WALTZING WITH JACK
DANCER: A SLOW
DANCE WITH CANCER
Geoff Goodfellow
Wakefield Press, $29.95

"THERE were 60 to 80 cigarettes a day/for 15 years," writes Adelaide poet Geoff Goodfellow, and this book records where a routine like that can lead. In January 2008, he was diagnosed with throat cancer. First, he had the tumor removed, then came chemo and radiation therapy. The tumor was close to his vocal cords, so he also had a voicebox inserted.

The voice of these poems is direct and clear. Although the title speaks of a dance, the more traditional metaphor of the fight is employed equally as much. In Goodfellow's case, the earlier part of his life fills out that image and reawakens it. He was once a boxer and an old opponent who hears he is sick comes to visit: "I've got news for cancer/Geoff Goodfellow doesn't run from cancer/He was silly enough not to run from me."

Goodfellow, a guest at the Melbourne Writers Festival, also fights with his doctors and nutritionists. The longest piece, The Seventh Doctor, shows an invigorating lack of deference for those mighty persons but also respect where it is due. The humour and lack of self-pity are exemplary.

But the poetry is only one of the ways the story is told. Accompanying the verse are colour photographs by Randy Larcombe. Cool, clear and unsparing, the images emphasise the solitude of illness, often showing Goodfellow alone in the austere settings of hospital.

Goodfellow's daughter provides a different voice, with a prose piece at the end that tells in its own engaging manner how her father's illness affected her final year at school.

POETRY
Reversing
I was reversing out of my driveway
& signalled to a bloke
to move his car which was in my way.
he was a young man twenty-
maybe twenty-two lots of bottle
blond hair tousled & spiky
& his car was about as old
as him.
he was parked in a No Parking zone
& it pissed me off
as i turned out i drew alongside him —
routine my window & growled
can't you read you idiot it says
no parking
he looked at me momentarily & said
chill out dude
i set the car into drive
took a left turn slowly —
& drove down the road laughing
he was right
of course.

Owen Richardson