

A COLLECTION OF **bytestories**

A WEBSITE SERVING AS AN ARCHIVE OF MY
DIFFERENT ADVENTURES ON PLANET EARTH...



BY LORRAINE PENN

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That is Not a French Martini

On a recent short cruise from Sydney to Moreton Island with my sister, I encouraged her to try my latest alcohol beverage a French Martini prior to our evening meal on the first day of cruising.

Thankfully she was willing, so I ordered us a French Martini prior to our meal in the magnificent dining room of Carnival Spirit Ship. Both of our taste buds were primed for what is, in my opinion, one of the best Martinis, comprising of Vodka, Chambord and pineapple juice are shaken not stirred and of course, served in a cocktail glass.

It arrived; I sipped mine, not that great was my impression. My sister sipped hers; she didn't have anything to compare her French Martini. She smiled with approval. "That is not a French Martini," I bleated out. The waiter looked horrified and asked why? "It doesn't have the acquired attitude needed for a real French Martini"

After our dinner and not being happy with my chosen choice, I decided that we would try one of the bars outside the dining room. And to my delight, the first chosen bar's cocktail waiter said, "what would you ladies like?" "A real French Martini, make that two please"

"No problems ladies I make them with attitude" His French Martinis were perfect and he won our custom for the entire cruise.

In Moreton Island, Queensland, Australia

It pays to read the signage first

Whilst trying to be the Coffs Harbour local tourist guide for my sister visiting here from Wollongong NSW, we took a drive to the Valley of The Mist, sounds interesting! The website certainly displayed something worth visiting.

To our surprise it had a completely run down entrance signage with another sign "The Funny Farm". The driveway was overgrown with tall grass, which hit underneath my car. This caused some concern, however I drove on into the mystery location.

It didn't take long before I said "this isn't for us, there are no cars or people, let's get out of here" Quickly turning the car back around and hastily descending out of this funny farm.

We felt that was enough excitement for the day and decided to have lunch at the local RSL Club in Nambucca Heads. My sister decided to go to the bathrooms before she sat down at our table.

It seemed ages before a red-faced sister appeared before us saying, "I can't tell you" "what" I blurted out. "Well, I mistakenly went into the men's toilets and walked in on three men holding their you know what at the urinal. When they spotted me in deep shock they just laughed whilst shaking their you know what" What could we say or do? just laugh at her embarrassment.

In Nambucca Heads, New South Wales, Australia

Falling in Love Missing

The ending of my six year marriage finally arrived with a divorce being granted 13th October, spurred me onto thinking about "was is really love".

I can now do the things I really enjoy, like listening to my choice of music turned up loud while relaxing in a bath filled with beautiful relaxing fragrances and singing along with Rod Stewart to all those romantic songs, like; I Took One Look At You, Crazy In Love With You and most importantly Our Love Is Here To Stay.

It wasn't until I heard these songs that I knew that the 'falling in love' part of our relationship was missing, sad but true. It took me twelve years in a tempestuous relationship to finally agree to getting married, why I still don't know, perhaps there was some pity attached to my decision as my partner lived in his place and I in mine, however due to him having a triple by-pass heart surgery and not coping, I suggested he live with me, wrong decision!

I cared too much for him, but complications related to his recreational drug taking prohibited me from making a commitment for twelve years. Our relationship was an 'on and off' one due to his mood swings, which sometimes scared me. However being away from him made me unhappy and it was myself patching up the difficulties and going back to him, big mistake.

If it isn't a good relationship don't go there especially with a marriage. Shame that I didn't take my own advice.

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Revisiting Your Life

Having being part of someone's life for nearly 20 years and finding out that part of your life is over is difficult to pick yourself up and start all over again, but I did!

Although this was a difficult time in my life, I never lost my real self. Having such a wonderful array of connections in my family and friends was what helped me to survive.

The hurtful way that my ex husband gave me an ultimatum of his way or the highway choice. Gave me no alternative than to say, "there is the door".

Being basically a strong personality there wasn't any choice as there wasn't any opportunity for discussion. We were basically too different to each other and he had an extremely complex personality, something that I found too difficult to deal with and he was in denial. My life with him was a constant compromise.

Our relationship was formed on pure physical attraction and it didn't grow beyond physical. This was the major contributing factor as to why the marriage didn't last. Over time a good relationship grows beyond the original physical attraction and deepens into emotional relationship and you grow as a couple, something completely void in our marriage.

Eighteen months on and I am totally at peace with the decision and looking forward to closing this part of my life with a divorce pending and of course a 'divorce party'. Best of all not having to compromise!

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Have You Ever Tried to Change Your Name?

Well, I attempted to change my name from my married name of Mouafi back to my maiden name 'Lorraine Penn'.

My banking account was a breeze; just showed my birth and current marriage certificate and bingo I now have my new account.

Centrelink was another story. The message that greets you when you walk into the office 'in line or online'.

The trouble with online is you can't do everything that is required, especially when I am trying to change my name back to maiden name. After going online to change my bank account name details via MyGov, which isn't instant. I phoned Centrelink's call centre and the details were changed, but I still had to go into Centrelink to verify my details and to get in that never ending queue just to prove it is I.

My arrival time at Centrelink Office was 2.25pm I got to see a Centrelink person at 3.40pm, after being asked to wait at the green chairs area.

Needless to say the Centrelink person couldn't change my Medicare details, as it is a different department. Back in the bloody queue again, this time I had progressed to the red chairs to wait for another 15 minutes before the Medicare person called out my new name.

One process of name change completed in 1hr and 20 minutes.

It will be another month before I attempt to change my license; I need to recover from today's experience.

A Blast From The Past

What an amazing coincidence happened to me recently, when I reconnected with a lady who taught me how to bellydance over an outrageous weekend approximately 20 years ago in a quaint little railway town near Lithgow NSW.

A work colleague and best friend had convinced me that taking time out from the stresses of work and to learn something new was going to be rewarding and fun for the both of us.

Thinking that I could actually learn how to bellydance over a weekend was going to be a challenge, but hey I am always up for a challenge, especially when fun was going to be had.

On arriving at the weekend venue we could see a large sign 'Bellydancers Extraordinary Here Tomorrow Night' across the front of the next-door building, a hotel. Wow! We both thought and booked ourselves into the accommodation whilst greeting other ladies who were also up for the challenge.

A gentleman who had attended a business course during the week decided to stay over the weekend to see these bellydancers.

He was completely in his element, having an array of women wanting to learn to dance. He took it upon himself to escort us the following night to the hotel to see these Extraordinary Dancers!

This little town had grown substantially overnight with railway men deciding to see these bellydancers too!

To our shock, the bellydancers extraordinary were our ladies!

Some polite fast-talking and a lot of laughter enabled everyone, especially me, have a terrific weekend.

In Lithgow, New South Wales, Australia

Pain in the butt

Having been awarded a plaque from Safety Institute of Australia for 'Excellence & Commitment' in the reduction of Injury and fatality, in recognition of TAFE NSW OHS training strategies, you would think that I take my own 'safety' seriously, wrong!

On a recent return trip to home after traveling to Grafton with my husband and youngest daughter, whom was on a week's holiday. I had what is known as a 'trip and fall' flat onto my bottom whilst alighting up one stair from the garage.

At the time of the incident, I was carrying on a conversation with my daughter whilst walking from the car to the 'one step' up into my house, when I misjudged the stair due to not paying attention to where I was walking. Like walking without looking!

Misjudging the location of the stair and my head turned towards my daughter, I fell with one holly thud from a standing position to flat on my bottom position and it hurt like crazy. The scurry from everyone wanting to find out if I was really hurt was amazing. "Yes of course I am hurt and I am sitting on it"

A common saying is 'you are a pain in the neck'; well now I am my own pain in the bottom, to the point of not being able to sit for an extended period of time.

Telling this incident to friends and family without them laughing has been a huge challenge.

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Bottle of Galliano Eased the Problem

It was the early eighties and I was working as an Accountant for a Computer Bureau. Our main clients were the Police and Broadway Credit Unions; we handled their payrolls.

It was during one of these payroll runs when things went haywire with system crash, leaving no alternative then to panic! Geoff, Computer Bureau Manager panicked! It is not much fun having to advise the Police their pays will be delayed.

I remembered having a Christmas gift sent to me from a client with a note "In times of emergency make a coffee with a dash of the enclosed Galliano to ease the problem".

With a smile on my face, I dropped into Geoff's office and gave him the replenishing Galliano coffee and left.

About five minutes later, the intercom ran, it was a most grateful Geoff asking for another special coffee.

The trouble was explaining about 'the special coffee' to Fred, Managing Director who had decided to drop into my office right on receiving Geoff's call.

Fred said; "What are you up to Lorraine?"

"I am just trying to sort out a payroll problem by making Geoff a coffee".

Geoff rang again saying; "waiting for the special coffee, can I have another?" "Sure Geoff, in a minute I am talking to Fred". Geoff replied "Don't give him one, they are our secret"

"OK Lorraine you are up to something, what is it?"

I opened my desk draw exposing the Galliano and said; "coffee Fred?" He responded with "Yes please!"

In Crows Nest, New South Wales, Australia

Techno-phobic Connected to the Techno Age

What a discovery my husband made recently, by finding a Jawbone Bluetooth ear device that was given to me as a freebie, when I purchased my iPhone 4 two years ago! Yes two years ago! Can you believe it?

Taking on the use of an iPhone 4, sync to other Apple devices, when my previous phone was a basic Nokia mobile wasn't easy for me to master. The Bluetooth device given to me at the time of purchasing my iPhone was something I found too hard, so I put into the office cabinet to investigate later, but hey two years later was not my intention!

After discovering this device, my learned husband, who can certainly read and understand a product manual, enabled my Jawbone Bluetooth earpiece device to sync with the iPhone. Now I am able to talk while driving and of course walking while the phone is in my handbag.

What a wonderful achievement enabling a product to do all these tasks after residing in the office cabinet for two years.

Thanks husband for actually finding it, even though it wasn't actually lost and bringing me into the techno age of using the earpiece when answering my mobile.

Being somewhat techno-phobic I now look like a bogan when I am walking downtown in Regional Coffs Harbour talking to myself.

At least now my husband is skilled enough to take on the latest iPhone 5s device and master its configurations for me.

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Believe it or not!

A Christmas shopping spree with my daughter almost turned into a disaster.

After several hours shopping, we were feeling tired so we headed off to my car. On entering the last section of the shopping centre in sight of the car, my arm was almost ripped from my shoulder and my handbag was gone!

We didn't see the perpetrator coming, but we saw him flash by and down went my daughter's bags of shopping and off she went in hot pursuit after him. I yelled: "don't chase after him, he may hurt you", too late she was gone and my heart started pumping like crazy.

She was within a few meters of catching him, and then she was gone around the corner of the building and out of sight. It was the most terrifying feeling I have ever felt, not only was she chasing after someone who had just stolen my handbag, but also I couldn't see her!

I turned the corner and to my shock she was standing there with my handbag in her possession. How could she have achieved this?

She said: "Mum here is your bag", "darling how on earth did you get it?" "I just said stop in the name of Jesus and he dropped it".

Believe it or not this is what she said and thankfully the Police caught him together with three other young men.

Her face whitened when the Police said; "never chase after a thief, as they could kill you".

In Brookvale, New South Wales, Australia

It's Only a Rabbit

1986 was such an exciting time when I decided to take my daughters on a short break from Sydney to Bathurst as being an ideal location to view Halley's Comet come by Earth.

Excitement abounded on our venture, one daughter had all her camera equipment complete with a tripod and the other just wanted to have fun.

I decided about 3am in the morning would be perfect time to view the Comet, so I woke the girls and off we drove to find a good viewing location. We ended up somewhere out of town in the farming area.

Both daughters jumped out of the car, one setting up her camera equipment and the other one wanting to go to the bathroom. "Just over there dear" I said with angst.

The environment was so quiet you could hear a pin drop, then all of a sudden we heard a thudding sound which scared the hell out of us. I said: "quick get back into the car". My youngest had not quite finished her bathroom duties and had her pants half down whilst my eldest tried to gather her camera equipment and thrust it into the car with the tripod's legs hanging out the window. Come on car get into gear and out of here!

To our surprise out of the bushes came the biggest rabbit we have ever seen. "Oh mum it's only a rabbit coming to see the comet too, can I finish going to the bathroom?"

In Bathurst, New South Wales, Australia

It was just a pencil, but it hurt

It is my Dad's birthday today, 4th September 2013 and he is 91.

I had the pleasure of sharing breakfast with him whilst visiting him from Coffs Harbour.

During our breakfast he started reflecting on some of his early childhood days and one that caught my attention was an episode when he got a kick up the bottom for pinching a pencil with a small plane at the end when he was a young boy.

It was a shock to hear my Father admitting to pinching anything, the first and last ever.

He was not only caught, but was given a hiding from his mother, in front of his mates who had egged him into doing it in the first place. The hiding from his mother was after the owner of the store had grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and given him a good kick in the behind, a kick that felt like he was being lifted into the air and it hurt!

He said, "The embarrassment I felt by being kicked in the behind and in front of his mates was unbearable".

Kicking a child like that today would be classified as assault, but back in the early 1930's one could almost do what ever they wanted.

Oh how times have changed, today's kids get away with a lot more and certainly there appears to be little or no punishment, just words like "why did you do that son or daughter?"

In Arncliffe, New South Wales, Australia

Bathroom Cleaning Frenzy

During a trip to the supermarket I asked my husband to pick up some cleaning agent in the cleaning aisle for our ensuite bathroom.

Being the willing husband, he disappeared up the cleaning aisle and was gone for ages to the point of me having to find him, then all of a sudden he appeared and said; "got something dear that will do the job wonderfully and I will use it myself when we get home" yes of course you will dear I thought.

To my surprise after he had finished his shower that night he called out with what seemed to be excitement "come here darling" Thinking something was wrong I hurried into the bathroom!

Nothing was wrong he just wanted to show me what a great job he had done cleaning the bathroom. The bathroom certainly sparkled from walls to floor to the shower screen. He had managed to use his newfound 'Mr Muscle' product so much that the container was near empty.

What could I say, this is the first and no doubt the last time he will ever clean our bathroom again, the product ended up being twice the price and half the size of my normal product, but I now have a very, very clean ensuite bathroom.

In Boambee East, NSW, Australia

Holiday Imagination

Taking a holiday can be fun, relaxing and in my case full of imagination.

During a holiday to the Gold Coast with my husband and daughter, who at the time needed a holiday due to her workload.

Our accommodation was a high-rise apartment built very close to other apartments, so close you felt you could almost reach out and touch the other buildings.

The closeness didn't bother my husband or myself, but my daughter could not walk onto the balcony and look at the magnificent views, which showcased the entire area including the mountains and ocean views.

On the first morning I was enjoying a cup of tea on the balcony and said to my husband "you know if one of these buildings fell over it would cause a domino effect, as the buildings are so close".

On hearing this my daughter just about freaked out, thinking that our building could be the first.

I beckoned her to come onto the balcony to look at the superb views. You could see she wanted to, but the height was causing her some anxiety.

"Come on dear I am here the building is well built and safe". My daughter responded with "But Mum you said there could be a domino effect". "Oh that is just my imagination, forget what I said and enjoy the views".

She finally walked half way onto the balcony, stopped, stretched and leaned over touching the railing; she took a mini second look and hurriedly went back inside.

In Broadbeach, Queensland, Australia

Sad about the Cat

It is a wet and miserable day in Coffs Harbour today the rain is unyielding.

I felt so sorry for a sales lady who just visited our home to give us a quote for installing new blinds. The preparation for quoting was the easy part, the difficulty is getting my husband to agree with a chosen style, colour and of course price.

My parting comments to the sales lady were; “shame that you have to go out again into the rain and not being able to stay in doors and read a good book”.

She replied; “oh well at least today is shaping up much better than yesterday” I asked why? “Well whilst visiting a client yesterday to do a measurement for blinds, her cat was playing relentlessly with the strings of her blinds and scratching the couch”

The owner said: “Not sure about actually going ahead with the blinds because of the cat being so destructive to the lounge and that I should really buy a lounge first before the blinds”

My sales lady replied with: “I guess you could wait until the cat dies then you can buy both the lounge and the blinds”

She then said; “you are not going to believe this, the owner of the cat phoned first thing this morning advising that after she left the cat got out and committed suicide by being run over by a passing car”

She then looked around and asked, “Do you have a cat?”

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Digital Devised Grandsons

It has been a challenging time for me over the past week as the Nanma of two 'iPad, iPhone fanatical' grandsons, aged 12 and 8.

Yes, I agreed to do the grandmotherly thing and come down from my peaceful home in Coffs Harbour to look after my grandsons while my daughter and her husband took a 'kid free holiday' in Singapore.

Prior to leaving on their holiday I was warned by my daughter that the boys could be challenging, "no problems" was my response. Ha!

Thinking out aloud, they couldn't be that challenging after all I have faced many very difficult challenges with raising two daughters myself and work related business challenges and survived.

Oh! How wrong was I, these two grandsons saw my visit as a time to do pretty much what ever they wanted, especially with the use of 'screen time' (iPad, iPhone usage) something that I believe is ruling their lives as the 21st century digital students.

There was absolutely no talking or games with Nanma? Gone, just spending they're time between digital devises and avoiding their chores. This made me take on a nagging role to achieve the feeding and walking of the dog, get dressed, have a shower, clean teeth, go to bed etc

Reflecting on the week of looking after my grandsons, I wondered about how this type of digital devised young students is affecting their one to one personal communication.

In Valentine, New South Wales, Australia

April Fools Joke on Myself

Today being 1st April, also known as 'April Fools Day' where we tend to play jokes on one another.

Well, today I managed to play a pretty concerning joke on myself by applying hair remover cream to my eyes instead of 'eye cream'. Both products are in similar containers in the same bathroom cabinet draw.

Thank goodness for the distinct difference in the fragrance between the eye cream and the hair remover was discovered on time.

On discovering the vast fragrant distinction I quickly realised, just in time, what I had done and rushed to cover my eyes in warm soapy water to remove the hair remover cream and hopefully not find eye lashes in my hand.

A lesson learnt remove the location of the hair remover cream from where I stock the eye cream.

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Drink Water Before a Live Interview

Imagine the shock horror feeling I experienced recently whilst being interviewed live on the radio, when all of a sudden my throat just froze due to lack of fluids combined with having to cope with a very nervous radio interviewer, as this was her first live interview.

The interviewer, wanting to ensure her first live interview was a success just about drove me to drink, but not water!

Weeks before the actual day of the interview I was starting to feel the torturous effects of her constant phone calls. She started to become a nuisance by her going over and over the proposed questions, were they sufficient, are the questions being repeated etc.

I said to her “just relax and let the questions flow, I will answer them to the best of my ability, after all this is a great opportunity to promote the writers group”. Myself being the President of the writers group I wanted a good outcome too!

My biggest mistake on the morning of the interview, I didn't make sure my throat was lubricated with any water before the interview. And the interviewer was so nervous she raced through the questions, instead of it being a 30-minute relaxed type of interview, she managed to ask all the questions and my comments were all over and done within 12 minutes.

Listening to the interview now on my phone's recorder, I can hear how much my voice was pressured due to lack of water.

Lesson learnt, drink water before a live interview.

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Adjusting for Your New Country

It is 40 years since my husband immigrated as a qualified Aeronautical Engineer to Australia from Egypt. However at the time of his immigration aeronautical engineering was not a skill in demand.

As a migrant, who suffered a lot as a young man with big ambition, he could not assimilate into the community with his limited resources to achieve his ambitions in this new chosen country.

His only survival was to accept any type of work to gain an income, a taxi driver, steel fabrication detailer, design drafting, but not anything using his qualified skills.

He wished then and now that the Federal Government processed people who immigrate to this vast country with a more adequate system of skills suitability assistance and guidance as to where to live and work using their life's skills. Not everyone can and should be placed into Sydney.

For him to be recognised as an engineer in his new country, Australia, he had to sit for an exam with The Institute of Engineers, and then complete his Masters of Engineering Science, which he did and therefore achieved adjustment of his skills to meet his new country's demand.

Forty years on and his wishes for a better system of assimilating migrants into this country have not been effectively achieved.

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Your choice to stay angry

You can choose to stay angry, upset and sad, or you can choose to get on with life by facing what has hurt you and be content.

How many of us can do this effectively?

Most people dwell on what makes them unhappy without letting it go and getting on with their existence.

Dwelling on situations can sometimes make the hurt much greater than it really was, but if you can manage to talk about it with the person/s who has hurt you, then both parties will achieve satisfaction.

If you cannot accomplish discussion, for the sake of your happiness give consideration to, was it really that hurtful anyway!

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Sydney Transport

Recently I caught a plane to Sydney for a business related educational event.

Unfortunately my flight leaving my hometown of Coffs Harbour was delayed 15 minutes due to Mascot Airport having flight allocation issues. Not a problem as I had caught the earlier flight due to the possibility of delays.

On arrival into Sydney Domestic Terminal I took the train into the city. What an experience this was in an overcrowded train with everyone immersed in their iPods, iPhones, computers, papers and books. Not a friendly face anywhere.

I managed to see there a vacant seat upstairs in the train, but it was in the middle of a three-seat chair. So I asked the lady who was the nearest to the aisle; "excuse me can I get pass you?" She didn't even look up from her book and said; "you could find another seat". Welcome to Sydney's commuters'!

Her huffing and puffing about the annoyance of someone sitting next to her didn't deter me.

After leaving the train it was a bus trip downtown, another unwelcoming situation the buses are cashless and you need a prepaid ticket! What a wonderful customer friendly town;

Thankfully my education event was worthwhile, the return flight was on time and a friendly husband was waiting for me at Coffs Harbour Airport.

In Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

My Version of Valentine's Day

Saint Valentine's Day, commonly known as 'Valentine's Day' or Feast of Saint Valentine, is celebrated in many countries around the world on 14th February.

The most popular martyr story associated with Saint Valentine was that he was imprisoned and eventually executed for performing weddings for soldiers who were forbidden to marry and for ministering to Christians, who were persecuted under the Roman Empire.

During his imprisonment, it is said that he healed the daughter of his jailer Asterius and before his execution he wrote "from your Valentine" as a farewell to her.

For one to be able to say Happy Valentine's Day to the one they love, you must have someone in your life to say this too!

Why do you need to only say this on the 14th February, you should be able to say this when and wherever you feel the need to?

Valentine's Day is too commercial now and has lost its true meaning.

For the community who do not have anyone in their life as a partner to love this can be a lonely time.

Why not say "Happy Valentine's" to a family member, friend or even your dog or cat.

I love my husband, but on Valentine's Day this year I will be flying to Sydney to attend a business workshop, "how romantic is that?" he said:

I guess that I can leave a message on my e-ticket to my husband saying: "love from your missing Valentine".

And of course bring him back something nice ME!

In Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Love, Honour and Respect

It is easy saying that you love someone, especially if you are an affectionate person, but to love, honour and respect them in the way you want to be loved, honoured and respected can be difficult for some people to achieve.

If you are someone with compassion, it is not difficult to show love, but not everyone can demonstrate this openly towards the other person. They maybe inhibited and just cannot show how they feel towards the other person.

How can you change this, or do you really try?

Would the person you are trying to change by coaching them how to be affectionate take them out of their comfort?

Do they actually want to be more affectionate anyway? does their inner personality prohibit this?

All very difficult to understand when you don't have any difficulty showing affection yourself.

Honour is about your own beliefs and if you are a honourable person then this is not a problem.

Respect is about how you respect yourself and depending on that you can either respect other people easily or you have no respect for yourself, then how can you respect others?

New Generation of Technology Users

Have just returned from a weekend, well actually one evening, of babysitting my grandsons' ages 11 and 8, in Newcastle, Australia.

During my visit, it was wonderful to see how my grandsons are using all forms of technology, iPads, iPhones and Smart TV with Wii games of course in a way that most adults my age and even much younger feel intimidated by, but not my grandsons.

The eldest grandson Damien said; "Nanna you would be surprised at all the technology available for us to learn now", how true!

During my stay I had the wonderful pleasure of seeing a video that Damien had written, videoed and directed whilst attending an Apple Store Kids Video Workshop in Charlestown Shopping Centre. I know this sounds biased, but his was without a doubt the best video shown on the day, amazing creativity.

Interesting as the school system said a few years ago that he was ADHD, yes right! Thank goodness my daughter did not take the medical advice to medicate him.

It was pleasing to see that technology is being used as a tool for learning new, and creative ways of opening up their minds to creativity, something that is stifled within the education system.

In Valentine, New South Wales, Australia

Good Friends

We all have them 'friends' but how many of these can you call 'good friends'?

These are the ones that you don't have to ring every day, month or perhaps years, but they are your true friends.

They are the friends that you can count on one hand and in some cases just a few fingers of one hand. They are the ones that you can ring in the middle of the night for an emergency or just want to talk too and perhaps have a good cry with, but not in the middle of the night, after all respect is part of being a good friend.

They will encourage you when you are down, help you celebrate when you have wonderful achievements in your life. They attend all the important events that are part of both of your lives. You can always rely on them, they understand you when no one else does or cares.

These are good friends.

You never take these friendships for granted, as it takes years of nurturing to actually know that some people can be classified as your real friends.

You meet them in all situations and places; it is identifying which friend has the potential to be good friends that counts.

I remember telling one of my daughters when she had the typical 'friend problem' at school, "you will go through life and make friends, but it is identifying who are your true friends that actually count and generally that is just a few".

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Amazing Holiday

Many years ago when I traveled with a shopaholic friend to Singapore via an unplanned stop over in Kuala Lumpur, where apparently there had been a terrorists bombing at the airport earlier. Not something we wanted to know on arrival?

Most passengers who were not terminating their flight at Kuala Lumpur were invited to alight from the plane just to stretch their legs. We both decided to have a quick look at Kuala Lumpur even though it was only the airport.

First port of call was the ladies and what a shock to find that the toilets were just a hole in the floor. There was no way that we would use this facility so we hurriedly left to investigate further outside.

The short visit became quite an interesting one though, as I met a man of Middle East descendant with several escorts that appeared to be security guards.

It turned out the man was actually a crown prince and he was keen on talking to me and finding out where we were heading. "Singapore" was my response, same as him.

He invited the both of us to his hotel when we arrived in Singapore.

Should we go or shouldn't we was the decision that we had to make, but I was intrigued.

Full of nerves, we arrived at the Penthouse of his hotel, were we going to enjoy the evening or be taken into a harem?

I thoroughly enjoyed an amazing evening! Something I will never forget.

In Singapore

Medical Emergency Trip to Sydney

Amazing how you can spring into action when faced with an emergency situation as I was earlier this week.

My husband needed critical eye surgery in Sydney to save his eyesight.

We got the bad news about him requiring immediate surgery on Tuesday afternoon, by Wednesday morning we were booked on 11.10am flight leaving Coffs Harbour to Sydney arriving at the hospital 12.30pm. We entered the emergency section of Sydney Eye Hospital and by 3pm he was taken into the theatre.

Many of us, including myself, complain about our health system in Australia, but when faced with such an emergency, the triage nurse, administration staff and eye surgeons performed outstanding efforts to achieve a timely and successful operation.

Although I did find the 'triage nurse' on duty at the time could have shown compassion and some understanding, especially when she yelled at me: "stay behind the red line", causing me some angst.

It was similar situation for other patients who felt anxious in the line.

Thank goodness another nurse arrived to control the patient build-up by implementing some common sense into organising an improved patient flow, by directing the patients to the correct windows instead of standing in a long line waiting helplessly.

The torturous 9-hour slow train trip back to Coffs Harbour brought us back to reality. Due to the air pressure on planes my husband could not fly.

Most importantly my husband's eyesight is saved thanks to quick medical response from Sydney Eye Hospital.

Distance Grandma

Being one of the lucky parents that has the title 'Grandma': in my case I am called "Nanma" is a wonderful feeling, knowing that you have had children yourself to enable the status of being a Grandma is so very special.

When I lived in Sydney I could see my two grandsons by just driving 2 hours north to Newcastle, but now residing on the Mid North Coast it is less often. So I have become a distance Nanma.

I remember one of my last trip to see the grandsons, when early one morning, actually too early like 6am, Matthew, the youngest, came into my bedroom thinking that Nanma would be a good 'push over' he asked: "Nanma can I have some chips before breakfast?" He was wrong!

After breakfast it was a coaxing job, this time to get him dressed timely enough for his swimming lessons. My goodness, bribes, gently to hostile persuading was hard going for my daughter, but we managed to get there.

The main task was to get him into the water with the coach and to do something that resembled swimming, which was amazing to witness. He tried every trick known to man to convince the coach that he did not need to swim and that getting his face wet was not part of the arrangement.

It took every bit of my effort not to fall about laughing at his antics. I thought to myself, forget swimming get him into acting 'right away'.

In Valentine, New South Wales, Australia

Wonder Man

Who and what is a 'wonder man' is he real, is he only in my dreams or does he just reside in my head and I wish he were beside me? Or is he actually here with me now?

In my minds eye he has a strong interesting personality, loving, energetic, compassionate, good sense of humor and a conversationalist, excellent vision for the future, has the ability to make one feel happy even when life goes off the rails, regardless of where or what you are doing, being that at home, out adventuring or socialising. Not reactive to insignificant matters.

His super powers can move mountains' or at least moves furniture around.

He has the ability to handle whatever life deals, be that good, bad or horrid.

Has astonishing vision for the future, is positive with the added capacity to acknowledge that there are beautiful people and objects all around.

His visualisation in knowing that with effective planning there is nothing that can not be achieved, even though there will always be challenges in existence, he just takes them in his stride and stays optimistic not cynical about life.

This is my respond to a 'wonder man'.

Is there such a man in your life?

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Father's Day

After relocating from the big smoke of Sydney to the Mid North Coast, Coffs Harbour almost 5 years ago. First day we decided to do some exploring of the local café's and were fortunate enough to meet our soon to be friends Jenny and Jeff, affectionately known as two J's.

Fast-forward to seven months later, we all decided to celebrate Father's Day by having lunch at a seafood restaurant in Urunga, my favorite type of food.

The day was glorious, location perfect overlooking the Bellengen River, the company enjoyable food excellent; conversations flowed in all directions particularly finding out about our new friends.

Prior to arranging the lunch at the seafood café Jenny suggested that we treat the guys and take them out for dinner as well. I agreed! The suggestion was to dine at a local International Golf Club Restaurant.

We arrived at the Golf Club; our table overlooked a magnificent golf course. The waiter was unbelievable entertaining; thank goodness, as the meal was hard to locate on the plate and the price too expensive.

When our meals arrived, minuscule piece of scotch fillet, covered with two pieces of asparagus and something that resembled a red wine sauce, extra cost of course I could hardly believe my eyes. My husband couldn't resist by saying: "where is the rest of the meal".

Funny as it may sound, I was horrified to think that a restaurant could charge so much for such a miniature meal.

Thank goodness for our delightful friends!

In Coffs Harbour, New South Wales, Australia

Understanding Yourself

How many of us really understand and accept ourselves completely, especially when you are dealing with difficult challenges in another person's personality. Do you think first about the consequences of your reactions then proceed accordingly, or do you act out foolishly?

All very important lessons that I have finally accepted about myself recently, after having to negotiate harmony with my partner, who is a highly principled person that when you upset his moral beliefs this is when issues occur and it is this that I struggle with constantly causing emotional changes for both of us.

Saying this there are great similarities between the both of us, it was his rather timid personality that attracted me to him in the first place many years ago. Isn't it always said: "opposites attract"?

My responsive, certainly determined and indulgent personality can get me into a lot of trouble, especially on the home front, particularly when I am too quick to respond to emotional comments without taking time out to think first about my reactions in a more considerate way.

But hey! My personality has achieved some really exciting careers full of challenges, never monotonous, as I would always turn something boring into ambition. All part of understanding you're self's ability.

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

What legacy will you leave behind

Recently I found myself going over old photos of the family, mainly to get one that related to my first daughter when she was 18 months. Doing this made me realise how the years have flown by.

I can vividly remember where we were in the one that I chose. We were on holidays at a pretty basic apartment block in Coolangatta, Australia.

We start our lives as babies; grow into teens, attend our début at 16 and next we are getting married. I was 18 when I married my first husband. Then two years later we had our first child, a daughter, followed four years later by another daughter.

All of a sudden you are attending their first day of school, first school formal, and marriage for my first daughter, birth of her two sons.

Looking over the photos reminds me about the happy holidays, various family members weddings, and birth of their children.

Wow! You can see how much you have changed in appearance, not only looking older, but the hairstyles and colours, clothing, weight variations and different husbands, just two in total.

It seems like the years have flown fast, and then you are all gathered together to celebrate your father's 90th birthday. Yes, he too has had his years fly by.

All of this is evolution and leading to new adventures, friends, taking time to reflect on why and what it is that you want in your life. What legacy will you leave behind?

In Coolangatta, Queensland, Australia

Forgetful Days

What happens in your brain to make you forget what day it is?

Is your brain inspired enough to know what day it is anyway?

These are all very worthwhile questions to ask yourself or of others, but what is the real reason we, regardless if you are working or semi-retired, forgetting what day it is can be upsetting, especially if you forget that this is the day of a very important occasion, meeting or social event.

When you research on 'Google and Google Scholar' websites it comes up with a whole lot of unrelated information, but interesting enough training your brain in the form of memory quiz appears to be mentioned in most articles.

I know my husband's memory has increased somewhat due to him now being addicted to Sudoku mathematic puzzles. Guess he can adapt to this style of mind stimulation being a retired Structural Engineer with an analytical mind.

From my perspective, when I am actively involved in doing something interesting, generally outside the home involving exciting community projects, I am stimulated and can remember every day, the meetings and what social events are scheduled.

However this tends to change when I am uninspired!

How do you stimulate your brain?

In Boambee East, New South Wales, Australia

Another Reason to Celebrate Christmas

As a Christian I know that 25th December, is 'Christmas Day', a day of celebrating the birth of Christ, but for me it is also a day to reflect on what transpired 43 years ago, when I gave birth to another daughter, Roanne at 7.25am on Christmas Day 1969.

Due to my specialist being too intoxicated, the midwife 'Sister Devine' delivered her.

Roanne was actually due late February, not December 25th, but calculations are not always correct and in my case definitely not correct.

After the birth my doctor said: "She is perfectly cooked", all very comforting to know.

With all the fuss around what happens at Christmas time, we as a family decided that we would make 25th December a very special day, by having two celebrations, one for Roanne's birthday and the other Christmas celebrations.

Trying to make an already celebrative day like Christmas different from the celebration of a birthday has been impossible.

When we all got together as an extended family wishing one another "Merry Christmas", I would continually say, "it is Roanne's birthday too!"

I hated doing this having to remind the extended family members, but it was actually the only way she would get acknowledgement on her 'special day'. I made yummy BIRTHDAY cakes with candles to prompt the 'birthday wishes', but even this became too much over the years.

Biggest disappointment for Roanne has been the dropping from two to one present for Christmas not her Birthday!

In Frenchs Forest, New South Wales, Australia

About Author

Lorraine Penn

Born in Kogarah, NSW semi-retired on the North Coast where I am giving back to the community as a mentor, board director, former president of Coffs Harbour Writers Group & turning my life into a book.

Why is the website called bytestories.com?

This is a place for "byte-sized" stories and there is a 1500 character (about 250 words) limit for two main reasons. Firstly, we want you to know that "War and Peace" isn't required to leave your mark. Secondly, it takes about 2 minutes to read each story meaning you can head here whenever you want a quick (and entertaining) read.

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