

Women's

Ink!



Winter 2021

The Society of Women Writers NSW Inc.
www.womenwritersnsw.org

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SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Editor's Message

Recently I listened to author Charlie Jane Anders interviewed on Sean Carroll's *Mindscape* podcast. In the episode, 'On Stories and How To Write Them', Anders discusses the unspoken rule in journalism that if something happens three times, it's a trend. 'Maybe that's the only three times that's ever happened,' she says, 'but if there's three times it's clearly happening a lot.'

The trends rule is constructive when writing characters, especially if, like me, you're bent on saying something ten times in case a reader might miss it. In truth, if a character behaves a certain way just two or three times, the reader feels the character acts that way consistently. Similarly, if a character *thinks* about something two or three times, the reader subconsciously knows they're obsessing on it. And if later they do something differently, it's innately understood they've gone through some sort of change.

The Winter 2021 issue of *Women's Ink!* is my third edition as editor, and its own trends are emerging: the magazine's layout, regular segments including 5 Write Answers, Q&A with an industry expert and a feature piece, and a fascinating variety of contributions by our members. My desire is for the magazine to develop and grow, and there is always room for change. Every member is part of shaping its future. Please reach out at any time, and share your ideas, thoughts or wishes. This magazine belongs to you.

Enjoy our Winter 2021 issue!

Jacqui

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President's Message

BY JAN CONWAY

It has been a pleasure and an honour to serve The Society of Women Writers NSW, Inc as its President for the last two years and prior to that as Secretary. I wish the new President well and trust she will find, like I did, how rewarding and satisfying an experience it is to be involved, supported by a strong committee, in steering this amazing, long-lived Society forward. I have been privileged to work with a thoughtful and friendly group of members and committee, dedicated women, all passionate to have the Society endure and succeed. The Society is a not-for-profit organisation and needs volunteer members to nurture it in order for it to grow and flourish.

All members are the beneficiaries of those forward-thinking women who, over 95 years ago, established a society for the purpose of providing a place for women to gather in support of one another, to discuss, mentor and write about what was important to them, to *Give Women Writers a Voice*. The Society in all that time has remained true to their principles and remains important in the literary landscape of Australia.

At the time of taking on the presidency, Covid-19 would have been a creation of science fiction. Undeterred by the pandemic, much has been achieved. While a new president brings fresh ideas and energy to an organisation, forward planning is under way as the Society moves towards its centenary in 2025.

A committee has been set up under the chair of Maria McDougall with some projects being progressed. Talks have been held with Sydney City Council regarding two exciting proposals: a bronze footpath plaque near SLNSW commemorating the Society's 100 years; and the commissioning of a sculpture of an Australian story book character. Permission from the author's family or estate is required and expressions of interest and quotes will be sought from sculptors. Each of these ideas needs State Government approval and a contact request has been submitted. To bring these ideas to fruition will require funds to be raised via grants or sponsorship. If you, or anyone you know, has particular skills in this area, or would like to be a sponsor, please contact Maria.

All of these projects, and particularly the women heading them up, will require assistance. Take this fabulous opportunity to be part of the Society's history and its future.

Thank you for your support ...

Jan Conway



'Follow your enthusiasms.' Louise Glück, 2020 Nobel prize for Literature

Your Magazine. Your Voice.

Women's Ink! is a contemporary collection of women's voices in the form of articles, personal essays, interviews, Q&As, fiction, poetry, non-fiction, book reviews, commentary and more. **Women's Ink!** showcases our members' writing and shares our members' voices.

Submissions for the next issue of **Women's Ink!** are now open.

Submission guidelines are available on our website, or email the editor for a copy at jacqui.brown@panachecat.com

A Writer's Trials and Triumphs

BY HELEN LYNE

Last year was disappointing since I had hoped to be published, praised and highly paid for books and poetry
A tiny ray of hope lit up and flickered fleetingly
A chap would print a chapbook - but only for a fee

I entered competitions and much to my surprise
my stories were ignored or lost since none received a prize
The judges' general comments I thought were all askew
They said overuse of adjectives and adverbs was taboo

My novel was rejected and the publisher was not
impressed by my brave hero and the absence of a plot
He said the girl was vapid and the murder scene lacked gore
and the fumbling in the blankets proved I didn't know the score

I therefore took the challenge. Each page I splashed with blood
The woman's now a werewolf, the man's her servile stud
There are body parts in cupboards and sex games in the mud
I've eliminated adjectives and crammed the plot with crud

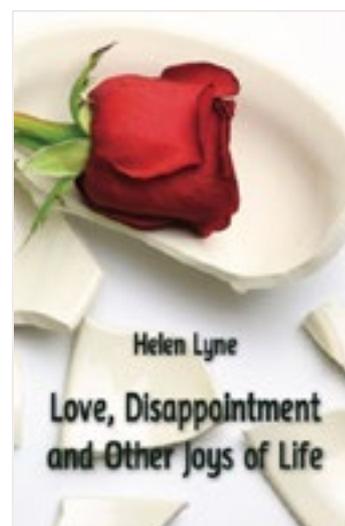
This year I'll get the Stella, I expect Miles Franklin too
For my entry in Liz Jolley, six grand will nicely do
My runaway best seller will earn a Netflix deal
now that readers find my characters authentic, fun and real.



Photo Credit: Laurie Wilson

HELEN LYNE is a performance poet and writer of fiction. Her collection of short stories was launched in June and is available from Ginninderra Press.

www.helenlyne.com.au



The Changing World of the Biography

BY GABRIELLA KELLY-DAVIES



Photo Credit: Jacqui Brown

Over the Easter long weekend, I read two biographies, both by Hermione Lee. One was Lee's acclaimed *Virginia Woolf*, and the other, the recently published *Tom Stoppard, A Life*. Both reinforced for me why we live in a golden age of biography. One aspect that stood out in Lee's biographies was the way she painted astute portraits of Virginia Woolf and Tom Stoppard, including their complex inner lives, melding traditional techniques with newer, more experimental biographical practices. As a student of the art and craft of biography this was fascinating, prompting me to explore, in greater depth, how biographical writing is evolving.

The biographers Nigel Hamilton and Hans Renders argue that a vagueness exists about what biography is in the twenty-first century. In particular, 'What the word now implies, its modern rules—or lack of rules—and how the genre is changing shape, character and purpose across different platforms from 'print to celluloid, and from digital pixels to hip-hop musicals'. Hermione Lee herself believes biographical writing has become 'iconoclastic, socially wide-ranging, and non-literary,' and the emphasis of contemporary biography has shifted from the depiction of public achievements to a

greater focus on domestic behaviour and the subject's private life. Lee maintains that today's readers expect details about a subject's motives and fears, sexual habits, dealings with money, behaviour as a partner or parent, illnesses, peculiarities—even dreams and fantasies.

Some authors are challenging the traditional 'cradle-to-grave' structure, and Lee did this in her biography of Virginia Woolf. Virginia Woolf once wrote in a letter to Vita Sackville West, 'My God, how does one write a biography?'. The famous author struggled with how to write the biography of her friend, the artist Roger Fry. In her Woolf biography, Lee echoed this question. She struggled

'...Today's readers expect details about a subject's motives and fears, sexual habits, dealings with money, behaviour as a partner or parent, illnesses, peculiarities - even dreams and fantasies.'

with how she could write a book that differed from all the other Woolf biographies. Lee particularly worried about how to open the biography, wondering whether she should start by

stating Woolf's birth date and the names of her parents? Or should she give the date and cause of the author's death? Should she describe Virginia's family history or position her as a member of the social and intellectual group she inhabited? All these beginnings have been used by biographers

for time immemorial, but in the end, Lee opened the biography with a reflection on the process of writing the manuscript. Then she followed with chapters based on themes such as the houses Virginia lived in and her literary experiments.



In the early decades of the twentieth century, authors such as Lytton Strachey broke free from the strictures of the Victorian period of hero-worshipping famous men to pursue a new style of biographical writing. In an essay, *The New*

Biography, Virginia Woolf described features of Strachey's technique, including a shift away from propriety and the quest to describe the 'goodness' of the protagonist. Woolf said Strachey approached the 'bigwigs fearlessly,' and instead of chronicling the protagonist's good deeds, he explored the 'pith and essence' of the subject's character. Strachey used literary devices new to biographical practice at the time, such as candour, irony, satire and fictional techniques, and emphasised the inner psychological life of the subjects. These techniques are increasingly being adopted by today's biographers.

After Strachey's experiments, biographical writing continued to unfold during the twentieth

century. Social, political, cultural, economic and technological developments drove a shift in focus, particularly the civil rights and women's rights movements.

Before the 1970s, women's lives were under-represented in biography except for some well-known female intellectuals and writers and wives of prominent politicians. But that changed with the rise of feminism and feminist biography. Feminist biography focuses on gender as the primary influence on women's lives, and it pays close attention to the interplay between the subject's personal and professional lives. At first, biographies appeared about women who had lived exemplary lives in the same way as occurred

for men, but the biographies of women who had not lived in the public eye started to arrive on bookshelves. These biographies portrayed women as individuals in their own right rather than as mothers, daughters or wives of prominent men. An example is Brian Matthew's *Louisa* (1987), about the poet, writer, publisher, suffragist and feminist, Louisa Lawson, the mother of writer and Australian bush poet Henry Lawson.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, biographers started exploring the lives of ordinary, marginalised and displaced people. Biographies of individuals from every section of society arrived on our bookshelves, including immigrants, refugees, Indigenous people and those with disabilities. These stories attempted to explore what life was like for the protagonists, who spoke for themselves. One example is Alexander Masters' *Stuart, A Life Backwards* (2005), the story of Stuart, a homeless man. Masters believes the importance of Stuart's life was 'not that he lived on the street, but that he revealed something about the way everyone, from the Queen to the

Before the 1970s, women's lives were under-represented in biography except for some well-known female intellectuals and writers and wives of prominent politicians. But that changed with the rise of feminism and feminist biography.

ratcatcher, would behave if they had to endure the same emotional and physical conditions that engulfed Stuart. He was a spy not just on the chaotic homeless, but on a character that nests inside the most settled of us.'

Andrew Lownie, a biographer and literary agent, believes today's readers are not interested in how prominent people shaped events but how those events affect ordinary people. And Boyd Tonkin, Literary Editor of *The Independent*, notes the recent wave of biographical writing recaptures many qualities from the classical life writing of Plutarch, with a focus on the meaning of a life rather than just facts. Tonkin cites Philip Hoare's *Leviathan, or The Whale* (2009) as an example of this style of writing. *Leviathan, or The Whale* starts

with memoir, then incorporates biology, history, social commentary, travelogue, literary criticism, biography and personal observations. *Leviathan, or The Whale* explores the history and ideas that meet the individual rather than merely focusing on the subject's achievements as was the case in Victorian biography. Tonkin claims this 'new biography' often shatters the biography's subject into multiple

Holmes says the 'monolithic' single life is giving way to biographies of groups, friendships, love affairs, 'spots of time' and collective movements in art, literature or science. An emerging trend is for biographies of groups of people held together for a 'historic moment by a common endeavour, place or ideal.' This shift is resulting in the rise of unusual narrative forms because the stories do not

Biographical writing is evolving... And the publication of biographical works is skyrocketing.

fit the traditional 'womb-to-tomb' structure.

From the 1980s, 'fractured' or postmodern

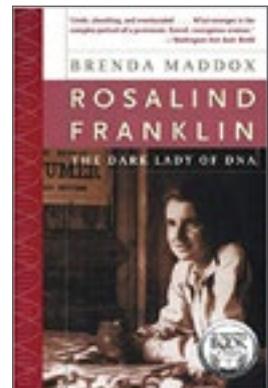
fragments—'pieces of a jigsaw that might never wholly fit. Then it can also show us how the smallest life can illuminate not just its times but our shared condition.'

Hamilton and Renders maintain that modern biography has become 'the most elastic, vibrant, contested, controversial and popular genre' and that technological innovation has transformed the way biographers produce and publish biographical works. Biographers are experimenting with novel forms, investigative approaches and stylistic expression and employing fiction techniques, from flashbacks to inverted chronology—although they apply these methods to well-researched actual lives. Some authors are experimenting by slicing individuals' lives into smaller, more discrete periods to focus on pivotal moments and turning points.

In her article 'The Death of Life Writing' in *The Guardian* in 2008, British biographer Kathryn Hughes laments the demise of 'quality biographies'. 'The general standard, the mean, the middling, seems to have sunk to a listless low.' However, Hughes believes exciting innovations are taking place at the frontiers of biographical writing, including biographies on familiar subjects, but coming from odd angles—such as we have seen in Hermione Lee's biographies of Virginia Woolf and Tom Stoppard. Also, some biographies now focus on one episode in a life, unfolding a far richer story. The biographer Richard Holmes suggests that focusing on a pivotal episode or period in the life of an individual, family or group has led to new ways of thinking about the possibility that biography might not cover the entire life of its subject(s) and instead focus on an episode to illuminate the whole life.

narrative biographies appeared. Holmes cites Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) as a fascinating example of this form. In *Flaubert's Parrot*, Barnes created a fictional biographer to explore factual or counterfactual questions about Flaubert. Another example is Peter Ackroyd's *Dickens* (1989), where Ackroyd inserted flamboyant fictional interludes into the biography.

A contemporary trend in biography is its use as a bridge to fields of specialist knowledge such as science. Holmes asserts that readers want to know what drives individual scientists to make discoveries, and they also like to hear about the dead ends and mistakes in scientific research. Psychological and social interpretations of the scientists' lives also intrigue today's readers, as do non-scientific aspects such as love, religion and politics. One example is Brenda Maddox's biography, *Rosalind Franklin, The Dark Lady of DNA*.



Lytton Strachey's biographer, Michael Holroyd, believes biographical practice will continue to evolve, and it will become more personal, idiosyncratic, imaginative, experimental and hybrid. He also considers it will move from the comprehensive 'Life and Letters' structure to novel narrative forms. However, several scholars argue that at its core, contemporary biographical practice remains consistent with earlier eras and in many respects resembles Victorian biography.

Carole Angier argues that contemporary and Victorian biographical writing share many

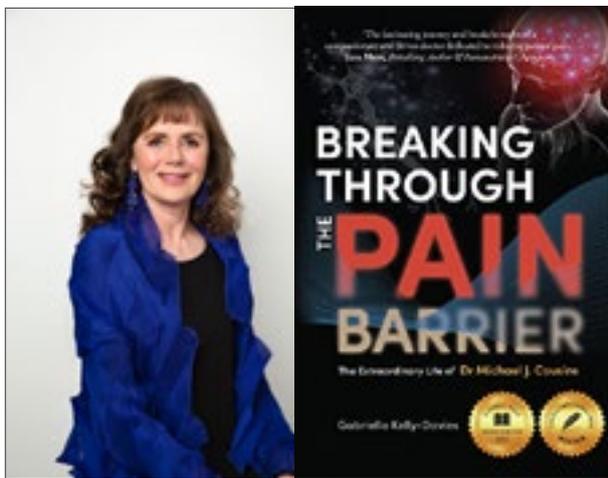
similarities and that every generation fights the battle for ‘experimental’ biography. Literary scholars Joe Law and Linda Hughes agree, claiming biographers still publish traditional ‘cradle-to-grave’ biographies of prominent people (mainly men), and as during the Victorian period, they are voluminous. Robert Skidelsky asserts that in these tomes, ‘Truth is equated with length, with “telling all,” with piling up detail on detail.’ The English biographer, critic and academic Philip Furbank believes readers expect biographies to include chronological progression and specific types of information such as dates in the same way as we assume a teapot will have a spout. He attributes the consistency of biographical writing across the ages with the belief that biographers do not want to disappoint their audiences—Furbank claims modern biographers, like those before them, strive to provide their readers with what they expect and desire and a contemporary literary biography, apart from a few superficial differences, does not seem ‘at bottom so very unlike a Victorian ‘Life and Letters’”.

Skidelsky argues that scholarly biography is becoming more Victorian in the way it approaches its subjects. He also claims the same forces shape

modern biographies as Victorian—especially the desire to focus on ‘exemplary lives’. However, Skidelsky points to what he sees as an essential distinction—‘now the example is the life itself, not what the life enabled the person to achieve. Or, more precisely, the life is the achievement; what used to be called the achievement is now only one accompaniment, a minor one, of a style of living’.

Biographical writing is evolving, and there are changes at the frontiers such as the use of hybrid narrative forms, increased diversity of protagonists and the use of fiction techniques. Biographers now disseminate their works via a multiplicity of distribution channels, including film, theatre, digital, blogs, social media and live or internet exhibitions. And the publication of biographical works is skyrocketing.

But at its core, today’s biography writing is similar to earlier eras, with a focus on exemplary men, a broadly chronological structure and rigorous research and footnotes. Still, intriguing innovations at the cutting edge continue to captivate readers, pointing to a long future for biography’s golden age.



Gabriella Kelly-Davies a Sydney-based biographer and PhD student. In 2018 she founded the boutique publishing house Share Your Life Story and has self-published over thirty life stories, memoirs and family histories for her clients.

Hawkeye Books is publishing her biography of a trailblazing Australian pain medicine pioneer. *‘Breaking Through the Pain Barrier. The extraordinary life of Dr Michael J. Cousins’* will be on bookshelves in late August 2021.

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James Layton on the Humour and Heart of Larrikin House!

QUESTIONS BY JACQUI BROWN

Hi James, Can you tell me about why you started Larrikin House?

Our schools business Learning Discovery was looking for fun, quirky Australian picture books to add to our book packs for schools. I was finding so many were so heavy & serious, mostly books that adults wanted kids to read, as opposed to books kids wanted to read for themselves. I saw the gap in the market and decided in that moment to start publishing.

What made you want to specialise in quirky, original & humorous kid-focussed books?

I believe the love of reading is up against some tough competition right now. There's loads of great entertainment options other than reading,

and have been with it ever since. Publishing is way more creative and fun than selling books, so I wish I started publishing earlier.

What does your usual day look like?

Emails, zoom meetings, more emails, more zoom meetings. Actually, it's quite fun. I wrestle new story submissions, brainstorm stories with my team that are good in concept but need help, go over illustrations, and do manuscript assessments.

I see you're expanding from picture books into chapter and middle grade – what's your vision for Larrikin in the Australian marketplace?

Long term I would like to publish across all the genres. If it's quirky humorous, then we'll go there eventually. Next stop for us is junior fiction.



If we want to engage kids in reading, then we need to stop trying to teach morals... Kids don't always want to learn. They want to get absorbed in stories that are fun.

so unless we're publishing kid-focussed books, we'll lose them as readers.

How important do you think humour and quirkiness is in engaging kids in reading?

Two words... Andy Griffiths! I first watched Andy in action with kids 20 odd years ago at school events. The kids were 100% engaged!

Humour is universal. If we want to engage kids in reading, then we need to stop trying to teach morals and make them better people in all the stories. There's no fun in that. Kids don't always want to learn. They want to get absorbed in stories that are fun.

Have you always wanted to be in publishing and education? How did you get into it?

I got into bookselling nearly 30 years ago by accident. I thoroughly enjoyed the business craft,

How many books does Larrikin publish in a typical year?

At the moment we're committed to 20 picture books a year. I need 80 titles a year for our school market, so there's room to publish more. Just need some more money.

What's your process for finding new stories to publish?

Our submissions portal runs pretty hot, so we get the odd story from that. I get the best ones through our assessment service because authors take on my feedback and come back with better stories.

From the last 100 assessments, I've signed about 8 stories, whereas I've probably only signed one story from the last 250 general submissions. Our greatest source of new material now comes from our existing author pool.

Can you talk a little about authors sharing their work with Larrikin and other publishers through editor assessments at conferences as opposed to submitting through a publisher's website?

I think assessments are incredibly helpful in the crafting of a story. Assessments from a publisher are even more vital because, from my experience most budding authors don't really understand how publishers think, and what they need to make a book financially viable. We're the ones investing up to \$20,000 to produce a book, so our opinion matters most. The best part of my assessments is the zoom meeting where I can answer questions, and help an author understand what makes a book work for me.

What's your best advice for authors who want to write humour?

If you're not funny as a person, writing humour will be difficult. If you are a bit bent, then write into that space. Go big, take risks, observe the funny side of life.

What's your best advice for aspiring authors who want to get their first book into the marketplace?

Spend 90% of your time crafting a great story, and 10% on everything else. It's surprising how many cover letters are better written than the story submitted. I can't publish a cover letter. Story is king!! Get your hook in the first 20 seconds of reading.

What do you like to read in your spare time?

I read bits and pieces of everything. Wilbur Smith, Trent Dalton and Chopper Read. Haha I love autobiographical humour the most.

Anything else you'd like to add!

When writing for kids, ask yourself: What's the buy in for the kid? Why would a kid want to read your story?

Thanks for talking to us, James!

Spend 90%
of your time
crafting a great
story, and 10%
on everything
else...



Your Own Personal Yoda?

Q&A with writing mentor Dr Jane Messer

QUESTIONS BY JACQUI BROWN

Ever wondered if you need a writing mentor, but not known what to ask? Dr Jane Messer was formerly Course Director of the postgraduate Creative Writing programme at Macquarie University. Now she's sharing her 30 years plus teaching and writing experience through her creative mentoring service. I'm thrilled she is able to share her experience with us.

Hi Jane, Could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I've been writing about my family background for my book *Raven Mother* which is a part-memoir, part-biography of my father and his mother, and it's become really clear to me how eclectic my parents were for the times. My father moved from science grant to grant in different countries. I grew up moving around, and hearing my parents' life stories, listening in when their friends come to the house and regaled them with their adventures — and being read to every night. I had dyslexia and synesthesia, and was slow to learn to read. I think that all combined to me wanting to do my own thing. That pretty much sums up my most significant influences.

How and why did you get into mentoring?

I came to it through teaching creative writing for many years, first at Johns Hopkins University, then UTS, and then for 16 years at Macquarie University where I was the Course Director of the postgraduate Creative Writing programme. Before

'Love sentences, understand how to use a comma, listen to your doubts, but also be bold.'

teaching I'd been working in the community sector and with independent publishers doing marketing and event management work, and sort of slid into teaching at a time when there were more opportunities, after publishing my first novel *Night by Night*.



Mentoring, working one-on-one with a writer, working closely with their text, giving feedback about characters, the structure, the language, everything associated with the creative text itself was a favourite part of my university teaching. So it was the obvious thing for me to continue doing after leaving academia.

What do you enjoy about it and why?

It's very rewarding working with writers to support them to develop a piece of work, learn new techniques, solve creative problems, and so on. I love the close reading part of mentoring, of working with the creative text, and thinking about how the author can make it the best it can be. I enjoy the listening, watching out for what the writer is needing— often the writer doesn't know it themselves. It's very rewarding seeing a writer become more skilful, seeing their work simply get "better".

I can get very fond of a particular manuscript too, and really want it finished and published and out in the world! It's fun to be excited about another writer's work and to share that excitement with the

author in a practical way.

What's the hardest part about being a mentor?

I always remind myself that for the writer, sharing your work with another person, an expert so to speak, can be a terrifying experience. I remind myself how very, very important this experience is for that writer, and that it needs to be a positive one. I've also worked with writers who're coming-out in their writing about their sexuality, or past trauma, or in the case of an Indian writer, coming out as an atheist. Respecting the trust the person has placed in me isn't 'hard', but it's not something I take for granted.



I can get very fond of a particular manuscript too, and really want it finished and published and out in the world! It's fun to be excited about another writer's work and to share that excitement with the author in a practical way.

Does it help your own creative work?

I'm sure it does. Not in a specific way that I can point to and say, I wrote this because of my mentoring. But yes, my writing has been helped immeasurably by the many years of thinking and working with writing 'problems' as a mentor, reader, editor, teacher. I've been very lucky in my work. There's a creative symbiosis there for sure.

Why might it be important for aspiring authors to be mentored? What about published authors?

Well, there's quite a few reasons. Firstly, you can learn a great deal with a good mentor, about technique and craft, and ideally you take those new skills with you through to your other writing projects. Those delicious 'aha' learning moments. You're working on a specific piece of writing or series of works, but you're also learning as a writer in more general ways. A writing mentor will help identify problems in the work, or talk with you about issues you've raised and you can canvas ideas, solutions, basically a mentor is someone to have deep conversations about the work with.

I'm working with a published author currently, but she's working in a totally new genre. The difference for her is that when we're talking about the work, or we're going through my comments on the page, she understands the issues more quickly and is more confident in her rewriting and revisions.

Deadlines: a mentor will hold you to them. It's great to have a deadline that isn't one you just made up for yourself. It gets people going with their work. They write more often, they write more words, and revise more rigorously.

Once your work is at a potentially publishable stage, a mentor can help direct you to appropriate publishers, agents, journals, competitions and so on. Agents and publishers are expecting very finished work from new and established authors. The industry economic model has changed and there's not the money or time for a publisher's editor to work with a writer to rewrite the 'promising' text. That's why the mentoring sector

has grown so much in the past few years; writers need to present much more developed work than they did, say, twenty years ago.

Getting a mentor costs money, with no guarantee of being published or earning it back, which can be a block for some writers.

It's true, there are no guarantees of publication. I've worked with some incredible emerging writers and manuscripts, but they don't always get published. Conversely, most writers who're published have had other readers working with them on their manuscript, be they professional writer friends, or a writing group, their agent, a mentor, or series of mentors. If publication is your aim, working with a good mentor will improve your work and thus your chances of publication. You're also learning skills and techniques that go way beyond that particular manuscript. Mentoring can be an 'investment' in your future writing, as well as the manuscript you're working on right now.

How would you recommend someone goes about choosing a mentor?

That's a good question, because how can you be sure? It's important to choose wisely, and that goes both ways – most mentors will want to see an example of your work beforehand so they can judge if they're the right 'fit' for your work. I was recently offered a military/espionage history novel and said no, because I know nothing about military

Q&A WITH WRITING MENTOR DR JANE MESSER: CONTINUED

history and there's others that do.

Look at the mentor's testimonials, and how long they've been teaching and mentoring. Are they familiar with the genre that you're writing in? So, if they're focused on scripts, and you're a short story writer it's maybe not the best fit. Ideally, you can have a first conversation at no cost, as it's important to feel you will get on at a personal level. If you can, ask other writers who they've worked with, and why it was beneficial. And get into specifics of how the mentor worked: find out if the mentor reads the text in progress closely, or if they're more oriented to talking about writing process in general. What are your expectations?

If you're just starting out, a mentor isn't the right approach. You should start with just writing, doing some short courses, maybe a university programme, or have some substantial writing already accomplished.

What's the best way for someone to approach working with the mentor – how does a writer get what they need out of it?

What an excellent question. Sometimes, of course, you're not sure yourself what it is you exactly want. Giving the mentor information about your writing experience and background is important; any publications you've had, writing courses you've done, and so on. Explain what it is that you're working on now, and what you hope to achieve: for instance, maybe you want to finish the manuscript and learn new techniques. Alternatively, you might be wanting to start a new work, and you're not exactly sure of its form. Or you might struggle with a regular writing practice, in which case talk about that and devise a schedule together that helps with that. The important thing is to begin by saying what you believe you need and want, and be open to suggestion.

How can the mentor and mentee best work together so it's a positive experience for them both?

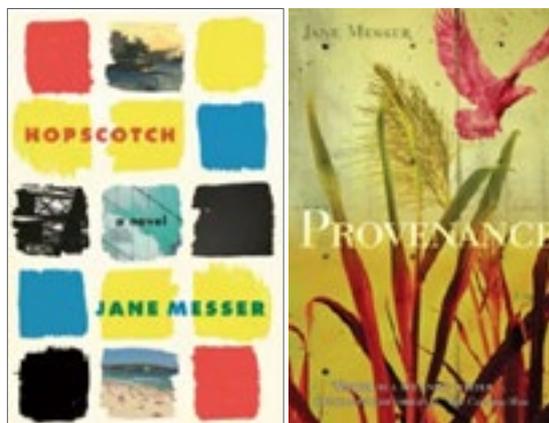
Good communication, naturally and mutual respect, it always works. Send well-proofed copy. Don't be afraid of your mentor, but don't pester with thrice-weekly emails. Ask questions, tell them what you want them to know, or ask for what you need. Your mentor will try to read your mind, but

it's not a foolproof method.

What advice do you have for aspiring authors?

Writing takes time, it is an art that can be practiced, and must be practised. It's also very time-consuming and there just isn't any way around that, so you need to find a way to enjoy yourself while working hard for many years. It takes time to develop your craft. While you're doing that read widely and attentively. Love sentences, understand how to use a comma, listen to your doubts, but also be bold. Finally, writing can be heart-wrenching and make you feel low, then high, then irritable, then elated. People don't talk about that roller-coaster much, though all these emotions are all 'normal'. Embrace them.

Thank you, Jane!



Dr Jane Messer has mentored many writers and student writers over the past thirty years in her work as a creative writing teacher, mentor and editor. She has published novels, anthologies of world literature and new Australian writing; written and produced two radio dramas; and published experimental and realist short stories. As well as being passionate about her own writing, Jane loves working with writers to help them hone their craft, explore new techniques, become confident about process, and to write the best possible work.

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Facebook [/JaneMesserauthor](https://www.facebook.com/JaneMesserauthor)

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Listen to Jane being interviewed here:

<https://soundcloud.com/mark-parry-3/jane-messer>

My Magic Bag of Ideas

BY FELICITY PULMAN

There's nothing more disconcerting than facing a blank screen (or notebook) with a brain empty of ideas.

My remedy: use a 'magic bag' of assorted objects to kickstart the imagination and set your fingers tapping furiously. You can add anything you fancy to your magic bag – even a humble pencil holds enormous potential: what if everything you write comes true? What if you can draw yourself to another reality? What if you start writing down a memory and wind up with a memoir?

I first started using a magic bag in schools during my creative writing workshops on fantasy. Students really enjoyed taking turns to pull a magical something out of the bag and showing it around while everyone jumped in with their ideas, always surprising and wonderful. I found it made a real difference to them having something tangible to see and hold rather than trying to pluck ideas out of the air. The objects don't have to be 'magical'; the best and most useful could be related to something you're already writing: a photograph, a letter, an item of old jewellery. Hold it in your hand and find out what it can tell you. It may be a memory or a kick-off point to something new. The important thing is to start getting words down, and see where they take you.



Photo Credit: Felicity Pulman

You'll see the contents of my magic bag in the accompanying photo: the colourful scarf might become a flying carpet – or contain a code or a map? On one memorable occasion when the scarf was flourished, I asked,

'What might you do with this?'

The answer came back:

'Send for the fashion police!'

But that too could be turned into a story about a gypsy, a punk singer, or a homeless woman in colourful cast-offs.

The crystal might be a precious diamond stolen by jewel thieves – or it may enable you to see into the future. The flute might summon ghosts, or induce a trance – or create a character

who loves music. The cup might represent the Holy Grail – or contain the nectar of forgetfulness – or poison! The pentagram could serve as a compass, or denote five tasks to be done to achieve 'the Quest'. Most recently, when stuck for a story, I used my 'magical pentagram' to inspire a children's story: by pressing each point the player in a game was granted a wish – not always with a good outcome! A key might unlock a magic portal – or family secrets – or ...?

Searching for a story idea? Take a lucky dip into your own 'magic bag' and start writing. You are limited only by your imagination!

Felicity Pulman is an award-winning author of novels for children, teens and adults, including *Ghost Boy*, *The Janna Chronicles* and *I, Morgana*. Her stories reflect her love of legends and fantasy, history and mystery. Book 1: *Shalott - Into the Unknown* was published in July.

www.felicitypulman.com.au



Putting Yourself Out There: A Guide to Surviving and Thriving as a Visiting Speaker

BY CINDY BROADBENT



So your book is in print—what an achievement! But how are you going to sell it? According to some articles I've read, fifty percent of an author's life involves writing and the other fifty percent is selling.

You may be lucky and your publishing house assigns a publicist to you for a short time. You might even have an agent. My publisher is a small independent one, and while very helpful with information about marketing, she can't provide a publicist. If you're self-published, it's down to you to market your work.

I haven't discussed on-line marketing, Facebook, a website or book-giveaways in this article. Instead I've concentrated on how to sell your books by being the visiting speaker for various groups including Probus clubs, University of the Third Age, and local libraries.

My second novel, *The Revolutionary's Cousin*, is set in Iran, the USA and the Illawarra region of NSW, so logically the Illawarra is a good place to talk about it. So far, each talk I've given this year in Wollongong has resulted in good sales. Recently I sold fifty-six books at one talk which was a fundraiser for cancer patients. I'm happy to say that the charity also raised a lot of money. In Sydney, usually only five percent of the audience will buy a book.

I organise bookings by emailing clubs and libraries with a flyer which includes a short biography

and information about the novels. It helps the organiser to present me to the audience with a quick, accurate introduction. So far I haven't charged a fee, being happy to have an outlet to sell my books. I'm usually paid in red wine. The favourite choice is Shiraz—the talk is about Iran, after all. I'm considering charging a fee once my third book is published.

However, giving talks about your novel involves a lot of preparation and you also need an interesting PowerPoint presentation. My first novel, *The Afghan Wife*, is set in Iran, which I visited to do my research. I have a lot of good photographs which I use in PowerPoint. If you download photographs from the internet, make sure to check the copyright before you use them.

One of my PowerPoint presentations is an overview of Iranian history up to the current political situation. Throughout the talk I refer to my novels and how I wove Iranian history into the fiction.

So, you have a wonderful PowerPoint presentation and you've got a booking. Now you need to do some careful checking. Even though you're told a laptop will be provided, always take your own. You don't want to arrive with just a USB and find the laptop you were promised isn't available.

To avoid your laptop battery draining, take the power cable and an extension cord, maybe even a power board. I take my projector in the car with

the necessary cables too. I invested in a device to forward the slides in case I'm separated from my laptop. It works well even if the laptop is halfway across the room.

If you use someone else's equipment, ask the organisers not to download your USB onto the desktop. It's a good idea to put copyright on your presentation, in case they ignore you. At the end of your talk remember to retrieve your USB. It helps to have it on a fob and you can just hang it quickly round your neck. You're there to sell books as well, and you need to get to the book table quickly. Enlist a friend to help if you can.

It's worth investing in a credit card reader from your bank if you expect a lot of sales. Half of my recent sales were by card but I also take a cash float.

Most venues provide a mic and these vary widely performance-wise. Often there's no mic stand, so you have to juggle the slide forwarder, your notes and the mic. Make sure you arrive early and note where the loud speaker is located, so that you don't make the mistake of walking in front of it and splitting everyone's ears with feedback. Always use a mic, your voice just won't carry in a large room.

You've finished, they loved the presentation and you ask for questions. Note, you asked for questions not statements or worse, reminiscences of someone's holiday. One needs to practise the art of tactful interruption to deal with them.

However, be prepared to suffer the indignity of an

audience member fact-checking you on his mobile phone. During questions a man quoted misinformation from Wikipedia at me. It pushed my tactful response button into overdrive. Someone else informed me that I had made a mistake and Iraq was really called Mesopotamia. The talk was about Iran. Recently a well-meaning person flicked the wall switch to dim the room lights while I was speaking. He switched off my lap-top and projector in the process.

Several times I've been unable to stop someone yanking the USB out of a laptop without ejecting it first. Both me and the USB survived this assault—just.

The best part of giving a face-to-face presentation is the buzz from meeting your readers, especially if you're on a return visit to a venue. I believe that word-of-mouth plays a part in selling books as much as advertising.

So, if you haven't done it, why not give it a try? If you need help with public speaking, enrol at Toastmistresses for a semester. Even best-selling authors give talks at the local library, so why not you?

Cindy Broadbent writes under the name of CINDY DAVIES. Her two novels, published by Odyssey Books are *The Afghan Wife* and *The Revolutionary's Cousin*. Her third book is set in Istanbul, Turkey, in a sixteenth century harem.

Photos supplied by Cindy.



Your Inner Critic: Lock it away so you can be your creative self

BY LIBBY SOMMER



Photo Credit: Canva

Your inner critic can drive you crazy when you're trying to get words on the page.

It can attack you and stop you writing. It tells you, 'You have nothing original to say, what made you think you could write anything anyone would want to read, your writing is crap, you're a loser, I'm humiliated, you write a load of rubbish, your work is pathetic, and your grammar stinks ...'

On and on it goes! It is essential to separate the creator from your inner critic. When you practise writing, the creator needs plenty of room to breathe, experiment, and tell it like it really is.

If the inner critic is being too much of a problem and you can't distinguish it from your authentic writing voice, sit down whenever you find it necessary to have some distance from it and put down on paper what the critic is saying, put a spotlight on the words.

Say to yourself, *It's OK to feel doubt about my writing. It's OK to be open to this.*

You can learn to cultivate compassion for yourself during this internal process by practising **Mindfulness Meditation.**

Sit up straight, close your eyes, bring your awareness to your inner experience. Now, redirect your attention to the physical sensations of the breath in the abdomen ... expanding as the breath comes in ... and falling back as the breath goes out. Use each breath to anchor yourself in the present. Continue, concentrating on the breath for several minutes. Now, expand your field of awareness to include the words of the inner critic. Turn your attention to where in your body you feel the unpleasant thoughts, so you can attend, moment by moment, to the physical reactions to your thoughts.

'Stay with the bodily sensations, accepting them, letting them be, exploring them without judgment as best you can.'—Mindfulness, Mark Williams and Danny Penman.

Every time you realise that you're judging yourself, that realisation in itself is an indicator that you're becoming more aware of the barriers to your creativity.

The more clearly you know yourself, the more you can accept that the critic is self doubt. If the voice says, 'You have nothing interesting to say', hear the words as part of the process of writing. It will change to another cycle and eventually end, and you will continue working.

In the meantime, you return to your notebook and practice your writing. You put the fear and the resistance down on the page to give room for the creative voice that follows.

Libby Sommer is an award-winning author and poet. Her most recent novel, 'Lost In Cooper Park' was published by Ginninderra Press in December 2020.

Blog: www.libbysommer.wordpress.com

Website: www.libby.sommer.net.au



renewal

To walk
with a heavy step.
Needing nothing
a credit card can buy
but wanting to be
somewhere new.

Seeing the same old things
you've explored to death.
Imagining yourself
someplace else
breathing in
a new perspective.

A regenerated self
could see differently.
But what would that do to
the old self still following
in its own footsteps?

Libby Sommer



Photo Credit: Canva

anamnesis

i reach down to gather shells
my age-spotted hand slips
between the waves
small pink fingers of the child in me
lift shells ocean glass

startled and curious
it is through her eyes i marvel
catch fleeting beams of light
golden pearl sienna emerald green

the child runs with playful waves
curling in and around her toes
surfs a 'yes' on their swell
held by core beat of the sea

she builds a sand-castle decorated
with shell and stone and seaweed
digs a moat
and walls

and walls
against the creep of tide
under bruised afternoon sky

Colleen

Keating

Connection, collaboration and continuity: a poetry publishing success story

BY JULIE THORNDYKE AND BEVERLEY GEORGE



Tanka: A form of poetry usually written in five lines, often addressing profound human emotions, such as love or mourning, can also be used to record everyday experience. Despite this genre being 1300 years old, it is surprisingly relevant to the way people think and feel today.

Connection

Fifteen years ago, Beverley George introduced me to tanka, a form of ancient Japanese poetry, at a local Fellowship of Australian Writers workshop.

I was immediately hooked! I think that it had a lot to do with Beverley's gentle way of encouraging and teaching. Not only did she offer examples of classic poems and share the modern conventions for writing tanka poetry in English, but she also showed the way to publication in the various journals around the world.

I was excited to learn about her plans for an Australian tanka journal and listened with interest as she described a publication that would be as beautiful to hold in the hand as to read. When the first issue of *Eucalypt: a tanka journal* was published in 2006, it was a joy to be included among the contributing poets.

Beverley's generous approach to teaching and mentoring Australian tanka poets has created a wonderful poetry community. Being a *Eucalypt* poet is more than just submitting to a journal – connections and collaborations have resulted which have enhanced the creative lives of many people around the country and overseas.

Our common goal—Beverley as creator and founding editor, me as second editor since 2017— is to publish a tanka journal that is Australian based but international in reach, true to the spirit of tanka, and an experience of authentic beauty in every sense.

Collaboration

The team that Beverley put together, illustrator Pim Sarti, and designer Matthew George, continue to work with me as editor to produce each issue. Pim's work appeared in issue 3 of *Eucalypt* and then with that of other artists in issues 4 - 6. With issue 7, Pim Sarti became the sole illustrator of the journal and has continued to fill this role. Matthew George does a great job with his consistently professional design and layout for each issue, responding to new challenges that arise with variations of length and page requirements.

Continuity

2021 sees the 30th issue of *Eucalypt*: a tanka journal. The longevity of the journal is due in no small part to Beverley's careful planning in the initial stages and the opportunities she provided for learning at her Bowerbird workshops. Enthusiastic tanka poets and subscribers have supported *Eucalypt* through fifteen years of publication and feedback continues to be positive as new writers discover the form.

The Distinctive Scribbling Awards recognise two outstanding poems from each issue of *Eucalypt*, selected and appraised by winners of the Awards in the previous issue. Here are some of the past selections:

casting a stone
into a billabong
broken reflections —
I return his house key
but not the dog we shared

Margaret L Grace
Eucalypt Issue 23, 2017

jasmine tendrils
climb the nursing home's wall
long and wild
after months in lockdown
my proud mother's un-styled hair

Carolyn Eldridge-Alfonzetti
Eucalypt Issue 29, 2021

beyond
the flare of city lights
our southern cross
swings up —
I find my bearings

Margi Abraham
Eucalypt Issue 29, 2021

Eucalypt: a tanka journal issue 30 (yes, thirty, can you believe it?) is brimful of the potent little five-line poems we have come to associate with the name *Eucalypt*.

It is due to our many wonderful supporters, both in Australia and overseas, that this unique poetry publication has reached such an important milestone. With over 80 poets from all over the world featured in the new issue, *Eucalypt* is still going strong.

Although often poems of mourning, not all tanka are expressions of love, loss or grief. Some are celebratory, optimistic and life-affirming, like this new poem from Beverley George.

troubling times
as each concern or glitch
spills into another
a true friend calls to tell me
there's a pink full moon tonight

Beverley George
Eucalypt Issue 30, 2021

If you would like to receive the new issue, please contact:
editor.eucalypt@gmail.com.

Thanks to all our contributors and subscribers for being part of the *Eucalypt* story!

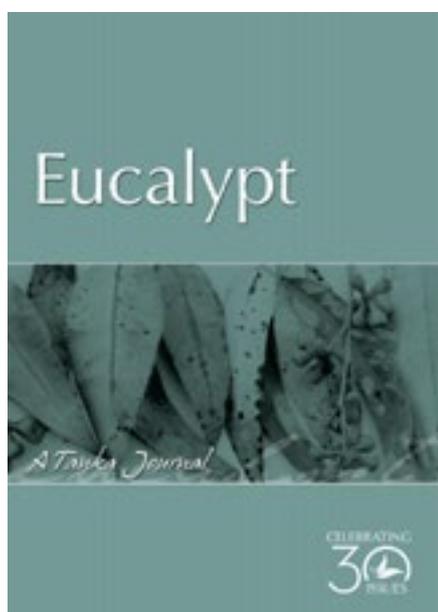


Photo Credits: Supplied

Eucalypt: a tanka journal is the first Australian journal devoted to this ancient Japanese poetry genre. Japanese waka (now called tanka) are five-segmented poems. In English they are usually written in five lines. Often they address profound human emotions, such as love or mourning, but can also be used to record everyday experience. The genre is 1300 years old, but is surprisingly relevant to the way we think and feel today.

Eucalypt is a print magazine which showcases contemporary tanka poetry, written in the English language and publishes only those poems its editors consider of the highest standard. Its objectives are to offer wider publication opportunities to tanka poets and to make more people aware of the delights of reading and writing tanka.

There are two issues per year, in May and in November.

Eucalypt receives no external funding but is sustained by reader subscriptions.

INFORMATION <http://www.eucalypt.info/>
SUBSCRIPTIONS <https://juliethorndyke.com/eucalypt-a-tanka-journal/>
SUBMISSIONS editor.eucalypt@gmail.com

Winner of the 2021 Abbie Clancy Award: Deborah FitzGerald

'I'm thrilled - it's great to be recognised, particularly in the middle of a pandemic when writers feel even more isolated,' says **Deborah FitzGerald**, winner of the Abbie Clancy Award presented by Dorothy Keyworth.

The Abbie Clancy Award is awarded to a female honours and or post-graduate student attending university in New South Wales for an abstract of an unpublished research paper on the published or unpublished works of fiction or non-fiction of an Australian woman writer, journalist, playwright or poet.

Congratulations Deborah! Read Deborah's winning abstract below.

When considering Dorothea Mackellar's poem "My Country" in the context of contemporary discourse, it is important to seek intention as well as outcome. A reading through the filter of post-colonial history suggests white privilege with all its racist assumptions and violent narratives. But a closer reading reveals complexities which create tension between the author's intention for the poem and the way its meaning has changed in the national consciousness over time. As poet and activist Judith Wright wrote in *Preoccupations* in *Australian Poetry*, when considering the work of writers, it is important to "free them... from the limitations of their time and see them in proper perspective".

Mackellar's poem demands a closer reading which looks beyond its iconic and patriotic landscape pictures to something darker. There are gothic overtones in the juxtaposition of beauty and terror in a country cast as a femme fatale, and echoes of Marcus Clarke's "Weird Melancholy" in lines that capture that strange feeling only an Australian landscape can provoke. Mackellar experienced her own demons and the poem reflected her suffering. There was also the sexual ambiguity of her complex relationship with her best friend and collaborator Ruth Bedford.



Deborah FitzGerald (left), Dorothy Keyworth (right)
Photo Credit: Rita Shaw

In 2017, the *Australian Poetry Journal* commissioned twelve Australian poets to write a response to the poem in a project called "Transforming My Country". The writers challenged the "sweet, blinkered nostalgia of 'My Country' while offering some very different realities and imaginings". I will examine the response from contemporary Indigenous poets and, by way of comparison, explore the work of an Indigenous poet born a century earlier, Oodgeroo Noonuccal and the writing of poet and activist Judith Wright.

As Mackellar was writing from a British-Australian point of view, her heartfelt lyrics about a deep connection with the land are easily overshadowed by the sheer depth of ancient Indigenous culture. Poet Kevin Gilbert, a member of the Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi people of New South Wales, wrote in 1988, directly referencing "My Country", "Despite what Mackellar has said/about the sun scorched land/you've never really loved her/nor sought to make her grand." Can a poem written at the high tide of the White Australia Policy survive another century in a country trying to come to terms with its racist past? Can it be a poem for all Australians?

Deborah FitzGerald is an author, editor and journalist, and official biographer of Australian poet Dorothea Mackellar.

Book Review

Of Breath and Blood by Dorothy Simmons

Published by Arcadia

REVIEWED BY BEATRIZ COPELLO

Of Breath & Blood is the second book of the distinguished writer Dorothy Simmons. In addition to four young adult novels Simmons has had a play: 'Night Exercise' performed by the Murray River Performing Group, as well as an extensive collection of short fiction and poetry published in literary magazines. Simmons has a PHD in Creative Writing which she completed at Melbourne University, her doctoral thesis later became her novel Living Like a Kelly.

Of Breath and Blood is a historical fiction, and as such contains facts and fiction. The plot in this fascinating book takes place at the Parramatta Female Factory in the year 1827. The factory was the destination for many of the convict women sent as prisoners to the colony of NSW. Some of the characters in this book are based on real people like the first Matron Elizabeth Fulloon nee Raine who served from April 1824 to October 1827 and the Matron Ann Gordon. The story in the book commences when Ann Gordon takes over from Matron Raine.

Early in the book the reader finds out about the hard life of the women who occupied the Parramatta Female Factory. A hint of the deprivation that the inmates suffered becomes clear when Matron Raine advises the new Matron how to control the women, she says:

"The Reverend Marsden and I hit them where it hurts, in their stomachs. We rationed their bread and sugar. It's all they understand, just ask Reverend Marsden. He knows what they're like, and yet he is a true Christian, a true man of the cloth, always reminding me that these women know no better. Licentiousness and loose living have been their lot from the cradle, the cradle Mrs G!" No wonder the women started a riot!

The writer demonstrates her talents in many ways, I was very impressed by the dialogue in the book and how these give insights into the personality of the characters. For example, in the following

paragraph we get a glimpse about Ann and her husband Robert.

"He seemed to think he had the Storekeeper job in the bag. Which was a big relief; at least she wouldn't have to waste time worrying about what he was getting up to everyday. It was a proper job, too, there'd be no more snide remarks about Mr Matron. Not that those had ever seemed to bother him, water off a duck's back. That was Robert: not an anxious bone in his body. No, things always worked out for Robert. Home and hosed."

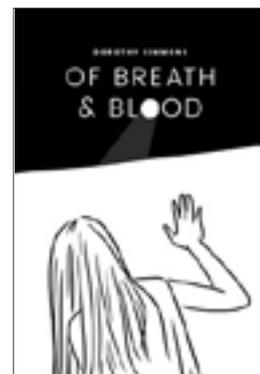
There are very interesting characters in Of Breath and Blood particularly Ann Gordon and Molly described by Reverend Marsden as violent criminals and Em a younger woman with ginger hair. There are other salient characters like Sarah, Joan and Emily.

Something else that would impress the reader is how the writer includes the character's thoughts in the middle of the narration and dialogues, for example in this passage:

"Ann looked down at her day book, then into those deep set, dark circled eyes. What now, said those eyes as clearly as if their owner has spoken. What now indeed? Ann pushed her chair back and crossed to the window overlooking the yard. Bit of distance, that's what I need ... She turned around."

Page by page we read how Ann must deal with the hungry women, their riots and their problems. She has her heart in the job and she wants the best for them, but a lot is against her.

Simmons brought to light a compelling book which, once more demonstrates her skills as a writer, resurrecting a past with its gods and devils.



Dr Beatriz Copello is a former member of NSW Writers Centre Management Committee. She writes poetry, reviews, fiction and plays. Her poetry has been published in literary journals such as Southerly and Australian Women's Book Review and in many feminist publications.

5

WRITE

Tell us about your writing

One
Question.

Five
Answers.

Every
Issue.

Got a burning question? Something you're keen to know? Want to know how other writers do it, don't do it, or what their secrets are?

Please submit your questions to the editor:
jacqui.brown@panachecat.com

And if you'd like to be asked a question, don't be shy, my email is just there, right above this paragraph! I'm very friendly, so why not put your hand up?

Lynda Calder

My writing space has been severely curtailed since my adult children took my office as their gaming space. Also, with COVID, everyone set up an office desk and left me in the lurch!

So, I have an itinerant writing space - the lounge, the dining room table, the local cafe, the park - depending on what alone space I can find.

It is important for me to be completely alone and uninterrupted to write as this helps get me into a headspace that gives me "flow".

One day, I will be able to set up a dedicated space (again) with charts on walls and reference books to hand, but I'm in no hurry because I love having my family around.



Lynda A. Calder is a Western Sydney based emerging author of middle grade and young adult adventure fiction. Her latest book is "The Enigma Diaries: Tangled Time", the last in a trilogy of middle grade time adventures. She is the Active Author: she does lots.

Facebook: The Enigma Diaries of Lynda A Calder - Active Author

@LyndaEnigmaDiaries

Christine Sykes

Most of my writing is done on my mother's pine kitchen table which had red legs and a scrubbed top. It reminds me of the times when Mum and my aunts told stories about their lives over tea and scones with great hilarity. I imagine the stories are embedded in the wood grain, even though we removed the red and varnished the table many years ago.

When I write, I sit at one end of the table, with a view across our combined kitchen - dining - lounge-room and out the window to the trees. On windy days, I catch glimpses of the sea winking at me as I type on my computer.



Christine Sykes was a community worker and senior public servant. Being raised in Albert Street, Cabramatta provided the basis for her memoir, Gough and Me.

Her novel, The Changing Room, which was inspired by Dress for Success Sydney (DFSS), received the fiction award from the Society of Women Writers NSW.

www.christinesykes.com

Facebook: /christine.sykes.585

ANSWERS

space and what it means to you.

Susan Ramage

My writing space is one end of a glass enclosed verandah with sliding doors that open wide to embrace birdsong drifting in on the breeze. It is sunny and warm in winter and cool in summer. I can step outside the sliding doors onto a small terrace and fully immerse myself in the outdoors, inhaling the unmistakable aroma of approaching rain.

The verandah is on the first floor of a low rise strata built on high ground and affords a panoramic view over neighbouring homes and gardens. It is quiet and peaceful. I see the calvacades of clouds shape shift across the sky, watch the birds soar, flirt and flutter and observe the trees changing through the seasons. It is here I connect with Nature which inspires me. It is here that I rewild my soul and soothed from the busyness of life, write.



Susan Ramage is an award winning author who has published both prose and poetry. Her first book, *Kokoda Secret*, was described as "a national treasure". Her love of nature is celebrated in *The Urban Escapees* and in much of her poetry.

www.susanramage.com

Robyn Elliott

It is 3.30am. I haul my pink dressing gown over polka dot pyjamas, add sheepskin slippers then tip toe down the hall. I have a husband with dementia who has been sick and in need of care since 2015. I can't disturb him and the early hours are MY time to write.

I by-pass my office which is fully equipped with a radio broadcast panel, microphone, and floor-to-ceiling shelves of books and music cd's. then shut a sliding door behind me.

My laptop sits on the dining room table. I open the document file and select the most recent manuscript, an 85,000 word memoir.

I read the final chapter, discard one paragraph then sit for some time contemplating the depth of the night time sky. No beam of light shines through, no inspiration from afar. I understand it is enough to write what is true for me.



Robyn Elliott joined Society of Women Writers as an Associate in 1967 and is now a Life Member. She was awarded first prize in Berkelouw writing competition in 2017, and won second prize in SWW Non-Fiction competition, and has many other writing credits.

Rita Shaw

My writing space - hmm, I have no space! While I do have a desk in a designated study, it is the messiest place on earth, piled high with 'stuff! My brain, in computer-mode, is perfectly ordered, logical and highly disciplined but this does not translate to maintaining a space where I can work, write, create.

My laptop sits on a coffee table in a nook off the lounge room. Not the most comfortable or ergonomic setup but it is mostly quiet, with a view, when it's not raining, south down the coast to North Head and observing boats quietly at anchor in the 'puddle' at the bottom of Pittwater - this is my 'thinking' space, a moment to ponder.



Rita Shaw Rita was a Bid Manager, writer, editor and proof reader in Sydney and is a professional wildlife photographer. Her travel memoir, *A Rhino Lady in Africa*, recounts experiences over 12 trips to Africa, people she has met and special encounters with animals. Rita's rhino collection was featured on *The Collectors*.

facebook:

[/Rita-Shaw-Author-105187247536958](https://www.facebook.com/Rita-Shaw-Author-105187247536958)

Looking Back at our recent events!



Photo Credit: Canva

APRIL 2021

PHOTOS, LETTER AND MEMORABILIA WORKSHOP - FINDING INSPIRATION FOR YOUR FAMILY HISTORY OR MEMOIR WITH WENDY FREW

Family history is a rich source of meaning for many people, and for those of us with a literary bent, the desire to record it can be hard to resist.

We may know certain facts about our ancestors but it can be difficult to understand people we have never met, or who died when we were young.

At the April 2021 workshop we explored the power of family letters, photos and memorabilia to bring family history to life.

Family letters, especially those written in wartime, flesh out the dynamics between parents and children, and between siblings, that we might not otherwise discover. They also point to the education, class and world view of the letter writers, and what was happening in the world around them.

Old photos, too, can tell us much about our ancestors – how they liked to be seen by others, for example, and how they wanted to be remembered.

The things valued by our ancestors, whether they are handed down by the generations, or rediscovered years after the death of the original owner, represent a tangible link to the past.

Items of jewelry, objet d'art and holiday souvenirs might seem like small items but they can help tell a bigger story about our families, with their allusions to dislocation and diaspora, war and peacetime.

The letters, photos and items brought to this workshop brought forth a wealth of powerful connections to the past, and prompted thoughtful discussion about what we know and what we still have to discover about our family history.

In time, I'm sure there will be at least one or two powerful memoirs or family histories to emerge from the wonderful material that was shared that day.

JUNE 2021

POETRY WORKSHOP WITH MARGARET BRADSTOCK

On Wednesday 9th June I facilitated a workshop on the theme of environmental poetry. We had 13 enthusiastic participants and an impressive variety of poems to discuss, ranging from appreciative nature poems to the more challenging protest against global warming and climate change. I requested (and received) copies of the poems ahead of the meeting so I could assess them more thoroughly, and foreshadow areas for discussion. At the workshop each poet read her circulated poem and group members offered responses to aspects they liked, anything problematic or unclear, and suggestions for improvement if needed. Criticism was constructive, spot-on and friendly, and many points raised coincided with my own impressions, which were summed up at the conclusion of each reading. Written comments were delivered to the poets.

I felt the workshop was a success, and hope each of the poets felt the same. Thanks go to Pippa Kay for all the organisational details, including emailing the poems to me and ensuring there were enough copies printed to go around. It was very much a hands-on workshop and an enjoyable group experience.



Our Winter to Spring Programme

August
11

WORKSHOP | ELISABETH STORRS: THE TELLING DETAIL

AGM | ELECTION OF 2021/2022 COMMITTEE

ANNOUNCEMENT | WINNER MEMBER WRITER'S GRANT

MEMBER GUEST | KELLY VAN NELSON: CHANGING THE WORLD WITH THE POETIC WORD

KEYNOTE SPEAKER | ANNE MARIE NICHOLSON: THE JOURNEY FROM JOURNALIST TO NOVELIST

September
08

WORKSHOP | SUSAN GEASON: CRIME WRITING

MEMBER GUEST | COLLEEN KEATING: LOOKING FOR OLIVE - THE RADICAL AND IDEALISTIC LIFE OF OLIVE MURIEL PINK

KEYNOTE SPEAKER | JULIE JANSON: A WOMAN WRITER'S JOURNEY - THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE OF WRITING AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS THEMES

October
13

WORKSHOP | RITA SHAW: MAKING WORD WORK FOR YOU

MEMBER GUEST | JAN CONWAY: SKIMMING THE SURFACE - EXPATS IN KIRIBATI

KEYNOTE SPEAKER | SAMI BAYLY: ILLUSTRATING NATURAL HISTORY

November
10

WORKSHOP | ROBYN MCWILLIAM: CHARACTERISATION

SPECIAL EVENT | NATIONAL WRITING COMPETITION AWARD CEREMONY

Special Note:

When Decima Wraxal first submitted this poem for inclusion in the magazine, it seemed that, within Australia, we were past the worst of the COVID pandemic. Lockdowns and contact tracing had kept infection numbers low, and vaccinations were underway. Yet at the time of sending the magazine to print, we find ourselves beginning another lockdown period, with new clusters emerging across Australia due to the virulent Delta variant.

Decima's poignant poem is dedicated to all healthcare workers to whom we are deeply grateful for your tireless work in keeping our communities safe.

Eye of the Hurricane

BY DECIMA WRAXALL

Gift shop examination rooms. Chapel beeps, *ICU*.

No routine surgery, another Covid ward. Tents
command Hospital entrance. Elderly Hispanics

and blacks, admitted by the score. *Their houses stretch to fit
another guest, social-distancing a myth.* Diabetes, obesity,
heart disease, sepsis. Now, whole families grapple Covid.

Few ventilators, induced comas. Proning brings others
precious air. Lives lost at horrific speed, young and old.
Essential workers from supermarkets, buses and trains.

*We juggle exhausting levels of care, working in the eye
of a hurricane.* A patient's second infection; he's intubated.
Nurse sighs. *In New York things were grim, but this is worse.*
A monitor **beeeeps** into the silence. Flat lines on the screen.

Women's Ink! Magazine: ISSN 2203-3017

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