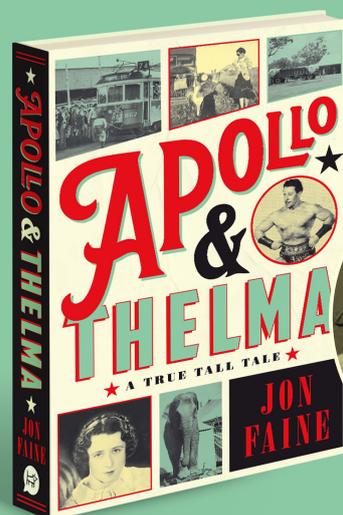


Apollo and Thelma

A True Tall Tale

Jon Faine

ISBN: 9781743797082



About the book

"I only met Thelma Hawks after she died. Her brother Paul, 'The Mighty Apollo', introduced us."

Apollo and Thelma have been a constant in Jon Faine's life for decades. As a young lawyer, he was captivated by his favourite client, the Mighty Apollo, a legendary strongman and circus star, famous for pulling trams with his teeth and having an elephant stand on him. Apollo's sister, Thelma, on the other hand, ruthless and rugged, had survived decades running solo one of the most remote pubs in the outback until unexpectedly dying, leaving behind a complicated estate.

Befriending Apollo and immersing himself in Thelma's estate, Jon is forced to untangle a long line of astonishing stories and episodes from Melbourne's depression-era slums to the isolation of the outback. Via the circuitous route of these two larger-than-life characters – alongside a supporting cast of characters from the world of politics, law, literature and media – Jon reflects on their stories and is inevitably forced to rethink his own.

This is a uniquely Australian story, beautifully told.

About Jon Faine

Jon Faine is an award-winning journalist who, until October 2019, hosted the agenda-setting morning broadcast for ABC Radio in Melbourne for more than twenty years. Before joining the ABC in 1989 to host 'The Law Report' on Radio National, Jon had practised for seven years in both commercial litigation and as a legal aid/human rights advocate. He regularly contributes to major newspapers with opinion pieces, has been nominated for three Walkley awards, and does countless conference presentations, panel moderations, guest lectures and public events. His best-selling travel book was published by ABC books. Jon is well known for his provocative and probing debate, quick wit and thought-provoking ideas.

Questions for Discussion

1. Apollo is a larger-than-life character, a self-taught self-promoting world record holder and performer, totally obsessed and driven in his pursuit of success. Is there an equivalent today?
2. Thelma survived decades on her own at Top Springs pub, in the toughest possible surrounds. What difficult choices would she have been forced to make as a female publican at this time and place?
3. Rondahe vanished, leaving Apollo and their three sons aged 5, 7 and 9. The oldest, Paul, will not even say her name, calling her 'The Incubator'. How can we judge the extreme emotions triggered by the extraordinary circumstances of other people's lives?
4. Sid Hawks recounts how he and Thelma fell out over money and 'split the blanket'. Some couples are brought closer by hardship – others driven apart. What sort of pressures would have challenged a marriage like Sid and Thelma's in this era – could either party be blamed for what came to pass?
5. Frank Hardy inserted himself into the Wave Hill walk-off and became the publicist for the Gurindji. How did the Gurindji activists and Frank work together to achieve their goals?
6. In his introduction, the author writes: "Coincidence piled upon coincidence leads me to interrogate our colonial myths and sanitised version of Australian history. As my own story intertwines with our racially charged past, I find I cannot look away, cannot keep pretending."
The true story of Australia's colonial past is more openly explored now than ever. How do you think our teaching and learning of this history has changed over the decades?
7. The author has worked in both the law and the media over his unconventional career. How do you think these career experiences assisted him in both his drive to represent someone else's story and to hold power to account?
8. Has everyone got a story waiting to be told, as the author did with this one? As he explains, it was the oft repeated dinner party conversation that after twenty years his wife banned from being recounted.
9. Apollo and Thelma weaves together many stories including Jon Faine's life, the lives of Apollo and Thelma and their families, as well as Frank Hardy and the Wave Hill Gurindji land rights walk-off. Does the author succeed in threading them together? Is there a salient theme within these different stories?