



Port Ponderings

A collection of creativity

Port Writers Inc

Sampler

Excerpt from Frank Urban's "As A Show Secretary, You're A Failure" - a fictional tale of organising a country Show in a fictional town on the Mid North Coast of NSW.

A Mr Luigi Marcellana had booked a site to sell candy-floss despite my having warned him that the Girl Guides were already booked to sell candy-floss. He threatened to sue me for loss of profits until I quietened him by moving him alongside the merry-go-round. But there was no holding back his ire when he discovered a small, grey and extremely squashed furry animal in the recently mown grass at his new site. He arrived at my office holding the little carcass by its tail and shouting, "My solicitor, he tell me strite, underda Trade Practices Act I sella what I like. Ten years I sella da candy floss. Da proper secretary, he promise me da same site lika lasta year." For a moment I wondered if Claudia's Doxie had met disaster until I realised the carcass was just an unfortunate bush rat.

The Alternatives had offered to play music at the show and I gave them a site near the beer tent without foreseeing that their songs on the environment magnified fifty times would not be appreciated by thirsty beer drinkers who had just competed in the Woodchop Championship. These beefy fellows resolved the matter themselves at the fuse-box. Claudia's granddaughter, blissfully ignoring the fact that Claudia's family had long made its living by cutting down trees for their mill, hit it off with Rick Man-am-I-Aware, the rock band's writer of songs about the environment. The pair were last seen walking down Moonlight Lane arm-in-arm.

For a few minutes there was calm until Jeramiah Smyth protested at Vic Redlow's steer winning 'Best Grass-fed Steer', pointing out that its dung contained numerous oat seeds. Vic explained to the judge that persons unknown – but he could hazard a guess if he had to – must have fed oats to his animal that very morning at the show. Honour was satisfied that afternoon when in a 'most unfortunate accident' in the Men's Gumboot Throwing Competition Jeramiah's gumboot went astray and hit Vic Redlow on the head and gave him a black eye.

The New Sections

In the view of many people, the introduction of a deer section was a success ... but you can't please everybody, especially the owner of a new Volvo from Port who had parked in an unauthorised spot next to the old cattle ramp and had a 300 kilogram buck jump onto his boot ... not one of his suede cowboy boots, his Volvo's boot.

The new art section received numerous entries but attracted comparatively few spectators until Claudia was heard condemning as 'disgusting' a photograph of a young lady posed on the bonnet of a sports car. A queue quickly formed. The photo had been taken by Glitz at a motor spares convention on the Gold Coast.

As no one in Pelican Creek owns a sports car, Glitz was accused of being a 'professional ring in.'

The Alternatives exhibited their sleek Angoras and droopy eared Anglo-Nubians and kept them under control until the Grand Parade when a Cashmere buck got away from its handler and chased one of the Leigh's Lively Lincolns weaners into an old water tank. A fork-lift had to lift out the unfortunate animal and its dripping wet championship ribbon.

The Camp Draft

Tradition demanded that the show end on the second day with the Camp Draft. Our enthusiastic announcer, Pat explained the procedure, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we present Pelican Creek's most exciting event—the spectacular, death-defying Camp Draft. Will the ladies watching the show judging please stand clear of that temporary fence... oooaah! The rules of the Camp Draft are simple. Five bullocks are let into the cattle yard. Each rider has to nominate one bullock, cut it out from the other four, draft it around the red stake at each end of the arena and finally drive it between the two blue poles which represent a gate. The winner is the rider who separates the correct bullock, drives it round the two red stakes and between the blue poles in the shortest time. Our first rider is local lad Ross Grey on Grey's Nag. Give him a big hand folks!"

Pat's voice rose in excitement "Ross has drafted his bullock out of the yard and he's cutting it towards the first stake. They're round the first stake and racing towards the second. The bullock balks! Ross doesn't give up—he tries again but misses the stake... and the blue poles. Eat your heart out Canberra; we got our Blue Poles for just two dollars. Time: One minute thirteen seconds. Not so lucky for Ross. The old grey nag ain't what she used to be! Will the poultry entrant who left an Old English Hen at last year's show please call at the poultry pavilion to collect your eggs."

"Our second rider is Wayne Johnson – four times State Winner – on Flashgun. Give him a big hand, folks. The clock is on. Wayne drafts his bullock out of the yard. Have you ever seen such a brute? Wayne drafts him round the first stake. Will this be a State record? What's that at Flashgun's heels? Small, grey, fuzzy? My God! He's fallen. Ambulance to the arena please."

"Ladies and Gentlemen. We have a report that President Witherfire is missing her dog: small, grey, answers to the name of Fifi ... that tiny dog running across the ring! Couldn't be Fifi could it? Just below that huge pelican! My God, it's diving? It couldn't ... It wouldn't ... Drop it! You stupid bird!" *(Continued)*

“Dance Me to the End of Love” is a poem by Barbara Orlowska-Westwood, a published Poet. A powerful piece with an economy of words evoking emotion.

That night I didn't listen to the lyrics
that night the music spoke to me,
I absorbed
the liquid heat of the rhythm
a turbulent river of sound flowed in me
you held me close
I inhaled the smell of your body
and your *Lanvin for men*
we moved as one
wrapped in love
seeing only each other,
ignoring tomorrow's dangers
awaiting you

Next morning
your backpack, camera
on your shoulder
your fingers on my cheek
a long kiss
only six months, watch my segment,
you said
a clang of the shutting door
the smell of your body and your aftershave
lingered in the room

Two weeks later they gave me
your backpack, broken camera
your notes and laptop.
In a plastic bag, separately
was your torn parka
with brown stains,
the smell of your sweat and your
Lanvin for men
still there.

Excerpt from Gill Goater's, "Mr Mistopheles", a heart-warming and wrenching tale of life, love and loss. Gill is a celebrated and accomplished poet who dips into prose in this story.

Midwinter in Iona. Ice on the windows. Nine year old Molly scratches patterns on them with her finger nail. The grass underfoot crunches. The only things growing in the vegetable garden are some late turnips. Our breath glitters like white fog. On the other side of the ridge, Jenolan Caves House is snowed in. Peter and his wife Anna, who rent a house on the property, can't get to work.

In the barn, the young cat has given birth to her first litter. We haven't seen the kittens but her stomach which was as round as a melon is now flat and flabby.

It's a couple of weeks before Steven, Molly's father and our farm manager, catches his first glimpse. 'There's five of 'em,' he tells us.

The following day I'm in the barn milking the goats when I see the kittens for the first time, two black, a grey tabby, a marmalade tabby and a dear little grey fluffy thing.

The following morning, Steven comes into the Long House, the farm's shared living and guest area, and thrusts a tiny bundle of fur into my hands. It's the fluffy grey kitten

'See what you can do with this, will you Gina? Found it on the ground outside the barn. It's the runt of the litter. Mother's kicked it out.'

The kitten's eyes are closed and it's not moving. I push my finger through the fur to touch the skin beneath. It is cold. I can't feel a pulse or breathing.

'It was minus two last night. I think it's dead but—see if you can bring it 'round.'

In the Long House, Anna and I stack cushions into a platform in front of the wood stove. She finds an Arran wool beanie and we wrap the kitten in it and lay it gently on the cushions in front of the warmth. I sit on the floor and touch it now and

again, making sure it's not getting too hot from the stove. After a few minutes, its flesh feels warmer. Another few minutes and there is no longer any doubt. I can feel its little chest rising and falling. Then it wriggles, emits tiny mewling sounds and suddenly we have a kitten, frantic with hunger, to look after.

'Get some milk and warm it up,' Anna says.

We pour in a little warmed milk diluted with water into a dish. I dip my finger in the mixture and hold it to the kitten's mouth. It scrabbles at my hand, licks my finger,

and seems to like the taste so Anna fills a rubber teat which we used to feed an abandoned lamb last year.

'Squeeze it gently so a drop falls near its mouth,' she says.

All very well but this kitten is not exactly in the business of staying still. It bites and claws at the teat, which soon looks like a sieve. But it is definitely interested.

Over the next few hours we try several ways to get milk inside the tiny animal, settling eventually on a glass eye dropper. Then begins a gruelling routine. Every two hours the kitten screams to be fed. Its teeth and claws are needle sharp and it digs in frantically to whichever hand happens to be holding the dropper. We resort to wearing a leather ski glove at feline meal times.

It's very young and we have to do everything for it. Mother cats keep their babies clean by licking away their body wastes. We substitute a soft rag and have to clean it a couple of times a day.

Steven wishes he hadn't saved it.

'Kittens learn to look after themselves from their mothers. This cat won't be able to. We shoulda let it die. It woulda been kinder.'

We all hate the thought, but recognise he is just expressing the pragmatism of the farmer.

'The mother's feral, it's never gunna be like a real pet cat,' he goes on gloomily. 'And no one's gunna want to look after him when he's full grown. He'll be a bloody monster.'

After numerous examinations, we've decided it's a he though it's difficult to tell the sex of such a young animal. Molly christens him Mr. Mistopheles after Andrew Lloyd Weber's character in Cats.

The Arran wool beanie winds up stitched to either end of a leather strap and this contraption is worn round one of the surrogate parent's neck with Mistopheles inside. He sleeps, pokes his head out, miaows for feeding, pats cheeks and chests and is generally about as lucky a little cat as you could get, especially as all four of his litter mates perished the night after his rescue.

I'm chief mum and he sleeps in my bed, crawling down under the covers and snuggling into the hollow behind my knees. I get used to the soft furry ball patting my nose and cheeks with his sharp little paws to wake me as sun first touches the high branches of the eucalyptus on the hill. *(continued)*

In this poem, "Well, it Rhymes!", Bessie Jennings has a play with the incongruence of the English language. This poem challenges your brain! Bessie is well known for her rhyming poetry and teaching.

A nasty dose of whooping cough
has taken our old grandpa ough.
His life was often really tough;
perhaps that's why his voice was groug.
We children loved him, as we should,
and loved to help by chopping would.

We're thankful for the things he taught,
like how to do our best at spaught.
He leaves a farm and brand new plough,
a breeding bull and jersey cough.

As if that wasn't quite enough
he leaves a lot of household stough.
Our dad's a bit like him, although
he's city-bred, from head to tough.
Yes, Dad's a worker, through and through
and gives us lots of jobs to dough.
He also thinks his children ought
to spend the weekends playing spought.

I'd be like those men if I could
and hope that I'd be understould.
I'd like to teach my son and daughter
not to be afraid of waughter.
I'll teach them both to sail a yacht,
the very nicest thing I've gacht.

Excerpt : “Rectitude” by Melanie Wass, an award-winning short story of revenge.

Music wafted like an ethereal dream - no - more a nightmare. It wasn't soft and melodious: it was bone-gratingly sharp. I remember the sound of chalk on a blackboard. Chalk that wasn't soft and smooth writing itself over the surface. Chalk that scraped itself along the barely even contour of the board taking the blood from my spine with it. This music reminded me of that. Not pleasant but evocative, in a negative way.

I'd come to find my brother's tormentor.

Petey was 26 going on 12. Been that way all his life. After too many tests and specialists, they couldn't find a reason for his condition. It wasn't until Petey was two years of age that his father finally admitted to dropping him off the table when he was changing him. That's when they worked out what was wrong: Spastic Cerebral Palsy.

Maybe if they'd known sooner. Maybe. Maybe if he hadn't been born or dropped or damaged then my life would have been different. At the age of 17, I became his carer when Mum decided she'd had enough.

Bullying was normal for Petey.

“Hey, spaso” they'd taunt.

“Hey, Pete - run this way” they'd laugh.

And worse.

They only got away with it once.

I saw to that.

Why Petey got caught up in rap music I'll never know.

Maybe it was the repetitive beat. Maybe the mix of spoken word and singing. Maybe it was the anger and hatred in the lyrics. He'd pump it out of his bedroom so loud I had to get him special headphones so I didn't hear it. Sadly, I couldn't stop him singing along with it.

Last Friday, he'd taken his iPod and earbuds with him to the club.

“Hey, spaso, nice gear. Gimme a look, eh, mate?”

“No. I'm not allowed.”

"Only wanna look. C'mon, give over."

"No. I'll get in trouble with Sissy."

This went on for 30 minutes said the Barman.

Wherever Petey went in the club to get away from them, they'd follow and bait him. Eventually they followed him into the loo, stripped all his gear off him, put his head down the toilet and flushed it, twice. Petey was too scared to leave the toilet for an hour.

Barman said they left the club with an iPod playing rap music really loud.

Now it was my turn.

I rapped on the door of the warehouse as soon as there was a break in the music.

"What are YOU doin' here?"

"I invited myself. Looking for an iPod."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. The one you stole from my brother - where is it?"

No answer. Just a lop-sided smirk.

More persuasion needed.

I pulled out my Beretta 92FS 9mm.

"Where is it?" I repeated as I pointed the gun at his groin. I noticed a wet patch forming.

"Ok, Ok, Ok. It's in my back pocket. I'll get it."

"Sure. Move slow. One hand."

"Here."

"Good boy. Now ... sing."

"Sing?!?"

"Yeah, sing. I don't want you to die with the music still in you."

Excerpt from Tom Penrose's short story, "Warning at Sea"

James Reginald Holsworthy was very pleased with himself. Money in his pocket and a first-class steamer ticket to New York. He smiled at the thought that his benefactor might be wishing James was dying of seasickness rather than enjoying the sunshine and sea air. He was smartly dressed in cream trousers, a white shirt and a beige waistcoat topped with a windowpane brown check jacket. His jaunty outfit was completed by brown and white wingtip shoes and a canary yellow tie. He looked every inch the smart young man about town.

He was pleased to have secured a small first-class cabin to himself. No need to share with some snoring American, his worst nightmare. His first meal on board in the first-class dining room was excellent, and the wood panelled room was reminiscent of a good London club.

He had been placed on a table with three other passengers who were travelling by themselves. Seated opposite was a man who had introduced himself as Bradford Compton. He was a slightly overweight American with a friendly manner. He wore a dinner suit that gave the impression that its owner had grown somewhat since it was purchased. Several of the vest buttons threatened to pop off and finish in the turtle soup. He explained to the group that he had been in England to buy artworks.

'You can get a real bargain since the war finished,' he advised. 'I buy for wealthy New Yorkers, they love their European art. I have been making two trips a year for the past few years. Always travel on this ship, can't beat it for good old English service.'

The two ladies at the dinner table could not have been more different if you had deliberately chosen them.

One was a mature lady by the name of Mrs Hawkes, and the name suited her. While she was elegantly dressed her appearance was dominated by a thin face and beak-like nose.

She was travelling with a lady's maid, who was naturally dining in second class. Mrs Hawkes' husband, the late George Hawkes, had died several years ago leaving his considerable estate to his widow.

'It's so nice to be able to travel to Europe again,' she said in what James believed was described as a southern drawl.

It was the other lady who caught James' eye. Miss Evelyn Vance could not be older than twenty-two or twenty-three, a pretty girl with a small nose, bright green

eyes and short bobbed hair that curled around her ears. She was stylishly, but simply, dressed. There was nothing simple about her small pieces of exquisite jewellery, old and delicate but probably worth a small fortune.

As James stared out on the first morning at sea his thoughts of Miss Vance were interrupted by the voice of Bradford Compton.

'Good morning Mr Holsworthy, enjoying the fine weather this morning?'

'I was told the seas would be rough, but this seems quite pleasant.'

Compton was dressed for much cooler weather than they were experiencing including a warm overcoat and a grey scarf.

'Don't worry, we have five days before good old New York, I'm sure your promised unpleasant weather will make an appearance. Have you been to sea before?'

'Only once, across the channel to France.'

'Was that during the war?'

'No, well before that. I was at school; my parents took me to

Paris.'

'If you don't mind me asking, what did you do in the war?' James had his answer well prepared for it was an often-

asked question after the great conflict.

'I was in a government department, behind the scenes. I

can't say too much, they are still very much involved in European matters.'

'Yes,' said Compton. 'There must still be a lot of work even after Versailles. Still, the Germans have been put in their place, they won't try invading anywhere again for a long time.'

In fact, James had gone to great lengths to ensure he was never part of the action in Europe.

The numbers on the Promenade Deck had gradually increased as the passengers took advantage of the fine weather and the calm seas. Amongst them were Mrs Hawkes and Miss Vance. Mrs Hawkes was also rugged up against the non-existent foul weather while Miss Vance wore a lighter weight grey wool coat and a dark grey felt hat. Mrs Hawkes invited Crompton to join her on her morning promenade and the friendly American fell in beside her.

James invited Miss Vance to join him on a metal seat facing the ocean. (Continued)

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