

QLD government acknowledges older drivers

By Val French

IT IS ENCOURAGING to report that the new Queensland Government is making people transport a priority.

First, the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, Scott Emerson, went to the people for their opinions on the findings and recommendations of the Task Force that had been working for more than a year collecting worldwide research on older drivers.

This has been followed by the establishment of a committee made up of a broad representation of disability organisations and taxi-driver spokespeople to look into the transport problems of those with a severe disability that makes public transport impossible.

The other committee is the new advisory committee on public transport.

This fledging committee recently met for the first time, well represented by people with years of experience in researching the needs and problems of public transport.

As one of those serving on these committees I would like to thank the new government and the ministers involved, for these important committees.

Mr Emerson, who is the Member for Indooroopilly, gave all committee representatives a fair hearing, and he also showed that he had researched the topic extremely well.

He acknowledged that older drivers have a wealth of experience which makes them safer on the motorways.

Over the next 20 years the number of elderly drivers (70 and over) is predicted to triple in Australia.

In 1970, for every 100 Australians aged 15-24 (which captures our young drivers) there were 17 Australians aged 75 or more. By 2010 this had risen to 46, and by 2050 it will be 106. As age increases, older drivers generally become more conservative on the road.

The argument for stricter controls for older drivers has some validity, because cognitive and physical ability decline with age. However, ageing takes place at different rates in different people, and in different ways.

Recent research has found that most older people showed little or no cognitive decline over a 20-year period, while those who did exhibited a rapid decline.

Furthermore, even the oldest age groups of drivers have lower crash rates than our youngest drivers.

Focusing our attention on ways to take older drivers off the road is short-sighted, given the ageing of Australia's population.

The State Government has taken this research on board and we are expecting intelligent and all-encompassing approach to any changes in transport legislation. □



A message from the *Life Times* team ...

WE HOPE YOU'VE ENJOYED our newspaper this year, and we hope it will become bigger and better with time – so please let us know your likes and dislikes.



Better still, if you'd like to contribute any copy at all – news, a personal story, humour etc. – please contact us via the OPSO website. We've made this issue a much longer read for the holidays, and we wish you all the best for this festive season. **Happy New Year!**

Isolation and neglect, highlighted by Christmas expectations

AGNES (not her real name), aged 78, phoned the Elder Abuse Helpline to complain about her grown-up children who abuse her psychologically, fail to visit or call her, and blame her for everything that has gone wrong in their lives.

Agnes told the Helpline worker that she had three children and a very difficult marriage, verging on domestic violence towards her and the children. Eventually she had the support and the courage to leave her husband and since then has worked very hard to bring up and educate her children.

Her adult children often saw their father, who still blamed her for the marriage and family break-up. The younger daughter communicated with her occasionally but the other two – a daughter and a son – have stopped communication all together, and when she phoned them they would not allow the grandchildren even to talk with her. She made a point of sending the grandchildren birthday and Christmas presents but never heard back from them to confirm that they have received them.

Agnes said she felt shame about her children's behaviour and was ridden with guilt, blaming herself and thinking that she must have been a very bad mother to deserve it. Agnes said she had a few friends and she was involved with a volunteering organisation to keep busy, so usually she managed quite well. However, she added, with the approach of Christmas and the build-up of expectations of what it was supposed to mean for families, she felt the loneliness and the pain carving into her heart.

We spoke with Agnes about her strengths and how hard it must have been for her to take the children away from the abusive husband and father, to dedicate her life to her children's wellbeing and to protect them from feeling angry or resentful towards their father. After all she has gone through it did not harden her and she was still a very caring and loving person. We also spoke of the reality of Christmas and that unfortunately it was not the expected joyous period for many people with or without families.

We explained that there was no specific Elder Abuse legislation in Queensland, although Elder Abuse could be addressed through various existing legislation when relevant to the situation. However, it was impossible to legislate for every human behaviour. Therefore we suggested that Agnes could benefit from a few counselling sessions because, although people can't change other people's behaviour, they can change how they themselves feel about it and how they react to it. By changing their own reaction to the abusive behaviour they could break the cycle of expected reactions and that could change the abuser's behaviour as well. Agnes could access Lifeline's face-to-face counselling, other organisations' counselling, or get a referral from her General Practitioner for up to 12 sessions on Medicare with a psychologist. We also encouraged Agnes to continue her contact with her grandchildren, broaden her social networks, join a group of interest and believe that people can change – although it could take some time. Merry Christmas to you all! ☐

For confidential support, information and referrals please call the Uniting Care Community's Elder Abuse Helpline 1300 651 192 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

– Maya Zetlin, Senior Project Officer
Elder Abuse Prevention Unit
Uniting Care Community

In 'locus parentus'?

with Maida Lilley

MY LIFETIME CAREER was as a teacher, when I held as sacred the place of the school in providing safety for pupils, with teachers being legally in *locus parentus* (in place of parents).

The horrific news from Connecticut in the US, of a mass shooting of young children and teachers in a school was deeply distressing. I had done psychological testing in schools in New England and visited them Illinois and California when I was a graduate student, and later I was invited into kindergartens and primary schools in Alabama where I shared wonderful books by Australian writers. I was back there in thought as I took in the news.

What a terrible situation for the community of the school with so many families in mourning, and the nation and the world reacting with shock to such unnecessary carnage.

With real-time reporting across the globe, thinking people reacted instantly. One commentator was reported on several channels saying: "It is deplorable that no one in the school had a weapon to defend them." Pardon? This was in reply to the third major gun attack in the US this year! Surely this is a most inappropriate reaction – so different from that of President Obama who said: "Our hearts are broken. As a nation we have had too many of these."

One can only hope and pray that the revulsion felt by teachers, parents and lookers-on worldwide will bring about the passing of realistic gun control to a nation desperately in need of it.

I am reminded of a National Seniors Zone Conference held at the time of the senseless mass murder at Port Arthur in Tasmania. The assembled delegates refused to close the conference until the CEO agreed to break with formal year-long processes to release to the media a strong condemnation that called for sensible gun control in the name of National Seniors. In Australia PM John Howard moved swiftly to bring this about. ☐

A personal story of an amazing 5-year battle with cancer

On being confronted with my serious challenge, I would have appreciated something like these following words...

WE CAN FIND BROCHURES on the symptoms, even on the treatments and possible side effects, but rarely are we informed about the emotions, or 'feelings' and of the mysteries, as we actually experience the treatments.

Maybe knowing how it was for me could be of some help to others facing a similar challenge. I have recorded this for that very purpose, although no two people will experience things in the same way.

It was in November 2008 that I received some great news about my health. I turned up for my regular (by now, it was six-monthly) check for the cancer that had been diagnosed in 2003. After the usual checks, Dr B sat back and said: "Well, that's the five years, congratulations!"

How it began

In May 2003, when I was 76 and in very good health (except for the inevitable arthritis in the knees), I had been experiencing pain in the lower back, which, over a five-week period had moved up to my shoulder blades. Eventually, I consulted my GP, who sent me for a blood test. She told me that I had lymphoma. I knew nothing about lymphoma, except that I thought it was a form of cancer. She said: "Yes, but these days it can be treated with tablets."

This was somewhat comforting but, on reflection, was a little unrealistic at such an early stage and with so many more tests to undergo. I realised that I was facing something that could be fatal. I would have appreciated information about lymphoma and treatment possibilities. To date, I had been fortunate in having no major medical problems, so I found myself thinking about the many others who have been through similar serious illnesses – why should it be any different for me?

Next was an X-ray of the chest, then ultrasound, then a CT Scan and an endoscopy, and two small biopsies.

I was then referred to Dr B, a haematology and oncology specialist, who arranged my admission to hospital for a further series of tests.

My only hospitalisations had been for the birth of my three children and for an appendectomy when I was 50, so it was all new.

I was in a room with three other ladies, all in various stages of treatment for cancer, one of whom had been returning again and again, over a period of 12 years. Another for a couple of years, while the third had just been in treatment for a few months. All were cheerful, which seemed incredible, considering what they were going through. That was good for me, because I was over the shock and could predict what was probably ahead, so was able to look at this in one of two ways – did I have

the strength to stay positive and try to be cheerful, or could I give in and feel sorry for myself? Although the second option was tempting, there wasn't much choice. If I was going to survive, I must meet the challenge head-on and being positive is an important part of that.

By now it was August 4 and, as an inpatient, my first visit by Dr B brought the realities of the diagnosis. I had non-Hodgkins lymphoma in the stomach. He explained what tests I would be having and was quite open to questions. I was yet to learn the type of questions to ask, but I made a good stab at it and learned a lot. There was a CT scan, which was not too scary – just the dye injection and then lying still for the scan. (I hesitated in including this next part, but I think it is important) – the nurse said: "The dye will cause a warm feeling through your body and you may feel as if you have wet yourself, but that it would be all right because that will not happen." She was right and I so much appreciated her telling me.

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Now, when I see that bright purple colour, I immediately recall those sessions

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Then in preparation for a gallium scan, I was given an I.V. injection of gallium 67 citrate. This meant nothing to me, other than it made my body radioactive for about seven days. The radiologist assured me that I would not glow in the dark. (What a shame! If we go through all that, we should have something dramatic to show for it.)

The serum was going through my body from top to toe and attaching to the cancer cells, which would then show up in the full body scan three days later ... amazing! One has to lie motionless for about 20 minutes while the scan goes the full length of the body, then another 16 minutes, to move around the upper torso and again, around the lower torso. It seemed best to relax and think of pleasant things. I also had a bone-marrow biopsy (under anaesthetic), which wasn't too bad, although I was uncomfortable for a couple of weeks. It is well worth it, as knowing the extent of the cancer allows the treatment plan to be adjusted.

I didn't know that these three tests were to be repeated every three months for the first couple of years, then every six months.

A week later I was admitted to have keyhole surgery on my stomach, by Dr M, taking biopsies from four sites, transforming my navel. Next week I was again admitted when Dr W inserted a Port-a-cath under the skin near the collarbone.

This is carried out under local anaesthetic and links to the large vein to be switched open to accept the chemotherapy, instead of continually having a cannula inserted. It could also be used for anything that needed to go in, or be drawn out of the vein, such as an injection for nausea, to take blood, or a blood transfusion. I also

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had an echo-cardiogram (an ultrasound of the heart). A day later I had my first chemotherapy (through the Port-a-cath). Very interesting ... the specially trained nurse wears a bright-purple gown and purple gloves and everything goes into a purple 'garbag'. Even my wrist band was purple ... pretty! Now, when I see that bright purple colour, I immediately recall those sessions.

Dr B told me that it was a nasty type of lymphoma because they could not operate on the stomach, like they could if it was under the arm or in the neck. He said that there was an 80% to 85% chance of getting rid of the cancer cells, and a 50% chance of a total cure. When questioned on how many years before I could expect to be clear, he said that if I was clear of symptoms for five years, they would call it a cure. That was hopeful, as I had thought it would be at least 10 years. I decided that, if I had 'one foot in the grave', so to speak, I would be really positive and lean heavily on the other foot that was on solid ground.

Twelve days after I had my first chemo, my hair started coming out. It was such an awful feeling. When I picked up my wig, I went straight to the hairdresser and had all my hair cut off ... much better than finding chunks of hair in the shower or on the pillow. I made a satin head-cap to wear to bed. Apart from keeping out the cold, it would eventually protect the new fragile hair growth.

For me, the hair loss was one of the hardest things to face, even comparing it with the pain, nausea and weakness. I was very self-conscious about the wig: Was it obvious? Were people staring, or laughing at me? Would a strong wind blow it off? I couldn't use bobby pins – nothing to which I could pin it. Being very good with hair, I always combed it up before each wearing, so it looked fairly natural. I shopped around and bought another wig that was more like my real hair – worth the \$200 that it cost. It felt like a beanie on my head, but was not too hot, as there wasn't any hair underneath. I crocheted a cotton skull-cap to fill the space between the scalp and the wig, making it feel more secure.

The side effects of the chemo were very difficult. Firstly, there was the nausea and vomiting ... I felt so very sick, but living alone, I only had to care for myself. How much more difficult for younger people who have a family to look after. Of course it affects everyone differently.

Although the bed looked very inviting, one cannot just lie around all day. I would make a supreme effort every day, to apply make-up, dress up and go to the organisation (where I was a volunteer). It was just five minutes walk (when I was well) but, at that time, I was too weak to walk that distance and get back again. So I would drive down, sign a few cheques, or sometimes have some lunch and drive back to 'crash' on the bed. Such a small activity, yet it seemed a mammoth task, although I did benefit from the determination to go out each day.

I was allergic to one of the ingredients in the cocktail mix of my chemo and I developed a very red rash on my arms and legs and to a lesser extent, on my face. I was really grateful that it did not itch, but it looked terrible and although it was summer, I wore long sleeves and slacks, especially when travelling by bus. Dr B withdrew that ingredient thereafter. However, the rash did not disappear immediately. The dermatologist prescribed oil in which to bathe three times a day, followed by an application of Sorboline cream. My eyebrow hair had fallen out and it took a while before I realised why my eyebrow pencil would not go on, let alone stay on, so from then on, I kept the cream off the eyebrow area.

It was the strangest feeling to also lose my eyelashes and I was pleased that I always wore glasses, as it seemed like protection. Surprisingly, the eyelashes were the last to go and the first to regrow.

“ ... the hair loss was one of the hardest things to face, even comparing it with the pain, nausea and weakness

Another side effect was loss of finger and toe nails. The nails couldn't just fall out like the hair. It took a long time for the damaged nails to grow out, being pushed by the new growth. Slowly, the new nails took over; however, the little toe on one foot grew back 'cobbled up' – (that is probably the wrong description) – and it was very sore. I consulted my GP and he referred me to a podiatrist, who worked on it and after a few visits, it was back to normal. The outcome and good side, is that I now have regular appointments with the podiatrist – such luxury! My white blood cell count dropped to a very low level, putting my body at risk, as I had no immune system, so I spent some days in 'isolation'. A nurse asked if I was lonely, but who wants company when one is vomiting all the time? I appreciated those days alone.

I was to shower three times daily, using Phisohex Anti-Bacterial wash and I was to press the buzzer for a nurse to do my back. Nobody told me the location of the button and I assumed it would be in the shower, but who wears their glasses into the shower? The button was out of my line of vision under the grab rail, so I pressed the only buzzer I could see, a large yellow one. People ran from everywhere. I had pressed the emergency button, (just to have my back washed).

How embarrassing! When I apologised to the nurse, she was gracious enough to say that the practice is good for them. Apparently, it wasn't a first.

The isolation occurred twice during the time of my treatment and I also had six bags of blood over two transfusions. Thank goodness for the Port-a-cath.

I experienced a wryneck (wrick in my neck, I called it), which I assumed was from a pillow in a motel (I had gone to my granddaughter's wedding in Kingaroy). Then my upper arm had a shooting pain when I reached up. I consulted my GP and she could not find a cause, but gave me a letter for my appointment with Dr B on the following day.

He discovered a large blood clot. There was some

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urgency and I went directly to Radiology for an ultrasound. I was then admitted to hospital and sent smartly to theatre to have the Port-a-cath removed (again under local anaesthetic) ... it was the obvious culprit. It hurt more coming out than it did going in ... it was like having a tooth extracted, because it seemed to have become a part of me. I had been told that it sometimes creates an infection or a blood clot I guess the clot was better than an infection. I was put on a drip of heparin for about a week and without the Port-a-cath, it was back to cannulas, for that and for the chemo. I was to be prescribed Warfarin for the next four months.

These events will not be in chronological order, as I was not rigid in recording everything as it was happening, because I didn't start out with the intention of writing this. However, this next event was of major significance.

Earlier in the treatment plan, MabThera was introduced. Dr B explained it as being administered intravenously, the first time requiring constant monitoring by a special nurse, who would be with me the whole four hours it was to take, every 15 minutes, increasing the strength. If I had a negative reaction, it would continue, but stay at that level. I did not have any reactions. There would be four treatments over four weeks and luckily, with no side effects! The MabThera (serum) would go through my body and wrap itself around the cancer cells, allowing my own immune system to find and kill them.

Absolute magic!

I clearly recall Dr B saying: "Imagine how many thousands of mice were used in all the research to discover this treatment!" (Only someone in the profession would think of it in that sense!) I can also wonder about it now, believing that it was the MabThera, in conjunction with the chemo therapy, that led to my recovery. When I was not an in-patient, I attended the out-patients clinic for the chemo, which was fortnightly and the Mab-Thera, which was weekly.

Once again, I don't recall in what order, but just on Christmas, my X-rays showed something on my lung, although I felt OK. Dr H took a biopsy and it was eventually diagnosed as pneumocystis. I did not have any idea what that is, but later discovered that it is the name of a 'bug' causing pneumonia, seen in immune-suppressed patients. I had medication, which was monitored over a few months, and eventually it cleared.

Over a period from July to February, I was hospitalised a total of 13 times. Mostly it was for just three or four days, but sometimes a week or two, although I was not confined to bed. The nursing care was very good, but it did seem as if I was living in another world. I could take a walk around the corridor of the two adjoining wards and although it was slow going when I wasn't feeling well, it speeded up on the days I was stronger. It was good to be able to get out of the room. I

found it a good idea to leave a note on my pillow, so my whereabouts were known.

A couple of times I asked for, and was granted, a few hours leave. Once I took a taxi home and did some personal washing and the other time, my grandson picked me up and we went to lunch. My final discharge from hospital was in February 2004 and then began the round of tests every three months.

The regrowth of my hair began a few months after my last chemo session. People had told me that it would probably grow back curly and a different colour. I thought that would be a real bonus and was looking forward to it, but no such luck. It was exactly the same ... baby fine, straight and the same colour. Although, maybe it was a little less grey.

I discovered that most people don't know if they should mention the word cancer, so I was quite open and tried to make them feel comfortable. I would share the diagnosis and immediately talk about the magic of the treatment. I found this to be acceptable; being open certainly helped me to remain cheerful and reinforce my determination to look on the bright side. It also seemed to encourage others to respond in a positive way.

A friend suggested that I include an occurrence that I had shared with her and that I had almost forgotten. I hope it will be helpful to others who may be confronted with a decision on whether or not to withhold information from someone who is experiencing a major health crisis.

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... understand that because a person has a severe medical condition, it does not alter their intelligence

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Try to understand that because a person has a severe medical condition, it does not alter their intelligence. Therefore it can be very hurtful to be excluded from discussions on issues, not necessarily regarding their health, but that are pertinent to them. No matter how well-intentioned the reason, the person could feel they are being over-protected, left out and treated as a child.

When this happened to me, I felt very hurt, so I spoke to the person, explaining my feelings of hurt and rejection. The person was horrified and very apologetic, but it cleared the air, which is why I took time to recall it.

I didn't realise how much the treatment had taken out of me. I had lost 12kg and felt comfortable at that weight, but I was pretty weak. Once the chemo stopped, the nausea abated and food began to look and smell appetising, I soon put on some weight.

After I was discharged from hospital, I started walking each morning, but was shocked when I could just go around one small block before my legs started to shake (only eight minutes). I did the same eight minutes for three weeks before I increased it by five minutes. I continued increasing it by five minutes every three weeks until I was eventually able to do 30 minutes at a much faster pace.

It felt really good and it certainly proved the wisdom of starting small and gradually increasing the distance and the pace.

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During one of my stays in hospital, a young woman was admitted for a second course of chemotherapy. She had not lost her hair with the first course, but it would not be so with this particular cocktail to come. She was visibly upset after Dr B left. The nurses made an attempt to placate her, by saying that it wasn't anything to worry about, because it would grow back. To dismiss her emotions as trivial was the most unhelpful response, making her more upset.

Her crowning glory was thick and dark with a modern short cut. I went over and spoke with her, sharing that I had felt the same and it was terrible to be bald and very natural to feel upset, saying how much I appreciated the wig,

I would encourage others to be aware of how sensitive and vulnerable people can be in these circumstances, even if normally very confident and efficient.

As time goes on, I keep recalling more and more incidents. During, and for a while after the time of treatment, I was having difficulties in remembering lots of everyday things. Just general things, such as, where did I leave something? Did I do such and such? When I was supposed to pick up friends and left them waiting, missing a meeting, not being able to recall someone's name.

I realise that, at times, this happens to lots of people, but it seemed to be excessive. It created a great deal of concern and I began to think that this could be the beginning of memory loss. I did wonder if the after effects of the treatment may be the cause of what I was going through, but continued to hope that it would

be temporary. As it turned out, it was short-lived and much later, (it could have been a year after treatment finished), I noticed that my memory was back to normal (well, normal for me, anyway). If memory loss is one of the side effects of some treatments, it would have been comforting to have known of that possibility.

Pondering on how this document originated, I repeat:

It was in November 2008 that I received some great news about my health. I turned up for my regular (by now, it was six-monthly) check for the cancer that had been diagnosed in 2003. After the usual checks, Dr B sat back and said: "Well, that's the five years, congratulations!"

What a WOW of a day! He was discharging me. I was really surprised, as I had not been thinking about it at all. I quickly recalled that, at the time of the diagnosis, he had said that if I was clear of symptoms for five years, he would call it a cure. Although he was congratulating me, my only job had been to remain positive and cheerful, continuing with my life as much as possible. I believe the congratulations should be to the brilliance of the researchers in producing the treatments, plus Dr B's knowledge and the decisions he had made on the method of treatment.

It is now a year later – and how quickly we put it all behind. For me, it is good to recall how serious it was and to value my return to normalcy.

Every day I give thanks for those who research, for those who study and practise these treatments, and for the caring staff ... because every day that I am well is a bonus. □

– Ailsa
November 2009

THE ORIGINS OF EXPRESSIONS

Rub the Wrong Way – This saying means to deal with someone insensitively, whether on purpose or by accident. The term goes back to colonial times and wide oak-board floors. Once a week, servants had to wet-rub and then dry-rub these floors. Seems simple? Well, if it wasn't done with the grain, it looked awful because streaks were made. To the owner, this was worse than not doing it at all! And a real embarrassment to any company that came. So a servant was called clumsy or inept by their employer. Today the term means anyone (floors or not) who irritates others by a clumsy word or action.

Another version: To 'Rub [someone] the wrong way' also refers to animals. Take a cat for instance: if you rub it along the way its fur grows (head to tail), it's fine – but if you rub it the wrong way (from tail to head), it gets extraordinarily angry and irritated.

Blue Jeans – Many years ago a heavy cloth was created in Janua (modernly known as Genoa today) and shortened to the term 'jean'. In 1495, King Henry VIII of England bought 262 bolts of it because it didn't wear out quickly and was very prized. It remained its natural shade for years and years until one day a batch was dyed blue and turned over to tailors. For many years, the pants made from this fabric was for men only. Only until women wearing pants became socially acceptable (around WWII)

and later in the 1950s and '60s have jeans become a fashion garment for women as well as men. They are no longer worn for their durability, as today jeans are promoted for being softer and even includes spandex for stretch jeans. In fact, these days they're not even blue...

Beat Around the Bush – This comes from the days of boar hunting when the noblemen hired workers to walk through the woods beating the branches and making noise to get the animals to run towards the hunters. Boars are dangerous animals with razor-sharp teeth – you really did not want to meet them on a one-to-one basis, especially unarmed. So the workers avoided the dense undergrowth where the boar might be and beat around it, rather than going into it. Thus, this evasive technique was termed 'beating around the bush' and today refers anyone who avoids approaching anything directly.

Know Beans – This phrase comes from an old riddle often told in old rural country stores. The question: 'How many blue beans does it take to make 7 white beans?' Do you know? If you don't then you are said to 'not know beans'. The answer is: 7 blue make 7 white. Why? When you peel 7 blue you get 7 white. The term today about 'you don't know beans' refers to anyone who doesn't know anything that should be common sense or general knowledge. □

Love letter to the volunteers running the *Heritage Express*

By Anne Ring

WE'RE COMING UP to the end of the old year, and approaching the beginning of 2013. And thinking about that reminded me of how four of us celebrated the New Year nearly a year ago. We had spotted an advertisement in late 2011, placed by something called the *Heritage Express*, for four days of roaming around the backblocks of NSW being dined and wined on a heritage train, as a way of seeing out 2011 and seeing in 2012. It sounded like a fun thing to do, and very unusual. And with the offer of \$50 off the going price of \$1,495 per person before the 1st of October, we booked it months ahead, looking forward to activities such as exploring remote villages, walking through the Dorrigo Rainforest, going to the Wallabadah Picnic Races, and celebrating New Year's Eve on the train.

What we weren't expecting was the delightful group of Heritage Volunteers who run this service, for the love of old trains. While some of the staff who kept the old diesel train ticking over were paid casual employees, the people who looked after all the activities, the sleeping carriages, the meals, and the bar, were all volunteers, smartly dressed in white shirt and black trousers and bow ties. Mainly male and mainly older, but with a scattering of younger and some females, they did everything, from waiting on the tables to providing extra blankets when needed. And, in a good-humoured and humorous fashion, they made sure that the bus tours ran smoothly, taking us to places that our 50-year-old *Southern Aurora* couldn't get to, and checking that none of the mainly older, all venturesome 100 passengers got left behind. They were friendly and discreet, but happy – if asked – to talk about why they were providing their delightful service and what it was that, variously, got them hooked on trains.

And everything was organised so efficiently that the whole experience ran like the well-oiled machine that we boarded on the evening of the second-last day of 2011. Most people followed the advice of packing light to fit into the limited storage space in the cabins. These, with their bunk beds and tiny ensuites with old-fashioned plumbing, were an instant trip back into nostalgia for those passengers who remembered them from their past, which was most of us. After depositing our bags, we were welcomed in the lounge cars, with champagne and excellent canapés that were a foretaste of the high quality of the food we were served throughout our journey. We also received our name tags (with varying degrees of enthusiasm), and (much more enthusiastically) our meal sitting allocations for dining car, first or second sitting, and table, for the whole trip. This proved to be timed and arranged to work extremely well throughout, for both the waiters and (therefore) the passengers.

Some of the passengers were already train lovers. And some others, like me, have since acquired a newly



Dorrigo Rainforest

found taste for train travel, and are now looking forward to jumping on a train to see what other treasures lie along the line. On this trip, however, as well as some fascinating railside stops, we did venture further afield, with the unique experience – at the end of each day – of having the *Southern Aurora* waiting for us back at the station, like a faithful horse, to take us to the next destination.

Our last day of 2011 was spent mainly in and around the Dorrigo Rainforest and surrounding villages. We were picked up by two Coffs Harbour buses at Urunga, a small and pretty coastal town we hadn't heard of before; and we got to Bellingen Village by late morning, with an hour and a quarter to explore it.

This sounded quite generous, but we discovered that Bellingen had not only some lovely historical buildings and what was probably a fascinating museum, but also some excellent shops that were too seductive for those of us with shopaholic inclinations to resist. And no regrets about that – just the wish that we'd had more time to check out more of the shops, as most of our time was absorbed by the gorgeous old Hammond and Wheatley Emporium. This was a picture, outside and in, with its beautifully preserved historic features and dark

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wood counters. Downstairs was filled with fashionable clothing and knickknacks, while upstairs was a stunning cornucopia of Asian artifacts and colourful furnishings. It turned out, on talking with one of the sales assistants, that the owner is also a shopaholic, with a much bigger purse than ours, and goes overseas each year with the enviable task of stocking his store.

But it was time to go on to the Dorrigo Rainforest, where it was – indeed – raining and misty. But not enough to spoil our enjoyment. We went first of all on the elevated skywalk through the treetops, accompanied by bird song at our elbows, to the viewing platform at the end, where the entire view was blanketed by thick fog. Then we went down into the rainforest itself, and found that there is something quite magical about a rainforest in the rain and mist. The leaves on the myriad of different types of trees gleamed and the tangle of vines looked mysterious in the gloaming. And by the time we emerged, it had stopped drizzling and the mist was evaporating, so we went along the skywalk to the platform again, to find the view unfolding before us as the curtains raised over the lushly forested mountains stretching into the distance.



Green glassware in window of Dorrigo antique shop

After a very good packed lunch that we ate in the picnic area, we got back on the buses to go to Dorrigo Village. And here the shopaholics were faced with frustration when we found that while Dorrigo boasts one of the most tempting second-hand stores that I have ever seen, filled with a hotch-potch of collectables and antiques, it was shut for the holidays. We were restricted to admiring its amazing collection through several large display windows. Moving on from that, further along in the main street the local burghers must – at some time in the past – have decided, quite rightly, that the public toilets would be greatly enhanced if fronted by a cheerful mosaic of the village and surrounding countryside.

We had two other stops on the way back to Coffs Harbour: a detour to see an outdoor rail museum of the future, with a huge collection of old engines and carriages waiting for council approval and funding to be completed (currently sharing the fields with roaming cattle, and a photographer's delight); and a stopover to see a carob factory, a substance I knew virtually nothing



A third of the upstairs area of Bellingin's Hammond and Wheatley store

about and had dismissed as a freaky alternative to chocolate, until a brief talk by a sparky spokeswoman made it sound a whole lot more interesting as a plant, and the samples provided for tasting turned out to taste pretty good.

We saw a bit of the Coffs Harbour harbour at a gallop, and then it was back on 'Old Faithful' to get ready for our New Year's Eve Dinner, preceded by more complementary champagne and canapés. We had a very good night, and I paid for it the next day. Drawing a veil that won't be lifted any further over that, we moved on to the activities planned for Day One of 2012. And they were a treat.

Our first stop, mid-morning, was at Werris Creek, which my travelling companions and I were completely ignorant about and which turned out to be the 'first and last railway town' in NSW, as detailed on a large billboard on its main street. Fascinatingly, what this meant was not only that it was a purpose-built town to service the railway system, but also that it was the first one to be built, and the last one surviving. As a result, it is a town full of train lovers, and has a station with two surprisingly large and very beautiful old buildings, one of which (previously a tea room) has now



Checking out the Dorrigo mosaic

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Uniformed Volunteer next to the Southern Aurora, on Werris Creek Station platform

been converted to a rail museum with an absorbing and varied collection, introduced to us by one of the local volunteers running it. Its beautifully displayed memorabilia include interesting and often touching items that honour a mode of transport and a range of workers to whom – I have to admit – I haven't given much thought until now.

Outside and around the station there are more memorials to these workers, in various ways: intriguing skeletal metal sculptures of men frozen in various railway activities; paving stones naming local railway workers; and banks of walls where the name of every railway worker who can be identified is added in, according to the state where they worked. And the museum staff are always interested in hearing from people who know someone who should be included. There is also a moving plaque to ex-railway worker and Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, the author of the famous 'light on the hill' speech, part of which is reproduced there, and which politicians of various persuasions could do worse than take another (or perhaps, for some, their first) look at.

But by now, more broadly, I was starting to feel that the Heritage Volunteers might well have had a hidden agenda in designing the itinerary of this trip: to convert people to their passion. And, as far as I was concerned, it was working. However, they were careful not to overdo the message, so the next activity took us right away from the railway line, by bus to the Wallabadah Picnic Races. This turned out to be in a beautiful rural setting, with

gentle hills sloping around it, and even forming part of the race track. There was a special marquee set up for us, in the centre of the race course, and there was an arched thoroughway across the track so that interested persons could place their bets with the bookmakers and TAB in the outer perimeter of the course, beyond which one could go and look at the horses waiting for action in the rows of horse stalls.

Never having fully understood how the betting system works, or even what 'each way' means, I found a helpful bookie who explained it all to me, including waiting until the odds were finalised before placing the bets. But it wasn't just the betting that proved interesting. There was the whole atmosphere of the day, which was very much a family affair with lots of children, some of them girls mimicking those of their elders in racing glitz and fascinators, while other people were dressed much more casually. The barbecue and bar did a roaring trade, and even though our lunch was catered for with quartered sandwiches and nibblies, there were those of us who couldn't resist the lure of a hot sausage sandwich.

The races finished near our marquee, but the starting points varied with the length of the race, and gradually moved closer to where we were. So we were able to see the complications of preparing for the start of a race, with the handlers buckling on kick-proof vests, and to have the thrill of the horses bursting out of the starting gates. And then, there was the betting. I decided on a system, sort of, based on the jockeys' past performances. And this proved to be a real winner on the first race. But not at all on the rest of the races. So I got the experience of the failed gambler, hoping that the next one would come in. My travelling companions were a whole lot more successful, with their diverse methods of horse picking, and had the fun of winning intermittently. And we all agreed that it wasn't hard to see, either way, how addictive gambling could become. And found the fine print at the bottom of the betting slips, warning about the possibility of problem gambling somewhat ironic.

After a very full day, and good dinner on the train at the end of it, some of us had forgotten that there was one more activity planned before bedtime, and we were almost tired enough to forgo that. Which would have been a pity, as it proved to be a delightfully surreal way of winding up our taste of rural NSW. This was a visit to the 'famous Walcha Road Hotel for an after-dinner drink'. While there were those amongst us who had never heard of this famous hotel, and also those of us who were still eschewing anything remotely alcoholic, most of us went anyway.

This involved getting off at the tiny station, into total darkness, in what felt like the middle of nowhere – surrounded by bush with no street lights or buildings to be seen. It turned out that the hotel was on the other side of the tracks. Which we couldn't get to, as the engine was parked across the pedestrian crossing over the tracks. So the engine driver obligingly reversed the train, which was a dramatic sight in itself, and we crossed over, with the help of torch lights held by the Volunteers.

Still, everything was in darkness, as we picked our

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way down the unsealed road; until, gradually, we saw a glimmer of light, and there was a parking area with a few cars, fronting a fairly new pub, with quite a few customers in it. They coped well with the sudden influx of nearly 100 people, some of whom went straight to the bar, while others of us roamed around what turned out to be art-filled rooms, as the experimental works of Peter Blayney, a 90-something painter now 'attempting to depict the classical myths', were being exhibited. There was a balcony out the back which probably overlooked attractive scenery in the daytime; and in the pub there were records of the original, old building which – it turned out – had been burnt to the ground and replaced by the current structure.



Horses thundering past in a Wallabadah Picnic raceplatform

In the dark, we had no idea where the rest of the township of Walcha Road was, let alone what it looked like, but wending our way back to our train by torchlight was a curiously pleasant way of ending our day. And the next morning, after another substantial breakfast and plenty of time to pack as we passed through the lovely scenery of the Hawkesbury waterways and past the suddenly strange looking built up areas of Sydney, we came to the end of our very satisfying journey.

We had checked with more seasoned train trippers, and found that the Volunteers did not accept tips. Instead, they gathered on the platform in an informal group to farewell all of us, receiving handshakes, hugs and kisses, as our way of showing our appreciation to a dear set of mentors who gave us a glimpse of a different approach to a life worth living. And a world of train travel has opened up for me. I've now downloaded the rail map for NSW, to help me plan trips to explore other small, peaceful, country towns with hidden treasures. Since many of them are in danger of dying as sources of income dry up, the more of us who can visit them as tourists, the more we can help them – and part of our state's history – to survive.

This year, the *Heritage Express* is travelling south for the New Year, to Victoria's High Country and the NSW Riverina district. Based on our experience last year, everyone going on this trip is going to have a fabulous time seeing in 2013. □

Anne Ring © 2012



"PARTIES HAVE CERTAINLY LIVENED UP
SINCE DOLORES MOVED INTO THE COMMUNITY"

Cartoon © John Danalis

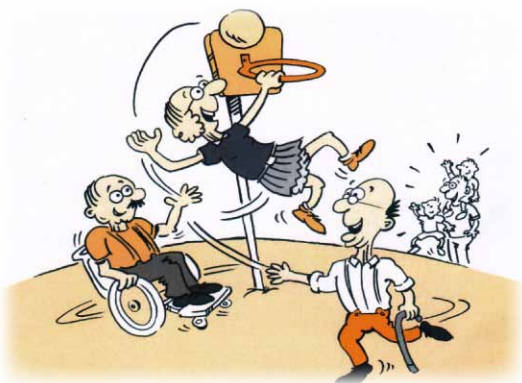
THE ORIGINS OF EXPRESSIONS

Red Letter Day – Back in the old days, calendars were only made (or seen) by monks and made by hand in monasteries or convents. Scribes often emphasised days of Saints or other important events by using a reddish ink made from ocher (a mineral of oxide of iron). A quick look at the calendar instantly showed all these red marks from the black, so that preparation or anticipation of those days could be acted upon. Today, we consider a 'red letter day' as any important day to us in our lives such as birthdays, weddings, anniversaries or the beginning of vacations or ending of school years. Some even have them mark special emotional times such as first dates, births of babies, pay raises etc.

Old Stamping Ground – The prairie chicken was often observed by early settlers dancing around at dawn with their fancy mating steps, making noises and strutting as part of their courtship with the females. They were so intense on this, they actually wore some areas of the ground bare! Soon, settlers could just tell by looking at some bare land that it was the mating spots for those frisky prairie chickens, and soon got called their 'old stamping grounds'. Today the term is used both for areas where males and females gather to meet each other, or for any place in which a group of people just go to have fun and kick up their heels etc.

Henpeck – Biologist WC Allee gained fame when he discovered the pecking order of hens, and the female's habit of using her beak as a weapon against other females. The hens never peck the males (roosters). And yet the term today is often referred to represent the verbal attacks females put upon males. Go figure! □

Fun for the Frail & Frisky



Celebratory Games

Easter Egg/Chocolate Santa/Lolly Hunt

Players: all

Equipment: Easter eggs etc.

Hide eggs all around the room (garden). Players then find them and bring them back to the start. Different types of lollies or coloured wrap may be used in each treasure spot.

Winner: the person who finds the most

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Easter or Christmas Treasure Hunt

Players: pairs

Equipment: sweets, clues

Hide sweets in six set places. Hide enough in each place so that each player gets one! Prepare six clues, one for each pile of sweets. Hand out clues all at once, to all players. Players, in their pairs, work out the clues and go and find each 'treasure', and bring it back.

Winner: the first pair to find all six treasures and bring back a sweet from each

* * * * *

Secret Santa/Valentine/Easter Bunny

Players: all

Equipment: small gifts, pencil and paper

Three weeks before Christmas, St Valentine's Day or Easter, secretly allocate each person the role of a secret Santa or Valentine or Easter Bunny for another player. This may be done by putting all names in a hat and letting players draw out the name of the person to whom he will be a 'Secret Santa'. On a set day each week, for the next four to six weeks, the secret Santas will prepare and bring a small gift (worth no more than 50 cents to \$1) and a clue to their identity. These gifts are placed in a box and given out by the leader each week to each person. On the last day, after receiving the last gift, receivers are asked to write down the name of the person they think has been their 'secret person':

Winner: whomever guesses correctly

Memory Games

Animal, Mineral, Vegetable

Players: any number

Equipment: pencils and paper

One player thinks of something that is animal, mineral or vegetable, writes it down and hides the word from the rest. The group then asks questions, to which the player can only answer 'yes' or 'no', until someone in the group works out the answer. Then it is the winner's tum to think of a new animal, mineral or vegetable item.

Winner: none

* * * * *

Trivial Pursuit

Players: teams of four, who sit together at a table

Equipment: five sheets of paper and a pen per table

The pieces of paper have a category (history, geography, sport, literature, current affairs) and a list of numbers, 1-10. (For a longer game add more categories.) The compere has a list of 10 questions in each category. Questions are read out from history first, allowing plenty of time for team members to discuss their answer to each question and write it on the appropriate sheet of paper, against the appropriate number. At the end of each game, read out the answers and allow tables to tally the number correct on that card. Altered answers are not allowed.

Winner: the team with the highest number of correct answers

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Memory (Kim's Game)

Players: any number, teams of three, or pairs

Equipment: a collection of objects on a tray

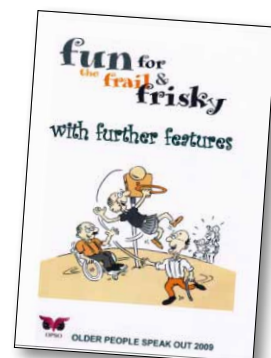
Players have two minutes (or longer) to look at the tray and commit the objects to memory. Take the tray away and have the players write down as many objects as they can remember.

Winner: whoever remembers the highest number of things □

Want more?

This is an excerpt from *Fun for the Frail & Frisky* (48 pages) – available for \$12 (incl. P&P) – send your address and cheque or money order to:

OPSO (Fun & Frisky)
PO Box 1037
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The Web: making it easier



BRISBANE SENIORS ONLINE ASSOCIATION INC.

by Dick Bennett

BRISBANE SENIORS ONLINE (BSOL) is a not-for-profit organisation that provides affordable computer training for seniors and over-50s in their own home, at community centres and libraries as well as small classes in some areas using volunteer unpaid mentors.

With the increased development of new technologies throughout the world, more and more information and services have become available online only. How often do we see a television or radio advertisement where it ends with the phrase 'for more information, go to www...?'

Without access to a computer and the Internet and the skills to know how to use them, we are unable to go any further. In addition, many services such as seeking funding and the like must now be made online with no option for submission of a paper version.

Recently one of our mentors assisted someone applying for a job where the application could only be completed and submitted online. There was no option to submit a written application by mail.

Why queue at Post Offices and cashiers to pay bills or use almost obsolete cheque services to pay when internet banking through BPay, external bank transfer and PayPal are available? These transactions can be securely made in a few minutes with a record of the transaction available for tracking purposes.

Travelling away from home and concerned about missing your favourite TV or radio program or newspaper? The Internet will allow you to listen to podcasts; see recent and archived television programs as well as listen to live digital radio from anywhere in the world.

Seniors living at home can experience social isolation. Twitter, Facebook, Skype and the like can help keep in contact with friends and relatives. In addition, playing games on your computer such as solitaire, sudoku, doing crosswords and playing other computer games have beneficial health benefits.

BSOL can assist seniors and over-50s how to safely use computers and the internet. Volunteer mentors are always welcome to join BSOL and undertaking such work is rewarding and enjoyable. For more information, contact the BSOL central office on 3210 6983 or see www.bsol.asn.au

Please note that the BSOL office will reopen on Monday 14 January 2013. □

THE ORIGINS OF EXPRESSIONS

On Cloud Nine – For some odd reason, the number 9 has always been considered by mathematicians to have some super power. Some say it goes back to the Holy Trinity since $3 \times 3 = 9$. And later in Victorian times, a person who was all dressed up was said to be 'dressed to the nines.' So what does this have to do with clouds?

It was believed that clouds existed on a successful level of layers, and the ultimate high layer was 9. So anyone who is suddenly super happy was said to be soaring in the clouds and naturally the level of the cloud they were assumed to be on was the highest ... level 9. Today another way of saying you are very happy and even in some cases, in love, is to say that you are on cloud 9.

Double-cross – Illiteracy was common in the old days and so when a person was asked to sign his name to a document, he would put an 'X' or a cross and it was perfectly legal. Now, many times this was done under pressure and the party making the 'X' had no intention of observing the terms of the contract. Oral lore stated that if a cross was doubled – if one was written over the other one – then the second one made the first one void. The contract was then null. So a double-cross was often referred to someone who promised in word or writing, but changed their minds, or never even intended to obey the agreed rules.

Graveyard Shift – All companies that work around the clock have a 'graveyard shift'. It really has nothing to do with graveyards or burial places. Actually, any thick liquid was termed 'gravy'. So if you laughed till you cried you were called "gravy-eyed". And, as lack of sleep lead to bleary eyes, sailors who had to stay up on deck all night were often 'gravy-eyed'. When the term was used in pubs and other places on land, these people did not quite get it. Because superstitions were so rampant in those days, they assumed it had to do with graves, being dead tired, etc. So the seafaring phrase go reformed by the landlubbers to mean 'graveyard shift'.

Another version: The 'graveyard shift' is actually tied to the term 'saved by the bell'. First, to explain 'saved by the bell': at one point, being buried alive was a common occurrence, so some people who were paranoid about such a fate were buried in special coffins that had a rope to pull from the inside that attached to a bell above ground. At night a guard was set to watch the graveyard and to listen for any bells to ring, and thereby dig up the living person from underground, saving them 'by the bell'. The guard who sat watch overnight was said to work the 'graveyard shift' – a night shift in a graveyard.

Sirloin – Once upon a time a king came upon an inn and was served beef not quite like he'd ever eaten before. He was also drinking a lot with this meal and after a while (being a bit drunk) he pulled out his sword and knighted the meat 'Sir Loin'. And so in today's society a good sirloin steak is sold in the fine restaurants only fit for kings! Or ... the word smiths feel that it really comes from the word 'surlonge' in French which means beef just above the loin. □