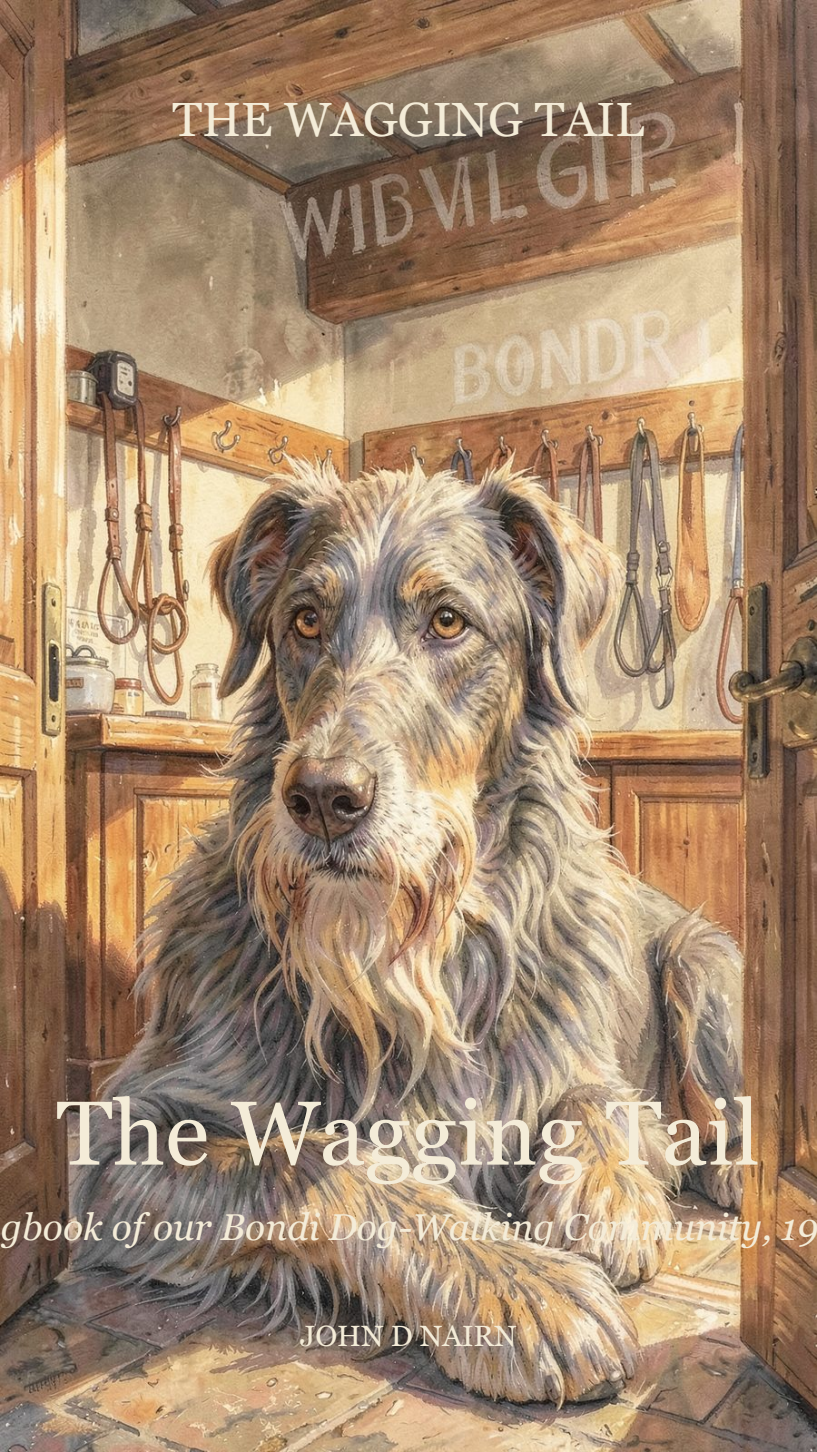


A detailed illustration of a long-haired dog, possibly a Scottish Deerhound, sitting in a wooden doghouse. The dog has a thick, shaggy coat of grey and tan fur, with long, flowing ears and a prominent white beard. It is looking directly at the viewer with a calm expression. The doghouse is made of dark wood, with a wooden bench and shelves in the background. On the wall, there are several leather leashes hanging from hooks. The lighting is warm and golden, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall style is that of a classic oil painting.

THE WAGGING TAIL

WIBVLGR

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# The Wagging Tail

book of our Bondi Dog-Walking Community, 19

JOHN D'NAIRN

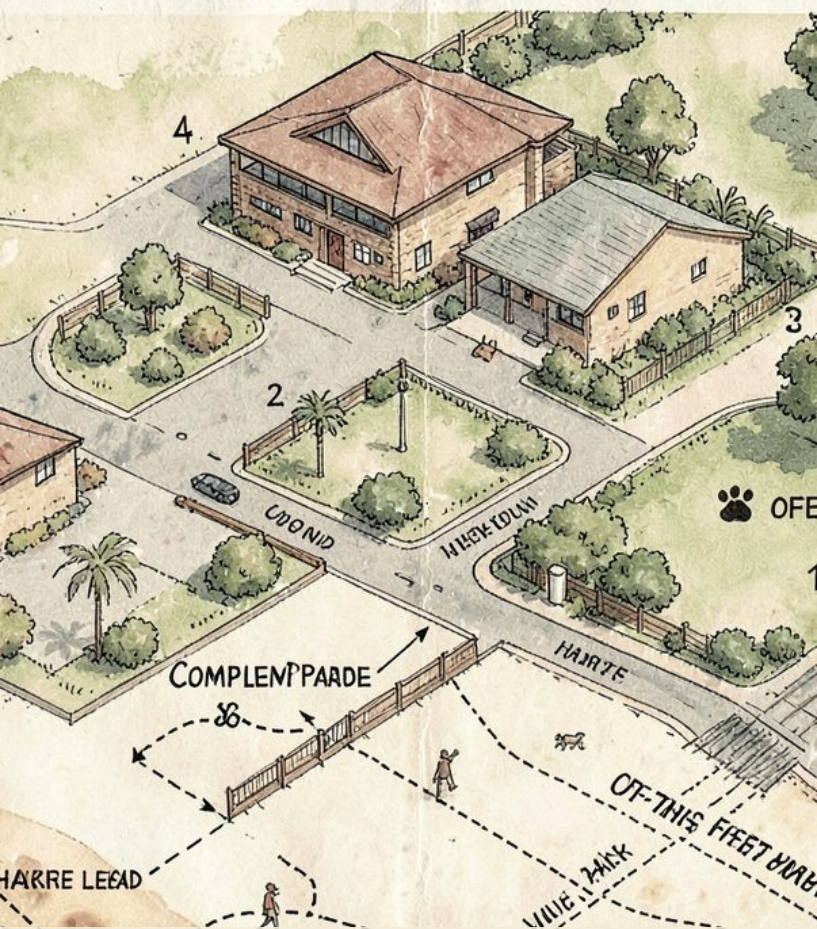
# From Kit

A note before you turn the page.

I found this book in Tom's desk after he didn't come home. Linen-bound, half a hundred blank pages, a pencil with no point. I sharpened the pencil. It seemed a waste to leave it.

This is the working book of The Wagging Tail — the dog-walking concern I run from what used to be my husband's veterinary practice. The faded sign under the new one is his. The surfboard against the back-room wall is his. Most everything else in the building is the eight young women who come through the back gate at half past six in the morning, leads in hand, ready to walk Bondi's dogs.

In here you'll find them. The walkers. The regulars on four



## Our Bondi, 1947

1. The surgery (back gate, Bondi Beach)
2. The off-lead park
3. The off-lead park
4. The headland walk
5. Bondi Pavilion
6. The butcher (do not loiter)
7. The surf club bins (do not approach)
8. The outflow (do not approach)
9. The tram stop
10. Mrs Cantor's washing line
11. The Curlewis cat
12. Home, by half-eight



# The Walkers





## Fran Delaney — Book 1

Eldest of six. Fishing-family hands – she can gut a snapper before breakfast and untangle a lead one-handed. Came to me because Joe Cassidy is too steady to be flirted with and she needed somewhere to put the surplus. She fed Argos before she fed herself the first three days. I had to tell her.



## Meg Wallace — Book 2

Goulburn sheep-station bones in a Bondi aunt's tea dresses. Reads a weather front better than the wireless. Pays for her university with what she earns here and a scholarship her father doesn't know about. I will not be the one to tell him.



## Vi O'Halloran — Book 3

Father pulls pints, two younger brothers, mother gone. Comes in tired and leaves walking taller. She thinks I haven't noticed; I have. The dogs noticed first.



## Elsie Patterson — Book 4

First job, first wage, first cup of tea poured without grace said over it. Eighteen and curious, which her father thinks is worse than rebellious. He may be right.



## Dorry Michaels — Book 5

Berlin in her bones; Bondi in her boots. Father was a veterinarian — qualifications not recognised here, so he kennels other men's dogs. Dorry knows more about anaesthesia from listening at the kitchen table than half the men with brass plates on their doors. Carries it lightly.



## Jo Henderson — Book 6

Ex-WRANS. Spent the war in a windowless room and came back to a Bondi that thinks she's the same girl who left. She isn't. The dogs don't ask, which is why she lasted here past the first week.



## Bee Simpson — Book 7

North Shore exile. Came down with a small suitcase and a great deal to learn. Her grandmother sent her here on the theory that I would not flatter her. The grandmother was correct.



## Nan Foster — Book 8

Wagga farm. Stepfather. A suitcase, an address that turned out to be a forwarding slip. Eighteen and convinced she travels lighter alone. I have not yet said anything; she would only argue. The dogs are doing it for me.



# The Regulars





## Hector

Suspected wolfhound. Papers lost in transit, dignity intact. Came to the practice in '42 with a story Tom believed enough to feed him. Has not left since. Sleeps across the threshold; the threshold is his, the rest is mine, the arrangement is dignified.



## Nails

Harry Emerson's. Found in a box of nails on a worksite at Tamarama. Stayed in the box for three days. Walks past the back gate at six-twenty most mornings whether Harry has a reason to or not. Harry usually has a reason.



## The Postman

Knows every dog on his round by the way it stands at the gate. Will not deliver to Number 14 because the schnauzer there is a known fraud – barks like a bear, runs like a rabbit. I keep his biscuits at the front counter.



## The Clients

Argos – Border Collie, escape artist, finds things he shouldn't. Roxy – boxer, brindle, was on Tom's books in '43, on mine now. The spaniel from up on Notts – best-in-show on Saturday and rolls in fish guts on Sunday, which is the correct order. Scout – kelpie pup, working bloodlines, will be brilliant

# House Rules

1. Dogs walk on a lead until the gate of an authorised off-lead enclosure closes behind them. The beach is not one.

2. Beach inspectors do not care that he's friendly. They will fine you. So will I, in biscuits.

3. If you are in a swimming costume, dog or no dog, you will be told to move along. The 1947 council of the People's Republic of Bondi has views.

4. Pick up after them. The council is watching. So am I.

5. No feeding from the table. Yours, mine, or anyone else's.

6. The seagulls are not yours. They live here. They were here first. They will be here after.

7. The surf club bins are not a buffet.



### *Things They Shouldn't*

*A list of misdemeanours, compiled by management over the first half-year — the seagull (eight separate incidents, no convictions), the surf-club sausage (one incident, full*



### *The Building*

The faded letters of MORAN VETERINARY PRACTICE are still under the new paint if you stand at the right angle. I did not paint over them on purpose. The painter was apologetic about it. I



### *The Back Room*

Tom's surfboard against the wall. The patient cards in his handwriting in the second drawer. The drug cabinet that was emptied in 1943 and has not been refilled. I do not need to

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WEATHER





### *End of Day*

Half-past six on a Tuesday in autumn. Back gate latched. Leads on their hooks. Hector at the threshold. The bench outside the surgery where someone else's cup of tea cools. The light goes warm

# All eight Wagging Tail mysteries.



Read the series →

<https://johndavidnairn.com>

