

2006 – A YEAR WE WON'T FORGET BUT WISH WE COULD

Merv & Helena Binns

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Dear Friends,

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My late friend Noel Kerr often told me that I was much too negative in my writing in our newsletter OUT OF THE BIN, but I just try to comment on things the way they are or the way I see them. 2006 has been a sad year, with friends such as Noel and Diane Marchant passing on, plus SF authors such as Bob Tucker and actors who I appreciated over the years. I am getting older of course and consequently so are my contemporaries, be they SF fan friends or people who have entertained me. No, we do not live forever, but life does go on and we can only do the best we can to enjoy it, though it gets a bit tedious at times.

It has been very frustrating not to be able to produce our zines and keep in touch with our friends. Initially due to computer problems, then in March this year we were shocked to learn that the house we were renting was being sold and we had only a few months to find a new home. Our third move since getting together, none of them by our own choice. The nightmare had begun and we looked at all our "stuff" and screamed. Unless you have actually visited us and seen our collection of books, magazines, calendars, posters, and quite simply too much of everything else, you could not possibly imagine how much stuff we actually have. We knew that we should have dumped a lot of things in the rubbish bins or given it to the opportunity shops while we were at #21. But on our previous move everything had been crammed in wherever it would fit, making it difficult to sort. And we were so busy producing our zines, reading books and watching TV and so forth however, we just did not get around to tackling it. I have been mowing lawns three mornings a week on average, to help the finances a little (our pension just pays the rent and household bills, leaving nothing for incidentals such as food and entertainment), plus trying to look after the garden at #21 Oakleigh Road, and all my potplants. Aches and pains slowed me up a lot this year, which I suppose at my age, 72, it is not surprising. I started taking Glucosamine capsules recently and they seem to be helping to relieve my arthritis somewhat.

As it turned out, the house did not sell quickly and we had until August to find a new place to live, but we could not start looking until we had money to pay rent and the bond for a new house to accommodate us. (It was only the help of people such as our good friend David Russell that made it possible at all.) And we knew that it would take us a long time to actually move. When that was sorted out as best we could manage, we started looking and we found a house in a quite reasonable time, about 10 to 15 minutes drive from where we were.

Plymouth Street, East Bentleigh is in an area where many of the adjoining streets have names of British towns and cities, such as Hull, Warwick, Chester and such. (With my British born parentage on my father's side, I feel quite at home.) We have a nice house and garden, with a good layout of rooms that suit us quite well, a large covered patio, carport and garage, plus a garden shed. I will have a bit less and easier garden to care for, with a lot of shrubs and trees. Taking care of the leaves will be time consuming, but the lawns will be easy to manage. The well-shaded back yard area has plenty of room for my pot plants, including a cumquat and tamarillo, herbs and even a small dahlia patch. I have two pots of zucchinis plus a few potatoes coming up amongst the dahlias, left by the previous tenant. And that will be all. The threat of climate change and lack of water will make it hard to keep a good garden at any rate (not to mention water for washing and drinking and all in due course).

The move was very traumatic and I do not know how we would have managed it without the help of our faithful friend John Straede with his van, who gave us a lot of his time and energy (way above and beyond the call of duty). He also lent us a lot wooden boxes, which he had used to move his books and such from New South Wales to Victoria. Moving all our stuff and cleaning up as we went, was one hell of a job. As it was, we were so long getting out that we were expected to keep paying rent for the old place, which complicated the financial situation and still is. Consequently the owner and agent are claiming the bond money for the extra bit of rent we couldn't pay, along with sundry other expenses real or imagined. So be it! There is nothing we can do about it.

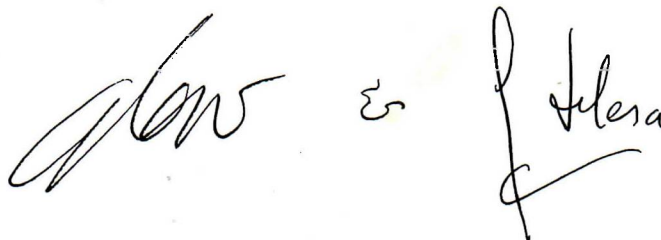
We are still in a mess with boxes of books and stuff still piled up in and out of the house waiting to be sorted. It is a long slow process, but we are getting there as we take things to the op shops and dispose of them at the tip or in the rubbish bins. Personally I have got all my music on LPs, cassettes and CDs in order and after putting up with playing the CDs on my computer, I bought a CD player at a garage sale at the house next door, for only \$15. I hooked it up to my amp and it works well, but I am having problems with a loud hum from the LP player. Although I have most of my books and magazines on shelves, they still need to be sorted and put in order. A lot of old book catalogues and fanzines, will finish up in the waste paper bin. The rooms here are good, but not quite as spacious as the last place, which in the long run may be a good thing, with it forcing us to dispose of things. (No, it just makes it more difficult to find room for the stuff we *have* to keep. *Helena*.) It will take us quite a while to move all the boxes in the carport and patio into the sheds or dump.

We would have liked to get it all tidied up in time for a special birthday party/barbecue to celebrate Helena's 65th birthday and a more or less house warming. Not having even approximately reached that optimistic target, nevertheless the party went ahead, though not as ambitiously as originally planned. We did manage to organise a small get-together on the evening of Saturday the 23rd of December, two days after Helena's birthday, with friends Irene Kerr, Bruno and Keren Kautzner, Peter and Tanya Kemp, who all live relatively close by, plus Bruce Gillespie who made the trek by public transport from the other side of town, and David Russell who made a special trip up from Warrnambool (a four-hour journey to Melbourne by train). After several days of classic Melbourne summer heat, it turned out to be a mild day after a rainy night, so after enjoying the barbecue in the back yard we all moved inside at sunset when it got chilly again, to have dessert (Tanya's classic apple cake) and birthday cake (made and iced by Merv).

The kitchen facilities here incidentally, are quite good and it has been heaven cooking things, after the worn-out stove and such that we had to put up with at #21. The weather has been a record warm but not too bad on the 23rd. It rained seriously, finally, on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, while the temperature in Melbourne was I think a record low for Christmas day (14°C), which made the cooking and the consuming of the usual Christmas fare more enjoyable than ever. But water restrictions are still going to be a big worry in the New Year, when they will probably range from severe to Draconian.

In due course we will write personally to all our friends who have been sending us their zines and e-mails or who have simply been wondering why they have not heard from us. We have not been ignoring you and we hope the above will explain everything for now. We thank all those friends who have sent us greetings but we have not been able to send cards to everybody as we usually do. Meanwhile, we hope you all had **a great CHRISTMAS and we wish you a very HAPPY NEW YEAR!** Sorry, none of our fancy personal Christmas cards this year.

Merv & Helena Binns

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Merv' and the one on the right is 'Helena'. They are written in a cursive, flowing style. There is a small 'E' or similar mark between the two signatures.