

A Note from the Author

The Truth of It ... evolution of a short novel from idea to End and beyond.

Writing fiction offers no certainty of any outcome, least of all one the writer finds truly satisfying. It's not until The End is written can you evaluate what you have achieved, if anything. I do feel, humbly, after much work and help, *The Truth of It* is a strong and entertaining young adult novel of power and purpose.

I can't say for sure when I had an idea for the story that became *The Truth of It*. Was it back on the farm, aged about ten, when I was told quite seriously to never harm a hare as it will bring bad luck? Or was it walking along a deep, black, slow-winding river in Tasmania whilst staying on a magnificent property settled during the tragedy and treachery of the 1840's?

The Truth of It began as a murder mystery (of a sheep) set in Colonial Tasmania (Van Diemen's Land). Originally titled, Isaac Swift, Mimmy Rose, and the mystery of the Missing Spanish Sheep, it was the story of eleven-year-old farm labourer, Isaac, and recent arrival to Longfields Farm, the untamed island escapee, Mimmy Rose.

After witnessing the slaughter and theft of a valuable Spanish Merino sheep (a crime punishable by hanging), I set Isaac and Mimmy the task of exposing the true culprit in the historically accurate and genuinely dark atmosphere of European settlement of Van Diemen's Land. This was a time rife with superstition, including accusations of magic and witchcraft. The reality of harsh punishment and retribution for crimes major and minor was ever present and not always left in the hands of the law.

Set in Dark River's multi-faceted culture of silence and self-survival, my story evolved naturally into the perception of how people act toward others who are different, strange, or strangers. This complex subject, triggered by the slaughter of a fictional sheep, soon became a symbol of historical evil that I could not ignore. Drawing on various European histories, cultures, folklore and beliefs, my story not only became more complex but far more interesting and entertaining.

My characters, young and old, grow in proportion to the difficulties and dangers they face in presenting the truth of not only a missing sheep, but also of navigating the essentially hostile community of Dark River. How the Indigenous Tasmanians were dealt with is also an ever-present thread, subtle and sinister. I hope the echoes of this story stay with young readers, as it is set in a time long gone but one never to be forgotten.

The Truth of It is a story of young and old heroes and villains, but the truth of what constitutes villainy is not clear in every case. My main characters: Isaac Swift, Irish Pat, Mimmy and Kahikatoa Rose, Jemma Buttons, Captain and Missus Eliza Black, Sissy and Cromwell Sledge and other colourful contributors bring to life the tough, often incredible, and sometimes terrible nature of living as new settlers in an ancient country.

This is a story of magic and truth, life and death, silence and violence, law and order, the rich and destitute, and the literate and illiterate. It is the story of Isaac, Mimmy, and Jemma finding the beating heart of goodness in the face of danger and falsehood. *The Truth of It* solves one crime then gently invites the reader to resolve an even greater one. And that, I hope, makes *The Truth of It* far more than just a very carefully written young adult work of Australian fiction.

Dave Metzenthén, February 2025