

ink

Self-Pub Magazine

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Emerging Writers & Poets

Disconnecting Connection

Skin Deep

A Caribbean Jewel

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POEMS

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Foreword

Welcome to ink issue 2. Our aim is to give writers and artists the chance to publish their work. ink is a completely non-commercial, community venture. We hope you enjoy the works featured here, and please feel free to email us if you'd like more information about any of the authors. selfpubaus@gmail.com



Skin Deep

There is more too black than the
colour of my skin
it is my long-lost ancestry,
that gives me the edge
on those who would judge me
by the shade of my colourless skin,
colour does not speak,
we give it meaning.
I choose my meaning,
in good faith,
deeds not words,
love not hate,
peace not war.
If you must judge me,
then do it on my terms
no skin-deep theories,
but deeds not words,
love not hate,
peace not war.
I rest my case,
for now:
stance
and tough attitude.

By Wilfred C Roach



A Caribbean Jewel

Dedicated to the late Derek Walcott

I heard a soft whisper carried on the
warm
Caribbean night air,
with a fragrant hint,
that foretold a Jewel
bright as a bright night star
passing into immortality.
They say his soul flew high, high, high,
Through jagged crestfallen folds of
the green laden Piton Peaks,
on his beautiful island of St Lucia,
graced by the sun's warmth
his face reflected in the deep azure sea.
His profound intelligence,
produced works full of theatre and
poetry
his poet's wisdom from a distant
unknown place.
His sonorous voice replied from a place
far removed
from our knowledge,
resembling in its timbre
and rich depth the holding of another
time.
Destiny had called him and not forsaken
him.
We who are left to ponder his poetical
gifts
are in his tailwind
savouring his words forever.

by Wilfred C Roach

Organ Control

by Jack Fringe

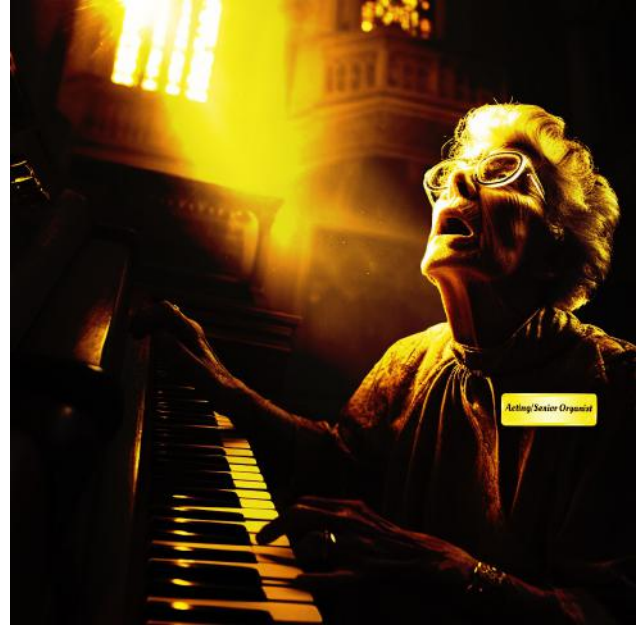
Prior to the Senior Organist becoming ill, Mrs Clampton had dreams of being the lead organist and prayed that Miss Fitzsimons would retire early or even take extended holidays. But those prayers were left unanswered. Miss Fitzsimon was often praised in the Church Flyer. And occasionally parishioners would run up the gallery stairs to glimpse at her manipulating the sacred ivory keys. Of course her junior was jealous.

As second, Mrs Clampton's duty was to play the organ at minor masses and pauper funerals, but she wanted more. She admired her own talent and knew that to get to the top position she would need to pray harder. And she did, visualising her senior develop an ailment. But then in her darkest moments, she hoped it would be cancer or even a car accident. Heavy guilt caused her to change that request and she'd be happy if she just passed away in her sleep.

Her prayers were answered.

Miss Fitzsimon's illness had kept her away from Church for some months. Mrs Clampton grew more impatient and worried that the Senior Organist might live for another year – and she'd still be in the 'acting' role. She knew she was a far better organist than Miss Fitzsimon, and according to her personal diary, she offered parishioners a much better recital. Even the Bishop commented that her music lifted the hearts and souls of the congregation.

Then it all happened so quickly, thanks to a German Baroque composer. Mrs Clampton played Pachelbel's Canon in D Minor at the main Sunday mass. The Bishop wept as that piece was his most favourite music ever – something he'd let slip when he met Mrs Clampton at the Church fete. Through a visiting Priest the declining Miss Fitzsimon learned her understudy had played the disgusting Pachelbel's Canon in D Minor – a piece she despised. It sent her into such a rage



that she had heart failure and passed quickly to the next. Fortunately the visiting Priest was on hand to give her the Last Rights.

Mrs Clampton, now as Senior Organist, performed that same piece at Miss Fitzsimon's funeral, much to the delight of the living.

(Mrs Edith Clampton appears as a minor character in Jack's book Get Rid of Glenda)

Christmas in July

Light the beacon fires
Farewell the waning sun
The folk of Oak depart
The Holly people come

Burn the yule log
And feast and have good cheer
Share round the wassail cup
For Wintermas is here

by Anon





The Lunch

In the waning luminescence of twilight,
 A beacon, a sanctum of solace,
 Emerges, a monument to shared tales,
 Stitched together by motes of spices,
 And symphonies of seared morsels.
 Here lies the domicile of together,
 An interwoven tapestry of souls,
 Bound by an eternal embrace,
 Where strangers sift through the tableau of lives,
 Breathing in the whispered vows of communion.
 Let us traverse the galleries of this art,
 Casting shadows on the pristine cloth,
 Under the watchful gaze of the moon,
 With fingers tousled in each other's stories,
 As we share the opulence of dreams and sustenance.
 In this haven, the alchemy of spirits permeates,
 A marriage of earth's bounties, And the artisan's craft,
 To forge a shared experience, a momentary kinship,
 A fleeting touch of hands reaching for the bread.
 As we untether our souls in the tapestry of tastes,
 Allow us to paint a canvas of memories,
 With the vibrant hues of spices,
 In the sanctuary of this place's embrace.

by Robert Costa

Writing

We write with our friends,
 We write in our sleep,
 We write in the rain,
 We write in the heat,
 We write in the dark,
 We write in the light,
 We write with our hearts,
 We write with our might.
 We write for the world,
 We write for ourselves,
 We write to be heard,
 We write to be seen,
 We write to make sense,
 We write to make a change,
 We write to be free,
 We write.

by Robert Costa



The Foreigner in My Hometown

by Conchita GarSantiago

I've been to cities that never sleep. I've been to places that hadn't been mentioned to me before, outlandish places.

I mingled with different people. Different from me. I learned new habits. I learned new customs and how to respect them.

When it was time to go back home, I stopped in cities in Europe. Europe that used to be big and foreign, was now small and home, familiar and recognisable.



Eager and happy, I arrived in Spain, to my hometown. Looking for my very personal treasure, my memories, my background, my past.

Sadly, I discovered my town had betrayed me. It didn't keep my memories. It didn't keep my hideaways.

The hospital I was born in, wasn't a hospital anymore. My first school didn't exist and my high school had been transformed. As was my university. My town that was said by outsiders to be dull and grey now had a glorious rainbow all over it. The many historical buildings that used to blend unnoticeably, were as if on display now, fresh and bright colours in its architraves and cornices with a clean facade allowing them to stand above anything else in powerful domination.



Old buildings that were knocked down, made way for beautiful avenues.

Shops that just showed their merchandise were now flashy and stylish, with neon signs blinding whoever dared to look at them.

Empty, open spaces that served for young people to sit and sing, around a guitar, now had colourful flowers and big trees.

Visitors happily walk around the town, open-mouthed, marvelling at buildings and avenues. I also happily walk around the town, open-mouth, marvelled mouth as I go down the streets that witnessed my first steps. But, while I praised how the ugly duckling became a beautiful swan, I looked for my favourite spots and couldn't find them.

Where Mum took me to see the toys I was going to ask from Santa, where I hid with friends tasting, for the first time, the burning of a cigarette, where I had my first kiss, where I went to celebrate with friends.

It was more beautiful, but it wasn't my town.



The seedling

by Julie Howard

With each swing of my legs, the old single bed creaks.

I could say I can smell six things, but he'll want to know exactly what they are. I close my eyes and count. Apples – one. Kerosene – two. Candle wax- three. Blood and bone- Four. Blood and Bone!! Is it really?

I do wish he'd come back.

I twirl my butterfly net in my hand, anxious to be out exploring the allotment.

What can he be doing?

Rain-streaked newspaper peels from the walls. 'Newspaper's good insulation, lassie.' Uncle Bill always says.

Oh, do hurry up, Uncle Bill! I can't wait to see if my carrots are ready.

The door scrapes across the floor catching on the torn lino. I leap up and I'm beside him in a twinkle.

'Well? What can you smell lassie?'

I give him a huge hug, burrowing my head into his flannel shirt and say, 'Earth, leaves, worms, smoke and you Uncle Bill. I love the smell of you. Oh, and apples, kerosene and candle wax and Uncle Bill, is blood and bone really blood and bone?'

He laughs and says 'Yes, yes, you're a canny lassie. Are yer ready?'

He hands me a basket woven with twigs and we fill it with my carrots and potatoes.

As I rove the garden beds, I find a new crop, small shoots pushing through the soil. But they're stiff. Lifeless almost. No leaves just pale, yellow stalks.

'Uncle Bill, Uncle Bill. Come and look.'

'Oh, those things. Spaghetti seedlings. Don't touch. Quick growing. Ask yer mum to bring yer over next week. They'll be ready then.'

I plead, 'Mum, mum, we have to go the allotment, today. PLEASE Mum please! The seedlings will be ready.'

When we arrive I rush to the veggie patch. He's right. Long strings of spaghetti have grown from small leafy twigs.

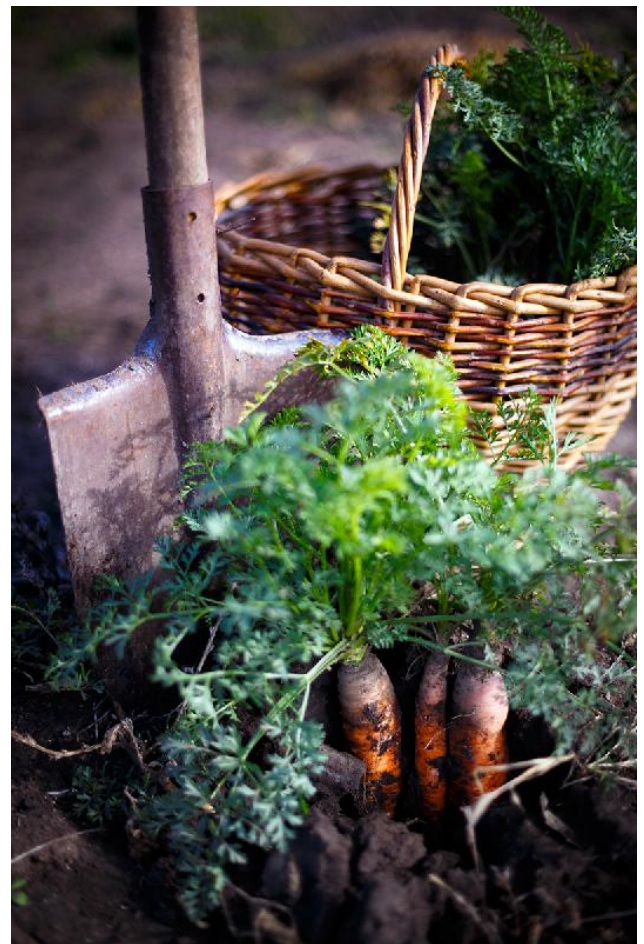
Mum shakes her head and says, 'that brother of mine needs his head examining!'

'Oh, Uncle Bill you're amazing.' I breath.

AND then he says. 'April Fool!'

Nothing is ever quite the same again.

This story was written for the Spill The Beans "Foolish 400" challenge



A Challenging Man - The Story of the Man Named Wolff

by Larry Allen

The Man was seated in one of the cramped little reader's rooms at the 'Place of Mysteries'. Calming his breath, he started to align his own spiritual energies with those of a Great Lady who was wise with the mystical gift of Tarot reading. The Man had visited this store on many occasions through the years of his journey into the Darker Light, to buy esoteric books or to find a certain type of sacred stone to enhance the incantations which he planned to use in a sexual scene.

Sometimes he would choose a talisman for his long-term slave to wear, from the impressive display which the store always had in their cabinets. Many different readers worked in the store, as well as other types of mystics and spirit healers. The Man would seek their services whenever the Otherworld required, or requested breeching, or some other complex personal problem had arisen in his life or in the lives of his trainees.

The Great Lady unwrapped a multi-coloured Cambodian krama scarf, revealing a set of Rider Waite tarot cards, which she handed to The Man. He closed his eyes, centred his thoughts and let the cards for shuffle through his fingers. He placed the deck back onto the table, reverse side up and cut it, pointing to the right-hand group as the place from which they should start the reading. As the Great Lady selected cards from the pack and placed them into their designated positions in the spread, The Man cast his eyes around the small room in which they sat. He noticed the cheap curtains on the window behind her, shimmering with the bright morning sunlight. The painted walls were beige and bare, except for an American native dream catcher hanging on the wall beside them.

Despite the beautiful weather outside and the sweet incense aromas coming from a small thurible on the table beside them, he was feeling desolate. "Do those things work?" The Man asked, pointing to the dream catcher.



She glanced up from the cards and said "Rather too well I'm afraid. I keep a dream catcher here to trap people's nightmares, which sometimes come up for discussion in the tarot readings. But then it gets muddled and I have to cleanse it and say a blessing over it in the moonlight, to set it all right again."

Returning her attention to the tarot spread which she was laying onto the table between them, she said, "here we have seven of the most beautiful cards now, some of the most powerful cards in the deck. This means that the completion of a life task has come and now it is time for the flowering of an earned reality. I also see a regenerative companion spirit which is now right here, with you, in your current soul embodiment on Earth.

"Yes, the most beautiful cards, many from the Major Arcana. But there is also much heartache here. I can see that a very large price has been paid, some sort of ransom even." The Great Lady said, as more cards were placed into the spread.



The Man said, “How do I tell you this? I don’t know how to tell you this... I’ve basically spent most of my adult life immersed in the language which is only used within my own circles. It’s so ingrained into my way of thinking that I find it hard to speak outside of its frameworks sometimes. We are also living in the times of Babel. One word means one thing to one person, but something completely different to another person, and then something else again to a third person.”

The Man had a Leather S/M dilemma on his hands. It is always impossible to explain such things to people outside of the context of the Tribe itself, because the language, the emotions and the passions, don’t translate very well into the knowledge systems of the wider world.

“Nevertheless, I shall do my best to make the translation for our divination today.” said The Man. “In the building of a Master, by which I

mean, the creation of this embodied spirit who is here now with me on Earth and in the creation of the mythology of myself as a Leatherman; I have worked with, on a very deep psychic level, men whose identity has been fractured in one way or another. These are the companions of the journey into the life of the Darker Light, the life which we call Leather S/M.

The Great Lady asked, “So are you saying that you are not the Master?”

The Man laughed. “Oh dear... You see, we have become lost in the translation already! I think that the best explanation, is that I am a Master, as I have learned and earned the skills of being such. I am an embodiment of that concept and that would be a literal and actual achievement in my life. From that state, I have also earned the bestowment of the title ‘Master’ from my comrades and colleagues in the Tribe. However, consequent to that issue in life, there is a second bestowment, a spiritual state which comes into play.

We call this spiritual phenomenon, ‘The Building of a Master’, or more commonly, becoming ‘The Man’. This refers to the psychic Master, or the spirit form of the Master, which we also seek to embody into our lives. There are many other issues and essential energies which come with the pursuit of that elevated state of life. One amongst them is this magnetic ability to attract companions which the presence of the spirit Master requires for its own, or his own, purposes, as well as for whatever desire I may hold for myself within the overall situation. It is something like that. We call it Beast-Lock.

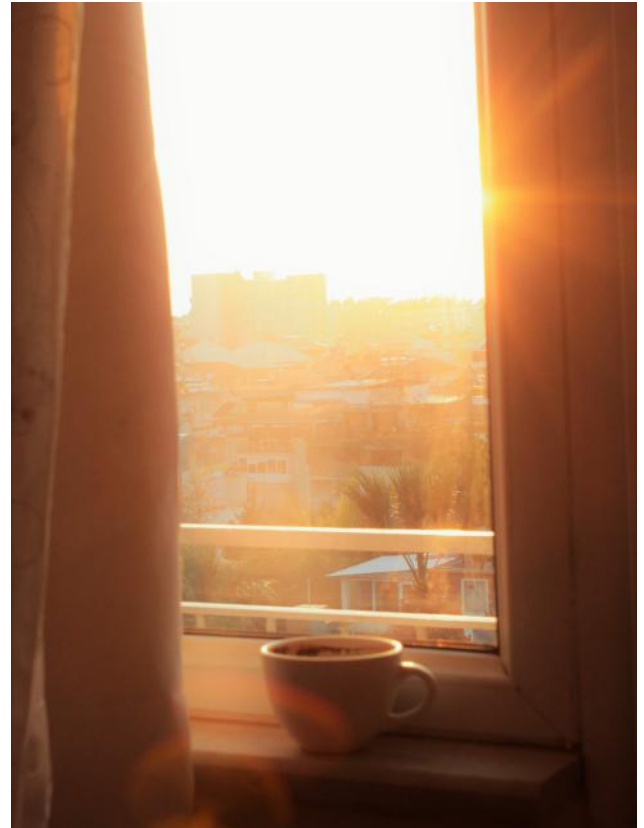


The Melody of Synchrony

To see light,
Don't need to look for the sun
Open the curtains!

To see love,
Don't need to look for the fire
Make the fire!

by Rymos



Transcendence

Transcendence is where you become
transparent,

Become water when you want to swim
Become wind when you want to swing
Become dirt when you want to play with
mud
Become invisible when you want to make
love naked.

by Rymos

Inspiration

Water seeks its path
Finds pores
Empty spaces
Fills in the gaps

When you listen to Verdi
Reading Goethe or Rumi
Exploring wind in Van Gough's
And compose, write or draw

That's not an inspiration
But an amusement
It's not original
But a copy of a masterpiece

Inspiration is the voice of the universe
Only is heard when one is ready
A light comes to the dark corner
Only when the curtain is open

by Rymos





Wildcard

by *Adelaide Hunter*

Simon Gentle opened the door and tossed the lifeless body into the alley. He quickly surveyed up and down the street, took one last glance at the bloodied man splayed carelessly on the bitumen and closed the door. Not good for business, he thought. Simon was the caretaker - the one who took care of business from time to time in the back of the little cafe just around the corner from the Pink Panther in Kings Cross. Most of the time, business hummed along swimmingly. Everyone knew the rules and played their part. Occasionally though, a wildcard would be thrown into the mix and disrupt the well-oiled machine of the criminal underworld.

Simon's stomach grumbled and he checked his watch. The boys should be here soon to clean up the mess in the alleyway and everything would be sweet. As long as that new detective wasn't sniffing around. Detective Locke. Their informant down at the local cop shop tipped them off earlier in the week. According to the

source, this new copper had an unbroken record of twenty-seven consecutive arrests leading to successful prosecutions. The local cops were all bent, so this outsider was brought in by the commissioner to straighten things out. Unlike the local cops, this new one wasn't on the payroll yet and was therefore an unknown quantity, a potential wildcard.

Another growl from Simon's stomach reminded him to eat. He washed his hands and face before entering the cafe for food. Murder always made him hungry. When Simon entered the room the other patrons in the cafe stopped eating and stared. It was deadly quiet all of a sudden, like the establishment was holding its collective breath. A family of four eating breakfast at the sunny corner table gaped at the huge figure occupying most of the doorframe.

The little boy with red hair whispered.

"Mummy, is that a giant?"

His mother shushed him and glared at her husband while the children inched closer to their parents.

"Eat up kids, we need to finish here," said the father, his left eye twitching.

Wildcard (cont'd)

The son opened his mouth to question this but when he saw his father's stern look, he put his head down and polished off his food. A priest in full clerical garb, reading a newspaper at a table near the door, stubbed out his half-finished Benson & Hedges extra mild, downed his black coffee and exited. The family weren't far behind. So before long, Simon had the cafe to himself. And that was how he liked it.

The familiar clinking of cutlery and china coming from the kitchen was comforting. Simon studied the menu chalked onto the blackboard in careful script while tucking the spotless white napkin under his chin. It didn't take long before a double meat burger with extra cheese, chips and an extra-large cafe latte appeared before him. A bottle of Heinz Tomato sauce was sitting next to the salt and pepper shakers and he squirted a sizeable amount of it onto one side of his plate, near the chips. The pool of red pleased Simon and he smiled.

Now that's what I call a balanced diet, he joked to himself.

He grabbed the juicy burger with both hands, opened his enormous jaw around it, teeth hovering over the soft doughy bun, when a police badge flashed before his eyes.

"Mr Gentle? Mr Simon Gentle?"

Simon frowned. Nothing got between him and his food. He took a savage bite of the burger and shovelled in a few chips while they were piping hot. It went down in a fraction of a second.

"Who's asking?" he said, before taking a second bite, head down, totally focussed.

"We'd like you to come down to the station," the detective said, nodding to the junior officer to cover the back door.

"What for Pet?" Simon asked, dabbing the shiny spots around his mouth like he was hosting a high tea. Large blobs of grease began to spread on the crisp white napkin.

"We just want to have a little talk. A witness reported you throwing a man - a Mr Terence Taggart, outside this very establishment not more than 30 minutes ago."

Simon licked his lips and reached for the sugar bowl, adding two mountains of sugar to his latte before stirring it.

"Mr Taggart has now disappeared, leaving a trail of blood in the alley," the detective continued.

Simon took a sip of his latte then cut a particularly long chip in half, stabbed one half with his fork, salted it and dipped it in the pool of tomato sauce. He ate that half then stabbed the second.

"We would like you to accompany us to the station and assist us with our enquiries," said the detective.

"Yeah?" Simon snorted and squirted more tomato sauce on the plate, "Well, that sounds like some kind of make-believe story sweetheart. Better get back to your knitting."

He returned his concentration to the remaining half chip, doused it in salt and sauce then brought it to his mouth.

BANG!

The gunshot blasted through the air like a thunderclap, echoing off the walls and reverberating through the space. A high-pitched ringing screamed in Simon's ears snuffing out the clatter of cutlery from the kitchen. He smelt something burning and his right foot was hot. He looked down. There was a bullet hole through the floorboards exactly one millimetre from his shoe. The wood was smoking and there was an eerie stillness. He heard the detective's voice cut through the silence, sharp as a biker's blade.

"I don't believe we've been formally introduced," she said, replacing her gun in its holster.

Simon looked up at her for the first time and saw a pair of amused blue eyes. She held up her badge again and continued.

"It's Locke. Detective Locke."

The junior officer was by her side now, cuffs at the ready.

"Officer Clink will assist you to the vehicle."

Wildcard.

Ubud Revisited

by Gerdette Rooney

The business of “Wellmania” is thriving in Ubud, Bali, where one can de-tox, cleanse and meditate the days away at a fraction of the cost in Australia. Along with digital nomads tapping into the cloud to the waft of bougainvillea and under the beady eye of Hindu deities, the town is awash with yoga practitioners and sadly, noisy scooters.

I first visited Ubud in 1985, lodging with a family on Monkey Forest Road where electricity was unknown and the children acted as human scarecrows in the vegetable patch. My daily shower consisted of scooping cold water over myself from the mandi adjacent my modest room and at dusk the patron brought me an oil lamp to write by. Each night, the family would inform me of local ceremonies happening and I would often accompany them to the temples. It was very inclusive.

You can imagine my reluctance to revisit nearly forty years later, not wishing to disturb my fond former memories. However, I was keen to meet up with my backpacking niece who had just completed her yoga teaching course and I determined during my four days stay to uncover an authentic Ubud amidst the tourist frenzy everyone warned me of.

My accommodation in a typical Balinese family compound right in the town centre, was an absolute gem and the ideal opportunity to witness daily family life first-hand whilst contributing to the local economy. Behind the temple-like street façade of imposing stone carvings, stretched a garden with various pavilions called bale, each used for different domestic purposes. Small guest rooms were scattered throughout - the premium ones secluded in exotic foliage surrounding the pool. The architectural layout is not random but preserves a Balinese cosmic order. No matter how early I rose, grandfather greeted me with a serene toothless grin and the fresh offerings of fruit and flowers were in situ on the family ancestral shrine.



Ignoring many of the trendy organic restaurants with Sydney prices, we embraced the local warungs to get our taste buds salivating and practice our few words of Bahasa Indonesian which is an easy language to learn. The cuisine includes six flavours to stimulate the senses – sweet, sour, spicy, salty, bitter and astringent. Bali’s signature dish at any time of day is nasi campur, a dish of steamed rice with mixed ingredients.

My favourite kickstart to the day was the famous bubuk injin (black rice pudding with palm sugar, grated coconut and coconut milk). Forgo the latte in favour of a luwak coffee, made from the world’s most exclusive and expensive coffee beans. It may not be to everyone’s taste as it is named for the indigenous civet cat that feasts on ripe coffee cherries and the intact coffee beans are harvested meticulously by hand from the animal’s droppings, producing a particularly pungent brew. In one café, the nocturnal animal was fast asleep near our table and was badly in need of a hose down!

It is well worth visiting the Pulina Agro tourism plantation outside town to witness the process itself. This beautiful place doubles as a medicinal garden and tea plantation and at the end of the tour a tasting tray with the various teas and coffees on offer can be enjoyed with a view over the rice paddies.

The best and quickest mode of transport to get around is to be whisked away on the back of a scooter or call a Grab driver – the Bali equivalent of Uber.

Ubud Revisited (cont'd)

The cultural highlight of my stay was a visit to the Agung Rai Museum of Art in the centre of town. Named for a local private collector of Indonesian and ex-pat art for many decades, the vast collection is housed in exotic gardens that transplant you to near nirvana. The entrance ticket includes a drink served in the elegant café and it feels a world away from the busy streets nearby. There were just a handful of visitors when we visited and many hours later, I left with an enhanced sense of peace and wellbeing.

It proved relatively easy to escape the assault of scooter noise which unfortunately pervades Ubud. The Campuan Ridge walk between two rivers takes you on a scenic path through lush fields of elephant grass and zig-zagging rice paddies that defy geometry. At one point hearing splashes and screeches of delight from a point below the path, we descended to the river and joined some local children in an impromptu swim in a deep pool. Towards lunchtime, after skirting around a lady sorting her rice grains on the public path, we spotted a thatched café to shelter from the midday sun. Adorned with sculpted coconut shells sold as souvenirs, it was the perfect spot to drink fresh coconut water whilst observing the fishing antics of the local egrets.

One evening, we walked out to the hamlet of Petuna, renowned for the influx of 20,000 big herons each evening at sunset. The villagers believe the birds bring good luck and it is some spectacle to witness the noisy squabbling over prime perches for the night. It is advisable to avoid walking under the trees at this time and we settled ourselves to await the show at a rehabilitation centre for rescue chicks and got the lowdown on the worthy project.

Ubud, being the cultural centre of Bali, hosts multiple dance performances each night - Mahabharata and Ramayana ballets, shadow puppet plays and gamelan orchestral shows. They are often held in temple compounds and in the main pavilion of the Royal Palace. A change from my previous visit was that many religious ceremonies are now private and entrance to the temples restricted to worshippers

only. This is understandable in the era of intrusive mobile phones and iPads.

No trip to Ubud would be complete without a visit to the Monkey Forest. This cool jungle sanctuary is inhabited by over 700 grey-haired and greedy long-tailed Balinese macaques who are only waiting to grab a plastic drink bottle or snack, so beware! Cute and innocent looking, they do bite and irritating signs everywhere explain the body language to avoid. There are also three holy temples in the forest surrounded by Indiana Jones type foliage that is eerie but hugely photogenic. Unlike my previous visit where you could wander through the forest at random, the paths are all paved in concrete and you now queue for tickets at a huge ugly building that doesn't really gel with the leafy beyond. Linger awhile to witness the fish feeding frenzy in the river nearby.

Ardent shoppers will be pleased to learn that Ubud abounds with beautiful craftwork and tasteful souvenirs. The frenetic alleyway that is the main market is full of colourful stalls and thankfully some delightful traditional garden compounds to dodge into for a cool drink and a rest from the hustle.

Despite nostalgia for my rustic visit of old, I thoroughly enjoyed my recent return to Ubud. Change and progress is inevitable and as elsewhere, it is good to see tourism bounce back post-Covid, and witness happy smiles on local faces as they aim to please, share their rich culture and make a decent living. Go visit for yourselves and enjoy!





Disconnecting Connection

Can ex-Lovers
Truly be friends?

Does it differ
For Men
Than for Women?

It can work
Yet how more often does it fail?
And how truthful
Are both parties?

Something always remains
Whether a mere sliver
Whether an understanding
Not to enact
On such a feeling
Something tangible remains
An ember
In a month-old bushfire
Clinging to its heat
Refusing to die
No matter
How pure
The intent
For otherwise.

Once shared bodies
And remaining contact
Ensures emotion
Is always at the forefront
Impossible to separate fully
At least,
Not for both.

By Anthony J Langford

Continuous crackle, on a revolving record

Caught in an anxiety whirlpool
A suffocating drag
When all seemed to be going well
Hoodwinked &
Tripped up
Under its pricy spell
Yet I feel
As though I was party to it
Self-sabotage?
Who else is there to blame?

A tingly, floating churn
Weakening body
And resolve
For seemingly no point
It's just there
Hanging about like tepid moisture
Ensnared.

I can blame my childhood
I guess
Or the long addiction to booze
And other addictions
Or the employment situation
Or lack of it
Or my own actions
And reactions
Over the years
Yet I've run out of guilt
For the acts I haven't committed
So why the punishment?

It's nothing new of course
Yet quite protrusive now
It's my Keeper
And I can't explain why.

My ears ring
My heart pounds
And I lack the confidence
To tackle anything of significance
Standard steps are demanding enough.

I'm fatigued
Worn & whittled
Like the wooden pier
Dissolving into the ocean
And draining
Like the receding tide.

By Anthony J Langford

The Conductor

by *Liz Mulcare*

She raises her hand, the fineness of her fingers defined by the acute angle of the wrist that holds them suspended in a position of perfect poise. The knuckles of each finger angled at slightly varying degrees to maintain a curve between each forefinger, inclining them into a gentle fan, balletic and light as air. Immediately the hand commands the focus of 60 pairs of eyes, held as if attached by silken webs that she has cast over their silent figures. They wait like puppets for her command to come to life as she stands, Grecian-like, with a perfection that belies the intensity of the power that emanates from her. Her eyes scan over them, her creatures. She smiles. The first note of the cathedral organ splinters the silence, creating shivers of vibration through the majestic crown of thorns hanging precariously above their heads. The hand descends, the silken thread that binds them jerks open the mouths of the sopranos, like baby chicks to their mother and the first sweet notes of the aria emanate into the surrounding air. Meanwhile the altos wait as, with almost imperceptible glances, they hungrily follow the lines of the music cradled possessively in their arms.

A sharp intake of breath, a nod, an all-encompassing gaze as she summons the deeper timbre of the tenors to add to the mounting crescendo of sound. The music starts building in force as she summons its strength to eat up the bars of notes spread across the pages, releasing them into the air before, just as suddenly, they disappear to make way for the next ordered and blended cacophony of sound. An almost imperceptible glance at the waiting altos as she drops her sylph-like hand in their direction pulling the notes immediately from their throats. Commanding more and more with only the slightest nuances and gestures, a fleeting smile breaks across her face and, just as suddenly, is gone. The air around them crackles. Did everyone feel the heat of its spontaneous appearance or did they each individually feel

that it was meant for them alone. It says, watch me and only me. Individual choristers tear their eyes away for only a splinter of a second at a time to glance at the pages cradled in their arms, desperate to stay in pitch and time so that they can soar together, as Icarus soared, craning to reach as high as they can, basking in the light and intensity of her gaze upon them, unwilling to turn away in case it fades and they fall to the ground too soon. Almost spent from their time in the heights, she moves her fingers in another direction, pulling the strings and launching the basses into action. The air around the altos' cools. They return to their puppet form, watching hawk-like, greedy for another turn to be called upon to add to the swell of sound. To be held as if spellbound in her grasp.

The magic ends as the last notes of the organ pulse through the air. The choristers wait, joined in silence, spellbound, held mute by the upturn of her hand, waiting for the final downbeat to release them from her steady gaze. Just before the final gesture, her right foot turns involuntarily into its usual resting place, the sure sign of a balletic past that has been abandoned and sacrificed to the higher cry of opera and music. A gesture that only adds to the perfection of the sylph-like presence that has involuntarily summoned each individual musical story and carefully and tenderly moulded them into a blended blanket of sound, that reaches the audience sitting, spellbound, in the further recesses of the dimly lit church.





An Insect's Request

An Insect's Request

Let me introduce myself.
My name is Florry Fly.
I know you think I'm horrible
but can't imagine why.
I pollinate the plants you need
with cousin Barry Bee
and help clean up your garbage
and your doggy's poo and pee.
Two hundred sixty million years
we flies have been on earth.
The boffins say we paved the way
for human species' birth.
If you didn't swat or spray us
or drape your hats with corks
you'd find us super friendly
when we land upon your forks.

Our insect code of ethics
means we don't discriminate.
Our conduct is inclusive
and we don't reject or hate.
We happily will lay our eggs
on anybody's face,
no matter what their age or sex,
religion, looks or race.
The boffins say you'll kill us
in a century or two
and saving flies and bees and wasps
is what you have to do.
Your demise will follow ours
and so to save your species -
Sign up now! Adopt a fly!
And feed him your best faeces!

by Helen Lyne

Spiny Anteater

A prickle of spikes
undulates haphazardly
across stony ground
soft snout sniffing and seeking
unsuspecting termite ants.

by Julie Howard



A Yorkshire Childhood

I am a child of seasons.

I am of the March wind that lifts my hair into
a wild frenzy and scurries my kite high until
it's snared and left dangling by an unfriendly
wire.

Now caressed by gentle summer air, I tuck
my dress into my knickers and cartwheel
languidly alongside fields of swaying corn.

September breezes entice a carpet of golden
leaves to my path. I laugh, dance and twirl
in a whirlwind of colour and movement.

Now I am a child of soft falling snow, smoky
coal fires, hot chestnuts and Parkin. Limbs
gently curve around treasured books and
my mind travels as the storms brew.

by Julie Howard

Creating hate

by Jim Lemon

It's not easy being apathetic. People with whom you have little or no acquaintance keep laying road spikes along the peaceful paths you choose, disrupting the progress of your gentle inactivism. Those you do know are encouraged to upbraid you for ignoring the plight of the oppressed of the moment or cheer your refusal to support the latest fantasy of oppression that you didn't notice.

You're correct that this correspondent is somewhere on the battleground of the cultures, but in which trench, you ask? Fortunately, this can be condensed into a single word. Hate. One of those words packed with extremity. It's hard to live up to hate. I don't really want to try. The reason that I'm complaining is the frequency with which I am accused of it. Not personally, face-to-face, but as a member of a loose, ill-defined group.

This typically begins with imperfection. Doesn't seem to matter which one. I have imperfections myself, so I understand the premise. The pattern has become clear to me. Someone is complaining about an imperfection that is important to them. It is an imperfection that I don't have, at least not to the extent that the complainer is expressing. As the complainer catalogues the torments that his or her imperfection has wrought, the monologue or



discussion funnels inexorably toward hate.



Those people who don't have the imperfection (remember, this includes me) hate the ones who have it.

At this point, I want to complain myself. Hang on, you're implying that my emotion tank is filled with hate when all I'm feeling is that I'd prefer you didn't have it, but I can't really do anything about it. In my understanding, this does not qualify as hate. More like useless sympathy.

Introspection may not be giving me the right answer, though. It could be that other people are radiating the hate. Let's say that someone is very concerned about attribute X and that they are not a perfect X. I have often encountered people who are not perfect Xs and others around them. Do I sense hatred directed toward one who is imperfect in the X attribute? Again, I am disappointed. Indifference, rejection, even ridicule by the least enlightened is all I can recall. Imperfection seems unable to ignite hatred in the beholder.

If I can't find the hate, could the one who complains about it be creating it? Now an explanation beckons. If the X is so important to the one who feels imperfect in it, it may be natural to imagine that it is arousing the worst of antipathies in those around them. It may even validate the perceived importance of the imperfection. Contradictory evidence fails when what is imagined reaches the point of being believed. I feel less troubled by these apparently baseless inferences. I may even have a way to properly argue against them.

Leon & Lisa

by Peter A Stankovic

At 10.00 a.m. Friday, Lisa had set up the Zoom meeting in her office. Leon arrived a minute before that time and leaned back with his carton of Cappuccino on the table in front of him. Soon they joined by DS Camden and DS Taylor, both of whom appeared alert and keen to proceed.

Lisa asked about their progress. Leon noted that she was stylishly dressed in a white skirt with horizontal blue lines running down the length of it. She also wore a blue top and black heels.



DS Camden and DS Taylor peered out of the Zoom screen at Leon and Lisa, their expressions serious. Camden, with his slight build and sandy hair, had a file folder before him on the desk. Taylor, with his solid build and dark hair, had a notepad in hand.

The detectives had been working tirelessly on the case, trying to track down the wanted criminals who had been untraceable for untold months. Camden cleared his throat and began to speak.

“Leon, Lisa, we have some findings that I'd like to present to you,” Camden said, his voice low.

Leon and Lisa leaned forward in their seats, their attention fully focused on DS Camden.

“Using our real estate connections and police data, we've identified three potential locations where the criminals might be hiding,” Camden continued, opening the folder to reveal a map with three red circles marking the potential hideouts.

“Okay,” said Leon, “That’s good.” He then glanced at the North Sydney detective.

Taylor leaned forward and added, “I've also been working with our street beat cops and local listings of recently let premises, and we've identified four other potential locations.”

He held up his notepad, displaying the addresses of the four premises.

Leon and Lisa listened intently as the detectives presented their findings, taking notes and asking questions when necessary. Once the presentation was over, they sat in silence for a moment, processing the information.

“This is great work, guys,” Leon said, impressed by the thoroughness of their investigation. “What’s next?”

“Well, we need to coordinate with our tactical team and plan a raid on each of the locations,” DS Camden explained. Taylor nodded in agreement.

Leon looked at Lisa for any comment she might have, then he said, “We also need to be careful. We don't want to put any innocent bystanders in harm's way.” Leon stroked his nose, thinking about the potential risks involved.

Camden and Taylor nodded, understanding the gravity of the situation. “We'll work with you every step of the way,” Camden said, a reassuring smile on his face. Taylor agreed, saying he would communicate with Lisa on a regular basis.

“Terrific,” Leon said.

Both detectives exited the Zoom meeting.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Leon turned to Lisa. “Hey, I know this is short notice, but would you like to grab dinner with me tonight? We can discuss this further then,” he asked, a hint of nervousness in his voice.

Lisa smiled, feeling a flutter of excitement in her stomach. “I'd love to,” she said, feeling a blush creep onto her cheeks.

Leon grinned, feeling a sense of relief. He had been wanting to ask Lisa out for weeks, but the case had taken up all of his time and energy. He was grateful for the opportunity to spend some time with her outside of work.

Leon & Lisa (cont'd)

Although he had been seeing Emma recently, he didn't consider her a serious connection. They had had fun sure, but he wasn't interested in pursuing a relationship with her. He also didn't expect that seeing Lisa once for dinner would mean anything serious.



Leon and Lisa arrived separately at the Italian restaurant in Willoughby, each parking their cars in the street before meeting up at the entrance. They exchanged a smile before walking inside, taking in the cosy atmosphere and the scent of garlic and tomato sauce.

They were quickly seated at a small table in the corner of the restaurant, away from the other diners. After ordering their drinks, they both took a deep breath and started to talk about the case.

"I'm just worried that we might not have enough evidence to make the arrests," Leon said, frowning slightly. "We've been working on this for months and I don't want to see it all go to waste."

Lisa nodded, understanding the pressure they were under. "I know. But we have to stay focused and keep pushing forward. We'll get there eventually," she said, trying to reassure him.

They talked for a few more minutes about the case, discussing possible scenarios and brainstorming new ideas. Eventually, the conversation shifted to more personal topics.

"So, tell me about yourself," Leon said, leaning back in his chair and taking a sip of his wine. "What do you like to do outside of work?"

Lisa smiled, feeling her nerves ease a bit. "Well, I love to read. And I also like to hike and go camping whenever I can," she said, twirling a strand of hair around her finger.

Leon's eyes lit up. "Really? I love camping too. Maybe we could plan a trip together sometime," he suggested, feeling a rush of excitement at the prospect. But Leon actually hated camping. He'd only been once and he couldn't stand erecting the tent, building a fire and dealing with mosquitos and other insects. But if he could get Lisa to spend a night with him in a tent, he'd be able to put up with the inconveniences.

Lisa's heart skipped a beat. "That sounds great," she said, feeling a warmth spread through her body. Although she had promised herself not to get involved with a work colleague, she needed to be diplomatic. She wouldn't go camping with him, no matter what.

As the night wore on, they continued to talk and laugh, enjoying each other's company. They discussed their families, their dreams, and their fears. And by the end of the night, they both knew that there was something special between them. As they walked out of the restaurant, arm in arm, warmed by the three bottles of wine they consumed, they both felt grateful for the chance to connect on a deeper level.

Driving home would be risky, Leon knew. He hailed a cab for both of them and insisted Lisa join him to get to her place then he would ride the vehicle to his apartment.

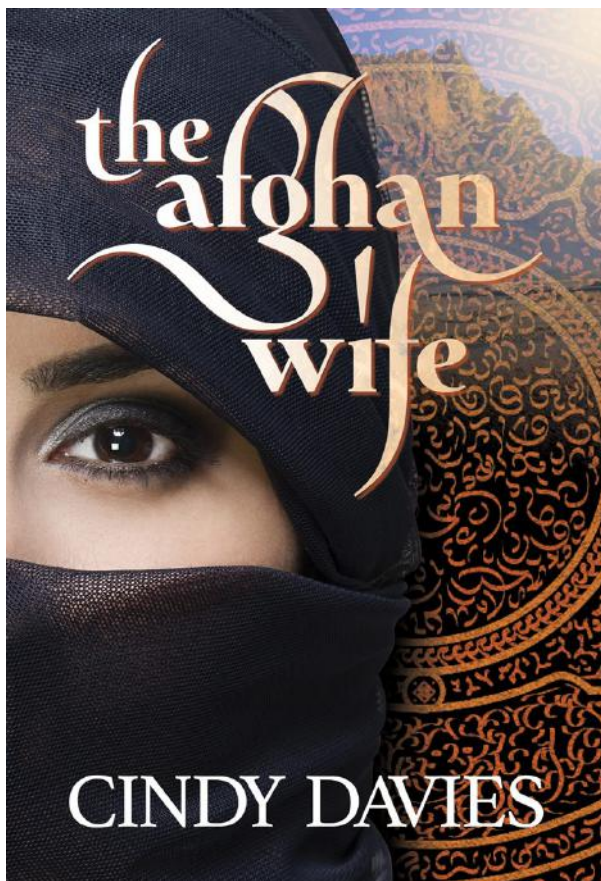


Interview: Cindy Davies

Tell us about yourself

My name is Cindy Broadbent and pseudonym Cindy Davies. I was born in the UK, but have lived most of my life in Australia, with my family. I've worked and travelled in Turkey and the Middle East, and speak some Turkish. I was originally a business studies graduate but returned to Uni and graduated in English from Sydney University. I taught English as a Second Language for many years. I was also a tour guide in Sydney and Turkey. I've written articles for the Good Weekend and The Museum of Australia magazines. I've won competitions for short stories and non-fiction writing.

My two award-winning novels (published by Odyssey Books), *The Afghan Wife* and *The Revolutionary's Cousin* are set in Iran, the USA and Australia. My third novel, *The Favourite of the Harem* is set in the 16th century harem of the Topkapı Palace, Istanbul. Publication date is set for late 2023. CindyDavies.com.au



What do you love most about writing?

Now I've moved to fiction I love getting to know my characters. They begin as vague shadows then become real people for me. It's a huge thrill to see your work in print too.

What are the most unexpected opportunities that your writing has led to?

Even though I have a publisher much of the book marketing falls to me. So, I give talks to Probus Clubs, Book Clubs and other groups. I've become an accomplished public speaker. and proficient in PowerPoint preparation and presentation as well as operating a card-pay sales system.

What are your future plans for writing?

In 2020 I was awarded a writer's residency in Devon, England. I'll be there from May to July this year; 2023. I'm working on a fourth novel *Unaccompanied Baggage*, set in both the UK and Australia.

What's your top advice for other writers?

Be prepared to work at marketing your own book(s). The first draft isn't the final one. A rejection from a publisher is not a personal insult. Keep sending your manuscript out, someone will like it. Finally, find a good physio, hunching over a keyboard isn't good for your back!

Drama on the Orient Express

by Cindy Davies

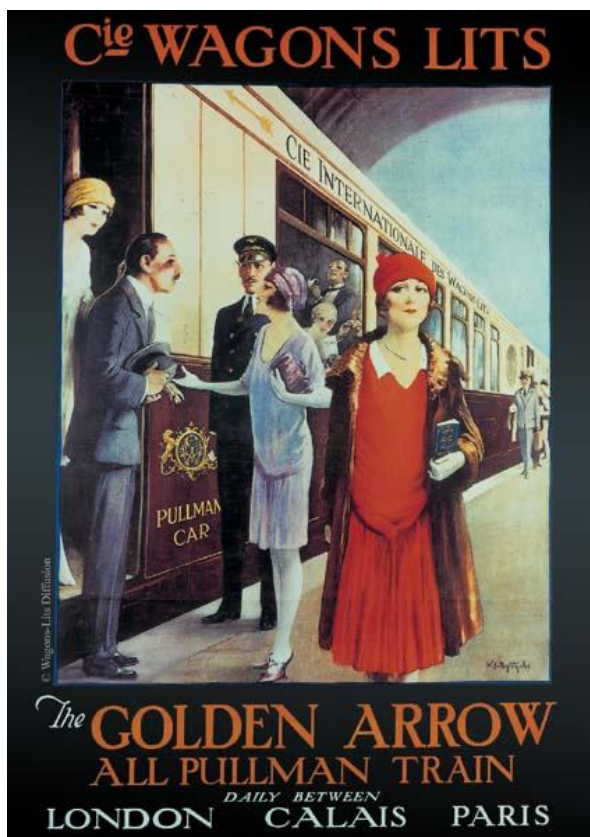
Milan, Italy, August 1967

I'm in a third-class carriage on a train in Milan station. Its final destination is Istanbul in Turkey. And I'm terrified. My hands are flat against the window because the Orient Express is chugging out of the station with me on board. I'm alone with no passport, no money and no husband. He thought he had time to buy pizzas.

I can see him in the distance, running toward the departing Pullman. He's holding a small pizza in each hand—flat out in front of him. As the train speeds up, so does he, still balancing the food.

Two Italian passengers who got off in Milan are trotting alongside my carriage shouting to me, 'It's okay! It's okay!'

But it's not okay. I'm in an empty railway carriage, with assorted rubbish on the floor, and our two suitcases are the only ones in the rack above my head. The green vinyl seats are empty



and the train is gathering speed. I think the next stop is Belgrade in Yugoslavia.

The Italians are running now and their shouts of 'It's okay!' are fainter. My mind is blank with terror. I'm travelling further and further away. The Italians and my husband are distant figures at the end of the platform.

I rush out into the corridor. Why didn't I think of that before? It's empty. The friendly, tri-lingual couchette assistant got off in Milan. There's a woman in the next carriage. She's dressed entirely in black and she has a huge pot plant at her feet. Its ferny tendrils spread out on the green vinyl.

'Help me!' I fling the door open.

'No English,' she replies. 'Vous parlez Français? Moi, je suis Arménien.'

A French-speaking Armenian with no English!

While she's looking expectantly at me, the train jolts. The carriage door rolls shut, nearly trapping my fingers. I look through the window at her, but she's lost interest. The train slows, then stops. I rush to the exit door and am just about to fling it open and leap onto the tracks when a warm hand closes over mine.

'Stop! I forbid open, madam.'

I stare desperately at the tri-lingual attendant. He's still on the train!

'Madam, the train, it changes platforms. Now it returns to Milan station,' he says. 'Please wait.'

Featured Writers



Robert Costa is a retired architect with significant experience as an architect, having performed many roles over 30 years in private practice. He writes to explore new worlds, real and imaginary.

[Robert on SelfPubAus](#)



Adelaide Hunter is a Sydney-based author from a medical background, who writes in a variety of genres and was most recently published in the anthology “Weaving Words” by the collective Women about Women.

[Adelaide on SelfPubAus](#)



Peter Stankovic is a Sydney-based author who has self-published several contemporary thrillers. He started writing crime fiction and thrillers since retiring from a professional finance career in 2010.

[PeterAStankovic.com.au](#)



Helen Lyne taught French and English in Australia, Canada and France for nearly forty years. She now works as a movie and television extra while writing satirical and self-send-up poetry, performing at open-mic nights

[HelenLyne.com.au](#)



Wilfred Roach is a Sydney-based author originally from the UK, who has performed at spoken word and poetry events and taken his one man shows to various Adelaide and Sydney Fringe Festivals

[Wilfred on Facebook](#)



Larry Allen is a Sydney based author, podcaster and dog-lover working on two series of mystical BDSM novellas. “Generations: The Grace of the Dominants: Heartland” and “The Obsidian Mirror”.

[Larry on Substack](#)

Writing Opportunities

Lost Voices of Women

A new anthology with the theme of “Lost Voices of Women” aims to highlight the stories and experiences of women that remain silent or forgotten throughout history.

The editors want to magnify the lives of resilient women who bravely pursued their passions: from artists, scientists and musicians to scientists, saints and writers, and all those who shaped the origins of folk traditions still shared today.

Stories can be fiction or biography, and should be no more than 1500 words, submitted in doubled-spaced Times New Roman in a Word doc to umasrinivasanbooks@gmail.com

Deadline 28th August 2023

Poets at the Petersham Bowl

Poets at the Petersham Bowl runs a friendly, supportive and relaxed monthly open mic soiree (3rd Thursday each month, from 6.30pm).

As well as poems (originals or works of others), short stories, comedy, anecdotes and music are all welcome. Admission is free with a bar and bistro open.

Petersham Bowling Club is based at 77 Brighton Street, Petersham NSW 2049. Email soulserendip@yahoo.com.au



Sydney Authors Inked

Sydney Authors Inked is a new collective of local authors sharing their experiences and expertise of writing on the theme of "A Writer's Journey".

The events are open to anyone interested in writing, publishing and reading. They are free author talks and events will be social as well as educational.

Next event 10th September at the Little Big House, Summer Hill - numbers limited.

Contact: Sydneyauthorsinked@gmail.com



Spill the Beans

Spill the Beans online writing community was a COVID love child – unexpected, unplanned, and now much loved.

Spill the Beans welcomes writers regardless of writing experience, age or cultural background.

It sets regular 400-word writing challenges (free to enter) which are published on its website, with the most popular ones printed in physical books.

The group is always looking for people to help run its activities, from computing to editing and marketing.

The current challenge is Fearless: send your 400-word FEARLESS story or poem to beanswrite21@gmail.com

Deadline 30 August 2023