

Floating

By Judith Smyth

I am floating on my back in the cool water, the beautiful old trees frame the bright blue sky and the magpies are chortling. It is an oasis away from the scorching heat of the centre of the village.

I worked in a concrete tower in a soulless city, but I lived in my town. Appearing over the range were green fields, sheep, cattle and wind turbines on distant hills. Our town nestled in trees in the daylight and twinkled after dark. My car was locked away for the weekends and I loved to get out, saying hello to the people I passed as I walked through the town to shop, wander through the galleries and get a coffee.

I'm retired now, free to wander into the heart of town at any time. I can explore the secret green spaces that are not used a lot because they are enclosed by houses, shops and galleries. Able to chat to the locals and watch the birds, free of all feelings of being caged or enclosed.

The original houses are on large long blocks of land. As I walk along the streets I enjoy the gardens and sense of space created between the houses in the "village", that is how the locals refer to the central part of town, breathing space for humans and nature. As I look out to the four new subdivisions with their smaller blocks and big brick houses, large expanses of concrete driveways and 4WDs, I see no breathing spaces there.

At the heart of the village, where my favourite space with grass, gardens and beautiful trees used to be, is the new fifty car concrete car park with two charging stations for electric cars. The council says that makes it environmentally friendly, maybe they think it will bring more tourists. The heat is shimmering off the concrete, I haven't seen anyone using the charging stations, there are a few 4WDs parked, probably belonging to the shop owners. The Village is hot and soulless now, not the pleasant place to come to wander around Galleries and relax over food and coffee.

I turn my back on the centre to walk towards the pool, it will be better there. Past the new supermarket with their fifty-car concrete parking area. It used to be a paddock with trees and horses grazing. You didn't have to watch for 4WDs being driven by people too busy to be courteous or kind. It wasn't so suffocating before.

I take a deep breath, one large green space left. Here, this park, these trees I am looking at through my tears. They are closing the pool tomorrow. The bulldozers are coming. The pool, trees and cool grass will become a new High School with concrete playground, despite the available paddock zoned for development ten minutes walk away.

Our town is burning, not from the inevitable bush fires but by the sun, the concrete is destroying the soil's ability to drain, more flooding. The residents aren't relaxed, happy and friendly anymore. We are going under.

I am sinking, feeling the cool water embracing me, taking me to its heart. Drown or fight? I am tired.