

From the Writer

I am remembering now that my original proposal to Company B Belvoir was to write a play dealing, somehow, with memory. At the time I was reeling from the recent news that someone close to me would lose their memory. As sometimes happens, these real life circumstances were too raw so I let the play evolve in a new direction. The character suffering from memory loss was not granted his entrance beyond the first draft. I focussed my attention instead on the other figures that were beginning to populate my play. But a fascination with memory seems to have remained.

Science and literature have long struggled to explain memory. Plato's image of memory as a wax tablet remains in our language today when we describe "impressions". These attempted analogies shift with the advent of technology; perhaps memory is like the computer I am typing on right now or the voice recorder from which I am transcribing these words. But, of course, as I type, I am tampering with the words. How do we account for memory as the reconstruction of life replete with the unreliability, the subjectivity, the editing, the colouring and the exaggerations? How do we describe recollection as a creative act?

Memory is like writing a play.

After about a year of writing, something clicked in the story and I was surprised to discover that much of the play is in fact underpinned by disputed memories. Perhaps this is a likely conflict in a family, among people who may have opposing interpretations of their shared history and shared identity.

The voices in this play stem from people I know and love but as soon as they found their way to the page they were characters bending according to dramatic impulses and artistic imperatives. Now that they reach the stage, the characters are merely impressions of those inspiring people. A play is a rectified account of life.

That said, I do know a beautiful woman who played her last game of tennis in her backyard court at age ninety. I have also encountered people fearful that they will find themselves in a kind of purgatory, abandoned by family at, the cruellest moment, the twilight of life. I have interviewed priests from developing nations, several from Nigeria, who like Father Ezekiel have been brought to Australia to fill the gap left by dwindling priest recruits. They expressed feelings of isolation and regret for the "individualism" of Australia. They seemed homesick for a church that relishes greater influence over its community. To me these missionaries stand for the church's resistance of bigger questions about its place in Australian society.

Tommy Murphy