

FORUM

Flood victims offer lesson in perspective

THE first full week of 2011 started well ... a beautiful day spoilt by only one thing.... no, two. One was the cause of minor irritation, the other of guilt.

Friends picked me up on Sunday morning and took me to a beach where I enjoyed a turbulent dip (I could hardly call it a surf) and a walk which thanks to a dodgy knee was more like a totter.

Then it was lunch at a place where I had previously enjoyed meals. Not this time. Food decidedly average and service a mile too slow, made worse by a mistaken order.

Now I'm not a restaurant reviewer, so why am I telling you this banal little story? Because it struck me later how tiny an inconvenience that episode was compared with what Queensland's thousands of flood victims have endured ... and still are.

Just one little TV news segment on Sunday night moved me to tears. A farmer on an isolated property just north of Rock-



ANOTHER THING

Peter Richardson

hampton has a wife with multiple sclerosis. He built an emergency shelter high in his farm shed and was ready to get her up there by fork lift if the flood level so demanded

Talk about ingenuity, improvisation and self-reliance ... this is a perfect example. It reminds us that necessity is the mother not only of invention but also of endurance, acceptance of circumstance and positive action.

But how should we who have not had to face having to put our homes, our businesses, our farms and yes, our lives back together respond to the needs of those who have?

Obviously, giving generously to one of the various relief appeals is something we can all do, remembering that generosity has less to do with the amount given than the degree of sacrifice by the donor. These floods have been described as biblical, so we should remember another bible story, that of the widow's mite.

And there are many other ways to help, whether through donations of personal and household necessities to volunteer labour in the great clean-ups.

One suggestion I heard was that

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Sunshine Coasters might like to offer distraught flood victims respite holidays in their homes, much as was done in the aftermath of the Victorian bushfires.

Perhaps one of the charities with the necessary organisational resources could get such a scheme up and running.

Best wishes, John

IF ever there was a voice of the Sunshine Coast, it's surely that of John Stokes, early-morning presenter on ABC Sunshine Coast FM. His relaxed, friendly, manner and his inclusive program format exactly fit the Coast's quintessential lifestyle and John has started my days pleasantly for more years than he might like to say

As always, I missed him during the holiday period and was relieved to hear him back on the air, but only for one day, as he is unwell and will be off for a while longer. Best wishes, John. All your listeners, and all my readers, I fancy, will want you back ASAP.

Let this be the year that we stop those story highjackers

DON'T want to start a new year on a negative note but there's a problem that needs to be addressed. It's a people problem. Something needs to be done about the story highjacker.

Once I explain what a story highjacker is, you will instantly recognise one in your own circle of family and friends. The story highjacker lies in wait everywhere.

Here's how she operates. (It could be a he, I've just used the feminine because it's easy.)

You start to tell a story, no doubt a riveting one, for you are an amusing raconteur. The story highjacker listens attentively for a minute or two and when you get to a really good part, she leaps in and says: "Yes, I know exactly what you mean, that same thing happened to me," and before you realise it, she has nicked your story, claimed it for her own and is telling a most dull version of it.

You are sitting there left high and dry without chance to finish your story. The highjacker doesn't notice this of course.

The highjacker doesn't intentionally do it, it's just that your story is so entertaining she can relate to something in it and thoughtlessly pushes in to recount her own similar experience.

It happens to me all the time, for I am a good story teller - as you are well aware.

Just recently, my daughter from Cairns was visiting with her beautiful new baby. I wanted to hear all the details of the birth as I wasn't



OLD WIVES' TALES

Ann Rickard

able to be there. I am close to my daughter and was disappointed that I couldn't share the experience.

We were in the company of several women. "Give me every tiny detail, right from the start," I told my daughter and off she went with her birthing story.

We got through the contraction bit, and then went on to the frantic-drive-to-hospital bit, and then it came to the all important crowning of the head bit.

That's when a highjacker in the room leapt in, shouted 'you think your baby's head was big, you should have seen the size of my baby's head, a water melon it was, ripped me apart it did,' and off she went, stealing the birthing story,

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making it her own. And a rather gory story it was too.

I never did get to the end of my daughter's story.

I have had acquaintances (not you) who have pleaded with me to tell them stories of my travels on my return from a trip. "Come around, we'll have coffee, I want to hear all about Italy," this fictitious acquaintance will say.

And around I go, *not* armed with several hundreds photos and videos of me throwing a coin in the Trevi Fountain, for not only am I a good story teller, I know when to stop.

"Tell me everything about Italy," the fictitious acquaintance says when I arrive. "I want to hear all the details. It's my favourite country. I was there in 1974 and I loved it, I toured with a group, it was an Italy history tour, I learnt so much, I was the star of the group, I visited all the ancient sites, the museums, oh, the Italian men loved me, called me *bella donna* and pinched my bum and then I..."

And the evening labours on and ends with her getting out musty 1974 photo albums to shriek with delight over curled old pictures of

herself standing by David in Florence (looking up at his willy and giggling), posing in front of the Colosseum and sitting in intimate Tuscan trattorias drinking Barolo.

I always go home from these evenings with a feeling of unfulfilment, a hollow emptiness.

"I thought I was invited around to talk about my trip to Italy," I say to my husband.

"You were. You were story highjacked," he replies.

Months later the highjacker runs into you in the street, and gushes: "You've never told me about your trip to Italy. Come home with me now for coffee and tell me all about it."

You are at the other end of the street by the time she has finished.

I am so fed up with this I am determined to let 2011 be the year of foiling the story highjacker.

I've done it twice already this past week. "Whoa," I've said. "You just highjacked my story. Back to me. Back to me."

Both times the highjacker has looked at me with complete surprise. She has not realised the dastardliness of her deed. (She does now.)

As a reader of this column it goes without saying you are not a story high-jacker, you are a courteous and attentive listener. But if you have a highjacker in your friendship circle, let this be your year to do something about it. Let us unite and highjack the high-jackers.

Read more of Ann on www.ann-rickard.com



ON CAMPUS

Professor Greg Hill

Resolved to grow teaching, research

WHEN I took over the leadership of the University of the Sunshine

Coast in mid-2010, after the retirement of founding Vice-Chancellor and good friend Professor Paul Thomas, my vision and commitment were already established as I had been Paul's deputy for five years.

During that time USC had become the fastest-growing campus in the country, with more than 7000 students, 16 buildings and 100-plus undergraduate and postgraduate study programs.

As we launch into 2011, I don't need to make any rash resolutions.

My goals for the university remain clear: to nurture further growth of teaching and research, to actively support a sustainable university and to foster connections between the university and the region, particularly the business community and service industries, which can offer career paths to our graduates.

I know this will be a year of building new structures, figuratively and literally, from a new management team to a new Olympic-sized pool.

There will be a strong focus on expanding our research capabilities, particularly in the niche areas such as aquaculture, forestry and sustainability. Opportunities exist for additional research centres and groups in allied health and education.

Also, the university's increasing scale will allow it to develop closer links with communities from Hervey Bay, Gympie and the Moreton region. Of course, more demand requires more infrastructure and we will continue careful planning.

This month we welcome two new executive members to assist our 2011 goals: molecular physicist Professor Birgit Lohmann from the University of Adelaide as new Deputy Vice-Chancellor and chemistry Professor Roland De Marco from Curtin University as USC's first Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research. Visit our website at www.usc.edu.au.

Professor Greg Hill is Vice-Chancellor and President Designate at the University of the Sunshine Coast.