

Foreword

I am motivated to record my journey for posterity. Life is one long journey. There are several smaller voyages embedded. The motivation came from Mr Ben Taaffe. I enrolled in a Memoir Writing Course at the Australian Club in Sydney with Ben as the tutor. I'm glad I did. I needed all the help I could get! At first I was quite intimidated. It was an eclectic class of twenty five senior Club members. Eminent Judges, Surgeons and leaders of industry were enrolled. There was an ex-Head of the ABC as well as one of Australia's most distinguished rural journalists. They knew literature. Ben proved to be an excellent teacher; the very best I have ever had in English. He could inspire even if you did not know it at the time. Ben had taught for many years at exclusive Ascham School for Girls at Edgecliff. He coached English at the highest level for the HSC. He had a link to the Club through a senior class member who was fundamental in the Australian Club library. Ben was of Irish heritage originally from working class Werris Creek. He did not fit the median profile for the Australian Club but was neither daunted nor overwhelmed. He was a modest and unassuming man in the finest way. Intellectually Ben was well above median in the Australian Club. I think he had instructed the daughters and granddaughters of many in the class? He knew how to engage in his lessons and tutorials. This was productive because there was quite a lot of class work and interaction. The latter was easy because there were many confident and communicative alpha males in the room!

Travelling to and fro from Sydney for the classes every Wednesday for six weeks was challenging. There was also plenty of homework. Fortunately I could customise some vignettes I had composed earlier. This proved to be my saviour. Communication was written via email. Attached Word documents had to comply with specific set rules of font type, font size and spacing. This became second nature. Ben was magical with celerity in marking and responding. There was much positive reinforcement. This alone is rewarding, stimulating and encouraging.

As usual for me everything takes a long time to settle down and eventually sink in. I abandoned the memoir project for a few years. Part of the reason was dealing with my late sister Diana's final few fraught years on earth. I did write two family histories as a consequence. Diana had accumulated some very old sepia photographs in a plastic bag. Some were more than 100 years vintage. She told me 'they would be thrown in the bin' when her time expired. I wrote, published and printed the definitive document dedicated to her. One year later on yet another compassionate overseas visit I proudly presented it to her as a trophy. She announced she had located more photographs! It was back to the drawing board for Edition II. There was only just time to take this to her as well. I think she liked them but did not say very much. I dedicated the second to my brother John. Both were fairly didactic descriptions of very typical family situations. I relied on the photographs. They shaped a pictographic record with some written annotations. If you don't keep a diary you rely on photographs. Photographs prompt memory even if the latter is unreliable.

My brother John has warned me about 'fake news' and 'alternative facts'! Writing this memoir has elements of catharsis and exorcism for me. I savour both. Only very few will ever read it; perhaps close family only? It's for them anyway. I trust some will appreciate and might even approve. They don't have to like it.

'Existence is a party. You join after it's started, and you leave before it's finished.'

People who think they know everything
infuriate those of us who do.



Like anyone you know?

Correspondence

Writing Memoirs

Dear Mr Taaffe

Mon 1/07/2013 1:47 PM

I am enrolled in your Writing Memoirs Course at the Australian Club beginning on Wednesday 17 July 2013.

As usual I had not read the instructions carefully about written submissions for W1 – Journal Writing! I have actually never kept a diary or journal in my life (other than for appointments etc.) I have however written a couple of books about my work and life. The two attached documents I submit in haste from one of my ‘books’ from a section called ‘Unreliable Anecdotes’ (with apologies to Clive James). These are in Font Time New Roman 14 but with 1.5 line space – my Windows version offered only 1.15 or 1.5? I opted for the latter? These are not recent memoirs as requested but ‘historical’. My memory is unreliable but my records impeccable.

Please note I will be O/S and/or interstate from tomorrow (Tuesday 2 July 2013) until just before the course starts. I will check my Emails but may not be able to respond adequately?

I have read ‘Michael Kirby, A Private Life’ and George Orwell, ‘Down and Out in Paris and London’. I will pick up on the others nearer the time as my memory is suspect – at best!

Kind regards

Bill

Dear Bill,

Mon 1/07/2013 3:53 PM

‘Horse Away’ ‘Hazardous Journeys’

Thank you indeed for sending me your two narratives. I did enjoy reading them. In my view, they are very well done but I've made some suggestions to help make the writing clearer than it is. I attach them here.

You read very much like Henry Lawson. Were you consciously imitating his style and his sense of characterization?

I look forward to meeting you in person when the course begins. Enjoy your time away.

Sincerely,
Ben Taaffe

Good afternoon Ben!

Fri 19/07/2013 5:10 PM

I valued the first lesson although I felt a bit ‘intimidated’? I thought you might like some light reading over the week end? Just joking!

Please see attached for your deliberation? I'm not sure if these are what you are asking? Historically I have been guilty of 'not answering the question'. I wrote two after our first lesson (Travels, Eulogy). The 'eulogy' one is a bit pre-emptive because that is the lesson plan for next Wednesday. It is even possible you attended Kylie Gray's memorial service in 1994? The 'Priorities' is one of the 'philosophical perspectives' I wrote when I was a Councillor with the Upper Hunter Shire Council.

I hope to see you next Wednesday.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Kind regards

Bill

Dear Ben

Fri 19/07/2013 7:43 PM

Thank you - this is remarkably quick turn-around! Incredibly Kylie Gray's mother Jane (my sister-in-law) has just arrived to stay for the week end. She has talked about Kylie. We are watching the British Open Golf from Muirfield. Iain Gray is officiating as a marshalling steward on the 18th hole! He is a member of the 'Worshipful Company of Edinburgh Golfers'. I don't think he goes to Covent Garden?

I was not intimidated by you. You were very inclusive and impeccably fair; very professional. It was more the company and it is really only me. I have to overcome my inhibitions! It may be too late? "The fault dear Brutus lies not in the stars but in ourselves that we are underlings". About 55 years ago at my boarding school in Yorkshire I was 'humiliated' by my then English Teacher (Mrs Walker) when she used my written work as an example to the class of 'how not to'! She wrote it on the blackboard. It was bad! I probably still bear the scars although I recovered enough to do quite well in English Literature - not so well in English Language but enough to secure my place at University. I read 'Pride and Prejudice' 8 times and 'Julius Caesar' 6 times - at least! Australian of the year in 2004 Dr Fiona Wood (Burns Doctor, Perth WA) is a former pupil of my school.

You will probably know that David Marr has written a quarterly essay dated 1 July 2013 about Kevin Rudd. It is called "Power Trip" Rudd v. Abbott and has been published and released by Black Inc. David uses a very different opening sentence when introducing Kevin Rudd! I have secured a copy of 'Inside Outside' after trolling through some book stores on Wednesday. I am happy to donate this to the library for others to read?

Kindest regards

Bill

-----Original Message-----

From: Benjamin Taaffe [<mailto:btaaffe@mac.com>]

Sent: Friday, 19 July 2013 6:26 PM

To: Bill Howey

Subject: your three texts

'Eulogising in 1994' 'Travels without My Aunts' 'Priorities in Ethical Public Service'

Dear Bill,

Thank you so much for sending me your texts. I enjoyed them very much indeed and have put comments in the form of footnotes on each of them and as general remarks at the end of each.

As memoirs, these would be an admirable set for a collection of what you might call "Reflections." They are recounts of events and they mark your own engaging personality as you describe those events.

I'm attaching them here.

I'm sorry that you felt intimidated in class but I'm pleased you have been candid and let me know. I can't issue an imperative to relax but I can certainly say that, from my perspective, you have every reason to feel confident as a writer.

I look forward to next Wednesday.

Thanks,
Ben

Good morning Ben

Thu 25/07/2013 11:04 AM

Thank you for yesterday's very informative and sensitive session on eulogies. I am sorry I am not yet confident enough to place my work on general display?

Please see attached – one of which is recent and current and contains elements of eulogy? The other is a slightly customised version of one of my old philosophical pieces. The topic is current!

I will try to keep up with my homework. The trip home yesterday was almost six hours in total. It leaves me ample time for reading but less for writing which takes me more time. Travelling to Scone by City Rail via Newcastle is very cheap – and for the amateur psychologist provides abundant opportunity to study behaviour – and speech - of our fellow human species!

See you next week. I am working on and thinking about journeys.

Kind regards

Bill

Dear Bill,

Thu 25/07/2013 8:26 PM

'Requiem for a lost Tribe'

This too is altogether engaging. I have made just a few suggestions in footnotes.

Thank you for sending it.

Sincerely,
Ben

Dear Bill,

Thu 25/07/2013 8:16 PM

'The Trammels of Quotidian Life'

I read you on the page and I lose sight of the fact that I am supposed to be marking your work. You write beautifully. You match structure and style to the subject, and you have a wonderful sense of tone. I am drawn in as to a text I am reading.

I hope that you find a structure to accommodate texts such as this in an anthology of your writings.

My mother loved the word *quotidian*. She would use it with an ironic sigh when some news report struck her for its remarkable banality: "Well, dear, it brightens the quotidian scene." Your daily life, Bill, is anything but banal.

Thank you indeed.

It's attached.

Sincerely,

Ben

Dear Bill,

Thu 25/07/2013 4:49 PM

This Thing Can Be Done'

I'm home just for a little while and I do like to read work as soon as I receive it. I've read and commented on one of your texts and I attach it here. I'll read the others later this evening.

You have a vigorous personality in your writing. Memoirs are as flexible as memory itself. Have you considered a collection of reflections? This would fit well into that.

Good to know you are thinking about journeys.

Sincerely,

Ben

Dear Bill,

Thu 1/08/2013 8:36 PM

'The Voyage Out'

Thank you for this one. It is a very engrossing text, a striking journey.

You have a preference for the inverted commas. I find them a distraction, drawing attention to an expression which is invariably a routine piece of language.

It's attached.

Sincerely,

Ben

Dear Bill,

Thu 8/08/2013 12:28 PM

'The Figurative Journey'

Thank you again: another very engaging text.

Yes: everything is in the planning.

Ben

Dear Bill,

Sat 24/08/2013 5:08 PM

'Your Plan'

Thank you for sending the plan. It is altogether clear. It is indeed, as you say, a start.

I think you have been very wise to plan it at this stage chronologically. I would imagine that each of those chapters will have several sub-headings. You may wish, at some point, to experiment with the time sequence of your actual narrative. If you are happy with the chronological structure, fine. If you wish to fracture the chronological structure to juxtapose episodes from various time slots, that choice is open to you.

You are very kind in the words you use about the work of the 6 weeks. I myself feel very fortunate to have known such a class. Having left the shop floor of the high school classroom, I did not have any expectations that I would meet another outstanding class. As it has so often done, life proved me altogether wrong.

Yes, I note David Marr's substantial win. Truly deserved. I doubt that he will be voting for Mr Abbott but I'm sure \$20,000 will soften the disappointment of an Abbott victory.

Sincerely,

Ben