

## **IMMERSION JOURNALISM**

***“Inspiring, Nurturing, Informing and Empowering”: Magazine Writing For Publication Using Experience as Journalism.***

### **ABSTRACT**

Immersion journalism uses personal experience as a method of research. This project consists of two pieces of feature writing using immersion as a journalistic methodology. These pieces are written for the “inspiring, nurturing, informing and empowering” magazine, *Living Now*.

Journalism theory in relation to professional practice is contentious. Many see a discrepancy between the theory of striving for ‘truth’ or ‘objectivity’ and professional practice riddled with deadlines, commercial pressures and audience expectations. Immersion as a method of research moves away from traditional journalism in that it sacrifices the ‘illusion of objectivity’ in favour of conveying intimate emotion and atmosphere, often by using literary techniques.

The accompanying exegesis will: investigate immersion journalism techniques, history and theoretical debates; contain a literature review; include a publication profile and author guidelines for *Living Now*; document the projects activities; and critically reflect upon my project and its practice in relation to theory.

### **PROJECT AND EXEGESIS**

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Thank you to my supervisor, Josie Vine, for her mentorship and encouragement. Thank you to everyone else who assisted in my growth and knowledge along the way.

## **STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP**

This folio and exegesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the exegesis.

Signed

Karen Leverenz

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## INTRODUCTION

*"The truth isn't always beautiful, but the hunger for it is"* (Nadine Gordimer in Ricketson, 2004:33).

### Methodology

Immersion journalism uses literary techniques to engage the reader's imagination and to convey emotion and atmosphere, 'what it feels like,' rather than facts on 'what happened'. Whereas the method used by traditional journalists is interviews, the method used by immersion journalists is reporting from experience. Immersion journalists rely on in-depth, 'fly-on-the-wall' research that leads to a greater understanding of the emotions beneath events, people and places. For example, if writing a story about homelessness an immersion journalist would live on the street for a period of time and experience *what it feels like* to be homeless in order to convey the emotion of what it feels like to be homeless, or a 'higher truth' about homelessness. A 'higher truth' is the internal conflict within the human psyche, the inner moral code of right and wrong or the personal spirituality of a person.

This participatory method of reporting is similar to Truman Capote's method of reporting for his non-fiction novel *In Cold Blood* or Helen Garner's *Joe Cinque's Consolation*.

### Aims and Realisations

The project component is two 1500-word articles that are intended for publication in *Living Now*. *Living Now* is a free spiritual magazine that aims to inform, nurture and inspire its readers, assisting in their self-empowerment. The magazine publishes independent articles that contain "a gift" to the reader by presenting well-grounded information from practitioners and researchers in their fields - as well as uplifting personal stories of empowerment. Contributors to the magazine are writers, professionals, academics, business people or ordinary people who want to share their spirit, stories and knowledge with the world. Articles have been written at *Living Now's* preferred word length, 1500 words. A publication profile for *Living Now* has been included on page five and author guidelines can be found in Appendix 3.

The first article, *Vipassana: a story to meditate on*, aimed to be centred on my experience of learning to meditate at Vipassana, a 10 day meditation 'boot camp'. The topic of meditation is popular in *Living Now* so a story about learning to meditate fitted within the framework of complimentary health and wellbeing in the magazine. An overview of Vipassana meditation can be found in Appendix 2. My experience of Vipassana was unexpected and this story that set out to be about meditation ended up being about abortion. Due to the personal nature of the article I am undecided as to whether I will attempt to have it published. Abortion is common yet people are afraid to own it. Do you know someone who has had an abortion? Have you ever had an abortion? Abortion has been newsworthy in 2008 as it was decriminalised in Victoria.

The second article, *One Fell Swoop*, is about my experience losing a home and facing possible homelessness. A story about overcoming adversity is an uplifting story of empowerment that fits within the framework of personal growth in the magazine. Although the article was written for *Living Now*, I felt that it did not suit the publication style and made the executive decision to have it published in a magazine that would make better use of it, RMIT's *Catalyst*. I have attached the magazine with the published article on pages 40-41 for your interest. The article in this folio is intended for *Living Now*, not *Catalyst*. The differences between the two articles demonstrate how a writer writes to suit the publication and that truth is versatile depending on what is included and what is excluded. My realisation that: "it is not the house you live in but the people you live with that's important", made the story uplifting (and clichéd) but better suited to the style of *Living Now*. Author guidelines for *Catalyst* can be found in the Appendices on page 53 and a publication profile for the magazine can be found on page 54.

*Vipassana: a story to meditate on* and *One Fell Swoop* are particularly suited to immersion journalism because they are intimate, personal journeys that need to be experienced in order to be able to convey emotion and atmosphere.

## PUBLICATION PROFILE

This publication profile gives an overview of the magazine *Living Now*. Author Guidelines for *Living Now* can be found in Appendix 3.

**Title of Publication** – *LIVING NOW*

**Editor & CEO** – Elizabeth Stephens

**Contact details:** postal address, 116 Cardigan Street, Carlton VIC 3053, Phone: 1300 730 326, fax: 9347 1912, email: [editor@livingnow.com.au](mailto:editor@livingnow.com.au), website: <http://www.livingnow.com.au/>

**Frequency of publication** – Monthly

**History** – Established 1989

**Circulation** – free circulation, under half a million readers monthly.

**Distribution** – Two editions – For sale in over 3000 Newsagencies – free from over 1500 outlets including health food shops, healing clinics and centres, coffee shops etc.

**Cover** – Colourful, with diverse imagery of people, places, objects or art.

**Types of stories** – environmental, political and social issues, personal growth, metaphysics, complementary health, wellbeing, relationships, spiritual living.

**Length of stories** – Usually 1000–2000 words, preferably 1500. Up to 3000 words.

**Tone of the writing** – uplifting, inspiring, nurturing, informing and empowering. The writing must offer a gift to the reader. Articles are generally written in first person detailing the experiences of writers/readers.

**Advertising** – books, films, health store products, coaching seminars, training, environmentally friendly alternatives, skin care products, workshops, aromatherapy, accommodation and venues, astrology, forms of massage therapy, gardens & landscaping, fitness, travel, organic products.

**Readership** – mothers, women, families, spiritual people, environmentally aware people, people interested in mind, body, soul.

**Editorial Policy** – Living Now is a vehicle for the exchange of ideas and experiences by which they hope to inspire, nurture and empower the human spirit. Submissions and advertising are accepted from a broad range of people. No responsibility is accepted by Living Now for the opinions or accuracy of the information published.

## PART 1 – PROJECT

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*“A writer says: read what I have written*

*An historian says: listen to my lecture*

*A critic says: listen to what I think*

*A journalist says: let me tell you a story”*

(Gideon Haigh in Ricketson, 2001:ix).

## **Vipassana: a story to meditate on**

### **Vipassana: a story to meditate on**

As I sat down to write I casually shuffled Words of Wisdom cards from his holiness the Dalai Lama. “Never lose faith in the truth” sprang from the deck. I had lost faith in my truth the day I left Vipassana meditation on day six of 10, bags firmly in hand, while everyone sat peacefully listening to the teachings of Gautama the Buddha. It was my second attempt at leaving and this time my resolve was stronger. A taxi ride and \$80 dollars later, I was free.

But not from the depths of my mind.

It is not an easy decision to have an abortion. Deciding not to have my child - yet - is one of the hardest things I have ever done. The first time my partner and I went to the clinic I was sent home because I couldn't hold myself together. If I had been in an abusive relationship the decision may have been easier. But I was in love.

There were five reasons we decided not to have a baby: one - we had only been together a few months; two - we were not ready; three - it was not a planned decision; four - being only 25 meant I would likely be given another opportunity to have a child; and five - I believe abortion is merely the postponement of the entry of a soul.

Abortion is controversial because it relates to religious and personal beliefs. Abortion is still illegal in most Australian states except where the pregnant woman's life is in danger, despite the fact that some 80,000 abortions are performed in Australia every year.

It was three months since the abortion when I went to Vipassana.

I caught the bus into countryside Melbourne, 10kms from Healesville, and took the short walk through the scented bush to Dhamma Aloka, the Melbourne Vipassana, meaning “to see things as they really are”. I had never meditated before but I was determined to learn and, typically, had thrown myself in the deep end. If you had told me then I would fail I would have laughed like the kookaburra that laughed at me when I went to tell the assistant teacher I was leaving.

Vipassana meditation stems from the Theravadin tradition of Buddhism that believes nirvana is experienced through moral and mental effort. The best way to describe Vipassana is a meditation ‘boot camp’: 10 days of silence and 11 hours a day of meditation. The code of silence is supposed to create a feeling of seclusion in nature, practicing meditating in hope of achieving “purification of the mind”.

The first few days of the course focused on “quieting the monkey mind”, or catching your thoughts as they trailed off and bringing them back to “focus on the breathing”. The rest of the course was spent learning the Vipassana technique of meditation, observing the changing nature of the body.

The bronze gong reverberated through the mountain ash forest at 4am, and students sleepwalked past the frosted blossom that lined the path to the meditation hall and began the day's meditation. During rest breaks we ate a simple meal in the dining room, like oats and fruit for breakfast. All meals were vegetarian, thus adhering to the first precept; to abstain from killing. The five precepts – no killing, no stealing, no sex, no telling lies and no intoxicants, were the “foundation of moral behaviour”.

In the evenings we would spend an hour in the meditation hall listening to the video recordings of Mr Goenka who would clarify the techniques of Vipassana and preach Buddhist philosophy. Mr Goenka was a charismatic Indian man with a surprisingly good sense of humour, who rather reminded me of a turtle. “Vipassana meditation is a method of turning misery to happiness,” he said.

Born into a traditional Hindu family Mr Goenka grew up in Burma suffering migraines. His search for a cure led him to the teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin, and in 1955 and he began learning Vipassana meditation. In 1969 he was authorised to teach and began teaching in India, reintroducing the technique to its land of origin. Today he teaches the technique worldwide through audio and video recordings and appointed assistant teachers.

Much of my free time at Vipassana was spent soaking in the magical surrounds, bathing in the sun or staring up at the trees or the birds in the sky. Cows would gently low from a nearby paddock and occasionally the narcotic scent of daffodils or jonquils lingered as I passed them on the path. I spent some time under a wattle tree, soaking in its green and yellow dapples.

The first day I watched a bee pollinate a flower. That evening I glimpsed a rabbit dash into the eucalypts. I thought of my animal medicine cards. They tell of the greater meaning coming into contact with animals signifies: “Scared little rabbit... Please drop your fright! Running doesn't stop the pain, or turn the dark to light”. Another evening I left the meditation hall and saw a dog run beneath a bridge. I went to look for it but it wouldn't come out from hiding. Why was it scared? I thought.

I had been warned that Vipassana can open unhealed wounds. On the second evening the teacher discussed the concept of karma, or taking responsibility for your contribution to suffering in your day-to-day activities. At the mention of karma there was no “quieting the monkey mind” during the next meditation session. Guilt was rising up inside me and I keep pushing it back down.

The next morning on day three, while everyone was having breakfast I packed up my belongings and went to tell the assistant teacher I was leaving. “I am not a vegetarian,” I confessed. “I work at a butcher and I can't quit my job just yet because I am studying and they treat me well and pay me well and I only have to work two days a week to survive,” I trailed off hopelessly. To which the assistant teacher said purification of the mind was a process; I didn't have to be perfect right now. “Just keep practicing the technique,” he said.

I felt too weak to leave. I found a fallen log to lie on and stared up at a eucalypt tree. The tree was beautiful because of its imperfections - its peeling bark, its height and its unique markings. It struck me that the tree was alive - it eats, rests, breathes and circulates 'blood'. Why was it okay to chop down a tree for warmth or shelter that had been living for thousands of years but it was not okay to kill an animal for food for energy?

I started to think about life and death, questions of fate and mortality. I noticed a spider's web glistened in the sun. There were seven dead insects in the delicately patterned web but no spider to be seen. Where was the spider that had weaved a web of fate for all those little destinies?

During meditation I started to focus less on the technique and more on the fact I had not started menstruating since the abortion. I began to convince myself that I was never going to be able to have children – karma for what I had done. Intense sadness welled up inside me but had nowhere to go. I tried to practice the Vipassana breathing technique but pain took over my entire being. I struggled to fight back tears in the room filled with quiet rhythmic breathing.

All I wanted to do was run away and cry, not meditate. I started to look for reasons to justify my leaving. 'I did not want to be a monk and this practice was designed for monks,' I reasoned. 'I believe in expressing emotions, not suppressing emotions,' I thought. 'I am not a vegetarian'.

I created enough fuel to justify packing my bags, walking out the door and never looking back.

Of course none of this fuel satiated what Vipassana was about; it was simply a meditation technique, a tool to apply to your daily life to accept that everything changes.

Just as coming into contact with people has a greater meaning, so does coming into contact with nature and animals. When I got home I looked up the greater meaning of the animals I had seen at Vipassana in Ted Andrew's *Animal Speak*. The rabbit, the cow and the bee were all symbols of fertility. Telling, considering I began menstruating again soon afterwards.

I had run like the rabbit, and the dog, from Vipassana. I had escaped the prison my mind had created only to realise I had been the only person judging myself and my actions. I had let fear and guilt take over my beliefs. Again I thought of those words spoken by the Dalai Lama. 'Never lose faith in the truth.' Who's truth sir? Yours or mine? I heard myself ask.

Mine.

## **One Fell Swoop**

### **One Fell Swoop**

“All my pretty ones?”

“Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?”

“What all my pretty chickens and their dam”

“At one fell swoop?”

(Macduff on finding his home had been destroyed)

Receiving the ‘Notice to Vacate’ was akin to being handed a letter from the military when your child is at war. At one fell swoop ‘Vauxhall Manor,’ our sanctuary for the past year was plucked from our hearts and things were going to change. Again.

Like the ghost in the front room, we did not want to leave.

‘Vauxhall’ could charm royalty. Friends would gasp “how did you get this place?” and I would answer knowingly “we deserved it”.

You see I used to swim with ducks but now I fly with swans. Amelia, a nurse for the elderly studying naturopathy, infuses healing energy into the homeopath medicine she makes for her father who suffers Parkinson’s disease. Rose’s hypnotic voice could bring peace to war. Her gratitude for shelter stems from her parent’s four-year battle with homelessness. Jamie’s intimidating intelligence hides behind his kindness and humility.

An old proverb from my childhood is: ‘where rosemary grows the women rule the house’. And this was true of Vauxhall. To the back of the house rosemary grew and to the front the ‘ladies quarters’ was protected by Olive the Tree of Peace and encircled by lavender. Occasionally, on a full moon the ‘ladies of Vauxhall’ would make offerings of lavender and rosemary from our garden to various Goddesses.

We wondered exactly what needed “major renovation” but our intuition told us this was just an excuse to get rid of us. We hypothesised over the real reason for our eviction. Was it increased rent? Was the owner returning to the property? Had the owner been displeased on inspection that we had turned the second dining room into a bedroom so that we all had fair-sized rooms?

We thought of the expense and time involved in moving house. There were those horror stories about the current rental market: lines of people protruding the streets at rental inspections; people offering higher rent to secure properties; people offering six months’ rent in advance; it taking up to and beyond three months to find a rental property.

We were about to find out.

We started looking for another house two whole months before the lease was up. Paying double rent for a month or so was preferred to becoming homeless. All students, we faced paying double rent for an unknown period of time.

Not only were we going to have to leave the house we loved, we were going to have to leave the area we loved too. Nothing in Northcote had the character of 'Vauxhall' and anything that did was at least \$200 per week more to rent. The Office of Housing Rental Report revealed that rent increased 12.7 percent in Melbourne between March 2007-2008.

The Tenants Union of Victoria wrote in the 2002 Social Changes Report that renting was once a temporary option on the way to home ownership, but for an increasing number of people who can't afford to buy, renting is now a long term reality. This was evident at opens. One property we looked at was more like a house-party than a house-inspection; I had to turn on my side to get past people.

Senior Property Manager at Brad Teal Michael Pateman said five years ago tenants would be offering less to rent houses rather than more. "It's a landlord's market. Landlords can be more choosy whereas tenants can't," he said. "You've got 10 to 20 prospective tenants at different opens and that is driving prices up".

Each week we looked at at least three houses and applied for one. Each week we would hear nothing back.

Senior Property Manager Michael Pateman said the best way to be successful when applying for a house was to get applications in promptly. "If you want to have your application filled out for the open, have it all filled out," he said.

One house looked appropriate but when we got there all the freshly painted walls had mysteriously cracked and peeled, it was smaller than we remembered from the website and the scent of what suspiciously smelt like urine pervaded the rooms. But it was the barbed wire coiled around the barriers of the house to protect it from burglary that topped it off. Forget feeling at home. We just wanted to feel safe.

I threw a tantrum for the first time in years trying to convince my roommates that one house in an area I liked was better than another in an area I disliked; when clearly it wasn't. Two of my roommates took up smoking again despite my constant badgering that smoking actually causes stress rather than relieves it.

House-hunting was like going on a date with a rock star that has many admirers. We would get all dressed up to make an impression and on meeting be pleasantly charmed; or dismally disappointed. If we were interested we would wait anxiously by the phone for a call that never came. Rejection hurt.

But we did get better.

Many renters feel compelled to offer more money than the advertised price to increase their chances of getting a house. The Tenants Union of Victoria are fighting to make rental bidding illegal because it breaches state laws about false advertising and wastes renter's time who wrongly believe they can afford a property.

With only a few weeks until the end of our lease we started to discuss the unthinkable. What would we do if we didn't get a house? The answer made our stomachs churn; we would have to stay with friends and pay a phenomenal sum to put the whole house in storage.

Homelessness Australia defines homelessness as "a person who does not have access to safe, secure, adequate housing". According to Homelessness Australia, over half of the 100,000 people homeless each night are staying temporarily with friends or relatives.

Toby Archer Policy and Liaison Worker for the Tenants Union of Victoria said "the rental crisis will continue without a concerted effort from governments to rectify the problem. The State government also needs to explain how it plans to fix declining affordability and profiteering by landlords".

The Housing Affordability Fund set up by the Federal Government aims to encourage the building of new homes by subsidising the cost of building. In the 2008-2009 budget 2.2 million has been allocated to 'housing affordability' including the building of 50,000 more rental properties.

With one week to go, we applied for a house in Coburg, even though the asking price was high. The house was \$500 per week which was about \$50 more expensive than the other three-to-four bedroom houses for rent in the area.

Apparently, more people in the property made for more expensive rent. The owners tried to increase the rent to \$550. We politely told them that we could only afford the advertised \$500 and that a house's value is dependent on its value and not the number of people living in it. They agreed to rent it to us for the advertised price but only for a six month lease. Coincidentally, rent can be increased every six months.

We told them we would take it but put off signing the lease until the final weekend. We applied for another house in Coburg, far more beautiful, and it was only \$450 per week to rent. The garden was lined with roses so fragrant they could charm the passing breeze. We offered \$500.

At last, after two painful months of gambling the rental market, the pretty chickens were given another dam.

All we wanted was an owner who would remember that it might be their house, but it is our home. After all, we pay them good money for it. It felt good rejecting the offer of the first house. We were tenants choosing the owner instead of the other way around. "Thanks, but no thanks," we said.

The final blow came three months after we moved into the 'Coburg Manor'. Rose's friend called to tell her she was moving into Northcote, but not just Northcote, she was moving into our old house 'Vauxhall'. We finally had an answer to the question of our eviction. The new household had been told they were strictly not to use the second dining room as a bedroom, like the "previous tenants" had done.

They were right to kick us out. If they had been kind enough to ask us to use the tiny fourth-bedroom as a bedroom instead of the second dining room, we would have politely declined.

Our new home has four even-sized bedrooms with skirtings painted to reflect the souls who reside in them. Green depicts nature and the earthiness of Amelia. Red depicts the passion and emotions of Rose. Angels depict the disposition of James. Blue depicts the creativity in me.

In one fell swoop it hit me. It didn't matter where I lived. It was not the house that mattered. It was the people in the house that made the house a home.

## PART 2 – EXEGESIS

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*“When you want something, the whole Universe conspires to help you realise your desire”*

(Paulo Coelho, bestselling author of *The Alchemist*, 2007:8)

## **Literature Review**

## **JOURNALISM FORMS**

*"The feature writer's aim is the dramatist's aim: make 'em laugh; make 'em weep"* (Mary J.J. Wrinn in Ricketson, 2004:1).

Matthew Ricketson identifies twelve categories of feature stories (2004:14-31):

### **1. Colour Story**

The colour story conveys atmosphere and emotion or a 'slice-of-life' of an event. It answers the question, what was it like to be there?

### **2. Human Interest Story**

Human interest stories convey more emotion than information.

### **3. News Feature**

News features develop the news of the day by explaining the meaning and examining it.

### **4. Backgrounder**

Backgrounders explain complex issues in simple terms.

### **5. Lifestyle Feature**

Lifestyle features offer new and relevant information for the reader to use in an entertaining way. Lifestyle features revolve around a list, an issue or an idea.

### **6. Travel Stories**

Travel stories are lifestyle features aimed at providing information on travel destinations.

### **7. General Feature**

General features are newsworthy because they are intrinsically interesting rather than linked to a news event.

### **8. Interview Piece**

Interview pieces are confined to an interview, often with a celebrity.

### **9. Profile**

The profile provides a mini-biography of (generally well-known) people.

### **10. Investigative Feature**

Investigative features provide revelations that are the result of solid investigative work.

### **11. Columns**

Readers develop a relationship with columnists through opinion. There are five types of columnists: advice columnists; gossip columnists; senior learned or skilled columnists; personal columnists; and specialist columnists.

### **12. Reviews**

Reviewers inform people by providing information via personal assessment.

### **Hard News Journalism**

Hard news journalism uses the inverted pyramid model by placing the most important facts at the top of the article. The 'five W and H model' used in hard news journalism promptly explains the 'who, what, when, where, why and how' to the reader. This technique has the important function of providing a quick fix of information and conveying facts quickly. Hard news journalism is good at describing events in terms of the facts, but is not so good at conveying the emotion and atmosphere that is inherent in reality. It cannot encompass the psychological and the effect can be dehumanising. Feature stories, by focusing on the underlying emotions and motivations allow the reader a more in depth understanding that is often denied to them in hard news journalism.

### **Yellow Journalism**

The late nineteenth century saw the age of 'yellow journalism' which refers to journalism involving: "hoaxes, altered photographs, screaming headlines, "scoops," frauds, and endless promotion of the newspapers themselves" (Ferguson, Patten & Wilson, 1998:9).

### **Literary Journalism**

Matthew Ricketson describes the characteristics of literary journalism as: subjects chosen from the real world; exhaustive (and often immersion) research; novelistic techniques borrowed from fiction; personalised voice; literary prose style; and aims to find underlying meaning (2001:156-157).

### **Immersion Journalism**

Immersion journalism is one form of feature writing that borrows from all forms of journalism. The main characteristic of immersion journalism is 'experience' or immersion reporting. It uses in depth research to answer the question 'what it feels like'? Similar to the colour and human interest story, the immersion piece tells what it is like to experience an event while emphasising emotion. It can be based around newsworthy events, like the rental crisis, or it can be intrinsically interesting, like Vipassana. It can provide background information and/or it can offer new information via solid investigative work. It can include opinion, reviews, travel information, interviews and profiles. Similar to literary journalism, immersion journalism chooses subjects from the real world, requires exhaustive research and aims to find the underlying meaning. Also, literary techniques can be used to convey emotion and atmosphere in the writing. Despite being very similar to literary journalism, immersion journalism is *not* an interchangeable term with literary journalism. However, more academic research has been done on literary journalism, hence a greater emphasis on it in the literature review.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

*“New Journalism – which is not really very new – frequently involves the first person voice. Even when the third person is used, the writer can still be in the middle of things, acting as a participant as well as an observer... its proponents say it is more honest and entertaining than traditional writing formulas. Its critics complain that it allows form to rule content, and that it is dishonest in sometimes recreating scenes and conversations with dialogue either invented or drawn from memory rather than notes”* (Conley, 1997: 225).

Mark Kramer describes Tom Wolfe’s contentious ‘New Journalism’: “Coined in the rebellious mid-sixties, it was often uttered with a quizzical tone and has fallen out of use because the genre wasn’t really alternative to some *old* journalism, and wasn’t really new” (1995:21). What was known as ‘new journalism’ in the mid 1960s is now commonly referred to as literary journalism. The word ‘new’ implied there was some ‘old journalism’ that was on its way out: but both hard news journalism and literary journalism thrive today. Hard news has retained its function to get information and ‘facts’ across to the reader quickly whereas literary journalism, using fictional techniques, functions to allow the reader to imagine and experience emotion, atmosphere and psychological ‘higher truths.’

The *aim* of literary journalism is to find the underlying emotional ‘reality’ behind the ‘facts’. Professor Nicolaus Mills argues that new journalism gained momentum in the 1960s because the ‘who, what, when, where, why and how’ model did not capture the emotional essence of social movements occurring at the time (1974:xvii). Intelligent and involved citizens wanted more understanding of the social movements than was being provided to them in the hard news model. Professor Stephanie Shariro argues: “The New Journalists who came of age in the 1960’s and ‘70s rewrote those lessons even as they dismantled the vestigial traits of yellow journalism. Heeding a revolutionary muse, they were intent on dismantling a smug country’s misappropriation of inherently solid values in the service of greed, racism and other social ills” (Shapiro, 2005:x).

The term “new journalism” came to professional and critical prominence in the mid-60s. Littered with fictional techniques, the language of news was brought to life like sequins on a military uniform. The latest fashion, its rebellion against the old was admired by some and abhorred by others. New journalism critic Dwight Macdonald argued against new journalism calling it “a bastard form, having it both ways, exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction” (in Mills, 1974:xv). New journalism requires more time, skill and research than traditional journalism and attempts to narrow the gulf between objectivity and subjectivity. Articles are lengthy and often develop into books. Literary techniques are used to keep the reader interested in lengthy articles. Truman Capote spent five years researching *In Cold Blood* (Ricketson, 2001:159). His in-depth research humanised two murderers and the people of Holcomb. Hard news journalism’s ‘objectivity’ can dehumanise

someone like Bill Hickcock or Perry Smith by making them out to be killers rather than human beings: it doesn't account for the fact that these 'killers' are human beings or have to deal with any of the social or psychological problems that led to their demise.

Professor and award winning journalist Matthew Ricketson argues that Truman Capote's novel *In Cold Blood* created hype over the 'non-fiction novel': "Journalists were outraged and literary critics dismissive; one snorted that the non-fiction novel was an oxymoronic phrase and a moronic idea" (Ricketson, 150). Nicolaus Mills argues that the advocates of 'new journalism' (e.g. Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese) helped to establish the form and criticism helped to develop it: "What sets off modern (1960s) new journalism from these earlier efforts is the way in which it has developed into a more clearly definable literary form and grown into a sizable body of writing" (Mills, 1974:xvii). Definitions and criticism of new journalism in the 1960s effectively created a genre with an individual style, techniques and conventions for enthusiasts to learn and follow in the years thereafter.

However, using fictional techniques in non-fiction writing actually pre-dates the 'new journalism' of the 1960s. Novelists and journalists have been borrowing from each other since at least the eighteenth century: Matthew Ricketson writes: "Daniel Defoe presented Robinson Crusoe in 1719 as a just history of fact" (Ricketson, 2001:152). Kevin Kerrane argues Defoe is the pioneer of literary journalism: "His novels, rich in realistic detail, read like documentary reports, while his journalism shines with literary quality" (in Ricketson, 2001:152). Other writers to mesh fiction and non-fiction techniques prior to the mid-1960s were Charles Dickens and Mark Twain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Stephen Crane in the 20<sup>th</sup>. Professor Mark Kramer adds: "Before and just after the Second World War, James Agee, Ernest Hemingway, A.J. Leibling, Joseph Mitchell, Lillian Ross, and John Steinbeck tried out narrative essay forms. Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Tom Woolfe, and Joan Didion followed" (Kramer, 1995:21).

The most identifiable quality of literary journalism is its leaning towards fictional techniques. Descriptions are constrained to the real but should shine with literary quality. Immersion journalism is a method of literary journalism with a greater emphasis on subjectivity and experience. It uses many of the techniques of literary journalism to involve readers in the narrative prompting them to imagine 'how it feels.' Writing subjectively, or from the characters point of view can allow the reader to understand events from the emotional perspective of someone caught up in them. Gay Talese, a new journalism practitioner, argues: "The New Journalism, though often reading like fiction, is not fiction. It is, or should be, as reliable as the most reliable reportage although it seeks a larger truth than is possible through the mere compilation of verifiable facts, the use of direct quotations, and adherence to the rigid organisational style of the older form. The new journalism allows, demands in fact, a

more imaginative approach to reporting, and it permits the writer to inject himself into the narrative if he wishes" (in Mills, 1974:xii).

Literary journalism uses fictional devices to involve readers in events, allowing the reader to imagine details often omitted from the traditional news story. Immersion journalism uses literary techniques to convey atmosphere and emotion. Like the literary journalist, the immersion journalist develops a narrative style by carefully choosing words and by structuring the narrative for dramatic effect. These forms of journalism read like fiction with a catchy beginning, organised structure and a satisfying conclusion. It encourages the reader's imaginative participation in the text. Using fictional techniques humanises the people caught up in events and dialogue is often used to establish character. Matthew Ricketson argues that mixing fiction and non-fiction overcomes the limitations of the news while keeping the power and impact of the real: "Novelists envy journalists' power of the real and journalists resent the limitations of news" (Ricketson, 2001:153). Immersion journalists use experience as a research method, and fictional techniques as a writing method in order to examine newsworthy or historical events, or they can write about people or events that are neither historic nor newsworthy.

## OBJECTIVITY vs WRITING SUBJECTIVELY

*"It is a writer's obligation to impose narrative... And, by the same token, it is apparently a journalist's obligation to pretend that he does nothing of the sort" (Nora Ephron in Bennett, 2005:36).*

Hard news journalism adheres to the idea of objectivity. Mark Levin, a journalism teacher, writes: "To be objective you must report the facts without bias – without including your opinions or letting them slant the reporting" (Levin, 2000:38). Mark Levin teaches that to be 'objective,' facts, which can be proven, should not be confused with opinion, which is open to dispute. The typical viewpoint is this: "*Your* opinion... has no place in the story... report what you saw and heard, not what you think or feel. Let the readers draw their own conclusions" (Levin, 2000:38). Bill Moyers, journalist and once White House Press Secretary, argued the greatest myth of journalism is objectivity (in Mills, 1974:xvii) and immersion journalism does not pretend to be objective: it allows the writer to have a voice. Like the novelist, the immersion journalist has a 'voice' and this voice conveys emotion rather than facts - what it feels like to be caught up in events. Professor Nicolaus Mills argues: "The structure, the language, the point of view of the new journalism all go against the grain of the ordered, objective, detached approach of established reporting" (Mills, 1974:xiii).

Generally subjectivity is delegated to editorials, opinion pieces and travel writing. When writing subjectively in first person, you write as either the protagonist of your story or as a privileged observer. When writing the book *A History of Reading* Alberto Manguel struggled with how he could link the diverse topics but found there was no justification for it being bound with a single cover: "What could bring all these bits of lore, however rich and quaint, into any but the most arbitrary coexistence? And suddenly it struck me: *I* was the cognitive link, the common denominator" (Manguel, 1997:16). So Manguel wrote the book by threading himself through the story – by reminiscing or confessing (Manguel, 1997:16). Writers often struggle with writing in first person, not because of its difficulty, but because of the objective convention and they question whether readers will care about their opinion, especially when it is someone else's story. Manguel observes: "what was intriguing was how many of these experienced professionals used the *I* with initial diffidence and anxiety, as if making themselves visible on the page was not much different to streaking... It seems that in serious contemporary journalism, as in scholarship, virtue still significantly resides in the third person impersonal" (Manguel, 1997:17).

The 'New Journalists' of the 1960s exploited narrative conventions such as subjectivity. However striving for objectivity by writing in the third person impersonal is still popular amongst feature article writers: Professor Richard Keeble argues: "Significantly, the National Union of Journalists' code of conduct ([www.nuj.org.uk](http://www.nuj.org.uk))

stresses the importance of separating 'established fact' from 'comment and conjecture' and the Press Complaints Commission's code ([www.pcc.org.uk](http://www.pcc.org.uk)) says newspapers, while free to be partisan, 'must distinguish between comment, conjecture and fact'" (Keeble, 2005:57). Other journalists' organisations such as the MEAA Code of Ethics ([www.alliance.org.au/code-of-ethics.html](http://www.alliance.org.au/code-of-ethics.html)) are backing away from the term objectivity and instead are using words such as balance and fairness. But: "Isn't *fair* a better description of this approach than *objective*?" asks Professor W. Lance Bennett (Bennett, 2005:183). Bennett argues that balance or equal time given to all sides is also a dubious term: "what if one point of view is seldom heard, and is more complicated than the already established positions?" (Bennett, 2005:183).

Subjective reporting can give new meaning and a different type of authenticity to journalism. However, 'subjective truth' should be treated with caution; there are downfalls to subjectivity such as the risk of self-indulgence. Myra Macdonald, writer and academic, argues that "a more egotistical presentation of the investigating self encourages an absorption in personality" (Macdonald in Keeble, 2005:57). Alberto Manguel argues that: "The third person in journalism does serve one vast, worthy, *real* purpose, which is this: when the reader wants urgently to satisfy his curiosity, get the headlines, learn the bad news, find out how the situation unfolded, read the latest findings, it's plain bad manners for the messenger to insist on getting in the way. Who needs his sticky egotistical proximity? Journalists need to guard against being self-centred, self-indulgent, self-absorbed, pushy" (Manguel, 1997:19). Manguel believes the way to guard against ego is to ask yourself "why are you telling all this to me, a stranger?" before you start writing (Manguel, 1997:19).

Objectivity is a journalistic convention. Any literary form relies on conventions. Professor Dan Schiller argues that: "Formally created and substantially embodied conventions alone can be used to contrive the illusion of objectivity" (Schiller, 1981:2). Tuchman argues journalists and the public have become trapped by conventions "which may be used by journalists in warding off charges of bias or distortion" (in Schiller, 1981:3). Bennett argues that: "Above all, the objectivity norm gives the press the look of an independent social institution" (Bennett, 2005:202-203). Molotch and Lester argue that the "'objectivity assumption' states not that the media are objective, but that there is a world out there to be objective about" (in Schiller, 1981:2). Stories that claim to be objective by offering the 'facts', hide the fact that they are in fact *stories* told by a person, in a specific sequence. Matalene argues: "The act of writing is always – no matter how 'factual' the story – an act of selecting and creating, naming and foregrounding, leaving out and marginalising" (Matalene, 1998:2). Gerber asserts "there is no fundamentally non-ideological, apolitical, non-partisan, news gathering and reporting system...all news is views" (Gerber in Schiller, 1981:6).

In theory, everything is biased. The objective illusion is that there is a neutral 'unbiased' position; but once a journalist engages their emotions it becomes difficult to fence sit. Immersion journalists reject the notion they can

be objective – by writing subjectively they are able to openly interpret events and express their opinions. Bennett argues that “news is biased not in spite of, but precisely because of, the professional journalism standards intended to prevent bias” (Bennett, 2005:182). Schiller argues ‘perceived lack of bias’ or ‘objectivity’ has often become the measure of performance because the cultural convention “permits readers to indulge their belief that bias is indeed present or absent” (Schiller, 1981:6). Bennett argues people who see bias, see it with their own ideology: “If neutrality or objectivity could be achieved, citizens with strong views on particular issues would not recognise it” (Bennett, 2005:39). Bennett asserts: “The irony of this notion of objectivity is not easy to defend: officials are known to have biases, facts are easily disputed, and the news can never include all the viewpoints that may be important to understanding events” (Bennett, 2005:181).

Objectivity has remained the most constant attribute of hard news because of the emphasis on reporting information quickly: Ricketson argues that: “In a literary sense straight news reporting is formulaic. The need for speed dictates a formula that once learnt is never forgotten” (Ricketson, 2004:149) When the newspaper became a commodity and as communication technologies advanced, everyone was considered a buyer. No market was to be offended by ‘biased’ reporting. Bennett argues that in the early days people bought papers knowing the political perspective and people would seek points of view they felt aligned with: “As diverse political perspectives gradually disappeared or became discredited as not objective, it became easier to convince people that the remaining perspective was somehow objective” (Bennett, 2005:188). Professor Martin Hirst argues that: “It wasn’t until the emerging middle class got its hands on the printing presses in the nineteenth century that newspapers changed from agitation and propaganda to a more ‘objective’... and sanitised news” (Hirst, 2001:69).

Ben Bagdikian, journalist and professor, argues that “Objectivity’ demanded more discipline of reporters and editors because it expected every item to be attributed to some authority. No traffic accident could be reported without quoting a police sergeant. No wartime incident was recounted without confirmation from government officials” (in Bennett, 2005:180). Thus, objectivity overemphasises official voices. Bennett believes that the “most serious biases in the news occur not when journalists abandon their professional standards, but when they cling most responsibly to them” (2005:181). Journalist James Cameron, who dared to portray the North Vietnamese as human during the Vietnam War, commented: “It never occurred to me, in such a situation, to be other than subjective. I have always tended to argue that objectivity was of less importance than the truth” (Keeble, 2005:57). The reality of what was happening in Vietnam was best conveyed subjectively because it allowed feelings and atmosphere to enter the equation.

Writing in first person is generally permitted in the diary, the reminiscence or memoir, the letter, the confession and sparingly in travel writing. Alberto Manguel argues that the limited conventions of first person writing stem from “its very beginnings, journalism, preoccupied with facts and events, bent on relaying news bulletins and true

histories, made a fetish of impersonality... The messengers – the conveyors of news – went unnamed” (Manguel, 1997:18). Manguel believes this habit has become dogma for purely cosmetic reasons because writing in third person gives the *appearance* of authority, infallibility, objectivity and disinterestedness (Manguel, 1997:18). It gives the impression of authority by quoting not mere human beings but shakers and movers, those whose title holds authority. Speaking in third person makes it seem as though this is ‘everyone’s opinion, everyone thinks this way, its law’. “In contrast, the first person singular is subjective, interested, biased, opinionated, frail, sinful, mistaken, lazy, all too fallible” (Manguel, 1997:18). Manguel argues that writing in third person is like speaking over a loud speaker in the safety of an office, no introspection or self-knowledge is required: “In the first person, however, a journalist resembles an uneasy guest attending a private party given by strangers. The guest needs to explain who she is and how she came to be invited, all the while telling an interesting story” (Manguel, 1997:19).

Writer Caroline Matalene calls it “keeping a continuous stream before the reader’s eyes” and says writers not only tell people what happened, they interpret it and tell people what it means: they understand that we construct the world by the language we use to talk about it (Matalene, 1998:1-2). Matalene believes writing in the first person is ‘self-conscious’ and calls attention to the act of writing: “How will I choose to tell the story? What is my role? How has covering this story changed who I am? What about my story?” (Matalene, 1998:2). Matalene argues that the most risky form of writing is the “admission of the personal” as these writers refuse to be mere onlookers with a notepad or transmitters of information, they “reveal themselves as persons with memories and experiences and histories, persons who when pricked, bleed, sometimes forever. Their admissions make us realise that print journalism is produced by people, not by processes” (Matalene, 1998:2). By including an argument, journalists can draw attention to the fact that reporting is in fact a persuasion: “Most journalists pretend that reporting is not persuasion, but these writers select and arrange their evidence to direct us to specific conclusions about our world” (Matalene, 1998:2).

As journalists the things we routinely remember for people are ‘newsworthy’ events like massacres or hurricanes rather than the intimate events of everyday life (e.g. the feeling a woman feels when she beats cancer). Walt Harrington argues newspapers should include more of the everyday in them by functioning as a muse rather than a public watchdog (Harrington, 1997:xiii). Harrington believes: “Reporting of everyday life preserves journalistic integrity, expands the report, connects readers emotionally to their newspapers and makes journalists seem less like the unfeeling, uncaring hit men many people wrongly believe them to be... Unfortunately much of this negative image is deserved, growing from the traditional watchdog ethic gone over the edge” (Harrington, 1997:xiv). Harrington argues people now live far more fragmented lives than ever before and a more ‘intimate journalism’ of everyday life will repair society: “The stories of everyday life – about the behaviour, motives, feelings, faiths, attitudes, grievances, hopes, fears and accomplishments of people as they seek meaning and

purpose in their lives, stories that are windows on our universal human struggle – should be at the soul of every good newspaper...Obviously, they're not" (Harrington, 1997:xiv).

Immersion journalists must seek 'higher truths' than a surface understanding and reporting of events. Professors Leo Bowman and Stephen McIlwaine identify three stages that reporters must move through to reach deeper truths – reactive, analytic and reflective (2001:104-105). The problem most people have with hard news journalism is that time constraints prevent most articles moving beyond the reactive stage. Enquiry should move beyond reactive reporting (e.g. passing on the news of a rise in interest rates) through an analytic stage (why has this happened?) and ultimately reach the reflective stage (what does this event say about our society?) This type of reporting stops the tendency to believe reactive reporting is the 'truth' or the end of the story. This method of reporting allows for a shift beyond epistemological claims to greater societal problems.

## **Projects Activities & Reflection on Immersion Journalism**

## TECHNIQUE

*“A good feature is something that tells you something you didn’t know before. It’s a story that has surprising characters... A good feature is about making strangers connect”* (Thornton McCamish in Maskell & Perry, 1999:64).

Immersion journalism is not easy to define but there are some common elements: immersion reporting (thorough/fly-on-wall research); novelistic techniques (structure, characterisations etc); literary prose (use of metaphors, inclusion of intimate details etc); subjective voice; emotional and atmospheric drive; and basis in reality. The events described, as with all journalism, must be real in order to keep faith with the reader. Matthew Ricketson argues quotes and attributed thoughts should be verifiable: “no composite characters, no invented quotes and no attributing thoughts to sources unless they can be verified” (Ricketson, 2001:156). Walt Harrington argues that ‘intimate’ or immersion journalists “avoid the idea that the story *is* the interview” (Harrington, 1997:xxxiv) by immersing themselves in the real lives of the people they are writing about in order to gain a greater understanding of them. Immersion reporting means participating in the story while observing it by immersing yourself in the world of your subject for lengthy periods of time. Matthew Ricketson believes: “Literary journalism stands or falls on the quality of the reporting and research work. Without that, all the fine prose in the world has little meaning. In literary journalism the research is the iceberg, the polished prose its tip.” (Ricketson, 2001:157).

The method of ‘hanging around’ and aiming to become a ‘fly-on-the-wall’ - whose presence is there, but often forgotten – enables the immersion journalist to gain access to knowledge and understanding that is more difficult to get using traditional journalism technique. The method of silent observation is similar to method acting, in which the actor experiences the life of his characters in order to better understand them and portray them as truthfully as possible. This technique “encourages the writer to become a part of the story” (Gutkind, 1998:4). For *Vipassana: a story to meditate on*, I did more than the basic journalistic technique of researching and interviewing people who have done the 10-day course. I enrolled in the course and experienced it for myself. By doing Vipassana I was able to gain a greater understanding of ‘what it feels like’ to meditate for eleven hours a day. It changed the nature of the article because I was not just relying on hearsay of what doing a Vipassana meditation course is like, I was experiencing it for myself. I was able to relate my experience and include intimate and telling detail that would not have been possible by using the traditional interview technique.

Immersion journalism is similar the participatory model of documentary making, in which the author can make themselves known to the audience. Lee Gutkind, award-winning author, teacher and editor, believes reflection is permitted and encouraged but exploration of ideas is equally vital: “from George Orwell to Ernest Hemmingway to

John McPhee, books and essays written by these writers are invariably about a subject other than themselves, although the narrator will be intimately included in the story" (Gutkind, 1998:6). In *Joe Cinque's Consolation* Helen Garner reports on the trial of Joe Cinque's killer but the novel was also about grief and the justice system. In *One Fell Swoop* I reflect upon the roller coaster of emotions when one loses a home and faces possible homelessness but I was simultaneously investigating the current lack of affordable rental housing.

Immersion journalism is about not ending up where you expect to end up and being open to new pathways. I enrolled in Vipassana expecting to come out with a story about meditation, but I came out with a story about abortion and standing by your own beliefs. Walt Harrington, writer for 15 years for *The Washington Post Magazine*, says when reporting you shouldn't worry what the story is, because this undermines your ability to grasp the story: "it means we'll inevitably fall back on well-worn themes and observations – interpretive clichés – and not give ourselves the time or frame of mind to see anything beyond that" (Harrington, 1997:xxxiv). Relevant are the words of documentary photographer Walker Evans: "It's as though there's a wonderful secret in a certain place and I can capture it. Only I, at this moment, can capture it, and only this moment and only me"" (Harrington, 1997:xxxiv).

Immersion journalism is about telling an interesting story and making it an enjoyable ride. Scenes are written not necessarily chronologically but to create dramatic tension. In *Vipassana: a story to meditate on* I began at the end of Vipassana telling the reader "I failed" and then described the events that led me to this fate. Lee Gutkind says go off on tangents but always come "back to the beginning – that rare and wonderful moment of clarity" (Gutkind, 1998:11). Like in the non-fiction novel a teaser at the beginning should end with a taste at the end. In *One Fell Swoop* I began with a Shakespearean quote and ended by demonstrating the quote's relevance. Lee Gutkind argues that the golden rule any form of creative writing is "show don't tell" (1998:7) and this what I tried to do when writing my articles: I aimed to show the reader how it feels to lose a home, rather than tell them; I aimed to show the reader what it feels like to do a Vipassana meditation course, rather than tell them.

A method of 'showing' is to include intimate and specific detail in the article. Lee Gutkind says: "Intimate means recording and noting detail that the reader might not know or even imagine without your particular inside insight" (Gutkind, 1998:7). For example in *Vipassana: a story to meditate on*, descriptions of plants and animals serve to give the reader a sense of atmosphere at Vipassana. Walt Harrington argues immersion journalists must continually ask 'why'- as truth is in the details; but a "deeper truth is in the meaning of the details" (Harrington, 1997:xxviii). When reporting, Harrington argues that anything could be potential data so it is important to get as much detail down as possible: You won't know what will be important until later, when your story has taken shape, so "write down everything and anything" (Harrington, 1997:xxix). For *Vipassana: a story to meditate on*, I

was not able to write during the course, but for the days I was there I mentally recorded and repeated things I saw, heard, smelt and touched. I collected information through all of my senses.

Walt Harrington believes the goal of the immersion journalist, rooted in descriptive realism, is “to describe and evoke how *people live and what they value*” (Harrington, 1997:xx). Harrington argues ‘intimate’ journalism is designed to “make readers leave themselves momentarily and feel what it is like to *be* another person” and the immersion journalist’s goal should be to create the ‘feeling of a lived experience’: “It is not ‘news you can use’, but ‘news you can feel’” (Harrington, 1997:xv-xx). The technique I used to achieve this when writing my articles is writing using literary techniques such as metaphors: “Like the ghost in the front room, we did not want to leave”, I wrote in *One Fell Swoop*. In immersion journalism, dialogue can be captured from recording overhead conversations as well as through casual discussions. Thus, unlike traditional hard news reporting, the ‘interview’ is the *entire research period* rather than a structured interview time. In *One Fell Swoop* the interview/reporting period was the moment we received the ‘Notice to Vacate’ until three months after we moved into our new house and found out the real reason we were kicked out.

When reporting, collect facts through all your senses and view scenes from different angles: write in long and tight shots as a filmmaker would. “Remember that the most artful journalism is craft. And the most artful journalists are craftsmen” (Harrington, 1997:xxxvi). In *Vipassana: a story to meditate on* I wrote in tight shots, such as describing the spider’s web, and in long shots, such as describing the sound of cows lowing. Walt Harrington argues: “There’s no end to the craft you must hide... You will check decades-old weather reports to be sure it actually rained on the day someone says it rained” (Harrington, 1997:xxxi). When writing *Vipassana: a story to meditate on*, I had to research the type of forest, ‘mountain ash,’ that surrounded the site to get the type of trees that I had been looking at; so that I could describe the tree as a “eucalypt tree”, rather than a “tree”. Harrington believes if you an open, honest and genuine person can use your own experiences to unlock those of your subjects: “people are more willing to show their vulnerabilities to those who reveal their own vulnerabilities” (Harrington 1997:xxxv). Immersion reporting is about establishing relationships with the people whose story you are telling. In *Joe Cinque’s Consolation* Helen Garner became friends with Joe Cinque’s family. She didn’t hide this but instead reflected on it in the book and questioned how it may have affected her reporting.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

*“Journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, comment and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression. They scrutinise power, but also exercise it, and should be responsible and accountable”* (MEAA in Tapsall & Varley, 2001:5).

Yellow journalism techniques, in particular the exploits of Nellie Bly, bear some mention in relation to immersion journalism: she once faked being mentally ill and got herself committed to a mental institution. By reporting undercover she was able to expose the asylum's poor conditions and inhumane treatment of its patients. By using immersion reporting as her methodology she was able to access the 'truth' of what it was really like to live in a mental institution. Her sensationalised story sparked reforms in mental institutions around America but was her method of deceit was unethical? The MEAA Code of Ethics asks journalists to disclose all essential facts and identify themselves before obtaining material. However, the MEAA Code of Ethics also says the public good overrides all other ethical considerations. The treatment of patients in the mental institution was so poor that the public right to know overrode the fact that she had used a deceitful method to get the story.

This ethical consideration was particularly relevant in my research for the Vipassana article in which I identified myself as a student journalist who wanted to do the course and write about my experience of it for publication in *Living Now* and for my Honours folio. Walt Harrington argues that: “Unlike anthropologists, journalists usually use real names in their stories. The first ethical rule of intimate journalism is to be completely honest with your subjects about what kind of story you are writing” (Harrington, 1997:xxiv). I attended the course with the teacher's awareness of who I was and what I was doing there. The MEAA code of ethics says that: “Ethical journalism requires conscientious decision-making in context” ([www.alliance.org.au/code-of-ethics.html](http://www.alliance.org.au/code-of-ethics.html)). By striving to follow the MEAA code of ethics and acting according to my conscience I was able to understand the importance of disclosing relevant information. The old 'put yourself in the other person's shoes' works wonders. If someone was researching me and was going to write about it; I would like to know first.

Journalists should be aware of the baggage and prejudices they bring to every assignment and be accountable for the lens they frame people in. When expressing opinions Matthew Ricketson argues journalists should express a little humility: “It is important for journalists to develop an awareness of their own preconceptions and prejudices” (Ricketson, 2004:190). The MEAA Code of Ethics asks journalists not to allow personal interests or beliefs to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence and to disclose conflicts of interest that may affect your accuracy. For the Vipassana article I had differing beliefs in regards to abortion than Vipassana and without

disclosing my beliefs first I may have been seen to be undermining their religious beliefs. I had to be very careful to ensure I respected their beliefs which were different to my own by validating both views. In immersion journalism when writing subjectively to portray feelings and atmosphere, opinions and prejudices are even more apparent. Knowing yourself, expressing humility and not trampling on other people's beliefs can soften the impact of your voice. Walt Harrington argues: "Ethically, when writing about the intimate lives of ordinary people, the immersion journalist must adopt the anthropologist stance: they should do everything within their power to protect people's physical, social and psychological welfare and honour their privacy and dignity" (Harrington, 1997:xxiv). Despite various codes of conduct, ultimately, it fell on me to make the decision to act ethically and ensure my conscience was clear.

When researching *Vipassana: a story to meditate on*, I had to remember that representation of any group is a powerful tool of persuasion. Certain groups have been subjected to a legacy of definition and classification. Professor Paul Scott believes the subtlest and most influential influences create and maintain stereotypes: "We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them" (Scott, 2001:131). Distorted representations can be linked to marginalisation of groups and individuals. When writing about Aboriginality Professor Michael Dodson argues: "It is as if we have been ushered on to a stage to play in a drama where the parts have already been written" (2003:37). When reporting there are techniques that can be used to remain fair, accurate and culturally unbiased. Hybrids of culture and identity are more commonplace nowadays and using simplified ethnic identity labels and stereotypes are unwarranted. Fair representation of class, religion, age, sexuality, disability, gender, race and ethnicity can be achieved by understanding 'others' and abiding by codes and principals outlawing discrimination and hatred.

A goal of immersion journalism is to accurately describe and understand people's worlds from the inside out, to understand and portray people as they understand themselves. This means acknowledging that all people have the right to self-determination, the right to pursue their own economic, social, political and cultural development. Michael Dodson argues: "Recognition of a people's fundamental right to self-determination must include the right to self-definition, and to be free from the control and manipulation of alien people" (Dodson, 2003:31). What is promoted as normal, natural and common sense can lead to its entrenchment and validation. The media plays a key role in this process through repetition and framing events in a certain way. Paul Scott argues: "Equally – through omission, neglect, or ridicule – other ideas, lifestyles or behaviours can either be marginalised or become part of the spectacle of the bizarre" (Scott, 2001:137). In my reporting of Vipassana I was conscious that this article might be people's first imagined experience of Vipassana and I didn't want to frighten people from

experiencing it for themselves. By writing subjectively in first person I was emphasising that this was my opinion and my experience and it would not necessarily be the opinion or experience of anyone else.

Paul Scott argues that journalists should strive for 'cultural competence' which: "encourages explanations, enhances understanding, provides greater access to individuals...reflects a more accurate, complete, and authentic picture of communities. It builds bridges between different groups. It captures the whole as well as it does the sum of its parts" (Scott, 2001:145). 'Cultural competence' can be achieved by asking yourself *why* you are writing a story and ensuring *how* you write it, reflects this question. When writing *Vipassana: a story to meditate on*, I was writing subjectively to convey the atmosphere and emotions I felt at Vipassana; I was not writing to argue that my beliefs are right or better than other beliefs. My aim was to 'inspire and inform', not to ridicule or marginalise. I had to make sure I understood and made it clear that Vipassana is simply a meditation technique. It wasn't suited to me. It might be suited to you. I came away with some good things from doing the course so it was not a wasted experience.

There is a lack of dialogue in the Vipassana article because the assistant teachers only agreed to do interviews with me if I completed the course. I did not have permission to quote them so ethically I had leave out conversations I had with the teachers. The teachers thought that because I did not complete the course I was not going to write about it, but I felt if I wrote about it subjectively with consideration for their beliefs and aims then I could still write about my experience of Vipassana. Again in *One Fell Swoop* even though I changed the names of my housemates I left out dialogue for ethical reasons. They were unaware I was writing about them and the story was centred on my experience of losing a house, not theirs. In the article published by *Catalyst* my housemates are not described at all and I don't think this took away from the story. The version published by *Catalyst* has a different ending to the version written for *Living Now* because *Living Now* expects 'positive and uplifting'.

## CONCLUSION: WORDS IN ACTION

*“Generally I’m looking for a point well made, and an enjoyable journey in getting to that point”* (Jim Buckell, in Maskell & Perry, 1999:54).

*Living Now*, the magazine targeted for publication, expects articles to be “informing, nurturing, inspiring and empowering”. The style of the magazine is positive and uplifting. Both of the experiences written about were not initially the positive experiences I was expecting to write about. Moving house was an ordeal of going to numerous house inspections and dealing with numerous knock-backs and we were lucky to just avoid homelessness by getting a house right at the last minute. We didn’t want to leave ‘Vauxhall’ and then we found out they kicked us out *not* to do “major renovations,” but because they did not like how we were using the space. To the owners, the eviction was ‘a piece of paper,’ but to us, students, trying to find a rental home and moving during semester, was a nightmare. I went from having the master bedroom to the smallest bedroom. Rose and James had to move away from High Street with its great band culture. We all sacrificed things we valued moving out of ‘Vauxhall’.

*Living Now* audiences expect ‘positive and uplifting’ and in *One Fell Swoop* I struggled with how I was going to achieve this without bending the ‘truth’ of the situation. The only thing that made the situation positive and uplifting was the fact that eventually we did find another house as nice as ‘Vauxhall’. Also, I came to the realisation that it is not the house you live in that makes a house great, it is the people you are living with. In this respect I am blessed. It took time for me to understand the good in the situation. When change happens it can take a while to accept it and I think most of *One Fell Swoop* captures the raw emotion of me not wanting to embrace change. By telling the reader at the end of the article that ‘it is the people, not the house that makes a home,’ I was speaking the truth. Also, by coming to see the good in the situation it made the article more suited to the style of *Living Now*. Similarly for *Vipassana: a story to meditate on* the experience was not positive or uplifting. I failed the course. Writing for a particular magazine can cause difficulties when the ‘truth’ does not align with the audience expectations.

My experience of writing *One Fell Swoop* and *Vipassana: a story to meditate on* supports the claim that ‘the act of writing is always an act of selecting what to put in the article, and what to leave out’. Therefore what is put in and what is left out determines the way in which the reader is ‘persuaded’ to believe one thing over another. In *One Fell Swoop* I left out that at ‘Vauxhall’ we had been letting the smallest bedroom to a friend temporarily. This may also have had an impact on the owner’s decision to kick us out. Thus, ‘truth’ is only ever what someone

decides to tell the journalist or what the journalist decides to put in the article. Also 'truth' from one moment to the next can change. My story about the rental situation changed over time because things happened that changed my perspective, we found out for sure we had been lied to about "major renovations". There is a discrepancy between striving for 'truth' and audience expectations if you allow one to influence the other. This is because 'truth' can be 'biased, frail, changing, sinful, mistaken and fallible'.

For *Vipassana: a story to meditate on* and *One Fell Swoop* I used experience as the method of research. This works on the assumption that the best way to understand something is to experience it or the best way to understand someone is to know them. Because I was writing in first person I needed to 'guard against self indulgence'. It was best for me to understand 'why I was telling you this, to a stranger?' I used immersion journalism as my methodology because it best conveys the emotional truth inherent in reality that we are often distanced from in other forms of journalism. I think both articles achieved their aim of conveying the emotion of 'what it feels like' to lose a home, or 'what it feels like' do a Vipassana meditation course. My presence in these stories added something to these articles – the human element and the 'higher truth' of my emotional experiences. I wrote subjectively because I needed to alert the reader this was *my* experience of learning to meditate and *my* experience of losing our home. Using the first-person pronoun makes it clear to the reader it is my interpretation of moving house, or attending Vipassana, and may not necessarily be the experience of someone else.

For *Vipassana: a story to meditate on*, I did the course expecting to come home with a positive article about meditation and I ended up with a story about abortion and beliefs. This highlights a point made earlier about not knowing where the story is going to end up when beginning the research process. I left with animosity towards Vipassana because I had 'failed'. I wanted to blame them because I couldn't complete the course (by labelling them as a religious cult or a course suitable for people who want to become monks or numb their emotions) but in the end (after a period of time to reflect) I realised that it was perhaps partly my own fault because I had not tried harder to do the technique - I had let my mind wander and allowed myself to get caught up in issues of my mind's creation. I did not realise when I went to Vipassana I already had strong belief systems in place that conflicted with Vipassana's beliefs. This was the reason I had to leave.

I used literary techniques such as imagery and metaphor to create emotion and atmosphere. In *Vipassana: a story to meditate on* I mention a kookaburra laughing (when I tried to leave Vipassana) as a method of conveying my inner embarrassment of not being able to complete the course. Hard news functions to convey information quickly and relies heavily on 'facts', which are verifiable, and the views of experts and people whose title holds authority. Immersion journalism, on the other hand, functions to convey emotion and atmosphere through

experience. Subjectivity relies on vague and uncheckable sense-impressions. The 'illusion of truth' is lost because the reader has to trust that for example a kookaburra actually did laugh as I went to leave Vipassana. Both articles consisted largely of unverifiable sentences - imagery of sight or smell and metaphors. Not only did I have to act ethically according to my conscience, I had to act morally by being honest too. The reader must trust that for example when I shuffled Words of Wisdom cards, 'never lose faith in the truth' came out of the deck, which it did. Thus immersion journalists should commit to personal and professional integrity by describing events that really happened. This allows readers to maintain faith in the writer and in journalism as a whole.

If *One Fell Swoop* had been a hard news story it would have relied on facts and statements from official people like government officials or representatives of advocate groups. If it had been a feature article I would have included the human face in the story, by interviewing various people who have experienced the current rental market. Immersion journalism takes it one step further, by using literary techniques; it dealt with the emotion of 'how it feels' to lose a home in the current rental market. Although blending fact and fictional techniques has been happening for centuries both forms of journalism are important today, they simply perform different functions. By writing in the third-person impersonal it can create the illusion that a process of selection, exclusion and persuasion has *not* occurred, when in reality, this always is the case. The third person requires no introspection but 'all news is views': in hard news it is 'official views'; in feature articles it is 'other people's views'; and in immersion journalism it can be 'subjective views'. The idea that: 'once journalists engage their emotions it becomes difficult to fence sit' is true because when you experience something emotionally it can be difficult to see an issue neutrally and not have an opinion about it. In immersion journalism you don't have to fence sit because you are entitled to an opinion. In *One Fell Swoop* my opinion about the rental market is clear: landlords can play god with people's lives, the tenants have no rights when owners hide behind untruthful "letters to vacate".

Immersion journalism should move through the three stages of analysis as identified by Bowman & McIlwaine (2001, 104:105). The reactive stage is 'what happened' – I lost a house, and didn't complete Vipassana. The analytic stage is 'why it has happened' – the owner didn't want to renew the lease because we were using the dining room as a bedroom, and I couldn't cope with the guilt of my abortion. The reflective stage is 'what does this event say about our society' – because of the current rental crisis it is a landlord's market rather than a tenant's market, and people have different beliefs concerning abortion. By moving through these three stages and by using immersion as a method of reporting, and subjectivity as a method of writing, the reader is hopefully able to imagine how it feels. Understanding by experiencing leads to less stereotypical judgement of people, issues and events.

By investigating immersion journalism I learnt this methodology is best suited to conveying emotional journeys and can aspire to the 'higher psychological truth' of what it feels like to be human. The project achieved its aim of conveying emotion and atmosphere by using literary techniques, which is the method I chose. Using literary techniques made the style of the writing different to what is usual in *Living Now*. Although both of the articles are written well and are of the right word length I will not submit them to *Living Now*. The stories are not "uplifting" in the sense that *Living Now* wants them to be. I think that this is because *Living Now* writers often write because they want to give a "gift" to the reader and the topic chooses them, rather than the other way around. For example I once read a story in *Living Now* about a mother who lost her child - the bulk of the article was about how after his death, her life had taken a very different course and now she was using her experience to help other people get through grief. A version of *One Fell Swoop* was submitted and published in RMIT's *Catalyst* magazine, the November 2008 issue, because it better suited the style of the publication.

The bulk of *One Fell Swoop* and *Vipassana: a story to meditate on* focus on the negative and then reach a positive conclusion. To be accepted to *Living Now* I think the opposite has to be true: they can start with the negative but the bulk of the article should focus on the positive. This was not the 'truth' of my experience so I can see how journalism theory in relation to practice is contentious – balancing striving for 'truth' against audience expectation. Perhaps the articles would read different if they were written in a year's time as I may really see the positive in the situation. For example I may buy a lottery ticket in Coburg and win the lottery, and then I would be glad we moved to Coburg. I would feel 'lucky' to have moved out rather than 'unlucky'. Thus deadlines also have a substantial impact on 'truth' because 'truth' fluctuates with emotional healing, time constraints and hindsight. Many of the uplifting stories of personal empowerment published in *Living Now* are written with the benefit of hindsight.

Writing in first person is akin to 'streaking'. I did not go to Vipassana expecting that I would end up writing about my abortion. But this was the 'truth' of my experience, so I either had to leave out the most important information about my experience, or bend the truth. It was a pretty big 'admission of the personal'. By 'streaking' and admitting to the personal I revealed I am 'a human who has memories and emotions, who when pricked, bleeds'. When writing *Vipassana: a story to meditate on* I struggled with my 'higher truth': I struggled internally with what to include and what not to include; I struggled morally with my own code of right and wrong; and I struggled with my beliefs and with my spirituality. I hope this was evident in the article. Although I will not be submitting the articles to *Living Now*, this project and exegesis sought to explore immersion journalism, issues surrounding it and its practice in relation to theory. I think it achieved its aims in this respect.

### **PART 3 – REFERENCES AND APENDICES**

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*“Human beings weren’t made solely to go in search of wisdom, but also to plough the land, wait for rain, plant the wheat, harvest the grain, make the bread” (Paulo Coelho, 2007:70).*

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## APPENDIX 1: MEAA CODE OF ETHICS

### Media Alliance Code of Ethics



Respect for truth and the public's right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression. Many journalists work in private enterprise, but all have these public responsibilities. They scrutinise power, but also exercise it, and should be accountable. Accountability engenders trust. Without trust, journalists do not fulfil their public responsibilities. Alliance members engaged in journalism commit themselves to

*Honesty*

*Fairness*

*Independence*

*Respect for the rights of others*

1. Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do your utmost to give a fair opportunity for reply.
2. Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.
3. Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable source. Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.
4. Do not allow personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence.
5. Disclose conflicts of interest that affect, or could be seen to affect, the accuracy, fairness or independence of your journalism. Do not improperly use a journalistic position for personal gain.
6. Do not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence.
7. Do your utmost to ensure disclosure of any direct or indirect payment made for interviews, pictures, information or stories.
8. Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material. Identify yourself and your employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Never exploit a person's vulnerability or ignorance of media practice.
9. Present pictures and sound which are true and accurate. Any manipulation likely to mislead should be disclosed.
10. Do not plagiarise.
11. Respect private grief and personal privacy. Journalists have the right to resist compulsion to intrude.
12. Do your utmost to achieve fair correction of errors.

#### Guidance Clause

Basic values often need interpretation and sometimes come into conflict. Ethical journalism requires conscientious decision-making in context. Only substantial advancement of the public interest or risk of substantial harm to people allows any standard to be overridden.

## **APPENDIX 2: VIPASSANA**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE TECHNIQUE**

Vipassana is one of India's most ancient meditation techniques. Long lost to humanity, it was rediscovered by Gotama the Buddha more than 2500 years ago. The word **Vipassana** means seeing things as they really are. It is the process of self-purification by self-observation. One begins by observing the natural breath to concentrate the mind. With a sharpened awareness one proceeds to observe the changing nature of body and mind and experiences the universal truths of impermanence, suffering and egolessness. This truth-realization by direct experience is the process of purification. The entire path (Dhamma) is a universal remedy for universal problems and has nothing to do with any organized religion or sectarianism. For this reason, it can be freely practiced by everyone, at any time, in any place, without conflict due to race, community or religion, and will prove equally beneficial to one and all.

#### **What Vipassana is not:**

- It is not a rite or ritual based on blind faith.
- It is neither an intellectual nor a philosophical entertainment.
- It is not a rest cure, a holiday, or an opportunity for socializing.
- It is not an escape from the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

#### **What Vipassana is:**

- It is a technique that will eradicate suffering.
- It is a method of mental purification which allows one to face life's tensions and problems in a calm, balanced way.
- It is an art of living that one can use to make positive contributions to society.

Vipassana meditation aims at the highest spiritual goals of total liberation and full enlightenment. Its purpose is never simply to cure physical disease. However, as a by-product of mental purification, many psychosomatic diseases are eradicated. In fact, Vipassana eliminates the three causes of all unhappiness: craving, aversion and ignorance. With continued practice, the meditation releases the tensions developed in everyday life, opening the knots tied by the old habit of reacting in an unbalanced way to pleasant and unpleasant situations.

Although Vipassana was developed as a technique by the Buddha, its practice is not limited to Buddhists. There is absolutely no question of conversion. The technique works on the simple basis that all human beings share the same problems and a technique which can eradicate these problems will have a universal application. People from many religious denominations have experienced the benefits of Vipassana meditation, and have found no conflict with their profession of faith.

### **MEDITATION AND SELF-DISCIPLINE**

The process of self-purification by introspection is certainly never easy--students have to work very hard at it. By their own efforts students arrive at their own realizations; no one else can do this for them. Therefore, the meditation will suit only those willing to work seriously and observe the discipline, which is there for the benefit and protection of the meditators and is an integral part of the meditation practice.

Ten days is certainly a very short time in which to penetrate the deepest levels of the unconscious mind and learn how to eradicate the complexes lying there. Continuity of the practice in seclusion is the secret of this technique's success. Rules and regulations have been developed keeping this practical aspect in mind. They are not primarily for the benefit of the teacher or the course

management, nor are they negative expressions of tradition, orthodoxy or blind faith in some organized religion. Rather, they are based on the practical experience of thousands of meditators over the years and are both scientific and rational. Abiding by the rules creates a very conducive atmosphere for meditation; breaking them pollutes it.

**A student will have to stay for the entire period of the course. The other rules should also be carefully read and considered. Only those who feel that they can honestly and scrupulously follow the discipline should apply for admission.** Those not prepared to make a determined effort will waste their time and, moreover, will disturb others who wish to work seriously. A prospective student should also understand that it would be both disadvantageous and inadvisable to leave without finishing the course upon finding the discipline too difficult. Likewise, it would be most unfortunate if, in spite of repeated reminders, a student does not follow the rules and has to be asked to leave.

## **PERSON'S WITH SERIOUS MENTAL DISORDERS**

People with serious mental disorders have occasionally come to Vipassana courses with the unrealistic expectation that the technique will cure or alleviate their mental problems. Unstable interpersonal relationships and a history of various treatments can be additional factors which make it difficult for such people to benefit from, or even complete, a ten-day course. Our capacity as a nonprofessional volunteer organization makes it impossible for us to properly care for people with these backgrounds. Although Vipassana meditation is beneficial for most people, it is not a substitute for medical or psychiatric treatment and we do not recommend it for people with serious psychiatric disorders.

## **THE CODE OF DISCIPLINE**

The foundation of the practice is **sīla** — moral conduct. **Sīla** provides a basis for the development of **samādhi** — concentration of mind; and purification of the mind is achieved through **paññā** — the wisdom of insight.

### **The Precepts**

All who attend a Vipassana course must conscientiously undertake the following five precepts for the duration of the course:

1. to abstain from killing any being;
2. to abstain from stealing;
3. to abstain from all sexual activity;
4. to abstain from telling lies;
5. to abstain from all intoxicants.

There are three additional precepts which old students (that is, those who have completed a course with S.N. Goenka or one of his assistant teachers) are expected to follow during the course:

6. to abstain from eating after midday;
7. to abstain from sensual entertainment and bodily decorations
8. to abstain from using high or luxurious beds.

Old students will observe the sixth precept by having tea without milk or fruit juice at the 5 p.m. break, whereas new student may have tea with milk and some fruit. The teacher may excuse an old student from observing this precept for health reasons. The seventh and eighth precept will be observed by all.

## **Acceptance of the Teacher and the Technique**

Students must declare themselves willing to comply fully and for the duration of the course with the teacher's guidance and instructions; that is, to observe the discipline and to meditate exactly as the teacher asks, without ignoring any part of the instructions, nor adding anything to them. This acceptance should be one of discrimination and understanding, not blind submission. Only with an attitude of trust can a student work diligently and thoroughly. Such confidence in the teacher and the technique is essential for success in meditation.

## **Other Techniques, Rites, and Forms of Worship**

During the course it is absolutely essential that all forms of prayer, worship, or religious ceremony — fasting, burning incense, counting beads, reciting mantras, singing and dancing, etc. — be discontinued. All other meditation techniques and healing or spiritual practices should also be suspended. This is not to condemn any other technique or practice, but to give a fair trial to the technique of Vipassana in its purity.

Students are strongly advised that deliberately mixing other techniques of meditation with Vipassana will impede and even reverse their progress. Despite repeated warnings by the teacher, there have been cases in the past where students have intentionally mixed this technique with a ritual or another practice, and have done themselves a great disservice. Any doubts or confusion which may arise should always be clarified by meeting with the teacher.

## **Interviews With the Teacher**

The teacher is available to meet students privately between 12 Noon and 1:00 p.m. Questions may also be asked in public between 9:00 and 9:30 p.m. in the meditation hall. The interview and question times are for clarifying the technique and for questions arising from the evening discourses.

## **Noble Silence**

All students must observe Noble Silence from the beginning of the course until the morning of the last full day. Noble Silence means silence of body, speech, and mind. Any form of communication with fellow student, whether by gestures, sign language, written notes, etc., is prohibited.

Students may, however, speak with the teacher whenever necessary and they may approach the management with any problems related to food, accommodation, health, etc. But even these contacts should be kept to a minimum. Students should cultivate the feeling that they are working in isolation.

## **Separation of Men and Women**

Complete segregation of men and women is to be maintained. Couples, married or otherwise, should not contact each other in any way during the course. The same applies to friends, members of the same family, etc.

## **Physical Contact**

It is important that throughout the course there be no physical contact whatsoever between persons of the same or opposite sex.

## **Yoga and Physical Exercise**

Although physical yoga and other exercises are compatible with Vipassana, they should be suspended during the course because proper secluded facilities are not available at the course site. Jogging is also not permitted. Students may exercise during rest periods by walking in the designated areas.

### **Religious Objects, Rosaries, Crystals, Talismans, etc.**

No such items should be brought to the course site. If brought inadvertently they should be deposited with the management for the duration of the course.

### **Intoxicants and Drugs**

No drugs, alcohol, or other intoxicants should be brought to the site; this also applies to tranquilizers, sleeping pills, and all other sedatives. Those taking medicines or drugs on a doctor's prescription should notify the teacher.

### **Tobacco**

For the health and comfort of all students, smoking, chewing tobacco, and taking snuff are not permitted at the course.

### **Food**

It is not possible to satisfy the special food preferences and requirements of all the meditators. Students are therefore kindly requested to make do with the simple vegetarian meals provided. The course management endeavors to prepare a balanced, wholesome menu suitable for meditation. If any students have been prescribed a special diet because of ill-health, they should inform the management at the time of application. Fasting is not permitted.

### **Clothing**

Dress should be simple, modest, and comfortable. Tight, transparent, revealing, or otherwise striking clothing (such as shorts, short skirts, tights and leggings, sleeveless or skimpy tops) should not be worn. Sunbathing and partial nudity are not permitted. This is important in order to minimize distraction to others.

### **Laundry and Bathing**

No washing machines or dryers are available, so students should bring sufficient clothing. Small items can be hand-washed. Bathing and laundry may be done only in the break periods and not during meditation hours.

### **Outside Contacts**

Students must remain within the course boundaries throughout the course. They may leave only with the specific consent of the teacher. No outside communications is allowed before the course ends. This includes letters, phone calls and visitors. Cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices must be deposited with the management until the course ends. In case of an emergency, a friend or relative may contact the management.

### **Music, Reading and Writing**

The playing of musical instruments, radios, etc. is not permitted. No reading or writing materials should be brought to the course. Students should not distract themselves by taking notes. The restriction on reading and writing is to emphasize the strictly practical nature of this meditation.

### **Tape Recorders and Cameras**

These may not be used except with the express permission of the teacher.

### **COURSE FINANCES**

According to the tradition of pure Vipassana, courses are run solely on a donation basis. Donations are accepted only from those who have completed at least one ten-day course with S.N. Goenka or one of his assisting teachers. Someone taking the course for the first time may give a donation on the last day of the course or any time thereafter.

In this way course are supported by those who have realized for themselves the benefits of the practice. Wishing to share these benefits with others, one gives a donation according to one's means and volition. Such donations are the only source of funding for course in this tradition around the world. There is no wealthy foundation or individual sponsoring them. Neither the teachers nor the organizers receive any kind of payment for their service. Thus, the spread of Vipassana is carried out with purity of purpose, free from any commercialism.

Whether a donation is large or small, it should be given with the wish to help others: 'The course I have taken has been paid for through the generosity of past students; now let me give something towards the cost of a future course, so that others may also benefit by this technique.'

### **SUMMARY**

To clarify the spirit behind the discipline and rules, they may be summarized as follows:

**Take great care that your actions do not disturb anyone. Take no notice of distractions caused by others.**

It may be that a student cannot understand the practical reasons for one or several of the above rules. Rather than allow negativity and doubt to develop, immediate clarification should be sought from the teacher.

It is only by taking a disciplined approach and by making maximum effort that a student can fully grasp the practice and benefit from it. The emphasis during the course is on *work*. A golden rule is to meditate as if one were alone, with one's mind turned inward, ignoring any inconveniences and distractions that one may encounter.

Finally, students should note that their progress in Vipassana depends solely on their own good qualities and personal development and on five factors: earnest efforts, confidence, sincerity, health and wisdom.

May the above information help you to obtain maximum benefit from your meditation course. We are happy to have the opportunity to serve, and wish you peace and harmony from your experience of Vipassana.

## THE COURSE TIMETABLE

The following timetable for the course has been designed to maintain the continuity of practice. For best results students are advised to follow it as closely as possible.

4:00 am	Morning wake-up bell
4:30-6:30 am	Meditate in the hall or in your room
6:30-8:00 am	Breakfast break
8:00-9:00 am	Group meditation in the hall
9:00-11:00 am	Meditate in the hall or in your room according to the teacher's instructions
11:00-12:00 noon	Lunch break
12noon-1:00 pm	Rest and interviews with the teacher
1:00-2:30 pm	Meditate in the hall or in your room
2:30-3:30 pm	Group meditation in the hall
3:30-5:00 pm	Meditate in the hall or in your own room according to the teacher's instructions
5:00-6:00 pm	Tea break
6:00-7:00 pm	Group meditation in the hall
7:00-8:15 pm	Teacher's Discourse in the hall
8:15-9:00 pm	Group meditation in the hall
9:00-9:30 pm	Question time in the hall
9:30 pm	Retire to your own room--Lights out

### APPENDIX 3: LIVING NOW AUTHOR GUIDELINES

To inspire, nurture, inform and empower  
Australia's largest wholistic publication

Address: 116 Cardigan Street, Carlton, 3053.  
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#### GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS – May, 2004

Before we get down to tin-tacks, please note that we get hundreds of articles a month, and can print only dozens. So, apart from the fact that it can be hard to be successful in having your article published, you will almost certainly have a long wait – sometimes even a long wait before we acknowledge your article.

If you hope to have your story published in a specific edition, it is best to send it in well in advance. It has little chance of being looked at, let alone published in that issue, unless we have it at least six weeks prior to publication date and unless you mention you have a date preference in your covering email.

To be eligible for consideration, articles need to –

- (1) be uplifting,
- (2) offer a gift to the reader, i.e., describing an exercise to try at home or a viewpoint which they can apply to enhance their experience in their daily lives (more below),
- (3) be free of 'advertorial' or a promotional slant, i.e., not be disguised advertising which carries a 'barb' such as 'you need to come to my seminar' or 'you need to read my book' (see also below),
- (4) be well written,
- (5) usually be of length 1000 -2000 words (1500 or a little less is excellent for our purposes and is therefore our preference)

#### Presentation

Articles will be accepted only by email, preferably sent as an attachment in MS Word format. They may be sent to: [editor@livingnow.com.au](mailto:editor@livingnow.com.au). Please do not use any page formatting or type solely in uppercase, and use lowercase for any subheadings you may include.

Include your name, address, email address and phone number on the article itself (as it gets separated from your covering email).

Also note on the article if you give us permission to publish it on our website – more details below.

Please include an abstract or synopsis of the article at the beginning.

Please only use one space after a full stop.

Please spell check all articles before submitting.

In the "subject" line of your email give us a few words to go on, e.g., "article on forgiveness", or "massage story", etc. – definitely do not say "Living Now article" as it makes filing and finding almost impossible.

Articles must be exclusive to Living Now and not be published elsewhere (except perhaps short-run, in-house publications). We pay a nominal fee for freelance articles published – refer below.

The editor reserves the right to select portions of articles submitted, in accordance with the aims of Living Now, i.e., to nurture and enhance the growth of individuals and communities.

Consistency and factual accuracy are essential. Please ensure that you always put '(OK)' next to the spelling of each name, place or book/music/work of art every time you write it. We don't want to have to spend hours of frustration cleaning up articles.

Please provide a short 'bio' for publication at the bottom of the article. This may simply be "Joan is a freelance writer from XX" or else it can include your qualifications and experience. Note that we very rarely allow contact details at the bottom of articles. This is a tactic that on the whole does not work for us. Our being free, we need to

ensure we make as many stories as possible pay for themselves. The way we do this is to contact appropriate advertisers. Say you've written a story on rebirthing -other rebirthers are not keen to advertise if the writer gets his/her contact details at the end of the story.

#### Payment policy

Broadly, stories fall into three categories:

1. Those that do not promote anyone's work, commercial interest or healing practice, etc. We pay for these with either cash (according to the edited word count) or an ad (of a greater value than the cash, but still according to word count, as listed below).
2. Those that are a good read and of public interest or benefit but which also promote or benefit the writer's own business such as Reiki etc. We do not pay for these. This works as a beneficial arrangement for both parties as the writer enhances his/her own work through publication of the article and we in turn appreciate the opportunity of publishing a good story.
3. 'Modality' articles – This is the exception to our non-promotional requirement above. Say you want to write about kinesiology:

It can be as promotional as you like, since we can get lots of kinesiologists to advertise next to the story. That way, it actually serves a group of advertisers and of course it serves the readers in keeping them informed. However, the gray area occurs when the modality is a little-known one. Over the years we've come across many people who have 'invented' a new modality – often a combination of another two. At the beginning we cannot offer to publish a modality story as, at that stage, it is still a 'one-man-show' and therefore the story is promotional and serving the needs of only that one person.

#### Fee schedule for stories and articles

##### Word Count Payment

2,500-3,000:	\$165
2,000-2,500:	\$150
1,500-2,000:	\$125
1,000-1,500:	\$100
750-1,000:	\$70
500-750:	\$50
300-500:	\$32
200-300 (reviews):	\$20

For Australian writers, in order for payment to be made, please send us a Tax Invoice after your article is published. If you are not registered for the GST, it will be necessary for you to include a Hobbyist Statement with your tax invoice. This statement simply says something to the effect that writing is a hobby for you and as such you are exempt from paying GST.

Overseas writers need to invoice us, but not including GST.

#### What style of article?

We're the biggest magazine in this niche in Australia, and we believe that one of the main reasons for our popularity is that we do not publish promotional style articles. It can be a bit tricky to define what we mean by this, since there are hundreds of good people with good stories doing good work and they don't understand that a story about their good work is actually self-promotion.

By running 'real' stories we (i) keep faith with our advertisers, many of whom happily spend advertising dollars with us without a thought about unpaid promotion in the form of an article; and (ii) we give our readers a valuable gift. (Re (i), just imagine how annoyed our advertisers would be to see someone who's never spent a cent with us suddenly getting free promotion on the pages that they're paying for with their advertising dollars!) Having a free title, our advertisers mean the world to us.

If you believe that your story is newsworthy, and you cannot submit it to us for the reasons given above, then you could contact a mainstream publication. They have the freedom of being able to run a Calvin Klein or a Ford ad on the next page and therefore their advertisers do not suffer.

#### When you can use 'advertorial' with us

If your need is to publicise your own work, product or business, and it's obvious that we offer the right niche for that, then we're very happy for you to do so in story form – indeed we think it is a worthwhile and creative approach to marketing. You simply buy the display space and place the words in it as though they are a story. The word "Advertisement" will be placed in 6 point type at the top or bottom. If you'd like us to lay it out for you to

see how much fits, we will be happy to oblige. On average, you can allow 800 words to a half page (including heading and photo). The Readers' Digest have proven by their surveys that putting that word "Advertisement" at the top of the 'article' is not a deterrent to readers.

#### A gift for the reader

Over the years we've found that when articles are written from a place of graciousness the gifts that ensue are amazing for all. If you're writing in a generic way about your topic (i.e., the non-promotional stance we talked about above) don't hold back on the information you give out. Even if it is in your book or in your workshop, if it's good information it won't suffer from retelling. And think of this: each issue we have more than a quarter of a million readers, and there's no way they'll all come to the workshop or read the book – so why not give them a beautiful gift. From my experience, if you get into a meditative state before writing and ask what gift you can give the readers of Living Now, then you'll do your best work, the readers will get something to cherish and Spirit will reward you. Finally, I'd like to share with you that as Editor of this magazine I have the privilege to hear how articles have changed readers' lives over the years – go for it!

#### Poetry & 'channelled' material

Generally speaking, we do not publish work in these categories.

#### Photographs and illustrations

Please feel free to submit these for consideration with stories. We pay a nominal fee – generally between \$20 and \$40 for internal use and up to \$200 for a cover.

#### Hints on style

1. First impressions count. Spend time getting your opening paragraph just right, so the readers stay with you for the whole story.
2. Vary the starting words and length of paragraphs to maintain readers' interest. Be aware of how many times you have used one particular word in your story.
3. Have the readers participate in your story – engage as many of their senses as you can manage but not to the point of cluttering your story with unnecessary words or phrases.
4. If you need to use jargon or terms specific to your topic, then be sure to fully explain the meaning of the terms. Remember that the reader may not be familiar with concepts that you are dealing with daily; so be considerate.
5. Avoid being dry and 'academic'. Have fun with your writing, play with the words and the reader will read on.
6. Speak from the heart to touch our readers' lives.

Publication on our website, [www.livingnow.com.au](http://www.livingnow.com.au)

If your article is published in the magazine itself, you may like to give permission for it to be published on the website too.

Unfortunately we cannot pay extra for this, but you're welcome to put your contact details at the bottom of the article for website use.

If you are going to give permission for publication on the website, please mention that in a note with your contact details at the top of the article itself – as usually the article gets separated from the covering note.

#### Copyright

The copyright remains your property. By submitting your article to us you are agreeing to our publishing it on the above terms and conditions and for a one-time use only. The exception to this is if you agree to our publishing it on the website as well.

#### Are you a non-professional writer?

If you're unsure just how well your story will be received, a good test is to have a person who is not very familiar with your topic read your story to you aloud. You can then see if they get confused, or if they stumble over poorly composed sections, or if they have to take big gasps of air at the end of segments which are too wordy or drawn out.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*“Go in search of your Gift. The more you understand yourself, the more you will understand the world”* (Paulo Coelho, 2007:19).

I lived in South Australia until eighteen years of age. In 2001 I moved to Hobart and started an arts degree at the University of Tasmania. An arts degree suited me because I have broad interests and it allowed me to study a range of courses, such as psychology, journalism and politics. In 2002 I got into the RMIT Bachelor of Arts (Media) program and moved to Melbourne. This degree gave me a broad understanding of media and media institutions while enabling me to study diverse topics. I majored in Cinema Studies and Television Production. Many of the electives I did during my undergraduate degree were writing based, such as journalism, creative writing, and screenwriting: my self-created major. I am currently doing the Bachelor of Communications (Honours) (Media) at RMIT to gain experience writing for various publications and in order critically reflect upon the theory and practice of feature article writing, journalism, literary journalism and immersion journalism. I hope to create a portfolio that builds on my life's purpose: teaching people through the power of words. I hope to continue learning throughout my life, and share this knowledge with others where possible.

Contact details: karenleverenz@hotmail.com