

Treasure 4

October 2016

Mervyn Barrett
Jennifer Bryce
Don Collins
Robert Day
Bruce Gillespie
Robert Lichtman
Gail Reynolds
Robyn Whiteley
Casey Wolf
and many others



Dennis Oppenheim: 'Trotters' (Photo: E. G. Schempe)

Treasure

No. 4 October 2016

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Mervyn Barrett

The night the Melbourne SF Club (almost) burnt down

Mervyn Barrett migrated from New Zealand to Melbourne in the early 1960s, and became a leading figure in the Melbourne SF Club until he migrated to Britain in the late 1960s. After living there for many years, he returned to New Zealand, where he lives with his wife Janet Horncy. This article was originally published in Sam Long's *QWERTYUIOP* 8. Reprinted from the *Aussiecon Worldcon Program Book* 1975, pages 54–6. The first Aussiecon was held at the Southern Cross hotel in Melbourne.

When I lived in Melbourne, Captain Cook's Cottage was where the Myer Music Bowl is now, and if you wanted to go out to Coburg by tram via Hawthorn, the journey could take you several days, and even then you mightn't get there. The Melbourne Science Fiction club was in Somerset Place, a narrow back alley which in those days walked (a quieter time, when streets never ran anywhere) fifty yards in from Little Bourke Street and then stopped. Mervyn Binns had talked McGill's bookstore into giving us the top floor of their warehouse and we had, and had room for, a duplicator, bookshelves, a home-made non-regulation-sized ping-pong table (an ideal collating surface), a few rows of old cinema seats, and lots of science fiction fans. On a mezzanine floor up above the rafters was a room containing three toilet cubicles and a washbasin.

In those days the Crown and all things best and British were revered. That a Union Jack, which we found in the rafters, was hung from a clubroom window for the duration of a visit by Queen Elizabeth even though we knew that Somerset Place wasn't one of the streets chosen for the royal procession is, I think, a fair

indication of our loyalty and the strength of our patriotic feelings.

There was more law and order in those days, too. The State's Attorney General practically worked himself to death keeping everything pure and upright by suppressing any book or film he thought might outrage public decency or damage public morals, even though anything that reached Victoria had already passed through the fine net of Commonwealth censorship. 'Victoria has certain standards,' he would say. This, of course, was before his wife died in mysterious circumstances and he went off to Sydney after deciding quite objectively he was in charge of the police and public prosecutor's office — that there were no suspicious circumstances surrounding his wife's death and therefore no need for an autopsy or an investigation.

Some time earlier, long before I went to live there and long before the Melbourne Science Fiction Club nearly burnt down, they'd cut Moorabbin Airport in half and put half of it down by Albert Lake with the idea that an airport with seaplane facilities close to a major city would put them so far ahead in the aviation game that

they'd probably get a lot of business then going to Orly or Croydon. World War II interfered with this project, though, and so in order to recoup some of their money the western runway was sold for housing lots and became the suburbs of Prahran and St Kilda. What was left was grassed over and called Albert Park, and the main hangar was filled with ping-pong tables one could rent by the hour — still can, I would think — and there my girlfriend Jill and I would go sometimes on a Sunday afternoon, stopping first at the truck that retailed freshly cooked hot donuts which we'd eat and wash down with coffee from the ping-pongery buffet before touching bat to ball. Sometimes John Foyster came with us, and once or twice Dick Jenssen.

Dick Jenssen considered himself club champion at ping-pong, chess, and just about everything else, but I think that John Foyster could have, and probably did, in fact legitimately dispute this. And besides John had status as a *Publishing* Giant. Dick, though, always bought two copies of books and magazines, one to read and one for his shelves (often rebinding the shelf volume, which is a one-up thing to do).

The clubroom was on the top floor, and in those days it was reached by a hydraulic lift one worked by pulling on a rope. (McGill's didn't like us tracking through their offices on the in-between floors.) It was a fairly rudimentary kind of lift, with no cage door, back wall, or roof: just a floor, two sides and a beam across the top to which the cables were attached. Don Lattimer had a good trick he would play with this lift. When someone below called out for the lift, Don would get in it, start it down, then cling to the side of the lift shaft and let the cage go down without him. The unsuspecting fan would get into the lift, start it up, and be surprised in mid-journey by a great shrieking thing dropping from nowhere onto the floor beside him.

Besides being able to play jokes in lift shafts, Don's more significant claim to fame was being an original member of the MSFC and in being the club's bookbinder. He bound the library's paperbacks

into hard bindings and bound volumes of SF magazines. He bound books for members too, to order, rebinding Pogo or Oz books in elegant new bindings with exotic endpapers to suit the tastes of their owners.

If you walked at dusk from Jolimont up to Spring Street through the Fitzroy Gardens, the possums, coming down from their trees to begin their night's work of staring at people, would come over to eat off your hand (if you weren't careful) and then, if instead of continuing up Spring Street toward the Scientology Centre or the Exhibition Building, you turned left at the Treasury buildings and walked down Collins Street, with a bit of luck you'd get to Exhibition Street and the Southern Cross Hotel, which is where the 1975 Worldcon was held.

The Southern Cross had a bowling alley, and Alan Perry was probably the first person to get his thumb stuck in one of their bowling balls. ('Mervyn, I've got my thumb caught in the bowling ball.') Alan Perry's connection with fandom is that he is the friend of a fan and he stopped at the Southern Cross soon after it opened. He didn't think much of the breakfasts.

One of the Southern Cross's greatest assets used to be that it was only a five-minute walk from the Mee Wah cafe. The Mee Wah had the greatest Chinese food outside of Hong Kong that I've ever eaten. (We loved the Chinese sausage, the scallops cooked in batter and served in sweet and sour sauce, the sliced steak in black bean sauce.) There was one trouble, though. If the sight of men wielding large sharp knives made you nervous, you didn't go to the toilet there. To get to the toilet you had to pass through the kitchen, where a kitchen staff of unemployed dacoits, resting up between assassinations, kept themselves in practice by whittling slivers from the sides of beef at a frightening speed and with deadly accuracy.

There was one friend of ours, not a fan, who used to come to the film shows in the club because they were fun. (We'd drag along

as many as possible and charge them admission to defray the expense of renting films.) It was a semi-party-ish atmosphere. Most everyone would bring a bottle, and drinks were traded and shared while the movies played. She even discharged herself from the hospital one night to come over to one of our screenings. She just put a coat on over her nightgown and walked out. We were screening *Metropolis* that night. Some time later she told me that while the movie was going on, her boyfriend — another non-fan we'd roped in — had taken her upstairs into one of the toilet cubicles for some fast vertical sex. No one disturbed them. Us true fans were all downstairs watching a robot that looked like Brigitte Helm being cooked up inside a glass tube! I don't want you to think from all this that the MSFC was made up of a bunch of debauched alcoholics or sex fiends — it wasn't. What I'm trying to point out is that in those days in Melbourne, when the pubs still closed at 6 p.m., people were more prepared to make their own amusements.

Anyhow, it was because of the activities of the film group that the Melbourne Science Fiction Club almost burnt down. I'd started the group and used to run it: hustling films and running the little Ampro 16 mm projector. When I left, Paul Stevens took over the group and did all sorts of enterprising things like renting proper cinemas so that 35 mm films could be shown and stuff like that. Then, some time later, when an enthusiast who happened to own a couple of 35 mm film projectors joined the club, they installed these in the clubroom and started showing classic old movies — some of them on nitrate film. Mervyn Binns had complete confidence in the projectionist and the equipment. 'This guy really knew what he was doing,' he told me, but the introduction of nitrate film

into the clubroom was just too much for one of the members, who had the clubroom inspected by the Health Department and closed down as a fire hazard. Admittedly nitrate film has one or two unfortunate characteristics like becoming unstable with age and being just plain highly inflammable and becoming downright explosive. But even when this is coupled with the fact that the clubroom was on the top floor of a 90-year-old brick building with wooden floors, roof, ceilings, and staircases, that it had no fire escape and that its only entrance was through a narrow wooden staircase (which McGill's grudgingly allowed to be used when the lift was finally taken out of commission when the Melbourne Water Board decided it was no longer an economical proposition to go to the trouble of supplying compressed water for it) one still has difficulty seeing the reason for his excessive nervousness.

Soon after this, Mervyn Binns left McGill's and opened Space Age Books in Swanston Street, but that's another story and someone else can tell you that one. What I've tried to do is tell you something about Melbourne as it was then. Before I started writing this, I went along to Oz House here in London and got a pamphlet titled *Interesting Facts about Victoria* (which I suspect and hope must have a companion volume title *Boring Facts about Victoria*) and a map. The map just made me more confused. Melbourne doesn't seem to look the way it used to at all. So, when you see me at the Worldcon in Melbourne, buy me a drink and say 'hullo' and I'll buy you a drink and say 'hullo', but if you want to get anywhere, don't ask me for directions: ask a policeman.

— **Mervyn Barrett**, 1975

Robert Lichtman

My life and FAPA

Robert Lichtman is a Big Name Fan in the USA — perhaps the best of them all. His annual fanzine *Trap Door* is worth seeking out. The following article first appeared in *King Biscuit Time* 65, for the August 2016 mailing of **FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Publishing Association)**. Quite a few ANZAPA members have been members of FAPA over the last 50 years.

As perhaps not everyone reading this knows, FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Publishing Association) is not just the oldest SF fandom apa but also the oldest continuously operating fannish organisation, having started in August 1937 — nearly four years before the runner-up, the National Fantasy Fan Federation, which was founded in April 1941 and is also still around. FAPA's official publication, *The Fantasy Amateur*, commenced publication with the third mailing — before that, co-founder Don Wollheim's *The FAPA Fan*, served in a semi-official way — and is fandom's longest-running fanzine title, albeit with numerous editors. (The record for a fanzine published under a single editorship is Robert and Juanita Coulson's *Yandro*, with 259 issues between 1953 and 1985. Harry Warner Jr's FAPazine *Horizons*, which had 252 issues between October 1939 and his death following the February 2003 issue, is the runner-up. The newszine, *Fantasy Times/Science Fiction Times*, had considerably more issues but operated under a variety of editors.)

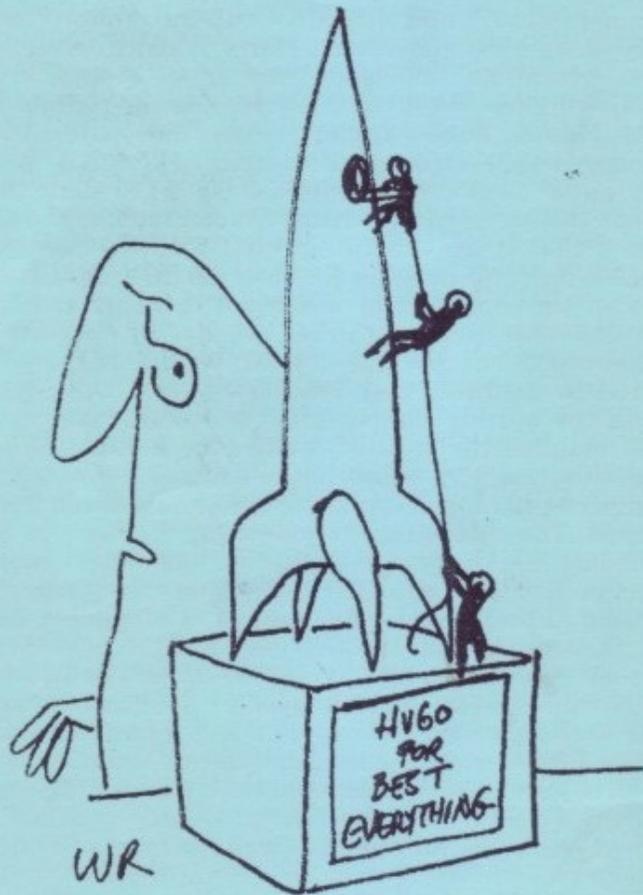
The original membership limit was 50, set to allow the possibility of producing one's zine using a hectograph, and was raised to 65 in 1943. At the time of the first mailing, there were 21 members;

it took two years for the roster to fill to capacity. There was a brief time in the late '40s when there were a few open membership slots and no waiting list, but by the '50s this no longer happened — and by the '60s membership in the group was considered so desirable that for a few years there were more people on the waiting list than on the membership roster. In order to manage the cost of sending copies of *The Fantasy Amateur* to so many, a subscription fee was instituted and acknowledgment of their receipt by waitlisters was required every other issue. Those were the glory days!

By the late '80s the glut of applicants had abated, and for the first time in decades the August 1989 membership report had no one waiting in the wings. This state of affairs didn't last long, thankfully, and through the first years of the '90s there were always some people on the list having short waits for membership. But by the mid '90s two things happened that marked the start of a long-term trend we are still experiencing. First, the waiting list disappeared forever — the last time there was one was 20 years ago, in May 1996. Second, and more significantly, our numbers began dropping below the constitutionally ordained 65 and have

KING BISCUIT TIME

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never returned. We are now down to 21.

My own FAPA adventure began with the 87th mailing (May 1959), where I first appeared on the waiting list. I was #32 in the long line, which got even longer during my wait. By the time I became a member with the 101st mailing (November 1962), there were 57 people behind me. I replaced Bill Danner, which made me sad because I was a big fan of *Stefantasy*, the fanzine he produced using handset type and a printing press that lived in his basement. But this experience was an instance of living up to the FAPA 'tradition' that by the time you become a member many of those whose work you enjoyed will have left. Along the way I published two minor zines for the 'Shadow FAPA' that sprung up as a way for frustrated waiting listers to reach out to actual members: *Amnesia* #1 in August 1961 and *Grok Around The Clock* in May 1962.

Once a member, I revived my genzine title, *Psi-Phi*, for two issues in 1963 that had considerable distribution outside the confines of the mailings. These were ambitious publications with a lot of my writing and outside contributions from Gary Deindorfer and Ray Nelson. My humorous article, 'A Child's Garden of Scientology', in the first of those issues drew a deadly serious response, which I published, from a Berkeley Scientologist friend to whom I'd given a copy of the issue. After that initial burst of energy, however, my time and energy for FAPA began to taper off after I graduated from UCLA and moved to the San Francisco Bay Area just in time for 'the Sixties'. I waited until May 1965 to publish again, co-editing a fanzine with Miriam Knight entitled *100% Whole Wheat* (which was rendered in Hebrew on the cover) in which we had contributions from Redd Boggs, John Champion, and Ray Nelson in addition to our own.

For the final years of my first FAPA membership, I reduced my activity to annual minac, always in the August mailing — that being the end of my 'membership year' — and with a unique title for every outing: *Lundy's Lane* (1966 — named after the street in San

Francisco on which I lived), *Foggy Day* (1967 — a nod to SF weather), *Purple Haze* (1968 — Jimi and my ditto repro), and finally the first issue of *King Biscuit Time* in 1969. Where did that title come from? you might wonder. As I wrote in #2 back in 1985, it 'refers to a very unusual cover I was sent on ditto master by Jay Kinney which depicted (with photographic clarity) Sonny Boy Williamson and his group performing for a radio show sponsored by King Biscuit Self-Raising Flour'. These zines were entirely my writing on subjects (some of them pretty trivial) that had varying degrees of interest to me at the time: the expansive view from my house perched on the side of Bernal Heights; the antiquarian methods of garbage collection in San Francisco; the fire that destroyed the venerable Sutro Baths; the 'hippies' — from their genesis in 1964 through the 'Summer of Love'; musical influences and interests, including a diverse list of what I liked at the time; and how I got into the Beach Boys (beyond their surf music) thanks to meeting and hanging with Paul Williams.

After the last of those zines, I got caught up in the group head that had at its core the 'hippie guru' Stephen Gaskin — eventually moving, as at least some of you know, to Tennessee and becoming a founding member of the Farm commune — so I let my FAPA membership lapse with the August 1970 mailing.

Fast forward to November 1984, when I found myself invited to rejoin after only two mailings on the waiting list. How times had changed! The title of my first FAPazine of my new membership reflected my shock and awe at being back in so quickly: *Not Ready For Prime Time FAPazine*. That was quite a mouthful, but in casting about for something with more zip I ran up against a creative wall. Shrugging my mental shoulders, I decided what-the-hell and revived *King Biscuit Time* with the following mailing.

The Secretary-Treasurer at the time I rejoined was San Francisco fan Shay Barsabe. And a unique thing happened with her in 1986

— she resigned her membership but kept on preparing the quarterly membership reports. I ran to replace her in the August 1986 officers elections and, being unopposed, became Secretary-Treasurer with the November 1986 mailing.

And here I am, still on the job. In fact, with this August mailing I complete my 30th year sitting in this chair. And what a long, strange trip it's been. Along the way I've been involved in a number of revisions to the FAPA constitution that have streamlined it to reflect changing conditions and to clarify things you'd think would be obvious and unneeded (such as what is a 'page' for activity purposes and the requirement that contributions be in the English language) but which were being abused. But I've unfortunately also presided over the gradual thinning of our numbers — taking the job when we had a full 65-member roster and watching us shrink to less than a third of that.

I've done my best to recruit new members along the way, and had some small success with that. Sadly, all but one of them have fallen by the wayside. I 'met' the exception on eBay back in the early 2000s, when he was buying things from me and occasionally outbidding me on items we both wanted (fanzines in both cases). We became friends, and he became a member of FAPA in 2003. It's a good thing he's stuck around because together with his wife they're our present OEs. (Hi, Steve and Vicki!)

So how low can we go, and still remain viable? Our sister apa, SAPS (Spectator Amateur Publishing Association), with a membership limit of 25, is still getting by with only nine members, and their mailings are comparable in size to ours (FAPA, 92 pages in May; SAPS, 97 pages in July). What does anyone think? Does anyone care, or are we just coasting to an uncertain future? Discuss?

— **Robert Lichtman**, August 2016

Farewell to John Collins

On 20 July 2016, my friend Robyn Whiteley sent an email to many friends: 'John Collins died this morning in St Vincent's Private Hospital in Melbourne.

'It is a great relief for John, who was quite lucid to the end, but very distressed. At the hospital last night his son Don said, "I'll see you tomorrow." "No," said John, "I won't be here." "Well, in that case," said Don, "I'll see you but you won't see me." Thank you to all of you who have been praying and sending positive thoughts.

'John donated his body to the University of Melbourne and he didn't want a funeral, he wanted a party. He actually wanted to be at the party, but I vetoed that.

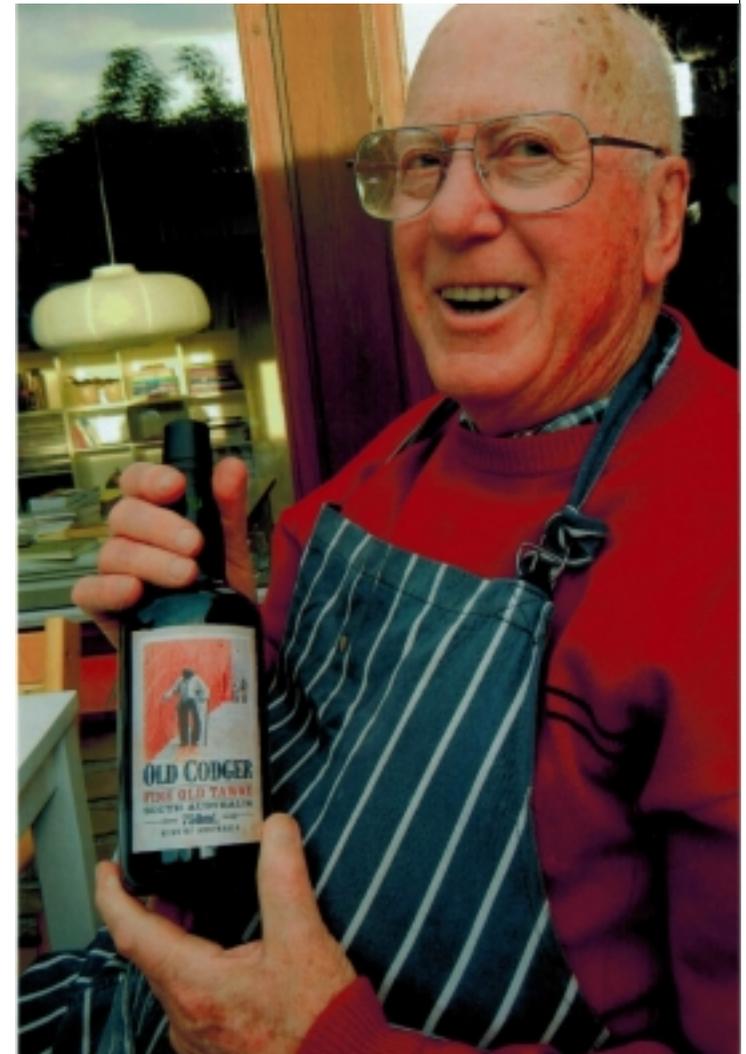
'Thank you again for all your caring love and support of John and me, both over the years we have known you and especially in this last two weeks.'

On 25 July Robyn emailed: 'John's farewell party will begin at 11.30 on Monday, 1 August at Leonda, 2 Wallen Road, Hawthorn. If you are able to be there we will be very happy to see you.'

Few if any readers of this issue of *Treasure* will have met John Collins. However, his wife Robyn has contributed to *Treasure* letters over the years, and in *Treasure 2* she wrote a recent article about a journey that she and John made to Europe. The photos reproduced here are from that article.

It tells you much about John Collins that he asked for a party, not a funeral. The party did take place at Leonda, a mansion-like reception centre in Hawthorn. 200 people, at least. Many stories of John were told; great food was eaten; there were unexpected meetings with old friends. The feeling was one of celebration, although some speakers had great trouble speaking through their tears.

Over the years I have had much less to do with John than with Robyn, but I met them both at the same time.



It was 1971, my first year at Publications Branch of the Education Department of Victoria. It was also Robyn's first year there. I had already met Robyn, both during my Arts degree and while doing Dip. Ed., but Robyn doesn't remember those meetings.

Publications Branch was part of the Department's Special Services Division, which was dismantled in the early 1990s. In 1971 it boasted many branches. John Collins was the Assistant to the Director of Special Services, which occupied an entire building in Carlton, including a huge cafeteria, where we had morning and afternoon tea as well as lunch. John Collins joined us (Publications) regularly for morning tea, when he wasn't gabbing with members of other branches. He seemed very jolly, but gave away little about himself. He also seemed to be in his late forties or early fifties, but he wasn't. He was 43. He had lost his hair in his late twenties, so looked much the same in 1971 as he did when I met him again in 1996. He still looked much the same during his last few years and months.

I lost track of John, but Robyn did not lose track of me. We corresponded occasionally during the 1970s and 1980s, and I sent Robyn my magazines. While I had been freelance editing, Publications Branch had grown somewhat, then shrunk a lot, then been demolished by the Kirner Government in 1991 or 1992. At Robyn's fiftieth birthday, to which she invited me in 1996, I discovered that she and John had got together in the 1980s, and were now married. I also discovered that members of the branch had all been forced to 'go freelance', most of them with great success. At about that time I was invited to the annual Publications Branch reunions, which year after year remain very enjoyable, although most of the people who still attend joined the branch long after I left in the middle of 1973.

During the last 20 years, I have corresponded with Robyn (and she has sent Elaine and me concert programs, concert tickets, and many emails), and nattered with John from time to time. However, at no time have I become aware of any of the following information



about the life and times of John Collins. As you can see, John was both 'a bit of a lad' and a man deeply committed to many educational and social enterprises.

He was also a science fiction reader! But he never pinned me down for a discussion about science fiction. Or have I have forgotten some long-ago conversation when we did indeed discuss the Good Stuff?

John Collins was 88 when he died of asbestosis. He seemed very healthy to me when I met him during the last 10 years, but obviously he knew what was coming. He led such an amazing life that I feel privileged that Robyn and the family have allowed me to reprint these fragments from his life — a life encapsulated in the following tributes delivered at the Leonda Party on 1 August 2016.

— **Bruce Gillespie**, September 2010

Don Collins: John Collins, lifelong learner

My father John remained the epitome of the phrase 'lifelong learner'. John delighted in learning new things — sometimes the hard way no doubt — but he valued education in its many forms and saw infinite value in being curious, in gaining new understanding, and in sharing knowledge with others.

A difficult childhood and an abruptly terminated schooling experience mid way through Form 1 led to a somewhat misspent youth that had him working on many low-end jobs. However, each experience added to what became a vast body of knowledge, skills and understanding.

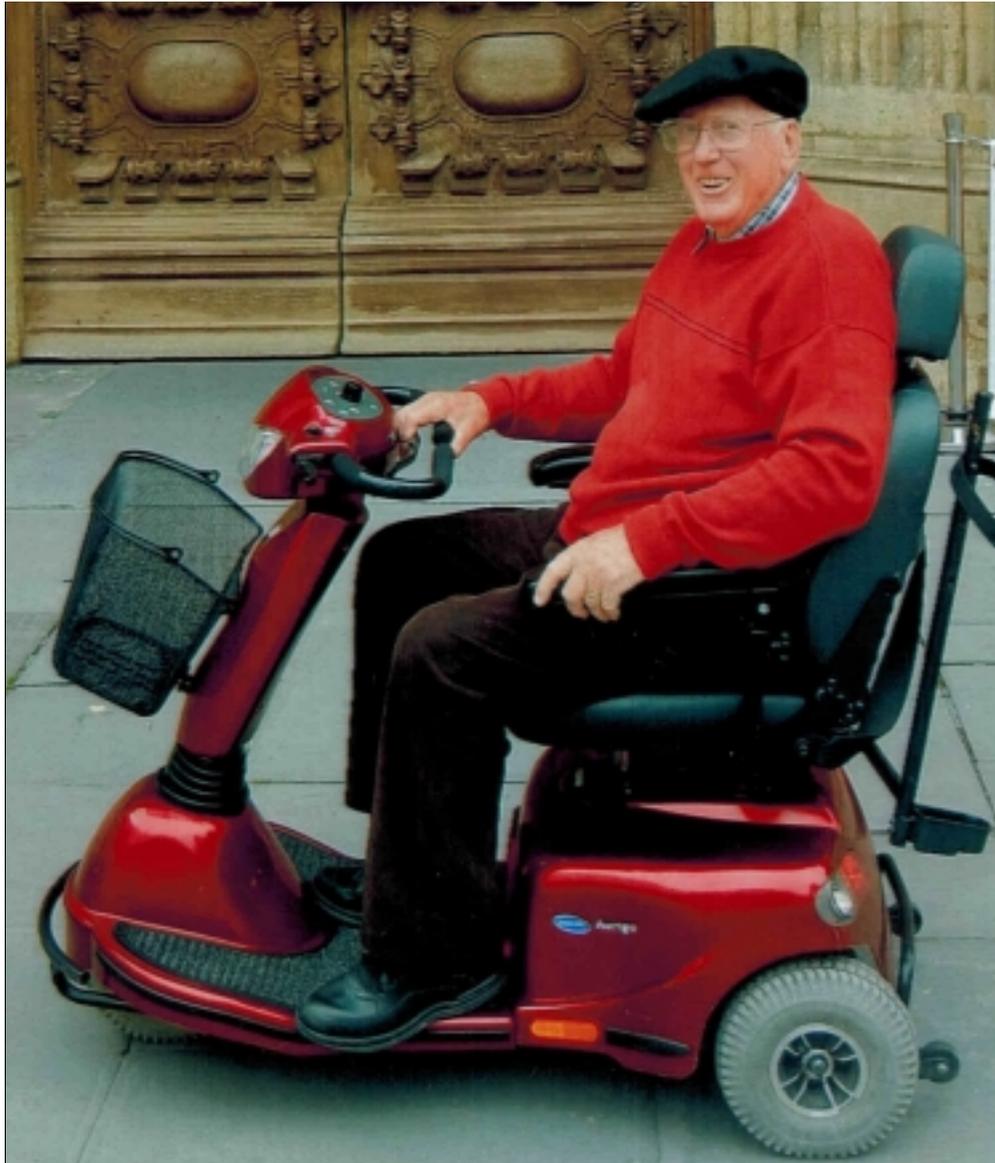
He worked as a projectionist for Hoyts in Melbourne during the 1940s, drove Pict Peas delivery trucks, and spent time as a wedding photographer in the 1950s, while he studied at night school in order to better his seventh grade education. At 32 years

of age, he was the oldest student at Teachers College in his year.

John loved a wide variety of music and was always looking to fill in gaps in his knowledge. He loved to discuss structure, instrumentation, and melodic elements in classical music with my wife Anne, and our childhood was peppered with classical music, firstly on the stereogram and later on the Yamaha hifi system.

Perhaps the 'Switched On Bach' phase that was Bach played on a Moog synthesiser may not have been the finest moment in classical music history ... but, hey, it was the seventies.

John and Rob were regular patrons at the Melbourne Recital Centre and Hamer Hall for all manner of performances. John had a preference for the Australian Chamber Orchestra rather than the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, but would attend anything of



interest to him. Few can top my surprise 50th birthday where John, Rob, and Anne conspired to have the band The Blue Grassy Knoll perform live to my favourite Buster Keaton film *The General*.

John's days working for Hoyts on Swanston St established a lifelong love of film, and always an interest in what was happening in the bio box, back in the days when film was still reel to reel and not digital. As children, we were taught to look for the 'pineapple ring' on the screen image that would signal to the projectionist the upcoming need to change reels.

His splicing skills, developed during the days working at 'the flicks', were transferrable when in, the pre-stereo recording days, John painstakingly spliced a mono track of *Under Milk Wood* into a stereo format so the play for voices alternated out of the left and right speakers. This was at the time when John was also instrumental in developing nascent teleconferencing capacity when working for the Council of Adult Education in the 1970s.

World films, action, sci-fi, Aussie productions (Sorry John, I still think *Red Dog* was a shocker of a film), silent films ... it didn't matter, so many genres were of interest to John.

I shared John's love of science fiction, a broad church of styles and themes, we pretty much liked them all, but definitely had our favourites Very early Isaac Asimov, and Robert Heinlein are in our collections along with the more well-known classics. Only a fortnight before his death, we were reminiscing on the qualities of Ann McCaffrey's *The Ship that Sang* and the influence it may have had on Kubrick's *2001 A Space Odyssey*.

As a family we went to the theatre. It was considered essential for our learning and understanding. We attended local productions at the 1812 theatre in Upper Ferntree Gully, and Ringwood High School musical productions.

Professional shows featured with some regularity. I remember

being seriously narked at being declared too young to see *Hair*, but a few years later went to *Jesus Christ Superstar* at the Palais. I can still feel the overload of the senses and elation your first full-blown professional production can give. Topol in his prime as Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof ...?* Of course. *Man of La Mancha*, for sure. Gilbert and Sullivan ... absolutely.

Live performance experiences continued across the years: Classic theatre, Burlesque at 45 Downstairs, Spanish Baroque music at the Melbourne Recital Centre, *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Trek* with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra ... we shared these experiences with John and Rob, mostly at his expense. Shakespeare in the Botanical Gardens was an event the wider family attended each December for quite a few years. Four generations enjoyed the Bard's fine work. Porn star Annie Sprinkle did a show at the 1996 Comedy Festival. John thought it was so good, he rang us all and then bought tickets for the next available night. The same with the Demon Drummers of Japan ... and indeed the Taiko drummers were exceptional. He felt we all needed to have the experience.

We grew up on a diet of *The Goons*. It seemed that every Sunday lunch we listened to *Blue Hills* 'by Gwen Meredith' followed by an episode of *The Goons*. Throw in compulsory viewing of *The Auntie Jack Show*, *The Goodies*, *Blazing Saddles*, and other Mel Brooks films etc ... it all explains my own slightly warped sense of humour.

John rode motor bikes in his youth and even raced sidecars for a while. The Indian and the BSA that once hung around the family home should have been stored and then restored. But alas, some gems are not recognised at the time. Both Geoff and I ride, and if John had been a little more nimble I am sure he would have swung his leg over the Harley — even if only as a pillion passenger.

A love of camping was deeply ingrained in John. Gail and Geoff shared some of this earlier. After a brief dalliance with semi-serious bushwalking, John and Rob founded the Bush Bludgers:

the Downhill Walkers ... which was quickly shortened to The Bludgers, as even downhill walking got in the way of backgammon, mah jong or cards. The times shared at Fireman's Bend in the Kulkyne Forest and other spots along the Murray remain strong in my memory.

I remain fortunate to have taken long service leave earlier in 2016, which meant I could drop by for a chat and to pass the time in companionable silence between wideranging discussions nearly every day in the three months before his death. We would watch episodes of *The Chaser* (British and Australian versions), testing our general knowledge and handle on trivia ... always learning something new. Of course the episodes were recorded on the DVR — John always delighting in fast forward through the ads. Rrrex the wonder dog loved keeping John company, especially when the electric throw rug was in play. Rrrex is living out his days with best friends Murray and Jane at Barwite near Mansfield.

John and I discussed his impending death. He was matter of fact. 'It's obvious that my time is limited,' he said to me. 'Now China ... you are not to come back. It's a waste of money.' 'Hmm,' I said. 'You don't get a vote. You won't be there.'

It became known as 'the lecture' as he tried the same line of argument on Anne. He received the same answer.

In his last weeks John loved having his two sons visit together at St Vincent's, so whenever we could Geoff and I organised to be there together, sending each other simple texts to confirm departure and predicted time of arrival. As they say, when death is staring directly at you, family is what is important.

John was so lucky to have Robyn in his life on so many levels, but none more so than the 24-hour care she provided in the last weeks of his life. As I said, come the end, family matters.

It seems he got his wish. Because of the complex requirements

of the getting a Z class working visa for China, Anne and I can't be at the wake. We are unable to leave Beijing until the single entry visa is converted into a multiple entry visa — a process that takes some 30 days. We left on 21 July, knowing this might well be the case, but hoped there would be a solution that could be worked out at the Beijing end. But no.

A few days before he went into hospital John and I sat at Brady St and spoke about process of looking back on one's life. The highlights in some detail and the lowlights ... We agreed the not-so-glorious moments should stay where they were — each a learning experience that, whilst not to be ignored, need not be dragged out for close inspection. As Tom Waits says, 'We all develop ways about ourselves that aren't quite right.'

When Anne spent two hours with John on Monday night, he so enjoyed listening to the conversation between Anne and Rob, signalling when he wanted to join into the conversation about Sam D'Astiani, Pauline Hanson, Shorten, and Turnbull ... but struggled to get the words out between laboured breaths. Though fighting for every breath, he insisted on been given his glasses, and he

rallied enough energy to smile. It must have been so tiring. 'Enjoy China,' he said. 'I won't see you tomorrow. I won't be here.'

And he was true to his word. Selfishly I want to believe he hung on until the day of our departure for a new life in Beijing to maximise the opportunities to spend some more time with Anne and myself. But in reality, the struggle became too much. The rapid three-week decline from the 2016 Brady Street Christmas-in-July that, for once, we actually held in July, to his death on 21 July was rapid. I don't blame him for having decided he had done enough.

I will miss him, and in ways I am yet to fathom. As the tears stream down my face as I write this, I know he made the world a better place.

For those who gave up your busy days to come to this wake, thank you for coming along and for the support you offer Robyn in doing so. Wakes are for the dead but also for the living. Drink, eat, and if you wish, sing in celebration of a life well lived and a man who loved people and of course, learning until his dying day.

Gail Reynolds: A tribute to my father

My father must have been about 26 when I was born. He had some hair then. My earliest memories involve John leading singing at parties, lots of singing, toddling around at the youth camps (more singing), riding on a tractor and in the tray of a station wagon while he earned much needed cash hay baling. He ran a successful rag-recycling business and he worked on the wharves; wherever

he went he was always the larrikin at the centre of the party. I am told that one of the favourite pastimes on the wharves was to bombard each other with the loose asbestos which lay in open bags on the wharf. That ultimately came back to haunt him or maybe the asbestosis arose because of the house that he built at Ferntree Gully, with its half asbestos walls and asbestos roof, cut

with a handsaw. No masks in those days.

I remember when I was aged about three going to collect my brother Geoff. My father drove the dilapidated A-model Ford known as the Blue Bomb. On the way home, I took my nap on the broad parcel shelf behind the only interior seat, away from that squalling baby, the one I hadn't wanted to take home, while my parents laughed at me. It had been a huge fight to adopt Geoff: meetings, paperwork, and people inspecting our living conditions, but Dad doggedly persisted, enlisting the support of Sir William Angliss and his wife Bena, until eventually the system agreed. From day one Geoff was told he was special because they had chosen him.

Don was born some four years later, a miracle of modern medicine, overcoming the RH incompatibility that had blighted previous attempts to add to their family. I had only survived with timely blood transfusions. Baby Donald and I were paraded in front of medical conferences as examples of RH survivors. My parents were always willing to aid education of anyone.

Life in the house that Dad built was always social. People came and went. Christmas morning or Christmas Eve, local people congregated there. This of course demanded the grand clean-up of the often untidy house, and every year Dad suddenly decided that the window sills (or something else) needed painting. I was always left with cleaning up the paint brushes, a job that he didn't like, and neither did I — ah, the petty grudges we hold!

Family circumstances meant my father went to 14 primary schools, a situation that created yawning holes in his education. He took great pride in the fact that he overcame this lack of education as an adult. He struggled through night school, gaining enough credits to undertake teacher training. His first appointment was Norwood High School. I remember when we set off to see the school. We arrived at the address and found an orchard. Not a building in sight. We drove around searching and eventually

came back. Unsurprisingly it was still an orchard. Consternation. It turned out the school was yet to be built and classes were held elsewhere. He did have a job after all.

As a boy, John remembers being incensed when his teachers set a question that involved petrol being 1/6. He walked past the petrol station every morning and it was one and nine. A literal boy, he argued, long and loud, about the price. The discrepancy made no sense to him, but the teachers couldn't see his problem. Incidents like this shaped his teaching style, and, contrary to the methods of the day, many of his lessons were grounded in the reality of the students' lives, keeping them actively involved in their learning.

He was determined that we children would have access to the best state education he could arrange. He became president of the primary school committee, and he convinced them that the school should have a more books than the standard *John and Betty* and *Peter and Susan*. We did have those readers, and the Victorian School Readers, but because of him we had so much more. Cutting edge for their day, graded readers were introduced, and eventually a school library, taken for granted today but a rarity then. These things helped turn me into a voracious reader. John was a great believer in books. He always said his real early education was the *Arthur Mee's Encyclopedia*, which he read cover to cover, volume by volume.

I believe one of his greatest prides was that two of his children hold Masters degrees, as he did himself. My brother Geoff is the odd one out here. All he wanted to do was work in the bank, and with Dad's philosophy that 'if you bring your children up to make choices, you can't complain when they make them', he supported Geoff's decision. Of course the laugh is on Don and me, who followed our parents into teaching, as before he abandoned his banking career, Geoff earned a salary no teacher dared dream of.

Dad was a great advocate for State education. My oldest friend

Katrine Hoggart, now Kate Serrurier, was offered a studentship that entailed a commitment to teach in a state school for three years and which required a guarantor. Her father refused to sign it. Risking a long-term friendship, John signed. Kate spent 22 years teaching in the State system as a result of that signature. Kate says she is sure that our fathers are singing together in the afterlife now with extraordinary abandon — my father in tune and her father very out of tune!! 'Twas ever thus.

Summer holidays and Wye River were synonymous. In the days when Christmas school holidays were six weeks long, we spent four or five of them at Wye River, first year camping, then, when our tent irredeemably leaked, in a caravan and in later years in the one-roomed cabins that encircled the campsite. It might have been Ron Crawley who found Wye and invited us to join them. Faye and Bill and Sharon Gerrard dropped in on their way to Apollo Bay but stayed at Wye. It became a tradition. Each year other families joined us, and soon we took over a sizable proportion of the camp. There were two campgrounds at Wye, one right on the beach front, but ours nestled in the valley straddling the river. Sounds reverberated against the hills; my sound track of Wye at night is the arrival of the boys from the Wye Lifesaving Club, and

the whole camp resounding with rousing (and perhaps increasingly inebriated) choruses of 'Cigareets and Whusky' and various folk songs, all led by John, whose instructions could be heard from my bunk in the cabin where I was meant to be sleeping.

Days were spent snorkelling rock pools and body surfing the long waves and eating sandy sandwiches for lunch. Once, my larrikin father convinced Faye to hide a spare swim suit around her middle under her costume. We swam out deep, away from my mother, who was under the beach umbrella keeping an eye on three-year-old Don. Faye handed over the hidden cossie and Dad and the other men emerged from the water triumphantly twirling the bathers in the air and tossing it between them as though Faye had been left naked in the drink. I think Faye was shouting words of indignation in dulcet tones as only Faye can, but I may be making that part up. They had fun, but as I recall it, my mother was not amused.

As we became adults, Dad was there as a backstop, never short of advice (wanted or unwanted!) ready with small loans in times of need, ready to pick up the pieces if need be. What more can one ask of a father?

Robyn Whiteley: 'If you'll play, I'll sing!': Robyn's tribute to John

Don said in his presentation that John left school in Form 1, but John always said he left school 'failed form 2', because he didn't understand school. As Don also said, John had an amazing array of jobs before he realised that, to get on in life, you need 'a piece of paper'. That's when he started his night school studies for Leaving and Matric., while delivering frozen vegetables and picking up his own variety of the Italian language. In 1957, with a wife and two children to support, he took up an offer from the Education Department for a one-year Trained Primary Teachers Certificate, the best of his education qualifications, he always said. Because mature male teachers were in short supply in 1958 he was sent to Norwood High School, which Gail has described so graphically.

Not one to let the grass grow under his feet, John progressed reasonably quickly to other high schools and to Senior Master status and he then started looking for other opportunities. At a time when television was new to schools he was seconded to the ABC as a liaison officer between the ABC and the Secondary Schools Division. The job involved lots of visits to schools and plenty of driving around the countryside. Everywhere he went, he gathered friends, and some of them are here today.

But three years of that was about enough, and he moved on to become Assistant to the Director of Special Services. When a young teacher from Brighton Technical School applied for a job in the Publications Branch, she was interviewed by 'three old bald men'. That was the first time I saw John, and he was all of 42. He

always said he had been bald since he was 29 and he never worried about it at all. 'You can't have hair and be virile too,' he used to say.

From Special Services he went to the Council of Adult Education as Assistant Director, with a remit to strengthen links with the adult education centres in the country — Wangaratta, Wodonga, Mildura, Warragul etc. Yes, lots more country driving and lots more friends. While he stayed at CAE from 1974 until he retired in 1987, he changed his job within the organisation every two years or so, and the last job was a secondment to Richard Pratt's Visy Board, to set up a management training program for employees across Australia. More travel, more friends.

John retired from government at the best time for him financially. We set up our own business, The WC Company (W for Whiteley, C for Collins). On good days we were 'flushed with success'. On bad days we were 'chained to the desk'. We offered consultancy services in education, training, publishing, curriculum, and building design. We took on any project that looked like it would be fun and might make a bit of money. I took a year's leave from the Education Department to see if we could work together as well as live together and when we found we could, we ran the company for 15 years, until GST came in and John said it was all too hard. He turned to the stock market, and he claimed recently that he made more money after he turned 80 than at any other time during his life.

Later today you may hear the strains of 'Tom Dooley' coming from a spot by the balcony door where our friend Danny Spooner will be playing some of John's favourite songs so that those who would care to can sing along. 'Tom Dooley' was the song that brought me to his notice, I believe. He said one day at afternoon tea in the Special Services building that he played the guitar. I scoffed, polite little person that I am. I said, 'If you play, I'll sing.' The next day he appeared with his guitar — and I sang. Maybe I can say the rest is history. In 1982 we moved into our house in Richmond, the one he designed. In 1985 we were married in our own courtyard (in August!) amidst so many of the friends we had amassed from our various jobs that they had to have name tags. From 1988 until Wednesday, 20 July 2016 we spent most of our time together. We ran the business, we walked our dogs, we entertained, we had wonderful open-house parties, we took on a big building project next door, and we travelled — around the state, around the country, and around the world. Most of you have kept up with our travels in recent years through the diaries I have emailed. You know that what we were doing was what we did from the very first — we had fun.

It was a privilege to be John's partner. He taught me much. He

shared his family and friends with me. He shared his love of music, his passion for games, and his thirst for knowledge. He tried hard to pass on his deep interest in gardening, cooking, and the share market. In return, he said I did what my mother had told me that she had done with my father, who was 13 years older than she was. 'I ran him around, Rob, to keep him young. I didn't let him snooze by the fire', and John said that was what I did to him. At 88, he suggested a road trip from Melbourne to Townsville and back, and we did it in March this year, more than 7000 kilometres in over a month. How much that took out of him we'll never know, but he was determined to do it and we did it. We were a good team.

Thank you all for coming today. Thank you for your love and support of John and me over all the years that we have known you. Thank you for sticking with us through thick and thin. When your glass is filled today, raise it in the memory of a man who loved life, John Collins.

— **Don Collins, Gail Reynolds, Robyn Whiteley,**
August 2016