

Dear Wordsmiths and Friends,

In today's Age (31/7) I came across an excellent article by Louise Adler, which I quote from here:

In A History of Reading, Alberto Manguel arrives at the same conclusion with a personal story about the importance of literature even in the darkest of places:

"When I was 10 or 11, one of my teachers in Buenos Aires tutored me in the evenings in German and European history. To improve my German pronunciation, he encouraged me to memorise poems by Heine, Goethe and Schiller, and a Gustav Schwab ballad, in which a rider gallops across the frozen Lake of Constance and, on realising what he has accomplished, dies of fright on the far shore. I enjoyed learning the poems but I didn't understand of what use they might possibly be.

"They'll keep you company on the day you have no books to read," my teacher said. Then he told me that his father, murdered in Sachsenhausen, had been a famous scholar who knew many of the classics by heart and who, during his time in the concentration camp, had offered himself as a library to be read to his fellow inmates. I imagined the old man in that murky, relentless, hopeless place, approached with a request for Virgil or Euripides, opening himself up to a given page and reciting the ancient words for his bookless readers. Years later, I realised that he had been immortalised as one of the crowd of roaming book savers in Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451.

A text read and remembered becomes, in that redemptive rereading, like the frozen lake in the poem I memorised so long ago — as solid as land and capable of supporting the reader's crossing, and yet, at the same time, its only existence is in the mind, as precarious and fleeting as if its letters were written on water."

The last paragraph especially, moved me.

Since we last wrote, much has happened. Our Wordsmiths meetings are growing in size. At our July meeting we had 21, a record attendance. With so many it was necessary to split the group for our workshopping time- some upstairs and some downstairs. A special welcome to first-timers Ros, Paige

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WORDSMITHS

On September 8th we hope to mark this occasion with a special **Poetry Reading** to follow our usual Wordsmiths meeting, at a venue still to be finalised. It also happens to be National Poetry Week, so we will invite other poets from around Melbourne, as well as the general public, to join us for the reading and some supper.

POETRY WEEKEND

We would also like to find out how many of you would be interested in coming to a **Poetry Weekend, in place of our usual meeting in November. (November 9-11th)** We ran it last year for the first time, with a Quiet Day on the Saturday (a day of silent retreat, directed by a spiritual director, using poetry, prayer, meditation and writing) followed by a Sunday time of fellowship together and a Poetry Workshop (to be led by Kathryn Hamann) in the afternoon. Please advise us, via the Response slip, if you're interested in coming, so that we'll know whether or not to organise it. Last year, with seven of us staying the whole weekend, we were able to stay in a holiday house at Shoreham, but if the numbers go up, we could find an alternative venue. By self-catering we can keep the cost down – it could be between \$50-\$100, depending on the venue and numbers going.

WORKSHOP WITH RON PRETTY

We had 14 in for a workshop with Ron Pretty on Saturday 28th of July, an extra meeting as Ron was unable to come for his preciously scheduled visit. Ron started by telling us about the Australian Poetry Centre, an exciting new development for Poetry in Australia. This is the fruit of Ron's many years work in setting up the Poetry Foundation and the Five Islands Press which has over 300 titles to its credit. Located at Glenfern in East St Kilda, the Centre will be busy encouraging poets. Ron went on to lead us in a fascinating workshop starting with a poem from which he had removed the last line. We had to try to think of how it should be worded. We were all surprised by the original. He then went on to get us to write a corporate poem, which proved to produce much entertainment. A very stimulating afternoon, as Ron also showed us by the way, just what we were doing as we wrote.

LAUNCH OF "EARTH WORKS"



June 23rd was the event of the year: the launch of our 21st book, with **Janette Fernando**, our new managing

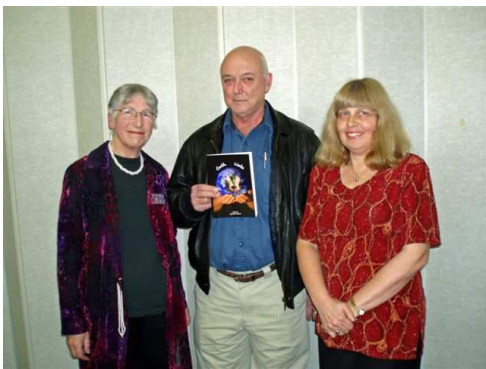
editor, in charge of proceedings. Held at one of our favourite haunts, St Paul's Lutheran Church in Box Hill, it attracted an audience of 70 people.

Janette carried the evening off very well. It was satisfying for her to be able to present a book representing so many poets and to have so many of them there able to read their work. John West, who launched the book, set our work in the context of earlier Christian poets such as William Blake and Dean Jonathan Swift and applauded our efforts. We were all delighted that he chose among the poems he read in launching the book, one by Ashley Harris (who was firmly refusing to read his own work) and one of Janette's. Afterwards many people commented about how lovely it was to hear the poets reading their own work. We were enthralled by the musical interludes presented between readings, by one of our poets **Cathy Altmann**, playing violin, accompanied by pianist Angela Chandler. There were also many appreciative comments about the cover of the book. Janette called on **Jean Sietzema-Dickson**, the Director of Poetica Christi Press, to speak about the exciting new projects ahead: 1. a coffee table book (providing we can attract funding) to be called *Reflections on Melbourne* featuring art work as well as poetry about Melbourne. 2. The start of publishing poetry for children with the forthcoming production of *Stick your Neck* out by Leigh Hay and a revamped bigger version of *The Huggle* by Jean Sietzema-Dickson.

As usual the occasion turned into a very good party and there was great enjoyment in meeting poets and their families.

We are delighted to announce that we have already broken even on the cost of publishing the book!

If you would like to order a copy of "Earth Works" please use the response slip.



(Jean, John West & Janette at the launch)

SURREY HILLS READINGS

In May my guest was **Lauren Williams** who delighted us with her poetry and her singing. In June **Kathryn Hamann** who read from her new book, "Saint Moon" and had her audience by the ears.



(Kathryn Hamann reading her work)

In July **Phil Driver** told us about his journey in the world of poetry and shared a number of his poems. The Surrey Hills Readings are held in the cottage behind the Surrey Hills Neighbourhood House, 157 Union Rd Surrey Hills. Come in from Bedford Avenue up the lane and enter the cottage from the rear. We meet in the Kitchen from 2-4 pm. This reading, unlike many around Melbourne, is designed to be of interest to those who do not write but do enjoy poetry. Any of you who are free, are most welcome to come, but do think about bringing a poem to share and also bringing a friend with you. **My aim in this gathering is to encourage people** (who think poetry is not for them) **to enjoy poetry again.** In August, I have invited **Rebecca Maxwell** to be our featured reader, then in September we hope to have **Alex Skovron**, October **Robyn Smith** and in November I have **John West** coming- that will probably be the last meeting for the year. The cost for each gathering is \$5.

BOOK ON MELBOURNE

What do you love about Melbourne? What makes it great to live in this city of ours?

Reports are that this is still one of the most liveable cities in the world, but why? Get your thinking caps on and your poetic juices into action and let us know in no uncertain terms.

Since our last Newsletter the committee has met and agreed that our **competition theme for this year** will be on the theme *Reflections on Melbourne*. (see attached Entry form) Subject to getting help with funding we hope to produce a coffee table book with poetry and artwork. (See competition form for further details.) This is a project I, Jean have been dreaming about for over 15 years so I am very excited that we are now going ahead. But we do need your prayers. Competition to get funding is very strong, so we will need to prepare a very thorough submission in applying to the Victorian Council for the Arts and other sources.

In May there was a full capacity crowd at the Kew Library for the launch of **Joyce Lee's** posthumous publication, *Bountiful Years*. I announced there that we were planning a book about Melbourne and would dedicate it to her memory.

Six of the wordsmiths attended a **retreat at Campion** in May. This was led by Marlene Marburg and Margaret-Mary Flynn on the theme "I see you are a prophet". It was a very enriching weekend for all who attended. We looked at the story of the Rich young Ruler and of the Woman at the Well and meditated on these themes to see how this biblical word could influence us today. For those of you who missed out, we who were there can recommend going to a retreat at Campion in the future. Contact Marlene Marburg for news of future events.

NEWS OF OUR POETS

Mary Macdonald reports that she has had a request from McGraw-Hill to have permission to reprint her poem "The Alligator" in English and Spanish in an audio-visual for professional development of teachers. With the request came a cheque (for \$345US)

Cameron Semmens seems to be getting out all over the place. One of his poems, "Rejoice, for something ordinarily is about to happen" was read in devotions at Mountain Districts Christian School recently. He will be in Queensland in August, then Alice Springs in September. He also has a new book in the pipe-line, so stay tuned for news of its launch. Congratulations to **Dilys Terry-Smith** on her 80th birthday! (Editor's note : and to **Jean Sietzema**, who turns 75 on the 8th of August. See the attached invitation about her party on the 11th of August.)

POETICA CHRISTI PRESS

Poetica Christi Press is delighted to be involved in publishing **Leigh Hay's** book for children called *Stick your Neck Out* - a hilarious account of how Geoffrey who has retreated into a black hole, is drawn out of his misery by Penelope with a sound and light show. The illustrations are delicious!

My own (**Jean's**) children's book *The Huggle*, is also nearing completion and we hope both these books will be out by the end of the year, in time for Christmas. Meanwhile, **Kathryn Hamann** is working on the book of prayer-poems which has been on the back-burner for quite some time.

We are currently having a **stock-take sale** : the best **bargain** we're offering is on 6 of our books – *Water of life*, *Source of Life*, *On our reflection*, *Life Dance*, *Getting into the Spirit* and *Set Free*. They normally sell for \$15 each, but now they are **1 @ \$10, 2 @ \$15 or 3 @ \$20**. Another excellent deal is on the back page of our updated catalogue : **buy two full-priced books, get one free**. Use this or the response slip to order. Why not buy a book for yourself and some for the present-box? Poetry books are especially good as Get Well gifts!

COMPETITIONS

We have attached the entry form for the annual **Poetica Christi Press Poetry Competition**. As described earlier, the theme is "Melbourne".

Melbourne Poets Union Competition: Closing date 31st October. Poem on any theme. For entry form see home.vicnet.net.au/~mpuinc

Rolf Boldrewood Literary Awards :Closing date 21st September. Australian theme, poetry to 80 lines. 1st prize \$600. Send SSAE to The Covenor, Rolf Boldrewood Literary Awards, PO Box 1042, Dubbo, 2830 or see www.mrl.nsw.gov.au

MELBOURNE WRITERS FESTIVAL

Saturday, 25th of August-

1.30-2.20pm; "Waiting to be hit by Lightning" – **Clive James** talking to **Craig Sherborne** about the craft of the poet.3.45-4.45pm : **Soi modern poets launch-** 3 new collections by **M.T.C.Cronin, Barry Hill & David Prater**.5.30-6.30pm : **W.H.Auden celebration** with **Clive James and John Clarke**.

Sunday, August 26th –

1.30-2.30pm : **Poets against the War** with J.S. Harry, Alison Croggan & Barry Hill discussing the war in Iraq and how poets can find a voice.
3.45-4.45pm : Launch of a new book by **Judith Bishop**.

Saturday, September 1st-

1.30-2.30pm: The Unelitist **Les Murray**
5.30-6.60pm: Another tribute to **W.H.Auden**
7.00-8.00pm : Launch of a new book by **Michael Crane**.7.30-8.30pm : "The elixir that renews"
Celebrating the work of 13thC.mystic **Jelaluddin Rumi**.

Sunday, September 2nd-

1.00-2.00pm : **John Tranter**
7.00-8.30pm : **Poetry Idol Final**

For information : www.mwf.com.au

DIARY OF EVENTS

Wednesday, August 8th 2-4pm. Reading at 157 Union Rd,Surrey Hills. Guest: Rebecca Maxwell

Saturday, August 11th Wordsmiths Meeting at 493 Elgar Rd. Mont Albert Nth, 2-5pm. to be followed by Jean's birthday celebration. (See accompanying invitation.)

Saturday, September 8th Wordsmiths Meeting at 493 Elgar Rd. 2-5pm, to be followed by a public reading to celebrate 20 years of the Wordsmiths of Melbourne's existence. (Venue to be advised)

Wednesday, September 12th 2-4pm.Reading at Surrey Hills. Guest: Alex Skovron, author of 6 books of poetry and well known to the poets' community of Melbourne.

Wednesday, October 10th 2-4pm.Reading at Surrey Hills. Guest Robyn Smith from Melbourne Poets

Saturday, October 13th Wordsmiths meeting at 493 Elgar Rd, 2-5pm.

POETS' CORNER

NEW HOPE

New hope reaches out its leafy arms
To grasp my soul and hold it tight.
Whispering quiet words of peace
That build my Hope in these bleak times.

New Hope holds me tight in leafy grasp.
Denying black despair and lasting grief.
Supplying the meaning of my life.
I look up and see its light.
And throw my heart into the soft arms of God.

© Elaine Foster

FAIL OR WIN

I'm a failure, he said,
but that wasn't right.
He'd tackled the thing
put up a good fight.

I'm a failure, he cried,
when his efforts were done
and the thing didn't work
when he thought he'd won.

I'm a failure, he nodded
I said, "no. You're not">
"you started and worked,
now don't lose the plot!"

A failure is one
who won't even try-
won't make and attempt-
lets chances pass by.

A Winner is one
who knows how to begin.
The moment you started-
YOU had your first WIN.

© Dilys Terry-Smith

COMPASS POINT

Wind-rocked into this long sleep,
your feathered shape sprawls
where my feet pass.
Body and beak, curled claws
on stick-stiff legs,

are shrouded in dust:
you lie, eyeless, on the littered gravel.
Voyager now,
you lift on invisible wings.

I can not trace you
in the shouting blue of sky,
and where horizon arcs,
clear light masks the darkness
of the coming night

but daily in the cluttered lane
as I step around you,
I marvel at your remains –
fold of flesh and skin
peeled into blown dust,
layered intricacies
pressed paper-thin on stone.

I breathe you spiralled in air
and map myself
in the clarity of your frail bones.

© Margaret Campbell

THIRST QUENCHING

There is rain
soft sounding
in swish of tyres on tar

caught hanging, translucent
until its weight yields to gravity

seen in shining, wet branches
faint streaks between me and trees
shiver of a puddle
the sheen on an umbrella

felt on hands and face –
the cold dampness
smelled in wet earth
and freshened foliage
tasted as my tongue retrieves
a drop from a twig.

© jmsd

Newsletter produced by Jean Sietzema & Janette Fernando

***If you haven't paid your dues for 12 months,
please do so now, using the Response slip***

RESPONSE SLIP – send to 42 Hawkins Rd, Montrose, 3765

I have enclosed my yearly membership dues (\$25) as a Wordsmith/Friend of *PCP*.

I cannot afford \$25 but enclose a donation.

I am happy to have the newsletter emailed to me (my email address is below)

I am interested in coming to the Poetry Weekend (Nov.9-11th)

I am willing to stay on for the Poetry Reading on September 8th and read some poems.

(Note that Wordsmiths who are reading won't need to pay the \$5 entry fee, but we may order in some pizza for dinner between Wordsmiths and the Reading)

I would like to support Poetica Christi Press by buying books (as follows)

ORDER FORM : Please send me the following book(s):

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Source of Life*(\$15) | <input type="checkbox"/> On our Reflection*(\$15) | <input type="checkbox"/> Trapeze Artist (\$7.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Songs of my World(\$8) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sing to the King (\$15) | <input type="checkbox"/> Life Dance*(\$15) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting into the Spirit*(\$9) | <input type="checkbox"/> Mother Lode*(\$10) | <input type="checkbox"/> Water of Life*(\$15) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In Search of Joy*(\$13.50) | <input type="checkbox"/> Set Free*(\$14) | <input type="checkbox"/> Two Edged*(\$15) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disarmed*(\$15) | <input type="checkbox"/> My Father's Voice* (\$12) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My Brother, My Sister, My Country*(\$15) | <input type="checkbox"/> An embrace of morning* (\$15) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listen For the Green*(\$14) | <input type="checkbox"/> Earth Works (\$17.50) | |

SPECIAL OFFER 1: Applies only to *Water of Life, Source of Life, On our Reflection, Life Dance, Getting into the spirit, Set Free* - Buy 1 book @ \$10, 2 @ \$15, 3 @ \$20 (circle books wanted)

SPECIAL OFFER 2: Buy any two books, get one free*

* Free book to be chosen from those marked with an asterisk; free book will be the least expensive one.

I enclose _____ as payment (please enclose \$2 extra per book for postage & packing, max. \$6) Cheques to be made out to Poetica Christi Press

NAME _____

ADDRESS : _____

PH: _____ EMAIL: _____

Send to : *Poetica Christi Press, 42 Hawkins Rd, Montrose, 3765* Ph: 03 9736 1941 or 03 9890 5885
Email: poetica@iprimus.com.au or pcp@digisurf.com.au Website: www.poeticachristi.org.au