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## Inside: Men's health

- This issue was prepared with the collaboration of Dr. Rick Hayes, Senior Lecturer, Head of Department (Undergraduate) and BHSc (Human Biosciences and Public Health) Undergraduate Coordinator, School of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.





## Artistic trove reveals a father's life

KEITH BETTANY AND RICK HAYES;  
ARTWORK: DES BETTANY

**Not everyone gets a first chance, much less a second, to tell their story. This is especially true of many who served in the Armed Forces during time of war. Those who were prisoners of war often felt that no one would believe them. So, we have cultural images and social memories of returned soldiers sitting in sheds at the end of gardens quietly fading away.**

However, some former prisoners of war (POWs), such as Ronald Searle who passed away recently in England, have left us a testimony in their artwork. Searle, a prisoner of the Japanese, returned to civilian life and continued his cartooning to great effect. Some of his work was used to illustrate such books as the early editions of Russell Braddon's, *The Naked Island*. While Ronald Searle is widely known, there were other returned service men that were artists as well.

One such artist was Des Bettany. Des chronicled his life as a prisoner of the Japanese during WW2; he captured much of what it took to stay alive under circumstances beyond the imagining of most. It was a way for Des to keep his sanity. Yet, this was no easy task and could have easily cost him his life. His son, Keith Bettany who is the community services officer at the Holdfast Bay Council in South Australia, comments:

...in trying to keep his head (sanity), he nearly lost it...a book of art he did of political cartoons of the Japs was discovered and he had to do some quick talking to the commandant, Col. Sito. The book was taken, never to be seen again with the threat that if he ever did any more like these, he'd have a 'short haircut' with his samurai sword. Dad has actually painted a cartoon of this confrontation...



If it was difficult to paint and keep your memories during the war, it has almost been as hard to keep the treasure available to the public. Bureaucratic red-tape, the desire to forget and other limitations have kept access to the cartoons limited to a few in the past. However, the ubiquity of the web is changing the situation. This resource is allowing those who have participated in the traumas of life an opportunity to share their stories – to have their voices heard. And, we all benefit. Des's artwork now has a home on the Internet. Recently, the site logged almost 11,000 page views in one day. The treasure that had once been stored in a cupboard for much of a life-time can now be shared as a trove with others.

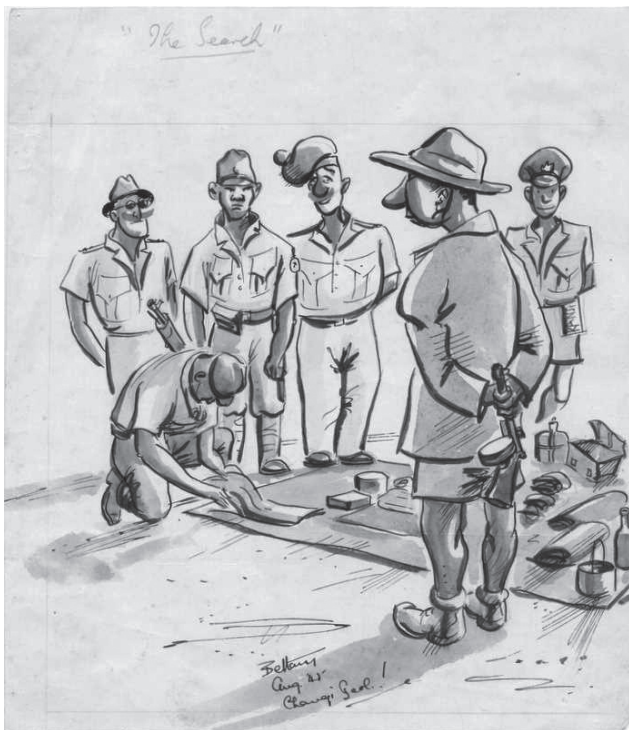
This can bring great healing to those who have experienced the trauma directly and to those who have inherited the hurts through the generations. At this point, it is probably best to let Keith tell the story in his own words:

Dad did this before 'art therapy' was even thought of, but he told us he painted to keep his sanity and to...boost his mates' morale also. So, what you see in many of the cartoons is the opposite of what was his reality: workers happily going to work; chauffeured by Japanese in vehicles; troops look well fed, healthy skin, well shod and all around just having a good time.

A few years before he died there was a great healing. We have had [foreign exchange] students as homestay and were asked to have a male Japanese or Korean. We said, Korean, as dad was a POW. We proudly rang dad about this. He said, 'What? Koreans were worse than the Japs, they did the beatings and if they didn't beat us hard enough, the Japs would beat them'.

Later, we had a Japanese man, Hiro, aged 22, who used to come with us to dad's place. He'd sit at dad's feet and call him grandpa. Dad said to him 'I was your age when I was in that summer camp in Singapore' and 'you're nothing like the men that used to tuck me into bed at night'. Hiro knew nothing about the war, as is typical for most Japanese people.

Hiro was killed in a car accident 12 months later in Western Australia. [His] family insisted that our family attend the funeral and they would pay for us. My son fitted perfectly into dad's black suit, RSL tie and white shirt. Dad said: 'If you told me 50 years ago that my grandson would be going to a Japanese



person's funeral, in Japan, wearing my clothes, I would have laughed at you, but things have changed'.

Dad actually painted five oil paintings of Outback scenes, where Hiro had been, for us to take over to his parents.

My daughter was encouraged to go for a scholarship in secondary school to study for one year in Japan. She first asked her grandpa, who said: 'Go for it; the Japanese people now are not the ones I used to have to put up with'. So, she did and can speak and write Japanese fluently.

Des Bettany was a Lancashire lad who had an interest in art. After the war, he made a vocation of his earlier interest. He trained at an art school in the United Kingdom and, then, enjoyed a long life as an art teacher in Adelaide, South Australia having migrated with his family in 1958. He was the acting head of the South Australia School of Art for many years. One son became an architect and the other, a community worker; his daughter became a secondary school art teacher. His work, as well as important background material to his life, can be viewed at this web-site: <http://changipowart.com/>.