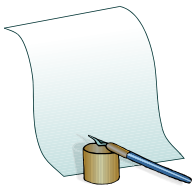


WORDSMITHS NEWSLETTER
February 2026

Welcome to the first edition of Wordsmiths newsletter for 2026. We begin another year when we can meet to share our own poetry and be inspired by the works of others. There is always much to learn from workshopping poems and from people whose work we admire.

I was reminded of how much poets contribute to the world when I learned of the death of Chris Wallace-Crabbe who passed away on 16 December at the grand age of 91. Living almost his entire life in Melbourne, Chris enjoyed a significant international reputation as a poet with a literary career stretching over 60 years. He also enjoyed a long and distinguished academic career at the University of Melbourne and generations of students and poetry lovers benefited from his wisdom and creativity. The winner of 12 awards and author of 26 volumes of poetry, Chris's contribution to poetry will remain significant, long after his death.

However, as poets, being well-known or well-connected is not a prerequisite to make a meaningful contribution. In January this year, Wordsmiths lost Cath Barnard, a loved and much respected long-standing member. Cath was one of those quiet, serious yet light-hearted poets who brought so much to the Wordsmiths meetings. Her poetry was always a pleasure to read, and her love of nature, music and humankind, was evident in her expressive words. Cath cared deeply for others and I for one felt personally honoured when she asked if I could help her compile her poetry into a volume for publication.

Whether we write a single poem or 365 poems per year, we are contributing our thoughts, opinions, concerns, loves, joys and even sorrows. As poets we have the opportunity to enrich the lives of others with our words. Whether this makes us famous is irrelevant, but for those challenged to write 365 poems this year, you'll probably be remembered as a living legend.

Leigh Hay

MEETINGS

Leigh Hay led the November meeting with the poetry of Australian poet Barry Collier. A barrister, former senior teacher and MP for the southern Sydney seat of Miranda in the NSW State Parliament, Barry has recently published his first book of poetry titled Poems *Of Life, Of Love and Passing*. Barry's collection of verse is unique in that he has included background notes outlining key points as to the time, setting, language chosen and observations as to why certain poems were written. Leigh read *Meeting*, *Presence* and *Hope*.

The final Wordsmiths meeting was held on 12 December, when all poets came together to share lunch and a Christmas poem of their choice. This was followed by workshopping of poems by individual Wordsmiths members.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Unless notified otherwise, meetings will be held, at Carolyn Vimpani's at 8 Woodhouse Road, Doncaster East. Zoom facility will also be available if possible.

Month	**Leader**	**Afternoon tea**
Feb	Janette	Chris, Leigh, Daryl
Mar	Greg	Maree S, Jean, Cecily
April	Carolyn	Jemma, Janette, Greg

LAUNCH OF LIFE'S TAPESTRY

On Saturday December 6, 2025, Poetica Christi Press launched its most recent poetry anthology **Life's Tapestry** at Ashburton Baptist Church.

The launch was very well attended with

musical interludes provided by Cathy Altmann and Angela Chandler. Simon Nette launched the anthology, sharing meaningful insight into the poetry included and words of appreciation for Janette Fernando's skilled editing and Poetica Christi's continued work in publishing the works of Australian poets.

Peter White acted as MC with 23 poets reading their poems and Simon Nette reading *Voice,* the winning poem by Rosemary Blake.
Thanks were extended to the book committee (Leigh Hay, Maree Silver, Jemma van Loenen, Carolyn Vimpani and Peter White) and to photographers (Peter Eshuis, Leonard O'Brien, Maree Silver, Joyce Vandenberg, Peter White and Peter Williams). Janette extended a special thanks to Maree Silver for organising the launch. Copies of **Life's Tapestry** are available for $20 from PCP. Email poetica@primus.com.au for more information.

PCP 2026 ANNUAL POETRY COMPETITION

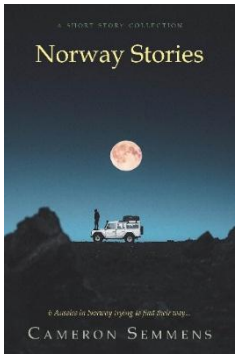
This year's competition is up and running, with the theme for the book being **A momentary darkness.** This topic lends itself to poems about patience through suffering, difficult times, looking ahead, hope for tomorrow, the journey of life, the highs and lows of life, light and dark, day and night, affliction, life cycles, change, trust, faith, perspective, the Big Picture, redemptive encounters. Entries are $10 each. First prize is $300, Second prize is $100. Competition closes on April 30th.

MEMBER NEWS

Vale Cath Barnard (21.12.1935 – 6.12.2025)
Members of Wordsmiths were very saddened to hear of the death of long-standing member

Cath Barnard. Formerly of Doncaster East and Bulleen, Cath passed away peacefully at Martin Luther Homes on 6 December 2025. Cath was much loved by her family and her community. As a poet she is remembered for her gentle nature, compassion, acknowledgement of First Peoples and concern for the environment. An anthology of Cath's poems (*Learning to Listen*) was published by Poetica Christi Press in 2021, and launched by Rev Mark Dunn on 27th February 2022 at Manningham Uniting Church in Templestowe – the same church where Cath's funeral was conducted on 19 December 2025.
Jean Sietzema-Dickson wrote of **Learning to Listen,** *From the outset of this lovely collection of poems Cath Barnard makes her undoubted Christian faith very clear. This is not a work written to make her mark on the world, but to honour her Creator. Delightfully enhanced with sketches by her daughter, the poems, written lyrically in varying styles and rhythms, help us to consider how we can be reconciled with the First Peoples of this land and in what ways we can help to preserve and conserve the wonderful natural world around us.*
Cath is survived by her children (Anne, Elina, Jack & Myrawin), their spouses, 11 grandchildren, and 4 great grandchildren. She will be sadly missed at Wordsmiths, where for many years her friendship, humour and creativity was much enjoyed and appreciated.

Janette Fernando and her husband Roger recently celebrated their 50th Wedding anniversary and were pleased that a number of Wordsmiths could attend.



Cameron Semmens has written a short story collection titled **Norway Stories.**
The stories are about six Aussies in Norway trying to find their way. Cameron will share these six poetic short fictions over the next six weeks on Substack – 1 per week. Substack is a platform particularly designed for authors to share their work and engage with their readers. For more information contact Cameron at : cam@webcameron.com

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Annual membership fees of $25 or $20 concession are now due. Direct transfers to : Poetica Christi Press, BSB: 633-000 Acc: 118162593.

WELLSPRING CENTRE

Contemplative Circle
Tuesday, 3 March 2026, 10am – 2:30pm
Come and enjoy a Quiet Day designed to help you slow down, breathe deeply, and reconnect with your inner life. Inspired by Parker Palmer's wisdom that "The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, and yet exceedingly shy," this day offers gentle spaces where your soul can surface without pressure or hurry. Whether you come seeking rest, clarity, or simply a pause from the rush, this Quiet Day offers a compassionate sanctuary to settle, listen, and be restored.
Cost: $60. Facilitator: Margaret Loftus.
https://www.wellspringcentre.org.au

Autumm Retreat : 3 nights (6-9 March 2026) 6 nights (6-12 March 2026). Don Bosco Retreat Centre, Lysterfield. Bookings at : https://www.eventbrite.com/o/120418442611

Quiet Day with Andrea Long. WellSpring Centre. May 14, 10.00am. Bookings at: https://www.eventbrite.com/o/120418442611

COMPETITIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

Melbourne Poets Union International Poetry Competition 2025/26

1st prize: $1500, 2nd prize : $500, 3rd prize : $300, 4th prize: Wendy Fleming urban realist award $150, 3 highly commended prizes: $100 each. Judge : Jennifer Harrison
Submit unpublished poems of up to 50 lines**.** $15 first entry and $10 for each subsequent entry. Closing date: March 30th, 2026. Info: https://www.melbournepoetsunion.au/projects/ipc31-2025

SCWC 2026 Poetry award
Theme: *states*, poems up to 50 lines
Entry Fee: $15, *1st:* $1,000, 2nd: $100, Ron Pretty SCWC Member award: $100, Wollongong Art Gallery Special Award: $100
https://southcoastwriters.org/scwc-poetry-award-2026

Ada Cambridge Poetry Prize
Open to 18 years and over and who live in the state of Victoria. No theme. Poetry 30 lines, entry fee $15 (up to two poems), prize $500. Entries close 8 March 2026. More : https://www.willylitfest.org.au/ada-cambridge-prizes

Boree Log Poetry Competition
Open to all. Theme : Australian Bush. Bush poetry 80 lines, entry fee $8 or $30 for 4.
1st prize $100. Closes May 15th, 2026 https://www.austwriters.com/competitions#boreelog

Eastwood/Hills FAW Literary Competition
Phillipa Holland Award for Poetry. 80 lines, $8 or $30 for 4. First prize $150.00. Entries close 15 May 2026. More information : https://hillsfaw.wordpress.com/judges-reports-2020/

Sutherland Shire Literary Competition
Traditional verse 80 lines, Free verse 80 lines. Entry fee $15. Entries close 28 February, 2026. https://libraries.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/whats-on/sutherland-shire-literary-competition

POET'S CORNER

In the Bush

Star
among sticks
smooth purple petals spread
silently praising God
sun orchid.

© Cath Barnard

Attend

The sky is dappled grey. Its soft
structure lifts above me. The sun
going down behind the shops and
houses tints it yellow. How much

of my life have I missed already?
I have barely noticed how the
moon is fuller than the tiny fingernail
of two nights ago, how the sun

hits the land on an angle now at
autumn, and winter will come,
and spring again. How this earth
is somersaulting away from

the sun towards night, and wheeling
through space. How my daughter's face
is turned to me now and
I have already missed what she is saying.

© Cathy Altmann

Mardie
A tribute to my Mum

A neat woman
compassionate caring
practical private

forever number five
of ten siblings
sandwiched between brothers

she became the filling
in one rough and tumble game
pushed to and fro

never one to boast
she kept much
about her interests from me

only after she died
did I find letters certificates
and documents detailing

compassionate nursing help
badge of Guide Commissioner
membership of Save the Children

at the back of her wardrobe
a tattered shoe box containing
a pair of peach satin slippers

nestled in yellowed tissue
fringe-fluffed
with matching feathers

flamboyant high of heel
reminiscent of Hollywood
and youthful dreams?

© Maree Silver

The Rose

That gorgeous crimson rose
draws you into its beauty.
Move closer.
Petals open as nearness
welcomes you within.
Cosset the invite.
Feel comforting velvet surround
until enveloped,
perfumed dew on your soul.
Life deepens.
The gorgeous risen Rose of Calvary.

© Don Helmore

Send any news for the May 2026 newsletter to treehousepoet318@gmail.com by April 15, 2026. Newsletter edited by Leigh Hay and Janette Fernando.