



Patrons : Margaret Throsby & Bruce Spence

Balmain Bookworm

The Newsletter of the Friends of Balmain Library

No. 39 November 2009



THE MATILDA CANDIDATE



Have you ever entertained the idea of *Waltzing Matilda* as Australia's National Anthem? Are you aware that this apparently simple song is in fact deeply political, and that A.B. (Banjo) Paterson was inspired by a confrontation between shearers and police at Dagworth Station in Queensland during the last decade of the nineteenth century?

Curtis Levy, local resident and award-winning documentary film-maker, certainly strongly supports both notions; so much so, that he stood as 'the *Matilda* candidate' for a seat in the Senate at the last election. And, for the record, decided to turn his belief and experience into a documentary. Completed in time for this year's Melbourne Film Festival, *The Matilda Candidate* is his most personal, and amusing, film to date.



Curtis Levy and campaign manager Jo Smith on the trail

Although his name was not familiar to me, Curtis Levy's documentaries certainly are! *The President Versus David Hicks* was shown on ABC television a few years ago, and *Hephzibah*, about the acclaimed concert pianist and human rights activist Hephzibah Menuhin, aired on SBS and enjoyed a long run at Cremorne's Orpheum Cinema. Both films have featured at International Film Festivals, with *Hephzibah* winning three awards, including the Australian Film Institute Best Documentary, and the 2001 Silver Wolf Award at The International Documentary Festival, Amsterdam. His three-part television documentary *Riding the Tiger*, examining the origin of authoritarian rule in Indonesia, also won an Atom Award for Best Television Series.

These days, it is deemed almost obligatory to study at specialised film schools, but Curtis followed up an Arts degree from Monash University with a job at Melbourne's Channel O television station as a production assistant. On-the-job training continued through years of dramatic and documentary experience, both overseas and in Australia, culminating in a decision to become 'independent' more than twenty years ago. A strong interest in Asian culture and society resulted in Curtis making five documentaries in

Indonesia, as well as *The White Monkey* set in the Philippines during the Marcos regime, and *Breakout*, an account of the mass breakout of Japanese prisoners-of-war from their Cowra prison camp.

Closer to home, *Sons of Namatjira* explores the relationship between a group of Aboriginal artists and the world outside their Central Australian environment. And now, still closer to home, his latest documentary centres on Curtis's strongly-held belief that Australia needs finally to 'breakout' from our historical ties with Britain. *The Matilda Candidate* not only uncovers the history of our de facto anthem but also reflects on whether our love of this song indicates we are now ready for our country to become a republic.

In 2007 Curtis received, in recognition of his body of work, the prestigious Byron Kennedy Award, "an award that is given in respect of a filmmaker's relentless pursuit of excellence in filmmaking".

We will have the privilege of welcoming this eminent artist as guest speaker at our special Christmas Event – fresh from *The Matilda Candidate's* international premiere at The International Documentary Festival in Amsterdam. Come along to what will be a lively discussion, accompanied by excerpts from *The Matilda Candidate*, and the chance to meet this delightfully modest man in person.

Herma Sieper

The Friends of Balmain Library
 invite you to our Christmas Event with
CURTIS LEVY
 Award-Winning Documentary Maker

Friday 4th December @ 7.00 for 7.30 pm
 Meeting Room - rear of Balmain Town Hall
 Entry : \$ 15 / \$ 10 concession / FOBL members
 Advance ticket sales at the Library ...

BOOK BOOST FOR BALMAIN LIBRARY — SEE PAGE 5 FOR DETAILS !!



EX LIBRIS

with Librarian Sarah Wild

It is time once again for our Library News, and to talk a bit about the activities that we have run in the library over the past month.

Firstly some staffing news: our lovely Branch Librarian, Chris, has gone on Long Service Leave and will not be back until next year. In the meantime we have three librarians from Leichhardt Library who will be filling in for her: Bruce [Local Studies Librarian], Indira [IT Librarian] and Marion [Client Services Librarian]. All the staff here really hopes that Chris is having a great time on her break.

We've had some fun activities here lately, especially with our children's programmes. One of the highlights was definitely the visit from the zoo guides, and some of their animal friends, from Taronga Park. Children, parents and staff all looked on as they brought out a range of scaly, furry and slimy creatures, and we were then treated to an interesting talk about their nature by one of the talented zoo guides. Audience participation was also encouraged, and we were allowed to pet or hold most of the animals. My personal favourite was the huge python, mainly because, whilst massive, it was such a beautiful specimen – and I really enjoyed watching the children engage with this creature, as first a boy and then a girl were asked to pretend they were trees and to let the huge snake slither all over their arms. The girl was asked if she had a guinea pig, cat or dog at home, because the python was obviously attracted to something it could smell on her hands. Her mother piped up that she had eaten some tiny teddies on the way to the library, so perhaps that was it! A tiny-teddy-eating monster python. That, I think, is definitely a snake with style.

Our Winter Writing Competition attracted some wonderful entries yet again this year, and I know that the judges had great difficulty in selecting the winners for each of the categories, due to the overall high standard of entries. Having said that, this year's winner of the Overall Competition – Simone Chin aged 15 years – stood out with a beautiful poem remarkable for its poignant imagery (which you will find published on Page 3 of this edition).

The award ceremony was well attended and received, with Leichhardt Mayor Jamie Parker enthusing with all of the young writers as he handed out the certificates. (See photograph above – courtesy of McRobbie)



We have had two author events in the library of late: Larry Writer talking about his research findings into the Razor Gangs of Sydney, for his book *Razor*; and Harro Drexler who detailed the problems, and potential solutions, in respect of the current environmental debate as outlined in his book *Global Warming*. I was able to catch most of the latter's talk – and found it really interesting, as we learnt quite a bit more about the extent of this world-wide problem, yet was disconcerted on hearing some of the statistics which were used to graphically illuminate the extent of this problem.

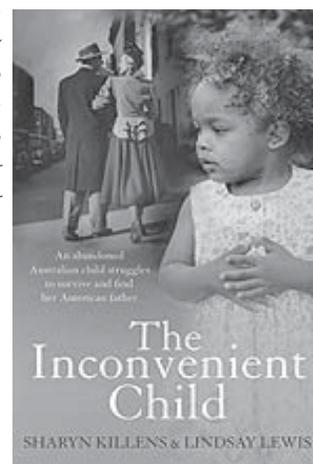
I was, however, somewhat heartened to learn afterwards, whilst chatting to a school teacher during the wine & crackers part of the evening, that her Year 8 & 9 students (to whom she is teaching the topic of global warming) are actually extremely well-informed about this issue, as well as a whole host of other environmental concerns. It would seem that the next generation is not just well-informed either, but hold very strong opinions as well. I found this extremely encouraging.

We have another author talk coming up on 11th November with Sharyn Killens & Lindsay Lewis, authors of *The Inconvenient Child*. This book was recently reviewed in the SMH, and there will be a segment about it coming up soon on the ABC's *7.30 Report*. I anticipate this will be another really interesting author event.

Here is an overview of Sharyn Killens' life-story – as is contained in the book:

This true, no-holds-barred story will strike a chord with many who are familiar with life in Sydney, particularly Kings Cross. The Inconvenient Child is a gritty account of Sharyn Killens' life, beginning as an abandoned Australian black child – and her struggle to survive in an often hostile white society, her journey to success as entertainer Sharyn Crystal, then her quest to find her African-American father.

Bookings are essential for our Author Talks & if you haven't been along to one as yet, I can really recommend them.



Ex Libris – with Sarah Wild

continued ...

Winter Writing Competition Overall Winner

Winter's Age

*The cold creeps in,
Icy fingers grasping old feet,
Feet wrinkled and laced with pale blue veins,
Bringing with it deafening silence,
And snowy cold air
Heavy with tension.*

*It smothers like a blanket,
Though freezing, chilling the bone,
Slowly gaining dominance and
Ebbing away strength
Until you are bound
To a morbid bed.*

*And yet, here the cold will remain,
Coming in spasms and shivers,
Delicate skin, fragile and papery,
Eyelashes clinging to frozen tears,
The reaper advances so slowly,
But surely, and ices the heart.*

*Breath comes in gasps,
Family gathers, grandchildren full of verve,
New life to envy as heart slows,
As age's wintry breath steals,
Green shoots lie under the snow,
Bubbling with childish delight.*

*It is a slow and usual way,
Rude death comes to snatch and grab and take,
And as cold snow settles on a wise old face,
The ones left with bear the pall,
Chant orisons and sigh,
As winter melts into spring.*

Simone Chin - aged 15 years

Balmain Library Opening Hours

Monday : 9.30 am – 5.30 pm
Tuesday : 9.30 am – 8.00 pm
Wednesday : 9.30 am – 8.00 pm
Thursday : 9.30 am – 5.30 pm
Friday : 9.30 am – 5.30 pm
Saturday : 9.30 am – 4.00 pm

**CLOSED between Christmas & New Year
– check library for details**

Friends of Balmain Library OPEN BOOK GROUP continues to flourish in 2009

With the re-opening of Balmain Library in March, we are now holding our meetings at 1 pm on the second Tuesday of the month, in the Library Meeting Room, on the left just inside the entrance. While the Hannaford Centre served us well during the renovations, it's good to be back in our "spiritual" home!

Our reading so far in 2009 has been a satisfactory balance of fiction and non-fiction, with *Stasiland* by Anna Funder and Peter Robb's *Midnight in Sicily* in the latter category. Funder's engaging meetings with a wide variety of East Germans whose lives were irrevocably changed under the Stasi regime opened our eyes, while Robb's rich detailed prose covered all aspects of Italian culture from the mafia to cooking, and art to travel.

Popular fiction choices of *Brother and Sister* (Joanna Trollope) and *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* (Mary Anne Schaffer / Annie Barrows) divided the group, but this meant that conversation was both animated and thought-provoking.

With its sensitive, realistic and poignantly humorous depiction of the journey to our inevitable destination, Debra Adelaide moved us deeply in her novel *The Household Guide to Dying*; while Kate Grenville's *The Lieutenant*, and Maggie O'Farrell's *The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox*, as well as Christos Tsiolkas' *The Slap*, were all well received and vigorously debated. We chuckled at *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* by Paul Torday, but our discussion also explored some deeper undercurrents.

This Group is truly "Open", and there is no charge. While many of us attend every month, there is no obligation to do so, and members are welcome to come to any meeting that piques their interest. We now have about 40 people on our e-mail distribution list, so you never know who will turn up and which direction the resultant conversation will take. Numbers fluctuate due to it being an 'open group', and we continue to welcome new members.

Each meeting has a Moderator and, once the book has been reviewed and discussed, there is the chance to socialise over some light refreshments. Lots of us have things to say, but there are others who just enjoy coming along to listen to "book talk" ... and that is perfectly fine too!

Books are chosen after suggestions from members, and the following have been selected for our forthcoming meetings in 2009 / 2010 :

10th Nov. *The Mother of Mohammed* by Sally Neighbour

8th Dec. *Engleby* by Sebastian Faulks

9th Feb. *The Other Side of You* by Salley Vickers

9th March *The Outsider* by Albert Camus

For further information please contact :

**Gillian O'Mulloy (9818 5951) or Jan Aitkin (9810 1862)
or e-mail: friendsbalmainlibrary@gmail.com**



The Agony and the Ecstasy

by HELEN COLMAN - FOBL's Public Officer

and Past Chair (1999 - 2002)

Writers' Evenings

Blessed as Balmain is with very good writers, in the early FOBL years we were able to hold about four or five writers' and journalists' evenings a year. Our guest speakers included: Margaret Throsby, our patron, of the ABC, who recommended that in reading, we should pursue our interests and passions rather than books we ought to read (don't take The Bible and Proust on holiday out of a feeling of duty); Tony Stephens of *The Sydney Morning Herald*; Andrew Ross of the ABC; Bruce Petty, cartoonist for *The Australian*; novelist Kate Grenville; writer, activist and politician Tom Uren; and many, many others.

At our first Christmas party we had to put up a 'Sold Out' notice when John Doyle entranced his audience with an extremely funny, but very wise appreciation of libraries. In later years Stephanie Dowrick and Karl Kruszelnicki also spoke to capacity houses. Of course all these speakers' talks were followed with the usual good cheer.

Enjoying Ourselves Mark II: The Shakespearean Dinner

We came to a point in my fourth year when we felt a need both to widen our membership with something different and also to raise more money. Financially we were doing nicely, but if and when a new library opened we wanted to be in a position to make an attractive contribution to the refurbishment. We had already contributed a few smaller items - a listening post and headphones for the CD collection, a post to which people could tether their dogs outside, and library bags with our Bruce Petty logo and a drawing of the Town Hall designed by local artist Jenny Porter.

We decided to hold a community dinner with a Shakespearean theme. The Town Hall could hold 300 seated and we determined to cook them a three-course dinner, using mainly Stephanie Alexander's recipes, but with an Elizabethan theme. At only \$70 a head, with a free champagne cocktail and wine, we felt this was very good value. At first tickets were slow to sell, but in the last week it became THE event to be seen at, especially as everyone was asked to dress extremities (don't ask) in Elizabethan style.

The spread included a decorated hog's head *à la* Henry V, Chicken Malvolio (or was it Antonio?) and certainly Strawberries Desdemona and mini meringues Othello. Decorations by Liz Bisson and David Wilsher were massive, the *pièce de résistance* being a huge picture of Shakespeare, by David. When Brian Brown later decided to auction it, he gumpumped the final bidder and bought it

himself. This seemed somewhat illegal but as there was no one there from the Auctioneers' Association to check, we turned a blind eye and accepted his generous cheque. A reading by Rachel Ward from *A Merchant of Venice*, and another by Kate Grenville, gave tone to the evening, while the C.J. Dennis lovers' response to *Romeo and Juliet* was brilliantly rendered by Bill Young. Having baked an enormous snapper for the main course, Jocelyn and John Morris were judged to have the finest dressed extremities. The judging was, of course, totally objective.

One reason for the financial success of the dinner was the very generous donation by well-known Aboriginal artist,

Bronwyn Bancroft, of a large and beautiful painting for the raffle. The exhausted committee members crawled into their burrows for a few weeks before my final AGM.

Ian Aitkin Chairperson Mark II

For the AGM in April 2002 we had invited George Richards to be our guest speaker. I had met the recently retired George and his wife several times at Evan Williams' house and had long admired his work for Granny's Column in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Unfortunately the usual meeting room at Balmain Town Hall was not available and we were forced to hold the meeting in the huge town hall with its notoriously inadequate acoustics. It was difficult to hear George's very fine talk, despite the microphone - we had a large attendance but a rather disappointed audience.

During the AGM I called for nominations for a successor. At first there was deadly silence. And then a woman stood up, said she had been a member of FOBL for a couple of years, admired the work and aims of the organization, and was prepared to put her name forward. How relieved was I! Although I did not know Jan personally, I did know that she had been the first person to give a donation after our launch of the tax deductible scheme. This seemed to be a good recommendation. Later she told me that she'd come to the AGM partly because she was an admirer of George Richards but also because it was time to lend a hand.

How lucky we were to acquire Jan at this crucial point in our negotiations with the Council for a better library. If at first she endured some suspicion from some members, being relatively unknown, it was soon evident that her experience chairing meetings, a long involvement with the women's movement, dealings with public service requirements, and a passion for books and libraries, made her an ideal Chair for this stage of our work.

The Agony and the Ecstasy

continued ...

Jan was fortunate in having a solid committee, some good new members, and the experience of Nola Harris, Frances Heathfield, Janet Sorby, Roleena Jennings and Liz Bisson to help. While the group continued with successful book sales and writers' talks – amongst others, Ian "Herbie" Hemphill, Peter Luck, Irina Dunn, and Margaret Fulton – the focus of Jan's four years at the helm was to obtain a new library. This meant absolutely determined negotiations with Council, while at the same time maintaining the group's high profile and membership; supporters mean voting power, a fact that most elected bodies are aware of. During this time Council's Town Hall Committee became a little more active, with Roleena and Frances our representatives on it.

Our national body, Friends of Libraries Australia (FOLA), held its conference in Adelaide in 2002 and one of its highlights was a PowerPoint® presentation by Jan and Herma Sieper, on FOBL's approach to public relations with particular reference to *Bookworm*, which was really admired by other Friends' Groups as the benchmark for Newsletters. Another landmark event was the symposium organised by FOBL to discuss book clubs. This was extremely interesting (I heard most of the proceedings from the catering quarters), particularly as we were amazed to find there were so many different ways the groups were run and how they had started. FOBL had been instrumental in starting three of them in Balmain, and several we had not known about emerged from the woodwork. The representatives who spoke were able to provide a useful list of favourite books for discussion. We also heard Leichhardt Council's Library Manager, Marilyn Taylor, speak about her vision for our new library.

Meanwhile Council had finally made a financial commitment to upgrade Balmain Library. It seemed to take forever before they appointed architects to develop a submission for a D.A., the heritage issues concerning the whole Town Hall precinct taking a long time to be identified and then accommodated. Committee members attended various meetings with groups of architects, Council staff, and members of the Town Hall committee. All sorts of concerns were thrashed out: the placing of public toilets, the position of a lift to the Town Hall auditorium, the use of the entrance hall, library space, auditorium box office space, exhibition area, shared space etc. The committee was very worried that a great deal of money would be spent with very little extra shelf space for books, despite the addition of the old State Emergency Service's flat. We had a vision of using the courtyard as a children's play and story area. Dank and cold in winter, the area was shaded by fig trees, which had grown up in the '40s as rogue saplings and would need to go. The arborists agreed, saying they were dangerous to the structure of the building. Other arborists were not so sure and fierce lobbying from a small group finally caused Council to reverse its decision. We were however delighted when the architects proposed a new extension for the children's library and a small archival storage space upstairs.

All this required the committee to follow events closely, to keep our concerns before Marilyn Taylor, Leichhardt Council and the architects, whilst maintaining our fundraising and profile. Speakers during this period, included Dorothy McRae-McMahon, and Siobhan McHugh – her book *Minefields and Miniskirts* doing much to raise our morale. Jan's reports and letters to Council proved to be models of clarity and determination. She is a skilled negotiator. Although the new library was not complete when she resigned in 2006, she was satisfied it was on the way...

... To be continued in our next *Bookworm*



FOBL'S BOOK BOOST FOR BALMAIN LIBRARY



To celebrate the recent refurbishment and expansion of Balmain Library, FOBL are about to donate \$10,000, from funds raised by the community, for the purchase of new books for both Adult and Children's collections.

For two days in November – Friday 20th & Saturday 21st – Balmain Peninsula residents can have real input into the much-needed expansion of our Library's collection, across a wide range of authors, titles and subject areas. Fiction for adults, young adults, and children will be well-represented, as will non-fiction and reference works. This project is supported by Balmain Library management and staff, together with generous assistance offered by *Hill of Content* Bookshop in providing stock, at a **substantial discount**, for these purchases.

"It gives all library users a wonderful opportunity to participate in the acquisition of new works

according to their own taste and judgement", said Friends of Balmain Library Chair Mariella Totaro-Genevois. "Current budget constraints affect the buying capacity of all public libraries, so we believe it is timely to use a portion of our accumulated funds to give the Balmain Library collection a boost."

Just come along to the *Reading Room* of the Library – on the right as you enter – **between the hours of 10 am and 4 pm on Friday 20th and Saturday 21st November** – to make your selection from the books on display. Selected books, if not already part of the current catalogue, will be purchased by FOBL and added to the collection! Each book will contain an acknowledgement of the community's involvement in this donation.

Come early for the greatest choice as, obviously, there will be a 'limit per customer'.

A Friend Amongst Friends

Herma Sieper visits with Friends of Wingecaribee Library (FOWL)

In August, I was lucky enough to spend just over two weeks in the Southern Highlands region of NSW. Although we woke to chilly mornings, clear blue skies and sunshine were the order every single day. Our three grandsons were in our care while their parents travelled to the UK, giving us the opportunity to genuinely immerse ourselves in the local community.

Wilfred, the four-year-old, loves his local library, regularly attending Thursday's story-telling session at the Mittagong branch – just a hop and a skip away from home. Of course, I was delighted to keep to this routine and set off on the first Thursday to the charming, old sandstone school house conversion that is their local library. And, of course, I scanned the notice-board to see if there was a local Friends group.



Mittagong Library's Collection - six shelves high

Library staff contacted the president of FOWL, Bernice Lichtenstein, and we were soon in touch and organising a meeting over coffee at Elephant Boy Cafe in Bowral. Bernice has only lived in the area for about six years, but has always had some involvement in community organisations and knows they provide a great opportunity to meet people and feel a strong connection to a new area.

FOWL has been going for about 15 years and is enthusiastically supported by library staff. I had already visited the main library in Bowral and been shown around their newly organised interior by a very proud staff member. One innovation, a separate room for young adults, was equipped using funds raised by the Friends. I asked Bernice about fund-raising and learned that some of their activities, such as book sales and author talks, coincided with those of FOBL. Others differed, possibly a reflection of the area's geographical positioning between Canberra and Sydney. Excursions with a literary or historical bent are regularly organised and have proved to be popular fund-raisers as well as creating social adhesion within the membership.

Just to give a few examples of recent trips arranged by The Friends: The National Archives and Floriade in Canberra; Treasures of the University – a guided tour of The Art Collection, Macleay and Nicholson Museums, and the Rare Book Collection at Sydney University; and a self-guided Walking Tour of Miles Franklin's Goulburn – in conjunction with the Goulburn Library. For those interested in genealogy, FOWL organised a bus trip to Kiama and Gerringong, primarily to visit the Family History Centre in Kiama, “one of the most comprehensive Genealogical Centres in Australia”, but also to just enjoy the area's stunning coastline and scenic mountain backdrop.

FOBL has been fortunate in its great author talks, and Bernice was quite envious as she flipped through the file of *Bookworms* I brought to our meeting. But it soon became apparent that the Southern Highlands is not without a wonderful source of writers and speakers – Noeline Brown, Christopher Kremmer and Holly Kerr Forsyth for example. Last year, Susannah Fullerton talked on “Those Mitford Girls” and will again address the group at their Christmas function this year - “Christmas with the Brontës” will no doubt be a great crowd-pleaser!

Author talks are well-attended and held mostly during the day, although occasionally in the evening. Bernice commented that the cold winter nights, and long driving distances for members and friends living in Sutton Forest or Glenquarry for instance, meant a significant drop in numbers. Two recent talks included Brendan Shanahan's *In Turkey I Am Beautiful* and Cecile Yazbek's *Olive Trees Around My Table*, and Bernice's account of these works has encouraged me to seek them out at our library.

What really enthused me, and suggests a new approach for FOBL, are the special days FOWL runs. They are called “Book Conversations” and include: “Bloomsday”, with readings from Ulysses and Irish food for lunch (B.Y.O. Guinness); similarly, Bastille Day focused on French literature and food; and a local ex-history teacher hosted a Kafka Day (with plans for a John Updike Day, focusing on his novel *Marry Me* for the near future). Late last year FOWL ran a “Geraldine Brooks Book Day”, a full-day event with three sessions, broken up with morning tea and lunch. Three novels were covered: *Year of Wonders*, *March*, and *People of the Book*, with readings, commentary, and conversation (audience participation). Two readers were ex-NIDA and the other a voice therapist, while commentators ranged across professions appropriate to the works: a herbalist, an historian, and Director of Studies, Shalom College.

After farewells, and promises to meet again next time I'm down that way, I walked back to my car stimulated by the contact, and enthusiastic about giving our committee some new ideas to play with. Bernice asked to be put on our mailing list for *Bookworm* and I will make a reciprocal request for their newsletter. Perhaps the committee might consider our own bus-trip to one of their functions? The Southern Highlands is always a pleasure to visit, and even more so when it could include an interesting event with fellow Friends of Libraries.

IMPORTANT : If your issue of *Bookworm* contains a membership renewal form it means your subscription is now due. Your membership has ensured that FOBL has grown to become an effective community organisation so we hope you will continue with us. Don't forget the good discount available when renewing for three years, as well as the 10% discount on book purchases (excl. ABC merchandise) from *Hill of Content Bookshop* Balmain

Have your say WRITE ON THE WALL

OFF THE WALL - NOT ON THE SHELF

It's just wonderful to have a revamped library - but I should like to express concerns about the shelving. Why is it not HIGHER to enable accommodation of more books?

I have heard comments concerning OH&S issues, but this is surely not possible, or else practically every other library, and all book shops that I know, are flouting the law.

Also, why is the lowest shelf so difficult to access - not to mention read the spines of books? Is it perhaps possible to adjust the shelving to allow books on the lowest shelf to be easily identified - without the need to sit on the floor?



ERRATA e CORRIGENDA

Whilst Superbike and MotoGP fans on the peninsula will no doubt be delighted that FOBL have been able to channel Carl's long lost brother Dan, I think that you will find that it was Daniel Ferguson (NOT Fogarty) that so eloquently addressed FOBL's 2009 AGM - and provided invaluable support in the early years of FOBL.

Foggy reporting it might have been - but the man himself will have to wait for another day!



Absolutely true - and sincere apologies to all, especially Daniel Ferguson FOLA's Executive Director.

*But it demonstrates that Bookworm's new 'Spot the Error' segment will be a success! So, from this edition onwards, the first reader to find and report the intentional error contained herein shall receive FREE ENTRY to our next event - in this case our Christmas evening with Curtis Levy, on Friday 4th December. ** Entries to 'The Wall' only.*

Good Luck but don't expect it to be easy!

** FOBL Committee Members excluded!

Bookworm Editor

Having your book turned into a movie is like seeing your oxen turned into bouillon cubes.

John le Carré

**GO ON - EXPRESS YOURSELF ...
(ANONYMITY ASSURED !)**

Remember, a book is a present you can open again and again !

**A VOICE TO FOBL MEMBERS -
BOOKWORMWALL@INTERNODE.ON.NET**

FREE SPEECH RULES! OK?

We wish all you a joyous Christmas & Happy New Year





IN ARNHEM LAND

by Jan Aitkin



Arnhem Land is the big flat bit to the right of Darwin on the map of Australia. Until this year that was close to the sum of all I knew about this very large and interesting place. In March this year a good friend took up a post in an aboriginal community in Arnhem Land and invited us up to help with the settling in.

To remedy our complete lack of knowledge we embarked on a quick study of its history which turned out to be really engaging, especially in light of contemporary indigenous politics. I began by rereading an old favourite book: *My Crowded Solitude* by Jack McLaren. In 1911 he had set out to establish a coconut plantation in the jungle of the Cape York peninsula. He did this single-handedly with only the local aboriginal people for company and as potential workers. His account of the culture he encountered is gently humorous and quite revealing of the major differences between native and Western culture and gives an insight into why the 'integration' of the two has been so problematic.

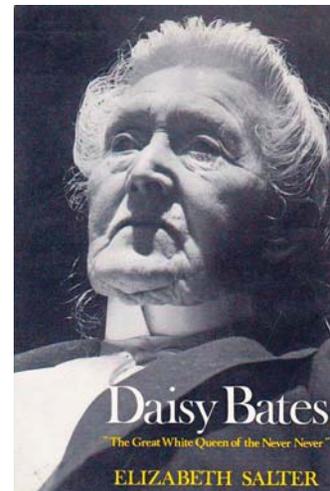
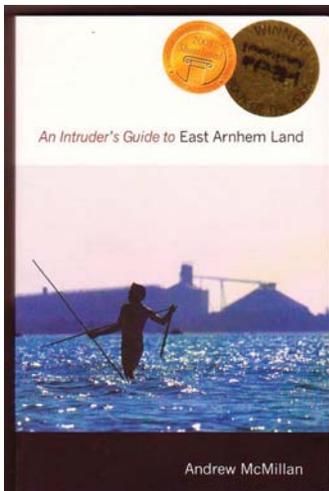
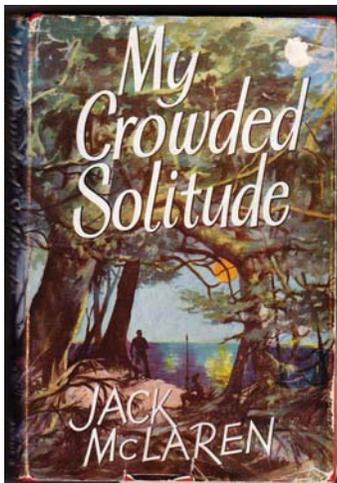
Our friend suggested a couple of other books: *Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land* was the first. Thomson (sometimes written Thompson) was, *inter alia*, an anthropologist and ornithologist. It is a quite splendid account of his travels there, and is really brought to life by the pictures which he took along the way. As his first trips were in the late '20s and early '30s the effort it took to take and process the pictures, in the most primitive of living conditions, was really remarkable. He felt deeply

about the injustices done to aboriginal people, and was the prime mover in having Arnhem Land set aside as their land. He had a particular bond with the Yolngu people and when he died his ashes were scattered over Caledon Bay in their territory.

And the second was *An Intruder's Guide to East Arnhem Land* by Andrew McMillan who had close contact with Yothu Yindi band members and Mandawuy Yunupingu and his family over a long period. This is a very detailed contemporary account which manages to combine history and journalism in a way that is both partisan and detached. Very readable and almost required reading if you want to understand current issues of concern to aboriginal people.

At this point I went back to read about Daisy Bates and her book *The Passing of the Aborigines*, as well as the biography by Elizabeth Salter, *Daisy Bates: The Great White Queen of the Never Never*. How Daisy O'Dwyer, an Irish society lass, came to be in outback Australia living with aboriginal tribes and surviving enormous hardship, is a story well worth reading. While she didn't work in Arnhem Land but in South and Western Australia, the stories and problems were very similar.

What all these writers have in common is a close appreciation and great understanding of aboriginal culture and deep empathy with the people. If you are interested in better understanding the background to indigenous politics, these books are a great way to start!



 Don't forget to recycle your 'Bookworms' by giving them to friends and relatives - and encourage them to become a FOBL member!

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