

KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD BIRTHDAY SPEECH 2022

1. KSP BIRTHDAY

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future, for they hold the history, the cultural practice and the traditions of their people.

COMBINED ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF WADJUK NOONGAR PEOPLE AND TRIBUTE TO KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD

1. Honour to the Wadjuk and let what we say and hear today be a tribute to them, offering respect for their knowing, acknowledgment of our unknowing, and hope for acceptance in this land.
2. We also honour the memory of our organisation's namesake, Katharine Susannah Prichard, first white Australian author to publish internationally a novel commemorating an oppressed indigenous woman.

3. A small tribute of my own

PULLING UP THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH

(in memory of Katharine Susannah Prichard's "The Earth Lover")

This is attempted by quite a few.
Often it follows your birth
and having only your profit and loss
to show for your umbilical cost,
you fasten eager rounded lips
on the nearest thing to mother earth.

Later in life, dependent on choice
of the one true love, instinct prompts
pursing of the lips once more and
the sense of the old connection
is feverishly sought and even found.
And in our mouths the fresh taste
of what is called earthiness abounds.

4. Fire at Katharine's Place

(i) **“Firelighter” by a UK visitor and outstanding poet who came to Katharine's Place 20 years ago**

There's a secret to laying a fire:
the night before her fingers are black with print.
Business. Property. Appointments. Money.
Everything twisted and ready to burn.
The tongues are only sleeping.

There's a secret to lighting a fire:
a girl rises early back in the mists
rubbing her stick-thin bones together.
She's learnt the trick of sealing the hearth with paper,
the risk of holding a sheet of flame.

There's a secret to feeding a fire:
she knows when the spark has truly caught,
watches words smoke, begin to be eaten.
The kindling takes like anger,
she stokes the seasoned heartwood till it roars.

There's a secret to keeping it burning all winter:
before she retires a white-haired woman
banks up the coals until they glow
hot enough to hatch a dragon,
blankets them with whispering ashes.

I blow on them now:
the fire sucks its breath and draws.
Kneeling in the red-leaded dawn
I feel the warmth unhinging
my book of palms.

Esther Morgan

(ii) DON EADE OBITUARY

The late Don Eade first applied to become tenant at Katharine's place in the late 1980s and quickly became very attached to the cottage. At that time he was an aspiring short story writer and soon became involved with the Centre's activities, reporting to the Management Committee any work needed for the buildings and grounds. Later he was invited to join the committee and eventually he became Committee Chair for several years.

Don was a man of great enthusiasm and ideas for the activities at Katharine's Place and was instrumental in the foundation of the Thursday Night Group, a wonderful round table of aspiring and experienced writers whose reading sessions fostered many a KSP member to come out of the closet and begin to acquire a readership. This activity naturally led to the publication of an anthology of the members' own work.

Although initially an independent group who merely rented the premises on a weekly basis, the TNG was invited to nominate a member to serve on the KSP Management Committee. As Don became more involved with the running of Katharine's Place the two bodies worked more closely until, until, like other users of the Centre, such as the "Write Free" group, there was a synthesis of common purpose in serving the writers in the community.

Don's own efforts as film script and short story writer came largely from his varied background such as farm work and driving taxis, which had given him an unusual degree of insight into human nature. Eventually his collection of 16 short fiction works, entitled "Ten Roses and Other Australian Stories", appeared in 2001. A dozen of the stories had been previously published, many in Farm Weekly. In the preface to the collection, I wrote, "I cannot imagine that any who read this collection of stories will be disappointed by the range of characters, settings and situations that is offered." Don earlier had published a history of archery, which is a unique insight into the use of the bow and arrow in sport and warfare.

At times, Don's enthusiasm and adventurous spirit were epitomised in various incidents. He shared with some of us grand vision for developing Katharine's horse paddock for tenants and we can see that this did eventually come about after the University of Western Australia conducted a landscape architecture competition to plan a redevelopment of the area. Less happily, he was involved in the lounge room fire that could have destroyed the house forever. Don fought the fire which had escaped from the open fireplace and saved most of the furniture in the room. On another occasion Don helped defend the house from major bushfire roaring up the hill from Helena Valley.

After leaving the house about ten years ago, Don went to live in the south-west at Denmark where he engaged in successful film-making projects. Sadly, he contracted cancer and although he was in remission for a time, he succumbed earlier this year.

No one who ever knew Don Eade or worked with him will ever forget his characteristic craggy jaw and his unbounded enthusiasm for all that he pursued. He was a true Australian of the old bushman breed and it was a privilege to have known him as a fellow writer. Katharine would have approved of him unreservedly as a tenant.

(iii) THE FIRE AT KATHARINE'S PLACE—The famed ghost speaks...

(in the early 1990s the Writers Centre was nearly burned down)

At Katharine's place I'm in the fireplace.
But I'm about to break out in depths of night!
Confined in these raked-over coals I fret,
for nobody could possibly expect that
it is I here, plotting so darkly
a desperate dastardly act!

I've sat here night after weary night
for a hundred years, watching these
humans haemorrhage their thin blue
or black rivulets on their blank sheets,
dribbling out of their fantasies
from their dandling finger-ends.

Sheaf after sheaf of their papers
they have laid down on shelf
upon shelf of their work rooms.
Their collected words, selected
works and all their rejected reams
are to me now unprotected dreams.

One night it came to my mind,
glowering here in the hearth's ash
that I could rise up, send their
sonnets, novellas and scripts for stage
or screen, their short stories and cinquains,
novels and biographies to smithereens.

Anyway their words should be set afire,
their long slow fuse of non-completions
tempts me to put spark to blue touchpaper,
stand back and see the whole damn
tragic accumulation go sky high like that
prized dynamite of the Nobel tribe.

Glen Phillips

5. Now to some KSP Centre matters of moment

Last Sunday I enjoyed a lovely day by the Swan River at Guildford with our KSP volunteers and most of the KSP executive eating and drinking in the shade of the great trees at the House Restaurant. It was lovely to see our ‘immediate x-coordinator’ Shannon and husband as well as experience the efficient organisation of new Coordinator Sofija Stevanovic. Our newest Chairperson Kate Driver was also there to greet and enjoy the midday gathering. What a great idea that was.

On Katharine’s birthday we do well to remember all our past Chairpersons, with a special mention going to Elizabeth Lewis who supported the Centre for five consecutive years, making her the longest serving Chairperson in the history of the KSP foundation since 1985. We also acknowledge the previous Coordinators, and the rest of the executive teams of the past without whom the Centre wouldn’t be what it is today. The volunteers were of course the heroes of the day, from house cleaning, gardening, librarianship, publishing, catering, publicity, editing of anthologies, seeking grants, gaining historic status, modification and repair of the house, but above all, leading all our writing groups—the great strength of KSP as equal first and now premier residential writers centre in Australia. Pardon if I left some jobs off the list!

So many wonderful memories of so many people. And I knew them all! Our history should be written officially before too many memories are lost. Once we looked into this and were quoted a mere \$30,000 just to get a book ready for printing. In these days of digital publishing I am sure we do it much more efficiently. Does it sound like a project for some Government funding?

What more can I say? MANY HAPPY RETURNS seems appropriate on this day.

Glen Phillips

December 4th, 2022