

# WORDSMITHS NEWSLETTER

21.1

February, 2021

Welcome to the first edition for 2021.

After a year of social distancing, 2021 is offering poets possibilities to physically meet again to workshop their latest (and sometimes oldest) poems and be encouraged by feedback from others. And with Melbourne now experiencing a run of Covid free days, getting back to some sort of normality is encouraging. Last year I valued the isolation of lockdown as it meant I didn't have to be at meetings, social occasions, or commitments of any kind. I did write more poetry!! However, with 'freedom' fast being restored, suddenly the diary is filling up with all kinds of busyness and I'm back where I seem to have left off a year ago. I felt quite ashamed of myself this week as I couldn't even remember the title of the very last poem I wrote...and that was only a month ago. It will be somewhere in my 'Sketches' folder (the repository for all my first drafts on my laptop), but I'll have to go looking and even then I might not recognise or remember the title. It's made me realise that it's only February and I've already prioritised dozens of other jobs and people before I've even thought about my own writing.

Of course I do have excuses. Always got them. We've renovated our kitchen, loaded rubbish to a 6m skip, fast tracked stuff to Savers and babysat grandchildren over the holidays. I've also edited manuscripts for several other people, so you can see I haven't been mooching around. But I haven't seriously sat down to write either, and if I'd bothered to make any New Year resolutions, that should have been an important one. So it's probably high time I put fingers to keyboard and wrote a poem...or two...or three. But first, I'll go looking for the last one I remember writing....whatever I titled it.

Leigh

## MEETINGS

**Leigh Hay** led the December Christmas meeting, reading Christmas poems by various poets including *Christmas Bells* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Music on Christmas Morning* by Anne Bronte, and *Before the ice is in the pools* by Emily Dickinson. Nine Wordsmiths met at Carolyn Vimpani's home to share an end of year lunch and one other poet joined in workshoping poems via Zoom.



## FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

We are planning (and hoping) we can meet face-to-face at Carolyn's place again, 8 Woodhouse Rd, Doncaster East, from 2-5 pm. However, please bring masks to wear. Here's the roster for the next few months. Please let Janette know if you can't do your duty so she can swap you with someone else.

Month	Leader	Afternoon tea
Feb 13th	Janette	Greg, Maree S, Leigh
Mar 13 <sup>th</sup>	Jean	Jean, Peter W, Maree N
Apr 10th	Florence	Peter B, Janette, Cath
May 8th	Peter W	Joan, Cecily, Daryl
June 12	Carolyn	Florence, Rebecca, Greg

## MEMBER NEWS

Please pray for **Don Helmore**, who hasn't been well but is now out of hospital. Also pray for **Sue Donnelly** in Canberra, who has been having treatment for cancer.

Congratulations to **Joy Chellew**, who hopes to turn 96 on February 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## LAUNCH OF JOY IN THE MORNING

*Joy in the Morning* (edited by Janette Fernando and Maree Silver) will be launched by Dr Anne Elvey on Sunday February 28th, 2021. Dr Elvey is Adjunct Research Fellow, School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures & Linguistics, Monash University & Honorary Research Associate, Trinity College Theological School, University of Divinity).

**Joy in the Morning** includes poems by the winners of the 2020 PCP Poetry competition with contributions from The Wordsmiths of Melbourne and others. A number of poets will have the opportunity to read their work.

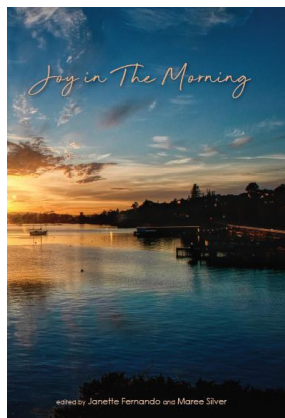
**Launch date:** Sunday 28 February, 2021.

**Time:** 4.30 for 4.45pm.

**Venue:** Arbour space the Box Hill Community Arts Centre.

**Address:** Cnr Station & Combarton Sts., Box Hill – enter from Station St (Melway map 47 D11).

Parking is available in the car park opposite and surrounding streets. Books will be available from 4.30 and the official launch will be at 4.45pm, followed by refreshments. If you wish to attend, RSVP by Feb 21 to poeticachristi@optushome.com.au or (03) 9808 8591.



### Judge's comments for *Joy in the Morning*

The theme 'Joy in the morning' attracted numerous poems with either 'joy' or 'morning' or both in the title. Many of these were similar, celebrating the start of a new day as a time of hope or resurrection, and used familiar Easter tropes of dawn, the sun rising. A good number of poems celebrated early morning bird calls, especially as prompting joy in the hearer. Anzac Day, the dreadful Spring-Summer 2019-2020 bushfires and the Covid-19 pandemic each entered the entries. There were memorable lines and music in many of the poems that did not reach the shortlist. In selecting a short list, what I looked for were approaches to the theme that brought some originality or insight beyond the well-loved trope of daybreak as a kind of daily taste of Easter morning, poems that used imagery in interesting ways and showed evidence of poetic craft even if not achieved perfectly.

I will make a few comments on each poem in the shortlist, before turning to the final four. 'After the smoke' brings together human vulnerability and need for solace with the fate of a baby kookaburra after the fires; subtly, the poet situates joy in the midst of tragedy in a shared instinct for survival. 'A Simpler Time' holds its central theme of milk throughout the poem, as it points to a capacity for joy in the work of providing and receiving sustenance. 'Clarion at Dawn' is an eight-line poem, juxtaposing war and dawn; what attracted me to this short rhyming poem was the way it echoes Auden, for example, parts of 'For the Time Being'. 'Currawong', another short poem, in its repetitions and reminders to me of Judith Wright and

William Blake, is a skilfully wrought evocation of the joy of the bird itself. 'Eagle' strongly builds its picture of a majestic bird in flight; then, as the poet intervenes to interpret the eagle's sharing in the place and purpose of things, the bird gradually disappears from 'sight'. In its description, 'Eagle' suggests without spelling out the theme of joy. 'Equivocal' offers a unique and poignant perspective on grief, through the trope of dreaming of loved ones who are deceased, ending 'I woke more or less with joy'. Another short poem 'Gannet' deftly poses a question about the way the poet's relation to the bird they are watching calls forth joy.

'Ghazal', as its title suggests, takes the form of a ghazal, with its repetitions and shifts, and does this with a depth that invites reflection on miracles missed, even as the imagery the poet chooses acknowledges the way trauma and the everyday intersect. 'Morning Cuppa' appeals in the way it describes loss through the image of an old red sock found in a mug under the sink; the way an object associated with a beloved can call forth both grief and joy. The second line of 'Morning rituals', 'she wakes in the space of herself', signals the strength of the voice in this poem which builds its picture of the beginnings of a day in pleasing imagery, closing with a woman bringing day back into the house with the scent of crushed lavender on her fingers. 'My Kintsugi' is a narrative poem that folds together family heritage and loss, evoking joy in a mending that honours its scars. 'Newells Paddock' describes a morning scene with attractive imagery, flowing deftly toward its beautiful final image. A series of questions, in the poem 'Not Joy', provokes the reader to consider situations in which 'joy in the morning' stands together with its opposite; the rhythm and repetitions that mark this poem call forth a kind of joy in the act of witness and response to suffering and injustice.

Humorously, 'Ode to Joy' offers a pandemic lockdown perspective on a neighbour's daily music practice and the anticipated (longed-for) excess of a return to both peace and choral singing. 'Regime', as I read it, is a bleak poem of domestic abuse, where joy can be fleeting, requiring moments of safety for joy to arrive. A narrative poem, 'Spring Rapture', ably tells of a moment of gifts given and re-given. With lines like 'The day is fresh lemonade', 'Sunrise' offers an attractive exposition of the common themes of morning freshness and birdsong. In 'The International Space Station', the poet imagines that astronauts' dream of Earth, and juxtaposes the idea that, while people might seem to be closer to the divine on satellites beyond our planetary atmosphere, there is solace in our everyday embeddedness in Earth. 'The theophany of trees' is a beautifully realised poem of natural revelation as divine revelation. 'Voices in Stone', in two complementary stanzas, evokes the cathedral stone setting of Bach's choral Mass in B Minor and in so doing suggests a crossing between religious architecture and

religious music as sites of joy. 'Winter Mornings' has an engaging movement that suggest seasons, the change of seasons and our responses to them are a kind of 'yes'; the language is simple, yet expressions like 'autumning herself ready' evoke for me Gerard Manley Hopkins.

It is always difficult to choose one poem among dozens of dozens, and I mention two before coming to the runner-up and winning poems. 'How You Begin' is a poem I read many times, with its simple morning scene told through images in one long stanza before a single line on its own and then the spare three line finale celebrating a moment of conception, where the final 'you' also echoes as an address of prayer. 'Instructions Before Forgetting' is another poem that repaid multiple readings: a poignant narrative and counter-narrative of love, grief, longing, and the joy embedded in the everyday living of these.

The runner-up 'How Joy Arises' by Scott-Patrick Mitchell is a prose poem. Again I read this poem many times, and what kept me coming back were not only the shifts of imagery but the way the poet brings in concepts like glory, the angelic and prayer, avoiding clichés by claiming the words, for example, 'We could use a word like *glory*, and we shall'. There are subtle shifts on each claiming that keep the reader interested, and by the time I reach the closing line, although it is a kind of telling rather than showing, I am convinced. The flow of the poem, its stops and its intentional imperfect grammar all add to its work as an argument for joy and holiness, that is not far off but here.

The winner 'My Grandfather's Blessing' by Toni Brisland is a sustained narrative poem which builds its story through a weaving of imagery appropriate to fishing labour like the weaving of the fishing nets themselves. The imagery is lush but not overdone. The poet's love of their Nonno is clear in the careful attention to detail; in this detail is the joy of relation. The spare inclusion of Italian dialect assists in creating the deep sense of place and persons. The poem closes with an evocation not only of the grandfather's legacy, when he calls the poet your Nonno's blood, but also with a frisson of the hardiness and cost of a life of labour spent well.

Congratulations to all the poets, and thank you for the opportunity to read your work.

*Anne Elvey*

## KARDIA FORMATION

In 2021 Kardia will embark on a journey of spiritual conversations with mentors and leaders in the field of deep listening in the hope of expanding perspectives for spiritual direction. Participants can sign up for the whole series or join just one or more conversations.

For more information about any of Kardia's programs : [www.kardia.com.au](http://www.kardia.com.au)

## A Conversation with Monty Williams SJ: Emerging Aspects of Ignatian Spiritual Direction

10am — 12pm (Melbourne time zone), 12 February, 2021, 12 March, 2021: and 16 April 2021: Emptiness: the Hospitality of God.

## A Conversation with Ingrid Rose: Process, Dreaming and Quantum Consciousness for Spiritual Direction

10am — 12pm (Melbourne time zone), 7 May 2021, 14 May 2021 and 21 May 2021.

## Six-Day Lenten Journal Retreat at home 21-27 March 2021

Kardia is offering an invitation to join in forming a community of prayer during a six-day Lenten Journal Retreat while you are at home. While the focus of the retreat is Lent, the modes of prayer include personal journal writing if that is your desire.

For more information : [www.kardia.com.au](http://www.kardia.com.au)

## WELLSPRING CENTRE

## An Introductory Embodied Life Zoom Retreat with Russell and Linda Delman (12-14 March)

Immerse yourself in the practices of this unique work developed by Russell Delman, which brings together meditation, conscious movement and compassionate listening/speaking. Expressions of interest and queries to Jenny Guild – email [gld.hnwd@bigpond.com](mailto:gld.hnwd@bigpond.com)  
Phone- [03] 9819 3106 or 0417 512 148

## MELBOURNE WRITERS HUB

The Melbourne Writers Hub is a group of professional writers and book designers, of which Poetica Christi Press is a member and in the last e-newsletter, MWH featured Poetica Christi Press. For more information on MWH, visit <https://www.melbwritershub.com> or email [melbwritershub@gmail.com](mailto:melbwritershub@gmail.com)

## COMPETITIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

### Poetica Christi Press 2021 Anthology

Entries on the theme of *Silver Linings* will be accepted from 1 Feb to 30 April 2021. Poems up to 50 lines (including spaces). 1<sup>st</sup> prize \$300, 2nd prize \$100. A total of 25 poems chosen by a judge will be published in the 2021 anthology. Entry forms now available at [www.poeticachristi.org.au](http://www.poeticachristi.org.au) or from PCP Competition Coordinator, PO Box 110, Greensborough, Vic 3088.

### Aesthetica Creative Writing Award 2021

This international literary prize is open to poetry and short fiction submissions on any theme, celebrating innovation in content, form and technique.

Submissions close 31 August 2021. For more information : <https://aestheticamagazine.com>

### The Ada Cambridge Writing Prizes

Open to writers who live in Victoria, for biographical fiction and poetry. Submissions close 31 March, 2021. For more information : <https://www.willylitfest.org.au>

### Bridport Creative Writing Competition

Based in the UK, the Bridport competition seeks poetry, short stories, flash fiction and first novel beginnings. Closing date 31 May, 2021. For more information : <https://bridportprize.org.uk>

### TCK Publishing Poetry Awards Contest 2021

The TCK Publishing Poetry Awards Contest is an international poetry contest established in 2021. Each year's prizewinner receives a \$1,000 honorarium and publication of his or her poem on the TCK Publishing website. Closes March 31<sup>st</sup>. More information: <https://www.tckpublishing.com/2021-poetry-awards-contest/>



### POETS' CORNER

#### My Grandfather's Blessing

After filling with petrol at the top of its hill  
Ulladulla was the sort of town you'd drive through.  
A quick glance at the harbour's fishing fleet  
and you'd seen the best of it. But not to me.

When the breeze was buoyant in summer  
the sky bright, you'd find my nonno  
in his shed, sweat on his forehead  
a handkerchief under an overall strap.

My grandfather's fisherman-skin was feathered  
like mother of pearl, his lips the colour  
of a rose too long in the sun, the cathedral blue  
of his eyes, milky from a life lived at sea.

The room's air caught the steel-purple  
of imported net twine, bales upon bales of it,  
some rolled onto spindles for his net weaving,  
some already woven and *piled up neat*.

His needle, bone grey, flitted like sail-fins sea-flying,  
his creation was strewn about the mackerel floor  
amidst rolls of float lines and sinkers,  
its pattern in his head, miraculously cast.

Dust motes rose gull-like over the stillness  
of bags of chicken feed near kegs of wine,  
of buckets of olives and barrels of salt  
that would cushion layer from layer of sardines.

Iridescent flies and mosquitoes circled kerosene  
lamps;  
swallows nested in broken rafters close to the strafing  
light.  
From hooks hung binoculars, boots and dried herbs  
and cod, air-drying by their roped tails, for *pisce  
stocco*.

Sometimes he'd call me in to sit near his stool,  
pass me apple slices on his pocket knife's blade.  
He'd listen to my dreams. I lived what he did at sea  
and he'd call me *sangue di tuo nonno*.

© Toni Brisland

(Winning poem for PCP 2020 Poetry Competition)

#### Joy

wisps of notes  
birdsong  
wings of sunshine

© Sue Donnelly (from *Joy in the morning*)

#### Tyrant

I live with a tyrant.  
He controls my thoughts and actions.  
I sit  
    and wait  
        and wait  
            and wait  
until he sees fit to attend to my needs.  
He often refuses to let me in  
Or makes it so difficult that I give up!  
I need a child, the younger the better,  
to help me.  
Children seem to understand,  
But as for me –  
I really dislike the guy!  
His name?  
COMPUTER (come, put 'er down...)  
    *Have you ever felt like this?*

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Send any news for the May 2021 newsletter to  
[treehousepoet318@gmail.com](mailto:treehousepoet318@gmail.com) by April 15 2021.  
Newsletter edited by Leigh Hay and Janette Fernando