

From the Kitchen

26 August 2009

A correspondent recently opined that I write baldly. Whether he's seen my unthatched pate or is having his own problems with auto-correct in Word (see *From the Kitchen* #12) or is being tongue-in-cheek, I don't know. I baldly go ...



I do hope I write boldly. Timidity does not become a writer and certainly doesn't suit me. I aim to entertain, while at the same time, with varying degrees of subtlety, informing, challenging, even upsetting.

I also write to challenge myself. I'm sometimes surprised at what comes out of my fountain pen.

I've recently finished reading a book by a bloke who pulls few punches. Actually, I read it twice, as I was reviewing it. The book is called *Bloke* and the author, Bruce Pascoe, is far from timid in his writing – he is a sharpshooter rather than the user of a shotgun. There are few people and institutions he does not have in his sights and he doesn't miss.

Bruce writes boldly. He is passionate about many issues, including the relationships between Aborigines and whitefellas, the lack of true connection most whitefellas have with the land they occupy, (lack of) integrity in business, politics and personal relationships, and the natural world around us. His writing is a pleasure to indulge in, full of humour, sharp observations and wonderfully drawn characters.

Bloke is a book that should be studied in high schools, for the windows Bruce Pascoe opens on many aspects of our society. It's a bloody good read, as they say.

It can be hard to find writers who have obsessions that they can write about or that they can allow to inform their writing, without the reader feeling beaten around the head with a cricket bat. As Bruce Pascoe put it at the launch of his book, the writer needs to control obsessions when writing about political or social issues. I still have a few things to learn in that area.

What do I obsess about? That politicians and business people should operate with integrity, that teachers should enthuse their students rather than filling them with facts; that the primary aims of the healthcare system should be the overall wellbeing of the people and the demedicalisation of natural processes such as reproduction and dying; that businesses that purport to exist for the benefit of the populace should concentrate on fulfilling that function and trust that their profits will flow from that (e.g. pharmaceutical companies and banks); that if using a mobile phone while driving is illegal, so should applying makeup at 105 kph on the freeway; that making ever more detailed restrictive laws only effects the law-abiding not the nose-thumpers; that if I don't have a perfect backup system I might lose essential computer files.

It's no fun having obsessions if I don't at least try to get other people to agree that all these things are worth striving for. Why can't others see that I'm right? A phrase that George Orwell should have included in *1984* is, "Hubris good, humility bad."

Living in climate controlled houses and driving climate controlled cars to climate controlled offices and factories, we separate ourselves from the environment that could sustain us. And this not having to deal much of the time with whatever is going on 'out there', may be at the root of our collective inability to address our collective violation of that environment. That and the fear that really addressing the issues and acting decisively and quickly, will damage our economy and put people out of work. It's equivalent to someone living in a flood-prone

area putting all his energy into packing his money in waterproof containers instead of fixing the levy bank.

It should make no sense to anyone to keep allowing the logging of water catchments and old-growth forests to protect a few hundred (or even a few thousand) jobs and because “we need woodchips for paper”. We would all be better off if encouragement were given to establishing a crop industry, such as flax or hemp, which make wonderful paper, and financially supporting the displaced timber workers for as long as necessary.

Governments everywhere have recently shelled out billions of dollars to shore up financial institutions and other businesses because they saw it as desirable and the will was there. It is time they shifted their focus. They obsess about the wrong things, including survival of the fossil fuel industry.

If I were to make a short list of my obsessions, it would include integrity, wholeness, clear thinking and not taking myself too seriously. The dog has a shorter list of obsessions: food, walks and balls. His second obsession has come to the fore and he’s waiting for me to finish writing, so ...