

## *From the Kitchen*

16 June 2010



Reading is not always a pleasurable pursuit. Recently I have been working through a number of books which are not entertaining but certainly worth the effort. In fact, they are important books and the reading of them can lead to positive changes in our society.

Ken Crispin's *The Pursuit of Justice* ([reviewed](#)) is stimulating and thought-provoking. It reminded me of what I enjoyed about being in legal practice in the 1970s and why I have continued to care about how we live our lives and why we need to avoid going to sleep as successive governments pass ever more laws in response to the outrage expressed through the media about the ever-increasing lawlessness in our communities. That lawlessness may not in fact be increasing seems irrelevant to the media and to most politicians.

More recently, I read *Sarah's Last Wish* by Eve Hillary ([reviewed](#)). Its subtitle ('A chilling glimpse into forced medicine') is a warning to the reader. As CEO of the Australasian College of Nutritional & Environmental Medicine ([ACNEM](#)) I was peripherally involved in the closing events of this narrative in 2004. Knowing much of what happened around the last 1½ years of Sarah's life, I knew I was in for bouts of anger and feelings of frustration and grief. The book is wonderfully written and is a tribute to Sarah's courage and that of her family, in the face of overwhelming odds – standing up to the full might of a bureaucracy gone mad. I also feel good about any contribution I may have made to the postgraduate training of doctors who are able to offer people more than the restricted orthodox 'treatments' available for many degenerative and life-threatening diseases.

It angers and saddens me that those things we take for granted – our privacy, our freedom to choose our medical care or to refuse medical care, and the honesty and openness of healthcare professionals – have still to be fought for, because governments and bureaucracies continue to want to curtail these and from time to time doctors, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists choose to gang up on a hapless citizen. Unfortunately, we cannot always rely on the Courts to protect us or to correct the wrongs which have been perpetrated. As a lawyer, it also angers me that there are other lawyers who see their clients' interests as being secondary to their own interests or who are too timid to stand up for their clients.

Set against this, it was a pleasure to recently watch a documentary about a government doing something right in a difficult area. The Queensland government has been able to cut through a spaghetti bowl full of red tape in dealing with the problems of the largely Aboriginal community of Lockhart River in the far north of Cape York. To see the positive results of an intelligent and compassionate approach to issues which are often labelled as intractable, helps to dispel my negative feelings after reading the books mentioned above. Not that I regret reading the books.

There is some positive news to be found of the not-sickly-sweet variety, but one has to make an effort to find it or be lucky to stumble upon it (as I was with the Lockhart River story). By the way, it is well worth watching it on-line at [www.abc.net.au/messagestick](http://www.abc.net.au/messagestick).

While there is an overwhelming number of things that are wrong about our society and all of them need to be addressed and all of us should do something to help address them, no one person can take on all of them. Thus, each of us must choose one or a small number of issues to work on and do so in such a manner as is appropriate for us. Each of us has different strengths, different expertise and experience, our own level of tolerance, energy and courage.

Right now, I feel that my most powerful tool is my ability to write clearly and my most useful option is to put that writing to work to promote necessary change. When I was in my twenties, my most useful and powerful tools were related to my legal training and I used these effectively for some years. And I know what it is like to be threatened, including receiving serious death threats from a multinational company because I was helping people to resist its demands for unconscionably high (and illegal) rates of interest.

I have met other people who have taken action to right wrongs or alleviate suffering, often at great personal cost. Yet they would do it again, despite the costs, because the reward is the feeling that comes with doing it – the sense of achievement in doing something that benefits many others.

What is it that *you* see needs changing and what are *you* going to do to make change possible?