

### WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE?

Flowers play an intimate role in celebrating the many milestones of our lives, from the cradle to the grave. They can be symbols of our heritage and national identities, as well as the inspiration for poets. Who does not know William Wordsworth's "The daffodils"?

*I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd  
A host of golden daffodils ...*

Or has not been moved by physician and soldier John McCrae's "In Flanders fields"?

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

It seems flowers have always been a powerful motif. Not only have they captured the essence of beauty and transience for the Romantics, and symbolised sacrificial death on the field of battle for the war-weary McCrae, they have also brought solace to the sick.

While the Japanese prefer living plants to bring comfort to the sick, we have traditionally brought bright bouquets of flowers to the bedside and livened up many a hospital ward with their presence.

This tradition is now under threat in the United Kingdom, where hospitals are increasingly banning bedside flowers from wards. The rationale? They either harbour deadly bugs or compete for patients' oxygen. A more realistic explanation, perhaps, is that ward staff feel they have more important things to do than look after bedside flowers.

Similar antipathy to ward flowers in Australia is not yet obvious. But when increasing emphasis is being placed on maintaining an environment of clinical efficiency and despatch, it would come as no surprise if we were to follow suit.

Given the strong possibility of such a cultural change, will we not soon be asking, "Where have all the flowers gone?"



Martin B Van Der Weyden

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