

# staying in books

dailytelegraph.com.au/entertainment/arts

## Earthquakes and hippies inspired a culture vulture

Victoria Hannaford

**L**ynnette Lounsbury has a very clear recollection of growing up in the shadow of a volcanic mountain. Living in Papua New Guinea, her family faced frequent earthquakes as the volcano near Rabaul started to show signs of life.

"It was going to go off at any time," she says. "It went off after we were there. We had earthquakes — big ones — probably weekly."

The author says she found the experience a thrilling aspect of everyday life.

"I loved earthquakes. We had certain things we were supposed to grab, like glasses, and then we'd run outside to these big trees and stand on the roots."

After moving back to Australia with her family at seven years old, they settled on the north coast near Byron Bay. Being immersed in her new community gave Lounsbury the opportunity to cast an eye over her diverse neighbours.

"On dole day in Wollongbar, everyone would come in from the mountains to Centrelink and it would be the oddest groups of people. It was awesome. I would always beg Dad to

go down the street. There were people who would wear rats on their shoulders, proper hippies, and people with dreadlocks. When you're a kid, they are so cool."

While these early experiences gave Lounsbury a love of adventure and taught her to be a keen observer of human nature, it was a literary discovery as a teen that led to her latest novel, *We Ate The Road Like Vultures*.

"I went to a really conservative Christian school that had a tiny library that was full of 'prairie romance' novels," she says.

"So I would go to the town library and read (Kerouac's) *On the Road*. I just loved it."

Lounsbury's novel is a cracking yarn where teenage protagonist Lulu sets off to find Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady — she's convinced they're both alive and well and living in Mexico. The novel's premise is a fantasy born of her teenage fascination with beat culture.

"When I read Kerouac," Lounsbury says, "there was no internet, so I didn't know he was dead. I assumed there was this person I could go and find."

She says the story, with its overtones of magic realism, came to her after the birth of her second son — "I started writing in earnest to keep my sanity" — and started with publishing it on a blog.

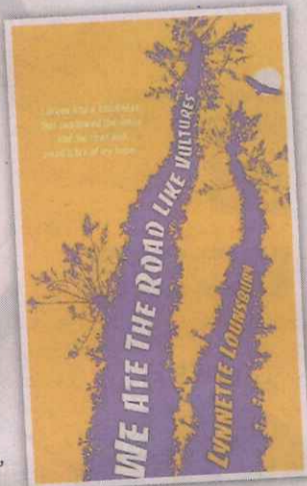
It then became a short story before finally emerging as her first adult novel, after publishing the young adult title *Afterworld* in 2014.

She's now keen to write another book with Lulu, the main character of *We Ate The Road Like Vultures*, at the helm, and there's no risk she'll get stuck with writer's block.

"I'm writing another story about her. I like writing in her voice. I have more ideas than I have time to write, so I never feel that emptiness or worry that I haven't got another idea."

"If I don't write, I feel like I have wasted a day of my life. But if I get something down, I really feel like I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing."

*We Ate The Road Like Vultures*, Inkerman & Blunt, \$29.99 (available April 4)



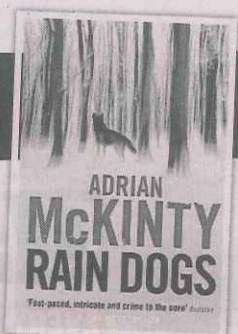
Lynnette Lounsbury, author of *We Ate The Road Like Vultures*. Picture: Bob Barker

### FICTION

**RAIN DOGS**  
ADRIAN MCKINTY  
SERPENT'S TAIL, \$30

THIS is the fifth outing for McKinty's Royal Ulster Constabulary detective Sean Duffy. The series is set during The Troubles in Northern Ireland, a perfect backdrop for criminal activity. Yet this time, the 1980s have a strong connection to more recent events, revealing a neat and compelling twist that would necessitate a spoiler alert. Duffy is the classic crime fiction cop — wry, smart, cheated in love, alone, noble and damaged. This time he has to work out if a journalist jumped or was pushed to her death from the ramparts of Carrickfergus Castle. Surely it must have been suicide because the castle was closed when she died. The prose shines and his plots are watertight. This offering lacks the complexity and layers of previous Duffy stories, but is still powerful.

NICK RICHARDSON

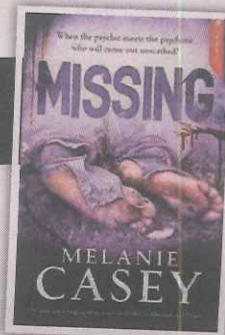


### CRIME

**MISSING**  
MELANIE CASEY  
PANTERA PRESS, \$29.99

THE third and final case starring reluctant psychic Cass Lehman ends on a particularly neat note. The plot is relatively straightforward: Homeless men are disappearing from the streets of Adelaide, only to turn up dismembered at a McLaren Vale dump. Cass's partner, detective Ed Dyson, is heading the inquiry, though it is her singular powers his boss is more interested in exploiting. But her "gift" for reliving the dying moments of the slain could be missing. Along with a flair for portraying scenes and themes, local author Casey has developed her characters throughout this trilogy. This one is distinguished, though, by its pace and cliffhangers. She is obviously a believer in the showbiz adage to always leave them wanting more.

SHELLEY ORCHARD



### POLITICS

**THE ROAD TO RUIN**  
NIKI SAVVA  
SCRIBE, \$33

SUBTITLED *How Tony Abbott and Peta Credlin Destroyed Their Own Government*, it's clear political commentator and former Howard government staffer Niki Savva isn't talking up their achievements. It's a hatchet job and it's every reason you'd watch *Macbeth* or *Downton Abbey* — for the conflict, power plays and character failings. It concentrates on their "weird" co-dependence, which alienated other MPs and public servants. The book is a revelation if you thought it was just politicians running the country. After about 140 pages the focus shifts from Credlin — who comes across as a micromanaging narcissist — to Abbott and his many debacles. Credlin's admirable qualities aren't broached.

BLANCHE CLARK

