

# The Manning Community News

JUNE 2023

SHARING COMMUNITY NEWS AND VIEWS

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This paper is being published as a community service to provide readers with factual and independent coverage of news, people and events in our district.  
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## WHEN IT COMES TO WHINGES ABOUT COUNCIL'S INADEQUACIES... SHOULD WE SPEAK UP OR SHUT UP?

The Auditor General's report on Financial Management and Governance in MidCoast Council has just been released. It is a damning document which shows that our Council ain't doing too well!

**G**eneral Manager, Adrian Panuccio explained that the findings of the Audit, do not come as a surprise to the Council.

Well, nor is it a surprise to many others including -Cr Peter Epov - who have been pointing out the problems for some time.



Council spent \$266m in 2021-2022. Council says it will be another 10 years that General Funds will continue to perform in deficit.

So, does that mean Council will hoik up our rates even more? A scary thought looking at the massive rate rises elsewhere - one council by nearly 100%.

According to the General Manager, Mr Panuccio . . . "The audit process has provided a learning opportunity and we actively participated in the process to obtain full value of the results." He added the recommendations were consistent with the improvement path Council has been on since early in 2021.

Too slow! I hear you mutter. Whether Council did or didn't know what a mess they're in financially with significant problems (which would have been hard to miss, frankly) the fact remains they're still trying to schmooze us that they've got matters in hand. Given their slow rate of action, ten years to get square seems a tad optimistic.

Comments from the Auditor General include – **MidCoast Council did not have formalised governance arrangements for key financial and budget decisions made by its executive team until February 2021**

**MidCoast Council has not met all legislative and policy requirements to effectively carry out long-term financial planning**

**MidCoast Council's implementation of its financial management system following its amalgamation in 2016 did not ensure that all staff used the system effectively and efficiently**

However....

**MidCoast Council has improved some financial risk management processes but does not routinely test the effectiveness of its controls.**

**MidCoast Council has improved its approach to delivering financial management reports.**

The audit office completed fieldwork during November 2022 to February 2023. The audit period of review was from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2022.

So how have we been travelling in the last 12 months?

There are probably few residents in our Local Government Area who don't have a whinge about, or blame, our Council for every minor upset and inconvenience that happens in their area. From disastrous roads, to slow handling of queries and applications, to unhelpful communication from many in Council to complaints about neighbours over the back fence . . . the big the small and the ugly, the blame falls at the door of our (very expensive) Yalawanyi Gunya.

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No doubt behind the scenes there are a lot of hardworking Council staff up against it. But the turnover of staff seems high. As do some salaries, starting with the General Manager.

The Auditor's General's Report is a factual document, thoroughly researched and presented. Such reports are of enormous value as a window into how Council operates, what it's promising, and what it's achieving or not achieving.

But what is it actually improving and changing for the better, and in a reasonable timeframe, and at a reasonable cost? How bad does any council have to be before some real action is taken? One shudders to think.

Of equal importance is how our community absorbs this information. How many of us comb the complicated confusing council website? Some residents write letters and get rote replies or obfuscating waffle, and some occasionally get a helpful reply. How many of us can locate and find answers to questions, but give up trying to talk to anyone at council? How many of us sit over coffee and debate the pros and cons of what our council is doing. How many of us will read every word in the Auditor's Report? How many of us will decide to take more notice, have some input, or try to get a word in at Council meetings (which is limited.) Or how many just prefer to let council get on with it, and then when the rates rising alarmingly, start to complain.

### SO, DON'T LET APATHY RULE

Perhaps we need to take more of an interest in exactly how and what goes on in council to get some real action.

Tune in or watch council meetings. Ask questions. Report incidences of possible problems and follow up. Talk to neighbours. Join neighbourhood and action groups. (see story on our Knitting Nannas). Have neighbourhood get-togethers and discuss problems and how to tackle them.

It's our money, our lives, our community and our Council. Let's make it work for the benefit of our community.

DM

# AS HAL SAID TO DAVE:

**"THIS MISSION IS TOO IMPORTANT FOR ME TO ALLOW YOU TO JEOPARDIZE IT."**

**I**t's a line from the 1968 classic film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, produced and directed by Stanley Kubrick who wrote the screenplay with science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke. Hal was an early, though fictional, manifestation of A.I., Artificial Intelligence, with human traits.

Regarded as one of the most influential films of the 20th century *2001*'s narrative is about many things, one being the human-like supercomputer, the HAL 9000, that makes an error but is unable to recognise or acknowledge the error, resulting in the death of all the crew of the spacecraft, except Dave, who manages to disconnect Hal.

Artificial Intelligence has been big in the news with the release of numerous software packages, broadly termed 'generative pre-trained transformers' (GPT); ChatGPT is but one of many. Reception has been mixed, some seeing only sunny uplands of data processing, others, dark replicas of the Hal 9000.

GPT A.I. programs are artificial neural networks, that is, electronic synapses with numerous links to other synapses that mimic our brains, and can access large data-sets, so able to generate new texts drawn for the accumulated data-sets. And these data-sets are continuously expanding.

And remember, A.I. isn't just restricted to words: it can do music, moving and static images and mimic voices, if it has a sufficient sample to draw on.

Today, simpler Hal 900's descendants are already here. The aggregations of algorithms that run Facebook or Google or TikTok have already achieved much of Hal's capacity for awareness of purpose, lacking, perhaps, only self-awareness or conscience.

The trouble is, there is evidence that no one knows how the whole aggregation of algorithms works, or what they are capable of.

In 2021, as the Commonwealth government introduced a News Bargaining Media Code, to oblige Facebook and Google (and others) to compensate media companies for the companies' contents they published on their sites. Facebook closed its Australian news-feed to retaliate. The shut-down of news-feeds had an unexpected outcome: hundreds of other sites, many not-for-profit charities and arts organisation were shut out.

This collateral damage adds weight to an argument that I have advanced since Mark Zuckerberg's appearance

before the US Senate in November 2017. Not surprising, the transcript revealed that the Senators knew little about how Facebook functions. But, more surprising, it seemed to confirm that Zuckerberg's own knowledge of the subtleties of Facebook was limited, if he was speaking truthfully to the US Senate.

That should be unsurprising. Facebook is run by this aggregation of algorithms, interacting in complex ways with little human intervention. Without doubt, individual parts are understood by its programmers but not how the whole functions as an organism. It is now a massive piece of artificial intelligence capable of acting outside human command, at least in the short term.

And with this, computer servers across the world, there's no OFF switch for Dave to find!

Because of this lack of knowledge of overall function, the programmers, who designed the shutdown of Australia news-feed, were not able to anticipate the collateral damage to arts, health and civic sites, because the differences were too subtle for the present algorithms to discern. But, endowed with artificial intelligence, the algorithms will learn.

Without doubt, advanced A.I. will have some impact on just about every aspect of human life, and, in particular, the what and way we communicate, what we choose to believe or trust, and, hence, what we do and the way we are governed.

At the International News Media Association's World Congress of News Media in New York at the end of May, the chief executive of News Corporation, Robert Thomson, said 'journalism content is under serious threat and it is being harvested, scraped and used to train [A.I.] engines that ultimately undermines the work of reporters'.

His statement touches on several concerns: since generative A.I. harvests what has already been written, then re-purposes the content, it is not an original story; original reporting. And because the generative AI output is a synthesis of all the material the AI can find, it can recycle fake news as well as true reports, and create an amalgam of both fact and fiction. In addition the input material might be intentionally manipulated, flooded with fake stories, and A.I. might judge the fake news to be the true story, because of an apparent 'consensus'.

A third concern is that people may choose to use only AI sources, so com-

promising the original reporting on which the generative output is based and undermining the economic viability of original reporting. This was Thompson's main thrust, one supported by several other media executives present.

But, as far as I can determine from the edited text of his speech, Thompson did not touch on the impact of AI-digested news on the political information economy, that is, the flows of information, news and opinion we rely on to inform our choose of nearly everything, from the make of a new car to the make-up of the local, state and Commonwealth governments. That is, influence democratic governance.

But some see a greater threat. On May 30, more than 350 top A.I. professionals including Sam Altman chief executive of *OpenAI*, creator of ChatGPT, and the chief executive of *Google DeepMind*, Demis Hassabis, and 37 of his co-workers, signed a one-sentence open letter to the public that aimed to put the risks of the rapidly developing technology for humankind, in stark terms.

They said: "Mitigating the risk of extinction from A.I. should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war."

Their principal concern is that the technology has the potential to grow sentient and, just as Hal sought, attempt to destroy humans in some way, to preserve its own being. Earlier in the year, a different public letter gathered more than 1,000 signatures from members of the academic, business and technology worlds who called for an outright pause on the development of new AI models until regulation could be put into place.

For me, the greater and more immediate danger is the impact on knowledge and trust in the media and the consequences of misinformation being gilded with a veneer of truth by A.I. When we don't know what to believe or who to believe, we lose trust in our community and society becomes ungovernable.

About 30 years ago, I wrote a whimsical piece for ABC Radio's Ockham's Razor, titled *Silicon Futures*, envisaging a world where a silicon-based life-forms replaces the present carbon-based life forms, like us. That is, A.I. – silicon life, replaces humankind.

**Vincent O'Donnell.**  
Media analyst/Media researcher

# BEWARE GREENWASHING!

The debate over whether we are in a climate and extinction crisis appears to be largely over. Oh yes we can all breathe a sigh of relief now that governments and corporations are leading the way in addressing these existential threats as a matter of urgency.

## **B**ah Humbug. That's called Greenwashing. Putting a green face on ugly facts.

After guzzling £2 million of taxpayer subsidies daily to run its Drax power station, the largest coal burning consortium in the UK was able to proudly report whole days when none of their electricity came from coal burning. Cooper Energy now claims to be Australia's 'first carbon neutral gas company'. Shell and Ampol are both promoting their 'carbon neutral petrol' here and overseas. Didn't take long for governments and corporations to show the way, did it? As Darryl of 'The Castle' might have said, "Tell 'em they're dreamin'"

The much-touted UK transition from coal just happens to be via millions of tonnes of wood pellets imported mainly from Nth USA, and deceitfully doesn't account for the emissions at the Drax smokestacks. World climate and Northern USA forests would actually be better off if they continued to burn coal, because it produces less carbon dioxide. Despite an international campaign to stop this absurd practice, it continues regardless.

'Carbon neutral fossil fuel' does not even pass a pub test, let alone

any close scrutiny. Carbon capture and storage (CCS) and purchasing offsets are the main choices of the big polluters. CCS is not practical or economic on a large scale, and offsets are highly contentious. Cunningly, Cooper Energy has chosen to offset the emissions only from their business operations (a miserable 1% of all emissions), and have conveniently ignored the emissions from burning their fossil fuel products.

Surely they cannot get away with these false claims, or 'greenwashing', in a well-regulated democracy like Australia? Amazingly, the answer is: yes, they can. The Australian government's carbon neutral certification scheme, Climate Active, has endorsed Ampol's 'carbon neutral fuel'. In the Netherlands, Shell was ordered to stop using the term 'carbon neutral' by the country's advertising watchdog. But it took the filing of a 'greenwashing' complaint to bring about this change.

Corporate claims of 'carbon neutrality' and 'net zero targets' are on the increase in Australia. The ACCC estimates that at least 40% of these are fraudulent. None of these fossil fuel companies are significantly reducing their production

of coal, gas and oil. In fact, most are expanding production. Their 'greenwashing' is based on carbon offsets, mainly tree planting or forest protection projects that have been highly discredited by expert analysis.

Santos is being accused by shareholder activist group the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility (ACCR) of engaging in misleading or deceptive conduct relating to its 'clean energy' claims and its 'net zero by 2040' plan. The claims are based on CCS, yet to be effective anywhere, and 'blue hydrogen'. 'Bluewashing', as an alternative to green, hides the fact that the hydrogen is produced from gas!

The Defenders recently filed a complaint about Ampol's false claims. ASIC has made clear it is keeping a close eye on the climate change commitments being made by corporate Australia. But it is an arm of the same Federal government that is sponsoring 'greenwash', rather than genuine decarbonisation. Fox in charge of the hen house?

It seems unlikely this pretence will improve while the two major political parties in Australia are so beholden to fossil fuel compa-

nies to finance their electioneering. Meanwhile, we continue to increase our carbon emissions, particularly via exported coal and gas (Scope 3 emissions). In the meantime, we can at least ensure we are not being conned by the 'greenwash' of corporations, banks and superannuation funds that we invest in. Not always an easy task if you rely on a glossy prospectus.

And watch out for Australia's own potential Drax at Redbank power station in the Hunter, where Verdant Earth Technologies has applied for State Significant status to burn 1 million tonnes of northern NSW hardwood to produce 'clean green energy' including 'green hydrogen'. Yep, the company name says it all...

**Tom Ferrier**

*Tom Ferrier has had a lifelong passion for the natural environment. He holds a Masters degree in Environmental Management, and has taught Environmental Science at both tertiary and secondary levels. He was an early adopter of renewable energy systems, works constantly to regenerate the bush, and is a part-time forest activist.*

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# THE RETIREMENT OF RETIREMENT

France has been engulfed in the worst riots since 1968. Those of us who are old enough to remember those events – and even to have participated in them – are now old enough to retire. The French retirement age is 62 and the government would like to raise it to 64.

**B**ut should we retire? Is it time to retire retirement? Retirement was a noble government experiment but perhaps it has outlived its usefulness.

Most workers throughout history never “retired”. They worked until they died (often in the workplace itself). Or they may have spent their final months or years with their families; there were few “aged care” institutions.

The workers who were officially “retired” were mainly members of the military. The UK scheme of Chelsea Pensioners was created in 1692, for example, and today 300 veterans in their distinctive red uniform are a London tourist attraction in themselves.

Things improved for civilians in the 1880s, when the German chancellor (prime minister) Otto Von Bismarck promised all German workers an old age pension when they turned 70. He was not giving much away because most workers died before turning 50.

However, the German idea caught on. One of the earliest pieces of national Australian legislation was the 1908 Act guaranteeing an old age pension to men aged over 65 and women aged over 60 (only four per cent of the population reached 65 years, and so again the government really was not being that generous).

The Club of Rome has estimated that if the German scheme were introduced today workers would need to be aged around 87 to be eligible.

The focus on “70” years may well have come from the Bible. Psalm 90, verse 10 talks about “three score and 10 years”.

Otherwise, there is little logic behind that figure, especially today. There is nothing magical about that

figure, or the 60/65 one. Retirement is not age – it is simply a number.

One reason for abolishing retirement is, then, that people are now living longer, healthier lives. A person who retires at 65 and does not die until aged 90, will have 25 years of retirement. By 2050, a quarter of the Australian population will be 65 or older.

People are aging more slowly. They have healthier lifestyles, better healthcare, better nutrition, less or no smoking and drinking, better dentistry, and better skincare (because of sun blockers). They are younger for longer.

Second, the nature of work has changed. The tough, back-breaking work in agriculture and manufacture is being eased by the use of machines.

Both sectors, in employment terms, are declining. Most workers today are in the service sector, such as editing magazines. They have little physical work to do.

Third, western countries cannot afford to have people in retirement for many decades. The original German scheme envisaged (at most) just a few years relying on income from the government.

Many pension schemes are “pay as you go” whereby the currently retired population are financed via current taxpayers. But this is a giant Ponzi scheme because there are increasing numbers of longer-living retirees and fewer taxpayers as the years roll by.

The Australian superannuation guarantee levy is helping to address that problem. But most current superannuation balances will not be large enough to support someone for (say) 25 years in retirement.

Societies are headed towards a “can we afford the elderly?” debate. Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1965) have won the lottery of life. They grew up during a booming economy, received a free university education, cheap housing, and there were many well-paid middle-class jobs.

Many of those factors are no longer present for today’s younger workers. For example, Baby Boomers bought cheap housing, held on to it as it increased in value, and have become on paper “millionaires” simply by holding onto their property. It has been an easy way to become wealthy. This is the power of compound interest – people make money

while they are asleep.

Finally, retirement may well be a health hazard. Work is often good for a person. Not only does it provide a wage, but it also provides social connection, a challenge to keep the brain ticking over, a sense of purpose, a form of keeping active; in short, a reason to get out of bed in the morning.

From a business point of view, older workers are important to understand older customers. We hear a lot about the need to connect with young people, but older people should not be neglected, especially since they may be wealthy.

To conclude, we need to think through the consequences of an aging, healthier society. Here are two examples,

First, the Australian government has decided to treat 75 as the maximum year for contributing to superannuation. A worker at 75 can no longer be involved in contributing to the superannuation guarantee levy. That age limit should be abolished. Let the worker decide when they want to stop contributing to the scheme.

Second, we need to make Australia’s built environment more suitable for an aging population. I was the national facilitator of the Australian government’s 2006 project “A Community for All Ages – Building the Future”. The project envisaged different parts of the Australian society (government, business and non-governmental organisations) working together to make buildings of all types more age-friendly. Unfortunately, with a later change in government, many of the recommendations languished.

The challenge remains to make sure that the increasing number of older Australians live well. Australians should die as “young” as possible as old as possible.

**Dr Keith Suter**  
[www.globaldirections](http://www.globaldirections)



Whenever you choose to retire, it should be on your terms



# OUR NANNAS DO MORE THAN KNIT!

When the NSW parliament rushed through harsh new laws to crackdown on protestors without public consultation, two of our Mid Coast Knitting Nannas, Helen Kvelde and Dominique Jacobs, supported by the Environmental Defenders Office, (EDO) launched an action in the NSW Supreme Court.

**T**he decision is still pending, but the two Knitting Nannas hope it will come down in their favour. The laws as they currently stand are so broad that a person can face civil charges simply by protesting near a railway station if it causes others to be redirected around them. This means peaceful protesters like the two Knitting Nannas could be fined \$22,000 or two years in gaol.

"This has a chilling effect on our ability to speak up. We are simply trying to transform our protests into change and action," says Helen. "We have tried everything from sending letters and signing petitions to meeting politicians and still the government continues to dismiss climate science and destroy native forest habitat and Approve new coal and gas projects."

Adds Dominique, "Our communities have felt terrified, angry and stressed. Protest can transform those overwhelming feelings into change and action."

So Helen and Dom decided they had to challenge these harsh laws arguing the legislation infringes the implied right to freedom of political communication and is therefore unconstitutional. **If they are successful, the worst excesses of the new laws in NSW will be struck out.**

The decision by the court is being closely watched. Both Tasmania and Victoria passed tougher anti-protest laws last year with Victoria's specifically targeting protesters who enter native forests which are being



Helen Kvelde (left) and Dominique Jacobs. Midcoast Knitting Nannas

logged. In Western Australia police are targeting climate protesters searching their homes and possessions.

Civil society and human rights advocates are hoping this case will help them push back against the erosion of our democratic rights to stage protests.

Protesters like Helen and Dom play a vital role in our democracy say the EDO. Without collective, peaceful and public demonstrations, we would all be without many of the rights and protections we take for granted today.

The story of the Knitting Nannas began in 2012 when a handful of older women joined an anti-coal seam gas (CSG) group in Lismore NSW. The Northern Rivers region was being targeted by CSG mining and their male compatriots appeared to be out of ideas and getting nowhere.

The women became so frustrated watching this inaction and indecision, they decided to join them. They were further annoyed when the men

began asking them to make tea and take the minutes of their meetings.

Rather than remain frustrated and used for menial tasks, the women devised their own alternative activism in the form of "guerilla surveillance". Small groups calling themselves Knitting Nannas went out into the countryside, parked their cars by the roadside and with their knitting, folding chairs and thermos flasks sat down to "scope out the works", by counting truck movements.

Initially, knitting was a way of productively passing the time, but it soon became a form of environmental activism that older women could engage in.

The Nannas welcomed membership to their group and decided to work to address a collection of crises. They began highlighting the crisis of confidence in politicians who they believed were too close to corporate greedy mining companies. They demanded that a social contract and representative democracy

be upheld in all government decisions and that politicians work for people and not for big business.

By challenging misinformation and denialism with evidence-based research, they contributed to the communities understanding of climate science and the destructive role of the fossil fuel industries. As visible and vocal older women, they challenge sexist and agist stereotypes.

They support families in rural communities suffering the toxic effects of air, water and land pollution; they assist townsfolk who realise they have been duped by mining companies and politicians and they

embolden younger protesters who are emotionally fraught and frustrated by the lack of serious action to combat climate warming.

In the case of the Nannas, their older ages empowered them to challenge gender and age-related stereotypes and become vibrant and central actors in the broader social movement. They further enlarged their commitment from not only fighting CSG extraction, but to include all sorts of oil and gas extraction, stop the logging of old growth and native forests and protect the bio-diversity of forests and wildlife. In the process, they have become part of the feminist 'me too' movement towards gender equality.

The Environmental Defenders Office firmly believes Australians shouldn't have to risk imprisonment or bankruptcy to participate in our democracy and the Government should not be taking away our democratic freedoms.

**Sherry Stumm**



# COULD OUR KIDS SURVIVE 40 DAYS IN THE BUSH OR RAINFOREST JUNGLE?

# SHOULD WE BE TEACHING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE TO ALL OUR CHILDREN?

Most of our children aren't going to find themselves walking away from a tragic plane crash in the middle of an Amazon jungle and survive for several weeks.

However, a few practical life skills – what plants not to eat, those you can, how to light and put out a campfire, how to shelter, how to find water, could save their lives.

**T**he discovery and rescue of the four young Indigenous children, aged from 11 months to 13 years old, 40 days after the aircraft they were travelling in crashed in the remote Colombian rainforest, was hailed in the international press as a “miracle in the jungle”.

I was relieved and amazed when the children were found. So I was fascinated to read this article by an anthropologist Eliran Arazi who has spent more than a year living among the Andoque people in the region, conducting ethnographic fieldwork, and who declared that the childrens' survival was not a ‘miraculous event.’

Here's his story reprinted with permission from The Conversation online.

It was not a miracle, at least, not a miracle in the conventional sense of the word. Rather, the survival and discovery of these children can be attributed to the profound knowledge of the intricate forest and the adaptive skills passed down through generations by Indigenous people.

During the search for the children, I was in contact with Raquel Andoque, an elder *maloquera* (owner of a ceremonial longhouse), the sister of the children's great-grandmother. She repeatedly expressed her unwavering belief the children would be found alive, citing the autonomy, astuteness and physical resilience of children in the region.

Even before starting elementary school, children in this area accompany their parents and elder relatives in various activities such as gardening, fishing, navigating rivers, hunting and gathering honey and wild fruits. In this way the children

acquire practical skills and knowledge, such as those demonstrated by Lesly, Soleiny, Tien and Cristin during their 40-day ordeal.

Indigenous children typically learn from an early age how to open paths through dense vegetation, how to tell edible from non-edible fruits. They know how to find potable water, build rain shelters and set animal traps. They can identify animal footprints and scents – and avoid predators such as jaguars and snakes lurking in the woods.

Amazonian children typically lack access to the sort of commercialised toys and games that children in the cities grow up with. So they become adept tree climbers and engage in play that teaches them about adult tools made from natural materials, such as oars or axes. This nurtures their understanding of physical activities and helps them learn which plants serve specific purposes.

Activities that most western children would be shielded from – handling, skinning and butchering game animals, for example – provide invaluable zoology lessons and arguably foster emotional resilience.

## SURVIVAL SKILLS

When they accompany their parents and relatives on excursions in the jungle, Indigenous children learn how to navigate a forest's dense vegetation by following the location of the sun in the sky.

Since the large rivers in most parts of the Amazon flow in a direction opposite to that of the sun, people can orient themselves towards those main rivers.

The trail of footprints and objects left by the four children revealed their general progression towards the Apaporis River, where they may

have hoped to be spotted.

The children would also have learned from their parents and elders about edible plants and flowers – where they can be found. And also the interrelationship between plants, so that where a certain tree is, you can find mushrooms, or small animals that can be trapped and eaten.

## STORIES, SONGS AND MYTHS

Knowledge embedded in mythic stories passed down by parents and grandparents is another invaluable resource for navigating the forest. These stories depict animals as fully sentient beings, engaging in seduction, mischief, providing sustenance, or even saving each other's lives.

While these episodes may seem incomprehensible to non-Indigenous audiences, they actually encapsulate the intricate interrelations among the forest's countless non-human inhabitants. Indigenous knowledge focuses on the interrelationships between humans, plants and animals and how they can come together to preserve the environment and prevent irreversible ecological harm.

This sophisticated knowledge has been developed over millennia during which Indigenous people not only adapted to their forest territories but actively shaped them. It is deeply ingrained knowledge that local indigenous people are taught from early childhood so that it becomes second nature to them.

It has become part of the culture of cultivating and harvesting crops, something infants and children are introduced to, as well as knowledge of all sort of different food sources and types of bush meat.

## LOOKING AFTER EACH OTHER

One of the aspects of this “mirac-

ulous” story that people in the west have marvelled over is how, after the death of the children's mother, the 13-year-old Lesly managed to take care of her younger siblings, including Cristin, who was only 11 months old at the time the aircraft went down.

But in Indigenous families, elder sisters are expected to act as surrogate mothers to their younger relatives from an early age. Iris Andoke Macuna, a distant relative of the family, told me:

To some whites [non-Indigenous people], it seems like a bad thing that we take our children to work in the garden, and that we let girls carry their brothers and take care of them. But for us, it's a good thing, our children are independent, this is why Lesly could take care of her brothers during all this time. It toughened her, and she learned what her brothers need.

## THE SPIRITUAL SIDE

For 40 days and nights, while the four children were lost, elders and shamans performed rituals based on traditional beliefs that involve human relationships with entities known as dueños (owners) in Spanish and by various names in native languages (such as *i'bo ñqe*, meaning “persons of there” in Andoque).

These owners are believed to be the protective spirits of the plants and animals that live in the forests. Children are introduced to these powerful owners in name-giving ceremonies, which ensure that these spirits recognise and acknowledge relationship to the territory and their entitlement to prosper on it.

During the search for the missing children, elders conducted dialogues

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and negotiations with these entities in their ceremonial houses (*malocas*) throughout the Middle Caquetá and in other Indigenous communities that consider the crash site part of their ancestral territory. Raquel explained to me:

*The shamans communicate with the sacred sites. They offer coca and tobacco to the spirits and say: "Take this and give me my grandchildren back. They are mine, not yours."*

These beliefs and practices hold significant meaning for my friends in the Middle Caquetá, who firmly attribute the children's survival to these spiritual processes rather than the technological means employed by the Colombian army rescue teams.

It may be challenging for non-Indigenous people to embrace these traditional ideas. But these beliefs would have instilled in the children the faith and emotional fortitude crucial for persevering in the struggle for survival. And it would have encouraged the Indigenous people searching for them not to give up hope.

The children knew that their fate did not lie in dying in the forest, and that their grandparents and shamans would move heaven and earth to bring them back home alive.

Regrettably, this traditional knowledge that has enabled Indigenous people to not only survive but thrive in the Amazon for millennia is under threat. Increasing land encroachment for agribusiness, mining, and illicit activities as well as state neglect and interventions without Indigenous consent have left these peoples vulnerable.

It is jeopardising the very foundations of life where this knowledge is embedded, the territories that serve as its bedrock, and the people themselves who preserve, develop, and transmit this knowledge.

Preserving this invaluable knowledge and the skills that bring miracles to life is imperative. We must not allow them to wither away."

**Eliran Arazi**

*PhD researcher in Anthropology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (Paris)., Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

(One hopes that precious Indigenous knowledge, culture and lands of Australian Aboriginal peoples will always be acknowledged, respected, protected and shared. Another reason to Vote Yes. Ed.)

*This article first appeared in The Conversation online.*

# OLD HOLDENS NEVER DIE

HOLDEN FANS ARE STILL FANATIC



Happier days. A Holden Commodore billboard from 1978. Picture supplied

**I**t was a sad day in October 2017 when General Motors closed their iconic plant in Elizabeth South Australia, where they had manufactured Holdens since the 1960's. With a group of fellow members of the Great Lakes Historic Automobile Club, I enjoyed a guided tour of the plant in 1916 when it was operating and we were all impressed with the dedication of the workers as they continued to crank out 'Australia's own car'!

But seems these days that nothing lasts forever and the demise of the Holden is an no exception, and

the lion's roar is but a faint echo. In what must be the ultimate transformation, the space is set to become the exotic mushroom capital of Australia with the Epicuren Food Group (EFG) setting up a \$110 million growing and processing facility. The former lion's den is able to grow and process more than 20,000 tonnes of exotic mushrooms each year and has brought a massive boom to Elizabeth's employment opportunities, including many ex-Holden staff. The plant is specially designed to grow exotic kinds of mushrooms such as oyster, shitake, enoki, king oyster, and in an acknowledgement to the

previous owners, a new variety to be known as the Lion's Mane! With the specially built growing rooms each with columns up to 13 metres high, EFG says that they are using techniques that others do not, with waste products taken from farms across the state. Once fully operational, EFG expects to employ over 300 workers. Minister for Trade and Investment, Nick Champion, says "Repurposing one of the states's most revered manufacturing sites is proof that the sector remains strong and adaptable. Nothing like this facility exists interstate."

**Brian Payne.**



Owners of some of Holden's most iconic cars have gathered outside the factory. Picture AAP



The last generation Holden Commodore, left, with the first from 1978. Picture: Supplied.



# VALE ROBIN ADAIR

Veteran journalist and prize-winning author Robin Adair has died aged 87. Robin was a wordsmith with a great sense of humour and loved nothing more than a good pun. This was on show every week for 15 years in his witty column *Round Robin Adair* in *The Australian Women's Weekly*.

**H**e began his career at 15, while still at school, writing stories for the old news magazine *The Bulletin*. He went on to be a star reporter on *The Daily and Sunday Telegraphs*. He was then head-hunted to join the *Weekly*, where he was the only male reporter among a bevy of beautiful and smart females; among them best-selling author-to-be Di Morrissey and in later years Mary Moody, who went on to become a TV gardening star and author. Robin was also a keen gardener and had an orchid named after him -- or so he claimed. But it could well have been a bit of his inherited Irish blarney.

In the late 1950s and 60s, he also edited the baby-boomers' magazine *Teenagers' Weekly* (a supplement in the *Weekly*). For the *Weekly*, he invented board games and many contests -- some called on readers skills in sketches and puns. One such was the popular Egg-Words, drawing several thousands of entries. Among many winners were Eggsodus, Charles Deggaule, and Eggsposure.

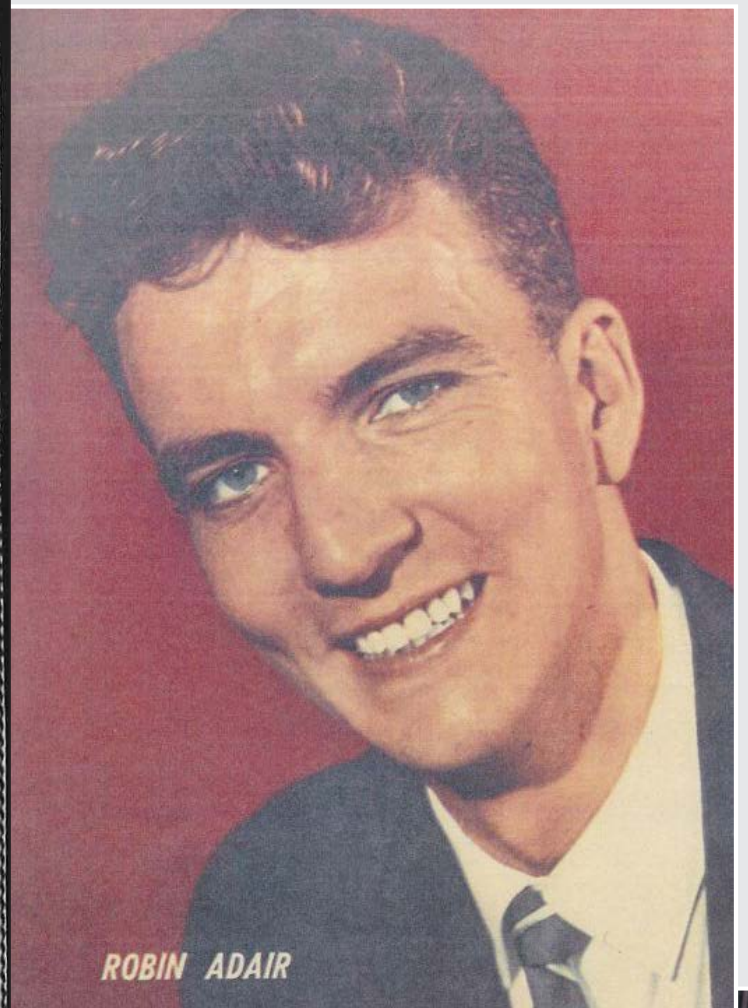
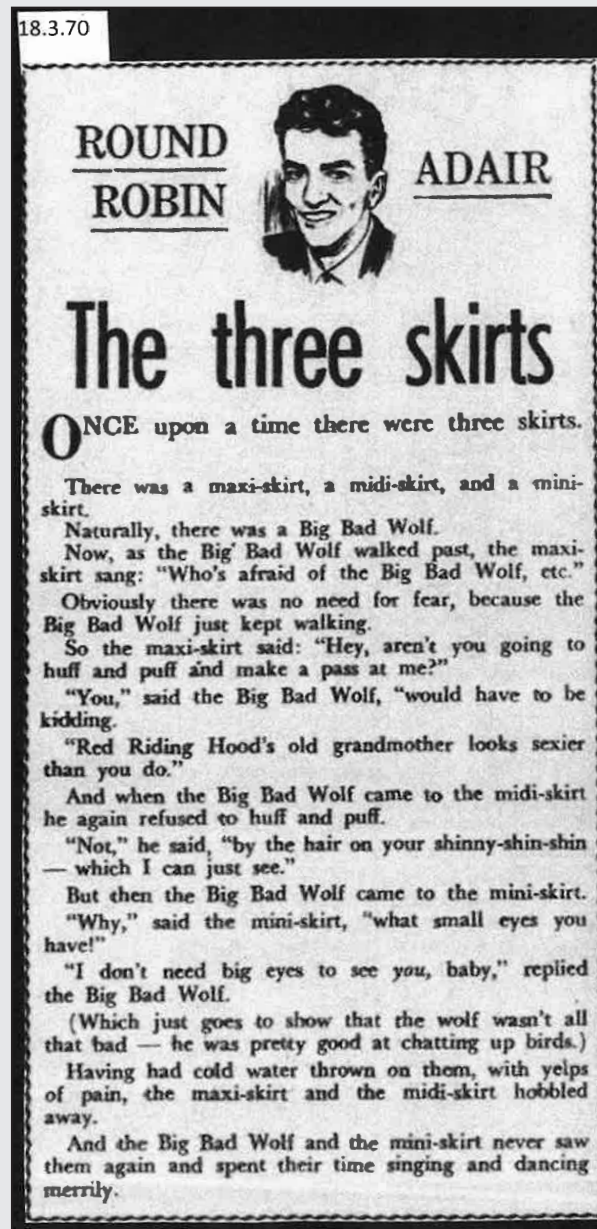
He later worked at the *Australian Financial Review* and the ABC (where he was editor of the FM and fine arts magazine, *24 Hours*).

A pub raconteur, he could keep audiences hanging on a punch line for at least half an hour. He also coined much-used popular phrases. He dubbed the Catholic pontiff's tour vehicle "the immaculate contraption" long before it was shortened to the boring popemobile.

In retirement, he penned several colonial-era crime novels. His

first, *Death and the Running Patterer*, won the inaugural Penguin Most Wanted competition for new Australian crime fiction and was short-listed in the Best New Fiction category in the 2010 Ned Kelly Awards. When his publisher asked for more sex in his next novel, Robin replied: 'Well, now I'll have to go home and practise.' His second novel was *The Ghost of Waterloo*.

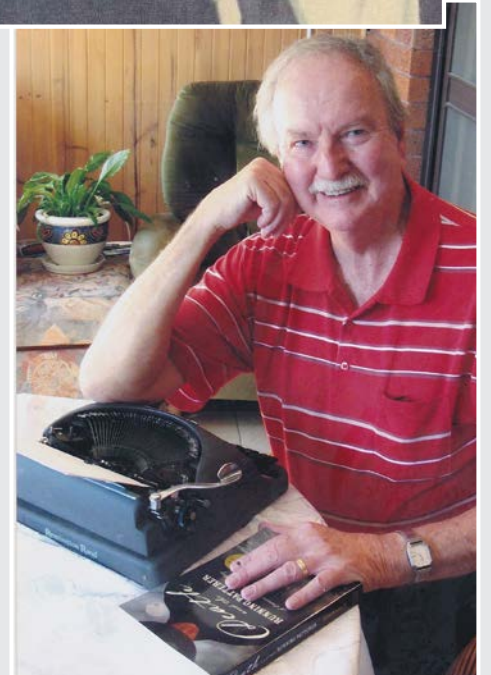
His third, *The Requiem Club*,



will be available soon on line. It was putting the finishing touches to this that kept him going

through years of punishing bouts of operations and radiation and chemotherapy treatments for a cancer he thought he'd beaten 20 years before.

Robin Adair is survived by his wife, journalist Julie Kusko, his daughters Kristin and Sherry, four grandchildren and one great grandchild.



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I'm Tyler Budden, a specialist knife maker. I specialise in custom Damascus and culinary knives, all hand forged and hand crafted in Rainbow Flat, NSW.

**I** make each piece by hand so it is unique. I love experimenting with different styles and incorporating customers' ideas as well as bringing my own style to each design.

The patterned steel is called Damascus. The patterns are formed and created by forge welding alternating layers of two types of steel like smashing together black and white playdough and folding it over itself many, many times. This is how you see all of the intricate patterns on my blades, which are forged at well over 1000 degrees. I enjoy experimenting and creating different patterns, using particular laying methods to create the different patterns. Each pattern is different and never the same, making each knife different and unique.

If you are after a knife that is super easy to look after and use, I also offer stainless steel knives. These still hold a fantastic edge but have the advantage of rust resistance (perfect for people who just want a functional and stress free knife). Get in contact and whatever your needs are, I'll be able to accommodate them.

### My other services include:

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- \* Knife restorations
- \* Made to order custom knives (with brass nameplate if wanted)
- \* Damascus blanks for other knife makers
- \* Bottle Openers
- \* Cheese Knives
- \* Herb Choppers
- \* Various blacksmithing needs

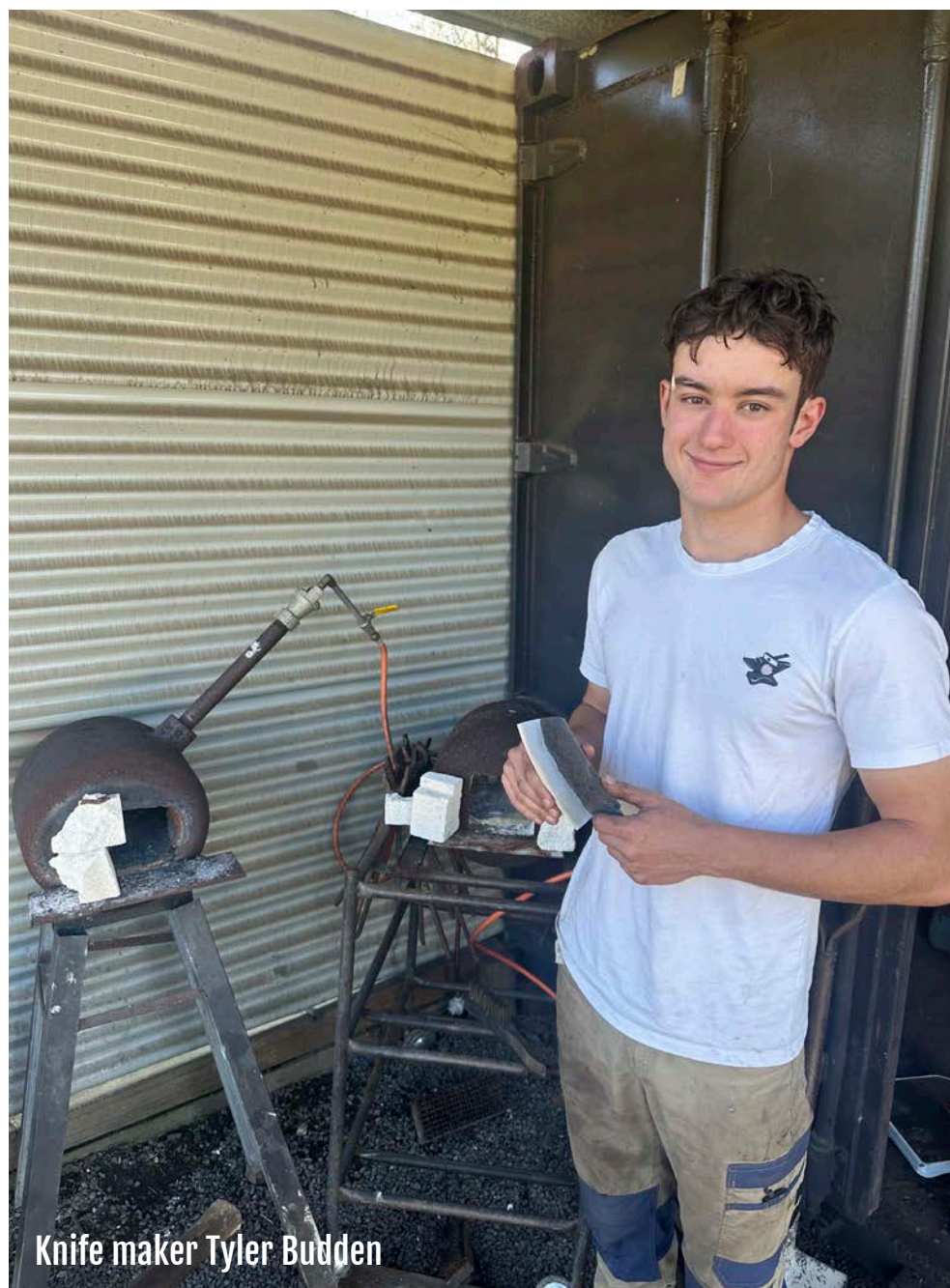
If you are after a last minute gift or you want a knife especially made just for you... give me a call.

Instagram – [tb\\_kustom\\_knives](#)

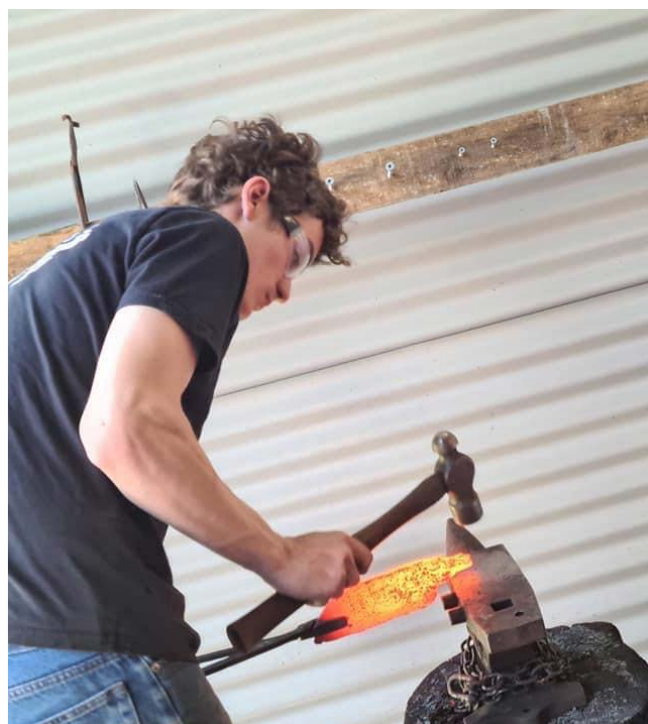
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Contact me on: [Kustom.knives.tyler@gmail.com](mailto:Kustom.knives.tyler@gmail.com)

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Knife maker Tyler Budden





# ALL READY TO GO IN WHERROL FLAT

Escape the hustle and bustle of city living and embrace the tranquillity of this stunning, newly built master home set on 25 acres. It has 15 acres of magical creek frontage, with bass, yabbies and platypus!



**T**his property offers endless possibilities for those seeking a peaceful lifestyle or to create a business such as cattle, orchard, tourism or farming for starters.

The spacious open plan kitchen includes a 900mm wide oven and cooktop, plenty of bench and cupboard space, a butler's pantry and expansive living and dining areas, and a big deck, perfect for entertaining.

The wood fire burner is cosy, while ducted air

conditioning ensures comfort year-round.

The master bedroom includes a walk-in robe and ensuite, while three additional bedrooms including the master all feature ceiling fans and soft carpet underfoot.

Other highlights include a media room, main bathroom, large laundry, and covered entertaining area with ceiling fan.

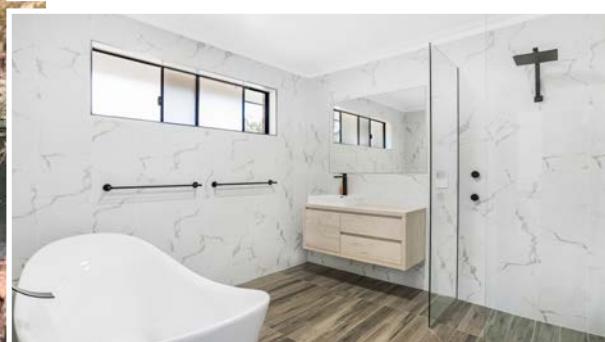
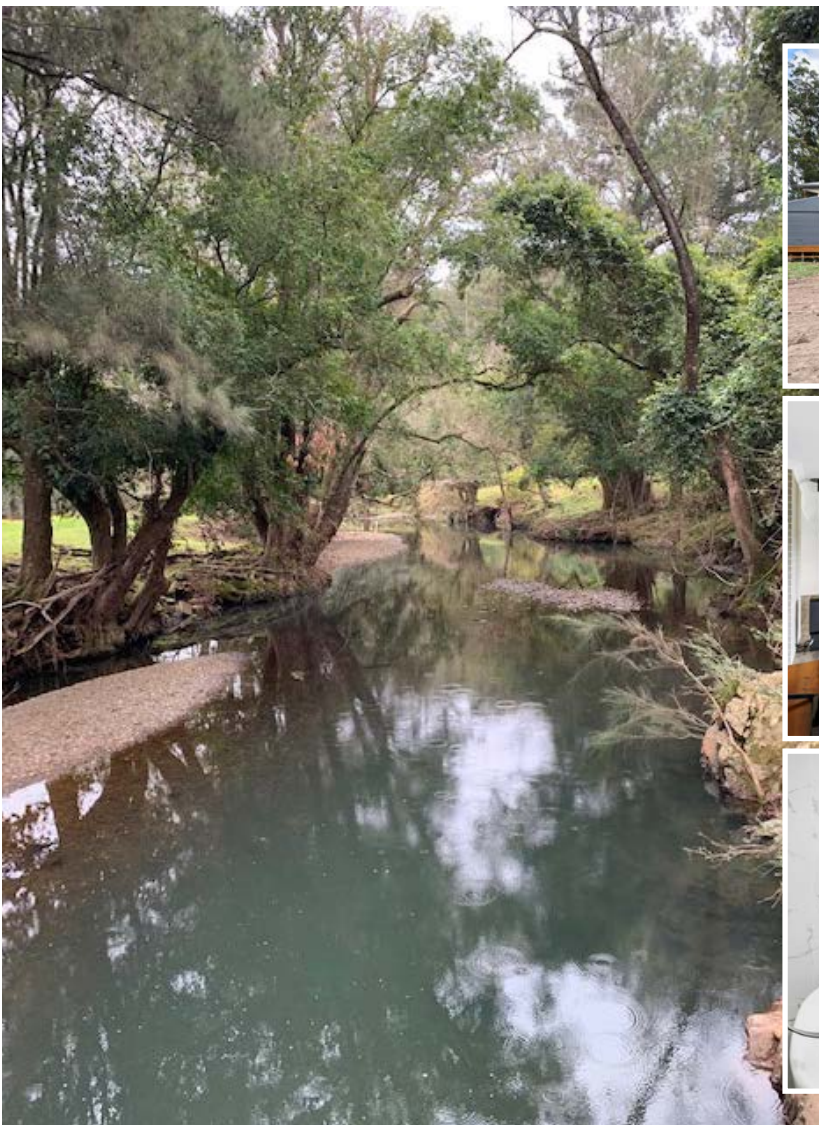
The property also features three 23,000 litre water tanks, two designated for the house and one for fire, and is fully fenced, making it ideal

for cattle or horses. The home has a new 7.8 KW solar power system.

Conveniently raised garden/veggie beds are ready for the avid gardener plus a spacious chicken coup.

There are 2000 Christmas trees planted a year ago will be ready in 2-3 years' time.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to own your own slice of country paradise including your own waterfall.



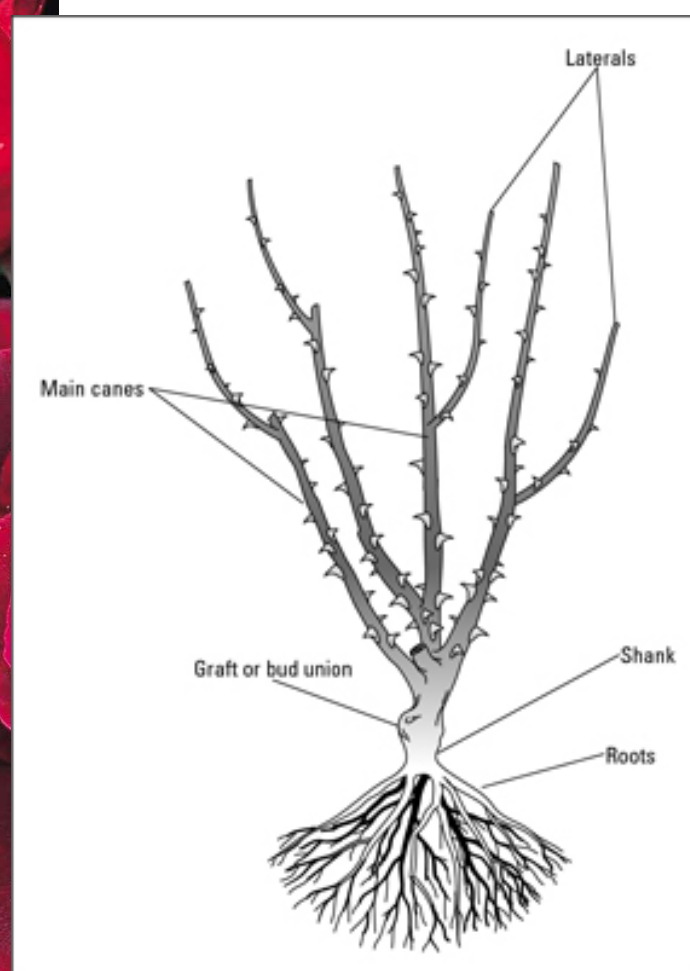
**Call Alister  
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inspection.**



# IT'S ROSE SEASON!



Roses are some of the most romantic and classically beautiful flowers that we grow in the garden, but the number of choices can be mind boggling. Choosing a colour as well as perfume is a great place to start, but it's important to select a rose with a habit that suits your situation too.



**A**t Wingham Nursery, we have 1000+ roses to choose from in peak season. There are many aspects to take into consideration when selecting the correct variety, so it's quite easy to be overwhelmed! So, hopefully, these steps will help you narrow down your selections as to which will perform best for your desired use.

**Step One:** The first step in deciding which rose to buy is to determine how you want your garden to look, and the purpose of the rose. For example, do you want it to climb along a fence, be the border of a garden bed, be the display at the front of your house, or will it be planted in a pot, as a feature or mass planting?

**Step Two:** Consider the area you will be planting the roses in. Will there be enough room for the rose without over-crowding the growth or root systems?

Avoid planting too close to established shrubs, trees and other roses, as overcrowding your plants can

cause many issues such as competition for sunlight, water and nutrient. Remember whatever grows above the soil is mirrored below the soil in the root growth (just like a tree).

Roses need at least 6 hours of direct sunlight per day, preferably more, although in shaded areas roses will still grow. The quantity of the flowers will diminish with less sunlight.

**Step Three:** The next step is to decide which category of rose will have the best growth habit for the look you wish to achieve.

## DIFFERENT GROWTH HABITS

**Climbing-** Climbers and ramblers are tall-growing roses that need support. Perfect for covering a strong metal frame, pergola or arbor.

**Floribunda-** Floribunda blooms appear in clusters and give a mass of colour over a long period. Most grow to 1.2m high and 1m wide in a dome shape, with lots of flowers on shorter stems all over the bush. Very spectacular in the garden, and most can

be picked and admired inside, they just may not last as long, and have shorter stems.

**Hybrid Tea-** These are the most recognized roses. They grow in a V shape to 1.5m high and 80cm wide. The base of the bush will have a skeleton of branches, the middle is generally leaves, and the top will have long stems and the beautiful cut-flower type bloom.

**Standard-** A standard rose that has been grown to the shape of a ball resting above a single stem, usually 60-90cm tall. They look fabulous in formal gardens, and are a great way to add roses that look to be instantly established.

**Miniature-** Generally the smallest of the roses, with flowers that are less than 5cm across. They are usually less than 50cm high, and can be used in pots, as edging for a garden bed, or in rockeries.

**Last Step:** Choose a variety within the category that you like. Take note of the various specifications of each variety, such as growth habits,

flowering habits, bloom colour, and fragrance.

There is a rose for nearly every purpose and function in your garden. You are limited only by your imagination!

We have roses arriving throughout winter, and we have just received our first delivery for this season. So, come and take a gander at some of the brand-new releases and the good old-fashioned favourites today. However, if you'd like the largest choice and availability, we recommend returning in July to see our complete collection. As soon as the roses arrive, we pot them, prune them and display them in their colour categories. And, as always, if you're unsure or would like some advice on how to grow (and prune) the perfect rose in your garden, come and see one of our team, or give us a call on 6553 4570. We're here to help!

Happy gardening!

**Wingham Nursery & Florist**  
5 William St Wingham 6553 4570



# GROWING GRAPES MIGHT BE FUN



Deirdre Macken  
Allen & Unwin  
RRP. \$32.99

**"Growing Grapes Might Be Fun" for author Deidre Macken; then again it may not be to the mind of a rational reader. Particularly so if you didn't have to service a big mortgage and you had enough funds to wait out the five years it takes to grow, harvest grapes and follow the process through to bottling the wine.**

**T**he author also tells us the first grapes harvested may not turn into drinkable wine and may not yield a worthwhile financial return. So, despite enthusiastic assurances from Deidre that it might be worth a punt, I would personally find it difficult to draw from her experiences as an inexperienced farmer to follow through in the way she and her husband have

done.

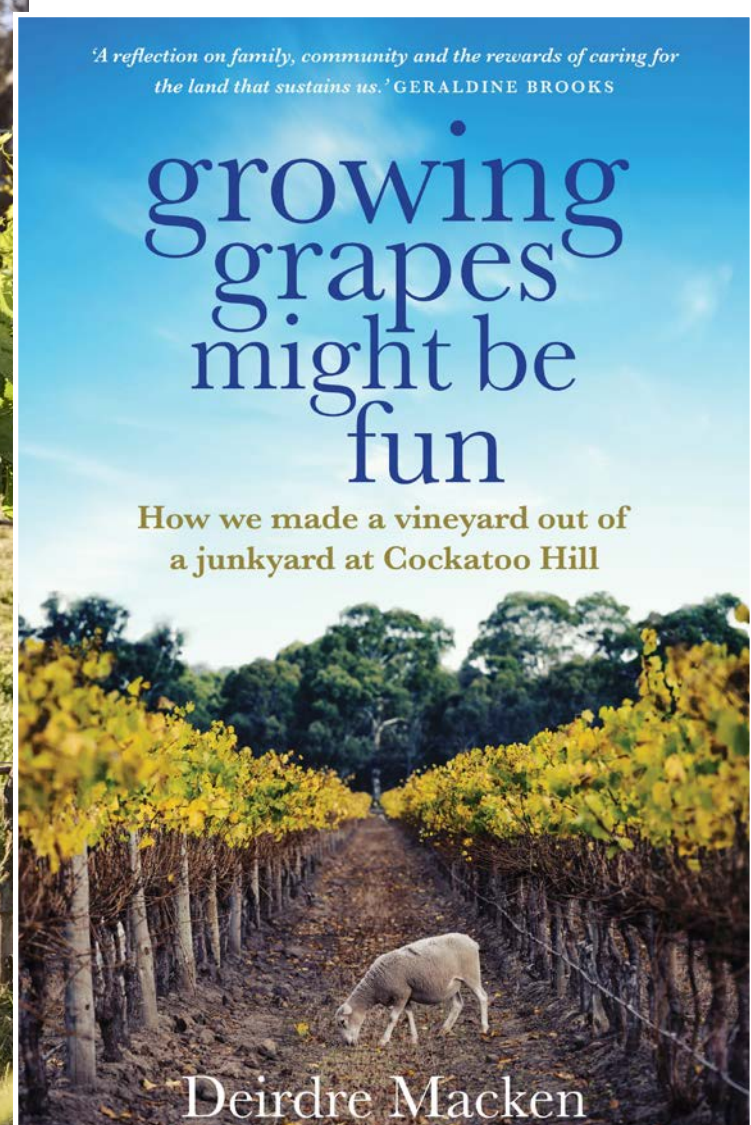
But then again perhaps I don't have a generous mother to give me the land to play with as happened to Deidre and her husband Roger, both former journalists, when they found themselves made redundant.

So all hail to them anyway for taking the plunge to develop a vineyard establishing a crop of grape bearing vines at Cockatoo Hill, a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13



Deirdre Macken





## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

100-hectare property outside Yass, in NSW.

The word was that a few hectares of the sheep grazing property owned by her mother Ann, might be good land for grape growing and Deidre's large loving family and children were willing to help them with the intensive planting and harvesting.

Then there was their collective daydream of sitting on a sunlit terrace of the house, one day in the near future, serving delicious food at a big family lunch, while washing it down with their locally-grown vintage, toasting their successful tree change.

Like all dreams, it didn't include having to clear the land from what seemed like endless amounts of garbage amounting to taking ten separate skips to the landfill, the legacy of decades of occupation by former owners and careless tenants.

The house was falling down and needed rebuilding, but until that could be attended to Deidre and Roger had to drive each weekend from Sydney to Cockatoo Hill. There were also regular times when there was so much work to do, that they'd have to camp there for several weeks which meant taking sleeping bags and picnic food.

Before planting, the ground had to be ploughed and fertilised to give the baby vines a chance and the weather was a fingers-crossed exercise not knowing whether frost at the wrong time would cause havoc to new plants.

It is at this point in Deidre and Roger's journey that one would wish for a fairy godmother. That didn't eventuate. The weather sent them a few storms which knocked down some huge old trees, hail which damaged the new shoots on the vines along with hungry locusts and, on one occasion, a small mob of sheep who had escaped their paddocks, entered the vineyard and chewed every bit of green growth they could reach.

This second career by now may not look enticing to those in the city and it probably sounds irrational, but Deidre decided this project spoke to her heart. She explains; "you hear the call of another self, it's liberating, you escape the cage of your age, you've heard the nay-sayers and decided you're still going to do it."

By the time drought and then bush fires arrived, Deidre and Roger had been working the land for three years and both felt too invested in the labour and money they had spent on the project. Deidre says during her journalist career economists often referred to this as

sunk-cost fallacy; others might call it throwing good money after bad.

"We hadn't thought about walking away except for a few moments of hot temper," she says.

Her bigger fear was welcoming her friends and experiencing how they would respond to her new identity when they came to visit the property. "Would they say, cut it out, Deidre, you don't like this stuff, who do you think you're kidding; a pretend farmer, pretend winegrower, put your work gloves away and get a manicure."

"In fact, the weekend went well," she says. "We built a fire, ate sausages, visited mum, walked up the big hill, saw lambs, ate dinner at a fine restaurant and played golf the next day. I even trailed them through the decrepit part of the house telling them 'it's just a crash pad and needs demolishing.'"

When they left, I asked myself why I was so unnerved by my initial reaction to their visit. I suppose we define ourselves by our work,' she says. It's our identity even though she is normally unfussed by what people think of her.

The book contains a lot of Dierdre's inner thoughts and feelings. It is not just about farming facts and fears of encountering snakes and other unwanted wildlife. It is well written with a lot of humour, interesting insights and close observations of farm life.

It is a book probably more appreciated by city folk than country dwellers, for Dierdre can't tell country folk of her trials and tribulations because this is par for the course for those who live in country and regional Australia.

In five years, they finally harvested two-and-a-half tonnes of grapes from the vines of sangiovese and shiraz. "It took eleven workers, seven hours of work and it all went so smoothly it almost felt creepy," says Dierdre. "So many things could have gone wrong and didn't."

Their first harvesting was sent for bottling and the process yielded just one and a half pallets, just over sixty-five boxes which is not a lot of return for tens of thousands of dollars and four years of hard work. "Gounyan Wines" is the label to look out for.

Still, Deidre and Roger are pleased it tastes so good. Their verdict: "a fresh lively wine, leaving a slightly acidic taste."

They are proud their first wine crop survived storms, drought and their own mistakes in securing their vines and that it ripened during a wet and cool summer. "It is its environment. It is its soil. It is what it is meant to be. Enjoyed".

**Sherry Stumm**



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# THE VOICE TO PARLIAMENT HANDBOOK. ALL THE DETAIL YOU NEED



Thomas Mayo and Kerry O'Brien  
Hardie Grant. RRP \$16.99



**T**he publisher's media release for this short (85 page) but informative handbook says this:

"(This book) will be a clear and simple guide for millions of Australians who have expressed support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart, but who want to better understand what a Voice to Parliament actually means. And in the face of calls for more 'detail', the book will cover all relevant

discussions, including the history of the struggle for an effective Voice, what is a referendum, what is the Uluru Statement and other frequently asked questions."

Over the past months there certainly have been many calls for more detail. Some of those calls, particularly from some agenda driven politicians, have been quite disingenuous and clearly designed to muddy the waters. No amount of information or detail will satisfy

them, but for the vast majority of Australians of good faith, this book will be an essential tool as they decide how to vote if the referendum later this year.

Kerry O'Brien probably needs no introduction, being an acclaimed and trusted journalist who spent many decades at the ABC working on such programs as This Day Tonight, Four Corners and Lateline. He has been awarded six

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



Thomas Mayo and Kerry O'Brien



## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

Walkley awards for excellence in journalism.

Indigenous leader Thomas Mayo is a Kaurareg Aboriginal and Kalkagal, Erubamle Torres Strait Islander man. He is a signatory to the Uluru Statement from the Heart and has been a leading advocate for its implementation since 2017.

The book begins by setting out the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and then explains how the Statement was created, who was involved, and how a consensus was finally reached as to the wording of the Statement.

Mayo and O'Brien then explain what the Voice means to them personally and why it should be passed.

Mayo says:

"The Voice is a wonderful consensus position, informed by history, experience and sound, logical sense."

And:

"It is a choice between improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, through the simple act of asking the Parliament to listen, or choosing to accept more of the same."

O'Brien explains that the Uluru Statement is a request for three things, being:

Constitutional recognition with a Voice to the Australian Parliament and the Executive Government, Truth telling, and Agree-

ment-making.

He says:

"Australia has nothing to lose and a great deal to gain by voting 'Yes' in the Voice referendum. One key reason why Indigenous policy has failed so fundamentally at times is because it has been written and implemented from Canberra by non-Indigenous politicians and bureaucrats without listening to the people they're supposed to be helping."

Chapter 2 outlines the history of the struggle for an effective Voice, explaining that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had no role to play in the drafting of the Australian Constitution and were often sidelined by governments in relation to matters affecting them and that it's been "the slow, painful dance of two steps forward and one step back with no policy advance set in stone." This all helps to explain why the Voice needs to be in the Constitution:

"With its continuity guaranteed in the Constitution, the Voice would be able to mature and evolve as an effective part of the ongoing drive to close the gap on the inequities built into Australian society over 235 years."

Chapter 4 of the Handbook asks, "What is a referendum?" We are told that the only way to change the Australian Constitution is by the holding of a referendum and that for there to be a change the majority of voters must vote 'Yes', but also that there must be a

majority of 'Yes' votes in a majority of states:

"In other words, more than 50 percent of voters in four of the six states have to vote 'Yes', as well as the nation as a whole."

Chapter 5 is titled "Why vote 'Yes' and other frequently asked questions". It deals with such issues as whether it would amount to a third chamber of Parliament. It certainly will not. It will only be able to make representations and advise on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It will not manage money or deliver services. It will have no power of veto over government decisions.

One question which is commonly asked is why all of the detail about how the Voice will work will not be in the Constitution. That is simply not how the Constitution operates:

"For example, the Constitution grants the Commonwealth the power to impose taxes and laws regarding the collection and administration of taxes, but it does not detail how the Taxation Commissioner is selected, where the tax office will be based, or how much will be spent on tax collection efforts."

There are many other such examples that the authors could have given as are contained in section 51 of the Constitution and which any interested reader can readily access online.

If the referendum is passed

it will then be up to the people's representatives in the Parliament to decide on all the detail.

The authors never shy away from facing up to the difficult questions which people have been asking.

Some of the other questions raised and answered are:

Is it safe to amend the Constitution?

Are the possibility of High Court challenges a real problem?

Won't the Voice just add another layer of bureaucracy?

Don't Indigenous people already have a voice with the right to vote?

Why are some Indigenous people not supporting the Voice?

Why not just spend the money dedicated to establishing the Voice on Aboriginal communities?

And quite a few more.

Chapter 6 looks at the issue of how the Voice can help to close the gap in a number of specific areas, and the final chapter then explains how the reader who wants the referendum to succeed can help by having conversations or by actively joining the 'Yes' campaign.

This is a very thoughtful, readable, and easy to understand Handbook which deserves widespread use in the months remaining before Australians are required to vote on this crucial issue. It does indeed provide "all the detail you need."

I highly recommend it.

**John Watts**

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# REWILDING (THE RADICAL NEW SCIENCE OF ECOLOGICAL RECOVERY)



Paul Jepson and Cain Blythe  
Icon Books 2020

Sometimes daytime TV viewers are bombarded with advertisements about the dire state of koalas and other wildlife. On social media we are often fed a diet of alarmist information about environmental destruction. The thinking behind this seems to be that if anything positive is syuri@cuc.ac.jpaid then the listener will think everything is OK and not be motivated to act or donate.

**I** am not for one moment suggesting that there aren't serious environmental issues facing humanity, but for a long time I have thought that this overly negative approach can be counter-productive, and it is one reason why I found this book to be such an illumination. On page 2 the authors say this:

"In particular, the relentless telling of stories of biodiversity decline and an impending sixth

extinction crisis, combined with newer anxieties

over climate change, has led to a growing sense of despondency within the conservation movement. Many have started to lose hope and question whether they still want to devote their lives and careers to lessening harm and fruitlessly cataloguing the end of nature."

This book offers some practical solutions to our environmental problems and some hope, although it certainly does not shy away from acknowledging the significant environmental problems and challenges facing humanity.

The book explains what is meant by rewilding and mentions that some scientists have argued that the term has "become fuzzy and should be abandoned because it lacks the precision necessary for robust scientific analysis." The authors do not agree and argue that the term can be applied to a range of activities which might be different, but which "all emphasise the restoration of ecological functions and encourage a better understanding of the processes, dynamics and connectivity of ecosystems."

The book is full of original ideas and concepts. At least many were new and original to me and will be to many readers with no training or expertise in the area.

Early on the authors look at the question of what baseline should be adopted when considering biodiversity. Should it be the way nature was at the beginning of the industrial era as is often assumed? This book argues for multiple biodiversity baselines.

We are then introduced to some examples of rewilding, such as the well-known reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone National Park, but also to the lesser known, but more radical and controversial nature restoration project, referred to as OVP in Holland. We are told:

"The OVP experiment involved the reassembly of a guild of large herbivores, including 'wilded' horses and cattle and red deer, to create a Serengeti-like landscape. The results were startling – populations of small birds and small mammals rebounded..."

However, the OVP also provoked controversy from farmers and citizens who believed that allowing cattle and ponies to starve in hard winters is cruel and unjustifiable."

Interesting stuff.

It is noted that where some of the original wildlife of a region has become extinct it is possible to use substitutes with similar characteristics to the original. The example given is on the island of Mauritius where "non-native tortoises have been successfully introduced as 'taxon substitutes' for an endemic giant tortoise, the extinction of which had

caused ecosystem dysfunction and loss of native wildlife."

The book makes the point that rewilding is not anti-globalism, and it doesn't seek to restore what industrialisation has destroyed or damaged. It is realistic and pragmatic:

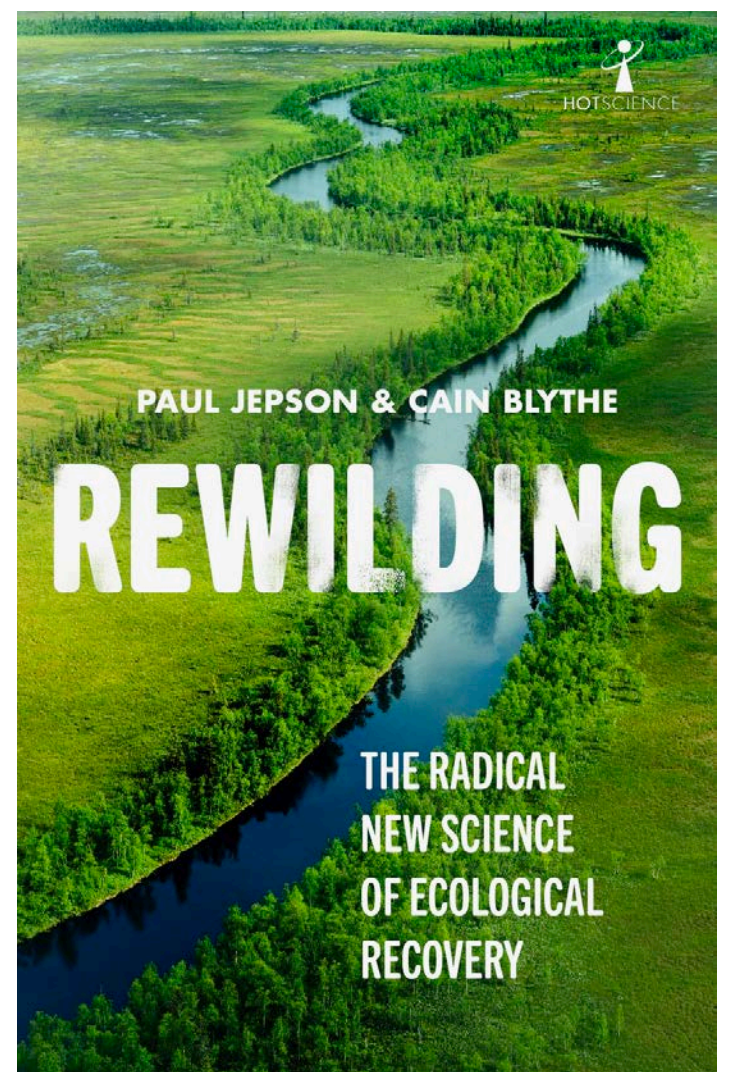
"Rather, it is about restoring networks of interactions between communities of organisms and their physical environment, along with the ecological processes that emerge from these interactions."

And:

"A goal of rewilding is to release landscapes from engineered structures and agricultural inputs so that the variety and abundance of eco-spaces reappears."

The authors suggest that rewilding activities do not need to be a drain on scarce government coffers and point to the southern African example where, following a period in the 1980's when much wildlife was wiped out, governments have encouraged the development of a "wildlife economy" which has resulted in a win for the environment and a win for struggling communities. The book says:

"By 2010 there were over 10,000 private wildlife ranches in South Africa. Private landowners have rewilded landscapes, supported an abundance of wildlife, and brought



a level of prosperity and stability to rural areas."

There are probably some good lessons here for the mid north coast of New South Wales. As we struggle to prevent the extinction of our koalas and other native species we tend to focus solely on the need for more government owned national parks, when perhaps private landowners can also make a significant contribution to the environment and maybe generate some income along the way. As they say:

"...rewilded systems offer the potential to simultaneously address a suite of concerns – climate change, biodiversity loss, flood management, soil health, ethical food production and rural depopulation."

This is an easy book to read with lots of fascinating, interesting and surprising ideas. It's well worth a read.

Highly recommended.

**John Watts**

\*A group of organisms that are assumed to be related.



# REVIEW OF THE BELL OF THE WORLD



Gregory Day

Transit Lounge RRP \$32.99

I remember some years ago staring intently for some time at a sculpture in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney and wondering if the sculptor was having a bit of lend of me. I couldn't make head nor tail of what I was observing, and so I reluctantly decided to ask the nearby attendant what the artwork was all about.

**I**t was truly a lightbulb moment because as the attendant spoke, the sculpture was in my mind transformed from a meaningless statue into something of significance that has stayed with me to this day. It was a good lesson to me about taking care when judging any work of art to not jump too quickly to judgment.

After reading a number of pages of this book I had convinced myself that I was going to dislike it, if not detest it. My initial impression was that it was a pretentious piece that had to be read with the regular aid of a dictionary and google.

It is not my practice to read other reviews of books before I write mine but, in this case, I felt compelled to do so because I knew that the author had been the recipient of several literary awards and I wanted to get the flavour of other views. Gregory Day has received the Patrick White Literary Award and was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award. As I read the early pages I began to wonder why I wasn't enjoying the book. Why was I finding it irritating? Was I missing something?

Unfortunately, the first review that I happened to find on-line was one written for the Guardian Newspaper which said the following:

"The novel's incantatory yet challenging prose make flaneurs of its readers, leading us down innumerable warrens of natural imagery and sinuous thought."

And:

"... authorial peregrinations on humankind-nature relations largely permeate the novel."

And:

"The Bell of the World devotedly sews the fibral connections-as if a rhizomic root system or the branching filaments of mycelium-between humankind and the natural world, of which we are "both, both, both: both, both and Both again." Some may recoil from Day's effort..."

After reading that those words and not having a clue what the reviewer

was talking about, I became more convinced that my initial impression was probably accurate and that I was one of those who would recoil, and recoil strongly, from Day's efforts. I even wondered if I should bother continuing to read.

I am now glad that I did finish the book's 405 pages, although it did take some time and effort.

As well as being a novelist, Day is also a poet, and the style of writing and his choice of language reflects this. In some ways the work is as much poetry as prose.

The tale begins in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the central character, Sarah Hutchinson being shipped off to a rather posh girls' school in England after her parents' separation. There is no parental love in Sarah's life with a drunken mother and absent father. At the school she is clearly a square peg in a round hole and really remains that throughout the whole book. However, Sarah is clearly a talented musician interested in all things artistic.

After finishing school, the plan is for Sarah to be sent to live with her gay uncle Ferny who lives on a bush property near the coastline south-west of Geelong, Victoria. The bush/sea mix is a significant symbol.

On the way home Sarah visits Uncle Ferny in Rome where she is exposed to the arts and culture of the city and to Ferny's rather bohemian lifestyle and friends. In Rome Sarah loses her virginity to a painter by the name of Roiseaux, "a man old enough to be her grandfather." Sarah is clearly craving for some affection, meaning and stability that her childhood has lacked.

On her return to Australia Sarah is unable to immediately head to Ferny's property because he is still in Rome, so she spends a time of stability and renewal with Maisie, an indigenous woman. Maisie re-clothes Sarah which is clearly symbolism for much more than simply the changing of her outfit.

"She (Maisie) would dress her herself, if need be, strip her naked and reassemble her identity via Maisie's

own choice of clothes."

The book is in two parts. The first part deals with Sarah as a young woman living on Uncle Ferny's property. The setting for the second part of the book remains on the property but Ferny has died and Sarah has aged, and is corresponding about fungi with an American composer.

Sarah travels via train to Ferny's property Ngangahook, where the rest of the narrative takes place.

The fly cover of the book explains:

"As Sarah's world is nourished by music and poetry, Ferny's life is marked by *Such is Life*, a book he has read and reread, so much so that the volume is falling apart. Its saviour is Jones the Bookbinder of Moolap, who performs a miraculous act. To shock and surprise, Jones interleaves Ferny's volume with a book he bought from an American sailor, a once obscure tale of whales and the sea (*Moby Dick*). In art as in life nature seems supreme. Ngangahook and its environs are threatened, however, when members of the community ask the Hutchinsons to help 'make a savage landscape sacred' by financing the installation of a town bell. The fearless musician and her idealistic uncle refuse to buckle to local pressures, mounting their own defence of the 'bell of the world.'"

The prime mover behind the installation of the town bell is one Selwyn Atchison, a Bob Jelly type found in every town who sees progress as any development where nature is pushed aside. In Ferny's eyes the sound of such a bell will overwhelm the natural world. Sarah is quoted as saying:

"That he considered Atchison a dolt and his desire for a bell a ruse for his own self-aggrandisement was self-evident enough to me."

Ferny is quoted as saying:

"And to be honest, I'm not sure I want an hourly reminder of our local Christian hypocrisy penetrating deep into the redemptive rustling of the trees."

The bell is therefore the symbol of the way that the expansion of "civilised society" has been destructive of both

the natural world and First Nations communities.

The book is packed with metaphors and symbolism.

Symbols such as:

The skull of a dead lawyer which hangs in the room of Jones the Bookbinder.

The fact that Sarah has altered the sounds made by her grand piano by affixing natural objects such as gum-nuts, leaves, parrot bone and pieces of kangaroo to the strings.

The binding together of the two books. One a story based on the land and the other a tale of the sea.

The killing of a tinker's horse and the burning of his carriage.

Sarah's correspondence with the American composer about fungi and in particular, the collared earthstar fungus.

The significance of the fact that the music performed at a concert that Sarah attends in Melbourne at the invitation of the American composer is that of early 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde composer Henry Cowell.

And more.

This book is not an easy read, and it will not be for everyone. It is like a complex piece of poetry with many layers of meaning which different readers will no doubt interpret in their own way. Like any good work of art, it needs some effort, but it is a work that will, if you persist, really make you think. The book is really an invitation to the reader to do just that. The penultimate page says this:

"To think, Sarah thought then, and to think again. And not for the first time. To think and think again, as a wallaby finds her truffle. To think, she thought...to think of all that can be unleashed. By doing nothing. By being."

As I finished the last page, I had the feeling that I had barely scratched the surface of what Day was trying to say to me. It's well worth a read or two or perhaps three, even if you often do need the aid of a dictionary and google.

John Watts



# THE THERAPIST



Hugh Mackay,  
Allen & Unwin RRP \$32.99

**W**e know Hugh Mackay as a social psychologist whose non-fiction writing in books and newspapers over many years has often turned the spotlight on our social and cultural attitudes as we face the cultural upheaval created during some of our biggest social changes.

He has always seemed like a friendly uncle ever ready to shine light on our ethical and psychological dilemmas when they occur.

Hugh's book is a bit of a surprise because the cover tells readers that it is a novel, but the short quotation he has chosen from David Malouf's book *Johnno* whets our appetite: "*Maybe, in the end, even the lies we tell define us. And better, some of them, than our most earnest attempts to tell the truth.*"

Intrigued by this, I opened Chapter One and was mildly disappointed to find I was not met with prose that felt likely to quickly wind me up with excitement. In contrast to my expectations this compact novel introduced me to a sensible, methodical psychotherapist called Martha. It then proceeded in subsequent chapters to make me feel like a fly on the wall as she consulted a collection of troubled clients. Looking back this is clearly what the author intended.

If you are interested in how therapists work and what goes on behind closed doors in these private conversations they have with their clients, many of whom seem to come looking for a listening ear and calm reassurance they are not going crazy, settle down with a cup of tea and enjoy this book.

It is entertaining as the plot develops, relationships are exposed, love blossoms and blackmail rears its ugly head as one couple try to discredit our poor well-meaning heroine, Martha.

Hugh writes in explicit detail bringing Martha and her fellow psychologist Rob to life. We learn how they react to some of the information they have privy to and what sorts of issues they are dealing with at a personal level.

The clients are a complicated bunch who come seeking advice

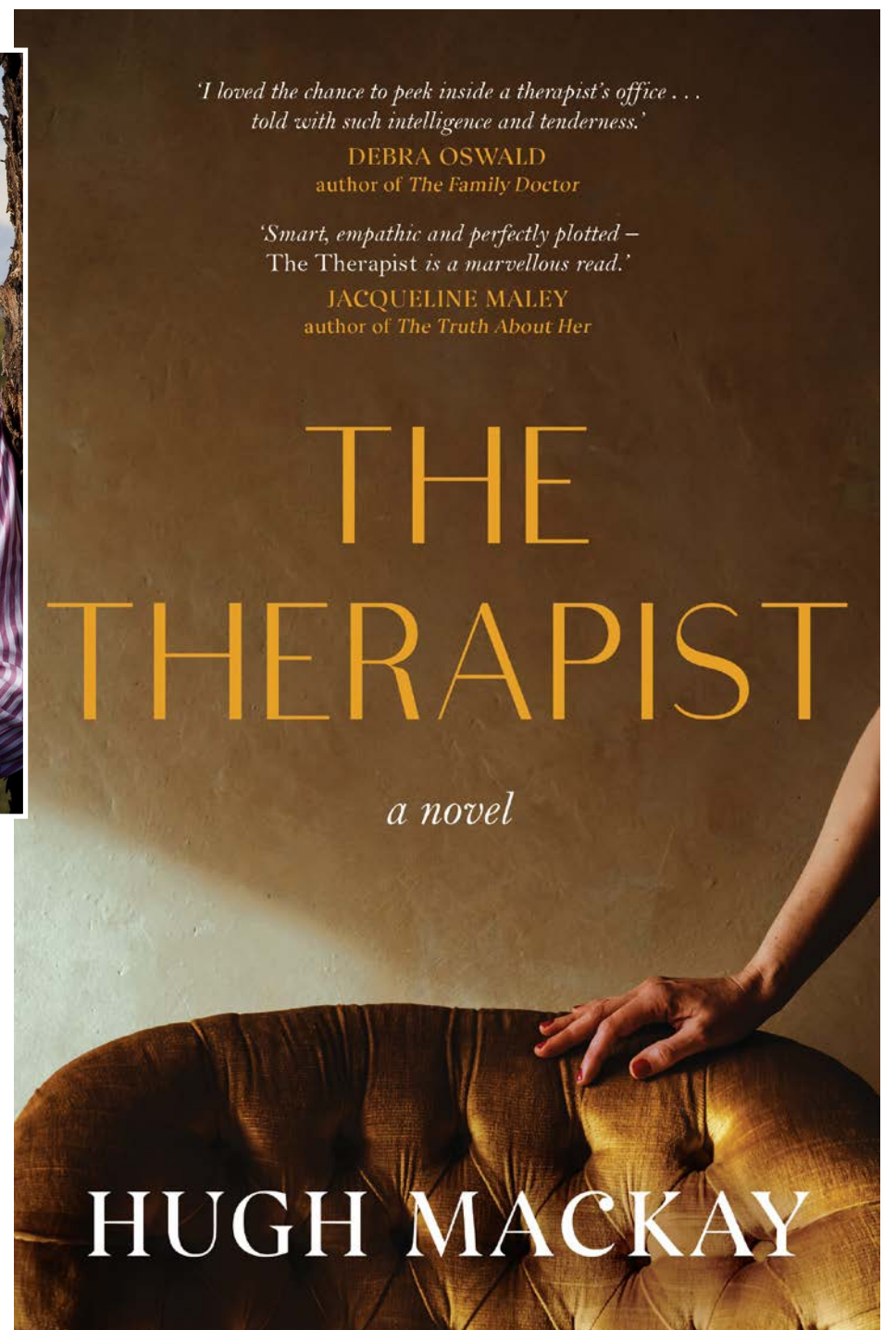


and direction. Some of the issues they want answered may resonate with some readers as they did with me. What is interesting is how Martha skilfully gets her clients to reveal even their most secretive issues.

Marsha doesn't always play by the rules and blends her counselling with breathing exercises, meditation and foot massages. These are tools she tells her startled clients that help them relax and allow her to build trust with them. She even invites a select few clients for afternoon tea at her house, wanting them to interact with one another to see if this kind of social interaction can help them deal with their feelings of isolation and confusion.

During her counselling sessions, we witness deep encounters, interesting insights into her clients' characters, their fears and phobias and the truths they are so reluctant to speak about much less face.

Through Martha we are even party to her honest reflections on the nature of psychotherapy itself; does it really help those who refuse to accept the reality of their situation. When one couple complains about the imbalance in their relationship and their declining sexual interest in one another, the question becomes can Martha's



guidance and the well-meaning social event she invites them to spur them to look at each other in a different way.

What really spices up this novel are the stories that Rob and Marsha reveal about themselves. Rob is in a tempestuous relationship with a beautiful, sexy Latin American woman who places huge demands on his kind nature, twisting him around her thumb in the belief that his lust for her body will not diminish until she is tired of him.

Samantha, Martha's beautiful, intelligent daughter who can't seem to land a husband, believes her biological clock is ticking at 40. She is determined to find a sperm

donor so she can have a child, but she is choosy and finding it harder than she thought.

Martha hides a secret she has not been willing to look at and admit to for forty years. She knows that if she doesn't, she is in danger of alienating the one person she loves most.

This a tender, compassionate novel only a person like Hugh Mackay with his long experience watching closely the human condition, could write about so convincingly. I enjoyed its unfolding stories.

**Sherry Stumm**





# ANTIQUES AND COLLECTABLES

Collect for enjoyment, collect for knowledge, collect for the potential of future windfalls, collect to share and most of all collect because it is a wonderful hobby that lasts a lifetime.

**C**ongratulations to those responsible for the big improvements to the road surfaces around the Taree Service Centre. It was disgraceful for a long period of time, not a good advertisement or welcome to Taree. It is hoped that the new standards can be maintained.

Jade is supposed to have the virtues of charity, rectitude, wisdom, courage and equity in ancient Chinese culture, jade was also associated with Confucian ideas of purity and virtue, making it the most desirable and prized decorative material for centuries. Jade's associations with royalty and high status—coupled with its inherent beauty—have produced an art form that has been coveted and collected for over six thousand years.

"Jade" is not actually a mineralogical term but is rather an umbrella which covers both nephrite and jadeite. Native to China, nephrite was used in traditional jades including Neolithic weapons and ritual objects, whereas jadeite was imported from Myanmar in large quantities only beginning around the 18th century.

A few tips to tell the two apart: jadeite's surface should appear vitreous—like glass—while nephrite's surface will be waxier or "greasier." Both are cold to the touch, though will absorb body heat quickly when held. Keep in mind that this is not a foolproof identifier of authentic jade, as faux (false) jade can often mimic these properties. Jade will have a pleasant "ringing" sound when touched to another object. Authentic jade will be hard to mark with a blade, unlike softer, more easily marred substitutes. Again, this is not a foolproof method, as jade found in old tombs may have become softer and less durable. Identifying the stone requires experience—when in doubt, don't hesitate to ask an expert!

Mention the word 'jade' and most people will picture the colour green. Jade can range from celadon (mist green) to dark "spinach" green hues, but is also found in white, yellow, brown, grey, lavender, and puce shades. Both nephrite and jadeite can be found in a range of colours, though as a rule, nephrite is more muted in tone. Indeed, in its purest state, nephrite is pure white in colour. Any pigment comes from contact with metals such as

copper, chromium, or iron, which have tinted the stone.

The colours of jade items are often closely tied to the period in which they were carved, reflecting the tastes of the moment. For instance, Ming dynasty jades are found in a range of hues, while Qing dynasty examples—when the art form arguably reached its zenith—show a preference for white and emerald, green jades. In today's market, pure white specimens are highly desirable, as are imperial and spinach jades.

Collectors look for flawless stones with an even overall colour without inner cloudiness. The more uniform, the better. Surface finishing is also a consideration, as all aspects of the jade should be properly refined to enhance the colour of the stone (but remember that jadeite will be shinier than the waxier nephrite!).

Provenance and condition are important when investing in any art form—and jade is no exception.

Choosing items with clear provenance is helpful, especially in a moment where clever reproductions have infiltrated the market. Contemporary carvers often copy traditional forms and designs,

meaning that style alone cannot be depended on to signify if a jade is antique or modern. Jades from established collections or dealers are a safer bet—and typically command more on the open market. Don't be afraid to ask questions!

While larger carvings make a bold statement, the skill required by an artist to carve a small jade is enormous and speaks to the finesse of the art form. Prices are generally lower for smaller carvings, making them accessible for new collectors looking to enter the market. Jade snuff bottles are also a nice entry point for novices, as they display many of the same design motifs of larger, more expensive carvings. A carefully carved miniature is preferable to a poorly crafted chunk of jade. Often the rule of thumb is that the more complex the carving, the more it will hold value.

Jade can be susceptible to scratching, so keeping jades away from everyday wear is key—whether that is on a shelf or in a soft pouch or case. If kept exposed, sturdier jade can be gently washed with mild soap and warm water, though it must be dried immediately. Higher value jades are best kept in cabinets where they will be protected

from frequent handling, accidents and environmental build-up.

Finally, as with any collecting category, there is no 'right' way to collect. Boulders, themes of carving or from a particular period. Choose what you love to look at, and don't fret if your tastes begin to shift years down the line—jade has held its value for millennia, and you can always resell them at auction! Collections are everchanging, which is what makes them so interesting. Follow your heart!

Support your local Antique Shops Taree – Isadoras, Clancy's Emporium, Wingham – Delinquent Funk, and Antiques & Old Wares – they all enjoy your regular visits.

I recommend collecting to all. Find the area of collecting that suits you or take the plunge. Collect a wide variety of unique and interesting treasures. It is always fun and you are always learning, and it is something that can be done for the rest of your life.

**If you have family treasures you are not sure of, I may be able to help with information, appraisals, or sales. I love discovering old and interesting items.**

**Ring Rex – 0427 880 546.**







# MEMORY LANE

This photo, from the family album of the late Arthur Burgess of Mayfield, Newcastle, is labelled "Tuncurry Punt". The date is unknown, but appears to be 1940s.

Comments are welcome, to [greg@phototimetunnel.com](mailto:greg@phototimetunnel.com)

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