

Issue 80 Winter 2018

# Dialogue

WN BULL



# Dialogue

WN BULL

**Editorial Office:**

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

Member of InvoCare Australia Pty Ltd  
**ABN:** 22 060 060 031

**Dialogue Publications**  
© 2018

**ISSN:** 1832-8474

*Dialogue* is published quarterly by

**Dialogue Publications**  
- a publishing division of  
WN Bull Funerals

**Editorial Board:**

Richard White  
Jake Ryan  
Patsy Healy

**Production:**

Phillip Pavich  
Email: [phillip@ridehigh.com.au](mailto:phillip@ridehigh.com.au)

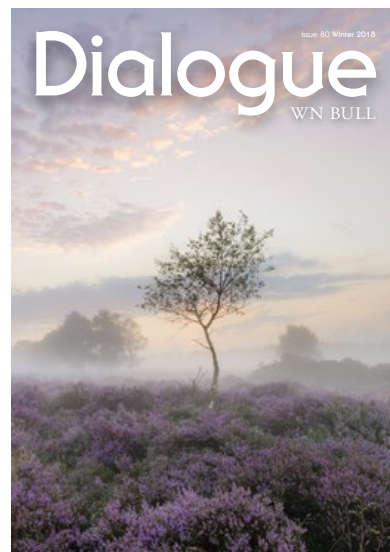
Copies of *Dialogue*  
can be obtained by  
calling (02) 9519 5344

**Cover Image:**

*Winter Present*

# Contents

Issue 80 Winter 2018



## Regulars

- 1 Editorial
- 20 Recommended Reading  
*Silence in the Age of Noise*
- 22 Recommended Reading  
*Gratitude*
- 24 Poet's Corner

## Features

- 2 WN Bull Funerals  
Chatswood
- 6 Stuff
- 9 Ten Years of Service  
Brett Kennedy
- 12 'Lemon Tree Very Pretty...'
- 14 Memories
- 18 Blue Willow

# Editorial



Richard White

Some years ago, I attended a conference in Durham, UK; it was the DDD Conference, 'Death Dying and Disposal'.

The name of the gathering was confronting, if not grim. But, my take on the event was its performance in the tried and true criterion: to what level do they pour your wine at the conference dinner?

Yes, Cana-like fulsomeness! Death, dying and disposal are facts of life; generosity and hospitality are signs of life. This Winter edition is eminently real in the addressing of death and dying and warmly human in its honouring of life.

Brett Kennedy, the new Operations Manager at WN Bull Funerals chose to be a Funeral Director rather than an airline pilot. Curiosity about DDD overcame the excitement of flying.

Marcella Belcastro and Sharna Adolphe are responsible for the new WN Bull premises in Chatswood; both bring a sense of vocation to their work. It is not buildings or shop fronts that establish a genuine funeral service but the humanity of the people who serve. Marcella and Sharna know what it means to be a blessing because they know from experience what it means to be blessed.

Erica Greenop's two articles evoke the wonder of the ordinary, the 'stuff' of life and the miracle that can bring forth from the rubbish a fragile, fractured beauty.

The editor lets the sweet fragrance of lemon blossom and edginess of its fruit break down barriers. It is more than commingling of sweet and sour; the barriers fall or are overcome and there's the possibility of community.

Rob Greenop is an Englishman, a former Royal Navy pilot who had a distinguished career with Qantas. Rob's 'Memories' describes the treasures preserved and the treasures revealed in tokens and emblems from the past. The lost and elusive moments, the little deaths in every parting, become conjurors of life.

The two books in Recommended Reading speak for themselves or at least the authors do. The explorer of the North Pole and the explorer of the mind are both lost in wonder at what they've seen and what is beyond understanding.

Marjorie Pizer's simple poem addresses again the mystery that is human life and human dying: it is mystery that draws us into the 'heart and soul' stuff of our lives and makes death, dying and disposal experiences less to be feared.

Wishing you a warm and bracing Winter, from all of us at WN Bull Funerals.



---

## WN BULL FUNERALS CHATSWOOD

---

written by Richard White

WN Bull Funerals have opened new premises at 222 Sydney Street, Chatswood. This occasion was significant in a number of ways.

For most of its 125 years of operating, WN Bull Funerals has been based in Newtown and the new offices, to the north of the city, create a new presence or focus. Also a funeral shop front is not like any other retail business in a suburban street; despite the modern façade and advertising logo, this business is about death, grieving and honouring, celebrating and remembering a life.

To acknowledge the particular significance of the new buildings, Patsy Healy asked the Bishop of the Broken Bay Diocese, Bishop Peter Comensoli, to bless the premises and the work to be conducted there.

We all come from different religious traditions or from no religious tradition at all. Blessings may seem completely foreign to our understanding and experience. However, when Patsy told me about this ceremony at the new Chatswood building, I was reminded of my first day of work at WN Bull Funerals in King Street, Newtown.

Patsy Healy, the General Manager, took me into the mortuary before we went into the office. While Patsy did not say to me, 'this room is the heart and soul of our business', her attitude and the signs on the wall gave that meaning.

‘Remember that families have entrusted their loved ones to us.’ ‘This is a sacred place and requires respect and care at all times.’

This was the attitude Patsy wanted to convey to me at the beginning of my employment. Over my seven and a half years as part of WN Bull Funerals, I grew to understand and appreciate the drama and the mystery of death and importance of care and solemnity in the conducting of funerals.

‘This is a sacred place...’ or ‘this room is the heart and soul of our business’ are profound statements; they are not lightly made. The sacred and the soul are found in the inevitable and often heart-rending experience of death.

Nowhere is the holiness and the awe-filled more present than in the many public and varied symbols and rituals associated with death. We see this solemnity in the ritual of Anzac Day, in the vigil this year in the park where a young woman was raped and murdered, in the various road side memorials for those who died as the result of car accidents...

And, in those deaths where gratitude and affection can be as overwhelming as the sadness of tragedy there can those feelings of holiness and the awe-filled. Funerals can be occasions for laughter as well as tears, memories of a life time and thanks and heart-felt appreciation. In both case, in profound sadness and inconsolable grief and those occasions when we seem unable to contain or express the wonder and love we experience words fail us.

“ Remember that families have entrusted their loved ones to us.’ ‘This is a sacred place and requires respect and care at all times. ”

Blessings are like all those gestures and symbols, prayers and poems, that try to say something that is so often impossible to put into words. The Bishop’s blessing of our new building confirms and situates Patsy’s signs in the mortuary within one religious tradition; however, the meaning of this religious ritual goes beyond the confines of one tradition.

In this edition of *Dialogue*, there is a moving description of two half-starved explorers being ‘blessed’ by a totally surprising gift of food (See Recommended Reading) and their ritualised response, a moment of profound silence.

Blessings are things we do naturally and spontaneously, the hug, the touch, the smile, the respectful gesture, the exclamation, the greetings and farewells. Our expression, ‘blessing’, comes from the Latin term ‘benedicere’, to speak well, even, to speak well-ness, to hope, wish, intend wellness or goodness to others.



There is an added mystery here. These blessings or blessing have need of the silence that the explorers entered. The visit to the mortuary on my first day of work, affected me even though I became aware of how I defend myself from the reality of death with countless tricks and avoidances.

For a few moments with Patsy, my defences were down; there were a number of other moments in the mortuary, dressing a baby, discovering I knew the deceased, assisting the funeral staff where my work was much, much more than a job.

This is what I mean by the added mystery, where I know that I have been blessed and where I know that I have been or can be a blessing to others. This is so, so much more than those sayings we here every day, ‘Have a nice day!’

In talking with Marcella Belcastro, the Location Manager for the new Chatswood office and Sharna Adolphe, the funeral consultant, I encountered some of this added mystery.

Marcella has had experience in the funeral business prior to returning to the industry in her current role at WN Bull Funerals. Because of family commitments, Marcella moved from funeral work for some years, but she had hoped to return.

Marcella met Patsy at the time of a family bereavement



and she was open to returning to work in this area. As Marcella spoke about her interest in the funeral business, and WN Bull Funerals in particular, I heard the same sentiments being expressed I had heard before: 'I am a

Marcella, spoke of her desire to help families in their time of grief: 'There is so often darkness at this time, and loneliness and helplessness. Being able to bring some light, even a small smile can be a sign, a comfort.'

“ There is so often darkness at this time, and loneliness and helplessness. Being able to bring some light, even a small smile can be a sign, a comfort. ”

caring person. This employment is not a job for me; it is closer to how I live my life, the way I care for people, the sort of person I am.'

Sharna Adolphe comes from New Zealand, where her mother has her own funeral business. Sharna, like



Marcella and Sharna, too, are part of the blessing that is at the heart of the new Chatswood premises of WN Bull Funerals. It is no easy task to be faithful to 'the heart and soul' stuff when working in this industry. Sharna

and Marcella come to the work with the capacity to be a blessing; the Bishop's prayers and those of their colleagues and families, all our 'wishing wells', the *benedicere*, go with them in this new service.



**Image**

Sharna Adolphe, Funeral Consultant  
Marcella Belcastro, Locations Manager  
at the Entrance to the Chatswood Office



## Put those you love in the hands of those who care

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

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

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

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



**WN BULL**  
FUNERALS  
*Leaders in Personal Service*

(02) 9519 5344 | [wnbull@wnbull.com](mailto:wnbull@wnbull.com) | [www.wnbull.com.au](http://www.wnbull.com.au)



---

# STUFF

FOR *NEW PHILOSOPHER*  
MAGAZINE WRITERS' AWARD XVIII

---

written by Erica Greenop

'Stuff.'

A disposable little word. Unimportant. Inconsequential. You wouldn't hear its soft sounds if you weren't paying attention, the scary message of a twenty first century cautionary tale told in a single word, un-listened to, its warnings un-heeded.

"Once upon a time," our grandchildren will tell their grandchildren, "Earth was a planet of consequence, and evolving life forms it provided for and nurtured who used up its energies and resources and sustainability and goodwill and filled it with stuff and couldn't see what was happening to it and didn't know what to do with it and left it somewhere and forgot all about it."

Lounge suites, washing machines. Plastic climbing frames. Barbeques. Car tyres. Stuff of constantly changing technology. Objects we 'have to have' to stay connected,

or keep up, or be worthy, or liked, or admired, or 'move forward' or stay ahead of the game. Stuff treasured by one person, disposed of by another. Not re-cycled. Not even treasured differently. We are in danger of forgetting what it's like to care. I wonder if disposable consumerism has all been done before. Another planet. Another time. Somewhere else.

Years ago, at the British Museum, at the top of that flight of stairs - the ones that look like a museum film set waiting for David Attenborough to appear, marble steps if

I remember correctly – I saw a huge ball of conglomerate, a lump of space detritus that had arrived on our planet and been transported to the top of the marble steps in the British Museum. It was an irregular fragmentary lumpy brown roughly spherical collection of compressed bits of stuff, like one of those loads on the back of a heavy transport vehicle you get stuck behind on the freeway. Stuff of our world compressed into transportable rubbish.

That was when I started to think this has all been done before, an adult extension of those drifting coming-going dream-like un-scientific moments of a child wondering if we are all alone in the universe. I used to watch the stars 'til my eyes ached and the night went pale and someone blew them out, my mum used to say, like birthday candles.

Maybe the story went like this: on a planet long long ago, beyond our celestial canopy, there existed a life form, a species of creature which was able to think and create and remember and develop skills and systems and dig up their planet and use up all their resources and run out of food and water and make the place so hot none of the species could survive. And there was their rubbish, all their world's detritus, spinning and tumbling through the crowded spaces of the universe, lumps of stuff, pieces of fabricated stuff, metal, rocks, at the top of the steps at the British Museum, warning us it has all been done before.

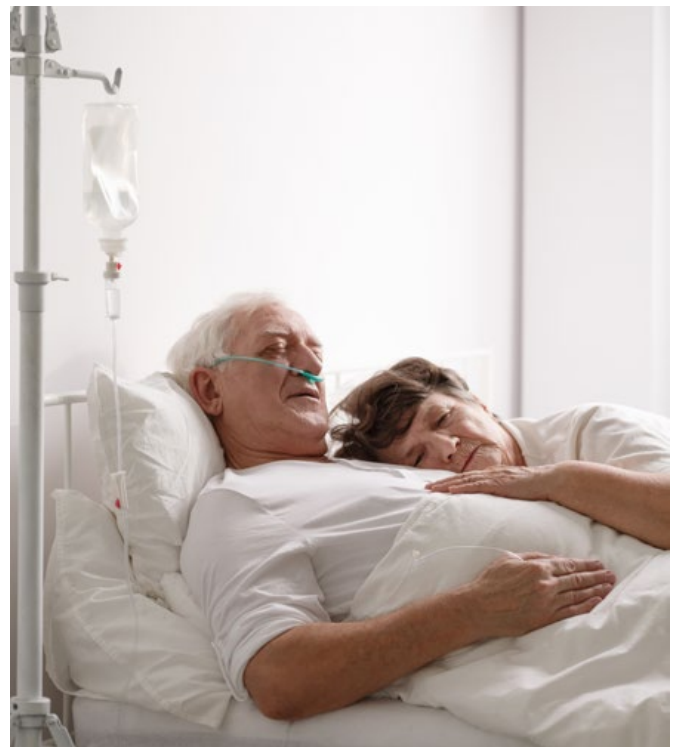
Have we misunderstood this little word? For all its implied wastefulness, 'stuff' is evidence of history and mankind and the species that have lived on this planet.

“ The earthly version of immortality. The need of human beings to be known and remembered. Stuff of the vast incompleteness of it all. Stuff of farewells. ”

Bones. The stuff of life. Tools, artefacts, battlements, walls, tombs, pottery. Stuff people leave behind. Remnants of human existence. It tells us stuff, where we've come from, what it was like, how we got here. The common folk. Their stuff. Languages. Entire civilisations. Kings. Richard the Third for example, the stuff we know, now his bones have been found, DNA, genetics of the Plantagenet dynasty. The stuff we don't know. Was he all evil, or did he have a conscience? Did he know about pity? Or humility? Did his back ache? Did his worms trouble him at night?

And what a magnanimous little word 'stuff' is. A ying yang little word. A benevolent heart lives in this little word, charitable, forgiving. All the stuff we can't explain or haven't got adequate words for, the *"I've got to go and do stuff"* unexplainable importance of things; the *"I might need all this stuff"* reason we take our entire wardrobe of summer clothes for a weekend away. The forgiving quality of the 'stuff' word understands why every surface in the kitchen is a display counter, the milk jug collection, the teaspoon collection, plant cuttings, the fuchsia sitting on the dresser between the antique box with mother of pearl inlay round the keyhole and the polished silver mugs, a pile of last week's mail, the plastic of emptied lunch boxes, the general stuff of kitchens which doesn't fit in cupboards. And its benevolence lets someone else make careful sense of what it is we are talking about, the *"stuff I can't talk about right now"* kind of stuff.

Stuff. The earthly version of immortality. The need of human beings to be known and remembered. Stuff of the vast incompleteness of it all. Stuff of farewells. A branch from a favourite blossom tree placed gently on a dying person's bed, a flower from a carefully tended garden which will never again be visited, the thanks of a son whispered into the still hands of his father.

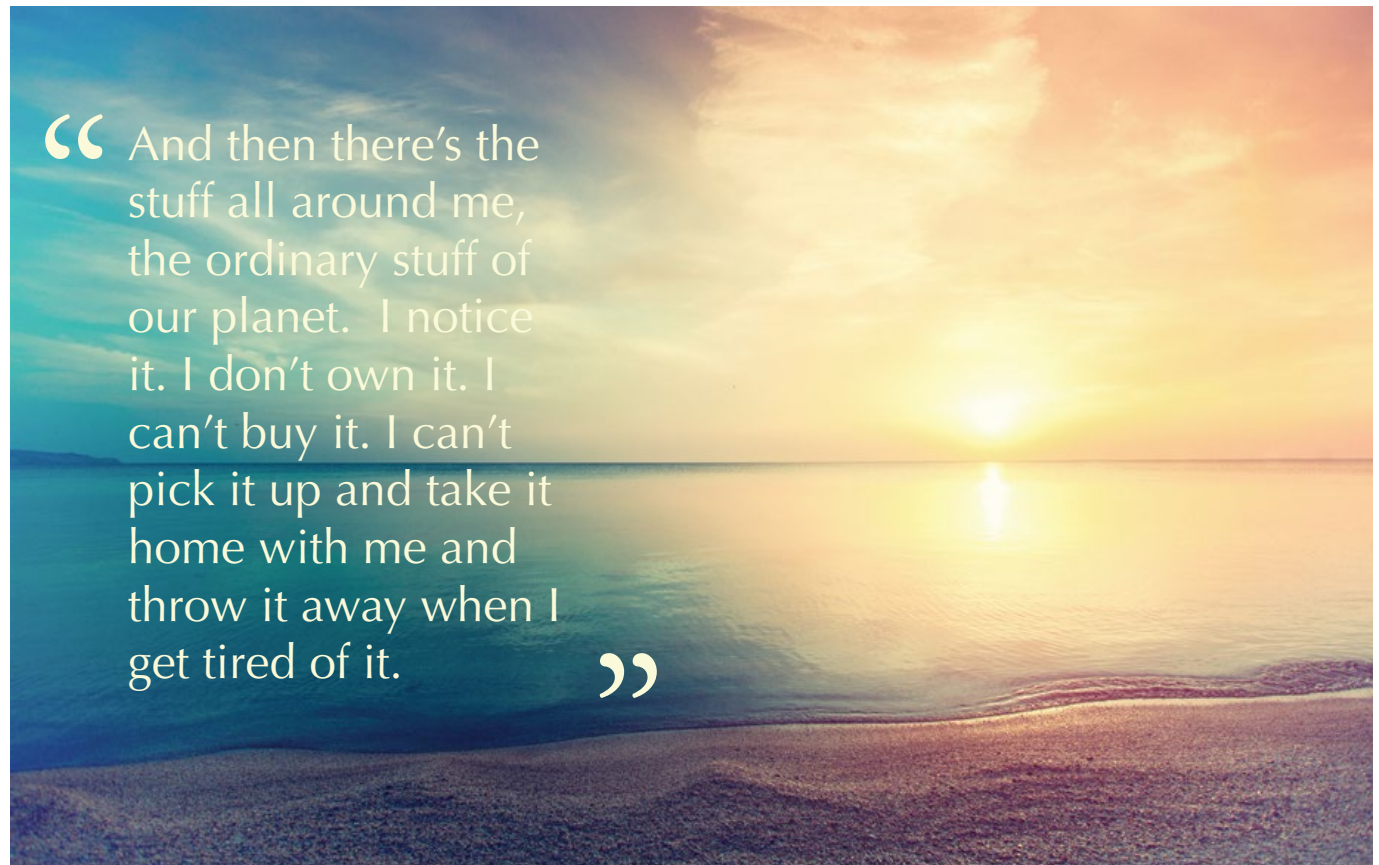


Stuff of dreams. Stuff of memories. Surely this version of stuff is something to do with who we are deep down, tangible evidence of the inside life of the person who owns it. I am wondering - if stuff and memories are intertwined - what happens to memories if stuff is lost. What about

aunt Lil who had always been old, a Londoner who lived through two wars and never married and seemed never to have had a life of her own and died all alone, what about the stuff in the immersion heater cupboard on the landing at the top of the stairs, ball gowns in amongst the blankets and hot water bottles, a scarlet corset with black satin ribbon criss-crossed down the bodice, dancing shoes. I wonder where those memories had taken her, giddy happiness maybe, that delicious un-anchored feeling inside, haunting music, blissful aching magic, tears.

utterly irreplaceable stuff that gives my life my version of wisdom and creativity and usefulness and belonging. The “*what on earth are we going to do with granny’s stuff*” kind of stuff.

And then there’s the stuff all around me, the ordinary stuff of our planet. I notice it. I don’t own it. I can’t buy it. I can’t pick it up and take it home with me and throw it away when I get tired of it. Hydrangeas when they have turned green with tiny red dots after they have been purple all summer. Dazzling liquid-gold heat slipping away off the



And then I think of my study and those beads in a jar and those fairies on thumb-tacks between the shelves on which Virginia Woolf, Kenneth Grahame, John Betjeman, Laurie Lee, Oliver Sacks, Alan Bennett and Michael Leunig stand like old friends. A school art prize from when I was twelve, books from my childhood, botanical illustration books. Folders and files. Student notes from courses I have run, workshops, training programmes, session notes, lecture handouts. Files of talks I have given to conferences, study groups, volunteers, nursing students. Notes on talks to memorial services, talks on radio. Stuff that has taken me to somewhere of my ‘self.’ I wonder what Oliver Sacks would have said about this kind of retrospective connection with the stuff of who I am. There is also a farm fence in a box, a necklace of plaited grass and purple wool with intermittent cup-cake papers and small lengths of green drinking straws. All that disposable, inconsequential but

bottom of the sky into the ocean. Creatures that run off and plop into the creek as I come near. 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, wrinkled yellow bandana round his neck, tail pressed on sideways, and his eyes look as if he has been to war and seen terrible things. Buzzing in the telegraph wires. Dry leaves that rustle and chase themselves in circles. Wellies boots at the back door. The smell of damp wood burning. Sparks that stick like dots of starlight to the soot in the chimney. The way the world stops before it snows. Pale blue-yellow sunshine coming sideways through the trees.

The ordinary vibrant momentary stuff of our planet. The sudden surge of birds around the headland; the muffled hush of a hot day; stuff of our world which touches the bigger idea of life with some tiny thing of its own, then disappears as quickly as it comes and most of it is forgotten.




---

## TEN YEARS OF SERVICE

### AT WN BULL FUNERALS: BRETT KENNEDY

---

written by Richard White

‘Working in the funeral industry is a vocation, not a job’. I had heard this statement before from a funeral director. When Brett told me his first experience of a funeral business was when he was fifteen, I immediately thought, ‘that’s young!’

This working with death and with grieving people is not for young people; the work itself and the needs of people in grief demand some maturity and experience. Brett had chosen a funeral company for his high school work experience. Again, I thought a strange choice. What had led this school student to choose this sort of work? What had he hoped to learn? What had been the impact of those two weeks, so many years ago? Is this where a vocation began?

I knew from a previous conversation with Brett that funerals were not his only interest when he was young; he had also had a serious interest in flying and went through the training to get his pilot’s license. Being an airline pilot was another option. But, the funeral business won out and now some twenty years after that first experiment, Brett is firmly established in his vocation.

One of Brett’s explanations for the interest in funerals was curiosity; he wanted to know what went on in those funeral parlours he went past when he was younger. Again,

curiosity set me thinking, too. I had not overcome my curiosity about what exactly a 'vocation' is and how early and how deeply this 'calling' takes root.

What goes on behind the doors of a funeral home cannot be simply or adequately explained. For, funerals are about death and how we manage or negotiate the reality of death. Superficially, we could list the things that funeral people do, their roles and tasks and the service they provide. This might go some way to satisfying curiosity, but it would not explain or explain away the reality of death and the strong feelings associated with death and loss.

Brett has worked in a number of funeral companies. He has experience of different styles and practices and traditions. When he was a young boy, he lived on a farm outside of Sydney and would come to town, to Alexandria, to visit his grandparents. His parents would drive down Missenden Road and through Newtown and past the WN Bull Funerals' premises. Brett remembers looking out the widow of the car and telling his parents, 'I'll work there one day!'

“ Perhaps a number of us can identify similar feelings or interests, an image or memory, a thought or idea that has been with us for years... ”

This memory is well before the student's choice of work experience. This interest or curiosity has a long history. Perhaps a number of us can identify similar feelings or interests, an image or memory, a thought or idea that has been with us for years and which has influenced our choice of career or profession.

The thing is that this 'thought or idea', if it is really the seed of a vocation, has a life or strength of its own. A vocation is not something tacked on to our personality; it is something that we are or become. The exact shape or expression might change, but this deeply embedded interest or curiosity has an insatiable edge to it. It is a bit like that line from the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, '*what I do is me: for that I came*'.

Brett has worked for WN Bull Funerals for ten years and has over twenty years experience in all of the aspects of the funeral business. He is demonstrating a commitment to this work and has progressed in his career, recently appointed as Operations Manager at WN Bull.

However, as I mused above, a career is different from a vocation, although it might be the outward expression of a vocation. A vocation involves this other sort of commitment, a life long curiosity or wonder, a longing to go on learning, an openness to being changed by the original 'thought or idea'.

When I thought about Brett's interest in flying, I thought of the poem by John Magee, *High Flight*,

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth

And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;

Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth

Of sun-filled clouds... and done a hundred things

You have not dreamed of...

John Magee, an American, joined the Canadian air force early in the Second World War and was transferred to a Spitfire squadron in England in 1941. He was nineteen when he wrote this poem; six weeks later he died in a training accident.



Perhaps Brett dreamt for a time of 'slipping the surly bonds of earth', who wouldn't. But, the earth and earthiness was where he was at home. This experience of death can be unsettling and for some traumatic. There is something in us that protects against its terrible finality;

there is something, too, that recognizes the human reality that we cannot avoid and which we all have to acknowledge and honour in some way.

“ Brett chose to work at WN Bull Funerals because he found here a tradition and accumulated wisdom that suited him. ”

Brett chose to work at WN Bull Funerals because he found here a tradition and accumulated wisdom that suited him. That boyhood vision out of the family car has become a reality, the curiosity and the wonder continue to shape a life. The earth is less a 'surlly bond' than the all-too-human mystery from which we came and to which we return. This discovery and exploration is the stuff of a vocation, rather than just a job or even a career.



## Put those you love in the hands of those who care

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

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

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

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



**WN BULL**  
FUNERALS

*Leaders in Personal Service*

(02) 9519 5344 | [wnbull@wnbull.com](mailto:wnbull@wnbull.com) | [www.wnbull.com.au](http://www.wnbull.com.au)



---

## ‘LEMON TREE VERY PRETTY...’

---

written by Richard White

And, ‘the lemon flower is sweet, but the fruit of the lemon is impossible to eat...’ So goes the song made popular by Peter, Paul and Mary many years ago. I was reminded of this song the other day after listening to a friend of mine talking about her lemon tree.

When she moved into the house where she now lives, she bought a lemon tree. Instead of planting her lemon tree in her small back yard, she put it outside the fence, in the corner of her block, on the surrounding lawn. ‘I wanted neighbours to share the fruit as well’.

Ann is from a farming background and a keen gardener. We have discussed the rhubarb and strawberries and roses and tulips. ‘I’ve bought the tulip bulbs and put them in the fridge in preparation for planting’. A couple of years ago, the small garden in the front of the house was bright with yellow and purple and red tulips, popping up and decorating this corner block.

The lemon tree has been equally well cared for. This summer, Bill, the gardener, remonstrated with Ann about ‘flooding’ the tree. She smugly told me that that was the idea; this year’s lemons are well formed and especially juicy.

‘Just the other day, I came home and there was a jar of lemon butter on the doorstep’. A neighbour from across the street had asked for and received a large parcel of lemons and this was proof of their quality and of her gratitude.

Then, there was the incident with the ripening fruit; Ann respond to some excitement in the street to discover some local children engaged in a battle with lemons from

her tree. Calmly she approached the combatants and explained the danger arising from being hit with the hard fruit and of the loss of some of the harvest. When she spoke with the mother of the children, Ann encountered some maternal defensiveness and unwillingness to hear criticism of her children.

“ The tree outside the fence is another image, one that is working its small miracle in that little *cul de sac* in a suburb of Wagga. ”

Some time after this, there was a note from one of the children, also on the front mat, and two dollars. ‘Mum had need of a couple of lemons, and thank you!’ Ann met one the boys from the family later and asked him to thank his mum and returned the two dollars saying, ‘the lemons are there for the taking, whenever you need them.’

#### Below

A portrait of the juicy product from Anne McRae's community lemon tree



This is just a little story; no earth-shattering event. However, the tree outside the fence took on an added significance as I listened. I saw the lemon tree, still with plenty of healthy looking fruit on it, on the other side of the six foot fence, out in the open, deliberately planted there and thriving.

That fence gives privacy and some security; it is not, however, a border or a barrier. The fence does not mark off and protect a private or secluded garden; like the tulips, the lemons are there, a picture of health and fruitfulness, for show and for enjoyment... for anyone, for everyone.



Our world has been blighted by images of separation and fear; the Berlin Wall, the wall separating Israeli settlers and Palestinians, the wall between the United States and Mexico, not to mention the petty disputes between neighbours over walls and fences and rights and wrongs.

The lemon tree is a living thing, beautiful and generous in its flowering and in its fruit, no matter what the song says. Life and beauty do not ‘belong’ to anyone. When we stop and think, as I did with Ann’s story, some of my walls dissolved and the life of the tree and the generosity became obvious and strangely nourishing.

The tree outside the fence is another image, one that is working its small miracle in that little *cul de sac* in a suburb of Wagga. Living things can do that, trees and flowers and dogs and... people like Ann and her neighbours. Walls and fences need not create exclusion zones; living things and living people can transform them with ‘trees on the other side of the fences’, or their equivalent. Ann gave me two lemons to take home.



---

# MEMORIES

---

written by Rob Greenop

I'm not as young as I was – no, perhaps that's gilding the lily a little too much. I have to face it, I'm old. Even my eight-year-old grandson suddenly seemed to sense it. Yesterday I felt a helping hand under my elbow as I got up from the couch where he had been showing me something special on a laptop. Perhaps I had struggled a bit – hadn't really noticed until that hand arrived, but certainly he had.

I don't feel old – well sometimes.

I don't fear getting, or should I say being, old, for I have many memories to look back on. That is what is so important for me, those memories. Not just written ones – it is also the visible, the tangible things that I have collected over the years, the things I treasured. These bring back memories more than anything, my treasures.

Do you have a collection that you have squirrelled away in an old shoe box or the back of a drawer or cupboard? Things that are meaningful to you, events or times in your life. Maybe you had forgotten they were there, perhaps hidden among old photo albums or under long-since-used-but-not-thrown-away place mats for the dining table.



For my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday my son-in-law Raymond, or Mondo as he is affectionally called, made me a handsome box from silky oak, lined with red leather with my name engraved on a small brass plate on the front. The box resides in a place of honour on top of an antique cedar chest-of-drawers in my study and is ideal for keeping the bits and pieces that I kept from times gone by. It is appropriately named my 'Mondo' box and it is precious.

“ There is a pipe that I bought in Bergen, Norway, in 1955 during a visit when I was on HMS Theseus, an aircraft carrier converted into a training ship. ”

There are numerous documents relating to different periods in my life. The earliest are my baptism and confirmation certificates. Naturally I don't remember being given the baptismal one and I'm sure my mother had good intentions when I was later confirmed. From an examination of my School Certificates, one may deduce I was not a brilliant student. That is correct but then not everyone manages to pass the same subject twice - the second time by accident.

After leaving school I was accepted into the Royal Navy as a cadet on a short-service commission. It wasn't until five years later my commission certificate arrived in the post. It now resides close to the results of my training as a

pilot. I am proud that after a rather ignominious start to my career I demonstrated that I was quite good at something.

There is a pipe that I bought in Bergen, Norway, in 1955 during a visit when I was on HMS Theseus, an aircraft carrier converted into a training ship. Other items from Bergen, that sit alongside the box waiting to get in one day when there is room, are two Norwegian troll figurines I gave to my mother on my return. After her death they made the long journey to Australia and have joined my other treasures. Bergen was the first foreign port I visited and as such the pipe and the trolls bring back fond memories.

I never really knew my father and, apart from some early photos, I have only two items connecting the two of us. The first I received following his death in 1955 was a pair of cufflinks monogrammed with his initials **RMG**. The second is a letter he wrote in 1947, to a Dr Howe, who, by the most extraordinary set of circumstances, I met in 2000. Dr Howe still had the letter and gave it to me.

I have kept the death notice of my grandfather Bernard Utting who died in 1967. Without his generosity both during his lifetime and following his death our lives in Australia may not have been the same. I have his tortoise-shell hairbrushes which could not have seen much use during his later years as his hair was very sparse on top. They are well over 100 years old. I use them every day so they, like the trolls, are waiting to find their way into the box.

There are also some special words said of my mother, sent to me by my sister Jenny in England, following Mother's death in 2001.

A brochure from the Grove House Hotel in Wellington, Shropshire is in the box. This is where Mother, sister and I spent three safe years during the war. It was then called Prospect House, a private residence owned by Geoffrey



and Edna Peace. I have many happy memories of living there. 65 years later Erica and I, while walking the streets of north Wellington looking for it, stumbled upon it by chance. It had greatly changed and is now surrounded by houses – no longer the green fields I remembered.

There is some old currency in the box. The English £5 note was among many concealed under a 1938 magazine in a safe in my grandfather's office. There is also a £1 note, one of a dozen tucked away in a tattered yellowing building catalogue. The £5 and £1 notes only came to light in 1988 when the safe was emptied. They had been there from before the war.



There are also three \$2 (AUD) notes - a souvenir from when paper currency of such small denomination was still of value.

Several objects in the box have their own history. There is a tin of 'RAF Emergency Flying Rations (Mk IV)' from my flying days in the Navy. Perhaps a strange thing to remember with nostalgia, but these were tins of boiled sweets carried by us in our flying suits in case of an emergency. This one was issued to me in 1958 and has never been opened, but I'm sure its contents as good as new. Fortunately I have lost the key to open it so its contents are quite safe. Perhaps that is just as well, for the instructions say when opened to 'Bury Container in Jungle or Throw into Sea from Dinghy.' As there is no jungle where we live in Turrumurra and I do not have a dinghy this could be difficult.

There are shoulder-badges from squadrons I flew with. They were worn with pride on the left sleeve of our flying suits. Now a bit worse from wear, the badges and I spent many an exciting hour in the air.

My commercial pilot's licences from the UK and Australia remind me that I flew passengers for more than 30 years. They are bundled together with a Federation

Aeronautique Internationale Sporting Licence issued to me in 1989 prior to our successful attempt to fly a Boeing 747-400 non-stop from London to Sydney. It established a world record.

There are my uniform wings that I wore when I had the honour to fly the Queen from Singapore to London when she returned home after her 1992 visit to Australia.

And there is the passenger list, signed by many of them on my last flight before retirement. I had flown back to Sydney from Christchurch - Jeremy, my pilot-son, was one of my crew members.

“ Last but not least there are several cards and *billet-doux* from my dear wife of over fifty-four years. ”

Last but not least there are several cards and *billet-doux* from my dear wife of over fifty-four years. There is also a pair of gold half-sovereign cufflinks, her gift to me when we married in 1964. They share a small blue box with those that belonged to my father.



So those are some of the contents of my special box from Mondo. The sweets in the tin which is a little rusty still rattle when shaken, many of the documents are curling at the edges, the shoulder badges are somewhat tattered, and the hair brushes have lost some bristles. Nevertheless, all have a meaning for me and are treasured. Each brings back a memory of its own.

## 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.

NEWTOWN (02) 9519 5344  
CHATSWOOD (02) 9954 5255

CENTRAL COAST (02) 4323 1892  
PARRAMATTA (02) 9687 1072

[WWW.WNBULL.COM.AU](http://WWW.WNBULL.COM.AU)



---

# BLUE WILLOW

---

written by Erica Greenop

Winter back then. Childhood. The historic house, creaky stairs, low beams, velvet curtains and firesides that took ages to warm, sparks that stuck like starlight to the soot in the chimney, Alistair Cooke on the radio on Sunday evenings, blue willow cocoa mugs warming in the hearth; and the North Sea fog rolled in across the flat coastal land of Kent, we could hear it coming, like men's voices humming. The dining room floor sloped, just a little, pieces of folded cardboard under the table legs on the down side and a sensation as you went into the dining room that the horizon was moving.





“Mum used to do this. The mood of shadows dancing, sunlight flicking. The crunch of pebble pathways. Long summer grass. Memories so alive I could feel their breath on my skin.”



But sometimes stories stop before you have had enough. My mum died. My aunt and her stifled multi-layered history stepped into my beautiful unfinished story. She could be waspish. She hated creaky old houses with low ceilings and oak beams and floors that sloped. She hated mediaeval villages and cobblestone streets. She hated my mum's oriental rugs and Japanese egg-shell porcelain coffee cups and blue willow crockery. Especially the blue willow crockery. I always wondered what had happened to Mum's blue willow crockery.

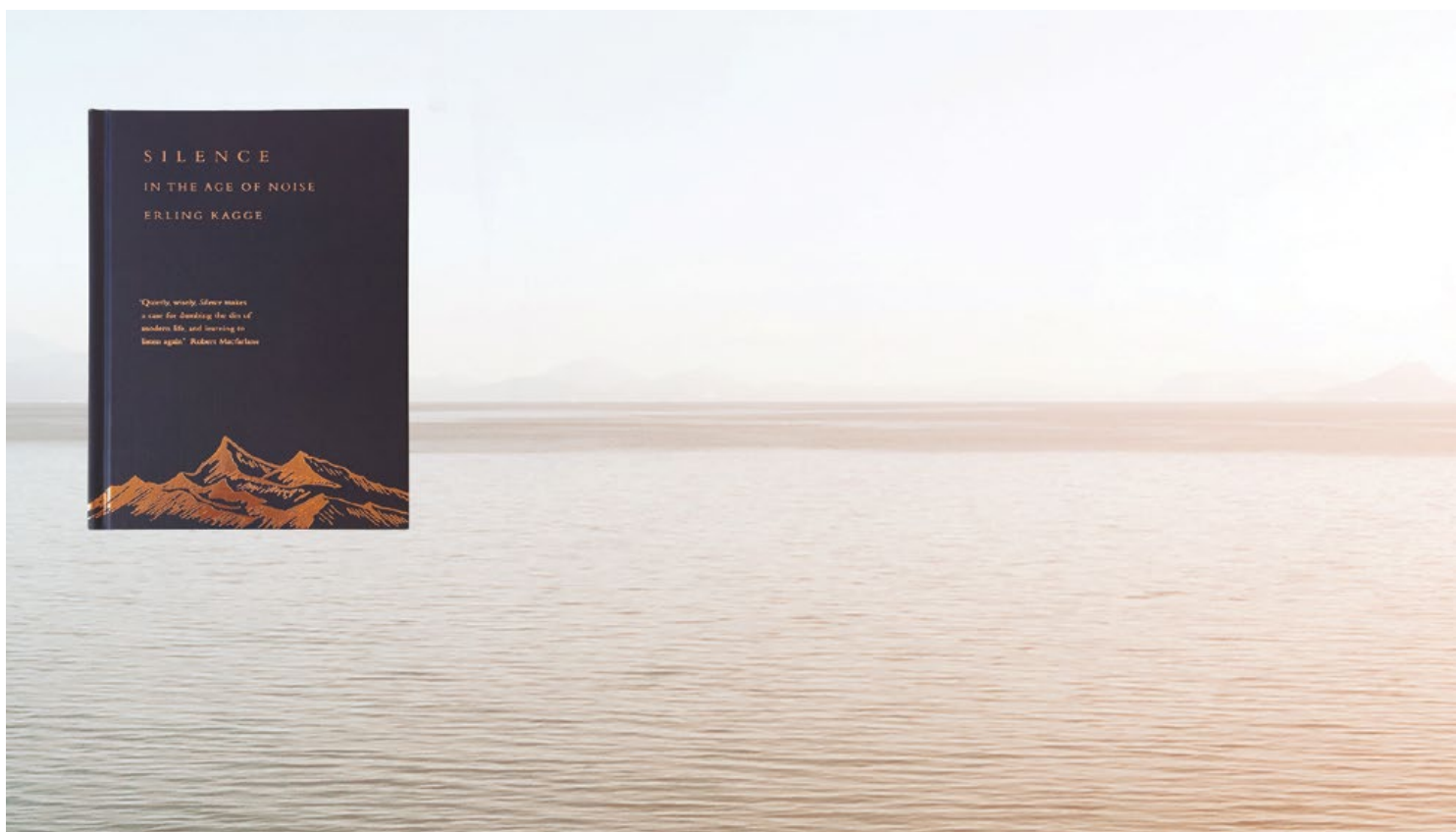
Summer 2015. 56 years have gone by. We were welcomed, my sister and I, this afternoon - all this way, all this time, all this memory, all this lifetime – this historic home and its owners greeting us two old women who used to be children here. Rosine opened her arms. We were enveloped. John shook our hands, held them together in his hands. After tea we walked in the garden.

The smell of trodden leaves. Mum used to do this. The mood of shadows dancing, sunlight flicking. The crunch of pebble pathways. Long summer grass. Memories so alive I could feel their breath on my skin. And there were changes. The house had been restored, an apple tree set in the middle of the emerald lawn, and round the corner a double garden seat, stained gentle green-blue, golden roses climbing over its arch, ancient walls and bees humming and lawns beyond, doves on the roof and birds flapping on seed trays. The beautiful story back again. And mosaic art, made by Rosine, set into the old flint walls, a dolphin leaping out of a tumbling wave, a night bird singing, a blue vase stuffed with yellow Van Gogh flowers. They were magnificent. I studied them closely.

“Tell me about the mosaics,” I said to Rosine. “The blue willow.” My heart was doing back flips. “The pieces of blue willow.”



“Aahh,” she said. “The mosaics.” She seemed to be talking about creation itself. “When we finished the house restoration, we started on the garden. There was a shallow pit at the edge of the courtyard, full of bricks and smashed blue willow crockery, covered over with garden soil. Someone's history. Someone's precious possessions. It was so sad. Perfect for my garden mosaics, but you wonder, don't you? I mean, what could have happened?”



---

# A SILENT THANKFULNESS

– *SILENCE IN THE AGE OF NOISE* –

BY ERLING KAGGE

A NORWEGIAN EXPLORER

---

Reviewed by Richard White

There it was, on the middle table of a small book shop in Beechworth, country Victoria. The title of the book, a brief quotation from Robert Macfarlane and the mountain range outlined beneath, all stood out, eye-catchingly, in bronze on a dark blue, hard-back cover. I could not resist buying it.

Quietly, wisely, *Silence* makes a case for dumbing the din of modern life, and learning to listen again.

As I am writing, there is not so much silence, as thoughts or fascination with silence that arise. One that I have spoken about many times is the phone call I had from a friend after his daughter was born: 'I was there, Whitey, and it was unbelievable! I couldn't talk for a week!'

Kerrin was an excited father but what I heard was more than excitement. There was awe and wonder in his voice. This was a profound, heart-stopping moment. Even today, as I tell this story yet again, I catch something of his feeling.

'...I couldn't talk for a week!' Words, ordinariness, the usual banter and battles of life all fell away; at least that's how I interpret his cry. Silence gets rid of the clutter, makes room, creates space. There's a story that Kagge tells early in his book that illustrates well this 'making room'.



In 1990, when the explorer Borge Ousland and I reached the North Pole, an American spy plane happened to fly overhead the day after we arrived. The pilots were probably just as surprised as we were to find someone else at the North Pole. As a gesture of kindness towards two famished polar explorers, they circled back and dropped a box of food before continuing on...

Kagge goes on to relate that they had been 'walking' for fifty eight days in temperatures down to minus seventy

“ The explorer does not say as much, but this reader is moved more by the experience of grace than the restraint and the sacrifice... ”

degrees Fahrenheit, 'most of the fat and muscle mass had been burned off our bodies'. When they opened the box

they found what they surmised was the pilots' lunch – sandwiches, juice, kippered herring.

They divided the food between themselves and Kagge was ready to devour his unexpected feast when his companion paused. Ousland suggested a moments silence, to count to ten internally before eating.

Show collective restraint. Remind each other that satisfaction is also a matter of sacrifice. Waiting felt strange. But I have never felt as rich as I did in that moment of silence.

As I read the above, I knew why this book was irresistible. I have lived with noise all my life. The noise was both inside and outside; inside noise was the voices of demand and dismay, the outside noise was voices of excitement and distraction. If only I could stop the noise, quieten the voices, I would be happy, and at peace.

But, despite my best efforts, many and various, the clanging and disturbing noise persisted. As I got older, I continued in my search and efforts; I attended a course in 'Mindfulness and Cognitive Therapy' at the Buddhist library in Sydney; yet again I thought I had found the Holy Grail.

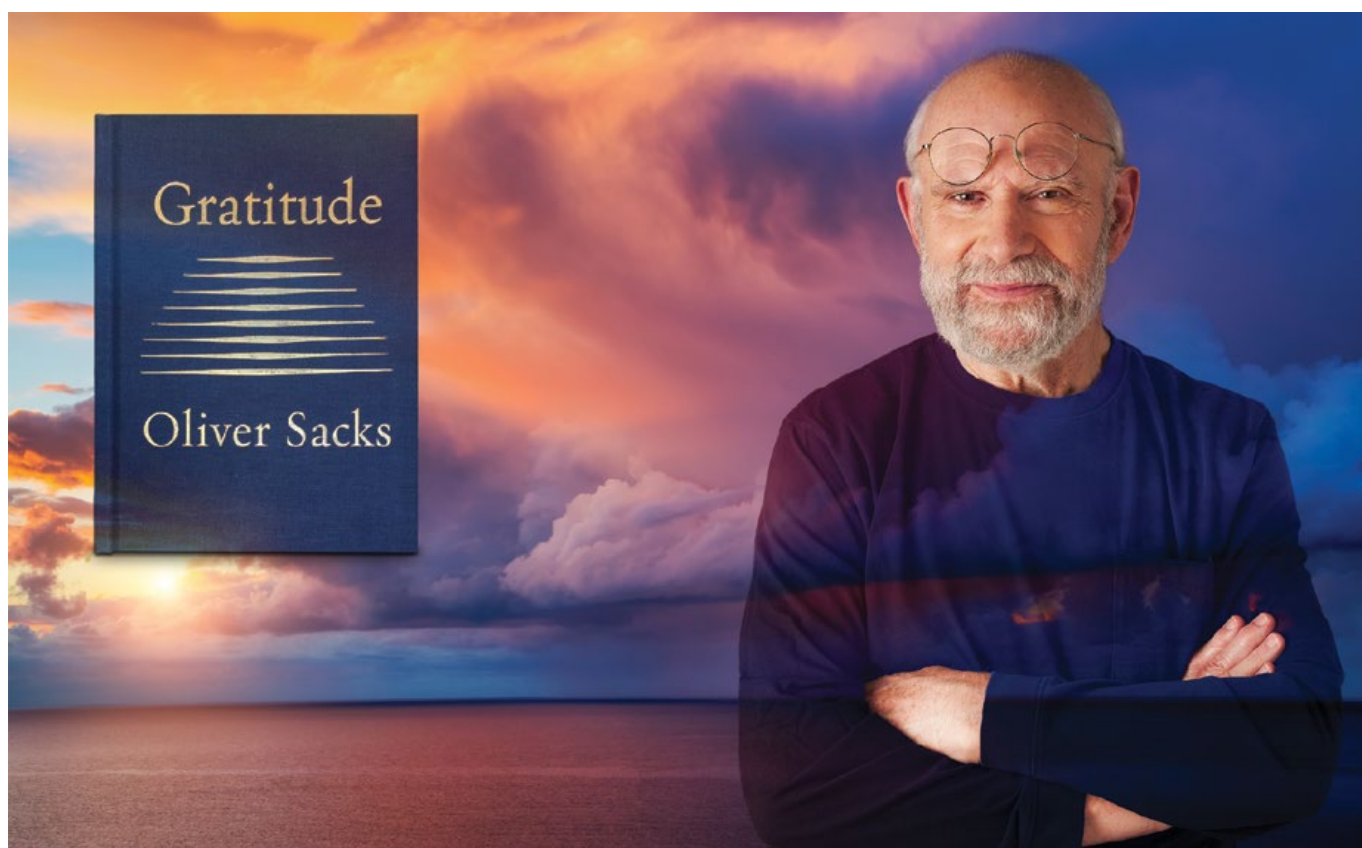
The mindful practice has accompanied me and the fascination with silence has been rewarded with mini discoveries and a growing ability to be still. But, fidelity to a morning meditation has not been the answer. Despite my envy of the disciplined, focused regime of the true lover of silence, my efforts have been fragmentary and inconstant. Discipline alone is not enough.

If I go back to Kagge's story about the gift from the sky, I begin to see what it is about this moment that brings my heart to my mouth: the unexpected kindness. The explorer does not say as much, but this reader is moved more by the experience of grace than the restraint and the sacrifice; discipline and resolve are the framework, creating the space; it is what comes with the space that is important.

My friend's wordless week was filled with awe and wonder and his sharing in the creation of new life. I would like to think that the some of the clutter and concerns fell away for a while; the effort and the concentration gave way to gratitude.

There are then two types of silence: the one we work for and the one that is comes upon us. They are both important, the longing and the fascination coming from the pain and emptiness of distraction and anxiety and the wonder and awe that come from surprise and kindness.

The birth of a child and the food from the heavens find their ordinary, daily expression in the breaths we take, one after another, the rising of the sun or the rain in the paddocks. When we stop looking for the marvellous and the self-confirming and enter the openness that silence brings, miracles and gratitude become our daily, nourishing fare.




---

# GRATITUDE

BY OLIVER SACKS

---

Reviewed by Richard White

You can't tell a book by its cover, but you can be intrigued, tricked or seduced by a cover; where you go from there is up to the contents of the book and the history of one's own reading, living and thinking.

This book, like *Silence in the Age of Noise*, was small, neat, hard-backed; unlike *Silence*, however, I knew the author of this book, Oliver Sacks. I had seen scenes from the film *Awakenings* starring Robin Williams based on Sacks' book of the same name.

At the time, the story did not interest me; it sounded too medical and there was not a happy ending. From what I can remember, the book is about Sacks' work at a psychiatric hospital where there were patients who had contracted some form of 'sleeping sickness' in the 1920's. Through research and a particular drug, Sacks was able to bring the patients back to consciousness, awake.

Now and again, I came across other book titles, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat* and *Musicophilia*:

*Tales of Music and The Brain*. Not my cup of tea, I thought. Then, along came *Gratitude*.

It is a short book, only forty-five pages, comprising four essays, not too complicated, beginning with 'Mercury', a celebration of his eightieth birthday:

I thought I would die at forty-one, when I had a bad fall and broke my leg while mountaineering alone. I splinted my leg as best I could and started to lever myself down the mountain, clumsily, with my arms. In the long hours that followed, I was assailed by memories, both good and bad. Most were in a mode of gratitude - gratitude for what I had been given by others, gratitude too that I had

been able to give something back. *Awakenings*, my second book had been published the previous year.

A year or so later after the writing of the first essay, at the age of eighty-one, Sacks was diagnosed with incurable cancer. The musings and reminiscences of the initial essay continue in the following pieces; however, they are now coloured by the realisation of his imminent death.

There's a latin expression, *sub specie aeternitatis*, literally, 'in the face of eternity'. For most of us, for most of our lives, 'eternity', not to mention 'death', is at the fringe of our thinking, if it rates a mention at all. However, even though it may be at the edge of our awareness, that does not mean it is not working its magic somewhere deeper within us.

I chose the word 'magic' rather than dread or anxiety, because eternity for Sacks seemed to have more than a touch of wonder about it. When the thought of his imminent death impressed itself on him, Sacks did not despair or become unduly maudlin; he became more alive.

For all his life, Oliver had been curious and compassionate. He was a scientist and a doctor, a researcher and a human being, a tireless analyst and an incorrigible story-teller. The scientist in him was focused on the meaning of things, particularly the working of the human brain. More than the searching for cures for pathologies, Sacks studies took him to the edge of our thinking, the limits of our understanding, to the reality of limit-less-ness, to eternity.

Now, I may be stretching things a bit but there are these words from his essay, 'My Periodic Table',

A few weeks ago, in the country, far from the lights of the city, I saw the entire sky 'powdered with stars' (in Milton's words)... It was this celestial splendour that suddenly made me realise how little time, how little life, I had left. My sense of the heavens' beauty, of eternity, was inseparably mixed for me with a sense of transience .- and death.

That 'magic' I touched on above is the simultaneous experience of the reality of our own dying, the boundaries of our life, and the reality of a boundlessness beyond our small and passing existence.

The magic is that our own experience of frailty or ageing or imminent death or the illness and death of people we love can bring us face to face with eternity. Instead of hopelessness and despair, the end as Oliver was experiencing it, can allow us to see or sense something we have never allowed ourselves to 'see or sense' before.

Sacks with all his books and success, his belief in the legacy he was leaving behind, paled before this 'sense of heavens' beauty, of eternity...'

I am reminded of the story told of the fourth century theologian, St Augustine, who was walking along a beach, lost in puzzlement over a profound religious doctrine. He

came across a small boy filling a bucket from the sea and pouring it into a small hole in the sand.

Distracted from his pondering, he asked the boy what he was doing. 'I am draining the sea!' To which Augustine exclaimed, 'You'll never pour the whole sea into that small hole!' 'Ah,' said the boy, 'nor will you come to understand the great mystery with your small mind.'

I'm not sure how much this emphasis on magic and eternity was Sacks or this reader of his book. However, this is what I have taken from *Gratitude*. Oliver Sacks was an eminent neurologist, a lover of motor bikes, a deeply shy man, a much published author... and so much more. He fascinated me and I will read *Awakenings* as I have discovered his autobiography, *On the Move*, on my book shelf, picked up cheaply, on a whim.

“ There will be no one like us when we have gone, but there is no one like any one else, ever. ”

I cannot explain why 'eternity' has impacted on me nor why I believe the experience of endlessness should be fascinating not threatening. The best thing I can do is finish with another quote from this little book, with thanks, gratitude for the man and his final, inspiring words.

I have been increasingly conscious, for the last ten years or so, of deaths among my contemporaries. My generation is on the way out, and each death I have felt as an abruption, a tearing away of part of myself. There will be no one like us when we have gone, but there is no one like any one else, ever. When people die, they cannot be replaced. They leave holes that cannot be filled, for it is the fate – the genetic and neural fate – of every human being to be a unique individual, to find his own path, to live his own life, to die his own death.

Oliver Sacks was not a believer in the religious sense. He was born into an Orthodox Jewish family, but he reacted to his family's faith and never practised his religion after he went to the university. However, his close association with human suffering and his commitment to learning found expression in a fascination with human stories, with the human story.

Somewhere in that human story, in the stories of all our lives, is a sense, a whiff of eternity, of the boundlessness, magnificence, wonder we cannot grasp but at some moments can seem terrible close.

# MYSTERY

I feel a poem on the tip of my tongue  
As I turn my bed lamp off to sleep.  
I close my eyes and snuggle down in the warmth.  
The poem niggles in my mind  
And I open my eyes and write.  
The mother of my friend  
Is preparing to leave this world;  
Only her poor wasted body is left.  
Her spirit has already gone.  
Living so long has become a misery  
But she is too afraid to die.  
Give her good courage for the journey.  
Here is my poem of sleeping and dying  
And of the mystery of it all.

*Marjorie Pizer*

Copies of Marjorie Pizer's  
books can be ordered from  
Pinchgut Press  
67 Diamond Street  
AMAROO ACT 2914  
[www.pinchgut-press.com.au](http://www.pinchgut-press.com.au)



# Celeste

## CATERING

— Est. 1991 —

### ORGANISING THE WAKE

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

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

### 2-STEPS TO BOOKING A FUNCTION

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

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

### ON-SITE FUNCTION ROOMS

Book a beautiful Function Room with Celeste at:

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

### OFF-SITE CATERING

Celeste can also cater for Wakes & Functions at:

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



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

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



WN BULL  
FUNERALS

*Leaders in Personal Service*

[www.wnbull.com.au](http://www.wnbull.com.au)