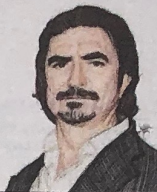


A PAIR OF RAGGED CLAWS



Stephen Romel

When it comes to dedications, Geoff Goodfellow's is hard to beat. His childhood memoir, *Out of Copley Street: A Working-Class Boyhood* (Wakefield Press, 158pp, \$24.95), is dedicated to Ken Kesey, the bloke who wrote *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Goodfellow met Kesey at Adelaide Writers Week in 1986. The poet was on home turf, launching his first collection, *No Collars No Cuffs*. The American writer told him he had read the poems and loved their "unmistakeable Australian voice" (the poet acknowledges Banjo Paterson as an inspiration). Kesey went on, "But man, you've got to stop writing poetry and write a goddamned novel. Otherwise you're going to be living in a trailer when you're 60."



Goodfellow was 37 at the time. When Kesey, who he came to know and spent time with at his home in Eugene, Oregon, died 15 years later, Goodfellow took a moment to pause. He'd had some success as a poet "but that certainly hadn't translated into dollars".

He's well over 60 today and has finally taken Kesey's advice. *Out of Copley Street*, named for the street in which he grew up in the 1950s and 60s, is his first work of prose. It is a treat for readers of any age. It takes us back to an Australia that used to exist. The books that came to mind as I read were *Stillways*, the memoir by the actor Steve Bisley (with whom the young Goodfellow shared a love of motorbikes), and *Fitzroy Raw*, the latest novel by Tom Petsinis.

Goodfellow was one of four children: two younger brothers and an older sister. He had red hair so it almost goes without saying that everyone in 50s Australia called him "Bluey". His father was a war veteran (a Rat of Tobruk, no less, who suffered from what we now know as post-traumatic disorder), a successful boxer (and his sons would all follow him on that path), a glassblower and a drinker. His mother ran the children and the house.

His parents, who lived through the Depression, would sometimes "eat tripe and lamb's brains". His mum called it "Depression food". I didn't live through the Depression, but my grandparents did and on that basis I will echo Monty Python's *Four Yorkshiremen*: "Tripe and lamb's brains? Luxury!" I have never forgotten my maternal grandfather's main diet: bread and dripping. There's a chance, of course, that was because he liked it.

Anyone with a connection to that generation will feel the nostalgic tug of this book. I, too, remember listening to the "wireless" and seeing some adults, the posher kind, drink "hock". My maternal grandparents had a public phone outside their house. The scene where Bluey's dad deals with a woman who's been in the phone booth for 20 minutes is hilarious. A tin of ham is involved. He is gentle but his point is made.

I hope that younger readers, too, will take something from this book. I know the world has changed, but that's no reason to forget how it once was. It's even possible younger readers might appreciate the differences between then and now and understand why the dinosaurs did what they did.

Bluey starts his working life on the local milk run. He is five. On the first trip, he worries because he can't find the pillows that customers have left their money under. The milkman, Lenny, laughs and sets the lad straight "with a lecture on architecture". The money is under the pillars that hold up the verandah roof.

As he grows into his teens, Bluey works as an apprentice butcher. He starts with a local shop and then moves up to a small chain. To land that second job, he has to run seven miles to make it to the interview. The chapters on this time in his life are a lot of fun, especially for the appearance of a Latvian man named Harry, "the best window dresser in Adelaide".

Bluey goes on to other working-class jobs, including on an oil rig (another terrific chapter, in which he meets men from "exotic locations I'd only ever seen before on a map": Sydney, Newcastle, Ipswich). He hurt his back and it was at this time of recuperation that he started writing poetry. "I didn't grow up in a houseful of books," he writes. "We did have a few books, mainly hardbacks, but they sat largely untouched on a shelf in the lounge room."

The untouched included Neville Shute's *A Town Like Alice* and Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory*, but the one he remembers is John O'Brien's collection of bush verse, *Around the Boree Log*. This was the book his dad, when "half-sickered", would call for and read from. "He'd then tell us how lucky we were to be descended from a nation of storytellers."

With that in mind, I'll finish with one of O'Brien's poems, *The Father*, in which a boy moves through his life thinking about his father. I think it befits this book, which ends with the poet thanking his four children. "His dreams dispersed, the bubble burst. / We find him where we found him first. / Right proud about his father. / And now again he writes in sooth / The head-line of his early youth, / But he observes — unwelcome truth, / At times he's worried, rather — / His hopeful son has just begun / The same old devious course to run: / And now it's he's the father."