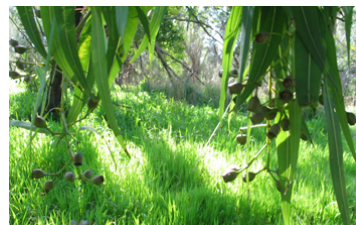


## *From the Kitchen*

10 June 2009

The dog suddenly gets up from his spot next to the heater and races to the window. With his paws on the sill, he starts barking at something outside. I listen carefully. Between barks I can just hear what sounds like the warbling of a bird. I've never heard *that* before. I get up and join the dog.



On the path through the reserve which skirts our property, two teenagers are using their cupped hands to create a whistle, blowing across their thumbs. They seem to be competing with each other. With me next to him, the dog has fallen silent, his ears alert and his head cocked at an angle (his 'what's going on?' look). The whistling is sonorous and surprisingly loud. The girl seems better at it than the boy, but both are obviously enjoying themselves.

The boy glances in our direction and seems embarrassed. He reaches out and pulls the girl's hands away from her face. He points at us. I wave. The girl waves back tentatively. The boy takes her raised hand and proceeds to pull her along the path and out of sight.

I sit back down at the kitchen table and the dog reclaims his spot. I recall instances of public exhibition when I was a child. It was usually accompanied by embarrassment on my part, because it was my mother who would be singing, or my father whistling, as we walked along the street. I was worried people would notice. What would they think? Somehow it would reflect negatively on me – grown-ups shouldn't behave that way. Looking back on it now, anyone noticing the singing or whistling would probably have enjoyed it. As I enjoyed just now watching the two teens making bird sounds. They were enjoying themselves, until they noticed me noticing. Where does the embarrassment come from? Of course, it truly is mortifying when your parents insist on holding hands in public, even kissing.

My own children both went through a long period of not wanting to be seen out with their parents – not in a café or a restaurant or the cinema. Not even just out on the street or in a shopping centre. "What if one of my friends sees us?"

My daughter tried very hard to 'shoo' us away as my wife and I waited for her to board the bus that was to take her class away for a week in the country. She even tried to convince us that we should drop her around the corner from the school, so that we wouldn't be seen at all. Despite all other children having parents in attendance, ours whispered angrily, "They'll all think that you think I need looking after." While trying to disown *us*, would she have been less self-conscious with a cabbage plant?

Even at home, with friends visiting or staying overnight, it was often "Mum, don't talk please" or "Dad, don't you dare try to be funny". Both children were embarrassed at the food we offered – even that we offered their friends any food at all. Other children's houses were always "way cooler" and their parents "so interesting". Without any sense of irony, they would then report that "Gavin thinks you guys are more interesting than his family. He says I'm lucky." "Stacey likes the food we eat here", even though the same ingrate would report that "I think that they have much more interesting food at Stacey's".

Yes, we know where the most vivid green grass grows.

They do eventually grow out of it. Now they openly bring friends around and ask to be fed. They complain, to us, how their friends' parents sometimes behave. They even sometimes complain about the "boring" food served up by other parents.

One thing does puzzle me, however. Why is there no embarrassment at the things young (and older) people post on Internet social network sites? Photos of them throwing up, or cavorting drunkenly with people they may not even want to be seen with in public in 'real life'. And the far from salubrious behaviour people are willing to exhibit on 'reality' TV, which millions will see and discuss and make fun of.

Ah well. The sun is out again, so I'll take the dog for a walk. I hope he does his poo on the grass before we get onto the footpath. I'm so embarrassed when he does it with people watching.