

**Behind the Boomgate: A short story cycle
and accompanying exegesis**

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Abstract

This PhD research consists of two elements —an artefact of sixteen inter-related short stories in the form of a short story cycle titled *Behind the Boomgate* and an exegesis. The research explores the effects of a lack of affordable accommodation and the lack of a Residential Residency Act on the permanent residents of Tasmanian caravan parks. It also considers the relationship between research methodology, creative practice, and activism. The project has a threefold practice-led methodology. The project's process is not a linear procedure but a cyclic and bottom-up application (Mafe & Brown, 2006). Firstly, it considers research *for* practice and documents the use of conventional research methods to provide knowledge about the content and the context for the artefact (Webb, 2008). Secondly, the project considers research *into* practice that generates knowledge about the techniques, approaches and thinking on the making of the artefact (Webb, 2008). The exegesis explores auto-ethnographic interpretation, social action realist writing's ability to expose injustices, considers the question of appropriate genre, and interrogates the specific creative techniques open to me as a writer. Thirdly, the project addresses research *through* practice to generate knowledge about social, political and cultural issues (Webb, 2008) in the form of the artefact. Through interaction with exegetical research, a social activist short story cycle is produced.

The short story cycle is executed through the setting of Brackwell Caravan Park on the Taylor River. The owners William and Clair Anderson are the principle antagonists. It follows several residents as they contend with the conflict and tension created by the social and legal complexities of living in the caravan park.

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To all baby boomers who live in caravan parks.

And finally to my husband Les, who patiently sat through countless afternoon readings, who could spot flaws readily and already understands the extent to which I appreciate his encouragement and help.

Declaration

I certify that the thesis entitled '*Behind the Boomgate: A short story cycle and accompanying exegesis*' submitted for the degree of PhD contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma; to the best of my knowledge contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and is not based on joint research or publications.

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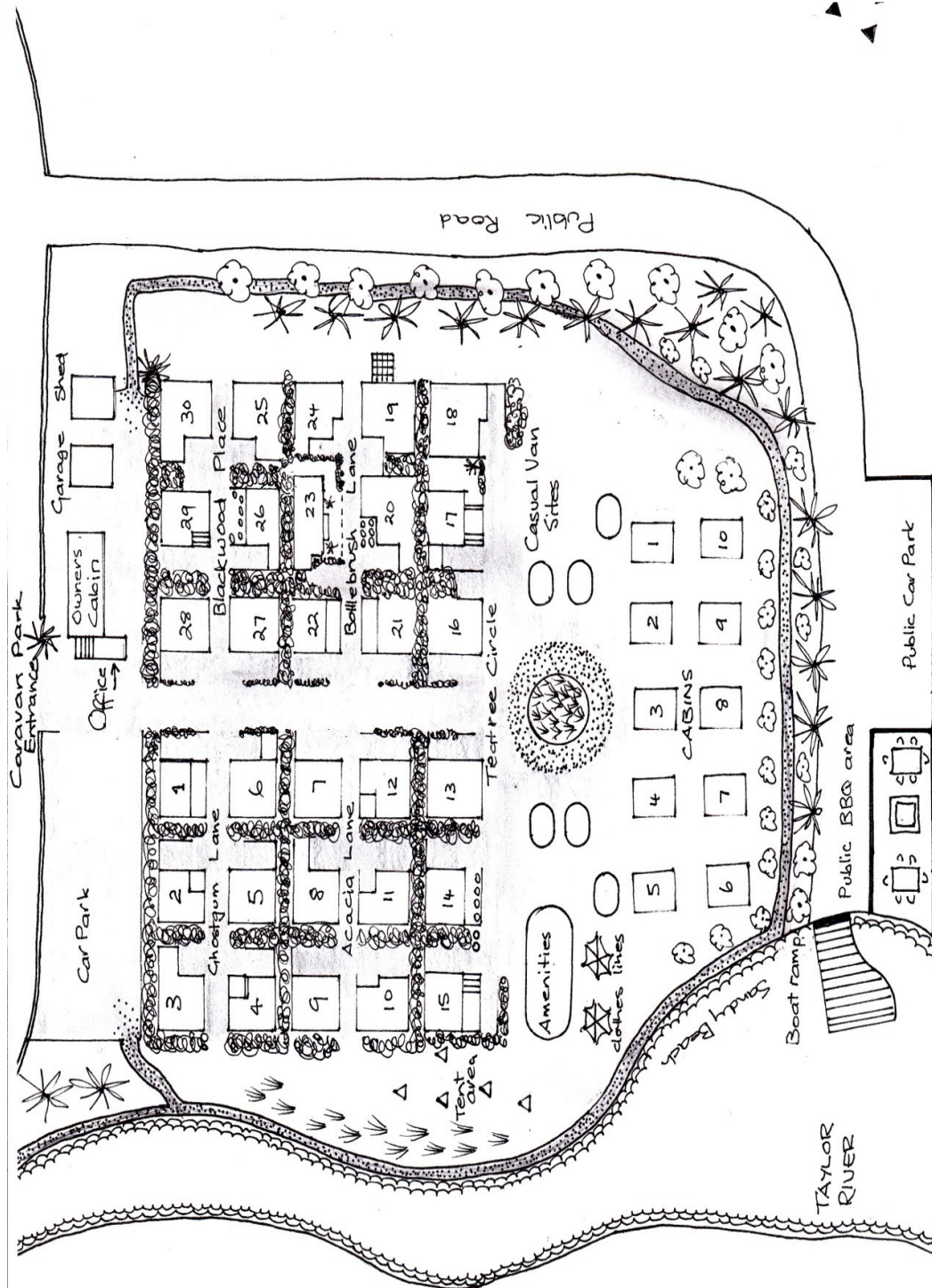
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Behind the Boomgate:

a short story cycle

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Map of Brackwell Caravan Park

Changing Places.

Justine is on her back, the air is thick and her whole body is moist with perspiration. The dominant beat of country music is thumping through the ground, the walls, and the roof like a migraine throb.

‘How many times have they played that now?’ Trevor explodes as he sits upright in their undersized bed. ‘I can’t get to sleep with that racket going on all night. Bloody hell, it’s 2.30 in the morning! I’m going out to see who it is.’

He swings his legs over the side of the small double bed. Wearing only his boxer shorts, he stealthily opens the van door and goes out. After five minutes, he returns and flops on top of the bed.

‘It’s that mob in the street behind us. You know the one with the battered Ute and a Harley out front. Looks like they’re having a party. Half the park’s there and they’re tanked to the eyeballs.’

‘Ignore them and try to sleep,’ Justine advises.

But Trevor yells out from bed, ‘Oi! Shut up you lot!’

Not long after, footsteps crunch on the gravel road outside.

‘Youse go that way and we’ll comes from the other way,’ Justine hears someone mutter.

She sucks in her breath and makes a sign on Trevor’s lips to keep quiet. The curtain is ajar enough for her to peer through the crack. In the light of the waning moon, five or six heavy guys stand abreast. Justine makes out a tattoo, another with long hair in a ponytail, a bandana, and others carrying things she can’t identify.

‘Oo’d you recon it was?’

‘Dunno! Along ere somewhere.’

One stumbles over a shrub. A tinkle of glass.

‘Aw shit.’

‘Shut up, you stupid dickhead.’

The footsteps fade and once more she breathes. She finds out later from one of the neighbours that they were armed with a club, a fishing knife and chains and were going to scare the bejesus out of them both. That was their first experience of weekend living in a caravan park. They both realised after that night what the first rule was. You don’t complain. To anyone. About anything. Or you might just wear the consequences.

* * * * *

Last summer, Justine and Trevor were introduced to this place by their neighbours in town. The Richardsons from Rotary invited them to stay in their touring caravan for the weekend. It's a pretty good spot. The park is on a stretch alongside Taylor River. The river's edge is bordered by calm water where flocks of pied oyster catchers and pelicans nestle. A lone sea eagle has made its eerie in the tall gums and families of olive-coloured shrikes dart in and out of the native grasses and wattles. The densely wooded areas form wind breaks, creating a sheltered lee to sit and gaze over the unspoiled water to Mt George and Mt Cuthbert in the distance, or the other side of the river toward Newtown. It is not a neglected vacant block hidden behind some service station to accommodate the homeless, it's a prime piece of real estate.

Saturday excursions attract them to the area after that. They like the position of the park, the swims in the river on warm days are soothing and they often go fishing or have a lazy lunch on the public barbeque.

'You know, I sometimes think, wouldn't it be nice if we didn't have to go back to suburbia at the end of the day,' says Justine.

'Hmm, we could just stay here overnight. It would save us the hour's drive back home and it's always a bother to tow the boat from here to there,' says Trevor.

'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' says Justine.

They found a small second-hand pop-top for \$2,000.

There are two site options. One sandwiched between other casual tenants on a short lane near the front office, the other in a dead-end street behind. As they consider the sites, a stream of loud music belches from the van in front of them where a Harley is parked alongside the pyramid of beer cans stacked near the garbage bin. Those two things alone seal their choice.

They settle for a small block in Bottlebrush Lane on the short dead-end street. Their place is half-way along and even though they aren't anywhere near the river they can see the back water just thirty meters away. They make a name plaque for their small van and canvas annex and call it *Our plot*. Even though their first night in the park didn't get

off to a good start, they embrace this slice of heaven on weekends and revert to suburban mayhem and stressful jobs during the week.

* * * * *

In the coming weekends Justine gradually meets their neighbours. At the laundry a woman, dressed in tracky-daks and braless tank-top, approaches her. She nods a greeting, wipes her nose with the back of her hand.

‘Hi, which one is your van?’

Justine pointed vaguely towards Bottlebrush Lane.

‘Where are you from?’

‘Near Chesterfield,’ she replies.

‘So where do you work?’

Justine has noticed how the conversations like this go when a new arrival appears in the caravan park. She realises it’s more out of nosiness than friendliness. But like any chat with new people, after the first hellos and where do you come from, talk soon shifts to where you work. From Justine’s experience she knows that when she tells people where she works and what she does, they treat her differently. For instance when her hairdresser found out she was a manager of a big city store, the treatment prices almost doubled as a consequence. So Justine now has a standard answer.

‘I work at David Jones in town.’ Then she waits for the next obvious question.

‘So what do you do?’

‘In the morning I clean the ladies’ toilets and after lunch I clear the cafeteria tables,’ is her typical reply.

This woman slaps Justine on the back in recognition.

‘We knew you were trailer trash.’

Justine stares back at her. Did she want to be trailer trash? She smiles numbly, then hurries away.

* * * * *

Getting used to the caravan park and its people is an education for Justine and Trevor. The place is inundated with casual rentals as well as tourists and a few permanents. During the holiday season, no matter what time it is, drinking is underway. There’s even an official park maxim—*it’s five o’clock somewhere*. Whatever their poison – beer, wine, spirits – these residents can be seen doing what they themselves call *the trailer*

trash walk. Glass, cardboard box or multiple stubbies in hand, costumed in budgie smugglers, bikinis or similar attire and bare footed, they meander from van to van, street to street, chatting, laughing and swapping stories. They're a happy lot until someone disagrees with a point of view or some male makes suggestions to another's female. Then tempers flare.

'No one is going to use that f*** word in my presence,' a female prude demands.

'No ... well fuck ... fuck ... fuck!'

'Look, you rude bastard; don't use words like that in front of my girl!'

'Try and stop me.'

Slap, shove, folding chairs topple backwards, drinks are spilt, women scream, yelling men are restrained. They part, vowing never to speak to each other again. And they won't, but only for a few days. Trevor dissociates himself and keeps his distance.

'Do you think I should report them to the owner? That'll pull them into line,' he says.

Justine just rolls her eyes and shakes her head from side to side. 'Just leave it be, they'll get over it.'

Strong words aren't all the exchanges made. One particular female, a divorcee in her mid-50s, is attractive and footloose. A salon blond and educated, she drives a black speedster. Her raucous laugh advertises to all in earshot she has company. She's a real Moll Flanders.

'I'm looking for a man, any man, who's a good bonk,' she advertises in desperation at one of her barbeques.

She tries latching onto the males in the park and even drags one or two strangers in for a weekend of partying, but they never return. One male who did appear more than once was a guy who lived opposite her in the park. He has a partner who comes from the north-west. One weekend the guy turns up by himself. After the usual end of street get-together and under the cover of darkness he disappears into Moll's setup. A raucous laugh ... she'd found her man. Some say they eloped, but the management somehow must have had eyes in the back of their head because they evicted them for breach of conduct and breaking the new park rules.

Then there's the girly club that Justine wasn't part of yet, but she could see and hear what they got up to. This group are a strange mixture of personalities and shapes, aged between 50 and 60, all unemployed. She didn't know their names so she gave them tags to suit their personalities. There's a divorcee who owns two shiatsu dogs and a matted fur ball of a cat, a live-in housekeeper of the Digger, a cougar for a chap twenty years her younger, and a carer of an invalid husband. Justine overhears their girly conversation.

'I need me grey hair done, who can come over and do it?'

'I'll come, what time?'

'I've gotta go to town and get the stuff first.'

'Hey, why don't we all go and make a day of it?'

They return mid-afternoon and withdraw inside for some serious girly business.

At the *five o'clock somewhere* signal they appear drinking their chardonnay from recycled cream cheese jars.

'How do ya like us, eh?' They twirl and parade.

'Pretty cool, dontcha recon?'

The divorcee's jet black shoulder length hair is striped with shocking pink (her favourite colour). The live-in housekeeper has a ginger mop of tight curls, the cougar has a stiff spike that rivals any punk and the carer has pigtail bunches tied up with purple ribbons any eight year old would adore. Each have multi-coloured finger nails—black, purple, red, yellow, green—each hand different. Some are dotted with contrasting colours and sequins.

'Gorgeous, simply gorgeous,' the grandstand of males chorus.

The guys have a club of their own. They trial organic medicine. It's not difficult to see and hear what goes on, as the set-ups are very close to each other and conversations drift easily. Sometimes they just sit in the open, oblivious to any on-looker.

Ritualistically, one of them selects and teases the dried strands from an old yellow camel tobacco tin. Another draws out the wafer thin tissue paper and rolls the strands into a crude cigarette. The next holds it between his thumb and forefinger, lights it, draws in, holds his breath, and exhales the sweet pungency upward. His face beams satisfaction as if he has just pulled himself off—then he passes it on to the next. And so it goes until it dies out. Moods mellow, pain subsides, tempers smooth. The Digger, with determination on his face and a strange tension in his voice warns all who can hear.

‘Mind you keep your mouth shut about this.’

Watching from her window, Justine is uneasy; she remembers the threats they had on their first night here and how the Digger and his mates went to great lengths to scare them. Turning back to Trevor, She makes the motion of zipping her lips with her hand. Trevor nods his head

* * * * *

After a couple of months of cramped weekend living, Trevor decides to upgrade to a larger van. She’s streamline, 24ft long and has a full-sized bed, an en-suite, a four burner gas stove and padded seating. They remain at 23 Bottlebrush Lane. All the other shacks are built on concrete slabs and any amateur additions are haphazard and irregular, painted any colour that was cheap. Trevor, being a handyman, builds the solid annex just as Justine wants it—off the ground. He makes it look like a cottage and even erects a deck and veranda out front. He paints it cream and contrasts the wooden veranda slats in charcoal to match the black aluminium windows. It looks really upmarket. He’s gone to great pains to make it comfortable for them both.

On the first evening in the new cottage, the air is balmy and a soft breeze brushes through the open window. Outside, the harvest moon reflects off the back water, as still as black oil. Justine sets the dining table with her Royal Dalton and silver on the cream brocade table cloth with long stemmed glasses, two soft pink candles in crystal holders, matching roses and serviettes to compliment. They celebrate with a special meal, an entrée of Tasmanian oysters, King Island hand-reared steak, local brie and Pinot Noir from an award winning winery down the road, while Andre Bocelli croons Liberta. Justine snuggles up to Trevor as they toast to their new cottage.

* * * * *

The next weekend’s weather is sultry without any breeze. Trevor thinks out loud while they are fishing on the river in their tinnie.

‘How would you like to live here all the time?’ Trevor teases Justine. ‘We could go for early morning swims and midnight fishing expeditions for flounder. We wouldn’t have to pack up at Sunday lunch-time to head back to town.’

These conversations occur more frequently as they enjoy the laid back summer weekends. The reservations, though, happen just as frequently.

‘I’d have to commute further to work,’ Justine complains, ‘but at least I’d have a four-day weekend here.’

‘Well the same thing goes for me, luv, I’d have to relocate my handyman business and find new customers. I don’t suppose that would be too hard.’

‘Aw, heck, this conversation is getting worse. We would have to sell the house in town if we did that,’ says Justine.

‘And we’d have to switch from casual to permanent and pay the higher park rent of \$440 a month. Could we manage that, do you think?’ questions Trevor.

Justine glances over their plot to the small vegetable garden she has planted. Trevor thinks of the fishing. They remain silent as they ponder the alternatives and the changes they would have to make.

Trevor comes up with the answer.

‘Why don’t we just lock up the house in town and try living here permanently for a year. If it doesn’t work out we can just move back. What do you reckon?’

They shake hands to seal the decision.

The next hurdle is to ask the owner the likelihood of taking in another permanent resident. There are five occupancies at the moment, mostly older folk who have nowhere else to go. The owner and his wife are cheery approachable people.

The next weekend when he collects the garbage, Trevor casually asks, ‘Are you thinking of accepting any more permanents?’

‘I would, but we have someone interested in buying the park and I’d need to check with him,’ he said.

The answer came several weeks later.

‘The prospective owner is open to proposals, and will discuss it with you when he next comes down from the Northern Territory. On the quiet though, I’ll let you into something, he’s thinking of turning one side of the caravan park into a retirement section for mature-aged people who have no kids. That would be you, wouldn’t it?’

* * * * *

The first drops of rain sound like tap dancers on their cottage roof—toe slides, double tap, heal toe, stomp. Camera flashes burst outside followed by thunderous applause. All lights blackout. In the comfort of the storm Justine pulls the covers over her head, snuggles up to Trevor's back and relaxes into the innerspring that takes her weight. She draws a deep sigh and succumbs to the changes that have engulfed them these last months.

They must have slept for ages. The morning light streams through their window like slivers of hope. Outside earth is washed and reborn dripping with rejuvenation. Footsteps crunch on the gravel road outside. They pause out front. Barefooted, and without disturbing Trevor, Justine drapes a jacket around herself and cautiously shuffles to the front door. She pulls the curtain aside, opens the front door and stands on the veranda of their cottage. On the road below, three people face her like wise men bearing gifts. It's two of the girls—the carer and the cougar—and the digger.

As he steps f, a faint smile flickers at the corners of the digger's mouth before he speaks. 'I shot a roo last night and I thought you'd like some to make a casserole.'

'The girls thought you'd like some flowers from our gardens,' says the carer.

'I know it isn't much, but here's a bottle of cleanskin chardonnay from our stash,' the cougar offers.

Heads down, they place them at Justine's feet and retrace their steps. Justine doesn't speak, so they can't reply. She faces the eastern sun allowing it to energize her. She glances up. High above the trees and out over the water the white sea eagle is freelance soaring, higher – higher, strong and free. She gathers her welcoming gifts and turns inside to their new home.

*

Takeover.

Rumours are a sure way to get tongues active. Often it's just 'Have you heard Julie's cat has run away', or 'Faye and Sally are moving in together, they're a number now you know'. Sometimes it's all high drama. 'Crazy Joe lost his licence. They nabbed him after the footy match just ten metres from home'.

While these loose stories often turn out to be true, even with some embellishments, this latest rumour was more un-nerving.

'The park's up for sale! There's \$1.5 million on it.'

Who would have that kind of money? Maybe a lotto winner. Several of the permanents play the game of 'what if' and decide that they could form a conglomerate and contribute \$250,000 each, then buy the place. They could do as they pleased. Having bought it they could turf out the people they don't like. Like that guy down the bottom of the park who undresses you with his eyes as you walk by, or that guy who always has rowdy drunken parties. Then there's the newest arrival who gawks into your place as she drives past ever so slowly.

The owner didn't let on that the park is for sale either. Chuck, a South Australian who had previously lived in America, let it be known that he bought the park in the first place because he wanted to invest his \$890,000 dollars for about three years, and then sell-up and make a million. Two years are already up which feeds the truth of the rumour. He has a heavy Texan drawl and treats folks around the park fairly. There aren't any rules, people can come and go as they please and do what they like. The only trouble Chuck had with the park people was when he raised the rental by \$5 month. That's not a great deal but because the rent hadn't increased under his ownership or the previous owners, it heckled a few feathers. A park insurgent, who disregarded anything Chuck imposed, spread the word about a planned uprising.

'Meet at the barbeque area on neutral ground outside the park at 11am, we'll discuss the issues, work out what to do, and then storm the place,' the self-elected spokesperson announced.

Trevor and Justine go into town shopping that day, because they'd heard of the undercurrent rebellion and didn't want to be implicated. After the meeting a twenty

strong crowd of casuals and permanents stormed up to the office with homemade placards chanting.

‘Stick your rates, stick your rates.’

Chuck’s wife Jennifer barricaded herself in the office while he confronted the mob. His ruffled hair fluttered over his right eye. His khaki work shirt hung somewhat untethered by his trouser belt. He stood on a milk crate, trying to reason with the crowd.

‘Dangit you lot. There’s no need to get worked up for nothin. I’ve got ta make ends meet. What with tha cost of living these days.’

‘Stick your rates, stick your rates.’

‘Hey, you lot, I’ve drunk ya beer and you’ve drunk mine. It’s not like I’m your enemy, now is it?’

The rebel yells from the back of the mob.

‘Go home Yank.’

That sledge really made Chuck furious. His faced reddened, his fist tightened and he began to punch the air with every statement.

‘I might own tha park, but there aren’t many rules. You’ve got a pretty easy life here,’ he says.

The crowd start to chant ‘Yankee go home, Yankee go home,’ as they press forward.

‘Get the police,’ he yells to his wife over his shoulder.

After she’d pretended to call the police, Jennifer, wearing a red blouse, jeans and work boots boldly appears, trying to look fierce by brandishing a carving knife for protection. When the crowd thought that the police were going to turn up they dispersed like dogs scurrying off with their tail between their legs.

* * * * *

In the next few days after the near riot, when Justine is paying the rent, she casually asks, ‘What on earth happened the other week?’

Maybe it is how she asks, or maybe Jennifer just needs someone to confide in. Whatever the reason, Jennifer starts to cry. She lowers her head and takes a hanky from up her sleeve, unfolds it and dabs her eyes. Justine gives her some space to gain her composure.

‘I was so scared. The mob was yelling at us. It’s as if we were lepers or something.’

Justine doesn’t want to get involved so just nods and keeps a civil tongue. That confrontation by the crowd is the last straw. The owners put the caravan park up for sale.

Justine must have given her too much listening time, for in the following weeks Jennifer treats her like a long lost friend. It is more likely that she sees Justine as a neutral person because Justine doesn’t have an axe to grind with the owners. They find out that there is a potential buyer. Justine wonders if someone has actually won the lottery. How long does it take for the payout of a winning ticket? But after two weeks they hear the deal has fallen through. The rumours continue though, surfacing like bad smells. Jennifer, normally softly spoken and shy, is the one to give Justine information.

Next time Justine is paying the weekly rent, and before she has even opened the office door, Jennifer eagerly tells her, ‘Someone has made another offer; we’re just waiting for the finance confirmation.’

Justine teases information out of her every second day. ‘Heard anything?’

‘Not yet, but I’m hopeful.’

Chuck comes by not long after that, parading around the lanes with a fellow and his lady in tow. Chuck is in his element, you can tell by his stride.

Trevor whispers to Justine. ‘Do you think they are the potential buyers?’

As he drew along-side their place, Trevor casually calls out. ‘Hey Chuck.’

Chuck halts.

‘We want to extend the veranda alongside the front here a bit, is that okay?’

Trevor says. They pace it out for him and indicate how big it will be.

‘Well you guys are really nice folk, so sure,’ he says, ‘that’ll look grand and you can have a place to sit in the shade.’

Secretly they pat themselves on the back, and make a mental note to progress with the alterations quickly just in case the couple in tow were the buyers.

The rumour clans gather in twos and threes to exchange underground information.

‘Do you know who that couple were?’

‘Are they the new owners?’

‘Dunno, haven’t heard a thing.’

‘They’ve been up and down our street several times, looking at our place and next doors.’

‘Where are they staying?’

‘Well there’s a red rental car parked out of sight behind one of the older cabins on the edge of the park.’

‘I saw them there too.’

A few days after that Jennifer comes to see Justine at home, something she never does. She’s dressed in casual cream slacks, matching sandals and a turquoise chiffon tunic top. Her brown hair is coiled loosely at her nape. She doesn’t bother to keep her voice down; she comes right up to Justine and grabs her shoulders.

‘We’ve sold! They bought it! Do you hear me? We’ve sold! I can get out of this forsaken hole and head back to civilisation.’ She sighs, takes a deep breath and in hushed tones says, ‘Chuck and I haven’t been getting on for a long time. We’re separating. He’s going back to Adelaide I’m going to stay with a friend here.’ Her voice holds no remorse.

‘I’m sorry to hear that Jennifer, I wish you all the best,’ Justine consoles as best as she feels she is able.

Nobody officially tells the residents that it’s sold. They receive a plain piece of paper that is hand delivered and stuck either in a security door or under a mat. It simply reads that Chuck and Jennifer have sold the park. Not even a thanks or no thanks for their patronage. The park people don’t volunteer any farewell parties for them either or even offer a bouquet of flowers for Jennifer.

It was almost a reprieve for the insurgents, like a hush before a storm. But it wouldn’t be long before the park people wished they’d given Chuck more leeway and obliged his changes.

* * * * *

Everyone thinks of the general store in Brackwell as ‘the corner store’, even though it’s not on the corner. Rather, it’s sandwiched between a small white bungalow and a vacant block. Self-made local signs are stuck on the front windows, claiming to be able to

clean up your yard, supply winter wood for \$100 a trailer load, baby sit and do your ironing. The store supplies mobile phone top ups and Efptos cash up to \$50 a transaction. No accounts.

‘Hello darl,’ Justine hears as she weaves through the multi-coloured fly deterring plastic strips in the doorway. They clack together as she pushes past. She’s hardly set foot in the threshold before she’s confronted by a woman who uses the terminology of a butcher. She’s the local all-purpose shop owner and a little over five feet four. Her face is weathered as a nicotine addicted bar maid, her fresh perm still with bone curled tightness. Justine judges her age as about forty eight. Salami and locally made fresh bread test Justine’s hunger. There are only four aisles, no room for a trolley—baskets only. The store is a perfect square so shoppers have no difficulty in finding what they want. They have the choice of most things – tinned goods, dry grains and pasta, beauty products, cleaning products, biscuits, lollies, delicatessen goods, bread, dairy goods and soda. If you need birthday candles or waxy flycatchers or even shoe laces, you’ll find them.

Justine selects some grapes, a bottle of black olives and a salami to accompany her home made focaccia, and makes her way to the front of the shop. On the counter is a raffle of chocolates for the local fire brigade. Tickets two for a dollar. She buys two dollars worth.

‘So darl, you live in the caravan park,’ the owner states.

Justine wonders how she knows this. Is it tattooed on my forehead? I don’t have tracky pants on, I’m not braless and I have enough cash to pay for purchases. Justine is slightly affronted. She can’t help but get haughty.

‘Well yes,’ Justine says, ‘only for a short time’. To throw her off the scent, she says, ‘My husband and I have managed to sell our large brick home on a half an acre in the Northeast. We’re looking to down-size.’

It is a deliberate notion to bring in Trevor as not many others in the park have married partners.

‘Oh! So where was that then darl?’ she pries.

‘Singleton, that lovely sandstone heritage town that professionals invest in,’ Justine says, baiting her with status and upbringing.

‘Right.’

As she pays for her items she is farewelled with, 'We aim to meet the local need darl, anything you want we'll get in. Just let us know.'

Justine makes a show of slipping her change into her Prada leather wallet.

* * * * *

The new owner and his wife arrive to take over ownership in the June. He is tall and tanned with heavy shoulders. He has a rugged look, but not the Clint Eastwood sort. His hair is short though not styled, which gives him a slightly criminal look. No-one is introduced, but the residents get glimpses of him and his shorter wife while walking the dog. The white Chihuahua suits her. It darts, sniffs and retraces. They meander up the main drag and divert along the one-way side streets, occasionally taking a short cut along the sandy shore of the river or retracing their steps along the public road alongside. If any of the residents study them long enough they would know that they are planning and calculating. They gesture up and down with their arms. 'Along here', 'up there'. Then cut horizontally, 'Wipe this out', 'take that away'. More a demolition job than a priestly blessing.

* * * * *

Next time Justine goes to the corner store, she's welcomed with the butcher's greeting as soon as she enters.

'So I hear the park is sold for a million and a half,' darl adds in the same breath. 'This guy's a mainlander—from the Northern Territory I hear, going to turn the place around, just like the mainlanders who bought up St. Judith's and Wishes Bay. They told everyone to get out,' she say, 'really upturned the communities, they did, rebuilt the whole thing for the tourists—re-named them Tourist Parks. Permanents were turned out on their ear.'

'Have you met them yet?' Justine asks.

'Right upstart she is. Came in and demanded organic chicken, which we didn't have. Asked for an account, which we don't do and then steamed out. I thought she mumbled under her breath 'you can jam your store'

She natters on. 'The locals don't like him. It's more out of the rumours they hear about the park and what he intends to do.' Darl continues, 'The park people come in

here for some comfort. They tell me what's going on, or not going on. You know what I mean?'

Justine nods politely and hands Darl the money for her milk and bread. When the change comes back, she drops it into the charity box on the counter. Darl looks surprised for a second, then gives her an approving smile.

* * * * *

The new owners make their presence felt with a letter of mandatory rules. It is official with a letter head and a name change. No longer is it a Caravan Park but now a Tourist Park, whatever that meant. The new owners' names are clearly stated and upfront. William and Clair Anderson. The letter started off without any salutation.

We would like to inform you that we are the new owners of the park and reside in the manager's cottage alongside the office. For the benefit of your comfort and community acceptance of the park as a nice place to stay we believe the appearance of the park and resident behaviour can be greatly improved.

So the following park rules apply.

- *One car per site, otherwise park other vehicles or boats in the car park, or find alternative means. Visitors' cars must park in the car park.*
- *All lattices, shade cloth on or near vans must be removed. Self-erected fences will not be tolerated and must be removed.*
- *No alteration or additions to vans and annexes permitted without authorisation.*
- *Portable barbeques will not be left outside. Push bikes, surf boards to be housed inside.*
- *No garden arches or freestanding gazebo's allowed and must be removed.*
- *Garden pots on concrete slabs or patios must be removed.*
- *Clothes lines between trees or posts are unacceptable. Remove immediately.*
- *No new pets will be allowed. Any dogs and cats must remain inside or restrained on a leash at all times and their excrement collected in a plastic bag and disposed of.*
- *No walking around the park with alcohol (tinnies, bottles or casks) at any time.*
- *No noise after 11pm. Offensive behaviour and undue parties from tenants or their visitors will result in eviction from the park.*

- *No open fires to be lit. This includes fire pots, braziers, potbelly stoves or brick barbeques.*

The letter concludes with an administrative statement that management reserves the right to alter or update these rules at any time without consultation with occupants. Failure to comply with these rules and regulations means the resident's site will be cancelled or if a permanent resident, they will be evicted.

The rules and regulations are drastically stricter than the laid back attitude of Chuck. The freedom of *five o'clock somewhere* and *the trailer trash walk* will be abolished. The gatherings of likeminded folk who just wanted to share idle talk, a tinnie and a snag are under scrutiny. The flower pots, the lattice and the clothes line are things that make the place homely. How will Jake, Tingles, and Jupiter handle being on a lead or kept inside? The gloom spreads like a shroud of plague through the underground rumour clans. Reactions are mixed.

'Who do these arseholes think they are? We were here first, why do they think they can just come in here and change things around?'

'I, for one, think the place could do with a big clean-up, good on them.'

'Well I'm not going to stay around here for another minute, I'll sell up. I'll use the \$2,000 rental for an overseas holiday rather than come here every weekend.'

'We like our sleep at night; we're sick to death of those drunken parties, the loud music and the dope.'

'When you live here like us regulars, you don't want the yobos hanging around, it gives the place a bad name.'

'We've had it too good for too long.'

At the corner store several seek solace and advice from the shop owner.

'They gave us all the 'thou shall' and 'shall not' do letter. We don't like what we read. The bastard is going to turn the place upside down. What am I going to do?' one poor fellow whinges.

'My son and daughter-in-law live in the next town, it's close to them here. I either have to put up with this or move out. I can't afford to move out and I'm not going to live with her,' sniffs an older lady.

‘Me and the missus like what we have. We don’t know whether to go or stay. How do we know what else they’re planning on,’ says another.

Darl speaks up. ‘I told you folk what they were up to. They’re gunna build a resort just like over at Wishes Bay,’ the corner store owner forecast. ‘What do you think will happen to my business and others if you guys pick up your goods and move on?’

‘I heard that concern too when I picked up my sister in the next town. People at the butchers, the chemist and the newsagent say their business will fall apart if folk start to move on,’ a busy body interjects.

The argy bargy went back and forth between the residents and the corner store owner. None had firm evidence of what was going to happen. Their fear and uncertainty contribute to their ideas.

‘Best you make up your mind before it’s too late. The outside community needs you guys here so that our business can survive. You might just have to toe the line. But you should stand your ground. Get others together and face them,’ contributes Darl.

‘We tried that with the last fellow and that didn’t work.’

‘Hell! We didn’t want these type of people to take over though, did we?’

‘These types are greedy mongrels. Mark my words, just you wait and see,’ the corner store owner prophesises. Darl busies herself dusting the shelves and glances over her shoulder as the park people dawdle out.

*

Buy-up Big.

It has been a busy week away from home in Sydney. In the waiting lounge of Melbourne airport she drops her inboard bag alongside the seat, slings the laptop off her shoulder and kicks off her high heels to feel the coolness of the floor. The lounge invites her to rest a moment before the boarding call. She resists the urge to close her eyes so she observes the other travellers. Everyone looks flustered, in a hurry, burdened by oversized trolley bags and last minute souvenirs from the airport shops. Holidaying mothers with children. Couples embarking on back-packing adventures. Business types returning to head office, dark suits and jackets buttoned over white business shirts and college ties.

Striding along, brief cases in hand, a trio look like the Mafia on a take-down. The taller one in front seems to be the leader. The others listen to occasional comments he makes, nodding in agreement. He is about six foot tall, with broad shoulders and short dark hair.

Hang on, she says to herself, I know you.

He hasn't spotted her. Well, he isn't expecting to find her here, after all they aren't that close. She lives in Sydney and him in Darwin. They only see each other now and again and exchange niceties on Christmas cards. Jumping to her feet, she pounces spread eagle in front of the mob.

'Ta da! Hi ya Bill!'

The mob halts in their tracks. Bill stares blankly at her—then to his companions, and then back to her.

'Do I know you madam?' he queries.

'It's me, your sister Maree.' She wants to add 'you idiot,' but doesn't.

He recognises her. As he bends to grip her shoulders, he says in hushed tones.

'Good grief Maree, what are you doing here?'

She tugs his sleeve and beckons to the lounge where her hand luggage is. He hesitates. She can see he's debating what to do. Should he sit with this strange woman or tend to the mob? It's clear he doesn't want to lose face in front of them. After all, this is her brother who is a very important person in the world of land deals.

He had left home at sixteen after falling out with his father—her step-father. They were too much alike: independent and proud. His father worked him to death in

the fish and chip shop learning the ropes so that he could take over the family business. He hated the smell of oil and fried food that clung to his clothes and hair. They argued constantly.

‘Geez Dad, all I do is work, work, work, I’m not at your beck and call and I’m not your slave.’

‘You’ll do as I say, boy. I know what’s best for you,’ his father would say.

‘Bugger off,’ Bill would answer back. ‘As soon as I’m old enough I’m leaving home.’

Bill had ideas. He wasn’t going to be under the thumb of a domineering tyrant. He wanted to be his own boss. And rich! Not like his pitiful father who had to scrounge money to pay the owner of the building every month for the use of the grotty little shop that had him hand cuffed every day from dawn to dusk.

After finishing at Marrickville High School William, or Bill as Maree calls him, started selling houses at 18 to become Sydney’s youngest real estate agent. Heavily in debt to the bank he bought his first property for \$89,000 and sold it for \$145,000 six months later. At 21, he started his first business, Anderson Land Ltd. and watched it grow from zero to 20 staff in 12 months.

‘Can’t talk now, Maree, I’ve clients with me. Where are you heading?’

‘Sydney,’ she says.

‘I’m on the 1.30 plane, I’ll catch you there in the Long Bar,’ he says.

Maree nods and smiles. The mob regroup and resume their debrief. She turns away to give them privacy.

* * * * *

The Long Bar coffee shop at the Sydney terminal is teeming with passing travellers. They group on the plush red velvet lounges that line the walls which are adjacent to the counter and glass display case of dainty biscuits, muffins and the hissing coffee machine. The aroma of freshly roasted coffee beans beckons the traveller to sit awhile and relax. It’s already 3.30 so Maree is expecting Bill to walk through the doors at any moment. She positions herself near the window to look out at the taxiing planes below on the tarmac, but conveniently keeps the entrance in view. He arrives, gives a little familiar wave as he sees her, and strides over to where she’s sitting.

'I would never have believed I'd run into you,' he says as he jerks his inboard bag onto its wheels and slaps the handle down. He bends over to peck her on the cheek.

'Hi Bill. What would you like to drink? I'll go over and order and then we can talk.'

'A long black please, and maybe a raspberry muffin, I'm famished.'

Maree lodges the request and then settles back in to resume talking with Bill. They haven't seen each other for five years and make a start on catching up.

The waiter arrives and places the coffees and muffin on the low table between them. Bill explains that he married his partner of ten years and they still don't have kids. Maree has split with her husband and is single again. He hasn't kept in touch with his father. She knew their father isn't well. She discovers her brother's real estate business is looking after itself. He has offices in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Darwin. After her separation she embarked on a new career. Bill seems interested in that.

'So what do you do,' he queries.

'I'm in the tourism industry. I broker ideas.'

'What sort of ideas?'

'Well that's why I was in Melbourne; I develop proposals that involve strategic assessment of potential ideas. Partly it's about locating suitable areas that can be developed and identifying what conditions they would be subject to. The Melbourne City Council wanted some advice about a new festival to coincide with the Australian Open Tennis Comp. Next week I'm going to Tasmania for the same sort of thing. Most of their tourism attractions happen in January, February and March so they want to link all the activities together.'

'Is that right?' he questions with a furrowed brow.

She guesses she knew what was coming. Bill was always the business person, shrewd and cutthroat, using whoever and whatever he could.

'I've got an idea. I've been looking around the eastern states for an enterprise. There've been some really big deals on caravan parks lately. Guys are buying them up cheaply, chucking everybody out, dozing everything down and rebuilding purpose designed retiree places and charging a mint. Just on the quiet, Maree, could you do something for me? Keep your eye open for any caravan park that's for sale in Tasmania and let me know.'

He reaches inside his suit coat for his business card and hands it to her. His photo is a bit dated but the face is stern and determined. The gilded edges with strong colours clearly state Anderson Land Ltd established 1990, with the motto *Can and will*.

‘Thanks Maree, I knew you would,’ he says without waiting for her to answer. ‘Look I have to make a dash, my connecting plane to Darwin leaves in 30 mins. Don’t forget to ring me.’

He outstretches the handle of his on-board luggage, and pats her on the head before rushing off.

‘Hey, how about paying for the’

She didn’t finish. What do you expect from someone who goes out of his way to make money?

Maree is true to her word. She keeps her eyes open and her ear to the ground by scouting the real estate outlets. There are three caravan parks for sale. The real estate manager provides information about one on the east coast at Wishes Bay which sold the week she arrived. Already the local newspaper was headlining *East Coast Residents ready to fight back over sale of Caravan Park*. Another is in the north-west near a mining town. It is used mostly by the itinerant workers and was a bit run down. The photo showed lopsided annexes and boarded windows.

‘Is there anything else?’ she asks.

‘There’s one in the north that has been around for a while. The owner is anxious to sell up,’ he says.

She wastes no time in letting Bill know. He asks her to find out how long it had been on the market and how much they had on it and would they be willing to reduce the price for a sure sale. Maree told him in no uncertain terms to do his own dirty work. ‘Here’s their phone number and their website. That’s it, my hands are clean!’

* * * * *

Bill can see the iridescent ocean below from his window seat. Closer to land white caps crested the plundering waves hurtling toward the coastline, like an excavating machine clawing at its prey. The engines drop a tone. Bill looks over at his wife beside him, her soft ginger curls frame her face against the airline pillow, her glasses are clutched in her hand. Clair stirs from her nap.

‘We’re coming in soon,’ he says.

‘What’s the weather like out there?’

‘It looks a bit windy—the seas a bit rough,’ he says.

As if by cue, the stewardess’s microphone spurts into action. Her voice on the intercom is muffled by the drone of the engines.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, our pilot has advised that we are descending into Chesterfield. We will be disembarking in ten minutes, please make sure your seat belt is fastened and your tray is secure. Please place your arm rest down and your window shade up for landing. The temperature outside is a cool 12 degrees and there is a 30 knot wind so be prepared to rug up as you alight. Thank you for flying Jet Star.’

It has been eight hours since they had left Darwin. The weather there had been a sultry thirty one degrees with a usual duty shower scheduled for the afternoon so Bill had decided to travel in a T-shirt, shorts and sandals and she a loose caftan. The Northern Territory was always hot; the only difference was whether it was wet or dry. He’d gotten used to it these last ten years, but figured it was time for a change. The real estate boom had been kind to him and he had been able to make a few dollars selling the estate land to prospective builders. The boom hadn’t hit Tasmania yet and he was keen to re-invest his earnings in a substantial venture.

The plane yaws in the strong wind as it makes a three point landing, causing the passengers to grip the armrests and brace their feet as the pilot throws it into reverse thrust to pull the beast up on the short runway. The wind whips around the passengers as they disembark down the mobile stairs onto the runway and walk across the tarmac and into the small terminal. Bill and Clair shiver in their tropical clothes. They wait inside with the other passengers to collect their luggage brought in from the fuselage by an undersized tractor and trolley.

‘This place is more backward than I thought,’ he whispers to Clair. ‘Fancy not having an undercover walkway or even conveyer belt for the luggage. They probably don’t even have a security scan.’

‘No matter,’ says Clair, ‘we’re here, aren’t we? And we have some serious business to get on with. All the better if they are backward, that means the vendor will be unsuspecting as well.’

The red rental car leaves the under-sized airport, takes the drive to the city in its stride, and weaves through the older city streets of sandstone buildings and double story terrace houses. Further out of town, the road takes them through rich green sheep

pastures, vineyards and small rural communities. Every now and again beside the road they can see Taylor River in the late afternoon light. The ruffled water is bathed in pale apricot from the setting sun. The street lights flicker on as they approach their destination. Bill pulls the car over under one of them so that Clair can study the town map.

‘Just a kilometre on,’ she advises, ‘look out for a sign that says Brackwell Caravan Park.’

They pass the town centre on their right. They drive cautiously for two or three more kilometres looking from side to side without seeing any caravan park sign and decide to turn around and head for the only store open to ask for directions.

‘Hello darl, what can I do for you?’ the female shop owner asks as soon as Bill steps through the doorway. She draws her cardigan closer against the rush of cool air.

‘We’re lost I think, we’re looking for a caravan park along here somewhere,’

‘Ah, righto, go to the end of the road here and turn right, it’s only 50 meters further and there’s no sign out front. Just look for the red flowering gum under the street light. There she’d be. You a tourist, are ya? Ya look like it in those shorts and T-shirt.’

‘Sure, we’re from Darwin and we’re just having a little look around. Thanks for your help.’

Bill spins around and exits the shop before the woman asks anything else. Back in the car he says to Clair, ‘I hope the caravan park owner is a daft as that woman, we’ll have it made.’

The shop owner is right. There’s no sign welcoming the traveller. The dirt road sidles up to a small cottage with a rustic *Office* sign with a finger pointing hand directing the visitor to a side door. Bill opens the door, automatically setting off a small bell attached to the latch. Clair follows him into the office.

‘Howdy folks, do you have a booking?’ mutters a man they assume is the owner. No employee would be allowed to look so scruffy.

Behind the desk stands a tall man with broad shoulders. His tussled brown hair droops over his eyes. He has a pen behind his ear and his dusty khaki shirt has a few cobwebs clinging to his pocket.

‘Evening,’ says Bill, ‘we have a booking for a cabin. We’ve asked for one furthest from the others.’

‘Hey, you must be William Anderson? I’m Chuck.’ He shakes Bill’s hand.

Bill introduces Clair. 'This is my wife, Clair.' Chuck grunts and nods.

'It's a busy time at the moment because of the long weekend. Everyone who owns a setup has come. We have a cabin on the edge of the park, it's nice and quiet there. Number 10. Just fill in this form with your details and I'll get my wife to get you the key.'

'Jennifer, Jennifer bring the key for number 10,' he bellows out.

'We haven't eaten yet,' announces Bill. 'Is there somewhere we can get dinner?'

'Well certainly, but not here,' he says. 'The closest is the local Brackwell pub a block away, you might be lucky. They might have something still going.'

A petite lady with mousy coloured hair hands over the key without saying a word, then retreats.

'If you go through that wooden boom gate over there, your cabin is right at the end of the road,' says Chuck, as he hands over their cabin key.

They unload the car and put on something warmer. They easily find the pub. Much to Bill's disgust the only item left on the menu is a plate of greasy fish and chips. He refuses to eat old memories and settles for a couple of Boags. Then they return to the cabin for the night.

* * * * *

Bill stretches as he comes outside onto the deck, then bends to tie the laces of his joggers. The wind has dropped overnight and first light brings a cool sunshine. Leaves blown from the overhead tree scatter in the corner of the deck. A possum has left his calling card on the hand rail. He casts his eye over the paintwork and grimaces as large flakes peel under his examining hand. *This could certainly do with a coat of paint*, he thinks. *The rusted gutter and downpipe could be renewed and the wooden steps shored up*. He calls to Clair through the door.

'Come on girl, time for our inspection.'

'Ssh not so loud,' she cautions as she comes outside zipping up her tracksuit top. She looks like a local already. To get their bearings, they leave the cabin and stroll along the dirt walkway that leads along the river's edge. There are about ten cabins exactly like theirs lined up, standing like soldiers shouldering arms. Further along is a shanty town of caravans hitched up to canvas or solid annexes.

‘Make a note of how many there are Clair, must be more than thirty of them. Look how they stretch all the way down on either side of the central driveway.’

‘There’s the showers and the laundry,’ chips in Clair, ‘but no camp kitchen or play room.’

‘There seems to be only a few spots for tourists. Look there’s one there and another over there. Did you notice the small tents pitched under the tree?’

‘Yep, jotted that down,’ says Clair.

Already folk are getting ready for the day. An eager fisherman primes his boat motor. Others rig their fishing rods and are calling across to their mates about where the bite is on. Kids race each other on their bikes. A woman pegs out an early wash on a makeshift line between setups. Two yapping dogs sniff each other and quarrel over a bone, then chase a wayward cricket ball hit from further down on the road. One or two folk are having breakfast on the barbeque on a stretch of grass out front. Older folk read the newspaper on their soft chair on the patio. Small groups gather in the middle of the road, chatting in the sun, warming their hands on their coffee cups but retreat when a car wants to squeeze past. Utes, four wheelers, mum’s taxi and tinnies on trailers jockey for any spare space.

Most of the setups have name plaques of varying lengths attached to them. Did you bring a beer along was retitled *didyoubringabeeralong*. Dun rooting, Weowna. Thru travelling, and Chardy Shack. Several flag poles fly the Aussie flag while one or two are already barracking for their footy team in the early pre-season games. The women seem to have put their energy into their pot plants out front. Some are on the deck while others swing from veranda posts. Everyone has a portable barbeque and an outside brazier for coolish evenings.

Back at their cabin, Bill and Clair lay out their notes on the kitchen table. Bill retrieves his briefcase from the bedroom and takes out a folder and places several documents on the table. The first is a layout plan of the caravan park. It outlines the tarred main drag and adjoining dirt roads. Each area where a caravan and annex exist is grid off and numbered in plots. The borders of the caravan park are defined by a tree line and rivers edge. The next is an evaluation form from the Tasmanian Lands Department. It clearly states that the property and existing buildings, including the manager’s residence and office has been valued at \$500,000 dollars for the coming year. Then a photocopy of an

official transaction paper from Jones and Miller Solicitors records that the current owner paid \$890,000 dollars for the property two years earlier. The next piece of paper is from Viney's Real Estate which says that the property has been on the market for three months and the asking price is \$1.5m. Attached to that is a small note that there had been two previous offers well below \$500,000 that weren't accepted by the owner. The last document, on buff coloured paper is stamped *not for public scrutiny*. The letterhead announces it is from Warfield Investigations and Forensic Group in Adelaide.

It hadn't been too difficult to secure this last document. Based on his sister's spy effort on the owner's dubious character, he knew exactly what to do. Last month Bill, dressed in a black suit, white business shirt and red tie, had simply arrived unannounced at the firm, approached the front desk and deviously introduced himself to the assistant.

'Good morning, I'm Jack Phillips. I'm a private investigator from Tasmania.'

'Good morning sir,' the assistant echoed. 'What can I do for you?'

'I am investigating a Mr. Chuck Reynolds whom I believe has been scrutinized by your firm before. There has been a complaint made against him and how he operates his business and I am seeking further defaming information,' he fabricated. 'I would appreciate your evidence on him to assist my investigation. Retrieve his file, will you?' Bill ordered.

'Mr. Phillips, I am forbidden to disclose any confidential documents on our suspects,' the assistant hesitantly replied.

Bill drew a Benson and Hedges packet from his pocket, extracted a cigarette, lit it with a monographed silver lighter, took a drag and blew the inhaled smoke skywards above her head. He then lent on the high counter with his elbows and smiled at the young lady. *Probably her first job*, he thought. She wouldn't have been more than eighteen years old. Her young face has minimal make up. Her slim figure sculptured in a dark navy skirt, white blouse and a cardigan with a loose strand of fake pearls at her throat. Her long fair hair is clasped in a ponytail high on her head. He referred to her by her name badge pinned on her breast.

'Come on now, Julie I'm sure a bright young lass like you could be very helpful to my case. This could put a stamp on your career; give you long standing experience for future legal ventures.'

Julie looked sideways at Bill, slightly raising her eyebrows in search of enticement.

'I imagine your boss doesn't pay you your correct entitlement for the after hour's work you do. That's right isn't?'

Julie lowered her head.

'How say we do a deal? Mr. Warfield need not know. I'm prepared to give you \$1,000 cash here and now for a copy of the Chuck Reynolds file. Just leave it here on the desk and make yourself scarce.

The girl was gullible and Bill had walked out with what he needed.

'It was worth paying the front desk girl at Warfield for this piece of info hey!' boasts Bill.

'You are the cunning one dear. Well done.'

'So seeing our Mr Chuck friend is wanted for fraud, they'll be on him like a ton of bricks,' he says.

'What a gullible idiot to think he could get away with embezzling the company he worked for,' says Clair.

'You know, I reckon he may have used that misappropriated money to buy the caravan park in the first place,' surmised Bill.

'No wonder they are about to seek his extradition to South Australia to put him on trial. I wonder if he knows that if he's convicted he'll have to repay the \$500,000 or spend five years in gaol.'

'Maybe.'

'So how are we going to tackle this, Bill?'

'It's probably better if you just leave it to me; follow my lead. I think we'll approach him this afternoon to start with.'

* * * * *

'Hi Chuck, a pretty good place you have here,' chirps Bill that afternoon as he and Clair deliberately stroll past the office.

'Such a nice place to have a caravan park, all these tall trees and the water nearby. No wonder people like coming here,' adds Clair.

'Howdy Mr and Mrs Anderson. How's your cabin?'

'Just fine,' they say at the same time. 'But please call us Bill and Clair,' offers Clair.

‘Y’all seen around the park yet? It’s about this time of the day that I’m fixin’ tu check things out. Wanna come along?’

‘Thanks that’d be great.’

‘Jennifer, you mind tha office, I’m fixin’ tu go out.’

They have to double their pace to keep up with Chuck who strides at a hectic rate, his long legs beating out almost the same route they’d taken earlier that morning. Chuck waves to the casuals who have come for the weekend, and occasionally stops for a chat. A couple who are permanent dwellers ask him if they can extend their veranda.

He taps the male on the back playfully. ‘I like you guys. Uh huh, you want the shade? Then no trouble, sure’nuff,’ he says without a second thought.

‘So how long have you been here, Chuck?’ Bill asks.

‘Two years. Two years too pesky long. Jennifer doesn’t like it here. Says she misses the warm weather.’

‘So where did you come from?’ asks Clair.

‘We come from Adelaide. I ran a big company there, not like this little caravan park. Trouble is I didn’t like the big boss and he hated me. He’d call me a dam Yankee all the time and I never get a promotion.’

‘You’d have a bit invested here, Chuck, then wouldn’t you?’

‘But only for a short time, want to make a bit out of it. Got this place up for sale. Gunna sell and make a bit, I need the cash.’

‘So this place is for sale?’ Bill queries. ‘Well I’ll be blown. We’re looking for an investment here in Tasmania. Thought about a chain of Laundromats across the State, but there aren’t enough of them to make it viable.’

‘Yes,’ chimes in Clair, ‘even something like Chickenfeed or Banjo’s would be okay.’

‘You willing to make an outlay for something like that?’ queries Chuck, knitting his eyebrows. ‘You’d be better off with just one enterprise, pooling your money into one thing and make a good go of it.’

They don’t contribute to his suggestion, nor do they disclose their intention. They just catch each other’s gaze without him noticing. Back at the park office they thank Chuck for the tour around.

‘Before you go Bill, come with me. I want to show you something in the shed out the back.’

As Bill strides off after Chuck, Clair nonchalantly passes comment to Jennifer. 'Chuck says you don't like it here Jennifer?'

'He said that?' She looks around to see if he was still in earshot. 'That'd be right! I know I said I wanted to leave, but I actually like it here sure enough. He's the one who has to go back.'

'But you have this place for sale. Why sell if you like it here?'

'He has a debt he has to pay. He needs the money. He really has to sell this place quickly. I'm not going with him. I'll stay around here somewhere; I've made some nice friends.'

'I'm sorry to hear that things aren't good between you,' says Clair as she respectfully retreats.

Back at the cabin, Bill and Clair share ideas. She relays what she has just learnt from Jennifer. They both agree that Chuck has got wind of the investigation and extradition. He knows he has been found out. They decide on \$500,000 for the caravan park. Just the exact amount of money he has to pay back to the company he stole from.

'I think he's in a bit of a panic just now,' says Clair.

Bill pulls out his mobile phone and calls the office. 'Chuck my friend, let's have lunch tomorrow.'

*

No Other Choice.

They live in a city suburb in a large house with an immaculate garden. The house is too big for them now that their son has grown up with a family of his own. Both of them are in their late 50s. Laurie loves his car, a midnight purple 1972 GT Falcon. It is like a baby to him. He'd had it from its birth, nurtured it, cleaned, polished and displayed it like you would an infant at a baby show. Every weekend he polished the exterior with old fashioned solid resin polish from a metal tin, and hand buffed the baby to a swanky gloss. His three door shed smelt of grease and petrol. It housed spare parts, tools, jacks, hoists, and a glossy poster, not of the March pinup, but GT Falcon releases for the past 20 years. A Roadstar caravan that they toured in over the summer break is parked alongside the baby.

Norma loves tending the garden. It is her pride and joy, with roses, gladioli, hydrangea, azalea and jonquils in spring. She isn't into the veggie side of growing but prefers sweet smelling flowers. Laurie, her husband, didn't want to vary his evening meals much and was a stickler for steak, chips and gravy, so she didn't grow vegetables.

Laurie drives a truck for a warehouse. The hours are long and arduous and workmates are not necessarily a friendly lot. The foreman has it in for him.

'You dickhead, there's no need to log your exact hours on the log book. Geez the boss will think you're a work-a-holic.'

Everyday the words change but the attitude is the same. The only reason the foreman demands this is that he himself doesn't pull his weight, taking extra coffee and smoking breaks beyond the set 10 minutes. Laurie's work ethic makes the foreman look like what the boss calls a lazy son-of-a-bitch. When Laurie obeys the foreman the big boss reprimands him about the log book entries and demands Laurie pull his act together or risk reduced hours. There were other discrepancies and inconsistencies between the foreman, Laurie and the boss. Starting times, rosters, delivery dates and addresses all seem to go astray

It is 4.30pm on a Thursday when Laurie drives in from delivering a load to a country town 100 kilometers from the depot. He's been driving for over two hours over dry dusty back roads and steep, windy mountain ranges. He's hot, tired and has skipped

lunch. The boss is waiting for him in the loading dock, arms crossed and legs astride. He doesn't even wait for Laurie to alight from the cabin of the 10 ton boggy wheeler. He yells from where he is, striding towards him with a pointed finger punctuating the air.

'Man you are nothing but an imbecile, a stupid dickhead in a useless piece of skin. Fuck man, what possessed you to take a half load to Charlestown, when you could have filled her up for the return and done a double load. Shit you're wasting my money and time. Who do you think you are?'

Laurie steps down from the cabin. The boss jabs his pointed finger into his shoulder and continues the sledging without giving Laurie any opportunity to say a word in defence. Over the boss's shoulder, Laurie sees the foreman leaning against the dock, cigarette hanging loosely from the corner of his sneering mouth. The foreman is clearly enjoying this.

Even before Laurie can explain how he had followed the foreman's instruction, he could feel the tension rising. In an unusual outburst of frustration he lets loose with a tirade of accusations against the foreman, about the harassment and injustice he experienced every week. The boss doesn't pause. They both shout at each other at the same time, voices gaining volume and pace. The foreman joins in with equal ferocity, claiming innocence and laying blame. Laurie's breath is shallow, he gasps for air, and he can feel his face heating, his temples throbbing ... a tension in his left arm ... tightness across his chest. His knees buckle. He crumples on the dock floor at their feet and loses consciousness.

* * * * *

Norma is caring for the two grandchildren that Thursday. Sarah is two and a half and Annalise is four. She loves them to bits and they love her too. Everything about her is soft. She carries them on her broad, pudgy hips, they feel secure with her cheery smile, her familiar blue eyes edged with crow's feet crinkles, and her blond hair in short loose curls.

The phone rings in the hallway. Norma continues to keep an eye on the children and answers the call on a cordless mobile phone in the sunroom.

'Hello.'

‘Mrs Simpson,’ a woman’s voice says, ‘this is Constable Barclay from Chesterfield police station.’

‘Yees,’ she hesitates, ‘what’s wrong?’

‘Your husband has had an accident at work. Paramedics have taken him to the General, and I’m sending a courtesy car to pick you up.’

‘What sort of accident?’

‘They didn’t say, just that he’s in hospital.’

‘I’ve got the grandchildren with me,’ Norma rambles a little too quickly, ‘what will I do with them?’

‘That’s alright, Mrs. Simpson, I’ll be with the car and I’ll look after the children while you are at the hospital. Is there anything else I can do for you?’

‘Yes please, can you ring our son at Jones Joinery and tell him to meet us at the hospital.’

Norma hangs up without giving his name or phone number. The girls stand facing her, watching, their eyes wide, not blinking. Norma’s face is blank and emotionless.

* * * * *

Bumping along, lurching and swaying—traveling too fast. Strapped in. Red and blue flashing, a droning siren. There’s something over his mouth and nose.

A muffled voice says, ‘Nearly there’.

* * * * *

The accident and emergency waiting room is square with rigid grey vinyl seats lining the walls. The air is stale from people waiting too long. Dog-eared magazines are scattered aimlessly on the seats and side tables where they’ve been left. To the side, a self-serve coffee machine waits for another \$2.50 to dispense instant flavoured hot water. High on the wall, a television mesmerizes those below. Restless exasperated people are waiting their turn. The automatic entrance doors open and close on their tracks at the slightest movement near them. Mothers with small children. A young boy in his sporting gear. A hacking cough, a whimper of pain, a tish-tish from a parent. A

sign over a glass window in the wall declares—Visitors are to register at the nursing station. Norma presses the bell.

‘Name,’ the nurse asks without a please.

‘Norma Simpson. My husband was bought here in an ambulance.’

‘Go through those doors on your left,’ she says curtly.

A buzzer sounds and Norma is able to push the door open. Everything is clinically white. Uniforms are cold pale blue, the floor too glossy, trolleys dally in the passageways, blinking lights, tubes and beepers. Every person is busy, recording, measuring, mending. She recognizes James, their son. His hair is ruffled. His face pained. His work clothes drape casually off his frame. She turns towards him.

‘Oh Jim, what’s going on?’

He grabs her shoulders, locking his eyes with hers, the message etched on his face.

‘Mum, Dad’s had a heart attack. They’ve taken him to the operating room immediately. He’ll be in the intensive care unit later where we can see him.’

James catches her under her arms as she slumps into the nearest chair.

‘He’ll be right Mum, he’s always been a fighter,’ he says as he crouches in front of her, clasping her hands in comfort.

There are no tears, just a sigh. Norma knew that Laurie would eventually have a heart attack; after all he had been taking Anginine for over five years now. He had constantly complained about the tension at work but he wouldn’t talk it over with her. He just came home at night and busied himself in the shed out the back with his vehicle.

‘Come on, we’ll go and have a cup of coffee. I’ll get Becky to pick up the girls and take them home. We’ll wait.’

They retreat through the waiting room, take the girl’s hands, nod and thank the Constable who had kept an eye on them while the girls amused themselves with Ella the Elephant on the late afternoon television.

It’s a long gap between stale coin dispensed sandwiches, coffee, neck breaking cat naps and dawn. They talk things through and think long and hard about Laurie’s predicament. They decide to persuade him to slow down.

* * * * *

A smell of freshly dead germs. Distant voices. Shapeless people around him. Haloed dimness. A hand pat.

A woman's voice says, 'You're in the General Laurie; you've had a heart attack. Doctor has had to put a stent in your coronary artery. It was touch and go for a while.'

* * * * *

Several days later during visiting hours they put their planned attack into action.

'Dad, you need to have a rest. The doctor says that you have to give up smoking, change your eating habits and start to exercise.'

'Yeah sure, how am I going to do that,' he replies hotly through his oxygen mask.

'I think the stress at work hasn't been too good for you, dear,' Norma says gingerly.

'Don't you start too! I can't afford to give up work. We have the mortgage to pay,' he answers sharply.

Norma leans in closer and brushes his hair off his forehead.

'Dear, there is no option. Sorry but we have to make decisions together: you, Jim and I. After what you've just been through you have to rest. Then we'll get you out of here and we can talk about what needs to happen.'

'Dad, how about I tow your caravan to that nice place by the river where you go every summer? You can put your feet up, do a little bit of fishing, and go for short strolls.'

'That sounds nice, don't you think Laurie? Take your sick leave and have a holiday,' encourages Norma.

Laurie sighs, 'Yeah I guess I don't have any options. Just get me out of here!'

* * * * *

Two weeks later their van is parked on a large space reserved for tourists in the caravan park. The plot is hedged with bottle brush and gum to provide some privacy. Jim had positioned the van so they can capture the sun but still see the river further over. It wasn't too far from where they normally parked in the summer. Though their usual friends aren't here, there are several other vans further along. In the fading afternoon sun, Norma sets the fold away chairs and table under the van awning, makes a cuppa for

them both, spreads the local newspaper out to do the crossword, then turns the local radio on.

‘This is Jersey FM radio 65.8 on your dial. I’m Max, your afternoon announcer. Welcome to this lovely river of ours on such a beautiful autumn afternoon. The temperature at the moment is sixteen degrees and overnight it will drop to eight. Keep yourself warm folks but stay tuned now for songs of the 60’s.’

Laurie began his month’s sick leave. He wasn’t particularly worried about the trucking company and didn’t think of them much, he took everything in his stride and settled back. Life was turning out rosy.

* * * * *

Norma takes the opportunity of the sunny lunch time weather to fire up the portable Weber barbeque under the canvas awning. Being careful to select a more healthy diet for Laurie, she grills some lean porterhouse steak on the slotted hotplate. Lettuce, tomato and onion are already on their plates on the card table. It’s the third week, and the end of their holiday is looming like an impending storm.

‘If we sell our city house for a good price, then paid off the mortgage and invested the left-over money, I could retire early and live off the interest,’ Laurie says knowing he didn’t really want to return to the trucking business.

‘That might work,’ considered Norma.

They then begin conjuring dreams.

‘We might be able to find a smaller house and yard that would suit us.’

‘Or maybe even a block of ground that we could get a demountable home to be built on it,’ they schemed together.

‘Somewhere along this river?’

‘I’d say so, I like it here, don’t you Laurie?’

‘Yep, it’s peaceful and I’ve always liked this area each summer.’

‘Today’s paper is here on the table. Let’s check out the real-estate section in the *Domain*.’

‘Where are we now?’ asks Norma, sifting through the real-estate insert. ‘Here’s one in Bass Street,’ she says as she scrolls down the list with her finger. ‘Fantastic views, three bedrooms, large living room, easy stroll to the shops, large yard with

colorful gardens and a single garage. Gosh, \$300 or nearest offer—that will be beyond us Laurie, besides it's too large, more like the hard work we have now.'

'Here's another, it's further out at Misto. Two bedroom wooden cottage, tank water, right on the water's edge, single garage, needs kitchen and bathroom renovations—\$250 to \$300—who are they kidding!'

Still reading and sifting, Norma finds a block of land.

'Here we are. A quarter of an acre up the hill here a bit—\$100. You know a small two bedroom demountable could work there. There's nothing much else around, certainly none cheaper than that.'

Norma looks up. There is silence from the other side of the table.

'Laurie what would you like?' She stops to give him a chance to say something.

He sighs and points. 'See that place on the other side of the road here; I've been looking at it, that's nice.' Directly opposite them is a converted caravan and annex, shaped into something that resembles a cottage. 'It looks big enough, it's nicely painted a cream colour, there are a few trees, and shrubs around it. It catches the sun and you can see the water from there. Look, it even has a veranda out the front to sit on in summer.'

'Let's go and have a peep while no one's around,' she suggests.

The curtains on the front windows are drawn—they shelter their eyes against the window to get a clearer view. The lounge is large with comfy recliners and a wood fire with a plush rug in front and a large TV against the back wall. There is a side table and lamp and a bookcase full of paperbacks. Through the side door they see light wood stained kitchen cupboards with crisp white tiles and upright gas stove and an alcove for breakfast.

Through the other window they can just glimpse a double bedroom with a black wrought iron bedhead and vintage white bed covers. They investigate outside. As they round the corner a slight breeze buffets them, and causes a Japanese maple to scatter spent red leaves on them like confetti. They discover a private alcove sheltered by a manicured hedge ideal for a barbeque area and a quiet place to read or have an evening wine.

'Look,' says Norma, 'Roses, azaleas and early jonquils, my favorites.'

'Catch this,' Laurie exclaims as he investigates further, 'a good size shed and a carport. I could live in something like this.'

'I adore it,' she murmurs under her breath.

* * * * *

When Laurie leaves the hospital they advise that visits to his doctor are mandatory. A month later Laurie's GP calls him in for a post operation check-up. The GP puts him through his paces. Weight, blood pressure, listens to his pulse rate, quizzes him on his progress to quit smoking, and changing his diet and exercise.

'There's something not quite right with your heart beat, Laurie,' the GP says as he places his stethoscope to different parts of his chest. 'It's strong for several pumps and then fades away, and your blood pressure is 190 over 100. It should be closer to normal. We'd better have a specialist check that out. I want this investigated immediately so I won't send you to the General because of the nine month waiting list. Are you in a health fund?' He asks as he sits back at his desk to write a referral.

'No, I've never bothered,' Laurie replies.

'You'll just have to pay the gap I'm afraid.'

Laurie could feel his wallet getting lighter.

* * * * *

Dr. Felix Meredith, Cardiologist, the brass plaque announces. His specialist practice metamorphosed a 1920s style brick inner city mansion that was passed up at auction. The polished wooden floor boards and twelve foot ceilings of the front entrance hall resonate past footsteps. Meredith's office, once the parlor, remains austere and dimly lit with minimal mahogany furnishings. Instead of framed rural scenes, charts of heart systems, miniature models and an Xray screen grace the wall.

'Mr. Simpson, I have your test results here from yesterday. The *Radionuclide* identifies a cold spot on the nuclear scan.' He holds it against the reflective light so Laurie can see.

'I'll be blunt with you. The stent that you had last month has only temporarily eased your problems. Your aortic valve is malfunctioning.'

Laurie swallows deeply to moisten his dry mouth.

He reaches for a model to explain what has happened. 'Your aortic valve has calcified and doesn't open properly,' he continues, 'so you need it replaced to regulate

the blood out of your heart. It's a rare condition and the operation is risky but we can't delay. I've scheduled you in for this Friday at the Melbourne Private Hospital where I operate as a visiting specialist. We are experimenting with prosthetic lotus valves and you are a perfect candidate for this operation. Other than that,' he continues, 'a heart transplant is the last resort we have. We'll have to arrange an emergency flight over to the mainland and an extended stay in the hospital for the operation and further observation and monitoring.'

Laurie is gob smacked. He stares at the evidence, his jaw agape. All he can say is 'Are you sure?'. Rapid thoughts of specialist expenses, hospital expenses, anesthetist expenses, recovery expenses race through his head. *If I can't work where is the money going to come from? And Norma? How in the hell am I going to tell Norma? What will she think—how will she take it? What if I don't make it ...?*

Back home, Laurie leads Norma into the loungeroom and asks her to sit down. She knows the news will not be good and tries to set her face in a neutral expression as she listens. She doesn't say it but her first thought is *oh my God I might lose Laurie*. Then she forces herself to take control and sits upright, stiff backed, in the sinking lounge cushions. *I must be strong for Laurie. Not let him see me worrying or crying. I'll take control*, she voiced inside. Then intuitively it occurred to her that it was only a month ago that they were dreaming of selling the house. Now they will just have to do it. That was that.

Later that afternoon, Norma telephones the local real estate agent. 'We need to sell to be able to pay my husband's medical expenses, we desperately need the money, please put a reasonable price on it for a quick sale,' she says.

She made an appointment at Centrelink for the next day.

Norma enters through the automatic sliding glass doors and stands in line with the others. There are four more ahead of her in the queue. The air, confined by the air conditioning, is stale from dripping umbrellas and muddy feet. It is strange being here. She's never needed to go on the dole or a pension, Laurie was always the provider. Some of the other people glanced at her—here she is, a well-dressed lady too young for the aged pension and too fancy to be unemployed. They are probably wondering why she is here. Most of the people are young and scruffy, definitely out of place in this

open plan modern building of glass partitions, lime green seating and beech desks and filing cabinets. On the outer walls are client computers where several of the more techno savvy were updating their details online.

‘Next,’ the pan-faced women called.

‘Hi, I’m Norma Simpson, I have an appointment today at 2 o’clock.’

‘What were you applying for, Mrs Simpson?’

‘I need to speak to a financial advisor on what available assistance there is.’

‘Thank you. Please sit over to that side and someone will come and call for you, it shouldn’t be too long a wait.’

Norma takes her place, careful not to side-glance at any of the other people around her. She waits.

‘Norma ... Norma,’ a voice eventually echoes between partitions.

She looks up, stands to her feet as the financial advisor greets her.

‘Good afternoon, Mrs Simpson. I’m Tim Andrews.’ He offers a limp wristed arm and shakes her hand. ‘Come this way please.’

Self-consciously she follows the short, balding man in a light grey suit past several open conversation areas to a double-sided desk designed to extract information from naive clients. Mr. Andrews listens attentively as she tells him of their plight.

‘What you will have to do Mrs ... ah ... Simpson,’ he says looking down at his appointment iPad, ‘is to get your husband’s GP and specialist to verify his disability officially. Take this *Income and Assets* form with you and complete all the details with the copies of the original documents. Make sure to attach the doctors’ reports. I’ll make another appointment for you next week to sort out the details.’

She collects the form, looks up to say ‘thank you,’ but he’s already standing to his feet looking over her shoulder for his next client.

* * * * *

Breakfast at Jim and Becky’s place changes their routine. There’s the aroma of tea rather than coffee and a sweet smell of melon and yoghurt rather than greasy bacon. Family conversation around the table centres on their changed lives and impending future.

‘We just have to consider ourselves lucky Laurie,’ Norma reassures. ‘You are alive and your prognosis is good now, even though you can’t go back to work. We’ve sold the house and auctioned off the furniture, well below the market value I admit, but at least we’ve paid the mortgage, Dr. Meredith and the hospital expenses. CentreLink have approved me as your carer and we have a pension to live off.’

‘Dad, it doesn’t matter that Becky and I won’t get any inheritance,’ Jim chips in. ‘The best thing is that you are still here with us. Now that you’ve sold the house and squared your debts you can stay with us permanently. It will be nice to have built in babysitters for the girls.’

‘Yes,’ throws in Becky, ‘It’ll give me the chance to go out during the day doing my own thing.’

Later that night, in the spare bedroom of their son and daughter-in-laws house Laurie and Norma toss ideas around.

‘I don’t know if I want to be a babysitter,’ Laurie confides to Norma. ‘You know I love the girls. But they’re overactive little monsters. I don’t want to have them running around all the time, like Cyclone Tracy. I want our own place. They can visit but I don’t want to live with them under my feet—or our son and daughter-in-law either for that matter.’

‘I realize that Laurie. Our lives are different now and we only have ninety thousand dollars left, barely enough for some land let alone for a shack. We just might have to live here.’

‘Tomorrow we should decide what to do.’ Laurie suggests, hoping for a resolution.

‘Okay,’ says Norma. ‘Why don’t we go for a drive along the river and have a look at what places are available? That way we can clear our heads and prioritize our thoughts.’

Daylight brings early showers that dampen the surroundings but not their trip out. While Norma prepares some sandwiches and a flask of tea for a picnic lunch, Laurie let loose the GT Falcon from its inertia in James’ carport, firstly checking the oil then idling the engine to warm it and cleaning the windscreen. They have no plans other than to look around. Travelling in a northerly direction their trip takes in fifty or so kilometers from the city, following the river, meandering through vineyards, smaller towns and the rural

countryside. They stop at several real estate agents to check the front windows for smaller cottages for sale. Nothing has changed. Everything is too costly.

Overhead the clouds form into foreboding masses. Gradually at first, the wind flattens the drops on the windscreen then they trickle away. But unexpectedly a sheet of fiercely driven rain buffets the car, blinding their way and forcing them to pull over in a siding.

‘Well,’ said Norma, ‘what better place to have our picnic.’ She reaches over to the back seat and brings the basket to the front bench. She unpacks the sandwiches handing one to Laurie and pouring two mugs of tea, placing them in the holders on the dash. The steam from the hot brew fogged up the front windscreen on the inside, making it all the more gloomy.

‘We’re not having much luck, are we dear?’

‘We could always live in our caravan in a paddock somewhere,’ says Laurie, trying to be funny.

It was this flippant comment that directed their discussion.

‘Why not indeed.’

‘But we need electricity.’

‘And a shed for the car.’

‘Plus somewhere to shelter from rain like this.’

‘What about the caravan park?’

‘We could use their amenities.’

They hit the road again with renewed hope. They park their car in the visitor’s parking lot out the front of the Brackwell Caravan Park. It is still showering a little after the storm. Norma unfurls her umbrella and Laurie pulls his cap further down his forehead, flips up the collar of his jacket as they head for the office. The trees have now lost all their leaves, the roses have finished flowering and have been pruned to short thorned sticks. The gazanias that edge the gravel path no longer produced their summer buds and slump drearily. Laurie and Norma side-step a puddle to get to the steps of the office. She places her umbrella on the landing floor to dry out.

The new owner Clair Anderson is managing the office and looks up from the computer as she hears the screen door bell tinkle and the glass door open. Taking off her glasses, she stands up and smiles.

‘Hello, may I help you.’

‘We were wondering if we could park our caravan here permanently, we’re in a bit of a pickle at the moment.’

‘We’ve been coming here in Summer,’ pitches in Norma, ‘we thought it might be on the cards to live here.’

‘Hmm,’ Clare hums, ‘regulations don’t allow living in caravans permanently in the casual areas. You can only do that in regulated sites.’

Then she offers: ‘There’s only one permanent site for sale at the moment I’m afraid. If you want to have a look at that, it’s straight down the main drag, past the first two streets on your left and it is the second set-up from the corner. Number 18 is in Teatree Circle and has \$85,000 on it,’ she finishes off.

‘Might as well,’ says Laurie as he exchanges a glance with Norma.

They leave the office and head in the direction Clair had indicated. Down the main drag, past the first street and the second. Number 28, 22, 16 ... Norma stops and catches Laurie’s elbow to get his attention.

‘Laurie! We’re heading in the right direction. What if ...,’ she trails off.

‘Here it is. Number 18.’

They stand dumb founded. Directly in front of them is the cream coloured cottage they admired when Laurie was on sick leave. They look at each other then back to the cottage, tears whelming in Norma’s eyes. Laurie cradled his arm around Norma’s shoulder, kissing her hair.

Norma sighs. ‘This is it lovey, I think we’ve found home.’

‘We have no other choice,’ says Laurie.

Overhead the afternoon sun peered through the receding clouds and cast an arc of promise over the sheltered tree banks.

*

Clean-up.

Clair Anderson casts her gaze over the caravan park. She stands with her feet apart and her arms crossed and mulls to herself. Now they own it what are they going to do with it? It's overcrowded with too many hangers-on. The place looks like a brothel. Stiff! Get them to clean up their act. Bring them into line.

'Come on Clair; bring your note pad and pen. Oh! and the camera. We might as well take the dog for a walk too.'

'Here Scruffy, ... walkies.'

Clair attaches the pink sequined collar and lead on her dog who immediately wants to scurry off on her adventure, but is abruptly halted by the retractable lead.

'Where will we start?' she asks.

'We'll go road by road, plot by plot, caravan by caravan, and then weigh up what we'll get rid of. You're good at design, my dear, so you call the tune.'

The casual crowd have retreated to civilisation. It had been a job just to clear the backlog of garbage, sluice the shower and toilet cubicles into respectability and mow and water the grass to remove the evidence of three days of festivities. A handful of permanents are the only inhabitants at the moment.

'Okay, in this lane are plot numbers 1 to 6,' Bill says as he unfolds a sheet of paper and studies the park layout, 'says here the name of the lane is Ghostgum.'

'Right, how original,' says Clair sarcastically, 'what about number 1? That garden shed looks crappy, and that entire lattice needs to be removed. Look,' she points to numbers 3 and 5, 'they also have temporary barriers and I don't like those pots out front. And the shade cloth add-ons like they have at number 2 will have to go, even gazebos and the outdoor barbeques.'

'Yep I agree.'

Clair writes this in her book and Bill marks the map with a cross in the appropriate place, and then takes a photo of the offending setup. They sweep through the park. Acacia Lane numbers 7 - 12; Tea-tree Circle numbers 13 - 18; Bottle Brush Lane numbers 19 - 24; Blackwood Place numbers 25 - 30. They are pointing and planning as they go. They note the hedges that need trimming, the lack of parking space, push bikes propped up on side walls, washing baskets under make shift clothes

lines draped with the likes of underpants and bras for all to see, rubbish tied up in black bags and the plots with weeds and long grass.

‘Do you see the locals at number 23 peeping through their curtains, Bill? I reckon they are bursting with curiosity.’

‘I did! Did you see the woman scurry through the back for a bit of gossip with the other permanent?’

‘Too bad, they’ll find out soon enough.’

‘That’s right and a few more changes that they need to know about,’ reminds Clair.

‘Bugger, look at that tan Cocker Spaniel over there doing its poop on our lawn. We can’t have any mangy mutt just wandering around like it owns the place.’

Clair claps her hands, waves her arms and yells out, ‘Oi, you piss off out of there.’ The dog replies with three sullen grunts, does a back leg shuffle to signal he has finished, thinks twice about sniffing Scruffy and struts off down the main drag.

‘Whose is that?’ asks Bill.

‘No idea, just keep it away from my Scruffy.’

‘Right! So let’s go back to the office and look over the whole plan.’

* * * * *

Justine notices the pair scrounging around the lanes and between every setup with disregard for anyone’s privacy. Then they stop in front of their place. She’s writing and he’s taking photos.

‘Trev come here,’ she quietly gestures to her husband. ‘What do you make of this?’

He folds his paper, puts it on the small table beside his recliner, wedges his thongs on his feet and peers through the curtains next to her.

‘Hmm, might be the new owners. I haven’t got a clue what’s going on. Go see Mavis, she knows everything,’ he says as he resumes reading his morning paper.

When the couple with the dog have passed Justine sneaks outside, creeps around her gazebo in the barbeque area and slips through the back hedge, irritably pushing aside the long fronds of the weeping willow that block the alley through to the next lane. Mavis and her husband of 50 years have lived in the Park for ten years. Fred is out

the front of number 26 in his cane chair, a terry towelling hat perched on his head covering what hair he has.

‘Hello Fred,’ greets Justine, ‘what are you up to today?’

‘Giddyay there,’ he mutters around the cigarette dangling from his mouth. ‘Got me a game of bowls later on, thought I’d give them a polish,’ he says as he swings a black ball back and forwards in the polishing sling. The warm resin smells like paraffin on boot leather.

‘Well, I hope you have a win. I’ve come to see Mavis, is she in?’

‘Yep, just give a holla.’

‘Mavis,’ she coos, ‘you there?’

‘Sure ducky, come in, I’m about to make a cuppa, want one?’

Justine steps onto the concrete patio slab through an opening in the lattice railing just as the screen door to the annex opens and Mavis appears from the kitchenette. She is short, her full-length sunny yellow pinny covers her roundness. Her grey hair is tucked in a knot at the nape of her neck and secured with a plastic hair comb.

‘I won’t give you a cuddle,’ she says as she gestures her floury palms in surrender, ‘I’m about to pop some scones in the oven. How are you dear?’ she asks.

Back in the kitchenette she circles the tin cutter through the soft dough on the bench top, sprinkling flour so the cutter won’t stick.

‘Fine, thanks,’ Justine helps herself to a chair as Mavis continues with her chore.

She lines up the scones in a lamington tin like mushrooms in a field, bathes their button heads in milk and slides the tray into the small gas oven.

‘Haven’t seen you for a couple of days, been busy?’

‘I’ve had a few things to do in the city so I spent the whole day there,’ Justine says as Mavis reaches overhead for three cups and saucers and a tea pot. She fills the kettle from the sink and ignites the gas cooktop. They carry on chatting about what Justine’s been up to.

It’s not long before the kettle signals the water has boiled. She puts three teaspoons of leaf tea into the pot ahead of the steaming water, and puts milk and one sugar in Justine’s cup.

‘Fred, your tea’s ready, are you coming in?’ she calls out.

‘Coming. Hmm, I smell scones.’

Fred sits next to Justine at the small wooden, four-chair kitchen setting, while Mavis places a blue checked table cloth over the stained rings on the table top. She carefully sets the warm scones wrapped in a tea towel in the centre with the home-made strawberry jam and cream alongside, and pours the tea.

‘Awe, these are yummy Mavis,’ hums Justine as she bites into one, ‘I can’t make them like this.’

After they finish, Fred, knowing the girls will want to talk, signals to a mate who is passing.

‘Oi, wait up, I want to ask you about your vege garden, I’d love to have one of my own.’

‘How ya going cobber?’ the friend asks, as Fred catches up.

‘Reasonable,’ he replies, ‘Mavis and I love *Dutch creams* so when’s the right time to plant them?’ Their voices trail off in the distance as they round the corner. A tan Cocker Spaniel scampers after them up the dusty lane, darting in and out of the other set-ups, sniffing here and there, stopping briefly to cock his leg on a parked Ute.

Justine broaches the topic she’s come about. ‘Mavis, something is going on around the Park, have you noticed?’

‘Well I did see them poking around the street just before.’

Justine briefs her on what she has just seen. ‘Fred reckons they are the new owners,’ she says confidently. ‘Maybe they’re going to seal and curb the roads? Can’t say they don’t need that. Remember the last big downpour we had. The place was awash for days.’

‘We had a leak,’ Mavis says. ‘Poor Fred had to get up on the roof and try and seal it off. Hmm, I’m not sure what they’re doing. We could ask a few of the others what they think is going on, couldn’t we?’

As Justine slips off her chair to go, Mavis wraps two scones in a serviette.

‘Here take these for Trevor, he’ll be sorry he missed out,’ she says as she hands them to Justine. On the patio she cuts three long stemmed Fragrant Cloud roses from one of her plants and wraps them in another serviette.

‘You have such a nice potted garden,’ says Justine. ‘The reds and yellows look great against the white latticed patio here, Mavis, and these red roses smell unbelievably gorgeous.’

‘I’ve had those roses ever since we came here. Our daughter gave us that Fragrant Cloud for our fortieth wedding anniversary. You know, something ruby on

your 40th. I'm glad Fred is handy enough to cover in the patio and do the painting. Besides I like my little space of peace and quiet, it's nice just to sit and relax out here.'

As Justine disappears through the overgrown hedge she holds up the roses and scones and calls, 'Thanks for these Mavis.'

'My pleasure. Bye luv.' Mavis's voice echoes across the garden.

* * * * *

'You know, there's only a few places that measure up to our expectations,' says Clair when they are back to the office.

'Some are really bad news,' agrees Bill, 'but a few are sort of alright.'

'No, these people will have to do something about their set-ups before we move on with the major changes. I think I will reinforce the new rules and regulations by sending them out again with a note about the individual offending things and attach the photo,' says Clair.

'I'll deliver them to the permanents, and we'll catch the casuals as they pay their rent and come for Easter,' says Bill. 'We'll give them a week after that to make good. Then I'll enforce the rules. I might even conduct some night searches to see if I can catch anybody breaking the rules.'

'Now you've got the idea,' urges Clair, 'bring them into line.'

* * * * *

Justine and Trevor have been in town doing their Saturday morning grocery shopping. Trevor parks the Hyundai in the carport. Justine gets out and goes ahead to open the annex door. As she does a piece of paper wedged in the door flops to the ground. She picks it up, puts it and her handbag on the kitchen table and goes back to help Trevor unload the car. Trevor struggles past her with his arms full.

'Thank goodness we only do this once a week. You'd think as retired people we'd avoid the Saturday rush,' he gasps under the strain. Justine manages a laugh. He doesn't like shopping.

'I'll get the last bags, you sit and rest,' she says.

Justine hears a loud gasp from inside. Then, 'Oh my god!'. She drops the bags and rushes inside expecting to find Trevor collapsed or in pain.

‘Get a load of this.’ He has unravelled a piece of paper.

‘Good grief Trevor, can you be sensible? I thought you were dying, yelling out like that,’ she scolds. ‘So what is it?’

‘We’ve got the same letter from the owners again about the new rules and regulations. They want to improve the appearance of the park,’ he said. ‘Remember this. No noise after 11pm, no walking around with alcohol, no barbeques left outside, no lattice, garden pots or gazebos, no clothes lines. Animals have to be on leads. Everything has to be fixed within a week,’ he recites.

‘Well, that doesn’t apply to us does it, luv?’

‘Hang on there’s a photo of this place with a note attached.’ He reads aloud, ‘You are reminded that one car per site rule now applies. The management have inspected your site and request that you remove your free standing gazebo and trim your hedge. We can arrange to have your hedge overhauled for a fee, please let the office know. There will be an inspection in one week.’

‘Well, I like the hedge as it is, weepy and willowy,’ Justine said.

‘I think it is a bit overgrown. We can’t get through to the back lane. I’ll trim it tomorrow; we don’t want to pay the management to do it. God knows what it will end up like. Might even lose it altogether.’

‘I’ll help you. What about the gazebo?’ she asks. ‘We need that for the shade in summer.’

‘The weather is beginning to cool off now. We don’t need it. I’ll dismantle it and store it away for now. We’ll think of something for next summer.’

‘Well, that was easy for us but I imagine there will be others who have received a worse note than that.’

‘Everyone had better do as they request.’

‘Or what?’

They exchange glances.

* * * * *

There’s a tap on their front door. There’s no yoo hoo so Justine comes from the kitchen to see who it is. Mavis is standing there. Her shoulders are drooping. Her normally neat hair has fallen from its clasp and clings to her wet cheek. In her clenched hand is the crumpled note and photo. Justine sees the note, opens the door and grasps Mavis’s hand

to guide her inside. Mavis looks at her through red-rimmed eyes. Justine strokes the hair off her face. Mavis lunges forward and hugs Justine tight around the neck sobbing into her shoulder. Justine lets her be until the heaving subsides. She pats her on the back then peels her off and holds her at arm's length.

'My roses.'

'I know.'

'My patio.'

'I know,' she says as she strokes the back of her hand.

'Fred's white lattice.'

'Yes. I'm sorry.'

The sentiments immediately kindle Mavis's tears and she sobs anew.

'Sit down here,' Justine says as she eases Mavis into a comfy arm chair and passes her a box of tissues from the sideboard. 'I'll fix you a nice warm cuppa.'

'Fred's dumbfounded. He's slumped in his chair just staring. He won't even talk to me. All that hard work to make the place feel like home,' Mavis keeps on. 'We've been here ten years, nothing has happened like this before, not even with that Chuck fellow.'

Justine pokes her head around the kitchen door and says, 'We'll think of something Mavis.'

* * * * *

Across the park a male voice calls out.

'Here boy ... come on.' The voice grows more urgent but is still loving. 'Get here, come on.'

The tan Cocker Spaniel, eyeing off a rabbit burrow, hears his master call. It darts through the long grass, past the tall timbers, along the lanes, through the hedges and eagerly heads home. The owner welcomes his mate as the dog jumps into his arms, nuzzling his face into the soft wavy hair. The dog licks his face.

'I'm sorry old man, I have to keep you in the yard. You're not allowed to roam where you like anymore.'

The Spaniel looks up with soft doe-like eyes and tilts its head. It doesn't comprehend the hopelessness in his master's voice. His owner places his mate behind a new cage-like fence alongside the carport. The dog feels the barrier but doesn't

understand why he is being punished. He lets out an unholy yowl. And another. And another. His distress is heard across the Park, like a prisoner confined in Alcatraz.

* * * * *

In her set-up, Justine suggests to Mavis. 'I think it best if I give your Sally a call, Mavis. What's her mobile number?'

'Here scroll through the names, I can't see anything,' mutters Mavis as she hands her mobile to Justine.

'Here it is, pressing the automatic dial.'

Ring ring ... ring ring

'Hello, Mum?'

'Is that you, Sally?'

'Yes, who is this?'

'It's Justine, a friend of your mother's from the caravan park.'

'You're using Mum's phone, what's wrong?' Sally starts to sound agitated.

'It's okay Sally, there nothing really wrong, it's just that your mum and dad are very upset.'

'About what?' she demands.

'It's probably best if you can come and comfort them.'

'But what's upset them?'

'The new owners want them to remove their trellis and stuff like that.'

'What! Why them?'

'Oh everybody's received this letter, everybody has to clean up. Your Mum's here with me now. She's quite distraught.'

'I'll come straight away.'

'Right,' says Justine. 'I'll make sure they are okay until you arrive.' She presses the red button and places the phone onto the couch with a sigh. It is going to be a hard next few days.

It takes Sally a little over an hour to arrive from Chesterfield. She drives her red commodore through the entrance to the caravan park, along the main drag and turns into the gravel road of Blackwood Place. She parks her car in the space allocated for number 27 and goes to 26.

‘Mum,’ she calls out, barging through the front door without waiting for an answer.

Justine meets her. ‘She’s having a little lie down. I’ll let you talk this out.’ Justine gracefully leaves.

Fred is pacing back and forth in the lounge room. ‘All that new fellow’s fault,’ bawls Fred.

‘Hi Dad, what’s the matter here?’

‘We have to pull the whole place down, or we are going to be chucked out. Here read the letter.’ He flings it to her as he slumps heavily into his well-worn corduroy arm chair.

Mavis comes out from the bedroom.

‘Hi dear, thanks for coming.’ They give each other a cuddle and Mavis flops into the other matching arm chair. ‘Your father’s in a rage. He’s going to challenge the letter.’

Sally takes in her mother’s red rimmed eyes and shortness of breath. ‘Can’t say you look the best Mum.’

She draws over a kitchen chair, sits it backwards, throws her leg over it sideways and reads the letter and notice.

‘See I told you,’ rants Fred. ‘What’s the use of being here any longer? It’s all gone to wrack and ruin.’

Mavis glances sideways at Fred, then sighs. She dabs her eyes with a white lace edged handkerchief and twists its corner.

Sally is divorced, in her mid-forties and works in Chesterfield as a social worker in a large multi-therapist complex. She tackles this problem the same as she would any other.

‘Mum, what is your understanding about this letter?’

‘We’ve been told to remove the lattice around our entrance-way and get rid of the pots from the patio.’

‘We don’t want to do that, so we have to leave,’ Fred interrupts.

‘Hang on Dad. Mum, what do you think is so special about the lattice and pots?’

‘The lattice gives us privacy out the front here. And the pots have all my roses in them, even the lovely Fragrant Cloud you gave us. I like it here and I don’t want to be forced to leave.’

‘Dad, are you really going to object to this notice? Have you and Mum talked about this at all?’

‘No,’ interrupts Mavis. ‘He’s digging his heels in. Stubborn as usual.’

‘Well no, we haven’t talked,’ admits Fred. ‘I’m sorry love,’ he says, turning to Mavis. ‘I just didn’t have an answer, and you were so upset, I know you love your garden pots and roses. I can get by without the lattice, but your roses ...’ He leans over and pats her on the shoulder. Mavis strokes his resting hand.

‘Right,’ Sally says. ‘Will you listen to what I think may be a solution?’

‘Sure,’ says Mavis. Fred nods.

‘First we’ll remove the pots.’

‘But ...’

‘Mum, wait. We’ll remove the pots but not the rose bushes. We can plant the roses out the front in the soil. Make a real feature garden of them. We’ll remove the lattice and in its place I’ll provide some quick screening shrubs to give you privacy again. How does that sound?’

‘It may work. We would be improving the appearance of the place making it more natural,’ admits Fred. ‘That’s what they want.’

‘I really like the idea Sal,’ says Mavis.

‘Good, I’ll call into the nursery on the way home and ask what would be the best to grow here. Then get them delivered during the week and next weekend we can have a working bee.’

‘I’m sure Justine and Trevor will help and the single fellow next door in 25. We’ll help each other in turns if this is what most of us have to do,’ said Fred.

Mavis sighs heavily. They are startled by a knock on the door.

‘Mr and Mrs Hulme,’ a gruff male voice calls out. Bill is out front. ‘Is this your red Holden Commodore registration number A * 56 KL in number 27?’

‘Of course it’s not,’ whispers Mavis. ‘He knows ours is the little Ford in our carport.’

Sally steps confidently out onto the patio. ‘Good afternoon, I’m Sally Overton, Fred and Mavis’s daughter,’ she says, extending her hand. Bill ignores the gesture. Her hand instead rests on her hip.

‘That’s my car; I’m visiting Mum and Dad.’

‘Mrs Overton ...’ Bill starts.

‘Ms Overton if you don’t mind.’

‘Ms Overton,’ he begins again, ‘the new park rules allow one car per lot, and other vacant lots cannot be used for extra vehicles or visitors. Remove your car immediately and in future use the car park out the front.’

‘Thank you, I will,’ she replies, but not before wrinkling her nose and poking her tongue out at Bill’s back as he leaves to do his rounds of other plots along the lane. Mavis stifles a giggle with her hand.

‘Onya, Sal.’

‘Now I know you two have a bottle of sherry over here in the cabinet. Let’s have a little nip to calm ourselves. Agreed?’

* * * * *

It’s well after the 11pm curfew. He told Clair earlier that he would patrol the Park again later that night and not to worry if she heard him move around. Earlier there had been a party in the vicinity of the permanent set-ups and he wanted to revisit the area. He dons his navy blue tracksuit with the hoodie, takes a flash light and stealthily leaves their cottage. He flicks the light on and scouts the perimeter pathway alongside the river. There are two late night fishermen looking for flounder with their hand spears and surface lights sweeping back and forth in the shallows along the shore line. There are no caravan lights on in Ghostgum or Acacia Lanes. In Tea Tree Circle a dim bathroom light flicks on and off. Only one of the tourist cabins is occupied. The rest are empty. He cuts across the grass towards the public road, keeping close to the tall gums and wattle trees on the edge for cover. He turns off his light and slinks between Bottlebrush Lane and Blackwood Place. Squatting, he peers at the same place he had observed earlier. There had been 10 of them. They had lit a fire pit at the end of the lane for their barbeque and the warmth later. Some were smoking dope. The noise had come from a guitar and lots of laughter.

They are still at it. Just as he hadn’t earlier in the evening, he doesn’t intervene this time either. The fair woman leaves the party and heads across the lane to number 19.

‘Goodnight everyone. We’ll christen my new deck next time,’ she calls out.

‘See ya Virginia,’ one or two reply.

He could see a new deck just in front of him, attached to the caravan at number 19. While people clear up and head back to their own set-ups. Bill stays low in the shadows.

An inside light in Virginia's set-up throws elongated rays across the lane like probing fingers. A male figure lying in wait across the lane eases himself back into the shadows. The inside light goes out and a flickering candle glows from her bathroom window and Bill hears the shower running. It is only then that the male wanders across the lane to her set-up. He mutters to something as he opens the door. It clicks quietly shut. Bill waits. No scream. It must have been a welcome intrusion, he thinks.

Bill emerges from the undercover, flicks on his torch and sweeps the beam across the lane. It rests on a few glowing embers where the fire pit had been. He kicks dirt on them to snuff any life. The beam glances off a black dog waiting patiently at Virginia's front door. Momentarily startled by the light, a deep growl warns Bill to move on. Bill stares down at the dog. This will be the first one I'll bring into line. They'll be told to go and there will be others to follow, he thinks.

The dark swallows him, but his footsteps can be heard on the gravel long after he disappears.

*

Free For All.

It had been another long lonely night. She stretches her arms and rubs her eyes. Five years of nights. Charley stayed for one weekend and took off. Tony got so pissed he couldn't get it up and Jim got it over and done with in just two minutes. Virginia eases herself up off the double bed. She takes the long cheesecloth drape off the brass hook wedged into the shack wall and pulls it over her frame. Then slips into leather thongs that barely protect her feet. She is well rounded and slightly overweight at 50. One handed, she ties her sun streaked hair in a loose knot and moves to the next room. Searching for some heat she prods the wood fire. None.

'Ah damn.'

She bobs under the door lintel and shields her eyes from the early morning light as it breaks through the tips of the trees to flood the clearing. A wisp of smoke here and there are the early signs of life in some of the other dwellings in the park. She collects some dry grass and twigs from under a 44 gallon drum, ties them in the hem of her dress and returns to her shack to start the fire. As the flame flickers to life, the smoke wafts from the cast iron fire box, lingers around the room then escapes through the roof hatch. She scrounges in the storage bin for some heavier wood to keep the flames active. Empty.

'Dammit! It's a good thing I can look after myself.'

Virginia again goes outside, collects the axe and a wood sling. She traipses down the dirt track to where she has hidden some fallen tree limbs under a piece of corrugated iron. She takes two of the dry gum logs, splits them and gathers them up in her wood sling. Shouldering the weight, she takes the long way back alongside the edge of the river. A mist follows the contour of the backwater, where the morning light creates an eerie cast between the tall timbers and swaying grasses alongside where the river flirts with the rock wall and the sandy edges. Further up the track she meets her only companion, her black Labrador that has followed her. She tugs his velvet ear and pats his back.

'Hello Fella.'

She has several passions in life. Her dog, her plot here in the caravan park and a sleek, black Volvo coupe. She is a true Tasmanian, lived here all her life. She'd been married long enough to have two kids who have since left the nest. Now she's married to

herself. The Park is her permanent escape from a disastrous marriage, a time for herself after a period of neglect. No-one acknowledges her at this time of the morning as she passes between the vans closest to hers.

* * * * *

From a dwelling across the lane Richard follows her with his eyes. He watches her every move, noting her perky breasts through the see-through cheese cloth. He allows his gaze to focus on her thighs and the parting of her legs down to her soft ankles. How he often dreamed of holding her in his arms and smothering his face in her silky hair. Inhaling her earthen smell. He doubts that she would protest, after all several times now she has held his gaze for longer than necessary.

Life is so different here than in Sydney. He graduated from University with a degree in engineering. There was a general unrest amongst the fraternity. Students paraded a dislike against the federal government's industrial reforms and rich fathers who wanted their children to follow in their parochial footsteps. It was almost a pledge between alumni brothers and sisters to exodus the city enmass to find alternative lives free of taxes and the confines of civic life. Most vacated to the warmer climate of Nimbin and Byron Bay but a few wanted the cleaner, greener alternative life in Tasmania.

Richard and likeminded others had been lured by small business opportunities to the Northwest. He set up his engineering workshop in Strathfield, a small town nestled in the lower reaches of Mount Honest. To be reliant on no-one but himself was the fascination. He had come with great expectations of freedom. At first it was an adventure, but he soon found that it was a lot of hard work. His plot at the park was a further way of weekend escapes with Donna, his current partner.

* * * * *

There's a soft rap on the annex door.

From within the van Donna bellows out. 'Bloody-well make yourself useful. Get that Ricky! And while you're there turn that shitty music down.'

Sighing, Richard puts down his novel. He snubs his cigarette in the ashtray then turns down his Dire Straits CD. Easing his frame out of the arm chair he shuffles to the door.

Virginia from across the lane is standing there.

‘Hi Richard,’ she says with a hint of plea in her voice. ‘Sorry for disturbing you.’ She grimaces at Donna’s bellow. ‘I’m thinking of putting a deck out on the grassy side of the van overlooking the woodland, but not really sure how to go about it. When you have a tick could you come over and tell me what’s possible?’

‘Sure, is now okay?’ he says, thankful for the break.

Across the lane she tells him what she wants to do.

‘See I want it about here but the van is the wrong way around,’ she waves with her arms.

‘I’d have to come out that door and walk the long way around. The ideal would be to come out through the van wall. But that’s not possible, is it?’

‘Well may be,’ he suggests, puckering his brow.

He taps along the van looking for some solidity.

‘What’s behind here?’ he asks.

‘That’s the area between the kitchen and my bedroom.’

‘You know you could cut a hole just here, make it into a door and use that as a link out to the deck.’

‘How am I going to do that myself? I don’t even have any tools,’ she fibs.

‘Well I’ve got a router and some carpentry tools.’

‘And what timber will I need?’

‘Okay, let me see,’ he ponders. ‘Treated pine logs for the stumps, some ready-mix to cement them in, floor joists on top of that, then pine deck flooring should do it? When do you want to start?’

‘Well as soon as possible. I want to get some solid use out of it before summer disappears.’

‘I’ll help if you want me to,’ he offers too quickly. ‘I can bring my engineering gear with me next weekend and we could start surveying and laying it out. I’ll order the timber and bring it with me; you can pay me back later.’ Too right she’d pay him back later.

‘Hey that’s great. Here, let’s drink to that.’

She goes inside to the fridge and brings back two VB stubbies. They sit on the grass verge in the shade where the deck will go.

‘This is a great spot Virginia. You must love it here amongst the tall timbers.’

‘I do,’ she says, without realising what those words might end up meaning.

* * * * *

Richard arrives earlier than usual the next Friday afternoon. His black work Ute draws to a halt in a cloud of dust. The tray is full of gear with the timber lashed down on the rack over the top. He steps from the sideboard, his khaki shorts and blunnies showing off tanned legs. Taking off his floppy canvas hat, he unfurls his curly brown hair with a ruffle of his fingers. Virginia pokes her head through her side door, restraining Fella who is eager to greet Richard.

He calls out to her, ‘I’ve come straight from work; I’ll unload this stuff, have a shower and come over for a beer.’

Refreshed and changed he strolls over to where Virginia is sitting on one of the fold away chairs in the shade. A waft of Brut aftershave clouds around him. She has anticipated his coming and has the cold beers waiting. He gives Fella a pat on the top of his head and slumps into his seat.

‘Thanks, I need this beer, it’s been a long slog today.’ She hands him a VB and he touches her fingers as he takes it.

‘How’ve you been?’ he says after taking a long drag of beer.

‘Good! It’s been a quiet week here alone. I’m looking forward to making a start on this deck though. I notice Donna’s not with you? When she coming down?’ she asks intentionally.

‘She’s not. This is a working weekend, she’d hate it. She likes to put her feet up on Saturday and Sunday.’

‘Right!’ Virginia makes a mental note not to relax too much.

He fuels her enthusiasm. ‘I’ve got everything ready to go first thing in the morning. I reckon we could have it done by Sunday. The first thing we have to do is measure up though so that I can start digging the holes for the concrete and stumps. You want to help me do that after we finish our beer?’

‘Sure,’ she says, making certain to be positive.

He collects a tape and a white spray can from the Ute as she explains again where she wants the deck. Confidently he asks her to hold the end of the retractable tape on each corner of a rough square and marks where the holes will be dug with a dob on the grass.

So that she appears friendly and not wanting idle gaps in conversation, Virginia makes small talk. 'I believe there is a new chef at the local pub. Some have been saying he's real good and I've wanted to suss his evening meals out. I've not got anything out for tea and thought I'd go there tonight. I've seen an ad for the cover band too—The Leftovers I think it was.'

'I've heard of them, they play stuff from the 70s and 80s like Cold Chisel and Dire Straits.'

'That's them,' she exclaims, 'I rather like their style. Hey, what are you doing for tea? You shouldn't have to cook something for yourself.' She watches his face for signs of hesitation. Without waiting for an answer, she offers, 'you deserve a break after such a hard day's yakka, come with me, it's within walking distance—when we've finished measuring we could go and have another beer there, then tea and catch the cover band.'

He glances at her to make sure he heard her correctly. He doesn't hesitate.

'You're on. I'd like that a lot.'

'Okay, I'll just get a light jacket and meet you out here,' she says as she goes inside.

She gathers the chicken breast that's defrosting on the bench for her tea and puts it in the fridge.

* * * * *

At seven the next morning she feels the van shudder as he wallops the ground with a mattock before shovelling out the first hole. By the time she gets dressed and has a coffee he has finished the eight holes ready for cementing in the poles.

'You're the early bird, aren't you?' She greets him.

'Hi, I wanted to make a firm start on this so the concrete can go off and we can start nailing the joists on before lunch. Last night was great, hey?'

'Sure was, I'm glad we went. The Leftovers turned out to be a great band and the company wasn't too bad either,' she adds with a slight chuckle.

He smiles to himself. He'd had a good time. She was easy to talk to, liked a laugh and a beer and listened to him prattle on about the things he was interested in. And as a bonus they both liked the same music.

During the day they work solidly together. Virginia is his unofficial technical assistant. She brings the buckets of water for the concrete. They carry the logs and planks between them. She retrieves the spirit level and nail gun when he asks for them. He is amazed she doesn't wince or cover her ears when the nail gun goes off. She is impressed with his building prowess. He is impressed that she helps out all day without complaining. By afternoon the deck is finished.

'Tomorrow I'll need to cut through the outside of the van with the router to make the doorway. Cutting metal is pretty noisy and there are always a shower of sparks, so you'd better take Fella for a walk when I do that,' he says, thinking of her safety as well as frightening the dog. 'I'll take the cut out bit back to my workshop to make it into a door and finish it off. In the meantime I'll cordon the hole off so that it will be secure and weather proof. Next Saturday I'll finish it off for you.'

'You're going to a lot of trouble for me Rick, thanks so much.'

* * * * *

There is a monthly get-together planned for the next Saturday night. Usually people in the immediate vicinity bring something to cook on the fire. They share each other's food and everyone has a relaxing time.

'We'll need some driftwood to start off the fire later on tonight, let's go along the river bank and see what we can find,' someone suggests.

Virginia and Richard and several others fossick along the sandy shore retrieving sticks, pine cones and drift wood. They stop as they pick up some of the dry sticks.

'So, how has your week been, Richard?'

'Okay I suppose. It's nice to be here on my own again.'

'So where's Donna?'

'She didn't want to come, hates the roughing it style here. She'd prefer all the mod cons and the luxuries.'

'She wasn't here last week either, was she?' Virginia states.

He hesitates. 'Well no.'

She studies his face. His eyes are downcast and dull, his smile masked. He doesn't look at her when he talks, but shuffles along, dragging his feet.

Intuitively, Virginia confesses. 'You know I haven't had a guy for a while, I miss having someone around. I can't find someone who is interested in me who can meet my needs—you get my drift.'

They stop. He faces her, holds her gaze, drinking in all of her, and then drops his head.

'We had a blazing row, it's not the first. They've been going on for a few months now. I realise that I don't even like her anymore, but she clings on.'

'I know what it's like; I've been through that. The hurt. The threats. The uncertainty of what they will do, then trying to please them. Sometimes you don't know if it's better to leave or stay.'

He raises his head, recognising a kindred spirit.

'You know—that's just how I feel. What should I do?' he implores.

She tilts her head to one side. 'You'll know what's right,' she says, touching his forearm and giving him a warm smile.

Before sunset, the self-installed fire pit at the end of the lane is lit as an invitation for those around to congregate. It not only provides a grill to cook the shared meal but warmth against the descending cool of evening. The *five o'clock somewhere* signal was well and truly underway. As custom has it, they bring fold away chairs, rugs, food for the fire, a candle or two and their required grog. A guitar provides the entertainment while a joint is passed from person to person to ease the tension of the day.

The get together goes long into the night, beyond the coloured sky at nightfall and the Cinderella chime. Some lie on their backs watching the sparks from the fire pit stretch up to the black heights, while others huddle in pairs, chatting and keeping each other warm. A couple of guys lean against a van annex animating about the up-coming footy season.

'I'm off to bed everybody—I'm so tired after finishing off the new renovations to the van and the deck today,' Virginia announces to the few remaining people. 'We'll have to christen it at the next get-together.'

'See ya,' most answer back.

Hazy from the evening her aching body pleads for a late shower. She undresses and wraps a soft white bath sheet around her body. In the dimness of her place, she lights a candle and some sandalwood incense sticks and inhales the exotic perfume. Her drape falls to the rug on the bedroom floor and she steps into the bathroom and her steaming shower.

Richard sees the candle being lit and her shadow move through the van from outside. He waits until she has been in the shower for five minutes or so, enough for her to relax. Quietly, though without stealth, he tells Fella to stay outside and opens the front door. He makes his way to the rear of the set up and draws the bathroom door aside, whispering her name.

‘Ginny’

Virginia, lethargic in the warmth, wavers.

‘Ginny, would you like me to soap your back?’

She recognises Richard’s voice. Instinctively she covers her breasts. He’s in here. He’d come to her. She feel her nipples stand erect, the warmth in her groin increases and she knows she will not turn him away.

‘Yes.’

He comes to her then. Naked, he steps into the cubicle as his eyes holds hers. His fingertips trace the trickles from her wet hair down her nose across her lips, down her chin and rests on her throat. She takes a breath. He outlines her nipples before he cups her breast. Raising her head towards him he kisses her lips—softly at first then more demanding. She groans as he lifts her out of the shower and lays her on the bedroom rug. He looms over her but she doesn’t care. Raising her hips to lure him she gasps as he enters her.

In the lane outside a torch scans back and forth and rests on a few glowing embers where the fire pit had been. A shadowy boot scuffs sand over them. Fella offers a tentative growl as the light glances his way. The dark swallows the retreating intruder but his hefty footsteps echo long after he has gone.

Get Out Of Here.

Outside, Fella, the black Labrador, barks loudly that Saturday morning. Several times. His brogue warns of an ominous day. Despite this, the weather looks bright. Each morning is like a barometer of what activities will happen that day. If it rained, you stay indoors, if it was sunny you have a barbeque. But today the river is calm. There is a little breeze. The weather is forecast as mild with mostly sunny periods. Jack the cheery breakfast announcer on Jersey FM radio 65.8 declares, 'What are you doing in bed you lot, rise and shine. It's going to be a beautiful day. You'll probably need your Sloppy Joes on for a while but by lunchtime you'll have them off'.

Fella barks again. Virginia pokes her head through the side door.

'What are you up to mate?'

He takes three steps forward, tilts his head on the side in total understanding of her question. 'Wuff,' he barks again, then whines.

'Oh it's not all that bad Fella,' she says in reply to whatever he cautions. 'Come on, we're going for a walk.'

Usually they strolled along the river bank, but today she decides they would walk along the side road to the corner store to buy something tasty for her lunch date. Maybe chicken breasts or gourmet sausages. No need to lock the door as it's only a quick excursion. As she passes the end of the road, Mavis gives her a hoy.

'Ducky, you going to the shops?' she calls out. 'Run out of milk I have, could you get me some for Fred's morning tea?'

'So skinny or full-cream?'

'Full-cream, he won't have any other.'

'Not a worry,' she calls. 'Pay me when I get back.'

Fella scampers over to see if he can get a pat from Mavis, decides he'd rather the excursion, and runs after Virginia.

The aroma tantalises Virginia as she enters the small store. It was a bit out of character but the owner installed a Lavazza coffee machine last month to attract more customers. It made perfect coffee and the smell of freshly ground beans immediately transports her to Morocco.

'I'm wanting something special for my lunchtime barbeque Ada, do you have anything different that I can impress my guest with?' she asks the owner. Ada is wearing her favourite grey cardigan under her shop apron.

'Well darl, I don't do this for all of ya, but seeing you are one of my better customers I'll let you into a secret. I'm expecting the butcher from town with my delivery pretty soon and I ordered some moisture infused pork steaks; well that's the fancy name he gave em. He reckons they are all the go at the moment and as tender as ...' she trailed off, not knowing what to compare them to.

'Hmm, sounds special,' Virginia says.

'He should be here soon, so sit yaself down.'

The beast is already belching steam so Virginia orders a latte and sits outside on the fake wood setting in the sunshine. Fella helps himself to a lap of water from the community dog bowl and flops on the courtesy rug.

There is a known affinity between dogs and butchers. Fella bounces to his feet the moment the van turned the corner. Inside the shop Virginia chooses some fancy lettuce, cherry tomatoes, shallots and the milk for Mavis. Ada unpacks her meat delivery from the cooler bag and takes out the pork steaks, displaying them to Virginia like prized Penfolds Grange.

'Look at these little beauties, as thick as a cricket bat, pale as a baby's bum and shiny as lip gloss,' hums Ada.

'And hardly any fat,' notes Virginia. 'I'll have two please.'

Like all good corner stores, on the counter is a 50 cent special of Ferrero Rocher chocolates in gold-coloured wrappers. Virginia takes a couple for Mavis and Fred as treats to go with their morning tea.

'So what dandy are you trying to impress?' she asks as she runs the purchases through the till.

Virginia didn't answer, no use giving Ada something to gossip about, but her blush was enough to signal that Richard was coming back this morning.

'Thanks for the great coffee, Ada. I'll see you soon.'

'Bye darl, enjoy your lunch.'

With the enthusiasm of a homing pigeon, Fella bounds ahead, scampers around the corner and out of sight.

* * * * *

Earlier that week, Richard received a text message from Virginia asking if he was coming over this weekend. He'd said yes. He wanted to ring her just to hear the warmth in her voice and to make sure what they were experiencing was real and not a one off. But he didn't.

Now Richard is eager to get to Brackwell this weekend especially as he worked late on Friday. He plants his foot on his work Ute, urging it through the timbered hills on the backroad from Strathfield to Brackwell. The short cut shaves an hour off his trip and brings him out at the far side of the township rather than the usual river side approach. Nearly there. He slows down to the 60 kmph restriction as he passes through the township on the last stretch of road before the caravan park. Past the rifle range road and the town centre corner.

There's a small group ahead. One or two crouching on the roadway with a few others standing on the sidewalk. A blue station wagon is in the middle of the road. Instinctively, Richard brakes. He pulls over, gets out of his Ute, thumps the door shut with the sole of his boot and walks over to the group. *A dog, a dog's been hit.* A crumpled body of a large black dog sprawls in the middle of the road. Its hind quarters are skewed sideways, a trickle of fresh blood seeps from its mouth onto the asphalt. Its eyes are mere slits.

'Fella. Oh Fella,' he groans as he squats beside him. 'What's happened to you?'

The dog briefly opens his eyes in recognition of his voice. The brushy tail lifts once and is still again.

'Man, I'm sorry about your dog, it just ran across in front of me, running like a bat out of hell he was. Couldn't brake. Is he dead?'

'No but he looks pretty bad. Is Virginia about?'

Nobody noticed the offender sidle to his wagon, open the door and slide behind the wheel until he fled off in a shower of accelerated dust and gravel.

'Not a local,' someone said.

Richard hears running footsteps behind him. Those there turn in her direction. She sees Richard next to the animal.

'Oh my god, Oh my god, what happened?'

He stands to face her.

‘Ginny, Ginny don’t look. It’s Fella, he’s been hit,’ he consoles her as he grabs her shoulders in restraint. Virginia sharply pulls aside of Richards grasp and kneels beside her best buddy. She strokes Fella’s head and shoulders. He doesn’t recognise her. There’s no movement. She lifts his face gently and cradles his head on her knees. The last drop of blood seeps from his mouth onto her jeans.

‘Fella, Fella,’ she rocks him gently back and forth like a mother coaxing her baby to sleep. She closes her eyes and remembers. Four years ago you were that mischievous puppy, a black bundle of fur tugging at my shoelaces, chasing the seagulls on the sand. You grew so quickly. You forever pestered me for something to eat, anything meant for humans. Every day, you greeted me with your sloppy grin and thrashing tail, just so I’d ruffle you. We explored, went for walks together every day. You were an unrestrained free spirit. The images stop as Richard kneels behind her and places his hands on her shoulders.

‘Ginny, we’ll take him to the Animal Hospital,’ he says gently.

‘Christ Richard, how could you do this to him?’ she spat at him. ‘He likes you.’

‘Not me love. I just came upon it.’

‘That’s right,’ someone said. ‘The other guy just took off.’

Richard retrieves an old rug from his Ute and places it on the road.

‘Ginny, let me look after him.’

She says nothing. She doesn’t move. He gently lifts the dog onto the blanket.

Wraps it around the lifeless body and places him the back of the Ute.

‘Come on Ginny,’ he coaxes her tenderly to her feet.

It hits her then. He allows her to thrash his chest with her fists, again and again.

‘Why ... why ... why Richard?’ Then sobbing, falls into his arms.

* * * * *

The return trip to the caravan park is strained. The unbroken silence harnesses their thoughts. As if in a trance, he drives through the park entrance, past the office and the car park, down the tarred main drag and turns down Bottlebrush Lane to her set-up at the end. The same place their bodies interlocked in frenzied passion two weeks ago.

‘Do you want me to come in?’ he asks, ‘Or shall I leave?’

She just shakes her head side-to-side. ‘Later ... maybe,’ she hesitates.

Virginia leans on the side door; a folded letter jammed in the opening falls to the floor. The earlier shopping dangles in a plastic bag from the inside handle. She retrieves them and places them on the kitchen table, and then, flops on the lounge just to let her mind re-wind, fast forward, re-wind, fast forward over the events of the morning. The tears run freely.

* * * * *

A tap on the door breaks through the endless fog of thoughts.

‘... ... there? Ducky, you there?’

‘Yes Mavis, come in.’

A cloud of rose talc precedes her entrance. ‘I won’t stay, I just want to say I’m sorry love, I’ve heard about it.’

‘Thanks. It’s a loss that can’t be undone Mavis. Sorry for the holdup with your milk, somebody has brought my groceries here,’ says Virginia as she passes it over and presses the chocolates into Mavis’s hand.

‘Oh ducky that’s so sweet of you. I’ll go now and leave you in peace. Oh I see you’ve got your letter from the owners too,’ she says as she points to the folded letter on the kitchen table.

Virginia had forgotten the letter. With heavy footsteps she slowly moves around the table. She reaches for the letter and gingerly unfolds it. The letter is written on official caravan park letterhead.

Virginia Bradley. Site number 19, Bottlebush Lane.

We have been monitoring the permanent residents over the last month for compliance with the park rules. It has been noted that you have breached regulations. The owners insist that you deal with the following instructions immediately. We did not authorise the erection of the four by four metre deck on the western side of your dwelling. This must be dismantled and removed. On the evening of Saturday the 12th February you lit an outdoor brazier for a party that went beyond the 11pm curfew. This serves as a warning that open fires and noise will not be tolerated. The owners have also observed your dog roaming around the park unrestrained. Like all other residents who have an animal it must be on a lead when walking and kept indoors or in an enclosure.

*Clair and William Anderson
Owners of Brackwell Caravan Park*

Letter in hand, she heads to the park office, opens the entrance door and steps inside. In the office Clair Anderson spots the assault coming. She puts on her dark rimmed reading glasses and busies herself in contrived bookwork behind her desk.

‘How come you’re accusing me of holding a party and lighting a fire?’ Virginia blurts, waving the letter clutched in her hand.

Behind the counter, Clair calculatingly raises her head and her eyebrows at the same time. ‘You can lower your tone, dear!’

‘It wasn’t my party, we were all there. It wasn’t only me, there were about ten of us.’

‘And who might they be?’

‘That’s for you to find out,’ she slams back.

‘We have it on reliable authority exactly what went on that night,’ says Clair, raising one eyebrow. ‘And that you exceeded the 11.00pm curfew and...’

‘But we weren’t noisy,’ Virginia interjects.

‘I haven’t finished. The fire was closest to your place, so you will have to take the responsibility.’

‘That’s unfair. And what’s this about the deck? It was constructed by an engineer, it’s perfectly sound.’

‘That’s not the point; you didn’t get consent for the addition. It has to be dismantled.’

‘That’s unreasonable, there’s nothing wrong with it.’

‘Rules are rules,’ is her answer. ‘That goes for that dog of yours too.’

‘For your information’ ... *don’t falter* ... ‘my dog was run over and killed this morning,’ Virginia says as she lowers her head.

‘Well that’s your fault isn’t it? Probably because you let it run wild.’

In defiance Virginia holds Clair’s gaze and says, ‘Fella was a free spirit, he wasn’t meant to be’ ... *keep it together* ... ‘he wasn’t meant to be controlled’.

‘That’s what the rules are for. Dogs must be restrained.’

‘That’s so cold hearted.’

Virginia turns and slams the door. The bang dislodges the entrance bell overhead and rocks the empty vase on the information table just inside the room.

* * * * *

Clair sat still for a bit. Can't say she didn't expect that outburst. Several have complained about the changes already. Just wait for the rest of it ...

'How about a coffee break,' asks Bill as he plies his work boots off outside the door?

'Good idea, there's something we need to talk about.'

At the rear of the office, Clair boils the electric jug and makes two instant Nescafé's. She opens a packet of Scotch fingers and sits back on the stool.

'So?' questions Bill.

'That Virginia Bradley was just here, complained like heck she did.'

'About what?'

'That letter we sent out about breaking the rules.'

'Well, we've had a few of those, haven't we?'

'I don't like her, she's too smart for her boots. Came in here like lady muck squaring the blame on the others, refusing to remove the deck.'

'Well, did you tear strips off her?'

'Didn't have a chance, she tore out of here in a rage. She said I was cold hearted.'

'Not too far wrong is she?'

'What's that supposed to mean?'

'Sorry, a joke.'

'This is serious, Bill. We must continue to make an example of her otherwise the others will buck the system as well. You'll just have to tell her to pack up and leave.'

'That'll reduce out monthly takings, you know.'

'That's just like you, think about the money. When we start up the other enterprise here, we'll make it back, you'll see.'

Clair stares past him, out the window across the plots and lanes towards the river. An ominous breeze clatters an empty beer can from someone's party the previous night along the road.

* * * * *

Richard, never content to wait anywhere for too long, sits on her side entrance step. He wasn't sure of his rights at the moment. But he didn't want to lose what he had found either. Virginia turns into the lane, her step slower and with less spring. Richard notices the downcast eyes, her stooped shoulders. He stands as she approaches.

‘Hi Rick,’ she sighs. ‘I’m glad you came back. Sorry about this morning.’

‘It’s okay, I understand.’

‘Heck, I could do with a beer,’ she says and tugs him inside by the hand.

He opens his arms for her to come to him. He strokes her fair hair and nestles his face in the earthy smell.

‘It’ll be fine,’ he soothes.

‘That’s not the end of it. I had a run in with the office just now over some regulations I’m meant to have breached. Here’s the letter that started it all.’ Virginia flings it across to him.

‘Let me get us something to eat and I’ll tell you what happened. I was going to have something special but we’ll just have to have pot luck now.’

She prepares cheese and tomato sandwiches and cracks two VBs. She slurps out of one and passes the other to Richard.

‘It was only when that Anderson woman told me to lock up my dog that I remembered a saying my mother had. Her favourite was “*when things cloud your day and all behind you looks gloomy, see only the bright things and carry them forward with you*”. I can’t ... I won’t let the loss of Fella make my life gloomy. The brightest thing to carry forward is that he’s still a free spirit and on the loose.’

‘He’d like that,’ he says as he strokes her hand.

Over lunch she tells him about the accusations and ridicule about Fella and the worst thing of having to uproot the new deck.

‘So she said to pull it down, did she?’

‘She was more emphatic than that. “Dismantle it” she demanded. But I told her in uncertain words that I wouldn’t.’

‘I’ll stand up for you, I’ll explain the construction of it and prove it’s safe,’ offers Richard.

‘I don’t think that’s the problem. Apparently you have to get permission for any additions you plan for your set-up, prior to starting. That’s their beef.’

‘Did they say why?’

‘Nope. Just pull it down.’

* * * * *

After lunch on Sunday they retire to the deck for a couple of beers and to enjoy the warmth of the day. Their favourite country and western music filters from the player in the van. Trevor and Justine from further up the lane are ambling along filling in time. Seeing them, Virginia calls out to come and join them.

‘Wait a bit,’ Trevor says, ‘we’ll go get our folding chairs.’

They return with chairs under arm and a smirk on their face. ‘We smuggled our bottle of red in this cold water container, can’t be seen to walk around with grog can we?’ says Trevor, as Justine produces two stemmed glasses from her organic hessian carry bag.

‘It’s five o’clock somewhere, isn’t it?’ They share a laugh.

‘Sorry to hear about Fella,’ Justine offers as she unfolds her chair on the deck.

‘Thanks, though I feel I’m on the mend, Rick has been really comforting,’ she says as she catches his eye.

‘These rules are beginning to get under my skin,’ says Justine. ‘Poor Mavis and Fred were in a terrible state the other week, pulling down their lattice and replanting the roses and new trees in front section. At least all we had to do was trim the hedge and take the gazebo down. Harold from number 25 had to lock up his dog. Poor Jake howled and howled for ages.’ As if by cue Harold, with Jake on a lead, squeezes through the perimeter trees bordering the dirt track. They all wave.

‘Hi Harry,’ says Trevor as he comes by. Jake waggles his torso like a sprinkler in the back yard to rid the water from his swim. Bare footed and wearing only shorts, Harold loops Jake’s lead over a stump and squats on the grass verge, the fair stubble contrasts against his tanned muscular legs and arms. His tussled sun bleached hair and chest pelt signal a modern day Robinson Crusoe.

‘Sorry about the moaning and groaning from this dog of mine. Poor guy doesn’t understand that he has to be on a lead and penned up all the time.’

‘We understand Harry, the dog’s not to blame. So many changes for everyone,’ chips in Richard.

‘Here, you want a beer?’ asks Virginia.

‘I only drink beer when it’s lite, Luv. It’s not dark yet now so what are we waiting for?’ he jests.

‘In that case, here’s a can.’

‘Ta,’ he answers. They all laugh.

‘You lot mind if I come over,’ says a voice across the lane from behind the hedge. Mavis appears. ‘Heard the chatter from over there. Fred’s gone to bowls so I could do with a bit of company. Brought some cheese squares from the oven,’ Mavis offers as a bribe as she unfolds her beach chair, without waiting for an answer. ‘Hello everyone,’ she greets.

‘Anyone with nibbles is welcome here,’ says Virginia.

Mavis puts the container of freshly baked squares on the deck. She re-opens the twist top of a small coke bottle to take a swig. Then, with a snap of the wrist breaks a cheese square and tosses half over to Jake who devours it immediately.

* * * * *

Mid-afternoon, William Anderson thunders up the lane.

‘Here’s trouble,’ Harry says. ‘I’m off, come on Jake, time to scat.’ He grabs the dog’s lead and makes a beeline for the tree cover.

The others hurriedly conceal their drinks and make feeble excuses to leave.

Richard looks up the lane to see what has caused the quick retreat. ‘Now what?’ he says.

He stands and faces William Anderson squarely as he advances towards Virginia’s set-up. Virginia stands beside him, hands on her hip.

‘Ginny, let me do the talking.’

Bill stops short of the front door, feet astride, arms crossed. Un-smiling.

‘What can we do for you?’ asks Richard.

‘Ms Bradley has already been told what to do,’ he replies.

‘What might that be?’

‘This has nothing to do with you.’

‘It has everything to do with me if it is about the deck that I constructed for her.’

‘It’s more than that. Ms Bradley abused my wife. She called her a cold hearted bitch. Thumped the counter and threatened to get even.’

‘That’s a lie,’ Virginia says, as she takes a step forward, nose slightly in the air. ‘I said she was cold hearted.’

‘That’s abusing my wife. I’m going to speak to my lawyer and have you charged.’

‘What? You can’t do that for such a small thing,’ chips in Richard. ‘Everyone calls other people names all the time.’

‘You stay out of this mate, this is not your problem.’

‘Well I’ve just made it my problem ... mate,’ spurts Richard as he steps forward and shoves Bill’s left shoulder.

‘That’s it, I was going to be reasonable but you’ve made this impossible. Get out... That’s it. Get out,’ he yells, pointing his index finger directly at them.

‘What do you mean get out?’

‘Not only remove your deck, but dismantle your annex and remove that and the caravan. You’re no longer welcome here.’

‘You can’t evict me just like that. If I haven’t paid my rent, you might have some leg to stand on. You can’t just chuck me and my set-up out,’ claims Virginia.

‘Well, let me tell you something,’ he says snidely, squinting his eyes. ‘You don’t have a leg to stand on. This land is mine. You don’t own the land, you only rent it from me at a monthly rate. I can do what I like when I own the land, you only own the set up. I can ask you to remove it and I just have.’

‘You heartless bastard,’ spits Richard.

‘Your rent is paid to next week, that’s all you have. Get out of here.’ These are his last words as he turns and strides back along the lane.

‘We stuffed that up good and proper,’ Virginia says, flopping down on the front step.

Justine, Trevor, Mavis and Harry trickle out of their eavesdropping hidey-holes.

‘I can’t believe what I just heard,’ says Mavis. ‘We’ve all tried to obey the rules for the sake of peace and quiet.’

‘Yeah don’t ruffle the feathers or look what happens,’ says Trevor. ‘I mean we didn’t want to cut the hedges and take down the gazebo but we thought it better to just shut up and get on with it.’

Mavis chips in ‘Look what I had to do. If it wasn’t for our Sally, Fred and I would be in the same boat. We aren’t in a position to complain, or we get thrown out on the street.’

‘It’s like that Bill fellow has two standards,’ suggests Harry. ‘Or maybe two minds. Mister nice guy on one hand and if you challenge him, bastard on the other.’

‘There’s no hope then I’m done for,’ says Virginia.

Harry continues. 'That's it, you can't do anything. We don't have a leg to stand on. Us plebs have no comeback. There aren't any laws on our side.'

'We'll help you to dismantle this here,' says Harry. 'We'll show him one big happy family.'

'Too right we will, we'll pitch in,' says Trevor.

Virginia heaves a long sigh. 'Hell. What will I do, Rick, where will I go? I can't put this set-up in another caravan park. In fact I don't want to live in a caravan park again if this is what it's like.'

Richard has been quietly thinking. 'I've got the obvious solution you know. You could bunk up at Strathfield. I've a spare room. Stay there as long as you like. Move on when you want to. What do you say?'

Virginia looks back over her shoulder at her set-up in disbelief.

* * * * *

The next weekend the third load on Richard's Ute, heading for Strathfield, is piled high with the dismantled deck structure. A Budget truck driven by Richard's mate is stacked with the flimsy annex sheets and furniture with the caravan towed behind. Virginia's car is piled to the roof with personal belongings. Formal goodbyes have already been said, but those in Bottle Brush Lane and Blackwood Place line the lane in respect, like mourners at a funeral procession, signalling solemnly as they pass by. Bare ground where number 19 had been gapes like ground zero.

* * * * *

Richard's rustic farm house rests on a grassy knoll amongst the red gums overlooking the open cow paddocks. At dusk they sit on the top step of the veranda. Crickets serenade from the undergrowth. The warm breeze carries the earthy smell of newly mown hay from across the valley. On the horizon a harvest moon escapes from behind the rolling hills.

'I could suffer it here.'

'It's time for a new beginning then, don't you think?'

'I think I'd like that Rick.'

'Well in that case, I have something for you,' he says as he steps down and disappears around the corner. He returns with his hands behind his back.

‘Shut your eyes and hold out your arms on your lap’ he demands. ‘Hold steady now.’

She feels a squirming weight. He says ‘Open,’ just as she receives a warm lick on her cheek.

On her lap the round dark eyes of a black Labrador puppy searches her face for acceptance. Virginia strokes its soft floppy ears and plants a kiss on its forehead.

‘Oh Rick, he’s beautiful,’ as a solitary tear of happiness trickles down her cheek.

*

How Does Your Garden Grow?

It all starts with the question on a clear spring morning.

‘What are those things there?’ asks Frank.

Justine replies, ‘Aubergines.’

‘Orbers jeans, never heard of them.’

‘Aussies call them eggplants, but the Italians call them aubergines.’

‘What? Can’t hear you. Haven’t got my hearing aids in,’ Frank says in a raised voice with his hand cupped to his right ear.

‘Eggplant,’ says Justine, a little louder.

‘I thought you said something about jeans, now you telling me you’re growing eggs. I don’t understand you.’

Frank turns and disappears through her hedge, waving his hands in the air above his head in surrender.

Frank has the habit of just appearing. He has little respect for privacy; six foot hedges weren’t considered fences in his book. He’s the latest newcomer in the park. Single, podgy, on a pension and stone deaf. His head sprouts tufts of grey hair from behind his ears to around the top of his neck, exposing a shiny dome. He’s probably about 60 years old. The local publican of the Blackwell Hotel suggested he look for a place at the caravan park.

‘You can’t live upstairs here for ever, mate.’

He took up residence in number 30 Blackwood Place opposite Harry. Harry wasn’t all that pleased because Frank didn’t put his hearing aids in regularly. Rather, he’d turn the radio up so that he could hear it. Those in the surrounding lanes heard it too. When he answered his phone, everyone heard his conversation.

‘Yeh, yeh, North Melbourne lost again on Sattade.’

‘...’

‘Don’t rub it in, you old bugger.’

‘...’

‘Rightio mate, see you at the pub at three.’

Justine is quite proud of her little courtyard vegetable garden. Although it's only one metre by three she is able to grow things she and Trevor like the most. Italian things. Aubergine, capsicum, basil, parsley, zucchini, broad beans, tomatoes and garlic.

'I bet that was you who left the beans hanging in a plastic bag on my door handle,' Mavis says, when Justine's plants overproduced. Other times Norma calls in for a bit of this or that.

'Can I have a sprig of parsley, luv, I'm thinking of having scrambled eggs in the morning.'

'Sure, I only have the flat leaf variety because that's better in Italian dishes, but it's okay for eggs too. Come and we'll pick you some now,' Justine says.

It was occasions like these that gave Justine the idea. Most of the residents didn't have enough room around their set-ups for growing vegetables and herbs, or couldn't be bothered. Justine chooses a day where she thought there was general peace in the park and that no-one had any complaints or grumbles, least of all Bill and Clair, the owners. She picks two zucchinis from her garden and puts them in a brown paper bag. Long, dark green, firm zucchini, not like the ones you get at the general store that are limp and squishy on the ends. She waits until Bill is out of the office doing his chores in the grounds and casually saunters up the main drag towards the office. Clair is tidying up outside, sweeping the entrance way.

'Hello Clair, how's things,' she asks her as she gets closer.

'Justine, Hi. Pretty good today, thanks.'

'Great weather, don't you think? Just a hint that spring's around the corner.'

'Yes, I suppose. But that means more tourists, more work.'

'Well, here's something to brighten your day,' she says as she hands the zucchinis to her.

'Gee, thanks Justine, that's really nice of you,' she says as she accepts them and unfolds the top of the brown paper bag to peek inside. 'These are really great. Where did you get them from?'

'I grow them in my vegie patch.'

'You've got a vegie patch?'

'Yep, a small one just inside our barbeque courtyard. I try and grow things in season.'

‘I don’t have the time for stuff like that,’ says Clair. ‘Not that I know how to grow vegies anyway. What’ll I do with these?’

‘Just slice them and fry them in a pan with butter and some garlic, then sprinkle some parsley and parmesan over them. Rather scrumptious as a side dish.’

‘I must come and have a look someday.’

‘Well, are you busy now? I’ve got an idea that I’d like to talk to you about.’

‘Well, no, we’re not really busy at this moment. I could do with a break. I’ll just put the *back soon* sign on the door here.’

‘Come with me along Bottlebrush Lane and I’ll explain.’

They fall in step, like old friends out on a shopping spree, and casually stroll along the main drag and turn into the lane.

* * * * *

Justine’s target is the plot where Virginia used to have her van and annex that lay vacant since she was evicted. But first she wants to show off her garden. Clair follows Justine through a small arbour to her small courtyard vegetable patch on the side of her set-up.

‘It’s not large but last year I had climbing beans over there,’ she explains to Clair pointing to the corner. ‘And the season just gone, I managed to grow broad beans here. All my herbs are in those terracotta pots. Marjoram, basil, parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme.’

‘Sounds like a song,’ says Clair.

‘There’s the zucchini bush that your two came from,’ she points to the sprawling dark green plant that takes over half the bed at their feet. Supporting a broad yellow flower in her fingers, Justine continues, ‘This here will turn out to be another zucchini. The only trouble is they take up so much space there’s little room for anything else. I’d like to grow some other things.’

‘You’ve done really well Justine. They look so healthy.’

‘There’s nothing like fresh organic vegies, they taste so different. They’re good for you, as well as that you get a sort of spiritual boost when you produce something that you’re tending. Come with me over to the end of the lane,’ she coaxes Clair.

‘What are you up to?’ asks Clair.

‘Just wait a minute and you’ll see.’

Justine leads Clair through her hedge, across the small patch of lawn out the front and across the gravel lane to where number 19 had been.

‘See this area here,’ she says as she points her arms in the direction of bare ground. ‘If you and Bill don’t have any use for this space, I was wondering would Trevor and I be able to cultivate it as a community garden? We could grow all our summer vegetables.’

Clair’s brow furrows as she tilts her head to one the side, as if visualising it.

‘I think I’ll make an executive decision and say I don’t see why not. Just let me know what you’re doing. Right, that’s it. I must get back now. See you later, Justine.’

‘Thanks, Clair.’ Justine captures a handful of air in front of her face and clenches it to her chest in victory. ‘Yes!’

* * * * *

Before Clair can change her mind or Bill overrides her decision, Trevor and Justine peg out an area of eight meters by four meters for the proposed garden. Trevor attempts to slump the mattock into the compacted earth, which has solidified for years under the caravan and annex. It’s unyielding. Each swing jars his wrist and arms.

‘Don’t bust yourself, Trev.’

‘Struth luv, this is like rock. We’re going to need something else to break this up.’

‘I can hear the grunts and groans from over here. What are you two up to?’ asks Harry as he appears from his place.

‘We’ve got permission to start a garden here, but the grounds so bloody hard I can’t even get a mattock into it.’

‘Well, your gardening angel’s here, my lovelies. My mate, where I get my wood from, has a rotary tiller. I reckon I can get a loan of it.’

‘Does our Harry think he’s a guardian angel?’ butts in Frank who is close behind Harry.

‘Gardening angel,’ repeats Harry.

‘Who wants a garden angel? Most people just use gnomes.’

‘Forget it,’ mutters Harry as he rolls he eyes.

Later that morning Harry delivers an old red tiller in his Ute at the new garden site. He yanks the retractable starter cord on the top. It recoils. Nothing happens. He yanks again and again until it fires up and splutters into action in a billow of blue smoke. Harry, bare footed, wearing khaki shorts and blue singlet, with a bandana tying his unruly hair back, cautiously eases the gears into forward. The beast takes off with a self-propelled mind of its own, dragging Harry helplessly behind it. His bare feet fling up the sods as he runs behind. He overshoots the border marker, leaving a caterpillar trail that heads for the bank of trees before he is able to jam it back into neutral.

‘Jesus, what an animal we’ve got here,’ he calls to Trevor and Justine who have been watching him. They can only laugh at his antics.

‘I think it needs two people to tame that one,’ Trevor says between laughs.

‘We’ll just have to extend the garden by a few more meters now,’ chuckles Justine.

Trevor puts his Blundstones and a farmer brown straw hat on as if ready to ride a bull in a rodeo. It takes the two men to restrain the contraption and change gears from forward to neutral on the corners and back to forward for the straights. Justine rakes whatever grass has intruded on to the dug-up area, scoops it up into the wheel barrow and dumps it under the tree line near the road. Frank sits on a deck chair swigging on a VB can.

‘Justine, when you finish the raking could you check the garden guide for what organics we need to make this soil sweeter. We need to encourage the worms,’ says Trevor as they pass by with the tiller for the third time.

Justine returns from inside their place with her favourite gardening book to find that Fred and Mavis have joined the spectacle.

‘Hi you two. This is becoming a real community affair.’

‘We’d love to be involved. Who else is sharing in on this project?’ Fred asks.

‘Most of this lane and several others who have expressed interest. What we’re thinking of doing is getting this ground ploughed up and ready for planting, then divvy up the area in plots for those who want to grow vegetables. It is going to be strictly organic. That means no pesticides, poison sprays and lots and lots of natural manure and straw.’

‘Good stuff. Count us in then, please,’ says Mavis, ‘I’d love to grow my own vegetables.’

'I'm just checking what nutrients need to be added to virgin soil. Yates Organics suggest animal manure and mushroom compost are a good start,' Justine says.

'The horse stable down the road is selling poo for \$4 a bag. We could donate two bags of that,' says Fred.

'Thanks Fred. Actually sheep poo is better, it has more compound nutrients,' suggests Justine, 'but we could mix them both to give the dirt some bulk. Harry, could I borrow your Ute please? I'll go and gather the animal manure and get some mushroom compost from the nursery.'

'Sure, you do that, we'll have a break,' he says as he turns off the tiller. It splutters to a sighing stop. He rips off his singlet and drapes it over his shoulder. 'Here's the keys,' he says as he tosses them towards her. 'Okay guys, time for a beer.'

'Yep, I could do with one of those,' says Frank from his deck chair.

* * * * *

By the end of the week, the garden area has taken shape. The dirt is broken up and blended with the animal manure and compost. Trevor has sprinkled in blood and bone, raked it over and watered it in. The dark brown, friable soil smells earthy and sweet. Harry, Trevor and Justine have divided the area into five long beds, running on a North South approach so that each catches the sun. Harry has collected shavings from his wood cutting area to put on the paths to discourage any weeds. The plot owners mingle in a small group like expectant parents.

'What are you going to plant in your plot, Justine?' asks Mavis.

'Well, I've been thinking something that complements what I have in my small inside garden. Cherry tomatoes, eggplant and capsicum. Maybe another zucchini because they grow so big.'

'I'm going to put in lettuce, onions and pumpkin.'

'It's a bit late for onions Mavis, try leeks instead. And I don't think pumpkin is a good idea unless you want everyone to complain about your vine taking over their space.'

'Hmm, true.'

'I've persuaded Norma and Laurie to take a plot. They haven't ever grown vegetables before. Norma's more a flower and shrub person. I think radishes are a good

start for her, don't you think? They sprout up in four days and you can eat them in a couple of weeks. Then she can experiment with other things.'

'Harry tells me he is going to plant lots of potatoes and sweet corn,' says Trevor. 'Look out here comes Frank.'

'Hello Frank. How are you today? Have you come to have a look at your plot?' asks Justine.

'Frank, not Scott.'

'Yes Frank. Which one is your plot?'

'Yes, today's a bit hot.'

Justine takes a step closer to Frank and raises her voice. 'Which one is your plot?'

'No need to yell. I've been given this first one here,' he says pointing.

'What are you going to grow?'

'You didn't know? Well that's why I just told you.'

'What are you going to grow?'

'I'm growing lettuce and leeks,' offers Mavis.

'We start in a couple of weeks. Good?'

'Christ Frank, will you go and put your hearing aids in. You're driving us bloody balmy mate,' says Harry.

* * * * *

The group are blessed with some warm weather so that they can begin planting their beds out. It is like a pleasurable working bee most days. People come and go when they have the time and linger for a chat. Someone leaves a spade and a rake for others to share. A new hose is attached to the outside tap of the plot and coiled around the fixture. Trevor's wheel barrow is parked to the side for general use.

Justine drops the first of the four Tommy Toe seedlings in a shallow hole she's made with her hand. It wasn't a difficult task now that the soil is soft and friable. She spaces the plants apart, firms the soil around the base to make sure they are steady. Trevor hammers an old grey wooden stake alongside each seeding for her and she loosely ties a soft cord around the base to the stake to make them stable. Next she plants a second

zucchini bush, a grafted eggplant and a capsicum, and then waters everything in. Harry appears behind her.

‘Hi Justine,’ he says

‘Ah Harry, you’ve come to start your garden.’

‘Yep, got me carrots and parsnip seeds. The guy at the nursery said these Topweight carrots and Yatesnip parsnips are the best to plant now in time for summer.’

‘Good on you Frank. Off you go then.’

‘What do I have to do with these?’ he says as he rattles the packets of seeds.

‘The directions are on the back of the packet. It’ll tell you how deep to plant them, how far between the rows and when to expect the plants to appear.’

‘I’ve got my ears in but I haven’t got my glasses on me. Can you read them out for me,’ he says as he hands her the packets.

‘I didn’t know you wear glasses Frank,’ she says as she removes her garden gloves and takes the packets.

‘It says here that you have to sow them in drills.’

‘What are drills?’

‘Little furrows, one centimetre deep. Scatter them lightly in the furrows. Then gently pat the dirt over them. If you have potting mix or sand that’s even better over the top of the drills. I’ve got some that I can give you,’ she offers.

It is clear he has not planted carrots or parsnips before. Justine watches as he carries out her instructions.

‘Now you have to water them in ever so gently so as not to wash the seeds away.’

He gets the hose and turns it on.

‘Not on full spray Frank!’

Justine snatches the hose from him and readjusts the swivel head to read light mist. ‘Here, try again,’ she says, as she passes it back to him.

* * * * *

In a month the garden is flourishing. Everything has erupted through the soil. Harry’s stout green spears of corn stand tall and erect and floppy dark green leaves of the potatoes have appeared. Norma’s early radishes are ready to pluck. Leaves of Mavis’s lettuces can be picked from the outside. Justine’s eggplant, tomatoes and capsicum need

to be trussed further on the stake as they have grown much taller. Her zucchini has spread to a metre wide and already bright yellow star-like flowers are emerging as a sign of a bumper crop. Frank's rows of carrots and parsnip are a jungle.

'Hey, look at my carrots and parsnips coming up everywhere,' he proudly says to anyone who passes.

'You'll have to thin them out,' says Trevor who is weeding their plot, 'otherwise they will just strangle each other and you won't get any carrots at all.'

'So how do I do that?'

'You just pluck out every third or fourth little plant.'

'Pull them out? But that'll kill them.'

'Yep. You'll have to do that again when they get a bit larger too. You have to be cruel to be kind, otherwise no vegetables.'

'I'll think I try my chances. Pull them out. I can't do that.'

'Please yourself,' says Trevor, on all fours as he continues weeding. He's careful to place all the weeds in a bucket, and then bag them for the rubbish collection.

Over his shoulder he says to Frank. 'Take care to pull out the weeds otherwise you'll have everything overgrown in no time.'

'Which ones are the weeds?' he questions.

* * * * *

The group are a bit surprised that they haven't got a reaction from Bill. Those living closest to the garden notice that when he does the garbage run each week he stops to check the garden. Whether it is in admiration or to find fault they aren't sure.

Justine assures the group, 'He's not bothering with us because we got permission from Clair, not him. It's best to toe the line around here, rather than just do your own thing.'

'I was chatting to him just yesterday about how luscious the plants were,' says Trevor at one of their casual gatherings at the garden. 'He seemed genuinely interested in them. He asked whose plot was whose and what were the plants growing in them. His only suggestion, which wasn't an order, I might add, was to put the garden implements away so that the locals weren't tempted to sneak in and steal them at night.'

* * * * *

Frank continues to admire his plot and produce. He measures the carrot and parsnip growth daily. He waters them regularly whether it has rained or not. For him, it is a joy just to stand there, hose in one hand, directing the shower over all the garden, and a tinnie in the other. The droplets cascade like a waterfall. Sometimes he aims the hose high so that the light catches each drop, and depending on the time of day he finds he can capture the sun in such a way that a small rainbow appears through the haze.

‘We’re going to have to stop him, Trev. I hate to do this but we have to stop Frank assuming the watering rites for everyone’s plot,’ Justine says to Trevor the morning she found her zucchini drowned for the third day in a row.

‘Poor guy doesn’t know much about growing things,’ he says. ‘Even Harry complained that his potatoes were being saturated unnecessarily. Frank needs to understand that plants need to harden off and sink their roots down deep for moisture. Imagine what would happen if a big wind came through. It would flatten the lot. Or the potatoes would rot because they were continually wet.’

‘No only that, my zucchini will get powdery mildew being watered overhead like that. It needs watering under its big leaves.’

‘Get Harry to say something, he won’t mince words,’ he suggests.

They arrange for Harry to give Frank a garden lesson on watering. Shortly after Harry caught him spraying pre-prepared roundup on the footpaths and surrounds to kill the weeds, rather than smother them with mulch or pluck them out. The residue spray settled over everything. Harry, in not so many words says to him ‘Are you blind or what, read the directions. This is poison, put that shitty stuff where it belongs.’ Then he educated him on the method of organics. And it’s this one occasion that Frank is told to wash the garden plants off immediately before it did some damage. He threw the hose to the ground and stormed off. It was general consensus after that chat that each member of the group took control of their own plots.

* * * * *

Nobody sees the intruder in the cover of dark. He approaches the garden area from the side road that surrounds the park and hesitantly comes out from the undergrowth. In the clearing he stops to listen, looking left and right. He treads lightly towards the garden

area. His footsteps are hardly heard as if swathed with cloth to muffle any noise. The figure halts at the corner of the garden, and then slowly circumnavigates the area as if looking for something specific. The dark shadow stops at Harry's plot of corn. There is a rustle of leaves and stems, a ripping sound of mature cobs as they are stripped from their stalks. The intruder ribbons the husks back to reveal the juicy, golden kernels and quickly retreats the way he came.

Harry is the first to notice that something is amiss in their garden area the next day. Some of his corn is trampled to the ground and the ripe cobs had been stripped off.

'Bloody mongrel,' is all he says.

He walks around the rest of the garden inspecting for other damage. Nothing else has been touched. He calls into Trevor and Justine's set-up, which is closest to the garden, and taps on the front door. Trevor comes out.

'Hi mate,' says Trevor. 'What's happening?'

'Someone's been at our garden. Did you hear anything last night?'

'Geez no. What's happened?'

'Come and I'll show you.'

'What's going on,' calls Justine from inside.

'We're going to have a look at the garden, someone's been into it.'

'Hang on. I'll come too.'

They walk across the lane to the garden area and Trevor and Justine stare in disbelief.

'Who would do something like this?' asks Justine. 'What a waste. Your lovely corn! Harry, I'm so sorry.'

'I'll catch the mongrel,' says Harry.

'But who?'

'Frank hasn't been too happy with us lately. Maybe he didn't like being told off about his gardening technique,' offers Trevor.

'Surely not. He wouldn't!' says Justine. 'He's having so much fun with his plot.'

'I'm going to have to ask him though,' says Harry. 'If it's not him then, who in the town would be stupid enough to sneak in and deliberately destroy our garden?'

As if summoned, Frank shuffles around the corner, still in his red and blue tartan flannelette pyjamas and pull-on slippers, rubbing his eyes. His hair is wirier and his face more lined than usual.

‘Hi guys,’ he says, with a yawn. ‘I’ve had a hell a rotten night.

‘A bit early for a tinnie, don’t you think Frank?’ says Justine, flicking her finger at his can.

‘Had to take a tablet to get to sleep. Need something now to wake me up. Geez did we have a storm? Look at your corn.’

Harry takes a step forward towards him. ‘We thought you might know something about that?’

Frank steps back. ‘Me. What’d I do?’ he bellows back. ‘I know I helped meself to your corn the other week, but I wouldn’t wreck it.’

‘Ah, I thought so. I’ve been counting the ears and I notice a few gone. Why didn’t you just ask?’

‘Was I meant to ask, was I? I thought it’s our garden and we could use what we liked? I took some of Mavis’ lettuce leaves yesterday and two of Norma’s radishes and half a dozen your tomatoes, Justine. But I’ve been knocked out all last night. I didn’t do that,’ he says pointing to the damage and swigging on his tinnie again.

‘Well someone has invaded our space. I suspect it was one of the locals and I intend to find out,’ commanded Harry.

Looking for any evidence, Harry makes a thorough inspection of the ground and surrounds looking for footprints, broken bushes, corn bits and pieces or anything odd. At one point he bends down and picks up an animal scat from the ground and puts it in his pocket.

Now he knows who the intruder is.

Frank, as if vindicated, tells Ada at the corner store that Harry has lost some of his corn and that he’s blamed him for doing it. And because Ada is all ears, Frank over elaborated how one of the local, nose-pierced louts had crept in over-night and destroyed the garden. Ada, who can’t keep her mouth shut about anything, told Fred when he came for his morning paper about the tattooed lout, who immediately told Mavis when he got home about the dreadlocked local. Mavis, concerned about the risk of unsavoury locals wearing hoodies roaming around the park at night, tattled to Norma that morning over a cup of tea. Norma, who thought it only proper, mentioned it to Laurie. Laurie who wasn’t really interested in the garden anyway, but was concerned about predators, told Bill. In that way, within 12 hours of Harry discovering the

intrusion, everyone in the caravan park, and probably all of Brackwell thanks to Ada, shared an obsession about the hooded intruder.

* * * * *

The following evening, Harry retrieves his hidden 22 rifle from on top of his wardrobe. He carefully unwraps the oil skin cloth that protects it. He takes the cleaning equipment and box of shells from under his bed to prepare for the stakeout. To make sure he hits his target he polishes the inside of the barrel with a ram rod, gauze and solvent to remove any spent lead and powder residue. At dusk he carefully positions himself to the side of his place facing into the night breeze. To his left the stand of trees that line the public road gives him cover. He has clear access to the garden area slightly to the right of him. Harry squats under a low wattle tree, spreads out a ground sheet and a dark blanket on the grass, and then places his gun and ammunition beside him. He lays flat on his stomach and pulls the hood of his camouflage jacket over his head. There is no moonlight. All that can be seen are the whites of his eyes through his charcoal darkened face. He waits.

After several hours, Harry hears a rustle in the undergrowth further along the road. Nothing moves but he stealthily reaches for his gun. He slowly levers himself onto his elbows like a tripod, cocks the bolt up, back and down to load the bullet into the chamber and then shoulders the gun, cradling the barrel in his left hand. His right hand pointer finger rests steadily on the trigger. His eyes accustomed to the darkness, sweep back and forth for the slightest movement. Nothing yet.

Frozen in position, Harry's back strains, his neck stiffens and his upper arm muscles are tense. Just when he thinks his body can't stay rigid for one moment longer, a shadow escapes from the undergrowth. He waits staring at his prey as the shadow prowls toward the garden. The gun sights are fixed on the movement. The shadow halts, stretches to full height and looks around momentarily, then moves forward. Harry's trigger finger flexes slightly. The shadow hesitates then stoops. Harry seizes the moment and squeezes the trigger.

Th war tttt.

The shadow thrashes its limbs in the tense air, tumbles backwards and topples into the garden, motionless. At the sound of the discharge, a little further down the side

road, a bulky figure plummets from a tree in the undergrowth like a sack of potatoes. Thin branches, twigs and stripped leaves cascade after it freeze framing the image.

‘Bloody hell,’ says the voice of the figure.

Harry remains motionless until the voice gathers itself up off the ground and limps down the public road. Only when it’s quiet again does he emerge from his hide-out to retrieve the dead shadow from the garden and drag it by the tail back to his set-up.

* * * * *

Harry is up early the next morning to get on with what he had to do in his makeshift laundry. As the caravan park comes to life, Frank emerges from his place with his usual breakfast tinnie in hand. He saunters over to where Harry is and seats himself on a stump. Harry doesn’t bother to greet him but rather turns his back and places a boning knife under cover and then throws a large cloth over the dead animal hanging from the roof.

‘I have an idea,’ says Frank. ‘You know what we should do; we could fence the garden off to keep the local riff raff from sneaking in. We could wire it around and make a sort of swinging gate and even have a lock on it.’

‘That might be a good idea,’ says Harry.

‘Are you telling me they might reappear?’

‘It’s a good idea; the fence is a good idea.’

‘Have they already been here?’

‘Frank, for god’s sake put your ears in. Your ears.’

‘That’s what I said, I have a good idea. I know you guys thought it was me who destroyed the corn but it wasn’t. I’m gunna provide the stakes, wire mesh and nails and stuff and I’ll make the garden fence just to show you that I’m okay. So there.’

Harry slaps Frank on the shoulder to curb the conversation.

‘I’ll ask the others first though, Frank. Sounds good.’

‘No need to ask the others about the wood.’

‘Yeah ... right,’ says Harry as he shakes his head from side to side. ‘Go get yourself another beer.’

‘Yep, thanks I will, I’ll go get me ears.’

* * * * *

Around mid-morning when walking Jake, Harry caught up with Justine and Trevor out the front of their place to tell them about Frank feeling remorse and his wanting to put a fence up.

‘How tall is he going to make it? It will have to be pretty high to keep those local brats out,’ says Trevor.

‘Aw, I don’t think you will need to worry about the intruder much now. I was waiting up last night to catch them. There were two of them. One who got scared and ran off, and I caught the other culprit.’

‘Who were they?’ asks Justine. ‘Did you let the police know?’

‘There’s only one that I could get. Looked after him myself I did and gave him a thrashing. Rest assured he won’t be back.’

‘Well, we do have something to be thankful for. I say we should have a celebration party for the garden group.’

‘That’s a wonderful idea, Luv. What about your Italian.’

‘Something Italian. Yes definitely Italian,’ says Justine. ‘We could make it a real Italian slow food afternoon; we could turn lunch into supper and spread it out. I could turn our barbeque area into a trattoria and have antipasti then primi and I might even make my special Torta di Mele e Pinoli for dessert. I would so love to create something from the garden so that everyone can enjoy their produce,’ says Justine. ‘I will need some of your potatoes Harry, and my zucchini flowers, capsicum and garlic. A few of Frank’s carrots. Mavis’s leeks. What fun.’

‘A tad excited I’d say, wouldn’t you Trev,’ says Harry elbowing Trevor. ‘I just love your cooking. They all will too.’ He hesitates and then whispers behind his hand. ‘I want to play my part in this my lovelies so, I’ll provide the wallaby for the main meal,’ he says, then gives Justine a cunning wink.

Justine is true to her word on notifying Clair of any changes they were making to the garden.

‘We need to put up a temporary fence around the vegie garden, because someone’s been stealing the goods. It is more important now, especially as it’s close to harvest time. Oh! And we’re thinking of having a harvest celebration party on our barbeque concrete slab. Is that alright?’

There was no resistance whatsoever. And there was no comment from Bill who was squatting and whose head was down busying himself with their kitchen rubbish bag which had burst on the verge. Justine stands on tip toes to see what's going on. Clair looks a little sheepish as she hurriedly re-wraps six or so bare corn cobs and husks in newspaper and transfers the rubbish to a new container.

'Blasted dogs,' she mutters. 'They raid the garbage bags for anything. Rip things apart. Scatter it everywhere.'

Bill stands and puts the re-tied bag into their outside receptacle, and drags it to the curb side, limping badly from what seems to be a painful sprain.

*

The Big 'O'.

Justine's birthday is only a few days away. It's a decade one, the type that everyone seems compelled to ask you about or comment on. She starts to prepare her answers.

Sure enough, Trevor starts the well-meaning inquisition. 'How do you feel about the big 'O' next week?'

'Much the same as any other, love. Birthdays haven't really meant much to me. If you want to know, I feel fifty.'

'Well we should make this one special and celebrate with a bottle of red, what do you think?'

'That'd be great Trev, because I've not really ever had a chance to celebrate a big birthday.'

Justine's birthday is around Christmas time and in the school holidays. As a child there were never any friends around who could come to her birthday party. They were all off holidaying at the beach or locked away at their grandparent's place. On her first 'O' birthday her mum changed it for the same date a month earlier. That way she could have her first and only party. It didn't feel like her birthday. Her friends had wanted to know why she was having a party when it wasn't really her birthday. Did they have to bring presents? Her mother had set it up in the formal dining room of the house and smiled thankfully when the youngsters sat with backs erect and ate cucumber sandwiches. There were no balloons, bags of lollies, pin the tail on the donkey or outside games. It was a flop.

There are no close friends here either who would come to a big 'O' celebration. She and her husband Trevor have just moved into the Caravan Park and she has left two good friends in another area of the state. Their kids are overseas; her acquaintances at work didn't even know when her birthday is and besides, just like back at school they are off doing their own holiday thing.

Justine wanted this year to be different. Surely this of all birthdays could not be the same. She needed to give herself an extra special day. She could drive into the city. Buy some new shoes, have lunch and perhaps visit the art gallery to see the new Russell Drysdale exhibition. Maybe she might even have her eyelashes tinted and indulge in a pedicure. 'Yes that's what I'll do,' she decides out aloud.

Up early and showered, she faces the day.

‘Happy Birthday love,’ says her husband at the breakfast table, as he places a card against her coffee cup and a small gift wrapped present on her place mat. He bends down to give her a warm kiss and a cuddle.

‘The big ‘O’ today, love,’ he reminds her.

‘Thanks sweetie,’ Justine replies, as she opens the envelope and reads the card. *I love you just as much today as I did ten years ago*, he had scrawled, *you haven’t changed a bit since your last big ‘O’*. *All my love Trev, ♥, xxx*. She smiles at his sentimental jottings. She opens his gift, being careful not to tear the paper. He had chosen carefully. Nestled in the blue velvet covered box is a fine gold chain necklace encrusted with turquoise stones and accompanied by matching earrings.

‘To match your eyes, love.’

‘They’re beautiful Trev, thank you so much,’ she says as she pecked him on the cheek and gave his hand a squeeze.

‘So what are you going to do today?’ he asks as he sits down at the table.

‘I’ll think I’ll go into the city and have a girly day by myself.’

‘Good idea hun—you do just that! You deserve a day out. What time are you going and when do you think you’ll be back?’

‘I’ll head off after breakfast. I’ll make a day of it. I rarely get a whole day to myself. I’ll give you a ring when I’m leaving town.’

Trevor gives her a wave as she backs her car down their narrow lane. He waits until he is sure she is on her way then ducks through the back easement of their hedge to the lane behind. He goes to the nearest set-up and calls out.

‘Hoy.’

The cougar from the girly club comes to the open door. Dressed to face the world in her best tight fitting black jeans and leopard skin top, it’s as if she is expecting him.

‘Hi, everything okay?’

‘All’s clear,’ he says, ‘She’s gone into the city so get the others and meet me at my place.’

The divorcee, the live-in housekeeper and the carer arrive not long after.

‘Right whadda we gunna do?’ the divorcee asks

‘Yeh. How we gunna do this?’ says the carer.

‘Well I can’t leave here just in case she turns up or rings me on her mobile. How about I give you lot \$150 and you go to the nearest shopping centre and get what we need. I really don’t have a clue, but I’m sure you girls will know what to do.’

‘So what’s Justine like? We dunno ‘er really and cause she works we barely see ‘er,’ says the cougar.

‘Well she likes red,’ Trevor said.

‘So what’s she feel like? inquires the housekeeper.

‘She feels she’s fifty years old.’ Trevor says confidently while handing over money for the expenses.

‘Rightio,’ declares the cougar, ‘we cun work with that, let’s get goin.’

Before they left for the shopping centre, the four of them fan out to several other caravan set-ups in the Park. Knocking on each door they spread the word of the secret to the other permanent dwellers.

* * * * *

It takes Justine just over an hour to get to the city. It is an enjoyable drive through tall timbers, farms and several smaller lazy towns. She passes the central shopping centre and makes a mental note to call in there on the way back to buy something nice for tea. Maybe she’ll select something from the gourmet delicatessen. Perhaps a pair of quails, something a little extravagant for my special evening meal. Of course she’ll buy a nice robust red wine to complement the meal. Yes a cabernet sauvignon from the Barossa Valley—Pepperjack is always reliable!

She manages to get a long term spot in the parking station in the city. She secures her parking ticket and goes straight to her usual beauty salon in David Street.

‘Hello Irene. Sorry I don’t have an appointment, but I’m in from out of town today, any chance for an eye lash tint and a pedicure?’ she asks. Irene is perfectly made up. Her unblemished skin is lightly dusted with shimmer foundation, her cheekbones sculptured with blusher, and her green eyes are accentuated with dark eyeliner and long lashes.

‘No worries Justine, we’ve had a cancellation at 10.30am, would that suit?’ the beautician offers.

‘Perfect,’ Justine replies, ‘I have a few other things I want to do before then.’

Justine is the sort of person who likes to shop around for the exact thing she wants. But if she finds her choice she will pounce on it immediately. Today though she wants to take her time. David Jones has a 50 per cent off shoe sale so she goes there first. Next to the shoe shop in the Mall and later to the discount retail store around the corner. She finds a pair of yellow leather Italian-made sandals in the overseas import store and decides immediately that she couldn't do without them. One hundred and eighty dollars seems like a bargain too.

'Don't bother to wrap those thanks, I'll wear them now.'

She removes her conventional white sandals and puts them in the carry bag the shop attendant gave her. That simple action put a spring in her step. She retraces her steps past the morning cyclists having their café latte's al fresco, the toddler who is throwing a coin in the fountain and the busker giving a bad rendition of an Elvis favourite. Around the corner from the beautician she spots a yellow strappy top on a mannequin in Furwood's window. Looking at her feet and then the top she decides it is the exact same colour. Entering the store, she heads straight to the attendant. The stately woman is a David Jones look alike, dressed in black, standing at attention waiting to serve.

'Excuse me,' she says, 'do you have a size 10 of the yellow top that's in the window?' she asks.

'I'm sorry madam, we've sold out of that particular garment. We have it in red though.'

'Hmm, no,' wrinkling her nose. 'Gosh I really like it in yellow. Can you tell me what size that one is in the window please and if it's a 10 can you sell me that yellow one?'

'It must be your day, it's your size,' the attendant says as she peeked at the label.

'It is my day, thanks I'll take it,' she says without even asking how much it cost.

The attendant undressed the model in the window and delicately wrapped the top with tissue paper before placing it in a paper carry bag advertising Furwoods.

'That will be ninety-nine dollars thanks.'

Justine doesn't bat an eyelid. She is going to make it her day.

* * * * *

At the shopping centre, the four from the girly club are going about their business. First to Coles. The cougar pushes the trolley while the other three select from the shelves.

‘Ow bout this?’ the housekeeper asks.

‘Hey that’s neat,’ the other two of the girly club agree.

‘Look ere’s dese in the same colour,’ rejoices the carer.

More excited now, they dart here and there, exclaiming as they go.

‘I found this in packs a twenty.’

‘And ere are sets of dose in the same colour.’

‘This is so much cool fun, we cun match everythin.’

Next they go to the newsagent and purchase a banner, some streamers and balloons and then to the butcher for some beef sausages and wallaby rissoles.

* * * * *

Feeling restored from her beauty expedition Justine is peckish. She walks along the tree lined street, thankful for the shade and the slight breeze as the day is beginning to warm up. On the pavement she dodges several black wrought iron café settings where couples are eating their lunch. Wafts of garlic, basil and spicy tomatoes drift by her as she passes the trendy café door. The delicious aroma stops her in her tracks and she scans the menu pasted on the window. She sees exactly what she had hoped she would, so slips into the other outdoor seating and hooks her carry bags over the other seat. A black-long-curly-haired waiter with a dark complexion welcomes her and places the menu and a bottle of water on her table.

‘That’s okay,’ she says ‘I know what I want, thanks.’

‘Fine. He takes out his order book from the pocket of his apron and a pen from behind his ear.

‘What would you like?’ He massages her with his dark eyes.

‘A glass of chilled water, then I’ll have *Linguine alla puttanesca per favore*,’ she says in perfect Italian.

‘*Si Singora*,’ he copies her, ‘*un momento per favore*.’

He sets the table with silverware and a crisp white serviette and returns with a tall glass of iced water. Soon after, the tomato smothered linguine arrives with side bowls of freshly grated parmesan and torn basil leaves. The aroma and colours are pure Italian.

‘Enjoy your meal and your day.’

‘Thank you. I will and I am.’ She smiles inwardly.

As she tastes the first delectable mouthful she tries to remember the last time she’d had a meal alone like this, and then self-consciously looks around in case she’s conspicuous. The couple at the other setting glance her way as if querying why she’s solo.

She enjoys the meal, pays the bill and continues on to the art gallery.

* * * * *

‘Hello.’

‘Hi Trev, I’m about to leave and head home now.’

‘How’s your day been?’

‘Great, I’ll tell you all about it when I get there. I have a nice idea for tea but I’ll have to call into the shopping centre to pick it up as well as a bottle of red wine at the bottle shop on the way home, but I won’t be long.’

‘Okay, see you then.’ Then replaces the hand piece of the home phone.

He quickly goes to the public barbeque area just fifty metres from the Park.

‘Hi girls,’ he says. ‘She’s on the way home so will be about an hour. Just as well you were home early; she’s going to the shopping centre. Imagine if she accidentally ran into you lot.’

‘We’ll be okay; you’ll have to keep her out of the way though until the right time.’

‘No worries, can I do anything for you?’ he adds.

‘Sure, seeing you’re tall, can you pin this up there on the shelter wall and tie these balloons in the trees above the picnic tables?’

‘Who’s bringing the portable CD player?’ asks the cougar.

‘Harry, I think,’ someone answers.

Trevor does what he can, then in a flurry, waves as he leaves the secret preparations.

* * * * *

Trevor hears the tyres on the gravel as she turns into the lane. He walks onto the veranda to welcome her and gives her a big squeeze as he takes her carry bags. He playfully raises an eyebrow to jest about what's in the bags.

'Good day then, hey?'

'Yep,' as they sit down on the outside deck chairs.

'So ... ?' he asks.

She takes off her new shoes dangling them on her little finger for him to see, then unpacks the new top, and tells him about how lucky she was to get into the beauty salon, all about the meal and the exhibition.

'So what's this special tea we are having for your birthday, luv?'

'Quail. I've two quail. I think I'll sauté some beans, blister some cherry tomatoes and triple bake some kipfler potatoes with a sprinkle of chilli flakes and onion.'

'Yum sounds fantastic, but I'm not ready to eat just yet, let's go for a walk before tea. It's really nice out here,' Trevor suggested.

'Can't yet I have to marinate the quails before I cook them.'

'Good. We'll have a glass of wine while you do that and then walk while they're soaking. Then I'll help do the other stuff with you and I'll even set the table. And I promise to do the washing up as a treat. Okay?'

'You're on.'

* * * * *

Justine and Trevor walk down the main drag hand in hand. The late afternoon is mild after the warm day and the undergrowth gives off its warm eucalypt smell. Overhead a flock of pink galahs squawk on their way to their feeding ground. In the distance music floats on a light zephyr. As they near the end of the Park, the music gets louder.

'Hey, what's that?' exclaims Justine, 'looks like there's quite a crowd down there. Oh no! That means there's a party going on and the music will go all night.'

'Perhaps we should check it out in case there is trouble later on,' says Trevor, 'I'll go down and see.'

As he does the music quietens, it seems he has managed to convince them to keep the volume down. Justine follows down the sandy track, sees Trevor talking to the group and figures it is safe enough. As she gets closer there is a loud cheer.

'Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday to you ...' everyone sings to her.

Justine clutches her chest and gulps down a lump in her throat. Tears trickle down her cheek but she still manages to smile and giggle. 'Awh heck, what is this?'

'It's your birthdy silly, your big 'O' surprise birthday party,' says the cougar.

Justine looks at Trevor. He winks at her.

'Come, sit here at the head of the table,' someone commands her.

The girly club tie Justine's hair into a top knot with a red streamer and sprays red hair colour on the tips. It looks quite ridiculous but she doesn't care. She's now accepted as a member of the club. She glances around. There must be twenty or more people here. All the permanent residents of the Caravan Park and some drag-in casuals. Everyone is talking at once, trying to explain to her about the devious scheming they had been up to. Everything is red. The table cloth, the plastic cups, the eating utensils, the plastic plates, the serviettes, the streamers and balloons, even the Happy Birthday sign on the shelter.

Each of them come and give her a hug and a kiss. Everyone has bought a gift. Justine is speechless but she cannot take the grin off her face. Someone gives her a CD of *Pavarotti* singing in Italian. 'Something to add to your hoity-toity music.'

Someone else hands her a red gift bag. 'Ere's a bottle of Sav Blank.'

More presents come. A bottle of Elizabeth Arden's Red Door, a box of Red Roses chocolates, a pair of red see-through G-string undies, a bottle of red nail polish and a red covered note book.

She opens her birthday cards. The first one reads. *Happy fiftieth birthday, you're not an old fart yet!* Justine stares at it, her brow wrinkling. The next card says, *Happy fiftieth birthday*, so does the next and the next. Justine starts to giggle again. All the cards are for a fiftieth birthday each with advice on how to stay young or how to enjoy the occasion.

'Time to eat,' calls the barbeque cook.

It's a trailer trash special occasion spread. She glances over the table at the prepared salads and potato salad from Woolies, cheddar cheese and crackers, commercial dips and chips, white bread to wrap a sausage in, rissoles and tomato sauce. Then out comes the birthday cake that one of the girls has made. Its iced red with smarties outlining the words *Justine's 50th* on the top. They sing Happy Birthday again and Justine plunges a large knife in the centre.

'Speech ... speech,' they chant.

She stands. With a quivering voice she attempts to thank them all. 'Thank you so much for organising this, it's been a great surprise and I feel very, very special. I've never really ever had a birthday party, so you've really made my day.'

Later that evening, she receives a call from her daughter in London. 'Happy 60th birthday Mum. We're having a drink. I'm toasting you with your favourite red.'

*

Soul Mate.

A distant wail approaches Brackwell, growing gradually louder and louder. Early joggers stand on the road to blatantly stare to see where it's headed. Several townsfolk pull their curtains aside to sticky beak.

The flashing blue light and siren stop. The ambulance hesitates briefly at the wooden hand-operated boom gate of the caravan park, just long enough for Bill to open it and give directions to the last lane in the park.

'One of my tenants is ill. Teatree Circle mate, straight through along here and turn left at the end to number 18.'

Those inside the caravan park watch as Bill runs alongside the ambulance to Laurie and Norma's setup.

* * * * *

Norma is up at dawn as usual. She makes her first Nescafé coffee of the day in her favourite blue iris mug. The hot water awakens the roasted coffee granules. After she stirs in the milk and sugar, she slides open the glass entry door and sits on the cane settee on the front porch. Apricot fingers etch the Pro Hart dawn. Further over, the river glides effortlessly by, exposing sand crimps in its wake. She takes a sip of her coffee, sighs and decides that this really is a heavenly place in the early day. A rooster crows from a farm across the water, piercing her thoughts.

It has been two years since they arrived and were welcomed to the park community. She remembers the time their group started up the small but prolific vegie garden. It was community-minded Justine who encouraged Norma to stake a small plot for Laurie and her.

'Do you want some fresh vegies Norma? We've got permission from the owners to start a vegie garden seeing there's not enough ground to make it work near our setups. We've been given space at the end of Bottlebrush Lane where Virginia used to have her place. We can grow and share the produce. Come on, it's just behind your setup, you don't have to know how to go about it, we'll all pitch in,' she urged. So Norma had joined in the gardening project and loved every minute of it.

Norma was able to repay the friendship when Justine turned 60 and everyone thought she was only 50 and that her favourite colour was red when it was lime green. That was a fun time. She'd helped organise Trevor's surprise party for her at the public barbeque area. Laurie and Trevor weren't close buddies but they liked talking fishing and Falcon cars. She would often catch them on the river's edge, heads together talking men's talk. Laurie hunched over, Trevor more a bean-stalk, straight and erect.

Their friends kept an eye out for them and their place too, especially when they took their mobile van to the mainland on their winter trips. Last year Justine sent her an SMS when they were away.

The owner has ripped out hedge between you and 17 to make room for their boat. Azalea gone. Saved your bulbs.

Norma, who rarely got hot under the collar, vented her anger to Justine.

Not fair top \$ for tree. First plant in garden. Thanks for keeping bulbs.

Justine's replied:

Anderson fellow owns the land and everything in it. Plants not yours. But doesn't own your set-up. He can do what he likes with the land he owns and what's in it. ☺

Her memories here were mixed. But things had changed so much these last two months. Things had changed terribly.

* * * * *

'Hello dear, you had a bit of a sleep-in this morning, you old sleepy head,' Norma chirps from the kitchen as Laurie comes through the bedroom door. He feels his way along the wall and topples into his lounge chair and sits there. He doesn't answer her. Norma glances around the corner from the kitchen to see where he is and if he's heard her. Back in the kitchen she takes the bacon off the stove and puts the jug on.

‘Are your cross with me love?’ she asks from inside. He tries to answer but the left side of his mouth doesn’t form words.

‘What, didn’t you like me calling you old sleepy head, I was only joking, love.’ Still he doesn’t answer.

‘I’ll make you a coffee, that’ll soften you up.’ When he doesn’t reply she goes into the lounge area and stands in front on him, hands on her hips. He is staring at her.

‘This isn’t funny Laurie, stop playing games as if you’re cross with me.’ She looks at his face. The left side is motionless. His left arm is motionless. His eyes implore her to understand.

‘What is it, Laurie? What’s wrong? Is it your heart?’ She kneels in front of him, her hands on his knees. He says nothing but just slides sideways into the armchair and closes his eyes.

‘Oh my god. Not again.’

Norma runs to the front door, changes her mind and hurries back to Laurie, feels his forehead, listens for a hint of his breath. Back to the front door and onto the porch.

‘I need help. Help someone. Help.’ She rushes back inside and rips the blanket off the bed and covers Laurie’s body to keep him warm.

She runs outside again and around the corner into the lane behind, calling out as she goes. ‘Justine. Justine, quick.’ Trevor hears her stress and meets her in the lane. Breathless, she grabs his elbows to steady herself and gasps ‘Trevor, there’s something wrong with Laurie, he’s collapsed.’

‘Justine,’ he calls over his shoulder, ‘get the owner to call 000 for an ambulance for Laurie quick.’ Trevor, the faster, leads the way back to number 18. Justine races to the office. Thumps insistently on the residence door and calls out.

‘Quick. We need an ambulance for Laurie Simpson, something’s wrong.’ Instantly, Bill opens the wire screen. Clair is just behind.

‘Quickly, phone for an ambulance. Laurie Simpson is ill,’ she says again.

‘Right,’ says Bill as he retreats quickly inside to make the call.

‘Can we do anything?’ asks Clair. ‘Do we know what’s wrong?’

‘No. Trevor is with Norma and Laurie now.’

Bill waits at the front entrance under the sign of the caravan park until the ambulance arrives, giving directions as he runs alongside. It halts abruptly at number 18 as the two

ambos spill out and briskly go inside. One, a tall man in navy blue overalls with iridescent arm bands introduces himself.

‘Hi, I’m Daren, are you his wife?’

‘Yes, I’m Norma Simpson.’

‘Norma. What’s happened?’

‘He just didn’t respond this morning. He complained about another headache last night so I gave him a Panadol and we went to bed. This morning he just wasn’t there, not even responding. He didn’t talk, he couldn’t move.’

‘It’s possible he’s had a stroke. Has he had one before?’

‘No, but he has had serious heart trouble a few years ago. His cardiologist is Felix Meredith if you need more information.’

‘Okay we’ll give him a shot of insulin and put him on an oxygen mask to stabilize him and take him to the General for a MRI scan.’ An antiseptic smell fills the small room as the attendant rips open an alcohol wipe in readiness for Laurie’s injection.

‘Are you alright, Mrs Simpson?’ Bill asks from outside the annex. ‘Would you like me to drive you to the hospital?’

‘She’ll be right, we’ll make sure she is taken care of,’ says Justine from inside.

‘Right ... okay ..., thanks Mr and Mrs Cooper ... that’s nice of you.’ Bill spins on his heel and saunters back to the residence with his hands in his pockets.

* * * * *

It’s like the heart episode two years ago. Hospital visits, specialist appointments, endless questioning, testing. The family, Jim and Becky, visiting. Norma sits for days on end at Laurie’s bedside. Watches the lack of progress. Nothing changes but the relentless spasms of the second hand of the clock on the wall. Each movement signals when he’s to be hand fed, sponge bathed, or his toilet bag changed. Laurie can’t talk to her, he can’t respond through writing. *Do you know who I am?* She wonders. *Do you understand what I’m saying?*

‘Laurie, do you remember what happened?’

‘ ... ’

‘Are you in any pain?’

‘ ... ’

‘Can you indicate anything to me?’

‘ ... ’

‘Darling, I love you. If you understand, can you blink your eyes?’

She saw a two-eyed flutter. *Was that a sign?* She pats his right hand just to pretend that she recognized that he understood she loved him. No response.

‘We’ve been through this before, we can do it again. What do you say?’ Norma dabs a tissue on a string of dribble that hangs from the corner of Laurie’s mouth.

‘There you are, my sweet.’

The triage nurse touches Norma’s shoulders briefly to get her attention.

‘Mrs Simpson, I’m sorry but this is going to be a difficult time for you. The prognosis for your husband is very slim. The specialist has said that he will not improve and it is very likely that he will deteriorate further.’

Norma sighs, she slumps back into the chair, flops her head against backrest and closes her eyes. *This is going to be hopeless, she thinks. I can’t have him back at the caravan park. The wheelchair won’t fit, I can’t care for him. He doesn’t know me, he’ll think he’s with a stranger. I am a stranger. I’m no longer his wife. What am I going to do?*

‘Mrs Simpson ... Norma ... there is assistance available for you. We have a counsellor on our staff for just these situations. Her name is Wendy Suffolk, I’ll make an appointment for you, will I?’

‘Yes please, that would be nice. I really don’t know what to do and what my options are.’

‘She’ll help you to make decisions about your husband and the appropriate care he will need. She’s a medical social worker and her job is to listen to family and patient needs and then liaise between the medical professionals on our team.’

Through the window, Norma watches the clouds float by aimlessly. The same clouds as yesterday and the day before.

* * * * *

Norma and Jim wait in a windowless room within the hospital. The room smells of paperwork and filing. The temperature is prescribed by the air conditioner that hums indifferently on the side wall. A woman enters the room.

‘Hello, Mrs Simpson. I’m Wendy Suffolk.’ Norma looks up to find a smiley face framed by a brunette bob. Wendy is about thirty-five, dressed in casual slacks and a loose jacket. Under her arm is a black satchel of documents.

‘I’m your assigned medical social worker and I’m here to help you.’

‘Pleased to meet you.’ Norma shakes her hand. ‘This is Jim, our son.’

Jim also shakes Wendy’s hand. ‘How do you do, Nurse Suffolk?’

‘There is no need to be so formal, please call me Wendy.’

She waves her arm towards a round table in the centre of the room. The floral carpet speaks of many feet that have trod its surface, the threads exposed from worried paces. The overhead single fluorescent tube casts a nimble light on their concerned faces.

‘We’ll start with what options are available to you both in regards to ongoing care for Mr Simpson,’ Wendy says as she removes a wad of papers from her satchel.

‘First we have assisted-living facilities that take care of a person who cannot live alone but can still function. The next is residential care facilities like a retirement home where the person needs daily assistance and supervision. Meals and cleaning are provided and there are some daily activities run so they join in with other residents. Both of these do not have medical or daily nursing care.’

‘Well, I don’t think those are quite right,’ says Norma, ‘from what I’ve seen Laurie needs help with everything.’

‘Right then, the possible best option is a nursing home. There he will have nursing care for 24 hours per day, as well as medical attention, medication, housing, and all personal needs provided.’

‘That seems to be the best way, Mum, don’t you think?’ offers Jim.

‘I’d say so dear.’

‘Trouble with that, Mrs Simpson, is that option is the expensive type of long-term care, but the most appropriate choice for someone with extensive disabilities.’

‘Disabilities?’ says Norma, ‘but he doesn’t have disabilities.’

‘I’m sorry Mrs Simpson, it may not seem so to you at the moment but the medical team here have diagnosed that he will deteriorate from wheelchair bound to a bedridden state quicker than you think.’

‘Oh god, I can’t cope with this.’ She cradles her head in her arms on the table and sobs uncontrollably.

‘That’s alright, Mum, you’re allowed to have a cry.’ Jim leans over and hugs her heaving shoulders.

* * * * *

The foreboding entrance door of the nursing home looms over Norma as she enters. The waiting room provides a soft sofa with warm apricot cushions that is reflected in the rustic carpet squares on the floor. She sits down and picks up a woman’s magazine that is left open on a low table. She turns the page without looking at it but studies the surroundings. Turns another page. Historical black and white photos hang on a display wall. One is of this building when it used to be a hospital; the year 1889 is etched on a brass label on the frame. Another of proud female staff lined up against a doorway wearing stiff white pinnies to their ankles and bonnets that transformed them into Florence Nightingales. *Or are they nuns?* Their dignified faces are expressionless. The nurse in the middle of the group is taller and more buxom and wears a wimple. *She’d be the matron. No wonder they don’t smile, what a dragon. Probably breathes fire from her nostrils too.*

On the opposite wall a home-made poster with a cut-out horse stuck on it. Large scrawling words invites everyone to the Melbourne Cup luncheon and activity on November 2nd. with a reminder that there will be a prize for the best hat – male or female. Further over she notices a glass-fronted display cabinet. Inside sits a crystal vase, a small model car, an ebony box, a silver salt bowl, a statue of a cat and a bone china cup and saucer. *Somebody’s left-overs.*

‘We invite our friends here to bring along their trinkets to make it feel like home,’ a voice says alongside her.

‘Oh sorry, I was miles away,’ says Norma as she stands. ‘My name is Norma Simpson, I’ve already seen the Aged Care Assessment officer and I’ve come to consider the suitability of this nursing home for my husband. The nursing manager told me to come.’ She prattles on fretfully. ‘I have her name here on a piece of paper,’ she says as she scratches through her handbag. ‘Yes here is it, Joanne Myers.’

‘Hello Mrs Simpson, welcome, I’m Sandra the receptionist.’ The woman introduces herself with a confident smile. Her strawberry blond hair is slung in a pony-

tail, a discreet stud contests for a spot amongst the freckles on her nose. Her turquoise uniform reflects the depth of her eyes.

‘I’ll notify Joanne the nursing manager that you are here. I won’t be a moment.’

Her footsteps pad down the passage and around the corner, waver briefly, then return twofold. The nursing manager appears. Joanne Myers looks nothing like a dragon, more like a shepherd. Norma sees a petite lady in her forties. Her face is softly lined. She’s wearing navy slacks and a professional blouse like they do in the post office or the Commonwealth Bank with a small logo on the pocket.

‘How do you do Mrs Simpson.’ Joanne extends her handshake and her smile. ‘You’ve met our receptionist. I’ll introduce you to the staff we have here today. All up we have four community nurses who are on shift during the day and night, and we have Sam our activity therapist who organises activities and excursions.’

‘Come with me, please, and I’ll show you around.’ Norma follows like a lost sheep. ‘On the bottom floor are the office, storage rooms, an activity room and the kitchen.’ The smell of warm chocolate muffins drifts out as they pass. ‘The sleeping quarters and community lounge are upstairs. They are accessible by the stairs or the lift,’ the nursing manager continues.

‘He can’t use the stairs.’

‘That’s alright, Mrs Simpson, family can use either and come and go at any time, there are securing doors at the top of the stairs.’

They poke their heads into the activity room. A cheery soul of round proportions with the broadest grin calls out, ‘Hi there,’ while precariously balancing on the top of a ladder unravelling red and yellow streamers. Then she tries to stick them to the ceiling.

‘Getting ready for the Melbourne Cup.’

‘Good on you, Sam, well done.’

‘Sam?’ Sorry I thought he was a male,’ says Norma flushing a little.

‘Short for Samantha. She was a bit of a lad when younger and the name has stuck. We like to think all she has to do is wiggle her nose to weave magic around here. She is a cheery person, residents love her. There’s never a dull day with her here.’

Upstairs the nursing manager guides Norma along the corridor. The walls glow a soft green, the natural timber dado sets off the beige carpet and a modest chandelier highlights the end of the corridor above the community lounge room.

‘It looks like a plush hotel,’ Norma exclaims.

‘We’ve had it redecorated to be more like a home than a hospital. We don’t want an antiseptic smell up here. None of the stark white and blue and slippery lino floors will do. Here’s a single room similar to what your husband could expect,’ she leads Norma by the arm. Inside is a single bed, a cupboard, a Lazyboy chair and full-length windows that open onto a small balcony. The room is basic but clean and modern. Beyond the balcony Norma sees a walled garden below with large trees and outdoor chairs and a barbeque.

‘You can bring a favourite rug, TV, DVD player and even a special bedside lamp. Anything that makes it feel like home.’ *How will Laurie like it here?* She wonders. *One room when he is so used to the outdoors and wide spaces. Lots of other people sharing his home. Am I doing the right thing putting him here?*

She watches as one of the male residents shuffles past on his walking frame, looking lost.

Norma argues with herself all the way to one end of the questions and back again several times a day after her visit. For the second time in as many years she has no other choice. This nursing home is close to the caravan park. She can visit any time she likes. It is a stable place with routine and facilities that he needs. There are people who can care for him now and later when he declines. He has company. It has to be.

* * * * *

The actual transfer from hospital to the nursing home isn’t as difficult as Norma imagines. The triage team arrange his medication, the patient transporter and wheel chair hire, and notifies the Nursing Home that Laurie is arriving with all his admission particulars that Norma has already filled out. The struggle is getting his belongings and clothes together. They all have to have his name branded or sewn on them. *Oh God*, she thinks, *this is like naming everything your child owns before you send them to pre-school.*

She chose his favourite pillow, the family photo album, his glossy GT Falcon poster, and his fishing rod and tackle bag as the reminder of home objects. Jim bought a smaller digital TV for his room so that it could be turned on at any time of the day or night to occupy him, rather than have to rely on the community lounge.

‘There is no need to buy another TV,’ Norma tells Jim.

‘I want to do something to help, Mum,’ he insisted. ‘I feel sort of helpless.’

‘I know what you mean. If only I had seen the symptoms earlier this may not have happened. Those excruciating headaches. His difficulty in understanding some things, his imbalance at times.’

‘You’re not to blame Mum, all his heart functions and tests have been good. Something has just slipped under the radar.’

‘He often said he had used up his nine lives, didn’t he.’

‘Yep but he’s still alive Mum. We don’t know how long this will last or if it will get worse. Let’s just hope and pray.’

‘Yes dear ... let’s hope and pray. I’ll take these things over to the Home now, I’m sort tired of the emptiness around here, I need to feel useful.’

The drive is only eight kilometres away. Norma winds down the driver’s window to get some cool air and sniffs the newly-mown grass from the passing paddocks. She pulls into the loading zone out the front, goes inside to find Sandra and find out which room Laurie has been given. Sandra remembers her.

‘Hi Mrs Simpson, your husband has arrived. He’s in Room 7. He’s settled in nicely and you can go right up.’

Norma takes the stairs, goes through the security gate that is activated by pressing the green button and turns left only to find she can’t find number 7. She checks each doorway.

‘Hello Norma,’ says Joanne, the nursing manager who is doing her rounds. ‘Are you looking for Laurie? He’s the other way and around the corner. It’s a really nice room that overlooks the North. He’ll get the early morning sunrise, and be able to see the river in the distance from his balcony. The room will get warmth in winter and the cool breeze in summer. Off to the side is a large Liquidambar tree that shades in summer and colours crimson in Autumn.’

‘Thanks, that sounds really lovely and I’m sure he will appreciate it on a day-to-day basis.’

She retraces her steps and finds number 7. Tentatively she taps on the door and enters. Laurie is sitting in a Lazyboy, looking out the large windows. A cup of tea with a lid and a straw in it is sitting on a high table beside him.

‘Hello Laurie, I’m here.’

He turns slightly to her voice. His eyes seem vague with a lack of recognition, though Norma detects a small glint. She cradles his cheeks in her hands and kisses his forehead. A light smile twitches the corner of his mouth.

‘I’ve brought your things, they’re downstairs in the car. I’ll go and get them now, I won’t be a moment.’

She returns. ‘Here’s your car poster. I’ll get it put up on the wall in front of your bed so you can see it. Here is your fishing rod and tackle for when you go fishing.’ She places his pillow with his favourite blue-striped pillow case on the bed and the photo album on the side table, carefully opening it at last Christmas’s family shot of them and Jim and Becky and the two grandkids dressed up in Santa costumes around the tree. Then she hangs his clothes in the cupboard and places folded articles in the drawers.

‘Jim is bringing the new TV over tomorrow to install it so that you can watch the fishing programs and the stock car races.’ *This is like talking to myself*, she thinks. *Does he hear me? I can’t pretend like this.*

‘I’ll see you tomorrow dear,’ she mutters, unable to continue the conversation.

She scurries down the stairs before anyone can see her dismay. On the ground floor near the front door, Sam is talking to Sandra the receptionist.

‘Hello Mrs Simpson. Mr Simpson seems to have settled in well. He’s got one of the best rooms in the Home.’

‘Yes ... thank you Sam .. I’m sure he will like it,’ she stammers, turning away.

‘Wait a moment Mrs Simpson. Next week we have a Melbourne Cup luncheon for the residents and a bit of fun with a sweep and hat competition. Maybe you would like to make a hat for Mr Simpson? Everyone will have one, and you’re welcome to come along for the day.’

‘Thanks that would be really nice. If I bring the hat on Monday so that he can wear it on Tuesday – would that be okay?’

‘Perfect. Then come for the pre-cup celebrations at about eleven.’

Norma’s feeling of being needed boosts her step.

* * * * *

Preparations for Melbourne Cup at the Home the next week are in full swing. Sam arranges the sweep so the residents can engage in the festivities. She sets up shop in the

community lounge room so that when residents came for their afternoon tea or to watch TV they can enter the sweep.

‘My goodness Sam, what are you wearing today?’ exclaimed an old lady bent over in a walking frame.

‘This is my betting hat,’ she points to a black Stetson perched on the back of her head, with a dollar sign tucked into the band. ‘You can place your bets with me, ladies and gentlemen. Choose a two or one dollar chance. Roll up ... roll up,’ she coaxes as the residents mull around her. Some manoeuvre their wheel chairs or walking frames, others plod over with sticks. They all talk at once with expectant excitement.

‘When will we get our horses?’

‘On Tuesday morning before the race.’

‘I wouldn’t mind drawing the favourite.’

‘Naw, the favourite never wins.’

‘Last year I won \$10, I did. I got me a lottery ticket with that.’

‘Now you lot, don’t forget the hat competition for the Cup,’ chipped in Sam.

‘You can make a start on that in the craft session tomorrow in the activity room. Bring along anything you have. Even your old hat and we’ll pretty it up. I have a few feathers and sequins from last year that we can attach with some glue and pins.’ She gives an older lady a quick cuddle.

‘Are you going to come as a call girl this year, Jess?’

‘Might as well, I’ve still got it in me you know.’

‘I bet you will look dapper again as usual Bert,’ as she winks at him.

‘Anything for you Sam. You know you’re my favourite girl.’

‘Get off with you, Bert.’

* * * * *

Norma arrives on Melbourne Cup day at eleven-thirty. She doesn’t bother to wear a hat, it seems improper. She’d made Laurie’s hat and delivered it yesterday. She decided to use his settler’s Akubra - the fishing one he loves the most with its down-turned brim at the front. It wasn’t tizzy, she had made it regal by turning up the side with a plume of pheasant feathers like a fascinator tucked in. Her gold brooch held it tight. It was more like a slouch hat worn by the ANZACS, quite appropriate for her hero.

Festivities are already begun when she arrives. The residents and carers are in the activity room decked out with red and yellow streamers and balloons. Each of them is wearing a hat. Feathers, sequins, flowers, tinsel, and baubles, decked out like Christmas trees. They sit at the tables set with white cloths, plates and cutlery already assembled for lunch. Even Laurie, wearing his hat, is sitting at the table in his wheel chair. On the notice board are enlarged photos of the horses and their jockey colours.

The nursing home cook is busy in the small kitchen behind. Wafts of roast chicken and stuffing linger. Plastic covered bowls of salad and trifle stand on the servery ready. Bubbly glasses line up like soldiers waiting for the chilled liquid. Everyone is smiling, talking at once; it was like a chicken house at dawn when the hens laid. She stands in the doorway not wanting to disturb the hubbub.

‘Your attention ladies and gentlemen. Before we have our lunch, it is time to announce the winner of the hat competition,’ calls out Sam. Everyone stops talking.

‘Unfortunately we only have one prize to hand out, but you all look so wonderful and each of you deserves to win. I don’t think I have seen anything like this turnout before. Well done everybody.’ They clap.

‘The best Melbourne Cup hat for this year goes to ... Laurie Simpson.’

‘Yeh.’

‘Super.’

‘Yes.’

‘Well done.’

‘Good choice.’ They all cheer.

Sam approaches Laurie at his table. ‘Congratulations Laurie, you look the part. Here is your prize.’ She hands him a small silver Melbourne Cup replica. He takes it in his right hand and smiles lopsidedly. Sam embraces him. He responds. Everyone cheers.

‘Onya Laurie,’ they chorus. ‘You’re welcome here son,’ says Cecil beside him. Cecil is old enough to be his father.

Norma slinks back without being noticed. She doesn’t want to disturb the amorous scene. She knows that he is accepted and happy here, not with her. Her heart is as empty as her desolate home. She has lost her soul mate.

The Journey.

Laurie's favourite pillow, the family photo album, his glossy GT Falcon poster, and his fishing rod and tackle bag are stacked neatly in the corner of the annex. His folded clothes and toiletries remain against the wall in the brown calico carry bag from the nursing home.

Living alone for six months had not prepared Norma for the outcome. Every day of those six months she visited him in the nursing home. He did not readily respond to her in the beginning and there was still no familiar recognition of her in the last month. No movement. His mobility, normally reliant on his wheel chair, succumbed to a stationary bed. He lay prone, not able to shift his own weight to ease the bed sores or to assist with bodily functions. In the end, it was like his soul said 'enough', and he slipped away quietly as the crimson Liquidambar tree outside his window dropped its last leaf.

Her footsteps rattle the interior of the set-up. Meals at the two chair dining table are no more. She prefers to eat her lunch on her lap in the reclining chair watching the midday movie, and dinner during the six o'clock news on WIN and supper after Midsommer Murder's. When she stirs she rubs the stiffness from the nape of her neck as a result of her head slumping on her chest for two hours, long after the iridescent TV screen signalled the close of program. Only then does she pluck up enough courage to retire to the cold sheets of the large double bed where she knows the mental taunts will begin again. Last night, not long after two o'clock when the cool winter moon pierced through her half-drawn bedroom curtains, she sat bolt upright, thinking she had heard his voice.

Each night in the early hours she hears the movements again. 'Is that you Laurie? Come back to bed dear,' she calls out. Perspiration saturates her breasts; her pounding heart accentuates her laboured breathing. She knows he's not here. Without bothering about slippers or gown she shuffles through the lounge room to the front door to inspect the door latch, draws the curtains, turns on the dim side light and slumps back into the reclining chair, wringing her hands and twisting her wedding ring around and around.

The grey dawn greets Norma as she turns on the local radio station,

'This is radio FM 65.8. It's five-thirty. This is Jack, your breakfast announcer, signing on until nine o'clock. The first song we have today is Dusty Springfield's *You*

don't have to say you love me. Enjoy your day, folks.'

Norma thumps the radio off with a heavy handed burst.

'Just be close at hand indeed,' she mutters.

Norma takes the feather duster from the store cupboard and flicks it over the TV, in and out of the sideboard, around the lamp table, through the bookcase and across the GT trophies in the display unit. She stops and takes the silver cup from the top shelf. She buffs it gently to highlight the writing. *1990 Devonport Motor Show. Late classic winner Laurie Simpson for his purple 1972 XY-GT Falcon.* Norma gives it a kiss and replaces it. Back in the kitchen she plugs the electric iron in, sets the ironing table up and irons Laurie's hankies that she had washed yesterday. After neatly pressing out the corners she folds them in four inch squares just as he liked them.

There is a tap at the door. Norma peeks out. Mavis is on the veranda, wearing sneakers and a tracksuit. Norma slides open the door. The smell of the damp tea-tree undergrowth greets her.

'You alright luv?' questions Mavis. 'I'm on my early morning walk and noticed your light on. Have you been up all night?'

Norma motions for Mavis to come in.

'You want a cuppa or a coffee, Mavis?' she says as she places three cups on the bench.'

'Sure Norma, coffee will do this time of the day,' she says as she helps herself to a kitchen chair. She notices the ironing table and the neat piles of men's hankies. 'You poor luv.'

Norma looks back over her shoulder around the room.

'Since Laurie's gone nothing is the same. I sort of expect him to come through that door. I hear him at night when I can't sleep. I smell him on the clothes in the wardrobe, I see him in the car. But he's not.'

'You know Norma,' as she pats her hand. 'Laurie is in your memory. Your anniversaries and the photos.'

'Convince me, Mavis.'

'I can't, but I know someone who might. You know our Sally, she's a gem at what she does. She helped us think through the kafuffle that Anderson fellow caused us. I think you should speak to her. Being a social worker, she'll listen to what you're going through and she'll know what to do.'

‘Humm, well that might help, Mavis. I think I need someone, you know, just to talk to. Our son Jim has been great over these last six months but now that his Dad’s gone, he hasn’t been around so much.’

‘He might be suffering too you know, missing his Dad.’

‘I hadn’t thought of that. How silly of me. Here’s me thinking he was avoiding me. Poor guy. I’ll follow up on that, thanks.’ She scans the room and sighs. ‘What’s next Mavis?’

* * * * *

‘Hello Norma,’ says Sally as she knocks on Norma’s open door. ‘I’m Sally Oberton.’ Her blue sympathetic eyes twinkle in tune with her smile. She’s wearing off-duty sneakers, casual denim blue jeans and an apricot t-shirt with black wording on it, and a black hoodie wrapped around her shoulders against the cool of the day.

‘Hello Sally, your Mum said you might call in over the weekend. Please come in.’

‘I hope you don’t mind me just popping in.’

‘No worries. Has she told you anything about me?’ says Norma as Sally enters the set-up.

‘Mum has spoken a little bit and I want to help. No charge mind you, what the Chesterfield complex doesn’t know won’t hurt them. I’d like you to tell me in your own words what happened and what you’re feeling now.’

‘Where do you want to sit?’ asks Norma.

‘Anywhere that is comfortable for you. How about over here in the sun?’

Sitting down in tub chair next to Norma, Sally faces her and says, ‘In your own time Norma, tell me what happened,’ then waits silently for Norma to start, leaning her elbow on the arm rest, cradling her chin in her hand, scanning Norma’s face.

Norma looks down at her clasped hands, draws a breath then outlines what has happened over the last six months, from the time of Laurie’s stroke to the degradation of his condition and his passing.

‘I told your mum that I still feel him here. I smell him on his clothes. I keep him in the bedroom beside me.’

‘Right,’ says Sally listening.

‘The hardest thing for me, Sally, was that during the time at the Nursing Home he hardly recognised me and he couldn’t talk. But the day before he died, out of the blue he spoke. He said to me, “I’m taking a trip in the GT and I need to pack my bag”. I was so surprised that he spoke but what he said confused me.’

‘We’re often confused when we don’t understand, Norma. But I think your Laurie knew what was going on. You know it’s funny, often they say they have to get their bags together for a trip. They think they have someplace important to go or they just have to go home,’ explains Sally. ‘I think he knew he was passing.’

‘I do too Sally. I called Jim and Becky to come in just in case. He didn’t speak again; I just held his hand and spoke to him as if he could hear. I said he could go on this trip and that I’d wait for him. Then during the night after we had left he just slipped away. I don’t know if I could have stood seeing him go.’

‘That’s not uncommon you know. It’s often the case that families will sit late into the night, but the person doesn’t die until their loved ones have left, as if they were unable to let go while they were there,’ says Sally. ‘It’s sort of as if they don’t want to spare you the trouble.’

‘I suppose so.’

‘I see you still have his stuff here,’ say Sally casting her eye in the corner.

‘Yes, I can’t bring myself to get rid of it. Jim came and took the caravan and the car to sell, but nothing else.’

‘It might help you to settle down if you just take one step at a time. Maybe go through his clothes and belongings. Make three piles. One to keep, one to give away and one—‘not sure.’ You can save some special things of Laurie’s to give to your son and daughter-in-law and a memento for the grandchildren. Just go slowly, there’s no rush.

‘I just don’t know.’

‘I think you need to make a fresh start, to make things better for yourself, and face the change in your life. Maybe get out and go shopping with friends a few times a week, see a movie or even splurge on new clothes.’

‘It sound practical, but I don’t know yet.’

‘I understand,’ says Sally as she stands to leave. She clasps Norma’s elbow. ‘But I think you need to let him go. Visit his plaque in the cemetery, take some flowers. What did you say about where Laurie was before? Where is he buried?’

'I keep him beside me in the bedroom. His ashes are in an urn on my dresser. They gave them to me after he was cremated.'

'What do you think about that?'

'It's nice to know he's there.'

'But he's not really there, Norma, is he?'

'Well no.' Norma stands to open the front door. Sally turns to her.

'I think you need to let him go,' Sally says as she clasps Norma's elbow. 'You need to say good-bye, set him free, and yourself,' she adds as an afterthought. Norma lowers her eyes.

'What does that say Sally?' She points to the writing on her T-shirt

'Carpe diem.'

'Carpe diem ... what does that mean?'

'Seize the day. Gandhi would add "the future depends on what you do today"'. But Robin Williams would say "make use of every opportunity".'

'That speaks to me Sally. Thank you.' She pecks Sally on her cheek.

They wave to each other as Sally follows the tree line on the edge of the park and through the hedge and around the corner towards her Mum and Dad's place at number 26.

* * * * *

Ring ... ring

Ring ... ring

'Hello.'

'Hi Becky. It's Norma here,' she says.

'Hello Mum, how are you going?'

'Much better. I've spoken to a social worker.'

'I'm pleased to hear that Mum, we were getting a little worried that we hadn't heard from you for a bit.'

'Is that son of mine in, I'd like a little chat.'

'Sure, hang on a minute.' Becky voice is muffled as she turns aside. 'Sarah, go get your Dad and tell him Nan's on the phone for him, there's a good girl.

'Sarah's gone to get him, Mum.'

'How's the girls?'

'They're fine. Annalise is so enjoying school. Last week her class had an excursion to Frazer Farm to experience real life cows, hens and working dogs. Sarah wanted to go too, she had a bit of a whinge, but I suppose she'll get her chance when she starts. Here's Jim now. Bye Mum, we'll catch up soon, yes?'

'Yes luv, we will. I miss the girls.'

There's a shuffle of air as the phone changes hands. 'Mum.'

She is always surprised how deep his voice is and so similar to Laurie's.

'Hello Jim.'

'Is there something wrong?'

'I was going to ask you the same thing. Are you okay?'

'Sure Mum, why?'

'Well you haven't been around much since your Dad died; I thought I must have upset you somehow.'

'No ... no not at all. We didn't want to barge in or anything. We wanted to give you some space. Some grieving time. We love you Mum. We only wanted what we thought was best for you, after the difficult time you'd had over those six months.'

'Oh, thanks Jim, that's so sweet of you both. Maybe that's just what I needed and didn't know it.'

'So are you okay then?'

'Yes luv, I am now. I've had a talk with the daughter of one of my friends here. She's a social worker. She gave me some sound advice.'

'That's good.'

'I just need to ask you something. I've decided to spread your father's ashes, rather than hang on to them. I'm thinking this week and I wondered if you'd like to be part of the release.'

'What do you mean?'

'You know spread the ashes somewhere. Do you want to help me do that?'

'Well,' he said slowly, 'I think you need to do that yourself. I said good bye to him at the funeral. This is your special time. Is that okay?'

'Are you sure about that?'

'It's between you and Dad, you'll know what to do, Mum. Are you anxious about doing that?'

'Not anxious, uneasy maybe but I'll be okay.'

‘You’ll be right, Mum. Make it a special occasion, like the first time you met him.’

‘Sure, I understand and you’re right, you know. The other thing I’m thinking of doing is having a garage sale to clear out his junk and stuff. If I make a time will you come and help please?’

‘It’d have to be on a Saturday. Well that’s the best day for a garage sale any way, everyone has one on a Saturday.’

‘Great luv, I’ll let you know. Oh and thanks for being understanding about the release of the ashes.’

‘Cool Mum, catch you soon.’

‘Bye luv. A big kiss and cuddle for the girls. And love to Becky too.’

She hangs up, pleased that she had broken the ice and everything was fine between them.

* * * * *

The late autumn breeze whistles along the lanes of the caravan park. Playful leaves chase each other into void corners like children playing tag. There is not a day where it eases. The wind practices its winter gusts, when it will turn from the south off the snow covered central ridges and move inland. Norma draws her chenille scarf tighter around her throat, slips on her gloves and opens the front sliding door. The breeze barges in. Norma shivers and steps outside. In her hand is a pearl-coloured ceramic urn. She slips several other things into the deep pocket of her padded grey Kathmandu vest and sets out.

There are no tourists in their Winnebagos or in the cabins. They are scarce now that winter is approaching. No-one at the park sees her leave as she takes the single path towards the rocky outcrop on the river bend. She weaves through tall grasses and bobs under tea-trees bowering over the path. The path twists and turns facing into the breeze then behind a thicket of wattle. A black rabbit kitten scurries out of her way and stops a few steps aside and watches her treading her way through the leaf litter. The iron stone outcrop is heavily water-worn, smooth near the water line but higher up craggy steps and finger holds beckon a climber to a panoramic view. Norma chooses a simple route several metres above the Taylor River. Below the water sidles slowly past like an oil slick, like Old Man River. On a flat rock projection she stops and takes the urn from her

pocket and places it at her feet. She takes a tea light candle and crams it into a crevice out of the breeze, strikes a match and cups her hand around it to ignite the wick. Then she presses a jasmine incense stick to the flame. It flutters to life in a wisp of pyre smoke, darting this way and that, spreading a sweet smell.

Should I say a prayer? she thinks. No there were enough of those at the funeral. Should I sing a song? But what? Abide with me – No too late for that? Can I remember that poem I wrote for him when we were first met ... how does it start?

God I can't think of that now.

Norma stands with the urn in her hands. Shuts her eyes for a moment and clutches it to her breast.

'We've travelled this life together, sometimes it's been smooth, but it's been bumpy and steep as well. It's time for your journey to end. I hand you back to whence you came.'

Norma takes the ceramic lid off the urn. She places it high above her head, then turns the open neck to the North-west breeze. As if beckoned the breeze strengthens and gusts. Norma flings the urn contents skywards. The breeze lifts and carries the ash out over the water. It filters down like silica, the pale sun catching each tiny speck and turning it into a glistening jewel before it hits the water. Old Man River rolls along.

'Good bye my love. You're free now.'

With a faint smile of relief, she turns and retraces her steps.

*

For Sale.

The day is fresh after the rain and there's a slight breeze that gently twinkles the chimes together.

'Garage Sale, 18 Teatree Circle. Second-hand clothes, fishing gear, books, GT falcon spare parts', the hand-written cardboard sign announces. It is tied on the park front fence with red string.

'Are you sure you're ready for all of this, Norma?' asks Justine.

'Absolutely. Absolutely. I'm ready. Only I've never done one of these before.'

'Well we have, don't you worry,' Justine says as she places her arm around Norma's shoulder. 'It can be quite fun, you never know who you might meet.'

'Norma, I've this little card table you can use,' calls Mavis, as she struggles onto Norma's patio.

'That'll be a help, Mavis, thanks. Jim and Becky are bringing two trestle tables in his trailer. Speak of the devil here they come round the corner now.'

The green Commodore King Cab Ute turns into Teatree circle, the rear wheel of the trailer catches a full puddle on the verge, spraying muddy water towards the ladies. Mavis gives a little shriek as they jump back. Annalise opens the back door of the Ute and the two girls spill out and run to Norma. Both girls are wearing pink track suits with matching pint-sized gum boots. Annalise's long blond curls bounce as she runs. Sarah's short ginger curls are controlled under a pink beanie.

'Nan, Nan,' they chorus.

Norma bends down to scoop them in her arms, smothering them with kisses.

'I see you still have your freckles and my blue eyes,' she says to Sarah, twiggling the end of her nose. 'And look at you Annalise, I swear you're growing taller every time I see you.'

They wiggle free and go exploring around Norma's yard.

'Hello Mum,' says Becky.

'Hi there, how's it going?' asks Jim.

'You remember Jim and Becky, don't you ladies?'

'Sure, we're just setting up for tomorrow,' Mavis says. 'Where are we going to put the tables then?'

'Over there maybe, where the tourists park their vans.' Justine points to the spare area in front of Norma's plot.

‘You don’t want them too close to your set-up. You’ll need them in the open for people to be free to scrounge through your stuff,’ Jim suggests. ‘Sorry Mum, didn’t mean to be disrespectful, but we know what the hawkers are like. They’ll be here before eight in the morning, rummaging around, even before you unpack everything.’

‘Well, I don’t know what to expect. There’s so much to think of, I sure hope the rain doesn’t come back, we need a fine day,’ Norma says. ‘I must remember to get some small change from Ada at the corner store this afternoon. I’m no good with money.’

‘Good idea,’ says Jim. ‘Do you have a bumbag to keep your money safe in?’

What’s he talking about? Sounds like a swear word.

‘A what?’ asks Norma.

‘Never mind, I’ll lend you mine. Better still, I’ll be back early in the morning to give you a hand. Becky and the girls can stay at home. I’ll look after the money side of things. You can be the queen of garage sales.’

‘We’ll come early and load up the tables too,’ says Justine.

‘Too right. Trevor and Fred will be here to lend a hand,’ adds Mavis.

‘We’ll make them in-charge of crowd control,’ quips Jim.

‘I think we’ll need to rug up. Wear something warm everybody,’ warns Norma.

It is fresh at six the next morning. A light mist that follows the river spills onto the edge of the park seeking to claim more territory. Tall trees restrain the creeping haze, their undergrowth is damp and smells of fresh soil and composting leaves. The sun is barely up when the crew arrives to fold clothes, stack books, empty the store room at the end of the carport of fishing rods, bags and tackle. The guys lug the car parts and wooden boxes of tools from under the van. When ready they stand around hugging steaming mugs of hot chocolate in their hands.

‘Onya Norma, this chocolate is the best,’ says Harry. His words splinter in a gust of vapour as he jiggles on the balls of his feet to keep warm. ‘Give me summer any day.’

As predicted several of the garage sale fanatics are on the doorstep at 7.30am. An old biddy in a worn out poncho and fingerless gloves brings her two-wheeled shopping trolley. Another guy wearing gum boots has bought a wheelbarrow to carry his loot home. Several cars with trailers, park on the side road and the scroungers walk across

through the park. They pick over and poke, lift and sift, bargain and haggle until they get what they come for.

The inquisitive continue to dribble through after the onslaught of the fanatics has passed. At about 9.00 o'clock, a man strolls down the main drag, and turns into Teatree Circle. He is wearing well-cut jeans, designer sneakers and a fleecy brown jacket. He is tall, and wears glasses that tint in the light. His dark brown herringbone flat cap made of a warm, stylish wool blend is perched on his head and matches the scarf twisted around his neck. He seems more interested in looking around the park than finding a treasure from the garage sale.

'Haven't seen this guy around before,' whispers Fred to Trevor as they watch the man peer down one of the lanes. 'What do you make of him? Best we keep an eye on him. Suss him out if you can Trev.'

'Giddy mate, needing something,' asks Trevor.

'Good morning, just having a look, thank you.'

'I take it you're not from around here, then?'

'Well, not directly.'

'So, what's your interest here?'

'People like you and places like this. The best way to get to know about a place is to come to garage sales. I make it my hobby. Well, I make it my business, so to speak.'

The man half-heartedly turns back to the sale and scuffles through some of the clothes on the table. 'This is all men's gear. I take it someone died and the widow's clearing out his belongings?'

'That's a bit nosy, mate,' says Trevor.

'Uncalled for I'd say,' chips in Harry.

'None of your business, I'd reckon,' states Jim.

'Well that's just it. It is my business,' the man says.

'And what might that be? Are you some kind of private eye?' asks Trevor.

The man laughs and shakes his head. 'No I'm a rep for disgruntled residents.'

At that moment Bill strides around the corner in his usual fluster, interrupting the bargain hunters and the team.

‘Since when have I allowed a garage sale on my property?’ he yells, waving his arms in the air. ‘This space is for tourist caravans. What if I have an unexpected booking?’

People step aside to make way for him. ‘It’s not on. I’m not having all these people tramping in and out. You should’ve got permission.’

‘Gee, sorry Mr Anderson,’ offers Jim, stepping forward. ‘We’ve always just done our own thing in town. Didn’t think this was any different, this being a residential area and all.’

Ignoring Jim, Bill demands, ‘Who put the sign on the front fence?’

‘I did,’ says Norma, stepping forward like a naughty schoolgirl. ‘It’s my garage sale, there’s a notice in the local paper too. I’m just trying to clear out some of the Laurie’s belongings. Stuff that’s not needed anymore.’

‘Well, I can’t stop it now. But these people just can’t wander through the caravan park. I’ll put the boomgate down to block them off at the front entrance and make them use the public side road. They just can’t make themselves at home and poke around where they like.’

Bill turns and goes off without any further explanation.

‘I think this is a first for us, you guys,’ says Trevor slapping Fred and Jim’s backs.

‘That’s precisely what I’m on about,’ said the stranger, re-emerging from the rear of the small crowd. ‘These owners think they can push residents around and get away with it.’

‘So man, what’s your name?’ asks Jim.

‘Bligh, Jon Bligh. Here’s my card,’ he says handing one to Jim. ‘Call me if you need me. Especially you madam,’ he nods to Norma.

Jon Bligh discreetly makes his way out by the public side road rather than leave through the front entrance.

‘Well, what do you make of that?’ says Norma.

‘He looks a nasty piece of work, don’t you think?’ suggests Fred.

Norma watches him press through the tree line alongside the road and hopes she doesn’t meet him again.

Case Dismissed.

A month after the garage sale, the dreaded south wind arrives off the snowy highland. The morning frost on the grass and trees casts an eerie gloom until the wanderlust sun draws it away. Eucalypt smoke curls from the chimneys most days and nights. By evening a blanket haze hangs fog-like low in the heavy atmosphere. The residents retreat inside early in the afternoon and keep their doors and windows closed against the cold.

Justine opens the front sliding door from the patio into their lounge room for Trevor to come in. His arms are stacked high with split logs.

‘My wood pile is running low,’ he says.

She quickly shuts the door behind him to keep the cold out.

‘Maybe we could get Harry to cut us another load?’ she says as she takes the wood from his arms one piece at a time, placing them on the hearth of the cast iron heater. She opens the fire door and places two logs on the glowing coals. It sparks back to life.

‘That’s a good idea. I’ll do a scout around and see Fred, Norma and some of the others to see if they need more wood. I’ll ask Harry if he’d mind cutting us all a trailer load next time he’s helping himself to his stash of dead wood.’

‘I know Norma wouldn’t need any. She’s got one of those electric fan forced ones,’ says Justine. ‘It’s not terribly efficient and she has it on all the time. I suppose she likes the idea of no creepy crawlies indoors or tramping outside in the cold and damp to chop up the firewood, like you’ve just done. You’re a sweetie, what would I do without you?’ Justine pecks him on the cheek.

‘How’s Norma going to get on with the latest electricity fee we got slugged with yesterday?’ says Trevor.

‘Yeh, how come we got that?’

‘Mr. Nice Guy is putting in new digital meters on each set-up so that he doesn’t have to read the electricity every month. At our expense, of course.’

‘So how much?’

‘Two hundred dollars for the meter and three hundred for the installation.’

‘Struth, that’s a hefty packet. How’s everyone going to pay that?’

‘Your guess is as good as mine, luvvy. We’ll just have to use some of our nest egg.’

‘But what about someone like Norma, who’s had all those nursing home expenses and now surviving on a single pension? How’s she going to cope with that?’

The power supply momentarily dips and flickers.

* * * * *

There is unease in the air for several weeks after the electricity meters are installed.

Rumours thrived. Everyone has a different idea and opinion.

‘What’ll they do next? There’s no telling what they’ve got in mind to do.’

‘Well, they can do what they like, can’t they. They never ask us about anything.’

‘She’s got an idea to build luxury apartment units.’

‘And how in hell are they going to do that, there’s no spare plots?’

Harry has the most informed guess of them all. Last week when he went to pay his rent, a temporary worker, who he’d never seen before and was not likely to recognise him in the street again, is behind the desk. He’s probably only sixteen, pock-faced and distinctively geeky.

‘Are you taking the rent?’ he asks the young man.

‘Yep, what number are you and what’s your surname?’

‘Harry James, number 25.’

The young man tabs the computer keys to locate the charge and issues an invoice. ‘That’ll be \$280,’ he says

‘I usually only pay weekly, son, not fortnightly.’

‘Sorry, that’ll be \$140 then.’

‘What! My fee is \$90 a week. How can it be \$140?’

‘Wait a moment then, I’ll need to check with the owners. They’re not here; they’ve got some business in the city today, I’m only the temp.’

He presses a direct dial on the office mobile.

‘Mr. James is here to pay his rent. The computer says \$140 a week, but he insists its \$90 ... What? ... Yes I asked for \$140 ... Where does it say that? ... Right last week in August it says ... Sorry ...’

‘That’s your new charge in August, Mr. James,’ the young chap says without removing the mobile from his ear. ‘How was I to know you didn’t want him to know that yet? ...’ he says in the mobile.

He blushes as he replaces the mobile, and issues an invoice from the printer.

Harry stares at the man in disbelief.

Unceremoniously, as usual, in August there was an internal note wedged in people’s front doors. It states abruptly that single resident’s fees have increased \$50 per week to \$140, couples \$60 a week to \$160.

‘Christ, he made us pay for our new electricity meters, now this,’ Harry mutters to himself.

Harry, the longest serving permanent resident, is the first to complain outside the park. Ada at the corner shop is all ears.

‘When I moved into the park twenty years ago all I paid was \$40 a fortnight.’

‘I remember that darl, youse were foot loose and fancy free, just escaped the misses hadn’t ya,’ says Ada.

‘Yes well, this was the best place to be. I know we’ve had increases now and then with the two previous owners, but Jesus this takes the cake. Fifty dollars increase in one hit. That’s a fifty-five per cent hike.’

‘That’s not good luv, what ya reckon that Anderson fellow is up to?’

‘No bloody idea, but it stinks. Some of those guys there won’t be able to cope with this.’

Harry goes to take a packet of his favourite TimTams, checks the price, sighs, puts them back, and selects Milk Arrowroot instead.

* * * * *

Norma holds the rent increase note in her shaking hands. A tear trickles down her cheek and flops on to the paper. She brushes the next tear away with the back of her hand and sighs. Trevor had called in earlier to tell her that the permanents residents are going to have a meeting to talk about the charges and increases that had been happening recently.

‘They’re going to meet at the barbeque area off site at 11o’clock today,’ he’d said.

Fred and Mavis are already there when she arrives. Trevor and Justine are close behind and Harry is a little late. Two new permanents that have moved into 28 Blackwood Place come along and introduce themselves.

The couple are in their sixties. Both are the same height, grey haired, wear glasses and are neatly dressed in polar fleece vests and jeans.

‘Hi guys, I’m Keith and this is my wife Elizabeth.’

‘Hello,’ they chorus.

‘Trevor and Justine.’

The men shake hands.

‘Fred and Mavis.’

‘Norma.’

‘Harry.’

Each give a limp wave as they announce their names.

‘How do you like it here?’ Trevor asks.

‘Great,’ says Elizabeth. ‘It’s such a peaceful place and such a lovely spot. We’re still finding our way around though. We thought we’d come along today and get to know some of you.’

‘The owners have been very helpful. We were looking for a small place to retire to and he allowed us to have number 28 for \$60,000,’ says Keith.

‘She was nice too. She allowed us to have our two dogs, Trapper and Bailey, here with us,’ says Elizabeth.

‘Two bloody dogs,’ mutters Harry under his breath. ‘No-one was meant to bring in any more pets. Jesus,’ he whispers behind his hand to Fred. ‘Wait ‘til they get to know the owners.’

Sensing discord, Harry fast forwards the discussion.

‘We’re here this morning to talk over the recent increase in rent,’ he says. ‘First increase was when the current owner took over two years ago and we’ve had three since then. It looks like we will score an increase every six months at this rate.’

‘For that degree of increase we should expect some improvements around here,’ says Fred. ‘But it seems that we’re the ones doing all the changes for them and paying to upgrade equipment.’

‘Well, I can’t go on,’ Norma says. ‘The little I made from the garage sale has gone on the meter upgrade. I’ve reached the bottom of my purse, I just can’t fork out for

any more increases. The latest rumour I've heard is that he's putting in a swipe card and a new modern electronic boom gate.'

'I've heard that too,' says Harry.

'For what it's worth,' interrupts Keith, the new guy, 'the owner told us he was going to make it more secure so that people just couldn't come in off the street.'

'Oh, the garage sale! Yes well, that will probably mean another increase in rent, won't it?' says Justine.

'Probably,' replies Trevor.

'That's it, I can't go on,' moans Norma. 'It's just too much for me. I'm going to have to go and see them.'

Norma leaves the group and shuffles lifelessly back to her set-up.

* * * * *

Seeing Bill out and around the grounds the next day, Norma approaches him.

'Mr. Anderson, I need to talk to you,' Norma says to Bill as he heaves the garbage bag into the back of his truck. Bill walks to the next set-up. Norma toddles along behind him, waiting for an answer. He removes the next full garbage bag, ties a knot in it, heaves it on the truck and un-shakes a new plastic bin liner and places it in the bin.

'Not now. Come on up to the office after my lunch break.' Bill turns his back and continues with his task.

After 1.30 Norma walks up the main drag. She has changed her slacks and T-shirt for a skirt and blouse, and her pearls.

She enters the office and looks around. The layout hadn't changed but some things were different. The pot plant in the corner lacks water; the local newspaper, its pages out of order, is scattered on a small table. Tourist brochures hang lopsided in their wall hanging. The map of caravan park on the back wall that lists the resident lanes and plot numbers has hand-written scribbles and cross outs written in Texta over it.

'Hello,' says Norma as she enters the office.

'Hello Norma,' says Clair as she enters through an internal door to their cottage. 'I've just finished lunch,' she says, wiping a bread crumb from her mouth. Bill, who is sitting at the counter, hands his plate to Clair as she comes in.

‘What is it Norma?’ Bill says

‘I’ve received your note about the rent increase and I’m sorry I just can’t meet it. My single pension won’t stretch that far.’

‘Well, what do you want me to do? I need to increase the rent in accordance with the cost of living. If I didn’t, I’d go broke.’

‘But the pension hasn’t gone up for five years. It’s not as if the pension increases with the cost of living. I’ve had so many expenses and bad experiences this last year. I’m sorry I can’t go on,’ she gasps, and takes a hanky from up her sleeve and dabs her eyes.

‘Mrs. Simpson,’ interrupts Clair, ‘considering that we need to survive in this business and for the viability of the caravan park, we need to keep up with the market. You do understand that, don’t you?’ she says sweetly.

Feeling a little more confident with Clair, Norma says, ‘Would you consider a rental concession, considering my circumstance?’

‘Mrs Simpson,’ blurts Bill, ‘are you hearing me?’

‘I’m trying to.’

‘Read my lips. There is no concession. There is going to be an increase this month and probably in further months. Everyone is in the same boat. You included. If you don’t like it, sell up.’

‘I just might have to,’ heats up Norma. ‘But how do I go about that?’

‘You can advertise it with me and I’ll sell it for you.’

‘What if I want to sell it myself?’

‘You can’t.’

‘But what if I have a buyer?’

‘Too bad. The other option you have is that I buy it off you and on-sell it.’

‘So how much would you give me for my set-up?’

‘Well it is over eight years old. It needs a lot of maintenance; it’s not in a really good spot. People mightn’t be attracted to your area. Well, I’d say \$40,000.’

‘But we paid \$85,000 for our place.’

‘Depreciation, depreciation, that’s how it is.’

‘Well, I’ll be. There has to be a better way.’ Norma tilts her nose in the air and struts out of the office.

Norma trudges up the sandstone steps of the courthouse. She made sure she looks presentable in her Sunday best grey suit, stockings and semi-heeled black shoe with a matching hand bag. Her directions to the civil court were neatly folded in her hand. She is early so that she will be called in first. She pushes open the heavy glass entry door. There is no one there to ask where to go. She scans the foyer for directions. A wooden panel lists courtroom numbers and floors. 'Court room 3 is on the first floor,' it says. She uses the self-driven lift. Once out, she looks along the corridor for the waiting room sign. She finds it and cringes a little. Her footsteps echo on the timber floor. She pushes open the door. The room is square, the cream coloured walls have no windows, and only seats are wooden-slatted benches around the edges. A small table is in the centre of the room, but there are no magazines, only a Gideon bible for those seeking guidance or peace. She sits on the bench for an hour. No one else arrives early. No one comes to advise her. She hears people approaching before she sees them.

'What the fuck do we have to be here today for?'

'Bloody hell, don't you fuckin well listen?' a male voice says. 'If we don't turn up today, they're gonna bloody well throw us in the clink and refuse bail. Is that what you want?'

'Shit no.'

'Well that's why we're here, dipstick.'

Three burly guys ramble into the waiting room. They are wearing jeans and thongs. One wore a checked flannelette shirt, another a hoodie, the last in a singlet top has tattoos covering all of his arms. Norma reaches for the bible and buries her nose in it.

'Fuck man, how long is this gunna take?'

'Will you shut up. I've bloody well told you. You'll get yourself in hot water if you keep this up,' says the fellow in the flannelette shirt.

'O'd ya think ya'are? I don't av to fucking take notice of you,' says the hooded guy.

'I'm the leader of this crew right! I'm the one who makes the decisions, you dickhead. You folla me and what I say. Got it?'

The room quietens as a young, well-to-do lady comes through the door. Norma smiles at her and nods. She returns the smile as she sits down. This lady is wearing a

navy blue suit, white silk blouse and pearl necklace and matching stud earrings. Her black hair is neatly drawn back to a loose knot.

‘Have you been to court before?’ Norma leans over and asks her.

‘Yes, many times,’ she replies confidently.

‘I haven’t,’ Norma says. ‘I came early so that I can go to the front of the line.’

‘Are you being represented?’ she asks.

‘I’m representing myself,’ Norma replies.

‘Have you been in the court room yet?’

‘No.’

‘Well, come and I’ll show you.’

A door at the end of the corridor opens in to a grey walled central room. It’s not large. At the far end is a semi-circular bench like desk with a single chair. Lower in front of that is another semi-circular bench with two similar chairs.

‘The magistrate sits in that high place and the court clerks sit underneath,’ the lady explains as she points to the benches. The defence and prosecuting lawyers sit lower again at their desks either side, and the defendant has to stand in that box over there to the right,’ she points out.

‘It all looks rather scary,’ mutters Norma. ‘If I’m representing myself, where do I have to go?’

‘So what are you representing yourself about?’ asks the lady.

‘The owner of the caravan park where I live won’t let me sell my caravan set-up.’

‘Right! That’s why you’re in this civil courtroom. It will be rather informal, you can stand or sit in front of the magistrate and there won’t be any lawyers.’

‘Okay, thanks.’

‘Those who represent themselves usually go last, but you can sit in here in the public area and wait, instead of putting up with those fellows in there,’ she said rolling her eyes and indicating with her thumb over her left shoulder towards their direction.

‘And,’ she continues, ‘don’t forget to call the magistrate Your Honour.’

‘You seem to know your way around. Thanks, you’ve been very nice,’ Norma says as the lady leaves the room.

Norma sits and looks around her. She expected the room to look and smell like she imagined a Perry Mason court room would. There is no dark wood panelling, musty

smelling carpet, or long curtains reeking of cigar smoke. This is modern. The dark turquoise carpet matches the fabric covered chairs. The courtroom furniture is a light pine colour with black metal trim, and even though it didn't have any windows, there are four large skylights on the ceiling.

It is a long morning. Just as the nice lady had predicted, Norma is one of the last to make her case.

'Mrs Norma Simpson is called to the front bench. Mrs Norma Simpson,' the court clerk calls.

Norma stands and weaves through the two rows of seats to the front of the court.

'Stand behind your seat here, Mrs Simpson. Please state your name and where you live.'

'Mrs Norma Simpson. I live at the number 18 Teatree Circle, at the Brackwell Caravan Park.'

'Thank you Mrs Simpson, you may take your seat.'

Up in the single chair the grey haired magistrate looks down at Norma through his clear rimmed glasses. He wears a black suit, white shirt and black tie. No robes or wigs. She can't see much more of him behind the bench he sat at. He smiles at her and nods.

'Do you realise that this session is not a formal trial and that today is your opportunity to present your case to justify if it needs a further hearing?' explains the Magistrate.

'Yes, Your Honour.'

'Good, proceed please, Mrs. Simpson.'

Norma looks down at the notes Jim had helped her prepare. 'Give them all your details, Mum,' he'd said. 'Let them know what you've been through.'

Taking a deep breath, Norma begins. 'I live as a permanent resident at the Brackwell Caravan Park. My husband had been very ill and we had large medical bills to pay, so we sold our house. My husband and I moved in, around February two years ago. When he got really ill I couldn't look after him anymore and I had to put him in a nursing home and pay for all his costs. My husband died six months ago, we'd been together for 45 years. I'm on a single pension now. The owner of the caravan park keeps asking for money to pay for their changes. They keep increasing the rent and I find that I can't pay my monthly bill. I'm unable to get any concession from them.'

‘Have you sought concession from them, Mrs Simpson?’

‘Yes, Your Honour.’

‘When you moved in did you ever sign a rental agreement with the owner?’

‘No, Your Honour. Nothing formal has ever been signed.’

‘Carry on.’

‘I want to sell my place now; I think it’s best that I move out. I want to move into town and live with my son and daughter-in-law and be close to my two granddaughters. But the owner says that I can’t just sell my place to whoever I want. He means to sell it for me. He insists. But I don’t know how long’s that going to take or what price he’ll put on it.’

‘So what are you expecting from the court today, Mrs Simpson?’

‘I need a ruling against him selling my place.’

‘Have specific instructions been exchanged between you, your husband and the owner on how your dwelling can be dispensed with?’

‘No, Your Honour. The first I knew about it was when I told them I wanted to sell.’

‘Disputes between tenants, in this case yourself, against the landlord, the owner of the land or property,’ continues the magistrate, ‘usually comes under the Residential Tenancy Act. Are the owners in court today?’ he asks the clerk.

‘No, Your Honour, they have a representative.’

‘Call in the representative then.’

The clerk goes to the door, opens it and calls. ‘Representative for Mr and Mrs Anderson, Brackwell Caravan Park.’

The door closes and a figure proceeds to the chair alongside Norma. She doesn’t look up but continues to study her notes for anything else she is meant to say.

‘State your name please,’ the clerk says to the man beside her.

‘Bligh, Jon Bligh.’

Norma looks sharply to her right in recognition of his name. He looks straight ahead to the magistrate without acknowledging her. He smirks as he senses her look of astonishment.

‘Now Mr. Bligh, what have you to say on behalf of Mr and Mrs Anderson?’ asks the Magistrate.

‘William Anderson contacted me, when he became aware that some of the permanent residents of his caravan park disapproved of his intended rental increases.’

‘His caravan park? So Mr. Anderson privately owns the caravan park, not the local council?’

‘Yes, Your Honour.’

‘Carry on.’

‘It was my job to investigate the ramifications of his ownership and any government legislative act that covered any disturbances. The difficulty being here is that the residents own their dwellings but the owner owns the land.’

‘And what did you find, Mr. Bligh?’

‘Your Honour, The Residential Tenancy Act does not cover caravan parks. Only boarding houses and private rentals where the rented room or building is owned by the owner.’

‘So you’re familiar with this Act, are you?’

‘Yes, Your Honour. It’s different in other States where I operate, but this State has not included caravan parks under their Residential Tenancy Act.’

‘I’m aware of that Mr. Bligh, thank you.’

‘Mrs Simpson, let me try and explain what this means for you,’ says the magistrate. ‘Because you’re renting the ground that your caravan dwelling is situated on, the owners have the right to charge any rent they please and that includes water and electricity. There is no jurisdiction and because it is their registered business they also have the right to sell your dwelling on your behalf. Unfortunately I have no supremacy to override that until the Government changes the rules.’

‘But can’t a higher court rule against that, your Honour?’ pleads Norma.

‘Not until there’s a rule in place. I’m sorry but you have no case to put before the court.’

‘So I have to pay the new rent and any other expenses?’

‘Yes.’

‘And I have to rely on the owners to sell my place, no matter what?’

‘Yes. That’s it.’ The magistrate nods to the clerk.

‘This civil case is dismissed, you may go now, Mrs Simpson,’ says the clerk.

Norma stands, faces Jon Bligh and brushes past him on her way out.

‘Told you to contact me, lady,’ he sneers at her. ‘I could have found a loop hole for you. But the owner fellow got in first.’

Norma has made up her mind. She is going to sell out to William Anderson and move in with Jim and Becky and the two girls in town. She can be close to Annalise and Sarah, be with them as they grow up.

She marches over to see Bill in the caravan park office as soon as she arrives home. She strides in without bothering to knock. Bill is sitting at the desk, staring at his computer screen. He jumps in fright as the door bangs behind her. She ignores the slightly sickening aroma of the ham and pickle sandwich that has paused midway to his mouth. She marches up to the desk and places one hand firmly on the top.

‘Mr Anderson, I want to take you up on your offer of \$40,000 for my set up. All in all, I think that would be the easiest for me to cope with, if you don’t mind.’

Her politeness after the slam of the door reassures him that he still has the upper hand. ‘What \$40,000? I don’t remember suggesting that! More like \$20,000 now, Mrs Simpson. You shouldn’t have gone behind my back to the Civil Courts, now should you?’ He jumps to this feet. The sandwich falls to the keyboard and disintegrates with a messy yellow smudge over the left hand side of the device.

‘\$20,000!’ gasps Norma.

‘You can make it \$10,000 if you prefer.’

Norma’s knees buckle and she faints to the floor.

*

Expansion.

It smells of fresh paint. Bill Anderson stands on one side of the waist-high counter and looks around. The large local Council office is modern. The colour scheme has obviously been selected by a consultant seeking to make an impression. The accent wall is a deep aubergine purple to contrast with the soft dove grey of the other walls. The carpet is a darker grey and the fire-engine red furniture highlights the colour scheme and accentuates the shiny black counter and the open plan desks beyond. The long, slim windows allow the sunlight to elongate sharply across the room in incremental lapses.

A tall man advances from his office with a door title Council Engineer on the door. His curly brown hair is short but unruly and he wears dark slacks, blue council shirt and a monogrammed jacket.

‘Mr. Anderson?’ he says as he extends a hand. ‘Richard Flanders, I’m the council engineer.’

‘Hello,’ says Bill, ‘I’m pleased to meet you.’

‘How can I help today?’

‘I’ve got some development plans for the caravan park that I own and I want them passed by council so that I can begin building.’

Bill places his manila folder of rough sketches on the counter and slides them towards the council engineer.

‘I see, William Anderson from Brackwell Caravan Park. These are your home drawn plans I take it?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well to start with they will need to be drawn up by an architect. Then the building inspector and myself will need to look at the dimensions, specifications and building codes that apply to what you intend. And that’s before we can even consider the outcome. Here, take one of these building instruction leaflets. That will describe the processes for you.’

‘Right I see,’ says Bill as he takes the leaflet and gathers his sketches and places them back into the manila folder. He turns to leave, but stops and faces the engineer. ‘I seem to know you from somewhere. Richard Flanders? But that name doesn’t ring a bell. Do I know you?’ Richard Flanders turns away without answering and heads

towards to his office. Stopping briefly at his door, he glances back at the figure of Bill Anderson and smiles to himself.

* * * * *

Settled after hours in front of the television in the wood fire warmth of their cottage, Bill and Clair agree it is time to consider their original idea for the caravan park. The initial tidying up is completed and now they intend to modernise most of the park.

‘It’s taken a couple of years to get this place in order. Now we’re ready for this phase of the project, Bill. We have to get a move on, don’t you think?’

‘Well, what do you suggest is the first move dear?’

‘We need space. Space to build the new apartments. There’s hardly any spare areas in the park. The best spots are taken up with those casuals and one or two permanents. They don’t bring in much revenue, we could make much, much more with the tourist dollars. The casuals only bring in \$60 a week and the permanents \$125 a week. But if we had ten or twelve resort cottages then we could make \$200 a day both summer and winter.

‘I like your language,’ says Bill.

‘We don’t have any other option than to tell those set-ups to the right of the main drag to relocate.’

‘That means from the car park down to the amenities. Numbers one to fifteen along Ghostgum, Acacia Lanes and half of Teatree Circle has to go?’ says Bill.

‘Well, I suppose so if we want to do what we intended in the first place. That’s the only way. We didn’t pay out \$500,000 to that crook just to sit back on our haunches, now did we?’ says Clair. ‘Okay, let’s plan what we want where.’

They get up excitedly and move to the kitchen table with a plain pad between them, pencils in hand.

‘We should face them to the north, so they catch the sun,’ says Clair, scribbling rectangles here and there.

‘Hang on, how many are we going to have?’

‘We could vary them, some bigger ones at the back maybe on stilts with a balcony so that they can see over the others towards the river. Some three bedroom and the others two. No use having anything bigger, that wouldn’t rent out regularly. If a family want accommodation they can rent two at the same time.’

‘No wonder I married you, Clair, you’ve all the sound ideas.’

‘We’d need a kitchen, lounge and eating area. I think open-plan would suit best. Maybe one and two bedrooms. Just a shower, vanity and toilet in the bathroom with washing machine is all we need there.’

‘Hey, wait on a minute you! We also have to think of underground plumbing, wiring and drainage. What outside cladding and windows are we going to use?’

‘We’ll make them super modern, with neutral colours inside and out. Maybe that new Colorbond trend on the exterior. Check this out,’ she says as she opens a glossy brochure. ‘That looks snappy, don’t you think?’ Clair says pointing to a bungalow.

‘So, who’s going to design these?’ Bill asks.

‘Never you mind. We’ll do it ourselves.’

‘But don’t you think we should clear out those set-ups while we have the chance?’ says Bill.

‘Well yes. We want to be ready for the tourism rush in spring. So are you going to tell them or I?’

‘Um...’ Bill hesitates.

‘Yeah ... sure. I’ll write up the vacate site and removal notice, as I always do, you can enforce it. You’re good at being the forceful one.’

‘What are you going to say in the notice?’

‘Something like ... Due to the intended development of the caravan park, the owners require you to vacate your rented plot and remove all structures including caravan, outbuildings, extensions and concrete slabs. You are reminded that any plants, trees and hedges are the property of the management and are not to be removed,’ says Clair.

‘So how long are we going to give them to get out?’

‘Six months. No, damn it. One. They’ll have to find another caravan park who will take them. Other than that, they’ll have to tear down their set-ups, sell off their stuff and find a place to rent.’

‘Okay, so we had better put a date on it. March 31st, how’s that?’

‘Done,’ she says making a note of that date on the sketch pad they had been planning with.

* * * * *

It is a great summer. The weather is kind. January is unseasonably warm which attracts many more day trippers, weekenders and holiday makers. The fishing mates in numbers five, eleven and thirteen have a spectacular fishing season out in their tinnies. Their catch exceeds thirty bream. None are willing to spruik off where the fishing hole is on the river, for fear their closely guarded secret leaks out. The visiting youths start up a marathon competition between themselves. It begins as a dare but it didn't take long for rivalry to set in. Their task is to swim across Taylor River and back at the boat ramp. Jump on their skate board at the barbeque area and skate to the Ada's corner store along the public road, then run back along Brackwell Road, carrying their board to the finish line at the entrance of the caravan park. There are no prizes, just puffed chests.

The girls perfect their tans with frangipani Reef Oil. Dreamily plan their summer wardrobe from Total Girl, thumb their absent friends on their iPhone, listen to Katy Perry and ogle the boys in their swimming costumes. The ladies lounge about and chat over tea or coffee at each other's place. The little ones watch Peppa Pig until it is time to go to the river's edge to make sand castles. In the heat of the day, Mavis and Justine visit to catch up with friends they have made over the years. Harry, the dog sitter, takes his Jake and any visiting canines for a leg stretching run down at the footy oval every second day. Fred and Frank entice the visiting outsiders to play a game or two of lawn bowls on the single green behind Ada's store. But the main intention is the social drinks afterwards at the bar for a catch up brag. There's a lot of laughter and back slapping, sharing, barbeques, stories and young love. It's a wonderful summer.

* * * * *

The main drag of the caravan park segregates the two portions of casual and permanent residents, and since the daily walk at *five o'clock somewhere* has been abolished it's less likely the two sides communicate on a daily basis. Contact is more likely along the laneways and those dwelling immediately in front and behind. Early in February, things begin to happen that go unnoticed. First, two garden sheds are dismantled. Then a few patios are taken to pieces and the terracotta pots disappear. It's only when a rented *Thrifty* removal van arrives to take furniture, whitegoods and sundries away that several note something is going on. When the curtains and blinds are taken down the residents realise that someone is moving out. It's not an uncommon thing for families to sell their

holiday vans so no one thinks any more of it. But when a family working bee gathers to dismantle the annex, questions are asked.

First a tray-back truck parks alongside number four Ghostgum Lane. The men of the family take out ladders and a crowbar. One of the guys uses a battery-operated screw gun to undo all the brackets along the gutter. The roof is peeled off in sections and manhandled onto the truck. The rivets are drilled out around the windows and jimmied out and the flimsy wall panels are piled on the tray.

‘What’s going on? We thought you might have sold out, but why are you taking the place to bits and carting it away?’ asks a passer-by.

‘We’ve been told to move out and clear the property.’

‘Hell, what have you done to deserve this? Must have been pretty serious?’

‘Maybe you’ve had your head in the sand, mate. All this side of the road have to clear out. That bloody owner wants to build a resort. They’ve given us just one month to find somewhere else. We have to take the caravan and everything. Leave nothing on this plot of ground.’

‘Jesus.’

It was directly after this that the permanents found out there was something amiss. It wasn’t as if they hadn’t suspected that the owners were concealing something. After all, there were rumours of a resort back when the rent was increased and at the time poor Norma was pressured to sell out for \$10,000. Fred, Frank and Harry join Trevor on their deck chairs on his grass verge at one of the men’s get-together in Bottlebrush Lane.

‘So it looks like what we thought Mister Nice Guy is up to is true,’ says Trevor.

‘Why does he have to be so secretive about these things? Don’t you think it would be a lot better accepted if he’s transparent about what they’re doing?’ says Frank.

‘God knows,’ adds Harry. ‘His behaviour sure does un-nerve you.’

‘You know our Sally?’ asks Fred.

‘Yep,’

‘Sure,’

‘Yes,’ they say.

‘Well, Mavis and I talk to her a fair bit about how he treats us. From her psychological training she reckons he’s a psychopath. Nice one day, a horror the next.

He's only concerned with getting what he wants and doesn't care about hurting us and is even apathetic to how we feel.'

'Big word, Fred,' say Harry.

'But it has a ring of truth about it,' says Trevor, 'I wouldn't be surprised.'

'Well his latest outburst is pretty rough,' says Harry. 'I was talking to that permanent guy at Number three in the corner. I don't remember his name, something like Gerald it was. He's just come back from his three-months retreat on the mainland where he visited his kids. Says he got a note in his internal mail telling him to pull up roots. Now what's he going to do? I bet he'll just doze it all down and go back up North.'

'Poor bugger,' says Frank.

'A lot of those people have been coming here every year since they were kids. Their parents owned it before them,' says Trevor. 'And the couple in number 10 Acacia Lane are about to retire here. She told me they were looking forward to settling down here next month. They even have their house on the market. Thank God it hasn't sold yet. How say we go for a wander and have a chat to some of these poor folk.'

'Good idea.'

'Wait until I finish me can, can't be seen to wander around with that in me mit,' says Frank.

The four of them abreast look more like a posse than interested guys concerned with what is going on. But as they wander through, the evicted warm to them.

'This set-up has been here for forty years, I don't know if the tires will actually inflate and I cut the tow bar and ball off ages ago, me thinking I will never have to tow the stupid thing out of here,' says the grey-haired guy at number 11.

'Well if you like, I've got a welder over my place,' says Harry, 'and I'd only be too pleased to weld it back on. Do you still have it?'

'Yep. Geez mate that would be fantastic. Can you do it tomorrow? We're anxious to get out of here now.'

'No worries. Where are you taking her?'

'We've managed to get a spot further up North in a smaller caravan park. They're okay to take us on permanently.'

Further over toward the river there is a commotion. A crash. A thud.

'Oh my God!' someone screams. 'Help someone, we need help,' a woman cries out.

‘Oh no Jack. Jack, are you alright?’

The four guys and many others rush towards the wailing. Number fifteen has been dismantling their annex but it is now a shambles. They could see that the roof has collapsed inward with a toppled ladder underneath. Legs protrude from under the rubble. One foot is twisted at right angles. A sneaker lies off to the side.

‘Come on you guys, put your back to this and we can lift it off,’ says Trevor. In the same breath he yells to the female. ‘Dial triple O.’

Each of them secures a corner and others balance the sides and centre.

‘Right everybody ready, on three lift and bring it this way over there on the grass. One two three, heave.’

Slowly the group of men shuffle in small sideways steps as they strain with the weight, and grunt when they cautiously settle it down on the ground.

‘I can’t look,’ sobs his wife.

‘Get a blanket,’ Trevor instructs her.

The male who was under the collapsed construction tries to sit up.

‘Hey man, stay still,’ yells Trevor as he rushes to his side. ‘What happened mate?’

‘I was on the roof of the annex when it gave way at one end and I fell under it as it came down on top of me.’

‘Do you feel any pain anywhere?’ Trevor asks as he places the blanket around him.

‘Don’t know. I can’t feel my right leg.’

The wife kneels beside her husband, holds his hand and whispers gently to her man. ‘Don’t worry I’ve sent for the ambulance. It’s on the way, it won’t be long, I can hear the siren in the distance.’

Bill sees the progress of the ambulance stalled by his new electronic boom gate; its siren and flashing lights summon urgency. He releases the gate by a remote switch in the office, then runs down the main drag adjacent to it to see where it’s heading. He approaches the group standing around number 15.

‘What happened here?’ he fronts up, breathless, pushing people aside.

‘He’s had a tumble off the roof that he’s dismantling,’ says Trevor.

‘Gosh that’s no good. Man, are you alright?’ says Bill. ‘Here let me help, what can I do?’

‘I think we can leave that to the experts now they’ve arrived,’ says Trevor. ‘It looks like he may have broken his pelvis or his leg at least.’

The wife who is kneeling, stands from beside her injured husband, feet astride and hands on her hips. Her face grimaces before she speaks.

‘You crazy bastard,’ she spits out at Bill. ‘This wouldn’t have happened if you hadn’t insisted we all move out. How do you feel now, making a fifty-year old pull his building down? You should be locked up.’

The group gave muffled agreement.

‘Yeh.’

‘I agree.’

‘There’s no love lost from him.’

Bill shrugs his shoulders and lifts his palms in the air in uncaring surrender and retreats along the main drag. *Who cares what they think*, he muses. *Where were they when the guy needed a hand to dismantle his set-up?* He brushed the incident aside. *These things happen. I’ve got to get a move on here.*

* * * * *

Bill throws the file down on the kitchen table with a disgruntled thud. ‘Have you seen the building requirements?’ he says on his return from the Council. ‘Hells bells, before we can even think about what we want, we have to work with consultants. Christ, we can’t even do the drawings ourselves.’

‘Like who? Who do we have to work with?’ questions Clair.

‘Building Designers or Architects are to draw up the plans,’ he reads from the leaflet. ‘That could take thousands of dollars just to get that done,’ he says as an afterthought.

‘Do we know anybody who will do it cheaply, and quickly?’ asks Clair. ‘We should look for someone who has a digger around here too and get them to start digging channels and stuff.’

‘Yes, and maybe there’s a local plumber who’s out of work who can lay all the pipes.’

‘That way we can have a lot of it done and dusted before the Council needs to know about it.’

Bill thumbs through an old dog-eared telephone book that he found out the back of the park office. He runs his finger down the list of architects in the yellow pages, bypassing large firms and business, searching for someone local. Bannisters ... Board of Architecture...Bramble Consulting ... Cockburn Pty Ltd ... Flemming Group ... Smith and Associates ... Waterman Mallory ... Wilson and Sons. He stops and goes back to Waterman and finds there is a larger description of the business on the page.

Mallory Waterman.

Architect. Operating since 1945.

Strathfield area. Phone: 6478 5555

‘I think I’ve found us our architect Clair,’ he calls out. ‘Lives close handy but not in Brackwell or in the direction of Chesterfield, so that should suit us, don’t you think?’

‘Give him a ring. See if you can meet up with him as soon as possible.’

That afternoon, Bill, still in his dusty khaki work shorts, boots and gaiters, drives the white work truck over the back road to Strathfield. The manila folder is beside him on the front seat. Once there, he slows the vehicle to a crawl looking for number 35 Plunkerton Street. Number 35 is residential. ‘Not what I expected,’ he mutters to himself. The house is a red brick bungalow with the same red tiled roof. The small front windows are shuttered and stand beneath a false gabled roof and patio. The front fence is hedged with some form of ivy that drapes itself lazily over the post and rail. There is no other garden or front gate, just a hole in the fence. Bill parks on the opposite side of the street, gathers his folder and quietly closes the cabin door of the work truck. He crosses the road and walks up the three front steps. He raps the small door knocker three times. The pathetic raps are hollow. He raps again, more heavily this time. As he is about to decide this is a lost cause, an old man appears around the corner of the house.

‘Hello there, you must be Bill Edwards?’ the man says.

‘That’s me.’

‘Mallory Waterman,’ he says as he steps forward extending his hand. Mallory is short and lean. His face is pinched, with a chiselled nose and rat-like eyes. His grey hair is swept over the top of his head as a makeshift toupee that matches his equally unruly goatee beard. ‘We can talk out the back. I work from my shed,’ he says as he leads the way.

In the middle of the shed is a long flat table and wooden swivel chair. On the table are scattered various set squares, retractors, rulers and callipers, a barely legible qualification in a black frame, and a blue plastic cylinder that holds lead pencils of all sizes. Behind him on a rack are rolls of white and transparent paper.

‘Would you like a drink?’ Without waiting for a reply, he pours a long scotch into a used glass from a bottle under the table and takes a gulp. He sits in his swivel chair, pulls out a drawer and selects yesterday’s pipe and relights it with a redhead match. He sucks several times on the mouth piece. The pungent smoke accumulates in the air with last month’s stains on the ceiling. He draws long and hard, leans back in his chair, allowing the fumes to escape his nostrils. Bill fetches a nondescript three legged stool from the corner and carries it to the long work table. He straddles it.

‘I have some building ideas here that I need architecturally drawn up,’ he says as he undoes his manila folder. ‘I rather need them in a hurry. Are you able to do that?’

Mallory Waterman takes his time, reaches for his wire-framed half glasses, places them halfway down his nose and ponders the sketches and dimensions. ‘I’d better check my diary first.’

Bill could see over his shoulder that there were no entries.

‘Well, I suppose I could do them next month.’

‘And how much is that going to cost then?’

‘About \$3000, I suppose.’

‘Mr. Waterman, I can see that you could probably use some ready cash on the spot. How say, I give you \$3500 and you have them done by next week?’

‘That’s very generous of you, young man,’ he says, coughing.

Bill stands. ‘I’ll be back on Monday next. You’d better have them done. I’ll pay you cash when I see them.’ As he is about to leave he turns back to the ageing architect.

‘Oh! By the way do you know of anyone who has an excavator who could do some digging and plumbing work from around here?’

‘I’ve a cousin in the business. I’ll get him to contact you, will I?’

Bill doesn’t bother to shake hands. He just slaps his business card on the table and retreats. He strides back to his work truck with a smile on his face, confident that Clair will be pleased with his efforts.

* * * * *

A small light blue slide tipper with a miniature digger perched on the back pulls up at the park entrance in a billow of dust. The name on the driver's door speaks in faded red writing that the rig is owned by Handy Pete who will discreetly complete any job at a reasonable price. The truck has seen better days. Careless manoeuvring has dented the front right hand fender and the tip tray is scratched all along one side. The rusty tail gate hangs precariously on its hinges and is held in place with a two inch link chain and padlock. A podgy bellied Pete, wearing bib and brace overalls, steps down awkwardly from the truck cabin. He swipes his nose with the back of his hand, extracts an oversized hankie from his pocket and blots his forehead as he heads to the office. Bill, with his drawings in a manila folder under his arm, meets him out the front of the office and escorts him along the main drag to the newly vacated area adjacent to the river. Bill indicates with his arm—along here and across there, specifies the depth by holding his hand one metre off the ground then points to the architectural drawing. Pete nods and cleans his hand on the side of his trouser leg, before shaking hands with Bill.

The work begins immediately. Pete begins to stake out the area with pegs and a stringline. He consults the architectural drawing periodically to get his bearings. The digger is offloaded down a makeshift ramp. Its tractor tread scars the grass verge like an advancing military tank as it finds traction. All afternoon Handy Pete and his squeaking contraption thrusts into the soil and swings, shakes empty, swings and digs, emptying the soil into the back of the truck.

In two days, a maze of trenches evolves; zig zagging back and forth over where residences in Ghostgum and Acacia Lanes and the south end of Teatree Circle once existed. As Pete is about to get Bill to show him the completed task, a trench closest to the river's edge collapses and disappears. The sandy sides of the trench dissolve like melted ice-cream into a three metre sink hole. Pete gets down off his digger, scratches his head and peers over the rim.

'Geez, he ain't gunna like this,' he mutters to himself. With a 'come here' arm signal he waves to Bill, who is working outdoors.

'What in the hell is this?' Bill asks when he sees the gaping hole. 'Crikey man, I didn't want a hole like this here. Why'd you do that?'

‘Not me mate. The ground just collapsed by itself. It’s too sandy and too close to the river. The water’s just sucked it up. I reckon it will get bigger too.’ As if commanded, another wedge splices off like an iceberg and splashes into the hole.

‘Shit,’ says Bill ‘What are you going to do?’

‘Not what am I going to do, man. What are you going to do? It’s your responsibility not mine. I’m here to dig trenches and lay pipes,’ says Pete.

‘I’ll double your fee if you fix it for me.’

‘Looks like it’ll need draining. Then I suppose it’s going to have to be shored up somehow otherwise it’s just going to keep collapsing.’

‘Can you do it?’

‘Nuh. Know a mate who used to be in mine rescue who can tell me what to do though.’

‘It has to be done on the quiet.’

‘Pay me in cash and you’ll have no trouble.’

Pete’s mate helps him shore up the sink hole with railway sleepers. They pin them together with coach screws to make them solid. Then mix concrete to plug the hole. Together, though neither had a plumbing licence, they connect the water pipes and sewerage, crisscrossing the bare patch to link where the twelve luxury resort cabins will eventuate. Tell-tale grey plastic stink pipes and white bathroom and kitchen connections protrude above ground like sprouting mushrooms.

* * * * *

‘Mr. Anderson,’ the female voice on the telephone says. ‘This is a follow-up call from the engineer at the Council. I believe you were making inquiries about building on your site, is that correct?’

‘Yes,’ says Bill. ‘I was in to see the engineer about two weeks ago and he gave me some instructions on how to go about that. I’ve had the plans drawn up and I’ll be submitting them this week for approval.’

‘Fine. Would you also submit the soil testing, water and sewerage plumbing and drainage reports with the site plan as well please? Then once that’s done we have to get building approval.’

‘Soil testing?’

‘Yes, that needs to be carried out first before any construction. We have a geotechnical engineer here at the council if you need to engage his services.’

‘A what? Blimey, what does he do?’

‘He tests the physical properties and soil stability on the building site.’

‘Right ... thanks for your call.’

Click

* * * * *

The next week a large white envelope addressed to Mr. Richard Flanders in scrawly hand-writing arrives on the engineer’s desk. He opens it with his letter opener. Inside are the architectural drawings by Mallory Waterman and a soil test report from the excavator Peter Grose. He scrutinises the drawings and places them to one side. The soil report receives the same treatment. He bundles them back into the envelope and presses the intercom button to this secretary.

‘Beryl, could you summon our geotech surveyor please and tell him to bring his augur drill and soil analysis kit, we need to visit a proposed building site in Brackwell. I’ll meet him out the front in the council wagon.’

The surveyor lumbers his equipment into the back of the wagon and slides in beside the engineer as the engine turns over. They begin their trip.

‘What’s up, Flanders?’

‘I’m a bit suspicious of this fellow who runs the caravan park at Brackwell. He wants to build a resort complex there. He’s submitted his plans drawn by a Mallory Waterman of Strathfield. That fellow hasn’t been a registered architect for over ten years. There’s no site plan, just the cabin designs. And this soil test is pure nonsense. I don’t know what he’s up to and I intend to wheedle it out of him.’

‘Right, so we are going to give this fellow a surprise visit and do the test ourselves?’

‘Yep, spot on,’ says the engineer.

The work wagon turns into the entrance of the caravan park and stops in the visitor’s parking bay in a billow of dust. The two council employers get out. One retrieves the equipment from the back while the more senior strides to the office with the white envelope under his arm. Before he reaches the door of the office, a voice stops him. Bill has come out of the shed behind.

‘Can I help you?’ Bill says, as he wipes his greasy hands on a grubby cloth. ‘Oh, the guy from the council. You’ve received my plans I take it. All in order?’

‘Well no, I need to talk to you about them.’ Bill steers the engineer away from the office back towards the council vehicle. The engineer spreads the contents of the white envelope on the bonnet of the wagon.

‘The soil sample report is incomplete. It’s not set to the 2870 standard and there’s no classification. There needs to be more than one hole drilled to give an accurate account. And it should have been done well before any building plans were drawn up. Now where is your proposed building site?’

Bill shrugs his shoulders in defiance.

‘It won’t help you not to assist us, Mr. Anderson.’

Bill indicates beyond the row of trees with a backward thrust of his head without saying anything. His shoulders slump and he sighs.

‘My assistant here is going to take some soil samples,’ says the engineer as he waves his arm towards the surveyor to go ahead.

‘Further to this omission, Mr Anderson, the plans you submitted were drawn up by a non-registered architect. Mallory Waterman was disbarred ten years ago for malpractice.’

‘What? ... That old bastard! Took my money easy enough.’

‘Would you mind telling me who Peter Grose is?’

‘He did some work for me ... a while back.’

‘And what might that have been?’

‘It doesn’t really’

‘Well, I think it does matter because this fellow is not a qualified soil testing technician.’

The assistant hurriedly appears from behind the trees with his auger and a few samples in his hand. Grinning, with his eyes wide with excitement, he interrupts the conversation.

‘I think you need to come and have a look at what I’ve found boss. There’s been a lot of work done on site already.’

‘Oh shit,’ says Bill.

‘It’s best you come clean, Mr Anderson. Take me to the building site.’

The three of them round the corner. The engineer stops in his tracks.

‘So, you’ve levelled about fifteen van sites here.’

Bill is silent.

‘Not only that boss, all the water courses have been dug and laid.’

‘I can see that. All done prematurely, without council permission.’

‘More than that boss, I was taking a sample and I hit a big concrete pad. So I took samples all around it. It’s all sandy soil and the classification is the worst it can be. Class P.’

‘Explain what that is to Mr Anderson, will you.’

‘Mr Anderson, Class P means P for problem site. The ground is very unstable and will not bear a load. It’s quite likely there will be landslip or sinkholes. I’d say that’s what’s happened there and you’ve tried to repair it.’

The engineer turns to Bill. He stretches to his full height, squares his shoulder and takes a deep breath. ‘There’s only one thing for this. As a result of the poor soil readings, you doing the work before council approval and that your building plans are fraudulent you will never be able to build anything on this site. The council will not allow it.’

‘But...the resort. I’ve paid out twenty thousand as a non-refundable advance to a building firm.’ Bill sinks to his haunches with his head in his hands.

Clair seeing the group discussion and Bill’s demeanour strides over from the office and places her hand on Bill’s shoulder. She spots the engineer.

‘You! What are you doing here? You were told never to come back.’

‘Who is it, Clair? I knew he looked familiar but I don’t know from where,’ says Bill, standing to his feet.’

The engineer smiles. ‘I’m a very good friend of Virginia Bradley. You threw her out of this caravan park and made Virginia, now my wife, tear down her place and evicted her for no apparent reason. I no longer work for myself. I’m the council engineer and the council have declared this building site a non-event. You will never be able to build your resort. Good day to you.’

Richard and his surveyor turn towards their vehicle, confident of their decision. Behind him he hears a resounding slap of Clair’s hand on Bill’s face. He could imagine the stinging pain in her palm and the red welt on his face. There will be no rest in the park office for a while to come.

*

What's Up?

Those pesky rumours have surfaced again. If it isn't Ada at the corner store with her prophesies it's bound to be over enthusiastic verbalisers within the boundary of the caravan park. It's a pastime, just as addictive as cryptic crosswords. The gossip usually starts with the customary 'What's up?'

The latest swept through the park like a dose of salts but it originated from outside. It developed one afternoon at the local watering hole at Brackwell. Trevor, Harry and Frank are sitting on the high stools leaning against the bar watching a local broadcast of a pre-season football match on the TV. During half-time Frank goes to the mens to relieve himself. Seeing it's his shout, on the way back he orders another three schooners of VB. He juggles the glasses between both hands and plops them in front of the guys.

Sitting down he says, 'Guess what? That fellow, who broke his pelvis when he fell off his annex roof when dismantling it. He's suing Bill.'

'Well ... well,' says Trevor.

'Well, indeed,' says Harry.

'Where'd you hear that?' asks Trevor.

'The publican just then. He says everyone's talking about it. Ever since half that lot at the park were told to clear out. Why do you think he's having a go at Bill?' asks Frank.

'I suppose because Bill demanded he demolish his set-up and live elsewhere,' says Trevor

'That'd be a pretty penny if he has to cough up for all the medical and hospital bills,' says Harry.

'Plus rehabilitation,' says Trevor.

'Holy shit,' says Frank. 'I hope he doesn't think of some hair raising scheme to bleed more money out of us. Christ!'

Park people are on the side of park people. By now, few have time for Bill. They certainly wouldn't stage a demonstration against a resident for having a crack at the owner. Keith, the newcomer in Blackwood Place who obviously hasn't as yet fallen prey to Bill, took it on himself to form a petition on his behalf. He lobbies the park. All

he's met with is slammed doors, blind eyes, rebuffs, raised eyebrows and a few 'you've got to be fucking joking mate.' They certainly wouldn't lift a finger to support Bill.

* * * * *

Justine parks her green Hyundai outside the corner store. 'Hi Ada, how are you doing?' she says as the new automatic door lets her in and swishes behind her as it closes again. Ada in her usual work garb—slacks, cardigan and a full length apron—is on her knees stocking the biscuit shelves. She looks up as Justine enters.

'Hi darl, you've just made it today. I'm about to close. What are you after?'

'Just milk and bread for breakfast tomorrow, Ada. I'll get them.'

Ada has improved her little store over the years. The new commercial refrigerator down the back now holds different varieties of milk, fancy cheeses, dips, exotic sausages with strange mixtures of herbs and spices like lamb, rosemary and fetta. The vegetables and fruit, rather than in the wooden crates, are now in a cooling display cabinet. She experiments with seasonal vegetables like fennel, kale and brussel sprouts, rather than just potato, beans and salad stuff.

'So darl, what's happening in the caravan park?' says Ada as she tabs Justine's items through the till.

'I was going to ask you that same question, Ada? You're usually the first to hear anything amiss.'

'Well, I have. You know that nice Mr. Brumby, man who that broke his hip in the caravan park a while back?'

'You mean that guy that fell off his annex roof?'

'Yeh.'

'Ah, is that what his name is? I never really got to know him.'

'Yeh, Mr Brumby. That guy that broke his hip ... well he's out to sue your Bill fella for making him pull his place down. Got himself a fancy lawyer who deals in accidents.'

'Well, I'll be.' She gives Ada ten dollars and gathers her milk and bread. 'I'll expect you will keep your ear to the ground Ada,' she says, touching the side of her nose with a forefinger. 'Thanks, see you soon,' she says as the door opens and closes for her. She gets in the car and motors off, eager to get back and tell Trevor what she's just heard.

* * * * *

Back at the caravan park. Justine opens the front door of the set-up and calls, 'Trev, you in here?'

When there's no answer, she knows exactly where he'll be. She puts the milk in the refrigerator and the bread on the bench. Down the end of the lane she spots the guys having a chat. Trevor has his hands in his pockets. Harry is leaning against a stump, with his dog Jake, resting at his heels. Frank is swigging from a tinnie.

'You'll never believe what I've just heard at the corner store,' she says before she reaches them.

'You'll never believe what we heard at the pub,' says Trevor. 'You first. What did Ada have for us today?'

'That Mr. Brumby, who broke his pelvis here the other month, is suing Bill.'

'Well ... well. Is that right?' the three of them tease.

'What's up with you lot?'

'That's the same thing we heard. There's something going on here,' says Trevor. 'It's a bit hush-hush inside these walls, but the outside community knows about it.'

'Do you remember that day, you guys?' says Harry. 'While we helped him we had to get his wife to call the ambulance, and Bill only turned up when it arrived. He didn't give much of a hoot either.'

'His wife tore strips off him too, remember?' says Trevor. 'No wonder there's trouble afoot.'

'So, who is to blame here? It's not as if it's a workplace accident. I can't see it as being occupational health and safety, either can you?' says Justine.

'No, I don't think so,' says Harry.

'But who is responsible, I wonder?' asks Justine. 'Now I'm curious, I'm going to find out.'

Justine knows exactly who she can ask. Gayleen, her long-time school friend, is a solicitor in Melbourne and she decides to make a personal phone call during working hours. She dials her number 03 9748 9000.

Ring ... ring.

'Gaylene Thompson here.'

'Hello Gay. This is Justine Cooper, in Tassie.'

‘Hello Justine. It’s been a while since I’ve heard from you.’

‘Yes, it’s been a while hasn’t it. Sorry.’

‘Everything alright? Are you in trouble?’

‘No, not me. I just hope you can fill me in on something, you being the solicitor and all?’

Justine tells her friend of the unfortunate accident and how Mr Brumby is suing the owner. She also makes a point of informing her that the residents were told to remove their set-ups by the owner. Her mouth is so crowded with questions, they just blurt out.

‘The trouble is Bill Anderson owns the ground, but Mr Brumby, who is nearly fifty I might add, owns the living quarters and pays rent to the owner for the use of his land. So it’s sort of private property on a public place. I want to know who is responsible for the accident. Who is liable?’

‘It will probably come down to duty of care. If the owner demanded the living quarters be dismantled and removed, he should have offered assistance,’ says Gaylene.

‘Well, he didn’t do that Gay. Everyone had to do their own work.’

‘The other probable thing is that the owner will have liability insurance because the park is a public place. Mr. Brumby is able to take the owner to court, but he’ll need to be represented. It’s a costly business. Not only are medical bills taken into account but the court costs and the solicitor fees can double the payout. The other option is to settle out of court.’

‘Thanks Gay. You’re a gem. I knew you’d have the answer. I promise not to make it so long between calls next time. Bye.’

‘See you, Jus.’

Click.

Justine finds the guys still chatting at the end of the lane and tells them that Bill is probably at fault and could be out of pocket in a big way. Harry winces at the thought of it. Frank just says ‘Holy shit.’ Trevor purses his lips and nods his head several times.

* * * * *

The Bottlebrush group scour the local papers over the next month or so for names, dates or court listings. Nothing about Brumby verses Anderson. There’s only one thing for

it— to go and see Ada and ask. Justine is designated to suss her out, being girl-to-girl business.

On one of her usual trips to the corner store, Justine mentions the subject.

‘Ada, you know Mr Brumby and that liability case against the owner? We haven’t seen anything in the paper about it yet. What’s going on, have you heard?’

‘Darl, I just so happened to bump into Mr Brumby last week in town, I did. Poor bugger’s still limping and uses a walking frame.’

‘That’s a bit sad isn’t it?’

‘He’s happy though. That Anderson fellow settled out of court. Don’t know what that means really, but he’s got his money.’

‘How much? Did he say?’

‘Nuh. Sworn to secrecy he said.’

‘That’s why there’s been nothing in the newspaper. He’s settled out of court so that it’s not public. No records of what the payout was. No admission of liability, or wrong doing,’ says Justine.

‘What a crafty bugger he is.’

‘Just imagine what would happen if word got out that he was negligent and all those people who took their places to bits could also have his guts for garters.’

It was obvious that Bill had outsmarted Mr Brumby, kept his reputation intact and concealed it from the inside community by playing by the rules of settlement. Justine smiles at Ada as she holds the hessian carry bag open for her purchases.

But they know the truth.

*

Pulling The Pin.

Late in the afternoon Justine sits on a white cast iron chair out of sight in their private barbeque area. The sun is about to set, casting long fingers of red, orange and apricot across the indigo heavens. She looks around, observing how their place and gardens have matured. The warmth of the day vaporizes the fragrance from the jasmine that is full-grown, twisting around and over the trellis. Their privacy hedge is over three metres tall. The pinot grape vine, heavily laden with a vintage next to the potted olive tree, is ready for harvest. Trevor comes out from inside with two glasses and a bottle of red wine. He places them on the café-style round table.

‘Here’s the wine,’ he says as he sits beside her on the other chair.

‘Thanks Trev. Do you want some crackers and cheese?’ Her eyes light up. ‘Hey we still have some of that pâté I made.’

‘Yum. That’ll make this occasion complete. You go get them, I’ll pour the wine.’

She returns and places the nibbles on the table. ‘This is a special spot, isn’t it? We’ve had some good times here, haven’t we?’

‘Sure have.’

After a long silence, he breaks their reminiscing thoughts. ‘It’s not quite the same around here though, is it?’

Justine knows the answer to this.

Is it the right time to go? What don’t they like around here now? What has changed? These are the questions they have pondered separately for months now. Their answers merge in agreement after long evening discussions.

* * * * *

Bill’s demeanour changes for the worse. After half the caravan park is told to move on and disassemble their set-ups and that the resort idea had failed. Gloom radiates from the office on a daily basis. The abandoned resort area is hastily grassed over in readiness for large tourist vans and Winnebagos in effort to re-coup some money. The casual and permanent rent changes again without any consultation or reason, though it is obvious to the residents as to why. Without warning, Bill demolishes the garden fence that Harry

had erected around the community garden and he levels the ground with his small dingo digger.

‘How come you’ve demolished that Bill?’ asks Trevor.

‘You’ve finished with it.’

‘We were going to get it ready for some winter vegies.’

‘I need the land for another permanent.’

‘But it worked so well for us,’ puts in Justine.

‘Too bad. It’s my land, I’ll do what I want.’

‘Right ... thanks for the privilege last Spring.’

He must have already had inquiries because a caravan towed by a battered, green and white daisy-encrusted Bongo van arrives the next week. A couple get out. The male has no shirt on. He wears a long black trench coat over his leather pants and worn out Uggs. His long dark un-kept hair hangs over his eyes and shoulders. She is shorter. Her long floral dress is covered with a khaki coloured shawl to match her thongs. Her fair dreadlocked hair cascades down her back. An adult Rottweiler bounces out of the back of the van and immediately investigates its surroundings sniffing at everything and stomping on the edge of an African daisy bush. Their camp intrudes on the Bottlebrush Lane group who watch from a distance just metres away.

‘What are you gawking at?’ the male rants, giving Trevor the tall finger.

‘Nice, I must say,’ says Fred.

They reverse park the 1950s, round-nosed caravan on the bare plot and make themselves at home. They spread a tarpaulin on the dirt alongside the van and hoist a make-shift tent roof on two poles over the top and string a rope clothesline between. Then with some of the natural rock from under the tree line, they construct a shaky open fire. From then on there is guitar music with a strange mixture of minor keys and exotic off beat melodies. They drink long into the night and from within the caravan, the other residents can hear domestic squabbles and penitent sex.

‘It looks like the park rules have gone to pot,’ Harry says to Trevor and Justine not long after. ‘A hostile dog on the loose, an open fire, smalls on the clothes line and noise after 11.00 pm.’

‘Rules for one and not the other,’ offers Trevor, ‘especially what we all had to go through when they took over! Things must be bad in the office to let anyone in.’

'I feel uneasy about them over there,' says Fred indicating with a thumb over his shoulder.

Mavis rolls her eyes heavenward. 'Lord what's the world coming to?'

'Are those two having another blue,' quips in Frank.

At least he made them laugh.

* * * * *

The weather usually changes in April. This season it's different. It begins as scattered showers just as the weather bureau had predicted. It's just enough to frizz Justine's hair or for her to need a brolly to stop her glasses from getting damp. The garden enjoys the fresh water. Petunias, the lobelia and silver beet weigh over with the extra drops.

'Your grass'll need cuttin if the sun comes out again after these showers,' Gary calls out to Trevor.

Gary, or Gazza as he likes to be called, is one of the newcomers enticed into the park after the failed resort. He's the every inch of a lazy, fat mongrel. He is about five foot five, just as wide as he is high, with a shaved head. Gazza's taken over number 20 across the lane from Justine and Trevor, next to the gypsies. Because the lanes are dirt and gravel, some are now wheel rutted from vehicles, others puddle dished where sparrows dirt bath.

One morning when Trevor is mowing their grass verge, Gazza, bare footed, in shorts and a blue singlet, calls out. 'Now you know why I got ridda me grass, Trev me boy! Dammed if I'm gunna mow the bloody stuff every weekend. Much better to have blue metal, all you have to do is rake the leaves off.'

They'd watched Gazza's garden renovations. First he poisoned the grass and weeds, and then layered old rubber-backed carpet over it all to smother the grass. Then a delivery tipper from the landscape supplier backed down the street with unwashed blue metal and dumped it ceremoniously in a heap.

'Put more over here, I want to park me four wheeler there,' he orders. 'That's it, right up to them pots, don't want no bloody grass here. I'll share a slab with youse if ya spread it out for me,' he hollers. When the driver and his mate have finished, the whole area is paved in blue metal. No grass in sight. *Psst, clink*. The twenty-four cans are emptied and thrown in a pile.

In contrast, Trevor and Justine enjoy their weed-free patch of lawn. When they established it, they'd prepared the ground from the garden beds to slightly slope to the road for the water runoff. Then dressed it with topsoil and fertiliser, then, over sowed it with an all-purpose lawn starter seed. They watered it daily until it sprouted, then gingerly gave it its first hair cut two weeks after. They stand together and stare as the sun's rays glint against the blue metal.

Those forecast scattered showers increase to rain. Across the roof tops others light their wood fires to keep out the damp. By two o'clock in the afternoon the rain has settled in. On the six o'clock news the weather presenter upgraded the forecast to storms. 'No lightening or thunder,' he says, 'just an endless torrent.' The forecaster is right, it is persistent.

'It'll be interesting to see what the rain gauge reads in the morning. What do you bet,' Trevor challenges Justine.

'Twenty mils.'

'We'll see. I reckon it will be more. Much more than that.'

It's still raining in the morning. It sheets down relentlessly as if there's an unplugged waterfall above them. Their lawn is soggy and puddles have settled over the lane. Trevor reports there are thirty mils in the gauge. By afternoon, there are fifty mils. The bath towels don't dry. Washing is draped over chairs like dust jackets. Rain coats drip from door handles and there is an ant track of muddy footprints across the floor. The rain doesn't stop overnight.

The next morning the lane is a lake. There's not one metre of dry land. The gardens and lawn are under water.

'I'll need my gum boots on to get out the front door,' say Trevor.

'Thank god you built this place up off the ground, otherwise we would be swimming by now.'

'We've had 150 mils in two days. No wonder the place is under water,' says Trevor after inspecting the rain gauge.

Their set-up looks like an ark. The muddy brown water from Blackwood Place behind them has found its natural gravity and flows underneath their floor boards and

floods into Bottlebrush Lane. There's no drainage and the water cannot get away. The gravel around Gazza's place acts as a dam wall that holds the water in position. But he isn't exempt; the flood laps at his front sliding door. They can see him peering through the glass.

When Bill barrels down the lane in the work vehicle checking the runoff, the tyres create a wave high enough to surf on. They slosh against Gazza's door in recurring breakers, seeping through the gaps around the ground level door and ooze over his carpet. He raises his clenched fist and shakes it at Bill as he speeds away. The waves lap at their top step, ripple over Justine's flower beds and Trevor's prized lawn.

Days later, when the water recedes, it leaves a muddy sludge that stinks of human waste and rotting garbage. It smothers everything and suffocates the lawn and masks several of their trees. It's a task to screed and wash it all off with the hose.

There's no sign of Bill.

The gypsies at number 19 hole up in their caravan, buried up to the axel and wheel hubs in a quagmire.

There's no sign of Bill.

Across the park there are hacking coughs, bronchial rattles, asthmatic wheezes and whooping croaks. Elizabeth, the newcomer in Blackwood Place, is not used to the cold weather and damp, ends up in hospital with pneumonia from the mould and bacteria caused by the flood.

Bill does nothing about the drainage.

* * * * *

The beginning of their change comes via a message. Justine is shopping in Chesterfield when her iPad beeps inside her handbag. She retrieves it to find an early real estate message.

Forward warning of vacant land for sale in Brackwell. Number 35 Jackoby Street. Enquiries to Viney's Real Estate Chesterfield.

She opens the attachment and scrolls down past the houses for sale and seeks out vacant land. The photograph of number 35 is of a gentle, sloping large block. There are no trees, only a garage at the rear.

911m2 sloping block with garage

Located in picturesque Brackwell, this 911m2 gently sloping block has a partially-lined garage and amenity shed for your convenience. Water and power connected. Well fenced, this block is just waiting for you to build your own home or holiday retreat. A comfortable 60 minute drive to Chesterfield. Owner wants to sell quickly. Offers above \$55,000 will be considered. Some views of the river if proposed dwelling is elevated from the road frontage.

Justine thumbs Trevor's number into her mobile.

'Hello,' he answers.

'Trev, It's me. I've just received a property alert on my iPad. I've seen a picture of it and it looks pretty good.'

'Right.'

'It's just the block we're looking for. It's around in Jackoby Street, can you go and have a look at it?'

'Sure. What number?'

'35.'

Fifteen minutes later Trevor rings back. 'I've got it now. Hey, this looks good, even has a little bit of a water view. How much did you say was on it?'

'55.'

'I'll give the agent a ring and tell them we're interested. Who was it?'

'Viney's.'

Justine arrives back at the caravan park later that afternoon. Trevor meets her on the veranda and gives her a hug. His eyes are wide and shining, his mouth twists in a smirk.

'What's up with you?' she asks.

'The agent is coming before dinner,' he says.

'What!'

'I rang him and I said we wanted to make an offer.'

'What? Gosh Trev, we haven't even talked about this yet.'

‘He says there’s others interested who have already made offers. We’ll have to talk quickly now then. I think this is the best we’ve seen so far.’

‘Cripes, give me a glass of red, this is too much.’

In the twilight, the representative from Viney’s Real Estate parks his silver commodore with the red company logo on the doors, in the visitor’s car park. He doesn’t bother with the office but follows Trevor’s directions. He bobs under the boomgate and walks along the main drag. He finds 23 Bottlebrush Lane easily enough. Trevor opens the door to a tall, lean man in his 50s, dressed in a black Hugo Boss suit. They introduce each other, shake hands and Trevor invites him inside. The agent sits at the table and places his crocodile skin brief case alongside his chair.

The first thing he says to them is: ‘I’ve already seen the other two prospective buyers. Their bids are above \$55,000. I’m not at liberty to tell you how much, but if you want this land you’ll have to make it good,’ he warns. ‘Finds like this are rare around here so make it worth your while.’

‘\$70,000,’ said Trevor with a wink to Justine.

‘And, \$100 more just in case the others gave a round figure,’ says Justine.

‘So, your bid is \$70,100, is that it?’

‘Yes,’ they say simultaneously.

The agent breaks into a grin. He slaps his palm on the table. Justine holds Trevor’s gaze and they instinctively know they have clinched the deal without the agent saying anything.

‘I’ll telephone you before the evening is out to let you know the outcome.’

After the agent leaves Trevor says to Justine. ‘We’d better keep this a secret otherwise the owners might get wind of it before time. I hope they don’t notice the car out front.’

‘What do you think the others here will think of it? They probably won’t like it too much. If we move does that mean we won’t be trailer trash anymore?’ asks Justine.

* * * * *

The time has come to uproot. Too many changes. Too many irregularities. Too many broken rules. Too many unsavoury characters now. Trevor and Justine decide to build on their land and sell their set-up at the caravan park. That decision was easy in the end.

Like many times before, they approach the park office where all decisions are made. In the late afternoon they tap on the glass door. The entrance bell tinkles above them as they enter. Bill is at the desk talking on the telephone. A cigarette rests smouldering in an ashtray, its pungent smoke carves a upwards spiral. They wait. Bill continues talking on the phone. On hearing the entrance bell, Clair comes into the office from the rear.

‘Hello you two. What can I do for you?’

‘If you don’t mind Clair, we’ll wait until Bill is finished, we want to speak to you both,’ says Trevor. Clair’s eyebrows furrow. She turns and snubs the cigarette out in the ashtray, opens the front door and tosses it outside.

‘Blasted smokes. God knows why he’s taken them up,’ she mutters, giving Bill the cut throat action to hang up the phone. Bill hastily replaces the handpiece, without smiling he stands to greet them.

‘Trevor, Justine, what’s on your mind,’ he asks. Trevor takes the lead.

‘We’ve bought a block of land in Brackwell and we’ve started building on it.’

Clair purses her lips and Bill lets out a long, slow sigh.

‘... well,’ says Clair smiling. ‘You’re vacating then?’

‘Yes, we’ve come to give you notice. We’ll move out when the house is finished.’

Bill stares ahead, looking right through them without replying. Clair looks sideways at Bill. She frowns. He’s holding his breath as if he needs to measure his words.

‘You just going to leave us in the lurch then,’ he spits out.

‘No, we’re letting you know that we’ll be selling up eventually,’ says Justine.

‘We’ll be sorry to see you go, you two, you’ve been here ...’ begins Clair.

Cutting Clair off mid-sentence, Bill continues. ‘So how much are you going to put on it?’

‘We thought \$65,000, I’ve done a lot of improvements to the garden and renovations, and stuff,’ says Trevor.

‘So, we will advertise it for you,’ says Clair.

‘What’s the procedure for that then?’ asks Trevor.

‘We’ll put it on our web site, on the notice board in the park, reply to any emails we receive and list it on paper for those who make personal inquiries,’ says Clair

‘That will cost you ten per cent of your asking price,’ says Bill.

Clair turns sharply to face him, a look of puzzlement on her face.

‘So what do you do for that?’ asks Justine.

‘That’s it.’

‘That’s it! \$6,500 for administrative purposes?’

‘Well, more than that. We are selling your set-up on our land,’ says Bill. ‘We are your selling agent. You pay us \$6,500 when we sell it.’

‘We can’t use an agent of our choice?’

‘No.’

‘Okay,’ says Trevor. ‘We’ll put a For Sale notice in the set-up window for visiting people to see.’

‘Not allowed.’

‘Well, at least I can put it in the For Sale column in the Chesterfield newspaper.’

‘You can go to that extra expense if you like. I don’t bother with that.’

‘I don’t believe this ...’

‘Take it or leave it.’

As if dismissed like troublesome children, they turn and leave the office without closing the door. Behind them they hear raised voices.

‘Bill, can I tell you something?’

‘Don’t tell me I have a choice.’

‘You’ve made some stupid mistakes these last few months. That ten per cent commission is another one. Why?’

‘You want an explanation? I’ll give you an explanation. We’re getting short on ...’

The front door slams shut.

Trevor and Justine walk quickly along the main drag out of ear shot.

‘This could be harder than we think,’ says Trevor.

‘Oh Trev, we are doing the right thing, aren’t we?’

‘We’ve bitten the bullet now. I could have punched his teeth down his throat, he made me so angry. The power that fellow thinks he has.’

‘Well, he does, doesn’t he? But to get through this, we need to go along with him. We can’t shake hands on a deal with a clenched fist.’

They walk silently, hand in hand back to their set-up and begin to plan the next phase of their life.

* * * * *

During the next few months, five permanents place their set-ups for sale. All have to comply with Bill's demands. The place is full of looks and nods and elbows in ribs. One couple engage the services of a Real Estate Agent after complaining to Bill about the ten per cent. The agent is astounded. 'We only take three per cent for selling your property. Why don't you take this fellow to court?'

The answer to that had surfaced before, when poor Norma went to court only to find out that there is no legislation to help out caravan park residents. When Bill found out they had approached an agent, he deliberately excluded their sale from any prospective buyer, leaving them stranded in the caravan park for longer than they wanted to be.

Eventually those of the Bottlebrush Lane group discover that Justine and Trevor have bought land and started to build on it. Harry, the longest serving resident was the first to approach them. 'Best move you've ever made. Congratulations. I'm pretty settled in my ways here, I can tolerate the mongrel. He'll never walk over me, I shoot wallabies remember.'

Mavis and Fred are beside themselves. 'We wish we could follow you. But we don't have enough money to set up again. The only way we can get out of here is to live with Sally in town. She's independent and wouldn't like us hanging around,' says Fred.

'I don't like it much ere now,' says Frank. 'That Bill fella don't like my deafness much either. He either ignores me or scowls at me about whatever. I might have to go back to the pub to live. I could try and put mine on the market and see how it goes. If I make it really cheap, say \$18 or \$20,000 it might go quickly. What ya reckon?'

'Good luck mate,' says Trevor.

Bill, aware of Frank's haste, offers him \$15,000 for his set-up. He grabs at it, packs up and vacates on the same day. He's happy renting a room upstairs back at the local pub. He can still drink his tinnies whenever and where ever he likes. The other boarders there don't question what he's saying or repeat what they are saying to him.

A week later, around midnight, those who live near Frank's old set-up in Blackwood Place hear what sounds like fireworks. Harry, the closest, looks out of his front window from across the road. It's as bright as day. Frank's old place is on fire. It's as if a fire-

snorting dragon is stomping its feet. Cracking, splintering, bursting. The fire moves at a furious pace and within ten minutes the structure collapses in a charred, smouldering mass. The other residents can only look on from a distance.

‘Luckily his place is on the end of the street and the fire stayed just there. Pity it’s gone though,’ says Harry.

‘Bill won’t be too happy. He’s just lost another \$15,000’ says Trevor. ‘Clair might have something to say about that too.’

‘How do you think it started? There was no-one living there, no gas or electricity being used,’ asks Fred.

‘Maybe old Frank snuck back and put a match to it?’ Trevor jests.

‘Naw, the old bugger wouldn’t know how to do that,’ says Harry, as he turns away to conceal the wry smile on his face.

* * * * *

While Trevor and Justine’s house is being built, there is hardly a nibble at their sale from the office arrangements. So they up-the-ante with a detailed advertisement in the local Saturday newspaper. The first day the advert is in Trevor, who is the upfront man, gets three phone calls on his mobile. The first comes as soon as the paper hits the streets at 7.30am. A male explains that he and his wife want a sea-change and from the advert it looks exactly what they want.

‘We have two dogs. Are dogs allowed?’ he asked. Trevor advises him to ring the owner to ask, and gives him the caravan park telephone number.

‘Call back and let me know how you go. We can arrange for you to have a look through.’

Bill did not allow them to bring in two small dogs.

The next call was from a single fellow who has access to his twelve-year old daughter now and then. He questions Trevor about the layout, facilities, cost and rental charges. He talks for about thirty minutes and seems eager to see it.

‘I have to go to Melbourne in the next few days, but I’ll call and make a time when I can look over it.’

They never hear back from him. It appears children of permanent residents were not welcome.

The third caller that weekend are a retired couple who have one dog. They made a viewing time at 3.00 pm on the Sunday. They loved it and its position in the park. They asked the bottom price, Trevor said '\$59,000.'

'Great! Done,' he says. Trevor and Justine could not believe their luck in selling it on the first weekend. The couple call again the next day and want to measure the rooms to see if some of their sentimental furniture fitted.

'Only trouble we have is that we have to sell our house first. But we are going to ask our agent to lower the price for a quick sale.'

'It would be a good idea to make contact with the owner of the caravan park before you make any decisions,' advises Trevor. 'But, if I have another buyer I'll be obliged to take that offer. So, I'll ring you before I do, to see where you are at with your house sale. Good luck.'

'This seems like a lost cause Luv, how long is this uncertainty going to go on?' asks Justine. 'We have this lovely new house just waiting for us to move in. I've had enough of living here. Can't we just move out while we sell it?'

'I don't know sweetie. But I've had enough.'

When they approach the office yet again, they are told by Bill: 'Of course, you may move out. All you have to do is maintain your permanent rental of \$125 a week until it's sold.'

'You mean, we have to pay rent, even though it's vacant and we're not using it?'

'That's what I said,' says Bill.

They shake their heads and just turn and leave.

'Pity these poor people who are stuck here under that tyrant. At least we have the means to get out of here,' says Trevor.

'I think he realises that. I have a gut feeling he's going to bleed us for what he can.'

'What's the worst that can happen?'

After a year of unsuccessful attempts to sell, Trevor and Justine lower the price to \$40,000 for a quick sale, even though it's well below cost. It finally sells.

Back at Bottlebrush Lane they vacuum through and dust for the final time. They lock the front door and turn to go. On the road below, three people face them like wise men

bearing gifts. It's Mavis, Fred and Harry. Harry steps forward, a faint smile flickers at the corners of his mouth before he speaks.

'I shot a roo last night and I thought you might like to make your favourite Italian casserole.'

'The folks around here thought you'd like a *Fragrant Cloud* to remember us by,' says Mavis.

'Here's a bottle of Champers to celebrate your sale,' Fred offers.

'Thanks guys, that's really sweet,' says Justine as she accepts their parting gifts and gives everyone a cuddle. Trevor shakes Fred's hand then pecks Mavis's cheek. He slaps Harry on the shoulder before giving him a man hug.

They go to the office for the last time to settle up and hand in the set-up key and the boomgate swipe card. There's no sign of Bill, so they deal with Clair.

'Bill's not in?' asks Trevor.

'No, he's on the mainland at the moment,' she says with downcast eyes.

As he places the cheque book on the counter, Trevor says, 'Well, we'll pay our dues if you don't mind. From memory we have to pay \$6,500 for the administration of our sale.'

Clair hesitates, then smiles. 'Seeing you've paid an extra twelve months permanent rent, I don't think you need to pay any commission.'

'Bill won't agree to that, surely!'

'It's got nothing to do with Bill any more. Oh yes! I've made an executive decision on that.'

'That's decent of you Clair,' says Trevor, as he retrieves his cheque book.

'Thank you very much Clair,' says Justine.

'Good luck with everything guys,' she says as she stands and shakes their hand.

They turn and leave the office for the last time. They are so elated that it's all over. They feel as if they've severed from a failed relationship or escaped from a dysfunctional career. The warmth from the day enriches the eucalyptus oily, pine scent and the cicadas drone their farewell. Trevor and Justine escape from behind the boomgate.

It's not a requirement since 1976 and hadn't been seen for decades. But a most unusual notice appears in the Chesterfield Tribune under public notices, a month after Trevor and Justine leave the caravan park. It reads:

Clair Anderson (nee Robertson) of Brackwell, wants the public to be aware that she has filed for divorce against William (Bill) Anderson. Therefore, she will not be responsible for any debts incurred in her name by her husband.

The following month, in the same paper under the general business column, this notice appears:

Be it known that the company Anderson Land Ltd, under the management of William (Bill) Anderson, is unable to meet its financial obligations. Therefore, the Brackwell Caravan Park has been placed in the receivership of consultant Jonathan Barry, who has custodial responsibility for the property and all assets and rights. Mr. Barry, as the receiver manager will resume the running of the business under the expectation that the business will remain operational until a reasonable outcome is achieved.

Nestled together on their new balcony, Justine and Trevor raise a glass of red for Clair and a tinnie for their friends at Blackwell Caravan Park.

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**An exegesis on
Behind the Boomgate**

Introduction

Good writing illuminates truth ...is designed to give the impression of transparency in a world of shuttered doors ...tells a story and tells it straight.

Laurie Penny (2014, p. 8). *Why I write*.

Stories are all around us and within us. They may be real or imagined, oral or written, and long or short. Some amuse us, make us cry, test our intellect, question our judgement, seek our empathy or transform our thinking. Australian writer Arnold Zable (2002), says “the storyteller was one of the most powerful of communicators, and the tales he or she told were far more than mere stories” (p. 3). My project, documented in this exegesis and artefact, focussed on writing stories about my experience of living permanently in a Tasmanian caravan park. I and many others experienced a range of injustices that, without exposure, could continue to affect the lives of hundreds of people across the state.

My project explored the question of which combination of research methodologies and creative practice has the potential to expose the injustices that baby boomers experience when living permanently in a caravan park. The two components of my PhD unify to present a solution to this problem and to represent my writing journey through charting both the process and result of practice-led research.

The project’s process was not a linear procedure but a cyclic and bottom-up application (Mafe & Brown, 2006). As a researcher and creative writer I asked questions, generated methodology, collected data, created stories, revised them, conducted more research, reflected and then modified the practice. I recorded and debated the questions and ideas with myself on hand written, now dog-eared, A4 writing pads. The pads also became a repository of my academic reading. Important decisions were highlighted with sticky notes and different coloured highlighter pens. Most practitioners refer to this documentation as a journal (Arnold, 2014; Bacon, 2014).

Some academics claim the exegesis develops from the knowledge gleaned during the process of creating an artefact, documents the creation and is thereby led by practice

(Arnold, 2007). Students are often strongly encouraged to produce the artefact first before attempting the exegesis (Arnold, 2014). Others argue that the process is created in parallel (Mafe & Brown, 2006). My project adopted the latter process. In my case there was necessary scholarly and experimental research that needed to be conducted before any creative writing occurred. None-the-less neither could exist without the context of each other. The journaling created synergies between the exegesis and artefact in what Josie Arnold (2014) refers to as the “H component” in which the journal joins the two strands. To document the scholarly interaction of the exegesis and artefact my project had a broad practice-led methodology and adopted a threefold model proposed by Jen Webb (2008).

Firstly, Webb’s model allowed me to consider research *for* practice and it documents the use of conventional research methods to provide knowledge about the content and the context for the artefact (Webb, 2008). It was important for me to begin with research *for* practice ahead of any creative element, because it was essential to provide key issues, circumstances and details that underpinned the realism of my setting, characters and story line. Information *for* practice was developed through Chapter One, the literature review; Chapter Three, the auto-ethnographical interpretation, participant observation, and the readings and textual analysis. It is important at this stage to mention that the auto-ethnographic methodology allowed me to use my voice in the reflexive first person account throughout the exegesis and also guided the representation of the experience that underpinned some of the story content of the artefact. These ideas will be extrapolated in Chapter Three.

Secondly, the project considered research *into* practice as a way to generate knowledge about the techniques, approaches and thinking on the making of the artefact (Webb, 2008). My examination of theory in this section of the model occurred simultaneously during the research and the making of the artefact. The broader theoretical approaches fashioned my ability as a creative writer, exposing me to further ways in which I could integrate these elements into my stories. The chapters that contribute to research *into* practice are Chapters two, three, four and five. Chapter Two explored and categorised social activist writing; Chapter Three considered auto-ethnography and realist writing, Chapter Four evaluated possibilities when working with a short story cycle, Chapter

Five focussed on how to create character and plot and Chapter Six interrogated techniques to incorporate body language in writing.

Thirdly, the project addressed research *through* practice to generate knowledge about social, political and cultural issues (Webb, 2008). The artefact exhibits and creatively documents these issues and is the outcome of the practice-led research (Dawson, 2008). In deliberation with the exegetical research that represents, interprets and disseminates the findings, the creative narrative of the social action orientated short story cycle was produced. The social action aspect of the project is quintessentially linked to the idea of narrative power. Indeed, Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle (2009) speculate that narrative power may be the only tactic available for those experiencing injustice. “Without narrative power they may not be heard” (Bennett & Royle, 2009, p. 60). The narrative also gives power to the reader who acts as an “interpreter” of what they are reading (Atwood, 2002, p. 44).

Being “heard” by the reader is not only important for the writer but also meaningful. Meaghan Morris (2014) highlights the relationship between people penning stories and those who read them. She stresses the authority and power thereof is in the exchange between writer and reader (pp. 172-173). Rosie Dub (2014) equates this authority and power in writing to “alchemy” (np). She uses it not in the original sense but offers “alchemy” (np) as “the mysteries of the creative process[es] and the transformative power of story” (np). Alchemy occurs then when the writer arranges dissimilar elements into something comprehensible and significant.

Hence, this reflexive exegesis maps the process of my emergent understanding, the research behind the project, and the pursuit of a suitable narrative genre. The exegesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One provides the rationale for the project. This chapter is inquiry-based and functions as a literature review that informed my artefact. It focussed on Tasmania, an island and the most southern state of Australia. The literature review investigates Tasmania’s ageing population; what baby boomers expect and want in their retirement; the use of caravan parks as permanent dwellings; and the lack of legal protection for caravan park residents in Tasmania. It discusses how social capital can serve as a model that explains how these individuals survive and what difficulties they experience.

Chapter Two explores and categorises social activists according to what they are opposed to, the scope of change, the pace of the change and the means or actions required. Literature is investigated as a popular way of expressing injustices. I then explore who wrote fictitiously about injustices and discuss André Brink (a South African), Arnold Zable (an Australian), John Steinbeck (an American), and Frank Hardy (an Australian). Following this I examine non-fiction accounts of reporters and their study of long-term low-wage working environments where social injustice is rife. They are journalists Polly Toynbee (from England), Barbara Ehrenreich (from America) and Elizabeth Wynhausen (an Australian). I then consider those who personally write about their experienced injustice and study Jimmy Baca (an Indo Mexican), Marilyn Beker (an American), and Arundhati Roy (an Indian). Using all these authors, this chapter concludes with a classification of social action writers compared to on-the-ground social activists and consider their work against the categories of radical, liberal or revolutionary activism.

Chapter Three methodologises how I researched my stories. The first considered is auto-ethnography, which was originally drawn from the discipline of Performance Art, English and Communication (Ellis, 2004). The major theorists on auto-ethnography drawn on were Anderson (2006) regarding stance, Chang (2008) and Ellis and Bochner (2000) for methods, Reed-Danahay (1997) for approach and for reference to methodology overall Denzin (2006) proved enlightening. The second method discussed is participant observation, an investigative framework commonly used within the fields of Anthropology, Sociology and Ethnography (Delamont, 2007). Of particular use were writers Babbie (1999), Burns (1997), Gold (1958) and Hemley (2012) for their interpretation of how the combinations of participant, observer and community emersion could work. The third research method is textual research, a form of analysis utilised in Humanities and Education (Sandelowski, 2000). Using the scholars Babbie (1999), Neergaard, Olesen, Anderson and Sondergaard (2009) and Sandelowski (2000), I was able to determine the best approach for textual analysis. I then compare how other researchers utilise these methods and evaluate their relevance to my project.

Chapter Four profiles my understanding of the creative writing process. To begin, I research the notion of narrative by studying Abbott (2008), Whitla (2010) and Bennet and Royle (2009) and in particular the deviations of short story through thematic

interpretations (Moorhouse, 1972) and interrelated and overlapping explication (Gelder and Salzman, 2009; Winton, 2005). I liken the creative writing process to those used by social action writers. The chapter concludes with a realisation that my artefact will consist of short stories that combine to reach a novel length through weaving the characters, actions, incidents and outcomes loosely together over two or three episodes within an overarching short story cycle (Belen & Lucan, 1997; Cook, 2012; Ferguson, 2003; Mann, 1989).

Chapter Five begins with the debate between whether character or plot is the key to narrative. To inform this discussion I called on the work of critical theorists Abbott (2008), Barry (2002a) and Cuddon (1998). My research on Rimmon-Kenan (1993), Barry (2000), Abbott (2008) Chatman (1978) and Cuddon (1998) revealed that the idea of priority and various order of character, plot and action are mutually championed by many modern writers. I then considered the question of characterisation and discovered critics and practitioners who find there are no hierarchies between the three and that which element is privileged depends on what the writer is trying to achieve (Rimmon-Kenan, 1993). My research suggested that character is demonstrated through a mix of psychological means and actions (Bal, 1997). Characters can also be termed direct depending on the degree of exposure through salient details (Rimmon-Kenan, 1993) and by the creation of flat or round characters (Abbott, 2008; Bal, 1997; Whitla, 2010) through psychological depth or sophistication. The chapter concludes with the insight that if characters are to be realist, lifelike, and like real people then they must have complexity and real life obstacles to provoke reader sympathy and empathy (Ballon, 2003; Bennett & Royle, 2009; Cheney, 2001).

Chapter Six furthers the nuances of character through the explanation of non-verbal communication. I discovered that I am able to use non-verbal communication to enhance the realism of my character's personality, their complexity and to present psychological traits as physical actions that the reader can use from the text to construct the image of a character. The first component of nonverbal communication that I studied consisted of kinesics, often referred to as body language, which deals with the motion of the human body. The chapter concludes with an analysis of environmental and social factors that make up the other components of non-verbal communication and the further authenticity of character, actions, dialogue, setting and appearance.

Behind the Boomgate evolved from this research and my experience, and grew to include tales from those who had similar encounters until it finally became *The Story*. On completion it leaves the safe haven of my imagination to begin another life.

Appendix One considers Ethical Considerations of the project. This section has been included to reflect the considerable ethical dilemmas involved in the research, particularly during its evolution over a range of story forms, and to explore the extensive procedures required for ethical clearance of the project as my university. Writing fictionally about a community of which you are a member is a fraught process and it is important to me that my efforts to come to a resolution about best practice for this process is noted, not only for my community but also for those who wish to follow in my footsteps.

Chapter One

Rationale

The journey of this PhD began with my experience of living permanently in a Tasmanian caravan park. Over my five years of residency I noticed dichotomies between baby boomers and aged retirees, the married and the single, male and female, the healthy and unhealthy, the happy and unhappy, and the groupies and loners who lived there permanently. I knew that I wanted to write stories about these people and their differences as a way of documenting the challenges and enjoyments that those oppositions created. However, having lived side-by-side with the occupants, I realised there was a wealth of information I needed to discern in order to accurately capture their experience and represent their lives. So I stepped away from their stories and engaged in supplementary research as a way of understanding the needs and expectations encountered in their specific season of life. This chapter is the outcome of this inquiry and functions as a literature review that investigates Tasmania's ageing population. It analyses what baby boomers expect and want in their retirement; the use of caravan parks as permanent dwellings; and the lack of legal protection for caravan park residents in Tasmania. Social capital is also examined as a model that seeks to explain how these individuals survive and what difficulties they experience.

Tasmania the ageing state

Tasmania is an ageing state. Baby boomers, that is, those born in the 20 year period between 1946 and 1965 (Quine & Carter, 2006) and who are of or near to retirement age, are more directly affected by issues such as health, wellbeing and the quest for quality of life, than other sections of the population (Quine & Carter, 2006).

It is estimated that in Tasmania, by 2019 one in every four people will be older than 65 years of age (Tasmanian Government, 2007). The Australian Bureau of Statistics census (2011a) confirmed this projection, claiming that Tasmania's median age is now the oldest in Australia. Equally as important, Tasmania also had a higher proportion of people aged 45 years and over (44%, up from 38% in 2001) than Australia as a whole (39%) (ABS, 2011a). In addition to these statistics, the state has recorded the oldest median age interstate migration into Tasmania in the nation (ABS, 2011a). Thereby,

Tasmania is experiencing an incursion of baby boomers that will only increase in the future.

This information offered a point of inspiration. As Tasmania is referred to as the aging state and faces further increases in people over 55 years of age, this meant that the issues around aging and aged quality of life would be pertinent for years to come. With the ongoing social and political interest in this age group, it seemed a rich, pivotal, and issue driven area around which to set my artefact. Having decided this, I now needed to understand the group's background, requirements and expectations.

Baby Boomers

The influx of baby boomers in Tasmania mean the state will be faced with a range of competing needs (Quine & Carter, 2006), as they are not a homogeneous generation (Mackay, 2005). Boomers sprang from parents who were born during the Great Depression and experienced the Second World War. The baby boomers were at the forefront of many social trends and phenomena; the first television broadcast, the Beatles, National Service, the Vietnam War, the pill, the unprecedented sacking of Australia's Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam and the "establishment of 12 months separation as the sole grounds of divorce" (Mackay, 2005, p. 8). In contrast to their parents, boomers developed a different view of humanity, the world and life. They were the first generation to assert nonconformity to a broad spectrum of political, economic and social issues, for example National Service, the Vietnam War, casual sex and the pill. With this history, there is little doubt the baby boomers will continue to have a dramatic effect on the state and nation's politics. They are a politically influential and highly vocal group who have a history of pushing forward political, legal and social change.

Retirement

This culture of independence has translated into the desire to be in similar control for the latter half of their lives (Olsberg, Perry, Encel, & Adjorjany, 2004). An issue arising from this is that as baby boomers age they prefer to live independently, that is "not live with children or be institutionalised" (Quine & Carter, 2006, p. 5). This statement is reinforced by research that concludes nursing home accommodation does not appeal to the baby boomer generation. There is a general consensus amongst baby boomers that

nursing homes are a place of last resort with as many as 75% of over 50s saying they would *only* go into a nursing home if they had no other choice (Benevolent Society, 2008). Those aged between 50 and 59 are the most negatively disposed to nursing homes (Benevolent Society, 2008). This may be because more boomers own their own home. Eighty per cent of household owner-occupiers were “aged 65 years” (Olsberg et al., 2004, p. 7), suggesting that some may prefer to be independent and spend retirement and old age in their own homes, until they need to draw on public sector health services (Ozanne, 2009).

There is a contradiction however, in that they will not remain in their existing homes. Some will liquidate their assets to support downsizing housing and lifestyle options (Olsberg et al., 2004; Quine & Carter, 2006). Bernard Salt, a social demographer, predicts the nation’s baby boomers will sell up and relocate to sea-change and tree-change locations (Salt, 2009). These migrations are already evident in Tasmania, with the top four highest percentage growths in local government areas for age 65 years and over being for sea and tree-change regions (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2011). It has been determined that these areas will continue to expand with the mid-north and eastern coastlines experiencing the highest projected population growth between 2007 – 2032 (Tasmanian Irrigation Development Board, 2009).

High-income boomers who remain in their house or sell out and relocate are reliant on sufficient superannuation or assets to retire comfortably. This will only be achievable if their financial situation is stable, whereby they may consider selling their houses to finance their retirement (Olsberg et al., 2004). However, the circumstances of low-income boomers are very different. Half of 50-65 year olds have no accumulated wealth to fund their retirement. They believe they will need to continue to work after retirement age for financial reasons or alternatively survive on the pension as best they can (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006). In Tasmania, during the period 2008-09, 76.7% of retirees were reliant on government pensions or allowances as their main source of income (Tasmanian State Government, 2011), further implicating the difficulties for baby boomers.

These realities provided excellent fodder for my stories. I was particularly concerned about single asset baby boomers who are reluctant to enter nursing homes and who were

prepared to sacrifice the family home to downsize to a sea-change or tree-change location with an accompanying lifestyle. Also of interest to me were those whose financial situation is unstable. A caravan park seemed the obvious setting for my story as, when I had resided in one, I encountered residents who either elected to live there because of affordable rent or who had chosen to retire to the site for its location. The opportunities for stories from this are abundant. I contemplated experimenting with these and including these elements in my story.

Their health

Even though baby boomers are only one section of the ageing population they represent several aspects of the health debate. Firstly, it is predicted that baby boomers will have a higher life expectancy. Overall, they have benefited from comfortable lifestyles and improved health services, lengthening their life span when at the “age of 60 years in 2004-2007, women and men could expect to live to 86 and 82 years respectively” (Humpel, O’Loughlin, Wells, & Kendig, 2010, p. 8). This is an increase of four years since previously assessed in the early eighties. It can be assumed that medical advances in research will assist longevity and provide solutions to serious illnesses (Quine & Carter, 2006).

Secondly, they may be more health aware. They will be more educated and health conscious than their parents (Ozanne, 2009; Productivity Commission, 2008). Some researchers suggest they will deliberately choose to be healthier than their parents by seeking information about prevention and behaviour change (Quine & Carter, 2006).

Thirdly, conflicting with the above statements, a portion of baby boomers will move in the opposite direction, thereby disregarding health. This attitude can be attributed to their retirement lifestyle. Mackay (2005) reports that baby boomers see themselves as the “forever young generation” (2005, p. 39) who remember their parents at a similar age appearing to be much older. Therefore, they intend to live life to the fullest and have fun claiming “sixty is the new fifty” (2005, p. 5).

Baby boomers who do not visit health services regularly present more often with chronic disease such as depression, anxiety, arthritis, high blood pressure and particularly obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Increasing weight and lack of exercise

implicate diabetes and heart conditions (Quine & Carter, 2006, p. 5). Many Australians aged between 55 and 64 years engage in risky health behaviours. For example; “17% currently smoke, 16% have risky alcohol consumption, 35% do not take part in sufficient physical activity and 59% report low vegetable consumption” (Humpel et al., 2010, p. 10). In Tasmania, a self-report health survey attributed that two thirds of people over the age of 60 years were in excellent health (Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). However, the self-reporting assessment may be inaccurate. Due to self-reporting being subjective about how one feels and functions, respondents may reply in the affirmative because they do not understand, nor take into consideration, the risk factors associated with ill-health. For instance, the same survey where the respondents expressed their excellent health also noted that most over 60 years of age were significantly overweight and obese compared to the total adult population, engaged in inadequate physical activity and consumed inadequate quantities of vegetables (Department of Health and Human Services, 2011, pp. 2-3).

This two way health debate suggests that baby boomers with high life expectancy may think they are healthy yet are not. Alternatively, they may embrace the keep fit regime or the forever young attitude and an accordant lifestyle. These fundamentals provide attributes for likely characters in my story. For instance, I may illustrate some with a carefree attitude who live life to the fullest, depict those who disregard a healthy lifestyle, and represent others as individuals who do not realise their health risk.

Close to family and friends

As with retirement and health, baby boomers have expressed mixed opinions about their family and friends. While many expect to be caring for their grandchildren in retirement others want to escape their own children and their grandchildren. The first group are looking forward to spending a lot of time with their children. This may stem from their feeling of distance and removal from their parents when they themselves were teenagers. As a result they may be determined to stay close to their children. Some welcome their children still living at home when they require emotional and financial support, and may pride themselves on their ability to still assist their offspring. Their desire to help is partly because of their obligation to assist their children now rather than leave them an inheritance (Mackay, 2005). These boomers also want to live close by when their children do move out and marry, so that they have access to their

grandchildren (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006). Though, as previously noted, many have expressed that they do not want to live *with* their children (Quine & Carter, 2006).

To other baby boomers, there is a drawback to having the grandchildren in close vicinity. As grandparents they are concerned that they may morph into undertaking parenting and babysitting roles. Some boomers have expressed that they would rather work than retire so that they have an excuse not to baby sit the grandchildren (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006), thereby deliberately dodging the expectations of their children. While some mothers sympathise with their daughter's commitment to a career, they will not let themselves be taken advantage of in this respect. In later life these boomers do not want to become carers and seek to be free from obligations of family life (Mackay, 2005).

Real life baby boomer traits regarding family produce different attitudes that characters in my story may adopt, rendering them dissimilar according to their situation. I may choose to represent any or all of these combinations to yield authentic representation. For example, a couple who want to live close to their children and grandchildren. Alternatively, a single person having a family member close in case of need, or a re-energized couple who are "free" of parenting obligations.

Friends are a different matter. Boomers who either remain in their homes or relocate to a smaller residence do so in order to retain long-standing friendships and stay in a familiar area (Benevolent Society, 2010; Boyd, 2010). No matter where the boomers live, a sense of community, shared activities and supportive neighbours, a better shared lifestyle with others, and social companionship are held in high esteem (Mackay, 2010; Olsberg et al., 2004). They are more likely to form intentional communities or friendship enclaves of community and commonality of lifestyle. Being amongst likeminded friends means a great deal to the widowed, divorced or those living alone. A great number of baby boomers who have experienced divorce at some point in their lives do remain single (Ozanne, 2009). It is therefore important that they have opportunities for friendship, social activities and a feeling of being less lonely (Gardner, Browning, & Kendig, 2005).

In Tasmania, 20,000 of those aged over 65 were living alone, which places them at a greater risk of social exclusion (Tasmanian Council of Social Service, 2012). Older Australians who have been divorced or are single will have lower incomes and fewer assets than they would have if they had remained married, and therefore need opportunities for housing that they are able to afford (Ozanne, 2009).

Whether married or single, baby boomers are social beings. I am particularly impressed with their need to retain long-term friendships, companionship and sense of community and saw many opportunities for this idea to be translated to my story. Additionally, there is an opposite effect where this may be reversed to illustrate social exclusion.

Housing needs

Most Australians are fearful of the consequences of being a part of a growing and ageing population and the lack of affordable accommodation (Benevolent Society, 2010). It is no different in Tasmania (Jackson & Felmingham, 2005). It is a concern that over the past 20 years housing prices have increased five-fold compared to average earnings (AMP National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, 2008). In 2010, over 3,000 people were on the waiting list for public housing in Tasmania (Tasmanian Council of Social Service, 2012) with priority applicants waiting for 26 weeks (Tasmanian State Government, 2011), and affordable rental properties recorded as being in short supply (Anglicare Tasmania, 2011). This problem applies to older generations too. Of the 3,916 respite, high and low care, secure dementia and assisted and supported living residencies existing in Tasmania there were only thirteen vacancies (as of 21st December, 2012). What this suggests is that a diversity of housing types is needed to meet the needs of our ageing Tasmanian population. In 1998, Beckwith (1998) predicted the role of caravan parks in meeting the housing needs of the aged. Reflecting the accuracy of this, in Australia between 1996-2001 there has been a steady increase of long term residents in caravan parks (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (ADHURI), 2004). In the 2001 Census, 61,464 people were permanent residents of Australia's caravan parks, an increase of 6,263 people compared to the 1996 ABS Census (ADHURI, 2004). Of these, 23% of individuals were aged over 65 and another 19% were aged between 55 and 64 years (ADHURI, 2004).

Inhomogeneous baby boomers who are nonconformists and who in their retirement remain fiercely independent and non-institutionalised present an interesting element for my story. Although a challenging undertaking, their different physical, mental and health attributes and social inclusion requirements would make attention-grabbing story lines. Similarly their needs for affordable housing, as discussed above, in addition to increased use of caravan parks as permanent residence make a caravan park a timely and apt site on which to anchor my narrative. In order to ensure I captured an accurate picture of caravan park living, I turned my investigation more formally to the roles and nature of caravan parks in Tasmania.

Caravan Parks in Tasmania

If the permanency trend continues, Tasmania may need to investigate the viability of their caravan parks as possible sites for affordable housing. There are fifty-seven caravan parks of varying sizes across Tasmania (Caravan Industry Australia (Tasmania), 2012). In Tasmania, according to the 2011 Census, 999 people were residing in Tasmania's caravan parks¹ (ABS, 2011b).

Caravan parks cater for casual occupancy (that is on weekends and holidays) and permanent dwellings (that is occupancy every day and the occupants consider this their principal place of residence). A small number of caravan parks casually cater as crisis accommodation for those who are temporarily homeless, or as short term stays for itinerant workers (Bostock, 2001). Short term casuals are sometimes considered undesirables because of their socially disruptive reputation (Severinsen, 2009).

Due to this, those who choose to live in a caravan park permanently are sometimes stereotyped as lower class “trailer trash” by the community. “Trailer trash” is a term originating in the United States (Muller & Martin, 2001, p. 11). It is often used for any person living in a caravan park irrespective of their status, appearance or demeanour. Residents may regard being labelled in this way as signifying that they are second rate, or a second class citizen (Muller & Martin, 2001). Additionally, the residents may have difficulty in obtaining goods and services on credit and in using local community services, such as libraries, through being seen as itinerant and lacking in assets

¹ Precise numbers for caravan dwellers are difficult to gauge as the ABS classify caravan, cabin or houseboat under the same ‘dwelling structure’.

(Department of Health Housing and Community Services, 1991) even though they may actually not be itinerant or lacking assets. Furthermore the media exacerbate that tension in reporting about caravan park residents in ways that position them as “trailer trash” communities (Carter, 2010). However, despite this negativism, many choose to retire to caravan parks for the lifestyle change, as they think it will provide them with the quality of life they desire. Several studies indicate it is possible for long-term caravan park residents to be satisfied with their lifestyle (Greenhalgh & Connor, 2003; Secomb, 2000) where strong social networks can contribute to quality of life, a cohesive community life and an atmosphere of community spirit (Barclay & Mawby, 2008).

This tension between negative social attitudes to caravan park dwellers and the positive attributes of the lifestyle offered exciting possibilities for creative exploration. I could depict one or two of my characters with undesirable traits who perhaps broke the law and others who had strong social ties within the community and were included in the fabric of park community. In order to capture the sense of disadvantage or shiftlessness that seemed to be attributed to caravan park residents, I began to research the legal constraints that governed residents.

Residential Tenancy Acts

It was a concern for the Tasmanian government that in the Australian states of Queensland, Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria caravan parks were closed down so that the owners could upgrade their facility to a village of retirement home status or rebuild totally as “leisure and lifestyle villages” (Walker, 2005. p. 29) of five star status. Both styles catered for the niche market of retirees. This meant that caravan residents were evicted without any rights, causing undue grief and hopelessness. Due to this outcry over eviction, most States now have a Residential Tenancy Act to guard permanent resident rights.

The Residential Tenancy Act covers things like signed rental agreements, building regulations and drainage under the local government. Design factors are key elements in that they take into account lot size, floor space, setbacks from the road, road design, storm water displacement and access to a Consumer, Trader and Tenancy tribunal to arbitrate when inconsistencies and discrepancies occur. More importantly, when there are more than twenty permanent sites, priority is given in the establishment of a Park

Liaison Committee for the purpose of improving the lifestyle of residents and helping avoid problems arising in the park. The Committee helps the owner with park rules, standards of behaviour and undertakes discussions with the owner on the general rules of the park (NSW Office of Fair Trading, 2007).

Increasingly, from the year 2000, mainland property developers began to buy caravan parks in Tasmania. In Tasmania several caravan parks were rejuvenated to more luxury complexes, often evicting the residents to enable restructure and leaving the resident either homeless or searching for another venue (Wood, 2002). For this reason the Tasmanian State Government reviewed the Residential Tenancy Act. However, after a review the government did not include dwellers in caravan parks who classify their dwelling as their permanent place of residency (McKim, 2011a). This omission has considerable consequences for permanent dwellers.

The plight of the permanent dwellers in Tasmania

As caravan parks in Tasmania do not come under the Residential Tenancy Act (Tasmanian Government), none of the implied regulations above apply. The owner of the caravan park is the landlord and owns the ground on which the caravan and annex are situated. Since the owner's ground is being used, the resident has to rent it. It is up to the owner to make and enforce park rules. This may be as simple as a noise curfew at 11.00pm, restrictions on parking, the height of shrubs and trees or whether pets are allowed, when visitors may come, erection of garden sheds, speed limits, and garbage disposal (Edwards, 2005). As well, anything planted in his/her ground belongs to the owner regardless of who purchased the plants and trees. They may decide to cut down or remove these plants and trees without consulting the resident (Harrison, 2011).

Furthermore, major rules are made and enforced by the owner. These may include increases in electricity costs, rental charges, and whether extensions and alterations can be made. More disturbingly, if the owner needs a plot of rented ground he/she can ask the tenant to remove their dwelling and vacate without any justifiable reason (Harrison, 2011; Wood, 2002)

Additionally, if a permanent resident wishes to vacate the caravan park and sell their residence, they cannot. It is in the hands of the owner who will sell it in his/her own

time and will take ten per cent of the sale price as a commission (like a real estate agent, though they only charge three percent). The resident has the choice of remaining in their residence until sold or if they do vacate, the owner demands the regular weekly rental fee until sold (Harrison, 2011).

Fear of reprisals

Permanent residents are reluctant to complain or challenge the owners on enforced home-made rules (Jones, 2010). They fear revenge, eviction and even exploitation and therefore remain voiceless. Until the Tasmanian Government ordains the inclusion of caravan parks in the Residential Tenancy Act, residents have no legal leverage for reprisal against the owner (Jones, 2010).

The review of the Tasmanian Residential Tenancy Act concluded in 2011 with the omission of permanent dwellings in caravan parks (McKim, 2011b). This reluctance to complain and the government's omission highlight a power inequity between residents and owners and government.

Hence, many residents may experience caravan parks as a negative and restrictive place to reside. Residential life in caravan parks may or may not be ideal, creating an un/satisfactory condition of existence. Due to the high likelihood of conflict and tension that these rules created and the social and legal complexities residents could encounter during their stay in a caravan park, Tasmania provides an ideal physical environment to generate character, action and plot for my story. How people survived or not in such a place and what difficulties they experienced would be linked through creative representation to the social capital model. It is now appropriate to explore further what social capital is, how it is generated, and now it might be destroyed.

Social capital

This section seeks to identify elements of social capital in order to evaluate its ability to shed light on the experience of caravan park residents. Social capital is not a new concept. It differs from human capital, which concerns knowledge and information (Black & Hughes, 2001; I Falk, 2000) which is cogitative (Portes, 1998) and from economic capital which relates to accumulated finance in people's bank accounts (Black & Hughes, 2001; Portes, 1998), though social capital may benefit both (Australian

Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2002). It has been a key component of community practice for decades and has many perspectives and definitions. The fundamental core elements of social capital were formed by three key theoretical approaches on which most modern researchers have built or expanded on. The approaches are seen in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu (1985), James Coleman (1988) and Robert Putnam (1993, 1995).

Pope (2003) notes that Bourdieu claimed the benefits of social capital were the deliberate pursuit of “social ties or memberships of particular communities that made resources, advantages and opportunities available to individuals” (p. 1). That is, people deliberately sought out relationships that provided access to a variety of resources their contacts possessed that provided an economic advantage.

In comparison to Bourdieu, Colman defined his idea of social capital by its function. It consisted of two elements. The first “consists of some aspect of social structure” and the second “certain actions of actors” (Pope, 2003, p. 2) to support individual opportunities. Colman’s individuals or “actors” as he named them, created their contacts as free willed persons unconstrained by economic factors in order to further their self-interest. His individuals were motivated by trust in others and the belief that they would reciprocate the individual’s actions.

Building on the Coleman definition of social capital, Putnam popularised the concept. He gave an explanatory framework of it in his 1993 performance study of institutions in Italy. He was particularly interested in why governments in northern and southern Italy differed and investigated accumulation of networks and social linkages. Putnam describes social capital as referring to “features of social organization, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1993, p. 1).

Social capital is now widely recognised as a multi-dimensional concept which has gained popularity over the last twenty years. Many researchers and social scientists have contributed to our understanding of it. In Australia for example, Eva Cox’s Boyer lectures *A Truly Civil Society* (Cox, 1995) raised the idea of social capital strengthening entire communities. She spoke of the “forgotten values”, such as trust, co-operation and goodwill that hold society together. In her first lecture she argued that Australia was

losing “that important social glue” (Cox, 1995, p. 1) and that as citizens we were focussing on being competitive individuals rather than social beings. She believed that as social beings, quality of life and life satisfaction is more important than the economic indicators. Cox quoted Putnam’s definition during the second lecture and firmly believed that social capital could be measured and quantified.

Deciding what to measure and how to quantify social capital has proven arduous. Despite the interest in social capital there were still many interpretations of what exactly should be measured. However, the basics of networks of people, trust amongst these people, and reciprocity or exchange of something that benefited those involved, and the elements of such stand to generate social capital. Other scholars had embellished these.

Lesley Harrison conducted the first primary data collection in Tasmania that led to further defining social capital. She located a vibrant community of multiple networks, where folk trusted one another and interacted with each other. That data was later conceptualised by Harrison (1998), Falk and Harrison (1998) and Falk and Kilpatrick (2000). Onyx and Bullen (2000) empirically tested their ideas of networks, reciprocity, trust, shared norms and social agency across five Australian communities. Further to these studies, Stone (2001) went on to empirically conceptualise what measurable variables were associated with the structure and types of social networks and the quality of the social relationships involved. Since then the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), The World Bank and the Australian Bureau of Statistics have formalised measurement tools.

The ABS decided that questions on social interaction and community involvement were best addressed by specific small scale studies initiated by interested stakeholders (ABS), (ABS, 2002). Topics such as these below have been incorporated into many investigations that inform and contribute to the ABS evaluation and predictions of social capital:

- Community safety and crime;
- Education, employment and training,
- Families,
- Arts, and culture,

- Sport and recreation,
- Health and well-being.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004, 2006) placed social capital in context after a broad consultation process with Commonwealth and State government agencies, non-government organisations and research institutions. What eventuated were social indicators that could be quantified in a range of areas, for example:

- Educational attainment
- Rates of employment and unemployment, income distribution and equality
- Morbidity and mortality rate.
- Housing and transport.

The ABS results, released at random, will be useful and beneficial to those developing sustainable local communities, health, community housing renewal, managing levels of crime and vandalism or building a sense of efficacy and other problems associated with poverty, mental health, and poor education. Guided by the report *Tasmania Together* (Tasmanian State Government, 2011), Tasmania is one of two Australian state governments who have incorporated social capital elements in their 10 year planning document in shaping the State's future. These elements are especially about feeling safe, having friends and family nearby, being able to seek assistance in an emergency, volunteering and arts, community and culture.

It appears that social capital is a suitable model for me to utilise in my story. This opinion is based on the fact that baby boomers have expressed their desire for quality of life and life satisfaction and how they want trust, cooperation and goodwill between family, friends and relationships which are the mainstay or "social glue" (Cox, 1995, p. 1) of social capital. It is also a matter of feeling safe, being healthy and having assistance in emergency. These are fundamentals that can be woven into my story through situations such as incidents of reliable, trustworthy neighbours who look out for each other, sharing produce, celebrations and regular conversation.

For the benefit of this research project and to assist me in capturing how a caravan park community works, it would be appropriate at this point to outline the variables that have

informed the ABS research questions. Therefore, what constitutes networks, trust, and reciprocity will be determined below.

Networks

Social networks are seen as relationships with other people. They may be informal, formal, vertical or horizontal and have different functions and purposes.

They are informal when they operate in a community such as social interaction between neighbours, family, friends, acquaintances and interest groups (ABS, 2006; Harrison, 2003). Informal contact with people is classified as homophilous, that is people in whom they cohere with when they are comfortable with and unchallenged by them. These horizontal contacts (Latham, 2000) provide social support and well-being (Harrison, 2003). Similarly, Granovetter (1973) claimed these types of groups produced strong ties that breed local cohesion. Woolcock (2000) sees these relationships as “bonding” which she referred to as trusting and co-operative relations between members of a network who are typically alike, for example families and ethnic groups. In addition, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) have suggested that bonding connections is associated with loose ties *across* communities, not just within local individuals and groups.

More formal engagements occur through civic associations, religious groups, political parties, unions and the like (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2006; Harrison, 2003). Formal interactions are those considered heterophilous, or where there is not necessarily an affinity between contacts. These interactions occur with those who are credible and have more expertise and experience than themselves. These connections are made to seek new information, knowledge and skills (Harrison, 2003). Granovetter (1973) claimed these interactions were weak ties because they are especially those who were not close friends and moved in different networks to their own. However, Woolcock (2000) saw a benefit in these and refers to this association as “bridging”, where the people sought were not similar in socio-economic status, or were from a different generation or ethnicity. This created an extension beyond their normal familiar contacts. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) suggest that bridging is associated with strong ties *within* a limited group.

Woolcock (2000) further expands the network capabilities. She includes a third action as “linking”. Linking connections are relationships with people who have *power* to leverage resources, ideas and information from institutions *beyond* the immediate community radius. They may be further up or lower down the social ladder. Latham (2000) also highlights that vertical or hierarchical relations with people in authority occur in social capital. This notion is similar to Harrison’s idea of heterophilous connections though Woodcock’s linking and Latham’s vertical connections extend *beyond* the community whereas, Harrison’s contacts were *within* the immediate community.

As this research unfolded, I realised that the impression of horizontal and informal networks between friends and neighbours that are comfortable and unchallenged or the reverse, can be expressed amongst the permanent caravan park residents in my story to indicate un/acceptance of each other. Additionally, vertical and formal networks with civic, and law enforcement groups when my characters need information and knowledge can be included to illustrate this. Health and Law contacts would be appropriate examples to weave into the plot element or character journeys of my story.

Trust

A definition of trust entails a willingness to take risks in a social context based on a firm belief in the reliability, integrity, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something (Oxford Dictionary). Trust is based on positive experiences with other people and it grows with use and is essential for our social wellbeing. “We need to trust that others are going to be basically reasonable human beings and leads to co-operation” (Cox, 1995, p. 5). “[Trust] is the core component of social connections” (Cox, 1995, p. 3). Stone and Hughes (2000) highlight three types of the norm of trust:

The first is *trust of familiars*. This type of trust exists within established relationships and social networks. The second type of trust is *generalised trust*. This type of trust is a trust extended to strangers, often on the basis of expectations of behaviour or a sense of shared norms. Third is *civic or institutional trust*, which refers to basic trust in the formal institutions of

governance including fairness of rules, official procedures, dispute resolution and resource allocation (2000, p. 26) .

Putnam (1995) had earlier claimed that the interactions which engender trust and recognition of common ground allow people to move comfortably from the defensive “I” to the mutual “we”. A sense of connectedness is based on the development of trust where people feel they belong and are valued. Therefore, in processes of interaction and networking where trust, connectedness and belonging are evident, one may expect an increase of social participation, cohesion and social capital (Harrison, 2003). Harrison’s (2003) homophilous interaction, where people felt comfortable with and unchallenged by another person, is the same familiar social trust which occurs within established relationships and social networks (Stone & Hughes, 2000) and the strong ties of Granovetter (1973) and bonding aspects of Woolcock (2000).

Where heterophilous interactions describe contact with credible others with experience and expertise (Harrison, 2003), the weak ties of Granovetter (1973), and the bridging and linking aspects (Woolcock, 2002) would still require an element of trust. This, however, could be noted as generalised trust because it is extended to strangers. Trust in the correctness of the information, knowledge and/or skills provided would also be mandated by those who sought these.

Without trusting the goodwill of others, Cox claims “we retreat into bureaucracy, rules and demands for more law and order” (Cox, 1995, p. 5). Social capital can be depleted by widespread lack of trust or by our own failure to trust others. Without trust we avoid contact with others because we fear betrayal (Cox, 1995), all of which would not generate social capital and any relationship would be unpleasant. One would expect that when civic trust is lacking in vertical/hierarchical (Latham, 2000) or linking (Woolcock, 2000) interactions and where power, fairness of rules, official procedures and dispute resolutions are required (Stone & Hughes, 2000) there would be an inability to generate social Capital of an individual or community nature.

In addition to networks, trust is a fundamental attitude the resident characters would need to demonstrate in my story. With excitement I realised that the lack of trust and therefore unpleasantness between characters, for example the owner of the caravan park

and others in the community, could also be used to compose a one-sided interaction of power and rule enforcement. This could assert through disagreements, non-compliance of enforced rules, uncertainty, lack of trust and non-acceptance between the characters.

Reciprocity

A definition of reciprocity is “the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit” (Oxford Dictionary, n.p). Colman’s idea of reciprocity is a rational contract between individuals seeking to maximise their self-interest (Gleeson, 1999), with the expectation that whoever received would duly return the favour at another time. A sense of reciprocity, Putnam believes, is more than just a useful trading relationship. It creates complex social relationships of which networks and trust also exist (Putnam, 1993). Within networks there should be trust that people will act accordingly to their word, in agreement with social rules and norms. Thereby it is about a give-and-take condition or relationship, where a mutual or cooperative interchange of favours or privileges is given.

However, there are those who give and do not expect that person to return the favour, but rather it induces that person to constitute the favour to another person in the future, thereby generating altruism. Stone & Hughes (2000) highlight these three norms of reciprocity.

Reciprocity among family and friends [thereby horizontal, homophilis and bonding] is in an ongoing process which may take many years to realise and may enable uneven levels of exchange, for example in-kind or in lieu or direct or indirect exchange of favour. Amongst networks involving less regular or long-term exchanges [thereby vertical, heterophilis, bridging and linking] are those less flexible and less robust and may be immediate or delayed (2000, p. 26).

I realised that this illustration of reciprocity within the caravan park could be used to deepen the characterisation of the people in my story. Mutual benefit and inclusiveness or lack thereof will demonstrate altruism in the community. This may be between friends, neighbours, the local store owner, health personal or strangers.

The use of social capital in the future

Research has indicated that social capital provides benefits across a range of areas including health, education, employment and family wellbeing as well as in building community strength and resilience. Now that social capital has been established as a multi-dimensional concept, with various community and individual networks and interactions that generate trust, and reciprocity for mutual benefit, the use of social capital has been sanctioned across other disciplines. These are namely, health promotion (Hawe and Shiell, 2000), public health (Lynch, Due, Muntaner, & Smith, 2000), health and mental health (Cullen & Whiteford, 2001), life-long learning (Kilpatrick, Field, & Falk, 2003), neighbourhood life (Ziersch, Baum, MacDougall, & Putland, 2005) human resource development (Kesels & Poell, 2004) climate change (Adger, 2009), housing security (Hulse & Saugeres, 2009) and social inclusion (Adams, 2009) just to name a few.

Given that social capital is now firmly entrenched in the various regimes noted above, there is nothing to prevent caravan park owners and residents coming under the influence of social capital in order to promote goodwill and well-being. The notion of social capital provides a warm and easily identifiable frame and so the artefact of this project will embrace the social capital model to illustrate to the reader the discordance brought about through the lack of representation of permanent caravan parks in the *Residential Tenancy Act* in Tasmania. It seemed remiss to overlook this as the glue in my story world. I was excited by opportunities to play in a creative space with how social capital develops and can be represented.

Conclusion

The literature review was essential as it provided key issues, circumstances and details to underpin and make realistic my setting, characters and story line. The challenging dichotomies that exist amid baby boomer expectations provide rich differences and comparisons. As such, a caravan park in Tasmania provided an ideal physical environment to generate character; action and plot for my story and the likelihood of conflict and tension that may be encountered. This chapter explored the issues that underpin my stories. Once this research was completed, I turned to considering how best to execute these ideas and how to develop stories around this research. As the

permanent residents are without the security of a *Residential Tenancy Act* the question arose of how best to represent the injustices they may experience. With this in mind, I engaged in the study of a number of other works to evaluate the nature and techniques used in these pieces of writing.

Chapter Two

Social activism

Expression against injustice is a theme frequently addressed through creative media. For example, art has been used as a vehicle to express objections, to educate the public, enlighten about transgressions and to alert to injustices. In music there is an entire genre known as protest songs. This ethos continues in contemporary tunes. For example Melissa Etheridge sang her educational activist work “*I need to wake up*” (Etheridge, 2006) with the message “don’t sit around doing nothing” as part of Al Gore’s global warming campaign. In the medium of dance, South Africans use the warlike chant and synchronised arm and leg movement referred to as the Toyi-Toyi dance (Power to the people, 2008), to express their grievances over impossible conditions and poverty caused by apartheid. Theatre has also been used to express injustices. A recent Australian example of this is the work *Jack Charles verses the Crown*, a one-man stage show about a tumultuous life of crime, detention, drugs and abuse (James, 2012). Likewise, art activism expressed on a billboard or graffiti is used within movements and various cultures as a key element of social protest. For instance, the Oxford Street’s rainbow crossing for the Sydney Mardi Gras was used to raise gay pride (Campion, 2013). Protestors believe the duty of the graphic is to “speak what other people do not want to speak and say loudly what other people don’t want to say” (McClellan, 2012, para 6). These media have been used to express aversion, distrust, wrongful possession, poverty, and the trials and tribulations of life in order to develop social consciousness. One way or another, these social actions may or may not be connected to a social movement. Determining if social action is connected to a social movement relies on what the activists are opposed to and their required change over time.

Daniel Little, a social science philosopher, advocates there are three types of social activists categorised by what they are opposed to; the scope of change, the pace of the change and the means or actions required (Little, 2010). Little refers to social activists as “radicals, liberal reformers or revolutionaries” (pp. 1- 2). In contrast, Michael Newman (2006) talks about domains of action. He claims the term social action “is often associated with community action and political action” and these terms are used interchangeably (p. 231) but that the divisions may become blurred (p. 232). He refutes

they are the same and suggests it is beneficial to understand the domains of each in order to understand social action campaigns. *Community action*, he claims, is in the local domain, defined by that locality and is limited to that locality (p. 231). For example, the neighbourhood needs improved lighting and the group ceases to exist when the issue has been addressed.

Social action, he suggests, is not “constrained by physical location” (Newman, 2006, p. 231). The people engaged in social action are defined by “a common disadvantage ... or shared interest or belief”. The aim of their action is to make changes to the social world in which they live. For example, combating racism or to promote a civil society. Newman (2006) claims that social action is normally related to one issue, but can develop into formal and long-lasting actions within the context of social movements.

Political action “takes place in ... formal structures” ... and the activists “are united by common ideals” ... “against political parties in government” (Newman, 2006, p. 232). They have clear memberships, regulations and usually established with long-term struggles in mind (Newman, 2006), and therefore are a social movement.

However, it appears difficult to define social movement because of the variances between the intentions of the designing theorist (Morris & Herring, 1989). There are a number of competing frameworks in the field which conceptualise movements differently (Morris & Herring, 1989). For example, Marx was interested in movements aimed at dismantling the capitalist system (p. 3), whereas Weber viewed a movement as pivoting on a charismatic leader who attracted followers (p. 4). Hence, movements may be categorised by the collective behaviour of the participants or the masses who band together and geared toward social change (pp. 5, 6). They may be defined by the methods of activism, for instance based on violence, assassination and terrorism (p. 7), or alternatively on the institutionalized associations who rely heavily on strikes, demonstrations and violence (p. 8).

Mark Welton (1993) is a scholar who has combined these thoughts to argue for a model that sets minimum requirements determining what constitutes a social movement. He prescribes the three elements that need to be present if social action is to be defined as a social movement:

1. A clear self-image as a collective identity
2. Know decisively who they are up against
3. Struggle against a dominant authority (p. 153)

These ideas raised questions within myself of myself. I began to be concerned and interested at the same time as to whether I was a social activist. I made this exact comment in my reflective journal, the title of which, *Questions I ask myself*.

I had scribbled on the cover in black marker.

What does a social activist do? Am I one of those?

There were no answers to those questions at this time. I presumed the journey I was about to take in my exegetical research and creative writing artefact would result in a solidification of my position and understanding of these issues. While these questions remain unanswered I was stimulated to find an appropriate medium that I could use as a protest. It was then that I discovered a literary movement, originally arising in the United States, known as social action writing.

Social action writing as a literary movement is strongly advocated by Frances Adler, Debra Busman and Diana Garcia (2009) because “People are looking toward the poets and writers of our time for truth” (p. xvii). Social action writing has, of course, existed long before their time. Charles Dickens, for instance, wrote about the conditions of the slums and the poor who lived there as a way of critiquing the economic, social and moral abuses of the time. His works became a potent tool for exposing social injustice, poverty and the inadequate responses of government to these problems. Dickens’ work drew on the readers’ emotion as a way of leading them towards recognising the need for “ethical behaviours” (Cosgrove, 2008, p. 236). Cosgrove (2008) notes that “any novel with plot points and characters (that is, things happening to ‘people’) is going to involve some level of ethical engagement as readers question or support the actions and decisions made within the text” (p. 234) but Dickens’ particular use of characters struggling with dilemmas that pitch them against the unfair social conditions of the time marks his work as a form of social action writing. An even earlier instance of writing that encourages social action is *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Bunyan, 1678/2004). Originally written in 1678, it ranked just behind the King James Bible as the most important book in evangelical Protestant households and is clearly a book of the common people (Ryken, 2004, pp. i, iv). As an allegorical story, it required the reader to

understand the symbolic image of the text and convert their understanding of what was portrayed in order to produce action about their status with God.

Social action writing may also be associated with and include other terms such as political fiction, cultural rebelliousness and social feminist writing. For instance in *The Political Novel*, Scheingold, (2010) speaks of the early instances of political estrangement, in the works of writers such as Franz Kafka. In contemporary times Enza Gandolfo (2006) identifies as a political fictionalist. Mike Newman (2006) documents the work of Bill Gammage who historically wrote about the First Australian Imperial Force. Gammage wrote of the soldiers' attitude and behaviour as cultural rebelliousness (Newman 2006, p 17, 18), arguing that "Australians [soldiers] are said to be irreverent, disrespectful and intolerant of people with airs and fancies" (Newman, 2006, p. 17). Gammage documents that the men of World War One, who did not want to be regular soldiers, had an attitude towards pointless demonstrations of authority and military rigmarole. He wanted his readers to understand that the soldiers were merely city boys who worked for their employers and farm boys who made their own decisions. Gammage called for the soldier's recognition for their independent spirit who drew on other codes of behaviour. Lastly, Barbara Nelson (1992) summarises the distinctive form of social feminist's influence in writing. One example she gives is that of Australian Sophie Watson (1990). Watson's book stems from her own experience and bears witness to her and other's struggle. Watson reflects on her own move from classical leftist identity but also advocated for a recognised relationship between women and the state. Watson wrote of feminist compromises, their diluted demands and real gains of feminist intervention. There is little doubt that her call, and the voices of others like her, prompted social change. This call was answered when "well-educated, middle-class, Labour party feminists entered state and national bureaucracies" (Nelson, 1992, p, 492). These "femocrats" (Watson, 1990, p. ix) were successful in bringing about change, for example establishing women's refuges and gaining election to government.

Adler, Busman and Garcia (2009) claim that not only is social action writing "bearing witness" (p. xvii) and "breaking silence" (p. 1), but the stories raised are a "part of the political issues that requires action" (p. 2). As my intention is to write about living in a caravan park it is logical that I focus my investigation on social activist literary works as a way of developing and positioning my own work as a form of protest.

Literature to express injustices.

Herman Rapaport (2011) observes literature is a popular way of expressing injustices. As a literary critic he points out literary work that raises consciousness functions as a powerful device that “observe[s] social relations better than sociological theory” (p.11). With this in mind he encourages literary critics to not only undertake a formalist analysis of the text but also to ask why does a writer have a particular interest in their subject and its relation to who, what, where and why. One could argue that this particular interest puts text on an equal footing with real life and promotes the depiction of the social content of everyday life. Michael Newman, an activist educator, suggests that as storytellers, realist writers can be considered confrontational because they use the experiences of themselves and those of others to give understanding to social experiences (Newman, 2006). Social action writing is important to me then, in that I desire to bear witness of my and others experiences of living in caravan parks and call to action that which has virtually gone unnoticed by State politicians and legislative bodies.

André Brink is one such author who was an adamant activist writer on political issues. Within his collection of essays, lectures and addresses², Brink (1983) a South African writer, continually probed the tension between creating a work of quality and maintaining confronting content. As an author, Brink agreed “that inside every writer is a word struggling to get out” (p. 163) and the urgency for Brink was usually spurred by injustices.

For Brink, these injustices are the larger issues in life. Brink (1983) is emphatic about the idea that:

... most of the problems in the world today are related to the exploitation and degradation of people ... and to their struggle to liberate themselves from the most humiliating ... forms of exploitation and degradation. (p. 47)

He pursued a calling as a social writer because he wanted to exemplify resistance to oppression and to expose the injustice to the public not only in his perceived duty as a writer, but on behalf of oppressed people. When he remarks that the “intention of the

² *Mapmakers: Writing in a state of siege* (1983) is a collection of political writings and offers a rare insight into the dilemmas of living in South Africa.

writer, if it is worthwhile, acts as a conscience in the world” (Brink, 1983, p. 46) he stimulates me as the writer to be steadfast in the exposure of injustices and people’s struggle against exploitation and degradation. Apart from his political writings, he also wrote of exploitation and degradation through his novels. For example, he depicted a socially unacceptable sexual relationship between a white woman and a black man and the treatment they received from white outsiders during a trek from internal South Africa to Cape Town in *An Instant in the Wind* (1976). Similarly, exploitation is a theme in his work *Devil’s Valley* (1998). The novel explores the development of the life of a white community that deliberately excludes any multiculturalism. The valley leaders exploit the people who were confined to the valley, making their life a misery, and degraded any outsider who dared enter the valley with torture and death.

In the eyes of the activist author, therefore, it is up to them to relentlessly bring to light the circumstances that restrain freedom and justice of the persons in his or her immediate culture and community. This highlights the notion that writing is more palatable than forceful protest. Writing about the challenges which confront the writer is in a different dimension to those faced by politicians and military. As Brink suggests “A book cannot enter the field of battle against the sword” (Brink, 1983, p. 169). Rather, the writer’s approach must probe and examine the situation in such a way to validate the problems as authentic experiences that touch people’s emotions. Unlike Brink, this has resonance for my own practice. There will be a lesser need for me as a writer to probe into people’s situations other than to document my own experiences and validate these against other situations in order to provide that authentic experience to which he refers.

Yet there is a danger that the activist writer may privilege the message above the manner. A balance needs to be struck between the writer’s quality of work, passion about the injustice and the social consciousness it provides to the readers. Brink proposed both quality and authenticity in social writing. “Above all the writer’s primary concern is with the quality of his work” (Brink, 1983, p. 170) but even so he argues then “One cannot deny that much of the persuasive passion [of the work] derives precisely from the anger of the committed author ... and that without that flame no mind would have been set alight by those works” (Brink, 1983, p. 43). Brink also testifies that the function of the writer is to passionately “keep the voice of humanity alive; to ensure the survival of human values” (p.48), and implies the writing “acts as a conscience in the

world” (p.46). A hard-line social activist author of essays and political writings like those of Brink, whose work is derived from anger, can provide an outcome unwelcome to some and be frequently excoriated or even banned (Eder, 1980). Therefore, in order to ensure positive reception of my work it is important to me to refrain from anger, but still maintain my objective of alerting to injustices while keeping the human predicament alive within the story. Keeping the voice of humanity alive is also an intense passion for the next author I investigated.

Arnold Zable³ is an Australian contemporary novelist and human rights activist (2011b). He declares his stories are “combined separate incidents and encounters [shaped] into one composite tale and/or composite character” (p. 193). His images of immigrants and his Yiddish ancestors are based on his experiences, what he has observed, what people have told him over the years and his research. Zable writes because he must. He does so because “Stories are what makes us human. Stories can reveal forgotten past. Stories can uncover hidden injustices and record the contradictory impulses that drive us” (Zable, 2002, p. 5). He fashions fact in fictitious ways. The process of writing, he emphasises, is that “at some point the research ends and the imagination takes over” (Rubbo, 2008 np). Zable explains the art of story in revealing life can be seen as using something he terms ethical imagination (Zable, 2011a). This is a device that positions the storyteller as “powerful and confrontational, the tales more than mere stories but a “parable [that] forms codes of ethics and guides behaviour” (Zable, 2002, p. 3). From Zable’s writing it appears to me that in order to exemplify ethical and behavioural transgressions against humanity, a writer takes on the role of protester and amplifier of injustices in his/her writing. I see amplification in my writing as more than stating injustices as fact or telling the reader about them, and as more than incorporating these issues in a believable fashion of a real story.

John Steinbeck wrote using similar methods to Zable. In the *The Grapes of Wrath*, his focus was itinerant migrants travelling in search of work during the Great Depression.⁴

³ *The Fig Tree* (2002) is a book of short stories about Yiddish-Polish culture, migrants, WW2 and the Holocaust. *Violin Lessons* (2011) is a book of short stories include those of asylum seekers, Vietnam, Iraq, and Poland taken from incidents between 1970 – 2011.

⁴ *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is classified as a social realist novel. The story is about Oklahoma tenant framers who were expelled from their land and forced to migrate in their thousands to California where they became itinerant workers. They experienced much hardship, sickness, poverty, homelessness and

Whilst regarded as an anthropologist, he did not go into the field to substantiate a theory by taking notes and interviewing (Lisca, 1958). Rather, Steinbeck worked and travelled with the migrants as one of them, living as they did (Lisca, 1978). He reported his observations of their living and working conditions (Fontenrose, 1963), becoming passionately involved in their suffering and injustice (Lisca, 1978). Lisca and Fontenrose endorse that Steinbeck's "intimate knowledge, the product of his experience and his direct observations of their plight contributed to the realism of his stories" and therefore gave them authority (Fontenrose, 1963, p. 68; Lisca, 1978, p. 89). His characters are "drawn as fully credible human beings individual yet also representative of their social class and circumstance" (Lisca, 1978, p. 90). Hence they function as a collective representation of the migrant workers he has encountered. Steinbeck employs this generalised method in *The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck, 1939) showing a condition or an event as it affects a group of people. His writing evolved from his feelings and humanist stance (DeMott, 2006). Steinbeck (cited in Lisca, 1958) surmises his writing simply as ... "the way it seems to me at the moment" (p.45). As his writing was realistic in its depictions and themes, his work was initially not readily accepted or evaluated as a piece of fiction and was often debated as a factual document. I have gleaned from Steinbeck that fiction written in a realistic fashion may appear factual and be seen as a social activist work due to close representation of the situation and characters. The works of Zable and Steinbeck have influenced me to represent my writing as fact in a fictitious manner, the popular term being "faction", "which denotes fiction which is based on and combined with fact" (Cuddon, 1998, p. 302), thereby appearing a realistic reflection of everyday happenings.

There were other writers that I could have discussed as part of this exegesis but did not because of the radical nature of their writing. American novelist Toni Morrison, for instance, created works that were confronting in their treatment of civil rights issues, and also represented injustice in more subtle ways through her writing. However. I chose not to draw her work into my discussion because her novels deal with a politicised minority group, whereas my subjects were completely non-politicised and only came to recognise and act against their unfair circumstances through their growing bonds of social capital. Similarly, while American novelist Barbara Kingsolver write

persecution. Such was the impact of this novel that Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for Literature in 1962.

about issues of social change, most of her work draws on her biology and ecology degrees and adopts an environmentalist and fresh food agronomist approach. Her works are not suitable for my undertaking because environmental topics are not relevant to the stories I was telling. Other writers whom I could have explored against the context of my own stories and writing include several early 19th century Australian writers who may be considered social action writers, such as Eve Langley, Dorothy Hewett and Katherine Prichard. Their works, however, were feminist with emancipatory leanings. Their focus on female experience rendered their stories and approach unsuitable as models for analysis as the world of my caravan park was focused on injustices that were collective and unrelated to gender.

Further to the theme of living in a caravan park, there are two works about living in caravan parks that provide useful comparison. The first is *Vinyl Inside* by Rachel Matthew (2008) and the second is *Trailerpark* by Russell Banks (1981). The scope and tone of these works are markedly different to my own and bear little fruit in terms of social justice writing. Firstly, Matthew's book is a romantic exploration of the consequences of a 15 year old teenager who has given her baby up for adoption. The child returns twenty years later seeking her mother. There is a distinctive play on nostalgia through the setting of the work in the 1980s and this, combined with the lack of consideration given to the power structure of the owner-tenant relationship, marks it as a problematic text for me. It is the sunbleached, holiday version of life in a caravan park that offers few insights into the realities of everyday life in this hidden community. Taking this sense of romance further, Bank's novel depicts the eccentric mannerisms of the residents of the caravan park to the extent that they seem to exist as caricatures created for comic, rather than realistic, effect. Both novels simplify the experiences of living in a caravan park and position the residents as lower class rather than economically challenged. There is little representation of injustice and the creeping everyday oppression experienced by those living without Residential Tenancy Acts. I considered the writing of Brink, Zable and Steinbeck more appropriate for their realistic portrayal of struggle, tyranny and disparity.

Realistic writing is a term also appropriated by Australian Frank Hardy. Hardy was from a working class background and had a "commit[tment] ... to unjust social conditions" (Adams & Lee, 2003, p. 11), as well as interest in socialist trends. He began

his career as a short story author representing his experience of the 1929-1940 Great Depression (Morphett, 2003, p. 24). Hardy, in an interview with Tony Morphett emphasised that his “commitment to be a writer ...” was “to use literature as a weapon ... to tell the story of the battler” (Morphett, 2003, p. 24). He credits the Melbourne Realist Writers Group for educating him in many of the cultural, literary and political skills needed to become a finished writer (Morphett, 2003, p. 10). Hardy “sought different kinds of authority for [his] fiction ... especially in this case the great tradition of realist fiction” (Adams & Lee, 2003, p. 13), and experimented “to develop authenticity ... in [his] novel” (Adams & Lee, 2003, p. 9). These experiments are evident in his socialist novel *Power without Glory* (Hardy, 1950).

With his obligation to the Communist Party of Australia and his role as President of the Melbourne Realist Writers Group, Hardy insisted that a writer must serve the working class unselfishly (Gardiner, 2003, p. 37). He did not want writers who were writing about the working class to succumb to middle class values. Hardy’s solution was that the writers be assigned to a factory branch where “their artistic inspiration would then be drawn most directly from working-class experiences and they [would] be able to facilitate literary activity at the level of workplace” (Gardiner, 2003, p. 38). This would allow articles about workplaces to be written on the spot and therefore offer a more truthful representation (Gardiner, 2003, p. 38).

Rupert Lockwood gave insights on working class writing technique in the *Realist Writer* in 1960, a publication of the Melbourne Realist Writers’ Group (McLaren, 2003, p. 53). Lockwood promoted similar writing techniques that social action writers employ. These techniques include, for example, the active writing voice because it is “synonymous with an active daily political life” (Cahill, 2008, p. 160). He saw the most important thing in writing was to be concrete, not abstract and to write of living things that the reader could feel, touch, see, hear and easily recognise (Cahill, 2008, p. 161). “Circumlocution” (Cahill, 2008, p. 159), a style and method storytelling, was preferred rather than short sharp speech or “scientific” language (Cahill, 2008, p. 161). Lockwood, as a “craftsman not an ideologue” (Cahill, 2008, p. 162), concluded that “[creative writers] should write from life, about what people know and understand to be true. From [their] own day to day experiences” (Cahill, 2008, p. 161), and thereby introduce an activist element to enforce change in the working conditions.

Therefore the writings of Brink, Zable, Steinbeck, and Hardy are a form of writing that can be considered not only as an act of critical inquiry, but a call for change. They speak against social injustice and refuse to accept the oppression of silence (Adler et al., 2009).

One could argue, then, that the dominant criteria for successful protest literature as extracted from Rapaport, Newman, Brink, Zable, Steinbeck, and Hardy is threefold. Firstly, the author must have a fervent passion against the inhumane violations and injustices a generalised group is experiencing. Secondly, the writer must identify and work closely with the victims to portray their plight in a realistic fashion, thereby giving authority to the work. Thirdly, the work must be powerful and confrontational through the quality and authenticity of the writing. These specific insights, though appearing as a challenge for social activist writers, raise questions for myself and my writing. Do I meet these criteria needed in order to write successful protest literature? I felt I met the first two conditions. Firstly, I believe I have a passion against the injustices I and my group experienced, and secondly, I not only worked with those close at hand but I also broadened my concerns to consider others who had experienced similar treatment. However, I felt that I needed to investigate how to make my stories powerful and confrontational, and broaden my writing ability and therefore searched how I might bring a quality and authenticity to my writing that would enable me to address the third criteria of successful protest literature.

Journalists as social writers

My examination of fiction writers who expose social injustices yielded some specific insights into my own work. However, as illuminating and inspiring as these works were I still needed guidance on the techniques and tools best used to expose the injustices of the caravan park into the living and breathing world of my characters and stories to produce quality and authenticity. With this in mind, I turned to examining non-fiction accounts of individuals who moved through worlds where social injustice was rife. These works were often more transparent about their method of engagement, documentation and representation of hidden worlds than were the social activist fictions I surveyed.

While writers may use fiction to promote their call for change, there are a range of writers who wield non-fiction as a device for calling attention to injustice. *A Working Life*, *Nickel and Dime* and *Dirt Cheap* are texts that were written over three decades between 1971 and 2005. The authors Polly Toynbee, Barbara Ehrenreich and Elizabeth Wynhausen (respectively) may be considered social activists because they uncover injustices in society (Kilfoyle, 26th January, 2003), though as journalists their information retrieval, motivation for writing and writing method differ from the authors discussed previously.

Toynbee (1971) who was from a well-to-do English family holds several honorary doctorates and worked as a journalist for the *Sunday Times* and *The Guardian*. She wrote *A Working Life* because she was concerned with how the British youth of the day choose or were guided into their occupations. She sat in on and observed interviews between school boys and career advisors from the Department of Employment and the Labour Exchange (p.153) and the Youth Employment Bureaux office (p. 25). Basically, the youth were prepared to do any menial task to earn money but “did not think too much about whether it is the sort of job [they] could do happily and creatively for the next 40 years” (Toynbee, 1971, p. i). Toynbee exposed the injustice demonstrated by the interviewing officer in their lack of guidance, advice or training of the youth and was concerned these youth would remain underachievers in their adult lives.

As a result of these early perceptions, Toynbee deliberately sought work in poor regions and in unskilled jobs to determine how and if workers were financially sustained through their employment. She contacted relevant management to secure undercover work on the floor of a cake factory, a maternity ward kitchen, a car part factory, the Women’s Army Corp, and a soap factory. Toynbee found that poverty is more than lack of money. The poor have lower quality education, are more “ignorant”, and are always treated unfairly (p. 57). Furthermore, most of the workers are reluctant to stand up for better entitlements (p. 74) because of the fear of losing the job they had been forced to do for their whole life (p.78). Several times Toynbee, to ill effect, attempted to disclose her position in order to better the workers conditions. She discovered that the bottom line for these workers is they get used to conditions when there is no alternative (p. 135).

Toynbee's investigation revealed workers had a life time in the same job with little choice from school leaving age or recognition for the service, which legitimizes the title of her book. However, with limited but generalised reference data (pp. 9-10) and in-text assertions without citation, the book is little more than a story that does not wield any authority. Indeed the fly page states this book "does not claim to be a survey but it does make you stop and look at a way of life we seem to accept without question" (i). From this I have learnt that authenticity yields authority in stories and I was reminded to strive to gain knowledge of how to execute this in my writing.

Barbara Ehrenreich (2002), the celebrated American author of *Nickel and Dimed*, and Elizabeth Wynhausen (2003), the Australian author of *Dirt Cheap*, write in a similar manner to Toynbee. Both Ehrenreich and Wynhausen have a doctorate and work as journalists. Their collections of short stories are concerned with how people live on the wages available to the unskilled.

Both journalists actually searched advertisements for jobs and applied for the least attractive positions. They fabricated their resumes with moderated skills, and set themselves specific rules. First they were not able to fall back on skills from their education or current employment. Ehrenreich would take the highest paid job (p. 4) whereas Wynhausen would take the first offered (p. 5). Both decided to take the cheapest accommodation without compromising safety, privacy, or enduring homelessness or starvation (Ehrenreich, 2002, pp. 4, 5; Wynhausen, 2003, p. 5). Ehrenreich worked as a waitress, a cleaning maid at several elite residences and a retailer in Wal-Mart during the week and as a nursing-care aide on the weekends. Likewise, Wynhausen worked alongside the poor and underclass by serving in an elite club, packing in a chicken and egg factory, tending at a breakfast bar at a hotel, working as a checkout operator in a large department store as an attendant and in aged care. Both authors altered the names and identity of those observed to preserve privacy and ensure place names and exact locations are concealed (Ehrenreich, 2002, pp. 8, 9; Wynhausen, 2003, pp. 189, 194).

Due to the authors' frustration over their experience and the confronting nature of the conditions they witnessed, they wanted to take action on behalf of the workers. They revealed their identity to several workers but received a nonchalant reaction from them

as they saw the author's undercover disclosure as only an afterthought of their initial experiment. Their fellow workers were reluctant to stand up to bullying supervisors or institutional stupidity (Sparrow, 2005) due to reprisals from their employers. The situations and circumstances Ehrenreich experienced in her experiment influenced her verdict. She concludes that:

... if low-wage workers do not always behave in an economically rational way, that is, as free agents within a capitalist democracy, it is because they dwell in a place that is neither free nor in any way democratic. ... when they enter the low-wage workplace ... [they] check [their] civil liberties at the door and ... zip their lips for the duration of the shift (p. 210).

Their stories hold more authority due to their initial concealment as researchers and their method of documenting their findings. Ehrenreich and Wynhausen use reliable citations and referencing to establish authority. Ehrenreich chooses to use footnotes and Wynhausen includes chapter endnotes to substantiate and expound their discoveries and analysis of the situation. Their reporting style blends documentary with analysis and comment on the "how and why" (Cahill, 2008, p. 139). Although the author's citation substantiated their findings and lent authority to their writing, I have learnt that reportage is unlikely to suit my writing style or intent.

Their intended experiment was to live and work like the underpaid and overworked to gain valuable insights to the social injustice the workers were exposed to, but they did not forego their comfortable every day commodities completely in the manner of Steinbeck who abandoned his lifestyle comforts. Both women had the luxury of a car, employment they could return to, and bank accounts they could rely on in troubled times. With this in mind it was unlikely they would really experience the ongoing poverty or how it really felt to be a long-term low-wage worker. In the least, their experiments would only be objective in matching income to expenses.

Ehrenreich and Wynhausen themselves acknowledge they failed to adhere to their pre-project guidelines. Downhearted, Ehrenreich admits her rules were broken to survive (p. 3) and Wynhausen confesses she failed to survive in unappreciated, underpaid and unseen jobs and only managed to live on her income because she had no dependents, no outstanding debts and a permanent position to return to after the experiment (p. 236).

An area in which these authors did not fail was the careful use of citation and referencing as a method demonstrating their investigative abilities. The value of this approach is particularly clear in Theodore Cheney's instructions that creative non-fiction requires the skills of the storyteller and the research ability of the conscientious reporter (Cheney, 2001). Their writing style reflects the genre of reportage with analysis and comment on the situation. Although I agree that these two reporters used research, analysis and comment to support their stories within their stories, I will not adopt that precedent because I believe footnotes, endnotes and in-text comments detract from the reading flow and predicate a more academic genre than a narrative. However, for the purpose of the examination of this exegesis, research and statistics are included as support for my artefact. These will be addressed and evidenced at Appendix 1 and 2.

From these works emerge another method used by Ehrenreich and Wynhausen that surfaced in protest writing in the non-fiction narrative genre. The authors attempted to place themselves in the position of those they are portraying. For example Ehrenreich "was challenged by her editor to do the study and did so out of curiosity" (p.1) and Wynhausen "decided to do her study on a spur-of-the moment decision" (p.1). Both did not spend lengthy time with their subjects and allocated days and weeks only to duties of the job. This raises the question of whether they gathered sufficient data for their storyline. Or whether their investigation simply provides a window through which we are able to view a thumbnail sketch of their locus? Jeff Sparrow thought it better if "in future, perhaps, dishwashers, waitresses and other conscripts from the invisible army of the poor [should] pen their own stories" (Sparrow, 2005, (np)).

Whilst I agreed with his thoughts, Sparrow's comment raised an issue of concern for me. Did I have the right to pen the stories of living in a caravan park? As I reflected, I realised I inhabited a unique position. While these experiences were not strictly mine alone, I had suffered injustice at the hands of the caravan park owners and their rules. I would have been a victim for much longer if I had not had the means, resources and confidence to persevere and fight the battle to leave the park and sell my set-up. The residents and I had been subjected to the same injustices, but we merely differed in our ability to challenge these. With this insight I concluded that I qualified as Sparrow's

“ordinary person” and so began to investigate how “ordinary people” represented their stories.

The oppressed and outcast penning their own stories.

My discussion of the use of literature to express injustices so far has centred on the novelist’s and journalist’s point of view. While these particular methods are useful, as Jeff Sparrow (2005) suggests there are a growing number of ordinary people who are in a position to pen their own stories. The oppressed as social action writers write from their lived experiences. Frances Adler, Debra Busman and Diana Garcia, advocates of social action writing, strongly urge that those who have experienced injustice should be encouraged to write their accounts (p. xvii). Debra Busman warns that when creative writing and social action are combined “be ready for some serious truth to be spoken” (Busman, 2009, p. 3). When the perpetrated break their silence and bear witness, their writing bestows meaning to their lives within a larger societal frame. Some of these stories have been originally withheld because they had been forced into silence, or are considered too shameful to reveal.

Social action writing gives the freedom to speak to those whose stories have been withheld. For example, during World War 11 the Japanese Imperial Army used “comfort women” (Berndt, 1997, p. 178), females coerced into sexual slavery for their troops. In 1990 several of these women broke their silence to share the stories of their years in slavery. Also, in other societies, activism began with voices and visibility through the act of writing (Booth, 2005). This was evident in stories of Arab women breaking free from closeted life “written as an autobiographical narrative that merged into fiction” (Booth, 2005, p. 1), or the family expectations on young Indian women (Barsamian, 2009, p. 413). An example of such a writer was Arundhati Roy. In an interview, David Barsamian speaks with her about her novel *The God of Small Things* (Roy, 2002). She reveals her position in the Indian caste system and how she rebelled against it. Her social activist novel with “autobiographical elements” (p. 413), earned her fame. She now uses her celebrity status and her writing gifts to continue activism. Writings of Roy and others impacted on me due to the authors’ courageous ability to break free and speak out. Furthermore, they allowed their autobiographical elements to converge with fiction to ensure their stories were as realistic and readable as possible.

Social action writing not only gives voice and visibility to the writers and their plight but has the capacity to stir the reader into action. Former incarcerate Jimmy Baca confessed in a short story that he was illiterate and had learnt to read and write while in prison. His social action stories tell of the “emotional butchery of prisons” (Baca, 2009, p. 169) and he writes “to avenge the betrayals of a lifetime, to purge the bitterness of injustice” (Baca, 2009, p. 169) that he experienced. Marilyn Beker, a daughter of holocaust survivors, experienced her early life in a refugee camp that was fraught with “horrible, frightening, heart-breaking stories that made me want, even then, to be able in some way to stop people from suffering” (Beker, 2013, p. ix). She continues to use writing as a weapon to make a difference in people’s lives and motivate them to take action. Beker claims that “activism ... encourages self-examination, social awareness and an understanding of what it means to be engaged in the human condition” (p. 2). As writers, “the call to witness such complex issues means that no subject is too fearful or shameful to address, either directly or obliquely” (Adler et al., 2009, p. 1). Stories may include “a father’s rage”, “illegal entry”, (Adler et al., 2009, p. 3), “rape”, “friendly fire in Iraq”, and “government deafness” (p. 4). Writers can fight the ongoing war against “oppression, evil, hatred, discrimination, injustice and inhumanity” (Beker, 2013, p. 7), by using their stories to expose their worlds in a realistic style.

Hence for me, realistic writing is a common thread in effective social activist writing. In their own words, Roy “tells politics like a story, to make it real” (Barsamian, 2009, p. 416). Debra Busman stresses “the importance of sensory details, concrete language and vivid imagery” (Busman, 2009, p. 4). Stuart Scheingold insists that novels “draw sustenance from [the] cultural context filtered through the mind’s eye” (Scheingold, 2010, p. 1). Beker interposes these author’s thoughts to add one’s own experience to make “the story real and vital” ... “with characters reacting to very real and huge obstacles” (Beker, 2013, p. 146). Above all writers must display a commitment to their writing (Adler et al., 2009, p. xxi; Beker, 2013, p. 7; Booth, 2005, p. 3).

My investigation into writing to express injustice reveals that an essential aspect was the writer’s commitment to exposing injustice and to promote change. In addition to this, based on different stances attributed to on-the-ground activists by social science philosopher Daniel Little (2010), and social activist educator Michael Newman (2006), I have construed there are differing levels of engagement and intensity that can be

attributed to social action writers. It is with these in mind that I return to these theorists and apply their framework on the writers discussed in this Chapter. Little advocates there are three types of activists categorised by what they are opposed to, the scope of change, the pace of the change and the means or actions required (2010, pp. 1, 2). Newman believes there are three domains of action governed by the boundaries, circumstances and duration of the action (2006, p. 231).

The first of Little's classifications is a "radical activist" who opposes defective institutions and practices (p. 2) and who wants "large scale, rapid change in society" (p. 1). Newman classifies these activists as "political actionists" against "political parties in government" (p. 232). Andre Brink and Frank Hardy are two who "identified existing practices that were fundamentally flawed, and demanded ... change or replacement" (Little, 2010, p. 1). Similarly, in Newman's judgment they "struggled ... against issues important for the world they want" (2006, p. 232). Brink's work was fiercely against apartheid and Hardy's against conscription and a corrupt labour government, and lack of Indigenous rights. Indeed Hardy coined the phrase "land rights" for aboriginals (Waterford, 1994). Both wrote provocative stories that aggravated their governments, which led to Brink's work being frequently banned (Eder, 1980), himself branded as a traitor (Tayler, 2010) and his house and family were targeted by security services (Tayler, 2010). For his confrontational working-class literature Hardy was arrested for criminal libel (Lamb, 2010, p. 1) which resulted in a legal fight and campaign to defend him (p. 1). Both Brink (Eder, 1980, p. 2) and Hardy (Adams & Lee, 2003, p. 11) were forced to publish their novels underground, but both frequently continued to write openly. Brink had a column in the biggest Afrikaans newspaper (Tayler, 2010, p. 4) and Hardy continued to write stories (Adams & Lee, 2003, p. 31) as a freelance writer (Simper, 1976).

The second type of activist according to Little is a "Liberal reformer" (Little, 2010, p. 1). Little advocates the liberal reformer rejects "a feature of the social world" (Little, 2010, p. 1). Newman classifies these activists as "social actionists" against the "erosion of social services" (2006, p. 231). Barbara Ehrenreich and Elizabeth Wynhausen are two such journalists who identified with "an accepted reality of the present, but who propose a set of immediate and midrange reforms that work to modify the unacceptable feature of the present" (Little, 2010, p. 1). Or by Newman's standard "make changes to

their social world” (Newman, 2006, p. 231). Both journalists were passionately concerned about the working class and people doing menial work for minimum wages (Ehrenreich, 2002, p. 210; Wynhausen, 2003, p. 234). Ehrenreich was alarmed by the welfare reforms in America endorsed by President Bill Clinton (Endleman & Ehrenreich, 2009) and Wynhausen was concerned with the welfare reforms of Australian Prime Minister John Howard (Wynhausen, 2011). Their model for change is both a “gradual transformation” (Little, 2010, p. 2) and “longlasting” (Newman, 2006, p. 231). Although neither offered suggestions to “reverse the tide” (Tiernan, 2005), they did campaign for “reforms for a more satisfactory set of institutions and practices in the future” (Little, 2010, p. 2). The “intellectual level” of this type of activism (Little, 2010) is underwritten in their stories through the analysis and comment on the “how and why” (Cahill, 2008, p. 139). Ehrenreich donated profits from her book to welfare groups working on “much-needed reforms ... such as suitable wages and affordable housing” (Ehrenreich, 2006) and both authors continue to promote workers’ rights through newspaper columns, essays and commentary (Ehrenreich, 2009; Wynhausen, 2011).

The third category of Little’s typology of activist’s is the “revolutionary” (Little, 2010). Revolutionaries want to “sweep away the bad institutions and social relations of the present” (Little, 2010). Newman suggests these people may begin as “community actionists” (Newman, 2006, p. 231) but who are likely to “become social actionists” or even “political actionists” (Newman, 2006, p. 232) should the need arise. John Steinbeck, Arnold Zable, and Arundhati Roy, examples of these types of activists, had “visions of a new society” (Little, 2010). Steinbeck exposed human beings representative of their social class and circumstance (Lisca, 1978). Zable humanises immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, formerly faceless people in stories that speak of their universal truth, shared humanity and experience (Jennings-Edquist, 2013). In Roy’s first novel, *The God of Small Things*, the underpinning theme was about the destructive power of India’s caste system and moral and political bigotry in general (Beer, 1997). Revolutionaries “have a vision of the new society ... being intellectually committed to that achievement” and “committed to the feasibility of the new order” (Little, 2010). Steinbeck continually sought ways for the disenfranchised to be atoned. While he was writing *The Grapes of Wrath* he chaired the Committee to Aid Agricultural Organization on Housing, Health and Relief for agricultural workers. The committee was established to provoke political change (Shillinglaw, 2012). However,

the course of events that Steinbeck foresaw as a solution were interrupted by the Second World War (Fontenrose, 1963). Zable continues to write and give public lectures as a human rights advocate. His latest public lecture was on exploring “the cry of the excluded in contemporary settings ... and explores ways of enabling their cry to be heard and their anguish recognised” (Zable, 2014, para 1). Roy continues to be recognised for her courage in campaigns for human rights (Hirsh, 2004) and as a unconventional Indian female whose mother, a liberal thinking Syrian Christian, clearly speaks her mind about her life and encourages others to do likewise:

... [I] had none of the conditioning that a normal, middle class Indian girl would have. I had no father, no presence of this man telling us that he would look after us and beat us occasionally in exchange. I didn't have a caste, and I didn't have a class, and I had no religion, no traditional blinkers, no traditional lenses on my spectacles. (Barsamian, 2009, p. 415).

While I have been able to classify the social activist writers that I have researched against on-the-ground social activists, there is still a group of writers who do not fit comfortably as Little's radical, liberal or revolutionary activists or in Newman's action domains. These are the writers whose stories feature in Adler, Busman and Garcia's (2009) anthology *Fire and Ink*. Adler et al say that the writers represented in their book retrieve and reclaim stories that others have historically miswritten about them or their culture (p. xv). For example, Jiménez, writes about his life as a Mexican migrant worker and Kelly writes about her struggle as an American in lesbian relationships. To remedy the untruths, most contributors write of their experiences in first person through subjective poetry, short story and non-fiction. By doing so they seem to reflect auto-ethnographic or “personal narrative”, “narratives of self” and “reflexive ethnography” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739).

The use of the first person – the “I” is auto-ethnography's dominant device (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It is a method where the writer resolves, in a factual story, how the self feels, what the self thinks, and what the self does (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In this case, the writers as self may not have a clear idea of who they are against (Little, 2010) but they do know what it is they want to say to “forge a more equitable future” (Adler et al., 2009, p. xv). If equity is the scope of change expected from this type of writing, then “change is about the agency in the world”, therefore “the things [they] aim for, the

means [they] use and the principles [they] adopt” in their writing (Little, 2008, p. 1). At best, agency implies the writing “acts as a conscience in the world” (Brink, 1983, p. 46).

According to Adler et al. (2009, p. xv), change and the pace at which it occurs is still an elusive outcome for the writers of *Fire and Ink*. Little (2010) speculates this kind of social activist activity elicits only “piecemeal improvement” (p. 1). A proactive kind of consciousness, a term coined as “praxis” that is “a consciousness which combines reflection [as writing] and action [as agency]” (Newman, 2006, p. 67) may better categorise these cases. Praxis was engendered by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher who advocated liberating the oppressed by enabling them to unveil their world of tyranny through praxis (reflection and action) and more importantly committing themselves to positive action for change and development (Freire, 2005, pp. 53,54). Therefore, if this is the case, the writings of *Fire and Ink* cannot be gauged against Little’s (2010) radical, liberal or revolutionary activist categories.

Based on the discussion above, if I were given the responsibility to allocate a name to *Fire and Ink’s* type of social activism I might suggest Confessional Activism, Self-emancipatory Activism or maybe Auto-ethno-activism. All of these examples have enlightened me. However, first person accounts and the inclusion of the soul of self-activism do not suit my writing intention. This said, representing my and other’s accounts does raise ethical questions of how to go about writing in this fashion. Appendix one documents the ethical considerations undertaken through the course of my project. I begin with an examination of the relationship between writing and ethical responsibility. I then place this in the context of the University ethics clearance process and discuss the challenges of presenting semi-fictional works of real people and real settings.

Having evaluated the nature and narrative tendencies of social action writing and ethical considerations, I was then faced with the question of how best to approach or methodologise my process of researching for the stories. The next chapter will outline the methods I used for the creation of my artefact of short stories. I will compare how other researchers utilise these approaches and evaluate their relevance to my project.

Chapter Three

Methods.

During the creation of my artefact I employed the scholarly method of auto-ethnographic reflection. In this chapter, I explore its application to the construction and the production of my artefact. In addition, I also consider how the methods of participant observation, and textual research, were applied. In doing so, the methodology and methods supplement each other as a whole. The exegesis itself, however, should not be read through the prism of auto-ethnography. Its role is to contextualise the insights generated through creative practice and through the research for this creative practice.

With this in mind, I have chosen to discuss three particular methods used in the creation of my artefact. The first is auto-ethnography, which was originally drawn from the discipline of Performance Art, English and Communication (Ellis, 2004). The second method considered is participant observation, which is an investigative framework commonly used within the fields of Anthropology, Sociology and Ethnography (Delamont, 2007). The third is textual analysis, a form of research utilised in Humanities and Education (Sandelowski, 2000).

Auto-ethnography

Transforming observations and experiences into narrative has been of interest to me since the following moment of insight occurred. When I was a full-time academic, I had a confronting conversation with a university colleague. I confided in her that I wanted my thesis to be in the form of a narrative, a story about my experiences of living in a caravan park community. “Not possible, you’ll never get it past ethics, we don’t do that sort of thing here” was the unswerving answer (Anonymous, 2009). Less confidently, I dodged that issue by suggesting that I *could* at least illustrate some data with conversational pieces. The reply, in tones that suggested defeatist resignation was, “if you insist in diverting from a qualitative research design you’ll need to go elsewhere” (Anonymous, 2009). I pondered this for some time, and then came across a remark by social researcher and novelist Hugh Mackay. He argued that it is possible to portray

truth in fiction where “a novelist – rather than a social researcher dealing in the hard facts ... opens up an entirely different pathway to the truth from the well-worn groves of social analysis” (Mackay, 2009, pp. 16 - 17).

With this incentive, I began to search for a theory, a method, or an art form that would open up a whole new range of possibilities in writing narrative text as a thesis (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9). Auto-ethnography was discussed in many writing journals as a useful methodology for writing and creative research undertaken through artefact and exegesis. I began searching for a university who accommodated a doctorate by artefact and exegesis. I was particularly comforted by something Art Bochner, a writer and teacher of auto-ethnography, said of his students. He said the disciplinary boundaries were being broken down by authors who were anthropologists, psychologists and communication and performance studies scholars (Holman Jones, 2004, para 93). With this in mind, I began investigating auto-ethnography.

At the outset, I found that auto-ethnography has gained increased popularity and goes under the guise of multiple names. These include “personal narrative”, “narratives of self” and “reflexive ethnography” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 739). For this reason there is renewed interest in self-narrative through self-reflection and self-analysis. I discovered that auto-ethnography is an “autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 739). However, auto-ethnographers vary in their emphasis on “the research process (graphy), culture (ethno), and on self (auto)” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 740), with varying examples on a continuum of each of these axis. Despite these variances, the key aspect is that auto-ethnography should be ethnographic in orientation, cultural in its interpretation and autobiographical in its content (Chang, 2008, p. 48). Given that my stories were about people and caravan living, thereby ethnographic and cultural, and included my experience it was obvious that auto-ethnography was a suitable application for my project. However, I had to determine how to collect material for auto-ethnography and I also needed to decide to what extent “graphy”, “ethno” and “auto” were represented on the ethnographic axis espoused by Ellis and Bochner (2000) and where to position myself and others in auto-ethnography in order to determine the intention of my project (Chang, 2008).

In order to position myself and others in my project I had to consider what techniques of auto-ethnography I could use. With this in mind, I investigated the typical tools and methods of the approach. There were several well-intentioned scholars who drew attention to completed works of auto-ethnography to illustrate what the finished product looks like (Chang, 2008; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Scott-Hoy and Ellis, 2008), but few that guide novice researchers in this method. Chang (2008) in her book *Autoethnography as Method* dedicates the latter half to exploring how to collect data from personal memory, other people and textual material using ethnographic methods, then discusses how to classify, sort, code and refine the data and finally how to analyse and interpret it. The first manageable steps, she professes, circle around a timeline, memory and cultural rituals and artefact (pp. 74 – 80). In relationship to writing the artefact, I found I could identify easily with these points as my experience was the primary source of data. My residence in the caravan park was four years, I had observed others, and I had committed my experiences to memory that may be stimulated by family photographs should I need to improve my recall. I had also made writers' jottings in which I recorded sayings and rituals such as "the five o'clock somewhere" signifying a drinking ritual, and the events that occurred at annual birthday celebrations and the regular communal Barbeques.

Chang's next step was to collect external data to provide additional objective perspectives with suggestions of textual artefacts like official documents and literature. Again I felt confident I could comply. I had saved the caravan park notices and newsletters and collected other caravan park layouts and photographs from a diarised road trip through Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland in 2012. More formally, I studied academic theses on caravan parks as part of the ethical requirements (see Chapter three). I had decided to analyse and interpret this information using qualitative description and textual analysis based on my first chapter's literature review. When I read that Chang suggested categorising information into themes and recurring topics (pp. 128 -137) I felt I could confidently say that I had collected the required material. However, I still needed to identify what "form" of auto-ethnography I was doing.

Having read widely I noticed that scholars embraced several forms of auto-ethnography which fell into either an analytical, theoretical and objective approach (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008), or an evocative, emotional and subjective approach (Ellis and Bochner,

2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997) or somewhere in the middle of the road (Denzin, 2006). In my artefact, I combine the analytical, theoretical and objective approaches.

Although Carolyn Ellis (2009) compliments Chang on the usefulness of her book she challenges Chang's method of auto-ethnographic data collection, labelling it as too much like Leon Anderson's (2006) objective analytic approach. I add to these three attributes Ellis's admonition that "you can't have auto-ethnography without heart and soul; caring, feeling, passion and vulnerability at its centre" (p. 361). From her statement it appeared that my approach so far was lacking on the evocative, emotional and subjective end of the continuum. I wondered how I could differentiate between these and whether this lack would pose a problem to my project.

The use of "I" is a common tool in auto-ethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). It is a method where the researcher as self, investigates and documents how self feels, what self thinks, and what self does. This way the author becomes a character in their story (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). The character Justine in the artefact is indeed myself and my experience. Auto-ethnography is not simply a study of self alone, for as Chang suggests "Others personally or conceptually connected to self are often incorporated in auto-ethnography" (Chang, 2008, p. 65).

While my creative stories are not in first person, all stories were still conceptualised from my observations and readings and so are experienced initially in first person, the auto of auto-ethnography. I then re-imagined them in third person in order to include the toing and froing between social and cultural aspects (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). That way I reflected the interconnectivity of myself with others (Chang, 2008) required to establish a bond that depicted what I wanted in the creative stories. This let me explore not only what I felt, thought and did but what the other faceless and nameless participants felt, thought and did. I wanted to be a producer and product of the text (Richardson, 2000). I wanted to be the insider looking out and the outsider looking in (Mackay, 2009, p. 17). Due to these processes I now believe the emotional and subjective approach espoused by Ellis and Bochner (2000) and Reed-Danahay (1997) are translated into my stories. I felt that I was also embracing both approaches, similar to Norman Denzin's middle of the road technique where he proclaims our writing

instructs our readers about this world and how we see it, but it may also “challenge and contest” ways of seeing and representing (Denzin, 2006, p. 422).

However, while in the artefact I believe my stories lean towards the necessary emotional and subjective side of auto-ethnography, I did not want to, nor see the need to, write in the extreme evocative approach of auto-ethnography using highly personal evocative stories (Ellis, 1997). That writing method is classified as “confessional/self-critical/self-evaluative which tends to expose self-inequalities, problems or troubles” (Chang, 2008, p. 40). Some dramatic personal accounts that use this method are mental health (Foster, McAllister, and O'Brien, 2005), international adoption (Wall, 2008), sudden death (Ellis, 1993), political resistance (Kideckel, 1997), prison life (Svensson, 1997), and abortion (Ellis, 1997). While my auto-ethnographic writing approach is not confessional nor necessarily emotive and does not expose intimate details of my life, my short stories do include other's personal agonies and hidden secrets. Infidelity is evident in *Free for all*, personal loss in *Get out of here* and *Clean-up*, health difficulties in *No other choice* and indiscrimination in *Take over*. While I have removed myself from the absolute evocative position of auto-ethnography I still had to position myself within it to achieve what I was trying to do in my project (Chang, 2008).

Using her explanation from her book *Autoethnography as Method*, Heewon Chang (2008) was instrumental in enabling me to reflect upon and to elucidate my understanding of the positioning of self and others in my project and the outcomes I wanted for my project. There were three options for me to consider. Chang stated that I could “investigate [myself] as a main character and others as supporting actors in [my] life story” (p. 65). I would use this position if I wanted to make cultural sense of myself. The second option would “include others as co-participants or co-informants” (p. 65). I would use this option if I wanted my story as part of a larger study of others. The third option would include “others as the primary focus, yet also as an entry to [my] world” (p.65). Chang states that I should choose this option if I wanted to investigate a topic about a personal experience without centering on myself unduly.

From Chang's options above I saw the first as a more pure form of auto-ethnography with the emphasis of self as the main character that posited an enlightenment of cultural self, not dissimilar to Ellis's evocative inference. In contrast, the second and third

options use a bilateral inclusion of self and others in a concerted story about the world of the ethnographer and the world of the others, engaging both. I felt safe in tandem between Chang's positions two and three above. The benefits of this axis position in auto-ethnography are twofold. Chang (2008) affirms that the research method is researcher and reader friendly, suggesting a "personally engaging writing style" (p. 52) is easily accessed and privileged with a "holistic and intimate perspective" (p. 52). This form of auto-ethnography offers readers insight to a world and culture of which they may be unfamiliar and lives that have "vicarious experiences of the things told" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 751). I decided this best captured my intentions but I was also mindful of a number of pitfalls inherent in auto-ethnography outlined by scholars.

Exposing a creative artefact to these types of exegetical reflections can raise concerns about the validity of auto-ethnography, particularly in the context of the art/science divide. Those arguing from the perspective of the science side question whether Ellis's method, in which self is the data source, can be considered "proper research" (Sparkes, 2000, p. 22) and claim the ways of inquiry are "soft and fluffy" (Wall, 2006, p. 147). William Gass expresses concerns that the use of self as the researched is the principal preoccupation of our age (Gass, 1994). Several scholars refer to self-reflection as symptomatic of an age of narcissism (Gass, 1994; Sparkes, 2000), self-indulgence and self-absorption (Sparkes, 2000) and "navel gazing" (Sparkes, 2000, p. 30; Twitchel, 2011, p. 632). Where the self-reflection deals with morals, ethics and trauma, Elizabeth Twitchel labels the imaginative representation as "memoir of crisis" and "misery lit" (Twitchel, 2011, p. 632). These reactions are partly because approaches such as Ellis's evocative stream are seen as a method of healing for the researcher writer (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) where the consequences of the story are "therapeutic" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 746) and where "the story helps others cope with or better understand their worlds" (Ellis, 2000). This gives me another reason to not have my stories positioned as evocative or confessional/self-critical/self-evaluative as it would be counterproductive to my goal of activism to have them labelled as narcissistic. This brings forward the relationship of the artefact and exegesis as complementary scholarship in which the exegesis does not act to ratify the artefact as about scholarship but shows it as scholarship.

The opposite debate in favour of Anderson's scientific approach is that in order for the stories to have credence there must be a form of theoretical abstraction or conceptual elaboration. Andrew Sparkes states that by themselves "these stories do not and cannot constitute good scholarship" (Sparkes, 2000, p. 24). Chang also agrees with Sparkes and contends against the pitfalls of auto-ethnography by reducing and avoiding the "Excessive focus on self in isolation from others and overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation. Exclusive reliance on personal memory ... negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives and the inappropriate application of the label autoethnography" (Chang, 2008, pp. 55, 56, 57). It appears to me that it is an advantage rather than any disadvantage to place one's writing squarely with a mixture of both science and art. Indeed, there are scholars who agree within this. Faith Ngunjiri and Kathy-Ann Hernandez attest that not only should auto-ethnographers mix scientific inquiry and self-exploration in different styles of writing and presentations of inquiry in the final products (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang, 2010) but also present "methodological discussion" as part of thesis and dissertations (p.10).

One point I found particularly interesting from Chang's discussion on pitfalls is the notion of ethical standards for *others* in their self-narratives. Chang (2008) questions auto-ethnographers who are blasé when writing about self, and who disregard others mentioned (p.68). Martin Tolich (2010) capitalises on this notion advising writers to "treat all the persons mentioned in the text as vulnerable, including the researcher" (p. 1605). He explains that if the writer exposes something about themselves, it is as if the writer is walking around dressed with a sandwich board proclaiming their stigma (p. 1605) and likewise the other characters (be they family or friends) can be viewed as on reality TV (p. 1608).

The science and art mixture is also represented in my auto-ethnographic writing methods. In my stories I use an "imaginative-creative" (Chang, 2008, p. 148) and "realistic descriptive narrative" (Chang, 2008, p. 143; Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 149) methods. The imaginative-creative lens rests with the artistic writing style (Ngunjiri et al., 2010) whereas the realist descriptive lens rests with the scientific inquiry (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Chang says these methods are ideal for documenting auto-ethnography because they depict places, people, experiences and events as accurately as possible with minimal character judgement and evaluation (Chang, 2008, p. 143). There is a

sense that this could result in research with blurred genres and shaggy boundaries (Chang, 2008; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Richardson, 2000). I am, however, comfortable with this as it works in the form of the short story and so suits my artefact. Laurel Richardson (2000) claims empirical senses and literary forms embrace the binaries of “fact and fiction, subjective and objective and true and imagined” (p. 253) and that good auto-ethnography connects social science and artful writing (Ellis, 2009). In this artefact, then, I have aimed not only how to explore the fact and fiction, but also the subjective and objective and to negotiate the line between the true and imagined dichotomy.

Participant Observation

As I lived in the community about which I was writing, I required a qualitative method to address the challenges of interaction. For the researcher working with qualitative inquiry, there are three methods that commonly arise. They are ethnography, fieldwork and participant observation (Delamont, 2007).

Ethnography has a long history in both social and cultural anthropology and in sociology (Delamont, 2007). “Real true ethnography” (Delamont, 2007, p. 207) is used by both anthropologists and sociologists but the methods do vary. Sara Delamont explains that ethnography is an inclusive term where fieldwork is the setting in which it occurs and participant observation the method of collecting the information through watching, talking to and taking notes in the community in which they are a participating member. Anthropologists spend a great deal of time, perhaps two years or more, living in a setting to experience and capture the culture. They can be immersed in the setting 24 hours a day. Similarly, sociologists may also spend extensive time in a setting but return home every night to their own lodgings and are partially immersed in the setting (Delamont, 2007).

Participant observation serves to capture “what [the people] do at work and in their leisure time; what makes them laugh, cry and rage; who they love, hate and fear; and how they choose their friends and endure their relations” (Delamont, 2007, p. 206). Delamont further clarifies participation as “not real participation”, meaning that the researcher does not necessarily have to actually do the things the observed are doing.

“The researcher may do the same things, but that is *not* a requirement” (p. 206).

Capturing what people do, how they say things, what they experience is paramount for writers. By observing life, they aspire to capture real everyday occurrences and experience various places to then transform that information into their stories.

Whether a writer is writing in a realist or journalistic style, the writer needs to gather information for their narratives. I wondered whether the writer consciously behaves under any of the formal banners above or whether they do so naturally when they are investigating for their narratives. Babbie (1999) suggests that the nature of the data they are gathering determines how they participate in their setting.

After exploring Toynbee, Ehrenreich and Wynhausen’s works and how they participated and researched their material, I began to ask myself what might their positions be in relation to their subjects and settings in their writing? I needed to know if my situation was similar to theirs or not. Toynbee took on several positions. Initially she was an observer in her first stories about the boys in a school. Ethnographic theory regards this as a “closed setting” (University of Strathclyde, n.d.). With permission from the gate-keepers she sat, watched and took notes without any interaction with the subjects. As an observer not only did she refrain from not partaking in the setting, but was able to openly take notes of her observations (Babbie, 1999; Burns, 1997; Gold, 1958). Next, as a participant when working in menial jobs, she again secured the permission of the management of the companies for whom she worked. As a participant she also observed the other workers. Hence, in the middle section of her book, she is a covert participant-as-observer to the other workers (Burns, 1997; Gold, 1958) but overt to management. In the last section of her book she talked with her subjects about what it was like in the coal and steel industries. In that instance she is an observer-as-participant and interviewer to secure the meaning of individuals life (Burns, 1997; Gold, 1958).

Ehrenreich and Wynhausen operated in open settings (their secured unskilled work positions) as participants but covert observers. Burns (1997) and Gold (1958) term this position as complete participant with secret observation. Due to their undercover status, they were unable to take notes during the day but spent hours in the evening scribing their thoughts on a computer. As Ehrenreich and Wynhausen went out of their comfort zone to secure information, Hemley (2012) would interpret their role as immersion

journalists, that is they immersed themselves (as participants and as their own subjects) in society to experience it before writing about it in a narrative non-fiction style. As a result of their information gathering Ehrenreich and Wynhausen could be considered sociologists as they partially immersed themselves in their settings on a daily basis and returned to their lodgings at night. The fact that they stayed in the setting for only weeks at a time also validates this judgement.

Steinbeck, in his capacity of researching and writing *The Grapes of Wrath*, is perhaps the purest example of an anthropologist who, as participant-as-observer, experienced and gathered information over a long period of time in order to produce a collective representation of facts written in a narrative (Burns, 1997; Delamont, 2007; Gold, 1958).

First unlike Ehrenreich, Wynhausen and even Steinbeck, I did not deliberately go into a setting (mine being the caravan park) to experience it and gather information to write about it. I lived there before the idea of writing about that world arose. In that instance, then, I was a complete participant in that I took an insider role in that setting (Burns, 1997; Gold, 1958). I might also be classified as an observer (Burns, 1997; Gold, 1958) as while I did not record, take formal notes or diarise events, I did observe what went on and took occasional writer jottings. If I could conjure a title for myself it could be as a subsequent reflective-participant-as-observer though there is officially no such term.

There are two further markers that can assist my understanding of my position within the caravan park. Living in the caravan park placed me in what Hemley (2012) terms “a state of immersion” (p. 8). This was because I was entrenched in the setting, although my immersion was different to Ehrenreich and Wynhausen, but similar to Steinbeck, because I lived in the setting 24 hours a day for four years. One could argue I could be considered an anthropologist of sorts (Delamont, 2007).

This returned me to the question of whether writers consciously take on an anthropological or ethnographic stance in preparation for their writing. Perhaps they do so naturally when they are investigating for their stories or alternatively it may depend on the purpose of their writing. In a time of blurred genre, the lines between fiction and nonfiction have become increasingly indistinct (Behar, 2007). Ruth Behar (2007), an

ethnographer, is concerned that ethnographers are losing the battle to include the art of creative writing as a literary genre in their research write-ups. She is worried that creative writers do a better job of using ethnography and anthropology in their writing than ethnographers and anthropologists use creative writing in their final drafts. I have taken her challenge and reversed her concerns for my own purpose. I have, as a creative writer, embraced the research method of participant observation from anthropology and ethnography and turned the exercise to my advantage in my stories. As a writer, latent participant observation suited me; it was now a matter of discovering a method of transforming my conjoined observations and academic readings into narrative. The next step was to decrypt it.

Textual Research

Ruth Delamont in describing the process of an anthropologist researcher notes that “apart from what [they] can see and what [they] can learn by listening and asking, there may also be documents ... archival records ... newsletters [and] ...books” that once they leave the field are available for the researcher (Delamont, 2007, p. 208). This was also applicable to me. It was a requirement of the ethics committee who reviewed my project proposal and application that I study other documents about living in caravan parks to be able to write a collective representation about my experience and other subjects in a variety of settings (outlined in detail in the previous section under ethical considerations). Reading other literature is also recommended when completing auto-ethnographic projects. It serves as an important source of data that enables me to contextualize my personal story within public history (Chang, 2008). As a result I studied four theses, twenty-two journal articles, four formal reports and four newspapers to glean information on the experiences of retirees living permanently in caravan parks and whether there existed similar occurrences and incidents.

In my readings I systematically focus on people fifty-five years of age and over, who considered caravan parks as their principal place of residence. By using qualitative descriptive methods these close readings revealed recurring themes and incidents of residents’ experiences in caravan parks.

This technique is similar to grounded theory commonly used in field research and in which the researchers take an “inductive approach to propose themes and common categories” about the observed participants (Babbie, 1999, p. 261). I am familiar with this research method, having used it previously, and in the first instance I gravitated towards it. However, Margarete Sandelowski (2000) alerts us that researchers claim they are using grounded theory because they “felt obliged to defend their efforts as something more than mere description” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 334). In my case the grounded theory processes were inappropriate. For me as a creative writer generating themes and categories from established literature is closer to qualitative description. Qualitative description is a “description of the patterns or regularities in the data that have, in part, been discovered and then confirmed by counting” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 338). It is a rich, straight description of experience or an event (Neergaard et al., 2009). Qualitative description uses other research documents of existing knowledge, from the work of others in the field, to locate data (thereby establishing credibility in the method⁵). These documents are sorted for similar phrases, patterns, themes, sequences and important features focusing on the experiences of the participants. These sortings are then quantified into themes (Neergaard et al., 2009, p. 2).

In this exegesis I describe how I utilized qualitative methodologies to research and develop my artefact. In developing the artefact based on my research, five themes evolved from my close readings that depicted experience, thoughts and related issues regarding—the permanent residents, the owner or manager, health and safety, conditions of the park and dwellings, and how to improve these. Within each of these themes different topics were mentioned numerous times. When I had completed my close reading I was able to tally the number of times these topics were revealed. These potentially became the overall umbrella from under which possible short stories could evolve. I was amazed, but pleased that the same experiences that I and others had in caravan parks was evident in other caravan parks across Australia. There were people out there who had troubles and difficulties as well as wonderful joyous experiences that they shared with one another and other researchers. The highest scoring tallies from this exercise were social capital (the nicer things) and the problems with the managers and

⁵ Appendix 1 details the documents used in qualitative description. The research design of each document is detailed to establish credibility and authenticity of the data and therefore objectively transferred to my project as such.

owners of the caravan parks (the not so nice things). Table 1 highlights the themes and the potential topics for my short stories.

Table 1: Example of various topics according to theme

Theme	Topics (not exhaustive)		
Permanent residents	The social capital (25)	Why they live there (10)	Why they left (4)
Owner or manager	What they didn't like about the manager (19)	What the managers think of the residents (10)	
Health and safety	Death and illness (6)	Safety (9)	Appropriateness of park (5)
Conditions of park and dwellings	Conditions of dwelling (8)	Conditions of the park (8)	
How to make the park better	For retirees (8)	For managers (8)	

Note: the number indicates how many notations on that subject was recorded

The storylines for the stories were generated from the topics which had the most notations each subject received and other significant smaller entries have been incorporated within the main subject of the short stories. Table 2 highlights an example of the possible storylines for my short stories gleaned from the themes and topics.

Table 2: Possible story lines from themes and topics

Topics	Possible story line			
Why they live there	Had holidays there and decided to move in	Nowhere else to go	Cheap residence	Deliberate lifestyle change
Social capital	Surprise birthday party	Sharing fish and garden produce	Helping others with repairs and cooking	Looking out for each other
Negative social capital	Adultery	Bickering and fall out	Gossip	Lack of networks and loneliness
What they don't like about manager and conditions of the park	Changing owners	Upkeep of drains, and facilities	Indiscriminate eviction	Different rules for different people
Why they leave	Spouse dying and the difficulty of selling up	Have to pay rent even though they have vacated	Social capital diminishes and no longer a nice place	They have been evicted

I found this exercise to be not only beneficial for my project but also a possible use for other creative writers in the academy. The method of sifting through other academic research theses, journal articles and formal reports serves as a sound basis for writing

material that holds credence without the writer having to conduct time consuming interviews, observations, focus groups and the like (not to mention the grapple with ethics committees). The ethical considerations for those studies had already been approved, the time in the field accomplished and the data established, analysed and interpreted.

I began to understand that from the readings and the categorisation of the themes and hence the example of the short stories, that residents who consider the caravan park their principal place of residence frequently found life a struggle and are often under duress but also have wonderful times of friendship, happiness and social inclusion. This research method renders my creative writing objectively factual, but like Steinbeck I am subjectively fictionalising my experience with those of others.

The next chapter will investigate how best to fictionalise my experience and explore various writerly techniques available to me. I was particularly interested in exploring how short story authors dealt with the boundary between real life experiences and imagination and if there was a way of overlapping and interlinking the stories in the form of a sustained narrative.

Chapter Four

What narrative form?

A central question for me in the early stage of my artefact was what form of narrative should my story take? Should it be a novel, novella, long short stories, or short stories? To begin, I sought to define narrative and to explore what attracts the writer to consider short story over other narratives? Simply put, a narrative is the representation of an event or series of events (Abbott, 2008, p. 13). Most scholars argue that the narrative must not only recount a series of events but also needs to establish some relation between them (Abbott, 2008; Bennett and Royle, 2009; Whitla, 2010). Technically a novel, novella, long story and short story are all narratives, though differences relate to length and point of view. Principally the shorter the story, the more the story line is compressed in time. Its subplots are lessened and point of view is singular rather than multiple (Sayer, 2011).

Short story has a long proud history in Australia, particularly during the 70s and 80s, though some say it has lost its popularity amongst literary critics (Gelder and Salzman, 2009, p. 97). This is especially so with single authored collections (Gelder and Salzman, 2009). Yet anthologies are resurging (Gelder and Salzman, 2009), probably due to our busy lifestyle and the lack of spare time rendering the short story of a length suitable to read in one sitting (Sayer, 2011). Short story is also claimed to be the preferred medium for first time writers because they are easier to get published in literary magazines and to submit to short story competitions. The popularity of short stories is evident when in 2013, 850 were short listed from the thousands entered in *The Age* short story competition (Steger, 2013) pointing to the ongoing status of short story as a literary mode. Two Australian authors dominant in this resurging trend are Tim Winton and David Malouf, both of whom have lured me with their collection of short stories and their ability to write “luminous prose of sinewy leanness” (Winton, 2005), and about the “unrevealed things that have shaped the course of people's lives” (Wyndham, 2014).

My bookcase is littered with short story collections in the likes of *The Best of the Best* (Oakley, 2009), *10 Short Stories You Must Read in 2010* (The Australian Council of the Arts, 2010), *Award Winning Australian Writing* (Aranjuez, 2011) and *Emerge: New*

Australian Writing (Edmonds and Wilson, 2006). I have been particularly influenced by the short story collections of Jeffrey Archer's *And Thereby Hangs a Tale* (Archer, 2010) and Arnold Zable's *Violin Lessons* (Zable, 2011b), David Malouf's *The Complete Stories* (Malouf, 2007) and Tim Winton's *The Turning* (Winton, 2005). All of these authors entwine stories which are based on someone's real life experiences, then re-imagined with the interspersed of the author's own imaginative narrative. Often their stories are based around a similar theme, for example Zable's texts often merge under the theme of immigration and human rights (Gelder and Salzman, 2009, p. 44) whereas Winton's texts often centre on rural existence (Gelder and Salzman, 2009, p. 98).

The term thematic writing is used by several authors and is likewise referred to by a number of other names. Frank Moorhouse, for instance writes into diverse themes in his work *The Americans Baby* (Moorhouse, 1972) by writing in third person about different incidents but maintaining a sense of the conflicts between American culture and Australian culture. Moorhouse refers to his technique as "discontinuous narratives" (Gelder and Salzman, 2009, p. 98) an innovative narrative method that he also terms as interconnected stories (Moorhouse, 2011). Another example is Tim Winton's *The Turning* which not only has a thematic consistency, but also has many stories of the same characters and the same location (Gelder and Salzman, 2009). Winton names his technique as "overlapping stories" (Winton, 2005) while Jen Poster defines Winton's short stories as "interlinked" (Poster, 2005).

I wanted to explore the concept of overlapping and interlinked short stories as to me they appeared an indistinct form that resided between collections of short stories and novels. I found that in academic circles, overlapping and interlinked short stories were considered more than just collections of short stories and that concept interested me. Along with overlapping and interlinked short stories the term short story cycle appeared. I discovered that Forest Ingram (1971), an early writing theorist, proposed the themes, characters, settings and images of his own short narrative had "dynamic patterns of recurrence and development" (p. 20) and as such argues that these are the heart of the genre of the short story cycle. Others like Gerald Lynch (2010) in critiquing Norman Duncan's *The Soul of the Street*, written in the year 1900, deemed it to be a short story cycle. This declaration served to illustrate that authors unknowingly operated in this fashion or used this structure without openly acknowledging it. The short story cycle, it appears, has gained notoriety as a fragmented genre in that it is hybrid between

the novel and the short story (Belen and Lucan, 1997, p. 239; Ferguson, 2003, p. 104). Interest in this form is wide spread with the emergence of the short story cycle as far as Latin America and the Caribbean (Forkner, 2012; Smith, 2011).

I wondered whether there was an expectation that stories in short story cycles needed to exist in their own as stories that could be understood without the context of the other stories around them. There is much debate about this, with the emphasis on the need for the stories to build towards a larger message rather than being required to work as stand-alone pieces. In a scholarly study, Susan Mann (1989) explained she regarded the essential characteristic of the short story cycle is that the stories are both self-sufficient and interrelated (p. 15). Yet, there is the implication in the scholarship of Cook (2012) and Abbott (2008) that the stories are better suited to being experienced as a collection rather than as self-sufficient entities. Whilst they *may* be read independently of one another their emphasis is on working together, creating something that could not be achieved by a single story (Cook, 2012). They are a collection of short stories in which the narratives are specifically composed and arranged by the author with the goal of creating an enhanced or different experience when reading the group as a whole as opposed to its individual parts (Mann, 1989, p. 12). To accomplish this, writers, not unlike Moorhouse and Winton, use repeated or developed characters, themes, setting, and images to create the sense of a larger whole where the stories are fashioned to function cumulatively, returning the readers from the beginning to the end of a story cycle (Lynch, 2010, p. 41). Most cycles do not have a consistent voice or central plot (Cook, 2012) allowing for varying point of view and narrative. This concept enables the cycles to resemble a novel more than short story. This said, they may have distinctive narratives because of the different events envisaged but share the involvement of at least one character and the same location or setting (Abbott, 2008). Short story cycles, suggests Smith (2011, p. 10), are realist in description, modernist in the fragmentation and post-modernist in their experimentation with the reader/text relationship.

The artistic effect of the short story cycle particularly interested me because I had wanted to write a longer non-fiction narrative but due to ethical restrictions, for which I am now thankful, I turned to fiction. As I discussed earlier I specifically chose short fiction because I wanted each story to emphasise a single storyline in which I could portray particular characters, incidents, and events seemingly in the same setting. This

came about quite naturally. However, as I started to write I found that the story I was creating had a sequel, and although there was a small time gap, the next story was linked by the consequences of the incidents (or actions) and characters in the previous story about a caravan park. When people asked what I was writing I would answer “a novel of short stories” because this was the concept that lived in my head before I discovered short story cycles. Workshop participants with whom I discussed this project expressed surprise that there was such a form. This lack of awareness of the medium extends to modern writing classes. Cook (2012) convinces his students to experiment with the cycle by encouraging them with a clarification by Michael Chabon. Cook explains that Chabon, an early proponent of the short story cycle, expounds that the linked narratives can create an effect they can’t get from a novel or from one story alone. He says it’s like a series of snapshots taken over time, where part of the pleasure is turning to them again and again, and the interest lies in what has happened in the interstices (Benedict, 1991; Cook, 2012).

In gathering the narratives together in a cycle, it has been suggested by Cook that writers may use at least one or a combination of “sense of place; a central protagonist, family protagonists, an era or epoch, a unifying theme or a characteristic form” (Cook, 2012) as a central thought. Gerald Lynch points out that the first story of a series of cycles usually introduces the setting of the ensuing stories in a way that presents place itself as the cycle’s major player (2010, p. 41). By doing so, it sanctions local colour, characterisations, customs and dialect.

The first story in my artefact is titled *Changing Places*. The narrative has geographical description, for example, tall timbers, and a slow moving river. It has local dialect and language that is colloquial such as, “Oo’d you recon it was?”. The customs, incidents and activities of the residents are captured through aspects such as the *five o’clock somewhere* drinking catch cry and the inter-community squabbling and fighting. The characters paint a picture of trailer trash, moral indecency, the elite girly club and the groupie men’s club, and establishes the caravan park as the central place of setting and therefore the major player in the artefact. The last story of my artefact, *Pulling the pin*, is a portrayal of leaving the caravan park as a closure of place in the cycle. This brings the reader to a full cycle in the narrative.

Protagonists can also have their own cycle within the linear framework of the collection. An example of a central protagonist cycle from my artefact is the trilogy *Buy up Big, Takeover and Clean-up*. In *Buy up Big* a shrewd interstate businessman, Bill Anderson and his wife Clair, locate a caravan park for sale and proceed to extract it from the owner for less than the asking price. It is written in third person from the position of the two central characters who disclose their intent. *Takeover* introduces some of the residents of the same caravan park, and is also written in third person. It focusses on how they deal with the rumours of the impending sale. The link to *Buy up Big* is the outcome of the sale and the new rules and regulations stipulated by the new owners, Bill and Clair Anderson. *Clean-up* is positioned a short time after the take-over when the new owners seek to clean up the caravan park and enforce the new rules and regulations. Again it is written in third person and outlines how these changes affect the residents, some of whom have featured in other short stories. Each short story is brief with a single, compressed storyline and contains an epiphany or turning point (Sayer, 2011) but like Winton's *The Turning* I have overlapped and interlinked these three stories using the same characters and setting under the theme of "new owners taking over the caravan park and how that affects the residents". After their opening stories, Steinbeck (1937) and Tsiolkas (2008) work similarly. Steinbeck's stories concentrate on different characters, relationships and incidents within the "Flat" as place. Whereas Tsiolkas uses different characters and relationships around the "Slap" incident as the central stories in the cycle. Both works display overlapped and interlinked characters in stories that do not necessarily offer story as a solo work.

Once I realised that I could write stories that appeared longer through weaving the characters, actions, incidents and outcomes loosely together over two or three cylindrical episodes within an overarching cycle, I eagerly embraced the idea. However, that decision was not without its difficulties. In doing so I had to remember every character's appearance, voice, values and intentions as well as what they said and did and ensure these appeared consistent across all the stories. I tried to prevent making costly time wasting errors by clawing through what I had written to remind myself of what I had created. To overcome this difficulty I set a small white board up in my writing space and documented each character as they were revealed, more or less like a detective keeps track of their investigations. A further challenge for me was when I was referring consistently to the setting and locality of the caravan park and its outlay in the

stories. For instance in *No other choice*, Laurie and Norma noticed a set-up they liked while they're camping in the public area of the caravan park. They muse on its attraction. Through life's difficulties they find themselves back in the park looking for somewhere to buy. The park owner advised them of the site for sale and gave directions on locating it.

Number 18 of Teatree Circle and has \$85,000 on it. Down the main drag, past the first street and the second. Number 28, 22, 16 ...

In the *Big O*, the surprise birthday party was on the edge of the caravan park at a public BBQ. But where was that in relation to where the people lived? I needed to position that so that my readers could visualise it. In *Clean-up*, I had to make my directions reliable. Justine from number 23 visits Mavis who lives behind her in number 26. She

slips through the back hedge, irritably pushing aside the long fronds of the weeping willow that block the alley through to the next lane. Mavis and her husband of 50 years have lived in the Park for ten years. Fred is out the front of number 26 in his cane chair ...

Another instance from *Clean-up* is where the owners scout through the lane names. In my story they are listed

The new owners sweep through the Park. Acacia Lane numbers 7 – 12; Tea-tree Circle numbers 13 – 18; Bottle Brush Lane numbers 19 – 24; Blackwood Place numbers 25 - 30—pointing and planning as they go.

To make sure the lane names and set-up numbers in these and subsequent stories correlated I drew a typographical layout of the caravan park and listed who lived where, noting the street names, numbers, facilities, plants and the likes. This not only provided a clear direction for me as a writer as I sculptured the stories, but also offered the opportunity to provide the map as a dynamic inclusion in the artefact for the readers to follow the storyline and characters. As the audience read of the escapades behind the boomgate, the map could be consulted as a way to give the overlapping and interlinking stories a visual reality and authenticity.

Further to expanding the genre of social action writing as a short story cycle, I discovered the order of the stories in the cycle had a significant contribution and impact. In the closing months of my candidature, at the particular point of determining the order of the stories in the artefact, I recalled what Gerald Lynch (2010) had said about the first and last story in the cycle. When I revisited Lynch's article to determine what else he claimed about the short story cycles, I discovered that he argued that "stories [are] organized [sic] chiasmically" (p. 42). In writing my artefact story lines I was particularly governed by the various themes that were defined by the close readings prescribed by the ethics committee (see Table 1, p. 67). I basically addressed and wrote the stories in a chronological manner. Now, I had to determine if the order of my stories in the artefact were chiasmic and returned to researching how the cycles could work. At that point, practice-led research, thereby my need to find out the mechanisms of chiasmic patterns that applied in my artefact, drove my research. William Engel (2009) defines chiasmus as "a mirroring principle ... rooted in classical rhetoric". (p. 2). Chiasmus builds from two matched, but opposing members, toward a shared middle or meeting point (Lissner, 2007). Boris Wiseman and Anthony Paul give the Greek meaning as "cross-wise" where chiasmus is used to describe a construction involving the repetition of words or elements in reverse order (A B C: C B A) (2014, p. 2). Commonly, the key elements that repeat in chiasmus are words or sentences (Lissner, 2007).

However, chiasmus is also featured in larger texts such as paragraphs, chapters and narratives (Lissner, 2007). Max Nänny (1997, 1998) recognises Hemmingway's use of back and forth movement that "enact[s] a cyclical movement that begins at 1 and comes full circle in 1 again" (1997, p. 159) ... and that the chiasmic centring "highlight the important theme or central issue of a passage, scene or story" (1998, p. 183). Gerald Lynch claims the middle two stories place cultural emphasis as the axis. The "center [sic] of the book frames the whole with ... political stories that conveys a sense of entrapment and even despair" (2010, p. 42).

With this information in hand, I returned to ordering my short stories in their cycle. I was extremely amazed to discover that, with minimal changes, for example splicing *Case Dismissed* from *For Sale* to make a stand alone story and inserting *What's up?* I had unconsciously written chiasmically. *How does your garden grow* and *The Big 'O'*

form my culturally appropriate social capital axis. The other stories, still in opposition, frame the social injustices that people experienced, portraying entrapment, anxiety, and uncertainty. To outline how each story relates to the opposite, I have mapped the chiasmic order of my short story cycle in Appendix 2.

This unconscious writing had me baffled as I have had no training in or knowledge of chiasmus. Michael Prusse (2012) suggests that a writer may use chiasmic patterning consciously if they have a particular emphasis they want to achieve, or unconsciously because that kind of that patterning fits the writer's artistic sensitivity. Further to this, Mann (1989, p. 16) claims that the stories are arranged only after the stories have been written. I'd like to claim both aspects but then my muse might be offended.

Having established how a short story cycle is the most appropriate form for my artefact, I will now address how questions around the relationship between character and plot drove the creation of my narratives.

Chapter Five

Character or Plot?

Once I had determined that short story cycle was the most effective form and structure for my narrative, I then needed to further develop the characters in these stories and to continue to flesh out the stories themselves. The information about over 55 year olds who live permanently in caravan parks that evolved from the close reading of theses (PhD and Masters), journal articles, formal government reports and other documents echoed my own experience of living in these spaces. These combined to predetermine the characters and the stories that I would write about. The five themes that evolved from my close readings depicted experiences, thoughts and issues relating to the permanent residents, the owner or manager, health and safety, conditions of the park and dwellings, and how to improve these. Thus I had notes not only on caravan park owners and those who lived in the caravan parks but also key aspects of their stories. In a way I inherited the characters and their stories, and albeit extrinsically, it was as if I “knew” these people and their actions. A question arose however, when I began to move these notes into more fully fledged narratives. What aspect, I wondered, should I develop first? I evaluated whether it would be best to concentrate first on character or on the story.

The question of whether character or plot is the key to narrative has been debated since the days of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Ricoeur claims Aristotle recognised three literary genres: epic, tragedy and comedy (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 20). Tragedy, Aristotle suggests, is an imitation not of men but of action and life. Without action there cannot be a tragedy though there may be tragedy without character (Aristotle, trans. Butcher, 2000, p. 11). Thereby Aristotle claims that the plot is the first principle and the soul of a tragedy and that character holds the second place (Aristotle, trans. Butcher, 2000, p. 11; Cuddon, 1998). He calls plot “the imitation of the action” as well as the arrangement of the incidents (Aristotle, trans. Butcher, 2000, p. 5; Cuddon, 1998, p. 676) and argues that character is only expressed in action (Aristotle, trans. Butcher, 2000, p. 10; Barry, 2002a, p. 224).

This discussion regarding the importance of character versus plot continues in contemporary times. Modern critics acknowledge there are two components to every story—the actions and the characters, but claim the opposite of Aristotle’s belief that plot should be developed before character. Peter Barry (2002a, p. 230) notes that in psychological realist fiction, the subordination of character to action is reversed. Similarly, Porter Abbott claims that without character there would be no events or actions (2008, p. 19) and Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle go as far as to say that character and actions are equal and mutually defining (2009, p. 63). Likewise, Sylvan Barnet and William Cain in their text of the best method of deconstructing literature, propose that people and action are inseparable (2006, p. 141).

The theory of these modern critics, with their twofold proposal of developing character and action simultaneously, made it easier for me to resolve my predicament of “knowing” the characters as caravan park owners and those who lived in the caravan parks and “their actions” before I fashioned their narrative. My research on character and plot also revealed that the idea of character and action equality and mutuality is championed by many modern writers. For example, Mandy Sayer, an Australian author, emphasises that the fusion of character and plot are uniquely realised in the structure of the modern short story (Sayer, 2011) and when instructing writers on how to write short fiction Elizabeth George advises that plot or action is what the characters do to deal with the situations they encounter (2004). Similarly, what better advice could I take but that from Stephen King. He says “I think the best stories always end up being about people rather than the event, which is to say character-driven” (King, 2000, p. 224). I could now take a page out of their book, so to speak, and re-imagine my characters and their actions simultaneously feeding off each other and contributing to the narrative.

So how do I make a character out of a person? Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1993) identifies two challenges that writers face when trying to develop character. She raises the question of whether characters should be expected to feel like real people or whether they can only ever be an abstraction? She asks primarily whether characters are “people” or “words” (p. 31). Dare we assume we can create a set of characteristics on the page that feels enough like a living breathing person that the reader accepts them as real? Or should we give more weight to the opposite debate that suggests characters do not exist at all but rather, are part of the images and events of the text. Rimmon-Kenan

concludes there is no separation but rather in text the writer designs the character and in story character is constructed by the reader from various indications throughout the work (p. 36). The writer both fashions the text and the story to illuminate character. It is the analytic critic that seeks to separate text from story to comprehend character (Barnet and Cain, 2006, pp. 141, 180; Roberts, 1983, p. 7).

A further issue to consider is whether the character is seen as “being or doing” (Rimmon-Kenan, 1993, p. 34). Formalists and structuralists believe characters to be performers of an action (Chatman, 1978, p. 111; Rimmon-Kenan, 1993, p. 34) and are only interested in what the characters do. Vladimir Propp’s (Barry, 2002b) study of character forms lists them by functions (p. 226, 227) or spheres of action (Chatman, 1978, p. 111; Rimmon-Kenan, 1993, p. 34). For example: the hero *leaves home*, the hero and villain *are in combat*, the hero *is delivered* through a magical agent and *saves* the princess (pp. 226, 227). Although Propp’s study concentrated on recurrent structures and actions of folk tales, the outcome related more to the chronological story outline of the “archetypal” players (Barry, 2002b, p. 230). For example each story has a villain, a helper and princess and a hero (pp. 229, 230). I decided not to apply Propp’s ideas in my short story cycle genre because the order of his fixed chronology felt too restrictive and the limited actions that depicted stereotypical characters, rather I prefer my characters to be more representative of real people.

Seymour Chatman (1978) raised the Barthesian notion that character was secondary and entirely subordinate to events or actions in the story. However, Chatman records that Barthes reconsidered his previous decision to later claim that psychological measures are legitimised by using the terms personality and trait to characterise beings (pp. 115, 116). Chatman states that Barthes “no longer argues that character and setting are subservient to action” (Chatman, 1978, p. 115). Again I turn to Rimmon-Kenan (1993) to consolidate the question of characterisation. She advocates that there are no hierarchies and it depends on what the writer is trying to achieve. Character may predominate through psychological means and in other places actions prevail (p.36).

Having established that as a writer I am able to fashion text and construct character through action and also psychological traits and personality, I now needed to understand how the mechanics of this worked. I realise that characters are constructed by the writer

and do not exist until invented (Margolin, 2007, p. 67) and that as a writer I am the “master architect” (George, 2004, p. 12) but at the same time I must remember that it is also the action that reveals character. The dilemma is that my people exist and have a history drawn from my background research on people living in caravan parks and also from my own experiences of interacting with the personalities and circumstances of those I lived alongside in the caravan park. In the initial stages they simply had titles like “owner” or “permanent resident” and they do not have names, bodily description, voice or thoughts. In other words, they do not have psychological traits or personality. It is my task to put them into action and to give them skin and bone. It is up to me to determine the properties of my characters (Margolin, 2007, p. 68) but I am reminded that characterisation is not simply done by the author and that I cannot just manipulate them, I also need the reader to assist in formulating characterisation.

The interaction between writer, the written and the reader has endured an extended literary debate. Roland Barthes in *S/Z* differentiates between lisible (readily) and scriptable (writerly) actions of the reader (Barthes, trans. Miller, 1990, p. 4.). John Cuddon assists our understanding by claiming that “The lisible (readily) text is read with little interpretative effort (perhaps unconsciously) and does not impose its own mechanics as the subject of interpretation” (Cuddon, 1998, p. 463). Cuddon elaborates that the response is passive especially when reading a realistic novel of a recognizable world and characters (Cuddon, 1998, p. 725). In contrast, the “scriptable (writerly) insists on the collusion of the reader in the production of meaning” (Cuddon, 1998, p. 463). Here, Cuddon elaborates that the response is to make meaning by working things out, focusing on how it is written and the mechanics of it (Cuddon, 1998, pp. 725 - 726). What I have gained from Barthes is that I want my ideal reader to enjoy the story but at the same time recognise the world and characters of the caravan park as likely to exist down the road from them, to identify with them and their plight, rather than be a literary critic focusing on the mechanics or the work.

My main concern is to understand how I am able to construct a character given the plethora of debates explored above, but still allow the reader to re-construct a character, allowing them to be a “creative accomplice” (Boulter, 2007, p. 138). Although I may do this unconsciously, Amanda Boulter encourages me to “develop a sense of critical-creativity” (Boulter, 2007, p. 138) so that I am more aware of ways to accomplish this.

My dilemma resulting from this is determining the boundary between allowing my reader to be a “creative accomplice” in determining character, and wanting my reader to deduce what I need them to. I continue to find theorist Rimmon-Kenan useful. She explains there are two textual indicators of character: direct and indirect (Rimmon-Kenan, 1993, pp. 60 -61). Direct is fundamental to Aristotle’s diegesis or telling the reader the character traits, whereas indirect is associated with mimesis or showing the reader the characteristics (Aristotle, trans. Butcher, 2000, pp. 5-10; Rapaport, 2011, p. 73). Rimmon-Kenan (1993) states that in modern fiction, indirect presentation predominates, and she stipulates the four methods to display and exemplify character are. These are action, which may be non-routine or habitual (p. 61. 62), like speech through its content and form (p. 63), external appearance beyond the character’s control, such as height, facial and bodily features (p. 65, 66) and environment such as physical surrounding and social class (p. 66). Characterization is built up throughout the novel gradually allowing the reader to piece together subtle nuances (Boulter, 2007).

This gradual disclosure of characteristics throughout the novel produces another dilemma for me. Writing in the form of short story cycle limits gradual character build-up due to brevity. The brevity is evident when the cycle relies on a careful balance between individual stories and the whole structure with noticeable interconnections between the stories (Forkner, 2012). Unlike a novel, which tends to be uninterrupted and develops the main characters as well as the plot that leads the reader through the novel, the short story cycle compels the reader to readjust one’s interpretation after each story (Forkner, 2012, p. 18).

For me, as a social activist writer, the dilemma is to provide a gradual disclosure of character to allow the reader to interpret each story while still allowing them to coalesce within all the stories to identify with the characters and plot. It is imperative to portray the characters realistically for the required effect. The owners of the caravan park are the principal characters in my artefact. I need to represent them as the oppressor through their dealings with the residents by their actions and decisions but at the same time disclose other characteristics just sufficiently for the reader to form their own opinion of the characters and to view them as fully rounded human beings.

Mieke Bal (1997), similarly to Rimmon-Kenan, gives advice on how to “flesh out” (p. 118) characters on the basis of bits of information released in the narrative that more or less makes them predictable so that the reader assumes more about the character than is disclosed. Predictability (Bal, 1997, p. 124) is one labour saving device that helped me to build my owners’ character with reduced indirect or direct information. This allowed me to rely on the reader to piece information together to unconsciously predict what may or may not happen.

For example, in *Buy-up Big*, before buying the caravan park, the owner (William or Bill) treats his sister (Maree) with contempt and coerces her to do some spying for him. His sister, through a flashback, discloses William’s younger life and his strained relationship with his father. Through these actions William is portrayed as dysfunctional within his family, which ultimately gives him the drive to succeed as a young man. He is devious in falsely extricating the copy of Gunter Driessen’s file from the receptionist at Warfield Investigations and Forensic Group in Adelaide. Then he spuriously buys the caravan park for less than it is worth with the undercover information he has extricated. Through these snapshots the reader should perceive his cut-throat, pitiless nature. Bal (1997, p. 125) suggests further techniques that can make a character feel fuller are repetition of the characteristics, adding further clues, and divulging the characters’ relationships with others. This, she argues, aids reader predictability.

In *Takeover* the reader finds a repeated attitude from the owner and his wife through the stipulation of the rules for the caravan park. The mandatory notice without any consultation states:

Failure to comply with these rules and regulations will mean your site will be cancelled or if a permanent resident you will be evicted.

In the final set of the short story cycle, *Clean-up*, the reader should be able to predict what will happen to the residents, knowing how William (Bill) has treated others previously and now he characteristically will not stand for any challenges. Actions have revealed his character and dialogue has revealed his intentions but I felt I also needed a device that would reveal his inner thoughts at certain times. Frank Moorhouse uses italics for inner thoughts without verbalising them and uses thoughts in first person

without quotation marks. Abbott (2008) formalises this method as “stream of consciousness” (pp. 78, 236). He prefers to use this method for actual conveyance of thinking and feeling.

I liked that idea and used that at times to signify William’s frustration, to further the tension and again add to the characterisation. His inner thoughts are revealed in several of my stories, one of which is noted below.

*This could certainly do with a coat of paint ...
Probably her first job. (In the story Takeover)*

As previously discussed, I leaned heavily on the advice of Rimmon-Kenan (1993) regarding the four aspects that produce character. The aspects she proposes are action, speech, external appearance and environment.

While all storytellers utilise these aspects, different genres of writing tend to lend different degrees of emphasis on each. As the focus of my writing was social action, I examined how writers producing works in their form balanced action, speech, external appearance and environment and considered what uniqueness they brought to these elements. Most interesting of these for me was the social action novel *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy (1997). Roy’s novel, set in India, uses indirect presentation in defining character and plot through the mediation of multiple viewpoints. She creates action through the use of conflict presented as horrors of a highly intimate nature. She then deliberately increases the intensity of this conflict through unexpected consequences. The lack of a singular viewpoint is again critical here, as she refuses to allow the reader to view the proceedings from any single vantage point (Truax, 1997). The call for social action is emphasised through letting the reader see the world and its various conditions and injustices through many eyes rather than merely one set. This allows the author a wider and more convincing canvas through which to articulate and explore the cause of discrimination and poverty in the Indian world. An intimate relationship between reader and character is built through the use of the native tongue Malayalam. This works well to emphasise character and place (Grace, 2010). There is an emphasis on the personal appearance as a way of communicating social stance and the relationship of characters to traditional Indian culture. There is marked attention of

given to descriptions of the traditional Indian make-up of lipstick, kohl and rouge on women. I was particularly engaged to find that one of the characters is considered to be based on Roy herself (Deepa and Nagarai (2014): a girl described as thin black and clever (Barsamian, 2009). This accorded with my own instinct to base the character of Justine in my stories on myself. Roy's reliance on the reader as creative accomplice in scene visualisation by describing the smells and sights particular to the conditions of living quarters, the toxic river, and stink of sewage was also highly effective in generating concern for the characters' social conditions. The realistic description of the environment in the terms and vocabulary of local custom, of the caste system (untouchables) and through a positive emphasis on the importance of the communal creates social awareness and sympathy in the reader. These are elements that I too attempted to include and explore in my stories, through the techniques presented by the narratologists that I have so far discussed, and also through analysis of the application of these in stories such as Roy's.

At this point, I came to understand that the some of the smaller pieces of work documented in *Fire and Ink* (Adler, Busman and Garcia, 2009) as social action writing did not seem to sit as comfortably in this category as the examples above might. I suspect the brevity of the writer's stories did not provide the opportunity to expand character and plot.

Of course, merely building these criteria into my representation does not alone make my characters believable. Hemley (2006) states that writing in a realistic fashion, as I do, does not necessarily make my characters feel like living people. Salient details, both physical and sensory, are required to give the illusion of real life. To understand how to create this, I investigated the notion of flat and round characters.

Flat and round characters

Salient details are more or less exposed in flat or round characters through use of psychological depth or sophistication (Manfred, 2005. para N7.7). Flat and round characters are attributed to E. M. Forster and are discussed in his work *Aspects of the Novel* (Forster, 1927; Bal, 1997). Bal cites Forster's explanation that "flat characters are stable, stereotypical characters that exhibit nothing surprising" (p. 117). Also, William Whitla claims flat characters are just a "simple function" (2010, p. 161) and Abbott

asserts that flat character can be summed up in a single phrase and has no existence outside a single quality (2008, p. 230). By comparison Jahn Manfred (2005) is more explicit in claiming that a flat character does not develop in the course of the action, is “one dimensional” and can often occur as a caricature with comic effect. According to Amanda Boulter (2007) the characters are predictable and if the character doesn’t surprise or convince, then it can be considered flat (Boulter, 2007). I found this useful when I needed a character to be available as an ancillary person and who didn’t appear in any other stories. I employed this method in my story *For Sale* with the character of the temporary caravan park office worker. He had a simple function to take rent and instil unease to a resident but didn’t have a name or description. I also used this method for the man who appeared as “rep for disgruntled residents” in the same story, even though he was briefly described and was given a name, he was simply a go-between and did not appear in other stories.

Round character is an opposite term for flat characters and provides a comparative viewpoint. Bal (1997) reviews Foster’s explanation of a round character as a complex person who undergoes a change in the course of the story and is capable of surprising the reader (p. 117) and is therefore “unpredictable” (Abbott, 2008, p. 230; Boulter, 2007, p. 138). Again, Manfred is more explicit in claiming that round characters are “three dimensional figures” which are developed in the course of the action and characterised by many and often conflicting properties (2005, para N7.7). This description is supported by Whitla, who suggests that the complexity of round characters is built up through multiple layers of description and action (Whitla, 2010). Using the form of short story cycle afforded me the opportunity to introduce my characters early in a narrative. Due to this I was able to release some characteristic dimension where they were needed and gradually add more description and action as the short story cycle continued. This was particularly beneficial to the development of the main protagonists William and Clair Anderson who at times appear predictable, especially in the early stories. In later stories, their characters were conflicting and unpredictable especially when they undergo a change in the course of the story, thereby surprising the reader.

Critical theorists Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle (2009) support the assertions above by concurring that complexities solidify the character as round rather than one

dimensional, cardboard or flat (p. 65). To be lifelike they state that “a fictional character should have a number of different traits ... that are conflicting ... and should be to some extent, unpredictable [where] his or her words and actions ... appear to originate in multiple impulses” (p. 65).

John Steinbeck's (1939) *The Grapes of Wrath* is a particularly good example of how social action writers are able to use flat and round characters to create psychological depth and suspense. Indeed, Steinbeck himself claims his “techniques of writing are psychological tricks” (Shillinglaw, 2012, np). For example he uses the bank and a deputy sheriff as flat characters. He utilises these predictable one-dimensional caricatures to serve a singular purpose in scenes and does not develop them over a prolonged course of action. The Joad family of twelve, who can be viewed as a collective of persons (Fontenrose, 1963), consist of individual characters who develop through multiple layers of description and action to become rounded characters. The emphasis on the fullness and roundness of the characters means the reader invests heavily in them as they perceive they are significant to the story. They assume the family to succeed in their venture. However, Steinbeck skilfully eliminates several family members in the course of the story's progression, shaking the reader's belief in the inevitability of the family's success. Perhaps the most surprising and unpredictable occurrence for the reader is the final page where the Rose of Sharon feeds a starving man from her breast (Fontenrose, 1963). For Steinbeck it is an “oracular image, forecasting in a moment of defeat and despair the final triumph of the people” (Fontenrose, 1963, p. 69). Yet when we consider the careful attention that Steinbeck has given to building up the genuine generosity and kindness of the characters in the face of despair and betrayal by their fellow humans, it is actually not unexpected. This tension demonstrates the richness possible in social action writing and proved a good model of how character can generate plot twists and resolutions, especially when these characters are situated in a tight community or bound by the mesh of social capital.

Complexity

Bennet and Royle (2009) suggest if characters are to be realist, lifelike and resembling real people then they must have complexity. In addition to understanding flat and round characters, I wanted to learn how to develop these complexities in my characters.

Australian writer Marele Day (2007) says the most successful fictional characters reflect the complicated nature typical of real human beings. Complexity, according to Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle (2009), are tensions, contradictions and multiplicities in a single personality. Without these attributes the character is not round. As I wanted my characters to be life like, round and have complexities, I investigated other writers who have analysed this. In the first instance, Day (2007) claims the reader will relate to and identify with the emotional truth of the character. Emotional conflict overrides action and conflict and is found in the situations of frustration where the character feels “thwarted, blocked or trapped in negative relationships or situations in which they see no clear way out” (Ballon, 2003, p. 138).

Theodore Cheney (2001), although a creative non-fiction writer, has some sound advice for his student writers based on fiction writing techniques. He advises that the use of concrete details will evoke emotions in the reader that trigger memories of other characters that resemble the character developed (p.114). Readers will then become emotionally involved (Ballon, 2003). By doing this, Cheney says, the indirect method or “showing” method of characterisation evokes a feeling of control in the reader, similar to a jury that’s heard the evidence and come to a decision based on careful thought. Rachel Ballon (2003), a recognized psychotherapist who specialises in working with writers, also espouses that all characters must be involved with emotional inner conflicts (p. 129). The more obstacles and complications the character has to overcome, the more powerful and absorbing the conflict and story become. In order to leave lasting impressions on your reader, Ballon (2003) suggests, as does Hemley (2006), that the necessity of believable characters demands a writer create a realistic personality, with in-depth complexity and a solid psychology (p. 72). By doing so the reader will identify with the character through sympathy and empathy or, in contrast, resist the character if moral and behavioural codes are broken (Abbott, 2008, p. 86; Bennett and Royle, 2009, p. 70).

Complexity within a single personality can be used to strong effect in social action writing due to the natural tensions that occur when a character’s morals are challenged or when their morals are in conflicts with the social mores of their society. A good example of complexity is contained in the novel written by André Brink (1998) titled *Devil’s Valley*. It is set in an isolated mountain valley where a group of primitive Boer

farmers and their families have been holed up. This novel portrays white South Africans who once thought they could maintain apartheid forever (Smith, nd). Brink creates complexity by generating tension through the principal protagonist who begins his journey to discover the valley and record its history. This character is morally sound, though a ruffian in the beginning and the reader identifies with him and his task. However, when his recording equipment fails, he is forced into looking and listening rather than experiencing through the mediated barrier of the camera lens. This leads him into direct involvement in the violence and forbidden desires that infest the cottages after nightfall (Sage, 1999). As the outsider to the valley, he enters with a separate and, we assume, more developed set of moral values in comparison to the insular valley dwellers. This creates a growing set of moral conundrums that develops into a dramatic and character-testing obstacle when he falls in love with one of the villagers. He breaks a code of moral decency, but the reader cannot help but understand his decision as it is made through the fog of blinding passion and true love. Further strain is created when supernatural ghosts that are the gatekeepers of the valley seek to detain him and his lover from fleeing (Kaver, 2007). This produces complexities of tension, emotional inner conflict, complications and obstacles and generates empathy in the reader, thus stirring the desire for social action.

In comparison, I came to believe that some of the smaller pieces of work documented in *Fire and Ink* (Adler, Busman and Garcia, 2009) do not necessarily generate complexity. I believe because they are written in first person they ‘tell’ not ‘show’ the situation. This use of a single point of view limits the reader’s ability to identify with a range of character and puts them in danger of being the narrator to be unreliable at times. There are, however, strengths to this approach, as the reader may feel a more intense empathy and sympathy with the protagonist or, indeed, the writer if the work is clearly autobiographical.

I was able to utilise these insights into the tool of complexity and the use of real life obstacles to provoke reader sympathy and empathy in my writing through the characters Laurie and Norma in the story *No other choice*. The principal characters forfeited their suburban house to finance Laurie’s drastic surgery that the near death heart scare required. Almost destitute and with Laurie unable to resume work, his wife Norma has to swallow her pride and resort to being his carer and survive on a pension. Not wanting

to live with, and be reliant on their son, they secure a permanent residency at the caravan park with a happy ever after ending in this story. However, in the short story cycle follow on *For Sale*, after five years of living in the caravan park Laurie does die and Norma is left to struggle with the obstacle of selling the set-up against the deception and trickery of the owner.

Another occasion of emotional inner conflict is with Fred and Mavis in the story *Clean-up*. They are elderly permanent residents who have been told by the owners of the caravan park to remove privacy structures and sentimental roses from their set-up. This causes severe angst for the couple who believe they are going to be evicted, but much to their relief their daughter steps in and solves the dilemma. This unfair treatment should arouse resistance against the owner and sympathy towards Fred and Mavis. Still another example of broken behavioural codes that should evoke reader disdain is the continued dominance and disregarding attitude of the owners towards the permanent residents.

This is evident in the stories *Buy-up big*, *Clean-up*, *Get out of here*, *Take-over* and *For Sale*.

One such story that breaks moral codes which may go against the grain of the reader's sympathy is *Free for all*. The characters Richard and Virginia have an affair. This action may signal either moral indecency or emotional involvement for reader. However, in the short story cycle follow-on of *Get out of here* Virginia lives through a deep emotional crisis when her dog, Fella, is run over and killed. Richard becomes the hero providing Virginia's emotional support and even more protection when he is forthright in standing up to the owner who evicts her for non-compliance of park rules. This follow-on action in the story is intended to evoke the reader's sympathy and empathy for the characters Virginia and Richard and the reader's retaliation is directed against the owners of the park.

When writing I am particularly aware of emotional imagery created by the appeal to the senses of touch, taste, sound, sight and smell (Ballon, 2003) which I use frequently.

There is consistent advice from practitioners on what to concentrate on when creating character. Description, dialogue, gestures, and place are common (George, 2004; Grenville, 1990; Singleton, 2000; Walker, 2009). But when I discovered more explicit points like choosing their character name carefully (Day, 2007; George, 2004), ascribing a star sign, their position in their family, how their body moved (Day, 2007),

graffiti, street and hotel signs where they live, how they use their phone and letters they write (Cheney, 2001) my previous training unrelated to creative writing leapt to the forefront. I recognised that these practitioners were referring to non-verbal communication though they do not name it as such. Non-verbal communication will be investigated as a tool to enhance character in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is rarely identified as a device useful for the communication of a character's state of mind in critical interpretations of literature. James Holoka (1992), for example, criticises scholars who study only the significance of spoken communication between characters in classical literature. He claims there are many more attributes in literature that could be judged by nonverbal communications, specifically "physique, clothing and personal artefacts; gestures, posture and bodily movements (kinesics); facial expression, including gaze and eye behaviour; and bodily contact, territorially and special behaviour (proxemics)" (p.238). Although Holoka centres his discussion on classical Greek and Roman texts irrelevant to my own exploration, I was motivated to reinvestigate nonverbal communication. I hoped that doing so would improve my ability to enhance the realism of my character's personality, their complexity and to present psychological traits as physical actions that the reader draws from the text to construct the image of a character.

It is not surprising that this type of emotional representation in literature is often overlooked by scholars. Nonverbal communication is a recent field of analysis, having only been studied since the 1960s (Pease, 1981). Albert Mehrabian and Ray Birtwhistle were the first to estimate that verbal component of face-to-face communication was made up of less than thirty-five percent of the interaction time. This shows that more than sixty-five percent of the total interaction is through nonverbal communication (Pease, 1981, p. 9). What this means is that when we are unsure of what the other people are feeling or how we feel about him or her, we tend to read the nonverbal cues over the actual words that are spoken (Pease, 1981, p. 10). Sometimes the signals are sent out consciously or unconsciously (Holoka, 1992). Other times the words and actions can be congruent or incongruent. Nonverbal signals carry about five times the impact of verbal channels and when the two are incongruent, people rely on the nonverbal message and the verbal content may be disregarded (Pease, 1981, p. 14).

Given that these ratios of impact have now been well documented in research on person-to-person communication, and with little available on the use of nonverbal

expressions in creative writing pedagogy other than Ballon (2003), I was eager to test whether some of the elements could be utilised in my writing to enhance characterisation. I also hoped to add to scholarship in the field and was curious to find out if, when the reader scans the nonverbal cues, the same unconscious recognition is applied to the scene of interaction.

Body Language

The first component of nonverbal communication consists of kinesics, often referred to as body language, which deals with human body motion. It includes such variables as facial expression, eye movement, gestures, posture, and walking speed. Valuable communicator information is contained in the look on your face, whether you stare or avert your gaze, whether your shoulders are straight or drooped, whether your lips are curved in a smile or signal contempt with a sneer, and whether your gait suggests eagerness or anxiety (Pearson, Nelson, Titsworth, and Hartner, 2012, p. 159).

Within my stories, I experimented with various forms of body language to create an adjunct to action and dialogue. At first my writing was too stilted and over inscribed, resulting in characters having too rigid a presence. After much experimentation, I discovered that by reducing the magnitude of body language and giving the character fluid, supple movement, as one would in a real interaction, the characters became more natural. I presumed the reader would also more subconsciously link the movement with the dialogue and hence build the visualization of the character in their mind more effectively. While it will be problematic to list in this chapter every time I have used kinesics in my writing, I will give some examples here.

In the interaction between Richard and Virginia in *Free for all*, the impending intimacy is shown through the following incidents. These lines are in sequence but over various timeframes so as to slowly build the intimacy between them. My reflection that follows here points to what I am looking for in the interaction and the italics indicate the actual section of the story and the body language that I included in the scenes.

Firstly, I needed a subtle indication that Richard was interested in Virginia romantically. After all, this is the beginning of their relationship and he needs to draw a response from

her to his attraction. Pearson et al.(2012, p. 171) propose that a deliberate slight touch signals the desire for closeness with people we like. It is usually congruent with dialogue and signals flirting. At this stage there is no need for a response from Virginia, so this gesture felt quite natural, tentative and yet suggestive. With this in mind, I amended the line to read: *She hands him a VB and he touches her fingers as he takes it.*

Unconsciously, Virginia may realise that Richard is interested in her. I needed for her to indicate some interest in return. In a conversation by the river, I want her to notice that Richard is not happy with his life and to realise that she wants to find out more about him. An obvious way to achieve this was for her to read his facial features. According to Alan Pease, eyes reveal the most accurate signals about emotions (1981, p. 86). She finds his eyes downcast and dull which unconsciously tells her that he is feeling out of sorts and anxious (Kuhnke, 2012). In order to progress this moment, I wanted him to tell her something, but to be unsure how to go about this. So his smile is masked, which indicates he is wondering if he should say what he needs and wants to, or whether he should lie (Gamble and Gamble, 2013, p. 158). Additional signals are congruent with his feelings. His steps are short and he is dragging his feet, a delaying tactic which, according to Pease (1981, p. 15) will imply that he is conscious that he may be distancing her through their conversation. Assembling these movements and intentions, I composed the line: *She studies his face. His eyes are downcast and dull, his smile masked. He doesn't look at her when he talks, but shuffles along, dragging his feet.*

After the initial touching between Virginia and Richard several weeks before, I needed to increase their intimacy. The scene is on the foreshore of the river, where they are walking together. No one is around. As with their eyes (Pease, 1981), bodily stance can signify further closeness. Pearson, Nelson, Titworth and Hartner (2012, p. 6) propose that body rotation from the male towards a female indicates a quest for her attention and indicates his attraction. This move and a longer than normal eye gaze indicates a more intense longing (Pearson et al., 2012, p. 171). The line for that scene reads: *They stop. He faces her, holds her gaze drinking in all of her, and then drops his head.* The drooped head, according to Kuhnke (2012), signposts a reluctance to disclose something. I needed to use this body action in this particular scene as he was about to tell Virginia something contentious to their ongoing friendship.

As a result of his reluctant disclosure, I required Virginia to use both body language and dialogue to agree to what he said. Nierenberg and Calero (1980, p. 54) suggest firstly that an unconscious tilt of the head and a touch to the forearm signifies she is interested in what was said. This movement coupled with confirming dialogue finished with a smile that affirms everything is alright. Nierenberg and Calero (1980, p. 123) and Pease (1981, p. 90) suggest that these congruent movements with dialogue are frequently used as a courtship signal. I was able to demonstrate Virginia's approval of Richard by these movements and related dialogue in the line: *She tilts her head to one side. 'You'll know what's right,' she says, touching his forearm and giving him a warm smile.*

These representations of intimacy were challenging to construct due to their reliance on small and barely discernible movements. When it came to signalling aggression, however, a more overt approach was required. The story titled *Get out of here* is a sequence in the short story cycle and the same two residents are present during a confrontation between the owners of the caravan park. The body language had to accentuate the frustration and anger of Virginia and, further in the story cycle, convey the protective heroism of Richard.

Virginia had received an unwelcome ultimatum from the owners of the caravan park. I needed her to display anger when she confronts the owners. Nierenberg and Calero (1980, p. 27) assert rapid and deliberate strides indicate a goal orientated mission with the likelihood of appearing hot under the collar. The line I used to give this impression is: *She strode up the lane in purposeful strides.* I wanted the female owner to be on the receiving but defensive end of this anger. To understand this impression I combined the ideas of Nierenberg and Calero (1980) and Pease (1981). Pease (1981, p. 103) suggests that putting on dark rimmed glasses signals the wearer is prepared for aggression. Coupled with this action Nierenberg and Calero (1980, p. 62) state that eye covering hints at rejection of the intruder. Further to the eyewear barrier, I needed another barrier of defence. Facing the intruder from behind a counter or desk creates an obstruction and therefore a defensive position whereby the owner has the upper hand (Pease, 1981, p. 124). The line that stitched these ideas together is: *In the office Clair Anderson spotted the assault coming. She put on her dark rimmed reading glasses and busied herself in contrived bookwork behind her desk.*

As a result of this confrontation with Clair Anderson, the co-owner, I required her husband, Bill, to retaliate against Virginia. But while doing so, I wanted Richard to step up and protect his new love. I felt I needed to combine several body language movements to give this impression because confrontation itself is a combination of emotions – anger, exasperation, and a determination to only express these discontents. Givens (2012) states that to give the illusion of confrontation, the foes need to face squarely. This action is a power cue, similar to warriors preparing to fight. Both want to dominate and they will either threaten or bluff. The line that illustrates this is: *He stands and faces William Anderson squarely as he advances towards Virginia's set-up. Virginia stands beside him, hands on her hips.* The indication of Virginia standing beside Richard with her hands on her hips is an action that Givens (2012) claims is what occurs when the female is indicating she is prepared to take steps to perform alongside her male.

With this scene in place, I needed to demonstrate the actual conflict between the men. I wanted it to be male dominated and aggressive with both body movement and dialogue to give the action congruency. Pease (1981, p. 79) contributes the idea of feet astride as a sign to the defender (Richard) that the aggressor (Bill) is fearless. In addition, Givens (2012) agrees with Pease's idea and claims that crossed arms exaggerates the stance giving a guard-like posture that portrays arrogance, dislike for the defender and signals the impending disagreement. To complete these reflections on the aggressive body language, and the initial tentativeness of Bill, I note that Pearson, Nelson, Titsworth and Hartner (2012, pp. 8, 11, 20) engender an unsmiling face, which is a neutral negative action. With this in mind I developed the line: *Bill stops short of the front door, feet astride, arms crossed. Un-smiling.*

With the opening body language established I needed to match it up with further action and dialogue to promote plausibility. With this in mind I researched for actions to indicate that an altercation had begun and continues. Pearson et al., (2012, p. 171) and Pease (1981, p. 22) claim that stepping into the offender's personal space, close enough to shove the offender with aggressive dialogue, incites hostility. The line I created for this incident is: *'Well I've just made it my problem mate,' spurts Richard as he steps forward and shoves Bill's left shoulder.*

The next action I wanted to create proved more difficult. I needed Bill to verbalise the pre-conceived intention to evict Virginia and Richard and demand they remove their set-up, but connect that decision with action and dialogue. Pease (1981, p. 30) states that a jabbing pointed finger is often a precursor to a punch in the nose. That action would indicate that Bill is angry and would possibly consider punching Richard. But at the same time, I wanted the reader to perceive that the eviction was something in his mind that he had long wanted to do. The line I created is *'Get out. That's it, get out,' he yells, pointing his index finger directly at them.*

There is dialogue between Bill, Richard and Virginia following that tirade. It is Nierenberg and Calero (1980, p. 56) who reason that snide remarks together with narrowing eyes indicates that the affronting situation has gone to plan - as if the answer to Bill's problem has been answered. The line that eventuated is

'Well, let me tell you something,' he says snidely, narrowing his eyes. 'You don't have a leg to stand on. This land is mine. You don't own the land, you only rent it from me at a monthly rate. I can do what I like when I own the land, you only own the set-up. I can ask you to remove it and I just have.'

Physical actions discussed to this point are not the only component of nonverbal communication. In conjunction with this are environmental and social factors that are equally important and useful for crafting character and scene.

Environmental and Social Non-Verbal factors

Environmental factors include how buildings are designed and how they appear. This includes furniture, decoration, lighting, colours, temperature and additional noises or music. Social factors may refer to space (closeness to another person) or territory (ownership), status and symbols that include artefacts like tattoos, jewellery and personal effects (Knapp, Hall, and Horgan, 2014, p. 11).

The following example identifies how simple environmental and social attributes can affect communicative understanding. The extract is from *Buy-up big*. The scene is where William (Bill) Anderson, alias Jack Phillips a private investigator from

Tasmania, dupes the young office receptionist into handing over confidential information. Bill is pretending to be someone he is not and therefore out of character in this scene. I needed to portray him as a corrupt, underhanded swindler.

In order for him to be visualized this way I sought symbols, and environmental and social factors that would portray that effect. Dress can be used as a symbol of status and success, such as that of a black suit, white business shirt and red tie (Butland, 2012, p. 108). To further the illusion of success, I decided that Bill should smoke Benson and Hedges cigarettes. These are a symbol of confidence and status, due to their costly, shiny gold packaging suggesting luxury and due to being the most popular cigarette on the market (Butland, 2012, p. 108). The brand itself and the action of smoking is regarded as signifying power play, emitting a sense of “let’s get this over with” (Nierenberg and Calero, 1980, p. 59), especially when the cigarette is lit with a monographed silver lighter (Butland, 2012, p. 108). With Bill dressed in symbolic clothing, and using such objects, I then sought actions that complemented these and investigated social factors that represented them. A drag on the cigarette with the inhaled smoke blown skyward is an aggressive move emanating confidence over, and humiliation towards, a subordinate (Pease, 1981, p. 146). Butland (2012, p. 106) claims barriers between aggressor (e.g., Bill) and subordinate (e.g., receptionist) can be enforced by leaning on elbows and encroaching on the subordinate’s space to generate vulnerability. Finally, a hypocritical smile portrays insincerity (Pease, 1981, p. 136). My solution to the problem of how to portray Bill as an undesirable character who is perceived to have the upper hand is indicated in the researched symbols, environmental and social factors in the following description: *dressed in a black suit, white business shirt and red tie ... Bill drew the Benson and Hedges from his pocket, extracted one, lit it with a monographed silver lighter, took a drag and blew the inhaled smoke skywards above her head. He then lent on the high counter with his elbows and smiled at the young lady.*

Using nonverbal communication through physical attributes creatively has its challenges. I was concerned that I may inadvertently produce stereotypical characters if I used just physical gesture and movement. Robin Hemley (2006, p. 82) strongly advises avoiding stereotypes in writing, the reason being that fictional characters are complex and need to be seen as flesh and blood. I was assured by nonverbal theorists,

particularly Allan Pease (1981), and Gerard Nierenberg and Henry Calero (1980) that I can overcome this pitfall by introducing nonverbal communication, as one would in real life, observing intentional or unintentionally physical attributes in clusters of three. Pease (1981, p. 13) suggests in real life that physical gestures and movement in clusters are like any language. It has words, sentences and punctuation to get the message across. One single physical movement cannot and should not be read to mean what a whole cluster is capable of. Knapp et al (2014) further consoled me in that when I use physical nonverbal communication with environmental and social attributes as interactive codes I am able to work towards eliminating the error of stereotyping characters.

With the chapters of this reflective process-based exegesis complete, I will now revisit my project journey and outline the proposed action that is the final step in my social action writing project.

Conclusion: the journey of a social activist writer

The shelves are stacked with the sacred and the profane, the tragic and obscene, slush and trash and death notes and love letters, and somewhere in the dark of the farthest stacks are the volumes yet to be written. One of them is yours. Make it count.

Laurie Penny (2014, p. 9). *Why I write*.

To embark on a practice-led PhD by artefact and exegesis was an enjoyable journey of discovery and creativity. The crux of the exegesis and artefact was the theme of injustice. The twofold purpose of this exegesis was to find an appropriate research methodology to uncover injustices and work within a creative genre that had the potential to expose these injustices. Revealing injustice, however, is a risky and fraught task that often feels too large for a writer to execute alone.

It wasn't until I attended a writing master class under Australian Arnold Zable that I discovered that a writer can generate stories that uncover hidden injustices and record the contradictory impulses that drive us (Zable, 2011a) without having to be an overt social activist. He didn't give that process a name, but I left that workshop with a personally signed copy of his book *Violin Lessons* (Zable, 2011b) and a determination to alert others of unjust happenings through story telling. After researching what this process was called and how it is done, I discovered the political writing of André Brink (1983) and Frank Hardy (1950), the reportage of Elizabeth Wynhausen (2003) and Barbara Ehrenreich (2002) and the realist writing of John Steinbeck (1939) and Arundhati Roy (2002). I also discovered that some of these writers were considered social activists. But I was particularly taken by something Brink said in an interview. He confessed, "I am not a very forceful sort of person. I am not really an activist, I'm really rather timid". But as the apartheid system entrenched itself and the injustices surfaced, Brink explained, "I just couldn't take the things that were happening" (Tayler, 2010). While the writers above may not have felt like activists, their writing attempted to bring about a change in the situations they wrote about. So I posed myself a question: am I an activist? The theoretical investigations for this exegesis contributed to my understanding of who I was not and who I thought I may be.

Some creative scholars shy from the theoretical side of research, because they feel theory can suppress the muse. I revelled in it, as I realised that the exegesis nourished my artefact and the artefact nurtured the exegesis. The toing and froing between had an interrogative effect. There were early portions of the exegesis that were primary focussed on the creative element, and later, the creative element was enriched by assistance from the research, particularly in relationship to narrative form, character, plot and complexity.

The broad umbrella of auto-ethnography allowed me to use my reflexive voice in this exegesis and to pen my experiences within my artefact by basing the character Justine upon myself. The privileging of craft was important to me, but I was always mindful that at the heart of the artefact were other people's experiences that my research uncovered and exposed. It was important for me to grow as a writer and gain confidence when transcribing others experiences on their behalf.

The dialectic interaction in each chapter of the exegesis allowed me to offer new and significant knowledge to my field. The accompanying exegesis presented insights into how to transform scholarly research, anthropological observations and experiences into narrative. The artefact is also a part of this contribution as it represented, interpreted and disseminated the findings of the exegesis. The creative narrative of social action as a short story cycle generated knowledge about social, political and cultural issues in caravan parks. Therefore, the short story cycle offers readers insight to a world and culture in which they may be unfamiliar, and to lives that are inaccessible to them, expanding the genre of social action writing into an infrequently used form.

Once I had determined that my short story cycle was chiasmic, I considered what difference that would make to the artefact. The very structure of the device can allow for powerful rhetorical results (Engle, 2009, p. 2). It stands out as being more memorable, more engaging and sustains a major degree of dynamic tension (Engel, 2009, p. 3, 4). The effect is one of reinforcement and foregrounding, putting focus on the passages in the centre (Prusse, 2012, p. 366, 367). It offers the ability to describe everyday experience and reality (Prusse, 2012, p. 378).

The underlying rhetoric emphasised in the artefact is that social capital is the “important social glue” (Cox, 1995, p. 1) that generates quality of life and life satisfaction. The basics of which are horizontal networks of people, trust amongst these people, and reciprocity or exchange of something that benefited those involved. The reader will grasp this concept from the focus of the centre stories. The reader should also identify vertical networks in regards to law, health and social welfare, where it is interwoven through the other stories. However, lack of trust and therefore unpleasantness, for example, between the owners of the caravan park and others in the community where power and rule are enforced, diminishes social capital therefore reduced goodwill and well-being.

My project amalgamated social action and short story genre with personal experience (auto-ethnography), traditional research methods and close readings of other research to seal a gap in the way caravan parks are represented. The longer work of a short story cycle rather than stories of five hundred words or less appears to be a more successful realistic portrayal of oppression and injustice. Therefore, I believe it spearheads the creative narrative representation of social action as a chiasmic short story cycle in Australia.

Upon completion am I now a social activist? I am. My writing categorises me as one. Will I move forward to another social action writing project? I am not sure of this yet, but this journey has been enlightening, and rewarding, and my research into the craft of creative writing has heightened and honed my writing skills for whatever the next project may be.

In closing, before his untimely death on Monday, 9th February, 2015, one of the last statements André Brink made in his final speech delivered at the conferment of a doctorate at the Catholic University of Louvain in Brussels was:

"The only triumph the human being can boast about is to go against the questions to try to find answers." (Sydney Morning Herald, 2015)

All social activists around the world applaud his statement, embrace his philosophy and engender his ethos in their work. I am proud to stand beside them.

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Appendix 1

Ethical considerations

I feel this project would not be complete, and indeed authentic, unless I shared the dilemmas around determining the most appropriate and ethical way to tell the stories that I had encountered during my time living in a caravan park. As I progressed in my candidature, my principle supervisor and I realised that it would be both appropriate, and in the best interests of my subjects, to gain an ethics clearance for my project. During the process, the university ethics officer forewarned me that I was not able to write about myself and people in the caravan park without getting informed consent. This posed a number of challenges for me as a writer, and placed pressure on me to publicly reveal details about my writing to those in the community that I interacted with every day. I also worried that I may need to reveal my status as a PhD candidate. I felt if I disclosed that fact, my social inclusion within the group may have been jeopardised. A question recorded in my journal indicates my thoughts at the time.

Should I gain consent from everybody in the caravan park before I write about my experience there? I would need to do that before I wrote about it. If I went up to them and said "I am writing in the first person about my experience of living in this caravan park, you might be mentioned", they would ask questions. To answer them they would have to know that I was doing a PhD and that writing stories were involved. They may want to read them. (December, 2011)

The revelation to me at this point was that I didn't want them to read my stories. I questioned why I felt like this and evaluated possible answers. Was my reason for hiding my writing from them because I was intending to reveal some home truths? If so, would this fracture my relationships with the people I wrote about, whom I saw every day? What effect would my revelations about them or how I depicted them in real life have on me and my subject's lives? Would it then matter how careful I was? Perhaps I was scared I would be sued for libel?

I turned to research to evaluate how other writers dealt with this. I came to learn that fallouts between friends and siblings do occur and sometimes a writer will be sued for libel. Though Hemley (2006) says it is rare for fiction writers to be sued and the courts rarely award damages (p.173), it does still happen. I was curious and concerned about how this could happen, so I focussed my investigation on a contemporary occurrence.

A particularly famous case of libel was formed against Katherine Stockett, a white American who wrote about African Americans in her novel *The Help* (Stockett, 2009). She explains in the novel's introduction that the story centred on black [sic] maids who raise white children in Jackson, Mississippi. Stockett drew on her own experiences to write her novel. She had a coloured maid in her childhood, which she and her family considered a normal part of life. The story exposed the rules and mistreatment between coloureds and whites, voiced through the point of view of the coloured help. It is a trustworthy story in which the reader sympathises with the plight of the help and their camaraderie with the white protagonist. I identified with this as I too had not informed my community that I was writing about them and they were unaware I was undertaking the stories as a method of drawing to the plight of the silenced. This story resonated with me as the families who hired the maids unknowingly feature in the story and the writer is a budding social activist.

Stockett writes as a coloured woman in first person, giving the story a sense of veracity. However, on the fly leaf of the novel there is a disclaimer specifying the fictitious nature of the work, stating that the characters, places, incidents are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblances to recognisable people are entirely coincidental. Stockett speaks of this in an epilogue yet does not deny factual inclusions. "*The Help* is fiction, by and large" (p. 450). By and large seems to suggest that aspects of the novel are invented, but that there are elements of fact and real events present. The reader is left to wonder where the facts end and the fiction begins. She herself seems uncomfortable with this blurred distinction, especially when it dealt with events that drew on the lives of those she cared about. "Still, as I wrote it, I wondered an awful lot what my family would think of it, and what Demetrie [her childhood nanny] would have thought too ... I was scared, a lot of the time, that I was crossing a terrible line, writing in the voice of a black [sic] person" (p. 450). Stockett used real life characteristics and incidents that were very close to home then transported them into her novel verbatim (James, 2011). The novel was an instant bestseller, as was the motion picture of the same name.

The twist here is that Stockett's brother encouraged his current help, who thought one of the novel's character had been based on her, to challenge his sister in the courts, an action which created a rift between brother and sister (James, 2011). The case was

dismissed due to the two year time lapse between publishing and lodging of the case, not necessarily because there had or had not been a violation of privacy due to the revelation of characteristic details. I found Stockett's example of using one's own experience to expose rules and mistreatment over others living in a caravan park could easily be my own. Wanting to avoid conflict with those whom I was intending to assist, I asked myself, how could I prevent this happening to me?

When discussing tactics for avoiding libel, Robin Hemley, author of *A Field Guide for Immersion Writing* (2012) and *Turning Life into Fiction* (2006) advises writers "not to include anything in your stories that you wouldn't want your mother to read" (Hemley, 2013, p. 160), and "don't include a passage that [you] might ... regret later" (Hemley, 2012, p. 160). The example of Stockett's predicament, and Hemley's advice, signalled to me that I must be very careful in depicting characters who could be seen to be based on real people and I must ethically consider the importance of their inclusion in a story. However, I didn't know enough about formal ethics evaluations and this led me to ponder what type or form of ethics I must consider. This, then, drove me to further research around the likely ethical issues I would need to examine.

I discovered that all writers, whether practising artists or researchers, have ethical considerations they should apply to their pre-writing research and product. Practising journalists and essayists for example, abide by the *Journalists' Code of Ethics* (Media Entertainment and Art Alliance, 2013). Within the twelve standards there are four that pertain directly to approaching and representing humans. They are:

Clause 2. Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationship, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.

Clause 8. Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material ...

Clause 11. Respect private grief and personal privacy. Journalists have the right to resist compulsion to intrude.

Clause 12. Do your utmost to achieve fair correction of error (Media Entertainment and Art Alliance, 2013).

A common sentiment across these guidelines is the notion of respecting human life. This idea of respecting human life in the context of journalistic ethics, emphasises basic principles such as "human dignity, truth-telling and non-violence" (Richards, 2009a, p.

20). Leon Dash (2007) a journalist who explores the relationship between ethics and writing, emphasises that truth-telling is the primary justification for journalism because journalists delve into a story to uncover the truth where their “obligation is to the public and their right to know” (p. 873), therefore a person’s real name, places and incidents are not usually camouflaged. Robin Hemley is adamant about this when he remarks that “facts stated must be provably true” (2006, p. 174).

This posed an interesting challenge for me, because while my intention was to reveal the truth, I was also writing as an advocate to give voice to the subjects in my story. Given this, I felt I owed them the obligation of telling their stories but to ensure their privacy and identity remain protected. Hence I couldn’t openly state “*this is the truth*”. Ethically, I found that I would not be able to write as a journalist reporting factual information because people’s real names, places and incidents would have to be camouflaged and fictionalised. This led me to explore other forms. Creative non-fiction was a logical next step because it seemed that its flexible form would allow the revelation of truth within the safety of fictional disguise.

However, narrative non-fiction still required the writer to work through a similar set of ethical considerations to other forms. Narrative non-fiction writers producing, for example, biographies about family and friends faced difficult decisions around ethical considerations. Of particular interest to me were the solutions or measures needed in order to manage these issues. Hemley (2012) offers one such dichotomy and explains the ultimate “litmus test” (p. 150) is whether the disclosures made are in the public interest. Other suggestions when writing a non-fictional text included ensuring the writer gained permission from the person/s involved before the writing begins to avoid “[writer] self-censorship” (Hemley, 2012, p. 157). Another other potential approach is allowing subjects to read the final draft in order to make any changes required. However, Hemley claims this can have a number of reactions. Subjects shown particular passages could request minor details changed or object completely to what was written, and others were astonished that the particular writing was about them, as they did not recognise themselves (p. 157). It is a matter of trust, when you enter people’s lives as a writer that the writer respect their wishes and their information (p.161). The most effective method Hemley concludes is to not “write anything false that might defame someone ... which may affect someone’s life in a way they might not like (p. 157, 158).

Respect the privacy of others as much as possible (p 158), he suggests, otherwise take out media liability insurance before you publish (p. 158).

From this consideration of journalistic reportage and narrative non-fiction I concluded that both forms were able to record truthful matter either in first and/or third person but that steps had to be taken to ensure this was done ever so delicately. I was still frustrated with the necessity of disclosing my intentions to the people of the caravan park, of writing truthful disclosures about them on their behalf. At this stage I had almost abandoned the notion of writing truthfully. Seeking to find an easier path towards ethical representation I investigated what obstacles creative writers face when seeking to use real events and people as source material.

I uncovered that novelists and short story writers also have ethical obligations, and whilst that is not as stringent as the Code of Ethics discussed, many still seemed to aim to treat their subjects in an ethical manner. Fictional writers often use real people as a basis for their fictional characteristics but they tend to avoid one singular person. Rather, they take aspects from several people and meld these together to make a character. Susan Johnson (1999) comically reveals to her subjects how she does this.

I am sorry to be the one to tell you that even though I might have taken aspects of your character, your manic laugh for example, or your poignant willingness to hope against hope, you will not stand as you complete waking self in the refashioned story either. For I have taken your head and repositioned it on someone else's body. I have taken the most vivid characteristics of your personality and blithely grafted them on to someone else entirely ... I steal shamelessly from my family and friends, from the faces of people in trains. I steal from my lovers and husbands (p. 88).

It seems more appropriate to amend your subject's personality as much as possible when trying to transfer them into a character. Developing characters using common devices include archotyping, which is a basic model or typical character from which copies are made (Cuddon, 1998). For example, if the writer needs a wise man they might draw on qualities of Gandalf from Lord of the Rings. Other approaches include gender-swapping (Dub, 2010), creating composites (Ellis, 2004; Hemley, 2006) as Susan Johnson discusses above, and changing names (Hemley, 2006), remembering to make full transformations, not simply superficial amending in order to reduce

identification. For the storyline, Hemley (2006), as a fiction writer, says while you cannot “copyright an anecdote told at a party, a secret told in confidence or any other life experience, you should be aware of other people’s feelings and realize that what you write might inadvertently hurt someone ...” (p. 165). The defence of the fiction writer, compared to that of the journalist, is that the story is not true, that it’s fiction, and that there are no “disclosed private facts” (Hemley, 2006). Hemley (2006) sums up how fiction writers utilise the real but remove it from its original context. He elaborates:

The fact is, real life is the stuff of fiction, and real people are the stuff of life. You can’t avoid writing about real people, nor should you be expected to. The problem is that fiction deals with moments of crisis and with secrets. It deals with exactly the types of things real people would rather not have known about them (pp. 181-182)

Where Hemley’s words seem to give permission to harness the real, he openly confesses that he has lost friends as a result of what he’d written in short stories where he’d based a character on someone real (2012, p. 156). He concludes by saying that no matter what lengths we, as fiction writers, go to in order to disguise our characters and storyline, there will still be people who read themselves into our characters and the locales of our story (p. 183). To overcome this, one may place a disclaimer at the front of the piece that reads “Any resemblance to person, living or dead is purely coincidental” (p.166), yet this may only offer legal protection rather than protect relationships. Above all, suggests Hemley, a writer must keep their notes (p. 155), in case formal or informal defence is needed.

It seemed, then, the easier option would be to write fiction. I revised my plans in order to write a fictitious story rather than of a book of first person reportage. Hence, I was disappointed that my project would not be a truthful depiction of people living in a caravan park. I did however, submit an ethics application in an attempt to be respectful towards my subjects and thorough in my approach.

In Australia, research guidelines and ethics are established by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). Bio-medical researchers dealing with animals and humans must adhere to these guidelines as do researchers in Humanities and Social Science who deal with or research about people (Collins, 2012; NHMRC, 2013a). Typical research methods requiring ethical clearance include medical procedures and

testing using any body parts and issues and less invasive methods such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, being observed, using personal information (Collins, 2012; NHMRC, 2013a) and archival documents (NHMRC, 2013b).

It is the responsibility of ethics committee members, made up of five or six academics from different disciplines (on which there are few representatives from journalism or creative writing fields (Richards, 2009b)), to critically read and evaluate a students' ethics application for the design of the project and risk to humans participants. They are particularly concerned with "informed consent, right to privacy and protection from harm"(Chang, 2008, p. 68).

By January 2012, I completed a first draft of the form and submitted it to my University pre-ethics staff member for review. With minor suggestions and in what I thought was appropriate language and with sufficient detail it was submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval. I was confident it would be approved.

The format of the artefact, which included a character loosely based on myself in some of my stories, and the exegesis where I reflected in first person on the writing process, was explained. However, as Josie Arnold (2009) predicted "both elements of the PhD in writing by artefact and exegesis can be seen as literature of self. They thus cause a new consideration of University ethics clearance procedures" (p.75). It was clear that the committee did not understand how writerly aspects, such as semi-fictionalising and amalgamating real people and real settings, function within the traditionally scientific inquiry of an ethics form. They wanted to know who my subjects were, how many of them were involved, and their age and gender. How I was going to observe them, how I would interview them, and over what time frame? Project design requirements raise difficulties for student researchers in the arts when their project does not involve premeditated interventions and does not have a clear start or finish (Richards, 2009b). I had to convince them that I was not setting up a data base of participants, but that rather "the narrative is imbedded in ... [the writer] as much as in the so-called data sources" (Arnold, 2009, p. 76). I had to explain the concept of and the role of writer jottings as a method of noting description and more importantly, the existence of the first person reflection, or as Josie Arnold calls it "the subjective academic narrative" (2009, p. 82).

They required that I secure informed consent from anybody I referred to in the personal reflection aspect of the exegesis, including my husband. A friend suggested they were possibly concerned with “what happens to Lesley’s hubby if they separate or fall out” prior to submission (Anonymous, 2012). My husband and I joked about this. We have been happily married for forty-six years and mockingly agreed not to separate or divorce until I submitted my artefact and exegesis. But realistically, to meet the requirements of the ethics committee I had to agree to pass the research explanation notes by him, have him read and understand the instructions, reveal any passages that referred to him, and ensure he read those sections, making sure he was comfortable with the content of those passages, and have him sign an informed consent form. This meant he was not going to be harmed by what I had written now or in the near future but allowed him to return at a later date and challenge what I had written if he felt it had caused him belated distress. It looked like we were stuck with each other for as long as we both shall live.

By mid-February the head of the Ethics committee gave me some helpful questions to address and I was required to formulate my answers and submit them again to a single reviewing person. This was frustrating business but was simplified when the same friend suggested “there is a call for clarity – just imagine you are talking to a five-year-old” (Anonymous, 2012). This humorous remark gave me the insight to realise that what I do as a writer helps me become a better writer and accountable for my own writing process.

The outcome by mid-March was an extremely simplistic breakdown of exactly what I was doing and how. I used examples and suggestions of possible courses of action when exact details were unavailable. The supplementary document turned out to be an extra 2,500 words and included a glossary of creative writing terms to aid their understanding. This included concepts such as fictitious, first person, imagined and writer jottings. On the 19th March, 2012, I was given ethics clearance to commence my project. The whole process from first submission had taken five months. While it was a rewarding activity in refining my artefact and exegesis it is little wonder that creative writing academics in supervisory roles call for a new and more open approach to ethics clearances within universities (Arnold, 2009; Beasley and Walker, 2014; Evans, 2007; Richards, 2009b). This is especially so if the narrative is fashioned realistically

“because it creates a world that looks ‘real’ and characters that are believable” and represents a version of our world (Gandolfo, 2011).

The feedback about this second supplement from the ethics committee indicated they were concerned with two things about my project. The first was that the characters in the short stories may be recognizable as discussed previously. Writing scholars (Dub, 2010; Ellis, 2004; Hemley, 2006, 2012; Johnson, 1999) had given me some sound advice on how to overcome this.

Second, the committee was concerned that incidents I experienced in the caravan park may identify me and the caravan park in which I lived. The ethics committee required I review other literature for similar situations of living in caravan parks to prove the common nature of the experience across many caravan parks before I started writing. My note in my journal indicated that I had come to terms with their requirements.

I would have to demonstrate to them where the subject of each story came from so as they do not think I have targeted anyone or this caravan park singularly. This would mean that I would have to categorise all the thesis and articles that I have on caravan parks into themes to demonstrate that occurrences in this caravan park are synonymous with others across Australia (February 2012)

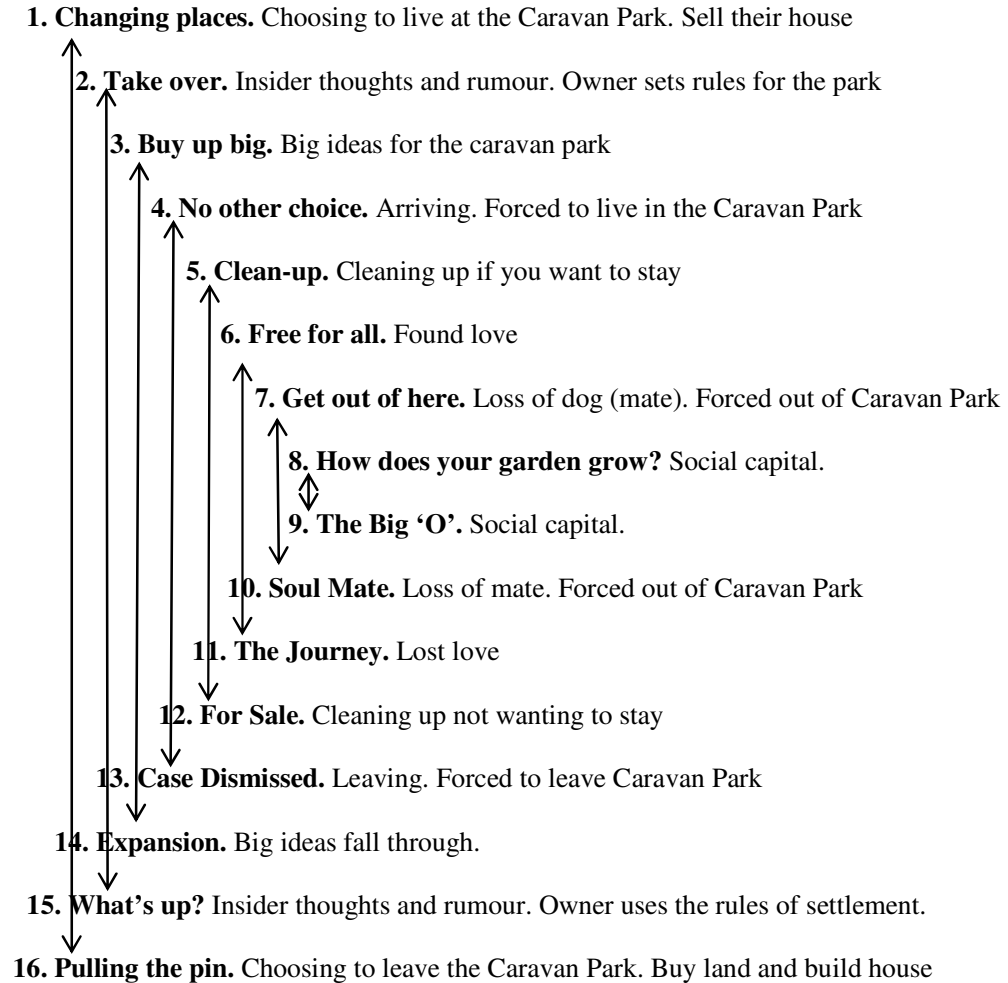
I carried out a literature review on theses (PhD and Masters), journal articles, formal government reports and other documents about Australian caravan parks. As it turned out, the literature I covered readily reflected my experience as well. Much to my delight and with gratefulness to the ethics committee, I discovered that I could tell a truthful story that depicted what myself and other people experienced by using the examples in a generalised fashion. A full documentation of the research techniques and the ethical requirements of these documents appear as Appendix 1 of this exegesis. How I used these readings and how I sorted them into their respective themes and topics has been documented under *textual analysis* in chapter three.

Appendix 2

Author	Title	Methodology/Authority
Secomb	PhD. <i>Retirement in Mobile and manufactured housing</i> . UniNSW	Retirees over 55 and permanent residents. Written questionnaire, interview and observation. 778 responses from 34 Caravan Parks. Ethics required
Severinsen	PhD. <i>Marginally Grounded</i> . Uni of Otago	Semi-structured interview with open ended questions for key informants and long term residents and owners. First with 18 informants and 4 owners and then a further 22 residents over 6 caravan parks. Ethics required
Greenhalgh	Masters. <i>Principal Place of Residence</i> . QUT	Snowball sampling. Interview survey with operators and long term residents, supplemented by newspaper and reports. 34 survey interviews with owners, residents and other community leaders. Ethics required
Wedgewood	Bachelor. <i>Destined for closure</i> . UniNSW	Historical and current literature and did discourse analysis. Caravan Park Audit for numbers. 2 Key informants. Ethics required
Barclay et al.	Report. <i>Crime in Caravan Parks</i> . Uni New England	Random sample. 36 Caravan Parks. 121 Interviews with Owners, Tourists, Permanent residents, public enforcement, local govt. Two nights observations in each park. And some oral surveys. Ethics required
Wensing et al	Report. <i>On the Margins</i> . AHURI and UniNSW	Digital analysis ABS 1986-96. Postal survey councils in three states, 106 responses. Focus groups 2 in each state by a written questionnaire and structured discussion. Semi-structured interviews with 40 stakeholders. Ethics required.
Newton	Report. <i>Emotional attachment</i> . Uni Ballarat	Interview 10 managers. Interview 12 permanent residents in various caravan parks around Melb. Ethics required.
Bunce	Report. <i>Relocatable Homes</i> . Flinders Uni	Literature review. Questionnaire survey and interview with 60 permanent residents. Ethics required
Various	<i>Multi-various</i> . 22 Parity Journal articles.	Editorial group from RMIT, Swinburne, Uni SA, QUT, and Flinders Uni. Writers are Federal Ministers, Academics, Project workers, Journalists, Action Groups, Local Gvt. Researchers, AHURI, Community Workers, Unionists, Legal Centre, Caravan Park services. Community Services.
Smith Keioskie Wood	<i>500 Retires face losing park homes</i> . N'Castle Herald <i>Caravan Park lifestyle under threat</i> . Gold Coast Adv. <i>Caravan owners ready for war on resort plan</i> . Hobart Mercury	Journalist with Editor Journalist with Editor Journalist with Editor
McKinnon	<i>Caravan Parks turn into upmarket resorts</i> . T'Tonight	Journalist with Editor

Appendix 3

Chiasmic order of stories



Appendix 4

I, Lesley Bronwyn Harrison, declare that all conditions pertaining to the clearance for the thesis were properly met

Signed:.....Date:.....

SUHREC Project 2012/013 Ethics Clearance

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SUHREC Project 2012/013 Ethics Clearance

Keith Wilkins [KWilkins@groupwise.swin.edu.au]

Sent: Friday, 30 March 2012 6:02 PM

To: mbandrew@swin.edu.au; Lesley.Harrison@utas.edu.au

Cc: Carolyn Beasley [CBeasley@groupwise.swin.edu.au]; Nadine White [NWhite@groupwise.swin.edu.au]; Resethics [Resethics@groupwise.swin.edu.au]

Dr Martin Andrew/Ms Lesley Harrison, FHEL

Dear Martin and Lesley

SUHREC Project 2012/013 Life stories: self to fiction
Dr Martin Andrew, FHEL; Ms Lesley Harrison, Dr Carolyn Beasley
Approved Duration: 30/03/2012 To 30/03/2017 [Adjusted]

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol by Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC). Your responses to the review, as emailed on 13 March 2012 with attachments, were put to a SUHREC delegate for consideration and feedback sent to you. Your response to the feedback, as per your email of 26 March 2012 with attachment, accords with the feedback.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project may proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions here outlined.

- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/ clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project.

- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact me if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance and if you require a signed ethics clearance certificate, citing the SUHREC project number. Copies of clearance emails should be retained as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for the project.

Yours sincerely

Keith Wilkins
Secretary, SUHREC

<https://sinprd0111.outlook.com/owa/?ac=Item&t=IPM.Note&id=RgAAAACkvZYLI...> 12/07/2012