ANZAC Day 2020

ANZAC Day this year in Gympie was very different than in past years. This year there was no big gathering of people at the Eternal Flame in Reef Street after a short march from the RSL down Mary street and into Reef Street, for the Dawn Service. No gathering of people at the Vietnam Remembrance at Normanby Hill Park after the Dawn Service. No parade from Smithfield Street along Mary Street and around into Reef Street, of returned soldiers, nurses, schools and other clubs.

This year we were asked to stand at the end of our driveways with a lighted candle and hold our own minute silence. Well I did just that. I downloaded the RSL app which had a virtual candle, the Ode and the Last Post. Just before dawn I walked the short distance to the end of my driveway and waited and waited but no one else at my end of the street came out. As I can’t see the full length of the street, I’m not sure if anyone else was at their driveways. I am hoping that the people my end were on their back balconies watching the dawn break.

Just as light started to break I lit my candle and played the Ode then the Last Post. During the minute silence I said a silent prayer in remembrance for those who paid the ultimate sacrifice, those who returned and have now gone, those who are still with us and those who are still serving. I said another prayer for the families that have lost someone in war or troubled times and for those who have family serving. I thought about my own family history, two great uncles reported as ‘Missing in Action’ in New Guinea, never to be found. One of these uncles, married just before being sent to New Guinea, never knew that he had a son. Another great uncle (who lied about his age) who was a POW in Changi, how he never got over what he went through and has now passed. Lest We Forget!

What a lovely way to celebrate the day, this may just become my way of holding the dawn service for ANAZC Day every year from now on. No screeching cockatoos and other bird life taking to the skies because we have woken them, no poop from the cockatoos and other bird life as they take to the skies, no big crowds gathered so we can’t see or hear the service. Just me at the end of my driveway with a candle, my phone and my thoughts.

Wendy Flikweert
New Group Starting Soon

Do you enjoy discussing a wide range of topics with interested people? We are starting a new Discussion Group. The purpose of the group is for members to share their opinions on a range of relevant, contemporary issues. We may explore different positions on such issues; identify problems underlying social conflicts; explore likely causes and answers to the problem; and suggest possible implications. We expect to meet fortnightly, on Thursday mornings from about 10.00am, for 1 - 1 1/2 hours.

Be Connected

Be Connected is an Australia wide initiative empowering all Australians to thrive in a digital world. We have online learning resources as well as a Network of community partners - the Be Connected Network - who offer in-person support so you can develop your digital skills and confidence. Learn at your own pace with our free courses on everything from how to access the internet, make video calls or set up your device. See what topics are available by following the link below.


Bookworms Bookclub

As our members didn’t want to meet on one of the social media platforms, each month we each contribute an article on the books read over that period and I e-mail the ‘newsletter’ out to each member with internet access and one copy goes out via snail-mail. Looking forward to the time that we can all read the same monthly book but in the meantime, it helps us keep connected. Thanks for your efforts with U3A’s own newsletter. It all helps to keep life interesting.

Drawing Class

The drawing class has been receiving weekly lessons in the form of PDF instructions. This term the focus is on drawing people. We started with stick figures, focusing on proportions. Then we looked at filling out the figures, and adding observational skills. Here’s some work by Marilyn, Natalie and Greg.
National Volunteer Week

Volunteering Australia is closely monitoring the evolving COVID-19 situation closely. At this uncertain time we feel that it is more important than ever to recognise and acknowledge Australia’s volunteers and therefore National Volunteer Week 2020 will be held as scheduled on Monday 18 May – Sunday 24 May 2020, but with online activities and events, instead of in person ones.

The theme for National Volunteer Week 2020 is “Changing Communities. Changing Lives”.

Comet Atlas

Have you ever seen a bright comet with your naked eyes? The last one of any note was Comet Hale-Bopp way back in 1997, but it’s possible we will get another chance later this month. Comet Atlas was discovered on December 28, 2019, the last comet discovery of that year. It has an eccentric elliptical orbit of the Sun and only visits us once ever 5,519 years. For now, it’s still out beyond the orbit of Mars, close to the constellation of Ursa Major, (the Big Dipper). However, it is only visible through telescopes. But it’s getting much brighter. Comet Atlas is due to reach perihelion—get closest to the Sun - around 23rd May. At that point it will be just a quarter of the distance between Earth and the Sun. Although comets are extremely difficult to forecast, some astronomers believe that comet Atlas could brighten to a magnitude of between +1 and -5. That’s brighter than Venus! This could potentially make it the second brightest object in the night sky besides the moon.
Interesting the way this isolation can affect us. “Strange” or even “weird “ might have been more accurately suggestive than “interesting”, come to think of it.

Anyway today I met Denice in the patient queue at QML up there on Horseshoe Bend. We were all social distancing of course. Signs everywhere insisted on total hygiene, “ Don’t lean on the rails”, “Do not sit here”, “Stand here”. But where you were told to stand there was a huge cross which seemed to indicate it was the wrong place anyway. All that, no doubt calculated to keep us on the alert, get us fit and, hopefully, avoid the plague.

It gave me a real buzz to see Denice’s friendly face. Of course I like her and I appreciate what she does for us ordinary U3A members. But it was more than that. I realised, as I drove home, that our self-isolation has made encounters with familiars that we once took for granted especially uplifting. Naturally Denice and I didn’t hug, or even shake hands. I have never hugged Denice or even shaken her hand, but I am resolved to do at least that when this darned social distancing is over—if she is OK with it of course.

You all know Denice. She’s the one who collects our course fees so sweetly you don’t even notice she’s taking your money. She said " I was going to ask you to write something about what you are doing in isolation. It might be of interest to the others. "I thought, “Denice, they can’t possibly be that bored!”

Instead I said, “I’ve got writer’s block”. This was an unjustifiable boast. To suffer from writer’s block you almost certainly have to be a writer. The latter is surely a prerequisite for the former - to put it backwards. Anyway, writer’s block is the literary equivalent of the “yips” in golf. A golfer with the “yips” freezes as he or she stands over a putt. They can’t make that tiny swing to put the ball in the hole. For the writer it happens when he or she picks up the pen—and has to put it down again—without writing a word.

Well none of that mattered really, because I think Denice may be hard of hearing. She replied, with a lift of the eyebrows and a smile of approval, “ You've been writing a lot?” I denied it and repeated my confession of failure a bit more loudly. She seemed to get it that time.

But Denice seems to have unblocked something, because here I am at the IPad contemplating the almost nothing of the past weeks - or is it years? - and trying to make nothing seem like something that is interesting.

And so to the isolation thing. My wife, Yve, had gone to stay with our daughter Lib and her husband Steve on the Mornington Peninsula just before the lockdown occurred. So, from the start, I was seriously into self-isolating - well except for the wallabies, the magpie family of three and their ever-present hangers-on, the dozen or so Mickey birds. Most days they turn up at the back door in the early morning and late afternoon for a bit of a snack. The little grey wallabies, all of them female and most with joeys in their pouches, are dainty and gentle. They hold their small morsels of bread in their delicate paws as if it were communion. The magpies, very formal in black and white, are stand-offish. But the Mickey birds, as we called them when we were kids, (I think they are native grey minors) are the opposite. Aggressive and athletic, they crowd in close, will tread ever so lightly on your toes to retrieve a crumb, or swoop to a perfect intercept to the magpies’ dismay and obvious disapproval.

How long has this St Francis of Assisi thing been going on? Well, I must confess it started a few years ago, so it is not specifically “isolation therapy”. But I have continued to do it during the lockdown, with even more appreciation of their friendship, so it kind of falls within the context of Denise’s request to tell you what I am doing in isolation.

So what SHOULD I be doing with all this solo “spare time”? There are years and years of clutter in the office, the studio and the barn. It is a golden opportunity to do what I have been “going to do” for years, and to enjoy the much-touted psychological and physical benefits of “decluttering”. 
So what do I do? As is my wont in such situations, I enter vigorously into procrastination and call on my highly developed evasion skills. I decide I’ll clean the windows.

Ours is a big ranch-style house of brown brick, but the sombre exterior belies the brightness on the the inside. I have loved that brightness, but now, as I begin my newly discovered, urgent project, I become acutely aware that it is due to the large number and vast size of the windows and doors—all of which are screened!

There was a brand new window-cleaning sponge with a telescopic handle which had been standing in the pantry for months. Not that the windows had been neglected all that time. We had a cleaning lady who came once a week and did a few windows each time as part of her housekeeping duties. But alas, the Coronavirus

The brand new window-cleaning sponge was an up-market version of those you see at service stations, a wistful reminder, if you are old enough, of a time when an attendant would clean your windscreen while your car was being refuelled. This one consisted of a lilac towelling roll with a sturdy, hinged black rubber squeegee attached to the back of it. It looked rather smart—almost industrial quality.

As soon as I picked it up, I felt a bit professional. In fact I had a momentary flashback to a September day in 1984. On a day visit to Dublin’s famous Trinity College I was surprised by the sudden appearance of a window-cleaner sitting languidly in a webbing sling outside a second-story window a metre from where I was standing. He looked so casual, I felt a surge of admiration for his confidence. But I was pleased that, thanks to the telescopic handle, I would be able to reach the top of every one of our windows with my feet firmly planted on the ground. I have never done heights well - not even as a kid.

So I put "The Best of Van Morrison" on the CD player (he has a good song about being happy cleaning windows) and, armed with the brand new sponge, a bucket of sudsy water and another one of clean, clear water for rinsing the sponge, I set to work. It didn’t take me long to realise that I had underestimated the challenge ahead of me. The windows and doors virtually surround the house. There could be an acre of smeared glass ahead of me—just on the outside. And, of course, the screens have to be removed, cleaned and put back as well. I hadn’t really thought of that when I took the “window cleaning ” detour.

Still, conscious that the alternative was the “real work” - throwing out the useless, but precious “stuff” accumulated over decades in the study, the studio and the barn - I applied myself with renewed determination.

Strangely, the sight of the clear glass of each clean window had me feeling rather pleased with myself. I began to think I might be good at this. The feeling of satisfaction increased when I looked back at the windows that I had done- not that there were all that many for quite some time. This was going to be a lengthy detour! The task would take me just over a week at three or four hours a day. Oh, and I hadn’t bargained on cleaning the detritus (deceased moths, grains of dirt and dust, even a couple of the tiniest frog corpses that I have ever seen - how did they get in there?) from the channels in which the windows run and rest. So I had to expand my range of equipment by an old toothbrush and the vacuum cleaner and spend much of my time either crouched or kneeling. Those postures have their attendant challenges these days I found ...not least being rising from them.

Still, that feeling of satisfaction grew towards euphoria, and the thought even crossed my mind that I might be becoming addicted to window cleaning.

And I might have - but for an unfortunate incident when I was cleaning the last window in the dining room, and in fact the last one in the house. It was almost lunch time on the second Sunday of what was now feeling like an almost completed marathon and I was looking forward to finishing, having lunch with a glass of red and then resting virtuously on my laurels for the Sabbath afternoon.
The windows are very sturdy structures, thick glass panes in strong metal frames, they average probably a square metre in area and, as you can imagine, they are very heavy. I had this last lower window held up by a strong wooden prop made for that very purpose. I had used it successfully and safely on every set of windows up to now. I was on my aching knees cleaning out the bottom channel.

Suddenly, for some reason - I don’t think I bumped it - the prop collapsed and the window came down like a guillotine and hit me on the back of the head. I saw stars, or their blurred equivalent, and put my hand to the excruciating pain. The warm blood oozed through my fingers and into the palm of my hand. Despite the urge to just lie there and cry - it was the very last window - I scrambled unsteadily to my feet and half-ran, half-staggered to the bathroom for a towel. In just a few minutes I had to replace it with a fresh one. For twenty minutes I “bled like a stuck pig” as the saying goes.

Then, instead of lunch and a glass of red, it was a couple of Panadol and a glass of cold water. After that I lay down with a fresh towel swathed around my head and one on the pillow in case the blood seeped through. It did. My head was still throbbing and, for a while, I just lay there breathing, as my one time yoga teacher had advised. I felt like a steeplechase rider whose mount has led all the way and is well ahead of the field, only to crash into the last hurdle.

Eventually I dozed off for a little while. But it must not have been a proper sleep. Probably just an REM nap - because I had a dream. In the dream I was back in Grade at St Patrick’s Convent in Mitchell. I must have done something to upset Frog Brown, the toughest kid in the class and a bully. Frog was chasing me in the playground over near the railway line, and he was flailing the air as he ran with a stick that closely resembled the errant window prop. In the dream the swishing of the stick was coming ominously closer - but I woke in the nick of time, just before he actually whacked me with all the strength he could muster.

When I moved my head on the pillow just before opening my eyes and I felt the pain at the back of my head, I thought momentarily that the dream had got it wrong - that Frog had actually caught me with the savage whack he so clearly intended for my innocent skull.

But then I remembered. And found to my relief that I was no longer in danger of addiction to window-cleaning.

See what you’ve done Denice? I hope you’re satisfied. Want to know how I broke my collarbone? Well how it got broken. I wasn’t solely responsible. But that is a story for another time.

Merv Welch (Retired window cleaner).

May 2020
Hello to all at Gympie U3A

With the current pause in running face-to-face classes, many in your group may have a new, or renewed interest in online learning opportunities. With this in mind, we would like to invite members of Gympie U3A to join a free, world-renowned online brain health course that is starting soon.

Free online dementia education for everyone
The latest research suggests that around one third of dementia cases may be preventable. The Preventing Dementia MOOC (massive open online course) examines the latest evidence on dementia risk factors and ways to reduce the risk. This free online course is open to everyone and members of your network may be interested in learning how to reduce their dementia risk. Being part of an online community of participants can also reduce feelings of isolation.

You are never too young or too old to do something about your dementia risk.
Enrolments are now open for the next Preventing Dementia MOOC
Course opens: 12th May 2020
Course duration: 4 weeks
Estimated effort: 2 hours per week
Course access: Day or night, on your smartphone, tablet or computer
Course closes: 26th June 2020 (content is accessible across 6 weeks)
Cost: FREE

Click on the button below and follow the prompts to sign up and enrol at: mooc.utas.edu.au

Community Visitors Scheme
The Community Visitors Scheme (CVS) arranges volunteer visits to older people to provide friendship and companionship. Visits are available to anyone receiving government-subsidised aged care or Home Care Packages.

Some older people feel alone for various reasons, including
- Little contact with friends or relatives
- Feeling isolated from their culture and heritage
- Mobility issues that prevent them from taking part in social or leisure activities
- Being different in some way

Regular visits from volunteers can help to improve quality of life and help older people feel less isolated.

At this time with Covid-19 volunteers can not visit, but are able to make contact via
- Phone
- Email
- Zoom/Skype/Facetime
- Snail Mail

For more information you can contact SkillCentred. Anne-Maree Walsh is the Community Project Officer and she will be able to help and answer any questions you may have.

Telephone – 07 5489 9777
Mobile – 0419 636 868