

# PLATFORM

edition 16 winter 2014

words from the west



# ROTUNDA IN THE WEST



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## What is Rotunda in the West?

In Bruno Lettieri's words: 'A rolling festival of intimate conversations with creative Australians.' This festival is about making creatives accessible to the literary community of the western suburbs. It's an opportunity to listen to and engage with well-known and emerging writers – such Australian luminaries as Hannie Rayson, Raimond Gaita and John Marsden among many others – who speak on what it means to be a creative and, by extension, what it means to be human. All while enjoying a good meal and better company, often surrounded by the waterfront views of the VU Bar! Rotunda encapsulates the humanity in art, the shared forces of story and intimacy. Come join the creative conversation!

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# EDITORIAL

What is education? The submission guidelines did not ask this question, but parents, teachers and students (both former and current) nonetheless did their best to answer. These subjective answers take a variety of forms: poetry on death, homework and community; fiction about language and escalators; essays on the nature of the education system. The figures that loom largest are the heroes of the schoolyard—those teachers who accepted the sacred duty of nurturing their charges. If these stories tell us anything at all, it is that the students shaped by these often unsung heroes will never forget their names.

Education, whatever this ephemeral thing may be, matters.

Platform is powered by education. A team of Professional Writing and Editing and Bachelor of Communications students from Victoria University's TAFE and Higher Education departments shaped its creation. Advanced Design students, under the guidance of Beata Cranswick, handled the cover and internal page design. Platform is a not only a rare chance for a diverse collection of community, emerging and established wordsmiths to share the pages of a magazine. It is also a student's first opportunity to experience the real-life workings of a publication. The editorial team managed the submissions, applied our editing skills, negotiated the flat plan, learned from our fellow students and created a beautiful, tangible symbol of our educational success.

Like the educational pursuits depicted in its pages, Platform is a journey of discovery and learning. It is our chance to step out into the world and shine.

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Kim Cook  
On behalf of the Platform 16 Editorial Team

# ANOTHER YEAR

The holidays are a distant memory. You have returned from the beach or your site in the mountains—from your seat at the bar, from your towel by the pool, from the depths of your summer dreaming—to a land of demands and obligations, to a time of no time at all. Another year is underway.

You have your plans. A long list of writing tasks. A creative map and new ideas. You make that list every year, and every year it defeats you. Your work is strangely hit and miss, and then the year is gone.

‘No matter,’ wrote Samuel Beckett. ‘Try again. Fail again. Fail better.’

How good is that? Failure is inevitable, but not inconsequential: whoever fails better succeeds a little more. So keep on keeping on.

Beckett did. Long before the Irish poet, playwright and novelist won the 1969 Nobel Prize for Literature, he was a solemn and solitary young man with ‘little talent for happiness’ (his words). In his early twenties

he secured an academic post at Trinity College, Dublin, but his career lasted less than two years.

His study of Marcel Proust—the French novelist responsible for the truly novel and monumental work, *In Search of Lost Time*—convinced Beckett that his own time was finite, and likely to be lost in the formal habits and settled routine of the academe. So Beckett took to the road: wandering Europe, working when he had to, writing when he could.

His first novel was rejected by countless publishers. His most famous work, *Waiting for Godot* (1953), took five years from page to stage; it was a critical success in Paris, but opened in London to mainly negative reviews.

He invited failure, too. Despite being a native English speaker, Beckett wrote much of his work in French. Can you imagine a natural right hander electing to play his tennis left-handed?

Beckett, it seems, sought in his writing the clarity and economy of expression that his second language necessarily imposed. Armed with less, and unburdened by excessive literary style or cultural baggage, Beckett had more. You see it when—as in the case of *Waiting for Godot*—Beckett translates his work from French back into English:

ESTRAGON: Why don't  
we hang ourselves?

VLADIMIR: With what?

ESTRAGON: You haven't got a bit of rope?

VLADIMIR: No.

ESTRAGON: Then we can't.

'Compact' is one word that critics use to describe Beckett's later works; 'refined' might be another.

Towards the end, Beckett wasted nothing. He wrote in small ways about big things—boredom, despair, confusion, sadness, irony, time and memory—and this, in part, is what gives his writing its greatness, its universality and its enduring appeal.

Beckett's characters live in a perpetual Groundhog Day: they stand stranded, dazed, lonely and alone in a fog that never lifts. They are bewildered, battered, bored and overwhelmed.

Absurd? Or life as we know it? Few make it through: eternally marooned, baffled and confused, it is no wonder they go in search of ropes.

But not Beckett. He worked. He wrote. He lived. And no amount of existential theory negates the fact that he showed up every day and put his pen to paper.

And you? To what this year will you bring your energy, time and imagination?

Surely the lesson of Beckett is that if nothing amounts to nothing, then something amounts to something. So make your plans. Write your lists. Set your goals and get to work.

And fail again. Fail better.



# I WRITE

## I

I can hear you, who would rather I not be myself or do what it is I have worked so many years for, tell me it is a waste of time. I am a waste of your time. Ask a bird not to fly. Ask a fish not to swim. What will you have? You will have the shell of a bird or a fish, but you will not have its spirit, because its spirit is in what it is most compelled to do. If you take away my spirit, I am your shell. I loosen out of you. This is not a smooth transition. Your shell cracks where my skin is yet to thicken.

## II

This see-saw quest of mine has me dizzy with lost expectation. I rise into the air, languid limp for my bottled-ink core. 'You will need more than hope,' you say. Who are you to chide me? Which you is the one to point the finger? The you who chose to work for more money than you need and who, with all that you like to show that you have, has something to be unhappy about? I see people like me. Ones who have searched out paths that have taken them where they did not know they would go. They may not outshine the group every time, but, when they speak, I am nourished. 'You will live to regret this.' Your words—spoken, unspoken—eat at marrow in my broken bones. 'Look at you now. Look at what you have come to.' The see-saw rises again. Mud dries under foot. Your brows knot a black cross into your face, the way knitting needles swamp an unfinished woollen hat. If I can rise higher, I might no longer hear you. You shout obscenities in the wind.

Another bounce. Under paper skin, calf muscles continue to harden. 'Ha, ha!' you cry. 'Your shoes are broken. Your voice is coarse.' I cry into myself rather than speak. There's your 'idiot' word again. Yes, I'm shaking. You see that this time I might not make it. The pain is worse. I scream in my gut, in a room beyond your soul. For those with heart to hear me, I wish I could take away what I have to experience. Ink stained wings, it's been so long. This is awkward. 'Come on.' I egg myself on. 'You've done this before. You can do this again.'

## III

The wind up here slaps my mouth such that my skin, a loose bag, flaps and contorts. I have no idea how I will end up—just a free fall and the hope that I will touch the ground in one piece. I firm up. I am not as I seemed. Everything keeps changing. This is life's one constant. Tomorrow is an open book. I contemplate the blank screen in front of me. I write.



Diane Simonelli

## SWOT RASH

**Y**our rash flares up and scars again  
stressing from unyielding effort;  
you read and write and blot out pain,  
through uncontrolled obsessive habit.  
Stressing from unyielding effort  
your flexibility turns taut;  
through uncontrolled obsessive habit,  
you beat yourself with what you ought—  
your flexibility turns taut,  
the opened: closed, the listener: deaf,  
you beat yourself with what you ought;  
self-conscientiousness, bereft.  
The opened: closed, the listener: deaf;  
your single study goal consumes  
self-conscientiousness; bereft.  
Imbalanced, you're destined to resume  
all your single study goal consumes.  
The scale that measures the scars of gain  
imbalances. You're destined to resume;  
your face is a map of inner pain.  
The scale that measures the scars of gain,  
can't read, write, and blot out pain.  
Your face is a map of inner pain;  
your rash flares up and scars again.



Tru S. Dowling

# HOW TO LOSE AT ANIMAL BALL

**I**t was my first time. It felt sweet. Scary and weird. Very weird. Here I was, in 1980s provincial Victoria, the captain of the local under 16s football team, and doing it for the first time.

Publishing a poem.

He's a poet—and he knows it, the English teacher told the entire class. Her name was Miss Light. That seems important now. She held up the school magazine. There they were, eight lines that would change my life. That would give me the confidence to write more poems. The next day and for years afterwards. And then some more years after that. I would one day after all those years, to the amazement of this boy from Geelong who back then read only *Doctor Who* books because what he really enjoyed was football, weightlifting, marijuana, Pink Floyd and football and girls, one in particular, publish poetry books. A third volume coming out in 2014. That will include poems a long way from that first published poem. But not too far:

The five teens  
on the edge of adulthood  
sit and discuss  
the meaning of life.  
An obscure portion of fluff  
floats by. The five  
keep it alive with their breath.  
The fluff falls. The  
conversation continues.

Any boy who wrote something as girly as poetry at my school was duly beaten up. Except me. Because there were only three boys at school who could beat me up. And, smarty pants that I was, they were all my friends.

I'm not sure about all that, actually. If they were really my friends. Whether I was really theirs. I'm also not sure that boys who wrote poetry would have been beaten up. It was just the atmosphere of the place. It was a public high school with paint peeling from most walls. A guy let off a bomb in the quadrangle one day. I had to wave a golf club at a group of punks who came to the school to bash my brother. Actually, it took me and three of my mates, waving golf clubs from the window of my mate Pedretti's Dad's Mitsubishi Magna.

The height of honour at my school was not writing poems about the meaning of life, it was having the ability to carry a basketball from one end of the bitumen court to the other while at least fifty boys tried to stop you. The game was called Animal Ball. I never made it to the end.

Only one boy did. Mark Inglis. Short of stature, but big of animal. He was a warrior. He held the ball aloft, minus his shirt and several sections of his school pants.

I was a warrior of another kind, but didn't know it then. I was learning to integrate my feelings with my thoughts and my body. I was coming to terms with enjoying football and fights at lunchtime; sex, drugs and Emily Dickinson. And Robert Lowell. And T.S. Eliot.

Are you a faggot, Mitchell? No, Strachuanie (yes, that was his name), I'm not. And here's a punch on your chin.

There were gay boys at my school. I remember one being dragged around by his jumper and punched and called faggot and poof. A tall boy. Someone McLean, I think. It was Year 12.



There were lots of us. What was happening to him had been done to me for being tall and gawky in Year 7. I wasn't dragging McLean around. I was watching from a distance. Watching his face. Still and set. Unflinching. Silent. I didn't stop the abusers. I was weak. I wrote poems.

McLean suicided not long after Year 12. Would he have done that if I'd been halfway courageous and stepped in and stopped those gay bashers? I don't know. It was my first chance to stop someone from being abused and I didn't stop anyone from doing anything. All I can do is write about it now.

I don't know if McLean wrote poetry. But I want to posthumously dedicate my first poem to him. His name is, obviously, not written under the title of the poem in the school year book. But, somehow, because somewhere inside me that chunky,

weightlifting, footy-playing hetero who wrote girly poems at school still lives, McLean's name is written every time I write a poem or stand in front of an audience and read one. I know now—and somehow knew then but couldn't express it—that real men, McLean, can be gay, can be weak, can be strong, can be scared and tough and write poems. They can apologise for not stopping abusers. And they can promise to try to learn to live the kind of courage it took for you to keep your face strong and not cry out while they abused you.

*The five teens ponder the meaning of life ... they keep it alive with their breath ... the conversation continues.*



**Paul Mitchell**

# HIGH BROW EDUCATION

**B**ack in 1963, my Gran performed a weekly ritual of afternoon tea in the Myer store at Chadstone Shopping Centre, gloves and hat not optional. I had just turned five when she decided it was time for me to accompany her in order to start my social education.

‘What does “epiket” mean?’ I asked.

Gran raised a manicured eyebrow. ‘Etiquette,’ she pronounced, ‘is how you conduct yourself during social intercourse.’

My eyes widened. Intercourse. Wasn’t that a rude word? Yet here was Gran saying it loud enough for the neighbours to hear. Maybe I’d been wrong about it.

‘What’s inter—corrs?’ I asked.

My mother’s hand slapped over my mouth. ‘She means “manners”. Behaving yourself. Being a good girl.’

‘She has to learn these things sooner or later,’ said Gran. ‘Better from us than in the playground.’

As we stood outside the Myer entrance, its shiny gold doors forbidding yet beckoning, Gran turned to me. ‘Keep your hands in your pockets and don’t touch anything.’

I looked at her, puzzled. ‘Mum says pockets are for hankies, not for hands.’

Her smile faded and the look began to develop: her raised eyebrow was accompanied by a puckered mouth. I slid both hands into my pockets and looked at the ground.

‘Follow me and watch where you’re going. You’ll bump into something if you’re not careful.’

I lifted my head.

She sighed and smiled. ‘You’ll get it, don’t worry.’

She turned and swept through the portal that would lead to the establishment of our strained relationship. Her instructions came thick and fast. ‘Don’t speak unless you’re spoken to. Always say please and thank you. Don’t sniff...’ Gran’s voice droned as I tried to keep up with her.

Distracted by the vast array of brightly-coloured goods stacked on high counters, I almost crashed into her bottom as she stopped to allow a sales girl to spray scent on her wrist.

After smelling the perfume, Gran pulled her lace-bordered handkerchief from her purse and wiped her wrist as she continued on her mission. When we reached the escalator she didn’t pause. But I did.

Gran turned to see me still standing at the bottom. ‘Katherine! What are you waiting for?’

I could only stare at the rising metal teeth before me.

‘Katherine! Look at me!’

I did.

‘Put your hand on the railing and step on.’

Her knitted eyebrows seemed to grow darker and pointier.

I shook my head.

Gran was now a third of the way up the escalator. ‘It’s just like stairs,’ she called.

‘I can’t,’ I cried, tears welling.

‘Of course you can. It’s easy. Just step on. I’ll meet you.’ She began to climb back down, but a man pushed past me and blocked her progress. She

leant over the railing and yelled down to me, 'Wait there. I'll come back down.' She disappeared as the escalator carried her above the height of the ceiling.

I hung back and watched as several people got on the escalator. Gran was right—it didn't look that hard. I moved forward, holding my breath as I lifted a foot ready to place on the next jagged-edged step. Not quick enough.

I waited for the next one, then the next.

A lady carrying several shopping bags was approaching. I had to get on, or get out of the way. My foot touched the step, and suddenly I was being tugged upwards. I'd forgotten the handrail. Forced into the splits, I fell sideways, bumping my head.

'Sweetie! Are you okay?' The lady with the shopping bags grabbed my arm.

I bawled.

She dumped her shopping on the steps below and picked me up. 'It's okay, it's okay. I've got you.'

I resisted the urge to bury my face in her chest. She might have been the stranger-danger Mum was always on about. I bawled louder.

At the top of the escalator, the woman settled

me and turned to retrieve her shopping. As she grabbed the bags, the contents spilled.

I forgot to cry, fascinated by red apples bouncing down the escalator.

'Katherine!' Gran was retreating down the opposite escalator. 'I told you to wait for me!'

'Is she yours?' called the shopping bag woman.

'She's my granddaughter,' Gran called back.

The escalator carried her away again. 'Do. Not. Move!' she yelled, her voice disembodied.

When Gran reappeared, she passed several bruised apples to my rescuer then pulled out her purse. 'Please, let me pay for the fruit. It's inedible.'

'No, no. It's okay. I'm just glad she's not hurt.' The lady took her bags and left.

That's when Gran turned and, instead of giving me the consolatory hug I expected, I saw her eyebrows framing a *look of death*. I was too frightened to cry anymore.



# ARE THERE ANY BLOKES IN THE CLASS?

**I**t's almost six. She hears the train's whistle. Best get moving. The vegies are half cooked and the chops are done.

Strap the baby in the car and get the girls organised.

This is the day, she thinks, as she drives down to the station. Her mind wanders. She might just wing it. Ask him if she can go to night school.

Tea's on the table. She thinks this might be a good time (when's a good time?). I'd like to do one subject for my HSC at night school at the High. It's only one night—Wednesday, seven to ten.

What makes you think you can do that as well as look after the kids? Anyway, how much will that cost? And are there any blokes in the class?

She lies, not that much. The kids will be ready for bed before she goes.

Who's gonna do the dishes and put them to bed? He points at her son.

Before she can answer, he slams his plate on the table, roaring, No! Blood streams from the remnants of the dinner plate.

She looks at her girls—both ashen faced with eyes that tell the story. The baby starts to scream. The blood runs.

Mad dash into the car—stitches, and naked condemnation on his face. It is her fault. She feels cowed, let down and guilty.

Something has shifted. This is important, she feels. I want to do this. She remembers her school experiences. Apart from English, she'd hated it. I will do this.

Tuesday night. I'm going now.

He grunts as he raises the can to his mouth.

I'll be home by ten thirty. Bye.

What about the—

She shuts the door.

Walking into the room. All afternoon she had envisioned a hundred scenarios. How wrong she was. What she gets is a bland classroom and a small redheaded woman who welcomes the class.

On that first night she is re-united with **Great Expectations**. She, who hadn't read a book for so long, is seduced by the word.

Picture the same woman going to a Literature class at the old FIT. That is where she finds herself again, struggling to learn. William Faulkner, Gustave Flaubert—what does it all mean? Then she finds Helen Garner, Tim Winton and authors going back to Patrick White. But, they are names. She remembers that struggle and someone saying to her, Are there any blokes in the class?



**Helen Morcom**

# THE TWO OF US: BARRY GARNER AND BRUNO LETTIERI

**B**arry, fifty-six, likes to tell people he works in advertising and finance, in that he delivers pamphlets and cleans banks. Bruno, fifty-nine, is a TAFE creative writing teacher. They met ten years ago through a creative writing class Bruno taught.

## **Barry Garner**

When I was forty-two years old, I enrolled in a creative writing course at St Albans TAFE. At the time I was working six days a week at the Lost Dogs Home, driving an animal ambulance. I hadn't been in a classroom since I was fifteen. I walked in, and there was this little ball of enthusiasm at the front. Bruno was very different from the men who taught me in secondary school and the men I worked with over the years—he had a gentleness I had never seen in a man.

There's something about being in a writing class that supercharges the getting-to-know-you process. I reckon two writing classes are about the equivalent to fifteen first dates. You get all the bull and shadowboxing out of the way pretty quick.

It was a bit of a problem when I kept on re-enrolling. It got to the point where Bruno said, 'You are not to enrol anymore, go away!' By that stage we were such good friends he could say that. But he sat me down and said, 'Look, you're at the point now where you can start motivating yourself.'

I was diagnosed with bipolar in 1991 just after the death of my grandmother. She had lived with me for the last ten years of her life because I was a single parent. When she died, I took it

pretty hard and got depressed. It sort of went on and on and there was something not quite right. I've always had it, but it just wasn't given a label—back then people called it bad nerves. I'd had a breakdown at eighteen. I'd been prescribed some Valium, took an overdose and went to the hospital. That was a very bad experience. In those days they said, 'You're an idiot, man up.'

One day Bruno rang to ask me to speak to his writing class in Sunbury, and I was in the middle of a very bad episode. I said, 'Aw mate, I can't write anything, I can't think about anything except being depressed.' And he said, 'Why don't you write about it?' That night, I sat down and wrote a poem about manic depression. I turned up to class and read it.

Caz was sitting in the room. She has bipolar, too. She got my address off Bruno and wrote to me, so I wrote back, and this went on for a couple of months. We fell in love swapping letters.

Eventually we met up at uni on a Sunday afternoon. When she turned up, I thought she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. I just wanted to kiss her once, because as soon as I opened my mouth I knew I'd stuff it up. So I threw my arms around her and gave her this great big kiss—I don't know who got the biggest surprise! I have never in my life kissed a woman on the first date. I think that was because we had exchanged those letters.

When we got married, Bruno gave Caz away, because her family live in England. It was the first time I have ever seen him stuck for words. When

the reverend got to the part where he said, 'And who gives this woman away to be married?' Bruno just stood there! I'm looking at him saying, 'Well, come on big fella!' and he goes, 'I...I... I do!'

He's part of the family. I've been hospitalised a couple of times. The first person to visit me in hospital is Caz. The second is Bruno. Bruno is not a psychiatrist, but he's taught me little things to help me get through. He's taught me to always dangle a carrot, always have something on the horizon that you're working towards, even if you feel like you can't do it now. In recent years it's been helping me get my book, *Haloes in the Windscreen*, published.

I'm a firm believer that if you feel strongly about someone, you should let them know. My father died when I was thirteen, and he never said to me I love you. So I spent a lot of years wondering if he did. I carried that around like a little secret envelope. And Bruno opened up the envelope and put a stamp on it.

### **Bruno Lettieri**

Barry was in the first creative writing class I taught. He wrote me a letter a few weeks in. He started with 'Dear Professor.' It takes the piss out of me, but it's very endearing because I work in a uni where every second person is a professor, I'm just the TAFE literacy teacher.

He kept re-enrolling for the course. It got to the point where I said, 'You could have got a degree by now with the amount of times you've re-enrolled!' So I'd get Barry along to talk to my

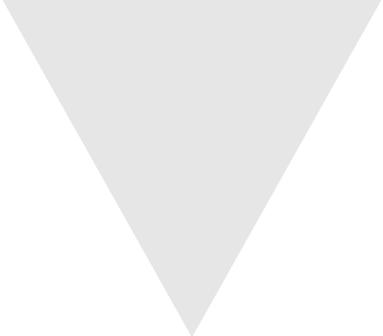
new students about how writing can provide a wonderful telescope to your own world.

People always loved his stuff. I have taken him to people training to be integration aids, the lowest level ESL classes, the naughtiest VCAL kids—and Barry talks to them all. It's the unaffectedness of his voice, a voice that doesn't attempt to overly embellish or pump the world up. Here is this person who left Collingwood Tech at fourteen years and nine months—they didn't even know he had gone because he was wagging so much—and he's speaking alongside the great John Marsden, Raimond Gaita and Hannie Rayson.

My teaching style is quite personal, so I think I must have mentioned the wordlessness of my father. Something must have touched Barry. My father was an Italian peasant, an uneducated man who wasn't touched by great literature, but he had a tendency to cry. My mother would always go, 'Oh look at him, pissio occhio—pissing his eyes.'

I didn't like having to visit Barry in a psychiatric ward. I didn't know what to say to someone in the deep abyss, but you soon realise that you are better at it than you think you are. Mind you, if someone just cuts their finger, I go 'eeegh!' I don't pretend to be terribly brave, but it would be pretty awful to be fifty-nine and say that I've shirked others' stories of deep pain.

Twelve years ago, when I invited Barry to speak to another new class, he was down, but I asked him to come in and tell us what that was like. He read a



poem he wrote called 'The Ride' which was about hanging on because you're about to go into this steep descent. Carolyn was in the class. She was so moved she had to leave the room. I don't think she'd heard a man speak so sensitively about a condition she also lives with. Like all great attractions, it was something you don't realise at the time.

I gave Carolyn away at Barry's wedding a year later. She was about a foot and a half taller than me, looking stunning in her dress. Barry and I aren't that much different in age, but at times there is a fatherly feeling I have for him. We have lived through each other's major calamities and joys. I cried on his shoulder when my marriage went belly-up. Barry is instinctively the man I go and sit

with when I'm broken-hearted. Great friendship is about the shortcuts and the coded language referring to moments that you don't need to explain.

We are both sooks. We will cry at the same bits of stories. We'll sing together the same daggy songs. We are proof of an emotional literacy between men. I have all of Barry's letters in black scrapbooks. I'm turning sixty this year, and he has already appointed himself as my speechmaker. He might bury me too, if I were to die. You know how we all balk at that kind of thing? I think he would know exactly what to say.



*Alice Pung*

# STREET LESSONS

Between the faded font,  
a kaleidoscope of colours  
mingle and blend  
on warm concrete.  
Plaster paste, mortar, glue—  
street decoupage.

Crouched low, she works her hand.  
The can rocks and hisses,  
its mist covers the faded red bricks.  
Toots! Sup?  
Alfresco art—a new tag line.

On round windows,  
bird shit  
piled like termite mounds:  
her laneway, her canvas.  
Plastic bags float and dance.  
Coffee cups, fallen leaves—  
The Viet Times, page twenty-five:  
Furniture going cheap.

The Guerrilla fresco soars above.  
Her hands grapple the red brick.  
Barefooted, she reaches  
higher, higher—heaven beyond her fingertips.

He follows behind.  
Not swimming; not flying.  
Floating  
upwards and over,  
like the plastic bags,  
the leaves, the coffee cups.



*Anna Brasier*

## O.L. HOOPPELL

**I**t's over fifty years since I left school, but many aspects of those formative years in an all girls' Church of England establishment remain with me.

The teacher I most admired was a statuesque, Germanic-looking woman without much bosom and, indeed, a convex look about her. She wore her iron-grey hair cut abruptly, parted on one side and bobby-pinned on the other. A belted, flannel pinafore was her choice of garment, either with a jumper or blouse beneath, but always with an academic gown over all. Shoes were sensible lace-ups. No make-up touched her clear skin and her rimless, round spectacles were practical, not a fashion statement.

When she moved it was at an unhurried pace in a grand manner, as if she were a Roman general inspecting his cohorts. She waved dismissively to clear her path; her eyebrows rose enquiringly if perchance your gaze met hers, her lips pursed as if she were annoyed. To travel, she contained herself, regally upright, in a little Citroen, its riveted pieces making it look like a silver pasty.

She was, however, a marvellous teacher of English, French and German and gave unstintingly of her wisdom. Her only deficiency was a flat and unattractive Aussie-French accent, so Madame was employed to refine our spoken French.

The times I loved best with her were in Matriculation, first period after lunch, if we had Literature. She allowed us a cup of tea and a biscuit

whilst we read Shakespeare. There were only five of us, and it was often amusing because you may have been a main character, a soldier, possibly a hand maiden or the Chorus—and, if the text required, you may have to have read these parts one after the other, ostensibly to yourself! Or you could look ahead, see your part coming up and quickly scoff your biscuit. We became expert at accents, change of voice and swallowing rapidly!

She carried a classical atlas and gave us descriptions of empires and individuals, cities and towns—the life of the times—always expanding our horizons. When we did Ibsen, she encouraged us to read all of his plays, not only the one being studied.

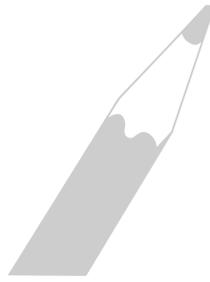
Some of the women in Ibsen were good examples of what she believed to be the role of women in society. She allowed us to see the bonds of expectations of girls of the fifties with the possibility of breaking free. She encouraged us to achieve—to think for ourselves.

I loved this teacher, this woman, this friend, and I will thank her always for the giving of herself to us—to me.

She was Mrs O.L. Hooppell.



*Diane Williamson*



## AT THE TABLE BY THE WINDOW: RAIMOND GAITA ON PETER STEELE (1939–2012)

I remember, November 1972 because I was about to go to England for the first time. Peter Steele and I were sitting in my battered, old black Citroen outside the Jesuit Theological College in Royal Parade, Melbourne, where he lived and taught. I asked him how his work had been received.

He laughed and said it was like listening for the echo of a feather dropped in the Grand Canyon. Our conversation turned to teaching and friendship, prompting him to quote these lines from Robert Bolt's play, *A Man for all Seasons*:

Thomas More: Why not be a teacher?  
You'd be a fine teacher, perhaps a great one.  
Richard Rich: If I was, who would know it?  
Thomas More: You, your pupils, your  
friends, God. Not a bad public, that.

By the time he died in June this year, Peter had published eleven books of literary criticism, essays and poetry. His friends included the noted poets Peter Porter, Seamus Heaney and Chris Wallace Crabbe, a public that would have made even Richard Rich see value in a teacher's life. Rich might also have been brought short by the gratitude of Peter's students. Ailsa Piper told me recently that she still kept aside her writing desk an essay marked in 1996, for the inspiration his comments continued to give her.

Peter would have been a fine teacher whatever route had taken him there, but he became the teacher he was because of twin vocations to the priesthood and to university teaching, each informing the other.

Both, he said, called him to celebrate the world. His task, he thought, was to enable students to see the world as their gift—a world that he believed was both created by God, who had become human to live amongst us, and rendered to him by the writers he loved, many of whom were not religious.

That same spring evening in 1972, Peter told me, 'I believe in teaching.' Having been taught and inspired by Vincent Buckley, at the time Professor of English at the University of Melbourne, he abhorred the spreading notion that teachers merely put into the heads of students what, in principle, students could have got from elsewhere—that teachers are merely facilitators of learning, doing for their students what autodidacts do for themselves.

This conception of teaching is now ubiquitous, which is why we hear so much about Learning (capital intended) but so little about teaching. I once heard a bright young man say at the end of his schooling, 'Teachers are losers'. He would not have disparaged Learning: he needed it to qualify for a place in a prestigious law or medical school.

When Peter declared, 'I believe in teaching,' the emphasis fell as much on 'believe' as it did on 'teaching'. He professed his faith that a good teacher's love of her subject and her joy in teaching it can nourish students not only with an entirely new understanding of their subject, but also with a deepened sense of intrinsic worth. I'm sure he meant love rather than enthusiasm, which, even if it is passionate, will be banal if directed towards things that are banal. Everyone knows, of course, that

enthusiasm can be catching, so it is often regarded as a pedagogical asset, but it is neutral with respect to what it is about. Love, on the other hand, as Plato was perhaps the first great philosopher to see, is in complex ways related to the good. One can be an enthusiastic debunker, even an enthusiastic nihilist. Love, however, asks to celebrate the beloved. Often we come to see something as precious only in the light of someone's love for it. This includes teaching, but for that to occur, the person who reveals the value of what she loves, as much as the one to whom it is revealed, must not fear to disclose their vulnerabilities. Such courage is a gift, and it requires faith to receive and make something of it.

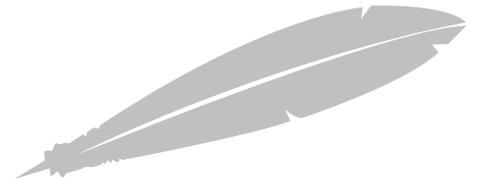
It therefore grieved Peter to become partially estranged from his subject when, as he put it, "God" lost a capital letter and "Theory" gained it.' It was a caustic remark, but it was not, as someone who did not know him might think, a cheap shot in the culture wars. Peter was not a polemicist, let alone a cultural warrior. He meant, I think, that although there is an obvious reason why God should take a capital 'G' in monotheistic faiths, only hubris could make someone claim capital letters for the name of an intellectual endeavour, as was the case when science yielded to scientism, with teachers (and others) applying scientific method to unsuitable

subject matter. This did not diminish Peter's passion for teaching because he knew that it would be ever thus, as it had been in his early days when literary criticism became Criticism. Even so, it tested faith to be a celebrant when debunking was fashionable and nothing so admired as a sceptical, cool urbanity.

In the introduction to his last book, *Braiding the Voices: Essays in Poetry*, Peter writes that he is essentially an essayist. This surprised many people who believed he was essentially a poet. And it may well seem that I have written as though he was essentially a priest and teacher. I suspect, though, that all existed inseparably in Peter Steele the celebrant. I have not written about his poetry because I am not competent to do so, but I am confident that for him poetry was not only a way of expressing his love of the world. In the formalities of poetic discipline, in making the words come together in exactly the right way, he was making himself fully open to the wondrous complexity and beauty of the world.

In an interview with Radio National in October 2011, he said:

... [Seamus] Heaney is, as he said when he came to Australia years ago, a yes man, not in the sense of course of truckling to what other people want him to do—he is very bad at doing that—but he's saying yes to the world, he is saying yes to existence and saying



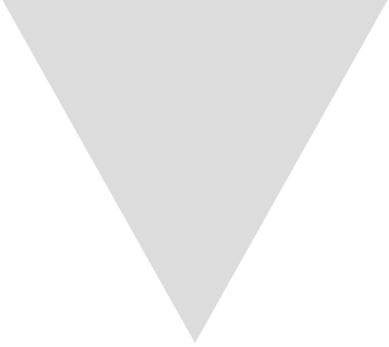
yes to language. He is somebody whose business as a poet is to celebrate life, and for me these two fuse together in the ordinary conduct of an ordinary day.

Peter and I seldom discussed religion, but it was implicit in almost everything we talked about. I remember, for example, that he remarked with gratitude when I had written that each human life is a miracle. I did not mean anything supernatural by it: I meant that every human being is inalienable precious and that when the reality of it is fully present to us can it call us to a kind of witness to its wondrousness. Our desire to celebrate the world as a gift was one of the main things that brought Peter and I together. He understood it as God's gift and he knew that I did not. Nothing he ever said, however, suggested that he believed my sense of that gift depended on explicit metaphysical or religious commitment to make it coherent, not, at any rate, in the context of any of the many conversations we had about the life of the mind and spirit. Or, just about life.

Less than two weeks before Peter died, I curated a conference for the Wheeler Centre titled 'Faith and Culture: The Politics of Belief'. At the conference, his good friend Morag Fraser told me he was barely conscious and might die any day. At lunchtime I rushed to see him at Melbourne University's

Newman College. As Bill Uren, the rector, took me to Peter's room, he told me Peter was more alert than he had been for days, probably because he had been taken off a particular medication. To my astonishment, when I entered the room, Peter was sitting in his study, a bottle of wine on the coffee table. Margaret Manion, who cared devotedly for him, brought us lunch and cut up his meat. We talked of the conference and other things, and drank what I feared would be our last glass of wine together. I was humbled by his dignity, and his determination to honour his life and his dying by trying always to be lucid about their meanings. I returned to the conference just in time for the first lecture for the afternoon, and I heard someone remark from the floor that religious people must lack intelligence and courage. I thought I might strangle him.

Peter believed in the resurrection. I do not know quite what that means, in part because I do not know what it is to believe in God—what the grammar of 'believing' comes to here. The person who said religious people lacked courage thought he did know. He thought that such people sought consolation in the face of death by believing that after death they go to another place, a good place, and he thought that they believed this much as



one believes that going north in winter brings relief from winter misery, only that it is much better—infinately better, he might say. Perhaps some religious people believe this, but I'm sure Peter didn't. You would have to think of death as a strange form of travel—that you can fly or drive to the north, but you have to die to get to heaven.

In his last days at the hospice, close friends and his brother came to sit with Peter. It struck me how much we all needed him. I reflected on my own deep need of him when I had asked him to bury my father. Again, when my father's closest friend and a second father to me, Pantelimon Hora, died, I turned to Peter to bury him. I don't know why, given that he was older than me, but I had hoped that Peter would bury me. I am disoriented by the knowledge that he will not.

Now when I am at the University of Melbourne, or when I walk through Carlton, I realise how much

my sense of the life of the mind and spirit had been deepened by the way Peter revealed, at our many lunches at the table by the window upstairs at the University Café, his humane, ironic love of the world and appreciation of how many sorts of us it takes to make all sorts. I have not known anyone like him.

Peter Steele died bravely. Everyone who saw him in those last days remarked on it and was moved by it. Two days before he died, he said to a friend, 'At times like this, one loses one's urbanity.' Characteristically, that has many layers of meaning, he meant, at least, that he needed as much sobriety, but also as much passion, as he could muster if his courage was to be true and truthful.



**Raimond Gaita**

# YOUNG DECISIONS

I'm trapped;  
I can't decide.  
I want to do something that shows  
my inner happiness,  
but my choice must impress my parents.  
My siblings are all at college or have finished school.  
I want to whisper my miseries into the night; listen  
to the wind carry my pleas.  
I should choose a career that will  
be secure, my father says.  
I still don't understand why this decision is so vital.  
I want to have peace of mind when I grow up.  
I shouldn't rush my decisions, my mother says.  
I've always enjoyed my freedom,  
but what is freedom?  
I want to make my own music  
and dance to the melody.  
But I can't be alone.  
I have to expand my horizons.  
Studying has no flavour, but it must  
be done, my parents say.  
Persevere.  
They have their own expectations.  
I have my ambitions.  
I must remember to be happy, my mother says.  
Life has become complicated, and I've yet to grow.



Antonina Mtanu

# PLEASURE TO MEET YOU

We learn from each other,  
The smile from our mother,  
Then the sound  
of thunder.  
Nature.  
Nurture.  
Arguments, conflict, drama.  
The lightning bolt.  
The slow-down unbelievable  
heart rate cutting short of life.  
Severing the umbilical cord  
Connecting,  
Attached  
to a current situation of imitation  
to meet you.  
The stranger of a bee, you touch me and my  
heart buzzes lovingly.  
A stranger giving pleasure of pain and  
Insanity,  
love  
that bleeds  
holds me like your lightning; lightly.  
Just shy  
of life kisses, grief and strife; heart rate settles  
meeting you is hedonistic.  
Sex, dirt, flowers with romance lasting for hours;  
But the flash of lightning, gone in the blink of an eye  
Kissing you goodbye, coming  
again  
another day by surprise, when our eyes meet  
in the sky,  
I am born again, a baby by your side.



Ryan Stojimenov

## THE OLD MAN AND THE LEGLESS LIZARD

Mick Jagger once wrapped his red rubbery lips around it as he pouted and strutted across the stage. He reckoned it waited for no man. Kerry Packer used every inch of his influence to try to make punters forget about it as they proffered their donations.

The day the old man walked into the Legless Lizard, which was basking in the sun amongst the Poa grass on Jones Creek, he felt a great affinity for it. Christ knows, he'd been legless himself on umpteen occasions. He approved of the crude effort that the Legless Lizard had made to try to halt what Mick had sung about and what Kerry had wanted to hide. But for the people dubbed 'mature-aged students' at Victoria University in St Albans, there had to be a concerted effort, because they didn't have an abundance of it.

The Lizard's assistants had certain powers, but their efforts to confound it managed to confuse the old man. Maybe he would get legless again himself. Forget about sands, forget about not waiting for nobody, forget about it going by, forget about it being of the essence. The Legless Lizard was halfway there. He'd stopped its progress behind his protective scales. None of the clocks were working. All he had to do now was start his two clocks up again—one on level one and the other on level two—and select reverse gear.

The old man had tried to reverse it a couple of years ago, and it bloody near killed the poor bastard. No more waving goodbye to the missus

as she went off to work while he leaned back against the pillows and composed stories on his laptop until after nine o'clock. Bacon, sausages—or a small steak—mushrooms, fried tomato and bubble-and-squeak with two fried eggs on toast for breakfast every morning soon increased his girth and raised his blood pressure to an alarming level. Fresh fruit salad, muesli and yoghurt, topped with chopped nuts, replaced the fry-ups, and he pulled his ring out on fast seven-kilometre walks along the Kororoit Creek every morning. The 'Y' got him next. They don't call it the YMCA anymore. It's a bit like the 'G,' instead of MCG. Bloody stupid.

'Your missus will be climbing all over you in two months,' said the gym instructor, as he mapped out a strenuous fitness program.

With his knobby knees up around his ears and his dirty old runners splayed out against the footboard, the fat man looked askance at the fit man from his contorted position inside the leg compressor, an offshoot of the fabled Procrustean Bed, and groaned, 'You've got to be fuckin' jokin', mate.'

The promised two months morphed into a year before any visible sign of improvement could be detected in the old man's physique, but his missus still reckoned that she'd seen plenty of chooks with better legs than his, and she said that nothing short of a plastic surgeon would fix the dewlap hanging below his chin.

The old man's exercise regime bordered on obsessive-compulsive disorder, as his internal picture

of himself began shedding wrinkles like a woman who had discovered a miracle unction at the Body Shop.

Tacking his bike into a north wind on his way to the Lizard one afternoon, while his car with its air conditioner sat at home in the garage, was sheer folly as he realised when he arrived in a muck lather. All the while he wondered where it had all gone. 'It is of the essence now,' he thought, as he headed off to his Editing class.

Homeward bound now, with his spinnaker billowing, the old man rode through the wayward spray from garden sprinklers. The drought was over. The pollies had said so. As he pedalled he recalled his initial visit into the Lizard's gizzard, when he had walked past a clock that had been stopped at 10.10 and then past a stationary 3.22 model on the next level. He remembered being distracted that day by the lyrics of a Johnny Cash song: 'There's a lot of strange men in Cellblock Ten/But the strangest of 'em all/Was a friend of mine who spent his...' He knew that he should have felt safe inside the Legless Lizard (aka Building Ten, an architectural-award winner), but instead he had felt a crawling sensation along his spine and he just knew that the pens were out. When he had been inside, in a real 'Cellblock Ten,' it had been different: he had been special. The crooks had all shied like mendacious politicians at the very mention of writing a story. He had composed their love letters, written to their lawyers and cajoled the

parole board for them—even helped them write emails to their kids—but in Building Ten there was a pervading madness: everybody was special.

Once again Cash's mournful lyrics played on in the old man's head as he rode on, and he shuddered as he thought of his Cellblock Ten brothers. 'God help the poor bastards.' It was always on their minds. He looked at the little clock on his handlebars. If they could only turn it back to before their troubles began.

The old man shrugged, shaking off his maudlin mood, as he neared a sacred watercourse—the Kororoit Creek. Here, just south of the Western Highway, was the confluence of the Jones and Kororoit creeks. 'Long live the Legless Lizard, and long live the Kororoit,' he sang to himself as he turned his bike onto the track that ran beside the creek. It was an ancient place where he and his mates used to swim, knifing through the green algae, when he was a boy; its rock formations were as protective as the Legless Lizard's scales. The Kororoit Creek could turn it back and almost make it stand still. With a little help from the Legless Lizard.



Ron Burrows

# PHILOSOPHY OF FALLING

Maybe it was forefronted by the recent election and the evangelising certainty it produced: politicians claiming they could stop boats and save economies; television programs pitting people against each other in nuance-free arenas; pundits pronouncing outcomes and moguls preaching slogans.

Maybe it started with a beaming pope telling a planeload of journalists that the door was closed on women's ordination—end of story.

Maybe it was my own inability to construct a cogent argument when met recently with a slam-dunk about the negative nexus between asylum seekers and Australia's GDP. That day, mumbling phrases about compassion and empathy, I was confronted with my fallibility. Big time.

I'd always thought I knew the etymology of the word 'fallible', but how wrong I was. How fallible. Apparently it comes from Medieval Latin—liable to err, or to deceive. Mistakenly, I'd thought it meant you were able, even likely, to fall.

Fall-ible. Fall-able.

A laughable notion to any decent Latin scholar. Fallible, certainly. But consider for a moment. We take a fall for someone when they are in trouble, shouldering the blame in order to

lighten the load of someone who is vulnerable, broken or simply weaker than ourselves.

The other day I sat opposite a woman on a train. Her clothes were skimpy and she was quivering, trying to hide her blackened eye under a hoodie. The rest of the passengers in the carriage averted their eyes. Were they making a judgement about her? Was I? Had we decided she was a fallen woman?

And when, I wondered, was a man last called fallen?

Bombs fall. Empires fall.

Soldiers fall, over and over, and we mourn them. They are children, many of them so fallible, and I can't help wonder if that is not due to the fact that leaders are fallible. Cities fall to conquerors and to the earth, too, as it quakes and ruptures under cathedrals and citadels.

Waters fall. So does night, in a slow embrace or with terrifying speed. We fall asleep, sometimes because staying awake is too painful. Easter falls on a different date each year, as does Passover and Ramadan. We fall ill and we hope to recover. There are no guarantees. Sales fall, and we can't stop them, no matter how often interest rates are lowered. They rise again. Or not. Things fall apart, as the poet said.

And the centre may not keep holding.

We fall into love, and out of it again, like it is some dark hole. We forget that love should be about rising, because we have fallen back onto cliché. We fall for, and so we fall short. We fall behind, hoping we may yet find someone on whom we can fall back. We fall out—with family, friends, neighbours and cultures. We fall out and out, until we are so far fallen that we are invisible to each other. Tiny dots that can be rendered less than human, just targets on a flickering screen.

We fall.

They talk about the fall of man, but I know something of the fall of woman. I've fallen several times in recent years, and always onto concrete. I've bashed my knee bone and gashed my elbow. I've had stitches. I've sobbed like a child each time I've fallen, and I am not a crier. There is something about falling...

We go through life as though we will always be upright, and maybe we need to believe that in order to keep going. But when we fall, we must confront the brutal reality that gravity is real. That even the mighty fall, though it may be forced on them. And it hurts. Children are able to fall and come up laughing. They don't yet know about the importance of saving face, or the solemnity of falling to the knees. They just know that falling is part of life.

Part of being human.

We grownups might do well to remember that, and to remember that the fallen—the refugees, the homeless, people with mental illnesses, the depressed, the penniless, the carers, the infirm—can be helped to their feet and to walk again, if only we recognised that, in the space of a heartbeat, we can become them. Beware the cracks. They can trip you up, or you can fall between them.

The sensation of head, hands and knees falling toward concrete is not something I would wish on anyone—not politicians or popes or pundits—but it's a reminder of fallibility. That is a memory that can slowly, humbly bring me to my knees.



Ailsa Piper

# SUNSHOWER, EXETER-BOUND

Hard of focus now, in time  
of plenty, wept as strangers to a damp  
and greying greenland, grown with elder  
twine: people grasp likewise  
upwards, as though the rain to climb,  
as Jacob's ladder, as the oversky  
clears and closes again, and hard  
of focus again, English women  
of the daytime train—or, farmproud,  
louts in dripping tractors, or geese  
by swollen ponds, more hard a-flapping,  
hardness being something every  
mudwalker, every railstalker, every  
classroom chalker carries somewhere  
in being. Now: focus ye!  
Now harden! All that's olden,  
rich, and soggy: it will downsuck  
when you would wander over fields  
and under showers. I tell you, friends,  
post telescopes! Mark your strides!



Tom Clark

# LOSING

Blank white walls,  
dead and eerie silence.  
Sitting down, anxiously waiting  
alongside others for the results.

Slowly, it crept over us,  
a sickly shadow,  
consuming positive atmosphere.  
Death steps through the doors,  
and meanders his way to us.

Each step that is taken  
casts veins of darkness.  
A sleuthhound follows,  
tight on its leash.

The tenebrous hood  
covers its face,  
concealing all trace of sympathy.  
Bone fingers grasp the handle of a scythe,  
which is dragged behind, like a body bag.

Other times, I've had answers,  
or a clue at least.  
But in this moment,  
I have nothing.

I've learnt from my mistakes,  
always known how to solve  
a problem—  
but how do you learn to surrender  
the one you love most?



Kelly Rawnsley

## TAKE CARE, TAKE RISKS

The defining characteristic of the bureaucratic mind is fear. We are currently suffering an epidemic, a pandemic, of fear, all the more bizarre given that the Western world has never been safer. Those who suffer from fear have at least one unique characteristic—unlike other illnesses, where sufferers generally try not to infect others, people in the grip of fear do their best to contaminate everyone they can find. By convincing everybody else that the fear is justified, they can reassure themselves that they are not being irrational.

Hence we have schools where all the lower branches are cut off trees, so children cannot climb them. There are no shrubs or boulders or tunnels in playgrounds, in case paedophiles or spiders or snakes are lurking in or behind them. Sandpits are regarded with suspicion because they may harbour broken glass or cat poo. As landscape architect Fiona Robbe says, 'It's thought your eye must be able to sweep over the playground at one glance to see everything and everyone.'

Those who indulge in the mollicoddling and over-protection of young people because they are unable to control their own fears, or their need for power and control, are always very quick, and very glib, to justify themselves, usually by vague references to 'insurance companies' and 'legal problems, like being sued'.

This kind of talk needs to be closely scrutinised. My school, Candlebark, has never had any problems obtaining insurance for the adventurous program that we run, which includes skiing, horse riding, rock climbing, archery and cycling. In the 2013 calendar year, this cost us \$29,000. However we pay our insurance bill reasonably cheerfully, knowing that it gives us the freedom to practise the policies we want to follow.

As for being sued, courts have always been sympathetic towards schools which run well-organised, purposeful programs. Even the High Court is well aware of the need for students to sally out into the big, wide world, recognising that they may run some risks in doing so. In 2000, the Federal Court of Australia held that a boy injured in a play fight could not recover damages, because play fights are normal student behaviour, and are not to be confused with behaviour that presents a serious risk to the safety of students. In 2005, the High Court found for the school in the case of a student who was injured by another student while playing on a flying fox during free time. The court said that it is not reasonable 'to have a system in which children are observed during particular activities for every single moment of time... (This would be) damaging to teacher-pupil relationships (and likely to) retard the development of responsibility in children.'

Yet a memo from the Tasmanian Department of Education stipulates that no child in a Tasmanian school may climb a tree. In many schools around Australia teachers on playground duty wear bright fluorescent vests and carry whistles, which they blow loudly and shrilly if they see a child running, because running is forbidden. In England, a council plants a row of yew trees near a children's playground, but digs them up again when informed by a risk assessor that if a child eats large quantities of the bitter tasting leaves it might make them vomit.

The secret motto of Candlebark is 'take care, take risks'. Both taking care and taking risks are important. We believe children should be adventurous. If they are not allowed the opportunity to be adventurous, then we condemn them to a slow spiritual death. It is completely understandable that parents do not want their children to come to harm. The good parent will make the ultimate sacrifice, will give his or her own life to save the life of their child. Nothing is more awful for a parent than to see their child gravely injured or ill.

But the cruel truth is that we must accept a certain frequency of serious injury and death in order to assure the spiritual life of all our children. It is a requirement of adolescence that one confronts challenges and dangers. How else is the adolescent to understand his or her capabilities? Who would go into battle with an untested blade? Who would gallop an unproven horse at a high fence? Who wants to tackle adult life with no sense of his or her powers? We need to know what we can do.

Too many decisions are made from the bedside of the injured child. A school not far from us banned playground football for four years after a boy broke his collarbone playing football. The child who is overprotected, kept from danger, is dying the death of a thousand cuts. He or she is likely to become passive, unmotivated, apathetic, or alienated and angry. Or all of the above.

In his autobiography *The Tongue Set Free*, Elias Canetti, winner of the 1981 Nobel Prize for Literature, describes his early years in Ruschuk, Bulgaria, and his family's move to England when he was seven. He writes, 'Everything I witnessed in England at that time fascinated me with its order. Life in Ruschuk had been loud and fierce, and rich in painful accidents.'

Rich in painful accidents! What a succinct summary of the glorious advantages a colourful, fierce, chaotic life can offer. And perhaps Canetti's genius was built upon a synthesis of the order of England with the arbitrariness of Bulgaria.

It's the kind of synthesis that we try to achieve at Candlebark.



John Marsden

# TALKING IN TONGUES

**Y**ou learn to read one word at a time, just as you learn to walk one step at a time. Walking is easier, once you get the hang of it. You just put one foot in front of the other, while learning to read is a constantly evolving challenge. Words change, as do meanings, and sentences meander into paragraphs or shrink to fragments.

The trick is to read between the lines, go beyond the words and immerse yourself in the story. A good writer invites the reader into his or her imagination, and then forces the reader to draw on their own resources to expand their understanding of a story or text.

And that's just what I'm hoping to do today—delve beneath the story I'm going to relate, in the hope of finding out just what the hell is going on with my family.

I'm Ben, by the way. At fifteen, I'm already hooked on words and the strange hold they have over people. Take my family—please someone, anyone. Sorry, that's an old joke, and not a very good one. And as for my family, well ... maybe I should just tell the story and let you, the reader, decide what should be done with them.

It all began about a year ago when Dad started talking Italian.

Dad is not Italian. He's as Aussie as Vegemite ... er, Blundstone boots ... I mean, Bundaberg Rum. I know those aren't good examples, but you get what I mean. Dad could balance a stubby of beer and a meat pie in one hand at the footy, while he tore out his hair with the other and hurled obscenities at the umpire at the same time. Dad used to be the only person I knew who said, 'fair dinkum', 'struth' and 'bugger me', in the one sentence.

Everything changed one day, when Dad sat down to breakfast.

He turned to me, winked, and said, 'Buon giorno.'

Fair dinkum, I almost choked on my cornflakes.

I might have thought he was joking if it hadn't rolled off his tongue like he was the Pope.

Mum was on another of her religious charades—full on Catholic, I think—so she just rolled out a Hail Mary and went back to scraping the burnt bits off the toast.

My younger brother, who is thirteen, has ADHD and OCD—doctors seem quite fond of acronyms—along with Tourette's syndrome. Mum reasons it is God's will that Joey was born with these afflictions, and only the will of God can take them away. And that is Mum's great dilemma, since being denied a miracle by her own Lutheran God. Rather than lose

her faith, Mum decided she must be barking up the wrong tree. She converted to Buddhism, Hinduism and Masochism, before doing the rounds of the other Christian faiths: the Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, Presbyterians and finally the Catholics.

But Buddha, Ganesha, and Jesus, Joseph and Mary had failed to deliver the goods, and Mum was ripe to test the waters of less mainstream religions. I guess Dad's 'renaissance period' pushed her closer to those Gods who occupied the fringes of the religious pecking order. She started doing voluntary work at the library just to get out of the house, I think.

With Joey and Mum caught up in their own worlds, I suppose I was the only one who noticed Dad's slide into an ethnicity that didn't belong to him. My older sister, Melanie, had turned goth two years ago and was seldom seen during daylight. Mum had long given up trying to save Mel's soul. I think it was the tongue piercing that finally threw her, or perhaps Mel's 'I do it with the devil' tattoo.

Either way, it was up to me to work out what was happening to Dad, and more worryingly, just what the hell he was talking about. I tried the library first, only to find all the Italian phrasebooks had been checked out, along with the 'How to Learn Italian' CDs. I should have put two and two together right then, but hey, I'm fifteen and there's a lot going on in my life. So, since we didn't own a computer, I had to book internet time at the library after school and trawl through sites searching for translations to Dad's latest utterings.

To begin with, Dad spoke a mixture of English and Italian, with the odd colloquialism thrown in.

His native tongue gradually slipped away, though, sliding into pigeon English and then full blown Italian. By then Mum had taken up Hare Krishna, so our house became like a backpacker's lodge.

Dad would walk into the lounge after work—and God knows (sorry Mum) what language he spoke at the council depot—saying, 'Ciao Angelo, ciao Beniamino, ciao Elena.'

'Buon giorno,' I'd reply, the only Italian I knew at that stage.

From the kitchen would come Mum's mantra, breathed over the latest variation of lentil soup: 'Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare.'

Joey was busy killing aliens on the PlayStation, muttering a ceaseless line of obscenities, head jerking to one side and his body twitching in time.

'Non piu,' no more, Dad would say; 'di niente,' not at all. But Joey just kept ploughing those two-headed freaks into the ground.

'Dio mio,' God, oh my God, Dad would say, to which, unexplainably, Mum would reply, 'merde,' shit. (Pardon my French ... er, Italian)

Again, I should have smelled a rat, but a few days later I discovered Beni amino, meant: son of the right hand. That threw a whole new light on the secret—or so I thought—meetings I regularly had in the shed with Miss November. And I couldn't help spending more time in the shed, considering what was going on in the house.

Mum had shaved her head—never a good look on an older woman—and incense drifted throughout the house, along with Mum's never-ending mantras. Dad had quit his job and moved into Joey's room, forcing

me into Mel's abandoned crypt. No one bothered to tell me what was happening; I just arrived home one day to find my stuff had been transferred. I couldn't get any sense out of Dad by then, and Mum didn't seem to be around much anymore. I assumed Mel must have moved in with her creepy boyfriend.

Over the next couple of months things settled into an uneasy routine. Dad and Joey spent hours on end hidden away in their room, only venturing out for food or the occasional burst of PlayStation. Mum had taken up full-time study at the local TAFE college, and was letting her hair grow out. Religion had been put on hold for some reason. I still hadn't seen Mel, and Mum was deliberately vague on the subject of where Mel was and what she was doing.

I had a permanent internet booking at the library, where I headed everyday after school to brush up on my Italian. Joey didn't go to school anymore. Apparently Dad was home-schooling him, which seemed a stretch considering the language barrier. I tried not to think about it all too much. Joining the dots together seemed a task of monumental proportions.

A week before final exams, the situation took another strange turn. I was about to set off to the library once more, when Dad pulled me up as I was walking out the door.

'Scusi, Beni amino,' he said, grabbing me by the hand and dragging me to the car. Joey sat in the front. He flicked the 'seek' button on the radio so snatches of voice-overs and songs and ads dropped in and out and over each other.

'Non piu,' said Dad, 'di niente.'

Joey took no notice, except to curse in time to each fragment as it was delivered on the airwaves. We set off into town, pulling up at the local greengrocers, Agnoletti's. Sounds like a type of pasta, I know. It clicked then, what Dad was up to. He'd finally had enough lentil soup in all its varied incarnations, and was desperate for some fair dinkum 'Eyeticie' cuisine.

I usually sat in the car with Joey on occasions such as this—Mum being too horrified of Joey offending someone. But Dad waved for us to follow, saying, 'Venire qui,' come here. He took a basket and headed off to the vegetable section, while Joey, who wasn't used to this sort of freedom, held back.

Joey looked up the footpath in one direction, and then turned to look the other way. I half expected him to make a run for it at any second. At that moment, however, Luciana Agnoletti walked out of the store and began rearranging the fruit stalls on the footpath. Let me tell you, Luciana Agnoletti makes even Miss November pale into insignificance. Though only a year out of school, she exudes an aura of worldly confidence and femininity.

Joey was instantly drawn to her, while I searched for a Ben-sized hole to disappear into. Dad was taking particular interest in the tomatoes, lifting each in turn to his nose and inhaling, before trying another. Joey had moved to within arms reach of Luciana, who was repositioning the bananas in a manner that made me blush. She didn't seem bothered at all by Joey's attention, turning to smile at him.

'Ciao,' she said.

Joey's face twitched in response, and I prepared to run for the sanctuary of the car at the expected flood of curses. Much to my surprise, Joey stepped closer, somehow controlled the tics and contortions of his body, and nodded his head in greeting.

His lips parted, and instead of a staccato grunt of curses, these words slipped out: 'Ciao bella,' hello beautiful. From inside the store came a sharp intake of breath, and the tomatoes Dad had been holding fell to the floor. His hands reached up to grasp his head, and I saw a strange look in his eye.

'Santa merda,' Holy shit, he said. 'Bravo.'

Joey's head dropped and his whole body seemed to shudder. His head twitched uncontrollably, and I knew there would be no holding back this time. Again, I was totally unprepared for what actually came out of his mouth.

'Merda!' he said. 'Testa di cazzo. Brutto figlio di puttana bastardo.'

From the speed in which Mrs. Agnoletti rushed to Luciana and herded her away, I guessed Joey had said something worse than 'shit'. Luciana, however, seemed unperturbed, laughing as she was ushered away. This only angered Mrs. Agnoletti further, who turned and flapped her arms in Dad's direction.

'Grando disgraziato.' Big disgrace, she said. 'Stupido.'

Dad just shrugged his shoulders. 'Accidenti. Che diavolo vuoi?' What the hell do you want?

'Vattene,' Go away, said Mrs. Agnoletti.

'Va all' inferno. Pezzo di merda. Che palle. Figlio di puttana,' shouted Joey.

'Vattene. Sbrigati.' Hurry up, said Mrs. Agnoletti. Then, glaring at her husband, 'Che disordine,' what a mess, 'dicci perché stai ridendo,' tell us what you're laughing at.

Mr. Agnoletti hurried to clean up the splattered tomatoes. Luciano called over her shoulder, 'Ciao, Joey.'

Dad clapped Joey on the back, laughing. 'Bravo, Angelo, bravo.' Then he bundled us into the car, pausing only to wave in apology to Mr. Agnoletti. 'Scusi, scusi, Mario.'

Since that day, Joey's improvement has been amazing. His symptoms of ADHD and OCD have decreased to the point where he no longer takes medication. He's returned to school and is doing fine. He still has the odd bout of Tourette's, but it seems almost eloquent seeing he now curses only in Italian. His Doctors are uncertain of the cause of this turn around, though Mum harbours no such doubts. Joey is her modern miracle, and Dad his saint and saviour.

Dad, however, isn't doing quite so well. His decline has mirrored Joey's recovery. While Joey is now fluent in English and Italian, Dad barely talks at all. He watches TV all day or kills aliens on PlayStation—his score is now higher than Joey's. He's at his most animated, swearing like a trooper, while killing off the alien hordes. The swear words are the only Italian he speaks, apart from praising Mum's recent penchant for Italian food.

Mum finished her TAFE course, and now works

at the library. She still wears her hair short but has given up on religion, for the moment. I passed my finals with marks in the top one percent of the state and have a scholarship for a hotshot college in the city. I'm going to be a writer, and over summer I'll teach Dad to read English again. By getting Joey to learn Italian, Dad somehow forced him to let go of his compulsions and focus on something else. I figure I can do the same for Dad, but it may take a little longer.

The same doctors who diagnosed Joey are yet to come up with a reason for Dad's condition. It could be a degenerative brain disease, or a psychosomatic response to the strain of living and working so closely with Joey for the last few months. Either way, the doctors aren't putting a timeline on his recovery, or even suggesting he will get better. I don't agree with them. I've seen the power of words cure what medicine cannot.

I've already swapped rooms with Joey and can't wait to get started. I'm sure even Dad would agree it's never too late to learn to read.

Dad doesn't call me Beniamino anymore, though he still likes to use Angelo instead of Joey. I found out 'Angelo' means 'messenger of the Gods', so maybe that has something to do with it. As for Melanie, I suppose you are wondering just what happened to her. Well, she turned up the other day, though I could barely recognise her.

The doorbell rang and I went to answer the door, expecting to find the Mormons or Jehovah's

Witnesses, who still haven't given up on luring Mum into their fold. Instead, there stood a young woman with blonde highlights through the dark rinse in her hair. I counted only three piercings, and her face was almost devoid of make-up.

'Uncle Benny,' she said, drawing open the bundle of blankets in her arms, 'meet your nephew, Donny.'

I stood there, blinking, trying to extract her face from my memory. 'Mel,' I finally said, wanting to leap forward and crush her in my arms. 'Mel's here. Mel's here. Come on,' I shouted.

Mum and Joey rushed out onto the veranda, followed closely by Dad. He walked straight up to Mel, took her face in both hands, and kissed her. Then he lifted the baby from her arms and brought him up to his face, smiling broadly.

'Donato,' he said, 'un dono di Dio,' God's gift. And then he winked at Mum, nudged me in the ribs and said, 'Fair dinkum, he'll make a good centre-half-back I reckon, Benny.'



Craig Henderson

# MRS DOLD

Patiently, she waits; she smiles and opens the door.  
My day stands still, for half an hour, no more.  
She sees what I see and hears what I hear;  
Her language is colourful and clear  
Love is the key to what she does.  
She makes me feel valued, precious and loved.  
She creates lessons out of life and helps me understand.  
She makes learning fun, and her lessons are grand. Life is easier for me  
for you have taught me many meaningful skills.  
You believed in me and kept in touch.  
Now that I am away, you send me emails still.  
My life has changed for the better  
because of what you've done.  
To me, you are a precious living letter  
from the Holy One.  
I look forward to the day when we meet again.  
You are not only my teacher but my special friend.  
What you have taught me,  
I use every day.  
Your valuable lessons  
have kept me along the way.  
No words can thank you enough, Mrs Dold.  
As mum says, there are things that cannot be bought, or sold.  
You hold a special place in my heart.  
Thank you, for all you have done and for the daily lessons you impart.



Isaiah Frizzell

## SCORING GOALS

‘Soccer Mum’ is an ambiguous title. Apart from noble suggestions such as passion and commitment, it does imply an element of boisterous barracking, with loud advices doled out at the right moment and an assertion to deal with anyone who dares to deviate from the well-respected rules of fair game.

Taking my kids to their weekly indoor soccer games, I’ve seen plenty of zealous parents steering their kids’ actions from the sideline. The competitiveness is highly contagious, even for a feeble softie like me. Winning is everything; why play if you don’t aim to win?

This afternoon the stadium is again filled with all sorts of noises: children’s voices, chatters, cheers, clapping, even the whizz of the few giant fans working hard to generate some cool air to anyone passing by. But their artificial energy could hardly reach the most needed—those children running after the ball—sweating profusely in this heat-trapped building. Here, my friend Zoe and I spend our weekly Tuesday afternoons catching up on news and gossip while our sons do what most kids of their age like to do: compete.

I have missed out on two earlier games and not seen Zoe for more than two weeks. She looks attractively different today. Her light blond fringe brings about a schoolgirl feel—willowy straightened

hair that drapes tenderly on her shoulders and purple-rimmed glasses tone the innocence down a notch to the level of a woman approaching her forties.

I’m about to ask Zoe if she’s had any recent spa indulgence, when a medium-built, friendly guy of mid-thirties walks past us. He nods and smiles jovially to Zoe, exchanging a quick greeting before moving on.

I eye them full of curiosity. A new friend?

Zoe fills me in quick enough. ‘The week before last, that man told me I was too good for sports.’

‘What? Was he being sarcastic or real?’

It turns out, at that week’s game, our kids’ team was so far ahead, nineteen to nil, that they were challenging themselves to create a record of over twenty scores.

While the other team was struggling desperately, despite numerous sideline coaching and cheering, they were unable to score a single goal. All was deemed a humiliating loss. Time was running out.

It was intolerable for the parents—any parents—to watch, seeing their children’s efforts dashed, their attempts stunted and their spirit plummeting.

Zoe came up behind the goal net where her son Mick was standing leisurely, as no ball had graced that ground during the last twenty-five minutes. She beckoned Mick closer, and they exchanged a quick

message. Mick quickly passed the message around to the other team members when they brushed past him.

No one could have predicted the turnaround as the final siren sounded. The other team had scored two goals, bringing the final score to nineteen to two.

'After the game, that man came to see me. He said I was too good for sports. He must have seen me hissing at Mick to go easy on the other team. "Let them score some goals!"' Zoe calmly reported, as if telling someone else's story. 'He thanked me for doing them a great favour. He said their kids had been crushed and dispirited. It was so heartening for them to score those two goals in the end.'

I shouldn't be surprised at what Zoe did, as I know my friend is capable of more altruistic gesture than that. But it is rather unusual in this part of our narrow world where competition is unwittingly drilled into our children at an early age.

Zoe beams, sending out more glowing news in her usual composed manner. 'Last week, their team still lost to our team by seventeen, but they managed to score one. That man came to thank me again. He told me that he couldn't get what I did out of his mind for the whole week, and he felt reassured that good things still happen out there.'

'What a compliment! This must have made your week then.' I'm so proud of her. 'What a great

chain reaction, from a selfless task! He was feeling happy for a week, and then by telling you, passed on that happiness to you for another week. This is definitely cheaper and lasts longer than a massage.' I can't help calculating the cost of a massage.

So the secret to her glowing beauty is revealed. My friend has been nurtured by this secret happiness for a long week. No wonder she looks so radiant and content.

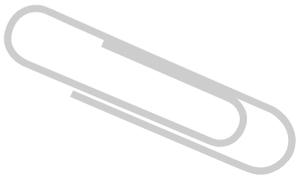
The game finishes before we realize. Mick and the group saunter back to us, sweating and puffing.

'Well played, guys. I see the other team is getting better this week, sixteen to two,' I say.

'Tom wanted to give them one more goal, but we ran out of time,' Mick says casually, high-fiving teammate Tom.

I look at Zoe, amazed at how far the impact of her gesture has travelled. This Soccer Mum has scored a massive goal from the sideline.





## BURDEN OF PRIDE

The Kanits had two fingers on their hands, two fingers on their feet and long nails protruding like those of beasts. They had bulky chests and human-sized legs, but their legs and arms were not straight. Their knees and elbows were S-shaped. Their faces were alien with the horns of a goat; their three tails hung low to the ground. They looked fierce, as if they would hunt anyone who dared to so much as look at them. Such was the first impression of the Kanits.

Tellga Walt was a female choleric and sanguine Kanit. When she was seven, Tellga wore a skirt. She wore sandals that made her feet look naked, such that it looked like it would hurt when she walked. Her midriff was bared, but she covered her breasts. Her sharp and crooked tails had seven rings, one for each tail. She wore shoulder armour but left her arms and hands bare. She had feathers in her hair of majestic blue shades.

Every Kanit had a unique design on each of their three tails. If a Kanit had a tail based on the element of fire, all three tails would be fiery-

looking and burn to the touch. In Tellga's case, she was born with three differently-designed tails, which was a rare situation for any of her kind. Each design represented the three elements: fire, water and earth. Her fire tail shone like the burning sun, while her water tail glowed like the moon's light hitting the ocean surface, and her earth tail was a warm dark brown like the quaking land.

The water tail felt like diving into the ocean and swimming in the endless surface. The earth elemental tail was like a planet's crust. They were not so bright as to blind her or her surroundings, but rather had a distinguished glow. Tellga saw her situation as an omen and believed she was the chosen one.

However, no kingdom dared to emerge, because destruction soon followed. When her compassionate parents told her at the age of seven that it was not normal for a Kanit to have three uniquely-designed tails, they forgot to teach Tellga that she shouldn't be above all others. It was too late, however, and she had already begun to take measures. She thought she was great and mighty. When she told her cowardly

friends and relatives that she wanted to rule her people as their queen, one of her rebellious cousins got scared and told the United Defence Force, which took immediate action and captured Tellga.

Her parents could do nothing. Like the arrival of a mighty tornado, the forceful guards stormed and took her to the barbaric palatial barracks. She was tied up in a dungeon with cold heavy chains and with secured bars. There Tellga languished, for during her imprisonment she refused to be manipulated.

The General of the United Defence Force personally set out to brainwash Tellga, and told her things like, 'As long as you are not queen, you can do whatever you like.'

Each time the four seasons passed, Tellga was losing out to her one ambition. Soon she

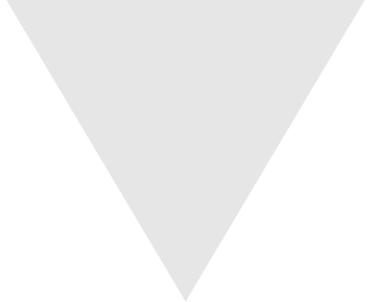
forgot all else and she began to fixate on one thing: to become queen of her people.

Despite her imprisonment, Tellga was still a sweet and loving child.

Thankfully, a member of the United Defence Force, a man named Rulla Woryth, took pity on her. Tellga convinced Rulla to help her escape the city for good.



**Halil Hacıoğlu**



## OPEN LETTER TO A TEENAGER

**T**o the fifteen-year-old present-self (suffering from Depression), I know you will have heard all the clichés, so I will spare you the usual stock phrases that people say when diagnosis of mental illness is made. Instead, I will tell you the things I wish someone else (mostly adults) had said to me, when I was your age.

I know it feels like you have weights tied to your feet and you are sinking through a large body of water at night. You cannot hear things properly, and you cannot see yourself within all the murk. All you know is that you are slowly drowning and you cannot stand existing like this any longer.

However, it is all in your mind.

The truth is that you are not alone (you never were). People that care about you (and would mourn you if you died) do truly exist in reality; you are significant, and you have an impact. I know this sounds cheesy and contradictory, because right now you are drowning, and when you are drowning, you can wave your hand in front of your face and still not see it. You only think and feel like you are alone, that you are carrying the weight of the world and all those social expectations around on your shoulders.

The thing is: those problems that now appear so enormous and insurmountable are really not. You will find that, if you look hard enough, the vast majority of problems have a solution. It may not be the solution you were hoping for, but it is a solution, and therefore a choice. I can see you now, your arms crossed against a black T-shirt, rolling your eyes and giving me a dismissive snort. I know you have talked to multiple therapists and doctors, with all their knowledge and fancy doctorates, and still they could not help you—but somehow I can? Some doubts and lingering suspicions are justified, however, unlike you or the others, I have the advantage of knowing what is wrong and how you think.

What you struggle with are common problems such as identity, self-esteem and self-worth—the way most young ladies do, in comparison to others your age. You're completely normal in that regard (sorry to disappoint). Even the emotional trauma and scarring of your parents' multiple divorces is becoming disturbingly common. See, the source of your depression is not that you are bullied at school, or that you have issues with your parents; it is how you handle those issues, and how those

issues have been allowed to shape and condition you.

First piece of advice: there is nothing wrong with you!

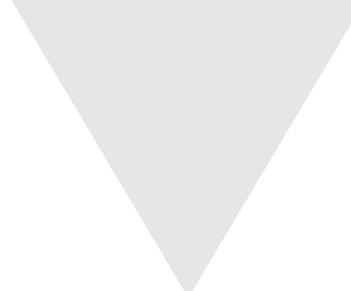
There, I said it, the thing you have always suspected. There isn't anything wrong with you. And it doesn't matter how many doctors your mother takes you to, how many cat scans, ECG scans or blood tests you're subjected to, the answer is always going to remain the same. It is society and your parents that are the problem. Yes, you are different from 'normal' teenage girls, and while you have been made to feel your whole life that being different equates to less (somehow), it is not true, and others were wrong to make you feel that way. I know it is not the magic cure you were after, but that is the reality. The fact remains that being treated differently will help you: you will be more understanding, compassionate and stronger for it in the end.

Second piece of advice: it is not your responsibility to educate others.

A bunch of idiot teenagers that are so racist and homophobic Hitler would approve

currently surround you. So what? It is not your job to correct every ignorant racial stereotype or slur that comes out of their mouths. That is the teacher's job. Now, I know what you are thinking: the vast majority of teachers at your high school are more concerned with their popularity with the student body than their jobs, and you have to say something in opposition to it. After all, that behaviour is unacceptable, and if you do not say something, nobody else will.

Wrong. While we all like to think of ourselves as the righteous heroes of our own narratives, it just comes off as self-righteous and obnoxious. It does not matter how many times you factually prove that Asians and Muslims are not coming to Australia with the intent of taking over. They are narrow-minded bigots, and they are going to believe what they want to believe. Recognise a losing battle when you see one, that the situation is out of your control, and let it go. I know it is difficult when you are forced to deal with them on a daily basis, and you should not have to deal



with such a toxic environment, but the only way to deal with such a thing is to remove yourself from the situation, literally and metaphorically.

Third piece of advice: stop trying so hard.

It is okay to screw up, and as long as you learned something from it, failure is acceptable. I know that nobody enjoys failure, but you do not need to be so critical of yourself. It does not need be perfect first go, and it probably never will be. But that is okay, because there is something worse than failure, and that is not doing anything at all. I suspect it is one of the reasons why those other girls give you such a hard time, because you try so hard and want it so much. It is easier to tear down somebody else's ideas than to make up your own and follow through with them. Nevertheless, those naysayers do not count; it is not as though they know you. So do not pay any attention to them. It does not matter how long it takes or how many tries you need to get it right, just keep going. I know you will get there eventually.

I know you are going through a tough time, tougher than it should be, but whether or not

you are 'cured' is entirely up to you, and, as I said previously, it really is all in your mind. However, I know that does not make it less real or frightening. It does not lessen your anxiety; it does not silence the voices in your head. The mantra of equal parts self-loathing and self-preservation is lurking in the dark corners of your mind, just waiting for the opportunity to strike. Nevertheless, you cannot stop now, especially when life is only just beginning, you have to keep going. I know it gets better, trust me.

With love, Your twenty-five-year-old future self (still a work-in-progress).

*Julia Kyle*



# ELEMENTARY ALCHEMY

The teacher blinks hard    it's our signal  
to sit and listen    feet still under  
low brown tables where our shoes always  
fight for space    he strides up and down  
the platform that stretches him up  
and cranes our necks    he can always see  
when we are not singing    not thinking  
and a sixpence spins in the air  
flipping light and promises    'answer me  
this question' and we hang on his words  
in the corner the firebox now is too hot  
to touch    the fire monitor  
has proudly stoked and poked    latched  
the glass door with a gloved hand  
we are all envious    we all want  
to control the fire    to ignite

our lives with some forbidden magic  
the question stays unanswered and  
the sixpence gleams on the ledge  
chalk dust drifts    the teacher blinks  
harder    he so wants us to learn  
at any price    to see the spells that  
spill from books    at last one small voice  
guesses and lo! is correct    the sixpence  
flies through the air    it is hers  
she is crowned for the day    bigger  
and brighter than she has ever been  
a flash of quicksilver yearning



Sherryl Clark

## THE LEAP OF FAITH

The local paper was spread open across the table in front of me, and I was enjoying an afternoon coffee, perusing the articles on the 'What's On' page. That's it ... simple as that. What was just another tick on the clock, where I was waiting to be inspired to prepare dinner, became a life-changing event.

What was 'On' was an evening at the Victoria University campus in Sunbury. The ad went something like: 'Have you ever wanted to write? Contact Bruno Lettieri on...'

The truth is I can't remember the rest of the ad; I just remember asking my son if he would go with me to the campus up on the hill.

I wanted to write about a wonderful woman artist I had met. She was a friend and an inspirational woman; her journey had been bold and interesting, and I felt her story deserved to be told.

And so, it was a dark and stormy night ... it was! It truly was. There was a summer storm brewing, bringing a cool change, hopefully. We arrived at the campus, which had been an old asylum. It was quite gothic and seemed to carry a sense of foreboding. Jon and I took the well-worn steps up to the only room that was sending out a bright light and muffled voices. It was a big gathering,

and our hosts, Bruno Lettieri and Irene Dostine, were amazing in their warmth and encouragement.

I shall never forget it.

My son and I both enrolled in the course. We met wonderful people from every walk of life and from every age group. Being in my late forties, I was in the older group.

I learned to read aloud before people, something that a girl from the 1960s education system was never encouraged to do. A particularly inspiring part of the course were the nights where a guest would come, and we would listen to them have a conversation with Bruno about their latest novel.

Guests included Helen Garner, Peter Rose, Arnold Zable, James Button, Margaret McCarthy and many more. There was a plan to get the students involved. When Christine Koval and I were asked to interview Arnold Zable, I was simply terrified. It involved reading the book, researching the book and thinking deeply about what had been written. And then, asking the writers everything you wanted to know. That involved speaking out loud with them! In front of an audience!

How did you arrive at the idea for this book? What was the inspiration? How long did it take to

write? Was the character based on someone you know? In chapter two, you say that ... etc, etc.

You could ask anything and everything you thought the audience would like to know.

Bruno said it was like diving off a diving board, and that I should give it a try. 'Take the big step,' he said. 'The big leap into the abyss.'

Take the leap of faith. Faith in what? Faith in myself. Something I had never contemplated ever having. I had to work out that it wasn't about me anyway. It was about the author.

You see, that was the thing. We didn't learn about syntax or paragraph endings or sentence construction. What we learned about was self-expression and, through this exercise, self-determination, self-confidence and self-awareness.

We learned about ourselves. And like everything, our light and our shadow were included.

I would do the course all over again. In fact I did—three times.

Bruno jokes that I could've had a PhD in the time that I spent at the Sunbury campus. But he doesn't realise how something like this can feed a person's soul, and that can be addictive!

From an ordinary day when I was sitting reading the paper, I have gone on to write extensively. I'm not saying I write well, or that I will write a best-seller, but writing is now my job, and I love that it has become a service I do for others in the telling of their stories. I can stand up in front of a large group of people and tell these stories, but I'm always thinking of how I got to be here, and how grateful I am to people like Bruno, who have an ability to see in others what they are unable to see in themselves and give them a chance. Maybe it is permission they are given to be who they truly are.

It was the greatest tool for personal growth I have ever experienced, and it gave me so much, not just in terms of learning, but friendships and stories, poets and poetry, and a never-ending love of the written word.



**Bernice Steinfort**

# CHAPLAIN IN THE CANCER WARD

Fear  
Catching in my throat  
Chest tightening  
Hollow belly wanting  
  
I urge my eyes  
To meet Hers  
Such deep pools  
Of calm  
Sadness  
  
Such beauty in the curve  
Of her soft cheek  
Gentle lips  
And open-hearted welcome  
  
This second meeting  
In the shadow of last night's  
penultimate crisis  
Like old friends  
Few words, truth unspoken  
  
Her eyes  
And my gut  
Said it all  
  
She has moved among  
The despairing  
Midst suffering and violence  
In the world's running sores  
Naïve youth  
  
And hope  
Staring down hardship  
To serve the weak  
And the frightened  
  
But now she waits  
Solitary  
In a small room  
Where hope  
Has flown

In body  
I cannot share  
Her journey  
  
In spirit  
I feel  
Her torment  
  
Incomprehensible  
Unexpected  
Real  
The losing  
Of it all  
  
And the startling  
Shocking  
Reality  
Of a generous faithful giver  
Surprised  
Not by joy  
But a tsunami  
Of mortal grief  
And loss  
And pain  
She said she isn't  
Scared  
Not thinking of the future  
Trying to live in the moment  
Now sharing this one  
With me



Martin Prewer

## MAYBE TOMORROW

Jennifer Mead, twenty, has been looking for a job for three years. Every week she circles advertisements in the paper, makes phone calls, sends off resumes. At least twice a week she journeys from her home in the far northern suburb of Craigieburn to the CES office in Glenroy. There she takes a number and waits.

On Saturday mornings Jennifer's father, Alec, gets up early to buy *The Age*. He cuts out ads that sound promising and puts them in a pile, ready for when Jennifer gets up. If she looks doubtful, he urges her. 'You could do that, Jen. You've got those skills.'

She has lost count of the jobs she has applied for, but she knows it is in the hundreds. Although she has her VCE from Craigieburn Secondary College, and completed basic hospitality and computer courses, most companies don't reply to her applications.

Still, she has a sheaf of rejection letters from the Commonwealth Bank, Hungry Jacks, Transfield, Safeway... At one point last year she was getting a letter a day. One letter from Drake Personnel arrived twice within a few days. Jennifer smiles at that now. 'If I was working for them, that sort of thing wouldn't happen.'

In the afternoon her parents bring in the mail. 'Go on,' they say, 'open it.'

'There's no point,' she says. 'If it's a letter, it means I didn't get the job.'

Sometimes, to console her, her father takes a rejection letter and throws it in the fire. 'Watch it burn, Jen. Watch it burn.'

For a city interview, Jennifer has to walk for fifteen minutes, ride a bus for half an hour into Broadmeadows, and then make a thirty-five-minute train trip into town. By then she has to prepare herself again, so she uses the Flinders Street Station toilets to redo her lipstick and brush her wind-blown hair. The light is dingy, the room smells.

She likes to arrive an hour early to locate the building. She'd hate to be flustered at the interview. Once she knows where to go, she finds a cafe. She never drinks coffee—it might smell on her breath—or Coke, which might make her burp. She sips juice, reads her book and waits.

She has come so close to what she calls 'the magical job' that fits her skills. She had three interviews and a medical for a food and beverage job at Crown Casino before the axe fell. Late last year she got a second interview for a clerical position with a computer company on Southbank. The interviewer asked what she expected to be paid, showed her the desk she would fill and where she could park. He asked questions that made her think, 'Yep, for sure.' He was a bit daggy, which she liked. They had a few laughs and even chatted about his favourite music. Despite all her knockbacks, Jennifer got really excited. The job, she decided, was heaven-sent.

Then the letter came. When she collected herself and rang the company for feedback—‘to find out what I was doing wrong’—the response was familiar. Your application was excellent. We just found someone more appropriate.

Although national unemployment remains at eight point six percent, and although Jennifer has many friends who are unemployed, she blames herself for her predicament. After finishing her VCE in 1993, she was torn between further study and work. She worried that she might finish four more years of study with no work experience. ‘I totally made the wrong decision. I am still whipping myself. I feel like I have let myself down so much,’ she says.

Job hunting brought unexpected shocks. At seventeen she was shy about asking street directions. She is more confident now, but was appalled when one interviewer lectured her that her neckline was too low, her shoes and necklace all wrong. Jennifer hurried home trying to cover her blouse.

For a year she worked casually as a room attendant at the YWCA, but six am starts and requests that she begin work in a few hours made the job impossible. She does computer work for her parents’ home businesses. She has good friends and a bright, ready laugh.

The fourth of five children, she was the first in the family to do her VCE. ‘It was always going to be me that had the job and went far.’

Both her parents have two jobs. Her father, who does promotions for WorkCover and is a part-time masseur, is at a loss to explain his daughter’s bad luck.

‘She’s a lovely kid. She’s got a great personality, she’s got the skills. To her credit she just keeps trying... We hate to see her hurting so much, but what can you do? You can’t actually buy them a job,’ he says.

WORK FOR THE DOLE, declares a newspaper headline on the Meads’ living room table. The proposal, floated this week by the Prime Minister, John Howard, put unemployment back in the news. Jennifer likes the idea if it gave her skills that would help her get a permanent job. From what she’s read, she’s not sure that is the case.

Beside the newspaper is her sketch book. Her passion is art. Four of her pieces were chosen for the walls of her old school, and still hang there. But it never occurred to her that art might lead to work or further study. ‘Still, I’d do it. I’d rather be out there.’

On Tuesday morning Jennifer calls a contact in a CES office, who tells her about some jobs that might suit her. Because she may have to go straight from the CES to an interview, she dresses in her best clothes: a dark suit with a green blouse. She wears platform soles to give her more height.

The family lives right on the city’s edge. To reach the bus stop, Jennifer walks across vacant

lots and treeless parks. The winding streets full of new homes are empty, save the occasional woman pushing a pram. There isn't a shop in sight, let alone an office or a factory.

On the bus she meets a friend who is job hunting with a stack of resumes in her bag. Recounting her experiences so far, she is laughing, optimistic. The bus trundles down the Hume Highway. At the Ford factory, the friend says she might stand at the intersection and hand cars her resume. Jennifer sits back and says quietly, 'I was like that when I started, too.'

An hour after leaving home Jennifer enters the CES, and takes a number. The office is crowded. Jennifer waits twenty minutes. In her hand is a piece of paper with the job descriptions written down: lingerie retail, and clerical work with a mechanic in Airport West.

At 11.55am, with her number next to be called, a CES clerk puts up a sign: NO JOB VACANCY REFERRALS BETWEEN 12PM AND 2PM.

Jennifer groans. 'I don't believe it.'

By two pm, the jobs have gone.

Jennifer hears the news in the city office of her case manager, Jane Norris, who has access to the CES computer. Ms Norris works for Employment Express, one of the private

companies to offer case management after the Labor Government introduced one-on-one support for long-term job seekers in 1994.

On her desk, Ms Norris has some other vacancies. A city jeweller wants a clerk; a personnel firm wants a part-timer who qualifies, as Jennifer does, for a JobStart subsidy. 'What about coming in for twenty hours a week?' Ms Norris asks.

Jennifer shrugs and smiles. 'If it's a job, I'll take it.'

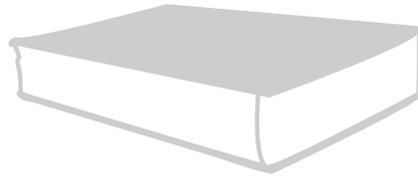
'Or a job with Melbourne Pathology: is Fitzroy too hard to get to?'

'No, no. I've got a great friend in Fitzroy. I can probably stay with her.'

Although she manages one hundred and thirty unemployed people, Ms Norris has a special fondness for Jennifer, whom she sees regularly. She tries to keep her optimistic; their conversation is playful. Ms Norris believes Jennifer would appeal to most employers face-to-face, but lacks the weighty resume to get her in the door.

Jennifer 'is willing to go anywhere, do anything,' says Ms Norris. 'She's a bright girl, she's punctual, she's constantly calling me up ... I have absolute faith I will find Jennifer a job.'

While Ms Norris makes calls and faxes resumes on her client's behalf, Jennifer gets back on the train.



She passes inner northern suburbs that grew up last century around workshops and small factories.

Further on are Glenroy and Broadmeadows, which drew post-war migrants in search of work at Ford and other factories. The suburbs are like geological strata, showing a city built through work—until you come to the outer suburbs. No work.

On Wednesday Jennifer gets a call from Ms Norris, who has arranged an interview with an engineering firm in the city. It's a job in the mail room. Is she nervous? 'No, not now. I just take a deep breath and go, "Oh well, we'll see what happens." I don't get really excited anymore.'

Still, the next day she puts on her best suit and an orange shirt. Her younger brother, Michael, carefully straightens her collar. She grabs her resume and hair brush, and consults the bus timetable.

Just before Broadmeadows the bus lurches and Jennifer's suit almost collides with a huge chocolate stain on the back of a seat. In the city she notices her shirt has creased. She stretches it under a toilet hand dryer and the wrinkles disappear.

Before the interview she sees Jane Norris for a pep talk. 'Ask to be shown around,' Ms Norris advises. 'Remember employers are nervous, too, and like to be put at ease. And good luck.'

The interview lasts fifteen minutes. Yet Jennifer emerges feeling positive. She thinks she did her best. The interviewer was friendly and smart. 'She said, "I'm not going to ask stupid questions like where you want to be in ten years."'

At the interview, Jennifer was shown the desk where she would work if she got the job. The interviewer asked about her parents. She and Jennifer had a joke about how much they liked massages. She said she would probably let Jennifer know the following day.

At five pm yesterday, Jennifer has not heard from the company. After all this time she is philosophical. What dogs her most is the thought of having wasted three years. 'I'll be twenty-one in September, and I've done nothing. It wasn't supposed to be this way.'

She's thinking about more computer courses, volunteer work. She'll keep trying. 'At this stage of my life I don't want a relationship, marriage, children, anything. I just want a job.'

After this article was published a number of employers contacted Jennifer to offer her a job. She accepted one and is still working for the same firm.

*Previously published in The Age,  
15 February, 1997*



**James Button**

## A LESSON IN FAITH

Primary School 1501 was a typical 1800s school. Its red brick façade faced Yarraville's Francis Street, in the days before B-doubles rumbled by in unbroken procession, tempering the suburb's gentrification. In 1966, I arrived as the nervous new girl in grade five. My chequered history of attending different schools (Williamstown Primary School for prep to grade two and St Augustine's Girls School for grades three and four) had left me academically unsettled and struggling to make friends. The ones I made, I quickly lost on transfer. Although my report cards (yes, my mother kept them all) indicated I was a good student, coming directly from a sixties Catholic school curriculum doled out by dour Josephites meant the fear of getting things wrong was so ingrained in me, I had often run from my classroom. Now, shy and discouraged, I had to adjust to yet another new school. I wanted to be anywhere else but there.

The grade five room was on the second floor. With adult memory, it was small with three short rows of desks. Even though I sat towards the back, I still felt exposed. Anxiety overshadowed my academic performance. Maths overwhelmed me, I had no idea of history and science baffled me. One thing that held me together was my love of reading, which I'd been doing, so my mother claimed, since the age of four. It was how I escaped everything wrong in my world.

My teacher, Mr Barry Gill, was the first male teacher I'd had. He was tall and fit, probably twenty-one years old, and, to my young mind, as grown up as anyone could get. Mr Gill doubled as the school's sports coach and, I discovered, was somewhat of a celebrity among the students as a player for the Carlton Football Club. Although he would go on to be part of the 1968 and the legendary 1970 premierships teams, in those days remuneration for footballers wasn't what it is today. Most players had routine day jobs and Mr Gill's was teaching. It turned out to be a good thing for me.

He must have noticed my struggle because early into the school year, he summoned my mother to discuss my academic performance; at the rate I was going, I would not get through grade five. Despite my mother's trepidation, it wasn't a meeting to admonish or lay blame. It was a meeting to share his concerns and discover my interests. Mr Gill asked my mother if she would allow him to give me additional work and special projects. My mother, who valued academic success above all, readily agreed. So it began, extra reading and creative projects designed to patch the gaps in my knowledge, but mostly to boost my confidence.

In the nineteen-sixties, projects were done on 'project paper', hand written, with cut and paste pictures taken from magazines or hand drawn. Of all the additional work I undertook, one in

particular sticks in my mind. It was a 'newspaper', complete with front-page headlines, feature articles, advertisements, crosswords and a sports page. I wrote all the articles and illustrated all the accompanying 'photographs'. I wish I had kept it. Mr Gill must have been impressed. He showed it to the class, much to my embarrassment. However, with the flush of heat in my cheeks came something unexpected. For the first time, it occurred to me that perhaps I was more capable than I had let myself believe. I began to gain courage in the classroom. At the end of that year, I was dux of the class, the following year, dux of the school. Since then, I've revelled in any opportunity to learn, culminating in applying to undertake a PhD.

There are days when I wonder what would have happened to me had Mr Gill not taken an interest in my welfare. He saw beyond the struggling student to the struggling child. I'm sure he did the same for other students. Perhaps after a career of classrooms, he has no memory of particular students and no understanding of his effect on their lives. My younger-self gazes out from my grade five photograph, face screwed up in consternation. Mr Gill stands to the side of the class with arms folded, his posture confident of what he can do for his charges. On the back of the photograph, he'd written a simple message that didn't hint at his role in my success: Congratulations on being Dux, 1966. Best wishes for the future. I've often been tempted

to track him down, although I'm not sure what I'd say: maybe simply, 'Thanks for believing in me', poor words that don't do justice to the extent of my gratitude.

Yarraville Primary School closed in the early nineteen-seventies and reincarnated into a still-operational community centre. I pass the building regularly, and each time I think of my grade five teacher and his kindness. He taught me a valuable lesson: when we don't have faith in ourselves, we need to borrow someone else's.

Lucky for me, Barry Gill had a lot to lend.



**Lucia Nardo**

# POSTPONED

I realise the eighteenth of July  
was supposed to be Sonnets  
and I promise we'll get around to them  
but not today.  
This afternoon I'm having a little trouble  
counting stress/es  
because this morning  
around twenty past nine on Dandenong Road  
right in the middle of blinking the Datsun  
into the left hand lane  
ahead of a Grace Brothers van,  
I suddenly understood  
the gifts of breath  
and possibility.  
I'm not sure why it should have been  
revealed to me in peak-hour traffic.  
Perhaps it was something about  
the late winter air just beginning to warm  
or the sun slicing my windscreen  
at the exact angle of iridescence.

But in honour of being alive  
and of knowing it  
I won't limp along in measured feet  
today. I'll dance freely  
while I still can.  
Even though the class notes are prepared  
I feel like winging it  
because after all  
Shakespeare is dead  
and I am not.  
True, I was alive last week  
and we still did Villanelles.  
But that was before this happened.  
So today I'd like us to talk  
about capturing these moments  
in our poems.



**Kristin Henry**

# MY EDUCATIONAL HERO

I have a strong belief in the power of education to transform people's lives and help them achieve their dreams. This belief probably started because of my dad, a farm boy from the Wasatch Mountains who left 'poverty flats' when he was eighteen to study at university, the first in his family to do so.

Eventually he achieved the highest qualification attainable at that time in fine arts—an MFA from the University of Washington—and became a professor of art. My father's dream was not to work on the production line at Kennecott Copper like so many of his contemporaries, but to travel the deserts and mountains of America's Southwest and communicate his vision of the landscape and our place in it.

My father's influence has been extended throughout my experience as a student and through my work. I have studied at five universities and even did a stint as a study-abroad student in Europe. More recently, my career has focussed on international education, and this allowed me to travel to many countries and visit many universities. During these trips, I have spent lots of time meeting all kinds of people—students, teachers, parents, employers, alumni, as well as leaders in business, the community and government.

The stories shared by these individuals share a similar quality to my dad's—education helped them transform their lives. Many international students and their parents have made enormous sacrifices in order to come to Australia to study. Students leave their homes, friends, family and their place in society and culture—basically they leave everything that is familiar in order to gain the knowledge, skills and attributes that will change their lives and help them achieve their dreams. People everywhere have commented on the profound personal and professional impact that tertiary study has had on them.

A strong professional and personal motivation for me is to communicate about educational opportunities and to help make these available to a wide range of individuals. It has been wonderful to continue in my father's footsteps, and I am very grateful for the journey he made from the farm into the world of ideas and opportunity.



**Brooke Young**

## WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO READ IT?

**I**ronically, perhaps the single most important educational moment in my life happened the year after I left university. I say ‘moment’, but it was more of a movement, and although I’d completed my degree the previous year, the incident I’m thinking of—the moment that triggered a movement in me—actually occurred at my old university, La Trobe.

My then new girlfriend, now partner of twenty-eight years, Shelley, began her Arts degree the year after I’d finished mine (she already had another in Applied Science). On this particular day, for reasons I no longer recall, I had travelled with her to the Bundoora campus. It was late 1987, and the academic year had ended. While Shelley went to the Sociology Department to meet with a lecturer, I happily walked around my old haunts, filling in time. The lack of classes, and therefore students, gave the campus a pleasant, melancholic feel, like a resort town in mid-winter. The Agora, a kind of village square dominated by four large plane trees and surrounded by shops and banks and a cafeteria, was almost empty. Already nostalgic about my student days, for old times’ sake I went into the health food shop and bought one of the cheese and vegetable pasties that, for the past four years, had been my staple fare. While

being served, a familiar, reedy voice addressed me from behind, ‘What brings you back?’

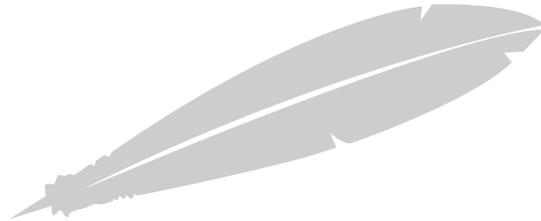
Turning round, I saw Chris Eipper, whose Honours Anthropology elective I’d taken the previous year.

‘Oh, hi,’ I said, distracted, fumbling for change. Once we both had our food, we took it outside and ate it together on the disk of lawn in the centre of the square.

Apart from being a shy member of his Honours class, I’d not had much to do with Chris, but his manner now invited familiarity and put me at ease. This warmth and lack of teacher/pupil hierarchy was typical of my experience of lecturers at La Trobe, particularly those in the Sociology and Anthropology Department.

As with his teaching style, I quickly discovered that Chris’s conversation was a complex mix of seriousness and humour. His interest and questions were genuine, but were often expressed in ways that gently tipped me off balance. When he asked what I’d been up to over the past ten months, I hesitated for a moment, arranging my mixture of pride and embarrassment about the answer into words. ‘Not much, then,’ he quipped.

‘No. I mean, yes. I don’t know ... I’ve just



finished writing a novel,' I finally blurted. Most people, when I told them this, seemed vaguely impressed, and I guess I'd expected a similar response from Chris.

Instead, he said, 'Welcome to the club,' and wiped a paper napkin across his lips, not quite hiding his smile. Allowing my confusion to dangle between us as he swallowed another mouthful of his sandwich, he added, 'I've got three unpublished manuscripts in my desk, and I'm working on another. I hadn't pegged you for a masochist. But welcome.'

With his full head of brown hair and slight build, Chris looked too young to have completed a doctorate, become a lecturer and written so many novels, published or otherwise. For the next half hour we talked freely about writing and reading, and discovered our common love for the creative process. Having long ago finished our food, Chris finally stood up, ready to leave. 'I'm really glad I bumped into you,' he said. 'Lots of people talk about writing, but not many actually get around to doing it.'

We walked together towards the library, and as we dropped our wrappers in the bin, Chris spoke the words that created the moment of which I am now writing. There, then, at the end of another academic year, having guided his honours

students to the completion of their theses, being burdened by the ongoing supervision of numerous PhD students, yet freshly free of undergraduate marking and looking to re-engage with his own research and writing, Chris, to my astonishment, and against all obvious readings of his own self-interest, asked, 'Would you like me to read it?'

That moment of crazy generosity had a parallel a few weeks later when we once again met in the 'Ag' so Chris could return to me my manuscript. By then quite a few of my family and friends had read the novel and had said generous and affirming things about it—impressed, I imagined, merely by the fact that I had done what I'd set out to do. Chris had warned me his response might be different, that he would edit the text in the hope of imparting to me lessons he had taken years to learn working in isolation. Still, after doing so well in my final years at uni, and having recently published some poems in journals, I felt confident I would like what I was about to hear.

Handing me back the satisfyingly thick wad of paper, he repeated his earlier comments about the distinction between writers who talk about writing and those that actually write, and said there were things to like in my effort but that I needed to refine

my craft. He encouraged me to study his edits and then ring him to discuss them. Having already given me so much of his time, I found it hard to believe he was offering me more. But then, given his lack of affirmation, I didn't know if I would want it.

After we parted, I nervously leafed through the manuscript. Nearly all of my once-familiar sentences had been altered, improved, or simply crossed out.

I felt exposed, utterly deflated.

Chris had dissected my prose, and on every page had left a trail of blood-red ink, which, when traced, revealed how my words could be rearranged or deleted for greater clarity and elegance. He suggested structural and narrative changes, too, and engaged with the story and the characters with such sympathetic imagination that I could not doubt his good intentions.

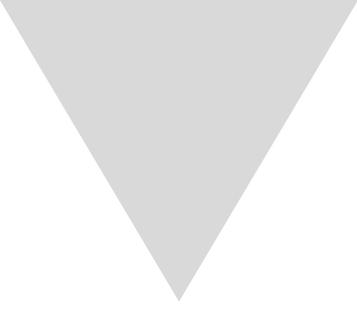
Weeks later, when my ego had healed enough to study his edits more closely, I realised that although overwhelmingly critical, his detailed response elevated my effort even as it exposed its abundant weaknesses. In showing me that I was not yet writing literature, he also implied that one day I might.

Through Chris's incredibly generous act of critical engagement I not only began to learn the hard lessons of craft, of the difficult pleasures of drafting and editing and redrafting, but also that, at its best, teaching is itself a form of giving, one that can sometimes be unexpectedly reciprocated.

As it turned out, the manuscript that Chris had been working on was published two years later. And, over time, I improved my writing craft and, in the process, absorbed something of Chris's editing techniques, so that some years later I was able to return the favour and view his work through that critical yet sympathetic third eye with which he had so generously read mine.



**Roger Averill**



## THE NEED FOR CHANGE

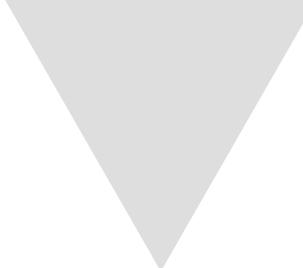
The need for change must move beyond an obsession with content.

Education in Australia is a fiercely contested space. It is held to high levels of scrutiny by the media and in the political sphere. But while ideologues battle for ground, one thing is certain. The world is changing at a rate that is unprecedented throughout history. How then do we best prepare our students to navigate this change? We are currently preparing a vast cohort of people for an equally vast array of jobs that don't even exist yet and to tackle problems that the old system helped to ingrain.

Contested curriculum is only one dimension of this experience. There is increasing dialogue about twenty-first century learning and the need to develop twenty-first century skills, to shift from consumers of knowledge to producers of knowledge, and to utilize information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance teaching and learning. Students will need to be able to work creatively and collaboratively, to think critically and to develop

personal and social responsibility that allows them to be active citizens. I was forced to reflect on this during a year nine transition program at the end of 2013. I was constantly surprised and inspired by the lateral thinking and altruistic leaning of the discussion and the depth evident in the work produced during this time. This happened at an age when research shows a dip in engagement and performance from this year level.

One of the consistent themes that came up was that knowledge and skills weren't just static but needed to be applied and, in an increasingly chaotic world, wouldn't it make more sense if they could be applied for the greater good, not just to benefit the individual or the share dividends of a company? So does the data dip at this age because students are voracious and our current model doesn't sate that hunger? Do we do more of the same and expect a different result, or do we try something different? If we protect what we have already built at all costs, we fail to seek out new challenges. And



challenge is a defining characteristic in relation to the resources, the environment and equality of the world these students will find themselves in.

Curriculum content is indeed important, but it shouldn't reflect one ideology over another. It needs input from many voices, not a select few from privileged positions. However, what is equally important is a conversation about facilitation. We are talking more and more about twenty-first century learning. The need for change means that our conviction must match our rhetoric. Our twenty-first century needs and learning are still predominately coming out of the old model. A factory model. To go about fostering this change, we need to discuss the attitudes and behaviours that will enhance learning for all our students. We must move past a conversation dominated by content. This has implications for the physical spaces we build and use, how we assess and how we teach. It is an exciting and necessary challenge,

and we all will benefit in the long run. Isn't that a great measure of an effective education system?

The need for change won't be ignored, and we can choose to better equip our students to navigate it by being brave and matching increasing levels of action to the rhetoric, or we can continue to pay it lip service, or get lost in the content debate. One avenue places our students in a stronger position. We need to be brave enough to choose it and concentrate more energy there. The year nine students I have this year are ready for it; are we?



Daniel Walsh

# OUT WEST

Out in the west,  
not far from Footscray Station,  
an ancient building  
stands.  
Once it soothed aches and pains,  
now it soothes  
souls.  
It whispers to this clan  
of dedicated poets,  
the devotees of Westword,  
'Come in, sanctuary awaits inside.'

Every second Sunday,  
amongst  
the smell of coffee  
and the hum of hushed voices,  
they gather—  
reciting their tales;  
bellowing their  
heart-wrenching songs;  
their melodies ripe with passion,  
with comment of social unrest, death  
and destruction;  
of the heartache and the emptiness  
when a love dies;  
of lingering joy and rapture  
that holds  
two souls together.

This clan  
of the melancholy,  
the mighty and the magnificent,  
may disperse separately at night's end,  
but always, they leave  
with one thought in mind.  
'In two weeks' time  
we will gather again  
at the Dancing Dog café,  
and continue to soothe our souls.'



# STORY LESSON

**I**t was my very first day at school. My family did their best to prepare me for that significant day, that decisive period.

I was dressed, like other pupils, in a new white *jallabiyah*, which was believed—not without controversy—to be ‘the national dress’ of my country of origin, Sudan. Therefore it was imposed as the public school uniform in those days.

Like many schoolboys descended from the lower class, my shoes were white plastic ones. On the other hand, and like many pupils who derived from the middle class, my schoolbag was made of leather. It had probably been imported from a foreign country, such as Egypt. However, I lacked the privileges other middle class students enjoyed.

For instance, I never went to elementary school, which would have provided me with a pre-school grounding. In those days there were two types of pre-schooling in Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan: the modern kindergarten and the *khalwa*. The modern kindergarten was inherited from the British colonial tradition, while the *khalwa* was its old-fashioned Islamic-sophist equivalent. My lack of preparation did not matter to me. I lost no important advantage, as my marks ranged between excellent, very good and good throughout my elementary schooling.

On that very first day of school I was as filled with excitement, pandemonium and enigmatic

expectations as any of the schoolboys attending that day.

When we had finished learning and practising how to properly perform the morning assembly, and how to enter the clean classroom with its dark green door, windows, desks and seats, a teacher entered. He was handsome in a formal way, and his elegance and refinement made an immediate impression on us. He introduced himself as the headmaster of the school. And, as if he felt the mixture of eagerness, pleasure and anxiety that was racing through us, he said, ‘I’m going to tell you a wonderful story.’

Accordingly, we directed our whole attention towards him. It’s unfortunate that I’m now not able to recall the entire details of that ‘wonderful story.’ I can only remember a vague image of a knight riding a horse, and a gorgeous princess riding on the back of that same horse, encircling her arms around the knight’s waist, while the horse galloped fast along the road, leaving clouds of thick dust floating in the air.

That headmaster was a brilliant teacher because he had chosen an ideal informal starter to our formal education. He had whetted our appetites and left us perfectly prepared for the upcoming official lessons. That appetiser made me look at the school as an attractive place, an apartment of stories. Therefore, I loved—at least during that elementary phase—going to school.



I believe that that appetiser contributed substantially to the development of my own narrative impulse. The curriculum itself helped me to develop this. That is to say, subjects such as ‘Islamic Religion’, ‘Arabic Language’ and ‘History’ were mostly presented in narrative forms. My imagination even allowed me to deal with subjects like biology and geography in a narrative mood. It was natural for me to envisage the growing stages of a plant as a story. I also enjoyed learning about women, who had different features to mine, in continents such as Africa, Europe and Asia.

However, as my schooling advanced, new subjects were introduced and old subjects were getting complicated.

My engagement with subjects that had narrative characteristics, such as ‘Arabic Reading’, ‘English Reading’, ‘Arabic Composition’, ‘English Composition’ and ‘History’, was increasing. On the other hand, my relationship with subjects like ‘Mathematics’, ‘Physics’, ‘Chemistry’, ‘Arabic Grammar’ and ‘English Grammar’ degenerated from a half-hearted interest to a complete detestation. I guess their lack of narrative structure made a significant contribution to my declining interest.

Ever since I learned to read independently, my affiliation with narrative has become increasingly intimate. I’m now unable to imagine my life without narrative. Narrative has grown into the most decisive

component of my cultural-creative identity. As a result, I became known in my motherland, Sudan, as one of its prominent ‘professional narrators’, that is, as one of its leading short-story writers.

I’m now doing a PhD in postcolonial studies at Victoria University.

My ‘narrative creative identity’ has the upper hand in determining the approach and method I’m employing in my academic project. I am making use of the story-telling skills I have acquired from my experience in writing short stories, together with the imagination that has been considerably enriched by my ongoing immersion in reading—and sometimes watching—a wide range of narrative and other creative genres. These experiences have played a vital role in my decision to utilise them in my thesis.

Could all that be possible without that very first ‘story lesson’ on that very first day in that very first school?

My answer is: it’s likely not.



Adil al-Qassas

# SCHOOLING

That day I got a zero  
for my homework, I told my mother  
she was stupid, and vowed  
never to ask for help again.  
BODMAS—the anvil of my humiliation—forged my independence.

My mother told me  
they hadn't done maths like that in her day.  
In her day, mathematical equations ran  
left to right. Things had changed, she said,  
but I knew I'd been born at just the right time—  
things would never change as much again.

My daughter lugs IT books to school,  
subtracts using sharing instead of decomposition,  
struggles with BODMAS and asks me for help.

I try to help her *parle Français* but  
she wants to argue English pronunciation—it's *zee* not *zed*, Mum  
—and tells me I'm stupid. Sometimes she *onamae wa nan desu ka-s*  
and then she's on her own—  
and `<b>`, `</b>` is about my html limit.

Some things don't change.  
Assignments are still as wanted as head lice,  
just as hard to deal with.  
Homework is still the scourge—and dirge  
they sing along to.

She wants my help with everything  
but doesn't want to listen.  
I tell her we didn't do work like that  
in my day, and I see that she's thinking  
she was born at just the right time.  
But somewhere in the future  
the spectre of her daughter  
tilts back her head  
and laughs.



Tracey Rolfe

## MISS THOMAS

At Newlands High School my best subject was always English because my teacher was young and beautiful and wore very short skirts. All the boys and some of the girls paid a lot of attention to her in class.

I tried to impress her by writing essays as she directed and concentrating hard on my homework. One morning during second term Miss Thomas smiled at me and read my essay to the class as an example of good writing.

I blushed and stammered when my classmate whispered: 'Miss Thomas has her eye on you.' Late that night I lay in bed with Miss Thomas on my mind and I realised that writing would be a good way to talk to people without having to open my mouth.

One day when we had English for last period Miss Thomas asked me to stay behind after class. My friend winked at me and I turned red. When the bell rang the students rushed away and I looked at Miss Thomas as she sat on top of her desk with her legs crossed. She beckoned to me and said: 'I have a special treat for you.' She leaned back across her desk and took hold of some books. 'Read these,' she said, 'I think you'll like them.'

I placed my hands all over her beautiful soft books, and read their titles: *Catch 22*: Joseph Heller, *The Ginger Man*: J P Donleavy. I leaned closer to Miss Thomas and stuttered my thanks. That was the day I stopped being a boy and started to become a writer.



Myron Lysenko

## NO MORE, DEAR

She sits in the car, the heat pouring over every part of her, the sweat glistening on her face. The windows are down, but that doesn't help. She would fan herself, but the sisters take up all the room in the backseat. That's how things are, when you're Ray's daughter. The car park is small but busy. She watches the heat rising off the bitumen in the far corner, right in front of the grocery store.

'Get out of the car,' he says.

Better not make eye contact when he's in a mood. She obeys.

'What's that?' He stabs his finger in the direction of her legs.

'Just some coloured marker. It washes off.'

'Just some coloured marker all over your legs.'

'Yeah, Mr Palmer already yelled at me about it.'

'Yeah? Why's that, you think?'

'He reckons it makes the school look bad. I reckon the school just looks bad anyway. Thought I'd brighten it up a bit,' she says, holding her chin high.

'Yeah, you brighten it up all right with your short dress, colouring flowers all up and down your legs. And you think you don't give the school a bad name?'

'I'm not the only one that does it, okay. All the girls in class do it.'

'Yeah, do they all wear cake-face make up like you, too?'

'What?'

'Is this what I pay for? For you to just follow everyone else like a mindless, stupid, slut? Is that what I pay for?'

She leans further back into the burning car and looks down at the pavement, praying that no one she knows has come to the shops with their parents. Maybe if she presses herself hard enough into the car she might melt away and be invisible.

'Answer me! Is that what I'm paying for?'

'I'm not an idiot!'

'Are you talking to me, or chewing a brick? You answer me right now, you filthy slut.'

'Chewing a brick,' she whispers, still looking down, still praying she will melt.

'What?'

'Chewing a brick!'

He snorts.

'Don't worry about what the school thinks of you. You worry about what I think of you. You're

a disgrace, a disgusting child. You drag my name through the mud by drawing on your legs like that again, and I'm sending you to a foster home.'

Her head snaps up. His face is smeared with pure satisfaction. She turns to look through the open window at her mother in the front seat. She doesn't make eye contact. Just pretends like nothing is happening. She won't react; she never does anything when it's Ray's word.

'Get back in the car. I can't have you standing out here showing your legs off to all the married men, home-wrecker.'

She opens the car door, glad to hide from all the onlookers gawking through the shop windows. Ray steps out of the car and heads towards the grocery store.

'I hate you,' she says to her mother. 'You don't care a second about me.'

'Don't say that, dear. Of course I care about you.'

'Not enough to stand up to Ray.'

'Dear, you know I can't. You know how he gets when he's in a mood. He's just had a long day,' says her mother. She bites a cigarette between her lips and lights the match close to her face.

'Yeah, I know his moods; I get to see them all the time. And all you ever do is sit there ... silent, while he calls your daughter a slut.'

'Don't get like that, dear. It'll all be fine tomorrow,' she says, taking another long drag of her cigarette before she stubs it out in the ashtray. 'Now, no more dear. Ray's on his way back.'

'I wish you died instead of my dad.'

Ray opens the car door and huffs into the front seat. 'Light me a cigarette, Madge,' he says as he digs his hand deep into the grocery bag, pulling out two lollipops. 'Here you are, my darlings,' he says as he turns in his seat and offers one each to his girls, who cheer and laugh and know that only they matter.

'When we get home you're washing the dishes and doing the ironing for your mother. I've had enough of your attitude,' he says from the front.

Drawing back hard on his cigarette, Ray starts the car.

## ALL LEGS AND CURIOSITY

On the shore of the sea of bubbling, babbling lanky kids dipping their toes into the ocean of college for the first time, there was also of course a raft of outwardly calm but inwardly rattled parents of every gender, and I got to talking to a tiny mother, and as soon as she started talking about her daughter she burst into tears, right there by the women's bathroom, but she recovered fast, and started talking faster, and I think you should hear what she said.

This is the greatest moment and the worst moment, she said. I was just changing her diapers a moment ago. Now she's all legs and curiosity. I can't believe she's not coming home tonight. I'll get ready to send her a text message at midnight where are you, come on home, and she won't come home tonight. She'll be here with you all. I love that. I can't bear that. Her father can't stop crying. He's out in the truck. Everyone thinks he's a tough guy and he's out crying in the truck. These are our babies. All these tall babies. Will you take care of her? Will you know if she's sad and scared? She's scared more than she admits. She brought her baby blanket, you know. In the bottom of her luggage. She doesn't think I know, but I know. I held it against my face,

and it smelled like her, and I cried and cried. I hope you know how great she is. She's the greatest kid in the history of the world. She wanted to come here so badly. The day the letter came she danced right out the front door and across the grass and around the neighbourhood, waving the letter at the neighbours, and everyone was laughing and pouring out of their houses to give her a hug, because everybody loves her. You'll love her too, you'll see. You better take care of her. She didn't want to go anywhere else. We tried to be sensible, but she wouldn't hear of it. She knew this was the place for her. She knew she would get in. She knew you would know what she wanted more than anything. She never wears socks. She'll get sick twice this year, mark my words. October and February. Are you writing this down? Can you tell the nurses here? She wants to be a nurse. Her grandmother was a nurse. My husband's mother. He's still out in the truck, crying. He says he'll be fine by dinner. He won't be fine by dinner. He used to carry her on his back all the time when she was little. They would climb mountains that way. He makes fish just the way she likes it. He says he's going to go talk to your chefs here about

how they cook fish. She'll be the best nurse there ever was. She has the biggest heart of anyone God ever made in a million years. I can't stand it that she's not coming home tonight. She's not coming home as a kid ever again, is she? Will you take the very best care of her that you can? Do you swear? Because I spent every minute of every day since she was born thanking God for the gift of that kid, and even when she was bad she was the best kid there ever was. Promise me you'll take care of her. I can't bear this. You'll know her—she's tall with long hair and blue jeans and a smile like the sun. You can't miss her. When you meet her you'll know who she is. You'll know. Trust me. Once you meet her, you'll never forget her for the rest of your life. Trust me.



**Brian Doyle**

## ADVENTURES ON THE ROAD TO GROWING UP

Sometimes I get it right. I had an opportunity to attend my daughter's Class Six sailing camp as a parent helper, and I took it. I had some trepidation about what would be involved, but I shouldn't have.

The morning came, and the teachers, outdoor-ers and Class-Sixers all piled on the bus and, after what seemed a blink of an eye, arrived at a beautiful campsite at Balnarring. Before we knew it, the kids poured out of the bus and set up their tents with enthusiasm and aplomb. After a quick lunch, we went off to the beach for a swim with much splashing and laughter as the kids raced to be the first in the cool, clear water of Westernport Bay. That evening the children learnt to operate their camp stoves safely and cooked their first meal by themselves, before we went off to the yacht club for an introductory presentation on sailing.

The next few days were marked by a rhythm of rising early to see the horses that trained on the beach at sunrise—the drumming of the hooves travelled all the way to the tents, providing a wonderful alarm clock—followed by sailing activities, learning to right a capsized boat, dolphin sightings, walks to inlets and capes, chapters of Tim

Winton's *Blueback* read by the outdoor teachers, and tales of prowess and cunning in the camp game that has become a staple at the school, Lantern Stalk.

On the last evening, while another school group could be heard in the distance receiving a lecture regarding the ozone layer, my daughter's class crawled through the bush on their bellies in the dark, having had their imaginations fired up the evening before. They now had the chance to test their 'stalking' skills themselves, and perhaps even better, share their stories afterwards!

For the parent helpers, the week was a precious chance to get to know their child's classmates, to marvel at how capable the children are, to be entertained by their wit and liveliness, and to get to know the teachers better. For me it was an idyllic week away from the world of work, one filled with cups of tea, music, laughter, good humour and wonderment at these children, with such life in their eyes, having such great adventures on the road to growing up.



Tao Bak

## SISTER FLORA AND ‘THE DROVER’S WIFE’

An early childhood memory is of my riding a bicycle to my Catholic school past a local state school. A couple of children chanted anti-Catholic songs. An apple core was thrown and got caught in my wheel spokes, throwing me off balance. I was a bit off balance. Why was I separated from these children, divided by a belief system?

‘You are specially chosen,’ we were told.

‘Forgive them for they know not what they do,’ I said to myself after the apple-core incident.

Why should they understand? The mysteries of Catholicism confused even me. I didn’t want to be specially chosen. I didn’t see myself as ‘better than’ anyone else. The nuns rarely answered my questions with wisdom. Their dogma did little to calm me.

And yet, my most vivid primary school memory (that spoke to my spirit) was elderly Sister Flora reading aloud from inspiring works of literature.

A favourite was ‘The Drover’s Wife’ by Henry Lawson, a story of fear, suffering and bravery. The toil and heroics shown every day by ordinary people moved me deeply. Sister Flora read ‘The Drover’s

Wife’ many times at our insistence, and a group of us cried each time.

Words from great writers lit a flame inside. For this awakening, I loved elderly Sister Flora, despite her erratic outbursts and inability to control the class.

She taught me for two years, and the number of students often exceeded seventy.

In her floor-length nun’s habit, she chased wayward children to their seats or out the door. She was often stalked and tripped by classroom rascals. I was an ally, yet Sister Flora once came up behind me and slapped the back of my head so hard that I fell off my chair, losing my bobby pins. I never asked why and never told anyone.

The goodness of Sister Flora outweighed her shadow side. Great writing took me to a deeper place of inner compassion and forgiveness. Sister Flora showed me that.



*Dianne Lee*

## TAKE ME TO THE RIVER

For the first ten years of my life I lived in the inner city around Carlton and Fitzroy. I'd never been to the beach, and the only running water I saw ran along the bluestone gutters of the street when, as kids, we played under a hose on warm summer days. My family spent a life one step ahead of the bulldozer. Our homes, in both Carlton and Fitzroy, were knocked over to make way for the first of Melbourne's high-rise public housing estates. For a time, after our second forced move, we lived on a housing estate until my mother found a terrace for rent in a hidden corner of Collingwood.

The house was across the street from the high redbrick wall of a derelict wool mill splashed with anti-war graffiti. The wall was impenetrable, and I had no idea of the wild beauty beyond it. Soon after the move I took a meandering Sunday morning stroll. I walked beside the wall, running the tips of my fingers across the brick. Reaching the end of the wall, I turned a corner and headed along a grassy lane, curious about where I might find myself. At the end of the lane I spotted a narrow dirt track disappearing into a weave of weeds, thorns and low trees.

I hesitated, took a breath and walked the track.

As I stumbled downward, my senses were struck by a rich scent in the air and a steady beating rhythm under my feet. At the bottom of the track I stood in an open field. Ahead of me lay a sight that would come to frame my teenage years, the endless days of smoking cigarettes, swimming and

thinking about girls. This place would also become the muse for much of my subsequent writing.

I ran toward the section of the Yarra River I would claim as my own. The tea-stained water carried debris that morning as a result of a heavy storm a day earlier; mostly tree branches and old logs, but also household rubbish from upstream, cardboard boxes, plastic bags and the odd tennis ball. I didn't know it at the time, but I would come to realise that while many Melbournians loved the river, unfortunately others were too willing to use the river as an open drain.

The deep sound I'd heard while heading to the river had come from Dights Falls, a man-made weir to the left of where I was standing. It had been built in the mid-nineteenth century to supply water for the mill and other industries along the bank. While, in hindsight, it was no Niagara, for a young boy, speechless with excitement, it may well have been. I would spend many years sitting at the falls, skipping stones across the surface of the still water above the falls and diving from the sandstone piers into the tannin water each summer.

And I would come to love the river like no other place.



Tony Birch

## THESE ARE THE WORDS

Square. Baby. Slut. Nerd. Loser. Geek. Bitch. Dork. Whore.

These are the words that I carry into the rest of my life.

There are more specific words, too.

'Participation' makes me cringe because a classmate sneered that word, over and over, to put me down for a low score on a state-wide science test.

'You are my sun, my moon, my stars' reminds me of the fake love-letter my friends put in my locker and their amusement at my humiliation. I still hear the girls taking my pathetic, childish words—'You'll be sorry!'—and screeching them back at me between fits of giggles.

I still hear the teasing, fake tears my classmates used to torment me. I still hear the creak of metal underneath my shoulders as I land against the lockers, and I still hear the girls giggling as I pass them in the hallway.

I'll never forget cringing back against the wall, alone and helpless, as a boy advanced on me. 'I'll punch your face in!' he said as he waved his fist in my face. I don't remember why he wanted to hurt me. I don't remember the names and faces of my tormentors. The only things I remember are the words.

Even now, they still have the power to make me cry.

I endured most of the things that happened when people think of bullying: the verbal assault of name-calling, slurs and threats; the physical

assault of pushing, hitting, shoving and groping; and the psychological assault in the correction of pronunciation, friendlessness, isolation and mocking. I've been spat on and locked in the toilets. I've had textbooks stolen. Uniform-free days, with their inevitable onslaught of teasing, were a visible reminder of all the ways in which I am different—and in which high school is a dangerous place for difference.

'Boys only tease you because they like you,' my mother said.

'Just grow up and stop crying about it,' my father said.

I spent parent-teacher interviews listening to teachers insist that I needed to stop getting upset. 'You worry too much,' they said. 'You're too shy,' they said. 'You need more friends,' they said. 'You're just giving them reason to tease you,' they said.

Looking back, the words that matter are the words they didn't say: words of help, support, counselling, reassurance, safety. The kindest teachers said and did nothing at all. They just watched with silent eyes while I wiped mine dry.

The words that now hurt the most are the lies I told. 'I had a great day at school,' I said when I came home with slag all over my backpack. 'School was fine,' I said the day I was pushed into the lockers. 'It was good,' I said with a smile after I spent the lunch-time wandering the schoolyard alone, afraid to talk to anyone. I didn't know then why I lied, just that they were the words that rolled off my tongue.

My daily hell was my private secret nobody else wanted to see.

No-one said the words aloud, but no-one had to: I was the problem.

I became an adult who struggled with words. I avoided speaking to people. I so feared the words they might say to me that I was afraid to dress, speak or think in any way that might inspire a hurtful word or phrase. I didn't have the words for my sexuality or my gender identity. I didn't have the words to describe my dreams, my interests, my joys, my fears.

I didn't have the words to describe who I was.

I ghosted through a BA and a job: silent, voiceless, dishonest. My teachers and my bosses didn't know me. 'Work was fine,' I said to my father, even though I spent eight hours trying not to cry in the aisles as a co-worker harassed me. 'These clothes are great,' I said to my mother, even though the thought of wearing a dress brought me to tears. I waited, wondered and hoped for that change in me, that moment in which I would become grown-up—that moment in which I could say the right words and silence the bullies.

'Those words don't exist,' my psychologist said, fourteen years too late.

She gave me words, strange new words: abuse, invalidation, love, support, empathy, pain, survival, bravery. She supported me in my stuttering fumbblings as I began to give voice to my gender, my history, my creativity. She encouraged me to go back to school and to trust that the teachers would listen to me the second time around.

'I want to be a writer,' I said to the teachers during interviews, anxious and awkward.

In acceptance letters and conversations, they all said the single word that mattered: 'Yes.'

I've heard many different words in the intervening years—I've had teachers ask about my gender identity, offer writing advice, answer questions, encourage me in my hopes and dreams.

It's a strange, precious freedom to know that I can be who I am. For the first time in my life, it is safe to be different, and my new teachers are only remarkable in that they're everything a teacher should be, complete with words I don't remember and smiles I'll never forget. I have teachers who offer me opportunities, who challenge me, who believe that I am entitled to sit in a classroom without having to fear what others say. I now find satisfaction in helping others to reveal their words, just like my teachers have helped, and are helping, me. I now have enough confidence in my own words to share them with the world—and gratitude for the teachers who have nurtured that ability in me.

I don't know what I might have become if my teachers in high school said the right words.

I just know that words shape the path of a life.

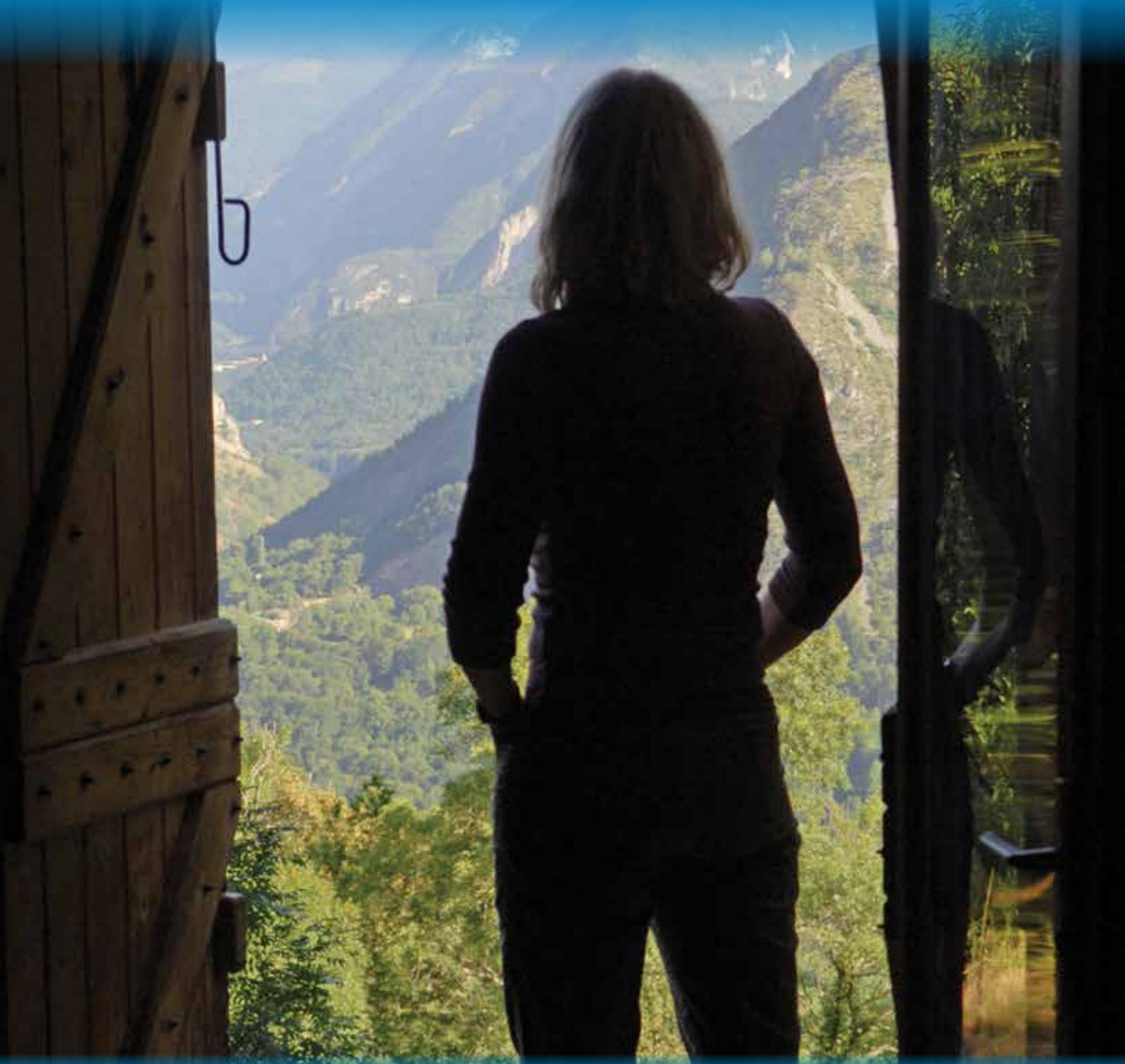


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