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POEM

Tilt

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Fonzies Fantasyland at 31 Oxford St
(now a disappointing IGA)
opened in 79 next door to Patches
a few months after the Ghost Train fire
at Luna Park killed seven.

It was Alan Saffron's brainchild:
Mr Sin's legitimate heir (later disinherited)
dreamed of a chain of Leisure Centres
to clean up the family name.

I was an original Fonzies girl:
blue polysatin shorts, nude stockings.

Prior experience none
unless winning a poetry competition
or playing Fire Power at Reggio's counted.

The kitchen hands from East Sydney Tech
approached their work as an installation.

They wore kinky white nurse's uniforms
and Dolly Parton wigs

like something out of Richard Prince.

They perfected psychedelic ice cream sundaes
and gave out quarter tabs of acid *gratis*.

They were cool:

I looked up to them
and heeded their advice.

The hard men got together
 in the glassed-in office (Cone of Silence).
 Abe stopped by for a sandwich: 'Keep it simple'.
 A silver stream flowed through my hands.
 When the red pay phone rang
 it was Susie, Alan's wife, checking in from Hawaii.
 If I accidentally locked the till
 one of the street kids who hung around
 jumped the counter with his wad of keys.
 In the quiet early hours of the morning
 punters lay on their backs tripping
 in the rainbow neon tunnel,
 Donna Summer blaring into the night.

When Brooke Shields came to town
 for the premiere of *Tilt*
 (in between *Pretty Baby* and *Blue Lagoon*)
 we rolled out the red carpet
 and formed a guard of honour.
 She was sweet, tired, five years younger than me.
 The movie flopped and she ended up
 in St Vincent's with bronchitis.
 Space Invaders had landed
 and the mood was introverted.
 The art students were the first to go,
 taking their *joie* and their LSD.
 I was reprimanded for reading
 and stayed too long on my break upstairs at Patches
 watching the drag show and drinking Bacardi.
 I wore the wrong stockings and didn't care:
 the dark bit at the top showed under my shorts.
 The junior manager I'd reported for sexual harassment
 lectured me on pride in appearance.
 The writing was on the wall and I was ready to go.
 To show there were no hard feelings the boss
 handed me a scrap of paper.
 'If you're ever in any trouble, call this number.'
 I thought of Juanita Nielsen
 last seen entering the Carousel Club July 1975.

Two year later it was Fonzies' turn to burn.
 The chief suspect was Les Murphy,
 youngest of the three Murphy brothers
 jailed for life ('never to be released').
 It was the trial of the century.
 Anita Cobby, 26,
 a nurse at Sydney Hospital,

arrived at Blacktown Station
 just before 10pm, February 2 1986,
 found the payphone out of order
 and started walking.
 She was found two days later
 in a Prospect paddock
 almost decapitated.
 Kidnapped, tortured, raped and murdered
 by five men in a Holden Kingswood
 as detailed in their confessions.
 According to the NCA report
 Les was working at Fonzie's when the fire broke out
 but no charges were laid.

Around that time I went to a weird party
 high up in Victoria Towers
 on the street where Juanita Nielsen had lived.
 It was an empty shell suspended
 over the wharves of Woolloomooloo
 said to be owned by a dealer.
 I felt bad and left straight away,
 heading for my second home,
 the Academy Twin (3A Oxford St:
 opened with Polanski's *Macbeth* in 1974,
 the year we moved to Sydney,
 closed for good in June 2010).
Heatwave was on starring Judy Davis
 as 'Kate Dean', a Nielsen-style activist heroine.
 Takings were low but it won for Editing
 and *Cinema Papers* called it 'subversive'.
 By then Luna Park was back in business,
 the Green Bans were history
 and Alan was long gone
 (see *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares* for the LA sequel).
 In the dim auditorium
 we were part of another time, watching it burn,
 and I was on my way to another life.

About the author

Kate Lilley is Associate Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at the University of Sydney. She is the author of three full-length poetry collections: *Versary* (2002), *Ladylike* (2012) and *Tilt* (2017).