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*by Nick Gadd*

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Adult Education in  
the Community

# Editorial

Welcome to our special student writing edition of *Fine Print*.

In February this year the editorial committee began to plan the content of our editions for 2008. We brainstormed many ideas, looking for something new relating to the broad field of adult literacy: trends, politics, issues, teaching methodologies, technologies... Then we came to our students. Who are they? Where are they? What are they learning? What do they think?

We decided to answer this question by devoting the summer edition to student writing. Here was an opportunity to use the VALBEC network and our members to gather a collection of contributions from across the state, and, we hoped, from a broad range of students and learning contexts. It was also an opportunity to highlight the work of teachers in enabling the writing process, and how they approach the teaching of writing.

We have had a great response. The editorial committee read and enjoyed every contribution. Unfortunately we couldn't publish them all as there is not enough space in the journal. We have printed a selection of pieces, which both fitted the guidelines and showed a diversity of learning contexts and student backgrounds.

The edition has a different structure and content. We have one feature, and four sections for the students and teachers writing:

- Learning journeys and life stories from Melbourne,
- Learning journeys and life stories from regional Victoria
- Of people and places
- The poetry of learning.

Each section contains teachers' reflections, which offer both practical strategies for teaching writing, and inspiration on how to motivate their students.

We are proud to start the edition with a feature article by Nick Gadd, former ALBE teacher, and now award winning

author. Nick brings his teaching and writing experience together in 'Writing the story, understanding the plot' Nick has a refreshing perspective on the story and writing in the classroom. He focuses on the importance of the plot; he says it's the plot and not just the story which shows the depth and complexity and relationships between events and people. Seeing the plot in life, as well as in a story, he suggests, is the reason why many people continue and succeed with adult education.

Then it's over to the students.

As we read about students learning journeys in the first, second and fourth sections, we see common themes: struggle and achievement, success and loss, humour and sadness, isolation and friendship, wit and imagination. There is continual reference to the inspiration and encouragement of teachers, and the difference that learning has made to lives. Some reflections are ever so brief, but in every piece there's an illumination, and an insight into the learning process: 'Going to class is now part of the rhythm of my life'; 'I love the computer'; '...working out my maths problems has saved me lots of money that I can put into my education'; 'now I think with my head and fight with my pen'.

The third section 'Of People and Places' contains the creative contributions. These are both personal and imaginary: all entertaining, moving, revealing style, sophistication and plot.

So thank you to all the teachers who took the time to prepare their students for this project, and contribute their own pieces. Thank you to all the students who have taken the time and courage to write and share their personal stories.

This edition is a valuable evidence of our student's learning experiences and insights.

We hope that it gives new insights to us all, and helps to confirm existing ones. We also hope that policy  
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**The Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) aims to lead the adult literacy field through identifying issues of importance to practitioners and facilitating positive change. This is achieved through networking, professional support, the sharing of information and the promotion of best practice.**

# Writing the story, understanding the plot

by Nick Gadd

People may enter adult education with practical needs, like wanting to read a newspaper or write their own story. But after a while what they are looking for, what teachers can help them to gain, is an understanding of the plot, not just what happened but why it happened and what may have happened as a result. Nick Gadd explains.

I'm going to discuss the importance of stories because that is a thread that runs through what I've been doing over the last 20 years.

From 1988 to 1997 I worked as a teacher of adult literacy and ESL. One thing I learned early on, which every language and literacy teacher knows, is that adult students bring amazing stories with them to the classroom. Over the years I heard hundreds of stories from my students. Funny stories, tragic stories, moving stories. From some there were stories of wars, migrations, voyages, adjusting to life in a new culture, stories sometimes of appalling horror.

Others were less dramatic but still memorable, like the ones told by Peter, a man who had grown up in a circus in the 1940s and 50s. Because his people were always travelling around Australia, he'd never received much formal education, but he had a gift of storytelling. I remember him telling the class about the time animal liberation campaigners came to protest at the circus, which was an old-fashioned, politically incorrect show featuring performing ponies, lions and elephants. The short version of the story goes on (and I'm transcribing Peter's oral version from memory):

So we asked the protesters what they wanted. The protesters said, "You're exploiting those animals. We want you to let them go". So we said, "OK, we'll let them go", and we opened the cage and let the lion out. You've never seen anyone run so fast. Mind you, the lion couldn't have done nothing, it was 30 years old and had no teeth.

Peter was on a disability pension and unable to work, so he had come back to adult literacy classes at the age of 50-plus, where he was essentially writing his life story. That was his motivation to read and write. And as time went by and he grew in knowledge and confidence, he wrote many stories like the one above.

I expect all teachers have come across students like Peter because the urge to tell and listen to stories is very deep within us. The writer E.M. Forster made this point in 1927 in his book *Aspects of the Novel*. He wrote:

Neanderthal man listened to stories, if one may judge from the shape of his skull. The primitive audience was an audience of shock heads, gaping round the campfire, fatigued with contending against the mammoth or the woolly rhinoceros, and only kept awake by suspense. What would happen next? The novelist droned on, and as soon as the audience guessed what happened next they either fell asleep or killed him.

Forster goes on to talk about the Persian queen Scheherazade, the narrator of the *One Thousand and One Nights*. The story goes that the king would take a new wife every night and send the previous one to be beheaded. Scheherazade avoided this fate by telling the king a story that was so compelling that the king didn't kill her as he had all the others. Forster again:

Scheherazade avoided her fate because she knew how to wield the weapon of suspense. She only survived because she managed to keep the king wondering what would happen next. Each time she saw the sun rising, she stopped in the middle of a sentence and left him gaping.

We love to hear stories because we want to know what happens next. Beautiful descriptions, witty dialogue, memorable characters—to most readers they count for little if there is no story there. Forster, who could do these things very well, was in no doubt on the matter. His remark, 'Yes—oh dear yes—the novel tells a story. That is the fundamental aspect without which it could not exist', expresses his ambiguous feelings about this. It may be a 'low atavistic form', as he says, but there's no getting away from it.

As a teacher, I too was sometimes in two minds about the power of stories. Both ESL and literacy classes could at times be taken over by students with stories to tell: memories of childhood, supernatural tales, encounters with authority and injustice. I had a queasy sense that, given the opportunity, stories would swamp all the other things that students needed to learn, like procedural texts, essays and interview skills. There was no doubt though, that they often found stories engaging and motivating in an immediate way that other genres couldn't match.



In 1997 I left teaching and took a job as an editor in the curriculum unit at a TAFE. There I worked on learning modules for vocational education in fields like juvenile justice and aged care—which I had little knowledge of. Sometimes the writers didn't deliver the materials on time and in that case I helped to write them, with the support of people who had worked in the field. That's the sort of thing that happens when a provider has to deliver 90 learning modules in six months. So I can proudly say that my first published book was module A6 of the National Competency Standards for Aged Care Workers, titled *Communicating with Aged People*.

But again stories came into it. As we know, learning modules are broken down into competencies, and each competency was addressed in the guide by several paragraphs that explained the right or wrong way to do things, followed by some examples. And the examples were basically stories, or perhaps in this case, since they were meant to illustrate a point, I should call them parables (though that is hardly training package language). It's quite appropriate that this should be the case because a story brings a theory to life and is therefore more memorable, for most of us, than a theory.

So, for example, there was one competency that was about how carers can make mistakes and offend people, without meaning to, if they have no understanding of their backgrounds.

I wrote a story about an elderly man who had once held a senior position and whose dignity was very important to him. But now he was living in an aged care facility where the staff wanted to encourage him to mingle. So they invited him into the lounge where there was music going on, and the young aged care worker came up to him where he was sitting, threw a garland round his neck and said, 'Come on, dance!' And he was so infuriated by this that he stormed out. And she was put out because she had only been trying to be friendly. This was based on an incident that had happened once to somebody I knew.

That parable, if it was developed further, could perhaps become a short story about growing old, and losing your position in the world, and the way that, with the best intentions, people often fail to understand each other. But at the time it was written to illustrate a point for aged care workers in training. (Whether module A6 actually helped at all I don't know. Those competency materials were published in 1997 and so far as I know, post the abolition of ANTA in 2004, there are no copies in existence anywhere on the planet.)

Later I changed my job again and joined the marketing branch of a university, working on alumni magazines and staff newspapers as a journalist. I did a lot of interviews and found out a lot about the people who work in universities. I interviewed people in tiny offices who were doing great things with fibre optics. I interviewed professors of hospitality and sports scientists, mathematicians and cultural theorists.

But being academics they had little idea of how to communicate with non-specialists. My job was to turn what they told me into articles that non-expert readers would want to read. In other words, to do what journalists are trained to do: find the story.

It was around that time that I started trying to write a novel. My first attempt, which took me about two and a half years, was a complete, multifaceted, multinational, multi-generic disaster. I couldn't decide what the genre was, so it lurched from comic novel to melodrama to grungy realism. It had all the flaws of the inexperienced writer: long didactic passages, plot holes covered by extraordinary coincidences, and sub-plots that galloped out of control.

But a novel has to have a plot. And a plot is not quite the same thing as a story. I'm going to quote E.M. Forster again,

because he was the person who pointed out the difference between those two things. He said that if we write ‘The king died, and the queen died,’ we have a story, but if we write, instead, ‘The king died, and the queen died of grief’, then we have a plot. There’s causality involved, and relationships. It’s not just one thing after another. Forster said. ‘If it is in a **story** we say ‘and then?’ If it is in a **plot** we ask ‘why?’

I decided that I should chuck out all my research, and start again with another new narrator, and instead of setting it in Mexico, or Paris, I should set it where I actually live, which is Yarraville, in the western suburbs of Melbourne. And instead of having a flamboyant jazz pianist as the narrator I made him a local suburban journalist. Philip, who is the protagonist, is not larger than life, he’s been through some hard times and he’s realised that life is larger than him. I eliminated the sub-plots, coincidences and diseases. I tried to create characters that I could believe in, because I knew them, or people like them. This took me another two years to write, and it was the novel that ultimately became *Ghostlines*.

One mistake I had been making was to keep adding more STORY— more things happening. What it needed in fact was more PLOT— more exploration of the relationships between people and events, more understanding of the causes and consequences of things.

There’s a point in chapter 1 of *Ghostlines* where a character says to Philip Trudeau, who is the (somewhat reluctant) protagonist, ‘I just want to know why it happened’. That’s the trigger for Philip to start his investigation. At some point in any novel one of the characters must say or think that question. And if the novel is to be successful, the reader must say it with them.

Understanding that life should be seen not as a story, but as a plot, is part of the process of becoming a mature adult. How often do we say to children or to irresponsible adults, ‘You have to accept the consequences of your actions’, or ‘There are other people in the world besides you?’ Or words

to that effect. Life is not just a series of events one after the other. It’s more complex than that.

When we see things as a story, not as a plot, we see them in over-simplified terms. It happens on the big stage too. The United States and its allies went to war in Iraq because they saw it in terms of a story—we go in there, we kill the bad guys, we get out—instead of seeing it as a plot in which there are many characters whose motives and histories are complex and often unknowable and whose actions have consequences which we cannot possibly predict.

Maybe the reason why people enter adult education is because they have asked themselves that question. They may start off with valid practical needs, like wanting to read a newspaper or a medicine bottle or write their life story or help their child with their homework, but after a while what they are looking for, what teachers can help them to gain, is an understanding of the plot. Not just what happened and when, but why did it happen? What happened as a result? Who was affected? What did others think about it?

Sometimes it appears that education is framed purely in terms of story: come to class, pass an exam, get a qualification, and get a job. One thing after another. Many students see it in those terms too, but in fact there is more to education than that and there’s a role for teachers in taking people beyond that.

In other words, the purpose of education is to help people not just follow the story, but understand the plot.

And put that way, the job of teachers is just the same as the job of the novelist; namely, to help people find out the answers to this one overwhelming question: ‘I just want to know why it happens’.

**Nick Gadd was a teacher for ten years. He is the author of *Ghostlines* (Scribe Publications), a novel that won the 2007 Victorian Premier’s Literary Award. This is an edited version of an address to the VALBEC AGM in July 2008.**

# Learning journeys and life stories from students in Melbourne

Students throughout Melbourne write about their life and learning pathways, where they've come from and where they wish to go, while teachers respond by reflecting on their teaching practices.



## When does school finish?

by Peter Stevens

As a mature-age 30-something, starting school in pre-apprenticeship cabinet making was not a difficult decision. However, it did take some considerable thought.

Being a little older, surrounded by 'youngens' can be somewhat intimidating. Being a minority is always intimidating I guess. As much as we like to think we don't care what others think, part of schooling is the interaction with fellow students, the sense of belonging and camaraderie.

I am happy to report that our imaginings are always worse than reality. I find whether young or a little older, we're all here for the same thing and we all have our doubts! I'm impressed, however, with the maturity that some show towards their work and it inspires us all, not to compete with necessarily, but it does, and should, 'raise the bar'.

I must admit that 20 years ago, I'd not have thought this is where I'd be today but, living life is a funny old thing and change, loathe or love it, will always be part of our lives.

I'd had a range of previous experiences. After approximately six years in the Victoria Police Department, a European working holiday, a brief stint as a travel agent, then around seven years in non-urgent ambulance, I found myself pleased to have been able to help and assist those in my careers. However, my feet were beginning to itch and change was on the horizon. I wasn't sure where I was heading.

Then, after buying a house and not having the money to call in a tradie, I found myself laminating the kitchen, converting the laundry into a study, tiling, decking, plastering and the list goes on. I had found something tangible that gave me that feeling of satisfaction. I could point to it, use it and admire it.

In this industry not only do we have the personal satisfaction of a job well done but anyone who sees our work can appreciate our efforts as well. There are well-known

passages that will tell us this same thing, though essentially they are: compete with yourself, do the best you can because it shows through.

I am in a privileged position right now to be able to take on full-time study, having worked full-time and studied part-time in the past with the mortgage hanging over my head. I really hope I can impress on those of you that are beginning your lives in this industry— please take advantage of being able to give your best effort now while you can before life gets too complicated to study and concentrate.

So when does school finish? Never. You'll always be learning, don't be put off, enjoy it, because it means you're living. It's your movie, complete it any way you want, just make sure it's a good movie and it's yours.

If you remember anything, remember this; occupations do not define you. Enjoy what you do, change if you need to, but give everything a chance. Every job and experience you have will go with you. Use it, learn from it and most of all enjoy your life.

**Peter Stevens is currently completing a pre-apprenticeship in cabinet making at NMIT.**

## A teacher's reflection—literacy and the trades

by Gilda Alavuk

The beauty of working in a trade area is that one is quickly drawn in by the trade teachers' passion and enthusiasm for what they do. There are times when one could imagine being on a set in Jamie's kitchen or at some inspirational seminar.

Although literacy is not high on the students' priority list, trade teachers are continually trying to break down the barriers to writing by using different methods to encourage students to put pen to paper. Inspiration may come from attending an Art Deco exhibition, trade magazines or creating an artistic piece.

As a literacy and numeracy teacher, having worked in adult education for 16 years, my approach to teaching with these

students is to get involved and ask lots of questions, so I am learning along with them. I believe that like me, Peter Stevens was inspired to write about his learning journey by those talented teachers in the Furniture Studies department at NMIT.

**Gilda Alavuk is a literacy and numeracy teacher in Furniture Studies at NMIT.**

## **My story**

*by Kyra*

I come to CAE in 2002. I was bored in my life. My English is not the best. I have got a goal in my life to write a book about being disabled.

I use a computer to write with. I love the computer. I love to write letters to my friend and write short stories about my life.

**Kyra is a CGEA student at CAE.**

## **What English classes mean to me**

*by Ourania Panagiotidis*

I have been attending English language classes at AGWS (Australian Greek Welfare Society) for several years now, on Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons. They have become an important part of my routine and I cannot imagine my life without them. Going to classes is now part of the rhythm of my life, like doing my shopping, cleaning my house and cooking meals for the family.

I look forward to attending every lesson. I have a good relationship with my teachers who are supportive and encouraging. My teachers are so skilled. They have taught me to read, write and speak English so that I can get by in my daily life. I can now understand what people are saying to me and I can also read and write English—so a whole world of possibilities has opened up to me as I enjoy reading magazines in English; catching up on all the gossip about the stars; discovering new recipes, as well as gaining tips about having a healthy lifestyle. I can write sentences, fill in forms, read labels and street signs. It is like having been blind and suddenly discovering that you have sight! An entire world of possibilities has opened up for me!

In between every lesson I love doing my homework. I practise my spelling, experience the reading and writing of an increasing vocabulary and complete activities from class. All of this has kept my mind active and kept me busy. It is now a hobby—an enjoyable past-time—like doing my embroidery and hand crafts.

I have had inspiring teachers in the years of my learning and they have become my friends and mentors. I feel very lucky to have such positive people guiding me in my life. This is one of the aspects of English classes that mean so much to me.

I am now so proud that I can talk to my grandchildren and I can express my thoughts to them in English such that they understand what I am trying to say. I feel so much closer to them—that's what makes me happiest of all!

**Ourania Panagiotidis is currently completing English classes at Australian Greek Welfare Society.**

## **My learning journey**

*by Geoff*

After a work accident, I sat at home and wondered what the future had in store for me. I had no experience of the educated world, no office knowledge. I was scared of computers and had nothing to offer any future employer.

Then it hit me, 'Why not go back to school and show everyone that I could have something to offer?' So I enrolled at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre and hey presto, success immediately. I was no longer scared of computers, more confidence has been installed into my character and I enjoy every minute of my schooling.

The teachers treat me like an adult, and guess what, I've made new friends along the way. So carry on the good work and good luck for the future of Adult and Community Education. The future now looks rosy for everyone concerned.

**Geoff is currently studying at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre.**

## **Reflections on teaching writing**

*by Jacinta Agostinelli*

The student writing included here are responses to a project run by Adult Learning Australia to promote the value of the Adult and Community Education sector. The students were asked to describe their own learning journey and the role played by Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre in that journey. The fact that there was a real context for the stories was both daunting and motivational. All of the students wanted to share their positive experiences of learning as an adult, and the unexpected joys and opportunities it brought them, but were intimidated by the possibility that others were going to read them. The best outcome of this exercise for us was that some of the stories were selected for publication.

To begin this writing task we read the letter that introduced the project objectives and requirements. This exercise introduced the students to concepts such as learning journey, the ACE sector, pathways, personal health and wellbeing and human capital. These are abstract concepts that the combined Certificate II and III CGEA class managed. This text was a great way to launch discussion on the students' own learning journeys.

After discussion and a rewriting exercise I gave students a model story I had written. In a detailed reading we identified the stages of the story and how the paragraphs connected through both conjunction and theme and examined examples of nominalisation and metaphor. Connecting paragraphs and information was a skill we had been focusing on. I also wanted the students to consciously use nominalisation and metaphor so I included an example in my text. My text was deliberately short, so the less confident students could model it easily. More capable writers created a unique and experimental text.

Having a real context for writing is a prime motivator, but there are other factors that motivate my students to write. Knowing that they have something to write is also important, which is why we spend time reading around the context and discussing the topic before even thinking about writing. It is also very important to provide scaffolding to the writing process and I find a model is the best way to scaffold. If the model is such that students can use the structure and change the words then this is scaffolding at its best. Once the anxiety of what and how to write is removed then I find students begin to love writing and will demand to do more.

**Jacinta Agostinelli is a literacy coordinator and teacher at the Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre.**

## **My learning story**

*by Anthony*

I am currently studying literacy, numeracy, road rules and VCAL at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre. I prefer to come here than go to TAFE, which I also attended, because it's more relaxed and the people are a lot friendlier.

I am also in the choir at the centre. If I didn't come here I wouldn't have joined a choir and I wouldn't have got interested in acting. We put on a small play and a few people praised my acting. If I didn't get that praise, I don't think that I would still be interested in acting. In the near future I want to join an acting company and get my learner's license.

**Anthony is currently a student at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre.**

## **A learner's journey**

*by Randa*

I have been in Australia for 22 years. I didn't do any English when I came to Australia. So I went to school to learn the language and I'm still learning.

I have been going to Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre to improve my language, skills and knowledge. I did Certificates 1 and 2 computer courses and Certificates I, II and III English courses.

I have done a volunteer course to be qualified as an interviewer at CIC. I'm enjoying it so much. And my plans are to do more and learn more. I like coming to Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre. It would be great if more centres opened in different areas and encouraged people to improve their skills.

**Randa is currently studying at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre.**

## **My lucky life**

*by Binh Giang*

I left my dear country Vietnam about 20 years ago, because of the communist rule. I had to escape in search for freedom.

I escaped with my sister's family by boat. Our boat was so dangerous because it was about 20 metres long, five metres wide and it carried more than 200 people. The boatload was too heavy. When our boat was travelling out at sea for about two days, it encountered a low tide and got stuck on a reef. The engine broke down and couldn't turn on, so our boat fell to one side because of its heavy weight.

We stayed in the low tide of the sea for five days and nights. We were stuck without sufficient food and water. Some people got sick. Twenty adults and three children died. I felt so sad and worried. On the sixth day, luckily the high tide came and two men fixed the boat engine. Our boat continued travelling for about four more days until we arrived on a small island of the Philippines. The Philippine government then put us all in a safe and bigger cargo ship that took us to the refugee camp on another Philippine island.

It was here where my sister's family and I applied to live in Australia. We lived in the refugee camp for one year before the Australian Government accepted our application.

I arrived in Australia in September. The weather was warm. I felt fresh and comfortable more than what I did in Vietnam.

Australia was a big, wide, open space. Each house had its own garden, which looked nice and beautiful.

I enjoy the freedom here. We are free to talk about anything and tell people our ideas. You do not get into trouble from the government. Australian people are very kind and friendly. There are a lot of different foods and the water is nice and clean too, so I thoroughly enjoy myself here. Living in Australia isn't difficult. Even before I arrived here whilst living in Vietnam I hoped I could come to live here.

**Binh Giang is a student at North Melbourne Language and Learning.**

## **My journey into education**

*by Shane Kirby*

My journey back into education began when I first stepped onto the Victoria University campus in late 2004 but it wasn't until late 2006 that I actually put my head down and put the effort into my work.

At the start of 2007 I started working in the community garden at 115 Albert Street Footscray under the new order of our teacher Majella who to me is an outstanding and beautiful teacher with a heart of gold.

Working for her, I have learned to be more confident in my work and more confident that I can do anything that I put my mind to. At the start of 2007, where the garden is now, was an empty paddock. Since starting work in the garden I have helped build two big garden beds and two small ones. This took a lot of effort from me and my classmates. There were three classes working in the garden to get it ready for the open day. I was given the chance to give the main speech of the day.

So with the help of some of the teachers at TAFE I began to write the speech that changed the way I would go about my schoolwork. I had to thank all the sponsors and teachers who had contributed their time and their effort into helping us in and out of the garden. Besides thanking the sponsors I had to give a warm welcome to the head teachers at this amazing event. The open day turned out to be a very beautiful day.

Over the next year and a half the garden has grown into a beautiful community garden. Throughout my time working in the garden and at TAFE I have met a lot of beautiful teachers like Lisa, my English teacher. I believe that I have learnt a lot from her. To my knowledge, if it weren't for Lisa believing in me then I most likely wouldn't be writing this now.

My maths teacher Padmini has also helped me to think more clearly and Padmini, like all the other teachers over the years, has taught me to believe in myself. Because of this I know that I can do better.

Next year I plan to go to VCE because I want to complete a degree in maths and I believe that I can and will do it. I also want to continue to work for Majella in the garden.

**Shane Kirby is a student at Victoria University TAFE in Footscray.**

## **Learning each day**

*by Luciano*

I have come to CAE because I am willing to learn English because I needed to improve myself. It's done me well. My spelling has improved. My writing has improved and I think education is good for you.

Now I speak English well. Before I could not communicate well, so attendance at CAE has done me good and I have gone longer with studying at CAE. I've got confidence and the class is very good because we can help each other. Sometimes we crack a joke and we have a good laugh together. It's good that we learn something each day.

It's been eight years now and I have done a few subjects at CAE and I have found it all quite interesting.

**Luciano is a CGEA student at CAE.**

## **My ESL learning journey**

*by Dao Le*

I would like to share my reflections on my ESL learning experience. I hope you will find it interesting.

I am Vietnamese and I arrived in Australia just six months ago. At the beginning I didn't know where I could apply for an English course, how much the course would cost and how I had to pay for the course. When my friend introduced me to the English course at Chisholm TAFE I was very happy.

You know, I was a medical doctor in my country. I graduated from the Medicine University in Russia. In my student years at university I had to study very hard. I always do my best to study. Medicine is not easy. There are many subjects to learn and many exams to take. Now I am learning English. English is also not easy to learn. It is more difficult than Russian. Again, I will try my best to study.

I started learning English at Chisholm in March 2008. You know, at the beginning of the course it was very difficult for me because my English was not good enough to communicate with my classmates and my teachers. I could understand English a little bit, but I couldn't express my thoughts. My pronunciation was also not correct, so people found it hard to understand me. I told myself, I must study harder than others because I am already too old to learn a foreign language.

If possible, I would like to get back into my old profession. I know it will be a long journey but I am prepared for it. Wish me luck!

**Dao Le is currently studying in a LLNP program at Chisholm TAFE.**

## Learning

*by Emma Jobling*

Doing Year 11 in 1996 was very hard. I had a tutor that the school provided. I did work lower than the year level. My family was not very supportive. Then I studied a work education course at Shepparton TAFE from 1997 to 1998.

I worked at coffee shops and nursing homes. It was too stressful at the cafes and nursing homes. In 1999, I went to Wangaratta TAFE and did introductory level CGEA. It was both easy and hard. I also did Level 1 First Aid but it has expired. I would like to update my certificate.

In 2000 I did Certificate 1 in Retail at Victoria University Melbourne. To gain this Certificate I had to do eight weeks of work and study. I then got my Certificate.

I joined the job networks looking for a job, which didn't help because I needed help with my everyday skills.

In 2004 I was a volunteer in a childcare centre. It was very tough and stressful.

In 2005 I studied CGEA at CAE. I found it hard because of the class size and nobody wanted to talk to me or be my friend and I lost some confidence so I quit.

In 2006 I came to Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre to do the maths class. I liked the class because there were not many people in the class and I could understand the work. I made some friends as well. I volunteer there sometimes doing dishes and stuff like that. I get the help that I need. I have really gained a lot of confidence since coming. I have been given a chance to better myself.

I am currently studying Certificate 2 CGEA at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre. I am doing pathways, maths, English and computers.

Our pathways class went to *The Big Issue* for an excursion to look at different workplaces. I listened to the talk about how to become a vendor and I am now working for myself, selling *The Big Issue* a couple of times a week.

It has given me extra pocket money and now I am going to see Billy Joel at the Rod Laver Arena. I have never been there before or to an international concert. I have a lot more confidence to do things like that.

**Emma Jobling is a student at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre.**

## Learning for my future

*by Lucy*

Since coming to CAE, I have more writing practice and more spelling work. I have really loved trying to learn more and getting to know other people in the class.

At this time of the year I start thinking about what subjects I could do next year. I really love coming here.

Next year I would like to keep doing English, science and digital story writing. I feel that coming to CAE gives me a goal in my life and a reason why to get up in the morning.

**Lucy is a CGEA student at CAE.**

## My life and learning experiences

*by John Martin*

I attended school at St Monica's College in Epping and left that school in Year 8. Later on, I did courses at Lalor Living and Learning Centre.

In 1994 I had an accident while riding my bike. I was hit and ended up in the Austin Hospital for seven days with a broken fibula and tibia as well as back and facial injuries.

While I was in hospital I had three operations. In 1998 I finally got my driver's license and the car of my dreams, a Holden GL Calais, model 1984. That year it was as if my life started all over again.

I started going out with my friends and used to go for drives with my brother. We used to do Mario laps to Chapel Street and to Brighton Beach. In November 1999 I met

my girlfriend and in 2002 we got engaged and married in 2004.

In 2005 our beautiful son Daniel was born. He is now three years old and he keeps us extremely busy. In 2008 I finally got my XR6. Now I am back at school and I work with my brother three days a week, sometimes four, doing mechanics.

**John is a student at Lalor Living and Learning Centre.**

## **My learning journey**

*by Gemia*

When I arrived in Australia I was very happy because I had waited a long time to come here. It is big country and it meant a new life so I was very confused.

After three days the Migration took me to learn in AMES for 510 hours. At the time I didn't understand. After three months I understood. I wanted to go to the bank and do shopping.

I first worked in a factory with many people. It was very difficult to speak with them. Sometimes I didn't understand. It was terrible for me.

Most of the time I was learning English in AMES. After a few years I could speak well. I am still learning in Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre. Now I can fill in forms.

**Gemia is a student at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre.**

## **My life and my learning**

*by Najlaa Albatat*

I learnt very quickly as a child but I always had problems with schools. I use a wheelchair. My primary school had steps. I needed help from others. Every year I missed lots of school. I often studied at home by myself and then did the test with my classmates. I changed schools. However, I loved those years when I was able to study with my friends at school.

I had a wonderful teacher who I loved a lot. She cared about me and my study. I used to wait inside the schoolyard to see her. I loved all that teacher's classes. I still remember her words of encouragement about the value of study.

I also remember a good friend at school. We studied together in class and that helped me a lot with my studies. I learnt how to share food with people who weren't members of my

family. I was very quiet in class. My teachers thought I was smart. They encouraged me. I felt very proud when my good results were read aloud in front of the class.

In the future, I want to write stories. I want to go to university to become a multi-media secondary school teacher. I want to be an excellent teacher. I want to help people from my community who do not speak English. I hope I achieve all my dreams in this life.

**Najlaa Albatat is currently studying at Kangan Batman TAFE.**

## **My learning story**

*by Jessica Dunn*

I had an interesting childhood with a bit of bad luck and a bit of good luck. I have had a learning disability all my life. It started at primary school. Sometimes it was bad because I didn't get along with some teachers. The good teachers were so nice that I wanted to learn but, because of my learning disability, it was harder for me. I really didn't enjoy primary school because I was a lot slower than other people and that let me down.

The teachers at high school were great because they understood I had a learning problem. I was part of a transition group from special school to high school. I learnt lots more at high school than I did at primary school. The teachers made it easier for me to understand. I got better at spelling, reading, learning and concentrating.

As a result of all the difficulties from my learning, I am staying at TAFE. I want to achieve a lot of things in my life. I am sticking to my goals and having no interruptions in my life again. I have learnt that you can have plans and you shouldn't let anyone try to make you do anything you don't want to. My goals are to complete Year 11 and 12 before going to Kangan Batman TAFE at Moreland to study nursing. I am moving towards my goal and I'm doing well.

**Jessica Dunn is currently studying at Kangan Batman TAFE.**



# Learning journeys and life stories from regional Victoria



Students from schools in regional centres describe their pathways back to education. They identify the challenges they've faced and speak of a renewed sense of hope for the future.

## Learning every day

by Sam

I enjoyed school, learning, creating and making friends. But I became bored and I just couldn't be bothered with it so I made choices that I knew weren't good for me. I left school and had a child at the age of 16. By the age of 18 I had two kids. At that point in time I knew I had to make some life changing decisions. I would read constantly, get maths sheets printed off the internet and write small books about my life and my kids.

Now that my kids are at school I have decided it's time for me to further my education, so that when my kids come to me for help with homework and questions about our history or the world in general, I can answer them to the best of my ability. I am now married and have 5 more children—my husband's—to look after. Three of them are in their teens and in high school.

When they come home from school, they are always telling me about their classes or their work. I don't think a day goes by when I don't learn something new from them. I am also hoping that by furthering my education I will be able to work with the elderly in aged care and also become a registered nurse.

**Sam is a General Education student at Gordon Institute of TAFE.**

## A teacher's reflection

by Bronwyn Stretton

Apart from having low literacy skills, the students I teach are often reluctant writers, especially when what is being looked for is a personal or reflective piece. An example of how I overcame this recently was with a strategy sometimes used with people experiencing a block in creative writing.

In this session, the students were sitting with pens poised over paper and nothing was coming out. They insisted they didn't know what to write, despite a lengthy discussion about the topic beforehand. I saw the end of the class looming with

no writing from them, so I asked them to put their pen on the paper and just write whatever came into their heads. I told them I would time them and they could stop after five minutes and that they should just write whatever came to mind, no matter how silly or nonsensical it seemed to them. I said I wouldn't judge what they were writing and that the only objective was to get something down.

At the end of the class I took up what they'd written and was amazed that all of them had actually written on the topic with some of the most sincere writing I had seen from them. What they had written were statements about what they wanted to do with their lives over the next 3 to 5 years, which was part of the Develop and Document a Learning Plan unit. The technique was not one I had planned to use, and is certainly not suitable for all writing situations. Their block may have been fear of being judged on what they wrote, or my unspoken expectation that they would write something meaningful. Whatever it was, for every student in that group, this technique—for that one instance at least—proved successful.

**Bronwyn Stretton is a teacher at Gordon Institute of TAFE.**

## A learning journey

by Karen Hand

School was never an enjoyable part of my life growing up. Being a shy, quiet child, I was never confident enough to ask questions for fear of being laughed at. However, any types of outdoor activities were a joy to me.

Pressure to leave school as soon as possible, and not receiving any encouragement whatsoever from the home, I'd lost all interest in further learning. Finding work was easier then too.

After leaving a job due to health problems, I heard about Continuing Education in Bendigo while reporting to Centrelink. I had worked at a job for the previous sixteen years so returning to study was a very scary proposition. I was very interested in learning about computers and wanted to keep my brain active. They say, use it or lose it. I don't have much to lose so I thought I had better use it.

I enjoyed the computer class. There is so much more to learn. My teacher, Noelene, was very patient. However, the courses have changed and I have gone on to try my hand at something else.

Overall, every teacher is patient and the atmosphere is not as overwhelming as I thought it might be. Everyone should try giving Adult Education a go. It is about making new friends and finding out everyone has a story to tell.

**Karen Hand is a student with Continuing Education in Bendigo.**

## **My return to learning**

*by Jenni Mullen*

After years of disruptive schooling, due to the constant moving around for my Dad's work, non-understanding teachers and also peer group ridicule, I have returned to school. I feel enough confidence now that I can try again.

I enrolled at Continuing Education Bendigo three years ago and have done a few courses. I feel confident. The teachers are caring and the other students are friends, not just students. We are all in nearly the same age groups and are all there for the same reasons, to catch up on what we missed out on all those years ago.

This adult learning may not lead me to work but has given me self-satisfaction, an achievement I never thought I would ever be able to accomplish.

Now I feel I can try any course because, while I may not pass, at least I can say I tried. I gave it my all, and no one judges me for it.

**Jenni Mullen is studying at Continuing Education in Bendigo.**

## **My story**

*by Michelle Galante*

My name is Michelle and I have no confidence in reading and writing. My parents, who are both illiterate, moved around lots while I was starting primary school. Basically I missed out on learning the alphabet. I would be reading a different language and get three or four sentences into it, before I realised that it was not English. So from then onwards I sat at the back of my class during my whole schooling. What would take everyone half an hour to write would take me two days. I seriously don't know how I made it through school.

Coming to ALBE, my confidence was still very low. I remember starting there sitting at the back, thinking this is school all over again. That thought lasted two days. I saw that everyone else was about my age and at the same level. I found the teachers to be interested which encouraged me to learn and enjoy my experience. I don't feel embarrassed to ask for help and keep on asking until I understand it. I find I'm not scared anymore of using the dictionary, and I keep it by my side looking up new words to express in my writing.

**Michelle Galante is a student at the Community Access Centre at Gippsland TAFE.**

## **A teacher's reflection**

*by Persephone Minglis*

The students, whose work I am submitting are part of a CGEA group at the Community Access Centre at Gippsland TAFE. There are 21 people at the moment, ranging in age from mid-teens to mid-fifties and ranging in ability from Certificate 1 (Introductory) to Certificate II. There are also two support workers. The strength of this class is a positive attitude to learning and support for each other as learners, which carries across the wide range of ages and experience.

For this piece, I introduced the *Fine Print* journal and gave each person a copy of the *Fine Print* flyer. On the whiteboard, I wrote the information in a simplified form. I read the flyer and the notes on the board. I gave the group a short history of our department's involvement with the Latrobe Valley and the many basic education programs we have had. I encouraged students to submit their pieces to show others the good work they've been doing. From a short discussion students decided they would write about their learning experiences.

I am a strong believer in the power of discussion, of voicing views and listening to one another before writing. For this task, I began by describing how my Greek family and working class background influenced my learning journey. This opened up a sharing of students' experiences and reflections. I try to ensure everyone in the group contributes if possible. What ensued was a rich discussion of shared experience and positive affirmation of adults returning to study.

Students are familiar with planning and drafting— most students begin a draft, some students with brainstorming ideas. It's very much the Process approach to writing, with exercises on punctuation and spelling where I perceive a need from students' writing and reading, or at their request.

Some students found the word length for this piece difficult to stick to. Shortening pieces was challenging, involving decisions

about what to include and what to omit. This was done by conferencing with me, or a support worker. In the end, these students ended up with two pieces, a longer version and a shorter version to submit. Students wrote three drafts before they were happy with their final copy.

When I think back to the students' writing and reading when they first began, and when I look at their writing now and how confidently they express their views during discussion, it is such a big leap. It's terrific to be part of it.

**Persephone Minglis is a teacher at the Community Access Centre at Gippsland TAFE.**

## **My story**

*by Romeo Cabion*

My life has changed since I started at TAFE to read. Before, when I was reading a sentence, I was always stuck on a word. When I go out it's good now because I can read. It's a good feeling.

One day at the Mass of Anointing, Sister Joy came over to Mum and I and sat down and asked me, 'Would you read the Gospel?'

I said, 'No'.

Sister Joy said, 'Why not?' I replied, 'I cannot read Sister Joy'. She said, 'Maybe next time'.

I have always thought one day I will be able to get up in front of all the people in Mass and read the Gospel. Reading is the hardest thing I have done in my life. But I have achieved.

I would like to say thank you to all the teachers at TAFE for being so helpful. One of the things I say is, I would give reading a go. It has not been easy. It has been about 20 years at TAFE.

**Romeo Cabion is a student at the Community Access Centre at Gippsland TAFE.**

## **My learning journey**

*by Shontai Farrell*

There are good reasons why it's better to be an adult returning to study, such as, there is no discrimination or embarrassment to be who you are. The teachers treat you with respect. The TAFE teachers I have are a lot easier to talk to, as they are more understanding. At TAFE you have the chance to learn at your own pace. Since I have been at TAFE

I have learned a lot and have made a lot of new friends. I feel very comfortable in my classes and enjoy coming.

I did my high school years at Moe High. I left in 1993, as there was a fire and the school burnt down. I lived with my Mum at the time.

Soon after, I decided to come to TAFE, to re-learn or just to learn things that I didn't get the chance to learn. I decided that I didn't do very well with maths and needed help but the teachers didn't have the time. I felt ignored. I often didn't get help from home either, so I had to look after myself.

My father lived in Wodonga with two of my sisters. My mother had shifted to Queensland. My Nan is the person I looked up to and was the person I went to for advice or help. My Nan also cared for another two of my sisters. My Nan helped me to get an apartment, because I felt I was too much trouble for my Nan. I then got an apartment with my girlfriend.

In 1997 I got a job at Safeway as a cashier to help pay my bills. Then I gave birth to my first child. In 2000 when I had my second child. I wanted to go back to school as soon as I could because I knew I had missed a lot of days and had not learned as much as I should have.

Having to get up early and be ready for school myself has made me very independent in learning. Also having to do homework by myself has made me an independent learner. Being sent to school late sometimes has made me very punctual, as you get in trouble for being late as a child at school. Having to walk or ride to school also made me an independent learner.

I am hoping to study hard so that I can be more independent and in the long run, hopefully, I can get a job that pays well and a job that I enjoy.

P.S. TAFE is a great place to go to get out of the house.

**Shontai Farrell is a student at Community Access Centre at Gippsland TAFE.**

## **My story**

*by Robert Sierak*

I have come back to school after years of work. I have worked all over the country as an unskilled labourer.

But over the years I got very bored. I realised that I was lacking in something. It was difficult to keep up, so I said

to myself, I will have to go back to school to right the problem that was wrong. It was traumatic not knowing how to translate the language that was holding me back from understanding 'right from wrong' with numeracy and literacy.

I have now made the choices to study and learn as an adult. Since I have come back to school my whole life has changed. I have been so better off going to school. Everything has been so clear and so full of understanding I can sleep at night. I have found out working out my maths problems has saved me lots of money that I can put back into my

education. I would like to go further with my awakening to the alphabet and figures.

**Robert Sierak is a student at the Community Access Centre at Gippsland TAFE.**



# Of people and places

A collection of writing describing the many characters, the family and friends, that may accompany us on the journey. There are also stories about the places that help to shape our view of the world.



## Homemaking with Helga: tip no. 23

by Helen Seiler

Can you believe how many types of air fresheners line our supermarkets shelves these days? Do we really smell that bad? Sure, things were a bit whiffy when my quads were young or when our Raymond opens his bedroom door, but what's wrong with a bit of a pong now and then. My hubby Angus hates air fresheners. He says our home has never been a bed of roses so why should it smell like one. He likes to walk in the back door and smell only one thing, us, the McGherkinshaws. So I do my best to keep it natural, except for ... well let me explain.

Our home's unique odour is a mixture of what I have endeavoured to cook over the past six days and what our digestive systems have done with the results. Add a pinch of Ajax powder, a squirt of plain label toilet cleaner, a puff of talcum powder (Angus is a chafer) and whatever the dog decides to contribute and there you have it, well nearly. I confess I do toss in one additional ingredient, burnt toast. I burn a square inch of bread in the grill, on purpose, every morning after Angus goes out to work in the yard. It helps balance all of our odours plus any special ones, such as a mouse dying in the kitchen wall cavity, into one lovely wholesome blend.

If I'm in a hurry I use raisin bread.

Helen Seiler is a student in the Open Learning Program at the School of Mines Ballarat (SMB).

## Observations in Casablanca

by Geoff Lawson

Casablanca is a modern city of high-rise buildings and wide boulevards. But there is an ancient walled section of narrow alleyways and jam-packed houses. Inside the southern wall lies a small area where three lanes converge. Each morning, when the sanitation truck has cleared away the garbage, this can be a pleasant place to linger, but it isn't for one man who lives here. He might be a light skinned Berber, or a darker African from the south. I can't tell as

the filth that covers him makes his whole appearance a shade of black.

He has shuffled for so long in fish guts, dog droppings and vomit that his unshod feet are now black lumps with barely discernible toes. His trouser legs are frayed and split and flap when he does a madman's dance. His hair, beard and darkened face merge to form a blob that rises above a plastic raincoat that has the sleeves ripped off.

At times he lies on his side against a wall with his arms wrapped tightly around his chest. At other moments he sleeps with his body twitching and lips moving with painful cries. One morning I saw him standing against the roughcast wall. His legs were straight and together. I didn't want to look, but a morbid curiosity drew my eyes. He moaned piteously with arms outstretched and teeth tightly clenched. His neck muscles stood taunt and quivering. His eyes rolled upwards and his head jerked violently from side to side. It seemed to me that his body, legs and arms were pinned and his only relief came from the ceaseless movement of his head. Sweat coursed down his face and streaked across the raincoat. I walked on, leaving him to his misery.

Geoff Lawson is a student at the School of Mines Ballarat, the TAFE division of the university.

## About Steve

by Jesse Phillips

In this world, perfection is almost constantly demanded by our peers. But for one man, perfection is just a state of mind. Like a hot knife through butter, Steve cuts through the rubbish of this world. As he walks past the examples of social standards for Generation Y, he focuses on impressing no one. If he can look in the mirror and say, 'I was me', he is as perfect as he wants to be.

Born in Traralgon, Victoria, Steve hasn't had the most normal upbringing. As he reached eight months of age his parents split and he returned to Melbourne without a father figure. Through highs and lows Steve's very essence

has been shaped and formed to produce a bitter, lonely and jaded member of society. Whether it is the nervous ticks he shows each day or the wall that barricades him from friends, Steve is living a very isolated and potentially dangerous life.

As Steve awakes to a new day, he must reassure himself that his dreams were only that. In his life he has ruined many relationships with anger, jealousy and insecurity. These relationships still haunt him today, in dreams, in fears and whenever the room turns dark and the night turns silent. But not everything is negative in his behaviour. From abuse and personal regret Steve has become a loyal, honest and caring man. It could have been to do with his new found faith or possibly because of emotional letdowns, but Steve is at his peak when it comes to being a good person. Yet the barriers still remain.

Nobody knows what he is afraid of, but Steve hasn't let many into his life. Steve refuses to use the word friend. In most cases, he prefers the term acquaintances. He talks to these people, sees them regularly, but he refuses to let them into his life. Like a full moon behind clouds, his true personality is hidden from the world. He doesn't seek perfection in anyone, but deep down he constantly fears they seek it in him. His world, his mind, is beyond perfection. He knows and understands his faults, but he embraces them. Steve will not follow trends; he cares not for impressing anyone. He wants to be true to everything he is and everything that has created his state of mind.

If you saw Steve walking down the street, you would notice an aura of isolation. His eyes are transfixed to the ground like a cat watching a mouse. He is too afraid to look ahead, too afraid to show the world his face. This is a face worn by depression and anxiety, a face that has been rejected too many times. His cold blue eyes cannot be seen. His barely-there facial hair that hasn't been shaved in four months, sticks out like that on a grandmother's cheek. His once curly gold locks have been brown and straight for many years, as if they were a bunch of sunflowers that have died from too much darkness.

His unbalanced steps distract people as he walks past and causes him to become more and more an enigma. Even though his lips have not touched the disgusting bitterness of alcohol, he walks in a staggering manner that would worry even the most broadminded passerby.

But it is what lies hidden in this man that is truly a cruel waste. His roundish ears are always listening when someone is expressing a problem. His generous behaviour seeks to help others as much as he helps himself. Beyond the gruff expression is a man who can offer a lot to people

around him in need. Whether it is worldly treasures or an emotional touch, he always gives more than his guilty mind can receive.

As the sun rises on a cold dreary morning, so does hope rise in the presences of the year 2008. It has been a long struggling journey but Steve is beginning to picture what he has to offer. Now he can imagine just how much he can help in this dark and selfish world. His heart was once lost, searching the barrenness that was Steve's life of solitude. But in January his heart was found by another searching for friendship. Like a pile of dominoes, one after another all falling to place, Steve can see a much brighter, joyful world. He now sees the beauty in the word friendship, as friendship can see the beauty in him.

Steve's wall of bitterness and regret has been shaken. It is just a matter of time before it falls to the ground crashing all his fears and releasing possibilities that are endless. The once cold lifeless expression today shines with brightness and hope. The once embarrassingly defensive stagger has become a hopeful strut of confidence. This is only an example of how an emotional, abused boy in a man's body can be healed by the glory of a beautiful and fulfilling friendship. Today Steve continues his walk down the bumpy and long road of the relationship highway, and he isn't looking back for anything.

**Jesse Phillips is a VCAL student at NMIT.**

## **A reflection on teaching writing**

*by Laine Cannard*

I approach the teaching of writing primarily as a risk-taking activity. Often students in literacy/VCAL studies feel tentative about their skills and ability to write. In many cases they have built up strategies to avoid the stress that writing creates for them. I find that initial writing tasks that involve content the student is very familiar with are ideal for getting started in writing. The student does not have to worry too much about the content. They already know it and can focus on transferring it to paper.

I stress the importance of the drafting process. Writing does not have to be perfect on the first go. Initially it is about getting it onto paper and then working on correcting and polishing the work. I take a skills-based approach to the writing genre we are working on, and try to facilitate good outcomes for students by building the knowledge that underpins the text.

In the case of Jesse's writing, the task was to describe someone they know well. To prepare students for this task we read three short essays describing people. These essays provided

students with some models of creative ways to approach the topic. We analysed the essay structure, considered the idea of audience and purpose and how the authors had addressed these through vocabulary, sequence and expression. At the same time I focused on vocabulary building, using word cards with adjectives and nouns describing personal qualities. We did things such as sorting them into negatives and positives qualities, clarifying meanings, listing their own best and worst qualities and ranking them into most important qualities wanted in a friend or partner. All this involved lively conversation, where students gave examples about people they knew. They also talked about the values that underpinned their ideas.

When I set this task I provided a model for the structure and numerous prompts for the type of content students could include. I provided feedback on their first draft and then they produced a final copy. I was thrilled with the essays that were produced.

Laine Cannard is a teacher in the Youth Unit at NMIT.

## My mother

by Mahuba Hassan

My mother's name was Mariam and she lived to 75. She had my body structure, so she wasn't tall and wasn't too short, nor too fat. She loved us very much and raised us in difficult conditions with a family of nine; sisters, brothers and parents.

My mum was a special mother because she never complained of any problems. She was patient, caring and very religious. She prayed always and if anything happened to her she said, 'That was Allah's will'. She never asked, 'Why did this and that happen to me?'

My mum didn't have the facilities or the technology which today's women have, like washing machines and many other things that make life easier. Although my mum didn't have much help with housework, she managed to keep us clean and well nourished.

The most important things that I will never forget about my sweet mum were that she taught me how to be patient and to be able to control my anger. I owe her in many ways for every good manner that I have and every good thing that I learnt in my life. What is more she never beat her children and never said bad words to us. She used to say, please don't do this and that. I always wondered how she could be so patient and happy and look after us more than herself.

What's more is that in our tradition the man is the breadwinner and not much help with running the household

and looking after the children. My father was one of those men and mum didn't have much help from him in that way.

As she got older and became sick, I kept her in my home and cared for her. It was the least I could do and it was my pleasure to do something in return for her at this point in her life. Unfortunately we separated due to civil war in Somalia. She stayed with my sister when I left for Italy and I could not return because of the horror of war.

During my absence the civil war continued in Somalia so I was not able to return home to spend more time with her and continue with her care. One of my regrets was the fact that I wasn't able to spend more time with her. She died some time after the war and I was not able to go back and see her.

She was a beautiful person who is always very dear to me.

Mahuba Hassan is a student at North Melbourne Language and Learning.

## The cake

by Inesa Huremovic

It is a wonderful, warm summer day. Many people are walking up and down the street. Next to the street is a café and an American lady sits alone, outside on the terrace. She has long brown hair, big blue eyes, and a black dress with a deep décolleté! She loves black clothes because she has more kilos than she should have.

She is disappointed as she thinks about her life. She is almost 30 years old but she doesn't have a boyfriend. She has never had a boyfriend. She knows that to come to Paris was probably a bad idea, because lovers come here to the city of love. But she needed to escape from her monotonous life. She thought maybe she could find her prince.

She orders a cake, a big cake with dark chocolate and one serve of vanilla ice-cream. When the cake arrives at her table, she starts to eat it but only with her eyes. She is interrupted by a man's deep voice.

'Bonjour madam'. He looks at her with his wonderful dark eyes.

She just stares at him and her heart begins to beat fast. Her face changes colour to red and she starts to smile but just a little bit.

'I've watched you for a long time and I observe that you are not French. Can I sit at your table?' he asks.

She looks at him and she looks at her cake. What should she do? The cake looks so delicious but the unknown man was also. She answers positively and pushes the cake away for a few minutes.

‘Merci’, he replies and he takes a seat in front of her.

They start talking, asking questions to get to know each other better. She loves his accent and the way they speak in English. She really enjoys his company. He is polite. He looks her in the eyes and not at her deep décolleté. She could not believe that she was in a café with a good-looking man and everybody could see them. She smiled like a child that was given a big lollypop.

After a long time he said he must go back to work. She agreed when he wanted to give her his number.

‘Oui, oui!’ She was excited and searched for a piece of paper in her bag but she couldn’t find anything. He saw that she didn’t have paper so he took the serviette from the cake and wrote his phone number on it.

‘Please call me I would like to have a rendezvous with you’.

He kissed her hand and went away. She looked after him for a few moments and dreamed about children, many children, a big house near Paris, a little dog and a cat. She would cook and bake delicious cookies and cakes. So she daydreamed. With her right hand she reached over and moved her cake back in front of her and started eating.

As she ate the cake, a little piece of dark chocolate fell into her décolleté and onto the front of her dress. She picked up the serviette, forgetting that his number was on it. She cleaned her dress and put the serviette back on the table. After a few seconds she realised her mistake and smacked herself on the head and tried to quickly grab the serviette but it was too late. She couldn’t see the numbers because the dark chocolate was all over it. She tried to clean it and to see some numbers but there was nothing she could do. It was ruined! Her dreams of a happy family flew away.

She sighed deeply and thought, I am at the start again. She was so disappointed. She continued to think, well, since I am at the start again I should order another cake.

‘Garçon!’ she called the waiter and ordered a new cake, but this time it wasn’t with dark chocolate but with vanilla and fruit.

**Inesa Huremovic is a student at North Melbourne Language and Learning.**

## Teaching creative writing

*by Lisa O’Farrell*

As a teacher of Certificate 3 ESL Frameworks, I find that teaching this learning outcome with my current students is a challenging task. Many see no need or use for this style of writing and many are also not familiar with the genre and quickly panic when the task is mentioned.

I have found that teaching the creative reading outcome first helps give all the students exposure to the vocabulary, style and content of this style of writing. It also gives a focus for discussion and development work using adjectives and adverbs.

I often produce small paragraphs that model styles of creativity including mystery, romance, drama and science fiction. Students are encouraged to simply add three lines in order to encourage story development. We may brainstorm many possible endings.

As a class, we may also create story plans, initially as a class and then individually. I may model a plan, which they write, or give them a written story so they can write a model. I am careful to encourage those students who take a risk or use imagination to produce an unexpected ending.

I find this approach gives students a range of content ideas and tools to help the actual writing task become less stressful. I have been extremely pleased with the effort and work produced this year. Importantly, the students are really pleased with the writing they have produced.

**Lisa is a teacher at North Melbourne Language and Learning.**

## Teaching writing

*by Barbara Ladd*

To facilitate the writing process of biographies, my approach is to start with an example of writing extracted from an existing biography or life recount. On this basis, I create a framework of personal questions to help structure and build up the framework for the student’s own biography. I use a combination of chronological and interest-based questions.

To ensure originality, I encourage the students to interview each other and then record the answers for inclusion in their own biography. The finished piece often includes memories and cultural anecdotes from their rich personal histories. We may publish or share the stories if the students are comfortable with sharing the experiences.

**Barbara is a teacher at North Melbourne Language and Learning.**

## A winter's day

by Julie Spragge

To be alone in the bush with the warmth of the sun on my back is my haven.

Serenely, I walk the tracks made for trekkers, warming up as I follow the slope of the land. I wait for a cool breeze to flow over me as I descend the path. The hat I wear shades my eyes from the bright sun reflecting from the granite outcrops surrounding me.

There are pretty birds, wrens and finches, so small, busy flying about in their daily rush to survive. White cockatoos and pink galahs screech as they fly overhead and the shrill cries of black crows in distant treetops can be heard.

I hear the soft flow of the river continuing on to a waterfall that splashes beyond its boundary. I listen to the gush of water swirling over the potholes made from many years of movement resulting in erosion.

I am engulfed by the pretty colours of grey trunks and brown strips of bark shed as the trees grow; the smell of bright yellow wattle that glows as if lit up at night and the hum of bees collecting pollen.

To not see a cloud in the sky but to see the vapour trails made by jet planes that are far away, the bush with its fresh air and space gives me a feeling of freedom and peace.

I become saddened by the lengthening of shadows which proclaims evening closing in.

Julie Spragge is currently studying at The Avenue Neighbourhood House in Blackburn South.

## Teaching writing

by Jenny Chalmers

Writing does not just happen—we need to want to say something, independently, from our soul, before we can commit to sharing our news with everyone.

I tutor a small group of adult women who bring to class many and varied experiences and because their needs are similar, we all work together in a friendly and supportive way to improve our literacy skills.

Mostly, they have all experienced disappointment in their learning journeys and need to feel that they are totally supported in this quest for success. Importantly, there is a need for a basic

foundation that they can build upon, rely on, and experiment with, to find a platform from which they can ultimately fly.

As spelling is a frequent frustration for the majority of my students, we spend time developing phonic and memory skills and establishing an awareness of syllables. I encourage the use of dictionaries, spellers and individual index books so students feel confident at being able to access the correct spelling at all times. It was many years ago in the 1970's, when I became a disciple of Elsie Smelt, whose book *How to Speak, Spell and Read* outlines 'the orderly relationship between sound and letters in words'. For me, this has proved to be an exceptionally wonderful teaching theory.

Writing is encouraged through short regular writing exercises based on personal and familiar topics. To support and motivate the students in their writing activities, short well-written stories or extracts are read and explored for their inspirational qualities. Looking for descriptive words and creative ways of expressing views gives us a way of developing a scaffold to build up our writing techniques.

We all learn together, support and encourage each other and although we only meet once a week, the enthusiasm is carried with the students from lesson to lesson.

I would have to be one of the luckiest tutors to be able to work with such a trusting, conscientious and optimistic group of learners who have all acknowledged and faced their fears to gain the confidence to eagerly pursue the fascinating world of literature.

Jenny Chalmers is a literacy tutor at The Avenue Neighbourhood House in Blackburn South.

## Learning a lesson

by Dove

When I was a child I liked to watch my friends play. I would join them now and then but I preferred watching. Every day, we would see an old man walking by our playground, carrying an umbrella. He had big ears and a bald head. The moment my friends saw him pass by, they would shout, 'Hey, deaf and dumb, what's the time?' They told me that he could neither hear nor speak. One day at early evening, I was standing at the gate of my house when I saw the old man coming. I was alone. There were no friends around to shout at him as usual. But how could I let this man walk by without saying anything? So for the first time, I asked in a soft voice, 'Hey deaf and dumb, what's the time?' The old man looked at me. Then he looked at his watch and replied, 'It's five-thirty.' I ran inside the house and never shouted at

the old man again. After that day I knew I couldn't judge a person through their appearance. 'You can't judge a book by its cover' as they say.

**Dove is a student in the Access Department at Swinburne University of Technology TAFE.**

## **A teacher's reflection**

*by Vittoria Grossi*

Writing in any genre is not something that comes easily and naturally to everyone. For some students it is the most challenging task they face in our course. I feel the starting point is to inspire writing by making the task relevant and interesting to the learner.

With this in mind I called the task 'A learning journal'. In it the students were asked to write about significant moments or critical moments in their learning experiences, both in formal and informal situations. As we were exploring essay writing tasks in the areas of globalisation I encouraged the students to think about their cross-cultural experiences. What surprised them when they came here? How did they react to this? How are things different from their own country? Students were asked to think about how everyday activities are organised differently in Australia; transport, schooling, shopping, eating. If these topics did not engage them, I asked students to describe an important day, their best friend or their decision to migrate.

The students had to write and submit at least five entries, each between 250 and 500 words. Some of the experiences were shared in the class. Some students rewrote or edited their pieces following my comments. The feedback to this task was very positive indeed and I would certainly use this again.

**Vittoria is a teacher in Certificate IV Frameworks ESL (Further Study) in the Access Department at Swinburne University of Technology TAFE.**

## **Names**

*by Nora*

Hi Gina! Hi Catherine!

If somebody told me two years ago that I would be calling my teachers by their first name, I would think he or she was crazy.

Nowadays, if I called my teachers by their surname, they would be worried about me and my mental health. The change did not come about because of different times but because of a different place and culture.

In my culture, nobody dares to call teachers, bosses or older people by their first name. It is rude. We use it only between members of our family, to call brothers and sisters, wife or husband, or for parents to call their children. We also use it between really close friends.

Although our teacher or boss can be our friend, we call him or her by their surname to show respect. It took me a long time until I stopped feeling guilty after using my teacher's first name. Here I had to learn a new sense of names. Our first name is not such a private thing to be only used by our relatives. Our surname is not so unique to be only used for our identification.

**Nora is a student in the Access Department at Swinburne University of Technology TAFE.**



# The poetry of learning

A teacher and her students, based at NMIT Epping, use poetry as a means to shed light on the twists and turns in their learning journeys.



## My life

*by Joe Galati*

Going to school until the age of eleven  
Mum and Dad said that was the rule  
They were busy with a family of ten  
And had little time for me.  
Life back then, was distracted in Italy.

I left home at fifteen, full of awe and wonder  
On an old ship for a country far away  
Seasickness brought me to my knees, but  
A strange fruit from a banana tree  
Brought life back to me.

I landed in Australia, a country full of dust  
Where I had to earn my crust.  
No English, a strange culture, I attended migrant  
school  
Keen to learn a word or two.

I wondered from job to job, trying to make ends meet,  
Then I found my niche  
That saw me to the age of sixty-three.  
I returned to study, and that was the best thing for me.

I attended a Sustainable Living workshop, compiled a  
list, and  
An award and a cheque I did receive  
To prove I can succeed.  
This gave me a burst and a thirst for more.

## A teacher's perspective on the writing process and writing poetry

*by Parris Frangie*

The client group I work with are ALBE students of different literacy levels, cultural backgrounds and age groups. Many of these students are very creative but have never had the confidence or opportunity to give expression to their creativity. Their writing experience is often restricted because of their previous educational experience and in some cases, the pressures of family circumstances.

The students have developed confidence over the year by engaging in a variety of writing genres. This particular group of students is participating in work experience this semester. When they were asked to decide on their choice of work placement one of the students said that she wanted to be a mechanic because she was passionate about Ford motor cars. So much so that she often wrote poetry about Fords. I encouraged her to write the class a poem. She embraced the idea and with her permission I used her poem in a unit of work we were doing on language analysis.

This generated a lot of interest. I have found that using a student's work in class often encourages others to have the confidence to believe in their own ability a little more. I suggested that we could all have a play with the idea of everyone writing their own poem. The theme was to be a reflection of their school life—looking back, looking forward and looking at now.

I reassured them that it would be a group effort. I began with some guided questions relating to their past, present and future. They were asked to try to remember things such as the smell of the schoolyard, where they sat in a classroom and how they went to school. I then gave them a good hour to sit together and reminisce. This relaxed them and took them back on a journey from primary school, to high school, to now. They were then asked to just write down all of the feelings, thoughts, smells, and things they remembered that were good, that were bad, that made them laugh, that made them cry.

We all shared our memories. In three days their poems had taken form and by the fourth day they were experiencing the birth of their poems. They were then able to stand back and take control of the language and play with rhyme. I explained that they could, if they wished, treat their words as if they were plasticine and mould them into whatever shape they desired.

From my perspective as a teacher this project was wonderfully uplifting to have the pleasure of being part of a very brave group of people who were prepared to take themselves back to their childhood and then recreate this moment in time once again as adults, back in a classroom environment, and achieve a result that they will remember with pride.

Parris Frangie is an ALBE teacher at NMIT Epping.

## **Fights and rumbles**

*by Dion*

Fights and rumbles this is where my school life  
crumbled

Always getting into trouble during my school years I  
didn't learn much

Apart from recess and lunch

Detention to expulsion.

But now I am back doing adult education

The beginning of a new foundation makes

Me wonder why I ever left, maybe

I should have become a teacher's pet.

Damm how could I forget being a class clown

I laughed then but I cry now this

Troubled life got me walking with my head

Down flashing frowns am I wrong

Guess I'll never know so I carry on.

I left school to follow in my daddy's shoes

Now I think with my head and I fight with my pen.

I followed someone who is almost dead and buried.

I find myself walking through

The cemetery talking to the dirt.

Dear Lord take away all the hurt

And show me some happiness again I am going blind.

I know the world is mine.

It's time to shine keep your head up, you'll be fine.

I think it's time to get rid of Centrelink

If you want to succeed

You must defeat the evil beast

So screw them dead beats

I am a changed man.

I want to make it on my own not a hand out

I want to make it to the road to success

It's the only way out of this mess

It's time to do my best.

## **English**

*by A. Ingham*

My friends and school

In Infant school

No memories

Other than my poorly ears

Then I met Jade

She and I have been buddies

All these years

In Junior school

Some memories

I met my best mate Matt

Always smiling and talking

I'll never forget those chats

In high school

Lots of memories

I met the best mates ever

We were always there together

And looked out for one another

Now I've moved to Aussie

It's hard for us all

But I hope our friendship

Will never fall

Back to school

Met lots of new friends

Laughing and full of chatter

Still rubbish at English

But it doesn't matter

English is getting better

Learning more each day

And building more memories

That will always stay

## **The journey**

*by Marie Basanisi*

Pita! Pata! Pita! Pata!

Looking out the window

Watching the rain fall

Wondering how to get to school.

Along comes Dad

In his big red truck

In we get

Squishy Squashy

Around the corner

Up the street.

In the gate

Running to class

Ding Dong Ding Dong

All around the table we gathered

Making puppets was so fun.

Hot pies and sausage rolls

I could not resist

Hot days were so fun

Icy poles were a treat

Out in the playground

The rope goes round.

Then the fun slowly fades  
Like the falling fog  
Under the spell of the nuns  
Nowhere to go  
Nowhere to hide  
Waiting for the end of class to come  
Make up and hair  
Was on my mind  
Girls just wanna have fun.

Now at forty  
Back I go  
It was frightening then  
But now it's fun  
Just like the first day  
One thing has changed  
I have a choice  
So off I go to learning land  
Just like Alice in Wonderland.

### **Back again**

*by Tracey Casha*

Walking to school pick up my friend  
Playing on the monkey bars till the bell rang  
My teacher was beautiful  
I wanted to be her  
With big hair and make-up and nice clothes.

Got sick in Grade Six  
So had to repeat  
Year Seven was good  
Had lots of friends  
Suspended for talking to boys  
That didn't go to school  
Playing netball and running around  
Sports day was fun  
I loved to run and run  
My grades started to go down  
I just wanted to play around  
Left at Year Ten  
Got a job through a friend.

Many years passed  
Returned to study  
Wasn't happy at all  
First it was daunting  
Now it is fine  
Teachers make it easy  
Classmates are fun  
The days dragged on  
Now they go faster  
Won't say it's joyful

I'll just do my best.

### **Bits and pieces**

*by Marlene Parker*

I don't remember too much about school  
Just bits and pieces  
I remember walking  
With my brother  
The fog was so thick  
We would Cooee to each other.

My favourite sports  
Were rounders and basketball  
Being competitive against the other schools  
I loved it.

I would sit  
Behind the biggest in the class  
Hiding from the teachers  
Afraid of what they would ask  
And if I was wrong I would be embarrassed  
That was long ago  
When I was young.

Now after forty years plus three  
I have been told  
To return to study  
It was quite disturbing  
Now I have settled in  
It's not so bad  
I get on well with my new friends  
And my teacher Parris.

As I look towards the future  
Uncertainty is what I see  
Will I work or will I study  
What will become of me?

### **Adult learner**

*by Alan Dickson*

Thirty-five years after leaving school  
Here I am back doing it all again  
As an adult student  
I didn't know where to begin  
But two months on it's like I never left  
The teachers are better than high school days  
Maybe because I'm older and set in my ways.

Success or fail it doesn't really matter  
As long as I feel I have done my best

I have met new people and made some friends  
But that's how school was when I was ten  
Tables and chairs have replaced desks  
Where you sit in groups and not in pairs.

At seventeen you had no fears  
Youth was on your side  
No doubts, no problems, no worries  
The world was big and bright  
Now at fifty the future is uncertain  
Will you get work again?  
Or will you fall under the Centrelink burden?

### **A new beginning**

*by Dianne Thomson*

Going back to class twenty years later  
Apprehension is what I felt,  
Would I still remember how to learn  
Or would I make a fool of myself?

A new set of rules, no uniform  
No teenage angst or jealousy,  
Only help and understanding  
That comes with maturity.

Returning to study would have to be  
The best decision I have made,  
Growing in confidence as I awaken my skills  
They have laid dormant for two decades.

As my learning journey continues  
Into the coming years,  
I hope success I will find  
And trust it will be near.

For my journey has just begun  
As I study day and into the night,  
The road will be a long one,  
To move forward from darkness to light.

### **Down memory lane**

*by Elaine Thomas*

I walked the straight and narrow line to school  
Hot, cold, wind or rain it was always the same  
Home for lunch and back to school again.

Grade Four was cool  
As was my teacher Mr Poole  
Wise and smart  
He hated the word can't.

Main gate too far around  
Side gate out of bounds  
My friend and I always caught  
Taking the short cut home.

In Grade Six  
Sneaking around  
Unlocking the doors  
In the school grounds  
My friend and I had a ball  
Confusing the prefect  
To no end at all.

Transition to secondary went well  
Teachers were great  
Kids were swell  
This is the year I remember so well.

Got into fights  
Over stupid things  
Started to talk  
Then became best friends.

Playing students against teachers  
In hockey was great  
Treated as equals  
Was part of the game  
Never mattered who won  
Cheering and screaming  
From both sides of the field  
We all had fun  
These are the days  
I remember so well.  
Skies grey, tears hidden in rain  
Had to repeat Year Ten again  
Parents thought I was a pain  
On their purse string I was a drain  
Leaving school was their choice  
I felt I had no voice.

Always wanted to go back to class  
But fell in love  
And time passed  
Had kids  
Watched them grow  
Now they're on their own.

Centrelink said it's time for you  
Go back to school  
To learn something new  
Get a job  
That's what you must do.

So back I go

Scared as hell  
First day back turned out swell.

Never thought I had the brains to learn  
Now I know  
Education is what I yearn.



# Students and teachers featured in this edition

## Students

Peter Stevens, NMIT  
Kyra, CAE  
Ourania Panagiotidis, Australian Greek Welfare Society  
Geoff, Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre  
Anthony, Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre  
Randa, Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre  
Binh Giang, North Melbourne Language and Learning  
Shane Kirby, Victoria University (TAFE)  
Luciano, CAE  
Dao Le, Chisholm TAFE  
Emma Jobling, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre  
Lucy, CAE  
John Martin, Lalor Living and Learning Centre  
Gemia, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre  
Najlala Albatat, Kangan Batman TAFE  
Jessica Dunn, Kangan Batman TAFE  
Sam, Gordon Institute TAFE  
Marlene Parker, NMIT  
Alan Dickson, NMIT  
Dianne Thomson, NMIT  
Elaine Thomas, NMIT  
Karen Hand, Continuing Education Bendigo  
Jenni Mullen, Continuing Education Bendigo  
Michelle Galante, Community Access Centre Gippsland TAFE  
Romeo Cabion, Community Access Centre Gippsland TAFE  
Shontai Farrell, Community Access Centre Gippsland TAFE  
Robert Sierak, Community Access Centre Gippsland TAFE  
Helen Seiler, School of Mines Ballarat  
Geoff Lawson, School of Mines Ballarat  
Jesse Phillips, NMIT  
Mahuba Hassan, North Melbourne Language and Learning  
Inesa Huremovic, North Melbourne Language and Learning  
Julie Spragge, The Avenue Neighbourhood House Blackburn South  
Dove, Swinburne University of Technology TAFE  
Nora, Swinburne University of Technology TAFE  
Joe Galati, NMIT  
Dion, NMIT  
A.Ingham, NMIT

Marie Basanisi, NMIT

Tracey Casha, NMIT

## Teachers

Gilda Alavuk, NMIT  
Jacinta Agostinelli, Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre  
Bronwyn Stretton, Gordon Institute of TAFE  
Persephone Minglis, Community Access Centre Gippsland TAFE  
Laine Cannard, NMIT  
Lisa O'Farrell, North Melbourne Language and Learning  
Barbara Ladd, North Melbourne Language and Learning  
Jenny Chalmers, The Avenue Neighbourhood House Blackburn South  
Vittoria Grossi, Swinburne University of Technology TAFE  
Parris Frangie, NMIT

...continued from page 2

makers, journalists and politicians will read these stories; which convey messages about learning which more than complement statistics and budgets.

From the editorial committee welcome and farewell.

VALBEC welcomes Tricia Bowen as the new editor of *Fine Print*. Tricia took on the role in time to produce the previous 30th anniversary edition, and she has many years of experience in the fields of writing, publishing, adult education and the arts. Tricia has brought her skills as a writer, editor and educator to the job of collating and arranging this special student writing edition.

We also welcome Sally Hutchinson and Jane Westworth to the editorial group. Sally is an experienced ESL literacy

teacher and is now working in a management role at Faculty of Further Education at NMIT. Jane is a teacher at RMIT and has a particular interest in teaching and learning online.

We farewell Robin Kenrick. Robin served VALBEC for a number of years as president and committee member previous to five years on the editorial group. Robin has made many inspiring contributions and suggestions for the journal, and she has been instrumental in the concept for this edition.

Sarah Deasey  
*Fine Print* Editorial Group