

**THE AUSTRALIAN BOOK OF MEMORIES
AND NUDGE CATHOLIC CEMETERY**

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If we are going to talk about a book of memories, then we need to consider what it is.

We all know what a book is, but do we really understand memory?

For me, I believe it is about connections to people, places and events and to our spiritual centre. These connections are at our core as people. When we lose memories, we lose connections and part of us disappears.

I am a very visual person. My memories are primarily invoked by pictures – especially physical pictures – but also word pictures. Scents and smells can evoke strong memories for me. But I am not a person with strong verbal memory. I cannot remember long passages of conversation and rarely do they evoke strong memories. And, to my family’s amusement, because I see words, rather than hear words, at times my pronunciation can be odd. Statistically, most of us are visual and physical learners rather than aural learners.

As *The Australian Book of Memories* is a visual and physical thing, then, for me, it is able to make many connections to people, places and events. Even with the stories of people I have never met, I can make connections with my own memories and experience.

In that frame of reference, those stories mean something to me and in subtle ways; the connections with those stories become part of my story and part of our collective stories and therefore our history. Without this history, we are shallow people and probably not very in touch with our spiritual selves.

The Australian Book of Memories is a project of the National Trust and initiated in Queensland. It is a documentation of stories that would, in many cases, never be kept. This is because *The Australian Book of Memories* is not limited to stories of the rich and famous. There are certainly high profile people in the book but its value rises because of the stories of the ‘other’ people; those whose stories are often not recorded, yet whose existence provides the basic fibres that weave the cloth of humanity.

When we read their stories in *The Australian Book of Memories*, most of us are more likely to make stronger connections with the stories of the ‘other’ people than with some of the rich and famous. This is the core of our vision behind the Australian Book of Memories:

- to create a book that captures all these different types of stories, from the past and then far into the future;
- to present a more balanced picture of the people who are our history and our cultures and our civilisations.

The Australian Book of Memories is intended as an ever growing set of volumes that follows the generations. In 500 years from now, the connections will still be possible.

Although most people access *The Australian Book of Memories* through the internet, it is also printed in hard copy, on archival paper, with copies placed in national and state libraries. The paper is rated for a minimum 500-year life in controlled storage conditions, so original copies will still exist, even if internet versions have long been lost.

Though there is a master index which has every entry in alphabetical order, it is possible to rearrange the pages to create volumes that contain people by state or according to a specific place. One set of contributions is from David and Dianne who manage the Nudgee Cemetery and have been wonderful people to work with as far as establishing a Nudgee Cemetery component in *The Australian Book of*

Memories. They share the vision of keeping the connections to the people whose names are inscribed on the headstones and plaques in that place. And they share the vision of helping the relatives and friends of the people whose remains rest there to keep the memories of those people in a way that a headstone or death certificate never will.

Nudgee Cemetery is more correctly described as Nudgee Catholic Cemetery. David and Dianne have been advocates of keeping strong connections to the Catholic origins of Nudgee Cemetery as it continues to evolve. They can see that *The Australian Book of Memories* can reinforce these connections to the Catholic origins of Nudgee Catholic Cemetery. They have an endeavour to include pages in *The Australian Book of Memories* of Catholic priests and nuns buried in Nudgee Cemetery.

The list currently includes:

Reverend John Joseph Ahern

Reverend Joseph Augustine Canali

Reverend James Patrick Connolly

Mosignor Bartholomew Joseph Frawley

Dean and Monsignor John Francis McCarthy

And we presently have the material to add another 20. If someone seeks a volume of *The Australian Book of Memories* that focuses just on these priests and nuns, modern technology allows us to extract those pages and create a more personalised volume containing just those stories.

We can also extract pages for the members of a particular family. As the Nudgee Cemetery has been very popular with Italian families, it is possible in the future that there will be a special volume that could cover Italians in the cemetery or across Australia.

The Australian Book of Memories complements the cemetery by allowing the memories connected to it to be accessed by people who may never have the opportunity to visit it. Also it allows people who live in other states or overseas, or have become too frail to continue to visit a dear relative resting in the cemetery, to still make connections.

It is sad that we have already lost the memories of most of the people who were buried there long ago. Once the people who knew them have passed, the real memories of these people are lost. It is very hard to reconstruct a personality from a headstone.

The Australian Book of Memories can also help in protecting cemeteries.

Some people have asked what is the point of keeping a headstone or a plaque in a cemetery long after every person who ever knew them are themselves departed from this world? Should we take this valuable real estate and put new graves over the old ones as happens in some privately operated or overseas cemeteries.

It could be argued that the long term retention of these headstones and plaques is questionable unless there are connections that keep them relevant. Without these connections, the headstones and plaques become historical and architectural curiosities.

I am personally interested in visiting the tombs of older civilisations and I occasionally visit more modern cemeteries. In some ways the visits act to remind me of my own mortality, but these visits are more often limited to the architectural and curiosity purposes.

Occasionally a headstone will give a brief glimpse of a person, sometimes giving a small insight, although this may state how they died rather than who they were.

On the rare occasion that I can see the larger story inscribed, it is a real gem. I begin to connect to that long deceased person. But just as often, the retention of that story occurs either because of the wealth of the family or in some cases, because of community sympathy for the people involved in some unfortunate or heroic event. The so-called common stories are not protected in this way.

But even the stories of the rich, famous and heroic are not secure if they depend on inscriptions on headstones. The stories so physically inscribed on stones are vulnerable to loss. The headstones weather, the ground shifts and they fall, or vandals senselessly ruin them. Sometimes a government decides to put a road through the cemetery.

With the stories, the connections we make in a cemetery are more vivid and meaningful and the connections are strong to our own sense of mortality and our sense of perspective, which in turn cause us to seek deeper into our spiritual selves. If a cemetery visit is more powerful and much more meaningful when the stories are available, then the facilities such as *The Australian Book of Memories*, that allow the stories to be accessible, are of value to the cemetery.

You will observe that I strongly endorse the combination of physical cemeteries and stories. They both have roles to play. There are physical sensations that are evoked in graveyards and tombs that cannot be captured by books and the internet. My belief is that we need to strengthen the connections, so each adds to the meaning of the other. We are also therefore more likely to seek to keep both, rather than one or the other. In conclusion, I hope you will agree with the main points I have sought to make.

- Memories are based on connections to people places and events.
- Memories are essential to our personal and collective histories.
- These are connections to our personal and our collective spiritual selves.

- *The Australian Book of Memories* is about collecting all of our stories.
- Cemeteries have their own special values.
- Nudgee Cemetery is an excellent example with special significance to the Catholic community.
- Some of these values are vulnerable; especially where they depend only on headstones.
- *The Australian Book of Memories* can add value to cemeteries and gains value from their existence.
- Both have an important role to play and they both can protect each other.

Warren Oxnam has been a member of the National Trust of Queensland for over 25 years.

He suggested 'The Australian Book of Memories' project to the National Trust and has helped promote the book and assisted with the collection of its stories.

Warren is a land-use planner in private practice with extensive experience in government. For 13 years he worked for the National Parks and Wildlife Service with close involvement in the conservation of heritage sites, including St Helena Island and the Lark Quarry Dinosaur Trackway.