

# On Reflection

## Extracts

It is a beautiful February morning and I sit, elevated, in the hospital bed bought for me by Pete and Viv, so that I can stay at home, cared for by my family and wonderful support staff sent to help by the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA). My bed has been placed by the nearly floor to ceiling picture windows of Audette's and my bedroom. I have two views: along the expanse of the verandah of the house to the land beyond; and out the windows across the 15 acres of our land that includes a golf green that Doug Robinson, original head course superintendent at Sanctuary Cove, and Pete built there in early days, and stretching across fields, hills, a smattering of houses, the Tweed River, and then in the distance, the Pacific Ocean. How privileged I am!

I glance back into the room, my walking-frame sitting against the wall next to my bed, where Pete sits when he pops in every morning on his way out to work, and several times every evening, just to say hello, to see how we are, to say he loves us. Sometimes he sits on the end of my bed and plays drafts or cards with me, having purchased a fancy set of all sorts of games, to try to keep me busy and stimulated.

Next to the walking-frame is my beautiful Audette, in her favourite lounge chair, brought into this room so she can be with me every moment of the day and night ...



When Jarlath was a Visiting Fellow at Cambridge University, between appointments as vice-chancellor, and which had him and Margie at the other side of the world for several months, Audette emailed them nearly every day. A world-wide glitch with hotmail over a couple of days had her frustrated. She suggested to Bruce that he had friends everywhere: surely he could speak to someone.

'I'll ring Bill Gates when I get to work,' he offered.

She barely let him get through the door that night when she asked,

'Did you speak to your friend, Bill?' ...



Public and private property are vandalised by graffiti and a knife seems to be a young man's newest accessory on any evening out, or even a machete. In the sanctity of their own home, many young and old people alike feel compelled to lock their houses around them, even during the day. Not only in Mandurama, but throughout our decades at Rose Bay, doors and windows remained unlocked, even when we were away from home. As a society, we have lost our sense of personal safety in just going about our everyday life. In this, we have lost our most basic freedom ...



The parliamentary speakers from both sides are rarely even-handed, even though such bias would not be tolerated in any other forum. We demand a fair and impartial referee for the under-eights footy team, but not in the most important game in the land. Question time would be laughable if it weren't so serious. Apart from the level of childish abuse across the chamber, the concept of Dorothy Dixers belittles parliament as an institution ...



I commend Malcolm Fraser for accepting Vietnamese refugees, but it is hard to find anything substantially praiseworthy beyond that. He undermined the office of the Prime Minister by the way he came to it. Despite a huge majority in government, he failed to reform any systems and addressed few of the excesses of the Whitlam years. With presumably good intention, he gave us multiculturalism (and that's not the same as welcoming people of all lands and ethnicities), which in practice was tantamount to importing apartheid. He played a key role in giving us Mugabe in Zimbabwe, but has remained silent while the megalomaniac has turned the bread-basket of Africa into the basket-case of Africa. In recent years ...



I am also aware and very grateful for the particular privileges that living in a country like Australia brings. Despite our convict origins (in European settlement terms), we live in a stable and free country. We do not have to be afraid of our police force or our army, as so many people in the world do. They are here to protect us, not intimidate, harass, or even kill us. Despite their shortcomings, our political and judicial systems are generally free of corruption. Opposition leaders do not have to fear imprisonment or worse; we are free to protest peacefully in the streets; and I can even criticise past and present leaders, and feel totally safe from persecution in doing so ...



With this increasing affection for Anzac Day and all it represents, has come an increasing appreciation for our flag amongst these same young people. Though I understand why some aboriginal people might be ambivalent about the flag, with the Union Jack in its corner, Britain has given us the wonderful institutions that are the foundations of the freedoms we too often take for granted. It is part of our heritage. How can people who would tie themselves to old colonial buildings in the face of bulldozers, be the same people who would agitate to remove one of the most potent symbols of the same heritage? At some time in their lives, whether as a 10-year-old at their school assembly, or a new immigrant at their naturalisation ceremony ...