

# Dialogue

Issue 83 Winter 2019

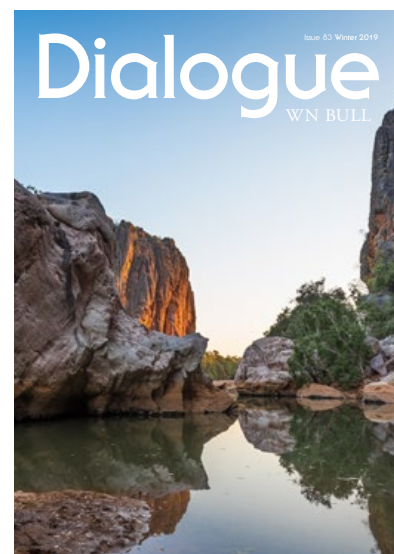
WN BULL





## Contents

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## Regulars

- 1 Editorial
- 22 Recommended Reading  
*The Philosopher and the Wolf -  
Lessons from the Wild on Love,  
Death and Happiness*
- 24 Poet's Corner

## Features

- 2 Some Memories of a  
Professional Undertaker –  
Carl Breust of WN Bull Funerals
- 6 “You Sit Up There, Do You”
- 10 Invictus: Is Being  
‘Unconquered’ enough?
- 12 A Teenage Dream
- 16 The Priest and the Farmer -  
A Conversation with  
Kevin Bates SM OAM
- 20 The Rule Book

## Editorial

There are lots of little sayings that have within them a grain of truth – ‘she’s got her head in the clouds’ and ‘he’s got his feet on the ground’. I hope these two get together; but it could be a rocky ride!

This edition of *Dialogue* seems to be more about ‘the ground’ and the dust of the earth than the broad expanse of the sky and endless possibility. Carl Breust has been a loyal and dedicated staff member of WN Bull Funerals for over twenty years. He is from the country, well acquainted with dust and how the simple and earthy really do have ‘endless possibilities’.

Disability is not the end of the story is there in the article on the Invictus Games. There’s a sense that this word, disability, is not only not the end but a distraction. There is a flowering and truth that can shine through all of our lives; this comes from who we are and who we become rather than what we can or cannot do.

There’s Rob Greenop’s lovely piece of taking care of Queen Elizabeth. Rob is the master of whimsy and detail, a lightness and gentle humour that bring forth a smile of recognition. ‘Yes, that is what we are like, engaged, polite, attentive ... with an affection that dissolves distance and difference!’

I have known Madeleine Pizzuti for a number of years and I have witnessed her at work. We all know a real professional when we meet one. There is an absence of

jargon, an ability to treat us as equals, an inherent humility and ongoing curiosity and desire to learn, even from us! Well, Madeleine is one of these professionals as her story reveals.

Erica Greenop is a regular contributor to *Dialogue* for which I am eternally grateful. ‘The Rule Book’ could also be called ‘A Handbook for the Compassionate Anarchist’. This story is an essential reminder that order and control might bring a surface satisfaction but only humanity can nourish the soul(s).

There’s a song, I think from ‘Oklahoma’, that is titled, ‘The Farmer and the Cowhand should be Friends’. Well, the article about Kevin Bates SM OAM, a Marist priest, links Kevin’s life with a conversation I had with a farmer. It’s that earthy heavenliness or heavenly earthiness again. The sacred is all around us, or, better the sacred is all that is. Francis Thompson said this well –

The angels keep their ancient places  
Turn but a stone and start a wing.  
‘Tis ye, ‘tis your estranged faces  
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

Wishing you a warm and patient wintering from all of us at WN Bull Funerals



Richard White



“Remember  
Man You Are  
But Dust...”

## SOME MEMORIES OF A PROFESSIONAL UNDERTAKER

— CARL BREUST —  
OF WN BULL FUNERALS

written by Richard White & Carl Breust

‘Remember man (sic), you are but dust and unto dust you shall return ...’ This is the traditional blessing for the ceremony of ashes on Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent.



There's a solemn rhythm to these words but they are rarely used these days, replaced by something less confronting. Talking with Carl Breust about his over twenty years involvement with WN Bull Funerals, the reality of dust kept coming up. This was the dust of a country town in summer, hard work, memories and affection.

At the age of fourteen, Carl helped his father dig graves in the country town of Temora and surrounding district cemeteries. Carl's father worked for the local council; he also assisted the town's funeral company by digging graves in the 'old fashioned way', with pick and shovel. This was Carl's introduction to the funeral industry.

It was not easy work. For the lawn cemetery section mechanical diggers were used; in the ornamental section it was the 'old fashioned way'. Carl remembers spending three days with his father digging a grave to the required seven feet depth in the rock-hard soil.

“ Little did he know it at the time, but his future employer at WN Bull Funerals, John Desmond Harris, had started his first funeral business in Wagga. ”



As well as the earthiness of the grave digging, Carl recalled his father's respect and attention to the needs of families and the funeral staff. The older man would insist on removing his hat at the approach of the hearse; he would be careful of the space around the grave, levelling soil and ensuring approaches were clear of rubble. He was particularly conscious of the inevitable dust on the road from the town to the cemetery.

‘My father would get the water tanker from the council on the morning of a funeral. He would spray the road leading from the church to the cemetery and ten minutes



Above Carl in his first funeral team position with Alan Harris McDonald and Co. Funeral Directors in Wagga Wagga

before the cortege was due to leave, he would make one final trip in the tanker. He was a good man’.

‘Remember ... you are but dust and unto dust you will return’. There was dust aplenty in a country cemetery as Carl was growing up. It was a nuisance, an irritation and a reality. It is the stuff we come from, so they say. The name of the biblical character at the beginning of the bible, Adam, means ‘from the earth, from the dust’.

Years ago, I remember seeing the re-touched version of the classic, ‘Gone with the Wind’. There's a scene when Scarlet O'Hara returns to the remnants of her family's pre-Civil War house and plantation, Tara, and she is digging with former slaves in the fields. She has lost everything.

When she is challenged by a friend to leave and find a new life elsewhere, she cries out in defiance. Reaching down, she grabbed a handful of earth, ‘this is where I come from, this is mine and no one will take it from me!’ Or, words to that affect.

The dust is there at the beginning and it is there at the end. It is both a nuisance and something we try to control or avoid and, equally, a blessed part of being a human being.

There is something extraordinarily earthy about digging graves. This was Carl's initiation with his father as his mentor. From the local cemetery, Carl moved to Wagga Wagga where he worked for his first funeral company. Little did he know it at the time, but his future employer at WN Bull Funerals, John Desmond Harris, had started his first funeral business in Wagga. As Carl put it, ‘we're two good things to come out of Wagga Wagga!’

Like John Harris, Carl eventually moved to Sydney where he began work as a casual hearse driver with



WN Bull Funerals. This seemed a long way from the dust of Temora but there was a deeper connection that was linking those early days to work with WN Bull.

At WN Bull, Carl came under the influence of John Harris and Patsy Healy. John and Patsy emphasised the values of respect and attention to detail that his father had demonstrated.

“ ...the quality of service, the traditional values, style, endless care and devotion to the families and communities served. This is timeless. ”

When I asked Carl what WN Bull Funerals was like twenty years ago, he said that ‘the quality of service, the traditional values, style, endless care and devotion to the families and communities served. This is timeless’.



There was something underlying our conversation, something deeper and connecting the experiences. The earthiness of the grave digging and his father's lessons of respect, the fascination with the funeral business and Carl's eventually becoming the supervisor of the mortuary at WN Bull Funerals and a qualified embalmer.

I asked Carl what interested him in mortuary work and why he decided to become an embalmer? In a small company, like WN Bull, the hearse drivers and other funeral staff all have experience in the mortuary, all witness or assist in the care and preparation of bodies for funerals. This can be a confronting experience.

‘Working in the mortuary never worried me. The mortuary has the feeling of a sacred and spiritual place where the living and dead rely upon each other. The decision to become an embalmer came from observing my friend and mentor, Steven Ross, who worked at WN Bull Funerals for twenty years. For me, to become an embalmer allowed me to completely carry out all aspects of mortuary care’.

Those were Carl's words, ‘the mortuary has the feeling of a sacred and spiritual place’. Not everyone has this feeling and describes these encounters with ‘the dust of

the earth’ with such respect and reverence. For Carl, too, I am sure that the stresses associated with his work, the day-to-day experience of death, the finicky details that go

“ ...WN Bull Funerals has taught me how precious life is, the importance of fulfilling the farewell of loved ones with respect and dignity. ”

into ‘getting it right’ can dull this feeling of awe. The feelings of ‘the sacred and the spiritual’ are real because respect and care are real. Those lessons learnt in the dust of Temora and reinforced by the vision of John

Harris and Patsy Healy prepared the way for the experience in the mortuary. There is something here, something precious, a life-time lived, a body that holds that life time and is the heart of all those who loved and shared that life. It is a mystery that not everyone sees, not everyone



Clockwise from Left WN Bull Hearse - St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. Carl shortly after joining WN Bull. Some members of the WN Bull 'Work Family' - The 125 Year Post-Mass celebration at Cathedral House, Sydney  
Original Above Image Giovanni Portelli Photography

is moved or touched by. I sensed in my conversation with Carl that he has this gift and that his story has the capacity to awaken in all of us an ability to see the sacred and spiritual in the dust of the earth.

My final question to Carl was what have you learnt about yourself and the funeral industry from working at WN Bull Funerals and he replied, ‘I have learnt that I have an ability to handle and care for the loved ones and this is a unique and rare quality in few people. Working in the funeral industry for WN Bull Funerals has taught me how precious life is, the importance of fulfilling the farewell of loved ones with respect and dignity. WN Bull Funerals has taught me about being humble, working tirelessly and discreetly in the background for the good and benefit of those we serve. Many years at WN Bull Funerals has given me fond memories of all past and present colleagues that I sometimes refer to as my work family.





“YOU SIT  
UP  
THERE,  
DO YOU”

written by Rob Greenop



“You sit up there, do you?” said the Queen pointing with a royal finger to the panels above her head in the ceiling of the cabin. Clearly for a queen she had a good understanding of a Boeing 747. She had been the only first-class passenger on board. The Duke of Edinburgh, who had accompanied her throughout her ten-day visit to Australia, had decided to go shooting in New Zealand rather than return with her to England on a chilly February morning. The other members of the Queen’s entourage, the private secretaries, the deputy private secretaries, the assistants to the deputy private secretaries, the ladies-in-waiting, the royal hairdresser and her assistant, the royal footmen and the rest, thirty-three in number, had been seated in business-class upstairs. The economy sections of the aircraft down below had remained empty.

We had parked in the VIP area of London’s Heathrow airport having just arrived after a fourteen-hour flight from

Singapore and, as the captain, I had been commanded to present myself in front of the Queen as soon as possible to receive the royal photograph in appreciation for delivering

“...and should I fly her Australian Personal Standard or should I use her British one” came from the back of the flight deck.”

her safely back home. Most likely she didn’t want to hang about and needed to get going to miss the early morning commuter traffic already building up on the M4. Or perhaps she was off to Windsor.





Leaving my crew to shut things down on the flight deck I quickly made my way down to the lower deck.

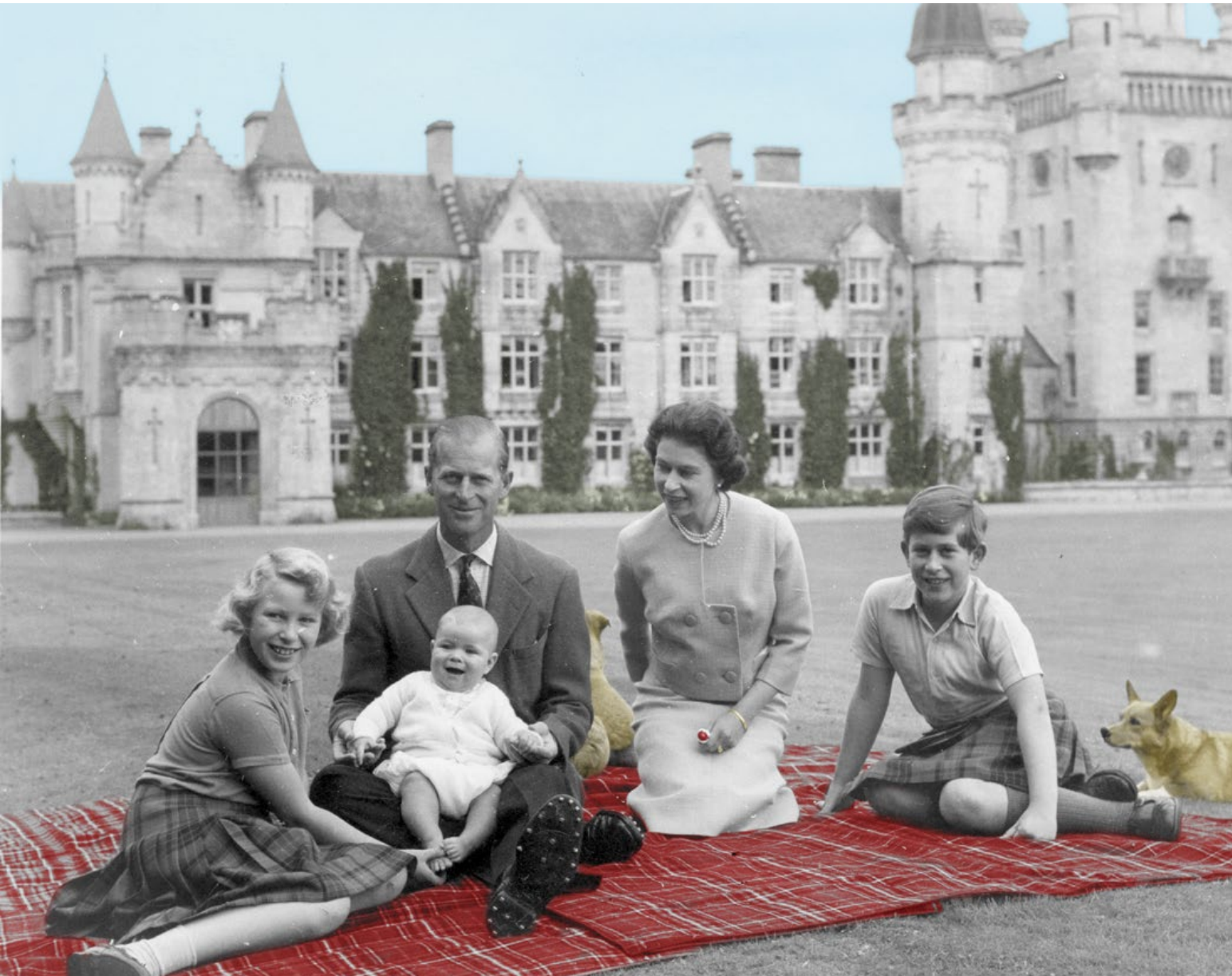
So, there I was, with my jacket on and hat securely tucked under my left arm, giving a bow from the neck – all in accordance with established protocol – trying to recall the correct manner of addressing her. First up it was ‘Your Majesty’ then on the next and subsequent occasions it was a simple ‘Ma’am’ as in lamb, or was it ‘Marm’ as in harm? Ma’am or Marm? Suddenly I couldn’t remember so to be on the safe side I decided that if necessary I would stick with ‘Your Majesty’.

“ Maybe she had also picked up a six-pack of lager for the Duke when he returned home. I knew he liked a beer or two...” ”

She did remind me of my sister, same size and hairdo, a few years older but with the same regal bearing. Except for the pearls – I have never seen my sister wearing pearls. And of course her handbag was of queenly size, the Queen’s that is, not my sister’s.

During the long flight all had been quiet and I had little involvement with any of the royal party. Normally at some stage I would have gone down and talked with the first-class passengers, but not on this occasion. One doesn’t talk to the Queen unless one is invited. Should there be anything to bring to her attention, such as how the flight was progressing, the expected arrival time or the London weather, my instructions had been quite specific. I had to pass whatever information I had to our company’s Deputy Chief Executive Operations who would relay it to the RAF Air Commodore, the Captain of The Queen’s Flight, who would then take it to the Queen. Presumably any reply or enquiry from her would come back to me in the reverse order. As far as I could determine both these gentlemen were onboard solely to be links in the communication network. It seemed like a game of Royal Chinese whispers.

One could imagine if one was entrusted to safely fly a B747 halfway round the world with one of the most important persons on earth as one’s primary passenger one wouldn’t be expected to mess up simple tasks such as which flag to fly through a hole in the roof. Yes, for the uninformed, a B747 does have a hatch through which one can poke a flag pole, on this occasion a special telescopic one constructed in Sydney. When my crew boarded the



aircraft in Singapore the correct flag, or to be precise ‘Royal Standard’, that was to be raised the minute the Queen stepped onboard, should have been the only one on the flight deck. Instead there were three different flags to choose from. With these pre-briefed arrangements not going to plan my second officer, to whom I had delegated this responsibility, became slightly perplexed.

The aircraft had arrived from Sydney just after midnight and during the forty-five-minute transit stop the Queen had disembarked to stretch her legs in the near-deserted Singapore Airlines terminal. Perhaps she had popped in to the duty-free to pick up a bottle for the Buckingham Palace drinks cabinet. Perhaps it was Gordon’s London Dry Gin, the brand with ‘By Appointment to Her Majesty The Queen’ on the label. I had seen the cabin staff instructions detailing her refreshment preferences and noted that she sometimes enjoyed a \*\*\*\*\* (here strict confidentiality dictates that I should not disclose her personal choice of

beverage) before lunch and a \*\*\*\*\* before dinner. Maybe she had also picked up a six-pack of lager for the Duke when he returned home. I knew he liked a beer or two because many years ago, when I was in the Navy, he visited our naval air station and popped into the gunroom for a quick one before lunch.

As for the flag-raising dilemma, protocol dictated that, as the Queen reboarded, the appropriate Royal Standard was raised to indicate that she was in residence. “Is she still Queen of Australia as she’s on an Aussie aircraft and should I fly her Australian Personal Standard or should I use her British one” came from the back of the flight deck. “Or is it her Head of Commonwealth flag, the square one with a big E in the middle?” A quick discussion took place and it was agreed that as she wasn’t Queen of anything in Singapore the correct flag was the one with the big E. In hindsight this was, of course, correct. By the time we were half way over India my crew and I had sorted out which standard to fly



after landing in England; to prevent any more uncertainty I had the other two stowed away.

All in all the flight was quite uneventful with RAAF and RAF aircraft keeping a watching eye on our progress, should we be in need of assistance. The weather was excellent with no turbulence to disturb our royal passenger. For security reasons the flight-plan filed in Singapore before departure made no reference to our VIP, so it was a surprise when over Tehran the controller asked us to convey ‘The people of Iran’s best wishes to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth’. As both our company Deputy Chief Exec’ and the Air Commodore were asleep I don’t think we bothered. On reflection our call-sign did include the words ‘Royal Flight’ and this probably gave the secret away.

And so we arrived safely in London. The Queen and her entourage proceeded down the steps to the fleet of Rolls Royces, Bentleys and mini-buses, the cabin crew of ten headed off to their hotel and my three companion-pilots and I boarded our own transport to travel into the city.

It is not every day that one is honoured to fly the Queen, so as a celebratory gesture for a job well done by my crew, I produced a bottle of champagne that I had purchased in Singapore. After fourteen hours it was nicely chilled. Although it was against company policy to drink in the transport leaving the airport, on that special occasion I thought we could bend the rules. My only regret was that the Deputy Chief Exec’ who, uninvited, came with us inferred he would like a glass too!





## INVICTUS: IS BEING 'UNCONQUERED' ENOUGH?

written by Richard White

At the end of October 2018, in Sydney, we had The Invictus Games. This event celebrated the 'unconquered' (invictus) veterans, members of armed forces, part of the coalition formed after the attack on the Twin Towers in New York. The women and men, injured through the conflicts that ensued or by accidents in training were living examples of spirit and resilience; they did not die and did not give up.

In the lead up to the games, there was a television programme on a small group of Australian and UK veterans, a man who lost both legs and all but 30% of sight in one eye, another who had a physical and emotional collapse from the demands of his deployment, and others with crippling physical and mental traumas. Then, there was one woman.

'Anne', like many of her companions, was a career soldier; she loved the life and excitement. Her injuries occurred in a training exercise; she was never to see active

service. Anne was in constant pain, chronic, unrelenting and morale sapping pain.

The challenge facing these individuals was a two week exodus to remote parts of Western Australia, day-long journeys in four-wheeled vehicles, camping in the bush, tramping, crawling, stumbling to allocated 'points of interest' and the unburdening of themselves with frank, revealing interviews. I was full of admiration and ever so slightly troubled.

A commentator at the Games, himself a well-known disabled athlete, listed five pieces of advice for conversations with someone with a disability; the one that particularly struck me was, 'don't tell the person he or she is an inspiration!' When Prince Harry opened the Games in Sydney, he said something similar, 'these men and women before us are not Super Heroes; they are ordinary people, like you and me!'

When I think of Anne and her companions in the documentary, it is hard not to think of them as extraordinary. I find it hard to imagine living with unrelenting pain or to continue a life with no legs and only 30% of my eye sight. I don't think I could do it.

That was the point of those comments; these are not out-of-the-ordinary human beings. What they might be experiencing is out-of-the-ordinary, but the resources and

“ ...the resources and the spirit that they have is no different from the resources and spirit that each of us have. ”

the spirit that they have is no different from the resources and spirit that each of us have. The circumstances of their lives are different from the ones you and I encounter, but in some way and at some time we will confront something that challenges us exactly as they were challenged. We will have to face the challenge of our own limitations, in whatever form it takes, we will come to 'the end of our tether'.

This is more frightening than thinking about the terrible things other people have to 'overcome'. Exhaustion, grief, loneliness, and helplessness in all its forms, can bring us to this place. When we do not or cannot get out of bed of a morning, when a blackness overshadows and a sourness spoils everything, we are at 'the end of our tether'. And, we all know this experience, because we are all human beings and 'end of the tether-ness' is part and parcel of being a human being.

In one of those revealing moments during the documentary, Anne reflected that she was different from most of the others in the group; 'I haven't yet reached the point of acceptance.' By acceptance, I did not understand being able to put up with the pain. I think for her acceptance included letting go of her dream of being a soldier, of being in control, of being ... or having, all that she had hoped for.

Acceptance involves letting go and for us watching Anne's story unfold it can look and feel like 'letting go'

mean having nothing! It means feeling empty, bereft, as any grieving person can feel. However, Anne's companions did not seem 'empty' or 'bereft'; they seemed determined, alive and engaged with life and with other people. Can 'letting go' and 'being alive and engaged' exist together? Can we be empty and alive at the same time?

These are scary questions. There's a part of me that does not want to ask them, just as there is a part of me that is afraid of disabled, disfigured, deformed veterans of war, a part that is confronted by helplessness in all its forms. It is the part that would want to make the veterans exceptional and 'inspiring', anything but to see them as human beings like me.

They are human beings like me, that is where the questions lose their confronting power. We are not alone, never alone. The very things that seem to isolate us, those feelings of loss and grief, the sadness at the heart of us at times, the struggles for acceptance are what we all experience. To be human is to experience all of this but it is also what connects us, what enables us to reach out and to be reached.

For whatever reason, Anne was chosen or volunteered for the exercise she was on. This former soldier put herself in the midst of this emotionally challenging situation. Anne's own struggles, her own life, was not only occupying a seat on a four-wheel-drive on an interminable dusty road, it was to be in the midst of a vibrating and vibrant emotional adventure. Despite where she was on the journey, her story, her emotions were tuning into the journeys of each of her companions. What she was feeling was being felt by others as what they were feeling was felt by her.

There is never guarantee, but being in tune with the feeling of others, sharing our common humanity, especially our 'at the end of our tether' experience, can create and open us to compassion. We can touch and be touched. What we could never do on our own becomes possible, together.

I did not see the second part of the documentary. However, I am grateful to Anne and her companions for that brief glance into their lives. Being 'unconquered', Invictus, is not enough; it is only the beginning.

To understand a little more what it means to be a human being, to choose to accept limitation and the inevitable experiences of emptiness and loss, that is the next step. It is like the shell that's protected us for so much of our lives, the 'being normal' and 'being acceptable', needs to be broken open. The normality that isolates us can then be transformed into the humanity that makes us vulnerable.

No, being 'unconquered' is not where it ends; being human is where it ends and where real life begins. Anne was coming to know this in the hot, dusty, uncomfortable trip with her companions. 'We are all in this together' is probably a more accurate and more empowering motif than 'we are unconquered'.



# A TEENAGE DREAM

written by Madeleine Pizzuti

It all began some fifty years ago in a small market town in the Fenland district of England where I grew up. I attended an all-girls public school – much to the disappointment of my mother who would have much preferred me attending the Catholic Convent School. However financial pressures prevented my parents from affording the fees and so they had to resort to a public education for their daughter.

I had somehow warmed to our French teacher during my latter years at the school – Mr Donlan was his name and he happened to be Catholic, married, with a swarm of children! I remember confiding in him one day after our class, about my desire to become a missionary. I sensed his initial surprise at my somewhat unexpected announcement, however he did offer his support in whatever way possible. For many months, in my mind's eye, I could see myself sitting cross-legged on the dry, dusty ground of some faraway land, surrounded by little children as I taught them about the wonders of God's love.

The next few years brought about a change of direction with the completion of my training as a secretary at Technical College and subsequent emigration to Australia. It had now seemed as though my dream of becoming a missionary had been put on hold. From secretary to switchboard operator and teachers' aide...the years flew by. Life's events, experiences and knowledge gained along the way all served to mould me into the person I had become. Yet the dream I held deep within me, remained.

As I now punched in the code to set the office alarm and make my way to my car to head off home, I looked up at the moonlit evening sky. I silently gave thanks for the wonderful job that I had been blessed with – the position of Pastoral Associate for a multicultural, vibrant Catholic parish in Sydney's northern suburbs. Now at the age of sixty-five, having spent the majority of my working life in

“ Tomorrow I had to look forward to an interview with a young mum preparing for the baptism of her firstborn... ”

pastoral roles, I found myself reflecting deeply on the years that had passed and how I had fallen into these roles.

The children in the Sacramental program that I had just taught, had long gone home; their activity books and pencil cases tucked under their arms as I waved the last parent and child off. Preparing these children to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation was just one aspect of my role – however, one of the most rewarding. Thoughts of the following day's schedule began to flow through my mind as I tackled the hour-long journey home. It was sometimes hard to switch off, especially after an eventful day. Tomorrow I had to look forward to an interview with a young mum preparing for the baptism of her firstborn; a catechist team meeting at midday with their

traditional shared lunch afterwards in the parish kitchen; altar server training at 3.30 pm and inbetween all of that the emails and phone messages that would be waiting in my inbox in the morning.

As I drove mindlessly through the suburbs my mind swirled with reminders of what I had to tackle the next day. At every red traffic light I quickly jotted down the reminders on my trusty notepad that had its place in the middle console of my car...



I could physically feel my body relax as I wrote the last reminder in the notepad. There... it's all done. I just have to remember to look at my list in the morning!

On arriving at the parish the following morning, I wondered what the day would bring as I wrestled with my bags trying to get the key turned in the door of the parish centre. Just at that moment, someone called out from behind me.

"Madeleine! Oh, I'm so glad I saw you".

"Hi Mary, how are you going? You look a bit flustered," I remarked.





"I've lost my mobile phone. I think I've left it in the meeting room when I came for Vinnies last night. Can I have a look?"

"Sure you can. Come on in."

And with that we proceeded to the meeting room, pausing to say "Good morning" to the rest of the parish staff in their offices.

“Preparing these children to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation was just one aspect of my role – however, one of the most rewarding.”

"Well the day had begun," I thought. One never knows what it will bring – meetings, conversations, emails, phone calls, visits, and now LOST PROPERTY.

This was one of the delights of being a Pastoral Associate – there was a lot of variety in the job. It also required one to be a good listener and attentive to the needs of others. To be able to know what to say, and what not to say to someone who is grieving was essential, and to be able to develop an understanding of the diversity of life's circumstances between one family and another. Being a Pastoral Associate requires one to be attentive to the needs of the whole person, not just the spiritual component. It is a role that is challenging, yet rewarding; confronting, yet humbling. Encompassing all of this is the privilege to be working in collaboration with a parish priest who is committed to 'serving the people'.

As I bid 'goodbye' to a very relieved Mary who had located her lost mobile phone, I realised how blessed I was to be surrounded by such beautiful parishioners. I also realised the depth of God's love as He had allowed my teenage dream to become a reality, albeit many years later, and not, I might add, sitting cross-legged on dry, dusty ground! Not only had God given me the opportunity of teaching children about Himself, but He had given me much more...so much more, in my role as Pastoral Associate.



## A prepaid funeral to honour a very special life

The celebration of a life takes careful planning and is too important to leave to just anyone.

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 these changes and remain compassionate, sensitive and responsive to the needs and wishes of our client families.

The recommendation of a tailored prepaid funeral plan is part of WN Bull's proud heritage of providing real comfort and personalised care for the deceased and their families.

A WN Bull prepaid funeral will ensure that every detail is attended to so that the life lived is the life celebrated. Paid in today's prices it's also a sound financial decision.

**When the care you seek is unconditional – talk to us.**



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“It was like he had grown to trust and let go, although he would not have used those words.”



## THE PRIEST AND THE FARMER

### A CONVERSATION WITH KEVIN BATES SM OAM

written by Richard White

Kevin Bates SM OAM has been a priest for a long time; he was ordained in 1972. When he talked with me the other day, he spoke about the things that were important to him; they were simple things like music and being with people at important times in their lives, about ‘radical hospitality’ and an ‘unknowable God’.

When I say these were ‘simple things’, I mean Kevin spoke simply. It was like a conversation I had with a farmer recently, an older man.

Our conversations had always been brief and slightly awkward. Those glancing meetings where shyness or uncertainty limit the exchange to something about the weather, only in the country and for farmers, the weather is no trivial topic.

What made the conversation different, I do not quite know, but when Rob said, simply, ‘the weather and the lack of rain doesn’t bother me so much now. I used to worry a lot about it, the weather, and other things. I’ve sort of given up worrying ...’

That expression, ‘I’ve sort of given up worrying’, touched me; I felt close to Rob for the first time. It was like he had grown to trust and let go, although he would not have used those words. The closeness I felt had to do with being a witness to this new trusting, a precious moment.

I had an image of a life time of sky-watching and caring that had left its mark, on his face, certainly, but on his spirit or soul also. The land tilled, the animals he kept, the years spent had shifted or shaped something within. He knew something now that he didn’t know as a young man. Or, better, he knew something now that he didn’t know that he knew, back then.

Kevin Bates has been a priest for a long time. Our conversation was more forthcoming than the one I had with the farmer. But, I found myself thinking about them together, a life time of caring for the land and a life time of caring for people, a life time that brings a quiet trust and simplicity and a life time of making connections that ring true.

Kevin is more comfortable with words; preaching, explaining, counselling are his bread and butter. However, the power of words, their capacity to influence and communicate, is not to be found in cleverness or learning alone; words need to take flesh if they are to ring true. The words Kevin used in our conversation had this same life time feel, something learned from living more than from books.

‘My job is to get out of the way ...’ Kevin is a talented musician and composer and I wondered what he meant by ‘getting out of the way’. When he spoke of music, he also talked of ‘touching the heart’ and ‘becoming connected’ and ‘music sure beats talking!’



“ He spoke about the privilege of being with people and of ‘sacred ground’ and helping couples preparing for marriage to see their wedding as ‘a sacred event’. ”

Maybe ‘getting out of the way’ is a bit like getting out of one’s head, out of the thinking (and worrying) that has ‘I’ at the centre. It is in the heart where quiet can be found, and wonder, and a deeper understanding about simple words about the weather. Being ‘out of the way’ enables us to see others in focus, as they really are; it enables us too to come into focus and be who we really are.

When Kevin talked about his ministry there was this stepping back. He spoke about the privilege of being with people and of ‘sacred ground’ and helping couples preparing for marriage to see their wedding as ‘a sacred event’.

that comes from a life time of using them gently, even tentatively, a verbal ‘getting out of the way’.

What is more important than our putting our words on an event or moment, is a being present or being-with, that creates the space for something mysterious to happen. To help a couple realise that their lives are ‘on the line’, that making a commitment in marriage is a momentous occasion, is more than finding the right words.

Kevin said about music that ‘it sure beats talking’. I’m no musician, but I know how poetry can do something similar. The American poet, Mary Oliver, has some lines in a poem, ‘When Death Comes’ that might be relevant.



... I look upon everything  
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood  
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,  
and I consider eternity as another possibility,  
and I think of each life as a flower, as common  
as a field daisy, and as singular,  
and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,  
tending, as all music does, toward silence ...

My farmer would not have used words like ‘privilege’ or ‘sacred’, but the surprising openness of the other day, led him to speak of having ‘a good life’, and he proceeded to list some of the good things and family was to the fore.

I might have wanted to say he felt blessed, with all the rich meanings that I associate with blessed or blessing. His words were simple, earthy, genuine. I felt blessed in listening and in being connected; perhaps I had stepped onto that sacred ground that Kevin was referring to. However, I am slow to use these words.

Expressions like ‘sacred’ and ‘blessing’ can be out of place and out of context, jarring and pious. What makes words sacred is respect or reverence and that simplicity

“ Similarly, in speaking about being with people who are bereaved, Kevin saw his role to help them ‘to grieve well and to love well’. ”



“ The plough pulled through the soil, heaped and turned, catches light and shines... ”

Music and poetry ‘sure beat talking’; they both can ‘tend towards silence’. And, it is this silence, a space that is not empty, but open and hospitable, a place where the ‘unknowable God’ may well be waiting.

Similarly, in speaking about being with people who are bereaved, Kevin saw his role to help them ‘to grieve well and to love well’. By this simple description, I understood that comforting that allowed people to feel and accept the pain of their loss, the heart of grieving. Then, or at the same time, to embrace and find consolation in the love that finds expression in grief.

‘To grieve well and to love well’ are two sides of the one reality. In the midst of grief it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand this truth. ‘Getting out of the way’ and finding the silence that comes from music or fellow-feeling, is where ministry begins. Words can get in the way and the unknowable and unbearable become possible by the presence Kevin describes with few words.

This presence cannot be taught. It is not a technique. Presence is always a gift, received and created. The gift can be longed for and lived for, known and glimpsed, and more sure and assuring as time passes. Gerard Manley Hopkins

seems to hint at something like this at the end of his poem, ‘The Windhover’.

... sheer plod makes plough down sillion  
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,  
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

The plough pulled through the soil, heaped and turned, catches light and shines, just as the black coals of the previous night’s fire can break open in the morning to reveal the living colour and heat within. So, years spent on the land and in ministry, can shape and simplify lives and allow them to shine brightly and burn warmly.

The priest and the farmer, Kevin and Rob, give us hope that our lives, too, might become simpler and shine brightly and burn warmly.





# THE RULE BOOK

written by Erica Greenop

I was a student nurse, back then in 1959, first year probationary nurse, at one of London’s top teaching hospitals so I should have been proud to have been selected for training, but I just didn’t fit.

It’s not as if I set out to transgress, but how I hated hospital rules that ensured emotions were hidden away. The times in which we lived. The rules of life. The don’t cry rules. Or pride, the sort of pride that hangs like a winter curtain between people. Or stoicism, that historical emotional strength of the people that got them through world wars. Compassion, empathy, that sense of *unity* – I think that is the word I am trying to find – helping people feel cared for when they are dying, or grieving, or living with life-changing pain and loss, the fearful silence of grief, its loneliness, its isolation, gentling away the barriers of emotional pain -- weren’t in the rule book.

As I write this I am right back there... temperatures, blood pressures, bedpans, bottles, probationer nurse duties

which means I am being watched doing simple jobs to assess my suitability to progress through nursing training... Mr Milne - I remember him as if it is yesterday, not sixty years ago - is still here, and it could be his name but he does remind me of Pooh Bear, the sweet vagueness, the *‘he crawled out of the gorse bush, brushed the prickles from his nose and began again’* attitude to life even though he is here in this bleak fearful place, bed six left hand side... no privacy, no love, the whole thing of being in hospital, layers and layers of remoteness... *we’re sending you home, Mr Milne isn’t it? there’s nothing more we can do...* bars on the windows, glass you can’t see through except sometimes when the impression of what could be grey London sky turns yellow... the loss of who they used to be

- the patients - their dignity, their human-beingness... Sister Jubillant in her glass box... *be more precise nurse, a little less imagination...* Sister Jubillant in her office, watching...  
...so I smooth my apron, take a deep breath, get my mind ready for being someone else, marshal the curtains between the beds so they hang neatly, set the water jugs on the trolleys so the handles all turn in the same direction, make the beds with 15 inches of top sheet folded over the bed cover and the hem stitching turned under, sit the patients upright against the pillows... Mr Milne is awake

“ ...just a little piece of his life returned to him, that simple bittersweet distant memory of being human. ”

and he smiles such a gentle old smile and touches my hand and says *thank you love...* and when all the patients are sitting upright and all the bed-wheels are turned inwards and all the lockers are three thumb-joint distance from the beds, Sister Jubillant appears and assesses my jug handles skills and inward-turning bed wheels and the ward rounds begin, now everyone is tidied up, registrars and surgeons and medical students in their white coats and grey faces able to refer to their notes un-distracted by curtains that hang crooked or, heaven forbid, patients who need attention.



An elderly lady has travelled by train from Halifax to London to visit Mr Milne. She sits beside his bed in her hat and her coat buttoned up as if she’s not staying long, asks if she can have a cup of tea, *it’s been such a long*



*journey love*, she says and her voice is old and trying to be brave and trying not to be a nuisance and she is holding Mr Milne’s hand and I feel this deep deep well full of everything that’s not in the hospital rule book and make her a cup of tea, put the cup and saucer and a lace paper doily which I find in the drawer in the kitchen reserved for visiting specialists and a little jug of milk on a stainless steel hospital tray and bring it to the bedside and old Mr Milne, dying neatly with the sheet at 15 inches on the coverlet and the stitching turned under, looks at me as if I have just given him this moment to own, just a little piece of his life returned to him, that simple bittersweet distant memory of being human - all the ordinary unspoken miracles of life brought back in that cup of tea for his visitor.

“Nurse?” I can hear Sister Jubillant’s foghorn-on-the-Thames voice... *“what on earth do you think you are doing?”* and, yes, of course, she has seen it all... and no, none of it was in the rule book.





# THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE WOLF

## LESSONS FROM THE WILD ON LOVE, DEATH AND HAPPINESS

BY MARK ROWLANDS

reviewed by Richard White

This is not a second hand book, bought from Vinnies or the Salvos. It was a single copy, smallish paper back squeezed in between larger more impressive tomes. We were on holidays, my wife and I, and while she wandered into more exotic shops, I browsed the book shop.

I remember an old priest, Jim Muirhead, saying once, 'there is nothing accidental about the books you pick up and read'. Why did I pull out *The Philosopher and the Wolf*? The title intrigued me, especially the subtitle, *Lessons from the Wild on Love, Death and Happiness*. Then there were the endorsements, one by the philosopher, John Gray,

Mark Rowlands has given us that rarest of things – a book that takes the reader beyond the human world, while exploring the deepest human emotions. This moving account of the life he lived with an adopted wolf will be recognized as a seminal work of philosophy that forces us to re-evaluate our view of the human animal.

There are numerous sections of argument and reflection in the book, much of which passed me by in a first reading. What kept me going initially were the stories that unfolded and the glimpses of more profound understanding that I would perhaps return to (I am now doing my re-reading).

This is a memoir, an autobiographical fragment; Rowlands lived with his wolf, Brenin, for about ten years. Those ten years were the beginning of his life as an academic philosopher. It is a snap shot of a life and a relationship. This fragment was full of drama and colour and I did with Mark and his life what I do with most (all?) of my reading: What does this life tell me about my life? Are there things here that I like or admire? Can I learn anything from this story? Do I even like the Mark Rowlands that emerges from his stories with the wolf?

Mark bought Brenin as a pup in his first teaching appointment in the philosophy department of Alabama university, in southern USA. He had grown up in Wales where his family had Great Danes as pets, big dogs. This was an impulsive purchase with initial disastrous results. But, impulse and bigness were sub themes in the book.

The author writes about our evolution from the apes, their cunning and hierarchical grouping. He does not identify with the typical Alpha Male, but that is how he comes across.

Rowlands, like his wolf, was big, an enthusiastic rugby player, a hard drinker and an equally hard worker. He would write through the night, the bottle (or, bottles) of Jack Daniels beside him and Brenin at his feet. This focused energy would translate into daily runs with his wolf and camping trips and a pushing of limits.

There was nothing to suggest a simple mellowing or a dawning maturity in Mark's life. He had a succession of university positions, in Ireland, England and eventually lived for a time in France, Brenin always accompanying him. His books sold and his reputation as a philosopher grew. He was a success.

The thing is that success, being on top of his game and acknowledgement, was not what he was after or not what was after him. That impulsive purchase of a wolf led him to understand what the ape in us can offer and how our thinking can be limited by deception and this quest for success.

We are, all of us I think, more ape than wolf. In many of us, the wolf has been almost completely expunged from the narrative of our lives. But it is to our peril that we let the wolf die. In the end the ape's schemes will come to nothing: its cleverness will betray you and its simian luck will run out. Then you will find what is most important in life.

I am still not sure what Mark Rowlands meant by 'in some ancient part of my soul there still lived a wolf', hence the re-reading. But, the impressions that remain from that

first reading were the companionship that developed between the man and this wild animal. This was more than a 'we love our dog' sort of thing.

Mark came to respect the intelligence of the wolf and to marvel at his physical grace, his untamed spirit, his ... abiding presence. He was dismissively critical of people who laud the capacity of humans over animals, with consequent patronising or cruel or utilitarian treatment of them. Rowlands became a vegetarian in the course of those ten years with Brenin and persuaded Brenin to eat only fish, a piscatorian.

“ ...like a light shone on that darkness, the possibility of a new wildness that was a freeing of the heart and soul and a capacity to love deeply and widely with and beyond the limitations of human intelligence.”

There was an opening of his world and his soul to the living otherness, the unique and reciprocal relationships that can grow between man and beast. This is a story about a man and a wolf, a wild and threatening thing in our traditional tales. Mark asserts that the traditional narratives about our superiority and primacy hide a dark side of ourselves.

The wolf's wildness was for this man something like a light shone on that darkness, the possibility of a new wildness that was a freeing of the heart and soul and a capacity to love deeply and widely with and beyond the limitations of human intelligence.

Brenin, by the way, is Welsh for king. The wolf was big, powerful 'he stood thirty four inches at the shoulder and weighed 120 pounds'. He could, and did, mix it with Pit Bull Terriers that Mark and he encountered at rugby training.

This was a man's (alpha male) animal. For my part, I have a diminutive West Highland Terrier named Teefs (he has an underbite and a slight lisp) and cannot say 'teeth'. He is wild, in his way, and I have grown in respect for him through reading this book. What more could I ask?

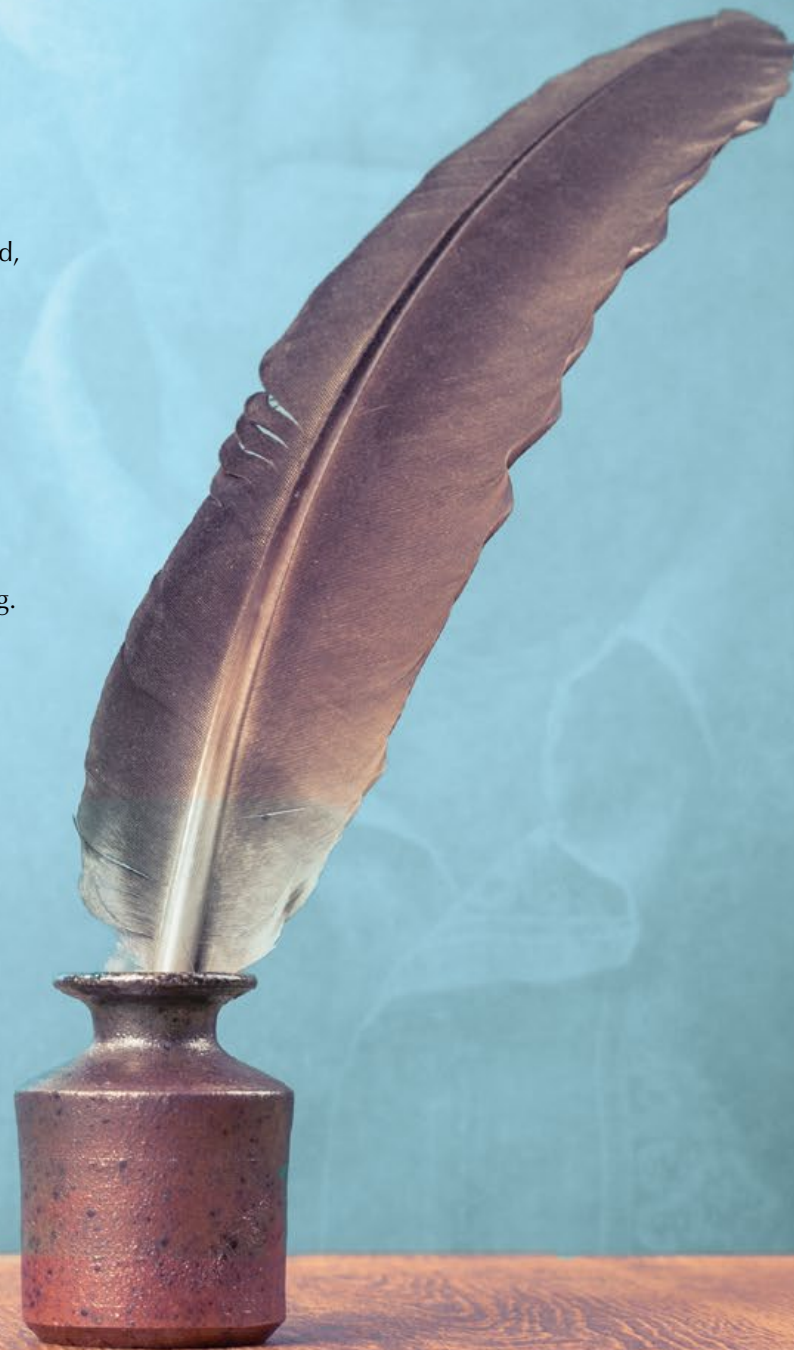


## ODE TO FRIENDSHIP

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

*Marjorie Pizer*

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