

GEOFFREY FALKENMIRE'S

"VERSE YOU CAN READ"

THESE ARE POEMS THAT YOU CAN UNDERSTAND. THEY WILL MAKE YOU LAUGH AND THEY MAY BRING A TEAR. THEY WILL CAPTURE AND RETAIN YOUR ATTENTION. THEY WILL NOT BORE YOU. READ THEM ALOUD AND BE CAPTIVATED BY THE PICTURES THEY PAINT.

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FOREWORD:

Geoffrey Falkenmire is one of those rare individuals who has combined academic brilliance with a down-to-earth, boyish enthusiasm for life and living which has been reflected through his penchant for poetry.

Geoffrey was born in Tamworth, NSW (1921). He decided to enter the teaching profession, and was awarded a scholarship to the Armidale Teachers College.

Came the Second World War and he enlisted in the A.I.F. serving in New Guinea and North Borneo. On resuming civilian life his first appointment was to Neutral Bay Public School. During his time there he graduated B.A. and M.Ed. at Sydney University.

In 1954 he was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and taught in Seattle, USA for two years. On his return, he was posted to Merriwa Central School as Headmaster. It was there that Geoffrey first became conscious that at least 20% of children would grow into adulthood deficient in the basic learning skills called the "Three R's".

Unable to change the entrenched education system, Geoffrey devised a simple "How to Read" instruction book which enabled any person who could read, to teach someone who couldn't read. In his capacity as Head-master he was able to have his simple literacy training system extensively field tested.

In 1956 he published a Reading Book for Adults titled 'Now Read This' which was revised and reprinted in 1977.

In a meteoric rise in his chosen profession, Geoffrey was appointed an Inspector of Schools, serving in Ballina and Tamworth. He was promoted to the position of Deputy-Director of Education at Wagga Wagga, after which he was called into the Head Office of the Department of Education to develop the Adult Education programme for New South Wales. He developed the Adult Migrant Education Service, where he served as Superintendent until his retirement in 1981.

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Since his retirement, Geoffrey has been active in the Teachers' Sub-branch of the R.S.L. where he has published two books of children's work in the Anzac Essay Competition. His work as Chairman of Red Cross Youth for 14 years earned him the Distinguished Service Medal of the society.

His love of teaching and learning has not diminished since his retirement. He graduated M.A. in literature from Sydney University in 1985, and he has taught literacy, literature and history to adults continuously, at Narrabeen, Balgowlah, Manly, Belrose and Dee Why. His enthusiasm is undiminished.

Geoffrey's lifelong penchant for writing poetry started at the age of seven when his first poem was published. His first selection appeared in book form in 1985, and now nearing seventy, he is still turning them out on a wide variety of subjects.

Falkenmire

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KINDERGARTEN CLASS

This is where we find the magic,
This is where the whole thing starts
This is where God put together
All these fascinating parts.

See those big eyes, trusting, glistening,
Ready smiles and gurgling laughter,
Confidences, gorgeous creatures,
Why should anything come after?

This is where the best things happen,
Children are such precious people,
Teach them number, reading, writing,
Here's the church and here's the steeple.

Let them show you too, my teachers,
All the secrets that they know of,
Secrets that the angels told them
Not too many seasons far off.

This one swings her shiny pigtails,
Tells you her new baby brother
Will be coming some time next week,
As a present from her mother.

This one with the short blond haircut
Tells you of the bike he's getting
But you know the bike's a dream thing,
That his crippled foot's preventing.

So they come and say they love you,
Reaching out with chubby fingers,
Urge you here to do some skipping,
Hurry, hurry, no one lingers,

Can't you feel their wild excitement,
Aren't you happy, aren't you flattered,
That these busy Lilliputians
Make you feel as if you mattered?

WITH APOLOGIES

I had written him a letter which I had,
Because I pay my taxes,
Sent off to my Member, Joe McCrackle, MLA.
He's a mate of mine, McCrackle,
So I thought I'd better tackle
Him about the local schoolies
Who are working up this way.

They're a solid bunch, these schoolies,
And they work like Chinese coolies,
Teaching noisy kids like that all day
Would drive me straight to crime.
It would smartly send me barmy
And I wouldn't join their army
If they gave me fifty quid a week
And double overtime.

So I told the Local Member
That, say, just around December,
He should write 'em all a letter,
Saying "Thank you, folks, well done.
We appreciate your action
So we'll up your pay a fraction
And send you overseas, buckshee,
Enjoy it - have some fun."

And the answer came directed
And it's not what I expected.
It was written by his Secretary
And this is what she said.
"We acknowledge your submission
But you've caused a strange position.
You've laid the Member out quite cold,
The poor man's nearly dead. (continued)

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WITH APOLOGIES (continued)

He's not used to hearing praises
And you've knocked him all to blazes
With your generous talk of teachers
And the schooling the kids get.
If you want to get a hearing
Then you'd best cut out the cheering
Do some moaning and complaining
That will be your best bet.

Boy, there must be some frustration
In this public education
If a little grunt of gratitude
Can cause a real hubbub.
So, I think I'll stick to farmin',
Where the life is fairly calm an'
Flood and drought the only troubles.
Any teachers want a job?

Geoffrey

Falkenmire

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ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

I have made up my mind
I will depart from hence
And do my humble teaching thing
Behind my little fence

Because there is enough
More than enough indeed
To keep me fully occupied
My students have real need

I don't want seminars
Or workshops by the ton
About the methods I *must* use
The things that *must* be done.

The methods that we use
The hours that we spend
Must be those that are functional
The teacher has to bend.

If I can teach my folk
To read and write and spell
Then let me grapple with my lot
And let me do it well.

So I will go chez moi,
And do the first things first,
Don't organize me eins, zwei, drei! -
Or else I'll surely burst !!

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THE PLAINT OF THE INFANTS' SCHOOL MISTRESS

"I hate you! hate you! hate you!
You're cruel, mean, unkind.
Your persecution has to stop
Or I will lose my mind.

Remember. I'm your Mistress,
I'm not a minor cog,
You give far more attention
To Ruff, the old school dog.

You've never liked my Mothers' Club
Our uniforms you've scorned,
You're so damned rude, I'm quite convinced
You weren't born - you were spawned".

The Principal took out his gun,
"You talk too much," he said,
"I'll do your staff a favour",
Then shot her - stone, cold, dead!!

Geoffrey

Falkenmire

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THE THRIFTY PRINCIPAL

He's been thrifty with his praises
All his life.
He's been thrifty with the dough
He gave his wife.
Now he's going to retire,
It's the cold he feels, not fire,
'Cause he's been just too damned thrifty
With his life.

He was thrifty with his tolerance
And tact.
And humanity was one more thing
He lacked.
So it isn't any wonder
That he feels he's going under,
That the dice are loaded
And the cards are stacked.

If the Sermon on the Mount
Means anything,
Then we'll have to have him back
Inside the ring.
We don't have to call him 'dear',
But, let's buy the man a beer,
'Cause he's just an old bee now -
Without a sting.

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SONG OF THE SMALL SCHOOL MAN

I live out in the mulga
A creature of the bush
The ruler in my own domain
The leader of the push
It's not the sort of living
A staff school bloke could take
But when I reach out for the cheque
At least my hand won't shake.

My Inspector, old and wise, *by*
Comes out to visit me.
He says, "I see the numbers
Have gone up to sixty three.
It's plain you need assistance
But you better get down and pray
'Cause the only casual teacher lives
A hundred miles away.

Geoffrey
The other night I had a dream
A dream that made no sense.
He came out on inspection
And promoted me at once.
He said "You're working too damned hard"
And pats me on the chest,
You ought to take promotion, son
And get a bit of rest."

Falkenmire

But I said "Don't be silly,
Who wants to be a boss ?
I've got the game sewn up out here
You're talking at a loss.
The only Bosses that I know
Have ulcers and no hair
Their peace of mind and happy days
Are all too bloody rare.

(continued)

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SONG OF THE SMALL SCHOOL MAN (continued)

Why should I leave the safety
Of my castle in the scrub?
We've got a church, a swimmin' hole
And one old family pub;
A cricket team, a general store
A solid P. and C.
No thanks, Sir Boss, I says to him
You'd better leave me be.

O the small school man *by*
Is a very worthy bloke.
He has no drinking habits
And he doesn't even smoke.
He's just below the angels
A paragon of good;
I'm sure God wants to raise his pay
And if He could, He would.

Geoffrey
So all you Poor ambitious types
With status in your eyes
Who talk about in-service stuff
With wild ecstatic cries
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Just let me tell you one thing,
One thing and nothing more.
There's nothing like a teaching job
In Primary School, Class Four.

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"SIR SAID"

"Sir said" and that's where it begins.
And all too often where it ends.
Because this young, strong paragon
Knows everything - and our son's friends
Agree with one another that
This fount of knowledge - Heaven's pride -
Is so damn right on everything
It makes poor parents want to hide.

It's "Sir said this" and "Sir said that"
At breakfast, lunch and dinner too.
On any subject in the book
From how to sit and what to do
When ladies come into the room.
And when you're hurt, you never cry
And tackle low around the boots
And always hold your head up high.

The Decalogue was all the Lord
Gave Moses - but this 'Sir' of ours
Has been endowed by all his kids
With some unique celestial powers.

One day our boys will all be men
And hero worship will be dead.
But we'll remember, all of us.
We knew things then, because "Sir said".

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EUCLID!

Said the Equilateral Triangle
To her friend Isosceles
"I'm a $60^\circ - 60^\circ - 60^\circ$,
But you're any shape you please
As long as both legs are the same
You can be monstrous fat
Or skinny as a bobby-pin.
Why can't I be like that?"
Old Cyclic Quadrilateral laughed
"There's no real fun, my sweet,
In changing shape, just look at me.
My corners always meet but
They push and pull me here and there
My supplementaries sing
A pretty duet - but I'm always
Struck inside this ring".
"You're lucky then, you lucky thing"
The Tangent Sisters cried
"No matter how we soar and dive
We never get inside".
The parallels began to moan
(They're lines and stand so neat)
"How madly happy we could be
If just once we could meet".
Ah, poor, poor geometric shapes
So human-like, so strange,
You will be rubbed out if you don't
Accept what you can't change.

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SPEECH NIGHT FEVER

Tum, tum, tum, tum tee tum
Ho the signal, up they get
Heaving chests and swelling bosoms
Taking air - and then they're set
Out she comes in mighty chorus
Voices shy and voices brave
Some are flat and some are raucous
Everybody beefs "God Save".

Then, this chore dismissed, they settle
Bang, crash, crump, in running waves
Ah, what noble patriotism
Britons never shall be slaves
Not while such brave souls continue
In their suffering year by year
Martyrs to the "speech night" fever
Time for talk and well-bashed ear.

Placid plebs - oh, several hundreds
Sweating in December heat
Solemn, staring, sans sensation
Waiting for the steady beat
Of the Voices, primed for action
Seated in their padded state
On the rostrum (place of honour)
Moment now, penultimate.

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SPEECH NIGHT FEVER (concluded)

Principal, in gown and trencher
Most impressive (for a change)
Rises to imperious podium
Clears his throat (two-octave range)
Then, for sixty solid minutes
Some harangue, some earnest plea
Some real dignified oration
Not a trace of ribaldry
Well-turned phrases fill the ether
Words bounce round like ping-pong balls
Improvising, modulating
Then he stops - dead silence falls.

Like stunned mullets, plebs applaud him
Happy that one doll is down
School choir sings - a discord descant
Music master makes a frown
Sports report, the school's finances
P. & C. get in their chop
Plebs have had it - white their eyeballs.
Won't this mayhem ever stop?

Ah, at last, time for prize giving
(Just rewards for things well done
Books and cups and printed pennants)
Plebs alert now, as the son
Or the daughter, some embarrassed
Some assured, but all so proud
Boys stomp up, girls pitter patter
Smile and handshake, back to crowd
So it goes, the long procession
Till all laurel leaves are shed
And the whole, replete ensemble
Can bestir itself - to bed.

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MISSNAMED

I'm a School Inspector, male,
And visit many classrooms
And in a year meet schoolkids
By the ton.
But how they might address me,
Is not a thing to vex me,
But how could they mistake me for a nun ?

Sometimes Sir,
Sometimes Mister,
Sometimes Brother,
Sometimes Sister.

by

But the thing that makes me hiss
Is when the Year Twelve call me "Miss".

BASICS

I love to read
I love to spell
I love to use the language well
I think that grammar is a must
I don't mean just to earn a crust
But for its own intrinsic worth.
Do you know there is quite a dearth
Of people who know English well ?
Who read with ease ?
And who can spell ?

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ADVICE ABOUT SCHOOL INSPECTORS

Inspectors are people
Just like you and me.
Don't put up your shutters,
When one comes to tea.

Why kow-tow or kid him?
He won't be impressed
But do be fair dinkum,
Straightforward is best.

Don't whitewash or blacken him
Treat him with ease
A dog never scratches
Unless he has fleas !

AN ADMINISTRATOR I KNOW

Masterly inactivity
Is what that man's most good at
(Indeed it's his Rubaiyat).

He's reached his lofty station
By dumb procrastination
And no decision making,
Initiative forsaking.

He has poor wit, less commonsense
But he's achieved incompetence
In massive style - so grand, admire,
He makes great smoke - he needs no fire.

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SAGA OF THE WILD WEST

This is a story of anguish
This is a story of woe
All about a teacher-in-charge called John
And a D.I. whose name was Joe
They lived out West
Where the hardship's cruel.

Now Johnny had written a letter
Marked it and crossed every T
'Please Mr. Joe, come to my place
I need some dough from your D.E.
We got white ants
And the building shakes.

Joseph jumped into his Holden
At 13.5 cents a mile
And lit out across the paddocks
A-wearin' his 'no money' smile
He'd been too long
In the Bridge St. Mill.

He pulled up in front of the school house
The dust and the flies were real black
The joint was an 1880 job
And it just wasn't worth a zack.
One good push -
And she'd all fall down.

The kids came down out of the gum trees
From out of the scrub and the creek
"Look at 'em come" said Johnny
"But they ain't been inside for a week
Cause the floor's all holes -
And the windows broke.

(continued)

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SAGA OF THE WILD WEST (continued)

The D.I. looked over the damage
With his keen practised Public Works eye
"You won't get on the next year's programme
But maybe some time, bye and bye
We'll paint her up
And we'll fix the tanks. "

Now there was a big irate parent
Honorary Sec. - P. and C.,
Came up and accosted poor Joseph
With his shot gun by the knee,
"We want her fixed
And we want it now!!"

That D.I. was very courageous
He stood on his dig and he roared
"You'll go through the proper channels
To the Holy Public Service Board
So don't you dare
Make demands on me".

But the parent was very impatient
They'd waited for ten years or so,
So he blew a big hole through Johnny
And he blew a BIGGER hole through Joe
It always pays
To keep Your big mouth shut !

The story is easy to follow
The moral is there plain to see
You can PROCRASTINATE with a teacher
But don't try it on the P. and C.
Or you'll end up dead
Dead as you can be!

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ADVICE TO THE PROMOTION-LORN

When your Inspector visits you
To scan your well-planned work
Don't fraternise, antagonise
Or argue with the jerk.

And if he says it's all so dull
When the sun is shining bright
Or walks, quite sober, round the place
Declaring black is white.

Just keep the peace - don't contradict
You know he's tryin' to bait you
But wait until he's down the road
THEN TELL IT ALL TO NATURE !!

Verse you can read
by
Geoffrey
Falkenmire

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A FAREWELL TO A WELL-LOVED HEADMASTER

Old orders change and new ones take their place
And now, instead of you, another face
We'd much prefer to keep things as they are
Why can't it be like night-time? Every star
Knows just exactly where it has to be
At some appointed time. It is not free
To leave its mates, to weep, to mourn, to moan
If it decides to leave its little home.

In other words, we want you *by* not to go
But stay with us. It would be best you know,
But if you must - we'll shed our selfishness
And with our love and wishes for success
Send you out on your fresh exciting way,
God keep you safely, each and every day.

*Geoffrey
Falkenmire*

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SNOB PHILOLOGY

The other day I met two words
The first was serendipity
The other, though not quite so posh,
Was that smooth one, concinnity.

The first is royal Cingalese
(Hence polysyllability)
The second (common noun and all)
With Shakespeare has affinity

I'd like to show this knowledge off
And air it with impunity
But in the company I keep
There's never opportunity.

I mingle with the pedagogues,
Whose conceit's so particular,
Concerning their omniscience
They're all so damned pellicular!

They're mostly school inspector types
And I confess this readily
That we, in all our innocence,
Enjoy this logodaedaly.

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