

UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

Creative Writing Newsletter

January 2015

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Happy New Year and may 2015 be filled with good writing.

Two contributors to this issue, Helen Stewart (page 2) & Pauline Rowson (page 6), say that to be a good writer, you also have to be a reader. So feel free to settle-down to enjoy those Christmas gift books without feeling guilty about the chores.

The Autumn term was busy for my own writing group in Porthcawl. One of our members, Wilma Walker agreed to start a 2nd group to mop-up our waiting list. Both groups are now flourishing. In December, we joined the Storytelling group in a country pub to present a morning of our work with lunch afterwards. It was a sell-out, & great fun.

Recent Newsletters have contained lots on self-publishing. Indeed there's another viewpoint on this from Mary Pilfold-Allan on page 3 plus one from Porthcawl. On page 4 you'll find an article by Ian Skillicorn of Corazon Books, with practical advice on using a traditional publisher.

A writing prompt that proved fruitful for my group recently was

There was a knock at the door & a servant entered with a letter on a tray.

Marcia

Change of contact details ?

Please let me know if your postal, or e-mail address changes, or you no longer wish to receive Network News. I will alert National Office, who send it to you.

Emails with attachments are the simplest way to collect Newsletter entries. PLEASE find someone willing to copy your work and email it to me if you have no access to a computer. It saves the process of copy-typing,

If you write a letter that needs a reply, please remember to enclose s.a.e.

Marcia

Beeston U3A Writing For Pleasure

Helen Stewart

Our group of 16 meets monthly. We started with autobiography so members learned about each other. We have since covered travel writing, biography, short stories, genre writing, newspaper articles, telling stories through letters & diaries, poetry, writing for children, writing for the theatre & how to write your own novel.

We spend 2 meetings on each topic, with members taking it in turns to lead. The first session starts with looking at professional examples of the writing we are going to attempt, followed by exercises in that topic & finishes with a home challenge. A good writer is also a reader, so members bring recommendations of books. The second meeting starts with a writing exercise before we look at what people have written at home.

Exercises have included:

- Members are given 10 printed poems & randomly pick a line from each. Write the 10 lines on separate pieces of paper, then try to arrange them into a coherent poem. The juxtaposition of different lines of poetry can spark ideas for your own poem.
- If you were stranded on a desert island which two pieces of music would you take & what do they mean to you? (Starting a piece on autobiography)
- Write a character description of yourself. Write as if no one here knows you. Perhaps write from a different age: child, teenager, newly-wed, middle-age.....

The idea of "Critical Friends" or "Writing Buddies" came from being such a large group. We have agreed not to read out anything in the session longer than 500 words. Members use email to write comments on each other's work over that limit. Gradually, people have settled on individuals they know will be sympathetic, honest or who will proof read.

Christmas 2013 we put together our first booklet of writing, based around the themes we had covered. This led to a collection of short stories, travel writing & poetry/haiku. An extra meeting was called to choose entries. We had 100 copies produced professionally. We plan our next booklet for 2015, to be called "Self-Portraits" & we aim to have a piece of autobiographical writing from every member. We have also put forward the challenge that the illustrations should be our own attempts at a self-portrait!

We have had 2 guest speakers over the last year. One was a local writer, the other a member of our U3A who frequently has articles published in a history periodical. She spoke about how she started & the joys & pitfalls of writing for magazines. She also set us a short story competition which she judged. As a group, we decided that there would be no "winners" but we were given constructive feedback & the one outstanding piece was passed around.

We have had some success with competitive writing; one member won 1st prize in a Nottinghamshire short story competition. Another has edited & published a book by her late husband. A third has sent detective fiction to publishers.

We have almost come to the end of our present programme. It is important to have ideas as to how we want our group to develop. There should still be a place for exercises & the practising of writing skills & styles but members want to be able to have more time to develop their own interests. Where this will take us I do not know but it will be exciting to find out.

Self-publishing - another aspect. Mary Pilfold-Allan, Cambridge

Self-publishing was given an airing in the last Newsletter & I would like to add my 'two-pennyworth' in the hope it might inspire people to have a go. It can work - & work well for low number publications, especially for subjects such as local history or biographies where there is an identifiable readership.

Four years ago my husband & I co-authored *The Man & the Island - Sir Robert Farquhar, First British Governor of Mauritius 1810 -1823*. It was written to mark the bi-centenary of the British take-over of the island from the French & its publication was timed to coincide with a visit to Mauritius by the Princess Royal.

There was a possible, if slim, global readership but the main sales were obviously in Mauritius. We decided to make certain our production costs were covered in the first instance & offered a numbered limited edition on launch day. These sold out & thereafter any sales were a bonus.

I am delighted to say that through bookshops & the web we have only a few books left from the initial print run of 500. Our time costs will never be covered but our sense of achievement makes up for that. Self-publishing, in my book, is a labour of love!

Yet Another Aspect

Porthcawl U3A

When the Porthcawl Writing for Pleasure Group produced a book of short stories, in October 2012, we used www.direct-pod.com From the first time we looked at their website, we found them to be entirely user-friendly & reasonably priced.

You can get an instant quote on line. The questions you answer to obtain this make you think about what you want (eg types of binding, number of copies if more than one & whether you want a proof copy before they print). If you decide to use their services, you are allocated one person who works with you throughout the project. They will do as little or as much as you want.....will hold your hand throughout if need be. You end-up with a professional-looking book.

In 2013, Clive Mort joined our group, wanting to write about his life & career. We put him on to direct pod & he had a book he could be proud of in time for giving to family for Christmas that year. Clive is currently using them to produce a second book.

On page 5 you will see that David Evans of Porthcawl has also written a book. David joined our Group 2 in 2014, having already almost finished it. With encouragement from us & technical help from direct pod, he has produced a lovely memoir which has sold so well it's already had a second print run.

How to find and approach a publisher

Ian Skillicorn, Corazon Books



In recent years there has been a substantial increase in self-publishing, but for many writers the holy grail is still a traditional deal with a publisher. In a very competitive marketplace, publishers offer skills, expertise and support which can give writers the best chance of success. But how do you find the right publisher for you and your book? And once you have found them, how do you approach them?

Do your research. This is the most important first step. Which publishers are publishing books similar to the one you have written? This may seem obvious, but you would be surprised at how many submissions I receive from writers who clearly haven't done their homework on my imprint and the genres we publish. A busy publishing house won't have the time or inclination to reply to a submission from someone who hasn't researched and understood their business. It is very easy to find out which publishers may be the best fit for your book. Presumably, you have written a book in a genre you enjoy reading yourself, so look at who published the books on your own bookshelf. *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* lists publishers' details, including genres they consider and how to submit.

Meet publishers. There have never been so many opportunities to meet a publisher face to face as there are today. Publishers can be found at literary festivals, writing conferences and the like. Some conferences, such as *Get Writing*, have one-to-one pitch sessions with publishers. It's daunting, but I know a number of published authors who got their first deal this way. Do an online search or look in the press (e.g. *Writing* magazine) for information about writing conferences and who will be in attendance. The first meeting with your future publisher could even be a brief chat by the tea and biscuits table. Be polite and friendly, but not pushy! Whenever a publisher expresses an interest in seeing your work and offers their card, always follow it up. I have known writers not take up this golden opportunity because they thought the publisher in question was 'just being nice'. No publisher will willingly add to their pile of manuscripts unless there is a genuine reason.

Submit a professional proposal. An over-worked editor with a burgeoning email inbox is just looking for an excuse to hit that delete key. Find out how a publisher wants to receive submissions (*Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* again, or the publisher's own website) and follow the instructions to the letter. The best way to stand out from the crowd is to present a professional, well-researched submission, because so many others fall at this first hurdle. It is very important to check whether the publisher accepts manuscripts that have been sent to more than one publisher at the same time. It is very irksome to invest precious time in reading a submission only to find the author has also submitted, and subsequently reached an agreement, elsewhere. If in doubt, ask before submitting, or make it clear that this is a multiple submission. Present yourself in a professional manner. I get many submissions from people who share an email address with a spouse or partner (e.g. bobandsue@...) or have a jokey email address (e.g. superdad1956@...); if you want to be taken seriously as a writer (and show that you take yourself seriously) get a dedicated, sensible email address for your writing.

Submitting without an agent. Many publishers don't accept unagented submissions. If you have done your research, you will know which these are, and if you don't have an agent, you won't waste your time approaching them. As for how to find and approach an agent ... once again *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* and writing conferences are good places to start. Good luck!

About Ian Skillicorn/Corazon Books

Corazon Books was established by Ian Skillicorn. Ian is also the founder of National Short Story Week, which is celebrated by bookshops, libraries, schools (and U3A groups) around the UK each November. For National Short Story Week 2014 he edited an anthology of stories written by schoolchildren which became an Amazon bestseller and has raised funds for Teenage Cancer Trust. More details are at www.nationalshortstoryweek.org.uk

Corazon Books publishes 'great stories with heart', including much-loved modern classics by bestselling authors such as Catherine Gaskin and Naomi Jacob, and contemporary romance by Sophie King. Recent releases include the popular *Nurse Jane Grant* series of four novels about a nurse working in the 1950s and *Sara Dane*, Catherine Gaskin's rags-to-riches saga set in eighteenth century Australia. Corazon Books also supports and nurtures new writing talent. This spring it publishes the romantic comedy *Home Comforts*, the debut novel by Ali Chrisp, winner of The Write Time competition for unpublished writers aged over 50, run in partnership with *Mature Times*. Learn more at www.greatstorieswithheart.com



NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

David Evans, Porthcawl U3A, has published a beautifully nostalgic book about life in the Rhondda Valleys in the 1930's & 40's. *Rhondda Boy* is available by post for £6.50 including p&p. Cheques in favour of David Evans should be sent to him at 1, Candleston Cl, Nottage, Porthcawl CF36 3HL . £1 from each sale goes to McMillan Cancer Support.

Wissey Writers (Norfolk)

Gilly Beckett

We meet twice monthly. Meetings start with a prompt for a fun write, then members read out recent work for feedback. "Homework" is set, with a 1500 word limit, sometimes using pictures. Although established less than a year ago, we launched a 60 page book of 15 short stories on 5th December. It is available for £3.50 inc P&P... requests to gillyannebec@hotmail.com

Arun Scribes: a blog for writers.

Patricia Stoner

Arun Scribes is a group of U3A writers who support each other. We meet monthly in Rustington, West Sussex, and share our stories, poems and novel writing. Each month there is a theme and an exercise aimed at improving our writing. Some of us have published books, some have had stories accepted by magazines, some of us write for the sheer pleasure of the written word. We started this blog first of all for ourselves, so we could congratulate, commiserate and share our experiences. Now we think it is ready for a wider audience, and we hope you will enjoy it and find it both entertaining and informative. It contains regularly updated information about competitions and other places where we can submit our writing. We also share stories and poems. <https://arunscribes.wordpress.com/>

Congleton Creative Writing Group

Sylvia Kemp

We have 14 members & meet weekly. Last year, we published (using Amazon's Create Space website) our first collection of short stories & poems in a book called "Our Serendipity". We sold it on Amazon. This only makes pennies in royalties, but has the advantage of not requiring any up-front costs. We donated the money made to a local children's charity as one of our members is on its board.

SPEAKERS & STUDY DAY LEADERS

Pauline Rowson (see interview page 6) is a regular speaker at U3A groups. You may confidently recommend her to your committee as a speaker at main meetings where she can talk about her life as a crime writer. She would also be ideal as a speaker at Study Days and can be contacted about any of this via her website: www.rowmark.co.uk The website is worth a look (you can also sign up for her free newsletter) even if you don't want to contact her quite yet. She also has a You Tube Channel showing videos of her interviews and talks. <http://www.youtube.com/paulinerowson13> You can follow her on Twitter and she has a Facebook page.

Peter Read, whose article appears on page 7 is a poet, playwright & ghostwriter. He has done some work with U3A , notably performing his one man show about Dylan Thomas, which for 2 years running received 5 star reviews at the Edinburgh Fringe. Having lectured on Creative Writing at Swansea University, & worked with many less formal groups, Peter is happy to help on study days, or to speak at U3A meetings. He can help with the process of writing for pleasure, or indeed for money. He also offers a one to one mentoring service for writers. Having known him for some years I can say that he is personable, approachable & his style is encouraging. Should your U3A wish to contact him it's petersamread@gmail.com

AN INTERVIEW WITH CRIME WRITER PAULINE ROWSON

Have you always written?

At the age of 8 I discovered libraries & have been hooked on reading & writing ever since. My childhood ambition was to be an author or journalist. I wrote my first novel when I was 11 (never published!) & wrote plays to perform in my parents' garage. I ended-up working in PR/marketing, where I wrote business books but longed to write fiction. I started doing that in 1988. After many trials, experiments & errors I found my voice & was first published in 2006.

Which writers have inspired you?

Enid Blyton started my love of adventure & crime novels & gave me the ambition to be a crime writer. Then came Malcolm Saville. His work emphasises location, with vivid descriptions of countryside, villages & towns. Perhaps this was where I got my strong sense of location; my crime novels are set in the Solent & South Coast. Then there were the Simon Templar (Saint) novels & those written by John Creasey featuring The Baron & Gideon. Then Zane Grey, who locked together character & land; maybe that's what stimulated me to lock the sea with my characters.

Do writers need to keep up with current reading?

All writers must be readers. It is only by reading others' novels that you see how they create tension, move characters round the scenes, write dialogue & create atmosphere. But I do find it difficult to read current crime novels for fear I might have used a similar plot. (Unfounded because most plots have been used repeatedly. It is the setting, characters, & style that make things different).

I'm re-reading for the nth time my stack of Georges Simenon Maigret novels. I love the atmospheric writing, the quick dialogue & the fact that you follow the story through Maigret's eyes.

Do you have a writing routine &/or a special place to write?

Some writers write so many words, or for so many hours, every day. I have no set times & don't count words. Some days, words flow for 8 hours or more. On other days I struggle.....so I don't force it but do something else. But every day I spend some time either writing or thinking through the plots. One bedroom has become my office & I write there, direct onto my computer.

Only 5% of actual crimes involve murder, but 99% of crime novels do. Why?

Murders fascinate and at the same time abhor us - what is it that drives people to such extremes? What motivates someone to take another's life? What kind of person could do that? Revealing the character behind such an act and solving the puzzle is what intrigues people. There doesn't have to be murder in a crime novel but there usually is, that or the threat of murder in the storyline. A novel about accountancy fraud without a murder or threat of murder would make dull reading. At book signings people have been known to check with me whether there is a murder in the book before they buy!

What work do you have in the pipeline?

The 12th Andy Horton "Fatal Catch" is due out in September 2015. I've already drafted number 13 for publication in September 2016. But new out in March 2015 is the first in my new crime series featuring former Royal Marine Commando, Special Boat Services Officer, Art Marvik. That is to be published by Severn House in March 2015. And I'm currently writing number 2 in the Art Marvik series. So a busy & exciting time ahead.

POEMS FOR PAGE AND STAGE

Peter Read

I always think it a shame when people write poetry only for the privacy of their own piece of paper or notebook. Of course, the fact that poetry should be performed as well as written can sometimes fill us poets with terror. The value of keeping our poems to ourselves is that we will never be embarrassed in public. But if we take this view, we miss out on the potential joy and excitement that comes from reading our poems to an audience.

Before we think of taking to the stage, or the front of a pub, or wherever the reading is going to be, there are at least three questions we need to face:-

1. WHICH POEMS SHOULD I READ?

- When you read a poem on the page you can read it as many times as you wish, to get the poet's meaning. When a poem is read aloud the listener doesn't have that luxury. For this reason, the performed poem shouldn't be too deep, demanding or difficult to grasp. It should go for a powerful image or strong impression.
- If you are just starting to read in public it's a good idea to do a mixed set, with your own poems and poems by other poets.
- Choose poems that you've read aloud to your friends. If they understood and liked them, then use those poems.
- Be careful about using over sentimental or emotional poems. Poems that mean a lot to you might not mean the same thing to an audience. Again, try such a poem on a friend before reading it in public.
- Don't be too long. I was once in an Open Mic reading where a reader stood up and said, 'I only have one poem, but there are three hundred and fifty verses.' If you have been asked to read a selection of your poems, 20 minutes is long enough

As you try to decide which poems to read, it might help to place them into categories such as :-

- Influences on What You Write - Family, Society, Thoughts and Ideas from various sources, Other Poets or writers
- Love/Friendship/Relationships
- Beliefs - What you love about life and what you hate
- Experiences - Places you've lived, Jobs, things that have happened to you
- Miscellaneous

The reading is a giving of yourself. Be enthusiastic about what you read and remember that personality carries five times as much impact as the verbal.

2. WHERE CAN I READ MY POEMS?

- Your own U3A group
- As an individual or a group of you, look around for places that book speakers. Put together an interesting and varied poetry reading and offer it to WI groups, Mothers' Unions, Church Social groups, Friendship groups, Rotary, Round table etc. Sometimes there's a fee.
- Throughout Britain there are many venues which stage Open Mic poetry nights. Google poetry events in your area

As time goes on you may be invited to be the guest poet at one of the above!

3. HOW CAN I WIN THE AUDIENCE OVER?

According to studies the most terrifying experience for people in Britain is performing in front of an audience. It is higher than the fear of death!

Try and see the event as a joint exploration of poetry. It is not a battle between you and them. They have paid to be entertained so they want you to succeed. Choose poems that you read well and enjoy the experience of reading them aloud. Don't try and win the audience over; as they see the joy you are getting they will join you. Welcome them into your world.



Summerschool, Newton Rigg,

In a comfortable room of tables and white board,
a lively group of fifteen scribblers with paper and laptops and post-it notes
will write our lives or imagined stories guided by Maggie - so inspirational - whose humour fuels our hesitant pens.

We read our homework in groups of three and find new ways with familiar characters.

A stroll in the gardens quickens the senses before plot and dialogue rapidly bloom. Constructive feedback fuels our fervour as work is heard by our panel of peers.

"Whose point of view is best for my writing?"
is a question we answer in singular ways that spin golden words from the straw of our lives.

Surprise! Delight! Relief! Long pieces are ready to read in the final sessions when none of us listening can spot a beginner
to writing in the wealth of stories from this summer school.

Maggie Norton, Furness U3A

The unusual format of the above report is explained by Maggie Norton being a poet, children's novelist & writer in education. So even seasoned writers feel they benefit from summer schools.

The Maggie referred to in line 7 is my predecessor Maggie Smith, who was the course tutor. Marcia

USEFUL INFORMATION



Sources: Included in postal deliveries of Third Age Matters.

U3A Online Writing Courses: see U3A website.

U3A Resource Centre: Materials to borrow free of charge, apart from return postage. email: resource.centre@u3a.org.uk

Handbook for U3A Creative Writing Groups— from start-up to the finished product. £2.50 (inc p. p) from National Office (address P1)

Signposts Edited by Tom Holloway, sent monthly (email only) by the U3A Internetwork Group UK and U3AOnline Australia to any U3A member. To receive Signposts, email Tom tom@worldu3a.org

ARTICLES FOR NEXT ISSUE



Please send items, however brief such as group news; comments, ideas; useful websites, magazines, books, competitions; anything you think worth sharing.

TO: U3Awriting@hotmail.co.uk

Deadline for next edition is 20th April but don't wait until then. Send items to me as you write them please.