

QLD holiday accommodation standards not good enough

BRICKBATS TO MANY OPERATORS of Queensland's holiday accommodation establishments.

Recently we spent a leisurely four weeks driving from Ningi to Townsville, weaving in and out of our wonderful coastline, to attend our granddaughter's wedding at Airlie Beach.

During that time all accommodation seemed to us to be over-priced, exorbitant in some cases, and in every case, grubby – to put it mildly.

We experienced holes in walls; cobwebs; filthy bins inside and outside; leaves, dirt and rubbish on balconies; no managers on site; mould on wooden towel rails; no linen changes; no basic provisions (milk, tissues); missing light bulbs; electric jugs and toasters that must have been scavenged from a roadside cleanup; an ironing board yes, but no cover (do we have to iron on the metal base these days?); outside furniture too filthy to use; gas barbecues with no gas – or not working anyway; noisy and filthy ceiling fans which were unbalanced and likely unsafe; exposed wiring from ceiling lights (it looked as though someone had started to fit a new globe but was interrupted); and slovenly cleaners.

We are part-pensioners and have difficulty accepting we have to pay, in some cases, \$160 a night for accommodation and accept unserviced rooms, derelict buildings and no service.

As an example, we arrived at our accommodation in Bowen a little early at 1.30pm, and were asked to wait for the room to be serviced. After some time a young man arrived to service the room: a very friendly young man who had obviously had his surfing interrupted. He ran a very casual dry mop over the floors and flushed the toilet ... room serviced!

It seemed to us that accommodation in Queensland caters for workers – those who fly in and fly out, or drive in and drive out – whose employers probably pay or contribute to accommodation costs, and these workers don't care if there is no ironing board cover, there are a few cobwebs here and there, and a few holes in the walls. They don't care if there is mould on the towel rails and no tissues and the electric jug leaks and boiling steam often burns your arm, and the toaster is a little antiquated and works only on a Monday or Wednesday. They don't care if the bins aren't emptied and spew their contents on the ground, and the stairwells are covered in dirt and leaves and there are no on-site managers. They work long and hard during the day, enjoy an hour or so of the idyllic surroundings of their accommodation in the evening, and go home for the weekends.

As I said at the beginning, brickbats to the operators of Queensland's accommodation establishments. The next time we plan a holiday, our dollars will probably be spent offshore. □

Seniors' PM rating reverses



Prime Minister Julia Gillard

THE 55-PLUS AGE GROUP has always been more likely than other groups to disapprove of the Prime Minister, by a gap of about 10 points.

However, since June of this year this has changed. The gap between has disappeared and the 55-plus group has increased its approval rating more rapidly than any other group and is now in line with the overall trend.

Why is this so? What criteria do the 55-plus use to make their evaluations? What has happened since June to cause such a rapid upward shift of approval?

Has anyone some answers? If so, please email them to us at opso@zipworld.com.au. We have some highly interested researchers. □

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Online fun for over-50s

THE INTERNET IS NOT just for the younger generation, with many people over 50 now spending time at a computer looking for websites they enjoy and that have been designed to meet their needs.

Born in the Fifties (for all those born in the 1950s) and Born in the Forties (for everyone born in the 1940s, '30s & '20s) are two such websites that many are discovering are fun to visit, contain lots of great information and are easy to use.

It is an enjoyable experience to look through the pages on both websites as they offer a range of topics which deal with life today, as well as offer an opportunity to remember life growing up in a time very different to today. It was a time when it was safe for children to play in the street, only coming home when it got dark.

The idea of the websites is for visitors to enjoy reading the interesting comments posted so far and then to contribute some comments as well. This is what makes them so interesting and visitors come back regularly to read the new comments.

The hints and tips pages also contain a treasure trove of relevant information and the daily sudoku and crossword puzzles are proving very popular.

It's time to have fun on the internet, sharing fond childhood memories and also having a chat about life today, so next time you are on the internet visit Born in the Fifties and Born in the Forties to see what they offer.

You will find them at:

- Born in the Fifties - www.borninthefifties.com.au
- Born in the Forties - www.bornintheforties.com.au □

- Robyn Edlund

Social and cultural issues emerge on the Gold Coast – Granfriends the solution?

IN THE NORTHERN PART of the Gold Coast region there has been a massive growth in rental accommodation that is more affordable than other areas of the Coast.

This has drawn older people downsizing or moving here from other areas, and families, particularly from New Zealand and of Maori origin. These families tend to be very mobile, moving backwards and forwards between New Zealand and Australia. Often children remain here with friends or relatives to attend school while others skip formal schooling.

The result has been generally a rise in both literacy and behavioural issues for kids of Maori origin. New Zealand has a bilingual language system to incorporate the Maori language into the curriculum, which of course ceases when they move to Queensland. This disrupts both the learning patterns and social behaviours in these kids. A significant number of Maori elders have followed their families to Australia and it is proposed that a Granfriends program, of both Maori elders and older Queenslanders, be established in one of the largest State colleges from Prep to Year 12 to develop a relationship and support network for these kids and older people in the Coomera area. This would provide opportunities for better cultural understanding but also enable the bilingual skills of the Maori people to be retained. □

THE ORIGINS OF EXPRESSIONS

Limelight – In 1816 Thomas Drummond devised a light source for theatres. It was a cylinder of lime heated by an incandescent flame and placed behind a lens or in front of a reflector. These 'lime lights' were very bright, so the star performer was very visible as long as he stood in it. Soon, actors were competing to be in the easily seen limelight. And so any location where many can see you today is called being 'in the limelight'.

Robot – Karl Capek, a Czech playwright was a pioneer in science fiction. He wrote a play during WWI called *R.U.R.*, in which a group of mechanised monsters revolted against their maker. The Czech term for work or drudgery was 'robot', and so Capek shortened his characters to be 'robots'. □

How caring is your carer?

AS MOST OF US can expect to age in place at home, the need for a carer might eventually arise. Existing HACC services and packages of care such as CACP and EACH are all very well but only deliver a limited number of hours of care, and, in the absence of close family, a private carer might be desirable.

John from Brisbane recently advertised in the paper for a full time carer to look after an elderly female relative and found one who seemed to be perfect. She told him that she used to work in an aged care facility but left because she disliked the way that the residents were treated.

He hired her and, although she always appeared to be kind and caring of her elderly charge, she managed to quietly steal some \$50,000 over the course of a year.

John discovered this by accident, sacked the carer and involved the police. It was subsequently revealed that this lady had a long history of financially abusing the elderly people she cared for.

Had John been more aware of the questions to ask, police checks, appropriate precautions to take to protect assets and so on, he might never have hired this particular woman.

He is now keen to raise awareness of the potential for private carers to take a lot of liberties. Of course, most private carers are wonderful, kind and extremely honest but there are always a few who exploit the vulnerable people they look after. These are the ones we need to be on the lookout for. □

- Rose Marwick,
Elder Abuse Preventions Unit

Strata laws must change for Sydney's urban future

THE CURRENT STRATA LAWS in NSW must be amended so that 75% of owners of apartments can ensure that substandard buildings can be significantly refurbished or sold to allow redevelopment, says the Urban Taskforce.

"The current law that requires 100% of strata members to agree on a sale is stopping the renewal of ageing apartment buildings and their replacement by new building stock," says Urban Taskforce CEO Chris Johnson.

"Around the world there are lower percentages for body corporates to agree to a building sale with the UK having an 80% requirement and Singapore's collective sale model requiring 80% for buildings over 10 years old.

"The current NSW law has a 75% requirement for a Special Resolution and this would seem to be an appropriate percentage to allow the termination of a strata scheme."

"We cannot let one or two apartment owners, in an old and decaying building, hold the rest of the owners to ransom by requiring an inflated sale price. Clearly, all owners must achieve a fair price on an equal basis related to the amenity of the apartment.

"The NSW strata system led the world when it was introduced in 1961 but it is in need of updating.

"It is important for all apartment owners to understand that they are part of a system of collective decision making, which is quite different to owning an individual lot of land with its own house.

"Sydney, according to the 2011 census, already has 27.6% of households as apartments and this is likely to increase as more people want to live closer to work and to amenities.

"By 2031 apartments could be up to 50% of all Sydney households.

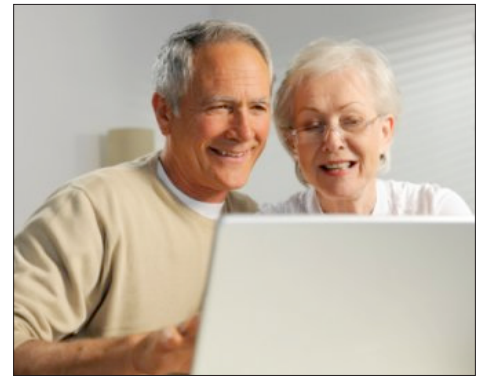
"In the 1960's and 1970's many substandard strata flat buildings were built that have now reached their use-by date. They need to be demolished to allow the next generation of well-designed apartments to replace them in new urban consolidation precincts. The city's future must not be determined by a few greedy individuals wanting to hold out for a lottery-like windfall.

"The Urban Taskforce is supportive of the discussion paper issued by the Department of Fair Trading and believes that the long term future of Sydney's built form must not be compromised by remaining with the 100% requirement for terminating existing strata schemes," Mr Johnson said. □

– The Urban Taskforce is a property-development industry group, representing property developers and equity financiers

Estate planning in the computer age

BRISBANE SENIORS ONLINE (BSOL) is a not-for-profit organisation that provides affordable computer training for seniors and over-50's of the Greater Brisbane area.



This is usually offered as one-on-one training in your own home, on your own computer, using volunteer unpaid mentors. However, in certain areas of Brisbane, training is offered in small classes as well. This is suitable for people who do not yet own a computer or prefer a class environment. One-on-one training is also available in our Brisbane City Training Office (CTC).

Training is available on Windows, Apple computers and Android devices – as well as a diverse range of new technology including iPhones, iPads, iPods and navigational aids. In addition, training is available in some types of software and applications.

BSOL also have active Digital Camera, Video Photography, Apple User groups open to all learners and volunteer mentors as well as a specialised Mentor Support Group. These meet monthly.

Guest speakers and computer experts also run special group training and information sessions in the CTC in the city on a diverse range of topics. These can include practical demonstrations of new hardware and equipment as well as programs.

Depending on the complexity of the topic, advanced users or beginners may be invited to attend. Recent topics included Internet and Identity Fraud; Online Taxation Completion; Estate Planning in the Computer Age; Online Banking and an Introduction to Apple Devices.

Seniors living at home can experience social isolation. BSOL can assist in helping them become more computer savvy and confident and this can help minimise social isolation, with them being able to communicate with relatives and friends all over the world, exchange photographs and use Skype and VOIP to video chat – at no cost.

BSOL is always looking for new learners across Brisbane as well as more volunteer mentors to keep this great work going. Mentors receive additional training and workshop sessions at no cost, and mentors join BSOL at no cost. There is great satisfaction in becoming a mentor and in giving something back to the community.

For more information phone 3210 6983 or see www.bsol.asn.au □

– Dick Bennett

Qld body corporate fee change: small-unit fees to soar

TENS OF THOUSANDS of small-unit owners in Queensland fear their body corporate fees will double under the State Government's proposed legislation for body corporate fee structures.

In NSW and Victoria property surveyors calculate body corporate rates via a combination of unit size and value.

However, Queensland has applied a principle of 'equality', and this complicated fee structure has been significantly altered three times since 1997. If passed, this new legislation will affect about 41,000 unit owners.

In a round of court cases since then, fees structures originally set by developers have been changed. For some larger-unit holders, fees up to 300 percent the average in

the block have been slashed to about 120 percent, while the fees of smaller-unit holders have soared.

In 2011, the Bligh government altered the laws – praised by small-unit owners and, consequently, condemned by 'penthouse' owners – by allowing a single unit owner to overturn a court decision on the distribution of fees.

People in 130 blocks took advantage of this precedent. Queensland Attorney-General Jarrod Bleijie proposes to scrap that option and change it back.

The Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 will be presented for debate in Parliament in November.

Ray Asher chronicles the dilemmas of two victims of these proposed unit fee changes:

CASE STUDIES

The retired policeman

JOHN (not his real name) lives in an apartment building on the Gold Coast. John told me his story and he is a very worried older man.

John should not have to worry alone. He shouldn't be made to worry at all. This story is one of what must be thousands that are resulting from the Attorney-General's proposed new legislation, which will cause huge fee increases to many high-rise unit owners.

John is an 81-year-old retired policeman who is being ignored by his local MP John Paul Langbroek. There have been no return phone calls for this senior citizen, who spent his entire career serving the community. All John wanted was to ask Mr Langbroek (the local member for whom he voted) was: "Please help me."

John wants to live the rest of his life in his unit – the one he carefully researched and bought so the body corporate fees would remain affordable for the rest of his relatively short life.

Like thousands of unit owners living on a pension, John is worried about the proposed legislation announced by the Attorney General. John's fees will increase and make his home unaffordable and impossible to sell at a price that would enable him to live the last years of his life in reasonable comfort.

When John purchased his third-

floor unit 10 years ago, his fees were \$49.70 per week. The new legislation will increase John's weekly fee to approximately \$150. Currently John is paying \$4,700 per annum and estimates his fees will increase to \$7,200 per annum.

The new legislation rationalises the body corporate fees over all units so a penthouse would get a huge reduction and a unit like John's would cop a huge increase.

Let's sum this up: say there are four units on John's floor and under the new legislation that floor would pay fees of approximately \$28,800 a year. Startlingly, there is only one penthouse unit – comprising two floor levels *and* a pool – and under the proposed legislation its fees would fall to approximately \$10,000 per annum.

John is deeply distressed over what may happen should this legislation be enacted, and feels that he will be forced to sell his much-loved home, a place where he has made many friends.

John's said: "Premier Newman and the Attorney-General should not this pass this new legislation."

He will certainly never vote for Mr Langbroek again, and his warning for unit buyers – both occupiers and investors – is "Beware!"

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The 83-year-old widow

BELLE (not her real name) will not be able to afford to live in her unit because the Attorney-General's proposed legislation is horribly

inequitable and grossly favours penthouse owners.

Belle is a widow who is 83 years old. She lives alone in her first-floor apartment.

After a great deal of consideration and careful budget planning – and assessing the body corporate fees and related expenses – decided that she could manage to live in her apartment on the Gold Coast. She worked out that even allowing for inflation and market fluctuations, this plan would last for the rest of her life. Belle purchased the apartment in 1989, when she was 70.

This year the Attorney-General has proposed legislative changes for November which threaten to force Belle from her home. As an aged pensioner Belle fears that she will not be able to afford to live in her apartment for the final years of her life.

Belle has assessed that her body corporate fee will be increased and that her new cost will be between one to one-and-a-half times her pension cheque.

What is the LNP thinking? These are not the intentions of a government that values its older citizens.

It looks like those who can afford a penthouse lifestyle will be even better off.

Where will Belle be living next year? □

By Sally Jones

WHEN WE WERE GROWING UP we were taught to respect our elders, royalty, bureaucrats and the police. Is it any wonder that the under-30s today have none, when they see all aspects of the media maligning, castigating – and worse – our current Prime Minister who, when you look at the governance of this country, is only a few steps down from Royalty.

In 1588 Queen Elizabeth I said: "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too."

In 1891 Louise Lawson said: "Whatever a woman does or is, she is criticised. The most innocuous qualities could be twisted to show her in a bad light ... if she is vivacious and enjoys social life she is a 'flirt' or a 'gadabout'; if she is quiet and of a more serious turn of mind she is 'withdrawn' or 'stupid'. Through such sneers in conversation, writings, jokes and cartoons, contempt for women was handed down from one generation to the next... It was time... for some systematic analysis of this constant crusade of the newspapers here in Sydney and all over the civilised world... habitual belittlement leads women to mistrust themselves and silently tolerate jests against womanhood"

It's 2012 – why are women still being put down? Shouldn't something have changed by now?

Julia Gillard is doing a very difficult job leading a minority government that already has got more than 300 pieces of legislation passed.

It's not unusual for Australia to have a minority government. In fact there have been 14 such governments since federation, led by prime ministers Barton, Deakin, Watson, Reid, Fisher, Scullin, Menzies, Fadden, Curtin and Gillard.

A minority government is a legitimate government – yet a capable female prime minister is subject to a fierce and gender-biased attack; the waters have been deliberately muddied around climate change science by politically motivated groups intent on destroying this minority government and its carbon price legislation; the reporting by large sections of our media is blatantly skewed – we should not be accepting this vitriol and abuse of our political discourse, this way of life!

Rather than accepting what the media are saying, when you know in your own mind that Prime Minister Gillard is actually doing a good job, stand up. Voice your support for a woman doing (what men see) as a man's job. Show your respect.

Quotes

"Democracy is a process, not a static condition, rather than being. It can be easily lost, but it is never finally won."

– William H Hastie 1904-1976

"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."

– Alice Walker, Pulitzer prize winner
(Source: *A Switch in Time* by Mary Crooks)

When is Christmas?

CHRISTMAS TIME is around the corner. Celebrating the birth of the Christ Child happens all over the world ... or does it?



In some countries, in the midst of conflict or financial crisis, to many it will be just another day.

To many pensioners it will also be 'just another day'. Pensioners who can barely afford to feed themselves will encounter the excruciating embarrassment of being unable to buy their children, grandchildren or great grandchildren presents. Gone are the days when knitted gifts or embroidered hankies were acceptable, expectations today run across a totally different spectrum.

Pensioners have their pride and prefer to be seen to be coping with life.

Families who invite their elders for lunch or dinner have expectations of them bringing something in the way of gifts or food.

There are many pensioners who will tell people they will be away for Christmas and just lock themselves in their homes to avoid the embarrassment.

Attending a charity lunch lets everyone know how one is placed.

Politicians blame the pokies, cigarettes or grog for pensioners' lack of budgeting skills, very few blame the government for a pension that is too low. How about a Christmas bonus for all pensioners and unemployed?

Do you still enjoy this time of year or does it give you nightmares?

Recipe

Mars Bar Slices

Ingredients:

- 75g butter, 3 Mars Bars,
- 3 cups of Rice Bubbles

Method:

1. Break up Mars Bars and melt with butter, stirring constantly.
2. Pour over Rice Bubbles. Press into tin lined with baking paper.
3. Set and cut into squares or bars.

– from Sally's Recycled Slices ☐

Community crime and its effect on seniors aged 60-plus (Part 2)

By Bill Benson

THIS NOW BRINGS ME to list a number of ways that minimise your exposure to the previous listed 'criminal' acts.

Fit quality security screens on windows and access doors. Ensure that these screens open outwards – this is a priority in case of fire so there is an avenue for escape. The fitting of bars on windows can be a hazard and is not recommended.

Security locks on windows and doors – note that many older types of locks can be opened from the outside using items such as credit cards or other flexible materials.

Don't leave door and windows unlocked, even when you are home or in the garden. There have been many cases reported of entry being gained via an unlocked door while the owner is working in the garden and concentrating on tasks such as weeding, pruning or mowing. Within minutes of gaining entry your valuables, money, jewels, watches and the like are in the pockets of an intruder and they are leaving by the front door. A good habit is to always lock that rear door and keep the key in your pocket.

Report anything suspicious to your local police. Always keep contact numbers of your neighbours, local police station and so on near each telephone.

When reporting suspected fraud or possible criminal acts use your local police or someone who can take action on your behalf. In my position as a Justice of the Peace of many years' standing, I have often been approached in relation to suspected 'rip-offs' and fraud.

Rip-offs include overcharging, paying for items and services not delivered and so on.

When shopping or walking for exercise go with a friend if possible and be aware of people around you. / Secure your handbag over your shoulder, don't leave it in your shopping trolley. A man's wallet in his hip pocket is an invitation to a pickpocket. Try to keep your wallet in a secure pocket that can be buttoned or zipped shut.

Don't leave items of value in plain sight inside your vehicle, even if you have locked it.

When driving, observe the road rules, don't wind down your window more than 2cm/1" to speak to annoyed or aggrieved drivers. Where possible have a mobile phone in sight and use it if you feel threatened.

When driving on your own never pick up hitchhikers.

Finally, don't lock yourself away or let these social misfits curtail your pleasures. All seniors have the right to participate in community activities.

Be aware and take any steps necessary to minimise your exposure to those individuals who wish to take advantage of a lack of action.

Till then, take care – regards, Bill. ☐

Granfriends Craft Ideas

Christmas tree for table



YOU WILL NEED:

- tree branch (privet is good but not necessary)
 - plaster of Paris (available from hardware stores)
 - fruit tin or plant pot the size of a tin
 - tin spray paint (colour of your choice)
 - Basket or plant pot in which to stand your finished tree.
1. Remove small twigs and leaves from your branch.
 2. Mix Plaster of Paris with water in fruit tin or pot.
 3. Stand bottom of your tree in tin and support until set.
 4. Leave 24 to 48 hours to dry completely.
 5. Spray paint your tree and base the colour of your choice. To stop overspray, do this in a box.
 6. When dry, place tree in container and decorate.

This tree can be made any size you wish.

We hope you have fun making this!

– Blanche O'Connor