

A Glass Still Full: Retirement and the Historian

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Assessing a Forty Year Career

When I started discussing the title and content of the first draft of this paper, written for my University of Queensland valedictory History Discipline seminar in August 2015, I began with: 'The Dregs of a Career: A Glass half full'. Patrick Jory, the discipline Convener was (I suspect) horrified at my negativity, and I had to assure him that a touch of self-deprecation was involved. However, I was forced to rethink and realised that the glass was still full and that anyway dregs sometimes taste very nice. The paper is about looking forward and how to detach from a long university-bound career, much of it in Pacific history, while enjoying what the future offers. I have added slightly to the original presentation, having now experienced 18 months of retirement, although it remains substantially the same.

After completing my Honours degree, I began academic life as a full time tutor in Southeast Asian history at James Cook University in 1974 and had my first publication the same year, a book review in *Australian Outlook*. After more than 40 years in academic life I have retired. I have written about Mackay in Queensland, the sugar industry, Australian South Sea Islanders, the Pacific labour trade, New Guinea, Solomon Islands, issues in community and national history, masculinity and sexuality. The story of my life really, but cloaked in fine words about regional political and social history. It is time for assessment of the past and a look forward. I still have major publications in the pipeline; two monographs and an historical picture book. This paper ruminates on how I hope to deal with these publications and what my literary future may be. At my retirement seminar I announced that I never wanted to write another foot-

note and wanted to communicate with an audience interested in history from outside of a university context. Sadly, I have already failed to cease footnoting, although I have made some progress with the move beyond the academic ivory tower. Along the way there will also be some assessment of the Australian academic system and its decline.

The basic statistics are easy to calculate: since 1974 I have written or in some way controlled 10,400 pages of print: six single author monographs, 19 edited works, 9 reports, 90 articles and chapters, and 200 small pieces in the ephemera category, ranging from book reviews to forewords to books. I am not sure what that is in words, but at an average 400 words a page the count is well over four million words and goodness knows how many footnotes. The interesting thing is how many would today's UQ count as respectable 'quality' publications? I was a little amazed in my final annual appraisal in which I included one prestigious book of conference proceedings, eight refereed chapters and articles, one un-refereed chapter, and five book reviews, all published over the previous year. My appraiser ignored the edited book, and four of the chapters and articles and the book reviews; they were not included in the Excellence in Research of Australia (ERA) standard which UQ seeks. More than half my year's productivity did not count. Since 1977, I have published about 14 articles in journals that would satisfy the present 'quality journal' A* and A categories. However, I am fairly certain that the publications the present system depreciates score highly with the readers I value in the Pacific.

This raises questions concerning the commodification of academic labour and the narrowing of scholarship into a 'seemingly authoritative horizontal order', a phrase used by Mingers and Willmott (2013: 1052). As they remind us, when an article's place of publication, as indicated by its ranking on a journal list, becomes more significant or valued than its scholarly content, academics find themselves increasingly in receipt of advice on where to publish to achieve the highest score. I know this is true as I have given this same advice when conducting staff appraisals. But who do we write for and what is the effect of our research? Is it only for the number crunchers in the university administration and in Canberra, or should it have relevance to the wider community?

Australian academic Roger Scott, in a recent assessment of institutional changes during his career noted that onwards from the late 1970s and into the 1980s the language of the sciences, engineering and management began to permeate Australian universities, replacing 'collective and participatory structures with hierarchies'. Scott puts it nicely: 'There was also an urge in an era of financial constraint to set up quantitative

measurements as a basis for resource allocation. In the context of the humanities and social sciences, this flowed on into measuring research output and using this measure as a basis for identifying excellence' (Scott 2012: 36). I would put it more bluntly: we caught up in the false reality of a publishing cult where the rules are rigged towards the sciences and controlled by large commercial publishing companies. Managerialism and dubious measures of impact have overwhelmed academic publishing.

Science-led article publishing has now reached the ludicrous level of a thousand co-authors on one article, which makes a mockery of academic measuring systems (*Times Higher Education*, 24 August 2015). Hopefully, the journal ranking system will collapse under its own weight. There has been another related development: book chapters are no longer valued. In my old School a financial incentive is available if one publishes in the 'best' journals (although the ranking of 'best' varies from country to country). No subsidy is provided for chapters, no matter how 'good' the publisher might be. As far as I can ascertain, this is because they cannot be 'measured' in the same way journal articles can. And, as I point out below, book publishing, once the mainstay of history-writing, has become such an expensive proposition that it is declining. Few publishers will produce a book without a substantial financial incentive from the author or their institution. Academic authors are advised that in the absence of supporting university funds they should finance their own research, conference-attending and publications. Name me another profession which mandates that you take on research and publishing and advises you to use personal income-tax-write offs to subsidise a work activity?

Also worth noting is the way universities exploit their staff, or perhaps, putting it more kindly, the way they encourage their staff to exploit themselves. My years at UQ coincided almost exactly with the arrival of personal computers. I brought one with me when I arrived in 1987; a state-of-the-art Amstrad, one of the first word processors. Some of the academic staff were still using old-fashioned ribbon typewriters, and the office staff had state-of-the-art IMB golf ball typewriters. There were a few computers, locked up in cage in the corridor, rather like rare trophies of modernisation, purchased for a particular project. We have now become solo work stations, capable of enormous productivity, but also enormous hours of work. I calculate that, based on a 36.25 hour week, UQ owes me over 50,000 hours of overtime since I was appointed, mainly spent tapping away on computers. I often ask myself why have I bothered? More generally I ask myself what should I do with my still unpublished manuscripts, and how do I cope with the conundrum that the

research for which I am best known—the history of Australian South Sea Islanders—has had a mixed reception in the community itself.

Mentors and Colleagues

In 2015, my colleague and one-time co-author Doug Munro wrote a paper about his academic life, which he subtitled 'confession of an academic nomad', an indication of his very mobile career. This was not my experience. I worked in only three universities and I spent 28 years at UQ. As I said at the beginning, I started fulltime university employment during the 1970s Whitlam years and then watched a government I admired crash and burn. Looking back, it was a splendid phoenix rising after a drab few decades. Unfortunately, it had forgotten how to fly high and had too many faults to survive, quickly ending in flames and spectacular self-combustion. However, the first half of the 1970s provided an exhilarating start to my academic life.

Unlike Doug Munro, I cannot claim to have been taught by or associated closely with the greats of Pacific history, such as Harry Maude, Dorothy Shineberg or Jim Davidson. I came out of Townsville-based James Cook University, which, although it has now developed a Pacific orientation, back in the 1970s looked to Southeast Asia and its own backyard in North Queensland, never to the islands just across the Coral Sea. I entered Pacific history via an unusual but successful path. I was taught by four superb and inspiring historians. Through Bob Herring, an Indonesia specialist, I was immersed in the work of Clifford Geertz and Ben Anderson (both scholars of Java) long before their work was more widely known. Howard Fry, a Philippines specialist, and originally an historian of British Pacific exploration in the eighteenth century, had equally high standards. I was also taught by Henry Reynolds, who went on to become Australia's most important historian of 'The Other Side of the Frontier', the much neglected Indigenous side of Australian colonialism. I 'fell' into Pacific history through an Australian Research Council Project with Henry Reynolds and Brian Dalton as chief investigators: in the mid-1970s Patricia Mercer and I took on interviewing Australian South Sea Islanders. I was also blessed with having Brian Dalton, a god-professor, as my doctoral supervisor. A New Zealander who had written on Maori-Pakeha relations, he was an exacting scholar. Although they all provided an excellent grounding in historical techniques, I had to catch up fast with Pacific history and anthropology as my career moved out to Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. I owe my University of Papua New Guinea appointment to historian Jim Griffin, and the decision to publish *Kanaka*:

A History of Melanesian Mackay (1985), my first monograph, to eminent anthropologist Andrew Strathern (then Director of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies). Even though I have written on other areas like masculinity, gay history and Queensland history, Pacific history in all its forms, including the labour trade diaspora, has remained a strong and central interest.

Appointments are the luck of the draw. I could have been left wandering in 'tutor world' in Australia, but in 1981 Jim Griffin had the faith in me to ask me to join him in the Department of Extension Studies (distance education) at the University of Papua New Guinea. A few years later, I transferred into the History Department where I worked with John Waiko, the most respected PNG historian of the 1980s. My background in distance education and Australian and Pacific history got me the UQ job. UPNG was a difficult teaching environment, although anyone who earned their 'teaching spurs' there in the 1970s and 1980s could cope with just about anything elsewhere. My appointment was to teach Australian history externally and internally in the dying years of distance education at UQ, so my UPNG background in distance education made me attractive. Although I had no track record in teaching Australian history, I had a research background (Australia, Queensland and the Pacific) that suited UQ and I was able to thrive in what was a conservative but generous environment.

I also worked very hard over long hours and could put more time into my career than someone with a family could spare. Doug Munro laments that his career was limited by lack of direct access to archives. In Port Moresby and Brisbane I had ready access to government archives which I used to create a solid research base in primary sources. By the early 2000s, the digital world had arrived and I was able to write *Happy Isles in Crisis* (2004) based largely on sources available on the Internet. In 2005-06, as part of research for my Malaita history, I took 30,000 digital images in the Solomon Islands National Archives, creating my own virtual archive and the basis of my research for the next decade. I went on to create the web-based *Solomon Islands Historical Encyclopaedia, 1893-1978* (2013), probably my most important publication in terms of potential impact. I produced acceptable products for the UQ system, although I always also published in ways that they did not approve. I never arranged book contracts before manuscripts were complete. I have never targeted publishing in 'good' journals, which is at the core of academic life today. Certainly, if I was starting off again, I would not progress as far. There is a lot of luck, sponsorship by powerful role models, and hard work. You

will also note that it was a very male academic world in the 1970s and 1980s.

Future Academic Publications

After I retired, I published *Making Mala: Malaita in the Solomon Islands, 1870s-1930s* with Australian National University Press (2017), and I have taken on one new publishing task - *Solomon Islands in Pictures*, under preparation for the Solomon Islands Government. I still have two companion monographs to complete: *Tulagi: Pacific Outpost of the British Empire* (110,000 words); and, *Honiara: Urban Social Space in Solomon Islands, 1942-2016* (100,000 words). The Tulagi manuscript is almost complete but Honiara still needs more work. It is much easier to deal with 'dead' topics like Malaita, 1870s-1930s, or Tulagi, 1890s-1940s, than the history of the ever-evolving rumbustious city of Honiara.

I could wander on for years completing these books, but now that I am no longer employed by a university I have no obligation to publish, and I have other types of writing at which I wish to try my hand. As well, I question the whole nature of the university publishing game and its rules, which to me seem to be out of touch with the reality of the digital revolution. And, I would question for whom we are writing? If you look at my career, I have always had strong community connections: first with Australian South Sea Islanders, then with the gay community, and constantly with the Solomon Islands. Although not all historians have these community connections, they have been important motivations for me, and they govern what I would like to do with my manuscripts after retirement. I need to get the Tulagi and Honiara books into a form where they can be read by Solomon Islanders in particular, but does that mean trying to get them all published by leading international publishers? I chose what I think is a good solution for the Malaita book: the Australian National University Press provides free digital downloads and charges commercial rates for the paper version. That way there is no cost to Solomon Islanders, as long as they have computer and download access. The Tulagi and Honiara books could be aimed at an international audience, but I want them to carry large numbers of photos and to be read in Solomon Islands. The best option may be the University of the South Pacific Press, or the ANU Press, but even so there are costs involved. There would be two lots of publication preparation costs to come out of my retirement budget. I have no intention of spending several thousand of my own dollars to score publication points for a university that no longer supports me. I am not saying that it should, as I am no longer employed

there, but equally as I have emeritus staff status, the School will claim the publications and benefit financially.

We have all been told to publish books only with reputable publishers, but the nature of publishing has changed around us. Many publishers now want a subsidy to publish most academic material, often something in the line of \$5,000 to \$10,000. I was involved with UQP's Pacific series, and recently I have published through ANU Press, which gives me a good idea of costs. Editing charges are about \$3,000 to \$4,000, then you need copyright clearance on photos which can cost \$30 to \$50 each. Then there are maps and an index, all of which are at the author's expenses. Book prices are climbing and can be \$80 to \$120 or more for what are quite limited library editions. Academic publishers such as ANU Press and UQ Press have been experimenting with combinations of print-on-demand paper copies and free or low cost downloadable pdf files, which is probably the only long-term future for publishing academic monographs.

Another option is hard copy self-publishing, frowned up by universities as such books can never be measured for quality. This no longer means cranking your Gestetner and producing duplicated copies. A smallish book can be produced for around \$10 to \$15, as long as the paper quality stays low. Photos are easy to include. The downside is poor distribution, although this problem is being solved through Amazon, Kindle, Smashwords and Booktopia etc. Then there is the ease of Internet access, which is where the largest changes have occurred. I already have my own website for the *Solomon Islands Historical Encyclopaedia*; it is relatively easy to hang extra manuscripts off this site or build another, and including hundreds of photos is not a problem. In terms of producing historical material that is accessible to the most people this is the best option. The downside of course is that it does not come with covers.

Life beyond Academic Writing

In many ways it is attractive to me to cut and run: get the manuscripts as ready as I can and place them onto the Internet—launch them into cyberspace and move on. I can forecast they will receive far more readers than if I tie myself to print publishers; and anyway self-publication is the cheaper option. The advantages may well outweigh the disadvantages. And I do have other plans that I can't really move onto until I get past this stage. I may be foolish to try, but I have two more publishing ventures in mind, both involving historical fiction. I want to write historical novels for young teenagers, books which relate to the school

curriculum, and I want to try my hand at writing a full-blown historical novel based on the plantations at Mackay in the nineteenth century. There is a gap in the market for historical fiction for young readers. Ask any school teacher and they will confirm this. These novels are only about 15,000 words—I have been busy reading some of them. Yes, there is an art in writing them, but I can't believe it is harder than learning to footnote and reference. Most of the authors come out of school teaching and their historical knowledge is basic. Very few practiced historians write for this market. It involves knowledge of the school curriculum, learning to write dialogue, understanding the teenage mind, and freeing one's imagination from the constraints of formal academic historical writing. There is an advantage in having a fund of historical knowledge on which to draw.

I also want to attempt to write the great Queensland plantation novel or some similar historical work. I have been struggling with finding a genre that can accommodate both historical fact and fiction. Novelists have the advantage of being able to make something up that is missing from the surviving evidence, to fill in gaps and to create some magic along the way. There might well be a dollar or two in it as well, which you certainly can't say for most academic publishing. I already have a wealth of material collected since the 1970s. It is a matter of deciding on a plot and weaving it all together. I am aware that other historians have tried to do this and that some have failed spectacularly. I have a few of their efforts on my shelves. I believe that there are ways to do this that don't have to quite conform to the standard historical novel. And there is always the Louis Becke (1855–1913) or Hector Holthouse (1916–91) fallback position. Becke was an Australian Pacific trader, short-story writer and novelist during the 1870s to 1900s. Almost forgotten today, Becke was an excellent evocative writer on Pacific themes. Holthouse was a journalist who turned to writing Queensland history for the general public, combined with a touch of imagination. During the 1960s to 1980s he reached a large audience with more than a dozen books on Queensland. Holthouse proved that people like to read local history, although they don't necessarily want to read learned footnoted history. A market exists for historical writing combined with the style of good journalism. I suspect that most readers do not want to be bothered with footnoted proof of the total veracity and fidelity of the sources. They want an entertaining relaxing read that is reasonably true and do not mind the addition of a little imagination.

I have now culled my large academic library to fit my future. Queensland and Pacific history remain, as do colonial Australia and In-

digenous history. I never really liked much about the twentieth century and was happy to surrender it. I kept all of my general histories of Australia, and a few gems with which I could not bear to part, and areas of family interest, but I gave away large areas of my book collection. Selling them at a dollar a book to second hand book dealers is too humiliating to contemplate, and anyway it is fun giving away ‘wings’ of your library to the younger colleagues. In making a final choice whether to keep paintings on my walls at home or put in more book cases, paintings won. Two bedrooms now house my library and research files, with an overflow to shelves in the garage. In the years before I retired, I scanned a huge amount of my photocopied articles and chapters and other research files. Now they are all floating around on a UQ digital cloud and can be accessed as I please. This enabled me to donate fifteen boxes of research files to the new Solomon Islands National University. They have the paper and microfilms and I still have digital access.

This all takes me back to Mackay, where I was born, and the issue of labour trade historiography and epistemology. Mackay was ‘sugaropolis’ the centre of plantations and blackbirding—Australia’s ‘deep south’ in the ‘deep north’. It is where Australia came closest to ‘a new kind of slavery’, and links me to Australian South Sea Islanders who have always been central to my writing. They continue to fascinate and puzzle me. One of my academic conundrums is that after 40 years the Islanders still do not believe the interpretation of their history provided by academic historians, particularly when it comes to what they see as the kidnapping and enslavement of their grandparents, and we see as the Pacific indentured labour trade and Islander agency. As I have assisted them with their political agenda in recent years, I have been conscious that there is no meeting of minds. They respect my many years of writing and support, although there is also a clear disbelief and another level of interpretation that requires explanation.

Perhaps this can only be resolved through historical fiction? Could it be that the multiple layers possible in an historical novel are the answer, linking the present generations to their past? There are historians who have travelled down the path I seek to find, and their work shows evidence of their training. The doyen is Peter Corris, who began as a Pacific historian, also in labour trade studies, ventured into journalism, then began writing detective stories, particularly the Cliff Hardy series. However, Corris always kept writing histories, about boxing and innumerable other topics including biographies and historical novels (Moore 2000). For me, his most memorable book is *Lightning Meets the West Wind: The Malaita Massacre* which he wrote with anthropologist Roger Keesing. It

covers the 1927 assassination of District Officer William Bell and his party on Malaita Island, Solomon Islands (where I have done much of my research) and the bloody counter-attack by the British and Australian-led expedition. It’s a good book at all levels, although it caused trouble for Roger Keesing who ended up banned from Malaita for some years, the site of his field work since the 1960s. However, what is more remarkable is that ten years later Corris wrote a sequel as historical fiction, *Naismith’s Dominion*. He has always been able to tread lightly through Pacific history and literature and is a role model for others.

Also, I have long watched my prolific Pacific historian colleague Brij Lal, now retired from the Australian National University, as he has experimented with writing ‘faction’: history with imagination. The skills of Pacific historians such as Corris and Lal have survived the transition from formal history to literature and I hope to emulate them both, perhaps spiced up with a touch of well-known earlier Queensland-based historical but literary authors, Louis Becke, Hector Holthouse, Glenville Pike, Ion Idriess, Jon Cleary, Nancy Cato and Jean Devanny (Taylor and Perkins 2007).

The Digital Future of History

It’s worth pausing here to try to assess the way the university system treats web-based materials. Three UQ twenty-first century professors of history—Paul Turnbull, Peter Spearritt and me—spent a great deal of their academic time over many years creating digital history. For Paul it’s more like twenty-years as his support for ehistory publishing and his South Seas Project make him a pioneer in the field. Peter’s Centre for the Government of Queensland produced *Queensland Historical Atlas* (150 contributors, 200 research notes all of about 1,000 words, and over 20 fully refereed articles over 3,000 words), *Queensland Places* (1,200 entries, 500, words, 13,000 illustrations), *Text Queensland* (a mini library with long runs of periodicals, MA and PhD theses and over 500 books), *Queensland Speaks* (100 interviews) and now *PNG Speaks*. This is Australia’s largest State history site and helps put UQ on the map for digital history. I produced a 280,000 word and 1,000 image *Solomon Islands Historical Encyclopaedia, 1893–1978*, which is the largest Pacific history site for any nation. We did this because we believe that community access to history is well-served by providing high quality digital history sites. However, the ERA system has shown itself to be incapable of measuring these sites and is barely interested. In a previous ERA, they were discounted and last time they were grouped together under a ‘non-traditional

creative output' category. If we had chosen to write books instead of websites, my School's History Discipline would be about 10 or 12 monographs ahead. I can't help feeling that UQ would much prefer that we had written theoretical books about creating historical websites, rather than created websites. These could be suitable measured, as long as they are published by good quality presses. If I may quote Peter Spearritt:

In my view, the greatest mistake made by both the Academy of Humanities and the Academy of the Social Sciences in recent years was not to argue that ERA, simply using a science citation model, was ridiculous for most of the humanities and more than half of the social sciences, where the science style model is primarily relevant to psychology and economics, sometimes to sociology, but not to most of the other disciplines. And the ERA approach penalises scholars whose primary aim is to write for the general public, with a commitment to public education. ERA rewards narrow, citation driven careers, inward looking and self-serving (Spearritt, 2015)

I should also add historical blogging as a possible digital histories future. My colleague Marion Diamond, aside from working on an academic monograph, has chosen a blogging path. But of course it does not pay and cannot be measured for impact. UQ would not approve of this form of historical outreach, except as community service, unless it was a spare time venture beyond A* journals and beyond your supposed 36.25 hours a week.

Add to this that we are imbedded in segregated disciplines. If I had worked in the School of Communication and Arts and wrote historical novels they would be recognised in an annual appraisal portfolio. If I had done this in the School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry they would not rate, but what is new about that? About half what I write does not rate.

The modern corporate university values money not scholarship. They are impressed by the size of grants and encourage quick turn-over of projects. I have never hurried writing projects: *New Guinea: Crossing Boundaries and History* (2003) took 15 years to research and write; the research for *Making Mala: Malaita in Solomon Islands, 1870s-1930s* (2017) stretches back 25 years. It is not that I produced nothing else while preparing these books, but sometimes I allow projects to mature, taking quite some time to locate some difficult source or deal with a conceptual issue. I am not sure if it is the nature of historical writing, or just the na-

ture of my writing, but time improves the product. One thing I do know is that this 'maturing' process is not acceptable in the modern university.

UQ and Excellence-Plus

I take the title of this section from a self-descriptive phrase now in common use in UQ self-publicity.

Academic life still has a lot of freedoms and I don't want to seem ungrateful. I enjoyed my time at UQ, and I know I have given back enough to pay my way. I held the McCaughey Chair in History, the oldest named Chair in the university. Onwards from about 1999 I always carried a heavy administrative load, and certainly did while Head of School from 2008 until 2013. Although the Head's position has its negatives, the overwhelming positive side is being able to have a hand in appointing new and vibrant staff. These appointments have left the School in safe hands, even though the School is not able financially to replace all staff members who have left. This is largely due to inflexible funding formulas imposed from on high which undervalue 86 percent of our courses, and then the university slices 62 percent off the top of all School earnings to support other UQ initiatives and administrative mechanisms. The School is left with 38 percent of its earnings. We faced the ludicrous situation in 2016 of having retired honorary staff teaching courses as casuals to keep one of the four disciplines afloat. How can a leading university operate basic services in this way and make claims about excellence-plus?

History has always been a foundation area of any university, and this has certainly been true at UQ since it began in the 1910s. But the funding formulas are so mechanical that any vision of what must continue to be taught as a core, regardless of passing academic fashions, has been lost. Many of the senior executives at UQ hold their jobs as managers, not superior academics. We have a fleet of Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Executive Deans, some of whom would be flat out making Associate Professor in their original disciplines. Their forte is management. This certainly has an effect of grass-roots undergraduate teaching. There is no longer any sense of trust in the integrity of staff, to design the best courses and throw themselves into producing the best possible students. Staff have become an asset on an inventory that need shaping, regulating and controlling. Intellectual passions have been made subservient to formula teaching. One could say in reply that many university staff have no teaching qualifications and need guiding in modern pedagogical techniques. However, this guidance has become so rigorous and efficiency-based that it has squashed initiative and demoralised staff.

If I look over a quarter-century, student standards have fallen (about 1 percent a year is my guess) and I never cease to be amazed at attempts to measure what cannot be measured exactly. Heads of School and Directors of Research quote percentages and statistics back at hapless staff and tell them to jump higher, playing off one against the other. Metrification is rampant and lauded as accurate and the way of the future. Sadly, I don't always believe the experts, and resent being told that the new assessment techniques are superior, when no proof is offered. In my School, marking is now all done via Turnitin, a digital system. There is no paper involved, marking is online and the system searches for plagiarism using accumulated work stored in its memory bank. Turnitin is far from foolproof: a few years back a colleague tested it by inserting an essay that consisted of the work of a major author in a major journal, but with alterations made to some words using Word's thesaurus and with a slight shuffle of grammar and word order. The similarity index showed around six percent not the 80 or 90 percent one might expect. He alerted UQ Information Technology and eLearning staff, as well as the Faculty Teaching & Learning Committee. Repeated inquiries met with no responses. Then there is the change from marking on paper to marking online. I complained within my School that this system is cognitively inferior for the marker, added to my existing RSI through typing strain, and added to screen reading by a few hundred thousand words a year. The School authorities were unable to find any education literature to allay these fears, and were unable to assure me that there were no health and safety issues involved. Yet, guided by a gung-ho Head of School, the staff blindly jumped over the digital marking abyss, which I suspect will cause health issues down the track. The bribe to get compliance was ipads for all. No doubt my School is regarded as innovative; at least this is how the Head of School expressed his efforts in a UQ blog extolling the virtues of online marking.

Another metrics failing is the method for monitoring teaching standards, which depends on student feedback to a short survey at the end of a semester. Careers ride and fall on the opinions of 20-year olds whose attention spans are getting shorter and who are largely incapable of reading whole books; even several articles and chapters are a challenge. Less than half attend lectures regularly and the digital recordings of lectures are not much accessed. The student response is in part a reaction to the level of the marks they receive during a semester, which is not an indication of staff preparedness or the quality of the teaching. Staff members are berated for not achieving a university average result, with no thought to differences between levels or types of courses, or student cohorts. There are

more complex ways that assessment could be achieved, using peer review of course outlines and lectures and tutorials etc., but a simple student survey is the only quality guide used. Again, I ask myself is this excellence-plus?

Conclusion

In my future, writing for a wider audience is far more important than satisfying a narrower university prescription. Whatever I decide to do, I know that the long-term answer does not lie with 'normal' academic research and writing. If I have not said it in the last 40 years, why should I think I have anything more to add? My New Zealand colleague Kerry Howe retired in 2008 after 40 year of writing New Zealand and Pacific history (Howe 2009). He walked away from academic life, but he always pursued two lives; one as an academic and one in the outdoors, especially long distance solo sea kayaking. Now he and his wife have a 50-year-old 30-foot kauri yacht which he says they love but which takes up most of their time and money. He has just written a non-academic book about sailing in the 4,000 square kilometres Hauraki Gulf in the North Island. I doubt that I have the stamina for such adventures, but equally just sitting at home is not an option, although I enjoy slowing down.

I know I have skills in writing. There is just the small problem of how can I use them in ways beyond the academic world? 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained' as they say. I don't have anything to lose and much still to gain. I do want to drain out the glass, although I need to refill it with the tittle that I prefer.

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