

# the spill

## brian purcell

THIS MAN OF WORDS TELLS **WENDY ANDREWS** ABOUT HIS LIFE FILLED WITH POETRY, MUSIC AND MANUSCRIPTS.

**ALTHOUGH POETRY** has always been my main passion, my first creative success was as the singer/lyricist with electronic rock band Distant Locust.

The music was strange. When we played live, audiences were quite surprised with the instruments we played – an antiquated drum machine, all sorts of electronic gadgets to manipulate sound, even children's toys – and didn't know what to expect next.

Eventually we became a bit more rock, but maintained a reputation as a cult band.

I remember being told we were "too weird for Sydney", so after we received a fan letter from Italy, we took a leap of faith, sold all our possessions and travelled to Amsterdam. We chose Amsterdam for the simple reason they speak English there.

**"We played ... in a converted nuclear bomb shelter in Berlin."**

We entered an MTV Europe competition for unsigned bands with a video clip we'd made in Sydney. Although our clip was shown on MTV Europe and ABC's *Rage*, things moved slowly and we were going through money pretty quickly, so our bass player decided to travel to Florence to find our Italian fan.

By chance, the fan introduced our bass player to some people at a huge record store specialising in independent recordings, which led to us signing with Contempo Records in Florence and releasing a CD. We played in Italy and Holland and also in a converted nuclear bomb shelter in Berlin a year after the wall came down, which was completely surreal.

Going to Europe did pay off for us, but ended up being a rags-to-riches-back-to-rags story.

In 1992 we returned to Australia and I returned to my first passion: poetry and writing. I became president of the Poets Union, membership secretary of the Australian Society of Authors and wrote articles for *Australian Authors* magazine. It was a busy

time as I did a lot of odd jobs, a lot of writing, continued to play with the band and got married.

In 1995 my first child was born, the bass player left the band and that was the end of Distant Locust.

I began a Master of Writing, concentrating on novel writing, at Sydney's UTS under novelist Glenda Adams. My classmates and friends included future novelists Nicki Gemmell (*The Bride Stripped Bare*), Arabella Edge and Belinda Alexandra. I really enjoyed the classes where we had to read our work to each other and I discovered I have the ability to react honestly and critique the work of others.

Later I started one of the best jobs I've ever had with the Royal Society for the Blind as a "talking book" producer. It was a fantastic, very intense process, sitting one-on-one with an actor and guiding the production. The best 'talking books' make the text disappear.

I remember being the senior producer for Jeff McMullen (former on-air *60 Minutes* reporter). His book told the story of his incredible life, from witnessing events such as the aftermath of Chernobyl to his passion for charity work. He was a great narrator, but would occasionally slip back into his *60 Minutes* voice during the read.

After producing talking books, I moved on to freelance audio work for the ABC, working for the Australia Council for the Arts and spending some time with a top Australian manuscript agency.

Sydney is for the young and aggressive, and I'm 50 now, so when I decided to set up my own manuscript service business I made a treechange to Bellingen. I love being here, I feel safe and my eight-year-old son can ride his bike to the shop.

I have the best of both worlds now, living in a great area and doing something I love. With my business, Renaissance Manuscript Service, I help people who have written manuscripts by providing them with feedback. I consider all sorts of things when reading a manuscript: sentence structure, character development, a hook and a reason for the reader and the publisher to read to the end.

**For more information on Brian's Renaissance Manuscript Service, check out [www.manuscriptservice.com.au](http://www.manuscriptservice.com.au)**

