

Contribution to SMH "The Heckler"

My Bloody Problem

Heckler is about what makes one's blood boil. I'm not sure whether my blood does boil, because the blood bank refuses to collect it from me.

As I get older, more of my friends need blood transfusions. I would like to contribute to the blood bank – a great Aussie institution – but, despite my best efforts, I cannot.

I have a fear of needles – it's as simple as that. Most of us harbour a phobia of some sort. Every time I try to give blood I am turned away, and usually told not to return.

At school when they administered compulsory inoculations, I had strong friends in front of and behind me. After they bared their manly biceps without flinching, they carried me to the quad and laughed until I recovered.

When the blood truck came to the first factory I worked in, I told the nurse, "If you give me that lolly, you will have to get it out of my throat if I faint." She did, and told me not to bother coming again.

When I took my young son to the doctor – a locum, not the regular GP – he said the boy needed an injection. My little son ended up looking after his shame-faced Dad.

On the day of the fateful Granville train disaster, everyone in the office rolled up their sleeves and went down the road to the blood bank. I was left to answer the phones. When I tentatively went down a while later, they took one look at me and said no.

I gave up for a while but had a spell in hospital some years later. I became better at being a pin-cushion and figured I was then on top of needle-phobia, so I made an appointment with the blood bank. I got up early, ate breakfast and drank lots of water, but promptly threw it all up. I turned up, trembling and some pale shade of green. I was told, "Go home, go to bed, and please don't come back."

It took years to get them to stop sending letters asking me to give blood. I spoke to Red Cross people by phone, letter and email – lovely, interested and caring people.

I have suggested a special time for people like me to donate. I have offered to contribute the extra cost of being a difficult patient – to pay to donate my own blood!

The blood bank is a wonderful, egalitarian, typically Australian institution. People contribute if they wish to, and others withdraw if they need to – all without cost to recipients or benefit to contributors.

Surely there must be a way for us bloody wimps to contribute to this great system.