



Source: Michael Gawenda, 'Hope and hopelessness march hand in hand', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 01/04/06.

Tags: [streets](#), [chance](#), [animals](#)

Writer/s: [Sarah Rodigari](#)

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There is a little café in the land from where my people come. It was there before the civil war, before the country split into states, before the language was changed. The chairs are barely serviceable, and the tables just manage to prop up their homely cloths, yet some say it is the most popular café in the world, more so than those on the streets of Paris, London, New York or Rome. It is always busy with men drinking coffee and women playing cards.

Directly outside is the only cemented footpath in town. The footpath is constructed in a series of one metre square blocks that extends for two hundred metres and then simply stops. It is the history of the sixth block out the front and to the left of the café about which I wish to speak.

It is on this block where inexplicable incidents happen, where people lose themselves, treasured objects slip free, and lives change irreversibly. It is where the recently wed Susie lost her ring. Where Tony, aged 15, lit his first cigarette, ran his fingers through his hair and burnt off every strand. Where Steven tripped on his shoelace and broke his back. Where Agatha looked up at the stars and realised she was completely alone. And it's where Don aged 20 first kissed a girl and fifty years later on the eve of his death at aged 70 first kissed a boy and realised that he'd wasted his life. Some may dismiss this as coincidence, as simply being bad luck or just plain fate.

However at the core of these disasters lies a pure mathematical equation, which involves an unhappy convergence of the lines of latitude and longitude, a blunder of physics, an unsavoury yet indisputable formula. All colliding at this spot.

Before the café, this was farming land, before the cement, this was the slaughter path, before the metre square block, this was the draining stand. The cows were slaughtered because their milk turned sour: their milk turned sour because their calves were slaughtered. And all the people who ate the meat became infertile.

Further back, in the battle of Jensen, this square metre was the bloodiest spot; for it was here that most men fell to their death, not because of each other but because of fear. When standing in this place it seemed far more sensible for a soldier to die by his own sword than that of another.

It was at this point where, after hours of poor negotiations, communication failed and the Homosapien killed the Neanderthal in a misinterpreted embrace. It was on this spot that the woolly mammoth fell to its knees, where the sabre tooth tiger drew its last breath, and the last triceratops was covered in molten lava.

Six blocks down from the café, beneath the metre square concrete block, beneath the history, is the axis where the tips froze and thawed, where plates shifted and continents drifted in and out of each other to realign themselves. And we find ourselves at a time when this piece of land was bordered by a vast ocean and out of that ocean a creature with gills and four stout legs, makes his first tentative steps up the sand.

And yet, six blocks of concrete up the road, the café never closes.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Sarah Rodigari.*