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Dialogue

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Gordon Dam, Tasmania

Editorial



Richard White

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The cover photo for this Summer/Christmas edition of *Dialogue* is of the Gordon Dam in Tasmania. It is a breathtaking image, magnificent and awe-inspiring, a heart-stopping moment when first glimpsed, silent and still. In different ways, the stories that follow are all about 'awe-inspiring, heart-stopping moments, silent and still', just like Christmas itself.

Our lives are dotted with moments, as Richard comments in Recommended Reading. They are moments that break through the predictable and ordinariness of lives and leave a mark that one writer called 'scars of blessedness'.

The First Armistice on Christmas Eve, 1914, was one of those moments; the guns fell silent and enemies chatted and played 'when hope was gone' and 'love was born'. Erica keeps coming back to a meeting when African Violets answered the question, 'Is that All?' and when 'All' is more than enough, fleeting and enduring and heart-stopping.

A little boy who could not speak begins to find words. It's a momentary hiccup in a child's development, but heart-wrenchingly painful, for him and his parents. When Kerrie's gift works its magic, a life and a family are transformed. So simple a story, repeated again and again, in the lives of all of us, but unforgettably real where lives intersect and pain and confusion break into our ordinary, predictable lives.

Rob tells a good story; Phillip, our graphic designer, supports the story-telling through images. The result is an

account of a meeting, connection that is like 'the joining of dots'. It is more than chance, another as-luck-would-have-it sort of thing.

The Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, wrote, 'all real living is meeting'. Rob's piece illustrates the story-teller's gift of making real the philosopher's insight.

Paul's memories about his father includes some heart-stopping images – a man, day-after-day, leaning on the flank of a cow as he milked and hummed, a grateful, human picture of respect and affection. They are memories that are a world away from 'production and prices' and they reveal not only what has been but what can still be, natural, faithful and human.

Thomas, the Director of Music at St Mary's Cathedral, tells his story about being moved by his first visit to this church on the edge of the city. The soaring space, warmed with sandstone and music, has a power to be more than a 'list of attractions'.

The Choral Celebration, the classical and traditional, brings us back to the heart of Christmas, a story, a moment in time when our wondering and wandering, our differences and our fears, our relentless humanity might find some rest and some peace.

From all of us at WN Bull Funerals, wishing you a blessed and peace-filled Christmas.



Christmas always brings for me a little sadness. It is the sadness of missing something, something important. The bright lights, the parties and the excitement of children are all part of the experience of Christmas, but they are only part; the most important part is the traditional Christmas story. Christmas has to do with mystery, something that is deeper than religious expression and beyond all our understanding of belief and unbelief. Let me explain.

When I first joined WN Bull Funerals in 2004, I knew that the company had a close association with the Catholic church and that many of the families who chose WN Bull for funerals had a church service. There was nevertheless a growing number of people who had no religious belief or who chose to have a funeral celebrant officiate at the funeral, rather than a priest or minister. As director of the company's bereavement service, I inherited from my

predecessor the role as funeral celebrant.

Because of the strong views expressed by some family members, the staff would sometimes hand me the notes on the deceased person, with DMG written on the top: Do Not Mention God!

It had not been my practice to presume religious beliefs or practice when I first met families in my role as a celebrant. My role was to listen, learn, to understand a

little of what was going on for the family and to help them prepare a funeral that best expressed the spirit of the person who had died and their relationship with him or her.

Invariably, with the conversations that took place initially and the to-and-froing of my outline of the service and respect for their stories and expressions of grief, there grew in me an appreciation of the person at the centre of all our reflection. These were privileged moments, concentrated, focused and so very human, so very real.

With one of these DMG funerals, I had some difficulty capturing the man at the heart of the stories told by his son and two daughters. Their father had been a policeman; he came across as stern, somewhat distant and hard to know. His children corrected my first draft of the service. They were insistent, too, that there be no religious references in the service, 'Dad wasn't that sort of man.'

I was a bit perplexed when his son, who was to give one of the eulogies, asked that we play 'Ave Maria', after he had spoken. Being a bit scrupulous about the 'no religion thing', I pointed out that this was a religious song. 'I don't care', the man's son replied. 'I've heard it at weddings and I like it.'

On the day of the funeral, the crematorium chapel was packed. There was a police guard-of-honour and one of the man's colleagues spoke first. The words portrayed a conscientious and honest man and obviously someone respected and much loved. His son then spoke.

This man was not a practised public speaker. There were no humorous stories or flourishes in his account of his father. There was, however, an unmistakeable affection and, again, respect, and the sense that he spoke for his siblings; this man was loved and in an unobtrusive but

“ Tentatively at first, then openly and in growing numbers, soldiers from both sides climbed out of their trenches and met in the muddy, frosty in-between. ”

profound way his life had impacted on his family and on his colleagues and beyond. Then, 'Ave Maria' was played.

What struck me then and what I continue to remember was the silence that grew as the music was played. Music can do that. Silence was an inspired response to the knowledge sensed at a deeper level; the man's colleague and his son expressed a truth – this man lived and he was loved.

Nothing more needed to be said. This truth was told simply and then given space and reverence to grow and deepen. The silence, the music and the religious imagery created that space. It is a space we do not often enter; Christmas is an annual celebration that offers us this opportunity. I was reminded of this by a little book *The Christmas Match, Football in No Man's Land 1914*, by Pehr Thermaenius.

Pehr Thermaenius is a Swedish journalist with an interest in the First World War. His book is a meticulous account of the fate of two soldiers, Scotsman Jimmy Coyle



Image
An artist's impression from *The Illustrated London News* of 9 January 1915: "British and German Soldiers Arm-in-Arm Exchanging Headgear: A Christmas Truce between Opposing Trenches"

who had played professional football before the war and Saxon Albert Schmidt who played in the third team for his local club, in Zwickau, Saxony.

The inspiration for the book is the reports and journal entries of that first Christmas of the war; something extraordinary happened. The conflict had reached a stage which was to become a bloody, permanent feature of the war; the armies were entrenched, at a stalemate.

The story outlines those early months of the war and the involvement of the respective regiments, the second battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the Saxon regiment IR133, and their eventual positioning in December, 1914. The author's surmise is that Jimmy and Albert may have met, may have kicked a ball together, on Christmas Day in 1914.

On Christmas Eve, back then, something remarkable happened. Along the German trenches, in some cases less than 100 metres from the allies' defences, Christmas trees appeared, sometimes with candles in them. Across No Man's Land drifted the sound of singing, especially, *Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht*, 'Silent Night, Holy Night', a traditional German Christmas Carol.

Tentatively at first, then openly and in growing numbers, soldiers from both sides climbed out of their trenches and met in the muddy, frosty in-between. They exchanged cigarettes and smattering of conversation and somewhere, on the next day, they had an impromptu soccer match, won 3-2, according to one report, by the Germans.

The Christmas Match is beside me on the couch as I write this; the image of a Scottish soldier and his Saxon (German) counterpart kicking a soccer ball, the line separating the armies, in red, and barbed wire running through France, Belgium depict this ‘hurting stalemate’. Trench warfare had been created and the horror was to last for another four years.

The other day, I attended Armistice Day celebrations, one hundred years after the end of World War I. It was a beautiful morning in our small, country town. There was a good crowd at the Cenotaph in the corner of the park, the roses in bloom, the names on the column well outlined and small crosses, red poppies, individuals singled out and surrounding the monument, a splash of colour, more reminders.

The official address was impressive, a detailed account of the historical significance of the war itself and Australia’s remarkable contribution. Despite the traditional military ceremony, the faultless precision, slow march and skilled solemnity, modern weapons held motionless, there was no overt glorying of war. There was, however, no attempt to capture the horror of the initial months from August 1914 to December.

“ Whatever our religious beliefs, life and death, war and peace, suffering and forgiveness... bring us to a place of silence. ”

It is as if we cannot hold together the reality of suffering and the crushed and unforgettable humanity, the things we do to one another and the spirit that shines in and through every human life. The Remembrance Days and names outlined in gold, the colour and solemnity are important; the ceremonies soften and make possible the remembering. But, but, that first unofficial armistice on Christmas Day, 1914, did something all of our later ceremonies can only hint at.

The singing of ‘Silent Night, Holy Night’ sparked a magical moment, unbelievable given the fact that ‘already half a million soldiers had been killed and another one and a quarter wounded, taken prisoner or were missing’. How did this happen? What was it about Christmas Day that restored for a time an awareness of common humanity and a sharing of gifts and an opportunity to play?

This is a rarely mentioned, lost opportunity, forgotten miracle of the First World War. It is the mystery, the blip on the radar of four long years. With Christmas in the air, it is possible that our wondering can be part of our celebrations this year. Why did the guns on the Western Front fall silent first at Christmas?



Image
62,000 red knitted poppies displayed at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, ACT, Australia representing those lost in the war. On loan from the London poppies and 5000 knitted by Australians.

There is no easy answer to this question as there is no easy answer to the choice of ‘Ave Maria’ at a funeral and the silence that fell after it was played. Those two minutes of silence, part of the Armistice Day ceremonies, is an inspired tradition. Whatever our religious beliefs, life and death, war and peace, suffering and forgiveness ... bring us to a place of silence.

The celebration of Christmas and that well-known carol still have the power to make us wonder, to lay down our weapons, to reach across barriers, to glimpse that indefinable spark that flashed in the words at a funeral and that shine in names etched on a monument – this man, these men, lived and his life, their lives, were infinitely precious, loved and cherished, because in the words of Michael Leunig,

... with a dark and troubled face
when hope is dead
and in the most unlikely place
love is born:
love is always born.



HEMSLEY AND WILSON

written by Rob Greenop

The spring morning was cool and from the lounge on the balcony, as he finished his coffee, he watched small white clouds scudding across a blue sky. His mind wandered a little as subconsciously he gently massaged his aching leg, his thoughts turning to the past few years of his life with Mary. Leslie Hemsley had been retired for longer than he cared to remember and had been on his own since she had died. Nowadays he felt his life was just drifting seamlessly by and while he had told himself he wasn’t lonely, inwardly he wasn’t so sure.

His thoughts were interrupted when from somewhere in the room behind him he heard the phone. Placing his cup carefully on the small glass table he slowly rose to find it before its impatient ring gave up. He was always misplacing it and this time it was buried under some clothes, tucked down behind the faded cushion in the old comfy chair in

the corner, his favourite afternoon snoozing spot. Noting the number displayed was one he didn’t recognise he replied in a polite but guarded tone he used for such calls, expecting to hear some market research person on the other end, or someone wishing to clean the carpets that he didn’t have on his apartment floor, or

perhaps just someone soliciting funds for some charitable organisation, that he couldn't spare,

But today the call was different.

"Hullo, Hemsley here."

"Good morning Mr Hemsley, this is Louise at Springhaven Veterans Village, in case you don't remember we met the other day, could you help us out, we have an elderly gentleman in need of a lift into town for a dental appointment and our usual volunteer driver is unwell. Are you free today and could you help please, it's just for a couple of hours?"

He often wondered what he could or perhaps should do to make his days meaningful, maybe something to help out in the community. After all apart from his leg he was a fit seventy-seven-year-old and felt he still had something to give to society.

“ Now, at last, an opportunity had come for him to be useful. The day ahead, his first day as a volunteer, now seemed to have a purpose. ”

And then, through mutual friends he had met Louise, the lady who ran the office at the veteran's home.

"Perhaps you could help us occasionally, do you have a car, perhaps you could drive some of the old soldiers around?"

And so he had offered his services as a driver should any need arise to transport anyone, anywhere. Now, at last, an opportunity had come for him to be useful. The day ahead, his first day as a volunteer, now seemed to have a purpose.

His guarded tone disappeared. "Of course," he replied, "that will be fine, very happy to help out, what time would you like me there?"

At 12 noon precisely he turned in through the gates and headed towards the reception area, quickly glancing down at his hastily scribbled note. 'Mr Wilson, waiting outside,' it said.

Wilson was a thin man with a shock of white hair, his twill trousers and sports coat now several sizes too large for him draping his slim frame, his highly polished shoes seemed to twinkle in the bright sunlight. Although the



day was quite warm, under his jacket he wore a buttoned waistcoat and a wide tie that had been fashionable back in the 60's. He might be over eighty, had been a military man for all his life, rising to the rank of sergeant-major in the Army. Keeping up appearances had been a cornerstone of his existence. The Army had taught him to stand up straight and tall and although the 'tall' part was now missing at least the 'straight' part was still possible. There was a bench seat close-by where he could have sat but he had chosen not to use it. He would stand patiently waiting for his lift.

He stood up a little straighter and adjusted his cap as the car drew to a stop alongside and Hemsley got out to assist him.

"Sergeant-major Josh Wilson, Sir, very kind of you to help me today."

Halfway round the car Hemsley stopped in his stride, a shiver running down his spine. He hadn't realised that veterans at Wentwell frequently used their old rank when formally meeting strangers. 'Josh Wilson' was a name he could never forget, never.

He blinked as his mind flashed back many years when as a newly commissioned national service officer in Vietnam his platoon had been pinned down by enemy fire in the battle of Long Tan. Some of his men had been killed and he had taken a bullet through the thigh. It was as though it was yesterday when he had lain there in the mud, unable to move, drifting in and out of consciousness as his wound continued to bleed, unstaunched.

He blinked again as the memories came flooding back, of the wrapping of a rough tourniquet round his thigh, the gripping of his jacket as he was dragged backwards towards cover in the scrubby rubber tree plantation - of the reassuring voice telling him 'Sergeant Wilson here, Sir, hang in there and I'll get you out of this.'



Somehow through a crossfire of bullets he had been pulled to safety and then carried on a stretcher to a field ambulance unit. From there he had been repatriated home to Australia, spending several months in hospital learning

“ Wilson stood a little straighter and a smile slowly came to his craggy face. He took off his cap, stepped forward and held out his hand. ”

to walk again. It was then he learned of the sergeant, who had saved his life, had been awarded a Bravery Medal for his action that day. He had written to Wilson. Their paths had never crossed again, but he had never forgotten him.

Hemsley, his eyes watering with emotion, stumbled against the curb before steadying himself against the bench. In a voice, which to him seemed far away he heard himself say "Its Josh, isn't it - I'm Leslie Hemsley - remember me - Long Tan - '66?" He paused, trying to collect his thoughts amidst the memories of that time of so long ago.

Wilson stood a little straighter and a smile slowly came to his craggy face. He took off his cap, stepped forward and held out his hand. "Good to see you again Sir after all these years. Was glad to hear you'd made it alright. Sorry it's taken so long to catch up."

Hemsley took the old veteran's hand and gently pulled him into a close embrace. For several seconds the two old men just stood there quietly, a sort of unspoken bond between them. It had taken over fifty years for him to meet the man who had saved his life in that muddy morass of Vietnamese jungle and having found him he was now reluctant to let him go.



A CHORAL CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION ~ FOR EVERYONE ~

written by Richard White

St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney is a beautiful building, next to Hyde Park, on the eastern edge of the city, a sanctuary of quiet and grandeur. Tourists come and go and worshippers gather for celebrations and prayer. On Friday 14 December, the Cathedral community is opening its doors and hearts to the people of Sydney, inviting them to share in the Choral Christmas Celebration.

Thomas Wilson, Director of Music at the Cathedral, spoke with me with generosity and enthusiasm about this Christmas celebration.

“ A thing of beauty
is a joy forever. ”

‘The Cathedral Choir will be joined by Sinfonia Australis; there will be traditional pieces by J S Bach and excerpts from Handel's Messiah. There will also be well known Christmas carols and opportunity for everyone to participate. Readings will include poetry as well as the biblical story and members of the wider community are contributing.’

Thomas then paused and I distracted him with some questions about his own life. Thomas is a New Zealander who spent six years in London at the Royal Academy of Music and on the music staff of Westminster Cathedral. When he was approached to apply for the position at St Mary's in 2009, Thomas admitted this was his first visit to Sydney.

‘A thing of beauty is a joy forever.’ Musicians know all about beauty. Or, perhaps it is better to say, musicians are attuned to beauty; they are sensitive to its power to uplift and console and inspire. When Thomas spoke of his first visit to St Mary's, I heard something of this appreciation and gratitude. When I heard him speak about this Christmas concert, I heard something else.

There's a Latin expression I heard years ago, *bonum est diffusivum sui*, ‘it is the nature of goodness to give of itself, to diffuse, to share...’ It was as if Thomas' quiet enthusiasm, his obvious love of music and appreciation of beauty, could not be contained, like goodness, they had to be shared, given away.

‘This concert is for the people of Sydney. It is beautiful music in a truly inspiring setting. Goodness, beauty, of their nature give themselves. I am very grateful to WN Bull Funerals for their assistance in celebrating Christmas in this way, with, and for, the people of Sydney.’

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IS THAT ALL?

written by Erica Greenop

Where do they come from, these images and thoughts, these flitting – or is it fleeting – moments that touch the bigger idea of a story with some tiny thing of their own and bring it to life then disappear? My writing tutor, author Susan Temby, said one day, just casually, write yourself a list of questions, pick one and see where it comes from, where it takes you. So I did.

Something was stirring, because of those questions, shimmering, like someone walking towards me out of the low sun. A passageway appears from nowhere in particular. Or stepping stones. I understand stepping stones. I have been known to scramble through wet leaves and into ditches and out again to look at my stepping stones, wonder why they are there, where they will take me.

My list of questions is telling me something.

“What do you mean?” is on my list. I can see myself, that dreamy kid being asked to say what I just said, again,

but clearly next time, being pinned down to reality. “What is it about?” I am worried for the birds on winter nights, those nights when trees were bare and there was frost on branches and meadow grass white in the moonlight and it was so cold they’d all be dead in the morning; the goldfish, when the pond froze over, that lost look in their eyes. “Why is it important?” “Where do I start?” I am getting brave. “Can I help?” I have grown up. I am reaching out to real life. The whole thing of *this* reality. And something else besides. Something pretty special. Things I have known

since I was a child still there, the ordinary magic of things that real grown-up life doesn’t have.

“ Gently I lifted her hand and she touched the writing, the palm of her hand flat on each card, one after the other. Touching again the person who wrote the words. ”

And I notice a strangely paradoxical question at the end of my list. “Is that all?” The sort of question that assumes it can’t be important because it was all too easy.

In my memory is a frail elderly woman. She is my “is that all” question.

I was a volunteer, years ago, in palliative care. I was visiting Miss Jackson. She had motor neurone disease. She was crumpled, fading, strapped in her invalid chair so she didn’t fall forward, head sideways, arms hanging. She could hardly speak. She indicated the cards on her bedside table. I opened them for her, read out the messages. Gently I lifted her hand and she touched the writing, the palm of her hand flat on each card, one after the other. Touching again the person who wrote the words.

I was sitting on a low stool beside her. In a little while, she spoke to me, whispers, tremors, interruptions. A whole vocal chord orchestra tuning up. I got my piece of paper out of my pocket, and my biro.

“Say that again,” I said. “I’ll write it down.”

Slowly she spelled out her message - “in your travels around this hospital, have you by any chance come across my African Violets?” Letter by letter. They were on the window ledge up there where she couldn’t see them. So I fetched them and put them on her lap and she looked at them from the sideways turn of her head, for ages just looking, and she whispered ‘aren’t they beautiful’, and she wept wrinkled silent tears, down her face and into her lap, and we sat together and in a tiny ordinary *is that all?* moment something magic had happened.





THE GIFT OF THERAPY

written by Kerrie Murphy and Richard White

Kerrie Murphy has a gift. This is what occurred to me in our conversation the other day. A gift is one of those almost indefinable qualities that is different from a skill or a technique and the reality cannot be equated with qualifications or even the fruit of long experience. Kerrie’s gift is a way of talking about people and a way of working with them that is closer to faith or trust than expertise.

Kerrie is a speech pathologist and her clients are mainly children and families. When we first met earlier this year I asked Kerrie to write something for Dialogue. I thought the article would be about the experience of overcoming a disability and the challenges this involves. However, this was only part of the story.

To have a gift is to be grateful and a little surprised. To have a gift is different from being gifted, with its emphasis on specialness and the exceptional. There is a quietness

about having a gift, a quiet confidence, and gratitude and enthusiasm.

Having a gift makes sense only when you’re sharing it or giving it away. It is not a possession, not ‘mine’ in a narrow sense, this gift. Having a gift has a lightness about it,

Above
Kerrie Murphy with husband, Michael, and children, Jack, Ella, and Lily

something elusive, but real, without trumpets and fanfare; having a gift is life-changing for all concerned.

A speech pathologist is called in by a family when there’s a problem, a very serious problem. The baby, the toddler, the child has ceased to grow in a most important area. The smiles and gurgles and the gestures, the guessed-at and instinctive understandings have failed to develop into words. The child experiences this difficulty with fear and frustration; for the parents there is anxiety and a growing helplessness. This is a most painful period in the life of a family.

Kerrie describes the drama she would often encounter when she first meets the family. It is a drama that has a familiar ring but which perhaps a child can express most vividly and without restraint.

“The childish and troublesome behaviour, the tantrums and the frustrations fall away. The little person is there, in all their longing and fear...”

‘I cannot reach you and you cannot reach me!’ It is an experience of being cut-off. The smiles and the gurgling no longer work, are no longer enough. The inner world of feelings and needs is blocked or closed; the loving attempts to reach in and out do not work.

Kerrie’s description of those initial meetings with families captured the pain. The work of the speech pathologist is with these obvious and childhood crises. However, this inability to communicate, the feeling of being trapped, inarticulate, helpless is a recurring experience. The children Kerrie encounters, the child with the ‘problem’, is the child who is with us until the day we die.

We talked about the child of three or four, but hovering and whispering, smiling and being moved, was the child who is always with us. The child in all of us is there when we laugh or cry, when the world is too wonderful for words and when words and smiles work and connection and recognition occur. Being in touch with the child within us helps us to be attuned to the child in trouble. That is part of Kerrie’s gift.

This gift that I sensed is more than a skill, much more than the slightly daunting ‘speech pathologist’. Along with being in touch with the child within, there is the being

aware of the children we meet. Something happens with these two children come together.

When I asked what, or, better, who, she saw in meeting a child described as disabled, Kerrie replied without hesitation, ‘I see the person’.

This was a brief moment in our conversation when the coffee grew cold. ‘To see the person’ is part of the gift. To see the person is to see through the difficulties or the problems to the heart, to that indefinable something that is unique... This is where words fail me, fail us. Kerrie sees someone who is best described by Gerard Manley Hopkins at the end of one of his poems,

This Jack, joke, poor potsherd./patch, matchwood,
immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond.

It is a gift of seeing through, of seeing beyond. The childish and troublesome behaviour, the tantrums and the frustrations fall away. The little person is there, in all their longing and fear, in all their reaching out and reaching in. This is who Kerrie sees and whom she trusts, or whom she surrounds and draws forth with her own belief and trusting. Then, the miracles begin to occur as described so simply in Kerrie’s own words.

Kerrie Murphy
Speech Pathologist

The new baby’s cry, first words or never ending ‘why’ from a toddler are early communication skills we can take for granted – unless they don’t happen.

The privilege of working with families to help their child communicate has been mine for the past 20 years.



As I meet my newest client, a gorgeous young boy and his family, his smile tells me what he can not say with words. He has a few sounds which I hear as we begin to play a game with cars. Pushing them to each other his



happiness is clearly expressed on his face. He tires quickly as he works hard to keep his little body upright.

“ I glimpse a tear fall from Dad’s overwhelmed face as my heart pounds with joy in bringing the power of communication into this child’s life. ”

His father smiles proudly at the way he is engaging and tells me he just wants the best for his little boy. After a little rest in his father’s arms he reaches for a ball and pushes it to me. I lean over and show him the communication board and as I say ‘roll ball’ I point to the matching pictures on the board.

Now he holds the ball and I wait. With much intention he looks at the new communication board and the pictures on it, then points and says ‘kick ball’. I glimpse a tear fall from Dad’s overwhelmed face as my heart pounds with joy in bringing the power of communication into this child’s life. My little client delights in ‘telling me what to do’ each time the ball comes my direction.

It’s not always this easy. Sometimes the sessions are tough – tears, tantrums and hiding under tables can be the behaviour of preference for struggling communicators. Parents watch on as the ‘expert’ doesn’t seem to make things better but promise to practice until our next session.

Slowly we begin to see glimpses of interaction and a session without tears. Before too long he is playing with the toys that initially would be thrown around the room. Mum delights in the chance to play with her child as they take turns with the fishing rod. Some sounds and even a word are not too far away.

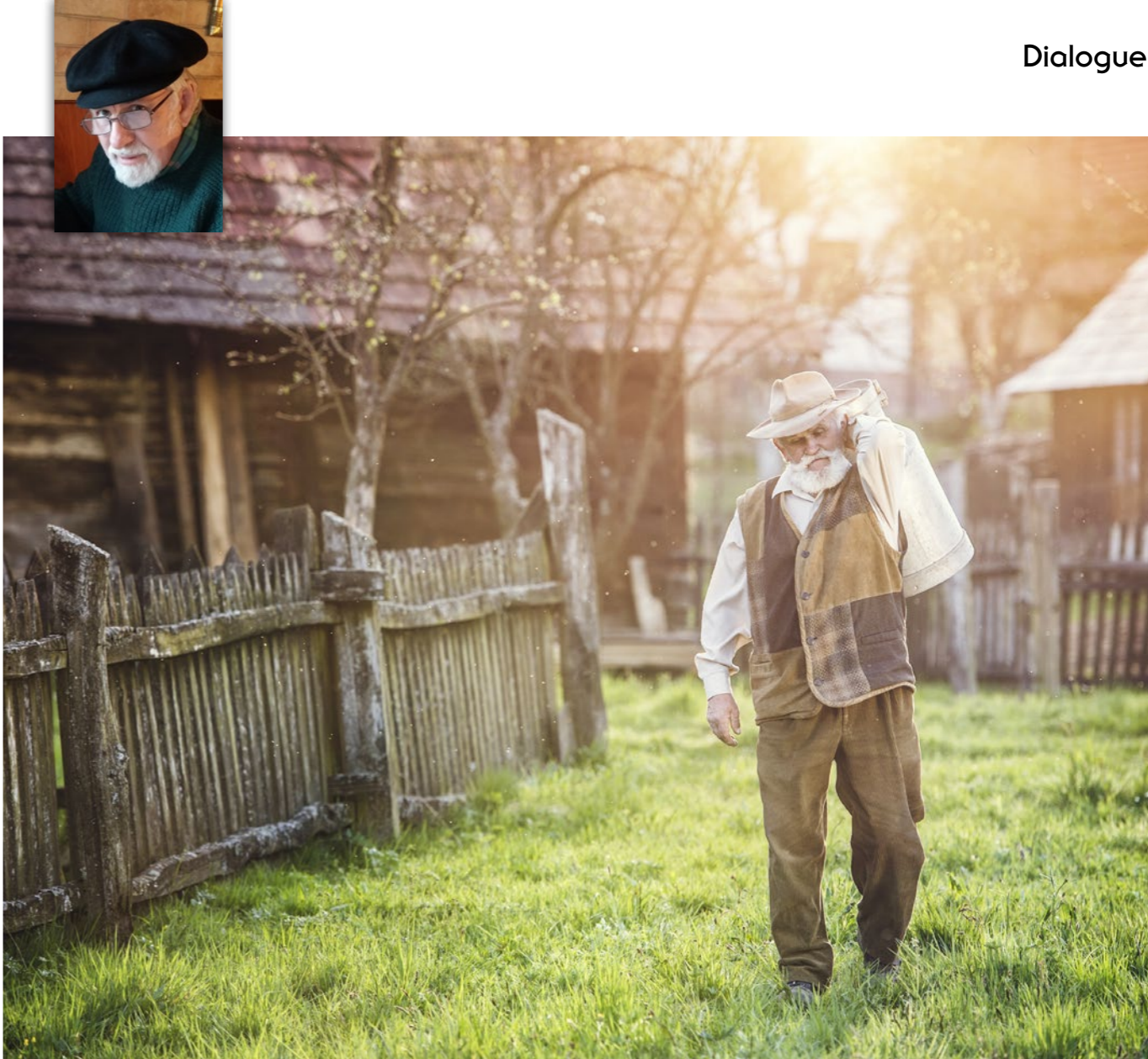
Before long the young tantrum throwing, table hiding boy is heading off to school – a new hurdle for his family. The first-day-kinder nerves are high for everyone. Mum worries that the teachers will not understand her son or may miss his need for a movement break to help him keep focused. Will he be OK in the playground and remember to eat the right food at each of the different breaks?

The teacher hopes she has arranged for him to sit in the best place and has some activities that he will enjoy. His day is busy and fun and the smile on his face as he runs towards Mum at home time says it all.

The children in my care stay for a short time in my therapy clinic but they each touch my heart in different ways. It can be a very big challenge but always an absolute



pleasure to support them to become the best version of themselves. We must believe in them and encourage and support them and their families to help build a better world.



MEMORIES OF MY FATHER, THE FARMER

written by Paul Pickford

Every morning of my childhood, I slept through the soft melody of the Dawn Chorus surrounding our farm house, but, the sharp bark of my father’s smoker’s cough always brought me to the consciousness of a new day. I would hear him move through the house he built towards his first task of the day.

Summer and winter, he would light a fire in the kitchen fuel-stove that would heat the big, black kettle for his breakfast cuppa, and prepare for my mother’s daily cooking. Her first product would be a pot of rolled oats porridge for his breakfast. I was alert to this early morning ritual, because, as a “junior farmer”, one of my daily tasks was to gather “chips” – firewood kindling – into a bucket, each afternoon. It was too late if Dad found the tin empty!

The clang and rattle of the shiny, stainless-steel milk buckets, closely followed by the squeak of the back gate, announced that Dad had gone to milk the cows. On cold, frosty winter mornings, I had half an hour to snuggle under the blankets before his return with two steaming buckets of frothy milk, and his call: “Come on, get out of bed!”

The mornings that I followed my father to the milking shed created the most evocative memories of all his regular

farming tasks. Dad had built the shed the year after my birth, 1947, from posts and split logs that had formed an older shed. The milking bail was constructed from old railway sleepers and a solid biscuit of a tree trunk served as a milking stool. The cows, two or three, would be waiting for him at the milking shed. Their calves had been

“ He was never to know that his great uncle Edward... had become a successful farmer of Dairy Shorthorns, from which he processed famous Somerset Cheddar. ”

penned away from their mothers overnight, to reserve a lovely udder full of milk to share with our family. These patient mothers enthusiastically put their head and neck through the bail and the head-stock was locked in place. I believed they enjoyed the milking process as much as my father did. Sitting down on his seat, he held the bucket at a slight angle between his feet. After cleaning the udder, he “milked” with a hand action similar to the way the calf sucked from its mother.

Very quickly he settles into the rhythmic sound of milking, as alternating jets of warm, white milk strike the sides of the silver bucket. Nuzzling his head and shoulders up against the cows flank, he enters an almost meditative zone of thinking about the day ahead or whatever private thoughts he now has time for. He has done this task automatically, every day, seven days a week, since he was a boy. Sometimes he hums or sings to the cow or talks quietly if she needs to be settled. The sound vibrating through the frame of the cow as much as travelling through the air to its ears.

Meanwhile, in the pen next door, the cow’s young calf believed it had been forgotten. The aroma of the bucket of warm, frothy milk accentuated its need for breakfast. My father released the calf when his bucket was nearly filled. The cow remained in the bail and the calf skipped to her for their morning reunion.

But, this was an ancient trick by farmers throughout the eons that cows and humans have co-habited. The cow tricks her human milker by holding back milk from his



bucket, for her calf. With the arrival of her calf and its enthusiastic sucking, she “lets down” her milk. When my father considers enough time has passed for this to occur, he moves back, and gently separates the calf from the cow, and fills the rest of his bucket.

When milking is finished, the cows move quickly from the shed, cropping mouthfuls of grass with each



step towards the paddock. Later in the morning they will regurgitate this rapidly harvested pasture, and “chew-their-cudd” in the comfort of a shady tree.

“ The sun is beginning to warm the day as Dad walks up the hill to the house, with his buckets filled. ”

“Dairy Shorthorn” is the breed of cow that my father admired. They are big cows that produce above average amounts of milk. He was never to know that his great uncle Edward, after whom he was named, who had remained in

England when Dad’s grandfather emigrated, had become a successful farmer of Dairy Shorthorns, from which he processed famous Somerset Cheddar.

The sun is beginning to warm the day as Dad walks up the hill to the house, with his buckets filled. The rest of the family are in various stages of emerging from their sleep; the fire he lit earlier is crackling and glowing; the room is warm and homely; porridge plops in the pot on the stove; steam streams from the spout of the kettle. My mother has prepared for breakfast and has placed a chilled jug of yesterday’s milk on the laminex table; a thick seam



of cream floats on its top. My father is now hungry for his first meal: hot, rolled oat porridge, drowned in creamy milk and liberally sweetened with a heaped spoon of dark, brown sugar.

Another by-product of Dad’s daily milking is the patt of rich, yellow butter on the table, churned yesterday by my mother. Yet another “junior farmer” task contributed to this production of butter. Each morning, between breakfast and riding my horse to school, I was expected to operate “The Separator”: an ingenious machine that separated thick cream from the milk, requiring a young boy to turn the handle for twenty to thirty minutes. The buckets of this, now, fat-free milk, became the eagerly anticipated food for the working dogs, young piglets and cats around the house and sheds.

Pushing his empty plate back, my father moves to the stove, takes up his hand-made toasting fork and holds a slice of bread close to the glowing coals. When both sides are crispy brown, he returns to spread it with soft butter, topped with plenty of home-made apricot jam. A cup of hot black tea has him ready for a hard day’s work, building more rich memories for me.

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CHRISTMAS WHEN THERE'S SADNESS ~ SOME SUGGESTIONS ~

written by Richard White

I came across this article in a 2005 edition of *Dialogue*. It began with a quotation from a book by Mary Butt, *Michael Mike Bert*, about grief after the death of her son, Michael.

“The worst anniversary for me has always been Christmas. Christmas was always important to us as a family, and Michael's absence was very painful. This was to be the one aspect of Michael's death which I was unable to face up to. We did not have Christmas at home for four years – the first one we spent with our good friends and the following three years away at a beach house.

The music of Christmas carols has been very emotional for me (and still is) – the sound of carols when out shopping was an exercise in control, as I would want to cry...”

‘Tis the season to be jolly, tra, la, la, ...’ And so it goes on and so the gap between what is expected and how we feel can grow. As Mary said, ‘Michael's absence was very painful’; any and all absences can be painful, especially when all around us there is this Voice (s) telling us, ‘Tis the season to be jolly...’

The suggestions below are divided into four headings: Be Real! Be Gentle! Be With! and Be Quiet!



BE REAL!

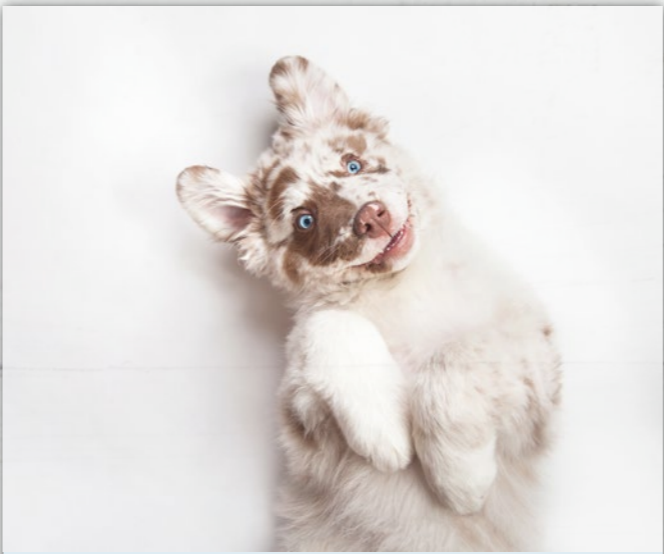
- Trust, listen to, be mindful of how you feel.
- Don't take these suggestions too seriously and trust your own instincts for what works for you.
- Let any unhappiness or hurt tell you something about yourself.
- Let any unhappiness or hurt tell you something about who or what is missing from your Christmas this year.
- Give in, give up, give generously and find the balance between your needs and the needs of others.



BE GENTLE!

- There's a saying, 'gentleness becomes the strong'; in other words, there is nothing soft or sentimental about gentleness; it is a real response, a courageous response to pain and grief.
- Let go of some of the expectations of others and of yourself. Nothing has to be perfect. The right thing to say or do is what you can say or do.
- Be as helpless as you need to be and maybe those words of the English woman, Julian of Norwich, can be of comfort: 'all will be well, all will be well and all manner of things will be well.'
- Find time and space to rest. Make and look for extra times for this.

Despite the exclamation marks (!!) these are only suggestions. There are no right or wrong ways to feel or to be when we are grieving. Christmas has its own pitfalls for all of us, the hype and the stresses, and emphasis on compulsory jollity. However, Christmas has its own blessings and power, more quietly, surely, gently comforting and real. Trusting in goodness, kindness, generosity and wonder, the little miracles, is where hope lies and life is revealed.



BE WITH!

- Let others, family and friends, into your grief or be with you in your grief.
- You do not have to talk or explain. You do not have to pretend, but allow for whatever enjoyment or distraction occurs; it is all good.
- Mix your alone time with company and do not retreat too far or isolate yourself.
- Let children or animals, the instinctive and unknowing ones, bring comfort and affection.
- Do what remembering feels right and share or cherish, discover and hold, images or feelings that come and go.



BE QUIET!

- Let the Christmas carol, 'Silent Night, Holy Night', or something like it, be a theme for your Christmas.
- Find or make those moments, however long, when you can be alone with your memories, your grief and your loss.
- Let the silence be stillness, as much as you can. Let off the doing for a while.
- Listen to the birds or to music or... to the beat of your own heart; be attentive to your breathing and gradually slow down.
- This quiet is a listening and relaxing and a respectful emptiness that is not loneliness or isolation; the unspeakable and the limitless, the too-bigness of love and of pain, the presences that are stronger than death and more sure than our thinking can be there in the quiet.



THE EXPERIENCE OF READING JOINING THE DOTS AND SENSING THE WHOLE.

reviewed by Richard White

My life has been dotted with books. By 'dotted' I mean pinpoints of light and of meaning. For years, this has been a source of delight and frustration: the delight of the moment or glimpse of understanding and frustration because moments or glimpses do not give me an overall grasp and obvious command over... anything. I felt a bit of a dilettante, a dabbler, not a serious reader or student.

Oh, hum, I can hear my nearest and dearest and keenest critic saying, 'Don't take yourself so seriously! Read for fun or for an exam and get over it!' But, that's the problem, the delight, the curiosity and the wonder keep me reading, following authors, haunting Op Shops and browsing in book shops and picking up bargains and titles almost at random.

The only thing is, there seems to be a pattern or a providence to this reading. From one of J D Salinger's stories I came across the 'scar of blessedness'; In Rumer Godden's *The Episode of Sparrows*, there was a realisation that the shy and diffident did have the courage and obligation to speak up and speak out.

I loved a good story, but there was more to it than that.

I read for entertainment and distraction, but I kept coming back to or discovering stories and authors that offered something more.

There's Graham Greene's *Power and the Glory* about the 'whisky priest' in 1920's Mexico who became an unlikely image of holiness. Then, there was a similarly disreputable character in Greene's *The Burnt Out Case* who reflected a goodness that that was so at odds with his dissolute and despairing life.

I remember quoting a line from *Power and the Glory*, 'there's only one tragedy in life, not to have become a saint', or words to that effect. In the secular world, 'holiness' and 'saints' are the stuff of myth and religious exaggeration. But, what Greene seemed obsessed with, was that the messy

human reality could and did exemplify something that was more than messy, was close to a strange completeness or was 'infinitely precious'.

It was with the story-tellers that the idea of holiness lost its association with perfection and became more closely associated with one's genuine, if flawed, humanity. There is this something bright and wonderful, extraordinarily endearing and far beyond the limits of our narrow, judgmental righteousness, in the imaginative genius of a true story-teller.

There have been many authors and story-tellers after Graham Greene. All of them, it seems to me, have caught that whiff of the wonderful in human life that the character in Greene's story referred to as sanctity.

The dots had been there over the years, moments that rang true and that gave an experience of what it means to be a human being. My latest crop of 'moments' has come from belonging to a book club. I have a say on two of the books during the year, but the remaining ten sessions are choices from my fellow club members. I usually read books then that I would never have chosen. Sad to say, *Cloudstreet* by Tim Winton was one of those books.

I was put off by the size of the edition we were given. The picture-book-type cover and my lingering reluctance to get caught up in the Tim Winton craze also contributed to my ignoring this book. That mysterious something or someone who has guided my reading finally won through; I read and loved *Cloudstreet*.

My Book Club colleagues had differing responses; some did not like the book at all, others enjoyed the story and that was it. I was excited and felt that something important had happened but that my mates would think I was crazy if I told them.

It was as if someone had joined the dots; the moments of truth, the sense that this or that understanding, had connected with the one before. There was a feeling of wholeness or unity that came with and through Tim Winton's story.

To put it simply, it had to do with the sheer realism of Tim's story of the two families, the Pickles and the Lambs. There is a saying of a Roman poet, 'there is nothing human that is alien to me'. Tim Winton's story is one glorious embracing of all that is human. For so much of my life, for all the 'dots', I had shied away from this glorious embracing.

Culturally and religiously my definition of being human had been restricted. There was an isolating smugness about this limited condition; there was also a blessed unsettledness, a ripe ground for one of those dots of understanding. On the one hand, I was one of the 'goodies'; on the other hand, evidence from my own experience, put me in the camp of the 'baddies'.

In the scheme of things, this dream of being human was inextricably linked to a dream or ideal of goodness, one where the faultiness and the weakness were finally

overcome. Such an attitude, deeply ingrained and often hardly conscious, was very destructive.

Those 'dots' of understanding were moments or glimpses of this 'glorious embracing', pointers or promises; the story-tellers knew something about humanity that I did not, something I deeply longed-for and which I found nevertheless unsettling.

I read Tim's book at the right time; there had to be more living, more dots, before I could appreciate the glorious embracing. That sweeping story, covering a period of time I know well and embracing experiences that had a deeply familiar feel, did the trick. Something clicked or shifted. In the course of reading this book and some days after, my world was a different place.

As I said above, I couldn't explain this to the blokes in the Book Club; I'm having trouble explaining it to myself. The novelist's advantage and skill, is that he or she does not have to explain; they only have to be true to that messy, indefinable, precious and beautiful reality we call humanity.

As a footnote to the above, I include some lines from a poem by Mary Oliver. 'Welks' is a description of Mary's walking along the beach, looking and seeing and reflecting on various washed-up shells and sea creatures. Her favourites are not the perfectly formed or intact mussels or quahogs, but the much-battered, chipped and long-travelled welks. This is another dot, not an explanation, not too clear but suggesting that there is more, much more to life than being perfect.

... and here are the welks –
whirlwinds,
each the size of a fist,
but always cracked and broken-
clearly they have been travelling
under the sky-blue waves
for a long time.
All my life
I have been restless-
I have felt there is something
more wonderful than gloss-
than wholeness
than staying at home.
I have not been sure what it is.
But every morning on the wide shore
I pass what is perfect and shining
to look for the welks, whose edges
have rubbed so long against the world
they have snapped and crumbled-
they have almost vanished,
with the last relinquishing
of their unrepeatability energy,
back into everything else...

DO NOT GIVE ME A GURU

Do not give me a guru
To sit at the feet of.
Do not provide me with a prophet
To follow into the wilderness.
Do not send me a seer with secrets
To guide me to life everlasting.
I am not looking any more
For someone to tell me the way.
I have found, in my life, many answers,
None of which turned out to be the Answer.
I have chosen various messiahs to follow in my time,
But each turned out to be false.
Now I know that I must follow my own heart
Along my own path.
Now I know that there are no answers
But only questions,
And the whole joy and anguish of living.

Marjorie Pizer

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