

BEST
MUSIC
& MUSIC
COMBINATIONS

Presents with



A friend received a Christmas present last year from a relative. It was a thriller; she reads a lot of thrillers. But it was sadistic trash which she found revolting. She tossed it aside after a couple of chapters but it continued to trouble her. "Why," she sighed, "would anyone who really knows me think I would want

to read a book like that?"

That's the thing with giving a book to a friend or family member for Christmas. Think about your choice as putting together a jigsaw — right book for the right reader. Make the appropriate choice, and they'll be thrilled.

OTHER LIVES

The Joke's Over: Memories of Hunter S. Thompson by Ralph Steadman (William Heinemann \$59.99)

SUBTITLED *Bruised Memories: Gonzo, Hunter Thompson and Me*, this is the tale of British artist Steadman, his gonzo pal Thompson, and their working-drinking-drugging relationship that lasted for 35 years until the latter's suicide last year. Steadman first collaborated with Thompson on the *Fear and Loathing* book which shot them both to fame (infamy, more like) and their volatile friendship was hard fought on both sides. This is not only a captivating study of a creative alliance between two strong personalities but of America during times of political turbulence, including the Nixon-Watergate era. Thompson's suicide is affectionately signed off by Steadman as "just another tax evader who got lucky".



created a comedy phenomenon on television and, over the past year, a sellout live show featuring a headspinning range of outrageous characters. The book follows them for the year of the tour, right up till Walliams' record-breaking English Channel swim in July this year. There are also intriguing snapshots of their younger lives as related by friends and family. Well-written and thorough, it's a satisfying insight into two clever, complex guys and the sheer slog behind comic genius.



the wonderful humour which Palin always brings to his narrative. Intelligent, astute and honest, his writing in these diaries remains crisp and fresh. February 27, 1978: Palin has been fitted with false teeth at the age of 34. September 20: "In an excess of zeal tonight I crack the top of my dental plate while cleaning it." Somehow, it all works.

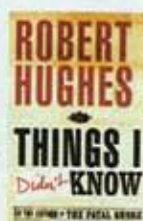
Purple Heart by Ta'afuli Andrew Fiu (Random House \$27.99)

OUTSTANDING memoir by Fiu, a Samoan who came to Auckland with his family when he was 3. Fiu's life came crashing down when he was struck with rheumatic fever at 14. Over the past two decades, he has had five open-heart ops, died twice, encountered shocking racism, struggled with the violence endemic to the older generation, made great friends, lost a few along the way, and became something of a medical miracle. Written with verve and humour, *Purple Heart* is a revelation.



Things I Didn't Know by Robert Hughes (Knopf \$65)

THE great Aussie snarler returns with a memoir that opens with his near-fatal car crash near Broome in 1999, and the ensuing bizarre court case, which served to compound his loathing for his homeland. Long based in New York, Hughes is one of the most influential art critics in the world. And he is a writer full of intellectual challenges and surprises. Whether you want to know quite as much about his marriages and sex life as detailed here is up to you. But the chapters on his Sydney upbringing, his relocation to London, the US and his subsequent impact on the international art scene have a terrific resonance.



Humble Pie by Gordon Ramsay (HarperCollins \$39.99)

DEDICATED to his mum, and opening with a chapter on his late hard-drinking, abusive dad, whom he hated, Ramsay opens up in a surprisingly readable, articulate trawl through his workaholic life and the pursuit of perfection. Now that he's 40, he seems to have mellowed (a little), happily married with kids which, you suspect are his @\$%@\$ salvation. He writes as he talks. But the photos of Ramsay trying to smile nicely for the camera are still pretty strange.



Memories of Old Roses by Trevor Griffiths (Penguin \$49.95)

NEW Zealand's grand master of the old rose — the ones that actually have a scent, unlike modern strains which have none — has loved gardening since he was a teenager in Timaru. This is his account of his life — his childhood and schooldays, the love of his life, Dixie, who he met when he was 16 and later married (they have been together for 60 years), and his growing interest in horticulture as a career. It's a fascinating story which mirrors a New Zealand in the process of social change — and the photos of the roses are divine. Enough to send you out in search of some of the featured specimens to plant over the break.



North Face of Soho: Unreliable Memoirs Vol IV by Clive James (Picador \$38)

ANOTHER expat Aussie, this is James' first memoir in 16 years, and the tone is darker, even if the humour remains tinder-dry. He opens with a "rare outbreak of normality" — his marriage ceremony. He addresses his addiction to booze and reminds us, in a modest, self-deprecating way, what a huge volume of creative energy he contributed to a variety of media. Apart from his columns and books, he was huge on TV until he decided it was a young man's game. Our loss. He also knows now there were things he should have avoided but "errors are essential".



The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid by Bill Bryson (Doubleday \$55)

HILARIOUS memoir of Bryson's childhood in middle America in the 50s, a time when optimism and innocence ruled, cigarettes were cool and the Bryson family wouldn't eat any foreign muck like pasta or rice. At the same time, racism and sexism permeated the entire society, but that was about to start changing. Meanwhile, it was the age of the treehouse, comic books and, on a more universal scale, the growing shadow of the Commies and atomic bombs. Which, to a young boy, seemed both scary and exciting.



The Python Years: Diaries 1969-79 by Michael Palin (Weidenfeld & Nicolson \$59.99)

PALIN has kept a diary since 1969, just before he started work on the *Monty Python* series. Here, he opens the chronicle on the first day of filming, July 8, and ends it on December 31, 1979. In between, there are the Python personalities, the TV work, the movies, the rows, the children, the tours ... and



Crossing the Line by Marc Ellis with Kirsten Matthew (Hodder Moe \$49.99)

DEDICATED "to all the good buggers I've met", which pretty much sets the laddish tone for the following 215 pages, Ellis' opening preface with the poem *Desiderata* is a bit of a worry. But then he hits his stride, describing himself as a "fairly energetic and mobile chap" as a kid, who grows into a wild university student, a larrikin sports star, then media personality, drug bustee and business man. Ellis' language is rather basic — "a bit of a bloody dag" — but he's got an honest, likeable voice. One for the blokes, if they don't already have it.



— Linda Herrick