

# Sunday Sundowners

LYN STEYN

Head Librarian, Fish Hoek Library

**W**e Sundowners describe ourselves as mature, experienced and well seasoned by life, but youthful in spirit and thought. We are mostly over forty so we would prefer that you remain tactfully silent about what you might call us.

Recently we visited a friend in her new flat in Disa Park, more commonly known as the Pepperpots. When they were built in the early Sixties, it was amidst furore and scandal; I've never been able to look at them without eyes clouded by all that historical baggage, but they endure, unmoved by my bias. Now I'm on the doorstep, enchanted by the stunning view and the peaceful rural feel of the mountain and the embrace of the natural environment. I can see the city but here we are above and apart from its urbanity. It is an anomaly and the start of an afternoon wrestling with ambivalent concepts. The towers are undeniably heavy brutal evidence of construction arrogance, yet the buildings themselves have some aesthetic qualities and the inside of the flat is charmingly quirky and attractive. I find myself asking prices and availability. Those views are stupendous.

Lunch and tea flow seamlessly through the afternoon as we sample and enjoy everyone's specialty contribution, touring the new home, admiring the changing angles of vista and catching up on our news and gossip. To cope with the feasting, we also fit in a sightseeing ramble around the three towers and their common grounds and social spaces.

And we stumble on another contentious anomaly, another debate although not one of principles.

'I just love my new Kindle! It is such a treat having so many books in hand!' Jenny points at a shelf full of books: 'That's as many as I took with me on last year's holiday, which was not really a problem

since we combined a cruise with a bus tour and there were no luggage restrictions, but this year we flew to Australia to visit the children. My husband gave me the Kindle as an anniversary present. I loaded about thirty titles, some free, some from Amazon and my favourite newspaper and two magazines. I was set for both flights.'

'I don't know if I can give up the comfort of holding a new book in my hands, the feel and memory of past delights all work together to make it an almost visceral experience,' muses Sharon K, 'and a book doesn't need electricity or tech skills,' chimes Lori. Suze (who is the youngest of our group) stares pensively at the mountain without comment, but as the defense of paper and print descends into platitudes, she interrupts, 'I suppose these reasons are all in some form or another generational considerations to disguise fear of change and loss of youth, hmm? This last ditch resistance to technology is an "age" thing, it's not about reading at all.' While we consider whether to slap her, bounce her out the window or make her sit in a corner for disrespecting her elders, Suze adds 'Your ambivalence is rooted in reluctance to change a lifestyle habit. Accepting the convenience and easy access provided by an e-reader doesn't mean the old ways are done; old and new co-exist happily, just as Jenny said, depending on where you are and what works best at that moment.' The schoolmarm tone and vocabulary are at odds with the orange highlights and the eyebrow studs, but we know Suze. An avid reader and aspiring writer of teen Goth novels, she keeps us from taking ourselves too seriously. We rely on her for advance news of books for that difficult sector of our market, the teens.

Right now she's reading Sally Partridge's **Dark Poppy's demise** (NB Uitgewers, e-book from *Kalahari.net*), an insight into what can lure a young person to forget common sense – there's nothing cool about common sense, is there? All the Partridge titles such as **Fuse**, **Goblet Club** and **First date**, speak a language and explore problems

that teens understand. Writing that appeals to young adults is a special talent and Suze is keen to learn from an award-winner.

I'm surprised to find that the Partridge e-book title is actually more expensive than the print books, because one of the selling points for e-books is their relatively low cost. The other great advantage is how quick and painless the transaction is. Jenny fetches her Kindle from the car and in a matter of minutes and half a dozen clicks, a new book is right there in the room with us.

Everyone oohs and ahs over the Kindle and suddenly the flood-gates open. Somewhat sheepishly we confess to one another and it turns out that despite the earlier debate, four out of the six of us have an e-reader of some sort: two Kindles, a Samsung tablet and an iPad. I've been practicing downloading mostly with free e-books such as the old Australian children's series by Mary Grant Bruce, the Billabong books, and a number of Zane Grey titles my late father loved. Daringly I've splurged a whole US\$0.99 (R8.00) on a manual for the tablet. Online subscriptions to periodicals and newspapers I approach cautiously, but happily one can buy one issue at a time before you need make a commitment.

Now the debate turns to logistics: which is better? The dedicated e-reader or the tablet? We come to the conclusion that it's a question of what you want from the device: all comparisons agree that the Kindle is the best for reading and now the Kindle Fire has added functionality; those who have the tablets opted for a wider variety of functionality with reading being just one of many uses.

We all agree that as librarians we have the opportunity to play an advisory role, to share knowledge about the new tools of our core business. However desirable and versatile e-readers and e-books may be, it hardly seems likely we'll be providing e-services at our libraries in the immediate future. Nonetheless, if we can speak from a user perspective and have enough practical information to help wary patrons, we can help them consider all options of devices and platforms, emphasising that the final choice is that of patron according to need; we should know enough about how content is acquired, about average costs and the limitations of devices so that a patron can make an informed choice. We can also start a discussion about a future vision of how library services will adapt and integrate technological advances, if and when funding were to become available.

'Have you considered one of the truly great advantages of online buying?' asks Jenny. 'You don't have to face the cashier when you buy the **Fifty shades of grey** (which is part of Fifty shades trilogy).

