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# Opening the Windows to Catch the Sea Breeze

BOOKS &amp; POETRY

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One Christmas a long time ago, I was given a signed first-edition copy of *No Collars No Cuffs*. That debut collection of poems by Geoff Goodfellow is on my bookshelves still, a reminder of not only how much time has passed, but that even rawly presented poetry about life succeeds.

The book had nine print runs, and in the years since Goodfellow has followed with 11 other titles, a number of which have also seen repeat printings. *Opening the Windows to Catch the Sea Breeze* is a selection from them, representing three decades of the author's poetry.

In that time Goodfellow has had his own journey. After growing up in a war-service house in Adelaide's northern suburbs and leaving school at 15, he had jobs on building sites and as a hotel bouncer. He's been a poet-in-residence at prisons and rehabilitation centres, schools and tertiary institutions. He's read his work in North America, Europe and China.

A protracted fight with cancer has perhaps defined more recent years. "Waltzing with Jack Dancer," he called it, in trademark fashion. Among his list of complaints about that gig was "having to spend two hundred dollars on an electric razor because blades are banned on radiotherapy patients".

Goodfellow has been described as "the hard man of Australian poetry", "the one with a lot of anger". In reading his work over the years and revisiting it now, I have not found that accurate. Workplace injustice, sexual abuse, and the down-and-outs of life – deep feeling over such things amounts to more than simply anger.

"I'm really just a pussy cat," Goodfellow has claimed, and although I wouldn't quite say that either, it does tend to balance the books.

In *Opening the Windows*, he says:

*I'm with Eddy today. He's mad. Crazy. A loony tune.  
A lunatic. But that's okay.*

Nor are truths skirted about places. A long-term resident of Adelaide's quixotic Semaphore, he describes his home:

*Semaphore  
you are so full of bad taste –  
you've half convinced me  
you're good taste.*

A characteristic bold front is put on when talking about "being a single man again in midlife, gives a certain freedom". The feline alter ego takes but a couple more pages to come out:

*I've lived through days  
remembering her eyes  
& the softness of her touch  
I feel I could throw  
my work away*

In a recent review I said of another book that at more than 200 pages and sensibly priced, in the age of the over-priced slim volume of poetry, it was a bumper offering of quantity as well as quality. The same applies here. And if these poems were not to be value enough, then an introductory autobiography could be. In unwavering style, the narrative has eloquence in its bluntness, pathos in its irony.

In that war-service home as a boy, Goodfellow hedges no words in speaking of a war-ravaged, alcoholic father:

*Pre-television, our entertainment was either the valve radio or the old man. Luckily for us,  
the valve radio didn't drink, and barring a blown valve, was a little more reliable.*

Goodfellow's work confronts, risks assaulting sensibilities, but it is never without true feeling for the next bloke or sheila.

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Opening the Windows to Catch the Sea Breeze, by Geoff Goodfellow, Wakefield Press, \$24.95