



# Life and loss

An essay by Robin Tennant-Wood

THE EDITOR ASKED ME if I would write about 'life after Roger', but as it's still only four weeks since my partner of 20 years slipped away to begin his next mission, I'm still not sure what a post-Roger life will look like. What I can write about is time and space, and how the death of a life-partner will alter these concepts: sometimes warping them together into a single Mobius strip; other times shattering them like glass. I can write about how the familiar becomes unrecognisable as the new conditions of life change the lens through which one views the world. I can reflect on what is important in a life suddenly turned on its head.

In the first week of January, Roger and I entered a long, black tunnel together. Five weeks later I emerged from it alone, blinking in the sunlight as I walked away from Braidwood Hospital on a thoroughly unremarkable late summer Sunday afternoon. Someone once wrote that tragedies play out against very ordinary backgrounds. Even though my life had been ripped and shaken to its core, the regular sounds and sights of small-town Sunday were present in the drone of a lawnmower, the shouts of kids on bikes, a magpie on the telephone wires, a dog barking. The black tunnel closed behind me. All that was left was for me to move forward into a

world that was so different, yet looked and sounded so familiar.

In the weeks since Roger's death I've noticed that things once important are suddenly not so. 'Things', in fact, are not important at all. People are important. Life is important. The connections that join us to one another, connections so fragile that they can vanish in an instant, yet somehow still survive, are important. The rest is just 'stuff'. Where I was once almost umbilically connected to my mobile phone, I now find myself forgetting it and leaving it at home or in the car. Once-valued possessions are just so much clutter.

There's a wonderful term I recently read about regarding bereavement: holding space. Holding space for someone means allowing them the time and space they need to find their own way while still remaining present for them. In a practical sense it involves knowing when to stand back and when to come close, giving information or guidance only as needed, respecting that each person's experience will be different, and importantly, remaining non-judgemental. This allows the bereaved person to find their feet, make mistakes and learn from them, and also to feel safe in asking for help. I've found that some people are natural space holders: people who seem to instinctively know

when to call or to drop by the shop; people who know whether what is needed are words or silence. The gentlest people are sometimes the strongest; the most innocent can be the wisest.

My fridge at home contains one jar of homemade sauerkraut, half a tub of margarine, some cheese and a small, thriving, furry ecosystem that I think used to be an avocado. My freezer, which once held the excess of the veggie garden's bounty, now contains only a bottle of vodka and a piece of Christmas cake that may or may not have arrived on the First Fleet. I probably shouldn't be admitting this in the public domain, and no, I don't need an intervention (no, really – the vodka's been there for ages!). Food and cooking, once enjoyable pastimes, now mechanical actions, will, I'm sure, regain their appeal over time.

Time contracts and expands irregularly and unpredictably. A moment spent staring into space can be an hour. An hour spent on a task may only be a moment. The changing colour of the leaves of the Chinese pistachio outside the kitchen window can hold my attention for an eon but dealing with emails and internet business occupies me for a nanosecond. Sometimes it feels like I'm a small round stone lying perfectly still at the bottom of a deep vortex, with my life spinning chaotically around me.

Yet even in this chaotic world I find continuity. There is a business to run, pets to care for, a house to maintain, a garden to tend. The wallabies have eaten the roses – again – but one of them now has a joey. Can I deny this little family a nibble of my roses? They're only plants, after all. I can't return to 'normal' life because there's no such thing as normal any more, but there is refuge in the ordinary.



Robin Tennant-Wood is the owner of Miss Ruby's Bookshop. Her husband, Roger Pye, died on 15th February 2015, five weeks after being diagnosed with lung cancer.



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Here you are — sorry it's late. It is a hard life these days when nothing seems to ever change except the date. It's flying past at a million miles an hour, so it's always later than I think.

There are no details about the mooted amalgamation of Palerang and Queanbeyan Councils in this issue. The saga is unfolding as we speak but there is not much I can tell you for sure about what will happen.

Residents of both local government areas will soon receive information from their respective councils outlining the available options. The two councils have been co-operating with State Government-appointed consultants to assess which option, stand alone or combine, best meets the requirements of 'Fit For the Future' and provides the best deal for each council's ratepayers and residents.

After being a Palerang councillor for six-and-a-bit years, my own view is that we should continue to go it alone. It's clear from the combined meetings that Palerang and Queanbeyan councils have different skill sets, both in the staff and the councillors.

On top of that — Queanbeyan don't want us — why would they? If the State Government forces the two councils to merge, Queanbeyan, which will end up with nearly all the councillors, will see Palerang as poor cousin foist upon them.

A wooden bridge on our Cooma Road (and that's not their Cooma Road, either Old or New), will struggle to attract councillor support away from, say, a bigger pool or other community centre in Queanbeyan City.

But there's always the question of rates income. Neither council is wholly able to meet its FFF mandatory fiscal position without raising more revenue in the future. A merged entity might, through cross-subsidising, allow our increase to be lessened. To put it crudely, it would be the cost of maintaining local representation.

When the 'Palerang Fit for the Future' flyer (or whatever it's called) arrives in the mail, it will spell out these options and ask for your opinion. Please think about it, start the discussion and tell Council your views.

Paul Cockram

Publisher & Editor: Paul Cockram  
 BWD is published by Artplan Graphics  
 64 Budawang Road, Mongarlowe NSW 2622  
 Telephone: 0417 459 775  
 email: paul@artplan.com.au  
 Printed by: Trendsetting, Fyshwick ACT