



Somers Paper Nautilus

Inclusiveness and openness, catering for a diversity of views without rancour.

Issue 73 June–August 2018

Beauty pops up where you least expect it

These shy little orchids were spotted on a coastal reserve not far from here.

Photos: Jethro Sallman



Lyperanthus suaveolens - Brown beak



Diuris spp. - Donkey orchid



Thelymitra grandiflora - Giant sun orchid

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Biolinks: Improve and connect habitats

PAM BANNISTER

Back in February, Rosemary Birney (Friends of South Seas Rd Reserve), Barry Fraser (SRA, SVCA) and I met with Simon Thorning, the MPSC Natural Systems Team Leader, to discuss and check possible 'connections' towards creating or improving habitat links from Balnarring through to Cerberus—this being part of the Mornington Peninsula Shire's Biolinks program. We inspected some areas of the Foreshore Reserve, other reserves or parks in Somers, plus some little pockets of Crown land, several roadside verges and beach access tracks.

Further meetings organised by Simon were held in Mornington and included other shire officers, along with Brian Thomas from Parks Vic, and community & Landcare volunteers. Simon's main focus was, "*to combine local knowledge and aspirations with the data contained in our GIS on biodiversity significance, EVCs, current Shire management, land ownership etc.*" (GIS is a geographic information system that lets us visualise, question, analyse and interpret data to understand relationships, patterns & trends.)

We also discussed how best to utilise volunteers and resources, and what funding options might be available to assist us with improving bush land areas in Somers and connecting these habitats. Gaps in these Biolinks, or wildlife corridors, have been highlighted with data gathered thus far by the Mornington Peninsula Koala Project team.

Most people in Somers would be aware of the Koala Project which started in late 2015, when GPS collars were placed on selected koalas from Somers through to Balnarring. Although not yet completed, the initial research data has confirmed



Our purpose

Somers Paper Nautilus aims to connect all the groups and individuals of Somers and to help reinforce a sense of community and belonging by giving them an avenue of expression through:

- News relevant to Somers and the surrounding area as well as items of general interest.
- Stories and examples of local creative endeavour.
- Letters.

The *Paper Nautilus* will not become involved in party politics nor take sides on any issue. However, we encourage readers to feel free to express their opinions on matters that concern them and the Somers community.

The volunteer editorial committee will have the final decision of the paper's content and reserves the right to edit or omit any item on legal grounds or because of space.

Views expressed in the *Nautilus* are not necessarily shared by the editorial committee but are those of the authors.

We aim for inclusiveness and openness, catering for a diversity of views without rancour.



Nautilus on the Web

Don't forget back issues
of the *Nautilus* are
available for viewing
at www.somers-nautilus.org.au

the difficulties faced by our local koala population due to such things as loss of trees and habitat, traffic, dogs and 'unfriendly' fences. But the GPS data also points to the distances some koalas are travelling, in order to source feed trees and mates.

A quick glance at a Google Earth map of Somers highlights the often huge gaps and areas lacking in protective vegetation cover, on both private and public land. If habitat links were to be developed, it would greatly assist not only those, at times, stressed koalas, but other native fauna as well.

An idea discussed during our several meetings was to improve the quality of vegetation on our roadside verges and perhaps extend 'wildlife' corridors into private land, with Simon stating a width of 40 metres is desirable for a healthy robust wildlife corridor. Some sections of our narrow Foreshore Reserve are much less than this 'desirable' width, which makes it even more important to protect and maintain this precious area.

Consciousness: what is it?

BETTY BROADBENT

There has been a lot of comment about Consciousness, *what is it*, on the ABC lately and it made me reflect on my experiences.

I don't know if dreams can be considered as 'unconsciousness' but when I was young and an evacuee in Cornwall, I had a very vivid dream that my mother had fallen down the stairs and hurt her head. A few days later we had a letter from our mother; indeed, she had fallen down the stairs and cut her head badly.

Later, in my teens, I dreamed I was walking with a companion in a street in London.

"You know this is a dream and we are not really here, don't you," I told him, but he didn't answer me. I had my green raincoat on and to prove my point I wrote a message on it. When I woke up I rushed to look at my raincoat but,

Human health and well-being is also linked to regular contact and 'engagement' with the natural environment. We are indeed fortunate to have some areas of remnant vegetation in and adjacent to our Somers village footprint. It's a good basis right on our doorstep, but it can and should be improved when you consider what a small percentage of remnant vegetation remains on the Mornington Peninsula: "*Remnant indigenous vegetation: Of the 18% that remains, only 8% is in public reserves and much of it is weedy or otherwise degraded*". (SPIFFA web page)

Our community has an opportunity to be involved in improving not only 'our character of place' and Somers' natural environment, but assisting with improving or creating these Biolinks.

Please contact Pam Bannister at somersvca@gmail.com if you would like to be involved in such a community project to improve/create habitat links from Balnarring through to Cerberus. ☺

of course, there was no message there!

When I was 18 my dentist suggested that I would look more beautiful without my two eye teeth which were causing my two front teeth to protude. In those days 'laughing gas' as it was called was used to "put one under" so I was ushered into the dentist's chair and a mask put over my face. Everything went dark, then I was swinging on one side through the air; after a few minutes I felt the same sensation on the other side. I was quite giddy when I awoke, still sitting in the dentist's chair, and there were my two perfect eye teeth sitting on the dentist's desk.

My next experience was when I was rushed off to have a caesarean at the birth of my first baby. I could only have a light anaesthetic because of the baby. After the needle prick I remember walking in a beautiful garden, but a lady across the way was in a lot of pain. I was quite sorry for her. My walking brought me close to where she was suffering and, as I slowly recovered my senses I was quite surprised to realise that the lady was ME.

Can we really be in two places at once? ☺

Why

A POEM BY ANDREA HOUBEN

We love the beach.

Families with their children playing.
People with their dogs exercising.
Fishermen fishing.
Couples canoodling.
The lone walker reflecting.
The Ocean is ever giving.

So WHY do some families leave the remnants of their picnic the plastic wrappers the plastic bottles the dirty nappies? They wash into the beautiful ocean pollute it and hurt maim and kill our sea life.

WHY do some dog walkers bag their dog droppings in plastic bags and leave them on the beach? To be washed into the ocean polluting and poisoning our sea life?

WHY do some fishermen who enjoy fishing leave the plastic bait bag to be washed into the ocean? WHY do you leave your tangled fishing line?

WHY do you leave your empty beer cans, water bottles, cigarette butts? WHY?

The ocean is ever giving but for how long if you show it no respect?

~

Every morning I walk the beach with my dogs. Every single morning I return with rubbish left behind by others. Some days just a few bits of plastic and some days with so much that I carry a large bag to cart it all in. ☺

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

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Remember saving Western Port

PETER HAYES

Memories are notoriously unreliable. But some memories cannot be extinguished.

The Bittern oil refinery's blue gas flare burning fiercely at night is still imprinted in my mind's eye. When the BP oil refinery at Jacks Beach in Western Port finally began to process shipped oil, that flame became a potent reminder, every night, of the industrialisation threat to Western Port Bay, seen out the front window of our farm house.

We lived at the corner of Coolart and Myers Road, next to the Balnarring Racecourse, where our parents, Ken and Meredith Hayes, had created a dairy and egg farm from a dilapidated property. One of our neighbours, Bill Jaffray, was a sailor who taught us to sail at Jacks Beach. Unlike Somers's sandy beach, Jacks Beach entry was

by an old rickety jetty and most of the time, to get to the water, you had to wade through thick mud and rocks next to the mangroves.

This was before Somers Yacht Club was founded, before we moved to Somers from the farm at Bittern. Sailing out of Jacks Beach near Scotland Island on Haja (HAYesJAffray)—our first dinghy, later sailed out of SYC—we would set a huge flock of black swans into the air, so many that their wings flapping and feet slapping on the water during takeoff sounded like shot guns firing.

The BP oil refinery was the trigger point for Ken and Merrie to take up arms to save Western Port. We spent many hours wading in the mangroves at Jacks Beach to document a drain pipe laid through the mangroves, across the mudflats, and dumping chemical-laden liquid wastes into the channel. When they lost control of the gas flare, it would flame out yellow and hugely into the air, alerting everyone that the refinery could lose control.

We researched the risks associated with oil refineries, specifically the shift from the old batch type refineries that relied on artisanal workers to run the plant. They would go round and put their hand on tanks and valves and keep in direct touch with

the machinery. The new automated process control refineries like the one at Jacks Beach relied on sensors and a dumbed down workforce, with a central control room, later run from overseas. It was much more prone to catastrophic risk.

The BP refinery was the advance guard for Sir Henry Bolte's vision of the Western Port region—to become the 'Ruhr of the Southern Hemisphere' as he put it. This was to include a jetport at Stony Point, the Lysaght steel mill, a BHP petrochemical complex, a nuclear reactor at French Island on Tortoise Head, and many other ancillary industries.

Having grown up on Western Port Bay, it was self-evident that Western Port was not a suitable location for this kind of heavy industry. And Ken and Meredith—trained as agricultural scientists but also local stakeholders deeply invested in the sustainability of the region—were equipped to rip apart the poorly constructed development arguments, both economically and ecologically, with devastating effect.

Meredith, in particular, mobilised coalitions of bureaucrats wily enough to know that the development plan was disastrous and politicians savvy enough to realise that the local land-owners and holiday-makers from Melbourne were politically potent. They arrayed these ad hoc coalitions against local developers, especially land developers seeking a fast buck and speculative fast-in, fast-out development opportunists, who put intense pressure on local councillors and members of parliament to push through their schemes.

Working as a team, Ken and Meredith helped to found Save Western Port and the Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council (WPPC). These organisations took on the developers, pitching submission after submission to planning agencies, working closely with Randell Champion at the short-lived regional planning authority, and making common cause with other early green organisations in Melbourne and then nationally. Crucially, they got to and were able to whisper in Rupert Hamer's ear, who



Ken with Haja at Jacks Beach



Ken and Merrie—never far from the water

intervened more than once to guide the bureaucrats.

Ken was shy and often the invisible hand guiding a strategy. Merrie was ruthless and happy to be the public face of conservation if needed. And they played political hardball if necessary—in one instance, enlisting my brother Robert in the single issue campaign Community Against Peninsula Airport to join a party branch and then dump a hopelessly bad developer candidate in return for the State Minister of Planning's canning the proposed airport!

Due to this work, Meredith went on to serve on a number of state planning and policy review committees, and was elected a long-serving Victorian councillor on the Australian Conservation Foundation, while Ken became a key person in the Victorian Conservation Council.

All along, they were actively farming, as well as tendering farming advice as consultants. In this role, Ken and Merrie helped to create the green wedge strategy for the MMBA by producing a study of the importance of landscape amenity in peri-urban farming properties that drew heavily on their knowledge of the Mornington Peninsula and Western Port Bay.

At Western Port, they were at the cutting edge of the early green movement, well before the Lake Pedder campaign (1970), ACF (1973), Friends of the Earth (1973) and Green Bans (1971), let alone Landcare (early 80s). A few industries that got in early like BP, could not be stopped and did some real damage. But they all left, and Western Port did not become a Ruhr. Sir Henry met his match in Ken and Meredith.

Ken and Meredith put themselves on the line in this battle in many ways. In a notorious case, they published an ad in the local paper about corruption and candidates for political office. One of the candidates sued, and although the advertisement content was truthful, he still won because the truth had damaged his reputation! They were forced to sell one of their businesses to pay for the court award.

They also hosted Professor Maurice Shapiro at the family home at South Seas Road in Somers after they left the farm at Bittern. Shapiro was a world-class water engineer from the University of Pennsylvania. He was hired by the State Government to produce a three-dimensional model of the stocks and flows of water in the Western Port Bay and estuarine

system, starting in 1971 and completed in 1973 for the Victorian Ministry of Conservation.*

He stayed with us for many months while setting drift buoys and measuring salinity levels, turbidity, and storm water inflow from the watersheds flowing into Western Port Bay. He demonstrated what we knew intuitively. The mean residence time of water entering the top end of Western Port at Warneet takes about three months to get to the ocean, and the Bay is constituted of at least three fairly discrete water circulation systems, with the tides slowing water back and forth in a figure of eight system rather than surging in and out.

This means that major pollution events from industry would have long-lasting effects on the estuarine ecosystems and the mangrove mudflats and sea grass areas which are the nursery for the marine flora and fauna in Western Port. And, he showed with incontrovertible data, Western Port is vulnerable to the chronic assault of incremental, constant land use changes affecting the tidal interface, mangroves, and water flows, with follow-on effects on turbidity, salinity and water quality.

It was the first time such a three dimensional, quantitative and interdisciplinary model of a major estuarine system had been done—remember, desktop computers didn't exist then. So it set a global precedent for how science should inform policy at a regional and local level. My parents and the Shapiros stayed in touch over the years; and today, we remain in touch with their daughter Deborah Shapiro who went on to become a blue water sailor of great renown with her Swedish partner, sailing to the Arctic, and over-wintering in the Antarctic on their yacht.

Many, many people put their shoulder to the wheel to Save Western Port in the nineteen sixties, seventies, and eighties. One was the amazing Lorna Bennett on Hastings Council, a lone voice in the community for decades before they caught up with her. They lent their support to other organisations following in the Council's wake like the Peninsula Conservation League. But none had Meredith



Meredith launching Mirror at Somers Yacht Club

and Ken's combination of scientific knowledge, political acumen, and sheer commitment to sustainability. Without that core knowledge—and willingness to deploy it in community service—I doubt that Western Port would have been saved from the onslaught that Bolte tried to unleash, at least not as effectively.

Perhaps there's a lesson there for us all today while we respond to the proposed repeat performance of Bolte's "Ruhr of the Southern Hemisphere," the Kawasaki and AGL gas processing plants at Stony Point.

In less than a decade, maximum two, gas is likely to be a Neanderthal energy form, part of the fossil fuel industry that threatens the entire climate system. What is more important? Preserving Melbourne's recreational lung and the ecological integrity of Western Port Bay for future generations, and its ability to adapt to sea level rise and climate extremes? Or another round of fast bucks for a corporate predator?

I know what Ken and Meredith would have said.

I began by saying that memories can be dangerous and misleading. A historian needs to go back to the

archives, and check the dates, find the other names, document the twists and turns in policy.

This account is also superficial, and fails to mention the stories of scores of leaders and activists who saved Western Port, locals who stood up to serve on committees, journalists who came on board, artists who created the mangrove puppet show in Hastings. It understates the hard slog, the thousands of hours spent in meetings,

drafting submissions, making calls, writing and mailing letters, posting pamphlets in mailboxes, knocking on doors (whereby I got my first dog bite). One day, this rich tapestry of community activism that welled up to Save Western Port will be written up by a historian. But for Ken and Meredith, it was time not spent on the farm, on the beach, sailing from Somers Yacht Club, enjoying life. We all learned a lot from it—but it was not always fun and had its costs to the family.

But this memory is as vivid as if it was today and I can safely write it is true. Each year as young kids in the mid-sixties, we would go to Stony Point jetty to fish the sea grass whiting that would run for a few weeks. For hours at a time, you could throw in a line with two or three hooks, and pull out beautiful whiting on an incoming tide.

Then, to get the big ships into the oil refinery and have turn-around room, the powers-that-be from industry dredged the channels and dumped the spoils on the sea grass. The following year, the whiting stopped running and never came back.

That's how fragile the Bay was—and is. We should never forget.

* A special issue of *Marine Geology* 30:1, February 1979, was devoted to the study and follow-on research. We have a copy of Shapiro's original study in family archives. ○



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Keitha McLean

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Friends of Coolart

JULIE EBBOTT
PRESIDENT, FRIENDS OF COOLART

The Friends of Coolart have been busy behind the scenes, working on the establishment of relationships and partnerships that will take us forward into the future. Recently the Friends signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the People & Parks Foundation that will enable us to set up a tax deductible 'bucket' to fund environmental and cultural projects at Coolart. Shortly we will add a donate now button to our website that will capture donations of \$2 or more and in the meantime, the Committee will continue to work with Parks Victoria to formulate projects. Top of the list for environmental & cultural projects is the creation of an all-abilities-access and Aboriginal Story trail through Coolart that we hope to start planning for—we'll keep you posted!

The Friends have also submitted a project idea to the State government's 'Pick My Project' initiative that will see community-nominated projects across the state receive a share of \$3 million. We have applied for a grant of \$192,000 to renovate the upstairs area of the homestead. The vision is that the area that was once used as the Ranger's apartment will become an area for art residencies including writers and artists, and community groups. This will not only enliven the property but the potential output of works will become the initiative for future events and activities at Coolart, and help to anchor Coolart as a community facility. If our nomination is successful in moving to the next round, all projects in the mix will then be voted on by the community and this will determine what projects are successful. We cross fingers.

Speaking of Artists in Residence, we recently held the opening exhibition for Coolart Artist-in-Residence, Rosa Tato. The day was cold but 100 people turned out to celebrate Rosa's work to date and enjoy a glass of champagne and refreshments in the homestead. It was a wonderful occasion, the fire was lit, the house was alive with people and conversation and Rosa's work encapsulated her experiences and

conversations of Somers and Coolart. Rosa's residency will continue through to late 2018 and a final exhibition and celebration of her work is planned for the end of the year.

The Friends are also on the hunt for English bone china cups and saucers, odds and ends that we will use for events at Coolart, so if you have the odd cup or saucer floating around that you would like to donate, give us a holler at info@coolart.org.au – I can pick up!

Coming up at Coolart

The third annual Science in the Park: Wildlife Counts will be held at Coolart Wetlands and Homestead, featuring free science activities for all ages.

PrimeSCI!, along with even more universities, state and local organisations and volunteer groups, will host a day of science seminars, science displays and hands-on activities, wildlife monitoring, and education on sustainable and indigenous practices in the unique wetland environments of the Coolart Reserve.

Sunday, August 12th 10am – 4pm and the event is free. For more information: <https://www.scienceweek.net.au/science-in-the-park-wildlife-counts/> ☺

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Dealing with a maiden aunt

MARK STOKES

A boy's tale from before the war

In those days we didn't use a toilet. We used a lavatory and, sometimes, it was a dunny in the backyard. Sometimes way down the yard, but in this case, it was quite close to the back door. Inside was pretty simple. A standard lavatory bowl with a wooden seat and a nail on which hung some cut-up newspaper. Every now and then the family would gather to cut *The Herald* into rectangular pieces, gather a bundle and pass a length of string through it to make handy parcels of lavatory paper which could hang on the nail. There was a candle in a candle stick and up towards the ceiling was a tank holding water. You pulled the chain to release the water to flush the bowl. The candle was handy too. I would drip the hot candle wax on to my hand, binding my fingers together. It was a pleasant pastime. I could spend lots of time evading authority in the lavatory.

It was wartime and from time to time we had Auntie Kath staying with us. Did she have a lover? I didn't know. She had a serious boyfriend but he joined up and went off and died on the Burma Road, never to return home. We didn't know that at the time. Auntie Kath was a modern miss. She worked in the city. She was hard to live with. At least, I found her so. She was a good-looker, in fact she was beautiful, but she was bossy and pushed me around. Well, she tried. I think she tried her tricks on others of the family, lasting as long as they could put up with her, then off to another family for a while.

April Fool's Day came around and this gave me the opportunity to even the score. I prepared the scenario carefully. I got an old bike tyre. Bikes were all the go for a boy in those days. The freedom machine.

We travelled everywhere on the bike. An old tyre was always to be found. It cost a penny on the tram to go to the beach, but a bike was free and a penny was hard to come by. A bike could get you anywhere, distance was no barrier. Every boy had a bike, a bitzer, and once you were on the bike you couldn't be

roped in for some unpleasant task like mowing the lawn. The mower was a push-me pull-me device. No handy motor. Then sweep the lawn with a straw broom. Plenty of work for a boy if he hung around, so the bike was always on call.

I made a big APRIL FOOL sign and stuck it on the seat of the dunny at the appropriate time, put the tyre between the seat and the door and retired to my bungalow, hiding under the bed where I could hear but not be easily found. Auntie Kath, right on schedule, came to the lavatory to find the door shut. She pushed gently and the door pushed back.

'Hurry up Mark,' she said. 'I've got to go to work.' She went off, only to return in a few minutes to repeat the process. Then again and again.

Getting nasty, she told me, hiding under the bed and holding my nose to prevent audible laughter, that she would call my mother. Once more and absolutely livid by this time, she carried out her threat. Out came Mum. No fooling around with Mum. She thumped the door and the bike tyre fell down and the notice was revealed. Mum was paralysed with uncontrolled mirth, but Kathy never forgave me. Somehow she didn't see the humour of the situation.

Her lover never came home. She remained beautiful and unmarried for a long time. She did marry many years down the track. I suppose there were lots of Auntie Kath's in those far-off days. ☹

The obscure we see eventually.
The completely obvious,
it seems takes longer.

Edward R. Murrow

Furniture fun

LINDSAY PULLIN

Some years ago a mate and I finished a job for a client who asked us if we could make an outdoor setting from a pile of timber we were shown. Just do the job and hand me the account, she said. We did the job and gave her the account, which she immediately contested. After a discussion we came to an agreement and settled. My mate was not happy but I explained—that's how it goes sometimes.

As we were about to leave a van pulled up and the driver asked us if we could help him carry the piece of furniture he was delivering. My mate said no but I was curious and agreed. Well when we saw what it was we were gobsmacked to say the least. It looked as if it was made from tip-salvaged materials and nailed together in a hurricane, but it had this amazing appeal to it and I liked it. In its chosen place, the entry hall, the client remarked, 'now there's a piece of furniture'. I almost had to throw a bucket of water over my mate but got him back to the car before a thermonuclear meltdown occurred. I asked the driver if I could see the paperwork. The shop was in Richmond, the price \$5500. Another bucket of water, but for me the seed was sown. I took my mate to the pub for a calm-me-down and raised my glass to a toast.

'Toast what,' he asked.

'To our new venture in the world of artistic furniture,' I announced.

'I'll drink to that,' he agreed, and we were on our way.

Next day we roughed up a sketch, rounded up some wood and knocked up a sideboard. My wife became our consultant and put us in the right direction at times. Next, we needed a gallery and I found one at Portsea. The owner, Rick, and I loaded it inside and were negotiating a price when a woman walked in, slapped a hand on the piece announcing it was now hers, how much? Turned out she had a gallery in Sorrento. Right, first piece sold and two galleries to supply. We were away.

We had sold two or three pieces

through Jan in Sorrento when my mate took a job in Europe and was gone, leaving me to it. I was managing one a week and got in some driftwood pieces as well. I was selling a large amount of teak I had, and a bloke came over from Goolwa in South Australia for a ute load. Timber loaded we were walking out when he noticed a driftwood piece on the front patio. I was a bit embarrassed when he said, 'what's that?' and I mumbled out a reply. He got in the car, buckled up and said, 'Bring a furniture van full of that over to Goolwa mate and you'd sell it all in a month.' I felt better then.

Jan had at least five or six exhibitions over the summer season and all artists were required to attend. In essence they were really just big sales parties and we all had a lot of fun. At one such exhibition Jan was standing nearby listening to me talking to two lovely old ladies.

'Now what inspired you to build this lovely piece of furniture young man?'

Well, me being silly me, I had the right answer and quick as a flash said 'money'. Wrong. Jan sidled over and still looking straight ahead, in a rasping whisper said, 'play the bloody game'. I immediately took up my wonderful persona of Basil Fawlty and smiling widely replied, 'Just joking ladies, just joking—my inspirations come from the wonders of nature....' You know the drill.

Rick from Portsea, and Jan herself took up another venture far down the coast. The last piece I sold was a red gum sideboard. My circumstances also changed. I still enjoy recycling timber to make furniture for family and do framed shell collections, but I won't forget those days when making furniture was fun. ☺



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Migrants and nomads

BRIAN THOMAS

If you take a pair of binoculars and go down to the Flinders back beach on a cold and blustery winter's day, stand on the lookout overlooking Mushroom Reef and look out to sea, your eyes will pick up the gentle, graceful gliding of albatrosses as they soar above the waves. Skimming the surface on long skinny wings, disappearing as they glide into the troughs of waves, and then allowing themselves to be lifted high into the sky and carried downwind until once again they drop to catch the air currents just above the waves. It's a mesmerising sight—a melody in movement; the ease and beauty with which they display their complete mastery of the winds is almost hypnotic.

It would come as a surprise to many people that you can see albatross from the cliffs and shorelines of our peninsula, as we mostly identify these birds with the open oceans or remote islands where they breed. But they do venture surprisingly close to shore and can sometimes be seen from the Queenscliff-Sorrento ferry as it crosses Port Phillip Bay, bobbing about on the waves.

A couple of years ago some work colleagues of mine found two Shy Albatrosses washed up on Sorrento back beach; another, a Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, was found in Gunnamatta car park. Yet another albatross, probably another Shy (though its condition was such that positive identification was difficult), was found on Balnarring beach.

The two Shy Albatrosses were interesting in that they both wore bands on their legs that had been placed there by researchers when the birds were chicks on Albatross Island—a tiny nature reserve off the coast of Tasmania. One band placed on the bird's leg 17 years ago and the other 27 years ago. This research, amongst other information gained by banding, shows just how long-lived these birds are. One of these birds is now suspended from the ceiling of Coolart's visitor centre.

Another banded albatross named Wisdom—a Laysan Albatross—was recorded breeding on Midway Island in the North Pacific Ocean, aged at 63 years. It was calculated that she would have hatched around 35 chicks in her lifetime. Not a huge number of offspring given her age but the larger albatross species are slow breeders, most laying a single egg at a time and only breeding every other year.

The Light-mantled Sooty Albatross is a rare visitor to these waters, usually being found much further south. It's a particularly beautiful bird—sooty brown head, throat and wings with a paler back and breast; described like this it doesn't sound very alluring but the softness and beauty of this bird's plumage can only really be appreciated when seen in real life, or real death in this case. When I opened the bag that contained the bird's body I couldn't help but let out an involuntary gasp of astonishment on seeing this beautiful bird.

So why did they die? An autopsy might give us a definitive answer but it is fair to speculate that these birds succumbed to exhaustion after battling the fierce southerly storms that were occurring around this time. Even such masters of the air as albatross need to eat and might find feeding difficult in

prolonged stormy weather, leading to exhaustion and eventual death.

Albatrosses mate for life and the pair bond is kept strong with elaborate courtship displays. Nearly all the species of albatrosses are endangered to some degree—some critically so. The causes are varied but include introduced animal pests on their nesting islands which destroy their habitat or prey on nesting birds and their young.

A particularly gruesome threat is long-line fishing where lines of baited hooks are payed out behind fishing boats to catch fish—these lines can be up to 100km long with 3000 baited hooks. Sea birds, including albatrosses are attracted to the bait and are caught by the hooks and then dragged beneath the waves and drown. A lot of good work has been done to modify this type of fishing so that the baits sink before the birds have a chance to grab them—this benefits the fishermen, who don't waste baits and therefore catch more fish (good for albatross but bad for fish). It was estimated that up to 50,000 albatross were killed this way each year before the safer practices were introduced. It's a shame that these sailors did not have the same superstition of killing albatrosses as those in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. >



Shy Albatross. Photo by Steve Wright

Another threat is discarded plastics. The adult birds pick up bits of floating plastics thinking they are bits of marine life, eat them and then return to the nest and feed it to their chicks. The chicks' stomachs can become so full of these plastics that they starve to death.

But let's return to a happier scene and our albatross effortlessly scything the air on long stiff wings. They stay aloft with barely a flap and you can imagine that holding wings of such length in that position for extended periods takes a great deal of effort, but albatross have a trick up their rather long sleeves. Their wings are equipped with a special locking mechanism in their tendons which reduces the effort needed to hold them in position.

The most common species that you are likely to see from our shores are either Shy or Black-browed Albatross; both have dark upperparts and snowy white underparts with wing spans of up to 2.5 metres—an impressive span, but not quite as impressive as the Wandering Albatross with a world record wing span of 3.5 metres. Wisdom, the aforementioned 63-year-old mother, also holds the world record for the oldest recorded wild bird. Albatross are also in contention for the longest incubation period of any bird—around 85 days, rivalling New Zealand's Brown Kiwi.

Albatross make good use of their powers of flight and travel vast distances—one which was radio-tracked travelled 33,000 km in 10 weeks—and when they have young they can travel up to 10,000 km in search of food to feed their chicks.

These distances are mind bogglingly immense but down on the beach below the Mushroom Reef lookout are little birds that perform equally amazing flights. Scurrying about on the water line are small flocks of wading birds: Red-necked Stints, coloured grey above and white below and little bigger than a sparrow; Ruddy Turnstones, about the size of a blackbird and patterned somewhat splotchily black, white and brown; and Double-banded Plovers, light grey-brown above and white below, with two bands across the chest which can range from rather faint to quite bold as the birds moult into their breeding plumage. The Double-banded falls between the other two species size-wise



Red-necked Stint. Photo by Gary Sissons



Ruddy Turnstone. Photo by Gary Sissons

and is rather special in that it is the only east-west migratory shore bird in the world. After breeding on sandy beaches and braided river beds of New Zealand, part of the population fly the Tasman Sea to winter in Australia.

The stints and the turnstones are the typical north-south migrants but these birds on the beach are ones that have been left behind. They are overwintering probably because they are young non-breeding birds, while their relatives have flown north on a great migration to the northern hemisphere where they nest in northern Siberia.

In 2009, several turnstones were banded on Flinders beach by researchers

of the Victorian Wader Studies Group and Deakin University; the birds were also fitted with a light-weight geo-locator attached to a leg which allowed the researchers to track their progress. The results were staggering. One bird flew 6,700 km to Taiwan in just over six days, non-stop! After resting and re-fuelling on Taiwan's mudflats, it continued on the next leg of its journey to the Yellow Sea, northern China and finally to Siberia. This bird was tracked for two consecutive years and interestingly the migration routes taken each year were different. In 2009 its route took it almost directly from Flinders to Taiwan and then on to Siberia. After breeding

it returned to Flinders via the Aleutian Islands, Kiribati and New South Wales. In 2010 it took a more westerly route to Hainan Island and then north to Siberia returning home this time via the Marshall Islands and Vanuatu. Other birds tracked in this way also showed that their choice of route varied as well.

This knowledge of the birds' migratory pattern is important for their protection as the numbers of all migratory shorebirds have plummeted.

A major threat to their survival is the so-called 'reclamation' of mud flats for building and industrial development particularly at their refuelling sites in Asia. Mudflats are the feeding grounds that these migrants need to rest, feed and regain their energy for the next leg of their migration. Nor are these threats found only overseas, the mudflats and beaches of Western Port are the summer feeding grounds for many species of migratory wading birds and are wetlands of international importance. Indeed, Australia is signatory to the Ramsar Convention by which it agrees to protect these wetlands of which Australia has 65, including our own Western Port Bay.

So, the next time you see David Attenborough on TV showing you amazing birds that perform spectacular feats and think to yourself, 'I'd like to see those in real life', why not take a walk down to our sea shores—they are in our backyard. ☉

On downsizing

BARRINGTON PLINTH

Having reached life's pinnacle the journey ahead involves a long downward slope. The house is full of things you value, but there are empty rooms where children and grandchildren used to be. The family now make quick visits and you hope that their visits are not just driven by a sense of duty. The problem is, like it or not, big changes are looming. The house is too big, there are stairs and passageways and, worst of all, there's work to be done and you really don't feel up to doing it.

So now comes the choice! You can stay and pay—hiring people to come and work around the property, or you can sell up and move into a smaller house with almost no garden—and there are plenty of these coming on stream, or you can go the whole distance and move into a unit. It sounds simple but whichever decision you take, you will be entering one of life's last nightmares. You have to face the fact that things you have spent a lifetime accumulating, and value, will be seen by all the third party people involved in your move as STUFF!

Anyway, you have decided that moving is inevitable so you call in the estate agents and they dare to walk from room to room with clipboards muttering things that seem a bit negative. Finally, you settle for the agent with the nice smile and hope that the sale won't come too soon.

Now, you have found a smaller dwelling and one thing has become abundantly clear, there's almost no room for anything. So the packing process involves discarding the stuff of your lives: meaningful clothes and footwear, hand-me-down crockery and cutlery, pictures off the walls and myriad objects in bottom drawers that relate to past times but otherwise have no value at all.

You have to hire a skip (a large steel

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box) and the children help you fill it up. They're in a hurry and do not share your feelings of nostalgia for anything, so you must shut your eyes while they manhandle your things into the skip. Not everything is discarded. While most things are seen as out of date and therefore worthless, your children will recognise objects of some value and put them aside against some future day when wills will be read.

We face the big day of the move with a heavy heart. The vans arrive and out jumps a team of hugely muscled men and before you know it they are through the house and into it! It's a helpless feeling and during the day your home regresses to being an empty shell. Finally, you lock up for the last time and drive off up the road leaving this part of your lives behind.

Turning in to your new street you can't help noticing that there are cars parked in driveways and on the street. Our moving vans are already on site and it soon becomes apparent that, even with all our culling of things, there's nowhere near enough room in the house for everything and this means the overflow must go into the garage—hence the cars outside, including ours. The neighbours too are downsizers and they all have the same problem; garages full of stuff and no room for the cars.

So here we are! Sensible house, low-maintenance garden and we can walk to the shops, doctors and dentists. There's a choice of eateries and various entertainments. In fact our new district, Balnarring, is booming and it's full of people just like us. In truth we should consider ourselves lucky to have had a prime house to downsize from and a waterproof house to downsize to.

Ah well! Time for a cup of tea and a rusk. ☉



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2. Gently push tooth back into position
3. Check no interference on biting
4. Contact dentist

Tooth Completely Knocked Out

1. Pick tooth up by crown only
2. Suck on tooth to remove dirt
3. Put tooth root (pointy part) back into socket
4. Contact dentist

OR

1. Put tooth into milk/saliva
2. Contact dentist (as soon as possible)

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More short stories

We hope you enjoy reading these entries from the runners-up in our 2018 short story writing competition. We thank all those who entered.

Honourable Mention:
Open Fiction

Johnny's first day

DAVID GOW

First days were never easy. Last days were even harder.

...

After a number of first days at a number of different schools, Johnny still found day one a harrowing experience. Even so, he donned his coat of armour and waded into class, an alien among a sea of unfamiliar faces.

He unpacked his bag and looked across the familiar yet foreign room. No matter which school he found himself in, the class rooms were all the same. He began to play with a piece of dusty

chalk he found and watched as more students dripped in and embraced old friends, many they hadn't seen since the summer break. The break that at the same time, seemed to span forever and then disappear in a moment. Johnny listened in to their conversations, but like the squawking of seagulls, the places they spoke of and the names they whispered, meant nothing to him.

Johnny scanned the room with a weary gaze that belied his years. As he did so, he received a smug wink from a little boy, he recognised the misplaced confidence of the class clown. Instantly his hands became clammy, his fingers flippers, as he gasped for air. He had been to enough schools to spot the type, short on height but not on arrogance. The class clown came sashaying in with a swagger that could not be justified by his life experience; after all he was little more than a grade five kid with a sun tan.

While students in grade six are very much considered big fish in a small pond, Johnny knew there was a much

bigger sea out there. Which school was it when the young girl Angel arrived with a black eye; on a Wednesday? Where was he when Brook drifted in late one morning, puffy eyed with a handful of handkerchief, only to leave before they had finished quiet reading? Johnny could never forget when Sandy threw a chair across the room as she shouted to the class, "I don't get this!" A ripple in a pond, she disappeared never to be seen again.

For every broken child – another crack in his shell of armour.

Yet Johnny 'kept on swimming'. Just as waves wash up on different shores, he fronted up to each new school with a sense of hope that this would be the place. The place where he could put his roots down, where he could make a real change, where he could find some respect. As he looked out at the faces of the students he wondered which of these would also break, and with them another crack, perhaps the final crack, in Johnny's armour. As his mind drifted off into a sea of possible futures the chalk he was playing with snapped in his fingers, and with that he slowly walked out the door, leaving his bag behind.

A moment later the class clown broke the silence, 'Good riddance — I hate teachers.' ☉

Runner-Up:
Teens Story, 12 to 18 years

Oil

GRACE XU

The oil tanker cruised lazily through the blue ocean, waves tipped with white crashing against the side of the massive ship. A bright yellow logo, outlined in red, decorated the body of it, the corporation name Shell emblazoned across the otherwise dull colours of the tanker. Here, approaching the shore, was the product of another multibillion dollar company prospering under

what is the height of capitalism. It was somewhat admirable, given the humble beginnings of the company, with a single person selling shells and other trinkets.

The ship stalled, then gave an unhealthy lurch. Inside, the fifty or so mariners operating it froze, aware that something was wrong. Shouts were heard, people conversed in urgent tones. Something is wrong with the engine. What is? I don't know, just something. It's a sailor's worst nightmare.

People ran along the steel passageways, and distress spread through the ship like a virus. With another lurch, an explosion in the engine room racked the ship violently, and with his ears ringing, a young man, no older than twenty, slammed into the

wall as the oil tanker started to tilt. The ship was sinking.

Oil, black and viscous, started leaking, coating the surface of the water, looking like sickness. Seabirds that were caught up in the spill struggled to fly away, the oil clinging to their wings and clogging their feathers, making them heavy and immovable. Down below, fish, whales and turtles started to be poisoned.

On land, people stopped and stared and pointed at the sinking tanker and the oil that bloomed around it like a flower. Rescue boats started the journey towards the ship. Online, people started muttering, the government released a statement, photographers captured the moment the oil washed to shore, and we the children hoped something would change. ☉

Honourable Mention:
Open Fiction

What's left behind

LOUISE ZEDDA-SAMPSON

Ayla's scarf flaps in the wind and a flutter of pink printed butterflies takes flight. Pale skin blends into the white sand, her pink shorts and tee a bright beacon on the shore. She breathes in the ocean scent; the salt is bitter on her tongue. Waves roll in fast and frothy and break before they reach her Mary Janes. Seagulls shriek in the blue sky, a dog barks, and someone unseen whistles in reply.

Ayla sits on her haunches; her shorts scrape the sand. She lazily pokes the seaweed with a piece of driftwood.

'No getting wet!' Grandma yells from a bench seat near the dunes, shawl wrapped tightly against the autumn air. Hands rest on her cane, eyes ever watchful.

Ayla waves. 'Don't get wet,

blahblahblah,' she says, to the receding water. Grandma was fun, once. Now all she did was worry and nag.

Through the tangled kelp, something shimmers. It's a shell.

'Ayla, Ayla!'

The tide rolls in. Waves lick her shoes, coolness tugs at her toes. She looks up and Grandma is standing to alert. Ayla groans and resettles on drier sand, but it's too late. Grandma is coming over. She wished that sometimes they could all stop fussing. Doctors, nurses. She was sick of it all.

The shell catches the sunlight. Like a pearl, it's iridescent but with pinks and blues and purples. It spirals like a pointed turban, no bigger than a ten-cent piece. A fitting home for a tiny crab. She shakes it.

'Whatcha got, Ayla?' Grandma takes a while to sit down.

'Look,' Ayla says, holding out the shell.

'It's beautiful, just like you.' Grandma turns the shell around.

Ayla looks at Grandma's silver hair. It's the same colour as the shell, in parts.

'Did you also know that its colours are formed by what the mollusc inside eats?' Grandma says.

Fancy that. What if eating fairy

floss made you pink? Ayla doesn't think anyone would let her, but she wants to try. She's just about to ask but Grandma starts talking.

'You know, shells are creatures, and if one's empty, like this one, the mollusc inside has died.'

Dying. Adults usually don't mention dying. They speak about how 'advanced' things are, but always stop when she's there. She only hears because she eavesdrops. Grandma says this is the last beach visit before hospital. Ayla doesn't want to go to hospital.

Her feet are cold now, wet.

'Will I leave something beautiful behind when I die?'

Grandma hugs a bit too tightly. 'Ayla, all that remains of us in time are plain white bones. But, people remember us from other things: a photo, a word, an item. These are the things that remind us.'

Ayla gives Grandma the shell. 'I want you to remember me like this, Grandma.'

'As a beautiful shell? What a lovely memory,' Grandma's voice trembles.

Ayla looks at Grandma's wrinkled palm. The shell had dried, its colour faded. 'Can you remember me as sparkly and pink?' ☉

Runner-Up:
Middle Years Story,
8 to 12 years

Bob the snail

AUDREY AND MACK MILLEN

One normal day there was a slug called Bob. Bob was a sad slug because he dreamed of being an overweight slug with a shell, in other words, a snail.

All of Bob's friends were snails and that made him even more upset. Plus all the good looking ladies that Bob was interested in were snails.

So one day Bob thought he could

outsmart the snails by getting a swirly lollipop and sticking it on his back. Bob was very proud of his idea, until Bob realised that all his friends would recognize him. So he changed his name to... NOB, and he put a fake moustache on himself.

So the next morning Bob went out of his compost bin and slid slimly to Snailville where only snails were allowed. As he reached the gates he saw the most beautiful snail he had ever seen, her name was Helga. Bob raced up to Helga and said 'Hey'. Helga quickly turned (well, quickly for a snail, that is) and saw Bob. She thought he looked so handsome with his manly shell. She said, 'Would you care to join me at the snail dance club tonight?' Bob stuttered 'yes, that would be ssssimply sssmassshing'.

Bob couldn't wait to go out with Helga the snail babe, so he put on his

best top and his leather jacket and off he went.

He saw Helga and almost fell over (in a slug kind of way), so Helga came over and said, 'Do you want to dance?'

'I would be delighted,' said Bob. So they danced for hours until Bob's shell started to feel loose, and then 'POP' it fell on the floor. Everyone in the room froze and the guards came and took Bob away. As Bob was being dragged away he heard a voice and it was Helga, she said, 'Hey Nob, you know for a slug you're not that bad looking.' ☉



Honourable Mention:
Open Fiction

Hermit 2.0

REBECCA FRASER

When hermit crabs grow, they discard their shells for new ones. But not us. Me, or Jason. Or any of the survivors. Our shells are all we know. We eat in them, sleep in them, shit in them. Titanium pods, fully enclosed: bomb proof, weather proof, bullet proof ... and bacteria proof, of course.

'Government issue. It's all we can afford,' Jason said. He used his thumb to gently wipe a tear that had spilled over my lashes.

'But, they're *single* ones,' I'd said. I twisted my wedding band. I'd only been wearing it two weeks. My fingers sought out its newness, like a tongue probing the socket of a missing tooth.

'Just for now, Sally,' Jason's smile was canvas stretched too tight across its frame. 'It's better than the alternative.'

Yes. I suppose anything was better than death. Or so I'd thought.

'The Hermit 2.0. An excellent choice.' The salesman's coffee breath fought for airspace with his overpowering cologne. 'Perfect combination of home and protection.'

'It's *nothing* like home.' I choked out, thinking of the cottage we'd saved so hard for. Selecting colour schemes, planting garden beds, making love in still-empty rooms.

But we could never go home. It was contaminated. Everywhere, contaminated.

'Well, of course, but...' the salesman waved a hand in the direction of The Outside.

I got it. Time was running out. Three months refuge in The Dome maximum before you had to make your choice. Overcrowding, see.

And we were young and optimistic. We wanted to live. For ourselves, for each other, and for the baby we one day hoped for. Remembering that now makes me laugh. Not cry. I was all cried out in the first year. Besides, inside Hermit 2.0, moisture must be preserved.

We'd been turned from The Dome in 2008, shuffling like hermit crabs in our shells. Fully enclosed bubbles, polyethylene sleeves for our feet. Human snow globes, we roamed The Outside, stumbling over the dead;

the rotting corpses petering out the further we travelled.

~

'Happy anniversary,' Jason's voice is a robotic drawl in my earpiece. I've tried to remember what it sounded like. He reaches out. Ten years our hands have splayed against the glass between us, desperate for the touch we cannot have.

'I love you.' I wonder if he remembers what *my* voice sounds like. What my skin felt like. My lips.

The Outside remains toxic. Five years, they'd promised. But the bacteria meters never drop.

'You still want to?' His grey eyes hold mine.

'Yes,' I whisper. It will be our final gift.

'On three then.'

We count together. On three we punch our release codes into our keypads. The Hermit 2.0 splits open and I step out of my shell, giddy with sensation. The freefall awareness of space, wind soughing through trees, the feeling of sun on skin.

And Jason. His arms around me, hands in my hair.

Jason.

According to officials, we have exactly twelve minutes before contamination.

But it's worth it.

☉

Runner-Up:
Junior Years Story,
Under 8 years

A wonderful day at the beach

CAMPBELL JAKSA

This morning, two friends Tom and Jack were going for a walk on the beach. Tom was exactly seven and a half years old and Jack was six years old.

They were walking along the beach, but then they suddenly saw a crab. So they screamed, "AAAAAAHHHHHHH!"

The next day, they went back to the beach and they saw a wonderful shell! It looked like it came from the crab that they saw the day before. But the crab wasn't in the shell. So they started to look for the crab in the rock-pools.

Finally, they found the crab in the rock-pools. Tom was going to put the shell on the crab but he was too scared that it would hurt his pinky finger. But then Jack put the shell on the crab and then the crab was happy again!

They couldn't help but feel a little bit sad that they couldn't take the shell home. So they started to look for another shell. And there it was... they

saw a really amazing shell. It looked exactly like the shell that belonged to the crab. There was no animal inside it so they decided that Tom should take it home.

Back at Tom's house they went to Tom's room where he had a big collection of shells. And then they played Monopoly using their shells as markers. Jack won because he had lots of money.

They went back to the beach and had a swim. And they saw lots of dolphins. So they swam with the dolphins. They heard the dolphins squeal, "Ppvghhyewhuyuy."

After that Tom and Jack walked home together and played Eye Spy. Then they waved goodbye to each other.

☉



Honourable Mention:
Open Non-Fiction

Jane Roadknight's volute

JENNY DEXTER

William and Jane Roadknight moved to Gippsland in 1858 with seven of their eight children, ranging in age from thirteen years old to a young baby. William was taking up farm leases on the Snowy River and at Lake Tyers.

William proceeded with the older children to a rough hut at The Entrance, while Jane stayed for some time at Sale with the younger children until the hut had been extended to accommodate the family better. She joined William about fifteen months later.

Up until that time, the Aborigines in the area had been treated poorly

by white settlers, but Jane came to be regarded as a physician as she managed to help them with her simple herbal cures. She was an extraordinary person, managing to minister to the health needs of her own family of ten and the station hands, with the nearest doctor thirty miles and three river crossings away. The local Aboriginal people called her "The White Angel" as she would go out in the pony trap at any hour of the day or night to help sick Aborigines and was known for her many acts of kindness.

Later, William decided to abandon the difficult farming life to set up a guest house called Merrangbaur, an Aboriginal word meaning "the home of the lyrebird". Here Jane established a productive fruit and vegetable garden so she could feed their guests. The guest house was built high on a hill overlooking The Entrance and the sea beyond. Later The Entrance was renamed Cunninghame, and later still became Lakes Entrance in World War I as Cunninghame was a word of German origin.

One day, as Jane was walking along the Ninety Mile Beach between Lakes Entrance and the mouth of the Snowy

River, she picked up a beautiful shell, took it home, and used it to prop open the window in one of the guest bedrooms.

It remained there, unnoticed, until Baron von Mueller happened to stay at Merrangbaur on one of his trips to the Gippsland Lakes district. He noticed the shell, could not identify it, and surmised that it must be rare.

Later it was indeed identified as a new unnamed species. Because it had been found by Jane Roadknight, it was named Roadknight's Volute (*Pterospira roadknightae*) by Sir Frederick McCoy in 1881.

It has been described as " ..a deep water shell of striking appearance.. Reaches about 6 -8 inches long... but it is rare, mainly owing to its deep-water habits." (Australian Shells, Joyce Allan). Also, "A handsome volute of strong texture, much sought after by collectors, easily recognised by its beautiful colouring and very pronounced bulbous apex." (John Hope Macpherson, Marine Molluscs of Victoria).

The beautiful volute shell found by my great, great grandmother Jane is now safely housed in the Melbourne Museum

○

