

Hobart doesn't need high rise

Sunday mornings in winter are a good time for free thinking. Recently, a free-thinking Sunday took me to a canyon – in my mind, as it were. My husband was in Melbourne caring for a parent being treated for a heart condition, a procedure which isn't available here. Filling in time between hospital visits, he plodded about Melbourne CBD, not especially enjoying big-city life, a distinct contrast to our lifestyle in Huonville. My question, "How is the weather?" provoked the answer: "How would I know? I can't see the sky. I'm trapped in these high-rise canyons where the wind whistles and blows all around."

Poor thing. He elicited my deep sympathy, but also opened a pathway for me into a stream-of-consciousness session. The word 'canyon' put me in mind of a Joni Mitchell song, Ladies of the Canyon, about the free-range hippie scene in Laurel Canyon, California, during the 1960s and 70s. Stream-of-consciousness writing is aided (or fettered, depending on whether you view procrastination as creativity or time-wasting) by chasing up songs on the internet. Like a dog following its nose, a procrastinator can follow their ears and eyes and get lost for hours. The music was good though. Before returning to reality, I perused a multitude of songs and stories, including Joni Mitchell's Big Yellow Taxi, with its prescient warning, "Don't it always seem to go/That you don't know what you've got til it's gone/They paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

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If we don't want to end up having windy canyons as streets, we should remember such songs. Do we want to be like every other city in the world? Do we want to lose



A impression by the Hobart Not Highrise Inc group of how a highrise building would have looked in Hobart had the application been granted

our sense of reality? Does every beautiful natural feature need, or deserve, human interference? No! Think Uluru. The stream of consciousness has no bounds – I'm off to the red centre now, where the debate over whether tourists should climb Uluru is raging. Do people who do not respect Uluru, or care to know about the history of the original people of Australia, deserve to go tramping all over the rock? The Aboriginal peoples who lived near it for thousands of years loved it. They lived in relation to the changes in the seasons and the weather. Their lifestyle was dominated by changes over time. You could say they were exponents of 'slow living'.

By contrast, many visitors are mostly interested in ticking a box: "I've been there, done that, and here's my selfie: me, grinning like an idiot, to prove my superiority." Probably it is unkind and unjust

to berate them, because I have climbed Uluru, back in the day when it was called Ayers Rock by visitors and invaders, though of course it was still known as Uluru to the original inhabitants of this land.

My visit was almost 50 years ago, when my sister and I, on a bus trip of central Australia, were fortunate enough to see the rock. It was truly magnificent. The bus driver, who doubled as tour guide, raconteur and chef, was a fun fellow, but had probably not undergone anything as flash as a cultural awareness course. His knowledge of the site and its history was not deep. He was not disrespectful, but I don't recall any mention of permission from the original owners cropping up in his travelogue. Neither did the tourists have any great urge to ask those delicate questions: "Is it okay for us to be here?"

It was taken as a right.

We went into a deep chamber, naturally carved way back into the base of the rock, its entrance about 15 or 20 metres above the ground. It was truly an amazing experience, with the sense of something big, deep and important, which even the crassest tourist seemed to perceive. The guide asked for quietness and respect, and we obeyed. The group asked questions, but I wish we had all had a greater knowledge of the area then. It was a lost opportunity to hear about the history of the true owners of the land, before the invasion of Europeans and others.

So the argument about high-rise buildings and natural features of our land, such as kunanyi, is pertinent. Mitchell's lyrics may come back to haunt us: we don't want to realise that we don't know what we've got til it's gone.

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