

WYNDHAM WRITING GROUP

**Anthology
2018**



**Innocence
& Imagination**



INNOCENCE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE:	TITLE:
4	Surprise, Surprise by Anthony M Dass
7	Things Are Not As They Seem by Briony Kucic Tuckett
9	Museum Dangers by Armtesh Manoj Kumar
11	The Rainbow by Miriam Grech
14	Falling Into The Abyss by Faye Lockwood-Rourke
15	The Cave by Pauline Rimmer
18	Mr Bully by Briony Kucic Tuckett
19	The Day I Lost A Hangar by Rodney Williams
21	The Wrong Journey by Michelle Ripari
23	Past Lives by Vicki Williams
25	Ella by Tracie Sigismondi
28	The Writer by Pauline Rimmer
29	Eavesdropping by Lesley Robinson
31	Special Agent Prison by Travis Sigismondi
33	The Day I Gave The Shits by Rodney Williams
35	Land Of Gods by Anthony M Dass
38	Why Do You Haunt My Dreams? by Faye Lockwood-Rourke
39	Turn Back Time by Michelle Ripari
41	Cruising Alone Through Europe by Lesley Robinson
43	Untold Stories by Vicki Williams
45	The Goblin by Miriam Grech
47	Hope by Briony Kucic Tuckett
48	Lost by Faye Lockwood-Rourke
49	3 Deaths, A Survivor, & A Rescuer by Travis Sigismondi
51	Haunted House by Armtesh Manoj Kumar
52	Author Profiles
58	Testimonials

WYNDHAM WRITING GROUP 2018 Volume 2: Innocence & Imagination.

Copyright © remains with each individual Writer/Artist.

The views and ideas expressed are specific to the individual author and not necessarily representative of Wyndham Writing Group as a whole.

This collection ©WYNDHAM WRITING GROUP 2018

No part of this book may be reproduced without written consent from the publisher and the writer/artist concerned.

First published 2018 in Melbourne, Australia. All rights reserved

Editor/Layout: MICHAEL YOUNG

Proofreaders: MICHAEL YOUNG & DAVID HADDON

Design: VICKI WILLIAMS & MICHAEL YOUNG

All Images: © Page 2 & 59 ©MICHELLE RIPARI 2018

Front/Back cover—Rights secured

www.VickiWilliamsAuthor.com.au

SURPRISE, SURPRISE

Anne ran frantically up and down the creaky old timber stairway of the hotel. It was the penultimate day of what was the highlight of her holiday. She and husband Ron checked into the hotel that morning, but she was now desperately trying to wake up the duty clerk at the front office. It was dark except for a stream of light that spilled from the foyer, she knew the hotel was empty, it was offseason. She was at her wit's end, thoughts inundated her, but she kept focus.

The dorky looking night clerk hurried down the corridor to wake up his manager; time was crucial. Still panting she waited at the counter. It was 3 am, freezing, no central heating, the temperature outside was minus 15 degrees Celsius, and very close to zero degrees inside the lobby. It had been snowing relentlessly and just when there was a lull all this happened.

Ron had wanted to surprise his wife Anne, he went to great lengths organising this trip. He'd been a Lieutenant in the Indian Army, a confident, steadfast gentleman; and a third-generation Military man. Anne was a beautiful woman from a farming family; she loved nature.

Ron wanted to see more of the world, so one fine day after marrying Anne he quit the Army, and they headed off to far away Aotearoa, the land of the 'long white cloud'. Migrant life was anything but easy, fraught with challenges, but it was still "sweet as" as the Kiwi's would say. Ron wanted to enthrall Anne with a surprise, he knew she'd love it. A trip to an off the track destination would be a perfect way. Someplace he knew, but at the same time was rife with adventure.

"Anne," he announced one day, "we are going to this place," pointing to a map of India. "Auli! It borders China, perched amidst the mighty Himalayas."

Anne was thrilled; she hoped she wasn't dreaming. Then realising her husband was serious, "I'd love it," she responded excitedly.

"I know you like surprises! So, I'll take care of all the planning and preparation," he grinned. "We depart in two months."

Before they knew it they were off; Auckland to Singapore to New Delhi, then Haridwar. Anne had never been to this part of India before.

The leg from Haridwar to Joshimath was interesting; it was the start of a seriously mountainous region. The military like checks by Ron were something Anne had never seen before; trekking boots, windcheaters, jackets, thermals, gloves, cashmere and woollen gear, backpacks, camping gear, and oxygen canisters were all organised meticulously.

As they climbed up to 1000 feet above sea level, the air was crisp, they made a stop at Godwin Hotel to recoup. Then off to Joshimath; 6000 feet above sea level and a 12-hour drive. The road was treacherous and an overnight downpour made driving conditions arduous; the rental 4WD was up to it though.

Anne clicked away with her camera; capturing stupendous views. Meandering rivers followed the winding roads; rafts and camping grounds dotted the river banks. The traffic was light; the odd truck or car passed once in a while.

Hotel Dronagiri at Joshimath was a backpacker hostel. The views of valleys below, snow-capped peaks, tiny hamlets perched amidst winding tracks were breathtaking. It was a lot for Anne to take in, they'd travelled and ascended rapidly.

The weather progressively deteriorated, it had snowed heavily on the heights. The 4km chair lift ride, was out of order. They drove 4000 feet higher in less than two hours.

"Anne, this ropeway ride was one of the surprises I'm afraid," Ron says looking crestfallen.

Auli, 16 km away, was 10,000 feet above sea level. Anne has never seen such perilous drops before; if you went off the road, it would be like falling off a low flying aircraft.

They checked in at the Cliff Top Club and prepared for the trek to Gurson Bugyal; to catch a glimpse of the Nanda Devi Peak in all its glory at sunrise; it stands over 25,000 feet above sea level. Clouds were strewn like cotton wool over the mountains.

The weather cleared, the temperature dipped to minus 15 degrees Celsius. The guide gave the go-ahead for the trek, so it meant a night's rest, before setting out tomorrow.

Breathing was an effort; oxygen was scarce, and atmospheric pressure low. Anne was braving the conditions well. A couple of hours of ambling around the hotel and they were back in their room. She noticed something but didn't think much of it; Ron was quiet and a bit out of breath at times.

Just then, there was a knock at the door, Ron answered it.

"Sir, I hope you're all ready for tomorrow?" the trek guide asked.

"Sorry! When are we going?" replied Ron.

"Absolutely!" intervened Anne, giving the thumbs up.

As Ron walked back to the lounge, he faltered and tripped.

"Are you ok, Ron?" she asked.

"Just a bit dizzy," he replied, "all good though," he assured her with a smile.

Within the hour, Ron's condition deteriorated. He complained of nausea, shortness of breath, and headache.

It was 7 pm when Ron asked, "Darling, please speak to the hotel staff and see if there's a medic nearby."

Anne rushed to the reception to check, but there was no-one around. She was in a panic and unsure of what was happening. As she returned to their room, Ron was not talking much. She decided to try dispensing an

oxygen canister and thankfully Ron started to feel better. Glad that things were under control, he and Anne retired to bed early.

Several hours later, Anne woke up. Ron had been tossing and turning. She switched on the bedside lamp and found him sitting up, gasping for breath.

“Ron, what’s happening?”

Unable to speak he pointed toward the First Aid Kit. “Oxygen,” he gasped.

Anne ran to the window and opened it to allow for more fresh air. It was freezing outside, but she shut off the room heaters and ran down the stairs to the hotel reception. After hearing Anne’s desperate calls the duty clerk jumped up from behind the counter, then quickly fetched the manager. He confirmed not only was there no medic, but there were no spare oxygen cylinders either.

The three of them headed to the suite. Ron was still not well. He’d known from the start what was happening to him from his training in the Army but was afraid Anne would become more upset if she knew.

“Madam, how can we help?” the Manager asked.

“Anne,” Ron whispered into her ear, “tell him I need to get to Joshimath... now!”

When Anne informed the Manager, he replied, “The drivers have all gone home! They’ll be back in the morning.”

It was 3 am. “What time are they back?” Anne asked.

“7 am, Madam. None of us can drive safely on the snow tracks, we may end up endangering all our lives.”

They took turns watching over Ron as they waited for the drivers. Watching Ron grapple with his condition was excruciating for Anne. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she clutched his hand tightly awaiting daybreak.

Finally, they got Ron into a rickety old 4WD, descend to Joshimath, checked in to a Hotel, and a medic was rushed over.

The doctor declared, “This is Pulmonary Oedema, a high-altitude condition, your rapid ascent would have caused it. It could’ve proved fatal, had you not descended to Joshimath, in fact, further descent is advisable, but he’s okay for now.”

Later Anne learned there was a heavy snowfall just after they’d left Auli, the roads were blocked and wouldn’t reopen for a week. She was so thankful they’d left when they did.

“I’m so sorry Anne! I wanted to surprise you. I think nature had its own surprise for us though,” Ron said.

“Darling, I’m glad it’s behind us. It was a wonderful surprise, but your life is what matters to me,” Anne sobbed, holding his hand as tears rolled down onto it.

THINGS ARE NOT AS THEY SEEM

I hate driving up to our family cabin, I always come home numb and sick for the rest of the holidays with this vivid memory of a country fair, it's always the same memory. I was so glad that I broke my arm last year and my stepdad said I couldn't go because of all the painkillers I was taking. He's so weird, he has never allowed painkillers in the house. I sneaked aspirin once and he knew.... How?

He absolutely lost his shit. I don't know what my mum sees in him.

While I was looking through my old stuff in the attic, I found drawings, old polaroids and a diary from when I was six. From what I can legibly read I talk about the cabin; that everything is the same there, and there are monsters in the cabin.

As I said, I have a vivid memory of a country fair that I think is fake, but I don't know why I would say that. There's a drawing of a TV with a Ferris wheel on it and two people sitting in front of the TV, I feel that this is me and my mum. I feel like it's a memory, but I can't remember it. It scares me looking at it as I don't remember drawing or writing it, but it's in my secret hiding spot in the attic, and it's my handwriting. This must have been the first and second year we went up there because I remember being sent to therapy because they said I was making up stories about my stepdad.

The drive up to the cabin is filled with troubled memories, the road signs, the cow in the paddock and the little cottage with smoke coming out the chimney. Everything looks the same.

I yell out "mum", but my stepdad looks at me with disturbed darkness in his eyes. His eyes almost looked black.

"Shut up!" he says, he had never spoken to me like that before.

"Mum!!" I yell. She acts like she doesn't even hear me. What's going on I wonder as we arrive at the cabin, and before we stop the car, I open the door and run up to my room.

I look out the window crying as they unpack the car. I sneak out the window and run to the petrol station, I try to call my Dad but the pay phone doesn't work, so I go into the petrol station.

"Do you have a phone that works?" the cashier looks confused and says nothing.

I have a headache, I've been crying for hours and it's now dinner time, and I didn't even eat lunch.

I look for Panadol, but all it has is candy bars. I grab some candy, I'm so hungry I go up to the counter and ask the cashier if they have Panadol. The snap in his neck looked like he had broken his neck.

"Get out!" he says with a deep dark voice.

What is wrong with these people? My stepdad grew up here, they have serious problems with pain relief. I just chuck money on the counter and leave, I know that I have really strong medication in my suitcase from last year when I broke my arm. I'll take that instead.

I'd been asleep for maybe three hours when I feel a sharp pain in my neck, I can't move, I'm paralysed, I'm scared. I'm being carried in the dark. My eyes open but I can't move. I'm seated in front of a TV, it's the 1920s country fair I see every year on the TV. It's in black and white, just like my memories with the creepy music. I'm trying to scream but nothing is coming out, a person steps in front of me to fix my position.

It's the cashier from the petrol station, his eyes are black, he smirks at me then says "Dad, they're doing that funny eye-opening thing again."

I hear my stepdad say "It's alright son you know they do that sometimes, but they won't remember anything by the time we are done."

Then the cashier responded, "Yeah, but it's still creepy, I've been so hungry for this one since I missed out last year, she tastes so good."

"But be careful son, not to suck her dry, or you will have nothing to eat for next year," my stepdad said.

The cashier stands in front of me, his face real close to mine, a tube comes out of his mouth almost like an insect, it sharply pierces my throat. I see my blood coming back up the tube then my stepdad comes over.

"Gee she smells as sweet as candy," he says.

His face opens up, a tube comes out, and he stabs me on the other side of my neck. My insides feel like they're getting ripped out of me. I end up passing out.

When I wake someone is stroking my hair and the sun is shining warmth on my face. I feel safe as I realise it's my mother's voice. I haven't heard that voice since I was a young child.

"Come back to me sweetheart, you did it, you saved us." I open my eyes; my mother is holding me in her arms.

"Mum, where have you been?"

"I've been trapped in my own body for ten years. Your stepfather was injecting me with poison to control me, and I couldn't get away. You were too young to poison, it only works on adults.

"How did you know painkillers would kill them, masked with the smell of candy so they couldn't smell it?"

"I didn't Mum. The painkillers worked as a blood thinner, and they just bled out and died. It was just dumb luck, just dumb luck," I replied.

MUSEUM DANGERS

The sound of cars honking and people screaming made me wonder what I did wrong to cause this much mayhem and chaos. Sorry, I forgot to introduce myself. Hi my name is Max, and I'm being chased by a crazy, big killing machine called a Giganotosaurus. This might all sound crazy, but it would be better if I explained to you what really happened from the start.

This all started four hours ago when my dad, who is a paleontologist (a person who studies old bones of old animals called dinosaurs), took me to the museum. Museums are boring so I was allowed to bring my friend Steve, he's 18 years old, two years older than me but that doesn't bother him. Anyway, he drove dad and me to the museum.

I had never been to this museum and didn't plan on returning in the near future. I know, you might think I'm being a little disrespectful, but truthfully, I don't understand what people find interesting about this place. To me, it was a huge building filled with old bones.

Anyway, my father told me facts about the old bones. I barely listened to what he said because I was watching dinosaur holograms. They were really cool because they moved, made sounds and you could walk through them without getting hurt. I guess that's because the museum has been upgraded with the latest technology. It felt less 1900 and more 2031.

After a while, my dad left Steve and me to look around. Steve hadn't talked much since we got there. I guess he was really interested in ancient animals. He asked which dinosaur was my favourite. I didn't know much about dinosaurs, so I pointed to the biggest most badass looking dinosaur in the whole museum. "That's a Giganotosaurus," he said.

It was then that I actually took a good look at the dinosaur skeletons. I was surprised and amazed. They were all brown and a little cracked showing that they were really old and fragile. There were dinosaurs who were really tall and contrasting to the really small chicken sized dinosaurs.

I was amazed by the Giganotosaurus. It was tall and long and like probably the scariest thing in the whole museum. It was around 40 to 50 feet in height, it had a long tail. Its legs were as big as tree trunks, but its arms were really small which I found amusing. Then there were its jaws, they were narrow like a crocodile except much larger. Its teeth looked like sharp bananas. As I admired the creature, Steve told me that there was more information about it on the bottom of the exhibit. I ignored every word he said as I wondered how something this huge could be extinct.

We explored the rest of the museum, while he was explaining about dinosaurs, I was looking at each different fossil. Each one was unique

because of its shape or its bone structure. There were some abnormal fossils like the Oviraptor because it looked like an Ostrich except it was squished in a circle of eggs. Steve told me that the Oviraptors died while protecting their eggs from sandstorms. In the end, the sand consumed them and they died. I was amazed at how protective some dinosaurs were of their babies compared to others.

The tour continued. I was amazed each time I saw a different dinosaur until we went around the whole museum. To me, it was really quick, but we had actually been there for a couple of hours. When we reached the end, I asked how these magnificent creatures died? Steve answered my question by explaining that a huge meteor from outer space crashed down on earth killing almost every single living thing. After a while, everything started to die as there was no food and also because the weather conditions were unfit for the dinosaurs to live in.

I was deep in thought about what would have happened to the world right now if there were still dinosaurs living on the Earth. Then something scary happened.

A bunch of men in black masks came into the museum, guns blazing, yelling at everyone to put their hands up. Everyone went silent and listened to what they said. When they started to rob the accountant, that was when the Giganotosaurus came to life. I don't know how, but it started to move which surprised everyone.

Some people screamed, others fainted, and a couple of people like me just looked at it in amazement. It was still a skeleton, but it could actually move. That's when I saw my dad with a remote control in his hand. He had a crazy grin on his face. It was then that I realised what had actually happened. In each dinosaur was small tubes of robotic fluid which helped the dinosaur move. Technology really is amazing!

The Giganotosaurus roared at the intruders who ran away screaming like little toddlers. My dad laughed and then when everyone else realised what happened they laughed and cheered my dad's name.

But all of a sudden it malfunctioned. The Giganotosaurus went haywire. It started stomping, roaring, swishing its tail back and forth until it looked at me. I panicked and bolted towards the exit, running out onto the street. Cars honked at first, then people started to scream and ran away when the Giganotosaurus stomped down the street.

Then the police and the scientist came in to help the people escape safely and subdue the haywire dinosaur. Luckily I made it to safety without injury, but the funny thing was the people treated my dad like a hero, even after all the mayhem.

THE RAINBOW

Samantha and Susan were skipping in front of their brothers who were in an animated discussion about cars. Peter was Samantha's 16-year-old brother as Brad was Susan's 15-year-old brother. They were friends since their playgroup days.

Samantha stopped suddenly and peered through some nearby bushes.

"What's wrong Sam?" Peter asked his ten-year-old sister.

"Look, I can see coloured lights through the trees!" answered Samantha.

"Let's go and see what's making the colours," said Susan.

"I dunno about that," said Brad, "It looks scary to me. It's really weird that a light is shining through the trees like that."

"Don't be such a baby Brad," said Susan. "Samantha and I want to see the colours."

"Please, Pete" pleaded Samantha, "We won't take long, pleeeeeeese!"

"Come on Brad, let's go and see what all the fuss is about," said Peter.

The four young people stepped through the trees in their local park and finally came to a sudden stop. With mouths wide open and eyes the size of saucers they stood there and gawked at what they saw in front of them.

They approached these beautiful lights hesitantly, not sure whether to believe their eyes or not.

"Are we dreaming?" asked Peter.

"If this is a dream then I think we're all in it together," whispered Brad.

"Is it what I think it is?" asked Susan.

"Let's find out," said Samantha, and she began walking forward.

"Stop!" shouted Peter. "We don't know what this is or if it's safe."

Samantha turned to look back at her brother.

"It's just what it looks like, a rainbow. We might even find the treasure at the end of the rainbow. My book says there is treasure at the end of every rainbow!" and before anyone could stop her, Samantha was off and started to climb onto the rainbow.

She turned back to the others and called out, "Come on it's safe, it looks smooth but it's very firm, and I'm not sliding off."

They rushed over to Samantha and began climbing the rainbow.

"Wow this is so cool," said Brad.

"Yeah," said Peter, "I wonder where it came from and how it's reached the earth. I've never heard of this happening before."

The four children just walked without saying anything, then Samantha pointed to something ahead.

"What's that?" she asked.

They all stopped walking, and Peter said: "I wish I had a pair of binoculars, we need to be careful, let's just go a bit further and try to make out what it is."

They walked until they saw a little girl, sitting with her head leaning on her bent knees, her blonde curls swaying in the slight breeze. She seemed to be crying.

"What's wrong?" asked Susan. "Are you alright?"

The little girl looked up with a startled expression on her face.

"Who are you?" she asked. "How did you get here? What do you want?"

"We don't mean you any harm," said Samantha. "The rainbow looked so pretty, we just wanted to go for a walk on it."

"We have never seen the end of a rainbow touching the earth." Brad piped up.

"Well, yes. That's the trouble you see. My friends and I were taking the rainbow home after the rain, and they got an urgent message and had to go home straight away. I thought I could lift it back by myself and I did for a while, but then it got too heavy, and I dropped one side of it, and it landed on the ground, and now I just don't know what to do!" wailed the little girl.

"Maybe we can help you," added Samantha. "There are four of us, and maybe we can all lift it."

"But I have to take it back over the clouds and into the rainbow shelter. Can you fly?"

"No, we can't fly, we're only human," said Samantha.

"Can you fly?" asked Susan.

"Of course, I am a rainbow fairy," said the little girl and with that she opened out the colourful wings on her back and rose a few feet above the rainbow.

"What's your name?" asked Peter.

"My name is Rose, what are your names?"

The children introduced themselves, but none of them could figure out how to help her fly the rainbow back to its home where it belonged.

Suddenly a very tiny fairy peeped out from Rose's pocket.

"Daffodil, what are you doing here?" Rose exclaimed.

Daffodil jumped onto Rose's shoulder, "I was tired when we finished working last night, so I just crept into your pocket for a nap, but I guess I napped too long... and oh dear, I have forgotten to take back the fairy dust we collected when we were cleaning the stars.

"Did you say that you have some fairy dust?" asked Rose excitedly.

"Yes, I do, but please don't tell Magenta, you know how upset she gets if any of us spills fairy dust. She thinks we're being careless and wasteful."

"Not this time my little friend," said Rose.

Everyone including tiny Daffodil stared at Rose, who burst out laughing at the stupefied look on their faces.

"If I sprinkle some fairy dust on you all, you will be able to fly and then you can help me lift the rainbow!

"I want to help too," squeaked little Daffodil.

And that is exactly what occurred. Rose sprinkled some fairy dust on the children. They were so excited and happy that they could fly and help Rose as well.

Rose and Daffodil showed them the way.

The children encountered many adventures with Rose and her fairy friends. Join me next time so that you can share in the wonderful and exciting adventures they have.

© MIRIAM GRECH 2018

TESTIMONIAL

"The 'How to Write a Novel' program was one that clearly took me out of my comfort zone; something I needed.

We were asked to write two short stories for this anthology. We also created a children's book from a child's perspective of areas around Wyndham.

This made me feel that there was a purpose to my writing. The information given to us to assist us with writing a novel or short story was exactly what I was looking for.

Thank you, Vicki."

MIRIAM GRECH

FALLING INTO THE ABYSS

The sun comes up, the sun goes down,
The world just keeps spinning around.
My heart is heavy, the trust is gone,
There are people around, but I feel alone.

When the lights are out the love is there,
As no conversation is required to share.
In the daylight hours, there's a different side,
Where now I feel my love should hide.

I want to reach out and hold everyone tight,
I want to feel loved, supported and bright.
My mind tells me there's secrets, mistrust and lies,
By people I've supported, loved and relied.

I've given my all and then some too,
Done some things I never planned to do.
Love has given me strength and peace,
But also made me feel sad and weak.

I've become a shadow of the person I was,
My heart and mind feeling the loss.
While encouraging and assisting others to grow,
It has drained my energy and taken my soul.

How do I move beyond this brick wall,
That builds itself higher and ever so tall.
Wishing to move forward and to find my bliss,
But feel myself Falling into the Abyss.

© FAYE LOCKWOOD-ROURKE 2018

THE CAVE

It was hot. Even the flies were listless and half-heartedly buzzed around my sweating face. I'd been walking what seemed like hours but in reality, was probably less than an hour. I was heading for a cave my brother and I used to play in as children.

We were reminiscing over a few drinks the other night and foolishly made plans to revisit our youth, which explains why this unfit fifty-something woman found herself trudging along with a backpack and a bad temper. Who was I kidding?

Annoyed at myself for making rash decisions and plans, I now understood why my husband, Mal, thought it so funny as I raved about how easy it would be to hike and much more fun than driving. My brother had generously offered to do the boring part and bring the car and heavy gear. He obviously had not drunk as much as me and was sharing the joke.

I was determined not to let him see me suffering and wiped my sweaty brow, pulled my limp dark hair into a ponytail and adjusted my hat. The car park where I would meet Christopher was just over the next hill, and I arranged my face into what I thought was a fresh happy hiker's expression.

I was greeted by yells and clapping as I crested the hill.

"Hooray, at last!" said Christopher. "I have been here for hours reading a book and drinking coffee while I waited for you. It was terrible but someone had to do it. Enjoy your walk in the sunshine?"

"Yes thanks, it was good fun," I replied. "I just need a little rest before we go and maybe a coffee."

"Oops, sorry. I drank it all. We had better get going anyway, it's already 10 am."

I was ready to yell at him then noticed the coffee cup steaming on the picnic table. Christopher had a wry grin as he took my backpack and I plonked myself at the table with a groan.

"Not such a good idea after all sis, never mind. I'll drive you back unless you want to hike of course?"

I didn't reply, just grinned back at him while I sipped my coffee. I had already drunk a litre of water on my walk so a toilet was the next stop. Christopher was two years older than me but still looked pretty fit and trim. We both shared the dark hair and eyes, but he was tall at 6'2" on the old scale and wore trendy glasses, and I had stopped growing at 5'4" and probably carrying a few kilos too many these days. Hopefully, I had shed a few on the way here, but doubtful.

I was looking forward to this silly excursion. I had recently been made redundant, both at work and at home as my last child had moved out. I pretended everything was fine, but inside I was feeling a bit lost and useless. Past my use-by-date, I thought, and not really needed by anyone.

Christopher's voice brought me out of my sad thoughts and I jumped.

"Mal said he would see you this afternoon and bring you a wine to recover."

"I hope he meant it," I replied smiling brightly.

I stretched before heading off to the toilet.

"I will get the torches and ropes ready, don't worry yourself," said Christopher in a sarcastic tone.

"OK, I won't," I yelled back over my shoulder.

Christopher was good for me, he knew I was down but didn't dwell on it, just quietly went about things and cheered me up with his dry humour.

Finally, we headed into the cave. It was a large opening and had obviously been popular as many footprints and the remains of a fire were obvious. There were also empty alcohol cans, which I kicked into a corner to collect on the way back.

"Leave nothing but footprints," said Christopher.

"Shame not many take any notice of that rule," I replied.

We walked on toward the darkness, and it actually looked a bit creepier than I remembered.

I watched as my brother tied a line to a large rock and let it run behind us as we walked further into the void.

"Safety first," he said with a grin. "We shouldn't need it but nice to know the way back, just in case."

The cave appeared to finish at the back wall but actually turned left and then abruptly right. We turned on our headlamps; they looked silly but were fantastic for this situation as they kept our hands free.

The air smelt damp, and there was also another smell, bat dung! Yuk! Guano it was known as. Regardless, it stank, and I was trying not to put my hands into piles of it on the rocks.

"This is gross!" I complained.

"Where is your sense of adventure, sis? Come on, we are nearly at the tunnel. Maybe we won't fit now? You're a bit rounder than when you were 10!"

I laughed out loud and it echoed eerily back at us. The noise and our headlamps had disturbed the sleeping bats, and they took off in a whirl of wings and squeaks.

“Aargh!” I yelled as I ducked. “Whose stupid idea was this?”

Christopher was crouched down and shining a torch into what looked like a ridiculously small opening behind a large boulder.

“Maybe we will just stop here? We have nothing to prove.” I sounded a bit pathetic, even to myself.

“Come on, we just have to go sideways here, and it opens up, remember? We have to see if our time capsule is still there.”

I sighed and followed the rapidly disappearing torchlight in front. It was only a tight squeeze for a minute then we were through to a large chamber about the size of my lounge room. Christopher swung the torch in a circle, picking out amazing shapes of stalactites dripping from the roof and stalagmites growing up to meet them.

So beautiful, it reminded me of a church organ of many pipes and made me feel reverent somehow.

The tunnel was off to the right, it looked much smaller than I remembered but of course, we were bigger now.

“You go first, shorty,” said Christopher.

I stood staring at the dark opening while I gathered my courage. It was my idea, so I guess I shouldn’t complain although I wanted to run screaming back to daylight and fresh air. I took a deep breath, checked the line was still behind us and dropped to my knees.

“You can do it, sis, remember it’s not far then it opens again I think. That’s how I remember it anyway,” said Christopher.

I adjusted my headlamp and backpack and began to crawl. The ground felt damp beneath my jeans. I was sweating despite the coolness and trying hard to fight the claustrophobic feeling of the walls closing in around me. I had gone about two metres when I got stuck! My backpack had snagged on something and I could not go forward. I started to reverse but soon realised I was stuck fast.

“Breathe, just breathe,” I told myself as real fear gripped me.

“Help! Christopher, where are you?”

“Right behind you, stop wriggling! If you try and lie flat, I can reach the strap. I think it has caught on something.”

I tried to lower myself but could only manage a sort of push up as whatever it was had me suspended.

“Got it!”

I fell free, my face hitting the dirt. Panting heavily, my heart hammered rapidly. Slowly I moved forward and slid down a smooth rock into the chamber.

There were our treasures, undisturbed after forty years. Amazing! Useless matches, a notebook all curled up, comic books and a rusty old torch sat in the corner near a shoebox. Our time capsule!

We sat on the ground as Christopher opened the lid. It was still in pretty good shape considering its age. A Polaroid picture had not survived very well. We could just make out blurry shapes so discarded it. The other photos were better, and we laughed at our innocent faces and the bad fashions of the time.

"You wanted to be a fireman and I wanted to be a famous writer," I read out loud from our letters.

"Instead I am a single Engineer, and you became a Business Manager, fantastic wife, Mum and Nana who is lucky enough to have the money and time to spend with the people who love her."

Christopher rarely gave a serious speech, but when he did, I listened.

I sat quietly, thinking about what he had said. He was right. I had been silly and self-absorbed. I wasn't the young girl I used to be or the busy career woman but had metamorphosised into a valued mature woman.

With uplifted spirits, I left the darkness behind and started back toward the light.

© PAULINE RIMMER 2018

MR BULLY

Hey Mr Bully stay out of my son's dreams
You don't have to hear him toss and turn and listen to the screams.

Hey Mr Bully do you think it's really fair
To break down his spirit and make him think people don't care.

Hey Mr Bully please just leave him alone
It's breaking my heart watching him cry and moan.

Hey Mr Bully this is the final straw
I had to watch him hurt himself and fall to the floor.

I curse you away forever you can never hurt us again
Cause I will lift this boy up with my last breath till the very end.

© BRIONY KUCIC TUCKETT 2018

THE DAY I LOST A HANGAR

This is one of those stories that will make you laugh or cry, better yet, if you were laughing, you may very well end up crying from the laughter.

Armourers were well renowned for being inventive and having a very good time. It was a common event for me to spend most of my days at the bomb dump sobering up from the night before. It gave me a chance to think and let life pass me by.

Routinely the week never eventuated into much, we would spend our days counting the weapons which never seemed to go missing, and making sure everything was working properly.

This week was a little different, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) training was being carried out by our senior personnel.

This exercise was all about bomb disposal. The bomb disposal van was on base for a few days for them to go through their paces ensuring personnel were current and compliant.

Exercises like this brought personnel in from all other bases around New Zealand. A Warrant Officer and Flight Sergeant from Woodbourne Airforce base, which is at the top of the South Island, were armourers through and through. They came with years of experience and a memory bank of stories of their own.

What you may not know is that alcohol was an integral part of my Air Force days, as it was for most of my workmates. This was part of the problem, as you will see from the events that unfolded.

It's amazing how we become ten-foot-tall and bulletproof with a bit of Dutch courage. Yes, I mean how alcohol can and does impair your common sense and good judgement.

As the day unfolded, everyone got stuck into the training programme. The bomb disposal robot was put through its paces. It was good to see how a robot could manoeuvre within a building, around and over obstacles, until the robot finds the suspect object. Then the whole tone changed as the robot carried out an investigation of what the object was and how much of a danger it was to mankind.

Being a typical Armourer, blowing up things was a part of the job we all longed for. This exercise was especially important to me because once the robot found the suspect object, a discussion ensued its outcome. Would they detonate to dispose of the object inside the building or was it safe to move the object outside to an open area for safe disposal?

At the end of the day it was time for the socialising to begin. Over a few drinks all the old stories came out. My Warrant Officer had been in the Air Force for 33 years, and his stories were impressive. I'm not too sure how embellished they were though.

Eventually, we couldn't hold on any longer and we all had to start going to the toilet. The toilet was located across the road and between two hangars. Every time we would go to the toilet someone would put soap and toilet rolls above the door. Each time you opened the door all of the stuff would fall down and hit you on the head. This started to frustrate us, and the more we drank, the worse it got.

We started to eliminate who was doing it. We finally decided who the instigator was. This was when the dynamic of the evening changed, for the good or the bad. I think only you can decide that for yourself.

We had all decided that the instigator was my Warrant Officer and when he went to the toilet, was when it all went south. Someone had made mention that there was a teargas grenade sitting on the bench in one of the offices, which should have been put away earlier in the day.

Wikipedia tells us that tear gas, sometimes known as mace, is a chemical weapon that causes severe eye and respiratory pain, skin irritation, bleeding, and even blindness.

Without thinking, I immediately leapt into action. Yes, at that moment I was ten-foot-tall and extremely bulletproof, and I didn't think of the consequences of my actions.

I grabbed the teargas grenade and ran out to the toilet block, by the time I got there he was already inside the toilet cubicle. I pulled the pin from the grenade. I can still feel the pin scraping on the metal as I withdrew it. I opened the main door of the toilet block and rolled the grenade in just like you see it in the movies; it happened like clockwork. I heard a small bang then I could hear the teargas escaping from the grenade. I held the door closed as the room filled up very quickly with noxious smoke.

My Warrant Officer was yelling "Let me out, let me out." I eventually released the door and ran back to the armoury not looking back to see how my Warrant Officer was. I got into the armoury a bit short of breath and said "I have done it" to the rest of the drunken Armourers.

We all went outside to see the Warrant Officer staggering out of the toilet block, the air was thick and pungent with the noxious tear gas, in fact, the gas had spewed out into the other hangars, and we could feel it sting our eyes.

After we had composed ourselves from laughter, we got the fire hose out to wash his eyes and face to remove the stinging sensation he was experiencing.

To this day we still giggle and laugh about the events of the night I had lost our hanger in tear gas, and one of the few times I was ten-foot-tall and bulletproof.

But, the night could have ended much differently for all of us, so remember drink is good to have mixed with a little fun, but it can remove your common sense and ability to make wise decisions.

THE WRONG JOURNEY

Screams of pain echoed around her and terror vibrated throughout her whole being. Patches of grass stuck to her face as it rested on the rock beneath her. She'd lay there for so long the blood had dried around her. She painfully dragged her head upward and tried to discern the scene of horror before her. Her eyes struggled to focus, the more she tried, the more her head screamed in agony.

She didn't know how long she'd laid motionless, a continual swoon in and out of consciousness. The last thing she remembered was the pilot informing his 800 passengers to brace themselves for impact.

She felt a gentle hand touch her shoulder, lifting her chin and bringing a bottle to her lips. She sipped the cool water slowly. Her throat burned, but she still wanted to thank her saviour.

"Slowly," he urged. His voice calm but assertive.

"Thank... you," she croaked. She kept her eyes shut. Blurred vision making the torture in her head increase.

There was something about his voice. It felt so familiar somehow. It brought back memories of her arrival at the airport. Parking her car as usual in the dingy long-term carpark. It appeared maintained but always stank of urine. Almost empty of vehicles, the lights flickered on and off, making her feel uneasy. She was not alone. Another car was already parked on the same level, deep enough in the shadows that she couldn't see the man's face, as he lifted the boot of his car. She pulled into the bay, reached over to recheck her documents and glimpsed up in time to see the man move something large out of sight in the boot of the car. The crazy thought that crossed her mind was it looked like a body.

The man spoke again, bringing her hazy mind back into focus; returning to the cataclysmic situation she was in. The torment she felt was so overwhelming that she couldn't even cry.

"I'll be back soon with medical supplies," he spoke gently yet with assurance. He paused, "I know it's hard, but you must take deep breaths and try to stay calm."

She attempted to breathe deeply. It was difficult without gagging though, the toxic smell of volcano ash heavy in the air.

She opened her eyes slightly to watch him stand, the pain increasing as she tried to identify the colour on his sneakers. Closing her eyes tightly she tried to think. She knew the brand of sneaker but couldn't remember the name. Her mind was clouded, random words vaguely circling in her thoughts. Then, unexpectedly, she felt a sharp blow to the top of the head. Again, her vision went black.

The next thing she heard was the sound of voices. Urgent whispers of

panic and fear. She could only catch words here and there. An active volcano. And something about a murderer who was also on the plane. Travelling with a detective or something. A woman's voice said she had seen the handcuffs on their wrists, joining one to the other. But the detective was dead.

The woman opened her eyes to inky blackness and tried to move, only to find that her hands were bound. Agonising pain and terror engulfed every part of her body. Her mind felt so groggy she could barely think. Putting two words together logically seemed impossible. What was going on? How many others survived, and where were they? Had the other people also been tied up?

She felt hot breath against her ear and jumped slightly. His voice again. Barely audible above a whisper. Telling her to remain quiet. He untied the rope quickly. Making no sound. His fingers worked expertly with the knots. Too expertly for her liking. She knew she was going to die but what hand would deal her fate quicker; a murderer, the island crumbling around them or her injuries. Was he really the killer though? She was so sure it was him. She never saw his face that day in the carpark, but there was something she couldn't put her finger on. Something she couldn't trust. She was going to trust him with her life now though.

As he lifted her gently to her feet, a moan of pain escaped from her lips. He quickly covered her mouth to mask the sound. He put one of her limp arms around his neck, holding it there, with the other firmly around her waist. She felt the thick muscles in his shoulder tense as he almost carried her, her feet barely dragging across the ground. He must have been very strong to take her so far, but he didn't falter and didn't speak. They moved in silence. Swiftly, even with her awkward attempts to step. Then as he leaned lower beneath some shrubbery, her head fell forward, and she felt leaves brush her cheek and branches catch her hair.

He lay her down carefully and her stomach clenched, every muscle tightened with unspeakable dread. The time had come for her to leave this world. It was almost a relief to believe that there would be no more pain. She could not bear it another moment. She almost wanted to thank him for taking her life.

Then the sound came from above, barely heard above the sudden and fierce explosions coming from the ground, vibrating through her body. The sound of salvation. A rescue helicopter descending nearby.

Days and weeks and months passed. The woman recovered very slowly in a hospital bed. Although she was very close to death when rescued, the physical injuries were recovering much quicker than her emotional scars. The man visited her again. He had saved her life. Saved her life from a killer on the loose. Her angel was an undercover agent who just happened to be on the same doomed flight.

© MICHELLE RIPARI 2018

PAST LIVES

Pounding away the tension in my shoulder blades, my spiritual masseuse dropped a proverbial bombshell.

"I'm being told you have to write about past lives."

"How the hell am I supposed to write about past lives, when I don't know anything about past lives or even what my past lives have been?" I angrily announced.

What were 'my people' doing up there! I thought they were working with me, wanting me to succeed in my writing career. Obviously not! Especially when they make outrageous statements like this.

"You have to give me more... what or more importantly 'how' do they expect me to pull this one out of the bag?" I pleaded with my masseuse.

"Stop tensing up. They said you have everything you need within you." With that, she dug her elbow under my shoulder blade desperately trying to release the deeply embedded knots.

Urrgh, back to that again are we? Back to cryptic messages that do nothing more than frustrate the hell out of me.

Distracted now from my massage, I asked 'my people' for help.

"Ok guys, if you expect me to write about past lives, then you will need to connect me with the people who can unlock my past lives."

The rest of the week flew by in the blink of an eye. I found myself being drawn to a local meditation group I frequent whenever I feel the need for more spiritual guidance.

As I walked in the door my spiritual advisor announced that tonight we were going to do something a little different, we were going to explore our past lives, specifically for the purpose of identifying negative patterns or behaviours that we have brought into this life, ones we may still be playing out.

We were to identify the behaviour, acknowledge it, and then cut the ties to it. What the??? Thank you, thank you, thank you, so 'my people' were listening to me after all.

We settled down into a very deep meditation, and I allowed myself to trust that whatever I heard, smelt, or sensed was in fact related to a past life and accept it as it is, not to analyse or judge it as being nonsense or inconsequential regardless of what came up.

My first vision was of a young slim white female in her 20's dancing in a circular motion. The words Blue Danube came to mind. There were lots of people dancing around the grand ballroom, I wasn't aware I knew any of them; I felt I was there alone. I was given the year of 1650. I knew I travelled to this dance by horse and buggy because I could smell the horse and the dusty road on me. All the people at the dance were white and well

to do. I have no idea the purpose of the dance or who I was. I wore a hat, and the long, full dress felt stuffy and claustrophobic to wear.

The word 'slave' kept coming through, but I couldn't identify what the significance was, the following questions entered my thoughts:

Did I feel I was a slave even though I was white?

Do I believe I am treated as a slave today?

Was I a slave sympathiser?

Do I have slaves, and how do I treat them?

Does this relate to how I treat people now?

What was my status and how did that affect me?

What does status mean to me now?

There were way too many things to think about, so I left this past life and moved onto the next one.

Before going into my next vision, I asked 'my people' to give me some clarification on why I have spent this lifetime struggling with weight problems. In an instant, I saw myself as an eight-year-old black African boy. I was skin and bone and although there were other people around me I felt totally alone, abandoned. I was dying or waiting to die. At first, I wasn't sure what was wrong with me, but then I heard the word Polio, I couldn't see any obvious signs other than the fact I was skin and bone.

Of course, that's why my body in this lifetime stores fat, so that it never runs out, that I would never starve again. I quickly severed this negative pattern and moved onto my next past life.

My next vision was myself as an old Tibetan Monk. I was skin and bone. Once again, skin and bone but this time I didn't feel that I was starving, more a lifestyle choice. I believe I was fed enough to get me through the day.

I felt crippled but realised this was the result of sitting cross-legged on the floor all day every day, which would certainly account for the pain I suffer today in my hips and lumber region. I saw a bowl in front of me. I first thought I was a beggar, but felt there was more to it than that, so I asked 'my people' for more clarification. They said I was a type of Oracle, I was very wise, and people would come for a glimpse into their future, they would put money into the bowl. The bowl was a musical singing bowl, and I would lure people over by its harmonious sound. I knew I could see, my third eye was pounding, and my sight shifted to reflect that this was my source of survival.

This first experience of past life meditation was back in 2015, since then I have dropped into many of my past lives; and yes, I will compile them into a book. Sadly, I have had more sad lives than happy, but that has taught me to be the strong independent person I am today, so that's a great thing.

ELLA

Ella woke up Monday morning ready for school, her Mum had never seen Ella so excited about going to school before. She was even happier when Ella told her Mum that she was strong enough to climb up and down the slide and that she was now ready to conquer the world.

Ella's Mum knew that Ella was still getting used to not having the bottom half of her leg and felt that because she didn't have a full leg, she believed she couldn't do anything, and nobody would like her except her two best friends Pearl and Mitsy.

Ella had climbed the steps that led to the top of the slide and loved every minute of slowly sliding down, now Ella wanted to join in PE.

Ella went to school wanting to participate in PE instead of watching from the side-lines. The teacher didn't make Ella sit on the sideline, she wanted her to join in but because Ella was young and afraid the teacher had never pushed her. Today Ella came to PE class asking to join in, so the teacher was very happy, as were Pearl and Mitsy.

To make things easier for Ella the teacher started slowly. "Ella, today we will learn to catch a ball." But when the ball was thrown to Ella, she dropped it, and this upset Ella.

Holding onto crutches and trying to catch a ball with her hands was difficult. The teacher saw the problem and got a chair for Ella to sit in so that she could retain her balance. The other students could sit on a chair too if they wanted. Now when the ball was thrown to Ella, she caught it, this brought a big smile to her face because now she felt she was a part of her class.

Ella went home from school that day feeling on top of the world even though it was only a small thing like catching a ball it was a big thing for her. This meant she could be included in all sports and her most favourite sport was gymnastics. Why gymnastics? Because she liked the idea of flying in the air, somersaulting, running around with pretty ribbons, wearing beautiful costumes and being the centre of attention. Ella told her mum what had happened especially about her ultimate dream of one day competing in gymnastics. Her mum told Ella to slow down and not to get ahead of herself. She told her to take baby steps, after all, she was only eight.

Ella went to bed that night very angry and upset, especially with her mother. Ella's mother was heartbroken. How do you explain to an eight-year-old that you couldn't do gymnastics with one and a half legs?

The next morning Ella got out of bed, got dressed for school, went to the kitchen where her mother was still upset. Ella felt pain in her

heart when she saw her mother upset and crying. "I love you, but I was angry because you tried to stop me from having a dream. I thought you supported me because I need my Mumma."

Ella's mum hugged and kissed her daughter and told her she loved her to the moon and back, she apologised saying she didn't mean to make her angry because she was scared that Ella might get hurt and that may make her never try anything again.

While Ella was sitting in the car going to school, she was thinking what she would do next. She knew it was going to be gymnastics, but she wanted to do other things as well so when she got to school she would talk to her PE teacher.

Ella's Friends Mitsy and Pearl were already at school when Ella arrived they ran to greet her and jumping up and down asking if Ella had told her mum what she had achieved yesterday. "Yes, now let's go to class," Ella said.

Ella wanted to tell her friends about doing gymnastics, but after her mums' reaction, she really didn't want to hear how silly it was.

At lunchtime Ella couldn't wait to talk to the PE teacher, she was excited and scared at the same time.

Ella found Ms Bend, the PE teacher. "Hello, Ella. Are you going to join in with PE again today?"

"Yes, I will always join in, but I wanted to ask you if you th-th-th-think y-y-y-you could teach me gymnastics?" Ella asked feeling suddenly shy, Ella found it hard to look up, afraid of the answer.

"No." Ella was shocked and upset she believed that Ms Bend was the one person who would say yes.

Ms Bend could see that Ella was upset. She went on to explain that she did not want to train Ella because she was not qualified to train someone like Ella. She did not want Ella to go backwards.

"Ella, come and see me after school and bring your mum?" Ms Bend asked.

Ella was not interested, why should she, Ms Bend had said 'no'.

Ms Bend had been a teacher for a long time and knew as she watched Ella walk away shoulders bent over, head down that she would not come and see her after school. Ms Bend liked Ella, she didn't feel sorry for her even though it was tough for an eight-year-old to deal with having no bottom leg. Ella finally found the courage to go on the slide and join in with PE, but now Ella wanted to do gymnastics, and Ms Bend knew she was not equipped or experienced to teach Ella. Of course, she could teach her very basic stuff like mat work.

When the bell sounded Ms Bend went to meet with Ella and her mum. Ms Bend had called Jackie, Ella's mum, earlier and told her what

had happened. She had explained to Jackie that she had a friend who was a professional gymnastics coach and she would like to get Jackie's permission to see if she could help get Ella started with gymnastics.

Jackie asked Ms Bend if this coach deals with girls like Ella.

"Yes, she works with children of different disabilities, but to the professional coach everyone had abilities, so there is no such thing as a disability."

Jackie was overcome with joy and could not help but cry. Jackie didn't care how much it was going to cost, she was going to see that her baby girl lived her dream.

Jackie and Ella entered Ms Bend's room, and Ms Bend told Ella she had spoken to her mum and had permission to talk to her friend the professional gymnastics coach.

"When I spoke to her, she said she'd be delighted to train Ella, but she would have to get Ella's doctor's permission first." Jackie didn't seem to think that would be a problem.

The giant smile on Ella's face was all Jackie needed to see to know she was doing the right thing.

© *TRACIE SIGISMONDI 2018*

TESTIMONIALS

"I met Vicki via a mutual friend, and overheard Vicki talk about writing and how she runs a writing class. I spoke to her as I have a son who is interested in writing.

I have been with the 'How to Write a Novel' program for 12 months and have learned a lot about different types of writing and what a great inspiration she is regarding her writing.

I haven't grown as much as I would like with my writing, but my son has grown heaps and will be a great writer someday."

TRACIE SIGISMONDI

"I found the 'How to Write a Novel' program gave me encouragement and assistance.

Vicky obviously loves the craft and passes on that love of writing to others.

It gave me the inspiration to continue with my writing. Thankyou."

PAULINE RIMMER

THE WRITER

It taunted me, this vast page of white
A virgin field, urging me to write
And still my pen refused to yield
My brilliance yet to be revealed
Then words tumbled like a dam released
Not a gentle stream, an angry beast
Jostling for the best position
Ideas and stories on a mission
Aching wrist and smudgy ink
Hardly giving time to think
Urgency flowed through my veins
To get it down lest memory wanes
At last I stopped, my mind depleted
One day my book will get completed.

© PAULINE RIMMER 2018

EAVESDROPPING

They sat over coffee, discussing the method of doing away with a detective.

I heard but didn't see them talking as I was facing the other way. Then from a nearby window reflection, I saw another person join their table. Surprise doesn't come close to explaining how I felt when I identified the police uniform of the latecomer. For the next half an hour I sat looking at my lunch in front of me, wondering if I had the stomach to eat anything.

Do I stay or get up and leave? The discussion continued, and as I listened, I wondered if I'd imagined something which was very likely nothing at all. Were they really discussing the upcoming demise of a senior police officer.

One thing which intrigued me was the ease with which the three men discussed issues that to me appeared to be menacing and criminal. The words they used were specific in nature and potentially scary to anyone who couldn't imagine participating in criminal activities.

My coffee was slowly cooling as I tried to sit quietly in a room half full of lunchtime patrons. I realised my lunch was not likely to be eaten.

Then in the window reflection, I saw the three men slowly rise from their table and leave the coffee shop. Should I sit quietly and allow them to go, or should I do something totally ridiculous and follow them?

What words did they use? I retrieved a notebook from my bag and started writing down parts of sentences I'd heard. As the page filled, I wondered what I would do with these notes. There was nothing of consequence such as when, or where or who would undertake what appeared to be a potential murder. Should I bring this to the notice of the police? Which police, where? And what would their response be when all I had to show them were my notes. I had no idea who the three men were. I couldn't identify them.

Since the three men had departed, the idea of following them had also passed. Which was somewhat reassuring as I had started to consider what I should do if I were to become a witness. Any decision I could have made might have put me at risk. Rising from my seat, I left the table and my uneaten lunch and walked slowly back to the office.

The streets were full of office workers who appeared to be returning to work. There was no sign of two men and a uniformed police officer walking together, but then I didn't expect to recognise anyone because I had only heard their words, not seen their faces.

The next day proved to be uneventful. I could not share anything with friends in the office, and it was difficult to focus on work. Life continued quietly for the next few days with no change, no news on television or in the papers. And there was no repeat of a visit by the three men at lunchtime in the same coffee shop. They didn't return; at least if they did, I was not aware of their presence.

Then suddenly one week later they returned. I heard them speaking and realised they were the same three men. Again, I was facing in the opposite direction. This time the discussion was focussed on the demise of a detective. They appeared to delve into the story behind the loss and why it had to happen. There was no indication in their discussion that they were responsible for such a crime. This surprised me. My original impression was that they would have a hand in the death of a detective with the intention that it must happen. It didn't seem to be the same focus of their previous discussion as I remembered it.

During the last few days, I'd followed the television news in case such a crime was reported. Nothing was included. Or did I miss it? Or had it been kept quiet from the media?

Then I recalled something that had been included in the very recent news about a specific actor and the part he played in a crime-based television program. The actor had taken the role of a detective who it seemed was to become a victim within the most current episodes. His character, unfortunately, had to be written out of the television program. The episode was to involve a spectacularly intense storyline which had been written by the scriptwriters for this criminal series. His demise would make an unexpected and dramatic change to future episodes.

And there it was. It seemed some members of the general public were quite moved by the loss of a specific character in a television program and it appeared to have become the talk of many over lunch in coffee shops, including even by professional police officers.

Not being a follower of such television programs and remembering that I'd overheard some details of what I thought would be a potential major crime, which turned out just to be fiction, it was a relief to have the opportunity to walk elsewhere at lunchtime and find another coffee shop.

SPECIAL AGENT PRISON

Standing on the roof of a high-rise, I push him off, hoping to end his life of crime, making sure that guilty son of a bitch could not take advantage of or kill another innocent victim. In my head, I thought it would work out smoothly, however, since then, everything has gone awry.

No one would come near me; the man who had pushed the incriminating mayor off the Eureka Sky Deck's roof, never to be heard from again.

I have spent 30 years working as an FBI agent cracking cases. My partner and I were assigned to go to Australia. We were following Eric Turner, the Mayor of New York City. He had gone there illegally. However, everyone has turned against me, even my partner, Special Agent Allison Perez.

Now I'm stuck in a Victoria state prison, no chance of bail. Some say I'm a lost cause, others wish I were not born. Even my family want nothing to do with me.

Originally, though, I never wanted to be a part of the FBI.

I thought I found my life's purpose, becoming a geologist, all the minerals just fascinated me. Every time a geologist discovered something new, I would try to be the first to read about it.

I worked hard in school (especially in science), getting a scholarship for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I geeked-out when I arrived, I think I fainted when I found out about the simulator for wannabe geologists and volcanologists.

I was first in the simulator. I visualised myself at the foot of an erupting volcano, seeing my feet trembling in fear. It made me feel as if I was the only one qualified for the task ahead.

I climbed a couple of feet when the ground around me broke. I knew I was stuffed until I quickly grabbed the side of a ledge, holding on for dear life, praying I didn't lose my grip and fall into the searing lava below.

Professor Amy Hutton turned off the simulator.

"Why did you do that?" I asked.

"You're a danger to us all, I should never have let you into this institute!" she yelled.

Then I muttered, a little too loudly, "Dumb bitch," and she threw me to the curb, out of the institute. Outside, the smell of carbon monoxide filled the air and reminded me of the time my father kicked me out of 'his' car for touching 'his' radio.

Later that night, wearing gloves so I couldn't be caught, I broke into the Institute through the air vents. Being short and skinny, I was a perfect fit.

When I got to the Professor's office, knowing I had tripped the silent alarm, I threw her rare mineral collection out the window, keeping three golden nuggets, of course. I thought after this all blows over, I could sell them to a collector for a lot of money.

Before I could be caught, I climbed back up into the air vent, sealed it up, hoping no one figured out it was me. I have never been back since.

A few years later, I studied law to get a Bachelor's degree while I trained at the Police Academy to become a Police Cadet. I planned to move through the ranks quickly. One day while I was sitting at my desk, I got a call from the FBI, they asked me to come to their headquarters for an interview.

I accepted, and seven hours of driving and petrol stops later, I made it to their headquarters. I entered and was asked to take a seat by the receptionist.

Then Special Agents A. Calma and T. Pennant took me into an interrogation room. They told me they had been keeping an eye on me since I was a cadet at the Police Academy. Firstly, they thanked me for my dedication to the job, then they got down to business.

They told me that they thought I should become an agent for the FBI. I accepted, and after I completed the application, I was off to the FBI's academy for a 20-week course. Soon enough, I was officially part of the FBI. The only weird thing was that they didn't have a file on me.

Right now, I'm back at the bottom, in jail, no way out and talking to a skinhead.

"What did you call me!" he exclaimed.

I didn't answer, but had a brilliant idea. A jailbreak. I got a couple of other inmates that claimed they were innocent, even though I didn't believe them.

Thanks to another riot that had already broken out in another cell, I grabbed a guard's shirt and yanked him into the cell bars. It split his head, giving me the chance to grab his keys and unlock my cell, then I snuck around to the Armory. I grabbed a couple of grenades while the other two begged me to unlock their cell. I hesitated, and they ended up getting shot by the riot squad. They couldn't catch me though, because I had already walked out unseen, undetected.

I vanished into thin air.

THE DAY I GAVE THE SHITS

This is the kind of story you need to start at the end to begin at the beginning. It was just another ordinary day, you know the type.

I had just got back to the armoury when my Sargent came to me with a serious kind of look, not often seen on his face. What came out of his mouth would make the pit of your tummy sink to the bottom of your feet.

“One of our planes has just crashed.”

“How did it happen?” I anxiously asked.

“The pilot got shit in his eyes.”

The reply confused me, and then I understood the joke was on me.

It all began two days before when I decided to get even with our corporal who was a complete idiot; you know the kind I mean. They just don't fit in, always causing you grief no matter what you do.

While Popey and I were making morning tea, we came up with an idea. He gives us the shits, so let's do it to him. After some minor discussion, an evil plan was hatched.

It was that time of the month when I needed to get a hair cut, so I told my Sargent I was off to the Hornby Hacker. Everyone knew that was the local barber, the specialist of the short back and sides.

I hopped on my bike and off I went. On the way, all I thought about was how I could sneak laxative into the corporal's coffee first thing in the morning without him noticing anything.

After my short back and sides haircut, I moved into the chemist next door. Browsing, looking for the laxatives, trying not to be noticed, the pharmacy assistant asked if she could assist. Talking to her for a while, I felt a bit more comfortable to let the cat out of the bag. I told her I needed some help as I was a little bit constipated. The conversation deepened as to how long and how uncomfortable I was feeling. Then the assistant recommended a bunch of tablets that would loosen up the problem. She had me hooked, there were tablets that we could just put in his coffee.

I jumped on my bike and headed back where I could unleash my evil plan.

When I got back to the armoury I grabbed Popey and told him I had the stuff, he was confused until I mentioned the laxatives.

“I thought you were joking, I didn't think you would follow through,” he said.

We talked about how we could sneak the laxatives into his coffee without him noticing.

The plan was to soak them overnight to see how they would dissolve. I put six tablets into a glass and just covered them with water.

I hid the glass behind the fridge where no one would find it. I never thought any more about it until Popey and I arrived for work the next morning.

I ran to the Joe room, a funny name ah, you know the old saying about a cup of joe, I think that's where the name came from, but that's what we called our lunchroom.

I reached behind the fridge and grabbed the glass, and to my amazement, the tablets had all dissolved. It looked clear in colour and didn't even smell, I wasn't going to taste it to make sure. I poured the laxatives into his favourite mug, added a bit more coffee than normal to hide any taste issues.

We both read the instructions on the label it said 'only use one tablet and repeat in 12 hours if no movement is apparent.' But we used six tablets in the one glass, 'Holy hell this is going to be massive,' I thought.

"Oh well, what's the worst that could happen?" said Popey. "It will just get shittier quicker."

Everyone arrived in the Joe room like normal, the coffee was poured and handed out to everyone. I kept looking at the corporal waiting to see if he noticed anything different about his coffee, he had one taste of his coffee, and to my amazement, there was no horrible look on his face. You know when you taste something bitter, but not a single reaction from him even as he took his second mouthful. Our plan was working.

We hung around the armoury for a while to see if it had any effect on him but nothing, nothing happened. I was sent to the bomb dump to get some ammo for the training school. An hour later I was back in the armoury.

I was greeted with the funny story of what happened while I was away, the corporal suddenly felt unwell and had to run quickly to the toilet which was across the other side of the hanger. When he got there, both cubicles were occupied. Apparently, you could hear him pleading to the occupants of the cubicles to hurry up. As the door of the cubicle opened, he pushed the LAC out of the way and then you heard the big 'Sigh of Relief' and the most hideous noises came out from that cubicle coupled with an overpowering stench that filled the room.

We had accomplished a successful mission.

Unfortunately, I had forgotten that the corporal was to fly to Auckland later that day. What a way to travel. Oh well, the deed was done, and I couldn't change it.

Remember how the story began, when I got back to the armoury to find my Sargent with a very solemn face telling me that a plane had just crashed and the pilot had gotten shit in his eyes.

You guessed it, the joke was on me, but the best thing was, revenge was sweet even if it was shit.

LAND OF GODS

Thoughts race through my head, the reels of life constantly run back and forth, of what was, what is and what's to be. I gaze outside the Jeep's window, to one side of the road, a thousand-foot drop; to the icy blue Ganges below, as the road snakes around the foothills of the Himalayas; in this Northern Indian Province of Uttarakhand, also called the "Land of Gods" or "*Dev Bhoomi*".

I've taken thirty years to revisit this place, *Bhimtal*; a settlement around a spring water lake. Around it are dotted step cultivated rice fields, lush paddocks, pine, native forests, and ferns.

I travel down the gravel road, wife Anita and daughter Angela in tow. Their enthusiasm to find out facts of my early life in this enchanting place is conspicuous and irrepressible.

I had lived here as a 23-year-old metropolitan bred Engineer; worked in this remote region for years at a manufacturing concern. The factories were literally imposed onto the simple *Kumaoni* and *Gharwali* mountain folk who called this home by ambitious industrialists and various Governments promising jobs. A total misfit of an establishment in this otherwise laid back and serene place, exacerbating the already deplorable conditions of frustrated locals. It was simply a casualty of the country's unsustainable modernisation drive.

Kan Paul, a 35-year-old, was my go-to man here, an ebullient thorough Kumaoni, who worked as a mail room boy at the company. He donned this perpetually exhilarated persona; you could never wipe the smile off his face. He helped me with everything and anything needing local guidance. I literally wouldn't have survived without him.

Back then, I rented this tiny beautiful cottage from, Mr Joshi, a Local Government Official; it overlooked the Bhimtal Lake. It was a sight to behold.

Three decades later I'm in Melbourne describing this Shangri-La like land of mountains to Anita but I just can't bring the place to life. I wanted my family to see the place first hand, meet Kan Paul and the Joshi family, so I arranged everything and here we are.

I look around but see no changes here. The same mountains, forest, springs, lakes, rivers and pristine surrounds. The hamlet, the market, the tin shed butcher shop, the vegetable shop right next to it; a contradiction of sorts. The watch repairer, the barber; it's all still there as if frozen in time.

Groups of men squat, huddled around bonfires sipping chai, smoking beedis and looking jubilant. Vivacious women wearing colourful sweaters and shawls as they go about their daily shopping. An old woman with weather-beaten skin; wrinkles carved out by time, age and wisdom hunches and supports herself with a walking stick. My eyes have seen this all before.

I remember back thirty years to the day when Kan Paul and I set out on foot to the factory; it's evening; I'm going to supervise and run the night shift and him to pick up stuff from the factory. It's cold, with layers of warm clothing, we're upbeat, animated, we chat. Flashlights in hand, we walk down this often trod windy *pagdandi* or walk path, dense shrubbery and trees surround us; we trample on dead leaves with disregard and apathy.

We'd only walked two kilometres, another 20 minutes and we'd be at the factory; home stretch so to speak. I even had the temerity to wave my flashlight aimlessly around and break into a song to break the monotony.

Kan Paul, for good reason, trains his flashlight down the walk path, "Sahib there's nothing amongst those trees," he quips, amused. I realise he's right, and I resume training my flashlight towards the walk path.

Ten more minutes into the walk, the forest floor gets damp, it's pitch dark, the overgrowth has a pernicious effect on my spirits, I'm cautious now, as I traverse this section of woods. My mind at times becomes hallucinatory, as though I am seeing things, and our progress slows.

Suddenly, this sharp tug, "*Sahib*." Kan Paul grabs my left forearm; his tight grip literally arrests the flow of blood in my arm as he prevents me walking forward.

I see him point his flashlight ahead, I follow it and look in that direction, about 10-15 feet ahead, our lights train on the object. It's the silhouette of an animal; its eyes gleam as it looks right back at us.

"Is this a wolf?" I whisper. I re-focus my eyes; it looks too large for a wolf.

Kan Paul screams, "*Baagh Sahib!*"

"What?" I reply, still dubious.

"Tiger!" he cries back.

I still can't see clearly, but by now fear creeps in, my body starts to quiver like a leaf, the thought of the worst crosses my mind.

Then it steps towards us; I want to run, but Kan Paul's still holding me back. I'm confused, I gradually see the creature and realise, it's all over. Our flashlights expose the stealthy animal; ten feet from head to tail; the stripes and distinct yellow background. Its head's the size of my torso, the eyes shine, it's a male *Kumaoni* tiger; the ones that quite often turned man-eaters when they aged or were injured in an accident.

"Don't move *Sahib*," Kan Paul whispers. "Hold your breath for now," he orders. I tremble, I start to perspire but obey without a protest.

The tiger advances towards us, ever cautious himself, then he pauses, and looks at us rather quizzically. We've probably interrupted his stroll in the Jungle, who knows, I count my last seconds alive.

"Kan Paul! I can't hold on to the flashlight," I mumble, my palm sweaty.

"*Sahib*, just do as I say, and we'll be ok," he retorts self-assuredly. I'm

not so sure though, but I have no choice, I listen to his seemingly wise words.

Time freezes, it's like an eternity. Finally, the tiger, with a look of disinterest, walks away into the bushes. He's gone! Just like that. It looks like he was as much surprised as us, for waylaying him.

"*Sahib*," Kan Paul barks sharply. It wakes me up from my trance state.

"We need to get to the factory," he orders, "it's less than a kilometre." His words like an incantation in my disorientated mind. How I came out of this encounter, how I traversed the rest of the distance, to this day I can never fathom...

Presently, our 4-wheel drive pulls up in front of Mr Joshi's residence; it's atop a hill. Kan Paul is meant to meet us here, he's old and fragile I'm told, but still anxious to meet my family and me. He is to travel from Almora, a 3-hour commute across the mountains by bus.

We clamber out of the Jeep. I hold Anita's hand, guiding her up the stairs to the Joshi family home, Angela follows us.

"Dad, you must have had a great workout with all this climbing around here," Angela jokes.

Mrs Joshi sees us, she waves frantically from the balcony.

"Hello Tony," she says looking euphoric, "so good to see you all."

Thirty years and she recognises me instantly. Mr Joshi follows suit with the usual pleasantries, soon we chat, reminiscing.

After a while, I quietly excuse myself to wander outside onto the courtyard, I look around and recollect my time here.

"Very little changes here?" I quiz Mr Joshi who was right next to me.

"That's what we prefer," he assures. "All those fancy industries of your time have all closed down." He looks triumphant.

"So is Kan Paul reaching here anytime soon?"

Mr Joshi looks away. A few moments later he turns back to look at me. I see his expression has changed, a pensive look, eyes moist, his throat swallowing with difficulty.

"I'm afraid," he finally declares, "he won't be coming."

"Sorry! What do you mean?" I demand.

My patience wears, but I notice the distress on his face as he speaks.

"Early this morning we got a call from his family. He's...He's.... passed away, Tony," he says, his voice faltering.

My heart sinks, the sadness intractable, I tremble as tears roll down my cheek.

Mr Joshi reaches out, his hand is on my shoulder, consoling. Remorse floods my mind; I left this too long. I wish I could turn back time by just a couple of days.

Then I remember, "Destiny waits for no man."

WHY DO YOU HAUNT MY DREAMS?

Why do you haunt my dreams?
It's never really clear
And it's not all the time
Just a couple of times a year

We never really dated
And were never really friends
But your presence still unnerves me
My consciousness it upends.

Are you from a life before
That has come back into this time
Do you have the same dream too
And feel my presence in the night

It makes me feel uneasy
At the same time all excited
A story through a dream
Past loves never to be united

Each dream a little different
In life it is the same
A longing to be together
But forbidden to reclaim

So, why do you haunt my dreams
Like a lost love so long ago
We are really just two strangers
Caught up in a secret show.

© FAYE LOCKWOOD-ROURKE 2018

TURN BACK TIME

The harsh snap of the whip followed by an outcry of pain bought him back. Miles shut his eyes tightly in the hope that when he opened them again, the horror that was before him would have disappeared. Why he had to touch it in the first place, he didn't know. He was too impulsive for his own good. Unfortunately, he had picked up that ring at the museum. One moment he remembered admiring the intricately carved and jewelled ring through the glass cabinet. The next he glanced down at his hand in disbelief to see the ring on his index finger. On *his* finger, the last place where it belonged.

Now he was in both a place and time where he had no right to be. And no clue how he came to be there or how to get home again. Or if it was even possible. All because of this damn ring. He bit his lip hard to hold back the tears. He couldn't let the other boys see him cry. He had to be strong like them. He was a slave after all. A slave of Pharaoh. Set to live out his days cutting rock in the harsh, unforgiving desert sun. To build Pharaoh's pyramid. Or at least that was what he thought.

He really had no clue. He was only a kid. He said little to the other boys. How he could understand and speak Ancient Egyptian he had no idea. The whole thing was illogical. Panic rose up like bile in his throat. He swallowed and licked his lips. They were dry and sore. He was so thirsty. He couldn't remember the last time he had a decent drink of water.

Mina had questioned him about the priceless ring that he couldn't remove from his finger. He had panicked. He wracked his brain but couldn't remember taking it from the museum. How could she have known! But Mina had held out her hand to show Miles a ring on her finger which was identical. She smiled so that Miles felt he finally had found a friend as she studied him carefully, her straight dark hair falling across her face. Miles had never seen eyes like hers before. Except for the eyes of his cat, Moshi.

Pain in Miles's chest made him feel like his heart would break. He missed that old cat so much. Moshi had been part of his life for so long, and now, he had no idea if Mina was ok either. Their rings had accidentally touched for a split second as they spoke with urgent whispers that day and then suddenly, they were flying through space. Fear reflected in green eyes that were so similar it was as though they were a mirror image.

Miles kept his head down as he continued hammering the rock with his small pick. It was a crude tool by modern standards and terribly blunt, but it would have to do.

Suddenly he was roughly dragged to his feet and thrown a few metres across the hot sandy ground. He cried out in pain as the bare skin

on his severely sunburnt limbs scraped harshly across the rocks. He knew without looking that he was bleeding. The guard screamed at him in a language that Miles wished he couldn't understand. He slowly rose to a kneeling position and was met with a vicious slap across the face. His cheek stung. This time he let the tears fall freely.

His eyes tried to focus on his hand, and he saw the blurry shape of the ring glint teasingly at him in the sunlight. He thought he'd kept the ring hidden by dirt and dust, but obviously not. His secret was discovered. He knew that a slave boy with a ring such as this in his possession would be punished severely. The guard pulled a leather whip from his waist. But as Miles gritted his teeth ready for the sting across his back, he heard an unexpected sound. The hiss and yeowl of his oldest and dearest friend. Moshi? How could it be?

Many kilometres away, Mina poured the grape juice for the Pharaoh's only daughter as she listened to the whispers of the other maidens. The talk of a slave boy who had been protected by a black cat only meant one thing. Miles was now on his way to the royal palace. With every moment he drew closer to her, the possibility of returning home grew higher.

Mina's hand trembled with the thought of home, spilling juice all over the floor. One of the other girls hissed at her to quickly attend to the mess as they left. Mina realised she had been holding her breath. As she cleaned, she couldn't help but study the sides of a beautifully decorated chest. The familiarity of the painted scene hit her like a slap in the face. The figures were them!

The princess entered the room as Mina adjusted the makeshift bandages on her hand that covered her own ring. She ordered Mina to come which she silently obeyed, walking a few paces behind the princess through the immense hallways. Mina's fear continued to increase, taking an icy hold of her throat as she entered a small room to find Miles already waiting. They both sank silently to the floor.

The princess spoke with royal confidence. She knew who they were and where they had come from, what their purpose was and of the guardian who came with them. Mina heard Miles gasp. Guardian?

In that same moment, black furry legs padded silently into her line of sight, sitting between the pair. Miles reached out and grabbed Mina's hand, his ring touching her own. Just as they felt the familiar pull of leaving one time and place for another, they heard the princess say the meaning of Moshi's name in the slave language, "Saviour."

CRUISING ALONE THROUGH EUROPE

The idea of taking a holiday was at the front of her thoughts. Eighteen months since retiring it seemed like the thing to do. Money in the bank, someone to assist with the planning, why not? Margaret Evans decided it was time. Being a single mother, retired, with grown-up daughters, taking off to the other side of the world seemed like an adventure of a lifetime.

A visit to her local travel agent was arranged. Margaret sought something adventurous, expensive, unique, exclusive and scary at the same time. Timing was important. After some deliberation, she decided on a river cruise from Budapest to Amsterdam during the European summer.

For a 20-day holiday, with accommodation on a magnificent new riverboat, an appropriate wardrobe was planned. Hiking shoes, jeans, tee shirts, over shirts, hat, and something excitingly colour coordinated for evenings was a necessity. As a photographer, Margaret planned carry-on luggage for her camera, laptop, cables, cash, cards and security for those things which needed to be secure.

It seemed like a miracle to do the transport thing with Qatar Airways business class, with French champagne, snoozing the night away, landing in Doha, then taking the next flight on to Budapest. Before Margaret could recover from 24 hours of travelling, she arrived in her magnificent hotel in Budapest, with impressive views over the Danube. Out came the camera, and the start of what was to become a jaw-dropping 1000 plus photo collection of Europe from city streets, magnificent river views, to world-famous historical buildings.

The next day was a day to remember. Budapest sights, city streets, and docked on the Danube River in front of the hotel was the Avalon Illumination in all its glory. It was a long day for Margaret. She took the opportunity to walk across the green bridge opposite her hotel, one of twelve coloured bridges, with its walkways, two resting lion statues at each end, and to nearby areas of interest, without getting out of site of the Illumination cruise boat. With crowds everywhere, it was becoming evident to Margaret that moving through the streets of Budapest alone was both interesting and scary.

The next day Margaret checked out of the hotel mid-morning and was given a complimentary transfer by bus down to the river where the Avalon Illumination was docked. After researching European river cruising on the internet, it was a delight to finally see it up close. This would be Margaret's home for the next two weeks.

The first few days were to be a challenge. How does one relate to about 100 fellow travellers from various countries including New Zealand,

America and Japan, who all appeared to be couples? Two days after arriving on board, Margaret realised she was a single traveller. Literally.

The welcome on board by the Tour Director and crew was tremendously appreciated. Margaret met all the crew from the Captain to the waiters in the lounge. All of them were wonderful, supportive and extremely knowledgeable about any issues related to river cruising.

At breakfast the first morning she sat at a table set for four, but she was alone. Nearby tables appeared to be full, with groups of couples seated together. No invitations were forthcoming.

After taking an arranged tour of Budapest during the day including a walk through the Castle Hill area, it was beautiful to be back on board for an official welcome dinner. Margaret was delighted by the crowd in the large spacious lounge, but it appeared that the other travellers sat everywhere else. Margaret wondered why she was ignored. Was it her or was it them?

It took just a few days to discover there was someone else in the same situation. Alethea Morgan, who was sitting alone in the dining room, saw Margaret and took the opportunity to introduce herself. She was a wonderful, strong woman, and like Margaret saw an opportunity to leave her home and do something exciting for the first time in years. Margaret and Alethea decided to sit together when possible and enjoy each other's company. Comparing notes about the other travellers on board, they decided to take a positive approach to the holiday.

The next day involved sailing along the Danube, and hearing from the Tour Director about the next stop at Bratislava. Most of those on board participated in a walking tour through the Old Town. Margaret loved the opportunity to take photos of the capital city of the new state of Slovakia. The walking tours were an excellent opportunity to meet her fellow travellers, but still she was left to herself with her camera in hand.

Dinner was again magnificent and another opportunity for Margaret and Alethea to discuss their day and what was planned for the next day. A walking tour in the morning involved visiting parts of the Old Town of Vienna and to the St Stephan's Cathedral. Margaret was stunned again by the lack of inclusion in discussions with members of the group. So, camera in hand she added to her growing collection of photos.

Each day as they cruised the Danube, stopping at predetermined towns, allocated groups walked the cobblestone streets amongst some of the most interesting, old, historic buildings ever seen. Margaret was thankful for her choice of safe hiking footwear, and her camera was frequently put to good use. Again, she was often walking alone within one of the several allocated groups with tour guides.

Although Margaret felt safe within the confines of the cruise boat and participating in organised walking tours, it was still a remarkably lonely way to spend so many days.

© LESLEY ROBINSON 2018

UNTOLD STORIES

I usually love the school holidays, but these holidays will be different because I have to spend them with my grandparents, which isn't the problem, I love my grandparents, but they have just moved, and I'm not sure I will like their new house.

I don't think my grandparents are old, I'm not sure how old they actually are, their age has never been a problem, they've always played with me, taken me to heaps of great places, and they are lots of fun. So, when we drove into the retirement village, my heart sank as I saw all these old people, everywhere. Why had my grandparents moved here I wondered, surely they don't need to be here?

Their new house is ok, a lot smaller than their other house, Nanny met me at the door and gave me the biggest hug ever, she showed me to my bedroom, and I was pleased all my toys and books were there too. I ran to the kitchen where Mum and Nanny were having a cup of tea.

"Where's Poppy?" I asked.

"He'll be here soon, he's gone to get you something special, why don't you unpack your suitcase while you wait for him," Nanny replied.

I went back to my room to unpack. It was then I heard the front door. I raced out to see Poppy. His arms wrapped around my shoulders and I felt totally at peace. Maybe I will enjoy my stay here after all.

After Mum left, Nanny & Poppy took me for a walk around the village, they introduced me to some of the people they had met over the last few months. Everyone was really nice; they wanted to know all about me, where I lived, what I did at school and what sports I played.

Most of them tried not to cry when they talked about their grandchildren. It kinda made me sad to hear they didn't see their grandkids much. That must be terrible.

Over dinner I remembered that Poppy had gone to get me something special, I asked him what it was.

"Thanks for reminding me matey, let me go and get it."

He returned with a book. He handed it to me; I opened it and looked at him unsure what I was supposed to do with it. There was nothing in it, just blank pages.

"It's a book with nothing in it?" I stated the obvious.

"That's right, Nanny and I thought you may like to write about your time here with us so when you go home, you can tell your Mum and Dad all the things you did while you were here. If you want, Nanny can help you get started, she's pretty good at writing, and your Mum said you were doing really well at school. So, what do you say, shall we give it a try?"

“Ok, why not, as long as Nanny can help me.” It shouldn’t be too hard, I thought to myself.

The next day Nanny took me to the restaurant in the village, we sat in the corner and spent hours talking to her new friends. They told me all about the things they had done when they were young, how they had fallen in love, got married, had children and all the things that happened after then. I was amazed at all the things they’d been through.

I remembered back to days when I was sick, and Mum and I would sit on the couch and watch movies, Mum loves watching love stories, and as I sat listening to these old people tell me about their life, I thought about all those movies and imagined watching a movie of them reliving their lives. I said as much to Nanny when we got home. She suggested I write down all the things I could remember about their stories today. We spent hours that day writing it all down. There was so much, and I didn’t want to forget any of it.

The next day Poppy took me to meet his new friends. I was amazed that some of these friends had been in the war. Of course, I had learned about it at school, but I had never met anyone who had been to war, the stories they told me made me cry. I will never forget how their stories changed the way I thought of them.

When I arrived at the restaurant I saw these frail old men, in Zimmer frames and wheelchairs, attached to oxygen tanks and other machines. But when I left I saw them as ten feet tall and bulletproof. The funny thing is they don’t regret any of the hardships they had to endure to get through life; they said it only made them stronger.

I couldn’t wait to get home so that I could write everything down. The next day Nanny & Poppy took me to the Museum so that I could see some of the things his friends had told me about the day before. I had been to museums before, but I had never seen them as I did that day, it was as if I was seeing a part of history through different eyes.

Over those school holidays, I met lots of interesting new people, some were old, some were not, and I still don’t think my grandparents are old. They said that being around me makes them feel younger.

My grandparents have been through some really interesting times and the next school holidays I’m going to ask them to share all their stories with me so that I can write them down and share them with my children, and I will encourage them to do the same thing.

We can learn so much about life from what other people have experienced, don’t you think?

© VICKI WILLIAMS 2018

THE GOBLIN

"It's been such a long time since we have seen Rose and Daffodil, I'm beginning to feel that it was all just a beautiful dream," sighed Samantha.

"I don't think it was a dream," said her brother Peter while keeping his eyes on the page he was reading, "after all, we all saw it together."

"Yeah, I know, but it sure would be nice to see Rose and Daffodil again," answered Samantha.

Samantha and Peter were in the same park where they had met Rose and her friend Daffodil. They were waiting for Susan and Brad to join them at the park.

"What time is it Pete? Shouldn't Susan and Brad be here by now?"

Peter looked at his watch, "Brad said that they would be here after lunch, so just be patient." Peter continued to read his book.

Just then Susan ran up, followed by her brother Brad.

"Did you see it?" asked Susan, out of breath.

"See what?" replied Samantha.

"Why the rainbow, of course, it's over there," and Susan pointed to the rainbow.

Peter and Samantha jumped up, the children looked at each other, smiled then they ran off towards the rainbow. They skidded to a halt in front of the rainbow, where they found Rose, Daffodil and some other fairies all trying to cast a magical spell.

"Rose, what are you doing?" asked Samantha.

"Oh children, I was hoping you would be here," said Rose looking at the children with a worried look on her face.

There was suddenly a loud bang, the rainbow disappeared, and in Rose's hand appeared a multi-coloured box.

"What's wrong Rose?" asked Susan. "You don't look happy at all."

"It's the goblins. They followed us, and they are trying to steal the rainbow!" Daffodil cried in her loudest voice.

"The, the goblins?" queried Susan.

"Yes, we just managed to escape them," replied Rose. "They were so sneaky and thought we couldn't see them, but we did and managed to run away from them."

The children were looking at the other three persons with Rose and Daffodil. Rose made introductions, and the children were introduced to Lilac, Amber and a small gnome named Norman who looked like a Smurf, except he wasn't blue, and his cap was red.

By now anything out of the ordinary did not take the children by surprise. They were actually delighted to make more new magical friends.

Suddenly there was a loud crash and the sound of fighting going on behind a nearby bush.

"Oh, dear what can that be?" asked Samantha tiptoeing to peer over the bush. The others followed her, and the fairies flew and peeked over the bush to look as well.

Suddenly Rose and her friends gave a cry and flew back behind the nearest tree.

The children quickly followed them asking what the matter was.

"It's the goblins, they have found us!" exclaimed Lilac and even though she sounded scared, her voice was very musical and nice to hear.

"Those troublemakers must have followed us just before we closed off the rainbow. They are so noisy, it's a wonder we didn't hear them before. They are always arguing and fighting amongst themselves, which is good as it gives us a chance to get out of here," added Norman.

"Well, let's get out of here before they catch us," said Rose, "but where shall we hide?"

"Come over to our house," said Peter, "you can come into our cubby, and no one will know you're there."

They all followed Peter to his and Samantha's house, and they went straight into their cubby house and shut the door tight.

Rose held out her hand with the colourful rainbow cube.

"Children, this is the rainbow. I have turned it into a little box. I am going to ask you to look after it for me. Will you do that?"

The children looked at each other with a scared expression on their faces. But when they turned to look at a worried Rose, Peter said: "Of course we will, what do you want us to do with it?"

Rose looked around the cubby house, she spied a basket filled with coloured building blocks.

"There," she said, "we will put it in the basket, and the rainbow colours will blend in with the blocks!" Rose quickly tipped out the basket and very carefully placed the little box in the basket and covered it with the blocks. "Nobody should think to look there, and if they do, they would mistake the cube for one of your building blocks."

A feeling of relief swept over all of them. The fairies had a smile on their faces.

"Now, one thing you must know," said Amber, a pretty fairy with pink wings and glitter in her hair. "The goblins must not get hold of the rainbow. They have been trying to capture it and take it back to their king who wants to change the rainbow colours into black, grey and brown."

"Oh yuk," said Susan.

"Why do they want to do that?" asked Brad who turned to look at Daffodil hovering nearby.

"Because they are mean and rude and horrible and nasty and..."

"That's enough Daffodil," said Rose, I am sure the children know all about goblins and the mischief they get up to."

Rose turned and looked at each of the children in turn.

"Dear children, I realise that I am asking a great responsibility for you to take on, but I can see no other way out. While the rainbow is hidden here, Daffodil, Lilac, Amber, Norman and I will use the fairy dust to go back home and get us some help to defeat the goblins. We will return as soon as possible."

They all said their goodbyes, and after the fairies left, the children wondered what was going to happen next. They hoped that the rainbow box would be safe until Rose and her friends arrived back to the cubby house.

© MIRIAM GRECH 2018

HOPE

I have no hope

I live in despair

I have nothing to eat

I have nothing to wear.

I live on the streets

I have picked through the trash

I can't get no medical

What is this rash?

People laugh and people stare

Where is your God now

He has left you without a care.

A hand reaches down and pulls me back up

Gives me a blanket and a coffee in a cup.

I'll always have faith and never give up

Cause one day I'll be the one giving you the coffee in a cup.

© BRIONY KUCIC TUCKETT 2018

LOST

Sad and crying, tired and scared
Nowhere to go, crowds everywhere
He's just down the hall, the man holds my heart
Yet I feel so alone, so close yet apart

His eyes that held so much light when young
Now seem clouded and lost. What have I done?
Gifted with music, a life filled with song.
Him being homebound just seems so wrong.

Lost is a word that describes how I feel
I thought it was something that loves meant to heal.
Lost plays with my mind and leads me to cry.
Why do I feel like my life is a lie?

So much in common, a team filled with love.
That's how it started, what made us so strong.
But the children arrived, and the partnership changed,
As one continued on, the other one stayed.

Soon conversations became less and less,
His eyes lighting up when others are present.
Those special moments that were once shared with me
Are now shared with others while I tuck the kids in.

Lost is a word that holds me for ransom
I can't live without him but feel lost around him.
Lost is a word that grows day by day
Infecting the mind in a damaging way.

© FAYE LOCKWOOD-ROURKE 2018

3 DEATHS, A SURVIVOR, & A RESCUER

"We got to get back to the ute," yells dad.

"Right," I answer.

"Where's Mum, Krystal and Andy?"

"Don't know."

"Maybe they're already in there," dad joked, but it was not the time. A massive cyclone ripped through Darwin and took almost everything with it.

"RORY!" squealed Krystal, but the wind was strong, and it picked her up, dragged her to the high heavens and she disappeared.

"NO!" I shouted as I tried to reach her, but it was too late. As I got to the ute, dad was there holding on for dear life.

"Son, *get* in the ute NOW!" he yelled.

"What about you?" I cried.

"Don't worry I'll be fine as long as you're safe," he replied, so I got into the Ute, but then dad let go. He flew right into the cyclone, and he yelled: "You'll be alright, just find your mother, I know she is alive."

Now, dad was dead, and I was on my own. I would have ended it all if the cyclone had not gone and disappeared into nothing, then I repeated my dad's words: "Just find your mother she is alive." However, I didn't know how he knew she was alive.

It has been a year since their passing, and it still keeps me up at night. I don't know where I would be if he had not sacrificed his own life for me.

"Wow Papa, I wish I got to meet grandpa," said my little girl Angie as her small finger was twiddling around my palm. "So, what happened next?" she asked.

"I started looking for her in and around the motel then around local places in Darwin like Litchfield National Park and Crocosaurus Cove. I didn't find a single living thing, so figured she'd have to be somewhere else, but it was getting dark, so I went to the motel, and decided to sleep on it.

"That night was hot and stuffy; I tossed and turned all night, soon ending up on the floor, I kept arguing with myself wondering if mum really was alive? Where could she be? What if she was injured? Did she have company? So many questions, and very few answers."

"Did you find her?" Angie asked.

"Maybe I did, maybe I didn't? My mum had watery blue eyes, a smile that you could get lost in and beautiful long blonde hair. She always wore a pink and yellow dress with red high heels and a 24-carat diamond wedding ring around her finger.

"I continued my search in a helicopter that was on the top of the police department's roof. I took it to search in the bushland, then the rotor

snapped off, and the helicopter plummeted into some trees. It was a cold day, and there were thick ice sheets on the treetops. To top it off, I almost froze to death. Then I saw a woolly jumper on the back seat, so I grabbed it.

"I jumped from the helicopter trying to land onto a branch, but I missed and fell to the ground. I tried to get to my feet, and I realised a stone had pierced through my leg and broke the bones, the fibula and tibia. I was in so much pain it made me feel like I wouldn't make it, and couldn't go on.

"I thought of my mother and grabbed two sticks and a couple of long leaves, put my bones back to where they were meant to be (which was very bloody painful) and made my own leg cast. I limped for a bit until I got the hang of it. I searched for hours and hours, but when it got dark, I knew I had to find shelter. I climbed up a very tall tree and slept there.

"In the morning, I woke to the sound of a rumbling stomach. Realising that I needed food, or I would have starved to death, I picked up a small but long log and grabbed the sharpest rock I could find. Next, I turned the log into a spear, and it didn't take long to find food: a colony of slimy, icky maggots were on a tree branch. I picked them up one by one and ate about nine and saving the rest for later by putting them in my pants pocket. As yucky as they were, I knew they were a good source of protein, which I would need for the journey ahead."

"How did you get water?" Angie interrupted.

"I had about four 1litre canteens when I left the motel. Did I forget to mention that?"

"Yes," Angie replied, "now, keep telling me the story please."

"Raging through the bush, I broke down near a tree and on the other side; I met a girl named Nancy. She looked down beat and unstable, so I shoved a handful of maggots in her mouth to give her energy.

"What was that for?" she exclaimed.

"I thought you needed some food," I answered.

"Yeah but you don't have to shove your fist in my mouth!" she yelled.

"Maybe that's true, but who cares," I said hoping that she took it the right way, but I was dead wrong. She shouted at the top of her lungs for a good 10 minutes then she calmed down.

"You done?" I asked nervously, still ready for another round but nothing happened. She'd lost her voice.

"Finally, some peace and quiet," I said joyfully. "Now, you coming or what Nancy?" she nodded, and we set off to find my mother.

"Wait a minute isn't Mu-m's-M-mum's name Nancy?"

"Right."

"So that means!"

"Yes, and they are the same person. I married Nancy after a bunch of events that happened while I was looking for my mother. So, shall I continue?"

© TRAVIS SIGISMONDI 2018

HAUNTED HOUSE

A newlywed family moved into a classy old double story house in Crescent Moon. Elizabeth agreed to live in the house as it was close to Mark's work, the park and many shopping centres, making it convenient.

The floorboards creaked as they entered the house and a cold gust of wind buffeted their faces sending chills down their spine. Choosing to ignore that eerie feeling, they continued looking through the house eventually deciding which rooms to put their stuff in. As they did, they heard the whisper of a young girl, but as it was quite a windy day they thought the whisper was from the wind outside.

Over the next six years, Mark and Elizabeth grew their family with three girls; Stephanie, Alice and Rachael. As kids, they would run around the house exploring every inch of it, including the attic, until one day Stephanie found a doll on one of the shelves in the attic. She took it and ran off unaware of the misfortune it would bring her.

She showed her parents and sisters the doll, she was surprised to see that they weren't all that happy with what she'd found. Disgusted, they told her to put it back where she found it as it was creepy and didn't bode well with them.

Being the obedient girl she was, Stephanie put it back on the shelf and quickly ran off back to her sisters to play. As soon as she left the attic, a phantom shaped face appeared and then entered the doll.

This year, Stephanie decided to invite a couple of her friends over to celebrate her birthday. They played with Barbie dolls, but got bored. After a while they started to play hide and seek. Stephanie went up to the attic and hid in one of the boxes. One of her friends found her and just as they were about to leave she pointed to the doll saying that she wanted to play with it. Stephanie agreed and took it down from the shelf. She realised that the doll had lost its face and had shrivelled up hair, but decided to bring it over to her friend regardless.

The party continued until 11pm. When they went to bed, they realised that the window was open and as they went to close the window a gust of wind blew the shutter closed and it hit one of the girls in the face. She was knocked out cold. As soon as that happened, a phantom face appeared and kept on repeating the words "Let's play, let's play."

All the girls screamed at the top of their lungs and as the parents entered all they saw were claw marks on the faces of the children. They called the cops, and when they searched the house, they discovered a dead body of a young girl in the roof.

They say that the soul of the young girl is in the doll and will haunt whoever enters the house...

© ARMTESH MANOJ KUMAR 2018

AUTHOR PROFILES

With a passion for writing, **Vicki Williams** entered a challenge to write a book in 40 hours and her career as an author took off. Vicki has published three books with her fourth book due to hit the market early 2019. She is currently working on the third in her mystery series, and a young adult fantasy series.



She is the creator and facilitator of the Wyndham Writing Group and runs many 'How to Write' workshops enabling creative forward thinkers to develop their writing skills.

She also mentors students wanting one to one guidance.

VICKI WILLIAMS

Michelle Ripari is an award winning and internationally published fine artist and facilitator of classes and workshops for children and adults. Sharing her skill and knowledge in the medium of graphite, watercolour and coloured pencils.

Fulfilling a childhood dream, Michelle has recently began illustrating for children's books using watercolour pencils and ink and is currently writing her first children's fantasy/adventure novel which she plans to turn into a series.



MICHELLE RIPARI

AUTHOR PROFILES



Faye Lockwood-Rourke has always written. Poetry has been a guiding force for Faye, as a teen, poetry allowed her emotions to be transformed into the written word.

Her first love is theatre and over the years she's written for stage. Recently Faye changed direction while writing a play and decided to turn it into a short story instead.

Her first novel 'Heaven's Homestead - The Body Under The Bridge' is in the editing phase, and will be published soon.

Faye is currently writing her second novel 'A Sister's Deception'.

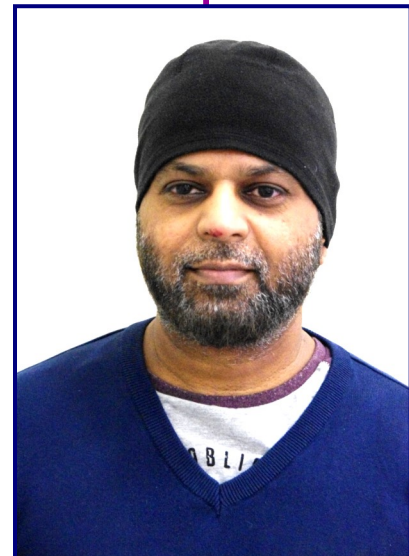
FAYE LOCKWOOD-ROURKE

Anthony M Dass is an aspiring author of Poems, Short Stories and Articles. He's contributed to community magazines, and other small publications. His writing interests span fiction and autobiographical influenced fiction. His stories and poems deal with the common man's daily struggle in understanding life.

His short stories included here are an autobiographical account of the life he experienced in his younger days.

He is constantly trying to improve his writing and learn from others.

ANTHONY M DASS



AUTHOR PROFILES

Travis Sigismondi started writing short stories in grade four, but didn't really think he wanted to be a writer, he just did it for fun.



In the past few months, he has entered a competition, written two short stories for this anthology and a 100-word story for a compilation children's book.

Travis's passion for writing is evident by the number of stories in different stages of development.

TRAVIS SIGISMONDI

A voracious reader and writer, influenced by her mother, a natural charismatic story teller, **Pauline Rimmer** grew up in 1960's suburban Laverton in Melbourne's west. The small suburb was dominated by the RAAF Base and surrounded by sprawling paddocks or prickly bushes traversed by Skeleton Creek. This area, known to locals as the hunting grounds, offered endless exciting opportunities for humorous adventures.

An award for her short story 'Taafi of the Naafi', inspired Pauline to continue writing. Her first novel, 'The Hunting Ground, Skeleton Creek' tells tales of growing up in the 1960's, a time when children were free to roam and play all day, returning home for dinner as darkness fell.



PAULINE RIMMER

AUTHOR PROFILES



B K Tuckett was born to a drug addicted mother and alcoholic father and raised in the foster care system of a small city in rural Victoria. The struggle of being alone, afraid and having nothing but her imagination to get her through the tough times, was what kept Briony motivated to get through each day.

Raising a family and graduating as a nurse, Briony gained the confidence to voice the stories deep within. During her time in Vicki Williams' workshops she found flow in her writing, and words desperately needing to be said found their way onto paper.

This therapeutic process has allowed her to let go of the past and reconnect with herself and the child within, allowing her creative spirit to shine.

BRIONY KUCIC TUCKETT

Rodney Williams fell into writing quite by accident, only interested in technical books he never believed he could or had the confidence to write fiction.

The magic started when he attended the 'How to Write a Novel' program and the author in him grew from a simple story of 100 words about a child's experience of visiting the RAAF museum to writing two short stories for this anthology.

Rodney has gone on to write a collection of short stories based on some of the antics, fun and adventures he got up to as a young and innocent airman in the Airforce.



RODNEY WILLIAMS

AUTHOR PROFILES

Retiree **Lesley Robinson** embraced the opportunity to gain more insight into the craft of writing. Quite by chance she saw an advert for Vicki Williams' program. Lesley entered the program and her creative thoughts were unleashed.



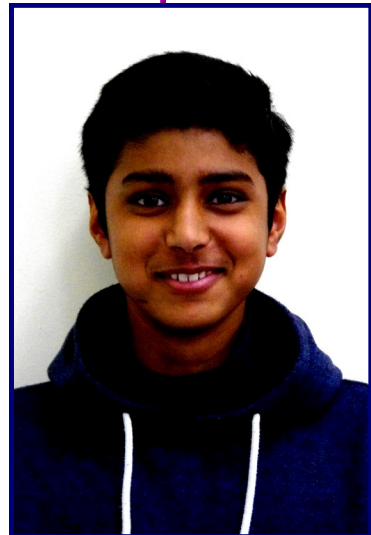
In Lesley's first novel 'River Cruising Alone Through Europe', she draws on her recent experience with an international mix of fellow travellers along the famous Danube and Rhine Rivers in Europe.

As an avid reader and writer Lesley divides her time between her local Bowls Club and reading groups.

LESLEY ROBINSON

Amrtesh Manoj Kumar only started to write narratives in high school and soon got hooked on creating short stories. He hasn't released any novels but is planning to. His genre is more focused on spooky/horror, fantasy and adventure which is a much-favoured genre among the children of today's society.

He plans to continue writing to satisfy the audience's cravings with his fantastic novels. He is currently focusing his attention to his new novel called 'The Abyss Stares Back' and plans to make it public soon.



ARMTESH MANOJ KUMAR

AUTHOR PROFILES



Tracie Sigismondi didn't have a passion or inclination to write, you could say she fell into it. She met local author Vicki Williams and when she learned that Vicki ran writing classes she enrolled her son Travis who has a passion to write. Instead of waiting 3 hours in the car Tracie joined the class as well.

As a result, Tracie has written a short story for this anthology and a 100-word piece for a children's book. She is looking to write a children's book.

TRACIE SIGISMONDI

Miriam Grech lives in Melbourne, Victoria.

She enjoys reading historical fiction and loves telling stories to children.

Miriam enjoys watching detective stories on television and would like to be able to ride on the Orient Express one day whilst writing a mystery novel.

MIRIAM GRECH



TESTIMONIALS

"Vicki's 'How to Write a Novel' program has been outstanding. The content delivered and information provided has been above and beyond. I'm so motivated and inspired to take my writing from my mind, to the page and then turn it into a book. I loved every minute!"

MICHELLE RIPARI

"I wasn't sure what to expect when joining the 'How to Write a Novel' program but I have loved every minute. The conversation between other authors, hearing their creative minds and ideas is wonderful and positive. The workbook that Vicki has put together makes you think of options you may never have thought of on your own."

FAYE LOCKWOOD-ROURKE

"I was looking for a course that would give me some insight into how to write and publish a novel, but what I ended up finding here was all that and much more. I found a mentor in Vicki, I found fellow students willing to share their journeys, I found the confidence in my writing abilities, and finally professionals that were willing to guide me and may be one day help materialise the dream to publish my first novel."

ANTHONY M DASS

"Vicki Williams' 'How To Write A Novel' program is a great place to communicate with other people and also a great place to improve your novel writing skills. I highly recommend it as the workshop is really helpful and the people have been really nice."

ARMTESH MANOJ KUMAR

"This 'How To Write A Novel' program has allowed me to learn how to structure a story and how to interweave it to make it more interesting to the reader as well as the writer. This has now given me the confidence to write more with the easy to follow process, thanks to Vicki."

RODNEY WILLIAMS

"The 'How to Write a Novel' program was interesting and very helpful, you learn more about writing than you do in school."

TRAVIS SIGISMONDI

"Inspiration to try something that I did not know I could do."

LESLEY ROBINSON

"Very informative, very well thought out."

BRIONY KUCIC TUCKETT



IMAGINATION

**This anthology was compiled by the students of
the Wyndham Writing Group 2018
'How to Write a Novel' program.**

**Despite their fears and reservations in their ability
to write, the students met the challenge and
exceeded their expectations. Their enthusiasm
and thirst for knowledge that they brought to
each workshop equipped them with the ability to
produce outstanding results.**

**The 'How To Write A Novel' program is available
in person and online. This nine-workshop
program is designed to take motivated writers
from story conception to publication.**

**This program is just one of the many workshops
that author Vicki Williams runs.**

**Full details of price and course dates are available
on her website**

www.vickiwilliamsauthor.com.au

