us
a father and husband kept watch
all that was required
was the peace and presence of each other.

So
remember
the kingdom of love is within you
and as my life was consecrated to your dreams
draw close as my day draws to its close
do not despair
be sad
rejoice in the life I have lived
guard what I have given you
do not fret after tomorrow
the precious moment we now share
is elegantly sufficient
forever
let me live forever
in the buoyant sea
of your life's remembrance.

Maurice Whelan

Maurice Whelan's books
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