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A personal reading history

Abstract

This article is a personal trip down Memory Lane. It is an autobiography that tells of a young person's early life devoid of books. In many ways, that period of my life is not too dissimilar to those of countless other children and teenagers whose lack of interest in reading denies them entrance to the worlds of imagination and adventure. But my life was destined not to remain a literary wasteland, it was to bud, blossom and ... well, you will need to read on to find out why and how.

Those of us who work in the discipline of English and the fields of education and creative writing often devote considerable energy to the promotion of recreational reading among children, adolescents and adults. We encourage young people, especially young males, to explore the realms of literature and nonfiction and are often discouraged by their indifference, even apathy, toward books and reading. Of course, reading for leisure is not only a childhood or adolescent activity; but many teachers, librarians, parents and others who promote reading often project a view that what happens during the school years will leave an indelible mark on reading attitudes and behaviour. This paper is a fifty-something year retrospective that puts the alternative case; that what happens during the school years may not adversely affect us for the rest of our lives.

Over a number of years, I have spoken publicly about my childhood and the part that reading played in that period. I have encouraged teachers and librarians not to dismiss young people who show indifference to books, or contempt for education generally, as the interest and excitement associated with both might well emerge later in the individual's life with unexpected consequences.

I suspect that few of us have given much consideration to our own development as people who read for work and leisure, but recently I sat at my computer to document my reading history and was surprised at the outcome. The task was not one I might have chosen had there not been an imperative. In the forthcoming semester, a colleague and I were to invite students enrolled in our masters-level course on recreational reading to prepare their own reading

histories as a homework exercise. What I offer in this contribution is not a research paper. It is more like a case study undertaken in the spirit of the best qualitative traditions of introspection and confession. It might neutralise some of the frustrations that teachers and other educators feel when dealing with teenagers who are resistant or reluctant readers and also encourage them to explore their own reading histories. Here goes ...

I was raised in a working class home in what was then an outer suburb of Sydney. My father was a metal worker who finished school after completing Grade 6. My mother went to Grade 9 and then left school to care for her sickly sister and widowed mother. My parents were married in 1940; my brother was born in 1942 and I entered the world not quite six years later.

My mother stayed at home to care for the two boys until I was in Grade 4 or 5 and then she found a job as a sales assistant in a department store, somewhat to my father's annoyance at the implication that he couldn't properly provide for his family. I'm sure that was not why my mother went to work. I think she was bored at home but also wanted a few luxuries after the privations that most families suffered during, and shortly after, World War 2.

Like many working class homes, there were not many books lying around, although my parents were regular borrowers from the local council library. My brother was an avid reader. He read at every opportunity and would occasionally incur my father's wrath when he brought a book to the dinner table, preferring its company to the other members of the family. So, as you can gather, our house was not exactly a reading wasteland.

I can't remember precisely when I learned to read. I remember my mother read Little Golden Books to me when I was very young, but no titles now come to mind. I can't remember reading anything by myself as a child and any interest that might have existed degenerated along with my regard for school. I still have primary and secondary school report cards that show absences of a quarter to a third of my school years, occasioned mostly through truancy.

It's rather sad to confess now that I have only two clear memories of reading at school. The first was when I was in Grade 9. We had a male teacher who was called The General. I can't recall why but he wasn't a very nice person. Among other subjects he taught Modern History. He would set reading as homework and then test the class the next time we met. He always started his oral test with the boy who sat at the far left in the front row. If he provided the right answer to the first question, The General would ask the next boy another question. If the first boy got it wrong, he was required to stand against the classroom wall and The General would expect an answer from the next boy. One afternoon there were six boys only left sitting after The General had completed his examination. The rest of us got two cuts each, one on each hand delivered via a stiff, stitched leather strap.

I remember travelling home on the suburban train one afternoon reading something about the Eureka Stockade in anticipation of The General's next inquisition. It did me no good because I got two more cuts with the strap the following afternoon.

Reading had its inevitable consequences.

The second recollection was of memorising sections of Shakespeare's *Henry V* for another sadist, this time a Christian Brother who was not-so-affectionately known as Bozo. He was bald across the top of his head and had fuzzy tufts sticking out each side, like Bozo the Clown, but without the funny suit.

I can still recall some of bits I memorised, like:

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more or close
the wall up with our English dead. In peace there's nothing so
becomes a man as modest stillness and humility. But when the
blast of war blows in our ears, then imitate the action of the
tiger. Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, disguise fair
nature with hard-favour'd rage. Then lend the eye a terrible
aspect, let it pry through the portage of the head like the brass
cannon. Let the brow o'erwhelm it as fearfully as doth a galled
rock o'erhang and jutting his confounded base.

There is, of course, a lot more to *Henry V*, but that's all I know. Being able to remember that part of Henry's speech has not been a complete waste as I've chanted it in class several times when I've been teaching about the differences between rote memory and the importance of comprehension.

My efforts devoted to memorising Shakespeare were about as successful as my reading of the events surrounding the Eureka Stockade and I was strapped more than most of my classmates for failing to answer important questions about Henry V and his antics around the Battle of Agincourt (wherever that was). You can get a sense of why I wasn't especially thrilled about school. I remember that we were supposed to read short stories and novels like *Wuthering Heights*, *Australia Felix*, *Riders in the Chariot* and *The Lucky Country* for various English teachers, but I never did. In retrospect, it is relatively easy to understand how a young teenager back in those days could get the impression that teachers were more concerned about enforcing study practices than encouraging a love of books or literature.

I'm not exactly sure when I first voluntarily read a book. It was likely after *The General* but before *Bozo*. But I recall quite clearly that the book was *Green Mountains* by Bernard O'Reilly. It tells of the rescue of two passengers who survived the crash of a Stinson aircraft in February 1937. The plane left Brisbane for Lismore but never arrived. There were reports from the Kerry Valley, near Beaudesert, about a plane heading toward the McPherson Range and O'Reilly investigated the possibility that the Stinson could have crashed in the mountains. From the top of Mt Throakban he sighted a burnt tree on the other side of the valley and bashed his way through the rainforest for eight kilometres to find the wreck and the two survivors of the 10-day ordeal.

I found a copy of *Green Mountains* in a second hand bookstore in Newcastle a few years ago and bought it for a dollar. It wasn't exactly as I remembered it. The original had a dark green cover and was hardly eye-catching. I don't know what drew me to the book in the first place and, to be totally honest, I don't remember very much about the story other than what I've just related.

If I wasn't reading, what was I doing? Well, you don't need to know too much about that, but I wasn't a very good boy. I was defiant, angry, aggressive and also very confused as a child and teenager. My parents had absolutely no control over me and, despite the couple of thrashings from my father because I'd been especially not very good, they left me alone to do just about anything I wanted to do, including not going to school. These days, we'd probably say that I had a severe behaviour disorder and lived in a dysfunctional family with a mother and father who'd abandoned their parenting responsibilities. I think they made a perfectly sensible decision to let me do precisely what I wanted because I'm certain that if they *had* challenged me, everything would have gone progressively pear-shaped and I would have achieved the prophesy of many relatives that I'd end up in the Boys' Home, and eventually jail.

When I was young I always associated reading with schoolwork. Of course, I knew the difference between school textbooks and newspapers, magazines and story books but there was one inescapable connection between them all: the act of reading. When I was a young teenager I bought the occasional war comic about flying aces and air battles. I can't recall any of the titles or stories but I can still name and describe most of the aircrafts active during World War 2. The attraction must have had some enduring influence because, some 30 years later, I studied, trained, and was issued a private pilot's licence.

When I was in my early and mid-teens I adored the outdoors, and reading played almost no part in my life. However, I do remember acquiring a copy of DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. I need to confess that I had absolutely no knowledge of the plot. I didn't know who Constance Reid was, or Sir Clifford Chatterley, or Oliver Mellors for that matter. I did know that there was supposed to be extremely passionate sex somewhere between the covers and spent most of my time with the book huddled in the crawl space under our house trying to locate those sections. I don't think I ever did. I also acquired an extremely grubby copy of John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* for much the same reason. In that case I certainly found material that held my interest as an adolescent novice reader.

When I left school I took an extended holiday until my father presented an ultimatum: if I wanted to continue living in the family home, I had to get a job and pay rent. After a period of passive resistance that had absolutely no impact on my father's disposition, I found employment as a junior clerk in the New South Wales public service in Sydney. This required a commute of about 40 minutes each way, each working day. I tried manhandling the *Sydney Morning Herald* for a week or two, to the continuing annoyance of anyone who sat beside me and, for a reason I've never been able to discover, started taking a book on the train. My first novel was John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, loaned to me by a friend. Then I met a lady where I worked and we soon began to spend lunch and tea breaks together. Inevitably, she would talk about the book she was reading.

Jenny was one of the telephone operators and her voice - by which I first knew her - was the aural equivalent of the finest liquid chocolate. One morning after she had put through a call to the section in which I was working, I phoned her back and asked if she wanted to have tea together, and she agreed. I was startled when we met the first time. She was plump, wore coke-bottle spectacles, had nasty skin problems and blonde, straw-like hair that was totally feral.

About two weeks after we started our regular rendezvous, Jenny loaned me copies of JD Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. And while I recall these books being hard work, I read them both within the same week and proudly handed them back to Jenny the following Monday. We talked at length about Holden Caulfield and Henry Fleming for a few days and then she loaned me another two books that she thought I might like. I read every day then, on the train to and from work, at morning and afternoon tea, and at lunch when Jenny and I didn't have the same break times. Occasionally, I sat in the park opposite the office where I worked and read and I read at night before I went to sleep. Most importantly, Jenny was always interested in what I thought of the stories and their characters, and why they did what they did.

I finished many books during my two years of commuting. Among them were *Catch-22*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Loved One*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* and, I have to

admit, at age nineteen years, my first introduction to Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*. I'm sure that I identified with Ratty.

Jenny and I remained good friends for several years. She married one of our work colleagues, moved interstate, and we eventually lost contact with each other.

Now, you'll remember that school and I never really clicked as a dating couple. While I learned quite a bit being at the pointy end of life as I was for many years, there was a universe of knowledge that had slipped by while I was hiding behind the door doing other important things. I confess that even to this day I have never read any of the great books of the Western world. I have no acquaintance with (in alphabetical order) Bacon, Cervantes, Chaucer, Dante, Dostoevsky, Homer, Melville, Milton, Plato, Rabelais, Swift, Tolstoy, or Virgil. I am equally ignorant of the works of Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, Joseph Conrad, TS Eliot, F Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Hardy, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ernest Hemingway, Henry James, Thomas Mann, Margaret Mitchell, Eugene O'Neill, Marcel Proust, George Bernard Shaw, William Makepeace Thackeray, Mark Twain, and Virginia Woolf. I'm not boasting about this. It's just a reality. All of these wonderful writers of Western literature are as unknown to me as life in the abyss of the ocean. I've never read Enid Blyton, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Treasure Island*, *The Magic Pudding*, *Snugglypot and Cuddlepup*, the *Grimm's Fairy Tales* or a hundred other classics of children's and young adults' literature.

Again, for reasons that remain obscure, I set aside the world of mystery and other-reality for a couple of years. I turned my attention to nonfiction and, believe it or not, the first book that captured my attention was the *Oxford English Dictionary* and then a world atlas. Even today I remain fascinated by words and places and still occasionally flip open the *OED* and trawl for unknown words. I read other minor gems like Arthur Schlesinger Jr's *A Thousand Days* about John F Kennedy in the White House, Chichester's *Gipsy Moth Circles the World*, Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon-Tiki Expedition* and *Aku Aku*, Robinson's *Aboriginal Myths and Legends*, and Simpson's *The Viking Circle*. And just to prove that I wasn't a complete dill, I also read volumes on van Gogh, Michelangelo, Dufy, Picasso, and even Grandma Moses.

By the time I turned 20 years of age books were no longer foreign objects and the planets were about to come into alignment. I was living and working in a rural community, my brother had recently been awarded a PhD in immunology and, late one afternoon, he harassed me as only an older brother can about how I was wasting my time in a no-future, no-brain job. So, not too long after that, I began a journey along a road from which I would never stray.

As you might suspect, I hadn't walked on stage to accept the English (or any other) award at the school end-of-year prize night - for some reason they don't give prizes for the Most Absent student - and the prospect of a tertiary education seemed as remote as the end of the universe. Nevertheless, I applied to every university in Australia at the time and amazingly was admitted to the University of New South Wales as a mature age student - I was just 22. During my first year I became friends with a small number of really smart people and started to read books and magazines that I never knew existed, like the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *New Yorker*, which I read faithfully for a decade or more and came into contact with some amazing writers. I still have a copy of *119 Years of the Atlantic* published in 1977 and you can see on the front and back covers an astonishing list of contributors to that volume, including Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, James Thurber, and WH Auden. At around the same

time I also read books by Jean-Paul Sartre, Kuhn and Koestler, Wilkie Collins and Marcus Clarke.

My early university years marked the beginning of my habit of reading collections of books by the same author. The first of these was by the German, Günter Grass, and then Solzhenitsyn. I also read the four-volume collection of Somerset Maugham's short stories that I'd bought several years before, but apart from a cursory glance for anything that might have been interesting, that set remained unappreciated at the bottom of my bookshelf. Of course, there were many other books that had some passing connection with my studies, like Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* and a collection by, and about, Immanuel Velikovsky, and there was also a light side to what I read. I remember Bob Hope's *I Owe Russia \$1200*, and John O'Grady's *They're a Weird Mob* and *Cop this Lot* about the hapless Nino Cullota, and his later book *No Kava for Johnny*.

When I finished my undergraduate degree I went to Canada to study for my PhD in cognitive educational psychology. My recreational reading took a severe beating during those years. The fun of reading was not altogether extinguished, but my serious commitment to a career in psychology required hundreds of hours studying less than captivating works by, for example, David Ausubel and Jerome Bruner, and scores of other textbooks. I used recreational reading as a means of escaping reality consistent with the fantasy of Luke Skywalker and Obi-won Kenobi who came to the movie screens at that same time. I began a long relationship with Agatha Christie and have read perhaps two-thirds of her stories, but none in the past few years. I also sought local flavours from authors such as Andy Russell, a prominent Alberta mountain man and naturalist, and renewed my interest in indigenous cultures and folklore with *Cry of the Thunderbird*. It was also impossible to escape at least some of the best sellers, like *Roots*, and there was yet another Günter Grass novel (*The Flounder*), which is the last book of his I've read. In addition, I struggled with *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *Slaughterhouse Five*, and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, all of which bored me senseless and I closed each of them for the last time well before the final page.

When I returned to Australia at the end of the 1970s as a young academic, there was scant time for recreational reading after lecture preparation and work on my developing research agenda. During that period, I chose authors almost at random until I discovered one I liked, and collected his or her works until I'd read them all or lost interest in that person. And a very curious characteristic of my reading collection during my late 20s and early 30s was the uncommon purchase of books written by women authors. This was never a conscious exclusion; and when I look along the bookshelves in my home these days, women authors are not at all rare, although most of these books have been collected in the past decade.

Recreational reading continued as escapism in the 1980s. Books by Tom Clancy (like *The Hunt for Red October*) and Jack Higgins were often on the coffee or bedside tables. But you can't fill a reading year with just two authors. Around the same time I sampled James Mitchener (*Chesapeake*, *Hawaii* and *Space*) and began reading Tolkien, predictably starting with *The Hobbit*, then *Lord of the Rings*, then *The Silmarillion*.

I'd never read any of Gerald Durrell's books and several friends told me that I should, so I bought *My Family and Other Animals*, written in the mid-1950s and then worked my way through several others. Around the same time I was given a copy of Peter Carey's *Bliss* and I read his novels until I lost enthusiasm

after *True History of the Kelly Gang*. David Lodge's *Nice Work* began yet another collection in the late 1980s.

Over the past decade my reading habit has changed a little, perhaps because of my increasing interest in creative writing. I tried to control my urge to read all of the books by a particular author and to select those by unfamiliar writers, but without much success. I've read most of Bill Bryson's books starting with *Mother Tongue* through to *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*, and I've battled with Louis de Bernières, from *The War of Don Emmanuel's Nether Parts* in 1991 to *Birds without Wings*, which sits arrogantly on my bedside table waiting to be finished. I've also pursued Umberto Eco with academic intensity, beginning with *The Name of the Rose* and continuing through *Baudolino*. I admit that *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* defeated me. It seems to lack anything resembling a plot and I quit before I got half way through and returned the book to the friend who had loaned it to me.

It was just about ten year ago when I wrote my first novel. Predictably, it was an epic. Most first stories are said to be autobiographical, possibly because budding writers know much more about themselves than anything or anyone else. Mine was loosely wound around the story of my late childhood and teenage years. It wasn't fully autobiographical and I became increasingly infuriated when loved ones and close friends who, after reading different versions would say, 'God, did you really do that?' 'No,' I would answer emphatically. 'It's a story. It's not about me. I just wish I had done all the things I wrote about.' So, in the early-1990s I read little but wrote a lot. When the great Australian epic was finished, I packed the hard copy away in a filing cabinet where it is today, archived the digital files, and moved on.

Moving on meant starting a masters degree in creative writing and a thesis that won me second prize in a national writing competition. It also led to a minor literary diversion. In the mid-1990s I discovered gay literature through Armistead Maupin's collection about a house in Barbary Lane in San Francisco. The stories appeared initially as a series in the *San Francisco Chronicle* called 'Tales of the City' and, as Maupin says, he wrote them by the seat of his pants, often completing Monday's instalment for the newspaper on the previous Friday. The first book edition of *Tales of the City* came out in 1978. Maupin's style and his characters totally captivated me and touched off the first release of emotions in me as a reader. I cried and laughed my way through the omnibus volume called *28 Barbary Lane* and its sequel, *Back to Barbary Lane*. I don't think that *Tales* is accurately labelled as gay fiction. It has gay characters but it wasn't only about gay people and their lives. Not too long after, a friend loaned me Michael Cunningham's *Flesh and Blood*, which has a gay main character, and this caused me to read all of his work up to *The Hours*, about Virginia Woolf, which I finished although I had largely lost interest in the story and kept reading only out of a sense of duty to Cunningham.

Since then I've generously sampled gay fiction, about gay characters and their trials, tribulations, and almost inevitable sex lives. Let me assure you that the overwhelming bulk of gay literature is dreadful; the sort of stuff where you go, 'Oh no, this is *sooo* bad' right from the first page. And yet there are writers who are amazing wordsmiths, like the Australian Robert Dessaix.

I pursued gay fiction for a year or two, including anthologies, because the novel I wrote for my masters thesis was based on the hate-killing of a gay man, so I justified my passing obsession by claiming it was an exercise in backgrounding. I've read nothing that could be classified as gay literature for a

few years but I am regularly bemused when gay characters turn up unexpectedly in the most un-gay story.

Where am I now? I'm a literary nomad. I buy two to three dozen books a year. I still borrow from friends and they borrow from me. Sometimes I buy a book based only on the attractiveness of the cover, sometimes by what I read on the back, and I'm not especially attracted to well-known authors, preferring to seek out first novels on the bookstore shelves - I say facetiously 'to check out the competition'. I've become suspicious of prize-winning books and wary of those that appear on personality book club lists, like Oprah's. I've read many of these over the years and have found them to be of mixed appeal and quality.

What is scary these days is the volume of available fiction. I don't think I've left a bookshop over the past 10 years without having bought at least one novel but I am increasingly becoming overwhelmed by choice. For example, I went into a store in Columbus, Ohio a few years ago. It had a vast browsing area, almost an entire warehouse floor, bookshelf after bookshelf, crammed only with novels and organised by author surname, A through Z. That shop had the largest collection of fiction I've seen. I made it through the As and Bs, bought three books and left exhausted and frustrated.

As I look back over the last few years, I realise that reading has been a source of motivation and delight: motivation for my own pursuit of a writing career beyond academia, and delight through the worlds of mystery, fancy and imagination in which I can become completely lost. My creative writing interest has centred on the transition between young adult and adult genres and, over the past decade, I've read much of the vast academic literature about young people's reading habits. I hasten to add that this has not been to understand my own history, but to guide my research.

This is not the place to review the cosmology of literature but it is important to say that opinions proclaimed by some well-known authors about young people and their reading likes, dislikes, and habits are not completely convincing when I think about my own reading history. For example, my parents and brother were wonderful reading role models but I had no urge whatsoever to follow their example. Smutty jokes and toilet talk were never appealing, and madcap mayhem seemed puerile even when I was a youngster. I concede that some young readers adore stories with such features but there is huge danger in generalising about what appeals to, or attracts, young (and older) readers, and what does not.

When I think about my own writing, I cannot imagine creating madcap mayhem, toilet humour, or being able to suspend sufficient disbelief to craft science fiction or fantasy. All of my creative work, including the few short stories I've had published, have distinct reality and affective foundations. I suspect that my creative *modus operandi* is solidly rooted in my professional training as a psychologist. On a whim, I recovered the great Australian epic from its filing cabinet and re-read a few sections when I was drafting the material you have just read. It was rewarding to find the emotional elements in that manuscript as I've described above despite the fact that the characterisation was hardly sophisticated, clearly written by the rawest of raw recruits in the field of creative writing.

Today, I gauge the impact of a story (mine and those of others) by my affective response to it. There are sections of a novel I've recently finished that bring tears to my eyes no matter how many times I read them. And there are several books that come to mind immediately, which have caused similar reactions. None has left me blubbing uncontrollably but several have touched me

deeply, among them *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *Chocolat*, *Blackberry Wine*, *Flesh and Blood*, and *Perfume*. But my top prize for emotional impact without equal goes to Lloyd Abbey's *The Last Whales*.

When I think about connection between readers and authors, which is the focus of my current research agenda, there is no substitute for finely crafted writing. But style, characterisation, plot and authenticity appear together as one dimension only. A second dimension relates to the emotional/intellectual engagement that the reader establishes with the characters and their circumstances. A couple of years ago, as part of a project on teenagers' recreational reading, a young man provided one of the best examples I have of the importance of that emotional and intellectual impact. In his case, he had recently read *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* by Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea. He said:

Sometimes when you read a particular thing, you stop and think about it. You go into really in-depth thoughts in your head and it really makes you question everything you've ever been told. That sort of stuff really grips me. I read *The Illuminatus!* book. It changed my perception of everything. It's almost like it gives you this incredible sense of paranoia about everything you've ever learnt and been told. You're not quite the same after you've read it. It's like a trip up the Nile; you'll never be the same ever again. It's like someone's finally told you the absolute truth, like you've just come out of The Matrix. And every time when you go around and people tell you things, you think the system is always lying. It's like you're always questioning everything from then on.

I hope none of my writing ever has a similar effect.

There's a lot more I could say about reading and its links to writing but this is not the forum for that. When I review my personal reading history it is clear that books and stories have become as much a part of my existence as starch and water. If one had predicted the course of my life - as many relatives did erroneously during my childhood and teenage years - the prospect of success in a professional career and a passion for reading and writing would have seemed highly improbable.

I sometimes wonder how my life might have unfolded if a sympathetic librarian or teacher had found the route to my adolescent soul. None seem to have tried but, beyond The General and Bozo, no one harassed me for *not* reading. The turning point in my life in respect to reading came with the remarkable coincidence of the imperative to have a job, and the appearance of a delightful lady called Jenny. It was she who opened the door that allowed my escape from the world in which I lived, and provided the opportunity to snoop into the worlds of others.

Wherever you are, Jenny, thanks.

Adrian Ashman received a BA (Hons) in Applied Psychology from the

University of New South Wales, and a MEd and PhD from the University of Alberta, Canada. His research and teaching interests have primarily focused on theory and practice in cognitive education, special education, and intellectual disability and he has published numerous books including the widely acclaimed textbook, Educating children with diverse abilities (with John Elkins). He has also published over 150 journal articles and book chapters in special education, disability, and related areas. Because of a recent interest in students' reading and creative writing, he completed a Master of Art degree in Creative Writing in 1999 (QUT) and is currently completing a second PhD in that field at Griffith University. His present research interests include young adults' recreational reading, the behaviour of at-risk youth, and cooperative learning.

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