

September 2024

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This edition is going out rather later in the month than usual, so it can include the winners of the Third Age Trust Short Story Competition. Congratulations go to:-

1st Place: **Demon Eye** by Carol Whitehead of Southport u3a

2nd Place: **One-Cent Boy-a story from Africa** by Veronica Wood, of Thameside u3a

3rd Place: **A Room with a View** by Alice Wakefield of Flintshire u3a

The winning stories are on the national website, as are all which were shortlisted from the 450 entries. From inception, the competition has been organised by Alison May, who also sends out these Newsletters. Recently, she has been helped by Katie Hull, who left the Trust in August. I am sorry to say that Alison will also be moving on next month. Many thanks to both of them for the tremendous support they have given to Creative Writing over the years.

Since the last Newsletter, the u3a Festival has taken place successfully. See page 4.

I am delighted to say that novelist Susanna Beard has agreed to write regular articles for the Newsletter. The first, entitled Books with Hooks, appears on page three.

Writing prompt :- Red (*thanks to Gilwern group for this.....see page 4*). **Marcia**

Change of contact details ?

Please let me know if your address or group leader changes, or you no longer wish to receive Newsletters. I will alert u3a Office, which sends them to you.

E-mails are the simplest way to collect Newsletter entries. Please find someone willing to copy your work & e-mail 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.

If you'd prefer a Word version of the Newsletter, please let me know.

Marcia

Thinking of Writing Your Memoirs?

Lichfield u3a members have created a template that could help. The writing pack is called 'Everyone has a Story to Tell' & provides an ABC guide to getting started.

Step 1 helps you think about creating a title page.

Step 2 provides timeline grids you can fill in, covering decades from birth to now.

Step 3 encourages you to write freely, choosing what you want to record.

The Appendices contain a lot of useful information.

If you want to compile your story on line, a digital copy is on the Lichfield u3a website under Projects/Memoirs: u3asites.org.uk/Lichfield/page/131291 Printed copies of the guide, template & appendices cost £8.50 +p&p from Veronica Birkett veronicabirkett7@gmail.com

Book Review:-

The Crime Writers' Handbook, by Douglas Wynn

Crime writers are a gruesome bunch, always looking for ways to kill someone. I'm frequently asked how I research this aspect for my crime novels. I consult with police, pathologists, forensic scientists & scene of crime experts. I obtain information from newspaper & magazine articles & the internet. I keep a ring binder containing forensic facts, murder methods & autopsy reports & hope the police never raid my house or I might find myself being arrested as a serial killer!

One of my treasured research sources is an excellent book called The Crime Writer's Handbook-65 ways to kill your victim - by Douglas Wynn. In 1984 Douglas Wynn took early retirement from a career in research chemistry to concentrate on writing & pursue his interest in true-life crime & forensic science. This book is an essential guide for any crime writer, or those interested in crime. My copy is much thumbed & as a result is falling apart.

The book is divided up into many sections including: methods of murder, methods of detection & forensic science (some of the latter have now been enhanced by new technologies) & other aspects of crime, for example, confessions, coroners & conspiracy to murder. Each page is broken down into sections. For example on Methods of Murder, Blunt Instruments, he gives an introduction, the effects of the murder method, real life cases & fictional examples. He also scores each method out of ten on the grounds of availability, effectiveness & detectability. The book also has a section on methods of detection including decomposition, bruises, bloodstains, ballistics, rigor mortis, lividity & stomach contents.

Sprinkled with examples from real life & fiction this book provides a wealth of information & ideas for any crime writer.

Pauline Rowson

Pauline Rowson is a regular speaker at u3as, talking about life as a crime writer. She can be contacted via her website: www.rowmark.co.uk The website is interesting (you can also sign up for her free newsletter) even if you don't want to contact her. She 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.

Pauline's regular article for this Newsletter appears on page 6.

Some readers may remember that the May 2017 Newsletter carried an article by Susanna Beard. She had just written her first novel and has gone on to write 7 more. The next 'The Wonder Drug' is due out next month. I am delighted that Susanna has agreed to write a regular column for the Newsletter. The first appears below.

Books with Hooks

Susanna Beard

I've been thinking recently about the concept of a 'hook' in writing, specifically with reference to novels (obviously!). I was prompted towards this train of thought by the book I'm currently reading, which has such a good 'hook' that I can't put it down. I'm staying up late, forgetting to feed the dogs (although not for long, they're excellent communicators!), thinking about it when I should be immersed in my own story.

A 'hook' for a book is an idea, or a premise, that 'grabs' the reader so they want to read the story, or want to keep reading it. It's what drives the narrative. What's the 'hook' in a news story? "Man goes for a walk" – no hook. "Man goes for a walk and never comes back" – there's the hook. It starts you asking questions – why didn't he come back? Where is he? What happened? It makes you want to know more, to read on – hence, the 'hook.'

For a novel to be a success these days, it needs a brilliant 'hook.' It needs to stand out in a compelling way in a highly competitive market, and needs to deliver on its promises. You might say, that makes thinking up a new story idea even more difficult, as there's no such thing as a new idea. But what's great about being an author is that we all know, if you give an idea or a topic to a random group of people and ask them to write a story about it, each one will be COMPLETELY DIFFERENT. It really will, because people are different. They have different lives, different backgrounds, families, jobs. Their values and their experiences are different. They think in their own ways. They write in individual styles that don't mirror each other. At all! And that's what's so great about being an author. This book I'm writing might not have the hook that will make it a best-seller — but it might! It might just catch the moment, the zeitgeist, the imagination of people living at this time, in this world.

And if it's not this book, it could be the next one. I live in hope, and I write on!

After a long career in public relations, Susanna took the six-month Writing a Novel course at the Faber Academy, and her first psychological thriller was published in 2017. Since then she has published seven more, with another to be launched in October 2024. All are available on Amazon. She writes dark, contemporary stories with strong female characters, often set in interesting places. She is a regular interviewee on radio, at literary festivals, in libraries and at book club meetings. She is willing to speak at monthly meetings or help with workshops within, say, an hour's distance from her home in Marlow (Bucks).

Visit Susanna at www.susannabeard.com; email her on info@susannabeard.com; like her page on Facebook: [@susannabeardauthor](https://www.facebook.com/susannabeardauthor); follow her on Twitter: [@SusannaBeard25](https://twitter.com/SusannaBeard25); or on Substack: susannabeard.substack.com.

GROUP NEWS

**Gilwern****Kay Blackwell**

We discussed Red as a writing prompt. Immediately, there were suggestions of passion, blood, temper & so on, but in the end we had fascinating stories including those about ghostly corrections made in red ink, an impulse-bought red dress, a red letter day, & hair colouring gone wrong. We had no murders, no violent scenes, & definitely no hot sex (come on, this is u3a after all!).

Bury St Edmunds**Gayle Wade**

I joined in February 2023 after coming across stories I had written in my teens & twenties. It has been great to start writing again. Members have been very encouraging & appreciative. Some of them have won competitions, had work published in magazines, or published books. They introduced me to the idea of self publishing, & I have self-published a collection of short stories 'The Lights of an Oncoming Train', which is available on Amazon.

Bee Writers (Beeston, Nottingham)**Helen Stewart**

In Nottingham; we have wonderful places to visit in easy reach by bus, car & on foot. In June, we visited Wollaton Park, an Elizabethan Mansion & surrounding deer park, for a poetry treasure hunt. This consisted of taking 20 photos, close-up shots, middle distance & long shots of the Hall & its stunning grounds. The photos were to become inspiration for writing poetry based on Wollaton Park. By the time we finished, everyone was buzzing with what they had seen & experienced. Slowly, finished poems are being submitted to our newsletter & the range of subjects (decay, wildlife, the survival of the Hall) shows what a successful morning it was.

Much Wenlock and Broseley u3a announce the 5th Wenlock Olympian Society Short Story Competition 2024/25.**Jo Jackson**

Our judge this year will be Julia Jarman. Julia has written over a hundred books for children of all ages and the very popular adult series 'The Widows' Wine Club'. <https://juliajarman.com/>
Competition Launch: 2nd September 2024

Closing date: 28th October 2024

Any theme. Maximum 2,500 words

Winners will receive £150, £50 or £25 together with a prestigious Olympian gold, silver or bronze medal to be presented in March 2025

For details go to : [www https://www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk/wenlock-olympian-society-arts/creative-short-story/](https://www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk/wenlock-olympian-society-arts/creative-short-story/)

Live, Laugh, Learn (& Creative Writing)... at u3a National Festival**Lynne Carroll, Crediton.**

18th to 21st July: 3 days of discovery, fun and friendship. I was one of over 1000 u3a members from as far afield as Cornwall and Scotland who joined together to make the first National Festival in York a huge success. A vast programme of workshops, lectures, sports and music sessions offered something for everyone. My two 'Writing Winning Short Stories' workshops were oversubscribed, and each participant threw themselves wholeheartedly into the sessions, men and women alike. I, in turn, was enthralled by two historical lectures and a fun 'Juke Box Jury' evening session. Sunshine sparkled on the lakes of York University campus and sparkled in the eyes of all attendees. Well done to the Yorkshire u3a groups who organised and marshalled this fab event.

Recommended Books, Publications & Resources

Marcia

Back to Creative Writing School, by Bridget Whelan

This is like having an informal chat with an expert. It shows you the basics & gives you confidence you can write.

Wannabe a Writer, by Jane Wenham-Jones.

This book is chatty & full of humour, but packed with sound, practical advice, delivered in a way that makes the book a good, enjoyable read.

A Novel in a Year, by Louise Doughty

A frank and funny approach to the practicalities and techniques of novel writing.

From Pitch to Publication by Carole Blake

Everything you need to know to get your novel published. Carole Blake is a literary agent who knows the publishing world inside out.

Creative Writing Handbook (u3a)

Ide-

as & exercises on the elements of creative writing. Useful to work through with a group. Download (free) from the Creative Writing Subject Adviser's page on the u3Aa website.

Leading a Group

Teaching Creative Writing by Helen Stockton, is available on Amazon. This book explains all possible aspects of leading. Chapters include:-

- Are you teaching or facilitating?
- Gathering ideas, information & resources.
- Planning the first session.
- Giving feedback.
- Setting boundaries.
- Managing the group.
- Dealing with inappropriate/offensive behaviour.
- Tackling poor attendance.
- Dealing with complaints.

Books on Play Writing

The Art & Craft of Playwriting by Jeffrey Hatcher

The Dramatist's Toolkit by Jeffrey Sweet

Free On-Line Resources

TED Talks Brief talks on lots of subjects. Make a search for TED talks on Creative Writing. The initials stand for Technology, Entertainment & Design.

MOOCS (Massive open on-line courses) Make a search for MOOCS on Creative Writing.

Future Learn Short, free on-line courses supported by the Open University, some aimed specifically at Creative Writing. Highly recommended.

How did you learn to write a novel? Did you attend creative writing courses? What makes a successful author? These are questions I am often asked & while there are no hard & fast answers there are some things that contribute to becoming a successful author.

The only way to 'learn how to write' is to write, & also to read. Reading helps you to understand what shapes novels. Writing courses & seminars can be both instructional & motivational. The lecturers (often authors themselves) can pass on useful tips & assist with the technicalities of constructing characters & plot. They can give advice on how to write dialogue & pass on the tricks of the trade as well as provide guidance on publishing. Often such talks can be inspirational & motivational. For me, while I didn't attend any creative writing courses, I did go to seminars given by authors, which I found helpful.

The key to successful writing is very much a process of trial & error & finding what works for you, of keeping an open mind, & not being afraid to experiment. Try writing from different points of view, i.e. from a female viewpoint & then a male viewpoint, in the first person & then third person. If you don't have a clear genre in mind then try different genres.

All writers approach their work differently so there is no right or wrong way of writing. Some authors plan their novels from start to finish, others improvise as they go along. I tend to do the latter. I start with an idea, often inspired by a location, I work up sketchy profiles of a couple of characters, often the victim in my case as I write crime novels, & then I get cracking on the novel & wait for the characters to start talking & acting, which in turn drives the plot & a shape begins to emerge.

Writers need to have a keen interest in humanity, along with good observational skills & an ear for conversations. Watch people's body language, see how they move, react, speak. Observe conditions – the weather, scenery, street scenes. Absorb sound, smells & taste. How can you add that to your writing? Be patient & persistent, also learn how to be selective. A tenth of that information & research you have gathered will be used, maybe even less.

All authors should have an open inquiring mind. Once you open your mind to ideas they can come thick & fast from anywhere – that overheard conversation, that snippet of research you've unearthed, a place you have visited or something you've seen or experienced.

Read & learn about the nuances of language, how switching the order of words can change their meaning. Look at the impact of how words look on a page & then how they sound when read aloud. Do they tell you anything about the atmosphere or about the character?

While you can learn technique, no one can create a 'voice' for you, that only comes with practice & experimentation.

You also need to be self-disciplined; after all, that novel has to be written, there is no magic wand to wave so it will appear on your computer. Writing involves many hours, days, months, years even of sitting down & putting words on to a computer screen or paper. Then you need the critical ability & ruthlessness to edit & polish.

Above all though you need to enjoy the art of writing & creating for your own sake. If publication comes, so be it. It might be a bonus for you but it might not be essential to every writer. Being deemed to be a successful author could be writing for the pure pleasure of doing so.

There's also a book review by Pauline on page 2. Her contact details are given there.

If you have undertaken any creative writing courses, you have probably been advised to keep a 'writer's notebook' with you everywhere, all the time. Many authors strongly advocate their use.

What is a writer's notebook?

Just as it sounds, it is a notebook where you note down anything you come across during the day which you feel may come in useful for your writing.

Names, overheard conversations, use of words, observed behaviour, amusing or surprising incidents, quotes, the list is endless. In Marks and Spencer recently, I stood in a queue behind a woman who incessantly nagged her husband. Without being too obvious, I made a mental note of her mannerisms, the tone of her voice, her expression and her stance, noting them down soon afterwards. There is the basis of a future story. Much of the content of the stories we create uses something from our own experiences or observations.

Notebook or Index Card?

I recently read an article which advocated the use of index cards instead of a notebook. Although I haven't swapped to this new concept yet, I can see the advantages:

Writing on an index card provides the opportunity to sort them into categories, eg. characters, names, incidences etc, rather than having them randomly accumulated in a book. Also, unlike a book, they never run out.

For many years I have used Post-its to create mind-maps for stories and to keep track of characters and story lines for writing novels, but I am warming to the idea of replacing my beautiful suede-bound notebook with a few index cards.

A possible study day for your group

How to Read (Contemporary) Poetry & Enjoy it.

A poem can feel like a locked safe to which you do not have the combination or key, creating a feeling of impatience, the urge to read quickly and get it over with. But there are a few conventions, a few 'rules' which can unlock the safe and open up a whole new world of pleasurable reading alongside the novel and short story.

Bert Flitcroft, has huge experience as a poet, running workshops and giving readings both locally and on the national stage, but says he now finds more pleasure (and satisfaction) in opening up the joy of poetry to wider non-poetry audiences. Contact him if your group members would like him to speak to them.

Contact for Bert : email bflitcroft@btinternet.com
www.bert-flitcroft-poetry.com Tel: 07583 362969

Bert was Staffordshire Poet Laureate 2015-17 and has three collections of poetry published. He has been Poet in Residence at the Southwell Poetry Festival and has performed at a number of major national festivals including The Edinburgh International Book Festival & The Birmingham Literature Festival. He has worked as resident poet with the Wedgwood Collection at the V&A, as resident poet with the prestigious R.I.B.A exhibition 'The Road Less Travelled' and recently as part of the University of Keele project 'Labelling the Museum'.

STUDY DAY SPEAKERS

Patrick Forsyth (Maldon & Dist) has had numerous books & articles published. He has spoken at u3as on "A Journey into Print", about his struggle to get a light-hearted travel book published. He has been a tutor at a variety of workshops for (aspiring) writers. He can be contacted on: patrick@touchstone28.com

Author Anne Ludlow is available to speak to u3as &/or to work with South East Region groups, in person or by Zoom. Anne can cover general writing, writing novels & self-publishing. Let her know what might suit & she will try to fit in! www.anneludlowauthor.com
anneludlowauthor@gmail.com

Jo Livingston, u3a Living History Adviser, will talk to your group (however large or small) by Zoom on historical letters & documents.... why some have survived, often by chance, but some intended to survive have not. The talk is called Write it Down, & you can contact Jo at jo_livingston@hotmail.com

NEED HELP GETTING PUBLISHED?

Dr Alan Corkish,(Maghull & Lydiate) has experience as a senior editor & in typesetting & cover design. He is willing to advise u3a members or groups (including editing) free of charge. www.erbacce-press.com

Patricia Feinberg Stoner (Arun East) offers a free taster editing service to members writing or planning a book. Patricia, whose own books have won awards, has set up Perdisma Edits, a proofreading, copy editing & creative editing service. She will take a look at the first 1,000 words of your book.

patriciafeinbergstoner@gmail.com
Facebook (Paw Prints in the Butter) Twitter (@perdisma). Website is www.perdisma.com

Player Playwrights has provided space for writers to try out work since 1948. Professional actors read your work before a knowledgeable audience. This London-based group also holds regular play competitions & talks with agents, casting directors & theatre professionals.
www.playerplaywrights.co.uk
tonydiggle@cainct.co.uk



Handbook for u3a Writing Groups

Available to download free from the Creative Writing Subject Adviser's page of the u3a website. Lots of exercises & material to use with groups.

u3a has a Facebook group where members can discuss writing & share books they have written. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/137742514769904>

COMPETITIONS

Free e-mail bulletin Chainlinks is a good way to keep abreast of what's on. Email Steph McGill & ask to be put onto the mailing-list. artswest@cheshirewest.gov.uk

WRITING PROMPTS

There are lots on the website www.creative-writing-beginnings.com

Items for next issue.

Please send me items, however brief, as email attachments, unless there is no-one in your group who can do this & you have to send 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

Marcia

