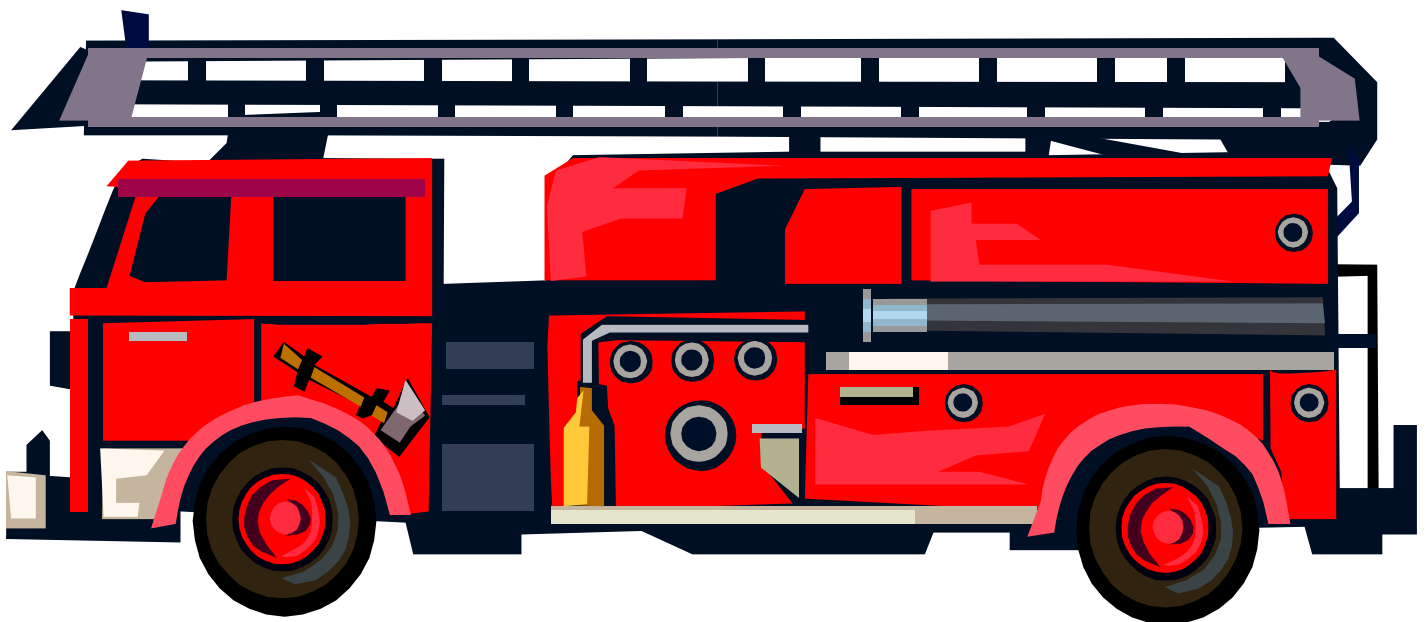




Norm Denny

An episode and characters set in the Western District not far from Cobden

The fire siren was still going full bore when I reached the station. People were collecting out the front. Through the window you could see Geoff Gronin, the fire chief and a fire-controller from out of town pouring over the huge coloured topography map on the wall. Ukay, Dennis, Bluey, Col Foster and Bernie Blackman were all listening attentively, heads cocked on one side, legs crossed and arms folded. They were all CFA members. There were different coloured pins stuck in a wide arc on red and black lines to the west of the town. Bertie, the communications Officer and Nudenut his 2-I-C were on the two-way radios and at the control panel. We could see them but we couldn't hear them. But their faces were serious, eyes alert and there was an air of nervousness about them. Billy Hardy, a local with a front-end loader, dressed up in his yellow Volunteer Fire-brigade uniform stood at the door waiting. The Fire truck was idling. The reserve water truck too. And Jim Irwin's, Roary's, Johnno's and Des Dugans's trucks, Cliff Crawford's and Dennis' vans, Vinny's moving-van, Chukka's ute and Fred Nelson's flat-top were all parked out the front with about twenty cars. There was a heap of old bags piled up beside a row of fire-fighting knapsacks sitting in pools of water on the cement and a dripping hose from the tap in the corner. Several 40litre bins were stacked beside each other close by. Roary and Hawk were strapping some knapsacks to the fire truck. The rest of us hung around waiting to see what they wanted us to do. It was sort of quiet and serious. Faces grim, eyes narrowed. "Looks pretty close," says Geoffrey Wallace, Bluey's old man, in from the farm. "Yeah," replies Russell Dean, Manager of the factory. Councilor Raymond stood quietly next to Hughsey and Mick who worked as casuals at the factory. Even old Lindsay was there. Standing next to little Malcolm. And both whispering seriously as they waited. Johnno, who was First Aid Officer for the footy club, sat beside Dennis' son Robbie who drove the ambulance. Doc Arnold was leaning on the back of it. Andrew Benjamin, dressed in a suit having been to some meeting or other, leaned on the front bonnet, arms folded. Both were silent as they watched the others- waiting to see what was wanted of them. Doc had brought in his nurse from the farm east of town where she lived. She was manning the outpatients at the hospital busily putting out bandages, liniment and other gear in anticipation of burns casualties.





Then the group at the map inside broke up and poured out the door. Billy and some of the CFA boys piled into the fire-truck and took off, their alarm screeching. Bernie and Col took the water-truck with Malcolm and Lindsay.

“Right you blokes, hop onto the trucks. Some of you grab the knapsacks - three to each trucks and a couple in the vans. The rest of you grab bags and bins and get onto the trucks.” Geoff Gronin was in full flight. “The CFA boys know where to go. Do what they tell you. The fire’s about 5k out of town. We’re going to set up a fire-line the other side of Broderick’s scrub.” Andrew jumped into his car and headed for home to change. Doc took off back towards the hospital.

We all sorted ourselves out and the convoy headed out west of town past Broderick’s scrub, trucks and vans peeling off onto bush tracks as they headed for their designated positions. Our group of vehicles pulled up in Broderick’s bottom paddock and we piled out. Bluey led us along a line about 300 metres from the Scrub dropping us off in twos about every 10metres. We stood on the edge of the paddock facing west across the bare strip of land about 500metres from the Crown land that followed the creek. The sky was bright orange making stark silhouettes of the brush and eucalypts. Every now and then you could see the flickering tops of flames as they engulfed a fresh patch of tinder. Still some distance from the bush.

We stood quietly with the hot wind in our faces. Some of us had fought the fires on Black Sunday and had an inkling of what was to happen. Those who didn’t stood expectantly waiting slipping glances at the people to their left and right. Wide-eyed glances that turned hurriedly away so that their fear would not be seen. Andrew, now dressed in overalls, dropped into place beside me grim-faced and eyes alert. He’d left his car down by the edge of the eastern end of the paddock. The line stretched for about half a kilometre to the right and left. Like a file of rifle-men ready for an impending enemy attack. Silent and set-lipped except for Bluey who was giving instructions what to do. “Make sure your bag’s wet from the bins at back of you. You blokes with the knapsacks don’t waste your water. Aim at the seat of the flames not at the flames themselves.” So we waited.

To the north-west, about a kilometre along, the flames cracked into life and leapt to the sky gorging themselves on a patch of scrub. Like the devil’s fingers prodding the dark and curling back to a fist. That charcoal burning smell. Hot wind and bits of flying ash on the face. Adrenalins pumping. Waiting for Bluey to give the word. And still we waited. Nervous glances at each other. A cough here and there. A “Shit! Look at that!” from Cookie who’d never fought a fire before, his voice loud with the wind. The fire crept its way southward along the scrub front coming nearer by the moment. I could see the flames jumping from dried cow-pat to dried cow-pat across the bare paddock after the wall of flame had passed. “Let it burn itself out.” yells Bluey. “We’ll clean up after the main front passes.” So we stood there in awe as the flames burnt closer and closer until they were in front of us. Hot. Bloody hot! The scrub crackled and hissed and popped and snapped. “Cover your faces with your bags.” Bluey again. “Shit!” yelled Longprong as an ember burnt into his jumper and he slapped at it. Amid the swirling smoke I could see the rest of the line hunched up under their bags. The flames seemed to be right on us. Except they were about 100metres away. Then silence. No-one spoke - except Bluey. No smart comments. No jokes to hide the fear. No nervous exclamations. Just the silence of the unknown and the unfamiliar - and awesome anticipation. Silence amid the wind and the distant crackle of the flames and the sudden explosions above the trees. Burning wood in our nostrils. Eyes smarting from hot winds. Wide-eyed, white-eyed, fear-dilated pupils. Tenseness of muscles and grim-jawed faces.

Then it eased off as the flames gobbled up the edge of the scrub in its path southward. The wind changed around to the north-east and the fire started to eat in on itself. The heat abated a little. A fire truck headed past us towards the southern end of the fire-line. The main body of the flames passed and headed back towards the creek leaving patches of burning scrub and smouldering cow-pats and tufts of grass chewed down to ground level - if it hit the vegetation at the edge of the creek it would get away and burn right past the factory and into the town. The truck disappeared into the night and the smoke.



“OK Let’s go to work.” Bluey led the way across the paddock to the burnt out scrub. In pairs and groups of threes we squirted and bagged. Hiss of water turning into steam. Thump of wet bags on small groups of flames and smouldering ash. “You blokes follow the fire along. You lot go back up along the scrub and make sure you put out the spot fires. You lot (and this included me) stay here and do this bit.” Bluey was in full control and we did what he said. A different Bluey to the quiet bloke on our Golf trips. Everything was black and gritty. And hot through our jumpers and stinging on our faces as the wind eddied and swirled the ash at us. The water truck passed and we dipped our bags into the 40litre drums and filled up the knapsacks. “Big bugger wasn’t it,” pipes up little Malcolm. Old Lindsay’s on the water truck with him. “Not as big as Black Sunday.” Old Lindsay always had the last word. The truck passed and we got back to the smouldering spots of bush still alight.

About an hour after Bluey declared “That’s it,” and we headed back to the trucks parked at the edge of Broderick’s paddock.

“G’day Ev.” Longprong was first back and first into the drinks and sandwiches laid out on the back of Johnno’s truck.

“You blokes a bit thirsty?” replied Ev as we straggled back in small groups.

“Bloody Oath!” Cookie’s still pumped up and wide-eyed.

Wilma Schiller and Maureen, Vinny’s Missus, handed out sandwiches and drinks waiting for the last of the group.

“That’ll do it.” She’s under control.” Bluey’s silhouette appeared out of the dark. “The water-truck’ll stay out here for a while. You blokes can probably head back. We’ll blow the siren if we need you again.” He grabbed a sandwich and a drink and headed back into the night.

So we piled into the trucks and vans, still eating our sandwiches and drinking cordial, and headed into town to the Pub. There was no way we were going home just then. Even though we were pretty exhausted after the adrenalin had worn off and our muscles were stiff and sore from the bagging now that we’d cooled down.

Morning. The wind had dropped. Only a heat haze to the north and hot blue sky. A red glow to the north-east and black clouds to the south-east. To the west and heading south, black clouds and flames flickering in the distance. The outskirts of town were just the same as they’d been the day before. Rusty yellow and gray fence-lined patches bordered by green windbreaks of cypress and elms. Johannsen’s, Davis’s, Irwins, the piles of stone and sand at Black’s. All were intact. Houses and barns in corners of paddocks beside dams. Cows dotted over the landscape under eucalypts looking for shelter from the heat. Bush tracks and the creek at the back of the factory. The converter station beside the main road. Dust billowed and eddied from the red-dirt airstrip where two light planes were moored at the make-shift shed beside the old double-decker bus that the local Aero-club used as their clubrooms. The race track. The Secondary School. The huge butter-factory towering above the Co-op and the other main road leading out of town. The fourth green at the golf course was still as green. Everything was as it should have been.

We collected at the Golf Club the next day for a sort of post-mortem. The CFA and the CES had locked themselves away in their buildings to do the official evaluation of their responses. Some of them were still out in the paddocks and burnt out scrub about 10K west of town dealing with the spot fires (one jumped up beside the huge old gum just south of the factory and the siren rang again. Trucks and men pounced on it before it got away - would have burnt itself out, there was little tinder in the area, but we were toey enough to make sure. Twenty men belting away at an area not much bigger than a haystack - it was over in about a minute. This was the closest the fire got to town.



The stories flowed. But not in exaggerated tones. There was no need to embellish. Most of them were serious and told in low voices to others with concerned faces. Old Ernie Cummings burnt to death trying to save his goats. Ches Roberts, the local muso in hospital with burns and a heart attack after his house burnt to the ground in front of him - his piano and saxophone gone with the rest of his belongings. Jim Watson dead out in the paddock, his horse standing over him - and the cattle he'd been herding strewn around the place and beside the dam - smoke affected fresians, standing beside the bloated bodies of the not so lucky, mooing plaintively in the hot black paddocks. Old Mrs Flemming boiled unrecognisable in the bathtub amid the burnt-out remains of her weatherboard on the edge of the forest. Haystacks gone. Feed gone. Scrub gone. The sanctuary black and ghostly in the smoke of after-burn, scorched defoliated tree trunks and dead roos and koala bears. The ranger's hut nothing but ashes, it's red-brick chimney the only recognisable remains. The community hall at Tucker's Creek nothing but a scorched cement slab above the septic tank. Eric Van Beuren's ute piled up a telephone post beyond repair and Eric wandering around with his arm in plaster. The burnt out shell of Greg Turner's four-wheeler beside the dam where he'd escaped the flames out the back of his farm. And, on the lighter side, Simmo walking down the street leading his horse - both of them covered in effluent from the sewerage plant just out of town. Seems he was out that way when the cloud came down and he thought it best to get in, in case the fire was behind it. The McDermott brothers up on the school Gymnasium trying to repair the roof before school started the next day. Sheets of tin seen flying over the fourth green of the nearby golf course by people scurrying back to their homes as the red-black cloud bore down on them. Old Frank Unwin and his boy trying to kick-start the old Austin fire-truck, succeeding and watching it take off down the hill and into the ditch beside the cement works. Seems they couldn't catch up when the boy jumped from the cabin (because his old man had slipped and was lying on the road) knocking the truck into gear. Knocker Morrison on his motorbike, carrying sandwiches and drinks out along the paddocks to the firelines, not quite jumping the irrigation channel ('but close - real close, only a wheel's length in it' as he walked it back with a snapped chain, the two kilometres to the nearest farm house). The stories were endless. Some funny, some sad. Some personal, some about what they'd heard, some they thought had happened but weren't quite sure because everything had happened so quickly. But all told with the gravity and seriousness befitting the situation. The bar trade was good all day. And Doc and Andrew were kept very busy in the weeks that followed as people licked their wounds and looked to compensation from their insurance companies.

Committee of Management 2008 ~ 09

Helen Worlidge	98851832	President
David Tydeman	98861034	Vice President
Chris Cairney	95607704	Secretary
Wilf Thorsen	9438 2081	Treasurer
Norm Denny	03 55 951 681	Membership Records
Alan Morris	95612803	Public Officer
Brian Williams	03 52 432 276	Immediate Past President
Margaret Reid	98081748	Past President, Life Member
John Solomon	0438054582	Member
Colin Crawford	96996050	Member
Ray Dennis	98036309	Member



John Ragas 95850334 or 0409525338 Editor / Web Co-ordinator



Uncle Art was a tall, stringy, desiccated Mallee farmer.

He, also, was a pillar of the tiny Methodist church.

Profane thoughts never disturbed his perusal of The Weekly Times stock prices, nor were profane words ever to issue from his lips at local footy matches.

In spite of his saintly demeanour, his family were somewhat at a loss as to his description of serious difficulties on the farm as "something of a real beggar".

Could a lone syllable absolve one from the accusation of being just a teeny bit foul mouthed?

That was then.

But now it is very difficult to use words that shock.. Overuse has blunted the curse to bland comment.

Even the oh-so-transparent use of first and last letters with intervening dashes has lost its point.

The most daring books handed out as Sunday School prizes a generation ago concealed the villain's expletives

as "d - -n" and "The D- - - I take you, you s - - - e".

No longer do we see the horrendous four letter name of a so - called sport, written as "g- - f."

In the street; in the media and in the theatre four letter words and what were the coarsest insults flow to the point of boredom.

How can we rectify this sad state of a major part of our beloved language and restore the vitality of a good vituperative cuss?

The use of deities' appellations has lost out to the laws that all religious beliefs must be treated with equity, so that's a lost cause.

Perhaps we could revert to a point made by the early writer on sexual behaviour, Havelock Ellis, who maintained that if viewing a pork chop were to be made unlawful, then, in time, a pornographic show could be most successful if a covered dish were to be brought onto the stage and opened with suitable ceremony to the ecstatic gasps of the audience.

Somehow, it is difficult to imagine banned words resurfacing after many years as serious contenders for imprecations.

Suggest it to your local member of parliament, as many of them seem to be seeking a path to ludicrous notoriety, and we may yet hear "You lousy mango!" or worse still, "Violin!!" and finally "Shall we dulcify?"

echo across the space of this wide, brown land.

As for me, I shall stick to a tried and true execration. Carrying the genes of a particular bunch of spare Mallee farmers, I can give vent to feelings in a way that have my family running for cover every time.

They claim that nowhere is there any person who can put such an intense feeling into the word "**Bother!**"

How rude and foul can it get?





**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING NO.14
HELD AT ANZAC HOUSE 4 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE
AT 11:00 A.M. ON 15TH MAY 2008**

Welcome:

Helen was delighted to see so many members attending our birthday luncheon and read out a letter from Bill Bewsher's daughter wishing us well on our 20th birthday.

Apologies:

B. Bewsher, B. Borchers, G. Brown, T. Brown, I. Cheesewright, Fay. Chisholm, M. Coulson, D. Crickmore, N. Denny, D. Evans, J. Finnegin, D. Gordon, A Morris, T. O'Riley, L. Schultz.

Registration of Proxy Vote:

David Crickmore appointed the Chairperson

Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last A.G.M. held on May 3rd 2007 were confirmed on the motion of Ray Dennis and Colin Crawford.

Business arising from the Minutes

Nil

President's Report (enclosed)

Helen was delighted that so many founding members were able to be part of our celebrations today and also thanked the present committee.

Helen hopes we can re-invigorate the association with a personal approach to new retirees.

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer presented the annual report provided by the Auditor

Closing Cash Book Balance: \$1,920.39 Investment Account: \$22, 962.92

Wilf Thorsen moved his report. Seconded by John Bone.

Appointment of the Auditor

Moved W. Thorsen. Seconded : John Solomon that Andrew McDowell be appointed as auditor for the next year.

A letter of Appreciation to be sent to the Auditor.

Membership Report

C. Cairney presented the report in Norm Denny's absence.

Helen did encourage members to make contact with principals who are retiring in the near future. The personal approach is the most effective way to keep our association viable.

Park Shiel addressed the members about his Peninsular Group and suggested we would encourage more members if our meetings were more informal. He invited us to Somers Camp to see the new upgrade of the camp.

Newsletter Report

John Ragas made a special presentation to Harry Buckland. John had collected over 40 poems and stories written and printed in our newsletters over many years.



Harry replied and regaled us with the story of how he became a teacher after starting out as a Grocer's Assistant. Congratulations Harry on a wonderful contribution to our association.

Council of State Retirees' Associations Report

Brian gave an outline of the quarterly meeting.

Matters of Interest.

(i) Interstate reciprocal travel concessions are moving towards resolution

(ii) Problems of VLine fares from regional areas, respecting weekend travel, lower fare structure and the difficulty of short Off Peak periods. It is suggested other Retirees' Associations be supported in their approach to Government.

(iii) The Association of Independent Retirees is recommending that taxation on property insurance should be developed on a more equitable basis.

Election of Office Bearers

Helen handed over the chair to Brian Williams to conduct the elections.

The following people were elected with acclamation.

President	Helen Worlidge
Vice President	David Tydeman
Secretary	Christine Cairney
Treasurer	Wilf Thorsen
Membership Secretary	Norm Denny

Committee Members:~

Colin Crawford, Ray Dennis, Alan Morris, Margaret Reid, John Solomon, Brian Williams (Past President)

Brian congratulated all those who have offered their services for the coming year.

Appointment of Public Officer

Alan Morris was appointed Public Officer.

Moved: C. Cairney Seconded: B. Williams

A.G.M. closed

Chris Cairney introduced our speaker **Joan Hamilton**

Joan regaled us with wonderful personal anecdotes from her first meeting with Jack to the many and varied experiences she had with the VFL and Grand Finals.

Margaret Reid thanked Joan and a presentation was made.

Following First Course Brian Williams presented **Certificates of Appreciation** to :-

Bill Bewsher, Murray Landt, Maureen O'Bree, Margaret Reid, Joan Hamilton and Vern Wilkinson.

Mention was made of the other member present at the first lunch ~ Mev Schier (*now deceased*)

Following the presentation of Certificates the Happy Birthday song and Cutting of the Cake took place.

The song written by Brian Williams to the tune of "These are a few of my favorite things" finished off the formalities.

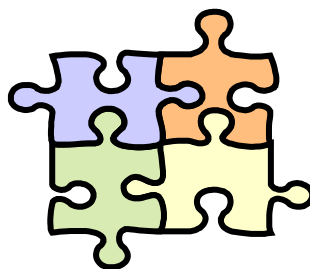
Next Meeting will be our October Luncheon



Attendance at our Birthday Celebrations on 15th May 2008

Page 25

1. Fred Ackerman
2. Margaret Atkins.
3. Wall Baker.
4. Paula Barry.
5. Eddie Beer.
6. John Bone
7. Tina Brown.
8. Harry Buckland.
9. Mary Byrne.
10. Chris Cairney.
11. Margaret Castle.
12. Colin Crawford.
13. John Daniel.
14. Ray Dennis.
15. Margaret Dozzi
16. Pauline Dumaresq
17. Ted Dumaresq.
18. Rowan Ebbels
19. Harold Fletcher.
20. Joy Fletcher.
21. Patricia Ford.
22. Ian Gastliff.
23. Peter Graham.
24. Joan Hamilton.
25. Clarrie Handreck.
26. Graeme Harrison.
27. Theresa Hoare
28. Marj Hookey
29. Len James.
30. John Jennings.
31. Ginnie Jennings.
32. Murray Landt.
33. Eveline McLeod.
34. Ken McLeod
35. Dorothy McLeod.
36. Jenny Major.
37. Ron Major.
38. John Melvin
39. Helen Nissner.
40. Maureen O'Bree.
41. Darryl Orgill.
42. Brian Pierson.
43. Beryl Pollock.
44. Gary Powell.
45. John Ragas.
46. Geoff Rattray-Wood
47. Ruth Rattray-Wood.
48. Margaret Reid.
49. Joan Romeril
50. Arthur Shankey.
51. Park Shiel.
52. John Solomon.
53. Joyce Tattam.
54. Bruce Thomas.
55. Beth Thorsen.
56. Wilf Thorsen.
57. David Tydeman.
58. Bob Wadley.
59. Jill Wadley.
60. Heather White.
61. Mick Whiting
62. Eunice Wilkinson.
63. Vern Wilkinson.
64. Brian Williams.
65. Barrie Winzar.
66. Helen Worladge.
67. Gordon Wright.





“Keeping in touch”

It is a great honour to be President at the time we are celebrating our twentieth anniversary. How delightful it is to have so many of that founding Committee with us today. Without their drive and vision, we would all be doing something different today, and be the poorer for it.

Honoured Attendees,

We welcome all retired principals to this AGM and 20th birthday celebration today.

We thank you all for your attendance and the opportunity to reminisce, speak about today and our plans for tomorrow.

We think about those who have been with us in the past and the joy & service they brought to the RVPA. We also think about those who are in ill health and can't be with us today.

Seventy special thoughts may help them on their way to recovery.

A special welcome to:

Murray Landt—19 years of service

Margaret Reid- 20 years of service

Vern Wilkinson-15 years of service

Joan Hamilton

Maureen O'Bree

Fred Ackerman VPA

& Margaret Dozzi

Our new venue at ANZAC House has been very successful and well-suited for our needs and we thank the staff, especially Liz Guthrie who has been so helpful to us.

Twenty Years On

Twenty Years On—a brief history of the RVPPA & the RVPA—many thanks to Vern and the past committees for the very detailed records they have kept during our twenty years of operation.

We are a relatively young organisation in the scheme of our personal years, however our history is strong because people have cared about each other and "kept in touch."

Thankyou to the RVPA Committee

What a great bunch of people the committee is to work with, even retired they are still hard working in the service of their past great profession. Who would like to be back on the coalface nowadays—certainly not me—even with the pay increases!!!

Finance: Wilf Thorsen 10 years of service

Wilf thank you so much for the eagle eye you keep upon our accounts. I know we must be a bit frustrating at times, however your good humour and knowledge of sound accounting practices keeps us all and the books in good shape.

Wilf thank you for your extraordinary years of service to the RVPPA and the RVPA.

Secretary: Chris Cairney—9 years of service

I am told that if you have a great secretary then the President's job is very easy. Let me concur wholeheartedly with this viewpoint. Chris is a wonder.



Past President: Brian Williams -10 years of service

Thank you Brian for your support for me this year and musical renditions which we will be involved in later on.

Publicity

The magazine has absolutely flourished under John Ragas' guidance. It is a publication for us to be proud of and we, John are very proud of you and your achievements.

Member Activities

Thanks to Alan Morris and John Solomon for organising these special events. I think Ray Dennis organised a golf day—perhaps that can be another special event next year.

The Future

The future is in your hands. We, the committee are here to serve you.

What do you want from your organisation? Any organisation is only as strong as its members.

I think we need to re-invigorate our membership with a strong drive for new members. If each one of you here today encouraged a new member to join then our membership would increase by 68 and so on year after year.

I always think word of mouth - a personal talk - is the best ways to encourage people to join.

In Our Memories,

It is an inescapable fact that death will come to all of us. Sometimes it comes to some sooner rather than later, and to some death comes as a great relief from pain and suffering.

We miss our colleagues who have left us and we extend our sympathy to those in their families who are grieving for their loved ones.

Conclusion

I hope you enjoy today and our birthday celebrations.

Maybe we should have a special celebration every five years.

Thank you for your support today and thank you for taking the time to "keep in touch" with your colleagues.

Enjoy Joan Hamilton's talk and then your lunch.

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* ***** and that we did in good measure!