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Beginnings

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IRINA DUNN is a well-known manuscript assessor, editor and literary agent. She has guided hundreds of manuscripts from rough draft to final polished work and on to publication.



I must thank the incomparable IRINA DUNN for the crucial role she played in bringing this novel to the bright daylight of publication. Had it not been for her encouragement, her efforts, her generosity and, above all, the wisdom of her advice, this book would still be languishing as a stack of A4 sheets with scrawled marginal notes on a shelf I really ought to tidy up – Ken Saunders, 2028... and Australia has gone to hell in a handbasket (Allen & Unwin 2018).

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AUSTRALIAN
Writers
NETWORK

Editorial

Whether we're finding our way into our very first story or braving that first submission, or facing yet another blank page, or struggling to find right opening lines, as writers, there are so many ways for us to begin.

In this issue, we explore all kinds of beginnings.

In her role as competition judge, Annabel Smith has read many bad beginnings and has some tips for crafting a winning opener; Ruby Ashby-Orr, Senior Editor at Affirm Press, shares advice for writers about to embark on the submission process; Emily Brewin charts a writer's arc, from yearning to publication and beyond; Clare Rhoden considers the various ways to begin a story; as Meg Dunley faces another blank page she finds useful parallels in starting over in life more generally, and Nancy Langham-Hooper explores the value of looking to our beginnings and seeing only their humble attempts at something better.

We also feature new work from members June Alexander, who looks at the connection between eating disorders and keeping a diary, and Su-May Tan, who questions whether a writer should really give up the day job. 📖

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INDUSTRY INTEL:

Submission Ready

Ruby Ashby-Orr, Senior Editor at Affirm Press, speaks to Emma Cayley with advice for writers about to embark on the submission process.

submit *verb* 1. To yield in surrender; 2. to subject oneself to conditions imposed.

*

The hard work is done: your manuscript is polished and your beta readers love it (even if you don't exactly anymore). You are finally ready to send it out to agents and publishers.

Embarking on the submission process is exciting – there's nothing like the (nauseating) thrill of pressing send that first time. But it is also very stressful ... and tedious – be warned, you will mostly be waiting. You may get a blistered thumb from repeatedly checking your inbox, all the while, fighting the urge to send upbeat 'just checking' emails, knowing that pestering is a strict no-no. A response may come within a week, a few weeks, maybe months; there'll be a few 'not quite right's, occasional 'requests for the full' that stop your heart, and one day, you may even get that 'Yes, please!'. But more typically, it's kind rejections that arrive. It is not unusual to have no response at all.

So, that's a writer's experience of submission (OK, mine!), but what about the other side? How do our manuscripts make their way to an editor? I spoke to Ruby Ashby-Orr, Senior Editor at Affirm, to demystify the process a little.

EC: How does an unsolicited manuscript make its way to you – and into your heart?

RAO: Before an unsolicited manuscript gets to me it's usually gone through a round of shortlisting. We ask the assessors to look out for books that show writing skill and have good commercial potential – and that suit our list. It's a pretty subjective set of standards, of course, so when they come to me I'm usually judging them on the exact same criteria.

EC: What makes a manuscript stand out for you?

RAO: The first thing I ask myself when I'm assessing is do I want to keep reading? When you read constantly every day, a book that can leap out and hook you is rare and exciting. But it always helps if the author has a bit of publishing history – not necessarily previous books, but journals, competitions etc.

EC: What is your favourite unsolicited discovery story?

RAO: The first book I ever commissioned was the memoir 'One Italian Summer' by Pip Williams, and it came out of the unsolicited pile. It had the perfect combo of a warm, strong voice, a good commercial hook (Italy always sells) and a lovely author who was a joy to work with.

EC: What is the difference between submitting directly to Affirm and via an agent?

RAO: An agent gives you a higher chance of getting read sooner. It's unfortunate, but it's true – we have so much reading to do on top of our editing and general admin that getting to new submissions can be very difficult. Having an agent say 'I know Affirm Press and this book is right up your alley' can help to get eyes on it. But on the other hand, there are other ways to get direct attention from a publisher: pitching events, masterclasses and competitions are great ways to get your foot in the door.

EC: What's the best part of your job?

RAO: The variety. Every book I work on is different: different challenges, different author styles, and often completely different genres. It makes it impossible to get bored!

EC: Any exciting Affirm projects pending that we absolutely must keep an eye out for?

RAO: Always! We have some great fiction coming up later this year, including Christian White's second page-turner 'The Wife and the Widow' and Melissa Ashley's decadent historical novel 'The Bee and the Orange Tree' – it involves fairy tales, assassinations and is set in 1690s Paris – what's not to like? I'm also working on an incredible memoir called 'Snakes and Ladders' by Angela Williams about her experiences on the wrong side of the NSW prison system – it's dark and heartbreaking and somehow still funny and inspiring, and will be coming out early next year.

EC: If someone is interested in submitting to Affirm, what do you recommend? Do you have a manuscript wish list?

RAO: The first step is to make sure you follow the instructions on the website carefully – not

doing so can put a cross through your name before you've even started. We have pretty wide interests but we're always in need of great non-fiction to add to our list. 📖

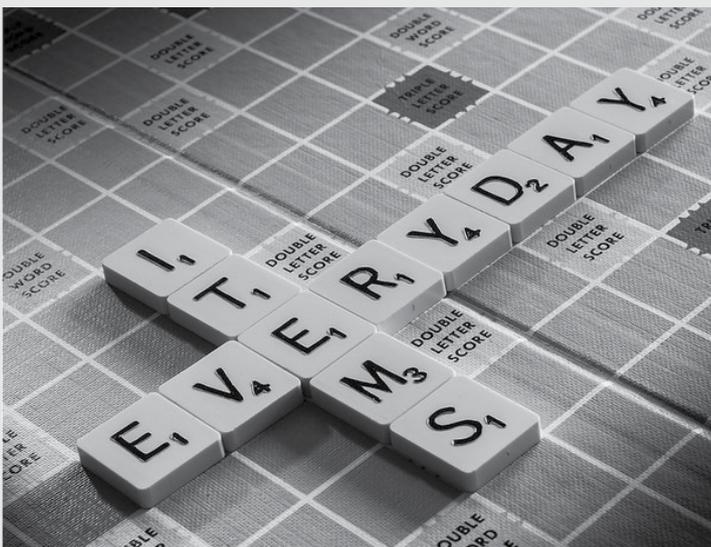
Ruby Ashby-Orr joined Affirm Press in 2013 and is now a Senior Editor working on both the fiction and non-fiction lists. In her time with the publisher she's edited a wide range of titles crossing literary fiction, commercial memoir, sport, comedy and more. She's also written books for Affirm Press including the literary masterpiece 'Death by Coconut: 50 things more dangerous than a shark'.

affirmpress.com.au

For more information about the submission process visit writersvictoria.org.au

Nitpicker

Your regular editing lesson, brought to you by Penny Johnson, Program Manager of Professional Writing and Editing at RMIT.



CC image courtesy of John Bugg on Flickr.

1. Procrastination and perfectionism (is/are) the bane of many writers.
2. Then I found this quote from Walt Disney (:/;) 'The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.'
3. This (piqued/peaked) my interest.
4. Could I (keep both/both keep) talking and begin doing at the same time?
5. So I dictated my story into my phone and emailed it to (me/myself) for editing.

Answers on page 26

False Starts

In her role as short-story competition judge, Annabel Smith has read many bad beginnings. So, how do you craft a good one?

In March, Tim Richards and I co-judged the Newcastle Short Story Competition, run by the Hunter Writers Centre, for which we read hundreds (and hundreds!) of short stories from all over Australia, to choose a shortlist of 35, and three winners.

When you read a vast quantity of stories in a compressed timeframe, it is inevitable that at some point, your eyes will start to glaze over. But what struck me is how many of the stories barely even made it out of the gate because their authors failed to catch the reader's attention in the first paragraph.

The shorter the form, the more pressure on each and every word to impact the reader by building atmosphere, creating intrigue, developing character or revealing information critical to the plot. In the short story there is no room for padding; every sentence – every word – must pull its weight, and nowhere more so than in the opening paragraph.

These are the five most common mistakes I saw writers making in their openings:

1. Wake up and smell the coffee!

I am not exaggerating when I say that I read dozens of stories that began with people waking up and going about their mundane routines:

Jordan was woken by the alarm on her phone that jolted her out of sleep every weekday. She pressed the snooze button several times before sitting up with a sigh and pushing off her doona. In the shower she thought about the day ahead while she washed her hair. She blow-dried it and put on make-up while waiting for the kettle to boil.

These 65 words have told the reader nothing of interest or significance. There are no details that give an insight into what makes this character different from any other human on any other morning. There is no sense of intrigue. There is, in short, no reason to keep reading.

2. Wiki Woes

Another common mistake I encountered was the story that began with a kind of 'wiki' paragraph, explaining the context within which the story would unfold:

In the Emergency Department, where I work, we use the tried-and-tested Triage system. It doesn't matter how long you've been waiting – if a more serious case presents, that patient will be seen first.

Sometimes, we need to convey certain information to the reader in order for them to understand an element of our story. But the place for that information is not in the very first sentence.

3. The devil is in the details

Lengthy setting descriptions bogged a lot of stories down:

At the small independent supermarket on the same street as his office, Hossein waits in line with his Middle Eastern couscous salad. He chooses the last lane, which usually has the shortest line, next to the half-price dishwasher tablets.

A lot of advice tells writers to bring things to life by including detail. But it can't just be any

“In the short story there is no room for padding; every sentence – every word – must pull its weight, and nowhere more so than in the opening paragraph.”

old detail. It has to be detail that pinpoints a certain element of the character or the situation that they find themselves in; detail that makes the reader sit up and pay attention, what Joan Didion refers to as ‘the detail that makes the scene’.

4. Done to death

Some opening paragraphs were riddled with clichés:

The old people’s home was expensive but her friends came from all walks of life; some who had gone from rags to riches; others who’d been born with silver spoons in their mouths.

A writer’s job is to render the familiar as strange; to make the reader think twice about something; to tell old things in new ways. Clichés in the opening paragraph are a red flag that the rest of the story is unlikely to offer any fresh insights into human behaviour.

5. I think therefore I am

I was surprised by the number of stories that opened with philosophical pontifications or extended metaphors:

She was like a remote-controlled gadget, controlled by some unseen, external force, propelled by impulses not her own. It was as though something or someone else was overriding her feelings, her desires, her own will. And she could no longer fight against it.

Perhaps the aim is to intrigue the reader, but the effect is more often confusing.

How to grab the reader’s attention from the outset

So now we know how NOT to begin a short story. But how can a writer pull the reader in from the very first line? I asked four acclaimed short story writers to share their favourite story openings and explain what makes them zing:

Laura Elvery

‘Being the Mother’ by Anne Casey:

Somehow we get away with the baby.

This opening conveys the narrator’s astonishment (embedding the idea that they didn’t expect whatever it is to have worked). I love a first person plural; it’s hard to pull off and it sets up a mystery right away, sets up potentially competing interests in a story that uses this type of narration – like, will they be on the same page? And finally, getting away with a baby is so brazen. Is this kidnapping? It sounds like kidnapping, but the ‘somehow’ suggests this is not a mastermind crime ring.

‘The Finkelstein 5’ by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah:

Fela, the headless girl, walked toward Emmanuel.

Within a few sentences, the reader gets a false reprieve – Emmanuel has woken up; this is all just a dream. But the story unfolds from here and reveals the horror of what happened to Fela. There will be no reprieve. Impossible not to keep reading after that opener.

Susan Midalia

‘Babies’ by Gail Jones:

My sister, the lunatic, beckoned from the back shed with a tightly curled finger.

The unexpected placement of the disturbing word lunatic after the familiar word sister jolts us into the realm of the uncanny – the familiar world made strange; while the syntax of the sentence leads us to the tightly curled finger and the sense of threat or mystery this might

entail. The diction is similarly clever: the use of the word lunatic returns us to its origins - lunar, of the moon - and to its traditional association with the monthly cycle/the feminine/the irrational. The overall effect is disturbing, and urges us to read on.

Ryan O'Neill

'The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber' by Ernest Hemingway:

It was now lunch time and they were all sitting under the double green fly of the dining tent pretending that nothing had happened.

It establishes setting (time and place), characters (several people, though we don't know who yet) and an intriguing situation - what are they pretending didn't happen, and why? It's impossible not to want to read the rest of the story.

Laurie Steed

'American Dreams' by Peter Carey

No one can, to this day, remember what it was we did to offend him.

This story opens with a mystery. Someone was offended, for reasons unknown. And yet the nature of the story, as it unfolds, proves the opening doubly poignant, in that they're mistaken in their assumptions about why Mr Gleason built a fence around his property. The real reason is something simple, subtle, and beautiful, all at once. 

Annabel Smith is the author of 'The Ark', 'Whisky Charlie Foxtrot', and 'A New Map of the Universe', which was shortlisted for the West Australian Premier's Book Awards. 'Whiskey Charlie Foxtrot', published in the USA as 'Whiskey & Charlie', has sold in excess of 70,000 copies. In 2012 Annabel was selected by the Australia Council as one of five inaugural recipients of a Creative Australia Fellowship for Emerging Artists, for her interactive digital novel/app 'The Ark'. She holds a PhD in Creative Writing from Edith Cowan University.

Laura Elvery's work has been published in 'Meanjin', 'Overland', 'The Big Issue Fiction Edition' and 'Griffith Review'. She has won the Josephine Ulrick Prize for Literature, the Margaret River Short Story Competition, the Neilma Sidney Short Story Prize and the Fair Australia Prize for Fiction. Her debut collection is 'Trick of the Light'.

Susan Midalia is the author of three short story collections, all shortlisted for major literary awards. She has been the judge of a number of short story competitions, including the Margaret River Press Short Story Competition, the Lyndall Haddow Short Story Competition, the Katharine Susannah Prichard Short Fiction Award and the Peter Cowan Short Story Competition. She is the chairperson of the Australian Short Story Festival.

Ryan O'Neill is the author of the collection 'The Weight of a Human Heart'. His fiction has appeared in 'The Best Australian Stories', 'Sleepers Almanac', 'Meanjin', 'New Australian Stories', 'Wet Ink', 'Etchings' and 'Westerly'. His work has won the Hal Porter and Roland Robinson awards and been shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Steele Rudd Award and 'The Age' Short Story Award.

Laurie Steed is the author of 'You Belong Here', and the editor of 'Shibboleth and other stories'. His short fiction has been broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and has been published in 'Best Australian Stories', 'Award Winning Australian Writing', 'The Age', 'Meanjin', 'Westerly', 'Island', 'The Sleepers Almanac', and elsewhere. In 2012 he won The Patricia Hackett Prize, and was shortlisted for The Bridport Prize.

Six Ways to Begin

Clare Rhoden considers the various ways to start a story.

I have a bone to pick with Julie Andrews. Well, half a bone: 'Let's start at the very beginning,' she trills in 'The Sound of Music', 'a very good place to start.'

Julie, yes and no. Sometimes you start at the beginning. Sometimes you start at the end. Quite often you start in the middle.

Writers can't afford to sit around waiting for a brilliant opening sentence to strike them. Almost every time, we create our story, or chapter, or entire novel, and then decide which point we are going to capture the reader, and how we are going to do it.

There are any number of ways to open your writing. Here I'm going to discuss two of the factors we need to consider: chronology (where in the story arc would we like to meet the reader?) and method (what element of the story will we use first?). Dividing these two factors into three options gives us six possibilities to consider for our opening.

1. **Chronology**
 - a. Beginning
 - b. Middle
 - c. End
2. **Method**
 - a. Description
 - b. Dialogue
 - c. Action

Say you have written a story. You have made all your choices about character, voice, tense, genre, vocabulary. You know the piece well – all its scenes and dialogue – and understand its narrative arc from the start to the finish of the story. Once you are confident about the garden

of delights you have to offer the reader, you can think carefully about which gate you will open to entice the reader in.

Another way to think of this is to imagine your story as a path or road that starts at the beginning and finishes at the end. Where will you invite the reader to join you? Perhaps you will set out from the starting line hand in hand, chatting all the way. Maybe you will stand together at the finishing line, looking back and reflecting on all that has happened. Or you might catch hold of one another halfway down that road and cast your eyes both forward and back to get a good understanding of what the story is all about.

Let's look at some examples of each style.

1. Chronology

In most forms of fiction, your story arc has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Here are some examples of opening lines that bring the reader in at each of those points.

a. Beginning

'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.' Jane Austen, 'Pride and Prejudice'.

In this opening sentence, Austen introduces the idea that a rich bachelor is about to enter the narrative, and that the story will proceed from his arrival. She sets the tone and language (witty, intelligent, formal) and indicates that this story will be about relationships – about marriage and money in particular.

b. Middle

'It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.' George Orwell, '1984'.

With this opening, Orwell alerts us to a different and strange world in which the action of the novel will take place. He does not tell us how we got to be in a place where clocks can strike thirteen: he dumps us immediately into that place. Using simple language, Orwell sets an ordinary tone, but alerts the reader that in this particular humdrum world, the extraordinary has become unremarkable.

c. End

'It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York.' Sylvia Plath, 'The Bell Jar'.

With this opening line, Plath provides what might be, in lesser hands, a gigantic spoiler. However she does this in such a way that the reader wants to know how the events occurred. Why were the Rosenbergs electrocuted? Why did the narrator not know what she was doing there? The summer is queer and sultry – two very engaging words in the opening line that key readers in to an unusual situation.

B. Method

You have many elements in your story. Description, dialogue and action are the ones to consider for openings. Again, let's look at some classic examples.

a. Description

'Far Out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the Western Spiral arm of the galaxy lies a small unregarded yellow sun.' Douglas Adams, 'The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy'.

Although Adams is describing a place we readers have never seen, he effectively sets the scene for a romp in a deliberately obscure part of space. We readers can cheerfully suspend disbelief as we know we will never be able to check facts for this story. We can just enjoy.

b. Dialogue

"You better not never tell nobody but God." Alice Walker, 'The Color Purple'.

The elements of this opening are strong reader-traps. The use of dialogue brings readers into the scene immediately, and there are clues about a problem: something is secret, somebody is being threatened and the language indicates a non-traditional setting. Jane Austen could not write this sentence. We know that we are looking at a different book, and it is immediately engaging, intriguing and perilous.

c. Action

'As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into an enormous insect.' Franz Kafka, 'The Metamorphosis'.

As action goes, suddenly being changed into an huge insect is pretty dramatic in itself. But Kafka has made the whole opening active. Consider if this had been presented in two sentences:

'Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams. He found himself transformed in his bed into an enormous insect.'

Is it stronger? Weaker? Or just different? These are the decisions and choices that writers need to make. In my opinion, this opening is made much more direct by the addition of the word 'as' at the start of the sentence, and the collection and connection of both actions (waking up and discovering the transformation) into one sentence.

Finally

We've briefly considered various ways to begin a story. In each of the examples, the author has opened a different gate into their narrative, and the story beginnings we have seen are very effective. You will find them on any internet list of the greatest opening sentences of all time.

Instead of looking at such sentences in wonder, we can use the simple framework of this article to unpack any opening sentence we meet: what is the chronology (beginning, middle, end)? And what is the method (description, dialogue, action)? Then we can think about how effective the opening is, and whether it could be improved by changing one of those elements.

In the same way, we can experiment with different openings for our own work until we are satisfied that we have the best reader-snatching words we can manage. If the unexpected happens and a brilliant opening line arrives without any extra effort on our part, wonderful! If not, we can use these techniques to wrangle that sentence ourselves.

Addendum

Some of my favourite opening lines:

'Anna Karenina' by Leo Tolstoy

'All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.'

Chronology: Beginning
Method: Description

'Fahrenheit 451' by Ray Bradbury

'It was a pleasure to burn.'

Chronology: Middle
Method: Action

'The Princess Bride' by William Goldman

'This is my favourite book in all the world, though I have never read it.'

Chronology: Beginning.
Method: Description

'The Hunger Games' by Suzanne Collins

'When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold.'

Chronology: Middle
Method: Action

'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone' by JK Rowling

'Mr and Mrs Dursley of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.'

Chronology: Beginning
Method: Description

'The Martian' by Andy Weir

'I'm pretty much fucked. That's my considered opinion. Fucked.'

Chronology: Middle
Method: Action. 🚫

Clare Rhoden is a writer, blogger and book reviewer inspired by politics, culture and the march of history. The third novel of her dystopian sci-fi series 'The Pale' will be published this August. Her latest book is the First World War historical novel 'The Stars in the Night'.

Clare lives in Melbourne and blogs about books, dogs and writing at clarerhoden.com

In the Beginning

Emily Brewin charts a writer's arc, from yearning to publication and beyond.

In the beginning, the universe created a writer. The writer was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep

In the beginning, I was a woman who wanted to be a writer but didn't know how to. Writers were mystical beings, after all, found at signings or inside book covers. You wouldn't catch them in the deli section at Coles, or in supermarkets full-stop ... they were beyond cold meats and cabanossi, spending their days scribbling in moleskin journals and exchanging lofty ideas instead. But they were there, somewhere, just out of reach.

Then the universe said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light

I tried to be one of them, way back when, after completing a journalism course. I worked at a small publishing firm that kept its journalists in dreary basement lodgings, and wrote medical newsletters, for which I had zero experience. When the job ended badly, my writing aspirations did too. Teaching, it seemed, would be a wiser option.

So, I taught, ignored the fact I wanted write, and got on with life. But life has a way of biting back. And it did, with marital separation and a bout of anxiety. 'What makes your heart sing?' I was asked at the time. 'Writing', popped out of my mouth before I could push it back down again.

An online course marked my tentative return – a safe virtual forum with weekly tasks and classmates I could converse with across cyberspace. It was a turning point. A covert attempt to reclaim my dream.

Starting out is often a secret thing. We shun the title 'writer' because what authority do we have to claim it? But we write anyway, unnamed, unsure about the process, because we're driven

to. Because we have a character, a place, a story to tell. Because writing keeps us sane, helps us makes sense of the world, brings us joy. Because we want to prove we can, if only to ourselves.

And so, it was with me. The series of posts I created for the online course morphed into scenes on my laptop in the snatches of time my infant son slept. I wrote on my own, for myself, but craved connection with others doing the same.

I enrolled in RMIT's short fiction course with author, Rachel Matthews. It provided an opportunity to hone my craft and to meet other writers. To my relief, my classmates were novices too. Over ensuing weeks, Rachel handed us the tools we needed to shape our stories. By the end of the course, I sensed we were standing in the shallows of something vast and special.

Then the universe said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters'

After dipping my toes in the literary waters, I wanted to dive deeper. To discover more of the skills I needed to write a book. Because that's what I was doing, I finally admitted, if only to myself.

I applied to RMIT's Associate Degree of Professional Writing and Editing, and felt like I'd been handed the key to a kingdom when I got in. A kingdom inhabited by literary types. With classes that taught structure, voice and setting. That allowed my work to be critiqued, so it could grow.

I met my writers' group in a fiction class there. A group of three wonderful women who've since morphed into six. I studied form and technique, discovered literary journals and festivals, learnt the business-end of writing – about agents and

publishers and how to court them. I told people I was writing. Not that I was a writer, yet ... And named my manuscript, fittingly, 'And Then There Was Light'.

Then the universe said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear'

I found my tribe at RMIT. A community of people I could discuss writing with who led me to others. People who understood the stamina it takes to put words on a page without guarantee they'll be published. Who'd had similar rejections and gains. A short-listing perhaps, or an award. Who loved the craft as much as me.

And suddenly my goals changed. Publication wasn't the domain of mystical beings after all, but of real people with grit and determination. Qualities I had too. I was writing, goddammit, and I wanted to publish a book.

But grit doesn't always get you over the line. I hit a stalemate. Lost objectivity. Decided my manuscript was failing, and couldn't figure out why. Hope deserted me until a friend recommended manuscript assessor, Nadine Davidoff. I wanted Nadine's permission to let my story go. Instead, she provided feedback to forge a path forward and the boost I needed to push through.

Then the universe said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night'

Once my manuscript was refined I asked the immemorial question – agent or publisher?

I sent it to a publisher then cried when it was declined. In quiet desperation, I turned to Google and stumbled upon an unhappy writer who'd posted his rejections online. One, from agent, Gaby Naher, was kind and constructive. I emailed her an introduction. A week later, she asked for my manuscript then, while I was camping in far-north Queensland, called to say she'd like to represent me.

Then the universe said, 'Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures'

Suddenly, anything seemed possible. I was in the toilets at Tullamarine Airport when I received confirmation that Allen & Unwin was publishing my book. If it weren't for strict airport security I might have screamed. It was

a defining moment of validation mingled with sheer bloody relief.

Then the universe said, 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind'

And so, it was edited ...

My manuscript returned from my publisher covered in corrections, which I worked like a demon to implement. I was consumed, refining characters, shifting timelines, making each ... word ... work. By then I wasn't doing it for myself alone. I felt accountable to all those who'd invested in my book. My friends and family, of course, but also the literary community who had, from the moment I uploaded my first wobbly words online, called me a writer, even when I was reluctant to.

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.

And then it was on bookstore shelves, five years after it began, with a new title, 'Hello, Goodbye', and my main character, May, beautiful in a bright orange head-scarf on the cover. I marvelled at it, reflected, and finally realised it was the journey, rather than the finished product, which made me the writer I'd longed to be ... in the beginning. 📖

Emily Brewin is a writer and educator based in Melbourne. Her first novel, 'Hello, Goodbye', was published in 2017 with Allen & Unwin; her second, 'Small Blessings', was released in February this year. She has written for 'The Age'/'Sydney Morning Herald', 'Feminartsy', 'Meanjin', 'Kill Your Darlings' and Mamamia as well as 'Metro', 'Screen Education' and 'Shine' magazines.

The Blank Page

As Meg Dunley faces another blank page she finds useful parallels in starting over in life more generally.

The blank page. The blinking cursor. Words swallowed by fear. Words written, deleted, written again, deleted. The super-clean toilet. The over-organised shelves. The aroma of fine baking. The very fit dog. These (and more) things, evidence of a writer beginning a new project.

I worked with a man in my former (and much younger) life in the telco industry. He was a wonderfully creative man, stuck in a non-creative environment. As he and I washed up with a wave of organisational changes – him treading water until the redundancy boat picked him up and me managing the most aggrieved customers – I found myself having to write letters on behalf of the managing director. In those early days, I would stare at the complaint, then at my screen. At the cursor blinking. ‘Dear [Name]’, I would start. Then the cursor would blink for a long time. I knew what I needed to say, but starting was tough. Enter my terribly eccentric, creative and about-to-be-made-redundant manager.

‘Just start,’ he said. ‘It doesn’t matter what you write now, the managing director will change it anyway, but if you give him a blank page, he’s got nothing to go with. Words ... words can be changed and moved around. Give him something to start with.’

This was a great lesson for me in my working life, and my creative life. Working in communications and marketing means that I need to get loads of words out into the world, and most often, they are seen as other people’s or business’s words. I have learnt that if I ask these people to pop some words through to me so I have an idea

about what they are wanting to say, they are most often stumped; however, if I send them some words, with ‘Not sure if this is what you are wanting to say, but thought I’d get us started’, then we are off and running.

It’s not dissimilar to new beginnings in life. When I made the decision to leave my first husband after seven years of mental angst and pain, I had to begin again. It was a completely terrifying moment at the sweet age of twenty-six to re-enter the world in which all my singleton friends had been living. It was a world I didn’t understand. I had spent seven years as a carer, navigating the world of mental health and drug addiction. I hadn’t been living in the way all my friends had. So, I faked it. I faked life until I worked it out. I put on my big girl shoes and tip-toed around the edges of what all the other twenty-somethings were doing. I made attempts at light conversation – tough when I’d spent the last five years trying to stop someone from dying. I’m sure I said weird things (just like a first draft), but over time I learnt how to do it.

When I apply this to my creative life, I need to remind myself that it doesn’t matter what those first words are, what the beginning is; these will all change as I redraft and edit until I find the gems that make the story. First drafts are meant to be an ugly mess. It’s how we write our way into the story to understand what needs to be told. But quite often we get hung up on the beginning. We reread it, rewrite it over and again, but forget to keep moving forward with that draft to find the story.

“It doesn’t matter what those first words are, what the beginning is; these will all change as I redraft and edit until I find the gems that make the story.”

It is very easy to slip into the practice of hunting for that killer first line in that first draft. It’s true that the first sentence is one of the most important in any piece of writing – it is the one that makes the reader bother to keep going, to bother investing their time in reading – but this is something that comes with the polishing and redrafting process.

For many drafts, I hung on to the same beginning for my first (unpublished and tossed into the bottom drawer) manuscript only because it was the beginning and I was sure it was a ripper. But, meh ... maybe it isn’t. Maybe they are just words that drew me into the story in the first place. What I have learnt over this writing life is that it is important to know when to toss away those first beginnings as most often they are the words that help me to work out what the story is. These aren’t words for the reader. They are words to help me understand. They are the words that need to be peeled back to leave some air for the reader so that they can discover the story as they read.

So begin. Begin anywhere. Type a word. And another. Type more, until you have a full sentence. Keep going. Push forwards until there is a story that you can shape into something for others to read. 📖

Meg Dunley is a Melbourne-based writer with stories and poems published in a number of anthologies. She manages the library and communication and marketing at a secondary school. When not working or writing, Meg wrangles her three teenage boys, potters in her garden, walks her dog or dreams. She is working on a novel-length manuscript based on her First Fleet convict female ancestor.

Sketchy Beginnings

An artist's juvenilia inspires Nancy Langham-Hooper to look back on her own early work with kindness.

Like assembling a pane of shattered glass or a mind-bending jigsaw puzzle, my role as an art historian is to piece together scattered bits of information to give context to works of art and the complex and interesting people who create them. It's painstaking work, but uncovering large chunks of information is endlessly exhilarating.

Well into my academic career, I came across a treasure: an old journal and sketchbook, from the artist I had researched for more than a decade. John Rogers Herbert was only in his early teens in the 1820s when he 'borrowed' an official notebook from his father, a comptroller of customs, and used it for artistic purposes. It has been passed down through the family for nearly 200 years, and I finally tracked it down in Italy. The current owner kindly digitised it for me. It was thrilling to open these digital files, even without the tactile immersion of the actual journal. Thrilling to see the juvenilia of a man I knew well after so many years researching his life. I delighted in his sketches, seeing him try new things and practice the standard art school exercises of his day. As I carefully transcribed each page of the journal, one page especially caught my eye. Two sketches in profile (always more difficult than a straight on) of a man with a beard. The top sketch is angular, the nose slopes straight, the sympathetic eyes bend downwards a bit too much, and the ears point up like an elf (ears and hands are really hard to draw). This was clearly unsatisfactory to the young artist, who tried again below. This time, the nose has

a careful natural curve, and the eyes are more level. But the chin is too big, the lips are wrong, and the ear looks, quite frankly, like a vulva. I knew what to record:

Leaf 11 – Recto (verso not photographed)

FY3A9349: A page with two sketches of the same bearded man (Herbert's father?), done approx at the same time (as they show a similar skill level). The top sketch is more complete, though both have significant trouble with the ear.

Looking back on my transcriptions, I realise how confident and detached I sound, such a contrast with the warbling uncertainty of the sketches themselves. I knew what was important to document, and what was immaterial. I could easily and confidently access the skill level of this young artist, and pinpoint where he was struggling.

Yet that young artist was the one who taught me. I dug through countless archives to find out a little more about his life and work, learning how to find and document my research in the process. I wrote draft after draft of Masters and PhD theses, scholarly articles and book chapters detailing my findings. After writing about every stage of Herbert's life and the evolution of his work, my writing matured. I knew what words to use, how to turn a phrase, and how to use buzzwords correctly (or better still, not at all). With the help of my supervisors and other academics, I was able to assert, with increasing



John Rogers Herbert, Sketches of a man's head, c.1823. Private Collection.

confidence, my own analysis into my writing. When I had read and seen more about Herbert than anyone else in the world, I learned to trust my own judgement and intuition about questions of authenticity, or fill in gaps in the record with educated guesses.

Compared to my own early academic writing, trouble with an ear is pretty minor. In one of my very first essays at university I took most of my 'argument' from a stand-up comic I'd seen on TV, without bothering to do any research beyond that. I didn't know my own ignorance. As I wrote more essays and learned the basics of academic writing, I still used faulty logic with generic and meaningless phrases. Even into my Masters thesis, I can see now how I missed crucial context and abused several sources appallingly.

There are times when I re-read things I've written years or even months ago and cringe. With a perfectionist's impulse I want to jump back in time, to warn my younger self about upcoming pitfalls: to exhort better thinking, more perspective, or a different plan altogether. It seems as if time travel is my only option to avoid heartbreak, arrogance, or even simple awkwardness of phrase.

Did Herbert ever pick up that old notebook and look at those sketches? Was he ever embarrassed? He may have been at some point, but he grew wiser. Later in his career,

he was able to look back on angled noses and terrible ears with satisfaction. He declared, 'I always feel disposed to take off my hat to the pictures of my early days, because I was in earnest then.'

His earnestness and his early attempts encourage me not to be ashamed. We can look to our beginnings, seeing only their humble attempts at something better. We can wish to warn our former selves, advise them on what we ought to have done. But this is arrogance. Those former selves are the very teachers that have brought us to this moment. And it is an ongoing process – not one that leads us towards perfection, but the next step on our journey. 🕒

Nancy Langham-Hooper is an art historian and writer based in Melbourne. Academically, she specialises in British nineteenth-century painting. Her non-academic writing, however, covers many diverse topics within art and culture. She is proud to be a Digital Writer in Residence for Writers Victoria, a position supported by The City of Melbourne Arts Grants Program.



Writing in Exile

Jackie Mansourian writes about a new collaboration for PEN Melbourne.

PEN Melbourne's newest collaboration is Writing in Exile in Melbourne, a three-part series of presentations and conversations with writers living in exile in Melbourne.

This program is a direct outcome of our diverse, strong, committed organisation, working both locally; and importantly, working as part of a global movement, PEN International, to promote literature and freedom of expression.

Mammad Aidani is one of PEN Melbourne's newest committee members. At one of the first meetings he attended he placed the idea of amplifying the voices and experiences of exiled writers in Melbourne.

His idea was immediately taken up by the whole committee, through listening and working together, it has developed into a partnership with The Wheeler Centre, providing a central platform for the diverse experiences of exiled writers, from different homelands, to be heard.

We developed dual objectives for Writing in Exile in Melbourne. First, to listen and to understand to the experiences of writers who live and write in exile; and second, to ask the broader community of writers and readers to consider their actions of solidarity to provide safety and space for writers in exile.

Aidani is a writer in exile in Melbourne. He is a poet, playwright and academic. He left Iran soon after the 1979 February Revolution and has never been able to return home.

Aidani was the first writer in exile to present a powerful, moving discourse about exile. 'Exile is harsh and crushing experience. There is the devastating thought that I may never be able to go back to the land of my birth place.

Living in exile breaks you. It totally shakes the foundation of your being.' I urge you to listen to his presentation and his conversation with the program facilitator Sami Shah (wheelercentre.com/broadcasts/writing-in-exile-mammad-aidani).

In June, Samah Sabawi will be the second writer in exile to reflect and present. The prologue to her upcoming presentation is: 'For Palestinian writers in exile, writing is a necessity, an obligation. ... Through writing our stories, our poems and songs, we reconstruct our erased past, assert our present and try to shape our future. With our pens and keyboards, we wage resistance and we decolonise the prevalent discourse and narrative that has for decades dominated the media and literature landscape. We write for our lives. We write to exist.'

I urge you to look out for Sabawi's writing. The presentation on exile will be made available online on The Wheeler Centre website after June 6. Importantly, Sabawi's most recent production with La Mama, is a play called 'Them', which explores the experiences not only of those who have left their countries of birth to seek safety in exile, but also those who are forced to stay behind, and survive, in their oppressive, violent homelands.

PEN's role is to amplify these profound reflections of exile as lived experience both in Melbourne and globally. The writer in exile stands in a distinctive position from which to reflect upon and bring emotional clarity to the experiences of fragmentation, displacement, sorrow. PEN's members include writers who have been forcible displaced. PEN's role is also to provide meaningful, direct support and solidarity for their courageous and hopeful acts.

As Behrouz Boochani explained to Arnold Zable in 'The Age' article 'A Voice in Exile':

The policies of exile, and of keeping people in harsh and inhuman conditions on Manus and Nauru for so many years, are extraordinary and unprecedented ... I am still struggling to get freedom.

But when I do think back over that time, I ask myself, 'How did I survive?' I have experienced so many difficult things, such as losing friends. The loss of friends makes me very sad. The question often returns: 'Why did the system kill these innocent people?'

A while ago I had a chance to return to that old prison ... we saw that the prison had been demolished. I sat in a place where we used to stand in long queues to get food. I thought about those hard days and asked myself: 'If I did not make the movie, or if I did not write this book, what would remain?'

Writing to witness, writing to remember, writing to make visible the unseen violence in our societies, writing to force responsibility.

Supporting writing and writers in exile is one of PEN International's clear mandates: pen-international.org/supporting-writers-in-exile

In PEN Melbourne, those of us who have the privilege of safety, have been working directly with writers in exile to create and advocate to be heard, for protection, for justice in the context of their determined, insistent courage and hope.

We invite you to listen. We invite you to consider your acts of solidarity with writers in exile here, with us in Melbourne, who have sought safety to live and write, those who have been punished for doing so, and those everywhere still seeking their freedom to live and to write. 🗣️

**Join PEN Melbourne: penmelbourne.org
Freedom of expression is not a crime.**

Thriving on Privacy

By June Alexander

In 1962, when I was eleven, I developed an eating disorder, and began to keep a diary. I didn't know it then, but these life-shaping, life-changing forces were twisted and twined from the start.

The themes and threads that bind my story together, however, began to weave a pattern in early childhood, when my world comprised a small, beautiful valley adjoining the Mitchell River National Park. We lived on a dairy farm with no electricity, television or internet, but my days were full. The farm, river and adjacent bushland provided a natural playground, seeding my imagination. Indoors, on rainy days and at night by lantern-light, at the solid oak kitchen table, I would ask my mother for pen and paper and write a note or two about my day. A friendship with words was already taking hold.

A bicycle ride along a gravel lane valley led to a sturdy, one-room, one-teacher, twenty-pupil school. Here, my love of words intensified and the happiest days were when new books arrived for the school's small library. When I was nine, I won a pen in a national story-writing competition, which fueled my writing passion, and broadened my horizons. I learnt that if I wrote well, acknowledgment might follow. Soon my stories, based on observations of adventurous wombats and other aspects of my daily life, were appearing in publications like the Sydney-based 'The Australian Children's Newspaper'.

Both my parents had left school to work on neighbouring farms. To their credit, they tolerated my literary interest. Pen-friendships in far off lands, including the United States and Germany; letters and articles to newspapers, and essay competitions provided other outlets for expressive writing as I entered adolescence. Words were my friends because they were safe, accommodating, did not judge and did anything I wanted them to.

One day, in the last year of primary school, the teacher announced an impending school doctor visit. I was terrified – most of all by the thought of undressing in the vicinity of my teacher, a male cousin who boarded with us. My family was dismissive of my anxiety, but I found a way to cope. With each new day, unaware my behavior was symptomatic of an eating disorder, I progressively ate less and exercised more. In this way, my fears were suppressed as my focus moved from worrying about the doctor's visit to calculating what I could eat and how many hours I needed to exercise each day. Several months later, the school doctor came and went, but my terror of eating remained, for the process of disconnection of my identity from body had begun.

Then, the gift of a diary at Christmas provided a reprieve. I now had somewhere to offload and store the calorie numbers and food and exercise rules that were cluttering and dominating my mind. The pen and paper provided an external connection, a tangible recording tool. Until now, the eating disorder thoughts had been internalised but the diary offered a private place to externalise them as well; the mere act of writing the figures and words on the page allowed a sense of control and easing of anxiety, however brief. In this way the diary, like the eating disorder, became a coping mechanism for meeting the demands of daily life. That gift marked the start of a literary journey that, over the next forty-plus years, would chronicle the loss and recovery of identity and self.

The entry for January 1, 1963, is crammed with details of food consumed, exercise taken, the times I woke up, the cricket results. Other entries include matter-of-fact mentions of friends and family, observations about the weather, the start of secondary school, my father's farming activities, the number of hen

eggs collected, and the days when I bathed. By the end of that year, when I transitioned into full-blown anorexia-bulimia, more self-expression is evident. In adolescence, words tumble out, trying to make sense of thoughts and feelings, and the limitation of one page a day is sometimes a challenge – my handwriting gets smaller and smaller as the end of the page approaches. My world is small. There is the diary, and me. Not for many years would I learn there was also the eating disorder, and that the diary's influence extended far beyond the two of us.

The illness, like the diary, thrived on privacy and encouraged the keeping of secrets. As a child and young woman, my diaries were safe places in which to express and analyse thoughts, and develop coping strategies. But confiding in the diary also strengthened the eating disorder, its unrelenting and stringent demands becoming increasingly impossible to meet. Nothing I did was enough and the rules of the illness became secrets within secrets that had to be guarded and hidden from others. By age 28, my diary had recorded an almost complete disconnection of healthy self from body.

Outwardly, I presented as a wife and mother with a full-time career, but within, the diary revealed a desperate struggle to honor daily lists and pledges, for instance, having a strict weight limit; running a set distance; and noting every calorie. Thoughts of suicide drove me to break the silence, and reveal the thoughts I'd confined to my diaries, to a doctor. He and other doctors, upon learning I kept a diary, encouraged me to continue writing as a tool for expression. However, like me, they were ignorant of the diary's potential to play a pivotal role in my illness, and of its ability to be a foe as well as friend. Eventually, in my thirties, a psychiatrist suggested I could use the diary to assist the healing process. Gradually, aided by patient, therapeutic guidance, what I wrote in my diary began to reconnect with authentic thoughts and feelings. Self-abuse and self-harm gave way to self-care as my body and mind progressively reintegrated. Decades later, at age 55, upon healing sufficiently to re-enter life's mainstream, I departed a journalism career to reflect on these decades of diary writing and write a memoir.

As I 'came out' and began to share my story publicly, the diaries 'came out' too. They fed

my memoir, 'A Girl Called Tim' (2011), and they became a resource pool of documented 'lived experience', assisting the dissemination of science-based knowledge and evidence-based treatments in books for health professionals and mainstream readers. In another outcome, the creation of a website as a companion to the memoir led to people with experience of eating disorders writing to say they had 'connected' with my story in a way that gave them 'permission' to share their stories revealed until then only, if at all, in their diaries. Adult readers wrote at length, explaining they had felt isolated and had kept their eating disorders a secret since childhood, but upon reading and identifying with my story, were able to share and externalise their thoughts and experiences for the first time.

Reflecting on the reader responses sparked recognition that perhaps my friend the diary had been destructive as well as constructive throughout my long illness. This revelation in turn became the catalyst for my PhD in Creative Writing, investigating how diary entries from multiple diarists might be used in writing a book. My research and reflection also led to the conclusion that my diary could have played a far different role in shaping my life if a writing mentor with experience in eating disorders had worked with me at primary school. A writing mentor who gained my trust sufficiently for me to feel safe in sharing my diary writings with them would have recognised from the very first entry that I had an eating disorder. Today I encourage use of the narrative as a therapeutic and self-healing tool for children and young adults, especially those who have experienced trauma, including abuse, illness or accident. Children who do not feel confident enough to speak, can feel safe in expressing their thoughts on paper. When trust is formed with a writing mentor, gentle guidance can be provided in confronting and addressing painful feelings and strengthening the healthy self. 📖

June Alexander is author of ten non-fiction books, including her memoir. She is a life-skills and story-writing mentor. Her PhD explored the use of diaries in creative works and her websites promote life writing and diary-writing as a self-help and creative tool.

**thediaryhealer.com
lifestoriesmentor.com.au**

Don't Give Up the Day Job

By Su-May Tan

When I did my first ever short-story writing class, the number one piece of advice my teacher gave was, 'Whatever you do, don't quit your day job.'

Six years later, I'm still working as a copywriter, and writing my own stuff on the side. Success has not been too bad: I have had a couple of short stories published, won a fellowship and just been shortlisted for a mentorship for my novel in progress.

So why do I feel torn?

I have come to a point in my life where I would just like to move on with my career. Not the copywriting one for which I have won enough awards to justify reasonable success, but the other one – as a professional writer.

A 'professional writer': someone who writes full-time for a living and is not afraid to say so. Someone who has a Masters or PhD, perhaps, and is paid to read and talk and dissect writing in all its semblances.

When you are a professional writer, whenever you write or get published, it adds value to your career. When you have a day job and write or publish something, it's a hobby, a dalliance, something people might congratulate you on over lunch but forget about two minutes later in the presence of 'real work'.

The reality is, most writers have a day job.

Only two per cent of writers can actually earn enough to make a living out of writing full time – many of whom, such as Stephen King, Nicholas Sparks and JK Rowling, have secured movie deals.

Industry trends suggest that writers are being paid a pittance¹, with the lion's share of profits from book sales being taken by publishers and online booksellers. Compared to 20 years ago, it has become increasingly difficult for full-time writers to make a living from writing alone, with many having to supplement their income by teaching creative writing, editing other people's work and judging writing competitions; or even applying for grants as part of their daily 'work'.

A manuscript consultant I met said most of the writers she worked with had day jobs. 'Some are copywriters and journalists. But there are also many who deliberately choose to work in areas outside of writing – they are retail assistants, administrative staff, doctors, waitresses.'

To juggle or not to juggle?

Towing a day job to support your artistic pursuits is not a new fad. Many famous writers have been doing it for years: Margaret Atwood worked in a coffee shop, Agatha Christie in an apothecary and Kurt Vonnegut was a car salesman.

Most of them did it because they had to, financially. And along with this, came the experience and inspiration to fuel many a novel plot and story idea. But how hard is it really, to juggle everything?

For some people, trying to steal time to write gets too hard, especially in today's technology-laden world. There's only a limited amount of energy and time that a human being is able to expend without breaking down.

For parents, it gets even harder as illustrated by the conversations in Rachel Power's book, 'Motherhood and Creativity: The Divided Heart'². Described as 'the third shift', writing is that third job women who work do after their day job and seeing to the kids.

Some people equate writing a book to the rigours of having a child. Others say it's equivalent to having two children. Regardless, I think the dilemma lies in the fact that writing or any artistic pursuit is hard to justify as it technically doesn't generate any income. If you consider the time you spend writing instead of working, it's effectively a money-drainer – or a luxury depending how you want to look at it.

Some writers like Julie Koh admit to not having the headspace or energy to juggle two vocations.³ Koh quit her high-flying and very successful career in law and became a lollypop lady, but in so doing managed to complete and publish her award-winning collection of short stories. In Harper Lee's case, her manager gave her a year's salary to write, after which she handed him 'To Kill A Mockingbird.'

her a year's salary to write, after which she handed him with 'To Kill A Mockingbird.'

Judging by today's economy, most writers (and aspiring writers) need a day job to survive. Sure, I would love to write away in my little studio in the garden while the kids are at school, or tap away in a university library somewhere amid a campus blossoming with trees and ideas.

But the reality of it is, we need that day job to survive. So why write? Why write at all? You're not saving lives. You're not making money. I guess the answer is the same as why paint, or draw, or create any form of art. Writing is akin to making something pretty, creating something beautiful with words, like making jewellery for the mind, perhaps.

Can it ever be considered a real career? Perhaps when the kids are grown up and can fend for themselves; or if my partner scores a million-dollar gig. In the meantime, opportunities like the Deborah Cass Prize and other grants are instrumental in helping writers – emerging or emerged but still struggling – to continue with our craft. ①

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Su-May Tan is a copywriter and emerging author. She was shortlisted for the Deborah Cass Prize 2018 and is a recipient of the Varuna Publisher Introduction Program 2018. Her short fiction has been published in 'Tincture Journal', Sala Prize and Margaret River Press. She lives in Melbourne with her husband, 2.8 children and red heeler mix.

Milestones

marina scott haiku and short form poet advises that she is now writing under her previous name of marine colne.

Eugen Bacon's 'Writing Speculative Fiction' by Macmillan is out in May 2019, and 'Claiming T-Mo' by Meerkat Press in August 2019.

Ray Liversidge has two flash fiction pieces in the latest issues of 'Star 82 Review' (US) and 'Southerly'.

'**Split: True stories of leaving, loss and new beginnings**', an anthology of personal essays curated and edited by Lee Kofman, will be out in June via Ventura Press. This collection features many well-known authors, including Alice Pung, Graeme Simsion, Kate Holden and Ramona Koval.

Jennifer Bryce is excited to announce that her recently published novel, 'Lily Campbell's Secret', is to be launched by Toni Jordan at Readings Carlton on Thu 13 Jun, 6 pm. Set around the time of the Great War, it tells the story of a young woman who is wrenched from her comfortable middle class existence, and when her young husband returns from the war, she has to face the most momentous decision of her life.

Cathy Koning had a lead article published in the March edition of the National Library of Australia's online magazine, 'Unbound'. It looks at the amazing variety of animal acts on stage in Australian and New Zealand early in the 20th century: nla.gov.au/unbound/march-2019

Nalini Tranquim has just published her memoir 'The Orange Hue', available at: nalinitranquim.com/store/the-orange-hue ('TVW' readers are welcome to use the discount code 'launch' for free shipping Australia wide.)

Classifieds

Speculative Fiction Festival

Writing NSW is delighted to announce that bookings are open for the Speculative Fiction Festival 2019! Our one-day festival will be held on Saturday 29 June, and will feature panel discussions, kaffeeklatsches and opportunities to network with industry experts and fellow writers. Attendees will learn practical advice on writing, marketing and publishing, and hear inspirational discussions of radical concepts.

With more than twenty speakers, the program includes some of Australia's leading speculative fiction writers, including award-winning authors James Bradley, Mitchell Hogan, Catherine McKinnon, Margaret Morgan and Kaaron Warren.

writingnsw.org.au/whats-on/events/speculative-fiction-festival-2019/

Creative writing courses with Tania Chandler

Mondays and Wednesday evenings at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre

Tuesdays and Wednesdays at Span Community House, Thornbury

Contact details for more info: tanchantraining@gmail.com
cnlc.org.au
spanhouse.org

Williamstown writing studio

Writers studio in quiet Williamstown garden with toilet, Contains desk, chairs, tea makings, bar fridge. Internet and heater. Close to train station, parks, cafes. Minimum three days \$90 or five days \$100. Email: dianagreentree@iinet.net.au

Send your milestone or classified to editor@writersvictoria.org.au

Nitpicker (from page 7)

1. are
2. : [colon]
3. piqued
4. both keep
5. myself

Comps & Opps

Send your opp or comp to
editor@writersvictoria.org.au

Wyndham Writing Awards

The Wyndham Writing Awards (previously Words of Wyndham) returns in 2019 to inspire, encourage and recognise emerging Victorian adult writers and literary creators.

Prizes will be awarded for unpublished works in four categories: short story, graphic short story, flash story and poetry. Shortlisted entries will be published in the Wyndham Writing Awards Anthology 2019.

The judging panel for 2019 is:

Central Victorian poet, novelist and short story writer Adam Ford; and Melbourne/Sydney based illustrator and comic maker Jess Kitty Parker.

Closes 30 Jun.

wyndham.vic.gov.au/writingawards

2019 Write-ability Fellowships

Writers Victoria invites writers with disability from throughout Victoria to apply for a 2019 Write-ability Fellowship.

'This project has boosted my confidence, energised me creatively, and brought a lot of joy into my life,' says 2017 fellow Jess Walton.

Now in its seventh year, our Write-ability Fellowships support emerging writers with disability with tailored professional development support such as manuscript assessments, curated programs of workshops, and/or mentoring.

Closes 10 Jun.

writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/opportunities-competitions/2019-write-ability-fellowships

The Next Chapter

Every writer knows that the story is only the beginning; that original storytelling needs time, support and a space in which to thrive. Presented by the Wheeler Centre, with support from the Aesop Foundation, The Next Chapter is here to elevate the Australian stories that aren't being published—and to nurture a new generation of writers, from all sorts of backgrounds, to tell them.

Each year, we'll pick 10 outstanding writers and give them \$15,000 each to develop their work. We'll match them with a mentor and work closely with them on bringing their writing to life; connecting them with peers, publishers and readers.

Closes 12 Jul.

thenextchapter.wheelercentre.com.

The John Marsden & Hachette Australia Prize

The John Marsden & Hachette Australia Prize for Young Writers is a developmental award open exclusively to Australian secondary school students in categories of fiction, nonfiction and poetry.

expressmedia.org.au/programs/john-marsden-prize/

Closes 30 Jun.

Workshops and Courses

See more courses and book online at writersvictoria.org.au, phone (03) 9094 7840 or email program@writersvictoria.org.au. All events are held at The Wheeler Centre unless stated otherwise.

Online

The Business End:

Let's Talk Tax

with [Lena Smarelli](#) from [A Counting House](#)

Only two things are inevitable, and this workshop will give you all the guidelines and advice to handle at least one. This webinar will cover tax matters that will be of interest to people working in the creative arts, including tips on how to cope with new tax rules and tax office substantiation rules for supporting tax deductions.

When: Mon 3 Jun, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$20/\$35

Non-member price: \$45

Level: All

The Business End: Pitching and Relationship Building

with [Neha Kale](#)

Crafting relevant and interesting pitches and starting conversations with clients and editors is central to establishing a career as a working writer – one that will sustain you creatively and financially in the long term. This course will introduce you to the basics of pitching, show you how to tailor ideas for different outlets and give you actionable tips for fostering professional relationships that can allow your writing practice to evolve.

When: Mon 15 Jul, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$20/\$35

Non-member price: \$45

Level: All

In-person

Refine Your Novel

with [Toni Jordan](#)

The end of the manuscript is in sight, although there's still much work to be done. Character, plot, structure, pace and theme will need refining. An ending must be devised: one that works both tonally and in terms of story structure. How do you revise and redraft? How do you tighten and also enrich your first draft? This series of hands-on workshops and webinars will encourage a forensic approach to refining the manuscript.

Workshops: Sat 1 Jun, 20 July, 17 Aug, 19 Oct (10am-4pm)

Webinars: Sat 15 Jun, 14 Sep (10-11am)

Member price: \$560/\$600

Non-member price: \$740

Level: Early, emerging

CSI: Crime Story Investigation – Session 5

with [Sulari Gentill](#)

'Curtain: Poirot's Last Case' by Agatha Christie is the final novel featuring Hercule Poirot, and the last of Christie's books published within her lifetime. It is the work of a master at the height of her powers but it is interesting for other reasons as well. Written in the early 40s, it was initially intended for publication only after Christie's death and was not released for over 30 years. It addresses some fascinating issues of causality and intent.

When: Wed 12 Jun, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$35/\$45

Non-member price: \$60

Level: All

Lunchtime Bites: The Power of the Verb

with [Kate Cuthbert](#)

Lunchtime Bites is a series of short deep-dives into one aspect of writing craft: bring your lunch and your notepad for a quick writing session! Stephen King says that the road to hell is paved with adverbs. It might not be true, but do you want to take that risk? This lunchtime session focuses on the power of the right verb and how it can clean up and tighten any writing.

When: Fri 14 Jun, 12-1pm

Member price: FREE

Non-member price: \$25

Level: All

Writing Historical Mystery

with [Sulari Gentill](#)

For all writers of historical fiction – including those who like to write in a bit of a twist! Writing fiction often begins with a single shining idea. Writing historical fiction is about setting that idea in a time and place that has existed and been recorded. This workshop will explore the techniques, tricks, ideas and pitfalls of bringing history into a narrative in a way that enhances rather than swamps.

When: Sat 15 Jun, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Literary Speed Dating

with Australian Society of Authors

A roomful of publishers and agents and three minutes to pitch your work, ask a question or exchange email addresses. Bring your solid story idea, business cards and pitching skills. Presented in collaboration with the Australian Society of Authors.

When: Sat 15 Jun, 12-3pm

ASA and WV member price: \$60

Level: All

Young Writers

School Holiday Program:

Writing for the Screen

with Christopher Gist and Sarah Mayberry

The Young Writers School Holiday Program is a series of half-day workshops for young writers looking to improve their craft and get some expert feedback. This introduction covers the fundamentals of story structure, character for screen, writing screen action, and dialogue. Perfect for TV, film, or web scripts.

When: Tue 2 Jul, 10am-2pm

Member price: \$75

Non-member price: \$90

Level: Early, emerging

Young Writers

School Holiday Program:

Writing Personal Essays and Opinion Pieces

with Roz Bellamy

Opinion pieces and personal essays require writers to delve into their experiences and share aspects of their lives with readers. We'll cover creative techniques, structure, ethics, and how to develop your voice and narrative. Our workshop will be friendly, inclusive and engaging, and you will leave with ideas and plans for stories to pitch to editors.

When: Thu 4 Jul, 10am-2pm

Member price: \$75

Non-member price: \$90

Level: Early, emerging

Young Writers

School Holiday Program:

Novel Writing

with Jennifer Down

Ever get a great idea for a novel, but run out of steam by chapter three? Or felt like you wanted to try long-form fiction, but feel daunted by the length? Or maybe you've immaculately plotted and planned the whole thing, but you're not sure what to do next. Join us for a half-day intensive examining the nuts and bolts of novel-writing – character, setting, plot, dialogue, and everything in between.

When: Fri 5 Jul, 10am-2pm

Member price: \$75

Non-member price: \$90

Level: Early, emerging

Finishing Your Novel

with Nina Killham

Novels tend to fall apart around 30,000–40,000 words, the last section written not in that first rush of excitement of a new idea but often abandoned in a slog of insecurity and grouchiness. This course will help you approach finishing your novel with confidence. With exercises, coaching and a whip if need be, Nina Killham will help get you to the finish line. Because as anyone in the industry knows, finishing your novel is just the beginning.

When: Sat 20 Jul, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Diving In: Finding Your Voice (And Your Subject)

with Kathryn Heyman

For writers of fiction and memoir, this half-day workshop will give you the tools and techniques to write with energy and joy. Using exercises crafted over many years, acclaimed writer and mentor Kathryn Heyman will help you create the conditions you need to write with freedom and vigour. You'll leave the session with a toolkit of techniques to keep you inspired and motivated, a stronger sense of your writerly voice, and the means to keep developing it.

When: Sat 27 Jul, 10am-1pm

Member price: \$80/\$90

Non-member price: \$120

Level: Early, emerging

Writing Your Way to The End: Plotting, Momentum, and Re-Drafting (REPEAT)

with Kathryn Heyman

How do you keep going with your novel or narrative non-fiction work after the first flush of excitement has settled down? How do you find the narrative momentum and, crucially, the writerly momentum, to get to the end? In this masterclass we'll discover tools and techniques to overcome narrative difficulties and internal blocks. Using exercises, discussion and carefully chosen examples, you'll learn how to get to rethink your manuscript to bring new energy to it. Whether you're working on your first or second draft, you'll leave with new ideas about structure and momentum, and the tools to continue on to the glorious end. Participants in this workshop should be already working on a full-length work of fiction or narrative non-fiction.

When: Sun 28 Jul, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$134/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early, emerging

Ask About...Writing Biography
with Jenny Hocking, Michelle
Scott Tucker and Loretta Smith

From life-changing achievers to quiet lives less ordinary, biographies can bring history to life and provide context to well-told stories. But how do you go about telling someone else's story? Join biographers Jenny Hocking, Michelle Scott Tucker and Loretta Smith as they discuss the perils of research, the choices in the details, and bringing their subject to life.

When: Tue 30 Jul, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$18/\$25

Non-member price: \$40

Level: All

**Reading for Writers:
Session One**

with Toni Jordan

Jane Austen's 'Emma', like so much of her work, is frequently underestimated by readers pre-conditioned by images of frocks and dances. 'Emma' is actually a masterpiece of voice, and a searing analysis of economic disparity in a country at war that is wrestling with political upheaval and totalitarian levels of censorship.

When: Wed 31 Jul, 6-8pm

Member price: \$35/\$45

Non-member price: \$60

Level: All

Membership Form

Name

Organisation or writers group

Postal address

Email

Please tick if you do not wish to receive our enews*

*We will not supply or sell your information to a third party.

Suburb

Phone

Postcode State

Gender Female Male Other

Date of birth (optional) / /

At what stage of writing are you?

Early (just begun) Emerging (some publication) Established (published a full-length work)

What do you write, or what would you like to write?

Academic Crime Literary fiction Radio Web content
 Biography/Memoir Essays/Reviews Lyrics Romance Young adult
 Blog Family history Non-fiction Screenwriting
 Business/Technical Feature writing Playwriting Short stories Other
 Childrens Graphic novels Poetry Speculative fiction
 Copywriting Journalism Popular fiction Travel

Do you identify as:

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Person with Disability

Join for two years and save

Individual \$135 Writers groups and organisations \$260
 Concession \$100 Regional \$90

One-year memberships

Individual \$75 Writers groups and organisations \$145
 Concession \$55 Overseas individual (Online, no GST) \$75
 Regional \$50

How would you like to receive
The Victorian Writer magazine?

Hard copy by post
 PDF by email
(screen-reader friendly)

Payment advice (all prices include GST except overseas membership)

Membership amount \$ Cheque/Money order attached Please charge my Visa/Mastercard

Tax deductible donation \$ Card number /

Total payable \$ Name Signed

Find out more about what it means to be part of an association on our website at <http://bit.ly/1MQAcQt>



The Next Chapter

Take your story to
The Next Chapter

Every writer knows that the story is only the beginning; that original storytelling needs time, support and a space in which to thrive.

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Each year, we'll pick 10 outstanding writers and give them \$15,000 each to develop their work. We'll match them with a mentor and work closely with them on bringing their writing to life; connecting them with peers, publishers and readers. We're now in our second year and looking for our next crop of Next Chapter writers.

Across the country – in our regions, in our suburbs, in our cities – we know there are aspiring writers with stories to tell. So let's hear them.

**Applications now open until
12 July 2019**

Find out more at
thenextchapter.wheelercentre.com