

# DAMASCUS MOMENTS



An anthology of writing by the students of  
St Paul's Catholic College  
Greystanes



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ROUGH DIAMOND PRESS

*an imprint of*

St Pauls Catholic College

Greystanes

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The staff of St Pauls Catholic College  
who inspire great writing across all KLAs every day.

I myself feel confident about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. (*St Paul's reason for writing so boldly.*)

Romans 15:14

We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1 John 1:4

## CONTENTS

Foreword	ix
<b>PART ONE <i>Memoir</i></b>	
Hike to the Top of the World <i>Musawar Gafari</i>	2
Chapters of Life <i>Lachlan Nolan</i>	5
Canal Road <i>Liam Abdy</i>	8
Rite of Passage <i>Ben Cerniauskas</i>	10
Guardian Angel <i>Ben Farrugia</i>	11
Fijian Romance <i>Jason Prasad</i>	12
The Boree Track <i>Ziggy Kowalski</i>	13
A Cricket Moment <i>Nitin Moopnar</i>	16
Lebanon <i>Peter Geagea</i>	17
Concrete Driveways & Holden Plate <i>Damien Gordon</i>	18
Iraq <i>Haider Zawaidi</i>	19
Displacement <i>Anonymous</i>	20
Jindabyne <i>Raymond Matar</i>	21
Ghidee Jim <i>Nathan Boulous</i>	22
Farewell to Iraq <i>Azal Rufaeel</i>	23
Exhalation <i>Anonymous</i>	25
A Man's Journey to Happiness <i>Nicholas Petreski</i>	27

## **PART TWO Poetry**

The Countryside	32
<i>Isaac Zammit</i>	
The Mountains	32
<i>Griffin Zaher</i>	
Tectonic Plates	32
<i>Abishek Sivagumaar</i>	
Promises and My World	33
<i>Sebastian Foster</i>	
Soccer Ball	34
<i>Geetansh Kaushal</i>	
iPhone	35
<i>Nishpaksh Thaman</i>	
Pencil	36
<i>Rynan Michael</i>	
Pluto	37
<i>Shivank Goel</i>	
Summer Symphony	38
<i>Sosefo Taufa</i>	
Growing Up With It	39
<i>Alvin Lanojan</i>	
Snowflake and Bottlebrush	40
<i>G P Curtin</i>	





## FOREWORD

For some time now, it has been our vision to establish an in-house publishing entity at the College. Rough Diamond Press is the culmination of that vision; *Damascus Moments* is its inaugural publication. These titles reference the process of refinement and transformation intrinsic to acts of reading and writing, and St Paul's epiphany on the road to Damascus.

St Paul was a prolific writer. The revolutionary zeal required to unify the early Church is reflected in his words and his deeds. Paul's letters, composed directly or indirectly by him, collectively comprise the largest section of the New Testament.

*Damascus Moments* is an anthology of inspiring work by inspired students. Through this collection, we celebrate the quiet – and not so quiet – realisations experienced by our boys, crystallised in language. The works that follow are a product of great teaching acting on the raw material of personal experience.

In an age dominated by technology, the will to communicate with each other remains crucial. Great literature and journalism retain a treasured status in our human experience: they are the first drafts of history and important chronicles of private and public experience. The digital word has replaced the printed word across many mediums, but the reflective, communicative and cultural forces of language – its capacity to evoke and provoke – are not diminished.

The first compositions to appear in this inaugural edition of *Damascus Moments* are memoirs composed by Year 10 students of 2015. They were generated through a thematic study entitled 'Overcoming Adversity', anchored in a class analysis of *The Happiest Refugee* by Anh Do. Like Do's work, the pieces represented here reveal a profound spiritual connectedness to otherwise commonplace experiences of life.

The power of memoir lies in its retrospection. What I find most moving and arresting about the students' pieces is the subtle weaving of enduring values and beliefs through otherwise ordinary encounters with family, friends, neighbours and mates – the indelible imprint of experience on the mind and soul of a boy. And their works remind us that profound moments are not always played out in grandiose settings: suburban streets, familiar beaches, country properties, lost homelands are the landscapes of their personal narratives.

We hope you enjoy the boys' contributions, and we hope you revisit *Damascus Moments* again and again across time. Our vision is to establish it as a permanent publication on our College website, with possibilities beyond, to preserve and publish our students' writing into the future.

Your ongoing interest in our boys' compositions will provide significant empowerment and inspiration for them as developing writers daring to experiment, and honing their skills for authentic audiences.

*Mrs Jennifer Simonetta*

2016



# PART ONE

*Memoir*

# HIKE TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD

*Musawar Gafori*

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing there is a field. I will meet you there.  
When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about.*

Rumi

## Prologue

*Have you ever felt time stop? I have heard this line time and time again in movies and books. Usually to describe an experience that elevates spiritually. Where your emotions run so crazy that time itself becomes irrelevant. You may ask how this is possible. I'll tell you. Time doesn't exist; clocks exist. Time is just an agreed construct. We have taken distance (one rotation of the earth, and one orbit of the sun), divided it into segments, then given those segments labels. While it has its uses, we have been programmed to live our lives by this construct as if it were real. We have confused our shared construct with something that is tangible and thus have become its slave. And suddenly, when we humans experience something so beautiful that proves this construct irrelevant, we truly appreciate life for what it is and not for what it should be. It's ironic how I'll never forget the date on which time became irrelevant for me. It was the the 25 December 2015. I recall that day as if it were my last. The wind, the sea and the horizon that glistened like a lover's departing smile.*

Located around three hours' walk south of Wottamolla, Eagle Rock is a highlight along the coastal track of Australia. The pure white rock stands out against the harder sandstone of the coastal cliffs. Its sharp edges and deep cracks radiate a perilous vibe, and a rather unique shape, like a slice of cake perched high above the pounding ocean. The white colour is caused by iron leaching, which makes the sandstone layers dangerously soft, prone to cracking and vulnerable to collapse. It was petitioned many times that standing on the rock be made illegal.

Sounds daunting, right? Wrong. As I eagerly listened to my cousin describe this phenomenon, all I could think about was the amount of likes I would get on my next Instagram post, posing on this rock. Proving to the world that Musawar Gafori's got the biggest balls of all.

Driven by our egos, and much to the disappointment of our parents, we decided to go on this terrifying trek. Were we suicidal? Or, rather, stupid? Neither. Just bored teenagers in search of purpose. My mum has always been a very understanding woman. Perhaps that's why I've never hidden anything from her. So, when I told her about our plan that night, she replied with only a few words: *Do what you have to? Your life is worth much more than these petty thrills.* I was disgusted. She had made it sound as if I was some adrenaline junkie who threw himself off every building he came across. Adults are always diagnosing our generation with problems that they themselves have created. Evidently, the technology that we apparently 'spend hours on' was welcomed and hailed by them. We're just looking for something that can define us. It's commonly overlooked that we're the middle children of history, no purpose or place. We have no great war, or great depression. Perhaps that's why we're so hell-bent on going against the system, creating something of our own and giving the finger to the rules and morals set by our forefathers.

So, we set off. Packed with too much food and twice as much defiance.

I've always hated trains. For starters, the smell is enough to make someone lose all faith in humanity. A tropical blend of fresh urine, zesty vomit and fossilised excrement gushes up your nose as soon as those sliding doors creak open. The constant rocking and bouncing gives a sense of motion sickness so strong that it puts years of seasickness to shame. And not to mention toothless Fred, who's been in the same corner of the carriage for ten years, and in the same clothes for twice as long. He's always there.

I had an hour's worth of stimulating my senses, from Martin Place to waterfall station. Finally, I had to perform an exorcism to pull my cousin out of the trance he calls sleep. As the doors of the train rumbled open, the sweet, pure air of the Royal National Park came as a saving grace. And the day that I would never forget finally began. We started our journey at the Wottamolla picnic area with two bottles of water, two protein bars, two bananas and a packet of chips between us. It was a three-and-a-half-hour trek to the rock. Little did I know it was just about to become a whole lot longer.

Halfway into our ascension as the incline of the track got steeper so did the decline of our energy. We stopped for a break and placed our bags down. "What should we have first?" I asked. Before I could get my answer, my cousins were already halfway through a banana. Warily, as I fumbled through his bag for a protein bar, my fingers groped empty air. "WHERE'S THE FOOD?" I exclaimed.

He looked at me suspiciously. "Don't exaggerate, it's just a banana." He thought I was going off at him for eating the food.

"I'm serious, where's the food?" In that split second all the colour drained from his face, as if somewhere deep down someone had pulled a plug inside him. "You left it in the train, didn't you?" Somehow I knew exactly where he had left it. It came back to me. Me yanking him off his seat, him blindly grabbing his bag and leaving the plastic bag filled with life on the seat. I dropped to my knees in devastation. We were halfway there – so close and yet a million leagues away. What makes this memory so special is what happened right after that.

All my life I've known myself to be a very logical person. Determining my actions by weighing up the pros and cons. If this was some other day, as soon as I realised that we had no food to continue with, let alone make our way back, I would've drawn the conclusion that any hope of reaching the rock would be futile. Yet for the first time in my life reason was irrelevant. Time was irrelevant. All I knew was that I had to climb this rock. Not for the Instagram picture, not even because of my stubbornness that rooted deeper than an ocean. But because of the simple fact that I had undertaken this task to the disapproval of my mum. If I were to return home and say that we didn't do it because we were too stupid to handle our food, I would just be proving her point.

I'm not one for self-analysis, but you could say that decision was a transitional trigger which set a chain of events into motion that are continuously moulding me into who I am. I was changing. I don't know if it was for the better or worse. But it was happening. I got up, put my bag on and started walking. My cousin saw the determination in my eyes as I walked past him. It

was an ignited inferno. Without saying a word, he packed his bag and followed me. Up until this day he says to me that that look on my face could convince him to do anything.

Making my mind up about it was one thing. Actually trekking for three hours without food required a bit more than will power. Our strides were sluggish. Our senses were muffled and our throats were parched. We took little sips of water, rationing each drop. Time was fragmented. Each second lasted an hour. In that moment, I can't help but relate our situation to the climax of *Lord of the Rings*. Where Samwise Gamgee and Frodo almost crawled to Mount Doom to destroy the ring. They had purpose and so did we. And our hunger, thirst and weariness played the part of Gollum, the persistent fiend stopping us from attaining our goal.

I was cold. It was an irrelevant observation. But a sinister chill had set in my bones which made my body rattle vigorously. Higher powers were at play. We had been trekking for over three hours now, why weren't we there yet? Everything was a blur. All the possibilities ran through my head. Had we taken a wrong turn? Or had I passed out, and this whole thing was a dream. Whatever it was, I had to keep going. If I stopped I knew I wouldn't be able to get up again.

So, we didn't stop. We kept going until 'fatigue' wasn't some trivial word in the dictionary, it was our very existence. Everything we knew was fatigue. Our whole being was defined by this very word. We kept going until that glistening white stone was finally before us. It could've been an illusion for all I knew. Though it was a welcome one.

The ground changed beneath our feet. The mud and grass of the track suddenly turned into firm sandstone. And for the first time that day I felt stable. As the bushes cleared, we were flooded by blue. The sky poured onto us and the horizon emerged as a long lost friend. I felt as if I was reborn. The purity of that setting sun and that cleansing smell of the sea would stick in my memories forever. I walked over to the edge of the cliff, sat down and took it all in. The rock, the sunset and the pounding ocean which lay at my feet. I was on top of the world. Not literally, but I had never felt closer to God.

And at that very moment, time stopped. I forgot who I was, what I wanted, what I needed, I forgot my worries and I let my pride escape me. At that moment, I was nothing but an element of nature. A mere brush stroke on the illustrious canvas of that divine being.

I don't remember how long we sat on that rock. But sometime right before the sun went down, we decided to try to walk back. I think we were both trying to avoid the fact that we may never make it back. Dehydrated, malnourished and fatigued, we gritted our teeth and set off. Submitting ourselves completely to a higher power.

Just before the bush consumed us again, we came across another person who had trekked all the way up. Only she hadn't forgotten her bag on the train. So, we ate and drank and shared experiences about the daunting Eagle Rock.

On the train going home the epiphany hit me. I had forgotten to take the photo for which I had set off on this trek in the first place.

## CHAPTERS OF LIFE

*Lachlan Nolan*

### ENGLAND

In the month April of 2012, my whole family and members of my extended family went overseas to England where my Grand Uncle Anthony was living. We all travelled there because after two broken hearts my uncle was finally getting married. My family, having the best connection to him, stayed in Newcastle upon Tyne the longest because we have a group of friends, The Andersons, who live in Hepscott, which is a small village in the town of Morpeth. Having friends in Newcastle, finding a place to stay was easy so our family split up. Being the youngest, I stayed with Mum and Dad at The Andersons' house. It was enormous!

On the third night, I can remember going to a pub in Ashington called The Block and Tackle. It was a lovely looking pub from the outside, but inside it was more like the dream home of a middle-aged man from another era. A pub that stank of beer, as loud as a rock concert with four pool tables, a TV in every corner of the room with the football on, a betting stand called 'Ladbrokes' and best of all a stunning bartender who made all the dirty old men drool. This was paradise, if only I was of legal age to drink and to gamble. The Block and Tackle was a ten-minute walk from where we were staying at another one of our friend's houses in Ashington. Our friend had the biggest Geordie accent when he was sober, but when he got on the drink you needed a translator just to understand *Do you want another beer?*

We were at the Andersons one day and my brother, sister, the Anderson kids and I went to the little stream down the road to construct a bridge. We set out as a group of six walking down the street together and it was a wonderful day: birds flying everywhere, butterflies floating in the air and the smell of the freshest air ever. When we arrived it was a wonderful little stream with trees hanging over it like a pathway through the bush. We all went out looking for sticks and branches to cross the stream and my brother, Jake and the Andersons' oldest son, Elliot brought back branches that looked like small trees, while the girls and I had smaller sticks. After we made the bridge we all walked back up the street to the park where we played hide-and-seek. I ran through a small bush, which I ended up having a reaction to and I found out that I had also stepped in dog poo.

My Uncle's wedding was held in Edinburgh at Alnwick Gardens where my most favourite cafe in the world, The Treehouse Café is. It is like a giant treehouse and there are rope bridges going everywhere and it is like entering another world. This place was wonderful, the most beautiful place I have ever seen, and there was a brilliant water fountain and perfectly manicured hedges.

The big day finally arrived. I woke up under the sun roof on the lounge of our motel room and it was snowing, the first time I had ever seen snow falling. It was wonderful. The fresh soft snow was cool but warm at the same time somehow.

I suited up in black pants, white shirt, silver tie and black jacket. Damn, I looked sexy. It was true. It was the first time I had ever dressed up and I looked amazing! At least I thought, anyway. We arrived at the gardens to see all the Nolans there. Grandma, who is my *great* Grandma was on skype. Seeing all my very distant relatives was so weird. Everyone was saying that my 4th cousin, Fin and I look exactly alike. Fin was from the side of the family who lived in Ireland, and for the rest of the trip I copped a ribbing from my whole family about how we were identical.

That day was the proudest I have ever been of my Uncle – just how good he looked and how his bald head reflected the United Kingdom's sun so vibrantly. Sarah, his wife, and my new Auntie wore a wig made because she had recently emerged from a battle with cancer that left her own hair very short. She wanted to be beautiful and she *was* very beautiful on her wedding day. The service went for a couple of hours and included many funny moments, some being when my uncle and his best man, my dad had to do an Irish dance, and they honestly looked like the biggest idiots. If you ask my uncle what and when his most favourite day was he would say his wedding day because most of the family were there and it was one of the best days of that week weatherwise.

## COOK ISLANDS

The best holiday that I have ever been on was when I went to the Cook Islands (Rarotonga) with my brother, Jake, and my Grandpa, Pa John. We had a flight with a stopover at Auckland, New Zealand. It was the first time I had ever been to New Zealand and we just stayed in the airport because we had a flight leaving in an hour. This trip was the best holiday for me ever because my brother and I had so much freedom. Mum and Dad weren't there and Pa was a coach for the Papua New Guinea touch football side.

My family has always been involved in touch. Nan and Pa used to run the Penrith Touch Association so my brother, sister and I have loads of Penrith gear. I have heard stories about how good my Aunt used to be at touch and I think that after her death Nan and Pa just thought that they should remain in sport management.

The first three days we were in Rarotonga, my Pa was with my brother and I the whole time, and being a small island everything was easy to get to. We stayed at this hotel called Edge Water and, as the name implies it is located on the water. One of the days that we were there my brother and I lured some chicks into the room – baby chickens, not girls – and when Pa got back he was going off at us saying they could have pooped in there. That night we went out with one of my Pa's friends and her daughter. When we met, I was gobsmacked. It was like love at first sight: perfect, same age, beautiful, smart and best of all she was smaller than me. I was a very small child back in the day.

On the second day, we went to get fish and chips in a town that was about 6 km away from the hotel we were staying at. My favourite seafood is fried octopus, so I ordered that and I



loved it. Fresh and fried to perfection. Because it was the best calamari I have ever had I smashed it down and on the last chewy ring it got stuck in my throat. I thought I was going to die. I was turning red, then purple, my Pa slapping my back as hard as he could. Then he got up behind me, wrapped his hands around my lungs and pulled as hard as he could until the small ring of calamari flew onto the table and I could breath.

For the next two days, we adopted the same routine going to the same fish shop, and then walking back and swimming out to the reef. One day we were out on the reef and we found a sea snake swimming about ten meters from us. When we got back to the room we found Pa stressing out on the phone to Mum and Dad. When we walked into the room he sighed with relief. Apparently, while we were out on the reef there was a tsunami warning. I've never felt a hug so tight as the one he gave us that day.

When we saw Mum and Dad two days later they also hugged and kissed us, relieved that we were still alive because the phone reception on the whole island went out after the shock of the earthquake reached the island. Even though we could have died, this trip was the best trip that I have ever gone on. Not only because we had so much freedom, but also because I realised my mortality. What if I never saw my parents and my sister again? How would Mum survive losing her two sons? How would my sister survive growing up without her brothers? My Grandpa would blame himself for the rest of his life.

I returned to Australia feeling very alive!

## CANAL ROAD

*Liam Abdy*

**A**t Canal Road, Greystanes there is a certain something that makes you know you're home. The place preserves that uniquely Australian culture of outdoor play with neighbourhood friends until the dark and the night-time curfew fall upon us. On Christmas Eve, wives gather on the street serving platters of exotic cheese and sipping wine, gossiping about this person and that. Husbands gather around a barbeque flipping snags, tongs in one hand and stubby in the other. Kids play footy and cricket on the road, one eye out for approaching cars.

But there is one evening I will never forget...

My Auntie Anna was visiting for a week. She is that cool kind of Auntie who lets you stay up late and eat junk food without grouching on you for it. So one night we decided to sleep out in the garage. By 2am she was sound asleep and I was still wide awake, hiding beneath the covers from monsters lurking in the dark. Auntie Anna had supplied a whole armory of Nerf guns so we could combat the aliens with a barrage of soft foam bullets.

It was usually cold in the garage and I was always too scared to leave my safe outpost of warm blankets to secure the military compound of my childhood imagination. But on this particular night the garage seemed to warm up and the pungent smell of burning wood seeped in. Light black soot morphed into a thick dense smoke.

Whoosh! The tin garage door sprang up and there stood a figure screaming at the top of its lungs. I emerged from beneath the covers and readied myself for enemy engagement with my trusty artillery.

Bang! I fired three shots, hitting the invading alien between its eyes.

At this point my Auntie bounced up from beneath her sheets, Rambo-style, with a Nerf weapon in each hand, poised for combat. It was my mother who stood at the garage door looking at us like we were complete idiots. Then the urgency of the moment kicked back in. "Both of you, get out! Matchy's house is on fire!" Dazed and confused, through a small hole in the garage roof I saw the orange glare emerging from my neighbour's home, and I ran to the front yard.

Ten minutes seemed like hours before the fire arrived. Their screaming sirens competed with a thunderous explosion. It was the gas tank of one of Matchy's motorbikes. Little by little the blaze consumed the house – and the eight Harley Davidsons he parked in his garage. The truck's lights flickered on the lawn while five firefighters stood their ground against the inferno. Matchy cowered on the grass watching his life go up in flames. He wept like a lost child in a supermarket, and the tears made a waterfall of his signature biker beard. The strongest, wisest and bravest man I knew was crying.

But no one was brave enough to approach Matchy, even in his sorrow. His big, beefy, bikie image, replete with full beard, long hair, tattoos and resounding laugh, concealed a brilliant mind that harnessed a love of Australian history and classical music: he taught me that Beat Heaven

was really Beethoven. He played guitar and piano with a missing finger! He was editor of *Live to Ride* and wrote his own column called 'Matchy's Tech Tips'.

He watched the flames devour his personal museum of *Live to Ride* back copies, and the 1970s photographs of his mates riding through Centennial Park in their life's prime.

I walked onto his lawn, dismissive of the inferno that blazed before us. I sat right next to Matchy and put my arm around him. "Everything will be fine," I said to him. "This is life and life is a mongrel sometimes. It'll do this to you. But stay strong, Matchy. I know you'll be okay."

To this day, that's the most inspiring thing I've ever said to anyone.

I was just 10.

## RITE OF PASSAGE

*Ben Cerniauskas*

It's been a family tradition for many years now that we go up to Shoal Bay during the Easter break. Some of the best days of my childhood were created on those wonderful white beaches, and I always feel a great sense of nostalgia every time I return. Despite this, there is one experience that remains a frightful memory.

My favourite part about the beach we went to was its complete seclusion. It was only accessible from a thin path that cut through bushland. I ran along the path as fast as I could while my father and uncles trailed behind. I wasn't waiting for them! They were so slow. I could run circles around them as they dragged their enormous surfboards along the path. I felt like an agile rodent showing off my mobility to four dawdling elephants.

So I left them to choke on my dust trail and made my way hurriedly towards the infinitely long beach. Regardless of my supersonic speed, it seemed to take a lifetime to get to the water. But once there, I didn't hesitate. I jumped into the waves and kicked amongst the foam. And I was splashing around for quite a while before the elephants began to appear at the end of the path, still taking their time, still dwelling amongst the distant mirages.

It was some time before I realised that the sea was carrying me out...too far.

I turned towards the beach and began to paddle. Placidly, at first, but it wasn't enough. I accelerated one notch, just a little extra effort, but still it wasn't enough to combat the current's momentum.

To this day I'm still amazed at how quickly blissful delight can turn to utter terror.

I activated full power in my thrusters, but it was futile. I flailed helplessly in the water, becoming more exhausted with each movement. The force of the water continued to drag me mercilessly away from my father.

Finally, he realised what was happening. He waded into the waves, and pulled me up and out. As I sat on the beach and recovered, the knowledge I had needed five minutes prior came to me. It had been a rip, of course, and the worst thing I could have done was to panic. In that moment I understood what it meant to be scared – and what fear can do to you.

## A GUARDIAN ANGEL

*Ben Farrugia*

**K**nock! Knock. Knock! Thinking of no reason why the knocks could be for me, I quickly dismissed them and continued with my work. There were a lot of things on my mind in that moment and I didn't really care why the Year 8 office monitor was at the classroom door. As the teacher read my name I could hear the clock ticking like a time bomb.

I found my dad awaiting me at the office. He smiled through his tears and we walked to the car together knowing, without speaking, the situation that had brought him to school to collect me.

It's a short trip to the hospital but it seemed to take forever. We walked past the room where we'd said our last goodbyes to Nannu the day before. He still lay there, but this time in a lifeless state. There was no breath, no voice, only the chatter of our closest family members telling stories of Nannu's life, their laughter hiding the pain and loss. And, of course, the tears of my Nanna in the foreground.

I had said my goodbyes to Nannu the day before. In that room. With all my cousins present. Mum had taken me home soon after that but the insistence of death made me feel weird and uneasy. It drew me back to him, like I had forgotten something there.

In the end, it's the simple things you remember: he lived around the corner with my Nanna so I often dropped in for a drink. But I feel him at those big moments of my life, too.

My Nannu left me with three significant mantras: *Don't fight with your parents. You have to start somewhere in a job.* And on his deathbed he said to me *You are the sunshine of my life, mate.*

Nannu is the Maltese word for grandfather. But it came to represent more than that in my life. He was my role model, my friend and a great person to have around.

Goodness is often born of suffering. My great grandmother was duped into believing the school she sent my Nannu to was a good school. So he endured the torture and abuse that sometimes characterised a boarding school education back then, and he rarely saw his family.

So when I think of him, I think of how there are moments where he is still shaping my life. Like the time I was chosen to play representative soccer for Parramatta, a distinctively Maltese club. My first experience of signing a contract was a big moment. He was there in spirit. He was a religious person from a religious family, and his passing taught me to focus on the things that matter above and beyond a football career with Manchester.

His suffering taught me balance and perspective.

## FIJIAN ROMANCE

*Jason Prasad*

**A** young girl strolls through the worn but stunning streets of Suva. She is just 19 years old. She wears a plain white dress but it makes her look like a Fijian Marilyn Monroe...gorgeous! She sees beyond the poverty of her people as they eke out a living in the dilapidated backblocks of her Suva. She looks harder than most for the humanity in her countrymen – political refugees of 1950s turmoil. She knows they are not hooligans. They are just homeless.

Her name is Prabha Wati. She is destined to be my grandmother.

Prabha continues through the streets and stops to join a woman singing traditional Indian hymns in her native Hindi. Prabha joins her in song and, soon after, a young man is attracted to the music. In this choral moment John Kissun falls in love with Prabha Wati and the two enter a union that will last for the rest of their lives.

My grandmother came from a family of twelve children, my grandfather from a family of nine. Together, John and Prabha go on to have five children. One of those children, Roselyn, becomes my mother. She marries Kushal Prasad and gives birth to two children, Jason (me) and my younger brother, Hamish.

I reminisce about the days when my dad would wake my brother and me at seven in the morning and drive us to Aji's and Aja's house through freezing morning temperatures that felt to us like Antarctica. (Aji and Aja are the Hindi words for grandparents.) *Keh she heh behta? How are you little ones?* she would say. And *Chumack deyo, chumack deyo! Give me a kiss, give me a kiss.* Over these affections would waft the aroma of food she'd been cooking before we arrived: bacon, eggs, pancakes, banana bread. Her food was the catalyst to secure the bonds of family, and she would always feed others before herself.

At the end of the day she would slip a fifty-dollar note into our pockets and mourn our departure. There was never any doubt about how much she loved us.

In December, 2004 it was my turn to mourn...on her behalf. John 'Aja' Kissun passed away at the age of 69. I did not truly know the shape of grief until I saw my Aji's face following his passing. She cried and mourned in a way I had never seen, every tear a purging of the moments they had shared throughout their lives together.

I knew her strength because in her aloneness she became my rock: the person to whom I turned first to heal the wounds of primary school bullies, the person who gave me wisdom and advice.

Now my Aji straddles a world that hovers between lucidity and dementia. Her memory started to fade a few years ago and she has completely forgotten who I am now, so I draw on memory to compensate the loss of hers to dementia.

And I hear from her carers that she often still awaits the arrival of my brother and me in the mornings.

## THE BOREE TRACK

*Ziggy Kowalski*

New experiences always seem to bring out the best in me. I like to think I'm open-minded and up for something new. Spontaneity! I came to realise this one crisp summer's dawn when we all piled into our family's old Mazda. It was one of those mornings where the crunch of the overnight frost can be heard under your sneakers, yet the air is strangely warm for the hour. Back then I wasn't the coffee addict I am now, so it did take me a while to come to my senses. After the McDonald's pit stop, I didn't feel half bad.

After a tediously rumbling drive through the Boree Track several hours later, we had finally made it. My aunt, uncle and cousin came running out of their half-built house to greet us, as relatives do. After exchanging my hellos, an uneasy sickness erupted from my insides from the smell of the angle grinder. I had surely left the city behind. My Uncle Ben was using the monstrous device to serrate the edges of the roof to make a chimney.

I told the others I was going to gather some firewood for the bonfire tonight, and I commenced trudging through the paddock and across the infamous gravel track. Surprisingly, it was quite therapeutic to gather firewood. I had even organised the various sizes of wood into separate piles along the edge of Boree Creek. All of a sudden, nature's calling had come. I noticed an eerie wooden dunny tucked away behind a small gumtree. The door creaked open, and I hastily brushed the thick cobwebs away with some toilet paper.

"No time like the present," I thought to myself optimistically. I sat down and awaited relief, as one does. Moments later I noticed a gap between two ill-fitted floorboards below. An insidious creak pierced through me. The next thing I knew the entire toilet had fallen brutally through the floorboards. The sharp remainders of splintering wood on either side had clawed out strings of skin as I descended, much like a kindergarten student tears up a Mr Stringy mozzarella stick at recess. I managed miraculously to keep myself balanced amidst my own uncontrollable laughter at how pathetic I must look. And amidst the pain of ripped skin I managed to hoist myself up, feebly walking on eggshells to try and avoid another weak spot in the floor.

Pumped with adrenaline, I dived into the creek as freely as I had slipped through the cracks in the dunny floor. I vigorously washed my whole body, planning not to tell anyone about what had just happened. I took a look at the menacing wounds under my arms, grateful to be alive enough to rinse one last time. I even thought about using some of the broken pieces of wood for the bonfire, but there was *no* way I was returning to risk a second humiliation. I pulled the dunny door shut and plodded back to the house using the distant illuminous sparks from my uncle's angle grinder to guide my way.

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Awakening from a deep sleep is something that I have always enjoyed. Those first few seconds of waking up in an unfamiliar setting are often the seconds when you feel most alive. The smell of fresh porridge and the sound of black cockatoos echoing across the valley are mystical and magical.

It was still very early in the morning, judging by the citrus-orange sunrise. There was a crooked and dusty analogue clock hanging on the wall, but one thing I had blatantly managed to miss in my first four years of schooling was how to tell analogue time. I was too embarrassed to ask anyone, even my parents, so I hazarded a guess of 6:00am.

After wolfing down my breakfast, Kurt, my brother, Seamus and I rode our bikes down to the dam. The flying fox had about a thousand fire ants staggering limply across its ropes. Some fell into the dam, making small ‘plop’ sounds as they did. Seamus fearlessly grabbed the rope and shook it about, causing the ants to enter fury mode. Kurt and I exchanged fearful glances, then shrugged it off and decided to have a go.

I was the first to run off the edge, holding onto the confused handle. When I came to an abrupt stop, I resisted the urgings of my brother and cousin to let go. The water was absolutely freezing when I eventually made contact, and I could almost feel the rumoured yabbies nibbling at my toes. After a few more rounds of the flying fox, Kurt spotted a white styrofoam board that looked big enough for three people. The next thing we knew, we were yelling *back-forth, back-forth* as we leaned backwards and forwards to our own rhythm and fell overboard. As simple as it was, it was great fun and we were laughing our behinds off. It’s the kind of fun that Wet ‘n’ Wild and Jamberoo just can’t give you.

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Seamus opened the fridge door around lunchtime and immediately lit up at the sight of raw meat. See, this was the thing about Seamus, he always saw a world of opportunity in the most insignificant things. This is why he’s a great cousin to have around.

Pretty soon we were down at the dam again, using fishing line to hook raw steak and hurling it in for yabbing.

“It’s all in the technique,” said Seamus, as he adeptly pulled the fishing line in, finger by finger. A dark shadow could soon be seen under the surface of the murky water. It was a bloody whopper!

“Someone get the bloody bucket, goddamit!” yelled Kurt. I ran back to the house and grabbed two buckets, thankful that I saw them straight away without having to ask my Uncle Ben. I ran back to the dam where Kurt had the yabby confined between four large rocks. I then used two sticks, much like chopsticks, to get the yabby into a bucket, and used the other bucket to get some dam water for the yabby.

By sundown, we had come home with an entire bucket of yabbies of all shapes and sizes (as well as cancerous sunburns all over our bodies). The adults took it better than I thought. They decided that we would use the big yabbies in the seafood curry that night.

As for the little yabs, Seamus and Kurt went back to release them. I was kind of glad they didn’t see the fate of the bigger yabbies. As carnivorous as my family is, it isn’t easy for anyone – especially my dad – to see yabbies boiled alive in a steaming pot.



That night was memorable. The stars were extraordinary, and enjoying an abundant seafood feast around an open fire with great company is something pretty special. I was completely exhausted, but it was definitely worth it.

I was unsure of what tomorrow would bring, but I knew it was going to be something amazing.

## A CRICKET MOMENT

*Nitin Moopnar*

A wicket falls, and I stumble around to gather my gear and take my place on the field. It is a chilling and uneasy situation when I walk on. There is no clear sense of what's happening or who my batting partner is.

Following a brief conversation with him, I take my place at the striker's end, preparing for my first ball ever. I'm not destined for a miracle debut. That will have to wait for another time.

I take my stance and prepare nervously for the bowler. *Tap! Tap! Tap!* The bowler steams in and delivers one around my pads. Inexperience is the impetus for the wild swing that follows but I somehow cream it towards the mid-wicket boundary.

All of a sudden I hear a chorus of voices shouting. "Run! Run! Go, Nitin! Run!"

I start running, all the time keeping my eye on the ball. Unfortunately, it halts just before the boundary line. At the other end of the pitch I find myself standing side-by-side my batting partner. I am so confused and then he tells me to run back. I immediately sprint back but I'm bowled out. OUT! I am gone first ball! Out by a golden duck on debut! I'm shattered.

The following week I'm told we're on top of the game. (I'm a mid-season newcomer.) I nod obliviously. I go out the second time a wiser, more seasoned man. I hit a whopping fifty-three runs not out. This illustrious moment boldly foretells my future in the sport. I go on to win four consecutive premierships with the Parramatta 'rep' team. Now I play green shield cricket for Blacktown.

Life doesn't always fall into place that way. So I'm feeling very grateful.

## LEBANON

*Peter Geagea*

**T**here are many beautiful places in the world, but Lebanon's scenery is special. The combination of elegance and simplicity makes it unique.

I experienced this firsthand just after I turned 10 years of age. In the village where I stayed there is a mountain range named the Arz. It is home to thousands of cedar trees, some of which are centuries old. In winter these magnificent mountains become a ski resort. Skiing every day for a month is the best part of the holiday for me. It becomes an addiction.

I slide off the teleski atop the shortest of the three slopes. I quickly become an expert and enjoy the skiing immensely. I tuck my ski poles under my armpits. I am a rocket about to launch with unparalleled speed. Off I go down the slope as straight as a bowling ball. No curves, no turning, no braking. The wind blows in my face, a blast of freshness. My skis cut through the snow like a razor. I am completely free.

Brimming with confidence, I dare to venture to the steepest, most difficult slopes. The only way to the top is via the agonisingly slow electric chairs. They move about 10 metres a minute at one of the highest altitudes in Lebanon, fingers numb, face frozen, ears frostbitten.

My body is engulfed by howling winds, but the top of the mountain is in sight. I am a shivering mess as I reach the top, hobbling like a penguin in search of a place to attach skis to boots.

I sit at the top of my white world and absorb the beautiful view. I can see half of Lebanon from up here. The place is serene, tranquil and majestic all at once. I am mesmerised. Up here, the world looks so vast. My perspective is powerfully adjusted by nature. I am minuscule in this broad landscape and so are my problems. I will shun the trivialities of my life in place of a more impressive, more amazing vista.

Nature is our greatest teacher.

## CONCRETE DRIVEWAYS AND HOLDEN PLATES

*Damien Gordon*

**M**otor Neuron Disease can change a family's life in an instant. It has no cure so it steals life away unforgivingly.

My grandfather, Sam was diagnosed with the disease. It didn't kill his spirit for life, though. His hardworking attitude became focused on the concrete driveway he had never managed to lay.

When our whole family pitched in to make it happen, you bet Pop was excited. The job was completed in a week, and Pop had never been so proud of my dad, Steve and my uncles, Glen and Brian.

A year later, around the time Pop had completely lost his ability to walk, we heard about the MND charity walk near Silverwater. The journey across the 5km track, pushing Pop in his wheelchair, gave our family time to catch up and socialise. In 2014, \$40 000 was raised to research the disease, and the figure keeps rising.

Pop was eventually put into a nursing home because caring for him became too difficult for us. He couldn't walk, talk or move his arms. He was spoon fed by Nan and taken care of by staff. He could still manage a laugh, though, and we all learned to love Slim Dusty because his music made Pop smile.

My Pop's journey toward death ended in 2015. Death freed him from the restrictions of his ailing body and the uneasy anticipation of his final moments on earth. He passed away on June 2 of that year. His beloved Holden ute carried the number plates *DTC 216*. For us, those plates came to register a significant portent – *Date to Cry 2/6*.

## IRAQ

### *Haider Zawaidi*

In the heart of Iraq is a region known for its beautiful beaches, exquisite foods and luxurious hotels. But the people are terrorised by a cruel tyrant called Saddam Hussein. He brings destruction on all those who live in the region, millions fleeing for their lives to distant lands for the chance of a better life.

One of those families was mine.

My parents had no time to celebrate my birth; they were busy planning an escape across vast oceans.

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Amid the political strife rumours abound that money can buy freedom. Passages on small boats take families across the sea to bigger, more luxurious ships. So, Dad parts with his cash and buys hope.

It is 4am when my family readies themselves for the journey. I am only 6 months old, still an infant, and my family travels for days, my mother scared, my sister screaming, me crying with hunger and my father planning and hoping. He realises he's been tricked and there will be no 'big luxurious boat' meeting us.

As the scorching sun beats down upon us, something underneath our boat keeps rocking us back and forth, back and forth. It is a great white shark, enormous in proportion to our flimsy vessel. The boat next to us vanishes beneath in an instant, leaving a flotsam of clothing and jewellery floating aimlessly on a blood-stained surface. The shark stalks us for a while longer before retreating. My mother's prayers of thanksgiving can be heard across the skies.

Later, on our journey a hole in our boat shoots water upwards with the force of a fire hydrant. The biggest three men on the vessel cup their hands desperately over and over, scooping the water out as we tilt dangerously to one side. In the distance, a massive boat speeds toward us, slicing the water in half. Our rescuers swim across to board our vessel and as my mother climbs aboard the ship, I almost fall from her hands. What a feeling that must have been for her!

## DISPLACEMENT

### *Anonymous*

**G**reystanes was an unknown frontier to us. It existed on the outer fringes of everything we had known to that point in our lives.

We came, originally, from a place considerably different called Connells Point. Our family home had overlooked the water. But when my little sister was barely two, we found ourselves down one parent, down on money, down on hope.

My mother gathered what she managed to salvage financially from her broken marriage and bought a three-bedroom pink fibro ‘shack’ with stained, mouldy carpets. She promised herself she would do everything in her power to give back to her children what had been taken away from them.

Years of tireless saving, a hand-me-down culture for myself and my two brothers, and op-shop couture ensured our survival. We didn’t know of evenings spent in restaurants, or the latest toys or gaming consoles. It helped, though, that Mum could make anything taste gourmet.

I know those days of hardship built my resilience and my humility.

A few years later our lives were back on track. Not perfect, but better than they’d been in a very long time.

So it’s with clarity that I recall the day my eldest brother, Anthony came home from school complaining of a sharp pain in his neck. Over the next few days a purplish bruise appeared that swelled to the size of a golf ball.

The anxious two-week wait following a series of blood tests brought no comfort. The tremor in the doctor’s voice was the prologue to a turn of events that again tested my mother’s resilience and our bonds as a single-parent family.

Our doctor was not her usual cheery self that morning. Her eyes were pink and vaguely bloodshot. Anthony was not yet in high school and through a veil of tears she relayed the news that he had contracted Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. Cancer.

My mother later told me that she and our doctor had sat in the room crying together for a long time while Anthony and I read old magazines in the waiting room, completely oblivious to the threat of his life being taken away.

My father re-entered our lives around this time to participate in his right to discuss his son’s destiny. How to communicate the news to us was high on the agenda of discussions, along with treatment plans. The discussions developed into intense arguments between my father and the nurse until my mother exploded. She yelled so loudly that they all stopped mid-sentence as if their breaths had been taken away from them. “I’m his mother, and if anyone is going to tell him it will be me, and only me. He will not learn that he might die from you.”

Many years have passed since those times. My brother is still with us and we will always be in debt to my mother for teaching us resilience in times of adversity.

## JINDABYNE

*Raymond Matar*

Jindabyne is Australia's answer to the Swiss Alps. Most winters, my family and I travel there and stay for about a week, skiing and throwing snow at each other's heads until our fingers feel they could snap in half like biscuits.

The drive there is the most boring journey, a little like listening to a lecture from the economics teacher in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

The best thing about Jindabyne is the cooling, fresh and invigorating air. It channels through your nostrils, clearing the blockages and chilling your lungs. Flying down the blanketed hills at top-notch speed is invigorating too. Now, I'm no professional skier, but when you see me flying down those slopes you'd better move because I'm unstoppable – literally.

Some holidays are more memorable than others. I climbed the icy surface on what they call j-hooks. These result, invariably, in a massive wedgie that you can't release without removing several layers.

On this specific day, the great Raymond Matar took the challenge of going solo – no help, no assistance, all by himself. He climbed what was a massive mountain, looking like he was getting reeled in like a fat fish on a line. As soon as he reached the top it was go time.

A treacherous experience awaited him as he nerved himself. Onlookers gazed at a maniac in the making. He checked himself out like one of those Scandinavian professionals, ensuring his equipment was at the ready.

For the next stage of my experience I will step back into myself. I fly down the hill dodging the odd tree that tries to clothesline me with its lanky arms. As soon as I reach my destination I deploy the pizza breaks. You'd think they'd work, wouldn't you? But I can't seem to stop and next I'm shouting *MOVE, MOVE you idiot* to my cousin whom I've just spotted on the way down. We clatter into each other, or rather me into him. Skis fly off our feet like darts, each one a weapon to innocent bystanders. It is a disastrous crash but a few bruises are all that's left, along with the pain and humiliation of the crash.

We argue forever over whose fault it was and Mum gets the whole thing on video. No need to outsource our entertainment that evening. I am an instant movie star and everyone spends the night laughing at the collision. I protest loudly the suggestion that we send the footage to *Australia's Funniest Home Video*.

## GHIDEE JIM

*Nathan Boulous*

**M**y great-grandfather passed away in 2012 at the tender age of 91. My fondest memories of Ghidee Jim (Ghidee is Arabic for grandfather) are of Christmas Days at the homes of our relatives. No matter where you were, he made you feel welcome. His generosity was overwhelming.

So you can imagine my bewilderment when I learned of his death. James ‘Jimmy’ Saad was the most buoyant, lively and spirited man of anyone I’ve known either side of 91.

When Christmas Day, 2012 came around, I envisaged a cry-a-thon, a day of mourning rather than commemoration. But it was neither. My family walked into my grandparents’ home that day and everyone seemed...well...focused, and yet distracted at the same time. It appeared that the collective incentive was to move forward with our thoughts, knowing that the thought of him would produce calamity. Everyone seemed less jubilant that day, more rigid and determined to force a smile and endure the day to its completion.

I thought about my aunts and uncles, their first-ever Christmas without their grandfather. I wondered how I would cope in their situation. A day marked as an occasion of celebration, joy and companionship had been cruelly sedated.

It wasn’t until Father’s Day two years later that I was reminded of those feelings. My grandfather uttered the simplest of sentiments, which reflected for me the beauty and closeness of our family. I’m not even sure why, in reminiscence, the utterance prompted the perplexity of that day. It just did. Just before we were about to enjoy an elegant Father’s Day feast, my grandfather tapped his glass, beckoning our attention. He stood up and calmly raised his drink to the heavens saying, “To all fathers, past, present and future”.

A clinking of glass and that was that: a memory reignited through the power of words. From that day forward, my grandfather’s simple sentiment would ensure I never forgot the wisdom instilled in me by my great-grandfather, and the memory I carry of him every day.



## FAREWELL TO IRAQ

*Azal Rufaee*

The Iraq I remember was just like any other country. I attended a preschool there and every day a driver would come and pick up about seven children, including me, and take us to school. The wearing of seatbelts was not enforced, so you could cram as many people as you could into a car.

Preschool was all you'd expect. We'd pray, eat, drink, laugh, sleep and learn. Our teachers were nuns, so we would pray before we ate, after we ate, before we started the day and before we left to go home. It was a fun time and a good prelude to Years 1 and 2.

Primary school was hard and sometimes brutal, with physical punishments for incomplete homework or refusal to follow directions. We would line up every morning in the yard, have our right hand to our heart and sing the Iraqi national anthem as they raised the flag. Then our school captain would shoot three bullets towards the sky from a real rifle. I still remember how loud each shot was: BANG. BANG. BANG. ... And then dead silence. Then every class would march like soldiers to their respective rooms.

During Religion, I and six other boys would be granted a free period. There were no Catholic schools and spiritual instruction centred on Islam, so we got to play soccer in the main yard. As none of us owned a soccer ball we'd fill an empty bottle with rocks and start the game. How dirty and ripped our shoes would look by the end, like we'd just returned from an arduous journey across desert sands.

We lived in the town of Mosul where I was born, in a double-storey house with my uncle and his family. My dad would go off to work in a place called Zakho. Zakho was over an hour's drive from where we lived, so Dad would leave for work on the Monday and return on Friday, at the end of the working week. He had his own office fitted out with a bed, fridge, toilet and everything he needed to survive the week. Dad kept his driving to a minimum because of his poor eyesight. He was injured on a building site in his youth and the infection that followed caused enormous damage. The operation that followed kind of put an end to his driving career.

In 2007 Dad bought a house for us in Zakho where he worked so it was easier for us to see him. So we left our house to my uncle and began a new life. Later in 2007 our lives changed forever. I can recall the news report as I shared lunch with my mother, my sister and my cousins: *Father Ragheed Ganni, along with three other deacons, has been shot down by unknown armed men in Mosul after finishing Mass at the Holy Trinity Church.* My mother fainted. I broke down in tears, as did everyone else in the room. Father Ragheed Ganni was my uncle.

I don't remember what happened next but I remember being in Karamlesh, my grandparents' village, at the funeral of my uncle. My grandmother didn't eat or drink for three entire days. My mother existed in silence for two weeks.

Father Ragheed was killed by Islamic terrorists because he refused to close down his church. He was killed for refusing to deny his religion and become a Muslim.

Following my uncle's funeral, we returned to Zakho. My dad sold everything we owned. What he couldn't sell was given to my cousins. Iraq was no longer a safe place so we needed to move on.

In October, 2007 we boarded a plane destined for Turkey. The sorrow of goodbye was tempered by my excitement – I'd never been on a plane before. I still remember the lights of Turkey as we approached Istanbul. It was something magical.

Our cousins picked us up from the airport, and shortly after our arrival we registered as refugees with the United Nations, nominating guardians. We rented our own little place in Turkey and lived there for a year and a half. Dad got a job as a cleaner and quickly picked up some essential language. I learned it quickly from playing soccer with some Turkish kids.

There was a special school nearby called Don Bosco, set up to teach Assyrian Iraqi refugees how to speak English. We attended for three hours each afternoon.

Turkey was a nice place. We visited some islands while we were there, and some significant places like the Hagia Sophia.

In early 2009 we received news that we were accepted to Australia and, after the necessary health checks, we departed on March 23 with a number of other Iraqi families. We were met at the airport by my auntie, uncle and their two children. My auntie and my mother broke down in tears at that first recognition of one another – they hadn't been together in ten years. I remember that night as if it was yesterday: the juicy chicken with chunky garlic sauce and the sizzling bacon pizzas in smoky barbecue sauce.

My life has been a crazy ride, so far. But the themes that define it now are no longer about being a refugee. I work twice a week, I train for soccer twice a week, I play once a week and I go out once a week. And I spend too much time on my phone. I need to make time for family and study if I am to carve out a good future and make my parents happy.

They came to this country to secure a better future for me, so it would be shattering for them to see me waste that opportunity.

## EXHALATION

*Anonymous*

She's screaming and crying, and I don't know what to do. I try to help my mum but I can't move. I'm frozen to the spot while my father repeatedly hits her, over and over again.

I can feel the emotion welling up inside me. I lose the rhythm of my breathing, my face gets tight and my vision is blurred. Then tears run down my cheeks like a silent river. I try to block out the profanities I can hear from my father's voice.

Blood paints itself on the canvas of my mother's body. "Go to your room," she mutters, as her eyes catch sight of mine. But she doesn't know I can't move, because the floor is holding me hostage.

My father turns in my direction. "Get out of here, boy!" His words hit me with a violent force but I am still pinned to the spot, unable to move. He glares at me again, ordering me to my room, and then laughs at us. "Like mother, like son," he says with hatred and vitriol. His right hand goes up and on the way down it makes contact with my left cheek. I cry out loud, more with despair than pain. He throws me on my bed and threatens to kill me. Then he leaves.

That was the first time I saw my dad as a villain. Before that, he had been my hero. Now I prayed that God would kill him and that I'd be fine with just a mum.

Eventually, God answered part of my prayer.

I came to Australia as a refugee of my African home. When my mother first told me the news of our impending departure, the phrase 'a better life' meant nothing to me. As far as I was concerned, I was already living that better life – away from my father. My mother's brother aided our passage to Australia, along with his three children.

I didn't know whether my father had any idea that we were leaving but I didn't care. I was happy to be widening the distance between us.

I remember first looking at the plane we boarded and thinking it was the biggest thing on earth. That's the moment I discovered my fear of flying – a fear I had not been aware of until then. As the steward ushered us to our seats I felt anxiety curl in my stomach and hands choked me from within. I was about to say hello to the steward but the words were dragged back into the acid of my gut. I just looked at her and started bawling. She awkwardly smiled at my uncle and asked to see our tickets.

The plane trip was sheer terror for me – all the way. But we made it and now I call Australia home.

We did contact my father, eventually. He has moved on now with a new wife and two kids. I wrote him a letter once...

*Dear Dad,*

*For every last bruise you gave Mum and I; for every time we sat in tears; for the million ways you hurt us, I just want to say thank you. You made us stronger, and you made us seek something better. You made our dreams bigger and our voices louder.*

*So, thank you, Dad.*

I never posted the letter to Dad, and I will probably never send it. But it helps me find a peace with myself and my situation.

I can finally exhale and live my life to the fullest.

## A MAN'S JOURNEY TO HAPPINESS

*Nicholas Petreski*

“Come on, boys!” Click, clack, click... My teammates slam their football cleats on the floor in exhilaration, awaiting further instruction from the coach. Taking in the atmosphere, I taste a mixture of nerves and excitement, and for a split second I close my eyes and dream. *I'm 40 yards out and it's a golden goal and I strike a shot...* But I'm quickly hurled back to reality by the voice of the coach.

“Boys, listen up. We all know why we're here today! These chances don't come around very often in life. So let's make the most of it and bring it home.” As soon as the coach finishes, the team begins to cheer.

It's the most anticipated and awaited game of the year – the Grand Final. We're playing our local rivals, Merrylands SFC. They've beaten us once, breaking our undefeated streak. It is time for redemption and vindication.

As team captain, I lead the team out of the sheds onto the freshly-cut pitch and notice rain droplets start hitting my head. Standing on the field facing our rival team, I look over my shoulder and see a familiar face in the distance. There he stands, his bright, multi-coloured umbrella looking like a native rainbow lorikeet. He sees my recognition and gives me a big smile.

This is the smile of a man who has faced many struggles to give his family a better life than the one he had.

The smile belongs to my grandfather.

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Jimmy Petreski was born in Kuratitsca, Macedonia in 1945, the third child in a family of four brothers and three sisters. At the age of 18 he had dreams of going to university in the city and leaving his village in search of a better life.

That was until a hot summer afternoon in 1963 when he returned home to find out his father had died in the woods. Being the eldest male living in the family home at the time, Jimmy had to step up and take on the roles and responsibilities of being the head of the house. His dream of a better life was shattered. He would be stuck in the village forever.

Three years later, Jimmy married Patricia (my grandmother) and in 1970 they had their first child, a son named Michael, my father. It was at that time Jimmy decided that he would do anything to get out of the village and give his son a better life. He made the heartbreaking decision to send his wife and son to live in Australia with his brother's family. He would eventually join them.

Jimmy worked in a coal factory in France for five years, saving enough to join his family in Sydney, Australia and invest in a three-bedroom home in Marrickville. He described it as his 'pursuit of happiness'.

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It is midway through the first half. The score is still locked at 0-0. There are plenty of chances for both teams. We had dominated possession and were trying to break them apart with tactics: long through balls, set pieces of corners, overlapping attack and longshots. But the frustration sets in that we can't infiltrate their keeper, no matter what we do.

In an attempt to break the dead lock, I take a free kick from 30 yards out. It floats over the keeper and I think *This is it. I'm going to put us in the lead.*

BANG! The ball hits the crossbar and bounces down. It had clearly passed the line as the keeper rushed to punch it out. We all run at the referee, appealing for the goal, but it is disallowed. I am devastated and sink to my knees.

A whistle vibrates to signal the end of the first half.

I trudge despondently to the locker room and my grandfather approaches me sympathetically. I say to him, "We've tried everything. We're not going to score. Their keeper is a brick wall."

"Then break through the wall," he replies. The background noise to his inspiration is a Virgin Atlantic plane flying over the field. It takes me back to the memory of my own trip to his homeland, Macedonia several years before.

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Macedonia was a place I had only heard about. It was simply beautiful. People rode their bikes freely. Kids played football in the streets. The culture and traditions were alive in the life of the city. The city of Ohrid is famous for its world heritage-listed lake. Breathtakingly beautiful!

We visited historic churches and climbed to Samuel's Fortress, built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, from where you can view the whole of Ohrid. I felt I was standing on top of the entire world. It was spectacular!

It was difficult to imagine my grandfather's need to leave this place. Macedonia is a beautiful, traditional land. Although most people survive on little money, they get along with one another and live life to the full.

The most poignant and arresting moment, however, was the trip to my grandfather's village. I stood on a piece of deserted land covered with weeds and saw in the distance a few broken walls of a house that once stood firm there. The earth stood still in that moment. It was a material reminder of my grandfather's life, his humble origins and the hard road he travelled to establish something better.

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It is late in the second half. The scores are still locked at 0-0. It is now or never, do or die. Suddenly, a flying-through ball passes through Sam and I, and the Merrylands left winger runs around to take it on the bounce. He chips our keeper from outside the 18-yard box and, as it

floats, I think *This is it. It's all over*. The ball smashes onto the crossbar and, as my heart sinks, I see droplets of rain vibrate off the post.

It is 0-0 at fulltime. There is only one option remaining: extra-time golden goal. As the first half of golden goal begins, it is end-to-end football. No slacking off now. Everyone wants to win. Controversy is unleashed as our right back puts a harsh slide tackle on their centre forward, resulting in a red card!

We are down to ten men!

As the end of first half approaches, we win a corner. Our Dutch right winger takes it and it rebounds out towards me on the left side of the field. It is bouncing and I take my heroic chance. It is either going in the net or out of the park.

As I hit the ball on the volley, it swirls and twirls and fires into the top left corner with the speed of a bullet. For a split second I look around in disbelief as the Merrylands players drop to the ground. I have secured our win.

I see my coach jumping and running onto the field. But this elation pales in comparison with the visage of my grandfather on the sidelines. His deep blue eyes are brimming with joyful tears. His smile stretches from ear to ear. My teammates overwhelm me and the celebrations begin.

After the game, we are awarded our medallions and I receive the cup as the team captain. It is as heavy as two watermelons, but I still manage the obligatory kiss and raise it proudly upwards for the team. We take turns to lift it to the heavens.

This has been a moment in my own 'pursuit of happiness' and I am glad Jimmy is there to share the elation with me.





## **PART TWO**

### *Poetry*

### **THE COUNTRYSIDE**

Wind whispers softly  
Warm light shines into my room  
Memories are made.

*Isaac Zammit*

### **THE MOUNTAINS**

The mountains echo  
They sound like cries of spirits  
Until morning comes.

*Griffin Zaher*

### **TECTONIC PLATES**

Tectonic plates crash  
Colliding and destroying  
As people escape.

*Abishek Sivagumaar*

## **PROMISES**

I see a world  
slowly  
falling apart.

Men sent to  
unjust war.  
Commanded to  
take orders;  
to slaughter all who  
cross their paths.

For  
oil  
gold  
power  
profit.

Manipulated minds  
polluted  
by  
fake promises.

## **MY WORLD**

I see  
a world  
amazingly created:  
trees that shade me,  
ease me.

Daybreak:  
birds singing their cheerful melodies.

As hours pass  
night sky forms.  
Stars shine predictably.

I see a world where  
pollution is no more.

Through these windows of my soul  
there is  
no difference between the shades of skin.

*Sebastian Foster*

## **SOCCER BALL**

A ball can unite the world like no other  
and bring joy --  
A circumference much smaller than our globe  
yet more powerful than its leaders.

My passport to a stressless world  
it brings something that money can't buy --  
freedom.

This world is full of passion for a mere ball,  
this freedom feeling is like an innocent prisoner  
released.

At the field I drill you to the ground  
and kick a huge chunk of your side  
sending you soaring through the air,  
watching that you'll fly between the posts.

*Geetansh Kaushal*

## **iPHONE**

Gladness overcoming dolefulness  
Fading sadness  
Holding it in my hands  
Gently with care.

It is my life!

I feel happy when I see it  
A minute flash promising  
Contact...belonging.

It feels sad when it doesn't see me,  
Like an eyeball of sorrow  
Behind a shroud.

***Nishpaksh Thaman***

## **PENCIL**

Light dispatches darkness as I open my pencil case.  
Something long rests its narrow body.  
It's my living, leaden artefact.

My spongy hand grasps it.  
It ascends into the air  
And lands lightly on my page.

The world is wired with robots attached to technology  
It breathes life into memory --  
Memories from childhood  
I cherish.  
It's my portable printer  
Our world is wired with Robots attached to technology.

So small  
Yet it fills lines... pages... books.  
It designs models,  
Gives birth to stories.  
It's my life creator  
And my passion.  
It records the past, present and future.

*Rynan Michael*

## **PLUTO**

Ninth from the sun,  
It was once a planet,  
But now it has been demoted,  
To a dwarf planet,

It sits in the Kuiper Belt,  
the largest of its kind.  
It got its name from its mum  
An 11-year-old named Venetia Burney of Oxford.

It doesn't sit alone  
In the night-cold,  
As it has its neighbours,  
Eris and Ceres,

Found in deep dark space,  
Made of hard rock and cold ice,  
Not many people have seen this sight,  
Oh! What a shame that is!

It orbits the sun,  
But they say it's no longer a planet.

***Shivank Goel***

## **SUMMER SYMPHONY**

The waves protect me from the guilt of the world.  
Peace washes in. Upon the shore  
the sand between my toes relieves me,  
the mangoes and ocean taste sweet and smell of bliss.  
I am a tropical island wrapped in one place.  
Time slows down as I sing at ease.  
Life's aria is like the rush of grace.  
My Summer Symphony is complete.

*Sosefo 'J J' Taufa*



## **GROWING UP WITH IT**

Circle of red, four legs and pizza patterns.

Memories amble of my journey with it...

I do not know where it came from,  
the first time it became a part of this home.

Cannot recollect memories as a little one...

Sit Down! Face the Wall!

I said... SIT DOWN AND FACE THE WALL!

Skin white, head red. My timeout and isolation from fun.

Stuck around for longer than I thought  
from toys creating a story to the smell of succulent roast chicken grasping my nose,  
as clocks slow down the chapter leading to the worries of adulthood.

A new brother, a new furniture

Green, grand, greater than mine.

Why does he get a better one while I'm stuck with red rubbish?

Months pass by... the green snaps while red gloats its survival.

I'm too big, it's too small

rusted, removed, retired under the bed.

I bring it out once or twice a year

and when I hold it, I hold a token of my childhood

and smile remembering a time when the world was wide with wonder

*Alvin Lanojan*

## **SNOWFLAKE**

Along roads around hills  
a wind, released, whips  
and skin becomes a thousand heads of pins.  
In the blink of eyelashes, flakes of white  
swirl the light,  
ice ferries from a coat to bone and  
pines hide under thick blankets.  
If time allowed, I'd spend all time  
outside, arms wide, face above believing  
in the summons of a man to find this,  
find this is enough.

*G P Curtin*

## **BOTTLEBRUSH**

I hunted for those shoots of bottle-brush,  
their tiny and hanging and gray-green leaves.

The crackling fires came and curled them all  
like melted human skin drawn tight. Those fires  
stripped hibiscus and azalea to roots beneath the ground;  
crawled up the flinching arms of taller brush;  
left survivors painted copper and black.

Now the sky is a basin of cotton-white clouds  
slit with eyelids of blue.

*G P Curtin*

*Moving...engaging...emotive!*  
**Year 10 Advanced English 2016**

*I was very moved and affected when I read their work.*  
**Mr Simon Humphries**  
**Acting Principal**

