

Hanging Out The Wash by Beulah Gross

I've done so much laundry over the years that I often liken myself to a Chinese washerwoman.

When I was first married we lived in a grotty flat in Braamfontein on Harrow Road - all we could afford as Rachael was still a medical student. The first time I did laundry I lugged a huge basket down scary metal stairs to the communal wash line. I'd barely started pegging when a dirty car raced through the yard leaving trails of mud all over my sparkling sheets. Too late I discovered that the yard was open at both ends and used as a shortcut so no one ever hung their washing out.

After this I used clothes-racks on the balcony, all very low because a city by-law prohibited laundry to be visible to passersby. When construction on Harrow Road began we ran an indoor wash-line in the long passage and past our front door. Wet nappies in the face became a regular hazard for visitors.

We then moved into medical quarters at Baragwanath Hospital which had once been an army barracks. All our washing had to be done in a hand basin as we weren't allowed to use the communal bathtubs. Inadequate wash-lines were shared by all resident staff and I often found my wet washing bundled in a corner on the ground and the line full of someone else's things. Once again clothes-racks did yeoman service.

As our finances improved we had maids to do everything, including laundry, but when we emigrated to Australia my romance with laundry was renewed.

Every couple of days I carried wet laundry up a spiral staircase, through the lounge and out the front door to the Hills Hoist wash line at the far end of the garden.

So what if the neighbour's cat had a fetish about my wash line and tried to climb it via the washing? So what if Cat wrapped himself around my legs, biting fiercely when I pulled him off? So what if birds zoomed overhead, leaving their calling cards on me and my washing? So what if the breeze sometimes blew so hard that the wash line whizzed round and round, flapping wet clothes in my face? So what if I was a free meal for the mozzies? So what if spiders lurked in the peg bags scaring

the daylights out of me? It was nice having a quiet think outside while doing something useful. The calls of the birds, the sunshine, the slight breeze ruffling my hair, all added to my enjoyment.

Once again noise and dust from roadworks on our doorstep were horrendous so the enclosed balcony was called into service.

We now live in a retirement village and our laundry is hung in our yard with no fear of road construction to interrupt it.

So what if mozzies still attack? So what if birds occasionally leave calling cards? So what if I believed the weather report and I had to bring wet laundry inside? If it rains we have clothes-racks in our spare room.

Hanging out the wash has never been boring.

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