

Nancy rubbed baby oil into her bronzed skin and reclined on a towel. The air was alive with screeching gulls, mingled with laughter from children on school holidays paddling in the sea. A shadow blocked the sun, and she peered over plastic sunnies at a constable. His blue woolen jacket looked stifling in the blistering January heat. He produced a photograph, its edges bent, of three smiling children.

"Seen them?"

"No."

He trudged on, and Nancy scurried to join the futile search. By morning the entire town was involved, the grief-stricken parents entreating the nation for information.



This was a piece I submitted for the [2024 100-Word Microfiction](#) challenge run by NYC Midnight. The contest involves waiting until they send you a genre, word, and action, then you have exactly 24 hours to write your 100 word story and upload it for judging. They gave me historical fiction, edge, and sunbathing, which is what inspired this story.

I did not advance to the next round, but I received an honorable mention within my group. The three judges who read my story opted not to push it along, because they were unclear why Nancy opted to join the search. Initially, I considered making Nancy a former babysitter, but I decided against it due to the real-life inspiration. Perhaps it was the Australian in me hanging out in full view, because to me it made perfect sense Nancy joined the search. The entire town joined together and looked for weeks. The disappearance of the Beaumont children is still considered [one of the most haunting unsolved crimes of Australian history](#), and there are still no confirmed reports of finding them. While I was double checking some facts on the story, it saddened me to learn [their parents died](#) without ever getting any

resolution.

While Australians are familiar with this [historical event](#), the judges feedback reminded me that no matter how familiar I may be with something, it doesn't mean everyone else is and I need to write as if they aren't. Could I change the ending to have satisfied the judges? Absolutely. Maybe next year.

The Reluctant Author 