



THE MUD HOUSE

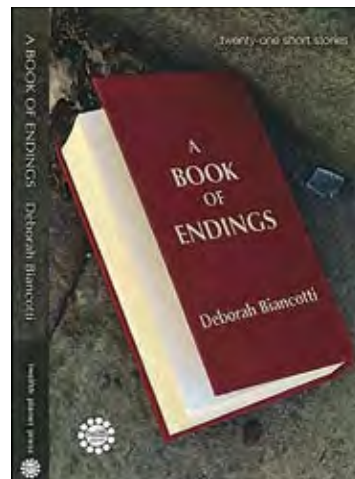
Richard Glover
HarperCollins \$27.99

Richard Glover (BA '83) is ABC 702's popular drive-time host and a *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist. He's converted the latter into a number of tongue-in-cheek and funny books, featuring his thinly-disguised and long-suffering wife and two boys, as well as other books for the young and young at heart.

The Mud House, subtitled "four friends, one block of land, no power tools" has been a long time coming as it predates all the above. It's been worth the wait, however, as it's a charming and often heartfelt memoir of the ridiculous enterprise of finding a bit of land and building a house on it with very little money and absolutely no expertise (or power tools).

The Mud House is the truth behind the romance of the sea change dream. "I don't advocate the f-word in polite society, but out there it was a necessity," writes Glover of the isolated bush block. "On the building site, the f-word is an aid to exertion... There's something perfect about the word 'f---' and its explosive sound: the way the bottom lip curls behind the teeth, building up pressure like a slingshot, before flinging the word forward into the world. Try that with 'holy moly'. In building a house, the f-words are as crucial as the G-clamps and H-brackets. Looking back over the whole period of construction, we used 500 metres of hardwood beams, 20 sheets of galvo and about 5000 f-words."

The funny thing about the book, and its palely reproduced happy snaps



of the adventure, is that it could as easily inspire you to try something similar as it might also convince you of the utter lunacy of the idea. In other words, it's honest, reflective, realistic and affectionate. It's as much about the author and his coming to terms with himself as it is about the house that was finally built. The two grew up together. A charming and funny book.

BODYSURFING

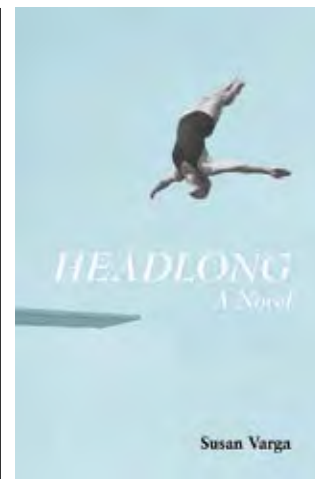
Neville de Mestre
Vengram Educational Services
\$19.80

This useful little book was just asking to be written. Sponsored by the Queensland Government and Surf Life Saving Australia, it's really everything you always wanted to know about bodysurfing but were too embarrassed to ask. Or if you did ask – your dad, mum, best friend or the nice old bloke at the surf club – they were unable to convey their knowledge in any useful way.

With workmanlike black and white photography by Stan Davies and pencil illustrations to show you what to do with a rip and other hazards, *Bodysurfing* is a thorough and readable how-to book based on the author's experience. Neville de Mestre (BSc (Hons) '59 Dip Ed '60) recalls tandem surfing with his father as a boy of eight in Wollongong.

He has gone on to win 10 World Masters' surf titles and 32 Australia Masters' titles and compete in many iron man events. In his spare time he is a mathematician, has written five books on mathematical topics and is Emeritus Professor of Mathematics

books



at Bond University, which is handily close to North Burleigh Surf Life Saving Club, where he is a member.

A BOOK OF ENDINGS

Deborah Biancotti
Twelfth Planet \$27.95

Biancotti (BEC (SocSc) '93) has compiled "twenty-one short stories" which also happens to be the straightforward subtitle of the book. These are unnerving and elliptical, in the main, and tread a fine line between the everyday mundanity that never is and an overblown literary style that can be tiresome when too self-conscious. Mostly they stay on the right side of the line and intrigue more than irritate. Biancotti is further proof of why readers enjoy the short story, even though publishers prefer to pretend we don't.

HEADLONG: A NOVEL

Susan Varga
UWA Press \$29.95

Grief and "closure" have become part of a rather revolting caring industry in recent times and Susan Varga (BA '65 MA '73) has written a novel that illustrates why it's so fatuous and unrealistic.

Kati's mother, the 80-year-old Julia, is as obstreperous with her daughter as might be expected of someone who came to Australia as a refugee but has no time for the Tampa asylum seekers. When her beloved husband dies Julia becomes matter-of-factly suicidal. Why should she continue to live? Why should not her daughter assist her in her wishes? Why should Kati's partner put up with the fall-out?



And so on.

Varga has fashioned a contemporary love story of mothers and daughters, families, friends and lovers that also looks at the deeper complexities of modern life – beyond jargon and platitudes.

CHARLIE WEBB AND THE RIDDLE OF MORDRED'S CASTLE

Jl Aresen
Octavian Books \$18.99

With JK Rowling drawing a line under the adventures of Harry Potter, there is a waiting market for another wizard-like boy with special powers, entrée to an enchanted world, spells, a jolly hockey sticks manner of talking to his chums and some spectacular obstacles to overcome in his quest to be a jolly decent sort.

So up pops JI Aresen (BA/LLB '09). She has successfully concocted a child-pleasing world for 13-year-old Charlie – introduced in 2006's *Charlie Webb and the Dragonmaster's Quest*. But it's impossible to read his adventures without comparison to Rowling. Charlie has to contend with Ormells, where Harry's dull humans were Muggles. "Incendo!" and "Avolo!" are incantations that make things happen and there's a Questing Beast and other mythic creatures.

The Riddle of Mordred's Castle takes Charlie and his pals to a place and time beyond King Arthur and the Round Table, because of course, rotten Mordred was the Arthurian baddie and the kids have everything against them in their quest. If you and your youngsters were Potter fans, you might fill the gap quite nicely with Charlie Webb.

All reviews by
Diana Simmonds



SUPERFLUOUS MEN

Michael Wilding
Arcadia \$29.95

The preoccupations of early retirement from academe naturally follow the satirical frolics of *Academia Nuts*. It also follows, therefore, that Henry gets involved with a Writers Centre as honorary Chair and falls headlong over the literary industry. All hell is let loose. Wilding (DLitt '96) is a wicked observer of human foibles and bureaucracy; and he has an evilly good ear for the dopey chit-chat that so often passes for high flown discourse and earnest-speak. It's very funny.

WILLIAM CHARLES WENTWORTH: AUSTRALIA'S GREATEST NATIVE SON

Andrew Tink
Allen & Unwin \$49.99

The tumultuous life of one of the University's founding fathers would not bear scrutiny as a work of fiction: the facts are amazing and, unless true, would be unbelievable.

Born illegitimately to a 17-year-old convict girl and an impecunious Irish aristocrat, who may or may not have been a highwayman before taking ship to Botany Bay, William Charles became one of the great figures of colonial New South Wales.

It's a pity then, that this first full biography is by an author who was most recently shadow Attorney General in the NSW parliament and before that a barrister, as these occupations probably contribute to the tendency to hyperbole and a crushing volume of detail.

A decent editor should have hosed down the purple prose and pointed

out that while research is essential, the art of writing is to know what to leave out. Alas.

Nevertheless, for those wanting to know more about the man whose statue dominates the interior of the Great Hall, this is a good place to start.

WEDDING DANCE

Zeny Giles, Koel Koel Press
\$25+postage. (Available from
zenygiles@gmail.com or
100 Carrington Parade,
New Lambton, NSW 2305)

Growing up Greek in inner city Sydney in the '50s and '60s is the beautifully drawn backdrop to Giles' (BA '57 DipEd '58) semi-autobiographical adventure. There is the ebb and flow of an extended family – the patriarchs and matriarchs, the dodgy real estate and unsurprising insults from "Aussies"; the rhythms and pace of life changing with increased fortune or notions of belonging.

"No chance of vermin in an Electrolux-clean house," a travelling salesman tells a young housewife as he's demonstrating the efficacy of a machine. It's a part of Australia's coming of age that is now more sepia memory than fully coloured, as the yayas and papous return to their ancestral islands or to god. A delightful book.

NEWS

University of Sydney scholars are the winners on the night: all four finalists in the general history category for this year's NSW Premier's History Awards are from the University's history department, chosen from 182 nominations. They are:

Warwick Anderson, for *The Collectors of Lost Souls: turning Kuru scientists into whitemen*, Johns Hopkins University Press.

Clare Corbould for *Becoming African Americans: Black public life in Harlem, 1919-1939*, Harvard University Press.

Judith Keene, for *Treason on the Airwaves: three Allied broadcasters on Axis Radio during World War II*, Praeger Publishers.

Iain McCalman, for *Darwin's Armada: how four voyagers to Australasia won the battle for evolution and changed the world*, Penguin Group.

And the winner of the \$15,000 prize is Warwick Anderson.