

The Publican's Daughter

a novel

By

Lindy Warrell





Little Girls

For Enid Blyton

Little girls yearn, dream
and moon around
aching
to become a pianist,
a composer like Chopin,
or ballerina in Swan Lake
dancing to acclaim
in tutu and *en pointe* or
for the fame and glitter
of a Hollywood star.

They practise hard
seeking smiles in the eyes of
an adult world
that too often
snickers and mocks. Or,
there is simply no-one
to care.

Lonely little girls turn to books
where they discover
magical worlds
mysterious paths
and multiple marvellous friends.

One little girl read for years
becoming a woman
doing her bit
raising children, burying parents
then, one day
she started to write.

Words kept tumbling out
as though they would never stop:
she wrote away the yearning
lost hopes and failed dreams
of all little girls
who grow up
unloved.



Acacia cambegie

Image from South Australian
Seed Conservation Centre



Mottled red and purple
your vast stony plains
tell ancient tales
revealed from deep
by sun, wind and time.

Your red wrinkled sandhills
expunge lizard tracks,
snake trails, traces of life
with every breeze
as though pristine.

But, under sky's blue intensity
and scorching eye of sun
your shiny stones and shimmering sands
hide grotesque massacres, killings
and extinctions —
an innocent palimpsest.

The Desert Lies

Lindy Warrell

Laughing Magpies

Inspired by sculpture (Bronze/Australian timber stump) by Bill Steele

Lindy Warrell

There they are, on a log,
laughing in black bronze.
At first, I mistook them for crows —
where's the white, I thought.
But, the fun is frozen there, in this cheeky pair
of finely tinkered magpies —
wrought from tin and copper.

The birds fly me to an open space —
no — a red earth flat with an old grey log
beside a billabong under a eucalypt
white with corellas looking down
to see what the fuss is about.
Not a warble in sight,
my maggies chatter and squawk
watching two naked girls
slide giggling down the bank
till their skin is mustard with mud
and goose bumped in the icy water.
The corellas lift off, a screeching cloud
in search of new horizons
and the girls and the magpies
laugh and laugh and laugh.



THE PUBLICAN'S DAUGHTER

It is 1962 and, at 19, **Katherine Forster** wants to find a husband. She decides to join her publican parents when they buy the only hotel in an outback railway town where rumour has it, men outnumber women, ten

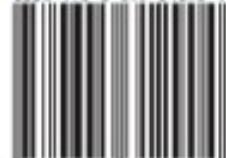
Katherine fears for her sanity as she is drawn into a vortex of family dysfunction, hard men, garrulous older women, frontier violence and rape. Aboriginal friends provide succour but, when tragedy strikes, she must choose a way forward.

The Publican's Daughter is a poignant tale of a young girl's brutal awakening through dashed expectations, betrayal, and loss at a time when sexism and racism flourished. With compassion and clarity, this debut novel offers a unique insight into the Australian outback, seen through the eyes of a naïve city girl.



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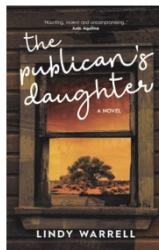
the publican's daughter

NOVEL

LINDY WARRELL



Lindy Warrell



It's March 2022. I'm writing this book review when *The Publican's Daughter* (Wattle Tales Publishing, 2022) is fresh off the presses. The author has sent me a copy which I immediately notice has a well-designed cover and silky, tactile feel. I'm enjoying having a physical book in my hand after spending time reading on screen. I've read the book in three sessions only – testament to the fact that it's a 'page-turner' – as Jude Aquilina who wrote the Foreword has described.

My first impressions are of a female-centred narrative that contains an implied post-colonial perspective. I cannot help comparing the novel with Australian films such as *Wake in Fright* (1971), *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), and *Animal Kingdom* (2010), in the brutality and chauvinism of the male characters, and the vulnerability of the white women and indigenous peoples.

I decide to interview Lindy Warrell, who is perhaps best known in South Australia as a poet. I want to know more about what motivated her to write her first novel. To this end, I pose a series of questions. Here is an excerpt from that interview:

What inspired you to write this novel? How close is it to your real-life experiences?

I wrote the book because, in my day and where I came from, socially speaking, we grew up thinking that finding a husband was the height of achievement. Really there was nothing else that you were supposed to dedicate yourself to. But the specifics of the story are not mine. That grew from retrospective rage at the way things were. I wanted to say, 'look, this is what it was like growing up girl in my day'. Things are different now, whereas I was about 50 before I genuinely

relinquished the subconscious expectation that a man would somehow appear, buy me a house, or save me. As my mother used to say, who would want you with three children from another man? Written well before the #MeToo movement, the story was my conscious way of showing younger women things were not always rosy emerging into womanhood in Australia.

Did you have any qualms about being so frank in your description of the sex scenes in the novel?

Not at all. The sex scenes have no erotic intent. To do that successfully is an exquisite art. The book's clumsy, failed, and often awkward or naïve sex is very much how it was for many girls in my day. I know from friends over the years, I am not alone in having let the occasional man get his way, just to get rid of him. It was quicker. We were pragmatic.

Many women I've known would agree that we often fell for a man's interest in us rather than making appropriate choices. Years ago, a *Women's Weekly* article argued that women spend more time choosing their refrigerators than they do their partners. On the other hand (in my observation), men are deliberate in whom they choose when it comes to marriage or permanent partnership. Male friends confided in me that they were happy when they found someone with whom they felt comfortable.

What are your expectations of the responses of younger, female readers?

Although I intended to open a discourse about the intimate side of women's lives, I can't know the answer until some 20-30-year-olds give me feedback. Most of those who have read the story, women of various ages, tend to focus their responses on the outback itself, the historical integrity of the setting, the delicacy of the Indigenous content or the poignancy of the family drama.

When I have outlined the story to young women, they replied that they'd love to read 'something like that'. There is always curiosity about the inside story of how things were for other women, older women.

Since this is your first novel, how did you approach the narrative arc: are you a 'plotter' or 'pantser'?

I have a minimalist approach to planning. A bare-bones structure marked in an upward diagonal timeline on an A4 Landscape page in Word, divided into three parts with significant events spaced along the line, starting at the bottom (the beginning) and rising to the top (the outcome/end).

This is the structure I am using for my current novel, *High Rise Society*. It keeps me on track but leaves things open. I am someone who finds that their characters start to tell their own stories.

Tell me about the research process?

As an anthropologist, I was trained in research. As a writer, however, the process is totally different because I start with a relatively strong sense of the story, the setting and who the protagonist is, and why. Therefore, my literary research is more about filling gaps in my knowledge. Where I have a superficial understanding, and need detail, I do the research. In the early 1960s, I lived in Darwin for many years; then, in the 1970s I lived there as a wife with three infants and went back in my early 50s on my own. Darwin was a different place each time. So, even when I 'know' a place, research is essential.

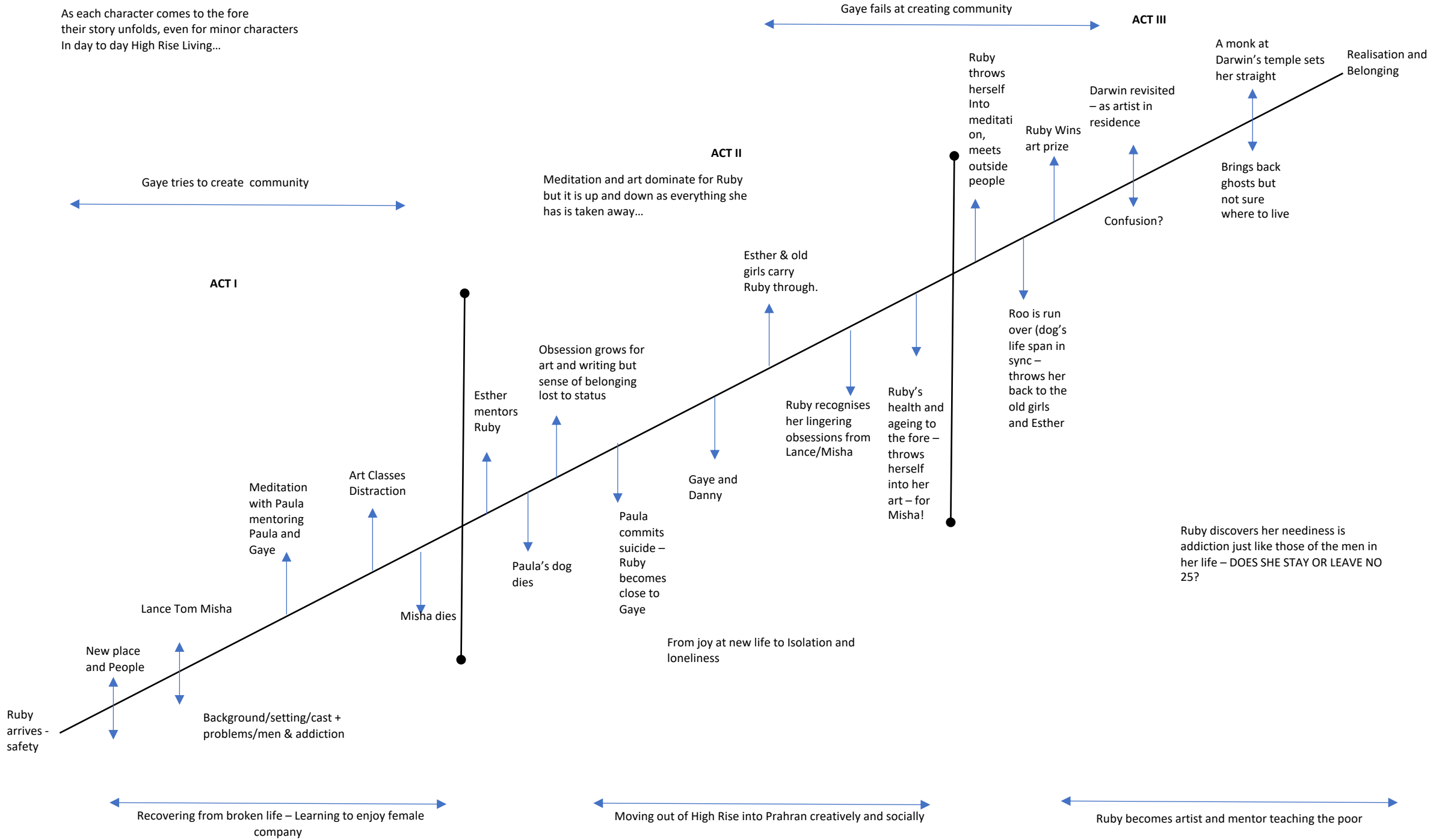
Memory is full of forgetting. It romanticises, and marks things, people and events with meaning, experience, and emotion. In a novel, settings are part of the story, so we cannot rely on memory alone. Research mostly comes after I capture the story's essence.

Will you be doing any literary events/public talks about the novel?

In my April 2022 blog on www.wattletales.com.au, I'll share everything from the launch of *The Publican's Daughter*. Also, Holdfast Bay Libraries purchased two copies for their catalogue and arranged for it to be uploaded to the State Library's *epub* lending service, *OverDrive*, in about 10 days. I'm doing an author talk in the Kingston Room of the Brighton Library on 2 June 2022. Dymocks Glenelg will have copies for sale.

Dr Kathryn Pentecost is a local poet, essayist, book reviewer and scholar.

As each character comes to the fore their story unfolds, even for minor characters
In day to day High Rise Living...



Gaye tries to create community

Gaye fails at creating community

ACT III

ACT I

ACT II

Meditation and art dominate for Ruby but it is up and down as everything she has is taken away...

Ruby throws herself into meditation, meets outside people

Ruby Wins art prize

Darwin revisited - as artist in residence

A monk at Darwin's temple sets her straight

Realisation and Belonging

Confusion?

Brings back ghosts but not sure where to live

Esther & old girls carry Ruby through.

Obsession grows for art and writing but sense of belonging lost to status

Esther mentors Ruby

Meditation with Paula mentoring Paula and Gaye

Art Classes Distraction

Lance Tom Misha

New place and People

Ruby arrives - safety

Background/setting/cast + problems/men & addiction

Misha dies

Paula's dog dies

Paula commits suicide - Ruby becomes close to Gaye

Gaye and Danny

Ruby recognises her lingering obsessions from Lance/Misha

Ruby's health and ageing to the fore - throws herself into her art - for Misha!

Roo is run over (dog's life span in sync - throws her back to the old girls and Esther)

Ruby discovers her neediness is addiction just like those of the men in her life - DOES SHE STAY OR LEAVE NO 25?

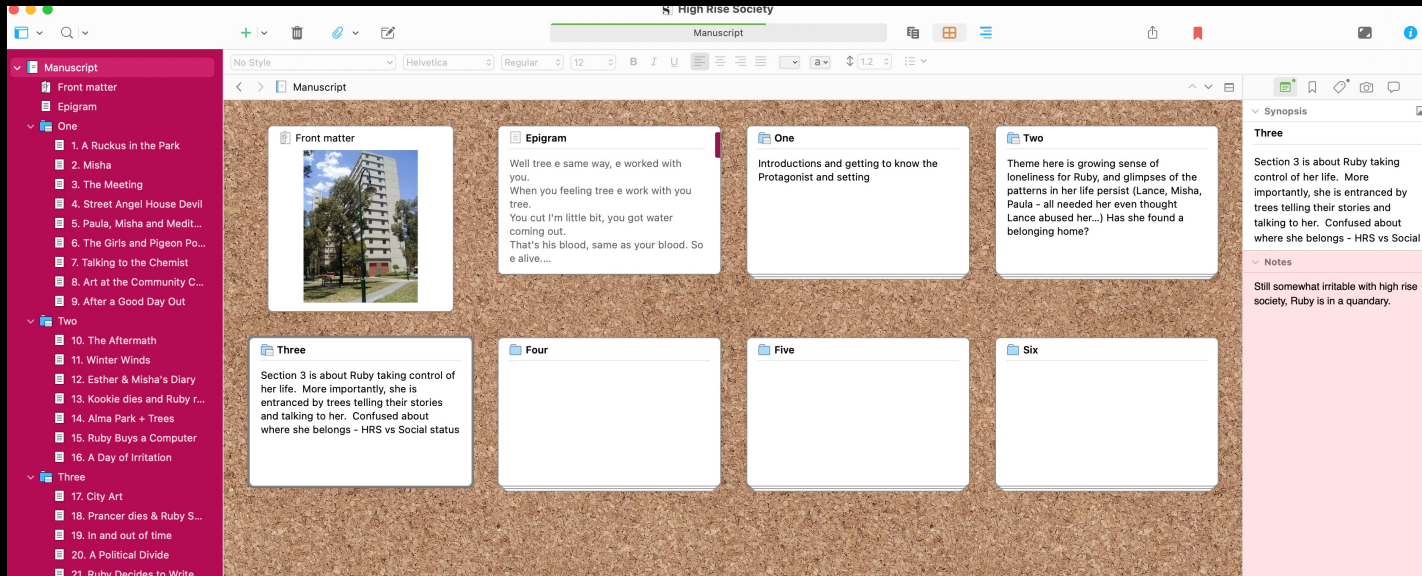
From joy at new life to isolation and loneliness

Recovering from broken life - Learning to enjoy female company

Moving out of High Rise into Prahran creatively and socially

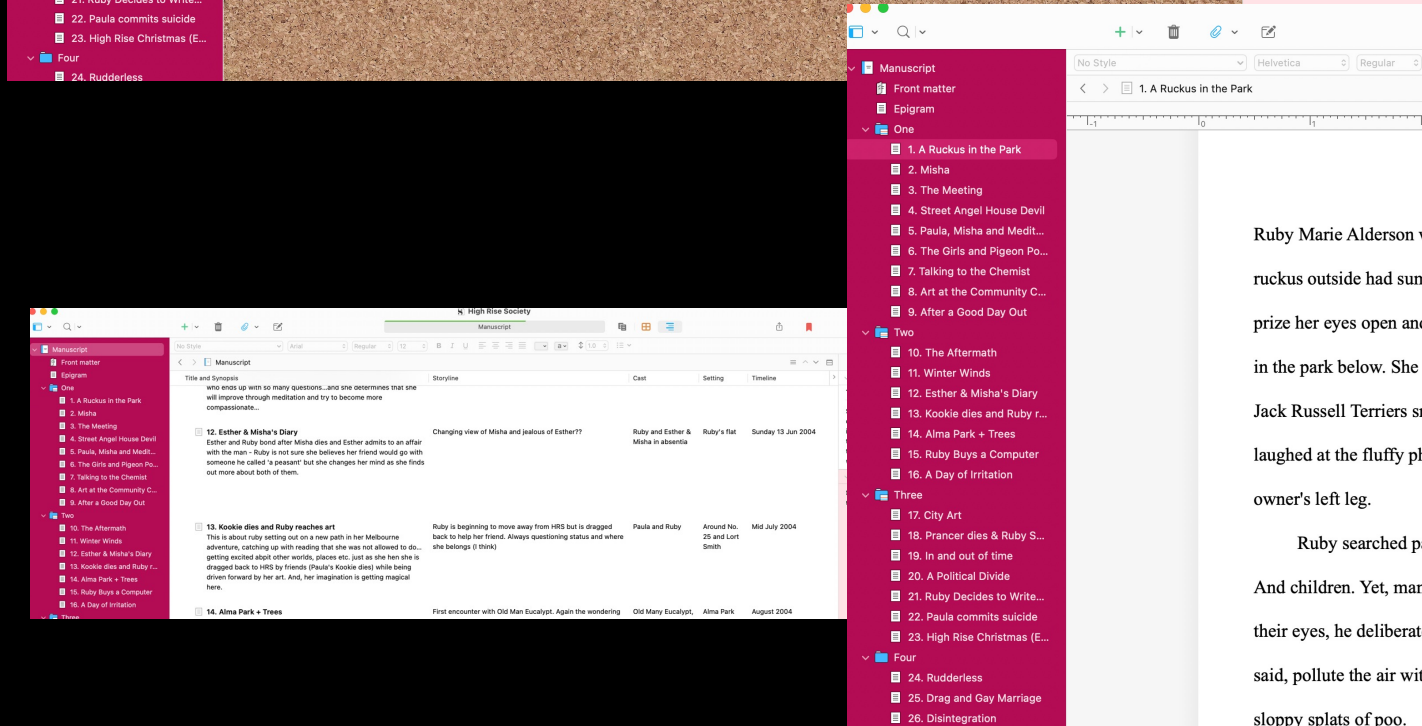
Ruby becomes artist and mentor teaching the poor

Scrivener by Literature and Latte



A Ruckus in the Park

Ruby Marie Alderson woke in pain. Like a tough-love friend, it was a daily reminder that she wasn't dead. A ruckus outside had summonsed her from sleep but it took a while for the whisper of trees and curiosity to prize her eyes open and urge her from bed to window. By then, there was nothing out of the ordinary to see in the park below. She stood for a while admiring the morning doggy parade. Pomeranians, Schnauzers and Jack Russell Terriers sniffing and snapping. Doberman and Rottweiler big boys running fast and free. She laughed at the fluffy phalanx of little poodle-crosses-on-leash yapping at everything from the safety of their



A Ruckus in the Park

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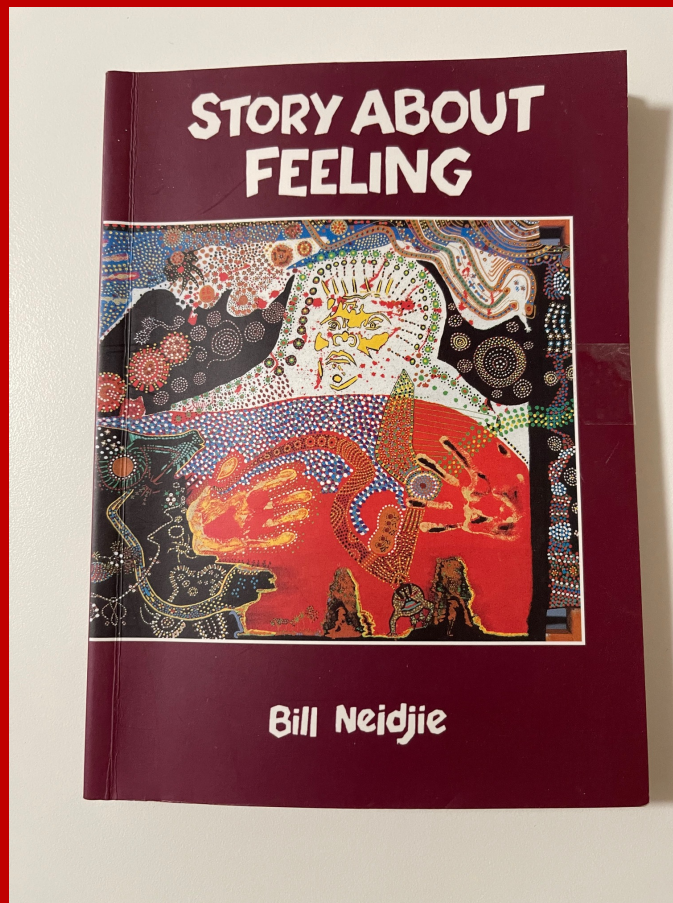
Ruby searched past the pooches for Misha, the pigeon man. She liked Misha. Dogs liked Misha too. And children. Yet, many people hated the old Russian who they accused of malice for feeding pigeons. In their eyes, he deliberately invited these rats with wings to destroy their residential amenity. Pigeons, they said, pollute the air with their mating coos and grunts of alarm and they smother rooves and ledges with sloppy splats of poo.





High Rise Society



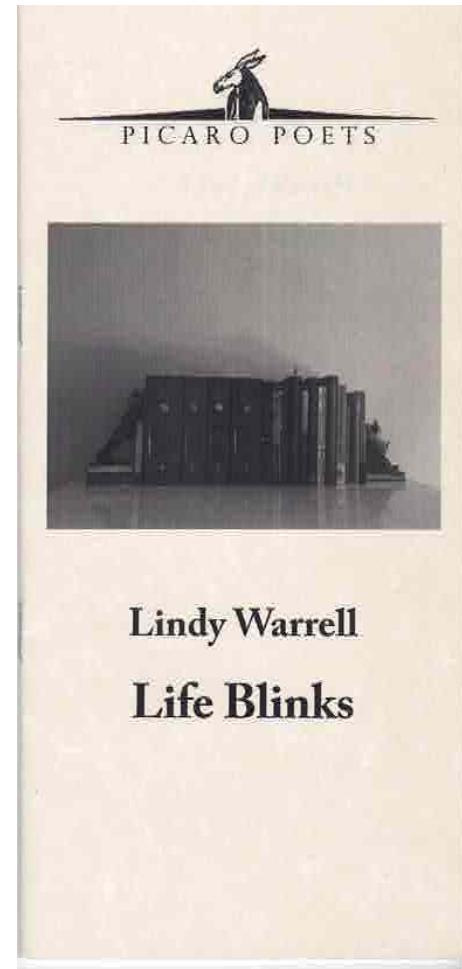
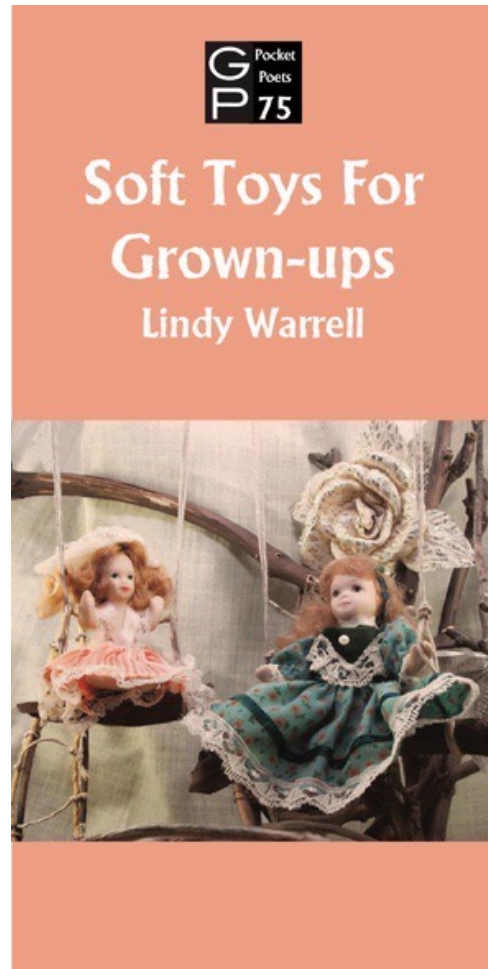
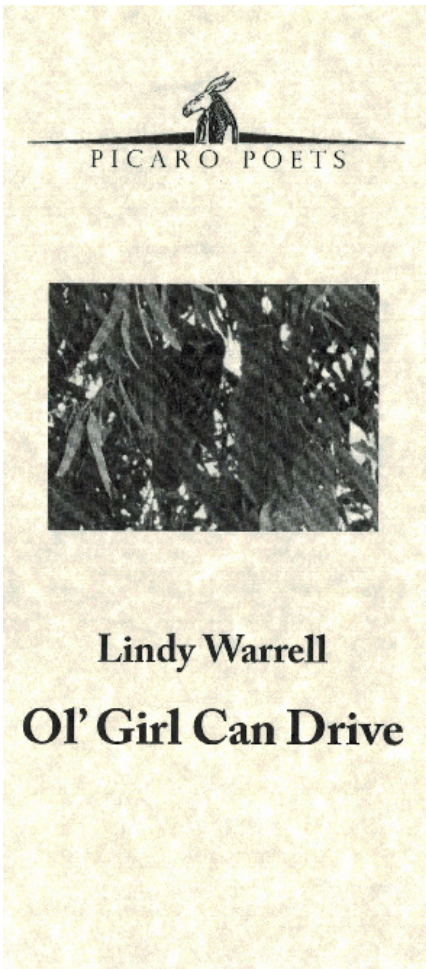


Taylor Kieth ed.,
Bill Neidjie, Story about Feeling,
Magabala Books, WA 2007 p.23

*That tree e listen to you, what you!
E got no finger, e can't speak
But that leafe pumping his.
Way e grow in the night while you sleeping...
You dream something
That tree and grass same thing...
E grow with your body your feeling.
When you sleep, good sleep in the night, I ask you
"Good Sleep?"
"Yes"*

*Well tree e same way, e worked with you.
When you feeling tree e work with you tree.
You cut I'm little bit, you got water coming out.
That's his blood, same as your blood. So e alive.*





Ol' Girl Can Drive

She sits beside me, silent. Intent.
A shock of white curls,
lined brown face,
dark eyes alive
to each furl and bend of grass
and ancient songlines
in water holes, cliffs and trees.

We drive far off-road,
no tracks, no talk. Hold tight,
the Cruiser swerves round boulders,
skirts tiny termite mounds
too sharp for tyres then
slides in the mud
of a paperbark swamp.
Back in the sun, a cacophony of green
glistens in the humid glare.

The crossing appears,
an 80-metre crocodile-swirl
of turbid water that licks at doors,
low range, low gear, slow, steady,
hearts pound, we rev
to scale the bank
straight up through slime
to a smile of applause on the other side.

A bush chorus begins
of chatter and barking dogs,
the clamour of children at play.
'This ol' girl can drive', she giggles
a riff of mirth
among sizzling sausages, bird song and croaking frogs.







Book Launch at Elatte Glenelg on 2 April 2022