

Granny's Good Reads with Sonia Lee – gleebooks Gleaner – Vol 25 No 9 October 2018

Another of my favourites is *Blessed City*, a collection of the letters poet Gwen Harwood wrote to Thomas (Tony) Riddell during World War Two. Gwen Foster (as she then was) entertained Tony, then on active service, with amusing anecdotes about a Brisbane church where she was organist, family life at 'Crimes' Street and the pranks she played on her po-faced bosses at the War Damage Commission. After the war she married Bill Harwood, Tony's friend, who took her to live in Hobart, where he taught at the university after his war service. There she met Alison Hoddinott, who later edited *Blessed City* and has more recently published as *Idle Talk* Harwood's later letters (1960-64). When Hoddinott moved to Armidale the two exchanged letters containing recipes, news of their children and academic gossip. Harwood sent her friend 'Sapphos', which were cut-and-paste postcards with funny speech bubbles added to pictures from old magazines. She often indulged in grumbles about the weather, which she found freezing and cheerless, signing off with I HATE HOBART. Best of all was the Great *Bulletin* Hoax. Suspecting that perhaps her poems were not being accepted because she was a "Hobart Housewife", she took a male pseudonym and success! The *Bulletin* printed the poems, even the sonnet with an acrostic saying "f*** all editors". There was predictable uproar when the outrage was discovered, but the Melbourne University students who first noticed the hoax made sure the offending items were widely circulated. After this, editors treated Harwood warily, to which she responded by continuing to use pseudonyms until she was recognised as a considerable poet in her own right. Many photographs and 'Sapphos' illustrate this delightful book.