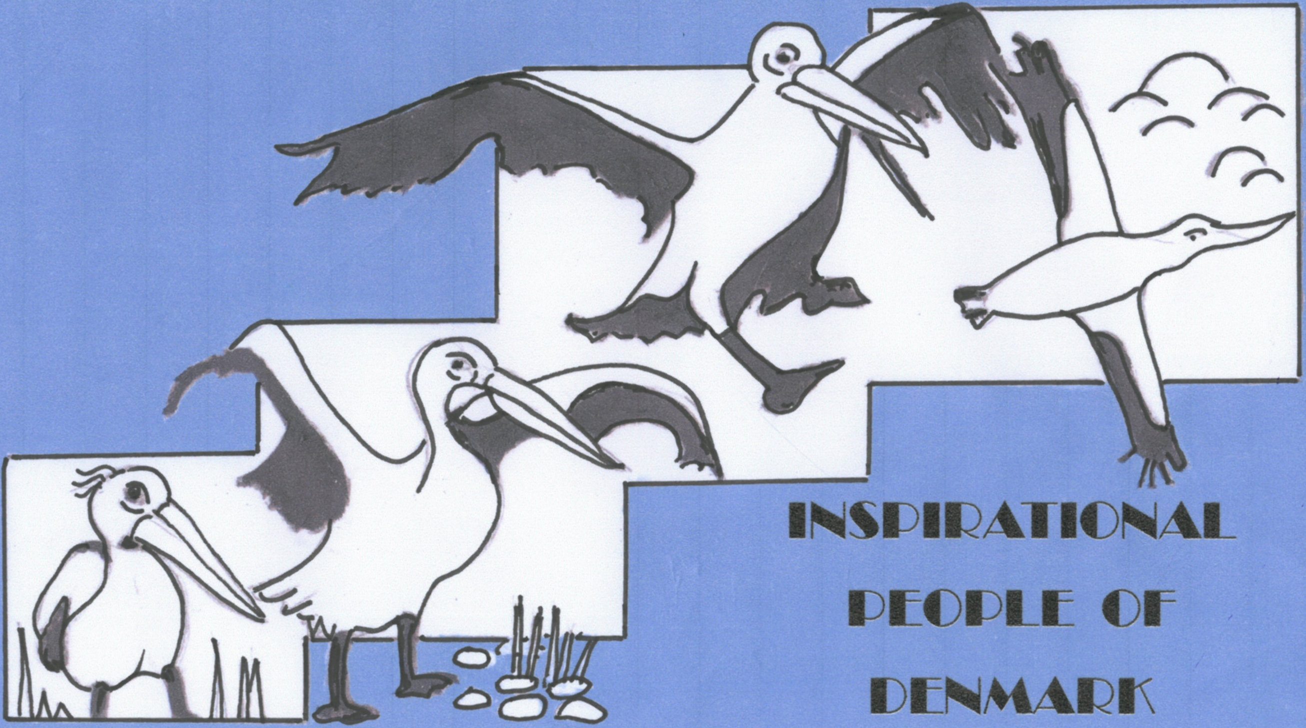
FLYING HIGH



INSPIRATIONAL PEOPLE OF DENMARK

FLYING HIGH

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WRITTEN BY

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Foreword by Councillor Mark Allen

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in recognition of the International Day of People with Disability and Disability Awareness Week

Copies of this book are available in alternative formats upon request

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First, thank you to the people who have been kind enough to tell us their stories. It cannot always have been easy to describe some of the problems they have had to face both in the past and even now. Some have been modest and unwilling to be classed as “inspirational” and just want to be seen as a person like any other. Like it or not, they are inspirational. They have courage, remarkable reserves of strength and have risen above their own limitations.

Thanks also to the parents and carers who, not only support their children or clients but who also encourage them to reach out and live life to the fullest and who have supported this project.

Grateful thanks to my fellow writers, Jessie Healey, Kerry Clark and Ashleigh Needs for the interest and expertise they have shown in bringing these stories to the public. Also to Heather Haskett for her intelligent interpretation of the purpose of the book in her cover design. A pelican may have a bit of a job in taking off, but, boy, once it’s in the air, can it fly!

Many thanks to Petra Thompson, manager of the Denmark CRC and her staff for their advice and assistance and for allowing their Work Experience student, Ashleigh, to join our band of writers.

I wish to thank the Shire of Denmark for funding the production of this book and the Disability Services Commission for their support for the official launch. In particular I would like to thank Gabrielle Rose from the Disability Services Commission, our Local Area Coordinator, who encouraged some of her clients to participate in the project. To honour the International Day of People with Disability 2016, it is the Shire's Disability Services Advisory Committee, Chaired by Councillor Mark Allen, which has promoted this project. Special thanks to Claire Thompson, the Disability Services Advisory Committee's Executive Officer, who has efficiently brought the project to its conclusion.

Dale Fewings

FOREWORD

It is an honour to be asked to pen the foreword for this inspirational book of short stories that gives the reader an insight into the lives of a few of our community members.

Congratulations must go to Dale Fewings and her support group for putting together this heart-warming book. I thank the people who have let us into their private lives. We live in a brilliant part of the world, made even better by people who share their lives with us.

Cr Mark Allen
Chair of the Disability Services Advisory Committee

INTRODUCTION *BY Dale Fewings*

Each year the Shire of Denmark and its Disability Services Advisory Committee celebrates the International Day of People with Disability, which is usually held on the 3rd of December each year. The celebration involves an element of education and information as well as inspiration and an opportunity to get to know members of our community who live with disability.

This year it was decided that a collection of stories about local people with disabilities would be a good way to show how we value their contribution to the community.

In particular, the purpose of this book is to bring to everyone's attention the "ability" of people with "disability".

For this, we interviewed a number of people with disability. We could have interviewed a lot more as there are many people with disability in our community.

However, there were time restraints and limited manpower. I am sure that there are many more inspiring stories to be told. And they should be told because they are motivating and uplifting.

What we have also discovered is a capacity, in all of our participants, to rise above their disability. Most are quick to identify the means by which they have managed to do this. For some, that is with the support of a parent or partner; for others that may include an unrelated carer or support agency; for some it includes a strong faith in God.

When we read these stories we realise that the ability to rise above a disability or a limitation, must come from some innate survival system, some reserve of strength that is triggered by a need to live life to the fullest, despite the drawbacks.

This is a lesson for us all. We all have times when we feel defeated by circumstances. Could we, like our participants, learn to use positive thinking to help lift our spirits and give us the momentum to rise above our disappointments or discover where to seek help or from whom to find inspiration and encouragement?

We want these little vignettes into the lives of some members of our community to not only raise our awareness of the battles they fight, but also to help us all to find strategies with which to overcome our own battles, large and small and, like these people, find ways to live our lives to the fullest.

NEVILLE CHEETHAM *by Kerry Clark*

Some years ago, I first got to know of Neville when I used to see him walking, slightly lopsidedly, his arms splayed out, as if to balance him, between his home and the Mary Rose restaurant. He carried a large bucket and would help out at the restaurant at the end of each day by packing up the chairs on the veranda in exchange for a cup of coffee, a chat and the kitchen scraps for his “chooks”.

In later years, when we played corporate bowls, we got to know Neville because he was in the Mary Rose team. He always made me laugh with his witty one liners and laconic grin.

When I started attending Melanie Rees’s morning gym class a couple of years ago, there was Neville, once again, with a welcoming grin, pedalling up on his three-wheeler pushbike, ready to do battle with the apparatus for another week.

When I had the chance to participate in this book project, I decided I would like to interview Neville. I collared him at the gym class, one day and asked him if he would be willing to be “interrogated” and he readily agreed to “tell me a few lies.”

That was how I found myself sitting across from him at his old haunt, these days Mrs Jones coffee shop, firing questions at him one wintry Sunday.

“Tell me a bit about yourself, Neville.”

“I was hatched in Subiaco, but my family was from South Kumminin Railway Siding, near Narembeen in the Wheatbelt. We had a wheat and sheep property. I had two sisters, both younger than me. I did my early schooling in Narembeen then went to

Wesley College in Perth. I did my Junior Certificate at Wesley then went back to the farm for four years.

In 1967, when I was nineteen returning home from a footy match, I had a car accident resulting in a head injury which left me with brain damage. I was told to stop contact sports because if I were to hit my head again, I might not wake up.

When I was twenty-one, two years later, I was called up to do military training. I should never have been passed as fit as I was prone to blackouts, but I figured the Doctor knew what he was talking about. I did eighteen months of training then went to Vietnam. I only needed to do six months there but I signed on for another six months, so that I would get the civilian benefits when I finished.

Because I had done all the necessary training courses, I was promoted to Corporal Crew Commander. I was in charge of three or four vehicles that did night raids on the Viet Cong.

On May 24th, 1971 while I was leading the troop in an armoured personnel carrier, we ran over a land mine. I was thrown against the side of the turret and had facial and back injuries.

Although I had been quite happy about going to Vietnam, as it seemed like a bit of an adventure, the Australian public was becoming more and more hostile to our involvement in the war. When we had finished our tour of duty and were flying home from Saigon, our Warrant Officer warned us that there might be protesters waiting for us in Sydney, who might spit at us or throw things and that we were not to react. In fact, this didn't happen but people looked at us as though we were from another planet which was disappointing. We got a better send-off from the Vietnamese than a welcome from the Australians.

I don't regret my time in the Army though. It made me disciplined and self-sufficient. It's the system that I don't like. I am proud that I survived and there is no point in being bitter. I am not a member of the RSL as I can't see the point in rehashing everything that happened.

When I left the army, I did a hotel management course with the Swan Brewery, then moved to Wyndham where I worked as a tele-clerk for the Harbour and Lights Department, between 1972 and 1974. While I was there, I met Patricia who was to become the mother of my son, Matthew, and whom I later married.

Patricia, Matthew and I moved back to Narembeen, where I worked on my Father's farm. He retired and moved to Denmark while I stayed on and ran the farm.

In 1977, I had another car accident. I had been doing a training course in how to use our new Header. I'd had a few drinks and was heading home when I ran off the road and again suffered head injuries as well as a broken arm and femur. I was in Royal Perth Hospital for a month then went to Shenton Park Hospital for rehabilitation. For about twenty years after that I was almost "non-compos".

My parents bought a farm in Denbarker, where Patricia and I ran sheep while my parents lived in town. In 1981, when my son Matthew was eight, Patricia and I separated. Patricia went to live in Mount Barker with Matthew and I went to

Denmark. My parents bought a duplex for me and, as I was unable to work, I received an invalid pension.

I kept “chooks”, had a “vegie” garden and an orchard. I sold my produce in a roadside stall outside my house. I soon learned not to leave stock out on the last day of a long weekend or the “city-slickers” would help themselves and “shoot off” without paying.

In 2007 my sister Robyn, who lives in Denmark, helped me to get a Veterans’ Affairs Gold Card and an ex-army mate helps me with lodging official documents, as I don’t have a computer.

A few years ago, I started going to Melanie’s physio class three times a week. This and cycling has helped me to become stronger. I cycle most places around town.

I don’t have any plans to travel. The way the world is, you wouldn’t want to. Denmark is the best town I’ve lived in. I like the climate and I like the people. They accept me for “what I aren’t.” Because of my scant grey-matter, I forget people’s names but I’ve learnt to do things my way, in spite of my disability.”

When I asked Neville what was his philosophy of life, he answered straight away with his trademark grin, **“Never give up!”**

NAOMI OGDEN *by Jessie Healey*

My name is Naomi Ogden and I am twenty-three years old. I have Albinism, five percent vision, Asperger's Syndrome and, until two years ago, was twenty kilograms heavier than I am today.

I was born at Bentley in Perth. My mother told me my birth was very traumatic and the Doctor who delivered me was extremely worried as to whether he could save both our lives. When I finally arrived, Mum said I had the cord wrapped around my neck and I was white. She was horrified. I was white because I was born with Albinism, a genetic disorder caused by a reduction, or in some people the absence, of the pigment melanin. It affects my skin, my hair and eyes and has left me with five percent vision. I have to be extra careful when I am out in the sun as I am at greater risk of sunburn and skin cancers. I am extremely short-sighted and have to have the piece I am reading close to my face and can only see about an arm's length in front of me. After that, my vision is very unclear. My depth perception is compromised and I need to sit with my back to the light, as my eyes are very light-sensitive. Mum told me too that, as a child, my mental age was estimated at being three years younger than my actual age.

For a long time, as well as the Albinism, I felt there was something else different about me. Mum told me later that she felt I was different too. I was eighteen years old when we learned about, and came to understand, Asperger's Syndrome.   It was like finding the last piece of a puzzle and explained the difference that both Mum and I felt, but could never explain. It did not change things in itself, but I could work on better ways to respond to people and to what was happening around me.

Mum tells me - although I don’t remember – that, as a baby, I was an absolute horror. I cried and cried, never settling and, as a 4 year old, was an absolute nightmare to take anywhere. For example if we went to the movies, I had to sit in a certain seat and I never considered anyone else. On my birthday, I would unwrap my present and throw it on the ground and scream, “I didn’t ask for that”.

Mum says I take after my Father. He is self-motivated and when he wants something he goes after it, so much so that not long after I was born we moved first to Merredin, then to Perth and then to Bunbury. Then, when I was seven, he wanted to move East and although Mum wanted to keep the family together, she just could not pick up and move again. I am still in touch with him though and I like that he still cares about me.

I started my schooling at the Bunbury State Primary School. I really hated School. I had no friends there and no-one ever played with me. The other children did horrible things to me like calling me names, teasing and bullying me or kicking balls at me and would never let me sit with them to eat my lunch. Sometimes I would wander around with the teachers but got little support from them. It wasn’t their job.

I have since learned that people with Albinism quite often experience social stigma. I did have visual aids and a personal assistant to help me with my schoolwork but I still struggled, falling further and further behind, not fully understanding or completing my lessons, always floundering. What made it worse was that I was moved up to the next grade at the beginning of each year. As a result, I just gave up and used to doodle and draw in my schoolbooks.

One thing that stays in my mind about this time, was when another student ran right into me as if I were not there.

I yelled out to her, “I’m here, can’t you see me?” She didn’t answer, just ran on.

I thought, “That’s it. I’m not here, I’m invisible. I am no-one.” I already had no self-confidence, low self-esteem and a fairly negative attitude. I had reached my rock bottom. Luckily for me, when I was about fifteen, one of my teachers did me a favour by pointing this negativity out to me.

The way he said it was, “You are always looking for the red, not the green in lights.”

When I was seven, my Mum paid for me to have private lessons in horse riding. As long as I can remember, I have loved horses and it is now my passion and fills up the greater part of my time.

When I was eleven, my elder sister died. My niece, her daughter, who was six, came to live with us and we became very close and best friends. Mum thought that it would be best if we both had a fresh start in a new school, so she enrolled us in a Private Christian College where she hoped we would get more support, both socially and academically. Once we were settled in, Mum went back to work. I did my after-school jobs when I went home and kept an eye on my niece. If Mum was late, I would cook the evening meal. If I didn’t know what to cook, I would ring Mum and ask what to do; did we have the ingredients and how did I make it? Mum believes that having responsibility for my niece, at that time, helped me become more self-confident and independent. We had a happy and, what I would call, normal family life. When Mum was home, we did family things, like shopping, visiting friends, movies, the beach - but only after five o'clock, when the sun was lower and it was not so hot and bright. I needed to protect my skin and eyes.

I had two best friends at this time: my niece and the eldest child of one of Mum's friends. Our favourite times were when we played with our Bratz dolls. We made up games and stories and acted them out with our dolls. These games would go on for hours and Mum always knew where to find us.

When I was in Year 10, my friend, who was by then eleven years old, became ill with cancer and died. I was devastated and for some time afterwards, life was a blur. Mum agreed that I could leave School. I was not learning anything and it was all pretty pointless. I looked for work and although I had work experience in an office, a florist and a Target Loading Deck, I could not find a job. I slowly found my way out of the blur and decided to enrol at TAFE (Technical and Further Education) and finish my education.

A bright spot at this time, was when I was sponsored for a place in the crew on the STS Leeuwin 11, Australia’s largest ocean-going, sail-training tall ship. We had five days sailing out of Fremantle Port. What an experience! I was terribly seasick but will always remember the last night. A crew member pulled out his guitar and the whole ship burst into song. It was just like the movies - until the night watch told us to “Shut it!”

After the Leeuwin, I made two new friends. The first just happened to own horses. She took me out to her place, a very large property at Dardanup, and from then on, I went there every Friday for two years. We are still very good friends. The second was Katie, who has a disability, Cerebral Palsy. We began shopping together and that grew into home visits, movies and sleepovers.

By now, I very much wanted a horse of my own. I pestered my mother three times a day, for twelve months until she said, “If you buy it yourself”.

I said, “Yes!” and started to save. I saved my birthday, Christmas, pocket money and any other money I could earn or scrape up, in any way at all.

At this time, I also completed my education by bribing myself with horse equipment for my future horse. It was a pretty busy time, TAFE, buying horse equipment and also learning about horses by volunteering at the Riding for the Disabled at Bunbury. I loved that place and still miss both the people and the horses.

It took me two years to get the money together to buy my horse but I finally did it. Mum always thought, and even said as much, that I would grow out of the idea of wanting a horse of my own, but I never did. One day, I saw an on-line advertisement for a horse called Rocket. He was my idea of the perfect horse. When I enquired, I was told by the woman who owned him that he was not for sale any more. I was really and truly disappointed but being a spiritual person, I began to pray that I would find the right horse and imagined it would look just like Rocket. I couldn't believe it when several months later, the woman owner contacted me and told me that Rocket was for sale and asked if I would like to look at him. The next day, Mum and I went to Pinjarra and met Rocket. It was love at first sight. I put a deposit on him, and that was the best day of my life. He used to be a pacer in the racing game and although not a great winner, I heard he had won about $60,000.00 in prize money.

I bought Rocket five years ago, just when Mum and I had decided to move to Denmark for a tree/sea change. Mum has a sister living here and she also saw Denmark as a more accepting and safer community. The neighbourhood we had been living in at Bunbury, no longer felt safe to us. As well, Denmark has better opportunities to agist a horse and that is very important to me. It has been a good move, despite the fact that it took me a long time to make friends and, in that time, I was pretty lonely.

Because I love art, I completed Visual Art Certificates 1 and 2 at Albany TAFE and I have actually sold two pieces. In both, the subject is horses. My favourite subjects are horses and anime, Japanese hand drawn or computer images. I made a friend at Art School who, unfortunately, has since moved away but we still keep in touch and she always visits when she passes through Denmark.

When I was much younger, I loved junk food and got into the habit of binge eating. As a result, I really stacked on the weight and three years ago I was getting sore knees, ankles and other aches and pains. I weighed about one hundred and fourteen kilograms and took about a size twenty in clothes. Apart from anything else, I did not want to fall off my horse with the extra weight, as I knew I was more likely to really hurt myself if I did. I tried to diet but it didn't work. I would take some weight off and then put it on again. My weight went up and down, up and down, like a yo-yo.

Two years ago, I realised that, if I was ever going to wear normal clothes or have a family, I would really have to do something about my weight. I did it differently. I had realised by now that dieting does not work. Diet is the food we eat, it is not something we do. I swapped white bread for brown, cut down on cool drinks, made smaller portions, slowly cut down on sugar in my tea and coffee and took up aerobics

Above: Naomi before & after the weight loss

and walking, as I was getting bored. Initially, I lost twelve kilograms and then ran into trouble. Perhaps because I had been a binge eater, I was now beginning to feel guilty about some of the food I ate and especially so if I ate something I saw as naughty. It was when I began thinking about purging that I realised I needed help. I was developing emotional issues about food and the last thing I wanted was to become bulimic or anorexic. I sought help and have made gradual changes in my diet since then. Since losing the initial twelve kilograms, I have lost a further twenty kilograms and, after two years, am still losing weight and feeling good.

When we first came to Denmark, Mum had already suffered with a very bad back for years. In 2012 it became chronic. She was in constant pain, spent more and more time in bed and had great difficulty in moving. I put my life on hold to look after her for the next period and I know she would do the same for me. At the time, we both found the situation hard to deal with and it was not the happiest home. Mum finally found a surgeon who diagnosed her back problem and, after a successful operation, her pain was relieved, allowing her to live a normal life again.

Once Mum was alright, we both felt it was time for me to move out and become more independent. I applied for a Homeswest house and after being on the waiting list for two years, was offered a place. I have been there now for over twelve months. It was a bit scary, at first - all the different noises; living on my own. But I had my gorgeous little dog, Pippa, to keep me company. Now I am fine and love it. Pippa and I have a lot in common. Mum noticed when we were bringing her home, as a puppy, that she has a problem with her vision too.

Rocket and I competed for the first time in 2016 in a Golden Oldies First Show competition. It was an encouragement day for riders and horses to experience what Showing is like. Rocket and I collected two firsts, two seconds, two thirds, one Champion and Reserve Champion sashes as well as a lead rope.

Three days of the week, I am out with Rocket - one day riding, one day with Riding for the Disabled and the other competition training. Horses are the best part of my life. Riding workouts and training Rocket are the highlights of my week.

I was thrilled recently when my dressage instructor told me she believed that I was capable of achieving competition standard. Rocket is an old horse and would not be suitable for training at this higher competition level. I will keep Rocket but in August 2016, I purchased a new horse, a chestnut thoroughbred named “Roi” which means “King” in French. Disappointingly, this choice didn’t work out but I aim to continue my search till I do find the right horse.

As I have no depth perception and can’t see distance, I have to trust my horse and I hope that he trusts me enough to keep us both out of danger. I have had a couple of spills. At an Adult Riders Course, when I was twenty-one, I lost my horse-confidence when Rocket shied at something. Although I came off uninjured, I was thoroughly shaken up for the next year. I hardly rode till friends helped me overcome my fear by teaching me techniques to lower my anxiety threshold. These techniques included singing and learning to sense when my body is tensing up. To relieve tension, I was shown some relaxation exercises, such as pretending I am a sack of potatoes and just flowing with the motion, completely relaxed.

In August 2015 whilst jumping, I had a nasty fall and could not ride for six weeks (at least that is what my Doctor thinks). I hurt my back at the time, but luckily had no permanent physical injury, although it did batter my confidence again. We have bright markers when doing arena work and my horse and I, as a team, have developed strategies to find our way around the course.

I am now busy saving, writing letters and finding ways to gain sponsors to support the competition career and aspirations I have, which is to be a Dressage Paralympian one day.

When I do have time from horses, I love to watch fantasy movies such as Lord of the Rings or the Xena Princess Warrior series. One of the greatest weekends of my life was when Katie and another friend and I went to the Pop Culture Expo in Perth in 2016, there were actors and actresses from all sorts of action, sci/fi and fantasy movies there and all the public went dressed up as their favourite movie characters. I went as Sailor Uranus, it was fabulous.

Above: Naomi with Lucy Lawless

The stars signed autographs, held a live Q and A, had photo opportunities with fans and a “Meet and Greet”. I went both days and had my photo taken with my favourites. It was just wonderful to meet my movie heroes in real life. Lucy Lawless was my heroine when I was growing up and I actually got to hug her. Xena Warrior Princess is one of my favourite fantasy characters. When I was at School her session would come on the TV at about 5.00am. I would watch her and then have to get ready and get to School on time. She has all sorts of battles in her life and made many changes. She may be a fantasy, but like her, if I decide to go after something, I am not going to stop till I get there.

I absolutely love life and I love who I am!

Meet Mark Blowers! *By Dale Fewings*

Toledo in Spain, is a town built on a hill. It is somewhat steeper and higher than Denmark but, like Denmark, is a trial for the unfit and a virtual “no-go” zone for anyone with limited mobility. Like Denmark, it has many attractions for residents and tourists alike.

A few years ago, the town had a brain wave and solved Toledo’s accessibility problem by installing several stages of escalators. Now each little stage of shops, houses, churches or public buildings can be reached in minutes by pedestrians, people with frailty, disability or the slowing effects of age.

Incidentally, the views from the escalator are stunning. Virtually no cars clutter or pollute the town. The peace and quiet is broken only by neighbourly voices or appreciative tourists.

Could anyone imagine escalators in Denmark from the Riverfront to the Visitor Centre? I bet there are quite a few people in Denmark who would relish the thought! Mark Blowers might well be one of them.

Let me tell you Mark's story:

Mark was a relatively active sixty year old, retiring from his job as a Building Trades Specialist in Perth, looking forward to a lifestyle away from the noise and rush of the City and more than ready to embrace a quieter, cooler destination, a smaller, friendlier environment where he could contribute his skills and time to further the bonhomie of the community.

He looked forward to creating a new garden, to exploring the hills and beaches and developing his hobby of photography.

For some time, he had been involved with the Catholic Church and looked forward to getting to know the Catholic community and to serving at the services, as he had done in Perth. The idea of a small, intimate Catholic community appealed to Mark and he began to make contacts and friends in this area. He also looked forward to seeing his wife develop a circle of friends.

Mark had served in the Army reserve, in the 10th Light Horse Armour Corps. He joined the Denmark Returned and Services League (RSL) where he also made friends and enjoyed the company of the other RSL members. He took part in discussions and in planning the ongoing ceremonies to commemorate the different theatres of War over the years. The RSL in Denmark is a place of good camaraderie where all sorts of issues, including health and welfare issues, are discussed.

Imagine all this – the anticipated pleasure, the opportunity for a new lease on life and then read on!

Mark, about twelve months after his arrival in the town, was on the roof of his house trying to install an antenna, when a tragedy occurred.

He was holding onto the solar panels on the roof ridge. He stood up to measure the mast height and the next thing he knew, he was on his back, sliding down the roof. He remembers trying to grab hold of the screws as he slid down, tried putting his feet down hard to try to stop as he reached the gutter and then - Nothing.

He regained consciousness in dreadful pain, on the ground, unable to move at all. He feared the worst: that he was paralysed from head to foot. He was alone. Time seemed to stand still. He’s not sure how long he lay there feeling nothing but pain, his mind also quite numb.

Sometime later, he thinks maybe only a few minutes, he was able to move his hands and minutes later, he discovered that he had some movement in his legs but still incredible pain. He thanked God that at least he had some movement. Because he was alone, his mind centred on getting help. It took him considerable time to drag himself to the phone to ring for an ambulance.

The team from St John’s Denmark arrived quickly and worked hard to make him as pain-free as possible. He was in hospital for a considerable time followed by rehabilitation.

The accident left Mark with a permanent 40% compression above L1 vertebrae which was completely fractured and took over twelve months to heal. This severely restricts movement, particularly on his left side.

Mark now needs physiotherapy and hydrotherapy at least once a week. For this, he travels to Albany. He cannot drive himself because of the medication he takes for pain relief. The physiotherapy and hydrotherapy help relieve the pain. Ideally, he should receive this therapy far more often but this is not possible due to the distance needed to travel to Albany for hydrotherapy. Denmark hospital does not have a full-time physiotherapist so more frequent physiotherapy is not possible either. Mark tells me that there are currently about twenty people who have similar physio and hydrotherapy needs living in Denmark, who make the journey to Albany each week for hydrotherapy.

It is well-known that chronic pain is often paired with mental depression. This is understandable but difficult to mitigate. Medication is usually the option available.

Depression often impedes recovery. It keeps the person at home, away from friends and other company, exacerbating the misery of pain and immobility. For Mark, who has always had a strong faith, it was prayer and trust in God that has helped him to lift his spirits, though it has not always been easy. He was always subject to depression, even before his accident, and had to work hard to lift himself above it.

The community can help considerably to draw a person out of depression, if it offers an open hand, a welcoming voice. Mark has said that when his friends and acquaintances have reached out to him with friendship, he has felt his spirits lift. He loves a good, serious discussion, has an active mind and the opportunity to share thoughts and ideas allows him to emerge from his disability into a person, like any other.

Like many other people with disability, he wants to be identified first as a person, not as a disability.

To some extent, this is true for all of us. Although we may be described as “that person with crutches” or, “with a funny hairstyle” or, “wearing unusual clothes” or, “driving a red car”, we know that that is not who we really are. We want to be identified by the “person” we are: “jolly” or, “kind” or, “intelligent” or, “helpful” or “skillful” and by what we do: “a farmer”, “a teacher”, “a member of an organisation”, “an artist” or, “a member of a group or family.”

Despite his disability – and, yes, he does have to get around on crutches or in a wheelchair; yes, he does need some help with showering, gardening, cleaning and being driven to appointments in Albany – Mark is a busy community member. He continues to serve at Church. He attends RSL meetings. He is also a member of the Shire of Denmark's Disability Services Advisory Committee (DSAC) where he is able to bring the perspective needed to assist the Council in interpreting the needs of the community appropriately. Quite apart from his membership on DSAC, he has a good working relationship with several Shire Officers and brings to them directly any concerns he and others have about services, which are needed to help those with disability access various areas or where repairs and changes need to be made. He is a strong voice in fact, for members of the community who have a disability.

Another service he offers is at the Denmark Men's Shed organisation. He is a very keen advocate for men to have opportunities to talk to one another and "get stuff off their chest". Mark also works with others to establish activities and opportunities for men to develop some skills which may lead to creative hobbies – things which help a person use concentration to avoid boredom and depression. He and others are working towards planning a shed of their own and to try to get funding for that worthy cause.

You can see that for Mark, a Toledo-style escalator could be the answer. In the meantime – because he is a realist – he suggests that a 40 km per hour speed limit on South Coast Highway in town would make life safer for slow moving people and some staged ramps on pavements would allow protagonists to pause along the strenuous climb.

Mark is waiting for surgery to help lessen the restrictions on movement in his left arm and leg and also to relieve some of the pain. We wish him well and hope surgery will be successful.

We thank him for the contributions he is making towards enhancing our community, despite his disability. He is a man of courage.

BARBARA AYLING *by Ashleigh Needs*

It’s 10 in the morning and Barbara has journeyed to the cozy local Mrs Jones Café in anticipation of our meeting. The empty coffee mug set beside her tells me that she is buzzed and ready to converse. I sink into the couch next to her and begin by introducing myself.

Perhaps, the way in which I describe my intention to write her story appears somewhat patronizing because she quickly, but politely, interrupts and introduces me to the term ableism. Sitting on the edge of her seat, she passionately explained the widespread tendency of people who do not have a disability to misinterpret the needs or preferences of people who do have a disability and the implication that has on her life. She did so, without personally attacking anyone in particular, but rather with the purpose of educating. And I was certainly learning something valuable.

As a result of what has been deemed bad luck, combined with perhaps medical negligence, Barbara was born not breathing. Evidently, during the course of her birth she had been deprived of oxygen which resulted in the development of Cerebral Palsy. Displaying that characteristic determination I was quick to notice she possessed, Barbara swiftly said that having Cerebral Palsy is only one part of her identity; she is also a daughter, a big sister and a Mother who has the same interests and worries as most women.

Before long, Barbara admitted to going through a particularly rebellious phase in her younger years, as the majority of teenagers do. Her visual perception is quite severely affected by Cerebral Palsy and rather than seeing objects that are in fast motion she sees what she described as a slow processing of still images. You can imagine crossing the road would be a nightmare! Well not always for Barbara. Being the defiant, bold teenager she was she would have a quick look each way and take a shot in the dark (almost literally) and cross the road, unsure of whether she was completely safe. Barbara laughed as she reminisced her turbulent teenage years. Her Mum, however, did not find this as funny and it was then, at twenty-one years of age, she was teamed up with her assistance dog, Ram.

It was then that Barbara found independence and moved out of home. With support from her Mum, Sheila, and some assistance from support workers, Barbara has lived outside of the family home ever since. At twenty-seven she became a Mother and continued living independently with her new daughter. She admitted that living alone with Bridget poses a myriad of challenges.

Some of those challenges are those that most people are likely to face, such as feeling lonely, working out a budget and managing the behaviour of a six year old child. There are other challenges that are especially exacerbated by having to deal with people who are not aware that they are behaving in an ableist manner towards her.

A turning point in dealing with this challenge came one day when she saw a documentary *The Ugly Face of Disability Hate Crime,* a discourse on ableism.

Ableism is a form of discrimination against disabled people based on the common assumption that people with a disability cannot fully function within society. It is this dominant notion in society that devalues the potential of people who have a disability.

“In my experience,” she says, “People act out of fear, and they are fearful because they think they don’t know how to relate to me”.

Dejectedly, Barbara explains how her everyday experience of ableism leaves her in a constant state of frustration and anger and how, after watching the documentary, she realised she is not the only person who feels this way. Despite understanding that, often ableist behaviour is well-intentioned and a result of ignorance, it does not make it okay and Barbara figures that awareness is the key.

All individuals who have a disability experience ableism differently. I asked Barbara about the implications of dealing with ignorance and ableism on a regular basis. Often she feels as though her actual personality, interests and values are completely over-looked.

“Most of the time it’s obvious that people just see my disability, they never take the time to actually see me”.

As a true reflection of how often Barbara experiences ableist behavior, she explains a situation that had just occurred right before our meeting. While out in the Denmark community, in the company of people they both know, Bridget has a tendency to misbehave at times, in true six-year-old form mind you. Onlookers, instead of approaching Barbara about Bridget’s behavior, tend to dismiss the fact that she is her Mother and wind up speaking to the Support Worker, present at the time. For ablebodied people, this is a predicament that we could barely begin to imagine experiencing, but it is an element of Barbara’s everyday life - her reality. You could say it has amounted to the development of Barbara’s ‘thick skin’ and self-awareness, both elements of Barbara that standout…along with her high-spirited attitude.

I could sense a feeling of nostalgia when Barbara was remembering, out loud, the very special relationship she developed with only one of the many Support Workers she has worked with. She recalls that, where ableism wasn’t present, she was able to cultivate a meaningful and personal helping relationship with Rachel – a relationship in which Support Worker and Client became close friends. In this moment, with a smile ear to ear, Barbara removed her beanie to reveal to me a wicked head of chocolate brown dreadlocks that Rachel had hooked her up with - to Barbara, a fashionable reminder of a truly treasured friendship. Unfortunately Rachel had to relocate which saw the end of the assistance she was providing.

Working with people who could not relate to Cerebral Palsy, as a dimension of difference rather than a defect, became increasingly hard. Barbara made the brave choice to reject most support services in order not to feel patronized any longer in the safety of her own home. Although it was a hard decision to make, she was one hundred percent supported by her primary provider of assistance - her Mother.

I asked Barbara who has been the most influential person in her life. Without missing a beat, she was quick to say that her Mother has never let her down. Sheila, throughout Barbara’s entire life, has dedicated herself to assisting and supporting her, when necessary - a true demonstration of that unbreakable mother-daughter bond. A love of English, History and Creative writing came early for her- influenced by her Mum and the many audio books she would immerse herself in. In fact, I’m feeling the pressure as I pen the experiences of my meeting with Barbara. Her creative writing flare has me wanting to impress. She is a published author. After winning a short story writing competition in High School, she continued to indulge her interest and began posting her prehistoric Celtic-culture-inspired Science Fiction pieces online.

Barbara’s proudest experiences have been nothing short of completely admirable and, strangely enough, totally relatable. At the top of her list is becoming a Mother. Looking down at her new born baby for the first time, she instantly knew that her name was Bridget - an old soul that has been here before. Another highlight was having her work officially published - the dream of many Creative Writing students. Speaking as a Lecturer, at a learning seminar and having her knowledge valued also made her proud. Such achievements that as proud human beings we can ALL relate to, prove that a person like Barbara, though she may have a disability, also has ability.

It is the ability, not the disability, that defines the person.

To encourage social change we need to confront ableism, within ourselves, the disability community and society in general.

It’s okay to talk about the hard stuff and after listening to Barbara, I realise how important it is to think about it in relation to ourselves too.

It’s time that the voices of our community members who have a disability, move from the fringes to the forefront of the story.

JASON PARKES *by Dale Fewings*

Hello. My name is Jason Parkes and I am 8 years old. My brother, Nathan, is 6. You may know my Mum and Dad, David and Jamie Parkes. We live in Kemsley Estate.

Nathan and I go to the Denmark Primary School. I am in Year 3 and my teacher’s name is Mr Fawell. Nathan’s teacher is Mrs Garland and he’s in Year 1.

I really like School. My favourite subject is Maths and my teacher says I’m very good at that. But I also like writing stories – if I can think of a good idea to tell a story about.

There are a few things at School that I don’t really like to do, such as Cross Country Running. The reason that I don’t like doing this much is because it is such a long way to run.

When I’m not at school, I like playing games on my Wii U and my ipad. I also like building things and watching my favourite TV shows.

Nathan and I belong to the Denmark/Walpole under 9s Auskick. I like Sports but I’m not a star exactly. Now, Nathan is very good at sport, especially football, which he loves. I like it too but I have to admit that Nathan is a natural whereas I am just average. But, I did something pretty terrific in Football recently. Auskick invited me to play at half time during the Dockers’ game against Adelaide in Mount Barker. Wow! Did that beat everything! I did a lot of running but I didn’t get in many kicks. I wish we had had longer on the field. But it was fun, anyway.

We do a lot of fun things in my family. One of my favourite things is going to Albany and going to the Cinema.

Nathan and I do lots of things together like play with our dogs, going on adventures and drawing pictures together. Sometimes Nathan and I argue but we always go back to being friends.

Nathan is really my best friend. We like a lot of the same things, like building our fort, with our Mum or jumping on the trampoline with our Dad.

Sometimes I do things with other friends like go to their Birthday Parties, after school sports and Roller Disco.

My Mum and Dad have told me that when I sometimes get in a tizzy over things, it’s really because I have Autism. They have told me that having Autism means that my brain works just as well as anybody else’s but it just works in a different way. It doesn’t stop me from doing things I want to do, but it does sometimes make things a little more difficult for me to do, in some situations. I will sometimes get headaches and not want to do some things if they are too hard or confuse me. I wish it wouldn’t, but Mum and Dad have explained that I have already learned a lot about how to stop it being a nuisance and they say I will learn even more about how to do that as I get older. When I was younger if I got upset, sometimes I would have a bit of a “melt-down” and I would yell and scream! Now, if I feel annoyed about something, I usually go and have a rest somewhere quiet.

Some people might think that because I have Autism, I can’t do much. Well, I have proved them wrong. I can even do a lot of things better than some people! People in my class understand what Autism is and that it can make people act differently at times. It’s nice that they understand why I get upset sometimes and may even have a cry but that doesn’t happen very often now, I can do pretty much all the things that I want to do.

I do know that some people who have Autism also have some other problems. That must be tough. When I was younger, I sometimes had to work hard at getting over my problems, so I think it’s great that other people, like the kids at school or friends, make me feel included and don’t make me feel too different. But the best thing is that other people understand and treat us as all the same.

Although I sometimes wish that I didn’t have Autism, I am still very proud of the way I can do my school work, especially Maths.

I don’t know yet what I want to be when I grow up, but I think I’d be good at making video games. Some of the video games I have played are a bit confusing and the rules don’t make much sense so I think I could learn how to make better games that make more sense. I think being really good at Maths & Science will help me learn how to do that.

My Dad’s job is with Great Southern Personnel. In his job, he helps people with disability find a job. He also helps employers understand that just because a person may have a disability, it doesn’t mean he or she can’t have a good job. Dad has found jobs for lots of people in Denmark who have a disability. He is a kind man and good at teaching people what they need to know about a job and how to do the work.

My Mum is good at teaching too. She used to work as an Educational Assistant at my School and she also spent a lot of time volunteering in mine and Nathan’s class rooms helping lots of children with their work and helping the teacher with whatever she needed.

Most of my family live in the Eastern States. I was born in Queensland but when I was three, my Mum, who grew up in Denmark and went to school here, wanted to come back to Denmark because she liked it so much when she was a child. She wanted my brother and me to have the same School and nice place to live. My Mum says Denmark is a great place for children to live. It’s a small place that’s quiet and friendly with no really noisy places. I don’t much like noisy places, like great big shopping centres where there are thousands of people and very bright lights and so much noise. I don’t like noisy traffic either. Where we live in Denmark, it’s very quiet and I can even hear the birds and the wind in the trees. That’s what I like.

My Nanna still lives in Queensland. My other Grandma and my Poppy live in a place called Grafton which is in NSW and we are going there for a visit soon to see them all. I have a lot of cousins plus Aunties and Uncles there too. My Nanna sometimes flies over to visit us in Denmark. She last came over to visit at Easter time. She brought us lots of Easter eggs and we had an Easter Egg Hunt.

GEOFF HILL *by Kerry Clark*

I was born in a Subiaco hospital but grew up on a wheat and sheep farm in the community of Varley, in Western Australia with my younger sister and brother.

It was a fantastic way to grow up, filled with adventure. We caught gilgies, built cubbies and drove an old bomb around the property. We would drive to the bus stop to go to school. We rode motor bikes and I moved machinery, such as the portable silo, between paddocks, from the age of eleven. I drove a tractor at the age of twelve. During seeding I would drive the vehicle to deliver the lunches to the workers.

We had no TV, so we listened to a lot of radio. We only had the ABC. We were twelve kilometres away from Varley. Our closest bigger town was Hyden, which was fifty-three kilometres away. We were one hundred kilometres off the bitumen, so the Royal Flying Doctor Service was vital. Until the early eighties, we used a generator for our electricity.

We went to School by bus. The School had forty students. It went to Year 7 and there were two teachers, a husband and wife team. I had dyslexia. My Mother was a teacher and she came in to help me out with my work. She would do half a day a week. I enjoyed my time at Primary School.

When I finished Primary School, I went away to Christchurch Grammar School in Perth. We were taught leadership skills and how to stand up for our own position with confidence.

Boarding was tough in the beginning, as I had never been away from home before. It helped that the younger students had their own separate house.

From the age of fourteen, I became involved in “Disabled Sport”. The WA Disabled Sports Association was looking for athletes. At eighteen, I competed in the Discus event in the Paralympics in Seoul.

While I was at Christchurch, I also became a football fan, following East Perth and then the Eagles.

When I left School, I went to Murdoch University. I studied communications and sociology. I lived in the student village, which was made easier by the fact that I had been at boarding school, for my secondary education and had been used to mixing with international students from different cultural backgrounds.

When I graduated, I worked at the City of Gosnells co-ordinating an urban art project. Later, I ran a Youth Centre in Hopetoun. I also ran a Local Drug Action Group, there and was on the State Committee as well as on the Shire’ Disability Services Advisory Committee. When I came to Denmark I was also on the Youth Advisory Council.

I now work the equivalent of a day a week at the Denmark Primary School as the School Chaplain. I run a Breakfast Club with a team of volunteers.

Because I was born with cerebral palsy, I am able to access a pension and have controlled rent. I do a lot of voluntary work because I see the benefit to the community, as well as a sense of personal fulfilment and dignity.

In my spare time I have a variety of interests. Because I had dyslexia, I am not a great reader but I enjoy reading about history and politics and watching the history channel. I am a fan of interesting facts so I love quizzes.

I like various music genres, depending on my mood. I listen to classical, jazz, rock and pop, particularly the eighties music of my youth. I like artists such as Michael Jackson, Prince, Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles.

I enjoy playing Chess. I am not very good at it but I like the fact that it is a thinking person’s game. I also like a game of pool.

I like talking to people. I don’t drive so I often get a lift and enjoy a good conversation.

I access support from the entire community. People know me in my capacity as School Chaplain and as a Christian so I get support in various ways. People cut wood for me, drive me into town and drive me to football games. Living on my own, people invite me for dinner. In turn I volunteer. Assistance isn’t a one way thing. Andre Steyl is an example of this. His impact on the Denmark community has been profound.

I like to think of myself as part of something bigger. For me that’s Christianity. I have had good moral and spiritual support from Christian people in my life, going right back to my childhood and Christmas holidays at the Hopetoun Beach Mission, run by the Baptist Church. My support comes from faith, friendship and family.

Looking to the future, the work situation is always fluid. In community work, funding sources change. I would like to continue as Chaplain at the Primary School, but my one day a week is not guaranteed. I have always had great support from my workplaces but support is a finite resource. I need to be prepared to constantly reinvent myself and do what needs to be done.

If you are unemployed, your job becomes getting a job. But this is not solely about finance. My job could be in a volunteering role. I may do further study. I do not necessarily need to earn, but to contribute. Being on a full-time pension can create a sense of dependency.

In the future, I would like to travel, go on a cruise and go to the Australian Football League (AFL) Grand Final. In the meantime, I focus on what I can do for the community.

We are living in an increasingly self-centred society but we need to look beyond ourselves. We should be judged on how we treat the less fortunate.

A Christian quote that resonates with me is that “All journeys are different, but all souls have the same value.” We can’t allow differences in beliefs to build barriers. Everyone has a contribution to make.

I am inspired by such highly successful people with disability as Stephen Hawking, Marli Matlin, Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles. Their talent and ability transcends their disability. I believe in the importance of will power and the drive to win. I will always back the person who needs to win over the one who wants to.

I don’t focus on my disability. If you do, you’re already behind the eight ball. I don’t like the term “disabled person.” I refer to myself instead as a person with a disability. The person comes first.

I am well known in the Denmark community and when I walk down the street, people stop for a chat. I am proud of that.

SAMALA GHOSH *by Jessie Healey*

My name is Samala Ghosh and I was in born Albany Hospital, but my home is in Denmark at the Wolery, which is close to William Bay. That has been the family home for more than 30 years. The Wolery is an ecological community where fifteen families live on one hundred and sixty five acres. The Wolery was a nice place for me to grow up in. I had lots of room to play around in and lots of children and people who looked out for each other.

Sometimes, people want to know how I got my name. I asked Mum and she told me that, before I was born, she went through a difficult time and didn't know what she wanted, so she prayed for grace. She found out she was pregnant with me, which was most unexpected, as she was forty two years old. As she was an older Mum-to-be, friends asked had she thought about having an amniotic fluid test. She hadn’t given it a thought, but thought that she would go along and have one, even though she was not worried about anything. When the time came and she saw me on the screen, and saw the great big needle they were going to use, and learned of the possible risk to me, she could not go ahead with it. She never thought about having the test again. When I was born, Mum named me Samala Grace. Samala is a Hebrew name meaning “prayed for” and it was “Grace” that she prayed for. It was five days after I was born that Mum found out I had Down syndrome. Mum tells that I am a blessing and she would not mind having ten of me.

Because I love learning and enjoy being around other people and making friends, I liked school. I went to Steiner School Kindergarten and then on to Spencer Park Primary School, when I was in Year six. When I was in Year seven, I became a Student Councillor. I wore a badge to identify that and I had to sit out in front with all the other Student Councillors at Assembly. I had a clipboard and it was my job to mark off, on a list, the sporting equipment that other students borrowed from the Sporting Equipment Store. I would get the student to identify themselves and then would tick them off against the item they had taken out, and again when they brought them back.

After Year seven, I went to Corpus Christi College in Perth as a day student for my High School years. I loved it and made lots of friends. Mum and I rented a house in Mt Pleasant, in Perth and Mum took me to and from School each day. She would say to me, “What did you like best today?” I would say, “Everything”. I left in 2009 when I graduated in Year twelve.

While at Corpus Christi, I had two work experience placements. One was at the Attadale Hospital where I helped to prepare the food for patients and then deliver the meals to them in the wards. I also did the mail and worked in the office. The other was at Regent Gardens, an Aged Care Home. I helped in the kitchen preparing food there too and helped in the office as well. In Year eleven, one of my subjects was fashion design. I made a number of things, a pink satin top, a skirt, bag and jewellery. After that, my interest in sewing grew.

After I left School, but still in Perth, Mum enrolled me in Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts WA (DADAA) in Fremantle, where I did Art once a week. It is an organisation that offers art and cultural programs to people with a disability or who are disadvantaged in some way. One day, she heard of an art exhibition called ‘Open Minds Open Doors’ which was sponsored by ACT BELONG COMMIT, in Fremantle. I decided to enter and won an award, the ‘Women at Their Best Art Award’ and $150. Since then, I have been a bit more serious about my art and Mum has pushed me a bit more too. She said she knows I am happy when I paint because she hears me singing. I love bright “retro” colours, especially red, but also like using earthy colours. I like art because I can have fun with it and use my own creativity.

In Perth, after leaving School, I completed Certificate 1 in Hospitality and then again in Albany, when I came back to Denmark. I have also completed Certificate 1 in

Horticulture, Certificate 1 in Woodwork, Certificate 1, 2 and 3 in Visual Art and Certificates 1, 2 and 3 in Clothing Production at TAFE.

I attended TAFE in Albany two days a week doing Art and Sewing. Mum worked in Albany on the same days. She used to get very tired driving backwards and forwards from Denmark to Albany each day, so we rented a house in Albany and shared with one of my older sisters, Neoma. We stayed over a couple of nights a week and it was great because I got to spend time with my sister.

Around this time, studio space at the Albany Vancouver Art Centre (which is walking distance from the house we were renting) became available. Mum had been dreaming of a studio space for a long time so she jumped at the opportunity to put in an application. We were SO surprised when we were successful. As it happened, the Art course I was attending was discontinued, so Mum asked the Art Lecturer, Kaye Embleton, if she would like to continue working with me and she said “Yes!”

When all this was happening, somehow or other, Mum heard about the Nexus Art Grant and decided to put in an application. Mum passed this information on to my LAC (Disability Services Local Area Coordinator) and now she lets others know about it too. Mum had never applied for a grant in her life but decided to give it a go. In the application, she explained that one of the biggest obstacles for me in producing art, was the lack of work space. She also said that I would like to learn new techniques and one day hold my own exhibition. In the application, Nexus asked what would we like to achieve by the end of the project and Mum said:

- I would hope to have learnt many new skills and techniques
- Have developed a network of friends with a common interest
- Enable and inspire others to also be creative
- Have gained confidence in my ability as an artist
- Enjoy the esteem of holding my own exhibition
- Discover that people want to purchase my work
- Make Sales!

Mum asked for the maximum amount of $10,000 to help cover the cost of the lease on the studio for one year, art materials and wages for an arts mentor. We were successful in the application! Mum was amazed!

As it happened, I had two art mentors. One was Kay Embleton, who used to be my TAFE Art Teacher and the other Karen Quain, whom Mum had heard about from my LAC. She too said “Yes!” when Mum contacted her about working with me. I was able to pay Karen through my DSC Post School Options funding. It was very exciting, being able to buy art materials and work with other talented artists. I stayed in that studio for one and a half years. I worked really hard. After I finished TAFE, I would go there and work for another three hours. I did that twice a week, and sometimes on weekends. I produced a lot of work and was finally ready for an exhibition.

I held my first solo exhibition ‘New York Dreaming’ at the Denmark Butter Factory, as the opening event for Denmark’s annual Community Art Festival, ‘Brave New Works # 21’. I sold a lot of work. Enough to cover my fare to America! Visiting America is my dream. After two weeks at the Butter Factory, my exhibition then toured to The

Vancouver Art Centre in Albany. We had an official opening and I was interviewed by the Albany Advertiser. Most of my remaining work was sold there. Whilst my exhibition was on, I also held an afternoon tea for the public in the gallery to acknowledge International Day of People with Disability.

Months later, when the City of Albany had their annual Vancouver Street Festival, I had an Open Studio for people to come and look at my work. That was when I met Natalie Gillespie, a great singer from Perth. She was performing at the Festival and came to look at my work. She bought my sculpture of Pink and one of my drawings and had her photo taken with me.

After one year, the grant money had well and truly run out. We kept the studio on for another six months but could not afford it after that. In the meantime, Mum had been searching elsewhere. Mum was like a dog hanging onto a bone when it came to the dream of having an art studio. She never let it go.

I was registered with Great Southern Personnel in Denmark and when I was asked where I would like to work, I said “Mrs Jones”. Mrs Jones Café took me on and I have been there for over twelve months now. I work four days a week for two hours each day. I was asked to work five days but declined because I like doing my sewing course at TAFE one day a week. I love working at Mrs Jones. I like the staff and have met a lot of people since I have been there.

I had just begun to work at Mrs Jones Café, when Mum heard of a studio space becoming available in the Butter Factory Gallery which is in the same building. She knew it would be perfect for me as I could access the studio easily and independently after I finished work each morning. She negotiated with the owner of the building and the other artists who jointly ran the Gallery.

She also started applying for grants again, including the Nexus Art Grant. This was two years after the first application. Again we were successful! The condition this time was that we build on what we had already achieved.

From that, Mum assisted me in developing my own business ‘Samala Ghosh Creations’ with my own Australian Business Number (ABN). Through the Nexus Grant I employed someone to help me develop my website www.samalaghoshcreations.com.au and re-employ Kay Embleton as an Art Mentor. I also employ Jenny Barter as an Art Mentor through my DSC Post School Options funding.

So now I am very happy!!! I have my own studio which also has its own gallery! And, best of all, it’s in Denmark! So now Mum doesn’t have to drive me so far. Albany was okay whilst Mum was working there and I had two days at TAFE, but now I’m only doing one day a week at TAFE and Mum is no longer working there. When I finish work at Mrs Jones each day I can walk over to my studio. I have sold a lot of work already and now have to work hard to continue stocking my gallery. I enjoy it all and love making sales. People talk to me at work and in the street about my artwork. I like being recognised. I enjoy meeting people through my studio and gallery.

Mum and I like to go up to Perth as often as we can to catch up with friends that we made when I was at Corpus Christi. Mum feels that there are different opportunities in Perth and we can both do things there that we cannot do in Denmark. Mum says that she does not think that I would be as confident and outgoing as I am, if I had not gone up to High School and made the social connections and had such a great network of friends in my teenage years as I had.

Mum made friends there too, with whom she can share the same concerns, ideas, resources and supports. I love catching up with my Perth friends. I belong to a Ten Pin Bowling group called Melville Strikers. We love parties and on birthdays, sometimes have fun with a box of dress ups and a camera.

When we were on our way home to Albany once, we were listening to the radio station Hot FM. The announcers, Tom and Heidi, asked, “Do you think you are a star?”
Mum asked me, “Are you a star?”
And I said, “Yes!”
She rang the station and said, “My daughter says she’s a star.”

They asked me to sing a song over the phone and then invited me over to Bunbury to take part in a promotion of the South West. Mum drove us over there. There were ten or twelve other people there and we were all given different places to promote. I had to stand in front of a great big picture of the Super Pit in Kalgoorlie and say, “Come to WA Aye!”

I love music and dancing. Mum said when I was little, I would be playing the harmonica, playing a drum and tapping my feet with bells on them - all at the same time! She joked with people that she could put me out on the street to busk and make a living.

When I was in Perth, I used to do ballroom dancing at a dance studio called ‘Dance Power’ in Melville. I wish I could still do it here. I have seven medals for my ballroom dancing. In 2015, I did a workshop with Carmello, from ‘Dancing with the Stars’ at his studio in Morley. I met him at the Down Syndrome Butterfly Ball. I love going to the Butterfly Ball. It is the biggest fund raising event of the year for the Down Syndrome Association. Last year it was held at the Crown. They always have an auction and, on one occasion, I gave two of my paintings for auction. For a while, I went to Belly Dancing classes in Albany too, which was fun. My friend Naomi and I were on the ‘The Sahaja Belly Dancing’ float for the 2014 Albany Christmas pageant.

I love cooking and often cook meals at home. I especially like to cook Lasagne and Tuna Bake for mains and for breakfast, scrambled omelette with tomato, onion and garlic. When ‘My Kitchen Rules’ chef Colin Fassnidge came to Denmark one year for the ‘Taste of the Great Southern’ and did a cooking demonstration of local cuisine at the ‘Rockcliffe’ Winery, I had my photo taken with him.

I barrack for the Dockers and I think that I would have to be one of their most loyal supporters. I watch them live on telly and think Ross Lyons and the Dockers players are just the best. They are a happy team and are always working towards a better performance, in their games.

I like learning American music and love to put on CDs and sing and play along on my drum kit. I can read music and have written a song. I was in Lou McKenna's choir at Steiner School and loved it. Andrea and Del Fisher, 'The Outback Gypsies', let me sing along with them from time to time as well. I can play a number of musical instruments. I learned the Recorder at Steiner School and learned Piano and to read music for a while, too. I now play the drums. My teacher is Mark Gretton. Sometimes though, I just like to do my own thing on the keyboard or guitar.

Although I love art, I am passionate about my music. It is my first love. I like Natalie Gillespie but Pink is my favourite performer. I have researched all about Pink on the computer, and know all about her life, her family, her support musicians and dancers. I know where her family came from and can find their countries of origin on the map. I know where and when she was born and follow her life and career on computer media, such as Facebook and Twitter. I have been to two Pink “live” concerts in Perth. The first was in 2009 at the Dome. I stood outside the stage doors for ages but missed her. I did see her whisked away in the car, with her head down. The second was in 2013 at Perth Arena. We were in the mosh pit and I managed to push my way to the front. Mum was pointing down at me. I was reaching up and Pink came and held my hand and gave me full eye contact. “Wow!”

Two years ago, I travelled to India with my Mum and sister. We went to many different places and sometimes it was hard because I didn’t like the public toilets. Best of all, I liked meeting my relatives. They are scattered all over India. My father comes from Santiniketan, in Bengal. It was good to see where he grew up and the School he went to.

I have two more dreams, at present, to bring about. The first is another travel dream and that is to travel, one day soon, to America and meet my idol Pink, visiting Philadelphia, where Pink (Alecia Moore) was born, as well as Los Angeles and Malibu. The other, is to have a music studio, to create music and play with other musicians.

I hope Mum can keep up with me!

This is the song I wrote:

Samala’s Song

I see clear
Crystal Blue Sky
I believe in music
And I sing along
With my music playing
I can see the sun shining
When the flowers are growing
I played basketball
I am a strong swimmer
I am so lucky
I have wonderful things to do
I have a beautiful face
And we’re laughing
And we go to other places
Different places…to see…and do good things

ANTUN DOSEN *by Dale Fewings*

Antun is a man with a mission. There have been times, in his life, when he was jumping out of his skin to do something or get somewhere but he frequently became frustrated by the many barriers that pulled him up short.

Antun has difficulty speaking in a way that can be easily understood. His Mum, Irene, of course has no difficulty understanding him as her ear is “tuned in” to his speech. For others who do not spend as much time with Antun, a conversation with him can lead to misunderstanding. Although Antun is keen to persevere, he knows that people often shy away, in case they embarrass themselves or appear foolish.

At School, Antun received some speech therapy but this was short-lived for some reason, probably long forgotten. As with many other people with a speech impediment, Antun has no difficulty in getting his words out if he sings. (What a pity that it would appear unnatural for a person to sing his way through a conversation, if he felt like it. In an ideal world, it would be quite acceptable.) Antun, in fact, has a good singing voice and although he did some singing in a small group, he finds a large group, like a choir, too overwhelming.

Antun, as a boy, attended primary School, first in Midvale and then Midland and after a few false starts, found his niche at St Michael’s, in Midland. (Strangely enough, Mrs Patterson, the teacher he liked best at St Michael’s, all those years ago, now lives at Young’s Siding.) Later, he attended the Special Unit at the Cyril Jackson High School. This was a School where there was a staff body with considerable experience working with students with disability but, as his teacher told Irene, Antun fell into a grey area. Intellectually, he was capable of more than most of the students in the Unit, but his lack of verbal skills held him back. He probably would have coped in the mainstream, had there been support available to assist with his verbal difficulties but none was available in those days. Remaining, therefore in the Special Unit, Antun had difficulty relating to the other students and tended to alienate himself from them. It was a less than satisfactory situation and, as a result, Antun made little progress.

Understandably, as a young lad, with unrequited ambitions, Antun sometimes lashed out in frustration. In his head, he saw himself doing so many things but was unable to communicate those ideas, plans, and desires in ways that attracted positive support or interest.

Growing up in the seventies and eighties, Antun loved to listen to music. Some of us remember that pop music, at that time, was easy to sing along to and this would have been something that Antun could do, with success. And those are the songs, as well as the wonderful 60s songs – which will probably last forever! – which Antun still loves to this day.

Often, sport is a good leveller, particularly for people who cannot communicate easily. Antun’s favourite sports at school were swimming and tennis. He participated in these sports more as a recreation than as a competitive activity but they would have provided that much-needed opportunity to let off steam and to work off any lingering frustration.

Antun’s first job, on leaving school, was trolley collection at a supermarket. This was his first taste of responsibility. As a job, it wasn’t very exciting but it earned him some money and gave him exercise. Other jobs he has enjoyed include voluntary work, particularly at various libraries, first at the Bassendean Library and later at other libraries in the Metropolitan area. He likes the quiet atmosphere of libraries and, of course, the books. He is a keen reader of books about a variety of topics, but particularly machines and vehicles. While he walked all over to try to find a paying job in a library in Perth, there was none to be had so he continued to work in libraries on a voluntary basis. Since living in Denmark, he has worked voluntarily at the Denmark Library. He has also volunteered at the Denmark Police Station and at the Mustard Seed Op Shop. Antun appreciates the willingness of managers and staff at the places where he volunteers, to encourage him and to teach him “on-the-job” skills.

It was when he was volunteering at the Green Skills Tip Shop in Denmark that staff recognised his ability and offered him a part-time job. This was organised through Great Southern Personnel (GSP), an organisation based in Albany, but with a representative in Denmark, that helps people with disability find work. GSP provides support during interviews, on-job training and on-going support once the candidate has procured the job.

Antun has shown considerable skill in his job at the Tip Shop and the Manager, James Gentle, has provided opportunities for Antun to use power tools, carry out building projects and work independently. Antun has been inducted into a work environment where health and safety rules and issues are very important. Learning to take responsibility for both his own safety and for the safety of those around him has been a useful work skill which will stand him in good stead, wherever he works.

Antun speaks highly of the support he received from David Parkes, who was then the Denmark representative of GSP, who eased him into this job and provided initial support when needed. He also speaks highly of James Gentle, the Tip Shop Manager and his staff, especially Anita Cottle who always finds Antun some interesting project or job to work on. Their encouragement and welcoming attitude is commendable. Antun is also especially glad of the company and support of Fred Smalley who is his Support Worker and who visits him at the Tip Shop twice a week to support him, as needed. Fred has shown him how to break down an old bicycle into its component parts so that the parts can be sold as spares. This has been of great interest to Antun and he is hoping, one day, to procure some old bikes himself, and break them down into spare parts. This could create a small business for himself.

Allowing a person to be employed and encouraging them to do a job well is not only an act of kindness. It is also a good investment. The employee will work more willingly, build his or her self-esteem, feel part of the organisation and be more productive. This has certainly been the case for Antun.

Like most people, Antun finds there are down-sides to any job. He is not as keen to carry out the mundane tasks, like sorting out a jumble of electrical cords or doing boring, repetitive tasks. As someone with an active mind, he prefers more creative jobs, like making planters, furniture items, building partitions or shelves.

Ideally, Antun would have loved to have worked on a farm, especially driving and maintaining tractors. Visiting a farm once, he was shown how to drive an 8-wheel 4WD tractor and learned how to handle it in 20 minutes. He reads tractor manuals and books on other farm machinery. Unfortunately, whenever he has applied for farm work, he has been unsuccessful. It is perhaps difficult for farmers to get insurance cover for someone with a disability working on farm machinery. Accidents on farms are among the most frequently reported accidents.

Aside from tractors, Antun also has a keen interest in any kind of vehicle or other means of transport. He reads books on transport systems of the past and is interested in the history and progress of transportation generally. He is always interested in the displays and demonstrations put on by the group of enthusiasts, in Denmark, who call themselves “The Machinery Group”.

Sometimes, Antun feels rather stifled in Denmark. He has lived here for some time now and has explored far and wide. He grew up in the Perth Hills so appreciates the hills and forests of Denmark but in recent years he has wanted to explore further afield.

He has had his driving license since 1996, when he was 21 years of age, so is quite independent in terms of transport to places nearby. Although at one time, he suffered badly from claustrophobia, he has overcome this and is now able to travel by air which gives him more scope. In this way, he is able to visit his sister in Melbourne from time to time. This he loves as she takes him to visit many interesting places. Some time ago, he had the opportunity of sitting in a flight simulator with a pilot and asked to have the pilot simulate very turbulent conditions, including sudden ascents and descents. Although he had overcome the claustrophobia, he still worried about how he would cope in the event of turbulence. After the flight simulation, he felt reassured. He also travels by TransWA to visit another sister in Perth. Visiting new places, he says, broadens his experience of the world.

As can be seen, Antun likes to be “on the move”. Between his visits to other places, he enjoys bike-riding with some friends, ten-pin bowling and swimming as recreational activities and, in the quiet times, he likes to listen to music.

At home, Antun and Irene have a new project underway. They are building an 8x6m shed on their property in which Antun will be able to work on pulling apart and rebuilding various machines, creating new items from old parts, setting up a sale for spare parts and, perhaps, sharing some projects with friends. Because Antun also likes gardening, Irene is also thinking of starting up a small community garden in the part of their property that is currently used to agist some horses. This project would not only be of benefit to others but would also enable more community interaction for Antun.

Antun feels that he has his life almost worked out. He still volunteers during his spare time and this brings him company and satisfaction in a job well-done, be it gardening, tidying, sorting or building. He is a valued member of the Tip Shop where he continues to broaden his experience and skills. He and his mother, Irene, have a wide range of friends and interests in Denmark. He finds ways around his disability, most of the time. Many readers will already know Antun and appreciate his determination to live his life as independently as possible. It is a privilege to bring his story to the community.

ADRIAN HINDS *by Dale Fewings*

Adrian and his family came to Denmark in 1985. A bare two years later he was diagnosed with cancer and ran the gauntlet of surgery, treatment, absence from home, trying to keep his business going in Denmark, worrying about his chances of survival and being able to provide for his family.

Adrian explains that his faith greatly helped him through this and other difficult situations. Adrian had grown up in the Catholic faith. His wife, Louise, was also a committed Catholic. The church was an important part of their lives and they took part in the many services that the church provides to communities, particularly that part of the community where there is great need for support.

When Adrian was struck with this cancer, which was in one of his kidneys, his two sons, Christopher and Tom, were about to enter High School. He wondered if he would see them finish school and although this worried him considerably, his trust in God helped him accept that, be that as it may, nevertheless they would finish High School and become adults and life, for them, would go on. And it would all be in God's hands. He put his trust in God and this was his refuge and strength.

Being a pharmacist and the only pharmacist in Denmark, he arranged for a locum to take his place while he underwent surgery and treatment. Luckily his treatment eventually saw him recover and return to work.

Many people in our community have experienced the shocking revelation of a serious illness and the anxiety, not just for themselves, as to whether they would recover, but also for their young families or spouses whom they may well be leaving behind, if their treatment is unsuccessful. At such times, whether we are the person who is ill and facing the possibility of death, or whether we are the family member who has to watch the slow process of treatment and recovery or death, we will all need someone to understand our fears and our pain. It may not always be easy to know whom we can rely on, whom we can confide in, who can alleviate our suffering. Some of us will keep it all to ourselves for fear of burdening someone else – a sure way to undermine our physical and mental strength.

Adrian became ill again in 2005. This time it was discovered that he had bone cancer in his leg. Doctors debated whether to amputate his leg because it was not known whether this was a primary or a secondary cancer. Then it was discovered that the same type of cancer was in an adrenal gland as well. This was in the days when Hospital staff tended to regard their patients as objects, rather than thinking, worrying beings, and little information was discussed with patients. Some staff even avoided answering specific questions. Adrian, being a pharmacist, had some knowledge of the human body so knew which questions to ask. However, his apparent knowledge acted as almost a threat to one specialist Doctor who dismissed his questions and, after one bout of X-ray therapy, sent him home. Sometime later, Adrian discovered that he had been sent home because this Doctor had assigned him to “Palliative Care”, meaning that no further intervention would be forthcoming. It might have been appropriate had the Doctor told him of this decision before sending him home. Adrian, once he discovered the “no-further-intervention” plan, sought alternative advice and it proved possible to amputate the leg and remove the adrenal gland. He was pronounced “well” though subject to yearly scans. There was also concern about gastro-intestinal cancer which required regular checks.

One would imagine that the prospect of losing a leg would be quite catastrophic. Perhaps it is Adrian’s stoicism or perhaps it is something else but he saw that if removing the leg would remove the cancer, it was a positive step! I am reminded of the verse in the Bible, “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out!”

Adrian says that he tried to find out each positive step and work towards it.

And work he did! Learning to walk again with a prosthetic limb took some time. First his surgery needed to heal. Rehabilitation at Shenton Park Hospital was a lengthy but quite thorough program. Being around others who were also learning to adjust, both physically and mentally, to a less than perfect body was a sometimes overwhelming experience. There was the full gamut of emotions. Young people who were the victims of serious accidents showed a range of anger and despair, but also fortitude, acceptance and determination. Amputees from cancer, some, like Adrian, were glad to be rid of the "offending" limb. Others despaired of being, again, the person they once were.

Most learned that the leg, or arm, or hand, was not actually what defined them as a person, even though it might have influenced the kinds of activities they pursued. They were encouraged to discover what really made them the person they were.

This made a strong impact on Adrian.

Adrian spent about eighteen months dealing with this cancer, the initial surgery, and recuperation, further surgery, to remove necrotic tissue from around the wound, and then the long road to rehabilitation.

He began to look at himself in terms of what he could offer the community in which he lived, despite his newly acquired disability. In 2007, he decided to sell his pharmacy business and retire from work. Having decided that he could still be of some use in the community, he decided to stand for Council and at the 2007 local government elections and was elected in the Town Ward. Following his experiences at Shenton Park Hospital, he had acquired a strong interest in people with disability and offered to chair the Council's Disability Services Advisory Committee. He had a strong commitment to ensuring that the Shire became aware of the infrastructure needs of people with limited mobility and was instrumental in drafting the updated Shire of Denmark Disability Access and Inclusion Plan. In his capacity as a person with limited mobility himself, he was able to test out pavements, ramps, pavers, parking spaces, access to the Shire buildings, walk-trails and the like. He served as Chair of this Committee for six years and two more as a Community Representative on that Committee. He served for two years as the Chair of the Denmark Seniors Advisory Committee, six years as a member of the Waste Management Committee and some years as a delegate to the Wilson Inlet Conservation Committee.

Adrian has said that the Disability Services Advisory Committee (DSAC) has uncovered a huge reservoir of goodwill within the Shire staff towards disability issues. As a result, the officers are quick to attend to anyone who has a query or complaint about issues affecting people with disability and are very open to personal visits from anyone who wishes to explain or report a problem in this area.

He now regards himself as being only mildly disabled, since he learned to walk with a prosthetic leg but admits that balance can be a problem at times and that although he doesn’t attend physiotherapy, he should exercise more because he needs to keep his core body strong and also the muscles in his good leg strong because they have to work hard, to compensate for the prosthesis.

One of the most common problems for someone with an amputation is coping with showering. Adrian has made me smile, trying to explain how to hold the soap, standing on one leg and not slip over, not to mention hopping around to get the water on all sides! Until the advent of the “wet-leg”! – ***not*** a nice name for it, I say. It’s a waterproof prosthesis and it means that Adrian can now stand on two legs in the shower, move about and be independent. Perhaps an aspect of amputation that not everyone had previously considered! Now, you know.

Adrian has always taken part in community life wherever he has lived. When he and Louise lived in Perth, and the boys were at school, they took part, as most parents do, in school activities whenever possible. They were also part of the Church Community. When they moved to Gnowangerup, Louise was instrumental in running the “Meals on Wheels” program and contributed to various other voluntary services in the community. For business reasons they moved to Denmark in 1985 where Adrian enjoyed meeting and helping his customers and gradually getting to know them. Adrian was an Office-Holder within the local Liberal Party and was active on Election Days. He was a member of Denmark Rostrum Club where he was a committed speaker and, I might add, a stickler for following the rules of debate and correct meeting procedure. He continued to participate in Church affairs, was a volunteer for the Target Reading Program at the Denmark Primary School and a volunteer Gate-keeper and Guide at the Forts Military Museum in Albany.

Adrian has always had an interest in Military history, probably prompted, he thinks, by the memory he has of the family air-raid shelter in the backyard of their home in Bayswater when he was a small boy and of seeing the Catalina Flying Boats landing on the water at Crawley Bay. One Catalina crash-landed once at Bayswater on the river. He also remembers being very interested when he saw a fighter aircraft being towed from Maylands Aerodrome along Guildford Road in 1942. His knowledge of military history, particularly with its relevance to Western Australia, has enabled him to share that knowledge at the Forts Museum. After the installation of the new ANZAC Interpretative Centre, he continued as a Guide in the older part of the Museum, until his wife became ill in 2015 and needed treatment in Perth. Louise passed away in January 2016.

Adrian has found consolation since his wife’s death, in the company of the friends he has made over the years, in Denmark and within the Church Community. From the time of his first serious illness in 1987, he says, he has put himself in God’s hands. He doesn’t worry too much about things he has no control over. He stays in close touch with his two boys, one of whom lives in Perth and whom he sees quite often and the other who lives in Washington and whom he doesn’t see often. Adrian has always read widely and continues to read, his interests being mainly politics, economics and history – topics to broaden one’s understanding of the world.

Over the thirty-one years in which he has lived in Denmark, Adrian has seen a lot of changes. The population has increased from about 2,700, in 1985, to nearly 6,000, today. He notes that, overall, the population has grown more diverse than it was in 1985. It still respects its heritage of beaches and hills, forests and farms and its history but its diversity has opened up and expanded the cultural structures.

Much of the population is made up of retirees from the City of Perth and from further afield, even overseas. There are, in fact, several different communities in Denmark, some of which may overlap but some that remain quite distinct. There’s the farming community, the retail community, the retirees, the active conservationists, the sporting community, the schools community and the arts community. The retail community has certainly grown as has the number of wineries in the area. The schools have been extended or rebuilt. The Recreation Centre has been built. Paths and Trails have been created for the enjoyment of walkers and cyclist and horse-riders. There are many more associations and activities that are now on offer in town. Many still hope for the heated pool, particularly as a much needed therapy for the ageing population and the number of people with mobility problems and chronic pain. The town has evolved and grown - a pattern that is likely to continue – and with this growth has comes revitalisation.

Certainly, Adrian has put down his roots in this town and finds not only solace in its beautiful setting but also an energy that keeps his interests alive.

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