

New England WRITERS CENTRE

For people who love writing and reading

Newsletter
September-December 2011

THE POWER OF STORY



Arnold Zable ...workshop and library talk.

Arnold Zable and **Felicity Plunkett** are the visiting writers in our July to December program.

Arnold's events will be in October:

The Power of Story – One Writer's Journey, talk at Armidale Library, Friday, October 21, 4pm, no bookings, pay at door, \$5.

Writing From Life – The Craft of Story, workshop at NEWC, Saturday, October 22, 10am to 4pm, \$75/\$65.

The workshop will be a broad exploration of the craft of writing, with techniques that can be applied to fiction and non-fiction, memoir, autobiography, biography, the short story and the novel.

Award-winning writer, performer, educator and human rights activist, **Arnold Zable** has had a busy year with his new book, *Violin Lessons*, being published this August, and one of his novels *Café Scheherazade* being staged in Melbourne.

His book *Jewels and Ashes* (1991) has won five Australian literary awards and depicts his journey to Poland to trace his ancestry. He is the author of six books of fiction and non-fiction and is a performing storyteller who has had shows in major cities and regional areas. A former lecturer in the arts faculty at Melbourne University, he has worked in the US, Papua New Guinea, China, Europe and Asia, and has published numerous articles, short stories, reviews and essays.

This year he gave the 2011 Colin Simpson lecture for the Australian Society of Authors, entitled *The Power of Story*.

New England Writers Centre and Poetzinc are bringing award-winning poet, Felicity Plunkett, to Armidale in November. Felicity will run a one-day workshop at NEWC and workshops in schools, and she will give a talk hosted by Poetzinc.

BURNING THE PERIPHERALS

— one-day creative writing workshop with **Felicity Plunkett**.

'Writing poetry is a tyrannical process. You've got to go so far, so fast, you've just got to burn away the peripherals. - Sylvia Plath, BBC interview with Peter Orr, 1963.

Vladimir Nabokov once commented that 'my pencils outlast their erasers'. Poet and writing teacher Steve Kowitz puts it this way: 'If there is any "secret" to writing, it is rewriting – a process that can be every bit as exciting as getting that first draft down on paper.'

This workshop will focus on what Kowitz calls the art of rewriting, says Felicity. After looking at some examples of powerful compression in writing, we'll play with some creative exercises that draw attention to paring writing back, or 'burning the peripherals'. There will then be an opportunity to workshop a piece of writing you have drafted. This will involve feedback and suggestions, and developing the writing itself. Through working on others' drafts, and considering some approaches to this, we will focus on the skills of critical and creative engagement that help to grow and polish writing. Throughout the day inspirational ideas

from writers, editors and a wealth of resources will be discussed, along with practical exercises and approaches, all designed to empower writers to hone and edit their work to make it go, as Plath says, as far and fast as it can.

DATE: Sunday, November 6, 10am to 4pm.

VENUE: NEWC

COST: \$65/55 NEWC members

Bookings NEWC.

IN HELL WITH INSTRUCTIONS

– an evening of poetry inspirations and challenges with Felicity Plunkett, hosted by Poetzinc. Felicity's talk will trace some of the instructions that have inspired her, and some joyful, exhilarating and occasionally hellish adventures in her writing and reading. After a short break she will read from her prize-winning collection of poetry *Vanishing Point*.

DATE: Monday, November 7. 7.30pm-9pm.

VENUE: Trax at the Railway, 222 Rusden St, Armidale.

COST: Donation - \$5 at the door.

Inquiries, Yve, phone 6772 6767. If you wish to join Felicity and Poetzinc for dinner, a la carte dining is an optional extra, 6pm for 6.30 at Trax at the Railway Hotel, phone Poetzinc to book 6772 6767 or 6772 7840.

* **Workshops in high schools** Monday and Tuesday, November 7 & 8 - Dr Felicity Plunkett, who was Chief Examiner of English Extension 1 and 2 from 2004-9, will be running workshops at Duval and Armidale High School as part of the Youth Online program.

!000 WORDS – PUTTING PICTURES INTO WORDS

This exciting project is a collaboration between the New England Writers Centre and the New England Regional Art Museum.

Local and regional writers – beginners to advanced of any age – were invited to write prose or poetry inspired by NERAM's permanent collections.

The exhibition of the paintings with stories or poems will open on Friday **November 18** at **6pm**, at NERAM.

There'll be a reading of the written work on **December 4, 2-4pm**, in the NERAM café – *neram harvest*.

For further details contact NERAM - Ph: 6772 5255 or email office@neram.com.au.

A CHILD'S EYE VIEW: WRITING FOR CHILDREN

- a one-day workshop for adults with **Sophie Masson**, winner of this year's Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

At a time when publishers' lists are contracting and it's harder than ever to make a living as a writer, children's literature is still thriving. Writing for children is wonderful, but it's not an easy option. Children can be much harder critics than adults and if you don't get their attention, they will not persist with your book, and they sniff out an author who talks down to them very quickly. But if they love a book, then they are passionately committed, and it will stay in their memory forever.

Writing from a child's eye view - and yet using adult experience - can be a tricky balancing act, but it's absolutely necessary if you want to reach young readers. So how to do it successfully? In this workshop, Sophie, who has published more than 50 books, will guide you in the art and craft of creating a story young readers won't be able to put down!

DATE: Sunday, October 16, 10am to 4pm.

VENUE: NEWC

COST: \$60/\$50 members

AFGHANISTAN TALK



Molalai Joya (centre) with from left: Fran Stahlut, Maxine Ross, NEWC director Lesley Sly, with event coordinator Bea Bleile on the far right.

NEWC with Women In Black, Peace Studies UNE, Uniting Church Armidale and Socialist Alliance New England hosted a talk at Armidale Town Hall by Afghan writer and activist, **Molalai Joya** on September 5.

The event was a great success, with nearly 200 people attending. There was also a fundraiser and

together these events raised \$3077.40, which was donated to Molalai's projects in Afghanistan. The event was filmed and posted on Wikileaks Central.

NEW DROP-IN COORDINATOR



Artist and writer, **Fiona McDonald**, is the new coordinator for our **Drop-In** monthly workshop, on the last Thursday of the month, 1.30 to 3.30pm at NEWC. This is free for members, \$5 per session for non-members. We want to develop this, in ways that participants would like it to be developed. So please come to the next meeting, to discuss ideas.

Letter of introduction from Fiona:

Hi Everyone,

From the end of this month I will be coordinating the Drop-In workshop. I thought you might like to know a little bit about me before I start.

I trained as an artist at the Julian Ashton Art School in Sydney. Since then I have worked as an artist/craftsperson, run classes and workshops and exhibited regularly.

In the nineties I felt I needed some intellectual inspiration and studied at UNE for some years. I have a BA Hons in English and Italian and am currently enrolled in a PhD in Creative Practice: I am writing a novel for young adults.

Stories are my passion whether they are written, told, performed or drawn. I love the combination of

words and pictures. I now have four knitting books published, one history book and contracts for three more with UK publishers.

I am looking forward to meeting other writers at the Drop-In workshops and invite you all to come to the next meeting (September 29) to discuss what people would like the workshops to offer and any other ideas that might make it a stimulating place to read and hear new works in progress.

By the way, I am having a book launch for *Knitted Fairies* on Sunday, September 18, 3pm at Chaucer on Bridge Street, Uralla. Everyone is welcome.

Cheers,
Fiona

<http://fionamcdonald.blogspot.com>

DIGITAL COMIC WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

Creating a Digital Comic workshop, funded by Artstart, was held September 10, with free places for students, and some members attended too. The workshop was taken by author Sophie Masson, and artists Fiona McDonald and David Allan, and participants learned a great deal and wrote glowing reports. Some examples:

Inspirational, appreciated access to the resources and the formatting of digital comic with music, thanks for sharing. — **Beth White**, member

A great interactive workshop, I learned heaps and thoroughly enjoyed it, especially getting to make my own comic and apply the techniques I had just learned. — **Claire**, student, Duval HS

It was great, and fun to talk about different aspects of visual design. Everyone encouraged me and I felt my contributions were useful and understood.

— **Thomas**, student, Duval HS

WHAT WE DID & WHAT WE WANT

We'd love to run news of what members did this year and a best books of year list, and we'd like to know what workshops you'd like us to run next year.

Whether you got published or just improved your writing (and if you did workshops you felt helped with that), please send us a couple of paragraphs, with What We Did This Year in the subject line, by November 25, for inclusion in the December newsletter and on website.

Please tell us the 2 books you loved most this year (title and author, any genre), and any requests for workshops next year.

Felicity Plunkett – Q & A



Yve Louis interviews Felicity Plunkett about her work.

I'd like to talk about your poetry in general and 'Vanishing Point' in particular. Would you be happy for us, broadly, to adopt Umberto Eco's directive when he says: 'The author must not interpret. But he may tell why and how he wrote his book.' (Reflections on the Name of the Rose)?

I'd been planning a collection for a while, but two opportunities gave me support. I received a Literature Board Emerging Writer's grant for 2005. Then, after moving to Brisbane, I became eligible to enter the Arts Queensland Thomas Shapcott Prize for an unpublished manuscript. The prize includes publication by UQP. I had started writing a manuscript, and thought that the discipline of editing and completing a draft and meeting the deadline would be helpful towards preparing a full collection. I was surprised and delighted when I won. A year later *Vanishing Point* appeared.

Amongst those various metaphors of murdering darlings and abandoning offspring (the former a well-known imperative for writers when editing work, the latter the idea of the need not to finish work so much as to abandon it) I felt that a deadline was a good thing. Along the way, two groups of poems that ended up in the book won generous prizes in the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prizes (for 'young poets of unusual promise'). I was fortunate to be able to take a step back from the academic

work I'd been doing into writing time paid for by the grant and prizes. So that was the practical path to the book. The imaginative path involved all the destinations of my working life, a life of reading and writing and teaching literature, though perhaps that sounds a bit grand!

You begin with a poem about a journey and we gather, by the title of the collection that you, as poet, head towards some final destination. I'm guessing that this trajectory was not pre-planned but rather evolved as the writing progressed?

At the time I began the book, I had a toddler and a baby on the way and I was fascinated by the scientific languages used to talk about pregnancy and birth. Through my critical research into mourning and elegy I was familiar with the idea that ours has become a death-denying culture, but I suspected that, in some ways, it was also birth-denying, in the same sense of a removal of rituals and language to express the event. At the start of my second pregnancy, though, my father became ill. His death from cancer came two days before my daughter's birth, and in some ways my need to think through the idea of the intersections of birth and death gave the book its direction. I sometimes quip that I decided to focus on a couple of small areas for my first book. When I think of the collection's origins I am reminded of a line of Virginia Woolf's that writers need to 'arrange whatever pieces come your way'. I found serendipitous connections with other ideas such as the moment where scientific creativity birthed destruction with the successful testing of the first atomic bomb in the New Mexico desert of the Jornada del Muerto (or 'journey of the dead man'). My exploration of Oppenheimer and the bomb became one way of considering some of these ideas both obliquely and directly. When I later read E.L. Doctorow's comment that 'Writing a novel is like driving a car at night. You can only see as far as the headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way', it rang true to my experience of the book's development. Exploring the idea of the vanishing point's illusory end-point gave me a further means of imagining the collection.

In the introduction to your workshop you quote Sylvia Plath: 'Writing poetry is a tyrannical process.' From your vantage point of very full professional and family lives, how does one match that creative tyranny against other demands?

By the development of superb balancing skills. I'm working on that. As a freelance writer, editor and teacher now, I sometimes have a moment of feeling I'm balancing enough income-generating work with room to do my 'own' work, but there's a continual

adjustment, for me, and when my professional work is energising it works best. I value the freedom and flexibility to create a working life that fits around my children, who are inspiring and interesting people.

Headings of all three sections of the collection refer to 'flakes' - flakes of dream, flakes of life, breaking into flakes. I read this not only as a structuring device, but also to indicate what it is to be a practising poet. Would you care to comment?

It started when I noticed the word flake cropping up all over the place. For a long time I've loved an image in Leonard Cohen's song 'Famous Blue Raincoat': 'You treated my woman to a flake of your life, and when she came back she was nobody's wife'. Then I read a line in John Banville's novel *Athena* about flakes of identity falling away. The idea of these flakes of quotation, imagining and desire floating across our minds, and sometimes lodging, offered a way of thinking about the process and the composition of a collection of poems. A suite of flake poems, scattered through the collection, and re-collected in *Seastrands* imagines everything made of flakes and re-making itself, including the collection itself. I had thought that that was the end of flakes, but I was surprised to find them appearing in my new work about the sea. But the lodging of flakes – the flake of another person's life, or the flake of an idea – is some kind of mnemonic for the processes of fascination and obsession poetry requires and originates from.

Felicity, I'd like you to talk a little about the role of the reader. What is your vision of the ideal poetry reader? How does this influence your own poetic?

There are real and figurative versions of the reader, I suppose. I've been enabled by wonderful friendships with other writers who've been interlocutors for me, and from whose work I have learned. One of these is my friend Wendy James, a wonderful writer of fiction, and former resident of Armidale. Having a trusted, generous and well-read reader who will look at a draft is invaluable. I can easily conjure up a critical and disdainful reader who would recommend that I stop all writing immediately. But to find, instead, mainly deeply generous and careful reviewers and readers has shaped my new work. I suspect that these warring factions in our own imaginations determine much of what we dare and risk, and that too cautious an approach may result in a lack of vitality.

As a long-time reader, teacher, editor and reviewer of poetry what is your view on the continued relevance of regional poetries - considering the

hold of cyber-speak and particularly, in our case, the globalisation of English?

The internet's provision of access to writing and writers beyond our own sphere has an important role in expanding reading, and battling small pondism and isolation. However, since most of the work of writing goes on in solitude, and in a quiet room (ideally... I find the quiet room elusive at this stage of my life) the local and the even-more derided domestic are obviously important to the energies of any piece of work. When jet-setting writers note that they have travelled to this place and that I always hope, for them, that they've found that same quiet room wherever they are. Ursula K Le Guin writes about the overvaluing of extroversion and the need for writers to go inwards, and I suspect there's an analogy here with the regional and the global. Ideally, a regional culture can involve enabling relationships with other writers and readers. But virtual communities of practice can create cultures too, and a writer's sense of the large world of other writers is important.

Given the mantra that 'poetry changes nothing' can there be a place for poetry in a world that we've brought so dangerously close to a point of no return?

After that apparently bleak line in Auden's 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' ('poetry makes nothing happen') he goes on to list what it *does* do: 'it survives', he repeats: 'a way of happening / a mouth.' The final section of the poem urges the poet to 'follow right / to the bottom of the night'; to 'persuade us to rejoice' and 'teach the free man how to praise'. It's a knotty kind of poem, but Auden does suggest that things make poetry happen – 'mad Ireland hurt you into poetry' – and that poetry has enormous energy. The broadest idea of poetry accumulates those elements and works as a tonic and corrective against a mindless and unimaginative life, for readers and writers. There can be activism in poetry, but perhaps its survival is an act of preservation of the imaginative and the intangible against the acquisitive and superficial? I'm thinking, here, too, of a comment Dorothy Porter once made in an interview: 'Why should poetry be the virginal wallflower? It has always been a lightning rod for the sacred, the extreme and the daemonic. "Ginsberg's Hals" is one of the most memorable and courageous poems of the twentieth century. It flames in and out of the madhouse - but is essentially a profound humane poem of spiritual survival.' (DP interview with Rosanna Licari, *Stylus Magazine*).

And finally, what do you plan for your own poetry?

After 'Vanishing Point' (2009) and the chapbook 'Seastrands' (2011) is there another body of work already in progress?

Seastrands became the bridge between two collections, so I'm working on a new collection with the unlikely starting point of a sailor lost at sea in a 1968 round-the-world yacht race in 1968. I'm working on poems to do with the race and relating to ideas of the body, and bodies of water.

Thank you Felicity. And we very much look forward to your workshops, talk and reading in November. Thank you, Yve. It's a pleasure to have this virtual conversation with you, and I appreciate your insightful, fascinating questions. I look forward to visiting Armidale, too.

- Yve Louis

FEEDBACK

Youth Online

I am writing in response to your request of how the writers program benefited our school. Our school is isolated and the video conference was an ideal opportunity for our students to see accomplished writers as real people sharing their real experiences.

The students were inspired as the authors gave them a platform to write interesting well-structured texts. Our students were excited to have the chance to respond on the spot to questions posed by the writers. Giving examples of literary devices and reading parts of their stories and poems was entertaining and beneficial. They also enjoyed seeing the range of school students involved in the VC.

The selection of writers were from a broad base and from genres the students were interested in. Our focus has been on improving writing and I know the three sessions we were involved with has given our students a good framework to draw upon in the writing process.

- Judy Cameron
Premier Public School

WORKSPACE

Sophie Masson More Congratulations

Sophie Masson's unpublished spy thriller set in 1910 Paris, *Wild Card*, was shortlisted for the Text

Young Adult Fiction Prize, one of only five books to be on the shortlist out of an entry field of 300 (the novels had to be unpublished) Sophie is certainly having an exciting and successful year.

Check out Sophie's encounters on public transport: <http://writerunboxed.com/2011/08/17/the-professional-stickybeak-and-the-train-of-thought/>

Book Review

Four Seasons with a Grumpy Goat

Publishers, Allen & Unwin sent us *Four Seasons with a Grumpy Goat*, by Carol Altman, for our comments. This is a hilarious book about escaping the ratrace only to come face to whisker with rats.

The author recounts her sojourn with her partner on a hobby farm on the outskirts of Hobart. Her evocative turn of phrase and very dry humour will have you laughing out loud at their naïve attempts at animal/ bird husbandry. Put this delightful book on your Christmas shopping list.

The rrp is \$29.99; ebook is available. Carol Altman is a freelance journalist and a lecturer in journalism at Monash University's Gippsland campus.

- Pam Summers

NEWS AND INFORMATION

Sophie Masson drew our attention to what she calls a 'great little dramatised documentary' based on an event in medieval history. It is fully locally-made - Gabriel Hooper who made this film and who is doing the film course at Armidale TAFE, is the son of local writer and artist Fiona McDonald who is one of the two artists working with Sophie on the digital comic *The Secret Army: Order of the Vampire* mentioned in our last newsletter. Filmed on location at the Pine Forest, it features a cast made up mostly of members of the local Medieval Arts Society, but also features the other artist working with Sophie on the comic, David Allan, as the Byzantine Emperor Alexios! A most impressive achievement, especially given Gabriel's age (he's 18 or 19). Go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNWuHQW5iy0>

Sick of those reject slips? There are two new books out on self-publishing. *The Self-publishers Marketing Guide* by Debbie Higgs (\$14.95), explains how to invest in a thorough and on-going

marketing campaign, using both traditional methods and the internet.

Self-publishing made Simple: the Ultimate Australian Guide by Euan Mitchell, (\$29.95), aims to save you time and money on printing and pre-press costs. Add \$6 each for postage from the NSW Writers Centre', PO Box 1056, Rozelle, 2039.

The Poetry Australia Foundation Inc. was established in 2002. Their stated aim is "... to promote the enjoyment of poetry in all its forms and to help poets develop their work, help published poets find an audience for their work, help readers find out where the poets and their books are, and help break down some of the barriers that have grown up between people and poetry." Contact: Poetry Australia Foundation, School of Creative Arts, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Vic. 3010 or (03) 8344 8713 or rpretty@unimelb.edu.au or go to: www.sca.unimelb.edu.au/paf/index.html

The Get Reading Campaign is underway. On offer is a free list of 50 books you can't put down. Buy one of those 50 books before 30 September and you will get a new, limited edition book free. You have the option of a collection of short stories: *10 Short Stories you must read in 2011* or *The Land of the Dragons* by Emily Rodda. The booklist is available from most bookshops or download from www.getreading.com where you will find information on events and other promotions.

COMPETITIONS

September 16: Rolf Boldrewood literary awards: Australian prose and poetry competition. Prose: fiction or family history memoir, 3000 words max; poetry: any form or style. Australian theme, 80 lines max. Contact: The Convenor, Rolf Boldrewood Literary Awards, PO Box 1042, Dubbo 2830 or (02) 6801 4501 or go to www.mrl.nsw.gov.au

October 1: *IP Picks* national writing competition for unpublished manuscripts provides guaranteed royalty publication to the best book-length manuscript in five categories: Best Fiction, Best Creative Non-fiction, Best Poetry, Best Young Adult/Junior Prose, Best First Book. First place winners of each category are awarded publication. Highly commended entrants are given a short reader's report valued at \$299, offering editorial advice on how to improve the manuscript. Commended entrants will receive a summary of the judging panel's report on their entries. Contact IP, (Interactive Publications), info@ipoz.biz or go to: http://ipoz.biz/IP/IP_picks.htm

October 14: Stringybark Australian history short story award, theme: a short story that explores any aspect of Australian history, \$500 in prize money plus publication for place-getters and highly commended stories. Entry fee: \$9.50 and discounts for multiple entries. Details: David Vernon, Stringybark Stories, PO Box 851, Jamison Centre, Jamison, ACT 2614, or judges@stringybarkstories.net or go to: www.stringybarkstories.net

November 30: *The New Writer* magazine prose and poetry prizes for short stories, micro-fiction, single poems, poetry collections, essays and articles; offers cash prizes as well as publication for the prize-winning writers in *The Collection*, special edition of *The New Writer* magazine each July. Further information including guidelines and entry fees go to: <http://www.thenewwriter.com/prizes.htm>. Prizes winners announced: <http://www.thenewwriter.com/prizewinners.htm>

February 14: Eaglehawk Dahlia and Arts Literary competition 2012. Short Story: The Rolf Boldrewood Award, max 3000 words, 1st prize \$200, 2nd prize \$50; poetry, the Apollo Award, limit 30 lines, 1st prize \$200, 2nd prize \$50; Bush verse, the Alan Llewelynaward, limit 52 lines, 1st prize \$100. Theme: Australian rhyme and metre. Contact: Estelle Randall, 4 Harpin Place, Bendigo 3550 or entry forms SSAE to Ruth Claridge, 99 Victoria St., Eaglehawk 3556, or (03) 54468240 or <http://Dahlia.bendigo.net.au>

PUBLISHING/FELLOWSHIPS/ OPPORTUNITIES

Seizure is described as a journal for new writing, available in bookshops throughout the country. Submission guidelines are available: www.seizureonline.com

Sid Harta Publishers: Submission guidelines, go to: <http://sidharta.com.au> and <http://publisher-guidelines.com/>

CONFERENCES/WORKSHOPS FESTIVALS

Two-hour seminar on publishing (including ebooks,) marketing, selling and distribution of books. 5:30 - 7:30pm, September 14, Tudor Hotel, Tamworth. Register online at boolarrongpress.com.au or contact: Karen on 07 3373 7855, cost: \$55.

NSW Writers' Centre Speculative Fiction Writers' Festival, November 5. Go to: www.nswwc.org.au