
A COLLECTION OF POEMS



BY

Ann Howard

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Ann Howard loves life. She is an enthusiastic traveller and adventurer. She has ridden elephants through the Sumatran jungle; climbed Anak Krakatoa when part of it was erupting; made a 14,000 feet free-fall from a plane and rock climbed in Tahiti. She brings this enthusiasm to her writing and studying. She enjoys; watching her grandson's brilliant progress through university with admiration, her garden, and a good single malt (not necessarily in that order).

Ann Howard lives in a heritage house she restored on Dangar Island in the Hawkesbury River, where the four-time, prize-winning local histories she wrote are very popular.

1. GEORGES SONG

George Howard arrived in the *Euripides* as a voluntary Barnardo migrant in 1921, aged 11 and was sent to a home in Perth. Aged 15, he ran away to find his brothers and a sister whom he believed had been sent to Sydney, and he walked the Nullarbor Plain alone. Carrying a bit of bread until it got mouldy, he was helped by settlers, Aborigines, and fettlers in their camps. It took him 6 1/2 months to find his siblings and he was never separated from his brothers again.

They took me from my grandma,
My grandpa, my mother
Took me from my father,
My brothers and my dog

They took me from my soldiers,
My pillow, my best mates
Took me from my footy team
And took my special mug

They dumped me in the outback
Away from my brothers
But the Nullarbor is nothing
I'll just walk back

The tribespeople helped me
Whenever we met
I'm the Lord of the Outback
With blisters on my feet

Turn around, back again,
I don't care a fig,
Just keep whistling
What about a jig

I'm riding on the axles
Clickety-clack
The fettlers will feed me,
Don't look back
Jump down, turn around
Run along the track
The settlers will help me
Give it a crack

And what about a jig now, a jig, now, jig now,
What about a jig now
On the way back

And a little bit of bread now
A jig now, a jig now,
A little bit of bread now
And I'm walking back

2. THE ASSEMBLY OF GOD

God waits to be assembled
Reads the sign on a humble redbrick building
In Goulburn.

Claude Neon awaits the sign
Among sheep, sheep and more sheep
In Goulburn.
Farmer's wives wait for the coming
Their brows heavily knitted in woolly thought
In Goulburn.

Drivers pass by on the other side.
One stops,
Checks himself in,
Tired, beaten, robbed,
In a motel, in Goulburn.

The neon sign outside the motel window promises
In intermittent flashes
The Assembly of God
In Goulburn.

Published in the Courier Mail by Bruce Dawe, poetry editor.

3. PIE IN THE SKY

Beyond the Ten Commandments

He's still looking for a track,

He's far from a lawyer's curly wig

And he's never looking back.

He's a speck in the singing, rippling sand

That never touches the sky.

Water's a gift to his swollen lips,

And no one will watch him die.

As his shadow creeps towards him,

He lowers his eyes in disgust,

At the bust-up compass,

And the billy covered in rust.

He'll take what is on offer,

Maybe the end of a rope!

But when the sun comes roaring up,

He will lift his head in hope.

4. NEW MOON

I saw the moon for the first time tonight.

On the edge of the possible, dizzy with terror and fascination,

Reeling with deaths, births, betrayal, passion,

Stretched on fortune's ball.

My mother the moon,

Eyeing me for the first time,

Saw an old woman clutching washing in a small yard,

Staring up at her.

And painting me silver.

5. CORPOREAL LOVE

A prosthetic is heroic

A glass eye is a marvel

But a broken molar!

Sad.

You'll be sucked into the grey gap.

You are in error, murmurs the dentist

I will take pure gold and porcelain

For a perfect imitation,

Perfectly imitative,

Undetectable when worn, polished, long-lasting,

A tooth to last

Where the rest of you has decayed.

I wish love was like that ...

6. SOME POP SINGERS

The angels spat and ground and cursed

With splayed-out toes

And haughty eyes

They spurned the busker with his pipe

with clamorous tongues

And ugly cries

And when they slouched back to the sky

Their posturing done

Their seeds all sown,

Sweet silence graced their empty space,

And gentle looks.

The beasts had flown.

7. CLAIMS

Pick up a feather

When you're walking

in the street

in the park,

anywhere.

Draw a bird around it

then claim that you have flown

Pick up a woman

When you're walking,

in the street, in the park, anywhere

Dress her, feed her touch her, and claim that you have loved

8. island haiku

Beyond the path

There seems to be a poem

Obscured by trees,

Until I hear

The sound of water

9. MY ISLAND

Well it's just another island
Where bright fish dart in the air
And the wind is lemon gum leaves
And jewelled birds sing everywhere.
And the shiny, slippery seaweed
Lies on foamy, sandy bars
And the faces in the river
Go on dancing in the stars.
My sons have slept in caves here,
Fished, then laughed in the sun.
I pray please stay a backwater,
Until our lives are done.

Fished, jump in the river,
birds call night and day,
However long we live here
We all just want to stay.

10. THOUGHTS ON A MARGARINE PROMOTION OF POETS OF AUSTRALIA

In 500 grammes of Meadow Lea,
Sealed in a tub of margarine,
A bard or two in lard.
Henry Lawson - a resigned look,
Banjo Paterson - averted, embarrassed.
Poets of Australia
Their heritage spread
With the easy communication
Of a knife on bread.
I never knew Lawson unctuous,
Or Paterson other than Racy,
But their fate
Is handed to them on a plate.
In black plastic, it reads:
The Man from Snowy River:
There was movement at the station
For the word had passed around
That the colt from Old Regret had got away
And had joined the wild bush horses -
Copyright reserved, contains less than five milligrams of cholesterol
Per 100 grams.
60 grams of this food contains 600 micrograms
Of vitamin A and 8 micrograms
Of vitamin D.
Which is 80% of the daily allowance
Of vitamin A and D respectively
And four lines of Australian poetry
Which can exceed the daily intake
Of most people.

They who loomed large on the horizon
Are sealed
With a disc of white plastic
Their piercing eyes
Smothered
In margarine.
Their refrigerated words
Stay fresh for weeks
For the consumers
Of advanced Australia.

This poem was published in Up from Below, Poems of the 80s. Women's Redress Press Inc. 1987

11. THE TIDE

Whether we swim with the tide or against it,

Float, wriggle or migrate,

We can only say

We paused for a long look into each other

At the edge of it all.

Before we were whirled and pulled

Into relentless waves

After wave after wave...

Lie in the warm shallows with me

Wait awhile

Watch from the beach

The great crested waves

Are full of children clapping hands.

12. THE FRECKLE

I saw a freckle
On your hand
Lichen-brown,
Star-shaped, growing slightly
As you stretched your thumb.
It scythed and spun
In me
As I watched
And felt the slow pull
Of time.
We are not
But I want to stare at your freckle
Lichen-brown,
Star growing slightly
As you relax your thumb...
Ostranenie

13. THE MOONEY-MOONEY BUS

Hair emerges through scalps
Like grass on graves.
Old watches tok slowly on old wrists.
Keep in touch!
We're still in the land of the living!
The bus waits
Interminably
For old Blakey.
Old Blakey smells so bad
He has to sit at the
Back of the bus,
But you can still smell him up the front).
Pale eyes,
No longer surprised,
Watch the passing gum trees,
Dark gold earrings
Lie heavy on necks,
Symbol of depressions
Won through.
They pay carefully
With their mottled hands
When they climb
Onto the Mooney-Mooney bus.

14. THE PUG

A parody

Of obedience,

Of swiftness,

Of elegance,

The pug.

Brave, fat, endlessly cuddly,

Patient, greedy, endlessly wheezy,

Snuffled his way into my affections

And stayed there

Forever.

15. A GOOD DROP

What's your drink?

Tootheys Old.

A good drop.

95% of the fellows

At Port Kembla

Drink Tootheys Old.

I'll tell you something else-

95% of the jokers I worked with

In 1936

Are still there,

Still drinking

Tootheys Old

Which proves I

That they're long in the tooth

16. WHAT BAD PUPILS

History uses us

To prove we can't learn from it

Technology uses us

To prove we can't use it,

Turner paints sunsets

To show we can't see.

Greig scores the birdsong

To prove we can't hear

17. CHERRY PICKING

My mother picked cherries.

Rain started.

She ran to the wooden pegs,

gathering blowy sheets,

pulling them down,

clusters of cherries over her ears.

A little dog fussing round her feet.

And she was a bunch of cherries,

coming from frothy blossom,

firm, ripe, full of goodness,

with just one cherry,

brown and bruised,

souring the tongue.

She picked a fight with my ballet teacher.

My lessons twirled to a stop.

Oh, Mum, I wailed.

She dragged me away,

tutu trailing,

the little dog fussing around our feet.

She picked a bunch of fights,

hoisting the laden tablecloth,

chicken cascading, gravy on my father's cheek.

Irish, of course, he sighed,

biting the cherries at her ears,

kissing her furious eyes,
while my sister cried
and I laughed and laughed and laughed,
the little dog fussing around our feet

18. LOVE AND DEATH IN AFRICA

Africa brought out the beast in her
Two finger shadows became giraffes,
Zebra rugs sliding from white rib cages,
Handbags slithered under leaves,
Shoes glared cold eyed from swamp,
Belts rubbed dustily against trees,
Ashtrays stomped in red mud,
Living for a kill,
Killing for a living,
She trailed her feathers in the dust,
Looking back at him steadily,
Until he followed her.
'You should be in a cage!'

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