In 1973, Julia applied to La Trobe University for entry under the 'Mature-aged Students' Scheme'.

'Write us an essay', the University advised. 'About your life. Tell us what education means to you'.

Julia bought a flagon of wine for company and wrote into the wee hours of two mornings.

I have never been educated yet I have been in schools, in desks, squeezed between the 'big girls' since I am amid sit up. Dad (or Sir as we called him in the classroom) strode the platform, teaching the entire school while keeping an eye on his plump red-headed daughter. This gave Mum a chance to cope with the baby. (One born every year for four years and three more to follow.) We followed 'Sir' from school to school: Rushworth, Balmattum, Bowhard, Elingamite North, back to Balmattum. All before I was eight. Times when the school and the 'school residence' were separated only by a wall, when promotion meant shifting, change, when good-byes were followed by moving vans packed to brimming with furniture, teac­hests, cardboard boxes, cots, mattresses, squashed bears and the worn-faced favourite doll, I called Connie. ('Short for Continuity', Dad used to joke.)

We children rarely grieved for what we were leaving. We were too excited by the prospect of change. Sure we howled — but only when we had to throw out broken toys, or when Dad wouldn't stop on those packed journeys for ice-cream or lollies, or when a brother or a sister spread limbs into your space, or farted, or sweated beside you in the increasingly crammed back-seats of the Essex, the Chevvy, the Morris, or finally, the F.J. Holden. We worried about change only when, spruced up and scared, we were taken to our 'new schools'.

The city for me, was a strange world of anger and violence. Our West Heidelberg Housing Commission home wasn't ready for us when we moved from the country and we were forced to live in Camp Pell, disused Nissen huts, discarded by the army after the war, homes for displaced persons. The first morning we set off from Camp Pell, in Royal Park, across Flemington Road to St Michael's — Mum with the four of us, the baby in the pusher — a group of jeering women linked arms and barred our path. Grim-faced and clutching at us, Mum paid them the two shillings they demanded to let us pass. Seeing St Michael's for the first time, I was privately ronvinced that city kids had sinned seriously and were being punished for it. Why else would they be dressed the same and crammed behind a tin fence so high it made it impossible to see the grass of the park, let alone play in its space?

I stayed at my next school, West Heidelberg State, for only one month. I was perfectly happy there until a dreadful thing happened. I was swinging across the monkey-bar-above a group of boys. I was halfway across when they began hooting with laughter and pointing up my dress. With my boot I hooked one of them under the chin before I dropped to the ground and fled the schoolyard. My underpants were old and grubby. And worse. They had a big rip in them.

Dad got a night job as a barman and sent my sister Susan and me to Our Lady's College,
Heidelberg. There life revolved around pressed pleats, finding gloves, and waiting for the world to end, as the mission priests promised it would. I outgrew my next school, Lavers Hill Consolidated, set in the mist of the Otways, and stayed at home to do my Sub-Intermediate by correspondence. Back in the city again, I passed my Intermediate at a private school in North Melbourne and the nuns sent for Dad and told him I was bright but wayward.

A seasoned eavesdropper, I listened while my parents spoke about my future.

Dad said, 'I want them all to be educated ... even the girls'.

Mum wasn't a dreamer.

'It's the boys who'll be breadwinners and there are four of them'.

'The girls should have something to fall back on'.

'Four boys to put through the Brothers, Bill. Imagine the cost'.

'She's not taking her studies seriously apparently'.

'Besides, she'll be married by the time she's twenty-one, and a mother shortly after, and it'll be wasted. All that money spent on education. Mothering is dedication, not education. You've told me that often enough'.

I could hear her beer glass thud on the green velvet card table.

'If we educate one of the girls Bill, we'll have to educate the others. All three of them...'

Dad was silent a long time, thinking about costs probably.

Mum would be waiting—watching him. 'Besides, you've said yourself, experience is the greatest educator'.

Through the tear-shaped keyhole I saw them kiss. A quick kiss, I remember thinking, with a sound like a full stop.

At fourteen I was employed by the Commonwealth Bank in Elizabeth Street. A teller's runner. Navy-blue skirts and white blouses. Every evening I ate a Violet Crumble bar on the Princes Bridge tram to Burwood. A whole purple papered Crumble to myself. Shared, it would be severed into seven with the big knife that cut the Sunday roast. Within a year I was bored. I knew, because I was plump and freckled, that no one would marry me. I saw myself at twenty, a long-legged spinster, still rushing along the raised, polished ledger platform checking bank-balances. Terrified, I studied three subjects towards my Leaving at Taylor's Night school, poured my soul out to a priest and was accepted into the Catholic Education Department.

'One more subject, Julia, and you could train with the state system'.

'One more subject is one more year', I told my father. 'I could be dead by then'.

At eighteen I stood before one hundred grade one children at Corpus Christi, Glenroy. No aisles except entrance and exit. Four books of the roll to fill in every day. School money to collect, four shillings per family per week. To pay for the teacher's wage. The concept of grouping so many children according to their abilities was, I decided, impossible. In order to survive, I grouped according to bowel habits. Weak bladders and troublesome bowels were placed against the only aisle and as close to the door as possible.

Teaching was as impossible as discipline. Except, I decided, through song. Song. When the chatter rose to the level of a din I could sometimes ward off chaos by whamming the blackboard ruler on the ledge, dancing the platform I polished of a Saturday, and launching them into song. Song after song after song. A day long song-and-dance act. Thumbkin and Rodolf and Twinkle and hymns, of course, hymns. But pub songs worked best in desperate situations, songs like 'Knees up Mother Brown' (with actions) 'Chattanooga Choo Choo', 'Blue Suede Shoes', 'Irene Goodnight', 'You are My Sunshine' and because it was my father's favourite 'Love's Old Sweet Song'.

And Mother? Was she right? To within a year. At twenty-two I was 'in love', pregnant and married (in that order) and still travelling with a man, this time my husband, from drilling
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site to drilling site, including a remote town in Tasmania, until with three small children we settled here, in suburban Greensborough.

Outside a wind is blowing, Julia wrote in her diary.
'Inside — where I am — nothing is moving, shifting, changing'.

The pile of mail is beside the flagon of riesling and the bag of groceries on the white laminex bench. The letter on the top is from La Trobe University. Marked confidential.

There is nothing personal about the letter. Hundreds of them with names in their windows wait in letter-boxes, on tables, pillows, or benches, wait. Julia thinks, to open like doors to change, or to slam shut — in a hard wind — to continuity.

Before she opens her letter, Julia will unpack the groceries, clear some space for thinking. Moisture has shaped a weeping pattern down the frosted glass of the flagon and the Women's Weekly on which it sits is rimmed damp. Beneath the wine the Queen's smile is quivering. Perhaps the Queen, like God, already knows the outcome. Julia, looking for a better omen, settles on the wind. 'Change and continuity, that's what the wind represents', she thinks. Julia pours a wine from the flagon. A toast to change.

The only person Julia knows who has attended a university is her cousin, Richard McArthur. University education was never considered an option by Julia's family, nor by the families of anyone Julia knew. Universities were for other people. The wealthy and the brilliant. The Duffys were neither. The McArthurs however, had money and one only had to look at Richard's pale prince-like features to know he was brilliant.

The house, this day, is unusually quiet. Julia's husband Kevin, has taken the children to the creek to catch yabbies. They will return soon covered in mud, swinging their plastic bucket and squealing with excitement about the amber claws groping desperately above the murky water. Julia will rail — again — about changing any creature's environment when the result can only be destruction. Certain destruction. Change is fine, Julia will argue, as long as there is no risk to health or happiness. No risk at all.

'Education changes people, Jule', Kevin said last night.
'Look at Bill Darcy. He was an ordinary, friendly kind of fellow before he went to that engineering school. Look at him now! A bloody snob!'

Julia agreed. Bill was unbearable.

'But I'm too old to change', Julia reassured. 'Too set in my ways'. She laughed. 'Can you imagine your wine-drinking, ex-pub singer wife becoming an intellectual snob?'

They both laughed.

In bed Kevin held her and said, 'Maybe I won't be good enough for you when you are educated, Jule'.

Julia kissed him passionately. 'Experience', she quoted to him, 'is the greatest educator'.

Like Julia, Kevin had left school when he was fourteen. He'd spent the next ten years on drilling rigs in Australia's outback. When Julia first met him he was full of whisky and draped over a bar. He proposed that same night. Walking home from Julia's house he had to take off his thongs. To get a better grip, not on life, he'd said, but on the bloody bridge.

Julia opens the letter. It is a rejection. Computerised. When Kevin comes home with the children Julia is tipsy.

'There's no need for you to worry', Julia tells him. 'I won't be crossing a bridge. I'll be staying on this road. With you'.

Kevin is sympathetic. The children have flooded the bathroom floor. Julia has let the potatoes burn. The humidity has got to the wine.

'We didn't get any yabbies', the children tell her.
'You weren't meant to', Julia says. 'Today is a stay put day. For everyone. Look! Even the stars are in their place'.

Kevin hadn't realized that it meant so much to her.

'God has done the dirty on me', Julia told him.

Kevin sifts through the mail. Most are bills.

'Maybe it's for the best', he says. 'We need your wage. At least for a while'.

Julia has opened a different letter. She passes him the rejection slip.

This one is for a children's book about pegs. Two pegs. Percival and Penelope. Born to a specific task. While Percival, the 'man of the house' gripped heavy navy overalls, even blankets, with enthusiasm and a sense of purpose, Penelope continually loses lighter items to the wind through dreaming. Julia led her wayward peg through many exciting adventures, Penelope the Princess, the Pirate, the Prime Ministress...until she had Penelope realise the inevitable. Her place is with Percival, as a peg. As in all the books for children that Julia writes, (the ones that keep coming back from publishing houses) the moral is explicit, and the ending always happy.

Penelope accepts her role in life and lives joyously ever after. As Julia will. As Julia will have to.

Kevin passes her two letters. The first is from the Catholic Education Department offering her a position as principal of a Catholic school. The second is from La Trobe University. Asking her to ignore the computerised letter. She has been selected in the second round of offers. Selected under the 'Mature-age Students' Scheme'. 'I won't take it up'. Julia reassures Kevin. 'I'll end up like the yabbies. Struggling desperately to survive in an environment that isn't meant for me'.

La Trobe University was once a sacred site for ancient winds. Undisturbed for centuries, in their landscape of flat brush between Heidelberg and Preston, winds bred winds, mature winds mastered the art of seeding, spreading, cycloning while younger winds with hilarious abandon curled and lurched and lashed.

Then man invaded in the name of education. Outraged, the winds dedicated themselves to the annihilation of all breathing and non-breathing invaders. Day in, day out, they rushed, chillingly angry, through the grey spaces, squares, columns and corridors left for them between the encroaching buildings; they hurlved gravel into the sky, pushed skirts into buttocks, sent papers flying and brought stinging tears to the eyes.

Of those who battled with the wind, most were young, most wore jeans and tatty shirts and boasted wild unkempt hair. They carried canvas bags of books, looked as poor as possible and spent great spaces of time stirring sugar into coffee in the cafeterias or floating paper planes through lecture theatres.

Julia wore pleated skirts and orange lipstick.

'I feel the freak!' she told Kevin, 'Yet one of them in the Greensborough complex would turn a hundred heads'.

In tutorials Julia said nothing while the young ones voiced their opinions confidently. Unashamedly they called their tutors by their first names. Other mature-aged students like Julia had read almost everything ever written. Julia hunched silent and despairing over her note book and wrote at feverpitch, not only every word the tutor said, but every word everyone said and every book anyone mentioned. Six pages she wrote per tutorial barely readable, to be deciphered later in private. And the list of books she'd never heard of, yet determined to read, grew despairingly longer. She prepared for her tutorials with meticulous care, reading, re-reading and reading again. Ideas, links, comparisons, came to her now and then, but never did she dare to voice them for fear others would discover what Julia had come to know with certainty; that she'd got into this place through some shocking bureaucratic error.
She wrote an essay on John Donne's poem, 'The Apparition'. She laboured over her sentences, her discoveries. Every word of over six letters she checked and re-checked in her dictionary. She handed her paper in on time in a manila folder. Mr Clancy smiled and said, 'I'll be very interested to at least read your opinions'. His words had a double meaning but Julia wasn't sure what it was. She dreaded the day the essay would be returned. Sure enough, on the day, Mr Clancy asked if she would stay back to discuss the essay after the tutorial. The others suspected what Julia knew instantly — that she'd failed. Mr Clancy said he thought her essay was very competent indeed but he couldn't — for the life of him — see any reference to the Blessed Trinity. And more importantly, would she please, please, call him Laurie.

'I will, since he's asked', Julia told Kevin.

'What mark did you get?' Kevin asked. Julia grinned. Kevin snatched the folder. 'An A-Jule'. The kids started screaming, 'Mummy got a aay. Mummy got a aaaaay!' Julia jumped with the lot of them over the chairs, over the furniture, around the room. 'Your mother is brilliant', she told the children. She looked in the mirror to see it was her. She told Kevin, 'With what I'm learning about poetry and novels and plays, the one thing I know for sure is that I'll never make a writer'. She wished the flagon wasn't empty. She could go on for hours. 'The tragedies and the passions of their lives, Kevin' she said as she donned her bri-nylon nightdress. 'I could never do it. The way they put the images together to make the whole. Each a perfect ingredient. Every image an enhancement of the one before'.

Kevin buried his head in The Sun. 'You're changing, Jule. You should hear yourself. The way you carry on these days'.

'A wind never dies', Julia tells her children, 'it is perennial until the season calls it up or it is disturbed by unnatural forces'.

'Mum talks weird now she goes to the Bersity'. Julia's children said. 'She surely does', Kevin complained. With the wind in her soul Julia raged in Philosophy tutorials.

'Imagine!' Julia told Kevin. 'We're to prove whether or not God exists!' Once, in primary school Julia had asked a nun, 'Since we can't see Him, or hear Him, how can we know for sure?' The nun took Julia aside and promised to pray for her. If a holy person prayed for you when a relative wasn't dying or drifting from the path of Faith, then obviously the devil had wormed his way into your soul without your knowing. Julia spent a year in a state of repentance, praying for God's Grace and preparing her soul for death. She waited for the Blessed Virgin to appear and direct her. And appear the Virgin did. To both Julia and her sister Susan. Kneeling before their luminous vision, they confessed, each hearing the other, their sins. For two days they were both too hysterical to attend school. The Virgin had warned that the world was full of sinners and the most serious of all sins was, of course, disbelief. Susan wouldn't stop praying for Julia's soul. Julia said if Susan didn't stop she'd tell Dad the things she'd been doing with boys.

'You're going to end up a prostitute!' Julia warned. Susan tried to pull Julia's hair out. 'Kissing's nothing compared to drinking sacristy wine', Susan screamed. 'It becomes Christ's blood, that wine, Julia and you've been vomiting it down the girl's toilets'.

In her entire life Julia had never met, let alone spoken to, an Atheist. 'The University is full of them', she told Kevin. 'They admit it openly'. Julia consulted a parish priest. 'Be careful', he warned. 'Faith is the most delicate of all relationships. It must be nurtured, protected'.

Julia felt sorry for the Atheists. They have nothing to fall back on, she said. 'Nothing to comfort them. This life, for them, is all there is. Imagine. No reward for a 'good life', no explanation for pain and suffering'.

For thirty years Julia had believed that the existence of God could be proved. It was merely a matter of coming to terms with the various arguments for His existence and presenting them rationally and intellectually. She found the tutorial discussion on this topic disturbing yet stimulating. Afterwards, however, she prayed for these people.
They're so sure they're right', she told Kevin. 'They believe everything they've been taught. Unquestioningly.' Fifteen attempts at an essay, a disappointing 'D' and Julia was devastated. She had written that God existed because she believed he did. But her faith was taking a beating. She'd tried desperately to justify cyclones and fires as the work of a loving God. Explain sickness and pain. She was horrified to discover the atrocities committed by the Catholic Church in the French Revolution. There could be no denying it, the church was a political power, a corrupt political power, dedicated to maintaining the gap between the rich and the poor, far removed from what Christ and St Peter had intended it to be. And Julia had been an instrument of this same institution. And worse, she had taught its values, its beliefs to hundreds and hundreds of children. Julia was angry. She'd been hoodwinked and cheated and indoctrinated. Her world was shattering before her eyes. The war in Vietnam was a travesty, father figure Menzies was a fraud. The Liberal party was dedicated to incentive before equality. Socialists weren't Communists.

Communists weren't evil. Communist policies had merit. A capitalist society was a consumer society. She was a consumer, a Bourgeoise, a capitalist. A suburban middle-class woman with suburban middle-class values. There was no hope for her. Change was impossible.

In coffee shops and in the Agora, Julia argued with strangers about God, about politics, and about morality. 'Why not', she told Kevin, 'they don't consider such topics bad manners'.

'There's nothing like a good philosophical debate', Julia would tell her dinner party guests. And afterwards she would say to Kevin, 'They're so complacent. They never think, or doubt, or question'.

Kevin said he found her approach aggressive. 'Why shouldn't they be shocked?' Julia would reply. 'They're like I was, cloistered, brain-washed'.

She instigated many an emotive argument with family and friends, saw many a wine glass stem crack in anger, many a tablecloth stain red with outrage.

'You rave on and on', Kevin said. 'People are either bored or furious. At this rate we'll have very few friends left'.

'No one ever taught me to think. No one'.

'Now you want everyone to think the way you do'.

'That can't be', Julia replied, 'because I don't know what I think'.

There were times, though, when Julia's head ached with thinking, when all she wanted to do was return to the old safe path. Given the chance again, she would take a different, safer turn-off. Keep well away from cyclones and tidal waves of air.

Julia was at the clothes-line when her mother called to visit. The two women stood in the wind, the wet washing flapping into their faces. In silence they filled a rotary clothes line to brimming.

'It's too much for you Julia. Trying to run a family and studying at the same time. A job I can understand. If it has to be'.

'I write my essays at night, Mum. I try to see no one is neglected. I'll admit it's much harder in third year. And now with the baby'.

'How does Kevin feel about all this?'

'He helps me, when he can. Gives me support'.

Julia's mother is silent. The word neglect hangs between them and the wind can't shift it.

'I was talking to Mary Delaney yesterday Jule and she tells me that you don't see your old friends so much..'

'Don't start Mum'.

'She says you vote for the Labor Party and that Kevin feels left out of your life. It's embarrassing having everyone praying for you'.

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‘God Bless them.’

‘These new friends, Julia, they’re not communists are they?’

‘I’ve got to shop yet Mum and go to ‘parent-teacher’ interviews. And then there’s dinner’. Julia’s mother smiles.

‘We’ll cook chops for dinner, shall we? Kevin’s favourite?’

‘Why not’. Julia grins. ‘But Kevin will be late home tonight’.

‘Oh!’ Julia’s mother hides her ‘knowing look’ in the clothes basket.

‘He’s going out drinking with our new friends. From the University’.

‘You mean he...?’

‘Yes’, Julia is laughing. ‘And they like him too’.

Early in 1975 Julia wrote an entry in her diary. She called it, My Fellow-students;

‘We are a mixture of ages and maturity and our backgrounds are so diverse that the chances of our knowing, let alone liking each other, outside of the university experience would be remote. But like each other we do. Learn from each other we do. Enjoy each other’s company. Certainly. We drink, we debate, we dance and we dine. And what’s more we sing. And we sing. And the more we sing the more singers we collect along the way’.

Professor Derick Marsh had a grey-blue room. He was tired and it was the end of a long day, when Julia and three other students, Tony James, Murray Gemmell and Margaret Strefford, visited him with wine, cheese, biscuits and a plea. ‘A room of our own?’ Tony had trained for years to be a Jesuit priest. He had a great sense of fun and a natural charm. He spoke persuasively about the need for a place for discussion and debate. He mentioned the four empty rooms along the lower corridor. ‘Such a waste’, he said. Murray poured the wine and said they were representing the majority of third year honours students. Julia had been in love with Derick since his lectures on Macbeth and John Donne’s love poetry. She was content to watch, listen, and leave the talking to Tony and the others.

Derick had produced another bottle of wine by the time Professor John Salmond (then the Dean) joined them. Dr Lucy Frost whose passion for Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own was well known, called in and was invited to stay.

‘A delegation’, Derick told them, laughing. Within an hour his room was crowded with staff members and students. Derick spoke about his life, the pain of being an exile from South Africa, his place of birth. John Salmond about his experiences as a meat worker and his love of fifties Rock and Roll. Lucy, of her childhood in Texas as a daughter of a Presbyterian Minister. Murray told the story of why the PMG sacked him. Margaret (or Streff as she was called), one of her wild travel adventures that had everyone hooting. Tony, his cause stated, sat back, served the biscuits and cheese and beamed. Julia could no longer remain silent. Full of wine, the winds of change and sentiment, she sang a love song for Derick.

‘There is a ship and it sails the sea.
It’s laden deep as deep can be.
But not as deep as the love I’m in...
I know not ere... I’ll sink or swim...’

We’ll have a ‘room warming’ and ask you all’, she said as she left.

Driving home she said to Kevin, ‘They’re people just like us really, Underneath it all’.

Kevin gave her one of his are-you-never-going-to-grow-up looks. Julia tried to explain.

‘It’s the same thing as never contemplating a nun weeing, Kevin’, she said.

How the refrigerator got into The Room late at night is a story that cannot be told. Not without involving a boom-gate man, a secretary, two night guards, and the blind eye of tutors conducting late night tutorials on the ground floor. As posters, ornaments, glasses, plates,
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cutlery, books, and radio moved in, so the initial rule of silence moved out. There was a library for silence and Julia and her friends needed to talk about their lives, enthuse over books not on the syllabus, debate the books that were, listen to poems still warm from last night's page, argue about politics, morality and religion.

On the night they warmed the room they opened a Pandora's box of song. As a group they had previously been to the Ivanhoe Coffee Lounge where Adrian Colette, a fellow-student, was employed as a folk singer. For the night of the room warming they persuaded him to bring his guitar and he led them in song after song. Anne Bellew (not The Baillieu, darling!) told the first of many tales of her astonishing life. (Julia's favourite was 'The groped-after-governess-on-outback-cattle-station-escape-impossible-tale'). She also performed a rendition of a Chinese Opera accompanying herself with spoon on bottle, her voice harmonizing hilariously with the chime. Did they sing duet that night? Anne B and Jean Dawson? Was that the night Bruce Williams sang 'My Old Dutch'? Nati Sangiau a Spanish ditty? Streff, 'Sweet Bonny Boat'? Did Julia and Kevin perform their party number 'Patrick McGuinty's Goat'? Julia isn't sure. The afternoons and evenings of that amazing year have merged in her memory into times of wine and song.

Julia's fourth child, Timothy, was born while she was a student at the University. The doctor who delivered him was drunk and when he needed to stitch her, had to borrow a nursing-sister's glasses. Julia had taught four of his sons.

'How about a song', he slurred, passing her the baby.

'After all it's a joyous occasion'.

One night, after Kevin had picked their precious 'last child' up from the University creche, Julia was nowhere to be seen. She could be heard though, singing 'Blue Suede Shoes' with John Salmond. Kevin traced the sound to John's office in the History Department where yet another great party was underway. Kevin stayed and joined in the singing. Everyone remembers the highlight of that evening. John Salmond, clunking his large knees together, singing 'Heartbreak Hotel'. Before they left that evening, Kevin invited everyone to a party at their Greensborough home. It was to be the first of many.

There wasn't a week of Julia's life that she wasn't in love again. Professor Marsh. Lucy Frost. John Donne. 'I wonder by my troth what thou and I did till we loved...'.

And of course, Gough Whitlam.

Professor A.D. Hope was to visit the University. Julia and her friends were excited. In their room, they read and re-read his poems. The Professor was to read in the English Department, visit the Music Department, dine with staff members. 'And we students. How do we get to meet him?' Julia and her friends asked. They approached Derick again, this time for permission to have the poet to themselves for a meal. Derick wavered, mumbling about their reputation for long lunches. In the end he compromised. Jerry and Ray, two fourth year students, would join the third year group for lunch and make sure that the professor was returned on time.

They hired a back room at their favourite hotel, 'The Rose, Shamrock and Thistle'. They ate, drank, talked, in the great man's company. And then the inevitable. Someone started singing. Duets. Solos. Sad, lyrical ballads. The Professor joined in the choruses. They bought another round and drank it quickly because time had run out on them. But so, it seemed, had the Professor. The men checked the toilet. Maybe he'd had too much to drink. Maybe he was ill. He wasn't exactly young anymore. They should have been more thoughtful, more responsible. The search was about to start in earnest when the Professor walked through the doors of the bar. Behind him was a waitress carrying a tray of drinks, jugs of beer, carafes of wine. And then he sang solo for them. A plaintive song, it was about a baby sliding down a plug hole.
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Not only was he late back to the English Department, he missed his flight to Canberra and had to stay the night with Derick, in Melbourne. Julia and her friends said, we loved him for his spontaneity and because he wanted to be with us. Derick said he’d never trust them again. They were, he said, all of them, mature-aged adolescents.

Lucy Frost introduced Julia to feminism and Julia adopted it with passion. Lucy also introduced Julia to magazines such as Meanjin, Overland, Westerly and to living writers. Julia felt as if landscapes were opening up before her, as if she were travelling.

It was in the purple-chaired lounge of the Bundoora Pub that Julia and some other Mature-Aged Adolescents (reduced now to MAA’s) lunched with Dorothy Hewett and her husband Merve. Julia can’t remember ever asking so many questions. About Dorothy’s life. About her writing. About mothering and writing. About starting to write late in life, about finding time to write.

‘Dorothy Hewett has given me hope’, Julia’s diaries read. ‘As soon as I finish this degree, I’m going to write in earnest’. And singing? Was there singing? Of course. That day Merve sang hillbillies.

Julia managed to get herself a minor part in a play called The Waltz of the Toradores. She played Mme Dupont-Fredaine. The director, Bob Tuttleby, tried desperately to tone down Julia’s seductive hip-swing action. ‘It’s not a bloody pub performance’, he would say. On opening night, Professor John Salmond and Professor Peter Tomory were in the audience. For moral support. Julia’s performance was a disaster. John only stopped laughing about it when he reached the car-park. His car had been stolen and with it the manuscript he had been working on for three years. In the weeks that followed, bits of the manuscript were found by police in lane ways in the inner city.

It was Bruce Williams, a lecturer in the English Department, who decided to do something about the singing. Channel the talents, he said. And so it was formed. La Trobe University’s Old Sweet Song; LUV’S Old Sweet Song. Adrian Collette sang baritone, Jean Dawson sang solos with grace and richness. The duet Jean sang with Anne B was wondrous. Tessa Jones sang comedy, Bruce Williams gave a moving rendition of ‘My Old Dutch’. Julia sang with her past in her bones, her new learning in her soul. Her kids knew every verse of ‘Daisy, Daisy’, ‘Hold your Hand out you Naughty Boy’ and the one Julia sang with a feather in her hat, ‘Down at the Old Bull and Bush’. As a group they harmonised ‘Love’s Old Sweet Song’, the audiences joining them in the songs their grandparents had loved.

Julia was heady about the change of Government. There was hope, hope for Australia, for humanity. She would laugh and say how astonishing it was that her own time of change had coincided with the Australian people’s decision that it was time for change. She sat her last exam, English Lit 3 B in November 1975 and drove to the hotel to meet her friends for drinks. The place looked like a funeral parlor. Faces had the pallor of smoke and the silence was thick and grey. Surely the exam hadn’t been that bad. The question on King Lear had been a gift. Its theme, betrayal. ‘What’s wrong?’ They were staring at her. ‘You haven’t heard?’ Julia was close to screaming. Someone said the words. Quietly. ‘Whitlam has been sacked’. It was too ridiculous. Julia laughed with relief. ‘You had me fooled all of you, she said. ‘For a moment...’ Eyes met and shifted before Julia’s mind and body numbed too, into the shared silence.

‘Education’, Julia decided, ‘is the wind of change and the wind of change brings disillusionment’.

Long after she had graduated, Julia was asked to write an essay about her experiences as a mature aged student. She wasn’t sure how to go about this. It had been ten years since then. Much had changed. She had changed. She and Kevin had separated. Her education and her writing had reared their heads like snakes in the affidavit Kevin had served on her. She was
forty-six. With an Honours Degree. Her family had grown up, well almost, and her first book of fiction was about to be published. She had no job, no religion, no intention of ever marrying again, no superannuation fund to secure her old age.

'It will be difficult', Julia told the editor. 'For the me of now to write about the me of then'.

'In a word what did your experience at University mean to you'.

'Change'. Julia answered and then she grinned. 'Change and song'.