

essayist now in her seventies. Is this a work of nostalgia? Only in part. True, Rainey-Smith does devote poems to good things she experienced in the 1950s and 60s: mother's cooking, radio serials, old-time courtship in a fairground and matinee movies. But there's a dark side to the past – the “murder house” for rotting death; Dad's erratic behaviour as a former POW suffering a form of PTSD; the furtiveness about sex and extramarital affairs; and menstruation taught as something shameful. Even given all this, though, Rainey-Smith is astute at telling later generations not to be patronising. The title poem “Formica”

challenges us to see how important now-obsolete appliances and fixtures were to families decades ago – not something to be sneered at. In later poems, Rainey-Smith gives a very cool assessment of what it is to grow old. And she knows the reality of the present. As her poem “Changing course” says, “All my secret roads are gone and our river's changed course.” Remember the past, but don't live in it. ■

FORMICA, by Maggie Rainey-Smith
(The Cuba Press, \$25)

Formica is Maggie Rainey-Smith's first collection of poetry, extraordinary in that she is an established novelist and

