******

Stay Strong, Stay Sane, Stay Writing!

‘WRITES’

*The visible hand of friendship*

A picture containing outdoor, water, sky, nature

Description automatically generated

IPA Section UK Writers Special Interest Group and Global Writers Forum Magazine

No. 18

**March-April-May-June 2021**

******

***This is ‘Writes No.18’***

***May we continue to prosper in friendship and health throughout 2021***

***All copy to: The Editor:*** [***davidlewis@brynstowe.co.uk***](mailto:davidlewis@brynstowe.co.uk)

***Editorial Chair David Lewis writes:***

*Dear fellow writers,*

*It has been a long break from the magazine but at last I have sorted my home worries out, if not my blurred vision, and here it is, ‘Writes 18’, the March, April, May and June 2021 edition! It has been a tough year for everyone I know but hopefully there is light at the end of the needle at last.*

*Of course, there is joy in the art and craft of writing and thank you for continuing with the submissions even when you have had no reply, I am grateful for your continued forbearance. I feel the need for some new inspiration and your writing has provided it. Also, some ‘curtain moments’ (as in the unstated ‘Come on editor, pull yourself together!’) which I actually also appreciated!*

*But as ever, here is joy; well-crafted words for us all from the pens of our wonderful writers and I heartily commend each piece.*

*Whilst I have been on my self-imposed furlough from writing to earn that filthy lucre, something we all need to a greater or lesser extent, I have had conversations with representatives of the ‘Thin Blue Line’ and ‘Police Care UK’ about the possibility of us as a writers’ group supporting post-traumatic stress issues and general police based mental good health. Do see the article within please.*

*I imagine this is a cause close to most of our hearts and I for one am not ashamed to proclaim my own sufferings. I spent two periods at the Police Convalescent Home at Goring with such issues (and one glorious month at Hove for those who remember it with a broken leg in my first year of service!). How well they treated me and how well they sorted me out. But around me I saw others suffer and offered what solace a supervisor can in the rough and tumble of policing.*

*I do believe we have something to offer because writing can and should be a way of relieving stress, coming to terms with the past, balancing the negatives with positives, providing a catharsis for traumatic experiences and generally being a relaxing and pleasant undertaking. (And yes, I know it can also be stressful at times if the editor is leaning on your pen!)*

*For these reasons I would like to dedicate the July edition of ‘Writes’ as well as ‘Fifty Shades of Grey’ to the subject of mental welfare. Please can you put your thinking caps on and submit poems, articles, stories, humour or reminiscences, on how mental health can be helped, addressed, balanced, or generally highlighted. The idea is to raise awareness and offer a lifeline to those in need in the service or after it. This is a worthy request and I know we will have a fabulous response.*

*On another positive note, Helena Hutt and Janet ‘Fizz’ Curtis have kindly offered to help with the secretarial side of the SIG whilst dear old Mike Baker is still poorly. I have had an email chat with Mike who is sadly under the weather but still positive, bless him. All our best wishes for your recovery Mike, we are thinking of you.*

*Meanwhile, please keep writing, keep positive all and see you soon!*

*Love to everyone as ever,* ***David*** *x*

***In this packed four-month triple edition:***

* ‘rubbish’ *by Sean Hannigan*
* ‘Ode to Then Litter Bug’ *by Fred Rankin*
* ‘The Tears and The Brick’ *by Will Henry P.*
* *‘*The Bookshop’ *by Helena Hutt*
* ‘Adrift in the Waste’ *by Fred Rankin*
* ‘A Soldier of The Great War***’*** *by Will Henry P.*
* ‘Fifty Shades of Blue’ *by the Editor*
* ‘Who Am I?’ *by a Serving Officer*
* ‘Memories of a Door’ *by Udo Lauterborn*
* ‘Writing the Novel’ *by Eleni Cotton*
* ‘A Rubbish Story’ *by Sean Hannigan*
* ‘The Admiral and I’ *by D.B. Lewis*
* ‘What Lies Within These Lines I Write?’ *by D.B. Lewis*
* ‘The Ian Thompson Memorial Prize Competition’
* ‘Life in the Writers Zoom’ *by the editor*
* ‘Us Yins’ *by Will Henry P.*

* ‘Nature Notes’ *by Steve Parnwell*
* ‘The Station Cat’

A picture containing outdoor, water, sky, nature

Description automatically generated

**Cover illustration: this is early morning on the holy River Ganges at Varanasi (formerly Benares) in Uttar Pradesh, India. I took this simple image a few years ago as I watched the daily burning of the dead on the Ghats followed by the floating of the ashes on the river, an intensely moving experience. I show it in this edition in memory of the dead in India right now. One recent local Indian estimate I read suggested the real figure for the number of dead may be seventeen times higher than the official reports make out. So very sad amongst all the sadness right now. Let us all hope for better times for us all ahead.**

**rubbishRubbishR**

***by Sean Hannigan***

rubbish

mounds of empty wrappers stick to roads and path

not blocking, blocked drains, and blackened rivers

paths to a cleaner world

where air fresh roadways are less car than foot

follow the trail!

as detectives do, catching the litter bug

while tree hopping life

sees all the mess of mice and men

rubbish

the call to grand kids, and grandparents

free as air to collect the

bag for life, to help life live-long

longing to stop the particular lead-fuelled

lungs, blocking, chocking agent

of man-made roadway mechanical bugs

rubbish

the post-covid beach-covered-unlock

where all rubbish is not

socially distanced nor masked

and the bill for the clean-up

free

free radicals, who stem the shores of covered shells

where invisible castles defend once more

the marauding clag of hue-man-toil

rubbish

free at the point of contact

dropped in tons by un-seen unfool filled man

rubbish

and unto dust ye shall return recycle and recycled

and the thought of modern man

returns to

rubbish

but Not in my back yard

**‘rubbish’: A Commentary**

***by The Editor***

**I** promise not to be supplying a commentary to all of Sean’s amazing poetry, but these recent submissions are, and should be, of considerable interest to us all as writers, and to those of us who specifically, or more generally, aspire to be poets.

Why? Because every so often a form of poetry comes along that is innovative, fresh, and interesting for itself as an artistic cultural form as well as for the content it seeks to distil to both the reader and the writer alike. The writer of ‘rubbish’ has hit several intriguing areas of the wordsmith. It is sometimes said if you need to explain a poem it has failed in its intent. I do not necessarily agree with this point of view, but I do suggest the reading and re-reading of the poem and the taking of whatever you will from it.

For me, this poem is an example of what is sometimes known as ‘Stream of Consciousness’ writing; a narrative device that uses the written word as if it was the character thinking aloud as a form of internal conversation (a type of monologue). This is a little like the person who, whilst alone, talks aloud, apparently to themselves. It is rare to witness these days but unnerving if you are not expecting it. ‘Stream of Consciousness’ writing is generally associated with leaps in thinking making the word flow seem disconnected but within a general theme and towards a viable, if often illogical, conclusion. The form is often seen to have a lack of punctuation, reinforced by incorrect, (or innovative!)

English usage, a term we should all be familiar with by now seeing as I keep harping on about it!

‘Stream of Consciousness’ is different from ‘Monologue’ such as in ‘Talking Heads’ where the speakers, whilst apparently alone and talking to themselves, or sometimes writing and reading a letter aloud (an Alan Bennett style), are in fact talking to the audience. In ‘Soliloquy’ again the speaker is uttering the words for the benefit of the audience, even if it appears to be an internal speech spoken aloud. The ‘Stream of Consciousness’ is entirely intended as a device of writing down the inner narrative of the writer, whether or not there is an audience.

In literature this technique is most often used in fiction, but it has its place across the genres and here we have it used in poetry to great effect.

What is the ‘great effect’ then I hear you say?

Bearing in mind the form involves a series of loose or un-connected thoughts let me give you a few examples. ‘…path not blocking, blocked drains’: ‘blocking’ is a form of path construction which leads to the disconnected thought of blocked drains and if you have ever had one you will know how black and grim that stuff is…which leads to the thought idea of blackened rivers as roadways (tarmac, if you follow) which leads to the lovely line of ‘air fresh roadways’ suggesting the petrol engine will soon be no more? And so on.

The nest verse is intriguing: ‘tree hopping life’. Now I suggest that somewhere deep down in the writer’s subconscious he has either read or seen an article, or maybe just knows, that a few years ago the very last ‘Brazilian Tree Hopper’ alive was discovered in the Amazon. Just the one. End of the line, looking at the mess humankind has made with the

wordplay on Steinbeck’s ‘Of Mice and Men’ novella. This is indeed intriguing.

And how about ‘Grandparents free to air’? Breath-taking use of the form really: any of us who are grandparents know just what ‘free to air’ means in this context. We most definitely give this time free and freely. Powerful. New. Stimulating. Writers should aspire to create such great new wordplay. Surely? To praise one line in particular of the many I could comment upon:

*…the post-covid beach-covered-unlock…*

This for me is poetry at its very best: for a start it is an brilliant example of the poetic technique known as ‘inversion’ (where the normal English usage would be ‘… the unlocked, (people) covered beach, post covid…’ but is completely turned around for poetic effect) as well as the use of assonance (the repetition of the ‘o’ sound as in p**o**st,c**o**v,c**o**v,l**o**c).

But the sentence, well alright usage-purists, the phrase then, just sounds so well. Read it aloud and you will see what I mean. Almost Yeats himself speaking if you have ever heard his recordings?

And finally, how long does it take to *pour out* ‘Stream of Consciousness’ writing? Well, that is the point is it not? The technique requires, and perhaps demands, that the writer just writes the thoughts honestly down straight away as they come into the mind, without editing, amending, or correcting. Perish the thought! As indeed I might if I wrote down my thoughts most days? The writer says this one took exactly four minutes. As he humbly says himself, it is a rubbish poem!

I commend us all to have a go and see what does *pour out*? It is for us. As writers.

**Ode to The Litter Bug**

***by Fred Rankin***

Litter bug, litter bug, how are you?

Why do you drop things the way that you do?

No matter the place; no matter the day,

Whatever you don’t want, don’t throw it away.

When you have gone home, it’s a sight for sore eyes.

Cartons and wrappers surrounded by flies.

Bottles and plastic and unwanted food,

Rubbish on rubbish, it’s really quite crude.

Please take a second to think for a while,

Instead of make mayhem, make us all smile.

Collect all your litter and take it back home

And make all our land a nice place to roam!

**The Tears and the Brick**

***by Will Henry P***

The tears ran from my eyes down my reddened cheeks,

Around the edge of my mouth they flowed, then to my chin did creep.

They pondered on the precipice of the stubble on my chin,

Before falling to the floor below splashing on an empty tin.

Others quickly followed taking the same watery route,

This time on falling they landed on my foot.

Why am I crying you may ask, the answer is clear to see?

I have just stood on a LEGO brick, and it is painful, believe you me.

**‘The Bookshop (Still) Needs You!’**

***by Helena Hutt***

Dear all,

Developing ‘The Bookshop’ for the SIG is going well. The idea is to help market our members’ published works. The intention is to launch a website with all our members’ books listed with links to their own sites. To make it work we need the following from all of you published authors:

* A colour image of each book front cover
* A short description of the book content and genre (Three lines)
* The Recommended Retail Price (RRP) and any member discounts
* The link to your own website
* An image of the author
* A short biography of the author (5 lines)
* Any testimonies the book has received (No more than three)

Please send all of the above in one mail if possible, to: [**helenahutt@btinternet.com**](mailto:helenahutt@btinternet.com)

**Adrift In the Waste**

***by Fred Rankin***

As I journey across all the seas of the world,

I have seen many changes as I drift with the tide.

Although the weather can be cruel at times,

I accept this as quite natural during my ride.

What I don’t like to feel, is the darkness around me,

Whilst the sun is so high in the deep, blue sky.

I’ve been caught on the edge of a massive oil slick

But purely by luck, I sail on by.

It’s not just the oil slick that makes me feel bad.

It’s the amount of waste beneath each wave

As it spreads out its fingers of torture and death

I can’t help the seabirds on their floating grave.

And not just the seabirds meet a terrible end.

Other sea creatures get caught in the waste

And suffocate slowly in pain and distress

So I must reach the shore with much more haste.

It’s been many years since being cast in the sea

And now at long last I just lay on the sand.

I hope for a miracle that I will be found.

Then suddenly I find myself in someone’s hand.

They pull out the cork and I breathe in fresh air

And the message of hope that I’ve carried for years

Is pulled from inside me and held to be read

And the young girl’s eyes well up with her tears.

The message in the bottle makes her think

And, although made of glass and unable to yelp,

I can see that she sees the mess in the world

And she will do all that she can to HELP!

**A Soldier of the Great War**

***by Will Henry P***

Who goes there? I heard the cry,

It is me a soldier of the H.L.I.

Identify yourself or proceed no more,

It is me, McTavish number 652-924

Advance my friend you are welcome here,

Inside you will find some rest and cheer.

A bed awaits your weary head, and somewhere to lay your head,

I am grateful for this, as others lye-in their dying beds.

In the morning I was on parade where the Company Sergeant Major,

Shouted out the orders and marched up to me as if a total stranger.

Stand still, up straight, get those shoulders back his orders I could hear,

You have made us proud McTavish as I stood there in tears.

A medal I was to receive for doing things I believed in,

A better world in which to live to give others their freedom.

I had lived, but many had died, in pain and abject horror,

Would those who come after me remember them tomorrow.

So, there you are, I have told my story, a soldier of the Great War,

Who fought for justice and freedom and not for the glory?

The name’s McTavish of the H.L.I. and alas I live no more,

If you want to remember me, the number was…652-924.

A picture containing calendar

Description automatically generated

**3 Region’s ‘Fifty Shades of Blue’ Project**

***by the editor***

Decision taken. This much delayed project has worried me a for a while but now I feel the breakthrough moment has arrived. ***‘Fifty Shades of Blue’*** was a great idea without a heart. Now I believe we have a heart. And a great one. The cause of helping to address the ongoing need for good mental health. I know, because over the past three years many of us have become firm friends and we have shared our angst, our distresses, our low points, and our need to just switch off for a while. It is part of the creative journey. A part of the writer’s journey. It is also an often-understated part of the policing journey we have all been a part of.

The plan is this. We have over fifty members in the group now and I will be writing personally to each member, and a few more potential members too. The invitation will be to submit a piece of creative writing that in some way has a positive bearing on the issue of mental well-being.

It could be in any medium or genre: poetry, prose, reminiscence, article, exercise suggestion, a case history, a personal experience of mental anguish and its outcome, a medical piece, or humour. As the old Reader’s Digest cliché went, ‘Laughter is the best medicine’. (But sadly, we do not send you the £50 the RD did way back in the day). It could be a painting with a commentary, a hobby piece, a description of a sculpture, a travel piece, any form of

writing or use of words you might be able to conjure up. The key is it must have a bearing on mental well-being.

The process then will be:

* Letter out to members
* Submissions returned
* Editorial processes
* Usual book publishing process by Bryn Stowe Publications of Scarborough 2021-2022
* Book published early 2022 at an affordable price with any surplus fees donated to Police Care UK and The Thin Blue Line.

As an example, I have included in this article the submission of a serving officer who has been gracious to give us access to this piece, a heart-rending story of his own journey with post-traumatic stress.

I hope you will all feel as I do that this is a worthy way to complete this project? And I know you will have stories!!!!!

There are no limits to submissions, but I suggest no longer than 2500 words as an absolute maximum and around 1000 words would be ideal. That would give a book of around 150 pages. Submission date: September 1st, 2021.

Usual Writes guidance please:

PLEASE!!!! Word document. Calibri 12 pt.

1.5 spacing. Please.

(And yes, I know the shading in blue in this article did not work too well!) Looking forward to seeing this one in print now!

**‘Who Am I?’**

***By a serving officer***

*(This is a real-life story of a serving detective and details some of the reality of being exposed to serious crime and sudden death as a detective. It gives knowledge of what detectives have to face on a weekly basis as well as some coping strategies. It helps us to understand the needs of our colleagues and ourselves and states the benefits and need for speaking openly with suitably trained colleagues. Names and locations have been anonymised to protect those involved. Ed.)*

‘**W**ho am I? Well, I am not somebody who I thought I was, or who people thought I was for that matter. I am a serving detective living with Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD), depression, and anxiety. This is a condition I have had for a long time, but I was only diagnosed with it late on, through a day I will never forget; a day that changed my life forever.

I am a 48-year-old Scouser, a husband and a father to six children, some of whom live with my first wife and some who live with me and my second wife. I have been a police officer for over 24 years, a detective for 22 of them. I love my job and have always been, and always will be, passionate about policing and being a crime investigator.

At the age of 17, I followed a family tradition and joined the army. I didn’t rise to any rank, I was happy being a front-line soldier taking orders, training hard and drinking even harder. I completed two tours of Northern Ireland and a tour of Bosnia. I saw everything you expect a young soldier to see in four years of service and had been involved in skirmishes where I thought things would not end well. My five-year-old asked me once why I didn’t die when I was in the army, ‘Because I was lucky son’ was my quick reply. I was lucky, but some of my brothers in arms were not.

I think the Army was where I learned to build my suit of emotional armour. By the time I left I had already started to develop ‘empathy fatigue’, and if I ever felt as though I needed to open up or show emotion, I would shut that right down. ‘Empathy fatigue’ is a red flag when it comes to PTSD and I ignored it, I was ‘being a man’ and dealing with things the way men should deal with it right? My PTSD journey had begun without me even knowing it.

After the army, I joined the police, becoming a detective two years later. Every day when I would leave for work but before I left the front door my emotional suit of armour went on. I needed to be this funny, outgoing and confident detective that took everything in his stride. The type of detective that would never emotionally leak – ‘Never let them see

you bleed and save your tears for home’, I would say to myself each day. I got really good at creating this believable alter ego as it had served me well for so long. My empathy fatigue was my superpower, or so I thought. I attended some atrocious scenes of death like all detectives do, but whilst most detectives I knew *were* challenged emotionally, I would be calm, focussed, and clinical in how I would assess and direct what needed to be done. ‘This is great’ I thought, ‘I’m not bothered by anything, chuck it my way, I can deal with it, do I need a defuse? Never!! No chance’.

Then, one year not that long ago, came Father’s Day. I was on the duty detective team for the weekend and had a rough time of it. I had been called out on the Friday to assist a National Crime Agency-led firearms job, on the Saturday called out to an old lady who had died in a house fire, and then Sunday to a mother who had murdered her five-year-old son by throwing him from a height, before doing the same to herself. She had done it on Father’s Day, so she said in a letter received later by her estranged husband, to spite him, to ensure that he would never see Father’s Day as a good day to remember for the rest of his life. Unfortunately, there are a number of us, detectives and others, who were there that morning that will never fully enjoy Father’s Day again either.

I went home that night claiming everything was fine. Nobody knew what I had dealt with that day. I later bathed my son as I usually do and

as he lay in the bath with his eyes closed waiting for me to wash his hair, all I could see was the young boy lying dead on the grass. That was it, I was gone, it only lasted about 20 seconds, but I quickly hugged my boy so that he couldn’t see that I was crying. Then the armour went back on. I couldn’t let my children, or my wife think that I wasn’t the person they thought I was. I had to be ‘strong’.

Slowly but surely over the next couple of years and without realising it, I became withdrawn and disinterested in most aspects of my life. I didn’t want to speak in any depth to anybody, including my wife. Our once meaningful conversations and date nights were non-existent, I wasn’t excited at seeing my kids at the weekend anymore and I put a bit of weight on. Nothing drastic but enough to notice. I was angry but I didn’t know why. And this spilt into the workplace. Feedback was sharp, immediate, and non- developmental and if I did engage in meetings, I had to seriously bite my tongue for fear of leaking my frustrations.

Then came September two years on and another weekend of being on call. I had finished a late turn and was driving to KFC to get a takeaway. I drove past a flat where a few years before I had attended a child death. I had a flashback. I was back at the hospital resuscitation room with the mother of young Mikey who was ten months old. He had been eating grapes for breakfast, but his mum had left him momentarily. He choked

on a half-chewed grape and died later in hospital. The scream I heard his mum shriek when death was called is something I will never forget. In the car I remembered working out how many years I had to go to retirement and how many more dead babies I would have to see again. I worked out ‘Four’ and said to myself ‘ I don’t think I have any more dead babies left inside me before this suit of armour breaks’. I then pushed that out of my head and didn’t give it another thought.

The next day, as most of my detective colleagues do after a weekend of being on call, I spent the day in a really good mood. ‘I’ll have a beer when I get in’ I thought. I got home that night and with the house empty decided to ‘fire up’ my laptop to clear some e-mails. There are always e-mails to clear. And there it was waiting for me, an e-mail saying that I had inherited five extra cases. I already had a full workload. I blew my top and completely overreacted in a way that was not me. I have never had an anxiety attack before, but I think I had one then.

With each extra call was another opportunity for me to come face to face with another dead child, and I couldn’t handle it. I waited for my wife to come home and told her about it and how I was feeling. I also went off on a tangent and started talking about a time in Bosnia when my team came under enemy fire and a mate was shot in the head and I started to

well up a bit. I wasn’t right and she could see that. The next day, she took me to my GP, and I got signed off with work related stress.

After initially referring myself to ‘Health in Mind’ and getting an auto reply saying that somebody would be in touch in twenty days I despaired, I was in limbo. After some advice from a likeminded friend, I referred myself to TILS (Transition, Intervention and Liaison Services) which is a part of the NHS that deals with military veterans. I had a psychological assessment and was diagnosed quickly. I wasn’t shocked and to be honest actually felt comforted and validated. I finally had something to hang my feelings and behaviours onto. I wasn’t this heartless, soulless man because of my genetic make-up, it was because of years and years of trauma exposure. I didn’t and still don’t blame the army or the police at all. I knew what I was signing up for on each occasion and I don’t regret it all. I would do it all again in a heartbeat.

I was told I would need specialist trauma therapy in the form of EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Re-processing). If you don’t know what it is then there is lots of literature on the internet. It is considered arguably the most effective trauma therapy in the world. I needed twelve sessions which is the most you can receive in one go, once a week for twelve weeks. I was advised not to return to work until I had a mid-point assessment by the therapist but there was a waiting list, and it was long.

So, there I was, months away from EMDR therapy, kids at school, my wife working ridiculously long hours and I was hibernating at home. I received lots of visits from friends, colleagues, and my line manager whilst I was off. I welcomed these at first, but my mood was rapidly deteriorating. I was used to having lots of distractions in my life to keep my mind busy, but now these were gone. The flashbacks came thick and fast all day and I couldn’t control them. It was like a bag of popcorn kernels that you microwave listening to them go ‘pop, pop, pop, pop.’ That’s the best way I can describe my flashbacks. I didn’t want to re-join the gym for fear of being seen and judged. ‘If you’re well enough to train then you are well enough to go back to work’, I knew that’s what people would think because it’s what I would have thought and vocalised previously. I shopped at different times of day and made sure it was at a time when the likelihood of being seen was minimal. Of course, that didn’t work, and I did bump into colleagues, and I found myself unnecessarily justifying why I wasn’t at home in bed.

Life was horrible and my wife found it really hard. I wasn’t her rock anymore, I wasn’t the glue that held everything together, I was needy and vulnerable. I wasn’t the man she married. The kids were ignored mostly and if I did communicate with them, it was meaningless.

Hypervigilance!!! This is a one of a number of symptoms of PTSD and basically means that you are constantly scanning your environment for threats, anything that can cause you harm physically or emotionally. It is horrible and drains you and your family. You question everything and you look for things that are not necessarily there.

Around January time, I had had enough. I wanted the pain to go away and couldn’t think of a way out. My EMDR which was due to start was put back six more weeks and it sent me into a complete flat spin. For the first time in my life, I considered suicide. I researched it a lot. I knew that the life insurance would be sorted so the family would be financially sound, it would be classed as a death in service so there would be more money coming in. I knew it would be by hanging and that I would do it in the local woods. I knew which tree it would be because it wasn’t too high, and I don’t like heights. It wouldn’t be at home as I didn’t want the family to find me. I have been to enough hangings to see the devastation it causes, but I was however prepared to sacrifice the mental health of a dog walker and the colleagues who would have had to cut me down.

Selfishly I didn’t care, I just wanted the pain to end. My particular ‘witching hour’ when these thoughts were the strongest were when I was lying in bed, three a.m. with the rain splashing down outside and the wind howling through the trees in the garden. So what stopped me? It was the lack of an SD card. I was going to film goodbye messages to my family and friends, but I had used the last SD card for my GoPro at a family holiday in Mexico…or so I thought. Shopping at Tesco was a worry. I knew that if I could avoid the aisle that sold SD cards, I would be alive for another day. I did wander over a few times to the aisle and could see them in the distance but then I about turned and carried on.

One day I had a meeting that changed my life forever. I instigated a meeting with a specialist police colleague as my hypervigilance was focussed on the threat of my job as a detective and I went to her as the equality lead for the Police Federation. I thought I had put on a good show but later found out that she thought my eyes looked ‘dead’. My colleague has known me for years and had never seen me this way before. She referred me to a charitable organisation called ‘Police Care UK’ which I had never heard of. Within hours they had made contact and within two days I had my first EMDR session. My colleague offered me ‘workplace strategy coaching’ that day but I turned it down, foolishly.

So, there I am, two days later and sat in an old lady’s house with two vibrating pebbles in each hand. I nearly walked out as I felt silly. Detectives don’t do this, do they? We don’t need help do we? We just need to wear our big strong pants and continue to soldier on? Surely? But I didn’t. I stayed for the full hour. During the first session, we dealt with the two deaths I mentioned earlier. EMDR doesn’t remove the memory, it can’t, but it will remove the trauma attached to it. Whilst memories fade, the level of trauma you felt on day one will stay at exactly the same level in a part of your brain called the amygdala. If trauma goes unmanaged or unspoken about then your amygdala will slowly fill up until you get to crisis point. That’s when your cognitive flexibility as well as other things goes out of the window.

I left the session exhausted but exhilarated. I was in a great mood and had never felt this good in years and years, maybe never. I knew I was on the road to recovery because my sat nav on the way back ironically took me through the location of the joint murder and suicide. ‘FFS’ I thought as I saw the road sign, but as I got closer my anxiety went and I smiled for the first time in ages. I went home and couldn’t wait to tell my wife. I was so excited, but she was very cautious at first thinking I was putting on an act. Believe me, you cannot put on an act like that.

I contacted my colleague again and asked her about ‘workplace strategy coaching’ and she agreed to do it for both my wife and I at the same time. I had never heard of it before, but it was life changing. She spoke to us about our ‘reptilian brain’, our ‘chimp brain ‘and our ‘human brain’ and explained how each can work for us or against us in life. She taught us models to use in work and life in general and I must say that it has been transformational. Every opportunity I get I actively market her services I do so. I think it should be given to every teenager whether going through a crisis or not. And it should be available to detectives facing constant exposure to trauma.

So, six sessions later I went back to work on restricted duties. I cannot perform the on-call sudden death function of a detective anymore for fear of secondary trauma, in particular, child deaths. I battle with guilt everyday with that as I see my fellow detectives, my mates, picking up the slack that I have left. They have been really supportive and fully understand my situation, however.

Eighteen sessions later, yes, I had to have a further six on top of the twelve, I have finished my trauma therapy. I feel as though the re-set button has been pressed. I can’t say that I am back to normal, because normal for me was having untreated and unmanaged PTSD for decades. I feel better than normal and the biggest compliment I have received to date has been from my wife. She said that she has got her husband back but with sparkles on. I’ll take that any day of the week and I’ll never forget the day she said it to me.

There is no cure for PTSD unfortunately, but it can be managed through trauma therapy, counselling, and support networks. Some of it can be prevented through having the knowledge and understanding of the early signs and symptoms. I make no apologies for the length of my story so if you have read this far then take a gold star from me.

I hope that if you feel you are struggling as a detective that you talk to somebody. ‘Don’t let your ego write cheques that your mental health can’t cash’. Yes, I’ve nicked that off ‘Top Gun’!!! Good luck with your work in the most rewarding of jobs; in my view there is no finer career in the world than that of a detective. You need to be valued and appreciated. Most importantly, you need to be valued and appreciated by you yourself.’

*We are grateful to the writer for agreeing to share this story and for his work. I have written to acknowledge his greatness in helping others in this way. There is hope. We are also indebted to ‘Police Care UK’ and ‘The Thin Blue Line’ for their amazing work in supporting all the police family. Yes, policing carries a long echo, but it does not have to be the end. Ed.*

**** A picture containing arrow

Description automatically generated

**Memories of a Door**

***by Udo Lauterborn***

'Hello, my name is “Conference Hall”. I’m a door, made of solid beach wood, a door with two panels inswing, a tall frame, two door handles and a four-lever lock. That‘s enough details about me. Don‘t ask about the amount of screws and other details. That’s too personal.

Most of the time I‘m closed.

My job is to be closed. To separate the inside from the outside and the outside from the inside. Not an easy job.

It comes in waves. One, two, twenty, a hundred people walk through. They stay inside for minutes or hours. Never for more than twenty-four hours. The usual timeframe is three hours, which means that I let in people, being closed for three hours and let out people. That would be an average day for me.

A door like myself is always busy. No weekend rest. If you force me to name a quiet time, that would be at nighttime, between three and five. Less motion of people in these two hours.

What I cannot stand is the misuse of my two handles. They are designed well by the locksmith, fixed well by the carpenter who created me, and they are maintained regularly by the housekeeper. A bit of oil here and a bit of graphite there. They work very smoothly, my handles. But; there is a ‘but’. Some people are not able to use them properly. You think, they don’t think. You have to push down the handle to the full. Not half the way. We are talking about some millimetres, not even an inch to move the latch. That’s all. That would cause less scratches, less damage. But what do these people do? They push down the handle half the way and bump their shoulder against me. Sorry, that hurts. I’m full of bruises above the handles. People are rude and ignorant.

People are strange. And so many varieties of them walk through. Businesspeople, handcraft men, politicians, scientists, short people, tall people (nobody has ever banged their head), people with different skin colours and people dressed up in so many different styles. To me, they are all the same. I can’t discover any difference between them. People are people.

What I will never understand is the rush that people can create. “Open the door quick” is one of the commands I’m afraid to hear. Then somebody close to me jumps, runs, bounces towards me, pulls down both handles in a harsh way, gives a push with the foot (I don’t like that) and both panels go flying in the opposite direction. Coming energized to the end of their range both panels swing back. This causes another hit by a foot (what I don’t like either). You can see the marks on both of my two panels. No oil, no liquid polish can cover this evidence. In some languages these panels are called “wings”. I know, where they are coming from.

There’s one rough situation that I hopefully never have to face. I heard handymen talking about it. If some criminals hide themselves inside my room and police wants to enter the room, oh boy, the police do not knock on the door and push down the handle, they use explosives. Don’t even want to think about that.

The gentlest way to come in is practiced by the caterer. They often open both panels to roll in big mobile trays. Quiet careful moves. Sometimes I feel a change of temperature coming from these trays. A bit steamy and moist, but that doesn’t last long. Some people have a carefully behaviour.

Changes of temperature and humidity are not good for me. Then I want to expand or shrink. Frame and panels are not compatible for a while and all the people can do is to bang the panel, to shake the frame, to frighten me all together. People have no respect.

Like it happens the odd time. Some windows are left open, thunder and lightning push in, a strong wind speeds through the building and when I’m not closed at that time, the wind will do so. My two panels and all hinges move, clash, bang, open to a gap, clash again. Terrible. Why can’t people close the windows in time? Have people lost their instinct for weather and nature?

We can all be happy, that I’m a solid door. Made of beech wood in total. No glass at all. With all this banging, the glass would brake on a weekly basis.

No glazing, no way to see through at all. No frosted glass either, which could give the idea of some life inside the room. Light attracts people, they say. The silhouettes through the glass, even through a frosted glass, causes nosiness. I observe this on the opposite door. Light, coming out of the room, causes interest. People stop for a moment, have a look through that glass, all they can see is the shadow of something. People try to analyse the shape, the shape of a human being, the shape of an

umbrella, the shape of something. Imagination takes place. What is going on there? Who is in there? What are they doing in there? People are curios.

Once, only once so far, a man in his 40s stopped at that door, inside the light was switched on, he discovered some shadows through the frosted glass and he pressed his left ear to the door. What a sight. A bit crooked he stood at the door. My only wish was, that someone opens this door in that minute. But he got away with it. People are strange and funny at the same time.

In a similar situation I put another episode to this sort of observation. A man in his 60s, well dressed, head up, generating a special aura by his walk, stopped at that door and peeped through that keyhole. Yes, stooped down half the way, to have a look through the keyhole. Don’t ask me if there was a key in the lock, if he could have seen something. Not through mine anyway. My four-lever lock doesn’t give any chance to see through it. It’s one of those modern locks and the key is always in it. But this serious looking man with the strange behaviour I will never forget. People are strange.

Coming back to this ear, pressed against the door. I’m not only a big door but soundproof as well. When I’m closed I’m closed. I protect the

inside from the outside and the outside from the inside by sound as well. I get the impression, that people outside the room are mostly not happy with that. Heads get very close to me, the breathing stops, ears are pressed against me. Nothing to hear. People get weird.

Last month a music concert was held inside my room. What I still remember are two songs about doors. One song was sung by a woman and a man at the same time. A line they repeated was “nobody knows what’s going on behind closed doors”. Nobody knows. People make me laugh. I know very well what is going on, on both sides of my panels. The other song I remember was about my threshold. The lyrics were like “dweller on the threshold la la la”. That was nice. Are there more songs about doors? Would love to hear them. Sometimes people have lovely ideas.’

A picture containing ground, tree, plant

Description automatically generated

**What Lies Within These Lines?**

***A villanelle.***

***by D.B. Lewis***

What lies within these lines we write?

Before the sounding of the knell

Let each word lend life and light,

To country, culture, wrongs or right,

In stories: verse or prose, let tell.

What lies within these lines we write?

Will words against indifference fight?

Whether wisely written; perhaps to sell?

Let each word lend life and light.

All writers strive, as well they might

Until the reaper rings the bell,

What lies within these lines we write?

The blank page beckons, the pen may bite

Where all those heart-felt memories dwell.

Let each word lend life and light.

How short the day! How long the night!

Now, let us from these pages yell:

What lies within these lines we write?

Let each word lend life and light.

**Notes on Writing a Villanelle**

***by D.B. Lewis***

Do not switch off yet! You can do it! Read on even if poetry is not your thing. You are a writer! Embrace the obscure! Be brave! You can do it! This is my very best work for you!! Honestly! Have a go!

**The villanelle** is one of the most prescriptive of all poetic forms and arose out of Italian and French song writing traditions towards the end of the nineteenth century. To be classed as a villanelle the form requires a strict conformity to both the given rhyming pattern (*aba*) and the layout of the stanzas or verses. (Just keep reading!)

Having said this, once the writer has mastered the technique the writing of a villanelle is surprisingly easy, but these days is not so often attempted by poets. Perhaps the most famous villanelle of all in English is Dylan Thomas’s poem written in 1947, **‘Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night’**, a masterpiece of emotional, highly charged word use; the line, ‘Rage, rage, against the dying of the light’ perhaps being one of the most poignant and memorable of any poetic lines ever written.

Villanelles often seek to expound a single, closely held belief or strongly felt opinion of the poet and often have an equally important, hidden explanation for the state of the writer’s feelings at that moment. They are intended to startle, and by the constant repetition, like in a song, reinforce the one strongly held belief.

**As simply put as I can, the main ‘technical’ requirements of a villanelle are:**

\*There are always six verses (or ‘stanzas’ as they are often called these days).

\* The first five verses are always of three lines. The sixth verse is always of four lines, making a total of nineteen lines in all.

\* The rhyming pattern of a villanelle must conform to the following: the first line and the third line of each of the first five verses must rhyme. This makes the rhyming pattern *aba*.

\* The second line of each of the verses must rhyme. Thus, the rhyming pattern throughout the villanelle is *aba* until the final verse which is *abaa*.

With it so far? Good, but just a little more is then required:

* The first line of the first verse always becomes the last line of the second and fourth verses.
* And the last line of the first verse always becomes the last line of the third and fifth verses.
* Then the two repeating lines become the last two lines of the final, sixth verse.
* Why? Because it just is. Possibly one reason the villanelle is not so popular anymore? It is actually easier to write than explain!

I have written the example and its explanation in this article to try and show some of the subtleties of the villanelle as well as something of the power of poetry generally.

**‘What Lies Within These Lines?’**

***An explanation by the author.***

I am of course having some fun with this here: we should have fun with our writing should we not? The title of the poem as you may possibly have noted also deliberately serves as the title of the explanatory piece.

Having said that, this is quite a dark poem, as many villanelles are; they seem to serve well to this end. The writer is suggesting we are facing our end. (This is poetry, not memoir!) He taunts the reader to find the meaning hidden within the lines although this is clear enough and deliberately kept clear to help illustrate the point; the use of funeral imagery throughout – the knell of the funeral bell, the use of ‘lend’ to suggest borrowed time, light and life triumphing over darkness, the coming of the grim reaper, the beckoning of the blank page being an allusion to the end of writing on the death of the writer.

Even the biting pen is a suggestion of all the unwritten parts of the writer’s memoir and more humour is used in the crafting to illustrate the revenge of the pen, often bitten by the writer in anguish, (during all those troubled

moments of low inspiration perhaps?) And then the even more obvious use of the metaphor of day and night for life and death and the suggestion that

the writer is shouting out his message even as he lies in the memorial garden at the cemetery.

There is a subtly deeper meaning too: the writer is telling the reader that it is by writing that we have ‘light and life’, the whole reason we are hanging desperately onto life at all perhaps?

And what is the message? Again, this is clearly stated. This is a writer begging his readers to make every word, every line count. Before it is too late. It is a poem, a poem specially written for writers.

The reference to making each word count ‘to countries, to culture, to wrongs and to right’ (note it is a comma, not a full stop at the end of the first verse) is a reference to the subjects of recent SIG zoom meetings where country and culture have featured. ‘Wrongs or right’ is the writer having some fun again: an allusion to the magazine title (‘Writes’) and its play on the word write/right as distinct from wrong and of course the writer once again begging the ‘writing readers’ to write with purpose where they can; to right wrongs through the written word wherever possible. The fight against

indifference carries on the same theme. The writer of the poem is passionate about this. Clearly.

‘In stories, verse or prose, let tell’ has been put in to cover the writing genres in a general embracing way but the line is really there to illustrate a poetic literary device known as ‘Inversion’. This is where a normally constructed sentence of ‘English usage’ is turned round for literary or dramatic effect- in this case, ‘Let (us) tell stories in verse or prose’ becomes ‘In stories, verse or prose, let tell’. It also helps the writer meet the rhyming requirement of the villanelle, so this works to both these ends. The final humour comes from the writer having a (jealous?) ‘dig’ at those who write merely for profit, suggesting it is far better in his opinion to write for ‘wisdom’. (This is poetry remember, not news!)

In terms of literary devices, the constant use of alliteration (the repetition of consonants, usually at the start of a word) works in the same way as the inherent repetition of the villanelle form: to emphasise the points being made: ‘lies, lines, light and life,’ ‘will, words, whether, wisely, written,’ and ‘blank, beckons, bite.’ And similarly, assonance (the repetition of vowel sounds); as in the ‘I’ sound of ‘lies, lines, light and life’.

And consonance (the repletion of consonant sounds within words in a line) is here too: ‘**wri**ters **str**ive’, **re**aper **ri**ngs’, ‘h**ow**, n**ow**’.

There is a hint of onomatopoeia (words that hint at the sound the ‘thing actually’ makes) in ‘S**ound**ing of the bell’ and Un**til** the reaper rings the bell’ which is yet another literary device.

This is probably enough to give you an idea of how a villanelle, and also how a lot of other poetry, works. You may find other meanings that resonate for you within any poem you read. But the messages that lie within these lines include:

* The opportunity we have to write more purposefully for the world
* The hope that we will explore poetry more deeply as writers
* The invitation to develop our use of literary devices and…
* A specific invitation as below:

**Another Prize Writing Competition for ‘Writes’!**

**The challenge is to write a villanelle! Write a villanelle: receive a prize book from the Bryn Stowe stable! Simple! A standing competition with no closing date. Go, on have a go! You can do it!**

Entries to: [davidlewis@brynstowe.co.uk](mailto:davidlewis@brynstowe.co.uk)

All villanelles received will be published in ‘Writes’ for sure!



**From Dylan Thomas’ villanelle masterpiece.**

*(Image by Creative Commons usage)*

**A Rubbish Story!**

***by Sean Hannigan***

“Rubbish, absolute rubbish.” Charlie said. Oh dear, here we go again. Visit to Mum was never easy at the best of times. Today was even worse than last month.

Rose was a cheery mum whose eighty years of living were not etched on her face but in her mind. With everyone away from home and a reasonably smooth divorce she was, pretty well free to do what she wanted.

“Now Charlie, it’s just stuff. I have a system and it works well for me.” As a son he was not so sure. Bags everywhere with shopping still in, unopened but cared for. Newspapers were placed neatly in date order, on top of each other and neatly squared off.

“We really do need to sort this out mummy. I thought everything was cleared out last time and put down the side of the house for the bin men”.

“Well, we did…. sort it out and brought it back inside to read again”. Charlie remembered the whole conversation as he visited his mum in hospital after the fall. He recalled the smell of the house, the flies

that danced all over the place and most of all the frail lade he saw in front of him.

He repeated the words again in a soothing voice. “Rubbish, absolute rubbish, Mum, you will be here for another few weeks while your leg heals, and you get your health back”.

His reassurance was all that was required, and Rose rested her ruddy porcelain skin back on the pillow. Charlie just watched as she drifted in and out of dreamy sleep and in no time visiting time was over for another day. Given all the circumstances the staff were not so good when it came to time keeping, and his visiting hours.

The Hotel was inviting and a welcome break from a third week of clearing the whole house out. While Rose was blissfully unaware and cocooned in her own reality, the decision had been made. Mum would never return home to the peace and chaos of that world, her world. She was simply too weak and unable to live the life she thought was playing out to her audience of one.

After a lovely soapy bath and a good dinner Charlie returned to his room. The La Mon was one of the best hotels in the province and he had an incredible deal because, as part of the furniture, he was given one of the twelve suites. He had stayed there at least 30 times over the two

years, and he made sure he spoke to everyone with a kind word and genuine interest in them.

He had an uncanny ability to pick up the conversation exactly where it left off weeks and sometimes months earlier. He knew most of the staff by name and remembered details about their family and interests. In return they always asked how his mummy was doing and if she would go home. It was funny how everyone still spoke about their mummy and daddy. Gillian, the manager, ensured Charlie was well looked after especially when he heard from his staff how he treated them.

The room was large, fresh and had a small wine chiller packed full of club orange. Housekeeping was great and left copious amounts of hot chocolate sachets and small biscuit packs of every kind on the nightstand.

Charlie had spent the last 4 days having breakfast at 7am sharp which consisted of a traditional Ulster fry with a hot chocolate and ending with a small bowl of cut mixed fruit. Myles who normally did breakfast service advised against the mixed berry bowl. “Charlie, it’s full of added syrup to make it taste good. I can fix you a fresh fruit salad every morning. Should counteract that healthy fry”, Charlie laughed as did Myles.

The road home to Mums was helped along by BBC Radio Good Morning Ulster. It took his mind off the continuing task ahead. He parked up just after the 830 headlines. The yellow skip was nearly full, with room for that last walk-in cupboard worth of goods. It was the room mummy never used, as she slept downstairs on the couch. Her legs just struggled to get up the stairs and when she came down Rose would bump along the stairs as she did when she helter-skelter as a child.

The skip was the fourth and final one. Each full of rubbish. Rubbish cards, rubbish gifts, rubbish Amazon parcels, rubbish clothes some still in their packaging unopened, rubbish papers by the score, rubbish cat food cans carefully washed out, rubbish junk mail in strong plastic bags. Life in bags now useless even to the recycle bins at the dump.

Charlie surveyed each room for the fifth time. He gave a little shudder as he remembered what it used to be like, stepping over a mountain of bags, some squelching some not, and trying not to play human-skittles with the uneven paper piles. It was a mammoth task, H he had no idea how to begin. He started one bag at a time until he cleared the living room if you could call it that.

He thought of the house like a whale, using the skip to eat through the skin blubber and bones, one bite at a time. The final bedroom had

been cleared of everything apart from whatever was inside the walk-in closet. Carefully Charlie opened the door which was stiff and unhelpful. He gave it one last tug expecting a mountain of God-knows-what to cascade down on his head.

He closed his eyes, and nothing happened. Silence and relief. He looked up as the first paper smacked him on the head followed by the rest. As he moved back from the building avalanche, he could only chuckle. Charlie had three days left in the house and the mountain of rubbish was not going to beat him.

The first layers were so easy to sort and sift. Newspapers in neat, ordered piles found themselves being managed down the stairs and straight into the car boot for recycling. Next the back seat including the floor and even the passenger seat at the front full to capacity. Three trips to the dump and the by now friendly wave of Paul who was used to Charlie pulling up and having a catch-up. He was pleased the house clearance was in its final stages and appreciated the box of doughnuts and sixpack Charlie had donated to the Tea fund.

“On the last legs now then Charlie?” “Yes mate, nearly all done. Thanks for all your help!” Charlie returned to the last few bags of

rubbish from the cupboard and after five weeks of clearing, cleaning, sifting, and junking out he was about done.

He thought to himself, nearly 3pm and time to pack up. Just throw the last bags of rubbish in the skip and be done. Skip pick up was in an hour. Five bags of rubbish to go. Charlie was physically mentally and emotionally exhausted. Clearing out the house brought back a flood of memories. His mind wondered as he came across family items during the last five weeks as he carefully placed them in plastic storage boxes.

Oh, hell, just get on with it, he thought. One last push. The last three bags were placed on the floor as Charlie thought out loud “rubbish, absolute rubbish”. The bags were placed on the floor. The first contained the now expected multi-pack of photographs in yellow wallets with negatives included and a free roll of film. The second was full of birthday cards Rose had kept over the years.

Charlie opened the last bag. His eyes welled up. Alone in his home, his Mums home, he tried to hide his emotions even though there was no one else there. He felt his face redden and could hold on no longer. Hot wet salty tears bit into his face and mixed with his stinging sweat. He found four letters addressed to each of his brothers Mark and Keith and sister Susan. The diaries his mum kept popped out and clattered on the floor

echoing everywhere. Rubbish no more. Charlie finished off the rest of the clear-up and locked the house for the last time.

The drive back to the La Mon was silent and thoughtful. After room service Charlie read through the diaries and carefully placed the letters and diaries in his cases. He wondered what would have happened if he had just treated the precious bags as rubbish, absolute rubbish….to be continued…

**Fred’s Request on Rubbish**

***by the editor***

Should you all be wondering where all this rubbish came from (*sic!!)* and whether you had missed anything, it came from a mail from Fred Rankin, one of bards seeking help from his granddaughter. Well, we badly missed the deadline here in the editorial office, but it did spark some interest so well done to the Rankin tribe.

Hi David,

I hope that all is well with you.  I am wondering how you are doing in relation to the next edition of 'WRITES' and whether there is time for me to ask for a little help with something.  I have been approached by my

granddaughter who is trying to complete a project on 'RUBBISH' for Leeds University.  She is involved in photography and art and has been out in

the Yorkshire countryside taking photos of rubbish left lying about and going out with her dad in a canoe to help clear up a local canal.

She is trying to use different means of getting the message across regarding those members of the general public who just seem to leave litter everywhere!  She asked me if I could write a poem for her.  One of the objectives of the exercise is to get as many other people involved as she can and I was hoping that you could include my poem in your next newsletter and ask our other fellow writers if they could create poems and stories relating to the problem of rubbish in our countryside.

Anyway, please find attached the poem I have written, and I hope you find it possible to use it.  I believe that at one stage you asked us to send articles in a certain font and size, but I cannot find the details now.  I hope what I have sent on to you is okay.

Kind regards,

Fred

**Writing the Novel**

***by Eleni Cotton***

[A picture containing text, person, black, posing

Description automatically generated](https://azure.wgp-cdn.co.uk/app-family-tree/posts/bertha2-07941.jpg)

**H**ave you ever thought about writing a novel based on your family’s history?  Maybe your Grandma has told you about her memories of the war years, the joys and the tragedies, her own memories of her grandparents and the extended family, and the roles they played.  *Well*, you might think, *that’s interesting enough but there are millions of people who could tell a similar story.  Pity there doesn’t seem to be a really momentous occasion or two, or three, to lift it out of the*

*ordinary.*  Stop right there!  You don’t need Genghis Khan or Mother Theresa as two of your ancestors to make a story worth telling.  I have come to realise that everyone, but everyone, has a family story worth telling and, in my view, the secret is in the detail.

When I started writing ‘[Bertha the Swiss Trader’s Daughter](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Bertha-Swiss-Traders-Daughter-Conspiracy/dp/1787194698)’, it was to be a record for my children of their ancestors, who were quite ordinary people who had lived extraordinary lives. I had been brought up listening to stories my mother, Bertha, used to tell me about her life and ancestors, and therefore mine. So where would I start? There were indeed some shattering, tragic and interesting events and I started off by listing these and inserting them on a horizontal time line. After all, there must be something or some events that have made you consider writing your novel: they are going to be your signposts.

**Creating the backdrop**

Now comes the critical part. You have to create a world in which your events will take place. You need to have a convincing and totally factual backdrop to your story. Remember that a mistake, if recognised, will drag the reader from his or her absorption in this fascinating world,

bring them down to earth with a jolt and make them lose faith in the entire novel.

This is where the importance of research comes into play. You must be able to take your readers with you into this world of the past with its sights, its smells, its pace of life and work, and along country roads before they became motorways. Its people will work at particular jobs, dress in current fashions and spend their leisure times in similar ways.  I don’t want to just tell a story; I want to take my reader by the hand and together enter this new, yet old world where they will see events first-hand.

This is not as difficult as it may sound. Research is the answer, and I shall not go into this since [*Family Tree magazine*](https://www.family-tree.co.uk/) have compiled a staggering and comprehensive guide to finding things out.  You will, however, from the bits and pieces of information that you gather, begin to form a picture and surprisingly soon, your mind will present to you appropriate scenarios for your event.

Personally, I will not begin to write until I can see in my mind’s eye, the scene where the action is taking place.  I want to know where my characters are standing, their mood, the colours of their environment.

Is it rainy, cloudy or is there brilliant sunshine? I think about the flora, the fauna, the perfumed plants, everything.

Once I have that I am ready to write, to take my reader to where things are happening. At one point in ‘Bertha….’  her father, Ludwig has a serious accident and I started off by simply relating the incident. My editor suggested that I go with Ludwig to where his accident took place.

I did and Bingo! From a tame little third-hand story it became a powerful first-hand account full of emotion, pain, blood and mayhem.

**Keep the narrative moving**

A word of warning here…. There are few things as boring as paragraphs of descriptive prose which, however brilliant, will make your reader impatient if they do not bring the story forward. ‘Bertha……’ starts off with schoolgirls fleeing their convent at midnight with the bloodthirsty insurrectionists approaching from the opposite direction. As they start their climb into the hills surrounding their convent there is much to terrify them.  A huge cactus looks for an instant in the dark like a revolutionary with raised arms, ready to strike and Bertha has to stifle a scream. They avoid large stones on the darkened path as they may well

harbour snakes and a hyena’s howling laugh terrifies the small children.

Each description must tell the reader something about the characters and move the narrative on. Needless to say, it would be inappropriate to tell the reader at this moment that the hills have an altitude of 5,000 feet at their highest point and that the lower slopes are cultivated with cassava plants by the villagers. Unless of course, you could make the information very relevant and not destroy the tension of the children’s flight.

But what, you might ask, if your story doesn’t have Bertha’s insurrectionists, slave traders, big game hunting and African mystique?  I can only turn to ‘Lark rise to Candleford’, one of my favourite books, as a shining example of how very ordinary lives can hold a great deal of information to intrigue and satisfy. Although it is years since I last read it, it is indelibly printed in my mind how the menfolk went to the pub each evening after work and made a half pint last (who wouldn’t with a wife and ten children in the one up and one down that was home!), how each family reared their annual pig and, when it was slaughtered, a piece was given to each of the neighbours, and so on.

A simple account, well written, can be mesmerising. And, anyway, even the most banal life has its moments from Aunt Ethel’s dalliance with Edgar the grocer’s lad when she was fifteen and the subsequent shot-gun wedding, to Tom’s bad behaviour at school which spiralled into criminal acts like stealing a loaf of bread and resulted in his free sea voyage to Australia. One could describe his father racked with grief and guilt and his mother’s silently breaking heart.

**Compelling characters**

Make your characters memorable and likeable so that your readers care what happens to them, not forgetting a couple of unlikeable ones that the readers can mentally ‘boo’ and wait to see them getting their just deserts.  It’s also a good idea to write brief mini biographies of each of your main characters, their appearance, their clothes, their facial expressions, any idiosyncrasies and so on. Make them real. And don’t do what I did and paralyse yourself with the thought that they are your ancestors. Forget that and simply look at them as people and your pen and your imagination will begin to fly!

Finally, but certainly not least, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Think about a paragraph that reads…

‘The leading gorilla raised his arm and urgently motioned to the others to sink to the ground behind him and load their firearms. Through his binoculars he scanned the terrain then signalled to the right and then to the left for the gorillas to position themselves for the ambush. The tension was visible on each face, beads of sweat gathered above the eyes, some hands shook as they mouthed silent prayer. They settled down to wait, thinking, ‘Bloody ‘ell! Gorilla warfare is hell on earth.’

Guerilla even? What a difference a word makes...!

My very best wishes for your success with your novel.

*We are indebted to Helen Tovey, Editor of Family-Tree Magazine for permission to reproduce this article which was first published in the magazine in 2018.*

For those who spread their interest between the Writers SIG and Global Forum and the Family History SIG do please see: [www.family-tree.co.uk](http://www.family-tree.co.uk)

Or contact: Warners Group Publications plc, The Maltings, West St, Bourne, LINCS PE10 9PH; Tel: 07841033833; Email: [Helen.t@family-tree.co.uk](mailto:Helen.t@family-tree.co.uk)

*Eleni Cotton*

A picture containing person, wall, indoor

Description automatically generated

**The Admiral and I**

***by D.B. Lewis***

**I** could have called this piece‘My Butterfly’. But what is the point of possession? I have no need to possess beauty. It just is. Actually, I have no desire to do anything with the glory of this morning: a perfectly formed Red Admiral that shared its transitory life with me. For twenty unfettered minutes today we lived together, the Admiral and I. In glorious, timeless wonder.

As he landed suddenly on the porridge spotted spoon of my empty breakfast bowl we stared at each other, a butterfly of such brilliance he barely moved. And I dared not. Beguiling, beautiful, the bounteous nature of life lay all before me. I think he knew it. ‘He’ simply because I wanted it to be so at that moment. We all have our needs. Male and female Red Admirals are almost identical to our sight. Or so I am told. He could have been she. Or a true gynandromorph? I watched ‘him’. Silently we stared at each other. His red and black and white a minute two-inch wing-spread wonder of the world as two antennae sensed themselves towards my space as if to say, ‘Do not move, I need you, I need your peace.’ And so, I did not move.

We sat together, the Admiral slowly soaking up the stray brown crystals of discarded sugar scrapings as I put away the morning’s newspaper full of self-defeating blame and woe for the hope and glory spread out before me, reminding me of who I was, where I was, and perhaps too, a little of why I was?

Turning, the proboscis, coiling and uncoiling endlessly for sustenance, the Admiral basked to soak up the much-needed sun of a cooling day to allow him to fly once more. I soared with the filigree fur of its wings, gently ruffling in the zephyrs of a breeze, I counted the spots, I glowed to the pattern of the startling red, soothed myself with the harmony of black and white brought to sublimity.

I remembered I was a writer and thanked this beautiful being out loud for bringing me to my senses with such solace, but quietly, lest I disturb him. Fifteen minutes passed and the Admiral fluttered to a nearby rock, basking on a phlox for five minutes more before creeping slowly across the stonecrop. And then he left me.

As I picked up my pen and pad, I realised how short our lives really are, the Admiral’s and mine. But why limit life by time? The butterfly in full form lives but a month or two, three at most; we perhaps live a little longer. If we are fortunate enough. But the Admiral and I had lived. That was the nature of our togetherness. I am a richer man for having shared my life with a butterfly.

**Life in the Writers Zoom…**

***Note from the Chair***

*For those who may have joined the group recently I thought a few words of encouragement or inspiration might help you feel your feet, find your fingers, or even flip your folios…*

*Please do join our merry little band via Zoom on Wednesdays every second week (the next is Wednesday 30th June at 4-5 pm.) Sean, our resident wonderful wordy wizard, sets it all up and sends out the link the day before the meet. We do have some truly amazing moments almost every time. Here’s our very own poet laureate and avuncular, ‘Uncle’ Will Petherick, who pens and caricatures away and never fails to amuse! Please do join us, we are a very friendly dozen or so indeed… (He’s from Scotland just in case you’ve missed him…) Nice one Bill. (Ed.)*

**Us Yins**

*by Will Henry P*

Stevie from the USA plays the Saxophone,

So does our Sean but as he says, he just sucks and blows.

Eleni is editing her book, Fizz is working on mime,

Ann’s book is being launched soon and not before time.

David who looks after us was busy as usual,

Checking on all our work giving it approval.

An artist of immense talent in Doz, there is no one better.

As for me I am still practicing on how to get better.

.

The others in the group were doing as they like,

Helena was on holiday, Neil out on his motorbike.

Oor Ian was still in the far North somewhere so remote,

His next-door neighbours are a Highland Coo and a Scottish Mountain Goat.

So, there you are, we happy group, of poets, painters, and writers,

Who meet every second week and there are some cheeky blighters?

But they give advice, encouragement, and Friendship to each other,

Like a family should, they are after all, my adopted sisters, and brothers.

***‘Hear all about it! …Stop the Presses…Latest, Latest… Get your news here...’***

**Gimborn Goes Ahead!**

**Great news, I spoke with Gimborn this week and they are open and fully expecting us! Book now if still undecided!**

  **Gimborn**

**The Fourth**

**International**

**Writers Seminar**

**26th September-1st October 2021**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | Bok now by email at [info@ibz-gimborn.de](mailto:info@ibz-gimborn.de) .   For further information, please contact the editor at:  [davidlewis@brynstowe.co.uk](mailto:davidlewis@brynstowe.co.uk)  ================================================== | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | |  | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | **Information and Education Center Schloss Gimborn eV | Schlossstrasse 10 | D-51709 Marienheide** Telephone: 02264 40433-0 | Fax: 02264 40433-69 | Email: [info@ibz-gimborn.de](mailto:info@ibz-gimborn.de)  It is strongly suggested that we all book early to secure a place at our wonderful spiritual home, the castle where we first came together to found the group in 2018. Please book directly with IBZ Gimborn. *The excitement mounts! Do contact me, Neil or Sean for information. (Ed.)* | |

**The Ian Thompson Memorial Prize**

**Writing Competition 2021**



Ian Thompson was a former policing colleague having retired from North Yorkshire Police following service with Thames Valley. On retirement he became the CEO of BAPCO, The British Association of Public Safety Communications Officials, and travelled extensively in their interest. In his two careers Ian did much to promote excellence in communication between the emergency services. Sadly, in late 2020, Ian died of heart disease aged 56, and the family have suggested a writing competition in his memory. We are honoured and grateful that Amanda, Ian’s widow, and their sons Jason and Adam, have agreed to this tribute and we hope that many of our writers will enter the competition in Ian’s memory. It is fitting that Ian strove to promote excellence in communication, something we as writers of course also seek to achieve. He was a dedicated family man, a loyal neighbour, friend, and colleague, and we look forward to some excellent entries which will be judged by the family.

**Competition Rules**

Not less than 1000 and not more than 2,500 words. Or, if poetry of not more than 40 lines. Any genre, form or style, fiction, or non-fiction.

Entries to be submitted in **Calibri 12 pt. 1.5 spacing in a Word** document.

**Subject:** The subject matter of the submission should embrace **one or more** of the following: communication in any form, any aspect of technology, A.I. (Artificial Intelligence), and should be ‘forward facing’ embracing the future rather than the past. Subjects do not necessarily have to be police related.

**The Prize:** The first prize, kindly donated by Ian’s family, is for **£150** together with a certificate. ‘Highly Commended’ certificates will also be awarded for any submissions considered to be so worthy. The submissions will be collated, and the best entries published in pamphlet form. If conditions permit the prizes will be awarded at a suitable ceremony in the autumn.

**Extended Submission deadline: 1st August 2021**

**Award notification: September 2021**



**Nature Notes**

***by Steve Parnwell***

**12th June 2021**

**It** has been a cold wet spring and wildlife and gardens are about a month behind where they should be. But the blazing sun this Saturday morning (12th June) heralds the fact that vertumnal temperatures are finally here, bringing with them the associated burgeoning of lush new growth.

Sitting by one of the waterfalls at Madeleine’s Patch HQ it is a joy to note that, with the help of our friend Andy Curtis and the rearranging of rocks, it is finally cascading as Madeleine and I envisioned it would do, but sadly with her sudden demise three years ago this work in progress was stalled. The sound of water tumbling over rocks is a joy to the soul and I know it would have gladdened her heart to see this project come to fruition.

Drawn to the sound I take a rare opportunity to sit and contemplate the frenzied dance of life unfolding before my gaze. In the margins of the pond, pale ragged robin florets wave their unkempt heads in time with the slight breeze, and Marsh Orchid spikelets are thrusting their spear shaped leaves to the heavens. Day by day the flowering buds swell a little more and are beginning to unfurl to expose their secret inner beaty. Sheltering in the sedge bed, the orchids are proving to be somewhat elusive. From one random plant last year, the seed presumably wafted in on some flirtatious zephyr, there are now 10 or 11 plants but try as I might, I can never be sure, as sometimes it’s 10 and sometimes it’s 11 as they blend in with the camouflaging assemblage of other marshy plants around them.

***Madeleine’s Patch Meadow***

A kaleidoscope of colour flutters above the water as damselflies of red, green and blue hover. Hard bent on courtship some are flying in tandem with the male grasping the female behind her head with claspers located at the tip of his abdomen. Fighting off ardent competitors the male flexes his abdomen to encourage the female to loop hers to interlock with him in a wheel shape or, for the more romantically inclined, heart shape. However, romance is not foremost on the female’s mind. She may already have mated, and the new male is therefore obliged to use his penis to scoop out his rival’s sperm before replacing it with his own. Survival of the fittest or survival of the fickle? Well either way it works for them.

Overhead, the aerial dogfight acted out for millennia still continues, with dragonflies fighting for territories, sometimes three or four at a time barging into each other with breath-taking turns and zigzags that would be impossible for even the nimble WWII spitfires to emulate without losing a wing or stalling the engine. Sometimes even these natural aerial skirmishers get it wrong, crash diving into the marginal vegetation but emerging to continue the fight at breakneck speed as if driven to make up lost time enforced on them by the earlier cold weather. Cruising through the canyons of verdant vegetation at top

speed they appear like armed gunship helicopters on some military mission.

In the watery margins grass snakes lay in wait for careless prey, their yellow neck collars a vivid contrast to their more subdued body colours that blend in so well with their surroundings. A plethora of young newts breaking the surface provide a feasting bonanza for the snakes. Many juvenile newts are still bearing their feathery gills, temporarily startling pond skaters and whirligigs as the newts come up to grab a gulp of air before rapidly descending back into the depths.

Everywhere the birds are on a mission, flying straight as an arrow from nest to feeding site and back again. Each flight path a giveaway as to the nest location by those who are patient enough to watch. Hungry magpies and jays are keen to steal eggs and young to keep their own offspring alive. Many of the nest boxes we have erected are now occupied with at least three separate broods of blue tits and jackdaws have commandeered the barn owl boxes after a short tussle with the intended recipient. From the trees a juvenile tawny owl makes its wheezy call and, in the hedges, black birds and thrushes perform their mellifluous choral pieces, while blackcaps are singing their scratchy, less

tuneful, but still spiritually uplifting calls to stake their territories in competition with the onomatopoeic chiff chaff.

Another onomatopoeic name dropper is the cuckoo, which has been calling at both Madeleine’s Patch and Madeleine’s Patch HQ, its haunting melody, oft heard from afar, foretells the fate of some hapless smaller bird’s brood soon to be usurped by this parasitic bird’s own offspring. However, this one-way foster caring has been going on for centuries and has been absorbed within the survival strategies of both species. What is of more concern perhaps for the future survival of both species and many others that fill our spring countryside with a symphony of melodious euphony are the unpredictable extreme swings of weather patterns possibly caused by climate change.

Noticeable this year has been the relatively low number of insects on the wing and several bumblebee bodies have been found under rocks at Madeleine’s Patch HQ. Victims perhaps of the late frosts? Birds have adapted to coincide their broods when the insects’ larvae are hatching so that the food is available when they need it. Lack of synchronicity in breeding patterns this year has led to smaller egg clutches and starvation of chicks.

Hopefully, the diversity of habitats and the abundance of insects and other wildlife associated with them at Madeleine’s Patch HQ and the reserve will be sufficient to see our bird populations through, but if this becomes a regular pattern year on year the future is not bright, unless the evolutionary timeline can be truncated for those species that take generations to adapt. Also, it emphasises the need for bigger, better more joined up habitats to reconnect our ever increasingly fragmented landscape and provide gene pool resilience and a recolonization reservoir with connected pathways when localised ecological catastrophic crashes strike.

Unaware of all of this, the wildflowers at Madeleine’s Patch have nevertheless been tardy in showing their faces this year. However, now the hardy cowslip, which was the only one to have the tenacity to make an early show has been joined by several others such as red campion, common sorrel, ox eye daisy, ribbed and hoary plantains and meadow buttercup with others waiting in the wings. The latter has done particularly well this year, filling Madeleine’s meadow with a swath of shining gold when backlit by the evening sun as it descends below the horizon.

Nature’s bounteous beauty is there for all to behold, just open your eyes and you will see. Open your heart and you will understand how this precious gift does not come free. The price it demands is respect and love. If we do not pay our dues now, we will have to pay with compound interest in the future when our very survival is the commodity on offer.

But in the meantime, I am content to take one brief moment to savour the scent of the climbing rose growing in profusion that eponymously bears Madeleine's name and planted in her memory.

A dragonfly on a stick

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

**Four Spotted Chaser Dragonfly at Madeleine’s Patch HQ**

A picture containing grass, outdoor, plant, flower

Description automatically generated

**Marsh Orchid at** **Madeleine’s Patch HQ**

A close up of a grasshopper

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

**Blue Damselfly at Madeleine’s Patch HQ**

A bug on a flower

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

**Red Damselfly at Madeleine’s Patch HQ**

A yellow flower on a plant

Description automatically generated with low confidence

**Water Lilly on Pond at Madeleine's Patch HQ**



**Pond and Waterfall at Madeleine's Patch HQ**



**Madeleine’s Rose at Madeleine's Patch HQ**

***(I so loved this image of Madeleine’s Rose, I gave it a half page all to itself!***

***Lovely Steve, thank you. Ed.)***

***The Station Cat Writes***

The Cat has been out on the tiles for a while but crawled back in as you know, a bit bedraggled but alive and kicking. But lots of things are now starting to revitalise the world and here are a few of them…

**SIG Nature Writing Weekend**

Steve Parnwell has kindly invited us all down to Madeleine’s Patch again, this time for a writing weekend on the theme of nature writing. For those who attended our last event there, a hedge planting weekend in January 2020, just before the pandemic struck we know just how amazing Steve’s place is; a fascinating weekend is definitely assured. The dates are proving a little tricky with the Delta variant, but early August is now looking favourite: we will confirm these at the next Zoom meeting. Thank you, Steve!

**Murder Mystery Weekend March 2022**

Tony Granger confirms the new date for this long-awaited extravaganza of a weekend will now be: 25th-27th March 2022. Going to be all the better for the long pandemic wait. Bookings will open in January 2022, but priority will be given to those due to attend the original booking. Thank you, Tony.

**Ann’s Book Launch!**

**Friday 25th June 2021 4 -5.30 pm**

**‘Which Way to The Gambia?’** is Vice-chair Ann Cumberland’s first book and it is having a grand launch on Friday 25th June at 4 pm to 6 pm at The Theatre, Cober Hill Hotel and Conference Centre, Cloughton, North Yorkshire, courtesy of Number 3 Region IPA and the publishers, Bryn Stowe Publications of Scarborough.

Please do join us and the invited audience for this charity fund raising event in aid of sending a bike or two to the children of a school in The Gambia, via the IPA *Valles Occidental* Branch of Barcelona in Spain: a true act of IPA friendship.

*We would not normally publish the access codes to avoid unwanted intrusion but due to the short notice and the hope that this will aid you coming along we publish it here: (please therefore only pass onto genuinely interested parties only!)*

To Join the Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81971359700?pwd=YXNvOUgyc3A4RFNFRE5SQm52TlNLUT09>

Meeting ID: 819 7135 9700

Passcode: 198596

**A Final Note on Delayed Publication Submissions**

If you have submitted material between the end of February and the beginning of June and it has not appeared in this edition, please accept all due apologies. I will make sure all of these appear in the next or following editions. It is just that having reached over 40 pages on this one I felt I must have it out there and start on the next one straight away. Each edition takes a very great deal of work, extremely enjoyable work I must say but a lot of time and effort does go into each one.

**A Zoom Note**

Please do keep writing: we are an amazing library of writers beyond any doubt and for those who have not attended a Zoom fortnightly gathering, you would be staggered at the range, depth and sincerity of the friendship: we are an excellent example of the living embodiment of the IPA. Do join us if you can; we are usually around a varying dozen or so and all very welcoming and friendly. The usual format is to have a ‘round robin’ of each member’s news, writing wise, but from time to time we have themed weeks which have included Irish Writing, Scottish Writing and soon we shall have English Writing! Not to mention African Writing as we know have so many ‘ex Africans’ amongst our number!

It has long been the Cat’s wish to have a Zoom News article each edition so if anyone fancies taking this on, they would be most welcome! (Bill? Could you manage a poem so regularly do you think, maybe with a sketch???)

***Thank you all once again, wonderful writers; please stay safe and well and continue to have a quiet and peaceful summer 2021!***

***As if…***

***Editorial Note: This newsletter is copyright to Bryn Stowe Publications and the IPA. Individual submission copyright remains with the contributing authors. For any corrections or omissions please mail:***

***The Editor, ‘Writes’:*** [***davidlewis@brynstowe.co.uk***](mailto:davidlewis@brynstowe.co.uk)

***©IPA and Bryn Stowe Publications 2021***

***Next Edition: Coming Very Soon!!!***