

How we get from topless bars to abuse



By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 35px; color: #8cc7d0;"] A [dropcap]fter I [published this piece](#), a reader wrote to me, asking how I “joined the dots” between a strip show and domestic violence.

I was really glad she emailed me, because not only did it mean that she was thinking and talking about this critical issue – along with her work colleagues who, she said, had talked about it in the tearoom – but it also made me write down, for the first time really, what has been swirling around my head.

This was my (slightly edited) response:

“The bottom line to my thinking is that it comes from the perspective of tackling domestic violence well before the

first punch, rape or other act of violence occurs.

Lots has been written about this, by much greater feminist writers (and researchers) than myself.

But in this sense, it is all about how women/girls are perceived and how they come from an entirely different position (ie. far less powerful) than men/boys, simply by being born girls in the first place.

This is why so much emphasis in the battle to end domestic violence is on empowering women/girls and, at the same time, educating boys/men to respect women.

So, to the strippers.

I have no problem with women choosing to strip for whatever reasons they may decide to strip, which I would argue are mainly economic reasons and there is another whole discussion around that. (Indeed the woman who wrote this piece that I just published said she applied to work in a men's club in Melbourne, purely for the money when she was a struggling student, but in retrospect she was so glad that she never got the job.)

I certainly didn't judge the women at Last Break for what they were doing, but was angry at the fact that there remains a market for that kind of "entertainment" which I thought had been left behind in the 80s.

The issue is that stripping, topless work, private dancing all reinforce the entrenched power imbalance between genders and, in so doing, reinforce women as something to be objectified, oggled, highly sexualised and valued for their ability to appeal to men.

This is why male strippers are not on the same scale.

They don't start from the same place as women in terms of power and, even when taking their clothes off in a strip show,

they retain that power as part of the dominant gender.

(To use a really simple analogy about how they retain this power in the real world, would a male stripper ever feel afraid if he was confronted, alone, by a group of women? Would a female stripper ever feel afraid if she was confronted, alone, by a group of men?)

I don't think that every man who goes to a strip show is going to beat his partner – of course not – but these shows do not empower women and girls and negates the message that we hope to educate the next generation with: that women/girls are not simply sexualised objects.

It is this devaluing of women that is the hardest thing to turn around in our culture and I am really dismayed that at a time when we are working to turn this thinking around, that we still have this form of “entertainment” on offer in Warrnambool.

My thinking around this has taken time to develop and there are times when I am still not sure how I can best explain that in no way do I want to shame/patronise the women involved in stripping/topless barwork/private dancing, while at the same time hating the industry in which they work.

I had a conversation with an escort the other day about this very thing: she once ran a brothel. I asked her how she felt about strip clubs and she summarised my thoughts so much better than me.

She explained the difference between how it felt to be involved in a private, quiet, one-on-one business transaction between a sex worker and a client, and women stripping or shaking their breasts, or lap dancing in front of “the mob” (as she termed it).

I certainly don't come at this argument from a place of superiority – I am the last person to judge a woman on how she

chooses or has to make a living – but I am saddened, truly saddened, that at a time when our domestic violence rates are astronomical, women are still valued for their ability to strip for men.

Again, these are not my thoughts alone, but based on years of trying to make sense of it all by reading and thinking and talking to others.

One of the best pieces on “false empowerment” I have read recently was by the feminist writer Clementine Ford, you may enjoy it too: [here is the link](#).

I am sure you will have your own views on what I have written, and perhaps disagree with most of it, but I appreciate you asking and hopefully at least something I have written here helps to flesh out the connections.”

– Carol

**In full voice: the
irrepressible Lyn Eales**



The irrepressible Lyn Eales enjoying some down time in her 'girl shed' at the back of her Warrnambool home.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 35px; color: #8cc7d0;"] L
[/dropcap]yn **Eales** is a performer, a pacifist, an activist and an organiser; a leader, a doer, a mentor and a singer; a lover, a friend, a sister and a daughter; a mother, a grandmother and a mate – no wonder she is hard to pin down.

It takes days – no, weeks – for us to finally find a mutually agreeable time to sit and talk for a couple of hours, tucked away in Lyn's "girl shed" behind her Warrnambool home where she retreats at the end of the day to savour a glass of champagne, a cigarette and some down time.

It is raining, but the shed has a pot belly stove, some comfy chairs and is made cosy with feathers, ephemera and an eclectic array of artwork that mirror Lyn's gregarious personality. This is a woman who is not afraid to be seen, who is comfortable in her skin and who oozes that undefinable mix of qualities that add up to charisma.

"I am the daughter of publicans. People and music have always been a part of my life," Lyn says, and it explains so much.

Her parents, Val and Lya, ran the Hawkesdale Hotel for many years. Like so many country pubs, the place was a catch-all for those in need of a laugh, a drink, a listening ear, or maybe a bit of each.

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"There was always music in the dining room, always," Lyn says. "Something was always going on: people playing guitar, playing piano, dropping in and playing an impromptu concert."

The little Lyn couldn't wait to be part of it.

"I remember singing for the CWA ladies luncheon when I was about 12 or 13. I had plaits and wore a long, seersucker pinafore that I thought looked quite good," she recalls with a laugh.

"The song was '*Take Me Home, Country Roads*' and it must have been okay, because the women didn't complain."



In the zone: Lyn Eales performing on stage with drummer Jon Emery. Image supplied.

[dropcap style="font-size: 35px; color: #8cc7d0;"] L
[/dropcap]yn hasn't stopped singing since and even though she hasn't had a single lesson, her voice has found its own way from the peppy John Denver to the silky, sultry blues of Billie Holiday and beyond.

As Lyn describes it, there is singing that people *hear*, and then there is singing that people *feel*.

"As a singer, you are telling a story and you want people to not only hear that story, but to really *feel* it, to connect with you and the music and the words," she explains, her fingers splayed as if grasping for the right words.

"Summertime, and the livin' is easy....Fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high..."

You only need to hear Lyn sing the opening line of this Ella Fitzgerald classic to know she is a *feeler*. By the end of the

song, you are broken hearted and elevated all at once. That's how it works.



Flashback: Lyn, far right, sharing the stage with Wendy Goyen and John Hudson at the Royal Hotel, Warrnambool, in 1999. The Royal was one of many local pubs that once hosted live music. Image supplied.

[dropcap style="font-size: 35px; color: #8cc7d0;"] L
[/dropcap]yn is now part of Warrnambool's musical royalty: she has been around long enough to know everybody, to have played in bands with great local musicians who are still making great music – John Hudson, Richard Tankard, Barry Galbraith, Wendy Goyen, Gavin Franklin, Lee Morgan...the list goes on – and to inspire others to find their voices, figuratively and literally.

In the past that has involved teaching young people how to develop their music, from start to finish, through an Australian Music course offered at TAFE. This later incorporated a Koori music course – *Songlines* – with Richard Franklin and Wal Saunders, and gave Lyn an entree into the rich, local indigenous community which she still cherishes.

She also leads the Red Tent Singers, a local women's choir that welcomes all women regardless of experience or age, where

she signed up “to do six weeks”. That was 16 years ago, give or take a few breaks.

“Red Tents is about singing, but it is also so much more than that,” Lyn says.

“It is an incredibly nurturing, caring, grounding environment. To see women arrive with low self confidence and watch them blossom through this slightly whacky group is wonderful.”

Lyn works in a similar vein in her “day job” as a project coordinator with Brophy Family and Youth Services, where, in particular, her work to empower young LGBTI people has been transformative.



Lyn is choir leader for the Red Tent Singers, a women’s choir that formed in Warrnambool 16 years ago and has since encouraged dozens of women to find their voice. Here they are performing at St Brigid’s Fifteen Minutes of Fame. Image supplied.

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[/dropcap] am starting to see a thread here.

When it comes to standing up for the marginalised or minorities – women, LGBTI, kooris, refugees, asylum seekers – Lyn is the sort of person who will march, who will turn up to protests, who isn't afraid to stand at the front in full voice.

It is a strong sense of social justice that began in her parents' pub and has shaped her ever since.

"I can get tingles 10 times a day from doing the various things that I do, and that is my gauge.

"That tells me I am on the right track."



Lyn chilling out with the sunflowers that form part of her "very random but enjoyable" garden.

[box]Lyn is leading a vocal workshop by the Red Tent Singers at St Brigid's Crossley on Sunday April 30 from 10.30am to 1pm. All welcome and no experience necessary. Cost is \$15/\$10 and includes catering. Call 0407 917 774 for bookings and more details. [Find the event on Facebook here](#). Lyn also performs regularly at the Warrnambool Hotel: keep an eye out for dates

and times.[/box]

The boy who talked to teapots: Bill Abrahams



Bill Abrahams has taken a boyhood love of beautiful objects and turned it into a passion for op shops and collecting.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 35px; color: #8cc7d0;"] A [[/dropcap]sk **Bill Abrahams** how his obsession with op-shops, thrift shops and secondhand stuff began and he pulls out a memory from deep in his early childhood.

“It began with these little teapots. I was about three or four – very young – and my mother (Warrnambool artist **Marie Cook**) would buy them for me in the op shop. The op shop ladies

started to keep them aside for me, actually, because they weren't very exotic teapots, just those little metal ones," Bill recalls with a laugh.

"They became my friends, these teapots. I would hang out with them, talk to them, and my grandfather built me a little red wagon so I could take them for walks."

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The slightly eccentric little boy grew into a slightly eccentric young man who, during his senior high school years in Warrnambool, distinguished himself by wearing elegant costume jewellery – marquisette brooches, diamante-studded pins, that sort of thing – on his school jumper.

"I don't think the teachers knew what to do with me, to be honest," he laughs.

"It was clearly not part of the school uniform, but I think it was easier just to ignore it, or maybe they thought it was cool, I don't know."



Bill with one of his collection of vintage after-five gowns from the 1930s, 40s and 50s that were once worn by Melbourne society women.

Bill's avant-garde dress sense as a schoolboy in the 90s was more than just a push-back against authority, however, it was also a statement about his sexuality.

"I came out in high school and I was getting picked on anyway, so I thought, oh well, I might as well just wear what I like," he says.

It was the beginning of a melding between Bill's emerging identity as a gay man and his love of beautiful, secondhand objects, be it clothing, linen, jewellery, ceramics,

furniture, glassware or kitsch memorabilia.

“After I moved to Melbourne (to study art history) I worked in a gay-owned op-shop in Fitzroy that was simply amazing. On a Monday, all of the drag queens would bring in these amazing outfits that they had last worn at the weekend, looking for something new,” he says, smiling.

“But it was also an education for me. I would listen to the older guys – and they were all guys that worked there for some reason – talk about what it was like for them as young gay men, when AIDS was first around and about the whole gay scene around the commission flats.

“It was incredible to listen to those stories.”

Unfortunately the op-shop went broke after, as Bill tells it, spending “too much on polished concrete floors and chandeliers”.



A wedding cup from the 1800s where the man pledged sobriety and the woman, domesticity, apparently guaranteeing a union as “firm as an oak”.

Bill is now 33, back in Warrnambool and studying for a teaching degree, but he remains one of the best known faces around the top four op-shops: the Salvos thrift shop, St Vinnies, Lifeline and the RSPCA shop where he also volunteers.

“It is an obsession, no doubt about it. I get really upset if for some reason I can’t go, because you never know what might be coming out that day,” he says.

Bill is compelled to visit at least one op shop every day, even when on teaching rounds, during which he manages a brisk walk (he doesn’t drive) after school to the CBD, where he can often squeeze in an hour of browsing before they close for the day.

The workers all greet him by name and he, in turn, knows the routines of the op shops right down to when they put their fresh supplies of linen out on sale (sorry, I have to keep that a secret...).



Bill strikes a pose with one of the many beautiful glass pieces in his collection, this one being originally owned by his grandmother.

Bill credits his great aunt, **Betty Beavis**, and his grandmother for giving him a collector's heart and a stylist's eye: he knows the good stuff, like the cedar wood, Georgian-period chest of drawers that popped up at the Salvos for \$100. It is still his greatest find, in terms of value.

Some treasures he collects to sell for fun through his etsy store , providing funds to spend back in the op-shops, while other collectables, clothing and jewellery are just too good not to keep.

"I can't show you my bedroom, really I can't. It is embarrassing," Bill explains, before relenting and allowing me a quick peek.

Yep, it is "busy", but not overwhelming, and there are objects of great beauty and whimsy: a wedding cup from the 1800s, a stunning glass jug, designer dresses from the 1940s...

"I see it as recycling," Bill says.

"And anything we can do that helps reuse and recycle, well, that has to be a good thing."



Bill chose this as one of his favourite pieces of kitsch: a souvenir from Surfer's Paradise that is open to all sorts of interpretation.

[box]Bill recently sold a large range of his costume jewellery to Channel 7 for use in its period drama series, *A Place to Call Home*, starring Noni Hazelhurst. His op shop finds are now finding buyers from around the world. You can visit his etsy store, [The AsFoundEmporium, here](#). [/box]

Stroke of luck – surviving a killer



Last year, Lee Nicholson suffered a stroke at the age of just 47 and, through her recovery, has learnt so much more about an illness that is the second biggest killer of Australians.

By Lee Nicholson

[dropcap style="font-size: 35px; color: #8cc7d0;"] C
[/dropcap]lose your eyes for just a moment. Is everything
silent?

No?

Is that inner voice chattering away, not letting you get any
mental peace and quiet?

Maybe you quietly yearn for that internal voice to be
silenced?

Be careful what you wish for.

It was exactly this time a year ago that the internal chatter
stopped for me and everything went quiet ... and it nearly
killed me.

That mental silence, that inner voice shutting down, was just
one symptom of Australia's second biggest killer: strokes.

At just 47 years of age, I have suffered and survived a
stroke.

A clot had formed, probably in my heart, and travelled through
my arteries to my brain, got caught and starved my brain of
oxygen.

I went down so quickly that I didn't even have time to put my
hands out to break my fall as I made a coffee in my kitchen.

Life, as I had known it, changed in that split second.

For people who survive a stroke in the Warrnambool district
you are bound to come in contact with Pat Groot.

As South West Healthcare's stroke liaison clinical nurse
consultant, Groot is the expert who at some stage will help
you trawl through your near-death experience, help you make
some sense of what you have gone through and understand your
new 'normal'.

“People like to know ‘what could I have done that would have prevented this’,” Groot says.

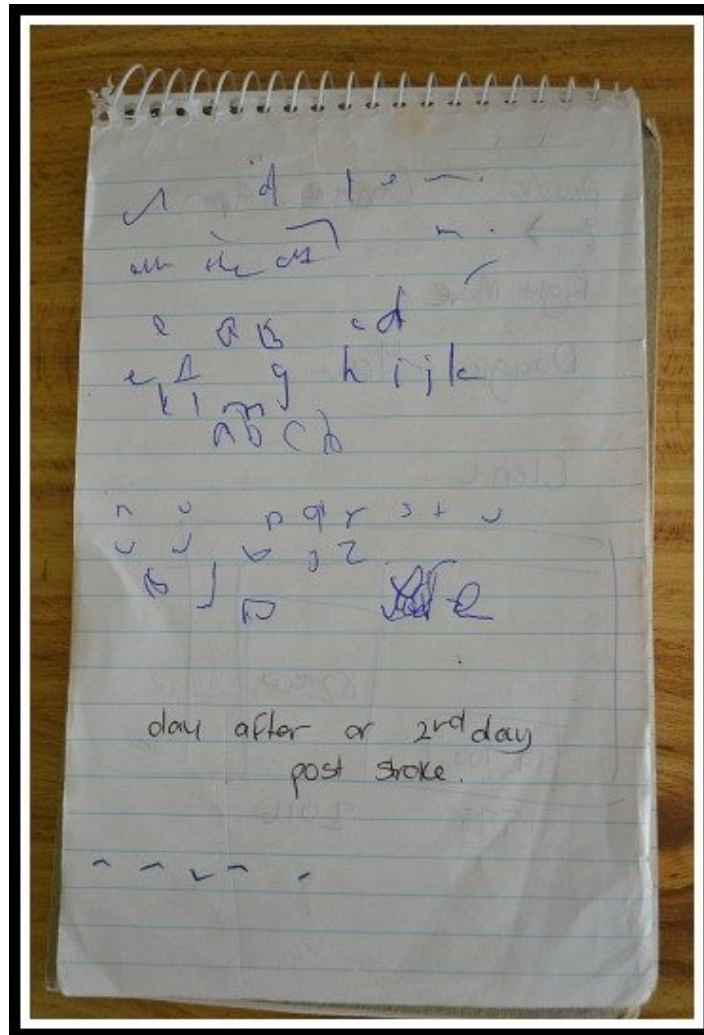
“There’s a lot of soul searching because people would have liked to have avoided stroke altogether, perhaps never become acquainted with it, but they’re here and sometimes they’re not really sure why.”

When I was felled by an embolic stroke, I just didn’t believe it: the thought that I was “having a stroke” was inconceivable.

I was violently ill. My right side couldn’t move and I couldn’t walk. I had to drag myself to my bed and lay there amid the agony of the very worst of headaches.

As crazy as it might sound, I took 24 hours to seek help because I didn’t have the ‘classic’ signs of stroke, in other words, my face hadn’t fallen.

The area the stroke took out affected the part of the brain that controls my balance, speech and writing – all of my fine motor skills – and, of course, decision making.



On first glance, this looks like pretty good shorthand, but it is Lee's attempt to write the alphabet the day after she suffered a stroke.

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was unable to work as a journalist and I had to resign from a job I was enjoying as a business editor in Adelaide. My life was now about trying to relearn all of the movements that I had taken for granted.

Walking, talking, balance, eating, typing, writing, drawing, driving. You name it, every action I did since I was born and was second nature, I had to learn to do again.

The fatigue. You have a stroke and it feels like someone has disconnected your batteries.

That two, three, four or five kilometres you used to be able to casually walk? Forget it.

You will be knackered just getting out of the armchair back to your bed to sleep for 20 hours.

Despite my delay in seeking treatment, I am one of the lucky ones and, fortunately, I have almost made a full recovery.

According to the latest figures from the Australian Stroke Foundation, stroke is the country's second biggest killer and a leading cause of disability.

The financial cost of stroke in Australia is estimated to be about \$5 billion each year.

Stroke kills more women than breast cancer and more men than prostate cancer.

"You see other conditions which seem to be, for want of a better word, sexier," Groot explains.

"Stroke continually fails to attract the attention of funders.

"We know if there was money directed at it we could reduce the instance of stroke by making people aware of the risk factors."

In 2015, funding for stroke research through the National Health and Medical Research Council represented just 4.1 per cent of the total investment in medical research.

The foundation predicts that this year there will be more than 55,000 new and recurrent strokes or 1000 strokes every week: that's one stroke every 10 minutes somewhere in Australia.

Around a third of all stroke survivors are of working age, or *under the age of 65*.

This year there will be more than 470,000 people living with the effects of stroke. This is predicted to increase to 709,000 by 2032.

After a stroke, 65 per cent of survivors have to live with a disability which prevents them carrying out daily living activities unassisted.

“The number of people who die within six months of a stroke is fairly high ... about 12 per cent,” Groot says.

He adds a stroke is a symptom of our 21st century lifestyle.

“The truth is we’ve become more sedentary, our diets have become worse, we perhaps drink too much and people who smoke are twice as high risk than those who don’t.”

Developed in the United Kingdom, the FAST test is an easy way to recognise and remember the signs of stroke.

FAST involves asking these simple questions:

- Face – Check their face. Has their mouth drooped?
- Arm – Can they lift both arms?
- Speech – Is their speech slurred? Do they understand you?
- Time – Time is critical. If you see any of these signs, call 000 straight away.

“When it comes down to it there is so much more we have to learn about stroke, more research that needs to be conducted for us to talk with authority,” Groot says.

Groot urges people who think that they might be having a stroke to act on the side of caution and seek medical help.

“If it turns out to be a stroke mimic, that’s not bad, that’s a good outcome. But if we’ve intervened in time ... that’s a good thing.

“You could be one of those statistics that could be affected due to stroke and not everyone makes a good recovery.”

For more information on the facts and figures, [click here](#).

[box]Victoria

Stroke Association of Victoria: (03) 9670 1117 local call 1300 434 233.

New South Wales

Stroke Recovery Association of NSW: (02) 9807 6422 local call 1300 650 594.

South Australia

Stroke SA Inc: (08) 8352 4644.

Call StrokeLine for free information and advice. 1800 STROKE (787 653)[/box]

Starting again...



[dropcap style="font-size: 35px; color: #8cc7d0;"] Most of you will remember **Bluestone Magazine**, a small start-up that brought an online, fully independent magazine to south-west Victoria in 2013.

By the time it closed in late 2016, Bluestone Magazine was making a name for itself as a place where you could enjoy a quality read about people within your community and also find out what was really going on, as we were not afraid to dig deeper into local issues.

Sticking your neck out in a small community is not an easy thing to do, but I think it is something that journalists and writers have to do if they are true to their profession, so I am sticking my neck out again. (You can find out [more about my background](#) here.)

This website is an experiment to see if south-west Victoria still wants an independent voice.

I have been lucky to harness some great writers to help me out, including experienced former Fairfax and Crikey journalist **Lee Nicholson** who will specialise in writing about the **local live music scene** (picking up where she left off more

than 20 years ago when she started a music column with the local newspaper).



Former Fairfax and Crikey.com journalist Lee Nicholson has recently returned to Warrnambool and will write about the local live music scene.

Local identity and passionate op-shopper **Bill Abrahams** will write an occasional, humorous column on the world of collecting, op-shops and the joys of finding that irresistible bargain.

I will also be bringing you stories about **people, politics** and **guest writers** who will air their spleen on all manner of topics. Yep, I like a bit of variety!

There will be no 'editions' as such, instead I will publish small batches of fresh stories as they are written.

If you would like to have the story links sent straight to your inbox, [join the mailing list here.](#)

I am not going to charge to read the stories, but if you want to make a donation you can do so here:

[Make a donation](#)

So here we go, starting again, stretching the arms, legs and

heart.

I hope you enjoy it.

Carol Attmann