

## *From the Kitchen*

12 May 2010



I'm about to take off again, literally. Flying to Perth for a stint of work, to be ensconced in a hotel for four days. Apart from the décor in the rooms and the colour and quantity of the marble in the foyers (or lack of it), one hotel in Australia seems to be much like any other, especially if I don't venture outside

Some years ago I was in a Melbourne hotel for four days for work. When I left in my car at the end of the entombment, I forgot which city I was in and got lost on the way home. It was a weird and puzzling experience, because I have lived in Melbourne for over fifty years.

Watching the Earth roll along beneath the hurtling cylinder in which I sit, I find fascinating. I can later check the details on Google Earth, identifying the various towns, rivers, mountains and other features.

With apologies to Dorothea Mackellar, Lady Mondegreen and (possibly) my readers:

Above a sunburnt country  
I sit in swooping plane,  
as ruggedly it ranges,  
no doubt to land again.  
I love to see horizons;  
from up here I can see  
the beauty without terror:  
then glide to land for me.

Just as people have had visions of paperless offices, they have had visions of peopleless conferences and courses without the need to travel, all to benefit the environment and save limited resources. We seem resistant in both areas. At least what I'm writing here may entertain you without having to print it out, unless you read this in hard copy in a café and if you also ignore the paper in my notebook and the several copies I printed out for proofing and editing. And we still see more than fifty doctors flying into Perth from all over Australia and from overseas to attend two or four days of training. Mind you, they probably all pay extra to plant trees as carbon offset, but these possibly end up making more paper for their offices.

I used to get excited about travelling for work, but it soon became a poor substitute for being home. The 'free' entertainment and food on the 'plane does not make up for it, nor does the swank hotel with hot and cold running employees, looking after my needs. One need they cannot meet is to be home with those I truly care to be with and who care about being with me.

I long for teleconferencing being the norm, so I can avoid the hurtling around in metal cylinders and sleeping in sanitised, concrete boxes, neither of them with access to real air.

The perception is that the ease of travel and communications has made the world smaller. Maybe it has, but I mourn for what we have lost in the process: caring for an about the uniqueness of our local communities; diversity of languages and cultures; a sense of the

meaning of celebration and ritual; limited but very fresh seasonal produce; chemical-free food; a sense of belonging. Do the benefits outweigh all this? I often wonder about that.

The lack of local takes place in schools as well. I attended primary schools that I could walk to and most children did (except for a NSW country school where I travelled in the truck collecting milk churns from the farms, and some of the children came in on horseback). Now many are driven to school and it is not always the nearest one. Thus children can spend the majority of their waking hours with other children with whom they have no connection the rest of the time. But maybe that is now irrelevant, because children no longer play in the streets and parks after school as we did. The nature and volume of traffic would probably not allow that, nor would the perceived danger from predatory older children and adults.

We didn't have the enormous feast of television, internet and games consoles, so playing outside was often a more welcome option than being stuck inside. My hotel television offers me a huge menu of viewing options, but not much of it interests me. There is almost too much choice.

Don't get me wrong – I don't condemn travel and I don't hanker for the past. I am observing and commenting, as I do occasionally about the changing use and appreciation of language. Change is inevitable and neither good nor bad. We need to adapt, even if we don't like what we're asked to adapt to. If I don't like the changes, then complaining has little power; what can be powerful is leaning up against it, with as many other people as possible, to have the change take a somewhat different path.

It takes mindfulness and that is not a huge ask. People come up with many asks, even if they really mean to make requests.