

Struggling with the question of why

Panmure artist Lisa Firestone asks some tough questions about suicide.

All words, no funding, for the Fletcher Jones story



Just like old times: the Fletcher Jones gardens came to life at the recent spring picnic, under the watchful eye of the silver ball. The next challenge is to preserve the Fletcher Jones stories.

OPINION – Carol Altmann

If there was any doubt as to how much the Fletcher Jones Pleasant Hill site in Warrnambool means to locals, the recent spring picnic has laid it to rest.

Around 1500 people flocked to the gardens last weekend to wander among the market stalls, listen to the music, stretch out on the grass and – like so many thousands of children and adults before them – take pleasure in the many garden delights that Sir Fletcher Jones created in his factory grounds.

Cr Jacinta Ermacora has leapt on this huge wave of support [to announce today in the local newspaper](#) that she thought it was “time to tell the Fletcher Jones story”, and a meeting would be held shortly between all of the interested parties to work out how this could be done.

What Cr Ermacora failed to mention, or was not reported, was that the council was first asked to collect these stories way back in 2002, when it was a key recommendation in a report it [commissioned](#) into the future of the Fletcher Jones site.

What has been done by anyone on the council since then?

Absolutely nothing.



Thousands of stories make up the fabric of the Fletcher Jones story, which is still yet to be documented from a social history perspective. Image: Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher Jones Gardens Facebook page.

There is also a vast amount of precious Fletcher Jones memorabilia cast about Warrnambool, with some in History House, some at The Artery, and some in people's private homes, that needs to be collated, assessed and preserved for future installations.

What has any council member done about that so far?

Absolutely nothing.

In the interim, as people age, and pass away, the stories are being lost and the memorabilia is getting harder to trace (and let's not forget that many items ended up in a skip bin when the site was first sold by the council in 2005, only to be retrieved by artists).

This is why a small group of people, led by **Julie Eagles** from

the Warrnambool Planning and Heritage Group, has been asking the council for *months* whether there is any funding set aside in this year's budget to at least start the process of gathering these stories.

It was hard to get a clear reply.

Bluestone got a reply on Thursday and this is it in full:

"We have no funding specifically allocated to telling the story of Fletcher Jones in this year's budget.

However, the history of Fletcher Jones and other elements that tell the story of Warrnambool will be on the table when the time comes to look at public art as part of the city centre renewal.

Once we have the foundation stage of the renewal plan completed – which addresses issues including accessibility and mobility – we'll be engaging the community in a discussion on public art." – Nick Higgins, Manager Communications.

So how much funding is there for the Fletcher Jones story project?

Absolutely nothing.



The stories behind
working for Fletcher

Jones are yet to be captured.

By contrast, Melbourne University has already started work on collating and recording the business story behind Fletcher Jones and **Melinda Barrie**, [from this project](#), has shown a willingness to work with local groups to capture the local stories.

It is embarrassing, to say the least, that a Melbourne institution has been more motivated and excited by our local, contemporary history than our own council.

And by contrast to the council's inertia on what we might call the whole Fletcher Jones package – the stories, the site, the potential – last Sunday's picnic was a triumph of what can be done through hard work, passion and belief.

Not only did it showcase the magnificent efforts of resident gardener **Lex Caldwell** and his team of volunteers who have kept the gardens alive, but it was a celebration for all those other volunteers who believed that the best parts of this iconic site were worth saving.

Those who pressed hardest to keep Pleasant Hill on the public radar – Julie Eagles, The F Project arts collective, us here at *Bluestone Magazine*, and the consequent [Save the Silver Ball and Fletchers Gardens Facebook page](#) started by **Tonia Wilcox** – all did so without any official backing.



The annual Christmas party picnic was a highlight of the Fletcher Jones calendar. Plans are afoot to bring them back again, albeit in a revised version. Image: Courtesy of Lost Warrnambool.

Similarly, the spring picnic was organised within weeks by The F Project/The Artery without a cent of funding and relied heavily on volunteers who pulled it all together – people like Dr Emma Charlton, Megan Nicolson, Des and Helen Bunyon, Ruby Richardson, Danielle O'Brien, the Factory Arts crew, Julie Eagles – the same names that keep coming up time after time and who continue to make exciting things happen around the city.

They don't sit around waiting for others to do something: they just get on with it.

The F Project, for its efforts, made less than \$400 on the day from a raffle, but it was never about raising money. It was all about bringing life back to the gardens through the arts, but you can't keep expecting volunteers to do all the heavy lifting.

And so it is with the capturing of the Fletcher Jones stories.

The funding is there: it's just how the council chooses to spend it.

It recently found [\\$10,000 on short notice](#) for the Oddball movie, and [another \\$3 million](#) of state and council funds are about to be plunged into sound and light shows at Flagstaff Hill.

So unless Cr Ermacora can come to the meeting armed with a firm proposal for council funding, it is nothing more than hollow words on the back of very successful picnic and that – unlike a pair of Fletcher Jones' scissors on the factory floor – just won't cut it.

The beat goes round and round for Spinners



It's all about the vinyl: Toni Jenkins is among a group of Spinners in Warrnambool who meet four times a year to share their love of music...played on record players.

[dropcap style="color:#DC943C;"] I [/dropcap]t began as a good idea for a housewarming party that has taken on a life of its own as a regular rug-twisting, hip-swinging, good-time-guaranteed-get-together for a group of friends who love LPs.

If you know what the acronym LP stands for, then you are off to a good start to be a "Spinner": a person who loves listening to actual vinyl records rather than CDs, MP3s or digital downloads.

"It is the sound – the richness and quality of the sound – and when you hear it again after not having heard it for a long time, it is wonderful," explains the founder of the Spinners in Warrnambool, **Claire Jennings**.

Claire inadvertently started the Spinners when planning her housewarming party in 2011 – a year after she had moved in –

and decided that because she was a year late with the festivities, the party had better be something out of the ordinary. Why not set up a stereo and play some records?

“But I didn’t have a record player and I didn’t have any records – I had nothing,” Claire throws out her hands and laughs.



[dropcap style="color:#DC943C;"] T [/dropcap>he solution was to borrow a couple of turntables and ask the guests to bring along their favourite records to “spin a set” in a seamless transition between one turntable and the other, just as DJs used to do when Claire and her friends were in their teens.

“I organised for a bit of a practice-run a month before the actual party, just to see how it would work, and the few people I invited ended up dancing all night...I basically ended

up having two housewarming parties,” Claire says.

Like all memorable nights, the talk the next day was all around “we must do that again!”

So they did.

And then they did it again.

And now a core group of around 12 people meet four times a year, with other “Spinners” included by invitation-only, to play their 25-minute “sets”, enjoy some food and, if they feel like it (which they usually do), to dance.

“To hear *Smoke on the Water* again on vinyl after so many years, well, it’s just magical,” Claire says, adding that she loves rock and roll and is a mad Beatles fan.



The record-breaking cake stand that is used by the host of each Spinners’ night to serve the

snacks.

[dropcap style="color:#DC943C;"] S [/dropcap]pinner **Toni Jenkins** said the group reignited her passion for music – she has eclectic taste from The Cure, to Janis Joplin, Bette Midler and just about anything from the 80s – and that there is a particular joy that comes from hearing great songs.

“There are still songs out there that you have never heard before and, every now and then, someone will come up with an absolute gem,” she says.

Toni admits she has her favourite Spinners – **Roy Reekie, Paul Sheehan** – who can keep her on the dance floor for most of the night.

“To dance through a whole set of about 10 songs is not for the faint hearted,” she laughs.

A few rules have been added in recent times, such as playlists being written down rather than chosen at random, and each Spinner bringing their own glass and taking their shoes off at the door, just to save on dishes and floor damage.

In the end, however, it is still all about the music.

“The songs represent a particular time and a particular era – it is our history – and there is great joy in being completely immersed in that again,” Toni says.



Songs and artists from another era are brought back to vivid life through the Spinners nights in Warrnambool.

[box] **The Spinners are hosting a farewell and tribute night to Warrnambool's legendary Capricorn Records and owner Mick Fitzgerald (who is a Spinner) on Sept 20 at the Ozone Room, Warrnambool Hotel. Tickets are \$10 from Long Gone, 115 Fairy St, Warrnambool.** [/box]

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From legal eagle to sea eagle: Jock Serong



Contrary to popular belief, writing – rather than the law – was Jock Serong’s first career choice and for many years he balanced the two before finally making the jump.

Words and photos by Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] T [/dropcap]he most commonly

told story about Port Fairy editor and author **Jock Serong** is that he was a lawyer who became a writer, but in fact it is the other way around: he was a writer who fell into law.

“English and English Lit were always my favourite subjects at school, but when I told my career counsellor that I wanted to be a writer, they suggested I do a law degree, because ‘there’s plenty of words there’,” he says with a wry grin.

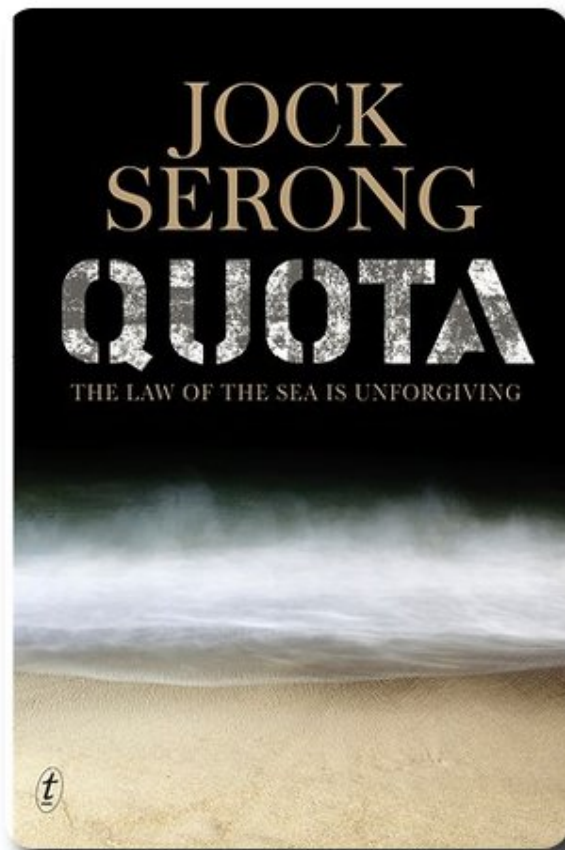
But what every writer knows- and what career counsellors never quite understand – is that there are words, and then there is *writing*: storytelling, building a narrative, creating a scene, turning words into living, breathing objects.

Worse, once you know that you love to write, the bug never leaves you.

All of the teenagers who kept journals and wrote short stories and loved English – and then grew up to become anything but a writer – still have a writer’s heart. Some listen to that nagging voice, most don’t.

Jock listened.

“I started writing professionally as a freelancer about six or seven years ago and had, if you like, three jobs: as a parent, my legal career and my writing, and the pressure to keep those three going all at once was increasing,” he says.



Jock's first novel was published earlier this year and has been optioned for television.

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] H [/dropcap]aving relocated from Melbourne to Port Fairy 10 years ago, Jock had already chosen between lifestyle and a more traditional career path.

He was a barrister in Melbourne, but came to Port Fairy to work as a solicitor after he and his wife Lilly, a nurse, decided it would be a better place to raise their children (they now have four, aged from 3 to 10.)

And besides, the surf was excellent.

Jock, a surfer, began writing for two or three different surf publications, while also working at Maddens Lawyers. It was his surfing connections, however, that eventually opened the door to a life submerged entirely in writing.

“Early last year, Mick (Sowry) and Mark (Willett) were nursing this idea of a high-quality magazine built around ideas of the ocean and they asked me if I would like to edit it,” Jock explains.

Like a cliff diver in Acapulco, Jock stepped to the ledge and took the plunge.

[Great Ocean Quarterly](#) was developed over the next six months and, like *Bluestone*, has just marked its first birthday. Also like *Bluestone*, *GOQ* is edited in the front room of a house, Jock’s house, which is where he does most of his writing.

“The last 12 months have been exhilarating, in that usually at this stage in your life, you have a sense of where things are going and you are consolidating. I feel like I am back in that period of your 20s, where you throw it all up into the air,” Jock laughs.



Jock, from Port Fairy, has no regrets about moving to writing full time: “The alternative was to spend the next 20 years not ever knowing if I could have done this”.

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] A [/dropcap]longside *GOO*, Jock has recently published his first novel, *Quota* (Text Publishing), a crime novel based in a remote town in south-west Victoria.

Just in case you thought – like me – that Jock might never sleep, the novel was developed over several years and involved several major re-writes before that magical moment of being accepted by a publisher.

“All writing has that edge of hard grind under it, the hard work, but I was happy to keep going and to keep at it; I find the process fascinating,” he says.

Quota has been well-received by readers and reviewers and has been optioned for a television production by Madman, in Melbourne. Jock will write the adaptation.

As Jock wanders down Sackville St on a perfect spring day in Port Fairy, saying hello to everybody who has already said hello to him first, there is a sense that his life has turned out exactly as it was meant to be.

When asked if he misses law, he gives a writer’s answer: “I miss the characters and their stories”.

“But no, no regrets. The alternative was to spend the next 20 years not ever knowing if I could have done this.”

Jock Serong will join authors Regina Lane and Clint Greagan for the Warrnambool Books Bookwiz Trivia Night this Thursday, Sept 18, at The Last Coach, in support of the Leila Rose Foundation. [Click here for full details.](#)

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