

Laurie Wilson: The Wharf

By the time the ferry reached its destination, the light had faded and Manly emerged from the gloom, first as navigation lights on the wharf, then the familiar lines of Norfolk Island pines, just visible as silhouettes against the darkening sky.

The ferry glided in, followed by the frantic activity of tying up and lowering gangways. How long was it since I had arrived at Manly?

Then it struck me; a combination of smells that could only belong here. Fresh fish and chips combined with decay and dampness from the dark underside of the wharf. How smells can evoke memories. Jumping off the side of the wharf into the harbour pool, now long gone. Watching the donut machine in one of the takeaway shops while waiting for a milkshake at the milk bar. An ice cream dripping onto sunburnt skin. Waiting for a bus after a long day at the beach.

But the crowd from the ferry was dispersing. The last surfers of the day were carrying their body boards onto the ferry for their trip home, while a few seagulls decided there were no more scraps and flew away from the lights into the darkness.

But a generation had passed. My own infant daughter was waiting at home; these experiences now lay in her future not mine.

I stepped off the wharf, glad that I had returned home.