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East Timor advances despite Australian aid failures

POLITICS

Richard Curtain



This week, Australian citizen Angelita Pires was one of 27 people brought to trial for the attempted assassination of East Timor's President Jos  Ramos-Horta on 11 February 2008. Pires, who insists she is innocent, is the former lover of rebel leader Alfredo Reinado, who was killed in the attack.

Next month will mark ten years since Indonesia agreed to a plebiscite. Four out of five Timorese voted for independence. The assassination attempt was undoubtedly the low point of the decade.

There have been many other setbacks, including the current destabilising accusations against Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao for his role in authorising a multi-million dollar contract for a company part-owned by his daughter.

But life in Dili has improved greatly over the last 18 months. The government has injected large amounts of money into the local economy, much of it directly into the hands of the poor. On the main road through Dili, stacks of government-subsidised rice are for sale. The camps of internally displaced persons have gone, although some claim they have gone only from public view. In their place are restored buildings and new public spaces. Opposite the main hotel in Dili, where a crowded camp for displaced persons once stood, a well-equipped playground is now full of children.

In Australia, a younger generation will have the chance to learn anew about the origins of Timorese independence with the release of the major film, *Balibo*. It re-enacts the tragic events of 1975. Journalist Tony Maniaty's book, based on his reporting from Dili at the time of the murder of the Balibo Five, will also add to many Australians' knowledge of these events.

So what progress has East Timor, as the country prefers to be called, made over the last decade? In particular, how effective has the Australian Government assistance been over this period?

Contrary to many Australians' expectations, the Australian Government has a low profile in East Timor. Despite its large troop presence of up to 800, its influence often appears passive, reactive and disjointed in its dealings with the Timorese Government. Australia's three main arms in East Timor — the diplomatic mission, *AusAID* and the International Stabilisation Force — operate as separate entities. This lack of an integrated presence is one reason for Australia's limited success in fostering the institutions and capacities of the new state.

In addition, there is little evidence that the Australian aid program has been effective, especially in reducing poverty. The World Bank, in a recent assessment,

concedes that 'despite concerted efforts by government and development partners, human development outcomes remain low'.

Australia is the largest donor to East Timor, its aid program amounting to \$117 million. But the aid funds are spread thinly across a broad range of activities. It has programs in security and justice, and public sector management. It also funds the delivery of services in health care, water and sanitation, vocational education and food security. Most expenditure, is on security and governance, with less than a third allocated to health, water/sanitation, rural development and education.

But despite the breadth of its programs, AusAID is floundering. Unlike its practice in other countries, it has failed to produce a country strategy for East Timor, despite repeated statements that it is about to do so. AusAID's ad hoc and fragmented approach to delivering aid has been driven from Canberra. Until this year, when staffing has been upgraded, only a small number of staff were on the ground in Dili.

Many complain that AusAID staff spend too much time closely monitoring programs, and too little time attending to the big picture or improving program performance. AusAID has no capacity on the ground to collect or analyse data. It cannot focus on delivering outcomes or on finding out what has worked and what has not. AusAID lacks transparency. It does not provide progress indicators for specific programs. Nor does it publish evaluation studies to report successes or failures.

To forge a new basis for its relations with East Timor, a new bilateral agreement is needed, based on the strong common interest of both countries to reduce poverty on a large scale over an extended period.

Australia also needs to address the concern of the Timorese government to gain access to the Australian labour market for temporary work and on-the-job training. It also needs to help provide more local benefit to the Timorese economy from the exploitation of its only major economic asset: its oil and gas reserves.

A more effective aid program has to be a core element in a new relationship. Program funding should be for ten years or more. A much greater focus on reducing poverty at all levels is needed. Changes need to be made on the basis of published reports on the success of programs. If Australia is to have a greater impact in the second decade of East Timor's existence, it needs to develop a much stronger and integrated local capacity.

Life of a non-conformist priest

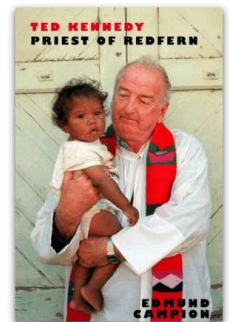
BOOKS

Jonathan Hill

Edmund Campion: Ted Kennedy, Priest of Redfern. David Lovell Publishing, Melbourne, 2009. ISBN: 9781863551298

With profound sensitivity Edmund Campion has crafted a biography that reveals the essence of Ted Kennedy, a man who touched the lives of many and left an indelible mark on the Redfern community.

Campion paints a portrait of a fiercely passionate yet also vulnerable priest, whose commitment to social justice was fuelled by a deep love of humanity and an unwavering faith in the Gospels. Refusing to conform to the mainstream brand of Catholicism, Kennedy's theology was centred on liberating the oppressed by understanding the truth of their situation.



A theme that underpins this book is Kennedy's intense love and appreciation for Aboriginal people. Redfern exposed him to a truth that, sadly, still lies largely unseen: Aboriginal Australians are pivotal to Australia's national identity; their salvation is directly intertwined with White Australians.

And so he became a tireless advocate for Indigenous justice, dedicating more than half his life to their cause. Such a stance did not spontaneously arise. He arrived at this point after years of prayer and contemplation which enabled him to discover his true self.

With a novelist's eye for detail Campion gives a chronological account of Kennedy's life, stitching together a tapestry of events and influences that determined his destiny. The book can be divided into experiences before and after Redfern.

The seeds of social justice were sown into Kennedy's conscience early on. As a child he once asked his mother what the Gospel meant when it said the rich would never go to heaven. Her reply: 'Your father and I have talked about it and we have decided to dedicate our lives to the poor.'

And they did. His father was a local doctor who ran a practice with his wife where the poor were personally welcomed and never charged. This stirred the child's curiosity, as he and his siblings shared in their parents' dedication.

The book guides us through his time at the junior seminary at Springwood before focusing on his stint at the major seminary, Manly College. At Manly he and the other priests participated in the rigid lifestyle while constantly contemplating what type of priests they wanted to become.

He was swept up in the energies that shaped the Second Vatican Council. The fresh approach to Catholicism being practised in Europe inspired him and his colleagues to adopt these strategies in their future ministries. The ideas of Parisian Archbishop Cardinal Suhard embodied this spirit as his books spoke of a church that was not hostile to the world but willing to learn from it and a priesthood that was open to all social classes.

We learn about Kennedy's life as a curate. His time within the University of Sydney Chaplaincy, under the guidance of Roger Pryke, was instrumental to his development. He would spend long hours engaged in discourse with students, unlocking ideas and uncovering the nature of their faith.

Towards the end of the 1960s a group of progressive curates sent a letter to the cardinal proposing they be assigned to a parish where they could work in collaboration as part of a team ministry. Such a lifestyle would entail common prayer, regular meetings and reflection, engagement in the community and a presbytery open to all. It took three years for this idea to become a reality. Kennedy was one of the three priests assigned to St Vincent's Redfern at the end of 1971.

By 1974, Kennedy was the sole parish priest as his colleagues chose other paths. This gave him the chance to express his interpretation of the Gospels in the parish. Central to his vision was a respect for the poor that shattered the sense of superiority so prevalent throughout the Christian community. He saw Christ in the oppressed and marginalised and saw it as his duty to join with them in solidarity in the pursuit of justice.

The most enthralling section of the book charts his development and growing presence in the Redfern community. We learn about his involvement with the Aboriginal Legal Service and the Aboriginal Medical Service, his insistence that his church be identified as a community of hospitality, his disdain for do-gooders and the role of various people in his ministry, especially Mum Shirl whom he famously described as the greatest theologian he had ever known.

The final sections deal with Kennedy's book, *Who is Worthy?*, his celebration of 25 years at St Vincent's, his steep decline after suffering two major strokes and his funeral that packed out The Block.

Kennedy is not portrayed as a saint. Imperfections such as his unpredictable temper, his occasional liking for a drink and his initial insensitivity to Aboriginal Australians reveal that he, like us, was a man of flesh and blood.

This book is an immensely rewarding read. By drawing on an array of sources Campion has assembled a comprehensive biography that gives the reader a clear insight into the imaginative Catholicism Kennedy embodied. The book challenges readers to examine the nature of our own faith by considering the role of conscience in the quest to live with authenticity.

The meddling priest and the Redfern prophet

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



In 1975, I turned 21 and headed down from Queensland to join the Jesuit novitiate in Sydney. Most nights a fellow novice used offer a prayer for [Ted Kennedy](#). I could not work out why we needed to pray constantly for a US senator, no matter what his Irish Catholic pedigree. I then learnt that there were two Ted Kennedys.

As a second year novice I was sent to Redfern. Ted enjoyed forming Jesuit novices. I was appointed Mum Shirl's driver. I learnt a lot. Then I was asked to drive Len Watson down to Canberra where we watched the passage of the Northern Territory Land Rights Act through the Senate.

In those months, I learnt that there were many Ted Kennedys. He was an enigma — exhibiting sophistication and simplicity, subtle discernment and black and white judgment, a romantic vision and that resignation born of hard, bitter experience, soft love and brittle anger.

Ted was a man of the Word that he proclaimed Sunday after Sunday at the old wooden lectern in St Vincent's Church Redfern, and a priest of the Sacrament, blessing and breaking the bread for all comers at the Tom Bass altar which he brought with him from Neutral Bay.

Ted was like the Old Testament prophet Amos confronting Amaziah. He was like one of the 12 in the gospels taking nothing for the journey as they stepped out proclaiming repentance and casting out demons.

Like Amos, Ted did not plan to become a prophet at Redfern. But he found no need to shake the dust from his feet once he arrived there. He proclaimed and lived the radical edge, or was it the radical core, of the gospel — making it more ordinary, more demanded and more expected of each of us.

He spent a lot of his time and nervous energy engaging with a string of Amaziahs from 'Head Office'. He often heard religious authorities telling him not to prophesy at Bethel, the king's sanctuary, the temple of the kingdom. He just kept prophesying about the swarms of locusts, the devouring fires and the plumb line which would lay waste the hypocritical, institutional aspects of Church and nation.

His family background and his early parish experience were no preparation for the ministry he exercised around the streets of Redfern. Like Amos, he said, 'I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel".'

I wonder what he would have made of last week's exchange of literary gifts

between the Pope and our Prime Minister. Benedict gave Kevin Rudd a copy of his new encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. Ted would have heartily endorsed Ratzinger's observations that 'the exclusion of religion from the public square — and, at the other extreme, religious fundamentalism — hinders an encounter between persons and their collaboration for the progress of humanity', and that 'human rights risk being ignored either because they are robbed of their transcendent foundation or because personal freedom is not acknowledged'.

For his part Kevin Rudd gave the Pope a copy of the National Apology that stated the threefold 'sorry' for the suffering, hurt and degradation inflicted 'on a proud people and a proud culture', and requested that the apology 'be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation'.

All of this would have been music to Ted's ears. He was always wanting those in positions of power and authority to make these acknowledgements. But I can't help thinking that his delight would have been tempered by dissatisfaction. Those who knew him would know where his niggling would come from and how he would express it. Though he wanted and expected much from authority, he was ultimately mistrustful of it.

He knew that in the end, no matter how much was said or promised by those in authority, there was a need for commitment on the ground. There was dirty work to be done and suffering to be embraced. Even when he waxed lyrical about Paul Keating's 1992 Redfern Park speech, he preferred to focus on the weeping responses of Aboriginal people he knew rather than on the grandeur of the prime ministerial rhetoric.

Ted proclaimed a message of repentance to our whole nation, seeking to cast out the demons deep in the soul of the country — those historic abuses of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters that are still being played out, as attested in the recent inquest into the death of Mr Ward in Kalgoorlie.

Launching Ed Campion's new book [*Ted Kennedy, Priest of Redfern*](#) last week, Sydney lawyer Danny Gilbert said, 'Ted felt that the church had over the centuries soft-pedalled on the gospels. Christ's words had been reduced to something that was comfortably domesticated. But to Ted's way of thinking the gospels were radical, raw and uncompromising. Ted blamed Rome and the church hierarchy for this dumbing down.'

The lesson of Ted Kennedy's Redfern is that the poor belong at the altar and there is no place for dumbing down at the lectern.

Who hates Harry Potter

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (M)*, 153 minutes. Director: David Yates. Starring: Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, Rupert Grint, Michael Gambon, Jim Broadbent, Alan Rickman, Bonnie Wright, Tom Felton**

I was an 18-year-old casual bookseller when the fourth *Harry Potter* book came out. Until that point the series had passed me by. Gradually I was persuaded by a trusted associate to ignore the hype, give the books a go and judge them on their own merits. I have since read all the books, and seen all the movies to date, always with that advice in mind.



The rule seems to be that one's attitude to the saga should be either obsession, derision, or total lack of interest. If that's true, I'm in a minority: I am an equivocal fan. A few of the books are great, particularly early in the seven-volume series. A couple are average. At least one is bloody awful.

Likewise, the film versions have been hit and miss. The first two were slavishly, tediously recreated by director Chris Columbus. Films four (dir. Mike Newell) and five (David Yates) overcame the narrative bloat of the source material (by that stage, it was as if no one bothered to edit the novels any more), but the stories suffered from being thus decimated.

Only film three, *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, directed by wonderful Mexican filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón and based on the series' best book, managed to be both a faithful adaptation and a great film in its own right.

Film six, *The Half-Blood Prince* is, like its literary namesake, problematic. The series builds towards a prophesied David and Goliath showdown between Harry (Radcliffe), student at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and the evil and formidable Lord Voldemort. The first 90 per cent of *The Half-Blood Prince* is a set-up for the final gripping few scenes, which in turn merely provide the catalyst for the climactic events of the next and final installment, *The Deathly Hallows*. In short, the film, like the book, is a glorified stop-gap.

In fact, without giving too much away, *The Half-Blood Prince* contains the most important and shocking plot development since Harry first learned about his magical roots. But other than that, not much happens.

What we do get during Harry's sixth year at Hogwarts is a preponderance of exposition (less so in film than in book), thanks to a few tumbles into author J. K. Rowling's most tedious of contrivances, a magical memory-viewer/flashback device known as the 'pensieve'.

There are a few cards held close to the chest. School bully Draco Malfoy (Felton) has something more serious in the works than his usual schoolyard harassment. Whatever it is, brooding Professor Snape (Rickman) has something to do with it — his loyalties remain questionable. These sinister elements help sustain the intrigue.

There is also entertainment of the teen drama variety. Harry's best mates Ron (Grint) and Hermione (Watson) have that whole love-hate thing going on. And Harry has feelings for Ron's sister Ginny (Wright), who is already spoken for. The humour and angst evoked lend a touch of mundane reality to the magical proceedings.

So why the lack of other goings-on? Well, Harry has been tasked by Dumbledore (Gambon), the eccentric headmaster, with a deceptively difficult mission. He must win the trust of old sycophant Professor Slughorn (Broadbent) in order to gain possession of a certain memory that contains the key to Voldemort's power.

Until he succeeds, the plot cannot move forwards. So it stagnates. The frustrating thing is that the obvious solution to Harry's dilemma lies in a plot device, a good luck potion, that is introduced very early on. God knows why he takes so long to use it — the film could have been an hour shorter.

One point of intrigue that the film fails to capitalise on pertains to the title character. His name is scrawled across the nameplate of a second-hand textbook that Harry obtains in his potions class. This mysterious 'Half-Blood Prince' has scribbled tips and corrections throughout the book. These help Harry excel in the class.

But the textbook also has a corrupting, corrosive effect on Harry. There's something not right about its previous owner, and the film fails to capture the import of this. Again without giving too much away, half-baking this aspect of the story could also bear on how powerfully one of the series' central redemptive character arcs will play out.

League tables short-change students

COMMUNITY

Fatima Measham



Since the OECD started testing students worldwide through its Program for International Student Assessment, Finland has been adjudged to have the best education system among developed countries. So when a member of the Finnish Board of Education criticises the practice of national testing and ranking of school performance, as Pirjo Sinko did at a gathering of literacy experts in Hobart last week, it's worth taking notice.

Many educators were already disturbed by Federal Government moves to make school performance 'transparent' to parents. The New South Wales Teachers Federation, as well as the South Australian branch of the Australian Education Union, have recently committed themselves actively to oppose the use of national test results to rank schools. According to federation president Bob Lipscombe, league tables reflect 'a lack of respect for the profession'.

It would be easy enough to dismiss his statement as sentimental. Many might argue that how teachers feel about their job is not as important as producing comparative data on schools for the purpose of providing information to consumers.

But if we're going to talk about 'best value for money', we should note that studies show a reciprocal link between teacher morale and student achievement. This suggests that publicising data to lift student achievement may actually be counterproductive if it leads to demoralisation within the teaching profession.

The proposal highlights a weakness in the Australian education system. Relationships between stakeholders are adversarial. Education is no longer the great social enterprise it once was, when parents and governments worked to support schools in their function within the community. Instead, much of the argument for league tables focuses on the right of parents to choose the right school for their children.

This is a false argument because parents are able to make this choice, and have been making such choices, without league tables. It is also a dangerous argument because it sets up a culture of hostility towards schools and teachers, in which parents are always right.

This is a far cry from the situation in Finland, where, in the words of its foremost education expert, Dr Reijo Laukkanen, 'We can trust that [teachers] are competent. They know what to do.' Nobody will be surprised to know that the morale of Finnish teachers is high.

The most concerning feature of the arguments about parental choice and school accountability is that they do not address the role that families play in children's achievement at school. Values, attitudes and expectations — the 'curriculum of the home' — greatly influence a child's preparedness for learning. In a practical sense, parents determine how their children perform at school well before the teacher even gets a chance.

For instance, it matters whether parents provide proper nutrition, because the developing brain needs glucose to process and retain new information. It also matters whether the child feels secure at home. Sources of anxiety — parental unemployment, marital conflict or divorce, violence, abuse and neglect — activate stress hormones that can severely disrupt the way the brain collects and stores information.

As yet, teachers and schools are not expected to feed their students or fix problems related to their home life. Therefore, it does not seem reasonable for them to be charged with the sole responsibility for students' preparedness and motivation for learning.

Governments need to recognise that, although it is easier to hold teachers and schools to account than parents, education does not exist in a vacuum. The four walls of the classroom do not insulate students from the rest of their lives. In fact, the classroom is the space in which their advantage or privation is magnified.

The quality of parenting and home life that young students experience must have its place in the conversation, if we are to be sensible about what the data means, and if we are to enable our young people to succeed. .

Irreconcilable dissonance and other reasons for divorce

NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle

I have been married once, so far, to the woman to whom I am still married, so far, and one thing I have noticed about being married, so far, is that it makes you a lot more attentive to divorce. Divorce used to seem like something that happened to other people, but not any more, because of course every marriage is pregnant with divorce. Now I know a lot of people who are divorced, or are about to be, or are somewhere in between those poles, for which shadowy status there should be words like mivorced or darried or sleeperated or schleperated.



People get divorced for all sorts of reasons, and I find myself taking notes, probably defensively, but also from sheer amazement at the chaotic wilderness of human nature.

For example, I read recently about one man who got divorced so he could watch all 60 episodes of *The Wire* in chronological order. Another man got divorced after 30 years so he could, he said, fart in peace.

Another man got divorced because he told his wife he had an affair. He didn't have an affair, he just couldn't think of any other good excuse to get divorced. He liked his wife, and rather enjoyed her company, but he just didn't want to be married to her every day any more, he preferred to be married to her every third day, maybe, but she did not find that a workable arrangement, and so they parted company, confused.

I read about a woman who divorced her husband because he picked his nose. Another woman got divorced because her husband never remembered to pay their property taxes and finally, she said, it was just too much.

It seems to me that the reasons people divorce are hardly ever the dramatic reasons we assume are the reasons people get divorced, like sex in churches and cocaine for breakfast and discovering that the guy you married ten years ago has a wife in another state.

It's more a quiet decay, as if marriages are houses and unless you keep cleaning the windows and repainting here and there and using duct tape with deft punctilio, after a while everything sags and mould wins and there you are signing settlement papers at the dining room table.

I read about a couple who got divorced because of irresolute differences, a phrase that addled me for weeks. Another couple filed for divorce on the grounds of irreconcilable dissonance, which seemed like one of those few cases in life when the exact right words are applied to the exact right reason for those words.

Another woman divorced her husband because one time they were walking down the street, the husband on the curb side in concordance with the ancient courteous male custom, and as they approached a fire hydrant he lifted his leg, puppylike, as a joke. The wife marched right to a lawyer's office and instituted divorce proceedings. She refused to speak to reporters about her reasons, but you wonder what the iceberg was under that surface.

The first divorce I saw up close, like the first car crash you see up close, is imprinted on the inside of my eyelids. I still think about it, not because it happened, but because years later it seems so fated to have happened.

How could it be that a couple who really liked each other, and took the brave crazy flyer on not just living together, but swearing fealty and respect in front of a crowd, filing taxes jointly, spawning a child, and co-signing mortgages and car loans, how could they end up signing settlement papers on the dining room table, and weeping in the garden, and being coldly polite to each other at the door when he comes to pick up the kid on Saturday? How could that be?

The saddest word I've heard wrapped around divorce like a tattered blanket is 'tired', as in 'we were just both tired'. Tired seems so utterly normal, so much the rug always bunching in that one spot no matter what you do, the worn dishrack, the belt with extra holes punched with an ice pick, the torch in the pantry which has never had batteries, that the thought of tired being both your daily bread and also grounds for divorce gives me the willies.

The shagginess of things, the way they never quite work out as planned and break down every other Tuesday, necessitating wine and foul language and duct tape and the wrong-sized screw quietly hammered in with the bottom of a garden gnome, seems to me the very essence of marriage. So if what makes a marriage work — the constant shifting of expectations and eternal parade of small surprises — is also what causes marriages to dissolve, where is it safe to stand?

Nowhere, of course. Every marriage is pregnant with divorce, every day, every hour, every minute. The second you finish reading this essay, your spouse could close the refrigerator after miraculously finding a way to wedge the juice carton behind the milk jug, and call your marriage quits.

The odd truth of the matter is that because she might end your marriage in a moment, and you might end hers, you're still married. The instant there is no chance of death is the moment of death.

Bush block rehab

POETRY

John Kinsella

Rehabilitation is its own profanity

The randomness of planting wattles on the hill
above the house has its own profanity — the shaping
of guesswork, or to plant where you stop thinking,
or to toss a stone up and follow its arc to plant
where it lands, nudging aside and then ringing
a sapling with that stone and others around.
Rehabilitation is its own profanity — who am I kidding?
Almost easier to take a place long ceased to be pristine
and make it better. The delusion of healing. It passes
a life, it pushes prime concerns to the back of the mind.
I've only seen one or two small birds while out and about
today — planting, nurturing. I lay plans for future
restoration, talk about the long-term. Shadows are thinner
and longer and that stone emits a changed, unsettling light.

This will not be a model farm

There is a new set of shelf fungus
on the overarching branch of York gum
by the lower rainwater tank — small tank
that once watered stock which are no longer
grazing the block — all that walks here now,
come and goes by other rules, even the lost
dog that was heard barking and left a shit
as it passed by. I won't introduce
new names but search out the old.
That's not appropriation — it's respect
and learning. Knowledge is the tree

replanted in the ashen bed of an old stump,
a partial mythology; I'd like to call it
'a Greek theatre', say Epidavros
I visited as a young man,
but it doesn't work — verse
doesn't make model farms,
even when ground-out in perfect
meter, the reader drained, waiting
for substitution. I planted that sapling
in ash-soil with acoustics of the lost
tree resounding in ways we can't be sure of,
and in the now wet and malleable earth,
hidden rocks emerge easily and lay claim
to surface. See, this is neither model farm
nor churchyard, though a wounded
spot of ground is set aside for olives.

Who deserves charity

APPLICATION

Susie Byers



Back in February 2004 historian John Hirst wrote an article for *The Age*, praising then Labor leader Mark Latham for distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' parents, and between the 'real' unemployed versus the 'slackers'.

Hirst's article might seem an odd throw-back to Victorian-era distinctions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, but it is a distinction of which the Howard Government made frequent use.

That Government had plans to introduce contingency to welfare payments for various transgressions, including convictions for drug offences.

Five years after Hirst's article, the Rudd Government has not altered that trajectory, trialling the connection of welfare payments to kids' attendance at school. And, of course, there are the distinctions in social security budgeting. In the 2009 Federal Budget, politically popular age pensioners were granted increases to their fortnightly payments while single parents and the unemployed (who live on \$227 a week) missed out.

So ironically, at a time when Centrelink officers come to resemble parole officers, when, like pocket money, welfare money is taken off you if you act up, and when the state acts like Victorian-era charity workers towards single parents, churches and other charities must provide help to the 'leftovers'.

This regression is interesting in the light of the historical development of the notion of 'social justice', with which social workers and charitable organisations are more than ever concerned.

The emphasis on social justice developed partly in response to the perception that charitable workers were censorious and treated their 'charges' without respect. Social justice engrained the principle that assistance to those in poverty is not the responsibility of private agents, but is a right born of citizenship and the responsibility of governments. This ideal has been in retreat of late.

Pope Benedict XVI's first and third encyclicals, [*Deus Caritas Est*](#) (2006) and [*Caritas in Veritate*](#) (2009), provide illuminating reading in this context.

In *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict called for the Catholic Church to return to Christian ideas of charity, writing that 'the Church can never be exempted from practising charity as an organised activity of believers', and that 'there will never be a situation where the charity of each individual Christian is unnecessary'.

He returns to the distinction between 'justice' and 'charity', the former the responsibility of the state, and the latter of the Church, insisting that the Church has a role in fighting for justice within the state.

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict further develops the themes of charity and justice, reiterating his conviction that charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine.

Certainly, charity (Church and non-Church) will always have a role in providing for those who 'fall through the cracks'. But Pope Benedict's words come at a time when churches in Australia increasingly have to provide 'charity' to those who have been failed by the 'justice' of the state.

As far as 'justice' goes, there is nothing wrong with establishing reciprocal obligations for people who require assistance from the Government, as both the Howard and Rudd Governments have tried to do.

If people are receiving a jobseeker's payment, for example, it could be a reasonable expectation that they go and seek jobs. If they are receiving a parenting payment, it's fair that they be required to show that there are some kids who are being parented.

The problem is that as the discourse of social justice became prevalent, governments move into territory vacated by charities. But when they try to decide whether clients are 'good' parents or 'slack' jobhunters, they go beyond what can reasonably be achieved by government officers.

Meanwhile, both religious and other agencies provide assistance to those who fall through the cracks or, sometimes, as in the case of the Welfare to Work legislation, are co-opted into the service of the state.

Caritas in Veritate makes the task of charities even more problematic when he defines charity as incorporating and surpassing justice. 'Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is 'mine' to the other; but it never lacks justice ... I cannot 'give' what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice.'

According to Pope Benedict's formula, if citizens do not receive what is just from the state, then the charity that is offered them by the church will only be compensatory, and cannot constitute 'true' giving.

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict writes that the Church does not claim to 'interfere in any way in the politics of States'. Lest one fall prey, however, to the familiar criticism of charity — that it is a panacea that distracts morally committed people from the task of heightening justice in the world — church and non-church social organisations must always be prepared to commit themselves politically.

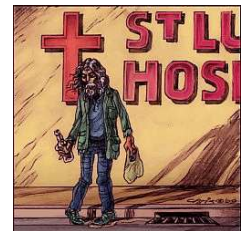
In today's context, the role of loving the unloved and embracing the rejected is critical, and so is that of fighting to dismantle punitive and exclusive conceptions of 'justice'. This is the responsibility both of those who proclaim faith and of those who proclaim simple humanism.

Homeless people are not toilets

COMMUNITY

Frank Bowden

Recently while visiting Melbourne, we dropped into a milk bar near our hotel to buy *The Saturday Age*. The other customer in the shop — an old-looking man with wild, grey hair and sun-coarsened features — was asking something of the woman behind the counter. I couldn't hear what the request was, but her answer to it was an emphatic 'No!'



The man thumped his hands on the sides of his Vinnie's suit pants and, screaming a string of expletives and racist slurs, he pushed past me and out of the shop. My 14-year-old daughter, shocked more by the intensity than the content of his outburst, had shuffled behind me as he was leaving. 'What was that about?' she asked, his ranting still audible through the front window.

My wife put her hand on my shoulder. 'Welcome home', she said to me with a smile. In the 1980s we had both trained at the inner-city hospital around the corner where this sort of interaction was a daily part of our life. Here was a survivor of a population that had been forced to move elsewhere by the invasion of middle class people like us.

My daughter, though, was having trouble disguising the fact that she could smell something awful. It was the pungent odour of the down-and-outer and its ability to linger after its source had moved on, that sent me back in time.

A large proportion of our patients were homeless men and women, mainly alcoholic. A few of them were 'characters' who were good fun to interact with. But most were very sad or very mad and essentially unreachable. They would turn up in the Casualty department throughout the day and night and I would sew up their lacerations, bandage sprained limbs, plaster broken ones and, on occasion, get them ready for neurosurgery to remove a clot from around the brain. I became proficient in the management of end-stage liver disease. It was not until I was rotated to another hospital that I learnt that alcohol-related problems were actually a little exotic in the mainstream medical world.

The homeless were usually brought to the hospital after they had been found in trouble by the police or by the ambulance. They rarely wanted the help we gave nor offered any thanks when it was provided. Their inability to look after themselves was often interpreted by the doctors and nurses as a conscious refusal to do so. The myth that 'personal responsibility' was a panacea ruled in some medical minds, and this belief legitimated their contempt for these patients.

Regardless of their sex, race or poison, one thing was always the same. The rank combination of urine, tobacco and the grime from cobblestones made them smell like a public urinal. So they were called 'dunnies'. If you asked a colleague

what the preceding night shift had been like, the response might be, 'Not too bad, just an infarct and a couple of dunnies'.

I heard the term the moment I arrived as a student in 1980 and it seemed to be peculiar to our hospital. It was used by most of the resident staff but I never heard any of the consultants use it. In the beginning I thought that the word was harmless and I probably used it myself a few times.

One day I witnessed a registrar being spoken to by one of the nuns. 'I never want to hear you speak of any of our patients in that way', she said in a quiet voice. There was never any dissent when a nun spoke. A reprimand of this nature was uncommon but devastating. Such public admonitions pushed the word further underground but it did not disappear.

What drives those who have chosen a career that is supposed to be about caring to demean some of the recipients of that care? Every medical culture does it — *The House of God*, a 1970s novel about a Boston intern, popularised the term 'gomer', short for 'Get Out of My Emergency Room', which described a similar group of hapless and/or obnoxious patients.

But ours was worse: we were not just saying you smell like a toilet (because that was true) but that you are a toilet. The paradox was that our hospital really did reach out to the homeless and prided itself on its equity of access. Other hospitals would probably have been far less tolerant.

What we call people, regardless of our underlying motivation, can determine the way we treat them. Today most of the intolerance that I observe in medical staff is directed at patients who inject drugs: most hold quietly intolerant opinions, and the publicly proffered attitude of some senior colleagues would make you question their right to hold the title 'doctor'.

The injecting drug user is sometimes a 'junkie' or 'addict' but it is the behaviour of the staff that betrays their feelings. Some doctors refuse to take these patients' symptoms seriously, occasionally with the disastrous consequences of delayed and missed diagnoses.

Young doctors always buffer the real stresses of their work with humour that may not be appropriate for the uninitiated. But I think with this one we went too far, and even at this distance I am embarrassed by it. I made a decision never to call anyone a 'dunny' after I overheard the registrar's dressing down, and I made sure that no-one who worked under my supervision subsequently did either.

We should not be afraid of trying to change the culture of our workplace. I just needed someone to tell me that I could.

National pride begets blind arrogance

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Fairfax correspondent John Garnaut [wrote](#) that detained Australian businessman Stern Hu is 'widely known in China and at Rio Tinto for his integrity and quietly spoken good judgment'. Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said he was 'perplexed' by Hu's arrest by officials at China's Ministry of State Security.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry official said on Thursday that authorities had the evidence needed to prove that the Rio executive stole state secrets, and that he had 'caused huge loss to China's economic interest and security'.

Unfortunately not all reaction to the arrest has been as circumspect as that of Foreign Minister Smith. In fact there's more than a touch of arrogance in much of the comment. Australians have rushed to the assumption that the arrest is payback for Rio's rejection of the Chinese Government-owned Chinalco's \$A24.7 billion bailout deal, after it was no longer needed to keep the company out of financial trouble.

Soon after news of Hu's arrest, Nationals Senate leader Barnaby Joyce issued a statement that declared: 'Chinalco's failure to buy an 18 per cent ownership of Rio would appear to have inspired Mr Hu's arrest and that of three other Rio workers.'

Pride in our nation and a desire to protect its interests can easily cloud our perceptions of other countries' legal systems. It may even cause us to assume that if one of our nationals gets caught on the wrong side of the law in a foreign country, they are innocent just because they're Australian.

We only need to remind ourselves of the widespread and confident declarations of Schapelle Corby's innocence in the face of her prosecution and sentencing for smuggling drugs into Indonesia in 2004. These have been anything but vindicated in the five years since Corby's arrest.

There are many manifestations of national pride and the arrogance and irrationality that often come with it. In the lead up to Kevin Rudd's meeting with Pope Benedict XVI last week, Shadow Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Tony Abbott was warning that it would be inappropriate for Rudd to lobby the Pope for the canonisation of Blessed Mary MacKillop. According to Abbott, he would disturb the purity of the canonisation process. It's just not done, he said. An announcement coinciding with the centenary of MacKillop's death on 8 August would indeed be a proud moment for Australia. But appropriate expressions of pride must come after a process, not before it is complete.

In the case of Stern Hu, Rudd's yielding to calls from political rivals including

Malcolm Turnbull and Bob Brown to lobby China on behalf of Stern Hu could prevent Chinese justice from taking its natural course. Interest in the case from Australia should be focused by a desire to see China uphold its own laws and protocols without fear or favour. Australians' opinion about the circumstances of the arrest, and his innocence or guilt, is a separate and secondary matter that we should keep to ourselves.

There is a sense in which those who promote the view that Hu's arrest is an act of retribution from China are doing him a disservice. They could be treating Hu as a political pawn in a manner that does little or nothing to protect his rights as a detained foreign national. The best thing that can be done for him as a person is to ensure he gets fair treatment from China's legal system (and to be fair, that is partly the object the lobbying calls). Similarly Mary MacKillop's sainthood will be more authentic if it is the result of a correctly administered canonisation process not impeded by the lobbying of a political leader bent on demonstrating the greatness of his country.

The roots of Obama's Afghanistan strategy

POLITICS

Ben Coleridge

This month, 4000 United States Marines launched Operation Khanjar (strike of the sword) into Helmand Province, Afghanistan. The images splashed across the media, of soldiers and helicopters in rugged desert, illustrate the bare facts of yet another US led operation. There have been so many since September 11, 2001, that it can be difficult to distinguish the latest.

But whether it succeeds or otherwise, Operation Khanjar is worth noting for the strategic change it represents.

On 4 July *The Australian* ran the headline 'Offensives reveal Obama's strategy'. Really, Operation Khanjar is not Obama's strategy at all. Behind this operation lies a strategic consensus on counter-insurgency that has been gaining ground since the 2007 'surge' in Iraq.

David Kilcullen, former Australian Army officer and senior counter-insurgency advisor to General David Petraeus, has been an emerging voice articulating new ways to combat insurgency. His book, [*The Accidental Guerrilla*](#) is a mind-boggling read and not just because it is a work of analytical depth.

Kilcullen's book rams home the almost overwhelming complexity of the Pashtun Taliban insurgency and the challenge of building an Afghan state, a project in which Australian troops are engaged.

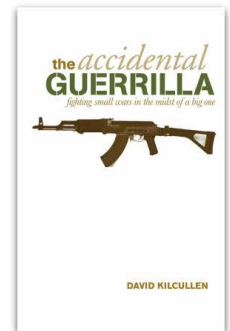
His argument is that most of those Pashtun tribesmen fighting for the Taliban are 'accidental guerrillas' who are not ideological radicals, but tribesmen who have been provoked, bullied or bribed into attacking foreign troops.

To combat this 'accidental guerrilla syndrome' Kilcullen lays out what he calls a 'population centric approach,' which emphasises denying Taliban insurgents access to rural population centres rather than endlessly hunting them down in the countryside.

This approach to counter-insurgency, Kilcullen argues, proved its worth in the 2007 'surge', pulling Baghdad back from the brink of sectarian chaos. Kilcullen draws from his experience as one of the architects of that operation and applies it to Afghanistan, where, he argues, protecting the population from intimidation and coercion by the Taliban is a vital part of stifling the insurgency.

For the insurgents, he says, the populace is oxygen: deny them access and the Taliban will eventually wilt.

Operation Khanjar has Kilcullen's thesis written all over it. The central tenets have been echoed by US commanders. In particular, Kilcullen's argument that



'reforms targeting local and provincial government effectiveness are indispensable' seems to have been taken to heart.

As Marine Brigadier General Larry Nicholson said to his officers before the operation began: 'our focus is not on the Taliban' but 'on getting this government back up on its feet'. According to Nicholson, that means drinking tea and eating goat with the local people, over and above firing bullets.

The US commander in Afghanistan, Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal, has also emphasised that Operation Khanjar is aimed at 'developing government that can protect people' even at the local level.

The fact that the first major military operation launched under the Obama administration rests upon intellectual foundations laid by figures such as David Kilcullen and David Petraeus does suggest a shift in American thinking. But contrary to headlines in the mainstream media, this was not President Obama's brainchild. Interestingly, it took a lot of convincing for Obama to come to terms with the strategies now being employed.

At the Crocker US Senate Hearing into Iraq in September 2007, then Senators Obama and Biden were sceptical about the merits of the population centric surge operation. Obama argued that the impact had been 'relatively modest' and asked General Petraeus for an answer to the question, 'at what point do we say "enough"?'

Likewise, Biden pressed the General for a progress update on a scale of one to ten. In this he echoed the mainstream media which often represents the counter-insurgency effort in statistics. Given Kilcullen's description of the multi-faceted nature of counter-insurgency, this reduction of the issues must have tried the General.

But Obama's reservations have since been laid aside, and the counter-insurgency strategy developed by General Petraeus alongside advisors like Kilcullen has been restored. Operation Khanjar, taking place in the very environment discussed by Kilcullen in *The Accidental Guerrilla*, is a test case for this 'population centric' strategy.

Kilcullen points out that the results will not be immediate. Building local communities is a long term project. Indeed, as of 7 July, Brigadier General Nicholson has highlighted the immediate challenges facing the marines, lamenting the lack of available local Afghan troops. From Pashtun tribal sensitivities to tensions between local and government authorities, the difficulties of southern Afghanistan are relentless.

Afghan parliamentarian Malalai Joya has argued that 'no nation can donate liberation to another', and that Afghan people must be left to work things out for themselves. But General McChrystal represents Operation Khanjar, coming shortly before the Afghan presidential elections and focusing on the people, as less about

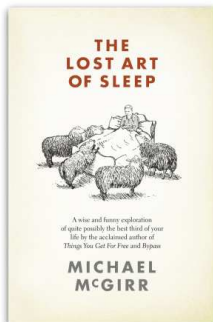
'liberation' than about providing the space in which Afghans might choose their own future.

Michael McGirr's waking life

BOOKS

Morag Fraser

**Michael McGirr: *The Lost Art of Sleep*. Pan Macmillan Australia, 2009.
ISBN: 9780330424912. RRP \$32.99. [Online](#)**



It's hard to imagine Michael McGirr asleep. Easier to picture him nodding off because the movement of the head can be read as resistance to life's tedium. And we know what this gifted connoisseur of life's ironies thinks about tedium because he tells us. Staff meetings are not his cup of tea. Tutorials rarely galvanise him. Cant bores him to stupefaction. About sermons he maintains a stout scepticism — he once dozed off during one of his own.

Yet by nature McGirr seems so much more the avid magpie than the dormouse. Even when he confesses to curling up under his desk to have a post-lunch kip (I have seen him do this) you figure he's just closing his eyes the better to plot mischief, or give his racing brain a few horizontal minutes to organise and file the prodigious miscellany that might otherwise leak out and stain the carpet.

The Lost Art is mayhem and wisdom in one handbook — a disconcerting package, because it makes you anxious and glad at the same time. Anxious because sleep, or lack of it, obsesses all of us at one time or another, and the extremity of McGirr's personal sleep pathology (acute sleep apnoea), however comically told, is daunting because it makes us all feel vulnerable — there but for the grace of ...

He knows too well that we simply can't manage without sleep. Like water, it is essential (little wonder that sleep deprivation and water boarding have become the tortures of choice for our disarrayed times). But the book also makes one vehemently glad — glad at the prodigal generosity of the writing, its humanity, its lust for family (a very extended 'family') life in all its exhausting and patched variety, for its comic brio and its grace.

On one page you can enjoy McGirr's zany scholarship (never waste a Jesuit education). He'll tell you that the word 'mortgage', from the French, means 'death grip', and the derivation makes mordant sense when you consider its context in the book: McGirr and his wife and young family of three in the clutches of the Melbourne real estate industry — an experience to rob one of more than sleep.

A few chapters on and you are reading bedtime pirate stories with McGirr's three children and feeling only gratitude for the joyously realistic way this former priest has become a husband and father. There is no sense here of an earlier life discarded, but rather of a rich evolution, with the past honoured, all the traces of experience cherished and worn on the front.

In between you get to follow the characters McGirr casts as the heroes and villains in this chronicle of sleep and wakefulness. There's that bright spark, Thomas Edison, who brought us light and noise in the form of the electric bulb and the phonograph. McGirr savours Edison's eccentricities, like proposing to his second wife — his first 'died of nervous exhaustion' — by tapping out 'will you marry me' in Morse code. But there is a cautionary tale in there too. This is the author, remember, who once had his new wife join him in a pushbike ride between Sydney and Melbourne as research for his next book (*Bypass*).

After Edison comes Homer and the *Odyssey* ('a book about getting home to bed') and then Virgil and his Aeneas, whose life trajectory, as we might say in tutorials, is not towards rest. Then there's Florence Nightingale, known to most of us as the woman who lit the Crimea with her lamp, but whom McGirr depicts as another eccentric, this time an austere one who 'spent most of her long life in bed'.

Dickens, another McGirr favourite, scarcely went to bed at all. He paced London's streets instead. Then comes Freud on the truth of dreams, and before him Aristotle, who thought of them otherwise: 'a random collection of mental bricolage ... not to be trusted'. And Plato and the Qur'an, the Bible and the Hebrew Scriptures and Shakespeare and Balzac and *Don Quixote* and some heartfelt chapters on Z-class drugs and other hazards to be negotiated by the world's insomniacs, the author included.

A random collection of mental bricolage? Never. McGirr is an inspired synthesiser, serious in intent even while riotous in execution. For him everything chimes in a narrative that, in the best essay tradition, uses the self as sounding board. You could call *The Lost Art of Sleep* volume three of a complex autobiography (with *Things You Get For Free* and *Bypass*). But if the central character embodies the quandaries, the delight of the writing lies in the world around him, particularly the close world of his wife Jenny, their son Benedict and the twins, Jacob and Clare.

Sleepless parents of twins should read this book. So should teachers whose students come to class dazed by the screens that have become their bedfellows. There are far, far better bedfellows, and this book is one of them.

A soft voice for China's wild west

POLITICS

Paul Rule

The recent bloody events in West China have drawn attention to a part of the world most of us don't ever give any attention to. We are hot and dry enough without thinking of one of the hottest and driest parts of the world, the high deserts of Xinjiang, the 'New Frontier' region of China.



Recently Australia was asked, and refused, to take some of the Guantanamo detainees who were Uighurs, Muslim activists from this region. This was far too hot an issue for the Chinese, and accepting them would have adversely affected Australian-China relations.

It was probably wise to find them a place other than Australia, one less closely tied economically to China. The Chinese view of Uighur separatism is inevitably far from ours.

Xinjiang, like Tibet, is territory on the fringe of China, under largely indirect Chinese control for many centuries but formally incorporated into China only in the last century. Ethnically, it was non-Chinese, consisting of Uighurs and other formerly nomadic peoples (Kazakhs, Uzbeks etc.). Religiously it was mostly Muslim.

Under both heads, ethnicity and religion, the region posed a problem both to the Nationalists and the Communists. The Uighurs are proud of their heritage, including periods when they ruled part of China proper. They suffered interference with their religion during the Cultural Revolution and since.

Just as in the rest of China, by their very presence the pork-eating Han Chinese create offence to Muslim neighbours, even to those for whom Islam is more a cultural than a religious identity. It is worth noting that Hui-hui, the Chinese identification of Muslims, is regarded officially as an ethnic rather than a religious label.

The Chinese government rightly fears that the mosques are centres of resistance to Chinese rule. Since the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the establishment of Islamic republics just across the border, Islamicist ideas have spread into China and become a focus and magnifying factor for more mundane resentments created by insensitive officials and police and by the ever growing migration of Han Chinese into the area.

Technically, the region, the largest province in China but with the smallest population density, is a special region for minorities, the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region. But with China's population explosion, and particularly the development of Xinjiang's oil and mineral resources (some 80 per cent of China's

total) there has been a huge migration of specialist workers and job seekers from China's eastern and southern provinces.

It is not surprising that confrontation between Han and Uighur factory workers seems to have been the spark for the current riots and street violence in Urumqi, the capital.

Xinjiang is also strategically important. Not only does it adjoin the former Soviet Union but its southern border is with Tibet. There are strong garrisons there of the People's Liberation Army and a strategic highway between Xinjiang and Tibet. To the Chinese government security in this region is vitally important for the security of the state.

For all these reasons it is difficult to imagine any solution to the discontent in Xinjiang, as in Tibet, without a general change in the governance and political culture of China. That seems a distant prospect indeed. China has no history of federalism (the word 'autonomous' in its names for minority regions is one of the many ironies of Chinese officialdom). Independence for the region is unthinkable in Beijing, and China is too reliant on its mineral wealth to loosen its control in a time of economic crisis.

If the situation in Urumqi worsens, President Obama, European leaders and perhaps even our sinophile Prime Minister may be able to suggest to the Chinese more sensitive treatment of its Uighur and Tibetan minorities, but even a change at the centre will not improve ethnic relations in the factories and mines or the pastoral areas of China's Wild West.

One of the side-effects of China's remarkable economic and cultural revival of the post Cultural Revolution era has been a growth in popular nationalism. I am constantly surprised in speaking with ordinary Chinese, even Chinese Australians, how close to the surface is their pride in nationality and their readiness to deny oppression of China's minorities.

Their passionate defence of the Olympic flag as it passed through Western countries was well orchestrated by the Chinese government but could not have occurred without a solid base of nationalist sentiment. There seems little hope that the majority Chinese, those identified as Han, will pressure their government for change.

It is perhaps a good thing to be born or live in a small country without too many national pretensions. This is both an opportunity and a limitation for Australia in its relations with China. A soft and friendly voice may do more than condemnation or contention.

How *Rafters* had its pro-choice cake and ate it too

TELEVISION

Tim Kroenert

***Packed to the Rafters* (PG). Starring: Rebecca Gibney, Erik Thomson, Angus McLaren, Jessica McNamee, Jessica Marais, Hugh Sheridan, Michael Caton, Zoe Ventoura. Channel 7, Tuesdays, 8.30pm**



Clean-cut TV drama doesn't get any better than *Packed to the Rafters*. It's charming, funny, well-written and packed ... well ... to the rafters with likeable and multi-dimensional characters.

In case you've missed it, *Rafters*, which has returned with the premiere episodes of its second season, is set in suburban Sydney and concerns the lot of would-be empty-nesters Julie and Dave Rafter (Gibney and Thomson), whose freedom has been dented by the return of their adult offspring.

There's Rachel (Marais), who is beautiful and confident but troubled; Nathan (McLaren), who's married to rich girl Sam (McNamee) and resents his blue-collar roots; and big-hearted man-child Ben (Sheridan) who, to be fair, has moved out ... next door. To ensure this is a multi-generational household, there's also Julie's widower dad, Ted (Caton).

As with any good story, sympathy is key. *Rafters* presents ordinary human situations to which its audience can relate. Recent episodes saw Ben feeling insecure over his girlfriend Mel's (Ventoura) friendship with a handsome doctor, and Rachel dreading the prospect of attending her high school reunion.

Sure, there's a formula at play. The above scenarios have been fodder for many a TV drama and sitcom. What sets *Rafters* apart is the cleverness of the scripts. The writers appreciate every nuance of every situation and character. The hour-long time slot allows them to unpack every skerrick of emotional baggage.

This mastery of plot is never more obvious than when it comes to dealing with controversial storylines.

Consider last season's climactic episode. Julie learns she is pregnant. Dave, yearning for the empty nest, and fearing the risks to Julie's health, advocates termination. Julie can see his logic, but is also overcome by powerful mothering urges. It becomes a point of tension between them.

To heighten the dilemma, they learn that Rachel previously had an abortion. Emotionally, Rachel confesses the pain, trauma and regret that attended the experience.

The episode ticked all the politically correct boxes, as various characters debated the pros and cons of terminating the pregnancy. A woman has the right

to do with her body as she pleases. The health of the unborn baby can not be put ahead of Julie's. After 20-plus years of parenthood, Julie and Dave have earned the right to be selfish.

In the end, Julie makes the 'right' choice, in the pro-life sense. And so *Rafters* managed to have its pro-choice cake and eat it too. The situation was impressively, deftly handled by the writers, in a way that was unlikely to alienate parties on either side of the abortion debate. It was also compelling, emotive television. A high point for the series.

If Gibney's 2009 Logie success capped *Rafters'* popular and critical appeal, McNamee's role on *Dancing With the Stars* and prime time product endorsements from McNamee and Ventoura cement the series' place as a commercial juggernaut. Let's hope that commerciality does not undermine the quality of this top-notch program.

Indigenous health: 'Things that work'

INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Myrna Tonkinson

The Commonwealth Government and Council of Australian Governments (COAG) have accorded high priority to improving the condition of Indigenous Australians, engendering great interest in the recently released Productivity Commission report, [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage](#) .



The report revealed that in 80 per cent of the 50 indicators of disadvantage that were measured, there has been a decline rather than an improvement. This negative slide has attracted much media coverage and expert comment.

Two subsets of the 50 indicators are given particular attention in the report. First, COAG's Closing the Gap Targets: life expectancy; young child mortality; early childhood education; reading, writing and numeracy; year 12 attainment; and employment.

Second, the Commission's previously established 'Headline Indicators': post-secondary education; disability and chronic disease; household and individual income; substantiated child abuse and neglect; family and community violence; imprisonment and juvenile detention.

Substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect have received the most attention. They have more than doubled in the Indigenous population between 2000 and 2008, compared to a 20 per cent increase in the non-Indigenous population. As has been noted, the figures are probably partly due to more rigorous reporting of cases, but by any measure these statistics are disturbing. They might even be below the actual rate of occurrence.

However, some perspective is required when considering the grim statistics. Two things are worth noting here.

First, many families are dealing with problems of abuse and neglect, often with remarkable success. I know of many cases in which children are taken by family members away from neglectful mothers/parents.

Just last week, in a desert community, I watched as a great-grandfather carefully made up a bottle of formula, using hot water from a thermos and bottled cold water, and tenderly fed an infant whose mother 'is in town drinking'; the child is in the care of her grandmother and other family members.

Such carers are now likely to be officially recognised, but they need to be supported and enabled, not undermined and denigrated by sweeping claims of neglect and abuse.

Secondly, many matters in the report that deserve attention have been all but overlooked in public discussion.

There was some mention of the worsening gap in imprisonment rates, with ever more Indigenous men and women being incarcerated. Many are juveniles who are sometimes placed in inappropriate adult facilities.

While greater policing of violent crimes is welcome, often offences leading to incarceration are trivial. In Western Australia, for example, a large number of Aboriginal people end up in prison for non-payment of fines or repeated driving offences such as driving without licence or driving an unlicensed vehicle.

Other alarming statistics in the report have been virtually ignored, including the rates of suicide and self-harm, mental illness, and 'avoidable mortality', which is four times higher among female and five times higher among male Indigenous people than in the general population.

These conditions have terrible effects, not only on individual sufferers but on entire families and communities.

A majority of the negative trends documented in the report are health-related. In the remote Pilbara desert communities I know best, obesity and tooth decay are most prevalent.

The former, a major public health concern in the general population, is twice as common in the Indigenous population. Combined with near-endemic diabetes, obesity has catastrophic implications. And while obesity is rare in children, tooth decay is not. Both conditions are most evident among young women.

Tooth decay affects nutrition and overall health, including heart disease to which this population is already highly susceptible. The report points out that poor dental health also has wider implications, affecting speech and language development, school, work, and social wellbeing.

The report eschews claims of cause and effect while noting that 'multiple disadvantage' is characteristic of the Indigenous population, pointing out correlations between poor education, high unemployment and low income. There is ample evidence that poverty and social inequality have multiple consequences, including ill-health.

Attempts to change disadvantage must be multi-pronged and long-term. Social change is often slow, and entails a degree of risk — human behaviour is not easily predicted or controlled, and there are bound to be surprises when conditions change. Panic responses and sweeping changes can create new problems, even as they correct existing ones — the Northern Territory Intervention is a case in point.

Entrenched harmful behaviours, such as poor nutrition, cannot now be simply undone. Income 'quarantining', for example, may make more money available for food, but does not ensure healthy food choices, crucial to combating obesity, tooth

decay and other health problems.

The Indigenous population is far from homogeneous. While there are remarkable cultural continuities across Australia, diversity must be recognised. Urban, rural, and remote locations engender different challenges. Arbitrarily imposed change for which the targeted groups see no rationale, of which they have little understanding, or for which they lack motivation, frequently leads to failure.

Authorities on the issues, such as Tom Calma and Fred Chaney, say that collaborative approaches are best. They also caution that there is no quick fix, and that some failures are inescapable in change projects.

The focus on the sensational is understandable but tends to obscure the positives. Throughout the report, the Productivity Commission gives examples of 'things that work'. This kind of news seldom makes headlines, but is of signal importance. One advocacy organisation, Women for Wik, has picked up this theme on its [website](#) .

Malcolm Turnbull and the parable of the pelicans

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews



We all know that there's no such thing as a dead certainty yet even the most circumspect among us are occasionally tempted by the thought: 'This time — just this once — it will be different. I'll get lucky.'

In Shepparton years ago, while dividing my time between school teaching and fishing in the Goulburn, I learned from my pedagogical colleague and fishing partner that a vast number of mature rainbow trout were to be released into the nearby Victoria Lake for the benefit of recreational fishermen.

Always interested in both the theory and practice of the piscatorial arts, my mate, Ken, getting wind of this plan, visited the distant trout farm and demonstrated rote-learned, earnest interest in fry, fingerlings and yearlings, not to mention allozyme variation in rainbow trout — or *Oncorhynchus mykiss* as he casually and incomprehendingly referred to them once he had warmed to his spiel.

In this way Ken discovered a vital piece of information: the fish had been raised on a diet of chicken liver, among other sustaining nutrients.

On the afternoon of the official trout release, at a lakeside ceremony presided over by the Mayor and a battalion of dignitaries, Ken manoeuvred me into a quiet corner of the local pub and outlined his daring plan. We would take our dinghy to the lake just before dawn on the following morning and fish for trout — with chicken liver-baited hooks.

'It's a dead certainty,' he said. 'Practically all they've ever known is chicken liver. We'll fill the boat.'

'What if they're sick of chicken liver?'

He gave me a withering look, not bothering to reply to such catastrophic thinking. And so the die was cast and the fate of an incalculable number of the sexily named *Oncorhynchus mykiss* was sealed.

The next day the first streaks of a cold northern Victorian dawn found us, shadowy silhouettes, anchored in the middle of the lake, the 'compleat' anglers. Armed with crucial inside information we were more prepared than Isaac Walton could ever have imagined.

Five hours later, just before midday, we gave up, having had not one single bite, though trout were jumping and splashing all around us for the whole time, as if rejoicing in their newfound freedom and space.

That same afternoon, when the sun we had seen rise was contemplating giving it away for the day, 50 or so pelicans cruised in from various reaches and bays of the Goulburn, herded all the fish down to the shallow end and ate the lot. Neither the mayor nor the dignitaries who had welcomed *Oncorhynchus mykiss* were on hand to farewell them. As for the pelicans, judging by the precision, efficiency and unerring accuracy of their raid, they knew they were on a dead certainty.

Only a few years later, I succumbed again, and this time I couldn't blame a fanatical fisherman. In London as a student, running dangerously low on funds and disinclined to send another emergency call home, I put my last £50 on an absolute you-know-what at Catterick Bridge, convinced of this nag's deadly certitude by a shamefully perfunctory study of the form.

As a neophyte punter in a foreign system, I didn't have the nous to bet each way. I put my bundle on the nose. And it was by that same nose — or, in fact, one of its snorting, plunging nostrils — that my hayburner was beaten into second place.

The dead certainty haunts every age and assumes guises suitable to the times. In our electronic world, the DC could materialise as, say, an email. South Australian Liberal leader, Martin Hamilton-Smith, a few months ago came across the dead certainty that would blow the wax out of your ears. It was email dynamite and would bring down Labor Premier Mike Rann and all his cohorts. But, more dead than certain, the email was a fake, a faulty grenade, and Hamilton-Smith — an ex-army man of some experience and distinction — blew himself up.

You would think his fellow federal Liberals, no matter how profound their lack of interest in anything east of the Divide, would have sniffed the cordite in the air and done some consciousness-raising sessions on weapons of self destruction.

But no: like a fisherman with irresistible bait, or a punter with inexplicably unshakeable conviction, Malcolm Turnbull took his dead certain ticking bomb up to the battle front, aimed, stood back in puzzlement when all it did was hiss, then fell about in alarm when, suddenly, it exploded in his face. Another dead cert up in smoke.

As I write, the OzLotto has jackpotted to 90 million dollars. The odds against are 46 million to one. Still, I've got a feeling. I sense something in the air. The rush of Fortune's wings? Or a squadron of hungry pelicans?

Treeless Eden, oasis of wealth

POETRY

Peter Matheson

A treeless Eden

The polished wall of glass
Audacious storeys high.
At ground zero
Tin soldiers,
With professional smiles
Pounce on guests
Wheel off their cars
Wheel in their bags
With clean-jawed friendliness,
Keep the poor at bay.
Not quite treeless, though,
This oasis of wealth.
I spot the odd ornamental shrub
And even the occasional bird
Though only sparrows, it seems,
Beloved of the Lord,
Survive this sterile affluence.

Hope

What a nerve, leaving us stranded
Without slasher or compass
In this root-littered creek-bed
Bush lawyered and nettled by experts.
No cleft in the rock, my dove,
No fading sign at the summit;
Just a shop-window's curling note to say:
Hope's off on vacation.

So we trudge on through the swamp
Boots skidding on submarine slats;
Thigh-deep in lies and in smut,
Flotsam and jetsam en masse.

Pillowed master

The sun slides westward.
Silvering icy seas
Warming cold-blotched hands,
Shriving the skin of my soul.
Blue sky belying polar wind,
Green grass infertile land,
Creased smile the belch of pain:
Uncharted worlds.
Or do these steadfast, gurgling waves,
Kaleidoscopic magpie calls,
Dear friends' departing touch,
Betoken rhythms underneath
Which ear nor eye nor mind can trace,
Or even guess, but only celebrate?
Walk we this thin and silent ice
Because a pillowed master sleeps?

Roads

No joy to the eye, these slump-backed,
Blue-black, tarmacadam coils
Which hug the contours of the land
Clog up the wetlands, slice through fields,
Hack canyons through the stubborn hills.
The Romans loved their rigid roads
Hitler was prescient, too, Reichstrassen
Providing the Blitzkrieg

With clearways East and West.
Sieg Heil, Sieg Autobahn!
Our old ones preferred a human scale,
Criss-crossed the patient plains,
Meandered through flowing hills,
Trod pounamu trails or pilgrim paths,
Geared movement to the pace of the eye.
Our modern roads expect a free-fire zone,
Mow down opossums, hedgehogs, pukeko,
Poison the flowers and strangle any bush
Which might slow down our onward rush
To urgent shops and dreams.
Mere grace notes now the token trees
Which line the one way street.
We're focused on the A to B;
Until that doomsday dawn,
When oil wells give
Their curt and final wheeze.

Malaysia's threat to Rudd's Asia Pacific Community

POLITICS

Greg Lopez

This week's [visit to Malaysia](#) of Kevin Rudd and Foreign Minister Stephen Smith reminds us of stormy bilateral relations under former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.



Following Mahathir's retirement in 2003, Australia-Malaysia relations returned to stability under the Badawi Administration. But with current Prime Minister Tun Haji Abdul Razak appointing Mahathir's son Mukhriz Mahathir (pictured) as Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry, some now fear a return of 'Mahathirism'.

To assess the likelihood of that, it is important to understand something of Malaysian foreign policy, and of Mahathir Mohamad himself.

Malaysian foreign policy is guided fundamentally by 'pragmatic neutrality'. It avoids imperialism and big power alignments while ensuring regional stability and meeting domestic political expectations.

A classic example of this is Malaysia's ability to choose its alignments based on needs. It formed a defence pact with Australia, Britain and New Zealand, which was crucial to the newly independent Malaysia, but declined to become a member of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation, instead opting for the Non-Aligned Movement to demonstrate Malaysia's neutrality, while also remaining a faithful member of the Commonwealth.

Regional stability is exemplified by the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, its principle of non-interference and keeping big powers and its allies out of the region.

When he became Prime Minister in 1981, Mahathir remained faithful to the policy of 'pragmatic neutrality'. However, foreign policy became very much influenced by this micro-managing Premier, whose ego and tenacity subsumed the professionalism of Wisma Putra, Malaysia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mahathir envisioned himself as a champion both of the Malays and of the Third World.

Mahathir's negative perception of Western democracies were heightened by his experiences with Australia. In 1986, Prime Minister Hawke described as 'barbaric' the hanging of two Australians in Malaysia for drug trafficking. In 1988, SBS aired *Slow Boat to Surabaya*, a documentary critical of logging in Sarawak.

In 1987, 105 Australian parliamentarians sent an open letter criticising Mahathir after he used the dreaded Internal Security Act against 106 people, including opposition leaders and social activists, to head off mounting problems within his party, the United Malays National Organisation. Mahathir responded by denouncing Australian intervention in Malaysia's internal affairs and criticising

Australia for its treatment of Aborigines.

In 1990, Malaysia downgraded relations with Australia, freezing bilateral projects and official visits, after it took exception to the ABC TV program *Embassy*, seen as critical of Malaysia. The relationship returned to normal a year later when Hawke agreed to disassociate Australia from media reports that were offensive to Malaysia.

The normalcy did not last. In 1993, Prime Minister Keating called Mahathir 'recalcitrant' for not attending the Asia Pacific Economic Caucus (APEC) leaders meeting in Seattle. This led to Malaysia authorising Ministers to take measures against Australia as they saw proper.

Keating had failed to understand Mahathir's and, by extension, Malaysia's opposition to any regional trade arrangements that featured Western powers. Mahathir had been vigorously promoting the idea of an East Asian Economic Caucus/Group involving Southeast Asia and northeast Asia.

Even at troubled times, trade and investment relationships were not significantly affected. These commercial ties, beneficial to both nations, were further strengthened by educational ties; the number of Malaysians educated in Australia has grown substantially, which has also led to increased migration to Australia.

The animosity between Australia and Malaysia will not return. Malaysia's understanding of neutrality is now driven by the need to remain competitive in an increasingly integrated global economy. This has required that Malaysia take part in the plethora of regional trade arrangements, with Australia a key trading partner.

Malaysia's key principle of non-interference remains. That is why Rudd's idea of an Asia Pacific Community has not been well received by Malaysia, which is wary of any country that has a tendency to intervene. Australia's record in the Pacific and East Timor does not put it in good stead.

That said, since Keating, except for some aberration during the Howard years, Australia has been mindful of not being seen to intervene diplomatically in the domestic affairs of Southeast Asian nations.

Malaysia too has changed. Under Badawi and now Najib, diplomatic and trade relationship have been elevated, and crowned with a Free Trade Agreement. The Najib Administration is not as anti-westerners as Mahathir was. While the US treatment of Muslim nations under George W. Bush and the Palestinian issue continue to cause uproar in Malaysia, US-Malaysia diplomatic and trade relations have improved. This has benefited Australia too.

Most importantly, UMNO's ideology of Malay supremacy is increasingly being challenged by Malays themselves. Malay supremacy is now understood as a method for UMNO to aggrandise itself and its coterie of elites.

Furthermore, Mukhriz Mahathir has neither the stature nor the substance of his father to personalise foreign policy in the same way. It is widely acknowledged that the only reason he has this position is because Najib wants to placate Mahathir.

On all counts, Australia-Malaysia relations are set for greater heights.

Russia's Soviet nostalgia trip

POLITICS

Colin Long



Siberia, seen from the window of a train, seems to go on forever. Kilometre after thousands of kilometers of brown grass flattened by recently melted snow, pools of icy water in the depressions alongside the railway. The sparse, spindly trees of the taiga are interrupted at intervals by ragged villages of age-blackened timber houses.

The shattered remains of abandoned Soviet industrial plants mark the entry to some non-descript city, or appear in the middle of nowhere, grim oases of broken concrete and rusting iron the location of which must have made sense to the Soviet planning bureaucracy but which today seems bizarre. The presence of still-functioning factories or power station is announced far in the distance by towering chimneys belching grey smoke.

Siberian cities have many things in common. Row upon row of white brick or concrete apartment blocks are surrounded by scruffy open spaces; it looks difficult to grow anything, even grass, in these tough, cold places.

Lenin remains ubiquitous in Siberia, as in the rest of Russia. Every town seems to have its Lenin statue, its Lenin Square, its Lenin Prospekt. Some other remnant names are more surprising: Tomsk still has a Dzerzhinsky Street, named after the founder of the Cheka, Lenin's political police force that would eventually become the KGB, the primary agent of Soviet repression.

Many Siberian cities retain, contrary to preconceptions, quite attractive central areas and large numbers of 19th century timber buildings, colourfully painted and with intricate wooden ornamentation. The Soviet imprint on these old city centres is often benign, with wide boulevards, generous public spaces and — perhaps the greatest legacy of the period — excellent public transport.

But the ordered, tidy, attractive core seems much like a façade as soon as one strays beyond it. In the suburbs the poverty is palpable, although apartment buildings seem neglected rather than ramshackle. But it is the areas of old timber housing and rubbish that shock. In some districts the old houses appear to be literally sinking, haphazardly, into the ground. Rubbish, particularly the ubiquitous evil of the modern world — the plastic bag, seems to be strewn everywhere.

It seems that all sense of civic cooperation was abandoned with other, more oppressive, forms of collectivisation when Russian tired of the Soviet Union.

The bifurcation of Siberian cities reflects, in microcosm, the duality of contemporary Russia. As the train leaves Siberia, winding through the Ural to 'European Russia', the sense of greater wealth is immediately apparent.

In Moscow, the contrast is dramatic. Clearly no expense was spared on the monumental aspects of the capital. Soviet monumentalism remains strikingly evident.

The Metro's wondrously ornate stations — Stalin's working class cathedrals (see Komsomolskaya Metro Station, pictured) — persistently proclaim the glories of the Soviet Union. Stalin's great skyscrapers punctuate the city's skyline like exclamation marks, extravagant essays in socialist classicism or Stalinist gothic.

The excessive Soviet pretensions to grandeur are most vivid in V. V. C. Park, a kind of exhibition centre cum theme park. This extraordinary collection of Soviet architectural styles set in spacious formal grounds appears to have changed little since the collapse of the entity that it celebrates, except that most pavilions are now simply numbered rather than featuring names of republics that escaped the post-Soviet Russian embrace.

On 9 May each year Russians celebrate victory over Nazi Germany in what they call the Great Patriotic War. It is a testimony to the closed horizons of Russia and to how little self-awareness there appears to have been about its behavior during WW2 that Russians commemorate only the years 1941—45. Don't expect any public acknowledgement of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that divided Poland between Germany and the USSR in 1939.

In public at least the commemorations seem steeped in the Soviet past. It is difficult for it to be otherwise. Russians fought under the hammer and sickle and the red star. These symbols, inevitably, continue to dominate contemporary commemoration. If Australian war memory is illuminated by old news reels and grainy film footage, Russians today are exposed to old Soviet propaganda films, since these are, besides the memories of those who lived through the war — whose ranks are by now very thin — the primary source of war imagery.

It seems strange to an outsider to see so many symbols of the Soviet past alive and well in contemporary Russia. It is too simplistic to say that this reflects nostalgia for Soviet times. Much of it is personal nostalgia. The intertwining of private and public memory is always complex.

For citizens of former socialist states, discarding the previous political ideology was one thing; reconstituting one's identity and holding on to a personally meaningful past when the broader public past has become so fraught is a much more difficult emotional exercise.

What to outsiders might seem like nostalgia for the socialist past is, for many people, a completely typical yearning for the circumstances of one's youth. The political restructuring of the last 20 years in Russia and its former satellites has been hard enough. We should perhaps be more understanding of the difficulties of individual psychic restructuring.

Yet in Russia, the persistence of Soviet symbols seems to be of a different order

than in Eastern Europe. Personal nostalgia that incidentally entangles public symbols is essentially a nostalgia of powerlessness. In Russia, in contrast, the remaining architecture and monuments of the Soviet period were designed to express power. The 9 May commemorations are about the remembrance of suffering, but also about military power.

It is here that Soviet symbols in modern Russia are, to the increasingly authoritarian Russian state, at least, of no nostalgic value. Instead they are to be embraced for their essence — the ability to express power — the rediscovery and reassertion of which has become a primary focus of government in Putin's Russia.

This year we should all celebrate the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Eastern Europe from Soviet tyranny. The continuing transition of Russia from under its Soviet past remains a complex, difficult phenomenon, and one of considerable importance for the rest of the world.

Back to the future for Indigenous youth

GUEST EDITORIAL

Brian McCoy

The theme chosen for this year's [NAIDOC week](#) to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is: Honouring Our Elders, Nurturing Our Youth.

Common with past themes, this theme links the Indigenous future with its past. In 2007 the theme was 50 Years: Looking Forward, Looking Black. In 2006: Respect the past — Believe in the Future.



Indigenous cultures, it seems to me, place more emphasis than Western cultures on those human and spiritual relationships that connect generations. In such contexts, young people ideally move confidently into adulthood with a pride and sense of their own generational history. Identity is not just about becoming an individual; it is also about knowing, valuing and embodying one's ancestral past.

This tension between past and future reminds me of a desert saying: *marlakarti nyawa, kurranyu nyinama* — 'If you want to go forwards you have to look backwards'.

Of course, moving forwards while looking backwards is not only difficult, it can be risky and dangerous. Would that drivers did not try it and that we were all born with eyes in the back of our heads. And yet, that is what most of us want to do, at least some of the time. We want the past to instruct and guide us while we seek to forge a future with new hope and possibilities.

Getting the balance right is not easy. We want to be faithful to what our grandparents have passed onto us, while being open to the future and what we might create and become. We want to avoid remaining sentimental or locked into our past, while also wanting to avoid our future becoming disconnected from our family and history.

Those who are most at risk with this tension are the young: reminded to respect their elders and acknowledge their past, while encouraged by peers, music and media to forget the past, change and be different.

At the same time, the past can no longer guarantee the security it once promised earlier generations, nor can the future engender absolute confidence. Young people can find themselves disconnected, neither able to access the past in ways that strengthen their identity and self-esteem, nor able to grasp and engage new pathways into the future. The most telling and painful expression of these human tensions is in youth suicide.

Recently, a young Aboriginal man I know committed suicide in a remote desert community. His was the fourth suicide in that community in a little over 12

months. His death, sudden and unexpected, came the day after a funeral for a previous suicide.

When our young end up in prison, on drugs, lost, confused and even die, we feel the pain of lives suddenly cut short. We experience a wounding of hope, a realisation that the life and energy of those presently young will never be transformed into the knowledge and wisdom of elders. These deaths strike at the heart. They prevent what might be. They threaten the possibility of enjoying a future built upon the past.

This is one reason why NAIDOC week is so needed and important, not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the daily burdens that so many carry, but for all Australians.

The annual NAIDOC awards cover a range of ages and abilities: old and young, scholar and apprentice, elders (male and female), sportspersons and artists. There is also an award for 'lifetime achievement'. It brings together the wise with the energetic, the creative with the imaginative, a wide gathering of experiences, talents and skills. In them we toast a new and promising future built on respect and knowledge of the past.

In NAIDOC week this year let us take some extra time to enjoy the richness of the young and old among us. There are so many Indigenous leaders, scholars, artists and sportspersons to celebrate. We might watch our sportspersons with joyful anticipation of their skills, or engage those artists who draw us back to the land, or listen to musicians such as ARIA award winner Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu. We might send an encouraging message to an Indigenous student, teacher, academic or leader.

This is a week to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life. It makes a powerful statement to those who have recently suffered the loss of a young person: there is a future and it is being built upon the past.