Hypallage

Issue 1 - May 2012

The Magazine of the Multicultural Writers Association of Australia

multiculturalwriters@hotmail.com
Kennedy Estephan

The Father I Never Had

At times I wished he had been like many others, an ordinary man preoccupied with ordinary matters and, while at it, enjoying whatever luxuries made available to him in a country forever plagued by poverty and civil unrest. But this was not to be, for he was an idealist, his principles so uncompromising that not only did they challenge the complex social and political problems of the day, they also sought individual righteousness and declared war on flaws deeply rooted in the human psyche—his included. Attempting to change the world was the easy part. Taming the yearnings of an old self—that was the real challenge, the cause of the many wars that I felt had raged within him: the human versus the divine, the practical versus the idealistic, the ‘what is’ versus the ‘what should be.’ Yet he struggled on, he persevered. He had no other choice. He was the people’s Mahatma.

Except for a photo or two gathering dust in a drawer, there was nothing left of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to remind us, his own family, of the man he once used to be. The Indian lawyer dressed in English suits and facing the camera with the confidence of the elite educated was long gone. What remained instead was a lean and hollow-cheeked shadow of a former self, courtesy of well-timed fasts which, ironically, had made thinner but stronger, calmer but far more outreaching.

I vividly remember him wearing his loincloth like a typical peasant, spinning cotton on the hand-cranked wheel and living the sort of existence he had always preached: a simple life, humble and ascetic; a life neither marred by ambition, nor stained by hypocrisy.

Yet, despite his tender humility and the easy smile he always wore, I never had been able to open up and confide in him. I feared that my little worries—those of a typical teenager, I guess—were too insignificant compared to the noble and superior causes to which he had devoted his life. The same causes which had preoccupied him and, I dare add, had inadvertently kept him at a distance from his own flesh and blood. At least that was my angle on things—flawed and subjective as it might be. But I try not to think about it anymore. I must not. This is all in the past, and the past is forever gone. Or is it?

Now I stand here, a solemn figure among numerous others, and watch the ancient alchemy of fire slowly turn his body to ash and smoke. People fill my gaze. From all over the world they have come here today to farewell him and offer his family their condolences. Even the English, the same figures who once had regarded the Mahatma as their major threat to a tamed and dependent India, have paid homage to that poor, little man who had demonstrated how strong ideals could be, how powerful and history-changing faith could get. ‘You keep loving people, and one day even the cruelest of hearts will learn to love you back.’ Years later and his words continue to echo in my ears. Then I think of the man who fired those bullets, think of all the rage
he must have felt at the time. Towards him I harbour no anger or resentment, only sympathy. This, my father have taught me. This, I will never forget.

A pyre crackling. A gust of smoke tossed into the air and wrapping me like an embrace. I breathe…

Around me mourners continue to grieve for the loss of a great soul, the Mahatma they did not wish to outlive. Then I, his son, stand behind a microphone and try to comfort them with healing words. But I fail. I fail. Until the moment of my death I will forever be condemned to parody. So I falter, I give up, I cry.

Not only because humanity has lost an idealist, a hero, a source of inspiration, but also because I’ve lost him. Him! The man whose seed has blessed me with life.

The father I loved, I always had.

But was never really mine…

Delhi, 1948

© Kennedy Estephan, 2012

Kennedy Estephan, born in Lebanon, was raised and educated in Beirut. He migrated to Australia in 1987, where he enrolled at UNSW and completed his tertiary studies.

A winner and finalist in many short-story competitions, some of his work has appeared in literary magazines, anthologies and broadcasts on local community radio.

Kennedy is a full-time science teacher. He lives in Sydney with his wife and two children.
Erin Kelly

"Float"

She considers the question.

“Well, I used to get picked last for teams in school, so I guess you can figure what I looked like. I was skinny in a sickly way, I had wiry red hair and spent most of high school permanently mid-way through a painful and urgently necessary orthodontic sentence to fill my mouth with metal that cut into my gums and cheeks.

“As with most people in my life, I naturally thought my orthodontist was out to get me. This might not be true, I haven’t decided yet, but I can say that most of my teachers, my peers, my parents, my friend Shelly, and even the guy who threw the paper onto the front lawn – they all hated me for some reason.” She laughs, but it’s a short, false laugh.

“I didn’t need glasses, and I think this is because the eye doctor lady knew glasses were coming back in fashion.” Her hand moves to the frame of her expensive glasses.

“The first time that it happened, getting picked last for a team, I watched as the crowd around me reformed into two parallel lines behind the two popular girls. I remember their names. Gemma and Corinne. Gemma had long, curly blonde hair and the prettiest face in the school. Corinne, she had breasts – a pretty face as well, but mostly breasts.” She looks down at her own breasts, enlarged.

“You can have her”, Gemma said, even though it was her pick and it would have evened the teams. She only ended up with me thanks to Ms Fern, who said that the teams needed to be equal, just for body count sake. “She will do her best not to get in your way”, Ms Fern smirked, trying to gain a little bit of favour from the popular girls. People didn’t refuse to pick me because I was bad at the game. I wasn’t. I wasn’t good either though, just sort of average. And it wasn’t just sporting teams that I was left out of. Mathletes, spelling bees, historical trivia – I was not sought after. You would assume that people would just think, err…yeah, well, she looks smart, she’ll do. But the fact is, and most people knew it, I wasn’t even intelligent. Welcome to the tragedy. How validating it would be to be intellectual. It would have defined me. It would have been something definite I could have branded myself with. But instead I floated. Alone in an ocean of insignificance, I drifted with no identity – completely unexceptional in all ways, from throwing a ball to determining X from Y.”

The interviewer nods, then asks: “Why are you quitting at the height of your success?” The camera zooms in for a close-up.

She looks at the photo of herself on the magazine; she is spread out across a lounge with a faint smile on her face. She has long curly blonde hair that cascades over her shoulder and down over one of her breasts. The large letters of the name of the magazine run across the cover above her. She remembers the ninety minutes of makeup. The two-hour shoot.
She thinks of the lost little girl she just described. How the worst of times back then seem far greater than the best of times now.

“I just want to float again.”

© Erin Kelly, 2012

Erin is a pendulum swinging between her interests in science and art. Currently working as an environmental scientist for a consultancy firm, late at night she stays up by the blue light of the computer screen and wears the keyboard down into the desktop.
I stumble into the restaurant. I’m late. Even in the dull reflections on the window I can tell I have big black circles under my eyes. My hair is uncharacteristically out of place, and I can’t remember what year I bought the jacket I’m wearing. This isn’t me. Some people spend so long with the same idea of what they want until one day they have a total shift.

There are four of them at the table. The women. I hate how much lipstick they have on. Their perfumes compete. The man. His cigarette breath. The wine they drink. The smell of these things is a rich blend of everyday poison that I never want to smell again. My eyes sting and begin to water.

I know that I wanted this life. But now that I’m here I think that maybe I couldn’t stand being any one of them. I try and remind myself of how much I want this – for my parents, my boyfriend, my future children.

“How are you?” Hermann asks, “Is everything okay?” His bulging eyes probe me for an explanation of my appearance. I see the contract on the table in front of him.

“I think I’m okay.” My answer is confusing, to them and me. A long pause follows. Someone inside me screams; get myself together, remember the work that it took to get here, remember who I am sitting with, remember who I am.

The women, powerful people, they look at me. Sitting directly across from me is Linda. She is the boss of one of the most publicly despised, environmentally reckless firms in the city, and she sits there with a barely disguised glare, sipping her wine. I can tell she is annoyed. She thinks I’m wasting her time. I’m not sure if I am yet.

“I’m sorry”, I say with a renewed smile, “I’m just not myself today. Please forgive me.” Good girl, someone inside me says, now be cool.

“You were starting to worry us”, says Hermann laughing, “Now then, let’s talk business.” He opens the contract and begins to read sections but I can’t listen to it.

A waitress comes over and interrupts. She is attractive and about my age. She looks at me and her eyes ask me what I am doing sitting here with Linda Hoffman (a profile regular). What is a scraggly little thing like me, who cannot possibly be rich enough to be a client, doing here? Her eyes ask me who the hell I think I am. Another bottle of wine is ordered.

Hermann returns to my contract and outlines my remuneration package. The contract is a crystal ball because I can see my future when I look at it. This job. My life. I would work for Linda, I will drive a Mercedes. My family will be rich and happy. I will retire early and travel. This is basically a contract to a happy life. It’s what I’ve trained to be. This is who I am.
When the waitress returns I want to change what she sees. I want her to see me conversing casually with Linda, with the contract open in front of her and my salary in clear view. That’s who I am, I would say to her. But I realise I don’t really want this. What I really want is the waitress to come and grab me by my dirty jacket and drag me out of the restaurant. To throw me onto the pavement outside. Tell me that I’m a nobody and don’t belong there. Kick me when I’m down. Spit on me. The waitress finishes pouring the women the wine and my fingers are crossed below the table and I’m saying do it, do it, do it inside my head. But she doesn’t and just walks away, and I feel empty, like I’ve just missed some sort of opportunity.

Now I’m here, I know the job would swallow me. It would swallow my world and vomit out cash into my bank account.

My delusory identification with these people is over.

Herman begins to explain the income insurance that is included in my package and I cut him off mid sentence.

“I’ve considered it”, I say, stopping him, “and I think that I would rather do anything else in the whole world than work for you.” The women look at each other confused; Hermann looks at me like I’m insane.

“Did you not see how much we’re offering?” asks Hermann bitterly. I get up to leave the table. Linda eyes me and tells me without speaking that I’ve made a very big mistake. That I’ve made an enemy.

Sometimes the goals you set for you self aren’t realistic. They aren’t your goals. And if you know who you are you will stop yourself, turn your back to the situation and say screw it. Not in defeat, not giving up, but in realisation, in enlightenment. Some people spend so long with the same idea of who they are until one day they have a total shift. An inversion. Wall Street bankers go to Tibet and meditate. Happily married women leave their husbands to be with other women. Alcoholics find sobriety as appealing as intoxication. Accountants become stuntmen. Young girls stop wanting a fairytale and a prince and start wanting what everyone else wants. This is my inversion. I see myself as one of those little girls. But finally, instead of wanting to achieve what everyone else wants of me, I want my fairytale back.

“Listen, you little stupid, little...” Linda starts in a loud whisper but I turn my back to her and don’t hear her finish. That’s how to abandon an ambition.

I’ve been worried that I’m not the person I used to be. Walking away, catching a reflection of myself, I think about it. What was so good about who I used to be anyway?

© Matt Hemingway, 2012

Matt is a recent university graduate who now spends fifteen hours per week in his car. He listens to lots of music and reads books in traffic. To describe his working life
he uses the word *Grey*. He loves his mum, girlfriend, and the books and music that keep him going.
Fikret Pajalic

Swollen River

The handwritten sign taped to the sliding doors of my local supermarket read, Night-filler Wanted – Apply Within. I was transfixed by the name. A job that fills the nights is an important thing for an insomniac.

The store manager looked me up and down, not offering a seat. ‘Any injuries I should know about?’ was all he asked.

I shook my head.

‘Come tonight. Ten sharp. We’ll see how you go.’

That was a year ago. The mindless task of stacking shelves all night frees up my mind. I love the pet food aisle the best, thousands of cans of different sizes; a robot would envy my carton rate. The sound of the metallic cans being neatly stacked merges into a comforting monotonous hum, like a river swollen with melted snow, bursting its banks.

At the beginning of the shift, Marco the Narco and I are in combat mode. Our enemy – dog food cans. He is a bona fide narcoleptic, hence the nickname, who graduated from being an insomniac a long time ago. That’s where I’m heading. Sweet, unexpected, nothingness.

He starts whinging about his sick dog. The mongrel is dying, apparently. He can’t afford the vet, who is asking $120 to put him down. I wait for him to inhale air between sentences and start with my story about how I came to Melbourne. Marco sucks in every word like groper fish sucks in its prey, but still at the end of my yarn he measures me with his suspicious eyes.

‘Bullshit. You’re from fucking Footscray. You speak grouse Aussie.’

My indifference to his reaction provokes his curiosity. But I cannot keep quiet for too long. The moment Marco feels too relaxed; he could fall asleep.

‘I weighed less than two of those when I left my country.’ I point at the 25-kilo bags of kitty litter he was stacking on the bottom shelf.

‘I get it. You looked like a prisoner in a concentration camp. Skin and bones,’ he says, annoyance now visible in his jerky movements.

‘I can help with your dog. Fifty bucks, cheaper than the vet.’

‘Do what?’ Marco is stupefied.
‘I’ll send him to eternal hunting grounds. He’ll be chasing rabbits there forever.’ I imitate the running dog with my tongue hanging out just to irritate him.

‘Have you put down animals before?’

‘Only one,’ I say.

‘Right. How’d you do it, tough guy?’

I put my hands around the one-kilo dog food can and pretend to strangle it. The Labrador on the can cannot feel a thing and looks happy. His tummy is full and he has people to take care of him. Something my dog lost.

‘Go on,’ Marco urges, aware that he needs my monologue to stay on his feet.

My mind flies back to the third year of the siege.

‘I learnt to tell by the whistling sound the bomb makes where it was going to land and what calibre it was,’ I tell Marco.

At the time I wondered if I survived the war, if this would be a useful skill in the future: Able to recognize the calibre, estimate trajectory and the level of devastation of any bomb, artillery shell, missile or grenade by using his ears. It sounds like something Superman would put in his résumé. But that prig does not operate in the Balkans.

I packed my rucksack with the essentials, a change of clothes, clean underwear and socks, identification papers and a few photos. I lifted it to check it’s weight. The handles dug into my shoulders. The war diet, tasteless rice and old potatoes boiled into oblivion had weakened my bones and melted my muscles.

I describe to Marco the inevitable crawl through the tunnel under Sarajevo airport, the only way out of the city. The two-by-three feet nightmare that still haunts me.

I asked myself if I should drag or push my miserly possessions through the claustrophobic darkness, if I should crawl through the mud in my underpants and get dressed when I got to the other side, or if I had enough money to pay off the guards.

Our collective suffering was intolerable and couldn’t be relieved other than by dying or escaping. Or dying while escaping, I smile bitterly.

Marco raises his woolly eyebrows.

I remember there was more time when I was a kid. When the war first started, it felt like I’d lived a hundred happy years and it was just as well. Memories were all that carried me through, as I am the last one left.

When my father was killed I washed his body with sand from the track-and-field sandpit at the local school, saturated with melted snow. We buried him on the soccer
ground, with the rest of the liberated souls, because there was no room in the cemeteries.

Religious tradition and the necessity of living in a besieged city dictated that he be buried within a day of dying. My father, a boy-partisan and life-long communist, was buried the way God prescribed and not the way he wished. I always wondered what would he think about this? A joke or an insult?

‘An insulting joke,’ Marco frames it for me, ‘a dead man’s wish should always be respected.’

‘A sniper shot him, while we were eating flavourless rice soup’. I carry on with my tale without taking breath. His brains spattered the dish and added some colour to it, like a garnish. At the funeral it was just the gravedigger and I. Not even the shyster-in-a-robe, my father’s term for clergymen, came. The gravedigger said a quick prayer and I helped him lower the body. Then I gently lay a plastic bag with our dog’s remains on top. The feel of his matted, dirty fur on my palms stayed with me for years.

I look at my hands as I twirl the can so that the label faces the front.

I approached our dog from above while he was in a hunger-induced sleep. He remained faithful until the end, his body refusing to struggle, letting go of life like one lets go of a balloon. I tucked some money into the gravedigger’s pocket before he was able to refuse. We shook hands and I left. I ran to the nearest building and turned around one more time. The gravedigger worked furiously and half the earth was already inside the shallow grave.

Marco listened intently.

When I crawled from under the airport tunnel I was covered in mud. I was on all fours catching my breath, my eyes adjusting to the blinding snow when someone from behind pushed me and ordered me to run. I didn’t stop running until I reached the outskirts of the deserted, bombed village, where I dropped the rucksack and counted my money. The truck driver was punctual. He had a tiny moustache on his chin that we called the upside-down Hitler. I handed over the money and he nodded towards the back of the truck where I hid amongst the furniture.

Marco’s ears prick up like a Kelpie staring down sheep and I resume my story.

The radio in the truck cabin was playing folk music. The chorus of the wailing tune about a man losing his love by being a drunkard, a gambler and an adulterer was still in my head. We drove for some time. Stiffness gripped my bones. The drone of the river surging with melted snow from the surrounding mountains filled the air. The bridge was an old Ottoman stone structure that straddled the riverbanks for centuries. There was a gentle climb toward the middle where the lookout tower was located. When we reached the checkpoint the driver turned down the volume on the radio and yelled at me to be quiet.
The rumble of the thunderous river was deafening and I could no longer hear the truck tyres clacking on the bridge cobblestones. Then we stopped. The river drowned out all sound.

My mind was racing. I wondered how cold the water was and if I would survive the jump. The truck suddenly jerked and started chugging down the slope of the bridge picking up speed. The vibration of the river receded.

Marco is saved from a sudden stupor.

I park my hatchback behind Marco’s Kingswood in his driveway.

‘Dog is in the garage,’ he tells me and walks into the house.

I find the dog on his back, bulging lumps on his belly. He looks lost in his own space of discomfort. I put the gloves on, kneel down and gently pat his belly. The dog lifts his head and looks at me. He pleads for help, not a release.

I lift him into my lap and whisper in his floppy ears. Hang on to your balloon mate. He tries to lick my face, but there is not enough strength in him.

I wrap him in a blanket and put him at the backseat of my car. I walk over to the house to let Marco know that I am leaving, but hear snoring coming through the screen door. While I drive I try to remember where the nearest vet is. The dog is taking long gulps of air.

His breathing is a heavy throbbing, like a river swollen with melted snow.

© Fikret Pajalic, 2012

Fikret Pajalic came to Melbourne as a refugee in 1994. He has a BA Photography from RMIT and for years he used images to convey a message, only to realise that some stories are best told in words.

He won equal first prize at the 2011 Ada Cambridge Short Story prize, has been highly commended in the 2011 Grace Marion VWC Emerging Writers Competition and in the 2011 Brimbank Short Story Awards. His work has been published in Platform magazine and the upcoming Wordsmiths of Melton Anthology.
Jorge Salavert

By the sea

The island has suddenly started shaking. It’s still mid-morning and, as it is usual in the tropics, very warm and humid. There’s a long rumble, then a sudden fierce jolt. The rumble goes on for about twenty or thirty seconds, and then there’s another remarkably powerful jolt. The tremor is a big one. Photographs, books, various objects that were carefully placed on shelves, cabinets and other furniture are now rattling, and then some things have begun falling off the shelves; yet he is not taking much notice. His attention is solely focused on feeling the earth crust’s quake, on listening to its distantly familiar, massive growl. A really big nice final shudder confirms his expectations. Then it all stops.

Yes, it’s been a big one; unlike the quake they experienced about two months ago. This might be the one he’s been waiting for. So many years waiting for this moment to occur. He knows there may be no time to waste.

Time. What an absurd concept it has turned out to be, after his consciousness of time being abruptly shattered that day. The unbearable burden of a time he could not force himself to enjoy. Too much of it to bear. Seeing time pass, the meaningless void.

Given his old age, he is rather slow to leave the fale he has made into a home in the last few years. He does not stop to take anything with him. He has only one objective, one goal, one obsession. He must get to the seashore, to the beach before the monster returns. The monster of water. Before the big black tongue of the beast that took them that day revisits the island.

It’s been many years that he’s been kind of hoping this very moment would come, and now that the time may have finally come, now that the hope – in his mind – of ultimate reunion might be possible, his pulse trembles. It is not fear, he realises, just the awareness of the ultimate consequences of a decision he made a few years ago, the prospect of the impending and final encounter actually taking place.

A wisp of a doubt crosses his mind. What if it were a false alarm, as it happened three years ago? His disappointment was huge then. It was a massive quake again (8.2 Richter scale). Yet that day, 17 June 2036, another colossal mass of water was pushed from the south towards the north-east, in the direction of the Marquesas. Nothing much happened, not much damage occurred. Not like that fateful day more than twenty years ago. Such a long time now.

He only takes a couple of minutes to climb down the road; the beach is about two minutes away from the school grounds. People are already running up the hill: that’s good, he thinks, it’s a good sign, he mutters to himself. Some villagers are shouting at him as he shuffles towards the beach, towards this moment of truth, the time of the ultimate reunion. ‘Galu afi! Galu afi! The sea is coming! Run! Run to the hill!’
He takes no heed of their panicky voices, though he knows the reason for them. How could he forget it. He walks on, strong-willed. He’s a determined old man about to meet his death; yet he’s also an old man who is about to achieve some sort of meaning for his long wait. He is about to enter the realm of an ultimate peace he’s been unable to locate since the day of the first encounter.

Oh, you should listen to their frightened voices, the screams. Of course they are frightened. Yes, the panic. He remembers it well: he can still summon up the images of the five of them running away from the seashore, the note of absolute terror in his yell, his voice beaming across the road, the racing of their bare feet on the sand and across the road’s hard tarmac, their toes getting hurt on the rocks lying about on the taro plantation. Their unwinnable race against the beast, against time. That instant of perfectly lucid, transparent fear, as the wall of water rushed on them, as the black tongue of the monster seemed to lift them off the ground while from above the jaws of the wave shut down on them. The sharp awareness of the immediate likelihood of death. Their whirling and spinning, just like puppets inside a washing machine. His struggle to reach up for air. The never-ceasing drag and pull of the water.

Just like that day, he’s barefoot again today. It now feels good to feel the sand under his feet, but his legs cannot run. The age, the long wait, the sadness heavy as lead in his heart. It’s been over twenty years, but he’s still unsure it will end today. The beach is now deserted. They have all learned the lesson well.

He comes close to the shore and looks away into the distance, past the island and beyond, out into the immensity of the Pacific Ocean. He might be too early; or it might not happen after all. Who knows. Despite all the systems and measurements in place, the beast is unpredictable. He knows too well.

Suddenly, the surf near the shore and closer to the reef sort of abates. The breakers stop their harmonious crashing. It’s an eerie feeling, those first few seconds, as the gradual realisation that the water is coming dawns on you. The water, the big big water. Its savage roar, which he has never been able to recall, may be about to revisit him. Like that distant relative you don’t really expect to see again.

And now it’s becoming obvious. The ocean seems to be receding. At last. It’s here. At long last. If you could ask him, he’d seriously tell you he feels this is a fitting end. He knows not whether he’ll be able to join her – in fact, his firm conviction is there’ll be nothing afterwards – but he’ll let himself be taken, wherever she may have gone that day. Back into the universe, back into the place where spirits await their turn, back into the nothingness forever and never.

Oh, if you could but have seen them that morning! Say, from high up in the air, flying over the lagoon and the beach, them relishing the smooth early sea-breeze. If you could see how those who are down there on the seashore have been slowly and lazily starting their new day. You could have seen the small group of five, the family, and you could have heard their happiness, even smell their cheerfulness; you could have been observing them while they walk westwards on the golden sands of the island, the
beautiful turquoise of the ocean waters on their left, the lush green of the rainforest on the right climbing up the steep hillside. Their eyes are absorbing the lot, the coconut palm trees that stand metres away from the shore. An idyllic place. A moment of true delight. Joy.

And you could have seen how one of them, the little girl whose skin is so beautifully tanned, has all the while been skipping, following the man. She’s trying to match her smaller footprints with those much bigger of his. Her father’s footprints on the sand.

Had you been watching, you would have noticed, hardly five minutes earlier, that many of those on the beach were woken up by the clatter of the earth, and they went outside their fales, as they were rattling, and everyone stared at the palm trees, flapping their fronds like birds flapping their wings. But the real birds would soon flee up the hill, to higher ground, to safety. They knew.

Had you been there amongst them, you might have heard a couple of minutes ago the curious six-year-old asking why the local children are wearing their uniforms, or how she explains to her mother the reason why she is tracing her father’s footprints. Her father’s keeping an eye out for the green shards of broken beer bottles, the unsightly blight of tourism. The little girl’s twin brothers are mucking around on the flat rocks near the shore, looking for shells. They are discussing the sandcastles they will build later, the games they will play all together. They are a happy family, they are exulting over life, rejoicing, delighted to be in this place that looks like some sort of paradise.

Had you been there, high up in the air — like those jet pilots, who were flying some thousands of feet above the ocean — you would have seen it dashing across the ocean. And just as they did, you would have stared at it in awe and disbelief. They wondered where it was heading for and prayed. Had you been there, you would have screamed. You might have yelled your lungs out, your life out to warn them: the monster is coming.

‘Disappointed?’ they’ve asked him at the resort while he was eating his customary chicken and salad sandwich. He’s just shrugged his shoulders. They all think he’s a crazy old palagi, even the younger ones call him loco, in the affectionate way an Argentine chef told them it was OK to refer to your friends; he does not resent them. They have all grown used to having him there. He has spent the last few years with them, always showing them a ready smile, ever glad to assist the village while he is waiting.

So no one raised an eyebrow or said a word of dissent when he leased Erik Mata’alagata’s fale halfway up the hill, very near the primary school whose library bears his family name. They all felt it was somehow naturally owed to him. Not that it was actually a debt: the matai, the village chief, said so in as many words when he explained the validity of his reasons before the elders; he explained why the old palagi wished to stay in the village. They all acknowledged the palagi should be allowed to live and to die there, if such were his wishes.
A couple of hours after lunch he’s going for his afternoon swim. But today he’s getting a little closer to the reef than usual. There, where the crash of the waves feels louder and the white of the foam dazzles in the tropical sun. And he’s diving to look at the motley array of reef fish, to admire their bluish, reddish and pinkish-white hues. Their incommensurable beauty. This place always appears to bring a hint of peace to him.

Down there, closer to the reef, he thinks he can hear a little mermaid’s voice that seems to come from the bottom of the ocean. The voice of a little girl. Today he will get even closer, perhaps he wants to have a proper view. Through the cloud of bubbles and sand that the breakers raise he finally glimpses something, maybe somebody. A little girl is riding a giant seahorse towards him; she’s still skipping, after all these years. And at this very moment, all he can manage is to smile at her.

The long wait is over.

Father and daughter, together. At last.

© Jorge Salavert, 2012

Jorge Salavert has published some of his sonnets in Transnational Literature. He writes poetry, short stories and reviews in Spanish and English, and supplies Spanish translations of Australian authors to Hermano Cerdo, where he is a member of the editorial team. He is the editor of Hypallage.
Lily Q.

Grab a quota to enter University

When I came to Australia for a higher degree I lived in a flat. One day the air conditioner in my room had some problem and a mechanic came to repair it. When he saw I was reading a big book and my desk was piled with books, he said proudly: “you take the hardest way while we take the easiest way.” When I was puzzled by his words, he wrote them on a piece of paper and explained the reason. He had entered a university easily but left after only one week because study in university was too difficult for him. I was shocked by his story: “How could you make such big decision of quitting university? Do you know how difficult it was to get an examinee’s quota for entering university?” I couldn’t help recalling my stolen quota and my father’s dream of grabbing a quota for me to enter university.

In Cultural Revolution which started in May 1966 all universities, colleges and schools stopped teaching but red guards were fighting and killing. At the end of 1968 under China’s dictator Mao’s order of “Going-Down to countryside to be educated by poor peasants” school students from year 7 to 12 started going to communes all over the country. This Going-Down policy lasted 10 years and only stopped after the rebellion of about 50,000 students in YunNan, when they stayed in the big mountains cutting primeval forest to plant rubber trees while being extremely hungry for 10 years and were strictly prohibited to have girlfriends/boyfriends, let alone getting married. There were 17 million young students who were cheated by Mao and forced by CCP to leave their home to be labour in the poor countryside. Many going-down youth died from different problems such as hunger and disease. Many youth became disabled when they bombed the mountain to build roads. Some were jailed, some were killed by officials, and many females were raped by local officials when they wanted a quota to enter university. Many of them live in the countryside permanently. China’s next leader Xi Jingping was also in the countryside as a labourer from 15 to 22 years of age, before he entered university without secondary school knowledge. He was 13 when the Cultural Revolution stopped his studies. Most people of my generation never went to school again, so when they wrote a letter, it would be full of the wrong words. Among hundreds of my schoolmates, I am the only one who has a bachelor degree. My generation was totally destroyed by the dictator Mao.

In 1973 universities re-opened to admit so-called students of peasants, factory-workers and soldiers. In order to enter university, one needed to get a quota assigned to workplaces. One commune with more than 10,000 people could have 2 quotas. One workshop with hundreds of workers could have one quota. Since university was a dream place in many young people’s hearts, hundreds or thousands of people in the same workplace fought intensely for one quota. The struggle was harsher in the communes because the quota was the only chance for going-down and local youth to change their identity from starving peasants to “rich” city residents.

At that time I was in the WuFu Commune. I not only worked extremely hard shoulder to shoulder with peasants but also contributed enthusiastically my spare time to the
local community and became very popular among the locals. I taught them Chinese and songs. I joined the performing arts propaganda team and I played basketball with them. I wrote and edited local newsletters and wall newspapers and my articles were published in Mian Zhu County’s literature magazine.

After the commune was assigned 2 precious quotas for entering university, I was recommended by the production team and the production brigade, and then I got approval from the Commune CCP Council. Mine was the first confirmed quota out of the 2 precious commune quotas. I thought my uni dream would come true, and I was so happy.

Unfortunately my quota was later stolen by a newcomer, and I was kept in the dark. When this short, fat woman came next door to me, I was told to help her by the member in charge of going-down youth in the Commune CCP Council and a male friend of the woman. The man was a worker at the going-down youth office in my hometown. I helped her to settle down and lent her furniture and farming tools because she sold all her stuff in a commune more than 500 km away before moving next door to me.

During the period of quota-fighting, the woman’s male friend came and asked many peasants to recommend her for the quota although she was unusually lazy and also became abusive toward peasants. The man promised people that he would buy them goods in short supply as a reward. As the woman failed to get a quota, the member of the Commune CCP Council forged all recommendations and approval documents, and the forged materials were sent to the Mian Zhu County’s Exam Council. Because she didn’t have a quota, they used the forged file to replace my true file, but I knew nothing about this.

Some days before exam I received a notice from Mian Zhu County’s Cultural Office to attend a writers’ meeting for a few days. While I was in the meeting, I was burning with impatience, waiting for the commune’s notice to collect my examinee ID. The day before the exams I still hadn’t had any news. I couldn’t wait any longer. I went to nearby post office to make a phone call. I called that member of the Commune CCP Council and asked my examinee ID. He didn’t tell me they had stolen my quota, instead he said my father’s former brother-in-law, an official of the former government, had serious ‘history problems’. Not even my mother had met him before he had escaped to Taiwan, but all of our family members suffered a lot as a consequence of his being a former government’s employee.

These words were the biggest blow to me: my dream was broken. I had hoped to go to university all the time. I had studied very hard night and day since I read the news that the university was re-opening. I taught myself chemistry and geometry, which I had never learned before. One night, as I sat on my bed beneath a mosquito net, holding a lit candle with my left hand (at that time there was no electricity in the countryside), I was so focused on my book that I did not notice my hair was getting burnt. Another day, as I walked out to the courtyard, my neighbour pointed to my shoes and laughed: “Your shoes are in wrong order!”
Suddenly, despite all of my efforts, my childhood hopes were gone. My heart was broken.

In order to get my quota back, I went to many places to see many people in charge of the exams. But they passed the buck to others. First they said my seat was already taken by others. After my father’s company called them, on the eve of examination day the Council told me I would be allowed to sit the exams. But early in the morning that day they changed their mind and asked for approval from the Commune. I rushed around, I went everywhere in a desperate attempt to enter the exam room. When the bell for the first exam rang, I pushed through 2 rows of security guards to enter the office of the examinations council. I asked to sit the exam while the relevant persons were discussing the matter. They said I would not be able to finish the exam, as nearly half an hour had passed now. I said I would hand in my exam paper when the finish bell rang. They still argued they couldn’t allow me to enter the examination room without the Commune’s approval.

I anxiously waited for my future outside the building until the finish-bell of the first exam. The examinees came out in groups. They were walking and talking excitedly: they knew that most of them could go to university and that they would have the brightest future in the country as everyone knew that exam results were not important, the most powerful factor was an examinee’s family background. Then I received the worst news: the Commune head, CCP’s Secretary Wang, had said he agreed that I could sit the exams, but that all Council members must have a meeting to discuss the matter before final approval. I was heartbroken and traumatised about my stolen quota. Even if I was the victim, I still couldn’t lay bare their evil plot of stealing my quota.

Several years passed. One day I visited my parents. I had just entered the house when my mother started telling me about my father’s happiest dream in these years. My father, who was tortured and maimed by brutes during the Cultural Revolution, sat in the chair and listened to my mother. My father’s dream was he was no longer disabled and that his health was as good as before the Cultural Revolution. When his staff told him that an examinee quota could be got on a waiting list, he rushed to the office of examinations council and joined the queue for the quota. At that time a queue was not really a queue, and the crowd pushed against each other. Finally he fought his way to the head of queue and used every ounce of his energy to grab an ID card-like quota for me… While my mother was telling me about my father’s dream the night before, my father’s face was beaming with a big smile. It seemed to him that his dream was true.

When I was listening to my father’s dream, I couldn’t help thinking, “Why can’t I enter university although I was always the best student in my class, which had more than 50 students? Why can my father, who is a chief engineer, grab only a quota for me in his dreams?” But I didn’t want to disappoint my parents with my thoughts. I could only put on a wry smile.

I knew my father was doing his best for me, even if he was disabled and could only help me in his dreams. My father knew of my childhood dream of entering university, and he could understand the deep pain and the suffering in my heart when I was
unable to achieve it. I really appreciated my father’s love for me. My father’s love was the greatest reason for me to overcome any difficulties and achieve my dream.

Several years later the quota policy was abolished and people didn’t need a quota to sit for exams to enter university. But many conditions were set in place for candidates. They couldn’t have any family members who had had any so-called political or personal historical problems. Candidates were not to be over 25 years of age; married people were barred, too. They could not have graduated from a technical school or college in the last 2 years.

Competition was of course very intense; maybe only about 3% of high school graduates could enter university. All university students appreciated very much the chance to study. I remember one of my classmates, a young boy, cried loudly outside the registrar office when he found out he had failed all the subjects and was ordered to quit university. Nowadays, although more and more students can enter university, many people still have no chance of going to a Chinese university to enrol for their first degree, a Bachelor degree. I was in the countryside for 6 years and started my study from technical school, then college, then uni. I got my bachelor degree at 40 and masters degree at 47.

Many people say that young Australians take everything for granted. Maybe one example is the many South Australian students who quit high school and university. In contrast, Chinese countryside parents even sell their blood and city parents sell apartments so that their children can gain an education. If young Australians knew why there are so many Chinese students in Australian schools and universities, they would appreciate their luck and their chance to study a lot more.

© Lily Q., 2012

Lily Q. was 14 when the Cultural Revolution started. She lived in the countryside for 6 years before entering a technical school and finally studying at Sichuan University to get her first degree. She has a Masters degree from the University of South Australia. Lily lives in Adelaide and blogs at www.blog.sina.com.cn/u/2163956491 (in Chinese language).
Eating raw herring is not everyone’s cup of tea, but the Dutch don’t have any qualms about it. My mouth waters at the thought of this delightful delicacy. It is not as unusual as it seems, after all, many of us eat raw oysters, and the Japanese eat sushi and sashimi. Even so, we Dutch have a traditional style of eating raw herring which might be considered a bit peculiar.

The custom of eating raw or “green herring” as we Dutch call it, dates back many centuries; it was already depicted in Dutch drawings of medieval times. We know that the drawings show eating Green Herring because of the distinctive manner in which it is customarily eaten.

The Netherlands is a country wrought from the sea, with an abundance of canals, rivers and lakes. A major part of the Dutch lands border onto the North Sea, a fertile fishing ground. Apparently our hunter-gatherer ancestors discovered these fortuitous riches early, and the Dutch developed a healthy appetite for fish, raw or otherwise.

When chasing migrating fish in the cold and stormy North Sea, it takes a fishing vessel days to get home. Even in the cool climate of the North Atlantic fish, once caught, doesn’t stay fresh all that long. In the days before refrigeration, cleaning out the gut, and sprinkling the fish with salt proved to be a simple and effective method of preserving.

In winter the herring migrate to warmer regions. Because of the calamitous weather in the North Sea with its many violent storms, Dutch fishermen have difficulty catching enough other fish. People started to preserve the summer catch for longer periods, developing the pickled herring (rollmops), and smoked herring (kippers) which are well known by fish lovers the world over. However, the Dutch Green herring is a springtime product which cannot be exported as it is too fresh and not preserved enough to pass import restrictions in most countries.

In spring, after all the pickled and smoked fish consumed during winter, the Dutch are hungry for fresh fish, and when the first fishing boats of the season come in loaded with a herring catch, customers are waiting in the harbour to get their hands on a herring. So eager are they that the raw herring gets eaten as it arrives straight off the ship.

The scales and skin have already been cleaned off, the head, guts and bones removed, but a little piece of tail is left on to keep the two sides of this filleted fish together. This delicacy is a lovely silverish pink, and has a very smooth and rich velvety texture which melts in your mouth, almost like a very thick mousse. It is served with chopped raw onions, which provides a crisp contrast with the smooth texture of the fish.
The Green Herring season lasts only a few months, after which the herring becomes saltier and a bit less smooth. But the Dutch continue eating fresh herring in the traditional manner, as well as take it home to chop it into salads or serve it on bread.

In Netherlands you will observe many people eating herring in the street, right outside the fish shop or market stall where they bought it. Custom dictates that the herring is eaten in a rather peculiar manner: grab the fish by its tail, dip it into the chopped onions, gently raise it above your head, and carefully lower it into your mouth. Trying to drop as little of the onion pieces as possible, take a big bite and chew, crunching the onions into the smooth flesh of the herring, while caressing its texture with your tongue. Repeat three or four times and all you will have left is a small piece of tail. Eating herring like this is an addictive and sensuous experience to any Dutch man or woman.

The aftermath is something different. You need to drink a lot of tea, coffee or milk, or even a shot of jenever, not only because the salty fish makes one thirsty, but because herring and onions is not the most attractive smell to friends or spouses.

Bon Appetit!

© Marianne Pietersen, 2012
the others

darkened by heat, blackened by dirt, bruised

by imperfections, weaker than the light,
immutable flaws, further down in the

hierarchy, not the same, a
different sort, they’re all

the same, that kind,
those sort,
them

....ism

The denial of you means

you hover, like a faint

smell or hide behind

the curtains or lie dormant

below the floorboards:

your temporary residences,

uncomfortable enough

to make you emerge

when my guards are etherised

like when I’m night-swimming

in unusual places, disturbing
my sleep, disrupting my morning
leaving an off taste in my mouth

Hearing other people’s accounts
of their encounters with you
draws you out further, assigns
you with more critical mass

The spikes of your aftertaste
lodge deep within me
wedged in such a way
that leaves it unreachable
impossible to remove

Luther King Jr refused to accept
that we are tragically
bound to your starless midnight

I wish I could be as hopeful
somehow believing a better
bright daybreak will come

The denial of you means
you hover

© Christine Ratnasingham 2012

Christine Ratnasingham is a writer and poet based in Sydney, Australia. Her poetry has been published in the journal conversations and extempore. She works in the human rights sector.
Put your feet up on the bed head
my darling sweet pea,
it’s all done nowadays with scientific repartee.

It’s a turn up for the history books
I can ask a nano mirror to change my imperfect looks.

Nose a little straighter
Eyes a brighter blue
And so much more than you can normally do.
It’s wise to be careful at what I’m quick to say
I called myself a nut, just the other day.

It took me by surprise, I lost a whole day’s pay
when I shrank almost to nothing
cracked open and rolled away.

Thankfully I hit the reset button
for a twenty-four hour stay.

Come to mention it my sweet
have you slipped out for a sec?

Oh no! I’ve called you sweet pea!
Now I’ve lost you in the bed.
When they had Alzheimer’s, 
my grandparents, 
there was no breakdown in communication.

They understood each other.

Before they cut off, 
there were messages 
getting through.

Advice:-
“Don’t buy anything 
unless it’s in a sale 
with 100% reduction. 
Don’t leave home 
without your toothbrush.”

Amusing advice musing.

Arriving at Guantanamo 
without a solitary personal item, 
I was busy mother unpacking my wits.

If I had tweezers, mirror and nail clippers, 
I would become Narcissus.

Perhaps a wig for justice 
to sit upon my shaved head.

They feed us well. 
They think it’s good for our memory.

Doctor Memory can’t find the door.

Metal gauze, provides an unexpected gift 
effective for meditation. 
I play with light, shadow and black.

Soft-shoe stalkers, smack the back of my head. 
This is not the caring discipline of monastic life.

My spirit stays out of my body as much as it can. 
Sometimes there is a bell warning. 
They are coming!
A distant alarm.
A dog’s bark.
The incessant barking of dogma penetrates the walls.

My neighbour said:-
“Don’t give away your secrets
when the owl appears,
talking about what the eagle does.”

What can you make of that?

I have developed my own mantra:-
“Apples fall and Newton
likes to know them.”

Mantras are a good escape.

They get me through
water boarding in Guantanamo Bay.

Answers are in the program.
I don’t know what they are.
Do I need money to buy the program?
What corporation is dining out on this deal?

Pain expels the spirit from my body.

I watch the savage drama spellbound.
I watch myself beaten and abused,
worried for my torturers.
They don’t like themselves.

When spirit returns to my body
and the pain resumes,
I plead for mercy.

Can I make up a story they want me to tell?

The information I don’t have,
is held in the heart of pain;
released to armies of blood.

A child’s story of “Snakes and Ladders”
Guantanamo is leased from Cuba
against their will.
The annual fee is
four thousand and eighty three dollars.
Cuba does not cash the cheques. 
Guantanamo! Fallen chief of the Tainos people; 
travels the corridors, 
chiding the ruthless, 
crying out for truth and justice.

The War on Celery

She was one of those people
who think they can control everything.

We were shopping when she said:
“I hate Celery”
as if celery had done her an injury.

I said: “Well celery doesn’t like you either”
as a joke

but she thought I was sticking up for celery
and she took offence at me
for taking celery’s side.

She tried to make me choose between her and celery.

“Are you with celery or are you with me?”

I held a carrot up to her to help her like celery.
I said celery was good in stews
But that sent her pear-shaped.

The only thing I could do
(to stop us both going bananas)
was to hold out an olive branch and say:

“I know what you mean about celery. 
I hate celery too”

After that everything was apples.

© James Whittington, 2012

James Whittington writes drama, film scripts and poetry. His play OChovihano was performed in the Hunter in 2009, and his short films have been shown in Festivals in Sydney, Chicago, New York and Berlin. “The War on Celery” was published in the Spring Edition of Islet in 2010.
Faith de Savigné

Faces Never Seen Before

They come here
for us to deliver the unknown
faces never seen before
made by people
meeting for the first time

From far earthly reaches
the couples converge
seeing them, I’m thrilled to ask
“how did you find each other?”
hoping they might cover
the distances, obstacles and prejudices
overcome
to find love in a face
foreign from their own
to make this awaiting life

The ultrasound can’t envision
the unique features and colours
this child will bring to light
with the Lebanese dad and Chinese mum
the baby I cradled out
appeared Peruvian

Or the Cook Islander and Australian
their brown toddler son
lay eyes on his blonde baby brother
amazed how totally different
everyone in the room was
except we all looked elated

With the Indian woman and Maori man
though rarely seen together
present on each side of the bed
were her sari-wearing sisters
and his Kiwi bros
now unified for their little girl

These children share origins
Egyptian-Korean
but here in their place of birth
people will ask, “where are you from?”
Waiting outside school
or the sidelines of the playing field
there are no obvious signs of relation
Thai-Greek
but the internal thread of family
African-Japanese
that needs no explanation

Families never guessed at
German-Indonesian
endure comments and stares
Aboriginal-Hungarian
so when you see them
take your first breath
and withhold judgment

Walking Through Your Sleep

I spend my nights
Looking into the face
Of you, the sleeper
Wondering past the surface
Of your home
Laid out, quiet as Sunday morning

Protected by unruly lawn,
My eyes tiptoe
Along your footpath
On guard for stalking dogs, stray car horns
Anything to jolt you forward
Forcing a look out your front windows
To catch this prowler
Taking stock while you’re unoccupied
This most stolen of acts
Trespasses into home invasion

From outside
There’s little to guess
What’s enclosed
Paint cracks around the frames,
But the warm colours give a welcoming veneer
Small details
Bare how you’ve stood up
To age and the elements

Can you sense me out here?
Or have you retreated
To the lounge to watch blood sports
Or deeper for backyard sunning?
Locked in the inner sanctum
These shutters close all out
The most I ever get
Carefully chosen descriptions
Of the interiors

In your safe separate place
You can be awake behind the lids
Without giving away you’re home
And before the door is opened
You’ll compose yourself in the hallway
Before leaving the refuge
Only you
Will ever enter

*The Kerb Treatment*

It all ends up
tossed onto these streets
where passers-by scavenge the kerb
vultures hovering till dark
hoarding to their nests
what others want to be free of;
the TV whose picture is bleak
ripped luggage with travelling long stopped
broken mirrors reflecting bad luck,
used then left for dead
for another to find its worth

But how to get rid of the rest?
needy friends who only want
lovers who won’t accept “it’s over”
thrown to the gutter
alongside mattresses of ripped deceit
trust-worn sofas and the frayed welcome mat
can someone gain from another’s value lost
before the garbos clear it out
crushing the promise of starting again?

© Faith de Savigné, 2012

Faith has had her poems published in Australia and the USA. She lives in Kings Cross, where her story seems to be sagging in the second act.
The Ister

When the poplars stood proud
Keeping watch on the valley
The water’s flow their guide,
Measuring time

The grass blades, unfurling,
Spelt the stories of peoples
Which, like braille, could be read
With palms only

There, by that riverbank
You wrapped each other in song,
Dwelt inside tradition
Sheltered by one.

Here, we stand unsure now
How to wear those strange customs -
Stitching ’til they fit or
Letting them hang?

We wait for rhythm to
Start her count and into steps
Now forgotten, once more
Lead us orphans

© Miro Sandev, 2012

Miro Sandev is a Sydney-based poet and short fiction writer. He has previously worked as a journalist, after successfully avoiding a career in the law.
Persephone, flees, scratching her body,

Soars, wings lightly out over the Styx,

A green featherless pop-eyed white crow,

Curling to the comfort of the sun’s heat.

© Caitlin na Houlihan, 2012

Caitlin na Houlihan aka Patrick Byrt is an author whose Aramaic lineage provides the nom de plume Trybyrt. He writes under an Irish nom de guerre, Caitlin na Houlihan. He is Convenor of the Multicultural Writers Association of Australia. His interests range from AAA to ZZZ…
I cup my hands with water
gushing from beneath the earth;
cool, refreshing,
as I walk in scalding heat
in southern France and Italy.
“what have the Romans
ever done for us?’
I wish they’d also been to Oz!
whose scapes where I grew up
look like the land I’m lost in now.
I could have written,
“like the land I find myself in now” -
but you cannot find yourself
until you lose yourself.
Yet I sense some parts of me
long have been amid here.
Have I come to Europe
to meet these traces?
If this water
recollects these,
do I taste them now?
Water forms
seventy percent
of my body -
this must imbue me
with a sense of flow;
fancies, feelings
flooding to my surface,
flavouring my fossicking,
footsteps of flaneur,
au fait with far more
than my life so far suggests.

Seventh day in Europe -
first ever visit here.
The Lonely Planet
I look through every day,
yet it hardly touches on
the Europe that presents itself in me.
“You wouldn’t read about it” -
but if I keep on writing this,
making this a finished poem,
you then just might.
Should I not compose this
in Italian or French?
If my grasp were good I would.
My poetic license
states preference
for shortish words
of Anglo-Saxon source
over ones from Latin
with many syllables.
But that can surely be relaxed
for a story such as this -
Anglo-Saxon resonates
with the way
my ancestors
in Tyrol spoke.
But if they roamed around these parts
my words of Latin origin
would echo theirs.

I hold roots too
in lands of Southern Slavs,
where my travels
soon will take me;
Caesars used to rule there,
so I’m looking forward
to their liquid legacy.

But is that really why
this water flows?
I ponder once I’m back in Oz.
Could it be from engineering
far more recent,
less romantic?
Well, no matter what the story
you’re better off in Tuscany
than pseudo-Tuscan Sydney,
where in streets and parks
taps and bubblers
have vanished like the Romans’ plumbing.

To tide me over
till again I walk about
in their former terra
I’ll plumb my memories of water
and those who left their trace in me.

© Mark Marusic, 2012

A lifelong resident of Sydney, Mark Marusic has published 2 books of poetry –
Mercurial Meanderings (2004) and Square Circle (2005). He performs his poems at
various Sydney poetry venues, writes short stories, plays, social and political comments and essays, and also reviews Jungian books.
The Bard Abroad

Culture shock has turned my head
Turned my neck from white to red
Turned my life from joy to dread,
My face a mask that of the dead.

I came here once to see beyond
To loosen isolation’s bond
To make my mind like Lao Tsu’s pond,
My heart a soft unfurling frond.

But now I’m out here in this world
In which my hopes have not uncurled
In which such grit and grime is hurled -
Yet isn’t that what forms a pearl?

© Katinka Smit, 2012

Katinka is a first generation Australian of Dutch heritage living in Germany, awaiting her husband’s visa approval for Australia. She thought she wasn’t quite Australian until she ventured into the world again and realised she wasn’t Dutch either. She has spent time living in Thailand, Germany, New Zealand and, as a child, America and Holland. She loves the world but is looking forward to coming home.
My beloved friends,

“Love is the Water of Life”

Did you know Rumi said that?

Yes, Rumi the Great Poet said that!

Love is the water of life; it is the fountain of life

And it is the light of life that illuminates our soul

And awakens our being

Advancing towards death

Without seizing the Water of Life

Is the cause to our agony

The absence of love in our heart

Is the root to our jealousy

So now let’s drink!

Let’s drink the Water of Life as we please

So we could spread the joy to those who love us

And send the blessings to those who hate us

My beloved friends,

Let’s drink the Water of Life as we please

Let’s fill the cup of our heart with much love

And may the earth be forever in peace.

© Subhan Zein, 2012
Samantha Sirimanne Hyde

Migration

creeping softly to the attic
in awe I gaze at its walls
swathed with bogong moths
heads under the wings
of the ones in front
like soft-tufted roof tiles

the moths soar by night
under a star-dotted sky
migrating to cooler climes
yet urban lights dupe them
that it’s daylight
so for now they take cover

many make the trip
but few will survive
this rambling harsh journey
like thousands who arrive
by plane and leaky boat
to have their hopes spent

gambles gone awry

Differing Opinions

Wait for a stronger breeze
He says more to himself
Don’t think it matters
I whisper to myself
Flinging a pebble
Midst the wrinkling water
Needing to deflect
From my pain

Leaves flutter off the gums
Weaving crazy coils in the air
Cutting through the shrill cold
Grabben Gullen wind
Tilted, the little box
Trembles in his hand
And the ashes fly away
Over our dam
Like the many ripples
Created by my pebble
The cycle of birth
Will go on
She, like me, will be reborn
In the passageway
Of this drawn out Samsara

Our paths will cross again

She loved tramping
This water, he says
Unable to look my way
In my mind’s eye, I see her
With her silt-soaked paws
Rambling behind him
Unhurried
He stares upwards and says
Perhaps she’s up there

A golden angel

© Samantha Sirimanne Hyde, 2012

Samantha Sirimanne Hyde lives mostly in Grabben Gullen, NSW. She enjoys dabbling in poetry and writing fiction to shorter and shorter word counts.