

WORDSMITHS NEWSLETTER

17.4

November, 2017

Guest Editorial written by Jean Sietzema-Dickson to celebrate 30 years of THE WORDSMITHS

This poetry group began as the result of two poets, **Don Hudson & myself**, meeting at a Christian artists' Conference, held while Calvin Seerveld from the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto was visiting. Don and I found we shared the same longing to start a Christian poetry group. It was Don who got it off the ground, inviting a few poets he knew to his parents' place in Wattle Valley. From this location the group took its first name – The Wattle Valley Christian Poetry Group. This was later changed, at the suggestion of Mary Macdonald, to The Wordsmiths. Later with the launch of *Reflecting on Melbourne* we became The Wordsmiths of Melbourne.

After two and a half years the group moved to my home at Elgar Rd Mont Albert North. From the beginning I had encouraged the group to think seriously about publishing, believing that putting writing on the shelves at home was not serving any purpose. (In 1989 the Victorian Writers' Centre employed someone to help a small group of people produce a chap-book. I encouraged the group to submit more poems, which she typed up and arranged so that they could be printed.)

Our first meeting in Elgar Rd in 1990 saw the launch by Connie Barber of our first booklet, *The Tree of Life*. (It was quite small and we had 200 copies printed, which were sold within the first fortnight. We printed more and went on selling.) All up we sold 800 copies. Flushed with success we were on our way as writers.

From the beginning there was never any querying of poet's church commitment. In fact we rarely thought about this but accepted anyone who came. Meetings began with prayer for the Spirit to guide our thinking and for any members in need of prayer.

In 1991, **Janette Fernando**, some of whose poems had appeared in *Tree of Life*, suggested that we should start a publishing house, which we named Poetica Christi Press. Our first venture was a set of poem cards and Bookmarks, which sold well.



The Wordsmiths Poetry Group in 1991.

Back row, L-R: Coby Hill, Janny Brouwer, Joy Chellew, Julien Winspear, Janette Fernando, Mary McDonald, Marj Kosky, Connie Barber, Hazel Robinson. Front: Don Hudson, Jean Sietzema, Linnet Hinton.

For our second poetry collection, *Water of Life*, Janette and I went to Classic Press, whose Manager, Paul Coyle, took us under his wing and gave us invaluable advice and encouragement. In 2003 we published the result of our first competition and have had one each year since except for the two years taken to produce



Reflecting on Melbourne, a beautiful coffee-table book of artwork, poetry and photos, which has made PCP a respected part of the Melbourne Poetry scene. We have also

become known for publishing the works of individual authors and are proud to be publishing our 44th book.

Over the years, we have enjoyed poetry camps together at Shoreham, Millgrove and St Andrews, as well as having Poetry Workshops led by established poets at least once a year.

In 2010 The Wordsmiths began meeting at the home of **Carolyn Vimpani** whose warm hospitality has delighted us. Our meetings are characterised by great fellowship and encouragement as we workshop our poems together and reflect on a wide variety of themes. We thank God for blessing our group over 30 years now.

PAST MEETINGS

Cath Barnard led Wordsmiths for August. She introduced the group to and read from, a book titled *A Man Called Jesus*, poetry by Normal Habel with paintings by Pro Hart, published by Rigby in 1982. Habel lays aside the traditional Jesus and presents a contemporary Jesus, calling him the Bush Man. Cath read a selection of poems, including *A Bloke Called Jesus; We are his mates; Signs at the shearing shed; Picnic at the races* and *Come share a damper with me*.

David Dwyer led in September and gave a brief background on Emily Dickinson and her family (as portrayed in the recent film, *A Quiet Passion*). David explained how Dickinson's work was altered by publishers to suit the style of the times and that most of her poetry was published posthumously. Dickinson never made a formal declaration of faith and lived much of her life as a recluse. She never married. Many of her poems are written in the same form as hymns, and they don't have titles – only themes.

Cecily Falkingham led the October meeting by introducing Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (Ricardo Eliécer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto, 1904-1973). Neruda was little known but praised as Chile's greatest Spanish writing poet. Difficult to translate, only a small amount of his total output appeared in English. In 1927 Neruda took an honorary consulship in Rangoon and in 1971 was the recipient of the Nobel prize for literature.

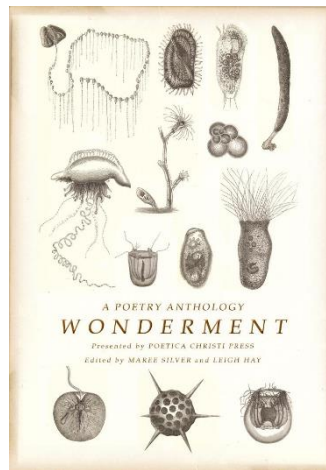
FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

The last meeting for 2017 will commence at 12.30 pm to give everyone a chance to share a meal, chat and catch up with original members of Wordsmiths, who we hope will attend, to celebrate 30 years of poetry together.

The following is a roster of poets to lead the monthly meeting, and also share afternoon tea duty. If you cannot make it on the date shown, please organise with another member to take your place.

| Date | Leader | Afternoon tea duty |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Nov 11 th | Leigh | Greg, Cecily, David |
| Dec 9 th 12.30 pm | Joan | 30 th anniversary. Everyone bring something to share. |
| Feb | Jean | Joan, Maree N, Don |
| March | Florence | Jean, Peter, Lucia |
| April | Janette | Maree S, Cath, Rebecca |
| May | Poetry workshop | Leigh, Florence, Janette |

LAUNCH OF WONDERMENT



In the last newsletter, we mentioned the winners of the 2017 Poetica Christi Press Poetry competition. Thanks to some hard work by **Maree Silver and Leigh Hay**, who have edited the book, it is now ready to be launched by well-known poet Philton. The launch is on 2nd December at All Saints Anglican Church,

Mitcham 18 Edward St, Mitcham (Melway 48 J8-9). Parking available in Coles carpark.

Wonderment includes poems by the winners of the 2017 PCP Poetry competition with contributions from The Wordsmiths of Melbourne and others. Afternoon tea will be provided.

JUDGE'S REPORT

Dr Peter Stiles, who judged the competition, writes, "The poems entered in the competition this year were consistently of a good standard. Reading through them all was an enjoyable experience. They reflected the meaningful moments and thoughtful observations that a significant number of poets wanted to capture and share in a variety of poetic forms. Many of them encapsulated what poetry does best, that is 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', as Wordsworth put it in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in 1800. Poetry helps to shape the individual consciousness and serves to temper the frenzied superficiality of so much modern living. It is undoubtedly therapeutic. Good poetry emanates from stillness, even silence, and is attentive to detail in a way that other literary forms are not suited to or ignore. There are exceptions, of course, such as the Australian novelist and essayist, Tim Winton, who is a reflective and respectful observer of the natural world.

The best poems in the competition drew me into a moment of time, a slice of life, a particular experience that had deep meaning for the poet concerned. Some dealt with seemingly mundane situations, like standing at the kitchen sink and looking up at the sky. Others focussed on exotic themes, such as the mass migration of Monarch butterflies. Both types captured the wonderment that is possible for those who take time to be attentive. The world we share, as poets, is alive with enchantment, wonder and mystery. I first read *The Orange Tree*, by John Shaw Nielson, when I was a boy. In that poem this early Australian poet visualises the magic in the everyday so well.

Effectively capturing this richness, however, can be a challenge. Poets should read over their poems again and again to see if there is a better word, a more

apposite phrase, some fresh and original ways to express an idea. Good poems usually have concentrated language, but read well rhythmically, with a lyrical quality that rings true to the ear of the reader. *Preludes*, by T. S. Eliot, is an excellent example; perfect in diction, perfect in cadence. It is a truly memorable poem. The best poems in the competition had this quality. They read well, and would be satisfying to the listener if read aloud.

I particularly liked the poems in the competition that had a clear sense of direction and were essentially transparent. Obscure and inscrutable poetry does not serve the cause of poetry. Some of the best poems had a delicacy and simplicity about them that was compelling. Less is usually best in poetry. Having said that, I also liked the poems that had a historical theme, and also those that had an inter-textual quality to them. Deep learning and wide reading are often captured in good poetry. Christian poets should restrain their desire to turn their poems in homilies. Gentle understatement is the best way to allow God's grace to be felt through verse.

Finally, I passed over poems that obviously made no reference to the theme of wonderment. Strident poems with an aggressive or abrasive tone seemed to have little place in the context of this competition. Good poetry avoids the clamour and attention seeking purposes of some other forms of written expression, and relies on subtlety and nuanced language to reveal the truths about the everyday. Our lives are full of riches and wonderment, just waiting for the eye, ear and heart of the discerning poet.

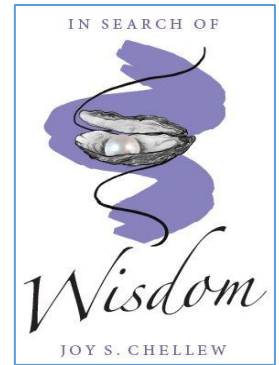
The winner of the competition was 'Flight of the Monarchs', an excellent poem about the mass migration of Monarch butterflies to Sierra Chincua, Mexico. It captures this spectacular, exotic event in a succinct, compelling manner, the reader drawn into a journey that juxtaposes life and death, flight and breathtaking clusters of colour in the forest. It is a very suitable poem for the theme of wonderment. The runner up was 'Ink', a touching poem about the loss of a brother in World War One. This clever poem explores the impression that writing can have on our memory, our consciousness, using ink as a metaphor for blood. The hopelessness and waste of war is stressed throughout. Wonderment is subtly suggested in the enduring nature and profound legacy of the written word. Other poems that stood out were 'Two-sided coin', 'The colour of music', 'Rayonnement', 'Sleeping in Sturt's Stony Desert', 'Summer Peaches', 'Illumination', and 'Apollo 8'. All had a special quality that set them apart from the rest of the poems."

MEMBER NEWS

Congratulations to **Joan Ray**, whose poem 'Fantasy in red' was shortlisted for the 2017 Shire of Nillumbik Ekphrasis Poetry Award. Joan wrote 'Fantasy in red' in

response to an artwork titled 'Benchmark'. Joan's shortlisted poem is reprinted in Poet's Corner.

Well done to **Joy Chellew**, who, at the age of 94, is having the third book of her trilogy published by PCP. Hopefully, *In Search of Wisdom* will be launched in time for Christmas.



DADIRRI REFLECTION DAYS

This year, the Dadirri Labyrinth Reflection Days at St Andrews Beach on the Mornington Peninsula will focus on "The case for the Missing Intervening God".

Remaining Reflection Days for 2017 include :

Significant Dreams (November 11)

A Quiet New Year's Eve Covenant Meditation (31 December) For more information: email Bronwyn Pryor

robron@ptryor.org.au or website <http://addirri.pryor.org.au>

EIGHT DAY RETREAT (SILENT DIRECTED)

19 - 26 November 2017, St Joseph's by the Sea - Williamstown. Kardia Formation is offering the beautiful grounds of St Joseph's by the Sea, space, silence and spiritual direction in which you can rest and reconnect to the source of life. The eight-day retreat is a privileged time when we can tune out the noise and distractions of our regular routines in order to more intentionally focus on our relationship with God. You will meet with your director daily for spiritual conversation. It is also possible to make a shorter retreat during this time. For more information go to www.kardia.com.au or to make a booking contact Kardia enquiries@kardia.com.au or phone 9818 4836.

COMPETITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Mozzie Poetry Prize

The Mozzie is an independent poetry magazine publishing over 400 poems a year. No need for entry forms. All poems received by post during 2017 are eligible. Send contributions to The Mozzie, 28 Baynes Street, Highgate Hill, Qld. 4101. Closes December 31. <http://www.australianpoetry.org/competitions/the-mozzie-poetry-prizes/>

2018 Peter Porter Poetry Prize

Entries must be submitted online. Read the Terms and Conditions and FAQs at www.australianbookreview.com.au. Poems must not exceed 75 lines. Entries close midnight December 3.

The Moth Poetry Prize 2017

Open to anyone (over 16) as long as the poem is previously unpublished. Entry fee is 12 Euros per poem and closes 31/12/2017. Poets can enter as many poems as they like. For more information go to: <http://calendarforwriters.com/events/moth-poetry-prize-2017/>

Elyne Mitchell Writing Awards 2018

Open from 1/1/18 – 23/8/18. Theme 'Reach for the Stars – Strive for Excellence'. Fiction & non-fiction. The award commemorates the celebrated author of the Silver Brumby's life and work, and has been established to encourage all writers to focus their stories on the Australasian rural landscape. For entry forms : www.elynemitchell.com

DIARY OF EVENTS

Saturday, November 11th, 2-5pm: Meeting of Wordsmiths. 8 Woodhouse Road, Doncaster East.

Saturday, December 2nd, 1.30- 4pm: Launch of *Wonderment* at All Saints' Anglican Church Mitcham Hall – 18 Edward St, Mitcham.

Saturday, December 9th, 12.30 -5 pm: 30th anniversary of Wordsmiths celebration lunch, followed by Meeting of Wordsmiths. 8 Woodhouse Road, Doncaster East.



POETS' CORNER

Fantasy in red*

A single seat invites a rest:
this bold red sweep bisects the park,
flaunts its fiery challenge –
less a destination than a route –
to where? Surely so sound a construct
must continue on, demands I follow.
Dare I walk that glowing path,
or step out safe along the grass?
But wait! If I fast turn,
will I catch the leading edge
quietly creeping up behind
to complete the circuit?

© Joan Ray, 2017.

*Shortlisted for the 2017 Shire of Nillumbik Ekphrasis Poetry Award.

The wool shalt not be pulled over mine eyes

trapped in lines
willingly

arms up to ears
to hear
constant bleat of audio guide
...this room was fashioned...
...that room was designed...

no time to wait
the next flock cometh

we pause briefly to view
that which others deem significant
shuffled in the same
direction

headed for the shearing shed
of endless kitsch gifts

we are all like sheep

© Peter White

(published in *Wonderment*)

Watching

I wake with light
tickling my eyelids
till they wriggle
delighted by this caress

Open, my eyes absorb shapes
of window – straight lines
dark thrust of branch
from the right
lighter foliage, back left

As day brightens
I see colour – dark green
of camellia, backdrop for
translucent younger leaves
offering light

Pansies in bright make up
yellow, mauve and burnt sienna
turn towards me and one rose
letter box red stands watching...

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(published in *Wonderment*)