More Me: How can a Memoirist create a Vibrant Sequel Memoir?

Comprising:

Creative Work
AFTER THE NIGHTMARE

And

Reflective Exegesis

CREATING A COMPELLING SEQUEL MEMOIR

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Abstract

Memoir, the writing of a portion of one or another's life, is becoming an increasingly popular genre of writing with readers. Writing a sequel to a memoir is relatively uncommon and little research has been carried out on the writing of a sequel or prequel to a first narrative. This thesis consists of a book-length creative artefact, a sequel memoir titled 'After the Nightmare', and a reflective exegesis 'Creating a Compelling Sequel Memoir.'

'After the Nightmare' is a sequel first person memoir which follows my husband and I returning to Australia following a traumatic and dramatic time living in Vanuatu. Not feeling that we could return to the city, we bought a farm in rural Australia and tried our hands, unsuccessfully, at farming. Needing human contact, I was employed to open and run a community haemodialysis house. My husband, left on the farm alone, located a general store to buy and we left the farm to operate that business. This narrative follows the most interesting and exciting time of our lives. Attempting to make a less exciting time as compelling reading became the focus of my practice-led research.

The reflective exegesis 'Creating a Compelling Sequel Memoir', follows my research journey as my writing process is examined, then — using textual analysis of other sequel memoirs, particularly those of a similar nature to my own, and books discussing the technique and theory of memoir — the process by which I challenged and altered my narrative. Other issues that impact the sequel memoirist are discussed such as ethical concerns and how much of the previous memoir needs to be divulged to the reader so as not to leave new readers floundering nor bore those who have already read the first narrative.

Although it is found that the techniques required are those that should be used in the first narrative, this adds to the knowledge base of creative writing as there has previously been a gap in the literature on the sequel memoir. A conclusion is reached that it is difficult to maintain vibrancy in a less compelling narrative and that a different readership of the sequel may need to be targeted. Avenues for further research are also outlined.

Keywords

Creative Writing, Creative non-fiction, memoir, second memoir, sequel memoir, serial memoir, writing processes

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP AND ORIGINALITY

I, the undersigned author, declare that all of the research and discussi presented in this thesis is original work performed by the author. No content this thesis has been submitted or considered either in whole or in part, at a tertiary institute or university for a degree or any other category of award. also declare that any material presented in this thesis performed by anoth person or institute has been referenced and listed in the reference section.

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Dated 14th June, 2016

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Refereed Scholarly Publications

Waters, Irene 2015, 'Time Travel - A Personal Essay', *Writing the Ghost Train Refereed Conference papers of the 20th Annual AAWP Conference 2015*, http://www.aawp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Waters-1-1.pdf pp. 1-9.

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---- 2014, 'Portrait of our new neighbor' *Idiom 23*, vol 24 p 142-146

---- 2016, 'Amelia' *Idiom 23,* vol 25 p 65-67

---- 2016, 'A Tale of Two Teeth' *Idiom 23,* vol 25 p 62-64

Scholarly Presentations

Waters, Irene 2014, 'More Me: The Discovery of Unique Issues and Difficulties for the Sequel Memoirist', paper presented at the WIP, University of Queensland, 29 October.

---- 2014, 'Reading Between The Lines: Couser's 'High Definition' Memoir', paper presented at the Australasian Association of Writing Programs annual conference: Minding the Gap, Wellington New Zealand, 30 November.

---- 2015, 'Writing the Body', paper presented at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Inquiry conference: Revisioning Time, Space and Bodies, Sydney, 10 April.

---- 2015, 'Me Again: How a Sequel Memoir can Capture an Audience', paper presented at the School of Education and the ArtsResearch Symposium, Brisbane, 20 August.

---- 2015, 'Writing Death', paper presented at the Australasian Death Studies Network inaugural conference: Death, Dying and the Undead, Noosa, 12 October.

---- 2015, 'Time Travel - A Personal Essay', paper presented at the Australasian Association of Writing Programs annual conference: Writing the Ghost Train, Melbourne, 30 November.

Creative Artefact

AFTER THE NIGHTMARE

Dedication

For my mother, Audrey May Mathers.

Without her, this book would not have been written.

Author's Note [1] [2]

This memoir has been written as part of a Master of Arts at Central Queensland University, Australia. When I began my studies, I was all fired up having recently completed my first memoir. As my research continued, I became aware of how unreliable memories can be and questioned whether dialogue had a place in memoir. The dialogue in this narrative is not word for word as it happened, but of the style spoken and the memories are as true to what I can recall. These are my recollections of this seven-year period of our life, and mine alone. The occasional name has been made up or changed, usually because I couldn't remember or never knew the name of the person concerned but occasionally to afford privacy to the person concerned.

[1] Please note that a very small part of this narrative has been published in the ERA A-ranked *TEXT* journal article, 'Time Travel — a personal essay', which is listed in my published works during my candidature (see List of Publications).

[2] Please note that a small portion of the manuscript pertaining to animals is duplicated or similar to what has been published as short stories on my blog *Reflections and Nightmares* under the title 'Trog and other animals'. (see references) https://irenewaters19.com/trog-other-animals/

Chapter 1

Finding our Next Venture

The narrow, dirt road dropped away on either side of us. My gut constricted. Panic became a restrictive vest around my chest. My knuckles whitened as I clutched the seatbelt. I knew I was screaming but I couldn't control myself 'Turn around. We're not buying this place. So, go back.'

My husband and I were attempting to leave the city where the unaccustomed noise disoriented us. We had previously lived with endless crashing, as the sound of the ocean breaking on the coral reef had been loud and insistent, comforting, constant, white noise. Now, the screech of the traffic with the uninvited sirens broke into our conversations and sleep, unnerving us and making us miss our tropical island life desperately despite our relief to have escaped. It had made us different. We looked the same. Roger, being short for a man looked dumpy as, although he wasn't greatly overweight, he carried his weight on his stomach and chest. His face could only be described as interesting with his long nose the most prominent feature. His head was topped with unevenly home cut hair. When I looked in the mirror my own looks alternated between ugly and pretty. This was due to my hair which curled tightly and made its own decision as to where it was going to sit for the day. I had inherited my hips from my mother and although, if anything, I was below weight my hips looked big. Where we had changed was in our view of the world, and we found we were no longer able to feign an interest in our friend's daily problems. They seemed so petty and mundane. 'The fridge broke down yesterday,' my friend had told me. Over the entire visit I had listened to the problems this had caused but I could not raise any enthusiasm. I knew what problems with refrigeration were in a hotter climate dependent on generators, solar panels and gas bottles.

It had started as a honeymoon adventure, going into partnership in Vanuatu with Tanna Island's head chief. We didn't know, when we left Australia, of the difficulties we would face or anticipate the disputes we found ourselves embroiled in, stemming from the many differences in our cultures. After bringing the small hotel business up from bankruptcy to a thriving concern, we learned the hard way after Roger's kidnap that our partner, Chief Tom, did not actually own the land that he had sold to the

company that the three of us had formed. We returned to our native Australia triumphant at our successful escape but much older, more cynical and, we hoped, wiser.

Now back in Sydney, homeless after our '*nightmare in paradise,*' my mother welcomed us, pleased to have company which she missed since my Dad died. Although my mother was accepting of our untidy ways, she and I could not live together for too long. I had left home at seventeen when I went nursing and found it difficult to accept my mother constantly telling me what to do. She also tried to treat Roger as a child but he immediately came back and said to her 'Audrey, I have been making my own decisions since I was eighteen, I don't need you to start telling me what I should do.' It worked for him but I had been taught well 'not to answer back' so I contained my retorts and struggled to control my rising anger. After a couple of weeks, it seemed appropriate that we set off to search the countryside for our next venture. Our only stipulation was that the property would be in a six-hour radius of Sydney and my Mum, as I remembered the angst I suffered as I struggled to get on one of the few available flights home from Tanna after my father died.

We headed north to Yarrahappini, north of Kempsey. We had to see for ourselves that we had made the right decision, after we had an adverse valuation done, in not proceeding with the purchase of a property we had seen in a newspaper whilst in Vanuatu. After a long six hours we turned onto a dirt track and drove half way up a mountain through dense rainforest which also surrounded the house, threatening to engulf it. Thrilled we hadn't bought this sun-starved property that would have lowered our spirits quickly, we continued our quest.

We did, however, find another place in Yarrahappini that suited our purpose well. Our plan was to set up a bed and breakfast in a country setting with the obligatory small farm animals and country garden. We also hoped we could buy some land that would lend itself to some form of profitable venture. The brown brick bungalow we inspected fulfilled our criteria but after brief negotiations we continued our searching.

The South Coast was our next destination. We had seen an advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* for a hotel at Central Tilba that we could afford. Although the rooms were small, decorated with chocolate box frilly curtains, walls painted in a 1950s dusky-pink and sporting cheap laminated wood furniture, I thought it had potential. Roger saw only the work involved. Apart from the hotel rooms, the business

included a newsagency, general store and restaurant. Where I saw potential Roger saw early mornings, late evenings and headaches for himself. He determined that everything to do with the business would need renewing but no renewal would alter the building, which was a boring, 1950s square brick monstrosity. Still arguing that night about its potential we ran into a fellow who told us, 'If you're buying a motel and want to make money you have to purchase one in a town where lots of sales reps and repairmen go. This is where the big bucks are to be made.' Good advice should not be discounted and so we both happily discarded Central Tilba as an option.

As we returned to Sydney we inspected one operational farmstay that was for sale and it cemented our wish to carry out our dream of a similar facility but we had decided that the South Coast was not the locality for us. Our connection with it was non-existent and at this stage we had a strong desire to feel as though we had come home, that life and places were familiar to us, and the South Coast couldn't satisfy that need.

We travelled back to the North Coast in response to an advertisement in *Grass Roots*, a magazine about alternative lifestyles. The property sounded idyllic with a creek meandering through it, populated by families of platypuses. On reaching Kempsey we headed west following the Macleay River. Wending our way along the river flats through arty-crafty hamlets I eagerly anticipated a life here until we began climbing on the narrowing road that terminated at Armidale on the New England Tableland. Seeing the steep drops close to the edge of the winding road my body tensed and my heart starting to thump as though I'd just run a marathon. Turning off, the now snake-like dirt road narrowed even further, punctuated with tight hairpin bends. My gut constricted. Panic became a restrictive vest around my chest. My knuckles whitened as I sat rigid clutching the seatbelt. I knew I was screaming shrilly but I couldn't control myself.

'Turn around. We're not buying this place. So, go back.'

'No we're going. We rang. They're expecting us. It'd be rude not to show up.'

'There's no point. We're not buying it. If we did I'd never leave. I want to get off this road. Turn around.' My screaming had no effect. Roger doesn't change his mind easily and he'd made his decision. We were going and he had no empathy for what he saw as my irrational fears.

The owners greeted us warmly when we arrived. 'You know,' the man said, 'We get quite a few calls from people saying they're coming but they never arrive.'

‘I can understand that,’ I responded. ‘If I'd had my way we wouldn't have either. That road is terrifying.’ My resolve was not swayed. I did not want to purchase the property despite its beauty and the creek babbling over worn stones over which the trees cast gently moving shadows. Not that Roger tried to change my mind, as he had no desire to be so far removed from ‘civilisation’ again.

We next explored Taree and surrounds a little further to the south seeing a farm at Hannanvale but it had a spectacular garden which we knew we wouldn’t be able to maintain in a similar condition, and water was a problem. The creek and a tank, which supplied our water, was on land that we would not own. Having survived one land dispute we were not prepared to risk another one.

We found another place almost immediately that suited us both at Upper Landsdowne. It was a pink picture book farmhouse with wide wrap-around verandahs complete with a duck pond, overhanging weeping willow tree and flowering water lilies. It needed a major renovation as everything was run-down and overgrown but we could imagine our life there. Our offer to buy was accepted and we looked forward to moving in after our planned trip to the United Kingdom to see Roger's father.

Before we left we took my mother to see it on a day that the rain drove down. We could tell from her comments—‘the kitchen will need a total renovation,’ ‘there is only one bathroom,’ and ‘how will you manage all that land’—that she didn’t think we’d made a good choice but she didn’t dampen our enthusiasm and we remained excited at the prospect of our move there. Due to the unrelenting rain and the huge volume of traffic returning to Sydney, it being the last day of the Christmas/New Year holiday week, the agent suggested an alternate route through Gloucester using the Bucketts Way. Following his advice, we found ourselves in a green valley dotted with cattle and creeks that snaked along the gully floor. The surrounding hills rolled into the distance.

‘Pity we’ve found somewhere,’ Roger said.

‘Yes. If we’d known this place existed we would have looked here. It’s beautiful. Those hills look like you could roll down them.’ I stared out at the vista unfolding before me overcome with its beauty.

‘Too late and I’m happy with where we’re going.’

‘Me too.’ We lapsed into silence. I, at least was thinking of what could have been.

Before we knew it, we were winging our way to Britain. Roger's ninety-eight year old father was now in a nursing home after the two strokes he had suffered whilst we were in Vanuatu. This would be the first time we had seen him since these events and we were uncertain as to how we would find him. It felt empty staying in Roger's childhood home in Brighton without his Dad's presence. The first week we walked to visit his dad every day. I was still struck by how much Roger resembled his father in looks but now this once 'larger-than-life' man sat shrinking in his chair, with his clothes hanging off him The strokes had left him unable to walk but he still had all his mental faculties. The dispute with Chief Tom, our partner in Vanuatu, had concerned him greatly.

'I've just been waiting to see you come. I needed to reassure myself that you are safe.' His fathers' eyes blurred with tears.

'You didn't need to worry Dad.' Roger always played down the effect his kidnap had on him.

'I can go now. Will you help me?' That was the first of several times that his father requested help with his end. He hated being dependent and if he couldn't go home death was preferable.

'No, I can't help you Dad.'

Our second week in England we hired a car and drove to Cornwall. On our return to Brighton the weather turned bitterly cold. Having the car enabled us to drive, relieving us of the hour-long walk to the hospital; however, when we went out to the car it refused to start. 'Damn, we're out of petrol. There's a petrol station in the old town,' Roger said. 'We can walk down and get some fuel'. I agreed and off we set. The chill had permeated through to the bone in the fifteen minute walk only to discover the garage had not sold petrol for at least ten years. We returned to the house. My feet felt blue and my hair was so brittle with the cold that it could be snapped in two. I could go no further. Once Roger's mind is made up there is no stopping him and he continued on to obtain the fuel, walking up and over the Downs to the Tesco supermarket on the other side.. As I thawed and warmed I felt my stomach knotting when he didn't return after a couple of hours. I was worried that if he had fallen on the Downs he would freeze to death very quickly. I started to trace his footsteps and luckily met him just as I started my ascent. He told me that by the time he had reached Tescos, he was shivering uncontrollably from the cold that had settled in his bones, spreading through his entire body. Frozen stiff, he lay down on the floor assuming a

foetal position. The heated tiles and the warm air from the mall's air-conditioning gradually permeated his bones. People stared, some stopped and offered to help him but, Roger being Roger, he spurned their assistance. He stayed there curled up on the floor until he was warm enough to again venture out for the petrol and the walk back over the Downs.

Despite the infusion of petrol, the car remained silent and we had to call the hire car people who said when they looked at the car, 'It's frozen petrol in the fuel line.'

'I've never heard of petrol freezing,' Roger said.

'Aye. Normally it doesn't but there are devious individuals that drive the car to outside the yard, fill the tank with water then return the car saving money on fuel. It's the water that froze.' This we thought unlikely given that we had travelled to Cornwall in it without problem. We later saw on the news footage that a few people in the north, stuck in their cars, having been stopped by snowdrifts and blizzards, had died in the bizarre cold snap that had hit the country.

Having been persuaded by his brother to broach the subject, Roger spoke to his father about the car that he had recently purchased.

'Dad, whilst the car's still new perhaps you should let David sell it,' Roger said.

'Yes, I know Roger, but while the car is in the garage I can believe that I'm going to return home.' I could see Roger's shoulders sag.

'I shouldn't have said anything. What does it matter if the car stays in the garage until he goes? I've taken all hope away from him now. Bloody David.' His despair was apparent as he fought back tears.

When it came time for us to leave, Roger and his father clung together as they said their final goodbyes.

'You won't be seeing me again.'

'You never know. You've got to hold on to get the letter from the Queen.' They laughed at this longstanding joke. That was the last thing his father wished for. Both knew they would not see each other again and laughter eased the pain of the last goodbye. Uncharacteristically, Roger kissed his father as he left.

During this time we were in touch with our solicitor every few days to see if the exchange had occurred on the pink house—we were always disappointed. It was looking more likely that we would be staying at my mother's house again on our return to Australia.

On arrival, we contacted the agent and found out that the house was in the

centre of a divorce settlement with one party refusing to sign the documents to sell. Consequently we were again left searching for our next home. Remembering the idyllic countryside we had passed through around Gloucester we renewed our search there.

Finding only receptionists in the four real estate agencies in town, we left each a printed list of the attributes we wanted in a property. It included that we were cash buyers with three hundred thousand dollars to spend. The house must have great views and be suitable for a country bed and breakfast. Not one agent responded, setting Roger off on a rant about the bad business practice these real estate agents were displaying. He had held on to a belief in Vanuatu that everything worked well in Australia and this lack of response started his eventual disillusionment in this belief. Finally, we made an appointment to see an agent and whilst waiting in the office, Roger flicked through the properties they had listed for sale. He discovered one that fitted our criteria perfectly. The agent seemed reluctant to show us this house, totally ignoring it whilst describing a few other properties that he would take us to visit. Roger insisted on seeing this house as well and off we set.

We drove half an hour away from Gloucester, mostly on a bumpy dirt road. Being used to the mud tracks on Tanna, we totally discounted the dirt as being a drawback. In comparison, these roads were like a four-lane highway. We rounded a corner and glimpsed our first view of the house. It was both unexpected and impressive. Even from this distance it was imposing, looking like a huge bird with wings spread to takeoff: an eagle surveying its kingdom. On closer viewing we knew it was perfect. It sat on top of a hill with scenic views stretching one hundred and eighty degrees, looking over the valley to the coast seventy-five kilometres away.

An English cabinetmaker had built the large pole house and his craft was in evidence throughout the house where turned wood was a feature. The entire house was wood; the exterior cladding was western red cedar whilst the interior was cypress pine. The wood theme continued with tallow wood flooring. It covered four levels with the ground floor housing most of the rooms including kitchen, dining, and office, and in a wing at the end of the building there were three bedrooms and a bathroom. All the rooms opened via French doors to the verandah that ran the entire way around the exterior. In the centre of the house, a sunken living room featured a magnificent open fireplace. A small staircase led to a huge attic bedroom with soaring ceilings and skylights. An ensuite, walk-in robe and a balcony finished this level. A basement was

below with a laundry and office and the potential for many more rooms. It too was complete with a fireplace that joined the central chimney that would heat the living areas and main bedroom. It looked as though the builder had created this fireplace as a practice run to perfect the technique for the one that he eventually constructed in the lounge room. A huge swimming pool was an added bonus. Over one hundred acres went with the property which was a great deal more land than we had thought to buy, but, we rationalised, this would give us options to earn some money and not need to rely solely on the bed and breakfast business.

We made an offer that was accepted and again we settled back to wait the six weeks for the sale to complete before we could move in.

Bucca Wauka

Our house at Bucca Wauka

Chapter 2

Arriving at Bucca Wauka

With nothing to do whilst we waited for the house settlement to take place, we decided to occupy our time by doing the necessary legal work for the property conveyancing ourselves. Although the lawyer acting for the vendor did his best to make us feel inadequate, it was, we found, a reasonably simple transaction; to perform. A booklet took us step by step through the procedures involved and provided the appropriate blank forms that were necessary for the transaction the hardest part was calculating the final amount payable at settlement as adjustments had to be made for services such as council rates and water. Our disillusionment with lawyers, gained whilst in Vanuatu, coupled with the simplicity of the procedures required for the purchase, only confirmed in our minds that lawyers are paid a lot of money in return for only a small amount of work. We saved a considerable amount of money by doing it ourselves.

With time on our hands, we also took the opportunity to visit the Turner Exhibition showing in the National Art Gallery in Canberra, returning via Hatton's Corner at Yass. Our search for fossils was unsuccessful, however we found instead a small grey and white kitten. Her dirty, lustreless fur was matted and both eyes were discharging creamy-green pus. She obviously didn't know how to lick herself clean. She attached herself to Roger following him and letting out a persistent weak miaow until he picked her up. She was one of seven kittens but the others ran from us and hid in a hollow log where we could not reach them. The mother cat we found nearby, shot dead. We took the demanding kitten back to my Mother's unit, naming her Trog, as we had been looking for Troglodytes. Although my mother fell in love with the kitten, pets were not allowed in her building, so Trog went to stay in isolation at the empty house of a friend who was working overseas. It was a lonely early life for her as the vet told us that she would have been no more than three to four weeks old and we were lucky that she could lap milk. We were all happy when we were finally on our way to our new home.

Bucca Wauka is located half way between Forster on the coast and Gloucester to the west. It could be accessed either by turning off the Pacific Highway at Cooloongolook or coming via the Bucketts Way from Gloucester. In the early days

we always came the former route. The road turned to dirt soon after leaving the highway, with only a little bitumen at the small town of Bunya, which consisted of a community hall and tennis court. Bucca Wauka didn't have any facilities. It was nothing but a name on a map and apart from the now disused schoolhouse there was no evidence that a bank, shop or other community buildings had ever existed in the vicinity. However, we were not daunted as we were only three hours from Sydney, three-quarters of an hour from Forster and Taree, and half an hour from Gloucester. We felt as though we were close to everything after the isolation we had felt living on Tanna.

'Roger, you've never lived in country Australia before so I'm warning you, you'll have to be prepared for all the visitors we'll have in the next week or so.'

'Why?'

'They'll come with plates of scones and all kinds of edibles to welcome us to the area. You'll have to down tools and have lots of cups of tea. You have to be sociable.' Roger hated being interrupted when he was in the middle of a task but I was looking forward to our many neighbours coming to check us out and welcome us.

My heart had sunk on our arrival as the house had webs hanging like parachutes from the ceilings and in every corner. The spiders were varied from skinny daddy long legs to glistening black, round bodied and hairy legged types. Thankfully none resembled poisonous varieties, but even worse were the cockroaches that were everywhere. A thriving community of small, light brown cockroaches were scurrying around between the glass panel and its backing that housed the front dials of the stove. We cleaned and exterminated as we berated the previous owner but now we were ready to entertain the hordes I was certain would come calling.

The day the removalist arrived we were up early, anxiously watching the road for the cloud of dust that would herald its arrival. Its load included furniture and little knick-knacks that we stored before going to live on Tanna and had not seen for years, and also our packing cases from Vanuatu. As we unpacked these we received the last body blow that Vanuatu dealt us. Many of the items we had boxed up to ship back to Australia were missing from the tea chests when we unpacked them. Despite this we remained in high spirits; we were back in Australia and away from this type of corruption. Systems here, we believed, would work well and conditions would again be comprehensible. Life was wonderful and we were happy residing in a beautiful location in a fabulous house. We cracked open a bottle of bubbly. The first weeks

rushed by quickly as we unpacked boxes, arranged our treasures and settled into country living.

My prediction that we would be overrun with friendly neighbours coming to visit did not come to fruition. Crestfallen, I tried to keep the depth of my disappointment from Roger as not even one person turned up to say hallo. He is much more self-sufficient than I, and happy just being in my company or his own. However, in those early days we were busy preparing for our bed and breakfast project so with full days it only momentarily dented my mood.

To make up for lack of human company, however, I wanted a dog. I knew from childhood that having a dog for company meant you were never lonely. Roger only took a small amount of persuading as he'd never owned a dog and he was adamant that we would not get a German Shepherd, due to the breed's so-called aggressive reputation, which would frighten our potential paying guests. Although this was my preferred breed knowing their loving, gentle nature and their ability to fit in with their owner's lifestyle, I accepted Roger's edict as long as we could get a dog. He insisted we get a dog that needed a home so we visited an animal shelter in Sydney. The first one they showed us was a kelpie. It came out of the kennel at great speed, ran straight past us, and then round and round in rapid circles until we became dizzy watching it. We knew we'd never handle that kind of exuberance. The next dog the kennel proprietor produced was a pit bull terrier. Even I was frightened of it and Roger explained to the shelter volunteer that their reputation was even worse than that of a German Shepherd. 'We need a dog that would be suitable for a bed and breakfast situation.'

'Well,' said the lady from the shelter. 'A cattle dog bites more people than any other breed so that wouldn't be a good idea. The dog you should get is my favourite type of dog.'

'What kind's that?' Roger asked.

'A German Shepherd. They're the gentlest, easy to train, most good-natured dog you can get.'

'Have you got one?'

'I've got a cross.'

'We're not having a cross German Shepherd,' I butted in. 'That's where you do get problems.' I had been told when training with the German Shepherd Dog League

years earlier, that if you looked closely at the reported German Shepherd attacks, of which there were few, they were predominantly crossed dogs, not pedigree.

We abandoned the shelter and started scouring the advertisements in the paper and found some puppies. Roger melted as the puppies milled about but we chose the black and tan runt of the litter who, like Trog, was insistent that Roger pet him. I tried to be a bit more rational with our selection but between Roger and the puppy I caved in. He was good on the long journey back to the farm, crying for toileting but otherwise happily sleeping. As the day was hot when we arrived home we cooled down with a dip in the pool. Our eight-week-old German Shepherd pup tried to follow, fell in, sinking to the bottom like a stone. This unexpected, watery christening traumatised him, making him avoid water and swimming from that point on. We named him Mungo, after the band Mungojerry who had the hit song '*Summertime*' in the sixties. We thought it was appropriate as the 'Jerry' indicated his Germanic origins. Trog the cat completed the most traumatic day of Mungo's life by attacking him at every available opportunity with claws bared.

Our immediate goal was to do necessary work to the house in order to submit an application to council for approval of our bed and breakfast venture. Roger, being a perfectionist, had to have everything not only looking good but also working well.

The exterior wooden boarding of the house had aged to a silvery-grey colour and was also covered with an unattractive black fungus. Removing this became Roger's goal. Replacing the rotting balcony, decking timbers and balustrades had been a relatively easy task but scrubbing the western red cedar to remove the fungus was much more onerous. The commercial cleaning solution was expensive and the house was huge. Roger, having read that Napisan, an agent for keeping nappies brilliantly white, worked just as well, proceeded to scrub the entire house with this diaper cleaning solution. This was no mean feat as the drop at the front was high off the ground and the ground sloped away steeply. Clinging on to the ladder four plus stories above the ground, suffering from a fear of heights, must have terrified him, but Roger is someone who has the capability of putting fears away in order to achieve a goal. 'I do what I have to do. You won't get up there and do it so it's up to me.' I disagreed with his philosophy. I would get the job done but I would have paid someone to do the work.

One day on his descent—luckily at the back of the house—the ladder jack-knifed as it had not been secured properly. Roger fell from roof height with his legs

twisting through the rungs as the ladder crashed to the ground, just missing me where I was on my knees weeding. His left leg turned purple and immediately doubled in size. After untangling him from the ladder we knew we needed to take our first trip to the local doctor. X-rays confirmed that he hadn't broken any bones but the soft tissue injury forced him to rest until the pain and swelling subsided.

When the fungus was finally removed Roger painted the house with Organoil, an organic eucalyptus oil from Byron Bay. This meant further climbing but now, at least, he ensured that at a minimum one side of the ladder was secured. On completion the house was a beautiful, rich red colour and the odour, which permeated the entire house, smelt as if a Eucalyptus forest had come indoors.

I was not idle whilst Roger was working on the exterior. I was getting the inside organised and working out a farm plan. We had over one hundred acres and we needed to do something with them. We had purchased the property with an ongoing agistment lease for ten steers. This rental money, although not large, covered the council rates for the year. With the lease of the land due to expire a couple of months after we took over the property we were deliberating whether to renew the arrangement. If we didn't have cattle on agistment we would have to do something with the land ourselves, but what? We were struggling with this dilemma when, unexpectedly, we met a neighbour.

We had just sat down to lunch when Mungo started to bark. We could see the dust rising on the road indicating company was coming. Within minutes a dual cab utility turned in at the gate.

'G'day. Darrell's me name.' A weather-beaten, older man dressed in baggy grey trousers, a long-sleeved shirt, peppered with holes, which had probably once been white, and a worn felt wide-brimmed hat. He offered his hand to Roger, his lined face turning into a multitude of ravines as he smiled at us.

'Hallo. I'm Roger and this is Irene.' Roger smiled back as he too extended his hand in greeting.

'Youse seen anyone else today?'

'No,' we both echoed. A long pause followed.

'Codger that's got his cattle on here had a blue with his missus this morning and beat her up. Police are with her now. John's gone bush and most like he's on yer place. I'd keep clear if youse do see him. Least 'til he's sober.'

'Thanks for the warning.'

‘What’s yer goin to do with yer paddocks?’

‘We've been trying to work that out.’

‘Yer got to do something, else the grass becomes a fire hazard.’ This was something we hadn't thought of.

‘Do you think we should keep the cows on agistment or get some ourselves?’ Roger said, surprised when Darrell burst into laughter.

‘Youse ain't got no cows on agistment.’ Darrell gave us our first lesson in the differences between a steer, a heifer and a cow. We already knew what a bull was. Darrell stayed for over an hour. We became used to the long pauses in his conversation and the even longer pauses before he answered a question. By the end of his visit we knew he had adopted us and planned to take us under his wing by showing us the ropes. He intended to turn us into farmers. We'd also decided that the steers currently munching our grass would leave when the arrangement for agistment concluded. At that time, Darrell would take us to the saleyards in Taree to purchase seven quiet cows. He knew where we could get a bull and we would start producing our own herd.

As for John, the wife beater, we never saw him. The police arrested him when he returned to his house after sobering up. They had been renting the house in which they were living and they vacated it, moving to Forster after making arrangements with Darrell to remove the cattle on completion of their lease—leaving empty paddocks to fill.

Inside the house at Bucca Wauka looking through to the kitchen from the lounge room

Roger cleaning the house with Napisan. The roof that he fell from.

Chapter 3

Our Paddocks

Once the steers went I felt comfortable exploring the paddocks. We had never walked the entire perimeter and, apart from the long paddock that steeply sloped from the house down to a dam bounded on either side by densely wooded gullies and a wooded ridge that extended past the chicken coop, we had no knowledge of our land.

Roger had no interest in exploring and after persuading him to come with me once he refused to accompany me. Being English he found our vegetation too untidy and random. He preferred a well-ordered landscape. One he could control. So, Mungo and I took our daily walks alone. By following the well worn tracks made by the cattle around the edges of the gullies and through the wooded glades we managed to avoid the dense impenetrable thickets of the lantana which grew in abundance. Also growing in abundance in the two areas of rainforest were my favourite staghorns, elkhorns and bird's nest ferns. Less popular were the stinging trees. Luckily Darrell had warned us that we had these, telling us a story of a man who, in need of toilet paper, saw the large, heart-shaped leaves and decided that these would be a perfect substitute. The foliage of these trees has tiny hairs that are easily transferred from the leaf to human skin by merely brushing against them, let alone using them to vigorously wipe oneself. The stings can last for months unless you remove the hairs using wax depilatory strips or similar products. Not a pleasant sensation anywhere, let alone somewhere sensitive. We were glad to know to avoid these trees.

Our land extended further than I expected and our hikes were taking up more of my time. The unexpected discovery of a full to overflowing dam covered in the large green pads of waterlilies and water irises with a large weeping willow had me dreaming of the picnics we could have with only a small amount of landscaping around it. We followed the creek rising from this dam and although the bed was not dry it was not running either. The coolness this dampness created along with the overhanging forest gave pleasant respite from the heat of the more open paddocks until I felt a familiar stinging sensation in my feet. On removing my shoe I saw a couple of attached leeches on the fleshy part of my foot and more of the slimy, red-

black, bloodsucking creatures making their way to join the vampire's party. All thoughts of making this a regular place to amble fled as I made my way quickly back to the drier paddocks and sunlight, then home for the salt cellar to remove the one attached to the arch of my foot. When we arrived home I covered it in salt and watched with a deal of satisfaction as it quickly detached and then shrivelled in death. A little later I noticed that there were large amounts of blood on the timber floors.

'Are you bleeding?' I called to Roger.

'No. You probably missed a leech somewhere.'

'I don't think so.' I was in bare feet and they looked clear.

'Mungo,' we both said in unison. On examination we found bleeding evidence of suckers who had dropped off, having had their fill. There were puncture wounds in several of the soft fleshy pockets between his toes. Salt was not required, as the offending suckers had already had their fill and detached, leaving the anticoagulant they had injected still having an effect.

Not only was Mungo company for me as we walked the paddocks but he alerted me to the presence of wildlife. He would run around as any dog, sniffing here and there but when he found a creature he would stand totally still, staring in the direction of the animal or reptile until I arrived on the scene and followed the direction of his gaze. If he was staring up a tree I could see anything from a goanna to a kookaburra. Without him, I would have been unaware that numerous koalas lived on our property, sleeping in the fork of a branch during the daylight hours that we walked. With the knowledge that we had koalas we would occasionally go out at night trying to see them as they moved across the ground from tree to tree. During mating season they were easily found by following the pig-like grunts heard high up in the tree branches.

Other animals Mungo found on our walks were echidnas, kangaroos and wallabies. The only animals that he chased were the kangaroos and wallabies and although I worried that he would take off after the dingos, he never did. These native dogs were always solitary and because they did not bark I believed that they were full-blooded. Some nights it was quite unnerving hearing the baying of these wild animals coming from all around us—making me feel I was an unwritten character in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Although there were plenty of snakes and lizards around, they rarely disturbed our walks. Judging by the number of conical dead-end holes dug in the grass, bandicoots were common, but possums, which had been so plentiful in Sydney, were

not evident here in the bush. We heard that we had quolls on our property but thankfully we didn't see any evidence of it. These white spotted native carnivores had a vicious reputation. They could easily kill small animals and chickens were easy prey. They would massacre all the chickens in a coop and eat only their heads and intestines leaving the rest of the carcass for discovery. We were pleased we had not come across these but there were, however, wild once-domesticated cats. We didn't see these on our walks but one day, on our return home, Mungo became agitated and raced inside. Within seconds a huge, frenzied ball of fur sped past us and disappeared outside.

'What on earth was that?'

'That was the biggest cat I've ever seen,' Roger replied. We could tell where it had been because the foul smell of its sticky urine, which it had sprayed everywhere, was strong and lingering. Despite cleaning, fresh air and numerous fragrant sprays its odour stayed in the house for several weeks.

All these tracks had me daydreaming of enhancing them, mapping them and creating a walking wonderland by planting flowering natives and placing seats, rustic bridges and other unexpected objects of interest along these paths for our bed and breakfast guests to find. Before we did this, however, we had to clean up the garden around the house, which was well and truly overgrown, and we had to get some animals.

Chickens were first on the list. I placed an order for seven 'point of lay' birds after seeing an advertisement in the local paper, the *Gloucester Advocate*. These would be picked up at the produce store attached to the dairy factory (which we discovered made the best cheddar cheese we'd ever tasted) when sufficient orders were received to make it worth the trip for the travelling chicken seller. When notified of the pullets arrival, we travelled into town to collect our Isa brown chickens stuffed in their temporary feedbag home and relocate them to their huge new quarters with 'state of the art' automatic water and feed containers. I now had my first farming routine. Every morning I let them out of the small totally enclosed coop, where they were safe from night marauders, into the large yard where they had dirt and trees and, until their pecking and scratching removed it, grass to spend the day in. Although they were safe from foxes due to the height of the wire surrounding the yard, I would return at night to lock them in their safe pen.

The next animals to come were the cows. According to Darrell, the one hundred and ten acres we owned was not a large lot for our area and would only sustain fifteen cows and their calves. Being above the frost line gave us good winter pasture and grass feed all year but, without the ability to move the cows to richer pasture in summer, some supplemental feeding was necessary as the quality of our grass was adequate at best. My heart sank when I saw the two scrawny beasts with their caved in abdomen and prominent hip bones. Both were heifers from milking breeds. Flossie was a black and white Friesian whilst Blackie, a jet-black cow, was a Dexter. Seeing my disappointment Darrell explained their lack of flesh was why they were milkers and not grown for beef production, as all their energy went into making milk rather than storing fat as the beef cattle did. 'Youse wait. Youse'll see when we go to Taree. The next lot'll be different. Youse'll see.' I could see Darrell laughing in his eyes and I knew he enjoyed educating us folk from the city.

As promised, Darrell took us to Taree saleyards, giving us our first taste of the farmer's domain. We arrived early as the chicken and vegetable market started at 7am. The shed housing the produce looked like a display pavillion at the Royal Easter Show with glistening red peppers, orange squash, blue black egg plants and green beans laid out on trestle tables around the walls and on a table placed in the centre. Two elderly ladies in pleated skirts and blouses done up to the neck sat behind a desk near the door taking money in return for produce. I found myself wishing I had not already bought my chickens, although none of 'my' variety were here for sale. I had read that Isa browns and Rhode Island Reds were the best egg producers with the added benefit that they were also highly edible as they developed meat and were not just skin and bone as most egg laying hens were. Here were a variety of pretty hens and roosters such as the black and white spotted chickens called Wyandottes, colourful Bantams with fluffy puffed up top knots. Roger stocked up on fresh vegetables and two passion fruit vines to grow over the wire enclosure we had made for Mungo to contain him on the rare occasions we went out without him.

We wandered across the dusty parking area to the yards to see the cattle, Darrell doffing his hat frequently to the many people he knew. There was little talking but occasionally he introduced us leading to a short conversation pregnant with pauses. We stood out due to our lack of uniform dress. The men all wore baggy trousers cinched at the waist with a leather belt, blue shirts, Blundstone boots and Akubra style hats. The real estate agents doubled as stock and station agents and ran the sales. They

wore the same outfit except that their light coloured, moleskin trousers followed their body contours, hugging them tightly as they walked above the cattle on walkways. They stopped at the pen they were about to auction, and launched into a rapid monologue. Their constant, fast-talking, rhythmical monotone instilled a sense of urgency into the listening buyers prompting them into a response. Unable to understand the banter we were relieved Darrell was going to bid for us on the pen of cows and calves he had declared quiet and therefore easy to manage. Darrell was skeptical but went along with our desire to have the designer breed Angus as opposed to his favourite Herefords. We thought black was popular and Angus would ensure we obtained a good price when we sold the calves in a few months time. Our pen came up early in the day and soon we became the proud owners of fourteen animals, seven cows and seven calves. I hadn't thought of the logistics of transporting these back to Bucca Wauka but Darrell had a quick word with one of our neighbours who agreed to truck them to us in the afternoon.

On arrival, with no yards or cattle ramp to offload the beasts, Steve backed the truck up to the hill which was opposite our front entrance gate and with the help of Darrell and his dogs the cows scrambled out of the truck and meekly crossed the road into our paddock, their new home.

The cows mesmerised me. If I couldn't count them from our verandah I would go out looking for them. The calves found ways of getting to the sweet grass on the other side of our fence and we spent hours getting them back in and repairing the barbed wire. Mungo, Trog and I would walk to the fence that protected the house garden from their constant foraging and call them, giving them a feed of hay when they arrived. Soon they came running whenever they heard or saw me.

Not long after buying the cows Darrell turned up and we were sitting on the verandah, passing the time of day, sipping on black tea.

'Y' know,' long pause, 'y'should have a hoss.'

'We don't know the first thing about horses and neither of us ride. No, I don't think we need a horse.'

'People like hosses. Y'should have a hoss. I know! I got a small hoss youse can have. Mind yer, he's got a gammy foot but youse don't want a ride im so it don't matter.'

'What do you mean Darrell? A small horse?'

'Miniature. Like a Shetland pony only it's a miniature hoss. White he is.'

‘What would I have to do with it?’ I was starting to get enthusiastic. I glanced at Roger and could see he wasn't too keen.

‘Youse ain’t got a do nuttin’ with ‘im. Feed ‘im a bit of hay like yer do with the cows and he'll come when yer call ‘im. Yer guests'll love ‘im.’

‘What do you think?’ I directed my question to Roger.

‘If you want it, it's up to you.’

Darrell delivered our horse a week later. His foot was certainly gammy and he walked with a peculiar gait as one hoof twisted sideways, causing him to throw that leg out. We also quickly learnt not to stand behind him as he had a habit of lifting both rear legs off the ground and kicking out violently. Fortunately, I was quick enough to avoid being hit but Mungo suffered a glancing blow to his rear before he learnt to avoid Snowflake’s rear end.

After his arrival, our menagerie was complete, at least for the next few months.

The swimming pool at Bucca Wauka

Above chicken house & Mungo

Below Snowflake and me

Chapter 4

Barkoleuwin

Darrell had taken to dropping around every couple of days, late in the afternoon. We'd sit on the verandah, outside the kitchen door, and enjoy his wisdom, which he released in a disjointed, slow manner. We were getting used to the long breaks in conversation and, although still not comfortable with them, we did not attempt to fill them. Over time we learnt about the world we now occupied.

'Did this place ever have a name?' Roger started one afternoon. 'We need to give it a name if we are going to run a bed and breakfast.'

'Crackpot Corner on Patterson Lane is what we calls it. Since the house's been here anyways, but guess youse don't want to call it that. It never had a name before the house. All this land was Patterson land.' They still owned land further up the road that belonged to Darrell's daughter Darrellene. We wondered if they had hoped for a son and called their daughter after Darrell anyway.

'Yeah. It was our winter pasture. Always got grass up here and never get a frost. We used to bring the beasts up mid-April and bring 'em down again 'round September. We always called it Patterson Lane after me Dad. Still got the sign down the bottom of the hill cause the locals don't know where Kundle Creek Lane is. If youse want somting you tell 'em youse in Patterson Lane and they'll know where to come. That council in Taree don't know nuttin'.

'When I was a littleun the aborigines still used to come through here on walkabout. They'd move to the coast in winter and back to the Barrington Tops in summer. Used this place as a burial ground for middle chiefs. Yeah, they used to bury 'em standing up. Youse could call the place Bucca something. Bucca Wauka means burial place for middle chiefs.' We didn't dispute this but wondered if this was correct. 'Bucca' we thought meant hills or mountain.

'Then youse got Buccabuccabuckappelby. Dunno what that means. Probably big chief burial ground.' Darrell laughed. The name fired our imagination and we put it in the memory bank for future exploring.

Darrell went on to tell us that during the Great Depression a camp of men had set up on his father's land at the bottom of our road. They were itinerant workers,

most having come back from the First World War. They grew corn and, when it was available, did the occasional day's paid labour.

A cabinet-maker, Digby Cowan, had designed and built our house. It was the third house that he had designed and, according to Darrell, ours was the *pièce de résistance*. The first house Digby worked on was an old boathouse from Forster, transported by truck to its present site around the corner from our house. The exterior of the small cottage gave no indication of the transformation effected on the interior. It was identical to our house only in miniature: cyprus pine panelling, a loft bedroom with all wooden cupboards and railings, all intricately routed. We had seen inside it, as it was for sale at the same time as our house. Darrell told us Digby's brother lived in it for a while. He was a well known author and seen as quite unusual by the locals at Bucca Wauka.

'He'd ride all over the place dressed in them flowing cape and turban thingies. Gimme quite a start when he'd gallop over the hill,' Darrell told us. 'He had them Arab horses. Must'a wanted to look the part I s'pose.' We laughed with him at the vision he'd conjured up. 'Yep, we get 'em all here. Like the hippies that built an igloo. Built it on that hill, over there.' He pointed to the hill that prevented us from seeing his house, the original Bucca Wauka homestead. 'Built it on my land they did. Didn't know what to do but thought I best tell 'em in case they tried to take me land off me later on. They didn't believe me at first but I got the map and showed 'em all the boundaries. They should'a been on the other side of the creek.' A long pause. 'Well they had 'emselves a party the next weekend and had all their friends come. I didn't knows what they were going to do but it was a right funny sight I came upon. They all got in that igloo and they lifted it up and walked it down the hill, across the creek and plonked it down on the other side. Alls I could see was this igloo and lots a feet moving down the hill. Like a big tortoise. But lots more feet. I laughed and laughed. Right funny it was.' Another long pause.

'The next house Digby did was just across the gully there. See them row of pines up the drive,' he said, pointing.

'Yes.'

'On the other side of that shed there was a house 'xactly the same as yours. Only bigger. Four stories. 'Xactly the same. Burnt down. Gone in minutes. Yours'll go too if it gets a fire into it. They reckon there was lots of antiques inside. Somes reckon it was done on purpose for the insurance but it weren't I don't reckon cause they got

paid by the insurance company and they had the investigators here and all. Digby and his wife come and visit every few years.' We hoped we might see him when he next came as he sounded an interesting character. 'He did this place for a friend but the friend never lived here. Digby lived here for a bit after his place burnt down, then he went to England. Then Richard bought it.' This was the fellow from whom we had bought it from, a well-known potter who we believed had his pottery displayed in Parliament House in Canberra. Another long silence before Darrell continued. 'Richard nearly burnt it down while he had it. He started a fire in the paddock to burn the grass off. Lucky we saw the smoke and came running. Richard was havin' one of his diabetic turns while the place almost went up. He was on the phone to the insurance company trying to get his insurance. The fire was close up to the house. He was lucky. When youse go to burn the paddock, youse make sure youse got us all here to help youse.'

'Do we have to burn?' I asked.

'Yep. Yer sure do. Youse don't want to have a hot fire to fight. No siree, youse burn that bladey grass in winter so as if a fire starts, it's not gonna to take off. Youse make sure youse get us to help.'

'Okay. I'm not going to risk the house going up in smoke—that's for sure.'

' Mmm. I jes had a thought. I think there used to be something called Buccalooin somewhere round abouts here.'

'Hey that's not a bad name,' Roger exclaimed.

'Yep. I'm pretty sure there was sumptin' like that.'

And so, our house gained its name. We tried to find some reference to Buccalooin on the topographical maps but couldn't come up with anything so we decided to spell it Barcoleuwin at Bucca Wauka.

Chapter 5

Are We Still in the Pacific?

While on Tanna our memory of Australia evolved into one that was less than realistic. I realised that we were mistaken but was unaffected by the discovery. Roger, however, struggled. His thoughts of Australian efficiency had maintained his sanity whilst on the island, when faced with the unreliability of staff and others, the reliance on gossip as the reason to act, the blue tape of officialdom and the tendency of people to tell you what they thought you wanted to hear rather than the truth; now breakdowns would be rare and when they did happen, fixed quickly. He therefore expected that tradesmen would be quick to respond, follow-up with a quote and then commence the work. This was not the case, and we weren't the only ones it happened to.

'Where the fuck is he? I've fucking stayed inside all fucking day waiting for him.' Roger exploded after a plumber ended up as a 'no show' despite his assurances that he would visit.

'Don't swear.' The more frustrated Roger was getting the more expletives were finding their way into his language. Before we went to Vanuatu I don't recall ever hearing him swear but now it was not uncommon. He was still ranting about the plumber when he next played golf. His golfing mate Ormonde, who lived further west of Gloucester shared his experiences. He had asked many workmen to come and give a quote, but none had ever shown up. Then one day a tradesman arrived and Ormonde and he spent the next four hours walking around, discussing what could be done as they compared their visions for the property. The workman left saying he would send a quote. He never heard from him again. On hearing this Roger installed the toilet himself.

Roger also grumbled about the time businesses opened for work. In Vanuatu everybody would be at their work station by seven in the morning whereas, in Australia, a first world society, it was often gone nine before you could reach professionals and eight-thirty for shops. For Roger this was inefficiency and would cause another outburst of anger when it affected the start of his day.

An unexpected problem we encountered was our electricity supply. Our power supply on Tanna was both unreliable and required high maintenance of the generator and solar system which supplied it. We had both been looking forward to being on the power grid and having a reliable mains supply that would allow us luxuries, such as television viewing, that we had been unable to have in Vanuatu. We were unprepared for the almost nightly blackouts that occurred that lasted for varying lengths of time. Worse, we hadn't realised that our water supply to the house required an electric pump so losing power at Barcoleuwin meant we also lost our water supply rendering us unable to flush toilets, shower or have a drink of tap water during the blackout. More frightening was the thought of fire and our inability, once we lost power, to pump water to attempt to save the house.

'Won't make one bit o' difference.' Darrell told us when we expressed our concerns to him. 'If a fire comes up that gully the house's a gonner. Nuttin'll save it. Youse wanna be gone if a fire comes up there.' Nevertheless, we decided that the purchase of a small diesel generator would be worthwhile for emergencies.

Living half an hour from town made a difference apart from tradesmen. I was thrilled when Roger started playing golf in Gloucester. He had played in England as a child and it gave him a pursuit he loved, that he was good at, and soon he had a regular playing group that saw him playing on Tuesdays as well as Saturday. During the time he was gone I played my music loud and wished I had girlfriends I could meet for coffee. In an effort to get to know some local people as, apart from Darrell, none had dropped in to say hallo, I suggested that he could ask some of his golfing friends and their wives out for dinner or lunch. He made the invitation but no one accepted. One man eventually told Roger that they didn't drive their car on dirt roads. I was bitterly disappointed but this rejection didn't upset Roger at all.

The biggest difference between our life on Tanna and our new home at Bucca Wauka was having easy access to shops that sold more than rudimentary items. Although the journey to the shops took one hour to travel the seventy-five kilometres each way to get to Taree or Forster it was such a joy when we went. We went at least weekly if not more frequently, starting with a walk for Mungo on the leash-free beach before heading to the mall where the supermarkets sent us into paroxysms of delight. Wandering up and down the aisles the variety, colours and packaging held us enthralled. After living bereft of even normal supermarket items we had developed a siege mentality, stocking our larder to overflowing with anything that displayed a

‘special’ label. Our eyes, big with amazement, struggled to comprehend how cheap the items were and, compared to Vanuatu, what good quality they were. We rationalised that even at Barcoleuwin if we wanted something spontaneously or ran out of a staple it was a half hour journey to the nearest shop. As a result we could have survived for months if necessary and still we bought more.

Before our Vanuatu experience Roger was an even-tempered relaxed person with only slight antisocial tendencies. I remember that if he had been in the company of people for any length of time he would lock himself away in his unit as he needed to have time to himself. Now he had lots of time alone but he had developed a high degree of impatience since our return to Australia that I don’t remember him having when we first met. As his frustrations grew, fuelled by business opening hours, unreliable tradesmen and other minor irritations, this impatience mushroomed out of all proportion and I was often the brunt of the anger that accompanied it. I came to dread our trips to Sydney. We went on average once a month to visit my mother and catch up with other friends. We had discovered a good kennel at Bulahdelah that could accommodate both Mungo and Trog. The cat hated going and before we had gone a few miles the smell of her loose motions combined with her fishy vomit would have us retching. We learnt to fill her cage with newspaper and take a spare supply so we could stop and change it before we reached the highway. Mungo, however, loved going. Any time in a car was a joy to him and as soon as we turned in at the gates of the boarding kennel, he started whining with excitement and alternating between hanging out the window and trying to get into the front seat where he knew the door would be the first to open. He couldn't wait to leave the car and join the pack of St Bernard dogs that Lyn, the owner, kept. Whilst he was an inmate at the pet ranch, Mungo spent most of his time in the house with his adopted family and visited Trog once a day in the cattery.

By the time we reached the highway at Coolongolook I was desperate to go to the toilet. Roger would not stop. We would drive with me begging for him to have mercy.

‘You should have gone before you left home.’

‘I did. It's my blood pressure pills. They make me want to go frequently.’

‘You shouldn't have taken them then.’

‘What! So you'd prefer I had a stroke?’ But no amount of pleading would make him stop. I felt as though, when I finally was within reach of a toilet, I'd stand up and

wet myself. I never did, but it was always an uncomfortable drive that put us both in a bad mood by the time we got to Sydney.

Barely talking to each other, Roger wove in and out of the lanes full of peak hour motorists causing me to stiffen with fear. Eventually, what I considered a near miss would occur and I couldn't suppress the scream which rose unbidden from my gut. My constantly tense body and the sudden sharp shallow intake of air, followed by barely suppressed screams were enough to have the adrenaline pumping around Roger's body.

'I thought I'd just run over a baby.' He'd shout at me, 'I'm never driving with you again.' On one particularly bad day he simply stopped the car in heavy traffic, got out and went and sat in the rear passenger seat. 'You drive.'

'Don't be stupid,' I cried but he was not budging. He sat there, arms crossed, unmoving. With no choice but to get out myself and hop in the driver's seat I drove, petrified, in the traffic. Neither of us spoke to the other for several hours! Silence, I was discovering, was Roger's way of dealing with anger.

Roger's attitude was now dictatorial. As he couldn't control outside people and events I became the obvious target. I would be instructed how to do my allotted tasks and provided I did them as told there were no problems. Should I add my own twist to the job I was in definite danger of his verbal wrath followed by a period of silence, the length of which depended on how angry he had become. Although at the time it was happening my head filled with retorts and plans of action I suppressed expressing them to him. I realised he had undergone something of a personality change which I attributed to the stress he'd suffered before and after his kidnapping. I blamed Vanuatu rather than Roger.

My desire to have children was also growing stronger and I was now suffering severe mood swings. I hoped each month that I had fallen pregnant only to have this hope dashed with the onset of my period, which came with perfect regularity. I tossed up the avenues open to me to have children and decided further investigation was not a possibility. I was not prepared to ask Roger to go down the road of infertility clinics with their countless investigations. I had done that with my first husband and I had always blamed the results of his sperm count as being the final trigger which sent him down the road to alcoholism, drug abuse and eventual madness. I could not bring myself to ask Roger to go down that track. I had made that decision before we went to Vanuatu after I had undergone blood tests and exploratory surgery with no findings to

explain my apparent infertility. I knew Roger was quite a different person from my first husband but I was not prepared to jeopardise our relationship and now, with the personality changes he was exhibiting since our return to Australia, my resolve became firmer.

Our love for each other was still strong despite my monthly depression and Roger's volatile mood swings. We still enjoyed planning our days and our business together. We could still make each other laugh and were still best friends. However, apart from Darrell, we could go for weeks without seeing other people and I started to believe that it was crucial that we somehow integrate ourselves more into the community. I felt that being each other's sole company was unhealthy and allowed us to view the world from a perspective that was skewed from reality. We had lost touch in Vanuatu and I worried that we may be perpetuating this at Bucca Wauka.

Chapter 6

Secondary Income Source

Our visions for the bed and breakfast set-up were going to plan. Roger had completed his house cleaning and all our efforts were now concentrated on the garden. To our delight as we started clearing the long runners of kikuyu, we discovered that underneath were gardens.

'Richard had 'em done,' Darrell told us when we told him of our find. 'Got 'em done for the wedding when he and Bianca got married. Paid a fortune he did. They got married out by the pool.' We could understand choosing that position as the view was outstanding—all the way to Cape Hawke at Forster.

'He had all these bigwigs, actor types come from Sydney for the wedding.' We already knew that the actor Ray Barrett was a frequent visitor to Barcoleuwin. Roger had recognized his photograph and, on pointing him out to Richard, was told Ray was a good friends with his mother who was an actress.

Darrell continued after his pause. 'Pity I thought. He came with Jenny. Had a dog like yours. She was a lovely girl. She walked all over the place with that dog. Always had time fer yer. He met Bianca when he was teaching potting in town. She lived in one of them hippie communes t'other side of Gloucester.'

We could understand Darrell not taking to Bianca the way he had with the original girlfriend as whether it was shyness or something else we too had found Bianca unfriendly in our dealings with her.

Comment [IW1]: Check for other mentions of Biata and change to Bianca

Our life settled into lazy but goal-oriented days. Having found the hidden gardens we were intent on restoring and adding to them. Rising early we would wander into the garden in our pyjamas with the intention of planning our day but lunch time would often find us having missed breakfast, still undressed, weeding.

We were fast approaching completing all the tasks required to get the B&B up and running, however, and realised that we had to find a project that would keep us occupied once we were operational.

'Flowers,' Roger said to me one morning.

'What about flowers?'

‘There's a big market for flowers. I was listening to a programme on the radio. The Japanese can't get enough of our wild flowers. They pay really good money for them. I think we should go to a seminar they are having at Yarrahappini and find out about it. We could plant on that flat ground behind the dam and that way water wouldn't be a problem.’ His enthusiasm was infectious and we signed up for the information day at the flower farm.

It was a long day as we had decided to do it as a day trip—six hours travelling and four hours there, with lunch included. We arrived and joined fifteen other keen would-be flower growers on a tour of the farm and packing sheds. They had five acres under cultivation with half of this planted with flowers. The plantings were predominantly waratahs and other proteas and a bloom called a windflower that is commonly seen growing in poor soil on the side of the road. When I found out the price they were fetching I determined that I would start collecting the roadside specimens. I soon learned that the Japanese were very particular, accepting only perfectly formed flowers that had their six upright petals pristine white and the stamens a perfect shade of yellow. The roadside specimens were rarely either of these things as these characteristics are only obtained when the plants get exactly the right amount of water and soil pH. After the tour we had one talk about the growing requirements. I was already losing my enthusiasm for the flower project as it seemed like backbreaking, labour-intensive work. My back was already fragile from my nursing days so I couldn't see myself doing it. Roger, however, was still keen. Lunch was sumptuous with chicken and salads, assorted sandwiches and oodles of sweet, home-made slices as only rural women can produce.

Following lunch, we had some more talks from the experts. The first dealt with the procedure for marketing to Japan. We had already been told in the morning session about the need to spray for pests. Now we found on shipping your flowers, if bug-damaged blooms from another farmer are also found in the container, the customs officers would destroy the contents of the entire consignment. This would result in no payment to the farmer for that shipment while leaving them bearing the costs of transport and production of the flowers. We knew the effect that would have on us and although you could control the pest treatment that you carried out, it would have been impossible to control that of the other flower growers. That, coupled with the knowledge that a fluctuating dollar could impact negatively on the amount of

money received for your flowers, was sufficient to put the death knell on this project for Roger. We would have to look for another project.

On the way home we spied some long-eared, gangly-legged donkeys grazing on the low quality grasses and weeds growing along the side of the road in Krambach. We stopped the car for a closer look and a woman came out of the farmhouse nearby that we had always noticed due to the rusting agricultural implements in the home yard.

‘I was just saying hallo to your beautiful donkeys,’ Roger said in response to her questioning look.

‘I wouldn’t be without my girls,’ she replied, ‘and they are great for the paddocks. They’ll eat all the rubbish, even the bark off a tree and do well.’

‘Even blady grass?’ What a joy it would be to have an animal that would mow the blady grass which the cattle wouldn’t touch.

‘Yes, they’ll eat it but only if there is nothing easier. Tether them in a paddock of blady grass and they’ll eat it.’

‘Do you know where we could buy some donkeys?’ I knew with that question that Roger was going to make sure that we found some donkeys to roam our paddocks. They would also provide Snowflake, the miniature horse, with companionship. We had concerns that she was lonely and donkeys would allay these.

‘Wada yer want donkeys fer?’ Darrell asked when we told him our plan. ‘Good fer nuttin’.’

‘I thought I might teach them to follow me around with saddle bags that I could load with wood. I'm finding it difficult lugging the wood up the hill.’ I had exhausted the supply around the house and thought this might be a way around it.

‘Donkeys don't do nuttin yer tell em to. What yer need is a pig.’

‘What do we want a pig for?’ Roger asked.

‘Them tourists that stay'll like to see a pig.’

That was probably true. ‘But we don't know the first thing about pigs.’

‘Youse can keep it next to the chickens. Already got a pen there just needs fixing a bit but yer can let the pig out to wander during the day. Just lock him up of a night.’

I was almost sold on the idea. Glancing at Roger I could see he would need a bit more convincing. ‘Pigs are supposed to make great pets.’

‘Did youse see that program on the telly t'other night. Woman had a pet pig. Lived in the house. She even let it go on the lounge. I think that's a bit much but a pig sure do make a place a farm. I've got one you can have.’

I wanted it. Roger rarely denied me anything apart from toilet stops if he thought it would make me happy. Seeing my questioning, wanting look he said, ‘If you want one you can get it but I still think we should get some donkeys.’

I kissed Roger and whispered my thank yous. ‘Yes, we'll take him,’ I looked at Darrell. ‘And we should get some donkeys,’ I said.

The pig arrived five days later. I concealed my disappointment that my expected pink, virtually hairless pig was instead an ugly, black and white bristly-haired animal with a long pointy snout that held no appeal whatsoever. Her appeal declined even further as the days went by on finding she was an expert escapologist. No matter what repairs we did to the run next to the chicken house the pig was out the next morning. Most mornings we found it rooting around in the dam and we feared that it would destroy the little water-holding ability it had left. We were at our wits’ end about what to do with her, when, on the sixth night, she disappeared without trace. The sad fate of this pig lives on as a dinner party story told by a friend who tells of the pig, named Helen after her, that became a dingo's supper.

‘Not to worry,’ Darrell said when he heard of the pig’s disappearance. ‘I've got a lovely pig fer yer. She’s a good baconer. Long and lean. She won't try and get out. Fact is, yer don't have to pen her. Too big fer a dingo ter take.’

‘I'm more worried about the dam,’ Roger said.

‘That other one’s got a bit of wild blood. Youse won’t have to worry with this one.’

And so Mrs Wiggins arrived on the farm. This time I loved her. She was friendly and very, very pink. She and Mungo formed a close attachment. Every morning Mungo would do the rounds of all living creatures to check that all was well. When he was let out of the laundry in the morning he would race up the stairs to our bedroom, sliding on the polished timber floors, legs splayed in his eagerness to greet the person who had the luxury to still be in bed. He would then go to say good morning to the chickens, Snowflake and Mrs Wiggins. We erected a beach umbrella above the dam as we didn't want Mrs Wiggins to get her very pink skin sunburnt. It brought a bit of the French Riviera to Barcoleuwin as both Mungo and Mrs Wiggins stretched out together lying in the shade.

We had enclosed an area under the house to contain Mungo on the rare occasion that we had to leave the property without him. We arrived home one day to find that Mrs Wiggins had broken the fence separating the house from the paddock and was lying stretched out along the wire on one side of Mungo's enclosure whilst Mungo stretched out inside, getting as close to each other as they could. We found this endearing and did nothing to stop Mrs Wiggins from keeping Mungo company. We regretted our lack of action when we came home after a trip to town to find Mrs Wiggins wallowing happily, covered in grey slime in what, before we left home, had been a grassed area covering our septic runoff area. As she extricated herself from the sludge, we heard the slurp as the quagmire released her. The overpowering smell of raw sewage caused me to gag and I could see from the grimace on Roger's face that he was struggling not to vomit.

Now all we needed was the inspector from Taree Council to come to check our facility to give approval for the development application we had lodged for bed and breakfast status. To repair it as quickly as possible, we spent that night researching the mechanics of a septic system on the internet, arming ourselves with the knowledge to do our version of a transpiration leech field, an area we'd previously not even thought about. The almost clean water from the septic goes into this area where its passage through gravel pits, soil and uptake by plants eventually leads to crystal clear water finally entering the waterway. Mrs Wiggins had done a good job disrupting this and as we examined the damage we sank down to our knees in the grey sludge that was now bereft of any sign of the grass which had once covered it. The slime slid down inside our gumboots and our feet slurped inside them. I doubted that the pungent odour would ever leave our nostrils as it seemed to stay with us even when we left the area. We set to work to recreate the gravel pits which we doubted had ever been laid properly. We dug through sludge to make the pits deep enough, removing the large rocks by hand. By the end of the day we looked like we'd spent a day mud wrestling as our clothes were covered and it dripped from our hair. We stripped in the shower, letting our clothes drop where they fell, relishing the hot clean water that washed over us. We fell into bed early, exhausted but satisfied that we had made headway in digging trenches to fill with gravel to increase the size of the area and give the water a slower journey down the hill whilst it cleansed itself. We rose early for the next three days and worked well into the afternoon. Our hands sustained lots of cuts despite the gloves we wore as we did all the work by hand, in difficult, rocky terrain. It took us

four days to finish and two days later the building/health inspector arrived to carry out his inspection of the property.

When he arrived I felt like I did on the occasions I had been sent to the headmaster's office. We held our breaths, but, apart from having to put signs on all taps that our water was not potable and guaranteeing we would supply our guests with bottled water to drink, all was satisfactory. Our drinking water came from a tank, which filled from rainwater off the house roof, and because we did not test weekly for bacteria and heavy metals the authorities classified it not fit to drink. Australia's tendency to sue had increased in our absence, veering towards the litigation-happy tendencies of the United States with the legislators creating new rules at every available opportunity. This was just another frustration for Roger. In addition to this we had to pay a levy of twelve hundred dollars for the upkeep of the road due to the increase in traffic that would result from our business. 'It's daylight robbery! How many guests do they think we're going to get. The cattle trucks going up to Darrell's will cause more damage than the few guests we'll get.' Roger complained bitterly at the unfairness of this levy and our petition to council was to no avail. There was no avoiding this penalty. We shared a bottle of wine to celebrate the day we received our approval to operate. Now we could make some money to offset the steady stream that was being spent.

Roger's determination to get a couple of donkeys was unwavering and when the donkey woman from Krambach rang, telling him an Irishman had a couple for sale on a property slightly to the east, Roger immediately contacted him. He arranged to see them on a property near Krambach, a small village that the main road, Bucketts Way, cut in half.

Shortly after leaving Krambach we spied the Irish flag that was the sign of reaching our destination. We drove up a long, straight, forested road, crossing a couple of geese and duck laden dams, before arriving at a clearing which held some ramshackle sheds and an old caravan. 'How do?' The Irishman, Sean, greeted us and took us over to a small fenced paddock where an old, toothless horse waited at the fence.

'Aye saved him from the knackers yard I did. He's a beautiful beastie but he's not long for this world. Hard for'im to eat with so few teeth. When he goes I'm orf back to Ireland. I got a yen to see the old country afore I go,' Sean said, his lilting Irish accent song-like. The thin man stooped and his movements were slow and

careful. His furrowed face gave the appearance of one suffering from chronic pain although he wasn't that old. Perhaps in his late fifties or early sixties.

‘He's beautiful,’ I said. ‘Look at the donkeys!’ I exclaimed, tugging on Roger's arm. Two donkeys were coming at a run, nuzzling up to Sean when they reached him.

‘I hurt my back at work,’ Sean said, ignoring my interruption, ‘and I'm on permanent disability. I got a compensation payout so I can afford a trip back home to Ireland but I have to make sure the girls are well looked after afore I go.’

‘We'll make sure we look after them. How much do you want for them?’ Roger asked.

‘Afore I let the girls go anywheres I have to come have a looky see. They ain’t going nowhere less it’s a right suitable home for them. If it is, I'd be happy with $250 for both. I don't want them separated. They've been together all their lives.’ We petted the donkeys for some time and got the ins and outs of donkey husbandry. Sean made sure we understood how important foot care was for these desert animals. On our soft wet ground, without regular trimming of their hooves, they were prone to diseases and abscesses.

With night falling, we followed Sean as he fed his chickens and geese before locking them up for the night and then joined him for a cup of tea in his caravan. Space inside was scarce so Sean sat on the steps. Birds flew in and roosted on various trees, chairs and shed rafters, coming to Sean when he stood with arms outstretched holding food for them in his hands.

On our way home, we marveled at how this man lived alone, communing with nature, isolated from any modern conveniences. Although a number of our friends would say we were doing that very thing and had in Vanuatu, we both felt we were comfortable having the luxury of modern conveniences. And, soon some paying guests to share it with.

The donkeys arrived the day after Sean had inspected and deemed our place suitable for them. We attempted to offload them on the hill we had used for the cows, but the donkeys at first refused to budge. We pushed and pulled and when they did finally move Sean yelled to Roger ‘Grab the rope! Don't let the rope go!’ Without thinking Roger did as Sean ordered. The first donkey took off with Roger running to keep up but never relinquishing his grip on the rope. The other donkey followed the first through our front gate. Now, in the sapling-covered paddock the donkey increased its momentum to a gallop, trying to lose the man, fists clenched white, that

was tethered to him. Despite having to hurdle boulders and dodge trees, still Roger held on. It looked funny but I repressed my laughter as I knew Roger wouldn't appreciate it.

Finally, the donkey stopped running and they and Roger stood, sweat pouring off them, heaving as they tried to catch their breath. 'Why dinya let him go once you were in?' Sean asked.

'You told me not to let go. I knew I should've once we were in the gate as there was nowhere they could go. I just didn't know if there was a reason I had to hold her.'

The donkeys soon settled in. Snowflake accepted them as company and the three were constant companions as they wandered the paddocks grazing. They soon got used to a routine of being hand-fed treats in the morning and again in the evening. If I was late for these sessions they would loudly bray, a sound which could be heard for up to three kilometres away but without neighbours, their noise didn't disturb anyone.

Still on the lookout for a farming pursuit, we became excited when visiting the Taree Recycled Centre to discover rabbits that looked like Easter Bunnies with white, long, floppy ears and a small pink, twitching noses. Our interest was piqued when we heard they were breeding New Zealand White rabbits to supply breeding pairs to people setting up rabbit farms for meat production. The breeder encouraged us to go to a seminar being held near Port Macquarie that would answer all our questions about rabbit farming.

A couple of weeks later found us sitting with sixty-five other potential rabbit farmers listening to numerous speakers who enthused us with statistics of how the demand far outweighed the supply. Persuasively the experts told of the huge restaurant trade that needed supplies of bunnies and the medical benefits of rabbits as the Heart Foundation was endorsing them as a healthy meat alternative. All parts of the rabbit would be used due to the popularity of Akubra hats, which used the rabbit pelts. A rabbittoir already existed in Kempsey and the local council had approved plans for building one in Gloucester. Unlike the flower growing, it seemed that the work was not onerous, apart from ensuring temperature regulation in their housing and giving the injections young rabbits needed to vaccinate against disease. The capital costs of building a shed system that allowed for ventilation, cooling and heating if required was the largest cost, followed by the individual containment system. The cages that the rabbits were kept in allowed for their waste product to drop

to a lower level where the fluid waste drained off allowing for the sale of the solid waste as fertiliser. As I listened I could not overcome an increasing feeling that the rabbit business did not make sense. When they called for questions from the floor I had three ready to go.

'Can you tell me what the current market for rabbit meat is?' I was given an answer that led me to believe there were not lots of businesses trying to buy rabbits.

'You have said that the farmer has to charge eighteen dollars to cover their costs so, to make a profit, you would have to sell for at least twenty dollars. Then for the butcher to make a profit he would have to sell for around twenty-five dollars minimum. Do you think that in Australia, where rabbit is seen as Depression food and therefore, in people's minds, a cheap meat, will people buy rabbit for the same price as they can buy rump steak?'

'This is where good marketing comes in. It will be marketed as a good heart-friendly food as it is leaner than pork, beef or chicken. The New Zealand White does not taste like wild rabbit but more like chicken so with good marketing strategies thoughts of Depression food will be gone. Some of the very good restaurants are serving rabbit on their menus which will also help change this perception.'

There were a few more positive questions from the floor before I managed to ask my final question. 'If everybody in this room goes into production in the next few months, and we all have rabbits for sale in around two to three months, would we be able to sell our product at the required price or would there be a glut on the market?'

The mumblings in the room were getting louder. Christian, a Frenchman who lived in Gloucester, had already set up his infrastructure at great expense and his face became a kaleidoscope of colour, first draining to an ashen white and just as quickly becoming red as he reacted to my question. His voice cracked when he reacted, sounding and looking as though tears were imminent. Some angry mutterings erupted throughout the audience and I wondered whether the organisers would sell the number of breeders they had expected to.

For us, the day showed it was not viable due to the length of time it would take to recoup the capital expenses. After a disappointing, tasteless rabbit lunch, missing the strong gamey taste of wild rabbit, we decided the industry would never take off. Instead, we would be content with the little we could make from the cows and calves, supplemented by the bed and breakfast.

Mungo and Mrs Wiggins

View from our verandah. The dam is on our property

Chapter 7

Guests Arrive

Our first guests were non-paying and regular visitors. They included my mother who enjoyed our rural outlook. She was a bit of a hit with Darrell who insisted we go with him to see his patch of rainforest. We all clambered into his four-wheel drive dual cab and set off across his paddocks, climbing steeply until we reached the ridge at the top. I anxiously stared at the drops on either side of the steep terrain, repressing the scream that was trying to escape. I wished fervently that I hadn't come. Once on the ridge I breathed again as, although it was narrow, the ground didn't drop away on either side of the truck. Finally Darrell pulled up. 'This is it,' he said. 'We're here. It's shank's pony now.'

'Is it a difficult walk?' I directed my question at Darrell letting him know it was my mother's ability that was in question.

'Nah. Youse don't 'ave to go far befores youse sees 'em. Youse'll hear 'em and smell 'em before youse get there.' We took off and it wasn't long before the overpowering stench of undiluted ammonia burnt our nostrils.

'You weren't joking when you said we'd smell them. It's as though we're walking through a well-used kitty litter box.' The bats were becoming unsettled with our movement and the high-pitched cat fighting sound they emitted was deafening.

'Youse knows why they hang upside down like that?'

'No,' we said in unison.

'Bats aint like birds. They can't take off from still. Not got enough flap so what they do is hang upside down high up then when they take off they just fall out of the tree with a gliding start. They can take off real quick that way. You knows, if a bat dies when he's hanging he'll hang until he turns to dust or the branch breaks.'

'How come?' I was interested.

'Someting to do with being relaxed. His claws are curled up but when he tenses his muscle they open up. Can't get more relaxed than dead.' Darrell laughed and we couldn't help but join in. We stayed a while longer then my mother returned to the car the way we had come whilst we followed Darrell further into the rainforest.

His rainforest put my little one to shame. The treetop canopy was so thick that the light barely made it to the rich leaf litter, which was creating a thick carpet for the

forest floor. As we went further away from our entry point the darker it became, until eventually no light penetrated from the edges at all. It was impossible to tell how large an area it took up. In the dripping dampness bird's nest and tree ferns thrived. Darrell pointed out the red cedars, tallow wood and red mahogany trees and told us of his childhood accompanying his timber cutting father on the bullock train to collect these timbers. Our walk back to the car did not last long enough.

Other regular guests were my brother and his two children, Gwen and Esme. I loved them coming as it gave me a taste of motherhood. Both the girls were prone to tantrums if they didn't get their own way but I seemed to have no problems getting them to behave and do what I asked of them. After she'd seen me deal with one of their tantrums my mother said to me, 'Irene, you'd make a great mother. Look how easily you manage the girls. I hope you aren't going to leave it too long before you have a baby.'

'We'll see,' I replied with a smile whilst my heart twisted in anguish. My mother had no idea how painful her innocent statement had been for me. No idea how desperately I craved to hold and suckle my own child.

On one of the girls' visits we gave them a kite to fly. The farm presented an easy launch pad, I thought, as all you would have to do would be run down the hill trailing the kite and letting it catch the wind. The girls didn't appear to have this concept as in their attempts to launch it they ran across the hill rather than down it. Being a good aunt I demonstrated, taking the kite from them and setting off at a trot down the steep hill. By the time the kite lifted off, soaring high into the blue of the sky I found I was unable to stop my downhill run. My legs took on a momentum of their own, turning faster and faster. I'd never run so quickly in all my life and my legs felt as though they'd become engine wheels that were blurring with the speed. My already racing heart started missing beats as the rocky terrain in front of me fell away steeply and the boulders loomed large. I could jump the smaller rocks that were in my way but the boulders coming up would not be as easy to hurdle. I saw myself with a broken neck and twisted limbs and I threw myself sideways, hoping the fall would stop my rapid descent. It did. As I picked up my cut and bruised body, the tinkle of little girl's laughter and the louder guffaws I knew came from Roger floated down the hill to my ears. 'Do it your way,' I said when they reached me.

Several friends were also regular visitors. They all loved the peace and tranquility that the farm gave them from their busy lives and for us it gave us

company that I, at least, craved. All our friends loved Mungo, whose adorable actions made us laugh, such as the time he appeared with our friend's daughter's dummy correctly positioned in his mouth. Most visitors, however, were wary of Trog who was prone to biting, hard, when least expected. As our friends and family did not translate to dollars by August 1997 we were in need of income. We had to get some paying guests.

For a small fee we signed up with the Gloucester Visitor Information Centre hoping they would send some visitors our way. They immediately presented us with various magazines, advising that we place advertisements but all at significant cost. We chose two and posted:

BARCOLEUWIN
A unique country getaway at Bucca Wauka
Roger and Irene invite you to enjoy
Breathtaking views, delicious food and
Convivial company. Relax by the pool, play
tennis, bushwalk on the property or explore
the local countryside.

Our first guests, from South Australia, came to us via the Visitors Information Centre in September. Mungo proved problematical as all dogs petrified Fran. Mungo sensed this and made no sudden movements, standing or lying quietly until gradually she relaxed. By the time they left, she was sitting beside him on the steps, patting his head. She had her husband, Brian, take a photograph of her in this position as she declared: 'No-one back home will believe me unless I have proof.'

Other early guests were Peter and Roslyn. They had also come via the Visitors Information Centre. They travelled by train which we met to transport them to Barcoleuwin. They were both chatty, holding hands in the back seat, giving each other the shy glances of new love on their first trip away together.

Peter was a train spotter and did not have a car as he preferred to travel by rail. Ros was new to the joys of trains and train timetables. They spent the days wandering the bush tracks, stopping at scenic spots to eat the picnics, packed by Roger, that they took with them. At night they ate with us and over a good bottle of red wine we all told stories that captivated an already captive audience. Ours of course revolved around Vanuatu and life on the farm, whilst Peter regaled us with train schedules,

routes and locomotive details. Mungo again made himself known to our guests when Peter vacated his side of the bed for an early morning bathroom visit. Mungo decided to keep his side of the bed warm for him and curled up next to Ros who woke abruptly, wondering why Peter was suddenly nuzzling her with a wet, cold nose.

Peter and Ros were to become regular visitors, celebrating a few relationship milestones with us. They returned in October 1998 and shared their engagement with us, and again visited us, although we no longer had the bed and breakfast, shortly after their wedding in March 2002. By this time Peter had succumbed to travelling by car.

When the junior tennis competition came to Gloucester every accommodation venue was filled to capacity, including ours. We had less to do with these people than we did with most of our guests as they left early for the tennis courts and did not return until the evening, after dinner. We had a mother with three children and another couple staying. The mother was trying to relive her failed time on the tennis circuit through her eldest child who was, apparently, a good tennis player. The child gave the distinct impression that she would rather be doing other things with her time.

It became time to re-advertise in the magazines to which we had subscribed earlier but we decided that the cost was not offset by the benefit and did not renew. Instead we advertised in the Uniting Church magazine. It was very cheap, less than twenty dollars, and we believed that it would give us wide coverage with an audience that would have both the money and time to travel. Friends had suggested that our place would be perfect for 'dinks' (double income no kids) and that we should advertise in gay magazines as these people would be our perfect clientele. We thought the church, however, would be just as good and so it proved. Between it and the Visitors Information Centre we had as many guests staying as we wanted.

We discovered that we did not particularly enjoy having strangers in the house. I found I had trouble sleeping when we had clients and worried about the creaks and groans that the wooden floorboards made whenever anyone was afoot and, already on edge, I heard every sound! I was also paranoid that any sound we might make would disturb our guests. I made Roger move around as though walking on eggshells and would only talk in whispers to him. 'Shhhhh!' I'd put my finger to my anger-straightened lips trying to get him to be quieter.

This annoyed him immensely, 'What are you trying to say?' He spoke in a tone a decibel higher than his usual speech. The more my anxiety grew the louder his volume. We grew to dread guests coming. Another of my concerns was only having

one guest bathroom that all had to share. To decrease my unease we limited ourselves to one group of people at a time, unless absolutely forced to do otherwise. Although this helped quench my concerns I never entirely relaxed.

A young couple from the country sent both our stress levels soaring. They had left their young children with her parents so they could have an indulgent weekend alone. Although they didn't say anything to us they were obviously surprised and uncomfortable that we were living in the same house with them. We went about our normal daily tasks but anytime we entered the house we would notice an immediate flurry of activity as they removed their feet from the coffee table and sat upright, like students waiting for the headmaster, on the lounge. They made no effort to go outside the house. By the middle of their first day I was as taut as a tight rope. 'Let's go to Taree for the afternoon and leave them to it,' Roger suggested.

'Good idea,' I said. Telling our guests we had to go out we quickly left. Our afternoon was pleasant as we hit the shops and took Mungo for a long walk along the river. In an effort to alleviate the tension I was feeling and the concerns I felt they too were experiencing, I decided to talk to them as they had another two nights remaining.

On broaching my concerns later I discovered the husband had recently been discharged from St Vincent's Hospital following emergency bypass heart surgery. Now I understood. I had often seen it in the Coronary Care Unit in which I worked, that men in particular felt emasculated following a heart attack. This particular man had a lot to contend with as he was much younger than most of the cardiac patients I had nursed and additionally had a young family that he needed to support. With this knowledge we were able to pass the next day and two nights easily as they no longer had to pretend all was well and we gave them plenty of space.

Overall meals were fun events. Roger was a great cook and served superb entrees and main courses whilst I was the dessert cook and bread maker. Dinner always felt as though we were with friends and much laughter and storytelling occurred. Roger was a good raconteur with some riveting stories to tell that he told with his very English sense of humour. He would leave guests enthralled, begging for more stories of our time on the island of Tanna, making a resort work without either electricity or water, where forty babies could be born to one woman bringing the entire island to a halt as everyone made pilgrimage to see them, and where witch doctors were tested to determine their skill levels after their treatment had left a local man dying after being hit by a rock flung from the volcano. Always there would be

absolute silence as he told of his kidnap, his fears as the men who held him drove off into the bush rather than take the road to the airport as they had promised him. I watched him on these evenings of hilarity and I could see the more he spoke the more drained he became. It was as though his essence was being soaked up by those listening leaving him spent, wanting to be left alone. The morning following such evenings, we would see our guests off leaving me feeling flat wondering *why aren't we going too?* Roger, I knew, was relieved and praying that our next booked guests were some way in the distance.

I wondered whether these memories were painful and eventually I asked. 'You're great at telling our stories but does it bring it all back? You have people eating out of your hand but you never let on that you were frightened? Were you worried when you were stolen?'

'At first I was angry but when we went past the airport I thought I'm done for. I knew they'd killed that woman for a few bags and mats and I didn't like my chances. I couldn't see any way of escaping. Yes, I was shit scared.'

'Do you think that might be why you have no patience now?'

'I hadn't thought about it but perhaps. I hated not being able to go back to Australia when your father died. And I've never felt so alone as I did when you left.' He paused, lost in his memories. 'And those bloody tourists who were there when you left. They were so understanding and nice to me, told me they'd had a wonderful time and went home and complained that their room wasn't cleaned during their stay. Tried to get their money refunded. That makes me mad thinking of it.' The moment was gone as Roger returned to reminiscing about our time on the island but I wondered whether some of his new mood swings were due to the psychological trauma he must have suffered.

None of our guests were aware, however, that Roger would prefer them gone. His performance was so good, that one couple, John and Karen, so enjoyed the evening they decided that they would sell their property on the Central Coast and open their own bed and breakfast. During the evening, not only did we tell our tales but John told his own story of coming to Australia as a Barnardo's boy thinking he was going on the boat for an afternoon's birthday party. We wondered how they would be as hosts of a bed and breakfast as their tales were told without humour where Roger would have his listeners captivated and laughing.

We found the true reality of a bed and breakfast in the country was that people really didn't want to stay on a property in a rural setting. The township of Gloucester was country enough for most people from the city and to go another half hour into the more removed reaches on dirt roads was not the desired holiday break for most people. This was, for us, a godsend. It meant that we never had people arriving unannounced who saw our property as they drove past and we rarely had unexpected guests book in at the last minute. Our guest numbers weren't huge but they were more than we wanted.

In our last year *Barkeldine*, a farmstay half a kilometre from our place, reopened. We had viewed it when we were looking to buy our property and dismissed it. Despite being set up for visitors we found it was in a bad state of repair and would need massive renovations to bring it up to scratch, making the high asking price unreasonable. Originally, a fellow who also owned a hotel in Sydney popular with the Japanese, operated the farmstay. He loaded his hotel guests onto a bus and brought them to his farm. Here they would have an Aussie BBQ, a horse ride and shoot holes in their jeans, taking them home as a souvenir, evidence of their brush with the Aussie outback. He had done well as he had the ready market with which to fill the beds.

Jim and Sue bought it and spent a massive amount of money not only on the bunkhouse accommodation but also converting the farmhouse to a bed and breakfast. As they had spent so much money they had no choice but to try and recoup it. They volunteered at the Gloucester Visitors Information Centre and Jim set up a business taking four-wheel drive tours to the Barrington Tops. Although I don't know what their guest figures were, I doubt they did much better than we did because of their distance from town, but unlike us they enjoyed B & B life and a few years later opened an establishment in the township of Gloucester itself.

Chapter 8

Landcare

Despite our guests company, we were yet to meet people with whom we could become friends. We discovered that the townsfolk, or at least the ones we met, didn't travel the distance to our place for their holidays and most definitely refused to travel on dirt roads. Cottages used by weekenders who seldom visited, and the houses of the rare long-time locals that didn't socialise, surrounded our property. These folk were friendly if you ran into them on the road, but dinners were just not part of the social make-up of the rural country folk. When an invitation to attend the next Landcare meeting appeared in our letterbox I was determined to go. I believed that this was the chance to at last meet some local people, and get to know some of the women in the area.

Roger was less keen but we set off to Bunyah with great excitement. Bunyah was a much bigger area than our locality at Bucca Wauka. It boasted a hall with a small stretch of bitumen on the road outside it, and a tennis court. Bucca Wauka had none of these community facilities. We walked into the wooden building to find the meeting already in noisy progress. We were met with utter silence as twenty weather-worn male faces turned to stare at us. I was the only woman in the room. We introduced ourselves and the meeting continued, but the restraint was now obvious. There was none of the carefree banter we had heard on our arrival. When someone mentioned a koala, I saw him receive a warning kick under the table from another man and the conversation ceased immediately. I realised that these farmers saw us as a threat, greenies from the city. Over time I understood their reticence as, in the case of koalas, if one was reported on your property government regulations restricted what farm work could be performed. I struggled unsuccessfully to find a question I could ask that would put them more at ease. We sat and took it in, saying little and, after some stilted conversation over a cup of tea at the conclusion, we made our welcome departure.

'I'm not going there again,' Roger declared.

'Oh come on. You have to give it more than one go.'

‘I don't think so.’

‘Didn't you think it was funny when they called for someone to go on the regional committee looking at the rabbit problem and the release of calicivirus?’

‘Yes. No-one had a problem with rabbits and that Geoff fellow said 'Ain't you got a problem Mark. Ain't you got a rabbit under your house eating your carrots?'‘

‘One rabbit and they’ve got a problem? And that rabbit qualified him to be on the committee!’

Our laughter was unrestrained and tears were streaming down our faces—not so much at the rabbit which triggered it but rather how we must have appeared to the farmers we had just met.

I managed to get Roger to attend one more monthly meeting before he put his foot down and refused to go anymore. Still the only woman attending, I continued being a silent presence but took in everything that was going on. Gradually, little by little, the men started to accept me. We attended the field days on giant Parramatta grass, a noxious weed that is of low feed value and can seriously affect pasture production. It was a fascinating day, not because of the grass so much, but because we visited three farms that had various trials in progress to eradicate it. For the first time I met some women who lived in the area.

At the next meeting, the secretary read out a letter letting us know that our Landcare group had been successful in its grant application to do some research into gully erosion.

‘We need some volunteers for the committee,’ the chairman said.

‘I'll do it,’ Jim volunteered, quickly followed by another two men.

‘Anybody else?’ The room was silent. ‘How about you Irene?’

‘I don't know the first thing about gully erosion.’

‘Don't matter. Nor do we,’ Jim replied. ‘Come on. We'll learn together.’

‘Okay,’ I said. We agreed to meet at Jim's farm, half way between Bunyah and Bucca Wauka, a couple of nights later. At that meeting I learnt that gully erosion is where surface water gouges out a channel that is deeper than thirty centimetres. It usually occurs on cleared land and can either disperse the soil from the surface or erode it from underneath the soil level causing a tunnel where, eventually, the roof caves in leaving a gully in its wake. We decided that we would do five initial farm inspections, to determine the extent of the current gully erosion and whether it was active or stable. We would then determine the appropriate treatment for the problem

and the entire group would assist the farmer to do this. By taking initial photographs and measurements, our efforts would be evaluated in six months and then again a year after treatment had been completed.

Again, I relished these farm visits. The first farm, owned by a single man, was closer to Cooloongolook and consisted of relatively flat land that the Wang Wauk creek ran through.

‘Is that normal?’ I asked Jim, pointing to the bones and rotting flesh of yet another steer carcass, one of many that we had seen scattered across the property.

‘Happens sometimes. ‘Specially in drought. He's just got too many beasts,’ Jim replied.

‘He should at least burn 'em,’ Clarrie cut in.

His gully erosion, we decided, was stable and no longer active as the sides were no longer steep and had a covering of grass. Along the soil cliff which edged his riverbank trees clung precariously with one half of their roots exposed and grass trailing off the edge like a curtain. Not having fenced to prevent his cattle having access to the river meant that in places their trampling had moved the edge further back into the paddock creating the earth to fall away and create a ramp that the cattle then used to get to the water’s edge. This riverbank erosion was severe but our task didn’t include this type of erosion. ‘You gettin’ the oars ready for your house. This river’ll soon be under it ‘less youse do something about it.’ Clarrie’s comment was jocular but the underlying message was far from funny.

On the next farm we found what we were looking for: active surface gully erosion. From above the gully it looked as though an earthquake had cracked the earth in two. We clambered into the gully and as we walked along the floor, the sides steeply rose above us, dwarfing us in the gaping hole. We measured the width and the depth to get baseline measurements so that we would be able to compare before and after to gauge the effectiveness of the rectification work we planned on implementing. After evaluating the land to determine the best location for earthworks that would divert the water and deciding where plantings should be placed that would hold the soil in place by their root spread, we gratefully sank into the comfy verandah chairs, pleased to be out of the heat of the day being served with a sumptuous lunch. Here I met another local lady. She was older and dressed as I was becoming accustomed to seeing. Younger women wore trousers or jeans, but older women always appeared in floral dresses that seemed to have come from the fifties. She was friendly but not

interested in erosion so left us to eat the feast of country goodness she had prepared. The thick, creamy pumpkin soup exploded in my mouth with a nutty sweetness and just a hint of ginger and bacon. This would have been sufficient for me but as the plates were whisked away by our invisible hostess bulging salad sandwiches replaced them. Now seriously full but with eyes bigger than my stomach I found the plate of gooey slices irresistible along with the cup of coffee to wash them down.

After lunch I would have been happy to have a lie down I'd eaten so much but instead we saw a farm with tunnel erosion, followed by another with extremely active erosion. Standing on the floor of the gully with the red sandy soil towering above me it was not quite the Grand Canyon but maybe so in a few years. I felt privileged to be travelling in the four-wheel drive seeing vistas that would never be seen from the road. Landscapes of such beauty, despite the erosion, that would make an artist's heart beat faster. Our valley was beautiful and diverse.

Our final inspection was of a property owned by another relative newcomer to the area. He walked us around his property looking at areas that he was unsure of. We were lucky to see any of his land as all our eyes seemed locked on the man's nether regions where his testicles waggled on either side of the crutch of his extremely short stubby shorts. He appeared oblivious and worsened the problem as he would climb on boulders to point out areas in the distance but also putting his parts right at eye level. We were very glad therefore of his dog's antics which provided a welcome diversion. Whilst his wife supplied us with afternoon tea we threw stones into the dam for the dog, which took off after them. When it reached the dam the dog would dive, head first, into the water and resurface with a stone in his mouth, immediately bringing it back to have it thrown again.

I felt a nice warm glow of contentment when I returned home that night. I was tired but I'd enjoyed the interaction with other people. I'd felt accepted and part of a group and rejoiced in the belief that the men were finally accepting me. At Darrell's Christmas Party, held on his property further up our road, that feeling intensified as we mingled in the crowd, finding numerous men and women we now knew and with whom we could chatter having met them through Landcare and Darrell.

At the next Landcare meeting I was surprised but happy to find I was no longer the only woman attending. A widow who was running the family's dairy farm and one of the wives had decided that it was no longer a men's only club and wanted to participate. By the time we left Bucca Wauka there were a total of eight women

attending the Landcare meetings, which, in addition to caring for the land, were becoming social outings.

My niece Esme and where I started running downhill to demonstrate kite flying

A koala on our property

Chapter 9

Bulls and Cows

Darrell informed us it was time to sell our male calves. He organised his son to help him round them up. The men arrived on horseback early in the morning with several red kelpies at their heels. We were requested to stay out of the way so from the house verandah we watched them work. Whistling commands to the dogs they surrounded the beasts, herding them into a bunch and with more whistles the dogs somehow knew which animal they were to cut from the mob. Once separated, the dogs and horsemen herded the steers up the road to the yards at Darrellene's place, where they awaited the truck to transport them to market.

Despite not having named them, I hated to think of them going to market for butchering. Darrell assured me they would be sold to a farmer who would fatten them up for the Japanese market. This made me feel a little better to think that they had a bit more time to enjoy the blue sky and to chew their cud.

'Youse got ter build yerselves yards.'

'Why?' I asked Darrell innocently.

'Now youse got cows you gotta drench 'em, inject 'em and it'll make it easy to get 'em on and off the truck when it's time to sell 'em, 'n' it's easier than walkin' 'em up the road.'

'What do you have to drench and inject them for?' I was starting to dread my involvement in the process I knew absolutely nothing about.

'Worms. All kinds of worms. You got Hair worms what attack the small intestine. Then youse got the Brown Stomach worm, and the Barbers Pole worm and another couple as well. Youse know cows ain't like us. They got four stomachs. Grass is too hard to digest so they vomit it and chew it and swallow it and do it all over again 'til eventually it gets to the fourth stomach, which is like our stomach, and from there it goes to the bowel.'

'What do we have to do to build yards?' Roger brought the subject back to its starting point in one of Darrell's long breaks in conversation.

'You should buy a crush and we'll build the yards and the race ourselves. I'll help youse.'

‘Why do we need a crush?’ Roger asked.

‘Cause youse got to do things to the cows, and youse got to look at ‘em regular like and if youse got to get the vet to come he won't look at 'em unless youse got ‘em in a crush.’

We started looking for a reasonably priced crush. In Gloucester they were all expensive and we were finding that our farm was walking money out the gate but not bringing anything in. We finally located a considerably cheaper steel one in Tamworth. We paid the price and awaited its delivery.

Darrell had decided the best position for our yards was on the road, at the corner of our furthest boundary. This would give all-weather access for trucks, good drainage when it rained (so that the hooves of the animals wouldn't sink into mud), and a nice grass paddock where we were to encourage the cattle to camp by regularly providing hay for them there.

Once we knew the dimensions of the crush we created a cement pad on which we would bolt it. The next day Darrell arrived sitting atop his tractor. Again Roger and I sat aimlessly whilst Darrell explored our gullies and ridges for the tallowoods of the right diameter to use as the timber to construct the yards and the race. When these trees were found, he went to work with his chainsaw, cutting them down and then chaining them individually to his tractor to pull it back to our work area. Although we were keen to be helping with these preparations, I doubt we would have been so enthusiastic if we had realised that once Darrell had transported sufficient trees to our worksite, we were to debark them.

‘Youse gotta take the bark orf of ‘em ‘cause bark rots quicker than the hardwood underneath,’ Darrell said. ‘If youse leave the bark on then when it rots youse end up with a hole too big for the post and it’ll rattle around in a hole that’s too big for it.’ As he spoke he pulled out a dirty flannelette bag and removed something wrapped in an oily cloth. Unwrapping it we saw an implement that resembled a giant cheese slicer.

Darrell deftly cut into the bark with a tomahawk enabling him to lift a section of the bark, allowing him to insert the wire of the cheese grater tool. With one smooth motion he pulled the gadget down the length of the tree, removing a large section of bark. Once this strip was remove, he inserted a knife under the remaining bark and ran it down the length on either side loosening it from the wood. The bark was then pulled

from the tree in one piece. He passed the implement to Roger, indicating that we were to carry on with the remainder of the trees on the ground.

He made it look easy but we found it back-breaking, difficult work and, until we perfected the art, we could only remove small sections at a time. What Darrell had managed to do in three steps took us ten, or more. Before long I had blisters forming on my hands which increased the length of time our trees were taking to debark. Roger was getting annoyed, partly because he wasn't managing to do it perfectly, but also because my pain was affecting my performance. Roger had little empathy for anyone in pain or sick. As far as he was concerned you just got on with it. I knew that this was his father's attitude to sickness and in Roger's youth, he either had to go to school or spend the day in the dark in bed. 'If you're sick you're sick,' was his Father's adage and Roger had taken this for his own. Darrell worked beside us but, instead of a similar tool to ours, he was using a machete with equal skill, enabling him to do at least two trees to our one.

Whilst we were having a 'smoko' in the shade of a tree another local drove past, stopping when he spied Darrell.

'Howse you goin'?' Darrell asked. A long pause followed.

'Not bad and youse?' Another pause.

'Alright.'

'Good weather?'

'Yer. Need rain but.'

'Good price they got for beasts in Taree last week.'

'Yer.'

The conversation continued in this vein with long pauses between question and answer. Darrell had by now squatted, one leg out in front giving him balance as he sucked absently on a stem of grass. The other chap stayed in the car. His head poked out the wound-down window, resplendent in a worn felt cockies hat. In the end they stayed like that for over an hour, but after ten minutes Roger and I walked to the house for a cool drink.

Over the next couple of weeks the work continued but it didn't get any easier. Once we had enough stripped logs for the upright posts, we dug the holes and placed the posts in them. At least the rocks were easily found lying exposed on the slopes. These we jammed in at the base of the pole to ensure that the post would remain at ninety degrees and finally we rammed earth in tight around the posts until they

eventually seemed as solid as if we had used cement. The remaining trees were split in two and formed the rails for the yards, being placed at a distance apart that allowed for easy climbing should a beast decide to charge. The thought of this did not make me feel any better about the role I was to play in our future cattle dealings.

The completed yard was square with a gate through which the cattle would be herded from the paddocks. Diagonally opposite this gate another one led into the race and crush. The exit from the crush gave the cattle the option of either exiting back into the paddock or being diverted up the ramp for loading into the truck. We started construction of the ramp after the crush had been delivered and attached to the cement block. The only difference in technique to the yard posts was the differing heights used for the posts which gave the desired incline. Darrell had chosen several trees that were of a similar diameter which were cut to the exact length to ensure a snug fit between either side of the support posts. These were cut in half and the rounded side placed uppermost, creating a corrugated effect that would help the cattle climb the slope to the truck without slipping. An unexpected advantage of the ramp construction was its additional use as a shady place where we could sit and have a break. The sun was relentless.

‘Youse got to plant some trees round the yard. Youse gotta have shade when you got cattle locked in, 'n' makes it better to work. If youse buy trees get something like an Aussie Willow. Grows quick 'n' gives good shade. Or just take a drive. Youse’ll see the trees. Jes pull a couple of branches offa the tree with the red flowers. Stick ‘em in. They'll grow but not as fast.’

We were now ready, in Darrell's opinion, to purchase the bull. The beast he had in mind was old but still up to the job and, most important, quiet. Our newly installed loading ramp was not required as the bull walked around to us from a nearby property. Occasionally, just occasionally, we wondered if Darrell saw us as suckers onto whom he could offload his ‘used by date’ animals. Despite not having horns the jet-black Angus bull frightened me, as it was broad, taller than me and probably weighed over 950 kg. We were reasonably confident that our paddock fencing was strong enough to hold him; we’d spent hours with Darrell on improvements when we had first brought the cattle home from Taree, as the calves had found every possible flaw in it. If just seeing the size of this animal filled me with dread I didn't think I would feel as comfortable going on my daily walks with Mungo knowing I may come face to face with this massive animal at any minute.

The cows didn't seem to share my concern, and although I didn't see the acts of procreation, it wasn't long before Darrell declared that all our cows were pregnant. The gestation period being 285 days for a cow we settled down for the nine months or more wait for the birth of the calves.

'You'se gotta get salt licks.' The cows had been with us for some time before Darrell imparted this piece of information. To provide all the nutrients and minerals that the animals needed for good health we were to purchase from the produce store a block of salt lick. Not knowing what to expect we ended up with a ten kilogram cube of pinkish salt. The Pakistani mined salt was considered the best for cattle. We placed it down by the dam where the cattle often gathered to drink. They quickly found it and needed no encouragement to start licking. Their long, sandpapery tongues scraped over the top surface, whittling it away. They must have been very needy as it decreased in size rapidly. In less than a month it was so small that we purchased another block. The cows must have replenished their reserves as this time the cube diminished at a slower rate.

I was right thinking that the bull would frighten me. Although it came up for feeding as meekly as the cows it was a different matter when he was free in the paddock. He may well have been coming at a rapid pace because he knew that I was the food lady, but I wasn't waiting to find out. I curtailed our walks in the paddocks. I started walking around the neighbourhood, avoiding the paddocks unless I knew exactly where the bull was.

The bull, with Mungo, waiting to be fed. The flowering tree is a Bauhinia.

Mungo and Me at the property's front gate.

Chapter 10

Our New Neighbour

We lived halfway up a hill on a dead-end dirt road. Four properties lay beyond us but we were initially the only permanent occupants. Our immediate neighbour was a millionaire, Barry, who flew in by helicopter for the annual Christmas party held further up our road. The weekender, apart from this occasion, was rarely used as Barry seldom stayed more than once a year, when he filled in his time riding trail bikes and drinking lots of scotch whisky. We had been invited to his place on several occasions but after our first visit we always found an excuse not to attend. We had sat on a tree stump outside the house soaking up the view as he plied us with Glen Morangie and wouldn't take 'I've had enough thanks' as a refusal of more. Barely able to stand, we staggered home that night keeping each other upright as we tripped over rocks and nothing as we went. The queasiness in the stomach and fuzziness in the head did not leave us for days.

Barry's place commanded an even better view than Barcoleuwin as it took in a full three hundred and sixty degree panorama. They had our view to the north and east but also looked over the valleys to the south and over a huge dam and farmland beyond to the west. Their dam had us green with envy. Water had become a commodity that took on immense importance as it was the life-blood of a farm, being talked about, dreamt about and creating jealousies that I would not have previously thought possible. Bushies looked at all dams through different eyes. The one on Barry's place was the result of successfully blocking a huge gully at one end. It was not only wide but also deep and, unlike ours, always full.

The big drawback to Barry's abode was the huge number of rats that made it their home. One day Darrell asked us to collect a tool from the shed that he wished to borrow. We heard, on entering the blackness of the interior, the unmistakeable sound of scurrying, squeaking rodents making their escape. As our eyes adjusted to the dark we noticed that the bike helmets and the trail bike seats were full of rat's nests. Darrell later told us that the inside the house was worse but despite it being always unlocked we didn't go in and look. Barry had initially bought it with another couple,

Robbie and Marlene. The two couples fell out over the state in which Barry and his sons left the property after their stay. Eventually Robbie and Marlene sold their share to Barry and purchased the next farm up the road. Although their new cottage was small they had most creature comforts thanks to solar power lights and gas refrigeration. They would come up a few times throughout the year to maintain the property and ride their horses.

Further up the road the next farm belonged to Darrell's daughter, Darrellene. She lived in Taree and stayed on the property for the Christmas party and only rarely on other occasions. Darrell used her land as winter pasture and although no-one lived there Darrell or one of his sons kept a close eye on the cattle pastured there. At the very end of the road was Jim, who became our only neighbor who resided full-time on his property.

When he moved in about a year after we took up occupancy, it thrilled us to have a permanent resident living nearby. Jim came and introduced himself to us shortly after he had bought the house where he immediately began renovations prior to moving in, both to increase the size and modernise the kitchen and the bathroom. His budget for the renovations seemed limitless. He took us on a tour of his house and land. Unlike our house, which sat in a prime position looking out over the valleys and to the coast in the far distance, his house sat on the valley floor with the hills towering up on all sides around it. Where we had just over one hundred acres, he had over one thousand. He drove us over it in his four-wheel drive showing us with great pride his paddocks, areas of rainforest and fertile river flats. He walked us through four Chinese elms planted close enough together that their wide, spreading branches became intertwined, creating a shady area where he had put a picnic table and benches. His land extended into the high ridges and he could rightly claim that he had land in all shires: Great Lakes, Taree and Gloucester. A short man with a presence, he puffed his chest out with self-satisfaction as he explained to us ‘I grew up on the wrong side of the tracks in Balmain. I numbered Lenny McPherson as one of my good friends. Still went and paid my respects whenever I went to Sydney, up 'til the time he was put in gaol. I studied at Thommo's Two Up School. I can still call it right every time. Got some coins?’ Roger handed him some coins and he demonstrated his skills, correctly naming heads or tails each time. ‘Yep, if I hadn't met my wife when I did I was headed for a life of crime. She was still at school when I met her. Came from a good Methodist family. Went to that private school Meriden in Strathfield.

She only agreed to marry me if I got on the straight and narrow. Worked for the mines in Queensland. Good money. Last place was out at Blackwater where I was the chef at the mine. When the wife left, I didn't feel like staying there anymore. She's living in Sydney so I'm hoping that being closer I might be able to win her back. I'm using the fact I've got a pacemaker to get a bit of sympathy from her. Had an accident awhile back and they had to give me an anaesthetic. It stopped my heart so they put a pacemaker in just in case I'm ever unconscious and can't warn them about the reaction I have to anaesthetics. A safety thing. Nothing wrong with my heart at all.'

We had never met anyone like Jim, who could talk without drawing breath, and having become used to Darrell's deliberate, pause-pregnant speech we felt as though we had been hit by a tornado. We were not surprised when we discovered that Robbie and Marlene had nicknamed him 'Havachat'.

Initially, we saw Jim often; sometimes over a dinner invitation, or helping him with cattle work. He also enjoyed a game of golf and Roger and he often went into town for a game. 'He didn't have any clubs or anything.' Roger told me after their first game, 'He bought everything new and all the best gear. Spent a fortune. He must've played before though cause he wasn't bad.' This was the opposite of Roger who used balls he found to play with and was happy with his second hand clubs. 'If you can't hit a ball an expensive club isn't going to make any difference.' I'd heard Roger say this so often that I believed it, especially as he was an A grade player with a single digit handicap who kept us in meat, fruit and vegetables that he won in the competitions.

When he went away for a week or weekend we regularly looked after his dog but found we missed him and looked forward to his return. He had become part of our lives and given me the company I craved. We soaked up his tales of growing up in Balmain and life in the mines, and teased him about being an old man with a dicky ticker. We knew that would set him on a rant having to prove to us that there was nothing wrong with his heart.

We heard that he had told the neighbours in no uncertain terms that they were not welcome to ride their horses on his place.

'What's he doin' there?' Darrell asked us one day.

'Running his cattle and enjoying life in the country,' we replied.

'Ain't normal. All by himself. Damn unfriendly too. That sure ain't normal.'

‘No, it's pretty normal for someone from the city. I can understand it. His paddocks are his backyard. His sanctuary. You wouldn't want people coming and having a picnic in your backyard. Would you? It just happens his is hundreds of acres,’ I said, remembering the way Jim’s face lit with pride as he showed us his land.

‘It ain't normal I'm telling youse. He's up to sumting. Youse mark my words.’ Darrell shook his head.

‘What do you reckon we're up to then? You could say the same about us.’

‘Nah, yousa’ just mad city folks. Youse ain't up to nuttin’.’

Then Jim's wife, Joy, came to stay. She was nice but out of place in the country. There were not too many places to wear designer clothes or ‘to be seen’ where we lived and everything that moved frightened her. She saw snakes lurking under every bush. Jim, however, delighted in her company and went out of his way to try to make her happy. Their son and his wife and child moved to Gloucester from outback Queensland and that certainly had a positive effect on Joy. She loved being a hands-on grandma and seemed to settle more into country life after their arrival. They still invited us for dinner and came to us for the odd return meal, but otherwise we saw little of them now. It came as a surprise, therefore, when Jim dropped in one afternoon, and told us that Joy had left him again and gone back to the city. As he was planning to go to Sydney every weekend to see her we thought that she must have tired of the country and that the arrangement was mutual. Jim had purchased a unit for her on the northern beaches. This didn't surprise us as he seemingly had endless amounts of cash: everything he owned was new and the best that money could buy.

Around that time we started getting the occasional huge American car come up our road, stop and stare at our house for a bit before departing. The loud vroom of the exhaust could be heard as the vehicle sped on, further up the road. We didn't think anything of it but we couldn't understand, when, having been asked by Jim to feed his dog for a few days, he greeted us with a tone in his voice that was both angry and accusatory on our arrival at his house.

‘What are you doing here?’

‘We've come to feed the dog.’

‘I left a message on your answer machine that I was home and there was no need to come.’

‘We went to Taree and came straight here without going home first, so we didn't get the message.’

‘Well you can go. I'm here now.’ As we turned around in his drive we saw the big car and realised that Jim did not want us to meet his visitors.

The next time we saw him it was as though nothing had happened. But over our next dinner he turned the conversation to drugs.

‘Another lot got caught coming in with heroin from Asia. Don't think it's that big a deal. I don't think drugs hurt anyone.’

I couldn't stop my immediate reaction, which had been born from living with my first husband’s addictions. ‘I don't think any drugs are good at all. Even marijuana, which you could argue is no worse than alcohol, causes irreversible short-term memory loss, and now they are concerned that it can lead to drug-induced schizophrenia. Alcohol is just as much a problem if not more so. The others are just life-destroyers. No, I don't think drugs are harmless.’

I had got on my high horse but I reigned myself in as I didn't want to spend the night arguing with Jim. After that evening we didn't seem to run into Jim much at all. If we were working in the paddocks when he went past, he would stop and chat but he no longer dropped in or invited us for dinner.

In early summer we were working in the paddock with Darrell stripping the bark off some trees that he had felled for timber to make our new set of cattle yards. It was nearly lunch-time and the sky was looking ominous. Huge black clouds were rolling in from the south. ‘Come on. We'd better get up to the house before this storm hits,’ Roger yelled.

We didn't take much persuading, packed up and quickly made tracks. We ate our sandwiches on the verandah watching the electrical display that had started shortly after we had made it home. For some reason I went out the back just in time to witness a bolt of lightning hit the ground, setting an old tree alight on Jim's property.

‘The lightning’s just started a fire on Jim's place,’ I yelled. Both men came running and after a brief look Darrell was on the phone within minutes to a fellow a few properties to the east.

‘Yer got a get a fire truck up to the old Yates's place. Lightning strike.’ Darrell was silent whilst he listened then said ‘I don't care if it's in Taree Shire. If you don't come it'll be in Great Lakes Shire in a few hours and be a bit hotter 'n harder to put out.’

‘Will he come?’ I asked.

‘Course he will. Easier to get it out now before it's gotta good hold. Roger and I'll head on over.’ He said to me, ‘You stay by the phone.’ This was one of those occasions where I found being a woman annoying because, in Darrell's world, firefighting was man's work.

When Roger returned home several hours later he told me that Jim had acted quite bizarrely by locking gates to prevent further access into his property. ‘He was none too happy that we were there at all.’

‘Do you think he wanted his place to burn?’ I asked.

‘I've no idea. It was bizarre,’ Roger replied.

The following day we were again out in our paddock, with Darrell, working on our cattle yards when Jim drove past. ‘I'm off to Sydney. No need to check on anything for me.’

‘Have you padlocked the gate?’ Roger asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Do you want to leave a key with us in case the fire flares up again and we need access?’

‘I don't want anyone on my place. Just tell everybody to fucking keep off.’ We were open-mouthed as Jim drove off.

‘I don't understand him. If I’d just had a fire I’d be appreciative if someone kept an eye on things for me,’ Roger said.

‘Don't worry. If a fire starts on his place we'll just cut his fence down. Rural fires got rights yer know. He ain't got any when it comes to a fire,’ Darrell said.

A week later we were planting an avenue of crepe myrtles to line our driveway. From late morning a helicopter had been buzzing around us. They would fly over the area, always seeming to return to hover above us for a few minutes before winging away again. The drone from the engine was constantly audible.

Just after lunch, Kelvin, Darrell's son, rode past our front gate on his motorbike. His short hair was blowing in the breeze, unrestrained by a helmet. He had one kelpie draped over the petrol tank, one around his shoulders, and another riding pillion. Numerous others were running behind, desperate to keep up. He lifted his hand in greeting but did not stop, seemingly oblivious to the seven police cars that followed close behind.

‘Kel's going to cop it,’ I said.

‘Don't be stupid. Did you think they were hanging about on these dirt roads in the hope that they'd catch people for traffic violations? No, something major’s going on,’ Roger replied.

When Roger convinced me it was not Kelvin the police were after, it didn't take much imagination to know where they were heading. Unable to control our curiosity, we put Mungo on a lead and walked up the road towards Jim's place. As we walked past Darrellene's place we saw Kelvin.

‘What's going on?’ we asked.

‘Apparently the Westpac rescue helicopter flew over this morning and spotted a crop of marijuana growing in the hills. Size of a couple of football fields apparently. It was so well disguised that they couldn't find it on foot and had to send in the police helicopter. Would'a taken 'im days to build them terraces they say are up there. All set up with automatic water. Ready to harvest. Couple of million dollars’ worth. We knew something was goin' on up there. A few people had told the local police they suspected something, but they didn't want to know. Couldn't ignore it when Westpac reported it.’

‘We really didn't have a clue.’ We may have thought that some of Jim's behaviour was odd but at the same time we could understand it. In retrospect a lot of things made sense.

The police giving the game away incensed Robbie. ‘Why didn’t they set up camp in my place. Every day Jim used to go up that mountain. They could have just watched and followed and caught him at it,’ Robbie said. As it was, much of Jim's property was confiscated under the 2002 Proceeds of Crime Act because he could not prove how he had come to have the money in the first place. His property was sold and he went to await the court case with his wife in Sydney. He dropped in to say goodbye and we had a final laugh about his dicky ticker. We were surprised that the police did not interview us at the time.

Naturally we followed the legal proceedings. After a drawn-out trial, we discovered that, due to his age and the state of his heart, the sentence handed down from the court was weekend detention for two years on the condition that he continued to live with his wife. Not a bad result for him! For us it meant that we no longer had a neighbor who lived permanently at the end of the road as another seldom-to-visit weekender purchased the property.

Chapter 11

CLEARING THE LAND

Our land was semi-cleared. The gullies and rainforest area were virgin bush, untouched whilst the ridges had a considerable number of flourishing old growth trees. These trees had been thinned to allow the sunlight to penetrate easily thus allowing good grass growth whilst affording the shady sensation of a wood; all dappled light and canopies. The paddocks had been totally denuded of trees apart from the odd shade tree here and there.

Although it was still visible what the early farmers had done with the land, as we walked around it became clear that the complete lack of maintenance had allowed new growth saplings to spring up in abundance in the paddocks and on the ridges. Some of this regeneration was already sizeable and a hindrance to making a road, or at least a track, that would allow us to get the dual cab utility to various points on the property, thereby making our life easier as currently any work we had to do required us to carry all necessary implements with us. These could be heavy and cumbersome and often led to arguments.

'You go and get it!'

'No, it's your turn. I went last time.' Our squabbling, if any tool was forgotten, became more and more heated as the walk up the hill to collect the item sapped us of our willpower to go on. It seemed to me that I lost the battles and walked that hill more than Roger did and as my feet moved slower my resentment grew.

'Youse aughter poison,' Darrell told us when he came upon us one day slumped in exhaustion. 'It's simple. Get yerselves some Roundup then go round with an axe and make two slices on either side of the tree. Just cut a flap so as yer got white wood showing. Paint it straight away with the Roundup. Youse can't leave it 'nd paint it later cause it seals. Youse got a get it when it's fresh.'

'How long before it seals?' Roger asked

'Youse got a do each tree as yer cut it. Yer should do the cuttin' and Irene should follow ya and do the painting. Then youse gotta wait 'til the tree dies.'

'How long does that take?'

‘The tree dies quick but youse gotta wait ‘til the roots rot. Then it’s easy to push over and get the roots out. If yer don’t wait, then yer’ll end up with a huge hole in the ground or a stump. Youse don’t want stumps.’

‘How long does that take?’

‘P’haps a year, maybe two.’

We started immediately. We attacked the front side paddock first. This paddock was close to the house and if cleared of all the saplings that had sprung up it would be good pasture for the donkeys and horse. Roger, being impatient, also thought that as these were relatively small trees it might be possible to pull them out before the roots had rotted. It was a huge job and time consuming. From there we made our way down the hill to the dam, poisoning the young trees as we went.

We didn’t get much further than this and I could see that my vision of the entire property being restored to its park-like state was receding further into the distance. We did attempt to attack the lantana, a declared noxious weed, and spent days pulling it out. Luckily, apart from some huge bushes, the roots were very shallow and we managed to pull them out quite easily. Darrell told us that you needed to get the roots out intact, otherwise a new plant would spring up from the remaining root. This posed our main difficulty as the roots were like elastic and would stretch, eventually breaking as the resistance became too strong. Our lantana pulling days left us both with sore, blistered hands, sunburnt faces and very tired. Mungo, of course, loved it as he played happily around us and then went and found a shady spot to rest. I wish we had known then that lantana is a good anti-erosion plant and unless it is in good pasture should not be removed. Living in the poor soil of the gullies its roots not only held the ground together but also added nutrients to the soil. My spirits were flattened when I found out that all our hard toil and blisters were wasted and possibly even detrimental to our land. I knew life on the land was tough and although we were trying to improve our lot and make some money from it, the reality was that I knew we were playing at being farmers; although no farmer would have done this work by hand. It made me want to weep for the wasted effort.

One afternoon as we sat on the verandah with a glass of beer after a hard day’s work, Roger suddenly said, ‘I’ve just worked it out.’

He was obviously elated. ‘Worked what out?’

‘It’s been worrying me for a while and I haven’t known what it is but I’ve just twigged. I feel as though, every time I look out over the paddock I’m looking for

something. As though something is missing, but still I look for I don't know what. But I've just realised—I'm looking for water. I miss seeing water when I look out the window.'

'Wow. I can understand that. We've lived with water for so long and now it's missing. And, we are Pisceans after all.'

'I think I was spoilt on Tanna. I loved stepping out of the front door and seeing that shimmering blue ocean straight in front of me. No matter how bad things got that view always calmed me. To some extent at least. We have to get some water to look at.'

'That could be difficult,' I said.

Roger thought for a few moments. 'Perhaps we could do what they've done next door and dam a gully. Maybe if it backed up far enough we'd have a huge dam that we could possibly see from the house. Let's go for a walk and check out it out.'

Enthused, we set off to look at the two gullies that ran down the hill on either side of the house. We decided after examining the one on the left that it didn't have steep enough sides or a long enough length to give us the size of dam we were both now imagining. The one on the right, though, seemed to fit the bill.

Excited at the prospect, we decided to visit Darrell at his homestead to find out the best way to go about building a dam. We had never been inside his house before. The room, painted in 1950's spring green, was huge and gloomy. Probably also laid in the fifties, the cracked, black, once-patterned linoleum still covered the floor with the newspaper underlay poking through in many places. The kitchen with its formica bench top finished with fake chrome stripping was situated at the rear running along one wall. The centre of the room was taken up with a large wooden dining room table covered with a floral plastic table cloth surrounded by eight chrome-legged, green vinyl padded chairs. At the far end of the room a lounge occupied a place in front of a television set. Floor to ceiling bookshelves lined the walls to either side and behind the television. These bookcases did not house a single book but were cram packed with video tapes. Darrell's wife, Olive, greeted us.

'Youse got to not mind the smell. Stinks in here. I told him a rat's died. But he aint never done nuttin' about it. Stinks.'

'It's okay. I can't smell anything,' I said.

'Stinks,' she repeated, a touch of venom obvious in her voice.

‘Don’t mind the missus. Come ‘n sit down.’ Darrell showed us to the dining room table whilst Olive bustled around preparing a cup of tea. She appeared embarrassed that we were there and was acting as though we were visiting royalty. We told Darrell that we wanted to dam the gully.

‘Youse wanna get the Department of Lands and Conservation to come and do it fer yer. They’ll give youse a quote and stick to it. And they’ll guarantee it. Youse could get it done cheaper but if it leaks it’ll just cost youse more.’ After a bit more discussion on the dam the conversation turned to the weather and cattle prices. ‘Did youse see that big bull on the news last week?’

We had to admit that we hadn’t.

‘Don’t matter. I got it ‘ere somewhere.’ Darrell started looking at the many videos he had stacked on his shelves. ‘Here it is,’ came his triumphant cry. ‘Knew it was here.’ He loaded it into the video player and we watched a segment that channel seven news had aired a week earlier. It highlighted the bull that obtained a record price at the sale yards. I wondered what else had taken Darrell’s fancy that he might have recorded on the hundreds of video tapes lining the shelves.

Following Darrell’s advice, we contacted the Department and they sent a team out to give us a quote. We walked down to the gully opening with them, showing them our preferred spot.

‘Nope. Can’t go there.’ The experts quickly squashed our suggestion. ‘The only place it can go is down here where the gully is wider.’

‘But I don’t think we’ll be able to see it from the house,’ Roger protested, ‘it’s too far away.’

‘’You’ve got no choice. You see the width required for the base of the dam wall to withstand the pressure of the water would be impossibly wide. To dam where you want it the wall would have to be high to get any decent amount of water in it and the deeper it is the more force is exerted on the bottom meaning you have to have a much wider base to hold the volume with it narrowing to the top. It just wouldn’t work there but putting it down there where the gully is wider you’ll get a huge volume of water. It’ll be a great dam. I promise.’

Payment was then discussed. They quoted us in two ways. The first method set a price that would be fixed irregardless of how long it took and what difficulties might arise. The second quote was a price per hour. We opted for the fixed price quote as we had never known anything to go smoothly resulting in less time taken than expected.

An unexpected advantage to using the Lands Department was that council permission was not required so, without the cost and time of having to put in development applications, construction could start within a couple of weeks. The massive earthmoving equipment came in and bulldozed a road from the front gate down to where our new dam wall would be situated. The road they carved allowed the dam builders' four-wheel drive vehicles easy access to the construction site. We were overjoyed as finally we had the road we had wanted. With the bulldozer they knocked the trees in the dam over as if they were matchsticks and deepened the area of the dam, using the soil from these excavations to create the dam wall. Each afternoon after the men had left we would venture into the yawning hole they'd made and try and visualise how deep the water would be. At the dam wall, I was certain it would be at least three times my height giving at least a water depth of sixteen feet. We were assured that it wouldn't leak as after testing the friability of the dirt being used in the dam wall and deeming it liable to leakiness, the experts decided to put in a liner to ensure it would hold water. The construction took two weeks and went without a hitch; the men coming in way under the time that they had quoted in their fixed rate. To our surprise they offered to work to the hours paid and asked us to assign them our desired tasks.

Having seen how effortlessly the heavy equipment had removed trees that had not been poisoned we set them to work knocking down the saplings we had poisoned and were in the process of cutting down by hand. Watching the ease of this work I determined that never again would I try to replicate the pioneers of yesteryear. Within hours, they cleared the ridge and the top paddock near the house of all but the old-growth trees. They shovelled all the trunks and branches into gigantic piles with their huge machines, leaving out only that wood which would make good firewood. To my delight they carried this to within walking distance of the house making future fires less onerous to prepare.

Our land was starting to look as Roger envisaged it—like an English country estate. Park-like. We impatiently waited for the rains to arrive to fill the dam. Having had a deluge earlier in the season it now seemed as though the skies would never darken and pour down again. It was many weeks before we saw the gully racing with water that eventually filled the dam to the brim.

We were both elated and disappointed when the dam finally filled. Elated as the amount of water opened endless possibilities for plantings on the area around the dam

in front of the house and disappointed that we couldn't see the water from the house as we had hoped. It did seem to improve Roger's psyche, however, just knowing it was there.

Once the dam filled we visited the aquaculture farm that we had often driven past on our way to Sydney, purchasing one hundred tiny silver perch fingerlings and twenty yabbies, a type of fresh water crayfish, to stock the dam. Impatiently we waited for them to grow, envisaging fresh seafood on the menu within a year.

That didn't happen. Despite hours staring into muddy water we never saw any evidence of the perch. 'There there,' we'd console each other. 'In a year we'll be reeling them in.' It was a similar story with the yabbies. They remained invisible although we threw meat-baited lines into the dam, with a net at the ready for when the line tightened, indicating that a hungry yabby had latched on. We then tried yabby-pots, also primed with the obligatory meaty morsel but these too were unsuccessful at luring any to fill our dinner table. We did see evidence of their apparent thriving as large twenty centimetre plus long bodies were found not infrequently at the side of the dam. It was clear that the birds were better at catching them than we were. Darrell told us, instilling us with fear, that not only did yabbies travel cross country in search of food or water if there were insufficient in their current environment, but by burrowing into the side of the dam they could destroy the capacity of the dam to hold water. We worried that perhaps we should have left the yabbies back at the aquaculture farm.

The people, who had bought the fisherman's cottage which had the same interior as our house, put in a dam for themselves at the same time our dam was being constructed but costing half the price of ours. When the first gully razing rain hit, their dam sprang lots of leaks, resulting in a partial collapse of the dam wall. Although we felt no delight at their dam wall failure we did feel that our extra expense was vindicated. Again we were thankful for Darrell's advice and our choice of contractor in the building of our dam. We had no regrets.

The dam we had built shortly after it filled with water

The yards we built

Chapter 12

Out and About in Our neighbourhood

In addition to mentoring us in regards to the farm, Darrell introduced us to the countryside around us; sometimes by design, at other times by accident. One day as he was helping us with the construction of our tennis court we discovered we needed some timber.

'No problem,' Darrell said. 'C'mmon, I'll take youse to the saw mill.' We hopped in his dual cab and headed off toward Bunyah. As we passed each farm Darrell told us about the people who lived there. Australia's poet laureate of the time, Les Murray, lived in the vicinity. So it seemed did numerous other Murrays. On passing yet another Murray farm he said, 'The preacher was called out to do a wedding. Them Murrays married Murrays and after he'd done the marrying the preacher, he says to me I don't wanna be called to no more Murray weddings. Soon it'll be like marrying monkey to monkey.' A long silence followed.

'Mind youse, I got Murray blood in me,' he eventually said.

We turned right at Bunyah onto a road we'd never travelled but knew it was a cross-country route to Bulahdelah. The farms became sparser and Darrell had a tale to tell about the owner of each one as we passed. As the pasture gave way to bush then forest the conversation turned to his father who had worked this land, logging the timber with the bullock teams. As a boy, Darrell had seen his father when he came home after a few weeks at the timber camps. Even though the area that he worked was now within easy driving distance, in the early days it was a full day's ride or more. Darrell held us captivated as he told of the dangerous work and the strong, resourceful men. Falling trees and rolling logs were only a few of the dangers the timber getters faced as they used a two-man crosscut saw, felling the giant Tallow woods, Grey and Blue Gums, Brush Box and Red and White Mahogany.

'They must have been jolly fit,' I said thinking of the blisters I had got when debarking the timber for the yards.

'It was a hard life when me Dad worked the bullock teams. I used to like it when he took me with 'im to camp in the bush. They'd be up at daylight hitching up the teams of usually eight bullocks to work 'til sundown dragging or pulling a cart

piled high with timber to Boolambayte where they loaded it onto rail carriages to go to Mayers Point. Even though it was tough, hard work, they had it easier than the earlier blokes. Before the Great War they used horses to drag the loaded wagons the full thirty kilometres to Mayers Point. Them horses must'av loved Allen Taylor when he built the light rail which did 'em out of a job. The steam locos and the steam driven haulers that replaced some of the bullock teams sure sped up moving the timber.'

He went on to tell us how the logs were then taken by boat to Newcastle and Sydney where the timber was used for local projects such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Melbourne docks and sleepers for the railway being built across the Nullabor. During WWII uses were also found in projects required for the war effort. Some of the timber was exported to Hong Kong and China, also for railway projects.

'I wonder if your Dad knew any of my relatives?' I knew that my forebears, the Engels of Tea Gardens, a German emigrant family, played an active role in this area, running supply boats every Sunday and Wednesday from Tea Gardens up the Myall River stopping at the small settlements at Bombah Point, Boolambayte Lake, Violet Hill, Johnson's Hill, Boolambayte and Mayers Point before finishing the journey at Bungwahl. These store boats, firstly steam and then diesel, provided their customers (who included the timber getters, saw millers, farmers, fishermen and their families) with all the supplies they needed plus their mail. On the return trip, the boat carried produce from these bush folk either to their stores in Tea Gardens or to transfer to the Hunter River Steamship Company for transport to the market in Sydney. Without these store boats survival would have been very difficult for the people living and working upstream.

Not only did the Engels provide the upper Myall with provisions, mail and passenger transport, the head of the family, George Adolf Engel, was a visionary. He purchased some ocean-going vessels that could then transport goods and passengers directly to Newcastle, but also, realising there was a growing timber trade, purchased two larger vessels, S.S. Iluka and S.S. Myall River, to transport the logs down the river system.

I related a story my father used to enthrall us with when we were kids. The Engels also ran the local picture theatre in Tea Gardens. It was in the days of the full-length double feature. Interval was always an indeterminate length of time, dependent on the weather, as one of the family on the conclusion of the first film would jump in the boat with it and make his way to the middle of Port Stephens. Here he would meet

someone from the picture theatre at Nelson Bay on the other side of the harbour. They would swap films and make their way back to show the film they now had in their possession to the patient, waiting cinema-goers.

On telling Darrell this family history he said, ‘I ain’t never been to Tea Gardens. Mean to go one of these days but never got time fer a holiday.’ He lapsed into his now customary silence. I was surprised that he hadn’t been to Tea Gardens as it was now only one and a half hours easy journey by car whereas in Darrell's youth it would have taken a couple of days.

Darrell broke into my thoughts. ‘Yer know. I worked for some Engels at Nabiac. They had a saw mill ways back. I think they might still be there.’

‘They’d have to be relatives’, I said. ‘I’ll ask Mum.’ Suddenly I felt a bond with Darrell and the land through which we were travelling as we sat in his ute, driving goodness knows where, reminiscing about a past long gone that is part of his history and also a part of my own family heritage. Then, on discovering that I probably had relatives still living in the area gave me a connectivity to the countryside that I had not previously felt. In a small way, it gave me a degree of understanding of the relationship that Australian Aboriginals have with the land.

Turning off the road that went to Bulahdelah we soon had to put the vehicle into four-wheel drive to negotiate the slippery mud track which in parts was covered in water from the recent rain. I sadly noted that it was a route we wouldn’t be able to recommend to visitors who only had a regular vehicle despite the beauty of the ever-thickening forest. We travelled for half an hour before we stopped at a clearing. Darrell parked and we walked until we came across the moss-covered remains of a trestle bridge that was part of the rail line, which Alan Taylor had constructed.

A picnic area and information signs told of the history of the logging in the area and the flora, fauna and forty-six species of birds that are possible to see there. In 1995, a joint project was undertaken with the Wooton/Coolongolook Progress Association and the government, which gave fifteen long-term unemployed people work for six months clearing and constructing a six kilometre walking track known as the Wooton Historical Railway Walk which follows the railway line from the trestle bridge picnic area to Sam’s Camp, a picnic area four and a half kilometres west of Wooton. We didn’t have time to walk much of the track, which passed through areas of shady rain forest. The damp leaf litter covering the path made our footfalls silent allowing us to hear the babbling creeks tinkling over the rounded pebbles, gently

cascading down small rock falls. It was difficult to imagine the noise of the bullock trains in days gone by disturbing the peace we were surrounded by.

After a good look around we continued our trip, climbing until eventually we came to a ridge along the top, turning left at a sign indicating Bunyah. This ridge road was the route that most people would take from Bunyah or Wooton to reach the trestle bridge picnic area way as, despite still being gravel, it was much wider and in better condition. It wasn't until we saw that the tops of the trees, which had previously towered high above us, were now below us that we realised how high we had ascended. After fifteen minutes, we turned off this road onto a narrow, winding dirt track which descended steeply into the valley below. My nerves were holding steady until Darrell said, 'We just have to hope we don't meet a logging truck. It won't be able to turn so we'll have to reverse back up the hill 'til we gets to a place we can pull over.' I knew there hadn't been too many spots on this narrow stretch where that would be possible and I knew I would panic if we had to reverse, renegotiating the curves already travelled in the road. The forest around us was dense and little light was getting through the canopy, which again towered above us.

Then, with no warning, we were no longer in the forest but suddenly in a huge shed. It emerged out of the jungle with the road happening to pass through what we discovered was the sawmill we had set out to visit. The building was designed so that the logging trucks could come in and offload the timber where it could be worked. The trucks could also drive straight through and circle the shed offloading in alternative outside areas. We got out and discussed what timbers we needed with one of the few workers present, organised for them to deliver it, and left wondering at the lax accounting system they appeared to have. They didn't ask for an address to send the invoice or even who we were.

'But they don't know us!' I protested despite Roger's black look. This was another of our differences that were starting to cause us problems. Roger thought that I was too keen to pay bills. He had no problem with paying them, he just felt that I should wait until the last minute. I preferred to pay them immediately as I easily forgot things if I didn't do them when they were uppermost in my thoughts.

'Don't worry,' Darrell broke into my thoughts 'they knows who youse are. Don't you worry about that. You'll get a bill.' He was right of course as a bill turned up a month later, written on a scrap of paper with the words timber $93 and no address to send a cheque. Again Darrell came to our aid with a vague address that he

said would get the money to them. As we didn't get any further invoices I presumed he was right.

It came as a shock when we left the sawmill that we were out of the forest in minutes and after a couple of farms and pastureland we hit the Pacific Highway just to the south of Cooloongolook. As we passed a mansion reminiscent of those from *Gone with the Wind* complete with an avenue of palm trees lining either side of the long driveway to the house, Darrell told us it was where the chap who owned the saw mill resided. 'Youse been to the Lake at Cooloongolook?' Darrell asked. On hearing that we hadn't, he turned off the main road onto a beautiful country lane that forded a creek and continued until we were at the edge of the Cooloongolook river which had widened as it made its entry into Wallis Lake. Weeping willows gave shade to a grassy area perfect for picnics. We looked across this huge expanse of water towards Forster, located on the other side. We made a mental note that this was an easy, beautiful spot for our guests to visit.

We returned home approaching Bunyah from another direction thus completing a circular drive. Darrell kept us enthralled with stories from past and present whilst we soaked up the natural beauty of the area. He had also pointed out other roads that we should explore such as the road to Tipperary, where on a clear day you had a good view of the ocean and Buccabuccabuckappelby Road where the name itself was enough to make us want to travel along it.

This enticingly named road was, however, a disappointment when we drove along it a few days later. It was a reasonably short, dead end access road and had recently had a tree feller through, as piles of dead trees lay everywhere, making the landscape look bare and desolate. Apart from the name it had little going for it.

The road to Tipperary was a different story. We entered it off Wallanbah Road, opposite the house where the potter we had purchased our house from now lived. We had no idea where it would end up as we travelled through bushy countryside, fording many streams as we went. This was a novelty to us and we stopped and went backwards and forwards through the first ford taking photographs. After twenty minutes of driving we started to climb up into the hills and as we went we couldn't help but sing, 'It's a long way to Tipperary.' As we climbed, the bush gave way to paddocks and finally we arrived at what we thought was the top of the rise and in front of us was a farmhouse with Tipperary written in huge letters on its gate. Like Bucca Wauka the area was named after its largest farm. I had thought the road we had

travelled on was a dead end, but now it joined with a road from the other direction. The join's odd angle made it unlikely that planners had allowed for this but rather it had happened over time. Finding that this road had a different name to the one we started on confirmed our suppositions.

Our belief that we had reached the top proved incorrect as we continued to ascend. Finally, at the top, we stopped and got out, pleased to stretch our legs. Looking to the east we saw that Darrell was right. You did get a good, if distant, view of the ocean from here. We continued on the road travelling west. It was different country as we wended our way along the ridge. It was mostly cleared and the rolling hills reminded Roger again of his Sussex Downs. He wondered if an unknown homesickness and the similarity of this countryside to his native hills near Brighton had led to him falling in love with the area in which we now lived. This was beef cattle country and it seemed to go on forever. Eventually we came to the end of the road and found, to our surprise, that we had come out on the Bucketts Way, the main road to Taree from Gloucester. On the corner was the Hamburg farm, belonging to another German emigrant family who had settled in the area many years ago. Darrell had told us stories of the Red Baron, as one of the three brothers was affectionately known. He had attained his nickname due to his reputation for daredevil flying in a single engine plane.

We looked forward to our unplanned forays into the countryside. It broke the routine and I enjoyed exploring the area in which we lived, the diverse countryside, the quaint farm buildings and discovering the stories that belonged to it. Eventually we explored almost every road in our environs and most we found delightful. We discovered an old school house on one, which boasted a stand of Bunya pine trees. The Bunya pine is a magnificent tree that is found on the east coast of Australia. Before the farmers cleared the land they were common in our area and the town of Bunya was most likely named after them. The tree can grow to forty-five metres in height and, although a conifer, it belongs to an ancient family which became extinct in the northern hemisphere in the Cretaceous period. It is related to the New Zealand Kauri, the Norfolk Island Pine and the Wollemi Pine, Australia's living fossil. I decided that I would collect the cones, take them home and paint them gold for Christmas decorations. The Bunya pine cones are large, most as big as a bowling ball. Being hit on the head by one of these nuts as it fell from the tree would certainly cause a massive trauma. Each cone had dozens of nuts in its interior. We knew that

the Aboriginal people ate them as did the European settlers but we didn't try them ourselves. Someone told us they tasted like roasted chestnuts, but after our day of collecting we weren't prepared to find out due to the unexpected problem that occurred from collecting the cones. I was lucky that I wore a shirt with long sleeves that day. The skin on Roger's arms, which had been in contact with the cones, initially reddened and then turned into huge water blisters that hung off his arms like bunches of grapes. These sacs eventually burst, resulting in the loss of a few layers of skin that peeled from his arms where he had carried the cones. These chemical burns were the result of the sap, which we presumed must have been highly acidic. Painting the cones and eating the nuts were no longer activities we contemplated.

As we ran out of roads to explore in our general vicinity, we went further afield exploring Gloucester Tops and Barrington Tops to the west of Gloucester. Here the land transitioned from paddocks filled with cattle to rugged bush and then back to rolling hills of pasture. The Barrington and Gloucester Rivers wound back on themselves, crisscrossing the road frequently. At these points, rocks created fords which made the streams bubble as they gurgled their way over them giving concern at some that perhaps the water was too deep or too fast for the car to negotiate safely. These fords on the way to Gloucester Tops became our main recommendation for sightseeing day trips for our guests, giving them a variety of vistas, rolling hills, rivers and bush. Although the countryside here was better for farming, we had no desire to live on this side of Gloucester, for to us it felt more isolated than our farm. For the people who lived here the nearest town was still Gloucester but with its limited facilities it was much further to travel to a larger centre, being a minimum of an hour and a half from Taree or Newcastle. From our house, this trip was no more than an hour, and still we felt isolated. Roger often said to me that it was another White Grass. He meant by this that we had again chosen a place to work and live away from the mainstream of humanity. As our preparatory work on the farm had diminished, we were now concerned with the mundane tasks of maintenance, and to my surprise, I was starting to feel the isolation acutely.

Part of the old rail line near the remains of the trestle bridge

The back (often called the front) of our house, our water tank and the passionfruit vine growing on Mungo's enclosure

Chapter 13

Social Events

I found myself watching the road in the hope of unexpected visitors. Apart from Darrell the only time we had an unheralded arrival was when our neighbours arrived cross country to find us skinny dipping in the pool. This at least gave Roger and I a good belly laugh after the event but also made me aware at how little we were now finding to laugh about. Our conversation had also become sparse. We did everything together so we didn't have the luxury of spending time telling the other what our day had been like. We already knew.

I determined that I had to start to meet people so I scoured the local paper, *The Gloucester Advocate*, for activities that might give me a social outlet. When I read that ballroom dance classes were being held in Gloucester I was thrilled as ballroom dancing had been a passion of mine for many years but had been let go when we went to Vanuatu. I had danced when I met Roger and he played golf. Early in our relationship we had agreed that I would not ask him to dance and he would not ask me to play golf. I knew that he would choose to stay at home but I decided I would go, despite my nerves at driving into town on the dirt roads by myself. I decided to give myself plenty of time to get there, and find the Uniting Church Hall, thereby limiting my stress levels. I encountered no problems on the drive and found the church hall easily. Gloucester is not big after all. I was left with an hour in which to twiddle my thumbs.

I was hopeful that the dancing would prove successful as I was lonely with no one but Roger and occasionally Darrell for company. Roger at least was playing golf once a week in the Saturday morning comp and he had befriended three men, all of whom lived up the Bowman River Road. The Bowman River was west of Gloucester almost as far as we were from town but in the opposite direction. Tony owned and ran the Bowman aquaculture farm and he was too busy to come and visit. Ormonde, whom Roger described as a perfect gentleman, was in his late seventies and married to Griselda. Jeff told Roger she was an alternative lady who had a healing technique that she had tried out on him and, despite being a lot of mumbo jumbo, she cured his back problem. Jeff was Roger's age with a girlfriend who sounded as though she and I

were of a similar age. I was hopeful that we might meet and eventually become friends.

Finally, a small number of people started to arrive at the hall for the dance lesson. I went over and joined them. There were two single females, including myself, and the other eight people were couples. The teacher, Max, was very friendly but the dancing, despite the dances bearing names I recognised, bore little resemblance to the dances I had learned and loved. Max danced with me and the other partnerless women. At first I found it very difficult to follow him as he took off on the incorrect foot and danced a waltz to foxtrot music. As I am by nature a purist it was difficult to allow myself to do the wrong steps but I quickly realised that the group was enjoying the lesson so I persuaded myself that was all that mattered. There was only one way I could deal with the technique errors and that was to pretend that I was learning new dances. It wasn't a jazz waltz it was a waltz á la Max. Consequently I relaxed, let go of all I had previously learned and been examined on, and just enjoyed myself and the company. Over the course of the evening I learnt that Max, a Swiss national, had enjoyed the rhythm from an early age and although he had not had formal dance lessons, he had picked up the dance styles as he attended musical events. Discovering that it was a good way to meet girls he had perfected his style of dance and been in demand ever since for his skills manoeuvering women around the dance floor. A local training agency had persuaded him to run these classes as there was no other way of learning to dance in the area. This skill was in demand as Gloucester, like many country towns, had a ball season and other occasional dances in the numerous halls dotted around the district. I hadn't danced since leaving Sydney in 1992 and I had to admit that once I got used to Max's unique style I enjoyed twirling again, my skirt flying as we jived away.

The lessons lasted three weeks and although there was one couple with whom I thought a friendship could develop, the class stopped before we could cement an ongoing relationship.

The Visitors Information Centre which we had joined to market our bed and breakfast was another possibility I had to meet people I could befriend. When I agreed to attend the Trade Show being held in the shopping mall at Tuggerah to sell Gloucester and surrounds to the Central Coast population, I hoped that I would go home with more than just bookings for our B & B. Four other tourist vendors and I shared the journey down by car. One of these, a man, was the owner manager of a

huge resort/camping ground, Riverwood Downs, situated between Stroud and Dungog at a place called Monkerai. He differed from the other passengers in the car as he looked like a businessman on his way to work in the city, being attired in a suit and business shirt with a somber tie and highly polished shoes. The rest, all women, were in country dress of either jeans or skirt and shirt. We all wore sensible shoes and although our garb suited the country I thought it would look frumpy when we arrived in a bigger centre. The chap obviously saw himself as a high-flying businessman whose livelihood depended on the success of his venture. This was understandable given that his business was of such a size that it had to make money. We were constantly relieved that our capital outlay for the bed and breakfast was small, as Barcoleuwin was primarily our home, and any income we derived from it was just icing on the cake. I was of no interest to him so he didn't speak to me for the entire trip but instead monopolised Wendy Hughes, the manager of the Tourist Information Centre. I sat in the back with Betty from Gloucester Cottage Bed & Breakfast and Ann from another B & B situated on the road to Gloucester from Newcastle. She and her husband had opened for guests at the same time as us. It was easy to chat to them and we soon found that we all had Hornsby in common as a talking point. Betty had lived in Hornsby all her life until they moved to Gloucester to set up the bed and breakfast after her husband, Keith, retired. Ann had retired a year ago as head nurse in Maternity at Hornsby Hospital, where I had worked in the Intensive Care Unit, and we knew many of the same people. Both women were considerably older than me and although we chatted easily I didn't think that we would be forging strong friendships.

I stayed the night with my mother's school friend Gloria. She talked nonstop from the moment I arrived. My theory was that as she lived alone, whenever she was in company, she talked to make up for the time that she lost not having anyone to talk to. We chatted away easily and after dinner Gloria asked me how I felt about not having children. It took me by surprise and my stock standard answer remained on the back of my tongue. Instead I told her how hard it was and the hope I felt each month as I willed my period not to come and the despair I felt when it inevitably arrived as regular as clockwork.

Gloria started to cry. She told me how she too had hoped each month and had that hope dashed. She and her husband Bill and my parents had gone to Sydney University together, all taking classical studies. Mum and Gloria underwent teacher training whilst both men were in theological college training to become clergymen.

When they completed their studies Bill joined the Australian Inland Mission where his first posting was to Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory. She showed me some photographs of the town back then. The wide main street was not paved but instead was the red dirt of the surrounding desert. Her longing for a child was apparently well known in the district and someone offered her a female child to adopt. There were obviously not the restrictions placed on adoption in those days. Perhaps if the child's parents chose the person to adopt their child it bypassed the red tape. Whatever the circumstances, Gloria and Bill found themselves with a baby girl Kate. A short time later the same person asked if they would adopt Kate's birth brother, which they did. Gloria loved those two children as if they were hers but over the years they gave her much heartache. The son, William, had severe learning difficulties from a head injury he sustained at birth and Kate became aggrieved at life and angry towards both her adoptive and birth mother. Gloria told me she could never talk to my mother about her feelings despite being best of friends because my Mum's world seemed perfect and my mother could, at times, be unintentionally lacking in empathy causing her to make comments that hurt. I had been on the receiving end on numerous occasions, regarding my hair, my weight or comments on other physical imperfections my mother noticed. Mum would say out of the blue with total disregard to who else might be present or how they might make you feel, comments like, 'Irene your hump is getting bigger.' On hearing this particular comment Roger took to calling me 'Quasi'. I could understand Gloria keeping her disappointment to herself, as I too hadn't told my mother how I felt. Gloria and I both shed a few tears and became closer to each other than we had been prior to this conversation. Neither of us ever mentioned the subject or the night to each other again.

The Trade Show was successful. Placing a huge double bed in the middle of the mall, and taking turns to lie on it, proved to be a magnet for the crowd. It caused much curiosity and they had to come over to see what was happening. Once we had the people there, as a reward for engaging in conversation with us, we put their names in the draw to win a couple of night's accommodation at Riverwood Downs. This combination led to a busy stall where we made several forward bookings for accommodation in the Gloucester area whilst generating an enormous amount of goodwill. I was only rostered to work on the Saturday so in the afternoon I drove back to Gloucester with a woman who was a co-owner of Altamira Holiday Ranch.

Beverley was the epitome of the country to me. She wore RM Williams attire showing her figure off to perfection. Her brown curly hair was more under control than mine and she had a ready smile. She was a South African émigré around my age who, with her husband and two other couples owned and ran Altamira, which was on our side of Gloucester. Her story was a little like the Irish Brothers of Tanna whereby one couple would manage the resort whilst the others marketed and had free time; but instead of holidaying I understood that finances were such that most of them worked at other jobs as well. Beverley was the current manager at the resort as she was the only one of the partners who did not have other employment and her husband, who worked in Sydney, came to the ranch on weekends to assist. As her clothes had hinted, she was very keen on horses, which was the major activity of the property, a horse riding retreat.

We chatted easily the entire way home, where she dropped me at the door. She stayed for a cup of coffee with Roger and me before heading off, inviting us, as she left, to a local's night at Altamira. We accepted and I excitedly awaited the BBQ night. The two course meal would be provided, apart from alcohol, which we would have to buy. After dinner, toe-tapping music performed by the singing butcher of Krambach would ensure we danced the remainder of the night away. The biggest drawcard for me though was the opportunity to meet more local people.

In the late afternoon on the day of the event we set off leaving ourselves plenty of leeway to ensure we would arrive in time. We drove almost to Gloucester and turned right at Mograni, opposite the lookout, where we had often seen on the signpost with the destinations of Mount George and Altamira in small print. We followed a creek and the railway line through a green lush valley. Our progress slowed and we needed all the time we had allowed and more as the picturesque road became progressively narrower as we climbed out of the valley. The road snaked around the edge of the hills that had previously towered above us. The higher we went the greater the curves with hairpin bends appearing around every bend. The edge of the road dropped off steeply with the soft shoulders appearing to me to be under the car rather than to the side. There was certainly no room for overtaking and the sun was setting directly in front of us, blinding our eyes by the glare that was created and made it impossible, for minutes at a time, to see where the road was going. My stress levels rose significantly and it was all I could do not to scream hysterically. What worried me more than I cared to admit was how was I going to cope returning on this

road late at night? I knew I couldn't drive it. My nerves would not allow me to even contemplate that, although my rational brain told me it would be less frightening if I was in control of the vehicle. I also knew that Roger would not refrain from drinking during the evening. He wouldn't get drunk but he would probably drink more than I considered safe to drive on this road I now hated.

Although we arrived late, there was enough daylight left to have a tour of the resort. It was superbly set up with tennis courts, swimming pools, stables and a female and male bunk house as well as private hotel style rooms, outdoor and indoor eating areas, lounges, bar, games room, and dance floor. 'Tanna Beach,' Roger whispered to me and I knew he meant that Altamira was not in our league and had everything that was desirable for tourists. They even told us how they kept their tourists content on the guided twilight walks. They placed a stuffed toy koalas high in the fork of a gum tree allowing them to be seen by torchlight giving the overseas visitor the sightings of Australian fauna they craved.

Prior to dinner we sat outside at long tables having pre-dinner drinks where it became obvious that the reason these locals' nights were held was to give the resort's tourists cheap entertainment—us and the other residents. The smattering of locals who attended were characters from the Australian outback. Some were like Darrell. All told a good local yarn. The singing butcher from Krambach sang a selection of old Aussie bush songs and some rock and roll numbers. Most of the by now alcohol-fuelled patrons joined in, singing along with gusto.

Early in the evening, to my relief, we discovered that we did not have to return the way we came. The locals expressed their surprise at our choice of route as it was the long way round. The trip home was quick and easy and not scary in the least. In reality Altamira was only a five-minute drive on a good dirt road before connecting with the main road to Taree. Where it had taken us over an hour and a quarter to get to Altamira, it was an easy twenty-five minutes to get home. My worry had been for nothing.

Although it was a fun night I still hadn't met anyone with whom I thought I could become friends. I had hoped a friendship with Bev might develop but she wasn't at the local's night having been called back to Sydney for a family matter.

Having met our neighbours I resigned myself to not making friends in the area. The people who lived at the bottom of the hill at least resided there permanently. They were a German couple, the Bahrs. She worked at the hospital in Taree whilst her

husband was retired. They were friendly but reserved and much older, staid and happy in their own world. This was also the case for the other people down the road from us. Prior to moving to their house at Bucca Wauka, the husband had a massive heart attack and the doctors told him that he could have another at any time. They decided not to change their plans and relocated to this lonely area despite this. They relished the isolation, wanting nothing from life but each other with no other people around. We only met them because Mungo wandered down to visit. They rang to let us know where he was. When we went to collect him they showed us the house they had built. It had been designed with his death in mind as everything about the dwelling was made with easy maintenance that the wife could manage by herself. They were both realistic and practical as they were convinced his next heart episode would leave her alone in the world.

We had dinner with the young couple who lived a couple of kilometres down the road, firstly at our place and then at theirs. They were pleasant evenings but we had absolutely nothing in common. We also knew the people from 'Sendubroke Ranch'. They were friendly, but their entire life revolved around their horses, horse shows and riding—a pursuit we were unlikely to join.

Throughout the year there were four dances held at the hall in Bunyah and although they were well attended we felt out of place. I persuaded Roger to come with me and being winter it was with reluctance that he left our fire at home. We discovered that the beer-drinking men stood around a forty-four-gallon drum, inside which a fire was lit warming the cool winter's night, whilst in the hall the women chatted. The dance floor was empty of people and the band played for whoever would listen. No one danced apart from some small children. Roger had no desire to stand outside with the men, as he was uninterested in men's conversations, and he refused to dance as he didn't want to be the centre of attention on an otherwise empty dance floor. We sat together on the chairs spread out around the perimeter of the hall feeling very out of place. I listened to the music itching to dance and as my frustration grew so did my anger. We attended only one of these events and both decided, for different reasons, that we would avoid them in future.

At least we were getting to know the people in the area to say hallo to and when it came to the Christmas Party, the social event of the year which Darrell held in early December, we felt that we were now part of the neighbourhood and could find people to talk with most of the night.

The event was held up the road from us at Darrellene's place. People came from all around the locality as well as coming from 'away.' All the weekenders made an extreme effort to attend. Our Scotch-plying neighbour flew in by helicopter, landing in the paddock, whilst Darrell's relatives came from as far afield as the Northern Territory. We were affectionately introduced as the people who lived at 'Crackpot Corner' but it didn't worry us as we knew the locals gave no value to aesthetics and view, considering our house non-functional in terms of placement and design, thus giving rise to their name. We had long learnt that having items which were purely for enjoyment, such as a German Shepherd dog instead of a cattle dog or a house on a hill with a view, were things derided by our local neighbours. The farmers believed that placement of the homestead should follow strict practical guidelines, being sited preferably on the edge of the main road giving easy access, despite the occupants having to suck up the dust as trucks went by.

As day turned to night and the stars were winking in the black sky, Santa Claus arrived in a cart drawn by a couple of small ponies. The children screamed when they saw him turn in at the gate and ran down the long drive to meet him. There was no singing of 'Jingle Bells' just the squeals of children's excitement.

A huge BBQ followed and the children then curled up in the backs of the utes to sleep whilst their parents partied on. We left, with perhaps a little too much Christmas Cheer on board, around eleven, wandering down the road in the dark, occasional headlights lighting our way as another person left or a latecomer arrived. The party went on into the wee hours of the morning with many people camping overnight. In the morning as people roused there was a constant procession of cars driving past our gate as the party goers departed.

Darrell became increasingly worried about the holding of this Christmas party and spent many hours chatting to Roger about whether or not, as the host, he could be held liable if someone attending his party had an accident whilst driving under the influence of alcohol. It was at a time when people were suing for the most ridiculous compensations and winning. An incident that occurred on the bridge between Forster and Tuncurry highlighted the issue. In our opinion, this bridge was the best part of the town as you had superb views of the mouth of the river in one direction and down the lake in the other. The water was always an azure blue enhanced by the contrast of the white sand islands dotted about within the lake. In the summer the mobile ice-cream boat puttered up and down the river selling ice-creams and drinks to swimmers and

those reclining on the sandy atolls. It was a glorious sight and filled you with a euphoric, holiday feeling. A young man diving off the bridge spoilt this. It was obvious the water below was shallow in parts as evidenced by these sandy outcrops. The local council had placed signs saying 'Danger — no jumping from bridge', for those who remained unaware. This reckless youth disregarded the signs, dived in and broke his neck when he speared into the sand beneath. I feel sorry for him as he is now destined to a life in a wheelchair, however, due to his successful action suing the council for a great deal of money, we now have high walls preventing pedestrians gaining access to the traffic lanes and another high wall to prevent them from jumping into the water. No longer is that delightful view available to car occupants as they travel across the bridge.

Darrell based his fears on another case. A dinner party host had been successfully sued by his guests for damages and injuries, with talk of him also being charged by the police, because he had allowed his dinner guests, who had consumed too much alcohol, to drive. The prosecutors argued that he was responsible for the number of drinks served throughout the course of the evening. With this knowledge, it was claimed he should have taken their keys so that they could not drive on their departure.

Although we felt that a dinner party was a slightly different situation to a picnic, where people consumed their own alcohol, we advised Darrell that he should consult a lawyer. Instead of doing this he decided that his Christmas Party of 1998 would be his last. A pity. It was the end of an era and an important social outlet for those in the area who rarely saw each other socially.

Chapter 14

The Kidney House

Having completed the renovations to Barcoleuwin, life settled down to something of a humdrum existence. We travelled to Sydney once a month to see my mother, but the busyness of the city no longer enticed us and the time we spent there became increasingly shorter and consequently, we saw less of our friends.

Once a week we would go to Forster, a seaside town an hour to the east. We had found a beach entry with no signs prohibiting dogs off-lead and it was a nice day's outing for all of us. The trek by foot to the beach on the deep sandy track was a half an hour's hard slog and on arriving at the beach Mungo would head straight to the water for a swim to cool down. The water always looked so blue and inviting and as I was hot from the walk I always wished that I had worn my swimming costume. Eventually I remembered to take it and entered the enticing water gleefully. My joy was short-lived as the wind had sent an army of blue bottles onshore. The long trailing fishing tentacles of the creatures wrapped around my body, releasing the toxic substance designed to kill the small crustaceans they would normally eat. The result on me was an immediate, intense, sharp pain, which lasted over an hour before it decreased to a spreading dull ache. I looked as though I was wearing multiple strings of beads due to the welts, dotted with small white lesions, which had erupted on my arms, legs and stomach. I didn't bother taking my costume again and was content from that time onwards to confine myself to paddling. After our walk, we would do our grocery shopping and return home loaded to the gunwales with supplies.

Apart from these trips to Forster, we mostly stayed on the farm. Roger commenced a conveyancing course through Macquarie University as a potential means of supplementing our income in the future. I found it more interesting than he did and together we studied the huge law texts at night arguing over legal points. During the day, there was always something for us to do on the property, although it soon became very clear to both of us that neither of us enjoyed maintenance, preferring the planning and implementing stage. It took us two full days to mow and whipper snip the area around the house, which we were keeping as a park-like garden. We were still discovering the garden beneath the kikuyu grass and it filled in hours as

we cleared the grass exposing hibiscus, grevilleas, bottlebrushes and other unidentified plants. We were intent on recreating the garden perfection that once had been. To decrease the amount of mowing we needed to do we designed new garden beds to encompass the difficult, rocky terrain.

After one hot morning spent in the garden, we stripped off in the kitchen and ran to the pool for a quick dip to cool down. We floated enjoying the feeling of the cool water on our bodies, unrestricted by clothing as our aches and pains from our mornings toil ebbed away. It was then that we heard someone say hallo from behind us. The one time that we had unexpected visitors was the one time we had taken liberties, feeling safe in our isolation, as we knew Mungo always let us know of cars coming up the road. Our visitors however, were on horseback and had entered our property from the east, riding up past our chicken coop. They obligingly averted their eyes whilst we ran to get dressed.

Mungo and I continued to wander the countryside daily, and I spent increasingly more time on the computer in the office. I had decided to write a book for my mother's seventieth birthday about our trials and tribulations in running White Grass Resort on the island of Tanna in Vanuatu. This set us on a trail of reminiscing about our time there and, because we were aimless at this point, Roger began to express a desire to return to Port Vila. It soon became clear the more we went over the events of our time in the small Pacific nation, the more he blamed me for making our life hard by choosing the isolated island of Tanna to open a business rather than in the main centre, Port Vila. He had become convinced that the outcome of the venture would have been quite different had our hotel been on the main island in the capital city. He then said that it was my fault we were at Bucca Wauka and not in, or at least nearer, to town. 'It's White Grass all over again.' He was increasingly short-tempered and intolerant of anything that was not done how or when he wanted to do it. He became furious when I requested toilet stops whilst we were travelling and usually refused, unless he also had to get fuel. I could beg but it fell on deaf ears. I would think of my days in Intensive Care where victims of car accidents were worse off if the person had a full bladder at the time of the crash. The pressure of the seat belt could lead to a rupture of the bladder and I always took measures to prevent this from happening. I would sit bursting to go in worried silence, knowing I had pushed Roger to his breaking point, which although it passed almost as quickly as it came, seemed to occur earlier and with more vehemence. I started to wonder whether it was his anger

that made me miss having friends so much. We all needed good friends, I believed, to share both the happy and the sad times. Humans, I believe, are herd animals and need that connection and touch, acting as a support system. Good friends will listen to secrets without being judgmental whilst at the same time keep you grounded in reality. In Vanuatu Roger and I had done this for each other but increasingly I was finding that his more frequent blow-ups and my inability to share just how desperately I wanted a child were making me feel how alone I was at times. Despite this we were all each other had and most of the time we were happy with that situation. That was until I saw the perfect job for me advertised in the local paper.

> *The Mid North Coast Area Health Service, Southern Sector, invites suitably qualified Registered Nurses to staff a new limited care haemodialysis facility in the Taree area. The primary role of a limited care dialysis unit is to provide maintenance haemodialysis services for medically stable patients.*

This was a part-time, short-term position with an option to continue, if your work was up to standard, and conversely if the employee wished to continue. I could think of nothing better suited to me, as in my time in Intensive Care I had experience with both peritoneal and haemodialysis. Chronic renal failure I knew would be quite different to acute, but the hours suited and I felt the type of work would be enjoyable. How I was going to broach it with Roger though, was another matter altogether. I knew he would agree to me applying and I knew he would say he was happy for me to work, but I believed the subtext would be there, as it was with my first husband who reacted violently to any time I was away from his presence. I believed that Roger would, underneath his bravado, be hurting that I chose to be apart for three days a week. It was days before I summoned up the courage.

'If you want to do it, do it,' he said as I had anticipated. I deliberated for a little longer before putting my curriculum vitae together and sending it off. I waited anxiously for a reply. There wouldn't be too many nurses with dialysis experience in the rural area applying for the position and I was confident that I would have a better than average chance of not only obtaining an interview but of being offered the job. Despite not having worked in nursing for over six years I knew my record working in

intensive care as both a registered nurse and then as a clinical nurse consultant and educator, along with the excellent references that I had, would make me hard to pass up.

When the letter finally arrived it was a 'Thank you for your application but no thank you' response. I couldn't believe it and I felt my self-esteem tumbling rapidly in the one area of my life where I had an abundance of confidence. The letter stated that the employer had decided that they hadn't received the quality of applications that they had desired and thus the position would be re-advertised in the New Year. I would be welcome to reapply at that time. I ranted and raved and tried desperately to understand and rationalise why I had not even obtained an interview.

'They did say you were welcome to reapply.'

'You've got to be joking. I'm not reapplying. I didn't really want the job anyway.' I was close to tears so I turned away from Roger, suddenly realising how desperately I had wanted this opportunity. I needed contact with more people and although I loved Roger I also needed to communicate with others. We were together virtually every minute of the day and night, and as our experiences were the same, we had nothing new to tell each other. We no longer had a project we were planning and now that it was all maintenance we both found it boring and monotonous. I needed this job so I wouldn't forget how to talk and so I could survive the isolation. The farm was far worse than Tanna had ever been. There, at least we had guests coming and going and the different intrigues occurring in the local life always gave us matters to mull over and speculate about. Here we had none of that. The guests we had for the B & B were not that great in number although there were as many as we needed; what I wanted was life. I felt as though I was suffocating and I wanted to come up for air.

A month later the job was re-advertised. I had no plan to register my interest, but after receiving a letter telling me that they were hoping I would reapply, I re-submitted my application. This time I was successful.

Roger and I both went to Taree on the day of the interview. Roger did some shopping whilst I waited at Taree Hospital for my meeting. A panel of two conducted the interrogation. It consisted of the renal clinical nurse specialist from Taree hospital and the chairman of the Nita Reed Dialysis House. They asked me questions from differing angles. The nurse asked technical questions and probed my expertise whilst the man asked more personal questions, and put scenarios to me about how I would deal with certain hypothetical situations mainly concerning personal conflict. I left the

interview feeling as though I had presented well so I wasn't surprised to get a phone call in the late afternoon offering me the job.

Again I went through agony deciding whether I would accept the position. The indecision was largely because they required me to spend a month learning the machines and procedures at the John Hunter Hospital's haemodialysis unit, The Wansey Centre. I knew this was not fair on Roger. A month alone, with only weekend visits, would isolate him far too much and was unreasonable of me to expect him to agree to. Additionally, they wanted me to start work at seven in the morning and this I would not do. I was not prepared to risk travelling through the thick mists that lay low over the narrow dirt roads at that time of the morning, especially in autumn and early winter. The earliest I would leave home would be seven-thirty for an eight-thirty start at work. I delayed giving an immediate answer and told them I'd ring back within the hour and tell them whether I would accept the job or not.

By the time I returned the call I had decided to decline the offer of employment. I told them my reasons and to my surprise the Chairman said, 'Irene, with your experience we could come to some arrangement with John Hunter for you to only be there for a few days and we can always move the starting time to fit in with your travelling time. If we altered these two conditions would you take the job?'

'Yes, I'd love to. That'd be marvelous if you could do that.'

'I'll discuss it with Leanne and we'll talk tomorrow.' My excitement was contagious and we opened a bottle of wine to celebrate my probable success. Roger seemed genuinely pleased that I had got the job and my anxiety dissipated.

The next day the chairman confirmed that I could start work at eight-thirty in the morning and attend John Hunter for two weeks, two days in the first week and three days in the second. A total of five days in all. I accepted the job and learnt that Monica, the woman with whom I would be working, had no prior dialysis experience and as well as working three days a week at the kidney house she would continue to work at Taree Hospital in the medical ward on a part-time basis. They set my starting date for two weeks later when I would trail the clinical nurse consultant as she did her home visits to dialysis clients in the area and spend time setting up the Nita Reed Dialysis Centre to make sure it had all the supplies we would need to care for patients.

The centre was the dream of its instigator, Nita Reed. Her husband had suffered renal failure requiring dialysis. For many years the couple had made the long trip to Newcastle for dialysis three times a week and later they undertook dialysis at home

where Nita had the role of carer. She had struggled with the duties required of her but it was preferable to the long journeys to Newcastle. As she and her husband aged it became increasingly difficult for her to manage. She successfully took on the bureaucracy to gain all the permissions required that would allow a community dialysis unit to be based at Taree on the Mid North Coast. The Mid North Coast Kidney Association rallied behind her efforts, as the long distances they had to travel for dialysis or the difficulties faced with dialysing at home affected all the members. The financial burden these two options placed on the patients and their families was heavy because they received no travel subsidies for petrol or accommodation as the government deemed that they resided within a reasonable travelling distance of the major dialysis centre in Newcastle. For some sufferers, this meant travelling two hours there, and then afterwards, at their most vulnerable time when severely weakened by the dialysis treatment, a two hour return journey.

The association held many raffles and fund-raising events along with gaining some generous interest-free loans and donations from private individuals until eventually they raised enough money to buy a house in Chatham, Taree, to be used for community dialysis. This was not the end of the efforts to raise funds, as they needed more money to buy the dialysis machines. This was a daunting task but the Mid North Coast Kidney Association with Lyn Mayo at the helm took on the running of the community markets called 'The Hub' and these raised the necessary funds. All was ready to commence operation when the association successfully applied for a government grant to pay the salaries of two nursing staff. Nita was immortalised in the building's name. Both Nita in 1998 and Lyn in 2014 were awarded an Order of Australia Medal in recognition of their hard work in getting the 'kidney house' up and running.

I spent my first day at work with Monica and Leanne, the renal clinical nurse consultant at Taree Hospital. Leanne showed us her setup at the base hospital. Here she performed dialysis for clients who were visiting the area on holidays, and acute kidney failure patients, as well as other semi-emergency and respite dialysis. She also followed up all the people in the community to whom John Hunter Hospital had supplied dialysis machines and were dialysing at home. The community area she covered was massive, stretching from Gloucester in the south, to Kempsey in the North. As well as orientating us to her room in the hospital she took us to the Nita Reed Dialysis Centre where Monica and I would be working on our own. We

acquainted ourselves with the layout, the supplies in the store room, the dialysis machines we were going to be using and the house generally.

I was thrilled that the three of us hit it off immediately. Lunch, which we ate at a coffee shop in Taree, was full of animated chatter as we got to know each other. I immediately felt as though I'd come home. I slotted in to this environment and realised how acutely I had missed the camaraderie that is normal amongst nurses. I went home full of enthusiasm, regaling my day to Roger ecstatically. I described the personalities of my co-workers, their life stories as I knew them and what the house where I would be working was like. Roger listened but he didn't seem enthusiastic.

Monica and I didn't work together again until six weeks later, a week before the house opened to the patients, as she went off to do her month in Newcastle at the Wansey Centre, in Charlestown. My time in Newcastle was programmed to commence the week she returned. Then, after a week preparing, our first patients would arrive. The Mid North Coast Kidney Association in consultation with the Wansey Centre had selected four people as our initial clients. We had a mix of clients. Jack had been dialysing at home for numerous years but was starting to struggle with the process. Margaret, an elderly lady, had started doing her dialysis at home but her husband had become frail and could no longer act as her carer necessitating the long trip to Newcastle three times a week. Prue, our third patient, was a single woman in her fifties and although she had a boyfriend she did not wish him involved in her care as she felt this would impact on their relationship so she too made the journey to Newcastle. Barbara, the other patient, had moved north with her husband from Melbourne, chasing the warmer weather and had developed end stage renal failure because of her consumption of APC powders back in the days when this had been a socially acceptable activity.

APC powders, which were a combination analgesic consisting of aspirin, phenacetin and caffeine, caused a huge number of cases of renal failure in Australia. It started during the war when women who worked in the munitions factories were issued the powders to control the headaches they developed due to contact with the nitroglycerine. I knew about this problem from when I worked in Coronary Care. Our patients also developed headaches from the nitroglycerine patches we applied to prevent and treat angina. Nitroglycerine dilates the blood vessels allowing blood to flow freely to the muscles. This sudden flow of blood to not only the heart but also the brain was the cause of the headaches that accompanied it. A doctor told us of a patient

who he advised to place the patch further from his head in the hope of the brain being less affected. The patient did this and reported back that with the increase in blood flow he had the first erection he had managed in years. He also reported that it was his wife who got the headache.

From standard issue it did not take long before Bex and Vincents, the two brands of APC powders that were available as I was growing up, took on a social aspect as well. Everyone knew the catchphrase, 'Have a cup of tea, a Bex and a good lie down.' Taking these powders was considered the appropriate action whenever anyone suffered from stress, pain and either good or bad moods. In the 1950s and 1960s the men would smoke and the women would take a Bex in a glass of water. Many women felt they could not get through the day without one or more powders and, as these drugs were highly addictive, it didn't take long before their consumption was occurring in dangerous quantities. A South African doctor who emigrated to Australia in the 1960s was the first person to realise the addictiveness and the harm these drugs caused the kidneys, and he agitated for legislation. In the 1970s the legislators put some control on the manufacture and packaging of the powders, removing phenacetin from the ingredients and adding health warnings to the packaging. We were still seeing the results of these powders: the diagnosis of interstitial nephritis, an inflammatory process inside the kidney, and papillary necrosis, where there is death of tissue resulting in shrunken kidneys, were common. Both these conditions lead to end stage renal failure where the kidney no longer performs its vital functions of eliminating waste products, maintaining the correct electrolyte balance, cleaning the blood, as well as producing hormones and enzymes which control blood pressure, make red blood cells and maintain bone health. Death will result in a matter of days without dialysis when the patient is diagnosed with end stage renal failure. All our clients were at this stage of the disease.

For the remainder of the first month I travelled around the countryside with Leanne visiting people on home dialysis. This gave me an insight into how alone these patients and carers were, isolated from medical help, other than the occasional visit from Leanne. The care giver, who was in many instances elderly and suffering their own health issues, dealt with any problem encountered, from inserting the needle, to tubing disconnections, to sudden drops in blood pressure. Rarely is a person allowed to dialyse alone due to the risks involved if something goes wrong. If no one was there to call for help or take appropriate action in the case of a complication, it

would not take long for the patient to pass out, bleed to death or die from extreme drops in blood pressure. We did, however, visit one person, a young male, who carried out his treatments alone. He was very stable as he was compliant with medical, dietary and fluid regimes and seemed to cope in his solitary sessions. It was clear on these community visits, however, that dialysis left him drained of energy.

We also visited a few people who had opted for peritoneal dialysis instead of haemodialysis as this type of treatment is a gentler form of dialysis with fewer side effects. Here the doctor puts a tube into the peritoneal cavity and a hypertonic solution is run in. The peritoneum, a membranous lining protecting the bowel and other organs, acts as a semi-permeable membrane. The fluid infused into this space has a concentration of molecules that attract water to it, in a similar fashion that a salt cellar will attract water from the atmosphere. The water will flow through from the body into this introduced fluid taking with it waste products which are small enough to cross the membrane. Other products which the body needs to retain are of a size too big to travel across the membrane. After an hour or more, the fluid drains out via gravity, having attracted excess fluid along with the electrolytes and toxins that require removal. This could be done intensively each night by an automatic machine that operated whilst you slept, or continuously throughout the day. This left the patient feeling much brighter as they didn't have the high build-up of toxins prior to dialysis followed by extremely low levels afterwards. It was these peaks and sudden troughs which were debilitating to those who used haemodialysis. Peritoneal dialysis was definitely the way to go if you were a suitable candidate for it, in my opinion.

These community visits opened my eyes to the problems that many people face in the country. Not only are they far removed from the resources that would give them a similar level of health care to those living in the cities, but they also have added burdens that country folk, many already on the poverty line, endure. In addition to the medical bills they need extra money for both transport and accommodation for the long trips necessary to see specialists, to relearn new dialysis machines, and for the inevitable occasions when their condition becomes unstable thus requiring assessment and treatment in a dialysis centre. As they weren't eligible for travel allowances many had no choice but to travel down and back in the same day, sometimes having to leave home at dawn or earlier to arrive for their scheduled dialysis time.

During this time Leanne took me to meet the prospective Nita Reed Centre clients in their homes. They were an interesting mix of personalities and it was

obvious which two clients would use the single rooms based on this. The other two would share the larger room but even after a brief meeting I knew that with their gentle personalities they would get along without any problems.

I enjoyed being back in a nursing environment with the repartee between staff members that went with the job. An added benefit to the community work was having access to homes and places I would not otherwise have seen. I learnt of the high incidence of Aboriginal Australians with end stage renal failure. This was due to numerous causes including a genetic susceptibility, but overwhelmingly an end result of conditions relating to poverty and lack of education. These include poor diets, obesity and diabetes, premature births, recurring infections and untreated high blood pressure. We were not going to have any Aboriginal people at Nita Reed initially although that situation could change if the Biripi Aboriginal Centre, who currently dialysed those Indigenous people who required it in a culturally sensitive environment found that they required our assistance. We visited Kempsey hospital and Port Macquarie hospital which both had small haemodialysis units but these were already utilised to capacity. My understanding of the difficulties for those in the country was growing and Leanne greatly enhanced this awareness with her tales told over the numerous lunches we had at different restaurants and coffee shops.

Whilst my days were stimulating, Roger was having the opposite experience. He tended to go to Forster more often, taking Mungo for solitary walks on the beach. He also explored the countryside on his own more. He was bored, telling me, 'I can't see myself mowing grass for the rest of my life.' I glossed over statements like these, dismissing his feelings as I chattered on about who I had met, where I had gone and conversations I'd had. I assumed that he would be as interested in my day as myself.

The month passed quickly and it became my turn to attend the Wansey Centre. The Kidney Association was putting me up at a hotel in Charlestown. Lyn, the proprietor of the dog kennel we used for Mungo at Bulahdelah, lent me her car when she heard of my dilemma of not being able to take the only vehicle that we owned to Newcastle. With transport, when I was given an early mark on the Friday, I drove home, surprising Roger with my early arrival. It also allowed me to go dancing in Newcastle on Thursday night, which I thoroughly enjoyed. It was the type of dancing studio I was used to in Sydney, and the standard of teaching and dance was good. I dreamt of the possibility of travelling there each week so that I could continue the lessons on a weekly basis.

The first day at Wansey I spent practising machine setup and trouble-shooting. Haemodialysis involves putting two large diameter needles into a surgically created shunt which connects a vein and an artery normally placed in the patient's arm. Blood is then pumped from the patient via the arterial needle and through an artificial kidney designed to remove the proteins, electrolytes and excess fluids that the person could not remove from the body because their own kidneys had failed. After the blood had been through the artificial kidney it returned to the body via the venous line. Setting up the machine involved priming the lines and kidney with a solution, so that air didn't enter the patient's body. The machine was a huge pump with alarms that sounded for most emergency situations. A disconnection was obviously one of these problems, which could lead to the patient's blood volume being emptied onto the floor in a matter of minutes. Other non-patient complications that they taught me to deal with included what to do if the electricity failed. In this event the operator manually pumped the machine, with a little handle attached to the pump housing, returning the blood to the body before it could clot in the tubing. This was not an easy thing to do and most of our clients would be incapable of doing this themselves so I hoped that the back-up generator purchased for the house to cover this contingency would not fail at the same time as an electricity outage.

The next day I was given the task of putting the needles into the most difficult patients they could find, and shown techniques that could be used when you just couldn't make it work. Again I was good at this task although I can't say I enjoyed it. The feelings of stress prior to each cannulation were not new to me, as I had felt like this working in intensive care before I performed any type of needling. I knew it was because of my own psychological fear response to being the recipient of a needle making me anxious that I was successful on the first attempt and so not inflicting too much pain on the patient.

Roger was none too happy when I arrived home. He was pleased to see me but, despite the long phone calls from me each night, he was feeling the isolation acutely.

'I can't take it.'

'It's only for another week. And only for three days. You'll be driving down on the third.'

'I'm going to have to look for something to do. I might take a trip to Vanuatu and look at businesses there.'

'Why? It sent you mad. Why on earth would you want to go back there?'

‘It sent me mad only because you insisted it had to be Tanna. If we’d taken on a business in Vila it would have been quite different. Everything you do has to be White Grass. We have to do everything the hard way. And now you’re deserting me.’

He was angry and blaming me for everything. Again I decided that he would calm down after the Newcastle stint was over. Three days couldn’t be that difficult to fill in when I was at work in Taree and it is, after all, during the nights that you notice the loneliness. Despite my rationalisation and downplaying of the problem, I went off on Tuesday afternoon a little concerned about leaving Roger at home alone. The three days went quickly for me. Each day the centre allocated me patients to care for from arrival to departure. I was also summonsed to attend anything happening of interest, mainly to do with patients suffering side effects of the dialysis.

Dropping blood pressures were by far the most common event with the expectation that twenty to thirty percent of those dialysing would suffer from hypotension (low blood pressure) due, predominantly, to removing too much fluid. Each patient is weighed prior to each dialysis session to determine how much weight they had put on. The aim was to remove this excess weight, due to retained fluid, during the process. Sometimes the target weight was incorrect, other times the pre-weight was inaccurate due to a difference in the clothing they were wearing. Occasionally it was due to other causes such as anaemia or septicaemia (infection of the blood) which was a constant risk with the numerous needlings combined with these patients’ already poor immune systems. A more dangerous reason for the drop in blood pressure was exsanguination due to the lines becoming disconnected and the blood pumping out of the body at a rate of up to four hundred millilitres per minute. Other common complications included headaches, chest pain and severe itching, which was due to excess calcium and phosphorus in the body. This was difficult to treat and many suffered constantly. A condition known as disequilibrium syndrome could also occur when the urea was removed too slowly from the brain, leading to a fluid shift into the brain due to osmosis, or because the electrolyte balance was changed too rapidly. This would cause cerebral oedema (fluid on the brain) leading to headaches, hypertension and nausea, vomiting and other neurological symptoms. I wondered how stressful it would be once we were on our own, isolated at the kidney house without access to doctors and multiple staff members such as they had at the Wansey Centre. I had always been in awe of ambulance officers who treated casualties on the scene. One of the reasons for this was because they didn’t have the

luxury of calling medical staff whereas in the Intensive Care Units I had worked we always had a medic on hand. I knew I was capable but it didn't stop the anxious twinges I was getting when I thought about everything that could go wrong.

The most beneficial activity for me was instruction on ordering stocks of dialysis equipment, administrative requirements and record keeping in the limited care setting. I also started to realise that chronic care brought about a totally new relationship with the patient from that which I had previously had in Intensive Care. In this setting you got to know them and their families intimately and I could see the involvement the Wansey staff had with their clients: feeling their pain, celebrating their successes and joys, and the inevitable grief when one of them died.

Lyn picked up her car on Thursday afternoon which made returning to the dance studio impossible but I was feeling weary so I was happy to talk to Roger and then fall asleep. He was coming to collect me the next day and we were going to head to Sydney for the weekend to see my Mother before I started work at Nita Reed House with our own patients on the following Monday.

CHAPTER 15

Part of a Team

Monica and I worked well together. It wasn't long before the patients began begging me to start work earlier so they could come in at six or seven in the morning to go on the machines. Their desire to get it over and done with early was understandable. My original reasons for not starting earlier had not changed, however, and I was resistant to agreeing to their request. We did concede that, although no one would be put on the machine until I arrived, they could come earlier to set up their machines. Monica usually arrived first at six thirty to rinse the machines which took approximately an hour, then the clients, with her agreement, arrived. Their arrival was staggered with the man in the single room arriving at 7am and the remainder at 7.30am as I was leaving home. When the weather was agreeable I departed earlier as I became aware at how our clients were desperate to rid themselves of the toxic buildup of waste products. Dialysis day they wanted over and done with as quickly as possible.

A limited care facility means that the patients are stable on dialysis and thereby unlikely to experience massive blood pressure drops and blood electrolyte swings. They should also be medically stable and capable of setting up their own machines with minimal help. We had a fifth patient who was agitating for admittance to the house but she was so unstable and incapable of setting up her own machine that Leanne and those at the Wansey Centre refused her application until we proved that we would be able to cope with the extra challenges she would bring with her.

The patients all had an arteriovenous fistula or graft, which means that the artery and the vein are connected to each other directly, either with a fistula or via plastic tubing with a graft. This allows the vein wall to become big and strong allowing the insertion of two needles into the vein with every treatment to draw the blood out of the body into the dialysis machine at a rate of about a pint a minute. It also prevented the vein being sucked closed under the strong pressure. Ideally, the patient performed the cannulation, that is, the process of putting the needle into the shunted vein, but most of our clients required either Monica or myself to cannulate them. Although only two attempted to put in their own needles, they all set up the equipment for the nursing staff to use.

The man who occupied the single room was used to issuing orders and had played a pivotal part in our employment process; he was, theoretically, our boss. Getting him to wait for my arrival was difficult. As he was very stable on dialysis, but often desperately in need of getting rid of his high potassium levels and other toxins that had built up since his last treatment as he hadn't made the necessary dietary changes, Monica would start to connect him to the machine just before my arrival. He could cannulate himself and had been successfully home dialysing. The reason he had wanted to come to the kidney house was twofold—his wife, who acted as his carer, was starting to become unwell herself and was no longer coping with the dialysis treatment or the bulky equipment in their house. The machinery and dialysis supplies were a constant reminder of his disease and both he and his wife had started to view their house as a hospital. The room where they had the dialysis machine had to be entered to get from one end of the house to the other so there was never any escape from the fact that sickness played a large part in their lives. Dialysing at the kidney house allowed them to return their house to normal and greatly improved their psychological outlook, a very important factor for the chronically ill.

This became clear when Monica and I, plus our husbands, received an invitation to their place for dinner. This placed us in a difficult position as normally we wouldn't accept a patient's invitation to their home for a meal, but he was also our employer who paid our wages. For that reason we accepted. We had a very nice evening and learnt about his involvement in the only unsolved plane crash to occur in Australia since the Second World War.

In 1981, when he was a police officer in Gloucester, the single engine Cessna had crashed with five men on board whilst it was travelling between Proserpine in Queensland to Bankstown airport in Sydney. The plane was being tracked by radar at the Williamtown RAAF base, which knew the plane was in trouble with instrument failure, and flying in bad weather. The control tower was attempting to guide the plane to safety over the radio when they heard it crash. Despite sending search planes out immediately looking for signs of a fire or crash, nothing was found.

Our boss participated in the initial search, which used four hundred police, army reservists and bushwalkers. Several years later, another attempt to find the plane led to his recall to the property of media mogul Kerry Packer at Ellerston. The search party's accommodation, for a few nights, was at the property and he tells tales of being asked what he would like for dinner.

‘What’s available?’ he asked.

‘Whatever you want. If we don’t have it we’ll fly it in,’ the butler said. Our host had us enthralled at visions of the property’s opulence conjured by his descriptions.

Conversation revolved around policing in Gloucester and Taree and discussion about the kidney house and our needs. He assured us that if we wanted anything we were just to ask and it would happen. His wife also talked about how the kidney disease had affected their life together, how she was resentful that the life she had anticipated for herself had not come to fruition because of her husband’s illness and about her own failing health. Roger lightened the evening telling tales of Vanuatu and his kidnap; despite the effect the kidnap had on him, he had the ability to make any situation sound funny.

The woman in the other single room was a much more difficult person. Not only was she difficult to cannulate but also there was no end of problems with her blood pressure and her machine. She was querulous, demanding and angry. She was angry at the disease rather than with us but it seemed she couldn’t help but take it out on us. Monica used to cannulate the two single rooms whilst I did the clients in the main room. We took it in turns, however, to spend some time with the woman in the single room, to which she responded positively. She loved us whilst those at the Wansey Centre continually received the caustic bite of her tongue.

We managed our four initial clients easily and those putting their names on the waiting list grew. In less than six months, our numbers had gone up from four to eight. We took on a young fellow who was waiting for a kidney transplant, a Taree businesswoman, and a retiree who wasn’t suitable as a transplant recipient because he had suffered from cancer in the past. We finally accepted the woman who didn’t fit the criteria of limited care but as she struggled to do the journey to Newcastle our employers demanded that we accept her now we had proved we could cope.

The Mid North Coast Kidney Association also paid the fees enabling both Monica and me to do a renal nursing certificate from the College of Nursing based in Sydney. I had completed my Intensive Care Certificate there and enjoyed studying again. Monica felt she was too old for it, but we both passed the course with flying colours, helped I’m sure by the practical experience we were gaining each week with our patients.

When one of our original clients died the house went into a real depression. We had all become very close and it was confronting for everyone as they knew that it

was only a matter of time before they too met a similar fate. We worried about the husband of the deceased woman as the couple had retired to Forster from Melbourne, leaving family behind for a warmer life at the seaside. His life, for most of the years they had lived in the area, had been consumed with caring for his sick wife and now he was bereft. He continued coming in to see us daily, his life empty, feeling lost and alone. Eventually he decided to return to family in Melbourne.

After a Christmas party, held at the local Chinese restaurant in Chatham, proved very successful our reservations to interact socially dissipated and we started to be a bit more sociable outside of the kidney house hours. The patients made a unanimous decision that they, with their partners, would come to the farm at Bucca Wauka for lunch. This occurred in January. Again we had a day that succeeded in making everybody even closer. We got to know them not only in the sick setting but also in a social non-sick one. Margaret and Thomas were one of those couples that you hope you will be like when you get old, still deeply in love. They were coming to the realisation that they could no longer manage the farm they operated on Mitchell's Island and contemplating the difficult decision to downsize and move into Taree. They talked of the difficulties they were having deciding on a retirement village as neither of them truly wanted to admit they had to give up their island home.

Despite these happy interludes the chronic nature of their illness caused many of our patients to suffer from depression. The worst of these was a young chap in his early thirties who was awaiting a kidney transplant. He hated himself for being a burden on his wife and two children and to make matters worse he also suffered from seemingly all the possible complications of dialysis. His skin itching was the worst case we saw and there was nothing we could do to ease it. His dry skin, particularly on his upper body, was covered in picked sores and scratch marks from his scratching. The more he itched the more anxious and depressed he became. The entire house hoped that his transplant would happen soon. He carried a pager with him and lived in the hope that it would be activated meaning that a kidney that was a good tissue match had become available. We were all thrilled when we heard he had received a call and devastated when he returned to the house without the transplant being done due to a technical problem. It was a few months before another kidney that suited was found. This time he successfully had the transplant and final relief to his itching.

Jack also waited impatiently for a kidney and we thought that he was not high on the list due to his non-compliance with diet and alcohol consumption, but

eventually he too received a transplant which for a short time gave him a break from the house, but when the kidney failed they did not put him back on the transplant list. The rest of our clients were not eligible for transplant as they were either too old or had another condition such as cancer that made them unsuitable.

While I was happy in my life now that I was again working and having some social interaction, Roger continued to express his unhappiness. A constant theme of our discussions was his desire to return to Vanuatu. He continued to feel that he had unfinished business there. Eventually, having worked a year at the kidney house I became eligible for holidays and I suggested that we take a trip during that time. He agreed and we both looked forward to travelling again as we confirmed our plans to go in February.

Although this was underway, I received a shock one day when I returned home from work and Roger said, 'We have to sell. I can't take being here by myself any longer. I can't see myself mowing lawns until I die and the house is going to need painting again. I'm not going to do that. Anyway, I've found a business I want to buy.'

CHAPTER 16

A Move Is On The Horizon

'What business?' My head was whirling with scenarios and recriminations. I worried about the kidney house, about whether or not I was included in the business and was I going to get a say.

'The Barrington General Store,' Roger said. 'Come on. We'll go for a drive and I'll show you.' I hadn't seen Roger this animated in months and knowing how I had felt before starting work I could understand that he too needed a purpose in life. Despite the farm's scenic beauty his needs weren't being met and this was made worse by the time he was now spending alone.

We drove to Barrington, a small hamlet six kilometres to the west of Gloucester. The town was no more than a village with small, rundown fibro and timber houses lining either side of the main road, Argyle Street. There were two other streets—Collaroy Avenue where the wealthy of Gloucester bought small acreages and the houses were new, brick and opulent and Skye Road with the two teacher primary school and a smattering of old farm and newer hobby farm cottages. The Barrington Tops were further to the west by forty-nine kilometres and Thunderbolts Way, a major alternative route to Queensland, was a turn to the right, joining the New England Tablelands region with the coast. The store was the last stop for petrol for seventy-one kilometres in both these directions.

We parked the car and stared at the shop, which had closed for the day. In one of our many drives we had stopped and bought an ice cream here, served by an old French lady. It had been unremarkable. Roger had been inside today, however, and told me that the shop was rundown with little stock, the restaurant had no guests but the post office was busy with people coming in to collect their mail. He felt that those serving were weary. 'You remember how we felt at Tanna Beach when we just wanted to be gone. That sense of desperation and longing.'

'Yes.' I could well remember the days we used to walk from the custom village along the volcanic ash paths back to our home discussing how we were going to get

off the island. Our feelings of hopelessness at being stuck there when all we wanted was to be gone.

'I got the sense that is how these people feel. They are over it. But it'd suit us. And the good thing is, we wouldn't have to travel far to work because the house is joined to the shop.'

His enthusiasm was rubbing off on me. 'What about Vanuatu?'

'We'll still go for a visit but I don't think you want to go back there to live.'

'I can't leave Mum again. A general store is jolly hard work though.'

'I'm used to hard work. It can't be worse than Tanna. Anyway, what I really want is to run the restaurant. I'm dying to do that but I'm too scared to just have a restaurant. This way if the restaurant doesn't work we still have the rest of the business to fall back on.'

Roger loved cooking and was a good cook when I'd met him. I had attempted to woo him with my tinned curried sardines—a failure on the first occasion I invited him for dinner. Undaunted, the second dinner I cooked for him was a repetition of the first. I had decided to show him that curried sardines were a culinary delight. Instead he said, 'I haven't reached this age to eat this kind of shit.' That was the last meal I cooked for him as he took over all the kitchen duties from that point on. On Tanna Peter, our cook, had passed trade secrets on to him of how to create a meal out of nothing and the art of preparing meals for large numbers, so that they were all ready at the same time, all perfectly cooked. He enjoyed cooking for our bed and breakfast guests and I could understand him wanting to take it further.

Excitedly we talked of nothing else on the way home and started to devise a plan of action. I was coming to realise that Roger and I both thrived on this planning stage and we worked exceedingly well together working through the finer details of requirements and who could do what tasks. We were always in total harmony with each other at this stage of a project.

The next day we visited the real estate agency who had sold us Barcoleuwin and arranged for a representative to visit to discuss the sale of our property. We then continued out to Barrington once again to look inside the shop. It was as Roger had described—run down with little stock and unfriendly, worn out staff. The owner wasn't there as he was doing some cattle work on his dairy property across the Barrington River, but the woman said she would tell him that we wanted to meet with him. So we arranged to see him the following Thursday at two in the afternoon, which

she told us was a quiet time of day.

Thursday arrived and we met the owner of the shop. He was softly spoken with a seductive French accent and a twinkle in his eye. He told us how well it was doing, showed us over the house, shop, restaurant and the massive store rooms and cool room at the rear. A couple of acres of land came with the shop and it boasted a large chicken house and yard. The huge Bougainvillea growing up an old dead tree had spectacular, showy red flowers. I fell in love with the garden. Roger fell in love with the restaurant and commercial kitchen and was already planning the modifications he would make to it to increase the restaurant's productivity. We were both hooked. All we had to do was agree on a price. We didn't think that it was worth what the Frenchman was asking. We went home to think about it.

We rang a couple of days later with our offer, which was immediately declined. Point blank. There was no gap left open that would allow further negotiations. There was, therefore, no point raising our more than reasonable offer, as it was clear that he had no intention of going below his asking price. We told him that it was more than we thought it was worth and we would have to leave it. Disappointed, we decided that we would go ahead with selling our house as Roger declared that he didn't want to do the constant maintenance required and it would soon need repainting with the Organoil to prevent the timbers turning black again. It was time to make a move. We signed on with the real estate agency to sell it for us.

The agent rang a week later with our first prospective purchaser. He had arranged that the single man would stay Friday night in the bed and breakfast and on the Saturday morning he would show the fellow the property. The potential buyer would pay us for the night's accommodation. Put on the spot, with no time to think about the ramifications of his arrangements, we agreed. We had learnt from past experience, to keep our stress levels to a minimum, to only book one group at a time. Therefore, as we had a young couple staying with us for the Friday and Saturday night we would have refused the man's booking but having accepted it we were left with a feeling of foreboding.

The man was massive. He stood above six feet five tall and even with that height he looked fat—a candidate for a heart attack. As he walked from the parking area up the steep ramp to the house his face turned puce from the exertion. He dwarfed the house, which was large, making it look like a flimsy doll's house and I feared when he sat on our furniture that it would just crumple beneath him. His

complaining and surly disposition combined with our painful awareness that we were going out of our way to make things perfect, resulting in us not being relaxed or free with our conversation, which created a stilted atmosphere. It stressed us because, as a guest, he had access to everything and he made no attempt to hide the fact that he was going through it with a fine-toothed comb. He also made dinner an uncomfortable affair, as he made it quite clear he was not here to enjoy himself, unlike our other two guests who were. Unfortunately, it was the other guests who were adversely affected and whose experience was not as wonderful as it might otherwise have been.

When the agent arrived the next day there was no need for him to 'carry out an inspection' of the property. The man said as soon as he saw him, ‘I’ve seen all I need to see. The house is too small. I need something bigger.’ This we felt was a true reflection but we thought that the chap would have to have a house custom-built if he was ever going to obtain a feeling of space.

Two weeks passed before we had anyone else look at the property. This time they came with the agent. I was at work at the kidney house so I didn’t meet them but Roger told me that he felt that it had gone well. We were not surprised when later that night we had a call from the agent advising that an offer had been made.

‘I’d advise you to take it. It’s the only offer you’ve had,’ The agent said to Roger on the phone after telling him what it was.

‘But it’s only been on the market for three weeks. He’s only the second person to look at it and let’s face it, the house was never going to suit the first person.’ Roger made a counter offer which was close to the asking price, way above what the offer we’d been given. The agent expressed his misgivings and clearly thought we were mad. There was not a huge market for houses situated remotely and with the agent’s protestations I thought that the sale had no chance, but Roger, having had plenty of practice at holding his ground in Vanuatu, showed no sign of giving in. His strategy seemed to work as they returned for a second inspection the following day. This time I met them and took an instant liking to them. They were a beautiful couple, him tanned with rugged good looks and she slender with long black hair framing an attractive oval face. He was obviously wealthy and, although in his early forties, he carried no excess weight, his brown eyes holding mine captive whilst he talked. He was a South African businessman who, at one point, had owned a farm in Victoria. He had decided to sell up everything and travel the world on his yacht where he had met the Englishwoman. They had sailed the world together and on returning to

mainstream living, she started a business where she set up call centres around the world, whilst he had various business dealings. They were living on their yacht moored in Cammeray, a suburb of Sydney. They had seen the advertisement for our house in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and he thought it sounded just like his farmhouse in Victoria. They even owned a German Shepherd dog. Obviously keen to buy, they wandered around the land taking in the four dams, the area of rainforest, the yards, the paddocks, the wildlife and the ride-on mower.

At the end of their tour of inspection they made us another offer. They would give us what we were asking if we would include the pot plants, the chickens and Roger's ride-on mower. We didn't need to give it any thought and we agreed without hesitation. The sale was also dependent on the woman being able to get a loan for her share of the property, although the fellow intimated that if she couldn't get the loan he could afford to buy it by himself. This endeared them to me even more as this was how Roger and I had purchased our first house together when we were not yet one hundred percent sure of each other.

We were busy from that point on as not only were we going to do the conveyancing ourselves, we had to pack up the house, find homes for the donkeys, horse and pig and sell the cattle. I also had to go to work and there was our holiday we had booked in Vanuatu. We also had to find the time to find somewhere to live until we worked out what we were going to do, since purchasing the Barrington Store did not seem to have any hope of becoming reality.

Roger on his ride-on mower

Irene and the Donkeys, Sadie and Shakey

CHAPTER 17

Vanuatu

Although we were both excited about returning to Vanuatu, I was a little nervous. I worried about the effect it might have on Roger. Although he could entertain people with his humorous anecdotes about Vanuatu and his kidnap, I knew that it was on a level that was superficial and didn't dip into depths of the experience where the emotions that he felt at the time resided. These he never spoke about in the same way that he never spoke of his sister who had died in a car crash resulting from a blown tyre. I could never understand Roger's refusal to believe that the condition of the tyres was a factor in car accidents. Even when I would say, 'but a burst tyre killed your sister.' I believed that he was burying large chunks of experience that he could not deal with and I was convinced his difficulty getting to sleep and staying asleep, as well as his quickly ignited anger, were due to traumatic stress disorder. Additionally, he had started having nightmares. From what he shouted in his sleep it appeared that he was trying to escape from something. One such night he became violent as he kicked and punched me yelling 'Take that you bastard.' Certainly he was disturbed and without knowledge of any other incident in his life on which it could be blamed, and the fact that the onset of these symptoms followed the problems we had in Vanuatu, I put this down as the cause. I suggested, 'Why don't you see the doctor and get a referral to someone?'

'What are they going to do?'

'They might be able to help you. Talk about it, perhaps.'

'Waste of time.' His response was always the same whenever I brought the subject up and I could understand that with his Victorian upbringing he would remain stoic and neither admit to a problem nor accept help for one. Now that we were returning I wondered if this might exacerbate any suppressed anxieties Roger may have.

I also worried a little, given all the trouble we had when we lived there, that we might have problems entering the country. As it turned out, we walked through customs and immigration without a hiccough. As soon as we left the air-conditioned comfort of the terminal the heady heavy scent of Vanuatu invaded our senses. We breathed deeply enjoying the familiar earthy, rotting odour that we had once taken as

the sign we were home.

We had booked into the Melanesian Motel, which was on the Kumul Highway next to the Kaiviti Motel where we used to stay in Vila. The hotel was part of an inexpensive package holiday that included it and the airfares. Although the hotel did not have the status of a resort it boasted a pool and an air-conditioned room with a television. That was all we needed.

Although we had spent most of our time on the island of Tanna in the years we had lived in Vanuatu, we had spent enough time in Vila to have places and people that we wanted to visit. We had no plans to return to Tanna but Roger was determined to at least talk to Peter, our cook and right-hand man. The next morning he rang White Grass Resort. Peter was thrilled to hear from us and immediately said that if we could not come to Tanna he would fly to Vila to see us. A short time later he rang to tell us that he would be arriving in Vila at ten the next morning. We arranged to meet him at the airport.

It did not take us long to realise that conditions in Vila had changed significantly since we had left the country. The expatriate population had shrunk and most of the people that we had known from our past were now living in Australia, predominantly in Brisbane. We didn't meet anyone who we had known well but we did come across some that we had dealt with either in relation to our business, White Grass Resort, or during the time we lived in Vila battling our case in the courts. In those days, these people were the bosses, restaurant owners or other business people. One couple owned a business on the Walter Lini Highway dealing in pool equipment and cleaning chemicals. Where they had employed several local people three years earlier we now saw them doing the menial tasks, such as cleaning the swimming pool at the hotel, themselves. We had a chat to the woman and she told us that a change in government had seen changes to the foreign ownership laws, which now prevented Europeans from selling their businesses to anybody other than Ni-Vanuatans, the local people. This had badly affected a lot of Europeans and she told us we would see many of them doing the jobs that previously only the local people would have been doing.

She also told us that the Europeans who could leave had departed and those remaining had either grown up in the Colonies and knew no other existence or were professionals who either worked for an international company or had their own business.

Port Vila also showed signs of new decay. Where it had once been a clean

vibrant colourful town it now seemed worn and dirty with second-rate service and facilities. Although it was disappointing, it was possibly the best outcome I could have hoped for, as it killed forever Roger's desire to return and take on a business that he felt he could make successful in Port Vila.

Meeting Peter at the airport the next day was a joy. He came through the doors with a huge beaming smile and wrapped Roger in a warm embrace, and shook my hand, talking the entire time. He told us that he no longer cooked for the restaurant, filling in only on the rarest of occasions. His wife now did the cooking. I'm sure that Peter trained her well but I doubted that there would be the same flair that he had given the meals in the dishes now being served. We stood chatting for half an hour before Roger said, 'How is Chief Tom going?'

'E gud nomo. E cum long plane long mifala.'

'You mean he's here with you? Now? He came on the plane?' Roger had never fully mastered Bislama, the local form of pidgin English that was the national language of Vanuatu, and was checking he had understood Peter.

'Yes. He's waiting inside until you go,' Peter said. With that, Roger turned on his heels and went to the double doors through which the plane arrivals came, opened them and went in to the baggage collection area. A few minutes later he returned with Chief Tom, our ex-business partner with whom we had fallen out. It was he who had ordered Roger's kidnapping that had resulted in costly court action. Despite these past difficulties, they emerged together, both smiling. Chief Tom had his arm casually draped around Roger's shoulders showing that continued animosity was not present and the gesture possibly a sign of affection. We talked for a short time and then Roger asked how Chief Tom had planned on getting to his accommodation from the airport.

'Mi wok nomo, mo me kassem bus.'

'No need. You can come in the taxi with us.' Peter was staying at the same accommodation as Chief Tom and we were dropping Peter's luggage off so it was no problem to take Chief Tom as well. This was the first time we had seen Chief Tom since soon after we had changed lawyers, four years ago. If we had known we were going to see him we would have worried how everyone would react to each other. Meeting unexpectedly demonstrated to us that any ill feeling toward Chief Tom that we may have harboured before had now disappeared. We understood in some little way why he had acted the way he had and thus it was easy to forgive; even for Roger, who struggled greatly with forgiveness.

In the taxi on the way into town we laughed about what had happened. Chief Tom said, 'After, court mi poor nomo. Peter em i richest man on Tanna now.'

'True,' Peter said. 'Mi listen gud long yutufala. Mi savvy every sumting yutufala tok tok. Mi gat plante haous long Tanna mo Vila mi gat two haouses. Mi kassem rent makes plante rich.' We all laughed. We felt pleased that Peter had managed to save and buy a few houses that gave him income, and were glad that he felt it was talking to us that had taught him the benefits of saving and preparing for the future. Social security was not available for the elderly in Vanuatu with the expectation that the family would take care of their ageing parents. As times changed and education improved this was going to happen less and less, although it was beyond our comprehension that this could happen on Tanna anytime soon.

We dropped Chief Tom and Peter's bags off and continued into town where we settled into a coffee shop for a long chat and catch up. Peter told us how the new airport on Tanna, which had been planned but not begun whilst we were there, had finally opened, changing the fortunes of White Grass to such an extent that Chief Tom's son Sam and his wife Merian had opened another resort nearby. Tanna Beach Resort had suffered as it was now the resort requiring the long drive to reach it. He showed us photos of Sam's tourist accommodation, Tanna Evergreen Resort. We had an enjoyable afternoon reliving old times, finding out about changes and people who we had known whilst we had lived in Vanuatu, and talking about world events and how we were now living. Peter and Roger had always hit it off with both being teacher and student to each other, and the afternoon demonstrated that time had not altered this relationship. When we dropped Peter off at his lodgings late in the afternoon we knew that we were unlikely to see each other again and our last farewell reflected this sadness.

The remainder of our week passed quickly. Roger did not seem distressed by his encounter with Chief Tom and seemed in holiday spirits as we went deep sea fishing, reeling in some big fish. We only kept one, which the hotel restaurant cooked for us that night. We also hired a car and took nostalgic trips around the Efate Island, snorkelling at Hideaway Island and having a romantic dinner for two at our favourite restaurant 'Vila Chaumieres'. Our final reminder of the changes that had occurred in Vanuatu was whilst we were waiting at the airport for our flight home. We ordered a coffee and, as we sat drinking it, a European woman greeted us. She was the owner of a restaurant we used to frequent when we were in Vila during the time we lived in

Vanuatu. Now she was wiping down the tables of the airport café. Roger felt as though he'd closed the door on the Vanuatu chapter of our lives and we left, knowing without any doubt that Vanuatu was not a place where we wanted to take on another business.

CHAPTER 18

What Will We Do?

Now we were back on the farm, the holiday over, we had to make some big decisions. The most crucial was working out where we would move to when the sale of Barcoleuwin became finalised. Just as important, we had to organise the despatch of the animals. We had to arrange the sale of the cows and calves and find homes for Mrs Wiggins the pig, the donkeys and horse. Mungo and Trog, of course, would come with us.

When it came to the cows, calves and bull we asked for Darrell's assistance. This was no problem for him and he quickly arranged a truck to come to load the animals. We herded them all up to the yards we had built only to find that the cows would not fit through the race, over which we had laboured, as they were hugely pregnant. Once again, we herded them all up to the hill that we had used for offloading them originally, and they entered the cattle truck the way they had arrived. We laughed at the irony of the situation as we had built the yards primarily for ease of loading the animals on and off the cattle trucks, and the first time we went to use them, they failed dismally.

We decided that we would attempt to rent short-term accommodation at the seaside whilst we worked out what we were going to do. To this end we went to Old Bar, near the mouth of the Manning River, which enters the sea at Manning Point on Mitchell Island (where one of my kidney patients lived.) We visited the real estate agent Errol who had been the agent involved in our attempted purchase of the house at Upper Lansdowne. He had the perfect place opposite the ocean, which we could have for a period of three months, and they would allow us to keep the dog and the cat with us.

Packing now began in earnest and we needed to organise for the disposal of the rest of the animals. We rang the Visitors Information Centre in town to tell them that we would no longer be putting our accommodation out for rental and we got talking to Wendy, the manager.

'I thought you two were interested in the Barrington Store,' she said.

‘Roger would have loved to have bought it,’ I replied, ‘but we couldn’t agree on a price.’

‘Are you still interested?’

‘Most definitely. Roger really wants to get his hands on the restaurant.’

‘I know they’re getting a bit desperate. His mother-in-law has returned to Sydney so he and his wife Audrey are working it and Alain’s heart just isn’t in it anymore. He’s only interested in his dairy.’

‘He made it quite clear that he didn’t want to talk to us any more,’ I said.

‘Let me have a word with him and we’ll see what happens.’ We left it with Wendy, not really expecting any response, so it was with an element of surprise that we took a phone call from Alain a few days later. He asked that we come and see him.

A couple of days later when I was not working we went and, over a cup of delicious coffee, we came to a mutually acceptable arrangement. We told him that we would now not be able to buy it until our three-month lease at Old Bar expired. With glee we decided that we would treat our time at Old Bar as a holiday, total relaxation before we put our noses to the grindstone. I wondered if Roger had any idea what he had let us in for!

Now that we had a future project the time just flew. Darrell took Mrs Wiggins back. He declared that she was in perfect condition as a baconer, but he promised me that he would not eat her. I never enquired in the future as to her wellbeing—I was happy believing she was living the life of a spoilt pig in the Bucca Wauka Homestead piggery.

The donkeys and the lame horse were more difficult to find homes for. Darrell had no use for them, as he considered donkeys to be useless animals. Eventually we asked the DeSilvas, who had opened Barkeldine the bed and breakfast near us, whether they would be interested in taking them on to delight their tourists. We were so persuasive in our honest arguments about how much guests loved them that they agreed.

Darrell again came to our aid by arranging the truck and this time we believed that we would be able to put our yards to good use. The donkeys were easy to get to the yards. We didn’t require dogs as we had done with the cows. A simple carrot sufficed. The carrot led and the donkeys and horse followed. However, once they got to the ramp it was a different matter. Nothing would induce them to walk up it and we saw first hand how stubborn a donkey can be.

‘Ain’t nuttin’ fer it. We’s goin ter have ter go to the hill an’ carry ‘em on,’ Darrell said. Out came the carrot again and we walked them up to the loading hill with me wondering all the way just what was the point of building the yards.

Snowflake the horse went in without difficulty. A dividing barrier was slid across the width of the truck to keep the animals apart.

‘Now, you get in the truck Irene and keep her head pointing in ’n Roger ’n I’ll lift ‘er up and carry her in.’ I thought I’d got the easy task until they had successfully managed to half pull, half carry the protesting animal into the truck where they deposited her, closing another division as they went, leaving me locked in with the terrified beast who was doing her damndest to get herself back to the safety of the paddock. She pawed the ground and attempted to turn, backing me into a corner from which there was no escape. I was close to being crushed as her entire body leant against the divider separating her and Snowflake, with me cowering between.

‘Help! Get me out of here!’ I sounded hysterical but it brought the help I needed as Darrell jumped in and pulled her head around giving me the few inches I needed to get on the other side of her.

‘Now fer the other one,’ Darrell said as though nothing had happened.

‘I’m not getting in there again.’

‘No need ter. She’ll go in easy like now the other’ uns in there.’

‘I hope so. I am NEVER ever having an animal bigger than myself ever again!’ I emphatically vowed, leaving those listening in no doubt that I meant it. Roger and Darrell just laughed. I could see Darrell retelling this story over a glass of beer and gaining a good laugh at my expense. It was a resolution, however, I knew I was going to keep.

Getting the donkeys off at the other end was no problem at all. They were keen to leave the truck, and the race being their only option, they took it with speed. Barkeldine, their new home, had several miniature horses already and after a couple of days in a paddock by themselves they joined their new herd and could be seen galloping over the hills of their new home.

We completed our tasks in good time and the removalist collected our furniture and boxes a couple of days before settlement allowing us the time to do a thorough clean so that the new owners would not arrive to a house full of cobwebs. We had learned that it only took a week or so for the house to take on that haunted house look, and we now no longer felt that the people we had bought it from had left it in a poor

state.

With everything completed, we headed off to Sydney in order to finalise our sale and have a bit of time with my mother. Once the exchange of documents and cheques took place we returned north to have our holiday at Old Bar.

The house we leased was across the road from the beach. This was a great position as we could walk out the door and Mungo could run along the leash-free beach. The house however was two-storeyed with a spiral staircase. Situated on the top floor was the lounge room, plus two bedrooms. The kitchen, dining room and bathroom were downstairs.

The spiral staircase was a fairly typical one made from wrought iron with open-backed, wooden slat stairs. This posed a real problem for Mungo who could see through each rung. The higher he attempted to go up it, the more his legs turned to jelly. Try as he might, he could not go higher than five stairs before he had no choice but to back down nervously. Trog, on the other hand, could go up and down at will and loved being the only creature living in the upstairs world. We were as distressed as Mungo was that he couldn't be up there with us and so tried to spend as much time as possible working downstairs at the dining room table.

Stairs we found were Mungo's nemesis. While my mother visited us we dropped in on a work colleague of hers who lived nearby. Although this chap's stairs were a straight flight they also had the open back design. Having managed to persuade him to go up the stairs, which he did with a lot of leg wobbling, we couldn't get him to come back down. After trying all enticements we could think of, we ended up carrying him down. Not an easy task as he weighed forty kilograms and was extremely nervous and thus not prepared to sit in our arms calmly.

It was a time of rejuvenation prior to taking on our next venture.

Chapter 19

Reflection

Our time at Old Bar saw Roger back to the person I had married. All his anger seemed to have dissipated and his sense of humour returned. Barely a day went by where we didn't find something mundane uproariously funny. It might be something we saw that struck our sense of humour or a chance comment I would make, usually something silly that most people would find pathetically idiotic. One such conversation revolved around converting the car to gas.

'I think we should consider installing gas in the car.' Roger's comment came out of the blue when we were out driving.

'Why?' I responded, 'do you want to make a cup of tea?' Roger laughed so much tears rolled down his cheeks and he had to pull off the road for safety. Laughter is infectious and I joined in, water streaming down my cheeks and my sides hurting from the exertion.

Roger's current good humour did make me question whether I had been incorrect in my diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. I had been so sure based on my knowledge of the condition from my nursing days in intensive care, where the condition was not uncommon amongst staff who were subjected to the motor vehicle accidents, gun shot wounds and other conditions that came through our doors. I was basing my diagnosis on the personality change which became evident after his kidnap. He had anxiety, anger and sleep disturbances. He didn't talk about experiencing distressing flashbacks and, although he talked about Vanuatu without appearing affected, I had attributed that to his Victorian upbringing and his ability to bury disturbing emotions. These, I believed, were coming out in anger. But had I been wrong? Had he just been depressed at again finding himself isolated, away from mainstream living? Whilst at Old Bar we had humanity around us, the opportunity to eat at restaurants and go shopping without having to travel miles to do it and, when we took over the shop, I was anticipating being surrounded by many people and loneliness would become an emotion of the past. Or had he found the Australian countryside too difficult? I knew Roger had wanted a park-like estate and that the Aussie bush was too untidy for his English sensibilities. Despite our efforts to create a garden, the unyielding, rocky ground we were working and the harshness of the

Australian summers, combined with our inability to obtain easy, unlimited water, we made minimal impact. We had both learnt that we were not farmers. As we were both of a mentality that wouldn't pay to have the work done, without the right equipment it was physically hard and mentally not that stimulating. Did he just need a project that he could focus on, and the prospect of building up the Barrington Store and particularly, creating a five star restaurant, fulfilled this need.

Vanuatu had left us with a legacy that we found difficult to recover from. It was a shock returning to Australia. Things had changed and people had moved on without us. We felt isolated prior to moving to a remote part of the country which only magnified that disconnect. When things didn't work in Vanuatu we could blame it on being a third world country or due to cultural differences. Back home in Australia, these occurrences caused frustration and perhaps a reason for some of Roger's anger. We felt different from society as we had been given an outlook removed from many people. This was particularly apparent when it came to aid. We had seen so much wasted and inappropriate help given that we now questioned all money spent. Not only that, we believed that people were unaware of the reality of the situation. It made us cynical no matter how worthwhile the project might seem. Vanuatu took on a new perspective. It became the place that we understood. It took our return to Vanuatu to be able to look at Australia in a new light. Finally we knew this was where we wanted to live and the illusion of a Vanuatu which worked fell away.

I couldn't countenance that perhaps in some way I was the cause of Roger's moods. If that was the case the angry explosions would not have altered when we moved to Old Bar. I had kept my feelings about my childlessness predominantly to myself. I too had undergone a Victorian-style upbringing and had learnt to bury my emotions as easily as I believed Roger could bury his own. I had not pressured him on any course that could ultimately have solved the problem for me, apart from the odd, offhand comment to test his thoughts regarding adoption. Once raised, I would let it go as quickly as I had brought it up when he didn't react with enthusiasm. I believed I could keep my feelings in check and whilst we were busy, planning our new venture at the shop and spending enjoyable time together exploring our new surrounds, this proved easy to achieve.

Our time on the farm had satisfied a childhood desire. Whenever I had been asked what I wanted to do when I grew up my answer had been, in my primary school days, 'I am going to marry a farmer and live on a farm.' I hadn't married the farmer

but I had now lived on the farm. Remote living, I found, did not suit me and I missed having not only friends but also the feeling of belonging to an anonymous crowd. I needed to know I was not alone in the world. We were now moving to a village and as the village did not have a postal delivery service all the residents were compelled to collect their mail from in the store. I wasn't expecting anonymity but rather to be an integral part of village life.

We would not have survived our life on the farm had it not been for Darrell acting as our mentor. We had no idea what we should be doing to look after the land we had taken charge of. Darrell told us that no farmer is going to destroy the land that feeds and clothes him and will go to lengths to care for it. 'Mind you' he laughed, 'good thing them early farmers didn't have chainsaws.' His advice as to how we managed our land and cared for our animals was a necessity. Looking back I realise just how difficult it would have been for us if he had not befriended us and taken us under his wing. His friendship we valued. We had bought the property, not to be farmers, but because the view sent ripples of delight through us as we viewed the rolling hills and valleys that was our vista from the house. The architect designed home also played a large part in our decision to buy the property. The joy we experienced from the view and the house remained constant but I realised that living in a nice house and having a view that caused visitors' jaws to fall open to their knees when they saw it could not by itself create happiness. It was sharing it with friends and Darrell had become a friend that we valued.

Darrell sadly passed away from prostate cancer soon after we left the farm. He had started to suffer from shortness of breath just before we moved out. He was worried. Being an asthmatic I had a peak flow machine which I lent him to monitor his lung capacity. I advised him to see a doctor but instead he went to a travelling expert who was teaching diaphragmatic breathing. At the time this was supposed to be the wonder breathing technique that would help all asthmatics. It didn't help him as it was later discovered that he had lung metastases. He died not long after. His was the passing of a true Australian icon—the Aussie bushman. I fear many of the yarns he told us will have gone with him.

Living at Old Bar made travel to work at the kidney house much shorter. It gave me a saving of forty-five minutes and I arrived at work earlier, allowing the patients to start their treatments sooner. I worried about travelling from Barrington as it was a longer journey than Bucca Wauka and once the clients were used to the earlier time I

knew it would be difficult for them to accept going back to starting later in the day. Resigning was an option but I was attached to the people and knew the effect it would have on a couple of them if I left. I also didn't want to let down Monica, my co-worker, or the kidney association. I thought replacing me might be difficult. However, as the preparations for the store involved post office training I realised how difficult it was going to be for Roger if I was not able to help him in the shop three days a week so I reluctantly put in my resignation.

As expected, thoughts of me leaving the kidney house devastated its clients. We were a big happy family and they trusted me and we knew each other. The young fellow waiting for the kidney transplant threatened not to come to the house once I was gone. We both knew it was a ridiculous statement borne out of his frustrations waiting for a kidney and his own enormous desire not to have to dialyse and attend the house himself. I gave them six weeks notice to enable them to get someone suitable but told them if they got a replacement earlier I would be happy to leave at that point.

The response to the advertisement they placed in the paper was overwhelming, unlike it had been when the dialysis facility was ready to commence operating. Prior to its opening, the dialysis community viewed the house with skepticism, believing its failure was inevitable. It was the first of its kind in Australia, having been set up outside the public and private health sector by a community group, so on the first call for staff no fully trained renal nurses took the risk of leaving their current safe working positions to work there. Consequently, the employment of Monica and myself had been an act of desperation on the part of the Mid North Coast Kidney Association. Now, however, responses to the job advertisement were numerous. There were a number from the Wansey Centre itself, and other renal trained nurses who saw Taree as a desirable destination.

Due to the response, the Association decided to employ a couple of people and set up a list of potential employees from whom to draw. With added staff, the house could increase the number of clients it was taking and open seven days a week instead of the current three and perhaps manage two shifts a day. It was sad to know there were so many people in the area who were suffering from renal failure, but wonderful that they no longer would have to make the long trip to Newcastle. I didn't have to work the six weeks of my resignation and left with only one week overlapping our purchase of the store.

Being at the farm had taught me much about myself. I now knew I needed to have human companionship apart from Roger. I had, prior to now, believed I preferred men's company and conversation to that of women. Now I was aware how much I needed a female friend or two. I'd always, until Vanuatu, had one female friend that I was particularly close to but I hadn't realised how crucial they had been for my psyche. I was now very aware that this was a gender difference between men and women. Men did not have the need for a confidante whereas women would network and always have someone they could call in time of need. I was excited to be moving into town where I planned on partaking in many more social and professional activities. In this time I envisaged a wonderful future. The shop would be a success and Roger's restaurant would be the talk of the town. I would play tennis and join other groups and get to know the local ladies. We would both be happy, leaving Roger's anger and my longings behind. I felt as though I had been rebirthed. This opportunity was going to bring the future and happiness I craved.

But did it?

The End

Exegesis

Creating a Compelling Sequel Memoir

Introduction

I am a memoir writer. I am both the narrator and the subject, the researcher and the researched. I am immersed. Immersed in both my creative work 'After the Nightmare' and the exegesis about the writing of it. These two pairs of 'me' co-exist.

I commenced this exegesis with a firm plan in mind. A plan that would be expected in either a quantitative or a qualitative research project. Chapter 1—introduction, chapter 2—definitions, chapter 3—methodology, chapter 4—literature review, and so on, up to a total of six or seven chapters. I started in this fashion but could not make it work despite completing four of the six chapters. *My* voice was missing. I was disjointed. I was failing the practice-led nature of the project by creating chunks of text and allocating each of these to its own section, where in reality each bled and ran into, and became inseparable from, the entire research journey. Fortescue (2010:8) takes a similar position, stating:

> Academic writing is a genre defined by certain structural characteristics that channel meaning and exclude noise as much as possible. It misrepresents the noisy walk of research in art by imposing linear order retrospectively, in the interest of defining territory and trajectories for future action that can be justified and validated through connections to other established bodies of knowledge.

I decided to show this 'noisy walk' in this exegesis.

Lee Gutkind, a major theorist of creative non-fiction, defines the area as 'true stories told well' (2012:6) and explains that the "'creative' doesn't mean inventing what didn't happen or reporting and describing what wasn't there. It doesn't mean that the writer has a license to lie' (2012:7). What is an exegesis then, I propose here, if it is not scholarly creative non-fiction? And if so, why can't the story of the exegesis be told in a way that engages the reader and takes them along on the research journey? That is, why can't it be creative non-fiction too? Indeed, there is a growing push towards a more creative exegesis with researchers such as Mark Lyall and Mary Weaven (2015) suggesting that the exegesis can use creative techniques in its production. Some scholars, possibly more concerned with the need to be taken seriously by academia, suggest that reporting the research must be 'in the language,

that research management will understand' (Webb and Krauth 2005:3). McNamara (2012) recommends the exegesis avoid all use of the first person 'I' and personal experiences keeping the exegesis in keeping with traditional academic writing.

My research has been on the topic of the sequel memoir. Writers are told to define their readers and see where on the bookshelf their texts would sit (Whitton & Hollingworth 2011). I know my place. I hope my research will be of interest to academics but also of value to other sequel memoir writers who are travelling the same journey as myself. Many of these sequel memoir writers are not academics but find the questions and concepts around memoir writing fascinating. This can be seen by comments from readers of my blog site *Reflections and Nightmares* (see for instance Waters 2014a and b). The comments on these sites clearly show that non-university based writers are interested in similar issues concerning the writing of memoir that I have delved into on my research journey, such as maintaining privacy and the dividing line between fiction and non-fiction.

To be inclusive in terms of readers, my language and voice will attempt not to exclude the non-academic reader or listener by leaving them wondering 'what was that all about?' Instead, I have adopted an explanatory mode and, where possible, the research will be conveyed with this in mind. After all, *story* is what we remember best. Our brains are designed in this way (Bruner 2004; D'Argembeau et al. 2014; Ellis 2004). The ancients knew this, which is why Plato's allegory of the cave ([1962] 1970) is remembered and still used today as a starting point from which to start the epistemological debate. I, however, did not know of the cave when I began my journey. I knew only that I had enjoyed the research I carried out to complete my Graduate Certificate in Creative Industries and, having successfully completed a creative work and exegesis in that program, was keen to keep writing and continue my studies by commencing a Masters by Research.

Immersion is a technique Gutkind (2012) recommends as a way of writing about a subject. Becoming part of the subject's world, even if only for a short time, allows the author to write from 'the inside' and makes that experience compelling reading. My immersion aligns with Gutkind's description, as one cannot be more immersed in any life culture more than one is in his or her own life. Eugen Bacon (2014b) successfully applied this to her practice-led research. She stated, 'My practice is as an artist. My discursive channel is along reflexivity, autoethnography, immersion...As the reflexive artist moves between, and explores, the world of

practitioner and researcher, inner and outer influences hook into artistic practice, weave into day to day' (2014b:1). Like Bacon, my practice-led research has become part of my everyday life. Fully immersed, my research journey became one of taking the scenic route as my research took me along routes of thought and investigation I had not planned to travel.

Although my exegesis may not, therefore, exactly follow the traditional order taken by quantitative and qualitative research theses, the essentials of a research report are included (Gray & Malins 2004; Haseman 2007). This exegesis contains:

- a research question;
- a discussion of why the research is necessary;
- a demonstration that the research has meaning for a broader community than myself;
- an explanation of the methodology used that will display rigour and transparency;
- evidence of the creation of new knowledge and insights; and,
- outcomes which will have ongoing accessibility for both peer review and further research in the area.

As it does so, this exegesis will recount my journey as I search for the knowledge required to address my thesis research question: 'How can the memoirist make a sequel memoir compelling reading?'

Chapter 1: The Research Takes Off

I commenced writing my creative work just after being accepted for entry into the Masters by Research degree. I had recently completed writing my first memoir 'Nightmare in Paradise' (Waters 2013b). The narrative in this first book recounted the time my husband and I went into partnership with the head chief on the island of Tanna in Vanuatu in running a small resort and tour business. It is our story, as a young couple, taking on a tourist venture in a world steeped in custom and tradition, 'clevers' and chiefs, ceremonies and magic. It tells of our struggles living in a culture very different from that which we were used to, our interaction with the local people and even the kidnap of my husband as our business dreams were shattered. It relates our despair as we were ordered back to the island whilst fighting for our equity rights in the courts in Port Vila. It tells of the traumatic events that occurred on our return, the loss of our residency permits and our right to work, and our heartbreak as one of our tourists is killed at the volcano by a flying piece of lava. It is also the story, however, of our eventual triumph.

It was a dramatic tale full of crises and as I began the sequel I was still hyped up by the euphoria of completing it. I wished to continue writing and believed that I had another story to tell. I had also finished my Graduate Certificate in Creative Industries and wanted to continue with my studies. Additionally, I had become aware that publishers looked more favourably upon authors with another book in the pipeline and was still looking for a publisher to take on my first. These three factors were the launching point and my motivation for the creation of my sequel memoir 'After the Nightmare'. These factors were different from that which motivated the writing of the initial memoir, which had been commenced because of its inherent drama and my desire to tell the story of the most exciting period of my life.

Some issues and concerns relevant only to the sequel memoirist rapidly became apparent. These included:

1. that some readers will read all or only some of the books in a memoir series and the order of their reading of these texts may differ;

2. Should the subject matter be broadly the same or markedly different in the sequel? And, if it is markedly different, will that affect the readership of the sequel? Do readers want to read more of the same, or simply want to find out 'what happened next'?
3. Should the sequel follow on chronologically?

Experiential starting point

My usual method of writing consists firstly of preparation via a period of thinking. As I am writing memoir, I do not need to 'create' characters or scenes. These have been done for me in the past life that I am now writing about. My thinking is a matter of remembering the scene, the emotion that went with it and getting this memory clear in my head. One memory will often prompt a second and the memories snowball. As I perform the everyday tasks required by living in the world, I think, and any thoughts that I need to hold past one writing session, I journal for future reference. Then, I sit and write without editing. The conversational voice of the text is my own, written in the way I speak, thus requiring grammatical corrections to be made, particularly in relation to possessive pronouns and correcting the position of clauses in the sentence. I have a naturally spare writing style and rather than having to cull the text, on its first edit I often need to expand. This expansion does not come naturally to me, as minimalism has been the way I have written all my life.

Without this knowledge of my current writing technique, and its experiential starting point, I would have no base on which to judge the effects of the research on the creative practice. Throughout this project, primacy was given to the manuscript, that is, the main goal of this research was the creation of a compelling sequel memoir.

'After the Nightmare'

The sequel memoir, 'After the Nightmare', follows our life on our return to Australia. We were traumatised by our experience in Vanuatu and chose not to return to the city, instead moving to the country to open a bed and breakfast in what we expected would be idyllic surroundings. The property we eventually purchased came with more land than we anticipated but luckily a local farmer adopted us and taught us about farming and living in the country.

The memoir tells stories of the business we started, farming, local identities and

the history of the Bucca Wauka area, a three-hour drive north west of Sydney. It also looks at some personal issues such as the disconnection we felt from society on our return from Vanuatu, our disappointment at the lack of personal friendships we made, and my husband's development of symptoms of an undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder. Struggling with the isolation, I secured employment in Taree as a haemodialysis nurse, and set up a community dialysis facility.

This created issues for Roger and led to us purchasing the Barrington General Store, a little further to the west. The memoir finishes as we wait to commence our new business and a reflection on our time as farmers.

The main theme of this memoir revolves around tree change but other minor themes include returning to Australia after living abroad, undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder, illness in rural communities, infertility and living in isolation.

The research question is born

At the commencement of the research, I had no problem with what could be characterised as stream-of-consciousness writing for approximately the first thirty-five thousand words of my creative work and then I hit a wall. I found it difficult to continue with any aspect of the manuscript although I was writing and redrafting other items quite prolifically.

The issues and concerns that I found with the writing of the manuscript at this time included that I was simply bored with myself. Jeannette Walls identified, when responding to requests for a sequel to follow her successful memoir *The Glass Castle*, 'frankly, I'm not that interesting' (qtd. in Yabroff 2010:59). I also began to realise that the narrative of my first memoir was an exciting out-of-the-ordinary tale whereas large slabs of the second narrative seemed pedestrian in nature.

I was also concerned that to make this manuscript work I had to expose much more of myself and my husband's lives and emotions to public scrutiny. I had a problem with this for several reasons. My mother is still alive and, although I say nothing about her in the manuscript, I feared that she might be upset by my disappointment about aspects of my life. The events and timeline were not as clear to me as they were for the previous book, perhaps because, apart from a few stand-out events, they were just not as memorable. I do include incidents from the first memoir throughout (although in a much more minor way than I had previously thought), attempting to give the bare minimum background required to understand these issues

yet not bore readers who had already read 'Nightmare in Paradise'. I was also hoping to encourage those who had not read the first book to do so.

My research question developed from this hiatus in writing; from my questioning of whether a memoirist *could* make a sequel memoir compelling reading. Perhaps most writers, I began to think, only have one memoir in them? This is the view of Yabroff (2010), who allows only a few exceptions, and Yagoda (2009) who writes that this is evidenced by how the sales of sequel memoirs decrease with each additional new memoir. This posed the following areas of enquiry:

- How common are sequel memoirs?
- Are any second memoirs successful? Are any more successful than the initial volume? If so, what are the reasons behind those successful memoirs?
- Are there any commonalities amongst those that are successful and those that aren't?
- Are there any other common threads? If so, what are these and is it possible to identify how authors maintain what I increasingly described as 'vibrancy' in their second, or even third, memoir?

The concept of 'vibrancy' throughout this narrative is defined as that which gives life and colour to the memoir, creating body and texture, and which results in an animated and vivid narrative. Gutkind (2012:11) writes, 'The challenge is to target your niche audience by concentrating on the subject while, at the same time, enticing the general reader by making the subject seem secondary and the characters and the narrative primary and irresistibly compelling.'

Textual Analysis

I completed a literature review to examine any scholarly research on the sequel memoir. This revealed that none had been performed in the area of sequel and, therefore, a significant gap in knowledge existed in this area. This can be clearly seen on the literature map (see Chapter 4) where the literature is sorted into categories. I also found there are fewer sequel memoirs on the market than initial narratives but the form is becoming more common, particularly if the first volume was successful. Where it was once uncommon to have multiple memoirs of the self, as more memoirs have become focused on one episode in, or aspect of, a life, writing additional volumes has increased (Couser 2012).

Whether anyone had managed to write a successful, compelling sequel intrigued me. There was, however, a degree of difficulty in determining how 'successful' sequel memoirs were historically. To determine this empirically, access to the Nielson Bookscan data base was required, but this tool only records sales with major booksellers and did not include readers accessing these memoirs via other means such as second hand or electronic sales. It also does not record whether the book was read or enjoyed. For my purposes, therefore, I defined 'success' using my assessment of the quality of writing rather than sales figures. To do this, I relied on reader reviews on sites such as *Amazon* and *Goodreads*, newspaper reviews, journal articles and author interviews and my own subjective reading of the memoirs.

Utilising online reviews posed various challenges. Reviews are important, as it appears many readers decide to read a book based on the star rating and the previous reviews it has been given (Rippon 2014). As a researcher, numerous questions arose from these reviews. The validity of the reviews posted on *Amazon* and *Goodreads* is questionable, given that such reviews can be purchased or written by the author. Although only a percentage of readers will leave a review, one way of determining the number of fake or purchased reviews would be by comparing the number of reviews to the number of books sold. Obtaining this information was, however, problematical. *Amazon* has a system whereby it will state if the review related to a verified book sale, but this does not indicate whether the book was sourced from another supplier. Additionally, when a review is left on these sites, it is interesting to consider whether a good review is more likely to be left than a poor one. In 2008, Bing Liu found that 60% of the reviews on *Amazon* were 5 star and another 20% are 4 star, and suggests that a figure as high as one third of all reviews are faked (Streitfeld 2012). In 2010, Todd Rutherford reportedly set up a company selling such reviews. He then charged $999 for a set of fifty positive reviews, soon taking in twenty-eight thousand dollars per month, although his website did not survive for very long (Hoy 2012). Locke, a recipient of false reviews stated: 'Reviews are the smallest piece of being successful. But it's a lot easier to buy them than cultivating an audience' (qtd in Streitfeld 2012:BU1). Faking reviews does not, however, have to be so blatantly false. As reviews are desirable from an author's perspective, these can be engendered from family, friends and colleagues. Additionally, free copies of the book can be circulated with the promise of the recipient completing a review. Reviews from these sources are usually positive. Rutherford claims that he would never trust a review online,

however, these overly positive reviews will eventually be equalised out by disappointed readers, who, having purchased the book based on the positive reviews, thus give a negative review (Streitfeld 2012).

Surveying the reviews of a series of sequels, I have taken this into account, positing that large numbers of reviews are possibly the only ones which have much meaning; however Mayle's bestselling series have few reviews on *Amazon* (366) despite having significant sales and numbers of readers. Many more people use the *Goodreads* site as a place to review books. Not involved in the sale of books, it acts as a social network library where others have access to the books you have read, plan to read in the future and those you have reviewed, as well as being a space in which discussions about books can take place. The vast numbers of readers providing reviews on *Goodreads* gives it a certain advantage in quality control as compared to *Amazon* or similar.

Taking nineteen sequel memoirists, from Angelou with six sequels, Karr and McCourt with three sequels and most with one sequel, I undertook an analysis of the star ratings on both *Amazon* and *Goodreads* (see Appendix C). It showed that the average number of reviews drops off drastically after the first memoir, and decreases further with subsequent books. The average number of stars increases with book order and is almost certainly statistically significant (see Figs.1 and 2).

There are, however, complications. Firstly, the sequels may have been published for a briefer period and, therefore, less time has been available for people to read it and write reviews. However, in those memoirs analysed in this graph it is unlikely that this is a significant effect, as most of the highly reviewed books have been available for lengthy periods of time. It is also likely that mostly readers who enjoyed the first memoir will read the second, and then third, and so forth and it might be expected that star ratings would rise. Similarly, the people who gave low ratings for the first memoir will probably not read the sequels.

My own subjective analysis is a little more negative as I found few second memoirs in my reading to date that I enjoyed equally or more than the first. This should be qualified in that, for many of these texts, I did not enjoy the first memoir and, therefore, would not in normal circumstances pick up the second. Where I enjoyed the first, I often found value in the second such as Turnbull's (2002, 2013), Mayle's (1992; 1990) and Dahl's memoirs. (1984, 1986) (see Chapters 1 and 4).

BOOK ORDER	NUMBER OF REVIEWERS AMAZON	AVERAGE NUMBER OF STARS AMAZON	NUMBER OF REVIEWERS GOODREADS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF STARS GOODREADS	% REVIEWS ON AMAZON GIVING 4 OR 5 STARS
First memoir	1117	4.08	156,715	3.76	75
Second	240	4.03	12,263	3.67	80
Third	243	4.17	13,307	3.91	82
Fourth	116	4.50	13,885	4.18	92
Fifth	59	4.50	3,294	4.22	98
Sixth	54	4.50	1,104	4.13	82
Seventh	644	4.50	4,964	4.00	95

Figure 1 Analysis of star ratings between initial and subsequent volumes

Maya Angelou ([1973,1974,1976,1981,1986]2006, 2002,2013) who, with seven memoirs, has constantly scored well, both with the number of reviews and stars given. The reason for her success, I believe, is her ability to touch a large audience with

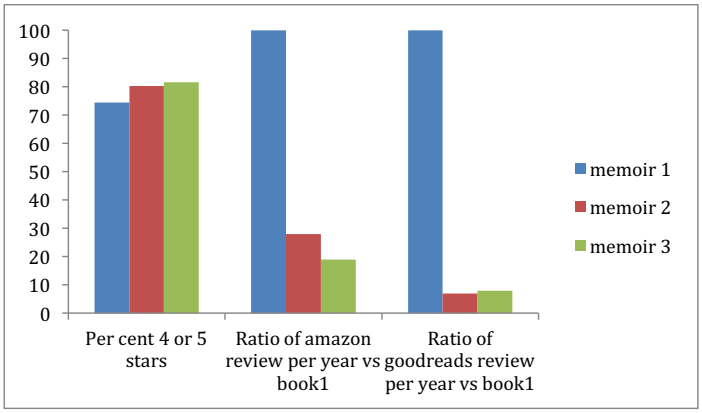


Fig. 2 Comparison of ratings between initial and sequels and between Goodreads and Amazon

some of her universal themes such as the mother-child relationship (see Chapter 5). Other themes of feminism, being a black woman, and violence are present and due to her uncensored description of sex, rape and violence in her first memoir, she is the most banned author in the United States, being removed from most school reading lists and libraries. Yet, *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings* ([1970]2006), remained on *The New York Times* Bestseller list for two years (Goffe 2014). Indeed, her books sold sufficiently well enough that an omnibus edition of her first five memoirs was published in 2006. Although all her books attracted good reviews and ratings, none did as well as her first. Her second received some poor critical reviews (qtd in Lupton 1990:2). In 2002, Wanda Coleman wrote a negative review of Angelou's *Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002) in which she described the writing as 'bad to God-awful,' full of 'dead metaphors' and 'clumsy similes' (2002:25). In response to criticism about her negativity, Coleman pointed out that, despite the history behind a work (in this case slavery and racial prejudice), it is the reviewer's responsibility to readers to tell the truth as they see it. I wonder whether some of the good reviews I read of Angelou's sequels were reviewing the heritage rather than the writing as several of Angelou's memoirs were quite repetitious, such as *The Heart of a Woman* ([1981]2006) and *All God's Children need Travelling Shoes* ([1986]2006) which both discuss her son's serious accident.

My textual analysis of sequel memoirs included Sarah Turnbull's *Almost French* (2002) and *All Good Things* (2013), Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence* (Mayle & Forbes[1989]1990) and *Toujours Provence* (1992), Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat Pray Love* (2007) and *Committed* (2010), Deborah Rodriguez *The Kabul Beauty School* ([2007] 2014) and *The House on Carnival Street* (2014), Roald Dahl's *Boy* (1984) and *Going Solo* (1986) and Jill Ker Conway's *The Road from Coorain* ([1989]1994) and *True North* (1994). I chose these as a starting point as none of these authors were celebrities before writing and their memoirs had some similarities to my own. Gilbert, Mayle and Turnbull, although journalists, were not particularly well known prior to the first memoir and Rodriguez, like myself, was unknown. Dahl was well known as a fiction writer whilst Conway was renowned in academic circles, but became known more generally due to her successful first memoir.

When analysing the memoirs read for the textual analysis I compared each pair to ascertain elements and narrative strategies that they had in common. If these were

found, I surmised, I could then apply them to my own creative work. I was looking for patterns, themes and topics that recurred in successful sequels. Initially, I was looking for features such as:

- Is the sequel about the same topic or a different one?
- Is the sequel about the same characters?
- Is the second book a sequel, prequel or other?
- Are there common themes that cause sequels to work or not work?
- Can I identify how memoirists make their work vibrant or not?
- How do sequels deal with significant others?
- Is the sequel in the same writing style and voice?
- How famous were the authors before, and after, their first memoir?

In addition to reviewing and analysing the memoirs in terms of these questions I also scored the features I was noting and graphed the results (see Fig.3).

It can be seen from the graph that this was an extremely cumbersome method and not extremely useful, especially as, as I continued, I included additional categories:

- Overall rating (that is, a taste-based score, on a scale of 1 to10, in relation to how much I enjoyed the narrative).
- Did the author use a conversational voice?
- Did the author locate the memoir in a different culture or lifestyle from the first?
- Did they have a lack of friends in their memoir?
- Was fertility an issue for them?
- Was there greater character divulgence in the second memoir?
- Did the author discuss their writing process?
- Was there a climax to the story?
- Could I relate to the main character?

After working with these seven memoir pairs, this numerical attempt at finding patterns, themes and topics was abandoned as ineffective. There were too many variables and graphing the data became unwieldy and irrelevant. As Green (2007) states:

> when it comes to practice-led research the integration of a quantitative dimension would seem to raise questions about the integrity of the practice. Given that validity and rigour are embedded in the research process, and in the relation to the field of the research in question, issues of number become a distraction and a reference to other frameworks of meaning and authority (2007:5).

This analysis did, however, make me consider those aspects of the sequel memoir. Additionally, in my reading, I also noticed other traits—dialogue, humour, personal revelation, vivid descriptions of scene, voice and truthfulness that helped the narrative hold my attention (or not) and, therefore, contributed to creating a vibrant narrative, (or not).

Dialogue

The first trait I became aware of was the presence of dialogue in the memoirs I enjoyed reading. I had already noticed in my own writing that where I included dialogue the narrative seemed to come alive.

It also appeared that these memoirists used more dialogue in their sequels than in their first memoirs. Assessing the proportion of dialogue in these memoirs was a time consuming process and one that I did not have the time to carry out. I, therefore, enlisted the aid of my elderly mother who was missing the frequent contact we had enjoyed prior to my undertaking this project. Counting the dialogue, I reasoned, would give her a useful task to carry out, allay my feelings of guilt and take her a considerable time. After reading each memoir, in order that she would not be distracted by the narrative, she then examined them again, counting and recording the lines of dialogue and total number of lines per page. On completion, she calculated the total lines per book and divided this by the total lines of direct speech and multiplied it by 100 to give a percentage. An example of her work can be seen in Appendix B. Her tallying found that all the sequels counted had more dialogue in them than the initial memoir. Although some differed by an insignificant amount others contained over 25% more. The results are tabulated in the table shown at Fig. 4.

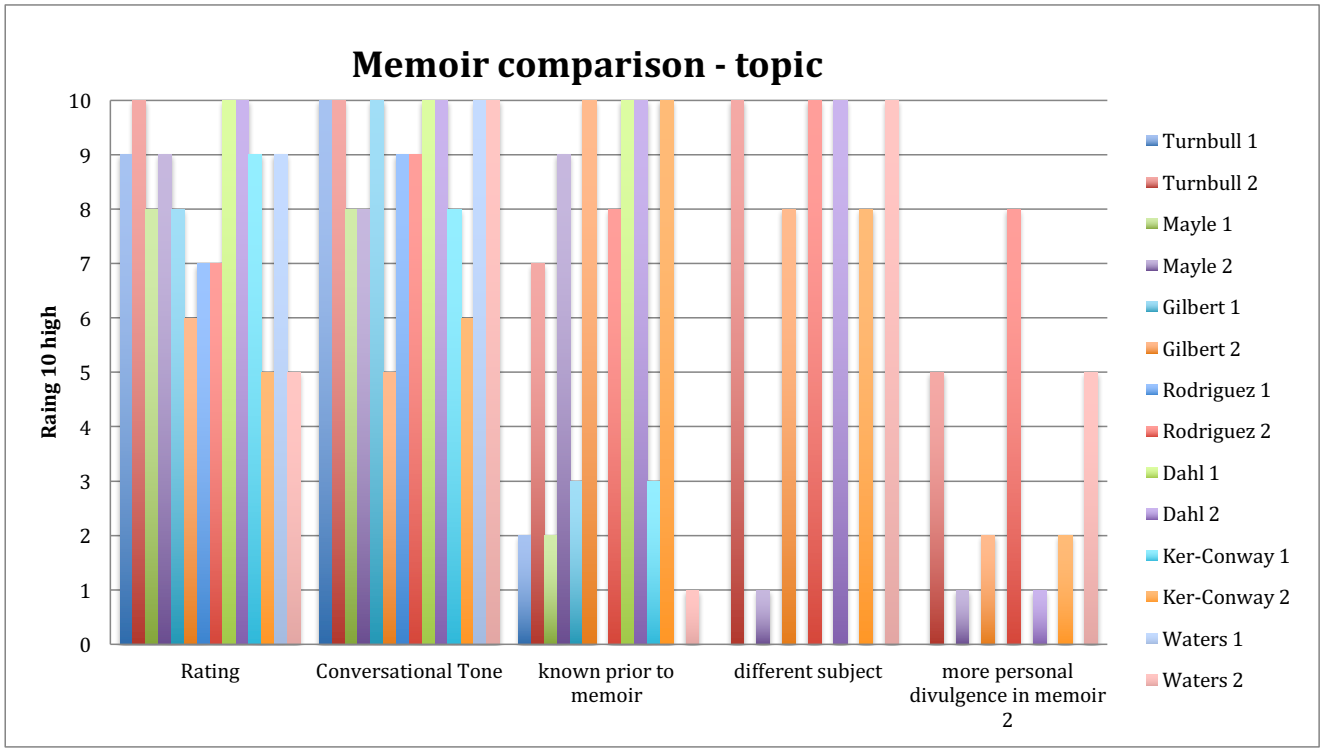


Fig. 3 Comparison of Sequel memoirs by Category

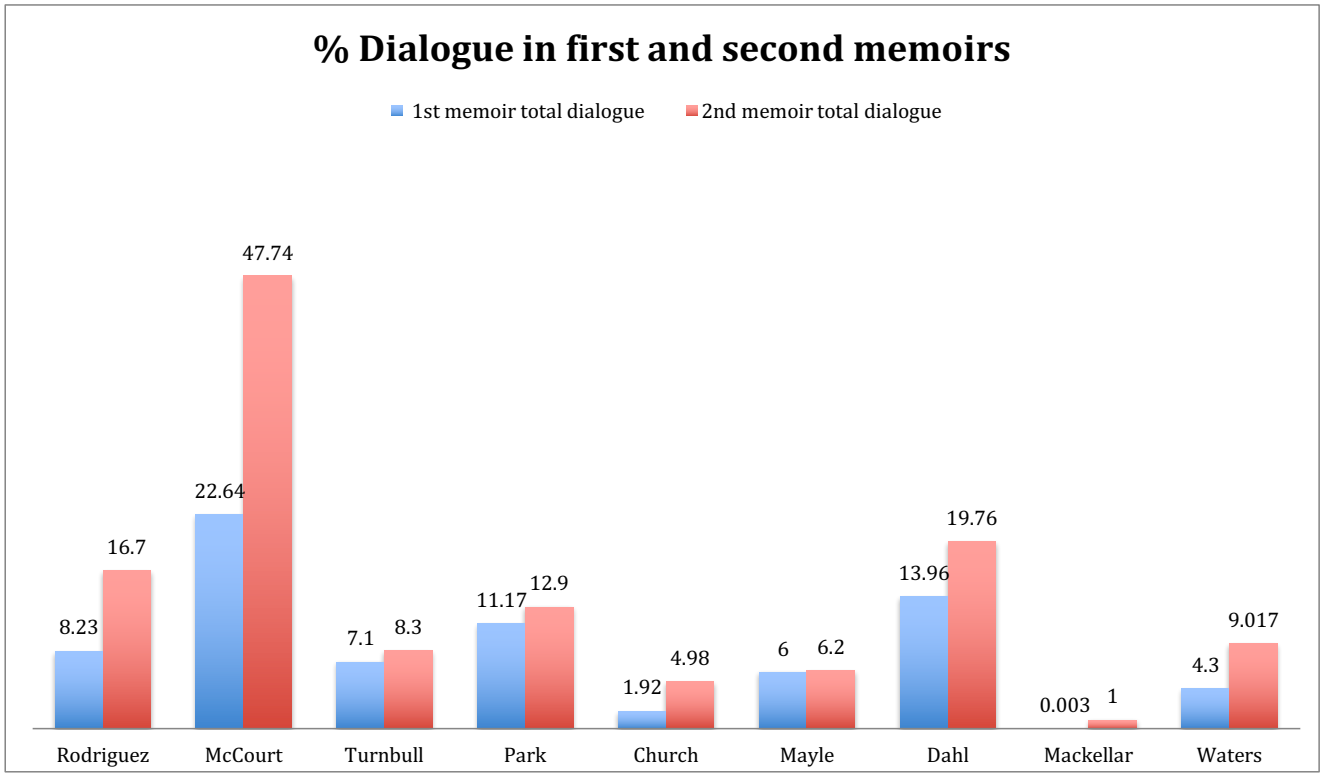


Fig.4 Comparison of Dialogue between first and subsequent sequels

(Rodriguez [2007]2014, 2014), (McCourt [1996]1999, 2001), (Turnbull 2002, 2013), (Park 1992, 1993), (Church 1955, 1957), (Mayle & Forbes [1989]1990, Mayle 1992), (Dahl 1984, 1986), (Mackellar 2010, 2014), (Waters 2013b, 2015a)

In fiction, dialogue serves several purposes. It is used to develop or reveal character, move the plot forward and give an immediacy to the moment being described. From the reader's perspective, it puts them in the scene (Cheney 1991; Couser 2012; Gutkind 2012; Hart 2011; King 2002; Levitin 1995; Rosenfeld 2007). According to Hart (2011), dialogue (amongst other narrative techniques) was borrowed from fiction by creative non-fiction writers such as Joan Didion (2009) and Truman Capote ([1965]2001), and used to engage the reader in the narrative. He states dialogue:

> has to do real work. It can advance action as characters encounter and struggle with obstacles, such as an antagonist who resists a character's progress in resolving a complication. It can help shape a scene as characters comment on objects in their environment, such as the clothes one of them wears (Hart 2011:28).

Dialogue uses direct speech, that is, by quoting the words 'said,' readers are shown the scene, whereas indirect speech reports what was said, usually converting it to past tense. In most memoirs, it is possible to identify direct speech quickly and easily due to the use of inverted commas. Direct speech does, however, create an issue for the memoirist, as they cannot possibly remember, word for word, dialogue that was spoken; that is, it is not a direct quote. In *Angela's Ashes,* McCourt ([1996]1999) deals with this by not using inverted commas for direct speech. Gutkind (2012) discusses this lack of inverted commas and claims that it is still easy to pick up the direct speech as it is written in italics. Unfortunately, this was not the case in the edition I read and I found it annoying, as mingling direct with indirect speech lead to constant disruption in the flow of the narrative. My mother and I discovered that in *Angela's Ashes* a comma after the verb of saying and a capital letter on the next word indicated direct speech e.g. 'Grandma says, That's enough. Ye have had yeer porridge and …' (McCourt [1996]1999:73). Where he used indirect speech it was obvious because instead of the pronoun 'I', a different personal pronoun, plus a change in tense to that of the past differentiated it from direct speech, for example, 'Philomena said she had tea and ham and cakes in her house around the corner' (McCourt [1996]1999:18). In his sequel, *Teacher Man* (McCourt 2005), an additional complexity was encountered as there were lengthy tracts of monologue in the form of transcribed remembered lessons that McCourt was giving to his students. Although these were spoken, they

were not counted in the word tally, but any give-and-take conversation between teacher and student was.

Further analysis of the results revealed that Mayle (1991, 1992) had the least variation in the amount of dialogue between his first and second memoir. This was not unexpected because of all the memoirs read and analysed, Mayle's two narratives were the most similar. They were almost identical in subject matter, his sequel was simply a matter of some more humorous anecdotes about his life in Provence. MacKellar (2010; 2014) used the least dialogue but also showed an increase in the sequel. Her first memoir was a grief memoir whilst the second was her transition to finding new love and happiness. I found both, despite promising beginnings, slow moving, and the inclusion of dialogue may have aided in drawing (at least this) reader into the narrative.

Writers of memoir generally accept that the genre includes dialogue and the reader of memoir understands that it is recreated (Finneran n.d.; Gerard 1996; Hart 2011; Myers 2013). Several technique guides for the genre of creative non-fiction, however, propose that any dialogue used should be taken verbatim from interviews, conversations, news clippings and the like, proposing that to make up dialogue in creative non-fiction constitutes a deviation from the truth (Cheney 1991; Couser 2012; Gutkind 1997) and, therefore, the non-fiction form. This led me to examine, not only dialogue, but what constitutes a memoir itself.

Memoir

The description 'memoir' is commonly used to refer to the writing of a portion of a life, whether it is the author's own or another person's, using the author's memory of the event or the other person's life as the major driver of the narrative (Brien 2004). When the memoir is principally about the writer's self then it is more correctly termed an autobiographical memoir and if it is about another person it is deemed to be a biographical memoir (Brien 2004; Couser 2012; Yagoda 2009). A memoir differs from autobiography and biography in that the narrative recounts the writer's memory of the events or people in the memoir whereas in a biography the author does not need to have known the subject (and often does not). In both biography and autobiography the text tells the story of a life from birth to death (or the current day) and is researched, with the facts verifiable by the reader, such as Scott Bevan's (2014) *Bill, The Life of William Dobell.* In auto/biography, the significant aspects of the subject's

life are usually examined, whereas in memoir only the portion of the memoirist's life relevant to the subject or theme of the narrative are included (Brien 2004; Couser 2012). Numerous examples of this latter 'portioning' are available such as in the memoirs of Julia Powell. In her first memoir, *Julie and Julia* ([1995]2011), she writes about her quest to cook every recipe (524 in total), over the period of a year, from Julia Child's & Louisette Bertholle's ([1961]1983) *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* and at the same time overcome the boredom of her day job and her flagging marriage. Powell's unsuccessful sequel *Cleaving* (2009) follows her becoming a butcher; learning this craft whilst conducting an extramarital affair.

Many memoirs also reflect on the effects the events recounted have on the author, giving such memoirs an internal and an external aspect. On the 'outside' are the facts as remembered and on the 'inside' are the feelings that these events created and the reflections and interpretations that these events had in changing the memoirist into the person they are at the time of writing.

The difficulty becomes in distinguishing autobiographical from biography and fiction. A major scholar Philippe Lejeune's 1975 essay (translated to English in 1989) is recognised as a defining work in the distinguishing of autobiographical works from other forms. In an earlier work he had attempted to define the form but a few loopholes remained so he applied stricter criteria in his essay 'The Autobiograhical Pact' (1989). His definition of the autobiography:

> Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality. (1989:4)

To supply a poetica to the definition he examined the definition from the reader's perspective coining the 'autobiographical pact' where the reader knows to read the story as 'true', because the author's name as written on the front cover is the same as that of the narrator of the story and the protagonist whose story is being told. This name gives an identity which is indisputable even if the reader were to question how much the narrative resembles the person. In fiction, where the author's name differs from that of the narrator and protagonist, the character may resemble the author but can never have the author's identity. For the reader, knowing the classification of the book being read determines how they will read it. In fiction, the reader will look for similarities, in autobiographical works

the reader will look for differences. An extension to the autobiographical pact is then made regarding the truth of the narrative. Unlike reference books which can be verified with research, the truth of autobiography is limited by memory, self-censorship, errors and involuntary distortions that merely resemble the truth although the author believes them to be a true recounting of their life.

After reading several authorities on memoir—Brien (2002, 2004, 2014), Clark (2006), Couser (2012), Gutkind (2012), Lejeune (1989), Miller (2007), Smith and Watson (2010) and Yagoda (2009), I concluded that four major elements need to be present for a narrative to be classified as a memoir. Firstly, Lejeune's autobiographical pact (1989) must be activated between the author and the reader. Secondly, the events narrated are in the past. Thirdly, it must be a 'true' story, that is, something that actually happened. Finally, there is both an external element (facts and memory) as well as an internal one (emotional feelings/reflection on events). If these four elements are present, the use of dialogue and 'high definition scenes' (Couser 2012; Gutkind 2012)—that is, where aspects of the location are given in such minute detail that the author could not possibly have remembered it (Couser 2012; Gutkind 2009; Yagoda 2009)—in my opinion, are acceptable in memoir. (This will be discussed further in the next section). Regarding dialogue, usually necessarily also a fictive element, Gutkind (2012:37) has clarified his opinion on the use of it where he stated that the 'idea is to replicate the conversation vividly and to mirror memory and speculation with trust and good judgement.' As all the memoirs I read used dialogue, I too determined that dialogue was a permissible technique in memoir.

Truth

As memoir relies predominantly on memory, the 'truth' of the memoir relies on the writer's memory and their ability to communicate this to the reader. This is, therefore, the writer's truth and a truth that will often differ from that of others who participated in the same scene or series of events (Sacks 2013; Schacter 1996). This does not mean that facts can be deliberately falsified in the way that James Frey (2003) did by describing his *A Million Little Pieces* as a memoir when he had made up sizeable chunks of it, an example being the length of time he was in prison, which was inflated from a few hours to three months (Clark 2006). Such deliberate falsifying of events is not permissible at any time as it breaks Lejeune's autobiographical pact (1989), where

the author tells the truth and the reader believes what is read to be true (Brien 2002, 2006a; Miller 2007).

What, then, about memoirs that relate the narrative from the author's perception of the truth, but use narrative techniques in the telling of these truths in a fashion that the reader knows cannot be true because human memory would not allow such accurate recall? Here I am referring to both dialogue and the description of scenes in minute detail. Couser (2012) calls these memoirs 'high definition' and suggests that they should be marketed as such with the added label 'based on a true story' (BOTS), in a similar fashion to the labeling used by film producers. Couser queries that, if you accept these as memoir, where do you draw the line between fiction and non-fiction? I would agree but suggest that if you followed this reasoning, virtually all memoirs would become BOTS. After all, no text is the literal reflection of reality. Yagoda and DeLorenzo (2011) examine the question of 'truth' in memoir and devise a scoring system (half in jest but with some validity) by which a memoir could be examined for veracity. From a starting value of 100, points are subtracted for inaccuracies, reflecting negatively on others in the narrative, use of dialogue and poor writing, whilst points are added for confirmation of the facts, clear statements regarding the veracity of the narrative, and self criticism/deprecation. Yagoda states that if a book obtains a score over sixty-five he classifies it as memoir, under this as fiction. He does concede that the positioning of this cut-off level is a personal one and will vary from person to person.

As well as in relation to dialogue, the question of truth was raised in my mind by many of the journal articles about memoir I was reviewing in my research (Brien 2002; Clark 2006; Denham 2010; Miller 2007; Wyatt 2006; Yagoda & DeLorenzo 2011) and books (Couser 2012; Gutkind 2012: Yagoda 2009; Smith & Watson 2010) as well as some of the memoirs I was reading.

Committed (2010), Elizabeth Gilbert's sequel to her bestseller *Eat, Pray, Love* (2007), raised questions of belief. Although her two memoirs both sold extremely well, they did not appeal to me as a reader; however, the first in particular, had some similarities for the purposes of analysis in having a travel theme. In her first memoir, Gilbert visits three countries, Italy (eating), India (praying) and Bali (loving)—in her search for enhanced self-understanding after the failure of her first marriage. The best part of the book, for me, occurred early in the narrative (pp.9-16) when Gilbert, lying on the bathroom floor, saw the futility of her marriage, as it described emotions that

most people could relate to. From that point the narrative seemed self-indulgent becoming more questionable as each part unfolded as to whether this would be the way a normal person would behave. Memoir is often seen as being narcissistic writing (Brown 2010) and this seemed to be an example of this. Reading this book helped me to see that I needed to guard against being too self-absorbed and showing myself only in a good light in my own writing.

On reading her sequel *Committed* (2010) I doubted that many could believe the overall premise of the book, which sees Gilbert agree to marry the person she supposedly loved and then proceed to research marriage in Laos to convince herself that her impending nuptials, forced on her to allow her partner Felipe residency in the USA, was the right thing to do. The proportion of the text where she is telling her story (rather than providing factual/academic information) seems to be relatively small and, where she did, my reaction varied from impatience tinged with annoyance to gaining small, momentary understandings of how Gilbert felt at key points.

An example of this occurred when her boyfriend Felipe was detained for six hours by Immigration and told that he no longer had entry to the United States. When Gilbert was eventually taken to see him, the narrative conveyed the vision of a woman in love:

> Both men looked equally tired, but only one of those men was mine —my beloved, the most familiar face in the world to me. Seeing him in such a state made my chest hurt with longing. I wanted to touch him, but I sensed this was not allowed, so I remained standing (2010:10).

When she was told that the easiest way out of this predicament was to get married she wrote of her reaction which I found incongruous:

> My heart sank, almost audibly. Across the tiny room, I could sense Felipe's heart sinking along with mine, in complete hollow tandem (2010: 13).

As it was clear that they loved each other, I found, like the Homeland Security Officer who was dealing with their predicament that their reactions were difficult to relate to; Gilbert and her boyfriend attributed their reactions to the difficulties they had experienced with their previous divorces. Consequently, they looked for other solutions, such as Gilbert hiring Felipe. This set up the remaining theme of the book,

the history of marriage, which Gilbert researched in her effort to feel positive about what she saw as a forced marriage. Gilbert's two feelings I felt were at cross-purposes with each other, causing for me as reader a conflict regarding what I found believable.

As soon as I questioned aspects of Gilbert's personal narrative, due to what I found was unusual human behavior, she lost me as a reader and the narrative lost its vibrancy. However, I realised that my reading was subjective and formed by my own experiences and taste, an area I examine further in Chapter 3.

I was looking forward to reading *The Kabul Beauty School* (Rodriguez [2007] 2014) as I had enjoyed Rodriguez's debut novel, *TheLittle Coffee Shop of Kabul* (2011), which I felt gave a good insight into life in Kabul. Her memoir, written earlier, I expected to add to these insights. This I found not to be the case as on initial reading I became increasingly skeptical about the memoir's veracity.

Rodriguez, an American hairdresser, initially went to Afghanistan as part of an aid team and, seeing a need for both the expat community and the local women, she returned to set up the Kabul Beauty School. In the story, the author was acting in ways that were difficult to believe a normal person would act in the period of Afghanistan's history that this book covered, where Kabul was still struggling with Taliban insurgency attacks and suicide bombings. Rodriguez, for instance, describes her arranged marriage to an Afghan man, Sam, and her blatant disregard for her own safety with apparently no fear of the consequences of her actions. It made me query whether she was simply ignorant or not telling the full truth by omission. She had already displayed stupidity by wandering around the streets alone, staring men down as she passed and not being circumspect in her coverings and other behaviour. Although she had entered a war zone, there was little mention of bombings and other traumatic events. She seems surprised at the treatment of Afghan women by their husbands although these events are generally known. There were, however, descriptions of Afghan daily life that were believable. One of these was her description of the day she came across a little cow tied up by the guesthouse where she was living. She was clearly delighted by the beast but:

> The next time I walked out to get a new box, I nearly slipped in what seemed like a street of blood. Someone had slaughtered the cow right outside the door. They were making steaks out of it just a few feet away… I had to keep moving boxes for the rest of the day, careful not to track blood

> inside or look at the little cow's head, now tilted lifelessly on top of the crumpled heap of its empty skin ([2007] 2014:164-165).

Passages such as these rang true having witnessed similar events in Vanuatu and I wondered whether there was so much trauma that only small stories, not related to humans, could be focused upon. Perhaps she had not allowed sufficient time to pass between the event and her telling of it and due to this rawness she could not bring herself to reflect upon the happenings in Afghanistan at the time. Despite this possibility, I still had difficulty believing that her narrative told the full story.

The book flowed well but as it progressed there was no developing depth to the characters or the writing. The less I believed her narrative, the more difficult it became to read, and I would have discontinued reading in other circumstances.

Nelson (2007) relates the effects of this book on the women who were featured in it. Although the book featured on the *New York Times* bestseller list and was about to be made into a film, the girls and women who were named by Rodriguez not only received no benefit from royalties, but were instead living in fear of their lives due to the facts divulged in the memoir. For me, this raised the need to examine a range of ethical issues in relation to memoir particularly as I had questions regarding my own work (see Chapter 3).

From this book I determined that the narrative must be believable and that if the author's truthfulness becomes questionable, the narrative loses its vibrancy, even if it is only dishonesty by omission rather than telling outright falsehoods (Brien 2002, 2006b; Couser 2005, 2012; Miller 2007; Yagoda 2009).

Rodriguez's sequel, *The House on Carnaval Street* (2014) follows the narrator's life on her return from Afghanistan. Initially in California, Rodriguez has another relationship with a man, despite still being married to the Afghan, grumbling constantly how she doesn't want to have any relationships at all. Luckily, he ends the relationship and she, and her cat, go to Mexico. The major theme of the book is recovering from post-traumatic stress disorder, which was interesting for me as this is also a theme of my sequel. Family and friends play a part in her new life in the seaside town, Mazatlán, where she again sets up a beauty school, finds love and finally feels safe.

Although Rodriguez was a more annoying character in this book, it was somewhat more believable and she confirms from passages in this book that there was

a considerable amount of detail left out of her first memoir, for example, her mother's visit to Afghanistan when, for a bit of fun, they fired her husband's rifle at what they assumed was an abandoned tank, only to find the turret turning to line them up in its sights. In her first memoir there is no mention of this event or even that her mother came to visit. The effect of this was to make the sequel a more believable narrative as Rodriguez filled in the gaps that were missing from the initial memoir.

I also found Rodriguez unlikeable as a character due to her self-indulgent actions, leaving her children with her mother whilst she travelled satisfying her own needs. One child, who was an alcoholic, recovered during the sequel but she does not seem to see the part that she played in his condition. The narrator seems to be a very self-centred person, leading me to ask if a memoir necessarily needs to be focused on the self of the narrator, or how such a focus can be handled less self-indugently.

As with Rodriguez's first book, the beginning was easy to read but the desire to pick it up lessened the further I got into it. The narrative became more compelling again towards the end of the volume. The story itself seemed more honest than the first, and having experienced an expatriate life myself, I found her descriptions corresponded with my experience living in an expatriate community. I found that having left the constraints of their home country behind, expatriates embraced life, particularly alcohol. Rodriguez writes:

> That Sunday on Stone Island, as I sat at Lety's surfside restaurant around a long plastic table under a palm frond roof with a dozen mismatched people of all shapes and sizes knocking back buckets of beer, margaritas, rum pulled out of someone's beach bag, and of course, straight tequila, I learned a lot (2014: 111-112).

Her descriptions of Mazatlán were also vivid such as the description of the house she purchased.

> But the façade of the crumbling little box we stopped at looked like the aftermath of a bubble gum factory explosion. It was pink. Pink, bumpy cement. Pink all over, with a flat roof, one tiny window with blue and red and green and yellow opaque panes covered by a handwritten "Se Vende" sign, and a house on either side, with not even a hair of space between them (2014: 90).

Rodriguez dealt well with the issue of how much to reveal about her previous memoir in her sequel. She made constant mention of her life in Kabul, to the point that, as a reader, I gained more knowledge about the truth of her life in Afghanistan than I did when reading the first memoir which was set there. The snippets released in this way were often undisclosed information, such as her ownership of a coffee shop in Kabul. When talking about cooking she writes, 'Even in Kabul, at my own coffeehouse, I was told in no uncertain terms that my one and only job was to greet customers and stay out of the kitchen' (2014:150). Where in her first memoir I believed she had taken stupid risks walking around the streets of Kabul, in her sequel she wrote: 'Sometimes, when I first started exploring, I'd catch myself navigating the brick sidewalks head down, as I had learned to do in Kabul, where eye-to-eye contact from a woman is a dead giveaway for a foreigner, even one wearing a veil' (2014:103). These little snippets gave enough information to the reader to understand why Rodriguez was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, but didn't tell the full story and, if the first memoir was unread, might have whet the appetite to buy the book to get the whole story. For me, it confirmed my belief that portions had been omitted in the initial memoir. Perhaps as more time had elapsed between Kabul and the sequel, she could now see it without the rawness it may have had when she wrote the first volume (Couser 2012), enabling the truth to be told.

Humour and Personal Revelation

Peter Mayle's Provence series consisting of *A Year in Provence* ([1989]1991), *Toujours Provence* (1992) and *Encore Provence* (1999) fall into the 'good read' category, recount his relocation from the UK to rural France and telling tales of life in France as small vignettes. I had struggled to read Mayles' *A Year in Provence* on previous attempts, however when I finally finished it, I found I enjoyed it. I empathised with his constant stream of visitors and found the stories he related mildly amusing and sometimes interesting, although, at times, repetitive. These books were highly successful, being read by over a million British readers and translated into seventeen languages (Hall 2011). Despite originally being published twenty-five years ago, these books are still in print and popular today and have, moreover, generated a whole industry of similar books, describing moving overseas. On *Amazon.com* there are over two hundred of these in relation to the South of France alone, including those by Carol Drinkwater (2001- 2010) who wrote a series of seven memoirs about

rejuvenating a run-down olive farm. Laura Bradbury's (2014-2015) *My Grape Year* was another similar series. Her first memoir featured in the top fifty Amazon bestsellers. Other countries also are represented in this manner including Italy (Mayes 1998, 2014) and Tahiti (Turnbull 2013), but none to the same extent as France.

I enjoyed the sequel, *Toujours Provence* (Mayle 1992), more than the first book as it was akin to revisiting old friends, with characters from the first book popping up throughout the narrative. The theme was the same as the first book, being a series of anecdotal stories of his life in Provence. Again, Mayle tells his stories in a humorous fashion, with his wife remaining a nameless, blurry figure in the background. By the time I reached *Encore Provence* (1999) I had eaten and drunk sufficient of what Provence had to offer by way of Mayle and I found it tedious to read. I wondered whether he too felt bored with his material, and whether that transferred to his writing.

Mayle writes in scenes, rather than about his internal self, describing amusing situations he found himself in as, for example, when he happened upon a mushroom collector in the woods dressed with a knee length rubber boot on one foot and a running shoe on the other. This, he was informed, was for protection from snakes. He then learnt much about mushroom collecting and found that local pharmacies converted into mushroom guidance centres where they tested the collected fungi for gastronomic safety ([1989]1991:165-169). Throughout the series his wife remained anonymous, being referred to on the rare occasion she is mentioned at all as 'my wife', which is interesting in terms of how the memoirist reveals (or not) the lives of those close to them. Instead of personal revelation, Mayle uses humour and this creates a fantasy world of which readers would obviously like to be a part in the sunshine of Provence, imbibing good wine, eating delicious food and meeting quirky French people.

The subject matter was similar in both books and perhaps it was this similarity which made them popular, but for myself I concluded that without the humour, I would have needed some emotional involvement with the characters.

Sarah Turnbull (2002), in her first memoir, *Almost French*—which describes Turnbull's arrival in Paris to stay with a man she had met in Budapest—also uses humour to good effect and does not reveal a great deal of personal information such as in relation to her blossoming love relationship with Frédéric. Instead, the narrative highlights the difference between the French and Australian ways of living and

understanding, with Turnbull struggling to find a fit for herself in France—which I, as a reader, could relate to.

She missed having (girl)friends and struggled until she developed some insight into the differences in cultures, which allowed her to finally understand that relationships are viewed in a different light between the two countries. Wyndham (2013) states that Turnbull's honesty and humour was the reason for her success with a readership of over two hundred thousand in Britain and Australia. This humour can be seen in her relating the reaction of her husband, Frédéric, to her tracksuit pants:

> Rushing to the bakery to get a baguette and croissants, I chuck on an old shapeless jumper and my tracksuit pants, which I'd rediscovered at the bottom of a wardrobe when we were packing up our place at Levallois. Catching sight of me, Frédéric looks appalled.
>
> 'Tracksuit pants?' He's never seen me wearing them before.
>
> 'What's wrong with that? I'm only going to the bakery.'
>
> There is a second's pause. Frédéric's eyes implore me. Finally he manages to speak.
>
> 'But it's not nice for the baker!' (Turnbull 2002:130)

This was both humorous and informative as to the cultural differences and suggested to me that small details can be very revealing. Another example of these small descriptions was when Turnbull's desire for a view of St Eustache church and a feeling of open space led to them employing a builder to create a window, albeit illegally. She gave a humorous explanation of the French legal system, ways in which it could be bypassed, and the manners of the French authorities. As an Australian, Turnbull enmeshed the reader into the book as her description of this French 'way' was written, not only with humour but also affection. With her descriptions, Turnbull carried me through her difficulties, her eventual understanding and the subtle shift as she came to terms with the French, allowing me an understanding of her pleasure when she eventually reacted as a French woman would.

The first time I read this book I felt Turnbull was withholding detail about her relationship with Frédéric and this made the memoir, like Mayle's, an impersonal account of her time in France. Despite the publishers, prior to publishing, insisting Turnbull tell more of the personal story (Wyndham 2013), my feeling that he was an unknown player in the story and his anonymity, for me, detracted from the narrative. On a second reading, I picked up a little more of Frédéric and was not as aware of his

absence from the narrative. When Turnbull does give the reader an idea of Frédéric, she shows by his actions that he is a tolerant, supportive and loving partner who would do much, even move from his comfortable apartment in the suburbs to a smaller flat on the sixth floor of an 'overpriced dump' (2002:98-103) of a building without a lift in Montmartre, in order to give this relationship the best chance possible. He is also shown to possess a sense of humour, such as, when a point is reached that Sarah looks forward to visiting his parents in the country (initially she did much to avoid these visits), he pretends that he does not wish to go.

The sequel *All Good Things* (2013) follows Sarah and Frédéric to Tahiti. The narrative is more personally revealing as Turnbull portrays the island culture, its scenic attractions and her life there, which is again lonely for although she does make relationships with the local people, they are on a different level to that of girlfriends in the Australian sense. It also follows her despair at her inability to conceive, her joy when IVF finally worked, and the added heartbreak when her child was severely burnt when he pulled a pot full of boiling pumpkin soup down the inside of his pyjamas. Turnbull looks at the difficulties that island living brings when faced with these circumstances. Her descriptions are vivid and give a real sense of Tahiti and her daily life there.

Both Mayle and Turnbull's memoirs achieved bestselling status, demonstrating that the use of humour is an effective narrative tool. Turnbull's book is also being turned into a film (George 2011 (updated 2014)). I found Turnbull's narrative resonated with me more, again due to my personal taste and world experience (see Chapter 3). Perhaps too, the author being Australian held an appeal. Although most readers appeared to prefer her first memoir, Turnbull's sequel, *All Good Things* (2013), held greater appeal for me as it was much more personally revealing as she relates her deep desire to have children. I had empathy with many of the themes of Turnbull's sequel where she lives on an island in the Pacific, the location of my first memoir. Her desire for children is, for instance, a theme of my own sequel, her interest in art is also a personal interest of mine, her return to Australia is another theme of my sequel, her continuing lack of friends is a theme in both my memoirs, and her writing process is of great interest to me. Although I do not believe that you can only enjoy books that are close to our own lives, I do believe that the reader must find the writer credible. Having had similar experiences and emotional reactions I

found that I didn't have any difficulty in believing the narrative, which was not the case with, for example, Rodriguez's memoirs.

I concluded that Turnbull's sequel involved me, as a reader, to a greater degree in her personal life, enmeshing me into the text and made me question whether, if she had revealed more of herself and Frédéric in her first memoir, I would have enjoyed it more.

Scene descriptions

Vivid scene descriptions draw readers into memoirs (Scofield 2006), and Turnbull is a master at this art. In the following passage, Turnbull transported me to Tahiti.

> All day cumulous castles had been bulging and building up over Tahiti's peaks. Now, at their most vertical and magnificent, they began dissolving into thin bands and streamers as if the effort of appearing so puffed up and self-assured had proven exhausting. As we watched, the sun threw all its remaining strength at Tahiti to produce feverish luminosity: saffron and flamingo pink with deep ripples of indigo and cobalt. Like an old face, the island wrinkled, growing wiser and more ancient before our eyes.
>
> Sumptuous sunsets. Palm-fringed private beach. Lagoon on our doorstep. Sweet papaya by the bagful. Vanilla beans bundled up like lush and fragrant firesticks (Turnbull 2013:49).

Here, Turnbull activates all the senses as not only can the scenes be visualised from her descriptions but the heat of the sun can be felt by her use of words such as 'feverish', the 'sweet papaya' can be tasted and the vanilla beans smelt. She makes me, as reader, feel I am part of the narrative and experiencing this moment myself.

Well-known novelist Roald Dahl writes of anecdotes from his childhood in *Boy* (1984) and stories from his time during World War II in the air force in *Going Solo* (1986). Both books are full of lively stories that held my interest from beginning to end. The foreword for *Boy* explains why this book is not formally structured as an autobiography but rather around a series of memories that had made such an impression on the author that they were 'seared' into his memory. He didn't have to search for these memories, he wrote, as they were as vivid in his mind as the day they happened, which made them easy to record (1984:7). He states: 'Some are funny. Some are painful. Some are unpleasant. I suppose that is why I have always remembered them so vividly. All are true' (Dahl 1993:7). The same holds for his

second book where he states in the forward that he was 'extremely selective, discarding all the inconsequential incidents in one's life and concentrating upon those that have remained vivid in the memory' (Dahl 1993:183). His descriptions are extremely vivid and engaging.

> The ship that was carrying me away from England to Africa in the autumn of 1938 was called the SS Mantola. She was an old paint-peeling tub of 9,000 tons with a single tall funnel and a vibrating engine that rattled the tea-cups in their saucers on the dining room table ([3]Dahl 1986:185).

There is no doubt that such vivid descriptions make the memoir come alive for the reader and, for me, it is an element that I realised I would need to purposely add to my sparse writing style. Even more compelling was the following:

> All of a sudden from my little spy hole, I spotted a movement at the far end of the deck. Then a naked body materialized. But this was no ghost. It was all too solid flesh, and the man moving swiftly over the deck between the lifeboats and the ventilators and making no sound at all as he came galloping towards me. He was short and stocky and slightly pot-bellied in his nakedness, with a big black moustache on his face … (1986:188).

Dahl's description of the scene prompted vivid mental images eliciting a humorous response, but the addition of personal reflection (below) made the passage even more compelling.

> I smiled weakly at the Major as he went prancing by, but I didn't pull back. I wanted to see him again. There was something rather admirable about the way he was galloping round and round the deck with no clothes on at all, something wonderfully innocent and unembarrassed and cheerful and friendly. And here was I, a bundle of youthful self-consciousness, gaping at him through the port-hole and disapproving quite strongly of what he was doing. But I was also envying him. I was actually jealous of his total don't give a damn attitude, and I wished like mad that I myself had the guts to go out there and do the same thing. I wanted to be like him. I longed to be able to fling off my pyjamas and go scampering round the deck in the altogether and to hell with anyone who happened to see me. But not in a million years could I have done it. I waited for him to come round again (Dahl 1986:188-189).

[3] Different editions of Dahl's work have been consulted.

In this passage and numerous others that are similar using high definition description interlaced with personal thoughts and reflection (Turnbull 2013; Karr [1995]1996) the reader is given a not only vivid visual picture of the scene but also an understanding of the emotions that accompanied it.

Mary Karr is the author of three memoirs of which the first, *The Liars' Club* ([1995]1996), is one of a handful of books that is widely cited as starting the modern 'memoir boom' (Brien 2004). This *bildungsroman*, or coming of age memoir, is typical of its type (and time) as Karr takes the reader through the misery of her childhood, growing up in a dysfunctional family, to her early adolescence, allowing the reader to observe the formation of identity—in Karr's case surviving neglect, parental alcoholism, her mother's slide into madness, her grandmother's death from cancer and the violation of her own body at an early age. The narrative was lyrical in nature and Karr set up the suspense from the first sentence, ensuring that the reader will wait over one hundred and fifty pages to find out why she is being examined by the doctor in the middle of the night. Penguin publishers (n.d.) described Karr's memoir as 'wickedly funny' and claimed 'Karr's comic childhood in an east Texas oil town brings us characters as darkly hilarious as any of J. D. Salinger's', a viewpoint supported by numerous reviewers posting on *Amazon* and *Goodreads*. Personally, I found her experiences torrid and in no way amusing.

She also includes extremely high definition description of her scenes, which has the effect of immediately placing the reader in the room with her, as in the passage below, where it is easy to visualise the scene of the doctor examining her, because of the detail that only someone present would know.

> He wore a yellow golf shirt unbuttoned so that sprouts of hair showed in a V shape on his chest. I had never seen him in anything but a white starched shirt and a gray tie. The change unnerved me (Karr [1995] 1996: 3).

This level of detail continues throughout Karr's first memoir although she often declares that she is struggling to recall.

> I don't remember our family driving across the Orange Bridge to get to the Bridge City café that evening. Nor do I remember eating the barbecued

> crabs…My memory comes back into focus when we're drawing close to the Orange Bridge on the way home (Karr [1995]1996: 137).

Karr recognised that her memory was unreliable. She wrote:

> Because it took so long for me to paste together what happened, I will leave that part of the story missing for awhile. It went long unformed for me, and I want to keep it that way here. I don't mean to be coy. When the truth would be unbearable the mind often blanks it out. But some ghost of an event may stay in your head. Then, like a smudge of a bad word quickly wiped off a school blackboard, this ghost can call undue attention to itself by its very vagueness. You keep studying the dim shape of it, as if the original form will magically emerge. This blank spot in my past, then, spoke most loudly to me by being blank. It was a hole in my life that I both feared and kept coming back to because I couldn't quite fill in (Karr [1995]1996:9).

Working from her earliest memory and then forward into the future and back to the past, Karr takes readers through her grim childhood growing up with a mentally unstable mother. Throughout the book she offers insightful reflections such as 'looking back from this distance, I can also see Mother trapped in some way, stranded in her own silence' ([1995]1996:55).

Karr's (2001) sequel *Cherry,* another *bildungsroman,* carries on where she left off in the first narrative at age seventeen and takes us through her sexual awakening, run-ins with authority and decline into drug taking. I found it equally as harrowing as her first memoir. Again, it was lyrical in style but while she began in second person, she then lapses for a brief time into first person and then returns to second person for the remainder of the text thus presuming to know what the reader thought. She may have used this technique to embody the reader in the narrative but I found it annoying and will not use it in my narrative. Throughout *Cherry*, references to the gaps in her memory are mentioned, such as where she admits to her difficulty in describing her marriage breakdown which has 'more mysterious blanks than the Nixon tapes' (2001:88). These difficulties with memory, however, do not stop Karr from including a lot of dialogue and high definition scenes, a technique which makes her poetic writing come alive.

In her third memoir, *Lit*, a conversion narrative (Eads 2011), Karr (2009) looks at her alcoholism and gaining spiritual faith, which saved her. She again discusses her

memory and how her recall has been affected by the years of drinking. Her purpose is plainly described. 'Maybe by telling you my story, you can better tell yours, which is the only way to get home, by which I mean to get free of us' (2009:6). In this book, she again starts in the present and flashes back and forth from past to present.

Both these sequel memoirs display the wonderful high definition scene descriptions that she demonstrated in her first. Her first two memoirs reveal a miserable life, akin to Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* ([1996]1999) and Dave Pelzer's ([2000]2001) *A Child Called It.* It is possibly this glimpse into someone else's misery and misfortune that readers find compelling, although Couser (2012) acknowledges that the reader can tire of this type of memoir. He claims that these types of memoirs should not be dismissed as simply written for their cathartic properties but rather as a demonstration of the social history of our times where, for example, there is a high divorce rate and dysfunctional family life. These modern 'misery memoirs' reflect this, correcting earlier memoirs from the 'Great Depression' through to post World War II, where child abuse was hidden and an idyllic family life was portrayed, as in such memoirs as *Cheaper by the Dozen* (Gilbreth & Carey ([1948]2003). Tim Adams (2006) questions why 'misery' memoirs have become a best-selling genre and suggests that they have replaced the love story as the most popular genre. Like the romance story of the past, he claims, the tale of the miserable childhood takes the reader through the full range of emotions and, similarly, usually has a happy ending.

The descriptions of the scenes in many of these 'misery' memoirs had implications for my own memoir, which although not misfortune oriented, nevertheless needed the addition of details of the scenes in order that the reader would be transported into them. Through this analysis, I identified high definition description as an essential ingredient in writing a compelling sequel as this technique creates vividness in the narrative.

Voice and structure

In my textual analysis of sequel memoirs, I found that voice was an important factor in the vibrancy of the narrative. Mary Karr claims: 'each great memoir lives or dies based 100% on voice' (2015:35). Although all the authors I read possessed, and wrote in, their own unique voices, I found those whom I felt were personally telling

their story to me produced more compelling narratives. The more personal I felt this communication to be, the more compelling the narrative became for me as a reader.

This was something that Gilbert worried about in relation to her sequel memoir, when she said 'If anything, I'm afraid it will be too academic, or that people will miss the carefree voice of *Eat, Pray, Love*' (qtd. in Yabroff 2010). Perhaps she was right to be concerned as on reading *Committed*, I got the impression that this was a book written to get some additional mileage from her successful first memoir. I did not feel that she had much to say and, therefore, padded out the narrative in an academic fashion. She, for instance, includes some thirty pages on the history of marriage throughout the ages using academic in-text referencing techniques such as 'Blackstone wrote' (2010:65) and 'The Holmes-Rahe scale….' (2010:81). She uses a similar referencing style, albeit in smaller chunks of text, throughout the book. The academic writing starts early in the book where on page 4 she writes, 'Rebecca West observed that ….' (2010:4).

I found *Committed* shifted between an academic essay on marriage, a travelogue and a disjointed personal story that did not have any real substance and to which I did not feel connected. One review in *Publishers Weekly* (n.k. 2010) describes *Committed* as a 'tedious slog' while another (Sohn 2009) describes how Gilbert had to rewrite the memoir as the voice did not work on her first attempt. Sohn also felt that the narrative's structure did not flow as Gilbert moved erratically from academic pondering to travel narrative with the most enjoyable parts of the book, for her, being the rare family anecdotes Gilbert included.

However, the inclusion of history and facts, if carefully written so as to be seamless, can add an extra layer to the memoir, giving the reader a greater understanding of the event. Gutkind states: 'Combining research and story creates connective tissue and forges the universal chord that we are all seeking in order to reach out to the reader on all levels and maximize our audience' (2012:68).

I read two other pairs of sequel memoirs written by academics. Jill Ker Conway, a historian, was well-known in academic circles for her work promoting the acceptance of women in academia and she became the first female president of Smith College, USA, but she gained universal renown as a memoirist with her first memoir *The Road from Coorain* ([1989]1994). This *bildungsroman* memoir tells of her time

in Australia, growing up on an isolated sheep property to her early adulthood when she graduates from university. Made into a film in 2001 and still in print today this memoir describes compellingly the Australian countryside and a childhood different from most. I found her sequel *True North* (Ker Conway 1994) too scholarly both in style and subject, appearing detached and impersonal. As a woman in academia myself, I expected to find it interesting but instead found that it did not hold my attention as she talked about women's lack of opportunity with little emotion and touched only at the edges of her personal life with a difficult mother and a husband suffering severe depression. Describing her husband, for example, she writes:

> He thought the separation of academic and fiscal decision making unwise in a social and political context, where the reality was that the Provincial government set the University's income, through its power to control grants to universities by a formula, calculated to vary according to the cost of educating a student in a given faculty. Similarly, the government of the day provided some 80 percent of the capital needs of the University. Thus, the old Board of Trustees was exercising fiduciary judgement over a smaller and smaller array of issues. Moreover, since the government set the global sum of the University's annual operating income, decisions about funding allocations within that global picture were every bit as much academic as they were financial, and needed to be deliberated upon as such (Ker-Conway 1994:157).

In this text, Ker Conway seemed to become bogged down in detail that as a reader I did not need to know. Twenty-two of the twenty-three reader reviews of this book on *Amazon.com* generally admired the book but many recommended it for academics or those planning on undertaking a university career. One of these reviewers was, like me, disappointed.

Another sequel memoirist and academic Mackellar (2010, 2014) was more natural in her voice and narrative choices. Her first memoir tells of the difficulty she had in coming to terms with the suicide of her husband and the death of her mother from cancer a short time later. Although she took leave from her job as a history researcher and lecturer, her writing at times reflects her academic background but in a very engaging manner.

> Rilke believes that in the isolation I will find inspiration. Inspiration or madness, I think, as I read one of his quotes I've copied into my notebook:

> Solitude is the alembic of personhood — its entrances seem to be guarded by feelings that would make most people turn and walk the other way — not just sadness, but anxiety, fear, doubt, premonitions of death, all unsettling, all pain, all depression, of spirit.
>
> Rilke insists I pursue this and count myself lucky to court such experience. For him solitude is not a matter of being alone, but far harder to achieve — it's a territory, which must be occupied.
>
> Of course, I'm suspicious of his absolutism on the creative process: he obviously hasn't had children and tried to write. His observations of the process remind me of Drusilla Modjeska's recreation of the composer Stravinksy's wife keeping her tableful of children in absolute silence through lunch in case Stravinsky's creative process was interrupted. Stravinsky obviously occupied Rilke's territory of solitude (Mackellar 2014: 178-179).

The inclusion of passages such as above was not out of place in this memoir as these sections seemed to flow more smoothly into the narrative than that quoted by Ker Conway above. This also differed from Gilbert's (2010) sequel, *Committed*, in which I felt her chunks of research, although written in a different tone to her personal story, were not as tedious as Ker Conway's (1994), who simply relayed too much overly arcane academic detail for a general reader rendering her narrative, at times, boring.

Writing about voice in narrative, Debra Adelaide (2007:6) states: 'If innocence has been smothered by too much knowledge, the work will be vitiated. Intimacy will vanish. There will be no kiss between author and reader.' This connection between the author, the narrative and the reader is essential in order for the reader to be captivated and involved in the life being told. This statement expresses my thoughts in regard to those memoirs I have termed 'academic' in nature.

I found Frank McCourt's ([1996]1999) miserable childhood recounted in *Angela's Ashes* an effort to read due primarily to the subject matter which takes us through the poverty and suffering of McCourt's childhood, his sexual awakening and activities of his young adulthood, including events suffered at the hands of the Roman Catholic church. Although his story was told well it seemed to me without purpose, and—after a few chapters—boring. I recognised, however, that his use of a simple child-like voice and short sentences described his misery well and dragged the reader into the volume, causing me, initially at least, to empathise with the deaths of

McCourt's siblings and the extreme poverty caused by his alcoholic father. The voice also subtly changes, as the volume progresses and McCourt ages, to describe his discovery of love, disillusionment with the Roman Catholic faith, and return to America. Although the so-called 'misery memoir' is a sub-genre that I do not enjoy, this work was compellingly written and created a deal of empathy for the memoirist. Reading McCourt's sequel, *Tis* (1999), didn't engender the same empathy for him. I found the man described was simply unlikeable. However, he seemed to tell his life 'as it was' and again deserved his reputation as a good storyteller (Bolger 2009). *Teacher Man* (McCourt 2005) finally saw me liking McCourt the man as he became the type of teacher who all could benefit from. In all these books there was evidence of humour and stories of how he overcame the adversities of his life. McCourt also includes his inner thoughts about the incident he is relating, for example, in *Angela's Ashes* when he is forced at the age of seven to learn to dance and his mother tells him he is learning to dance for Ireland, he writes:

> I wonder how I can die for Ireland if I have to sing and dance for Ireland, too. I wonder why they never say, You can eat sweets and stay home from school, and go swimming for Ireland (2001:140).

In *Teacher Man* (McCourt 2005), after a short onboard love affair with a nurse, he writes on seeing her with a new, elderly lover:

> I wonder if she waggled her arse deliberately to taunt me.
> Waggle on. I don't care.
> But I cared. I felt destroyed, cast aside. After her three days with me how could that nurse go off with that old man who was at least sixty (2005:166).

Sharing his thoughts on the events makes me feel that he is confiding in me as a reader.

Turnbull, a journalist, has a delightful conversational style of writing that also provides an insight into the French psyche. She observes the deep differences between the entrenched rigidity (and arrogance) of the French way of being and the casual carefree attitude of Australians, which I could relate to from personal experience.

Dealing with the first memoir in the sequel

The sequel memoirist needs to appropriately allude to the first memoir in a way that neither repeats the initial narrative yet gives sufficient information so that any necessary background is available to the reader. This occurs in Ker Conway's sequel to her much loved memoir *The Road to Coorain* ([1989]1994). *True North* (1994) has the reader left wondering at parts of the narrative that assume they have already read the first volume. Turnbull handles this segue between memoir volumes well by commencing her sequel almost where she left off, giving a brief explanation of who the characters were as they reappeared. At no point in the book did she leave the reader floundering and if I had not read the books in order, my interest would be piqued to read her first book. Indeed, in her case, the order of reading did not matter at all. The narrative form of Mayle's (1992) books did not require any explanation regarding other volumes as each chapter in each book is a complete story with no linking theme other than that being set in Provence. Rodriguez (2014) explained why she had returned to the United States in her sequel, however she proceeded throughout her narrative to give more detail of her time in Afghanistan, much of which explained gaps I had found in her first narrative.

Karr deals with this dilemma by commencing her third memoir (2009) with two letters to her son, titled 'Then' and 'Now'. These two letters serve to give readers who have not read either of her first two memoirs enough knowledge of what has gone before to ensure they are not left in the dark.

Conclusion

Reading these memoirs had implications for my writing of memoir. Although my first memoir was moved along by the story, I decided that my second would need to draw the reader in to my thoughts and feelings about our new life. I set out to achieve this by maintaining a conversational tone within what I hoped was a strong personal voice and, although I would research the historical facts, I would try to avoid making these sound academic but, rather, keep my own voice constant throughout the narrative. Analysing these memoirs also led me to conclude that humour, mixed with personal revelation, is a major element that creates vibrancy in the narrative, and along with dialogue, promotes the revelation of character, moving the story along. Telling the truth as I remember it is also essential, although writing the truth on some subjects has ethical implications. Some of these include the amount of personal exposure I wish

to reveal regarding myself, how much of Roger's story I should tell and the implications of writing about the renal dialysis facility that was planned for inclusion in the narrative. Research into ethics, therefore, would be part of the journey.

My expedition had begun and I felt as though I had completed the first stage. As I continued with the writing of my sequel 'After the Nightmare', I now consciously paid attention to the truth of my narrative. I would, I decided, also include more dialogue, a conversational voice and attempt to bring the memoir closer to some sense of midpoint on the private/public continuum. I would remain at this point in the journey for awhile, although some side trips would be made. These would include my Confirmation of Candidature, and the preparation of conference papers and the investigation of the ethics dilemma. At this stage, I was full of enthusiasm for my creative work and overflowing with questions I wanted to find the answers to.

Chapter 2: The Value of Confirmation and Conferences

The Confirmation of Candidature is a required procedure all research higher degree candidates fulfil at my university (as at many others). In my case, as a Masters candidate, this requirement had to be completed within six months of my commencement date. Conference papers were also an expected research outcome of my Supervisor. Both, were to me, time taken away from the research I was undertaking. That was, until I carried these out.

Confirmation of Candidature

Having written a detailed application regarding my project when applying to the university for admittance as a candidate, writing another document setting it out again seemed to be repetitious work in which I did not see any value. However, as I restated and expanded on my project it cemented in my head exactly what I was trying to achieve and, more importantly, how I would tackle the project. It made me plan and set out a detailed timeline, which gave deadlines for the various components to be completed and sets out chapters for my creative work and thesis. These I knew would be a guideline only as a practice-led project is iterative in design and it is unknown at the beginning just what will arise in the process and how many times the circular route may be travelled (see Fig. 5). Working through the necessary documentation forced me to focus on my methodology and determine the epistemological value of the work that I was creating and researching. I discuss this in Chapter 4. The process made me verbalise the project by having to explain it to readers who did not necessarily know the field of memoir intimately and demonstrate to them how the outcomes would add to the existing field of knowledge. At this stage, I outlined that the research output would consist of two parts: the creative artefact titled 'After the Nightmare' and an exegesis titled 'Creating a Compelling Sequel Memoir', focusing on the question: how can the memoirist make a sequel memoir compelling reading?

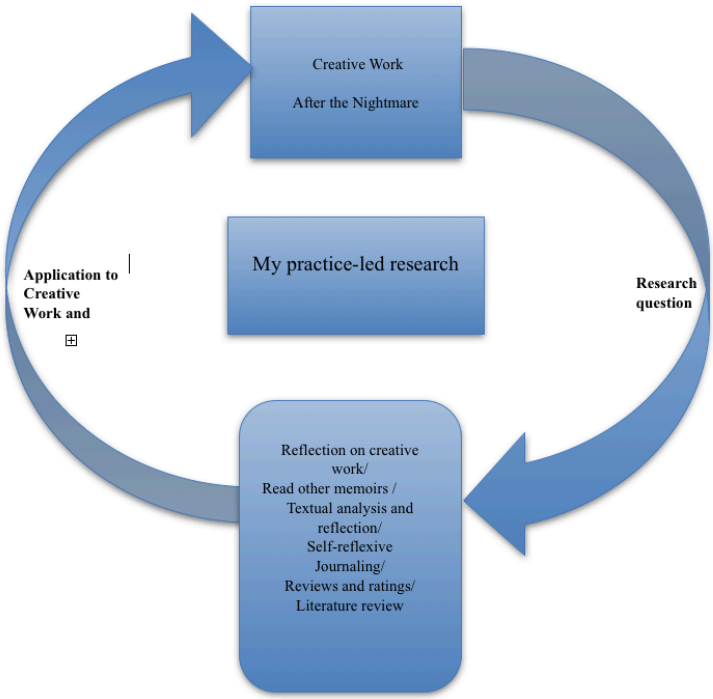


Fig. 5 Practice-led research

Additionally, I found that this preparation resulted in creating a finished document that was polished, with all the features I would be expecting my completed exegesis to demonstrate. Having to do this so early in the process pinpointed many of the 'bugs' and my lack of knowledge in computer and Endnote usage. Discovering these early in the process meant that I could take corrective action at a point where it wasn't a major hurdle to jump.

Having readers evaluate the Confirmation document was also more worthwhile than I had anticipated. The reports returned by the readers proved invaluable, as did the feedback provided at my oral presentation. I agreed with Carson's (Carson & Brien 2013) analysis that this evaluation—what she sees as the equivalent of an internal examination—helps me to view my work from another angle and appreciate how it is seen by others. Carson posits that critical comment at this juncture can act as

a road map; allowing change of direction and reassessment of the mode by which the candidate may follow the route. In my case, it also gave me a good deal of pride in my endeavours as I could now succinctly explain when being asked: what I was doing, why I was doing it, and the value it would add to the existing knowledge on my topic.

Conference Papers

I knew early in my candidature that presentation of papers at conferences and publication in peer-reviewed journals was an expectation of my Supervisor. I had no objection to doing this, however I discovered that the abstracts for the first two conferences, the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP) and Work In Progress (WIP) run by the University of Queensland, were due very soon after I commenced.

Consequently, I developed two abstracts based on points I had found of interest in my reading at that time. I did not put these in the peer-reviewed streams as I did not know the value of what I was going to produce. Although urging her students to present and publish, my Supervisor has herself expressed reservations about *insisting* on publication by RHD students postulating that this may lead to sub-standard, 'second-rate publications' (Brien 2008:7) which could have detrimental effects on the future prospects of the student.

I found in the first instance that creating an abstract using little more than the conference's theme and basing it on areas that I had found interesting in my research to date was difficult. The abstract needs to describe the work well as, being the first introduction, it determines whether the paper's presentation is attended or the article read. The abstract should include the aims of the paper, any background that is pertinent to the creation of the paper, the method used in fulfilling the aims and the results that were discovered in the process, and finally, a conclusion which sums up the entire paper (Happell 2008; Staiger 1965).

In the second instance, writing the article to match the abstract also proved difficult and, although my papers were seemingly worthy of presenting—having indeed created a deal of discussion after them and engrossing the audience for the second—the abstract, had it been written last as it should have been, would have been better. Now, on reflection, I regret not putting them in for peer review. At the time, although I had been advised, I did not understand the value of peer review. I chose not to include my papers for review due to my own insecurities as, being a new

researcher, I had not yet realised that I may be generating knowledge that I could share that would be of interest to others. I would have benefited by the comments my referees would have given, in a similar fashion to the reports I obtained from the Confirmation document readers. I resolved that all future papers would be written prior to the abstract and would be submitted for peer review. I did indeed follow this for the Institute for Interdisciplinary Inquiry Conference (Sydney, 9-10 April 2015) and found that it was much easier to write the abstract, and the process also became of much greater value to my research project.

The themes of the conferences also advanced my work. The WIP conference was based on the 'Life of Things'. Thing Theory was a new area to me, and this investigation took my journey along a byway I may otherwise not have travelled. I was introduced to philosophers such as Kant and Nietzsche, whose work I had not considered in depth. Now, I had placed myself in a position where I had to understand their ontologies and epistemologies. The deeper I looked, the further I had to travel back in time, until eventually I was in Ancient Greece around the seventh and eighth century BC.

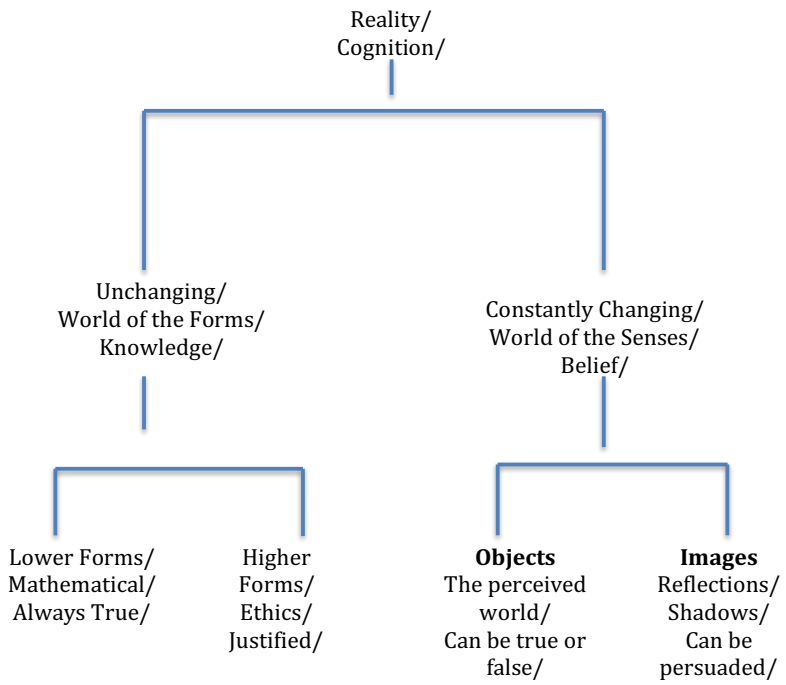


Fig. 6 Plato's World Duality and Epistemology

Here I discovered the beginnings of the ancient argument between mathematics and the arts as set out by Plato in the *Republic* (Plato and Jowett 1927; Webb & Brien 2011) where his epistemology was based on a belief in the duality of the world (see Fig. 6). Plato concluded that anything effecting the senses could not create knowledge as these senses clouded judgement and rationality, thereby, Plato postulated (Plato & Jowett 1927: 596A—600), writing could not contribute to the knowledge base. Knowledge was confined to the 'forms,' which could be mathematically described.

Returning to the ancients and following the work by philosophers who followed—such as Descartes, who showed thinking was valid and deduction, therefore, was a valid method (Skirry n.d.) and Kant who postulated that although certain elements, such as time and space, and cause and effect, are common to all people the viewer's world experience will also have an effect, leading to different interpretations of the object (Rickards 2015). Kant introduced the idea that we all live in a phenomenal world, not a noumenal one—gave me an understanding of the thinking which paved the way for qualitative research and helped me in my own acceptance that the textual analysis I was undertaking, which was subjective in nature, and my examination of both myself and my story as subject and object, was valid. From the Frankfurt School I developed an understanding for my project that it was valid to construct knowledge using both subjective and objective viewpoints (constructionism) and that interpretivism, whereby history, culture and one's standing in politics and society is allowed to influence knowledge which is both socially constructed and short lasting (Berger & Luckmann 1966). This deeper knowledge came at a time in my research journey when I was making decisions about my own methodology, and where I situated myself, allowing me to make informed decisions when determining my own approach to my research. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

The Institute for Interdisciplinary Inquiry Conference in April 2015 had the theme 'Revisioning Time, Spaces and Bodies' which took me further down this track, introducing me to French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty who maintained that perception cannot be removed from the body as it is the body that does the experiencing of the world. He wrote, 'In so far as I have hands, feet; a body, I sustain around me intentions which are not dependent on my decisions and which affect my surroundings in a way that I do not choose' (1989:440). The discovery of Merleau-Ponty was important to this project for his work relating to embodiment (Dufourcq

2014; Morrison 2009; Viljoen 2010) and ethics (Murray & Holmes 2013). In researching for this paper, the importance of writing the body became apparent. It firstly led to my analysing the various first person 'I's' of memoir (Smith & Watson 2010) (see Chapter 4). I found understanding these different first person characters was important in writing memoir as the narrative describes an identity to the reader and that identity is 'I'. Memoir can be viewed as representing a past self, disembodied due to the loss of that past self, and then its re-embodiment as the remembered self, who is embodied in the self who is at that time writing. The reader can also become embodied in the text as they bring an understanding of their own body parts to the reading. If the memoirist uses the body either as a metaphor or describes an event's effect on the body, this aspect of the writing should add vibrancy to the narrative as body parts are a feature to which we can all relate. Writing the body has implications for writing a vivid sequel memoir when this is a less compelling story, and has become for me one of several essential tools to not only create vibrancy but also to connect both the author and the reader with the narrated 'I' (Taylor 2011). This paper was peer reviewed and included in the Conference Proceedings (in press), as well as expanded for a journal article (Waters 2016a). This article examines and enlarges on embodiment in memoir and how using an interdisciplinary approach can add extra layers to the research creating greater understanding of the subject and the self.

Other papers I presented during my candidature have also assisted in adding additional depth to my research into the sequel memoir. They include the following:

- 'Three Considerations for the Sequel Memoirist in the Writing of a Compelling Second Memoir' (Noosa, 7 May 2015). This paper further examined the 'I's of memoir and how a possible dichotomy between these 'I' characters could influence return readers' enjoyment of a sequel memoir.
- 'Me Again: How a Sequel Memoir can capture an Audience'(Brisbane, 20-21 August 2015). This expanded on the above paper and examined the methods by which it could be ascertained whether, historically, any sequel memoir had been as, or more successful than the first volume.
- 'Writing Death – A Personal Essay' (Noosa, 12 October 2015). This personal essay examined death and dying from different perspectives embodied in one person's experience. For this last project, I found it useful to determine why readers read memoir. I found that reading memoir can allow a reader to be

guided through aspects of the human experience as memoir provides an insight into another's experience which in turn can offer comprehension of a reader's own or an understanding of experiences that are at the time of reading not yet experienced. As a creative work, this also allowed me to utilise various techniques such as embodiment, dialogue and high definition scenes.

- 'Time Travel: Memories, Identity and Memoir – A Personal Essay' (Melbourne November/December 2015). In this personal essay, I suggested that memoir allows people to time travel with ease both into the past and into the future, unencumbered by time and space, as they recollect different periods in their lives and imagine the future. These remembrances instill our sense of identity, and without memoir, identity fades and becomes ghostlike. I based this essay on the work of theorists Paul John Eakin (2001a) and Daniel Schacter (1996), and examine time travel, ghosts and the effects of personal history on identity, memory and memoir. All these aspects are important in the sequel memoir and analyzing them gave me insights into my own work.

The Confirmation process and presentation of two of these papers came early in my research journey, whilst I was uncertain of methodology and 'where to start'. The Confirmation focused me on my project in its entirety and the papers allowed me to see a bigger picture whilst concentrating my presentation on my own early work. The understanding I gained in regards to methodology by delving into the historical enlightened me on aspects of methodology I had previously struggled with. Later papers utilised techniques I was postulating would help create a compelling sequel and examined elements, such as memory, necessary for the writing of memoir. Discussion with other presenters also variously aided my own work including new approaches and references that thus came to my attention.

Chapter 3. Methodology[4]

This chapter will define the methodology that was used to investigate the research question: How can the memoirist make a sequel memoir compelling reading?

Following the philosophy of the ancients through to the modern philosophers, an understanding of the development of qualitative research became clear. Currently, the two forms of research in common usage are quantitative, known as 'research on practice' which centres on the concrete objective analysis which can be mathematically proven and replicated by others (Creswell 2009; Grix 2001), and qualitative. This newer epistemological approach, which is 'research-based', fills a gap left for the social sciences and creative arts in particular, cannot be adequately researched via quantitative means alone. Morgan and Smircich state qualitative research is an approach rather than a technique (1980:499), which aims to answer questions of 'how' or 'why' in order to gain a deeper comprehension of the phenomena being studied (Joubish et al. 2011). In this model, the researcher is central to the research and brings his or her worldview, knowledge, insight, creativity and taste to the research task (Joubish et al. 2011). Qualitative research encompasses several different forms of research enquiry. Wolcott (2001) lists a total of nineteen, which she uses the analogy of a tree to describe. (see Fig. 7)

Early in my journey I could not deduce whether practice-led research (PLR) was purely a means of arriving at the research question and, once the question was discovered, then other qualitative strategies were brought into play in finding the answers. McNamara (2012) claims many research higher degree candidates experience this confusion. I was already using textual analysis, narrative research and phenomenology in my work. Autoethnography, which was defined by Ellis and Bochner as 'an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural' (2000:739), was

[4] Please note that some of the information contained in this chapter is duplicated and also further detailed and developed in the ERA A-ranked *TEXT* journal article, 'Writing the Body' which forms a component of my published works during my candidature (see List of Publications).

another possible research methodology, however, being a retrospective action where the researcher looks back on his/her interaction with the culture into which they had immersed themselves, it did not exactly fit my project.

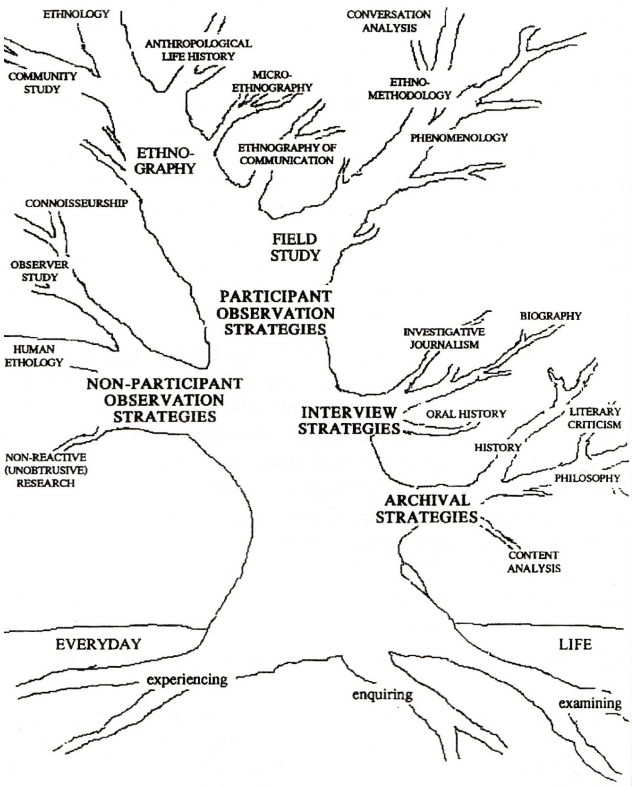


Fig. 7 Qualitative Research Stategies
from (Wolcott 2001:90)

Although I reflected on the past, I was also unraveling the present in order to affect the future. I was, however, using some of the autoethnographic features described by Pace (2012), including that I was central in the research and my exegesis was written as a first person narrative, autobiographical in style.

I continued searching for the methodology/methodologies that would fit my project. In his text *Research Designs* Creswell (2009) compared qualitative, quantitative and mixed method research from the philosophy to the nuts and bolts of the process. Working from this text, I knew that quantitative was not appropriate and, yet, qualitative, which examines individuals' reactions to social problems using interviews and other tools, which the researcher then interprets to make meaning of the problem and discover its complexities, did not appear a particularly close fit either, despite having various practice-based strategies available to the researcher. Constructivism—which involves a subjective understanding of the world and the problems that arise but is flexible, allowing different researchers with their own subjective experiences to arrive at different meanings—seemed most appropriate for my proposal. But I then needed to choose research strategies (see Fig. 7).

At this stage, I was in danger of becoming bogged down in the theory of methodology and could not work out the road on which I was travelling, as none of these seemed to appropriately fit the need, in creative writing research, to commence and finish the research through practice. I felt I was watching helplessly as my exegesis was heading down one road whilst my creative work was running down another. Webb and Brien (2011), when explaining that adjustment was required of the practice-led research model with creative writing, state, 'We know that we do not yet know; we know too that knowledge can never be full or final; and so we are perhaps more willing than other researchers to linger at the point of analysis, and to accept gestures and notions rather than facts' (2011:193). This was my understanding of the practice-led model. That is, that the questions would come as the creative work revealed them and the question itself provoked and challenged; the answers would be elusive and tentative and, when found, would illuminate rather than be definitive. In this analysis, information would be yielded and the longer one lingered, the deeper the layer of analysis would become. In reflection, this practice-led research model did not seem, to me, to fit the criterion of qualitative research.

This led me to a third, even newer, research method known as performative research, that is defined by Gray, one of its leading proponents. She states:

> research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using

> predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners (1996:3).

This definition of practice-led research fitted my project as the research question fell from the creative work as problems arose. Using some qualitative tools, such as textual analysis, meant that the research findings could be introduced into the creative work, both overcoming the problems that had arisen and working towards solutions to the question they had raised. Using practice and reflection I analysed the results. As all research, that which is practice-led must demonstrate that it has created new knowledge via rigorous and valid enquiry and this new knowledge disseminated widely. Research has been defined by QUT's Creative Industries as follows:

> information gathering and knowledge creation, analysis, critical investigation and communication in a fashion acceptable in the field of endeavor. Knowledge creation would encompass creative and professional practice and reflection on this practice (Carson & Brien 2013:4).

In my field of endeavor, the creation of my artefact (the doing), analysis of the reflexive processes and other research such as textual analysis, followed by reflection upon both the practice and the research, is therefore a valid form of inquiry, although practice-led research remains a methodology that is treated by some universities and sectors as an inferior type of research (McNamara 2012; Webb & Brien 2011). This is because many universities' prime focus is centered on the sciences and vocational fields. Creativity is not, however, seen as having the same value, although this is slowly changing as creative writers and artists are working hard to show that their research has value and is able to change the way people live or practice (Haseman 2007).

The practice-led research model differs from those of qualitative and quantitative particularly in its starting point and in the creative ways it examines the question that arises (Gray & Malins 2004; Green 2007; Haseman 2007). The starting point proves problematical both when applying to the university to carry out the research and when applying for grants, as the research question is not clearly defined in the early stages of research as it is in other research models. I thus found creating my research question difficult in a similar way to writing an abstract prior to completing the article it described. For purposes of admittance into the Masters

program I devised a question, however I felt constrained by it as the research question I had been approved to research was created in part before the practice. This problem was overcome by submitting a 'Change of research question' application.

As early as 1959, C Wright Mills was advocating 'let every man be his own methodologist' (Mills & Gitlin [1959]2000:224) creating methods that will answer the problem rather than the problem being stipulated by the method. Haseman suggests this could be circumvented in the following way. Instead of starting with a hypothesis or research question, creative writers using practice-led research could demonstrate an 'enthusiasm of practice' (2007:5) as a more appropriate starting point. "Enthusiasm of practice" describes the passion and drive to create new work purely for the challenge or joy of creation with no idea at the commencement of the project where the researcher may be led or what obstacles they may encounter along the way. Through experiential practice, the research question becomes clear. As it did in my case: how can the memoirist make a sequel memoir compelling reading?

Green (2007:1) lists the points she believes are necessary for practice-led research, that the research must be:

- non-quantifiable;
- assessable according to judgements of 'good' and 'bad';
- experiential and qualitative;
- subject to its own standards of rigour and validity; and,
- the only methodology available through which to pursue some research questions.

Assessed against these elements, the research strategy used in this project has been practice-led research. To give the findings of the research credibility, however, the methodology used must have a clear process, transparency and be documented. Firstly I propose to show that my project satisfies all five of Green's requirements.

That practice-led research was the only appropriate methodology was evidenced when an attempt was made at quantifying and graphing memoir comparisons, which revealed that using purely quantitative techniques for analysis were not possible or productive. Qualitative methods were restricted to an examination of other sequel memoirs, memoirs more generally and scholarly writings on memoir. When it comes to textual analysis, I do not come from a literary theoretical background, and my subjective analysis performed is purely on a taste basis, not on that of literary theory. I

looked for specific features in the texts analysed, which added to the creative writing discourse that follows. Some writers on the subject acknowledge that creative writing RHD candidates at the Honours and Masters level do not need to show an in-depth knowledge of the theoretical basis of literature (Bourke & Neilsen 2004). However, this textual analysis was necessary to ascertain where my research 'fits' in a historical context. This was essential to ensure that the knowledge generated from this research is new, thus fulfilling a core requirement of this project as research.

The focus of my research methodology has been experiential. Unlike the scientist using quantitative research or the humanitarian researcher using qualitative research, whose research outcomes are visible, repeatable and easily reportable, the creative artist is looking at outcomes that may not be able to be repeated as each experience is unique. Grech (2006), however, points out that practice-led research does not need to be repeated to achieve merit in terms of scientific research. Instead, removal of the layers, one by one, going from superficial to deeper and deeper into the work, will create new knowledge. Its subjectivity will be apparent and essential, allowing it to resonate with others due to the types of patterns and associations that will be found. Indeed, it is important that the outputs are well documented and in a form that can be questioned, allowing future researchers a framework that they can then enlarge upon (Green 2007).

There is, however, a school of thought that believes that for creative writers, adjustments are required to the practice-led model, although it is the closest fit of the methodologies available, as some postulate that these changes need to be made to achieve a good fit as the research may occur after initial creation of the work (Webb & Brien 2011). Where practice-led research focuses on the creation of data, in creative writing research the practice and the research feed each other as the data is collected (Hecq 2012a). Others consider that creative writing research would be a better research paradigm because 'creative writing entails seeing, knowing and being in the world: as such creative writing is a perspective, an epistemology and an ontology which all collapse the boundaries between practice-led and practice-based research, as well as research-based practice' (Hecq 2012a:4). Subjectivity is essential in this reciprocal process where the unconscious 'knowing' (tacit knowledge; see Fig. 6) is reflected upon and critically appraised, synthesising thoughts, impressions, experiences and feeling for their appropriateness and value, thus in order making meaning. In the process of converting this 'knowing' into 'knowledge' (explicit

knowledge; see Fig. 6) it is possible to, with the use of this new 'knowledge', utilise it in the creative work and experiment with it knowingly (Hecq 2012a:5). This process is repeated continually throughout the project as the knowledge is built upon, and further action is decided upon. Through such experiential practice, I arrived at my research question. The answer was to be found in my practice, as well as related research. The creation of the memoir 'After the Nightmare' was given primacy in the project, as this experiential activity would both create the knowledge and display the results of the knowledge gained.

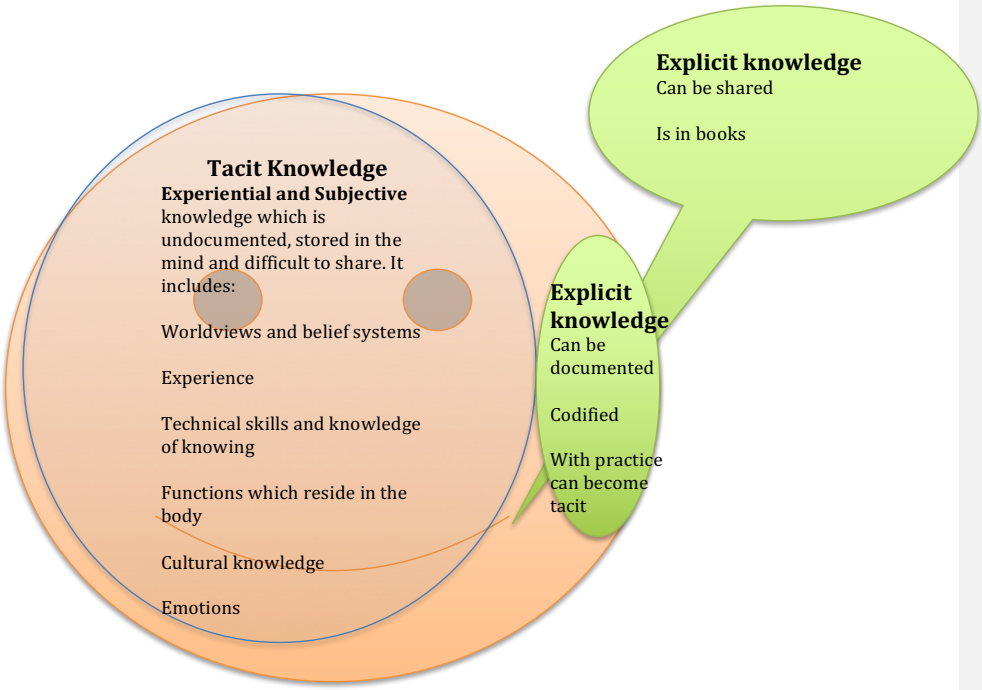


Fig. 8 Tacit versus Explicit Knowledge

Journaling was used to document the research journey, and benefits are gained in four areas. Firstly, journaling documents a starting point. This knowledge is essential in order to analyse the effects of experimentation on the narrative. Journaling also places the subject in the middle of the research allowing him or her a place to

interpret what is experienced. It increases creative output and thought processes and finally it encourages critical reflection on these processes allowing the researcher to delve deeper (O'Connell & Dyment 2011). In my journal, I recorded the techniques I used to create the memoir, reflections upon this practice (both personal and those useful to create insights and knowledge), and plans for utilising these in my creative work.

Additionally, I recorded insights gained from other scholarly articles and books read. Other thoughts and other creative works were also included in this investigation and recorded if they were relevant to the project or used for purposes of experimentation. In other words, I included those aspects which Schön (1983) called 'reflection-on-action', where critical thinking occurs in relation to an event that has already occurred, and 'reflection in action' where the critical thinking and decision making occurs whilst the event is still happening, in my journal. Bourke and Nielsen (2004) suggest that the journals be broken into two types. The first has personal, emotional diary style entries and in a second, academic insights about the process of writing are recorded. Bacon (2014a) was advised by her supervisor to keep three separate journals. Lincoln and Guba (1985:281) also suggested three journals be kept with one recording daily activities, another recording the personal (both reflective and introspective) and the third, a record of the methodology used. I, however, kept a single journal. I found this useful as I believed that it was the interaction of all facets that led to insights and progress in my project.

The journal documents a process of self-reflexivity. This differs from reflection, also an essential part of the research, which is performed on a completed process or experience and is, thus, usually a retrospective activity. Self-reflexivity is the process by which both the self and processes that come from the self, which are often achieved instinctively, without awareness of how they happen, are examined (Ellis 2004). Being aware of the reflexive, along with reflection on the experience combined with traditional methods of research, allows the self/researcher to make changes that will have a positive impact on the creative artefact and give validity to the research process. Robert Bullough Jr. and Stefinee Pinnegar (2001) articulate pivotal moments in the process which they see as crucial in both self-research and autobiographical writing, including factors such as truth and connection, insight and interpretation, supplying a historical context, and finally telling the story in an engaging and readable fashion. 'Telling' this research is essential to disseminate the insights gained and

engage with the reader, thereby opening the door to critical scrutiny. These writers justified my decision to tell my research journey in the form of a personal narrative (Bullough & Pinnegar 2001; Ellis 2004).

Using my journal, I followed my process over time, gaining a depth of analysis that would otherwise have been unavailable, enabling me to follow the changes that I believe made the writing of my sequel more compelling to the reader. Above all, the journal demonstrated that the self was crucial to the creative work, the research and the exegesis and could not be separated from it. Due to each 'self' being a unique entity, different outcomes will be achieved by different researchers. Lincoln and Guba state:

> The writing should demonstrate the intellectual wrestling the writer went through in coming to his or her conclusions, and should demonstrate the writer's ability to think "outside" that construction to which he or she may have been socialized…it will mean that the same setting will be presented very differently from two different researchers working at the same time (1988:12).

As my personal identity (as writer, researcher and subject) is therefore crucial to the project, Bullough and Pinnegar suggest that self-study 'does not focus on the self per se so much, but on the space between the self and the practice engaged in' (2001: 15) (see Fig. 9) as within this space, insights will be found. In my examination of the self, it was impossible to remove my past background and worldviews from the experience, and impossible to objectify my 'I', meaning that only a subjective analysis is possible, again leading to the issue of taste, which affects individual subjectivity. Not only will not all writing appeal to every reader, but the concept of taste undoubtedly also influences the researcher's findings. Zinsser (1985) writes: 'What finally separates the good writer from the breezy writer is a quality so intangible that nobody even knows what it is: taste. It can't be defined, but we know it when we see it… Taste is the instinct to know what works and to avoid what doesn't' (1985:126). Stephen Barley (2006) equates taste to how an audience reacts to a band. He says 'Whether an audience finds them interesting is a matter of perspective, if not taste. We all know there is no accounting for taste. There's no unanimity of taste, either' (Barley 2006:16). Pierre Bourdieu, the French philosopher who

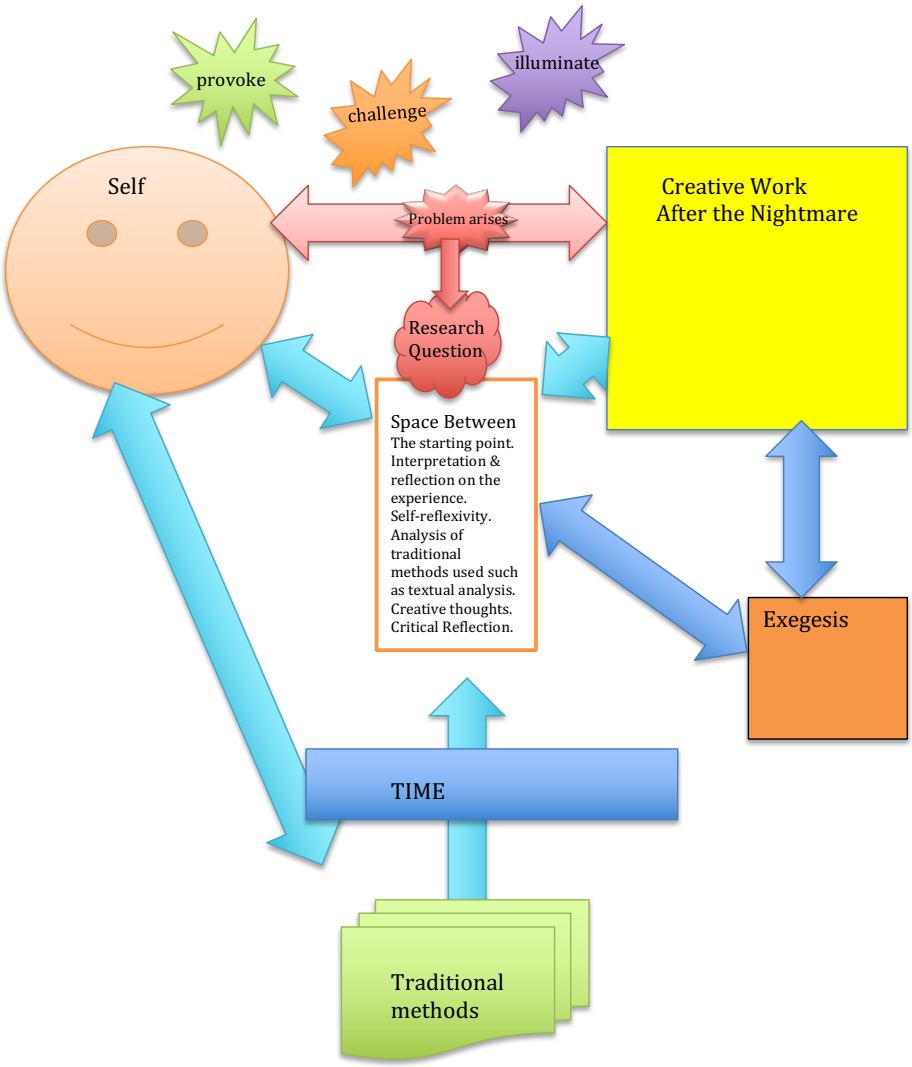


Fig. 9 Self-study – practice-led research – my visualisation of myself in this project

conducted important work on the subject, expressed in *Distinction* (1984), that taste is a determinate of the class system into which a person is born, with his

or her taste in the arts, other cultural and political fields set down by the social system to which one belongs. Bordieu suggests that 'habitus', which is where we perceive we fit in society, controls the way we live our lives. In addition to 'habitus,' he holds 'capital' as an important notion. He believes that different social groups tend to hold differing types of 'capital', which include social, economic or cultural capital. Although Bourdieu was writing about French society, his work gave me a greater understanding of how my own taste was affecting my assessment when reading other memoirs and giving me an insight into understanding the judgement of others.

Alongside reading from the perspective of one's own taste, Brien (2006a) describes how, when researching, we read from multiple different perspectives such as reading as a historian (finding facts and information that we utilize in our own work) or as a creative writer (where we find techniques and tools that we can experiment with). She also states that: 'Reading as a researcher' is an important part of the research. This reading is undertaken on a variety of different levels and for different research outcomes. King (2002:167) states: 'If you don't have time to read, you don't have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that' (2002:167). In my case, reading memoirs was important to analyse the techniques used by other memoirists with the aim that these techniques once discovered would be trialled in my own creative work, and then examine their effectiveness on the writing. With the same aim of discovering tools which would make my writing more vibrant, I also read relevant books on the process and technique of writing such as those by Cameron ([1994] 1995), Gutkind (1997), King (2002), Myers (2013) and Zinsser (2004).

The writing of my creative work thus commenced in the free writing fashion I had always used, but I began to examine the output every step of the way. I questioned how to begin the narrative and how much information about the first memoir should be given, where to end, and what should be included or removed from the narrative. Consideration of those whose life stories I was also relating required examining ethical practices of the memoir genre that I was writing. I also analysed techniques and changed my own, experimenting with those I did not normally use. I questioned if each addition or deletion enhanced the work or took from it, and whether it altered my voice. This editing was essential to the practice-led research writing process and continued until I felt that nothing could be added to the work that enhanced it and all that remained was essential to it. This building, dismantling and

rebuilding, allowing examination of the process of creation, gives creative writing researchers insights which can both enrich creativity and have value for other academics and the wider community (Brien 2006a).

In order to satisfy another essential criteria of research, the sharing of the research outcomes, publication is essential. I have worked towards creating a publishable standard creative work, but this does not mean that a publishing house will necessarily take on the manuscript. To ensure that the knowledge gained by this research project is disseminated widely, publishing in the form of peer reviewed conference papers and journal articles and sections from the creative work has been pursued. List of publications and presentations from this thesis are included at page ix.

Ethics

Early in my journey, I found that I had some reservations about publishing 'After the Nightmare' whilst my mother was alive. This was because I did not wish to upset her with my disappointments with my life. These I had always kept to myself. This I believed was an issue for me to resolve and involved an informed decision on my part as to what I would divulge in the text. Concern regarding my husband's privacy was another matter to which a great deal of consideration was given. After much deliberation, formal university ethics approval was deemed unnecessary for this project for numerous reasons.

Firstly, the people in the memoir were not the subject of the research and were not interviewed. The subject of the research was the writing process of a sequel memoir and the difficulties I encountered in writing a narrative based on my own memories, which is as true an account of events as I can make them from my perspective. Much has been written on the misfit of ethics committee approval in regard to narrative research (Carey 2008; Carlin 2005; Smythe & Murray 2000), but these refer to interviewing subjects, such as Carey's collection of data from home-based palliative caregivers, and mixing their stories with the author's interpretation. Subjects appear in these instances in both the creative work and the exegesis. This was not the case with my memoir, which was purely taken from my own memory. The characters in it do not appear in the exegesis. As it is my memory, it is to be expected that discrepancy in accounts will occur between people also in the scene as each views it from a different angle, depending on their own past and beliefs. Carlin

(2005), when considering the ethical issues surrounding writing about others in memoir, states that treating these individuals 'objectively' is not possible, but they must not be misrepresented, that is, they must be truthfully represented from the author's point of view.

There are only two people, apart from myself, who are featured in the memoir and who also play a major role in the narrative. One of these is deceased and the other is my husband. Both I hold in high esteem. It is not possible to make these people anonymous as my husband will still be identifiable as my husband no matter what I name him. I also believe that to rename these characters would be robbing them of their identities. Josie Arnold changed a name in her memoir and states, 'I continue to regret it as it seems to me to dishonor the truth and the woman concerned' (2009:81). In writing my memoir, I followed the principles of Lejeune's autobiographical pact (1989) where my own author's name is the same as the main character's thereby denoting the narrative is an autobiographical one. As an autobiographical memoir, I am making a pact with the reader that the narrative will be related as truthfully as I can from what I remember of these people and events.

Secondly, unlike a quantitative research project where the result of the research is postulated early in the project and the research undertaken is designed to either prove or disprove this hypothesis (Creswell 2009), in practice-led research the question is developed and refined as the project develops. It would thus be impossible to ask for ethics approval in the early stages of writing a memoir in which the events occurred years ago and the narrative unfolds as the memories appear and it is written. If truthful writing is the aim of memoir, and it certainly was for me, those events from long ago must be portrayed as remembered and remain true to the genre in which memoir fits (Brien 2002).

Ethics does, however, have a part to play in such projects. Eakin (2001b) postulates that we learn from our parents early in life the rules for relating life narrative and that these rules are synonymous with the rules for identity. Our life narrative is something we all practice every day although only a few write it down. He suggests that there are three rules: to tell the truth, to respect the privacy of others and 'to display a normative model of personhood' (2001b: 5). This last rule refers to the situation when the ability to narrate one's own life story is lost due to the loss of normal brain function, such as that which occurs with brain injury, dementia and other neurological conditions. These types of ailments, which affect memory, lead to the

sufferer losing the ability to tell his or her life stories and, subsequently, their identity diminishes and eventually is lost. When this happens the only narrative that can be told is by those 'others' that know their story.

Ethically, I believe that memoirists must act responsibly and tell the truth. We should not write with the aim of hurting another person or group, especially if they are innocent of any wrongdoing. At the same time, the truth should be shown and if the other person is displayed in poor light then their actions will speak for themselves. At all times, we must take care of those who are in a more vulnerable position. In writing my memoir, I obeyed all three of Eakin's rules, as well as adhering to a recognised form for the genre of memoir.

For these reasons, I did not need to obtain ethics approval to write my memories in my creative work, although ethical practice remained a major motivation and concern throughout my candidature.

Conclusion

Having worked my way through the various research models, it became clear to me that, with some slight tweaking, practice-led research was the most appropriate methodology to investigate my own writing, turning tacit knowledge into conscious knowledge, provoking, challenging and illuminating. Through the process of writing and rewriting my creative work, in the process reflecting on the books and articles I was reading, new insights were discovered and new methods and techniques became known and I could then share this knowledge via conference presentations, peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters. My ontology was interpretivism, which means I believe that there are multiple realities and that these will vary from person to person, as being experientially based the same experience may not be had by other researchers. My epistemology has been subjective, with myself being both the subject and the researcher. I was firmly inside and reacting with the research, sharing the knowledge that was gained in the process. The methodology was experiential but also included textual analysis whereby the current relevant literature was reviewed (see Chapter 4). The exploration and interpretation of the process demonstrates rigour in its thick detail. Despite only examining a small portion, the amount of detail allows for a close illumination of the subject. Elements from autoethnography and self-study were used, with both reflexive analysis and reflective processes being important elements. Journaling was used to record, evaluate and plan.

Most importantly, the process of turning tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge was actioned by a process of questioning, reflection and reflexion, interpreting, experimenting, moving backwards and forwards between thinking and doing. Documentation and sharing the knowledge developed demonstrates the rigour and validity of the research. The research was complete when nothing further added to the writing, editing and rewriting process of the creative work and it and the exegesis was the best I could make it. By this process, I fulfilled Green's (2007) five points for practice-led research and satisfied all the criteria necessary to be deemed research.

Chapter 4. Contextual Literature Review [5]

To enable examination of the research question, 'How can the memoirist make a sequel memoir compelling reading?' a contextual literature review was performed to discover current research on the sequel memoir. Although memoir is a rich field of research, and there has been much written in regard to issues for the memoirist such as memoir genre and sub-genre (Brien 2002, 2004; Brien & Gutkind 2000; Couser 2012; Miller 2007; Smith & Watson 2011; Yagoda 2009), truth (Brien 2002; Brown 2010; Collett 2008; Lim 2009; Wyatt 2006), the relevance of life writing (Aprile 2002; Gornick 1996; Terry 1998), privacy (Cowser, Philip & Singer 2011; Lim, Barrington & Miner 1996), and narrative issues such as the tense the narrative is written in (past or present), the type of voice (such as, adult, conversational, or academic) and whether it is written in the first, second or third person (Lejeune, Tomarken & Tomarken 1977; Lenta 2003; Piero 2014), extensive searching failed to uncover any significant research on either the sequel memoir as a type of memoir or the writing of a sequel memoir.

Creswell's (2009) literature mapping, an organisational tool which gives a quick visual summary of the literature, was a useful tool in the early stage of the project as it revealed that very little research had been carried out on the sequel memoir. As the search parameters widened, however, to include aspects of memoir more generally, this technique (see Fig. 10) became cumbersome and did not supply sufficient information as the number of articles and subject classifications increased. At this point, I reverted to lists of literature under topic headings in the areas that space had been fully utilised on the literature map. These lists can be seen in Appendix A. Not only did it show me at a glance where there was a gap in the literature but allowed me to see more information easily, aiding me in finding the appropriate article quickly.

After this initial literature review, following the principles of practice-led research, additional literature was sourced as the questions arose from the creative work, both in terms of looking at memoir generally and on the craft of writing. I

[5] Please note that some of the information contained in this chapter is duplicated and also further detailed and developed in the ERA A-ranked *TEXT* journal article 'Writing the Body' which forms a component of my published works during my candidature (see List of Publications).

continued searching using search terms including ‘sequel memoir’, ‘follow-up memoir’, ‘second memoir’ and ‘continuation memoir’ but these failed to find any research specifically carried out on the sequel memoir. The literature examined, therefore, was in several distinct categories which included memoirs of a similar subject matter to the memoir I was currently writing, sequel memoirs, the craft of writing memoir, scholarly writings on memoir and creative non-fiction more generally, and research methodology.

In this contextual literature review, I have narrowed my discussion on memoirs to those that bore a relationship to my own, that is, those which were written by a hitherto unknown author, with themes that bore similarities to my own, although others are mentioned where relevant both in this chapter and throughout the exegesis. Much has been written regarding the lessons that the reader of memoir can learn and then apply to his or her own life—see for example Messud (2009), Killick (2009) and Skelton (2003)—whereas the memoir that particularly interests me is the memoir that has a story that begs to be told. As there are few sequels in this category, again I expanded my analysis to include some misery and grief memoirs, as well as some authors who are highly acclaimed as memoir writers (Karr [1995]1996, 2005, 2009; McCourt [1996]1999, 1999, 2005). The purpose of reading these memoirs and their sequels was to determine whether these authors had been successful in writing a compelling sequel and, if successful, analyse what techniques they had employed. If not, I wanted to determine why the memoir was unsuccessful for me as a reader.

Additionally, a review of those seminal scholarly works on memoir that I found useful in my research is included in this chapter. I am not including a review of the books and articles that I have studied in planning this project and writing up my methodology, as my analysis of these can be found in Chapters 2 and 3. Finally, I am including those works on the technique of writing that I have found useful in this project.

Memoirs about a similar subject matter to my own

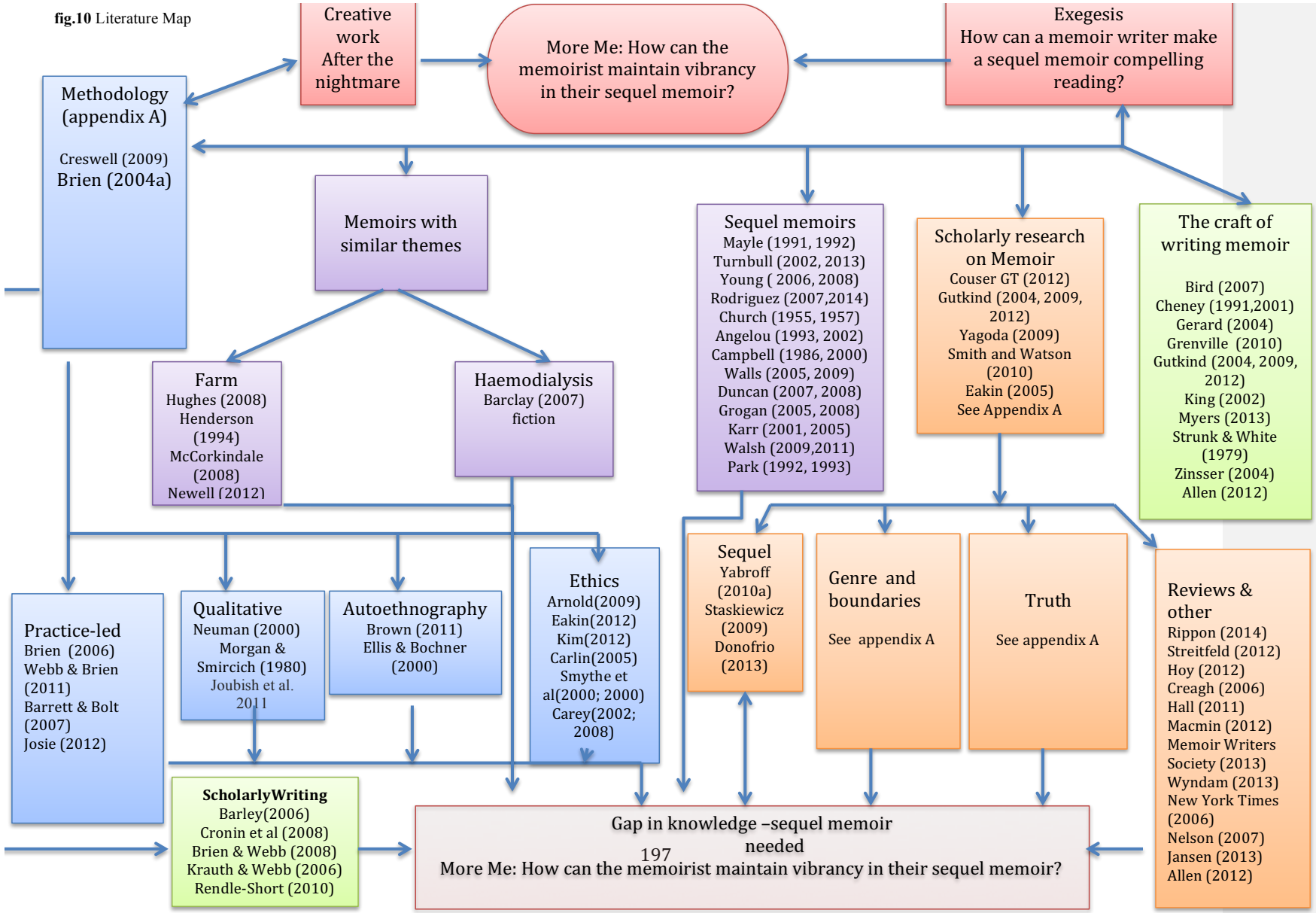
The two major themes of my memoir are farm-life and haemodialysis, with other minor themes dealing with loneliness and undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder. My reading, therefore, concentrated on books with a similar focus. There are numerous books on the market dealing with farm and rural-based memoirs, as well as the so-called ‘tree change’ memoirs where the narrative revolves around a move from

the city to the country but which did not quite fit with the experience I describe as we return from a traumatic time on a Pacific Island. MacMinn (2012) wrote online about these narratives, 'I love "farm memoirs" and apparently so do a lot of other people because they are perennially popular on bookstore shelves. The memoirs are sometimes "fish out of water" or "city girl goes country" stories, and other times they are more focused on personal adventure and discovery through rural or self-sustainable living.'

There are numerous rural/farm memoirs in circulation or otherwise available that relate to growing up on a farm such as *Life Ain't Easy on the Farm* (White & White 2013) or specialised farming narratives that deal with specific products such as bees, pigs, fish, or food production in general, such as *Blueberry Years: A Memoir of Life and Family* (Minick 2010). Although these types of memoirs (where farming is the basis of the narrative) were noted, my reading and analysis concentrated on narratives similar in nature to 'After the Nightmare'. Two of these are Susan McCorkindale's *Confessions of a Counterfeit Farm Girl* (2008) and her sequel *500 Acres and No Place to Hide: More Confessions of a Counterfeit Farm Girl* (2011) and Annette Hughes' *Life Art Chooks* (2008).

I found McCorkindale's narratives annoying for a variety of reasons. She appeared in her first book as an unlikeable and spoilt rich girl who spent the first part of the book discussing her high-flying career and the designer labels she favoured. She did not come across as a person who I would be friends with and, yet, her voice was that of a conspiratorial pal. She attempted to bring the reader into the narrative with the constant use of sentences in the second person, starting with the initial line 'The M.D. doesn't mean what you think it does' (2008:1). This continues incessantly throughout the book. 'All this bellyaching…probably has you wondering…' (McCorkindale 2008:108). This made me angry with the author as, not liking her character, I disliked that she presumed to know what I thought. Another aspect of her writing that I found irritating was the constant use of footnotes, featuring over 200 in total begining on page four. I felt that these were meant to create the illusion of secrets being whispered amongst friends but they were so numerous that they detracted from the main text. McCorkindale also used sarcastic humour throughout, which fell flat as she came across as condescending. Her treatment of others in the book left no one unscathed as she described, for instance, her husband's poor urinary aim (2008:215)

fig.10 Literature Map



and a chapter on how her sons smell and are obsessed by body parts (2008:277-289). Little is written about her move to the farm or the farm itself, leaving the author imaged as narcissistic, whining and even cruel. The sequel was much more of the same, with the addition of her husband's diagnosis with terminal cancer and the revelation that McCorkindale suffers with depression severe enough to require medication. Despite these sad additions, which do make the memoir seem more authentic, all the annoyances were still present: the conspiratorial voice, the footnotes and the biting attempts at humour.

I found these volumes to be a lesson in techniques to avoid and, although I aim to have a conversational voice in my text, having read these volumes I ensured that I did not presume to know what the reader is thinking, have no need for footnotes as all explanation is within the text and avoid humour that is at the expense of someone else.

Annette Hughes' *Life Art Chooks* (2008) appears to have some similarities to my own memoir in that she leaves her 'high-flying' city existence for a life on a rural farm. This book was well written, however I felt the narrative lacked a focus on her insights into her new life, of which she expounded at length about how positive it was, resulting in me believing she was trying to convince herself of how great it was and, because of this, her narrative lacked authenticity for me.

I have not found any memoirs dealing with haemodialysis as a main subject or theme. A novel, *That Damn Dialysis,* written by a dialysis nurse (Barclay 2007), deals with home dialysis. One review claims that, although the novel has little literary merit, it would be seen in a different light by those with kidney disease (Tamburello 2007). This dearth of material shows there is a gap in the literature and either publishers are not interested in the subject or there is not much written. As there are over twenty-one thousand people with kidney disease requiring dialysis in Australia alone and a yearly rate of two thousand five hundred new clients starting the treatment (Victorian State Government 2015), if other genres of memoir can be taken as an example, those suffering with kidney disease would be interested in the subject, as memoir is often read to gain both understanding and hope (Myers 2013). The haemodialysis facility in my memoir was the only community-funded dialysis unit in Australia and, as such, has its own unique history that deserved to be told.

Examining memoirs on the same theme or similar subjects revealed a gap in the market for memoirs with the themes of haemodialysis which 'After the Nightmare' addressed.

Sequel memoirs

Several memoirs with sequels were scrutinized in detail. A first reading was carried out to obtain a personal taste-based analysis. A selection were then re-read, examining techniques that the author had used in creating either a compelling sequel or analyzing why the sequel fell flat. Again, I attempted to keep my reading of these memoir series to ones which in some way had similarities to my own, that is, where I thought the memoirist was trying to tell a good story, or the themes were similar (Gilbert 2007, 2010; Mayle [1989]1991, 1992; Rodriguez [2007]2014, 2014; Turnbull 2002, 2013). I did, however, read a few others such as by Frank McCourt ([1996]1999, 1999, 2005) and Mary Karr ([1995]1996, 2001, 2009) as both these authors are accredited with putting memoir writing on the literary map (Brien 2004; Rak 2013; Yagoda 2009). I also read, amongst others, Duncan (2007, 2008) (survival memoirs), Ker-Conway ([1989]1994; 1994) (a 'misery' childhood followed by an academic career memoir), Mackellar (2010, 2014) (grief/survival memoirs). I am not discussing these in this section as they are included in Chapter 1 in relation to particular facets of memoir such as truth, high definition scenes, dialogue, voice and structure, but in this section I am reiterating the main implications for my research of those sequels I have particularly focused on—Mayle's *A Year in Provence* ([1989]1991) and his sequel *Toujours Provence* (1992), Turnbull's *Almost French* (2002) and her sequel *All Good Things* (2013), and Rodriguez's *The Kabul Beauty School* ([2007] 2014) and *The House on Carnaval Street* (2014)—as these volumes most closely approach the subject areas of my narratives and would all be either termed travel or cultural difference memoirs, which is where, I believe, my own memoirs fit.

Mayle's Provence series (see Chapter 1) demonstrated the effectiveness of gentle humour, as opposed to McCorkindale's brittle sarcasm. For women readers, I also think some emotional involvement would add to their appreciation of the story. I had no desire to read his third book in the series and wondered if boredom, which had brought my own writing to a halt, can indicate to the writer

that fresh material is required or a different angle taken to bring vibrancy back into the narrative.

Both Turnbull's memoirs, discussed in Chapter 1, I considered to be 'good reads' and the closest in theme to my own memoirs. Again, I concluded that if I could combine humour with a sense of emotional involvement for the reader, it should impact positively on the vibrancy of my sequel narrative.

Gilbert's memoirs, discussed in Chapter 1, demonstrated to me that a conversational voice should be kept when writing as the reader of memoir is more interested in the personal story rather than history or other facts.

Rodriguez's two memoirs *The Kabul Beauty School* and *The House on Carnaval Street* ([2007]2014, 2014) both demonstrated similarities to my memoirs in that they fitted within a travel theme and described a different lifestyle. The marketing for these works suggested that they should have been in the 'good reads' category. My reading of these two memoirs left me determined that I would avoid being egocentric in my writing while relating my life truthfully although from a viewpoint that encompassed the perspectives of others (see Chapter 1).

Although I cannot say that I enjoyed Karr's memoirs, I did appreciate her writing techniques which showed me that I needed to describe my scenes in much greater detail. They also acted as a good example of 'truthiness' (Yagoda & DeLorenzo 2011) as it was apparent that the detail of these scenes was not remembered but the image of the scene most likely was. This I found acceptable, where outright fraud as perpetrated by Frey (Clark 2006; Couser 2012; Yagoda 2009) and omissions, such as in Rodriguez's memoirs, I did not (see Chapter 1).

Maya Angelou

Angelou was one of the most prolific sequel memoir writers having written seven volumes. I believe her success is not only due to her lyrical writing style, but also her subject matter.

Her first book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* ([1973] 2006) takes the reader through her miserable childhood where she is sent from her mother at an early age to be brought up by her grandmother. She grows up as a black girl living a black life in the South during the Depression and suffers sexual abuse at the hands of one of her mother's boyfriends, who is subsequently kicked to death by

Angelou's relatives. Feeling responsible for his death, she stops talking. A theme of her book is black feminism. She writes: 'If growing up is painful for the Southern Black Girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat' (Angelou [1973]2006:9). Despite the depressing subject matter, Angelou's writing is uplifting and appeals to both black and white readers. The sequels follow on sequentially and all deal with her diminished identity as a black woman and then the formation of an identity as a woman who is black. She further details the displacement she experienced in relation to the ideals of democracy and the reality of her life as an African American woman.

The subsequent memoirs all deal with black feminism and have added themes including in the second memoir, *Gather Together in My Name* ([1974]2006), survival as an unmarried mother, and protest where she fights for her rights in a world which is predominantly male and white. Although she admits defeat in this memoir by returning to live with her mother, the story is uplifting, providing hope that it is possible to break the mould and redefine the self. Another theme of all her memoirs is the mother and child relationship. In her third memoir *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* ([1976] 2006) she revisits the past as, like her mother before her, she leaves her child with his grandmother, while she travels the world as an actor. For the reader, she was dealing with a universal issue—the need to support her son by working yet being torn between necessity and mothering. The guilt Angelou experiences sees her promising on her return that she will never leave him again. Again, in the fourth memoir, *The Heart of a Woman* ([1981] 2006), her theme of mother and child is prominent. It shows how powerful the maternal instinct is when a child is threatened and how, as a mother, there are events from which she cannot protect her son (he has a serious car accident). He recovers and at the end of the narrative he leaves home, leaving her alone. In this book she increases her role as an activist in the Civil Rights Movement and starts to talk about herself as a writer. The fifth memoir, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* ([1986] 2006), includes a fuller version of her son's accident and how she reacts and feels, up to the time that he leaves home. She also shows her increasingly independent life but particularly the importance that Africa has for her and her identity and her notion of motherhood. In her sixth memoir, *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (2002), Angelou returns to America to work in the Civil Rights Movement with Malcolm X, only to find he had been

murdered. A short time later, when she campaigns for Martin Luther King, he is also assassinated. Although a good lesson in history for those unaware of the events, there was more repetition of insights from her previous memoirs. Her final memoir, *Mom & Me & Mom* (2013) published a year before her death, revisits the complex relationship that she had with her mother.

Reading these successful sequel memoirs was interesting for several reasons. Running throughout all seven books Angelou developed themes which were common to all volumes. Black women's identity and the mother/child relationship were major points of focus. Continuous throughout the books these themes held them together and were described by O'Neale as 'self acceptance, race, men, work, separation, sexuality, motherhood' (qtd in Lupton 1990:1). Although I had not started my first memoir with themes in mind, in my second I have attempted to identify and establish issues that can flow on throughout subsequent (and prequel) narratives I might write. These include infertility, post-traumatic stress disorder and the effect loneliness from living in isolation without friends has on the psyche. I believe this method works well for Angelou and acts as the gravy that binds the memoirs together, giving her readers continuity. Like Angelou, I have left both my first memoir and its sequel 'After the Nightmare' open-ended, allowing for a further volume. Angelou did this well as each ended but left the way open for a new beginning, and a new narrative; for example, the first memoir ended with Angelou embracing being a woman who was black. However, as she at seventeen had just given birth to her baby son as an unmarried mother a new beginning beckoned, thus leaving the way open for another narrative to follow.

In Angelou's memoirs there were many instances of intertextuality, that is, where knowledge of a previous book lends an added richness to another. An example of this is the use of the roast chicken dinner; eaten by Rev. Thomas in her grandmother's kitchen and Mr Freeman who raped her in Vivien Baxter's kitchen in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* ([1973] 2006) and again finding herself alone after Guy left in both *The Heart of a Woman* ([1981] 2006) and *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* ([1986] 2006). Another example of intertextuality occurred when she confronted the gang leader who was threatening her son, living out a fantasy she had in the first memoir where she described her grandmother standing up to the dentist and running him out of town.

Fiction memoir hybrid

I have included Francesca Rendle-Short's work in this contextual literature review, as her memoir *Bite Your Tongue* (2011) was an important memoir in relation to technique. This memoir straddled the genre divide with the writing of a narrative that is intentionally fictional in one section and memoir in another. This coming of age story is her own, but she writes her disembodied childhood as fiction, using fictional names, whilst her embodied adulthood is memoir. She writes with three voices: that of a fictional child, Glory; the narrator who is on her way to see her dying mother; and a third voice who adds the facts that Glory (both the fictional character and her real counterpart, Rendle-Short) could not have known at the time. From the opening pages, the body is in evidence. An X-ray of her mother's hands leaps out from the first page. Her mother, an active anti-smut campaigner, undertook a campaign to save Queensland's children from literature she considered morally corrupt, such as J D Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* ([1951] 1991), Ray Lawler's *Summer of the 17th Doll* ([1957]2012) and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* ([1960]1982). She was, indeed, a religious morals crusader hell bent on burning books that she considered unsuitable. Rendle-Short's story of growing up in this household is still extremely raw and so it was written as fiction, allowing the story to take her to places that otherwise she would have struggled to travel. Rendle-Short describes her fiction in these terms:

> Incrementally, memories and connections and threads began to appear on the page that made sense, I could hold my mother up, the subject of my research – nudge, cajole, tease. This story became a body for the page – what I call a linguistic body – a body I could recognize, with skin and bones and hair and teeth… By writing a body on the page, a discovered body, an improper body, you reclaim your own (2010:5).

Not only was this memoir an excellent example of embodiment and the power of writing the body, it is also an excellent example of the use of metaphor, such as the flames and tongue. Dominique Hecq writes of the metaphor of the tongue at length in her review (2012b). Dinty Moore (2010), when talking of the importance of showing the reader as opposed to telling them, asserts that 'metaphors have a way of holding the truth in the least space' (2010:25) and Rendle-Short's use of

metaphor is a good example of this. Having read this book I made note to try to include metaphor in my own work.

This hybrid form also had implications for my research. Although this portrayed a miserable childhood, I could relate strongly to it as I came from the same era, was a minister's daughter and had connections to the location. I could remember the events that Rendle-Short describes and consequently, was compelled to read on. It is also very clear in this narrative that writing the body mingles the reader's body with the body in the text ensuring the reader becomes irrevocably embodied in the life being narrated. The body adds vibrancy to the narrative.

My book club read this book in 2012 and it remains one of only three books studied by the club that continues to impact those that read it. All the participants felt strong emotions, with some members relating memories of their own childhoods dominated by a strong mother figure. For me, as a writer, it shows that creating a strong emotional response in the reader with the use of metaphor and the body creates vibrancy by promoting the same emotions in the reader as felt by the child being narrated.

In the reading of these memoirs, and many others not mentioned in this section of the exegesis (see literature map, literature lists and project bibliography for full list of works consulted for this project), it became evident that the story being told was the most important element for whether a book held my interest or not. I found that if the story was not one that held my attention, or if I could not relate to the central character, good writing technique was not sufficient to hold my attention, explaining my difficulties with the misery memoirs of McCourt (2001), Karr ([1995]1996, 2001) and the grief memoir of Mackellar (2010, 2014). If I had suffered a miserable childhood, was a recovering alcoholic or was experiencing grief then these narratives may have taken on a different significance for me. Certainly, all were well written.

I did enjoy immensely Dahl's two memoirs *Boy* (1984) and *Going Solo* (1986) and Church's *Over the Bridge* (1955) and *Golden Sovereign* (1957). These I enjoyed for the wonderful language and storytelling skills. I also enjoyed reading Sarah Turnbull's memoirs (2002, 2013), which captivated me because of the subject matter, her humour and scene descriptions. All the other memoirs I

struggled, at some point, to continue reading, as I lost interest in the story or the protagonist.

Roche (2013) postulated when considering purchasing memoirs for library shelves that there are five criteria that are necessary to make a compelling memoir which has a good chance of standing the test of time. These factors are that there is a strong protagonist, a storyline that captures the reader and the memoir is set in an attractive setting. Not only should the writing be good but the mood generated should be compelling. Taking these factors and comparing my two memoirs with those that I have read, I believe 'Nightmare in Paradise' (Waters 2013b), my first memoir, is a compelling story, with a gripping mood and strong central character set in an exotic location. 'After the Nightmare' has the same features although the story itself is not as compelling. I do not think that my writing is ever going to be classified as literary in nature, but rather I hope readers will feel as if they are sitting, glass of wine or cup of tea in hand, being told a riveting tale with the 'me' coming through in the writing, a 'me' who is unassuming and non-judgemental. The 'me' that also has a sense of humour. Using the techniques gleaned from these memoirs, I hope my sequel will be given the best chance of becoming a compelling narrative, despite the story not having the same dramatic impact of the first memoir.

Scholarly writings on memoir and creative non-fiction

Literature on the sequel memoir is scarce. Yabroff (2010) commenced her article discussing Elizabeth Gilbert's sequel *Committed* (2010) then broadened her examination to look at other sequel memoirs. She suggests that authors write these books because of pressure from publishers and readers alike and most, in her opinion, should not be published.

Two other articles were found. One was written by a sequel memoirist, Beverly Donofrio (2013), wherein she explains why she is a serial memoirist. She explains that she is 'compulsive, self-absorbed, narcissistic, bossy and a know-it-all' (2013:2). I don't agree with this as a reason for being a memoirist and see this attitude as one that gives the genre a second-class reputation (Couser 2012; Yagoda 2009). A major reason for writing memoir is, rather, to create the person one wishes to become. Couser states: 'what we have in life writing is the writing, not the life; but (and) that the power of life narrative resides in the narrative. This

counterintuitive approach can be seen, not as denying the life in life writing, but as empowering life writers – and life writing' (2012:182). Perhaps Donofrio (2013) was attempting humour in her statement, as she concludes her article stating that her aim is to improve her identity as she works towards becoming the person she wishes to become and thus would appear to agree with Couser as to why one writes, not only one, but several memoirs. The other was published in *Entertainment Weekly* (Staskiewicz 2009), specifically on the sequel memoir. It was a humorous chart examining four authors, Julie Powell ([1995]2011, 2009), Gilbert (2007, 2010), Valerie Bertinelli (2008, 2009) and Karr (1995, 2001, 2009) and their sequels, giving a tongue in cheek rating in respect to the food eaten throughout the narrative, how emotive the narrative was and which actress is set to play the author in screen depiction of the memoir. This added little to my study.

My search for relevant literature was expanded to focus on seminal works on memoir by Couser (2012), Gutkind (2012), Smith & Watson (2010), and Yagoda (2009). These five well-respected authors in the field of memoir and creative non-fiction examine multiple aspects of memoir generally and their findings served as a backbone for my research. These four books examine memoir from different angles and discuss crucial aspects of memoir, such as truth, dialogue, and high definition scenes (see Chapter 1).

Yagoda (2009), in *Memoir A History,* examines the genre from a historical viewpoint. His discussion of the reason people write memoirs and the types of memoir that result—confession, testimony, *bildungsroman* and apologia—prompted an analysis of my own, both of which I placed in 'testimony'. Yagoda's only mention of the sequel memoir was to point out that most were unsuccessful and that sales decreased with each successive memoir. Yagoda's (2009) consideration of truth in memoir led to my questioning the use of dialogue and a search for further work on this subject (Couser 2005; Miller 1984; Miller 2007; Trahan 2008) led me to Couser's (2012) book, *Memoir An Introduction*.

Regarding the sequel memoir, Couser (2012) puts forward that with memoirs increasing in popularity amongst readers, it is no longer necessary that a memoirist limit themselves to writing one book only. He states, 'Thus, as a result of the success of the genre, it is now possible for professional writers to have careers as (serial) memoirists' (Couser 2012:51). He does comment that a point would be reached in the lives of those memoirists writing multiple life-writings,

that life would stop being lived, leaving the memoirist with no other recourse than to write about the writing itself as this would become their life. In sequel memoirs where the life is not as interesting as the initial memoir, there does appear to be a tendency for the memoirist to discuss his or her writing process (Karr 2009; Turnbull 2013), possibly increasing potential buyers of the sequel, as other writers might find this interesting.

Couser's discussion of the sub-genres of memoir, of which he finds the most popular category is the misery memoir, points the way to Smith and Watson's (2010) book which, in its Appendix A, categorises many of the types of life-writing—of which over sixty five apply to memoir. These categories of memoir include 'childhood', 'surviving illness', 'non-survival', and 'misery', 'celebrity' memoirs, as well as travel and numerous other sub-genres. Brown (2010) concurs with Couser, writing that those memoirs high on the *New York Times* paperback non-fiction bestseller list are predominantly 'misery' based with few 'feel good' ones doing well in the marketplace. This does not bode well for the sale of my memoirs as neither of them fit the misery memoir classification, as both are concerned with travel or 'tree change,' which examines the move from city to rural living.

Couser's discussion of memoir as a genre, memoirist's use of novelist's techniques, and the belief by some that memoir is a less literary form of writing, assisted me in analysing my own beliefs on the genre of memoir, particularly as I found that both Gutkind (2012) and Couser (2012) proposed that a new genre called 'Based on a true story' (BOTS) to circumvent the problem of deciding when non-fiction becomes fiction. They differed, however, in the criterion in that Couser's BOTS would be factually true, with the addition of made-up dialogue and high definition scenes. Gutkind, on the other hand, suggests that part of the story can also be fictionalised, enabling the writer to create a happier or better ending to the story or to increase the drama of the narrative. I concluded that another sub-genre would be an unnecessary addition to an already chaotic genre mix, however, I agreed that when writing memoir it is acceptable to use narrative tools such as dialogue and high definition descriptions but did not shift from my belief that the story must be a true reflection of the memoirist's memory. Couser prefers memoirs without these features as he believes it puts the narrating 'I' and the 'narrated I' closer together in proximity to each other, thus removing the

distance required for the necessary reflection leading to 'self-discovery' and 'self-knowledge' (2012:175). However, as I had found that several memoirs that used high definition scenes and dialogue kept my attention, and as I was trying to create a compelling, vibrant sequel, although I did not disagree with Couser, I determined that I would continue to use them in my memoir.

Reading Couser (2012) I found I fitted into the 'nobody' memoir, meaning that I was an unknown writer, as opposed to a 'somebody' memoir which referred to one written by a celebrity or other well known figure. He introduced me to the impact writing the body can have on a narrative with his discussion of the 'no body' memoir, a term he used in referring to disability memoirs where the narrative displays a particular, damaged body, such as in Lucy Grealy's *Autobiography of a Face* (1994), which narrates the story of her childhood when she was left disfigured after surgery for cancer of the jaw. Such writing of the 'no body', Couser claims, can result in embodiment for the narrator, allowing him/her to reclaim their body. This section gave me an introduction to embodiment and it, with other articles on embodiment (Krauth 2010; Morrison 2009; Taylor 2011; Viljoen 2010), drew me to the conclusion that memoir is an embodied experience (as memory resides in the body) and, as we all have bodies, inclusion of the body in the memoir might also embody the reader in the text, making the narrative more vibrant.

Couser discusses the ethics of writing memoir, including the obligations of memoirists to their readers in relation to truth and writing another's biography. Beginning with a discussion on the various hoaxes, such as that perpetrated by James Frey who stimulated the discussion of 'truthiness' in memoir (Brien 2002, 2006b), Couser suggests trust must be established between the reader and the memoirist. To facilitate this, at the beginning of the memoir it should be made clear to the reader what data the memoirist has used to base his memories on, thereby allowing the reader to decide how much they are prepared to believe. Couser also examines the ethical issues of writing memoir, which inevitably leads to the writing of the life of another, thereby robbing them of their right to privacy. This led to me carrying out further research into this dilemma, and ethical issues are discussed in Chapter 3.

Couser also discussed the concept of the various characters that make up the 'I' and the relationship between the 'I' 'then', the protagonist of the memoir, and

the ‘I’ ‘now’, the narrative’s narrator, claiming that the relationship between these two identities reveals a difference between types of memoir. I found this discussion very relevant and it led me to further examination of this issue, with Eakin (2005) who proposed a past, present and future ‘I’. Eakin proposed that the purpose of telling stories of the self is not carried out from a desire to remember and relive the past, but rather to create the future ‘I’ the narrator wishes to become. He believes that the ability to relate memoir is, therefore, essential for the creation of identity and our ability to relate our stories determines whether we will have a successful life.

Smith and Watson (2010) broke the ‘I’ into several ‘I’ characters to refer to the real or historical ‘I’, the narrating ‘I’, the narrated ‘I’ and the ideological ‘I’. The past ‘I’ is the verifiable ‘I’ and, as it cannot be reproduced exactly is, therefore, not the ‘I’ that is visible to readers in an autobiographical work. The narrated ‘I’ is the past person (the protagonist) whom the reader meets on reading. The narrating ‘I’ is the author, the present day person who does the remembering and offers reflections and interpretations of the past events and can have multiple voices. The ideal ‘I’ is the person who is placed in the world of the time and knows the cultural and spatial rules of the time (see Fig.11).

Identity is embodied in all these versions of the first person narrating/ narrated ‘I’ and the time over which they are narrated, can be lengthy. Eakin (2005) proposes that life narrative is an essential part of maintaining the equilibrium of the body:

> We learn as children what it means to say ‘I’ in the culture we inhabit, and this training proves to be crucial to the success of our lives as adults, for our recognition by others as normal individuals depends on our ability to perform the work of self-narration (2005:3).

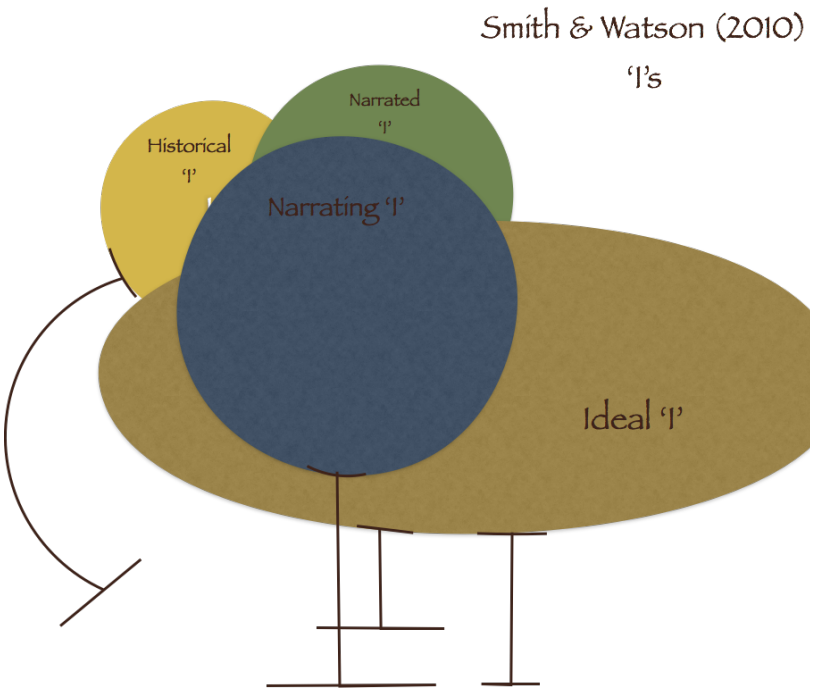


Fig. 11 Depicting Smith and Watson (2010) 'I' characters

In this schema, the autobiographical act is understood as creating a stable environment with the creation of a human identity. Eakin (2005) refers to this time aspect as 'temporal mapping'. This mapping keeps us aware of where our bodies are in time and space. It allows us to have a past, to know where we are when we wake from sleep and how much time has elapsed between falling asleep and reawakening. It allows us to be embodied. When we lose our place on the map we become disembodied, as happens with the onset of dementia where those around the afflicted can see the loss of identity as the disease progresses.

I became fascinated by the notion of the different 'I' characters, the purpose of writing memoir, identity formation and the concept that memoir is a homeostatic function. The 'I' characters were also essential in my understanding of embodiment, the reasons that people read memoir and why memoir is written. Although this did not directly impact my quest for writing a vibrant second

narrative, it gave me aspects to ponder when reading other memoirs. It made it easier to decide the author's goal in his/her writing as the action of the 'I' character was different for the different purposes of writing. For example, a *bildungsroman* follows the change of one 'I' into another, whilst in conversion narratives the 'I's are separated by a chasm (Couser 2012). Smith and Watson (2010) suggest that a possible dichotomy between the narrated and narrating 'I's is one reason that it is difficult to create a compelling sequel. They claim that identities and the interpretation of experiences will differ at different historical moments and as the narrating 'I' changes—a result of becoming self-aware through their narratives—these identities can be in conflict across subsequent memoirs. This makes it possible that a reader liking the identity they meet in one volume will not necessarily like the identity they meet in subsequent books.

In light of this claim, I re-examined some of the sequel memoirs I had read. One memoir where, for me, the narrated 'I' was likeable in the first memoir and but not in the second was Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* ([1996]1999) and *'Tis* (1999). I then created a table (Fig. 12) mapping the subject matter. This has ramifications for my own work as the first memoir is an adventure tale set in a different culture whilst the second looks at a more humdrum existence as a farmer, and nurse. I believe in my two memoirs there is no dichotomy between the 'I'

Author	First memoir	Sequel Memoir
Elizabeth Gilbert	Divorce and then the process finding oneself	Marriage
Sarah Turnbull	Living in a different culture	Living in a different culture Infertility
Maggie MacKellar	Death cancer, suicide Grieving and surviving	Remarrying Blended family
Jill Ker Conway	Coming of age	Academia
Frank McCourt	Misery	Life as a young man
Rodriguez	Life in a different culture Setting up a beauty school in Afghanistan	Life in another different culture PTSD
Mayle	Life in a different culture	Life in the same different culture

Fig. 12 Differences between subject matter and potential dichotomy of 'I' characters.

characters as the 'I's are essentially unchanged between them, that is, my identity remains consistent from one book to the next. However, as the subject matter is different, it is possible that a different audience should be targeted for each.

Couser (2012) also addresses how the reader should read memoir. He suggests that, for the reader, the story is secondary to the effect that the events had on the future life of the author as this knowledge can be applied to the reader's own life. My research found that, however, the story is the most important aspect when I read. Vibrant writing can make a story that is not interesting more compelling, however with the constraints of truth placed on the memoirist, it is the rare writer who can overcome an otherwise potentially boring story with their writing. One such successful writer is Richard Church (1955, 1957) with his memoirs *Over the Bridge* and *The Golden Sovereign.* However, if the story is pertinent to the reader—such as a cancer memoir when one has themselves been diagnosed or had a loved one diagnosed with the disease—Couser's statement is most likely true for them as readers as they search for answers for themselves. My memoir will hopefully appeal to those contemplating a tree change and with the changes in my writing, my story will carry them through to the end, leaving them interested enough to want to know what came before or what will follow.
Smith and Watson (2010), in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, suggested that memoir is about two different selves—the public self who is seen by the world and the internal self who is only seen by the individual. They define contemporary memoir as focusing on the relational aspects of experience, where the 'I' character is made visible externally and is 'dialogical' in form (2010:274). Although Smith and Watson only briefly look at sequel memoir, they describe in detail the constituent parts of life writing, such as memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment and agency. With this knowledge I could then recognise these features in my own narrative and the deeper analysis gave me the ability to understand my own self, experiences and memory. Smith & Watson (2010) contend that the 'self' and the story are creations fragmented in and by time, told to different audiences and are therefore more appropriately considered as a performative art and autobiographical acts of which the 'I' characters (Fig. 11) are part.

Memoir relies heavily on memory and I found it was important to understand, to a small extent, how memory worked. I accepted that memories are a construct of the mind (Bruner 2004; Eakin 2005; Schacter 1996; Żarowski 2012) and are created anew on each occasion of remembering, affected by our past experiences, knowledge and what we wish to create for the future. It is, therefore, to be expected that another who experienced the event will remember it differently, as he/she brings his/her own past, present and future, to create their own, individual memory.

Smith and Watson's discussion of memory, which they define as 'actively creating the meaning of a past that can never be fully recovered' (2010:22), led me to examine memory in more depth using the work of Schacter (1996) and Eakin (2001a). These experts challenged that autobiographical memory resided in the body awaiting the correct retrieval tool. Schacter (1996) claims that modern brain imaging techniques have demonstrated that autobiographical memory and visual memory share the same area of the brain. He proposes that if a person can see a scene vividly, this can be encoded into memory as an event that has occurred. He concludes that this is the reason for false memories, such as those described by Oliver Sacks (2013), where he vividly remembered an event in his childhood, during the blitz of London. He discovered many years later that he was not in London at the time of the event and found it difficult to believe that he did not experience it, for to him it was real. Eakin (2001a) postulates that rather than memory being experiential (and stored) as had previously been believed, it is a construct and can differ with each episode of remembering. Memories will, therefore, correspond with the future that we wish to make and what we want our identity to be. Both these scholars effectively argue for a constructed memory, which again reopens the debate about truth in memoir. I argue that these memories are the truth of the memoirist and therefore can be written as the memoirist's truth. However, outright fraud cannot be passed off as truth such as increasing the length of time over which an event occurred, such as when Frey (2003) greatly exaggerated the length of time that he was held in prison (Brien 2006b), or pretending to be someone that you are not. Leon Carmen (Koolmatrie [1995] 2006) did this when as a white man he wrote a memoir passing himself off as an Indigenous woman, Wanda Koolmatrie, even winning the Dobbie Award for the best first novel by a female author (Lofgren 1997).

Merleau-Ponty, however, argues that it is the body that remembers the world, a departure from memory being a sole function of the brain (1989). If this is the case, I thought, including some descriptions of the body, which is universal to all of us, should add vibrancy to my writing, thereby helping the reader to be compelled to read the narrative as embodied memories are common to everyone. Although my stance on memory is that it is constructed fresh on each remembering, both views can co-exist in some form as it would seem that memory being stored in body parts has in some way been verified anecdotely by the reactions of transplant patients who take up characteristics of the donor (Krauth 2010). Scientifically, cellular memory has been accepted since the late 1800s with the discovery of phenomena such as muscle memory (2010), which refers to the memory necessary to carry out certain motor tasks spontaneously, as the implicit memory of how to do them has been embodied in the body as a result of practice, habit or through either intentional or unintentional learning (Shusterman 2011).

Birkerts (2008) examines temporality in *The Art of Time in Memoir: Then, Now*, particularly the duality of time where the narrator looks back in time to understand the past from his present position. He postulates that there are three different purposes for writing memoirs. Firstly, there are the 'lyrical seeking' narratives, where the memoirist is trying to come to terms with lost experience. Secondly, the *bildungsroman* that often relate torrid circumstances. Thirdly, there are those narratives where the author has an overwhelming need to write what is purely a good story. Each of these types deals with time differently. The lyrical seekers combine 'then' and 'now' whilst in the *bildungsroman* the past and present is separated, often using flashback strategies. He also claims that the difference between autobiography and memoir is how the author deals with time. Autobiography demonstrates the linear timeline the life took, from birth to death, whereas in memoir the chronology is altered as memories are remembered in a more haphazard fashion and the narrative reflects this (Birkerts 2008:52). He believes this use of time is the difference between a good and bad memoir, suggesting the past and present need to be written together. Karr (2005) demonstrates this as she struggles to allow the past to surface. She jumps back and forward in time creating a tension which compells the reader to continue reading

to find the answers that Karr, herself, seeks from memories which are deeply hidden.

My sequel memoir is not of his lyrical-seeking type and predominantly is, I believe, just a hopefully good story following an even better one. However, reading Birkert's work, I have kept in mind that the temporal is an important factor and seek to combine my version of past events with reflections made from the positioning of myself, removed by time from the circumstances that I write about.

As time is another element of memoir that it is acceptable to manipulate, the memoirist can, according to Birkerts, conflate time by writing several events as one in order to have a smooth flow in the narrative. Additionally, vivid memories don't follow a chronological time frame and these may be presented as recalled by the writer with movement between past, present and future common (Birkerts 2008). The memoirist can choose where to start the account: some begin in the future, some at the beginning, whilst others start any place in between and flash backwards and forwards. Virginia Woolf (Woolf & Schulkind 1976) in her memoir *Sketch of the Past* uses a stream of consciousness writing technique. She is deemed a lyrical writer, which Birkerts (2008) classifies as the attempt to reconnect with the feelings and emotions experienced in the distant past. Joanna Russ (1995) in her book *To Write Like a Woman* described this lyric mode as 'without chronology or causation, its principle of connection being associative' (qtd in Drobot 2013:128).

In relation to my own sequel memoir, these works on time made me aware of the need to consider how I would deal with time not only in relation to the starting point of my narrative but also how I would deal with the past 'I' and the narrating 'I'. It also gave me reason to contemplate the effect that time has on memory.

These seminal books on memoir added to my understanding of the genre and where I fitted into it. Gaining this knowledge of embodiment, time, and memory gave me extra facets that I could apply to my own memoir. They made me decide where I stood regarding truth in memoir and the use of fictional tools such as dialogue and the high definition scene. This made me aware that although I was telling my truth, my truth could also be my construct and thereby differ from the memories of the other characters that were part of my life. This realisation was pivotal in my placing a small preface on memory at the beginning of my memoir.

The Craft of Writing Memoir

Lee Gutkind

Lee Gutkind is recognised as being the founding father of creative non-fiction and his book *You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The complete guide to writing creative non-fiction, from memoir to literary journalism and everything in between* (2012), gives an overview of what makes up the genre of creative non-fiction, which includes memoir. A large portion of Gutkind's text relates to the techniques of writing creative non-fiction. I found this invaluable as Gutkind examined the overall structure and techniques that authors use in writing, with many examples.

Gutkind also explained the necessity of avid reading to the process of writing and how authors can develop the skill of reading the work from the position of a reader. King also stressed this point claiming that 'if you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There's no way around these two things that I'm aware of' (King 2002:163). Reading is important, King posits, to both teach different writing techniques and what constitutes good or bad writing. King believes that although a competent writer can improve and become a good writer and a bad writer can become competent, neither can become truly great (King 2002:160). This statement gave me pause to ponder. I knew I would never be a great literary writer but I do believe I have a distinctive voice and by a process of deconstructing my writing and application of the techniques suggested by experts in the field, vibrancy was achieved in my own work.

Gutkind (2012) dealt specifically with how to write a compelling piece of non-fiction. I had decided prior to reading this work that dialogue and high definition scene were necessary to create a vibrant, compelling narrative but he had other suggestions that I could test by applying them to my writing. These included techniques to ensure that scenes are active and checking for focus. I followed many of his procedures in the editing of my manuscript and report these results in Chapter 5.

Stephen King

Stephen King's (2002) *On Writing,* is both his memoir on becoming a writer followed by tips for improving writing skills. He also recommends editing carefully, culling words (King 2002; Strunk & White 1979) and unnecessary phrases. Although I agreed with this, for my own writing style—which tended to be minimalistic—I needed to add more description. Although King is aiming his work at fiction writers, I believe much of his wisdom is also applicable to non-fiction and the techniques he describes that are applicable to the creative artefact are discussed in chapter 5.

Dinty Moore

Although all personal essays may not be memoirs, much of what Moore has to say in his book *Crafting the Personal Essay: A Guide for writing and publishing Creative Nonfiction* (2010), applies to both. I found this was also a useful book to explain exactly what the personal essay comprises, as I used this form at two conferences (Australasian Association of Writing Programs 2015 and Death, Dying and the Undead Conference 2015) where I presented creative papers using the personal essay form. (see page ix). The difference between memoir and the personal essay according to Moore is that pure memoir does not reflect on the events remembered (Moore 2010:27). I disagree with this distinction as I believe that reflection is an expected part of the modern memoir. However, later he discusses a difference between the two that I found pertinent. Memoir tends to be story-driven, starting at a point leading to a conclusion whereas the essay often has a looser structure, and can follow the ramblings of the writer's mind, finally arriving at an understandable point (Moore 2010:77). See also Chapter 5.

The three books discussed above all expressed similar techniques to make the writing as vibrant as it possibly can be. In Chapter 5 I outline how I have used these aspects. Other technique books such as Zinsser's *Writing About Your Life: A Journey into the Past* (1985) and *On Writing Well:an informal guide to writing nonfiction* (2004) and Bird's (2007) *Writing the Story of Your Life* did not add anything new to my technical writing repertoire. Zinsser did however remind me of the use of words in a similar way to Strunk and White (1979) and I resolved to,

in the edit, check for poor noun usage, exaggeration, unnecessary adverbs and adjectives and that the verbs I used were predominantly those of action.

Conclusion

Completing this contextual literature review was worthwhile for many reasons. Firstly, in the early stages of my research, with the aid of literature mapping, it demonstrated clearly that there was a gap in knowledge regarding the sequel memoir.

By examining memoirs with similar themes to my own I could see that again there was a gap in the market for memoirs relating to small general business and renal dialysis. Reading sequel memoirs and memoirs closely allowed me to analyse the techniques that other memoir writers had used to create a compelling memoir, or not. Examining sequel memoirs also demonstrated the various techniques these authors used to allude to their initial memoir and to create a stand-alone book that did not require the reader to consume the sequel in any particular order. All the examined memoirs were evaluated for how they maintained vibrancy (or lack thereof) in both the first and any subsequent volume. This textual analysis added a triangulation to the research when combined with journaling and self-study.

Scholarly works on memoir alerted me to the considerations regarding the genre of memoir and its components. These books acted as a signpost to keywords enabling me to find journal articles on the facets of memoir that became of interest to me as I carried out research for my project and wrote conference papers. The books and articles on research itself led to an understanding of research and research methodology. Without these, I would not have formulated my place as a practice-led researcher and my ability to carry out meaningful research would have been limited. These are discussed in Chapter 3. Finally, works on the technique of writing added an extra layer in my search for the ways a memoirist could maintain vibrancy and ensure that his/her sequel memoir was as compelling as the first memoir I wrote. Their application to my own sequel is documented in detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5. Creating the Compelling Sequel

A consideration of boredom, the starting point of this project, was necessary for the discovery of the ingredients required to move the project along. If I had not experienced this lack of interest in myself and my story, which stifled my creativity and brought my writing to a halt, I would have continued penning my narrative without any desire to make changes that would renew my passion for my story. Magee (2006) states 'Boredom is an indispensible moment in the experience of difference. It announces the presence of a way of being we do not, indeed cannot, know—at least for the moment. For boredom also signals the possibility of learning' (2006:10). Mann, a psychologist, has tested subjects and concluded that boredom led to an increase in creativity, to an extent that she now recommends that we should actively seek out boredom in our lives (Williams 2015). Mann postulates that boredom allows a shift from the task at hand, an external function, to looking inside the self, examining feelings, memories and experiences, and shifting the focus of attention elsewhere allowing daydreaming to occur, thereby opening channels allowing a new, creative way of doing the task to be discovered (King 2002; Mann and Cadman 2014). Daydreaming is described as 'a propitious mental state for creativity, insight and problem solving in which truly novel solutions and ideas emerge when the brain brings together unrelated facts and thoughts' (Begley et al. 2009:36).

When I found myself unable to continue with the creative work, I carried out my textual analysis which is reported in Chapter 1 and 4. With my opinions formed from these works I set out to test them on my own creative work. I also examined external issues that may affect the hiatus in the writing, such as the workspace.

The Work Space and other issues

During the hiatus created through my boredom, I considered other factors that could have caused the problem, such as where and when I was writing. Prior to the commencement of my candidature, I would write in the very early morning

between 4am and 8am, then between 11am and 2pm and occasionally between 8pm and 10pm. I would normally spend a minimum of six hours writing a day. This included any time I spent on my blog. I would often start the day by writing a post for my blog, which stimulated other writing to flow. The university provided me with a desk space which initially I found very difficult to work at, particularly creative work. In the early morning at home there were few distractions whereas at the university, sited outside the printing room, the distractions were numerous. However, during the day I also had distractions at home, such as the washing, sharing an office with my husband, and telephone calls. While some of these diversions were helpful by relieving tension in my neck due to causing frequent changes in my body position, others were less so. Creswell suggests that the place you write should be as unappealing as possible and quotes the Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Annie Dillard who said: 'One wants a room with no view, so imagination can meet memory in the dark' (qtd in Creswell 2009:82). I finally set up an office that was purely for university work in a spare bedroom. If I was in that room I did not look at social media or take phone calls but I still did the washing and other small tasks which gave me some relief from sitting at my desk. Although it did not immediately start the flow of writing this did give me a space conducive to writing. Later in the research journey, I was allocated an office, shared with three other students. This became my preferred working space as by this time I had finished the first draft of the creative work and was working on the exegesis and applying various techniques and insights to the memoir. This office gave me the necessary quietness, lacked distractions and, in sharing it with other candidates a beneficial support system developed.

Another issue I discovered was the large amount of reading I was attempting to complete in the limited timeframe. As I was an average-speed reader at best, reading not only memoirs but scholarly articles consumed a great deal of my time. I found I needed to be very selective with what I read. This made me realise how important abstracts were as this was the part of an article which determined whether I would read it in full or discard it as irrelevant to my project. I found those that were of most value demonstrated minimal jargon, made every word count and gave a concise summary of the paper. Although this did not mean that I could avoid reading the article itself, it did prevent me from unnecessary

reading, although some of this I found extremely interesting thus allowing irrelevant articles to become a distraction.

The Creative Work

As well as this research into memoirs, I also attempted to restart the flow of writing on the creative work. I found that I had been gone from the manuscript for sufficient time that I had lost confidence that I knew what I had written. To reacquaint myself with the manuscript I started reading it from the beginning. Slowly I started rewriting the creative work and to prevent a recurrence of the block I had been experiencing, I applied to myself Hemingway's mantra for writing:

> I always worked until I had something done and I always stopped when I knew what was going to happen next. That way I could be sure of going on the next day (2010:22).

Hemingway also made a point of not thinking about his manuscript until he started working again the next day. This, he believed, allowed his subconscious to work unrestrained (as I have discussed earlier in this chapter in regard to daydreaming), and allowed him to observe life around him, which he found beneficial to his writing. Stopping at a point where I could easily carry on did make a difference in areas of my creative writing where I struggled, although I could not control my thoughts which often turned to my manuscript.

The first draft of the manuscript was completed in nine months. Ideally, I would have then let it sit for several months or more giving myself some distance from it and allowing me to return to it and read it with fresh eyes. This was not possible due to time constraints placed on me by my candidature timelines, however I did take several shorter breaks where I worked on the exegesis and conference papers. The editing was ongoing and occurred simultaneously with the writing of the exegesis.

Starting Point and Dealing with the First Memoir in the Creative Work

This was a dilemma for memoirists and my reading had revealed that authors dealt with this in a variety of ways (see Chapter 1). Gutkind (2012) claims

that the narrative should start with a story scene to hook the reader quickly. Once the reader is reeled in with the story, necessary facts can be related, as being told generally has less holding power. The smaller scenes need to be placed into a structure where each scene follows the next and the reader is enticed forward. This overall narrative structure he says can be chronologically organised or not. By starting at a point other than the beginning, tension can be created, leaving the reader wanting to know what happened at the scenes' conclusion, such as in Karr's first memoir. Parallel stories are another possible way of structuring the narrative with both a personal and a public story running side by side. This was not an option for my work but formulating an appropriate starting point was, I knew, essential.

In my sequel, I replaced my original starting point:

> Having arrived back in Sydney from our "Nightmare in Paradise" it became imperative for us to find our next home. We were staying with my mother who staggered me with her flexibility and acceptance of us suddenly landing on her doorstep. Neither Roger nor myself are endowed with natural tidiness, the total opposite to my mother, and yet she just settled into accepting us as we were, despite the tendency to treat me as a tiny child. I tended to react to this poorly and after a couple of weeks catching up with friends it was time to head off to look for our next venture (After the Nightmare version 1).

The final product commenced with a story scene and I concurred with Gutkind that this was a bigger hook than starting at the chronological beginning. Early in the narrative an explanation was given of why we returned to Australia supplying the reader with sufficient information to allow them to continue with some understanding of our past that had resulted in the farm purchase and hopefully urge them to read the first book if they have not already done so. I also tried to avoid giving any additional or conflicting information in the sequel.

Dialogue

Both Gutkind (2012) and King (2002) claim that dialogue is an essential element in a narrative to both develop character and move the story along and that this dialogue must be honest, that is, the dialogue must fit the character being portrayed. King claimed the best way to learn to write good dialogue is to learn to listen to people talking.

An early change I made to my writing technique was, therefore, the inclusion of as much dialogue as possible and on completion of the final draft the percentage of the dialogue was 9%, significantly more than the 4.3% in my first memoir. The dialogue used was predominantly in the section which dealt with the farm. It became quite clear this portion was less vibrant and it was here that the writing faltered. The writing flowed again in the discussion about the kidney dialysis house. On analysing the reasons for this I determined that in the three years we were living on the farm, most of our life was humdrum. Things happened but only rarely involved other people. Most of our life was involved in carrying out routine maintenance and this was not interesting. The writing was true to the scene—tedious. The inclusion of dialogue in this section not only helped in moving it along, but also built a character for the bush man Darrell and my husband Roger.

Additionally, dialogue was easier to include in this section because having little else to focus on, the conversations that we did take part in were much more memorable and therefore better remembered. In this section, as suggested by Moore (2010), I used gestures, body language and silences to attempt to portray characters' personalities, as description of gestures can portray to the reader the inner thoughts of those people who feature in the memoir.

Adding Public Information

Moore (2010) warns that writing the personal does not mean writing the private which he contends should only be in a diary and not for public consumption. However, he believes that the best writing is where an emotion in the reader is elicited. Gutkind (2012) describes a creative non-fiction pendulum, swinging from side to side, which he classifies as private, to public on the other side. At the private end are personal stories that are owned by the author, such as memoir, and to the public side are stories that anyone could have researched and created, such as journal articles. He postulates that the most successful writing is where the pendulum is closer to the middle, adding the personal to the public and the public to the personal. Bearing this in mind, on completion of the first draft, I looked for areas in the narrative where I could insert more information to move the narrative in towards the centre thereby creating interest in the narrative on matters outside myself. I found that in parts I had included either nothing or the bare bones of

information, such as the use by the authorities of calicivirus to control rabbits, the history of the general store and my family history in regards to supplying the timber getters and settlers on the upper reaches of the Myall River. Having discovered areas where I could add information, I did so. In subsequent edits I analysed whether these additions enhanced the reader's understanding or whether I thought it would be creating a memoir with padding in a similar manner to Gilbert (2010). Where this was the case the information was edited or removed. However, I avoided researching areas that did not enter my conscious thought at the time, such as colonisation, farming and notions of Australia in relation to Australia's Indigenous people. I decided that should I include history that did not relate to me personally and would require more than memory, the essence of the memoir would change and be in danger of becoming a research narrative rather than a memoir.

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High Definition Scenes and Embodiment

Once I had completed this, I still found the farm section unexciting and as Strunk and White (1979), King (2002) and Zinsser (1985) all espouse removing unnecessary words from the narrative, I examined the third draft of my manuscript for this purpose. What I found however, was rather than removing words, I added a significant number. As discussed in Chapter 1, my natural writing style is sparse. Having examined factors such as the inclusion of high definition scenes (Couser 2012; Gutkind 2012; Karr 2015), 'intimate and specific detail' (Gutkind 2012:123) and writing the body (Eakin 2005; Krauth 2010; Merleau-Ponty 1989; Rendle-Short 2011), I found myself describing scenes and people in much greater detail and, where possible, including greater use of the body such as the physical description of my husband.

The use of high definition descriptions of place and bodies in the text enhanced the narrative, I believe, as it invites the reader into the story by allowing them to become involved by personally relating to the incident. By using detail, which is not only specific but contains details that the reader wouldn't imagine without having witnessed the scene themselves (Gutkind 2012; Karr 2015), such as the description of Darrell, the old bushie who adopted us, it adds honesty to the scene, as these small details resonate with the reader, allowing them to become part of the now enhanced narrative. Using specific, intimate detail, yet not

describing the scene down to the very last detail, further enmeshes the reader as it allows them to bring their own experiences and imagination to the narrative (King 2002).

Reading Aloud

Next, I read the manuscript out loud to myself to point out problems that the reader may have on reading my work (Gutkind 2012). This allowed errors in tense and spelling to be found easily. Reading in this way also alerted me to areas that the reader may find difficult to understand. Perhaps there was not enough detail or background, perhaps I had been too technical. Perhaps I had knowledge that I assumed other readers would have. Although I found reading the manuscript out loud helpful, beta readers, non-professional critiquers of the work, could also have supplied the information gleaned from this process if I had chosen to use them.

Active/Passive Voice

My fifth draft saw me searching for any paragraphs where passive voice had been used instead of active voice and ensuring that there were plentiful active scenes in my narrative. This was again stimulated by Gutkind (2012) who explains the importance of constructing scenes, and showing, not telling, which is common in most books on writing (King 2002; Myers 2013) Gutkind proposes a scene 'shows that subject, place, personality, vividly, memorably—and in action' (2012:105). He suggests a technique whereby the book is read and each scene encountered is highlighted, thus ensuring that the narrative is made up of scenes. He suggests that more than 50% of the work should be highlighted at the completion of reading and, if not, rewritten to include scenes. He proposes that scenes are the most important part of writing creative non-fiction. These scenes must fit into the structure, be honest and tell a story. Interestingly, I discovered that the farm section of my memoir used a large amount of passive voice and fewer scenes, so, I set about rectifying this.

Structure

I used a similar structure to my first memoir in the sequel whereby each chapter told its own complete story, thus the story of our neighbor covered a period of

years yet was narrated in one chapter. However, the action in my sequel did not have such a definite ascension to climax that the first had, as the story itself was much more low-key. Having now ensured scenes were present, temporality was examined. Being a chronologically-driven story meant that the chapters did not follow a strict timeline, as some storylines began in an earlier time to where the previous chapter had finished. However, the themes ran throughout these stories in the narrative in sequence. I also manipulated time to create a more interesting, compelling first paragraph, changing the beginning from a narration about our need to find a new home to my terror driving on a steep country road.

I was still keen to cut back on any extraneous matter and, as I was experimenting with flash fiction, I decided to rewrite this section as flash fiction to examine the effect that this had on the narrative. Flash fiction is defined as a very short complete story that is completely contained within the word limit. This can range from a sentence to one thousand words. The effect of flash fiction is to remove all unnecessary words and leave only those that are necessary to ensure a complete story.

I did this for ten chapters. Initially I went through and removed most adjectives and adverbs. I then looked at the narrative trajectory, ascertaining whether each part was crucial to the story. In doing so I found I was deleting the extra information I had added as well as the detail and other asides I had thought interesting. I felt the story was not benefitting by these changes and, to determine this, I again enlisted the assistance of my mother. She read the flash version, followed by me reading the unabridged version. We then discussed which version we preferred. This did not work as the changes were easily forgotten, so we then read paragraph by paragraph. There were only a few areas where we disagreed and for the majority we both preferred the full version to the flash version, and so I discontinued this experiment. On only one occasion did I retain the flash version as it was an action scene, teaching my nieces to fly their kites. Here, the tension seemed more pronounced, giving the segment added drama.

Finally, I checked the scenes for focus (Gutkind 2012; King 2002). I had determined that I wanted the reader to gain a sense of country living, the isolation and issues revolving around tree change. Secondary themes included being a woman in the country, infertility and undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder. I proceeded to mine the manuscript, removing anything unnecessary to this focus

including characters and adding scenes to reinforce what I wanted the reader to know.

Ethics

Another area that I examined in the creative work was how I had dealt with the issue of infertility. As Carlin and Rendle-Short state : 'The price of non-fiction is the humiliation of being found out, being seen' (2013:6).

By version 7, although I retained some explanation that my inability to conceive was an issue for me, I removed some references to it altogether for several reasons: I did not think it added anything to the narrative; felt that some sections violated others' privacy who had discussed this with me; and, I was cognisant of my mother's feelings. I have already discussed ethics in memoir in Chapter 3 and I believe that in deleting these sections that I was acting on Eakin's (2001b) rules for relating life narratives and maintaining the privacy of others.

On reflection, by the final version of the manuscript, these removed references were replaced and some further references added. To maintain some individual's privacy, I changed their names. This underlying theme was not meant to be the primary story but rather an undercurrent that ran constantly in our lives, surfacing only at critical junctures in the narrative. In treating them in this way the reader will in a minor way experience what the protagonist 'I' underwent by not having frank discussions about the issue. Treating this issue in this manner leaves open the possibility of a memoir with infertility as the major theme.

Conclusion

After nine versions, and although some of the changes made were minor, each improved the vibrancy of the narrative by either their addition (dialogue, high definition description), alteration (passive to active voice) or deletion (words, sentences, paragraphs). The process was completed when I found that I was neither adding more or subtracting from the text and I, therefore, decided that it was at the most compelling that I could achieve.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

When this rewriting was completed, my journey reached its end and like all fantastic trips I have taken, despite needing to take a rest, catch up on the household tasks ignored and spend some time with family and friends, I know much more than I knew at the beginning. I have discovered facets of memoir that were previously unconsidered by me, such as the purpose of memoir, identity and memory issues. These have opened horizons to explore further in the future. I have a greater understanding of the research philosophy with its origins back in Ancient Greece and its journey to the modern day. I have found where I am placed within this research culture as a practice-led researcher. However, most importantly, I discovered in my research ways of creating as vibrant a sequel memoir as I possibly could write. In this, I arrived at the conclusion that there are a number of techniques that are important to include in the writing of the narrative.

Dialogue is essential but must be used in moderation. It was found, in those memoirs examined for the percentage of dialogue the author used in the narrative, that most memoirs demonstrated more dialogue present in the sequel when compared to the amount used in the initial volume. This possibly indicated that in less compelling narratives, dialogue is a tool used to create vibrancy. I believe my narrative benefited from the immediacy dialogue gave, and the valuable character insights that it could display efficiently (rather than using lengthy descriptions.). Dialogue also kept the narrative moving through the scenes being portrayed. To satisfy the truth criteria after reading the stipulations of Lejeune's autobiographical pact, I added an Author's Note to the memoir to point out that the dialogue was recreated but that to the best of my ability, the dialogue gave the gist of what had been said at the time. It also noted that some names had been changed.

Describing the body and life's effects on the body draws readers into the text and helps develop a relationship with the characters within the memoir due to the reader's knowledge of their own bodies. Embodiment was also another essential part of this autobiographical work as memory itself resides in the body. Retrieving this memory proved difficult at times and I included a statement in my Author's Note about this.

High definition scenes create a visual image for the reader by the sharing of information that allows the reader to see the scene, placing them in it. Scenes that do

not ring true however will cause distrust and break the autobiographical pact so it is important that these details are believable. Gestures are an excellent way of showing the internal thoughts of the people in the memoir.

Truth is an essential of memoir. In memoir, the use of creative writing techniques such as dialogue, scene creation and the manipulation of time are permissible if they convey the truth of the remembered situation. I have included in my Author's Note a section on my memory and how I see its reliability in relating the narrative. In this, I have explained to the reader how I have reconstructed my memory and pointed out why, at times, my recall of events may differ from others. This allows the reader to decide what to believe or not. Facts were always checked.

Humour is a valuable tool in creating a compelling memoir. The ability to laugh at oneself is valuable, as is the ability to ascertain that the humour is not at another's expense. Personal revelation is also important. Some sub-genres of memoir demand more revelation than others, but at no time should the revelations be of a private nature. In imparting the personal, attention must be given to the ethics of memoir writing, being aware that other biographies are usually told in the story of memoir. The voice of the author should be strong and clearly their own, to ensure the most compelling writing. I prefer a conversational style of writing but this is personal preference.

Other writing techniques, such as the use of active voice, judicious use of fresh metaphors, attention to vocabulary, grammar and spelling and avoiding clichés are all of important. Technique is necessary as it is in all writing but, with a less compelling story, the author's writing skills need to be fine-tuned to attempt to create the vibrancy required. The memoirist can make the story more compelling by including information of a more general nature that may engage the reader further.

Also critical is how the first memoir is related in the second in order to keep the reader informed and desirous of reading the first volume. Enough information should be given so that the reader does not feel confused and 'in the dark' by references in the sequel to the first narrative, but not so much information that those who have read the first memoir become bored.

Although analysing the success of sequel memoirs was problematic, a conclusion has been reached by using reviews on *Amazon* and *Goodreads* as well as my own extensive reading that, although it is difficult to create a sequel of equal success to that which the first enjoyed, it is possible to write a compelling sequel memoir. However,

looking at this list of techniques required to write a compelling sequel, it becomes clear that all these items are equally important in the writing of the first memoir. I would go further and postulate that, unless the first memoir is successful, it is highly unlikely that the second memoir will be successful, even if it is compelling. It is therefore imperative that a compelling first memoir is also written. As the story, in the first memoir, is usually written about the most interesting period in the memoirist's life, this story may engage the reader until the end of that narrative due to the story being told but unless these techniques are also applied to the writing of it, the overall effect may not be sufficiently compelling to persuade them to return to read the sequel.

Consideration should also be given to the potential readership of the sequel and the author should be aware that due to changes in him/herself and the 'I' identity that is found in the memoirs, as well as a possible difference in the theme of the stories, the audience may be different to that which read the first memoir. A memoir that may be compelling for one readership will not necessarily be compelling to those who read the first memoir.

Following on from this work a further project could be to write an entire memoir as flash fiction. Although my attempt at flash fiction did not achieve the desired purpose, this may not be the case if flash was written initially rather than used to pare down the existing narrative. After writing the flash, high definition scene and dialogue could be added.

The research journey has led me to unexpected places and to my mind, it has certainly led to a marked improvement in my memoir 'After the Nightmare.' I have added high definition scenes, additional dialogue and used other techniques, which have all had a positive effect on the narrative. This research has also been a ground floor entry into the hitherto largely unexplored area of the sequel memoir. There is further work to be done in this field. Several areas that I would like to research further include a deeper examination of the dichotomy between the narrating and narrated 'I' characters and how these 'I' characters change between memoirs. In my case, the 'I' characters did not change greatly between the first and second memoir however, if I was to write and examine myself from birth to the end of my first marriage and compare that 'I' with those of my first and sequel memoirs, the dichotomy would be great. Finally, as I am in a position to rework my first memoir using the techniques outlined in this thesis I intend to ensure that the first memoir is of the highest standard I can achieve with the aim of ensuring the success of my sequel.

Appendix A: Literature Lists (Methodology)

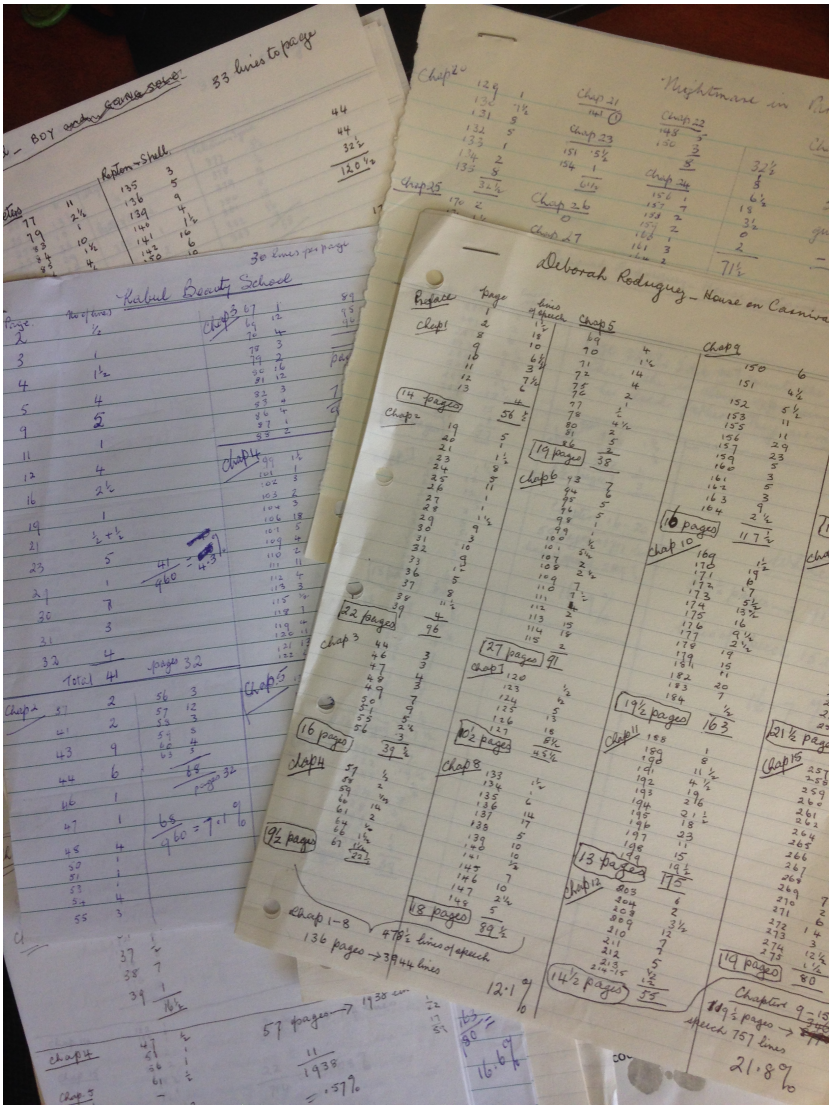
Practice-Led	Qualitative	Auto-ethnography	Ethics	Scholarly Writing	Historical	Textual Analysis	Taste
Brien 2006 Webb & Brien 2011 Barrett & Bolt 2007 Bacon 2014a, 2014b Magee 2006 Bilsborow 2013 Green and Haseman 2006 Green 2007 McNamara 2012 Haseman 2007 Bourke & Neilsen 2004 Fortescue 2010 Burr 2007 Webb 2012 Gray 1996 Grech 2006 Hecq 2012a O'Connell & Dyment 2011 Schön 1983 Bullough Jr. and Pinnegar 2001 Hogan 1995 MacRobert 2013 Smith & Dean 2009	Morgan & Smircich 1980 Wolcott 2001 Gray & Malins 2004 Haseman 2007 Berger & Luckmann 1966 Lincoln and Guba 1985 Joubish et al 2011 Knowles et al 2008	Brown 2011 Ellis & Bochner 2000 Pace 2012 Ellis 2004	Arnold 2009 Eakin 2001b Kim 2012 Carlin 2005 Smythe et al 2000 Carey 2008 Eakin 2001b Nelson 2007 Murray, S. J. & Holmes 2013 Cantelli 2012 Gardner 2011	Barley 2006 Cronin 2008 Brien 2008 Krauth & Webb 2006 Rendle-Short 2010 Carson & Brien 2013 Happell 2008 Staiger 1965	Plato &Jowett1927 Kennedy 2010 Berger and Luckman 1966 Mayoral 2012 Merleau-Ponty 1989 Brien & Webb 2011 Eisner 2002 Devlin 2010 Skirry n.d. McCormick n.d. Rickards 2015 Crotty 1998 Burston 2003 Wolff 1983 Barratt 2011 Kuhn 1996 Pollard 1952	Bourke & Neilsen 2004	Zinsser 1985 Barley (2006) Bordieu 1984

Scholarly Works on Memoir

Seminal	Genre and Boundaries	Truth	Sequel	Reviews & Other	Autobiographical Pact	Tense	Embodiment	Voice	Memory
Couser 2012 Gutkind 2004, 2009, 2012 Yagoda 2009 Smith and Watson 2010 Eakin 2005	Miller, N. K. 2007 Miller, 1984 Trahan 2008 Brien 2002,2004,2014 Lim 2009 Yagoda & Delorenzo 2011 Clark 2006 Eakin 2004 Brien & Gutkind 2000 Gornick 1996 Grimes 2005 Stone 2011	Miller 2007 Brien 2002 Wyatt 2006 Finneran Clark 2006 Denham 2010 Yagoda & DeLorenzo 2011 Cheney 1991 Gutkind 1997 Sacks 2013 Schacter 1996 Lejeune 1989	Yabroff 2010 Staskiewicz 2009 Donofrio 2013	Rippon 2014 Streitfeld 2012 Hoy 2012 Creagh 2006 Hall 2011 Macmin 2012 MWS 2013 Wyndam 2013 Nelson 2007 Jansen 2013 Sohn 2009 Bolger 2009 Goffe 2014 Broughton 2013 Jolly 2011 Lasley 1994	Lejeune 1989 Denham 2010	Lejeune et al 1977 Piero 2014	Adelaide 2007 Krauth 2010 Morrison 2009 Viljoen 2010 Taylor 2011 Borren 2013 Murray & Holmes (2013) Merleau-Ponty 1989 Dufourcq 2014 Prodromou 2012	Adelaide 2007 Karr 2015 Yabroff 2010	Eakin 2005 Sprengnether (2001b) Sacks (2013) Schacter (1996) Goode 2009 Shusterman 2011

Scene	Identity	Metaphor	Dialogue	Creativity					
Scofield 2006	Eakin 2001a, 2004, 2005, Butte 2005 Baldwin 2005, 2013 Bruner 2004 Cavarero 1997 Gornick 1996 Schwalm 2014	Hecq 2012b	Hart 2011 King 2002 Levitin 1995 Rosenfeld 2007 Gutkind 2012 Cheney 1991 Finneran Gerard 1996 Myers 2013	Begley et al 2009 Gardner 2011 Mann/Cadman 2014 Williams 2015					

Appendix B: Examples of Dialogue Counting



Appendix C: Data for Star reviews on Amazon and Goodreads

| | AMAZON | | |

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