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Title
Turning 70, The Age, January 2009

Date
2009

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Preferred Citation
University of Melbourne Archives, Turning 70, The Age, January 2009, 2014.0046.01223
Subject: FW: greer at 70
Date: Thursday, January 15, 2009 8:51 am
From: Carol Horne <kaj41@dial.pipex.com>
To: <percival@theage.com.au>
Cc: Leah Middleton <leah@aitkenalexander.co.uk>

Dear Lindy Percival,

Can you confirm safe receipt of this copy please?

Carol Horne PA
Germaine Greer.

----- Forwarded Message
From: "ccrrs@hotkey.net.au" <ccrrs@hotkey.net.au>
Date: Thu, 15 Jan 2009 11:06:37 +1100
To: <percival@theage.com.au>
Cc: <kaj41@dial.pipex.com>
Subject: greer at 70

I nearly didn't make it to my seventieth birthday. I was driving over the lip of the Mount Warning caldera to fetch a newspaper when, as often happens on our curving narrow mountain road, a biker gunning his Harley Davidson round the bend ahead misjudged the curve and swooped onto the wrong side of the road, aiming right between my eyes. Ours is one of the many roads in Australia that have such capricious camber that bikers use them for their regular adrenaline fix. Half the blokes in the helmets are as old as I am. I guess wiping yourself out on the Nerang-Murwillumbah road beats the hospice as a way to go. Neither of us went that morning. The Subaru and I took evasive action, and scored a few new scratches on the paintwork from the scrub at the side of the road. One of these days my reactions won't be fast enough. On my seventieth birthday my driving licence expires. Bikers be warned: I have renewed it. the Subaru and I are still likely to turn up on your favourite racetrack at seven in the morning.

Once I would have got a fright in a situation like that. My hands would have prickled with the noradrenaline rush and I'd probably have had the shakes for a while, but not any more. The proximity of death frightens the young; the elderly have no choice but to familiarise themselves with it. For most of my life I've been trying to get a grip on that great unimaginable event. In Varanasi in 1971 I went down to the river very early one morning and got a boatman to take me up-stream to the burning ghats. I was veiled and carried no camera, so he let the boat drift in close to the shore to where I could smell charring flesh, burning ghee and sandalwood. I watched as bodies swathed in brightly coloured silks were laid reverently on the pyres and more wood piled over them, and the pyres were fired. Attendants were raking through the smoking cinders from the cremations of the day before. Children were playing in the ash. As we came away we passed a procession of men playing finger cymbals and singing hymns as they jogged ahead of a donkey cart hung with jingling bells. On the buckboard lay a slender bundle wrapped in a scarlet wedding sari. 'Happy woman,' said the driver. 'Die before her husband.'

It was in Ethiopia in 1984 that I really got to know the feel and smell of death. On my first day in a famine shelter, 120 people died. I arrived to see bodies laid out on carts, mostly adolescents. It had rained in the night. When the temperature dropped the malnourished children didn't have the energy to shiver, and their parents woke to find them dead. I sat on a bare stony hillside and looked on as relatives washed the mud off the beautiful brown bodies. I saw them wrapped in the whitest cleanest cotton cloths that could be found and laid in the galleried tombs that the strongest men were struggling to hack out of the dark rocky ground. As the day wore on I saw others die, as they waited for the young paramedics to assess them, as they lay in the hospital tents, and as the press photographers thrust cameras in their faces, looking for the pictures that would unlock the purses of the rich nations. I learnt that day that death is merciful, and that delaying it for the sake of delaying it is stupid.

The unexpected thing about getting up close and personal with death is that it makes life sweeter. As we came away from a particularly tragic famine shelter, which the caring German medics in charge had described to me as a 'hell-hole', I found a mandarin in my pack. My throat was dry with dust and aching with unshed tears. As I bit into the first segment of the mandarin, my whole being was suddenly flooded with inexpressible delight. I was lucky, lucky, lucky, to be alive, to be well, and to have a single mandarin. Life is fabulous only because we have death. As I have got older my love for this wonderfully elaborate and exuberant little planet has become a passion as painful and ecstatic, as jealous and obsessive, as any human love. The thought that I will be recycled through it holds no fears. A cardboard coffin and a hole in the rainforest will suit me fine. If the goannas dig me up and eat my bones so much the better.

I should factor death into my plans but so far I've got nowhere. The rainforest project needs another twenty years, at least, and I may not have that long. For the first time in my life I will have to be provident, and put something in place to
protect the forest and provide some job security for my workforce. I haven't had job security since I left full-time teaching more than thirty years ago, and I've never felt I needed it. All my mates who invested in pension funds and bought annuities are now weeping into their beer. Meanwhile my rainforest grows exponentially, surging skywards. Money is a fiction but trees are real.

I'm extravagant but I can do frugal. It's easy for old ladies to do frugal because nobody wants to sell them anything. You walk into a car show-room and the sales-people run and hide. Fashion outlets would pay you not to wear their clothes, supposing they had anything that fitted and could be bothered showing it to you if they did. The clothes in the op shop are usually newer than what I'd be wearing. My latest fashion coup cost me $5 in a street market. It's a very ugly dress in some sort of slimy synthetic fabric. It shows rather too much speckled cleavage for my taste, but I'll get some wear out of it. Having seen fashions come and go and come back again, not once but twice or three times, and each time a travesty of the last, the notion that my clothes could be dated holds no terrors. To be behind the trend is also to be in front of it. Make-over programmes have yet to transform a 70-year-old into the last word in chic, because if they did it wouldn't be the last word any more. Not even Gok is going to try to get a 70-year-old to look good naked.

Am I happy? The forest makes me happy, because it has such vitality and renews itself at such astonishing speed. If I look beyond it to the whole of this adorable planet, I feel anguished, because it has been trashed beyond the point of no return. Stupidity rules. Human beings are still fighting poisonous wars although they know they are unwinnable. They are still demonising the natural world, attributing malice to sharks and locusts, failing to understand how fundamentally the balance of nature has been disturbed. Even in my rainforest cane toads are killing the frogs and pythons.

----- End of Forwarded Message
Subject: FW: greer at 70/URGENT
Date: Friday, January 16, 2009 11:17 am
From: Carol Horne <kaj41@dial.pipex.com>
To: Leah Middleton <leah@aitkenalexander.co.uk>

Leah,

Fyi.

Carol.

----- Forwarded Message
From: Carol Horne <kaj41@dial.pipex.com>
Date: Fri, 16 Jan 2009 08:40:33 +0000
To: "ccrrs@hotkey.net.au" <ccrrs@hotkey.net.au>
Cc: Germaine <ccrrs@bigpond.com.au>
Subject: FW: greer at 70/URGENT

Germaine,

Fyi.

Carol.

----- Forwarded Message
From: Frances ATKINSON <Fran.ATKINSON@theage.com.au>
Date: Fri, 16 Jan 2009 09:07:34 +1100
To: Carol Horne <kaj41@dial.pipex.com>
Subject: RE: greer at 70/URGENT

Hello Carol,

Yes. Piece has arrived (it's fantastic). As far as I know...there are no queries and deal is as arranged. Sally will be back first thing Monday.

Best,

Frances.

----- Forwarded Message
From: Carol Horne [mailto:kaj41@dial.pipex.com]
Sent: Thursday, 15 January 2009 8:52 PM
To: Frances ATKINSON
Subject: FW: greer at 70/URGENT

I have received an automated reply to the email below to say that Sally Heath is out of the office until 19 January and that you are dealing with any queries for her. Can you confirm safe receipt and deal with the copy please?

Carol Horne PA
Germaine Greer.

----- Forwarded Message
From: Carol Horne <kaj41@dial.pipex.com>
Date: Thu, 15 Jan 2009 09:34:42 +0000
To: <sheath@theage.com.au>
Cc: Leah Middleton <leah@aitkenalexander.co.uk>
Subject: FW: greer at 70/URGENT

I have received an automated reply to the email below to say that Lindy Percival is out of the office until 2 February and that you are dealing with any queries for her. Can you confirm safe receipt and deal with the copy please?

Carol Horne PA
Germaine Greer.
Dear Lindy Percival,

Can you confirm safe receipt of this copy please?

Carol Horne PA
Germaine Greer.

----- Forwarded Message
From: "ccrrs@hotkey.net.au" <ccrrs@hotkey.net.au>
Date: Thu, 15 Jan 2009 11:06:37 +1100
To: <lpercival@theage.com.au>
Cc: <kaj41@dial.pipex.com>
Subject: greer at 70

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Germaine,

fyi:

You will receive an automated reply to the copy you sent to The Age because Lindy Percival is out of the office until 2 February. I’ve forwarded it to an alternative email address and I am waiting for confirmation of safe receipt. I will confirm with you as soon as I get confirmation.

Carol.
Thursday 15 January - Mid January
The Age COPY
‘Turning 70’
1200 words/ AU$1.50
Original request came from Sally Heath but she’s out of the office until
19 January so copy to be sent to Lindy Percival
lpercival@theage.com.au
Carol and Leah,

I’ll do 1200 words.

Germaine

Quoting Carol Home <kaj41@dial.pipex.com>:

> Germaine,
> 
> Article confirmation:
> 
> Which length will you do?
> 
> 500-800 words/AU$1.50 per word
> 
> OR
> 
> 1200 words/AU$1.50 per word
> 
> Carol.
> 
> ------ Forwarded Message
> From: Leah Middleton <leah@aitkenalexander.co.uk>
> Date: Wed, 17 Dec 2008 10:21:35 -0000
> To: Carol Home <kaj41@dial.pipex.com>
> Subject: RE: The Age, article request - Greer on 70
> 
> That’s fine. Sally Heath will be away from Christmas eve to the 19th January
> so if Germaine delivers the piece should be sent to Lindy Percival
> lpercival@theage.com.au.
> 
> Could you confirm which length she will do?
> 
> Best,
> Leah
> 
> Leah Middleton
> leah@aitkenalexander.co.uk
> Aitken Alexander Associates
> 18-21 Cavaye Place
> London, SW10 9PT
> 
> Tel: 020 7373 8672 Fax: 020 7373 6002
> www.aitkenalexander.co.uk <http://www.aitkenalexander.co.uk>
> 
> From: Carol Home [mailto:kaj41@dial.pipex.com]
> Sent: 16 December 2008 09:37
To: Leah Middleton
Subject: FW: The Age, article request - Greer on 70

Leah,

Germaine could do this for mid-January 2009 at best. Is that OK?

Carol.
Germaine,

Article request:

Turning 70

500-800 words/AU$1.50 per word

OR

1200 words/AU$1.50 per word

Deadline: Before Christmas or January

Carol.

----- Forwarded Message
From: Leah Middleton <leah@aitkenalexander.co.uk>
Date: Fri, 12 Dec 2008 10:35:31 -0000
To: Carol Home <kaj41@dial.pipex.com>
Subject: The Age, article request - Greer on 70

Dear Carol,

Please see the below article request from Sally Heath.

Best,

Leah

Leah Middleton
leah@aitkenalexander.co.uk

Aitken Alexander Associates
18-21 Cavaye Place
London, SW10 9PT
Tel: 020 7373 8672  Fax: 020 7373 6002
www.aitkenalexander.co.uk  <http://www.aitkenalexander.co.uk>.

From: Sally HEATH [mailto:SHEATH@theage.com.au]
Sent: 11 December 2008 20:10
To: Leah Middleton
Subject: RE: greer on 70

Hello Leah - I was thinking a shorter piece than usual, more a column length of 500-800 words at A$1.50 a word. It could be filed before Christmas or mid January.

Or if Professor Greer feels she needs more length I could take 1200 words at same word rate, same deadlines.

Let me know what works best for her.

Many thanks, Sally

From: Leah Middleton [mailto:leah@aitkenalexander.co.uk]
Sent: Thursday, 11 December 2008 11:37 PM
To: Sally HEATH
Subject: RE: greer on 70

Hi Sally, thanks for this. Could you let me know what you might have in mind? Length, deadline, fee etc. that sort of thing?

Best,
Hello Leah,

I was wondering if Professor Greer would or was planning to write about turning 70. The perspective of 70 in our society. She might be planning to write a Guardian column on the issue. I had imagined it as a column-length piece.

Can you let me know if the issue interests Prof Greer?

Many thanks, Sally

Sally Heath
A2 Editor,
The Age, 250 Spencer St, MELBOURNE, 3001
P: 03 9601-2189
F: 03 9601-3137
E: sheath@theage.com.au