

shells. Bliss. A lot of my childish instincts feed my adult delights. The very best part of life as a child though was the weekends when we would all go up to our wooden cabin at Ferntree Gully on the slopes of Mount Wellington. It was simple living and set in the heart of the bush, not dry bush but lush bush with tree ferns on the edge of the stream. Wherever possible my parents would gather up their nets, sucking tube and small containers and go off collecting insects. For us we would prefer to play in the stream getting wet and muddy. Its dank distinctive smell of rotting leaves was the smell I carried with me for years. It is my one really vivid memory of the place I'd been born in and loved. I carried this smell to the opposite end of the earth, always looking, always hoping I would find it.

Finally I did. In the Mountains of Mourne when I was thirteen and where I was with Jeremy, while our parents were at an entomological conference. It is a moderately high mountain with sheep grazing in swooping green paddocks. Coming down we wandered to one of the more enclosed gullies. I think my nose first gave me hope with slight smells on the wind and then, yes, it was there. A very different gully, larger, more open with boulders and tree ferns hanging over the coffee coloured water in the tumbling stream. Above all it had the distinctive smell, of dankness of rotting leaves, that I had been looking for since Hobart. The smell of my childhood.

Many aspects of my early childhood in



THE WAR YEARS. NO EFFORT WAS SPARED IN MAKING SOLDIER UNIFORMS FOR LITTLE BOYS.

Hobart were idyllic. No mother rushing off to work, juggling work and dropping off children. Lots of time to spend as a family and particularly time with Dutchy on the beach or playing in the garden alone with my toys or perhaps with Jeremy organising me.

On the other side of the coin and despite being such a happy place for my mother, there was an incident of acute trauma for her which she never got over, and I'm sure affected her love for me. She loved me, but being a girl I was a reminder of that terrible experience which she felt every year.

Her first born child was full term but stillborn, and called Fenella. The next child, Jeremy, was by the very nature of being a boy less traumatic and easier to love whereas I as a girl gave the constant reminder of Fenella. I also wondered if growing up with such competitive sisters made loving a daughter harder. Certainly Je was her favourite and I was the apple of my father's eye.

My father was the Government entomologist for Tasmania. In 1944, with the war still raging in England, he was returning from a work trip driving round the island. Looking across the Derwent to Hobart safely nestled at the foot of Mt. Wellington he suddenly felt he must return to England to help in any way he could in the war. He was English and his father still lived in London. Hobart was sadly packed up. My father went by ship to England and with my mother we went to spend the year living with my grandmother in Canberra. She was considered an amazing woman but was not a warm cuddly person. Highly educated she was an early Canberra settler and well known for taking the jar of homemade jam or flowers from the garden to the newcomers of Canberra. Sadly though, she found it particularly hard to relate to young children. Aunt Pat and Aunt Hope were also living in Canberra at the time. I don't remember any feelings of warm vibes about them. I just remember overtones of conversations indicating they resented us being there taking up their mother's time.

It felt as if we were in transit for a year. I was five and went off to the kindergarten down the road at the Girls' Grammar. It was my first taste of school and I didn't like it. I howled when Dutchy left until, believe it or not, they found an Orlando book and I immediately felt at home. Actually where I felt most at home in that year was in a little spinney in a corner of the garden where I felt safe and hidden away, and a strange passageway at the back of the house with drooping hydrangeas and a magical smell. I spent a lot of time in these two places with gollywog and his friends. When inside I always headed for one of the two low stools by the fire, they had soft leather tops and wooden legs and were really too low to fall off.

I realise now how relieved Dutchy must have been to finally get a passage for all of us on the *Athlone Castle*, one of the first ships to take passengers towards the end of the war. We were on our way to be with my father again. It was a seven-week voyage but I remember it as fun. Watching the sea

has a mesmerising effect and one that I never got tired of. Added to that we had endless lifeboat drills and blackout practices but best of all we took on troops in New York and as they lined up for their turn in the bathroom they would pass me (the only little girl on board) over their heads. We stopped at the Azores and had baskets on a rope which we could lower to the boatmen below and then they would fill them up with local crafts; we'd haul them up and keep and pay for anything we wanted. Of course Jeremy got the only wooden boat. Still I remember it as being lots of fun.

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### We landed on Good Friday, the day after the last rocket fell on England in 1945.

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A welcoming band was playing as we pulled into the wharf. It made us feel very special, but my father wasn't there. He was in London and for security reasons had only just received a telegram announcing our arrival. I can imagine his relief that we had arrived safely. He would have heard no news of the *Athlone Castle* for seven weeks, would not have known if we were travelling in convoy or alone and would have always been worried that we might have been torpedoed. We caught a train to London and there he was. Utterly unused to trains I then in my excitement managed to fall into the gap between the train and the platform. I was nearly six and Jeremy nearly eight.

We now had a home of our own again. It was on the outskirts of a village, Chalfont St Giles, in Bucks about an hour from London. It was our own house with its own address, Mill Field, Mill Lane. It was a two-storey house, with a large garden and a wood, my own bedroom upstairs and a scary corridor that went to the upstairs bathroom with a manhole above that someone could jump out of onto me. No one ever did but it was scary. That was the only scary thing in my new world. Everything else seemed to hug me around with a feeling of 'this is where you belong'.

(to be continued perhaps ...)

#### WRITING WORKSHOP

This story by Jo Gordon and Maggie Hickey's 'Not For Sale' on page 33 came out of a writing workshop run by Pauline Webber during 2016.

# Shop locally

Robin Tennant-Wood makes the case for keeping your loot local

Over the Christmas and wider holiday period, people's attention turns to shopping. Everyone wants a bargain and kids facing the long summer break are looking for work. A compilation of typical comments from the local Facebook page send some mixed messages:

"That café is too expensive. I'm not going there again."

"The prices in the local supermarket are too high. Woolies and Coles are cheaper."

"Why don't local businesses employ more of our kids?"

Our little town is blessed with a good range of businesses, far more so than a lot of other towns of similar size. Starting or buying a business in a small country town requires several things: a commitment to local economy, confidence in local trade, and a lot of luck. However, none of these will mean anything unless there is also a commitment from the local community to ensuring that local businesses remain open.

While online shopping is fast, convenient and allows for quick price comparisons for the thrifty shopper, it often comes with hidden drawbacks, such as postage or delivery costs and the question as to whether goods will actually arrive in time for Christmas.

Heading to the mall is about as appealing as taking a dip in the shark tank at Sydney Aquarium – and possibly less safe – but the advantage of finding everything under one tinsel-decked roof is undeniable.

A trip to Canberra might get you a trolley full of groceries for \$20 less, but factor in petrol, parking and a two-hour round trip and that \$20 saving starts to look a lot less appealing. You'll also have the repetitive strains of *I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas* and/or *Frosty the Snowman* in your head for the next two days. Is it really worth it?

The economic benefits of shopping locally are well documented. While multi-national chains write their own rules and often have negative impacts far beyond the sight of the individual

consumer, local businesses can generate wealth in ways that are both equitable and sustainable.

Research in 2010 found that for every hundred dollars spent in a local bookstore, \$45 stayed in the local economy. Conversely, for every hundred spent at a chain bookstore, only \$13 stayed in the local community. The key differences are that local shops are owned and managed locally, are more likely to use local banking, accounting and legal firms, and local suppliers. Small businesses create local jobs and this, in turn, puts more money back into the local economy.

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When you shop locally, the person serving you at the counter is often the person who owns the shop.

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Their children go to the local school, they pay rates to the council and taxes to the government. Personal contact also means that if they don't have what you want, they are more likely to be able to source it quickly through their local supply chain.

Making a purchase online, while it has the advantage of convenience, will not create a single local job. That trip to the mall might net you a car full of Christmas goodies in a single morning, but most of those goodies will be from stores with offshore parent companies that pay no tax in Australia.

So next time you think a local café is overcharging for your cappuccino or the sour cream for your chips, why not ask the owner if they've made a mistake with the bill instead of taking to Facebook? If you think the local supermarket is overpriced, remember the number of people it employs and the fact that standing in the IGA checkout queue at least once a week will get you up to date with all the local gossip – and that's something you won't get at Dickson Woolies!



"Best wishes for a happy and safe festive season."

Mike

The Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM MP  
Federal Member for Eden-Monaro