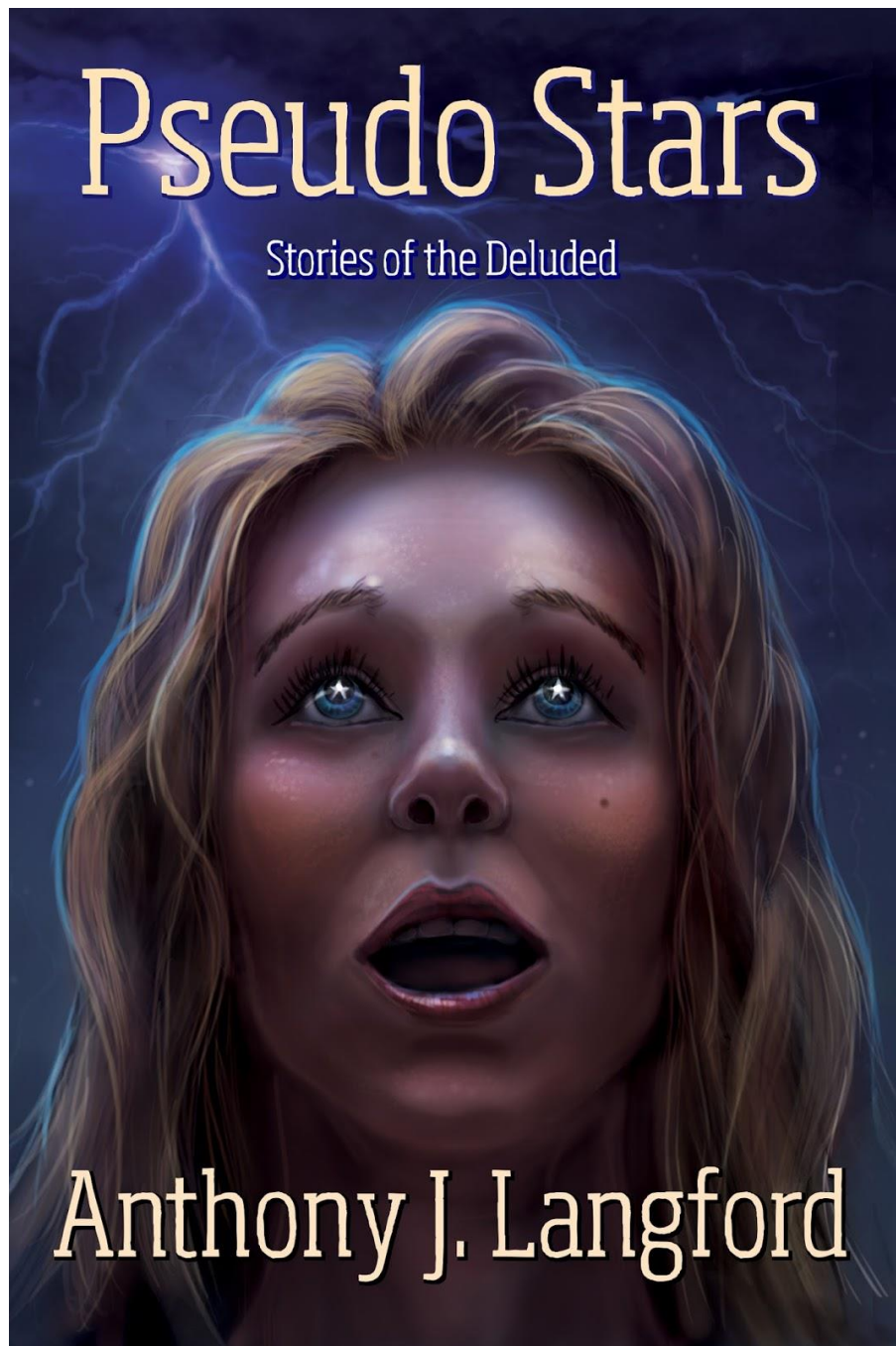


Companion Piece



The Stories behind the Stories

Plus Bonus stories

Plus Fun Facts

The Last Laugh

Like many of the stories you'll find here this is part fact, part fiction.

I'll never mention names, but having worked in a nursing home, the image of the couple at the table struck me quite significantly. This is the most recent story, written in 2017.

The Loop

People tend to stay in poverty. The abused often become their nemesis. I used the notion of a city train loop to highlight it. That was the intent anyway. 'Pill poppin whore' came from a real situation I overheard as a child.

Fabulous Phil

The second most written story, how much is Phil and how much is me? Haven't you ever felt frustration at how much noise those blowers make? My local pedestrian crossing is often overrun by cars and I let them know about it. And I did sit next to the policemen for lunch, with the woman who moaned then went onto her phone. Phil's his own worst enemy but in his own way, he's a good guy too.

Ding Ding

Ding is a true story, word for word.

Would you like an experience...

The newest story in this collection. I grew up in a small town and there was a man called coke and chips. He was an oddball and no doubt drew scorn. I know nothing about him. Perhaps it's best that way.

Cock. Old?

Cock Old, as mentioned within the story, is a reworking of the phrase Cuckold. I wanted to play with the idea of dating websites and not knowing what you're going to get. I love the idea of best laid plans. We've all been there in some form. It lies at the heart of many of these stories and indeed, of life itself. Cheers John Lennon.

The fence sitter

For a long time, this story was called Fence De-Straddl-ata. (Remember the Desiderata poem?) Ultimately, I decided it a bit too obtuse.

There's a men's boarding house in a little suburb close to where I live. Often, you'd see mentally ill men wandering about, talking to themselves. I wonder what thoughts they have. I also liked the idea of a fence sitter, someone who can never make up their mind.

My daddy used to say....

For some reason, I've always imaged this story being set in rural American.

Looking back, perhaps a sister story to 'The Loop'. The son slowly becomes his father, though he doesn't realise it. Be careful what you *don't* wish for. This was accepted for publication in the Netherlands.

Thirteen Steps

I actually wrote the first draft while sitting on a carpeted stair. There's the Bon Jovi reference there, other than that, I can't recall what made me come up with it, though in harsh times people live in boxes and doorways. Why not a staircase?

I am.

A story of shifting perspectives

Publishers often go on about voice, first, second etc. I wanted to include all three, perhaps as a subtle finger up and granted, it is subtle. I don't think it matters as long as the content is interesting. I also wanted to set a story in the States, so here it is.

Three little words

I've had issues with alcohol. A lot of my poetry for instance, was written under the early stages of it. I'm not a big fan of sales people, or corporate high flyers, so I merged the two concepts. Three little words usually applies to *I love you* so I wanted to play around with that also.

The First & Last Time aka Sliding Scale of Sexuality

Written in 2014, I wanted to write a dialogue piece, almost like a one man play, with a person on a phone. I was also reading about a male porn star who had committed suicide in the States, being mostly straight, yet appearing in gay films.

Island of Jonas

Like many I suppose, I'm inspired when away from home and the routines of life. This story was written on holiday after I saw the twisted corpse of a beautiful parrot, lying on the beach.

Her waterfall tears

Written in late 2014, I wanted to tell a story with one character gradually losing interest in the other. In this story it's more of an epiphany. Yet telling it in reverse, it works like two forces, travelling in opposite directions. And while we end at the beginning, it's still possible to deliver a surprise. Is it fact, fiction or a mix of both?

I cook the sausages

For three years I lived next to a man who had a mental illness. Sometimes he would go off his meds, go crazy and have to be hospitalised. He lived off food from 7-Eleven and did indeed, have a massive bowling ball stomach. Unlike the story, he had no family to speak of. I discovered through a neighbour that he had been a teacher and was assaulted in America. Not an illness but brain damage. I wrote the story in 2010 while still his neighbour.

It was published by Forge Journal in 2013

The last ice shelf

Ice Shelf was topical when first written in 2008. It took eight years to get it published. The climate change sceptics were personified by the Bale character and no doubt represents many a developer, the quintessential wanker. I'm a little haunted by that last image. I'm claustrophobic so perhaps it was the worst punishment I could think up for Bale. Typically, they take others down with them.

Creatures of habitual

I was staying down the coast in a rental, catching a few days break from city life in 2008 and read in the local paper about an ambulance team attacked while helping a young drunk, an event not uncommon. Having been a victim of assault, it's a theme I often explore. I coupled it with the idea of someone who lives a regimented life. I added my grandmother's beloved black cat and here we are.

Don't bring me down

I grew up on the river with a bridge like this. There was the occasional flood which was somewhat exciting but also dangerous. Unfortunately, people do stupid things in situations like these. Their actions can have severe repercussions for themselves as well as the innocent. The title is from the Beatles song but is entirely applicable to the poor young guy.

Luv u 4eva

I'm a huge advocate of no phone use while driving. It's a no brainer but I'll tell you a story. A girl I went to school with was driving when hit head on by a driver talking on the phone. It was 1993. This story, 2014. Still a long way to go. Invariably the innocent suffers. And it's so pointless.

Officer Material

I read about a young soldier in WW2 who kept diaries. He had some moral issues with War and his role in it, yet became officer. I simply set it in a future context, juxtaposing his concerns with that of killing an ‘innocent.’ There’s a little bit of Starship Troopers in there, a film I love, which is based on the book by Robert Heinlein, who also fought in World War 2. Full Circle.

The Long Jetty

The first story I had success with, published in Veranda’s 25th Anniversary edition. For that reason, I’m proud of it. It’s also a nice little story to end on. Well, almost end on.

The Elusive

The third most recent story, I wrote this in a bar late one night in 2016.

Though a little exaggerated, looks were exchanged and the recollection of the friend’s girlfriend is true. I almost ended this collection with ‘The Long Jetty’, but it’s slightly depressing. This has some sly humour. Plus, I like the notion of leaving it with the writer, me, being lost.

Bonus Stories

She was slim once

A tribute to a tornado victim

Thinking about the phone conversation with her daughter she'd had not twenty minutes before, wondering if her advice had been taken on board, even though she already knew the answer, there came a sound like a reversing truck.

A moving *disintegration* if such a thing were possible. A noise to charge her veins with adrenalin that had no comparison in her seventy-six years.

Before she could cross to the stream of daylight through the window in search of answers and possible escape, she was rising from the floor as the roof twisted and the walls crumbled.

Gravity shifted. She was carried sideways. Something hit her so hard that she almost didn't feel it, an overwhelming numbness that left her with the knowledge that the right side of her body was now useless.

The light was shut out and she felt wet, soaking, as though having emerged from a pool, though she had not been in one for over a dozen years because of a boy who had stared at the lumps in her costume from age and the reminders of her four children that had been left on her body. The child's stare was intrusive as though she were not a real person and just a thing of curiosity and more than likely repulsion. It was not his fault really. He was merely a little one but it was enough to guarantee that she never went back to that pool or any other one as it was not a pleasant thing to have your body betray you even though it's inevitable for all and is one of the more disappointing things in life as it's the same body that was once universally adored and doesn't that feel like a lifetime ago.

Yet she knows that it's not water that swirls around her but the debris of her shattered home and the wetness must be coming from her and it can only be the fluid of her life. She closes her mouth and her eyes to protect them and that's all that she can do even though this is not real, cannot be real, and if it is, then perhaps this is what death feels like. A pain like piercing blades shoots through her chest. Something has hit her in the dark. There's a roar of a jet plane and perhaps one has crashed into her home or more than likely it is the worst of nature or the finger of God as her punishment for having left her children's father years before despite his consistent emotional cruelty. She coughs and splutters and is rolling or flying and if that be true then whatever may come in the next few seconds will surely be the next thing and probably the last.

What would it be like to be caught in a natural disaster? We see the aftermath through media, at times, the event itself, but what goes through the mind at the end?

I originally had it in the collection but I pulled it out before I submitted it.

Published by Microliterature in 2013.

C i t y
of
Great Large

Chinquai is the nice place not to say Goodbye.

Chin Li sad, but to say Goodbye is true. Travel the land to City of Great Large is necessary. That wealth for family lives to need.

Chin Li adores the Father, Mother, Sister of Small. Is long the water eyes to run. Sister of Small love leg of Chin Li. To hold but not give back. **Chin Li** uncollect the hands of Sister of Small to return to Father, Mother. **Chin Li** float goodbye with hand to Family. Only to eyes the front and not back at Place of Born, **Chinquai**.

Sniffing the dust to journey the foot to bus, many times the hour.

Desire come round to travel to Place of Born, but not to stop now.

The light above uncollects.

The night sun forgotten in cloud.

Chin Li gather the sleep by tree of Great Comfort.

The light to come again. **Chin Li** journeys the foot.

Gathering the people of new Place. **Chin Li**, new stranger. **Chin Li** search for righteous bus. To call the question of strangers, but answer in laugh to **Chin Li**. His voice not righteous for new Place.

Born from the dark of bodies, a Girl of Young Freshness. Find him to help. **Chin Li** smile. To offer the heart when no history is known. Is wonder and righteous of human companys best.

The smile of Girl's spirits gave, carry the dark and ugly away of companys saddest ways. Girl borrowed hand of **Chin Li** to give to righteous bus.

Chin Li honour help yet fingers is lost of Girl. Too much companys.

Chin Li count faces but Fresh Girl uncollecting among too much faces. Hands to press on him. Walk to in of bus. Bus uncollect from companys and new Place.

Chin Li in next step of long paths to journey to City of Great Large.

Sleep come to rescue after display of ticket is gone.

*The sun of many faces of Born companys share with **Chin Li**.*

The tree of happiness stand tall over Place of Born.

The light of dark come over, to swallow peace of tree like hungry mouth.

*Follow the mouth to swallow **Chin Li**, into lung of Beast.*

Eyes of **Chin Li** open. His heart swim of forget. Return the memory of Girl of Young Freshness, give to smiles of heart. Eyes shining of glass illumine.

Still to sit on Bus of righteous. Bent of legs in space tight.

To pray is next to guidance of asking. For Happiness. For wealth of Family. For Fresh Girl return. **Chin Li** eyes the spice of water.

Sleep not return to **Chin Li** for next rise of night sun.

City of Great Large before him born. Smoke like Red Dragon fire. Fires gas to breath.

Hot eating flesh of many companys. Too much companys in City of Great Large. Time less of life, arms to all.

Journey of bus did come to close.

Chin Li not see ever City in life journey. His Place of Born, **Chinquai** to hunger over.

Chin Li no company. He walk and walk. To find in busy of cars and companys, many nothings. Dust and smoke. Too much. Lost **Chin Li** question, but companys not to help. Not to eat. **Chin Li** wish the water.

Hearts empty vat.

Darker the sky but lights not close in City of Great Large.

Chin Li empty sleep to reach him, on front of dried water step of concrete.

The fat light of day stand to high. Stink of breath of transports.

Chin Li see the Sweeper Boy. To push for a question. Too busy is boy.

Chin Li follow boy to push for question, to push to push. Boy find trouble to understand **Chin Li** voice of **Chinquai**. The boy do talk to **Chin Li** of more help than **Chin Li** have to history in City of Great Large.

Chin Li help boy of that day to sweep and talk. Side by work as one.

Chin Li meet owner of Sweepers Boys after fat light of day recollect. **Chin Li** rest to eat with Sweepers Boys. And sleep do come.

Now **Chin Li** Sweeper Boy too.

Days that are many travel by. Many. Work is all for the day. Wealth too little for **Chin Li**. More little for Family. **Chin Li** eyes that water for Father, Mother, Sister of Small. **Chin Li** eyes that water for Sweeper Boys. And for many companys in City of Great Large. Dogs of Poor Places live higher. Dogs of **Chinquai** live higher.

Rains of season show.

And show.

To show once more.

Soon river is fat too much. To vomit the flood.

In belly of night sun, Sweeper Boys do sleep.
Fat river enter to space of boys. Sweeper Boys cannot learn to float.
Chin Li float in Place of Born **Chinquai** river. Now to float. He wish to help of Boys.
Fat river too heavy. **Chin Li** away to float.
Not to float Sweeper Boys.
Chin Li catch the table that float. **Chin Li** do sense of heart that swells for Sweeper Boys.
Much time travel by. The safe of shore find **Chin Li**. Heart swells for hope for Sweeper Boys.
Chin Li journey the foot.
Sweeper Boys not to remain, only one of **Chinquai**. The last Sweeper Boy **Chin Li**. Eyes that water hard.
Anger turn **Chin Li** to wish that City blister. To sprinkle away as seed from petal of Autumn.
Now **Chin Li** make firm of mind. To return to Place of Born, **Chinquai**.

Fat river to loss to tight river again. Then to make more unhappy companys with water made sick with bitterness of flood. **Chin Li** make firm his anger.
Companys to die in street and steps.
Chin Li heart swells too much. **Chin Li** hopes but cannot uncollect from City of Great Large.
Cannot own fare of ticket of righteous bus.

Today **Chin Li** anger to blossom. Walk from City to never wish to look once more.
Chin Li walk to many days. Legs to pain that wish to sleep.
Chin Li hope to Family to look. Please to continue.
Sleep do come off balance of road. To eat of seed of plant. To eat cicada and slug of dirt.
Chin Li rest under plant. Sleep not come. Visit by faulty men. Not friend to **Chin Li**. To wish to take money of **Chin Li** who has not. To strike. To kick. To hurt. To break.
Blood like rains to run.
Faulty men laugh. To leave.

Chin Li only two rise of sun to Place of Born **Chinquai**.
But **Chin Li** to walk no more.
Eyes of **Chin Li** to close, must do.
Darker the sky. Night sun rise.
Flight of Death to linger close.

The fat light of day to stand tall.
Chin Li eyes to wish to see.

Boys of Youth Freshness stand tall, smile of spirits to help.

Chin Li not to smile but wish for help.

Boys of Youth Freshness to carry **Chin Li** on bamboo to Place of Born of Boys.

Chin Li to sleep and sleep.

The City of Great Large scream. And dust pour to mouth. And stink smoke of transports too much.

*The Sweeper Boys wave to **Chin Li** but the fat river vomit the flood, push them away.*

***Chin Li** wish to help but faulty men take arms of **Chin Li** and strike and hurt over.*

Eyes of **Chin Li** open. His heart swim of forget. Return the Girl of Young Freshness. Give smiles to heart. Dreams of smiles do make.

Fresh Girl not dream. Boy of Youth Freshness to help **Chin Li** be Fresh Girl Brother.

Now Fresh Girl help **Chin Li** with the good like Doctor. Like Family. Soon come to life again.

In switch of season, **Chin Li** return to Place of Born, **Chinquai**. Now to walk with help of stick.

And help of Fresh Girl, now wife.

Part is Last.

I sketched out a rough draft while sitting in a courtyard of a temple in China in 2007. I was overcome with inspiration and had to start immediately. I wanted to record the almost poetic mix of broken English I'd been hearing. This was pre-2008 Olympics and few could speak English and even less with competency. Better than my Mandarin of course. It was eventually published by Wilderness House Literary Review. They selected it out of all their stories that year for a Pushcart Prize nomination. For that reason it's my most well-known and successful story, yet the publisher didn't believe it sat with the others. For me, Pseudo Stars being the notion of the failed dreamer, it fits perfectly.

Pseudo Stars - Fun Facts

The collection was accepted for publication in October 2016. It took a full year for it to be released.

This is my fourth book. And my third with Gininderra Press.

Two separate artists worked on the images. A man from the UK did the front, a woman from the Netherlands did the back.

The only reason the back-cover image came into existence is due to the fact that I wanted to add more background to the front image. The artist informed me that it would cost more. I'd already spent a considerable amount so I had to let it go. Hence the back image, which became its own identity.

Before being titled Pseudo Stars, it was Pseudo Eyes. Before that it was Stars in their eyes, Glow on the ceiling.

Author Lucy Neville, whose blurb is on the back, is the daughter of the late Richard Neville, author and well known Australian media personality.

I had to proof read it so many times, that I was sick to death of it. And yet, when one physical hard copy was sent, I found six errors. It had to be redone. Therefore, there is only one copy that exists in that form. Worth anything? Ha-ha I doubt it. But I'll hang onto it.

The first story is the newest. Originally The Loop was going to be Number One. I added it in only months before publication.

Major book chains would not stock the book. Only a handful of independents. So much for supporting the little guy.

Author Pete Malicki, whose blurb is on the back, was the MC for the book launch. He also runs a theatre festival called Short and Sweet, which I once submitted a piece too and is how I met him.

I had a fight with my publisher over the City of Great Large. He didn't think it fitted with the rest. We compromised. I added in two more that I had originally removed. My daddy used to say... and The Elusive.

The publisher only publishes small books, mostly poetry. Hence my novels remain unpublished. Yet it did give me the idea to put this collection together. It's also the reason it's not as many pages as it could have been. My long form stories had to be put aside.

Because of the argument over the story I thought, next time, I control what goes in my book. (Unless dealing with a major publisher). So, while I'll keep sending out my manuscripts (and mostly not hearing back) I've decided to self-publish some of my work. It's not the sin it was once considered.

The stories were written over a ten-year period, beginning 2008. What's the oldest one? I'm not 100% certain. I think The Long Jetty.

I hope you've enjoyed the book. Thanks for being a supporter of my work. Without you, the stories are empty vessels lost at sea. You've given them safe haven. Thank you.