

A WALK IN THE WETLANDS

Every Sunday, Gran and I walked through the Narromine Wetlands. This started about 15 years ago, when Gran decided it was what we both needed as we grieved loves lost: hers to cancer, and mine to divorce.

Nowadays, I walked while Gran wheeled. At 97, her legs had finally given out, but it never stopped our weekly outing to the wetlands. Our time together was precious, but also with purpose. Gran would report the wetlands' birdlife to an online birdwatching agency.

"Here they come!" Gran clapped as a gaggle of geese swept out of the cowl to meet us.

About ten diehards would always join us on our walks. They loved Gran's wheelchair and snapped at the wheel spokes, which always made her laugh.

The gaggle swarmed around us as we slowly circled the cowl and wandered off when we stopped at a picnic table for coffee to assess the tally: 25 Domestic Geese, one Whistling Kite, five Crested Pigeons, one Little Pied Cormorant, three Australian Ibis, four Willy-wagtails, and 40 Galahs.

"Promise me you'll carry on my research when I'm gone, sweetheart," Gran said, cradling her cup.

"The world needs to know what birds they'll see on their walks here."

I nodded, smiling. "I will, Gran. When the time comes."

That time came sooner than I anticipated. Three nights later, Gran went to sleep forever. The following Sunday, I pushed her empty wheelchair around the wetlands, accompanied by the diehard gaggle, counting the birdlife for Gran through my tears.