Book review by Dr Bruce Turley

Some of the most remarkable invitations that come our way emerge from what Roy Fairchild called ‘lifestory conversations’. Margaret Perrin’s book As Best we Can introduces us to some carefully chosen conversations in which she has been privileged to share. They are testimony to her gift for hearing and responding to pastoral opportunities that present themselves in both expected and surprising places.

These fleeting glimpses into other people’s lives are also vignettes in which we can see ourselves, inviting pause for thought, drawing strength for our own personal and spiritual journeys – and our ministry to others. Every vignette is accompanied by stimulus for further thought and prayerful reflections that help us enter more fully into the inner world surrounding the lived experience behind each story.

In the opening section, carefully chosen hospital conversations invite us into the realm of illness where the world – our world at least – can feel like it is standing still. But we learn that in the stillness, in the stummness, even, new spiritual insight can illumine our pathway sufficiently for us to hopefully resume our journey.

The author then takes us on the road where we overhear some travelling stories in which strangers meet and share the untidy, painful legacies of impactful experiences. Planes and trains furnish the setting for these encounters, but the journeys are more about spirituality than geography.

Finally, we are introduced to some community stories. One of these respectfully shares experiences from the author’s conversations and correspondence with a life-long friend, made accessible with the family’s permission. We are inspired to learn how an unexpected detour occasioned by serious illness finds its way through a barren wilderness ‘without maps’ in a journey sustained by courageous honesty and faith that discovers ‘more promise in the travelling’.

True to her personality, Margaret Perrin’s book does not impose conclusions but leaves us to ponder opportunities for spiritual discovery resident within life’s struggles. These brief vignettes will help sustain our faith for our own spiritual journeys. They also gently challenge us to be more attentive to what other people may need from us in the conversations we hear every day, but are often too busy to hear.

To purchase ‘As Best We Can’ write to 16/45 McIntyre St, Bunwood, Vic, 3125, enclosing $25 for the book and postage.

Margaret Perrin is a member of Ashburton Baptist Church, and has written ‘Train Whistles in the Night’ (her autobiography), and ‘As Best We Can’. This review by Dr Bruce Turley appeared in the Witness in November 2009. Dr Turley has grown to know and respect Margaret and Alex Perrin as members of the East Doncaster Baptist Church where he was minister for a time.