



**AUSTRALIAN  
ASSOCIATION  
OF FORMER  
INTERNATIONAL  
CIVIL SERVANTS  
(AAFICS)**



**VOL. XXXIII, No. II**

**NEWSLETTER**

**DECEMBER 2021**

*AAFICS represents retired officials from the United Nations and its agencies and funds. Former officials of other international organizations are also welcome to become members. We offer a link to UN retirees through occasional social events, as well as contacts for information and advice about retirement in Australia. We are affiliated to FAFICS in Geneva, the Federation of 63 Associations similar to ours and an essential source of advice on pension-related issues and on after-service-health insurance schemes. This newsletter has been prepared and circulated on a voluntary basis by the AAFICS membership.*



Have you heard the new abbreviation *HOGO*? It comes from the UK and refers to the effect of the stress and worry we feel about the COVID restrictions that now rule our lives. Should I go out to a restaurant? How about the cinema? Do I have to wear a mask? And socially distance? What if someone at the next table is a virus 'close contact'? Will I have to go into quarantine? Oh dear, forget it. Why bother? I'll stay at home, cook a meal and watch the TV

instead. *HOGO...the Hassle Of Going Out*. Come what may, as we enter the festive season, maybe it's time to get out and about with masks and take the other designated precautions as we celebrate this wonderful time of the year. Christmas is so special, especially for children.

In this end-of-year edition of the AAFICS Newsletter, we have an erudite article on the COVID-19 situation, along with many non-virus stories about Christmas, travel in exotic lands, two book reviews and our usual contributions from the AAFICS President and State Coordinators. Thank you to all members for their Newsletter input during 2021. Have a wonderful festive season and a super New Year.

Oh, and enjoy the Ashes Tests along the way! **Editor**



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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT: JENNIFER ASHTON

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A happy Christmas and New Year to all. I hope that this year you will be able to be with family and friends for the festivities, for many of us the first time in two years.

I am very honoured to have become a FAFICS vice president, elected at the annual FAFICS Council meeting in July this year, except for.....yes, the tyrannies of distance, or more specifically, time zones, that have come back to haunt us Australians. With international travel very difficult, the teleconference or Zoom meeting is the norm. The problems of setting up a Zoom meeting between representatives in the US, Latin America, Europe, Asia and Australia is that meetings usually occur at midnight our time. I've talked to UN staff currently telecommuting from Australia because of COVID, who have the same problem. We all agree that a midnight meeting, which can last until 3am, knocks you back for the rest of the week, and our contributions are less than stellar. Most of the FAFICS meetings have concerned the amendment of our rules of procedure and developing succession plans; hardly the most riveting of midnight topics, but a strong effort to modernise a very traditional organisation.



The Pension Fund continues to go from strength to strength. From market assets of US\$60 billion in 2018, the fund is currently valued at \$87 billion. Our pensions are once again (or as usual) secure. The sustainability credentials of the Fund are ever improving. It is worth checking the details on the UNJSPF website, but suffice to say, the Pension Fund is located within the UN and abides by the sustainable development goals (SDGs) it has established. As the banks and superannuation funds in Australia are roundly chastised by parliamentarians



for failure to invest in coal, it is heartening that our very own pension fund combines sound investment decisions with social outcomes.

I was also heartened by the efforts that UNJSPF has made to get pensions to our colleagues in Afghanistan, after the banks collapsed and even Western Union did not function. There are a couple of cryptic communications on their website, which promise that they have found another route to make payments. What it is, I do not know, but I am heartened that the money will get through to those who are desperate for it.

The main questions I have received from members concern the digital Certificate of Entitlement. Many of these questions have been raised in frustration at the failures of technology in trying to set this up. Firstly, please let me make it very clear that the Pension Fund will continue to use the paper CE, and it was mailed out in June with a follow-up in October for those who had not (successfully) submitted their CE by then. The Pension Fund understands that many of us do not have the most advanced smart phone or tech know-how, so may not be keen on adapting the digital CE. If you are interested however, glitches are being ironed out and I have been working with the techies in UNJSPF as we come across pension beneficiaries who are failing in their quest to get the facial recognition CE set-up. If you want to go this route and are having problems, please let me know, so that we can sort it out together. UNJSPF has been very helpful with this.

Last December, I wrote that I hoped 2021 would be better than 2020, the first COVID year. I'm not sure whether I should jinx 2022 with any such wishes....but with an optimistic streak, I have booked tickets for some of the extraordinary cultural events at the Adelaide Festival, in the hope that the future will be brighter.

**Jennifer Ashton, AAFICS President**

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COOOEE!

REPORTS FROM BRANCHES

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QUEENSLAND

Once again, your Queensland correspondent has tried the patience of our tireless editor. Let's hope AAFICS readers will be equally patient with this just-in-time piece from the rainy Sunshine Coast.

Our Spring lunch was held at Maleny in September with 16 attendees. This is slightly fewer than usual due to a variety of health issues, including a nasty dog-bite, and property sales and renovations – just about sums up 2021, doesn't it?



It was a chilly day when the log fire was more appreciated than the misty views over the Glasshouse Mountains. It was also a sad day as our hosts for the past 15 years or so, Barbara and Klaus, had sold their business and were about to move on to greener pastures.

Given that a large part of the recurring attraction of Maleny was the warm, personal welcome we always received, it's probably time to look elsewhere next year. A quick look today at the restaurant's web site, which still features their Easter 2021 menu, underpins this sentiment!

We were pleased to welcome John Clements as a newcomer to our Queensland lunch. John will be well-known to friends in Victoria and moved

north at the beginning of 2021. Sadly, John lost his lovely wife, Vivien, in September. In recent weeks I have also learned of the deaths of Bill Edeson (ex-FAO) and Gary Taylor (ex-DPKO). All three will be greatly missed.



*A snifter and a chat before lunch.  
(All photos M.Hadlow.)*

Looking at the remarks I made at the lunch I see that I had just read the Pension Fund CEO's Annual Letter which had arrived a few days before. I shared the gripping news that the UN Pension Fund has a "new strategy featuring three pillars" (some things don't change in UN-speak) namely:

- Simplifying the client experience;
- Modernizing pension services;
- Developing a strong partnership network.

At the lunch I mentioned that the second item apparently included work on "business transformation including value stream mapping". Being a simple sort of fellow, I had no idea what this meant and offered a bottle of wine to anyone who could help me understand it. So far, none of the lunch attendees have taken up my offer. I am therefore opening up the challenge Australia-wide!





*Mike outlines his bottle of wine challenge to an incredulous audience.*

I did go on to report that the financial situation of the Pension Fund looked pretty good. The most recent (December 2019) actuarial valuations of the Fund showed that it was in the best financial position since 1999, with assets exceeding accrued benefits by 7%. Short of some major catastrophe, I don't think any of us need have concerns for the payment of UN pensions in our lifetime.



*Zwiebelrostbraten, Bayrischer Wurstsalat or Bauernschmaus: easy to say, but difficult to choose.*

On that happy note I'll sign off, wishing all of you Season's greetings and a happy and healthy 2022.

**Mike Sackett, Queensland State Coordinator**



*For the last time, restaurant owner Barbara handles the steins for AAFICS members.*

*[Editor's note: As Mike mentioned, Barbara and Klaus Lutze have operated the King Ludwigs Bavarian Restaurant and Bavarian Beer Bar for some 30 years. They met when both worked in the Bavarian Pavilion at Expo 88 in Brisbane, married, started a restaurant and later relocated to Maleny on the Sunshine Coast. The Queensland UN group has been using the restaurant as its venue for annual lunches for at least 15 years. Now, Barbara and Klaus have retired and are off around Australia in their camper/trailer. We wish them a happy and healthy time ahead.]*

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## **WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

No physical gatherings of AAFICS members took place in WA in 2021. However, regular communications with members were carried out by email and telephone.

Sadly, we learned of the demise on 10 February 2020 of Maurice (Bill) Lang who had been, until some years ago, a joyful presence in our reunions as shown in our very first AAFICS WA luncheon in 2010 (see photo). Bill had moved to an aged care facility in the last several years but continued to indulge in his passion for painting.

Bill's sister Judith Pearson contributed this account about Bill: *Maurice Lang (commonly known as Bill) was born in Fremantle in 1930. He attended Hale School and was fortunate to have a fine art teacher. Acclaimed Western Australian artist Robert Juniper and Bill were classmates and they remained friends for life. Aged 22, Bill went to Paris and studied at the Sorbonne. He was a prolific painter and exhibited in Paris and the Provence. Bill met and married Joyce who worked with UNESCO in Paris. They had 2 sons who have sadly passed. Bill and Joyce had a long association with the UN even after returning to Australia in 2004. Bill outlived Joyce and died peacefully on 10 February 2020. He is sadly missed by his siblings in Australia.*





*Front l-r: Monina S. Magallanes, Bill Lang, Irene Taylor;  
Back l-r: Bill Kean, Jim Taylor, Brian Moir (12 March 2010)*

This year saw the move of Siva and Luckshmi Sunderam (see photo) to a new aged care residential facility. They have been welcome regulars at our reunions in the past. My husband Bill and I visited them recently. They are adjusting to their new home and Siva continues to keep up with developing news around the world through the Internet.



With the help of her daughter Angela, Sheila d'Silva successfully completed the digitization of her Certificate of Entitlement. According to Angela, it was challenging and an eye-opener into the intricacies of working with the UN. The members in WA who embarked on the process of digitizing their Certificates of Entitlement have now all completed them.



*Sheila d'Silva and her daughter Angela (2021)*



**WA's safe transition date locked in**  
 In line with a 90% double dose vaccination rate of Western Australians aged 12 and over

**FEBRUARY 5**

From 5 February 2022, domestic and international border controls will be safely eased, and public health measures will be put in place to help manage COVID-19 in the WA community.

**80% Vaccination requirement for at-risk WA regions**  
 Enhanced public health measures will be introduced for at-risk regions with a double dose vaccination rate lower than 80%.

**Travel requirements**

Domestic travel:	International travel:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PCR testing pre-departure and on arrival, dependent on length of travel</li> <li>Must be double dose vaccinated with a G2G Pass</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PCR testing pre-departure and on arrival</li> <li>No quarantine for double dose vaccinated arrivals</li> <li>14 days quarantine at an approved facility for unvaccinated travellers</li> </ul>

*Interim testing requirements, subject to review*

**Proof of vaccination requirements**

16 years and over:	12 years and over:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large events (1,000+)</li> <li>Four stadiums (Darus, RAC Arena, HBF Stadium Man-Area, HBF Park)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crown complex and nightclubs</li> <li>Quarantine-free international travel into WA</li> <li>Domestic travel into WA</li> </ul>

**Public health and social measures**

- Mask wearing in high-risk indoor settings, hospitals, airports, public transport, taxis and ride share
- Contact registration at all public venues, taxis and ride share
- Revised COVID and Event Safety Plans and checklist
- Restricted entry to remote Aboriginal communities, where necessary

Public health and safety measures may be stepped up based on ongoing health advice and hospitalisations.

Protect your family, your friends and your community – get vaccinated, including your third dose when eligible.

More information can be found at [www.wa.gov.au](http://www.wa.gov.au)

WA Premier Mark McGowan announced that the reopening of WA's borders to interstate and international arrivals is now slated for 5 February 2022. This provides WA a target deadline to achieve 90% double dose vaccination by that date. It also gives time for parents to vaccinate their 5 to 11-year old children before classes resume in January 2022. There has been a slow uptake on vaccinations with many attributing it to complacency because of WA's strict border controls and relative success in managing community transmission. With the imminent reopening of WA's borders, there is anxiety in the community, especially among the aged group, that WA will emulate other states in rising numbers of infections. On the other hand, it means that there is some certainty for separated families to be reunited and residents stranded overseas to

finally return home to WA.

## Monina S. Magallanes, Western Australia State Coordinator

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### AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

The Canberra Yacht Club was the venue for the December gathering of AAFICS members in the ACT. Seventeen arrived to dine and there were twelve regrets.

As usual, excellent food and service were enjoyed, and members welcomed the opportunity to meet ex-UN staff like themselves and chat about times past and present. COVID-19 was, of course, a key topic of conversation and included, surprisingly, discussion on how to deal with anti-vaxxers in your own family.

When it came to settling the bill, we found there was a rather immediate problem or two. First, the ATM was broken and would not dispense cash. The Club was very accommodating and agreed to accept individual credit cards as well as cash and we were directed to the bar to make the payments. However, the bar credit machine was also malfunctioning.

In the end, Bob Pember who had (been?) volunteered and had then worried that when he counted both cash and cards we were some significant sum short (which would have landed on my Amex card), eventually came back to report that even with a good tip for the staff he was \$100 in the black. That surplus will go towards a non-Christmas lunch at a later date.

In November, a small group of AAFICS members who are keen gardeners had come to my house for lunch and then an 'open garden' to inspect the plants that had managed to hold their own in the face of a weed attack, the weeds having enjoyed the recent rains as much as the plants. Of course, the conversation ranged far and wide and we all enjoyed the company.



During the Christmas lunch, we shared this experience with our colleagues and several suggested that it would be good to have more regular get-togethers, one Christmas lunch not being enough. So, I have volunteered to host a lunch at the end of January or early February and will see how it goes. Ah, perhaps a good occasion for Bob's \$100 surplus!





*Photos by friendly Canberra Yacht Club waiting staff.*

**Lorraine Corner, ACT Coordinator**

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

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**William “Bill” Ross Edeson**

**26 November 1942-12 October 2021**

Our dear friend and colleague William “Bill” Edeson passed away on 12 October 2021 after a long illness, bravely borne.

From 1988 to 2003 he was based at the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Legal Office in Rome where, as Senior Legal Officer, he advised governments on fisheries law, specifically how to implement international standards into their own national systems. He was extensively involved, among other things, in the preparation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the International Plan of Action on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing as well as the development of the FAO Port State Measures Agreement.

His work at FAO led him to visit many countries including South Africa, Namibia, Vietnam, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Liberia, Ghana, and The Gambia, as well as many regional fisheries bodies including the Subregional Commission for Fisheries based in Dakar, the Bay of Bengal Programme, OECS, CARICOM, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.

From 2010 to 2012, following his retirement from FAO, Bill became Legal Advisor to the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and, for more than a decade thereafter, remained on as a legal consultant in which capacity he provided legal advice and support to the 17 members of the FFA on a wide variety of fisheries-related matters including discharging their responsibilities under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, IUU fishing regulations, and flag State duties.

Prior to becoming an international civil servant, Bill began his law career in the heady realms of academia, including Monash University, Melbourne (1969-1970), University of Wales (UWIST), Cardiff (1970-1973), University of Birmingham, UK (1973-1975) and the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra (1975-1988), where he taught a large range of subjects including Public International Law, Law of the Sea and Constitutional Law. On his return to Australia following his retirement from FAO, Bill made a return to academia by accepting the position of Professor at the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS) at the University of Wollongong, NSW.

While on leave from the ANU, he advised the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) on treaty law issues and the Law of the Sea.





On a more personal level, my husband, Don Greig, first met Bill in the course of his three and a half years teaching at the then newly established Monash University Law School. Don was greatly impressed by Bill's warm personality and they became firm friends. Hence when Don accepted the first Chair of Law at UWIST as part of the Cardiff Joint Law School, he arranged for Bill to be appointed a lectureship there. Much later Don was instrumental in organising for Bill to join him as a colleague at the ANU Law School. Bill's career went from strength to strength.

I met Bill in 1977, soon after immigrating to Australia from South Africa, at one of the Public International Law weekends at the ANU arranged by Don, who was then Dean of the Law School—I was then on the staff of Melbourne University Law School.

I owe Bill a huge debt of gratitude for his assistance in helping me prepare for my interview at the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department's Office of International Law. He had just published a lengthy article on the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea which had recently entered into force, on the strength which I learned enough to convince the interviewing panel to offer me the post.

We communicated regularly after I joined the London-based International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 1998 as Director, Legal Affairs and External Relations Division, as our fields of interest frequently coincided. I looked forward to his telephone calls which invariably began with “hello Rosalie, Bill here”. I was also fortunate to enjoy his generous hospitality and that of his wife Lyn at their apartments in Rome and in the picturesque village of Anguillara set in the hills outside Rome.

Bill was a bubbly, cheery personality who lived life to the full. Modest and unassuming, he was always ready to extend a helping hand and advice to all who asked. He loved the travel and the people he met through his travels, on many continents, generated by his work at FAO. He enjoyed fine food and wine, and, as I recall, he had a particular penchant for Italian coffee (and croissants).

While he published many serious articles on a variety of legal subjects, he also revelled in writing lighter pieces, including an article on whether the acronym “UNCLOS” could be applied to the 1982 international convention of the same name (my view—his view was that the acronym “LOSC” should preferably be used when referring to the treaty) or whether the acronym “UNCLOS” should be reserved for use when referring to the many international conferences of the same name which led to the adoption of the international convention (his ((probably more accurate)) view).

Bill is survived by his wife Lyn, his three children Sian, Juliet and Gregor, and their respective partners and children. Our love and deep sympathy goes out to them for their loss.

Rest in peace dear friend. You will be much missed.

**Rosalie Balkin, formerly IMO**

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## THOUGHTS ON THE VACCINATION DEBATE

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As one who has worked in both Clinical Medicine and Public Health, I am appalled by the extent to which people in responsible positions are actively discouraging vaccination, spreading unverified and false information about vaccination and avoiding any discussion of the relative risks of being vaccinated or not being vaccinated (for example, politicians, elected officials representing whole communities, their electorates, who are withdrawing support for the government over vaccine mandates).

I find that three things are missing from the overall discussion.

### **1. The difference between a 'clinical approach' and a 'public health approach':**

- In a clinical approach, clinicians are concerned with the health of an individual, while public health professionals are concerned with the population as a whole, with the health of the people in a community.
- 'Public health' promotes and protects the health of the people and communities where they live and work, while nurses, doctors and other health practitioners treat sick people as individuals.
- A 'clinical approach' has a primary focus on the individual, on disease diagnosis, treatment and care for the individual patient and is characterised by a personal service ethic with social responsibilities.
- A 'public health' approach has a primary focus on populations and is an extension of the concern for the individual which emphasises disease prevention and health promotion for a whole community. It is characterised by a public service ethic.
- Public health deals with wellness from the perspective of populations, not individuals.
- Clinical health deals with the wellbeing of individuals as they work with their doctors, nurses, dentists, physiotherapists and other Health Workers.

### **2. Not using "freedom" as a reason for opposing vaccination and vaccination mandates:**

- Presenting not being Covid-19 vaccinated as a freedom issue, without any acknowledgement of responsibilities one might have to the community within which one lives, and without any discussion of the opportunities vaccination provides for us as individuals to contribute to the greater good, to public safety and community health.
- In this discussion, the "right to remain unvaccinated" is presented as a human rights issue, without any acknowledgement of the right to health, or the recognition of the numerous rules, requirements and restrictions that enable us a degree of safety and security within our communities (just some examples include rules against driving under the influence of alcohol, speed limits, requirements for licenses to drive or to fly an aircraft, licenses to practice, rules to ensure that builders build safe buildings, rules that define some antisocial behaviours as crimes that can be punished, a criminal justice system which apprehends and detains offenders; and so many more).

### **3. Consideration of "Relative risk":**

- Often those for/in favour of Covid-19 vaccination simply counter the false information being promoted by those against/discouraging Covid-19 vaccination, without any discussion or acknowledgement of the relative risk, or comparative risk, of remaining unvaccinated.

- I see little or no discussion of the risk of the consequences of vaccination compared with the risks encountered by those who remain unvaccinated.
- I see little or no discussion of the risks we undertake daily, often greater risks, as we drive our cars, as we play our sport, as we take prescribed drugs, many of which have side effects, side effects that can lead to hospitalisation, risks that we accept.

If such things were included in the narrative, there might be more balance in the discussions, and better outcomes for the majority.

My 'back story' on immunisation includes my experience in Nepal as the head of the WHO Country Office in the mid-1990s.



A Neonatal tetanus immunisation campaign was funded by tennis star Martina Hingis and I



took her on a memorable field visit to immunisation sites. I also played a significant part in prompting a new Minister of Health in 1996 to embark on the National Immunisation Days, with every child under 5 receiving oral Polio Vaccine, a move that led to Nepal becoming free of polio and being declared 'polio free' in 2014. I am proud to have been part of that achievement,

which was part of a unique collaboration between Rotary International, WHO and its Member States. WHO supported the programme and I actively participated in the initial two rounds.



Previously, in Nepal, I had been aware of huge advances in the health of children, as indicated by improvements in under-5 Mortality rates, which could be attributed to improved childhood vaccination. Later research shows that in the 20 years from 2000, an estimated 36 million lives have been saved through childhood vaccination in low and middle-income countries.



All photos by Leslie Pigott

More recently, the debate of whether to be vaccinated or not and the airing of conspiracy theories associated with Covid-19 has made me much more aware of the hundreds of scientists who have spent years working on an mRNA vaccine, not to mention the thousands of Health Workers who have cared for those who have become seriously ill from the Covid-19 virus, particularly those front-line workers in ICUs, many of whom are now pleading with members of the public to get vaccinated, as they now see serious illness from Covid-19 mostly in unvaccinated people, or the thousands of public health personnel who are guiding authorities in countries all over the world in their response to a Covid-19 pandemic. I would like also to honour the huge number of our colleagues who have died from the Covid-19 virus, mostly caught from the patients they were treating, most of whom might have still been alive had vaccines been available and had they been vaccinated. I see figures in November 2021 that estimate at least 180,000 health care workers have died from Covid-19 since the beginning of 2020.

### **Bill Pigott, formerly WHO**

*[Editor's note: Thank you for this thoughtful article, Bill, which again highlights the importance of valuing and following the advice of medical experts. Bill, you have achieved important outcomes in your WHO career. As an aside, Bill advises that the Landrover in the photo was his personal vehicle and he brought it back to Australia after his UN service. The vehicle lasted another 25 years (until last year) and had more than 500,000 kms on the clock.]*

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## A COVID CHRISTMAS

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'Twas the night before Christmas, but Covid was here,  
So we all had to stay extra cautious this year.  
Our masks were all hung by the chimney with care  
In case Santa forgot his and needed a spare.  
With Covid, we couldn't leave cookies or cake  
So we left Santa hand-sanitizer to take.

The children were sleeping, the brave little tots  
The ones over 5 had just had their first shots,  
And mom in her kerchief and me in my cap  
Had just settled in for a long winter's nap.  
But we tossed and we turned all night in our beds  
As visions of variants danced in our heads.

Gamma and Delta and now Omicron  
These Covid mutations that go on and on  
I thought to myself, "If this doesn't get better,  
I'll soon be familiar with every Greek letter".

Then just as I started to drift off and doze  
A clatter of noise from the front lawn arose.  
I leapt from my bed and ran straight down the stair  
I opened the door, and an old gent stood there.

His N 95 made him look pretty weird  
But I knew who he was by his red suit and beard.  
I kept six feet away but blurted out quick  
"What are you doing here, jolly Saint Nick?"

Then I said, "Where's your presents, your reindeer and sleigh?  
Don't you know that tomorrow will be Christmas Day?".  
And Santa stood there looking sad in the snow  
As he started to tell me a long tale of woe.

He said he'd been stuck at the North Pole alone  
All his white-collar elves had been working from home,  
And most of the others said "Santa, don't hire us!  
We can live off the CERB now, thanks to the virus".

Those left in the toyshop had little to do.  
With supply chain disruptions, they could make nothing new.  
And as for the reindeer, they'd all gone away,  
None of them left to pull on his sleigh.

He said Dasher and Dancer were in quarantine,  
Prancer and Vixen refused the vaccine,  
Comet and Cupid were in ICU,  
So were Donner and Blitzen, they may not pull through.

And Rudolph's career can't be resurrected.



With his shiny red nose, they all think he's infected.  
Even with his old sleigh, Santa couldn't go far,  
Every border to cross needs a new PCR.

Santa sighed as he told me how nice it would be  
If children could once again sit on his knee.  
He couldn't care less if they're naughty or nice  
But they'd have to show proof that they'd had their shot twice.

But then the old twinkle returned to his eyes.  
And he said that he'd brought me a Christmas surprise.  
When I unwrapped the box and opened it wide,  
Starlight and rainbows streamed out from inside.

Some letters whirled round and flew up to the sky  
And they spelled out a word that was 40 feet high.  
There first was an H, then an O, then a P,  
Then I saw it spelled HOPE when it added the E.

"Christmas magic" said Santa as he smiled through his beard.  
Then suddenly all of the reindeer appeared.  
He jumped into his sleigh and he waved me good-bye,  
Then he soared o'er the rooftops and into the sky.

I heard him exclaim as he drove out of sight,  
"Get your vaccines my friends, Merry Christmas, good-night".  
Then I went back to bed and a sweet Christmas dream  
Of a world when we'd finished with Covid-19.

Joseph David

*[Editor's note: Thank you to Margaret O'Callaghan for alerting us to this amusing and touching poem.]*

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www.glasbergen.com



"I was texting while driving my sleigh.  
Your toys are in a ditch outside  
of South Bend, Indiana."

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## BOOK REVIEW

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### **REFLECTIONS ON A UNITED NATIONS CAREER: AN INSIDER'S ACCOUNT**

**Ian Howie (author)**

**Springer (2021)**

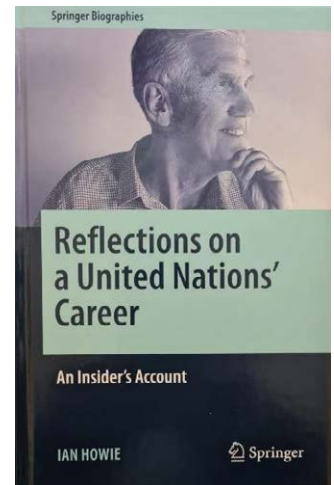
**262 pages**

It is interesting for all of us to think back on how we started our UN careers. For many, I suspect, like myself, it came as a logical next step in a complex career path, where we were looking to make use of what we had learned through past experiences, to somehow contribute to what we perceived as a 'greater good', while engaging in an interesting ongoing career path. For Ian Howie, this engagement and desire to contribute to international development seems to have germinated at a very early age. From an initial secondary school exchange to Texas in the USA (which happened to coincide with the assassination of President Kennedy), this led, seemingly inexorably, to a distinguished and highly productive total career in and around the UN System covering several decades supporting humanitarian work, especially in population management, largely through the International Labour Organization (ILO) with funding from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

As he says himself at various times, the author always took voluminous notes wherever he was, in whatever situation. This was important for his work but has also now enabled him to provide an account of his environment, work, successes, failures and life in general in incredible detail. I know that with suitable prompting we can all remember many details of our past lives, but the detail, the personal vignettes, the descriptions of people, organizations and places in this book are truly impressive. And with this detail, he has been able to paint for us a picture of a life of endeavour and achievement under enormous challenges, of which he and all of us can be justifiably proud. Of course, the organization we all love and hate in equal measure, the UN System, does not escape unscathed. The closed shop mentality of central bureaucracies, the lack of support for new employees, especially from headquarters for field staff, the often self-serving nature of many senior staff, the politics involved in appointments and assessments, these are aspects of the system we have all had to deal with in various ways. But in the end, as he acknowledges, the vast majority of UN staff truly believe in what they are doing and the goals they are looking towards and do their best, in their own ways, to achieve these.

It is worth noting here that all the chapters of the book, at some stage early on, contain potted histories of the countries in question. While the basics are little more than we could all glean from sources like Wikipedia, these are particularly valuable in being presented in the light of the author's own experiences and unique perspective. For me that proved valuable in putting what followed into context.

Talk about being thrown in at the deep end! With very little background knowledge or experience, and even more limited briefing by ILO in Bangkok and Geneva, the author found himself with a precarious consultancy in a rural village in Bangladesh, some 70 km from Dacca. Tellingly, however, this difficult start was surely the catalyst to future success. With no prior knowledge and prejudices, he was forced to adopt a real hands-on adaptive approach, through talking to the villagers and rural people, especially the women, who were most in need of support and training in the basic health and family planning issues. This facilitated the aid programmes as well as national government agencies and programmes to be moulded towards the desired outcomes. Obviously, there were many barriers to overcome, including cultural and social mores and religious strictures, and at the end of the postings there always





remained doubts as to the long-term success and sustainability of what had been done. But on my reading, this first, very challenging posting, laid the groundwork for future success. And the short lesson is there for anyone dealing with people's welfare (which I hope that we all took onboard in our careers): go talk to the people impacted first, and implement policies and programmes informed by this.

From Bangladesh, on to a series of postings with different levels and types of difficulties: Sri Lanka, fortuitously between the major internal conflicts there and relatively well-organised, where some of the lessons learned and tactics developed in Bangladesh could be applied; to east (Kenya) and west (Ghana) Africa, both with functioning bureaucracies in the aftermath of British colonial rule, but with totally different challenges in different social, cultural, traditional and ethnic environments; and to the very particular environment of China, with North Korea as an almost intractable side issue! Fortunately, along the way was the securing of a regular UN System position (with promotion), and big improvement in personal security from the precarious contractor role. Dealing with the bureaucracies in implementing UN programmes in tightly controlled countries like China and North Korea clearly presents a challenge, an almost impossible one in the Hermit Kingdom of DPRK.

After China, the move to New York to take up the position of Head of Human Resources in UNFPA presented quite a different challenge – from the account given, another hardship post, but in a somewhat different way: highly politicised, where the Executive Director controlled staff appointments and staff management; a top-heavy bureaucracy in both age and seniority; only positive staff assessments. Some attempt was made at reform, which foundered, so it was clearly a relief to end this after 7 years and get back into the field. An interesting sidelight of these years was coping with the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and the Twin Towers. This is not mentioned in this chapter but in the introductory chapter and was clearly almost as traumatic for the UN and its staff as it was for the United States.

Fortunately, Vietnam provided a much easier and more organized work environment than previous postings. While many of the problems were similar, it was clearly a pleasure to work with competent and willing counterparts. This posting was notable for the initiation of the One UN Movement, at least at country level, with one plan and one budget for Vietnam among the myriad of agencies and programmes involved there. This seems to have worked at country level, but not so much system-wide. However, evidence of some ongoing success did appear in Rwanda some years later.

After Vietnam, retirement back to Australia and the familiar feeling of loss and separation from what, in the end, we had all loved doing, and a sense of “what now?”. Fortunately for the author, “what now” appeared in the form of another limited contract to Rwanda, yet another challenge of a different nature, some 15 years after the genocide. Under the despotic, though in many ways enlightened rule of President Kagame, the country had stabilised and was rebuilding and returning to some form of, at least superficial, normalcy. And here was another pilot to implement the ‘delivering as one’ UN initiative. Of course, despite the best intentions of the UN System, it is ultimately the government of each country that decides what does and does not get implemented. However, the author clearly ends this posting, and finally his UN career, on an upbeat note, with pleasure in the life led, pride in the successes, and hope for the future.

One thing that struck me throughout the book was the inevitable interweaving of personal and professional life. Of course, this happens to all of us, where the needs of the family may take second place to the exigencies of the working environment. However, this was obviously pushed to the limit for the author and his family, having to relocate frequently and deal with the myriad challenges posed by life in very unfamiliar and stressful environments in hardship postings, from finding accommodation, to children's schooling, to basic security, to employment for the spouse – often legally forbidden. Yet, as he stresses, it's very important for the family to be there with the UN Official, for the welfare of everyone. And then of course

there are many upsides to these new worlds for everyone. It would be interesting if, one day, we could hear the story of these postings from the other side of the dinner table.

I must conclude on a negative note. It is difficult to gauge the intended audience of the book. It's of obvious interest to insiders like ourselves, to provide a vivid picture of another part of the UN System and at the same time reinforcing our own perceptions of the less than perfect aspects of the System and how it operates in the developing world. However, the lack of any photographs at all (and heaven knows we all took myriads of them), the very densely written text, with insufficient segmentation, the enormous alphabet soup of acronyms, and the masses of footnotes, would make it almost impossible to read and fully appreciate for a more general audience. On the other hand, it would make a good text and information source for undergraduate and even graduate students of the UN System. In fact, I'll likely use it as a source book for a class I'm planning on the UN System for my U3A. I must admit that I gave up looking at the footnotes very early, in order to concentrate on the text. Finally, and sadly, it appears to have been very poorly edited and proof-read, containing numerous typographical, syntactical, spelling, and grammatical errors.

However, despite this, I did find it an interesting read, a real insight into the work and life of one of us who spent his time on the front-line of supporting and improving the lives of those much less fortunate than ourselves. And all this despite the vagaries and obstacles placed by the System that we all love and despair of in equal measure – not to mention the various Governments! As the author says at the end, despite the difficulties and faults of the UN System, we were all working together for what we believe – “trying to make a difference”.

**Peter Dexter, formerly WMO**

*[Editor's note: Peter kindly pointed out Ian Howie's book to us and we invited him to write the review. Peter purchased the book at his own expense and presented us with this fine report. Sincere thanks, Peter.]*



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## REMEMBERING AFGHANISTAN

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In a year of global political turmoil, the on-going pandemic and a number of natural disasters, several other major events stand out. COP-29 in Glasgow, wars in Yemen, Ethiopia and Syria, potential crises in Ukraine and Taiwan, and even civil insurrection in our own neighbourhood, namely Solomon Islands.

However, for those of us who served with the UN in Afghanistan, the catastrophic news and images from Kabul in August probably caused us the most pain and concern. In a matter of weeks, the Taliban insurgency overwhelmed the entire country and, as one newspaper succinctly put it, 'a 20-year mission collapsed in a single day'.

Who can ever forget the images of complete chaos at the international airport in Kabul as thousands of Afghans sought to flee the country as the Taliban began taking control of the Presidential Palace and Government offices. The video of young men falling from the undercarriage of airborne US military C-17 aircraft as they lifted off carrying hundreds of civilians filled us all with horror.

Then there are the personal stories. After almost three years as UNESCO Country Director, one has so many memories of courageous and optimistic Afghan colleagues and friends. In late 2001, Afghanistan was exhausted after years of Soviet domination, civil war between powerful warlords and their factions, and a decade of Taliban rule. From then until 2021, the nation began to come back to life. Certainly, many rural and isolated areas carried on much as before in terms of traditional lifestyles, with health and education not reaching all. However, Kabul and other major centres were the beneficiaries of a more benign security environment afforded by the military forces of NATO and its allies, including Australia's ADF commitment. Businesses grew, banks and telecommunication services became mainstream, universities and colleges were re-established, the mass media developed, and women found a voice in politics.



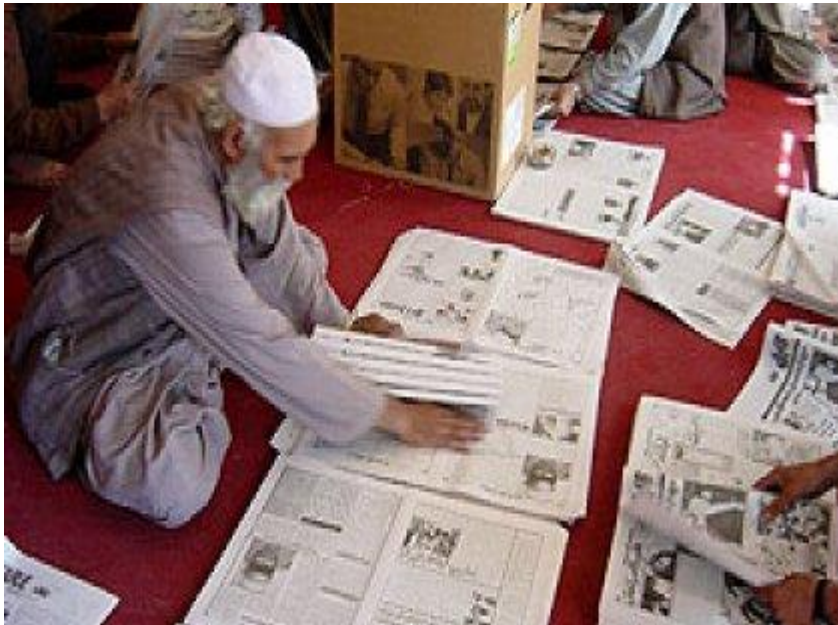
*Women and girls of Bamiyan gain literacy skills.*



What now? How will the people of Afghanistan survive in this new era, especially those who embraced modernity such as the Internet, mobile phones, e-banking and similar information and technological tools, not to mention basic human rights like educational opportunities, health care and freedom of expression? And will the National Museum again be ransacked and the nation's historical cultural artefacts looted or destroyed, as they were in the past?

How will journalism and an independent press fare in a climate of control and repression? Will girls and women teachers be allowed to return to schools and tertiary institutions? Have 20 years of efforts by Afghans in collaboration with international partners, such as the UN, World Bank, ADB, bi-lateral donors and NGOs, been in vain?

For me, the whole tragedy is personalised by the fate of someone I knew as a friend and colleague, Fahim Dashty, Editor of the *Kabul Weekly*, the first of the free press newspapers back on the streets in January 2002. Fahim had been badly injured before 9/11 when he was reporting on the 'Lion of the Panjshir', Ahmad Shah Massoud, in the Northern Alliance area. Massoud was assassinated by two Al-Qaeda operatives posing as journalists. They detonated a bomb inside their TV camera at a press conference, killing Massoud and badly wounding Dashty. After medical care in Europe, he returned to Afghanistan and established, with



UNESCO and AINA support, the *Kabul Weekly*.

Later, Fahim became an active and leading free press advocate and head of the Afghanistan National Journalists Union. He was known internationally for his commitment and I worked closely with him in Kabul for the entire time I was based there.

*The Kabul Weekly being collated by hand. (Photos by M.Hadlow)*

Just prior to the Taliban takeover in August, he returned to the Panjshir Valley as spokesperson for the National Resistance Front. In early September, reports reached us that he was killed in fighting as insurgents moved into the Northern Alliance stronghold. Apparently, his final message to the outside world was 'If we die, history will write about us as people who stood for their country till the end of the line'. Vale Fahim Dashty.

When Allied forces arrived in Afghanistan in 2001, there was a common saying that 'NATO has a clock, the Taliban has the time'.

That seems to have proved to be true...for now, anyway.

**Martin Hadlow, formerly UNESCO**

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## ARCHIBALD PRIZE 100 YEARS OLD: PORTRAIT OR CARICATURE?

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*The Archibald Prize is an art award for portraiture and is generally considered the most prestigious of its kind in the country. It was first awarded in 1921 after the receipt of a bequest from J.F. Archibald, the editor of The Bulletin who died in 1919. The Prize is awarded for: 'the best portrait painted by an artist resident in Australia during the 12 months' preceding the date fixed by the Trustees for entering the painting for the Prize and submitting it for evaluation. Preference is given for the choice of sitter – someone of stature who has distinguished him/herself in the world of Art, Letters, Science or Politics.*

*The centenary Prize for 2021 and the \$100,000 award has gone to Peter Wegner for his portrait of the artist Guy Warren - celebrating his 100 years. Wegner is six years a finalist for the Archibald Prize and one time a winner.*

### Prestigious winners all

The Prize/competition is administrated by the Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales; they set the date for submission of the paintings, evaluate the finalists and choose the annual winner. A financial award complements the prestige of winning. For the inaugural award this was £400; since 2015 the annual award has been \$100,000.



A couple of associated prizes have been added to the Archibald Prize during the past 30 years, the 'People's Choice Award' and the 'Packing Room Prize'. As the respective names suggest, the first is based upon a public viewing of the finalists; and the second, and perhaps more critical evaluation, comes from those 'on the shop floor' - people within the industry responsible for handling, packing, hanging and generally caring for the portraits displayed. The latter is based on all the original submissions

(and not limited to the finalists).

From professional art critics to the man in the street; it seems that everyone has an opinion of the Archibald. Over the years the Archibald has attracted much controversy, including legal battles and debate focused on definitions of painting and portraiture. In 1921, contemporary art depicted the era/times of the nation - conservative, white, mainly staid middle-aged men sitting in uniforms or suits having their portrait painted. As time and attitudes have changed, however, the Prize has become open to new interpretation - the different poses and sitters have become more varied, the paintings sometimes contain messages and have effectively introduced a new era in national portraiture.

In the 100 years of the competition, only 10 women have been awarded the Archibald Prize. Nora Heyson was the first in 1938. In 2020, the first Indigenous painter Vincent Namatjira was recognized with the award of the Prize. Both awards, however, were not without the controversy of their respective times. Nora Heyson reflected her time in what was a society largely dominated by men – with their expectations of artistic merit that the female artist could not be expected to match that of her male contemporaries. And Vincent Namatjira's portrait contained himself and the Indigenous footballer Adam Goodes (and three other figures – one

of whom was holding an Aboriginal Flag). Painted mainly in the colours of the flag, the title of the painting 'Stand Strong Who You Are' contained clear messages of intent.



### Pushing the boundaries

Which neatly links into the main critique of the Prize – should the portrait remain a photo-like picture of the man/woman sitting behind the easel or, equally, the sitter as seen by the licensed interpretation of the Artist behind the brush/paintwork - such that the image may become a caricature of reality. Such, for example, was the controversy of the 1953 awardee William Dargie and his Prize-winning portrait that one protester tied a sign around the neck of her dog which said: 'Winner Archibald Prize'. This, notwithstanding, Dargie went on to win the prize again three years later.

There was more controversy when William Dobell won the prize with a stylized, exaggerated portrait of fellow artist Joshua Smith. It was alleged that the painting was distorted and in caricature form and therefore it was *not* a portrait. Similarly, in 2012 the Archibald Prize for portraiture depicted a *headless* man which, by definition, could not be eligible ... leastways, for a majority of the 'men/women-in-the-street' who take pleasure when following progress, innovation and development in competitions of this kind.



The centenary Prize for 2021 and the \$100,000 award has gone to Peter Wegner for his portrait of the artist Guy Warren celebrating his age at 100 years - the juxtaposition of the Prize and the sitter. The portrait is one of a series that Wegner has underway painting centenarians across the country - with his personal target of capturing 100 people on canvas.



Contemporary reporting has Wegner on record as reflecting the thoughts of many of those who have sat for him – this thing about time moving quickly, and particularly as you grow older. It also reflects in the many different stories that are told between artist and sitter, stories that relate back to those earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century times - that, in effect, reflect the last living memories of people from those times. Herein are the stories of survival through times of economic hardship, wars, the rudimentary medical care of the period and, not least, that personal reality that the sitter has lived *all* those years.



#### Photographs

1. Artist Nora Heyson (1911-2003) was awarded the Archibald Prize in 1938 for her portrait of Madame Elink Schuurman, the wife of the Dutch Consul General to Australia. Heyson was the first woman to be appointed as an official war artist during WW2. She was stationed at Port Finschhafen, New Guinea. (Courtesy: [smh.com.au](http://smh.com.au)).
2. Artist Vincent Namatjira and his award-winning portrait for the Archibald Prize in 2020. Many of his portraits resemble caricature; others claim a level of sophistication that distinguishes the artist/colourist in the images. His portrait of Captain James Cook was purchased by the British Museum. (Courtesy: [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com)).
3. Guy Warren the artist in real life in front of his portrait – Peter Wegner Centenary Archibald Prize winner. One hundred years old in April this year, Warren was an Archibald Prize winner in 1985. He had earlier served in the Australian armed forces in New Guinea 1941-46; a period that has consistently influenced his work. (Courtesy: [smh.com.au](http://smh.com.au)).
4. Archibald Prize winning self-portrait of the artist Tim Storrier from 2012 and entitled the 'Histrionic Wayfarer'. This is Storrier pictured as young man with his clothes, art materials/tools, compass, dog, etc. on his back. There's a picture of Storrier on the paper caught up by the wind behind the figure. (Courtesy: [artgallery.nsw.gov.au](http://artgallery.nsw.gov.au)).

#### **Peter Steele, formerly FAO**

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### **MAKING WORDS COUNT**

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In its *Newsletter* dated March 2010 (No. 57), the Association of Retired International Civil Servants in Austria quotes under the title "When insults had class", a selection of *bons mots* which readers might enjoy. Here are some of them:

“He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire” – Winston Churchill.

“I have never killed a man, but I have read many obituaries with great pleasure” – Clarence Darrow.

“He has never been known to use a word that might send a reader to the dictionary” – William Faulkner {about Ernest Hemingway}.

“I didn’t attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it” – Mark Twain.

“He has no enemies, but is intensely disliked by his friends” – Oscar Wilde.

“I feel so miserable without you; it’s almost like having you here” – Stephen Bishop.

“He is a self-made man and worships his creator” – John Bright.

“I’ve just learned about his illness. Let’s hope it’s nothing trivial” – Irvin S. Cobb.

“He had delusions of adequacy” – Walter Kerr.

“Why do you sit there looking like an envelope without any address on it?” – Mark Twain.

“His mother should have thrown him and kept the stork” – Mae West.

“Some cause happiness wherever they go; others, whenever they go” – Oscar Wilde.

Lady Astor once remarked to Winston Churchill at a dinner party, “Winston, if you were my husband, I would poison your coffee!” Winston Churchill replied, “Madam, if I were your husband, I would drink it!”



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## BOOK REVIEW

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***WHITE MALICE: THE CIA AND THE NEOCOLONISATION OF AFRICA***  
**Susan Williams (author)**  
**Hurst Publishers (2021)**  
**688 pages + illustrations**

Recently released, ***White Malice*** vividly describes a remarkable and shocking period during the early days of the African independence movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Academic reviewers have already commented on the meticulous research which has gone into the production of this prodigious book and which includes information from previously sealed CIA files. As a former UN staff member who served in Africa and a student of that period, I would like to reflect on just one aspect of this complex saga - that of the attitude of the US government and its intelligence agency, the CIA, to the UN at this time.

It is apparent from the book that the activities of the CIA were comprehensively 'marbled' into, not just to the African liberation movement, but also into various aspects of the UN's workings (at times in collaboration with other Western powers). Reading through ***White Malice*** it was astounding to see how many different examples there were and I cannot but help ask an obvious question - why is the UN Headquarters still situated in the USA?

Williams provides considerable evidence of interference into the workings of the UN Headquarters in New York. Firstly, she reveals that in 1949 the first Secretary-General, Trygve Lie (said to be very compliant with the US government), '... reached a clandestine agreement with the US Department of State to screen American staff ...' employed by the Headquarters of this new world body. Extraordinarily, the Department was even provided with an office in the building. This presence was part of the nation-wide 'McCarthy era' harassment, resulting in many false charges of associating with, or supporting, the so-called 'Communist enemy'. Even the later eminent staff member Ralph Bunche became one of its victims, until exonerated. Shirley Hazzard, who worked there during the 1950s and later became an author, is quoted as saying that because of this outrageous behaviour, the UN civil service was denied its independence right from the very beginning (paraphrased). Dag Hammarskjöld, who took over as the Second Secretary-General in April 1953, was reported to have been angry about such interference and managed to have the Department of State staff removed from the building. Williams adds, however, that he was not likely to have been aware of the extent of the various intrusions which continued.

Another example described, was about the CIA arranging secretly enabled access to encrypted cipher messages from the CX-52 version of the Swiss Crypto AG system used by the Secretary-General's office. But it wasn't until 2020 that the *Washington Post* and the German national public broadcaster ZDF revealed the history of this operation. Tellingly, it was reported that at least four other countries (including the UK) were aware of its use or received information from it. They also reported that the Soviets and China, having been suspicious of its ties to the West, did not use it. Such a spying capacity provides what maybe a significant piece of new information about the fatal crash of Secretary-General Hammarskjöld's plane in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) in September 1961. It also adds to suspicions about activities that night which are described in Williams' 2011 book about the crash and adds to other more recent evidence being considered by Judge Mohamed Chande Othman who is leading the current Inquiry into the crash. He had already stated in his 2017



report, and contrary to earlier review findings, that: 'It appears plausible that an external attack or threat may have been a cause of the crash, whether by way of a direct attack ... or by causing a momentary distraction of the pilots.'

Hammarskjöld was already perceived to be a thorn in the side of the Americans and other Western powers because of his approaches to supporting the interests of newly independent countries, in this case, the Congo. His flight to Northern Rhodesia was made in order to meet with the Katangan leader Moise Tshombe, the President of the secessionist State of Katanga. The Americans may well have not wanted that meeting to take place as secession from the Congo of that mineral rich area was not in their interests.

Murder was already on the agenda. Nine months before, in January 1961, the CIA (in association with others) had already been involved in the killing of African leaders, including Patrice Lumumba, the first Congolese Prime Minister.

The book also describes how, by law, the CIA is not allowed to operate within the USA, but such a ruling supposedly did not apply to the UN Headquarters complex because of its extra-territorial status. However, any such covert activity, as Williams says, would defy the General Convention of Privileges and Immunities of the UN and clearly be an abuse of its hosting privileges. Nevertheless, it is apparent from **White Malice** that there was interference with General Assembly Member State delegates by US Foreign Service officers and CIA agents. For example, one of the latter, Howard Imbrey, ran a public relations office purposefully and conveniently situated very close to the UN complex, a location which facilitated easy access to country delegates and enabled return visits. Large amounts of money were also distributed by the CIA to organizations such as the African-American Institute, also conveniently situated a few minute's walk from the UN. Their activities 'spinning a web of influence', through bribery and other forms of persuasion, including the influencing delegates for crucial votes.

Similar pressure was exerted by providing covert funding to NGOs which had consultative status at the UN. In 1967, the *New York Times* ran a series of articles exposing how some of these organizations were compromised and called into question the legitimacy of all NGOs holding consultative status. They included well known institutions such as the International Commission of Jurists and the Federation of Free Trade Unions, some of which were unknowingly caught up in the web of influence. The *Time's* revelations were reported to have caused outrage and resulted in a review which tightened up the qualifications for consultative status.



There was also evidence of interference being exerted with the US Government denying some would-be delegates, such as Congolese Prime Minister Lumumba, from receiving a US visa, preventing him therefore, from speaking to his cause at the General Assembly. Such restrictions undermined the strength of the newly independent countries and made a mockery of the UN building complex being neutral territory.

There were also damaging character assassination campaigns against key individuals, such as the Head of UN operations in the Congo, the highly principled Rajeshwar Dayal, whose actions were seen as being contrary to US interests.

Not even the UN Peacekeepers were immune from interference. As part of Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah's strong support for newly elected Prime Minister Lumumba, the largest contingent of peacekeeper troops at the time were Ghanaians. However, almost all of their senior officers were British, including their General, Henry Alexander, whose actions are described in very critical terms in the book. There was also some evidence to show that he

was much closer to the American Embassy than to the British. Ghana's Ambassador to the Congo, Andrew Djin, was so concerned about the General's actions that he was reported to have warned Nkrumah about Alexander's 'intrigue and subversive actions'. The General had clearly been undermining what a UN Peacekeeping force was meant to be achieving, apparently for reasons related to his curious association with the Americans.

In conclusion, these examples provide a variety of evidence about how the CIA implemented a concerted and multi-pronged attack on the ability of the new global body to play its role in protecting the equal rights of all its member countries. Arrogance, racism and commercial self-interest are now clearly self-evident. Bribery and corruption were amongst their repertoire of tricks to ensure that they got their own way and achieved their own ends. Not even murder was off the agenda.

Which brings me to the crux of my reflections – how can it be that the UN's global headquarters is situated in the very country whose government was the major instigator of such deeds? A government which, up to Presidential level, approved and paid for such a program of actions against the unique organization it had helped create, and which, even now, is still involved in exerting un-warranted pressures. Eleanor Roosevelt would be appalled.

Would it be accurate to guess that there was no outcry because so much of the evidence of the interference was hidden or camouflaged at the time, and their extent not obvious? If Member States had their suspicions, they could not easily be proven. Unfortunately, even now, despite all of the new evidence exposed by Williams' research, there are still gaps in what is known and some information which is now public, is still not definitive. But one cannot help but wonder if the 'Communist threat' which was used to justify many of its actions, was really all that dangerous, or if it had been exaggerated for reasons of political and commercial self-interest

It is also possible that the silence was partly related to the huge investment already made in the UN complex. Few other countries would have been in a position to offer an alternative, especially given the state of Europe and parts of Asia in the immediate post-war period. Perhaps too, few would have dared to question the role of the post-war 'super-power'.

The USA may have been especially powerful at that time, and may be the largest contributor to the UN, providing about one fifth of its annual budget. But that in no way entitles it to feel any sense of superiority amongst the UN family of nations as the amount is simply based on an equitable formula which takes into account factors such as population size and GNP.



By the same token, it would be very interesting to know how much, in financial terms, the US benefits from UN Headquarters being situated in New York City, including from employment and provision of services, member country Embassy property rentals, security and so on. The total must be significant, reflecting a high degree of self-interest. Also, would it be possible, and practicable, to move it to a country which had less self-interest and more honourable intentions regarding support for the concept of the United Nations – or is there no such thing? Perhaps too, no country is out of reach of being undermined by truly determined forces who have self-interests to protect.

Whatever the answers to these questions, the US's efforts to undermine the UN during this period of African independence were definitely well 'marbled' in and hardly appropriate behaviour for the host country. **White Malice** indeed. This is an eye-opening book.

## Margaret O'Callaghan, formerly UNFPA

*[Editor's note: Thank you, Margaret, this sounds like a must-read work. The illustrations in Margaret's review show a map of Africa in patchworked African materials made by the author, and a photo of Margaret outside the UN Secretariat c.2000. Margaret served as UNFPA Country Director in Zambia, the location of Hammarskjold's plane crash. In passing, recently declassified CIA papers concerning JFK's assassination indicate that the KGB was also active at the UN inserting personnel into the organization in roles such as, for example, a 'trainee interpreter'. The UN seems to have always been the plaything of major powers.]*

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## THE UK'S MOST LOATHED JARGON PHRASES

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Touch base (24%): Briefly make or renew contact with someone

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Slide into DMs (24%): A reference to sending someone a private message on social media which is often to initiate some form of romantic connection

Think outside the box (22%): To think differently

Spit balling ideas (21%): To openly suggest ideas'

Helicopter thinking (21%): To rise above a situation and see the bigger picture

Bang for the buck (18%): Value for money

Low hanging fruit (16%): The most easily achieved of a set of goals

Play hardball (15%): To act ruthlessly

Ducks in a row (13%): Implies preparedness

Out of the loop (13%): To not be told some information

*[Editor's note: I am sure that we, in Australia, can think of many more. Queensland AAFICS Coordinator, Mike Sackett, has already mentioned 'business transformation including value stream mapping'. I'll add 'to pivot' which appears to mean that one has changed direction. Then, in traffic reports on the radio, vehicles are travelling 'under speed'. One presumes that this means they are driving slowly. And, of course, there are always 'grass shoots' appearing in budget estimates as reports of multi-billion-dollar national debts are delivered to the citizenry. Optimism that the grass shoots will actually grow and not be mowed down? Then there is 'drill down', which is to look in detail at something, and 'scalable, meaning that a project can be expanded without much further effort. And we all 'beat the bushes' when we want something to come into the open and have 'boots on the ground' to get things done. 'Back of the envelope' is when we are drawing up a quick plan, an 'a-ha moment' is when the 'penny drops' and someone understands something, and we all have to sometimes 'drink the Kool-aid' (whatever that means). A personal favourite? 'It is what it is...' to which one can respond 'and I don't care'.]*





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## FOLLOWING THE WIND IN THE SAILS OF SIR FRANCIS DRAKE

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*The Caribbean region lies southeast of the North American mainland, north of South America and east of Central America. It covers 2.75 Mkm<sup>2</sup> and contains >700 islands, cays and reefs that are home to >43M people. (Australia, by comparison, is 2.8x larger with 25.70M people). Depending on who is making the choices, the region is currently organized into 30 territories – sovereign states, dependencies, etc. – notwithstanding the various political unions that have occasionally enjoyed short-lived governance. The majority small-island states/territories are members of the ‘Caribbean Community’ which includes a number of sub-regions/countries on the mainland that retain strong cultural, language and heritage ties to the islands – Belize, Guyana, Suriname, etc. Community membership entitles the majority low-income countries in the region to preferential investment funding provided by selected donor countries and from the World Bank. An investment of this kind provides the basis for the story. The government of the British Virgin Islands (BVI) – a dependency of the United Kingdom – had requested funds from the regional development bank with which to construct livestock water facilities in Tortola. I was one of a small team responsible for checking the viability of the loan.*

### Walking in the unbelievable beauty of hill, sky and sea

My colleague in the BVI Department of Agriculture & Fisheries had collected me from my guest house after breakfast that morning and, half an hour later, had dropped me off on the ridge

road that runs east-west following the hills across the island of Tortola – the main island of the BVIs.

We had laughed that I shouldn't get lost and never be seen again, but this was the BVIs and Road Town the commercial centre/capital was little more than 5 km along the ridge road and directly downhill or I could simply track across country. The entire island of Tortola is only 20 km long and 5 km wide (100 km<sup>2</sup>) and from the ridge road you could just about see everywhere including Road Bay, the indent on the southern coast around which Road Town had grown over the years.

In any case, with a sandwich, some fruit and a bottle of water in my backpack, comfortable walking shoes and an island to explore, this was the sort of day that you can probably remember forever. So far ... I have.

#### Iconic sea channel named after Sir Francis Drake

Those memories have remained because of two key highlights that made this mission such a remarkable one. First, I had flown there in a DC3 (Puerto Rico to Beef Island Airport – one of those favourite names for collectors) – my first time ever; and I still had my return flight to look forward to – twice in one lifetime then. Not bad for a vintage aircraft enthusiast– a DC3! But I'll develop this one later (*if I have space.*) And second, the sheer beauty of the seascape around me – it simply overwhelmed – looking down from 400 m or so across and along the sea channel named after Sir Francis Drake.

It was a gorgeous morning – bright sunshine reflecting off the sea around the island; the sea largely open to the north and, to the south, that sea channel with a handful of small islands about 15 km away necklacing the horizon from Virgin Gorda in the east (in the BVIs) to Saint John in the west (in the US Virgins).

Once off the Ridge Road and into the pastureland on the slopes of the hills there was nothing to place you in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. You couldn't always see those occasional houses, but there were beef cattle and fencing that enclosed them. Sure, on reflection, that's something of a misnomer – imaginative time travel – these clearly weren't medieval cattle breeds, I wasn't wearing 400 year-old shoes and clothes, and my note book and camera were, well, something that would have amazed Drake and those other early travellers – the exploiters, pirates, colonizers and merchantmen who followed.



#### Before Drake there were the Arawak & Carib People

The Virgin Islands had originally been settled during the first millennium CE by the Arawak Amerindians from South America - successfully island-hopping in small boats and establishing agricultural communities along the islands of the Lesser Antilles. This is the part-volcanic

archipelago that stretches south-north for >1,200 km from what is now Venezuela, Guyana, etc. to Puerto Rico in the Greater Antilles (i.e. the larger Caribbean Islands – Cuba, Hispaniola & Jamaica).

The Arawaks were followed by the Carib Amerindians who largely replaced them throughout the islands – the Caribs described as the '*Norsemen of the Caribbean*' according to contemporary reporting. This, in reality, makes them the original '*Pirates of the Caribbean*' - pirates that preyed upon the Arawaks wherever they found them. And, following the arrival of the Spanish in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Caribs switched to harassing the early Spanish settlers – targeting their weaponry, materials and women. The Spanish were quickly followed by the other European maritime nations – the British, Dutch and Danes (and, 300 years later, by the Americans) – all eager to grab an island or two.

### Sir Francis Drake – English hero *par excellence*

Grow up with an English education and you have this historical Anglo-view of the world and there's this wealth of heritage that easily encompasses the national super-heroes that feature across the centuries. Of course, this includes Francis Drake. He was, in turn, explorer, sea captain, slave trader, naval officer and politician, but he's probably best known for his circumnavigation of the world in a single voyage and his significant role in the routing of the Spanish Armada in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.

For the English, he will always be that hero – knighted for his round-the-world voyage and, more particularly, for the wealth that he accumulated from raiding Spanish shipping and coastal settlements a large part of which was paid in tribute to the British crown – namely Queen Elizabeth I. The Spanish crown took a different view. Such was Drake's notoriety that the Spanish put a price on his head – the equivalent of US\$8M today. However, it was dysentery – common enough at the time - that finally caught up with him in tropical Panama. Drake was buried at sea in his 56th year.





Drake features today in the places named after him, the statues erected and in the cultural stories that have evolved – mixed factual and anecdotal. In recent times, some of the stories have fallen foul of changing perceptions of history that relate to slavery, subjugation and colonialization – names have subsequently been changed and statues removed.

### Technical and financial investigation

Drake and his cultural times were simply there in passing during the mission on Tortola – acknowledging the sea channel named after him that provided such an attractive background to my time in the country – that seascape view, those gorgeous contrasting colours, pristine air and the pleasure of spending time walking the hills above Road Town. There was also the professional challenge – new people, new country and, this time, a water supply project on hand.

The government had requested a loan from the regional development bank with which to provide watering facilities for cattle. Working as a technical advisor to the bank, it was my responsibility to check out the validity of their request for funding – to determine the feasibility of the investment proposed. Mine would be a preliminary review of the BVI's request. I had a copy of the relevant technical parts of their request as background material; it was time to see if the bank should follow through.



Numbers of livestock and extensive fencing provided a first impression – the hills were extensively grazed with a number of watering points along the ridge road; troughs with water level controlled by a float valve – reliable, long-term, well-known - as basic as they come. The new installations were at a distance from the ridge road and out over the slopes that seemed to fall directly into the sea. The maps showed the required lines/network of water pipes, points of storage and the proposed location of troughs

and, perhaps, wind pumps. It also showed the changing contour lines. The hills were exposed – it made sense to use the wind if this was practical – but there were also numerous houses along the ridge road with an electrical supply alongside. How did the different energy costs relate? Someone would know.

My initial review/evaluation would shift the loan request two-fold – the *preparation* of the loan, disbursement of funds, loan repayment, timetable etc. (i.e. bank's financial services) and, equally, the *engineering/evaluation/planning/costs/implementation* from a commercial consultant specializing in agricultural water supplies (i.e. bank's technical services). The costs of the latter would be added to the loan required that both lender and borrower would be certain of the transaction, the work proposed, delivery schedule and a likely timetable.

What eventually happened? Did the request meet both technical and financial requirements? This is where things become interesting.

### Wind forward 12 years and there's that sense of 'déjà vu'

Shift across the world to another technical role in another country/region. Outside my window I had a view of this elegant low-rise southern European city. I had an appointment with a consultant due – he was scheduled on a mission with terms of reference specific to the work required – agriculture, engineering, equipment, water supplies, dry country, mixed cropping/livestock, etc. It was a similar kind of development proposal with much the same technical responsibilities as the BVI proposal. I had selected the consultant – his education, background, technical track record, etc. I knew that he'd worked in the Caribbean. A first time with the service, but he'd been recommended by those whom to trust, and he would report

back with his professional findings and a written report with recommendations in a month's time.

And it was then, when talking, he'd said 'You're not that Peter Steele ... who'd checked out the livestock watering project in the BVIs?'



#### Developing small communities

Feedback and networking does not come any better than that one - an astonishing coincidence. It brought back the pleasure of the BVI mission; this unique little collection of islands that remain a British Overseas Territory in the Caribbean with, perhaps, just 25,000 people.

The islands that became the BVIs had originally been taken from the Dutch during the time when the islands of the Caribbean represented prime sugar-cane country – and before Napoleon/France had highlighted the potential of sugar-beet in Europe. Denmark had occupied what are now the US Virgin Islands – subsequently selling them to the US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century after 250 years of colonial rule. (*The US was seeking a military base; they had 'traded' their interest in Greenland to the Danes as part of the deal.*)

Then there are all those other memories - the sea surrounding the green hills and the distant islets that sparkled in the sunlit water; the US-made cars that seemed to dominate the roads in those days – all LHD and driving on the British side of the road. And, surprisingly, it was the *same* in the US Virgins – the only US territory worldwide with traffic on the 'wrong' side of the road. I had caught the ferry across to the US Virgins later in the week for a glimpse of a different approach to development – crossing between the islands by sea– the novelty of island travel by small ferry boat – passing the island of St John in the US Virgins - once covered in cane plantations and now 60% national park – the largest of its kind in the islands. I had the day in St Thomas the main island.

#### Flying home

There are so many more memories that crowd in given the village-scale of the communities that make up the Lesser Antilles Islands, but where to start/stop? First, however, that DC3. There it was on the tarmac – and a complete surprise; I could hardly believe my eyes – time travel; it represented a glimpse of my father's generation in real life. Climb a couple of steps into the rear of the plane and then along the short aisle that slopes uphill. Imagine. When did you last fly in a plane with a tail wheel? Your seat becomes horizontal during take-off. The plane had large square windows. It was noisy.

Then back to the routines of island hopping on the LIAT\* flight home; changing planes in Puerto Rico and catching the flight to Barbados and, at each of the main stops, the pleasure

of meeting up with colleagues on similar missions, travel, etc. so that there were half-a-dozen of us from the bank disembarking at Grantley Adams in Barbados that evening.



*\*Leeward Islands Air Transport Services – LIAT; an acronym better known in those days as ‘Leaves Island Any Time.’ Sadly, in liquidation since 2020 as one more Covid-19 victim.*

#### Photos

1. Virgin Islands map. Small group of islands 180-200 km to the east of Puerto Rico. The US Virgins are closer. This is classic tourist sailing country, but the majority of people travel by air: 30-40 minutes flight. *Courtesy; alamy.com.*
2. Tortola Island from space. The main island of the BVIs with the capital Road Town around Road Bay, and the hill country behind. *Courtesy: NASA Earth Observatory.*
3. Hill country. Open land cleared of trees and fenced to provide grazing for livestock; in this case images of horses/trekking for tourists *Courtesy: Facebook.com.*
4. Beef cattle. Livestock are the main focus of agriculture in the BVIs – the sector provides food, income and employment for <1% people. Tourism and financial services dominate the economy. Cattle were first introduced into the Americas by the Spanish. *Courtesy: DeptAgric*
5. DC3 aircraft. From 1930s-1950s the work horse of the western world - a period that included WW2 and the Korean War. More than 16,000 were built between 1936-1942. Estimated 300 remain flying today. *Courtesy: airlines.net*

**Peter Steele, formerly FAO**

*[Editor’s note: another delightful ‘mission report’ and travelogue, Peter. Thank you. What a wonderful place to visit...and how lucky that it was on official business. Complex work in paradise, but someone had to do it.]*



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## TOP UN ROLE FOR PACIFIC PEACEKEEPER

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**12<sup>TH</sup> November 2021**

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today appointed Unaisi Lutu Vuniwaqa of Fiji as Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security. Ms. Vuniwaqa succeeds Nóirín O’Sullivan of Ireland to whom the Secretary-General is grateful for her contribution and dedication.

As deputy to the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, the Assistant Secretary-General will be responsible for day-to-day management, supporting in the overall leadership and management of the Department.



Ms. Vuniwaqa has over 35 years of experience in law enforcement at the national and international level, and most recently held the position of Police Commissioner and Head of the United Nations Police component with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), instrumental in promoting 'Gender Responsive Policing' initiatives which resulted in the early achievement of uniformed gender parity targets set for 2028.

She was previously the Assistant Commissioner of Police Administration in the Fiji Police Force, having started her policing career in 1986 and progressed through the ranks, holding various operational and managerial positions since then, including in strategic planning, training, human resources and community policing.

Ms. Vuniwaqa holds a Master's degree in Business Administration from the University of the South Pacific in Fiji.

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## A FEW WORDS FROM THE EDITOR

Another year of confusion, change and worry as new variants of Covid-19 come and go. It



has been interesting to observe how various jurisdictions communicate the latest news on rules and regulations to their citizenry. Some let public servants, usually Chief Health Officers, tell the story. However, this often changes when 'good news' can be presented and the State Premier, or even the Prime Minister, takes over. With an election always in the offing, never look a gift horse in the mouth. As we go to press, the Omicron virus is the latest strain plaguing our shores and, indeed, the global community. Some countries in Europe are in lockdown, while the UK is reporting over

80,000 cases a day. Here at home, NSW is seeing figures spike, while all other States are also under pressure. Let us hope that the virus starts to dissipate in the New Year. This edition of the Newsletter has some interesting travelogues, two book reviews, a fascinating story on rebuilding a Canberra garden (which we hope will encourage other readers) and more. For the first time ever, the Editor has contributed an article. Previously, he has kept from doing so to give more space to others to have their contributions published. However, the tragic Afghanistan situation has given him cause to write a piece. Just an early reminder that our next *Newsletter* is due in July 2022. Let us have *your* contributions for that edition. We'll send you a reminder closer to the date. All articles welcome! In the meantime, stay safe and healthy.

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## A CANBERRA 'POOL TO POND' CONVERSION

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Those of you who have ever had a swimming pool will know how much work they are, including the daily cleaning, as well as the cost of running them. It is fine when one is young and strong or can afford regular visits by a pool person, and when you have kids or grandkids regularly using it. Nothing like sparkling water to keep them all happy and also to give you some relaxing exercise.

But the bending over to clean each day and having to cart 4 heavy bags of salt and containers of chlorine up from the garage gets to be a bit much as one ages, especially when the summer is short, as it was in the years just before I converted (but not afterwards!). I was reviewing the possibilities, such as filling it with rubble and turning it into a garden or even having it removed when I spotted some information from Ku-ring-gai Council in Sydney. It explained how it had helped over seventy households convert to a pond, most of them being in the same age category as I am and there was some inspiring footage of their successful efforts. But Canberra isn't tropical Sydney, so would it work?





Pix 1: 2017



Pix 2: 2021



Pix 3: 2021



Pix 4: 2021



Pix 5: 2021



Well, I can now say, four years later, that it did (pix 1 and 2). I found a young woman called Lea who runs an aquarium business and she helped guide the initial steps and comes a few times each year to hop in and do some 'water gardening', including trimming and moving plants around (see Pix 6). She also introduced me to two other women who were doing the same thing and we share plants, fish and experiences, and we know of at least two others – all of us in the same age bracket. Interestingly, all of the ponds are different – because of their position and amount of sun, proximity to trees and their depth and, perhaps, the amount of filtration. And note that they are easily converted back to a pool at any time. Our local weekly scribe even wrote up an article about it that first year

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6026817/the-canberra-woman-who-turned-her-backyard-pool-into-a-giant-fish-pond/>

Just to briefly outline what has to be done: the pool needs to be left un-aerated until mossie larvae appear, then it is time to put in plants and fibreglass 'islands' on stands (non-metal structures which place the plants at the right height in the water e.g. milk crates lashed together); add gold fish or Koi (or later, when better aerated, native fish or trout); add old logs for birds to perch on and lizards to climb on; set up a waterfall arrangement which can use the pool pump system with a divert and which provides the aeration; add a rockery around the edges if desired. Check Google for more details.



Pix 6

All of us agree that it has largely been a great success and we don't regret losing our pools for one minute. They are a great asset to our gardens and we all take great pleasure in being able to sit beside them and enjoy the flowers and plants, the water falls flowing, the birds and Dragon and Damsel flies flitting around and watching the fish glide by (pix 3). It is very relaxing. The reflection of the clouds and sometimes the sunset are especially lovely.



Pix 7.



Pix 8.

It is especially wonderful in spring as the Water Irises (pix 5 and 9) and Lilies (pix 4, 9 and 11) start to leaf up then flower and later the Water Hibiscus which grows a metre tall then produces magnificent scarlet blooms (see pix 7 and see its orange stem and leaves in pix 8 on left of bird statue). Brief, but beautiful displays. Also, the Houttuynia Cordata (pix 9) with its colorful speckled leaves and the Japanese grasses make a lovely contrast, as do the bullrushes and other smaller plants.



Pix 9



Pix 10



Pix 11

The goldfish flock to the surface every afternoon (except in mid-winter) for the feeding frenzy as soon as I appear pond-side. They have multiplied from about 20 to about 150, a few have died, others were caught by birds or given away. Being chest deep it is currently large enough area for the present numbers. But a funny side story – after the terrible hailstorm Canberra experienced last year, I was asked by Lea if I would ‘mind’ about three dozen goldfish. It turned out that the glass atrium of a local hotel had been smashed by the hail and the fish needed to be rescued from the pond underneath and given a temporary home while renovations took place. Well, minding them was fine, but it was a bit of a guessing game when it came to returning them. We could only promise to return about an equal number! But there was a bonus – the hotel had some lovely ‘Fanta’ colored ones and somehow a few of those remained, so both lots benefited from the enlarging of the gene pool and I from the addition of a pretty new color.

The pond attracts wildlife – including visits from Peewee’s, Satin Bower birds, Friar birds and the occasional Cockatoo and Rosella and a variety of others, coming and going. Also, it is a thrill to see Damselflies and Dragonflies as soon as Spring arrives and Water Boatmen and Hoverflies. Unfortunately, the Peron’s Tree Frogs which appeared in the first two years didn’t stick around, probably because there were no shallow, marshy areas – although two of them did appear in a toilet basin in the winter of 2019! They must have taken shelter from the cold down the outlet outside and ventured along the pipe.

Some wildlife visitors weren’t so welcome - Henry the White-Faced Heron, Cuthbert the Cormorant and a family of Kookaburra’s – the latter luckily for only one unsuccessful visit. But Henry has been persistent over a two-year period and isn’t deterred by the \$150 worth of metal Heron statue and so I have a running battle with him. Also, not so pleasant was a beautifully striped baby Eastern Brown snake last summer, luckily only sighted once, and the Wolf spider which took up residence in the filter box for some time until Lea took it out into the bush.

My pond is close to the kitchen and sunroom windows which means I can enjoy it even when indoors. A lovely sight, and a valuable addition to the local ambience.

Visiting kids enjoy trying to catch a fish (hard), or just feeding them. Adult visitors are all fascinated, many initially horrified about the color of the water – it does take a bit of getting used to.

The main disadvantage is that Canberra doesn’t seem to have any (?) water plants which survive over the winter so that makes for a sad looking period. Also, the fish disappear for about three months then, and that is because the pond is deep and they sort of hibernate down to the bottom for the duration. Also, unlike most other pool-ponds, the water color is still greenish - but biologically healthy. On the more positive side, the orange, white and red of the Goldfish contrast wonderfully against it and the colour makes it easier for the fish to hide from birds and it also hides the structures which hold the pot plants. Occasionally, it becomes clearer.

But in short, no real regrets. It has been an interesting experiment, a ‘green’ thing to do, adding to biodiversity in the suburbs and strongly recommended for those of us who are beyond pool care and who wish to do something positive for the environment.

But, be warned, it isn’t an instant delight because it takes time to mature. This year, the fourth, is the best, so it takes a while.

And just to conclude, at one end of the pond – the rose garden, having benefitted from the huge amount of rain that we have had recently, with Mr. Lincoln’s starring – isn’t Spring wonderful! (Pix 12)





Pix 12

**Margaret O'Callaghan, formerly UNFPA**

*[Editor's note: this is an incredible story, Margaret. What a great effort. But such spectacular rewards. No doubt your story will encourage many other AAFICS members to flex their muscles, bring their brainpower into play and follow your example. Well done.]*

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## THE LAST WORD

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### ON 'ON-THE-OTHER-HANDED-NESS'

"Other-handed-ness", as in "on the one hand 'this', and on the other hand 'that'",  
in a world where 'this' and 'that' co-exist, but are often cast as opposites,  
"other-handed-ness", as in 'on the one hand this is awful', while 'on the other hand that is awe-  
full',  
and the two can co-exist, along with so many other truths about us.  
In a world where many behave as if  
when you have 'this' you cannot possibly have 'that',  
with many unable to have/believe/respect or entertain another person's 'that'  
with many unable to see both  
arguing as if they have only one hand,  
claiming the other hasn't a leg on which to stand;  
one-armed bandits

How much more productive it might be if we could foster spaces  
in which we all have two hands  
and practise 'other-handed-ness'  
Respecting both 'this' and 'that',  
helping the other understand the difference;  
how one or the other might be more or less appropriate for the situation at hand;  
helping each other accept the benefits and hazards of what is in either hand  
On the one hand 'this' and the other hand 'that'.

I recall the many times I sat at a table, a metaphoric "round table",  
having been asked to mediate between two otherwise reasonable people  
who had become locked in a joust over whose might be the truth.  
Colleagues who had become antagonists  
because one believed his version of the situation was as much the truth of the matter  
as his colleague believed his was the only one feasible.  
Meanwhile I could see the table at which we were seated  
as a table, a space, strewn with so many "this's" and "that's",  
while each of the others could only see the "this" or the "that" in the one hand they held out;  
held out like a flag announcing "this is how the world is"  
one armed, flag waving, bandits.

"Other-handed-ness" might have allowed them to achieve  
understanding, resolution, collaboration,  
sooner and more creatively,  
and to do so without the shards of debris and shrapnel  
that litter so many of these jousting spaces  
and impact so many of their participants;  
people who then develop strategies to survive subsequent encounters,  
anticipating conflict, wearing armour, waving their flags and wielding weapons as their norm;  
none of which would be necessary  
if through 'other-handed-ness' they could come to each such space,  
ready to listen, do so, and learn all about what is 'on the other hand'.

On the one hand, this is what I think, on the other hand you may think differently. Let's explore.

**Bill Pigott, formerly FAO**

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## ABOUT US

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The *AAFICS Newsletter* is an informal communications tool designed to keep former UN staff members residing in Australia in touch with each other and their Association's activities. Editorial responsibility for articles is held by the individual contributor. The Editor appreciates any stories or articles of interest and thanks all who have contributed to this edition. Photographs are either supplied or taken from public Internet sources for non-commercial, private use. Please send any articles to the office of the President, to the Editor or through your local State/Territory Coordinator. The next *Newsletter* will be released in July 2022.

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