

A bit about me:

Karen Lethlean is a trying to be retired English teacher at a Senior College. Ever Present Predator is being published by Pareidolia Volume 2 Wanderkammer as part of their memoir section. She has won awards for her writing, Bum Joke was awarded a comedy writing award. She is currently writing of military services 1972-76. In another life she is a triathlete and has competed at Hawaii Ironman world championships twice.

I really appreciate the chance that my work will be read, and as I said hopefully I have this email address correct.

Karen Lethlean

### **Going Back**

Everyone in Australia understands what happened at Hanging Rock. These bewildering events are part of a best-selling book, and film, directed by Peter Weir. I like to think that history doesn't repeat itself, but perhaps it does. So, on Valentine's Day in 1900, a group of schoolgirls vanished. Only one is found unconscious, another fled the scene to raise the alarm. Eventually, maybe feeling responsible, the head mistress also kills herself by jumping off those same rocks. Seems the teeming heads, this mini silent place has much to answer for. I've been there, wandered amid bodies of rock, found myself wondering what became of those girls. It wasn't Valentine's Day, as that would have been my birthday. I lived in the suburbs of Melbourne, and such a trip merely a chance to delve into the mystery further. Alongside the rocks is also a racecourse, which I found strangely off putting. Who holds a carnival there? Who consumes alcohol, places bets and watches horses race within vicinity of such macabre events?

Theories include the girls followed a lizard into a gap in the rock and found themselves in a time warp. Must admit that the whole place has an eerie, is it pre-empted by the book/film, quasi-religious feel. Rocks form spires to God, have a cathedral ambience.

Even the birds are too afraid to squawk. When I think about this place, I concede it is Granite, and I didn't think Karst formations were of volcanic material, rather I assumed them to be built up of earthy matters, such as limestone, and sandstone.

I never realized how many ties my hometown has on my being. Perched on the edge of the West Coast, Perth, one of the most isolated capital cities in the world. Closer to Bali, than other Australian cities, like Sydney or Melbourne.

Currently problematic to visit. Being subjected to closed borders. My only option was to serve a two week quarantine period.

I am stunned to find simple things take on new significance, like the weeds which grow beside pavements. Wild oats we called them as kids. Slowly turning blonde as summer gets closer. I enjoy brushing my hands across these waist high weeds. Until the construction site closest to my accommodation mows these weeds. But wait, there are a few closer to an ancient, turn of the century Old Mill, and I can swing my hand to touch them. Guildford grass, thin tiny like onion which used to grow in the lawn of my childhood house, possessing little purple flowers. And dandelions, I spot a child existing his parents car, 'Don't step on the dandelions,' he yells to his older brother. Perhaps to grow to an adult with kindred reverence to verge side growths. Like my obsession with rocky groves.

I'd forgotten how windy my hometown was, until I encountered sea breezes again. Off the Indian Ocean, a long coast line with nothing to protect this coast from the relentless attacks, of various winds. Cutting chunks out of costal rocks, shuffling limestone walls closer to the ground. But scents of salt, waft nearer coast. I make sure to visit the coast, peer again at that ocean I'd swam in so much. Despite various things capable of taking lives. Out across the water, a mere 20km away is Rottnest Island. So named by Dutch explorers who believed local endemic species, Quokka were giant rats. Shades of *Princess Bride* film. I try to

imagine their shock at seeing black Swans, when in their world only white one exists. Born of this shock is the turn of phrase, 'a black swan moment,' something so unusual that it causes a gasping intake of breath. I can't help myself taking photographs of black swans on the Swan River. And later parents and cygnets walking across a pathway, as evidence of spring new life.

Perhaps I am bias, but in my mind the Indian Ocean has a different colour, brighter, lighter closer to the edges. Reflecting brighter light as the sun sets in the west, highlighting dribbles of sun setting glows each dusk. Afternoon tones are picked up, reflected, sky and sea work together to form a relationship. Reefs, in my imagination are clearer, off shore you can see waves breaking, and I make sure to remark about this to my three year old grandson. Makes me wonder if this magic reef world exists below the waves, what similar kingdoms don the sand hills.

Many people imagine Perth as born from ocean upheavals, sometime eons ago, not long before the Noongar people arrived. Others do not see the hills, nor inclines. But there are some, especially the Darling Scarp, which might have broken away when land emerged from seabeds. I can verify that slopes do exist, I know from childhood explorations of various gullies, low places, and rock kingdoms. Another frequented by puffing humans is Jacob's Ladder, a steep staircase rising across more Limestone cliffs. Signage – declares "please exercise quietly, residents appreciate lack of noise."

I have vivid memories of being on the edge of waterfalls, in full winter flood. Along with spring plenty and multiple wildflowers. Someone just needs to light a spark, and plenty of experiences come to mind.

But I am open minded enough to notice how urban growth has happened to where my hometown used to feature pine plantations, horse paddocks and market gardens. Rivers of

tarmac proceed in various directions. My home town has a reputation of being spread along the coast, because locals want to get a sea view. See I am not the only who has an opinion the Indian Ocean holds therapeutic powers.

Often the sea is dark grey, I blame early mornings. But waves are unrolled bolts of wrinkled silk, they lay immobile scarcely seeming to lap the pale flat sand. It is misty but mists hung thin and distant, obscuring views of headlands. I look for an excuse for this sea mist but can only assume it arrives because of minimal wind borne, or storm clouds. Perth is subjected to its wettest October ever, and I grow tired of wondering what happens to Limestone being constantly washed by rain.

Yet close to the city, pioneers decreed what is now called King's Park remained as undeveloped 400 hectares of bush land. I enjoy running the trails which criss-cross this pristine place. Yet I keep imagining what it might be like to have my mountain bike, and tumble over the edges of steep precipices of local limestone cliffs. I find one trail named after the Kokoda track, assuming that steepness and plaques are about equal-altitude and distances to the actual PNG trail. Regardless of the early morning hour, multiple people exercise running such steepness.

Perhaps my black swan moment is seeing stunning Kangaroo Paws wildflowers growing amid the 3,000 other local species of wildflowers. These are green and red, along with red and yellow Banksia trees which I remember my father chased for locations to place his bee hives to get the best honey. Along with various Banksia tree strewn locations. One which had similar rock nodules to Hanging Rock. We named saints and gospel figures after those formations, Sister Mary, Saint Gregory, after my brother, could I find it now and pay homage to the one who passed?

Another favourite of my father's was a tree we called Parrot bush. A thorny, prickly tree, which has tiny cream flowers secreted between these leaves. Another one which produced caramel like honey. We had certain names of many wildflowers, maybe not the proper titles, but nevertheless something we grew up with. A bubble of yellow was called a teddy bear flower. A colourful flower was called egg and bacon flower. We also had a name of a dramatic star purple flower, calling it a Bethlehem star. Spring in my home town is prolific with wildflowers. Being my father was bee keeper we probably knew more stores about random blooms.

Other things I am being made aware of, local limestone. Which I learn is only a million years old. A result of a ferry trip down the river, apparently quite young for a rock. I remember shapes and stones from my youth. Bursting out from scrub, beside beaches. The epidermis of earth, in my childhood, was often wet, grainy or solid rock. Well technically not solid, you could see grains of limestone, you could carve your name in this porous rock. Not that we did, such an action would be sacrilegious. But we did identify likely people amid those rocks, we did practise bowing down to such rock icon. Rather like the rocks of Middle Earth, or were they trolls, I would have a hard time separating element of those fantasy tales.

I enjoyed also being able to meet again with my brother, sister, and random cousins. Discuss again the family heritage, secrets and legends. Pry things open, excavate facts and figures. Because below the skin is buried treasure. Earth, Ocean, human forms all vessels holding something indefinable inside. My container is laced together by family, stories untold, witnessed by granules in rocks.

When not able to have these exchanges, with place, people and especially family I encounter feelings of loneliness, this follows me around always in close vicinity. Once I sit,

listening to music pouring out into Hay Street Mall from a local bar. Finding tears building up in my eyes.

I am prepared to concede that I am linked to a place, to a salty, dryness about air, and need to have the chance to get acclimatised again. I wish to be the one who trips into a fantasy land, forces myself through a gap in a rock. Learn to speak the language of Karst formations, stay longer, make my home again where Banksia trees and limestone pillars co-exist.