

LIVING TODAY

in Mooroolbark and the Yarra Ranges NO. 80 SEPTEMBER 2022



- **A work in progress: singer Caitlin Min Fa**
- **Mooroolbark Fire Brigade at your service**
- **When children pay the price of perfection**

11,500 free copies distributed throughout Mooroolbark and district

A Work in Progress

Local singer and songwriter Caitlin Min Fa radiates enthusiasm and a sense of optimism—as she talks, she’s brimming with positivity and forward thinking, which is echoed in the words and upbeat melodies of her music. However, life isn’t always trouble free, and Caitlin’s lyrics also reflect the struggles that many of us feel to fit in, the apprehension about what might lie ahead, and the quest to find life’s answers. With themes of love, friendship, and self-acceptance, the defining message of her songs is that “things will be alright.”



PHOTO: RYAN ARNOLD

Caitlin first performed on stage by herself in a talent competition when she was just ten years old. She recalls standing alone on a makeshift stage in the middle of Rowville’s Stud Park shopping centre. “I didn’t know what a backing track was then, so I brought in Kelly Clarkson’s ‘Because of You’ and just sung over the top of

it,” she laughed.

The performance may not have been professional, but it was a memorable start on the path to becoming a solo singer. Now, more than fifteen years later, Caitlin is establishing her career as a singer-songwriter. In May, she performed at Mooroolbark Community Bank’s 20th birthday celebration, at the invitation of David Green, the bank’s marketing manager, who had met Caitlin a couple of years earlier after she won a songwriting competition at Radio Eastern FM.

Caitlin really enjoyed the festival atmosphere of the bank celebrations. “It was a lot of fun,” she said. “Everyone was so, so friendly.” She performed two 45-minute sets, a mix of cover songs and her original compositions. For Caitlin, singing covers is a great way of building connections with the audience through familiar songs. But essentially, Caitlin is a songwriter. “When writing my own songs, I have my heart on my sleeve; I connect with the words a bit more authentically. It’s my own words, my own story.”

Caitlin’s story began in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. A first-generation Australian, she was born to parents who had emigrated from Mauritius before she was born. Since her parents and older brother aren’t musical, Caitlin feels she must have inherited her musical ability from her paternal grandfather, who sings and plays the piano. “My grandpa just lives and breathes music.”

When Caitlin was eight years old, she successfully auditioned for the National Children’s Choir of Australia. “Mum said I’ve been singing ever since I could speak, so she encouraged me to try choir. I loved it, and then she suggested I do lessons where I could work one-on-one.” Caitlin was initially a bit fearful of taking singing lessons, but she finally gave in when she was eleven years old. “After I started singing lessons, I wanted to take it a little bit more seriously and do the solo stuff,” she said. “After that, I could see myself on stage and I never



looked back.”

When Caitlin was in Year 11 at Catholic girls’ school Avila College in Mt Waverley, she was given a major role in the musical production of *Footloose*, which the school performed with brother school Mazenod College. The following year, she played the lead role in the schools’ production of *West Side Story*. “I grew up singing pop songs by myself, and being in musicals was being on stage in a completely different way—it involved the acting, dancing, singing all in one, and it was such a different experience with the costumes and the mics and headset. I really fell in love with it.”

“It was after I left high school that opportunities started coming to me. I had more freedom and was now old enough to gig around Melbourne—I didn’t need my mum supervising me, so I could spread my wings.” In 2018 Caitlin appeared on a TV talent show called *All Together Now*, where she performed in front of a large group of music industry professionals. “It was all about the song making them feel good and feel connected to your performance.” Although being involved in the show took Caitlin out of her comfort zone, she ended up enjoying what she feels was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and it also introduced her to people in the music business.

It was through industry connections that Caitlin was invited to join a choir supporting Tones and I at a televised performance at Rod Laver Arena, and she was also one of Delta Goodrem’s backup singers at the 2021 Melbourne Cup. In 2022, Caitlin was part of the Tones and I backing choir for *Australia Unites: Red Cross Flood Appeal*, on TV networks Nine, Seven, and Ten. “These were such great experiences,” said Caitlin.

Caitlin completed a Bachelor of Arts (Music Industry) at RMIT in 2017. While studying, she began teaching at JAANZ International Singing



PHOTO: CATHERINE WARD

Academy in Oakleigh, where she had been taking lessons since childhood. She continues to teach there, and said, "I never really saw myself as a vocal coach, but I've fallen in love with teaching." Caitlin enjoys the fact that her students range in age from six to 65 and they all have different goals, from just having fun and building their confidence to wanting to become an artist in the music industry.

Caitlin had always wanted a career in music, but it has only been in recent years that she has had the confidence to properly pursue it. She said, "It took me a really long time to believe in myself and put myself out there." She feels she gained more belief in herself and transitioned from becoming a singer to an artist during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. "2020 was a

little bit of a blessing for me, exploring my creativity with the world pausing for a while. That's what led to me getting into a studio and releasing my debut single."

Caitlin wrote her first single, "Younger Self", with Rob Amoruso and Elizabeth Webber. "It's reminding us to let go of imperfections and to embrace life's moments a little bit more," Caitlin said. "That's the message I would tell my younger self, because I'd always been afraid to step into my full potential. It's very easy to hold yourself back through insecurity or fear—but if you don't work through that fear, you're going to miss out on some pretty great things."

Caitlin describes the process leading up to recording her first single as daunting, but "I had my producer Rob to bounce off, which was awesome. Writing by yourself is so different to having two minds working together." Rob and Caitlin met at Hillsong Church in Knox, where he was part of the creative team and worship band, and Caitlin was one of the worship leaders. "He helped push me out of my comfort zone," said Caitlin. The duo has been collaborating for more than two years now, and Caitlin describes Rob as

a great support. Caitlin also gains strength from her family, who are very proud of her achievements and have encouraged her from the beginning. She also has a "number one supporter" in her partner Ryan, whom Caitlin met while she was a student at Avila and Ryan was at Mazenod College.

Once her first single was written and produced, mixed and mastered, Caitlin began the process of trying to find a market for her music. "I'm an independent artist—no manager, no label, and no-one supporting me financially. I've got the song, but how do I put it up on Apple Music, Spotify? How do I create a single cover, promo content? How do I get my song on radio? How do I pitch it to bloggers?"

"I had to be self-motivated and just get out there and do it, and I had to learn the business side as well. You can't just put a track out there and hope for the best." Among other things, Caitlin was advised to work out her "brand"—that somewhat intangible set of concepts or perceptions that she hoped people would associate with her work. "It took me a long time to figure out what my brand was," she said. "It involves things related to the five senses, like colour schemes, and scents. In the beginning I had no idea what my brand should be."

In between studio recordings, Caitlin has been building her voice-coaching business and making the most of opportunities to sing live. "Performing is my favourite thing to do because you vibe and reflect off the audience," she said. "It's so different to being in the studio where everything has to be perfect. On stage you can enjoy it a bit more."

Since releasing her debut single, Caitlin has released three more songs, each co-written by Rob Amoruso. "Work in Progress", a slower pop ballad released in 2021, is about identity. "I was figuring out who I was and who I wanted to be," said Caitlin. "We're all a work in progress. We don't have to have everything figured out yet, but we need to trust the path that we're on and know that we'll end up exactly where we need to be."

"I Need U", released in July 2021, is an expression of gratitude. "It's about being



PHOTO: HILLSONG MELBOURNE

grateful for the people around you who pick you up in times of need, and remembering to appreciate how life is better with them in it."

In April, Caitlin released her most recent single, "Do It Like That". It's a playful, feel-good song about enjoying the simple things in life that she hopes will uplift people and spread positive energy. And that, it seems, is Caitlin's brand. Although it took a while for her thoughts on branding to crystallise, she's now confident that she knows the vibes she wants associated with her music. "I want my music to be warm and inspiring. Someone once told me that when they heard me sing, it was like a virtual hug. That's a sweet way of putting it."

"My brand, I guess, is finding yourself in your 20s and making happiness a priority as you get older," Caitlin said. "There are so many things in this world that are negative—including, for a lot of people, their mental health. I'd like to concentrate on bringing positivity into the world."

Janet Van Dijk

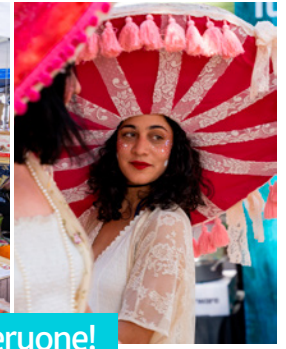


PHOTO: MERWIN MATHEW

Discover Caitlin and her music on the following platforms:

- Spotify: open.spotify.com/artist/565069ngyR6iaT7IWzlwyr
- SoundCloud: soundcloud.com/caitlin-min-fa
- Apple Music: music.apple.com/au/artist/caitlin-min-fa/1531276104
- YouTube: youtube.com/caitlinminfa
- Instagram: instagram.com/caityminfa_
instagram.com/jaanz_caitlin_vocalcoach
- Facebook: facebook.com/CaitlinMinFaMusic
- Linktree: linktr.ee/caitlinminfaofficial

Our cover photo of Caitlin is courtesy of Merwin Mathew.



PHOTOS 1 & 2 (ABOVE): JANET VAN DIJK

Celebrate Mooroolbark: something for everyone!

We're Turning Twenty-One —and You're Invited!



With our successful 2022 "Reconnect" festival packed away, it's time for our festival committee to reconvene and start planning for 2023. The committee is enthusiastic and full of ideas to bring an even bigger festival to Mooroolbark on 18 and 19 March 2023.

With the 2023 focus being on celebrating our birthday and the local community, we would love to see more community groups and organisations involved next year. We have big ideas, and while we can't reveal them yet, we promise there'll be something for everyone! In our continuing efforts to be recognised as a completely different festival to the much-loved Red Earth Festival, which ended in 2001, we will again be holding Celebrate Mooroolbark in the beautiful Hookey Park.

New to Celebrate Mooroolbark Inc this year was the partnership with Mooroolbark Wool to host the Yarra Valley Wool and Handicraft Show.

We'll continue this partnership in 2023, with the show to be held in the Mooroolbark Community Centre on Sunday 19 March. This year we'll be increasing the size of the Makers Market to be able to showcase even more local creatives and their wares.

Our committee currently consists of a small team of 13 people who put in countless volunteer hours between August and March to bring you this much-loved festival. We would love to meet more people who would be interested in helping us out. Only got an hour a fortnight? No worries! We really can find something for everyone, and you don't need any prior experience in events to join us. We welcome everyone, from retirees to full time workers to students. We have roles of varying sizes available in Site Management, Occupational Health and Safety, Marketing, Entertainment, Activities, Competitions, Volunteer Management, general administration,

and more! We're also keen to establish a youth advisory group this year, and would love to hear from people aged 16-21 who want to have some input into the festival. Joining our committee is a great way to gain more experience, meet some fantastic people, give back to your community, and add something to your CV.

The aim of the Celebrate Mooroolbark festival is to bring a low-cost family friendly festival that celebrates Mooroolbark and surrounds, which wouldn't be possible without our generous sponsors, donors, and volunteers. If you're interested in volunteering or sponsoring us, please contact Renae on chair@celebratemooroolbark.com.

Renae Jones
Chair, Celebrate Mooroolbark Festival

Having fun, making friends, and meeting challenges

Jamboree 2023



The Mooroolbark Girl Guides are currently working hard to raise more than \$20,000 so that 14 girls, aged 10 to 13, can attend the Jamboree in January. They have been very encouraged by the results of their fundraising endeavours so far. "We've had such great support from the Mooroolbark community," said Jaydine.

A trivia night in July raised \$4150, thanks to the generosity of those who attended and of the businesses who provided prizes and items to sell or raffle. The Guides have also been well supported in their other efforts to raise money—they've had a movie night, a Bunnings barbecue, and a family photo portrait fundraiser.

The girls have also held a market stall, selling items that they had made themselves, such as sugar scrubs, jars of brownie mix, and friendship bracelets. With some adult guidance, the girls set up the table display, made signs, and manned the stall themselves. "Not only were they raising money, but they were learning a lot of life skills in doing it," said Jaydine. Still ahead is another sausage sizzle, and a "pay what you want" car wash on 10 September. There is also an online raffle running throughout the fundraising period.

The cost for each participant will be nearly \$1500, which covers travel and all the costs associated with camping, meals, activities, and items like T-shirts and badges. Jaydine believes the experience will be invaluable for the girls. "They will get to meet other kids who have the same kind of interests they do," she said. "It's a great way to help them make friends for life."

Janet Van Dijk



PHOTO: JAYDINE RUMNEY

For more than two years, COVID-19 has deprived many of the Mooroolbark Girl Guides of typical childhood experiences. "They've missed school camps and other things that they normally would have done at their ages," said Girl Guides leader Jaydine Rumney. For that reason, next year's Girl Guides Jamboree is a special highlight in the lives of the girls who are planning to attend.

"The Jamboree is a large-scale week-long Girl Guide camp, and girls from all over Australia will be there, camping in tents," explained Jaydine. "It's run by volunteers, and it's a chance for the girls to get together, make new friends, have fun, and try things they wouldn't necessarily try otherwise."

The seven-day Girl Guide Jamboree is held in a different location every three years, and in 2023, Guides will be coming to Ballarat from all across Australia. While there, the girls will have the opportunity to participate in their choice of a wide range of outdoor activities such as hiking, swimming, and abseiling, and can also choose to learn about subjects like science, geology, and community service.

To see how you can help Mooroolbark Girl Guides get to National Jamboree 2023, look for their fundraising events on their Facebook page: facebook.com/MooroolbarkGirlGuides

The Price of Perfection

Dissolving into tears after a simple mistake. Triple checking work before handing it in. Refusing to attempt something new, in case it isn't good enough. These are some of the signs that your child could be struggling with perfectionism.

Perfectionism is when people set unrealistic standards for themselves and then feel distraught and self-critical when these standards cannot be met. In a classroom setting, these children may present as driven and self-motivated, with a strong work ethic. At home, it can be a different story, with parents needing to pick up the pieces when their child's efforts don't go as planned and everything implodes. Moodiness, overreaction, and excessive worry are common for children with these tendencies.

Some children have a strong desire to excel. They set a high standard for themselves, and enjoy putting in the effort to reach their goals. While this is commendable, there is a tipping point, when the pursuit of excellence can start to erode wellbeing and enjoyment of everyday life. Instead of participating freely in play, learning, friendships, and fun activities, children can become absorbed in hitting the mark, whether that be in sports, music, or academics. Some may also be susceptible to concerns about their appearance, wanting their skin, hair and shape to be "just so".

Other signs of perfectionism include:

- Ripping up or deleting their work because it isn't up to scratch
- Being overly cautious and thorough with tasks that should be simple and straightforward
- Seeking excessive feedback from parents and educators
- High anxiety about upcoming assessments or competitions
- Being exceedingly clean or neat.

For some children, the outward signs of perfectionism may be subtle. They may be reluctant to share their struggles, and instead mask what they are feeling by pretending everything is going OK.

The desire to please and a fear of failure is often at the root of this thinking. Children may have distorted ideas about what could happen if they don't win their tournament or get the grade they were hoping for. They may equate mistakes with rejection, losing parental approval, compromising their future, or being inadequate in some way. Their parameters of success can be very narrow and may not take into account factors that are simply beyond their control. Procrastination can also be an issue, with children avoiding new tasks because they know that they will never get it quite right. These rigid concepts may not be fully conscious, but still influence their behaviour and choices.

There are no definitive reasons for why some children struggle with perfectionism. Some children tend to be perfectionists if their parents have that inclination as well. Over-emphasis from school and home on grades and results can influence children to think that this is what really counts. Children who are sensitive, and keen to please, may also have a proclivity for perfectionism. Sometimes, there can be underlying conditions such as autism spectrum disorder or an anxiety disorder. Perfectionism can become more extreme in adolescence, especially for teenagers who equate achievement with fitting in and belonging.

As parents or carers, there is a lot we can do to help children who struggle with perfectionism. Listening to how they feel, helping them to prioritise and set limits, and sharing our own experiences can all go a long way towards a more balanced and healthier attitude towards success and failure.

Validate their feelings: When children experience setbacks, notice and reflect how they are feeling, without judgement or criticism. Help them to find healthy ways to work through these feelings such as going for a walk, talking with a friend, or via creative outlets such as art or journaling.

Help them to establish priorities and set boundaries: When faced with a new task, children may struggle to discern which parts are most important.



They may spend hours on small details and then feel stressed when they run out of time to cover the bases. They may need extra support from you to determine the size of the task and to know what a reasonable amount of effort looks like. Timers can be useful for setting work limits so that there is enough time available for rest, relaxation, and other enriching activities.

Clarify your expectations: Let your children know that although you are pleased they want to do their best, you love them for who they are, not for the results they get. Their health and enjoyment of life are more important to you than their achievements. If they fall short in some way, you will not stop caring for them.

Share a healthier perspective: Talk about success in a broad way, with the focus on a balanced life. Discuss what a good life might mean for people from different countries, cultures, religions, and backgrounds. Model a positive attitude towards mistakes, failure, diversity, and imperfection. Share examples from your own life when things haven't turned out as planned—how you worked through these setbacks, and what you learned from the experience. Notice and admire qualities such as teamwork, perseverance, kindness, creativity and respect. Demonstrate a "have a go" attitude, where it is quite OK to attempt things that are new, that you aren't good at.

Schedule time for fun: Make time for enjoyable and rewarding activities that are less focused on grades, scores and specific outcomes. Bake a cake, go for a bushwalk, or spend time together on an enjoyable project.

If perfectionism is affecting your child's mental health, and affecting participation in the enjoyable aspects of life, it may be time to consult further with a school wellbeing staff member or psychologist.¹ Working patiently with your child using the steps above, or following the tailored advice of a professional, can help bring about a happier household and a child who feels valued and confident.

Kate Chivers

Further reading:

Rocker, Leonardo: *Perfectionism in Children: Top 8 Strategies*. childpsychologist.com.au/resources/perfectionism-in-children-top-8-strategies

¹ To find a psychologist, access the website of the Australian Psychological Society: psychology.org.au.

Top Cut Hair Fashions

When Bianca Balcombe talks about hairdressing, it's clear that people are her focus. She talks about her clients, and about her relationships with her staff and with other shop owners in Mooroolbark—and she also shows concern for the bigger picture, the future wellbeing of all Australians.

Bianca grew up in the Yarra Valley, and began hairdressing at age 15. Nine years ago, she bought Top Cut Hair Fashions in Mooroolbark, hoping that having her own business would provide her with flexibility while she was raising her young son. Bianca now employs two other hairdressers, who also have children, and in October a young secondary school graduate will begin her hairdressing apprenticeship with the business.

Bianca describes the salon atmosphere as relaxed, and her relationship with the other hairdressers as family-like. She loves being at work. "It's not always easy to find a workplace you enjoy being at," she said. Each of the hairdressers has experience with clients of various ages, hair types, and style preferences. "No day is ever the same," said Bianca. Some of the staff's favourite customers are older clients who come in for their weekly hair styling. For the younger clients, Bianca and her staff do a lot of colour work, including balayage and ombre designs.

The salon uses and sells hair products by Hair Jam, an Australian-owned business that is environmentally conscious in its production and packaging. "As the mother of a 15 year old, making sure that he's got a future is huge for me," said Bianca. "By lowering carbon emissions, we're making sure our planet is going to be sustainable for our children, and if



PHOTO: BIANCA BALCOMBE

our products are Australian made and owned, we're keeping jobs in the country for the next generation."

Like most businesses, Top Cut Hair Fashions was affected when pandemic restrictions meant clients could no longer come in. However, Bianca made use of the time to redecorate her salon, and the result is a stylish and contemporary space that Bianca describes as "more me."

The salon is one of seven shops located at 61 Brice Avenue, and Bianca has appreciated the support and friendship of those in the other shops, especially during the pandemic. For Bianca, it's all part of the community feeling that comes with working in Mooroolbark. "Over time everyone gets to know everyone else. It's a tight-knit community," she said.

The salon clientele are also part of that community, and Top Cut Hair Fashions staff work hard to meet the needs of everyone who walks through the door. "As a team we love seeing our clients leave with a smile," said Bianca. "It means that you've done your job right."

Janet Van Dijk

Top Cut Hair Fashions is located at Shop 3, 61 Brice Avenue, Mooroolbark. For appointments and more information, phone 9726 9166 or visit the Facebook page: facebook.com/topcuthairfashionsmooroolbark.

Langford's Patisserie

To enter Langford's Patisserie in Mooroolbark is to walk into a colourful dessert-lover's paradise. A huge selection of delicious cakes and pastries is displayed under shining glass, with tempting trays of beautifully decorated, rainbow-hued treats—pastries, cupcakes, cheesecakes, macarons and more, in a variety of flavours, colours and sizes. Those not looking to satisfy a sweet tooth might be drawn to the appetising aroma of the savoury items—including croissants, gourmet pies, quiches, pasties, and sausage rolls—our range of artisan breads and rolls.

With more than 100 items in store, the hardest part for many customers will be making a choice. And with a variety of theme days throughout the year, Langford's doesn't make that choice any easier! As well baking special items for traditional days like Father's Day and Christmas, Langford's has

its own events like Donut Days and Vanilla Slice Days, with themed goodies, special deals and giveaways.

Still to come this year are Australian Teachers' Day, World Kindness Day, and, of course the big one—the AFL Grand Final in late September. "We usually do cupcakes and donuts with the finalists' colours on," said owner Gilbert Langford. Football-themed fare will be available to buy off the shelves, or to pre-order for those who don't want to risk missing out on their Grand Final day footy snacks and desserts.

Each day, Langford's displays beautifully decorated celebration cakes for those who have forgotten to plan ahead, and also makes special occasion items to order. Customers often request cookies and cakes decorated with edible pictures and logos, to add a unique and personalised touch to their celebrations and corporate functions.

For those unable to come in for Langford's takeaway or café service, orders for delivery can be placed through the website or Uber Eats, with an appetising range including grilled sandwiches, home-made soups, and burgers. Customers who want a sweet treat might choose one of Langford's signature mud cakes in a range of flavours, or a perhaps a decadent dessert box to share.

Most customers come into Langford's simply for the delicious freshly baked goods, perhaps not realising how generous the family-owned business has been to the community. For years, Gilbert and Joy Langford have quietly provided bread and other bakery items to those in need. As well as end-of-the-day donations to make way for fresh items, Langford's has also given away custom-made cakes to support local organisations and those going through a difficult time. It's this community spirit that has contributed to making Langford's Patisserie, after only eight years in business, a household name in Mooroolbark!

Janet Van Dijk

Langford's Patisserie is located at 48 Manchester Road, Mooroolbark. To find out about Langford Patisserie's upcoming events, visit the Facebook page. Orders can be placed in store, by phone (9727 0022), via the website, or through Uber Eats.



PHOTO: LANGFORD'S PATISSERIE

Langford's offers a range of made-to-order and off-the-shelf items for significant days throughout the year, like these treats baked for last year's AFL Grand Final.



Caladenia Dementia Care staff with the 12-seater bus that was donated by the bank. (L-R Caladenia Board Chair Harry Moyle, CEO Sarah Yeates, and Team Leader Leanne Smith)



Entertainer Chris Morant with members of the Mooroolbark Country Fire Authority



Bendigo Piggy poses with Julie Hion who, along with Rowan Alexander, is one of two original staff members still at the bank branch.

On 14 May, Mooroolbark Community Bank branch of Bendigo Bank held a celebration party to mark a significant milestone—20 years in the Mooroolbark community.

Everyone was invited to the celebration, and the area in front of The Terrace shopping centre came alive with food and coffee stalls, live entertainment, and displays from the Mooroolbark fire brigade, the local police, and the Historic Commercial Vehicle Club. Music was provided by singer-songwriter Caitlin Min Fa and vocalist Bethany Byrne, and roving entertainer Chris Morant displayed his juggling, stilt-walking and fire-breathing skills. Face painting was enjoyed by both children and adults, and bank mascot Bendigo Piggy made an appearance, posing with guests and helping to cut the bank-themed birthday cake. For the children there was a colouring competition with prizes, and party bags containing goodies including a Bendigo Piggy toy and a voucher for a free ride on the Mooroolbark Miniature Railway.

Most people in Mooroolbark are aware of Community Bank Mooroolbark's contribution to the neighbourhood—in the bank's two decades in the area, it has become a major supporter of local not-for-profit organisations. However, not everyone is aware of how the bank came to hold such a special place in the community.

Community Bank Mooroolbark was formed in the early 2000s as a response to community needs, after several other banks had closed local operations. A group of Mooroolbark residents actively sought another banking facility for the area and in 2000, it was proposed that a community bank be opened, operating under the auspices of Bendigo Bank. To raise capital for the new venture, shares were sold—the majority of them to Mooroolbark residents—and the new bank opened in May 2002. When the initial aim of providing banking services to the community had been achieved, the board of Community Bank Mooroolbark began to focus on strengthening its financial position and returning profits to the local community.

Living Today magazine was one of the first recipients of Community Bank Mooroolbark's support in the early 2000s, and is grateful for

Bendigo Bank Celebrating Neighbourhood Connections

the bank's very generous backing over nearly two decades. Over the years many local not-for-profit organisations have benefited from Community Bank Mooroolbark's generosity, and several of them were at the celebration, including Mooroolbark Men's Shed, Goodness Gracious Network, and the Lions Club of Croydon-Mooroolbark. During the birthday festivities, a "people's vote" was held to determine the favourite community group. Mooroolbark CFA was voted most popular not-for-profit group, receiving an additional \$400 donation from Community Bank Mooroolbark.



Groups who receive grants or sponsorships often use the financial products and services that Bendigo Bank provides, and also display signage which includes the Bendigo Bank logo, which can lead to uncertainty in some people's minds about exactly where the donations come from. Community Bank Mooroolbark Marketing Manager David Green explained that the community bank operates as a franchise for

Bendigo Bank, but the money that has been given to local causes doesn't come from the parent company. "All the funds we give out—sponsorships, grants, and so on—are from our Mooroolbark branch," said David.

At the birthday celebration, Branch Manager Rowan Alexander announced that so far, more than \$3 million dollars has been given back to the community in the form of sponsorships, grant payments, and shareholder dividends. "Our contributions to local community not-for-profits covers the full breadth of our community, from sporting clubs through to schools, emergency services, emergency food supply services, child special needs services and through to elderly-needs service providers," said Rowan. "Our branch is very, very proud to have reached this milestone of giving to the community. We thank our customers for using our services, which enables us to give back these funds."

While shareholder dividends form the smallest percentage of financial returns to the community, Rowan said that giving back those shareholder dividends has a special significance. Speaking to Yarra Ranges Life TV, Rowan said, "They're local people who were walking in this area and pulled a dollar out of their pocket to buy that initial share that got us up and going."

It's that personal connection to people that makes Community Bank Mooroolbark such an important presence in the area. As Rowan said, "Everybody at some stage in their lives would have been supported by one of these community groups, or know people who have been supported by these groups."

Janet Van Dijk



Mooroolbark Fire Station Chief Tony King in his dress uniform with medals of service, including recognition of 35 years of service to CFA, and the National Emergency Medal for significant service during the Black Saturday bushfires

Ready to Respond Mooroolbark Volunteer Fire Brigade

Tony King, who captains our local Country Fire Authority (CFA) fire station, has served as a CFA volunteer for almost 40 years, starting as a teen in the Belgrave brigade.

Born in the UK, Tony celebrated his first birthday on the ship travelling to Australia with his parents. As a child he attended Belgrave South Primary School, followed by Ferntree Gully Tech, before completing a fitter and turning apprenticeship at Ajax Nettlefolds. Tony also completed tertiary studies at Swinburne University of Technology. For the past 33 years he has been the managing director of his own business, Kingco Engineering in Bayswater, which he and his wife established in 1989.

Tony's juggling of his family and work responsibilities is hugely time consuming and presents a variety of challenges, as many of us know. And yet, Tony and his family have been able to organise their lives in such a way that we have all benefited from their contribution to our safety.

Most of us would have little difficulty in understanding the CFA's role during summer when bushfires threaten. However, what goes unseen is the level of personal involvement by volunteers on a week-by-week basis throughout the year. Requirements related to Occupational Health and Safety, training, and qualifications have increased enormously in recent years.

In the late 1960s when fires threatened around Ballarat, I volunteered to help, and spent the next 48 hours as part of a fire-tanker crew responding to emergencies. We were fed by CWA ladies bringing hot drinks and sandwiches in the back of a ute, and when our crew approached exhaustion, we'd snatch an hour or two of sleep on the ground next to the truck.

But no longer! Today, Tony told me, it takes on average three months of training before a new volunteer has the minimum skill set to become part of a truck crew. As a preliminary, the CFA requires each volunteer to complete the General Firefighter Course, which Tony explained is the bare minimum. Such training may be sufficient for outlying brigades whose operations centre around bushfire fighting, but in an urban brigade much more is required.

Drive past the Mooroolbark CFA on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday evening and you'll notice fire trucks in the driveway, and the buzz of activity as members are involved in maintenance, practising of drills, further training, and skill development.

At Mooroolbark, basic training is followed by a Low Structure course, taking perhaps another four weeks. Following that, there's the option of a Full Structure course—a further 10 weeks which qualifies the graduate to use breathing apparatus in structural fire response. Some members undertake additional courses such as leadership, first aid, and advanced life support.

The brigade organises regular weekly drills to keep the volunteers fire ready. Such drills can vary, from simulations that prepare for grass or scrub fires, to exercises behind local shopping strips to ensure familiarity with the location of fire hydrants and potential operational needs and hazards. The CFA also requires members to undergo regular skills maintenance to retain competency. For example, the procedure for use of breathing apparatus is tested every two years, and there is an annual assessment of drivers with endorsed licenses.

As the demands on the brigade continue to



grow in response to new logistical challenges, so too does the need for new and updated training. For instance, Mooroolbark's new elevated train station requires previously unimagined plans for rescue and fire response. Likewise, the rapid expansion of townhouses in the suburb has created access difficulties for large fire appliances and in turn requires the development of new operational response plans.

Currently, the Mooroolbark CFA has about 40 volunteers. More would help lighten the load and also enable the brigade to offer more diverse services. The turnover of volunteers creates challenges, too. Whereas traditionally volunteers often served for 20 or 30 years, patterns are changing. Volunteers these days may stay for perhaps five to ten years. Considering that it takes about five years to fully train a volunteer to respond to local needs, better retention rates in volunteering would be very helpful. These days a young person living at home might volunteer and be regularly involved, but the commitment may wane when the time comes to move out of home, due to economic pressures, residential distance from the brigade, the busyness of life and so on. And with greater pressures on businesses, Mooroolbark employers can find it challenging to enable their employees to be available for daytime response.

With all the demands and challenges, you might ask, "Why do people volunteer for the CFA at all?" Tony speaks very highly of the motivation of CFA volunteers. "They genuinely want to be of some help to the community;

they're not volunteering to receive thanks and other accolades. And the sense of doing some good for others flows into a sense of self-worth, so helpful for mental and physical wellbeing."

I was surprised when Tony said, "If they paid me, I wouldn't do the job. I continue to volunteer because I see the need and want to help. You feel that you've done something very worthwhile in your life."

Tony admires the fact that friendships in the CFA can frequently last for a lifetime, forged as they have been through facing tough challenges together. "The brigade—and the wider fire-fighting community—are like family. We place our lives in each other's hands, and learn to trust each other."

Fraternal support comes from neighbouring brigades. "Montrose, Chirnside Park, Mt Evelyn, Lilydale and FRV [Fire Rescue Victoria] Station 26 might help us in responding to a local fire, for instance," said Tony. "But the support is not just operationally. Other brigades may volunteer their help in catering for an important social occasion such as a memorial for one of our former members."

Tony admires the resilience of CFA members, given the risks and challenges they face, and is thankful that the care for members' mental health—which is essential, given the kinds of trauma firefighters can be exposed to—is now embedded much more intentionally in the organisation.

Although Tony chuckles about spending a New Year's Eve at the bottom of the opencut mine in Churchill during the long, drawn-out efforts to extinguish those difficult fires, he prefers not to dwell on memories surrounding the Black Saturday fire event when he served as strike team leader in Yarra Glen.

He admires the resilience of the CFA as an entity, too, despite sometimes political interference or the occasional spat between CFA and FRV.

Interagency relationships took great strides under the leadership of Emergency Management

Commissioner Craig Lapsley, when agency "silo mentalities" began to give way to greater cooperation and sharing of resources. Tony notes that relationships between various response agencies need continual encouragement and attention, lest gains that have been made diminish.

Tony's brigade responsibilities also include continual reporting. Paperwork seems to be a constant for many volunteers these days. It is, however, important, as his reporting can lead to the recall of unsafe or risk-prone products that he and the brigade discover during their response to incidents.

I'm sure that we are all deeply grateful for the role the CFA plays in keeping us safe, and for the generous sacrifice of time made by volunteers, along with their willingness to expose themselves to risk on our behalf.

I hope we can all find ways of expressing our gratitude. Perhaps we can do so by being generous when the brigade holds a fundraising event such as an Open Day to help locals learn more about the activities of the brigade and to raise funds for equipment purchases not covered by the CFA. ¹

On other occasions, the brigade holds a fundraiser in response to a community need, such as the coming Stairclimb on 10 September, when local members will be "running up 28 floors to raise money to fight depression, PTSD and suicide." ²

In recent weeks, the Mooroolbark Umbrella Group, supported by local organisations including the CFA, applied for an Emerging Stronger grant which would help us promote and support volunteering in Mooroolbark. The grants are offered as part of the state government's Victorian Volunteer Strategy, developed in response to a serious decline in volunteering in Australia—a decline which significantly impacts the economic and social wellbeing of our nation.

In May last year, *Philanthropy Australia*

published some of the findings from ANU research conducted by Professors Biddle and Gray which showed that in the first year of the pandemic alone, the "total number of hours of volunteering is estimated to have fallen by around 293 million hours." ³

The research went on to report that "In April 2021, 24.2 percent of Australians had done voluntary work in the previous 12 months, a decrease from 36.0 percent in late 2019."

Such a massive decrease in volunteering not only affected those vulnerable Australians who depend on the help of volunteers, but also negatively affected the health and wellbeing of individuals who ceased to volunteer. Former volunteers experienced greater loneliness and less life satisfaction than those who had continued to volunteer throughout the pandemic. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, those people who continued their volunteer roles reported positively on the social interaction that volunteering brought to their lives.

Regrettably, the research suggested that "there is a risk that many of those who have stopped volunteering during the COVID-19 period will not return to voluntary work and at least some will be volunteering less." ⁴

Thanks very much, Tony, for your countless hours of dedicated commitment to community safety and wellbeing—and to all your fellow CFA volunteers who have likewise persevered through thick and through thin. And, as the research findings mentioned above suggest, we're thankful too that your volunteering also benefits and enhances your own wellbeing!

As Winston Churchill once said, "What is the use of living, if it be not to strive for noble causes and to make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone?"

Randall Bouchier

¹ cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/whats-on/cfa-open-days

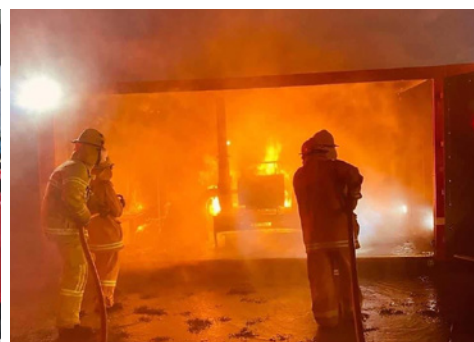
² firefighterclimb.org.au/station/cfa/mooroolbark/

³ philanthropy.org.au/tools-resources/news/volunteering-confronts-post-covid-challenges/

⁴ Ibid.



First Lieutenant Mark Drennan, second in charge at the Mooroolbark fire brigade, with his nephew Hunter



Firefighters use training pods to fight live fire in safe conditions



PHOTOS: MOOROOLBARK CFA

CHURCH NEWS

Forgive Us Our Debts

Suddenly, we seem to be immersed in a world of debt—nationally, locally, socially, and for many of us, personally. The depressing details find their way in some form or other into the headlines of our news almost every day. Many of us face personal situations of looming debt we didn't anticipate or dream of in our worst nightmares. Australia may have done relatively well compared with most other nations, but that doesn't make it any easier or more pleasant.

In the United States of America, more than 44 million people have outstanding school loan debt—amounting to more than \$US1.5 trillion that is currently owed. The forgiveness of school loan debt is one of the hot-button issues in American politics right now.

Similar to many Australians with their mortgages, many US borrowers are paying thousands of dollars every year but are finding it nearly impossible to get out from underneath this mountain of debt. Those who have just recently graduated are starting to realise that they will still be paying off these loans well into their senior years. The prospect of having to carry that load for most of the rest of their lives seems overwhelming.

While the topic is controversial for some, debt forgiveness is not a new concept. The "Year of Jubilee" we read about in the Old Testament includes debt forgiveness every 50 years. We can also see debt forgiveness in ancient Babylon in the Code of Hammurabi. Hammurabi ruled the Babylonian empire for 42 years. During his reign, he instituted four different general debt cancellations. The writings confirm that these were designed to ensure that the poor were not exploited and oppressed by the rich and that the widows and orphans were not burdened.

We also see debt forgiveness as far back as the 8th century BC practised by the Egyptians. When the Rosetta Stone was finally deciphered in 1822, they found the inscriptions confirming debt cancellation. You can only imagine the relief brought about by the cancelling of one's debts.

But these are just financial debts. The Apostle Paul, who was well-schooled and most likely educated about these historical practices, wrote about an even more important personal debt to the Colossian church:

"God made you alive with Christ. And God forgave all our sins. We owed a debt



PHOTO: MICHAEL THOMPSON/PROXIMA

because we broke God's laws. That debt listed all the rules we failed to follow. But God forgave us that debt. He took away that debt and nailed it to the cross."¹

Before Jesus came, every human was under a great mountain of debt. There was no way for us to get ourselves out from underneath this burden. Until Jesus, there was no forgiveness in sight for this kind of debt. When Jesus went to the cross, He took all the mess and all the mistakes of humanity with him. Everything was forgiven and we are now able to live free from those burdens.

But the work of Christ goes so much further than just the debt forgiveness and the release of the burden. We have been made fully alive, and it is through Christ that we are able to triumph in this life and the next.

Furthermore, unlike the ancient civilizations of Babylon and Egypt, where you could easily find yourself back in debt, we have died to that debt once and for all—we will never be under a system of spiritual debt again.

Although in this life you may find yourself in some financial debt in buying a home or a car or taking out a school loan that you might be paying on until your grandkids are grown, just know that spiritually you are never going to be a debtor.

We are released from the burden of our mistakes and are living debt-free in Christ, who has freed and raised us into new life!

Cara Garrity

Adapted from "Speaking of Life" a public resource video on the Grace Communion International website. (gci.org/videos/media-speaking-of-life/)

This magazine is sponsored by Mooroolbark Christian Fellowship, a congregation of Grace Communion International. If you would like more information or pastoral support, our local congregational contact is Matthew Gudze on (03) 9737 0126.

¹ Colossians 13-14 [ICB]

Community Tree Planting



PHOTOS: MATTHEW GUDZE

On Sunday 31 July, approximately 70 people gathered to take part in Mooroolbark's annual tree planting day, after a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19. The event was hosted by Mooroolbark Christian Fellowship (MCF) in partnership with Yarra Ranges Council. Approximately 70 people from the neighbourhood, including several families from Mooroolbark Girl Guides and Mooroolbark Scouts, filled in gaps and added seedlings to the established strip of plants along the Mooroolbark Road side of Balcombe Avenue Reserve, the site of previous tree plantings. Matilda from Girl Guides and her mum Sarah (above) were among those who enjoyed the tree-planting activity.

While many of the tree planters were rugged up in coats, beanies and gloves, Jason (below) seemed unaffected by the cool afternoon air! Although there was a fresh wind, it didn't take long for the enthusiastic group to plant nearly 1000 plants, provided by Yarra Ranges Council. All the activity attracted the attention of people walking past, prompting the comment that it was terrific to see families and community members out volunteering together. After the planting was finished, MCF provided afternoon tea of scones with jam and cream to the chilly participants, who were happy to warm up over conversation and a hot drink.



Native Birds Inspire Preschool Mural

When Manchester Preschool reached its 50th anniversary in 2021, it passed without much fanfare—a casualty of the pandemic. So when an exterior wall needed repainting early this year, the preschool committee thought it would be an ideal time to replace the painted logo on the wall with something updated and fresh. As a result, the wall facing Manchester Road now features a vibrant native wildlife mural.

“It was a nice way to brighten it up a bit and make connections with our local community as well,” said Manchester Preschool Director Cassie Mackenzie.

The preschool committee wanted to commission a local Wurundjeri artist, but when they had trouble finding one who was available, a teacher recommended Amanda Wright, whose artwork she had seen and admired. Amanda is a Palawa artist who grew up in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs, but her familial heritage is from Bruny Island in Tasmania.

Amanda, who studied Fine Arts at RMIT, is an experienced artist of portraits and murals, and has had her artwork displayed at various galleries and exhibitions. However, she hadn’t painted a mural of that scale before. She enjoyed the experience of trying something new, and felt very welcomed by the preschool staff.

Amanda painted two pieces, a tawny frogmouth on the exterior wall and a magpie on the wall facing the children’s playground. The inspiration for both paintings came from the preschool garden. “We have a family of tawny frogmouths who live here in one of the trees at the kinder,” said Cassie. “They come and go a bit, but last year they had a baby,

and the children were able to watch the baby grow.”

The second painting represents native magpies, which Amanda often saw as she was painting. “There was a family of magpies right near where the painting is now, and a little baby magpie was there all the time.”

Because both works of art can be seen from Manchester Road, they have attracted positive community attention, with some people commenting that they would like to see similar artwork on concrete walls and bridges around Mooroolbark.

The native bird theme suits the preschool’s curriculum, which emphasises outdoor activities. The children are also encouraged to take risks and test their limits. “We’re big advocates for children learning to manage how to be safe in different environments, and building the confidence to try out their capabilities,” said Cassie.

One of the ways the children gain independence and confidence outdoors is to gather around a small fire pit in the playground to learn fire safety. During the winter and spring terms, they experience the fun of toasting marshmallows and cooking corn cobs over the open flames. Of course, teachers and parent helpers are there to guide the children—and because the fire pit is right in front of the magpie mural, the children could be forgiven for thinking that the magpie is keeping a watchful eye on them too!

Janet Van Dijk

Visit [Amanda Wright’s Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/AmandaWrightsArt) to see more of her beautiful artwork: [facebook.com/AmandaWrightsArt](https://www.facebook.com/AmandaWrightsArt).

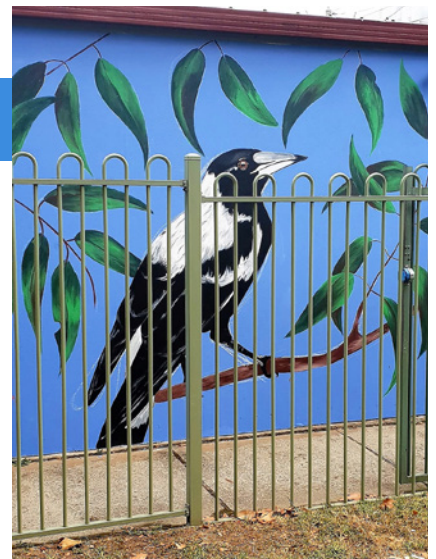


PHOTO: NILA BLENNERHASSETT



PHOTO: TRACY DE



PHOTO: MEGAN GANTER

School Council President Tanya Richardson and past Pembroke student Meredith were part of the clean-up crew.

Busy Bees

The humble school working bee held a special significance for Pembroke Primary School recently. After months of restrictions on togetherness because of the global pandemic, the working bee was a chance for students and friends of the school to reconnect in a hands-on way. “It was such a great feeling of community being able to invite the parents, students, past students, and community members into our school to contribute,” said Principal Megan Ganter. “There was a real sense of connectedness to our community. That’s why this working bee felt particularly significant to us.”

The working bee, on Friday 20 May, brought together an enthusiastic group of people invested in the future of Pembroke Primary School: community members, teachers, students past and present, and their family members. A great deal was achieved by the hardworking clean-up crew. Basketball courts and pathways were swept, the BBQ area was thoroughly cleaned, and the playground and sandpit areas were raked and tidied. In addition, the galvanised iron garden beds were weeded and prepared for the school vegetable garden,

an important part of the school curriculum.

“We did lots of work right across the school, but one of the main areas was our student vegetable garden. That’s all been cleared out and prepared ready for spring planting, which we do as part of our science program,” said Megan Ganter. “School gardens are fantastic places for learning. Not only do we learn about science concepts such as life cycles, but it also develops a connection to where food comes from. Many families don’t have the opportunity to have a garden area in their own homes, so it’s a great learning space.” Megan added that the students also love digging for worms and finding different kinds of insects in the garden.

The working bee in the fresh autumn air was just what the school needed before the onset of the cold winter months—as well as bringing together the friends of Pembroke and sprucing up the school grounds, the freshly turned soil in the garden beds provided a glimpse of spring renewal, when students will work together to create their veggie patch.

Janet Van Dijk

Sienna C. Jones

The Storyteller

Amid the challenges and suffering experienced by many during the pandemic, we've heard regular inspiring stories. Here's one about a 17-year-old Mooroolbark lass that is one "out of the box"!

As I prepared to interview Sienna Jones, my eight-year-old granddaughter asked me to find out if Sienna liked dragons. It was my first question! Sienna not only likes dragons, but was excited about the range of possibilities that dragons offer a storyteller—because a storyteller Sienna most definitely is!

At the beginning of the first pandemic lockdown, Sienna, who is a Year 11 student at Our Lady of Sion College in Box Hill, started online learning, which gave her more time to read. Already a keen reader, she took the opportunity to rapidly expand her personal library, encouraged by her parents who bought more bookcases to line her room.

Not only was there more time to read—there was also more time to write! And, perhaps audaciously, Sienna began writing a fantasy novel: a genre where mythical creatures, like the dragons my granddaughter asked about, feature prominently. The genre gave her the flexibility and freedom to create characters who could do anything: she could equip her characters with all kinds of magical powers; they could even return from death to life. And at the same time Sienna's writing led her into an exploration of universal literary themes such as the quest for power, good versus evil, conflict, the challenge of relationships, the desire for love, inclusion.

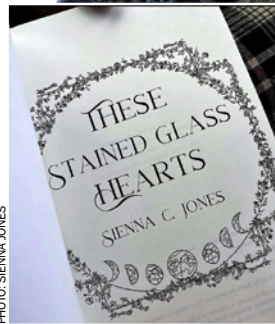


PHOTO: SIENNA JONES

PHOTO: RANUILL BOURGHER

Shakespeare marvelled about the storytelling that emerges from the richness and power of human imagination:

*The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them into shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.¹*

Sienna had enjoyed reading novels such as the Harry Potter series which might be described as "low fantasy", set as they are in our everyday world but including magical happenings. However, the book that inspired her to start writing was *Throne of Glass*, a novel by Sarah J. Maas described as "high fantasy" where magical happenings are set in a magical, imaginary world.²

After several rewrites and revisions over two years, Sienna's novel was completed, and she set about researching possibilities for publishing her work. In order to maintain creative control over every aspect of her work, she decided to self-publish through IngramSpark, a print-on-demand publishing service that offered distribution to various online platforms such as Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Booktopia, as well as in-store distribution. Sienna's creative control enabled her to choose her editor, as well as the formatting of the book, cover design, and additional illustrations.

And the much-anticipated moment arrived on 22 May this year, when Sienna was still only 16 years old! Google *These Stained Glass Hearts*, and you'll find synopsis details, reviews and purchase options.

Naturally enough, Sienna's English and literature teachers were thrilled and proud of her accomplishment. And so too was her family. I was first alerted to Sienna's accomplishment by her grandparents, Glenda and John Schubert.³ They were chuffed that Sienna had dedicated her book to them, and they had no doubt played their part in Sienna's love of books and writing by reading to their infant granddaughter.

Do you ever wonder what it would feel
like to wash your bones?
To fill a bucket of ice cold water and
slowly place each bone beneath the
shimmering surface?
The water would collect your burdens,
perhaps your sins.
The moon shimmering above would
heal your soul with a light that feels
like a hug you crave.
A touch so gentle that you could drown in it.
Your bones would feel lighter,
and slowly you would piece yourself together.
Just as you have always done.
Your back will no longer ache,
your steps will no longer feel heavy.
It will taste as the warm summer air
in the early mornings of those bright days.
Or perhaps if you run from the heat,
It will feel like the rain slipping down
from the thunderous skies.
A calmness in the air —
One that you long to crawl into.
Your bones would feel fresh and new,
Your soul would no longer feel so heavy.

Washing Bones

¹ A *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act V, scene 1

² Sienna was also influenced by the books of Israeli-American writer Leigh Badugo. In addition, she initiated some continuing correspondence with *Lightlark* author Alex Aster, who became something of a mentor.

³ See *Living Today* article about Glenda Schubert pp.12-13, June 2021. livingtoday.org.au

UNLOCKING THE MAGICAL WORLD OF

Reading



PHOTO: PETRA PIXARBY

Sienna is very disciplined, and it's looking as though she's anything but a "one shot wonder". She explained that her writing goal is a daily 5000 words, which leaves me in admiring awe! She is currently working on a sequel to *These Stained Glass Hearts*, having already completed the first book of a new series entitled *Forged from the Mist of Magick*, which is due for publication in December.

All this is in addition to her schoolwork, part-time job and attentiveness to a large online following on Instagram and TikTok.⁴

I'm impressed by Sienna's achievements: impressed by her goal to continue to write, and impressed by her desire to use her writing to increasingly promote inclusiveness. I'm impressed by her desire to study creative literature at university in the future. And, being a poetry buff, I was delighted to find that Sienna also writes poetry and hopes to publish a collection of her poems in the future. The poem pictured left is a beautiful nod to what seems to be our innate human desire for acceptance, secure wellbeing, wholeness, even transcendence.

What a joy it is to enjoy this young woman's blossoming giftedness. I'm chuffed that we're able to celebrate her achievements. And I'm sure all of us in Mooroolbark would wish her the very best for her future. Thanks, Sienna, it's been a privilege!

Randall Bouchier

For some people, a love of reading can open up new worlds full of adventure and exciting possibilities. Take, for example, young author Sienna Jones: a passion for reading and writing has led to the 17 year old writing her very own fantasy novel, beginning the work at age 14 and publishing it at only 16 years of age. Her love of reading has led her to achieve amazing things at a young age—see her story, as told to Randall Bouchier, on the previous page.

However, a passion for reading may not always be simply sparked by picking up a book. It is hard enough to encourage many teens to take their eyes off a screen and focus on the novel they need to read for school, let alone convince them to read for enjoyment!

The same can be said for reading to your little ones: it isn't always the easiest of tasks. With distractions all around us, physical books can sometimes be the last thing on a child's mind. However, it's important we persist. Studies have shown that reading and storytelling with babies and children promotes brain development and imagination, develops language and emotions, and strengthens relationships.¹

As a reluctant reader myself, I can understand the challenges to get kids reading and keep them interested as they grow. Whether the challenge is not being able to find an interesting topic, becoming bored easily, or thinking reading isn't "cool", your local library service can assist and provide information and resources to help you and your family promote reading to children:

- VOX Books: These books have an in-built speaker which reads the story to you as you flick through the pages
- 1000 Books Before School program for preschoolers
- Premier's Reading Challenge for students in Prep to Year 10
- Junior eBooks & eAudiobooks
- StoryBox Library: Watch your favourite picture books online, read by famous Australian authors, television personalities and comedians

Children's librarian Hanna Condon has some wonderful tips for parents who may have reluctant readers: "For young boys especially, starting with non-fiction or graphic novels and comics instead of chapter books can be a great way of introducing a variety of interesting topics. From sport, animals, STEAM and gaming, these collections offer young readers a way to learn and read in a format that may be better suited to them." "Not to be forgotten when you have a baby is reading to them yourself aloud," said Hanna. "Although they may not appear to be taking much in, getting into a routine of reading even the shortest of stories will assist in your baby's development."

Hanna also suggests using audio books as an alternative format for those children who may lose interest when reading. "A child can go about tasks or keep their mind active whilst listening to the books."

Although reading may seem like a chore to many, myself included at times, there are plenty of alternative options that allow you to rediscover for yourself what reading is. If you are unsure where to start, the lovely team at Your Library can help point you in the right direction on your reading journey, for yourself and the entire family. And despite ever-present technology, our beloved books are not going anywhere, anytime soon.

Angus Cooke
Team Leader, Mooroolbark Library

⁴ Instagram: @authorsiennajones. TikTok: @siennajones

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Cowey-Selman Kokoda Scholarship

A Journey of Promise

As the inaugural winner of the Cowey-Selman Kokoda Scholarship, 17-year-old Cameron Lilagan has an exciting journey ahead of her—next month, she will undertake the mentally and physically demanding trek along Papua New Guinea's 96-kilometre-long Kokoda Track.

When Cammy began researching the experiences of Australian soldiers in order to write her competition essay, she knew nothing about the battles fought on the famous Kokoda Track in World War II. "I didn't even know where the track was," she said. Cammy soon became inspired by what she learned about the soldiers, many of them still teenagers. "They were trekking this track and they were sick and injured, and had to carry their friends. They went through a lot of things to fight for our country and make sure we were protected, and I think that their strength was pretty amazing."

The Cowey-Selman scholarship is the initiative of the 39th Infantry Battalion (1941-43) Association Inc. and the Mount Evelyn, Monbulk and Lilydale RSL sub-branches. The award was inspired by similar competitions held in other Victorian shires, and is named after two Yarra Ranges residents who fought with the 39th Infantry—James Picken (Jim) Cowey and Harold Geoffrey (Geoff) Selman. Jim served in both world wars and was a founding member of the Monbulk RSL. He died in Victoria the 1960s at the age of 78. Geoff was killed in action in December 1942 and is buried in Port Moresby.

The competition was open to Shire of Yarra Ranges Year 11 students. It was initially to be held in early 2020, but the pandemic and border closures resulted in a two-year delay. Greg Green, chair of the committee of management for the scholarship, said the purpose of the competition was to encourage young Australians to gain an understanding of the sacrifices made by soldiers during the conflict. Greg has trekked the Kokoda Track twice, and said that it is the most challenging walk he has ever done, over extremely difficult terrain. "And to think that 17-year-old kids, 18-year-old kids, did that with army packs on and somebody shooting at them—it's just beyond comprehension."

The scholarship was funded by generous donations from several local businesses,¹ as well as a grant from the Yarra Ranges Council, and entries were judged by an independent selection panel. As the scholarship winner, Cammy will receive a fully sponsored, escorted trek on the Kokoda Track with Getaway Trekking, with all her costs covered except for personal items and spending money.

Cammy's prize-winning essay showed mature insight into the hardships suffered by the soldiers throughout the four-month Battle of Kokoda between the allied forces and Japanese troops in 1942. The 39th Battalion was one of the units involved in the fighting. Plagued by serious illness and supply shortages, they travelled on foot over treacherous terrain in the dense jungle, with poor visibility and intermittent communication.

Cammy, who attends Cire Community School in Mt Evelyn, has faced some big challenges in her own life. Her teacher Kylie Skidmore—known to everyone as Skids—said she is extremely proud of Cammy's win, especially given that she was competing with students from schools and homes that have more resources. "Our kids often struggle to get that sort of support, and they generally come to our school because they're disengaged from mainstream education, so there are a lot of extra barriers there," she said. "We weren't really expecting someone from our school to win something like this."



PHOTO: KYLIE SKIDMORE

Rhylie Scammell, another Year 11 student at Cire Community School, also entered the competition. Even though Rhylie didn't win the award, his teachers have been so pleased with his personal growth since he has been at Cire that they have found a way for him to trek Kokoda too. Skids said, "We were so impressed with the level of dedication he had in applying for this award and to his school work in general, so as staff we decided we would raise the money to send him as well."

"We also thought that Cammy and Rhylie would be really good supports for each other," Skids added.

Eighty years after the historic Kokoda battle, Rhylie and Cammy will be following in the footsteps of the Australian troops, trekking through the thick jungle on a symbolic journey that has been described by many Australians as life-changing. Cammy knows it will be demanding, but she is looking forward to it.

"I've faced some challenges in my younger teenage years," she said. "I was in a position for a while where I felt my life was a mess and I'd never get it together, and I never dreamed that I'd be able to do something like this. I had some things happen that I didn't think I'd make it out of, and I didn't think that I'd be able to create a stable life for myself. It's a really big turnaround, and I see it sort of as a reward or a sign from the world that I'm on the right track and that I can make a beautiful life for myself."

The scholarship committee is hoping that Cammy will be an ambassador for the Cowey-Selman Kokoda Scholarship next year. "It will help her develop, because it will involve some public speaking and promotions," said Greg. Cammy's enthusiastic about that opportunity because, although she's not sure exactly what the future holds after Kokoda, she knows that she wants to make a difference in the lives of others. "I really want to be an influential person for other people who have had similar struggles to me, or different struggles," she said. "I want to mentor people and shed some light, and show people that there is a way out and that there is a better life to live, against all the odds."

People meeting Cammy are impressed with her positive attitude and determination, and have no trouble believing that she'll achieve whatever she sets her mind to. It seems that for Cammy, the obstacles in life's path and the challenges she is preparing to face on the Kokoda trek are just the start of a journey that holds immense promise. Skids summed it up: "She's a genuinely inspirational young woman."

Janet Van Dijk

¹ For a complete list of sponsor organisations, visit monbulkrsl.org.au/cowey-selman-kokoda-award



PHOTO: EVIE NETWORKS

Electric Vehicle Chargers for the Yarra Ranges

With the increasing cost of driving a petrol-fuelled car, interest in electric vehicles is surging. But while the benefit to consumers and to the environment is obvious, some drivers may be reluctant to embrace the new technology due to concern over the availability of charging points.

Yarra Ranges residents will be reassured to know that, as part of the government's plan to invest in infrastructure for the supply of low-emission energy, four 50 kW charging stations will soon be available for community members with electric vehicles (EV). Supported by Yarra Ranges Council through the state government's Destination Charging Across Victoria (DCAV) program, charging station supplier Evie Networks will install three chargers in Belgrave, Yarra Junction/Warburton, and Healesville. Community group Yarra Glenenergy will be installing the other charger in Yarra Glen.

Yarra Ranges Mayor, Cr Jim Child, said the installation of the charging stations will mean the Yarra Ranges is much better equipped for EV travel. "Our municipality is large and diverse, so these additional charging stations will significantly reduce any range anxiety by EV users while they travel throughout the Yarra Ranges," Cr Child said.

"These public fast chargers will mean that current EV owners, and hopefully prospective EV owners, will be a maximum 80-kilometre return trip to any charge point in the municipality. This should also give our regional townships a boost in attracting more EV visitors to the region."

In addition, four new 50 kW electric vehicle charging stations will be installed for the council's electric fleet vehicles, funded by a state government grant under the EV Charging for Council Fleets (EVCCF) program. Council will match the \$125,000 government grant to deliver the charging stations.

"This is also great news for our own fleet of EVs, with a key action in our Liveable Climate Plan being to transform our entire fleet to zero emissions technology by 2030," said Cr Child.

Yarra Ranges Council is committed to achieving its target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 60% on 2005 levels by 2025, and to zero emissions by 2040. The council has recently achieved 100% renewable electricity purchase to work towards ensuring its facilities are more energy efficient and resilient.

The EVCCF-funded council fleet charging stations, the three public fast-charging stations funded by DCAV and Evie Networks, and the fast-charger funded by DCAV and Yarra Glenenergy are set to be installed by July 2023. The Yarra Glenenergy site in Yarra Glen is expected to be the first project completed in the coming months.

Customer and Communications Department
Yarra Ranges Council

The Big Anxiety 2022

A world-leading arts and mental health festival

The *Big Anxiety* is a program of art, ideas and transformations presented by Yarra Ranges Regional Museum and Yarra Ranges Council, in partnership with the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and the University of New South Wales. The program will be delivered at various locations across Yarra Ranges together with a broader program in Melbourne from 21 September to 15 October.

The *Big Anxiety* is a cultural platform for direct engagement with mental health. Embracing the diversity of lived experience, it examines what makes us anxious as individuals and social groups—from fears about the future to concerns about ourselves, our safety, other people, and belonging.

The Yarra Ranges program responds to the realities of a region in recovery—a post-pandemic world of inequity and trauma, as well as the devastation of the June 2021 storms. It asks how we might use our creative resources to establish the conditions we need to support our ongoing mental health. Program highlights include:

- *Hard Place/Good Place: Yarra Ranges* at Yarra Ranges Regional Museum, Lilydale, showcasing Augmented Reality (AR) stories told by young people aged 14-25 impacted by the fierce storms of June 2021.
- *Edge of the Present* at Arts Centre Warburton is coming to Victoria for the first time. An Australian world-first Virtual Reality experience for suicide prevention and mood change, the 10-minute installation helps viewers engage with the present moment—and the future—with openness, curiosity, and confidence.



IMAGE: NICK RICHMOND/ARTIST

In "Hard Place/Good Place" AR technology will be used to illustrate the experiences of young people affected by the fierce winter storms of 2021.

Yarra Ranges Mayor, Jim Child, said, "I am so pleased that we'll be hosting events locally as part of *The Big Anxiety* in Melbourne/Naarm over September and October. Mental health is a key issue in the Yarra Ranges. We have a large, varied and beautiful region, which we're all proud to call home. But it can be hard to access services locally and we've had a traumatic few years in our community—recently, through the pandemic and storms, and further back in the aftermath of the 2009 bushfires."

Cr Child said that *The Big Anxiety* will explore mental health through art and creativity. "It will provide a place for us to hear about other people's experiences and see how they resonate with our own," he said. "No matter where you are in Yarra Ranges, an event will be close by and I look forward to the conversations this event will start about anxiety, mental health and wellbeing in our communities."

Yarra Range Regional Museum
Yarra Ranges Council

Full program details for *The Big Anxiety* can be found at yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Experience/The-Arts/The-Big-Anxiety

Community Events Calendar

First Sunday of each month	Craft and Produce Market: 9–2 pm Bellbird Park, Swansea Road, next to Lillydale Lake. Rotary Club of Lilydale. All proceeds to local and overseas projects. Contact Rotary Club Lilydale: 0423 558 833.
Monday evenings March to November	Scottish Country Dancing: Mondays 8 pm (except public holidays). Beginners and experienced. Minimal charges. Croydon Senior Citizens Hall, cnr Mt Dandenong Rd & Civic Square. 9725 9074.
Second Monday of each month	Mooroolbark Country Women's Association: 1 pm at St Margaret's Uniting Church, Hull Road. New members always welcome. Contact Helen Linnie: 9726 0477.
Tuesdays & Thursdays	Mooroolbark Men's Shed: 9 am–2 pm. Cnr Ellen Road & Croydonale Drive, Mooroolbark. For more information please contact President Ken Reid on 0493 084 646.
Tuesdays	Home League: 10 am–11:30 am. A fun, inspiring and educational time where women fellowship with other women. Salvation Army, 305 Manchester Rd, Chirnside Park. Enquiries 9727 4777.
Tuesdays - Thursdays during school term	GymbaROO: Formative Sensory Perceptual Motor Program for babies, toddlers, and pre-schoolers. Mooroolbark Community Centre. More info: mooroolbark@gymbaroo.com.au or Facebook.
Wednesday mornings	Disabled People's Company: 10 am–noon. Disabled People's Company meets for coffee and a chat at the Mooroolbark Community Centre. For more information please ring Elsie 9726 4004.
Monday mornings	Free English Classes: at St Peter Julian's Church, 240 Hull Road, Mooroolbark. Call Jan Reilly on 0414 763 801 for bookings.
Thursdays during school term	Music Together Program: 0–5 years. St Margaret's Uniting Church hall. 9:45 am. Morning tea and playtime included. \$10 per session per family. Contact Nancy on 0413 389 441.
Thursday evenings each week	Maroondah TOWN Club: (Take Off Weight Naturally). Weekly, starting at 6:30 pm. St Margaret's Uniting Church. Hull Road. For more information call Kaye: 0414 984 062.
Friday nights during school term	Fridays@FrontlineYouth: LifeGroups, Live Nights and Socials for high school-aged youth. 7:30–9:30 pm. Life Ministry Church. Details: phone 9726 8111 or lmc.org.au.
Friday nights during school term	Fridays@Kids Domain: Activities for primary school age kids. 4–6 pm. Oxley College stadium. Details: phone 9726 8111 or lmc.org.au.
Every second Friday	People's Pantry: 6–7 pm. Three course home-cooked meal for the homeless and lonely. St Margaret's Uniting Church, Hull Rd. Enquiries Barbara: 0417 381 542.
3 September	Baker Boy: All ages event. Yolngu dancer, rapper, hip-hop star, performs his new single, "Wish You Well". The Memo, Maroondah Hwy, Healesville. Tickets 1300 368 333 or culturetracks.info.
10 September	Girl Guides "Pay What You Want" Car Wash Fundraiser: 1–3 pm, Mooroolbark Girl Guide Hall, cnr Marion Avenue and Ervin Road. Support Girl Guides going to Jamboree.
10 September 8 October 12 November	Urban Harvest: Backyard fruit and vegetable growers—swap your excess produce. Red Earth Community Park, second Saturday each month, 10–11:30 am. Enquiries: Claire Coutts, 0425 700 280.
21 September	Djirri Djirri School Holiday Dance Workshop: Under 13 years. Learn how to dance and sing in the Woiwurrung language. 11 am The Memo, Healesville. 1300 368 333 or culturetracks.info.
30 September	Laura the Astronaut: Musical and animation experience for families. Inventi Ensemble perform "The Planets" at Montrose Town Centre. Tickets 1300 368 333 or culturetracks.info.
8 October	Australian Army Band Melbourne: Swing, jazz, rock and roll, classical and concert band ceremonial music. 1 pm Mooroolbark Community Centre. Tickets 1300 368 333 or culturetracks.info.
6 November	Remembrance Day Service: 10:45 am Hookey Park. More info: Mooroolbark History Group, 9726 8740 or mooroolbarkhistorygroup@gmail.com.
9 December	Community Carols: Hookey Park Rotunda, Mooroolbark. From 6:30 pm: sausage sizzle, popcorn, fairy floss, hot and cold drinks. BYO rug or chair. Contact: 0425 809 021.
11 December	LMC Carols Night: Sunday 11 December 7 pm–9 pm: a joyful night of carols, a nativity and an encouraging message. Oxley Stadium lawn, Old Melbourne Rd, Chirnside Park.
12–24 December	Annual Life Ministry Church Christmas Light & Sound Show: Showing nightly 9–11 pm Monday 12 to Saturday 24 December at Oxley Stadium, Old Melbourne Rd, Chirnside Park.

Our Community Events Calendar offers a free service to local clubs and organisations.

To include entries for your group's community events in future issues please contact Janet Van Dijk on 0407 110 051 or email calendar@livingtoday.org.au

Note: *Living Today* is distributed quarterly—in the first week of March, June, September and December. Calendar entries need to be submitted one month prior to the distribution date.

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LIVING TODAY in Mooroolbark

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Like to contribute?

If you have a good news story about people or groups who are an inspiration to the community, please contact the editor on 0407 110 051 or by email at editor@livingtoday.org.au

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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

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