

Poems evoke memories and educate in equal measure



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IN his first book of storytelling poetry, Beechworth's Frank Prem evokes the era of innocence, freedom and fun experienced by those who grew up in regional Victoria in the 1960s and '70s.

From pieces about family gatherings, cracker night, rabbiting, piffing yonnies, and even visits from the nightman, many local residents will find their minds wandering back to the past as they read 'Small Town Kid'.

And that's just what Frank is after.

"There are two different responses to my work," he said.

"I've found when I do live readings, that it encourages folk who can remember the era to tell me their own stories; it allows them to step back into their own memories.

"I also hope that younger people, who have no experience of these things, think about a time before social media.

"By the time I had kids of my own, everything I told my kids seemed like myth and legend, and could scarcely be believed.

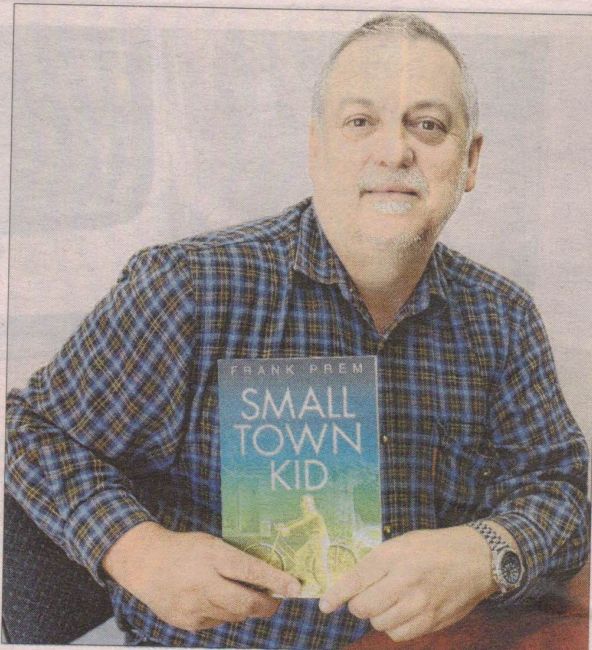
"In the space of a generation, life has changed so much.

"In my day, there was no 3.30pm car park crush, because as soon as possible, kids were walking to school; now, the whole of life is on your iPad."

Frank decided while attending a writers' retreat that the time was right to get serious about publishing the 40 years of work he had compiled.

"I was convinced it had to be done now," he said.

So, under the name Wild Arancini Press, he added an-



STORYTELLING POET: Beechworth's Frank Prem has released his first book, *Small Town Kid*. PHOTO: Mel Guy

other string to his bow as the publisher of his own work.

While he works as a psychiatric nurse in Beechworth, Frank said he was transitioning from being a nurse who writes, to a writer who also works as a nurse.

"Now I've graduated from a long apprenticeship, and think of myself as a journeyman," he said.

"I've been writing for 40 years, always in some variation of poetic form, and I can't go many days without writing.

"I've written for myself to unravel things, but also I think there's no point in writing if it's not for another person to read, so I have an audience at the forefront.

"I'm looking for a connection."

Frank's work also speaks of his heritage (he was born in Germany, and his family mi-

grated from Croatia).

"I've had a lot of conversations with folk of my ilk, first and second generation migrants to the country, and a lot who are in their 60s are still in a position to record memories from their surviving relatives, which is so important, because there is this rich past to reflect on," he said.

On the flipside, he hopes to spend more time in coming years in schools, kindling the stories of his childhood in the imaginations of children and young people.

Frank's second book, 'Devil in the Wind', is already in the pipeline, but he hopes 'Small Town Kid' will find a place in the hearts and memories of readers, especially those in the North East.

For more information about Frank Prem's work, visit www.frankprem.com.