

# ink

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# 12

Emerging Writers & Poets

*Honeymoon in Paris*

*Psappho*

*Scrappy Jack*

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## Foreword

Welcome to ink issue 4 as the leaves turn gold and red in the ceaseless cycle of the year. [ink](#) is a completely non-commercial, community venture. We hope you enjoy the works featured here, and please feel free to email us if you'd like more information about any of the authors. [selfpubaus@gmail.com](mailto:selfpubaus@gmail.com)



## Storytelling

by Maria Issaris

It is the end of a long day in the fields where you and your family have been toiling - the sun's setting - you set out for the village square - great excitement because you are in a hill village outside of Corinth, but even this village has its own little amphitheatre - and this is where you are headed. It isn't a grand thing, it's surrounded by taverns. You know that a wandering storyteller has set up his small stage. Everyone has gathered with a tankard of wine, resting up, a fire set for light and for roasting a few titbits - bit of local wine flowing - the children are at the front cross legged - and the storyteller begins - reciting the epic poem of the local myths and histories - let's say it is Homer's Iliad.

In each country there were people who crazily enough made storytelling their business; bards, troupes, and in Greece people called rhapsodists - and their purpose was to express in language and voice, our histories, our myths, the lessons, the morals the drama - for being human. Tales of gods and goddesses and strange beings and beasts. In times of utter survival mode, people still made time to tell and recite stories, and more importantly, wanted to listen to stories.

You could be in the village square, or you could be in the court of some reigning body - but - people gathered. What is it they sought? For now let's say it is a sense of something.

Storytelling - was and is an inherent part of life. Writing, education and printing - created another way to tell tales widely. Radio, podcasts and audiobooks. Using devices to record the human voice. All of it to replicate that gathering around the fire together and listening to someone orate and evoking that sense of something.

*This is an excerpt from a speech "Can AI be authentic?" which argues for the importance of real human voices in storytelling.*



## The tea towel

by Anna Ceguerra

Kimmy looked at the freshly laundered, crumpled tea towel in her hands. It was old and grey, having been used and washed hundreds of times. It was now threadbare and got drenched at the slightest taste of water. This tea towel was the one constant in her adult life. It moved with her from place to place, and now that she was in a permanent house of her own, she needed to start fresh.

Despite the practicality of decluttering, her thoughts turned to her grandfather, who had given it to her as a Christmas present the year she moved into her own place. Then, the tea towel was of a colourful, plush, terry towelling material. She gave him socks that year. Kimmy didn't regret it at the time, but now she did. Why now? She wondered.

Her grandfather lived for 10 more years after he gave her the tea towel. She was as close to him as any of his 50 grandchildren were close to him. He had no favourites, or so he'd say. She had a sneaking suspicion it was her. She used to tell him jokes, and he would rate it with either a "humph", a "ha" or a "ha Ha HAAA. Earning the rare belly laugh was the best.

As the old man's laughter echoed in the air, she decided the tea towel was too precious to throw out.



### How to defrost our frozen mind?

Did you know we are in a darker than dark age?

How should we know ?

Because of the three reasons below:

Because of cults we are in

What are the cults?

The education

The politicians and politics

Science and religion

Advertisements

Media and social media

Because of the subtle and aggressive controls

Subtle via media and social media and called smart gadgets

Aggressively via governments

Because of the complex ignorance of public.

The complex ignorance is the lack of knowing of not knowing and assumption of knowing! This is a very dangerous ignorance. Because they don't know that they don't know hence they won't do anything to take themselves out.

And the corrosive forces encourage their lack of knowledge as knowledge.

Meaning there is no salvation and no rescue.

And the solution for not to be in that darkness is to be aware of the above. You don't need to do anything. No need to protest or anarchy or resistance, only to be aware! Awareness is the power. Is unchaining! As simple as that. You'll see if you give it go.

By Rymos

## Scrappy Jack

by Julie Howard

After the breakup, I scraped the remnants of my life together and bought a soulless unit across town. Empty units and shops with FOR LEASE signs were my only welcome.

Finally, I had the silence I'd craved, but it drove me crazy. It was Rosa who rescued me. 'Hey mate! Give us a hand, will ya?' she yelled while struggling with a cumbersome box of picture frames. She pointed with her chin, 'I'm opening the 'Memories' Café over there.'

Hah! I thought. Memories the last thing I need.

Over the weeks, I got into the habit of popping down to help Rosa settle in, until finally the day before opening, we painted the feature wall.

'Black?' I questioned.

'You'll see,' she laughed, as she hauled the box of white picture frames across the room.

Rosa's coffee and cakes quickly put the café on the map - as did the photo frames. The idea of people displaying their photos of the local area and past events caught on. As the frames filled so the friendships grew.

It was the place of comfort I was seeking. Every day, I would sit at the corner window and write. On this particular day though, the peace was shattered by a noise of a bent and broken bike bearing a tall, ragged man crashing to a halt. We all watched as he bent to slip the bicycle

clips from his stained trousers before sitting on the seawall.

The café quickly calmed, and I settled back to my work.

It was the smell that made me raise my head for the second time. I held my breath as he shuffled by.

'Usual Jack?' says Rosie smiling. She's got to be kidding.

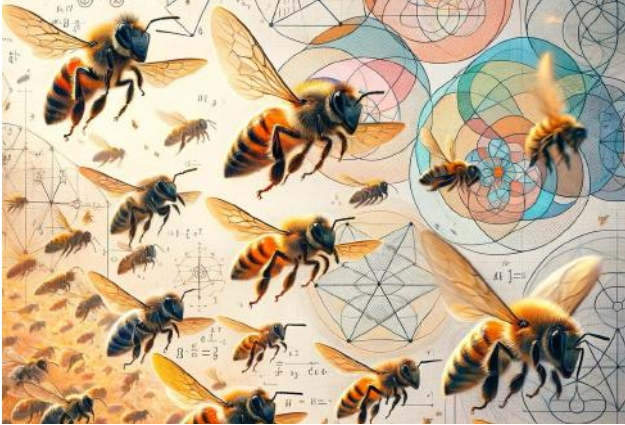
I try to ignore him but can hear him sniffle and cough his way to the table behind me. How can Rosa let such a filthy dero into the joint?

I turn to see him wipe his nose with his sleeve before his hand darts to steal the scraps of food left on the plates on one table and then another. It's too much!

'Who is he?' I hiss at Rosa.

She smiles and points to a picture of a tall, slim dark youth. 'Meet my hero. My brother, Scrappy Jack. First class honours from Oxford, renowned researcher. Rode around Australia and raised \$500,000 for Dementia research. 'Memories' she smiles.





### Bees are not Irish

They speak to me of diversity and individuality.  
 They speak to me of Venn diagrams of overlapping definitions causing things to have some of the same.  
 They speak to me of uniformity and normality.

Let the fish complain of being bees.  
 Some fly and most don't.  
 Let the bees complain of being fish.  
 Bees fly but don't swim.  
 Let them each complain of the hidden truth that they possess nothing in common except the vaguest things.

Do they weep and not understand they are the same in the eyes of others?  
 If I weep, do I understand they can't be?  
 We are lost to the world of insanity,  
 weeping over spilt thoughts.

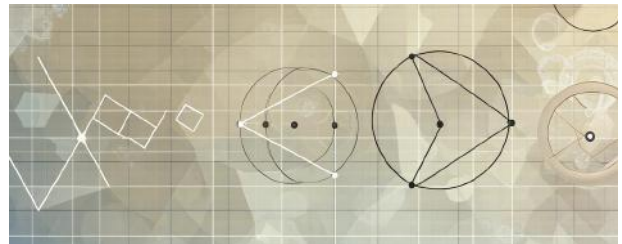
*By Robert Costa*



### Passing Time

Each minute makes no sense as I lay there.  
 Each day seems to pass faster than the previous day.  
 Each week I seem to reach out to myself wondering where myself is.  
 Each month is one-twelfth of a year.  
 I reached down and grabbed my 90-year-old hand.  
 I felt, beneath, the stifling weight of all that I will ever know.  
 I died for all of a brief moment. I was nothing more than a corpse on the street corner.  
 Each year I think of that.

*By Robert Costa*



### Just Passing By

A handwritten sign still speaks of hope.  
 A small tin lies empty with a hollow sound.  
 Untouched food weeps in loss.

The footpath is still there.  
 The dark grey is still there.  
 The bin still overflows with the detritus of the world.

Nature abhors a vacuum.  
 Even a street needs to be filled.  
 Even a street needs to be loved.  
 Someone has to replace her.

*By Robert Costa*

## Psappho

by Rob Simes

*“And it were not impertinent to make mention of Sappho here among the Muses ... Sappho speaks words mingled truly with fire, and through her songs, she draws up the heat of her heart.” - Plutarch, Amatorius 18*

*“Time has frittered away Sappho and her works, her lyre and songs.” - John Tzetzes of Constantinople, On the Metres of Pindar 20-22*

I sat, on the still warm sand, my feet in the cool water. My lyre, on my lap, my fingers sore from the strings, I looked west. The wind was wild, and the sea birds soared. My eyes glided across the bay, with them, as they cried; so too my heart, at the thought of leaving behind this place, my home. My mind joined them in their unfettered flight, but higher and wider still, to the west, to Sikelia, where we must go, and on to the famed Pillars of Heracles.

Though the sun slowly set, in the west, behind the island, her glitter and glamour lingered. The sea reflected her play, and obediently shimmered too.

And every aching part, was mirrored, for my memory.

And my fingers played, with the strings, and the phrase, “the glitter and glamour of the sun.”

And, as they did, I ached for greater freedom still. Certain of father’s disapproval, and lured by it, I placed my lyre gently on the sand, and shrugged out of my tunic. With the slightest sigh, it gathered by my ankles. I stepped out, and into the water. It’s cool touch, a delight, that gave life to my limbs. Stroke after stroke, I swam out to the island. I made



my way to the far side, so I could see the final rays of the setting sun, of Helios’ great and glorious chariot. I clambered on to a small rock ledge, and watched, and waited.

Once night had truly descended, I dived back into the sea. I had to swim quickly. I shivered from the cold, but the way each pore fired with the chill, and the effort of my limbs, was thrilling.

As my feet found the pleasantly rough sand, and I walked slowly from the water’s gentle embrace, I could hear her voice, “Psappho, Psappho.” It was my beloved, Telesippa.

I stood there, naked, before her gaze.

The biting drops fell from my dark hair, from my cheeks, from my nose. My head inclined down, before her appraising eyes. I saw them drop to the sand, creating tiny craters. Others caressed their way from

my shoulders, over my breasts, down my arms, falling from my fingers. Others, down my stomach, between my legs, down my legs, to form small pools at my feet, that quickly emptied. It was as if I was drawn by the eager sea, a painting, for a fleeting moment, and just for her.

I raised my head, to return her eager gaze, and feel that familiar grip, taloned and bruising, on my heart, that familiar flame, its silken surge under my skin.

We spend long moments, considering each other, but not as men in the agora, buying and selling, slaves and gems, livestock and pots, not like my brother, who purchased his paramour, in distant Egypt.

Then, eventually, words, “Your father has arrived, from Mytilene, with news, and a foul temper, and venom in his words.”

I smiled, “Telesippa, I love your newfound care with words, your delight in their shape, and cadence. More, though, the shape of your mouth when you speak them, the slightest crinkle of your brow, with your effort to bend them to your will, and for my ear.”

I considered her again, stepped back into my tunic, drew it back over my still wet body, took her hand, and we walked back, my mind mostly on the words I would write down when we returned.

The walk was not a long one. As we drew close to the house, I unhappily released her hand. It was best not to anger him without good reason.

He was waiting, impatiently, and launched as soon as we drew close enough, “What am I to do with you!” He points, accusingly, he gestures, up and down, “You sing of marriage, for others, of dowries, of love! What about you? I sent you here, to Eresos, to think, to come to your senses, to accept my direction.”

He was building, all the signs were there, the wide eyes, the bulging veins, the narrowed mind, “And, do you know, all I hear is snide remarks and hurtful gossip.”

“Then, Father,” I interjected, “choose not to listen.”

“Ha,” he bellowed, “if only it were that simple. You know how much I have risked, and our venture has failed, and you just provide our enemies with fuel to fire our destruction. You are an embarrassment. You are disliked, despised, you are a great disappointment.

“And,” he sighed, “if only you had been born a boy, you could have been the glorious future of our name.”

With clenched jaw, “You are to do nothing with me, father, that is my burden, my freedom. It is not for you. It falls to each of us, alone.”

And I left, for my room, to my desk, to write. And my mind, unfettered, soared and swooped.

I dipped the stylus into the ink, and it scratched its way across the papyrus, a gift from Charaxos. It was a pleasant sound, and sensation. The slight shiver of the slender stylus across the rough surface, whispering of the far-off and mysterious Nile.

First, some words for him, “Thank you for the papyrus gift, and I am glad your exporting of Lesbian wine gathers pace. But, I cannot condone your treatment of Rhodopis. We are not chattel, Charaxos, to be bought and sold, on a whim. I hoped for you to be better than those empty men who surround Helen still, pawing at her. She will be forever imprisoned, given our adoration for the so-called Poet. Be better, Charaxos.’

Second, that phrase, that came to me on the beach, ‘The glitter and glamour of the sun.’

Third, the tyranny of love, always in my mind, ‘I feel battered, burnt, trampled ... but, then, in turn ... the most wondrous energy, every atom aflame ... and, then, the merest moment later ... all is within sight, but out of reach ... I am exhausted, brutal mistress.’

I was now ready. I left my words, my desk, my room, in search of my father. And I hoped he was ready to hear. I found him in the andron, a suitable place for our dialogue.

I launched my words, and ideas, before he could gather his, ‘Father, I know we fight, a great deal. And, I know, it pains you. You rail against me, and my views, but you need to listen. Homer? You know I love his poems, Father, and he speaks of so much, of lust and hate, of war and vengeance, of the gods and man, of bravery and sacrifice.

“But, Father, there is so much more. So much about which he is silent, of love and kindness, of peace and forgiveness, of the spirits and all who follow them, of all the gentle places of the world, of the silent strength in the hearts of others. It is to them that I gift my voice. I will whisper of my feelings, as if overheard, as if by accident. And so others, over all the years that stretch before us, will learn of how I felt, of what I yearned for, and how lonely I am, and how brave. I will be a mirror for others, and gazing into me, their loneliness will soften just a little, just enough, and it will give these others hope.”

“I will do better than Phaethon,” I murmured, knowing he would resent my hubris, “he lost control of great Helios’ chariot, and truly shined as he plunged back to earth, but I will not. His horses

will bend to my will. I will dare, and will not fail.”

“And, Father”, I felt compelled to add, “my sexuality is my own. It is not the business of anyone else, least of all the vain and empty families who vie with you for governance.”

I was proud of him, in that one brief moment, for he summoned, against all his baser urges, though with a great sigh, “Dearest one, I hope the future will be kind to you, but I suspect it will not be so. For you enjoy, and are burdened, by a wonderful freedom. That others desire, but know is beyond their meagre means, their fearful hearts. You, Psappho, are a mirror, and people will shrink from what they see, and you will bear the brunt.”

Accustomed to words, unaccustomed to feelings, I understood, in that moment, before those words, as they pressed upon me, as I sat at his feet, that he was hurt by my bravery, in fusing them, wildly, with all the contents of my heart.

### ***Historical background***

*Born c. 630BC-.570 AD on the island of Lesbos, she is usually called Sappho, I have chosen to call her Psappho, given this is the form that appears in her extant poetry.*

*She is, importantly, the first surviving female author in the Western tradition, named by Plato the “Tenth Muse”.*

*Her verse is revolutionary, given its emphasis on the personal and emotional and feminine, rather than on the communal and martial and masculine, most clearly seen in Homer and Hesiod.*



## Honeymoon in Paris

by Conchita GarSantiago

I was strolling along the Champs Elysées in Paris. Holding hands with my brand new husband and wearing my light pink suit with the short skirt. A sense of immense happiness invaded my whole body. I felt elegant and worthy of being loved.

I saw my reflection in the dark glass of a café window. Memories of the moment that I bought that outfit came to mind.

"This will be perfect for going away, after your wedding reception," Mum said excitedly as I came out of the fitting room. "You look beautiful and smart," she added.

"Where are you going on your honeymoon?" the shop assistant asked. She had grey hair tied up at the back of her head and was wearing fifties horn-rimmed glasses.

"Paris."

"That should be very romantic."

"My grandmother was French and lived in Paris," said Mum still looking at me.



"Come on. Let's keep walking." David's words brought my mind back to the streets of Paris.

We had already climbed the colossal Eiffel Tower and seen the majestic city of Paris sprawling out beneath our feet. We had enjoyed a similar view from the top of the magnificent Napoleonic monument L'Arc de Triomphe.

We went inside the risqué Moulin Rouge, climbed the stairs of Montmartre excitedly



and ambled with open mouths, our eyes wide open as we took in the beautiful works of art in the Louvre and the old Gare d'Orsay.

With the obligatory sightseeing done, we decided to spend the evening exploring the back streets where tourists didn't go. We took a turn into one of the side streets off the Champs Elysées and walked until it was dark.

The lights of a cafe shone out in the dark and narrow street. Mesmerised, we walked towards it. I went to open the door and as I did so, a great tiredness came over me. Before I could say anything, my husband expressed what I was feeling. "I'm exhausted" he remarked. I looked at him a little surprised, that tiredness had come upon us both at the same time. The lights seemed to be dimmer than they looked from across the street.

My eyes went straight to the wonderfully displayed window with the most appetising pastries and my mood lifted. David tapped my right arm and I looked up. There was a middle-aged man with John Lennon glasses, Poirot moustache and Brylcreemed hair. He was wearing a waistcoat over a white shirt. On the sleeves he had a sort of black rubber band, holding them slightly above the wrist. He wore a long, brown, thin apron.

Behind him was a young lady wearing a long black dress almost covered by a long white apron. She was wearing a maid's white lace headpiece. I thought it was strange, but said nothing. The man gestured to her and after a quick curtsy she gave us our desired pastry. Then, in a copper coffee urn, he made our coffees. Bemused, we looked back. There were perhaps twelve or fourteen customers also

dressed as if it were the beginning of the twentieth century.

"Oh. They're having a theme party. How lovely!" We walked towards them. A sweet whiff of a familiar smell beckoned me. I was absorbed in it, until I realised it was my French great grandmother's perfume. She lived with us until she died. I was only six at the time.

Now more relaxed, we sat at a table and looked all around us at the exquisite and extremely convincing stage.

I noticed the lascivious look a few men gave to my legs as the women appeared angry and dragged back their husbands' attention.

I was admiring those elegant ladies who were so well attired, with Gibson girl hairstyles, beautiful long skirts with a train, so long that they trailed behind them and bodices that moulded on tight and well-boned foundations. These tops had stiff collars and sleeves that were tight at the top but flared out below the elbow.

The ladies moved slowly and gracefully which made it all the more enchanting. The men were courteous and gallant.

One of the ladies looked at me smiling lovingly. I returned her smile, but before I could say a thing I was interrupted. The middle-aged man, who'd made our coffees, came to the table with the bill. It all cost less than a franc! A few cents in Australian money. "We don't have francs. We have Euros." Our French was good enough to say that.

"Euros? *Qu'est-ce que c'est, ça?*" the waiter asked seriously. David and I looked at each other.

"They don't know what Euros are? They are really into the theme!" I was amused.

"Theme or no theme they have to take Euros!" David wasn't diverted. The man was looking at us a bit impatiently.

"*Quatre-vingt six centimes!*" He put his hand out as he repeated the cost of the bill.

David took his phone out to check if Google could direct us to a nearby cash machine

where we could withdraw some francs. As soon as he started to key on the phone everybody gathered around us.

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est, ça?*"

"*Mon Dieu!*"

"*C'est magique!*"

"It's... just a mobile!" Their faces were still perplexed "Now, I agree it's a bit too much with the theme."

"I don't know. They are really curious about the mobile..." David spoke trying not to move a single muscle in his face. A little unnerved I looked slowly up at all their faces one by one. Then, I looked at David. A cold shiver ran through us.

"They're not dressed in costume!" I shrieked. My yell froze them and we ran out of the café. Before reaching the door, I saw again the same lady, she continued looking at me lovingly. David pulled me out and we ran all the way to the end of the street. We turned the corner and bent over, trying to catch our breath and calm our nerves. Then we crept up on the corner and the light had disappeared. Holding hands we slowly walked back, to see it all again from the café window, but the whole place had disappeared. In its place was a laundry.

In the midst of it I saw a clear picture in my mind. A picture that had been hanging from Mum's living room walls. Her grandmother. My great-grandmother. The lady who smiled lovingly at me a few moments earlier.



## Confessions of a High School Scamp Growing up with the Internet

by Samson Sternhell

### Flash Animators, Salad Fingers and Shock Sites

Coming from a secular Jewish household coming to grips three generations in with post-Holocaust tremors, several high profile textbooks, an AO winning grandfather and a psychiatrist father who performed rehabilitative psychotherapy and Electro Convulsive Treatment on poor souls who came out of the rear end of Oxford St in the 80s, having a big time conspiracy rally organiser as one uncle and a real estate deal artist as another has been an interesting one. On the other side of the family were a legion of nurses,

radiographers and public health workers who had an alcoholic Police Inspector stumbling in home on stressful shifts dealing with the shitfight which was the Roger Rogerson police corruption case.

Chaos was pretty common growing up and the early internet at the age of seven served as my introduction to the pit of insanity that developed off of fringe interest forums, political news blogs and tortured flash animators putting up their disturbed masterpieces for everyone to share at school on USB flash drives away from teachers and after care workers.

It was pretty common for me to ask a lot of questions, and I had a lot after my cousins traumatised me with a couple episodes of David Firth's Salad Fingers when they were meant to be nannying me when my parents were out on the job. Enough said and give it a few years and I would be learning from Year 6 kids in



Salad Fingers was the introduction many Young Minds of Computer Addicts had to the Disturbed Pit which evolved online throughout the 2000s

Kindergarten how to animate shorts of Pennywise the Dancing Clown serving random kids cocaine on their way to school.

My Year 2 teacher in 2006 held me up after class once after asking me how I knew what cocaine was after we had a lesson on bad behaviour, role models and consequences of actions. She put up a mugshot list of different kids in that same cohort, who were well into their early high school years at that point, for me to identify from years earlier. She even scoured the Z:// drives of the 2004 grades looking for Pennywise animations and found several renditions of him murdering different stick figure children for shock value.

Least to say, if my grandfather would casually tell me that most problems in life weren't as bad as having a German SS Officer hold a gun to you or watching a Russian POW have his head caved in with an iron bar, there was not a lot else in terms of consequence I really cared about that much as a kid. Just say you're sorry like the cartoons on TV tell you to do, be a nice kid again and everyone will like you. Rinse, cycle, repeat. Don't worry, your computer and internet privileges will be back again in a week or two - just say you need to use it for work!

### **Internet Trolls, Memes and Sleepless Gen Z Electric Dreams**

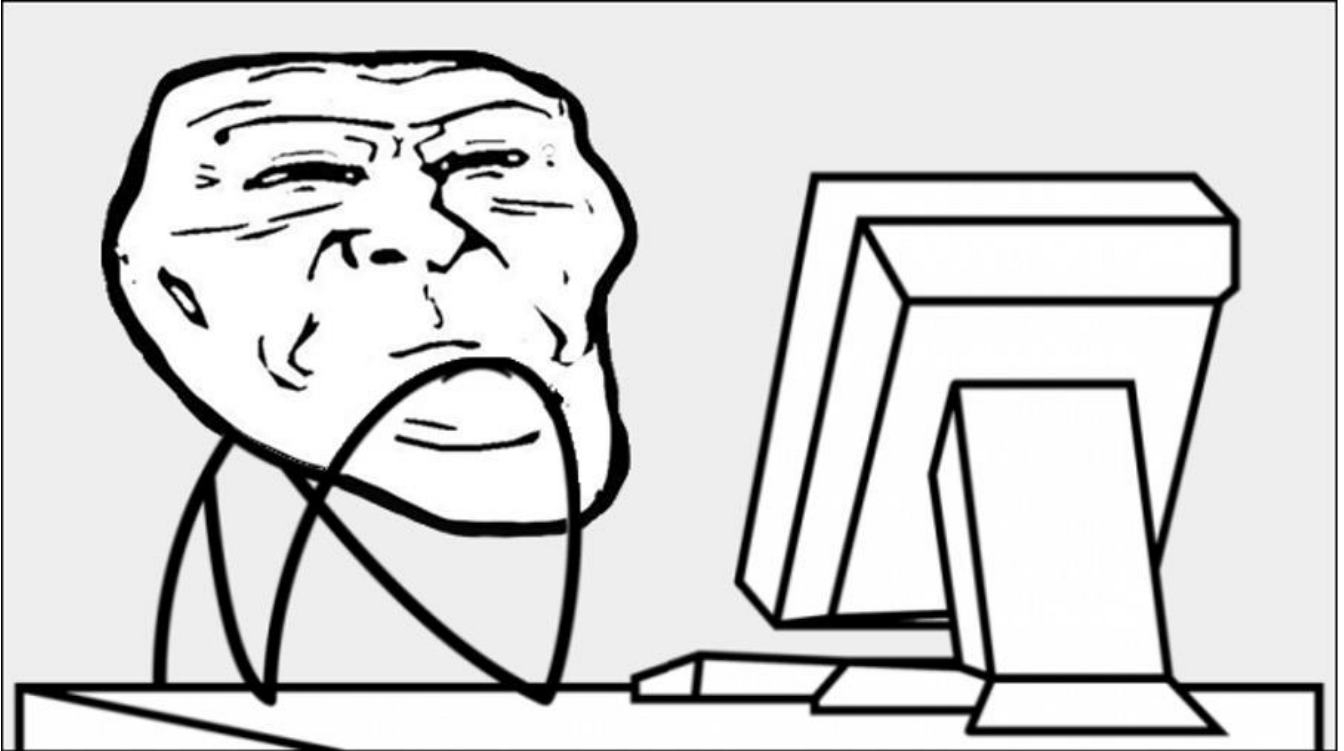
Spend enough time on the internet growing up observing stories of things caving in, political happenings taking place and enough armchair analysts on their esoteric blog networks that at one point you wanted part of the action. School's on Recess Break - time to make

and review some memes in the next 20 minutes!

Real life was IRL, memes and the internet were cyberspace and when shit happened up in real life Mysterious Hacker 4Chan always had to be behind it or a million different Reddit threads had to analyse it before a boomer journalist could squeak something together on a six figure salary. This is what led to the obsession in my grade with Twitter and my mind for current affairs watching my Dad slurp oats out of a brown bowl every morning reading *The Economist* or *The Spectator*. No matter whatever house we were in some things remained constant.

This led onto the 2016 American election and a year after the old man kicked the bucket after a famous medical scandal at St Vincent's. I had just come back from Italian exchange, was thrust into the HSC year, people were sympathetic to my grief and traumatic dissociation for about a week before rods were inserted up their backsides and they needed to squeeze at an ATAR ranking for a degree half of them would drop in subsequent years at the cost of a HECs rise which is indexing with each year.

Half of my grade was obsessed with anything and everything that happened in the race between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The popular girls in my inclusive inner city secular school had their gay best friend start a lot of rumours about our homophobia, transphobia and racism when we were questioning a lot of the ideas surrounding inclusivity double standards which we had grown up with. Never mind one of my best school mates in my nerd group was gay and another was Indigenous too busy selling debauchorous DeviantArt commissions to



**A Troll Face Iteration - A Meme which Aged Very Quickly from Cancer Inducing to Genuinely Haunting whenever it is Seen**

furries (the only paying commission on that scandalous site) to really care about a lot of drama. Needless to say, a bunch of nerds, scamps and mischief makers were hardly aspiring paramilitary group members - as far as we hoped at least.

I have personally spent a lot of time since 2016 picking up old pieces, contacting old high school friends, repairing relationships and doing my best for other human beings sometimes in very direct and constructive ways, other times in somewhat chaotic. Point being there was a time at which we all gaslit ourselves into thinking we would be doxxed by feminist and socialist activists at USYD we went to school and had friendships with and our parents would compare us to various high profile white privileged terrorists. Extra points if you had a parent die, travelled in Europe on your own and the fate of international politics

concerned you a bit and you weren't necessarily convinced the headlines reacting to world developments always had it right or your Mum's champagne socialist friends were completely with what was truly going on just after reading a millennial blue check marked journo barely beginning to dissect things in The Conversation or Guardian articles.

The personal is political as the feminists like to say - and damn well our trauma led us to politics and then led us back to ourselves. "The Most Traumatized Generation" is here to stay and God willing you better understand us if we want to keep this world together. We all survived a lot of casual depression and suicide related jokes in high school - so we're well past the point of caring about offending entrenched sensibilities when changing the world for the better.

by *Karlie A. Smith*

The ice on the fence shadows an early winter, it is only mid-autumn, and no one can say why the cold snap has arisen so early; maybe it is climate change but more so the ice age than the other crap. The weatherman dressed up in his ritzy new suit said it would be warm with a top of twenty-five today. How did he get it so wrong, and why do they need to wear such fancy clothing to tell the weather, Jack ponders? Jack had plans to build a new carport for his wife today before the frosts came every morning when winter arrives and lay like a blanket on the rusty old Fiat. The car never starts in winter; the price the drought has had on farmers and the loss of his daughter to a horse-riding incident has taken its toll. The bills are piling up, and the farm is not producing.

The cows are quiet, and the crowing of the rooster sounds muffled. Farming is not a lifestyle those weathermen can imagine. They dress up to tell porky pies on the battered up old television every night then probably goes on to sip fine wine and say to their wives of the hard day they had at work.

“Hard days?” Jack mumbles under his breath; they have no idea what a hard day's work is. Jack anticipates a horror and not from the weather that is unusually brittle for this time of year on the coast.

Something is lurking around the lands they toil over, something no weather forecaster could endure. The warmth of the open fire, the encountered and intrinsic memories of his father linger in



the sunshine of when he was a boy. "Let's go feed the chickens poppa" he remembered saying every morning before his breakfast was ready on the stove. The excitement of collecting fresh eggs to buddy with his French toast was all too much to bear.

Jack nods when his son Jesse comes out, plaid in a warm checked shirt and worn blue jeans, "let's go, son". They put on their sleek and shiny farm boots that have yet to see the sloshy mud of the torn-up grounds that is farming, and head to the chicken coop for today's surprise of organic, fresh eggs. "Slow down son, stop!" Jack bellows as he sees the horror before gaining entry to the coop. A shine of glittered black has caught his eye; he knows what it is and what awaits them.

Jack slips, takes a tumble over the dirty soccer ball that has sat again where it was not supposed to be. Jesse runs back with watery fear protruding down his cheeks. He knows what this means; he will have extra chores, and the ball will be crushed between the ice-cold ground and that of a tractor tire now. Destruction of the ball is

the least of Jesse's problems. Jack is bleeding, not a small scratch or bark off his arm, gushing like the waterfall Jesse saw on tv last night. "Poppa, poppa!" shrieks Jesse, he runs to the house like a poor African running from a hungry lion, "Mummy. Poppa is hurt" he exhales, bursting through the already fragile bamboo door.

Jack reluctantly gathers his bearings, claret from his head has pooled in his eyes as he squints to see the glittery subject has now gone from his coop. Did the noise scare the evil away? Jack reluctantly gets up and moves closer to the coop, slowly at first, then sprinting as he sees his lively hood slipping away like a Sunday waterslide at a family barbeque. The glitter has gone, scales appear from the corner of the building where the eggs lay in wait. Scales the size of Jack's morning papaya, why must he diet on such foods, Jack prefers his streaky bacon and pancakes, but the doctor says he won't be around for much longer if he keeps that up. The serpent, known to locals as Droom Van 'n Slang, has eaten all but three of Jack's prize laying chickens.

In the distance, Jesse is scampering down the trails towards Jack with the rev of an engine closely behind. Julie has jumped on the quad bike that holds the rake, shovel and poison; tools of another job that must get done today. She is persistently grinding gears as she shreds the grass into diamond-shaped fragments. But it is too late, and Jack feels the impressive displacement of his foot, he turns to see that the giant serpent has latched onto his new shiny boots. The boots which cost his weekly chicken egg

sales have disintegrated into pieces. Fangs the size of steroid injected great white sharks have now embedded into his flesh. He knows this is it; this is, however, how Jonathan was taken last week, just up the road, Jack heard his screams whistle down the valley like a ghost who finally met Satan as he died.

Jack was feeling foggy now; the breath was being taken from his lungs slowly as he comprehended the serpent encroach on his last breaths. Was this it; it was not his dicky heart that was going to fail him, Jack could have had his final meal of bacon and hot pancakes, after all, even men on death row get their last meal of choice, it was that damn soccer ball that got in the way and stopped Jack from concentrating on the job at hand. The screeching sound was close, the brakes have failed on the quad bike, and in a haze, Jack understood his wife's face as she tried to steer the quad bike away from the deathly collision with Jack; he closed his eyes and waited for the calm to come. It was in that moment that he heard a whisper "Poppa wake up! It's time to feed the chickens."



## The Lounge that Talks

by Jack Fringe

How can anyone get motivated to do something when being held back by guilt and shame?

For the past few years, my mind has been a hornet's nest wondering if I should dispose of a family heirloom. Every time I sat on Granny's Jacobean, memories came flooding back from my childhood. Memories and tears. But that ageing family friend had to go. My wife kept nagging. Especially after the latest shame.

I loved that lounge. It has been with me since I was a boy. It was mid-last century when my grandparents bought a Jacobean three-piece tapestry lounge made from sturdy oak. They commonly referred to the lounge and its two chairs as the "Jacobean". I can assure you the Jacobean was sturdy as, over the decades, most of us kicked our toes on its protruding legs.

When I was very young, Granny would serve me dinner on a tray whilst I watched her black-and-white Stromberg-Carlson television. That was the best treat. With my mother in the background hollering about the wayward children of today. "He needs to learn to sit at the table, Mum. He needs to use his cutlery correctly. Anyway, he shouldn't be watching *Lost in Space*. It's a dumb program." Granny would just reply "He's only a boy once. Let him be." Then she would remind my mother of something wicked from her childhood and that would shut mother up super quick.

That nostalgic Jacobean was part of many generations of our family, and, like



us all, it grew old—but the memories remained. Granny passed away. Mother passed away. The Jacobean became a catalyst for yesteryear. "Let me get you an antimacassar," Granny would tell my friends. They'd give me a confused look, thinking they were about to be served some sort of fantastical cocktail. But Granny's antimacassars lovingly placed over the back of the chairs saved it from years of mishaps from Brylcreem, Vaseline Hair Tonic and even the ladies' Gossamer. But time doesn't sit still. Granny's tradition of placing antimacassars over the backs and armrests of the Jacobean died with her.

Once those two family stalwarts left us, Jacobean started its decline. Who would bother to care for the lounge suite? I wish I had. The floral fabric, once the pride of the house, dirtied quickly from perspiration and a myriad of stains. The tapestry began a new life with the spots, splatters and smears beginning to resemble a Jackson Pollock painting. The deposits started to build on top of each other. Despite many attempts, some challenging fabric stains remained. After many a party, I had to dry the cushions in the sun; I am sure my neglect in



leaving them outdoors for days shortened their life expectancy. Spilled Merlot dyed in blotches, and cigarette burns never healed. Stains from my children's mishaps accumulated, and soon those stains had their own stories. Then my grandchildren's neglect followed them.

"Remember that time you..."

The Jacobean was a trove of stories. But it aged too quickly and dropped out of fashion as my wife's love of colour changed the lounge room into something horrific. Granny's lounge just didn't blend, it had become an outcast in its original home. We moved it to another room for a time. Then, like a funeral march, it made its way down the stairs and under the house, where it seemed out of place with the gym equipment and bar. My wife's further nagging forced me to consider getting rid of it altogether. It was causing her issues every time she passed it.



I felt guilty advertising it for sale online. But it had to go. The cockroaches were building nests and feeding off the old stains. I selected a good angle to take the photograph, ensuring that the stains were not visible, and, with the appropriate lighting, it appeared half decent.

There were no replies to my ad. I thought I would have received hundreds of inquiries. It was vintage, after all. Then, every so often, I'd advertise again. Still nobody wanted it. So I left it under

the house for another few years. The horrifying part is that I am now in my senior years and it is starting to look fashionable once again.

I dragged it onto the footpath with the help of my grandson, who also has recent memories of his great, great-grandmother's Jacobean. My wife caught him fornicating on it. She was filled with absolute horror. I hadn't the heart to tell her I had also used the Jacobean for similar purposes in my youth. And that she had also used the lounge for similar purposes when we were dating. In fact, I suspect we conceived our eldest son on it. At least we made love on it when it was elegant and pristine whereas my grandson used it when it was stained and tattered. "Disgusting behaviour," she said, and insisted it must go immediately. She blamed the Jacobean. I think she saw it as a magnet for mischief.

So the three-piece Jacobean tapestry lounge made from sturdy oak sat on the footpath with a sign: "Free to a good home". Possibly there are no good homes in my neighbourhood as it didn't move. Even the cushions remained. Perhaps stained floral fabric is not in vogue.

Then it rained. And every time I drove into the driveway I'd see it there, curbside, deteriorating further. When I told a dear friend at Bingo of my dilemma, she reminded me that people in my area didn't like taking things for free.

I replaced the free sign. In big bright colours, I announced: "For Sale - \$100."

She was right. Nobody in my area wants to take things for free.

But a thief saw it as something of value.

The Jacobean was gone.

## Life's Journey

by *Melissa Hickey*

A wrinkly, age spotted hand rose from the murky water, wavered, then slapped down again. The hand belonged to my ninety-two-year-old daughter.

I remember the day my girl was born, I died seconds after giving birth. My spirit hovered above the delivery bed. She was so tiny, so alone, so motherless, that I decided to stay.

My little one began her journey like other babies, in crystal blue water, only because of my sudden demise she had to swim harder against the current. Consistent in her stroke, she swam unscathed until she reached adolescence. Below the surface, where she couldn't see a bunch of stingers were circling. Their long tentacles reached out and stung her body, causing tears. "Stay brave," I called, "this will pass."

And pass, it did. By her mid-twenties, the stingers were a distant memory. She swam on. It was me who spied the massive rock sticking out of the water. "Watch out," I yelled, but focused on her journey. She didn't hear me. Bang, she swam straight into it, and sank below the surface. "Swim, swim," I screamed from the sidelines, "don't give up."

She reappeared minutes later. A man had her in his arms. He held her, and guided her onwards. She welcomed his support. For years they swam together. My daughter's hair turned grey and wrinkles formed on her face. One day a white light descended upon them and spying the face of his long dead mother, the man rose up to greet her. Now my

daughter was alone. With wide eyes, she swam in circles, unsure which way to go. "Help me," she moaned.

Younger, smooth skinned hands materialised, grabbed her and pushed her forwards through the choppy waters.

With less than ten kilometres to go, her brow creased, and she wriggled free of those helping hands. "Go away," she shouted. "Who are you, who am I, I don't know who I am?" With slow and uncoordinated strokes, she dog paddled aimlessly through the filthy, rubbishy waters of Alzheimer's, towards death.

I waited. She came towards me, her fingers reached out and touched the finish line. She looked up and saw me. "Mum," she cried, recognising me in an instant. I reached down and yanked her spirit from the water. As we embraced, a white glow shone done, and the voices of our deceased loved ones called our names.



## **Interview: Melissa Hickey**

### **Tell us a bit about yourself**

I work in early childhood at a preschool for 3 to 5 year olds on Sydney's Northern Beaches, and really love my work. The children are at such an interesting age so it's never boring.

I left school not knowing what I wanted to do but started volunteering at a preschool and enjoyed it so much I enrolled in a childcare course at TAFE, got my qualifications and went on from there.

Free time is taken up with writing of course, walking and, I've discovered crocheting. I'm a member of the Knitters' Guild and find crocheting very relaxing. I was also a member of Toastmasters for 10 years where I learnt a lot about self-confidence.

### **How did you start writing?**

I've always been an avid reader - reading everything from mysteries to biographies. As a child I loved Enid Blyton and would imagine the characters and what happened to them and in my head rewrite the endings.

Then about 15 years ago I joined a friend at a writing workshop in Fiji and came home full of enthusiasm. I decided to write a book though I didn't know how to write as I didn't have enough skills but I loved it. I took several courses, persevered and finished the book, a thriller about a girl living in the Southern Highlands.

### **What are your biggest writing challenges?**

Getting my work published. I sent my book to several publishers and even to an agent but it never happened. So I decided to try writing short stories and joined the Medium Writing Platform which has been very helpful as we read each other's stories



and get feedback. It's no good writing a bubble.

I also joined other writing platforms including science fiction sites and had a couple of stories published in an anthology and one included in a podcast.

### **What do you love most about writing?**

The freedom it gives me. I don't write during the week but during school holidays, at weekends and after dinner on Friday night I'll turn on my music, sit in front of the computer and I'm in another world. If I can't sleep I can get up at 4am and that's fine. I don't plan my stories but once I have a basic idea I let it flow. I try not to edit before I finish because it sometimes interrupts the rhythm.

### **What's your most interesting recent writing development?**

Discovering Spill the Beans. I took up its most recent challenge, Filthy, for which I really enjoyed writing. I can't wait for the next challenge.

### **What's your top advice for other writers?**

Enjoy your writing. Don't give up. Enter competitions and join writers' platforms where you can get feedback and most important - networking.

## Featured Writers



Conchita GarSantiago is a Sydney-based writer who was born, grew up and studied in Spain. Her stories have been published in different magazines and anthologies, with her greatest achievement her Spanish Civil War novel “A Cry for Home”.

[Conchita at SelfPubAus](#)



Jack Fringe has a background in media and TV, which is a rich source of satire in his dark novels and short stories. Based in Sydney, Jack loves black comedy and the joy that comes from creating something totally ridiculous and different

[JackFringe.com](http://JackFringe.com)



Maria Issaris is a journalist, editor and community media specialist, researcher and writer. She founded audiobooks@radio which enables Australian authors to publish their work as an audiobook.

[Maria on SelfPubAus](#)



Robert Costa is a retired architect with significant experience as an architect, having performed many roles over 30 years in private practice. He writes to explore new worlds, real and imaginary.

[Robert on SelfPubAus](#)



Rob Simes is a History teacher, now in Sydney and previously in London, a hopeful writer, and a keen traveller. He's a currently working on a Historical Fiction novel set in Paris during the Revolution

[Rob on SelfPubAus](#)



Anna Ceguerra lives in Sydney, Australia with her beloved dog, Patchy. Having spent many years building a career in science and software development, she loves weaving futuristic themes into unique and exciting stories.

[annaceguerra.com](http://annaceguerra.com)

# Writing Opportunities

## Self Publishing service suppliers

At SelfPubAus we've started creating a list of Australia-based people offering Self Publishing services.

From consulting and cover design to publishing and audiobook production, if you need some professional help or technical support with the self-publishing process, take a look at the list:

### [Self Publishing services in Australia](#)

If you offer a publishing-related service and would like to be included (listing is free) please email: [selfpubaus@gmail.com](mailto:selfpubaus@gmail.com)

*Writing - Coaching - Consulting  
Editing - Formatting - Cover design  
Audiobook production - Website creation  
Printing - Marketing - Distribution  
Agents - Legal services*

## Sydney Authors Inked

Sydney Authors Inked is a group of authors based in Sydney that runs free author talks at The Little Big House in Summer Hill.

The next event is on Sunday 2 June 2024, from 12.30pm - 2.30pm. Authors may have their books available for sale and a light morning tea may be offered.

Authors interested in taking part can email: [sydneyauthorsinked@gmail.com](mailto:sydneyauthorsinked@gmail.com)



## Spill the Beans at Manly Art Gallery

**Spill the Beans** online writing community is holding an event with local authors, story and poem performances and music.

The current **Spill the Beans** challenge is FORMIDABLE: send your 400-word story or poem by 31 April to [beanswrite21@gmail.com](mailto:beanswrite21@gmail.com)



## Produce your own Audiobook: the How-To! Meetup

Writers interested in finding out how they can turn their work in to an audiobook can join a new how-to [MeetUp group](#) to find out what's involved – it will be on Zoom.

It's run by Maria Issaris, an experienced writer and broadcaster who founded Australian audiobook production company [audiobooksradio](#).

They intend to hold a course by the end of April – register your interest to be included.

