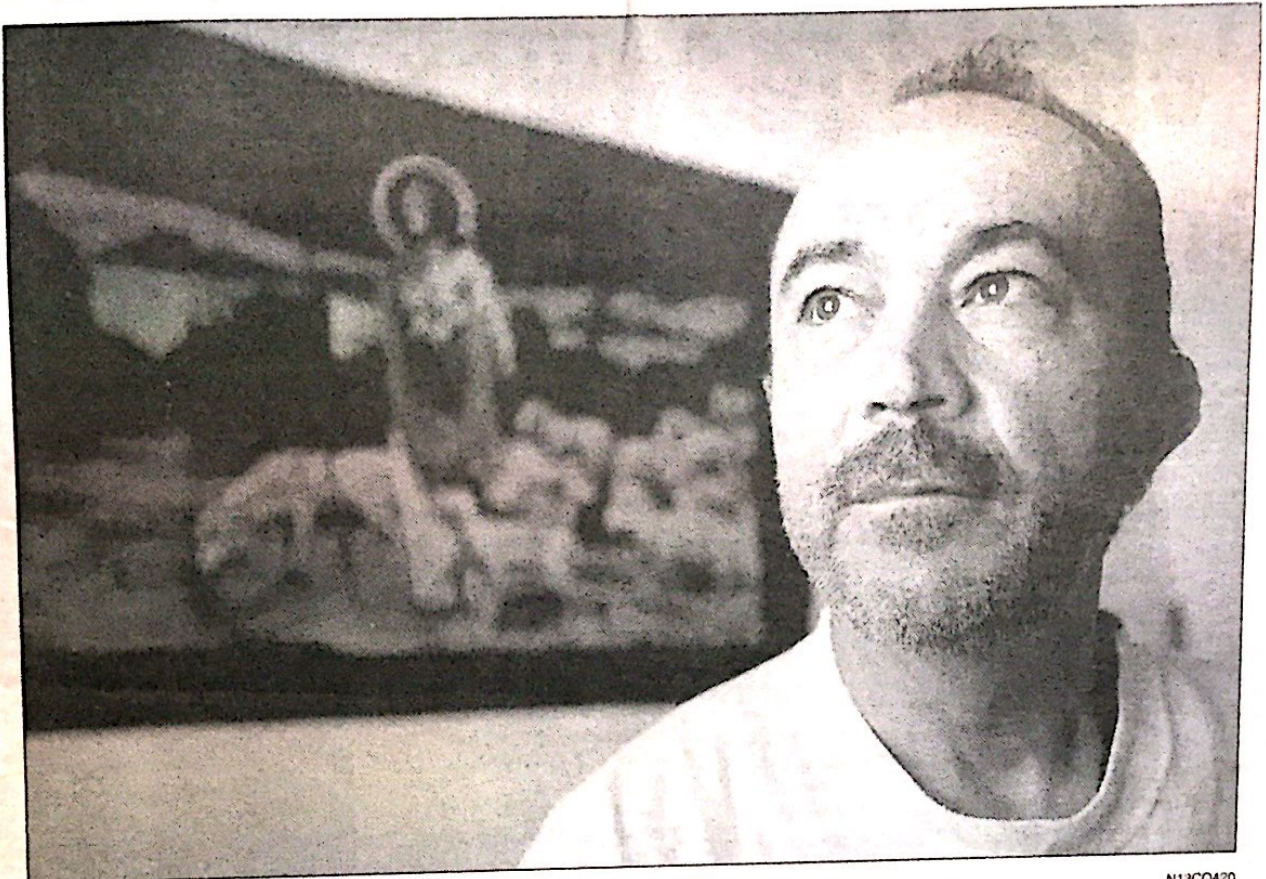


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Jad El Hage put six years into his book.

First novel in second tongue

By Tamara Heath

IT HAS taken Jad El Hage six years and many attempts to complete his first novel in English.

The 55-year-old, who divides his time between his mother's home in Coburg, his homeland of Lebanon and other cities across the world, has already had poetry and short story collections and a novel in Arabic published.

The Last Migration is his first novel in English.

He said the manuscript for his latest work ended up in the bin "many times" over the six years it

took him to write it. But he always believed it was worth persevering with.

"Once I finally finished I never wanted to look at it again," he said with a laugh.

El Hage described *The Last Migration* as a global love story that drew on his own experiences as well as those of his friends.

It also aimed to break down some of the myths surrounding cultural difference, he said.

"Basically I think we are all made from the same mould, we all have the same heart," he said.

El Hage, whose family fled war-torn Lebanon 30 years ago, said his great grandmother instilled a love of story-telling in him as a child.

She would tell him stories at night but always stop them at the most intriguing part and leave him to wonder how it would end.

El Hage is on a sabbatical from his work as features editor with the Lebanese paper *Al Hayat* and plans to settle in a small village in Lebanon to work on his next book, which will again be in English.

"This next one is already much easier to write," he said.

"It was hard last time because I stopped so many times. This one I have already planned."

The Last Migration was launched last week at the Victorian Arabic Social Service's conference, Arab-Australians: Taking a Stand.

The two-day conference aimed to raise awareness of Victoria's Arabic people within the wider community and address women's issues, education and employment.

Mr El Hage was a speaker in a workshop on the media's portrayal of the Arabic community in Australia.