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Clippings

Issue

16

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For volunteers and members of RPH Print Radio Tasmania

The Friday team

Meet some of the wonderful folk who make Fridays run smoothly at RPH.



Fridays on RPH



It's the end of the working week, but still it's all systems go. Phil Beck and Sue Hills are up with the lark to prepare the papers, and Margaret greets the listeners at 8.30 with the latest edition of the Australian.

By mid-morning, the studios are in full use – Cath Lennard and Elizabeth Macdonald present the programs and Phil Beck, Giles Hugo, Trudy Elder and Regina Share read the newspaper articles. Graham Clements and Dave Hunt (aka Len Lobo Sayogo) take over the live presenting in the afternoon.

Downstairs, all bases are loaded, including the preparation desks. The office is full of busy people. Throughout the day the regular volunteers - Peter Johnston, Fay Thompson, Belinda Kendall-White, George Richard and Ken Doughty – come and go, preparing material and recording their pieces. Mike Stickler provides technical help. Georgia Clark fills the gaps.

Head down, and get on with it – but there's still time for sharing some stories. Belinda's been to the big island... George tells Margaret how many snakes he's seen this season...

Focus on Friday presenter Elizabeth Macdonald

I was Dragged Screaming* from South Yorkshire to Darwin in 1986. After the initial shocks of dreadful heat and humidity, and terrifying threats of cyclones and crocodiles, I settled in and remained there until 2010. After my husband's sudden death in 1990, I re-engineered myself into something skilled and useful and took up the appointment of Director of Student and Staff Services at Charles Darwin University, a position I enjoyed immensely.

In 2005, I saw, on the internet, a house which I thought might suit my needs for retirement. It was in Blackmans Bay. As I had never visited Blackmans Bay, I showed either great courage or utter stupidity by putting in an offer on this property, which was then accepted. I rented the house out until my arrival in early 2010. Not knowing anyone in Tasmania, I decided to make the house into a project. Mitre 10, Fork in the Road, was my first forage into local society. Fortunately, and thanks to some very friendly people in my neighbourhood, I began to gather a lovely circle of friends and my 'project' gradually took second place in my life.

I joined RPH in 2012, at first reading articles for the *Australian Voices* program and then reading the *Mercury*. I was offered training as a presenter and subsequently given a regular slot for

the *Examiner* and *Advocate* newspapers. Along with Giles Hugo and Phil Beck we're part of the 'A' team each Friday morning. I also contribute to *Far and Wide* and along with Mel make regular contributions to *Musically Speaking*. I enjoy working at the station and being amongst a great group of people who never grumble but simply get on and do it. I count myself fortunate to be able to work alongside them.

* *Dragged Screaming* is a play by Suzanne Spinner

Focus on Friday volunteer Georgia Clark

I joined RPH late in 2013. I am currently studying at Utas, commencing my Honours year of a Journalism degree. I am a 41-year-old divorced mother of two teenagers (Callum and Chelsea) and primary caregiver of two hairy non-humans (whippets Max and Ruby). My lovely patient partner Peter and I live with our menagerie in Tarooma and are currently renovating our home, as well as helping 17-year-old Callum maintain and upgrade the newest family member, a 1977 Leyland Mini LS in Corinthian Blue, nicknamed the Tardis.

I am Tasmanian born and bred (barring a four year stint in Melbourne during my primary school years) and love the lifestyle here. My mother is a keen sewer and antique doll/teddy collector and valuer and my stepfather is a retired veterinarian. I am the middle-born of three girls, attended an all-girls Catholic school and spent a large part of my teen years either on a trampoline, a hockey field or the back of a horse. Then I learnt to drive and discovered boys, so the rest is history.

I have had a colourful work life so far, enjoying roles in retail management (G P FitzGerald & Co and Sanity Music) and hospitality supervision as well as volunteer work on a variety of committees from Clifton Pony Club, Geilston Bay Playgroup to the Hobart Repertory Theatre's chairperson of OneFest. I have

volunteered at Edge Radio at the Utas campus, presenting my own theatre show. Now that the entire family has joined the Mini Car Club of Tasmania, it's only a matter of time before I add another committee to the list...

I heard about RPH from a fellow dog-walking friend and auditioned for Vaughn after a quick phone call. At RPH so far, I have read the various newspapers live, filled in as a presenter, pre-recorded programs for and with others, prepared the papers for readings and trained to record and edit programs. Currently I have committed to *Stage Whispers* with Paul Morris, reading/presenting the *Australian* on Fridays, providing readings for *Australian Voices* and being rostered for a variety of other shows. I hope to design and present my own show, once I settle on a theme. When I first walked in the door, I remember being impressed by the set-up (four studios? LUXURY!) and I love the friendly, cheerful attitude of the volunteers. I have met so many new people and am so grateful for the opportunities Vaughn, Mel and Margaret have thrown my way. I hope to be around for a very long time and introduce others in my circle to the joys of volunteering at RPH.

What else is there? Hmmmmmm.

I am a mostly Green feminist/humanist atheist with a cracked sense of humour and a keen interest in people. I love: *Dr Who*, *Sherlock Holmes*, minis, whippets, travel, wine, theatre, Peter Gabriel, Adele, Mumford & Son, Ellen Degeneres and *Game of*

Thrones (my guilty pleasure), and the phrase ‘Smart Is The New Sexy’. I donate blood and I swear under pressure (mostly in the driver’s seat). My New Year’s resolution is to sing in a choir (help me, Suzy).

And I look forward to meeting you, if I haven’t already.

Georgia Clark

grin



Focus on Belinda Kendall-White

The first daughter (and second of three children), I was born in Melbourne to a Kiwi mother and Adelaide-born father. We lived on a large block in bayside Sandringham. Dad spent weekends mowing the wide expanse of lawn while my green-thumbed Mum worked in the garden (wonderful fruit trees!). We had chooks which NEVER stayed in their fenced-in area but laid eggs everywhere! An engineer by training, Dad was an inveterate ‘tinkerer’ around the home and I loved going with him to the hardware store.

While studying at Melbourne Uni, I was awarded a scholarship with the *Herald and Weekly Times*. It guaranteed a holiday job and employment on graduation. So a little later, and armed with a combined honours degree in Political Science and Indonesian Studies, I took up a job as a graduate journalist. They were heady times: the mysterious death of PM Harold Holt, the first landing on the moon. No computers, just the click-clack of typewriters!

I left after a year, choosing overseas travel as so many friends had already done. I decided not to take the potentially romantic P & O ship, but instead to fly, taking in SE Asia, Europe and the UK before heading back to Oz. I got a job at Sydney University’s International House, as Assistant Director (Programme), then moved back to Melbourne, lured by romance. I married, and reveled in the serenity and beauty of

our eight acres of weeds and blackberries (and giant eucalypts) in the beautiful Olinda.

My former husband was a pharmacist, and a wannabe (later successful) Feral MP. We have four children. When they were 1, 3, 5 and 7, I began to work part time in public communications, largely to retain my sanity, and in 1988, when the eldest was in her final year of primary school, we followed my husband to Canberra. I wanted the children to have anonymity and a peer group with whom to move into secondary school. Like Hobart, Canberra's a great place to bring up a family!



I worked with the Australian Sports Commission and the Australian Hospital Association, but found the last ten years of my paid working life perhaps the most interesting, as my employers were encouraging young students to follow a career in science. And that's how I met my husband Guy, whom I'd first met in Sinny 27 years earlier!

I 'd actually 'begun' my radio

career at school, an Anglican girls' school in Melbourne, where the school chaplain set up a short wave radio at lunchtimes. I was involved in several commercial radio station programmes in my teens and was training to present and produce music and current affairs with *Mountain Radio* in the Dandenongs when we moved to Canberra!

7RPH is a home away from home. My 'career' began as a 'paper clipper' and on-air reader progressing, after training with Mel, to produce as well. I was TERRIFIED at first but now really enjoy it! On Fridays, I produce *A-Plus Commentary*, one of Peter Johnston's 'babies' and often stay on to pre-record *Readings from the Island* and *Spotlight on Science*, both of which require research at home before going to air. I produce and co-present *Mercury Features* (we record on a Monday afternoons) and produce Fay Thompson's *Good Gardening* and *Subjects for Seniors* (which I would LOVE to re-badge *Seniors' Moments!*). I have been involved in the garage-sales, Seniors' Week and writing (occasionally successful) grant applications.

And away from Davey Street? As my husband proudly tells friends, 'B is great at weeding'! I enjoy lawn mowing on our sloping block at Bellerive Bluff, planting (and eating) produce from a small veggie and herb patch, and making jams and chutneys. I play tennis three times a week and am also a dragon boat paddler with the Derwent Storms out of Lindisfarne. It's GREAT for fitness, fun, friendship and FRESH

AIR: early morning paddles up-river, occasionally seeing sea-eagles and dolphins, the sunrise reflecting over our magic mountain and invariably contending with the wake of the MONA Roamer as it rushes past. I was one of Australia's first appointed civil celebrants. That role is far quieter than in the past. Some 11,000 of us were appointed, one Government wanting 'a celebrant on every corner'. Sadly, it's now a business, not the community service planned by the late Lionel Murphy. I'm also occasionally involved as an English language tutor with the Polytech, with refugees living in Hobart. And like our Clippings editor, I am also loving being a grand-parent. My three little grand-children (Walter, Morris and Olinda) live on the Northern Island so I see less of them than I would like.

'When will you move here?' their parents ask.

'Move HERE', I reply!

Focus on Friday volunteer Fay Thompson

I was born and educated in Hobart, and initially worked as a secretary. My first husband was killed in a car accident when I was 27, leaving me with five-year-old twin boys to bring up. I had to return to full-time work, and started back in secretarial jobs, moving into the ABC TV Newsroom as a News Typist. From there I moved to a large law firm as Secretary to a Barrister, until one day I saw an advertisement for Secretary to the board of management at the Theatre Royal and was lucky enough to get the job. After seven years as Secretary, I was appointed Theatre Manager, a position I held for ten more years.



I was contacted by Wrest Point Casino in 1984 and offered the position of Entertainment Manager to set up and manage the new Entertainment Centre they had built. After much internal debate, I decided to accept the job, mainly because I thought it was great for it to be offered to a woman, and it meant I could still be in

Hobart. By that time my sons were almost through University. The contract was only for one year, so I knew I was taking a risk. However, I was at the Casino for 14 years! In 1995, I was appointed as a Marriage Celebrant and after performing over 900 weddings, I retired from that occupation in January this year.

I retired from Wrest Point in 1998 because I was about to re-marry. I knew I didn't want to play bridge, or golf, or join ladies' groups. I heard about RPH from a friend who was a volunteer there, and as my only real skill seemed to be sight reading, I rang up and was auditioned. I started out reading the *Mercury*, but moved to the *Australian* very soon after it was started, and have been reading that for about ten years, although I've recently taken some time off in order to do more travelling. I do a garden program, *Good Gardening*, and *Subjects for Seniors*.

I read at least a book a week and love movies and theatre. My husband and I travel as often as possible interstate and overseas, and have recently taken to cruising. One of my sons lives in Alice Springs and has been there 16 years. I have been up there every year at least once, and love the outback. We have a large garden, and are in a Garden Club, so when I'm not at RPH, many hours are spent happily planting, weeding and pruning.

Fay Thompson

Reports

Here's the latest from our station manager Vaughn, our president Ron, volunteers coordinator Margaret and Assistant Manager Mel



From the manager's desk

Hello once again, everyone, and welcome to another successful year here at RPH Print Radio.

Most of you will be aware by now of a rather substantial bequest we received at the beginning of the year. This is much appreciated and our thanks go to the family of the deceased. It has been decided to invest the money until such time as a decision has been made as to what to do with it.

Mel has been busily working on a new rostering system. In large part it is the same as that which we have been using for the past few years, but it is electronic. It is hoped that we will be able to upload the roster for the coming weeks to the website and volunteers will be able to read and download the rosters which apply to them.

We have had a few incidences lately where people have forgotten that they were due to be on, particularly on weekends. This obviously makes it difficult for those who are left to pick up the pieces. It is extremely important that if you are not sure when you are meant to be on, that you contact us and ask! Likewise, if you lose your roster we can always furnish you a new copy. You have only to let us know. We will, of course, attempt to confirm with weekend and casual people wherever possible but we ask that you please pay attention to the roster and let us know if you are unable to attend, as sometimes

things get away from us and we can't always confirm with people. Thank you!

We have had a considerable number of new people join us over the past six months or so. Some of them are interested in doing weekends, which is always very much appreciated. If any of you who

perhaps are coming in more often than once a week and would like to cut back a bit, or indeed anyone who would like to change their regular shift, please let us know. We can't promise to accommodate but we will do our best! Similarly, those of you who come and record programmes, if you could consider changing times so that you can work with some of our new producers, it would be very much appreciated. We have yet to finalise exactly who will be doing what but Mel and I are trying to minimise the amount of time we're spending recording, so we can spend more time on managing!!

It is with regret that we say goodbye to Merlene Abbott. Merlene has been co-presenter of our *Northern Features* programme and ran our *Stage Whispers* programme. I know you will all join with me in wishing Merlene all the best in the future. Robert



Morgan is joining Giles in *Northern Features*, and Paul and Georgia have been very ably ‘whispering backstage’!

We are still very much in need of *Musically Speaking* programmes. If you’re interested, pick a topic and give us a one-hour programme featuring your favourite music. Tell us about your favourite artist, musical genre, Broadway show etc. If you would like to know more, give us a ring!

I think that’s it for this issue, except to say that we continue to go from strength to strength. I know it sounds like a cliché, but it’s true! We have a strong and cohesive volunteer force, and we are very lucky. I thank each and every one of you for your hard work and dedication to this station, and for your invaluable assistance to Mel, Margaret and me in keeping this station running smoothly and successfully. Until the next issue of the newsletter, take care and keep well!

Vaughn Bennison, Manager

Presidential ponderings

I’m tempted to comment how I can’t believe how far into 2014 we are already but, talking with fellow volunteers, it seems most of us are well aware how quickly time gets away, so my comments would be totally superfluous.

As Vaughn has mentioned from the Manager’s desk, the station has received a very generous financial bequest which, even though it will be invested in the medium term, will be very useful in the foreseeable future. On behalf of the committee, many grateful thanks to the family of our benefactor. Apart from the financial benefit, I believe it indicates that somebody out there liked us — a lot! Nice to know.

I’d also like to take the opportunity to say thank you to people who have given us some quite substantial donations recently. You can view the letters accompanying these and many other donations on the noticeboard in the volunteers’ room.

While I’m at it, I would like to thank all the volunteers and members who have donated in



so many ways. Volunteers donate their time, of course and that keeps the station on air but we receive donations of larger and smaller amounts of money, as well as donations of goodies for raffles, saleable items for the garage sale and, most recently, recycled books for our “book bank”, where \$2 gets you a pre-loved book to take away, read and either keep or re-donate for a further “sale”. It's a great idea and the cash keeps trickling in. Don't forget to grab a chocolate after a long reading shift, as the station gets a percentage from the proceeds. They're a decent size chocolate for a dollar, too. Good value.

Enough pondering for now, I'm off to check my roster. Have you checked yours?

Cheers,

Ron Andersen

Event Management

Do you have a bit of extra time to spare? The Events & Promotions sub-committee plans and organises events on behalf of 7RPH, including promotions, social activities, visits to the studio and fundraising.

Can you help to come up with ideas and then turn them into successful events?

Let Vaughn know if you'd like to join – we'll be delighted to see you.

Rostering and volunteer news

It is a pleasure to welcome some new readers who mostly work in business hours, but have offered themselves for reading shifts on weekends.

Watch out for these new names on the rosters: Ruairi Murphy, Tracey Graney, Jaclyn Brown, Fiona Jarvis and Chifley Clarke.

Speaking of weekend rosters, we've had some very unfortunate lapses recently when a rostered reader has not presented for reading duties. When two people failed to show on the one day, this caused much anxiety and inconvenience, as you can imagine. We do try to give a reminder, but sometimes circumstances such as illness mean that a reminder can't be given. On a particular occasion recently this meant that people who were present, out of the goodness of their hearts, gave an extra two or three hours of time to the station on a Saturday. One Sunday the presenter was left to do the presenting and all the reading as well.

When you receive your roster, please peruse it carefully. Put it in your diary, your reminder system on your mobile phone or in your computer — whatever works for you. Note carefully whether your rostered dates are on a public holiday when you know you will be going away, so that alternative arrangements can be made. And if your circumstances change, and you no longer wish to be included on the rosters for *From Far and*

Wide, Mercury Features, or Sunday Features, please give me as much notice as possible. I work four weeks in advance.

We have recently made morning preparation easier, especially on Saturdays, by producing a much-reduced summary of Death Notices. We presume that listeners are happy with this arrangement, because no complaints have been received. In fact, we think that this move meets with approval, especially from Northern listeners, who used to ring up requesting a Death Summary from the *Examiner*. Preparation people on weekdays are welcome to adopt this procedure, and some already have.

We need more people to join the morning team and experience the great fellowship. Our readers are on quite a good wicket, really. In some RPH stations all the readers have to do their own preparation. This means a 5 a.m. start in Melbourne, for example. And yes, I have talked to a Melbourne reader who has that regime.

We continue to have excellent feedback from listeners, who greatly appreciate our service.

Margaret Gibbs
Volunteer Co-ordinator

Training opportunities and tech news

As Vaughn has said, we've been excited to have had so many inquiries from potential volunteers, mainly from our website, but also from word of mouth from current volunteers. We are always keen to get the message out there, and there are still quite a few people in Tasmania who haven't heard of us! There are brochures available if you're involved in other social groups (or even visit various medicos!) and would like a few to take next time.

As far as training goes, we have had a number go through the process and they're presently on rosters or awaiting the call. Meanwhile, we are calling them for casual emergency vacancies. Our new volunteers include Chifley Clarke, who is going to start recording a new program shortly and Ben Dermoudy, who is working behind the scenes in production and audio-editing of book readings and the like. Peter Bulman has taken over the recording of *Tas Country* from Brian Evans, who is keen to record some musical biographies. We welcome Georgia Clark and Fiona Jarvis trying their hand at production, and they'll soon be able to record themselves and others. Belinda and Margaret assist us by doing some recording for us and we will soon be joined by Cate. Others record their own programs at home or at the station.

At present, we're looking for volunteers to join the ranks of presenters/producers, to ease the load on Vaughn and me. We

specifically need additional producers on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Do let us know if you would like to volunteer for these shifts. We won't mind if you have a go, but don't think it's for you. At least you'll see how the 'other half' lives when you're next in a studio to record a *From Far and Wide* segment or read the *Advocate*! So, if you want to try something different, give Vaughn or me a call.

As far as the rostering system goes, I am working on a fully electronic version of the roster which will be available online and on the big screen. When this is ready to go live, we will be looking for an even bigger screen (maybe 55 inches) to fix to the wall to display the rostering information. As well as normal reading shifts, this will include the *From Far and Wide*, *Sunday Features*, *Mercury Features* and *Northern Features* rosters—all available in one handy spot.

On a different note altogether, this newsletter will acquaint us with the 'Friday Volunteers' and the July edition with the 'Weekend Volunteers'. But after that? What about a 'Believe it or not' column which outlines little-known facts about our volunteers, but whose identities will be kept tantalisingly secret.

So until next time...

Mel Lee
Assistant Manager



Stories



3

Paul reports again from the Dress Circle — this time musing over shows that bombed or worse, never made it to the stage; and Sylvia reflects on the changes in the shape, content and style of *The Mercury*.

From the Dress Circle



One evening recently, I tuned in to 7RPH. I found myself highly amused and entertained by a light-hearted tale of woe involving an employee attending his boss's formal dinner and the boss's family poodle, under the dining table, peeing on the employee's boots. This story was presented by our very own Giles Hugo in a deadpan style that it made it all the funnier. Well done, Hugo!

This got me thinking about the old saying that the best comedy can be found in other people's misfortune. With this in mind, I googled the search engine in my head and decided to revisit some of the disasters that occurred during my career as a theatre manager.

The 1970s and 80s were not altogether kind to musical theatre. *Grease* opened at the Metro Theatre (now the Palace) in Bourke Street, Melbourne in 1973. Hot on the heels of the successful musical *Hair* and its ground-breaking nude scene, *Grease* was at that stage an equally gritty and vulgar little show. Sadly, it closed two days after opening due to lack of ticket sales. It also closed the Metro Theatre for good.

After several years American producer Allan Carr dusted it off, cleaned it up and produced a cute film musical that continues to spawn not only millions of dollars but also countless stage productions. Allan Carr went on to make the corniest of all film musicals, *Can't Stop the Music* in 1980 with the disco kings (or queens?) the Village People. To the horror of critics and film-

makers it was a smash in Australia but bombed at the U.S. box office. It amuses me that the Nine network in Australia still trot this turkey out every New Year's Eve after midnight. I guess their logic is that those of us still awake will be boozed up enough to enjoy it. Thankfully no one has dared to try to mount a stage production.

Bad Boy Johnny and the Prophets of Doom opened at the Comedy Theatre in 1989. This little gem was penned by Daniel Abineri, a Londoner imported to take over the lead role in the *Rocky Horror Show*. It featured a young Russell Crowe, who played a rock musician voted on a game show as the People's Pontiff. This highly entertaining romp into bad taste also featured a very young Nadine Garner who at one point, dressed as a nun, begrudgingly did a topless scene. It was written out of the show after three performances. I see Nadine now in *Dr Blake's Mysteries* on the ABC. To her relief I am sure, her topless days are well over. *Bad Boy Johnny and the Prophets of Doom* limped along for six months and was never seen again.

The Magic Show opened at the Princess Theatre in 1982. Music and lyrics were written by Stephen Schwartz, who had recently achieved success with *Godspell*. From the outset, the production was plagued with misfortune. First the Australian magician cast for the lead, Ian Buckland, was diagnosed with cancer. A Canadian magician was imported to replace him. The

show itself was light, fluffy and clever. The music, provided mostly by three female singers who popped up on stage via many visual tricks, was catchy and well done. The magic, too, was well done, but the replacement magician simply could not act. The highlight of the show was when the evil conjuror, played by a deliciously camp Molly Meldrum making his stage debut, turned our hero magician's assistant into a fierce roaring lion right before your eyes. Now, this involved borrowing two male lions from the Werribee wild life park. Even back then, Occupational Health and Safety provisions forced the cats to be alternated between performances and the performing animal was sedated before each appearance. The result was a doped-up lion yawning at the back of the stage.

On the opening night, a gentleman decided to relieve himself just as the overture struck up. In those days, prior to the Princess Theatre renovation, a trip to the loo involved a dash all the way upstairs to the Gents immediately above the upper circle. ('Clap with one hand and hang on with the other', stated Dame Edna of the upper circle. 'We don't want the stalls bombarded by plummeting paupers.') This hapless gent made it almost all the way to the loo when he found a rotted floorboard. His leg crashed through the ceiling, leaving everyone gazing at a frantically waving limb right next to the central ornate candelabra. Of course, the poor man could no longer contain himself and gave those audience members directly below his

waving leg a slightly damp theatrical experience. I often wonder if he ever recovered his dignity.

The Magic Show closed after eight performances, never to be seen again. However the cast recording sold well.

My very own Palais Theatre did not go unscathed. In fact, we hold to this day the record for a show not even making it to the stage. The Little Moscow Ballet was, as their name suggests, a ballet company from Russia. The thing was, the cast were all little people, to use today's politically correct term. The publicity of the day held no shame in billing it as *Swan Lake and the 30 Dwarfs*. The cast arrived, but the sets, costumes and promoter disappeared, never to be seen again. This caused quite a stir as the performers were then stranded in Australia with no money or means of travelling home. There was much head-scratching in Canberra while the local St Kilda community took these odd 'little people', who spoke no English, into their homes and hearts. It was quite the thing amongst the upper class of St Kilda to have a resident miniature ballet dancer occupy the spare room. As the affected theatre manager left with an empty dark theatre, I threw open the dressing-rooms and theatre facilities to the cast. Eventually after over a month, the Russian government footed the bill for the trip home.

Another show was hurriedly booked in, to replace the demise of *Swan Lake and the 30 Dwarves*. It was *The Sex Pistols in*

Concert. My staff and I, and those within coo-ee of the Palais considered our punishment complete!

Oh Calcutta! the first and, to my knowledge last all-nude musical, was booked to be staged at the Palais Theatre. The Palais had a very large auditorium with a very deep set stage, so it would have been necessary for those unfortunates in the last few rows of the upper circle to hire opera glasses, thus bringing new meaning to the words 'peep show'.

Thankfully - and much to my delight - the show was moved to the much smaller 800-seat Comedy Theatre managed by my wife. Naturally I went along to have a snigger and a perv. at my good wife's expense. Sir Robert Helpmann once stated he would never do a nude ballet because the wobbly bits keep moving after the music has stopped. I can confirm that astute observation.

Until we next visit the dress circle, may your wobbly bits continue to dance to the music...

Paul Morris

Homage to the *Mercury*

Twenty years ago, when I started at RPH, the *Mercury* was a broadsheet. It was black and white, including the pictures, although the traditional splash of red was added to the masthead on red letter days. There were usually two stories in full on the big front page. Typically these would introduce several protagonists such as police, state or federal governments or opposition, trades unions or the church, their diverse opinions all described and woven together. The trick for the RPH reader was to read in such a way that listeners didn't lose track!

But just look at today's *Mercury*! For a start it's in tabloid format. Chances are the front page has a superb colour picture of surfing, a grand cruise liner, a ship under full sail or perhaps a fire, a road smash or a child who needs our help. There may be a clever composite picture, so dramatic it almost compels RPH readers to describe it. Often the picture IS the story, leading to details on page 4. Unlike the old broadsheet, the present-day *Mercury* gives us a cluster of short pieces on the front page,

covering points of view argued between pairs of protagonists (think *Forestry v Red Awnings*, for example). Often there's one large photograph, and inserted into the frame of the picture there might be a short, 300–500 word article. Of course, many readers start at the back of the paper and the sports pages are great, especially the pictures. Inside, there are full-page coloured adverts for groceries and a lift-out for horse-racing fans. There's a flea market, news of stocks and shares, world weather and even Islamic prayer times. And where would Tasmanians be without 'Hatches, Matches and Despatches'?

Perfect? No, but I invite you to compare the *Mercury* with local newspapers around the globe. In my view, it's right at the top of the tabloids in its range. But is it better than the *Mercury* of twenty years ago? On the one hand, the standard of photography is fantastic but on the other hand, the old broadsheet had a proof-reader! Grammar? Spelling? Syntax, even? Enough said!

At RPH back in the broadsheet days, we had one reader for a 40-minute spell — and no preparation. Handling the big, cumbersome paper was tricky and as it wasn't pre-cut, we had to remember to turn the pages silently. I found pre-reading at home was essential. Nothing makes it more obvious that one hasn't pre-read, than the Births, Deaths and Funerals and in those days, we had to read Engagement Notices as well, would you believe? Everyone has some words that trip them up. Mine

are 'relevant' and 'farcical' and once I had to read about the Derby River Derby!

While the format, font size and style, and even the quality of the newsprint itself may have changed, while the Editorial may attempt to influence political opinion and letters to the editor may annoy, still I say, 'Thank you and cheers! Here's to the *Mercury!*'

Stay tuned,

Sylvia Watkins

