



HOW ABOUT?

with Louise Howland

In the midst of a wonderful experience, it's not often we fear it may be the last time for us. This month, Louise reflects on treating it as such, thereby increasing your joy exponentially.

Do you ever find mental lists running like mantras through your mind? I've had the odd recurrence of a 'last time list', and it seemed to be a negative habit, caused perhaps by briskly marching middle age.

Teaching my daughter to whip running stitch transported me instantly back to the library at Springwood Primary School. Undecided as to whether to make the pony on the tablemat a bay or a black, I struck on what I considered a brilliant idea and whipped the black with the brown. And, aged nine, that was probably the last time I worked row upon row of whipped running stitch.

Looking at the neat squares of a glistening gossamer organza ready to become insects' wings in stumpwork, my mind movie-screened my mother in a strapless, billowing evening dress, creamy skinned and sparkling eyed on the arm of my handsome father. I've not seen them together in such a way in many years.

Playing hide-and-seek this afternoon with six children, rusty on the finer points of the rules, I was surprised to find that the half-excited, half-terrified emotions of hiding surfaced still, albeit in a 'light' version. Hide-and-seek was a thrilling and absorbing game in our Blue Mountains backyard, hoards of racing, noisy kids revelling in night games while our parents talked together on someone's

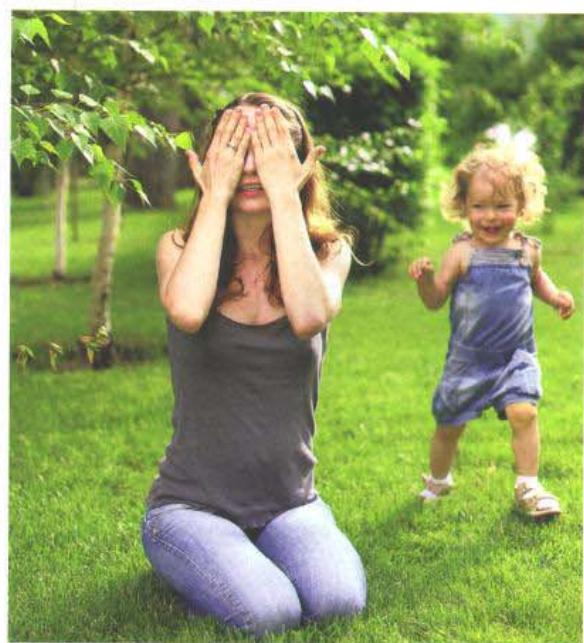
verandah. But suddenly and unbeknownst to us, one of those games was the last.

Meeting a stitching friend in a fabric store in London, gasping at the prices, I said to her, we must enjoy this; we will never be together in this place again. It sounds so negative doesn't it, but I meant it more to make sure I relished and cherished the moments and didn't sleepwalk through it.

A favourite craft, a favourite song, a favourite meal, even a favourite friend; so often without our knowledge it's the final time we experience them.

Sometimes it's deliberate, but more often it seems that last time just happens, as habits and routines that seem so permanent disappear.

I had stopped doing so many things I started to wonder what on earth I had been doing. Scribbling a list, it contained nothing startling, special or in any way meaningful to anyone else, but, to my relief and surprise, there were some fresh endeavours. I'd enrolled for a Master's degree, tried Mountmellick, designed a knot embroidery – and more amazingly almost finished stitching it! – helped an egg-bound chicken, been mentored, been a mentor, cooked curries, taken trumpet lessons with my daughter and even practised,



tried a different form of yoga, started a Facebook page, tried to appreciate my friends and family more and made deliberate efforts to spend more time with them; basics of life that you, my friend, have no doubt understood for years.

Recognising that every time we do something it may be the last seems to add significance and intensity to living. I glow as my daughter delightedly whips purple into her pink-stitched fairy and her eyes dance with pleasure at the effect she achieves. For every last time, there's a first!

Until next month,

Louise