

# Creative Writing Gallery

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## **A Darker Side of Me**

### **by Vanessa, Year 8 2004**

My battle started approximately two years ago. For me I don't think there was ever any official cause, even though experts say there is usually always some kind of trigger or stem to the complication. I think my problem was an overall issue with the way I saw my body. Maybe it was the light hearted jokes with friends about ourselves being too plump or chubby around the sides or maybe it was even the pressures of school constantly weighing down on me like a brick set in ever sinking foundations, whatever the cause it certainly changed my life in ways I never believed possible.

Most girls tend to at some point of their lives see themselves with some sort of imperfection, whether it be to do with their image, personality, lifestyle or what so ever. Truthfully speaking I never thought something as drastic as that could happen to me, but then again who ever does? We always find ourselves saying something along the lines of "It won't happen to me so why bother myself by worrying about it?"

What we don't understand is that anything is likely to happen to even the most stable people at any time in their lives – the future is unpredictable.

I never saw it coming, although there were probably unmistakable signs.

It all started one day after I had overindulged in a "chocolate hit." I found myself under the misconception that if all that went down I would increase my size of underwear by at least one whole size. In a fit of brainstorming as to all the possible solutions to get out there and lose some weight to make up for that which would be gained from that afternoons session of being a "gobble guts," I recalled something I had been told by an older peer named Anne just weeks ago (a thought which should have been pushed to the back of my mind where it came from while I still had the chance).

I had been told of a quick fix to a full stomach, where the food was brought back up through the act of inducing yourself to vomit. According to Anne it was a simple task of just thrusting fingers down your throat in order to kind of choke on them and bring back up the food. Anne looked great and if she could do it what trouble would I have?

I shuddered at the thought of trying to make myself vomit but I was desperate and already my guilty conscience was getting the better of me. I could almost hear the little voice in my subconscious mind nagging persistently at me saying, "come on just once try it once and then everything will be back to normal. One time will not hurt." I don't know how, but foolishly I let the unrelenting thought overwhelm me.

I found myself staring down into the jumble of thick brown muck floating in clumps on the surface of the water. Realising what I had just done a strike of panic and confusion took a hold of me. What had I just done?

Breaking my chain of thought came the swift footsteps on the wooden floorboards followed by a shrill voice...

"Stacey! Stacey, I need to use the toilet and I simply can not hold on any longer."

"Mum," I squeak out in a sudden effort to sound as confident as possible, "just hang on one tick I'll be straight off, just having a few women troubles at the moment," I add, feeling pleased with myself for my quick thinking.

"Ah I see, well if you need to talk about it you know I'm always here,"

"Mum!" I say arrogantly. Sometimes mothers can be so embarrassing I think as I thank my lucky stars she hasn't just burst her way in.

The sound of the whooshing toilet echoes around the house as I emerge looking a little flushed.

"Thank you darling," mum utters as she rushes through the door hurriedly.

Phew that had been a close one and I was determined not to let something like that happen again but I had to admit that I did feel a heck of a lot better knowing that most of those calories had gone down the drain not to be seen again.

Although I had promised myself not to do it again and that it would only be a one off thing, as the days went by I found myself doing it at an increasing rate for I found it to be the easiest way to “undo the past.” Lunch time breaks I would wait until the bell had rung before I quickly ducked in, did my business and got out again before anyone had even noticed me missing. As a result of forever having an empty stomach I would always be hungry and on the look out for food which then in turn would just result in me bringing every last drop of it up.

People noticed the increase of my eating habit and put it down to hormonal growth or simply an increase in my appetite. What they didn't realize was that comments they made on the increase of fatty food in my diet such as, “You'll put on weight if you continue to eat like that,” would only encourage me to keep doing what I was.

It was Sunday afternoon and I had just gone for a walk down to the beach. On returning I raided the fridge for something to fill my appetite. “Apple pie!” I exclaimed, minutes after there I was over the toilet bowl again. Doing it was a nightmare but it made me feel better.

A week went by and my problem only continued to get worse. Now not only was it degrading my health without me knowing, but it was also starting to depress and tire me.

At this point I decided it was time to let someone else in on my secret, I felt I couldn't deal with it any longer so I told Anne that I was doing what she had recommended me to do, as I knew she was also doing it herself.

Well, did that result in catastrophe or what! Anne congratulated me on my initiative to do something about my weight and as she stated, “You are getting fat Stacey, and I'm glad that you have finally decided to take things into your own hands and do something about it before it gets worse.” My gosh, did that have a deep impact on my self confidence. If not only myself but others were thinking that of me, then what hope did I have but persevere with what I was doing to my body, and hope that I would benefit from it somehow. Such a funny thing to say when you look at it outside the square, but when you are the person put in that position you are not thinking how ridiculous you're acting, and all the consequences it could have. All you want is to get rid of the potential pounds fast and efficiently.

On the home front things were fine, not one of my parents or older siblings suspected a thing and I was going to try my darned hardest to make sure that they didn't find out either. As I was certain that this would just become a temporary occurrence, just until I was satisfied with the size of my waist, I felt no need to concern my parents with the suspicion that their daughter was up to something.

It was about two weeks into the whole saga when I realized it was becoming more of a habit than a convenience but still, I was fooled by the misguiding promises of Anne that it would make me look and feel better.

Although I was not worried by what I was doing I did have a growing fear for Anne who was now becoming a little too thin for her own good. She wouldn't admit to anyone about what she was doing but I knew she was in deep over her head.

I mean there is a good weight to be but she was just overdoing it a little too much, man, was she taking this weight thing seriously.

Meanwhile I had my own problems to deal with, my homework was piling up and the pangs in my stomach were gradually getting worse.

I decided to visit the doctor. Of course I wasn't going to tell him of my new resolution to lose weight but I would ask him what was wrong with my stomach. Never did I ever stop to think that the cause of it might be due to the way I was practically abusing my body.

So there I was in the doctor's clinic tapping my fingers down in a rather rhythmic tune on the arm of the chair, when I overheard the doctor in the next room talking to Anne's mother.

“Doctor I'm so worried where do we go from here?”

“We get her trained professional help and we progress from there.”

As I sat on the edge of my seat listening anxiously I gathered as much information I needed to tell me what was wrong. From what I gathered, Anne had been admitted into hospital on the basis that she had an eating disorder.

That was all the motivation I needed, before you could say “jack black” I had cancelled my appointment and found myself running across the football oval on my way to the hospital.

I bolted up the squeaky clean hospital corridor in such a fluster, searching across the boards for the critical care unit that when I reached the front desk I was out of breath by the time I had said “What room is Anne in?”

The kindly woman at the desk directed me to the room where Anne was being monitored constantly. I moved across the floor to open the door but the woman moved into the doorway and blocked me, “I’m sorry sweetie, but you’re not allowed in there just yet. She is not quite up to visitors yet.” Tensely I stepped back and let my body catch up to my head so I could fully concentrate. The woman walked back to her desk and sat down, making sure to keep a close eye on me. I stepped up to the window and glared through the wired glass. Although I hadn’t noticed it until now, her frame was tiny and her skin seemed to be sunken into her face. How had she let it get like this? And as I continued to stare in on her pale complexion it occurred to me that this was the effect it had on people I had to admit that I had a problem and if I didn’t tell someone I could end up like this too. I was mid way into secondary school, I had too much to lose.

It was at this moment that I made the decision to change my future for the better. I left the hospital with a depressed feeling, promising Anne in my thoughts that I would come back and see her. I was going to be there for her all the way. Even though I had never considered her to be the best friend a girl could ask for, she looked so helpless lying there with all those tubes stuck in her body, as if it wasn’t damaged enough!

I returned home to have mum mention it to me.

“I know, I’ve just been to visit her in the hospital mum.” That alone was enough to make me burst into tears. I broke down in front of mum and admitted everything to her. She was rather good about it taking it all in her stride, as I know it would have come as a shock to her.

Mum took me to see the doctor and he recommended us to the best counsellor for this kind of thing.

I found out that Anne had been admitted to hospital because she had torn her stomach lining due to prolonged, induced vomiting and her potassium levels were dangerously low.

Looking down at my food now, I no longer see calories; I see the key to my health and wellbeing although it is hard sometimes when I feel like I’ve indulged not to go back to my old ways. But I’m stronger now, it’s almost as if I’ve risen from the dead, or shed a new skin. I’m me and no longer will social pressures hold me back from living life the way I want it. And I’m a new person, risen from the ashes.

“You going to eat all that?” Asks mum.

“You bet I am!” I reply with a giggle, as I stuff the fork of spaghetti hastily into my mouth.

Without regret, because..... once it’s done there’s no turning back!

Mum gives me the biggest smile as we eat our calorie packed dinner.

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## **Another School Day, Another Gothic Story!**

### **Samantha, Year 8**

#### **Chapter 1**

“Slowly she crept down the stairs. As she neared the door she felt the cool night breeze sweep across her face. Suddenly, there in front of her stood....

"The MURDER! Blood and guts everywhere. Ah! Ah! She's dead!" exclaimed Morgarna, sarcastically from the back row of the classroom.

"Morgarna! Be quite. We don't need you sarcasm," scolded Mr Under who was clearly unimpressed.

"But Sir she does have a point," stated Sameka who was finding the story utterly boring. "We all know how it will end."

"Nobody asked for your opinion, Sameka," remarked Nicholas in a chauvinist fashion.

"the KILLER! What could she do? Run? As the killer lunged towards her she let out a blood curdling scream ..."

"Ha! Ha! Maddie, stop it, give me back my pencil case," pleaded Melanie as Maddie through her pencil case across the room aiming at the classroom rubbish bin.

"Orh! Would you two grow up! Some people are trying to watch this you know," commented Sara.

"Ladies, ladies please. As much as I'd like to see you fight this out my ar...male intuition says you all should chill," shouted Lukas as he voiced one of his usual 'chill' talks.

"Class be quite!" bellowed Mr Under. "Or it'll be detention- after school for anyone who interrupts!"

"You may continue Sir," smart-mouthed Ephrod.

"What did I just say?" yelled Mr Under in an outburst of annoyance.

"Err...I dunno Sir," answered Ephrod, cautiously.

"Can you please continue Sir?" asked Mitch who just wanted Mr Under to get on with the story.

"DETENTION!!! Morgarna, Sameka, Nicholas, Maddie, Melanie, Sara, Lukas, Ephrod and Mitch- after school," bellowed Mr Under who was fed up with the antics of his year 8 English class.

## Chapter 2

"Sameka gazed up at the ceiling as Mr Under continued his 'that's no way to behave in class' lecture.

"Sir, can we go yet?" wined Ephrod.

"Are you smart- mouthing me AGAIN Ephrod?" questioned Mr Under as his voice rose a few decibels.

"But Sir, it is illegal to keep us in after school without a full 24 hours notice," clarified Sara.

"Unfortunately, Sara is right. You may all leave," permitted Mr Under.

Quickly, they walked along the corridor and headed down the stairs past room 16, all eager to get home after a long and boring school day. Lukas was the first to notice their problem.

"You've got to be kidding me!" exclaimed Lukas. "The exits locked!"

"Well try the other exits then, stupid!" replied Nicholas as he headed in the opposite direction to check for an unlocked exit.

All exits were locked.

"What the hell is going on?" asked Maddie who was getting agitated.

"OK, so all the exits are locked but what I don't understand is why we appear to be the only people left at school," explicated Sameka who was clearly confused by the whole situation.

"This is getting weird," confessed Sara who was known to be scared easily.

## Chapter 3

Things only got worse. As the afternoon progressed into evening it was time to face up to reality - they were trapped.

"That's it! I'm breaking a window," declared Ephrod who had, had enough of the whole situation.

"Ar... that mightn't be such a good idea," uttered Melanie as she pointed towards the windows.

"Look!"

The group spun around in shock. Staring them in the face was a dark and evil night sky, highlighted by streaks of lightning and loud cracks of thunder in the distance. But it was the millions upon millions of jet-black crows and vultures swarming around the stormy night sky that had them in a state of shock and terror. Simultaneously, as if they knew they were being watched, the birds began to thrash up against the windows at high speeds. The group stood in silence, frozen to the spot and awaiting the sound of breaking glass. But it never came. A bright red glowing light coming from within the corridor instantly repelled the birds.

Suddenly, a high pitched scream filled the air. Instantly the dark night sky was forgotten. The focus was turned to Nicholas and Lukas as they disappeared into a bright red ball of flame, capturing Sara at the last moment and taking her with them. It was the bright red ball of flame which had repelled the crows.

“What the hell just happened?” demanded Ephrod who could not believe his eyes.

“We’ve got to split up and find them,” explained Mitch.

“I dunno guys. Is splitting up a good idea? We don’t know what they’re capable of,” expressed Sameka who was worried about Nicholas and Lukas’ state of mind.

“We are wasting time. We have to find them - for Sara’s sake,” commanded Morgarna. “Maddie and Melanie search B block. Ephrod and Sameka search C block. Mitch and I will search the rest of A block. Good luck - I think you’ll need it.

#### **Chapter 4**

Slowly with caution Melanie and Maddie walked along the bottom corridor of B block. Chatting to keep themselves from going insane with fear, they checked each classroom carefully for any sign of Nicholas, Lukas or Sameka. Reaching the end of the corridor, they began to climb the stairs to the top floor.

“Maddie, did you hear that?” asked Melanie who was half way up the stairs with Maddie following closely behind.

“Hear what?” replied Maddie who had heard nothing.

“I don’t know anymore - I must be starting to hear things,” assumed Melanie with a hint of despair in her voice.

Melanie turned to continue up the stairs only to witness a massive spiked pendulum heading down the stairs straight at her!

“Run!” screamed Melanie desperately.

But it was too late. As Maddie, after hearing Melanie’s cry turned to run a second spiked pendulum hit her from the other direction to the first. The spikes pierced through Maddie’s body, sending a spray of blood down the corridor. At the same time Melanie was flung back by the force of the second pendulum hitting Maddie and hit from behind by the first swinging pendulum. The sound of the two pendulums colliding was the sound that ended Maddie and Melanie’s lives.

Meanwhile, Sameka and Ephrod were slowly getting more and more agitated.

“If we don’t find them soon...well, I don’t really want to think about that,” admitted Sameka as she began to go up the stairs.

Nearing the top of the stairs Sameka noticed a dark burnt mark on the side of the wall.

“Hey Ephrod, look at this,” said Sameka inquisitively. “I think they’ve been here.”

Cautiously, they continued up the stairs. They could see an unmistakably unusual bright red glowing light coming from the other end of the corridor. They approached quickly.

“Hold on! We can’t just barge in there - we don’t know what they are capable of,” explained Sameka to an extremely agitated Ephrod. “And besides we have to tell...”

Sameka was cut off mid sentence by a desperate plea.

"Help! Please, help me! Let me go! No don't! Please..."

Immediately Ephrod and Sameka barged through the door to find Lukas and Nicholas hovering over Sara who was huddled in the corner pleading for help. Ephrod took a swing at Lukas and managed to get him in a head lock. But Nicholas was quick. He reacted immediately, shooting a ball of flame at Ephrod, narrowly missing him by centimetres. This gave Sameka enough time to make her way to Sara who was quivering in the corner.

"Sara! Sara, are you OK?" asked Sameka knowing how stupid her question seemed.

"I don't know. My head hurts," replied Sara shaking all over.

"What is going on Sara? Why are they acting like this?" questioned Sameka who was looking for answers.

"I really don't know Sameka, it's like they are possessed. Nicholas is shooting balls of flame and Lukas is talking in gibberish," quivered Sara in a small whisper. "What are we going to do?"

"Get out of here!" shouted Sameka as a ball of flame whooshed past her face.

Everything happened so quickly. Lukas was the first die. Ephrod had him in a head lock but was having difficulty staying in control as Nicholas keep the fire balls flying. Using every ounce of strength in his body Ephrod pushed Lukas into the wall. Unexpectedly, a knife as though appearing from nowhere sliced through the wall stabbing Lukas in the heart. Sara let out an instant scream of panic. A white faced Ephrod turned to an expressionless Sameka.

"We are in over our heads. Let's get out of here," emphasised Ephrod in a state of panic.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Not so fast- I'm going to kill you all," snarled Nicholas who was acting as if overcome by demonic powers.

Nicholas lunged at Ephrod. Ephrod was ready for Nicholas this time, diving in the opposite direction to Nicholas. Nicholas was taken off guard.

He wasn't able to stop. The loud sound of glass breaking filled the room. Nicholas fell and fell. But he never hit the ground. Half way down his body was eaten by vultures. Sara screamed in desperation. They ran.

## **Chapter 5**

They couldn't believe what they had just witnessed. How could it have happened? Lukas killed by a knife appearing out of a wall and Nicholas falling to a horrible death. It was more than they could bare.

Quickly Ephrod, Sara and Sameka sprinted along the top corridor of C block, continuing on over the ramp that connected C block to B block. Then they received their second shock - they had found Maddie and Melanie.

"Melanie! Maddie! No! God please no!" screamed Sara

"I can't take anymore of this," sobbed Ephrod helplessly in reply.

"We have got to get out of here and find the others - if they are still alive," said Sameka in a desperate effort to keep the group together. "Come on they will be in A block."

Reluctantly, Ephrod and Sara followed Sameka as she crossed over the second ramp that connected B block to A block.

"Morgarna! Mitch!" called Sameka scanning the top corridor of A block.

To her left she saw movement. On instinct, Sameka went to investigate, Ephrod and Sara following close behind.

Sameka out a blood curdling scream.

There in front of her lay Mr Under in a pool of blood.

"Is he dead?" asked Ephrod walking over to examine the body, with caution.

**BIG MISTAKE!**

As Ephrod lent down to check for a pulse a force, invisible to the naked eye, pulled Ephrod up towards the roof.

“Ephrod! Ephrod!” screamed Sara in panic.

But Sara’s screams could not save him. Blades suddenly appeared slicing through his body killing Ephrod instantly.

“Oh God! Oh God! Help!!!” exclaimed Sameka frantically as she ran in search of Morgarna, Mitch and Sara after being spilt from Sara when she had ran in an uncontrollable outburst of panic after witnessing Ephrod’s death.

Sameka found Morgarna half way along the corridor - Morgarna had been looking for her.

“Sameka, I am so glad I found you. Come on, Mitch and Sara are upstairs,” beckoned Morgarna gripping Sameka’s hand and walking along beside her to calm Sameka who was shaking all over with fear.

Sameka saw Sara first. Mitch was hovering over her - his hands covered in her blood, knife laying beside her - the blade dripping with her blood.

“Sara! No! Sara!” cried Sameka tears running down her face, fear rushing through her body.

“What? What happened?” sobbed Sameka through her tears.

Mitch’s reply was subtle. “I killed her.”

“Indeed he did Sameka,” sniggered Morgarna with a glint of pure evil in her eye. “After all - guns don’t kill people, we do!”

“Now that’s my version of a horror story,” emphasized Morgan as the bell rang, concluding another year 8 English lesson.

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## **Anzac Day – one student’s view**

### **The 2004 Anzac Day address to students**

#### **Melissa, Year 12**

All of us, as members of the James Fallon High School community, should be proud of our school’s involvement in Anzac Day.

As you know, every year our school has a large number of students and staff who gather together on the morning of April 25th, proudly wearing our school uniform, ready to march down Dean Street.

This year was no exception. On Anzac Day Sunday we had about 80 students and staff marching; by far the largest group from any school.

We marched with the veterans who fought all over the world and in a number of different wars, with family members of veterans not here to march themselves, with people currently serving in the armed forces, and with a range of other school and community groups.

I always wonder, as we’re walking along, why so many people in the crowd are clapping for us. We haven’t fought in any wars. We’re only a group of school students walking from one end of our main street to the other.

Well, I think the reason is that by simply participating in this march we are showing our community and our Anzac veterans that we are thankful, and that we do remember the sacrifice that was made by past generations for us. That’s why the people in the crowd clap, and that’s why we should be proud.

After the march, our two school captains and two vice-captains attended the memorial service at the monument where we laid a wreath on behalf of our school in honour of the Anzacs. Also, on the Monday before Anzac Day we went to a dedication service held by the War Widows Guild, where we placed a white cross in the sand in honour of their fallen spouses.

At that ceremony there was a widow who turns 100 in May this year, so it's likely she knew people who fought and died in World War One.

Our school's participation has also gone well beyond taking part in the Anzac Day march – some years ago students from James Fallon High School helped in the consecration of plaques at the war memorial for each individual from Albury killed in war. There are more than 200 plaques in all, surrounding the Monument which was opened on Anzac day 1925, on the 10th anniversary of the Anzacs landing at Gallipoli.

In another year we sent a special school plaque to Gallipoli itself, where one of our teachers attended the Anzac Day dawn service at Anzac Cove, and this plaque was placed at the Lone Pine memorial along with other tributes from across Australia.

But there are also many very local ways that Albury always remembers. Noreuil Park is named after a battlefield on the western front where Albury men fought and died. Tarakan Avenue, just near our school, is named after another battlefield.

At the Albury Council Chambers there is a book displayed, called the 'Remembrance Book'. It is leather-bound and beautifully hand written. In its pages are the names of all the local men and women who served in World War One. Every day a page is turned. Every day a hero is remembered.

You have now heard the ways we remember, but why do we remember? The actual Gallipoli campaign was a failure. It didn't achieve what it set out to do. So again we ask, why remember?

We remember because of the sacrifice they made – the sacrifice of their health, their happiness, and even their lives. In fact, it's still a sacrifice that's being made today by those Australians fighting in the war against terror.

Our country continues to be a free, united, peaceful and democratic nation. That's why we should remember what others have sacrificed for our 'Australian way of life'.

It has not come cheaply.

Lest we forget.

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## **Dad** **by Daniel, Year 12**

"Dad! Can we go to the beach?"

"Dad! Can we make a sandcastle?"

"Dad! Can we go fishing?"

The crowd readies itself for the beginning of Mr. Magic's marvellous show of Mystery. Their eagerness etched into their faces; intricately detailed; facades of innocence.

"Now my boy, look at this. Next time you come out here this'll all be finished and we'll take the whole weekend off and go camping. Yep, camping. And while we're there I'm going to show you how to fish."

"Great dad! I can't wait."

"That's my boy; can ya give me a hand?"

Anticipation mounts as Mr. Magic tries to undo the knot he tied around his own neck; simultaneously riding his unicycle through a thirty foot ring of fire... cracking a safe combination and creating lasting world peace.

"Sorry son."

“Yeah, just as soon as this is finished...”

“I’m really tired.”

The crowd amplifies their adulation. Their idol does not disappoint. A truly remarkable performance lays them in the aisle; enraptured. The support crew nervously shuffles; this escape was a close one.

“Oh gee dad!”

“You rule mate, you’re really the best!”

“We can do it all, right after your rest!”

Time passes; the main attraction is forgotten in a torrent of support acts. Days Pass; the seasons dance; their constant ritual of birth and rebirth stretching throughout the years. The scene changes.

“Okay... I know we’ve been through a lot son, and it hasn’t been easy for me to come here and say this to you... but... well, your mother said that...well, I um...I want to make amends... a fresh start... let’s do all the things I said we could... come on, It’ll be fun, we can get to know each other all over again...”

Too Little. Too late. Too Bad.

“Get Bent.”

Wading in a pool of murky sharks.

Sandcastles washed away in a sea of regrets.

The fish; the biggest yet; the one that got away.

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## DJ Journey by Doug

He stood, slightly weak in the knees at first. He was a small man, but being elevated above the heads of others gave him a great rush of adrenaline. Age-old luck, which everyone experiences at some point in their lives, was going through his head at this moment.

“I’ve double checked everything, so it should work.” He paused.

“It worked when the room was empty, so why shouldn’t it work now. Nothing has changed.”

The young DJ stood before his crowd of ten thousand people, all staring in awe at what this new young-gun could bring about. Initially there was medium to low level music playing before he entered, which was the kind of music they would play at intermission for a Rock Eisteddfod.

The DJ shook off his nerves and waited till the precise moment to begin the first of many surprises for the crowd that night. He stared out into the foggy oblivion, webbed with decorations and illuminated by the sharp perfection of lasers.

Boom! The first surprise of the night, an incredibly pounding, extremely loud and resonating beat, with eardrum tantalising tunes and rhythms. Some time into his set, the young DJ felt he had the crowd in his right hand, like butter, morphing, mastering and mending the broken ties between the end of one song and the start of another.

This young DJ was smooth, no one could tell when one song ended and another began. He followed the same principle as plant and tree life. As you drove across the country the changes in the trees were so subtle no one would notice quantum changes unless they glanced out the window only every so often.

The journey this DJ created went from highs to lows, and every which way and back again. This was the first time he had played at a big event, and the crowd was in love, as one with the music.

As the journey neared its end and the sun began to rise and penetrate the cold, natural morning fog, the young DJ walked back through the crowd, took off his mask, and exposed an unknown face to a now completely universal sound.

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## DYSTOPIA

### Dylan

Thud. Thud. Thud. A few heavy drops slam into the hard dry ground. They have little effect in quenching the scorched land. The rain, this pure water rain, gradually becomes more frequent, the dust finally settles. In the few pockets of road that still contain bitumen, all cracked and worse to travel on than their dirt counterparts, the water is directed by the cracks to the earth below and around. At first the land is reluctant to let the water quench its thirst but gradually as the rain continues the ground has its first real taste of the life giving sustenance in years.

The once tall buildings seem tall again in the now pounding rain. It thuds on the few glass panels that had not melted away or been smashed in the Transaction because they had been too high to reach. Carpet on an exposed floor that is unreachable from the ground soaks up the water. Soil in a pot, spoiled and old, the plant that inhabited it long dead, breathes in the water like a person inhaling air after holding their breath too long.

Down below what can now be called the tops of these buildings but once was quite low the few people out had long since run and hid for fear of the precipitation. All but two. The old man stands facing the setting sun and looking up at the sky, expression of ambivalence on his face. The young girl stands pulling on her grandfather's arm, urging him to come with her. Like her mother she had never known anything other than a dry barren world. The clothes they wear are nothing more than rags. Hair now drenched, for the girl this is an entirely new experience, rags too, drenched and heavy. Panicking now, the girl lets out a wordless cry for her grandfather to run and hide with her. The old man pushes her and she stumbles backwards into the mud. Most people had never seen mud, never touched it, felt it; if they did, most would lose a hand, or foot - if they were lucky. Crying the young girl turns and runs for cover knowing she will never see her grandfather again.

The old man stands and looks up at the clouds. He had known this was eventually going to happen, he was ready. Though older than all in his tribe, and many in the other tribes that they trade with, he would not have been considered old before the Transaction. He is a valued member of his tribe.

He remembers the time before. A tattoo on his right, an army badge, means little now. His scars he wears with pride, his wrinkles he does not. Bowing his head he promises his old friends he will see them soon, his wife he will hold, his brother, his family, his friends.

The rain begins to burn the back of his neck. More raindrops hit their mark, his body begins to burn. They eat away the skin, hair and clothing. He does not run, he faces the rain, he does not scream and cry in pain, pain is his retribution.

His eyes widen in his melting face. He panics and turns but never gets to scan the haze of rain. His lifeless body crashes to the ground; all that would remain when the rain subsides is a half melted skeleton and a few mechanical organs.

The girl runs as hard and as fast as she can. But she doesn't make it to the shelter before the burning sensation hits her back. The rain falling on her now dissolves her rags to nothing but she keeps running and running.

The girl, naked, sits in the entrance to her tribe's shelter drenched in a water that prevents anyone from comforting her as she weeps for the loss of her beloved grandfather.

## Einstein watches the clock

### Nathan, Year 12

When time allows, you will be content to sit and not do anything. It is only when time does not allow that you spring into action, always coming up “just that bit short”. It is now part of the human condition to say: “imagine if you had started earlier”. Well here you are again, starting when time is not generous, imagining if you had just started that little bit earlier.

This is of course a trend in your life, and a trend in the world in which you live. People live to be late. And live to do a half assed job. The people who are good at whatever they do just tend to start less late, and do a three-quarter assed job. What is it that stops you taking the step to success? What is it about you that has let you leave this until a point where it will never live up to your expectations? You knew that this would happen; yet you chose not to begin. You CHOSE.

You have always viewed time as a friend, until the point where he turns on you and strikes you down with furious temper. You always make up with him though, over drinks on a weekend, or meeting with friends after school. Time allows you to enjoy yourself, to be with friends. But time always wants something in return. This is always the point of conflict in your relationship. Time wants you to repay him for your enjoyment of life, with the chores of duty, sadness, anger, and finally, time wants you to die. You have always wanted a close relationship with time, yet his demands always seem unfair. Is your fleeting happiness worth the sadness you feel most days? Is enjoyment worth the disappointment you acknowledge within yourself? Are your experiences worth your mortality?

At this point, as you turn from the monitor, time will not look you in the eye. He sits in the corner, crouched with his gaze at the floor. His head shakes side to side in disappointment. Time is always judging you. Without exception he is always disappointed. His reflection in the glass is crushing as you try to make the most of what he has given you. This is an obligation that you have never met before.

The words drip from your fingertips, but none of them say anything of what you are currently thinking, what you are currently feeling. It is not time who is a bad friend.

It is you.

Time gives you opportunity. He gives you a medium in which to exist. You repay him by trampling on his gifts. You discard them like last week’s mail. You insult your best companion at every instant with your ignorance and waste. Yet time still keeps presenting himself at your door begging for commitment. Time is always there for you, his compassion unrelenting. You know time is the best friend you will ever have; yet you push him away. You don’t know why you discard your best friend.

You think that time probably knows too much about you. It is unnerving that time could use what he knows of you to hurt you. He has known you longer than anyone else. He remembers you before you can even remember yourself. But how could your best friend want to hurt you? How many other people has time hurt? This point is disturbing, as time has hurt everyone at some point. He will hurt you. He will hurt you because you continually treat him badly.

Is time repaying you now? At the biggest hurdle in your life till this point, has time decided to abandon you for someone more deserving of his companionship and attention? It is strange to type with the numbness that this thought causes you. Time has walked out the door and you are now more alone than you have ever been. You have always discarded him, but when he discards himself, it smarts beyond your comprehension.

So the words continue, dull and lifeless like unkempt hair. Sprawling out on the screen without inspiration. You bore yourself with cliché phrases, and second hand ideas. They are words only, with no context and no relevance and no humour. These are just a collection of characters, without character. Time would allow thought, he would allow consideration, and he would allow change with retrospect. You now have none. You have only sickening contemplation.

It is strange that questions are now your answers. You question things to answer them, and you are internally defeated by the infinite loop that ensues. In time, you could always find the answer. Why did time run out now? You can't find an answer, but a question presents itself: Why now and not before? And another, and another, and another, and another.

You debate the reasons you are writing this at all. You hope that it is for you, but you cannot suppress the thought that you are just completing a chore for someone else. The most valuable thing you have access to, is being thrown at someone that doesn't even know your name. You are swapping a friend for a stranger. This is painful, tiring, and seemingly without a point if you cannot find an answer that isn't a question.

You now wish that time would come back. You could make it up to him by making it up to yourself. You could write something that would change both of you. With time you could write something of value, which spoke in tongues familiar to every person.

Wishing is an interesting concept to you. People wish for the things they can't have. That is why they can only wish for them. Wishes are a person's fears coming to the surface in the form of desire. What people really wish for, is to not need to wish at all. You know this better than anyone. You wish for the things only time brings with him. You never wished before, because you never feared that they would go away. Time would help you now. He would influence the drivel that has smeared itself on your consciousness with his overbearing stance. You long to fear time's temper, because it would drive you to be better.

Since time's running out you have become an object without the gifts that a human has bestowed upon them by the world. Simply a machine, who's output, is words. Whose inputs are second hand, damaged thoughts. Your memories are just a stack of useless data without the context that time so generously provided. You produce a product that says nothing of the manufacturer except a serial number: 13396930. A stranger consumes your offerings, with a simple number to cover the payment.

Now you realize that time does not just look after you. He serves everybody in some way. Simultaneously he is the enemy of the dying, friend of youth, healer to the hurt, and companion to the lonely. You are jealous of the people who have time now. You miss him like sleep. You need him to sleep. Time's absence drives you now. It drives you to earn his respect. You type now trying to justify time's attention, trying to justify your own effort by his return.

Slowly colour builds on the page. Reflections shimmer in the text as your mind releases. You produce goods now for time to read over and judge. Time's judgment is welcomed now as your disappointments serve only to encourage. Disappointment drives experience. You want to experience something that is without disappointment. You want to experience euphoria, and more over you want to express it to another by understanding it completely.

You now write, not for any marker. You write for yourself and you write for an answer. Every word that hits the screen now takes on an importance because each seeks a truth. With truth comes realization. Realization is your perception of all that is around you, and everything within you. While your fingers slap the keys, it is your mind that now writes the words. Your mind. Your mind is no longer a blank page; eagerly it accepts thoughts with words. The page is full, and so another is needed. Time does pass but you are too busy to notice his presence.

White and black, in different shapes and configurations explain you. They are a semaphore arrangement that the holder must decode. Tack, tack, tack. Time will provide an experience, and an answer to you. But for now, time is happy to watch you live, from the clock in the corner of the screen.

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## **I Sit There**

**Jessica, Year 11**

**1.**

I sit there all alone,

staring into space,  
wondering about life,  
and the human race,  
how did we get here,  
where did we come from,  
why do we have tears and hurt,  
when animals have none,  
my questions remain unanswered,  
whilst my life continues on,  
these feelings that I have inside,  
might someday all be gone.

**2.**

She looks into the mirror,  
a young girl looks back at she,  
how can anyone like her,  
with this ugliness she sees,  
her features are all wrong,  
she just does not look right,  
she looks through to the shop,  
then turns away into the night.

**3.**

I wish they'd go away,  
and just leave me alone,  
can't I just be miserable,  
on my very own,  
I want to feel this way,  
I don't want to be cheered up,  
I'm happy where I am now,  
so please don't help me up,  
these feelings that I have,  
will go away sometime,  
so just leave me alone,  
as these feelings are all mine.

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## **All the way with the USA?**

### **Kate, Year 11**

Since World War Two Australia has increased its links with the world. One link that has gone from strength to strength is our ties with America.

When you tune into your television at the moment many programs are American. Shows such as CSI, Law and Order and Survivor have Australians hooked. These programs are all placed in prime television spots where Australian programs could easily be placed.

Take one example. At 8.30pm during the week only 5 Australian programs are shown on the commercial channels - Ten, Prime and Win. That is out of 21. That means up to 16 American programs are shown at this popular timeslot instead of Australian ones. As these shows fill up our television channels we lose Australian money and culture to overseas. Mainly to America.

When two planes hit the World Trade Centre nobody could expect the events that followed. America vowed to retaliate by placing troops in Afghanistan to chase the suspect Osama bin Ladin and his terrorist organisation Al Qaeda. They also destroyed the Taliban regime, a heavy supporter of terrorist networks and a hater of the Americans.

Australia backed America straight away and the Australian public supported this. Australia's SAS troops were placed on reconnaissance missions in an unknown territory and performed exceedingly well. But did they really need to go? Was the war on terror really necessary? Or was it just America's chance to show off its weapons and power, and secure vast reserves of oil for herself?

As we thought the war on terror was over and the world could get back to normal, George W Bush accused Saddam Hussein and Iraq of having weapons of mass destruction. George W Bush wanted weapons inspectors sent back in and if Saddam Hussein did not allow this then America would invade. Australia was with America. This caused big debates within the UN, the US and around the world. Many countries thought America and its allies were wrong in resorting to violence.

In Australia the decision by our government to go to war was widely looked down upon and brought massive peace rallies. These rallies were the largest since the Moratorium Movement during the Vietnam War. Many Australians thought the government was too quick to rush into war and did not give other peaceful measures a go. It was seen that Australia was too quickly following the leader, America.

The war was a success in bringing down Saddam Hussein's awful dictatorship. The coalition of the willing also arrested Saddam and many of his head men for war crimes, and crimes before the war such as murder, rape and torture. As Al Qaeda and Taliban terrorist suspects were rounded up they were placed at Camp X-ray at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. These prisoners of war were placed in cages and left there under very tight security. Most are still there today under very harsh conditions.

But the one thing that started the war has not been found. Not one weapon of mass destruction has turned up after nearly a year of searching. Over five hundred American soldiers have been killed since March 21st 2003, the day the war began. Most of these deaths have been after the war.

All round the war has been a terrible waste of life. Australia was so blinded it forgot to ask itself was it really worth it? America's influence on Australia has created heavy loss of life and further unrest in an already stressed world.

"Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." I believe America's absolute world power has corrupted Australia and its independent way of thinking and living.

Australia has recently created a new link with America through the free trade agreement. On the department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, there is an overview of the agreement. Its opening paragraph states, "This agreement represents the landmark in improving Australia's trade relationship with the world's most dynamic and richest economy." Many people thought areas such film making and agriculture would be jeopardised by the agreement. I think the free trade agreement will create an imbalance between Australia and America. It will give America more power over Australia and undermine our independence even further.

Australia's links with America gives the impression that America has a lot of power over Australia. This is against most Australians' wishes. I have nothing against ties with other countries unless they damage Australia and our independence. I think the Australian Government needs to remember that it serves the interests and needs of Australians, not overseas powers and their aims.

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## **Making Things Happen**

### **Lauren, Year 11**

I have chosen to write about something that is really important to me, about how the youth of today are inspired. What is the power of inspiration for young people?

Inspiration works in many ways. One powerful form of inspiration is music. Music can influence our lives in many ways I never thought possible. It has the power to bring happiness, or sadness. It can make you laugh, cry or scream, and can get the shyest, most introverted person into the middle of the

dance floor busting the most outrageous moves. Music has the power to turn a person's world upside down.

If music can do all this you have to wonder how much influence one person can have on another person. As a teenager myself, I need to have someone to look up to, someone to inspire me, someone to motivate me.

My teenage years are the building blocks of my life. They are the years when inspiration is most needed. Teenagers often experience a lack of self-esteem, low self-confidence and little self-motivation. It may be because we are still trying to find out who we are in that transition time from child to adult. Or maybe it's all the hormones rushing around. What I do know is that teenagers need to be brought out of this dark place.

A question running through many teenagers' minds and playing on our consciences is "Am I good enough?" – good enough for him or her, or this or that. But good enough for whose standards? Someone else's, or your own?

There are many people teenagers look to for inspiration: friends, family, teachers, sports stars, singers and actors. As a teenager I look to the youth of today to inspire me. One inspiring youth who has also inspired others is Hugh Evans, the Young Australian of the Year for 2004.

At only 20 years of age Hugh's passion is helping others. When he was 12 he became involved with the World Vision 40 hour famine at his school. Over the next few years Hugh set himself targets to aim for. His school became Australia's largest fundraiser for the 40 hour famine.

At 14 Hugh was sponsored to go to the Philippines where he witnessed an entire community built around a garbage dump. He saw children scavenging in the rubbish, and dying around him. This was a turning point in his life. Hugh began the Oak Tree Foundation, Australia's first entirely youth-run development agency.

There are more than 250 volunteers under the age of 25 in Oak Tree. What a fantastic achievement for a young Australian!

Hugh's sincerity, humility and genuine personality are what have inspired so many others to join him. He is definitely an inspiring young Australian.

Teenagers should be encouraged to use the gifts they have, and the things they are passionate about. If Hugh Evans can set high goals for himself so can everyone else. It's all about being motivated, not giving up when the going gets hard, sticking at it, and striving to succeed.

Inspiration is easy to start giving to others. Saying something positive to someone who is a little down, raising someone's confidence with a helping hand, boosting someone's self-esteem with a small act of kindness.

There are two ways to live – waiting for things to happen to you, or getting out there and making things happen. So get out there, and make things happen.

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## **MIRROR**

**Mitchell, Year 11**

Two worlds stand beside  
Each other. They look forward,  
Only to reveal  
And only to find likeness.  
Likeness finds loneliness.  
Loneliness finds emptiness.  
In the dank, dark, blank world  
Springs alive the dance of light.

Looking inward  
revealing more than once was.  
The bounce of brightness finds,  
A vacant man,  
A lonely man,  
A light.  
Standing in the corner.  
The light was what reveals him,  
Darkness is what cloaks him.  
Two worlds, a corner,  
A space filled with more  
Reveals a man only to himself.  
Staring blankly at a world.  
Only to not notice it fall  
Finding only depth, darkness, awkwardness.  
The viewer is controlled  
In the dancing of light.  
The beam, concentrated.  
Spot the path,  
Shot the path,  
Conceal the path.  
Light is what distorts it,  
Darkness needed to reveal it.

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## Going Down Ben

“HANG ON A SEC!” AN OLD MAN IN A PLAIN BLACK SUIT AND BLACK HAT CLAIMED HIMSELF A SPACE ON THE ALREADY PACKED ELEVATOR. “THANKS.” REALIZING SOMEONE ELSE HAD ALREADY PRESSED THE LOBBY BUTTON, HE SETTLED BACK, LEANING AGAINST THE ELEVATOR RAILING.

Everyone seemed to mind their own business these days, keeping their eyes on the ground, checking watches, staring into space.

Nineteen...

Eighteen...

Seventeen...

The \*Ting\* of the floor indicator mixed with the scratchy sound of the radio crackling through cheap dusty elevator speakers proved to be an irritating combination.

Eleven...

Ten...

Nine...

A mother scolded her child.

Damn kids.

Joking about something along the lines of that middle-eastern place and the end of the world...Guess it's not so funny when it actually happens and you're the ones stuck in the middle of it...

\*Ting\*

The elevator doors opened and people got off and on. The old man didn't move. He just stayed in his place glancing at the floor number.

Seven...

Six...

Five...

Whining brats, elevator music. Groan...

Three...

Two...

One...

The elevator finally stopped at the ground floor, the lobby. The old man walked out into the blurry and indistinguishable mass of people. The usual scene of people reading newspapers, browsing shops, and eating at the shit-in-a-tray merchants had strangely changed. All eyes were fixed on the televisions in shop windows, some pointing and cursing the president of wherever, people confused, people crying. Pushing his way through the mass, the man made his way to the glass revolving doors at the exit. Stepping outside, into the street... Tall grey columns... The Harbor Bridge... The sound of the Prime Minister's voice blaring from a million car radios.

People, all different colours and nationalities moved around him. Some wore suits, some jeans. Some loitered, others hurried. But they all somehow seemed to become one living being that was the city. He reached the curb when he felt a sudden wave of heat. A hot wind picked up and he quickly grabbed his hat as pieces of newspaper and litter were blown through the air. What seemed like the last empty taxi turned the corner and he waved. It pulled over and he hastily climbed into the back seat. The street looked emptier, people running to the shelter of buildings and phone booths. The roaring wind could still be heard inside the cab.

The red earth was covered in a dusty grey snow. A harsh wind whipped across the sea of dust, crumbling bricks and rusted metal. The sun cast a dull circle of red light through the hazy overcast, thin and raspy, but covered the entire sky. The light was eerie... serene and unreal. More tall gray columns... windows long gone and the entrance buried feet under. A surreal world. Funny, because it was once full of life.

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## Blood and Love

### Daniel

She placed her plate upon the bench with a slight scrape. She picked up the vodka bottle with an unsteady hand and plodded towards the lounge-room.

She flopped herself into the warm and inviting armchair with a gratified sigh. The bottle that she had bought from the kitchen she placed tentatively upon the smooth crystal surface of the coffee table beside her chair. She chuckled cynically under her breath; no coffee had ever seen that table.

She poured herself a full glass of vodka, saluted to a forgotten friend, and downed the entire glass. A dry rasping cough tore at her throat, but she didn't care, it was all taking her closer. Her memories flooded back.

Blood, Passion, Hunger, Deceit, Betrayal, Death, Fire, Love...

Stupid house, she had never wanted one so big, but he had...

Blood, Passion, Hunger, Deceit, Betrayal, Death, Fire, Love...

No time, she rushed hastily around the room, bolting all of the doors, even the beautiful French doors that led onto her balcony landing. She stared out into the darkness for a moment, contemplating. Then she slammed the door shut with an imposing thud. Tentatively she headed for the last door left. The door to the foyer. Subconsciously she still heard the echo of the door swinging open, only now the echo had become footsteps.

Blood, Passion, Hunger, Deceit, Betrayal, Death, Fire, Love...

"No!" she screamed, launching herself at the door, throwing it shut and twisting the lock at the same time. She lay at its base, back against it, and sobbed.

Blood, Passion, Hunger, Deceit, Betrayal, Death, Fire, Love...

No, there was no time for the memories now, must be strong, no, no memories. But she couldn't stop them, so sudden was their flood, they poured over her, trapping her and pinning her down, making her watch the whole wicked pantomime again.

Her husband. She'd had it all. The career, the husband, the prestige, the respect. He had taken it from her, why couldn't he just kill her, make the pain all end?

Blood, Passion, Hunger, Deceit, Betrayal, Death, Fire, Love...

She backed away from the door slowly, she heard the footsteps again, and this time they were approaching her. No, she wouldn't let him have her, never, not her.

"No, never!" she screamed the words like a mantra. Over and over. Screaming at the dark night that had once again come to her, come into her house like an evil spirit.

Blood, Passion, Hunger, Deceit, Betrayal, Death, Fire, Love...

She drew herself up from the ground, and launched herself into a swift run. She stopped at the thick oak desk that sat majestically unaffected by the time that had so ravished her own soul.

Blood, Passion, Hunger, Deceit, Betrayal, Death, Fire, Love...

A stirring calm came over her. She clutched at the key about her neck that would open the top drawer. She'd locked it and never opened it since that day. She reached up, unlocked it and slid it open. From it she pulled the gun.

Blood, Passion, Hunger, Deceit, Betrayal, Death, Fire, Love...

The hard steel shell of such a dangerous weapon caressed her desire for revenge. Clutching the gun to her breast, she turned and walked towards her armchair. There upon the armchair sat the thing that had so haunted her existence.

She lashed out at it, throwing all of her being into showing it what it had done to her. She screamed, she wailed, she cried. The figure sat immovable. Its eyes, like fire, told her that it had come for her, and her alone.

"No!" she screamed at the shadowed figure. "I am not yours! NEVER!"

Blood, Passion, Hunger, Deceit, Betrayal, Death, Fire, Love...

And yet, the figure sat still, a smug smile writhing across its contorted face. Its hand, beckoning her forward, ever closer to the destiny she had chosen to ignore.

She stared it down, telling it she wasn't afraid anymore. But she was, and it knew it.

It was no longer sitting immovable in the chair. It moved towards her with a majestic and evil grace.

It grasped her shoulders in a smooth caress, passionate and dangerous. The gun dropped from her hands, and clanged onto the tiled floor below.

It kissed her, full on the mouth, and she could taste blood, her own blood.

"I love you," it breathed softly into her ear, ringing with the promise of ages. And she believed it, all she wanted to do was believe it, she knew it could give her everything.

Blood, Passion, Hunger, Deceit, Betrayal, Death, Fire, Love...

"Yes," she breathed.

"Yes?" it repeated. The fire burned brighter than the sun in its eyes.

"Come to me, I will give you everything you ever wanted, I will give you the way out."

She went weak at the knees, and suddenly she was lying in the chair, and it all seemed perfect once more. She picked up the gun from the table, where it had placed it. And filled her glass once more. She neatly arranged her hair; she had always liked neatness, before.

With the glass she saluted, to the forgotten friend once more. And with the gun she joined him, her body, limp upon the floor.

Blood, Passion, Hunger, Deceit, Betrayal, Death, Fire, Love...

## Sanctuary

### Jim

Nathan swore as he stumbled down the road, barely out of the gutter. "Hey! You 'right mate?" asked Brendan with obvious worry in his voice.

"I'll live," replied Nathan with a slur, "...I think."

They both laughed as they walked unsteadily down the road. The boys were drunk, and Nathan was attempting to walk home, which he found was a rather difficult feat without the steadying hold of Brendan guiding him.

Brendan was Nathan's best friend, they had been close friends for almost two years now. It was this close friendship which caused Brendan to feel obligated to make sure his buddy got home safely, as he was easily more sober than his friend. They had joked before about why Brendan could drink more than Nathan and they had decided that it was probably because of Brendan's larger body.

"You're gonna feel like crap in the mornin'."

"I'll deal with that when it happens," came the barely audible mumble that served as speech for Nathan when he had consumed a little too much alcohol.

"Yeah well, just don't do anythin' stupid when ya get home ya drunk prick."

Nathan turned his head and looked up at his friend with a wide grin.

"Me? Do something stupid? Never!"

At this Nathan almost toppled into the gutter and had to stop walking for a moment to get balanced again. He decided it would be best if he kept his concentration on the difficult task of walking in a straight line.

Brendan was worried about his friend. Although they often went out on Friday nights like these, it was out of character for Nathan to get drunk. Nathan wasn't like the other guys his age. He had always seemed a little more mature. Brendan knew that his friend had grown up faster than the others had, and in doing so had lost the playful innocence that the teenage years should have held for his friend. This was shown in Nathan's obvious dislike of drinking, usually Nathan wouldn't go near the stuff and it was obvious to Brendan why. Nathan's father, John, was an alcoholic, he was so bad that he was given a disability pension for his drinking. Somewhere along the way he had convinced the government that his drinking made him unable to work and that he couldn't stop it. Nathan despised that attitude, in fact there wasn't much about his father that Nathan liked. John was in his mid forties and spent most of his time drunk and sprawled across the couch watching whatever sport was on television. As a father he was useless. Nathan was the eldest of his three sons and because of his father's constant condition, Nathan was responsible for taking care of the cooking, the housework and whatever else needed to be done. Nathan's younger brothers were George and Richard, who were eleven and nine. In truth they were only his half brothers, as Nathan had a different mother to his brothers. Nathan's mother had died a few weeks before his fifth birthday so Nathan had only a few memories of his mother. All he had were a few photos, which he kept on a shelf next to his bed. Most of the memories he had were of her fighting with his father and her crying afterwards. Nathan had been told that his mother had been mentally ill and had taken her own life. Nathan believed that his father had driven her to doing this with his drinking and abuse. The mother of Nathan's brothers had left six years ago, she ran away from her children and Nathan's father. Brendan knew all of this, and it was clear to him how Nathan thought about his father.

It was almost three in the morning when the two teenagers turned into Nathan's street. It was a poor district with council flats and small houses lining the street, with an assortment of old cars on each side. The boys could only just see where they were going as a few street lamps offered the only source

of light. Brendan sighed as one of the lamps blinked for a moment and then went out. The sounds of distant traffic and a dog barking were the only noises that greeted the boys as they walked towards Nathan's house. When they reached the road in front of Nathan's house they stopped and Brendan turned to Nathan.

"Ring me when ya wake up alright?" he asked

"I'll try to remember, but don't worry about me, I'll be fine," replied Nathan as he swayed from side to side.

"Okay then, I'll see ya at school then mate." And with that statement Brendan started walking home to his own house. Nathan waved in reply and stumbled up the driveway, around his father's old Ford ute and around the house to the back door. As he came into the house he heard a groan followed by snoring and the sound of the television. His father must have been sleeping because the T.V volume was turned down quite low. Nathan walked down the main hallway of the house toward the kitchen and lounge room. He quietly walked into the kitchen and poured himself a glass of water, drank it quickly and wiped his mouth with his sleeve. The effect of the drinking was starting to wear off and all Nathan wanted to do was to sleep. He headed to his bedroom and on the way had a look in the lounge room. He saw a figure on the couch, surrounded by beer bottles and scraps of food. By the snoring and the low rise and fall of his father's chest Nathan knew he was asleep but he did not want to turn off the television in case the change of sound woke up his father. Nathan closed the door and went to check on his brothers. He carefully opened the door to the room his brothers shared. The room was dark and Nathan could not make out the boys as they slept noiselessly on the bunk bed. Nathan saw that they were sleeping peacefully and started to close the door but as it was closing Richard stirred from the bottom bunk. He rolled over and propped himself up with his elbow.

"Is that you Nat?" he asked in a slow sleepy voice.

"Yeah mate, it's me, I'm home now. Go back to sleep."

"Okay, goodnight," Richard whispered as he lowered himself back down to his pillow.

"Goodnight mate."

Nathan closed the door and walked to his own room. Once he was in he closed the door and turned on the radio, he turned down the volume and sprawled out over his bed. Nathan closed his eyes and let the soft music lull him into a deep sleep.

Nathan's eyes opened and he looked at the digital clock next to his bed. It was almost noon and he had slept in. The memories of the past night came back as he held his head and sighed. "I'm a fool," he said to himself. Nathan could hear the boys laughing in their bedroom. Nathan could hear them quite well as their rooms were right next to each other. The boys were saying things in their 'army talk' voices and Nathan guessed that they were playing with their toy soldiers. This brought a smile to his face as he hauled himself out of bed and got changed. He decided he would be better off having a shower later on as he knew the boys would be wanting some lunch soon.

Nathan opened the door and walked into the room. The boys were both sitting on the floor facing each other with a dozen little green army men and a fighter jet between them. The boys were giggling when Nathan walked in and when they saw him they both gave him a wide grin.

"I just killed Richy's General Nat!" said George with enthusiastic excitement.

"No you didn't! You cheated! He cheated Nat!" came the reply from Richard.

Nathan chuckled at this and crossed the room to sit on the bottom bunk.

"I hope you guys are playin' nice," he said looking from face to face.

"Yeah, we always play nice!" said George and the two little brothers started to giggle.

"Oh, of course you do. How could I forget what good boys you are..." laughed Nathan with obvious sarcasm. "...Now who wants some lunch?"

The two younger brothers hungrily munched down their ham sandwiches while Nathan poured them a cup of cordial each. Nathan looked into the sink and saw empty bowls which told him the boys had made themselves cereal for breakfast. Nathan sat down to his own sandwich and took a bite.

"Where did you go last night Nat?" asked George.

"I went out with Brendan mate, we went for a walk."

"You walked all night?" said George, his tone showing his obvious disbelief.

"Yeah, pretty much," said Nathan, not wanting the boys to know about the drinking.

Richard looked up at Nathan with a questioning look on his face.

"Nat?"

"Yeah mate?"

"When you came in last night, why did you smell like dad?"

Nathan stopped still for a second then continued chewing and swallowed.

"Well mate, I had a few beers with Brendan, that's all, nothin' to worry about," replied Nathan as he gave his little brother a weak smile.

George looked at his older brother.

"Are you gunna be like dad when you grow up?"

Nathan stopped eating again. He stood and took his plate and cup to the sink. He grabbed the bench and squeezed until his knuckles turned white. Without looking at his brothers he said "No mate...I'm not gunna be anything like him..." He shook his head, "...nothing like him."

Nathan stood motionless in the shower. He enjoyed showers, he liked the feeling of the warm water on his skin and found the sound of the falling of the water relaxing. He often did a lot of thinking in the shower, and while he stood there he was thinking about what his brothers had said. He asked himself what he would turn out like, and what his brothers would turn out like. The male role models they had were Nathan and their father and neither of these were what Nathan would call a good choice. He didn't like the idea of spending another day living in this environment but he knew unless something happened they would live like this for years. Nathan had been thinking about ways of helping the situation for years. He had wanted to take his brothers and live with his grandmother in Queensland but soon after Nathan had come up with that idea his grandmother suffered a stroke and was now in a nursing home. Nathan had thought of going to the government for help but he knew they would send them to a foster home, and that he might be separated from his brothers. Nathan thought this over again, and thought about what his brothers had said. He knew he had to do something, but he didn't know what. "If they did go to a foster home, could it be any worse than here? They must be good people and nice homes, otherwise the government wouldn't let them take care of foster children," Nathan thought to himself.

He decided that if things got worse, he would have to try that plan, he knew it was the only thing he could do to make his brothers safe.

Nathan stepped out of the shower and dried himself off, then he dressed himself and shaved the small amount of stubble he had. He walked out into the hallway and heard laughing and loud voices which told him that the boys were playing in their room again. He let them be and walked into the lounge room where Nathan's father lay on the couch dozing.

"You gunna be like that all day old man?" said Nathan.

John stirred and Nathan repeated what he said.

"Don't talk to me like that. You should learn your place," said John in a voice made hoarse from years of heavy smoking.

"What are you gunna do old man? Hey? Get off the couch and hit me? I'd like to see ya get off the couch. Come on old man, have a go!" Nathan said in a raised voice.

John looked up at Nathan and their eyes met. They stood like that for a moment then John turned his attention to the television and reached for the remote control.

"Yeah, I didn't think so..." said Nathan as he walked out of the room.

Nathan sat down on his bed and thought about the coming week. He had to get ready for school in the morning, as well as helping his brothers get ready. The boys had eaten dinner and Nathan had put them to bed. He had then made their lunches for the next day and was now ready to go to sleep. He knew he couldn't go on like this, something had to change, and it had to change soon.

The week seemed to go by without anything eventful happening. It was a familiar routine to Nathan. Wake up, go to school, come home, make dinner, get ready for the next day and go to bed. That was pretty much it, and it was a tiresome routine. The boys seemed to be fine, although they had seemed a little less excitable since Nathan had taken some old bags out of the garage and told the boys to put all their clothes in them. The boys knew they were leaving but to Nathan's surprise they seemed to welcome the prospect.

Nathan came home after school on the following Thursday and walked into the house. He was always home before the boys because the high school was just around the corner from their house. He walked to his room and put his bag down, then proceeded into the kitchen to get something to eat. As he opened the fridge he was struck with a strange feeling. He couldn't hear the television, but his father always had the television on, he turned down the volume at night but Nathan could always hear it. Nathan walked into the lounge room to investigate.

The lounge room was always dark at this time of day, his father had the curtains drawn all day so he could see the T.V without glare. When Nathan looked into the room everything seemed as it should be. The television was off but that was the only thing that seemed out of the ordinary. Then a thought hit him. He couldn't hear snoring and the television was off, so what was his father doing? Nathan slowly walked around the couch to face his father and what he saw caused his knees to give way and his stomach convulsed.

Nathan stood up straight and steadied himself. He forced himself into taking deep breaths and then looked down at his father. John lay motionless in the couch, without breathing. He was surrounded by empty tablet bottles and from the empty bottle of bourbon on the floor Nathan came to the conclusion that he had killed himself.

Nathan moved to the door. His eyes were brimming with tears and he wiped them away with his sleeve. He walked out the door and stood in the hallway. He hung his head for a moment and whispered in a barely audible sob, "You weak bastard."

Nathan knew his brothers would be home soon and he knew that he couldn't let George and Richard see their father. Nathan went into his own room and took the bag he had packed a few days before. He knew now was the time to leave. As he was leaving his room he stopped and dropped his bag. He turned around and walked to the shelf next to his bed. He picked up a photo of his mother and looked at it for a moment, before putting it in his pocket.

He went to the boys' room and grabbed their bags and some of the toys that were on the floor which he put into his own bag.

He half ran, half walked into the kitchen and quickly made some sandwiches then grabbed up the bags and took them out to the road, where he stood and waited for his brothers.

Nathan was only waiting for a few minutes for his brothers. When they turned the corner and saw him standing with the bags they hurried to talk to him. Nathan spoke before they could ask any questions.

"We're leaving," he said in an unsteady voice.

"What about dad?" asked George with frightened confusion clearly showing.

"Dad's..." Nathan paused for a moment. "Dad is sleeping, we should leave before he wakes up. I've got your stuff and some food."

"But where are we going," asked Richard.

"I don't know, to the council I guess, and from there...I don't know guys, I don't know."

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## Kicking and Screaming

### Tess

Demona lay on the floor kicking and screaming.

'Demona, please!' her father shouted over the racket.

The little girl looked up at her father with big, brown eyes as she wiped away tears.

'You promised!' she wailed at him, 'You're mean! I hate you!'

'I'm sorry Demona, but daddy's busy today.'

'You said you'd take me to the zoo! I wanna go to the zoo!' the little girl shouted.

'If you're good, I'll take you tomorrow. However, if you continue to carry on like this, you won't go at all!'

The little girl brushed some of her blonde hair out of her eyes and pouted at him.

'C'mon Demona,' said her father, 'Don't pout, it isn't becoming of you.'

Demona continued to pout.

'Look sweetie, I have to go and get ready for work. Mrs Watson will be looking after you again today. Okay?'

'NO!' shrieked Demona, 'I hate her! I hate her! Please don't leave!'

'Sorry, I have to go to work!'

'NO!' She shrieked again. 'You're gonna leave! Just like mummy did!'

Her father stopped fumbling with his tie. He looked at his daughter and crouched to the ground.

'Demona, come here.' He said softly and held out his arms. 'You know I'd never do that to you. Ever.'

He gently brushed more hair out of her eyes. 'Now you be good for Mrs Watson. Okay?'

'Okay daddy,' Demona replied.

There was a knock on the front door. Mrs Watson had arrived. Demona's father let her in and then went back to Demona.

'Now sweetie, remember what I told you,' he said as he kissed her on the forehead.

'Yes daddy,' Demona replied with a small grin.

'Have a great day at work, Jonathon!' Mrs Watson called out to Demona's father as he walked out the door.

The minute Jonathon had driven off, Mrs Watson turned to face the little girl in front of her.

'All right Demona,' she said, 'Now you be a good girl and sit in your room, I have things to do. Don't talk to me unless it's urgent.'

'But I want to play in the sandpit!' said Demona defiantly.

Mrs Watson bent forwards and looked Demona in the eyes with a hard look on her face. Demona stared back at her.

'I don't care what you want!' she hissed. 'You will do as I say. Your father has left me in charge and I don't think he'd be too happy if he found out you were being a rude little girl would he?'

Demona looked at the ground. 'No,' she whispered.

Mrs Watson gave a sly grin. 'There's a good girl,' she said as Demona shuffled off slowly to her bedroom.

Demona sat on her bed and hugged the blue teddy bear that her father had given her for Christmas. He'd been gone five minutes and already she awaited his return. She looked at her 'Bananas in Pyjamas' clock. It was only 8:30am. Her father was a lawyer, so he worked long hours. He usually didn't get home until 6:30pm.

Demona was to be starting year one in just a few weeks. Her father had to work so he hired Mrs Watson to look after Demona for the four weeks after Christmas. So far, it had only been three days. Demona looked around the room for something to amuse herself with. She spotted the box, which contained all her Barbies, tipped them out on the floor and began to play. She played in silence, knowing that if she made a noise Mrs Watson would be in there so fast that she wouldn't know what had hit her. Besides, it helped for eavesdropping on what Mrs Watson was up to.

Demona wondered if 'He' would be coming around today.

Demona wasn't quite sure who 'He' was, but she knew that he wasn't a nice man. The past three days 'He' would come around and help Mrs Watson do what she claimed to be 'cleaning the house'.

Demona never saw them but she knew that they spent a lot of time in the study and her father's room

rummaging through his personal things.

Suddenly the phone rang. Demona tried to hear what Mrs Watson was saying, but the closed bedroom door made it hard.

Although she couldn't tell what was being said, Demona knew by the tone of voice that Mrs Watson used, that she was talking to 'Him.'

She heard Mrs Watson hang up the phone and begin washing the dishes.

Demona continued to silently play Barbies, but she kept an ear out in case 'He' turned up again.

It was another half hour at least before 'He' eventually did arrive.

Demona pressed her ear up against the bedroom door and tried to listen to their conversation, but like the phone call before, it was all muffled.

Demona heard them walk past her room and into the study. She opened the door very slightly so she could hear them a little better.

Suddenly she heard a loud thud followed by a lot of cursing.

'You fool!' Demona heard Mrs Watson hiss at 'Him.' 'You're supposed to be helping!'

'I'm sorry sis!' 'He' hissed back at her.

Demona covered her mouth with her hand. So 'He' was Mrs Watson's brother!

'So you ought to be! This is important in case you hadn't realised, Julian!' Mrs Watson's voice continued to waft down the hallway. 'If you're not careful the little brat might figure out what we're up to! Honestly, don't you think?'

'Look! Do you want my help or not Ellen? Because if you don't treat me with the respect I deserve, I'm leaving and I won't come back!' the man named Julian spat at his sister.

There was silence, for a moment and then Mrs Watson spoke again.

'Fine.' It was all she said.

Not another word was spoken for quite some time. All Demona could hear was the sound of her father's files being rummaged through.

After a little while, Demona heard Mrs Watson and Julian walk past her room and into the kitchen.

Then she had an idea.

She stuck her head out the door. She could hear Mrs Watson and Julian in the kitchen making sandwiches. Quietly, Demona slipped out of the room and closed the door again. She crept down the hall and into the en suite of her father's room and waited.

There had to be a reason that Mrs Watson and Julian were going through her father's things. The little girl thought for a moment. Her dad was a lawyer. She didn't know much about lawyers—but she knew that they had lots of stories about people. True stories. The types of stories that contained information that could get people into lots of trouble. Her father had all kinds of stories. They were mainly stories about bad people who had broken the law by stealing or damaging things, but there were also stories about horrible people who had even killed others.

Demona shuddered at the thought of somebody being killed, then Demona realised something. Her father and one of his best friends (who was a detective) had been talking to each other quite a lot lately and spending a lot of time working on cases. It had been around the same time that Demona's mother had left, that Shane, the detective, had started this strange behaviour. It was strange because Shane and her father didn't usually see much of each other, because they were both very busy.

Suddenly, Mrs Watson and Julian walked into the bedroom with a whole lot of files, dumped them on the bed and started pouring through them.

Demona stayed in the en suite.

'Nothing in this one,' said Julian putting down a file.

'Keep looking!' urged Mrs Watson as she thrust another one into his hand, 'he's got to have something on Maree's disappearance in here somewhere!'

Demona froze. Mrs Watson had mentioned someone named Maree. Demona's mother was named Maree. Demona's mother, Maree, had also disappeared.

Demona sat on the edge of the bath and chewed her fingernails. She was extremely scared. She wanted to scream, but she was too scared to do even that.

Her father had lied to her. He had said that her mother had just gone away for a little while and Demona had just found out that her mother was missing. What was going on? Why had he lied to her? She didn't understand.

Demona sank to the ground and hugged her knees. Tears streamed down her face as she thought about how much she missed her mother. She hoped that her mother was okay. She'd been gone

almost three weeks now and Demona had been so angry when she'd come down one morning and found her mother gone. She'd felt neglected, like her mother didn't care about her anymore. She'd been so scared that her father would do the same. Then she'd be alone. All alone.

'There's nothing in this one either,' said Julian. 'How do you know he even has anything?'

'It's his wife! Of course he has something! He must have some of his detective friends on the case!'

Demona then thought of Shane again. Of course! Shane was helping her father!

Mrs Watson continued. 'I'd be surprised if he didn't!' she said, obviously irritated by her brother's questioning. 'Now keep looking!'

'How would anyone know that it was us who kidnapped her anyway?' Julian asked. 'Why would there be any evidence pointing to us? I mean we covered our tracks pretty well and we've got a reasonable alibi—it's believable!'

'You can never be too careful, Julian.' Mrs Watson snapped. 'We have no use for Maree. If we let her go, she'd surely come back here and talk to people and we can't just keep her forever—what if she's found? Or if she escapes? Then what would we do? There's only one solution... we must kill her otherwise I'll never get Jonathon to myself!'

Julian went white.

'You never mentioned murder, Ellen,' he whispered.

'Oh come on Julian! We have no choice!' Mrs Watson shouted, 'If people find out, we'd spend the rest of our lives in gaol! Is that what you want?'

'Of course it isn't!' Julian's eyes flashed with both fear and anger as he looked at his sister. He never remembered Ellen being this determined before. She was out of her mind and it scared him. He couldn't believe he'd let her talk him into this little scheme! It had all gotten out of hand so quickly and before he knew it they were contemplating murder! He had to do something, but what?

In the en suite, Demona was still sitting on the bathroom floor. She'd heard the entire story. It was too much for a five-year-old to take in. What could she do? Being so young prevented her from having any real power in the situation. She also knew that nobody would take her seriously. Mrs Watson was going to kill her mother and there was nothing she could do about it. She could tell her father when he returned, but he knew how much she hated Mrs Watson and would probably think that she made it up just to get rid of her.

'Excuse me for just a minute, Ellen,' said Julian quietly. 'I need to think.' And he walked out of the room.

Mrs Watson continued to look through files.

Demona stayed quiet in the en-suite.

After a few short minutes, Julian returned to the bedroom.

'All right Ellen,' he said. 'We can't do this anymore. It's wrong. I don't want to go to gaol and I know you don't either.'

Mrs Watson looked at him with pleading eyes. 'Please Julian,' she begged. 'We've come too far to turn back now! We must go through with it! We must!'

'No,' said Julian firmly. 'We can't and we won't.'

Mrs Watson looked at her brother in disbelief.

'So you're chickening out are you? Don't you have the courage? Oh, you're so pathetic!' she spat at him. 'A pathetic male!'

At that moment the bedroom door burst open.

Mrs Watson whirled around to see Jonathon, Shane, two cops, three men in white coats from the asylum and a young woman standing in the doorway.

'What the...?' Mrs Watson began.

A gun was pointed at her.

'I'd be quiet if I were you ma'am,' One of the cops said to her. 'You're in enough trouble as it is.'

Mrs Watson went white. She turned to the men from the asylum. 'And who might you be?' she asked, ignoring the cop's warning.

'Come on Ellen. We've been looking for you for over a year now!' one of the men replied.

Mrs Watson stared at Julian who stared at the floor.

'You!' she hissed. 'You... you... you traitor! How could you do this to me?'

'I had to ...I couldn't let you... you know...' Julian's voice trailed off as tears welled up in his eyes.

'I'm sorry, Ellen.'

Mrs Watson began screaming and thrusting her fists everywhere in a violent rage.

The men from the asylum held her back as she tried to lunge at Julian. They struggled to force her into a straightjacket.

Jonathon disappeared from the room for a moment then returned, his face white with terror.

'Demona's gone!' he shouted.

'No I'm not daddy!' shrieked Demona as she ran out of the en-suite and flung herself at her father.

'Oh Demona!' said Jonathon as he held his daughter tight. 'I'm so sorry I lied! I didn't want to upset you! I'm so sorry!'

Demona said nothing, but hugged her father tighter. He knew he was forgiven.

By this time, Mrs Watson was in the straight jacket.

She looked at Julian, who said nothing, but stared at her.

The look he gave her was so piteous that she had to look away. Her eyes met Jonathon's. A sudden feeling of grief came over her. As she stared into his furious brown eyes, she realised that her dream had been destroyed. They would never be together. Ever.

The men from the asylum led Mrs Watson from the room. She didn't put up a fight, for she was quite calm now. It was as though she didn't recall anything that had just happened.

Julian stared after her. He felt so guilty about what he'd just done. He slumped against the wall and wept.

The men from the asylum had a quick word with the police, put Mrs Watson in the back of the van and drove off.

One of the cops started talking to Julian, whilst the other spoke to Jonathon and Shane.

The young woman stayed with Demona and asked her a few questions as well.

Afterwards, Jonathon walked over to Demona and picked her up.

'We'll see mummy again tomorrow, okay sweetheart?'

Demona couldn't control her excitement.

'Really?' she asked joyously.

'Really.' Jonathon smiled.

'Can we go to the zoo then?' Demona asked hopefully.

'Certainly,' he replied.

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## Take It Like Red

### Nathan

Most people don't believe in leprechauns, but I do. I see them all the time; at the bar, the bottle shop, my mate Robbo's house, in line at the Centerlink office, all the time. Ok, so maybe they're not so much leprechauns as they are ugly children, and maybe not so much when I'm sober, but I can almost definitely state that I probably do believe in astronauts when I'm not drunk. Or as far as I can remember...

Now if you thought any of that made sense, well then you're either very moist or some sort of smarty man, either way I take my hat off to you, because just quietly, I don't know what the hell I just wrote and I'm too afraid of the ramifications of asking.

I get like this when I'm dry. Hell, I haven't had a drink in days. Well, maybe the use of a plural there was a bit hasty, make that 'day' and put an 'a' in front of that would you?

Ah, much better.

Well I haven't had a drop of liquor in about four hours and I think I'm starting to go through withdrawal as I'm writing this from on the ceiling.

"My name is Red and I'm an alcoholic."

The sound of a few laboured hand-clappings was heard before the chirping of crickets several miles away eventually became deafening and overwhelmed it.

I stepped off the podium and went back to my seat in the front row, third from the left. I could feel their judging eyes following me, taking careful note of my every move, waiting ever-so patiently for me to stumble drunkenly or for a slab of VB's to fall out of my pocket.

Now they knew my secret, I couldn't hide it or pass it off as 'year-round flu' anymore. These people would hold it against me for the rest of my life. I could tell, just by looking at them, that they were the kind of people who would hold something against someone for the rest of their life.

You bastards, I thought to myself, you bitter, unforgiving bastards. Ah, screw this, I'm going to go drink myself under a large table!

It was then that I realised I was still on the podium and that I'd been thinking out loud.

That was the first and last time I ever went to an AA meeting. Not by choice but because they banned me and made unnerving threats against my health; fair enough when you think about it, but what really stung was that they also kicked me out of SDA, which is unfortunate because lately I've been having some serious cravings to go scuba diving again. I must stay strong.

So after I'd picked up all the teeth and whatnot that had somehow leapt out of my mouth and onto the footpath following my untimely ejection from the vicinity, I headed in the general direction of the local Bottle'O or Bazza's as we were fond of calling it. Bazza's was a small liquor store a little off the main street, owned by a friend of mine, Barry or Bartholomew, as we were fond of calling him. Bartholomew offered low, low prices on bottom shelf products, which is why he had so many 'customers.'

One of those customers, in unnecessary inverted commas, was Sneaker, a rodent-like individual with all the stereotypical attributes of a police snitch from movies you may or may not have seen.

Sneaker would often be found a minimal distance from Bazza's wearing a hat, and this was no exception.

"Eh-hey, well look who it is, if it isn't my old pal Red?"

I tried not to laugh as I pushed him into oncoming traffic and continued walking towards the store.

Barry had just installed some of those fancy automatic doors, but had found that they scared off most of his customers and was seeing about having them replaced. I pretended not to care as on my approach the doors were seemingly opened by ghosts or possibly invisible scientists.

After the ordeal I'd been through I needed a drink of something strong.

I nodded at Barry, sitting behind the counter and he acknowledged by nodding back at me. No words need be exchanged between good mates.

With pleasantries aside, I trundled off towards the cheap wine aisle (which was anywhere wine was shelved), having seconds before decided on purchasing a bottle of red. I made my choice based on the little money I had to spare and moved towards the counter.

"Hello Red, how are things?" Barry muttered nonchalantly.

I handed him the exact amount of money to pay for the wine, as I was aware of Barry's 'no change' policy.

"You'll never believe what just happened to me," I started, "there were these doors that were opened by ghos..." but I was cut off by Barry's low pitched grunting and gesturing me aside.

I turned to once again try my chances with the possessed door when I noticed Sneaker was back on his feet outside and joined by a gang of hefty looking, brass-knuckle wearing, mobster types.

I handed the bottle back to Barry to look after while I confronted the awaiting mob.

I figured if I just casually strolled past them maybe whistling an inconspicuous tune, like, say, the theme from Mission Impossible and not make eye contact they wouldn't notice me, that and the fact that I had pulled my shirt up to cover half of my face.

It must have been the lack of alcohol affecting my brain because as soon as I stepped outside thirteen goons jumped me and threw me into the boot of some sort of car-like machine, possibly a car. As you can imagine, it was at this point that I proceeded to wet myself tremendously.

Minutes later, when I was satisfied I'd emptied every last drop of urine into my trousers I decided I'd best try to find some way to escape this dire situation I was in. There was no telling what men with hands that big could do to a cat, let alone a person.

I felt the car suddenly slow down, veer to the left and pull to a stop. Not long after, the sound of two car doors opening in unison and the crunch of the occupant's boots meeting the asphalt was heard. Silently I congratulated myself on the wise decision to drain my bladder earlier. Now I could hear the jingling of keys close by and I knew this was it. Two of my capturers appeared above me and hoisted me out in a surprisingly gentle manner. They stood me within an arm's length on the footpath and soon Sneaker emerged from the passenger seat nearest me. I noticed he was wearing a neck brace and casts on his left arm and leg. Sneaker drew up close so he was eye level with the top of my chin and started rifling through the inner breast pocket of his jacket.

"Heh-hey let's not resort to violence here Sneaker, I swear I tripped, I had an involuntary muscle spasm, I thought you was someone else, I didn't mean to push you in front of that Buick, honest!" I was getting desperate, but he took no notice and continued rummaging around in his pocket. Finally after I'd gotten down on my knees and offered him everything from my first born to my shoe laces in exchange for my life, he pulled a piece of paper from his jacket and handed it to me. Before I'd even had a chance to sob uncontrollably or thank one of my gods he was gone. The two guys he'd left behind shrugged and began walking in the direction the car had left.

It was then that I realised I had been dropped off right in front of my apartment building.

I called the elevator down in the lobby and while I was waiting I unfolded the greasy piece of paper Sneaker had given me and began reading.

By the time the old elevator had creaked its way down to the ground floor I was no longer there. I'd jumped so damn high; I'd smashed clean through four stories and was standing in my living room, now with an enormous hole in the middle of it where a coffee table had once been. But it didn't matter, because I could afford to fix it.

And I never drank again.

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## The Power of Power

### Vanessa

A nineteenth century historian, Lord Acton, once issued the warning, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." We, or more specifically we as Australians, actually do value and respect power. The power invested in those political figures who represent our country, the power of the media, the power of money, the power of modern technology, the power of knowledge, but also the power of philanthropy to help those less fortunate.

Power can be a great asset, but it can also have the potential to be dangerous in the wrong hands. I, as one of the next generation of adults soon to be voting about Australia's future, am concerned about the way in which power becomes corrupted and about how we know whether we can trust those that we invest power in. It's not hard for power to grow on people. We all know that feeling powerful can also lead us to feel that little bit more important, and we've all been put in a position where a higher

power presides over us. We all have an understanding of power and the massive impact it has on our lives. So with that understanding let me recount to you one tragic situation where those like us, the masses, trusted those in power and their decisions only to be betrayed.

In 1984 Bhopal, a city of India was struck in the early hours of the morning by a deadly cloud of toxic gas. The source of the gas, a pesticide factory. The factory was forced to cease operation. So the directors of the company, Union Carbide, put in place a safety system 'assured' to hold the deadly chemicals. But the system was allowed to fall into ruin, Union Carbide officials reasoning that the "inoperative plant proved no threat." Then, on the night of December 2nd 1984, the methylisocyanate exploded out of its concrete sarcophagus and leaked a toxic gas over the city. The unsuspecting citizens were killed in the most hideous ways. Over 20 000 people were killed and more than 100 000 people suffered subsequent side effects such as cancer and birth defects. So what happened to those responsible for this blatant abuse and manipulation of power? The CEO of the time never stood trial but evaded an international arrest warrant and then was only found in 2002, 18 years later! Living a life of luxury in the Hamptons – a group of islands along the coast of Long Island, New York. Furthermore, neither America nor India wanted to disturb him with an extradition order when he was found. Now I plead, if those in power didn't want to acknowledge this human rights abuse then how can we not see this as corrupt?

The same idea applies to Australia when we raise the issue of nuclear energy. With Australia talking about Uranium trade with China it raises concerns about nuclear weapons. How can we be sure that any country we sell Uranium to in the near future will not use it to a negative effect such as nuclear bomb production.

The power we give people through voting for a political leader or that we give large companies through consumer choice is something I don't want to see used for ill purposes. I do not believe it too idealistic to ask corporations to engage in positive roles in the community while making a profit.

Everyone here would be familiar with our nation's growing concern for rising fuel costs. The concern is based on crude oil monopolies sitting in the powerful position of being able to exploit Australia's rapid consumption of fuel for our transport requirements. This is a prime example of the way in which power is manipulated to one's advantage. This greed has not only hit our hip pockets hard but also the environment. Texaco, just one of the global oil mining companies, has spilt more than 50 000 kilolitres of oil in the Amazon region. This abuse without accountability makes all people throughout the world suffer. The Amazon tribes have been afflicted with numerous life-threatening diseases because they must drink the polluted water. Texaco refuses to clean up or even to compensate. This shows the greed and corruption inherent in their power. These exploitations are usually facilitated by a compliant and oppressive regime. In Burma Texaco allies with the Burmese government to force the indigenous people to work the land they own, to clear the native forest to prepare for oil and gas exploration. There is even a "free fire zone" in which the Karen Hilltribe members are allowed to be shot if they get in the way of the pipeline constructions. This is abuse of human rights, and oil companies such as Texaco have blatantly violated UN laws. Texaco itself is drilling in 24 countries – almost all in ways as unethical as the examples above.

I am talking about cultural, environmental and human destruction. All in the pursuit of the power of money. If we see these results how can we not ignore the obvious corruption of power? What is also disturbing is that again, we can directly compare this to the issue of uranium excavation and trading. Australia is sitting in the middle of the next energy source war with our own vast amount of uranium ore in the earth. War it just may be! When we discuss this we realise that aboriginal heritage and land rights may become irrelevant in the name of government revenue. There is already conflict over mining in Kakadu National Park. How far would we go for the dollar, how far would we go for power?

So how are you responding so far? Are you thinking that I'm only stating the negative influences power has over people? There are many cases in which power has been used ethically. But ultimately the possession of power is a moral responsibility. I tend to believe that the way we use power, for self centred or altruistic purposes, is a reflection of the ethical foundation we have built our society upon, and I can't help but wonder what foundations our society stands on.

These are the issues that trouble me when I am faced with the inevitability of being one of the next voting generation. I've seen and heard what humanity is capable of when it possesses power. Let me

redefine power as I see it. Money is power, media is power, corporate greed is power, being able to act without consequence is power, and so power often corrupts, subjugates, manipulates and destroys. I have come to believe Lord Acton's aphorism to contain a terrible truth. So when I register my first vote I want to be sure that I am putting Australia in the hands of a humanitarian, just and ethical government. If this is the only power I have to minimise the abuses of power I have already seen then I want to know I can trust those to whom I have given great power to control our nation's enormous assets and to influence our nation's longterm future.

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## The Price of Fame by Kirsty

It flashes in front of our eyes, all over television, radio and magazines. Media, paparazzi and the tabloids are chasing it like it's the next big thing - yet it's been around for many, many years. It's a word society is drawn to, a career everybody wants to have....FAME!

Do you remember your early teens when you would've given anything to be like your idols, the stars of their time? To live their fabulous lifestyle, to swim in their wealth, glory and success; when to have fans falling at your feet when crossing the street was all you could dream of!

I mean, even I'd love to have a voice like Olivia Newton-John. And I bet you'd love to have legs like Marilyn Monroe, or the charisma of James Dean. But behind the scenes of this dream-like picture story, the 'lifestyles of the rich and the famous' aren't always as they appear.

The criticism and public scrutiny (especially from the media) that comes with being famous forces celebrities out on a limb where they can be 'picked on' or judged by today's highly critical society.

Take a look at Michael Jackson, renowned for his musical talent and baby-faced appearance. All of which was destroyed when he entered adolescence.

A major influence, particularly on his appearance, was one point during a tour when a lady approached him at the airport. She cried, "Where's little Mikey? Where's little Mikey?" Then, realising he was standing directly in front of her, she said, shocked, "What happened to your face? It's covered in acne. You used to be so cute."

This statement was a major eye-opener for Michael Jackson, and with the constant hounding of the media at this early point in his career he felt the need to change his appearance to conform to the ideals of others. Over the years this became so drastic that he changed his skin colour entirely and had numerous surgical adjustments to his face.

An instance where the media went to unnecessary lengths to 'get a story' was the divorce between Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise. Every step they made was heavily monitored, to the extent that unrealistic reasons for the break-up were displayed in almost every gossip magazine. And they continue to this day.

And what about Holly Valance? New on the scene, chasing fame, using her sex appeal to grab attention. She has been branded a fake, as she hasn't entered her latest career as herself. The media have been harsh and judgemental, labelling her film clips as soft porn aimed at the younger generation.

Someone who did survive the media onslaught was Elvis Presley, 'The King'. He had an obvious talent and a crowd-drawing ability, appreciated by the media and world alike. He pioneered the worldwide spread of rock 'n' roll, which was fresh and innovative, broadening people's minds about the extent that music could be taken to.

As a result of his career and achievements he reaped the benefits of fame. And even after his tragic death, which was part of the price for his fame, the money received by his family has been enough to keep them rich, and still in the public eye.

Neil Armstrong has also been noted in history for his achievements. He was the first person to ever set foot on the moon, not only representing himself, but humanity as a species.

But unfortunately there is another side to the street of fame. The people living on the other side are not famous for what they have achieved, but famous for what crimes they've committed.

Christopher Skase, owner of high profile company Quintex, collapsed under a debt of at least \$1.5 billion. In June of '91 Skase was declared bankrupt, claiming assets of only \$5000 and personal debts of \$172 million. So, to avoid conviction, he fled the country to Majorca in Spain. Skase and the money never returned.

In August 2001, Christopher Skase died. Australia was never repaid, and this became another famous corporate crime.

Keeping up the crime theme... I'm sure you all recall when, in 1980, John Lennon, world famous leader of the Beatles, was assassinated, apparently by a 'nutter' believed to possess a jealous hatred for the rich and the famous.

Being the high profile person John Lennon was, this came as a terrible shock to the world. This is a good example of just how envious people can get of another's talents, advantages and success. Everybody at some stage in their life has had the desire to be famous, even if they won't admit it! But the downside is that it isn't a perfect road to fame. Fame is often destructive, greedy and selfish. If a person wants to be known, adored and remembered, then the price of fame can be high. And then fame might come at a terrible, and even tragic, price. Is fame all it's cracked up to be?

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## The Beat by Daniel, Year 12

The strobe illuminates humanity. A seething mesh of arms and heads and faces, eyes, hair, bobbing within the sea of the beat. A million filaments; shapes lattice with shapes, intense movement; a human garden; prayer.

The music stops; the cheap fluorescent tubes gutter, gulp, recover, casting a net of bright white light upon the crowd. Dingy corners brightened by the stark, invading presence of the illumination. Faces shining with sweat, upturned, staring into the light. The sigh comes up from the hordes; they chant for the return of the music; some beat their chests with their hands, pleading for the darkness and the enveloping, safe comfort of the dance.

A figure emerges; shrouded in pink; slowly strutting towards the centre of the platform. The lights flicker and die. Darkness. A single spotlight emerges, revealing the lone figure on the stage. The beat returns; recurring sounds and tunes. The crowd screams and renews their rhythmic swaying. The pounding music echoes the pounding within their heads; the movement the story of their lives.

Outside in the cold; initiates wait. Excited, young. They linger, anticipation etched into their faces; the cold night air biting into their skin. The bouncers; two Frisco seals; gesture for them to enter. The look at each other excitedly and move inside.

The beat pumps; they are dazed, disoriented. Surrounded by chiselled, sweat gleaming flesh they are immersed within the vast swarm; the earthen womb encompassing them. They struggle, bumping into

bodies and drawing disgruntled grunts from the people around them. The music draws them in; making them one with the mob; they move in perfect accord.

The music stops. Bodies; still, murmurs through the crowd. Cries, chants, "More, more!"

"Thank you, thank you Australia!" The small figure breathes, "I love you all!"

"Kylie, Kylie, Kylie!" the crowd chants.

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## The Cold

### Daniel, Year 12

There is no such thing as cold you know. My science teacher assures me that there isn't. "Cold", he says, "is the absence of heat, it's as simple as that, some things are just less heated than others!" (We had quite a heated conversation on that topic.)

Cold, I say, is in the absence. The vacuum of space that cries out to be filled by something, anything; the void that screams for a reality it cannot create; that little tear in the continuity that reeks of something missing.

I am a stereotype.

Transfixed by space and existence I lay, a mirage, a teenage vista of a planet yet to be explored. A being, existing within that vacuum-packed little tear in life. Formaldehyde. Moulded; a cast of reality. A small speck of a distant place; a time lost long ago in a sea of bones.

I pour my little heart out, I struggle; I tear a tear free. Pity. Small. Broken. "This mammal existed millions of years ago in the swamps of Brazil, but then a big mean ice age wiped them all out!" Interesting isn't it kiddies? The earthen womb exudes its dead boredom; it calls.

We listen to its words.

We dance throughout lives. We are that reality, oh god! Oh, mighty smite-r of the smite-ed. Unimpressed. Bemused. Trying to leave our mark in this little block of ice; in the middle of an unseasonably warm July day; but then again that's my fault too I suppose, I do use a hairdryer.

Answers. Sorry I annoyed my sweet dove. That little bird that carries the burden of hope couldn't possibly fly under the weight of its own guilt; especially after I pluck the little bastard. He flies suicidal at the roots of evil imbedded within that terrible garden filled with the whispers of that guilty little reptile.

But don't shoot the messenger.

What? You laugh? Cackling witch, you stir your pot. A little bit of this, a little bit of that; never enough of anything. You taunt me. You poke, you stir. Eye of newt and wing of bat, scale of snake, tail of dog? May you borrow some sugar? A little bit sour, eh? Sweet blood mouthfuls; sinfully good. Not that I'd know.

I despise you! You insidious disease, leprosy, typhoid, hunger, pestilence; oh! You plague upon humanity you! Flies erupt from your sweetly speaking mouth, smiling like a little girl. Oh Jezebel; corrupt-er of the corrupt-ed. The rivers of Egypt are red and flow as if they were blood.

You are cold. You are nothing.

Destruct-or of the destruct-ed, quietly you lie in wait. God's lioness; and I the wounded Gazelle. Trawling the dark. Oh little rat; gnawing at the foot of my monument. Your acid-raining filthy dank skies, rain down upon my aging façade. Soon my wall will be revealed to you, and you will slip between the cracks.

If you think I care; you're wrong. A clean slate has been ordered; you'll be written out of the plot; powerless to stop it you'll become just another extra; the background. I'll walk straight past you; the star of this show. You'll never play the supporting role; you're not my sidekick. Little Robin with all of the problems; can I help that she's a cat-woman?

Why don't you get a dog?

Your absence is what makes me cold. Raggy clothing reveals sweet flesh; fed upon by the vultures that can't fly. Screaming for the clouds they drink their unholy communion from my living flesh and fly with my wings; I am grounded. I plummet to earth and dream of the stars.

Haul me through the air; drag me forth into that sweet oblivion and make me safe. I unpeel; losing my inhibitions as we move forth to thy holy light and the glitter of seas falls behind us into a mesh of sunlight. My dear, sweet little man; it's your last resort; your magnum opus.

Peel off the napkin.

The light of the bright, bright moon illuminates your face; revealing that little twinkle in your eye. The big strip tease; we annihilate our restrictions; the wall falls; a mesh of bricks and concrete; the people pour in; it is over. The clasp on the gate is released; the flood ensues.

They search for survivors. Gently; slowly we float back into the continuity of the world; locked shut as a seashell; seagulls all around; trying to break us down. You hand me a paddle; we steer our own boat. A love boat with a cheesy captain. I'd love to live in obscurity.

But I'll always love you more.

The beat resumes.

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## **The Looking Glass**

### **Rhys, Year 11**

Through windows that no other gaze could bear,  
Momentum lost, I sit, I wait, I stare  
For through the looking glass,  
Inside the home of the maimed.  
A dark magnetism draws me closer  
To secrets left retained.  
Behind the eyes once resplendent  
A restless story left unmentioned  
Only held by Death's restraint.  
The wretched past stays trapped and faint  
The windows to the soul  
Now become closed over,  
The inharmonious silence of Death  
Not a movement, not a breath.  
So here I lay within my tomb  
Through the gates of hell I pass  
And as you gaze on me you'll see  
Malice through the looking glass.

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## The Need for Speed

### by Audrey

It's Friday morning and Thelma and Travis are getting ready for work. They are running late, as usual, so breakfast is instant cereal heated in the microwave, a quick 'heart-starter' instant coffee, and no time to pack lunch today. Thelma grabs clothes out of the dryer and puts them on. The dishwasher is quickly stacked and turned on as they rush out the door, each reaching for their mobile to phone the office and say they are on their way.

At the end of a long day Thelma and Travis drive home, stopping only to snatch a takeaway dinner at the drive-thru. They get home and reheat their meal, eat it and stack the dishes in the dishwasher. The remainder of the evening is spent watching reality TV.

They both sit there smiling blissfully, content in the knowledge that they haven't wasted a precious 48.5 minutes at the supermarket shopping and bumping into neighbours, and they haven't wasted another 56.2 minutes preparing dinner themselves, and they certainly haven't wasted a whole 36.9 minutes doing the dishes together while chatting about their day.

Everything in our lives is speeding up. We are becoming more and more obsessed with time. But more precisely, we are obsessed with the need for everything to be faster.

There are certain things we can associate with our modern hurry sickness.

Fridges and microwaves save us from spending hours a week shopping and countless hours in meal preparation. Electric heaters save us the time wasting inconvenience of chopping wood.

Mobile Phones help us to catch people anywhere, anytime it suits us.

ATMs and Credit Cards mean we rarely wait in long bank queues or spend hours on errands.

But the list really does go on : emails, drive-thru takeaways, e-tags, the internet, stopwatches, speed-dial telephones, traffic lights, elevators...they all come under this category of modern conveniences that empower us with a sense of control over the passing seconds.

Notice how there are digital clocks on everything these days... our microwaves, VCRs, in our cars, on the computer and on our wrists.

How many of us have stepped inside an elevator, waited a second and then frantically searched for the door close button because it's just too long to wait 3 seconds for the doors to close? Or what about those of us who will admit to pressing the pedestrian crossing button more than, let's say, 25 times. We just can't help ourselves.

But where is this need for speed really taking us? We're already showing the symptoms: impatience, anxiety, stress, depression, obesity and antisocial behaviour. To calm ourselves down perhaps we should spend more of that valuable time relaxing.

Leisure is our word for free time. If we "save time" by being more efficient and productive, are we really saving it for our leisure? Leisure is really just a state of mind, but no dictionary can define it without still referring to time passing.

In their leisure time, Thelma and Travis will probably play video games instead of joining sporting teams. After all, it's faster to flick a switch than to swing a bat. And they'll still watch reality television instead of visiting friends. They'll rent a movie instead of going out to watch a play and they'll phone our neighbours instead of walking 10 metres to see them.

This is where our obsession with time has left us...Oooh! I can see my time is up! But I still have 22.8 seconds to leave you with some words by that well known film maker, Woody Allen...

" I'm going to kill myself. I should go to Paris and jump off the Eiffel Tower. I'll be dead. You know, in fact, if I get the Concorde, I could be dead three hours earlier, which would be perfect. Or wait a minute. With the time change, I could be alive for six hours in New York but dead three hours in Paris. I could get things done, and I could also be dead." - Woody Allen

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## The Glass Wall

### by Vanessa

I tapped the glass wall impatiently and after what seemed like an eternity, the bald headed, stocky man had still not so much as glanced my way. He seemed to be too involved the conversation and mesmerized by his own hand motions.

Gee what an idiot. I decided to leave the poster with my roughly scribbled words pinned up to the window and jump into bed.

The sun beat down on the window pane blinding me as I awoke. I bounded out of bed only to be struck by the realisation that I couldn't really go anywhere so I slumped back down on the floor.

There was a knock on my door and a faint voice behind it coughed out "Breakfast is ready!". The door was momentarily unlocked and opened. A bowl of cereal was placed on the floor with a stainless steel spoon and then the door was slammed closed. I picked up the bowl and sat it out on the window sill. Yuk I hated cornflakes!

I slumped myself down on my beanbag and let myself sink in I was so bored it was unbelievable! I wished that something extraordinary would happen I lived such a boring life, in such a boring house, in such a boring part of town.

I was in the process of banging my head against the wall out of boredom when I noticed a note stuck to the outside of my window. It read "Silly little boys get what they deserve". Disturbed, I dropped the note and deciphered where it may have originated from. Then I remembered the man in the office the other night and the nasty note I had left pinned to my window. Frantically I scoured the window for my piece of paper and coincidentally found it lying on the floor next to.....

The Christmas tree!

Curious, I dug around for the object that had glinted at me from last night but found nothing. This was growing more bizarre by the minute.

The hours ticked by like the clock was on neutral or something. The sun went up but it seemed to be permanently stuck in the sky, super glued to the pale blue haze behind it. Eventually the sun seemed to sink into the sky after not what had seemed like 12 hours but 112. I gladly appreciated the thought that there was only one more day to waste away in these four walls. I resided to my favourite spot in my bedroom, the window and gazed out in awe as something struck me.

It was the bald headed man again and his baby carriage but this time there was a baby in it and the object that had glinted at me was a gun and it was sitting on the man's desk. There also appeared to be a large sum of money sitting next to the gun on the table in an envelope. As I studied it closer I realised it happened to be a very large sum of money!

The man started to turn and I ducked just in time I hoped not to have been seen.

I closed my curtains for some privacy, this man was peculiar and I didn't want anymore trouble after the Christmas tree already being put in my room. Besides there wasn't anything I could do about that man his baby, gun and money.

"Chink"- the TV sounded as I flicked the switch I guess I had to be thankful that at least if I was restrained in here I had a TV to keep myself entertained.

The news, not my style but it was all that was showing at this time. I sat down and began to watch as the next article was announced by the reporter.

"And in further news tonight the baby of well established company man, Mr. Gene Manfred has been kidnapped and held for a ransom of 50 000 dollars. Of course if you have any information on the child's whereabouts you should contact your local authorities."

I turned the TV off this was just too ironic to ignore I would have to tell my parents. I was grounded but not isolated from any human contact. Banging on the door I screamed for mum. As the footsteps slowly trudged up the hall I slipped over to the window and quickly peeked out from behind the curtain but the man and all his possessions had gone.

“What is it this time Simon?” mum barked as she opened my door.

“Mum you have to believe me on this,” I stated, as a frustrated frown came across her mouth.

“The man across the alley in the office, I think he’s up to no good.” And I explained the whole recount of what I had witnessed and what the news had reported.

“Don’t be ridiculous Simon he’s a nice man and we’ve invited him around for dinner. As a matter of fact I’d like it if you came out to meet him.”

I squeaked, “I don’t think that’s such a good idea.” And I tugged at my collar.

“Simon, I won’t stand for any of your nonsense it’s the precise reason why you are grounded in the first place, now come out and eat dinner politely with us all, we will talk about what you said after he leaves.”

So that’s the big fib that had me grounded yet again and all because I had wanted something to daydream about while I was bored as all hell. Give a kid a break, I couldn’t help it if I was prone to the occasional story or two.

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## The Power of Words

### Sophie, Year 11, 2008

- ‘A ship is safe in the harbour but that’s not what ships are for.’
- ‘In the end it’s not the years in your life it’s the life in your years.’
- ‘I cannot imagine how the clockwork of the universe can exist without a clock maker.’

Such simple words, cleverly arranged, can evoke so much feeling and thought. We speak thousands of words a day that have no lasting meaning, but there are times when the words we speak can mean the world - when the things we say can make a person pause and think, make a person laugh or cry, break a person’s heart or perhaps help mend it.

I have been told that in times past when a person gave you their word that was it. Is there still power in people’s words these days? I believe there still is.

Recently Prime Minister Kevin Rudd gave a speech that could possibly become one of the most famous in Australian history. His speech was centred on one word: ‘...for the pain and suffering and hurt of these stolen generation and for their families left behind, we say SORRY!’ The word ‘sorry’, one simple word with much meaning and significance for so many people. Aboriginal people have been waiting for that one word for many years. A symbolic word has brought relief and joy to indigenous Australians.

Another example of powerful words is the song IMAGINE written by John Lennon. The lyrics were inspired by a hope for a more peaceful world...

“Imagine all the people living life in peace.

You may say I’m a dreamer, but I am not the only one,

I hope someday you’ll join us and the world will be as one.”

Thought provoking words, simple words coming from the heart.

Words from the heart often have the greatest impact, but can often be the hardest to say.

The words “I love you” said to parents or children, to husband or wife, to boyfriend or girlfriend, could be words never forgotten.

I attended a funeral last year for a friend. At the end of the ceremony a song written by Andre Botticelli called 'Time to say goodbye' was played. Up to this point everyone was composed. The effect these words had on everyone was so powerful, the words went straight to the heart.

I love speaking to people and hearing what they have to say. Things people have said to me over the years have moulded the person I am, and increased my understanding of life. This is important to me.

Words can have a singular significance when said by particular people. An excellent example of this is Albert Einstein. He said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." His words are so powerful because they came from a man who possessed immense knowledge.

The words "There's no place like home" were spoken by a little girl called Dorothy wanting to go home from OZ. The word 'home' doesn't actually mean the bricks and windows that make up a house. That word actually evokes the special place we grew up in, the place where the foundations of our relationships began, the place that holds inner significance for each of us. Those words are so well known and wherever you are they ring true...there is no place like home.

The world is full of words, and we should always consider the words we say, and how they impact on others. Our words could change someone's life. Something we say could be something others never forget.

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## Beautiful

### Alyce Taylor, Year 9/10 Poetry Winner, 2009

My bone structure is shining,  
My skin is marble.  
I have so much more in my heart  
Than I know what I am worthy of.  
I own guilt, I am imperfect.  
I am strong and weak enough  
To lift the weight of the world,  
And have it melt in my soft, sculptured hands.  
My face is beaten and ripped  
In vulnerability and happiness and anger  
And all the emotions of the universe.  
I am beautiful.

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## Sweet As

### Brody Smith, Year 9/10 Short Story Winner 2009

'This new boat runs sweet as, mate,' said Robbo.

'Yeah, check out the wake it's making too. Can't wait to get out there,' I replied.

I was having a great day. I'd got my pay, and after a good day's work, I was out on my new ski boat with a couple of my best mates. There was very little wind, making the weir as flat as a dime. Although the weir was very low compared to previous years, you couldn't get much better conditions. Even though there were a lot of dead trees sticking out of the water, we just planned to steer clear of them.

'Alright, who's goin' first?' Robbo asked.

He was one of my best mates. Nice bloke, but doesn't let anyone tell him what to do. Tall, 186 centimetres, pretty muscly. Nobody wants to get in his way.

'Yeah, I'll go,' Mick answered.

Mick was the kind of guy you just don't seem to notice in a room full of people. A quiet guy. But once you get to know him, you can't help but love him. He's got a way to make you laugh at the right moments. Mick was a smallish guy at 173 centimetres and 70 kilos. I guess you could say Robbo was his bodyguard.

Then there was me. Dave Goode, or Davo to most. Brown, wavy hair, 83 kilos, 191 centimetres tall, and one of the best wakeboarders in NSW. I'd won several state titles, and competed nationally as well.

'Alright, what will ya take?' I said. 'The Jobe ski or my new Hyperlite 3000 series wakeboard?'

Mick replied, 'Yeah, chuck me the wakeboard Davo. I'll show you how it's done,' he joked.

'Ha ha, good luck with that, mate.'

Mick wasn't a bad wakeboarder. He had been improving a heap since he started, and he was going alright. I think he's better at skiing personally, but he seems to agree with me that wakeboarding is a lot more fun. I mean, all you do in skiing is cut from side to side, but with wakeboarding you can clear the whole wake while doing a backflip. You can't get much better than that.

Mick was in the water and ready to go.

'Yep. Go!' he yelled.

I put down the throttle and it popped him straight up.

'This boat's got some power behind it, Davo,' said Robbo.

'Yeah, it should, it's got twin fuel-injected 115s on the back of it,' I replied.

'Whoah! Is that legal? Ha ha!'

'Let's hope so.'

Mick was going great. He was doing huge jumps across the wake, doing clean mutes and crail grabs. It was sweet. We were heading towards the dead trees sticking out of the water, so I decided to turn around and go back the way we'd come from. I signalled to Mick that we were turning around.

As the boat turned, it swung Mick out the side, and then I heard a SPLAT! Just the sound you don't want to hear when you're driving the boat, and the pain you don't want to feel when you're a boarder. I first thought he might have just dug the nose of the board in the water and face-planted. But I knew it was more than that by the look on Robbo's face.

'Hey! Turn around. Mick's down,' Robbo exclaimed.

Once I turned I could see Mick lying lifeless in the water. Robbo dived in and pulled Mick up towards the boat. He was still breathing, and he only had a cut in his forehead the size of your little toe. He was going to be okay. He was conscious and the cut didn't look too bad.

'He must've hit a tree or something underwater,' Robbo explained.

'Yeah, they gotta do something about this water level. It's shockin',' I said.

'C'mon mate, we need to get you to the hospital,' Robbo said to Mick.

We got back to the boat ramp as quick as we could, loaded the boat, and left. Mick was screaming in pain the whole way through. We drove him straight to hospital where the doctors put three stitches in his forehead.

Apart from that, and his mild concussion, he was fine.

'I guess that global warming stuff is true, ay Mick. Ha ha,' I laughed.

'Yeah, well it doesn't hurt to look where you're driving.' He smiled.

## The Rain

Lachlan McIntyre, Year 7/8 Poetry Winner, 2009

The wind through trees often blows  
As the frost shall sleep on the grass  
But alas did anyone know  
Of the tempest about to pass

It was a searing day in December  
The birds were out on the wing  
And never did I remember  
A more wonderful, glorious thing

That evening out on the veranda  
A curious south wind prowled  
I did not stay long to meander  
As the cats and the dogs did howl

A crash in the heavens, a smash in the clouds  
A crackle of light brands the sky  
The corrugated iron roof rattled  
As flurries of rain washed by

Manifest there at that moment  
Was the fathomless depth of time  
The infinite realms of the universe  
And a merciless force divine

The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost  
Had descended upon the land  
The Almighty power of Providence  
Had finally shown his hand

The next morning all was peaceful  
Gentle and quiet and still  
I recounted the previous night's terrors  
As I sat by the window sill

Eleven long years we'd waited for rain  
And eleven long years it took  
But the measurements we'd made that day  
Rewrote all of the books

That storm will never be forgotten  
Nor the story put on the shelf  
A legend of man and of nature  
As old as time itself

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## A Cold Country

### Lachlan McIntyre, Year 7/8 Short Story Winner 2009

As the eleven o' clock train for Moscow pulled in to take on fuel, two Australian tourists were approached by a rather severe looking man with a rather alarming quantity of facial hair.

'I am sorry. You have no visa. You must leave.' Speaking was Locomotive Guard No. 6, with an accent almost as thick as his beard. Jack Whiting, of the 'cool and collected' variety, calmly assessed the situation and waded in with all the wisdom and perception of a two year old.

'What appears to be the problem, officer?' Jack inquired, casually leaning on a seat, which was obviously lower to the ground than what was first thought, as Jack lost his balance and nearly fell into the arms of a poor old lady who was simply trying to take a nap.

'Ah... you friend has no visa. She must be getting to off the train.'

'Nah... that's alright. She's with me....'

'Idiot!' I am not referring to of your person!' This poor man's command of the English language was laughable, but Jack understood that the command of the AK-47 hanging at his belt would probably be less so. And if that wasn't enough, the indignant scowl and the two hedgerows that he called eyebrows that were drawn together in an almighty frown gave the overall impression that he was not going to be open to bargaining.

Amy and Jack high-tailed it for the carriage exit. The full force of the cold enveloped itself around them like an icy bear hug.

'Amy,' said Jack. 'Amy?'

'What?'

'Look, I know you're tired but we're going to have to press on. The closest town from here is... roughly... 11 km away. Think you can make it?'

'What? Oh... Yes.' Amy replied absent-mindedly to her brother.

Jack and Amy pushed on through the forest all morning, pausing only to swill from the precious and dwindling supply of coffee in their thermoses. They were actually supposed to be on holiday in Moscow, to see their grandparents. Until they were kicked off the train. A chill sub-arctic wind whispered through a vale of great evergreen pines as snow wafted gently from the heavens.

They made it into town, exhausted, and cold by lunchtime. They went for a walk around and had a well deserved rest by the fountain. All about them lay the hustle & bustle of a European marketplace; a sanctuary of bartering, haggling, fresh goods and produce.

A lone figure heavily armed and in black fatigues crept quietly through the snow around the base of the fountain.

'Freeze.' The word cut the air like a knife, accompanied by the sickening click of a cartridge loaded into a pistol.

The figure spoke.

'Are you Amy & Jack Whiting?' The man inquired with a voice dark and laced with menace.

'Yes.' Jack managed a feeble croak.

'Excellent. Come with me.'

He set off at a pace, eventually leading them into a small cafe.

'Who the hell are you...?' Jack began.

'Shh!' the man hissed. 'I was sent here to find you both. He outstretched his arm. 'Operative John Maguire.'

'Operative?' Quizzed Jack. 'Like a spy?'

'Ha! No, better than a spy.' As he was met with curious yet confused glances, he continued. 'Operatives were conceived by the Queen, with President Reagan towards the end of the Cold War. Anyway...' He said, tossing the history aside.

'Hang, on.' Amy said, confused. 'How come this is so important?'

John turned slowly to face her. 'Do you know how your Dad died?'

'A... Car Crash.'

'I'm sorry. Your Dad was an operative like me. And....he was assassinated. By Russian KGB.'

'Why?' Amy sobbed.

'He was hacking into a top secret database. He retrieved the co-ordinates for their new nuclear warhead projec...'

'Their what!' Jack screamed.

Everyone in the room had abruptly lost interest in their lattes & doughnuts and Jack could almost feel eyes burning into the back of his head. The silence was deafening.

'Would you please... shut your mouth!' John whispered vehemently.

'Wha...what did I...'

'SHH!'

A faint clink reverberated around the hushed café as a woman dropped her teaspoon.

The newfound audience decided that there was little more to see, and returned muttering to their caffeine and conversation.

'Sorry. Continue.'

'As I was saying, yes, a nuclear defence program. New uranium mines in Siberia. Secret assembly lines in the east. As to their motives, who knows? But I can guarantee they won't be friendly. They could simply not risk this information being leaked, as they were vulnerable with the weapons still under construction. So, they shot your dad in his car and retrieved it.'

'So... This is big?' Jack said.

'This is HUGE! If this thing goes ahead we're as good as finished. Only...'

'Only what?' Said Amy.

'Only your dad was one step ahead. Before he was killed he made a secret copy. And he gave it to you.'

'Oh, my god! She gasped, realising with a twitch of horror that she had been carrying the fate of the free world on a USB in her back pocket.

'But now they know about that, too. And the project is nearly complete.'

A single shot rang out through the frigid air. The café window shattered, spraying glittering shards of glass across the room as people shrieked and ducked under tables.

'Jesus Christ! They're already here!' said John as he grabbed Jack and Amy. They sprinted over to John's car, dodging bullet fire from all directions. In a neat 7 seconds they were speeding through the main street, looking for the highway.

'There's... A helipad... about 2 miles down the road.' John panted, feet down hard on the throttle.

'There's a chopper waiting to take us to London, to the MI5 headquarters. Once we get there, the co-ordinates will be given to the squads and they will take out the factories.'

The Russians had already given chase, two black jeeps mounted with machine guns.

Rat-a-tat-tat as they opened fire, ammunition ricocheting off the tarmac, spraying bitumen onto the body of the car.

'Uh... take the wheel for a moment Jack.' Asked John.

'Okay.'

John started fumbling under the front seat for something

‘What are you looking for?’ yelled Amy.

‘Uh... it’s around here...somewhere... ah. Here it is!’ He pulled out a bazooka and grinned. ‘Let’s see if they can catch these!’

An ear-splitting ‘kaboom’ echoed across the plain, as a perfect shot transformed the engine bay of the first jeep into a hellish fireball. The driver of the second jeep swerved to avoid it but flung himself into the path of a semi-trailer heading the other way. In a spectacular but tragic display it slammed nose first into the prime mover, triple twisting and landing on its roof, engulfed in flame.

John took back control and made a screeching stop at the helipad. John, Jack and Amy hurdled out the car, in a life or death dash for the chopper, which had already started taking off.

Two more gunmen leapt from their vehicles, and opened fire. John flicked his Magnum revolver from its holster and ‘bang bang’ dropped them both in a single breath. But the damage had been done. Jack lay sprawling on the tarmac, blood seeping from his left calf.

‘No, leave him!’ John shouted to Amy as he fought to suppress yet more gunmen.

‘Jack! No... I...!’

‘Leave Him!’

‘NO!’

‘You’re the important one!’

The chopper was now well in the air, with Amy and the precious information on board.

‘JACK...!’

In his last moments, Jack looked on in grief and dismay as his sister disappeared into the clouds with the thundering roar of chopper blades.

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## **Tips for a Traveller** **Sophie Buckle, 2009**

### **One**

**You start climbing the mountain from the day you’re born.**

You start climbing the mountain  
from the day you’re born.

The steps are small

to begin with,

but once you get your footing

you race ahead.

The energy wanes.

You find

the going hard,

it’s not as easy as it used to be.

The ground grows more uncertain,

paths up the mountain

open.

Some choose the hard way,

maybe it seems quicker.

Some look for the easy way.

Do they care whether they reach the top?  
Some choose the scenic route,  
more interested in the climb.  
Some remain undecided  
for some time.  
Some people hurt  
themselves  
Some find a companion  
to walk the same road.  
Others walk alone.  
Everyone reaches the summit.  
Everyone has their own journey.  
Some are intertwined.  
Looking back they realise  
how far they have come.  
This is the beauty of life.  
The journey.  
Does it ever truly end?

## **Two**

### **I'd never thought of dying young**

I'd never thought of dying young. Never thought those 16 years would be long enough to be alive, but in a split second that all changed.

Black with a white line  
Black with a white line down the centre  
Black with two white lines down the centre

The speed of the car picks up as it breezes down the highway, blurring the line, the endless straight line, or is it lines? The firm grip on the steering wheel whitens my knuckles, my arms straight as a wooden board and my foot encourages the accelerator. The intimidating truck beside is left behind as the odometer continues to climb steadily. A few deep tension releasing breaths, a sign of a successful overtake. The first truck of many to come. The setting sun up ahead, usually a beautifully breathtaking view streams into the windscreen causing my eyebrows to snap together into an unrelenting squint. The golden sun matches the yellow L plate gripping onto the clear glass. One boring white line, I'm sure it's only one.

The cool of the night descends upon the road. A hush calms my family as the journey passes the halfway mark and the two in the back seat drift into a casual sleep. The highway has a few travellers tonight but is in no way crowded. Another truck looms up ahead and my heartbeat instantly quickens. The right lane is a step out of the safety zone. The straight road continues ahead as the headlights shoot out a constant bright light before being engulfed by the darkness. The red and white lights of a truck pass by as the car slowly pushes forward. The headlights discover something different to the constant black with a white line. Something that my eyes can't decipher through the dark night sky. There's no time to even let out a sound. My eyes are wide with shock. I sit there with my hands over the wheel and the car now completely out of control. My mind seems to freeze. I feel blank like an empty canvas awaiting the artist to paint the horror to come. I stare endlessly and speechlessly into the black night, although the ordeal only lasts a few seconds. The impact sends the car out of control as it veers into the side of the truck. With the steering now completely out of line the car rebounds out of the truck's side and begins to lose momentum. Everyone is jolted awake. In a split second life could be over.

I walk back to see the truck tyre left in the middle of the right hand lane. I couldn't have been seen it in darkness before the actual impact. The pitch black road completely camouflaged the black of the tyre.

Mum spooked. Dad white against the moon. My brother in a complete state of shock. Me quiet.

Later in bed, my mind seems to race. The calmness I felt afterwards a contrast to the rest of my family. My mind won't rest. A freak accident, couldn't be helped. Why me? Why that time? Why that place? Why my family? Why still alive?

The tears finally come, alone, when the rest of my family are truly asleep and safe. I close my eyes but I can't help thinking, one white line, it was definitely only one.

## Three

### Glenn McGrath

"The number of people living in the slums of India has more than doubled in the past two decades and now exceeds the entire population of Britain". I shut the National Geographic magazine with its glossy vibrant pictures to stare out of the hired car at the reality. The truth of the words echo in my mind as I enter the hot and crowded world of the slums I've only just read about. I have never felt so many eyes staring at me. I try to look straight ahead but the path seems to twist and turn so much that I need to focus my attention on not getting lost. Every doorway opens onto another dirt path that leads to another part of the maze of the slums. The dirt paths are often replaced with rough planks of wood constantly trampled by thousands of feet as the inhabitants move throughout the pathways of the slum. Eyes peer through the makeshift doorways as I follow the children who seem to roam free, yet know exactly where each path leads. This is their maze. This is their path in life, and as I follow them deeper into the slum I wonder if they will ever leave it behind, or be swallowed by circumstance.

The children are ragged and barely clothed, but they capture and steal a piece of my heart. Their brown eyes are alight, their clothes are filthy and ripped, and their bare feet are hardened by the rough ground. Big smiles show white teeth against dark skin and contrast starkly against the backdrop of their homes and lifestyle. As I look into their eyes I wonder if I am the first white skinned person they have ever seen in the flesh.

In the middle of a derelict building there is a group of kids playing cricket. My dad decides to go and join in the game with the boys embarrassing me and bringing colour to my cheeks. These kids don't speak English and we don't speak Hindi but that doesn't stop us laughing pretty hard when the only English phrase the kids know is 'Glen McGrath'. In my eyes the only similarity my dad has to Glenn McGrath is his nationality and skin colour. Certainly not his ability with a cricket ball. However, in the eyes of these kids this man was like Glenn McGrath. Dad bowled his first ball onto the uneven dirt ground; it turns out to be an absolute shocker, bouncing slowly to a small boy. Are they disappointed by his lack of pace and skill? Clearly not, as they cheer and run after the ball, pushing each other out of the way with their small arms as their bare feet thunder against the raw earth, and all the while yelling 'Glenn McGrath' at the top of their lungs. The game builds to a frenzy as more and more children run from the slums to see Glenn McGrath and be part of the game. I wonder if I had the ball in my hands what they would call me.

It amazes me to be in India, to experience these children, and share a piece of their lives. Not one of them wears shoes, their ball is old with chunks missing and their bat is held together with tape. In another way these kids are not much different to the kids at home. Dad's smile is huge, and he continues to smile as we walk back to the hired car and the air conditioning. I sit in the back seat as we leave the slums, remembering the children's eyes, the houses and the cracked wooden cricket bat.

Back home in Australia nothing has changed. We meet for an Aussie barbeque at my uncle's house in a pleasant middle class neighbourhood, with green lawns neatly mowed. The driveway is full of cars. The men gather around the large screen TV watching the cricket. I watch as Glenn McGrath bowls, showing his pace and skill. In only ten minutes he snags his second wicket and the lounge room erupts with cheering. My ten year old cousin drags me into his bedroom to show me his prized poster of Glen

McGrath. He proudly points to the black signature covering the cricketing legend's hat. I am immediately transported back to the children screaming 'Glen McGrath' to my dad in India. I feel like I can almost hear their voices echoing in my head. My cousin is about the same age as those little boys in India, and just as excited about his hero.

The boys all head out for a game of backyard cricket. The grass is even and freshly mowed, the bat and ball are new, and the wicket stretches between the house and the double garage. I watch them play their cricket, and wonder...

## **Four**

### **The accordion**

The accordion's wheezing sounds raw as it floats through the air and down the tiled staircase. My dad's burly voice answers and tells me to stop. The accordion's normally rich mellow sound is broken by a raw discordant wheeze. I put it down. Enough torture for everyone's ears for one day.

The village sign is plain oatmeal, yet the name imprinted into it is anything but simple. The bold Maltese alphabet letters appear to be randomly arranged, yet mum confirms that they match the instructions given by the music shop written on the scrap of paper. We follow equally foreign street signs as we drive the car around and around the small Maltese village. Box shaped sandy coloured buildings line the narrow streets. I wonder if we are driving in circles.

I see a bench seat filled with aged Maltese men, a common gathering place for socialising and cultural exchanges. We pull up next to them hoping that one of them speaks a little English. The man in the middle gets up slowly and makes his way over to my dad. Up close I can see his skin is creased and as he starts to speak to us his accent is rich and almost impossible to decipher. We show him the street name and try our hardest to follow his pointing arms and fingers. Returning to the car I feel just as bewildered as before the communication. At least we have a sense of the right direction. After a few more laps of the village we thankfully stumble across the small side street, hidden away from the main road and concealed by two large archways. We drive slowly into the narrow cobbled street and come to a stop in front of a dulled silver tin shed, masked by years of dust and rust. We remove the wheezy accordion out of the boot of our tiny Maltese car and knock on tin door, causing the whole shed to shudder. The door swings open and reveals a short man with silver hair. His skin is browned and he wears a workman's apron over matching blue pants and shirt. He warmly welcomes us into his workshop and we make our way out of the Maltese heat into the "world of Gino."

Gino's English is strong enough to hold a reasonable conversation. His workshop is intriguing. Wood carvings cover the concrete ground, and hip height workbenches are scattered with metal tools and half finished projects. A window opposite allows the natural light from outside to filter into the workshop. It reminds me of the workshop of Giuseppe, the creator of Pinocchio. Any moment and a little wooden puppet might come to life and speak to me. Gino immediately and eagerly begins to tell us unique stories about instruments he has fixed. I quickly come to realise that Gino is a very intelligent man, with a passion to salvage and solve instruments' woes by giving them back their musical sound.

I snap the locks open on the accordion case and lift it out. He slides the straps over his thin frame and I watch as his fingers settle on the ivory keys. Gino's fingers are long, bony and thin. Initially Gino's hands shake slightly but when they come into contact with the keys they seem certain. They belong there. Gino gently presses the keys and smoothly opens the billows. The wheezy sound is overtaken and becomes secondary to the notes he plays. The rich full sound of the accordion resonates through the workshop. Playing for no longer than a few seconds, Gino identifies the problem and knows how to fix it. Asking if we would like to see his accordion after recognising our interest in music he makes his way over to a brown door that I failed to see when first entering, and disappears.

We look around the workshop and without communicating all wonder how this man with such a passion and talent for music exists hidden under the wood and carvings of this little tin shed. We have stumbled on a hidden Maltese treasure in a very humbling and yet heartfelt state.

Re-entering with a black case Gino opens the lid and effortlessly slides out his own accordion. With love and passion in his voice Gino explains how he had made every piece of his instrument while learning his skills from the Scandalli Company in Italy. Pulling a simple stool off the bench he settles amongst the pile of wood shavings, and we all lean casually against the benches, anticipation consuming our faces.

Gino's fingers once again find their home on the keys. The tone this time is mellifluous, and richer than I could ever imagine. Music fills the space and seems to seep into every crack, consuming the room in its sonorous sound. The experience reminds us of the wild dance of the gypsies, yet at the same time of the gentle and thoughtful tones of a love song. The sun's filtered light illuminates the space with its golden rays and the whole scene takes my breath away. Gino's fingers deftly manipulate the keys while his arm effortlessly pulls the billows. Gino's face is completely at ease, lost in the string of notes escaping from the instrument.

Gino's notes have gathered around our bodies and sheltered us under their magical cloak. My ears are soaking in a wealth that no other music has ever presented. The song ends. I feel like it has just begun. The room still seems to resonate but the notes have ceased. It is now a workshop again. The billows stop, the fingers rest and Gino's smile is one of utter pleasure.

We get back into the car and pull out of the concealed road. Absolute silence prevails. The sound seems to have followed us into the car and we remain utterly consumed by our brief experience of 'Gino's world'. Any word would sound coarse to our ears after that rich musical experience. We have all shared the universal language of music, the love of a man for his craft and a memorable Maltese moment.

## **Five**

### **I've been waiting for you**

Loch Lomond Youth hostel looks more like a castle than the hostel we are expecting. The towering stone walls are impressive and the surrounding countryside has a strange majestic quality. The Scottish castle seems to belong there. Arriving in the early afternoon with my family, we wander through seemingly endless corridors leading in various directions trying to find our room. Uniform doors line one side while on the other side long vertical windows allow a glimpse into the world outside. Looking out the windows I can see the edge of the grass where it meets the forest. None of the doors are labelled or locked so it makes finding our room an interesting challenge.

My brother notices a small brass sign indicating we are at least on the right floor and it seems we've finally found our room. Eagerly pushing the door open we are surprised and confronted with about twenty five teenage boys watching sport on TV. Wrong room! I'm a bit embarrassed as every set of eyes turns in our direction and stares. Being sport mad my dad's always interested in who's playing, and never being one to shy away from making conversation boldly enters into the room and begins to talk to one of the boys. I hover half way, undecided whether I want to join in or wait till he's finished. I decide to listen in case something of interest comes up.

"Are you watching the footy?" Dad demands.

"Not footy. You're Australian right?" one of them says. "We have a teacher here who's an Aussie. Your accents are a dead giveaway."

My dad just laughs and says, "Yes that's right."

"All you get is soccer here," the boy says.

"Oh well, enjoy the game," my dad replies and makes his way out of the room.

I think about my Aussie accent. I never realised I had an accent but once you go to another country it becomes so obvious. We trundle down the stairs and leave the hostel's lobby to go sightseeing.

The countryside is a spectacular array of green, with the occasional brown. Little wooden fences spring up out of the thick shrubs that carpet the fields surrounding the road. Houses are scattered, most made of slate with tiled roofs. We hit a local traffic jam, about thirty sheep wandering along the road. Their white wool has turned into matted dreadlocks of a dirty brown colour and they seem in no hurry to move off the road. Their ruggedness matches their environment perfectly.

It is very late and dark by the time we start to head back to the hostel, tired after our adventures. I feel exhausted as my watch ticks over into the new day. The trees impose dark shadows against the moonlight, their branches creeping into the darkness while their trunks, like enlarged tombstones, spread along the concealed track. The headlights of our hire car only illuminate the bark for a second before moving on, enough time to dispel any irrational thoughts that night sometimes encourage. The trees begin to thin out as the car slowly makes its way onto the grey gravel. Coming to a stop on the circular driveway the night has an unsettling quality about it. It could be all those scary movies and books that have sowed a seed of doubt in my mind and ignited the fanciful thoughts that play with my common sense.

We enter the warm welcoming lobby looking forward to bed. Suddenly we sense movement. A young man in his early twenties is sitting in front of the computer and seems to be the only person still up. Seeing us enter, a look of hope spreads across his face and he is clearly eager to catch our attention. A broad smile is offered and he excitedly asks,

“How are you? Are you the Australians? I’ve been waiting for you.”

We must look confused as he quickly adds that he is a teacher in the Channel Islands on an excursion with the group of boys we had met earlier. They had carried the news to him that there were other Australian’s at the hostel.

He quickly continued, “I’m desperate for Aussie news from home and was wondering if you have time for a cup of tea?”

My entire family looks utterly drained and exhausted, wanting nothing more than to go to bed. His eyes have a deep hunger for news. Moving into the country-style kitchen with its wooden doors, long benches and piled plates, we sit at the long communal table. The man’s stylish, comfortable clothing suits his well cut dark hair and deep brown eyes. He explains he is yearning for news from Australia, news from his home, from our home, our shared origins. He quickly expresses how he misses the lifestyle, the sport and the Aussie sense of humour.

We spend hours talking and laughing. The rain begins, and splashes against the long vertical windows while the wind howls through the wooden frames. Inside the kitchen I feel warm and comfortable, sheltered from the elements outside. It feels like we have known him for years instead of minutes. Our shared nationality seems to initiate a strong bond as we continue to talk. I feel my eyelids getting heavier as I struggle to stay awake, yet thoroughly enjoying our time together. We say our goodbyes as we will be leaving in the morning. We will never see him again.

As I climb the ancient staircase, the night’s conversations run through my mind. Everyday conversations that mean absolutely nothing, yet tonight their impact was immeasurable. I remember his eyes and the raging hunger for news from home. Suddenly strangers had been joined purely because of their place of birth. I fall asleep thinking about home, about the simple things that make me who I am.

## Six

**I look down at my wrist and all I can see are his shoes with holes covering the top.**

The market bustles, noisily alive with hungry buyers looking for a bargain, the stark difference between tourist and local apparent in both clothing and skin colour. I slide between stalls avoiding a seemingly endless stream of bodies going the opposite way. The vibrant colours and clamorous noises fill my ears and eyes. I never seem to pause long enough on any one thing in case I miss something more amazing. Looking up at the row of spices the smells seem to pinch my nose, making my eyes water. The heat is exhausting and my energy supply flags, but I force myself to continue.

Pushing on to the stalls devoted to the colourful jewellery, the sound intensifies with the stall holders bargaining and yelling for attention. One voice cuts through the rest and I look up to see a small Columbian man with a table full of coloured metal bracelets. His shoes are worn thin and gaping holes cover the top of them. His shirt hangs off his dark weather-worn skin. I just stare at the table. There are so many bracelets, hundreds of them. His eyes catch mine and I can tell I am going to buy something. I follow his avid eyes and alluring voice over to the wooden table and start looking more closely.

“Six hundred peso,” his voice coaxes my ears.

There must be five hundred bracelets on the table. I blink, the glitter of the products seem to trap my eyes and hold my focus.

“Six hundred peso! No, too much,” I say in an amazed voice, but at the same time looking more closely at his products.

There are definitely more than a thousand bracelets, all of them laid out in colour groups. How long would it take him to arrange this spectacular display each day?

“Ok, five hundred and fifty peso, good price, high quality,” he says.

No way am I backing down now. The hungry shopper inside me comes alive and pushes on.

“How about two for four hundred peso?”

I can see his eyes considering the offer.

“Ok, two for five hundred peso, finest quality miss,” he replies.

I consider walking away, playing hard to get but decide against it, and I agree to two for five hundred peso, a fair deal. I buy several different colours for myself and an array of bracelets to take home for presents.

The sun hitting the brass metal hurts my eyes, but the glimmer brings a smile to my face, as it did to that little Columbian man who sold me the bracelets. The high pitched jingle of the gold bracelets sliding down my wrist reminds me of the bargain I scored earlier.

“Very nice,” my dad remarks as he peers at my purchases.

So eager to boast of my trip to the market and my skills at bargaining I relay my story to my slightly disinterested dad. I finish with my ruthless demand of two for the price of one.

“After all, I’m the Queen of the Bargains,” I joke with my dad. Dad’s eyes just stare into mine and I sense some deeper thought brewing.

“I was reading,” he says with a solemn look on his face, “that the average wage of a seller in the market is barely enough to put food on the table. That’s if they have a table at all, or even a house.”

I look down at my wrist and in an instant all I see are his worn shoes, and the gaping holes covering the top of them.

## **Seven**

### **The weight ticks over**

The weight ticks over.

The bags bulge.

Reached their maximum

Capacity.

The lines get shorter.

Slowly.

Passports please,

four passengers?

You have

80kg

between you.

Each bag adds,

till it equals

81kg.

She smiles

"You're one over."

No grace.

1 kg,

Repack.

The line seemed to span the whole length of the airport's terminal. I feel utterly exhausted as my eyes struggle to remain open. We shuffle our four bulging bags along at a snail's pace, slowly creeping up the line. The harsh sound of the word 'next' hits my ears and I drag my bag over to the counter. A blonde-haired young woman sits behind the counter asking for our passports and tickets. We hand them over, joking with her about her busy day. Secretly we are relieved to be going home and our small talk is trying to lighten her obvious bad mood. The next few words didn't sound as sweet, as my heart beat starts to quicken.

"Bags on the scales please. You are allowed 20kg each, that's 80kg in total," she says in a monotone voice.

We stack the bags one by one on the scales and steadily watch them accumulating the kilograms. I begin to feel the pressure as the figure begins to creep up to the eighty mark. The line behind us seems never-ending. This experience makes me undeniably nervous every time I have to endure it.

She stares at my father and states,

"So your bags weigh 81kg. You will have to pay excess for the 1kg," she says.

I can't really believe my ears. I look around and see a person double the size of me standing right behind me, surely one kilogram can be overlooked in my case. Where is the compassion for a weary traveller?

"So it's forty dollars for excess less than 10kg," she says.

I look at her and I feel like screaming.

"It's only one kilogram," I plead, but to no avail. Her face is set and I can tell she is not going to overlook anything.

"I'll move one kilogram into my hand luggage thanks," I reply very politely. I reach down and remove my hairdryer and a book from my checked-in luggage into my hand luggage, which was also at capacity when I checked in. This has the desired effect.

"Ok, you're through gate four," she says. I smile very sweetly and reply,

"Thank you." Picking up my hand luggage, we walk over to gate four and I board the plane with my extra kilogram now in my hand luggage rather than my checked-in luggage. I slump in the seat with a smile of amusement, and think how little experiences like this make travel so worthwhile.

## **Eight**

### **The back of the extended jeep**

Briskly scanning the movie channels I catch sight of a Bollywood movie. Perfect preparation; India here I come. The plane takes off and I catch one last glimpse out the window, with Melbourne disappearing beneath me, and I wonder how much I will miss being away. Life just goes on.

The back of the extended jeep offers bench seats facing each other and I can clearly observe the face of each of my family sitting around me. Shifting uncomfortably, I peel my bare legs off the black vinyl seat where the heat of the sticky Mumbai air cloys at my skin. The heat is claustrophobic and suffocating. Eyeing the grossly over-populated streets I wonder whether I can ever truly absorb the spectacles and sights as they skim by. This is something I have never experienced. The vibrant culture is like a painting, with the deep brush strokes of minute detail amid the richness of a painter's pallet. I notice our guide in the front seat preoccupied with manoeuvring the car through the gridlock as calmly as a Sunday drive at home. My senses are bombarded by the colours of the women's elaborate dress, the odours from the crowded windows that mask the small darkly lit over stocked shops, the rickshaws and bikes weaving in and out of the traffic. The noise is overwhelming, with people trying to call each other over the top of the rickshaw horns. The sound of animals and people going about their

lives saturates my ears. My senses are in overdrive at the sight, smells and sounds flooding in from such a different and intriguing culture.

I feel slightly uneasy getting out of the back of the jeep. Looking at this world from behind the jeep windows is one thing, but actually entering it sends a shiver up my spine, and my comfort zone is instantly destroyed. The impact on my senses increases tenfold but in my heart I know I am going to thoroughly embrace this opportunity as it might never happen again. My heart seems to beat even stronger and louder with the rhythm of the Indian drum echoing to our left, signalling a colourful wedding passing us by, offering us a quick snapshot of life's happiest times.

We finally arrive at the Gateway to India, teeming with a sea of people who seem purposed on invading my personal space to offer goods I don't want, or need. We look and feel a minority within this huge mass of people. Pushing through the crowds I feel uncomfortable with their inquisitive eyes perusing my appearance.

Our destination is the centre of the city, the Taj. Well the Taj Mahal Hotel anyway. The glass sliding door opens at my presence and the artificially cooled air hits my face as I enter a world I'm more familiar with. The clean open space of the courtyard welcomes me, and my shoulders drop as the tension I have been subconsciously holding fades away with the relief of familiarity, of Western influence. My eyes skim around the luxurious rooms, at the wealth displayed, but my mind goes back outside where beggars line the streets and struggle each day with their own needs, food, shelter and any number of things I take for granted.

The trip home to Australia is one of the saddest I have experienced for a long time. The hours seem to flash by as I wish to turn around and fly back. India seems so far away now, not only geographically, but culturally. The clean airport, the English language, it feels almost new to my ears. I feel determined to remember the poverty and to embrace life's simplicity.

My daily routine at home settles into a regular pattern almost immediately, the same regular pattern that I was in before.

Life just goes on.

## **Nine**

### **'The art of hobbling'**

The ocean's crystal clear blue water wraps around the green speck of land as the plane makes its way over Kiribus. As we get closer the water moves from our view and is replaced by a mix of green foliage from the tops of palm trees, and brown from the thatched rooves. The corrugated iron shed labelled 'Kiribati International Airport' seems to warp and bend from the intense Pacific heat. We sit on the plane waiting. My younger brother fidgets next to me. His whiney voice continues to beat my eardrums just as it has for the last two hours while I've listened to him complain about his Game Boy. Once my brother has finished with one complaint he simply moves onto another.

"I've left my favourite game at home. My battery has died. I've seen this movie too many times and it's not funny anymore."

His boredom still rings through my ears as I finally make my way down the aeroplane steps and onto the hot tarmac. The heat hits me hard and seems to burn into my pale skin. The humidity is intense and increases when we make our way into the tin shed. It feels like we have walked into a pressure cooker. We find our bags under the pile that have been haphazardly thrown into the centre, and walk out onto the dirt road that opens us to the islander way of life. No customs, no screening, just a wave through the door and out into the streets of Tarawa.

The four door utility speeds along the dirt road toward our accommodation, with no regard for holes and ditches. The utility's silver tray provides a rough ride, yet the breeze from its speed is welcome to

my warm skin. Every road is rough. Most of the island is covered in ankle-high shrubs, broken by little villages and the sand connecting the locals to the water. People seem to aimlessly walk around with bare feet, and the dark skinned women wear sarongs. I see a man in a loose tee-shirt and shorts walking along the road carrying a string of fish. We soon realise this is the Tarawan's staple diet. He casually pauses to talk with a lady using a bunch of sticks tied together to sweep away fallen leaves under a tree.

Our accommodation is a simple shack. Thatched roof, thatched floor, thatched walls. Luckily fires are scarce here. Inside, two single beds and a double bed make up the entire furniture, and on one side of the hut a chalk board stretches across the wall, covering the gaping holes the thatching allows. This make-shift arrangement does little to dissuade the endless mosquitoes from entering in and feasting on our white flesh every night. I gaze curiously out the window and watch the local children gather outside on the dirt, pulling along toys made from seed pods and green leaves. With their bare feet hardened by the gravel I see them run around the village, climbing trees and hiding behind the village huts. They seem so free.

The water's blue fingers grip the white sand, reaching out for my warm skin, to be relieved by its cool waves. I make my way down to its edge, letting my toes touch before immersing my whole body. Treading water I look back to where we are staying. Along the sand, brown skinned boys populate the beach wearing only old shorts and calling excitedly to each other. I am puzzled by their strange movements on the sand. Every boy is hobbling up and down the sand, sinking their feet in and out of its grainy texture. Their knees bend with the pressure and they hunch their shoulders over, slowly traipsing up and down, in and out. Their activity interests me. I watch them hobble and then fall to their knees and furiously dig.

I fall asleep that night listening to the water; its soft sound calms me and overtakes the buzzing of the mozzies. I fall asleep thinking of these brown boys on the sand.

Next day, my brother's pale skin has turned a lobster red. His freckles are more apparent and his boredom has reached an all time high. Sick of the sun, water and lack of TV I see him saunter over the sand to the water's edge. He looks at the native boys and begins to express his ideas about how bored they must be to spend their hours hobbling up and down the beach.

I wander down the beach and notice every boy is walking on his heels. Overcome by the mystery I finally say,

"What are you actually doing?" One small boy with a huge smile proudly holds up a small snapping pink crab. Every one of them is finding crabs. Under their rough heels they feel the movement of the crab, its pulse, its life. The challenge is rewarded by the final count.

My brother now daily joins the team. He is a pale face amongst the brown skinned bodies. I watch my brother hobble along the sand, digging furiously and finding nothing. He thinks that by copying the locals' actions he too will find a crab. This isn't something that can just be copied. This is an art to be learned, trained and practised. These boys have played this game since they learned to walk. It's different than a gameboy or a computer challenge which my brother can easily conquer. Finding the crabs is more unpredictable and requires greater skill. He can't feel the pulse. My brother's determination and earnest devotion to finding crabs consumes the rest of the trip.

I'm not actually sure if my brother ever did find a crab by himself. The boys laughed at his inexperience, but then in their casual way showed him where to dig. He became an accepted part of the team.

The whole way home on the plane my ears are lavished with stories about the hobbling. This simple game, without technology, had become the highlight of my brother's holiday, while showing his desire to succeed at a simple challenge. My brother, so competent and skilled at computer games...almost beaten by a simple game in the sand. The art of 'hobbling'.

## Ten

### Stopped at traffic lights, yet when I look they aren't red.

Running to catch the red double decker tourist bus I grab at the metal pole and haul my tired body onto the platform. Making my way up the small winding staircase onto the open roofed second floor, I use up my last ounce of energy to slump into the vinyl seat, hoping to relax and enjoy the sights. The hot sun shines down and warms me, and I'm content to sit and allow my mind to drift while the taped voice drones through Belfast's history.

The city's outer regions are industrious and steel cranes reside alongside brick storehouses with burgundy tiled rooves. A long steel bridge stretches over the murky river and the bus proceeds slowly, allowing the passengers to view the city from both sides. Tall buildings press in on every side of the small, black back streets, broken up occasionally by green parks decorated with tourists sitting at the base of white stone statues. The buildings begin to thin as the houses become more affluent, and the streets are lined on both sides by golden leafed trees. I can clearly see the difference as we move from the centre of the city into a much more prestigious area.

Approaching black iron gates the bus slows, revealing an impressive driveway that seems carved into the freshly mown green grass. Straight ahead, a rectangular building seems to be the only break in the manicured lawns. Six impressive pillars form the entrance to Belfast's parliamentary building, with rows and rows of small windows. Getting closer I see the massive white blocks that make up the building, and then see the finer detail surrounding the windows and doors. The building's size and contrast to the surrounding environment is impressive. Everything here seems in place, orderly and undisturbed, and the building seems utterly perfect.

As the bus pulls away from the Parliament building, I catch one last glimpse before we start to make our way back through suburban streets. The taped voice reiterates the beauty of parliament and then informs us we are soon to experience a very different representation of Belfast's politics and history.

Suddenly, endless vistas of uniform houses line the road, with only the occasional corner shop breaking the monotonous conformity governing the bricks and mortar. Something is very different here. I've entered a living art gallery where every available wall space is covered by murals, depicting political statements and conflict. My eyes scan both sides of the street and I start to concentrate on the information I'm hearing through the tape in the bus's sound system. The sheer size of the images is confronting. The painted murals overtake every wall and dominate the buildings, some of which are mainly rubble. My eyes are drawn to a double story mural depicting people protesting, with the caption "Thirty years of indiscriminate slaughter by so called Irish freedom fighters". This mural tells of the innocent Irish slaughtered through the conflict between the Protestants and the Catholics. I feel unsettled. How have I never heard of this before? The battles of Northern Ireland are foreign to my understanding, and I wonder how my history studies have ignored this massive conflict. I'm shocked, and now intensely follow the stories and the history being relayed. The iron peace wall continues to mark the division between the Catholic and Protestant sides of the street. I wonder why they are still standing; surely they are not still needed.

Thinking about my own life in Australia, I have no clue as to my neighbour's religious beliefs, nor do I find it relevant to our relationship. But here the knowledge and significance of religious belief impacts on every part of life. I replay the information I've heard in my mind until the bus stops. Wondering why, I look over the side of the bus and see that we are stopped at traffic lights. Yet when I look closer I notice that they aren't red. I see the light has been melted and the metal has been completely warped. A normal traffic light completely destroyed. I keep staring, trying to understand how a traffic light could be destroyed by a recent explosion. That's when I notice the vacant lot, and the whole side of the street desolate and empty.

The voice from the sound system maintains its calm explanation of the recently burned ground, explaining that a building once stood here. The bus pulls away as I sit there, stunned.

The traffic lights are a symbol, not of the conflict that has stopped, but of the present affected by the past. I realise now we are all a product of our own past.

## **Eleven**

### **An English Summer**

An English summer consists of barely any sun, but enough rain to end the harshest drought. The most exciting landmarks and tourist attractions in London do not include the Greenwich Meridian.

The busy train weaves its way through the flourishing English countryside, heading for London. Sitting on a small, plastic fold down seat skimming through a guidebook I look out the window, still not quite believing that I am finally here. My mum's arm signals the stop to get off and we both make our way onto the equally busy station. We hurry through the streets as time is of the essence. We have limited minutes this morning to spend on retail therapy at the famous Harrods. Away from the boys it is a time to talk, peruse and take in the culture of England's famous shopping experience. I'm in my prime, gliding down the comfortable clothes aisles occasionally stopping if anything striking catches my eye. Meanwhile, the boys of the family have opted for the Lord's cricket ground tour taking in their own form of sport therapy, wading their way through years of momentous cricket history.

Meeting at lunchtime we discuss possible plans of action. Every attraction is packed, requiring precious hours of waiting in queues. The rain is pouring down in bucket loads and drenches our clothes, and our spirits. Dad suggests a visit to the Greenwich meridian museum and timeline where the earth is measured at zero degrees. Is he serious? Why he'd excitedly suggest this as an option I have no idea. What is he thinking? We are in London and dad wants to visit Greenwich? I don't even know what it is. This idea doesn't excite me at all, and from the puzzled facial expressions of the rest of my family it seems we are united in a common feeling of anticipated boredom. Since no one can come up with a better idea, dad takes on the role of tour leader and master decision maker so we catch yet another train away from the city. I'm sure the whole way I can hear Harrods screaming my name. I feel like my sprits have been drowned with the damn rain of the English summer.

In contrast the train isn't packed this time. What a surprise, it seems no one else wants to go to Greenwich either. On arrival we have to run through a park full of green grass dodging from one tree to another, trying our best to stay out of the rain but to no avail. The path up the hill to the museum is steep and I honestly wonder if it could get any worse. Wet socks. Wet clothes. Wet hair. Once at the top, the view is limited by the black clouds blanketing the sky and I'm disappointed that all this effort is for a metal strip running up the ground marking zero degrees. A brass framed clock stands to one side, impressive against the grey sky. My dad is an assiduous and keen reader of history, and starts explaining bits and pieces about the significance of the muddy ground where we are standing.

The clock strikes four pm and I turn to face it. It's as if time is standing still and it strikes me how precious every day is. I look at my dad, his brown wispy hair soaked; blue eyes alight with the chance to relay his knowledge to us, smiling and waving his arms around as he points out different pieces of history. Mum is enjoying the excitement emanating from my dad, as she leans against a concrete pillar, contentment filling her face. My brother drinks all the information into his inquisitive mind, constantly firing questions at my dad. Time is always free, but once you've lost it you can never get it back.

## **Twelve**

### **There comes a point in your life**

There comes a point in your life when you realise  
who matters,  
who never did,  
who won't anymore  
and who always will.

## Major Work

### Joseph Spannari, 2009

#### Click

'Click', the gate was unhitched as the half boy, half masculine figure entered into his next door neighbour's property, the brown melting snow sloshing underneath his feet. "Veli!" a muffled voice called from inside the house. A tall slender young woman stepped outside and ran towards him. "Veli, Veli... you would not believe who I met the other day?"

"Well, firstly could I get some milk?"

"Of course, but then you must come in and have some lunch with me and I will tell you everything."

Veli sat comfortably on the couch positioned in front of the dwindling fire. He scoffed down some tuna casserole while Mia rattled on about what she had been doing and what she had planned to wear to the big dance on Saturday night. "...then I looked up and there she was, I was surprised because I had been informed that she was moving to Switzerland but that was obviously a rumour. Anyway, she said I'll see you Saturday night and I thought-

"Sorry Mia, who is this? I've never heard of her."

"Veli, stop mucking around, I in-"

"Are you talking about Elsa? Mia we have been broken up for nearly 2 months, I'm not interested in her."

"No, no, I'm talking about Rali, the one last Thursday night, at practice. I introduced her to you."

"Oh the one in the red dress tha-"

"Yes that's her, well she's coming on Saturday and ...." Mia continued on while Veli's thoughts disappeared into another world.

The war could not have been at a worse time, Veli had just turned 17 and was expected to help in some way with the war effort. As both his father and older brother had gone to fight he was having to fill their shoes at home.

"Veli, did you get the milk from the Tantu's?" the familiar voice echoed from the kitchen, welcoming him back home.

"Yes," he moaned.

"Well don't forget to take over some wood when you've finished chopping a bundle for us. Paivi and Mia don't have any men around the house so you need to help them as much as possible."

"Yes mum, I know." Veli rolled his eyes. He knew that his mum and Paivi, Mia's mum, were trying to match them up, like they had been doing since year one.

Veli walked sloth-like into the lounge room, peeling off layers of clothing as he moved towards the fire. Pulling over a chair to the radio he switched it on, a sudden blast of classical music roared, startling him almost off the chair. Cursing underneath his breath, he turned the volume down and changed the frequency. Veli knew his mother did not enjoy listening to news of the war so the classical station was usually playing while she was in the room; however he would listen when she wasn't around. But just in case he kept his eyes fixed on the kitchen doorway, praying she would not appear for the next 15 minutes.

"New reports from the front line indicate that the German army is on its way northward towards Finland, however our men on the outskirts of the homeland have been informed and are fully prepared if we are threatened. Both England and France have offered military assistance, but Sweden

and Norway have denied permissions to pass through. Continual bombings in London, England, have caused the death of many casualties as the war against Hitler continues; precautions have been taken, sending the children away from the cities to country towns. More young men are asked to take arms and protect their countr-." The radio cut out as a familiar looking hand flicked the large switch, 'dammit' he thought as he gave a smirk to the figure that towered over him.

"Veli, I thought I'd told you I did not want news of the war listened to in our house."

"But mum, I jus-"

"Veli that's the last time I tell you."

She abruptly walked out and slammed the kitchen door.

Veli sat quietly sipping at the vegetable broth,

"Did you take that wood around to Paivi?"

"Yeh, I did."

"Are you going to the dance tomorrow night?"

"I might go for a little bit."

"Is Mia going?"

"Of course she is, what type of question is that?" He sternly put down his spoon.

"I was just wondering, that's all. Can't a mother know anything!" she exclaimed, raising her voice.

"What don't I tell you? You know everything I do all the time, but can't I have a bit of privacy? You and Mia's mum are always pushing us together, when will you get the hint that we are just friends, and that it will never change!" He pushed his chair backwards, and stormed off into his bedroom.

"Veli I was just..." she said, trying to excuse herself, but he shut the bedroom door so he didn't have to listen.

*Worst Day Ever*, Veli wrote on a fresh page in his old school book. This was his way of releasing anger, he wrote down everything he wanted to tell his mum. It mainly consisted of words that were considered coarse. He reeled the page out and headed back towards the lounge room. Tearing up the paper into four pieces he threw them into the fire. Veli gave a sigh of relief and sat down on the couch. His eyes glanced towards the clock; five past five, brilliant; he still had time to make it. Veli sprung from couch towards the front door, picking up his black carry bag on the way out.

"Ffuhh, ffuhh, ffuhh," short bursts of breath escaped as each fist forced the boxing bag left... right, left... right.

"Keep it going Spannari, keep the rhythm, focus... 10 more reps then move on."

'Ding,' the high pitched bell rang, a scuffle of young men's feet could be heard in one corner as a practice match was underway. Meanwhile Veli moved on to the next stage in the circuit. Boxing allowed him to really unwind, especially when he was stressed or just wanted to get out of the house, but most of all he liked to keep fit. Veli wiped the perspiration off with his forearm then laid down on the bench press. He looked over at a young man, of similar appearance to himself, who leant against the wall observing him.

"Ari, are you going to spot for me or stand there staring?" The young man walked over and slowly lifted up the bar.

"Are you signing up, Veli?"

"For what?" He let out a gasp as he pushed the bar upwards.

"You know, 'For King and Country'," Ari spoke in a tone that mocked the posters and radio advertisements.

"Ari, I'm still 17. The minimum age is 18. Why are you asking?"

"Well, I've been thinking that I might sign up."

Veli dropped the bar down and sat up.

"What! You? Who else?"

"Oh just a couple of the guys, I've heard that they have accepted 17 year olds. You should come and sign up, it's worth giving it a go."

"Na I couldn't. My mum wouldn't let me, and I'm the only guy in the house and... I just couldn't."

"Well, I'm signing up tomorrow, so you can come with me if you change your mind." Ari picked up Veli's towel from beside the bench and threw it at him, then walked away towards the practice match.

Veli looked around the room, 'Maybe I should?' He considered the reasons against signing up, which seemed to outnumber the reasons for. How was staying here helping with the war when others were on the war front? Was it cowardice for him not to sign up? But he'd have to lie about his age, and lying only led to larger problems. Perhaps there was a reason for the age restriction that he didn't know about? Veli packed his gear up and headed home with questions flooding his mind.

As he stepped in the front door his mum was sitting in her rocking chair listening to classical music. He gave her a goodnight kiss and went straight to bed, even though he didn't feel the slightest bit tired. Veli tossed and turned, he couldn't sleep, his thoughts were running a hundred miles per hour. He found himself caught between doing the right thing by his family and the right thing by his country. Both had their burdens of guilt attached, and both seemed sensible decisions the more he thought about them. Veli got out of bed and turned the kerosene lamp on low, then checked his watch, ten past two. Pulling out his old school book again, he began to write. He wrote a list of things he had to do before going to the dance that night, then questions he wanted to know the answers to. He ended the questions with *Where is God?* He tore the page out, then carefully ripped the questions off the bottom. He opened up a Bible that sat collecting dust on his shelf, and placed the questions at the start of Genesis. He shut it and blew off the dust. Then after placing it back on the shelf with the list inside it Veli crawled back into bed and fell asleep almost instantly.

"Get up! Get up! Get up!" Veli was woken by little twin devils jumping on the bed. He pretended he was still asleep, then suddenly pounced on both of them. Pulling their socks off he then pushed them off the bed onto the cold floor. "Muuuummmmyyy...." Their voices drifted away as they ran out Veli's room and towards the kitchen. Veli got up and dashed into the lounge room, pushed one pair of socks into a gap between bricks and the other in his bag. He went and sat in his mum's rocking chair and watched as his younger siblings raced into the room and searched for their socks. It was a family tradition on the first Saturday of every month to have a specially cooked breakfast, but the twins added to that tradition by waking Veli up, and expecting him to steal their socks.

"Veli, get the twins ready for breakfast please." Veli grabbed the two during their eager search to find their missing possessions and dragged them to the table. "Mikko! Nina! Manners please." They had begun eating before their mum had said grace. Both shut their eyes and put their hands together. Veli smiled at his mum, who smiled back while she prayed.

Five past two, Veli glanced at the clock, Army sign up ended at half past two. Should he go or shouldn't he? He hadn't spoken to his mum about it either, how would she chop wood, cook dinner and take care of the twins if he wasn't there to help? Veli's thoughts were interrupted by something at the door. He got up from the fireplace to answer. Ari's cheesy grin greeted him outside, "What are you doing here?" Veli's blunt answer straightened Ari's smile.

"I was more expecting a 'hello' or 'what a nice surprise', even just a 'come in'." His smile came back and so did Veli's.

"Sorry, come in." Veli felt embarrassed.

"So did you go and sign up?" Veli asked, pointing towards the couch.

"Yeah I did, what about you?"

"No I've decided not to."

"Why?"

"It wouldn't be fair on my mum with Nina and Mikko to take care of. How did you pass the age requirement?"

"Well, that's the problem, I signed up but I was rejected cause it wasn't the army taking the forms but the local brigade, which is my led by my father's mechanic, so he knew that I wasn't 18. I was sent home immediately."

Veli began chuckling to himself.

"I suppose you learnt your lesson then Ari?"

"Yes I did, try again next week."

Ari began laughing as well, but his loud snorting sounded more like he was choking.

"What are you boys up to?"

"Hello Mrs. Spannari, I've just come to visit Veli."

"Do you want anything to eat boys?"

"No mum, we'll be fine."

"Thanks for the offer Mrs. Spannari."

Veli nudged Ari, whispering "You're such a goody goody Ari!"

"Mum! I'm about to go, I should be back by 11 o'clock at the latest."

"Wait Veli!" Fast paced footsteps were heard coming down the hallway in his direction, she came around the corner with proud 'that's my son' grin.

"Have fun darling."

He gave her a kiss then skipped out the door. Veli walked up the steps to Mia's house nervously, although he didn't know why when he'd been there at least a million times before. He reached his arm out to knock, but suddenly the door flung open.

"Veli! You're here, Mia's nearly ready."

Paivi stood there and stared at a potential future son-in-law. He tried to not make the situation awkward so he took a walk around the lounge room looking at the family photographs. Finally he heard Mia's voice coming from upstairs. Veli came around the corner to watch his best friend walk down to meet him, but instead a picturesque woman stood at the top. Slowly she walked down and introduced herself. Veli couldn't describe her in mere words.

"Veli, that's your name isn't it?"

He was unable to speak, 'Where's Mia?' All he wondered was 'Where's Mia?'

"Sorry, where is Mia?"

"I'm here, behind you." Veli swung around to the familiar face.

"Huh? Who is this Mia?"

"Veli I told you, this is Rali, she had no partner so I offered you, don't yo-"

"When was this organised?"

"Veli, don't you remember? I told you yesterday, during lunch."

"But who is going with you?"

"I am." A voice interrupted from beside Paivi. Ari stepped forward, marked with his iconic grin.

"Well, if everything is ready we should get going, mustn't we Rali?" Veli offered his arm.

"Let's," she replied, placing her arm inside Veli's.

Veli sat in the back of the vehicle with Rali while Ari told the women about how he attempted to sign up for the army. Veli listened for a few minutes, but then his thoughts disappeared into another world. This time he was no longer troubled by having to choose whether to fight or not because it wasn't his duty. He had once read a verse in the Bible, "*In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth*", and that was all he needed to understand.

That night Veli arrived home to find his mum wasn't awake listening to the radio but asleep in her room. He went back to his room and took out his old school book. This time he knew what to write; *This is where I am, and where I should be.*

## **She woke suddenly**

She woke suddenly, sensing that something was out of place, an uneasiness, a burden; it reminded her of... no, not again? Carefully twisting her torso and spying over her shoulder, but nothing... just nothing.

She tugged at the slightly askew doona till the striped pattern was aligned with the framed wedding photograph on the bedroom wall. Resting her head back upon the pillow she tried to go back to sleep, yet her eyes defied her, remaining open. The melody of an off-pitched 'Green Sleeves' echoed through her empty mind; she longed to sleep soundly but her heart pleaded with her to stay vigilant. "But what for?" she questioned, "I've already been through this," her eyes brimming with tears. "I've been through all of this," she cried out in anguish, "I thought we were past this point? Why are we back at the start again? Why?" her voice rising to a scream. Hands clenched tightly on the doona she pulled herself up, "Leave me to sleep! Please..." A sudden whooshing sound travelled through the room, then a still familiar voice. "Leave you? Is that what you really want? For you to be left alone?"

She attempted to force her eyelids shut with her fingers, but after that failed she pulled the doona over herself and huddled into the foetal position. "Is that a sign that you want sleep? It's a poor

attempt Leah. Whatever happened to being invincible? You know when you were 17 nothing was too much, nothing was out of bounds, you weren't scared. But look at you now!"

"I was young, and didn't understand," her voice quivered and was muffled by the thick barrier. "Yes, you were young Leah, but that's no excuse, people talk you know...people talk." The familiar voice faded away in moments leaving Leah petrified under the doona.

17, an age she would rather want to forget. It astonished her how one year could affect the rest of your life, more specifically, one night.

"And it's now 7am Monday morning, hope my early listeners are fully awake and ready for another week..." The voice of Leah's husband crackled on the radio alarm clock to wake her up. She ripped the doona back off herself to find light seeping in through the blinds. Leah walked into the bathroom, switched on the radio and turned it up loud so she could hear her husband over the screeching of the shower. His voice was calming, and enveloped her thoughts. As she stood motionless and naked in front of the mirror she reminisced on how she had fallen in love with his voice before ever meeting him.

His radio name was Danny, back then he was mid-day and afternoon news presenter, but since then he had been promoted to talkback host where he used his real name Tom. Leah remembered being the faithful listener to his news reporting throughout her ordeal, she would listen religiously 4pm until 5.30pm Monday to Friday. To her he sounded so self-assured, confident and mature, everything she was not; it happened by chance that she met him at a friend's wedding. Leah stepped into the shower while the memories played over in her mind, from what he wore, how he introduced himself, to their dance together. She remembered their first encounter, making sure every detail was pictured.

"...so Brent have you heard the-" The radio suddenly died, together with the lights, startling Leah. She turned the shower knobs counter-clockwise until the red and blue dots were in line. Wrapping herself with both the towel and the dressing gown over the top she got out of the shower and locked the bathroom door. Her hands scrambled over the bench for her mobile phone. She dialled Tom's number. As it clicked over to his voice mail she gave a quick message, then hung up and placed it precisely adjacent to the hair straightener.

Leah's hands shook slightly as she applied foundation to her now paler face. She blankly stared at her reflection while coating the dark bruises on her neck below the left ear with more foundation than usual. She tried to remain calm, yet her sharp hand movements contradicted this as she knocked the makeup container off the bench. Leah reached over the bath, frantically opening the half closed blinds. She hoped that the foundation bottle didn't leak onto the tiles.

"Tink tink." The lights returned to their usual yellow glow. Leah sprung towards the power point, pulling the radio plug out before it blared out an unfamiliar voice.

Two soft knocks on the bathroom door let Leah know that Tom was there. She hastily unlocked it, revealing Tom's unfailing smile.

## **Undefeatable**

Undefeatable? I'm Undefeatable,  
Nobody can get in my way,  
Mistakes? I don't see mistakes, only experiences.

Pale yellow pill, I bid you welcome,  
Enter me, Entice me, Excite me,  
No harm will this do to me,  
For it will be me and I it.

Spin your web so that I may be consumed,  
Take it to my lips and upon my tongue,  
I am not afraid as it will only be for the moment.

For the mom-en-t, oh... thirst... water.

Swirls of darkness, with glimmers of piercing light,  
Unfamiliar... Unfamiliar... Unfamiliar voice,  
Is this just sleep?  
How I am still tired... exhausted,  
black

Calm, quiet voice... Familiar,  
Digits... green... dot five dot dot zero zero,  
Danny... News report,  
Pain... heavy eyes,  
black

## **11.59pm**

11.59pm, waves crashed upon the side of the cruise liner as it made its way across the Indian Ocean. I sat on the deck, star gazing, the stars in the Southern Hemisphere were so different to the Northern ones. The smoke billowing from the cylinder chimney gave me a sudden flashback of my dad smoking his pipe before I left. It temporarily obstructed my view of the Southern Cross. It's strange how his last words still rang in my ears. "If you decide to leave my house, my country, then I never want to see your face on this front step again. Got me?" He saw me as a weak being if I returned, if I failed. The fountain of tears that flowed from mum's eyes while kissing her goodbye scared me. I wish I could see her again. My voice squeaked as I held back the bucket loads telling her, "I'll write soon". It was just another sign that "I am not a man," it's what he lectured me about constantly. "Men never cry, they mow the lawns, rake up the leaves or cut down a tree, but they never show emotion." I never received a hug, no smile, no nothing on my departure, just a cold firm handshake.

For goodness' sake get a grip of yourself John, I'm off to make a new life for myself, a land of freedom and countless opportunities, well at least that's what the brochure and posters told me. I hope they were right.

The truth is I'm petrified, only 17 and I'm heading to a country on the opposite side of the world from my birthplace, a million miles away from Scotland. What kind of people will I meet? How will I support myself in 10 years time? Do people really have kangaroos as pets? I have so many unanswered questions, yet so does Joe, the scholar who shares the cabin with me. Apparently the weather is hot and people swim on the beach, even in winter, and there are no white Christmases. Will I be rudely shocked when I arrive? What if my goal of becoming a millionaire by my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday is unachievable in this country? Or perhaps the long term goal will be more achievable. But right now I must face this... John pushed the strange crescent-shaped pastry away, "I think I'm safer with the porridge," he told Joe.

## **Pip**

Pip,

How does one start when one does not know where the start is?

It is my greatest desire to see you grow and flourish into the wonderful young woman that I know you will become. I know that you will hold your head high in the toughest of times and not stop fighting til you have won, but I just want you to know that sometimes the hardest times are the best of your life so never stop enjoying them. You may groan and grunt all you like as long as you do not drop the baton. I will always love you.

Never Give Up,

from

Father

## **Anna,**

My Darling, you remember when I asked you to marry me, 25 years ago, bending on one knee, and immediately you replied, "Well, it depends on what you believe holds a man and woman together for life, til death do they part?" I was absolutely speechless, thinking that your reply would only be a single syllable. I had no idea what to say as I had never thought about it before. You took my hands and

stood me up, then gazing into your eyes you answered, "Why don't we find out together then." My heart literally leaped out of my chest as I realized what you meant. It was one of the many highlights that I have enjoyed in this short and sometimes meaningless life.

But finally I have answered your question, after 25 years of living the highest times and the lowest with the one that I love, nothing could make me want to replace those times. Even the toughest moments in our relationship, when everything seemed to be falling apart, we pushed on, and it strengthened us so much. How can I ever express my utmost feelings towards you in mere words? But what I can express I have placed into a poem that has been carefully crafted with love, honesty and devotion, the things that have held us together all this time.

All my love,  
Your husband.

Your words of honesty sometimes piece my heart like fire,  
Your caressing actions take me to the highest of mountains,  
What can I say to sum you up in one word,  
You have been my whole world,  
My whole being, everything that I am is because of you,  
Anna

## **Sunday... Monday**

Sunday...Monday

12:00am...12:01am

28<sup>th</sup> February 1992...Creation

The Start, the Beginning

Where is it?

What is it?

As the pen taps the page,  
or the ink flows

How do we describe it?

Is it when the baby is born, or  
the sperm meets the egg

Perhaps it is before our time,

before our parents' time and their parents

Where does it stop, the universe, outer space, eternity?

What causes our heart to beat then stop?

Do we control that or some high power?

Where did that power come from, or has He always been there?

Is it our human mind that cannot comprehend eternity, forever, a never ending being,  
the Start

## **Suitcase? Yep**

Suitcase? Yep

Backpack? Yep

Wallet?... Um... Yep

Passport?... Um... Oh crap! Where is it?

I frantically scrounged through my bag, where could it have gone? I'm sure it was just in my pocket... there! It was in my jacket pocket the whole time.

"Hello sir, how can I help you?"

"One way ticket to Melbourne, Australia, on the 10.30 flight, economy class..."

I sat patiently waiting, the suspense was literally killing me. Was it the going to be the fat woman with the bag of potato chips or the emo kid who was staring down the hostess? I hate plane flights by yourself, you never know who you're going to have to sit next to.

"Um would you mind if I sat in the aisle seat?" A man dressed business-like had appeared out of no-where.

"Yeah sure, whatever." I shuffled over.

"Don't you hate having to sit next to total strangers on international flights?" He looked towards me, then continued, "I'm just glad it's you and not that young kid with the black side fringe or the obese woman."

The friendly stranger had a slight smirk, then offered a hand, "I'm Dan." I gave him a firm handshake, "Joe." Oh good, at least he knew how to break the ice...and read my mind!

We had been through the safety guidelines by the hostess, and the plane had set off for the 22 hour trip. I reclined back my seat slightly, then placing on the complimentary eye covers I attempted to sleep.

I woke to the sound of pages flicking, Dan was looking at some magazine that he obviously was not impressed by, wait... the sound stopped. "Hmm, that's more like it," now he sounded amused. I wonder what it was? I opened my eyes slightly but laid still, I couldn't exactly see what was on the page. I pretended to yawn and seem as if I was just waking up. Dan quickly shut the book and placed it into his bag, he took out a laptop and began scribbling a note onto the touch screen. *The boys look great but need more attitude*, I read. Huh? Who is he talking about? I sat up and began fiddling with the TV in front of me. Whatever, it's most probably just his sons or something irrelevant. I suppose it is rather rude for me to be peaking. I began watching some random subtitled foreign film to occupy myself yet somehow I still felt uncomfortable. Perhaps it's the chair, I reclined it back further and turned the volume up. My eyes began to tire, eventually they shut, and who was I to resist a good sleep.

'Crash,' the sound of cymbals rung in my ears. It startled me, I sat up and saw it was the end of the film. Pulling off the headphones angrily, I switched off the TV.

"Had a nice rest?" Dan inquired, chuckling to himself.

"Yeah it wasn't too bad, till just then!"

I took off my shoes and wiggled my cramped toes.

"How long are we into the flight?" I turned to Dan who was absorbed in his magazine.

"Dan!" I caught his attention, "How long left?"

"Oh sorry..." Glancing at his watch, "15 hours."

I let out a sigh and meanwhile had a glance down the row at the attractive blonde woman who was busy picking through her green salad.

"Hey, wouldn't mind sitting next to her!" I commented to Dan.

"No, not today." He didn't even look her way, 'Ok then, obviously gay!' I thought to myself, then laughed, 'He could have at least just agreed.'

"So where do you originate?" I attempted to create conversation.

"Melbourne," he replied sharply.

"I do too! City or outskirts?"

"City."

"Oh that'd be nice, I live about half an' hour out of the city."

I gathered from his short responses that he wasn't interested, so I cut it there. I took a glimpse at the magazine he seemed to be so interested in. Dan turned the page and began intensively scanning his finger over the paragraphs beside the image of a topless man...hang on! Topless? I shut my eyes then reopened them; I must be tired, it couldn't be...Why is he looking at... Yuk, no, he couldn't really be? I looked back up at Dan. He looks normal. Again he turned the page and there was another half dressed male. I sat back in my seat and turned the TV on again, wishing the whole thing would go away.

"What are you watching?"

I ignored his question, pretending I hadn't heard him; he turned back to his magazine not seeming to take offence. Once again he put the magazine away and wrote a note on his laptop, then just reclined the chair backwards and stretched out.

"Would you like a refreshment? Tea, coffee, a water maybe?" The brunette airhostess lent down over Dan, offering me a cup.

"Water would be great!" I gave her a cheesy grin.

"What about you sir?" She turned to Dan.

"Tea please," he replied bluntly.

She poured him the hot contents into a red cup with the iconic white QANTAS kangaroo branded on the side.

"So what were you doing in England?" she looked up at me.

"Oh I was just visiting a cousin, he's a graphic designer, I was there for nearly 2 months."

"Really? That would have been fun, I rarely get holidays." She continued onto the people that sat behind us, starting a similar kind of conversation.

Dan turned to me, "Did you say you're a graphic designer?"

Huh? He must have really not been listening. "No, my cousin is one."

"Oh, oh ok then."

"Why do you want to know?" I gave him a strange glance.

"Well, I like to meet different graphic designers. And as I'm an editor, on my way bac-" Suddenly everything else Dan was saying became a blur. He's an editor!

"So you're an editor! Is that what you've been doing with that magazine?" I said with a relieved tone.

Dan looked at me weirdly, "What! you thought I was gay cause I was reading through a magazine with topless men?"

"Yeh, kinda." I laughed nervously.

Dan started to laugh, he obviously found it hilarious.

"That's funny, I don't think I have ever been suspected of being gay."

"Sorry, but when I saw the pictures I kinda jumped to conclusions. So then I avoided talking to you."

"I noticed you were peeking, and I thought you were just trying to read over my shoulder. Then you began acting strange and didn't respond when I asked you a question, but I figured you were tired."

"Well, now that we have that issue settled, can we have a proper discussion?" I asked, relieved that the next 14 hours wouldn't be filled with an awkward silence.

## Ben

"Ben! Get my watch, it's on the table." I chuckled to myself as he got up off the chair beside me, trotting over to fetch the object. He handed it over with a distasteful look marked across his face, "I don't like your watch, it smells funny." He screwed up his nose. I placed my nose on the slightly worn band, 'leather and... sweat, what is he going on about?' "So what Ben? At least it's better than Nat's one." In fact it was just the same, although I didn't like to admit it. I'm sure Ben remembers when I was given this watch, and even though it is the same, it's different simply because it's mine.

It is Christmas Eve, the family sitting around the lounge room eating, as usual, and sipping wine. As most European traditions go the presents are opened Christmas Eve, unlike the Aussie tradition of opening them on Christmas day, but as Dad is Finnish and Mum Australian we do both!

Ben sits with his present in front of him. He gets his photo taken then quickly unwraps the present, but his smile is soon taken over by a frown. He had unwrapped a heater box, almost instantly his eyes fill up with tears. A bright flash from the camera sparks the family into a roar of laughter. The older brother cuts the sticky tape that holds the end of the box shut. The curious boy peers inside. Surprise and shock gives an unforgettable expression with another flash to capture the moment. He pulls out a new scooter and can hardly sit still. "Next," one member of the family calls. Dad's hand reaches under the tree. "Joe," he calls.

Finally, my turn to unwrap a pressie, all eyes in the room gaze at the box, I can hear my mum and sister whispering, one of them has obviously forgotten what they've bought.

Was the present disguised? Or is it a trick present with nothing in the box?

No more delaying, I delicately peel back the wrapping paper. Just to heighten the suspense I pause halfway, looking around the room, then continued...a plain box, no surprise. Inside is a tin cylinder with a brand name engraved on the lid, it's obvious, I'd seen this before, it is a watch, I knew it.

I quickly open the lid, Yes! Hang on... this looks familiar?

"Do you like it?" Mum and Dad's faces gleam with excitement.

"Hey that's the same watch as mine!" Nathanael looks peeved.

'What! How could they? It is! It's exactly the same as my older brother's watch! Do they want to dress us the same as well?'

But it is a watch, a brown leather watch, just what I had been eyeing off in the junk mail.

I raise my head, painting a smile with my eyes. Yet they're still exchange glances between Nathanael's wrist and the leather object that lay in my hands.

Mum's smile soon turns to a puzzled frown, "Sorry Joe, I didn't realise... do you want me to take it back?"

'Take it back? Take it back! That was an idea, no but it wouldn't be the same if I chose another.'  
I looked down at my wrist where the watch had now found a home, "Na, don't worry Mum, it'll be right."  
I take another long glance, 'I have a strange feeling it won't be coming off too soon.'

Six o'clock, my watch tells me. I stand at the door waiting for Nathanael. "Hurry up Nat! Paul will chuck a spaz if we're late to work again!" I exaggerate. Chuckling to myself as I watch Nathanael power-walk down the hallway. He forces his feet into the tightly tied-up shoes one at a time, then grabs his keys and rushes out the front door in a hurry. I follow behind at a steady pace. I didn't see a need to run, my watch said we had twenty-five minutes till we started. Watch! Oh no, I still have my good watch on. I turn around and run inside. I undoing the strap and placing it on the TV cabinet. A car horn toots me from outside, then a muffled voice from the car screams "Hurry up." I take one last contented glimpse at the brown leather object. 'That's mine.'

## Reflection Statement

*Vicissitudes*, the unexpected changes in a person's life. These unexpected changes shape who someone becomes. This is the concept of my Major Work. From the Proposal to the Reflection Statement my Major Work has evolved from that of a family history and a comparison of 17 year old lives, to the idea of events that shape a young adult's life, those many vicissitudes.

I began my Major Work with an organised approach. I had decided how many characters I would have, each with 1 letter, 2 poems and 1 story. This soon fell apart when the stories I wrote were not going to plan. I had found that I had put myself into a box, restricting any imagination or creative writing abilities. I took a step back and had another go. This time I just wrote, whenever an idea came I wrote, once it was at about 3 in the morning and another time it was during a church service. Eventually I had a written a collection of pieces. The time had come to present my *Vive Voce* and when I looked over my stories, looking for meanings and connections, I found that they were similar ideas that I had originally intended on writing. The only major difference was the structure. Now through closer study of my writing I have found a deeper meaning, and the writing begins to speak back to me!

Each part of my Major Work has represented this concept in different ways using different writing styles.

'*Click*', '*She woke suddenly*' and '*Undefeatable*' show the struggle of making a life-altering decision and the side effects in the years to come. The first deals with a young man torn between joining the war and taking care of his family. He is equally pressured by friends and family, but comes to the understanding that where he is, is where he needed to stay. This choice changes Veli's life, if he was to sign up for the war then he would be taken on a separate path with separate experiences, then the one he has chosen. '*She woke suddenly*', depicts a morning in the life of a person with chronic psychosis due to the taking of LSD. Leah experiences auditory hallucination and has an obsessive compulsive disorder. This story leads into the poem, '*Undefeatable*', that takes the reader back to the night she took the drug and the events that followed. It places the reader in Leah's shoes, experiencing her emotions. These two pieces in particular show the cause and effect, how a vicissitude changed Leah.

'*11.59pm*' and '*Suitcase? Yep*' are both about physical journeys and discovery, both of which shape the characters lives. *11.59pm* is about a 17 year old emigrating from Scotland to Australia. He worries about things to come and remembers the past. He realises how circumstances could affect his future. *Suitcase? Yep* is about a young man's plane trip from England to Australia. He wrongfully presumes the man sitting beside him, that he has befriended, is potentially homosexual, and this leads to 8 hours of awkwardness. He is taught a lesson in human stereotyping that he needed to learn and will remember for years to come, and to question something before jumping to conclusions.

The last three, '*Pip*', '*Sunday...Monday*' and '*Ben*', are about reflections and personal treasures. *Pip* is a letter from a father to his daughter and wife; he tells them encouraging words and reminisces about the past. The father says his goodbyes, this would impact upon the family in an unpredictable way, creating a vicissitude for those receiving the letter. *Sunday...Monday* is poem that is part of a continuation of *Pip* but asks its own questions about where is the beginning? Where is the start? It questions life, when you ask what is life it leads to wondering where life begins. An endless,

unfathomable question that is commonly asked by little children, but the truth is that adults still do not know. The answer would be life altering, but right now it remains the greatest puzzle of life. *Ben* is the reflection on how an unexpected situation can become a treasured memory. Sometimes an object may seem plain and ordinary to the everyday person, but to the owner of that object it would hold a story and greater meaning. This is fundamentally what this story encompasses.

These three ideas of decisions, journeys and reflections combine together to create life's unexpected twists and turns, life's vicissitudes.

I researched certain aspects for my Major Work, especially for the historical stories. For '*Click*' I interviewed my grandfather, asking him questions about what he remembered of WWII and life back in Finland. This was the foundation for that story. I then added to it with my imagination. My Modern History studies have been of assistance when studying the home fronts in Europe, finding out real restrictions and technologies in those days helped depict a real human, rather than just a character, somebody that could be related to, instead of just a stereotype.

Influences in my work have been a broad range of things. One main influence at the beginning was my older brother's HSC artwork from 2008, called "Émigré". It showed the emigration of my father's family from Finland to Australia, and this sparked more ideas on unexpected change. The graphic work of M. C. Escher and his architectural illusions has also been of influence to my work, making me ponder on where the start of things really occurs, and how sure can we be that it is the start. One or two stories were thought up in the middle of the night, from scaring myself with a strange shadow cast on the wall, to simply an introductory line for a story that came into my head, when least expected. My influences were not necessarily based on one author's writing style but a range of ideas with their own connections and voices.

One aim for my Major Work is that I would like the audience, intended to be 17 years and older, to be able to reminisce on how something similar may have shaped them during the transition from childhood to the adult world. I want my audience to connect with the characters, not just read them on a page, and I aimed to achieve this through the use of realistic dialogue.

The poems in my Major Work reflect on the stories and complement them. They are a transition from one idea to the next. Using a different medium in my major work has helped it become less like a blur of stories, aiding the reader.

My Major Work has allowed me to explore those questions I've always asked about life at this stage, and I have been finding pieces of myself in each of the characters. Through the process of investigation and exploration into other's lives, and my own, I have discovered truths that I might not otherwise have realised. These truths have arrived through my own writing.

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## **Major Work** **Kelly Jenkins**

### **Somniphobia**

fear of sleep...

Clarity is obtained when you can separate your sleep dreams, your fears, your fantasies and your reality.

- P.J. Varsalona

Her hot skin was slick with sweat as she gasped awake, staring wildly around the blackened room. They were here, she knew they were here. She blinked rapidly, eyes straining in the attempt to gain

sight, the only light in the room coming from those glowing green numbers. 3.06 AM. No no no, not again. She reached up and down the wall beside her bed in a frenzy, fingers groping for any sign of that safe plastic switch, and finding none. Her heart was beating like a drum inside her chest and her mind screamed at her; light, light, we need the light! She leant back onto the bed, clutching the sheets as her muscles tensed and froze. She was a goner, unable to move and unable to view what lurked in the darkness. Her breathing was shallow as she slowly moved her eyes backwards and forwards, adjusting to what little light the clock provided. She sighed. Nothing was there, her room was shadow free.

Tonight wasn't like the others after all. Then she saw it. The tiniest of movements taunted her at the edge of her vision. Her eyes widened in horror as she slowly tilted her head back. There, hanging above her bed were thousands and thousands of spiders, pulsing together on thick webs, gazing down at her. Without a thought she leapt out of bed, her body moving too fast to even allow a scream. She crashed to the floor, half crawling-half running, towards what she hoped was the door. Hitting the wall, she banged loudly against it. Awkwardly twisting the knob in her sweat drenched hands she wrenched it open, escaping into the hallway beyond.

The cool tiles felt solid beneath her feet as she backed into the hall, gasping for breath as adrenaline pumped through her blood, gazing back at the dark room. Shit, shit! She'd left the door open. What if they got out? Fuck it!

She looked around from side to side, breathing deeply. It's ok, it's ok, I'll just close the door. No problem... She hesitantly stepped back towards the room, focusing on the door and not the things inside. Just gotta get to that door, just got to get that handle.

She leapt forward and clumsily grasped the handle, yanking the door shut with a thud and backing away just as quickly. Ok, ok, it was done. They were in there and she was out here, far far away. Running a shaking hand through her tangled hair she leant against the far hallway door, feeling her sweat soaked singlet turn cool against the cold plaster. It was over now, it was...she looked up, the ceiling again weaved with hairy bodies and this time she screamed. One dinner plate sized spider twirled its way down a silken thread in front of her face, legs scuttling around its bulging body. Twisting to the side she opened the hall door, smacking the spider aside in the process as she slid through, slamming the door shut behind her.

'Come, ON!' She breathed, switching on the light to the next room, this time checking the ceiling first and receiving a welcomed all clear. I should get mum, she realised. Her mother was the one with the stomach for spiders. Her dad, as brave as he was, was as arachnophobic as herself. As she stepped forward to head to their room the lights flickered. Odd, she thought. Maybe the spiders had gnawed at the cabling or something. She paused, gazing around her as the lights flickered again, this time settling into an eerie dim glow. Without another hesitation she strode across the wide space of the living area to the door that would lead her into the next area of the house. For the third time that night she placed her sweaty hand to the door knob and turned. But nothing happened.

'What the...' she tried again. It wouldn't turn. She wiped both hands upon her pyjama bottoms, then put them both back upon the door knob. Again she attempting to open the door, turning the handle to turn it too and fro frantically, shaking the knob against its fixture. How is it locked, there's not even a lock on this door?! She let go, taking a deep breath and closing her eyes, her body shivering as a cool breeze hit her damp clothes. Wait, breeze?

She frowned, and opened her eyes. The windows. And the doors. All of the openings around her, they were boarded up. There was no glass in the windows, or doors where doors had been, just old wooden boards, nailed at angles to the frames. The lights flickered again, and finally the power failed. She was left alone, in the dark, with just the moonlight streaming through the wooden barriers.

It was only then it hit her. Okay maybe she was paranoid enough to believe a spider covered ceiling was possible, and that lights flickered eerily on their own and doors just got stuck. But a sudden change of setting? She had to be dreaming again. This had happened frequently to her since childhood, but never before had a night terror been so vivid, or so prolonged. Why wasn't she waking

up? She shivered in the dark, clinging to the wall behind her, noting its feel. She was definitely here, her dreams rarely included touch so she must actually be touching the wall. Steadily she stepped forward, repeating over and over in her mind it's not real, it's not real, this isn't really here.

But the scene before her didn't waver. The breeze still whispered over her bare skin, and her mind still revolted at the idea of being in the dark, especially in a place that no longer resembled her true home. She shook her head, trying to wrap her head around the idea of this being unreal; it was all in her head. Wasn't it?

Noises began to emanate from behind the rotting boards, guttural sounds that were followed by strange shadows. This place was being surrounded, and only those boards were between her and whatever her mind had concocted. She jumped, as the growling rose to harsh barks. Elongated fingers, accompanied by razor sharp claws. As more fingers hooked over the wooden slats she slid to the floor, huddling in a sobbing mess. Maybe this was all in her mind... but maybe this was the worst place to be trapped.

## **Anthropophobia**

fear of society...

Let us not look back in anger or forward in fear,  
but around in awareness.

- James Thurber

The subway doors slid closed behind her and she took a deep breath, securing a look of nonchalance on her face. Twenty something eyes locked suspiciously on her person as she shuffled down the aisle, her black strappy heels making that attention drawing click-clack she'd normally value. But that was only in the comfort of her own world. Finding a seat that wasn't too close to any of these strangers, she sat down, lowering her eyes to her purse. Lexi could feel the gazes of her fellow travellers rolling over her, up and down. They analysed who she was, where she was going and how much money she might be carrying. It caused an involuntary shiver to claw down her spine, and her cheeks flushed. Looking up cautiously at the people surrounding her, they all quickly averted their gaze.

She scanned those closest to her, one of which was an elderly woman who seemed suddenly mesmerized by the cans in her shopping bag. Her silver hair was tucked neatly under an old boat hat, and she wore a lumpy jumper with a lady beetle half-heartedly stitched onto the front. She could have been anyone's mother or grandmother, but the hue of dirt that stained her pants, coat and cheeks told Lexi that she wasn't anyone's. A pang of guilt tugged at the bottom of her stomach as she stared down at her petite feet, hugged by expensive footwear. This is why she hated the subway. The awkward mixing of social status always pulled wrenchingly at her heart.

To her other side there sat a man, who reeked of a different world. His brand label suit had not a speck of dust; whilst filth coated his contrary environment. A polished, leather briefcase sat snugly between his pressed pant legs. A thick newspaper rustling intermittently in soft, desk hands.

Somehow Lexi felt she knew this man, the common antagonist of her world. He was a man whom nothing reached, not the horrifying stories of world hunger in his hands, nor the stories of the vulnerable people he took this ride with everyday. Lexi felt a pang of anger towards this him; how oblivious he was to those surrounding him. But she realized it wasn't this man who had earned her disgust, but all of the people he stood for, and the emotional capacity they lacked. Empathy. As if feeling her gaze on him the man turned to face her, catching her eye before she turned away. The strange look imprinted on her mind.

The train came to a shuddering halt, and Lexi decided this would be her stop today. She hurriedly exited the confined space, every passenger's eyes fixed to her face as she walked out into the stale underground air. The world of the train all but forgotten, her guilt was placed in a box to be released on the next ride. Lexi scurried along with the crowd up the steps to the outside world, moving fast in a

mob of conformity. The people around her walked in such close proximity, but no one acknowledged each other. No one smiled, there was no eye contact. Each person might as well have been walking a bare street. Lexi flinched as each person brushed past her, murmuring soft apologies into the sea of tapping feet.

The crowd finally burst into the world above. Skyscrapers towered above them, dirty brick their backdrop as cracked pavement bared their weight. The same scene every day, nothing seemed to change. It was as if this city was stuck in a loop. It was then that Lexi spotted him.

An old man. He sat on the stoop of what seemed to be an abandoned apartment complex. The stoop was lined with mouldy cardboard upon which he perched. His knees sat up to his chest, resting on the boarded up door beside him. Soft, white hair hung in wisps about his face; a face blank of expression. The man's face was gaunt, lines of a life once filled with laughter barely visible. It was then Lexi understood the man on the subway. People like him weren't oblivious to the pain in the world; these were intelligent men and women who knew very well what lay outside their doorstep.

It was easy to judge people with wealth as heartless, but Lexi finally realized that maybe there was more to it than that. Maybe wearing that mask, keeping their distance from the world outside their own... maybe it kept them from this heartbreak. The old man lifted his head, his gaze locking with hers as the man on the subway had. This time she didn't look away, and her breath caught in her throat at what she saw. Envy, pain, sadness, loss. And something she recognized; something she'd seen in the man on the subway.

Hopelessness.

## **Monophobia**

fear of being alone...

I have accepted fear as a part of life - specifically the fear of change....

I have gone ahead despite the pounding in the heart that says: turn back.

- Erica Jong

The old window let loose a screech as Laura forced it upwards, letting the warm night air waft through in an attempt to air out its stillness. Wiping her hands on a dusty old shirt, she turned to face the room with a heavy sigh. This wasn't the first time she'd felt the sorrow of unpacking her life into a new house, but it didn't get any easier. She'd never fought the move before. She grown up with it and knew it was useless fighting the way her mother was. Mum just couldn't stay in the one place. But part of being a teenager meant that all those angst ridden emotions had to go somewhere, and things had seemed so depressingly inevitable lately. She lay back on her bed, staring up at the white plaster patches on the roof, and wondered why on earth her mother had picked Granville. Usually mum tried her best to lessen the blow of the move by finding a city that had something extra, something a little more exciting. But Granville was anything but exciting. As far as Laura could see it was just a small country town, population under 6,000. What could this place have to offer them? With another practised sigh she closed and latched the creaky window, shutting out the new world outside.

She awoke to a rustle. A sound not commonly known for being ominous, except when alone in the dead of the night. Every one of her senses prickled, and her body froze; muscles tensed to flee. Laura's eyes were plastered open, the cloudiness of sleep disappearing. Her heart thumped hard in her chest as she stared widely into the dark of the room. Her ears hummed in the silence, hearing only the subtle buzz from her bedside clock, and the intermittent creaking as the old house settled. Gradually she began to relax, her eyes adjusting to the gloom. A small amount of moonlight spilled into her room through the sheer curtains, giving the whole room a ghostly glow. She reached out to turn on her lamp in an effort to feel safe.

As she turned away from the window she paused. Moonlight came through her window, but where was the orange glow from the outside streetlight? A tingle ran down her spine as she blinked rapidly, as if this would suddenly equip her with night vision.

She slowly climbed out of bed, careful not to make a sound, even though her mother slept soundly at the far end of the house. Crossing over to the window she peered through the gap in her curtains, looking down at street.

At first all seemed still and quiet and she sighed with relief, ready to laugh at her paranoia. Then it moved. A flash of white beside her mother's car. She squinted, straining her eyes in the darkness of the unlit street. There it was again. A human-like figure crawled out from underneath the car, straightening and putting something into what seemed to be a tool kit of sorts on its belt. The creature was covered from head to toe in a luminescent white, though its hands were splotched with black. Looking around Laura took a surprised intake of breath, realizing that figures of similar appearance were roaming all around the neighbourhood, just faint flashes of white in the night. Some of them were even walking out of the other houses in the street, and each figure had a helmet... a visor of sorts covering its face. As if sensing her presence, the figure directly below her glanced around and then suddenly looked upward. Laura gasped. It was looking straight through her window. Straight at her.

Sunlight streamed across Laura's face, glowing red through her closed eyelids. She groaned, her head feeling heavy and out of place on top of her neck. Her eyes finally forced themselves open, and she groggily viewed the unfamiliar space. No wait, not so unfamiliar. It was her new room. She sat up, realising she must've fallen asleep on top of the bed spread. Yes, that must've been what happened. Laura walked to the window, viewing the sun high in the sky; the air already thick with humidity. She'd definitely got a sleep in. Looking down at the street she saw her new neighbours begin to exit their homes, adults off to work and kids out to hang with friends for the weekend. Interesting; it seemed like everyone had slept in today. An odd feeling niggled at the edge of her thoughts, but she couldn't place a finger on it.

She heard her mother down in the kitchen, the sound of clinging plates and utensils as she prepared breakfast. Pulling on jeans and a sweater she hurried downstairs, only to find her mother poised at the front door. She was looking out onto the front lawn, her expression blank.

'Someone switch all the trash cans this morning or something?' Laura quipped, causing her mother to turn from the door in surprise.

'Oh hey honey, you're up early,' she walked back over to the kitchen, continuing preparing breakfast.

Laura realised she absent-mindedly left the front door wide open. 'Are you hungry?'

Laura frowned. 'I guess. But it's not early mum, it's near midday. What's going on?' She walked over to the door, watching the curious scene outside. All the neighbours stood at their vehicles, trucks and cars alike, their hoods flung up. All of them seemed to be gazing at the interior, scratching their heads. Her mother looked up from the breakfast she'd begun preparing.

'Midday? Oh, I guess we must've slept in,' she said, her voice sounding odd and floaty.

Laura's frown deepened as she turned back to the door. People sat in and around their cars, attempting to start them to no avail. After a few moments of trying, each of them calmly locked the vehicles, walking back into the house without a word to each other. Laura gaped, not knowing what to make of the scene.

'Mum...' she started, closing the front door. Her mother continued preparing breakfast. 'Mum!'

Her mother once again looked up, her eyes focusing on Laura's face. 'Oh, yes, what?'

'Mum, have you tried the car?' Her mother frowned, confusion across her face.

'Yes, but it's not working. I'll get the mechanic to look at it later today.'

'What? Mum everyone else is having the same problem! Don't you find that a bit odd? A whole street full of cars doesn't just go bung over night!'

'Oh Laura you worry so much. This stuff happens all the time, it's not really...' she trailed off like she didn't even remember speaking, and Laura just stared at her in bewilderment.

What the hell was going on here? Her mother was obviously out of it something shocking, and it seemed like the rest of the neighbourhood was in the same state. She sat herself down at the kitchen bench, thoughts ticking over in her mind as she watched her mother preparing breakfast the same as she had every day, but somehow she seemed different. Her face was slack, emotionless, as she went

about the process. What were you supposed to do when you were in a new town where everyone was acting like zombies, even your mother?

## **Xenophobia**

fear of the unknown...

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself-nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyses needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.

- Franklin Delano Roosevelt

You never think it'll change things. That something that small and seemingly insignificant could change your life. It all ended that day at Great Grandma's house. 'It all' being everything that was, the way life had been. But I'm rambling, and not much of this makes sense now, so I should probably begin. It was the summer break and I'd just finished my eleventh year of high school. I was sitting on the couch flicking aimlessly through the TV channels while I thought about what outfit to wear out that weekend, when the phone rang.

'Mum! Muuuum! The phone's ringing!' I hollered, still staring at the TV. My mum stormed out from the laundry where I'd apparently interrupted her, answering the phone with a gruff 'hello'. The stress lines which seemed permanently etched into her forehead deepened as she spoke in hushed tones that I couldn't hear over the TV. I tried to watch her pursed lips to follow the conversation. Before she hung up I caught the words 'soon' and 'Rachel', and so became immediately curious as to my own involvement.

'So what was all that about?' I asked, casually glancing in her direction as she began pottering about the kitchen.

'Your Great Grandmother.' She answered abruptly, avoiding my eye.

'Oh... what about her?' I queried.

Great Grandma had passed away a few months ago, there'd already been a funeral and everything but we were unable to attend. That's what mum said anyway; I personally hadn't had anything on my schedule. I'd never really known my Great Grandmother. Mum and I had never really been close with the extended family; we didn't do the common holiday gatherings.

I guess you could say we were more the card sending type of people. When we found out about her... being gone, I didn't really know what to feel. Except a sense of regret that I never got to know her better. Mum seemed entirely void of emotion about it all, just awkward at any talk on the topic.

Mum grabbed her purse, heading for the door. 'I'm going around to her house today. Your Aunt says there are a few things that need to be collected and some forms I need to sign. It won't take too long.' 'Can I come?' I asked, the words out of my mouth before I could think about it.

She paused. 'You want to come with me? To get an old ladies' things and look over boring documents?' She raised her eyebrow at me, studying my face.

'Yeah well... I don't have anything better to do, and I want to get out of the house,' I muttered lamely, throwing on some shoes and a worn messenger bag as I followed her out the door.

The house was a whitewash old weatherboard place, the garden overgrown and the paved driveway cracked. Each house on the street looked the same as the next, the whole neighbourhood an eerie quiet.

'Oh, this is nice,' I said, my voice unconvincing even to myself. Luckily my mother didn't seem to be listening anyway. She quickly walked the length of the drive, pausing before the old wire door, her hand hovering above the handle. I watched the determination flicker across her face until, with a deep breath, she swung it open, the metal letting loose a mighty screech.

'Sal? That you?' My Aunt's voice echoed from the kitchen, one I knew well from recent phone calls.

'Yeah, we're here,' Mum called back, leading us towards the voice.

'We?' Aunt smiled. 'Rachel! You came!' She hugged me awkwardly, smelling strongly of potpourri.

'Yep, I sure did.' I stood uncomfortably between the two women as the conversation lapsed.

'Well... that's lovely. You should take a look around the place whilst we sort all of this grown up business out.' She smiled patronizingly at me, leaning close. 'If you see anything that takes your fancy, feel free to take it!' I forced a grin and a 'sure thing Auntie' before wandering off, my mum's face looking as unhappy as I was to be here. Stupid idea, why did I think I wanted to come? There wasn't much to see, it wasn't a large house and most of it looked like it had already been ransacked by the whole family. So much for respect.

While I strolled through rooms and rooms of floral print and family pictures a strange feeling of de-javu wash over me. I had been here before, I was sure of it. Sitting down on the bed in the guest room, it felt like the memory was almost there, but I just couldn't reach it. The bed was lumpy beneath me as I gazed across room at wooden vanity, the paint peeling and the mirror tarnished with age. My gaze wandered slowly over the elegant arrangement of picture frames on the wooden top. Scenes from school trips, days at the beach and family gatherings. It didn't take long for me to pick the common character. It was my mother. So young, so happy. I realized I'd never seen any of these pictures. Really it seemed I didn't know much at all about my mother's past.

Or my own family's history. This filled me with a sense of... I couldn't put a finger on it. Regret, or maybe it was guilt. I'd deliberately never probed about my mother's past, or my own. I'd never taken the leap of bringing up him with her; him being the 'biological'.

The whole 'father' thing never appealed to me, I didn't need 'parents'. Mum was my parent; she was all that I needed. I'd never felt that I would want to be part of a nuclear family, no matter how odd the two of us appeared. I only made the mistake of asking about my dad once, when I was around ten. It wasn't that I felt I'd missed out, no having a father... but I was curious at the lack of one. I'd grown up thinking it was possible for him to never exist. Needless to say, when I bluntly asked my mother where 'mine' was, it didn't go down well. She'd reacted strangely, ranting about who had 'told' me, and why I suddenly cared. It was the first fight we'd ever had. From then on I associated questions about family with a feeling of apprehension, something we both avoided. With a sad smile I gazed around the room, its walls browned with age and history. All the stories it had to tell.

It was then that I spotted it. At the base of the vanity there was a small crack, just below the last drawer on the right hand side, a small ribbon protruding from the gap. My curiosity peaked as I walked over to crouch down beside the crack, running my fingers along the roughened edge. I twisted the golden ribbon between my fingers, tugging it lightly until there was a soft popping sound and a drawer slid out where there appeared to have been none. I gasped quietly, sitting back on my haunches and staring in delight.

A secret drawer? Leaning forward I peered into the makeshift drawer at the objects it held. Or rather object. A single book lay in the back corner. It was covered in a pretty silken material, white calligraphy on the front proclaiming 'Sally Eastern'. The book belonged to my mother. Suddenly I realised that the adults' conversation was coming closer. Without a thought I dropped the book into my bag, pushing the drawer closed. I rose to my feet as the older woman appeared in the doorway. 'Hey honey, you right to go?'

'Sure thing,' I said with a smile plastered on my face.

We walked out, leaving the house behind us without saying a word, my Auntie waving from the porch.

Well, she did say to take anything. And this could be the key to learning about it all. Everything that was unspoken would be revealed. I put my hand into my bag, running my fingers across the gilt name on the cover.

## **Scelerophobia**

fear of wicked men...

Just as courage imperils life, fear protects it.

- Leonardo da Vinci

Lights swirled about Stacey's head in dizzying patterns, reflecting off the surface of the surrounding towers. The bright, artificial lights shone so brightly that the stars were no longer visible in the night sky. Though realistically that could have been due to the heavy layer of smog hovering over the city. The dusty air tickled at her nose, creating a constant need to sneeze. Blinking her watery eyes she looked again at the line in front of her, realising with a quick jerk forward that it had moved without her and the people behind her were glaring with annoyance.

'Come on Stace,' the girl in front of her smiled, taking her hand. 'This is gonna be great fun, just lighten up!' Stacey smiled encouragingly at her, trying to look enthusiastic but failing miserably. In the end she achieved something more akin to a grimace. The girl was Rachel, her best friend since the days of scrunchies and crop tops. Rach knew everything about Stacey, from her desired amount of juice in two minute noodles, to her favourite pair of socks. She also knew that none of this was really Stacey's scene. Bustling cities, bright lights, thronging crowds and loud music; all of it made Stacey want to run in the opposite direction, preferably towards a nice deserted field.

The normal excitement a young adult felt on a trip to another country hadn't been experienced at all by Stacey, and Rachel knew the only reason she'd come was because she had begged her to. As much as they were best friends, their personalities were nothing alike. Where Stacey was shy, Rachel showed charisma. Where Stacey was scared, Rachel was daring. Rachel loved everything about cities and the opportunity to meet new people, whereas Stacey was uncomfortable about the fast-moving city folk, all of whom were 'dodgy' in her opinion.

Rach squeezed Stacey's hand encouragingly, leading her up to the club doors. Above the doors a lit sign proclaimed the name 'Poison' in a large, fluorescent green flourish. Stacey attempted to peer down the dim stairwell beyond the doors but other than the occasional flash of what could be strobe, there didn't seem to be much light.

'I.D.' The bouncer drawled lazily, barely glancing at their faces. Rachel handed hers over, attempting to make bubbly small talk whilst Stacey cringed at the thought of her photo. It was a horrendous picture in her opinion, where as Rach's might as well have been taken for a magazine. 'Kay, let 'em through,' the man waved his giant hand behind him, and the girls followed its general direction. They started off down the stairs, feet feeling their way down in their tottering heels. Stacey put her hand on the banister for a moment before pulling back in disgust, trying not to think about whatever wet substance she'd just put her hand in. Finally, just as it started to feel like there was no end in sight, the stairs opened up. They were in.

Stacey glanced around, her eyes trying to consume the new surrounding all at once, and she suddenly felt like a kid who'd eaten too much ice-cream. Rachel's mouth hung open in wonder at the club, looking like a much happier kid, possibly one in a pet shop. The club was a flurry of activity, more than two hundred people moving around the space. Everything was ultra modern, sleek, sophisticated and totally intended to be candy for the eyes. The lounges were barely recognisable as such, created in odd arty shapes and furnished with black and green leather. Twisted metal poles rose up around a built up DJ deck, a glowing green light curved around it, resembling something like a lava lamp. The dance floor was a huge space, the floor a floating glass deck above a pool of emerald glitter. The walls were softly mirrored and warped, and ceiling glowed with tiny green lights. Basically, it was a techno wonderland.

Seeing Stacey had barely taken a breath since walking in the door Rachel laughed.

'Breathe Stace!' she grinned broadly, 'you know what you need? A reeal big drink!' Taking her hand again Rachel led a protesting Stacey off to the bar. The bar itself turned out to be another artistic feature of the place. Running the length of one wall, Stacey realised the bar appeared to be in constant movement. She reached out; cautiously placing her hand on the surface, before realising it was solid; just a glass structure with water running through it. At this she actually smiled, liking the feeling of the cool glass and imagining the calming movement beneath her fingers.

'Hey beautiful, what can I get you?' A deep, honeyed voice asked. Looking up Stacey's eyes were met with a cool green pair, matched with an award winning smile. His dark eyebrow flicked up at the look

of embarrassment and confusion on her face. Ice crept down Stacey's spine as she sat there silently, cheeks flush and her flight instinct screaming to be let loose.

Suddenly Rachel jumped in, rescuing her. She smiled excitedly at this attractive new boy. He didn't seem to be in a rush to serve anyone, despite being the only bartender for the shift. 'Hiya! uh we'll get a...' she chewed her lip thoughtfully, gazing around the room.

It seemed like in every hand in the place there was a margarita glass filled with shimmering, green liquor.

'What's everyone drinking, Midori?' she asked. The corners of the bartenders' smile twitched higher. 'That's the Poison's specialty drink, 'Green Poison,' he chuckled, 'It's what we serve here now, since the new owner.' He pointed to the wall behind him, and both the girls noticed the banner reading 'Grand Opening!' pinned above bottles and bottles of 'Green Poison'.

Rachel smiled sweetly, 'Oh, well then, I guess we'll have to try it!' Stacey opened her mouth to object, but before she could Rachel added 'Make that two!'

As soon as the bartender disappeared Stacey began babbling. 'Rach, come on, you know I don't like to drink, and we've got no one here to watch us, and well this place looks pretty 'underground'. And I mean... you don't even know how strong those 'Green Poison' drinks are!' she stopped, taking a deep breath as Rachel grinned mischievously.

'Precisely my point dear Watson!' she chuckled, 'chill out Stacey, this is what we're expected to do!' Without another word Rachel grabbed the drink that was slid across the bench at her, strutting off into the crowd.

'But...' Stacey sighed. She knew it was no use reasoning with Rachel. There'd be no calming her down or bringing her back once she had her heart set on a new risk or a new experience. Stacey picked up her drink, swirling it around.

The green liquor had an odd texture to it, something about the way it moved about the edges of the glass. It was almost... silky. With a sniff and a crinkle of her Stacey placed her drink back onto the counter. Her interest instead shifted to the throng of people occupying the dance floor. The music was largely electro-pop, the beat so deep it vibrated through the chests of anyone nearby. Laser beams of green light flickered off the mirrored walls, dancing over the sea of people.

Stacey suddenly felt a strange feeling in the pit of her stomach, something that drew her to that sea. She walked purposefully over to the crowd, hesitating slightly at edge. Her breathing had quickened, and the beat was now humming up and down her legs. This was so unlike her, this confined space; surrounded by so many people... but she wanted it. She needed to be right in the centre. Her foot was the first to break the outside membrane, and from there on she weaved and twisted her body around the thriving mass of people.

Sweaty, warm flesh pressed against her own. Her shoes suctioned with each step to the spilt, green liquid, hair tangling instantly into the intertwined arms around her. Stacey finally reached the centre of the throng, her body moulding comfortably to fit the extra limbs about her. The beat soon found its way into her movement, and suddenly she became one of the sea. Her body swayed in time with the rest, head tilted back as she gazed at the laser lights dancing above her. It was then she felt something shift, something in the dynamic of the crowd.

The swaying had stopped, and while the beat still vibrated through their feet no one seemed to notice. Suddenly there was a new energy to the crowd, and movement became more chaotic, raised voices adding to the confusing. Stacey now realised she was being dragged along with the throng of people as everyone separated off the dance floor, people now yelling.

A strange feeling washed over her as she suddenly came to terms with the new tension: fear.

'Rachel? RACHEL?' She called with a note of hysteria in her voice. She couldn't see anything except people rushing around to no apparent effect. It was then she saw it. The first one. The body. It (or

rather he) lay slumped at her feet. Lifting her gaze she saw more, dozens and dozens of them. People all over the club had collapsed where they stood, and more continued. Martini glasses fell to the polished floor, the sound of shattering glass resounding off the walls as they smashed into tiny pieces. Stacey stood shell-shocked as people cried out weakly over their friends' bodies, before crumbling into the glass speckled floor beside them.

In a matter of moments she was the last person standing in the dim room. The bodies of more than two hundred people layered the floor, the electro-beat a faint memory to her dulled ears. Her heart-beat hammered in her chest as she looked up that dimly lit stairwell, to the lights above.

## **Thanatophobia**

fear of death...

Turn not thy face from Death away. Care not he takes our breath away.  
Fear him not; he's not thy master, rushing at thee faster, faster.  
- Dean Koontz

The fluttering. That damn fluttering. I imagined a tiny, adorable bird fluttering in my chest. Its small wings beating softly, reverberating gently up my throat. A pretty image; except for the fact it was a bird inside my chest. I shuddered. Okay, so it wasn't a real bird caught in my chest, it was only a metaphor. But it was exactly as you'd imagine it. Not painful, just... odd, like it wasn't a part of me. It wasn't my beat I felt, it was like something removed from myself entirely. I glanced down at my hands, which looked like they were trying to strangle each other in a strange struggle of self. I took a deep shuddering breath, wiping my sweaty palms on my jeans repeatedly, to no avail. My stomach rolled inside me like viscous tar, my shoulders tensed up under my ears. Suddenly I stood up; my legs pushing the plastic chair back with a shrill shriek. All eyes in my class were drawn to mine. The colour drained from my cheeks, as if my face was an oil painting in a downpour of rain. Muttering something about having to leave, I did just that; the murmurings of emotional vultures following me out the door.

Standing at the sink in the senior girls' bathroom, I glanced upwards at the soap scummed mirror. This was too much, as clichéd as it sounded, I'd come to the conclusion there was only so much a person can handle. Everyone was expecting things from me. Big, fantastic, successful things. Failure was no longer a possibility. Not because of what might happen if I did, but because there was no room in anyone's mind for it to happen. I chuckled softly, my hands grasping the cool metal of the sink harder, as my sweaty fingers began to slide. I was pretty sure if 'failure' ever reared its ugly head at me, the heads of my friends and family would simultaneously combust. There was no room for error.

Which was why I couldn't deal with this. Homework, I could handle. Marks, I could handle. Study, I could handle. But when my body suddenly decided to do something out of my control... I listened hard as the chaotic beat flickered inside me. Tears sprung to my eyes in a hot rush, and with teeth clenched I whispered, 'You can't give out on me, you can't.'

That afternoon I stood outside the school gates I laughed and pulled faces at my friends as they hopped into cars, the same as every other day. The cool breeze was the only hint of a winter's day, the sun beaming down in a warm kiss that almost made me believe it could be spring. How I longed for the arrival of spring, and the banishment of these cold, dark days. A silver car pulled up beside me, the rays glinting off paint that showed signs of a mud tainted rainfall from weeks past. I slid into the car, my armload of books pushed into the back seat, but evidently not out of mind. 'How was your day possum?' my mother asked cheerfully, pushing sunglasses with the odd tint of a prescription lens up onto her head.

'Fine. Nothing to report,' I chirped, smiling warmly at her.

'Good, good. So are you all caught up, ready for our big trip tomorrow?' She pulled out of the parking bay, no longer focusing on my face. The 'big trip'. Usually a trip to the city was associated with road trips, loud music, shopping and maybe a play. The way she talked about it made it sound the same, but it was anything but. The words 'hospital', 'specialist' and 'heart' were the ones found running around my mind.

'Sure thing,' I said brightly; mum not even noticing my hesitation as she smiled back. We didn't talk about it like it was something to fear. Multiple tests, heart monitors, ECGs; suddenly these were all part of the norm. It was warped really.

Instead of worrying for my life, I was busy worrying about how this threat on my life, would affect my HSC. I chewed absent-mindedly on my nails, or what was left of them anyway. It was then I felt the tension change in the car. My mother took a deep breath. Something was wrong. I looked to her face, and she glanced at mine.

'Sweetie, you know there's nothing to be worried about right? There's nothing these doctors can't fix...' she said slowly, waiting for my reaction. I was stunned, my mouth hanging open as I grappled for words. I thought I'd hidden it perfectly. I knew mum and dad were scared on the inside; the happy 'rainbows and ponies' attitude was a dead giveaway. And I'd known from the start I didn't want to break that wall for them. Seeing me scared, would make them terrified. But somehow I'd failed, and she knew. All along, I think she knew.

I tried to draw a slow breath, but the air came rushing in with a shuddering sob. Suddenly I was crying, and mum was pulling over. With the car barely stopped at the side of the road she leapt out, and appeared at my door. She unbuckled my seat belt and drew me up into her lap, taking my seat with her legs dangling out the door. Then she just held me, like she did when I was six years old, like nothing had changed. I felt my core strength crumble, and the horrible feeling of my insides being pulled out of me was overwhelming.

I cried and cried, until I was no longer conscious of the tears streaming down my cheeks, and my sobs had resided to hiccupping breaths. My head rested against my mother's chest as she murmured comforting nothings. I could feel her life beat against my ear in a comforting rhythm, so different from my own.

My tired eyes gazed out the door of the car in a deadpan stare above. The only thing visible through my tear glazed eyes was that false spring sunlight through the leaves. It was then I realised that what I was really afraid of wasn't failure. But the chance I wouldn't have time to do so.

## **Reflection Statement**

My Major Work has first and foremost been an investigation into the personal self; the parts people rarely talk about and are even more rarely seen. The overall concept of the work is Fear. This was influenced by a personal experience, one that I based a short story on, and from which more short stories followed. The concept of Fear was interesting to work with as it is primarily influenced by yourself and other people. It's not something of pure fact; it's something that is felt, by everyone and in a range of different ways. Fear also gave me leeway into the various paths of exploration within my stories, from outright terror to the inner trepidations that hold us all back.

The form in which I chose to write my Major Work was short stories. The concept of Fear lends itself well to stories, and it is often present in many of them. Fear in novels is the unseen protagonist, the common motive behind the characters' plot changing decisions. One of the main factors I chose to contend with was the 'resolution'. For this major work I decided that for none of my short stories did I want there to be one of these. I threw conventional plot and denouement out the window, changing the classic structure of a short story. I felt that without a clear resolution the reader would be left with that feeling of fear, the feeling of 'what if'. Not knowing what happens next in itself causes tension, and I didn't want to break that for my readers. This was the aim.

My choice for character wasn't as predetermined. After a few stories I began to realise that my characters were all one gender. As this is a work composed primarily from personal experience it can only be explained that males and females deal with fear in very different ways (though it is the same base emotion) and that I myself haven't had the experience of another gender's mind.

For the purpose of these stories it was important to stay true to the concept of fear and the real feelings behind it. Without that connection to myself it wouldn't have come across to the audience as real.

The settings for each of the stories varied, as I tried to cover a wide range of fears and the stimuli in our world that triggers them. This is also the reason that I chose the different styles of narrative voice. While some of the short stories are written in first person, others are written third person. Some fears can be better explained by viewing a person's actions from the exterior, whilst others occur so deeply within our own thoughts it is necessary to accompany the character there.

Other than using my own experiences to influence my stories, research on various phobias began to alter and define my story. As the pieces in my major work are each named after phobias it was necessary for me to look into this dense world information. Soon after beginning my research it became evident that whilst there is a name for a phobia of nearly every action and object on the planet (some of which veered toward the ridiculous), there were phobias that had been defined as genuine which I myself could relate to on a smaller scale, and I was sure the same would apply to a majority of the population. It was then, with my work on Anthropophobia, that I realised Fear was more widespread than I'd originally thought. I used these definitions and research as a basis for some of my later stories, and whilst they don't demonstrate each phobia in its entirety, the idea was to give the readers some insight into what these phobias can do to people, and who they affect.

My process of writing was a difficult one, and I can't say it was always smoothly productive. For a long period of time I did no writing at all; I dug myself into a hole worrying about what sort of concept to follow. It was only when I began writing about my own experiences with this Major Work that I realised what the common problem was behind every reason I felt I couldn't write. Surprising enough, that reason was Fear. In having written about this fear I let it go, and so freed up the entire process of my Major Work from there on in. While this made my work as a whole slow moving (being unable to force these cathartic experiences) when the stimuli for a story came it flowed quickly and with ease.

In my particular style of writing there weren't many other writers to follow, and the closest influence to my work became the thriller/horror writer Dean Koontz. His influence came directly from his approach to a story, his use of fear as a protagonist and a companion to the reader throughout each book. Koontz's style utilised both the engaging 'action' sequence and inner monologue in viewing Fear. I used this to develop my own style as I aimed to incorporate both of these elements.

I also gained experience and influence from a writer who worked as a professional editor in a workshop I attended. His feedback as a reader and editor gave me invaluable insight. Our discussions about personal fears and the way I intended to explore them helped to create the possibility of my stories not only viewing fear, but looking at fear without fear, and in total honesty. His influence gave me the confidence to tackle fears in an open way, putting my honest feelings into the story so as to allow each reader to insert himself or herself into whatever situation I chose to recreate.

My intended audience is not specific; as the concept of fear is something that I feel can be recognised by anyone. Although I have used females in their teenage or young adult years, the stories are applicable to all of humanity. Each of us has at some point feared a nightmare, feared making a choice or stepping into the unknown, feared for our own place in society, feared others and feared being alone. The purpose of my Major Work is to open the reader to these stories and to guide them through this dark inner world, enticing them to explore it further. With plots that don't shed light on the fear at the resolution it becomes the job of the reader themselves to decide how they end, to come to their own conclusions about the fear. In the end it's about helping each reader to delve into their own fears and the antagonists in life that cause their fears; or even to just make them say 'yes, that's me, I've felt this way before.'

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## What it takes to become a hero

### Presented at the Lions Youth of the Year Quest, 2010

#### Joanna Martin, Year 11

When I was little, I had this idea that my hero could only be a cartoon character that wore a cape; like batman or superman, then I thought my hero didn't necessarily have to have a cape. He could climb walls, like spider man. And then I realized that my hero's name didn't have to end in 'man'. My hero could also be anyone of the power puff girls.

It was when my mum introduced me to lasagne that she was my ultimate hero.

To some, a good hero is hard to find. I don't believe in that, I see great people every day.

Heroes are seen everywhere, and are kept in the hearts of those who admire them. A hero differs greatly to many people, and it has always been that way. You decide who your hero is. Not *anyone* else. My hero is someone who can do something with what they've got. They don't *have* to rescue, they don't *have* to have the physical strength or ability to pull someone out of a burning building or succeed in trying to.

There are all kinds of heroes. There are your Saturday Disney cartoons, your favourite actor or even a musician, and then there are heroes that come from myths and legends;

They are admired for many for many things. Often strength and for completing usually impossible tasks.

In the story of Peach boy, an old Japanese legend, a boy born from a giant peach is found in the forest by an elderly couple and raised as a normal child. He ends up undertaking a great quest, in which he sails to a far off island and kills the trouble making demon that resides there. He returns home with the treasure the demon had stolen and lives happily ever after. Not all heroes, however, live "*happily ever after*".

You might have heard about Rod Wintle.

He had been away from home for less than an hour when a fire took hold in his house in the early hours of the morning, he returned home around 1.50am to find his house fully alight, neighbours shouted to him that his three children had been rescued but he didn't hear them.

The children aged 8, 9 and 11 had earlier been brought to safety by a neighbour named Joel Craddock after he had heard young children screaming, he went into the blaze to find two kids running around and another stuck in a bedroom, he picked up the little girl and held onto the two boys and pulled them out of the house. He shouted to Rod to tell him that his kids were okay as Rod headed for his house but he still didn't hear and even though people tried to stop him, Rod still tackled past and ran into the flames. By this stage, flames were already going through the roof.

Rod Wintle Died in an effort to save his children even though they were already safe.

He's a local hero.

Then, there are the simple stories of the people who volunteer to go to a nursing home once a week, the people who participate on clean up Australia day, *every day*. The teachers in our classrooms that are the foundation of our careers, the person that sees someone else fall over on the street and stops to make sure they're okay, single mothers or fathers that try to work and raise a child at the same time.

The people that contribute, by education, kindness or just love.

It wasn't that long ago when I read about Elena Desserich, Diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour when she was five years old.

When she was dying she left *hundreds and hundreds* of notes around her home, in between books on the shelf, behind jars in the fridge and in jacket pockets saying '*I love you*' so that when she died her mum, dad and little sister would find them.

She passed away in August 2007 and her parents began to find the notes that they say they still find today.

For Elena Desserich, it took three words; I love you- to be a hero. For Rod Wintle, it took love for his family, what does it take for you to be a hero?

I think we are all a hero, I think this world is full of heroes, it's time we appreciated our luck that we could have something so great, because a hero isn't just a role model, they are the people that shape a mould your life, they are your inspiration and your love. They are your first thought, and your last. I don't have just one hero, and I never want to- because with so many great people, one isn't enough. It doesn't take much to be a hero; it doesn't take much at all.

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## Inspiration

### Presented at the Lions Youth of the Year Quest, 2010

#### James Buckle, Year 11

Nelson Mandela once said "It always seems impossible until it's done."

Franklin. D. Roosevelt "When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on."

Charles Swindoll said, "We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations."

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, members of the Lion's club and judges.

The initial quotes are all about inspiration

What is Inspiration? The dictionary tells us inspiration is an inspiring or animating influence, something inspired as in an idea, or a person or thing that inspires.

In reality inspiration gives us the motivation to start, keep going or to finish something we are passionate about.

Lance Armstrong one of the greatest cyclists the world has ever seen stated "Pain is temporary quitting lasts forever." I am an avid cyclist and enjoy going mountain biking. He is a personal inspiration to me.

Lance Armstrong was a professional cyclist. He then had very aggressive testicular cancer with a survival chance of around 3 to 4 percent. Lance Armstrong overcame the cancer and came back to win one of the most gruelling races on the planet, the Tour De France a total of 7 times. Considering there is up to 198 competitors covering around 3500 kilometres in 21 days it is pretty impressive. He retired and after coming back at age 37 he came 3rd in the Tour de France and continues to race at the highest level.

Lance Armstrong set up an organisation called Livestrong which raises money for Cancer research and helps to provide hope, encouragement and inspiration for people going through cancer and their families.

Lance Armstrong is not only a brilliant cyclist but a man that has a heart that desires to help other people. He is an inspiration.

Teachers in our life can be inspirational. In Grade 1 I was considered to be a lazy student. The fact was that my teacher was very uninspiring. In Grade 2 I was taught by a teacher that although I didn't know it was inspiring me to do my best. This teacher gave me responsibility, acknowledgement and nurtured the drive to do my best. She inspired me.

Last year my sister Sophie chose Visual Arts in the HSC but always said she couldn't paint and draw. Her teacher, a talented artist himself supported her and at the end of the HSC she made three beautiful pieces of artwork, came first in the class, got a band 6 in the HSC and found out she has a love and passion for art. Sophie was inspired and through his enthusiasm she learned to love art as well. I saw this and have chosen to do Visual Arts. I have been inspired

I am a blood donor. I actually donated today. Giving is not exactly a pleasant experience. A large needle is stuck into your arm, the blood is taken and you leave the blood bank with a vague sense of doing something good. The thing that is inspiring about giving blood is the letter that you receive later telling you that your blood donation could save three lives. I am inspired to keep donating

Some men are inspired to do great things. Take the steam engine, the car, penicillin, the light globe. Thomas Edison tried to create the light globe over 10,000 times before developing a successful prototype. Inventors are often inspired by a problem or need in the world and an idea is born. These people are an inspiration and testament to perseverance and dedication to others that follow.

Inspiration comes in many forms. Nature inspires people, mountains, rainforests, beaches all seem to inspire people to explore and enjoy.

Love inspires people. Consider a parent and a child, two teenagers or two happily married adults. Love inspires people to better themselves, to go the extra mile or go to great lengths to impress.

Kind deeds inspire people to see the best of humanity and try to emulate the same thing. We witnessed this recently following the bushfires.

God inspires people to live their lives in certain ways and to be kinder, gentler and more compassionate people.

Australians are certainly inspired by sport. Great sporting achievements give hope to people and a sense of belonging.

One of the gifts of being human is that we are able to inspire others, through our actions, words of encouragement, how we react to different situations and people. Sometimes people are inspired by the smallest things.

Before I finish I'll tell you a secret. The beauty of inspiration is that it often comes from people who just have a passion for their own craft and the inspiration just flows onto others. You could well be an inspiration to others and not even know it.

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## **The AFL Draft**

### **Presented at the Lions Youth of the Year Quest, 2010**

#### **Joel Docker, Year 11**

For over 1000 of Australia's elite junior Australian Rules footballers, the AFL National Draft, which takes place at the end of November each year, marks the most significant day of their lives so far. It is the day when the years of hard work they have put towards achieving their dream can be rewarded with selection by an AFL club, or they will be forced to deal with the disappointment of not being chosen. The Draft is a process in which the top junior footballers from Australia and around the world are selected by each of the clubs in the Australian Football League. The potential draftees must turn 18 or older in the year they are drafted. Most are in the 18 year category.

A basic summary of how the Draft works is as follows: The teams are allocated Draft picks based on their final positions from the previous season. That is, the team that finished last receives the first pick in each round: Picks 1, 17, 34 and so on. The team finishing second last gets the second pick for each round. There are other systems in place in the draft, for example the Priority Pick, which involves clubs receiving extra selections based on poor performance over a number of seasons. Unfortunately this has been applicable to my beloved Richmond in recent years.

Each of the hopeful draftees has their own individual outlook on the draft. Some of these players have incredible natural talent that has allowed them to negotiate junior ranks with ease. For the purpose of this speech I will call these players Type One. Type One players are often looked after by coaching staff and don't have to work too hard to be selected in representative teams due to their ability. They don't have to work as hard as others at training and are gifted with sublime skills, but this kind of player is a minority. I think the questionable point of talented footballers, and even sportsmen as a whole, is their motivation. Sometimes it seems that everyone simply expects them to be elite, but this isn't always what they want with their life.

A contrasting type of draftee is one with not as much natural talent, but with a strong motivation and persistence. I'll call these Type Two players. This type of player has to make the decision to commit to their dream, and this commitment is a hard one to make. Type Two players have to dedicate their life to the game. They must live, breathe and sleep football if they truly wish to make it to the AFL. I have created a small acronym which I believe basically summarises the lives of Type Two players who pull through their years of hard work and are drafted into the AFL. It is DESS, D E S S, which stands for Desperation, Emotion, Sacrifice and Success. I believe Type Two players are more deserving of success, purely because of their attitude.

If I was a selector, a little less skill and a hard-working mentality would be far more appealing than raw talent. Unfortunately this is sometimes not the case, with selectors choosing talent over mindset. This is my only criticism of the Draft system, which has produced most current AFL players and gotten the league to the standard it is at now.

There are many struggles faced by all footballers in their draft year. Many are completing their HSC or equivalent qualification and as study takes up a large amount of time, it must be juggled with football commitments. This is more applicable to Type Two players who have to spend more time on their football and have less time for homework, part-time work and social time. This causes stress for the players, which often becomes detrimental to their football. Players need to carefully manage their

balance of all these commitments in order to maximise what they can achieve. This generally means making sacrifices, which can be hard for many footballers. Type One players tend to make fewer sacrifices because they have never been forced to.

Hopeful draftees come from a huge variety of backgrounds, and play the game for many different reasons. For some, their talent has given them an opportunity to save themselves and their families from a difficult life. In this instance there is often a lot of pressure on the player from his family and even himself to be successful. Another motivation which fuels a draftee's dream is a passion for the game. Players who love football for the physical and mental challenge, the team environment and the rewards for hard work are far more likely to achieve more.

Whatever the motivation a player has and no matter what their circumstances are, the elation experienced by every player selected on Draft day is the same. They know that everything they have done has paid off, and the dream of a future playing AFL football is suddenly a lot closer.

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## **It's a long way to the top**

### **Presented at the Lions Youth of the Year Quest, 2010**

#### **Breanna Lee, Year 11**

Let's face it, there's an ultimate life for everyone. Perceptions of this ultimate life vary from place to place, time to time and from person to person. Are you exactly where you imagined you would be? Every single one of us has the potential to be where we imagined, so why do most people think back to their original perception and find a vast difference in their intended life, and their actual life? In this speech, I aim to find an answer to the reasons we do not reach our full potential, and why, for some, reaching a full potential is out of their control.

Physiologically speaking, every human being has limitations, set to what's comfortable and what's not. From birth, our family values have contributed to our 'safety net'. If you have ever heard the saying 'The rich get richer while the poor get poorer' you will take this into consideration when observing the safety net rule. For example, the rich will tend to teach their children how to stay successful- to not be afraid to take risks, to risk it all if necessary. A poorer person may teach their child to stay in a safe position, to not take a risk on a goal with a high risk associated with it. In another example of our own faults in not reaching a potential comes pure, unadulterated laziness. Some people are always speaking of what they want and what they are going to do, but are always sitting in the same spot on a line we call life.

To make sure you are reaching your full potential, set a goal, make a plan, work toward it. Become an optimist, because every negative thought you replay in your mind is like an anchor holding you back. Define who your role models are and learn from them. Be grateful for any opportunity you come across, and be willing to change and adapt.

Unfortunately, not everyone is given the childhood, a basis, to reach their full potential. People are made to suffer through childhood; emotionally, physically, mentally, socially, spiritually and economically. Some people grew up in households less-than loving and stable, some have a loving and supporting family who just simply can't present them with many opportunities. Other people's struggles don't even start in childhood. However, regardless of someone's childhood upbringing and

history and past or present situation, everyone has the potential to become a happy and successful person.

For these people, possibilities for growth and change do await them. Oprah Winfrey is one of the most influential people in proving this. After her parents separated, she was raised by them both separately. She suffered abuse and molestation between the ages of 6 and 13, but has used her personal memories of her abuse to motivate her to better her life, and the life of others. People like this relay to us that to become successful is never going to be easy, and that if it hasn't been challenging, it's probably not your full potential. The only way to become everything you want is to have a goal, and to have the determination to see it through.

People may not be pursuing their life's dreams because they have entrapped their mind into believing there is no way, no way out and no clear path to take. I believe that everything we do is a result of the mind, which has been conditioned to believe or think a certain way. A mind can be conditioned by a spouse, media outlets, family, events etc., but it is important to remember that after all those forces have influenced your mind-good or bad- YOU are the driving force in your own life. Never entrap your mind to think anything other than 'I can do it!' Life is trial and error, growth and learning. Embrace it.

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## **The Innocent Enemy**

### **Presented at the Lions Youth of the Year Quest, 2010**

#### **Laura Harris, Year 11**

"Kill it; the only good one is a dead one." Those are some pretty harsh words. Right? And I can't really imagine myself saying that about any living thing, no matter what it is. So why is it thrown around so often when talking about this beautiful animal. Now at the moment maybe some of you are agreeing with me, but when I say the word 'SHARK' I bet that *uneducated* statement, that the only good one is a dead one, comes to a lot of your minds.

Well I guess they do have sharp teeth, powerful jaws and small beady eyes that look as if they're on a mission to kill. BUT if you only took the time to get to know the ways of the shark better and know why their presence is so *vital* for our oceans existence, maybe you could learn to love them, like I do. I know, sounds crazy right? But really, it's not. There are many people that study and love sharks, but unfortunately not enough.

The numbers in our oceans are declining fast, and you may not realise it but *sharks* are an endangered species. So what? You might think. What good do sharks do anyway? Well, like any ecosystem, the ocean has a food chain, and sharks, being at the top of the food chain are extremely important

If we eliminated sharks, fish species would over populate, which means food sources like sea grasses would become scarce and cause our oceans eventually to die.

Now we've all heard of the 'Jaws' theory. That there's a rogue shark and it's had the taste of human blood and it will come back for more! Well this isn't Van Helsing, this is nature's instinct. The sharks come close to the shores looking for food, because we humans are overfishing their ocean. In fact, the human presence is more likely to scare a shark off than attract it. Robert Stuart, a Canadian shark expert, believes that shark attacks, while tragic, are usually an accident. He says "sharks don't eat people. If they did eat people, they wouldn't end up back on shore."

Now did you know that there are more deaths worldwide by elephants every year than sharks?? The ratio is 200:3. Now I'm not saying we should kill elephants. Elephants are beautiful animals. But so are sharks. Unfortunately, most fishermen have the attitude that every shark is on a mission to kill someone so they must slaughter them

What about humans? When they commit murders deliberately, we lock them up in a jail cell, and sometimes even after an amount of years, let them free. We are in a country that doesn't believe in capital punishment, yet when a shark kills or attacks a human merely from natural fear or mistaken identity' we slaughter them.

It's all about getting to know the shark and listening to the warnings and information, which most people, especially we Australians ignore. You wouldn't go and stand under a tree in a thunderstorm, nor would you walk across a freeway in peak hour traffic. So why go swimming at dawn or dusk. Everybody knows that's the feeding time for almost every animal. You, I and all humans need to learn to respect the shark's environment

Sharks are incredibly valuable to all life on earth. Sharks continue to be hunted for their highly valuable fins and flesh at a rate that is pushing our oceans top predator to the brink of extinction. 270 000 sharks are killed every single day across our blue planet. In some areas of the Great Barrier Reef our shark populations are at extremely low and dangerous levels, as low as 3 %.

For four million years sharks have roamed our seas and survived four mass extinctions. But now they face their worst threat yet, humans. The shark fin trade is huge. It is a multi-billion dollar industry that is largely unmanaged and unchecked, an industry merely for the exotic taste of shark fin soup. Sharks are hunted off every coastline in the world.

It is a disgrace to think that a country like Australia participates in the international trade of shark fin. Not only is this unsustainable, it is anything but humane and *completely unAustralian*. Now you can't tell me that you're not disturbed when I tell you that *Australian* fisheries are allowed to slice the fins off sharks while they are still alive! In most cases sharks are stunned, finned and left to suffocate as they bleed out, piled on top of each other.

Our oceans are the climate control room for the planet. They produce 50% of the world's oxygen. In other words, you and I owe one out of every two breaths to the ocean. The impact of removing its top predator will kill our oceans. Leaving us gasping for breath.

Obviously not everyone's going to go away being as passionate about these animals as I am, and I don't expect you to be. But next time you hear someone say "the only good shark is a dead shark" what will you say? Remember that the shark, that big scary "man eating monster", is keeping **you** alive.

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## A Poem for Progress

### Lachlan McIntyre, Year 9 2010

History is always teaching us,  
But we may not ever learn  
The same faults, errors, and the same mistakes  
At every bend & turn  
Seven deadly sins equal  
Seven thorns in humanities side,  
Anger, lust, gluttony, sloth,  
Plus envy, greed and pride

From Stalin's Russia to Mussolini's Italy  
And Hitler's Germany  
Men who profit from war and destruction  
On the back of tyrannical regimes  
But the latest forms of fear and oppression  
Come not from the old form of Empires  
But from men of both faith & aggression  
Whose greatest weapon is terror.

Senseless men that scared the world  
On that fateful day in September  
An unprovoked and irrational attack  
Something we will always remember  
It was not because the United States  
Had done anything to hurt or offend  
But these men decided they shall suffer regardless  
For the love of a God they say, that they've right to defend

Whatever message they thought they were bringing  
Or any sanction from God  
It could surely not be said that any of our faiths  
Could support an intention so wrong  
Denounced by their own church, however  
These extremist groups carry on as ever  
Perverting the message of a holy book  
To justify the evils of the path they took.

Religious factions & fractures  
Are something we barely need  
Because the message in every vessel  
Is deceptively clear, you see  
To love thy neighbour as yourself  
And respect the rights of others  
To not pinch his property  
And then lie to blame another

If we could concern ourselves  
With not who we think they represent  
But focusing just on the words  
And not someone we resent  
We could take away a new perspective  
A new vision, a greater peace in our mind  
A better world irrespective  
Of who we worship in kind.

## Campbell St. Lachlan McIntyre, Year 9 2010

*“Residents along Campbell Street in Sydney’s west have been warned by authorities to be extremely vigilant, because police investigators believe that a notorious murderer haunting the area may be set to strike again soon.”*

‘Oh my god it’s on every channel.’ Alice murmured, clutching the grey remote. ‘Gary!’

‘What is it, what’s the matter?’

‘Come and have a look, quick!’

*“One of the officers said in a press conference yesterday that there seems to be a correlation between these killings and the time of the month...”*

‘I can’t believe they haven’t caught that guy yet.’

‘I know. Crazy isn’t it?’

*“We’ll keep an eye on that story, and should shortly have some developments over the next hour. After the break, Damien will bring us the weather...”*

Alice turned off the TV and looked out the window. The sky was broody and overcast, mottled grey clouds obscuring a pale winter sun.

‘Is there anything we can do, honey?’

‘Not really. I didn’t even know about it until I got home.’

‘What if he’s still here? On the loose?’

‘Oh I wouldn’t worry too much. He’s probably already fled the scene by now. And even if he did come back, you know I would protect you. Absolutely. They wouldn’t stand a chance.’ He said, a smile creeping up his face.

‘You would, would you?’ she giggled, eyeing his slight frame and goofy expression. ‘Karate Kid?’

They both laughed. ‘I have a late shift tonight. Nick can’t come in; he’s got sick kids at home.’

‘Oh ok then. I made some lasagne for tea.’

‘Great, I love lasagne!’

‘I know, probably a bit too much. Keep eating like that and you’ll have to slim down for the wedding.’

Gary chuckled. ‘No chance. You’re too good a cook!’

The happy couple had their dinner, smiling but quietly concerned about the events of the day, like a tiny splinter buried in the back of their consciences. Gary gazed out the window, pensive and yet apprehensive, watching the clearing clouds unveil a polished full moon. He looked up at the clock on the wall, its cold inevitability giving him no comfort. He thanked Alice for the meal and changed into his work clothes. It was just going to be one of those nights.

Harry Brown was walking down the street that night, casually humming and just generally minding his own business. He was one of those nice, inoffensive types of people who you might wave to if you saw them at the shops, or at the footy. He only happened to be out on his own late at night because Friday night was Happy Hour at the local pub and he liked to have a beer with some of the blokes from work.

It wasn’t really the rumours about the Campbell Street murders that made him put a halt to his comfortable little walk that evening. He saw something far more unusual.

Across the road another man was walking the other way, not nearly as cheerfully. Looking up at the sky, he saw the clouds break ranks and it was then, he knew, that it was going to happen again. The pale, silvery moonlight streamed down, and his skin took on an ethereal glow. Then he felt the familiar trembling fingers and sweaty palms, and he was soon down on the pavement, rolling and convulsing, morphing and transforming, losing control of his own body and soul to the dark mystery of the night.

Harry Brown stood rooted to the spot, soft amber light from the streetlight pouring over his slackened shoulders. He had witnessed possibly the most bizarre and amazing events he was ever going to. The last thing he saw was this animal, akin to a wolf, jumping over the road and its ghostly pale eyes paralysing him, searing into the deepest corners of his terrified mind. He screamed so loud; waves of pure, unadulterated terror rolling down the silent street.

The animal stood over its victim and took a few furtive glances up the deserted street, before dragging him into a nearby bush. It was settling down to its meal, when it heard a sound. A sound so faint, it could be passed off just a trick of the mind, or a ringing in the ear. But it grew, and grew, a sound that strikes fear into the common criminal and stamps its authority on even the model citizen, the sound of a thin blue line that separates the rabble from the respectable.

The sound of a police siren.

Anxiety flashed across the beast's face, and it saw the car coming down the hill on the far end of the street.

'Wahh...Wahh'

Time to run.

'Wahh...Wahh'

Quickly it turned and ran up the pavement, paws only making the quietest of thuds, long grey fur flowing out behind it. Powerful muscles drove it faster and faster, but the car was still gaining.

'Crr..ack' a bullet slapped the pavement near the werewolf, spraying a cloud fine grey dust up into the cold air.

'Crrack'

The wolf stumbled and rolled squealing into a hedge. It got up gingerly, blood weeping from a bullet wound on the shoulder. The car slowed down, and two men stepped out on to the pavement.

'You know, I couldn't believe it when they called us down to Campbell Street for a dog. But did you see the size of it?

'Yeah, what an enormous animal. Glad that little old lady down the road reported it; she said she heard a scream...'

'Shh...'

They heard a rustle in a bush off to the left. The wolf was angry now; the throbbing of its shoulder was driving it mad, the pale eyes hating the men that brought it such pain. It pounced.

The two policemen never stood much of a chance.

The wolf walked away quietly, it knew its time was almost up. On a bench in the park, it looked up at the sky for the second time that night. Again, the fever and the glow came over him; his fur thinned and he shifted morphed back into a man. Master of his own self once more, he saw his blood stained hands and he knew what must have taken place. How he wept.

Exhausted, and beaten, he stumbled back up into his apartment block. He stepped out of the lift and fumbled for his key. The door unlocked with a soft click and he swung it open, stepping inside as quietly as possible. Soft light from the hallway poured into the living room of the apartment, the man's long shadow up against the back wall.

'Gary? Where the hell have you been?'

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## **Has the ANZAC legend changes over the last 95 years?**

### **The Simpson Prize, Lachlan McIntyre, Year 9 2010**

The Anzac soldier to many Australians is the purest embodiment of what it means to be Australian, and perhaps by extension, the greatest example of one. The Anzac troops brought respect to the two fledgling nations of Australia and New Zealand, with Australia not fifteen years federated, and largely

unknown to the wider globe. At a time when Australia was making its first marks on the world independent of mother Britain, the Anzacs not only presented our new identity but became part of it, woven into the dreams and aspirations of future generations.

The Anzac legend is a difficult thing to describe, let alone define. It is so many things to so many people; an array of thoughts and ideals brought together under the golden banner of a rising sun. Nonetheless, it can generally be accepted that the Anzac spirit or legend centres on the following ideas and characteristics; endurance, determination, courage, good humour and larrikinism, and of course, mateship. Within these characteristics, I believe the Anzac spirit continues as ever, not only in our servicemen and women, but in the soul of the nation; just as the eternal flame burns at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Naturally, we must begin our exploration of the Anzac legend where it first began; at the infamous campaign of Gallipoli. Strategically, everything about it was backwards; the Turks held much higher ground, were essentially *awaiting* the arrival of the Anzacs, and had the cliffs fortified with machine guns. Even today there is debate and speculation as to whether the landing place was actually a mistake, or that the landing place was intended by the British commanders.

The courage and tenacity that was shown by the landing men is remarkable. According to Charles Bean, the landing took place at 4:53 am, and when they set out on the tows at 3:30 it was "so dark, that one tow could scarcely see a sign of the next one to it." From there, the Anzac troops first met fire just on dawn, Bean said "Not quite light but getting very close to it." Then, they heard a single shot, then two or three, and the men first realised that it had begun- one of the men even exclaiming "Hello, now we're spotted!" Once the Turks had opened fire it was a desperate struggle to even make it to the beach. Bean was told by a soldier named Milne that the Turks were shooting "from the whole face of the hill" and likened it to a "monster fireworks display".

The campaign lasted for eight months and the Anzacs, although making initial ground, failed to meet the objectives set for them. There were heavy casualties; Dr. Charles Bean stating the casualties for the Anzacs at 33665 men, 10025 killed. That the Anzacs faced this battle with the determination that they did, fighting against overwhelming odds in some of the most difficult terrain imaginable, shows us how strong, and how potent, the Anzac spirit was in these men.

The next juncture in Australian military history I wish to focus on is the Vietnam War. Although it heavily shaped the 1960s and 1970s, the conflicts in Vietnam began at the dawn of 1950, when on the 14<sup>th</sup> January the Nationalist leader Ho Chi Min declared that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North) was the only legal government, which was shortly recognised by fellow communist countries in Russia and China. However, Australia and the United States supported the south, what was then known as Indochina. This was an imperial government led by Emperor Bao Dai, and sponsored by the French. What ensued was a long and controversial war. The United States and allies were eventually chased out of Vietnam, confused and embarrassed; a loss of face and questions to answer when they returned home. Vietnam remains to this day a communist country.

Possibly the most famous battle from the Vietnam War, and the greatest example of the Anzac legend therein, was the Battle of Long Tan. This was fought on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1966 between the Australian Army and Viet Cong (Communist Vietnamese), on a rubber plantation near the village of Long Tan in South Vietnam, with backup from New Zealand and United States troops. It was a remarkable and resounding victory for Australia, despite being extremely outnumbered against a strong army on their home soil. The conflict first arose after Australian intelligence over several weeks had tracked a VC (Viet Cong) radio moving to just north of Long Tan. Then the Australians faced a barrage of mortar fire on the night of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of August, in which 24 were wounded, one soldier dying later from his wounds. Then, on the afternoon of the 18<sup>th</sup>, a small group of Viet Cong soldiers walked into the 11<sup>th</sup> platoon, where one was killed. The 11<sup>th</sup> platoon pushed forward, and although there was no more mortar fire, the Australians were immediately met with heavy machine gun fire.

The rest of the battle shows an incredible endurance and determination on behalf of the Australian troops, two important parts of the Anzac legend. All available artillery was brought in to try and allow the 11<sup>th</sup> platoon to pull back and form a defensive position, and by now there was very heavy

monsoon rain falling in the plantation. By around 5:00pm the men were becoming very short of ammunition, and the Australian commander Harry Smith called for a resupply. Unfortunately, however, there were no tools provided to open the metal crates, and the tired troops had to make do, bashing them open with machetes and the butts of their rifles. The VCs (Viet Cong) were always pushing forward, seeking to overwhelm their enemy through numbers, however they were successfully repelled. The rain was said to have a part to play in this; so intense that it kicked up a mist that gave the Australians some cover- "All that's poking out of that is the diggers' hats and their eyes, not even their rifles," said Dave Sabben. The final statistics read as thus: 108 allied troops (mostly Australian) defeated a force of between 1,500 to 2,500 Viet Cong, 18 allied deaths compared to 245 of the Viet Cong. Lieutenant Colonel Bob Breen puts it well: "The battle discipline and bravery of the Australians, the cover provided by the torrential rain, and the effects of hundreds of artillery and mortar rounds falling among the Viet Cong attackers resulted in a stunning victory for the Australians, and a further enhancement for the fighting tradition of Australian infantry."

From this staggering victory surely it is impossible to claim that the Anzac spirit has changed or diminished since its inception on the shores of Gallipoli. Granted, the military certainly has changed; more professional and career oriented than ever before. There also comes the increased shrewdness and awareness from the general public of war and what it truly is. Nonetheless, today in Australia's continued campaign against extremism in Afghanistan, the core values that make up the Anzac legend; endurance, determination, courage, good humour, larrikinism and mateship still live on in our armed forces. *"Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them."*

Lest we forget.

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## **What not to do in the holidays!**

### **Rotary Short Story Prize, 2010 – Robert Anderson, Year 8**

We kept running, as fast as we could go. We knew it was still following us, it could be round any corner. The two of us were being stretched to our limits. We had no idea this was coming a few days ago.

It was the beginning of spring holidays my friend, Micah and myself were trying to think of things to do. We were the pranksters of Adams Street. But we were out of ideas for pranks. We had thrown flaming dog doo at people's doors, we had got a long piece of rope and tied it to two door knobs across each side of the street, and then we knocked on the doors and watched the two people try to open their doors. It was hilarious. Of course our neighbours hated it, they all thought it was us, but they had no proof. They rang the police every time and every time we got our hands free, the fact that we lived out of the city in a place like Jindera helped. The cops took 20 minutes to get here. "I've got it!" I shouted as I jumped off the curb. "Got what?" asked Micah as he stood up. "I've got the idea for the best prank ever!" I exclaimed. His green eyes stared into mine, trying to see if I was serious. Some people say we look alike, we both have short brown hair, we both have green eyes and we are both tall and fit (mainly from all the running away from angry neighbours). "Okay then Josh, what is your great idea?" he asked me with a tone of sarcasm in his voice. "We pretend to rob someone! You know ski masks, fake guns big bags with dollar signs on the side." I explained. He sat there wide eyed. "What do you think?" After a long silence he answered, "It's absolutely insane, what if they called the cops and we got caught, I wouldn't survive in juvie!" I was a bit surprised by his answer, normally he's the one who wants to do all the crazy, insane things we do. "Okay then, I'll do it by myself," I said as I started to walk up my driveway. "Hey, hey, hey. I said it was crazy, I didn't say I wasn't in," he exclaimed as he jogged to catch up to me. "I knew you would," I said as we both walked in the front door of my house. "Sure you did," he said sarcastically. "Let's just go to my room and make some plans."

"So I'll meet you outside of the Reads place at 9pm tomorrow night, remember were all black and bring your fake gun. I'll grab some stockings and cut eye holes," I said as we went over the plan on a rough drawing I had made of the street. The Reads were the grumpiest, oldest, most boring people on the street. Mr & Mrs Read lived just down the street from us, they had been there since I was a kid. Micah and I both think that the house has been there since the first settlements, it certainly looks that way. We also think that the Reads have been there for longer! "Okay then I'll see you tomorrow night," said Micah as I walked outside with him. "It'll be great! We'll be legends forever!" he cried as he walked away. I on the other hand was having second thoughts.

The next day flew by. After diner I told my mum I was going to Micah's house (which was sort of true, that's where we were going to meet up afterwards). I grabbed my bag of equipment, put on my black clothes and left into the night. I got to the Reads house about 5 minutes before Micah. There was a row of hedges along the front of their house, it helped us hide there. Cars weren't a problem, no one ever comes down our street. When Micah finally got there I whispered to him, "What took you so long you're late!" "My mum wouldn't let me out in the black clothes, she was worried I would get hit by a car! Out here! So I put so other clothes on top," he explained as he scanned the Reads small front yard. He was also pulling off his other clothes to reveal a black pair of track pants and a black T-shirt. We were going to go in through the laundry door around the back of the house, they always left it unlocked. "I guess that's a good enough excuse," I joked. "Let's get going, I'm supposed to be home by 10:30 at the latest." We stepped carefully across the lawn around the side of the house. We stopped by one of the windows and peered in. They were both sitting watching television. Satisfied that they were distracted we put on our ski masks, grabbed our fake guns and continued to the back door. Micah went first he slowly opened the door and peered in. "No one in sight," he whispered as he crept in. I followed behind him in. We crept down the hall that we though lead to the lounge room. It was a good guess, we could hear the sounds of the TV show as got close to a door. The house was surprisingly big on the inside. We had passed 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, a kitchen and some sort of junk room, just in this hallway. "On the count of 4 we barge in.1...2...", I started to count but I was interrupted by a loud crash and shouting. It was coming from the lounge room. It sounded as though the Reads were actually being robbed! "What do we do?" asked Micah frantically, trying to stay as quiet as possible. "We better get ou...", I stopped as I heard footsteps coming towards the door. The handle slowly turned. "We run!" I exclaimed as I got up although it seemed that Micah was way ahead of me. Behind me I heard a man shouting, "Quick there is some others in here block them off!" We both ran frantically out the laundry door. We started round the side of the house and ran back just in time someone was holding a flash light down the side of the house waiting for us to come out. "The back fence. Quick!" I exclaimed as I ran towards it. There was a gate, but it was locked. We jumped it. We were in some sort of back lane. We could both here footsteps following us. They weren't firing we guess because it might wake some people up. Of course the shouting alone must have wakened someone. We were now on the road that leads to the centre of town. We kept running. We knew they were still following us, they may even been round any corner. We were being pushed to our limits, but we somehow kept going. We turned back onto Adams Street. Out of the corner of my eye I could see my house. We burst through the door, and ran right into my dad. "Dad, there... is. ... someone.. robbing the Reads house!" I said as I tried to catch my breath. "Looks like it was you guys," joked my dad. I forgot that we were still wearing the ski masks and holding the fake guns. "Not us dad, I'll show you, quick."

When we got there we found the Reads happy and smiling. They were still watching TV. They said that they hadn't heard a robber or seen one. We looked around the house, everything was where it should be. Micah and I were gob smacked. We didn't know what happened. That was until the next day.

Micah and I were walking down the street. We saw Mr Schmidt getting his paper. "Hello boys, did you like our little show?" he asked trying not to laugh as he did so. "What do you mean?" asked Micah. "You know the ski masks and the fake guns." "That was you," I exclaimed. "Not just me it was everyone on the street you every terrorised. Your mum let us know what you were planning so we made a plan of our own to get back at you two for everything you guys have ever done. And boy do you two get a fright" Mr Schmidt burst out laughing. We just stood there, pale as ghosts.

"We got it on camera to, we got my son to put it on that post tube, thing."

"You tube you mean?" I enquired.

"Yes. That's the one. Apparently it's quite popular."

As soon as he finished talking we sprinted home.

He wasn't kidding. It was there and it was popular! That had some really good footage too. We would never live it down. We both vowed there and then to never prank anyone again.....unless they deserved it!

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## **Presentation Ball!**

### **Courtney Tyack, Year 8 2011**

There's five months till the Presentation Ball for year 10. I'm scared of who's going to ask me. I hope it's not Kay Peterson. He's... let's be nice, he's not normal. But more than that..... But I won't say the rest. I want Charlie Headerson to ask me to the ball. He's hot, tall, and skinny. But there's my problem. I'm small, a bit fatter than skinny and I'm not the type of girl people like Charlie notice.

It's a Saturday, nice, hot. A normal Saturday in Batemans Bay. A nice day to feed the birds at the beach or go shopping with Mum for the Presentation Ball. 'Fun'. My older Sister Jessika had her Presentation Ball last year but at another school. Jessika lives with our dad in Melbourne.

I don't see them much. If I'm lucky I get to see them on the on Christmas school holidays, if I'm not working. I got a job two months ago at KFC. I work every weekend and some days after school. Life was good when Mum and Dad where together living in Thurgoona. But I was little then. Jessika was seven and I was six.

I get my bag full of money for shopping. Mum likes the olden day dresses. I hope I don't have to wear those dresses. I don't even know what type of dress I'm going to wear. Mum's yelling at me to leave.

Off we go, down to the middle of town just to get a dress. We live near the beach, nowhere near the shops and school. Well there's one school near our house but that's for boys and boys only! Which is weird but who cares. I can see the school outside my window, which is good because I can see the hot boys.

The shop has white walls, red carpet with heaps of dresses. Some are weird but some are the best dresses in Batemans Bay. But there are only two shops that sell dresses. I start to look for the perfect dress. I look everywhere, through all the racks. But there's one rack I missed. Most dresses are red and the rest are black. I've lost mum. She's gone.

I look around. I look past the change rooms. There she is walking out of the change rooms. Mum walks over to me holding a dress. I ask if it's an olden day dress but mum says "No". Which is different. She gives it to me. What am I meant to do? Mum looks at the change room. I walk in the change room with the long white dress. The dress is ok - a bit small and long, but I can fix that. I walk out of the change room, Mums standing there waiting for me. "How was it" mum asks.

"Small and long just because I'm short" I say. I take the dress back to its rack and keep looking. I find a nice blue dress. I go to the change rooms to try it on. It longish and a bit big but I can fix that. Mum and I walk to the register. Mum fills out a form to send it to some place to get made the

right size for me. The lady takes my measurement, to send with the dress. Done. Shopping's over but mum might make me walk around with her.

I see Penny, my best friend down the street. I wave, she doesn't see me. I go over to her and say "Hi". She walks away, closer to James. James is my other best friend. Penny and I like..... like him. Penny stops and starts talking to James, but then they hug and..... kiss. I walk away, not thinking about what I just saw. My minds gone all funny just seeing them kiss. Were best friends and we both promised we wouldn't date James or Matthew and Penny broke that promise! I can't think straight now. Mum yells out to Penny and Penny looks at me weird. I say "Hey, want to hang out?". Penny and James keep walking. It's like I'm not here, when I am. I ask mum if we can go, hoping she doesn't ask why. But she does, "I don't feel the best. I just need to go home and rest". It works. Mum starts walking back to the car park, so I follow.

We pull in to the drive way and there is Lilly. This isn't going well. Lilly is Penny's younger sister. I ask her about Penny -if anything has happen at school or at home. "She hasn't been the best and that's why I'm here", says Lilly. "She said she broke the promise whatever that is."

I but in "The promise is... Penny, James, Matthew and I promise not to date one another but that promise has been broken thanks to Penny and James. There dating if that helps." I was trying not to take my anger out on Lilly.

"Thanks I won't tell her that I know about the promise" Lilly says all sweet. I walk inside not in the best mood. "I don't feel like tea thanks mum I might skip tea and go straight to bed. See you tomorrow" I say thinking about what happened with Penny.

I walk slowly up stairs, hearing my phone go off. It's Penny calling me. "You called" I say not happy.

"Yes I did just to say sorry about today."

I but in "What about that kiss going out with James and breaking the promise" I say letting my anger out.

"Yes about that- James and I are sorry. It will not happen again" Penny says in a not happy voice.

"Ok if it does....."

Penny but in "It won't, promise."

"Fine I say." We chat for hours. I'm now feeling better. But its late, she has to go so we hang up and do what we have to do.

Four long months pass. Finally the home phone rings. "It's Shelly's Dresses. Your dress is here in town ready to be collected."

I yell out "Mum get the keys we're going in to town."

Mum doesn't ask what for. She knows what I mean. We get there. I run inside and mum just walks in. We pay and get the dress in a nice pink box. We get home, happier than ever before. I try it on. It fits. I put it back in the box and away somewhere safe. The days go faster than ever.

It's the night, the one and only night I've been waiting for. I'm ready just in time to leave. Mum has to take me in earlier so she can get to work in time.

I get to school, the same time as Charley Headerson. He walks straight past me. But Kay Peterson

walks up to me and gets on one knee and asks me to the dance and I **say** "Yes." I can't believe I just said "yes" to Kay the weirdest guy in school. But he is a good dancer- better than Charley. It's time to dance. I'm bad dancing at the start (but I get better as we go). But I'm not the only one. Charley is having the worst time dancing with Maddie Black.

The night gets better until a storm starts coming in, with big black clouds and very bad winds. It starts to rain very heavily. The wind gets worse. So bad that everyone runs inside. Kay and I are left outside in the storm. It's getting worse by the second. The wind pushes Kay and I into the mud. Whenever we move mud goes all over us.

The doors to the hall open when the storm stops. It's the principal, Mr Gull. He helps us out of the mud. We look like pigs and feel like pigs. We walk in to the hall. Everyone looks at us. This was the worst thing that's ever happened to me. The mud was bad enough but even worse was that I was with Kay.

The night is over. I have to walk home in a muddy dress. Everyone looks at me. I walk in the door. Mum looks at me funny. "Someone got down on their knees" mum says trying not to laugh. I

yell out "Leave me to die." I run up stairs to my room, crying.

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