

WORDSMITHS NEWSLETTER

20.4

November, 2020

Welcome to the November edition of the Wordsmiths' newsletter for 2020.

We've come to the end of another year of poetry with Christmas just around the corner. Most years don't attract many labels but 2020 takes the cake : *bizarre, unexpected, weird, strange, frustrating, anxious*, and the all popular media favourite *unprecedented*. We've lived through a slice of history and done our best to follow regulations and restrictions. We've gone without and stayed within. We've met face to face but only via a screen. With shopping off-line we've had to shop on-line and smile, talk, walk and even sneeze behind a mask.

But after a year of uncertainty, Australia (and Victoria especially) is emerging from the COVID tunnel. The things we've missed will eventually return and many of us will be asking ourselves if this weird year has changed our thinking, attitudes, friendships, hopes and dreams.

In a year of freedoms curtailed, the one constant for many of us has been a love of words. I've read, written and workshopped more poetry than usual. I've re-read classics such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre* just to wallow in the style of writing and surprise myself once again at how many words – for example *inexorable* and *approbation* – have disappeared from everyday language since Austen and Bronte's day. I've listened to podcasts and sought the solace of reading late at night in lieu of screen time.

I'm sure by this time next year, I'll bemoan traffic on the roads, the hamster wheel of busyness and life in full commitment swing again. I might even wish we could go back to lockdown and a curfew and a 5k radius. I might wish for peace and quiet again and time to write another few poems.

Leigh

MEETINGS

Jean Sietzema Dickson led the August 8 Zoom meeting. Jean read poems by Gerald Manley Hopkins, including *Binsey Poplars*, *The Windhover*, and *Inversnaid*. 14 poets attended. At the September 12 Zoom meeting, at which 13 poets attended, **Peter White** led by

reading *The Great Realisation* (a Corona virus poem) by Tom Roberts. The poem can be viewed and heard on YouTube

<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=The+Great+Realisation>

15 poets attended the October 10 Zoom meeting which was led by **Maree Silver**. Maree introduced poetry by Edwina Gately (Theologian and lay minister) and read *God Light, Waiting, Harmony, Presence, and Reflection*.



All Wordsmiths poets are invited to the next **Zoom meeting (Sat 14 November)**. If you wish to take part, email your poem to Carolyn, who will also lead the meeting, by Wednesday 11 November. BYO arvo tea is a must!! vimpani@bigpond.net.au

Our December meeting **On December 12th**, will also have to be via Zoom, as the restrictions would still only allow 10 people, but they'd need to practise social distancing. However, Carolyn suggested we include in our last meeting, some social time in chat rooms, so that way we can socialise a bit more than usual.

WORKSHOPPING BY EMAIL

Janette Fernando has continued to facilitate the workshopping of poems by email. For those who either don't have access to Zoom and/or would prefer to receive written feedback on their poems, please email Janette to be added to the contact list. janettefernando@iprimus.com.au

VALE CATE LEWIS



Remembering Cate Lewis (22.03.1952 - 17.10.2020)

It is with great sorrow that we learned of the death of Cate Lewis. Although Cate had only joined the Wordsmiths a few years ago, she impressed us with her insights as we discussed poetry and led a very well thought out workshop on the poetry of George Herbert last year. I thought her poetry, the fruit of her struggles with faith and her time working in Sierra Leone was deep and meaningful and encouraged her to put a collection together. Thanks to the hard work of our editorial team, she was delighted to see the publication of two collections before she died. The first, *Coming Home* is really a poetic prayer journey while *Kindlings* is a shorter collection for her family. To Cate's family we express our heartfelt condolences and prayers that they may be held in the everlasting arms of God.

Jean Sietzma-Dickson

Cate was an amazing woman – it seems she had planned all her life to work with oppressed people, so it's no wonder she spent a year teaching in Pakistan before marrying David, having three children and moving to West Africa to work for many years. The family returned to Australia, where Cate developed severe depression, but continued to look after her family. She was subsequently also diagnosed with Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia, but by 2016 she managed to complete her PhD in International Development and Politics.

I really appreciated the contribution Cate made to The Wordsmiths – her warm and witty nature, her passion for social justice, her positive outlook and her own down-to-earth, deeply personal writing.

We both believe that it was the Holy Spirit who prompted me to visit her in December last year, having heard she had terminal cancer. Cate mentioned to me that she had been collecting her poems together so she could leave them as a legacy to her family and asked me what to do next – type them up and go to Officeworks to get them copied? I suggested she send the manuscripts to Poetica Christi Press for the book committee to consider publishing and we received the first one in February. It was accepted for publication, so I began working on it with Cate over the following months, but due to the effects of the chemo, she had a break from it for several months and we resumed in August after she found out the cancer had spread. On September 24th, while she was in hospital, she held the first copy of *Coming Home* in her hands and was overwhelmed with joy. As her health declined rapidly, it then became a race against time to get her second

collection, *Kindlings*, together. We started on it in September and thanks to the prayers of many people, I was able to sign off and order the book on Thursday, October 15th, it was printed the next morning and she had it in her hands that same afternoon. The next day the family played the launch speeches and readings of her poems to her and she died later that night. I am so glad that she has indeed left behind a rich legacy of her work, not just for her family, but further afield. Her poems are deeply felt expressions of her life – her wonder at God's creation, her frustrations, her compassion, real life, depression, all underlined by her faith and relationship with God. We will all miss Cate but are thankful that, thanks to God's providence, her voice will continue to bless people far and wide.

Janette Fernando



MEMBER NEWS

Congratulations to **Xiaoli (Sharlee) Yang** who is the new Poetry Network Coordinator at WellSpring. Xiaoli has taken over from the previous coordinator, Elizabeth Lee, who always did a marvellous job. Xiaoli has a deep passion for poetry, and brings a breadth of experience in sharing this with others. She is a recently graduated spiritual director and academic researcher with many gifts in cross cultural settings.

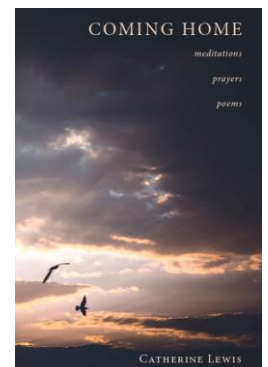
Zoom meetings have given Wordsmiths poets who would normally have difficulty attending the monthly meetings the opportunity to join with others. In particular, it's been great to reconnect with **Graeme Turner** and **Mary O'Shannessy** and enjoy their poetry.

POETICA CHRISTI PRESS NEWS

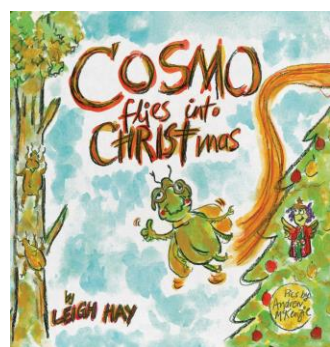
New Releases from Poetica Christi Press

Coming Home (Cate Lewis):

Cate takes us on a journey, through wonderfully evocative poetry, as she navigates life with a deeply felt faith in God. Even under the shadow of a terminal illness diagnosis, she sits on God's lap to chat about family, history, creation and her feelings, knowing her Father's love and embrace will keep her close and ultimately, bring her home.



Kindlings (Cate Lewis): Cate writes with a spare and simple intimacy. She reminds us of what matters: the cups of tea, the bumble bee, the glance of the weary mother, the burden of love and the journey to wholeness. Through these poems we go on a journey: the young mother staring horror in the eye in Africa, the tumble of family, the fear of mortality and the solace of the wild. This book is a collection of a life, a life lived with courage and with a clear eye. Copies of *Coming Home* and *Kindlings* are priced @ \$20 ea. \$3 p&H for one book or \$5.50 for two. To order see attached order form or contact georgina.c.lewis@gmail.com. phone 0478 736 044



Leigh Hay has written a book for children (illustrated by Andrew McKenzie) titled *Cosmo flies into Christmas*. The book also includes some background for kids on Christmas beetles and a special beetle song composed by musician and

teacher Margi Orr.

It's Christmas Eve in Australia. Cosmo, a small brown Christmas beetle, hatches in Mrs Bunnyfluff's garden. He flies through a back door and lands slap bang in Mrs Bunnyfluff's house. WOW!! Food. Presents. Bonbons. And a big green tree covered in silver stuff. Cosmo doesn't know about Christmas. But Mrs Bunnyfluff does. And she tells Cosmo a story he will never forget. Published by Poetica Christi Press, for ages 2+, copies are available from Leigh, RRP \$25.00

To order : treehousepoet318@gmail.com

Joy in the Morning

We had hoped to launch this anthology from this year's competition by the end of the year, but as the Covid restrictions will still only allow 50 people to gather outdoors, we're postponing the launch till the end of January.

KARDIA FORMATION

Eight day at home retreat : Grace Upon Grace

20-28 November 2020 Kardia is offering an invitation to join in forming a community of prayer during an eight day retreat while you are at home. The retreat will be drawn from the book *Grace Upon Grace* by Marlene Marburg. You can make this a silent retreat or a retreat in daily life. You can choose to pray with

one or more readings from the daily suggested readings. *Grace upon Grace : Savouring the Spiritual Exercises through the Arts* is available as an ebook. For more information : enquiries@kardia.com.au

WELLSPRING CENTRE ZOOM MEETINGS

Christian Meditation: Peter Leaver invites poets and others (via Zoom) to join in every Friday 10-11am. The session follows the format of the World Community for Christian Meditation (www.wccm.org). There is music, a short recorded talk relating to Christian Life/meditation, 25 minutes of mantra-based meditation, then a little more music. Everyone then shares a cuppa together. This is a friendly and open group welcoming all to join. email doubletake@optusnet.com.au

Prayer at Noon : is every Wednesday 12noon – 12.30pm (via Zoom). When prompted to enter the meeting ID in order to join the Zoom meeting, it is **308-158-245**. Prayer requests are also taken prayeratnoonrequests@wellspringcentre.org.au <https://www.wellspringcentre.org.au/events/prayer/>

MELBOURNE WRITERS HUB

The Melbourne Writers Hub is a group of professional writers and book designers, of which Poetica Christi Press is a member. MWH produces an e-journal and in a recent edition, Leigh Hay wrote an article about writing styles and a podcast on discovering your poetic voice. The podcast can be heard at <https://www.melbwritershub.com/tales-from-the-treehouse>. For more information visit <https://www.melbwritershub.com>

COMPETITIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

Globalisation Anthology : Submissions Open

Making Magic Happen Press is seeking poetry submissions for an upcoming anthology on the theme of 'Globalisation'. Submit up to three poems with a maximum of 80 lines per poem. Poems should be submitted via jotform. Find out more on Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/mmhpress>

2020. Coronavirus has turned the world upside down. We want to hear your experiences - the good, the bad, the strange, the surprising, the funny. It might be a moment or a memory, something you heard or saw, felt or thought. Tell us in no more than 50 words. It can be a poem or prose, a single sentence or a single word! There's no cost to enter and the most striking pieces will be exhibited (in person, we hope) in the new year. In doing so, we'll aim to raise money for a lasting tribute to our frontline healthcare workers. Go to www.2020words.com for details. Closes 31/12/20



POETS' CORNER

Timeless Tasks

*(At no other time than when I am hand sewing,
am I more aware of my women ancestors.)*

In the quiet of afternoon
sunshine streaming in
feel of textured fabric
place for needle pin
gentle rhythm sewing
mother granny stitching
and their grannies knowing
in another time how to
piece colours together

threads from the past entwine

for countless years we've sat and sewn
just as if we've always known
how to mend or stitch
enhance

God's gift
inheritance

© catherine m barnard

Christmas 1992, Koidu Refugees, Sierra Leone

O! Can't we hear them crying
through our busy Christmas cheer?
Can't we hear the sound of footsteps
dragging down the road,
blindly walking, walking, walking,
walking with no goal, no hope of haven,
only fear to drive them on?
With the weary children crying, crying, crying,
crying for a rest,
or struggling, mute with terror,
to keep pace?

And can't we hear the sound of wailing
that will not be hushed or soothed?
Rachel weeping, weeping, weeping for her children
the new-birthed mother wailing, wailing, wailing
for her baby, born too early
in the terror and the unrelenting march,
now left cold and still beside the road
beneath his hasty covering
of dirt and anguished tears.
And the mother reaching, reaching, reaching
reaching helpless empty arms

as her family pull her from him,
and the weary fear-filled flight to nowhere
starts again.

Can't we see the stable
for the tinsel and the glare?
Can't we smell the cow dung
for the turkey and the cake?
Can't we hear the baby crying, crying, crying,
crying for his dark and bloody world?
Will we chant out empty carols
and leave him weeping in the dirt?

Or will we let ourselves be stretched
by human joy and pain
as that tender babe was stretched
on that cross so long ago?

© Cate Lewis (*Kindlings*)

My Mortgaged Life

I know my success is not my own
but from those who in me believed.
What I achieved is an inherited loan.
From my forebears it was received.

Mum and Dad did their very best
to put me in a place I'd thrive.
Their parents in turn had little rest
while they struggled to stay alive.

I carry the baton from where I came
in the history of the making of me.
My desire is to pass on the flame
burning brightly for all to see.

I chose a partner with a similar drive.
His kin had invested in him.
We pooled our resources to survive.
Optimism shone from within.

When the family circles to celebrate life
with rituals some claim as vintage,
or one of the sons weds a wife,
our debt becomes our heritage.

© Maree Nikolaou

Old Rose Bush

My body ages, skin grows
thin and wrinkled
like rose-scented parchment
But still the spirit burns

Who knows what will happen
when I loose the flood of thoughts
and clothe them in illuminating words

© Jean Sietzema-Dickson