

# Seachange inspires new chapter

By Brad Lester

**HUDDLED** together under a leaking hose, a husband, wife and their daughter watched their family home burn.

Ray Dahlstrom will never forget that moment on the evening of Black Saturday, February 7, 2009.

His art, however, is helping to ease his grief.

Ray and Bronwyn Dahlstrom lost the home they built at Steels Creek in the Yarra Valley on a day when bushfires swept across regional Victoria, claiming lives.

The Dahlstroms lost neighbours and Ray remembers attending funerals for what seemed like an eternity.

On the same night their Steels Creek home was destroyed, another house they built, at Kinglake, was also razed by fire. Their pet pig of 13 years, Charlie, survived and moved to the beach too.

By the sea at Inverloch, Ray, Bronwyn and Charlie are finding peace with nature again and Ray has explored this response to the natural disaster through painting. Marine subjects feature in his recent work, implying he is finding a sense of home at Inverloch and loosening the

stranglehold of the flames.

He has opened Studio 40 gallery on his property and is experimenting with using epoxy resin and sand in his oil and acrylic paintings to give a three-dimensional effect.

"Now I'm by the coast, I'm painting fish, squid and jellyfish, and coastal scenes," Ray said.

Works with black and red jellyfish mimic Japanese watercolour techniques. Seascapes capture the vibrancy of Inverloch's main beach on a warm summer's night and the tranquillity of Yanakie beach. Flicked paint gives a sense of movement.

Ray describes his technique as "progressive".

"I'm always looking for new mediums to work with," he said.

Many of his works after Black Saturday were based on bushfire themes: falling embers against blooming smoke clouds, house remains after the fire and stark burnt landscapes. Some pieces will appear in a book about Steels Creek and the fire by Professor Tom Griffiths of the Australian National University, Canberra.

"I tried to suggest something about what the fire was like. I decided to do some really nasty pieces," Ray said,

with one work based on a rumour of birds falling from the sky during the fire.

"I used to do a lot more traditional bush stuff. I have gone back to it but I do not get much of a thrill out of it anymore."

After losing some 100 paintings on Black Saturday, Ray is replenishing his collection and is now exhibiting at the Inverloch Community Hub this month with Wonthaggi artist Frank Schooneveldt.

Come August, the Dahlstroms will have lived at Inverloch for three years.

"Our niece had a holiday house here and offered it to us after the fires. Our daughter (Karen) took it upon herself to find us another property. This was not the one she saw online but we finished up here," Ray said.

"It's cleansing here, but we are not being lulled into a false sense of security."

Ray describes his former home as "beautiful", but after seven years of drought and bush littered with fuel, a fire was inevitable.

Bronwyn said: "We were going to make a move to the coast five or six years ago as we knew there had been a big fire through there in the sixties."



The couple's challenge continued at Inverloch. Bronwyn needed back surgery after a horse riding accident.

On the mend, she is now involved with the Bass Coast Artists Society, Bass Coast/South Gippsland Reconciliation Group and Bunurong Environment Centre.

The Dahlstroms still have their 66 acre block at Steels Creek and after many unsuccessful attempts to sell, the State Government now looks likely to buy it

under a scheme to remove fire prone properties from human occupation.

"We did all the right things according to what we had been told about staying and defending, but it did not work. The fire was too big," Ray said.

"When we went back the next day, we thought 'How did we walk out of here?' We basically just had left what we were standing in."

How far they have come since.

## Aliens target Wonthaggi

THE aliens have returned to the Bass Coast.

Known as the Gliesans, they are in numbers and robbing the Wonthaggi seedbank, stealing seeds to plant on another planet to start afresh.

Their swoop is in revenge after an Earthling visited their planet Mendome.

From the author of the book *Cape Paterson*, comes the sequel *The Milk Run*.

Writer Claude Joseph from New South Wales explores a fantasy world with chapters set at Cape Paterson, Inverloch and Wonthaggi.

He sets his books in this area for its appeal: dinosaur fossils, a volcanic past, Aboriginal history, the existence of a rocket shed at Inverloch, and road names like Neptune and Venus.

"In the first book, the Gliesans saw someone put a flag on their planet and kill some of their monsters, and they have come back for revenge," Joseph said.

"They end up seeking us out and looking for seeds. They use a feathered bird as a drone and explore everything that is on earth."

However a Gliesan is left behind, floating on a yacht, and the adventure begins, as readers turn the pages to find out who wins in the exhilarating and thrilling interplanetary battle.

"The book tries to be as realistic as possible in terms of what aliens actually do and also what dilemmas will arise in the future, such as robots wanting to walk side by side with us," Joseph said.

The book explores the notion of invisibility cloaking the Wonthaggi desalination plant, travelling fast by fracturing space time to reduce the distance one needs to travel.

The book has references to Bass Coast Shire Council helping charity at Cape Paterson, Bunurong aborigines and dinosaurs, and the Inverloch rocket shed and Cape Paterson beach patrol vehicle being used to save an alien.

"It's a wide ranging sci-fi book for children as well as adults," Joseph said.

A third book is mooted.

Both books are available at the Bunurong Environment Centre at Inverloch and on Amazon.com.



**New direction:** Ray Dahlstrom's move to Inverloch has inspired him to explore marine themes.

## Ideas needed

SOUTH Gippsland Shire Council is now seeking public comment on its Active Ageing Plan 2012-2016.

"It is important for our residents to understand why we need an Active Ageing Plan. The plan demonstrates council's ongoing commitment to providing an opportunity for older residents to be valued as key contributors and actively participate in all facets of community life," said Louise Brydon, council's manager aged and disability services.

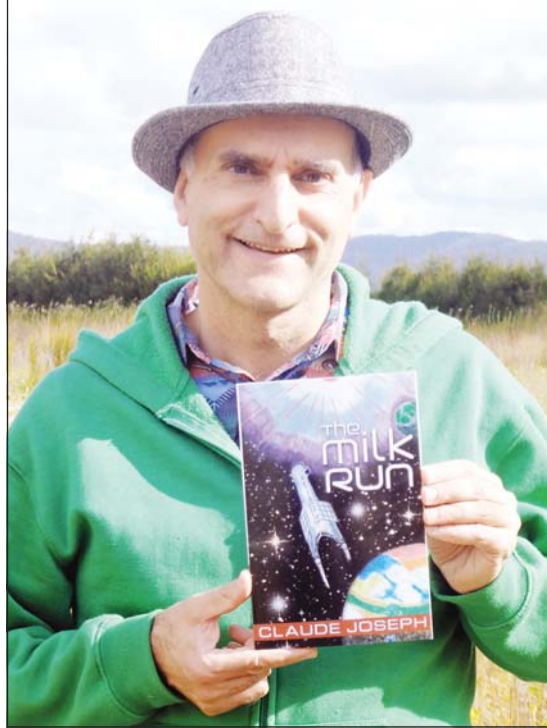
"The ageing population is a worldwide phenomenon. By 2031 the projected population of South Gippsland residents aged 60 and older will be 39 per cent of our population. Council has an important role in leading strategic planning for our ageing community."

A hardcopy of the plan can be obtained from council reception or downloaded from the website [www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au](http://www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au).

Alternatively, hard copies are available at: Foster, Korumburra, Leongatha, Mirboo North and Poowong libraries, Tarwin Lower District Health Centre and Venus Bay Community Centre.

Please address written submissions to Louise Brydon, manager aged and disability services by COB Thursday, August 2 using one of the following methods:

Deliver to council's main office 9 Smith Street, Leongatha; or mail to Private Bag 4 Leongatha, 3953; and email to [council@southgippsland.vic.gov.au](mailto:council@southgippsland.vic.gov.au)



**Sci-fi fan:** author Claude Joseph and *The Milk Run*.

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