



Contact
NATALIE KOTSIOS
on 57230108, email
nkotsios@nenews.com.au
or fax 57219447.

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The writer and the war zone

By **NATALIE KOTSIOS**

ANYONE can write. It takes a lot more however, to be a writer.

“It’s probably not the most lucrative career choice - you do it for the passion,” said Glenrowan writer John Charalambous.

Not that John, 49, isn’t enjoying success in his own writing career, with the recent release of his second novel *Silent Parts*, which tells parallel tales of a missing World War One soldier and the rumors surrounding him decades later.

Launched at last month’s Melbourne Writers Festival, the novel has been some seven years in the making, between drafting, editing, reworking and editing some more - but that is the nature of the writing beast and the process itself can be a battleground.

But all the work has been worth it, as the book’s release has been closely followed by positive reviews so far.

John first cultivated his interest in writing by studying creative writing at Melbourne University, which led to a number of short stories published in literary magazines.

Chasing a country lifestyle, he moved to Central Victoria for 13 years, before moving to the North East 10 years ago - and though he stopped writing as much then, it gave him some inspiration for his first novel, *Furies*, published in 2004.

Telling the tale of urban people in a country town, *Furies* delved into the world of small-town politics and received a very welcoming reception, including a nomination for the 2004 Commonwealth Writer’s Prize.

“When I first moved to the country I didn’t write anything for a while,

but then I started getting serious about it again once I turned 40,” he said.

“And to be nominated for a writer’s prize, it gives you such a buzz and you feel you’ve arrived somewhere.”

Following this, John went back to the draft of *Silent Parts*, transforming it into a story of delicate relationships, family gossip and “finding oneself”.

The novel’s lead character, Harry Lambert, is sent to France as a military baker in World War One, though he makes an unlikely soldier.

His ‘true’ story is paralleled with the accounts of his family in the 1960s, as young Julie pieces together what actually happened to Harry in France, and tries to discover if he is the hero made out to be.

Silent Parts becomes, in a sense, an interactive novel, as the two stories are deliberately and skilfully



intertwined, though at times conflict quite strongly.

"As a writer I wanted to leave certain suspense and intrigue to the reader, lead them through the novel and let them interpret it," John said.

It is somewhat interesting for John, a self-confessed pacifist, to write a story based around World War One, but then *Silent Parts* is not exactly a standard war novel - after all, the so-called hero doesn't actually get into the trenches at any point.

It is a far cry from the typical, blood-and-gore often associated with this genre of Australian literature, but John is more interested in exploring the type of people involved in war that aren't so glorified.

"Many had to have been middle-aged, domestic urban people and not the rough and rural types usually depicted," he said.

"Harry sees himself as something of a pacifist and isn't really suited to the rough and tumble of the barracks.

"He felt war was something he should do, not something he wanted to be a part of - I felt men like that must have also existed in the army to a wide extent."

Despite being set during World War One, some of the ideas raised transcend timelines, and perhaps show some of Australia's continued fascination with war - Harry, though a man of his times, is also informed by the attitudes of modern man, and modern man still has some violence as part of his nature.

"Now though, we can turn our backs on societal pressure far more than back then," John said.

"Life was a lot more constrained compared to now and duty was a

much bigger issue than it is for us."

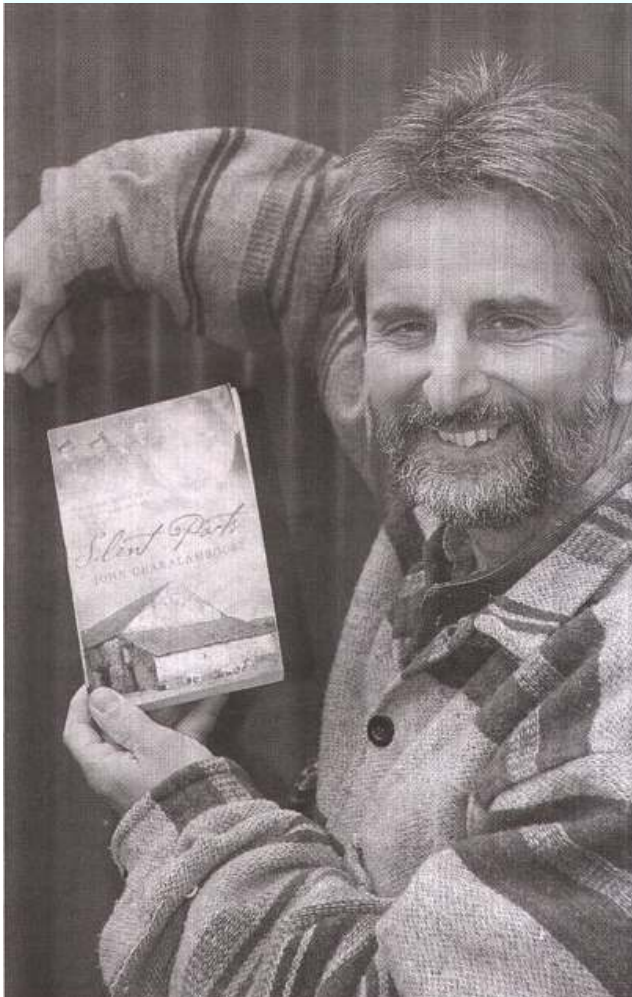
It is part of the challenge and fascination for writers, to rediscover these worlds and times long lost and only known through history books, and make them relevant for new generation of readers, but John believes the interest in the genre will continue.

"There is still a fascination I think, from many different angles, in Australia and war, it's part of who we are as a nation, for better or worse," he said.

And what's next for the author?

John is not too sure - there are a few story and novel ideas up his sleeve but what they will lead to, time will tell, however long it may take.

• *Silent Parts* is available now at most bookstores.



RURAL WRITER: Glenrowan writer John Charalambous is celebrating the release of his second novel, *Silent Parts*.