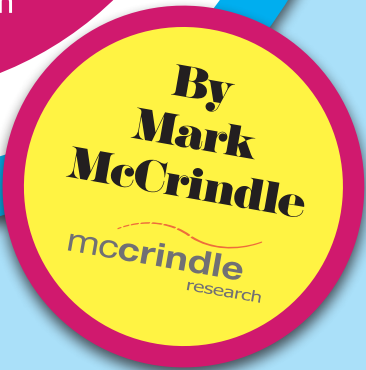




the power of good

True stories of
great kindness from
total strangers



The Power of Good

Other titles by Mark McCrindle with Emily Wolfinger

The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the Global Generations,
UNSW Press

From explaining the labels and quantifying the numbers to outlining the definitive events of each generation, the best-selling *The ABC of XYZ* is a comprehensive and fascinating look at the generations.

www.theABCofXYZ.com

Word Up: A Lexicon and Guide to Communicating in the 21st Century, Halstead Press

More than a comprehensive lexicon of Australian youth slang, *Word Up* looks at language, how it is changing, and the factors influencing this change with chapters on youth slang, literacy, manners, political jargon and more.

www.wordup.net.au

the power of good

**True stories of great kindness
from total strangers**

Compiled by Mark McCrindle with Emily Wolfinger



Published by Hybrid Publishers

Melbourne Victoria Australia

© McCrindle Research 2011

This publication is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the publisher. Requests and enquiries concerning reproduction should be addressed to the Publisher, Hybrid Publishers, PO Box 52, Ormond 3204.

First published 2011

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Author: McCrindle, Mark.

Title: The power of good: true stories of great kindness from total strangers / compiled by Mark McCrindle with Emily Wolfinger.

ISBN: 9781921665226 (pbk.)

Subjects: Kindness – Anecdotes.

Interpersonal relations – Moral and ethical aspects.

Inspiration – Anecdotes.

Other Authors/Contributors:

Wolfinger, Emily.

Dewey Number: 177.7

Cover design by Reader's Digest

Printed in Australia by Trojan Press

Contents

About Us	xiii
Acknowledgments	xvi
Foreword: <i>Tim Fischer AC, Former Deputy Prime Minister</i>	xvii
1. The Power of Good	1
2. Acts of Kindness in Hardship and Misfortune	31
<i>Louise Hall, Reporter, the Sydney Morning Herald</i> Food for Thought	31
<i>Anton Enus, News Presenter, SBS World News</i> Comradeship at the Comrades Marathon	34
<i>David Richardson, Reporter, “Today Tonight”</i> The “Mummy’s Boys”	37
<i>Simon Reeve, Presenter, “Sunrise”</i> A Cardiologist with a Heart	40
<i>Susanne Gervay, Author</i> With Pain Comes the Joy of Kindness	42

<i>Rick Ardon, News Presenter, Channel 7 Perth</i> A Life-saving Act of Kindness	45
<i>Elizabeth Brew, Secretary of Adoption Support Network Origins Inc NSW</i> Where There is Life There is Hope	47
<i>Sue Curby, Unsworn Member of Federal Police</i> Kindness in the Face of Death	49
<i>Penny Burke, Director of Essence Communications</i> I am Not a Runner; I Just Occasionally Jog	50
<i>Terry Hawkins, People in Progress, Terry Hawkins Enterprises</i> The Story Behind the Face: When Hearts Collide	54
<i>Janice Davies, Motivational Speaker and Author</i> The Angel Wore a White Cardigan	58
<i>The Reverend Graham Long, Wayside Chapel, Kings Cross</i> A Kiss from Heaven	61
<i>Peter H. Devin, Author, California USA</i> A Bucket List Dream Come True	64
<i>Ken B. Marslew AM, "Enough is Enough"</i> Kindness in Dark Places	68
<i>Father Chris Riley, Youth off the Streets</i> Rod's Story	70
<i>Simon Rountree, Camp Quality</i> There is Much to See if We Can Close our Eyes for a Moment	74

<i>Elissa Scott, Recruitment Agent</i>	
From Disappointment to Delight	76
<i>Sarah Garnett, Footpath Library</i>	
Superman in Disguise	78
<i>Joy Robertson, Homemaker</i>	
The Kindness of Strangers on Country Roads	80
<i>Leanne Duerkop, Homemaker</i>	
A Brave Kindness	82
<i>Lindy Jones, Professional Speaker</i>	
The Bumpy Road of Kindness	84
<i>Stephen Murby, Cystic Fibrosis Victoria</i>	
Of Gift and Grace	87
<i>Tracey Spicer, Former News Presenter, Channel 10 Sydney</i>	
Solace in Grief	90
<i>Blake Beattie, Founder of International Pay it Forward Day</i>	
Paying it Forward	93
<i>Darryl Blake, Best-selling Author</i>	
Healing Moments	95
<i>Anthony Ackroyd, Cast Member of "Thank God It's Friday!"</i>	
Little Things are Big Things Too	98
<i>Jean Kittson, Writer, Actor and Comedian</i>	
Summer Car Park	101

<i>Helen Dwyer, Relationships and Communications Manager, Hope Street</i>	
The Precious Gift of Hope – Andy’s Story	103
3. Acts of Kindness while Abroad	105
<i>Marian Arnold, ABC Classic FM</i>	
My Knight in Black and White	105
<i>Cecilia Dart-Thornton, Author</i>	
Kindness is Contagious	107
<i>Tim Fischer AC, Former Deputy Prime Minister</i>	
Kindness of a Train-travelling Stranger: All at Sea near the Holy See	109
<i>Amanda McLeay, Weather Presenter, Channel 10 Brisbane</i>	
Our Oral Angel	112
<i>Shane Stuart Ellis, Equity Protect Business</i>	
Giving Gives Back	114
<i>Justine Davies, Columnist for The Australian</i>	
Sometimes it’s the Smallest, Trivial Things that Stick in the Mind ...	117
<i>Emma Ayres, ABC Classic FM</i>	
Pyjamas in Iran	121

4. Acts of Kindness in the Formative Years	124
<i>Morris Emma, Former Premier of NSW</i>	
Goodness is All Around Us	124
<i>Geraldine Brooks, Pulitzer Prize Winner</i>	
Miss Glasby	126
<i>Professor David de Kretser AC, Governor of Victoria</i>	
Welcome to Melbourne	129
<i>Gavin Wanganeen, Former Captain AFL Team Port Adelaide</i>	
A Legacy of Kindness	131
<i>Natarsha Belling, Channel 10 News Sydney</i>	
An Act of Kindness I Will Never Forget	133
<i>Eric Bailey, Former NBA Player</i>	
Abandonment to Abundance	136
<i>Professor Anthony Klein, The University of Melbourne</i>	
Mistaken Identity	138
5. Acts of Kindness to Those Less Fortunate	140
<i>Libby Gleeson, Author</i>	
A Surprising Act of Kindness	140
<i>Peta Farquhar, Wesley Mission</i>	
Happy Blankets	142
<i>Glenda Rouxel, Author</i>	
Forbidden Fruit	145

<i>Di Knowles, Teacher</i>	
Ten Cents for a Hero	147
<i>Robyn Henderson, “Networking to Win”</i>	
A Random Act of Kindness in Reverse	149
<i>Professor Margaret Reynolds, Former Senator for Queensland</i>	
Opportunity through Anonymous Generosity	153
<i>Glenn Wheeler, Presenter of “The Morning Show”</i>	
Connor – The Kid from Coffs	156
<i>Professor Andrea Hull AO, Former Director of the Victorian College for the Arts</i>	
Kindness without Limits	159
6. Acts of Kindness in Emergencies	162
<i>George Donikian, Channel 10 News Melbourne</i>	
“Be Prepared”: Scouts to the Rescue	162
<i>Brigid Foster, Mother</i>	
Kindness in Phuket	165
<i>Sarah Degabriele, Account Executive</i>	
Flowers from a Stranger	168
<i>Reverend Professor James Haire, Charles Sturt University</i>	
Kindness Has No Boundaries	169
<i>Phillip Adams AO, Author, Filmmaker, Broadcaster</i>	
Thank you, Shaun	172

<i>Andrew Fraser MP, Member for Coffs Harbour NSW</i>	
From Loss Comes Kindness	176
<i>Pru Goward MP, State Member for Goulburn NSW</i>	
Mr Nice Bloke	178
<i>Graham Foster, International Speaker</i>	
The Awesome Generation	181
<i>Michael Groom, Professional Mountaineer</i>	
A Helping Hand	185
<i>Chris Gray, Sky News Business</i>	
From Entrepreneur to Philanthropist	191
<i>Stephen Dale, Motivational Speaker</i>	
When Strangers Become Savers	195
<i>Professor Henry Burger AO, Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research</i>	
Blown Away After a Blowout	198
<i>Peter FitzSimons, Best-selling Author</i>	
The Backpacker Brotherhood	201
<i>Jess Williams, Bartender</i>	
Heartlessness then Humanity	203
7. Acts of Kindness for No Particular Reason	205
<i>Sheridan Voysey, Author</i>	
A Sweet-sounding Love Song	205

<i>Peter Buckley, Keynote Speaker</i>	
The Glow from Poppies	208
<i>Jules Faber, Australian Cartoonists' Association</i>	
A Man of His Words	210
<i>Nola Smart, Pharmacy Assistant</i>	
Mrs Shmegg	213
<i>Sara Groen, Weather Presenter, Channel 7 Sydney</i>	
A Child's Cosy Gift of Kindness	215
<i>Stephanie Streatfeild, Student</i>	
My Genie with No Lamp	218
Your Story	220
Thank Your Kindly Stranger	221
Appendix	222
Endnotes	229

About Us

Background and Purpose

The idea for this book came about when my wife Ruth and I were backpacking as a young couple and were the recipients of several acts of kindness from strangers. It was Ruth who came up with the book concept, as we sat talking in a pine forest on Kangaroo Island, reflecting on the generosity of so many fellow Aussies who are readily prepared to help strangers as we had just experienced.

I spend much of my professional life researching people – whether by facilitating focus groups or conducting national surveys, and what I consistently find is that most people embody the Australian stereotype of lending a hand – whether it be to a mate or a stranger.

The perception of worsening violence and less kindness is largely based on crime coverage in daily media reports, and is refuted by solid research. The reality is that nationally, and for the majority of Australians personally, we experience far more acts of good than ill – indeed, as shown later in the book, by a factor of 38 to 1.

This book is a small testament to the power of good in our society. These seventy true stories of kindness from strangers are just a sample of the millions of such stories that could fill volumes like this.

Many of our contributors, though not all, are prominent Australians. Their stories are further recognition that individual achievement rarely occurs without a helping hand from others. After all, we call this the lucky country – we don't take the credit for it all ourselves. We value independence in a community-minded way. We hope you find this book further evidence of the power and life of the community spirit that shines so strongly in the Australian psyche. In these times of great change and incredible diversity we all know that when adversity strikes, whether in the form of bushfires, floods or international conflict, there'll be a fellow Aussie there to help out. It's the tradition of the digger, the character of mateship, and the enduring power of good.

This book was written and compiled by Mark McCrindle with Emily Wolfinger of McCrindle Research.

Mark McCrindle is a social researcher with an international reputation for tracking the emerging trends and analysing the diverse generations. He is the Director of not-for-profit organisation, the Australian Leadership Foundation, as well as McCrindle Research whose clients include over 100 multinational organisations. His highly valued research and reports have developed his renown as a futurist, demographer and social commentator.

Emily Wolfinger is a published writer and has freelanced for a variety of publications. As a freelancer, Emily enjoyed writing about some of the big issues of our times. At McCrindle Research Emily translates social and generational research into publishable form both for internal and external clients.

Mark and Emily are the authors of the generational tome, *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the Global Generations* (UNSW Press – www.theABCofXYZ.com).

McCrindle Research



McCrindle Research exists to conduct world-class research and to communicate its insights in innovative ways.

You will find out more about our research agency at:
www.mccrindle.com.au

Supporting Charity

You have already done good just by holding this book in your hand! One dollar from every book published goes to the work of the Australian charity, Hope Street (www.hopestreet.org.au), who look after some of our cities' most marginalised people. Daily the team at Hope Street dedicate themselves to supporting and empowering those in need, and in doing so they show the power of good.

Acknowledgments

Our heartfelt thanks to all of our generous contributors: without your stories, there would be no book! A special “thank you” to Tim Fischer, who contributed not only a story but also wrote the foreword to this book.

Thank you also to Josephine Brouard, Sue Carney, Louise Waterson and the team from *Reader’s Digest* for helping to make this book happen. Your support and input have made the difference to this important work.

Thanks to Louis de Vries and Anna Rosner Blay at Hybrid Publishers for believing in the book and working so hard to make it happen in such a short timeframe.

Thanks to that young “tradie” from Adelaide, whose act of kindness inspired this book. Finally, thanks to our 6,715,082 fellow Australians who, according to our research, engage in acts of kindness to strangers regularly.

On behalf of all of these strangers, thank you!

Foreword

Trappist Trend or Good Constructive Engagement: Which Way Forward?

There is a certain joy in life in helping out, in helping good causes, as George Bernard Shaw once famously remarked. Further, there is a longer life for those who do so, as medical research has revealed time and time again. This book provides many examples of the power of doing good works, the betterment conferred in so many different ways and, on occasions, leading to the saving of lives.

I salute my fellow contributors and I urge this troubled world to recall the example of the good Samaritan, to recall kinder and more generous times and look out for others. Otherwise, the individual self-centric society will dominate all, dominate to a greater extent than even now and so make for a more brittle and acidic society.

Mighty author Mark Twain, of Mississippi fame and Mary MacKillop, Australia's first saint, travelled the world in the last five decades of the 19th century and much of the first decade of the 20th century – different people with different purposes

who caught many trains and had to take many voyages. In fact, in 1895 Mark Twain caught sixteen trains in Australia alone and, who knows, may have even travelled on the same train as Mary MacKillop. Both encountered much adversity in life but both bounced back. Interestingly enough, both wrote of much kindness willingly extended to them in their travels, be it in Adelaide, London or Rome. Imagine how less productive their lives might have been if all that travel and worldly experience was undertaken with headphones jammed firmly in each ear!

In considering the mantra of extending a helping hand, of doing good because it is not only the right thing to do but ultimately in your broad community interest, it is time to reflect on very recent trends that have swung the world away from the useful friendly casual conversation. In the process, it has resulted in the creation of barriers of hesitation, higher thresholds before people intervene to help or just converse.

The world is a global village in many ways; life is increasingly hectic for so many – east and west, rich and poor, with family and friend network support or without. The crunch is that the opportunity for the unexpected good conversation from outside your circle, sparking a laugh or an increase in useful knowledge or a creative idea or two, has been sharply curtailed.

Why is this so in the so-called “social networking” world of Twitter, Facebook, email, iPod and all? Perhaps this is because free time and downtime when commuting or travelling or even just

shopping locally has sharply reduced. The more communication, cellular phones and game gadgets, the more self-absorbed people are becoming and the less opportunities then exist for new interface with those outside the existing social circle.

Take the grand conference circuits of today with every subject covered every which way, in locations large and small, exotic or sub-exotic, but even then it is often a case of smart speaker or lecturer in, then speak, then dash out without mixing. Or delegates in a controlled introductory mix on opening night followed by an overloaded agenda with subset fringe meetings, all resulting in little true “free wheeling” time.

In short, today’s a world increasingly lacks the good conversation factor, with a paucity of motivation to break down natural barriers. This makes it harder to build good community fabric with an altruistic or “helping hand” culture to the fore. The extension of this may be a greater reluctance for people to feel involved in their community as they find it harder to make the personal contact required. This culture can create higher and higher thresholds of reluctance or hesitation that must be broached before people act, whether on a planned basis or in a suddenly arising situation.

If we converse less, if we communicate less and less in a genuine way by whatever means, then we await further breakdown in family and community, and that is not good. Do I exaggerate? Maybe, but there is good news, too, as people start to find ways

to fight back and adjust to the new communication world we live in. This is what you will discover in soaking up the flavour of these writings, many which are counter-intuitive to the drift in the activities and affairs of humanity.

This is particularly uplifting in a world where, too often, bile and spite dominate good cheer and thoughtful conversation. Maybe it should be called the “Trappist trend” after the contemplative order of monks who take an oath of silence.

Lamartine wrote in 1840: “Civilisation is a battlefield, where many succumb in the cause of the advancement of all.” I would observe that civilisation is a battlefield in the 21st century and many will succumb, indeed many more will succumb if the “Power of Good” is not to the fore in every way. Unless you are a monk or committed to the worthy aim of a life of contemplation and prayer, the “Trappist trend” of non-communication can be destructive and deadly.

The late and colourful Cardinal Jaime Sin, in a famous installation speech as Archbishop of Manila, said in 1974: “Everywhere walls are rising. When we wall somebody out, we also wall ourselves in. All of us are living in our separate worlds, enclosed in selfishness by our bigotry. The change must start in ourselves.” Amen, *shalom* and *salaam* to this farsighted statement.

To help reverse this trend, each of us can make a difference in the way we choose to live our lives. So I challenge you, the next time you are boarding a flight or fast-train sector of more

than two hours, to first watch for the subtle and not-so-subtle use of body language being used to ensure zero conversation, passenger to passenger. I am not suggesting you engage in long conversations when clearly the other person has work to do or is not keen to engage – just the simple pleasantries are a start. Have courage, friends, before we lose the plot completely and continue down this path of egocentricity, celebrity obsession and growing loneliness. The alternative is so much better.

Tim Fischer AC
Former Deputy Prime Minister

1. The Power of Good

Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.

Leo Buscaglia

On the nightly news we often hear stories of random, opportunistic crime perpetrated against strangers, but rarely do we hear stories of generosity and altruism from strangers. In an age which seems to be marked by “acts of senseless violence”, fed to us by the media on a daily basis, an act of random kindness from a stranger or someone not well known to us is heartwarming – and perhaps astonishing. There are, however, numerous examples of acts of kindness that never come to light and it is the purpose of this book to highlight some of the best of these – from both prominent and ordinary Australians.

I was first inspired to compile *The Power of Good* several years ago after being the recipient of several acts of kindness when my

wife Ruth and I were backpacking around Australia. The idea came to us one dusk as we sat talking in a pine forest on Kangaroo Island. It had been a random act of kindness that had enabled us to make it to this beautiful part of the world.

We had left our backpackers' hotel to jump on our flight from Adelaide airport to Kangaroo Island. After getting off a local bus we found ourselves a couple of kilometres from the airport with little more than half an hour before our flight was due to depart. We were both toting heavy backpacks, there were no taxis around and we were walking as fast as we could. A young "tradie" in a ute pulled up next to us and said, "Are you guys alright?" We explained to him our predicament and he immediately jumped out, threw our backpacks in the back of his ute and drove us to Adelaide airport. We thanked him all we could and as he waved and drove away we were both struck by the generosity of his act. There was nothing in it for him and yet he chose to bless us; without his help we would have certainly missed our flight and lost our non-refundable fare. That man probably cannot even remember the deed he did, and yet his kindness inspired this book: this is the power of one, ordinary act of good! Indeed, the kindness of strangers does more than merely warm the heart; it transforms lives – over half of Australians (59%) say that if it weren't for the kindness, support, encouragement and gifts given them by strangers over the years, their life would be in a worse place.¹

The vulnerability of travel and the naivety of youth allowed us to experience numerous acts of kindness during our backpacking adventure around Australia. Far away from the comforts of home and the security of everyday life, we found ourselves more open to receiving help from strangers and often found we needed their help. A man we met at a Christmas carols service in Gove, Northern Territory lent us his Land Cruiser 4WD to explore the surrounding areas and then had us over for a BBQ at the end of the day. Twice we were offered accommodation at the houses of people we had just met. We found country Aussies swift to offer a lift or lend a hand. In our wider travels we found that kindness was not limited to Aussies. In Jerusalem we found ourselves at Christmas time with “no room at the inn”. We were offered accommodation with a Haitian American whom we met at the Damascus Gate. He then proceeded to cook us dinner and invited us to stay again when we had finished our travels.

The numerous acts of kindness we experienced as a couple have only expanded since having children. Those small acts that perhaps seem insignificant make the world a beautiful place. The man who helps carry your groceries to the car when you have a baby in one arm and a screaming toddler in the other; the person who lets you in at the checkout because you only have a few items and they can see you are juggling tired children; the person who helps you lift your pram on to the train or who offers you their seat on the bus – these small everyday acts of kindness are significant

and impact the way we feel about life in our community. The blessing of kind strangers never ceases to surprise and warm our hearts.

Finally, in 2010 we began to collect stories. We personally invited prominent Australians to submit their accounts of kindness, as well as receiving stories via our online panel AustraliaSpeaks.com. Submissions came in from people from all walks of life, including politicians, authors, radio and TV personalities, professional speakers, mums, students, teachers and business executives. All had amazing stories to tell. Here within you will find stories of kindness by people like Morris Iemma (former Premier of NSW), Professor David de Kretser AC (Governor of Victoria), Tim Fischer (Ambassador to the Holy See), David Richardson (reporter, *Today Tonight*) and Anton Enus (news presenter, *SBS World News*).

The stories in this book recall varied acts of kindness – abroad, in misfortune, in emergencies, during the formative years, and those for no particular reason at all (“acts of random kindness”). For one Victorian mother, a stranger’s act of kindness saved her from becoming engulfed by the devastating tsunami that struck Kamala Beach, Phuket, in 2004. In the case of news presenter Natarsha Belling and author Geraldine Brooks, *their* act of kindness from a stranger inspired the direction of their careers and, ultimately, of their lives. Geraldine writes: “I never met Althea Glasby, but her kindness shaped my childhood.” Miss Glasby’s kindness to a

young Geraldine awoke within her a love of reading which led her to become an internationally renowned author and winner of the Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 2006. Natarsha recalls for us the act of kindness that cemented her passion for journalism and which also took her career to great heights. She opens: “I have a very special story to share where I experienced a wonderful random act of kindness that changed my life both personally and professionally.”

For others, their stories were less dramatic but, still, touching and inspiring with a powerful lesson to convey. Author Libby Gleeson colourfully recalls how a group of punks who “... had the lot: spiked-up green hair, loads of metal piercing their faces, huge boots and ripped army clothing” gave more than loose change to an old, homeless man, while others chose to ignore him as he shuffled on by, begging. These stories prove to us that in a seemingly hostile world, kindness can come from anywhere, at any time and, indeed, from anyone – even a bunch of “punks”.

Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Good versus evil

It is easy to become disheartened with humanity when our daily catch-up with the world involves few uplifting stories.

In a recent survey drawn from our national online research panel (AustraliaSpeaks.com), 95% agreed that the media reports more negative than positive news and 93% felt that this gives the impression that there is more evil than good in the world. It comes as no surprise then that only 31% of Australians think there are more acts of kindness performed in the world than acts of terror.

However, the reality is that more good goes on in the world than we are led to believe. In fact, off-screen it is good deeds that, by a large margin, outnumber the bad. Our research shows that for every reported act of road rage, violence or abuse, there are 38 acts of kindness towards strangers. Further, we found that 86% of Australians say they have gone out of their way to help a stranger in need, and 29.5% or 6.7 million Australians help a stranger “regularly”.

Here are more statistics to illustrate this: 49% of Australians say they have been shown “significant” kindness by a stranger, while 29% say they have been the recipient of kindness from a stranger over the past week. Further testifying to the power of good over evil is the statistic that 64% of Australians “definitely agree” with the statement that “good is more powerful than evil” (only 6% disagree).²

What are we prepared to do?

1. *Help a stranger to gain access or mobility:* 88.5%
2. *Help at an emergency:* 87.5%

3. *Help with shopping*: 74%
4. *Comfort a stranger*: 69.5%
5. *Help with money*: 30%³

Kindness and the Aussie character

There is an earthy humility in our self-image. In defining Australia, the most mentioned quality was that this is the land of the “fair go”. For many Australians this is about equality for all and giving everyone a go – 68% define “fair go” as “equality – same rules and benefits for all”. Additionally, almost one in four (23%) Australians believe that this “fair go” quality is about supporting those in need such as refugees.⁴ Our lives are increasingly busy and complex yet our culture is down-to-earth. As Dan from Victoria mentioned in the research: “Where else in the world can you call a complete stranger ‘mate’?” While mateship is a term traditionally used among men, its definition is now more inclusive – 70% of Australians agree with the statement that mateship is “helping anyone in need regardless of who they are”. The vast majority of males (80%) as well as females (74%) agree with this statement.⁵

Australia is collaborative rather than individualistic. This teamwork, a mix of mateship and altruism, sets us apart from other cultures. It gives us a sense of belonging to something bigger than the individual, and empowers a “can do” attitude. Ian from Belaire in South Australia states: “Australians are legendary for their generosity and ability to collaborate to get things done.

We also have a great sense of humour and a larrikin nature that endears us to all.”

Whether at a street, city, state or national level, the Australian spirit unites us, not just to celebrate success, but also to battle adversity. Having experienced diverse and sometimes harsh environments and situations, Australians do not shy away from hardship, but bond together to tackle it.

In the survey, Tim from Camberwell, Victoria, said: “What makes Australia great is the way we band together when things get tough.”

The Australian values of mateship and a fair go have often been linked to our convict heritage, the 1850s gold rush, the trenches and battlefields of Gallipoli, our Judeo-Christian roots and, of course, the hardship endured by battlers, shearers and squatters in the harsh Australian bush. As our research shows, even in the 21st century, it’s still the essence of the Australian spirit. While these values are not confined to the Australian community, they are part of our national character and commonly celebrated on national holidays and in Australian literature, poetry and songs.

*’Tis hardship, drought, and homelessness
That teach those Bushmen kindness:
The mateship born, in barren lands,
Of toil and thirst and danger.*

“Shearers”, Henry Lawson

The famous Australian writer and poet, Henry Lawson, often called Australia's "greatest writer", once described Australia as "the Great Lone Land of magnificent distances and bright heat; the land of self-reliance, and never-give-in, and help-your-mate". In his stories and poems, Lawson extolled the virtue of the person who, in the midst of adversity, typically drought and fire, stepped in to provide aid. Lawson understood mateship as helping in adversity, as "the instinct that irresistibly impels a thirsty, parched man, out on the burning sands, to pour out the last drop of water down the throat of a dying mate, where none save the sun or moon or stars may see".⁶

*Down on the ground the stockmen jumped
And bared each brawny arm;
They tore green branches from the trees
And fought for Ross's farm;
And when before the gallant band
The beaten flames gave way,
Two grimy hands in friendship joined –
And it was Christmas Day!*

"The Fire at Ross's Farm", Henry Lawson

Following the disastrous Black Saturday bushfires in 2009, a book called *Black Saturday: Stories of Love, Loss and Courage* by John McGourty was released. A "tale about ordinary everyday people who, when fate demanded, became heroes", *Black Saturday*

celebrated this “natural willingness” of Australians to assist, recounting some of the heroic stories of kindness from strangers to emerge from the tragedy. One story was of Peter Thorneycroft who potentially saved the lives of twenty women and children by hosing down the roof of the local pub they sought refuge in.⁷

As locals and emergency workers joined to assist bushfire victims, Australians gave generously, clearly touched and devastated by the horrific news. More than \$388 million was donated to the Black Saturday Bushfire Appeal fund. Australians also donated 63,000 tonnes of material aid, with an estimated value of \$17.5 million.⁸ The Whittlesea Rotary Club recalls the overwhelming generosity of people at that time, how they “had clothes avalanching off the tables ...” with people working fourteen-hour, seven-day weeks to distribute it all.⁹

The tragic floods that ravaged Queensland in early 2011, affecting three-quarters of the entire state, showcased once again the kindness of fellow Australians – whether neighbours or from afar. It seemed that the overwhelming flood waters were matched only by the stories of strangers helping, giving and rescuing.

Similarly, Australians’ hearts and cash went out to the victims of the 2002 Bali bombings, the 2004 Asian tsunami and the Samoan tsunami in 2009. Australians donated more than \$100 million to the Asian tsunami victims on top of the \$1 billion given by the Australian Government, its largest donation ever made.¹⁰ Donations made by the Australian public equated to \$5

per Australian, while donations made by the British and American public equated to \$3 per Briton and 88 cents per American.¹¹

Tales of great Aussie kindness also emerged following the Bali bombings which claimed the lives of 202 people, including 88 Australians. Two West Australian men, Timothy Britten and Richard Joyes, became the fourth and fifth Australians to be awarded the Cross of Valour, instituted in 1975, for their rescue efforts at the Sari club. They fought intense burning flames to rescue victims and were among 37 people to receive bravery awards.

The Australian's willingness to help others in times of need is commonly celebrated following times of disaster. Former Australian Chief of the Defence Force and Australian of the Year in 2001, General Peter Cosgrove, summed this up best when he said:

Without doubt the best quality we observe across the entire Australian community is a natural willingness to pitch in and have a go, to help others. We see it of course whenever there is an emergency or a worthy cause. We see it in every community volunteer organisation from the lifesavers to the bushfire brigades through to the thousands of youth and mature-age sporting clubs and those great international service organisations like Rotary and many others. We see it in our professional bodies such as the police, fire and ambulance services, and of course in the defence force. It is a generosity of spirit and a selflessness that is perhaps our

most precious heritage to hand on to younger and newer Australians – a nation of people who care for and look out for each other.

The willingness of Australians to help in times of hardship is also demonstrated by the number of them who dedicate their time to volunteer work. Over a third of Australians over fifteen are volunteers. Over 500,000 of these are in the emergency management sector, which includes surf life-savers and fire brigade volunteers, amongst others.¹²

The astounding statistic that one-third of Australians dedicate their time to volunteer work supports our finding that 79% of Australians would most like to be remembered for their service to others, while slightly fewer (69%), their contribution to society! This is compared with only 31% who would like to be most remembered for their achievements, such as career success.¹³

One story in particular in this book highlights the generous Australian spirit in times of need – the story of Andrew Fraser MP, Member for Coffs Harbour NSW, who was moved by the thoughtful kindness of a stranger following a fire which claimed more than his family home.

Given their reputation for helping in times of disaster, and the fact that many of them do so as volunteers, it comes as no surprise that firefighters are rated in the top three “most trusted professions”, where 1 is the most trusted (according to Reader’s Digest and McCrindle Research findings):

1. Ambulance officers: 1.15
2. Firefighters: 2.38
3. Nurses: 3.42
4. Pilots: 4.41
5. Doctors: 5.34¹⁴

Australians are also big on charitable giving with one in ten Australians having donated to the Salvation Army alone.

The reasons Australians give to strangers in need of charity are genuine, and further demonstrate our nation's value of lending a hand in times of need. The main reason for giving to a charity is because people want to make a difference, with half of Australians strongly agreeing with this statement, according to our survey of 500 Australians, on charitable giving.¹⁵ Other strongly agreed with reasons which include that they give because it's the right thing to do (48.6%) and that they care and feel responsibility to help others (46.5%). Australians *don't so much* give to charities for tax benefits (7.2% strongly agree) or because they feel guilt (5.7%).

Australian wartime tales

It is often said that war brings out both the worst and best in humanity. Despite the countless experiences of unbelievable horror that war inflicts, it is the tales of heroism and of sacrifice that live on and are shared decades later. Soldiers, of course, give the ultimate gift of kindness to strangers, laying down their very

lives for the freedom of their countrymen and women. However, there is often much debate in the media about the role of Australian combat forces in foreign lands. In the minds of Australians their role in history has generally been a positive one though, with 69% of Australians believing that Australian soldiers (and members of the Australian Defence Forces) have done more good than harm. This is more evident with older Australians, but even most young Australians agree that the role of our diggers has generally been a positive one. Of those aged 46-85, 90.5% agree that Australian soldiers and members of the ADF have done more good than harm, compared with 54% of those aged 16-45.¹⁶

Amongst the best-known Australian wartime Samaritan stories is that of the “fuzzy-wuzzy angels”, the indigenous people of Papua New Guinea who, during the Second World War, carried wounded Australian soldiers to safety, risking their own lives to save those of foreign strangers. There have been a number of poems written by diggers about the noble Papua New Guinean bearers.

*Many a lad will see his mother
and husbands see their wives
Just because the fuzzy wuzzy
carried them to save their lives
From mortar bombs and machine gun fire
or chance surprise attacks*

*To the safety and the care of doctors
at the bottom of the track*

“Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels”, Bert Beros

*Misplaced step means a fatal plunge,
to the rivers far below,
But clambering on through knee-deep mud,
on sure footed way they go.
Muscles bulge under ebony skin,
as they climb over rocks and logs
Sometimes sinking to heaving chests,
in the treacherous loathsome bogs.*

“Native Stretcher Bearers”,
Corporal Peter Coverdale

While our history is replete with older examples of risk and sacrifice for others, there is a new generation of Australians with the same spirit of the iconic digger.

On 16 January 2009 Trooper Mark Donaldson became the first Australian in 40 years to be awarded Australia’s highest military decoration, the Victoria Cross. The official citation gives the circumstances of Trooper Donaldson’s actions which were “most conspicuous acts of gallantry in a circumstance of great peril”.

In 2008 while in Afghanistan, Trooper Donaldson and his

SAS mates were caught up in a Taliban ambush which turned out to be the worst single attack on Australian soldiers since the Vietnam War, resulting in six Australian soldiers being injured. After taking two hours to fight their way out, he realised a badly wounded Afghan interpreter had been left behind.

Still recovering from wounds received in an earlier battle in Afghanistan, Trooper Donaldson turned around and dashed across open ground, under machine gun fire, to collect the man and bring him to safety.

The citation states: “With complete disregard for his own safety, on his initiative and alone, Trooper Donaldson ran back 80 metres across exposed ground to rescue the interpreter and carry him back to the vehicle. Trooper Donaldson then rejoined his patrol and continued to engage the enemy while remaining exposed to heavy enemy fire.”

His citation said he “displayed exceptional courage in circumstances of great peril” and saved the life of the interpreter.

“Trooper Donaldson’s courage and selflessness in the face of such unspeakable danger is not only a great tribute to him and his family – it epitomises the spirit of the Aussie Digger. The soldiers that he saved will be forever indebted to him. The nation will be forever indebted to him.”

In keeping with protocol, Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston then saluted Trooper Donaldson.

“As the highest ranking member of the defence force there

has been no current serving member that I salute until now,” he said. “Tradition holds that even the most senior officer will salute a Victoria Cross recipient as a mark of the utmost respect for their act of valour.”

At the investiture of the award, the Governor-General Ms Quentin Bryce delivered one of the best speeches of recent times, which read in part:

We are here to dedicate your contribution.

Your unconditional surrender to duty and humanity.

Your abandonment of your own necessities so that others' may be secured.

Your courage, generosity and compassion.

All of these things: while in thrall to peril's brutal glare and might.

All of these things: without moment for reflection or concert.

All of these things: not for yourself, but for those whom peril crushed in your midst; for us, your fellow countrymen and women ...

We award you a decoration whose words are reserved for the incomparable and unsurpassed. Words whose integrity is untouched by vernacular. Words, rare and revered.

Gallantry. Valour. Self-sacrifice. Devotion to duty.

*These are the tenets of the Victoria Cross for Australia,
and you have met their rigour.*

While very few acts of helping others will measure up to that of this 29-year-old soldier, the same character lies at the heart of every altruistic act: compassion, generosity and a commitment to others.

Our Christian roots

While most of us (61%) don't think religious people are more likely to do charitable works, of those who believe in God, 88% have gone out of their way to help a stranger in need, compared to 84% of non-believers. Religious people are also more positive about the state of kindness in our world today. Those who have neither a religious affiliation nor a belief in God are most sceptical when it comes to the state of kindness in our world. Thirty-two per cent compared to 37% of Australians who believe in God believe more acts of kindness than terror are performed. Thirty-seven per cent of Australians who believe in God, but don't necessarily have a religious affiliation, believe there are more good deeds performed than evil. Thirty-two per cent believe there are more acts of terror.¹⁷

It is often the way that people who perform acts of kindness are motivated by their religious background. For the Christian, performing good deeds is an imperative, which comes from

following the example of Christ who articulated the greatest of altruistic acts when he stated, “Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). After love of God, to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:38) is the greatest commandment for the Christian.

In the Bible, a lawyer asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbour?” Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). The charity that a Christian is called on to aspire to is seen in the example of the Good Samaritan who bandaged, clothed, fed and housed a badly beaten Jewish man left for dead on the side of a road. The significance of this parable is that the Jews and Samaritans did not get along at this time. One’s “neighbour”, therefore, includes even his or her enemies.

Charity has always been a big part of the Christian Church’s mission. From the very early days, Christians organised church funds to feed the needy. Benedictine monks would take in travellers and give them free accommodation and food. Later, orphanages, almshouses, shelters and hospitals were set up – all out of church funds. The importance of charity to the Christian is further seen in the number of Christian charities throughout the world today that do so much to help the poor and other vulnerable and needy people. In Australia, we have the Salvation Army, Wesley Mission, St. Vincent de Paul, Anglicare, Uniting Care, Youth off the Streets and Catholic Mission, amongst others.

Yet it is in our diversity that the power of good is most in

evidence. This lucky country has for a couple of centuries offered a welcome to those from other lands looking for a fresh start. Our cultural mix is in our national DNA, it's part of our lifestyle – it's who we are. The fact that more than one in four of us wasn't born here seems unremarkable – as though it has always been thus.¹⁸ The second verse of our national anthem articulates this generosity:

*For those who've come across the seas
We've boundless plains to share;
With courage let us all combine
To advance Australia fair.*

In a recent survey, Prasad, writing from Noble Park, Victoria, returns the thanks: “There’s a world of opportunities waiting for me post-high school – this country opens the doors to those wanting to learn and grow. Where I come from if you have no money you have no education. Thank you, Australia.”

A universal and ageless ideal

The ideal of kindness transcends time, faith and culture. The earliest historical records show how humanity has always supported the concept of helping. These historical records go back over 4000 years. The Babylonian King Hammurabai, Confucius, Plato and Buddha were amongst the earliest philanthropists.

Table 1.1

Source	Quote
King Hammurabai	<i>To his subjects: See that justice be done to widows, orphans and the poor.</i>
Confucius	<i>He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own.</i>
New Testament, James, 2:14-18	<i>How does it help, my brothers, when someone who has never done a single good act claims to have faith? Will that faith bring salvation? If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them, “I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty,” without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that? In the same way faith, if good deeds do not go with it, is quite dead. But someone may say: So you have faith and I have good deeds? Show me this faith of yours without deeds, then! It is by my deeds that I will show you my faith.</i>

<p>Old Testament (Micah 6: 8)</p>	<p><i>And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.</i></p>
<p>The Koran, 4.57</p>	<p><i>And (as for) those who believe and do good deeds, We will make them enter gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them for ever; they shall have therein pure mates, and We shall make them enter a dense shade.</i></p>
<p>Dalai Lama</p>	<p><i>We find that not only do altruistic actions bring about happiness but they also lessen our experience of suffering. Here I am not suggesting that the individual whose actions are motivated by the wish to bring others happiness necessarily meets with less misfortune than the one who does not. Sickness, old age, mishaps of one sort or another are the same for us all. But the sufferings which undermine our internal peace – anxiety, doubt, disappointment – these things are definitely less.</i></p>

Buddha	<i>I do not believe in a fate that falls on men however they act; but I do believe in a fate that falls on them unless they act.</i>
Ramakrishna	<i>Through selfless work, love of God grows in the heart. Then, through His grace, one realises Him in course of time. God can be seen. One can talk to Him as I am talking to you.</i>
Swami Vivekananda	<i>The more we come out and do good to others, the more our hearts will be purified, and God will be in them. To devote your life to the good of all and to the happiness of all is religion. Whatever you do for your own sake is not religion.</i>
Aesop	<i>No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.</i>
William Wordsworth	<i>The best portion of a good man's life – his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love ...</i>

William Penn	<i>I expect to pass through life but once. If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do to any fellow being, let me do it now, for I shall not pass this way again.</i>
--------------	--

Business

Business people have got wind of the power of acts of kindness in recent years in boosting one's health, mentally and physically – and even financially. The power of the practice of kindness as a tool in business has been explored in several books.¹⁹

In *The Power of Nice, How to Conquer the Business World with Kindness*, Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval of the Kaplan Thaler Group, the fastest growing advertising agency in the US, recognise that “nice has an image problem. Nice gets no respect”. However, they argue that niceness is not the same as naivety. On the contrary, “being very nice and placing other people’s needs on the same level as your own will get you everything you want”. In their book, they cite numerous examples about how the good are rewarded – often with commercial success.²⁰

In *The Kindness Revolution*, Ed Horrell argues that if employers show kindness to their staff, employees will engage in a high level of customer service and profits will, naturally, flow.²¹

Australians consider visionaries and role models who include

Mother Teresa and Gandhi among their ranks, to be the most influential. Such leaders are not just for the history books; in business, it is the supportive and generous leaders who influence and impact the most. The majority (82%) of Australians agree that it is the people-centred leader, one who serves and supports, who has the most influence and impact. The traditional authoritarian leader (only 13% ranked as influential) and the task-driven delegator (just 5%) are rated as having far less influence.

In contrast, Australians consider dictators and rulers who have included infamous war tyrants Hitler and Stalin, to be the least influential. This is testament to the power of good! Military and political leaders also rank low, while others who also rank high include scientists and inventors, philosophers and thinkers, and writers and artists, those who help and inspire others.

Online

If you type “random acts of kindness” into an online search engine, you will be surprised by the number of responses you get. There has been an explosion of websites and blogs devoted to encouraging people to perform random acts of kindness to strangers, and countless pages of the anecdotes of the doers and receivers of kindness.

For example, the website of the Australian Kindness Movement contains many suggestions of everyday kindnesses that can be practised by anyone. They range from random acts of kindness

to common courtesy. Here are some examples: “Drop a few coins in an area where children play, where they can easily find them. Do you remember how excited you felt, when as a child you found a coin lying on the ground?”; “Spend a few minutes going through your old photos, and send whatever you can part with to the people in the photos”; “When phoning someone, ask ‘Have I phoned at the wrong time?’. If they are busy, ask when you can call back.”²²

Table 1.2

For a list of kindness websites, see Table 1.2, Appendix, p. 220.

A global phenomenon?

For some, the practice of good deeds is incentive-driven. It’s about being rewarded either in this life or the next.

However for most, doing good is indeed altruistic – done to help others for no personal gain, and sometimes for no particular reason, but to put a smile on another person’s face.

Here in Australia, 59% say they have done something nice for a stranger “just for the sake of being nice”, such as paying for a meal. Nearly all of these Australians (98%) say they would look to repeating this sort of kindness in the future. Of those who haven’t shown kindness for the sake of it, 75.4% say they would be prepared to, should an opportunity arise.²³

Multiple motivations to do good

1. Delight: 38.5% of Australians lend a helping hand to a stranger simply because of the joy they receive in putting a smile on another's face!
2. Conscience: 69% of Australians help because they feel bad if they don't.
3. God/belief in an afterlife: 22.9% perform good deeds because of religious beliefs.²⁴

Some say that the “random acts of kindness” movement was started by peace activist Anne Herbert who, in the early 1980s, wrote the following on a napkin at a restaurant in San Francisco: “Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty”. The famous words saw a chain reaction of kindness – from bumper stickers²⁵ to a spate of books, movies and video clips which celebrate spontaneous good deeds. Anne Herbert’s unspoken message of practising random kindness was heard loud and clear! Like a drop of clear water in a murky pond, it created a ripple effect of goodness in a world that is often unkind – that just kept growing! This is testament to the power of even those small acts of good.

Table 1.3

For a timeline for the random acts of kindness phenomenon, see Table 1.3, Appendix, p. 222.

But why the global trend? Eleven years on from Anne Herbert's message, Professor Chuck Wall of Bakersfield College in California challenged his students to perform "a random act of senseless kindness" after hearing a radio report describing "another random act of senseless violence".²⁶

The world of violence that we are so frequently reminded of by the media has caused a longing for its opposite, as seen in the example of Juan Mann.

In Australia in 2004, Juan Mann received much international attention for his unusual stunt in Pitt Street, Sydney, where he stood in the street, holding up a sign, saying "Free Hugs". Juan received so much attention, in fact, that the lead singer of the band Sick Puppies, Shimon Moore, filmed him for Sick Puppies' song *All the Same*, which quickly enjoyed notoriety on YouTube. The film, which has had nearly 34 million hits at the time of publication, has inspired "free hug" copycats from cities around the world, including Taipei, Chicago, Geneva and Shanghai. "Free hugs" websites have been set up across the globe, too: Wales, France, Israel, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.²⁷

In October of 2006, Mann told Oprah Winfrey what happened when he first held up his sign: "The first person who stopped tapped me on the shoulder and told me how her dog had just died that morning. How that morning had been the one-year anniversary of her only daughter dying in a car accident. And

how what she needed now, when she felt most alone in the world, was a hug. I got down on one knee, we put our arms around each other and when we parted, she was smiling.”²⁸ It’s no wonder that Juan Mann received the international attention that he did – while it may seem like the world is in adoration of self-satisfying celebrities, in reality it is kind-hearted people who we most highly regard.

For Australians, treatment of others is the most important attribute in determining what we think of someone – 76% say it is “an extremely important factor”. The amount of money/material possessions someone has, looks/appearance and status/success are considered by Australians to be the least important attributes.

Table 1.4

For an analysis of the “Free Hugs” phenomenon, see Table 1.4, Appendix, p. 224.

There is even an official world movement dedicated to kindness. It was formally launched in Singapore in 2000. The Australian Kindness Movement was one of the founding members, begun in 1994 by Sydney engineer Brian Willis, who was inspired to start it after talking to teenagers at the checkout of his local supermarket. He was dismayed to discover that these young people believed their parents did not have the time to talk to them.²⁹

Charter member countries include: Canada, England, Japan,

Scotland, Singapore, Thailand, USA, India, Italy, Nepal, Nigeria, New Zealand and South Korea. The movement has approximately 3 million members.³⁰

Giving back

In putting this book together, we have joined this growing world movement of kindness. We hope it gives some encouragement to those who wonder where all the goodness has gone, and some acknowledgment to those kind-hearted strangers who have helped us all out. We hope it encourages others to show random kindness, and indeed it's already doing that.

One dollar per book will go to the work of Hope Street (www.hopestreet.org.au), who look after some of Australia's most marginalised people.

Do you have a story of kindness?

Well, we'd love to hear it for our next book! Please go to:

www.powerofgood.com.au

to submit your account and get in print. Please see the back of the book for more information.

2. Acts of Kindness in Hardship and Misfortune

Louise Hall, Reporter, the *Sydney Morning Herald*

Food for Thought

Every Saturday the oncology ward at Sydney Children's Hospital at Randwick is turned into a giant BBQ for sick kids and their families. It's a tradition that's been going on for 30 years, thanks to nursing assistant Patsy Jones.

Each weekend she buys a heap of sausages, chipolatas, chickens, salads and bread and cooks up a feast on her trusty BBQ named "Elvis".

Patsy, 58, began providing lunch when she noticed most of the cancer patients didn't eat the hospital food, and their parents often went without proper meals for days at a time. Three decades later, the "pocket dynamo" has become a hospital institution.

"Many of the Hospital's former patients who come back to

visit don't remember much except Patsy's BBQ," says Nurse Unit Manager, John Watt.

"Patsy is such a great cook, she could have easily set up her own catering business but chose to work as a nurse assistant in the Sydney Children's Hospital oncology ward. She is truly an extraordinary person who gives so much of herself to so many people. She not only cooks the BBQ on the weekend but on special occasions, such as birthdays, she will bake a cake for a parent, carer or staff member," he says.

"Thank you from all the patients, families and staff for the fantastic job that she does."

The parents and siblings of sick children also appreciate the chance to have a chat with other families in the same situation.

"Her BBQs are almost like a social outing for patients, families and carers who are on the ward and you sometimes forget you are in hospital," said Maria Celi, whose son Santo, eight, is an oncology patient.

"We are from outside of Sydney, and when we arrived at the hospital we felt so welcomed by Patsy. She never fails to introduce herself to newcomers to the ward and will make sure you know where everything is within the hospital and around Randwick."

"Both Santo and I always look so forward to Patsy's Saturday BBQs, it's become the highlight of our week."

Patsy is given a budget of \$100 a week from a special fund set up by the family of a former patient. While she gives herself

school holidays off to see her son Marcus and grandsons Seth and Lachlan, she says she's not ready to down tongs just yet. "I'll keep doing it till I retire, but they told me I'm not allowed to retire," she laughed.

In September of 2010, Patsy benefited from the Channel 9 TV show *Random Acts of Kindness* when her BBQ area was renovated while she was whisked away on a family holiday paid for by the show.



***Louise Hall** has been working for Fairfax since 2005 when she completed her traineeship and had the education round before moving to health at the Sun-Herald. She is now the State Political Reporter for the Sydney Morning Herald.*

Anton Enus, News Presenter, *SBS World News*

Comradeship at the Comrades Marathon



The buzz at the starting line of the world's greatest ultra-marathon is unmistakable. It's the heady tingle of excitement laced with a dash of trepidation. The Comrades Marathon, founded in 1921 to honour those who fell in the trenches of the Great War, is a South African institution. It's like no other race in the world: an unforgiving character test over 90 long kilometres. Torturous climbing alternates with muscle-wrenching downhill. If, at the end of a taxing day, you make it to the finish line in time (not one second over eleven hours!), you're rewarded with a medal. It's a modest acknowledgment but I can tell you from personal experience that the ten I've earned mean more to me than almost any other material possession.

Here's the funny thing. It almost didn't happen for me. When I got to my first Comrades in 1987, I was young and stupid enough to think I could conquer it. In my early twenties something told me that I had to do no more than front up and the glory would be

mine. Not the glory of actually winning the race, you understand, but the satisfaction of being an official finisher. All I had to do, I thought, was take my 42.2 km marathon qualifying time (three hours 23 minutes), double it and add an extra half-hour as a cushion. So in my mind I was a shoo-in for a sub-7 hours 30 minutes, which would have earned me a silver medal.

Only, at around the 70-kilometre mark my body somehow rebelled against me. I was in pain from cramping muscles and sore knees. I was mentally flailing about, barely keeping focus on the job at hand. I had an overwhelming feeling of wanting to stop and lie down. There and then I had no idea how I was going to get to the next kilometre marker, let alone the finish line!

But an odd thing happened. An apparition settled in next to me as I shuffled along. It was a real, flesh-and-blood person, of course, but in my fragile state anything seemed possible. I have no idea who this runner was, but my recollection is that she was middle-aged, short and a little dumpy. In other words, not what you'd think of as a typical athlete. But she was coping a heck of a lot better than I was with the heat, the distance and the hills (the worst one, Polly Shorts, was still to come!). And yet she found the time to run at my side, gently urging me on, helping me take the focus away from my pain.

In a few minutes she was gone, but her pep talk got me going again. I struggled through the last twenty kilometres and finished, spent but happy, in ten hours and 47 minutes. To me, my

guardian angel remains nameless and unthanked, but there's no question, her intervention got me to the finish line. And finding a way through that day proved to be a seminal experience because it taught me that nothing else in my life or career was ever again going to be put into the "too hard" basket.



*South-African born news presenter **Anton Enus** has been a newscaster and journalist for twenty years. Anton is also long-distance runner, having completed more than 40 standard or ultra-marathons.*

David Richardson, Reporter, *Today Tonight*

The “Mummy’s Boys”

They come from all walks of life. A carpenter, a plumber, a couple of sparkies, an industrial insulation installer, two or three retired football professionals, a television journalist, even some high-flying bank executives ... completely different personalities joined by one common bond: Australian mateship! This band of 40-something dads couldn't be pried apart with dynamite. They call themselves the “Mummy’s Boys” and they’ve been the best of friends for a decade, some even longer. Once a month they gather in an informal fathers’ group to play soccer together, regale each other with tales of how their lives are going, seek advice from each other, and generally have a good time. It’s a release where men can let down their guards in the fellowship of friends.

The soccer is at times (very rare times) pretty to watch. It has certainly improved since the first game. Invariably there’s an injury or three, but after all these years no broken bones, thank God. But within the group is a collective heart that is purely Australian. Each person would do their utmost to help their mate, regardless of the situation. But they also help others. It’s just in their nature.