

# LIVING TODAY

in Mooroolbark and the Yarra Ranges

NO. 71 JUNE 2020

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# Not Just a GP



Dr Skilbeck treating an Aussie patient at the Ba Methodist Hospital in Fiji in 1982

The media has been saturated with information and commentary about COVID-19 for months now. We're living in uncharted territory. As a GP friend of mine said, "We're only beginning to gain some understanding of this disease. There's so much we don't know, but we're learning all the time."

It's timely for us to offer our gratitude to so many who continue to serve the common good—quietly, devotedly, sometimes obscurely. People who, like my friend the GP, make themselves vulnerable and place themselves at risk through their commitment to all of us.

At the front line are thousands of doctors, nurses, paramedics, hospital ancillary staff, teachers, chaplains and others providing essential pastoral care for our community. There are staff employed by supermarkets and other essential businesses, those who handle and deliver the deluge of packages that result from escalating online purchasing, and members of our police force. These people continue to serve you and me, because all of us are affected by COVID-19 to one degree or another.

It's impossible to adequately express our deep thanks to such people, who seem to have embraced the words of Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Marilynne Robinson: "To value one another is our greatest safety, and to indulge in fear and contempt is our gravest error."<sup>1</sup>

These people continue to respond and to bring benefit to us all even as they struggle with personal misgivings, anxiety, apprehension, and the unfortunate occasional abuse.

So, when my GP friend, Dr Keith Skilbeck, asked why I wanted to write about him, the answer wasn't difficult.

"I'm just a GP," said Keith. "Why would you want to write about me? What interest would there be in my life? Who would know me other than those I come across in day-to-day life?"

Why would anyone want to write about and read about Keith Skilbeck, GP? Because he's representative of a vast number of those to whom we owe our community wellbeing.

Keith and his wife Liz have lived in Mooroolbark for almost forty years. They raised their five children in Mooroolbark, and Keith has served our community from the Burntbridge and Wicklow medical clinics since 1981. Currently, Keith is one of the team of doctors serving at the Wicklow Avenue Medical Centre in Croydon, having relinquished his role as business partner in 2017 after 35 years in that position.

There's a growing trend to describe the healthcare sector as an industry. When we do, there's a risk of focusing on the economics of running a business at the expense of the personal care and trust built up, sometimes over generations, with a family doctor.

There's a tension between the quite understandable government desire to reduce pressure on hospitals by providing multidisciplinary care at "Super Clinics"<sup>2</sup> and the very human need we have for care delivered from a relationship of trust, frequently years in the making. I've benefitted from having Keith as my GP for some years now and I value the long-term foundation of trust that I hope will never disappear from doctor-patient relationships.

During nearly 40 years in general practice, Keith has journeyed alongside patients who come to him seeking care. He prefers to offer big-picture, holistic, preventative care in

response to the long-term needs of body, mind and spirit.

As I spoke with Keith, I was moved by his very obvious compassion for those he cares for. There were sometimes silences at the other end of the phone as he attempted to check his emotions when remembering people he has valued and cared for. For many years he took a particular interest in obstetrics, with the privilege of caring for some patients from first breath and other patients to their final breath. In addition to routine medical issues, Keith has seen people undergo tremendous struggles with challenges like serious illness and addiction. Although equal care is extended to all, outcomes vary. There are the inevitable joys experienced upon recovery, but also on occasion the grieving associated with those who might relapse—sometimes terminally.

I wonder whether we contemplate the emotional cost involved in offering care for others as much as we should. Who cares for the carers? Do each of us take some personal responsibility for thanking and encouraging those who care for us—those whose lives are very much like ours and who, like us, experience both the highs and lows of accomplishment?

Keith grew up in Mont Albert, where his father owned a grocery-delicatessen business which later became part of the Four Square supermarket chain.<sup>3</sup>

The youngest of four by quite a number of years, Keith pursued his schooling, church activities, musical and sporting interests.

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, M., 2015. *The Givenness Of Things*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p.29.

<sup>2</sup> [anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/administration-gp-super-clinics-program](http://anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/administration-gp-super-clinics-program)

<sup>3</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four\\_Square\\_\(supermarket\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Square_(supermarket))



The Skilbeck family in 1994 (left) and 2004 (right). From left to right, the 1994 photo shows Joshua, Joel, Jared, Luke, Rebekah, Liz, and Keith

Although not feeling that he was the most gifted of students, he discovered that perseverance and hard work paid off. Developing from his childhood interest in science, at the age of 12,



Keith at four years old. He grew up in Mont Albert, the youngest of four children.

Keith told his classmates that he intended to become a doctor, much to their surprise. They saw Keith spending more time kicking a footy or playing cricket than with his nose in a book.

While studying medicine at Melbourne University, Keith met his wife-to-be, Liz, who was training as a nurse. They married in 1978—a long, rich union that continues.

Keith acknowledges the importance of the mentoring he received. Through his teen years he was encouraged by youth leader Gil Cann.<sup>4</sup> Following his medical studies, the experience of those who helped him understand the nature, purposes and approaches of community health care were particularly valuable. They were not one-off events, but were collegial working relationships shared over many years. “You learn a great deal when you’re working in the next room along from another experienced doctor,” said Keith, “things about the ways families operate, how children think, or possibilities available for particular clinical challenges.”

4 [giccann.com/](http://giccann.com/)

Dr Ian Cameron GP was extremely helpful to Keith. Ian had been the medical officer for the City of Croydon and Maroondah since 1961 and brought a wealth of experience,<sup>5</sup> as did Bram Southwell and Paul Ambrose who’d gained experience as a GP while Keith was working in hospitals.

In 2017, Keith was inducted as a life member of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. He was the fifth doctor from Wicklow Avenue Medical Centre to receive the recognition. Doctors Ian Cameron, Bram Southwell, Paul Ambrose and John Easton had all previously received the recognition.<sup>6</sup>

Keith speaks about practising holistic medicine that caters to the body, mind and spirit of patients. As a Christian, he is convinced of the importance that a patient’s faith can play during ill health, recovery and also when confronting our mortality, but takes a respectful approach to other beliefs when encouraging patients to cultivate the spiritual dimension in their lives.

The way Keith lives is in itself instructive for us. He sees the need for exercise—running or swimming to clear the mind. During his life he has completed four Melbourne Marathons, along with multiple Puffing Billy runs—once even beating the train!

Marriage and family are hugely important to Keith and Liz, and for almost a decade they facilitated a program entitled “The Marriage Course” at Mooroolbark Baptist Church, where they’ve been members since settling in Mooroolbark.<sup>7</sup> From 1989 until 2007 Keith took on a leadership role with the Boy’s Brigade which operated at the church. Having four sons, it seemed the natural thing to do. He served as captain of the brigade from 1990 and served at several Pan Australia camps. The Boy’s Brigade has an interesting history. Founded in Glasgow in 1883, it preceded the Boy Scout movement which was established in 1908 by Baden Powell, himself a product of Boy’s Brigade.<sup>8</sup> During Keith’s tenure, he established Anchor Boys for younger ages, and several members from the brigade completed their Queen’s Award.

Amongst all that was going on, there was a memorable three-month long road trip enjoyed by the family. Education continued,

5 [scotch.vic.edu.au/greatscot/2005sepgs/53obit.htm](http://scotch.vic.edu.au/greatscot/2005sepgs/53obit.htm)

6 [wickmed.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/wamcnewsletterjanuary2017.pdf](http://wickmed.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/wamcnewsletterjanuary2017.pdf)

7 [marriageandparenting.org.au/tmc](http://marriageandparenting.org.au/tmc)

8 [boys-brigade.org.uk/our-history/](http://boys-brigade.org.uk/our-history/)

with Keith obtaining advanced qualifications in dermoscopy and the treatment of skin cancers. National and international connections and conferences with medical colleagues continue to be important to Keith through membership of WONCA (World Organisation of Family Doctors), the International Christian Medical and Dental Association, and Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship of Australia.

One word cropped up during my phone conversation with Keith. It was the word ‘privilege’—the keen sense of privilege that Keith experiences when people share their life, their concerns, and their vulnerabilities with another.

I want to thank Keith (and the so many others that he represents!) for his unassuming, compassionate, diligent care offered to so many. Close to forty years at Wicklow Avenue play out through the generations of many families! And, though Keith might claim that he’s “just a GP”, we might all echo his words: “I’m just a ...”. Perhaps we can more deeply reflect on Marilynne Robinson’s words: “to value one another is our greatest safety” and commit ourselves to deeply valuing other people and working for the common good.



Randall Bourchier

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PHOTOS: BARBARA AUSTIN

## The Festival That Wasn't!

One of the good things about living in Australia is that we are often just that little bit behind in experiencing what other countries go through.

Being "behind" has its downsides, of course. After all, wouldn't it be more convenient for travellers, businesses, and communication if we were in the same time zone as other countries? There would be no more jet lag, and no more phoning business contacts or relatives late at night because they are awake when we sleep.

When it comes to experiencing a worldwide pandemic, being behind was an advantage for Australia. Because COVID-19 began on the other side of the world, we had more time to prepare and to be informed about self-isolation, increased hygiene, personal protective equipment, online teaching, and learning how to adjust without our local events to entertain us. We learned that in countries that were practising self-isolation, the virus was contained much better, and we followed their lead.

Friday 13 March 2020 was an important day for the Celebrate Mooroolbark Committee—it was the day that the festival was cancelled. Our decision was based on the information coming from overseas, and the government advice that events for more than 500 people should be cancelled.

Once that decision was made, the Celebrate Mooroolbark Committee moved quickly. A message went out on our Facebook page and our website, and stallholders, Red Earth Unearthed and parade and main stage participants were informed. Emails were sent to our major sponsors who support us every year, and who have been very generous with their donations.

One of the questions the Celebrate Mooroolbark Committee had was: how do we make 21 March, the day of the festival, a special day for the community?

Our festival advisor Yolande suggested, and the committee agreed, that Collin Bogaars and Copper Taylor-Bogaars (performing as the Batacud Boys) be invited to entertain the public in Brice Avenue and Manchester Road in Mooroolbark on that day. These versatile entertainers have delighted the crowds at past Celebrate Mooroolbark festivals with their music and juggling, and were happy to bring their talents to the streets of Mooroolbark once more. Yarra Ranges Life TV and representatives from the Yarra Ranges Council planned to be in Mooroolbark too.

Unfortunately, most of the shops were closed because of self-isolating but, undeterred, the Batacud Boys started from Bakehouse Boss Café in Brice Avenue, and made their way down the street, entertaining anyone who happened to be there with their antics, witty remarks, and music.

Owners of shops that were still open came out to greet them and said "You have made my day!" It had been a particularly challenging week for businesses, as one by one they closed their doors, not knowing when or if they would reopen, so to have some light-hearted fun was a welcome relief. In appreciation, Bakehouse Boss Café gave the duo a free lunch.

Yarra Ranges Life TV presented live interviews and coverage of what was happening in Brice Avenue, including a pictorial history of 40 years of Mooroolbark festivals compiled by Mooroolbark History Group. YRLTV also spoke to Eric, the owner of a meticulously restored red 93-year-old Austin 7. Later, the Batacud Boys piled into the car and Eric's son Trevor took the car for a slow cruise through the shopping precinct while the Batacud Boys entertained passers by with their musical talent.

It certainly wasn't the festival we had anticipated for the past year, but it was a mini festival of sorts.

With all the work that the committee and other people had put into its success, it was disappointing to have to cancel this year's festival. People are very resilient, though, and we are already looking forward to Celebrate Mooroolbark 2021. This month the committee will begin planning next year's festival, with a brand-new theme and new ideas. We will still have the festival that's "the best one yet"!

If you would like to be a part of next year's Celebrate Mooroolbark festival, give Barbara a call on 0417 481 542 or email [barbara@celebratemooroolbark.com](mailto:barbara@celebratemooroolbark.com). More information and updates can also be found on our Facebook page.

**Barbara Austin**  
Chair, Celebrate Mooroolbark Committee

# What's Important to You?

The road to recovery after the coronavirus pandemic will no doubt be a long and difficult one for many Australians. One of the biggest changes will be to our economy. With many people out of work and the nation struggling to regain some financial equilibrium, we may find it's time to start evaluating what's really important to us.

Every day, all day, we're all surrounded by an incessant focus on materialism. We're constantly hounded to buy up-to-date gadgets, the latest clothes and other irresistible attractions. But when times get tough, young people often see a very bleak future ahead of them. Depressed economies mean high unemployment, so it's not surprising when people begin to run out of hope and see very limited potential for a comfortable future for themselves and their community.



## How do we know when 'enough is enough'?

Is today's 'enough' the same as it was 20 years ago? As parents, we might find it helpful to ponder whether we are reinforcing healthy lifestyle values for our children. We live in an age of materialism! Our kids have grown up with physical possessions in abundance—but has it done them any good? Or has it made them more self-centred? Do they feel that they deserve the latest 'must have' because 'everyone else has got one'? Is this thinking creeping into our attitudes as well?

How will our children's generation cope with an excessive focus on materialism and belongings, while at the same time possibly facing financial insecurity? Will they simply expect to have whatever is advertised on TV or online? Advertising is very effective at implying that we're just not worthy if we don't have the material possessions that are being offered. As parents we can help our children by encouraging them to show gratitude and appreciation for all we do have, especially here in Australia—safety, food, shelter, social security, and education. Even in difficult times, we have so much more than most of the world, which struggles to fulfill very basic and desperate needs every day.

## What's still important—no matter what?

When a community respects all of its citizens and seeks to ensure that everyone has what they need—as opposed to showing people what they should want—we are able to see the value in each other.

I have noticed that when young people do what they want for an extended period of time—for example during the school holidays—and have very little activity that is focused away from themselves, they can become very miserable and grumpy. Humanly we are hard-wired to have some giving in our lives. It adds a dimension to our inner person that we don't get from just pleasing ourselves.

Advertising encourages us to be selfish, with its focus on what we should want for ourselves. There are only occasional mentions of opportunities like the Blood Bank where we can play a vital role in assisting others in need. In our wonderful nation there is a truth that will never be made redundant by succeeding generations. It is this: appreciation and gratitude are essential to a healthy society. Along with our many freedoms and rights, we have an equally significant responsibility to contribute to our community where we can.

Thankfully, our nation has a healthy proportion of volunteers, old and young alike. As never before, we depend on their willing and generous contributions to our daily lives. Sadly, we may not even notice most of them—until we need blood or something else essential for life. We can't change the whole world, but we can have a positive influence in our own families and in our neighbourhood. It will pay huge dividends to our communities when our kids pass on the lessons we have taught them. What more can we hope for?

Employers are looking for people who have a strong work ethic and other good values. When businesses have valued staff, they can effectively train the next generation of workers and, eventually, business owners. These future employees and leaders are our kids! Our kids need to have a sure and firm grasp on what makes society tick. They need to understand how to value people, rather than material possessions. In the future it will be our kids who manage the businesses that employ local youth, manage the superannuation funds, the economy, and even countries. We need to show them the way!

As distressing as the recent turbulent times across the world have been, they can benefit us if we take stock of who we are as families, and make sure we stand firm with positive values and standards that will survive the test of time.

Steve Steel



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Living Today in Mooroolbark and the Yarra Ranges

Tucked away in a quiet little street on the Croydon-Mooroolbark border is a delightful surprise—an upscale takeaway chicken shop with a French flavour. The suburbs of Melbourne might seem an unlikely place to find a Michelin-trained French chef, but that’s exactly what you’ll find at Mon Poulet rôtisserie Française.

*Mon poulet* is a term of endearment meaning my ‘chicken’, and it’s clear that this little shop is a labour of love. It’s the culmination of a ten-year dream for French-born Maxime Croiset and his wife Lauren, who moved their family to Melbourne from New South Wales almost four years ago.



PHOTO: NATHALIE SALLUMBE @HITCHINTHINE

Sayshen Croiset tucks into one of Mon Poulet’s delicious sandwiches

After Max had spent three years as head chef at Yering Station in the Yarra Valley, the couple opened Mon Poulet in August last year.

The mouth-watering Mon Poulet menu has all the Aussie chicken-shop favourites, with a French twist. There are rotisserie-roasted seasoned chickens, as well as 18-hour beef brisket and slow-cooked saltbush lamb shank. Chips, gravy and side dishes are available, and a quick glance at the menu shows that these vegetables and salads are not your grandmother’s side dishes, with names like Pumpkin, Burnt Butter and Macadamia Crumb; Cauliflower, Pine Nut & Caramelised Vinegar; and Tomato, Radicchio, Pickled Eschallot and Chives. There are also classic French dishes: Boeuf Bourguignon, Poulet Chasseur, and Croque Monsieur, with Tart au Chocolat and Raspberry Clafoutis for dessert.

Mon Poulet is able to provide catering for groups, and also sells vacuum-sealed packs of ready-to-go meals that can be refrigerated at home then heated when required. Chef Maxime values wholesome simplicity, and sources locally grown produce. “We use everyday ingredients that people like to use themselves,” said Lauren.



PHOTO: LAUREN CROISSET

When social distancing became necessary, Mon Poulet packed up its limited in-store seating to concentrate on takeaway and delivery. It has been busy, but Lauren still enjoys taking the time to get to know her customers. “We want people to feel like they’re coming into our home and our family when they come in,” said Lauren.

Customers might occasionally see Max and Lauren’s own ‘little chickens’, their two sons, aged seven and four, spending time at the shop. Lauren said that customers have been very understanding about their family commitments. “We have beautiful customers,” she said. “They understand that we’re a family running a business, just doing our best. That’s what I adore about Melbourne, and in particular this area.”

Mon Poulet is at 11 Paul Street in Mooroolbark and is open from Tuesday to Saturday from 11 am to 8 pm, and Sundays from 4 pm till 8 pm. For more information, visit the Facebook page or view the menu at [monpoulet.com.au/menu](http://monpoulet.com.au/menu).

Janet Van Dijk

## Eastern Regional Libraries—Bringing Magic to Your Door

For many of us, one of life’s greatest joys is to be curled up with a good book, lost in the wonder between the pages. Whether relaxing outside in the summer sun or snuggled up inside beside the heater, we love to be transported to faraway lands or to explore the thoughts of our favourite writers.

Now more than ever, people are turning to reading to help fill the time. If you have read and re-read everything in your bookshelf, don’t despair—Eastern Regional Libraries (ERL) is still operating. Most of the usual library services are available from the comfort of your own home, with some additional services to meet the needs of those in isolation.

One of the most popular innovations is the introduction of home delivery of books to library members. Sarah Hopkins, ERL’s Corporate Manager Customer Experience, is pleased that the library is able to support social distancing guidelines with this service. “We want to keep the collection circulating and available to the community,” Sarah said. “At this time when people are stuck at home, they need something to read or watch or listen to more than ever.”

The “Click for Home Delivery” free service allows library members to order one box of books, games, DVDs and other library items each month. Members can choose their own items by placing online holds on the materials they want, or—if they are unable to access the online catalogue—they can phone their local library and ask staff to make a selection for them. The items will be packaged and sent by Australia Post to the member’s address.

The library is offering its usual loan items—books, DVDs, CDs, eBooks, video games, magazines and audio books—as well as a range of online content. There are technology and training webinars, live story times for children, and study resources. ERL’s Facebook page provides book recommendations, competitions, craft tutorials, and useful tips and updates.

To access any of these great services, all you need is a library membership, which is available free to all

Victorian residents. To become a member, head to the library website and click “Join the Library.” Once the simple registration process has been completed, your membership number will be issued and will be available for immediate use.

The worldwide health pandemic may have temporarily clipped our wings, but there’s no reason that we can’t be carried away to new worlds through the magic of our local libraries!



PHOTO: PERSIMMONS/MARIA SWANSON

Some of the above information applies to stage 3 stay-at-home restrictions, and there may be changes when restrictions are eased. For updates, please visit [yourlibrary.com.au](http://yourlibrary.com.au), call 1300 737 277, or phone your local library’s direct number between 9 am and 5 pm on weekdays.

# Different Journeys: a Place to Belong

*“You found my tribe and invited me to meet them. Thank you.”*

These words of gratitude are from an autistic young adult whose world has changed since joining the Different Journeys organisation.

Different Journeys began in 2015, when friends Mel Spencer and Merrin Ayton, both mothers of autistic children, began to dream of something that would bring together teenagers and families in the autism community. “We wanted to create a world where the autistic community is given the same opportunities as everyone else. We really wanted to celebrate our community.”



The events are also an opportunity to meet new friends in a safe and fun way. At the social events, teenagers sit together to talk and play games. Parents and carers sit at another table and are also able to share experiences and support each other. “It gives young people a chance to have those regular life experiences in a way that works for them,” said Mel.

Different Journeys’ social events now book out every month and have expanded to include events for adults too. Monthly teen and adult social events are held at Club Kilsyth and Greensborough RSL. More recently, Different Journeys has partnered with Croydon RSL and

running from appointment to appointment, and it can become quite lonely for parents, and siblings too.” The Different Journeys community has become a fun and positive space for the whole family. “They can find hope and connect with other parents who understand.”

The connections created at Different Journeys give young people a stronger social network. “Last year we had a bunch of 21 year olds who were able to have a 21st party because they now had a group of friends to invite,” said Mel.

While the focus of the group’s events is definitely on having fun, there is a serious side to the need for connection. “We know that co-morbidity of autism and mental health issues is really high—issues with loneliness and self-esteem too,” explained Mel. By creating an environment through social connection and positive experiences, Different Journeys also helps to tackle the health and wellbeing challenges faced by the autistic community.

Different Journeys operates under the auspices of Interchange Outer East, an organisation that provides disability support services through the Yarra Ranges, Knox and Maroondah areas. As the group continues to grow, the Different Journeys committee is exploring grant funding to support its expanding operation. However, it remains an almost entirely volunteer-run and community-funded group.

Feedback from one participant shows how the initial dream for Different Journeys has become a reality:

“Different Journeys is one of the best things that ever happened to me. Why, I hear you say? Because I have made so many great friends since going to the dinners. It took a while to find my friends at the dinners but once I did my world changed. In my everyday life my friends come to my house for parties, game nights, BBQs, Christmas parties, New Year’s Eve. We go out to places together, movies, game places and things like that. Friends drop in. This didn’t happen before. I am so grateful to you for giving me this opportunity.”

**Carissa Sianidis**

“There was a gap in services once you hit the teenage years. There was really no help or support. Many autistic teenagers also don’t necessarily have lots of friends or strong social networks, and some face bullying,” said Mel, co-founder and president of Different Journeys. “The world becomes a very lonely place for them.”

After months of planning, Mel and Merrin held the first social event in 2016: a dinner out for autistic teenagers and their families. “We just thought we’ll create this dinner and see what happens,” Mel recalled. “We had no idea of the demand!”

From this first event, Different Journeys was born. The monthly peer social events are an opportunity for autistic individuals and their families to navigate going out to eat at a restaurant in a supportive environment. The evenings are carefully planned. As Mel explained, “Going out to eat as an autistic person is not necessarily simple. There are lights and noise, and menu items are unknown or different to at home. All of this can create stress and pressure. So our dinners are a chance to experience this with a group of people who understand.”

the Nunawading Wargames Association to run tabletop wargaming events. Another new addition to the social calendar is the Autism Family Swim Nights at Kilsyth Centenary Pool. On these nights, the centre is open exclusively for the autistic community. Families can use the pool and learn more about the facilities and staff in a supportive environment.

The group had to find a new way to connect when its monthly social events were put on hold due to COVID-19 restrictions. The group began Friday night trivia events online and organising webinars for families to learn more about the NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme).

“What started as a dinner has become a community. It’s a hub of resources and opportunities for families in our community,” said Mel. The group provides not just a social network for individuals, but also a support network and resource for families.

Through the group, parents and carers have found a supportive community to engage with. “We actually thought we’d kick the parents out of the events, but we quickly found that often the parents didn’t have a social group either,” explained Mel. “Families spend their lives

*For more information about Different Journeys and its social events, visit the group’s Facebook page or website. Different Journeys relies on community support to continue its work, and it greatly appreciates tax-deductible donations, which can be made via [differentjourneysasd.com](http://differentjourneysasd.com).*

It didn't take long for the news to begin spreading throughout Mooroolbark: the teacher's wife had given birth to a baby boy! And ten minutes later, more good news—there was another baby, this time a girl. Twins!

It was 11 December, 1937. Peter James Hookey and his sister Marjorie Constance had just been born at Lilydale Bush Nursing Hospital—at that time, only the second set of twins to have been born at the hospital. Their mother, Constance, had been taken to the hospital by neighbour Arthur Ellis. The hospital rang local resident Miss Sherlock with the news of the twins' birth. When Jack was given the news, he jumped on his bike and pedalled to the hospital in Lilydale to see the new arrivals.

The Hookeys had been in Mooroolbark less than a year, having moved with their older son John from Geelong, where Jack had taught for several years, so that Jack could take up the position of head teacher at the recently built primary school no. 4417 in Mooroolbark.



## Side by Side

The twins' parents met when they were both teachers at Warburton Primary School. At the time Constance and her mother were living in Warburton where Connie's mother, who had been widowed early in her marriage, was running a boarding house. Jack Hookey moved into the boarding house in about 1925 and soon a romance developed between Jack and Connie. After they each moved away to take different positions, their courtship became a long distance one of several years, before they were married in Warburton at the end of 1930. After their marriage, Jack continued teaching but Connie had to give up her position, as married women were not permitted to be school teachers at that time.

In 1937 Jack received promotion and they left Geelong, with only a few weeks' notice. "They didn't really know where Mooroolbark was, because it was this void in between two highways that no-one seemed to know about," said Peter.

By virtue of being the teacher's children and also twins, Peter and Marj became well-known around the town. "When we were babies and mum would go to school the kids would line up, wanting to push the pram," said Peter. "I think we were probably a couple of villains," Marj laughed. "To me, in photos we always looked roguish, as if we were up to something."

When the twins were less than two years of age, war came to the world and to sleepy Mooroolbark. By the time the twins were about three years old the family had moved to a rented farm, (now Castle Hill Park) where they had room to keep a few animals and grow vegetables.

"Through the war when everything was rationed, we never wanted for anything," Marj said. "We didn't know anything about it. We just knew it was 'a war' but we had no idea what a war was." Peter recalls that at one time soldiers came to their farm. To his delight, "they brought along Bren gun carriers, guns, and soldiers," all to the front garden of their house. "It was a signals unit," Marj added. "I can remember Mum making scones for them, and a huge billy of tea."

Peter and Marj also remember their parents hanging thick blackout curtains every night, so that not even a chink of light would make the house a potential target for enemy aircraft. "I vividly remember seeing search lights during wartime moving backwards and forwards in the sky, looking for enemy planes," said Peter.

As a teacher, the twins' father was considered an essential service and was unable to enlist in the war effort. Younger male teachers were conscripted while married women, previously barred from teaching, were permitted to return to teaching.

Jack Hookey was in charge of about forty school children, with the help of sewing mistress Miss Rose Brice, who taught the girls sewing and also taught grades Prep to 2 half time. The twins were taught at home by their mother for most of their first school year. "She taught us all our phonics and counting and reading—so we started school in November and we had finished the prep year by December. The next year we did both grade one and grade two in the one year," said Marj. "Dad taught us right through primary school. We were very much the same as

everybody else, and we called Dad 'Sir' like all the other kids did."

Jack had to find creative ways to manage the limited school budget. "In those days they gave him about two and six a week to buy firewood for the school, which was ridiculous," said Marj. "So the kids would tell Dad whenever they saw a tree limb down, and then Dad would take the horse and cart after school to retrieve the tree. It's just as well he was a very good axeman!"

He also had to deal with a mouse plague. "Dad asked the kids to bring mousetraps to school and he would give them ha'penny a mouse, out of his own pocket," Peter said. "So there were all these mousetraps in the room—one boy had a mousetrap with four holes so that he could catch four mice at once, which we thought was cheating." The twins earned money by sweeping the school floors each night and, once a week, moving the desks and washing the floor. "We would get, I think, a penny for sweeping the floor and we would get a thruppence for washing it," Peter remembered.

"There were a lot of kids whose dads were absent during the war, so I imagine Dad was a very important father figure in those children's lives," Marj reflected. "School was just one big happy family."

"During the wartime some of the families were quite impoverished and Dad used to cut their hair at lunchtime," said Peter. "The popular thing was a 'basin cut' where it looked like someone had put a basin put on your head and just cut around it."

After the war, Jack and Constance decided to build their own home, closer to the centre of Mooroolbark. Building supplies were hard to get and homes were limited to 10 squares, but the Hookeys were able to build a simple weatherboard house in Station Street, where they lived for the next fifty years.

As teenagers, the twins enjoyed being part of the Presbyterian youth group, which was known as the PFA. "That was a valuable thing for all the kids," said Marj. "It kept us socially together and



provided opportunities to go places.”

Peter attended Box Hill Technical School, obtaining his intermediate technical certificate at 16 and gaining an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic on trucks and farm machinery in Lilydale. He then moved on to servicing cars, including having his own business in Ringwood, before entering management with Volkswagen-Leyland dealerships. He finished his career working for 25 years with Mercedes Benz, providing training, problem solving and technical support at car and commercial vehicle dealerships Australia-wide, before retiring to support Marj in caring for their father in his declining years.

Peter met his wife Beth in 1961 and two years later they were married, on 31 December—the same day Peter’s parents had been married more than 30 years earlier. Peter and Beth went on to have three children, two of whom are married and who also followed the tradition of being married on 31 December.

When Marj left Lilydale High School she was too young to enter teacher’s college, so she spent a year as a student teacher at Mooroolbark School under the supervision of a qualified teacher. She then attended Burwood Teacher’s College from 1955 to the end of 1957. After graduating, Marj spend ten years as a country teacher in the Western District and the Goulburn Valley, boarding with local residents. “I was very fortunate—I always boarded with wonderful people who became lifelong friends,” she said.

After that, Marj spent eleven years in a state-wide position, retraining teachers of junior grades in mathematics, before returning to the school environment, where she held deputy principal and principal roles until her retirement in 1993. The late 1960s saw the introduction of equal pay for female teachers, ending a system that Marj had long thought was terribly unfair. “It used to peeve me no end that a fellow who I trained with in teacher’s college was teaching grade three and I had responsibility for four grades and I was getting 5/8 of his wage,” she said.

Some of Marj’s attitude toward job equity may have come from her mother Connie, who believed in equal opportunity for girls. Looking back, Marj describes her mother as ‘a very liberated woman’ who was highly intelligent and well read. Peter and Marj remember their mother as an excellent homemaker who did a great deal with limited resources and few conveniences.

As her children grew, Connie became a tireless worker in the community, particularly with regard to the church the family attended, the Mooroolbark Presbyterian Church. In 1946 she was a foundation member of the Mooroolbark Presbyterian Ladies Guild, and later she and her husband were instrumental in raising funds for St Margaret’s Presbyterian Church, which was built in 1954 and became a Uniting church in 1977. Connie was a Sunday school teacher and also church secretary for some time, as well as representing the church on various committees.

Unfortunately, Connie developed early onset dementia in her late 60s and by 1974 she required full-time care at home. Jack, who was now retired, looked after her. Marj helped as much as she could while still working. Finally, in 1976 Connie moved to a nursing home, in Montrose. “Dad would drive up there every day and see her,” remembered Peter. She remained at the nursing home until her death at 84 years of age in 1984. Jack died sixteen years later, aged 95.

The twins are proud of their parents’ legacy in the Mooroolbark community, particularly with regard to their church and community involvement. The Hookey name will be familiar to all who have visited Hookey Park, which was named after Jack in recognition of his 25-year service as secretary of Mooroolbark’s Recreation Reserve Committee.

Marj still lives in Mooroolbark, and the siblings have retained their connection to the town throughout their lives. Peter now lives in Kilsyth, and has never been tempted to move any further away. “It’s a lovely area,” he said. “If you go out the western side of Melbourne it’s very flat. Here, you’ve got lovely views of Mount Dandenong.” The siblings are also connected to the area by ties of church, community, friendship, and the memories of their early years here. Above all, their connection as twins has been a steadfast one throughout their lives.

Janet Van Dijk

BELOW: Marjorie (left) and Peter with their father Jack Hookey  
RIGHT: The twins at 18 months old



PHOTOS SUPPLIED



On Brushy Creek Bridge, on the way to Sunday school, at about age four



LEFT: Marj and Peter at about age nine  
RIGHT: At a Sunday school picnic at Balwyn Sanctuary



## Put Down Your Sword!

There is a fascinating little detail in the story of Jesus' arrest prior to his crucifixion.

As the soldiers arrived to arrest Him, one of Jesus' followers grabbed his small sword and smote the high priest's personal servant, taking off his ear. As the gospel writers describe it, there were literally hundreds of soldiers who'd descended on four guys in a garden in the dark. Then one of them, Peter of course, decided to try to defend himself. What a preposterous picture, a fisherman with a sword against a detachment of professional Roman soldiers.

It's a painfully vivid picture of our eye-for-an-eye squabbles as human beings. You have a grudge against me, so I answer in kind; you cut me off in traffic, so I tailgate you! On and on we go in the cycle of offence and revenge, tit for tat. And yet how does Jesus react? Surprisingly He says, "Stop. Peter—put down your sword." In other words, stop the cycle, stop the insane merry-go-round.

This small conversation is a microcosm of the big picture. Jesus is in the midst of giving Himself, to take the punishment for our mess—and all the grudges, squabbles, and eye for an eye that goes along with it—onto Himself. Total unqualified forgiveness for all.

Have you ever forgiven when it really hurts? When it isn't really deserved? Our natural reaction when shoved is to shove back. It's deeply ingrained in our psyche, even in our physical reflexes. It can be uncomfortable, even painful, to stop ourselves from retaliating. We have to give up our "rights" in that moment, the revenge we "deserve" in our own minds. We are called upon to "put down the sword".



By every right, God could wipe humanity out and start over. We chose to mess things up and pollute His perfect world. But God's plan was never to take his revenge on us. Instead He took all that pain into Himself in Jesus. Instead of cutting off an ear, He let Himself be cut and beaten and finally killed. He forgave us until it brought literal hurt, suffering and death to Him. He took the pain and violence that we let loose into Himself in Christ, so much so that it killed Him.

Let's join Jesus in stopping the cycle of revenge by putting down our swords, and choosing to forgive as Christ has forgiven us.

**Greg Williams**  
*Speaking of Life*

## Time for Takeaway

When the spread of COVID-19 required Australians to self-isolate, People's Pantry wondered how it would continue its service to the community—after all, the purpose of the group was not just to feed people, but also to give them an easy way to socialise!

People's Pantry began in Mooroolbark in May 2011 when a community-minded

teenager named Dylan Butler—with the help of his school, church and family—began serving a three-course home-cooked meal to the lonely and homeless every second Friday. Within six months, there was a regular attendance of over 30 people.

A few years later, when Dylan had to withdraw from the project due to other commitments, the baton changed hands. Now under the auspices of Mooroolbark Christian Fellowship, the group has volunteers who continue to cook and serve a three-course meal to a regular group of between 25 and 35 people. The dinner is held each fortnight at St Margaret's Uniting Church hall.

Before coronavirus restrictions, meals were served at tables which had been set with cutlery, serviettes and floral centrepieces. The atmosphere was home-like and animated, with lots of chatter going back and forth. As life in the community changed rapidly, though, it was clear that the usual plan would no longer be possible. Although it was disappointing to lose such a positive social setting, it was decided that People's Pantry would have to temporarily move to a takeaway system.

People's Pantry now operates

in a similar way to many retail outlets, with signs advising guests of the new procedures, and tape markers on the floor indicating where people should stand while waiting to receive their meals. Before the guests arrive, volunteers divide the food into takeaway containers, working quickly to keep the food hot. Hygiene and sanitising have become even more important than usual, with volunteers wearing face masks and gloves.

Guests are also asked not to linger in the hall or in the carpark. This is very difficult for some, as socialising is what they miss most of all.

Nourish Network, an outreach program which provides groceries to those in need, provides parcels of fruit, vegetables and non-perishable items for People's Pantry guests to take home with them. While most are very grateful for this extra assistance, one man had to refuse the groceries, saying, "I live rough. I haven't got anywhere to prepare it."

It's for people like this that People's Pantry is keeping its doors open—but volunteers and guests are all looking forward to a return to the way it used to be, when people can once again share food and conversation together!

**Barbara Austin**



# Teddy Bears and Rainbows

## The Kindness Pandemic

We can sometimes have a pessimistic view of our fellow human beings when we look around us, especially in times of crisis. During the coronavirus pandemic, we have seen some poor examples of human behaviour, as people look after their own needs without thinking of others—food hoarding, confrontations in hospitals and supermarkets, and refusal to observe social distancing.

However, research and experience has shown that, in fact, disasters and tragedies tend to bring out the best, not the worst, in people. The current pandemic has been no exception, proving that kindness can be more contagious than a virus. At a time when so many people require help, others have rushed to meet their needs. A ‘pandemic’ of kindness has resulted, creating a connection that has benefitted both givers and receivers. Most of us are social beings, searching for connection with others. Yet the very measures needed to control the virus have led to the loss of something we need most—human contact. When physical connection was restricted due to the need to isolate, people sought new and ingenious ways to connect with and take care of each other.

Much of the support has been aimed at children, who often don’t understand what is going on but pick up on the fear and uncertainty of the adults around them. Some schools have arranged convoys of teachers’ cars to drive past the homes of their students, to wave and display signs letting the children know that they miss them. Other teachers have made bookmarks or other gifts and left them at their students’ homes. One mother was concerned about her daughter’s emotional health and mentioned it to the child’s teacher. The next day, the teacher came to sit in the seven year old’s driveway and read her a book. The little girl sat a safe distance away, listening to the story and feeling reassured by the connection with her teacher.

Mooroolbark, like most other Australian suburbs, has recently been studded with rainbow pictures and teddy bears. These are for our youngest residents, who might be finding isolation hard: during their daily walks, children can make a game of counting the bears they see in people’s windows or attached to mailboxes and fences. This ‘we’re going on a bear hunt’ game is popping up across the globe, just like the rainbows. Children have taped their rainbow artwork to windows to spread happiness and remind everyone, especially other children, that there are brighter days ahead. In some places, the rainbows also represent a show of encouragement for healthcare professionals.

There have been other signs of support for healthcare workers, too. In many countries, residents have appeared in balconies, doorways and driveways every evening to clap and cheer medical staff. Others have organised meals for tired, overworked doctors and nurses. One Melbourne man who began providing meals for his sister, who is a doctor, now supervises more than a hundred volunteers providing regular meals for those in healthcare. The program grew rapidly and now involves professional chefs, food supply companies and commercial kitchens. Another project, the “Adopt a Healthcare Worker” Facebook page, encourages Melburnians to reach out to healthcare workers to offer services like emotional support, child-minding, shopping, and dog-walking. Other groups have facilitated the donation of hundreds of thousands of home-sewn facemasks to hospitals and other medical facilities where protective equipment is in short supply.

Dozens of Facebook pages have been set up to promote kindness and suggest practical ways to help each other. Contributors to the pages post uplifting messages and provide connections for people to lend a helping hand to the vulnerable in their community by making meals, shopping for food, and running errands. One of the most popular pages is The Kindness Pandemic, which began in Australia. Dr Catherine Barrett created the page



in mid-March, and before long it had hundreds of thousands of members from around the world. It soon became more practical to have separate regional pages, and there are now groups in every Australian state, as well as in several other countries. Many of the state-based pages have now led to the establishment of neighbourhood pages. Mount Evelyn mum Cate Siegfried set up a page for the Yarra Ranges and said that it made her feel “alive and happy” to be part of something so positive. “It was spreading love, hope, and kindness,” said Cate. “Thousands of people were making a difference to the fear the coronavirus was spreading.”

Like so many others around the world, Cate also dropped letters in the mailboxes of her neighbours, offering help with tasks like mailing letters, picking up shopping, and obtaining urgent supplies. Cate dropped letters in 130 mailboxes and was thrilled by the response she received. “I felt privileged to be a part of it all,” she said.

While many groups have sprung up to help extend kindness, some people are finding their own individual ways to spread a little happiness. Chirnside Park resident Joanne Lynch placed a plastic tub filled with puzzles and games next to her letterbox, with a sign inviting people to take games to use, and to add to the pile if they would like. She was excited to find that within a very short time, some of the puzzles had already gone and new ones had been added to the box.

The internet has been a primary source of connectedness for many, with people creating workout videos, sharing recipes, and providing home-schooling advice to help everyone get through the weeks of isolation. Some have chosen to spread online joy by creating song parodies, memes, or funny videos that have helped others to see the humour in the situation.

For many, this pandemic of compassion and connection has been vital at a time when it can be natural to feel helplessness and a loss of control over circumstances. People all over the world have risen to the challenge of finding new ways to maintain social connections and let each other know that ‘we’re in this together.’

Janet Van Dijk

# An Unexpected Challenge

During my years of writing for *Living Today*, I've been constantly reminded of the sometimes surprising richness of experience and accomplishment we discover when we take time to get to know a person better. It was therefore a pleasure for me to sit down with Councillor Richard Higgins to talk about his new role as Mayor of Yarra Ranges. As we'll see, he brings diverse life experience to his representative council role.

Cr Higgins, the current Chirnside Ward councillor, was elected as the Mayor of Yarra Ranges by his fellow councillors on 12 November last year. Following what is an annual mayoral election, Cr Higgins acknowledged the outstanding work of his predecessor Cr Tony Stevenson and commented, "It's been 17 years since a councillor from Chirnside Ward has been mayor, and what a great honour it is to be in this position. To my fellow councillors, thank you so much for your support. There's a lot of work ahead of me, a lot of learning—I acknowledge that—but I look forward to it. It's going to be a great challenge."

Little did our new mayor realise quite what a challenge it would turn out to be! At the time of my interview with Richard, none of us could know how the global coronavirus pandemic would unfold, presenting communities and governments around the world with ever-shifting 'new normals', making it hard for any of us to anticipate what our world will look like in the months ahead.

Richard grew up in Mitcham as the eldest son of three. "I went to Mitcham High," he said. "I was not a 'flash' student—always in trouble.<sup>1</sup> From Mitcham High I went and completed an apprenticeship, as an industrial pattern maker down at Williamstown dockyards. I spent five or six years working there, before being retrenched. For a time, I worked as a boat builder before starting work as a shop fitter. I was fortunate that I could do anything with my hands; that was easy."

"I'd always dreamed of joining the police, but I was too short. However, after injuring my thumb in an accident with a circular saw, I thought, 'I've been doing this kind of work for eight, maybe ten years. With another 40 years of this, what are the chances of injuring myself again? That'd be nuts, so I decided to apply for the police force because, fortunately, by this time, the height restrictions had been lowered. They still call me 'Roy' in the force due to my shortness. It's a reference to the famous Australian jockey, Roy Higgins!"

After his training, Richard worked in and near the city for 17 years. "Then I took promotion to Melbourne east, ending up in Lilydale for close to two years before taking a position at Mooroolbark where Jeff 'Joffa' Haines was the officer in charge. That was about 12 years ago, and I'm still there, although currently I'm working part-time in order to devote extra time to my mayoral duties."

While working in Mooroolbark, Richard read *Snouts in the Trough*, written by former criminal lawyer Andrew Fraser. "I was attracted to the book because he wrote about Russell Street where I'd worked. One of the things that remained with me from the book was his philosophy that 'you get back what you give.' It motivated me to become more involved in the Mooroolbark community."

Encouraged by the examples of his mother and a community-minded scout leader, Richard began to give back to his community. He served on local boards, first at MARP (Maroondah Addictions Recovery Project), and later with Mooroolbark Traders, and the Mooroolbark Community Bank branch of the Bendigo Bank.

Richard continually asked the Melba Ward councillor Terry Avery for

<sup>1</sup> Despite being a self-described troublemaker, Richard completed his Queen's Scout award during this time.



Richard grew up in Mitcham before moving to the Yarra Ranges

money to do things in Mooroolbark. "Eventually he suggested that, as council elections were coming up, I should put myself up for election. It was a way of cutting out the middleman, so to speak."

Richard was first elected to council in 2008, missing out in 2012 when he was narrowly defeated by Andy Witlox, before being elected again in 2016. He has great respect for Yarra Ranges Council. "Our council is a rippa. It's very healthy. Compared to some of the other councils around the



BERNARDI THOMAS/STOCKPHOTO

state, we're really, really lucky. It's something we're very proud of. The councillors get on well. We'll explore differences of opinion in the chamber on various items, but that's healthy. It's not a problem—come the end of the meeting or debate, we'll head into the councillor's room and have a talk, a chin wag, a bickie and a beer! If any of us have been a bit heated, we apologise and move on."

Richard believes that everybody is there for the right reasons. "If you go into council or local government with one fixed idea you soon run out of reasons to be there," he said. "But if you share a common goal to make our shire better, that's another matter. Serving the common good of the entire shire is something councillors should continually aspire to—how to make our parks better, improve our roads, and so on."

Richard and his wife Tracey were married in 1991, and have called the Yarra Ranges home for many years. They have two children, Leigh (25) and Danielle (23), who have both lived and worked in the Yarra Ranges for most of their lives. Tracey works with the community as a health promotion officer and dietician at Inspiro in Lilydale.

When I asked Richard what he would like Yarra Ranges residents to understand about the working of council, he wondered whether people understood that council operates within prescribed limits. "I'd like people to understand that council is working hard, trying to do the best it can within the guidelines and restrictions placed upon councils by state and federal legislation."

Keeping up with the implications of new legislation is certainly a dynamic and complex challenge. It's sometimes difficult for ratepayers to be aware of the ways in which new legislation can limit decisions made by council, as a recent personal experience illustrates.

I was involved with some follow-up chaplaincy a year after the destructive Bunyip bushfires<sup>2</sup> and heard property owners sometimes struggling to understand why a neighbour was not permitted to rebuild a structure where it had stood before being destroyed by fire. Sometimes blame was attributed to council, when in reality the local council can only grant permits in accordance with current guidelines and restrictions imposed by state government legislation.

Richard explained that the Yarra Ranges Shire is very diverse, with a scattered population of around 150,000. "It's one of the largest shires in Victoria, about 2,500 square kilometres," he said. "Each of the 55 townships has particular needs. We're never going to get it right for everybody. In the shire we have 70 footy ovals, maybe more now. Each one of those has to be maintained. Each needs lighting, pavilions and so on. And each town has a main street, a shopping centre—something that needs to be maintained."

The YRC frequently requests financial support from federal and state governments.

"When we miss out on one, we have to move on, perhaps being able to source extra funding from somewhere else."

Despite its best intentions, council can't always deliver what the public expects. "You can't do everything," said Richard. "It's impossible; but we can attempt to make a difference with what we can do. It's important to listen to people and engage with people, but it's also important to be real. You can't achieve everything for everybody. You can't say we're going to build the Taj Mahal if you ain't got the ability to, so don't go there. Be real! Be truthful, don't lie or make it up—say I don't know, I'll find out."

About his own ward, Richard said, "I'm trying to get a township group happening in the Chirnside area so that people can feel better connected. It may be called something like the Mooroolbark and Chirnside Park Advancement League. We'd try to get people together to talk about what we want to get done."

Personally, I wonder if there's a case for re-examining ward boundaries. Mooroolbark is the shire's most populous township and is presently sliced three ways between the three councillors representing Chirnside, Melba and Walling wards. I wonder whether Mooroolbark would benefit from the less-divided attention of one representative councillor?

Richard's mayoral term has coincided with considerable upheaval in the operation of council, which has been called on by the community to provide leadership and support for businesses and individuals affected by the global pandemic. Another challenge is the very extensive renovation and rebuilding of the administrative offices, which Richard told me about before any of us understood how COVID-19 would affect normal business operations.

"We're going to decant a whole organisation from one building to different places," Richard explained. "Without a council chamber, we'll be meeting in the senior citizens' hall. We'll also be meeting in some of the townships in the council area. I think that's going to take quite some energy. And, then getting our staff back into a new building! I think that's where I should channel my energy to do my bit, help things be plain sailing."

Councillors have increasingly complex roles, and for those representing Mooroolbark and Lilydale the level of complexity has burgeoned in recent months as council attempts to gauge public opinion and then advocate with the Level Crossing Removal Project<sup>3</sup> on behalf of those communities.

We're grateful for Richard's commitment to local civic life and wish him and his family well for the remainder of his term as mayor.

**Randall Bouchier**



Richard as a young father with son Leigh and newborn daughter Danielle



Tracey and Richard with their son Leigh and his partner Kia (left) and daughter Danielle (right)

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Council of Churches Emergency Ministries chaplaincy response at the invitation of Cardinia Council.

<sup>3</sup> Formerly known as the Level Crossing Removal Authority.

# Why it's OK to be **BORED**

Managing children's boredom under COVID-19 restrictions has been challenging for many families. It's natural for children to feel bored more often than usual when they are out of their regular routines, and missing face-to-face contact with friends as well as the regular stimulation of school, sports, and out-of-school activities. They can feel restless and unsettled. With winter on its way, children may be even more likely to experience boredom and a sense of cabin fever. This can be difficult for parents, who love to see their children happy, occupied, and being creative.

It is understandable for parents to have limited patience when so much has altered in their own lives. As well as their usual roles, many parents have been supervising remote learning, looking out for their own older parents, and managing a changed work environment. They may also be in the throes of their own challenges: job insecurity, loneliness, financial problems and the many other issues that have heightened since the world became focused on COVID-19. In the scheme of things, a bored child may seem like a low priority. When parents are time poor and longing for a break, it can be jarring to hear children say that they are bored. Parents might wish *they* had time to be bored!

## A new perspective on boredom

Our first response to complaints of boredom may be to suggest fun things for children to do—board games, walks in the park, Zoom parties—only to have each solution dismissed as equally unappealing. We might drop everything that we are doing to make things exciting for our children, only to find that they continue to be uninterested and lacklustre.

Unfortunately, these fix-it approaches rarely make much difference. This is because rather than a problem to be solved, boredom is a feeling that needs to be experienced. We all feel bored at some time. Although it's uncomfortable,



it is vital to learn how to sit with this feeling, to acknowledge that it is manageable and that it will eventually pass. By permitting children to be bored, we show them that it is fine to be quiet and mindful sometimes, without always needing to be on the go or entertained. Rushing in with activity reinforces the message that boredom is unbearable.

There are upsides to boredom. Boredom can motivate initiative—most children will eventually learn how to occupy their time constructively, instead of waiting helplessly for parents to intervene. Boredom also stimulates creativity and problem solving, which are important life skills. In his book *Strictly Parenting*, Michael Carr-Gregg writes, “We know the slumped, knuckle-dragging posture of the bored child, and often rush to save them from what some people describe as an unpleasant, empty feeling. But boredom can be a good thing—it gives children opportunities to initiate activities for themselves, which promotes feelings of competence and mastery: “I can do this!”<sup>1</sup>

## Connections rather than solutions

We need to consider what children really want from us when they say they are bored. Boredom can mask other feelings—children may actually be feeling anxious, lonely, angry or sad. These strong feelings can make it hard to settle into an activity. Children may be looking for connection with us rather than a solution. They want us to notice and acknowledge what they are experiencing.

## Lines of responsibility

It can help to consider where your responsibility starts and ends. It is fair for parents to provide a selection of interesting and engaging activities. Consider rotating what is on offer to keep things fresh and appealing. At another time, when your child is feeling more positive, it may be helpful to draw up a list together of suitable activities—try to be creative. Parents can also join with or sit near their children for a while as they play if they are craving some company. However, our boundary ends there. In the end, our children make a choice to take up the activities that are available, or not. If they feel bored, that's OK.

## Responding to boredom

- **Let them know that you get it.** You might say something like, “Things are very different at the moment, and it is understandable that



PHOTOS: DEPOSITPHOTOS/ANDREW LOZOWI

you might feel unhappy. It probably feels a bit weird for you.” Let children know that you also feel bored from time to time, and that although it is unpleasant, it usually passes.

- **Be present.** Sit with them for a while. Listen to what they are saying; give them your attention. Your warmth and willingness to be close and attentive may be enough.
- **Avoid offering solutions.** As tempting as it is, hold back on giving your ideas. Suggesting countless options for activity is counter-productive. Instead, reinforce that you believe that they have the ability to come up with their own ideas of what to do.
- **Limit digital technology.** Online games and media are designed to stimulate and entertain, and most children love their screen time. The downside is that other activities can pale in comparison. Without limits on digital technology, children are unlikely to learn how to manage feelings of boredom.

## Be alert

Pay attention if your child is showing marked changes in mood and behaviour, particularly if it goes on over a few days. It is natural for moods to fluctuate somewhat during times of change at school and home. However, if your child is feeling low or anxious and unsettled for several days, it is worth discussing this further with your school wellbeing staff or GP. You can also ring Parentline, a phone counselling service for parents and carers of children from birth to 18 years old, on 13 22 89.

## ■ Kate Chivers

*Kate is a registered psychologist who works with children and families*

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<sup>1</sup> Carr-Gregg, M. (2014) *Strictly Parenting: Everything you need to know about raising school-aged kids*. Melbourne: Penguin, p. 87.



## Lantern Parade Keeps Community Spirit Alight

Normally at this time of year Yarra Ranges Council's Culture Tracks program of performances, shows, exhibitions, music and comedy would be in full swing. However, with restrictions placed on public gatherings and venues, the program has taken shape to offer virtual experiences and new ways to connect.

If there's one thing we've learned it's that a pandemic can't stop the arts—creative people have a habit of using creativity to find a way. We have seen an overwhelming response as people find alternative ways to run their festivals, workshops and events, and there is more planned throughout winter.

The Belgrave Lantern Parade will continue to light up the community this year, with the cherished festival reimagined in line with COVID restrictions. Normally, 10,000 people flock to the streets with their beautiful handmade lanterns, to mingle with their community in an explosion of colour, sound, and of course, light.

This year, local artists will be hosting a series of online lantern-making workshops. This fresh new take on the lantern parade is a symbol of positivity, inviting creativity into our homes, where families can connect while working together on a project. The lanterns will be ready to light up Belgrave streets and homes in time for the winter solstice on 20 June. Find out more on the Belgrave Lantern Parade Facebook page.

Eastern Regional Libraries has book home delivery available, plus an enormous swag of online resources, from livestreamed story time for kids through their Facebook page, to free audio books, movie streaming and digital newspapers from the ERL website.

Do you have a great idea that can build on the social and cultural life of the region? Maybe a mural or a sculpture that would brighten your town, or a commemorative piece to mark an important occasion from Yarra Ranges' history? Or perhaps a festival that brings a hobby or interest to life? Yarra Ranges Council's Community Grants Program is open from 1 June until mid-July, giving you the chance to realise your arts and heritage, and festival and event ideas.

Be sure to visit [culturetracks.info](http://culturetracks.info) for inspiration on other great initiatives happening in our shire.

Yarra Ranges Council

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## Let's Talk About It

Yarra Ranges Mayor Richard Higgins has encouraged young residents who may be having a rough time, or who want to talk about what is happening in their lives, to get in touch with community health service Inspiro.

The importance of lifelong good mental health was recognised in the Yarra Ranges Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-21. Young people aged between 12 and 25 who live, work or study in Yarra Ranges can access a free council-funded counselling service, without needing a referral from their GP. Inspiro offers the counselling for young people and families alongside its general counselling and private psychology services.

Inspiro CEO Sue Sestan said that young people and their families can access up to 12 free counselling sessions in Lilydale and at the Belgrave Health Hub, as well as through some schools and community venues in Yarra Ranges.

"Our counselling service is a form of therapy which can help to address the physical, mental and emotional issues, and problems that young adults, teenagers and their families face," Ms Sestan said. "There can still be a stigma for people seeking help with counselling, but it's perfectly normal to want to chat to someone about what's going on in your life."

"We get a lot of young people, right across the age range, coming to talk to our trained counsellors about moving to new schools, the stress of workloads, friendships, family dynamics and general uneasiness," continued Ms Sestan. "Some people come along for a session just to talk about an issue, while others might find they want to keep chatting and use all 12 sessions we can offer them. What I would say to young people and their families is to give us a call and give it a try—there's no cost, no pressure and no expectations on anyone coming in."

Councillor Higgins encouraged young people and their families to think of counselling as an unbiased ear and a chance to talk through issues with someone objective. "Counselling can be a key part of mental health support for people in the community of all ages, and no two people will be experiencing the exact same level of mental health on any given day," Cr Higgins said. "But it's important that people think of counselling as more than that—for many young people, they might just need someone to talk to about school, friendships or things happening at home."

"Good mental health isn't just seeking help when the wheels fall off—it's about talking through issues before they get worse, thinking about how to get through tough moments and learning about good self-care."

For more information, call 9738 8801 or visit [inspiro.org.au](http://inspiro.org.au).

Yarra Ranges Council



# Dawn Vigil

In the quiet dawn, the stirring strains of the *Last Post* floated over Mooroolbark as Anzac Day was commemorated as never before. In windows, doorways and driveways, candles glowed and flickered, lighting up the darkness and providing reassurance that "At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them."

With traditional Anzac Day services and marches cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic, RSL Victoria branch president Dr Robert Webster OAM urged Victorians to join other families around the nation to stand together at 6 am on Saturday 25 April. "The most important thing is that together we remember our pledge as a nation: lest we forget," Dr Webster said.

Leading up to Anzac Day, jazz musician James Morrison encouraged musicians across the country to learn the *Last Post* so that they could play it from home while Australians gathered to stand united in spirit. The hashtag "MusicForMateship" began trending across social media as musicians, many of them school children, practised for the commemoration.

On the streets of Mooroolbark, people could be seen in the early morning half-light, holding candles and torches to honour those who had given so much. When the last notes of music had lingered and faded, many turned their attention to a live broadcast of the dawn service from Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance.

In preparation for the service, Mooroolbark mother Bel King and her young daughters Ellie and Eden had watched an online reading of the children's book *My Grandad Marches on Anzac Day*, and made a wreath using an egg carton, paints and a paper plate. On Anzac Day, two-year-old Eden slept while Bel, her husband Ryan and four-year-old Ellie woke at 5:45 am to stand in their driveway and watch the service on their phone. "As a mum of young girls, I'm happy that a pathway has been paved now for the future to be able to participate in this event should we find it challenging to attend the actual service," said Bel.

Another resident, Torie Gordon, was moved by the sounds of the *Last Post* drifting across Mooroolbark. "It was haunting and beautiful; a poignant reminder of what was lost 105 years ago."

Janet Van Dijk



Ellie King with her handmade tribute

Due to the uncertainty about holding public events due to the current pandemic, we have not included our community calendar in this issue. We hope that community activities will be back in full swing by our September issue!

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# LIVING TODAY in Mooroolbark



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## MISSION STATEMENT

To contribute towards and to help to foster a **growing community spirit** within our neighbourhood.

We seek to achieve this by:

- highlighting the many positives within our community
- encouraging partnership in community initiatives
- contributing to the process of identifying and addressing community needs and concerns

## OUR SPONSORS

*Living Today* greatly appreciates the valuable contributions made by several businesses which partner with us in serving our local community through this magazine. Their financial sponsorship makes the magazine possible, and we gratefully acknowledge those partners in each issue.