

## REPOSITIONING A PLACE IN THE HEART

### VISUAL TRANSLATIONS OFFERS RENEWED VIGOUR AND CONFIDENCE

Using the audio history of her Dad's youth, Annette Peterson has painted a series of 'en plein air' paintings of his memories whilst at the Parkerville Children's Home during the 1950s. Her Dad's memories are full of confusion and emotion of a child felt abandoned by his mother and placed with siblings in an orphanage. Being a child's memories they are not necessarily chronologically accurate nor concise in detail but still relate to the understanding of what occurred and subsequently had an influence on his future life and relationships.

Annette's paintings give insight into her Dad's experiences when at the Parkerville Children's Home. They are a visual translation of many hours of audio recording and field work conducted by myself and Annette. Having personally participated in recording her Dad's stories I am intrigued with the artistic manner Annette utilises to reveal emotion that has emerged from her Dad and transcended into herself.

Annette's series of paintings *Repositioning a Place in the Heart* portray how the experience has affected her emotionally and allowed her to intuitively paint what she felt.

Each of Annette's paintings offer a glimpse of a child's visions while separated from his mother during the early years at the Parkerville Children's Home. They explore the feelings and understanding of her Dad's recollections many years after having moved from the home and embarked on farming, military and mechanical careers. *Repositioning a Place in the Heart*, reflect a child's version of his surroundings and how they influenced his pathways into youth and adulthood.

The true appreciation of Annette's paintings is how they have given her Dad renewed vigour and confidence to understand his past by sharing his memories with his daughter who has portrayed them in art.

Jeff Murray, June 2022

*Jeff Murray is with the Mundaring and Hills Historical Society. He is a Cartographer, Historian and records Oral History*

### Finally Seen and Heard

Annette Peterson

The paintings of *Repositioning a Place in the Heart* combine place, memory and emotion. I wanted to find out how painting can affect the memory of a place, a place with a history. Buildings but no people. The portraits provide a connection, but there is tension. It is emotional. You feel it. I researched the landscape of Parkerville Children's Home to create a series of plein air paintings of the site. I explored what memories the landscape evokes from

my Dad and what they evoke in me. I investigated how to translate non-visual phenomena within the qualities of shape, form and colour.

Parkerville Children's Home has been a centre for displaced or orphaned children since 1903 and has homed thousands of children in its time. As a child, I have always known that my Dad spent some of his childhood at Parkerville Children's Home. The initial research uncovered that he was in at least five children's homes. I had believed he was only in one. I thought his story began at Parkerville. I learned it wasn't true. Dad was there as a private admission between 1959-1960, during one of the centre's busiest times.

The reality of devastation for my father's upbringing was never considered while growing up. In 2019 I saw an artist call out for previous residents and workers of the Mundaring area to enter artworks for the Mundaring Art Centre. Although I did not enter, it got me thinking about my Dad's past. I realised immediately that he was still affected by his past, even though he was now in his seventies. Part of my Dad's pain, he said, was the idea that he, like other children with him, thought of themselves as forgotten. He asked me what art could do. I believe that art can heal and bring people together. I also think that art can shed light on issues that have long been forgotten and put aside. Therefore, this project hoped to uncover his story and experience.

Research began on this project in 2021. While doing an art residency at Midland Junction Art Centre, I recorded my Dad's story. We drove to significant areas of his life like Mundaring, the Wheatbelt and Perth. I was able to get over 27 hours of recordings. I then embarked on an artist residency at Parkerville Children's Home. I wanted to retrace the steps my Dad would have taken within the landscape of Parkerville, explore what memories the landscape evoked, and, hopefully, translate them into paintings. Using the audio of his story, I painted a series of plein air paintings onsite. I found the colours most intriguing and intended for an expressionistic approach in the studio.

I am interested in how time changes childhood perceptions of experience and what traces of memory remain; painting places brings the past and the present together. I hoped that creating plein air paintings of the Parkerville landscape and various buildings could develop a new perception of Parkerville. I hoped the paintings could replace the pain with nostalgia for the beauty of the place. See Image 1, *Sitting on the Steps*, Image 2A, *Verandahs*, Image 4, *In The Shade*.

Midway through the project, it all became too emotional. I could not paint. Instead, I researched more about other children in Parkerville and Perth. I spent time in New Norcia, another children's home, active during the same time at my Dad's experience. I felt it necessary to stay in this place as I tried to fathom the children's experiences and the mind of the parents.

When I finally entered the studio, I responded emotionally and intuitively painted. I listened to the audio while I referenced the plein air paintings. This project has definitely tapped into more abstract responses, as seen in Image 2B, *Landscape Network #2 (Walking to School)*. I hope that more significant development of this response will flow from here.

Painting portraits of my Dad became another significant element of the body of work. Ideas for various focal points from my father's perspective emerged in the studio that has become central to this unfolding of memory and story. In response to the audio recordings of his childhood through various angles, I wanted to capture him as a child and now. I did a few paintings from life, as seen in Image 5, *Yours Truly*.

My Dad and I realised that one person still alive who knew the truth about his history was his older brother Eddie. My Dad hadn't seen him in about 38 years. Previous attempts of my Dad to reach him were unsuccessful. Yet this time, Eddie and my Dad reconnected. Eddie said that this project with my Dad has changed his life and that he was ready to talk about his experiences. I was compelled to paint a portrait of my Dad with his two brothers, Image 3, *Soon to Part*, as it is central to the exhibition. This portrait is based on a photo taken just before my Dad was put in Parkerville Children's home. He is 11 years old, and Eddie is nearly 15. Eddie leaves home soon after the image is taken. I left the painting with Uncle Eddie for a few weeks. He said that everyone who came to visit him wanted to know what it was about. He never thought that anyone would be interested in his story.

This project is laden with emotion – loss, rejection, abandonment, shame, and pain. I am still yet to explore deeper feelings artistically. It may take years to germinate into some art I capture coherently. However, as the project developed, it created a new portrait of my Dad for me. I saw a transformation in him. At first, he was focused on finding people of the past. I think he hoped bringing them to life was the answer. Instead, I have seen his heart move, and his memories change. I have seen my Dad realise his value is meaningful and significant. The people we have met on the journey have all contributed to this story.

A big thank you to the following people:

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Mundaring Arts Centre

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