

New England WRITERS CENTRE

For people who love writing and reading

Newsletter
September- December 2010

YOUTH ONLINE REACHES HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN

Twenty five schools took part in our Youth Online project. At the time of finalising the newsletter, we were still waiting on final details from schools, but we estimate that at least 1500 children and youth, from lower primary school to Year 12, took part.

Thanks to a grant from Copyright Agency Ltd, with support from Arts NSW and Community Mutual Group, we were able to offer packages of seven workshops to primary schools and three to high schools for a very reasonable cost, so that tiny schools with 10 – 16 pupils could take part in workshops with **John Marsden, Miles Merrill, Cecilia Dart Thornton, Lesley Sly, Sue McMichael**, and poet **Martin Langford**, who did in-person workshops at Armidale High School and Duval. For more information about the project, go to the website.

Feedback from teachers:

Thank you for organising the Youth Online program. It was of immense value to our Year 3-6 class of 26 students aged from 8 to 12 at The Channon Public School. We are a small, rural school on the NSW North Coast and the opportunity for the children to use the newly installed video-conferencing facilities to interact with authors was excellent. The program was inexpensive, and allowed the children to pursue and develop their interests in creative writing in an innovative and interesting manner,' – **Martin Gill**.

Palmers Island Public School, North Coast NSW where 35 children took part in the junior workshops and 53 children in the senior workshops: "The Youth Online is valuable as it offers a service to schools that would otherwise not be viable, both

within a physical and financial capacity. We would not be able to access the number of authors or be able to afford to have them visit our school.

"We believe the Youth Online program was beneficial to the children and the staff by offering opportunities to interact with authors. This helped develop writing, thinking, talking and listening skills. The presenters offered some excellent ideas to develop writing. These ideas are already being used to spark creative thinking and writing. The children were engaged with the authors.

– **Kathy Hardaker**

Feedback from children:

We had a connected classroom conference with well known authors. The authors told us about writing strategies and we got to ask questions. My favourite was Miles Merrill because he explained better and was funny. It was a great experience!

– **Freya Year 6**

I think that the Youth Online is a good idea because if students want to become an author or a journalist it gives them a good idea of how to start a career and write stories or books. The only part that wasn't good was that there wasn't enough room.

– **Jesse Year 5**

I think the best Youth Online session was with John Marsden because he was the best speaker; he had good activities to help us write stories. He is also a very successful writer; he even has one of his books made into a movie. He is also a very published author. He has published more than 30 books so it is easier to respect him.

– **Jack Year 6**

It was really good for us to interact with famous authors like that. It was especially special for our little school because we never get to see anyone famous. It was really good for us to do all of the activities they put up for us.

– **Libby Year 6**

All the authors told me about something that I didn't know and it was a good experience. Youth Online taught us about lots of great writing ideas that we can use in stories which make it more exciting.

– **Holly Year 5**

WHAT WE DID & WHAT WE WANT

Please send us a paragraph or two on what you did this year in writing, and your favourite book. Please let us know what workshops or events you would like next year.

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WORKSHOPS

Final Draft

- with **Wendy James**,
Saturday, November 20, 10-4. \$65/\$55.

A workshop for refining your work, the last stage that can make or break your chances of getting an agent and/or publisher and, of course, an audience. Wendy will guide you on the long and sometimes arduous journey that begins with redrafting and ends in publication. Bring a piece to work on and be prepared to workshop and polish until you've got that elusive final draft. This workshop is not just for writers at an advanced stage, but also for writers who want to know what work they'll need to do when they get to a more advanced stage.

WRITERS READING

Session 4: JEREMY FISHER

The book for this session is *Our Father Who Wasn't There* by **David Carlin**, published by Scribe. Jeremy has worked as editor, publishing manager, executive director of the Australian Society of Authors, and is now Senior Lecturer in Writing at UNE. His writing encompasses fiction, poetry, prose, reviews and critical articles. He has been published in India and Vietnam. His most recent book is *Music*

from *Another Country*, a novel about the humility of survival.

DATE: Saturday October 23, 2 pm to 4 pm.



Session 5: ELIZABETH HALE

The book for this session is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll.

DATE: Saturday, November 13. 2pm to 4pm.

Elizabeth has taught at UNE since 2002, she has written scholarly articles on topics in children's literature, Victorian and New Zealand literature, and Australian theatre, with a special interest in the representation of classical texts in contemporary literature. She is currently completing a book on giftedness in children's literature (1837-1914).

This year she represented UNE at the prestigious Dickens University in California, where she will be talking about "marvellous boys" in *Oliver Twist*.

Elizabeth Hale

Here is a little background for those of you thinking of going to Elizabeth's workshop:

About the book on giftedness in children's literature - what does that mean, who are the most gifted writers in the genre?

The book is about how children's writers embody the state of childhood through characters who possess different degrees of giftedness/marvelousness/brilliance etc. So, it's not the writers who are especially gifted (though they are), it's the children, and I investigate how different types of giftedness or talent appear in different periods, or through the work of different writers. For example, Frances Hodgson Burnett has a series of gifted empaths, in the shape of Little Lord Fauntleroy (in the novel of the same name), or Sarah Crewe in *A Little Princess*, or Dickon, in *The Secret Garden*.

What have been most important discoveries in your research?

I think it's the way that children's literature is so ideologically driven, preparing children for a range of gender roles, for instance, or in the tussle between brain and brawn that appears in boys' fiction, or the anxiety about what to do with talented girls in the fiction of the late 19th century.

What was your 'marvellous boys' talk at the Dickens Universe in California about?

It was about the boys in *Oliver Twist*: Oliver Twist, the Artful Dodger, and Charley Bates, who demonstrate different types of idealised or demonised childhood.

Do you think children's literature should be censored? What are the boundaries that you think can't be crossed?

I don't really think it should be censored, but I see why there is such concern about what children read. Perhaps benign caring guidance for children is better than censoring? It depends on the book and depends on the child.

Some writers who teach writing have been amazed to discover how many aspiring writers don't read much or at all. What is the importance of reading to writing?

For myself, it's about picking up new words, ideas, phrases, rhythms, structures, and styles. The tricky part after that is keeping them out of my head while I'm writing.

Could you explain a little about the Writers Reading workshop you'll be running for NEWC on November 13. Why did you choose Alice's Adventures in Wonderland to examine?

I was planning to look at some passages that show Lewis Carroll's distinctive style, to discuss how they connect with the child reader (Alice was written for a particular child: Alice Liddell, the daughter of one of Carroll's colleagues), and also, if there's time, to explore some of the elements of parody in the book.

Readers might not know but many of the verses in Alice's *Adventures in Wonderland* parody a series of morally improving hymns written for children by Isaac Watts in the early 18th century. Carroll's parodies are classic English nonsense, and I hope anyone who comes along will be ready and willing to try their hand at writing some nonsense, too!

What are your top five children's books?

Currently (it changes all the time): Frances Hodgson Burnett: *The Secret Garden*; Neil Gaiman: *Coraline*; Janet and Allen Ahlberg: *The Old Joke*

Book; Tove Jansson: Finn Family Moomintroll; Herge: Tintin in Tibet.

WORK SPACE

Sophie Masson



Last year we heard that local writer, Sophie Masson, had been awarded a writer's residency in Paris. Now she shares her experiences with us:

"I've just come back from a marvellous six-month writer's residency in the Keesing Studio in Paris, courtesy of the Literature Board of the Australia Council of the Arts. It's been an amazing six months! Though I have been to Paris before, this was really an opportunity to get to know it properly, to explore it, and to be constantly surprised and inspired by the rich tapestry of life in this most lively, charming and unique city, weaving it into not only the novel I was writing, but lots of other ideas which are already bearing fruit. Not only that, but the first of my novels (under my pen-name of Isabelle Merlin) to appear in French came out in Paris in March, so I was there for its launch into the exciting world of French publishing! (Its title was 'Three Wishes' in English, but 'Paul, Charlie--et Rose!' in French. The book has also appeared in Polish and is due to be published in Germany next year.)

It's also been the most wonderful opportunity to range further afield, to immerse myself in such places as London, Rome, Malta, and especially the place I've been dreaming about going to since I was a teenager and in love with Tolstoy and Chekhov

and Dostoevsky--Russia. Amazing, unpredictable, disconcerting, exciting and richly rewarding, the Russian journey alone was something I will never forget.

For me, as a writer, the most important thing, the thing that really triggers floods of ideas, images, plots, is experience, experience outside the ordinary and everyday, travel outside of habits and routine--and this the Keesing residency provided in spades, and yet, providing a calm, pleasant home base as well, it also provided the space for reflection and imaginative work. Already, two new contracts have flowed out of it, and more projects are on the way. My reservoir of story is full to the brim and will be dipped into for years to come!

Books out this year:

The Hunt for Ned Kelly (Scholastic, February)
Bright Angel (under my pen-name of Isabelle Merlin, Random House Australia)
The Phar Lap Mystery (forthcoming, October, Scholastic).

Coming next year:

The Understudy's Revenge (Scholastic)
My Father's War (Scholastic)
The Boggle Hunters (Scholastic)

I have well over 50 books out now”.

Craig Schneider

Member, Craig Schneider, is having a busy year with a number of articles appearing in *The Armidale Express*: ‘Multi-cultures, shared futures’, published in *The Armidale Express* as ‘International students enrich university world’, July 7. ‘A distinct compassion for Haiti’, published as ‘Mighty neighbourly’ in *The Armidale Express Extra*, March 24. ‘Armidale Pathologist Aboard the Africa Mercy’, published as ‘Mission of Mercy on Hospital Ship’, *The Armidale Express*, January 13. He has also written an artist profile called ‘A portrait of Nerida Boessler’. Nerida, with other artists from the area, who has recently painted a portrait of the Member for Northern Tablelands, Dr Richard Torbay, which will appear in a documentary called ‘Painting the Speaker’. The profile is soon to appear in one of the *Armidale Express*'s publications. Craig is currently working on a novel, *As the Sparks Fly Upward*, as well as other short stories.

Linda Woodbridge



Welcome to new member Linda Woodbridge. Linda has just self-published her first book *From There to Here*. We asked her to tell us about herself and the experience self publishing:

I’m very excited to have joined to this organisation. I live in Moree with my husband and I have just started writing books after a lifetime of writing. Originally from California, I came to Australia as a young bride after working as an international flight attendant. I had to adjust from the high life to the quiet life when my new husband and I moved to the NSW south coast. We raised a family, I threw myself into the role of earth mother, I had some business experience and farming experience during those years, and I found myself being secretary of everything.

Sadly the marriage ended, I returned to California for a couple of years, came to a point of crisis and breakdown, regrouped, and then discovered an inner strength and direction that took me into new adventures.

Recently I thought I might put some of those adventures on paper. I mentioned being secretary of everything because I always found writing easy. When I came to Moree I had a friend at the local paper and she said I should write a column in the paper so that people could get to know me. “What!! I’ve never done anything like that??!!” She insisted and I started the column. That was seven years ago and I’ve tried to stop at least three times but have been asked to keep writing.

So, when I got the urge this year to write about something I felt obliged to share, and the doubts swamped me, I remembered that some people must like my style of writing, and with much encouragement from my husband, I started my first book. I had kept journals for many years which

made the work easier, and within a few months, the book was ready to publish.

Yikes!! Now the hard part was starting. I contacted a few publishing houses to find out how the mechanism works. If it took years to be discovered, if the manuscript had to be word perfect, if the writer had to market and promote the work, if the writer received such a small percentage after everyone else was paid to publish, why shouldn't I self publish? So I did.

Even more interesting for a writer in little country Moree, is that the work was done literally down the street from my home. The local design and graphics lady helped with the cover, sent away for the bar code plus all the other legalities, encouraged me, and made a mess of the back cover which was discovered after the books, all 2000, came back from the printer.

So we learned some things. The exciting thing is that I did it and discovered that I absolutely loved the process of writing, of delving into precise expression, and sharing myself. There is so much to learn and that's exciting. I am a total amateur...hugely arrogant to have presented this first book, *From There to Here*, but it has been so much fun!!

My next book is about the Ojai Valley in California, *Where My Soul Rests*. I trust there will be improvements with the benefit of the New England Writers Centre.

Linda Woodbridge

Local author John Heffernan, who leads workshops for NEWC, has a new book out. *Where There's Smoke* was inspired by the recent and devastating Victorian bush fires. John said, 'WTS is proving extremely popular. I'm heading off soon for two weeks touring Victoria and Melbourne, talking about the book. It seems to have touched a certain spot with readers, which is nice.'

We want to know what our members have been doing this year?

Have you got into print: articles, short stories, fellowships?

What is the favourite book you've read this year?

WHAT WE DID THIS YEAR

Had my first book of poetry published *Six Nines* through Kardoorair. Really enjoyed the readings in Armidale and Newcastle and the support of the various writing groups I'm associated with. Some

people were very kind. Always writing and sketching ideas for the next one.

Formed my own company "Six Nines Imagery" which includes poetry, photography and web design.

I love wandering the country side with my camera and exercise book, lost in the relationship between me and the world.

Favourite book MP: *The Life Of Michael Petersen*
- **Peter Langston**

FEEDBACK

The Exercise Pen

I enjoyed the process and by the end of the workshop I felt much more relaxed and flowing – more at ease with playing with words and ideas. I would have liked a little more time and space given to how to be a writer; how to structure ones mind and day to achieve and believe in being a writer, though others might not have been interested in this. But overall, I thoroughly enjoyed it and shall come again. Many thanks – Wendy is relaxed and warm and encouraged the flow beautifully.

- **Angela Earth**

The Poetry of Science: Science Made Marvellous

When anybody mentions science or maths to me, an impenetrable shutter drops in my mind and the speaker might just as well be speaking in Swahili. It was, therefore, with a little trepidation that I went to *The Poetry of Science: Science Made Marvellous*. I am so glad I went – poetry and science do mix and the result is enlightening, fun and enjoyable. Our local poets delivered poems of their choice from the Chapbooks, which were pounced on by the appreciative, capacity audience. I'm never going to listen enthralled to a scientific dissertation, but the shutter in my mind is not totally impenetrable now.

- **Pam Summers**

NEWS AND INFORMATION

We received an email from Dr David Reiter, who conducted the Retool and Remix workshop for NEWC in June: 'The latest issue of *IP eNews* is now online for your viewing!

Digital composing and publishing is certainly coming to the fore, and this issue has practical advice on how to learn more about it and whether or not you should be converting your own files for the Kindle and iPad.' For more information go to: <http://ipoz.biz/News/eNews46.htm>

The Australian Writers' Guild is an official reseller of *Final Draft*, the industry standard for scriptwriting. *Final Draft* is a program specifically designed for writing screenplays, teleplays, stage plays and scripts for new media. The program formats scripts to entertainment industry standards leaving you to focus your creative energy on the content.

They also now sell *Final Draft AV*, the only dedicated, full-featured scriptwriting software for the professional writers of commercials, corporate and training videos, documentaries, and presentations. Go to: admin@awg.com.au

A Decent Proposal is described as being designed to introduce writers to the techniques required to develop a convincing book proposal package. It contains models for both fiction and non-fiction book proposals and shows how to bypass the slush pile to become part of the publishers catalogue. Price is \$10. Contact: Sheila Hollingworth, writer and cartoonist, (03) 5348 2494 or go to: www.cartoonsbysheila.com

The following is the Australian Society of Authors press release following the Labour Party campaign media release during the recent Federal election: *Election 2010 – An absence of values and Initiatives*: The Australian Society of Authors is the peak professional association for Australia's literary creators. While the ASA welcomes yesterday's Campaign Media Release from the office of the Minister For Environment Protection, Heritage & The Arts, we remain very disappointed that neither the Coalition nor the Australian Labor Party has made any substantial policy announcements in direct support of artists or authors in the run-up to the election. The ALP campaign release has two sentences on the sustainability of artists' careers, under the heading 'Future Challenges'. For artists and authors, however, the challenges are here and now. The ALP proposes to allocate an 'additional' \$10M 'over five years' to performance and visual and other artists, while the portion to authors of this very small amount is not stated. Direct support of our authors is weak and at a historic low, proportionately not even where it was 25 years ago. The release points to the Prime Minister's Literary Awards as an ALP achievement. But these awards are inconsequential to 99% of working authors. The ASA argues that meaningful support of authors requires new policy, further reform, additional funding, and/or additional legislative effort in at least three areas:

- the proposed National Curriculum;
- tax on artists' and authors' incomes; and

- the Australia Council.

National Curriculum: From our authors' perspective, the forthcoming national curriculum is in danger of becoming an Australian author-free zone. Documents produced to date suggest the old cargo-cult mentality still holds: that overseas material should make up the larger part of the histories, biographies, novels, plays, poems and films to be studied in our schools. Authors believe that the suggestions for text material should be thoroughly revised to take account of a single key fact: today more than 60% of books sold in Australia are of local origin. Our own story and stories, and their creators, should be given much wider and deeper attention in our schools and universities than what is being proposed by ACARA. In the project to educate our own children and future citizens, we do not see ourselves as the junior partner of other societies and cultures.

Artists' and Authors' Incomes: With a forthcoming new report from Throsby and Hollister expected to show little improvement in artists' incomes over the past decade, Australia must pay greater attention to the economic circumstances of our creative classes. At a time when artists are struggling more than ever, government ought to consider serious reform of the tax system as it affects authors and other artists. If two pre-conditions for a 'clever' or 'smart' country are an education system that works and a culture that values creativity, an enabling tax system must be considered a third. There are some immediate and useful steps that could be taken in tax, such as exempting literary awards, prizes and grants from taxation. In this way the major political parties could provide a simple financial pre-condition desperately needed for a new artistic flowering in this country. The net effect on consolidated revenue would hardly register.

Australia Council: The Commonwealth's arts funding and advisory organisation is floundering across a critical area of its responsibility. Arts funding is currently only one of five 'strategic priorities' for the Australia Council. In direct support of artists, the Council is either under-resourced or risk-averse or both. An example: in 2009, the Literature Board allocated author grants and fellowships amounting to \$1.65M. But as long ago as the 1980s the Literature Board provided around \$2M of its total funds directly to authors – and that was a much higher proportion of its overall budget than current practice. In the dollar value of 25 years ago, an annual \$2M was of inestimable assistance in nurturing a host of Australia's most

successful authors – Helen Garner, David Malouf and Tim Winton to name three. To develop a similar degree of output and talent in 2010 dollars would require at least \$5M going directly to practitioners to buy writing time. Other art forms can tell a similar story of declining financial support. As the Australia Council is ultimately an agency of government, we ask the Commonwealth Arts Minister to attend to these problems as a matter of urgency.

Contact Angelo Loukakis, Executive Director of the Australian Society of Authors, (02) 9318 0877 or 0402 163 824, or angelo@asauthors.org



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*We gratefully acknowledge the support of CAL for
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The Self-publishers Marketing Guide, a guide to successfully marketing your book is now available from Palmer Higgs. The first section – the 16-page research guide is available as a free download from www.palmerhiggs.com

COMPETITIONS

October 29: Golden Wattle bush poetry competition for Australian rhyming verse. Contact: Golden Wattle, c/o Drapers, PO Box 453 Maffra, Vic. 3860.

October 29: ‘Queen of Crime’ short story competition for crime/ mystery short crime stories and book reviews of crime novels. Go to: www.partersincrimedydney.com

November 15: The Peter Porter poetry prize. First prize: \$4000, shortlisted poems: \$250. For

guidelines and entry form go to the ABR website – <http://www.australianbookreview.com.au/> Contact: Peter Rose, editor, Australian Book Review, (03) 9429 6700 or editor@australianbookreview.com.au or www.australianbookreview.com.au

November 30: Described as ‘one of the major annual international competitions for short stories, novellas, single poems, poetry collections, essays and articles’ Cash prizes as well as publication for the prize-winning writers in *The Collection*, special edition of *The New Writer* magazine. Details including guidelines: <http://www.thenewwriter.com/prizes.htm>

PUBLISHING/FELLOWSHIPS/ OPPORTUNITIES

The Australian Society of Authors is offering 15 mentorships for writers and picture book illustrators in 2011.

Successful applicants will have the opportunity to work closely with a mentor of their choice for 30 hours over up to 12 months.

Details go to: www.asauthors.org or (02) 9318 0877 or asa@asauthros.org

Closing : October 29

Peril, an Asian-Australian arts and cultural magazine invites submissions incorporating the theme of “Skin” for Issue 10. You don’t have to be Asian-Australian to contribute, but your contribution should be related to the theme and be of Asian-Australian interest. Go to:

www.peril.com.au contact Lian Low, Peril editor

Closing: October 30

Pantera Press is inviting popular fiction and non fiction. Go to www.PanteraPress.com

CONFERENCES/WORKSHOPS FESTIVALS

Varuna, The Writers House: Pathways Forum 2010: a one-day forum leading participants through the development of a book, from first draft through the editing and production process and on to bookshop shelves. Cost \$175 (includes morning & afternoon tea), \$150 concession OR Alumni /NSW Writers’ Centre/ASA/AWG member (includes morning & afternoon tea). 10am to 5pm –October 11. Venue: The Carrington Hotel, Katoomba (Blue Mountains) Details: 02 4782 5674 or go to www.varuna.com.au