

Gone South



Richard Warner

Years after losing my hearing to Meniere's disease came the longing to record an unfinished song. There was no way I could do this myself, so I was heartened when an old band-mate offered to rally people to the cause.

The first person he phoned was looking for us. She was arranging a birthday surprise for a mutual friend - a recording engineer who'd moved to Tasmania. With all the fun of an invitation and hope in unearthing a song, we made bookings.



I always carry something with me to read and '*The Narrow Road to the Deep North*' was the book I grabbed from the shelf as we rushed for the plane.

The following were written just as we were rising through cloud. I rarely travel, so setting out on a journey can be like a portal, a space between worlds. There's a gentle pause as thought fades and dreams draw close...

My desire is to lay things bare, but
also cover as much as I reveal.
Isn't that the only way
to show the full picture?



Another journey by plane
and though many days and miles have passed
since I last took to the air,
I'm still not much closer to the center.

When will I cast off all the ideas
wrapped round my head like these misty clouds?



All my journeys were heading to one place. Years ago I'd stumbled upon what I felt must be that place, but the feeling had faded. In its wake and perhaps in a misguided attempt to return, I'd been losing myself in giving.

It's strange how even when living a life devoted to others, you can fool yourself deeply. This crossed my mind flying low over Sydney:

Looking down on this city of three million souls
I feel small,
wondering how many I've truly helped.

Maybe one,
Maybe two,
Maybe none. *

That's got me thinking:
my ego must be at least
the size of this city!

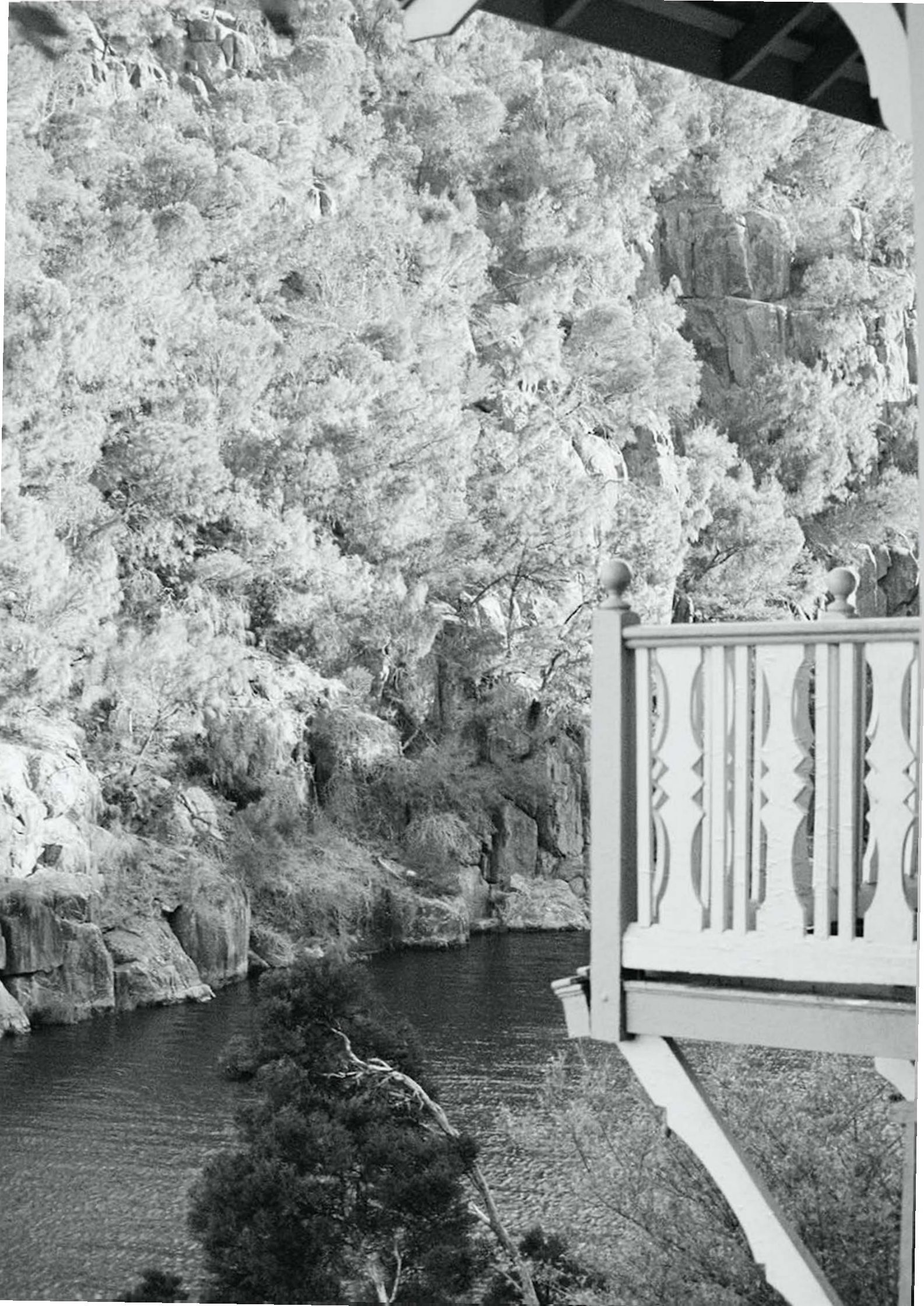
(* Of course! Who is there to help or to save?)

We arrived at Launceston in the late afternoon and were met by one of the birthday plotters, a violinist and artist in residence at the old gatekeeper's cottage in Cataract Gorge. We were led on a walk through the gorge at sunset, enjoyed a night of good company, food and wine - and we even had a go at my old song.

Waking in such a place there are no words.

For the first time in years
the dreams of the night
were friendly, companionable.
looking out the window this morning
I wonder if I've truly woken.





The birthday was filled with the joy of old friends meeting.
After the party our small group spent a couple of days
together. We all need a break from our ideas at times and
what better a way than among friends, in nature and with
time for thought.

These came through on a grey, windy morning:

I like sitting here in the quiet of the morning
before the house stirs;
the wind blows where it likes
leaving the sound of its passing.



With all that's happened
I've become a bit of a lonely soul,
but it's good to catch up with old friends again.



Warm summer shower,
refreshing aroma of
other people's soap

On the last day of our travels we drove to the old lighthouse at Low Head. It was windswept and rugged, the sea stretched in all directions. As we were leaving for home, thick cloud rolled in.

That night, we decided to have a go at recording my old song. The parts were long ready, but words had never come to match the feeling of the tune. I remember thinking: *there's no point forcing words - it'll have to sound alright without them*'. But just as it was time for recording vocals and as I was describing the emotion for the singer:

A ships horn,
a sea fog,
a siren,
my heart, my love.



Postscript

(June 2021)

The great neurologist and humanist Oliver Sacks would have a name for what happens when you're deprived of a sense. The mind abhors a vacuum and fills the space, at least for a time. For me this came in the form of an overflowing of melodies: songs by others, songs of my own and songs that seemed to come out of nowhere.

In normal circumstances this would be a boon, a creative rush you long for as a musician. But with no way to hear or share, it felt more like a curse. Luckily, I had some patient and talented friends, happy to take time out of their lives to notate, correct my out of tune whistling and take best guesses at the bum notes. Sixteen years later and despite the sadness felt at the time, I'm looking back with only gratefulness. The song mentioned in the story is titled '*Desiraling*'. A made-up word for a feeling we all know, treading the path to where we think we want to go. It should be available soon.

‘Every day is a journey
and the journey itself is home’

(Basho)

A note on the text

The story was written in the summer holiday of 2006, along with recording of a song. Both were left unfinished. Circumstances brought about by lockdowns in 2020 led to efforts to complete text and tune. The Author is profoundly deaf and now hears with two cochlear implants.

Images of cloud, Cataract Gorge, Low Head lighthouse and foghorn by Joss.

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