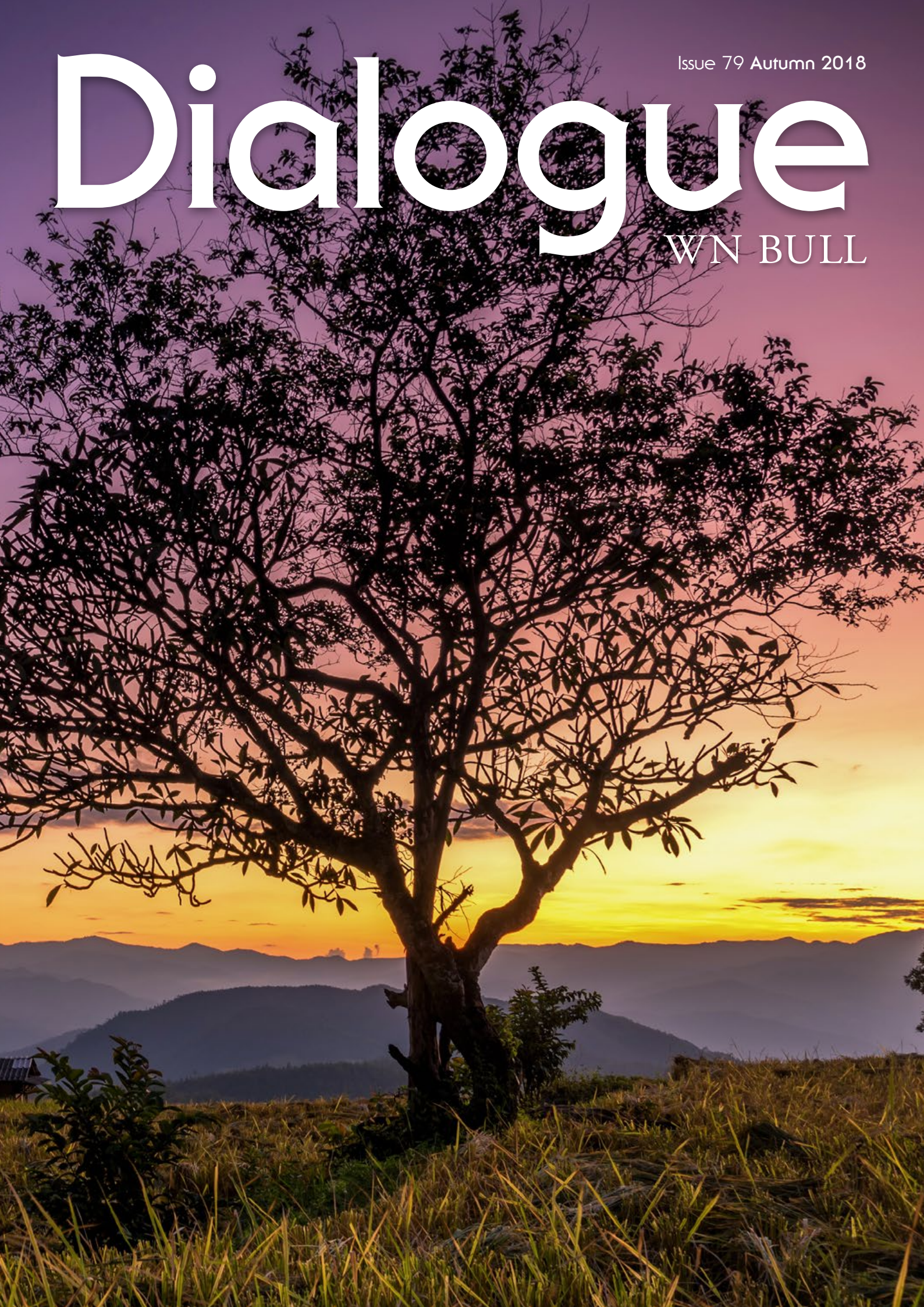


Issue 79 Autumn 2018

# Dialogue

WN BULL





# Dialogue

WN BULL

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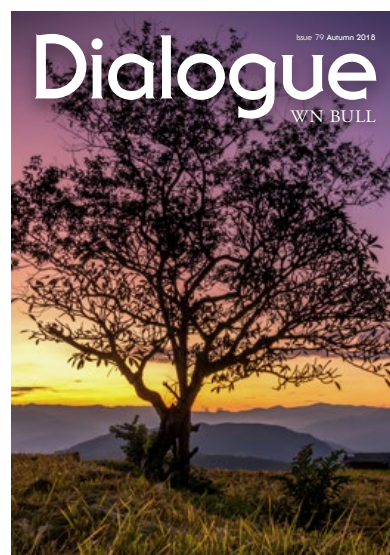
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*Autumn in the Mountains*

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# Editorial



Richard White

'The heart has reasons that reason knows not of...' This is the title of the opening article for our Autumn edition, a 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness', according to John Keats.

There is a part of us that goes beyond calculation and narrow convictions; it is that crazy, irresponsible part that loves generously, dreams outrageously and grieves deeply. It is the part of us that may even grow wise over time, that learns to let go, to live simply and to laugh and cry whole-heartedly.

This edition of *Dialogue* is a celebration of the heart. Patsy Healy's reaction to the unexpected news of a friend's death illustrates the all-too-human movement of our heart; the growth of affection and respect and the shock and pain of loss.

The all-too-human-movement of our hearts is there in Erica's reflection of dreaming by the river and the living spirit of a mother who emerges from that dreaming.

Brothers and sisters, I bid you beware  
Of giving your heart to a dog to tear . . .

Advice from Rudyard Kipling that he failed to take to heart himself and which Lisa Hines and the writer ignore to their peril and delight.

So much of this listening to our hearts has to do with trust. Kipling goes on about

There is sorrow enough in the natural way  
From women and men to fill our day . . .

But, we keep bouncing back, reaching out and living and loving again. Trust is about a little girl getting back in the water; it is about our believing in goodness and truth when we have been hurt or disappointed; it is about ground beneath our feet when we have gazed into the depths.

Rob's story about 'the extra distance' is about compassion and service that 'go beyond the call of duty'. It is a simple account of a young man's life and imminent death treated as the most important thing in the world, a source of wonder and gratitude and confirmation of what we hold dear.

'Walks aren't all about saggy bums' nor is Erica's second contribution. There is magic out there, on the walks, in the lives and faces greeted in passing and in the breaking of reasonable rules.

Cicero is a very ancient codger and one easily dismissed as a boring old Roman. But, he has much to say about the time of 'mists and mellow fruitfulness', when saggy bums and greying hair can be accompanied by twinkling eyes and a quiet sureness that 'all will be well and all will be well and all manner of things will be well . . .'

Wishing you all a mellow and fruitful Autumn from all of us at WN Bull Funerals.





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‘THE  
HEART  
HAS  
REASONS  
THAT REASON  
KNOWS  
NOT OF’

Blaise Pascal  
1623-1662

---

written by Richard White

‘The heart has reasons ... ‘ came to mind recently after a conversation with Patsy Healy, General Manager of WN Bull Funerals. Patsy had told me of her reaction to an automated email reply to an inquiry she had sent.

‘Peter Leach died suddenly and the book-binding business in no longer operating’.

Patsy told me how shocked she was to receive this news. She had not heard anything of Peter’s illness or death and was quite unprepared.

‘Peter has been our book-binder for many years. He would come up from the south coast regularly to pick up our records for binding and deliver the bound copies. He was meticulous in the work he did; he had a real pride in his work and we benefitted from his professionalism.

There was more to it than this, however. Over the years and with our conversations something happened. Peter became ‘part of the team’ and I relied on him, but more than that, I liked and respected him.

I had a sense that binding our records was more than a job with Peter; he put his heart into his work. It was as if these records, the personal information about families we had come to know intimately through their funerals, were significant for Peter as they were for us.



I was grateful for the work he did for us, but even 'grateful' is not quite what I mean. To say I respected Peter and his work is getting closer. I also felt that Peter respected me and understood what we were on about at WN Bull Funerals. We, too, put our heart into our work.

So, when I received that automated reply, I was shocked and saddened. I felt I had lost a friend and I contacted Peter's wife, Francesca, to extend

“ I felt I had lost a friend and I contacted Peter's wife ... to tell her of the affection and esteem that Peter was held in, here at WN Bull. ”

my sympathy and to tell her of the affection and esteem that Peter was held in, here at WN Bull.

Then, I contacted Richard and suggested he write something about Peter, our book-binder and our friend.'

This is where the article started. I followed up Patsy's suggestion and contacted Francesca and she replied:

Dear Richard,

. . . I am more than happy for you to write a little something about Pete – Pete himself would be pleased as well although he would be the sort of chap to wonder what all the fuss was about!

I had no idea he was so talented!! I am only glad I managed to convey some of my admiration.

He, on the other hand, would be critical of his work and would find a little flaw that would be invisible to us . . . he spent so much time on the funeral books .- he respected them and he was a perfectionist and he also appreciated the value Patsy placed on them . . .

Pete would always listen to his customer and strive to do his very best for them – the personal touch was what he valued . . .'

'The heart has reasons that reason knows not of'. There is much in this saying of Pascal. 'To put your heart into your work' is not 'reasonable' if it involves extra effort and time or it means undue concern for the needs and hopes of the client. Gaining a reputation, attracting clients and developing wider networks are all 'reasonable'; 'going the extra distance', as Rob Greenop writes in this edition, is a thing of the heart.

In the last couple of *Dialogues*, celebrating 125 years of WN Bull Funerals, we have discussed the company motto, 'Leaders in Personal Service'. There is something ever so

slightly outrageous in this claim.

Personal service is just that, 'personal' and as such it can never be made into a slogan or a claim. The 'personal' is what happens when people connect or relate or in some way speak from the heart. The connection between Peter and Patsy was personal in this sense.

When Patsy told me of her reaction to the news of Peter's death, you could say she took his death 'personally'. Over the years, through the meetings, the conversations, the interactions Peter had ceased to be a supplier; Peter had become a person and Patsy grieved his dying.





“ They had made an impact on me, gradually and without my noticing it. Working in a funeral company has the potential to bring about the same changes, to come to know people much more deeply ... ”

This ‘becoming a person’ is something that happens in our relationship with someone, but it is also something that happens within us. In the town where I live, separated by a couple of years, two men took their own lives, one the vet who looked after our dog and the other the owner of a café.

I remember being quite shocked by the news of their deaths. Neither man was a friend; I knew them both by the services they provided.

However, with both of them, there had been interactions and exchanges and I knew bits about them from the services they provided.

They moved out of that state of anonymity into people with names and personality. They had made an impact on me, gradually and without my noticing it. Working in a funeral company has the potential to bring about the same changes, to come to know people much more deeply and much more quickly and to be shaped and changed by these ‘knowings’.



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Patsy Healy, General Manager of WN Bull at Chapter Hall after receiving her Papal Medal.

**Image** Giovanni Portelli Photography

I remember being at a gathering with people I had not seen for some time. I told them I was working for a funeral company. They began making jokes about funerals and referring to

disrespectful or dismissive.

'The heart has reasons that reason knows not of'. There is heart-work in the varied jobs and professions and in the ordinariness of our lives. We come

This personal quality is hard to describe; it is something that happens, in us and around us. There are moments in grief, especially, when this personal quality is revealed,

“ In the town where I live, separated by a couple of years, two men took their own lives...” ”



movies they had seen. They thought they were being funny and perhaps before I had the privilege of this work, I might have been similarly

to know things and to know people through this heart-work that has this personal quality.

shared and celebrated. Patsy's story about Peter Leach and my exchange with Peter's wife, Francesca, is one of those moments.



## 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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## ON REFLECTION

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written by Erica Greenop

Every year on her birthday, they go back to the river. To be in it, surrounded by it, be filled up again. To feel the strange energy of remembering, that feeling that lets them float a little. To be in the place their mum loved. It's like stepping out of their lives into a different consciousness.



Ever so slightly the night river ghosts ebb away. The river is grey and still like an old woman dreaming.

"Just like me" their mum used to say when she was frail and old and her river had become a dream of another time, as if for years and years before it became a dream it was making a pact with her memory. She would fidget to make herself comfortable in her chair, put her feet slowly – perhaps they would stop working altogether if she asked them to go any faster – on to the footstool, hitch her funny old toes into the backs of her slippers so they fell to the floor, rub one foot on the other, like a pre-dream ritual, specs off her nose, folded carefully, on to the table, and close her eyes.

“ They can hear it.  
The foreverness of  
this place. Their  
mum is all around,  
in this place  
she loved. River  
bank reflections.  
Stillness. ”

"Don't talk to me," she would say, "just ten minutes." And Mick and Annie imagined she would be saying in her mind "OK dreams, I'm ready. You can come now."

Now the light is soft. The sky has a new closeness as if they can hold it. Their mum is here. Somewhere. Everywhere. Clouds and river gums hang in the edge of the river.

"Hush," she used to say, her finger to her lips, "listen." As if she was saying *if you don't shut up every now and then you might miss something wonderful*, and they would hush and listen and the silence would be bigger than the whole world.

They can hear it. The foreverness of this place. Their mum is all around, in this place she loved. River bank reflections. Stillness. In those mornings when burned toast haze and loose mist and interrupted sunlight hung in patches over their boat. Those hot flat days, gulls tearing holes in the sky, Barrenjoey headland shimmering, pouring into space. That tangerine-streaked-with-turquoise evening when they reached over the bow of the boat to trace the colours with the ends of their fingers, and the river moved in little whirlpools, and the evening light fidgeted on the water.



Today the whole world is quiet. The afternoon is the other side of forever, and the old woman's children are there, together, thinking of her, remembering her little rituals, loving her. Reflections rush up like echoes from their memories, a thousand hushed river voices singing. They can smell the green, touch the quiet, see the foreverness, old as eternity river sensations playing with what's real and what isn't. Knowing that even as the years go by, she is with them.

Now stillness floods the river.

Annie can feel it. *I could float away*. She whispers to Mick, nothing important, probably something like "can you feel it too?" He doesn't answer – *hush, listen, or you might miss something wonderful* – but in a little while he looks at Annie as if her words have travelled around the world to reach him and he has been waiting for them to finish their journey.



WN BULL  
FUNERALS

*Leaders in Personal Service*

125 years

## A PREPAID FUNERAL

In the 125 years WN Bull Funerals has been serving the people of Sydney, there has been significant growth and change in the community. We are proud to have been able to readily adapt to those changes and remain compassionate, sensitive and responsive to the needs and wishes of our client families.

WN Bull is especially proud of its heritage of providing real comfort and care when caring for the deceased and their families. This care extends to the recommendation of prepaid funeral plans.

A prepaid WN Bull funeral will assist family members and ensure that every detail is attended to.

When the care you seek is unconditional - talk to us.








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## LISA AND THE DOG RESCUE

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written by Richard White

When our last dog had to be ‘put down’, I vowed we wouldn’t have another dog. We buried him in the garden, with one of his soft toys and had a little ceremony with our neighbours and a few friends who knew him well. He had given much joy and amusement to the family; it was the least we could do.

I had discovered a poem by Rudyard Kipling in an excellent book of poems and reading for funerals, *Funeral and Memorial Service Readings, Poems and Other Tributes*. A friend read the poem and a young grandson suggested we each put a stone on the place where Mate was buried; so we did. The words of the poem stayed with me, ‘The Power of the Dog’.

There is sorrow enough in the natural way  
From men and women to fill our day;  
And when we are certain of sorrow in store,

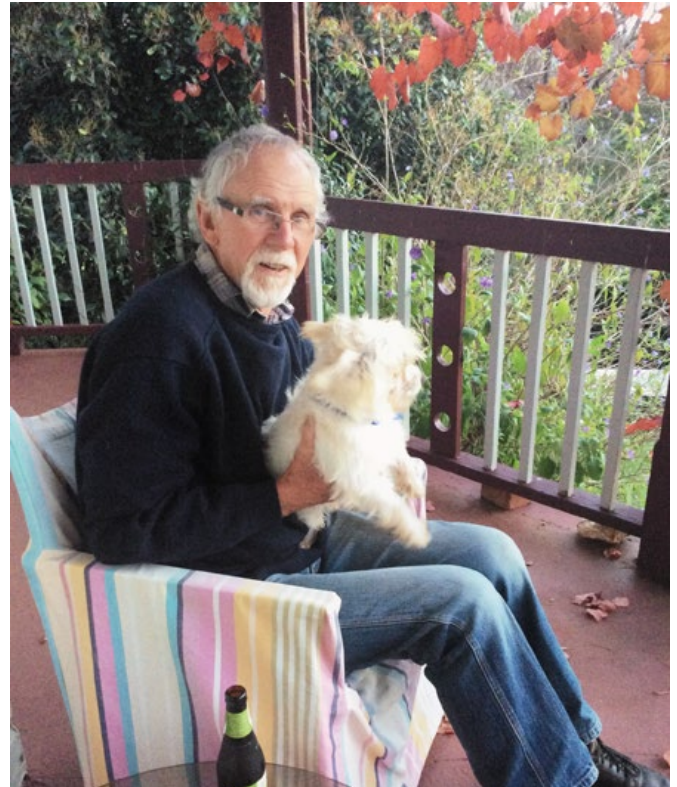
Why do we always arrange for more?  
Brothers and sisters, I bid you beware  
Of giving your heart to a dog to tear.  
Buy a pup and your money will buy  
Love unflinching that cannot lie –  
Perfect passion and worship fed  
By a kick in the ribs or a pat on the head.  
Nevertheless it is hardly fair  
To risk your heart to a dog to tear . . .

There are more important people and tragedies without  
‘giving your heart to a dog to tear’. No more dogs. No more  
pets, at all, really. Then, along came Lisa Hines . . .

Lisa grew up on a farm about 80 kilometres from Hay, south-western New South Wales. There were plenty of animals around. Of course, there would be 'livestock' of some sort on a farm. But, Lisa spoke about animals in a way that was different from so many 'head of cattle' or 'mobs of sheep'. There was something in the way she said 'animals' that marked a difference from talk about production or profit or markets or sale yards.

I may be reading too much into Lisa's expression or description of life on the family farm. I may have been listening for a tone or emphasis that has grown on me over the years. Farms were another world, literally, from where I grew up; animals were pretty much limited to cats that came over the back fence and the succession of dogs we had as pets.

These dogs had names and personalities and would become part of the family. I was involved in feeding them and taking them for a walk. I learnt to care for them when they were hit by a car or attacked by the big Labrador at the top of the street. Dogs were a source of fun and play and deep sadness and grief; my emotional life was fed and educated by dogs.



“ ... I thanked her  
profusely for putting  
this bundle of energy,  
fun and affection in  
our way and opening  
up again those  
emotional reserves  
of expression ... ”

When Lisa spoke about animals on the farm, I sensed a similar experience to mine. To grow up among animals in Lisa's world was to see them, if not as part of the family, as living lives of their own and having a value in their own right. This was not a viewing animals as objects, things to be bought, sold, killed and eaten; animals in Lisa's view were part of her world, a world where interacting and relating, interest and care were the *modus vivendi*, roughly translated as 'reasons for living'.

In more recent years, Lisa has lived in a small town, not on a farm. There may be so many 'head of cattle' and 'mobs of sheep' on the surrounding farms, but Lisa's interest now was focused on dogs, in particular on 'rescue dogs'.

Pet Rescue is the name given to volunteers like Lisa who keep an eye out for those pets that have become unwanted, usually through no fault of their own. With Lisa, the role is

associated with a phone call from the local council pound where the ranger lets her know when it is full of homeless animals. Lisa would make her visit and spend some time checking dogs that showed the most potential to adapt to a new family or environment. Then, Lisa would take them home.

I don't know how many dogs Lisa has cared for, but vet inspections and getting to know the new arrivals are part of the process. The next step is advertising and networking to find new homes for her visitors.

Lisa is a friend of my wife on Facebook. When our last dog was euthanased and after an appropriate period of time, Lisa began sending Leigh photos of dogs she had rescued. I was duly shown these photos which I dismissed with hardly a glance. 'No, no, never . . . another dog!' Until one fateful day about a year ago.

This time I did look for a second or two at a small, white, Maltese-West Highland Cross. I surprised myself by saying, 'Yes, let's get him!'

Lisa assured me recently that my grieving was over and I was ready for another dog. Maybe she is right; all I know is that I thanked her profusely for putting this bundle of energy, fun and affection in our way and opening up again those emotional reserves of expression and appreciation that had lain dormant for two years or so.

'That's it', Lisa said, 'dogs bring out something in us, as well as providing that unconditional presence and welcome.' I recalled writing an article for *Dialogue* entitled, 'All I know about Grief I learnt from my Dog.'

We talked about the importance of children growing up with pets; the ways of learning to care, being responsible



and fun and play as well as loyalty. Then, Lisa lamented the cruelty and indifference that led to abandoned and mistreated dogs. I will let Lisa take up the story in her own words.

“ Saving one dog won’t change the world but it will change the world for that one dog. ”

One of my favourite quotes is “saving one dog won’t change the world but it will change the world for that one dog”. This is what I need to remind myself when my small contribution to animal rescue seems so insignificant when I look at the thousands of dogs looking for new homes on the [www.petrescue.com.au](http://www.petrescue.com.au) website.



Our rescue group (a group of forty five volunteers) is often swamped with litters of unwanted puppies and kittens dumped in the deposit box at the Wagga pound. The deposit box allows members of the public to open a one way door where you can deposit your unwanted animals after hours and anonymously.

Unwanted litters get left there, sometime only a few weeks old and requiring round the clock care with bottle feeding etc.; usually dumped without their mothers. Regardless of their age it’s a traumatic experience and sometimes they die from dehydration before staff come back on duty. However horrible the deposit box is, it is

preferable to being dumped in a river or a paddock.

On top of that, we have people surrendering their animals because they “bark all day” (because they are left on a chain by themselves for hours on end), dig holes



**Clockwise from top**

Richard and the New Arrival, The Magnificent Seven, and the wonderful Teefs.

(normal dog behaviour, especially when bored), grow too big, owners are moving, going on holidays, they don’t have time etc.

We take too many animals into our foster homes because we know what happens to them if we don’t. We bottle feed them, care for the sick, do a lot of cleaning up messes, cages etc. We drive hundreds of kilometres to pounds and vets, spending our own money on fuel and pet food.

When I hear how happy you are with your new little friend, it makes it all worthwhile. That’s what keeps us going. It’s easy to become disillusioned because it doesn’t improve. The numbers of unwanted dogs is not decreasing. In Australia we put down 250,000 dogs every year! Thank you for adopting.

PS I advise people to take a dog into their home after losing one, not to replace their friend, instead it helps fill the hole that loss has created. A new friend can give you a sense of purpose, distraction from dwelling on your loss, provide love and companionship.



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## TRUST AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDHOOD

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written by Richard White

My granddaughter is fearless, almost. As a two year old, she loved the water. Even younger, her mother had a video of her crawling in the shallows towards the waves on a surf beach. The water was her element. With parents or grandparents around, to rescue or to temper her enthusiasms, there was little to fear. This wild fearlessness had at heart an element of trust. Water, the world, life were all there, for her and with her; throwing herself in was as natural as breathing.

The day came, as these days inevitably do, when the water revealed its other face. Having run ahead of her mother, one day at the beach, the three year old spotted the wading pool where she had so much fun in the past; this time she headed for the deeper end and jumped in.

Her mother caught her, her face just above the surface, spluttering and fearful. It was a parent's worst nightmare and a child's reality check, a sobering moment and one that could have ended that wild spontaneity.

Memories of that day were alive when her mother spoke



to her about swimming lessons. I went with them to that first class. My granddaughter was excited; she showed me her back-pack, the folded towel and the goggles, everything ready. My mind went back to that day at the beach and the tears.

There were two moments in that first lesson that stay with me; the first was when the young instructor walked up and called Josie by name; she smiled, reached up and took his hand and the two of them walked to the pool.

The other scene was the young girl standing at the ledge, in the water, and the instructor calling to jump towards him. There was a squeal and a jump; she went under and emerged spluttering and laughing.

So, this is what trust is, I thought. Such a delicate and essential quality in a child, in all of us. It is trust that enables us to enjoy life; it is trust that frees us to be who we really are.

The psychologists put trust as the foundational task or starting point for the development of a human being. We begin life learning that the unfolding journey is a worthwhile enterprise and that we have within us the adaptability and resilience to address challenges we meet - finding ourselves out of our depth and in serious danger.

In some religious traditions there is the belief in Guardian Angels, mysterious beings whose designated role in our lives is to be there, an aid and guide on those occasions when we are 'out of our depth'.

“ The surprise and delight are about our catching our breath, or, better, our catching the trust that reaches out and up and lets go of hurt or fear. ”

We can all perhaps recall the stranger who stopped on a wet night when we had run out of petrol or the person who helped us up when we fell unceremoniously in our new suit in a busy street or the woman who came to our rescue when a small child was throwing a tantrum when we needed to get off a train . . . or a mother who pulled us from a pool when our enthusiasm got the better of us.

As we get older, thoughts of Guardian Angels and other religious myths and stories are left behind, along with our childhood toys. We may not go so far as saying it's a 'dog eats dog' world; certainly there's a cynicism and wariness that has grown with stories of child abuse and our own

experience of trauma and misunderstanding while growing up. The sight of a young child taking the hand of a strange man, trustingly, can generate warning bells, rather than a sense of wonder.



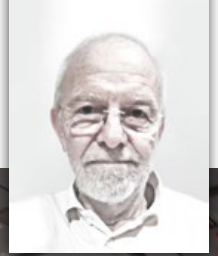
But, wonder is what it is all about. 'One step at a time' is an encouraging cautiousness; it also implies there is something solid there, to put one's foot on! 'Something solid' is not as exciting as a Guardian Angel; it is a 'taken-for-granted'.

'Life goes on' is another of those truisms that are intended to carry us through those troughs of sadness or loss of confidence. Here, too, we can fail to observe the magic of life, ongoing, persistent and faithful.

Those moments at the swimming pool occur whenever we allow the child to surprise and delight us. These surprises are miles away from the sentimentality and childishness of photos with Santa or the voyeurism of opening of presents. The surprise and delight are about our catching our breath, or, better, our catching the trust that reaches out and up and lets go of hurt or fear.

That 'reality check' that revealed the other face of water, is the reality within which we all live. There is pain and loss, death as well as life, limits as well as dreams; the wonder is that the child in us, as well as the child in the pool, continues to reach out and up.

There may well be more Guardian Angels in their blessed disguises. Our tentative steps will again and again find something solid on which to stand. And, we may find that life itself is bigger, more forgiving, more encompassing than the set-backs and crises we inevitably meet.



## — THAT — EXTRA DISTANCE

written by Rob Greenop

It was a February morning back in 1972, the beginning of a very long day when rules and regulations were put to one side and a group of people went that extra distance at a time of need.

My crew and I were in Bahrain starting a tour-of-duty flying a Boeing 707 to London. Strangely the passenger number was very light – around forty I seem to recall. We were scheduled for transit stops in Damascus to drop off one passenger and Vienna where just a few more would disembark. From there it was straight to London. It would be around twelve hours before our working day was over.

Although Bahrain winters are usually mild, on that early morning at 2.00am it was quite chilly. This was nothing when compared to the weather forecast for Vienna of rain and sleet, and heavy falls of snow for London. These conditions were going to make both arrivals quite difficult, with real possibilities of having to go elsewhere if we were unable to land.





But the weather forecast wasn't the only cause for concern on that morning – today's flight was going to call for extra care and attention by all crew members for we had a passenger in a closed-off area, hidden behind drawn curtains right at the rear of the aircraft. A peek behind and you would see nearly as much medical equipment as one would find in an emergency department of a small hospital. In there on a special stretcher-bed attended by two nurses

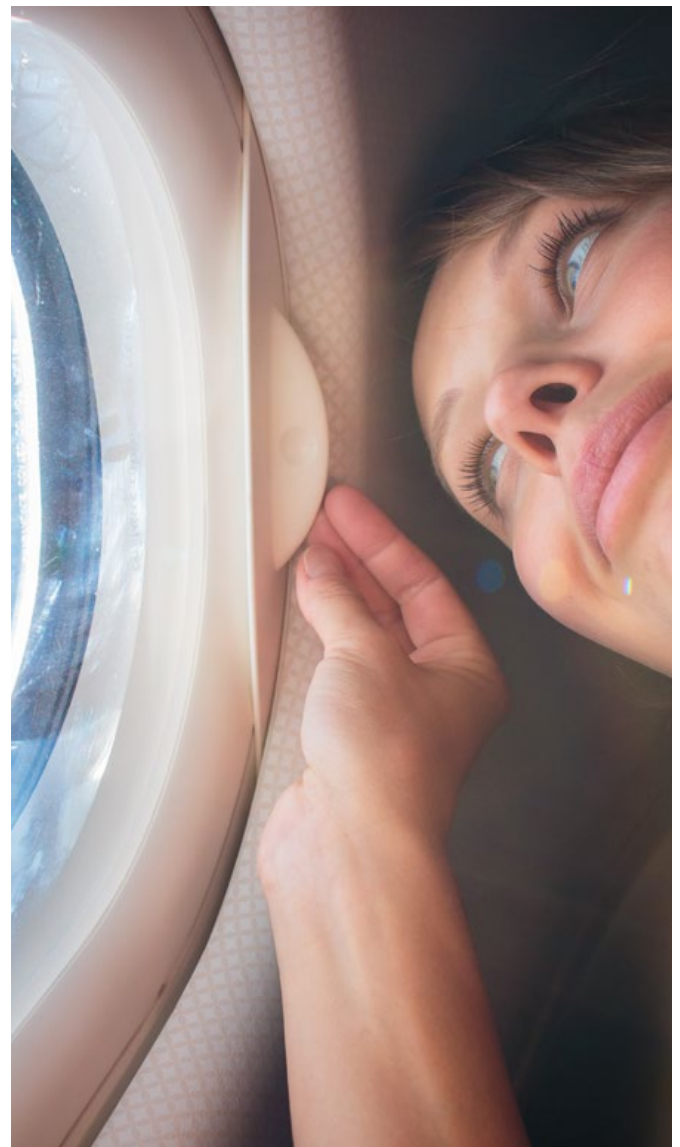
“ The atmosphere on board, as could be expected, was somewhat subdued and somber, the seven cabin attendants keenly aware of the gravity of the young man's condition. ”

was a young man of about twenty-five returning to his place of birth for the short remaining period of his life. He was terminally ill and together with his even-younger wife was making this last journey home. It was our task to see he got there safely and in as much comfort as possible. That, as it turned out, was not going to be as easy as it seemed.

The atmosphere on board, as could be expected, was somewhat subdued and somber, the seven cabin attendants keenly aware of the gravity of the young man's condition. Even the passengers travelling with us seemed, on that morning, unusually quiet.

The flight to Damascus was uneventful and our sole passenger for that destination disembarked. There were none joining and after taking on some fuel we were about to start when the first of a series of problems arose. Somehow, somewhere in one of the aircraft's wings there was a leak, a steady drip, drip of fuel onto the ground. Clearly we were going nowhere until things were fixed. The engineers got to work to sort out the problem while onboard the crew, and the passengers, all of whom had remained in their seats rather than venture into the old terminal building, waited patiently – in these circumstances there is nothing one can do but just wait. At this point I was not too concerned, but as the first hour ticked by into the second and then the third, my mind began to focus on alternate plans if the delay became even more protracted.

From memory we were running late by about four hours when we finally started engines, only to immediately run into further trouble when another technical problem arose, this time with the failure of an hydraulic pump. Once again we were going nowhere until the problem was fixed.



With this worsening situation my thoughts now focused on where to go, what to do if the delay dragged on and we 'ran out of hours', ie exceeded our working limitations, which limited pilots to sixteen hours on duty. If that limit was going to be reached we were required to stop. Already this figure was looking ominously close. We couldn't call a halt in Damascus and take 'crew-rest', the primary concern being a lack of a suitable medical facility nearby to take temporary care for our young patient down the back.

proceed directly to London regardless of how long it took.

Now running several hours behind schedule, we departed a wet Damascus and set off for the five-hour flight to London. But our dramas and misfortunes weren't over yet as the aeroplane had one more surprise in store for us when, at a busy time during the descent, with a loud bang one of the front windscreens cracked. Finally, after a last-minute runway change which created a minor panic for my first officer we landed in driving snow some twenty hours



“ I think we were all emotionally drained and tired, but our young man was home. ”

Then there was also the question of hotel accommodation for the remaining passengers and my crew. Perhaps we should proceed as planned to Vienna and take a rest there? I signalled the company in Sydney of my intention and received clearance to make my own decision.

By mid-morning even the Damascus weather was against us with occasional heavy rain hindering replacing the pump. It became decision time with regards to where to go, what to do. I called the crew together and explained the situation as I saw it, and asked for their cooperation. They were unanimous. We were a team. We would all work towards getting our patient to London, regardless of where we went.

I had decided that it was no longer sensible to try for Vienna, after all only a handful of passengers was due to get off and there could be the same difficulty as in Damascus in providing appropriate medical care. I signalled the company again, this time about my change of plan to

after leaving Bahrain. Perhaps the most welcoming sight, as we approached the terminal, was that of an ambulance parked alongside the finger waiting for our young man from down the back.

I seemed to take longer than normal to complete all the 'shut down' checks in the cockpit before going back into the main cabin. By then the passengers had disembarked, leaving ground-medical staff to carefully move the stretcher-bed through the rear door and onto a lift and to the ambulance below. All cabin attendants were still there, quietly waiting, none wanting to leave until the young passenger was safely on his way.

I think we were all emotionally drained and tired, but our young man was home. My crew had gone that extra distance.






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## WALKS AREN'T JUST ABOUT SAGGY BUMS

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written by Erica Greenop

I am thinking about my walks. All the health things I am taking care of, preventing various older age conditions and problems of weight gain and saggy bum and expanding waistline and as my sister says she always knows when she is getting fat because her trousers get shorter. Walking helps the health of my bones and muscles and stops my arteries clogging and if I am diligent, the walk website tells me, it will become a useful routine.

But it seems to me that walks aren't just about saggy bums and useful routine and clogged arteries. There's magic out there. The nearness of gum trees, their magnificent immediacy, their consciousness, their changing mood. I am thinking of those flat hot Sydney summer days, the air still and heavy and the sun spilling out of heaven's frypan on to the top of my head. Leaf litter pours off the gum trees on days like that, crunches under my shoes and piles up in the gutters at the edge of the road; cicadas scorch out the

inside of my ears, and the distances behind the trees seem to be with my thoughts on the edge of somewhere else.

I wonder about the elderly woman I see sometimes, in her wheelchair in her garden, just by the hydrangea at the letterbox, touching the raindrops on the leaves. I wonder about the Ghanaian woman with springing hair and a smile as big as houses, in her Turrumurra garden with its sandstone pathway and gardenia hedge and the magnolia in the grass at the top of the steps and her children on their



bikes up and down the driveway. I wonder about the old Japanese woman who shuffles along very slowly. She greets me, puts the palm of her hands together, tips of her fingers upwards, bows her head. No words, more like a meeting of souls when you can stop, and all the palaver of life isn't important and you come to a moment of quiet. And the old gentleman with eyebrows like cicada wings. And off to the left in a backyard there are gum trees and camellia hedges and sometimes the long scratchy unbroken middle C of a chook in labour.

“ Don't we all have critical voices in our heads, the ones that remind us to obey the rules, don't straggle, no jumping in puddles, hands out of your pockets, don't sniff? ”

And I think about my friend who can't do walks any more, tiny and frail now, and for ages we walked together



and I was afraid one day she would be picked up by the rushing air of a passing car and blown across the road.

She stands by her camellias, looking at them. "I don't want to touch them," she says, "I don't want to leave my fingerprints on them."



I like to think of daydreaming. I imagine, if daydreaming had form and shape, it would be a little bit magical, like rainbow soap bubbles, my world reflected floating upside down, empty of a wide range of knowledge, full of anticipatory nothings in particular just waiting to turn into something astonishing. It occurs to me that daydreaming used to be a survival mechanism, when I was at school. An escape. Eight years at post-war English boarding school required serious distraction from reality. Miles away in my soap bubble, thinking of snowflakes when my mind should have been on circumferences and diameters, watching the tiny spit bubbles at the corners of the teacher's mouth when I should have been concentrating on the constructs of relationships between given quantities.

I suspect school memories will always be the critical voices that interrupt the creation of those "*off a little bit in my own world*" thoughts, the newness of things that appear in my mind while I am out walking, or sitting in the chair by the window and the noises outside go quietly into the distance. Don't we all have critical voices in our heads, the ones that remind us to obey the rules, don't straggle, no jumping in puddles, hands out of your pockets, don't sniff? Don't we all have those voices that stop us creating our own thoughts? Keep us locked into the way it should or ought to be? The gospel according to the critical voice? The one that we become fettered to? That one?

I do.

And now I am reminded of my first day as a volunteer in palliative care. Over thirty years ago the training was brief, the rules uncomplicated – '*don't sit on the beds*,' '*don't touch the patients*.' So here I am in my flower lady apron with snips in my apron pocket and rules fresh in my ears. The first patient I come to is an elderly lady over there in the corner bed by the window, so full of fear, so alone, sitting rocking, murmuring, picking at her sheets; so I sat



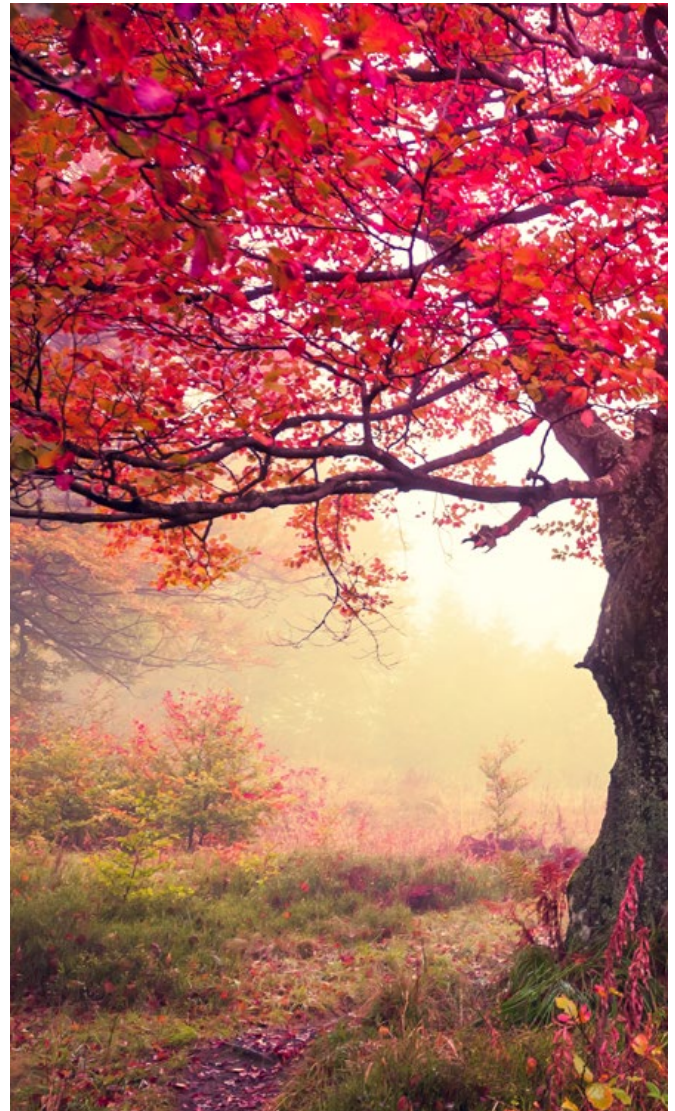
on the edge of her bed and held her hands and asked if I could stay a while and she was calmed and lay back on her pillows and shut her eyes and I stayed and she drifted into a place where fear disappeared and smiles came to her face.

“ ... I stayed and she drifted into a place where fear disappeared and smiles came to her face. ”

I like the stuff around me. The hydrangeas when they have turned green with tiny red dots after they have been purple all summer. Creatures that run off and plop into the creek as I come near. Little noises in the long grass. Buzzing in the telegraph wires. Dry leaves that rustle and chase themselves in circles. The brush turkey who lives with his



pile of leaves in the bush behind my home, who comes into the road every now and then, his wrinkled yellow bandana



round his neck and his tail pressed on sideways and his eyes look as if he has been to war and seen terrible things. And the water dragon sitting on the dried earth pathway, and I get right up to it, just a meter away, and off it goes, dashing off with its head held high and its legs doing a kind of over-arm paddling, like an old lady in an aqua-aerobics class trying not to get her hair wet. I like my evening walks when the day is darkening at the edges and shadows lie on the pathway, the delicate grey bird with long legs and knots in her knees picking her way among the shadows, the orange fungus on the fallen branches luminous in the evening light. And sometimes after an evening storm the late sun comes pouring out of the sky and clouds pile up like great towering pink cauliflowers.

So, what was it I was thinking about? Was it important? What was it I said about saggy bums? Ageing? Imperfections? Critical voices? I seem to have found my way to the edge of nowhere in particular, uncontained by any sense of rules or routine or expectations, outside bad memories, full of something that seems to be glowing. Did I say there's magic out there?




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# HOW TO GROW OLD

ANCIENT WISDOM FOR THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE

BY MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

Translated by PHILIP FREEMAN

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Reviewed by Richard White

In a little book on prayer, the Benedictine priest, Sebastian Moore, praises *The Art of Loving* by Eric Fromm. Fromm's theory is that love is an art or capacity, learned and developed over time; it is not object-centred, focused on any 'soul-mate' or prince charming or Vogue model. If you want to be loved, for instance, learn to be loving.

Madame de Sevigny, - I think it was her, anyhow it was one of those sophisticated old French women who wrote memoirs in the Versailles days – says in one of her axioms for young ladies: 'If you want men to love you, be kind and thoughtful to old ladies.' Maybe she was beginning to feel the draught herself and could do with a little bit of attention! Anyhow, what she says is true.

So, maybe my interest in this book on 'How to Grow Old', is because I am entering into that stage myself? Perhaps, but it is also true that the thought of growing old had been an enduring theme, in the background, for most of my life.

I remember an elderly man saying to me once, 'whatever you do, Richard, never grow old!' The thing was that I quite admired this man; he had a love of gardening and was very knowledgeable about native plants, he was a keen Swans supporter and had a particular, talkative



wisdom. I thought at the time that I wouldn't have minded being like him when I 'grew up'.

There was a story in a little book by the American priest, John Powell. Without stereotyping too much, I thought John Powell, a prolific and popular author, was a typical American. He described his youth, growing up in a tough part of Chicago, as a sort school of hard knocks; he was boxer, he could handle himself, get things done, confident and capable. Then, as a priest, he was in a community where there was an elderly man, confined to his bed, angry and irritable, loud in his complaining.

“ Old is good.  
Classics are good.  
The ancients have  
something to offer  
us, the distilled  
wisdom of the years  
and experience. ”

Powell was early on in his training and this experience had a profound effect on him. He resolved that he would live his life in such a way that he would not end up like the old man in his community. The editor of *How to Grow Old* quotes Cicero as saying something similar.

Moderation, wisdom, clear thinking, enjoying all that life has to offer – these are habits we should learn while we are young since they will sustain us as we grow older. Miserable young people do not become happier as they grow older.

Now, I have given an unconscious (?) example of one of the criticisms of the elderly - reminiscing, story-telling and getting-off-the-point-ness. Maybe. But before I say something about who Cicero was and why people have made a fuss about his little book, I want to say something about remembering and story-telling.

I was talking to a man the other day, about my age, who was recalling his days playing sport in a small village in England. Andy was not someone I knew well and even when I did have a 'conversation' with him, it tended to be one-sided; I would listen, distracted and bored as he went on and on about the World Cup and learning Portuguese before going to Brazil for the last one. But, on this occasion I found myself reacting differently.

My imagination and sympathy were engaged; I could see that village green, the trees surrounding the ground, break for tea around 4:30 pm, then the game continuing

into the daylight-saving-evening. I lost a little of my 'what about me' and heard Andy's enthusiasm and affection for the way things were. And, we both agreed that the past was only a stone's throw away.

'Nothing is lost and all in the end is harvest.' This was a saying I came across on a bereavement card. All that history is in our bones, in the shape and condition of our bodies and in the shape and condition of our hearts and minds. Nothing is lost. Our lives are a vast treasure store of memories, fragments, jig-saw pieces, sharp and bright, dark and bewildering. 'Not people die, but worlds die in them', as the poet said.

'Meanwhile, back at the ranch . . .' In other words, back to Cicero. I am no historian or Latin scholar. Cicero is a character I remember from whatever Latin I learnt at school. In more recent years I have come across him in my reading and he has come alive.

Cicero was a proud Roman who lived in the last century BC, a contemporary of Julius Caesar, whom he despised and Marc Antony, with whom he clashed. He was a famous orator and politician who believed strongly in the Roman ideal – order, reason, law and freedom within the structures of the Republic.

A combination of growing older and disenchantment with political developments, Cicero retired from public life to his farm. Instead of 'spitting the dummy', sulking and withdrawal, Cicero devoted this time to his beloved garden, to reading and to writing. This was a most productive time of his life, only cut short by his extra-judicial assassination at the command of Mark Antony.

There are plenty of 'self help' books around and certainly some dealing with successful aging. I've never been tempted to read any of these. However, this brand new-Op Shop Treasure, with its grey and white classical front piece caught my eye.

*How To Grow Old* looked more of a vade mecum, 'a small book or manual carried on one's person for ready reference... ' Old is good. Classics are good. The ancients have something to offer us, the distilled wisdom of the years and experience.

So you see how old age, far from being feeble and sluggish, can be very active,

Always doing and engaged in something, as it follows the pursuit of earlier years. And you should never stop learning, just as Solon in his poetry boasts that while growing old he learned something new every day. . .

Good old Cicero! Learning and reminiscing and improving the 'soil' of this generation with the bits and pieces gathered from the previous one. If it were true for this ancient Roman, then it can be true for the likes of you and me.

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NORTHERN SUBURBS  
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Dear Editor,

Autumn is here, but where is *Dialogue*? Are you like one of those visitors before mobile phones who is 'on the way', delayed by who-knows-what, but unable to let me know?

I mean by 'you', both you, the magazine, and your words at the beginning, weaving a warm oneness of scattered and 'dappled' variety. Like those lines of Professor Higgins, surprised at his missing Eliza, 'I've grown accustomed to your . . . ' 'Poet's Corner' and Erica's magical stories, reflections on grief and on life and your own meanderings, with their tantalizing quotes and vaguely familiar themes.

You seem to have been around for years, back to the days when John Harris was in charge. John used to make an appearance back then with an idiosyncratic article on 'The Rise of China' which revealed his life long interest in business or a recycled piece from the time when he wrote, compiled and posted the original *Dialogue*. When his eyesight began to fail, he handed everything over to you.

At first, the two of you would discuss content and go together to the offices of Catholic Communications at Polding House. John enjoyed the collaboration and the feel of still being in charge. The designer we first met is now a priest in the Wollongong Diocese; the next one, a young woman, has also moved on and finally came Phillip.

It's not Phillip's fault this edition is late. Phillip has been designing *Dialogue* for over ten years. He is creative, enthusiastic and most importantly a sensitive reader of content; I can tell this from the pull-out quotes, always appropriate and keys to the heart of the article.

Your contributors are faithful and generous, like Erica and Rob, and passionate and insightful like Cecile, personal and creative, like Deb and Jo and the many others who have blessed us with their stories and their lives.

The characters from WN Bull Funerals have hovered like Patsy, mother.-hen-like, over every edition, wise counsellor and warm encourager. Or, Steve, with his reflections on the sharp points of grief and the warm contacts with people and all the other funeral staff and arrangers with their particular *esprit de corps* that created the special WN Bull-ness I have come love and appreciate.

So, shake a leg, dear editor, and get this homely, human and much needed dose of reality and mystery off to me ASAP.

Yours faithfully,

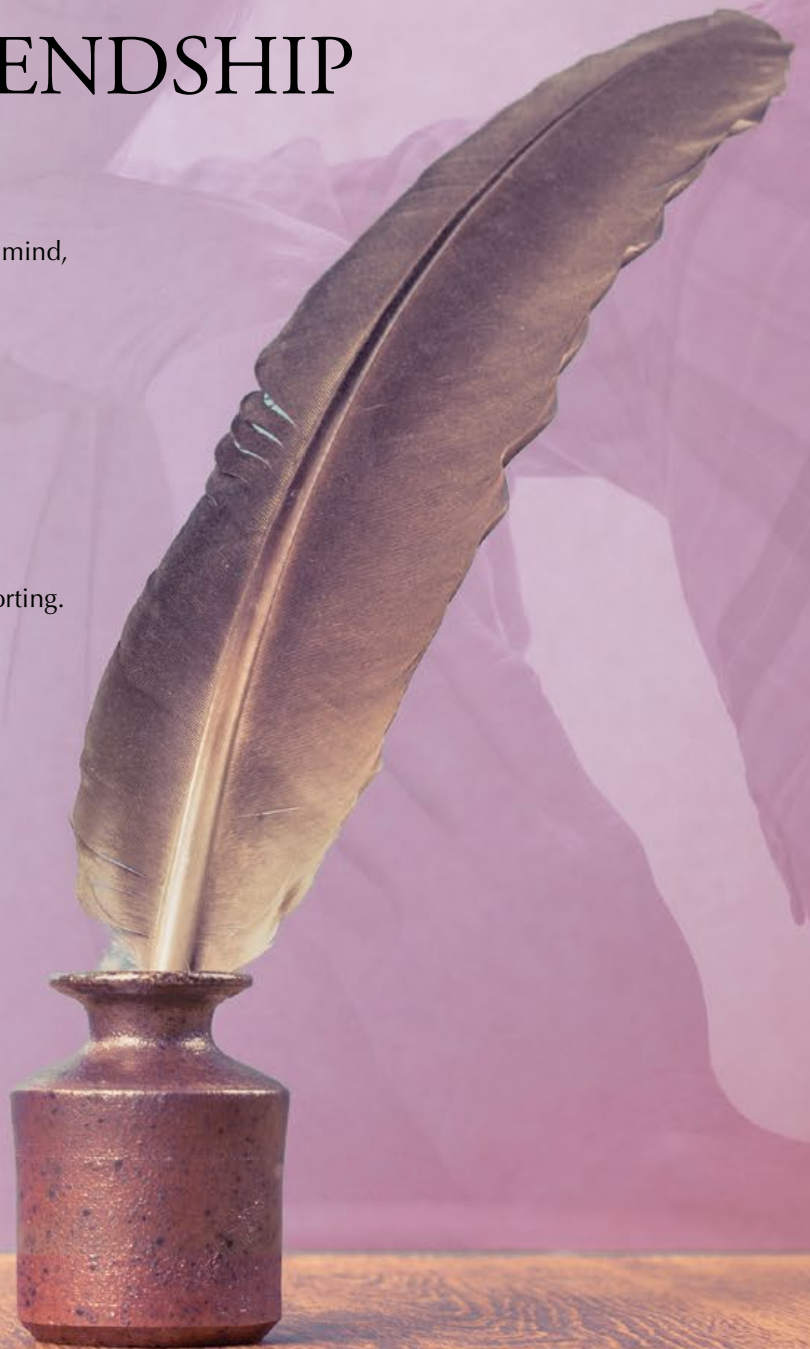
Richard White

# ODE TO FRIENDSHIP

I sing a song in praise of friendship,  
Of long conversations with people of like mind,  
Of laughter and tears,  
Of history going back years.  
I sing of the community of companions,  
Of slow meals and cups of tea,  
Of the tossing round of ideas,  
The exchange of experiences.  
I sing of the sharing of good times  
And the sharing of bad times –  
Of a shoulder to cry on –  
Of hands to be held, supported and supporting.  
Love has been praised endlessly  
But friendship has been forgotten.  
Today I celebrate my friends  
And all the ties that hold us together.

*Marjorie Pizer*

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