Winner

“A Distant Victory” by Liz Downes

Second prize

“the burning question” by Isabella Eichler-Onus

Third prize

“Ashes” by Peter Jackson

Commended

“F(Y?)RE” by Karen Conrad

“Beach haiku” by Liz Downes

“EPHEMERA” by (name unknown?)

“Breathing with the Ocean” by Tarquin Moon

“My Wild Backyard: Life Beyond the Verandah” by Julie Spencer

“It is an honour to serve as a judge for the 2nd MINCA Environmental Writing Competition. The prose, poetry, and hybrid pieces submitted interweave personal memories, collective consciousness, and ecological awareness, conjuring up voices and visions that are at once intimate and fiery. I’d like to thank the writers for sharing their evocative work with us, and I’m grateful to Maureen Alsop for inviting me to read these marvellous entries.”

Nicolette Wong, September 2025

A distant victory

Liz Downes

July 1st 1983 .... I wake before dawn having, it seemed, spent all night dreaming about the High Court ruling due to be delivered this morning. Twice I dreamt it had all gone horribly wrong, the judges had backed the Tasmanian government and the Premier would have little to stop him from forging ahead with the destructive and unnecessary dam. I woke feeling utterly miserable and then relieved to realise I had only been dreaming

Once I dreamt that all had turned out as we hoped – and woke elated, only to relapse into worry, knowing there were still hours to go until any announcement would be made. Last night on the TV news we had watched Bob Brown and friends snowballing in Tasmania. I wondered if any of them had got any sleep.

I get up, trying not to wake the others. It is school holidays and our family are spending a week on Magnetic Island. No snowballs here, just perfect north Queensland winter weather. The moon is high as I walk the long silver curve of beach, a gleaming horseshoe. My aim is to reach the far end before sun-up. A few early morning fishermen are appearing. On the horizon are the lights of the first of the returning prawn fishers.

I walk quickly, humming Shane Howard's *Let the Franklin flow* (a very good walking song) and trying to get my mind prepared for whatever the outcome might be.

The sky is rapidly lightening. A gap in the fringing casuarinas attracts my attention and I climb up to see what lies behind the dunes. A small brackish lagoon with a solitary lady jabiru. Delighted, I duck down behind the dunes and creep closer. I watch as she moves in stately fashion looking for breakfast. She is aware of me but doesn't seem to mind my presence; after a while she lifts off and flies lazily to a group of paperbarks. I return to the beach, realising that I had managed to forget about the High Court for at least ten minutes.

Full daylight now, though the sun is still not quite over the hilltop behind me. I race it – running along the firm sand to the piles of boulders at the end of the beach and clamber up them as the sun bursts into the sky. Only three hours now until the venerable judges deliver their verdict.

Seagulls and terns start their morning beach patrols. Pied currawongs are making their jubilant calls from the hoop pines behind me. I look for the familiar shape of the sea-eagle but he doesn't appear this morning and I feel a little cheated.

I start the long walk back along the beach, knowing the kids will be up and hungry. I don't want to hear any news this morning; the radio stays off. At 8 o'clock Mike says "So, two hours to go?" but I can't reply, can't talk about it at all, the moment of truth is just too close.

It's a beautiful, sun-sparkling day. We throw some towels and munchies into a back-pack and set out along the track to Balding Bay, the next Bay to where we are staying. Our only radio is the one belonging to our rented unit and runs off the mains. Even if we had one to take with us, I don't think I would. I'm beginning to fear the worst and simply don't want to know.

The walk is steep in parts and very pretty – it's only when I trip over a tree root that I realise I am walking with four pairs of fingers crossed. At 10'clock we are nearly at the bay. I am standing under a beautiful Moreton Bay ash which, unseasonally, is in flower. Clouds of butterflies are flocking around it and the whole tree hums with bees. I seem to be rooted to the spot, standing there with those bright wings and flowers above my head and fallen wattle blossom at my feet, thinking of a river that I have never seen, so very far away.

In my head I recite those beautiful lines of Gerard Manly Hopkins:

> *What would the world be, once bereft*
> *Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left*
> *Oh let them be left, wildness and wet*
> *Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.*

Hmm, well, maybe not the weeds.

Reaching the bay, the girls are already in the water – it's cold, they tell me. This place is so beautiful, the hills tumble down to the sand and the sparkling waters. Casuarinas, eucalyptus, acacias and hoop pines spring out of every rocky crevice on the headlands. On top of a huge upright boulder is an osprey's nest; it's been there for years. I am delighted to see one of the birds at the nest, its mate flying in and out at intervals. Monarchs of all they survey! I climb over rocks to get as close as I can without worrying the birds. Mother (or father) looks at me with, it seems, curiosity rather than apprehension. I look back in awe – and retreat.

The children call to me, wanting me to swim. It *is* cold – not used to that in the tropics! But the water is so clear and the temperature exhilarating. Alison and I sing *Let the Franklin flow* somewhat breathlessly as we swim. A man on the beach smiles – encouragingly? indulgently? We race up and down the beach to get warm and draw a NO DAMS triangle in the sand, like some ancient charm to ward off evil.

It's hard to believe that the decision must be known by now – that it's either all over or all just beginning again. There are campers on the beach, do they have radios? Do they know the decision? Do they care? I can't bear to ask – and doubt that I would trust their answers anyway. I need to hear the words in the measured, reliable tones of the ABC and realise I cannot possibly wait till evening. I must get back for the 1.30 news. I tell the others I am starting back.

It's a long steep walk up from the beach to the ridge where it joins the main track, and there is no breeze. I am getting breathless, going too fast. I slow up, standing aside to allow a small group to pass me on their way down. One couple glance at the "NO DAMS" badge attached to the strap of my binoculars, but say nothing – why not? Surely, they must know! To beat the paranoia I start running along and then steeply down the track back into Horseshoe Bay, afraid I will miss the news. In fact I am 10 minutes early.....

The family walk in just as the news comes on. There is that cool, dispassionate ABC voice "In today's headlines, the High Court rules against the building of the Gordon below Franklin dam. In a split decision...." I don't hear any more. I thought I would be laughing and leaping around with joy, but that comes later. First come the unexpected and unstoppable tears, the relief indescribable. Lucy, hugging me and laughing, says "But Mum, it's just a river..." "No", I sniff and sob, feeling so ridiculously happy and foolish, "it's not just a river". We are all hugging each other now and I can't stop smiling, a huge silly grin. What a day! What a feeling!

The rest of the day passes in a haze of bliss. In the early evening I walk to the huge freshwater lagoon which is a feature of this part of the island. It is fringed with giant *Melaleucas*, their leaves shining green and gold in the evening sunlight. Man-made sounds do not intrude, just the persistent, primeval sounds of the swamp – moorhen and grebe, black duck and cormorant, frogs, the whine of mosquitoes. For once, I am not intent on bird-watching. Today, this gloriously special day, I am content to sit very quiet and absorb the peace.

I think of Bob Brown and of all those campaigners whose names I don't even know. I think of the thousands of blockaders including the elderly, defiant Ruth Rowe, undeterred by arrest or

the prospect of Risdon prison. How wonderful they must be feeling now. I wish I could hug them all and shower them in champagne. I send out thought waves of love down Tassie way.

I think of Olegas Truchanas who witnessed the loss of Lake Pedder and ultimately lost his life in his efforts to save the Franklin . . . I think of Peter Dombrovskis who, following in Truchanas' footsteps, captured the famous image of Rock Island Bend that swayed a nation to "vote for the Franklin". Above all I think of the ancient forests, the mysterious spirit of the caves and of a river flowing free . . . . .

the burning question

Isabella Eichler-Onus

remember to smell the
salty spicey sweet
air —
AI overview tells me:
The harsh isolated nutrient poor Australian environment
is to blame
but the country I know is
supple, fertile
life giving
and unforgiving to those who mistreat it

Do you smell that?
Or are your pores, your holes
clogged, shovelled
pounded by the city
packed with soot
even your blackheads are contained
by the structures made
to protect you
and your children!
from savagery
that allow you to shelter, protect, survive, be comfortable.
to colonise/be colonised/be coloniser.

Are you uncomfortable?
If yes: interrogate your psyche, I'll wait.
If no: stay comfortable, the empire thanks you.

But I ask:
show me life that doesn't bleed
sky spills pink at dawn
glittered on split bark seeping
bright toffee, life force
Mother
possum left her blood on my balcony
twice.

But that thing you built for us?
— the colony —
doesn't bleed

calcified sacred veins
choke the morning chorus
I'm losing her!

the colony growls
but is not a beast that bleeds

Hoard memory like paper
and burn it for warmth
some seeds only bloom after

burning.

Ashes

Peter Jackson

On the sunny Horseshoe Bay foreshore, four people sat at a park bench table.

“Let’s get started,” Sally said.

Everyone looked at Tyler.

Tyler bit his lips. Thirty-two and tall, he had inherited his father’s lean body. Tyler’s unlined face contrasted with the creases and wrinkles in those around him.

“Dad wanted his ashes spread from Mount Arua,” he began. “That’s the big bluff you can see in Nelly Bay, at the end of Mandalay Avenue. We loved climbing up there but–.” His eyes teared up. Then he took a deep breath and continued, “– it’s a big climb, not for the faint hearted.”

“Or people with bad knees and dodgy tickers,” Sally interrupted. She wore new runners on her swollen feet but was breathless after walking a hundred metres.

“Exactly,” said Tyler. “You’re his closest friends. I want your thoughts on where his ashes ceremony will be.”

“Good on you, Tylery,” Deb gave him two skinny thumbs up. Deb’s short bob emphasised the narrowness of her face and spindly body, like a cropped silver-haired mop held upside down.

“Somewhere meaningful to Doug,” Sally asserted.

“Geoffrey Bay,” said Deb, “Doug loved it down there.”

“Here at Horseshoe Bay is the obvious choice,” said Fred, who lived one street back from where they sat and didn’t own a car. Tall and skeletal, he wrapped his weary flesh within drooping clothes.

“Not obvious to me,” said Sally.

“Geoffrey Bay,” Deb insisted, “Geoffrey was special to Doug." She looked far-away, “We used to sit in the sun, near the wallabies’ road, down near the rocks and mangroves. We’d watch the sky change colour as the sun set over the ridge. Beautiful times. Doug loved it.”

“What about Alma?” suggested Sally, “it’s kind of traditional.”

Deb lifted an eyebrow, “Alma’s a bit cliché, isn’t it?”

“Cliché?” Sally straightened her skirt and flicked something invisible off her knee. “I don’t think so.”

“Doug never hung out at Alma,” Deb retorted. “And there’ll be a wedding, or a surf carnival, or some other,” she waved her hand in the air, “*thing* going on. Somewhere quiet would be better.”

No one spoke while a bus accelerated past them.

“What about Picnic?” Deb spoke up.

“No.” Sally was absolute, “too clichéd.”

Fred growled at her.

Undaunted, Deb continued, “Picnic Bay. Down the Hawkings Point end.”

“We’re not climbing up Hawkings Point, Deb,” Sally huffed and shook her head.

“*Not* what I meant,” Deb sliced her hand sideways and emphasised the ‘not’. “We’d stay on the foreshore, past the last of the fig trees.”

“Not a good idea at all,” snapped Sally, squirming on the metal bench.

“Some bay special to Doug,” Sally said, “We’ve got to choose one.”

“Do we though?” asked Deb, her eyes bright with inspiration.

“Do we … what?” Fred’s eyebrows came together.

“It’s only an idea, right?” Deb’s left knee started to jiggle. She smoothed out her skirt and steadied her knee. “Couldn’t we divide the ashes and place a bit of Doug in each bay?”

“There’s bugger all left when you incinerate a body, Deb,” Fred shook his head. “We’d be dropping a tablespoon of ash in each bay.”

“It’s more than that,” Tyler corrected. “It’s about a cup and a half. Which is about …,” his head wobbled while he calculated, “nineteen tablespoons.”

“We could have nineteen places,” Deb was upbeat.

Fred blew a puff of air out the side of his mouth and crossed his arms.

Sally sat up straight, “If we had enough people, we could hire Tim’s bus.”

Confused, Deb asked, “Whatever for?”

“He has a big esky on the bus,” said Sally.

Everyone looked the same question at her.

“We could do an ‘ash-crawl’,” Sally bounced in her seat, “We could raise a glass of champers at every bay. Someone could say something meaningful. Or pretty. Then we could ladle out the spoonful of ash and move on.”

Tyler and Deb joked together about inebriated mourners losing the ashes, or the spoon, or each other.

“We’ve got to be practical,” Fred interrupted, “We want one bay. Easy to get to. Room for lots of people. And a bay where the wind is blowing offshore.”

“Oh, my goodness yes, so true,” agreed Deb, “You don’t want the ashes blowing into your face. I was at a funeral once, in Nelly Bay. The daughter emptied out the ashes into the waves and they all blew back into her face. It reminds me of another time–”

“We can’t have that.” Sally cut her off. She looked at Tyler, “Be careful which way the wind is blowing.”

Tyler nodded, a tight smile on his face.

“Good argument for Horseshoe,” said Tyler. “There’s usually a gentle southeaster blowing out to sea. As there is now. Not like Picnic.”

“But some of Doug’s friends are at Picnic,” Deb whined, “spread under the big fig tree near the end of the path. You know? Chris and Terry and Rhonda.”

“Sounds a bit,” Sally paused, “overdone, I would say.”

“Doug’s not craving company, is he?” Fred observed.

“Picnic won’t do at all,” Sally declared, “And it’s always blowing in Picnic.”

“I feel Doug would have loved us,” Deb scratched finger quotes in the air, “’Returning him to the earth’.”

“He would have dug it!” Tyler quipped. No one laughed.

“It doesn’t matter to Doug,” Fred interjected, “he’s past complaining.”

Sally and Deb rolled their eyes at each other.

“Honestly,” Fred continued, “let’s remember, he was the dopiest hippy.”

“That’s not true,” Sally said.

Fred raised his eyebrows and looked away.

“He did love giving those long, rambling explanations for things,” Deb said. “I mean they sounded amazing, but I could never follow them.”

“That’s because Doug thought he was left-field and out-there,” Fred said. “In fact, he was middle of the road and bottom of the rut.”

“Bloody hell, tell us how you really feel,” Sally protested.

Deb joined in, “Like any judgement it reveals more about you than Doug.” Deb reached out and squeezed Tyler’s arm.

Fred sat up, palms out, pushing the air down with his hands. “Alright! Alright!” he said, “First of all, Tyler, no offence. I loved your dad; he was my best mate.”

Fred stopped. Sally and Tyler had turned their attention to Deb, who had her face in her hands.

Fred changed his tone, “Sorry Deborah. I didn’t mean to upset you. I knew it was a bit … … edgy.”

“Edgy?” Sally snapped, “Rude, I’d say.”

Deb pulled her face out of her hands, eyes moist, and said, “Rude and unfeeling, Fred.”

“Now we’ve found the edge,” Tyler broke in, “Let’s not leap right over.”

Fred crossed his arms and his legs.

“Why does nobody support my ideas?” Sally pulled the corners of her mouth down.

“Well, they weren’t, you know,” Deb bobbed her head like a pigeon, “great ideas.”

Sally puffed up and took a deep breath.

“No, no,” said Deb, back-pedalling in her seat, “I don’t mean they were bad. But, you know, there’ll be more than a bus load of people who want to come along, and Alma can be as busy as an anthill.”

Sally deflated a little, and Deb relaxed.

“Nobody particularly cares for my ideas either,” said Deb, looking at Sally. “We need to work out what would make Doug happy.”

“Honestly?” said Fred, exasperated.

“No need to yell, Fred,” huffed Sally.

“I’m not yelling," Fred rejoined. "Listen, this idea of ‘what Doug wants’, is beside the point. Doug doesn’t care what we do, he’s dead. We could dump his ashes in the bin at Lion’s Park, it doesn’t matter.”

“Incorrigible,” Sally dismissed Fred’s words with a flick of her hand.

“You don’t give up, do you?” Deb said. “The ashes, the spreading of the ashes, it’s important.”

Sally used her schoolteacher voice. “The emotional and psychological healing for the mourners, for family. Closure, Fred, have you ever heard of that?”

“Of course,” said Fred, rolling his eyes out to sea.

“What exactly *would* Doug want?” Deb asked.

“He was clear as crystal,” Tyler looked at them in turn, “Walk up to Mount Arua.”

“Which is where we started,” said Sally, “It won’t work. We’ve gone full circle.”

“I don’t want to go around again,” said Tyler, shaking his head.

Deb turned to him, “If we give up, you can pick somewhere, Tyler.”

Tyler jumped straight in, “I’d do it right where we are.”

“Opposite the pub?” Sally looked like she’d bitten a lemon.

“I mean Horseshoe Bay, because there *is* the pub and the shops and the buses,” Tyler said. “But we’ll go down the other end of the road, for sunset. I’ll hold some ashes back for Arua, but half of what’s left we’ll spread on the water, the other half under a fig tree. With a barbie and party to follow.”

Fred smirked at the two women, who said nothing and looked away.

Tyler spoke into the brief silence, “I *really* miss him.”

F(Y?)RE

Karen Conrad

Planned burns in parks and forests to support a healthy environment.

Drones will be flown

Burning undergrowth

Protecting the environment

Fire.

Hazard reduction

Intentional threat to life

Flightless. Helpless.

Habitats will burn.

Threatening the environment
Killing us and our friends.

Grief.

Eulogy

241 dead

8 northern quolls

9 little red flying fox

18 dozing northern broad-nosed bats

11 wallaroos

18 death adders

17 brushtail possums

34 fledgling blue-winged kookaburras

68 bush stone curlews

15 sleeping barking owls

16 short-beaked echidnas

27 koalas

Beach haiku

Liz Downes

I

Low tide uncovers
the muddied weed and debris,
starfish surprise us.

II

Sand and sea crinkle,
red-capped dotterel blow like leaves,
osprey casts shadow.

III

Is the sea perhaps
the unconscious of the land,
harbouring monsters?

IV

Arched across the bay
The rainbow flaunts its colours
promising riches

V

On the kitchen bench
one of the shells I've gathered
puts out legs and walks.

Breathing with the Ocean

Tarquin Moon

I sit on the beach, my eyes seeing glitter pulsating upon the waters in front of me. The winds' hands brushing my face with a cold touch. I am alive. I am here and breathing with the ocean. Many events and many people before me have happened so that I now sit here taking in this moment. Living in the now is something I think to do here and there, and right now, here, I do in this moment.

I am an imperfect adult who forgets that, well – all I have is now. But I am taking this moment right now to remember I am a fleck on this magnetic beach, upon a vast ocean, upon a blue-green jewel within a universe surrounded by the blackness of unknowns and mystery and a scale that is beyond all the understanding combined of all human beings that have ever lived.

I am a miracle.

I am nothing.

I am a moment and I will be gone.

The tides of time will erase me and grind me up into little particles and distribute me a little bit here and there, breathing me into a thousand places to be a small part of many new things. I hope that my particles will be used to regenerate and perpetuate what exists now on this blue-green jewel but I am also well aware that perhaps a whole new reality is destined to be.

I make peace with this.

I breathe in and I breathe out with this tide.

I know that my breath is time-bound and that even this timeless tide is time-bound too.

I am only now.

And I wish now upon me and upon you too.

~

EPHEMERA

I cannot say

Movements gently beneath sunbeams

Quiet contemplation under sunny kapok flowers

Recalling dreams like grasping at clouds

Clouds sail over a solid granite emblazoned
with our glorious kapok

Sitting, watching the leaves sway in the gentle breeze
only to have serenity broken by the raucous squawk
of the Sulphur crested cockatoo

Twinning, chatting, binding, searching, exploring
the bush and being creative scratching, slapping,
smelling—breathe & feel the bush atmosphere

And yet, with all the churning
of leaves and twigs
there is nary a kookaburra in sight

An “Exquisite Corpse’’ written by participants in the 2025 Ephemera Art Trail at Claude’s Block

My Wild Backyard: Life Beyond the Verandah – by Julie Spencer

My home on Magnetic Island nestles against the bush, and I love living here, surrounded by nature. Each morning, I'm awoken by a cacophony of bird calls—no alarm clock needed. Drowsily, I rise and shuffle to the back verandah, cuppa in hand, and settle into my favourite spot: an old couch bathed in the first rays of sunlight.

Cradling my cup, I gaze up into the gumtrees. Currawongs call melodiously to one another as they swoop through the branches, their wings slicing the air with rhythmic swooshes. Overhead, a large flock of sulphur-crested cockatoos circles, screeching like rowdy schoolchildren. In a nearby tree, a family of blue-winged kookaburras erupts into raucous laughter, triggering a chain reaction from a rival family in the distance. A curlew darts across a grassy clearing, crying out before vanishing into the undergrowth. The piercing calls of rainbow lorikeets grow louder as a small flock zips past, shrieking and chattering in a whirlwind of colour. Nearby, the deep, resounding *whoop whoop whoop* of a pheasant coucal echoes through the trees.

These are my morning greetings.

I sip my tea and scan the block beyond the fence. Agile wallabies often graze there, quiet and watchful. If I move suddenly, they raise their heads and lock eyes with mine, staring silently before bounding away. Once, I spotted a cheeky fella inside the chook pen, helping himself to the chicken feed. No wonder the grain was vanishing so quickly!

A pair of orange-footed scrub fowl patrol the bush fringe, scratching through the vegetation and flicking leaf litter behind them. Their nest mound lies about fifty metres from our fence, though they rarely venture into the yard. I don't mind—I've heard tales of their garden havoc: mulch flung far and wide, beds ruined. We already have our hands full with our chooks!

During breeding season, the scrub fowl become fierce defenders of their territory. Twigs snap and calls ring out as rival pairs crash through the bush, chasing each other, leaping, wings flapping, legs kicking, feathers flying. It's a dramatic spectacle to witness from the comfort of my couch.

As the sun climbs higher, the bush quiets and the morning chorus fades. The light brightens, the temperature rises. Wallabies retreat into the shade, and curlews melt into the thickets. In their place, the daytime regulars arrive. Skinks emerge to sun themselves on warming rocks before scurrying back into the leaf litter. The buzz of insect life intensifies as butterflies and bees flit through the garden. The loud hum of a solitary carpenter bee's wings announces its purposeful foraging. Blue-banded bees, with striped blue and black abdomens, move among the Ixora flowers, feasting on nectar. I smile at the iridescent flashes of the blue Ulysses butterfly and the green Cairns birdwing as they flutter past—fleeting jewels in the sky.

Red and blue dragonflies hover like tiny helicopters near the pool, landing briefly before darting away. Sometimes, a rainbow bee-eater swoops down with a chirping trill to snatch an insect from the water's surface. Occasionally, I hear a loud splash as a bird—usually a currawong

or kookaburra—uses our pool as a personal birdbath. With a flutter and splash, they emerge bedraggled and proud, perching on the fence like soggy sentinels.

Blue-winged kookaburras are daily visitors, often gathering in family groups. I've counted nine perched along the fence and trees, their eyes sharp and curious. Sometimes one swoops down to hop across the lawn, pecking at tiny black beetles that surface after the sprinkler shuts off.

But my heart belongs to the olive-backed sunbirds. I love watching them flit from flower to flower, twittering to one another. Each year, they grace us with a nest on the verandah. I watch in awe as the female constructs her masterpiece using only her beak. Unlike nest building, both parents share the task of raising their young. I delight in spying them flying back and forth, feeding their hungry babies.

A pheasant coucal also frequents our yard, stalking through the undergrowth with stealth and intent, hunting lizards and insects. When startled, it flutters high into the trees, clucking as it goes.

When the callistemon and grevilleas bloom, the garden becomes a nectar haven. Helmeted friarbirds, honeyeaters, and rainbow lorikeets descend upon the flowers, chattering in noisy celebration.

Just beyond the fence stands a towering gum tree with a hollow midway up one of its branches, home to a pair of rainbow lorikeets. Fiercely protective, they become vocal when prying eyes get too close, vigorously chasing away intruders—cockatoos, galahs, even kookaburras. On another branch sits a currawong's nest made of twigs. One morning, I heard a loud grunting—it was a male koala straddling an outstretched branch. The currawongs and lorikeets were unimpressed, swooping at him in outrage all day. Unsurprisingly, the koala had moved on by the next morning.

Occasionally, the backyard hosts slithering visitors: a yellow-bellied tree snake sunning on the footpath, a carpet python winding along the railing, and sometimes a death adder curled beside a rock. A timely reminder to tread carefully—even when descending the back steps.

As dusk falls, flocks of cockatoos circle overhead, screeching as they fly home to roost. In the distance, barking owls begin their *woof woof* calls. Flying foxes swoop past, silhouetted against the sunset sky. Sometimes, a microbat flaps through the open verandah doors, doing a lap around the lounge room before flitting back into the night. Geckos emerge to feast on insects gathering near the ceiling light, and my favourite nightly visitors—the green tree frogs—come out to perch on the porch. One has even taken to dipping into our fish tank—a quirky and charming sight.

Sometimes, a brush-tailed possum knocks over a flowerpot as it scurries along the rail, a baby clinging to its back.

On rare nights, I spot the enchanting green glow of fireflies flickering in the dark. As I step outside to find more, I hear the crash of undergrowth and the *thump thump* of wallaby tails as they bound away. Groups of curlews cry out with such fervour it sounds like a bushland party.

But of all the visitors, the one I treasure most is the echidna. One quiet evening, I sat on the garden bench as it foraged so close I could hear its snuffling breath. It nearly bumped into my legs.

When I finally drift to sleep each night, it's to nature's lullaby of insects, frogs, geckos, owls, and curlews. I smile to myself in the dark. I love living here on Magnetic Island.
