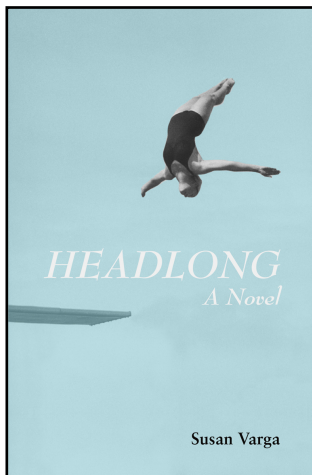

HEADLONG: A Novel

by Susan Varga

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With a raw simplicity, Susan Varga describes the gradual merging of the inner landscape of grief with the life-giving wider world. An unforgettable work, anchored firmly in our times.

- Robert Dessaix-

Against the backdrop of the Howard Government's Australia, a daughter tells the dramatic story of her elderly mother's desire to die.

Vital octogenarian Julia Denes suddenly loses her husband Gabor and along with him, her will to live.

Her daughter Kati watches helplessly as this once energetic woman, who had survived the Holocaust and made a good life in Australia, spirals into depression and tries to take her life.

"When does common or garden depression slip into the clinical variety? How do you grasp that someone your thought you knew has slipped beyond the reach of love and reason"

Kati tries all avenues to try to 'heal' her mother but worn down, eventually decides the compassionate action is to assist her to end her life.

"Oh for religious conviction that would help me make a clear moral choice on this! Or if I could just believe in the absolute sanctity of human life".

When their plan doesn't work – and Kati demands her mother wait three months before they talk about trying again - the real trauma and pain begins.

Kati not only loses her mother in a devastating way but the resulting grief and guilt affects her her sanity and tests her most valued relationships with her lover Gill and overseas based brother Robert.

The novel powerfully examines the disruption of relationships, the way private worlds become intertwined with larger events and the struggle to reconnect with life after overwhelming tragedy.

Headlong is a mediation on the ways people deal with death and beaverment; - the "untidy cruelty of grief...the sheer grind of it".

Headlong also asks the question: how do we deal with the notion that sometimes, "Life is not worth living".

Biography

Susan Varga was born in Hungary and came to Australia as a child. She has a MA in English Literature and a law degree. She has worked variously as a teacher, in community video and film, and briefly as a lawyer. She settled to full-time writing in the early 1990s. Her books include *Heddy and Me*, which won the Christina Stead Award for Biography/Autobiography and was shortlisted for several other major awards, and the novel *Happy Families*. Her last book, *Broometime*, co-written with Anne Coombs, is an account of the year they spent in the WA town of Broome and caused lively debate. Susan lives in the Southern Highlands of NSW.



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