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Music by Martin Morse, Nicky Moffatt and Julia Karas.
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Stories in the beginning....

Observing Our Lake
Sue Fraser (2019)

All the death that lurks within her then is
 flushed, and she begins her
 transformation to a waterway, alive and
 clean and free.

Those who spend time sitting silent
 from the dawning through to twilight
 see the changing play of colours
 as the sun moves through the sky.

Every hour the water changes,
 from the black of night-time dangers
 to translucent palest aqua that reveals the
 silver fry.

Daybreak shows the pinks reflected on the
 water unexpected
 in their myriad of shades from deep
 magenta to a blush.
 Sunset throws a fiery orange and the birds
 then cease to forage
 winging darkly to their perches as the last
 rays dim the brush.

Our lake can be still and tranquil, leaving
 watchers feeling thankful for a quiet
 time of respite from their very busy day.
 Other times she shows her fury as the wind
 tears at her during
 those ferocious storms that whip her roiling
 surface to a spray.

Over years of walking by her I have watched
 the algae mire her
 to a green primordial soup that smells of
 musty, slow decay.
 Dearth of rain up in her catchment causes
 waterhole detachment
 leaving fish trapped lacking oxygen to slowly
 fade away.

Then the rain falls to refresh her, to release
 the mounting pressure on the
 sandbar at her exit to the restless open sea.

Day of the Dragon
Helen Sheil (October 1999)

The day I first saw the dragon
 sparkled with spring sunshine.
 I'd gone to the creek to walk with local
 people
 to better glimpse their dreams.
 They were new acquaintances
 but felt like old friends.
 Rather like my husbands' son
 who I'd recently met when he was 26.
 So like his father
 it was difficult not to assume
 a knowledge and closeness.
 That had no foundation
 in his life experience.

The night before we walked
 thunder had rolled
 and clapped right on the town,
 then rain and on sunset, a rainbow
 both ends here in Nowa Nowa.

The earth by the creek had that smell
 of damp rotting life
 a smell I'd forgotten existed
 working as I then did amongst
 concrete paths and buildings with air
 conditioners.
 The smell instantly linked my memory
 to home and love and heartbreak.
 Of days walking along our track
 by the Cabbage Tree Creek
 with babies and goats
 of clematis in canopies over the tree ferns
 above our heads.

All this came in with my breath
 stopping me in my tracks.
 As the memories expanded
 threatening to escape
 in words and stories

to these people who were showing
 me their place.

I had to stop myself.
 It was their time to talk.
 So I looked, walked and listened
 noted trees, flowers, fairy dells and houses,
 and grand amphitheatres for local
 performances.
 Heard children's voices by the river.
 witnessed generosity
 'You can plant the garden.'
 An offer made to a partner in a new
 venture.
 A gift of new opportunities.

We passed the cherry trees
 a gift from the Shire
 given without discussion
 and received with dubious delight.
 Room for improvement in that relationship
 but invisibility no longer the issue.
 as the community planned and worked
 together.

We spoke of guardians of the rivers
 wondering about words
 to better reflect the soul of this place.
 Coming from other countries were stories
 of trolls under the bridge. Maybe bunyips?
 But they didn't quite fit the bridge over
 Boggy Creek.
 Kipling's stories of evil growing greenness
 needed adapting to the Southern
 Hemisphere
 into the life and vibrancy of spring.
 the time before flies and mozzies.
 of blossoms along the river
 bringing the fish and birds.
 The sky blue and the bush green.

Conversations moved to other people and
 places

of families. Of stories that didn't get
written.

Talking of life, we also talked of death.
Of ways we grieve.
This time there was a space
for emotions to surface.
Then a time to sit quietly
By the water.

It was then we saw the Snowy River Dragon
Here on the arm of Lake Tyers
Beautiful greens and yellows
on the spikes and scales
shining in the sun
yet disguised by the country
to which it belongs.
A liberating day,
the day I met first met the water dragon.

On Nowa Nowa Arm
Doug Esler (April 2017)

In the snug embrace
of Nowa Nowa Arm
where ancient spirits watch and protect
herons strut
with long-legged grace
along the water's verdant edge
and plovers, diligent
nod and peck
at tasty morsels on the lakeside beach
while swans and cygnets
glide serenely past in familial peace.
The kingfisher darts
from observation branch
down to the water a blue range flash
as a sea eagle soars
in the cloud pocked sky
scanning the scene for a morning catch
and in the tall trees
of the forest around
bush birds call their busy refrain
and we pass by
a moment in time
yet know we must return again.

The Mouse that Roared ***Elizabeth Blakeman (1999)***

From notes on the Nowa Nowa Gorge and the Gas Pipeline intervention

On the 2nd Dec 1999 a fax from an employee in the *Department of Natural Resources and Environment* told us that the international company *Duke Energy Corporation* were planning to blast their way through Boggy Creek in the heart of our town to make a passage for a gas pipeline.

Surprised and concerned, I contacted Duke Energy and arranged to meet with their Land Agent. At 10am on the Creek banks near the kindergarten, he told us that we could not have access to the engineering plans nor to the Environmental Impact Statement.

Furthermore, he could not tell us how wide the cut would be, or how deep, or how far into each bank it would be cut. There was no assurance that there was any mechanism or protocol by which any concerns we had could be conveyed to management.

We appeared to be irrelevant and were being dismissed.

We did not take that lightly. We began to gather information.

Botanically, we found that one unique *Grevillea* and 2 as yet undescribed species of *Callistemon* had been discovered in the gorge and that the *Pittosporum* there was an important marker of the past extent of the temperate rainforest.

Geologically we discovered the rock in the gorge was early Devonian volcanic rock, 400,000,000 years old, and that it was jutting out in an usual peninsular into surrounding gravels and sands.

We felt we had established that the gorge was unique scenically, botanically and geologically so we decided to ask for the pipeline to be moved.

I was referred to *The Environment Defenders Office*, a voluntary organization of lawyers who will work for nothing if they believe the cause is worthwhile, who told us that to set up a legal challenge we needed information in the *Environment Impact Statement* and the *Draft Enquiry Report number E15*, both of which were a massive 10 volumes long. We eventually found them, and my husband read and photocopied all the material we needed at the DNRE and Shire offices. It took many hours.

.....
By the December 16th Lidia Thorpe, a Gunnai Kurnai woman on the committee, told me she too had been busy! She'd been to the *Aboriginal Lands Rights Council*, *The National Heritage Council* and had consulted our local member of parliament. As a result of her consultations, we became aware that we might end up in the Supreme Court, no small undertaking.

However, nothing daunted, we contacted Duke Energy with all of the research we had collected and asked them to stop work until they met with us and planned an alternate route for their pipeline.

In retrospect, we were, in reality, a mouse that roared.

We braced ourselves to fight against the idea of
lost land,
lost heritage,
lost natural asset
and the rape of the Gorge by a huge multi national company whose profits go to America."

We organized a community meeting 2 days before Christmas which 25 people from a population of 200 attended, and we subsequently took up a petition which was signed by 111 people, 58 of whom were locals. We felt supported. The petition was tabled in both state and federal parliaments. We made national news.

On 13th Jan 2000 seven representatives from Duke Energy flew down from Wollongong by helicopters. There were about 20 people from NN there. It was a hot day. Amongst other things I said *"This is a gorge that has taken 400,000,000 years to form . There is no way that mankind can replace that. It is a special, unique and powerful piece of elemental sculpture moulded by the forces that formed the earth itself. It is not a Disney land construction set that can be re-modelled by the back room boys. Phrases like "Ensuring a smooth transition to the undisturbed bed" are trite."*

Then they spoke and simply presented their unchanged plan to blast through the gorge as though we had had no correspondence and no discussion at all. We appeared to have been completely ignored.

.....
 To my great surprise however I received a call the next day in which they offered to move the pipeline 9m further south. This was however still within the rock and would still need blasting.

Lidia, in particular, held out, and fought for more.

Duke's next meeting was in Melbourne with the Aboriginal Community and Lidia described it to me as nasty. Duke made unsubstantiated claims concerning aboriginal maps and community consultation and even appeared to offer a bribe with the idea of a new kindergarten.

The Aboriginal Community took direct action and organised stop work Court Orders, and set up blockades. There was a degree of intimidation from both sides. It was not an easy time but it was effective.

During this period I was reading a book in which the Great Spirit in the Northern Hemisphere was seen to be in the heavens and in contrast, here in the southern hemisphere, "down under" the Great Spirit was in the Land. In discussing this with the Kooris I was told, in return, that they believed the Rainbow Serpent had gathered up all the bad things on earth and buried them in the gorge, set in this hard rock forever, so they would never haunt or trouble the land again. Blasting or drilling would release the evil and was totally unacceptable. It was good to know what spiritual beliefs were involved, and to realise how they melded with the geological picture we now knew about.

The final meeting was held in neutral territory.....the office of the local parliamentarian. . It was so low keyed that I almost failed to appreciate the moment when Duke said they would move the pipeline 20m south. I had expected to be jubilant and smiling with delight. In fact we were pretty quiet. The Duke executives left immediately. The rest of us had sandwiches, a cuppa and went home.

After 5 long months the fight was over. We had finally been engaged in a meaningful dialogue ...and consultation, negotiation and reconciliation had won the day.

The Picture Rail
Susan O'Brian (2019)

A crow takes to air/waves,
 the world appears dark in certain views,
 Feathers break away, are then
 transmitted by deed or greed.
 Do prayer flags still fly outside our
 houses?

Yes we have opened wide, lifted our
 skies,
 framed doors and windows outside in
 with fish leaping
 over the moon and the picture rail and
 rant within.

Howzat! Howzat!

Over and over we shadow box dreams,
 shape our shores
 over and over,
 we draw wings on wish bones.
 Mountains smouldering send wind
 whipped smoke
 which reddens our beautiful sunsets back
 home,
 We mix landscapes, turn back to back as
 tinkers/ tailors,
 small bands of hand held miracle dealers
 this land's felt heart follows on from
 hope,
 in a century that still paces fair enough ...

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-Ante Deluvian : Post Plebian-

The Flood
Martin Morse (2019)

Goat - melting into the brackish muck.
The Haunted House looming in the
background—
benign, dealt with; reconciled;
unthreatening.
The past; the foundation for our
present.

Chopping wood.
Watching ladies chopping wood.
Showing them tricks we learn in Guy
School.

Building the fire High. Higher and
higher.
Dancing the night away,
Howling to the shadows—

It's alive out there! Cawing and
crashing
We are small though, and irrelevant.
No matter - we are all mixed up, in this
milieux together.

So, into the Bushy Palaces we retired,
Full with ambrosia and leftovers-
Listening to the Beasts..
Wombats muzzling around in the
moonlight

The Lady of the Lake is the custodian
here, built these nests.
The spirits are strong here—
Their presence is easy, like a Flood.
The Milky Way is thick and marvellous.

The Flood overcame me that night.
I had been hunting and waiting, and
praying for it,
but I didn't know what I would find.
Felt good to let something else take
over

Let all my fears be drowned.

"Join the circle," they all say;
"Let us in"..
She will show you the way.

Enjoying the quiet stars,
I feel awake and alive.
Watching as the night fades out.

I should get a few winks, because we
made big plans for tmro—

Plans for tmro:
Wrangling fuzzy bunny giraffes-
And who knows what can come of
that....!

Canberra keeping place
Andrew Spiker (2017)

...fragments of a whole culture
signalling to us from a strip of magnetised
tape
audible
language of a dreamtime
Gunaikurnai song...

In the compactus of the institute
collection
such items sleep in their protective shells.
Sometimes, after nightfall, in the vault,
I imagined fleeting shapes just out of
sight.

Photographs don't tell the whole story;
books can tell the story, but not the
sound.
Voices must be heard, how it was, how it
is now;
There needs to be a listening.

Then we can take the bone out of our
throats
and speak. Not make any more mistakes.
Care for the lake, care about the culture
- this is a path I hope to walk.

Maise Byrne - 1930s' poem

There are folk who travel eastwards
 And folk who travel west
 Just to roam afar from home
 Is what they like the best
 Some of them are weary
 And some of them are sad
 Away they go to hide their woe
 And make their sad hearts glad.

Oh restless roving lonely folk
 Away in far off lands
 Who search in vain to ease your pain
 Come home to golden sands
 To Australia land of sunshine
 All green and gold and blue
 A young land. A vast land/
 Theres a spot here just for you.

A land of wide horizons
 Of mountains plain and lake
 Theres pleasures here for all of you
 Which ever way you take.
 So listen and I'll tell you
 Of the bush I love so well
 And all the pleasures round about
 The spot in which I dwell.

In our palatial residence
 Beside a stony creek
 To find a happy family
 You haven't far to seek.
 There's Joe and me and Ronda
 Our darling baby girl
 With eyes of blue and cheeks of pink
 And hair that's going to curl.

And we've a faithful watch dog
 We call him Samuel Small
 He isn't any special breed
 But just a dash of all
 He's white and brown in patches

With a cheerful turn of mind
 No matter where you find us
 You'll find him close behind.

{And we have a gallant pony
 Brownie is his name
 His sleek and brown and shiny
 And we have clipped his mane}

We drive him in the jinker
 Or for rides on his back
 And it's grand to see him
 Come galloping down the track.

Of our palatial residence
 Perhaps I should explain
 It's built of sheets of stringy bark
 You couldn't call us vain.
 But in our humble little home
 Just two rooms and a tent
 You'll find a world of happiness
 And nought of discontent.

There's bushland all around us
 So friendly and so green
 I'd like to tell you all about
 The wonders I have seen
 For the bush is full of interest
 For those with eyes to see
 There's living things hide in the scrub
 And almost every tree.

There's beauty all about us
 From morning until night
 In all the green and growing things
 Bathed in the gold sunlight
 There's hardy bracken growing
 In amongst the trees
 Which sigh with softest murmur
 When stirred by furtive breeze.

And neath the brackens shelter
 A nestling in the grass
 Are dainty wee wild violets

Scarce noticed as we pass
Sometimes with the violets
is dainty maiden hair
and often green hood orchids
are hiding with them there.

*(In among the bracken fern
.....heath etc)*

In springtime all the wattles
Are clothed in gayist gold
The bush becomes a fairyland
Quite wondrous to behold.
Wild shrubs bedecked in flowers
Of misty mauve and white
Make a pleasing picture
All gilded with sunlight.

Sometimes after heavy rain
The water rises high
And in a roaring river
The floods go swirling by.
The creek ends at the corner
And there begins the lake
And we have worn a little path
Upon the way we take

For we often go for picnics
Down the lake in our canoe
We have the greatest fun down there
And Sam enjoys it too.
Of course, I don't go now you know
For our baby's very small
But when she's bigger she shall come
and help enjoy it all.

I pack them all together
The things we wish to take
A loaf of bread, some butter
The frying pan and steak.
A bottle full of water
A billy for the tea
And we often take the camera
To snap the things we see.

We paddle far off down the lake
Nine miles or so from home
And when we want to stretch our legs
Upon the shore we roam.
Joe takes the gun and whistles Sam
And off they go to see
If they can get some nice wild ducks
And bring them back for tea.
I watch the little parakeets
Hang upside down with ease
As they partake of honey
From the blossoms of the trees
And there's a mighty wedge tail
A soaring up on high
With scarce a movement of his wings
He floats up in the sky

And so I sit and ponder
Upon the things I see
From the graceful gum tree
to the humble bee.
The silvery shining water
Or dark mysterious shore
The other bathed in sunshine's gold
Who could ask for more.

In the midst of my reverie
I hear a distant shot
And so I know they'll soon be back
I hope they've got a lot
The sunlight makes a halo
Around a big gum tree
And in it's dappled shadow
I make a cup of tea.

A mud larks built her next mud nest
Up high upon a bough
And close at hand but lower down
A wagtails building now
Its one of nature's oddities
That these birds nest in pairs.
Wherever on finds a mud larks nest
There is wagtails building theirs.

And right throughout the nesting time
 These birds cooperate
 They do not fear if dangers near
 But rush to help their mate.
 The wag tails but a tiny bird
 But game right to the core
 He'll tackle those who are his foes
 Ten times his self and more.

And when they hear his angry cries
 The mud larks do their best
 To help their little neighbours
 Chase away the **pest**
 I stand and watch them for a while
 Then haste to get some wood
 And put some on the fire
 Till it is burning good.

Presently from out the scrub
 A happy pair appear
 Joe hails my crackling fire
 With a hearty cheer.
 His muddy and his hungry
 And Sam is dripping wet
 But they have got four nice plump
 ducks
 And praps they'll get more yet.

We feast on toast and cups of tea
 While Joe relates the way
 That Sam retrieved two wounded
 ones
 And how one got away.
 When we've quelled our hungry
 pangs
 And feel at last replete
 We shall on our way again
 Our journey to complete.

Until we reach our favourite spot
 In which we wish to camp
 Where it is nice and sheltered
 And the ground is not too damp

We haste to bring the things ashore
 And get the fire alight
 And then Joe gets great piles of wood
 To last us through the night.

While I am cooking supper
 Joes takes his rod and bait
 And goes to do some fishing
 Before it gets too late
 For the fish bite best at sundown
 Just at the close of day
 And he often gets some beauties
 Though the biggest get away.

Today he's not so lucky
 And only catches two
 I'll go with him tomorrow
 And show him what to do.
 Mean while we'll have our supper
 Of steak and scrambled eggs
 And Sam shall have the tit bits

 And when finished eating
 And Sammy has been fed
 We'll pack up all the dishes
 And prepare ourselves for bed
 Away out in the forest
 Far from the sound of cars
 We'll be on beds of bracken
 Neath a canopy of stars.

For day is done and its grown dark
 And we are far from home
 And creatures wild from far and **near**
 Have come abroad to roam
 There's a rumble, rumble, rumble
 From deep down in a hole
 And then a wombat lumbers out
 Poor little tailless soul.

A mopoke calls – a plover too
 And then a screech owl shrieks
 And suddenly the air is full
 Of countless little squeaks

Theres bats abroad and bandicoots
And creatures big and small
But whats this sound that fills the air
And chills them one and all?

A mournful wailing chorus
A haunting lonely cry
The dingo pack is on the track
And somethings going to die
Our Sammy's hair stands up on end
He hears their mournful howls
"They needn't think they're coming
here"
Says Sam and fiercely growls.

For though our Sam is just a mung'
Whose always in some strife
He's a truly worthy watch dog
Who'd defend us with his life.
Of course there is no need for this
No need for Sam's alarm
For a dingo is too cowardly
To try to do us harm.

And so we slumber peacefully
With not a thought of fear
Till night is gone and morning comes
And what is this I hear?
A magpie's happy warble
And a jacky's hearty laugh
The twitter of the tiny wrens
To wake my better half.

And see the sun is shining
The world is all aglow
With tiny sparkling dew drops
A gleaming high and low
And all around is peaceful green
And all above is blue
And from a shining she oak
A thrush is singing too

There's peace here for world weary
And rest for tired eyes

When the wind sings in the tree tops
And the sheoaks softly sighs
Oh! Australia land of sunshine
All green and gold and blue
My heart swells up with happiness
That I belong to you.



Maisie's Byrne's bee farm
Helen Sheil (2017)

While there are other grand stories
that originated in humble
surroundings
triggered in our memory
by images of a bright star
in a clear sky.
They were from another time.

So the invitation to make our way
to Josie's camp on her mother's
bee farm, to speak aloud
thoughts held silently in our hearts
created an opportunity
for another grand story of hope
to emerge in the quiet
of the small clearing
between the highway and the lake
that many have heard about
but like the mythical Camelot
few have entered.

Listening to a snippet of Maisie
Byrne's poems of life on Lake Tyers
in the 1930's
written in pencil,
on lined pages
held together with a nappy pin
you glimpse a life surrounded
by beauty and abundant happiness.

(extract)

*So listen and I'll tell you
Of the bush I love so well
And all the pleasures round about
The spot in which I dwell.
A land of wide horizons
Of mountains plain and lake
There's pleasures here for all of you
Whichever way you take.*

*There's bushland all around us
So friendly and so green
I'd like to tell you all about
The wonders I have seen
For the bush is full of interest
For those with eyes to see
There's living things hide in the scrub
And almost every tree.*

Maisie offers such a different
view to that of 'legendary' bush
Poets who wrote of
families battling to clear trees
struggling with drought, fires and flies,
the hardship, heartbreak and loneliness,
especially for women.

Maisie's daughter, Josephine Jakobi
Has *eye's to see the beauty* and the
creativity to map the complexity
of life in the lake we love.
Her unique style
a Josephication
of the world around her
is immediately recognizable.
Her art, paying attention to the
cycle of seasons
the length of days relating to
the ebb and flow of salt and fresh
water mingling is stitched, inked
and embossed onto linen immersed
for weeks in the lake to impregnate
the fabric with qualities of the
constantly halocline.



A visit to the bee farm
is an invitation to immerse
ourselves in this time and place
to bee present.
To re-connect
with nature's gallery of life.

Still Life***Doug Esler (September 2017)***

Still life still life
no breeze to stir the
morning air
no rustling of the stately
trees
still life still life
no ripples on the patient
lake
no sound of birds upon
the wing
still life still life
harbours first peoples'
ancient stories
locked away in a timeless
vault
still life still life
the writer waits with
eager pen
to scribe all of the mystic
tales
still life still life
guarding nature's perfect
beauty
holding nature in it's
hand
still life still life
a model for the artist's
eye
a canvas for the waiting
brush
still life still life
the painter poised in
anticipation
will draw and daub and
mark this place
still life still life.

“On Being an Almanacker”

Phil Evans

What is it that catches my eye, or rather, that triggers the wondering of mind, the wandering of thought.

That sound so new it leaves a trace through background noise, or that path through wilderness that makes me question what went before, whose only evidence of existence is the persistence of the spoor they leave behind.

Or the sign though subtle, that still appears faintly out of place and catches my attention, distracts me from my intention to pass through unhindered by sideways glances at other, and my mind stumbles over the multitude of patterns that will become my lover.

Adherence to purpose is rare- my mind wonders and wanders and my feet follow. Intention and direction is lost as I open my heart, bare my soul, as I explore my world, spiraling in until my attention is:

-contained within a puddle of water, held captive by fractal boundaries, that intimate, chaotic dance of complexity and simplicity, echoes of limitless shorelines, objects sorted by wind and rain, laws of physics that twist and distort without thought of the feast for my imagination laid before me like a banquet, surrounding me like a blanket of wonder, around me and through me with every breath I take.

-or carried beneath the Earth by the endeavor of an ant, her ceaseless energy passed from generation to generation leaving as her legacy soils of another sort, covering with gentle persistence the treasures of an earlier time.

-or bound to the transitory patterns left in the sand by the branches of the beach wattle beating time to last night's windstorm that brought no rain, but the roil of the universe makes ephemera of us all.

I seek the wonders that lie hidden in plain view, not there for me, not waiting for you but in their own place, and at their own time.

Lake Tyers has already written her Almanac, millennia future and past. We cast our nets in her waters, on her lands, through her forests and we catch fleeting glimpses that trickle through our fingers as we search for meaning, as we seek to give voice to that which speaks to us without words, (stirs within us), as we strive to give substance to silvered flashes of inspiration, and so we construct our artifacts as best we can, ornamentation that tells the story of us, here, now.

There will never be another me, or you. No-one else will ever see this world the way that each of you do.

No one else can see through our eyes but that is where the beauty of discovery lies as others see not what we saw, but what we were inspired to create and perhaps

those eyes are then encouraged to
join us and open wide, to see
around corners, and through
obstacles, to slide beneath,
between, beside, inside, to feel
their own connection to place and
time.

To absorb and digest the mundane and
create sublime interpretations that
inspire and retrain everyone's senses to
see and hear and smell and feel that
which has always been here, but hidden
from us by the buildup of everyday dust
and grime on our windows to the world.
Wash that away and expose the
perception and distortion through which
each of us experience our world
because it is precisely that perception
and that distortion that is our
uniqueness.

None of us can have prior knowledge
of our creative, constructive,
community trigger but, you know, I
figure we keep plucking at strings and
blowing on horns and banging on
drums, and from the cacophony,
rhythms and melodies and harmonies
will emerge; a discordant, chaotic,
ecstatic, wonderful human
symphony.