

## Going Overland

*Shaine Melrose*

We travelled overland, through a landscape in decay, where grief was palpable. We squandered hours of our lives to black tar, its gravel disembodied by excess rain; forsaken flooded roads. Scenery blurs, we disconnect from the real day, and I place a chewing gum packet in my pocket, unpaid for, at the servo.

Mum is already ash and memory, like the rainforests in the hinterland behind Byron bay and down Gippsland way. Tears fall, flood Forbes and Echuca, where Ron and Christine taught, after a contract in Nigeria. Fathoms of water, like oceans they crossed, seas they swam, as they grew up in the Caribbean.

In the sixties, Chris's brother Nick, drove with his wife Jytte, overland, from Denmark to Australia, in a mini-minor, through Europe, Iran, avoided Afghanistan, passed Bam in blue wonder, Pakistan, down to Sri Lanka, Ceylon back then, boarded a boat on its way to Perth, drove on to Adelaide. A Bajan and a Dane, miles from home and family

driving with their reasons. I have mine. Covid 19 left mother to die, away from family, she was overland, in resi-care, overloaded, in isolation and frustration, through the curtain of dementia unable to understand our absence, alone again, like the many times as a child, when her mother went away, brothers and sister shipped off, all to return, still and strange.

It's easier to fly by plane, we all know, but now none of us feel completely comfortable in a terminal; the word really explains why, yes none of us want to die, or know someone in the death toll. Most just move with the times, mask up or not, go with the flow; no, I travel, with my lover, our dying dog. Yes we take our divergences and chronic illnesses along, for the drive.

**Shaine Melrose** is a queer poet and gardener living with chronic illness in the Adelaide Hills. Recently Shaine was shortlisted for the Judith Wright Poetry prize and won Friendly Street Poet's New Poets#23 with her manuscript *Shooting Words From My Soul*. Read Shaine's poems in *APJ12.1*, *Bramble Journal*, *Cordite*, *104KIN*, *The Saltbush Review Issue 2*.