



VAGABONDAGE

A verse memoir

by Beth Spencer

Some topics to consider while reading *Vagabondage*:

- What creates a sense of 'home';
- Relationships and places;
- Loneliness vs solitude;
- What is and isn't essential in life;
- Poetry and storytelling (form and content).

Vagabondage traces the author's journey from when she decides to sell her beloved house and garden in a small town in country Victoria through to buying a van and going on the road, and wanders back and forth through parts of her childhood as the physical journey also becomes an interior one.

A meditation on belonging, her story tracks the often-fine line between solitude and loneliness, freedom and chaos, the pull of what we possess and what possesses us, and the idea of home.

Beth Spencer's *How to Conceive of a Girl* was runner up for the Steele Rudd Award and she is also a previous Age Short Story Award winner. Her poetry, essays and stories have been broadcast on ABC Radio National and published on CD as well as in newspapers and magazines. These days, 'Vandelicious' has moved on to new adventures, and Beth lives in a small house in Terrigal, NSW, and at www.bethspencer.com.



Discussion Questions

- 1 Travelling in a campervan is a dream for many people, but could you live in one without a backup?
- 2 Is home a place or a feeling? Is having the place (somewhere to call your own, and somewhere to return to) important to you?
- 3 What does the title, *Vagabondage*, evoke for you?
- 4 Have you ever been or felt 'homeless'? What was that like? Or have you felt the opposite – housebound and longing for more freedom?
- 5 '*Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose...*' Is the song right?
- 6 What creates a sense of belonging for you (roles, people, a job, objects, places, history, etc)? If you didn't have these – were essential to no-one and no-one was essential to you – who would you be? (Could you 'handle the vertigo'?)
- 7 When does freedom become chaos? In what way are boundaries helpful?
- 8 In one of the epigraphs Paul Tillich says: '*Language has created the word "loneliness" to express the pain of being alone, and... the word "solitude" to express the glory of being alone.*' What is the difference for you between solitude and loneliness?
- 9 Do you think some people crave solitude more than others?
- 10 If you only had room for a few possessions, what would you keep, and why?
- 11 If you were to draw an imaginary map of travelling from your childhood to where you are now, what would be some of the key places or stories along the way?
- 12 Do you have a favourite poem or section in the book?
- 13 Was poetry a good choice for writing this memoir? What is the effect of having the story develop out of poems and fragments rather than through a more classical linear narrative? What do you think poetry allows or enables that is different, perhaps, than if it had been written as prose?
- 14 In some cultures almost everyone reads poetry and many write it; it is a strong part of their everyday life. Why do you think that poetry is not read so much in our culture?