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# Medicine Man

by Dionne May

I was just sitting in the sun, out the back of the Oasis, contemplating the universe, as you do. Johnny Ganja is playing his guitar and singing out love to the world, while his new beautiful bride smiles on benevolently.

Palm leaves part to a tall, distinguished grey-haired man who asks politely in his soft South African accent if he may join us. He's super clean and neat (ironed white t-shirts tend to stand out in Nimbin) and obviously intent on talking to Johnny.

"You're Johnny Ganja. Do you remember me? I met you at Mardi Grass a few years ago. I got some tincture from you for my mother," he presses. We all look at each other with that "is he an under-cover" look. You never know. Johnny is quiet.

"No you must remember. It was in a small brown bottle. It was magic yah. No, no really good yah. My mother has really bad arthritis and doesn't sleep plus all the medication makes her sick so she can't eat. I gave her some of this stuff and she slept like a baby. And not only that but her mood shifted. Do

you know what I mean?" he pauses in his steady stream of words to finally connect with us. "She had nice dreams, she was happy and relaxed," he says with a smile we all share.

"Yah man marijuana is goood medicine man. I make medicine for people," Johnny warily shares with the man. "Well, I'm a helicopter pilot. I love to smoke but I have to be very careful and responsible in my job. But whenever I can, I fly to Amsterdam or to Nimbin to buy some nice weed and relax."

"So how do you get the tincture to your mother? Surely you don't take it with you on flights? Surely you wouldn't risk your job?" I ask.

"No, No. Oh God no! My mother lives on the Sunshine Coast. I fly here, hire a car and deliver it to her," he says shrugging his shoulders. "It's still a risk, but what else can I do? This stuff is pure gold and makes my mother's life so much better. I want her to be happy. She was a remarkable woman who courageously packed up her children and fled apartheid South Africa to make a



better life for her family in Australia in the early eighties. It is the least I can do for her, you understand?"

"Well ironically this wonderful healer is heading to court this very afternoon for his tincture," I tell the man. "The police call this man a 'drug-dealer' and openly harass him. Unless laws change soon, or professional men like yourself start to speak up, our friend and healer Johnny may end up in jail again. We all love Johnny here and are saddened by his constant persecution."

"But more and more cases

are becoming public. I see it on the television. Hopefully it is only a matter of a little more time before common sense prevails," says the South African.

We smoked a spliff together and soaked up the warm sunshine, pondering the situation. The very next weekend I am opening the Oasis to the early morning coffee rush, when this same man appears. Beside him is his smiling mother.

"I had to bring my mother to this wonderful place. I wanted her to meet Johnny. She wants to thank him herself," he says, beaming.



by Marilyn Scott

The last day of the coldest month today, as I write. Relentless white mornings, cloudless days of brilliant blue, tarnished gold paddocks, red tips scattered throughout... late afternoon sun shimmering on paddocks of golden straw. The ground is dry under my feet, it crunches as I walk; wildlife come close looking for food. I breathe in air so clear and pure it charges my cells. Evenings are snuggled by raging fires to keep me warm. The woodpile is getting low, I'll need to order more.

Two nights of undisturbed sleep, I'm feeling more whole, my heartbeat is calm but I sense its fragility. I need more time alone to recover. I've become the focus of my existence. The treasured quiet moments these last few days are saving me. The contrast is enormous, the world of the 'Mother', the invasion of machines. It's difficult to find words to describe the chasm that separates the two. A life nourishing vibration and one that destroys. We sacrifice so much in our modern world. We become blinded to what lies in front of us, what surrounds us in every moment.

The late nights and early mornings have been the worst. Glaring high

beams through my window, shuddering earth, engine sounds, the singular focus of man and his job... in a paddock of stillness, wake me from my sleep. I find myself sitting up watching TV, I'm afraid to go to bed. My heartbeat increases at the thought of entering my bedroom. What happened to my sacred space? Once something I looked forward to, my bed, my restful sleep, had now become a place of fear.

I sharpened my focus, I went deeply within. I knew what was at stake. I slowed my breathing, I went deeper but I couldn't control the reactions of my body. This was serious, I knew what could happen. With a Polio-affected body, a compromised nervous system, I knew the risks. I explained all of this.

It took a while to sink in. I'd found the leaflet in my letterbox. My god, it's right past my house fence, a short distance from my house, the paddock entrance they were going to use. I rang the phone number, he seemed nice enough. I explained how this could affect me. They were looking into other possibilities, ones easier to access, out of town off the highway. It was going to cost more, so they stuck to the original plan. I rang again. I was just recovering from a central nervous system collapse, it's been three years. I was beginning

to feel strong again; I'd planned to start working from home, just one day a week. I was looking forward to it. It'd been so long. I'd let people know. And the weekend retreats that had been planned! He told me there'd be trucks every hour from sun-up 'til ten at night... they had to make the ship in Brisbane, where the logs would be shipped out. Panic set in.

It was late, after eleven, when lights and vibration woke me again. Next morning I felt unsteady on my feet and I stumbled and fell. I've only had one fall before, and that when I was really unwell. It took a year to recover. This fall badly jarred my spine; my nervous system was in disarray. I wasn't good.

A few days passed, struggling to deal with the fall, another startled awakening - this one just after four, before dawn. I felt so horribly tired; I tried desperately to get back to sleep. I couldn't, I felt sick. By nine I was sobbing uncontrollably, my heart was racing, pounding my chest. I knew I might have to call the ambulance. I didn't want to. After years spent in hospital as a young child, I wasn't keen on doctors and hospitals. I tried all I knew, I'm a natural therapist, to keep my screaming body under control. By late afternoon I dialled 000. Chest pains and racing heart, at sixty-five, the ambulance was soon here. They came in with their machines, my blood pressure was 190, I was in the danger zone, so they took me to hospital.

Five days later, most of these spent in my pyjamas, I've felt weak, tired, heavy, low and strange. Not myself. I haven't answered the phone. I don't have the strength for anyone else. I need me. I need to calm myself, whatever that takes. It's not my time, I wrote, I know that from somewhere deep inside. It's not my time to go yet. The last few days have been quiet, the gods and angels are looking after me. I've called on the residing ancestors too. Something has changed.

# Caves and Canyoning 38/38



In Numinbah Valley

by Bill Potter & Bill West

June 29th was a glorious winter day, and a record twenty-four walkers headed off from the Queensland border gate in the Numinbah Valley to climb up along the border fence towards the Border Ranges. After an easy stretch over cleared pastures we began a steep climb through a forested area with panoramic views south east through breaks in the trees. Finally we reached an extensive overhang and found the caves of our destination.

After climbing through a boulder-strewn small gorge we descended into the main cave, the size of a small cathedral. As there had been no rain for some time, the normal waterfall screen in front of the caves was absent. Some of the more energetic explored the steep path beyond the caves that leads up to Binna Burra, several hours away. However, most were content to have lunch in the serenity of the main cave, the high wall of which bore the smoky evidence of many ancient fires. Physically and spiritually refreshed, we retraced our path back down now with more opportunity to enjoy the views.

– Bill Potter

Two weeks later, on 13th July, seventeen NBWC members clambered amongst

the rock-falls in the gorge called 38/38 by bushwalkers. It is so named with reference to its grid coordinates, as no map marks this large rocky cleft. Unnamed and small on the scale of natural features (being about a kilometer long), it is 'world heritage' on a scale of beauty. Perhaps it could be called 'Nature's Garden' or 'Green Ravine' or 'other worldly' when compared to the city, where one is immersed in man-made material things.

How to describe the magic of 38/38? It is beyond words and photographs! And of what use is a car there? It must be breathed and experienced by walking. Nevertheless, I will try to convey some of its features.

The canyon is enclosed by sheer forty-metre-high cliff faces on both sides, down which hang vines and tree-roots. It is damp, sunless and ferny. There is a bat cave. A waterfall cascades into the canyon when there are rains, forming a small creek that disappears into the spongy ground, finally to disgorge halfway down the cliff-face of the adjacent Wanganui Gorge. It was overlooking this spectacular gorge that we had lunch.

NBWC first introduced me to this secret/sacred place. A place that you may leave but it will not leave you. In this vein, therefore, I conclude with quotations from two people for whom walking amidst wild things was a lifelong and consuming passion.

Beethoven said: "I love a tree more than a man – woods and rocks furnish the answers one expects. I have fun like a child. What joy in wandering through the meadows among trees and



Gorge 38/38 challenge

flowers! It seems to me impossible that anyone can love nature more than I do."

And Clarissa Estes introduces herself in her book *Women who Run with the Wolves* with the words: "My love for wild woman began when I was a little child. I was an aesthete rather than an athlete and my only wish was to be an ecstatic wanderer. Rather than chairs and tables I preferred the ground, trees and caves, for in these places I felt I could lean against the cheek of God."

– Bill West

If you are interested in any of the planned walks, please contact walk leaders a few days ahead of time if you need further details, and to confirm there are no changes.



Gorge 38/38 rest

## August Walks Program

Nimbin Bushwalkers Club Inc.

### Sunday 17th August Two walks near Evans Head

Leader: Michele Alberth (6632-1214 / 0490-371-551 / [onthedridge@aapt.net.au](mailto:onthedridge@aapt.net.au))

**Walk one. Grade 2:** Goanna Headland beach walk, 90 mins, some walking along the beach, some on rough track over the headland, some over rocks.

**Meet** 9.30am at car park at the end of Chinaman's Beach Road. Then lunch at the beach followed by a short drive to:

**Walk two. Grade 1:** Gummi Garra just over an hour. Easy, level walk on track; wildflowers, rainforest, heathland, river views. For anyone wanting to join for this second walk only, meet at the end of Bundjalung Street (2.2km from Ocean Drive) around 1.30 pm (please let Michele know). **Bring** Lunch, water, hat.

### Weekend Camp 30th-31st August Jerusalem Creek

Leader: Judy Hales (6689-1477)

**Grade 2: Meet** 1pm at notice board, north end of camping area. Camp at Black Rocks.

**1st walk:** Leisurely walk along Jerusalem Creek, stop for picnic lunch and swim in calm water. Returning along the beach past 'coffee' rock formations of caverns, arches and tunnels.

**2nd walk:** Sunday 31st. Meet at notice board, north end of camping area 10am. Walk to Wendoree Lagoon, 2km (one way). Fresh water lagoon, easy walking, recommend a swim. Option for a much longer walk (or cycle) to the head of Esk River.

**Meet** at notice board, north end of camping area 10am. **Bring** camping gear, food (inc. picnic lunches), water, hat

[nimbinbushwalkers.com](http://nimbinbushwalkers.com)

## Nimbin Garden Club



by Gill Jones

On a beautiful, balmy, winter's afternoon Nimbin Garden Club visited the Lismore Koala Care Centre located on Rifle Range Road. There was a good turnout of members to assist with weeding, repotting and planting seeds for the Koala Care Centre's nursery.

The nursery provides a means to raise funds to care for koalas requiring medical attention and ongoing care, as well as to meet the overall costs of running the centre. The Koala Care Centre receives a small amount of money from local council and National Parks toward the running costs. Nimbin Garden Club donated \$150 to the Lismore Koala Care Centre during our visit.

Mark Wilson, Koala Care Centre Tree Officer, provided an interesting talk about the Centre to the Nimbin Garden Club members.

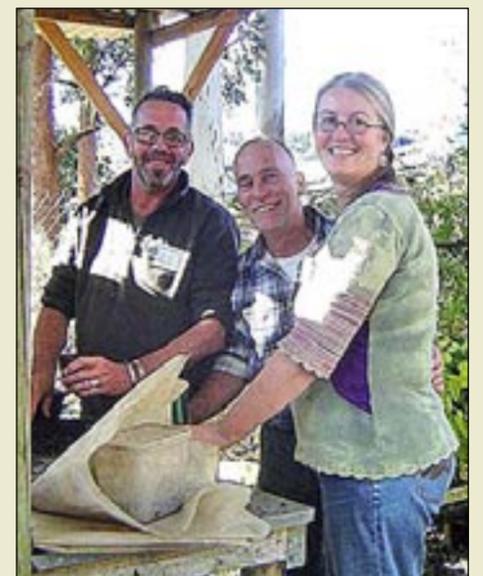
The Koala Care Centre is run by volunteers (Friends of the Koala) and provides support and care for Koalas from Tweed to Yamba and out as far as Tenterfield. The Centre provides care for approximately 300 to 350 koalas per year. An average stay for a koala at the centre is six weeks. As koalas are very fussy eaters, volunteers have to source very specific eucalypt trees for each individual koala. The main reasons that the koalas require care are either injury from domestic animals, car accidents, illnesses like chlamydia and loss of habitat.

Mark said that there has been an increase in the koala numbers around the Nimbin area, and we can all help by planting koala-friendly trees. The Koala Care Centre nursery is able to supply koala-friendly trees for free to local landowners who wish to increase the koala habitat on their property. The Koala Care Centre is always looking for volunteers to help with the nursery and caring for koalas, so check out their website: <http://www.friendsofthekoala.org/wp/> Our next visit will be on Saturday 16th August to Andrew and Nick's lovely garden at 1030 Mountaintop Road. It's just up on

the left hand side off Stony Chute Road turnoff. Watch for the club signs. As it's a winter's afternoon, the garden will be in hibernation, however the view is stunning on a northerly aspect.

Please remember to bring a cup, chair and a plate of something yummy to share for afternoon tea. New members are always welcome.

[nimbingardens@gmail.com](mailto:nimbingardens@gmail.com)



# Headers tough July battles

Match reports by Gary and PAC

## Womens 3rd Division

### Round 12 Sunday 13th July Pottsville V Nimbin Headers

The first game of July for the women's 3rds saw them travel to table toppers Pottsville. They have a very strong team, and boast a couple of quality players.

The first 20 minutes were even, with both sides showing good movement and passing. A number of half chances came and went at either end, until the home side took the lead with a well taken goal from their striker. 1-0 at half time.

As the 2nd half wore on, the heat became a factor and the pace of the game slowed considerably. Pottsville then took control of the match with another fine strike, making it 2-0, before wrapping up the win with a late goal for a 3-0 win. The Headers could take heart from the game though, putting together some good moves against clearly the best team in the division.

### Round 13 Sunday 20th July Pottsville V Nimbin Headers

It was back to Fortress Nimbin the following weekend for a clash with Richmond Rovers. The girls shot out of blocks, and created a couple of good opportunities in the opening five minutes. As the half wore on, we continued to look the stronger side, but failed to find the back of the net. The second period was a similar story, with chance after chance being squandered. Then in the last five minutes, Rovers get a breakaway, and their striker coolly slots it to give the visiting side an unlikely 1-0 win. How often do we see this happen in all levels of our beautiful game? Understandably, the women were devastated.

### Round 14 Sunday 27th July Nimbin Headers V South Lismore

Their chance of redemption came one week later, again at home, against South Lismore. This was a must win game to stay in the top 5 and keep their finals hopes alive. A large, vocal crowd were once again gathered to witness a fantastic game. The Headers were moving the ball nicely around the field, and looked full of running in the early stages.

Despite a few close calls, the half ended 0-0. Shades of last week? We hoped not. The tension built in the second half, and credit must be given to the South's keeper who was solid throughout. With only a few minutes remaining, Ruby broke through and from a very tight angle looped the ball into the far corner. 1-0! The crowd went wild, finally with a goal to celebrate. Despite a late rally from South Lismore, the women held on for a well deserved 1-0 victory, and came off the field to rapturous cheering and applause.

## Mens 5th Division

### Round 12 Saturday 12th July Nimbin Headers V Lennox Head

In the first 20 minutes of this game Headers, the penultimate team on the table, are in this game, but at the 23rd minute a Lennox forward gets the ball all on his own and slots it past the Headers keeper before anyone could shut him down to make it 1-0 to Lennox.

To make things worse, it's not long before Lennox make it 2-0. Then they hit the bar.



Headers 5ths defender Bruce Hatfield

Headers forward Jake Charles muscled his way through the Lennox defence and hits a shot which comes off the keeper's legs and is cleared by the defence.

With two minutes left in the first half, a Headers back line player has a shot, which the Lennox keeper tips round the post for a corner. And so the score at half time is a credible 2-0 down for the Headers.

Nine minutes into the second half, Lennox have two corners in a row, the second one producing another goal: Lennox 3 Headers 0.

Jake Charles has a couple of chances: one, the keeper just gets his leg to it to deflect the ball away for a corner. The next shot is straight at the keeper, who holds on to it.

Headers are having a bit of an attacking purple patch as Michael Longmiur persists on the goal line, slips around one defender and slots the ball past the keeper to make it Headers 1 Lennox 3

24 minutes in, Lennox Head score again. To me it looked like Headers defender Cameron McClean was first to the ball in the penalty box and was knocked over by a Lennox forward who went down himself, but recovered the quickest and gets to the ball first and slots it past the Headers keeper 4-1 to Lennox. Then another goal makes it 5-1.

Lennox are all over the Headers now as they put in another goal to make the final score Nimbin Headers 1 Lennox Head 6. So this defeat put the Headers at the bottom of the table.

### Round 13 Saturday 19th July Richmond Rovers V Nimbin Headers

I was not at this game, but I heard that the Headers put up good resistance until a second half onslaught by the Rovers saw them run out 6-0 winners.

### Round 14 Saturday 26th July Nimbin Headers V Kyogle

Not much happened in the first ten minutes – a few probing runs by either side – then the right winger for Kyogle runs through the defence, heads in towards the goal and shoots at the near post. The Headers keeper misses the ball and it's in the back of the net: Headers 0 Kyogle 1.

With 22 minutes down, Kyogle get their second goal with a ball

through the middle.

A grade sixteen player for the Headers, Harry Waddington is away down the left wing, and cutting inside he shoots – saved by the keeper. Then down the other end of the field, Kyogle hit the bar. The game is really hotting up now. Towards the end of the first half, Harry Waddington runs through the defence into the penalty box and only a great tackle stops him from going all the way. So the first half ends Nimbin Headers 0 Kyogle 2

Michael Longmiur for the Headers has a shot, but it's wide of the mark. Then the Headers are in the box again, but they just can't put the ball into the net. Then it's Kyogle on the attack and a forward has a shot and it's in Header 0 Kyogle 3.

Then young Harry for the Headers is through the defence again and hits a nice shot which smacks the bar and comes straight down into a relieved Kyogle keeper's hands, and so the game ends Nimbin Headers 0 Kyogle 3

## Mens 3rd Division

### Round 12 Friday 4th July Lennox Head V Nimbin Headers

First up for the table-topping 3rds in July was a tricky Friday night visit to Lennox Head, who were sitting second last on the ladder.

The home side flew out of the blocks, and could have scored in the first couple of minutes. The game see-sawed until we took the lead through a well-taken goal from Beau Grabovsky in the 20th minute.

They equalised 10 mins later, and began to take control. 1-1 at half time.

The second half saw Lennox take a 2-1 lead, which quickly became 3-1. The Headers were looking ordinary and were duly punished again on the counter, eventually losing 4-1.

We were awful, the worst performance this season by far. Credit to Lennox though, they deserved the win.

P.S. It turns out that Lennox Head had an ineligible player breach in this game so the Headers get a 3-0 win.

### Round 13 Saturday 12th July Nimbin Headers V Byron Bay

At the opening of this game, as you would expect, the home team came out firing and the Headers had lots of shots on goal in the first five minutes, but could not put the ball in the back of the net.

The Headers forwards put on some nice passing and Angelo Webb crosses to Gary Whisker who fires in a shot which the Byron keeper only just stops with his legs and quickly gathers in.

In another move by the Headers, a shot is fired in by centre forward Phil Courtney and as the ball was going to cross the line the young Byron keeper in a sliding tackle just



3rd Division Headers forwards Phil Courtney (left) and Roman Bordin on the attack against the Byron Bay Rams

got his foot to it and cleared the ball.

With 30 minutes on the clock, some beautiful passing from midfield to the wing onto Headers forward Beau Grabovsky, who smashes the ball at the Byron keeper but it was too hot to handle and the ball spun off his body straight up into the air and as it comes down Beau's first to it and calmly nods it into the net to give the Nimbin Headers a deserved 1-0 score line.

Byron change keepers about five minutes after the goal, Byron started the match short of players and some came late, so maybe the keeper was one of them.

As the Headers mount attack after attack to find a second goal but can not score.

So the first half is brought to a close with the Nimbin Headers leading the Byron Bay Rams 1-0.

In the second half the Headers get a free kick on the right hand side of the northern end, and it's taken by Phil Courtney. The ball loops down in the penalty box and Beau Grabovsky goes up for it with the keeper and a defender, the Byron keeper takes the ball off Beau's head but drops it and regathers.

Then it's Byron Bay on the attack, and it's all hands to the pump to keep them out, which is achieved.

Headers left hand wing Igor Santos has a run at the defence and shoots across goal with the keeper stranded and just misses the far post.

In another attacking move, Headers midfielder Leno Sersale is through on-goal with only the keeper to beat and shoots, but the Byron keeper gets down in time as the ball hits his body and loops out for a corner.

With time now running out, Byron mount a last desperate attack which catches the Headers left hand defensive line wholly out of position as there's three attackers on that side all by themselves and another attacker running down the right hand wing, and only one Header defender to deal with all four of them and as he moves towards the three of them a pass comes across to the attacker on the right (who I thought had run into an off-side position before the ball was kicked) who smashes it past the Nimbin keeper with only six seconds left in the game. Byron were ecstatic and the Headers and their crowd were devastated.

Full time score Nimbin Headers 1 Byron Bay Rams 1.

Headers should have won 3-0 and in the end they did by forfeit, as the Byron team fielded four junior players and you're only allowed three.

### Round 14 Saturday 19th July Pottsville V Nimbin Headers

The visit to Pottsville took on extra significance now we were back on top following the Byron forfeit. We were once again top, with Pottsville only two points behind and having played a game less.

Earlier in the season we both played out an entertaining 2-2 draw, and this match was also a cracker.

The Headers took the lead midway through the first half with a clinical finish from Huon Campbell, and that's the way a tight, hard-fought first 45mins finished.

Pottsville caught us cold after the restart, scoring three goals inside the first 10 minutes! This stung the boys into action, with Beau coolly slotting our second, then an almost carbon copy repeat five minutes later to level it up at 3-3.

A contentious goal-mouth scramble in the Headers' box resulted with the ball in the net, only for the referee to disallow the goal for a foul on our brave keeper, Brodie Ross.

Another flowing move from the back resulted in Phil Courtney dancing around the defence and the keeper, then passing the ball into an empty net to give us a 4-3 lead!

The last five minutes were fast and furious at both ends, but we held on for a fantastic away win over one of our biggest rivals.

### Round 15 Saturday 26th July Alstonville V Nimbin Headers

With Alstonville pushing for a finals spot, and with four wins and a draw from their last five games, this was always going to be a stern test of our resilience. It turned out to be a battle that will go down in Headers folklore!

This was an important game, being three points clear at the top with four left to play, but for a number of reasons we were only able to muster eight players: Phil, Dean, James, Saki, Matt, Gary, Brodie and Angelo.

We kicked off, annoyed at finding ourselves so short, but determined to play on regardless and give it our best shot. Having only seven outfield players against a fast, skilful and young squad was always going to be tall order, but we held strong in a tight defensive formation.

Alstonville scored on the 15-minute mark, thinking this would open the flood-gates. Think again gents! Defensive legend James Van Hest surged through the middle and collected Phil's clever back heel. He then calmly slipped it past the amazed home keeper. 1-1, and cue celebration from our depleted ranks.

We fought hard and held on until half time. The second period continued in the same vein, wave after wave of home pressure being repelled by a hardy, well-organised outfit.

Alstonville had a couple of good chances that weren't converted, and as the clock ticked down we collectively lifted again and held them out to earn a magnificent 1-1 draw.

The home crowd applauded us from the field, and to their credit Alstonville congratulated us on our efforts. This was a proud day for the mighty Nimbin Headers, and come the end of the season that hard-earned point may make the difference for us.



A scary moment for the Headers 5th's defence against Lennox Head Sharks

# Nicaragua revisited

by Warwick Fry

Revisiting Sara's Comedor (Restaurant/Bar/Kitchen) 25 years later was (how do you say it these days?) an 'awesome' experience.

In the 1980s Comedor Sara was the social hub for the 'Internacionalistas' who came to support the Sandinista revolution of 1979. It was a combination of Nimbin's Oasis Café and a Nicaraguan version of Alice's Restaurant where you could find everything and anything – poetry, song, unbreakable friendships undying memories, good food, and of course good cheer – you might want. Instead of Alice, you had Sara.

There was always beer except for the occasional drought caused by the US imposed blockade. In those exceptionally hard times the US comrades taught us how to make cocktails from the cheap rum and fruit juices always available... (Dangerous habits until the beer kicked in again). The whole scene ran on an honor system that was never abused. We helped ourselves to beer from a refrigerated box, and Sara's daughter Maritza came around afterwards and counted up the empties remembering exactly what we had dined on (even if sometimes, after exceptionally festive nights, we hadn't).

It was an emotional experience to step off the Ticabus from El Salvador 25 years later and see Sara, 23 grandchildren later, her hair still dark, sitting outside the Comedor with two of her daughters, catching the breath of evening breeze in the humid heat

of lakeside Managua. Moments of confusion and hilarity when I mistook granddaughters for daughters. Then we began remembering. Sara remembered us all. Who had scattered around the world, which of us had stayed and settled in Nicaragua, who had died, who had married whom....

"Antonio is getting very fat and going bald. He lives four blocks away"

Antonio was the 'chapparito' (short-arse) Costa Rican. Rumor has it that he smuggled weapons across to the Sandinistas from Costa Rica during the guerilla war of the 70s. He was better known at Sara's as the graphic artist who made reputation-enhancing T shirts, and for his satirical cartoons (yes, the Sandinistas tolerated satire) in local publications.

I found him after knocking on doors up and down the street, living in the back room of what looked like a run-down motel with a lot of legless guys in wheelchairs out the front. Seems that Antonio was helping to organise and run a co-operative of former veterans of the guerilla war and the war against the mercenary US paid 'contras' which harassed Nicaragua for eight years after the Sandinista revolution. He is still turning out brilliant graphic artwork – some of it published in an 'underground' magazine for homeless people and Chicanos in California.

He probably has Michael to thank for this. Michael organized the weekly poetry nights at Sara's. A bluff Irish American who could bash out a rousing song on his guitar at the drop of a hat, he married a Nicaraguan woman. He is involved in community

projects and artistic events in southern California. He has a growing family and visits Nicaragua regularly.

And there was John – John the marine, who married an Argentine woman while he was here. The wedding ceremony was held at Sara's. John was one of the elite graduates from the US Officer School, part of the US honor guard for the US President. John decided that what the US was doing to Nicaragua was not very honorable, and came with many other US veterans to protest the US victimisation of Nicaragua, making films and documentaries.

"Where is he now, Sara?"

"He died of cancer..."

So did Burt. Burt, a true product of the 60s, became a close personal friend. He was a reformed cocaine addict who claims to have shared heroin hits with Marianne Faithful and smuggled marijuana from Jamaica for the 'rastas'. That was some years after he had been a photographer for the Black Panthers. After seeing his best friend die of an overdose, he decided enough was enough. He landed in Managua with just a few dollars and skills as a mechanic and truck driver. He quickly got work.

Burt took me along on truck trips (for international aid programs) a few times, for company, assistance and translation. He showed me the Acka (AK47) under the seat that the Sandinistas had entrusted to him (rare for foreign workers) in case he was attacked by contras.

Sara tells me that his partner Ana (a Brazilian geologist on loan to



Sara

the Sandinistas from the Brazilian Workers Party) went back to Brazil after Burt died. I still remember Ana saying to me, in her guttural Brazilian accented Spanish "Warwick... why did I have to fall in love with this stupid gringo?"

"What about Nick...?"

Nick was the Canadian who rode down on a 450cc motorbike from Canada to support the Sandinista revolution and worked as a translator and writer/editor for a Cuban magazine. He too, married a Nicaraguan woman.

"Nick is still in Nicaragua. He has become a little bit crazy," says Sara. I guess we all did, when the Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections.

And she could tell me about Daniel, and Jim. Both worked for Sandinista security. Jim is back in the States, by most accounts, but Daniel, according to Sara is happily married on the Atlantic Coast. While Jim sported a Stalinesque moustache, dry humor and an authoritative presence, Daniel (rumored to be the son of a Brazilian diplomat) had a grin that would be

described as charming, had it not displayed several disconcertingly metallic front teeth. He would roll up to Sara's in a Sandinista military jeep in military uniform to greet friends and have a beer, pretending to be oblivious to the freakout effect he was having on the 'internacionalistas' just passing through (still unfamiliar with the ambience), who were wondering if the place was being raided.

Sara knew and remembered, understood, and remembered – remembered us all. She is an oasis of recollection. They say you 'can't go home again', but seeing Sara and her daughters (and granddaughters and three great grandchildren) was like stepping into a past that had begun to fade into dream, and finding a reality refreshed. Sara was the 'Tia', the 'Auntie' to our polyglot group of dreamers and idealists and workers and activists from all corners of the globe. We had come to Nicaragua to witness and perhaps be a part of the beginning of a genuine process of historical change that still hobbles along to this day. (Sara now wields a walking stick, and Sandinista President Daniel Ortega, former guerilla commandante is now very chummy with the Catholic Cardinal.)

Sara's Comedor was where we found the space to establish bonds; bonds of shared experience and friendship. Bonds of empathy with the process. As Sara, and her daughters Maritza, Myrna, and Torula all say when we share these reminiscences; in spite of the US imposed blockade, the 'contra' war, the shortages (sometimes all you could find on the supermarket shelves was Cuban rum and canned Rumanian tomatoes), "They were good times."

# Beating the drums of war

by John Jiggins

The First World War was a conflict that killed over 20 million people. As the 100th anniversary of the Great War approaches, the Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, the Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, and the entire Australian political class have been stoking the fires of conflict in the Ukraine, grandstanding at the start of what may well prove to be the war that will end war.

Why do we not learn the lessons of history? Has the 24-hour news-cycle only made people more ignorant about the world? Australian author, historian and cultural commentator, Humphrey McQueen, thinks that it has. On the eve of what might prove another disastrous European war, I spoke to him about the Ukraine conflict and why Tony Abbott and the Australian political class were so excitedly beating the drums of war.

"Abbott and his advisors have at last found a way to make him say something which puts him in a good standing with the Australian population, whereas over the budget he's just gone from one disaster to another. I am reminded of a turn-of-the-twentieth-century Victorian country newspaper that had this wonderful line, "We have warned the Czar before", so what we've got is some little Australian tin-pot

politician 'warning the czar'.

"He and Julie Bishop are, as someone said before, "pigs in a minefield of empire". They are just pushed in to see where the landmines are to blow them up so that the Obamas and the real power can come in behind them. They are the attack dogs of the US warmongering machine."

I'd spent the previous week in extreme en-murdochisation an ugly word for an ugly experience immersing myself in the Ukraine stories in the Murdoch tabloids, particularly the Brisbane Courier Mail, descending to the lower depths of journalism, passing beyond the outer limits of presstitute-bleating into the murky underworld of devious fakery.

The Murdoch press loves to photoshop photos. During the last election, the Daily Telegraph photoshopped Kevin Rudd's head onto some famous Hollywood Nazi; and the Courier Mail has its mystery photoshopper too, who celebrated the Abbott government's budget by photoshopping Joe Hockey's head onto a body builder.

For the Putin demonisation campaign, the Courier Mail's mystery photoshopper solved the dilemma of how to make Putin look more evil by giving him an Abbott-wink! They took a photo of Putin and photoshopped a wink onto his right eye, and placed the doctored photo beside a quote from Putin, so subliminally

you would perceive him as lying! Putin looked just as devious as Tony Abbott did in the Abbott-wink photo!

Humphrey McQueen described the demonisation of Putin as a consequence of the personalisation of the tabloids and the intellectual disconnect of the 24-hour news-cycle.

"In a way what we are seeing with the demonisation of Putin is another sign of the personalisation of the front pages of all the newspapers. It is a kind of political version of all of the celebrity figures, people who have no other role except they become celebrities and are in the media, so all the conflict in international politics is reduced to this bad person Putin, with no attempt to understand any of the connectedness, the history, the politics behind the story.

"This is the great evil of the news cycle, and the news item that is up-dated every 15 minutes. There is no context, no dynamic, no explanation of how everything fits together; you are constantly having new bits flung at you with no context. What you get is something designed to make us more stupid than nature intended because it separates every bit of information from every other bit."

For Humphrey McQueen, events in the Ukraine needed to be understood in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the expansion of the North



Atlantic Treaty Organisation eastward to surround Russia. For 20 years the US has pushed the boundaries of their allies in Europe further and further east and used every occasion to push Russia back. Like Georgia previously, the Ukraine is not a place where Russia wants US bases, so the dangers of a war between Russia and a US-proxy Ukrainian government are very high, without meddling, unpopular governments in far-away places like Australia, misusing the occasion to strut the world stage.

Humphrey McQueen says while the Russian government is backing the rebels in the Ukraine they don't control them, so it makes it much easier for the NATO forces to make it appear the Russians are to blame and they are refusing to co-operate when they are really trying to manage the crisis. "It gives NATO and all their agencies the opportunity to sell this as all Russia's fault... it's their fault that the plane came

down, it's their fault the rescue operation has gone so badly... and that's the story that you get in the 15 minute news update, you don't get any context, you don't get any dynamics, and you don't get any history, and therefore, as I said, the media ends up making us more stupid than nature intended us to be, and the way to fix this is to go outside it and not to look at what Murdoch is doing or what the ABC is trying to peddle, but to get a real sense of the long-term and the historical."

My immersion in Murdoch-world revealed that the Murdoch tabloids don't beat the drums for every war. On the third day of Israel's 'incursion' into Gaza, the Courier Mail had nothing about

Gaza at all, while devoting six pages to the Ukraine. At that stage, the death toll in Gaza was six hundred.

Murdoch-world was surprisingly totalitarian: you enter the world Orwell foretold of the one-minute-Hate, where War is Peace, and Ignorance is Strength; where a so-called free press becomes a propaganda machine that photoshops history. With 60% of newspapers sold in Australia belonging to Murdoch's chain, and with all of them following an identical line, the thunderous torrent of Putinhate deluging the Australian media was largely directed by one drummer-boy in New York, beating the drums of war.



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