

Okay, so January's slow – a sort of lazy month. It's either too hot to mow, or it's raining, or you don't feel like it. There's a laid-back tempo, and you go with it.

A perfect time for a bit of a read!

We've assembled eight pages of writing for your enjoyment, including fiction, poetry, essays, reviews and even humour of a kind.

For the younger readers, Wally the Cat learns a valuable lesson (and so do his owners); below Overpage, local guy Dave Reynolds ruminates

thoughtfully on how far we've come, in his essay, "The Evolution of Culture, followed by a full page of poetry with a social conscience!

In the middle you'll find a detailed report on Fleet Street's reaction to Harold Pinter's Nobel Prize win for literature in December, and on the subject of anti-war sentiments, we present Mother Jones' survey of the latest US pro-war merchandising and meet local convert to patriotism, Mary-Lou Shrub.

The debate about air conditioning heats up

on Page 12, with two well argued essays on the subject, while on the opposite page the review of "Suppressed Inventions and other Discoveries" recounts how promising solutions to problems besetting us may never see the light of day.

Finally, a serious matter, and Australia's shame. The loss of 350 lives of asylum seekers on their way to Australia on board the Siev X, our possible complicity and subsequent disregard.

So, whatever your tastes this summer, submit to the urge - kick back and have a good old read!

## WALLY THE WANTED CAT

By Ian Crowther

My real name, the one on the pedigree papers, is Ashanti Nashida the Third, but my owners call me Wally. Their names are Wilt and Polly. Wilt bought me as a gift for Polly on her birthday.

When they saw me they thought I looked strange. You see, I have very big ears and wavy fur. That may sound unusual for most cats but it's perfectly normal for Devon Rexes like me.

They took me home in their car. I'd never been in a car before and I was very frightened. When we got to their house I hid under the sofa until Polly coaxed me out.

At first I was lonely. I missed my brothers and sisters. But in a few days I felt quite at home. The house had lots of shelves to climb on and cupboards to explore. One room was full of cardboard boxes and sometimes I would climb into one and go to sleep.

I became Wilt's alarm clock. Each morning I jumped onto the bed and burrowed under the blankets between he and Polly. He'd then get out of bed and we'd both go down to the kitchen. Wilt would make Polly a cup of tea and get my breakfast. Sometimes he gave me Snappy Tom, sometimes Dine and sometimes Whiskas. But I liked the food which they ate better.

At dinner time I used to

sneak onto Wilt's knee and sniff the food on his plate. He said my manners were appalling for a cat of my breeding and he'd put me back on the floor. Wilt and Polly both went to work and I missed them during the day. But there were lots of things to do until they came home.

Wilt cut a hole, shaped like a cat, in the bottom of the back door and I could come and go as I pleased. Sometimes I visited the old lady next door, or climbed the trees in the garden.

The garden was like a jungle. It had lots of bamboo where I could hide and wait to catch birds. But they flew away too quickly.

Every day, when Wilt came home he whistled, and I ran inside to welcome him by stretching up and digging my claws into his jeans. Polly always gave me a cuddle when she came in. Often she bought things from the shops and I would stick my nose into her carrier bag. Occasionally she would tip me into the bag and swing it around in the air. It was fun.

I was very happy.

Then, one weekend, everything went wrong.

It all started when I caught the bird. I had waited, crouched in the bamboo for a long time before I pounced. It was my first bird and I was very proud of myself. I took it inside to show Polly



The Devon Rex cat - named after the Rex rabbits that also have short wavy fur.

and Wilt.

I couldn't understand why they were so upset. Wilt had never hit me before, but he smacked me hard on the nose and took the bird away from me. Next day he fitted a bell to my collar so that the birds could hear me coming. Wearing the bell was humiliating. I sulked and ignored him for the rest of the morning.

It got worse.

They had invited friends for lunch and Polly cooked a tuna casserole. She put it on the kitchen bench to cool after she'd taken it from the oven. Wilt and Polly chatted with their friends in the dining room. They seemed to have forgotten all about the casserole, and it was barely warm when I started to eat it. It was delicious – much nicer than tinned cat food. I ate lots of it.

Polly was very cross when she came in the kitchen and saw me. "Oh no! Wally's eating our lunch!" She grabbed me and whacked me several times, then threw me out the back door.

That did it! I had my pride! No-one was going to treat me like that! First the bell, then the belting. I'd teach them. I'd run away.

I enjoyed my independence, at first. It was exciting exploring the streets of the neighbourhood. At one house I played with the children in their garden. Later they made me a bed with a blanket and a cardboard box. I spent the night there.

Food was no problem. Everywhere I went people gave me something to eat. I was footloose and fancy-free. Who needed Wilt and Polly?

Then, on my second day away from home I saw Wilt in the street, putting slips of paper into letter boxes. I hid and watched him. He dropped one of the slips. When he turned the corner I ran over to have a look at what it was that he was shoving into the mail boxes.

It was a windy August day and it was difficult to catch the paper. It took all of my feline skills to pin it down as it fluttered along the footpath. There was a message on it:

"Has anyone seen Wally? He is a cream-coloured Devon Rex cat with curly hair, blue eyes and big ears. If found, please ring 5679-08432 or return him to 5 St. Francis Street. Reward."

I knew I had to be careful now. I was wanted. I headed for the tough part of town where I thought a cat on the

run could lay low.

By the time it was dark I was starving. Pickings were slim on those mean streets. The garbage cans, tipped over by alley cats, contained little worth eating. I did find some chop bones in one bin, but I was driven away by a tough, one-eared tabby. The fur along his spine stood up and he swished his tail and hissed at me, "Beat it, Big Ears! This is my territory!"

It began to rain. I dodged cars as I scampered across wet streets, trying to find shelter. I was cold, wet and hungry.

I wished I were back home, full of food and asleep in the laundry basket.

The house was dark when I arrived. I crept quietly through the hole in the back door, went into Wilt's study and climbed up on his desk. Even in the dark I could see that he'd been busy. There were papers everywhere. I looked to see what he'd been writing. On one of the sheets he had written a poem. It read:

"Willy Wally big ears  
Climbs up on my knee  
Willy Wally big ears  
You're spoilt, we all can see  
Willy Wally big ears  
Nose against my plate  
Willy Wally big ears  
You were my dinkum mate."

I ran up to the bedroom and pounced on the bed.

"Wally!" Polly squealed. "You've come back!"

She cuddled me against her. Wilt scratched me under the chin. I closed my eyes, purred, and luxuriated in all the attention.

And I decided to give them another chance.

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