

# UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

## Creative Writing Newsletter

September 2017

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**H**ello again. Another year of Writing group meetings begins.

On page 2 is an uplifting account of Prudhoe & District U3A's Writing group combining with its Photography group. The results have gone out to the local community. It just shows what can be achieved when we work together.

Do not miss the reference on page 5 to the silent film produced by Arun Scribes. The film is brief, but such an entertaining way of advertising their books; guaranteed to cheer you up.

Please note U3A National Office has moved....see above right.

**Writing prompt:** *On pages 3 & 4 are accounts of Study days. Jo Brooks & I have presented the material at 5 different venues. The exercise people seem to enjoy most is to tell the Adam & Eve story from the point of view of Adam, Eve or the serpent. Try it as a 10 minute write with your group.*

**Marcia**

### Change of contact details ?

Please let me know if your postal, or e-mail address or group leader changes, or you no longer wish to receive Newsletters, I will alert Sharon Ahtuam at National Office, who sends them to you.

Emails are the simplest way to collect Newsletter entries. Please find someone willing to copy your work & email it to me if you have no access to a computer.

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

Marcia

## Writing group / Digital Photography Project

Pat Stott

Prudhoe and District Creative Writing group began in 2013. We are nine and our aim is to stretch our minds, learn new things and have fun. Over time we have enjoyed workshops on poetry, comedy writing, monologues and had sessions with a local author using WWI artefacts to inspire us. In 2015, with branch support we published an anthology which sold very well. We meet for 2 hours once a month, to discuss our previous month's writing and do short impromptu exercises.

In March we were approached by the Digital Photography group who suggested a collaboration project of pictures and words. We agreed this would be exciting to be involved in. The Photographers presented us with a set of pictures: views, still life, portraiture, erotica, history and humour. Each of us chose a single picture. We asked not to know anything about the pictures or the photographers to enable imaginations to run free, but were asked to try and put ourselves into the pictures when writing about them.

After selecting our picture we had a month to do the writing, and in May Bill and Moira Wooldridge, Photography group convenors attended our meeting. I think it safe to say they were amazed at the variety of writing and interpretations of the photographs. They were able to give us some information about the photographers and how and why they had chosen to take the pictures.

Two scarecrows in a garden planned their escape, a reflection in a window spawned a creepy sci-fi story. A poem about the sadness of dementia was provoked by a photograph of a couple at their kitchen table. Abandoned VW cars reminisced about past exploits. A washing line of elves' clothing gave an insight into the sadness of infertility but with a positive spin. A row of empty neglected houses was chosen because it triggered memories of student days in Ealing. A stile crossing a country path gave an opportunity to speculate on what might lie ahead., the lock on an old trunk, on what it might contain. A pose by a scantily clad lady wielding a vacuum cleaner - well she was the owner of The Spanking Clean Domestic Agency talking about some of her favourite clients.

We have gained from this collaboration. We had used pictures as triggers before, but this time we made a conscious effort to get into our photograph. We learned from the photographers about how composition can alter perception, what gives the picture life' and how and why each was taken.

We are hoping to mount a small exhibition of pictures and stories in our local library and also to read out some of them at future monthly meetings for everyone to enjoy. A very worthwhile project and one I am sure will be repeated in the future.

## Writing Workshop Cardiff, 15th May

Richard Garman

Grab your reader they said. All we need is a plot, some characters, a beginning, a middle and an end. Sounds easy doesn't it? Eighteen of us gathered together, led by Marcia and Jo from our neighbouring U3A in Porthcawl, to explore and experiment with guidelines and hints on how to set about writing a short story. The key emphasis, however, was on enjoying the experience and giving it a go.

Marcia and Jo took it in turns to talk to us about various aspects of story writing, illustrated by familiar examples of books, writers and real world instances of good and bad practice. Many of us have heard the adage to show rather than tell, but I for one find it difficult to understand. A good rule of thumb is that adjectives tell while verbs show, especially if they are clever verbs rather than simple, obvious verbs. It can be a good exercise to ring all the adjectives in your piece and see whether you can eliminate them. Verbs which relate to the five senses are particularly good for showing.

With a quick trip around the Garden of Eden, we explored the use of different voices and dramatis personae. We were randomly allocated a scenario, and had some wonderfully funny and varied offerings from class members.

We need to think about the number of characters to present in a short story without weighing down our reader with too many confusing names and personalities. Stereotypes can be a valuable basis for establishing characters but it pays to be clever in polishing and individualizing your unsuspecting victim. Write a CV for your character being careful to avoid "cardboard" characters.

We moved on to conflict as a powerhouse for a story. Jo gave us a classification from man v. self through man v. nature to man v. supernatural. What does your character value? What is their goal and how far will they go to achieve it? You are writing fiction, so don't worry that what you are writing is a lie!

Dialogue can be tricky, but powerful, especially if it employs conflict. Dialogue should be fit for purpose and shed light on your characters. Intersperse dialogue with linking prose, but keep the whole thing concise. We were given a good example of a piece of dialogue which was cut to half its original number of words, whilst delivering an improved passage of play.

Finally sit down with what you have written, read it out loud. Edit, revise and prune. Don't be afraid to ditch some of your pet paragraphs. Enjoy having a go and just let it flow ... before using a simple, self-critical critique.

## KENT CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP

John Baker, Swanley and District U3A



In June, aspiring writers travelled to Hextable for a Creative Writing Workshop. The day had been arranged by Penny Collins, Creative Writing group leader for Swanley and District U3A in partnership with our Regional Trustee, Hilvary Robinson. The course was led by Marcia Humphries (U3A Subject Adviser) and her colleague, Jo Brooks. We were not only grateful, but impressed that they had made the journey from South Wales to Kent. The programme was comprehensive and included the components of successful creative writing.

The introduction gave a flavour of the course content being entitled "Recipe for a Short Story". We then began to investigate in more detail the essential ingredients of story writing. Marcia spoke to us about the importance of plot and character. Jo followed with a presentation on point of view. The delivery of the course was made effective by the opportunity to participate in ten minute writing exercises. This allowed us to consolidate and employ the advice we had received. Choosing from a list of stereotypical characters we prepared a brief description. This underlined the importance of a writer knowing the character.

The point of view exercise was challenging, but rewarding. Retelling the story of the Garden of Eden from the points of view of Adam, Eve and the Serpent was interesting and a lot of fun! The ability of the writer to "show not tell" was discussed. This is possibly one of the greatest challenges facing the creative writer. However, Marcia provided lots of ideas and strategies to help us.

In the afternoon we looked at conflict and dialogue. Conflict is a significant aspect of story writing. Jo gave us a useful exercise which required us to construct a dialogue between opposing siblings. It concerned Richard, Sarah and a valuable family violin. Fortunately, we did not need to provide a resolution! The exercise reinforced the importance of dialogue in moving a story forward. It also reminded us to read our dialogue out loud to ourselves before sharing it with others.

The final component looked at the need for editing and revising our work. There was lots of practical advice and valuable guidance.

It was a very worthwhile day. We all enjoyed the opportunity to talk with writers from U3As from the counties of Kent and Sussex. We certainly left with feelings of enhanced confidence, enthusiasm and ambition. Our thanks go to Marcia and Jo for sharing with us their knowledge, experience and passion for writing.

## NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

**Arun Scribes****Patricia Feinberg Stoner**

Things were buzzing at the Arundel Museum in April as Arun Scribes launched their latest books. A steady stream of visitors ate cake, drank Prosecco, chatted & bought books from authors: Rosemary Noble, Jane Weymouth, Angela Petch & me. Angela, who was showcasing her latest novel, *Now & Then in Tuscany*, & its prequel *Tuscan Roots*, sold out of one of her books. I took along my books, *Paw Prints in the Butter*, a collection of comic verse, & *At Home in the Pays d'Oc*, a story of two accidental expatriates.

We had worked hard promoting the books & the launch. A radio broadcast for Talking Newspapers was followed by an online launch on the Arun Scribes Facebook page, & a silent movie now to be seen on YouTube. Rosemary commented, 'It was quite a learning experience but we had a lot of fun & met a lot of interesting people along the way.'

Rosemary was showcasing her two Australia-set historical novels *Search for the Light* & *The Digger's Daughter* & presenting her latest book, *Ranter's Wharf*, set in Grimsby in the early days of the industrial revolution. Anyone who would like to know more about the Scribes will be welcome to visit their blog: <https://arunscribes.wordpress.com/> The film, *Three Ladies on a Bench (To Say Nothing of the Dog)* can be seen at <https://tinyurl.com/mf8foay>

**Beccles****Mary Wright**

Just formed in June, we are still discovering what we want from writing. We hope to explore our skills in writing pieces & to give each other support & encouragement. We've agreed to keep the group to 10 max to ensure everyone has chance to share their work.

**Cheltenham****Jean Dormon**

Our group of 5 men, 5 women has been meeting monthly for 8 years. Members submit titles anonymously on 2 slips of paper & we have 2 titles to choose to prepare our pieces for the following session. This leads to titles like *The Essex Volcano* & *Hawaiian Igloo*, producing extraordinary, hilarious stories. One member, Christine Griffin, has enjoyed success in competitions & read some of her work at The Cheltenham Literature Festival & on local radio. She recently published a book of short stories, *The Road Ahead*, the theme being it's never too late to change. Another talented member is Sue Cross, who has published 2 novels set in the 1970s: *Tea at Sam's* & *Making Scents*. All books mentioned are available on Amazon.

**Kenton & District****Paul Burns**

We've ended our 2nd year by contributing material for an amateur theatre production. Argosy Players plan to stage *The Angina Monologues* in October & asked us for short stories written in the 1st person that would lend themselves to stage adaptation. We submitted 14 of which 6 were chosen.

## Ten killer tips for writing crime fiction

Pauline Rowson

In 2012 the *Guardian* ran an article asking writers for their 10 rules for writing. I penned my top ten tips for writing crime fiction & looking back on them they still hold good with one or two little tweaks & additions. They are:

1. Always have a pen & paper with you, in every handbag, shopping bag, pocket, & beside your bed. You never know when an idea might strike. A Dictaphone might also be useful. Gone are the days when you got funny looks for talking into a machine or talking to yourself walking down the road. Everybody's at it now. So you can record yourself on whatever portable device you choose, but take care, best to keep your spoken thoughts to safe points of the plots & characters.
2. Travel by public transport. If you've got a free bus pass so much the better, you can stay on all day & save on heating bills at home. You see & meet great characters for novels. You also hear intriguing conversations which can be a fruitful source for crime stories.
3. Listen into other people's conversations in cafes, bars, buses, trains. But don't be too obvious or you could end up being the victim of a crime yourself!
4. People watch. Register body language, describe it, not in every detail but a gesture here, a twitch or mannerism there can add colour to your characters.
5. Write for yourself rather than trying to write something to suit your publisher, agent, readers, friend or social media.
6. Don't read reviews, or if you do, learn to take the rough with the smooth & then carry on writing for yourself & for enjoyment, not to please the woman from Woking who claims your novels are utter tripe.
7. If writing on a word processor, back everything up, again & again & again.
8. Take a break. You need time to 'think' your novel as well as 'write' it.
9. If you get to the stage in your novel where you're bored with the story, then your reader will most certainly be bored too. Chuck it out & start again. Or as Raymond Chandler once said, bring in a man with a gun.
10. Accept that writing is hard work. You don't get a pension plan or regular salary. Nobody is forcing you to do this, so don't moan, enjoy it....or give it up!

*Pauline Rowson 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 life as a crime writer. She would be ideal as a speaker at Study Days and can be contacted about any of this via her website: [www.rowmark.co.uk](http://www.rowmark.co.uk) The website is worth a look (you can 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.*

*In May, Patricia Finberg Stoner wrote to tell me she'd been to one of Pauline's talks. She said, What an excellent talk that was! Pauline is an excellent speaker, very friendly and approachable. One thing we all took heart from was that it had taken her 18 years to find a publisher.....hope for us all!*

*Marcia*

## Anyone for a Roundabout?

Dave Neale, Carrick (Truro & Falmouth, Cornwall)



Want to try something different & fun? I'd recommend writing a roundabout story. A number of people agree to take part - typically six in our group. Each writes the first part of a story, then that goes round the others, who each write an additional part before the almost completed stories arrive back with the original authors, to write the endings & give them titles. The stories are all being written in parallel - in our group on a monthly cycle, which means that with six members, there are six stories in circulation & the whole process takes seven months.

It's unlikely you will produce great pieces of literature, so it's important not to take things too seriously. Roundabouts are meant to be fun. The normal reaction on receiving a partially-completed story to continue is, "How do I get out of this?" It's certainly an excellent way of developing plotting skills, & learning how to escape the messes we sometimes write ourselves in to.

At the conclusion of the roundabout, we usually have a day-long session (often in the lead up to Christmas) where each author reads out the whole of the story they have started & completed, with a little discussion & some joviality. We'll also compile the stories into a booklet, & on one occasion, published it on Kindle.

A few notes on the practicalities. You need to agree:

the length of each part (we currently use 750-1000 words);

the time allowed to write each part (ours is monthly);

the file format (we use MS Word);

the way in which the stories circulate. Circulation in order of author name is the simplest, so Ann always passes to Bob, Bob always passes to Charlotte, & so on. The problem is that continually receiving a story from the same person over several months tends to get monotonous, so we circulate in a pseudo-random order designed to minimise those kinds of repetitions. (It's actually quite tricky designing one so if you want a copy of mine, let me know.)

We also request that members commit to staying in the roundabout until completion, since leaving disrupts the process.

If you'd like a copy of the simple instructions we use, or the distribution list, please email me. [dave.neale@btinternet.com](mailto:dave.neale@btinternet.com)

## 10% off Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre Courses for U3A Members

Tŷ Newydd is the National Writing Centre of Wales. Established in 1990, thousands of aspiring and emerging writers have since passed through its iconic teal front door.

We specialise in residential creative writing courses. Every week we welcome a new group of individuals from Wales, the rest of the UK and beyond to our home. They spend time together under the tutelage of professional writers, taking part in workshops and one-to-one tutorials, enjoying readings and basking in the inspirational setting of Tŷ Newydd. Participants also help in the kitchen, where home-made meals are prepared with local ingredients.

Our programme features a mix of residential courses and retreats which cover many genres, forms and styles, including poetry, fiction, non-fiction, scriptwriting, nature writing, illustrating, storytelling, yoga and more.

We choose our tutors and guest readers carefully, and welcome some of the best practitioners in their fields to Tŷ Newydd every year. Present and past tutors include Carol Ann Duffy, Gillian Clarke, Pascale Petit, Paula Meehan, Mark Cocker, Menna Elfyn, Patrick McGuinness, Kaite O'Reilly, Imtiaz Dharker, Niall Griffiths, Daljit Nagra and Malachy Doyle.



Our historic house was the last home of former Prime Minister David Lloyd George. It still retains the recognisable touches implemented by architect Clough Williams-Ellis, famous for his quirky Italianate village Portmeirion. Nestled in a quiet spot between mountain and sea, we're the perfect haven to retreat to and spend some time being creative. It is also possible to hire Tŷ Newydd privately for a corporate course, a holiday or a special occasion.

To browse our 2017 course programme, see our website [www.tynewydd.wales](http://www.tynewydd.wales), or telephone us on 01766 522 711 or e-mail [tynewydd@literaturewales.org](mailto:tynewydd@literaturewales.org) for more information or to request a print version of our programme. If you'd prefer to write, the address is

Ty Newydd,  
Llanystumdwy,  
Cricieth,  
Gwynedd.  
LL52 OLW

We will happily offer U3A members a 10% discount on our courses with the code **U3A10**.



## USEFUL INFORMATION



### TOP TEN

In *Sources* magazine in June the U3A Resource Centre published a list of its 10 most requested items. At 3 was the online Creative Writing Course and at 6 the online Writing Poetry course. The Centre is open Mon-Thurs 9.40 to 4. Tel 020 8315 0199  
resourcecentre@u3a.org.uk

### MORE ON CREATIVE WRITING

This month's issue of *Sources* (see above and top right) has Creative Writing as one of its themes, so well worth reading.

### ON-LINE

If you are a member of the U3A Creative Writing on-line forum, U3ACW, please consider adding to the folders there. In particular, the folder about writing for children and young people remains empty. We are not looking for examples of work but hints and tips on how to produce it.

### JUST CAN'T WRITE ON THE TOPIC?

Do your group members have difficulty writing on the topic/prompt they have been given? This can be simply because they have too much time to think about it and to have those scary thoughts that they can't in fact do it. Paul Burns, who manages U3ACW gave me a tip to counteract this. You make sure that you give the prompt 10 minutes before the end of the meeting and get everyone to write on it for 10 minutes straight away. So by the time you reach home you have the start of something you can work on and polish by the next meeting.

**Sources:** Issued three times a year, included in postal deliveries of *Third Age Matters*, OR free from Third Age Trust, simply ask. (Address P1 or U3A website)

**U3A Online Writing Courses:** see U3A website

**U3A Resource Centre:** A collection of material (not books) to borrow free of charge, apart from return postage.

email: [resourcecentre@u3a.org](mailto:resourcecentre@u3a.org)

**Handbook for U3A Creative Writing Groups**—from start-up to the finished product.

£2.50 (inc p&p) from National Office (address P1) Cheques to The Third Age Trust.

### ARTICLES FOR NEXT ISSUE



**Please send me items, however brief, in the form of attachments to an e-mail unless there is no-one in your group who can do this & you have to send items by post.**

**Please include:** group news, comments, ideas, useful websites, magazines, books, competitions, anything worth sharing.....

**U3Awriting@hotmail.co.uk**  
**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE**  
**15th December**