



Drinking and drugging
as a means of
forgetting
...



3

'Amnesia' holds us
together and stops the world
falling apart
...



4

GRUNGEDLOTTO



1970-2002



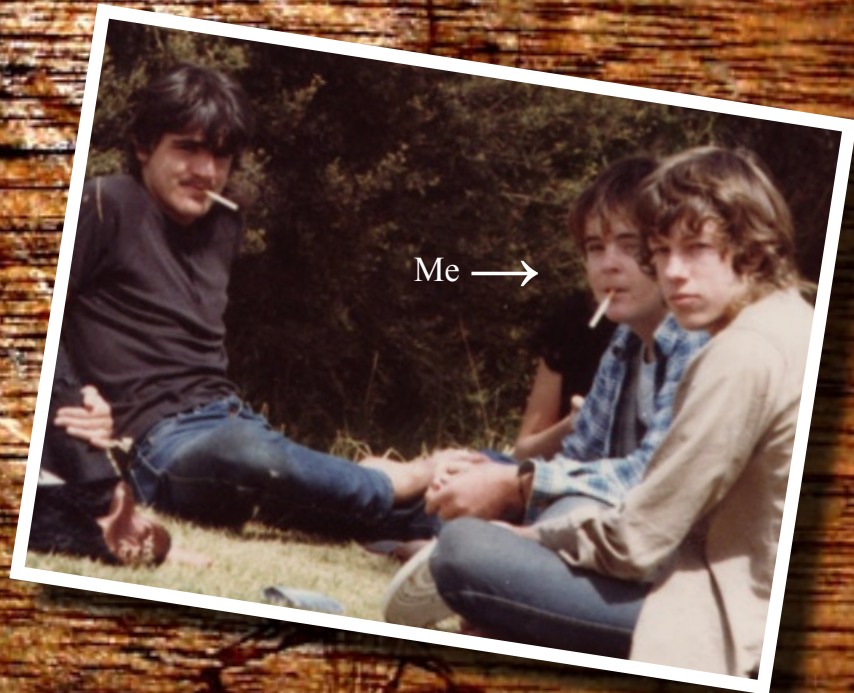
Tully: 'You can really write. Why do you live like a bum?'

Henry: 'I am a bum. What do you want me to do? Do you want me to write about the sufferings of the upper classes?'

Tully: 'This may be news to you but they suffer too.'

Henry: 'Hey baby, nobody suffers like the poor.'

(Mickey Rourke, *Barfly* [motion picture], 1987)





The past. How to make amends to the past? The undertow, underflow, memory. Dream. No freeing yourself. No way out, but in.

(Beverley Farmer, *A Body of Water*, 1990, p. 149)

1.
I was born in January 1970, the same year Jimi Hendrix drowned on his own vomit.
2.
My first memory was my Mum's death in 1974. I was four-years-old and my brother was two.
Our problem was that no-one told us what happened. The years unfolded through the 1970s with an unspeakable nightmare at their centre.

¹ An American hobo symbol from the 1920s and '30s. Translation: 'A man with a bad temper lives here.'



We orbited this nightmare but seldom touched it. Sometimes Dad got drunk and sobbed over my bed, ‘Y’r mum was the mo-mo-most beautiful woman in the wo-wo-world.’

His silhouette shuddering against the golden haze of the doorway, his face dark, his breath thick and beery.

The absence and silence grew louder and denser.

Like Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, we screamed in silence, an unspeakable and continuous and deafening silence.

‘She’d be pr-pr-proud of you,’ he would sob.

A forefinger skimming my brow, the lightest touch. His breath a fog of despair and spittle.

But this didn’t change the fact that this woman, aged 34, threw herself (or fell) from a 100-foot cliff and out of our lives on April 26 1974, just upstream from Blanchetown (5357) on the River Murray, in the still of night, beneath a sky full of stars and endless promise.

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,

How I wonder what you are!

To a bloody and brutal death in the rubble and



backwaters below.

*Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky!*

And for as long as any of us would live, her body would plummet through our minds and hearts, our dreams and nightmares, until the blood that sprayed from her head—spouts of red over the fossil-encrusted sandstone rocks at the base of the cliffs, on the edge of the lagoon, on the edge of the Murray, on the edge of the night—stained our very souls.

Like Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles*, only in blood, brain, and tufts of blonde hair.

And even today I treasure an old comb my mum once used to hold back her hair.

And so I grew up with Dad's hands forever rousing me from my dreams—and a face twisted and pale with horror and terror. Eyes bulging from sockets. Skin stretched.

'*I don't know where your mum is,*' he said one morning in 1974.

And I didn't either. But as the 1970s unfolded I began to wonder. For she never returned. And so my life started with an absence, an active and vola-



Taking away the moments that make up the dull day.

Pink Floyd

tile absence. An absence with body and shadow. My Mum's ghost stalking us through the banalities of everyday life. Nineteen seventy-five, six, seven, and eight.

And so I characterise my childhood as the Age of Uncertainty. As the Age of Chaos. As the Age of Terror. *Vertigo*.

I was so scared I didn't know I was scared. Fear was my default mode of being. I would lie awake at night waiting for the murderers. I was convinced they were coming, not for me, but for Dad. I would lie in bed, Scotty snoring softly in the bunk below, listening for murderers. And I would hear them. Nearly every night I would hear them. I would hear them watching TV in the room outside my door, chatting and squabbling and plotting. My heart would beat at my wrists and throat. My forehead would burn. I would marvel at their patience and confidence. My mind would race. And I would wait. Wait for day. Wait until Dad roused me from the chill of dawn to shower for school.

Insomnia, like fear, would never leave me.
IF I CLOSE MY EYES MY DAD WILL DIE.
Like my Mum.



In the life-story,
the narrativisation
always takes the
form of a life
course - facts and
events selected
as relevant and
organised within a
path, marked out by
rites of passage:
birth, school, first
communion, first
love, examinations,
first job, marriage,
birth of children
and so on. The
construction of the
life course scheme
refers, in the
interaction with
the audience, to a
shared knowledge:
the models of life
experience taken for
granted in a socio-
historical context.

(M-F. Chanfrault-
Ducket, 'Textual-
isation of the self
& gender identity
in the life-story,'
2000, p. 65)

IF I SLEEP BAD THINGS WILL HAPPEN. So I keep watch. But when the murderers come, and come they will and do, I stay perfectly still, gasping small gasps between the slit of my lips, waiting for Scotty and me to become orphans.

*When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.*

And I lived my childhood expecting doom and departure. I lived in nightly terror of a bullet entering Dad's head, behind the ear, in the jelly of the brain.

I had heard a story about a girl who answered the phone and door by saying her parents were asleep, and that callers and visitors should ring back or return when they finally awoke. This went on for weeks until one visitor smelt a rat. The girl had washed and clothed and taken herself off to school every day. She had thought nothing of her parents' endless slumber. For her, two-week sleeps were not yet unreasonable. Her parents were simply tired. And tired they were. The astute visitor decided to investigate. And—*fuck the world, God*



help that poor little girl!—found two decomposing bodies with bullet holes in the soft part of the head behind the ears. There was no reason for the little girl to suspect anything so hellish. Her parents were merely hibernating like bears. *As snug as bugs in rugs.* Peaceful to look upon, intact, sleeping.

And she was a good little girl who kept herself alive. Kept herself neat.

And I wanted to marry that little girl but didn't know how.

And so I thought it highly likely these assassins were on their way to 13 Centre Way, Belair, South Australia, 5052, to shoot my Dad in the head in the soft part behind the ear.

This would leave Scotty and me orphans.

And so I lay awake at night waiting for the end.

And so I had a sleepy and sleepless childhood hoping the world wouldn't stop. Lethargic by day, electric by night. *Vertigo.*

Then the traveller in the dark,

Thanks you for your tiny spark,

He could not see which way to go,

If you did not twinkle so.

I would answer the phone by saying, 'Hello,

The self is no longer understood ... as constituted by a history which then shapes its autobiographical performance.

Rather, it is autobiography itself which produces the subject: the subject, that is, is textually constituted and that textual constitution has a history.

(S. Radstone, 'Autobiographical times,' *Feminism and Autobiography*, 2000, p. 203)

2785832,' like Dad had taught me; followed by, 'Dad can't come to the phone right now—can I take a message, please?'

Just like the little girl.

A decade later I had my first drink. A mug of claret with my Dad as we sat around a campfire on the banks of the river at the very same 20 acre block Mum had stained with Miller blood a decade or so earlier. My Dad poured me the mug of claret. 'Try this,' he said. 'Don't finish it if you can't.' But I did. *And did I did I did I do, mug after mug, ha ha ha.*

As the fire spat sparks at the encroaching night and moths and bugs swarmed and burned against the spotlight, a new world dawned. It was as if I had been seeing the world in two dimensions only. As if life was projecting through the black and white television we got in the 1970s. As if I hadn't actually seen the world yet. But as this bitter syrup burned my throat and enflamed my gut, and the odd carp flopped and splashed in the darkness beyond, a wave of warmth and power spread through my body. I had arrived. At the age of thirteen I was finally born. The preceding years were a prelude, a



THERE IS NOTHING OUTSIDE THE TEXT.

Derrida

haze, a premonition. But now I was alive.

And angry. And thirsty. And shouting.

My life had been leading to this one fire-filled moment.

*As your bright and tiny spark,
Lights the traveller in the dark—
Though I know not what you are,
Twinkle, twinkle, little star.*

It had begun.

The next morning I arose feeling sick and full of dread. I knew something had happened but couldn't remember what.

The caravan smelt musty and sweet. Like the atmosphere had turned damp with claret, with a sticky, syrupy fug. An orange haze with dust suspended in blades of sunshine pierced the tattered curtains. And my head throbbed as if my brain were bruised and swollen. And my lips were caked in the jam of Dr Pat durries smoked too far down the paper. My eyes, glued with sand and grit, were blind but seeing. *Stars*. My throat felt torn. *Blistered*.

Yes, my first drink had led to my first drunk which had led to my first blackout. *Vertigo*. I was a

We can't write
sanitized, syrupy
versions of our
own lives. We have
to write about
problems, conflict,
the dark night of
the soul; we have to
focus more on the
bad than the good.

(Claudia Mills,
'Friendship,
Fiction, & Memoir:
Trust & Betrayal in
Writing from One's
Own Life,' *Ethics of
Life Writing*, 2004,
p. 105)

blackout drunk from the beginning. *Sick*. The only thing that would change in the next twenty years was the frequency with which I would repeat the performance—always more often, always more disastrously. I was performing the march of the living dead. But with gusto. With life.

The clear-headed me was retreating into an alcoholic fog. Suicide by instalment.

When I finally lurched from the caravan my Dad eyed me off from his humpy shed. 'You're a bloody dickhead,' he said, with venom and verve.

I saw tufts of tobacco strewn over the dirt at my feet.

'Maybe you should learn to roll before taking up smoking,' he added, teeth appearing in his beard.

Sulphur-crested cockatoos squawked across the spinning sky, flashes of yellow and white against the distant blue. One of the dogs brushed my legs, tail wagging, tongue flopping.

In full drunken flight I had told Dad *what I really thought*. And one of my pronouncements was that from this day forward I would smoke *whenever* and *wherever* I liked. Which I more-or-less did.

So, alcohol had freed me from the bondage of



Even better than
the real
thing.

U2

excessive thought and excessive introspection. It had freed me from the bondage of *me*. With liquor in my belly I was able to turn inside-out. An extrovert, an alter ego who spoke first and thought later, who lived beyond the reach of fear and shame, had hijacked my body and mind, like the Incredible Hulk, bursting out of my skin. But the thing I remember most about that night was the joy and fear alcohol brought me. I was both terrified and excited by its magical properties. It was the elixir of life with poison in its dregs. With alcohol in my blood I lived two lives: one as a sullen, sick, and silent introvert (for half the week), and the other as an excited, energetic, and loud extrovert (for the rest of the week). There were two of me. We were us. And we were at war with each other. And the world.

Through my teen years the silent and sullen self appeared more often than the loud and excited self did, but by the age of 32 there was little of the silent self left. The drunken lunatic had swamped him. And he took me all the way to hell.

To rehab in 2001.

We never cease to
reinterpret the
narrative identity
that constitutes
us, in the light
of the narratives
proposed to us by
our culture. In
this sense, our
self-understanding
presents the
same features of
traditionality as
the understanding
of a literary work.
It is in this way
that we learn to
become the *narrator*
and the hero of our
own story, without
actually becoming
the *author of our
own life*.

(Paul Ricoeur, in
B. Byrne, 'Reciting
the self,' *Feminist
Theory*, 2003, p. 32)

3.

Ah-dee-doo-ah-dee-doo-dah-day

Ah-dee-doo-ah-dee-day-dee

My Dad went all but bankrupt in 1980 when the bottom fell out of the building industry. To save our 20 acre riverside tract of mallee scrub and moonscape he sold our house in Belair—with its four bedrooms, three bathrooms, lounge, dining, TV, office, rumpus, heated pool, workshop, cellar, balconies, and city and coastal views—the house he had designed and built in 1971 for his wife, baby, and two-year-old son (me). Within three years Mum had jumped off the world and shattered his dreams.

He went to the pub and sent Scotty and me to our grandparents' house in Glenalta (5052), where we would spend part of every week. Omi and Opi spoke German to each other but English to us. I never did tell the kids at school that I was half kraut. There was no need: I had ginger hair and freckles; it was Scotty, with his blazing blue eyes, perfect skin, and thick blond hair who looked Aryan. I looked more like Muriel, my nanna from Marree (5733)—a dusty town 685 km north of Adelaide.

Sunburnt and windswept, Muriel's white-freckly skin was folded and lined like rock. She smoked and drank and cacked with the best of them. 'Tickle me pink,' she would say through plumes of Benson and Hedges smoke.

From 1974 to 1980 the house in Belair became a giant bachelor pad with three boys and two very absent girls. Mum was dead and her ashes buried in Centennial Park, Pasadena, 5042, and my sister, an older child from Mum's first marriage, went to live with Omi and Opi. Her old room, with its mock Queen Anne furniture, white carpet, and blue curtains, became something of a museum piece—a still and silent tableau that went untouched for five years. I sold the furniture twenty years later for a few hundred dollars when Dad died. It was still with him in 1993 in his dingy flat in St Marys (5042).

He whistled and he sang 'til the green woods rang

And he won the heart of a lady

In 1980 Dad, Scott, and I moved down to the Adelaide plains to a small dump on Kingston Avenue in Daw Park (5041) where we shared a



... I think we are well advised to keep on nodding terms with the people we used to be, whether we find them attractive company or not. Otherwise they turn up unannounced and surprise us, come hammering on the mind's door at 4 a.m. of a bad night and demand to know who deserted them, who betrayed them, who is going to make amends.

(Joan Didion,
'On Keeping a
Notebook,' *Slouching
Towards Bethlehem*,
1968/2008, p. 139)

room: a king-size bed and single bed side-by-side. We were moving, not from rags to riches, but from riches to rags: from a 15-room, two-storey mansion to a 4-room, sunken kennel. *St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was!* The race to the bottom had begun. I was on my way to dereliction and a gypsy worldview. Instead of hearing magpies and kookaburras warbling and laughing outside my bedroom window, I now heard the ongoing thrum of engines and sirens on Winston Avenue, and Dad snoring like a lawnmower beside me. Where once there were gullies to roam and creeks to tiptoe and caves to smoke in and gawp at *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines, there were now vacant lots to jump BMX bikes in and exhaust fumes to breathe and condemned buildings to smash and pepper with stones. Our bedroom window overlooked a grey street rather than a pink horizon. My brother and I were mountain men turned rockers. Ripple soles, black beanies, and flannelette shirts: the bogan attire. Kiss cards were all the rage. In 1980 Kiss sacked drummer Peter Criss because of his drug addiction, and Bon Scott (age 33) and John Bonham (age 32) both drowned on their own vomit: Scott



*I am drinking my
self 'out of'
being.*

Miller

in February and Bonham in September. Life in the fast lane was tough. But seeing Kiss live at the Adelaide Oval was a blast.

*A gypsy rover came over the hill
Down through the valley so shady
He whistled and he sang 'till the green woods
rang*

And he won the heart of a lady

Scotty and I rode to Mitcham Railway Station every morning on our BMX bikes to catch a train to Pinera Railway Station up in the hills. We weren't about to leave Belair Primary School and our mates. The sprawling school on Main Road with its transportable buildings and unbeatable football teams was our emotional home. We dobbed Ross Faulkner footballs, not Sherrins. Belair Primary School was where we learned to kick, swear, fight, kiss girls, play foursquare, and smoke cigarettes. It was the golden era when kids could buy smokes no questions asked. In the late 1970s I'd buy a packet of Ardafs and mixed lollies after selling newspapers at the bus stop by the bridge above Pinera Railway Station. With tips I sometimes made \$2 a night, but usually far less. A pack of smokes cost

That was the problem
with booze and
drugs, wasn't it?
At some point they
couldn't stop that
ticking sound, the
sound of certain
emptiness. And that,
I suppose, is what
I'd been trying
to tell my mother
that day: that her
faith in justice
and rationality
was misplaced,
that we couldn't
overcome after
all, that all the
education and good
intentions in the
world couldn't help
plug up the holes
in the universe or
give you the power
to change its blind,
meaningless course.

(Barack Obama,
*Dreams From My
Father*, 1995/2008,
p. 96)

me about a dollar. And smoking was cool, even if it stunted your growth and made you spew.

Being a licensed builder Dad renovated the small dump in Daw Park and added rooms—*bedrooms*, thank fuck—before selling up to pay off more debt. We moved back into the Adelaide Hills—to Eden Hills, 5050—into the first of a string of rental houses within cooe of Blackwood High School (5051) and our old stomping ground. It was about this time I had my first drink with Dad at the river and got a taste for it. Dad went to the river most weekends, even though Mum died there. For him it was paradise. In the 1970s Scott and I went with him, but by the mid-80s we stayed home to play football or run amok. Scott sometimes stole Dad's Holden Kingswood and hooned around the streets of Blackwood even though he could barely see over the dash, Iron Maiden blaring from the windows. By Year 10 I was restless, irritable, and discontent—as *The Big Book* would say. Bludging school and binge drinking and smoking dope were more important to me now than playing football and cricket, even though I was captain of both teams from Years 8 to 10. Like Jimi Hendrix said:

Post-structuralism:
 Post-structuralists hold that the concept of 'self' as a singular and coherent entity is a fictional construct. Instead, an individual comprises conflicting tensions and knowledge claims (e.g. gender, class, profession, etc). Therefore, to properly study a text a reader must understand how the work is related to his or her own personal concept of self. This self-perception plays a critical role in one's interpretation of meaning.

(Wikipedia, 'Post-structuralism,' accessed 21.1.08)

... all memoir is a process of researching one's own life. By that I mean rethinking, or course. I also mean reimagining and perhaps revising—because to see the past anew is often to view it, even at great distances, more clearly.

(Michael Pearson, 'Researching Your Own Life,' in *Writing Creative Nonfiction*, 2001)

'Excuse me while I kiss the sky—'

She left her father's castle gate

She left her own fine lover

She left her servants and her state

To follow her gypsy rover

At the end of Year 10 I dropped out of school and bought a 125cc Yamaha and left home with a hot leather jacket and a death wish. I went on the dole for homeless teenagers and moved into a corrugated iron shed at the back of a friend's house in Belair. Mouldy carpets and posters lined the walls to soften the harsh iron aesthetic and to ward off freezing winds and wildlife. There was no door but a flap of carpet, and no two sheets of iron overlapped. Each post tilted and water dripped in. The shed cost \$20 a week to rent and the dole paid \$45. With a disposable income of \$25 I could afford petrol for the Yamaha, a tin of Dr Pat or Rider tobacco, a few scraps of food, and maybe some buds or Stone's Green Ginger Wine. Although famished, and with my self-esteem plummeting, I took to starving myself until I had lost about one-third my bodyweight. Gaunt, with long hair, earrings, and the odd curling bristle on my chin, and wear-



No doubt adversity
is a great teacher,
but its lessons are
dearly bought, and
often the profit we
gain from them is
not worth the price
they cost us.

(Jean-Jacques
Rousseau, *Reveries
of the Solitary
Walker*, 1792/1979,
p. 47)

ing torn woollen jumpers from the Goodwill, I was fast becoming a grunge version of the Gypsy Rover I had sung about in school. Where Pip in *Great Expectations* was becoming a Gentleman, I was becoming a bum—like Magwitch (before his deportation). I once grabbed an acoustic guitar from the Goodwill and simply ran from the shop. *Fuck the world—*

She left behind her velvet gown

And shoes of Spanish leather

They whistled and they sang 'till the green woods rang

As they rode off together

At this time Dad and Scott were living in Hawthorndene (5051) in another rental house. Weeks earlier Dad had discovered my dope plants and pipes and I had taken off. I would sneak back while Dad was at work and steal chicken and bread before escaping back to my humpy in Belair.

Months later I moved into a caravan in Dad's carport so I could come and go as I pleased. The deal was that I had to get a job and not grow dope in the garden or keep pipes or bongos in the caravan. I agreed and celebrated by taking magic mush-

Children know that
ships sink, planes
crash and dams
burst. Adults, by
and large, do not.

(Richard Flanagan,
*The Sound of One
Hand Clapping*, 1998,
p. 28)



rooms with a mate. We sat in the little van laughing
and drawing pictures until dawn, sipping echoes of
Coopers Sparkling Ale. We were in Middle Earth
with Tom Bombadil and the hobbits. *No flies on
me, mate.*

*Last night, she slept on a goose feather bed
With silken sheets for cover
Tonight she'll sleep on the cold, cold ground
Beside her gypsy lover*

I started work in a factory making fold-up chairs
for nine hours a day. I was the youngest mug on the
floor and paid a paltry wage. ‘There *is* a job here,’
said the floor-manager, ‘if you want it. *If* you want
it?’ I remember it cost me \$20 a week in petrol in
1986 to drive Dad’s yellow Holden Kingswood
from Hawthorndene to Unley (5061) where the
corrugated iron factory sat oddly out-of-place in
an otherwise upwardly mobile suburb. I received
about \$200 a week in wages, enough to buy smokes,
beer, dope, and the odd hot guitar. With my 50 watt
Peavey amp I could blast the neighbourhood with
my own sloppy brand of heavy metal grunge. But I
was no Jimmy Page and soon quit.

Working in the gloom of the factory—smelling



sawdust, paint, sweat, and machinery, watching
sallow faces and baggy overalls, listening to the
endless hiss and clunk and tit and tat of machines
and punches, feeling sick—sent me into a state of
despair. I would watch the clock, second after tedious
second. I would watch the chairs stack up, chair
after tedious chair. I would watch the suits passing
overhead on mezzanine walkways and sneer with
contempt at their powerful demeanours and care-
free gestures, hoping some inexplicable and random
act of God and cruelty would rip the grates
out from underneath their shiny black shoes and
send them hurtling, flapping and screaming, to the
concrete below, where a population of semi-literate
waifs worked for longnecks of beer, flagons of port,
and the weekends. As Pink Floyd had forewarned
in 1975: ‘Welcome to the machine—’

*Her father saddled up his fastest steed
And roamed the valley all over
Sought his daughter at great speed
And the whistlin’ gypsy rover*

I soon quit this job (‘No worries,’ said the floor-
manager) and started working at the Tandoori
Oven on Unley Road, Malvern, 5061, where I

Telling a narrative
about one's life
involves making
oneself the subject
of the story,
claiming both
intelligibility and
agency for oneself.
It often involves
taking a particular
approach to the self
- as experiencing
transformation and
change.

(B. Byrne, 'Reciting
the self,' *Feminist
Theory*, 2003, p. 46)

would set up the restaurant for evening meals and lug cartons of wine and beer and food to the storeroom. 'What did you dream?' sang Pink Floyd. 'It's alright, we told you what to dream.' Chicken Tandoori and Buttered Naan very quickly became my favourite meal; particularly after fistfuls of cashews from the storeroom while vacuuming the floors all afternoon. And each time the Australian Cricket Team came to dinner or the health inspector came to scrutinise my work, my boss, Pomi, a tall, dashing north Indian Sikh, would give me the thumbs-up and say, 'Well done, Andrew, well done, Andrew, well done, Andrew.' It was a dream job for a sixteen-year-old: start at noon and finish at five; perfect for sleeping in and staying up late.

All-night sessions drinking and smoking with mates became a staple way of life. I gravitated to people like myself, teenagers hungry for excess, loud noise, old cars, and parties. In September 1986 Glenelg won back-to-back Premierships and I was there, euphoric. Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Alice Cooper, Midnight Oil, Cold Chisel, Black Sabbath, AC/DC, and Metallica provided the soundtracks for a bogan generation. Ian Dury said it best in



BREAK ON THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE.

The Doors

1981: 'Sex and drugs and rock and roll / Is all my brain and body need.' The only thing he forgot was BEER. Something Bon Scott and Jim Morrison would never have forgotten.

*He came at last to a mansion fine
Down by the river Claydee
And there was music and there was wine
For the gypsy and his lady*

Late in 1986 I nicked off again, this time to Kangaroo Island. I thought I'd build a shanty hut in the sand dunes near Kingscote (5223) and live like Colin Thiele's Storm Boy, scavenging for jet-sam and fish on the beach with Mr Percival and Fingerbone Bill.

A bearded bikie with a shovel in one hand and a dead cat in the other found me on the beach at dusk and told me I was nuts. 'You'll freeze to death,' he shouted, eyes squinting against the sand and wind, beard sweeping back over his shoulders. He buried the cat in the sand and invited me to stay at his place where he and his mate were hiding out from whatever mischief they'd been up to on the mainland. The bikies sipped and smoked their way through a dozen longnecks of Coopers Ale—and

If we don't write
about the hurtful,
harmful, dark,
dangerous things, we
won't write anything
anybody will want to
read.

(Claudia Mills,
'Friendship,
Fiction, & Memoir:
Trust & Betrayal in
Writing from One's
Own Life,' *Ethics of
Life Writing*, 2004,
p. 105)

as many pipes—a day. Every day was a Saturday: 'Cloudy but fine,' as the Coopers mantra promised. Whilst I didn't find paradise, the bikies and I (and their bullterrier) did find a slab of Southwark Stout at the rubbish dump and a hippy living in a lean-to on a sand dune. They taught me to cook two-dollar meals with lentils, rice, and black bean sauce, and how to use Indian ink, cotton wool, and needles to make cheap jailhouse tats. Their rental house in Parndana (5220) had little or no furniture, just mattresses.

When I returned to Dad's place in Hawthorndene with a rose tattooed on my foot, my brother gawped. 'Show me,' he said. I showed him the trick and soon Scotty was the youngest kid on the street to have a giant puma tattooed on his forearm. He traced the puma line-by-line from his sports bag. Dad said, 'You're a bloody dickhead,' and that was that. Twenty-five years later I still have that rose tattoo on my left foot. It was the first of many such tribal tats.

By February 1987 I was back at Blackwood High School, wasted and half-starved, and ready to take on Year 11. Finishing school suddenly seemed



I have become
comfortably
numb.

Pink Floyd

like a good idea. Building chairs in factories and cleaning toilets in restaurants and digging trenches at building sites and scavenging beer at rubbish dumps no longer seemed romantic. The lunatic self retreated, battered and bewildered. I settled back into my quieter, more introverted self and studied diligently, and left off binge drinking and joint smoking to the very occasional weekend. Cheech and Chong would have to wait. My head cleared, I put on weight, and I matriculated with straight As and nicotine stains in 1988. Having won the Year 12 Art prize, I was on my way to art school at The South Australian School of Art, at Underdale (5032), to follow my dreams.

'Have you forsaken your house and home?

'Have you forsaken your baby?

'Have you forsaken your husband dear?

'For a whistling gypsy rover?'

Remarkably, a girl I had walked to school with in Year 10 appeared at my window one night just after I finished my Year 12 exams. I was drinking a longneck of Coopers Light and smoking a tailor-made. I had moved out of the caravan and back into the house in 1987 and was still there in November

We forget all too
soon the things we
thought we could
never forget. We
forget the loves and
betrayals alike,
forget what we
whispered and what
we screamed, forget
who we were.

(Joan Didion, 'On
Keeping a Notebook,'
*Slouching Towards
Bethlehem*,
1968/2008, p. 139)

1988. She tapped on my window and told me she loved me. Just like that. I couldn't believe my luck. I had returned from a private nightmare and discovered life. The universe had delivered. Despite my oddities someone loved me. She slid through the window, took the longneck from my hand, and swigged. *Ahhh*. We smiled at each other through plumes of cigarette smoke: Escort Blue ribbons from her and Peter Jackson rings from me, curling together in a small room in a small suburb in a small town.

It wasn't until a year or so later when we were living in a small flat in Clapham (5062) overlooking the Adelaide plains that my drinking again took off. By now I had dropped out of Art school following a dispute over the legitimacy of my 'prose' paintings and was writing a novel about an old man and a canary while selling bags of dope to make rent. I took to drinking cans of VB while making revisions at night, and drinking goblets of port while ploughing through *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, and *Hard Times*. Smoking dope and watching SBS gave me the holidays I couldn't otherwise afford. Life seemed per-



SEX 'N' DRUGS 'N' ROCK'N'ROLL

Ian Dury

fect. 'Sex and drugs and rock and roll.' And beer. And art. And dreaming.

December 1989 saw the death of Samuel Beckett and September 1990 saw the death of Patrick White. My favourite writers at the time, I drank to their memories. To Stan Parker, *drink*. To Gogo and Didi, *drink*. To Godot, *drink*.

'Hats off to Roy Harper,' sang Led Zeppelin.

By the age of 20 I was an alcoholic and didn't even know it. Drinking beer and chain smoking seemed normal and reasonable enough. In my world, we all did it. We were hell raisers and proud of it. 'Going off the rails on a crazy train,' as Ozzy Osbourne roared in 1980.

*'He is no gypsy, my Father,' she cried,
'But Lord of these lands all over
'And I shall stay 'til my dying day
'With my whistlin' gypsy rover.'*

The only down side of living in the flat was when Scotty moved in. He was drinking more than I was. By 16 he had left school and was buying and drinking a dozen echoes of VB any day he could. I'd find him spreadeagle on the floor in a nest of stubbies and cigarette butts, muttering to the ghosts flap-

Childhood, looking
back on it, is
like this—a
mess of memories
and impressions
scattered and
clotted and pasted
together like a
mulch of fallen
leaves on a damp
autumn pavement.

(George Johnston, *My
Brother Jack*, 1964,
p. 1)



ping around in his head. I found him one night with both wrists cut and bloody. He roused as I mopped his blood and bandaged his wounds—‘Fuck’ff, leavmealone’—and staggered out into the night. Kamikaze, like Mum. I found him by the train line in the park at the back of the flats and checked on him through the night. After that I sent him back to Dad. Within two years he had turned to speed and made his way to Alice Springs, where he set up a caravan and an annexe and bought a bloody big dog, grew his beard, bought several rifles, and did drug runs from Adelaide to Alice in an old hearse. He was able to drink and drug himself to oblivion and beyond. Like one of his tattoos of Ned Kelly said: ‘Such is life—’

One thing’s for sure: he was a fucking good bloke. A maniac, yes, but a good bloke as long as you didn’t catch him on the piss and on the rampage. Then he was dangerous, as I found out one night outside the Belair Hotel when he punched me half to death because I wouldn’t fight back. He was disappointed that I had let myself go.

Ah-dee-doo-ah-dee-doo-dah-day

Ah-dee-doo-ah-dee-day-dee



Space truckin'.

Deep Purple

*He whistled and he sang 'til the green woods
rang*

And he won the heart of a lady—

As Ned Kelly once said: 'Ah, well, I suppose it had to come to this—'

4.

In 2002, twenty-eight years after my Mum's death, nine years after my Dad's death, four years after my brother's death, several months after leaving rehab and busting, and thirty-five dwellings later, I staggered into the rooms of an anonymous 12-step fellowship and started again. But that, as they say, is another story.

Ah-dee-doo-ah-dee-doo-dah-day

Ah-dee-doo-ah-dee-day-dee

Wine is the greatest curse to man — It is wine that causes unhappiness, misery, death and eternal damnation ...

(William Cawthorne, *Literarium Diarium*,
Adelaide 3 November 1842)

Indeed, the rise of
memoir as a literary
genre has sometimes
been linked with a
growing culture of
narcissism: 'And now
for some more about
me...'

(Claudia Mills,
'Friendship,
Fiction, & Memoir:
Trust & Betrayal in
Writing from One's
Own Life,' *Ethics of
Life Writing*, 2004,
p. 111)



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AHOOOOOOO---

Sapphire

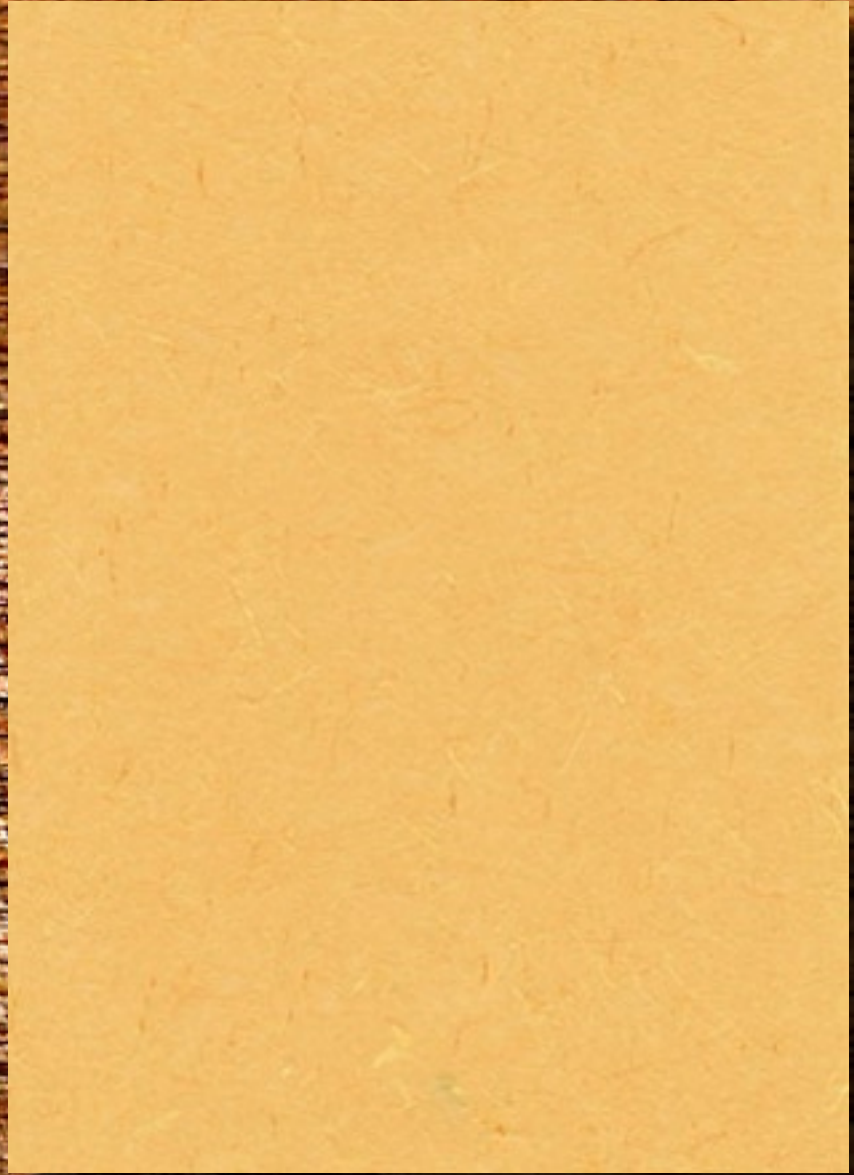


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Add text.

(Author, Title,
date, page)





We are built from
layers of text, meaning,
& experience
...



Ben: 'I came here to drink myself to death.'
Sera: 'How long will it take you?'
Ben: 'I'd say about three to four weeks.'

(Nicolas Cage,
Leaving Las Vegas
[motion picture],
1995)



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