Our Park  Our Community

Stories from the Narrabundah Longstay Park
OUR PARK  OUR COMMUNITY

Stories from the Narrabundah Longstay Park

Jenny Gall
Writer

John Tucker
Photographer

Peter Sutherland
Editor

Anna Tito
Graphic Design

SOFTLAW COMMUNITY PROJECTS
AND
ACT COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICES
2007
LOCATION OF THE NARRABUNDAH LONGSTAY PARK AND THE PROPOSED SWAP SITE

Map courtesy of the National Capital Authority, with aerial photography provided by Sinclair Knight Merz (www.ausimage.com.au)
Foreword

2006 was a momentous year for the residents of the Narrabundah Longstay Park. The decision to sell the Park to a developer meant that the 200 residents were threatened with the loss of their community, their homes and, in some cases, the only asset they possessed. From the start, it was clear that the residents were not going to give up without a fight. In many ways it was a “David and Goliath” struggle: a group of ordinary people taking on the might of the ACT Government and a well-heeled developer. Sadly, it also involved one of Canberra’s most respected charities. To the credit of all concerned, a solution was finally found which saw justice for the residents and a satisfactory outcome for the other parties.

It was my privilege in a small way to have been part of a campaign which was an eye-opener for Canberra. The feisty group of residents over several months used their combined skills to plan their strategy, make representations to Government, organize protests, publicise their predicament through the media and open days, and generally make the rest of Canberra (and the world!) aware of what was happening. I wrote at the time that affluent Canberra needed people like them to remind us of some very basic values: an appreciation of community, a willingness to share burdens, and an understanding of decent human values. I pointed out that Canberra as a whole would rightly be judged by the way the Park residents were treated.

I am delighted that these stories of an epic struggle have been gathered together because they will become an integral part of Canberra’s history. On behalf of the rest of Canberra, I say to a great bunch of human beings: “Well done. We are proud to be in solidarity with you.”

Bishop Pat Power
## CONTENTS

**FOREWORD**................................................................. v  
**THE STORIES**........................................................... 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We'll Buy the Park if We Win Lotto!</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Frank and Norma</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Could Never Give Up My Animals</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Michelle</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Might Lose My Kids</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Steve</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Generations Living in the Park</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Josephine</em></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Useful Place to Rent</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Janet and James</em></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s a Real Home</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s a Family</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pam and Mark</em></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home After a Roving Life</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ellie and Ron</em></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Need to Live Where the Jobs Are!</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Shorty</em></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Place That Allows Us to be Happy Home Owners</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lisa</em></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Lot of Us Here Like Country Music</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Val and Neale</em></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is the Way Life Should Be!</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sandra and Alana</em></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Peace of Mind</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Paul</em></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its Been Twenty Years</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Trees Have Grown!</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gordon</em></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greed, Graft and Something Very Smelly in the Wood Heap</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gabby</em></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The George W Bush Memorial</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Janet and Rod</em></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone Looks After You</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>David and Will</em></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It Can’t Happen</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve Seen <em>The Castle!</em></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jake</em></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back in Holland People in Caravans are Usually Descended From Gypsies</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tamara</em></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trailer Trash?</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jim</em></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Name Any Bird and I’m Sure it Lives Here</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Margaret</em></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Living in the Seventies</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Paul and Katrina</em></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Place</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Audrey ................................................................. 41
I've Gradually Made a Home For Myself
David ................................................................. 43
I Open the Window and the Parrots are Right There
Ron ................................................................. 45
For Young and Old
It’s a Very Good Place to Be
Christine .......................................................... 47
The End of 19 Years of Family Life?
Des and Liz ......................................................... 49
Who Can Afford Private Rent in the ACT?
Jim and Lyn........................................................ 51
There’s a Good Bunch of People Here
Myavilley and Abby ........................................... 53
Somewhere Safe for Me to Be
Doreen ............................................................... 55
He Ran Away For a Better Life
Emery ................................................................. 57
This is the Only Place I’ve Been Loved Back to Life
Debbie ............................................................... 59
Following the Dream
Lawrence .......................................................... 61
There’s the Wide Open Spaces in Front of Us
Alan and Andrina .............................................. 63
My Base For Bush Exploration
Glennys ............................................................. 65
This Place is Full of Her
Peter ................................................................. 67

THE HISTORY OF THE PARK ......................... 70
THE CAMPAIGN TO SAVE THE PARK ............. 75
THE PRINTER’S STORY ........................................ 83
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...................................... 85
THE COLLABORATORS ..................................... 86
Norma grew up in Binalong and met her husband Frank at the local tennis court. They married and moved to Harden where Norma worked at the hospital and Frank worked for the Shire. Together they raised four children, who all moved away to employment elsewhere.

So we thought, what’s the point of staying in Harden? Robert, one of my daughters’ partners, was working with Emery [who lives next-door] and he told us this house was for sale and brought us out to have a look at the Park. It was a much smaller place when we bought it. We’ve extended it through the bedroom and we have a big deck where we spend a lot of time. We have four children living around here and eleven grand children and we look after some of the grandchildren while their mothers are at work.

It’s much cheaper to live here than in Harden and here the variety of things in the shops is better. Country towns are very dear, food and petrol prices are much dearer up there. The social life was good in Harden and we still travel back. I was involved with the Line-Dancing up there. No-one gets paid. We have the charity tin and we all put in our $3 for the night and that money goes to charity. The school uses it to buy books or uniforms for the kids to go away to sport.

Koomarri owned the Park when we moved in. It was the biggest shock of our lives to receive the eviction notice. Ellie across the road came over about six o’clock in the morning. We thought, ‘Oh, Ron’s had a heart attack’ But it was the news of the Park evictions that had just come over the wireless.

Norma and Frank say they have no intention of leaving the Park. Norma says how peaceful it is. I’ve got a daughter who popped in the other day and we sat outside on the deck in the breeze. She said ‘Mum I could sit here all day it’s that quiet.’

Frank remarks, I can’t understand how the owners can’t run the place at a profit, apart from the fact that there is no manager. I’ve never had any trouble with anything going missing. I’ve left all my power tools on the truck and gone away and nobody touched anything. We all sort of keep to ourselves. We go for a walk sometimes and look at people’s gardens, but we can go for weeks without seeing anyone. It would be better if there was someone to refer problems to … I always said if I win the lottery I wouldn’t want to leave here. We’ll buy the Park if we win lotto!
I've been here for fourteen years. I work at Bunnings in Fyshwick and I've been in Canberra for nearly twenty years. I love my neighbours, and I feel safe here, as in having nice neighbours and having a bit of a community. I'm from Victoria originally, my ex was in the air force and moved up here, and of course that didn't work out and I did the renting thing. This was the only place that would let you have pets, so I could be single, live alone and have my own pets. This was the affordable option. Even on my wage now I couldn't afford to rent with a partner or alone. Well, I could afford to rent but I couldn't afford food, or do anything else. But I do like my independence as well.

I had a friend here at the Park and I used to come and visit and at the time there was nothing available. Finally a place became available. Since then I've been spending my time re-doing it and fixing it up. I've recently put in a new kitchen and I love my garden, it's very peaceful. I could never live in a flat, I'd just die. I could never give up my animals; I need this space and tranquility. The first time when Koomarri took over the Park, I was nearly going demented ... no-one will take animals when you're renting. Now I know this sounds dreadful, but for me I'd rather not be alive without the animals – there's nothing left. I know some of the other people talked about suicide when it seemed they'd be evicted. How sad is that to get to your sixties or seventies and feel like that. If I could have afforded to move out I probably would have, because I don't like that insecurity.

I haven't stopped doing things to the house since I moved in. There was no front fencing and really there was no garden at all. It had an old aviary and an old shed. That front bit was an old greenhouse that was filled in. I did the kitchen; I didn't have a bathroom but that's been put on. The bedroom was in another spot and I've moved it. It has changed a lot. I've put up the screening and the double fencing because I did have another big dog and I wanted to make sure that she wasn't going to get out, but she's recently passed away. Basically, the annex was full, so I cut a hole in the connecting wall. The place is tiny, sometimes it drives me crazy, but because I have the dogs I like to have the yard.

The Park is great because it's so central to everything, the cheaper rents that people can afford. Most of the people you can just wave to and say 'Hi'. I don't know everyone – 101 sites is a lot of people! It's like not living in suburbia with the olive farm next door, and the pea-fowl bopping around the place. There are lots of birds - so it's like living in the country.
Steve fears that, if he were forced to move from the Narrabundah Longstay Park, he might lose contact with his two children. *I've been at the Park for seventeen years. When my wife fell pregnant, we bought our mobile home as a stepping stone to buying something else. We're now separated and the kids live in Queanbeyan with my wife, but the kids still go to school in the local area. I leave home at seven and the kids stay there [at his home] till ten to eight, they then walk round to the bus to go to school. I have custody eight days a month. My daughter is eleven, my son is sixteen and they have friends in the Park and in the neighbourhood, because they went to day care in Narrabundah, Forest Primary, Telopea High and now Narrabundah College. Both kids love the Park. The football oval is nearby and they feel safe. I wouldn't feel comfortable leaving them anywhere else.*

As a single working father, the Park offers the perfect arrangement of safety and an attractive physical environment with the football oval just across from his home and the rural atmosphere of the surrounding land. There's plenty of space for the kids to ride their bikes around and visit their friends in the Park without crossing major roads.

Steve believes that the seclusion of the Park offers greater security than a conventional suburb. *We've got one access road in and out; we know who's coming in and out. If we see cars that are unfamiliar we have a look. We have a very low crime rate in the park. The neighbourhood is stable – my neighbours on each side have only changed once in the seventeen years we have been here.*

The proposed eviction threatened the loss of a major financial investment in his house of seventeen years, and the continuity of his children’s home life. Financially, Steve could afford to move out of the Park a long time ago, but it was better to keep the kids’ home and stability in their lives. *To accommodate my children it would be a lot harder. I could move in with my parents, I could rent share, but to bring in my kids where the kids live with me for eight days straight, how can I get to work at seven thirty and get the kids to school safely? Where am I ever going to find this again? I'm not!*
Up until very recently, when her father died, three generations of Josephine’s family were living in the Park. Josephine and her family moved to the Park just after the new section opened in 1987.

We bought a caravan in 1984 and travelled, spending 8 months in Queanbeyan waiting for the Park to be finished. We heard about the Park being built in 1987 as a place for the workers coming to build the new Parliament House and we put our names down on the list. There were a couple of pop-top vans on site with people working on Parliament House. My husband was working on the masonry on New Parliament House. We had our names down on the list for a Housing Trust place, but we took a look at a place in Kambah and decided we’d rather stay in the Park. When we moved in, in 1987, we had a really strong manager. This whole new section was meant to have our vans in rows, one type of shed and fencing to keep things neat and tidy. As soon as Housing took it over it went to ruin.

My father moved in and lived here from ’91 to ’97. He retired to Canberra after a distinguished career, becoming Surgeon Rear Admiral and he was the Medical Director of the RAN until he retired in 1976. He was serving on HMS Indefatigable just after they dropped the bomb on Nagasaki. They were repatriating prisoners of war, about a thousand a day. And of course they were walking around after the bomb had been dropped so that the radiation would have been tremendous. Dad had severe osteoporosis which we thought might have been due to this. He was attracted to the sea as a man of duty. He was a qualified surgeon and he wanted to help the sailors, he wasn’t a fighting man. In another time, Dad would have been a pacifist, but he felt bound to help. We bought a caravan for him on-site, made a garden, and he came up with his dog. He loved it here.

Josephine describes the variety of people who have lived in the Park. There are people who are caravan people and some who aren’t. There are people who have the spatial mind to travel and live in vans versus the people who have been forced to live in a van by financial circumstances. Between 1987 and 1993 it was very interesting, because there were a lot of itinerant people moving through, relationships, flare-ups, oh have we had some characters here.

Josephine is firm in her stand to stay in the Park with her son and daughter. I never intended for them to grow up in a park, but this isn’t a standard park. I would make a spectacle of myself, if I need to, to stay in the Park.
Janet says, We’ve lived here since June 2006 and we rent the place from a workmate. His father bought it for him and we pay the rent to his father in installments. My partner and I are both looking for work, so this place is very useful because the rent is cheaper than anywhere else. It’s been really hard finding anywhere we can live. There were eight of us in a two bedroom flat in Queanbeyan before we moved here: three adults and five kids.

We’d prefer to live around Narrabundah somewhere so we don’t have to move the kids, Erin, Michael and Joshua, out of their schools again. There are some really good schools around here. I’ll be going back to Queanbeyan to work in January, working as a cleaner in a hotel.

It hasn’t been easy living here for us. We’ve had some problems with the people who have been here for a long time having issues with our kids. They think they can tell them off. But it’s been very useful to be in the Park while we’re trying to find somewhere else more permanent and while we’re trying to find work. It’s close to Queanbeyan and easy for the kids to get to school on the bus.

We probably won’t be here for very long, but we certainly support the fight for the Park. Without it there would have been nowhere for us to stay while we try and sort things out.
I t’s a R eal H ome

I t’s a F amily

Pam and Mark

Pam and Mark, Pam’s mother Peggy, and their friend and neighbour Judy, share this story. While they are not all blood relations, these four people reflect the neighbourly relationships that promote a sense of belonging in the Narrabundah Longstay Park. Pam has lived in the Park since 1991, first on her own, then with Mark who moved in with her in 2000. Pam’s elderly mother Peggy is living with them while they build her a house in the Park, using an old building site office sourced from Sydney which they are modifying.

Judy has lived in the park for six years and rejoices in the combination of privacy and community offered by the residential environment. She describes her move into the Park. I was in a relationship with someone at the time who was living in a place here. I didn’t want to leave the Park when the relationship ended. I love it here. My caravan is my kitchen, the rest of it is a permanent structure – the study, the bedrooms, the lounge room, bathroom. It’s very quiet, you don’t have lots of stereos blaring, you actually hear the birds singing.

Mark explains that the kind of housing offered at the Park was initially a mystery to him. I must confess that when I came here I didn’t know what to expect. You still very much own your own house and you are responsible for your own land. What we’re aiming for at the end of eighteen months is that we’ll own our own block of land. Basically we’ll become like an estate. We can then have some say in how the Park is run.

After having to give up full time employment because she is suffering from a spinal problem and chronic pain syndrome, Pam is on a disability pension and putting much of her energy into the struggle to save the Park. When Koomarri took over management of the Park, we believed that because they were a charity they had our best interests at heart, but they were disorganized. … they decided after five years that we were in the too hard basket and sold us off.

After the death of her father, Pam found another site in the Park for her mother to move to from her farm near Tarago, but then the eviction notices arrived. Peggy still hopes to remain near her daughter and close to the land her husband’s family farmed. Her recollections of post-war Canberra are vivid. I came out here in ’49 and I met my husband the day I came to Canberra. They’d lost my suitcases, so I had the clothes I stood up in to go to work for three days! I went straight into the government as a shorthand typist in External Affairs.

Peggy’s husband Wally was born at Blundell’s farm house and his father managed the Wall Station property. He used to shepherd the sheep on the Parliament House site and put the dogs on the 19th hole on Red Hill golf course to stop the sheep going up there. He used to play with the Governor General’s daughter. She used to take a turn to push the go-cart up hill. That’s what community was like back then and that’s what we feel we’ve got here.
Ellie and Ron came to the Longstay Park eighteen years ago, after Ron had retired. Ellie was born in Casino in Northern NSW and married Ron in 1949 – that was the beginning of their roving. They travelled extensively throughout Australia following Ron’s work in the construction industry from Northern NSW to Queensland and Western Australia. After Ron’s retirement, and a year living at Batehaven, they dismantled the van and annex and brought it up to Canberra where they assembled the whole home again and added a bathroom.

I hated the sand. I never did like the sand getting in me toes and what not. Living in construction camps was often challenging. Living on construction sites, you wouldn’t have been game to come inside my gate because you would have been thrown out by certain people who were there. There’s just so much anger between people. It was absolutely impossible to make a friend in those kind of places. If they’re upset with a neighbour, they’ll cut the electric cable through with a knife, they let the tyres down on the van if it’s not jacked up. There’s just one tap sometimes on a Park this big. We had to join up our hoses to get water. If someone got cranky with you they’d take the hose in the middle out. Oh I’ve lived rough. Everybody kept to themselves; you had to watch your mouth because if you didn’t, you get it. If you bathed at night there’d be somebody outside having a peep show. So you bathed during the day. The toilet doors would never close.

Living in a caravan is the life Ellie knows and prefers, and the Narrabundah Park community is vastly different to the construction camps. I’m one of those, you know, you accept what you got and be happy with it. You’ve gotta live where you’ve gotta live. When you’ve moved around for years ... Out of forty years, we’ve spent eighteen here and six years in a house. You just go to these places; if you don’t like it you’ve just got to stay there, what else you do, you have to accept it.

I never see very many people, just the people across the road, they’re quite nice. It’s affordable here, I haven’t lived anywhere else since we went on the pension.

It’s the suddenness of the decision to evict the residents that has horrified Ellie and Ron: I’ve never been evicted from a park before. I first heard about it at half past six in the morning on the radio. That really shocked me.
Shorty waited for years for the opportunity to purchase his own place in the Narrabundah Longstay Park. His new home looks out through the pine trees and beyond are the open paddocks stretching towards Queanbeyan.

I've been in the Park for four years, living with my brother, waiting for a cheap enough caravan to come up for sale. Finally a caravan on a good block came up. I got rid of the caravan and I've built my own home. I work as a building contractor around town, so I've built my own place in my spare time. I've built the house big enough for my needs with plenty of room to sit outside.

There's a shortage of housing in this town, what's everyone supposed to do? The rent for anything that is available is unaffordable. The Park here offers a solution for workers like me who need to live where the jobs are. The rental market outside the Park is about $300 a week – I can't afford that. I don't want to live in a group house. I've done enough compromising in my time; maybe that sounds a bit selfish, but I'm at an age when I've had enough of making concessions. I don't want to live with anyone else and I just want to do my own thing. It's great having my brother just down the road; we can have a beer together after work and unwind.

I've got great, quiet neighbours. People are around if we need each other for help or for a beer, but we don't get in each other's way.

There's a real need for a proper caretaker here on the spot, living in the Park to chase the rent and to deal with any problems when they arise, not wait for months and then someone remembers to come out when things have turned into a crisis.

Most people here have a made a great life. They're here because they couldn't afford to live anywhere else in Canberra, but here they can have a home that's got a bit of a rural flavour and get to a job that they wouldn't find in a rural area. They pay their rent and do their best for the other residents. The future of the place is still uncertain. I want to keep fighting for the Park.
Public Servant Lisa is firm in her loyalty to the Narrabundah Longstay Park as the place that has enabled her to become a happy home owner.

*I inherited values from my parents about the way in which you build up a home: buy an old place and build it up. Dad was a banana grower – it was a one income family. These were the values I’ve inherited, of being debt-free and building up a good home rather than a mansion. I had to consider what I would have to pay in terms of market rent to have personal space - this was the best option. It’s a really idyllic place where I’ve had my own home and space - peaceful, in the summer with a beautiful breeze that comes straight through from the North. Living here over the past two years has been better than renting and share housing elsewhere in Canberra. I have also had more to do with my neighbours here than in other suburbs.

Some of my friends go, ‘Why? Why do you live there?’ I’m just a bit unusual in that I made a decision that it would work for me and it wouldn’t for others. But my friends have developed an appreciation of what the place means to me and that this is an established community of low cost housing that works well, while not requiring taxpayer assistance.

I’ve also got more of a familiarity with residential parks from where I grew up in northern NSW where there was a really beautiful caravan park just down the road, right on the beach. I went to school with kids who lived in the park. I associate residential caravan parks with being in some of the best places and a really good way to be set up somewhere really nice, affordably. I’ve lived near Uluru, in Tokyo and London, so I was used to living in smaller places that you pay a bomb for, so when I came to Canberra I didn’t need to have a huge house but I knew the kind of home I wanted and I got it there.

Lisa is angry that some interest groups dismiss residents’ outrage and trauma by saying that the sale was “legal”. It’s not so much “legal” as it just wasn’t illegal – although in Lisa’s opinion it should have been. Like many other members of the Canberra community, Lisa is angry that developers are interested in the Park merely as land to exploit, denying the rights of the many residents who have poured their life savings into establishing debt-free homes.

*I made the ethical decision earlier this year not to try and sell my place while the future of the park was so uncertain. I found a place that was a step up from where I am now, but I wanted to hand on my home to a good owner. I talked to my real estate agents and informed them that I wasn’t going to sell the house and put some other person into an uncertain predicament. When the Head of Koomarri was asked why he sold, he responded, ‘Well we just sold it to the highest bidder as anyone would’. Well, no, we wouldn’t and we didn’t, and we’re not even a charity!'
Val and Neale moved to the Park because they could only afford a house they could pay for with a personal loan. We used to rent in Downer but that got too expensive. We were able to buy a caravan in the Narrabundah Longstay Park. Here we are able to own our own house and pay a manageable rent, and we thought we were safe from eviction!

One of the great things about the Park has been getting to know some of our neighbours well enough to form great friendships. Sadly a couple of our closest friends here have died in the past few years, like Graham. Val met Graham across the way there through the country music he had playing on the radio when they were out gardening. They were both keen gardeners. Val called out that she really liked his choice of music and Graham offered her a beer.

‘Oh, I don’t drink, Graham’, said Val. ‘Never mind’ he said, ‘I’ll have a sip of mine then I’ll have a sip of yours for you while we keep gardening.’ There’s quite a few of us in the Park who like the country music. It’s always good to hear it when you’re working outside.

There was Len, too, who used to make model ships. He was a good friend of ours and he used to spend hours and hours making these really detailed models of all kinds of ships. He left us a few of these models that we got when he died.

Pam was a florist who lived across the way, then moved out when she retired. We used to help her out with Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day deliveries, it was always very busy. I also mowed the lawns for her and kept the gardens because she was pretty busy, working six days. She kept trying to sell her place when she retired and she’d bought a motor home. So we bought it as a family type retreat. I came into a bit of an estate, and I got some compensation from work because I snapped my ankle.

We keep an eye on people on their own in the Park and people keep an eye on our place if we’re out or away. It’s good to know that there’s someone always watching.
I was born and bred in Canberra, starting in Narrabundah. The streets used to have numbers back then, 9th Street etc. My father came here as an electrician doing work on government buildings in the 1950s. When I married, we lived out at Michelago for ten years; the kids loved that country atmosphere, and it feels the same here. Even though you’re in town, it’s still got that country feel about it ... it’s like being in a country village all over again. I’ve made quite a lot of friends here. I work in Fyshwick so it’s five minutes to work. One of the reasons we moved here was that Alana wanted to go to Narrabundah College because of the courses offered there.

We moved in at the beginning of this year, four days before the eviction notices were issued. Alana and I were renting a place in Isabella Plains for eighteen months after my husband and I separated. My brother-in-law owned this place in the Park for eight or nine years and I bought it from him. I’ve always liked the area, and Alana’s godfather owned the place before Ray. I had enough money to buy this outright with the divorce settlement. When I was living in Isabella Plains, I was paying $250 a week, and that ate into all the savings I had.

The day we moved in, just before we got the eviction notices, we were getting the dinner ready and Alana was standing at the window and said to me, ‘It doesn’t get much better than this, does it?’ And I said, ‘no it doesn’t sweetie, this is the way life should be.’ A few days later we went from total euphoria from finally having a place of our own to not knowing where we were.

Sandra’s daughter Alana has the last word about what she considers is the best thing about being in the Park and having this kind of lifestyle: It’s the friendly people. Everyone stops and invites you in for coffees and says ‘How’s your day?’
Paul lives in the Park with his new partner and his daughter visits regularly. He chose to live in the Park because his new partner’s ex-husband lives there and her children from that relationship wanted to be near their father.

I’ve been in the Park for eight to nine months. I was in Gundagai before I came here. My daughter was here and my ex-wife asked would I come up and stay in the area, and I said ‘No worries’.

The doctors say I can’t work. I done a fair bit of fruit picking years ago ... I had to give that away, I can’t work long hours. We’d get up early in the morning – 5 am, strip the trees, then go down and do size-picking and that took a while to fill a big container. There were all different nationalities. They were good people, nice people to meet and all of them spoke not too bad English. There were a lot of people at night round the camp fires maybe playing music and talking. I was pretty tired and kept to myself. We lived in Picker’s accommodation and you had to pick as many bins a day as you could. It was very interesting to get up the tree and ... try to get the fruit.

I had fourteen years on the railways in Victoria – I was made redundant after fourteen years. I was a plate layer, then I was on a machine that undid the bolts between the smaller and larger gauge. Then I worked from there ... doing the points and crosses. They were long days. We’d start at 7 in the morning and finish at 4.30 with a gang of men ... We had four day weekends – four days on then two days off then the other way. Most of us traveled home on the weekends. From there I went back to the workshops in Bendigo. We’d heat up the iron to make the tracks for the big springs. My first ten years was out on the gangs, then I went down to Melbourne as a cleaner then from there I got married. I worked on little gangs that done all the maintenance then that was when I was made redundant.

The Park community has made him feel welcome and he remarks on their fairness. He’s watched many of them begin to rebuild their lives after the eviction threat. Paul describes how he fills in his time now that full-time work is out of the question. I’m an AFL Referee. I’ve got to get fairly fit for that and every second Thursday I go in and do voluntary work for the Salvation Army. I work two days a week and that’s good for me mind. I’ve also got me garden and that helps. I like to keep me peace of mind.
I've been in the Park since 1986. I was working across the road at the golf course. I thought it was better than being in a flat because you got a bit of land for a garden, you can mow the lawn, it's quiet, it's close to work and I've got me mates living nearby. There was just the four of us to start off with in this new section ... My next door neighbour came in third, Graham behind me came in first, I was second. We all go away fishing for a week and the neighbours look after the place. We've got our own boat and we go away deep sea fishing. We went to the Trout Festival in Jindabyne. We were down the south coast and got some nice snapper. Me mate's got an old Canberra stove and we cook 'em in there, put the wood in one side, fish in the other.

The old section of the Park was where the old amenities block was, on the eastern side of the creek. The old section has been there since 1970 or something. In '74 or something, some people were out at Hall in caravans and they negotiated with the government and they ended up getting this place. Gerry and his wife Ann their names were, and the Drive In was next door. They were the caretakers for the government for this place. You had to apply through the government to get in here. They started moving more people in with the building of new parliament house ... I towed me van, well Graham towed it here, and slowly built the place around it. It's nice and quiet except when the peacocks jump on you. I've got a photo of one standing up here [on the roof] looking out at the street.

My mum's a pensioner and she lives in a government unit. It's not really the best place for her. If we had a better bus service coming in here and there was somewhere for sale, this would be the best place for her. But she needs to get to the doctor. ... there's always people around here so if anything happens they'd notice. Sometimes we'll have a bit of a party and invite the whole street. It's better than a flat.

If I have to move, I'm going to have to just knock the place down. There's nothing I can salvage. And if I moved it, where would I put it? Some people have spent over $100,000 on their houses. I know people who have been on the ACT government emergency housing list for three years. A flat has nowhere to put anything. I've got a shed out the back. People are always building things out here for each other.
Greed, Graft and Something Very Smelly in the Wood Heap

Gabby

This is how the feisty, sixty-something Gabby describes the machinations of the various interest groups over the sale of the Narrabundah Longstay Park and the threatened eviction of its residents.

Born and bred in Canberra, Gabby proclaims her love of the city, recalling her childhood in Turner with neighborhood bonfires, sparklers and cocoa for cracker night. She fears that a world of shared community interests has been consumed by the greed of developers and by the irresponsible attitude of governments to fundamental social issues such as affordable housing for all.

We all take a certain pride in owning our own homes - at least we thought we did! We thought we had safety and the security of knowing that you’ve got your own home and you’ve taken care of your future and you don’t need to ask anything of your family or anyone. We sold whatever we had before moving here and bought our homes. But we don’t have any money left. That’s the sadness – your life savings or your superannuation has gone into whatever you’re living in ... apparently you’re supposed to leave with nothing, nowhere to go and nothing to go with.

Gabby describes the great advantages of her way of life in the Park as a single woman with no extended family. I had a stroke ten years ago and being in the Park means I can cope on my own. Living here is wonderful. Here I’m more able to be independent. I don’t feel as self-conscious as I would in a suburb. I can fly round the Park on my scooter and I have rails all around the house to help with the falling thing. I feel safe and secure here more than anywhere else I’ve lived and I love the open spaces around us. I can have my dog which I can’t in another place.

Fiercely proud about her independence, Gabby questions the motives behind the sale of the Park, first by the ACT Government in 2000, then by Koomarri to Consolidated Builders in 2006. We’re quite happy minding our own business and not being a drain on anything. We haven’t taken anything out of the public housing bucket, but I guess we will have to now. Where would you put 200 people with varying needs? They should both tear up the contracts. It’s just this almighty dollar that drives them.
Janet’s life has taken her from Adelaide where she was born, to New York at the age of eight with her father who worked in the Australian Consulate, and then back to Canberra at the age of twelve. *I remember not really fitting in with school there in New York. We lived in apartments in the suburbs. I remember the Empire State Building. It was a big move from Semaphore Park in Adelaide to New York.*

Rod has lived in Canberra since 1954 in his parents’ house in Yarralumla, a suburb where houses have changed a lot from the small weatherboard government houses built in the 1950s. Janet explains how she and Rod came to live in the Park.

*My ex-husband, Rod, and his wife were all friends, basically there were two marriages that weren’t working out, but Rod and I did work out and we moved on. We were renting in No 23 till No 20 came up for sale in April 2006. We were lucky enough to get it and haven’t looked back. We were in this house for four weeks before the eviction notices arrived. I just wanted to draw the curtains and die. Then after a week of absolute despair, I started to get the fight coming back. Then I joined in on the committees and got to know everyone. With all of us together it turned out all right.*

*We weren’t able to compete in the outside rental market, or to compete to buy a house of course, at our age and income levels. And this is the way to go. We’ve got this great little house and a great block of land and it’s affordable. And then along came this nasty developer man and we all sort of rallied together and we went on from there.*

Janet and Rod explain that they have also had to get used to living with the presence of the past owner of their home. *His presence actually left when the trouble started in the Park and the reason it left was that he had to go on to help us with other things to help us stay here.* When we first came up to the house, the dog wouldn’t come into the house. And each step you’d take into each room you could smell a man’s after shave, then when you came into the room it was gone. *So I used to say, that’s George. And I used to talk to him, and sometimes you’d get this smell of cooking from nowhere. You can hear on some nights a distinct rushing of leaves up in the top bedroom, like wind rushing. I think he’s here and I planted a little bush out in the garden as a memorial (a bit tongue in cheek), and I call it George W Bush, because his name was George Waterford, and it’s his bush.*
David has been a resident of the Narrabundah Longstay Park since 1996. He started renting a house in the Park “because it was cheap and I owned it.” Born in Queanbeyan, David lived and worked there until he damaged his back in an accident at work. With the compensation money, he bought his house in the Park. In 2001, David’s son William was born and when he was two months old Will’s mother left him with David to look after. He has a few disabilities, fluid on the brain, he had a shunt put in, and he’s blind. Then when all this trouble was happening with the Park, he had a fit ... He’s six in February. He goes to Malkara special school. They’re teaching him to walk and it helps teach me how to look after him.

As well as his son, David looks out for a friend around the corner who is schizophrenic. He’s got no transport, he got done for DUI, and he got put in jail, he rolled his car, his father ended up selling it – it’s one less worry for them. They’re 79 or 80, he’s 53. He’s been in the Park about three years. He’s no trouble to anyone. There are a few people that look after him. He’s got a friend who lives a few doors down who’s a taxi driver and he takes him around.

It’s the closeness and the concern for others that are the best things about life in the Park. Everyone looks after you. The lady across the road, she’s up in Brisbane. I keep an eye on her house. When I’m not here she looks after my place.

But this tolerance is only sustainable where there is mutual respect and a willingness of residents to meet their economic responsibilities. The few who refuse to pay site rent need to be treated accordingly. If they don’t pay the rent, sell the place from under them. We need a caretaker who’s got nothing to do with the Park like they have in the places down the coast to make sure the place works properly.

David has a store of antique furniture in his shed that he has been restoring systematically for some years as a kind of life insurance policy for Will. I was out at Revolve one day. I saw a nice little cupboard there, sanded it back and I got an antique bloke to come from Fyshwick to see how much it would cost me to do them up. I was doing up a rocking chair at the time and he said I don’t need him, that I’m doing a good job. I store ‘em up till when something happens to me, then Will’s got something to sell for him. Like he’ll never be able to work so he’ll need something to help him. I don’t want Koomarri looking after him!
Jake, 67, moved to the Narrabundah Longstay Park in 2001 just after the Park had been transferred by the ACT Government to Koomarri. He rented one of the last vacant sites in 2003 and built his own two bedroom cottage. Jake’s move to the Park is the current chapter in an energetic life. After nursing his wife through a protracted battle with cancer, a decision that forced him to leave his full time employment, Jake sold the family property and moved into the Park to begin again.

In 2003 he took on the job of Site Manager for Koomarri. When he first took the job, he had some trouble with some transient residents, But when you’re Dutch you’re a bit stubborn. You think, “Ahh, no, you will go before I do”, and they did, and over time, it became a really nice place.

We love the Park – ten minutes from Woden, five minutes from Manuka. It’s $70 a week and you know what the rents are like out there. It’s paradise, ... if we look after it.

People were devastated when they received the eviction letters. Something like that takes the foundations out of people’s lives. There are certain things you would like to take for granted, and the roof over your head that you’ve paid for or built is one of them. For a lot of people all they would have been left with would have been a pile of building materials.

Jake recalls his anger when he received his eviction notice. I’m too old to be told what I can or cannot do for no apparent reason. I would use any means to stave off eviction. It was not for somebody outside to tell us to move on, or ‘You can’t live here any more’. I was looking at the principle of the thing and I thought, ‘well if you are going to do this, where’s my compensation for what I have to give up and where I’m going to re-establish myself?’ I said to people, ‘it can’t happen, I’ve seen that film, The Castle’, but you have to move heaven and earth so you can stay, you can’t just sit and wait. After you get the resolve then you find a way. Bribe the bloke if you have to, approach your mates with a quid, see if you can raise a million between you ... It’s the principle of the thing that got me very angry.

There are very few things I’m attached to. I survived the Second World War. If you have your health, you have a beautiful partner, good friends and a bottle of wine at the end of the day, then that’s sufficient. It was the principle of the evictions that really got me angry, not so much losing my house. And where is the government going to re-house 102 people? You hope that there will be enough good people left in the community to get behind you, sign a petition and say ‘Yeah, they can’t do this to you’.
Tamara lives in her pale blue cottage on the other side of the world from her native Holland. The close-knit community of the Park is reminiscent of the densely populated cities in her homeland where “you knew who was who”.

I came here New Year’s Eve in 1996. I was traveling around Australia after I’d finished my studies back in Holland. I met a man in Bateman’s Bay when I was on the way to Canberra and I stayed with him here in the Park. We rode our bikes to Cairns. At the end of the year I had to go back to Holland, but by then we’d formed a relationship. I went back to Holland in September 1997 but I just wasn’t able to get settled over there, so I came back and eventually I managed to get a permanent visa.

I’d trained as a music therapist back in Holland so I started work in aged care and started doing a nursing course. At that time our house in the Park was fairly pokey, we were always going somewhere and we used to call it Base Camp, and that’s what it was. Then my partner got sick with cancer and died in 2003. I managed to finish my course in spite of that and got a job at Calvary nearly two years ago. When Geoff died, I was happy to stay on by myself and the central location meant I could ride my bike or walk to work at Red Hill. It was the ideal location, plus at the time my income was really low and this was the way I could live.

Then I met Jake, and we’re still together now. We’re together in my house and I’ve renovated it, putting the finishing touches to it. I really like it here … At the beginning it was like I was on holidays all the time.
For 71 year old Jim, his home in Symonston epitomizes the achievement most Australians strive for. He has purchased, extended and renovated his original dwelling to become a comfortable home with an attractive garden; a place where his children and grandchildren can stay when they visit from Queensland. He is close to shops and health care facilities, and he lives among the friends who make up his community. Jim owns his own home, is in debt to no-one and his site rent is paid up well in advance. However, the difference between Jim and the majority of other Canberra residents is that last year he received an eviction order instructing him to abandon his home, receiving no compensation. Why? Because Jim’s home is not in the suburbs; it is a remodeled caravan cottage situated in the Narrabundah Longstay Park.

Jim recalls meeting construction workers on the New Parliament House site through his membership of the Canberra Golf Club. They were nice people, and they lived in the Park here so I decided to join them. Recovering from a marriage break up, the Park gave Jim the opportunity to start again by providing affordable housing, ensuring his privacy and financial independence. He also experienced the support of good friends who offered him conversation when he needed it, respect for his privacy, and community work making gardens for the Currong Flats and feeding the homeless. His neighbours helped build the extensions to his home.

Originally from Stranraer on the west coast of Scotland, Jim’s home has many reminders of his origins, with a fine topiary hedge at the entry gate and a selection of 18th and 19th century prints showing scenes of Scottish life. His pride in his home and the community he lives in is demonstrated by the leadership he shows in mowing the communal grass areas and clearing away the rubbish and fallen trees that the Park owners had failed to attend to.

Jim and many Park residents question where the justice is in evicting people who are doing all in their power to remain active members of their own and the wider Canberra community; people who have made choices to remain financially independent and debt free in an era when we are encouraged to live beyond our means.
Retired pensioner, Margaret, has created a nature lover’s sanctuary in her home and garden at the Park. Tall eucalypts fringe the garden and a system of small ponds in the fernery creates a tranquil entrance to the house with the sound of running water.

It’s seventeen years now I’ve been in the Park. I had a house in Waramanga and after the divorce I bought a smaller place in Weston. The children left home and I found on my own I couldn’t manage the mortgage. I saw this advertised – it was the manager’s house – so I came to look. This is the longest I’ve stayed anywhere. I love it here.

Over the years of her occupancy, Margaret has made many improvements and revels in her ability to stay independent as she grows older. I’ve replaced the fireplace with a slow combustion fireplace, had the roof re-sealed, had the gutters replaced, put up a garden shed, had edges put on the garden to stop the water flowing everywhere. I put in new vertical blinds, added the fish to the fishpond, and overhead water and mesh for the fernery. Handy Help have been very good putting things up when I can’t reach myself.

I felt I made the right decision when I moved here; we’re not imposing on the housing system. I’ve had hip replacements and I get community services to come in – I get home help. I don’t want to live in a flat; I couldn’t live in a small space. I like a bit of garden to look at – its easy care now, all the hard work is done. I’ve got daffodils and jonquils in the garden that come up every year. The azalea plants along the wall look magnificent when they flower.

I’ve read all the aged care books and they encourage people to stay in their own homes and manage on their own. We’re around young people here. The little kids that go off to school, they ride their bikes, say ‘Hello how’re you going?’, and if my daughter comes over with her two sons, they show off what tricks they can do on the bike. The 10 year olds like to show off a bit. It’s a bit of an extended family.

Margaret is concerned that a new owner of the Park might cut down the old eucalypts that form a habitat for the rich bird and animal life of the Park. For her, the proximity to such natural assets and her independence are invaluable.

If our homes are bulldozed to the ground what are we supposed to do - walk away without any tears?
Like Living in the Seventies

Paul and Katrina

Paul and Katrina moved into the Park in October 2003. Before then, they were living with Paul’s father, paying rent. Paul’s father gave $50,000 to all the kids to give them a boost when he sold his house.

We looked around and with our two wages we still couldn’t find anywhere to live. There was nothing available at that price in the open market. We saw Jake and this block was empty which was pretty unusual for this place, so we got a builder and we told him we had a $50,000 limit – build to that and then stop. So that’s what we did. He was pretty generous really.

It’s like living in the seventies. I’ve got a daughter from a previous marriage and she can come over and she runs around the place and everyone keeps an eye on them. It’s like having 100 grandparents, uncles and aunts keeping an eye on the place.

The owners haven’t really taken care of the Park. We’ve seen the roads deteriorate and the residents have made the repairs to the showers and amenities block. That maintenance is really the owner’s responsibility, not the resident’s job.

Katrina and Paul have been wondering whether to proceed with finishing the work on their home interior, but they are reluctant to continue until there is a definite announcement about the fate of the Park. We’ve had our fish tanks sitting around for three months waiting to go up on the wall, not knowing if we would have to leave.

The couple would like to know the fate of the Park so they can shed the sense of being trapped in a state of suspended animation. They want to make the most of the Park’s attractive recreation areas that are paid for in their site fees. We’d like to see a children’s park and barbecues so we can have our friends over and there’s somewhere nice for the kids to play.
At the Narrabundah Longstay Park, Audrey has found a neighbourhood where she can own her own home without being slave to a mortgage at an age when most people are considering retirement. Her house is a tranquil haven where she can have her children and grandchildren to visit, and where she can continue to make creative improvements to her home.

A Canberra resident for forty years, Audrey arrived in Australia in 1966 from England with her husband who took up an appointment in the police force. Their first home was the migrant hostel in what is now Ainslie Village.

We lived in the migrant hostel for two years and that was good too, because I really like communities. I've still got friends today, forty years on, from the hostel days. There were lots of interesting young people there. We brought three children with us, all under school age and we lived in a house there with two bedrooms and a big living room.

Audrey came to the Narrabundah Longstay Park after she and her husband split up.

It was one of those unfortunate things. My husband and I decided to agree to disagree – we were better living apart. I'd been back nursing for about twenty years, so I was able to buy and sell a place down the coast, and to give my kids money. I really didn't have enough money to do anything other than buy a place here – but I've done heaps to it. Look at the tiles on the kitchen floor. I've added another room and a beautiful bathroom.

What I like about it is you don’t have to talk to anyone if you don’t feel like it, but there are people around all the time. In the morning Glennys comes round to check out her house, we sit out and have coffee. David comes over and we'll have coffee. Where else could you live on your own and do that? How could you do that in a flat?

My son lives down the road. He got divorced and for him the Park is his new start. He’s put in a little pool and we did a barbecue the other night, me and his neighbour. It’s made all the difference for him to be able to have his own place to start again.

What the Park needs is someone who cares about the place enough to put money into the shared grounds and by improving the look of these areas that will encourage the residents to improve the appearance of their homes. It will keep the Park looking good.

I want to meet a seventy year old that I can travel round Australia with. I should be retired but I'm just so fit. What would I do every day not working? And I still want to do more to this place.
I’ve Gradually Made a Home For Myself

David

I came here, saw this site, saw the view, talked to both sets of neighbours, and I was in here within the week. Eight years I’ve been here. I started with just the caravan site and gradually just built up annexes, sheds and carport. I started off with a canvas annex and then good quality vinyl annex, then got this good solid one. I gradually extended it and made a home for myself. I’m very lucky; I work in the caravan industry casual part time. I’ve got contacts who will tell me there’s an annex to pull down and people say ‘If you’re prepared to pull the annex down and get the caravan ready to go you can have the annex.’ I’ve got three old cars. I’ve designed the place so I can squeeze one car round the back, so the cars are inside the yard, not in people’s faces, and also protected from the sun.

David’s family life after his marriage separation is assisted by the safe community of the Park. I’ve got the girls living here full-time now, the last three or four months. I’ve got the ex-wife living in the park up the road. The kids have always liked the Park because they can ride their bikes around, they’ve got their friends. The eldest child goes to Telopea Park and the youngest goes to Red Hill.

What I really like about it is the community, the location; I’ve got that lovely view out the front. It’s just an open space, an open free feeling. A lot of caravan parks are so closed and cramped in together. You’re too close to people you don’t like. It’s just a really nice place to live … For a caravan park, these sites are large. That’s what I think I like about it most. I couldn’t have a flat. If I have a flat I can’t have the dog or the cars. I’d like a house with more room, but a flat? No chance!

Like the majority of residents, David is proud of his home, proud of the Park community and proud of the campaign they have conducted in their efforts to save the Park from destruction. He acknowledges that the struggle is not over yet, but he’s pleased to have offered hope to other people in a similar plight across the country. Apparently we made a big stir throughout Australia with people using our example to make a case to fight a campaign to resist evictions. Let’s hope our fight is successful here.
Ron and Kaylene came to the Narrabundah Longstay Park from South Australia sixteen years ago. They own two sites, one for their daughter and one for their own home. They believe they have found the perfect place to live and retire in. Ron and I are sitting in the snug kitchen, his daughter working on the computer in the lounge room, as he tells his family’s story.

We’ve been here about fourteen years. The security here is very good ... and the house is compact – there’s not a great deal of maintenance on a unit like this. We own what we’ve got and it’s a nice feeling. I’ve never been interested in putting a noose around my neck as far as debt goes. You never know what’s around the corner. Relatives get sick, over in South Australia, and if they get sick over there we have to go back for a certain period of time. But you can see, it’s quite comfortable here.

When we moved this unit in here it was raining, and it’s fairly long, and I’m trying to back it in, and it’s sinking on the block. And there’s people coming from everywhere with shovels and the chap next door had a pile of gravel, and everyone’s there with shovels throwing gravel under the wheels, and helping me level it up. That was our first initiation to the Park and we thought, ‘Wow! We like this place.’ We’ve helped a lot of people, a lot of people have helped us.

Living in a place connected to the land is important for many residents at the Park, and Ron and Kaylene are no exception. Ron points out that despite the size and sophistication of new houses in the suburbs, the home life there is not necessarily better.

Today the houses seem to be getting bigger on the block, and there’s no back yard, and that was the dream ... Now kids have got nowhere to play they’re stuck inside playing the X Box, or on the computer or watching television, and what they’re saying on the radio is a lot of kids aren’t getting the feel of the birds and the plants and the grass and whatever’s outside. Here, we’ve got two little blue wrens that fly around. You’ll hear them flying around and whistling. I open the window up and there’s a big rose bush and when it comes out in flower it brings all the birds. There are parrots ... and you sit here with the camera and go click. And the parrots are right there! That’s one of the reasons why we do really like it here, because we come from South Australia off a farm and this is like a rural setting in the city.

There’s a really good cross section of people, people do a lot of different things ... One of the things I said to the Manager for Koomarri was, ‘Why the Dickens are you selling it? You’ve got a good lot of people here.’
I was born and reared in Harden, one of six children. My two sisters were trainee nurses at Canberra hospital and I came over first in 1966. I had a long marriage but finally decided that a parting of the ways had come. I was driving through the Park and this place was for sale, three years ago. There were a few places for sale. I questioned Koomarri and they said nothing about the place being in danger of being sold. I wanted somewhere where I knew I was going to settle. I’m close to my daughter and my work at Manuka childcare centre. I’ve had to get back to full-time work. It’s very exhausting. I work with the Nursery Group and the toddlers. They’re a beautiful lot of children. Behaviour of children has changed a lot over the years. I don’t think people are as strict as they were. They encourage children to have more say – I don’t think that it works all the time.

I’m turning 60 this year so the prospect of retiring here seems good. It’s very safe here. You know that the neighbours are there for you but they’re not on your doorstep every 5 minutes. There’s a cross section of young and old; it’s a very good place to be.

If the Park sale went through, I’d have to sell the place to someone who could afford to relocate it. I wouldn’t have any choice. I’d have to live with someone or look at ACT Housing. That would be the only thing I could do. When I parted with my husband, I had to live with my children for a while, then I found a place at Fisher. I didn’t get any rental discount. It was very, very hard. Because I had an asset that I couldn’t access, ACT Housing laughed at me. They said that things would be different if I had children, but because I was a single woman on my own they wouldn’t listen to me.

I like the convenience of getting around in Canberra. I wouldn’t live anywhere else. I’ve got three out of four children living in Canberra. We’re all happy here. The kids are very happy about my move here. There’s easy access to all of them, and they said ‘fight as hard as you can to stay there’. We only have security until February 2008, that’s the only doubt in my mind concerning my life in the Park.
Twenty eight years ago, when Des and Liz first came to Canberra, Des worked at the saw mill in Queanbeyan. At that time, they lived in a tent out at the Cotter Reserve with six children. After some years travelling interstate for work, they returned to Canberra and moved into the Narrabundah Longstay Park.

For Des and Liz, the Park is the home they have built and extended over the last nineteen years and where four of their eleven children grew up. It is also the place most closely associated with their son who was killed in a car accident thirteen years ago. The boy’s death benefit payment enabled Des and Liz to extend their house to create more space for the family.

When they moved into the Park, Des and Liz and four of their children lived in a caravan with a vinyl annex. The kids slept in two sets of double bunks in the annex. There are now 38 grandchildren, and various children and grandchildren come to the Park to spend every Christmas Holidays with them. The kids love the place, there’s lots of space for them to run around safely.

Asked about how they and other residents feel about the threatened evictions from the Park, Liz said: The people in the park are saying that they want to stay until they’re physically removed. I can’t understand why long term residents have to leave the quiet and privacy they value about the park. I don’t believe these things can be replaced by government housing.

Liz’s reasons for staying as long as she can are quite simple. As she says, the Park is a really great place to live, I just love it here.
We came to the Park two years ago. We were renting in Queanbeyan, where we both work. We wanted to buy here when rental prices escalated out of reach. We couldn’t get a home loan and couldn’t get out of the rental roundabout. We couldn’t afford private rental so this came up and seemed the obvious choice. We’ve both been through divorces, we both got the raw end of the pineapple so to speak. There’s got to be somewhere to put people like us. There are a lot of people like us. Some are in government housing paying less rent. The housing co-op worked well for us, then our income went up we were making too much money with our combined incomes putting us over the threshold.

We’re not the only ones. Everyone at work can’t afford private rent – it’s driving them mad too. Ordinary working class people can’t afford rent in the ACT. We don’t want to go to the government. In four or five years we’ll have this paid off and then we can retire here. Another ten years and we’ll be out of the work force and then how would we afford rent?

Jim and Lyn are quick to point out that, now they know the Park community, they would stay on even if they were offered the chance to own a house in the suburbs. If we had a choice, we’d actually choose to stay here. It’s a great community here, people from all walks of life, employed, unemployed, elderly, there’s no class distinction, everyone talks to each other. There’s no competition. Everyone keeps an eye out for each other. We keep an eye out on the bloke across the road, if we don’t see his curtains move we start to panic.

Like many other residents, Jim and Lyn are feeling the strain of the protracted negotiations about the Park’s future and their fear of homelessness. Jim concludes, The Park could be managed by a caretaker and a committee of residents. The way I think about it is, instead of closing places down, they should be expanding places like this!
Myavilly and Abby

There’s a Good Bunch of People Here

Myavilly, her partner Ian, and her niece Abby, live in a small house that looks like a rural cottage hidden behind a well-tended garden and the tangled greenery of established trees. She describes their arrival at the Park. “We moved here four and a half years ago from Tamworth. I wanted a new start. When we first moved in we were looking after the property for my uncle. He got sick and was living in Sydney. This is a demountable mobile home and the Park is a nice place to be a permanent resident. I work at Duntroon military college, ten minutes from everything and it’s seven minutes from my work to here. My niece Abby moved in to see if she could find a better school up here. Her parents are in Bateman’s Bay.

We have kept to ourselves. Ian works in the Air Force in Melbourne, I’m at work all day. But we did our Good Samaritan act last night and went around with all our Christmas presents for everyone. Abby wrapped all the presents up and we delivered them last night. We couldn’t do much for the fight for the Park because we work long hours, so this was a way of saying thank you to everyone for the efforts they had made. We know a fair few people, we know our neighbours – Lawrence, Judy. It’s like a family. If we were to go away there is always someone to watch the house. It’s very quiet, there are birds, and we’ve got wildlife jumping through the Park. We’re isolated, yet centralized – it’s the best place to live.

Myavilly talks about the ups and downs of events in the Park over the past few years. “Four years ago it was a no-go zone for the police. If there was a crisis, no-one would come in here. Now it’s very much like the bush, very much like Braidwood. It’s that quiet here that I don’t need to go anywhere. I can come home and have a spa, sit outside … I can come home and just find peace. Because we live so close together people are really respectful and stay quiet. It’s a lovely place to walk at any time of the day and night; Abby and I walk almost every night between seven and nine o’clock. It’s nice not to have to stop and turn around and wonder who’s following you. There’s a stunning view of Black Mountain Tower. Abby’s in her glory, she’s got every pet under the sun here. We’ve got tanks of these gold fish and sucker fish. They’re a very peaceful thing to sit and watch at night.

When asked if they could move their house should the evictions go ahead, they were not hopeful. “The price of land and to move the house would be as much as building a new house. We’ve got gorgeous trees here – it would be devastating to lose them. For a lot of people this is all they have. It’s all we have at the moment, but we’re more likely to buy something else. For others every cent they’ve got has gone into their places.”
Doreen is a long-term Park resident and loves the security the community offers her as a widow. I've lived in the Park for sixteen years. We moved here because my husband knew he had cancer and he wanted somewhere safe for me to be. This place came up and we bought it, and he only lived about five years. Mum and Dad came out here after the funeral and Dad said, ‘Doreen, you can’t stay here’ and Len was next door and he said ‘She’s safer here than anywhere else mate, - if anything goes wrong and she opens her mouth then the whole street knows’ … You didn’t even have to lock your door.

At seventy-five, Doreen’s life story reads like an Australian legend. She grew up in Nangus, fourteen miles out of Gundagai, one of nine children, with a father who was an itinerant rural labourer, working as a rabbiter and fencer and travelling down to Murrumbateman to be a wool-roller when the shearing was on. Her extended family included Uncle Jim Smart and his five girls who played fiddles and piano in the Nangus dance band. Uncle Jim would clean out his truck and take a load of us to the dance out at Jugiong. Doreen has also traveled the country, working in the Wagga Egg Canning Factory, then Romano’s pub, a season in the fruit canning factory, over to Goulburn to work with the gravel trucks, to Queanbeyan hospital, managing a hotel, then finally to a job in the abattoir. Buying the van was a reward for a hard working life and seemed like a prudent investment for her future. The $16,000 purchase price ensured that Doreen has been able to live debt-free in her retirement as a widow.

The uncertain future of the Park is a major frustration for Doreen. I’m sick of sitting around not being able to do anything. I want to paint the outside of this place. I want to finish the outside with gravel ‘cos there’s a dip that fills up with water from across the road … I’ve got sick and so’s a lot of the other people. I think it’s stress, not knowing what’s going on.

Doreen describes the feeling of safety in the Park. I like it here. I feel so secure. If I don’t hang my bird-feeder out, Val comes across to see I’m alright. I keep an eye on Jim’s curtains. As I am leaving, Doreen shows me the case moth she’s observing, a resident of the geranium bush in her front garden. Hopefully both of them will be able to stay put and not have bulldozers flatten the neighbourhood.
Emery’s life represents a bridge between the old world of traditional, pre-revolution Hungary, and Canberra, the relatively new capital of Australia. Born in 1943 in what is now Slovenia, in a village called Gornji Lakos, Emery fled the country at the age of eighteen, escaping across the Austrian border with two of his friends. For a year he lived in Vienna while he contacted his sister to act as sponsor for his immigration to Australia in 1963. Emery found a flat in Marrickville, married, and then bought a house in North Sydney.

Extreme poverty is Emery’s strongest memory from his early life on the village. He was one of a family of eleven. There was nothing to do but live in the village and work on the farm. My mother and father had never been anywhere else. My mother made six round bread loaves every week – we had cows, pigs and chooks, and we were self-sufficient except for coffee, salt and sugar and we sold our eggs to have money to buy them. We would sell a calf or a horse every year to pay the taxes or to make income for anything else that was needed. My mother would feed the pigs then kill them for winter, smoking them over the indoor fire. She would milk the cow and pour each of the children a cup of milk to drink with the new bread. All the children were born in the home; father had to go to the next village to pick up the midwife in the cart for each one. Mother used to paint the house with white wash and the bottom with yellow clay to stop the damp. It was thatched. There was a well in the centre of the yard. There was a smoke house, a big walnut tree, and a blacksmith’s workshop built by my brother.

Emery’s father was a fine singer and Emery himself learned many songs by ear - without reading written music. There were dances in the village and in the village next to his home. The Hungarian cultural activities in Canberra, especially the dancing that his two daughters took part in, were a positive feature of family life here, maintaining a cultural connection with the homeland.

Emery has lived in the Park on his own since March 1996; his dog is the same age and moved in with him. Three years ago he fell from scaffolding and could not work any more, but he enjoys his good neighbours and the strong community spirit of the Park. For a while he moved to a house in Kikoira, in rural NSW, but he found it was too quiet, with 75 kilometers to drive to the nearest shops, so he came back home.

Twenty-three years ago, Emery went back to visit his family in Gornji Lakos. He recalls having to report to the village police station to explain his escape and return. No-one was angry. Instead the officer made a report that stated, ‘He ran away for a better life’.
Debbie explains the unique support of the Park residents which enables her to carry on her work for many social justice causes in Canberra.

I lived at the coast and moved up to Canberra to make a new start. I fell in love with the place when I first moved in here with a friend – such a diverse group of people, but they all seemed to share a common bond and that was our community here. I've lived in communes and all sorts of places and I've never felt such a strong common bond in a place.

There are so many strong, positive things about living in a Park like this. I was on the emergency housing list because I got fearful about being able to stay here long term. The Government offered me a place but I knocked it back because I felt I was walking into a methadone clinic. The second house they offered me was in a massive block of flats, but I had no space. I had people on top of me, near me. I couldn’t do that sort of confinement. That fear of going to an unknown block where I don’t have my garden to move around in. All of this community is made up of wildly different people, but because we have our own space we manage to accept people’s differences.

Debbie was outraged at the intention of the Park’s new owner to evict all of the residents without offering compensation for their homes that would be demolished. This uncaring disregard contrasts violently with the unaltering positive support Debbie has experienced as a resident. This community stood by me and praised me and supported me over the last twenty-six months. This is the only place I've been loved back to life. It’s given me the opportunity to live life.
I'm from Somerset, born in Clevedon on the Bristol Channel. When we were children, my mother and father applied to come out here. The first time there were only two children and they were told that the family wasn’t big enough to be accepted. When we had the other three, Dad tried again, ‘Too many’ they said. So when we’d all grown up, Mum and Dad decided that they’d always wanted to come to Australia so they bought a house down at Tomakin. Dad worked with the local MP down there and he got the local mail delivered to all the houses there rather than everyone having to go to Mogo to collect the post. He and the local MP argued with the NSW local governments to get tarmac roads in there – Dad was an engineer. It had always been his wish to come to Australia from when he was a boy.

Dad’s family lived in London and Dad had a stepfather who used to treat him very rough. He was doing a bread round at five o’clock in the morning, right from the time he was twelve. If he put a foot wrong they had a rain-water bucket at the back of the house and he was stood in there, whether it was iced up or not. He didn’t enjoy that so when he was fourteen he ran away and joined the army and went to India. The Colonel there found out his age and said ‘you’re too young!’ He discovered that Dad could handle horses and dogs, so he said, ‘What we’ll do is I’ll keep you in the army, but all you can do is to look after the horses and the hounds.’ The Colonel looked after him the whole time. That was where he met mother because mother was the children’s nurse to Colonel Wixton’s family and they met in India.

We’ve had our ups and downs in the Park. We came here four years ago. We bought a block of land in Yass to build on, but we’ve had a lot of trouble with the council over there. Now it’s in the hands of the developer and they’ve got it to lock up stage, and they tell us its another three months before we can move in. But we’ve been very happy here at the Park, and will continue living here until I retire in five years time. The Park is a good place to live, it’s very quiet. The people who have caused the problems have moved out. It’s good for the children. I live here with my mother in law and my wife and son.

Last Christmas the policeman stopped at the gate and wished me a Merry Christmas. I said ‘You’ve got a problem in the Park?’ He said ‘No Lawrence, you see, I didn’t know if the Park was still here. Last year we were in and out, but this time I thought, “I’m back on the cars so I thought I’d just pop round and see if it was all still here because we haven’t had a call.”’
There's the Wide Open Spaces in Front of Us

Alan and Andrina

The rural location of the Narrabundah Longstay Park reminds Alan of his childhood in Gippsland, Victoria.

I went to school in Gippsland, worked on my father's dairy farm. My mother and father were old – I'm the youngest out of nine kids. My brothers and sisters all left home. We lived in Stratford and that's where I started playing cricket and AFL – I played both for twenty years. After leaving Stratford, we moved to Doncaster. The house cost $9,000! Who knows what it would be worth now. Then we moved to Wollongong in NSW where I worked on the wicket at the local cricket pitch and oval. That job stood me in good stead for the weekly cricket match. I was so familiar with that patch of grass, I'd been there all week, and it was like walking out into the back yard. After Wollongong we went to Cootamundra and then got work here in Canberra. I did four months in Parks and Gardens over the summer as a temporary gardener then got put off. After that I got a job as a gardener at the RAAF Air Base and had three years there. My wife went there twelve months after I did to work as a cleaner. We met all sorts of people - the Queen, Dianna, Charles and so on.

I wanted to work a bit closer to home in Belconnen, so I worked as a gardener in the Research School of Earth Sciences for 11 years. My wife was a tea lady in the same place until we were both made redundant 5 years ago.

We're both in the veteran's athletic team. I've always been interested in Australian Rules football, and my wife started hammer throwing. She won a silver medal in 1989 in Eugene, Oregon and she'd only been competing for three months. We went over to Buffalo in 1995 and both of us ran the marathon – it was fantastic! We had a train trip from Syracuse to San Francisco for two weeks, stopping off at Chicago and Denver, then we went back to Eugene to see people we'd met through connections with the competition.

It's nice and quiet around here. I like looking after the garden. I ride my push-bike to Manuka and I've ridden down to Chisholm. In winter, the novelty of being here was so distracting we never took any notice of it, even though it was so cold that there was frost on the inside of the windows. It's like being way out in the country somewhere.
I came to Canberra twenty years ago when Parliament House was a dust bowl; they’d just cleared the hill for the building. I heard about the Park through a friend who lived here. As soon as I walked in here, I saw the peacocks walking around and I was really impressed. I’m a motor-homer and I liked the idea of a base. The house looks solid because I wanted something that was set up off the ground and maintenance free. I’d come close to the fires and I didn’t want something that was going to burn. So I would like to stay here until the day I die. I call it Jurassic Park! There are possums and parrots.

I’m not a tourist, I’m a traveler. I don’t like the coast, I prefer the inland, country towns. Bush people haven’t changed. I don’t like the traffic at the coast – other people can have that! I’m not a photography person, it’s all in the process of seeing things as you travel; nice quiet sunsets, see what’s growing in the paddocks, listening to the birds.

I’m still very much a Country and Western music fan. I wouldn’t buy American music at all any more. I’ve gone way over to Australian Country and Western music, and the talent is great. No favorites. I have been up to Tamworth, thoroughly enjoyed that, I’d like to go again. I’d like to go round some of the musters when I retire. For me retiring is throwing away the calendar and the watch.

If you go out to places like West Wyalong, you’ll see someone just leaning against the wall, foot back against the wall, waiting for the bank to open. You never see city people do that. They’ll be pacing around with a cigarette or something, they’re busy, busy, busy, aren’t they? Ah, you see the Ute with the dogs in the back, all country things that you relate to, good stuff.

The best thing about being in the Park is that I can be as quiet as I like on my own and I can walk out the gate and I’ve got company – non intrusive company, a G’day at the letterbox, stop and talk if you want to. I work with girls who won’t let their kids play in the street in the suburbs. Well I’m sorry, but the kids have an absolute ball here with their friends riding round on bikes as it should be. Nice and relaxed, plenty of fresh air.

I went through a very stressful time with the Park being sold. What I would like to see now is our right to live here going to legislation. It’s a good life out here, and people have their independence. We’ve got ‘Go-fers’ rumbling around here and people are out and active that normally would be sitting in a little flat on their own.
Peter and his wife Desi moved to the Park five years ago. Their path to the Park was influenced by challenging events beginning with failure of their business to withstand the effects of the 17% interest rates of the late 1980s. Peter and Desi lost their home as well as their business and drove away from their venture with only a kombi van.

For years afterwards when we tried to investigate the possibility of buying a home we came up against a brick wall. There was a debt that was supposed to be fixed up at the time we sold, but it had built up and was sitting on our credit reference. Anyway, we eventually cleared that up and a kind friend lent us the money (which we’ve re-paid) to buy here.

We’ve got a son with cerebral palsy. When he got to about nineteen, we thought it was time he moved forward. We wouldn’t always be around to look after him so it was time he tried to live on his own. We contacted TAS Housing who has a service placing residents with disabilities in group houses, and then you take the services with you when you move on to more self-sufficient accommodation. That group house is near the Narrabundah shops and we needed to move a bit closer to support him if he needed it. Desi had been driving from Monash where we were living at the time and she used to come past here and she saw the cottage from the road. The verandah and ramp were appealing. It meant that Tyler could come and visit.

It’s really like a country lifestyle. The location is absolutely perfect. We moved here in August 2004. Desi picked this place from the street, she liked the cottage appearance.

In November 2005, Peter’s wife died of lung cancer. The house means a lot to Peter as it is an embodiment of his wife’s taste and reflects her personality in many ways, especially in the choice of location and the rural view. This place is full of her, infused with her personality. You know, the cupboard in the corner that you don’t like but she did and you’re not going to get rid of it. If you move, leave the Park, you keep a percentage of the person, but you don’t get the infusion.
The eviction crisis at the Narrabundah Longstay Park in 2006 has its roots in the housing shortages that have plagued Canberra since the Federal Capital Territory was established in January 1911. While Canberra as a city has appeared to become increasingly sophisticated in the ensuing 96 years, archival records reveal a consistent pattern of bureaucratic inability to meet the housing requirements of the developing National Capital. People were urged to move to the new Capital, but there was inadequate housing and minimal infrastructure and social facilities to support the new arrivals. While mechanisms existed for relocating public servants, there were none to ensure the provision of adequate accommodation for newcomers from other socio-economic groups. An ongoing conflict persisted right up to the construction of new Parliament House over the Commonwealth Government’s refusal to build accommodation for construction workers and other workers moving to the city to sustain the public servant settlement. The Federal Capital Advisory Committee tried to shift the responsibility for housing construction workers on to the construction authorities¹, “almost enforcing the creation of slums with its statement that it was ‘always opposed to the temporary which might become permanent’.”² This attitude towards housing shortages in Canberra is still evident in contemporary government attitudes towards the problem: successive governments have bemoaned the “sub-standard” appearance of housing such as the Causeway, lower-Narrabundah and the Narrabundah Longstay Park, but they have failed to offer affordable alternatives.

Significant numbers of construction workers first arrived in Canberra in 1912, building camps of tents for single men and shanties for families. Construction was driven by the priorities established by the Federal Capital Advisory Committee, meaning that workers built accommodation for senior public servants transferring from Melbourne before they had satisfactory accommodation of their own. Any Canberra resident today will feel great sympathy for those construction workers living under canvas, hessian bags and galvanized sheeting throughout the extremes of the Canberra seasons.³ As for residents not employed by government, their requests for assistance with housing were met with indifference. They were left struggling to survive and provide for themselves the services needed by a developing community. This early ambiguity about entitlement to housing has had a profound effect on the character of society in Canberra. While the artificiality of the original public servant settlement has been challenged, especially since the advent of self-government, a tug of war remains between those who need affordable housing and successive Territory governments which have tried to get rid of what they see as uneconomic public housing obligations.

After the Second World War, like every other city and town in Australia, Canberra suffered acute housing shortages, scarcity of building materials, and long delays in starting, let alone completing, any kind of construction work. Residents who did not qualify for government-built housing often resorted to owner-building: “many building initially only the core of the house, with rooms to be added as finance allowed and birth of children dictated”.⁴ This need to resort to resourceful, but sometimes ramshackle, building methods is also a characteristic of the development of the Narrabundah Longstay Park, where people’s incomes often are insufficient to permit access to the private rental market, and the cost of building materials is prohibitive.

After the War, the Commonwealth Minister continued to control provision of housing for government employees to the detriment of other Canberra residents, announcing on 15 September 1947 that only one new house in ten would be allocated to people outside government employment.⁵ However, when the local baker threatened to ration bread supplies if this injustice persisted, in late 1948 the housing allocation to non-government employees was increased to one in eight. It seems that Canberra residents have always had to battle bureaucracy for their right to accommodation.

On 27 September 1972, in the Canberra Times, a short article appeared stating
Both the Department of the Interior and the National Capital Development Commission announced discussions about a low-cost, longstay camping area in Canberra on a smaller scale than the mobile home village then proposed for North Watson. As action was now definite, the Hall campers were warned to move quickly to avoid legal action. The “caravanners” had other ideas:

Mrs Anne Kreunen, who has lived with her husband and three miniature poodles in an 11 metre caravan in the camping area for 5½ months said yesterday that there were between four and six caravans that intended to remain.

She said there was no caravan park in Canberra which would accept them with the dogs. If she moved she would go to the area outside Parliament House.

No definite sites were proposed, but the announcement indicated that the Government was under pressure to consider new alternatives for solving ACT housing shortages. In February 1975, in response to a group of “caravanners living at a picnic and overnight camping area at Hall”, the Department of the Capital Territory

and the National Capital Development Commission indicated yesterday that favourable consideration would be given to establishing in Canberra a park for mobile homes... the concept is that couples and families can live in one area as long as they want, and when they want to move elsewhere they move both themselves and their homes.6

Finally, on 27 February 1975, it was stated that a park would be sited along Jerrabomberra Avenue near the drive-in theatre “in order to provide low-cost accommodation for caravanners”.9 The Member for Fraser, Ken Fry MP, announced that “the land in Narrabundah had been cleared and facilities could be installed at short notice”10 as construction programs gathered momentum in the ACT and more and more workers were finding affordable accommodation impossible to find. On 30 April 1975, the Canberra Times announced that 30 of the available 40 sites were occupied in the new Narrabundah Lane longstay park at a rental of $8.50 a week:

The Park in Narrabundah Lane has showers, lavatories and washing facilities. No power has been provided at the request of the caravanners, most of whom have their own generators.

Mrs Dianne Pisanni, former resident of the Hall Park and member of the interim caravan park management committee, said the park was “100 percent better than the old. At Hall we only had one toilet, for example, here we have several, and have hot showers”.11

The exultant mood did not last. By August 1975, Gerrit Kreunen, chairman of the Park’s residents committee, reported problems with lavatories, drainage and the lack of electricity and telephones.12 The toilets became unusable when the showers were in operation as the floor was flooded to a depth of 25 centimeters.

The history of the management of the Park reflects the deliberate decision of the original Federal Capital Advisory Committee13 to plan a city without adequate provision of housing for
construct an answer here...
residents formed an action group to lobby all members of the Legislative Assembly to defer the sale of the Park. By 13 April 1999, a petition had been organized:

We the undersigned tenants of the Longstay Caravan Park, Narrabundah Lane, Symonston, call upon the Legislative Assembly to (1) ensure that the proposed sale of the Longstay Caravan Park be abandoned, and (2) irrespective of whether a sale takes place, ensure the implementation of guarantees of:

a. long term residential renewable tenure of a 20 year period, to include a sublease clause;
b. reasonable rental fixed at the current rate for the first 12 month period with further increments subject to the same constraints as specified under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997; and
c. in the case of any closing down of the Longstay Caravan Park, or enforced removal of any individual tenant, the payment of compensation equal to the current insured policy value held by the tenant or the insurable value of the dwelling be made.

An organization called the Symonston Village Community Housing Association\(^{17}\) was formed with the aim of ensuring that residents would have a say in the running of the Park, should the ACT Government hand over the lease to the Park residents and community housing be established. In the event of the Park’s sale by tender to a private buyer, the aim was to have the Association work in conjunction with the new owner to secure similar arrangements for resident participation in management of the Park. However, Brendan Smyth MLA, Minister for Urban Services, wrote to the Association advising that “ACT Housing has a statutory right to the Park as a result of a decision made prior to self-government and therefore it is not possible for a lease to be granted direct to the residents.”\(^{18}\) The residents decided that the Association should be wound up.

In March 1999, the proposed sale of the Park was challenged in the ACT Legislative Assembly, first by Kerry Tucker MLA for the Greens\(^{19}\), who spoke for the rights of the park residents as government tenants, and then by Bill Wood MLA, Shadow Minister for Urban Services. Both speakers questioned the need to sell the park, given that “the park returns something like $100,000 a year to the ACT Government. It seems to me that $100,000 is a pretty good return on capital.” Mr Wood also disputed Minister Smyth’s claim that the residents “are not public housing tenants. They own their own caravans or their vans”, replying that “every fortnight they front up to the manager, who sends the rent they pay straight through to the Government. They are government tenants ... and the Government has a responsibility to them, especially because of the sensitive issue of this being their home.”\(^{20}\)

In mid-1999, Ron Eskrigge, the caretaker of the Park, put forward a proposal to purchase the Park, but his offer of $700,000 was not accepted by the ACT Government. In fact, it appears that there was no attempt by the Government to consult with Mr Eskrigge. On 29 June 2000, the General Manager of Koomarri Association ACT Incorporated (described as “the leading service provider for people with a disability in Canberra and surrounding NSW Region”) wrote to inform the residents that Koomarri was taking over ownership of the Park. In what proved to be a far-sighted comment, resident Andy Beattie commented that “Koomarri was well intentioned, but that if it ran into trouble the long-term future of the Park could be in jeopardy.”

The Carnell Government “sold” the Park to Koomarri for no consideration. The Park residents claim that, from the time Koomarri took over management of the Park, nothing was done to make the improvements to roads and other communal facilities as was promised. Koomarri however have produced financial statements indicating that they did in fact spend a significant amount on maintenance and landscaping over the five years of their ownership of the Park, and that, at the time of the sale of the Park in 2006, “there was nearly $100,000 owing in overdue rent payments.”\(^{22}\) Residents claim that this debt was due to poor management, with Koomarri failing to collect rental arrears or to evict non-paying residents. Residents claim that the only major upgrade of the Park by Koomarri was conducted at the expense of residents and involved compulsory re-wiring of every dwelling on each site. However, Koomarri have produced receipts for payment to an electrical contractor to upgrade switch boards and meters. They also state that residents were only required to pay for electrical repairs necessary in their own vans. This upgrade occurred in 2005, just prior to the Park being placed on the market, leading one resident to suggest that this work was simply “detailing” the Park for its ultimate sale.

In the interviews conducted for the preparation of this book, many residents had stories to tell about the complete lack of warning about Koomarri’s sale...
of the Park. In several cases, residents who were contemplating buying a dwelling in the Park claim that they consulted with the Park Manager who advised them to go ahead with their purchase plans. They claim that this advice was given just weeks, and, in one case, only days, before the Park was sold on 28 April 2006. Koomarri strongly denies that any such advice was given to residents or prospective purchasers by the Park Manager or any other employee.

The purchaser of the Park was Dytin Pty Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Consolidated Builders Ltd, whose Managing Director, Joseph Zivko, was also a member of the ACT Property Council and the ACT Heritage Council. Eviction notices were issued on 9 May 2006 to all 102 sites on the same day that the sale of the Park was announced to the media.

The images contained in this book illustrate a vibrant community and a place that offers refuge to many who are financially disadvantaged. The Park is a community that should be supported as part of the Canberra way of life. How this community has fought for its survival since the eviction notices arrived is told in The Campaign to Save the Park.

End Notes:

5. Ibid, p 37.
10. Ibid.
13. It became the Federal Capital Advisory Commission, then the National Capital Development Commission.
14. Telephone conversation, 16/2/07.
15. Letter from Rod Templar, Commissioner for Housing, ACT Housing and Community Services Bureau, 1/5/94.
17. It was finally registered in July as the Narrabundah Longstay Community Housing Association Incorporated.
22. Letter to Elizabeth Whitelaw, Chair of Partners for Minter Ellison, 2006, from John Mackay, Chair, Koomarri Board of Directors.

CLAYTON UTZ

Sydney Melbourne Brisbane Perth Canberra Darwin

9 May 2006

Dear Sir/Madam

We act for Dytin Pty Ltd who has purchased from Koomarri its interest in the Narrabundah Long Stay Caravan Park with the date of transfer being 28 April 2006. An original letter from Koomarri's lawyers, Deacons, is attached which confirms this.

● ● ●

You currently have no ongoing occupancy agreement. You are required to vacate the Narrabundah Long Stay Caravan Park by Friday 18 August 2006. This gives you sufficient time to find an alternative site and remove your property. If you have not vacated the site by Friday 18 August 2006, we will take action to have your site vacated. This letter constitutes formal notice for you to vacate the site by Friday 18 August 2006.

● ● ●

Yours faithfully,

Alfonso de Rio, Partner

Extracts from the letter from Clayton Utz to Park Residence announcing their eviction.
Residents of the Narrabundah Longstay Park have, on several occasions over the life of the Park, faced the need to fight for their homes. The most recent and most serious threat to their security of tenure came at a time of severe housing shortages in Canberra and from an unexpected source.

Having complied with their agreement with the ACT Government to hold the Park for five years, Koomarri Association ACT Incorporated decided that the capital invested in the Park could be put to better uses. They released tender documentation for the sale of the Park that placed a heavy emphasis on the prime location of the land and the broadacre uses made of similar land nearby.

Park residents responded by lobbying the ACT Government to intervene in the proposed sale. Initially, however, the Government could see no reason to intervene because the Crown Lease over the site permitted the land to be used only for a caravan park and camping ground and because at that stage there was no application to vary the lease purpose.

The residents first heard about the sale of the Park through media reports and then from the eviction notices which appeared in their letterboxes on 9 May 2006. Some residents were required by their eviction notice to leave by 18 August 2006, others by 18 November 2006, and a very few by February 2007. The variation in eviction dates depended on the details of each resident’s occupancy agreement with Koomarri.

Many residents had previously established relationships with community organisations. When they received their eviction notices, they turned again to these organisations for assistance. Organisations such as Care Financial Counselling Service, Welfare Rights and Legal Centre, the Tenants Union, ACTCOSS, and ADACAS all received calls from distressed residents.

It quickly became apparent that there was a need for a coordinated approach to the issue that could harness both the energy and skills of residents and the expertise and contacts of the community organisations.

The first meeting of resident and community organisation representatives took place at the home of Mark and Pam Ashton in the Park. This meeting was the genesis of the Narrabundah Longstay
The Canberra Times

17 May 2006

The Canberra community will rightly be judged by the way the residents of the Narrabundah Long Stay Caravan Park are treated.

As someone pointed out at the residents’ meeting, the court of public opinion will severely condemn the ACT Government. Koomarri and the new owner if this community is broken up and over 200 people are left without their homes.

I have always admired the Stanhope Government for its stance on social justice and inclusion and I cannot believe that the Chief Minister and his Government can stand idly by and say the problem is out of their hands.

Koomarri has been rightly seen in Canberra as a wonderful model of care for vulnerable people.

It is a bit hollow for its board to justify their decision to sell off the park on the grounds that their core business is disabled people, when the sale is going to disable a whole community.

Affluent Canberra needs communities like the Narrabundah Longstay Caravan Park residents.

We can all learn from their sense of community, their willingness to share burdens and their understanding of decent human values. My experience as a young priest 40 years ago with the people of Causeway taught me a great deal about such people.

Is it too simplistic, before settlement takes place, for Koomarri to tell Mr Zivko to keep his money and for the ACT Government and Koomarri to work out a plan which will see the park residents treated with justice and with human dignity? Any lesser solution will demean the whole Canberra community.

Sir William Deane used to remind us that a society is best judged by the way it treats its most vulnerable members.

(Bishop) Pat Power, Braddon

15 May 2006

Well, that is another charity on my “I’m not giving to” list — Koomarri.

Obviously all it is seeing is the dollar sign.

As for the managing director of Consolidated Builders Limited, Josip Zivko (“Local developer bought caravan park”, May 13, p1), not being fully aware of the circumstances of some of the residents” – give me a break!

That caravan park has been there for as long as we have lived in Canberra (over 30 years), and most Canberrans “are aware of the circumstances of some of the residents”.

What sort of a businessman is Mr Zivko to not go fully into a property and its background before he makes a purchase? Did he think the Liberal

ACT Government gave Koomarri the land for $1 for fun?

As most readers of this column are aware, I am not a supporter of the Stanhope government, but I hope it, with the support of the Opposition, do all it can to block any variation to the existing lease of the park, give it back to the residents, and get someone (other than Koomarri, who doesn’t deserve it), to continue to run it as a caravan park. The inhabitants need it.

We drove past there a couple of weeks ago and commented upon how nice and tidy the park was with its little gardens, etc.

So what if they’ve sold and/or sublet – what harm is being done? Leave the Narrabundah long stay caravan park alone. Dollar signs aren’t everything.

Jane Chapman, Latham

13 May 2006

I do not understand what all the fuss is about. Koomarri, as I understand, fulfilled its part of the tenancy arrangements.

It is a not-for-profit organization and any money, whethergovernment-sourced or from sales of a caravan park, is spent on improving life outcomes for their clients.

I know, because I have received ongoing benefits for my child who has a meaningful job in a place where she is highly regarded and where the work conditions are administered in the same way as many normal workplaces.

Koomarri is a great organization and it is its right to sell the caravan park or any other assets and use the profit to continue ensuring equal work for people with disabilities.

The caravan park and its fate is the responsibility of the new owner, so please aim any flak in that direction.

Catriona Anni, Downer
Park Residents and Friends Action Group. The Action Group began the development of a strategy with three prongs: to gather community support; to ascertain and assert the legal rights of residents; and to gain security of tenure for residents.

The first step was to gather all the residents together to create a mandate for action. A large meeting of residents was arranged at the neighbouring Sundown Village Conference Centre. The meeting, which was attended by a majority of Park residents, gave residents an opportunity to share information, voice their concerns, have their questions answered and be informed about their rights.

The first Action Group meeting and the large meeting of residents were the forerunner to on-going meetings of three different kinds:

- regular Action Group meetings to develop strategies and allocate tasks to residents or to a supporting community organisation.

- regular meetings of residents to receive reports from the Action Group, arrange resident actions and provide input and ideas for Action Group meetings.

- occasional large meetings of residents with the supporting community organisations and government representatives to ensure that information flows were maintained and accurate.

From the earliest stages of the campaign, the Canberra media assisted residents by providing them with opportunities to tell their story and get their message out. The media also responded sensitively to requests by residents to be able to discuss issues privately with their advisers and to report only the outcomes of those discussions, as presented by nominated spokespersons.

At the first Action Group meeting, it was agreed that the media for the campaign would be undertaken by residents who would co-ordinate each day with the Action Group via ADACAS about the message to be delivered. Where the message was significant, or had altered in some way from the previous day, the Action Group assisted resident spokespersons by the production of a press release which was faxed to media outlets. This system worked well throughout the campaign.

Through the media, residents gave the people of Canberra a n
for addressing the issue.

**Thursday 18 May**
Through the media, residents dispute Koomarri’s claims about high rent arrears and expensive infrastructure upgrades in the Park.

In the first public event of the campaign, residents attend the offices of Clayton Utz to pay their rent and are turned away. They then march to the offices of Meyer Vandenberg Lawyers (Dytin’s registered office), where Partner, Ron Clapham takes their rent, provides receipts, and makes a list of residents’ concerns to pass on to CBL.

**Monday 22 May**
Residents meet with CBL to canvas alternatives to eviction.

**Thursday 25 May**
The Chief Minister begins negotiations with CBL and Koomarri.

Deb Foskey MLA writes to Canberra business leaders urging them to accept responsibility for the social impact of their business decisions.

**Friday 26 May**
Residents issue a media release calling on Koomarri to conform to its statement of ethics and on CBL to shoulder their social responsibilities as a significant Canberra business.

**Tuesday 30 May**
The Government offers to buy the Park from CBL for the insight into their lives in the Park, the community they had developed, and why it was important to them. They showed that the Park consisted, not of caravans, but of homes and gardens that had grown and developed over the years into valuable assets for their owners - provided they could retain them. Residents also effectively communicated their disbelief and pain at the possibility of a business deal between a developer and Canberra’s largest disability service provider leaving them homeless and without any significant assets. As with most Australians, the homes of park residents are their most important asset.

The early strategy of the campaign was to try to persuade Koomarri and CBL to reverse their deal so that Koomarri could continue to manage the Park or sell it instead to a longstay park operator or a community housing provider. The alternate plan was to persuade Koomarri to place the money it received for the sale into trust to buy back the Park.

Large numbers of residents, their friends and supporters wrote to *The Canberra Times* and to local members of the Legislative Assembly describing the situation, and calling on Koomarri, CBL and the ACT Government to find a solution that would save their homes and give them security. The Action Group as a whole, and key Action Group members and supporters, followed this up with a range of meetings and formal requests to the key players.

Once it became clear that the sale would not be reversed by the two parties to the sale, the commitment of the Government became the key to finding a long term sustainable solution.

Meetings by Action Group members...
with the Government emphasised that Park residents had been permitted by the Government and others for many years to place permanent dwellings on their sites; that many residents had invested their life savings in their non-transportable homes; and that many residents would be eligible for public housing if they were unable to remain in the Park. The Government accepted responsibility for brokering a solution to keep residents in their homes and entered into negotiations with Koomarri and CBL.

It soon became apparent that CBL was not willing to simply recoup its costs and relinquish the Park. CBL rejected a joint Government-Koomarri offer to repurchase the Park for the full sale price and made a counter offer. Koomarri then withdrew from the negotiation process, leaving open their offer to assist financially in delivering a solution for residents.

The Government continued in negotiations with CBL to achieve security of tenure for residents. The Chief Minister announced that the preferred option was to buy back the Park, however, as this had been rejected, they were prepared to consider a land swap or, if necessary, compulsory acquisition of the land on which the Park stood.

Residents produced an information sheet to give to the many Canberra people who wanted to know more about the issues affecting Park residents. The information sheet outlined the complicated history of the Park, the situation for residents and what others could do to help. It was distributed to residents’ workplaces, social and sporting groups, family and friends, and to members of the public.

Meanwhile, the uncertainty about their future was taking a serious toll on the health and well-being of residents. They were buoyed by the level of community and Government support but were unable to gauge whether this would be enough to carry the day with CBL. Many put in long hours attending meetings and actions, conducting stalls and open days, and offering emotional and practical support to other residents.

Residents continued writing letters to The Canberra Times. They also began calling the offices of CBL to discuss occupancy matters. Residents sought to impress upon Mr Zivko and his staff that, while ever CBL owned the Park, it was responsible for Park maintenance, rent collection and the uninterrupted supply of essential services. When issues relating to health and sanitation arose at the Park, these were reported to the appropriate Government authorities for investigation.

With negotiations between the Government and CBL continuing, the residents had no option but to wait and

**Wednesday 31 May**
Bishop Pat Power and the Council of Churches, through the media, urge CBL to accept the Government’s offer to buy back the Park. Bishop Power also speaks with Mr Zivko, in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade him to hand back the Park.

**Thursday 1 June**
Residents begin holding stalls outside the offices of CBL, providing the public with information about their situation and asking people to add their signatures to the petition to save the Park.

**Friday 2 June**
Koomarri assures residents, via a letter, of their intention to apply the money they derived from the sale of the Park to a solution to their situation.

Michelle Oakley of the Gem Cafe hands to Deb Foskey MLA early petitions in support of residents retaining their homes. Residents and supporters then march from the Legislative Assembly building through the Canberra Centre to the verge in front of the offices of CBL.
hope that a breakthrough would occur.

From a campaign point of view, it was difficult to know how to influence the negotiation process effectively. There needed to be sufficient pressure on the Government and CBL to ensure that both parties remained committed to resolving the issues, but not so much pressure that either decided to back away.

As the time for the first evictions approached, the Action Group made strong representations to Government about the need for some security for residents. The Government was asked to obtain from CBL at least an assurance that eviction notices would not be put into effect while negotiations continued. CBL refused to lose their bargaining power by giving any such guarantees. The Government asked residents to remain calm and positive. The community legal organisations made preparations to fight any evictions and residents were advised to remain in their homes and immediately contact a legal adviser if they received any indication that the evictions were to be implemented.

A second letter to shareholders of Consolidated Builders was drafted and made ready to be delivered by the hand of Park residents to shareholder’s homes when word came from the Government that a land swap agreement had been reached.

The Agreement provided for the ACT Government to release to CBL a block of land adjacent to the Park on a “like for like” basis. This meant that the new land would have to be of similar size, serviced with utilities, fenced, and have a land use permission similar to the Park. As the arrangements for the land swap were complicated, and necessarily would take many months to complete, CBL gave the ACT Government an 18-month sublease which authorised the Government to...
manage the Park in the interests of residents through to 11 February 2008. If the necessary planning approvals and other actions do not occur in the allowed 18 month period, the Park will revert to CBL.

At last residents had something to hold on to - security of tenure for 18 months, and potentially in the long-term.

This was a significant win for a disparate group of people brought together by the affordability, convenience and amenity of Park living. When the campaign began, few Canberra residents knew of the Park. By the time it ended, a great many Canberra residents knew of the Park and understood that it functioned as a community in which people supported and looked out for each other. This is what made the campaign possible and so effective. So many residents were prepared to work together to do whatever was asked of them. When one person became too stressed or exhausted to carry out a task, another would step forward to fill the breach.

The Park residents found in their midst some natural leaders and invested in them the authority to work with the community organisations and to decide what needed to be done. When the decisions were taken, the actions rolled out largely according to plan. Much energy was directed towards keeping residents and Action Group members informed of developments and activities undertaken on residents’ behalf. The community organisations contributed strategic direction and focus to the campaign and used their knowledge, contacts and influence with the media and Government for the benefit of residents. These elements successfully came together in a way which has not often been replicated in other parts of Australia.

The campaign for long-term security for Park residents is not yet over but now the nature of the work to be done is different. Now it is important to keep the conversation with, and the good will of, the Government.

Burnside QC has agreed to provide advice to residents on the legal avenues available to protect their interests. A Government official reports that the Government is in negotiation with CBL about a possible land swap.

Sunday 18 June
Residents hold an Open Day at the Park for the people of Canberra to attend. Visitors are treated to sausage sandwiches, live music, games for the children, and a car display.

Sunday 16 July
Residents hold a second Open Day at the Park.

Wednesday 2 August
The Action Group meets to discuss ramping up pressure on the Government and CBL to reach a deal. A media blitz is planned for Friday 4 August and a letter is prepared for delivery by hand to CBL shareholders’ homes.

Tuesday 8 August
News reaches residents that a land swap deal has been struck between the Government and CBL.

Thursday 10 August
Koomarri pays $750,000 to the ACT Government as a contribution to the land swap arrangement.

Friday 11 August
An Agreement for a land swap is signed by CBL and the Chief Minister’s Department which involves...
alive, while seeking to find an ownership solution for the Park. Whatever solution is finally chosen, it must be legally, administratively and practically sustainable, and give residents a measure of control and a secure future in their Park.

**CBL subleasing the Park to the Government for 18 months. During this time the Government is to make the necessary arrangements for land opposite the Park to be exchanged with CBL for ownership of the Park.**

**Saturday 12 August**
Housing ACT take over management of the Park.

**Friday 18 August**
The Chief Minister announces that the Government plans to amend the Residential Tenancies Act to ensure caravan park residents have the same legal rights as other tenants.

**Saturday 12 August**
Housing ACT take over management of the Park.

**Friday 18 August**
The Chief Minister announces that the Government plans to amend the Residential Tenancies Act to ensure caravan park residents have the same legal rights as other tenants.

**2007**

**Thursday 27 March**
Housing ACT and residents’ representatives agree on the form of an Occupancy Agreement for Park residents.

**Tuesday 5 June**
The ACT Government sets aside $600,000 in the 2007-08 Budget for a safety upgrade and maintenance at the Narrabundah Longstay Park.

**Wednesday 20 June**
The Chief Minister announces that the National Capital Authority (NCA) Board has agreed to a request by the ACT Government to prepare a draft amendment to the National Capital Plan that will allow for a mobile home park to be built on the land-swap site at Symonston.

**Friday 20 July**
The NCA releases Draft Amendment 67 – Provisions for Mobile Home Park which proposes to vary the National Capital Plan to authorise and formalise mobile home parks on the relevant land in Symonston.

ACT Land and Planning (ACTPLA) releases Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No 285 to authorise use of the land-swap site as a mobile home park.

Images courtesy of Shorty
Phil Abbott, Director of Canberra’s Goanna Print Publishing House and printer of OUR PARK OUR COMMUNITY, was a resident of the Park at the time when the company was founded back in 1982. After traveling in Africa and Europe for almost ten years, Phil returned to Australia with his wife-to-be.

I started work with a printer – we were pretty broke when we came back. We stayed with my parents in a caravan in their backyard which my grandmother had lived in.

I had big ideas. I’d come back from Europe, inspired by the beautiful printing they did in Italy and Germany and Britain. I remembered my early days in Australia when things were a little bit rough and ready. As a client you pretty much got what you were given. And I thought if ever I got the chance I might do something here, and offer people something a bit better than what they were getting – offer to go the extra yards.

My parents said take the caravan. We found the Park. There were a lot of families there at the time. The new section wasn’t there at the time, there were only the 4 rows. Ann and Gerry were looking after the Park – they were friendly people, but also tough. They interviewed us to see if we were suitable for the Park. They gave us the site directly opposite the office which is on the left as you come into the Park. They thought that we would be very responsible and that we would have a nice garden – we were a nice young couple. So they told us the rate – it was about $22 a week, I think, no extra for electricity or water a week. There were only 80 vans in the Park, families and tradesmen. So we towed our 23 foot Franklin across. We didn’t have an annex; we just had our silver caravan sitting in the middle of our very vacant lot.

We were there, in total, for 6 years. All around us were people coming and going, young couples with kids, tradesmen passing through, older people heading towards retirement, and there were some retirees. There was Lofty, a truck driver. Lofty’s father came to visit and said, ‘Look, it’s a bit hard if your wife’s pregnant going across to the amenities block, you should have your own plumbing.’ Probably very illegal at the time, but Lofty’s dad helped us plumb in a complete bathroom.

Jack from up the back came down and gave me a couple of lessons on how to use an electric drill and tech screws, I didn’t have a clue. When we first came to the Park, I couldn’t hammer a nail in a block of wood. By the time I left I’d built an annex all by myself, I’d plumbed in a whole new bathroom, done a whole lot of cabinet making inside, laid cork tiles all through the annex and the caravan, and these were all things I felt blessed to be able to do with the help of people in the Park. It was a real community and they all helped out. We poured the slab ourselves, helped by someone else at the Park who got the concrete at bargain basement prices.

Life in the Park was good. Because everything was on a small scale we were able to buy the best quality things to put in the van. We didn’t scrimp on curtains or anything like that. We put in a new sink; we made it very, very comfortable.

In 1982, Martin Nesci and I decided that Canberra needed our printing expertise. We went out and bought a few bits of machinery – equipment that other Printers didn’t want, small printers, an Armada offset press and an old Heidelberg platen. Martin was Italian and we thought we’ll print a few business cards during the day maybe the odd flyer and sit around and drink coffee.

And then we met a fellow who had put in a submission for a grant to start a community printing press, to help community organizations. It was in the last days of Malcolm Fraser's
government. It was an election sweetener to help deal with the long-term unemployed. So people could put in submissions to employ these people. And that’s how the Ainslie village printing project started, that later became Goanna. There were some start-up funds given to this fellow to start a press. The only trouble was he didn’t know anything about printing … until he met us. … There were quite a few anti-Uranium protestors who all came to Canberra in bus loads and I bought my clients from the National Gallery, so it wasn’t unusual to have kids and dogs and long haired uranium protestors there with the likes of luminaries from the National gallery. In a way we became the favourite printers of the National Gallery for a while. They were wonderful days, the early days of Goanna.

I really hope that the Narrabundah Park continues. It’s such a great community offering other options for young people trying to buy a house. And it’s where the idea of Goanna became a reality.
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Struggle for the Park

ACTCOSS and SCP wish to acknowledge some of those who participated in the struggle to save the Park. Our sincere thanks also go to the many others who also contributed.

Chief Minister Jon Stanhope MLA and the ACT Government for their determination to achieve resolution of the conflict through a land swap with the developer.

The many residents who served on the Residents Committee, who opened their homes to be used for Action Group and Residents Meetings, who maintained communication channels for residents, who acted as resident spokespersons to the media, who invited the media into their homes and allowed their personal stories to be broadcast throughout Canberra, who sat for hours on cold Canberra winter days at stalls to provide the community with information about the Park, and who contributed their time and resources to the success of the open days, the petitions and the media events.

Community agencies who participated in the Narrabundah Longstay Park Residents and Friends Action Group including ADACAS (Andrea Simmons), Welfare Rights and Legal Centre (Liz O’Brien, Annabel Pengilley and Jaleh Johannessen), ACTCOSS (Ara Cresswell), Tenants Union (Deb Pippen), Unions ACT (Peter Malone), ACT Legal Aid Office, ACT Shelter, CCHOACT, Conflict Resolution Service, Consumer Law Centre and SoftLaw Community Projects.

Dr Deb Foskey MLA and her Greens staff for their unswerving support for the residents in their campaign.

The Canberra media who took the story to heart and showed respect for residents’ processes. Thanks in particular to WIN TV, Stateline, ABC Radio 666, 2CC, the Canberra Times and the Chronicle.

George Tomlins from Chief Ministers Department, for his work on the land swap, and David Matthews from Housing ACT, who took over management of the Park once the land swap agreement was signed.

Michelle Oakley of Gem Cafe, John and Cheryl Keeley from the Narrabundah Newsagency, RSPCA, Salvation Army, Sundown Village, Southside Community Services, the Narrabundah community and the wider Canberra community, for their support of the residents’ campaign.


The Collaborators wish to thank the following for their contribution to this book.

The Park residents who so generously contributed their stories and portraits to the book.

The ACTCOSS General Committee and Executive Director Ara Cresswell, and the Directors and members of SCP, for their financial sponsorship of, and enthusiastic support for, the book.

ArtsACT for a 2006 arts project grant which paid for the photographic portraits by John Tucker in the book.

Park residents Gabby Rossell, whose networking skills gave us entrée to the Park and its residents, and Margaret Scott, who gave us access to her archives of the Park’s history.

Bishop Pat Power who wrote the Foreword for the book and who gave strong moral support for the Park residents in the struggle to save the Park.

Dulce Lander of the ACT Planning and Land Authority who facilitated access to archival files and plans of the Park.

Birgit Hofer, for proof reading.
Jenny Gall has worked as an interviewer for the Oral History and Folklore Section of the National Library of Australia on The Esso Performing Arts Oral History Project, the Folklore, Music and Dance of the Monaro Project, the Folklore and Musical Heritage of the Northern Rivers Project, and the Bringing Them Home Oral History Project. She will be part of the interviewing team in late 2007 for the ARC-funded Childhood Change and Tradition Oral History Project. She will present a paper entitled Collecting Women’s Lives: Women Musicians of the Northern Rivers NSW at the Women’s History Network Conference in Winchester, UK, 7-9 September 2007.

John Tucker
Photographer

John is a freelance photographer, specialising in environmental portraiture. His images have been used in a number of social justice campaigns, including for local and national carers organizations, the ACT Greens, the recent ACT Shelter Housing Is A Human Right project and an Anti Poverty Week 2006 poster commissioned by a group of community organisations.

Peter Sutherland
Editor

Peter is a solicitor and Director of SoftLaw Community Projects, the co-publisher of Our Park Our Community. Through SCP, Peter undertakes a wide variety of legal projects addressing social justice issues in the ACT, including writing, editing and publishing books and electronic publications, free legal advice for low income people and community organisations, and law reform work in areas of “poverty law” such as income support law and residential tenancy law. Peter is part-time Chairperson of the ACT Essential Services Consumer Council, Treasurer of ACTCOSS and Vice President of the Australian Institute of Administrative Law.

Anna Tito
Graphic Designer

Anna is the ACTCOSS Communication and Membership Officer. In this role, Anna is responsible for the layout and design of most ACTCOSS publications and liaises with member organisations. Anna has worked in the community sector since 2003, in a range of organisations. At present she is studying for an arts degree at the Australian National University. Her particular interests include issues around prisons and incarceration, housing, body image, self esteem, health and fitness, the digital divide, social justice and social and organisational accountability. In her spare time Anna participates in community theatre, reads, writes and studies.

Andrea Simmons
Writer – The Campaign to Save the Park

Andrea is the Manager of ADACAS (the ACT Disability Aged and Carer Advocacy Service), a not-for-profit community organization that assists vulnerable individuals with a disability or who may be aged to assert their rights and interests. Prior to taking up this role, Andrea was an adviser to Deb Foskey MLA, was the Campaign Coordinator for the ACT Greens 2004 Legislative Assembly Election, and from 2001 to 2004 was the Executive Officer for ACROD ACT (the peak body for disability services in the ACT). During this period she was also Co-chair of the Disability Reform Group and the Disability ACT Legislative Reform Group and a member of a wide variety of other joint community/government reference groups.