

# The Victorian Writer

Oct–Nov 2016 | Modes, Methods & Miscellany





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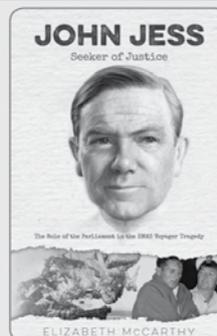
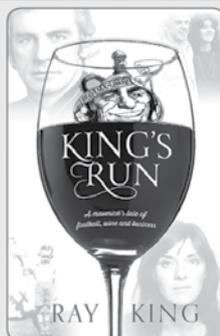
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# Editorial

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October is Subscriber-thon month, when we welcome many new (and renewed) members to the organisation. This issue of 'The Victorian Writer' is therefore the perfect platform to showcase the breadth of our writing and our practice.

We, the Writers Vic community, are a multifarious creature when it comes to our writing. Together, we are not defined by genre, style or approach; we embrace all modes and methods. And the work we are producing is exciting and bold, as demonstrated by this year's finalists of the Grace Marion Wilson competition, established in 2008 to promote and encourage the work of emerging writers.

In the short fiction category, judges Astrid Edwards and Laurie Steed were impressed by the submissions, reporting 'many glimpses of potential and interesting concepts'. But it was the originality and strength of execution that set the finalists apart. The winning story was 'Price Check' by Justine Sless and the runner up was 'Left of Centre' by Amelia Mellor.

The non-fiction category was judged by Liam Pieper who noted 'the very competitive and diverse field of entries'. The winning piece was CB Mako's 'A Year of Drawing Breasts' and the runner up was 'Real Act' by Anita Smith. You can read the winning works from pages 18 to 31.

Also in this issue, we have insight aplenty: Rajith Savanadasa talks us through his language rationale for 'Ruins', Wayne Macauley speaks to Charlotte Wood about his writing routine, Shivaun Plozza advises us on the art of the submission – for fiction and non-fiction work, Nova Weetman tackles a structural dilemma and Lyn Tranter gives a pocket history of her experience of Australian popular fiction.

The variety continues with micro-crime fiction from Sandi Wallace, fiction from Peter Symons and a frank essay on the frustrations of emerging as a writer by Meg Dunley.

This is our community. 🌱

**Emma Cayley, Editor**



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# Ask an ALAA Agent

# A Popular Question

Lyn Tranter from Australian Literary Management writes about the changing popular fiction landscape in Australia.

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Australian Literary Management was established in 1980 by Caroline Lurie. I joined the company some ten years later and in 1993 became the sole owner. The mainstay of the agency was Australian literary fiction. We also represented a few children's authors, biography authors, historians and academics. As far as popular fiction went, it mainly consisted of a couple of crime authors.

Then in 1994 I signed on a fantasy author, Sara Douglass. She was a lecturer in medieval history at La Trobe University, Bendigo. She was a brilliant writer and, I believe because of her background, was ideally suited to creating such complex and amazing worlds. I initially sent it to Pan Macmillan where it was rejected. And then I tried HarperCollins. A publisher there, Stephanie Smith, had just set up a new imprint titled Voyager and the first book they published was Sara Douglass' 'Battleaxe', the first in 'The Axis Trilogy'. I then continued to represent Sara for her next twelve books. They were also sold into the US, UK and into translation. Sara became an internationally successful fantasy author and one of the finest this country has ever produced. Sadly she passed away in 2011, aged 54.

I continued to represent other fantasy authors such as Jennifer Fallon and Pamela Freeman as well as horror author Will Elliott. I refer to those years from the late 90s till around 2010 as the golden age of fantasy publishing.

Things have changed a great deal in the past five years in this genre and I believe a lot of it is the impact of the internet. So many books in this genre are now self-published and

sell sometimes for nothing while others are available on Amazon for a couple of dollars. Fantasy aficionados, who tend to be voracious readers, can get copies for next to nothing and so are bypassing the traditional bookstore purchase.

Another area of popular fiction I decided to investigate was romance, particularly rural romance. Again, like fantasy readers, romance readers are devoted to this genre and will read sometimes two or three books a week. A mid-list literary author will currently sell around five thousand copies (even that is considered good these days), while a rural romance author will often sell around twenty thousand and some well over a hundred thousand.

Some years ago I attended a romance conference in Sydney. What struck me was how incredibly sincere these authors and their fans were. So if anyone believes they can sit down and turn out a romance work without being an avid fan of this genre, thinking it will be so easy, they will not succeed nor will they find a publisher. There is an authenticity and sincerity with good romance writing that cannot be faked.

Then we come to commercial women's fiction. This is an area that has always done well here, especially with the overseas authors such as Marian Keyes, Jodi Picoult, Paula Hawkins, Tana French and Gillian Flynn. I believe one thing they have in common is good, strong storylines. They are not books about 'isms', (multiculturalism, socialism, feminism, colonialism etc.) and they are not books where

Crime has suffered greatly with the high quality television programs in this genre, especially from the UK. But again I think things are changing now.

the quality of the writing takes centre stage. Some authors, of course, are simply excellent writers but I do not believe they see that as pivotal to a good book. This is changing, and publishers are now well aware that a great number of readers want those well-plotted novels. Of course, there are many exceptions where you have a brilliantly written book that also has a strong storyline.

Crime is another area that interests me and I believe it has suffered greatly with the high quality television programs in this genre, especially from the UK. But again I think things are changing now and we will slowly see the emergence of good quality crime books coming to the forefront. ⑩

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Lyn Tranter spent her childhood in Australian country towns. After working in England and hitch-hiking through Europe and across Asia, she married the poet John Tranter and has been actively involved in the Australian writing community throughout her adult life. She has two children.

**Australian Literary Management:**  
[austlit.com](http://austlit.com)

**Australian Literary Agents' Association:**  
[austlitagentsassoc.com](http://austlitagentsassoc.com)

## MACQUARIE DICTIONARY grammar tip

### Protagonist

Those who are conscious of its Greek origin ('first contestant' or 'leading character') sometimes object to the use of this word in the sense of an advocate or proponent for some idea or cause.

She was one of the leading protagonists for democratic reform.

From an etymological point of view, there should be only one protagonist in a play or political movement, but few writers limit their use of a word by strict reference to its past meanings. ⑩

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# Day of the Imprisoned Writer

---

'Over Manus Island, a black kite flies.  
A few youths, still with energy to bear the  
difficulties of this prison camp, made it.  
The black kite flies, a messenger of  
freedom for us, the forgotten prisoners.  
It circles higher and higher above the  
camp, above the beautiful coconuts.  
Our eyes follow its flight, it seems  
to want to tear its rope.  
It breaks free, dances towards the ocean, flies  
far and again farther until no one can see it.  
The youths stare into the empty sky  
after their impossible dream.'

Behrouz Boochani wrote these lines from the detention centre on Manus Island. His words call out to us to understand the plight of refugees, in this case those who, by seeking their legitimate right to asylum in Australia, have been detained on Manus Island. The words of the poet cut straight to the heart of the matter as all good writing does and reveal to us the universal longing for freedom from oppression and for safety that has impelled so many to undertake such perilous journeys and to abandon their homes and homelands. When I read Behrouz's poem I cannot believe the gentleness of his words. Of course it expresses a deep sadness and longing, but my anger rises as I watch that kite disappear with all his hopes.

At the recent Melbourne Writers Festival a panel discussed the role of language in shaping the 'refugee narrative'. The conversation focused on how those in authority have legitimised the pervasive negative rhetoric to create fear about those who seek asylum, to dehumanise them and to distance 'us' from the appalling reality of their lives in detention. It's the old 'them and us' dialectic and sadly all too often it seems to work, especially at election time. And those who have witnessed

the crimes against humanity that have taken place on Manus and Nauru, doctors and aid workers, have to contend with the possibility of imprisonment as embodied in the Australian Border Force Act. These are the people who could tell the very stories, communicate the first-hand accounts of the atrocities inflicted on the detainees that offer insight and bring the reality of these particular and singular lives into our homes and into our conversations. It is absolutely unacceptable that Australians accept this silencing of those who would speak truth to power. These are the very circumstances that writers in many countries under repressive regimes suffer constantly, writers for whom PEN advocates on a regular basis.

For a year now, PEN Melbourne has campaigned for Behrouz Boochani to be welcomed into Australia and we will continue to plead his case for as long as it takes to be heard. PEN Melbourne has led the way in acknowledging, and working for, writers who, as refugees and people seeking asylum, have been held without charge in detention centres. Now PEN International has announced a three-year campaign that will aim to increase opportunities for displaced communities to participate in, access, and contribute to global literature. 'This will include refugees, stateless persons, internally displaced persons, and asylum seekers. The campaign will work to uphold the right to sanctuary, celebrate displaced writers and their literatures, and foster creativity and cross-cultural exchange. This work is crucial at a time when one in 113 people has been forced into displacement; when racism and xenophobia towards refugee communities is rife; and when literary heritage is at risk of being destroyed, and writers and cultures are silenced and marginalised by exile'.



To keep these stories alive and present in our minds, PEN Centres, PEN members and supporters worldwide come together for the annual Day of the Imprisoned Writer on 15 November each year. This is an international day that recognises writers who have suffered persecution as a result of exercising their right to freedom of expression and it's a day to stand in solidarity with imprisoned and threatened colleagues. This year marks the 35th anniversary of this day and PEN Melbourne, together with the Wheeler Centre will host an evening with Peter Greste. Peter spent 400 days in jail in Egypt on false charges and was allowed to return to Australia in February 2015. He is an eloquent and passionate speaker on freedom of expression and human rights. PEN is delighted that Peter Greste will honour this Day of the Imprisoned Writer as our guest.

We warmly invite you to join us on this important day.

Day of the Imprisoned Writer

When: Tue 15 Nov

For more information please follow PEN Melbourne on Facebook and Twitter where the details for this event will be available. 

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**Chris McKenzie**  
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# Nitpicker

Your monthly editing lesson, brought to you by Penny Johnson,  
Program Manager of RMIT's Professional Writing and Editing.



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1. Joey confronted Marisa in the bathroom off the Grand Hyatt ballroom(. /,) 'Where did you stash the murder weapon?'
2. Marisa pointed to the left heel of her Manolo (Blahniks/Blahnik's).
3. 'How (ingenuous/ingenious)!'
4. While the poisoned dart is one of those weapons that (is/are) easy to hide, Joey was seriously impressed.
5. 'Watch and learn, Sweetheart (, purred/, purred) Marisa.

**Answers on page 41**

# A Glossary for Our History

Rajith Savanadasa writes about redefining the aesthetics of his language in 'Ruins'.

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It was closing time, around 11pm on a Tuesday or Thursday, and we were placing plastic lids on containers of sandwich fillings and packing them away in the freezer, mopping the sand-coloured floor tiles and counting the day's takings. While performing these tasks, a friend and I were engaged in the sort of conversation that's been had by young men since the invention of language. We were trying to get to the bottom of why he had no luck with girls. As we concluded our shift and closed down the store, a process that allowed almost an hour of dissection, my friend offered this: 'I get nervous. It's because my kadda [pronounced kud-der] isn't great.'

We were both uni students working at the least cool outlet of a large sandwich chain in the Melbourne CBD. My friend was referring to an incident that took place in Sri Lanka, where a girl had teased him about his kadda, his English. Kadda is a particularly interesting Sinhala word. It's a variation on kaduwa, which means sword. Kadda is the antiquated pronunciation of the word used during colonial rule, which is why it's used as a reference to the English language – the sword of the imperialist.

It's ten years later and I've written a book – in English. It's called 'Ruins' and it's set in Sri Lanka in 2009, at the end of the civil war. Each chapter is narrated by a member of the Herath family, including their servant, Latha. Quite a lot of work went into getting the voices right. Latha is uneducated and speaks only

Sinhalese. The rest speak English but with subtle variations of the Sri Lankan vernacular. The text is liberally sprinkled with Sinhala (and includes a little Tamil) but my editors and I made sure those words were either explained or could be worked out through context. I made a decision to not bring attention to the Sinhala and Tamil words, to not present them as foreign by italicising as they often are in books, after all, to the characters in this novel, these words are not foreign.



As expected, after the publication of 'Ruins', there have been a number of questions about those words. Many asked if the book needs a glossary. One of those was a fellow Sri Lankan emigrant. A blogger complained about 'lots of Sri Lankan words' and 'characters with names I found unusual and hard to remember.'

Now, when this question arises in interviews or conversations I tend to answer with a short history lesson. Sri Lanka was colonised by the British and we had a language foisted on us. It is a language we continue to have to use in order to communicate with the world, which in turn diminishes our own language; thus, I feel a responsibility to include some Sinhala, and if I learned English well enough to write a whole novel, to have you grapple with a few Sinhala words is perhaps not too great an ask. It's my polite way of saying: do some work, it's not that hard, especially these days with Google at your fingertips.

What I don't venture to include in those conversations is kadda. It's an altogether more complicated and tricky concept. Kadda isn't simply code for the English language. In fact, it hews closer to the idea of a sword, an implement of war, a weapon used to threaten and intimidate, to keep the enemy at bay and the workers in the fields. Kadda cuts many ways. Take the scene at the sandwich bar – my friend, a Sinhalese boy whose English was hardly terrible, lamenting about language-related mental scarring but, conversely, never hesitating to tease Indian co-workers for their singsong articulation, their rolled Rs and head-bobs. There's an unspoken hierarchy, one that's instantly recognised by us bottom-feeders, based on the sophistication of enunciation, comprehension, and vocabulary. A higher rank is achieved the closer your skills are to those of a local (although, to further complicate things Melburnians, like locals of most cities, already have a separate, established linguistic order). But language proficiency is not the only measure. While in my friend's narrative, kadda only appears to slice across class and education lines, as usual, race doesn't emerge unscathed. Upper-crust Lankans would take as much delight in belittling Tamil-accented English as much as the Sinhala-inflected variety. That elitism isn't bound by geography. The reason our sandwich bar was the least cool sandwich bar in Melbourne was common knowledge – it was staffed almost exclusively with brown-skinned Indians and Sri Lankans. Not because we were all aspiring to work there, of course, but because it was the only establishment that offered us work, apart from 7-Elevens and Indian restaurants – where working conditions were worse (or so we thought). The pay offered at our store was lower than other branches of this

particular chain of restaurants but we could make it up by doing longer hours: the owners conveniently ignored the 20 hours-per-week work limitation on international students.

Perhaps writing a novel was an attempt to claim some power – what better format than a work of fiction to display linguistic dexterity, to brandish kadda with a flourish and clamber up a few rungs on that collectively imagined ladder? I spent years fretting about what sort of novel to write, attempting multiple drafts in the style du jour before realising writing as an art form has an inherent resistance to such petty aspirations. If the literary practice is in almost diametric opposition to the standards and restrictions placed on one's self, then the critique of those standards may lead to some amount of freedom.

It took me a long time to come to terms with the fact that my standards of beauty were bound to a white view of the world. I needed to see myself reflected positively in the eyes of the west. Physical beauty and linguistic beauty were, for me, firmly situated in the typically European – kadda abounded, even in the material world. The only way to reclaim some of what was mine was to redefine the aesthetics of my language. And that was what I tried. What I continue to try – writing in the hope that a language might be made truly global by smoothing over its tyrannical past with minor acts of disobedience. Overlaying the scabbard with Sri Lankan stones, praying the sword remains enclosed and goes blunt with time.

**Rajith Savanadasa's debut novel 'Ruins' was published earlier this year. Rajith runs Open City Stories, a website documenting the lives of a group of asylum seekers in Melbourne. He was shortlisted for the Asia-Europe Foundation short story prize in 2013, the Fish Publishing short story prize in 2013 and received a Wheeler Centre Hotdesk Fellowship in 2014.**

# On Process: Wayne Macauley

In this extract from 'The Writer's Room', Charlotte Wood interviews WV tutor Wayne Macauley about the way in which he works.

---

**CW:** When you're starting a new book, how much do you know?

**WM:** Not a lot. Well, I know a lot subconsciously, and many writers talk about this, about how an idea bubbles underneath for a long time, and then bubbles up to the surface. That is true for me. I'm very superstitious about writing. I'm very conscious that it can all just go to shit at any moment. So that's why I'm loath to over-plan. Somewhere deeper back there I actually know everything that's going to happen, but I refuse to acknowledge that I know it. Then it does come to a time where it bubbles up, and I'm like, 'Okay, I'm going to write this one, I'm going to try this one out.'

Then, in practical terms, I do have a plan, which would run to about one or two A4 pages. With 'The Cook', the week before I started writing the book I wrote out a page and a half – I still have the document describing how it would go. I actually attached page numbers to these sections: 'That's going to be sixty pages, that will be about eighty. Then I'll get to there, then you'll go to the house, and that'll be about da-da-da, and then that little coda will happen.'

And pretty much that was it. I didn't know what was going to happen in the units really. But I have... what would you call it? A theme, a reason to begin.

**CW:** Let's talk about going to the physical space where you write, to get into that headspace. For me there's always some resistance, some niggling fear, every time I go into the room. How is it for you? Do you have a very strong routine?

**WM:** Yes, I do. Thankfully I don't have that fear so much now. I try to go in there with the idea

of neutrality, of allowing something to happen, of being totally in your body and so on.

I suppose I prepare by not preparing – that's my superstition at work. Of course it's about habit and routine, everyone knows that. I'll get up early, have the shower, have the breakfast. I find I need to read a bit before I start working, but I don't necessarily want to read something that's going to be too much of an influence on me, so first I read the paper. That's just a nice way of getting the brain from a slow ticking over into a faster tick-tick-tick!

Then I go to my study, I'm down there by eight o'clock. There have been times when I was down there at six thirty and earlier, for example back when I was writing 'The Cook'. I've got a nice armchair down there, just fits in there, and I usually sit and read just a few pages of the book I'm currently reading. I'll be careful not to read too far, though. I mean, I'll maybe bring that book up to the house later and read on the couch for an hour, if it's at an interesting point or something, but before starting work I'll just read a few pages, just to get the brain tuned up a little bit. Just to hear the rhythm, see the sentences. Then it's, 'Okay, right. That's enough.'

I'll then do three to four hours' work. I write longhand, in notebooks. My longhand pages run to about four hundred and fifty words, something like that, and two pages a day has been my routine this year. I'll have written two pages the previous day, and then I've just left them, closed the notebook and put it aside. So first thing I'll do is open up the notebook and go back to yesterday's beginning. I'll read into what I've written the previous day, and I'll do a first edit on it.



**CW:** So you're revising that before you write anything new?

**WM:** Well, if it was very good I wouldn't, but chances are I've tried to get into the state where I'm not going to question too much, I'm going to let things occur, so that means often that the sentences are very hurried, and pretty messy, and I've possibly even forgotten a character's name or something. It's always possible. So I'll do a basic clean-up, just so I know those two pages are set. They're obviously going to change heaps in drafting, but they're set for the moment. I'm happy. But also, what this does is refresh me. It tells me where I am, who I'm talking about. Just putting my toe back in, and saying, 'Well, what was I on about?' Hopefully, at that point, that's exciting, because you go, 'Oh, this is really good!'

Then I arrive at the blank page. I write on the right-hand side and on the verso page I keep notes. Then, at the end of every session, the last thing I do before stopping is tell myself in dot points what I'm going to do tomorrow, or where it will go next. Then I'll close the notebook, and that's it.

**CW:** So you write chronologically? You start at the beginning and work towards the end?

**WM:** Yeah, I do, very much so. It's mad. I write it all longhand, and I write it chronologically. That just forms a pattern, and some days when it's all breezing along there'll be barely a note on the verso page.

Often, though, what I will do on that page is write the first phrase or sentence for the next day, because sometimes you don't want to stare at the blank line for very long. You know that thing of stopping yourself just when it's getting interesting? That too. Even if it's just a phrase, I'll actually write it in quotes with a dot, dot, dot, like, 'This is what the writer would have written if he hadn't got hit by a bus.' So that's there, I know what's coming next.

**CW:** Why is it important to write in longhand?

**WM:** Look, every time I start a new book I question this idea of writing longhand. With some books, I have written everything that way, right to the very final full stop, before I've gone anywhere near a keyboard. It's very messy, but I have traced and tracked all the little marginal extra sentences and things. I know I can read those pages because I've read

them over each morning before the work. Then I just type up, almost like a stenographer really.

**CW:** So no redrafting before you type?

**WM:** Not yet. Very slightly, obviously. But at this point my mission is really just to type up this mother and get it onto pages. That's a block of work which just goes on frantically day after day, just typing, typing, typing. Then the miraculous day arrives – because it's all been just Wayne's head, Wayne's weird handwriting – the magical day arrives where I hit the print button, and it comes out, and it sits in front of me, and that's the beginning. It's a fantastic feeling, because that is when my real craft begins.

I actually really believe in this hand-eye thing. I don't think twenty or thirty years of computers have taken away the idea of man and tool. I just really do trust this more – that it's true, it's truer to me than if I had typed it. But the other thing is, we just spend so much of our lives in front of these fucking screens! So for that period of the work, which might take nine months to a year, maybe more, I'm not waking up in the morning staring at another fucking computer screen.

**CW:** There does sound to be something very pure about it.

**WM:** Yeah. It's very quiet, it's just the scratching of the pen, and seeing it. Sure, that's old-fashioned, I understand that, but seeing the marks on the page – to me, really, it's very beautiful. It's very messy actually, but very beautiful in a way. When you turn to that in the morning, it's textural, it's there, like it's a beginning.

The thing is seeing the traces, seeing the way it's evolved out of the muddle of the brain, through the muddle of those first pages, and as you type up, you start to see the way the chemistry between sentences came together in a much clearer way than you do when you're typing, I think. And I find that really valuable. ⑩

**Wayne Macauley is the author of the highly acclaimed novels: 'Blueprints for a Barbed-Wire Canoe', 'The Cook' and 'Demons'.**

**Charlotte Wood is the award-winning writer of 'The Natural Way of Things'. 'The Writer's Room' is available now. Visit [www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com) for details.**

# On Structure

For her latest novel, **Nova Weetman** wrangled a back-to-front story and confronted structure as never before.

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I'm not a planner. I'm a basher. I write furiously until I have a first draft and then stop. And fall in a heap. Then I read over what I've written. And despair. And then I start again. I pretty much repeat this process around ten times until I whittle the rubbish down to a polished final draft. I'm well aware that if I wrote notes or some sort of plan, even a vague one, I would probably manage to do it in a lot less time, but that's just not how I work.

Being a basher isn't all bad. It can produce some spontaneously good writing among all the turgidity. It can also keep you guessing as the characters leap from the plot you thought you were writing and start their own. And importantly, it (mostly) works for me. But over the past year I've been writing a new young adult novel, 'Everything is Changed', that has really rocked the basher in me. By the time it went to the printers, I'd written something like 19 drafts. Even for a basher that's just too many.

The reason this book was such a struggle for me is because when I started writing it, I had this brilliant idea to write it backwards. But writing a book backwards isn't like writing a book forwards. It requires planning. It requires starting with all the facts and gradually removing them as you weave in reverse through the narrative. Now that it's finished, I can see the decision to write it backwards was the right one, but if I'd been a plotter, then I think it may have been a much more enjoyable book to write.

The story begins with one of the protagonists in jail, and then reverses over a period of months to the night when the two main characters do something that will change their lives forever. The fact that it runs backwards means the story starts shatteringly and ends with a little more hope, which I think is better for this readership. It also means that the story is less about what they did, and more about the consequences it unleashes.

When I started writing the novel, I sat down like I always do when I'm starting something new, and began. But where normally I'd get to know the characters at the same pace as the reader, suddenly I was supposed to know everything about them from the beginning, because reading in reverse means you know it all first up. But one draft in I'd only just learned who the main characters were. And this book had two alternating points-of-view and a great many plot points, all requiring immense detail and knowledge on the part of the writer. None of which I had.

After five disappointing drafts, the story had stopped progressing and I wasn't any closer to understanding the characters or the events. So, I decided to write the book the other way. I flipped it all around. And started again. This time it was easier. I set up the world and the characters in the beginning and by the end it was all there. The only problem with that is when I came to flipping it back again, and cutting and pasting the chapters so the action unfolded in reverse, it didn't make sense. The character introductions were at the wrong end. The detail about how characters felt and thought was all in the wrong place. And I discovered that if I wanted the reader to be reading a story in reverse then that was how it had to be written. So that draft was useless.

It took another ten drafts before I had anything resembling a backwards narrative. Each time I'd finish another mediocre draft, I'd promise myself that next time I'd plot. Then I realised that because the book was in reverse and with alternating chapters of the two main characters, I did have to know where these points of view intersected. So I drew a map. Two narrative arcs that crisscrossed at certain points in the story. And suddenly it started to make sense.

What a shame I was a whole year into rewriting before I thought to map out the structural stuff. I would have saved myself so much time, and more importantly, so much worry that it wasn't going to work, if only I'd planned.

I've come to realise that as a natural basher I can't fundamentally change the way I work, but if I want to write books that are structurally challenging and push me beyond my comfort zone, then I do have to learn how to plan. Because otherwise writing books like this in the blind hope I'll find a structure that works, is never going to be sustaining.

'Everything is Changed' is the hardest book I've written. It has extended me, it has challenged me and it has terrified me. But it's also taught me things about my process that I can't ignore anymore. So hopefully next time when I'm stuck in the circular trap of writing, I can stop, take stock and make a plan. 📌

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**Nova Weetman's latest novel, 'Everything is Changed', is out now. Visit [novaweetman.com.au](http://novaweetman.com.au) for more information.**

# On Submissions

WV Manuscript Assessor and author of 'Frankie', Shivaun Plozza writes about giving your fiction or non-fiction submission the best chance of success.

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It takes many, many years (and tears) for a writer to craft a manuscript. Just look at the first Harry Potter (five years) and 'Lord of the Rings' (twelve years). But when it comes to the submission process, you need more than a finely honed manuscript. You need supplementary material – a cover letter and a synopsis, for example – and these are not to be rushed or left to the last minute.

Most publishers and agents will read your supplementary material first – if it doesn't engage them, they may not read your sample material. Knowing what to submit – and taking the time to get it right – goes a long way toward improving your chances for success.

Guidelines for fiction and non-fiction submissions vary. However, you can craft a number of documents in advance and repurpose them according to the specific guidelines of each publishing house or agent.

For fiction submissions, it's helpful to develop a cover letter, synopsis and a well-drafted sample of your novel; three chapters (the three you are most proud of) is common. Your sample material should be your best writing and the best example of why your manuscript is engaging, unique and saleable. Remember, for a work of fiction you should only query a completed manuscript.

The cover letter (sometimes called a query letter) is a one-page letter introducing your project to the publisher or agent, focusing on the key selling points. For Michelle Madden, Commissioning Editor at Penguin Random House, the cover letter is a vital part of the submission. 'I usually read the cover letter first,' says Madden. 'An articulate, well-focused cover letter tells us a lot about the author.'

A cover letter will generally contain a brief book blurb, an author bio (illustrating why you are the right author for this particular project), and any details that make you and your work an enticing prospect. Without editorialising, your cover letter should make clear your passion for the project and audience, and why your novel will appeal to the market. As with a job application, you should always personalise your query letter – why are you approaching this particular publisher or agent?

Most importantly, your cover letter should only include relevant information. As Madden says: 'choose the most relevant of your competition wins, or writing awards or the most recent and relevant publication experiences. If you're writing a picture book and you have a lot of impressive experience in writing for law, for example, just tell us that you're widely published in the legal area and that you're an experienced professional writer. We don't need to know the list of law publications. However, if you have experience writing for children, definitely focus on that'. It's not advisable to include the comments of a paid assessor or, more particularly, what your friends and family think of your work.

Not all fiction publishers require a cover letter; instead, some ask that you answer a series of targeted questions (usually found on the company's website). The information you would include in a query letter is often the same needed to answer the publisher's questions. For example, the submission guidelines for Allen & Unwin's Books for Children and Young Adult page asks that you, 'List any previous publishing history and/or any awards or residencies you've received' and

to indicate, 'What book would you see as a comparison title to yours'.

For a fiction submission, the majority of publishers and agents will require you submit a synopsis. The length of your synopsis will vary, generally anything from one page to three; ensure you check the submission guidelines carefully to determine the desired length for each publisher and agent. As opposed to a blurb, a synopsis is a clear overview of your storyline, including the climax and resolution. Madden advises that you should, 'keep the synopsis short and treat it as a brief summary'. As with the cover letter, Madden says that 'your writing is on show no matter what purpose it's put to' so the synopsis must be a taste of your quality as a writer.

For non-fiction submissions, it's worthwhile preparing the same documents as outlined above – a cover letter, synopsis and sample material. However, like with fiction submissions, many publishers now request that you answer a set of questions rather than submit a cover letter. Unlike fiction submissions, you can query your non-fiction manuscript before it's completed; however, as Foong Ling Kong, an editor and publisher who has worked in-house at Melbourne University Press and Allen & Unwin, says, 'understand that you'll have to work to an imposed deadline if signed up; few publishers want a book later than sooner'.

Where non-fiction submissions differ significantly from fiction submissions is when the publisher requires a 'book proposal', a document that generally includes a title page, a proposal overview (includes: book premise, book overview, market overview, author bio/expertise), chapter overviews and a maximum of three sample chapters.

If you are submitting a book proposal, keep in mind the following:

- Your book's premise – a one-sentence statement defining your manuscript – should be 'honest, straightforward and to the point', says Kong. 'Show that you as author have mastery and expertise in the area. At the same time, don't oversell yourself or get too cute. Never underestimate the power of suggestion (for good or ill). "My book is the Australian version of Caitlin Moran" will help anchor the publisher, but also set up expectations.'

- A book overview is similar to a synopsis, in that it clearly outlines the manuscript as a whole. Keep it succinct and focused on the main themes/ideas.

- The market overview indicates your book's appeal to an audience, hopefully highlighting your awareness of similar titles and the market 'need' for a book such as yours.

- Your author bio is particularly important for a non-fiction submission. A lot of non-fiction is sold on the back of the author's expertise or unique experience. As Kong says, 'credentials in the field the book is on matters in non-fiction. A profile as a commentator in the area the book is on helps tremendously. If you're submitting a cookbook and have appeared on TV, mention that. TV is still magical'. If you are able to show any kind of authority on the book's subject matter then do. According to Kong, 'the authority business really matters in, say, a work of history or investigative journalism. Authenticity counts if you're writing a memoir'.

- For your sample chapters, Kong suggests you, 'send your best. Something that is genuinely new or groundbreaking, if it's, say, an investigative book, and something we haven't all read before with a memoir'. As with fiction submissions, 'watch if there are page-count restrictions: if a publisher asks for two chapters, don't send five; they'll ask if they want to read more', says Kong.

- Importantly, 'The proposal itself is already some of your sample writing, and gives an idea of voice and how tight your writing is and so on. So, make the words work hard,' says Kong.

If you are still confused about what to submit, Kong has the following advice: 'Publishers encounter very many proposals and know how to read them in all their guises and forms; if there's something within that piques interest, they will be in touch'. ⑩

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**Shivaun Plozza is an editor, manuscript assessor and the author of 'Frankie' (Penguin, 2016). Her writing has also appeared in 'Where the Shoreline Used to Be', ArtsHub, 'ELLE Australia', 'TEXT' and more.**

# Price Check

Winner of the 2016 Grace Marion Wilson prize for fiction, this story by Justine Sless reflects on isolation and purpose in early motherhood.

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She pulls on her jeans, three red leather bangles and a shirt that can be unbuttoned modestly. There's a slightly sour smell in the air. The washing spills out of the laundry basket. She pulls back the covers on the bed. As she draws back the blind, dust motes rise like ghosts in the strong morning light. Three-and-a-half hours, at least. She knows that she shouldn't count, but adding up the hours of sleep, helps her feel like she has some control over the night that has just passed.

At the other end of the house the spoon is reaching its crescendo as he stirs his coffee. Her jaw is clenched in irritation. She gathers the plastic bag, full of wipes, pooey nappies and an empty tin of ointment, from the change table. Glancing into the mirror on her way out, she sees her hair is in fuzzy disarray. She pushes it down with her free hand.

'See you later - have a good one.' A last slurp of coffee, a crunch of toast, a trail of crumbs on the bench, one perfunctory kiss, then he is gone. She watches his broad back recede down the quiet street, the sun is just climbing. Her engorged breasts begin to leak through her shirt as she stands in the front yard. The garden has the classic renters look: slightly desolate, in need of a mow, and all the charm of a cup of tea gone cold.

Back inside, she positions the cushions, brings the infant to her, her right hand supporting his head, the left cradling his body. She feels a tingling light-headedness, followed by a sense of relief as the milk drains out of her. The baby belches, leaving a thin sour stream on her sleeve.

Stay calm and relax.

Some people say chocolate is not food, it's just chocolate.

No husband has ever been shot while doing the dishes.

She arranges the fridge magnets one more time. It seems like she is always there in the house, always just being there with the baby.

The radiant heat from the traffic and the concrete throbs. It's 10am and already it's already over thirty degrees. If she closes her eyes, she can pretend that the roaring noise is the ocean, not the traffic. The northern suburbs of Melbourne are heavy and tired from the incessant heat.

It took her till now, till she had the baby, to understand the seasons and to understand how the sun travelled across the sky in Australia. Arriving from the UK ten years before, understanding those things hadn't mattered. That was a time in her life when she hardly understood herself, never mind her surroundings. When she was pregnant though, someone had said 'Oh, how lovely, you're having a spring baby'. It clicked then, that spring was late in the year, that the heat came at Christmas time, that an English winter was an Australian summer. She had not understood it till she had birthed, nor had she ever looked or cared about the direction the sun travelled in during the day.

The position of the pram could be changed to suit the direction of the sun. The sun rose in the east, travelled north and set in the west. The pram faced west as she walked to the supermarket, the hot sun behind her. It mattered somehow that she knew this, that she knew where the sun would be, so she could change the direction of the pram as she walked around the streets.

Milk, nappies, coffee, something for dinner, the list was created to put purpose into her day. A trip to the supermarket felt like an achievement, something started and completed in one day. Unlike the rest of it: the blur of feeding, the saté pooey nappies, the thin streams of vomit always across her back, the all-pervasive smell of wipes and milk, the long stretch of the days. She knows no one in the suburb where she lives. Most days she speaks only to the checkout chicks at the supermarket. Often she stares at passers by, wishing that they would be her friends.

She pauses on her walk and looks up. Nothing assails her quite like the silvery green of gum trees, the endless varieties, the red explosion of colour, their gracefulness, their starkness. It always makes her stop and heightens her sense of loneliness and reminds her that she is here, in the Southern Hemisphere - in Australia.

The baby sleeps through the walk down to the supermarket. She usually has an hour or so before her breasts spring a leak, before she has to unharness herself, find somewhere to sit and feed the infant. Then she can release the engorged heaviness into the infant's wide, hungry mouth.

## Nothing assails her quite like the silvery green of gum trees, the endless varieties, the red explosion of colour, their gracefulness, their starkness.

She passes the black and brown Alsatian, barking at number 365 and a renovation that seems to be taking forever at 451. At 517 the garden is made up of a manicured lawn and topiaries in the shape of strange animals, all with plastic black-and-white stuck-on eyes, the kind you would usually find on a teddy bear. It would have taken hours to keep the strange beasts in shape, but she has never seen anyone tend the garden. She imagines that they do the topiary work under the cover of darkness, a torch guiding the hedge trimmer, the light deranged and the shadows short. Number 599 is dilapidated, its letterbox stuffed with unopened mail and yellowing newspapers.

She crosses the road to the supermarket; the heat seems to intensify around all of the parked cars. The cool air is a blast as she enters. Her shirt is sticking to her back. In the stark bright light, she feels stale. Her anonymity is amplified in the uniformity of the place, the groupings of cleaning fluids and toilet paper, the frozen items and the boxes of cereals, stacked, neat, an orderly flow of people in and out, the shelves always stacked, the shelf stackers never seen.

She contemplates the slithered tuna enrobed in a succulent mornay, surrounded by a trio of spring vegetables and wonders if it really is food fit for humans or as the tin suggests for animal consumption only. She trawls up and down the aisles. She picks up a pacifier, momentarily dreaming that this could be the answer to the endless sleepless nights, then hangs it back on its hook knowing that her choice to breastfeed means that she is the eternal pacifier. The very thought of it makes her nipples tingle, and not in a pleasurable way.

Haribo Gold bears 3.30 each ~~was 4.40~~  
SAVE 1.10  
25% OFF.

Haribo Gold bears Mini.  
1 Pack 250g

Some lines for the barcode.  
Some numbers beneath the barcode the number 22 in a circle.

She places the yellow and green sign for Haribo Gold bears into the basket underneath the pram, pays for the things that she has bought for dinner, the nappies, the coffee and leaves the supermarket. The heat hits her like a heavy sponge. She begins to walk up the hill back home and feels something

beyond the usual drag of tiredness. She stops momentarily to understand what the feeling is, and places it: it is the feeling of excitement tinged with purpose.

Between the feeds, the burping and the pooey nappies that night she sits by the glow of her computer. Her tiredness makes her sway and almost hallucinate, but she keeps going. Haribo Gold bears 2.20 each ~~was 4.40~~ save 2.10. The slightest change.

The next day she goes down the hill, purposeful, the drone of domesticity a momentary back drop. She enters the supermarket. Haribo Gold bears 2.20 each ~~was 4.40~~ save 2.10. She places the label onto the shelf. She does her shopping, slowly: bread, eggs, baby wipes, some washing up liquid, some fruit and a small box of tea. She slows her pace down, dawdling, not caring that her time might run out, that her breasts may spring a leak, or spurt even. Her basket fills; she has bought some light globes that she doesn't need, some cleaning cloths though she already has some at home, hoping and waiting. Eventually she realises that it won't happen today, that today she will have to go home without seeing her work in action, that the warmth spreading across her shirt and the baby's stirring movements means that she must leave, now before the infant begins to bawl.

Deliciously fruity Nanna's Apple Pie.  
4.00 each ~~was 5.20~~ save 1.20  
The slightest change.

When she gets home, her shirt is damp, with map-like patterns running across it. The souring milk smell almost makes her dry retch. The infant's hands are clenched, his face is red from crying. She feeds the baby, calming him with a slight rocking movement. She changes out of her soggy shirt, places the infant into the basinet, the one that can be wheeled around the house, and puts it next to her computer.

In the first week there was an orange string bag of onions: 1 kilo ~~was 2.50~~ save 1.00, imported cherries from the US, an assortment of confectionary, pet food and an electrical juicing machine, all altered slightly. It took until Thursday, four days into the alterations, for her to be in the store to hear it: 'Price check. Price check on grocery.'

She watches, while pretending to be fascinated by a show-and-tell magazine. A film star's ex-lover gets married to her best friend. Another film star reveals her fat-busting techniques. She peers over the magazine as the customer says: The sign said four dollars. It says it's on special.

She watches as the young assistant disappears up Aisle 7 and brings back the yellow and green sign. The numbers slightly altered, the lines slightly

changed. Her sign, oh so carefully mimicked, oh so carefully changed on her computer. Her almost-forgotten training as a graphic designer, dulled by the exhausting birth, the endless feeding, the intense boredom of early motherhood, sparking strangely back into the life because of a packet of Haribo Gold bears. The jelly confection so sweet on her lips as she worked on the yellow sign taken from the supermarket shelf.

The checkout chick shakes her head as the scanner waves over the top. She shakes her head again after a few futile attempts, waiting for the expected beep sound. The customer shows signs of irritation, a short sigh, eyes moving slightly upwards, a shuffle of the shoulders, a pursing of the lips, a quick glance at their mobile phone.

The Haribo Gold bears are given to the customer at the price displayed on the yellow and green label. It was small things at first, then large packets of toilet paper, then gourmet ice-cream crazily priced at \$12, boasting pistachio, drizzles of salted caramel and shards of toffee.

~~Was \$12.00~~ Now \$2.00.

Her head is dull with sleeplessness, her 'work' interrupted by the shrill cry of the infant wanting another feed. A month in and her living room is strewn with supermarket labels. Her walks up and down the hill to the supermarket have become a daily thrill. She cannot know who will buy what when she is there, while she is there buying her nappies, things for dinner, some milk. She can only hope.

Thirty two days in and as she enters the supermarket she feels dull and lugubrious, the incessant ache of her nearly full breasts, the buzz of tiredness making her temples throb. The

saxophone crescendo to Jerry Raferty's Baker Street filters through to her as she approaches the nappy aisle. She begins to hum along to the lyrics. Through the staccato rhythm another sound comes to her. The sound of alchemy at work, the moment she has till now, only imagined.

There has been one call, and in quick succession another, she hurries down the aisle, not even bothering to get the nappies that she has come in for. There is another call and another. She stands in the bright light and smiles, her backdrop is signs boasting that everything is 'Special'.

At all five checkouts that are operating, all of them are making the same call. Along with the call, she sees the flashing lights indicating that the operator is requesting assistance. They are like beacons. Then the noise, to her a beautiful melody. Five check out chicks yell at once:

'Price check, price check, price check, price check, price check.' 🗣️

**Justine Sless is a comedian, broadcaster and creative director of Melbourne Jewish Comedy Festival. 'Price Check' is part of a collection of short stories called 'Kernels' where truth and fiction meld.**

# Left of Centre

Grace Marlon Wilson  
Runner Up ~ Fiction

Runner Up of the 2016 Grace Marion Wilson prize for fiction, this nuanced story by Amelia Mellor explores the relationship between a mother and daughter.

We'd been watching the tree for the past three months. This apricot, still warm from the sun, was the first one of the season. The nectar beaded and ran down my thumb as I split it. I held out the bigger hemisphere to Alex, who lay beside the dog on the couch.

'Thank you, madam servant,' she said, with a haughty toss of her head.

I bowed. 'My pleasure, Lady Alexandria. Would you like some champagne to go with it?'

'No, that will be sufficient.' She reverted to her normal nine-year-old voice. 'Cheers.'

We bumped the apricot halves together. Just as I bit into mine, the landline rang.

'Ro, it's me.' Gabrielle's voice was high, breathy, as if she'd been crying. 'The settlement's done. I've blocked his number and everything.'

'Good bloody riddance,' I said, and she gave a shaky laugh. 'How are the kids dealing with it all?'

'Bree's still furious with me. She's at his place tonight.'

'So you got the house, then?'

She sniffed. 'I'm selling it. Too many memories. The whole place is tainted with his energy.'

Alex, book in hand, was resting her head on the dog and pretending not to eavesdrop. Her school t-shirt, loose as a canvas bag on her little body, was riding up to bare her stomach. She noticed me watching her and gave up acting like she wasn't hanging on every word. 'Is that Auntie Gabby?'

I nodded.

'Is she all right?'

I mimed crying. Tell you later.

'Vreet,' Alex said, in a cadence that meant okay. She wiggled her grubby toes at the ceiling and stuffed the rest of her apricot into her mouth. She wouldn't miss her uncle. He called her 'Alice' when she was little; she'd been counting strikes against him ever since.

'I've been talking to my therapist,' Gabby was saying, 'and I think I just need to cleanse my whole life, you know?'

'Fantastic, Gabs. Good on you.' I had no idea what cleansing her life would involve. Please, God, let it be something safe. African dance. Crafting vaginas out of felt. Just as long as it wasn't another detox phase. 'It's about time you did something for yourself.'

'Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Just a second, Lolly-darling, Mummy's busy.'

Gabby always spoke to her kids like that, even though her youngest was six and her oldest was going on thirteen. When Alex was six, she'd told me that Auntie Gabby was 'a little bit patronising', without ever having heard the word from me.

'Actually, Ro... are you around this weekend? From Friday evening? Because, not to be pushy, but I really need some nature time.'

I shouldn't have hesitated. I really did want to see her. I just would have preferred if she left her chaos in the city. Even though her house was big and white and scented with fake ocean spray, and ours was cluttered with my sculptures and scented with dog, hers always felt messier somehow. With anxiety or emotions or something, I suppose.

'Well, I dunno, Gabs,' I said, the tease covering my pause. 'Alex has a big project to finish for school. I really don't think she wants to spend the whole weekend swimming and playing with the cousins...'

Alex sat upright. 'Mum!' I laughed. 'Yeah, we'd love to have you. We're like a couple of hermits up here.' I didn't envy her the two-hour drive with her three squabbling in the back seat, but if it was worth it for her, I wasn't going to argue.

'You're the best, Ro.' She sighed. 'It'll be so good for me and the kids to just breathe, you know? Somewhere without all these monoxides and free radicals floating around.'

The breeze from the window stirred perfumes of wood and turpentine around the bright jungle of my workshop. I was sanding down the eagle I was working on, more as an excuse to move my hands over the lovely curves of it than any real need to make it smoother. Alex was curled in the armchair in her sodden bathers, flipping through her Field Guide to Australian Orchids.

'Mum, look. Dancing orchid.' She turned the book to me, pointing out a green one. 'It's like a little person.'

I leaned over to squint at the page. 'So it is. That's not what we found, is it?'

'No. I just like it. "Caladenia discoidea". Vreet.' She studied the picture for a moment. 'I think it's my new favourite scientific name. Disco-idea. It's like

deliciosus and impressa.'

'I'm impressa by you-a,' I said, but she was already back to her mission of finding our mystery flower.

She's an oddbod, my Alex. Her mind's not put together like anyone else's. She could memorise entire picture books when she was four but she can't tune out visual pollution. When we go to the supermarket, her eyes dart around from one plastic-bright distraction to the next, and I have to say her name several times to get her attention. She goes rigid when she's hugged, except by me. There have been times I've wondered if she deserves a better parent – someone smarter, straight-laced. Someone who keeps a calendar and doesn't let the dog sleep on the bed.

I shouldn't have hesitated.  
I really did want to see  
her. I just would have  
preferred if she left  
her chaos in the city.

But the bush was good for both of us. I cut down the pittosporums and she built humpies with the branches. We told each other about things we found or heard. We knew their rhythms of mating, flowering, fruiting, dying. We savoured the playfulness of their names. Bidgee-widgee. Mopoke. Purple meanie. Pobblebonk.

And now, 'discoidea'. I'd have to remember that one.

The dog barked so suddenly that I swore. Alex hopped up to let him out and he barrelled down the driveway on his stumpy legs. A moment later, Gabby's white people-mover pulled up primly in front of the house.

Gabby trilled her greetings and we pecked each other on the cheek. She called Alex 'sweetie' and almost forgot not to touch her. Bree put one arm around me in an embarrassed sort of way and Harrison wiped my kiss off with the back of his hand. Only Lola gave me a proper squeeze.

We stood apart from each other. Here were Alex and me, a couple of barefoot ferals who hadn't bothered looking for the hairbrush in days, and there were the city cousins, expectant and overdressed, wondering why they'd come so far for so little.

'So who wants a Paddle Pop?' I asked, starting towards the house. 'Alex, help Lola with her bag.' Bree didn't move. 'I can't have dairy.' 'There's Frosty Fruits too,' Alex said, shouldering Lola's sparkly backpack. She ran ahead, around to the back of the house. I brought up the rear with

Gabby.

'You okay?' I said, under my breath.

'Yeah.' She smiled. She had lippy on. 'I sort of can't believe he's gone. I'm still in the habit of being on my guard and then I'll remember he's taken all of his stupid judgements with him.'

'Atta girl, Gabs.' I patted her shoulder. 'Forget all that bullshit.'

'That's what I'm here for.' She looked up at the highest tendrils of the passionfruit vine shivering in the breeze. 'Your garden is so gorgeous. I love those wild vines.'

I'd been meaning to cut back that vine where it was blocking a window, and I was about to say so when Bree squealed. 'Mum! There's a dead mouse here!' 'That's just nature, darling,' Gabby said distractedly. 'Leave it alone.'

Alex danced back towards us and crouched in the grass. 'Vreet! That's an antechinus, not a mouse. They're marsupials.' She eased her fingers under it and poked at its jaw with the other hand. 'See how its teeth are pointed, not bucky?'

She held the furry corpse out to Harrison, who pulled away.

'Oh my God,' Bree cried. 'That's disgusting.'

Alex snorted. 'It's not like its guts are hanging out.' 'Alex,' I said sharply, 'that's enough.'

It was too late. Bree shot a panicked grimace at her brother. Lola's face creased up and she buried it in Gabby's sundress.

'It's all right, Lolly.' Gabby patted her on the back. 'The mousie's gone to heaven.'

'Excuse me, Auntie Gabby, but it's not a mouse.'

'It's gross,' Harrison said.

'It's science.' Alex looked indignantly to me.

'Very educational, Alex,' I said. 'Go and put it in the bush.'

Anyone would think I'd just murdered the dog, by the look on her face.

I took the plastic backpack from her. 'And make sure you wash your hands.'

Despite the Great Antechinus Incident, Alex and the cousins got along okay. She introduced them to the chickens and the fruit trees, and Harrison introduced her to his phone. I gathered from the way Lola victoriously galumphed in the back door in my gumboots, cradling an egg in each hand, that all was forgiven. I left them to it. As long as they weren't fighting, they didn't need our intervention. Except Gabby didn't seem to see it that way. She kept glancing out the window, in between long sips of wine. 'Should they all be in that tree at the same time?' 'Did they wash those apricots?' 'What about snakes?'

'We've never seen a snake on our property.' Not a live one. Not a venomous live one. She loosened up after a glass and a half. When I took the piss out of our neighbour, she laughed like a seal, the way I hadn't seen her do in months.

The kids chose that moment to stampede in the back door. Bree was propping up her brother, who was red-faced with the effort of not crying. 'Harrison stood on a bull ant nest!'

I put down my glass and went to the freezer for a packet of peas, but Gabby was already unclipping the lid of the Tupperware first-aid box she carried in her handbag. She sat her son down at my kitchen table and began pasting his bare legs and feet with Soov cream. Lola waved a handful of bracken at me.

'Darling,' said Gabby sternly, 'you should ask Aunty Ro before you pick her ferns.'

'It's from the bush.' Lola placed the crushed fronds daintily on the table. 'Alex said the sap is good for bites.'

Gabby's brows shot up.

'Old hikers' trick,' I said.

She tutted and uncapped a yellow spray bottle of Rescue Remedy. 'Lift your tongue.' Harrison let her spray the medicine into his mouth, although he grimaced at the taste. 'You've been very brave.' She kissed his forehead and gave him a jelly baby. 'Bree, why don't you go and pop a movie on?'

Lola squealed with glee and Harrison hobbled after her into the lounge room. It was a pity to be plopping them in front of a screen on such a beautiful evening. I almost said so. I caught Alex's eye as she was shutting the door to the lounge room. She was watching me with an intense curiosity. I smiled at her, but she had already looked away.

The kids stayed up late and woke up early. Gabby poured their cereal and bossed them into their clothes. By the time the young voices outside nudged me into consciousness, the sun was well up and Gabby had settled into her possie for the day on the front deck. Among the wreckage of breakfast, all I found was milk dregs and a box of Gabby's birdseedy muesli, so I toasted some crumpets and smothered them in jam. On the way outside, I hit the switch on the kettle and tried to look fresh.

'Morning, Gabs.'

She laid a thick book in her lap and took her feet off my deck chair. 'Give me a bite?'

I let her.

She grunted approvingly at the jam. 'Farmer's market?'

'Coles. What are you reading?'

She held up the cover of the book so I could see the title: Dr Cameron Parnaby's Guide to the Twenty-First Century Child.

Rolling my eyes theatrically, I blew a long raspberry, and she giggled.

'No, Ro, it's great. You'd find it really useful.'

'For propping up wonky tables, maybe.'

She widened her eyes and tilted her head towards the lounge room, where Alex was kneeling on the couch back-to-front, watching a fairy wren on the windowsill. The cousins were nowhere to be seen. The wren, which we called Aggro, was pecking his reflection and hurling himself at the glass. He defended his territory like this most days. When he paused, his tiny fat face fluffed up with rage, you could make out each feather on his sky-blue cheeks.

'Alex is fine,' I said.

'Well, she's a good kid,' Gabby said quickly. 'I just meant with, you know... with any kid who's on the spectrum, there's bound to be problems down the track—'

'On the spectrum?'

'Oh, come on, Ro.' She tried to laugh off the threat in my tone. 'You know she's a bit of an Aspie, don't you? Crazy smart, socially challenged, completely obsessed with... well, the book calls it a fasci-niche. And that noise she makes. What does vreet mean, anyway?'

I clenched my jaw. I wasn't going to show her that she'd stung me. She was the sensitive one, not me, and if she realised she'd hit a nerve, she'd probably decide I was in denial. Still, I had to make an excuse about running to the kettle to hide the burning in my face. Who the hell was Gabby to criticise anyone else's quirks? Gaga Gabby, who fell hook, line and sinker for kombucha and wouldn't touch handrails in public? Truth was, I didn't know where vreet had come from. It was just Alex's happy noise. Just a playful habit, like hopping over footpath cracks. I'd never really thought about it.

On Sunday, we took the cousins to our favourite swimming spot. We clambered out of Gabby's car in thongs and sarongs, pink zinc and bucket hats. It was a short hike from the car park down to the lake. The dog trotted ahead. Alex dallied. The track only fit two abreast, so Gabby and I were able to chat without much interruption. When we were about two hundred metres from the lake, I glanced behind us to find Alex wasn't there. She had dropped a long way behind, and was crouching by the side of the trail.

'Bit further, cheekyface,' I called to her. 'Up you get.'

But she wasn't tired – when she looked up, she was beaming. 'The sundews are flowering!'

Gabby looked quizzically at me.

'Carnivorous plants,' I said.

Alex stayed put. 'They're formivorous, actually.'

'Alex, nobody cares,' said Bree, propping her hand on her hip. 'Come on.'

My sister gasped. 'Brianna!'

'Don't Brianna me! She hasn't shut up about plants for three fricken days!'

Without a word, Gabby grabbed Bree by the wrist and marched her up the path until the two of them disappeared around the next bend. Lola pushed back her hat to look up at me. 'Aunty Ro, what's a carnivorous plant?'

'It sort of... eats things,' I said. I could just hear Gabby's fierce murmur through the trees – words like ungrateful and know better. 'Insects and things.'

'Like a Venus flytrap?' Harrison said.

'That's right.'

He jogged back towards Alex and leaned over her.

'Let me see.'

'It's probably not as cool as a Venus flytrap,' she admitted. 'This one just catches ants with these sticky bits. And then the leaf folds up and digests them.'

'Serves them right.' Harrison scratched his knee.

'Stupid ants.'

Alex laughed – she'd forgiven or forgotten Bree already.

But I couldn't. Alex would be a teenager before too long. How many kids like Bree was she destined to meet? Who would take the time to find out that my daughter was as strange and wonderful as the wildlife she loved, if her idea of a conversation was a monologue on trilobites?

We had the lake to ourselves. Flat water, sparkling boulders. Harrison, Alex and Lola threw off their towels and dashed down the little crescent beach, squealing as they shattered the forest's reflection. Bree shyly undid her sarong and waded in after them. With a sigh, Gabby sank down on a rock. 'I really needed this, Ro.'

I returned her smile as sincerely as I could. I was glad to see her happy, but I was looking forward to the send-off. Tonight there would be only me, Alex and the dog in honest, comfortable quiet. My chest tightened. Honest and Alex – I wished I hadn't thought of those words so close together. We would have to talk. Conversation is like a picnic, blossom. You have to bring something that

everyone can share. And I would have to go on telling her, pruning her, sanding down her splinters indefinitely. Get her used to hugs. Teach her to keep vreet between the two of us. Without siblings to smooth her rough edges, it was all up to me.

Lola's shriek cut the silence. 'That's too high!' Alex had climbed up on a boulder that jutted over the lake. Dr Cameron Parnaby would not have approved.

'Alex, darling,' Gabby called, 'I don't think that's a good idea.'

If Alex heard, she didn't care. She clenched her fists and set her feet apart. Then she charged, wet feet slapping the rock, out into the air. Her falling body looked tiny against the vastness of the sky and the lake, but she fell with silent control, spine arched, arms raised. There was the crash, the explosion of white. The ripples bloomed. The foam hissed. Where Alex had hit the surface, there was only green water, as smooth as marble.

Any moment, she'd be back up. She was somewhere down there, where the sunlit zone met the cool darkness below, pretending to be a turtle or watching her hair drift in front of her face.

I held my breath for both of us. ①

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**Amelia Mellor is a playwright and upcoming novelist for young readers. She is currently approaching agents with her first novel, *Anomalies*, and is developing her second with the support of Writers Victoria at Glenfern.**

# A Year of Drawing Breasts

Grace Marion Wilson  
Winner ~ Non-Fiction

Winner of the 2016 Grace Marion Wilson prize for non-fiction, this story by CB Mako brings together creativity, motherhood and therapy.

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Fingers marred with charcoal stains, I stared at the clean cartridge paper clamped to a thick wooden backboard. The easel towered over my small frame. Panic filled me. What had I gotten myself into? Where would I even begin?

In the art book 'How to Draw Manga: Bodies and Anatomy' from the Society For The Study of Manga Techniques (2004), the detailed instructions started with perspective and then, in a clinical fashion, depicted the steps on how to draw the human head. Each chapter discussed parts of the body down to the feet.

My resolve and bravado shrank. How could I draw a whole human figure within a span of five to twenty minutes? I fought the impulse to run away. It was my first day of life drawing, the start of a year of pushing boundaries and comfort zones. Then I remembered the enrolment fee for the school term was already paid for.

Squaring my shoulders, I forced myself to look in the centre of the room, where stood... a nude adult white woman. The only other person I had seen naked was my mestizo husband Chris - tall and bulky, he was born of mixed European and Asian ancestry. His fair skin contrasted with my darker morena complexion. Somehow, I couldn't recall ever seeing my own mother naked. Half-dressed perhaps but never—

'One minute pose,' a quiet, calm voice said, interrupting my train of garbled thoughts. Darien, my art teacher, had also been my art instructor in basic and advanced drawing and painting courses last year. I was the only person of colour among eight students of varying ages.

Suddenly self-conscious, I realised I was the only one with mocha skin and black hair, in complete contrast from everyone else in the art room. Thinking back, this situation reminded me of my breastfeeding mothers' group a decade ago, when I was a first-time mother at thirty-three years old.

I was the only woman of colour among the other new mothers.

Was I the only woman of colour when I signed up as a trainee breastfeeding counsellor? Somehow I couldn't remember. Because in this brilliant organisation of women, abiding by the breastfeeding organisation's code of ethics, I was treated like any other trainee: empathy and understanding mattered, not the colour of our skin.

I wiped my brow as I brought back my thoughts to the present. Whether it was from nervousness or the brisk forty-minute cycle ride in the midday summer sun, I was unsure. I was at Footscray Arts Centre after all, a community arts centre located in the west of Melbourne, in a council area that claimed to have the second most ethnically diverse population in the state of Victoria.

I was now a student artist and I was there to learn how to draw.

I'd tried almost everything. Two years ago, I had appointments with a local psychologist, engaged in group therapy among parents and carers with children with cancer, and saw a psychiatrist who then gave me a prescription for a low dose of antidepressants.

Stuck at home in the middle of winter with an immunity-compromised toddler, I even tried writing fanfiction, imagining I was worlds away, in space battling giant monsters and flying robot lions.

Yet, it wasn't enough.

Exhausted and broken following my toddler's cancer treatments, I was no longer the same person. I felt fragile, a humpty dumpty who couldn't be put back together again. Lumbering through daily life in a dazed, lost state, I didn't know who I was, what I had become. My child and I spent the better part of eight months at the cancer ward.

Her once cherubic folds of fat arms and legs, now turned thin, bony. Her luscious black hair fell out in clumps as powerful, toxic drugs pumped through her tiny body during chemotherapy sessions. Her skin was crinkled, loose.

Just like the body in front of me as I attempted to draw the life model. Long past her youth, the naked woman's skin was no longer taut, and her small breasts sagged. I could see the lines of her ribcage.

'Five minutes.' My art teacher clicked his digital timer, cueing his students to begin their quick sketches.

Where do I begin? I rubbed the back of my neck, where my muscles tightened. The life model, already tall, stood atop a makeshift rectangular wooden platform. Her long, pale limbs shifted, her hipbones jutting out. My eyes locked on her chest. Even before I realised it, I was riveted by the woman's breasts. I began drawing, starting from the breast outwards.

By the end of the school year, I had drawn forty sketches of women and their breasts, in their many shapes and angles. I would later realise this was my way to express something I couldn't put into words: an end of a decade of breastfeeding my two children.

Art as an elegy, a requiem, or even an ode to a phase I had once lived.

'Your daughter needs more breast milk.' The oncology nurse pushed the electric breast pump towards me. It was on a cart with castor wheels, easily rolled around to wherever the contraction was needed. The stench of my toddler's faeces filled the isolation room, which had its own heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system. She'd been pooing green liquid that stank up the place. My nearly two-year-old daughter was battling a bug in her gut and was constantly either vomiting or defecating.

Desensitised after a few months of chemotherapy, I moved like an automaton. There was no room for hysterics or meltdowns. Perhaps later. Much later.

It took three attempts before my toddler finally settled without yanking out the narrow yellow tube that ran through her nostril and straight down the back of her throat. Medicine and liquids would easily pass through the line without much fuss.

On autopilot, I followed the nurse to an empty, quiet room where I could try and relax and pump breastmilk. The mechanical churn of the electric breast pump hummed. A suction cup encircled my areola, drawing my nipple to extract the nutrient-filled milk. But I was stressed and my breasts felt



empty, light, deflated even. I rolled my shoulders, attempting to relax. I switched on to the other breast; a few drops squeezed out and dripped down into a sterile bottle.

After an hour, I had barely expressed fifty milligrams. Exhausted and drained, I was angry at myself for not producing enough milk. What was wrong with me? Wasn't it just a year ago my breasts were so full of milk, it would squirt in an arc across the bedroom? In a crisis such as feeding a child with cancer, there seemed too much expectation from my pair of tits, to produce breastmilk that would provide the sustenance to my dehydrated toddler who'd lost so much weight from her chemotherapy.

By sheer luck, the evening nurse assigned to our room was also a certified breastfeeding counsellor and lactation consultant. I told her what was happening to me. It felt therapeutic that someone knew the familiar language we were accustomed to using in our breastfeeding mothers group. I felt helpless, useless.

'Let her latch on to your breast. Her sucking motion will draw out the milk,' the nurse-breastfeeding counsellor said, her tone empathic, reassuring. I had missed the company of kindred women, yet deep inside, somehow, I couldn't go back to them. Not after all of this, not after cancer. How could I counsel breastfeeding women on the helpline when I needed counselling myself?

That night, the nurse replaced the cot with a regular hospital bed. With the side rails up, in fresh linen sheets, I co-slept with my toddler. Beneath the crook of my arm, she latched on and suckled my breast. I felt her relax and she let out a loud sigh. Her eyes closed, she appeared soothed. Both of us were. We clung to each other that night, holding for dear life, with the hope that she and I would survive another day at the cancer ward.

'You're drawing the angle wrong.' My art teacher drew a thin, nearly-invisible line across the pair of breasts I did from a three-fourths angle. It seemed I drew the side too high. Darien reminded me how the breast curved when light bounced off the body. I had to pay particular attention to the shadow beneath the curve and where the source of light was coming from. I was unaccustomed to the words he used in drawing. It all sounded different from a breastfeeding mother's point of view.

With the supplied charcoal sticks, I worked with varying shades of black to grey, using the pads of my fingers and thumb to smudge and rub across the paper. I wondered if I could use another art medium. In the previous year, I used the art centre's soft and hard pastels with varying tones of flesh, pinks and browns. Perhaps, once I have learned the life drawing techniques, I could re-enrol next year and use coloured pastels.

Lost in thought, I couldn't help compare the different words used between drawing and writing about breasts. As an avid romance reader and fanfiction writer, I was used to breasts being described as either pressed against a hard chest, or suckled for pleasure, or laved with a warm tongue that sent quivers down a woman's clit and—

The timer went off, jolting me back to the present. We all stopped drawing, stepped away from our easels, and went around viewing each other's artworks.

'She's drawing breasts again,' a classmate commented, chuckling.

Among the students who were women, most were past their prime, retired. They were already grandmothers, a few of them once held positions of power in local and federal government. Had they breastfed their offspring? Did they bare their own breasts during their heyday? How would breasts feel once women reach their senior years?

Perplexed, I wondered if the comment was made in jest. Unsure, I brushed it off as a passing remark.

By this time of the school year, our small group of five to eight students have gotten familiar with each other. One preferred drawing the entire body; another student liked drawing the face. While another student preferred backs and backsides. I continued to draw breasts in all shapes, sizes and angles.

At the third term of the school year, I wondered if my attraction to drawing breasts was also a form of mourning and regret. I was never breastfed by my own mother. I never knew the taste of breastmilk, or the sensation of warmth when held in comfort while sucking mother's milk. Sometimes, I envy my children. I never had that closeness with my own mother, who was herself motherless.

Born premature, I was left alone in a warming isolet, separated from the other babies in the hospital's nursery for a whole month. Had I been held at all during those thirty days in isolation? My parents told me that when they finally brought me home, I never cried, never uttered a sound. I was a 'good' baby. Little did my parents know. Years later, I would read somewhere that babies who were not held had higher cortisol levels, grew up anxious, and had other mental health issues too.

'Mum, your milk taste like strawberries,' my first-born said when she was four years old. She was in kindergarten when I gave birth to her sister. I was tandem feeding both her and her newly born sister. 'And I love your smell, Mum.' She patted my breast that was bursting with milk enough for two children. Soon after, my first-born stopped breastfeeding altogether. Still, as she continued to grow, she would find comfort in my arms and lay her head on my breast and inhale me. Somehow, it didn't matter to her whether I'd just showered or was icky and sweaty from cargo-biking all day.

In the documentary film 'The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness' by Mami Sunada (2013), which followed the routines of the artists and animators at Hayao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli in Japan, animation artists were shown performing stretching exercises in the morning before they began drawing. Eventually, I too would do the same set of stretching exercises before beginning each life drawing class. I rolled my shoulders, loosened my neck muscles, and shook my arms and hands. Ready. Steady. Draw.

While drawing, I was lost in the moment, exhilarated as I gained confidence in my charcoal sketches. I loved how the life model's muscles bunched up and twisted, how light fell across and reflected on the human body. A new world opened up; I was seeing things in a different way, the nuances, the small details and layers beneath the skin, down to the joints and bone structure. High from adrenaline, both from drawing and cargo-biking back home in time to pick up my daughter from school, I decompressed at night. Drawing digital art at home was quiet, serene, and untimed. It was when I settled the kids for bed and



art class. On our first tweet-up she introduced me to literary journals. Fascinated, I borrowed one of her subscription copies.

As another school year loomed, Chris and I brought our daughter to her regular six-month oncology check-up. At the end of the appointment, the oncology team surprised us with something we never expected to hear.

'We'll see you next year.' 'What do you mean?' I asked, gaping. Stunned by the oncologist's words, I could not believe what we heard.

'Exactly that.' The oncologist repeated what she said and then smiled at us.

By the time we got home, I cried. Was it from relief? Shock? Disbelief? Whatever it was, I felt a big load taken off my chest and I could breathe again.

How do we go forward in 2016? A new year, with a

new diagnosis of full remission, without oncology visits the entire year. We never saw it coming. And for the very first time, in five years, I found myself finding the courage to finally go through the journals I've written during our daughter's chemotherapy.

Then, I heard a voice, a whisper, daring me.

Write. ⑩

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**CB Mako is a West Writers Group member and student artist of Footscray Community Arts Centre. Her nonfiction piece was recently published online in 'The Suburban Review'. Her artwork can be seen in 'The Lifted Brow: Issue 31'.**

I would draw either using my mobile phone with its pre-installed drawing app or my nine-inch tablet. Then, quietly, each week, I cried.

Was it from relief? Or, perhaps, regret? Whatever it was, I felt something inside me had cracked wide open and raw, a gnawing ache of what-would-have-could-have-been. I could have been an artist. I could have been an animator. Instead, at forty-two, I was struggling to discover and find myself. Why was I here? Why did life turn out this way? What would life be as a carer?

At forty-two, life drawing drew out existential questions I never dared ask before. Twenty-six years ago, I applied to two universities for Fine Arts courses. All I wanted was to become an artist. Instead, I was sent to a prestigious catholic university that focused on business degrees. My parents convinced me I could draw on the side as a hobby; that a career as an artist would not bring food to the table but a business degree would provide a stable job and income. Now, at forty-two years old, I wondered if I fulfilled a sliver of a distant dream. Or was there something else? My gut feeling gnawed for something more.

At the end of the school year, I had a large folder that fit all the artwork I'd drawn throughout the school year of 2015. I had made friends with one of the life model artists who regularly posed for our

# Real Act

Grace Marion Wilson  
Runner Up ~ Non-Fiction

Runner Up of the 2016 Grace Marion Wilson prize for non-fiction,  
Anita Smith's raw story prods the boundary between acting and real life.

I know my lines word for word. Face void of make-up, wild hair, body in loose comfortable clothes like a first time mother of an eight-week-old baby. Acting work is far and few between, unless you're Jennifer Lawrence, and I'm grateful for this gig. At \$100 an hour and no glamour or vanity required, who wouldn't be?

I arrive at the hospital on time, my tyres squeak against the shiny floor of the new overpriced underground carpark and locate the simulation centre. Here is a mock emergency department set up with trolleys, monitors, IV lines and cables. I introduce myself to the simulation technologist. He is sponging blue and red makeup onto a rubber baby in a nappy with a plastic tube protruding from its tiny mouth. Bodies start to bruise after being 'down' for some time.

'If during the simulation you want to hold it, ask for a sheet because the makeup might smudge your clothes,' says Sim Tech.

'Will it come off in the wash?'  
'It should.'

Good. It wouldn't be real to request a sheet in the moment. I meet some of the faculty who will be monitoring the participating doctors and nurses; the ED consultant head honcho, an imposing man in blue scrubs who reminds me of Superman if Clark Kent had pursued a career in medicine instead of journalism; some ED fellows; and a kindly nurse practitioner who will be my guide. I ask if the participants are being examined. No, I'm told, no one is being assessed, it's training only.

Before the doctors and nurses arrive, I'm taken to an adjoining room, out of view and Sim Tech hands me a mic to wear like a chunky necklace. I'm told to switch it on before I start and don't forget to turn it off once the simulation finishes to avoid broadcasting 'non acting noises'. Toilet sounds flash to mind.

From my unseen seat, I hear the doctors and nurses arrive en masse from morning tea, buzzing on caffeine and uncertainty. Superman chooses three doctors and three nurses to participate while everyone else will watch and listen from behind a one-way mirror.

The team is warned – this communication scenario is designed to have a poor outcome, despite the

efforts of the emergency department, it does not end well. It will be emotionally challenging and a professional actor will play the mother. I calm my breath and internalise my character's situation according to the script.

A summary of the patient and parent demographics is read out loud to the group. The learning objective is not clinical – the focus is on communication. Mother checked on baby at 6am – found blue, floppy, not breathing. Paramedics arrived 6.20am. It is now 6.50am. Resuscitation unlikely to be successful.

I hear the team review the situation, delegate roles – 'circulation doctor and nurse, airway doctor and nurse, scribe, team members to attend family' take positions and share mental model – emotional readiness of team.

Eight week old patient in cardiac arrest arrives on ambulance stretcher.

Go! The doctors start to instruct and direct – they are firm but polite. Responses are clear and strong. Demands and replies are made with urgent control. They speak in jargon – technical language that may as well be in German but the words I do understand 'resuscitation... adrenaline... unresponsive... pupils dilated, fixed...' are repeated with such sincerity and truth, it hurts. This drama goes on for five to ten minutes and from a dark, primal and protective place, raw emotion swells in my chest, burns my throat and even though I try to hold back tears – don't want to peak too soon – let them roll down my face anyway.

Superman pauses the simulation and updates clinical information to the team – time shifts forward twenty minutes – stop resuscitation – prolonged down time – resuscitation is futile and he informs the team of mother's arrival.

My heart accelerates, hands sweat and tears flow. Kindly Nurse touches my arm. 'Are you ready?' I switch my mic on and nod.

She leads into an area and sits me down at one of four chairs. A curtain separates this space and where my baby lies. Three participants appear from behind the barrier. I stand. They introduce themselves, state their roles, and ask if we can sit, please? I nod. We sit.

'What's happening to Isabella?' I croak.  
A doctor leans in. 'Mrs Andrews...'  
'Emily.'  
'Emily...' Her features are soft and her brow is  
ruched. 'Can you tell us what you know so far?'

Did Doctor Ruche draw the short straw or fall on  
the sword for the team? I can't tell but I like her  
face.

'Isabella woke for a feed around 2am, she fed  
normally and I put her down in her cot next to me.  
I woke around 6am and when I checked on her...  
she was... blue... floppy... not breathing. I called the  
ambulance – they came around twenty minutes  
later and took her away – brought her here... my  
neighbour drove me in...'

A box of tissues materialises. Tick. I take a few. 'I  
want to see her.' Blot my eyes, blow my nose.  
'Can I see her?'

'Yes, of course but first... we... Emily, we are so  
sorry, we tried everything. We haven't been able to  
revive her. We are so sorry. Isabella has died.'

Swift and honest.

Tick.

Feel the impact.

In the actor's notes is a table listing character  
attributes: anxiety, shock, confusion, guilt, sadness,  
indecision, assertiveness, frustration and anger.  
These are graded from one to five. One being – not  
at all. Five being – severe. Shock is a five. Emily has  
been in shock since 6am.

Head in hands.

Sob.

Snot. 'Are you sure?'

'Yes.'

'You tried everything?'

Doctor Ruche says, 'Everything. We worked on her  
for a long time.'

'She was fine a few hours ago.'

The doctors and nurses nod in unison. Listen but  
do not counsel.

'Can I see her?'

'Of course, but first we need to tell you what to  
expect.'

Ruche explains Isabella will be attached to a  
breathing tube, cables and machines before I'm  
escorted around the other side of the curtain.

The sight of Isabella on the long white bed snaps  
my breath away. 'Oh, Issy.'

Still.

Lifeless.

Tiny.

'Can I hold her?'

'Of course.' The team release Isabella from the  
equipment. 'Have a seat.' Place her in my arms. I'm  
surprised how heavy she feels. I stroke her face  
and hear myself whimper, the tube in her mouth a  
surreal reality.

The cluster of doctors and nurses allow me to cry.  
No one interferes. No one fills the emotional space  
with questions or talk. That will happen in the next  
scenario. I cradle the weight of the mannequin as if  
she's a familiar part of me.

'Can I have time alone with her?'

'Of course.'

The team leave the emergency department in  
quiet respect. Superman and the non-participating  
observers follow, except for Kindly Nurse, leaving  
me to sway in grief with my dead baby. She stays  
seated next to me because no mother is ever left  
alone in these circumstances. Sadness is a five.

Once the room is clear, I lay Isabella back on the  
bed, relieved I hit the necessary emotional mark  
and nailed the dialogue but aware my work here is  
not yet done.

'Are you okay?' asks Kindly Nurse. Her hand is  
warm on my back, like a comforting heat pack.

I wipe my tear streaked face. 'I'm okay.'

'Are you sure?'

Give her a smile to prove it. 'Thank you.'

'That was so real.'

'Oh, good. I'm fine, honestly. I'm glad I got my lines  
out in the right order.'

We share a laugh.

'Well, you were so believable. I'm going to debrief  
with the group and I'll see you in the bereavement  
room.'

Sim Tech mimes switching off mic. 'I'll take you  
there now.' Lifts the mannequin. 'I'll get the baby  
ready and bring it to you. I don't know how you did  
that.'

I switch my mic off. 'It's just acting.'

Isabella is wrapped in a soft pink blanket, breathing  
tube removed. Her eyes are closed, her tiny lips  
parted. She lies on a pillow atop my lap. I'm sitting  
in one of four strategically placed chairs in the  
centre of a consulting room, alone. Desk in one  
corner, hospital bed against one wall, a small wash  
basin to my right and a large clock hangs above the  
one way mirror to my left.

I wait.

And wait.

I rehearse my dialogue, mouthing the words  
without feeling. I need to conserve my emotional  
energy.

Knock, knock. It's Sim Tech. 'Mic on.' Gives me a  
thumbs up I return. Kindly Nurse enters the room.  
'How are you?' Sits in a chair nearest to me.

'Great.'

She looks at Isabella and begins to hum calm tones  
as if soothing a baby in discomfort. 'What is your  
husband's name?'

Husband? A moment passes and I realise all of a  
sudden, we are on. Her gentle sounds are for me.  
I take Isabella in my arms and bring the script to

mind. 'Tom.'

'Is Tom on his way?'

I nod. 'He's on his way.' A sob rises from my body.

Knock, knock. A doctor in scrubs, stethoscope looped around her neck, steps into the room, her face the shape of woe. Her red hair is pulled back in a ponytail; fringe and freckles give her a youthful appearance, diminishing her credibility somewhat or I'm getting old. A social worker follows, solemn and composed. Introductions are made and they seek permission to sit. Redhead leans in. 'I can't tell you how sorry we are, Emily.'

I nod. 'Me too. What happened?'

'Do you mean what happened to Isabella or what happened in the emergency department?'

Tick.

'Both.' Redhead remains calm as she explains in plain language the ED procedure and process. She asks if I know what SIDS is and mentions the coroner and an autopsy. Anxiety and confusion are a four.

'Is this my fault? Have I done something wrong?'

'No, of course not. But because the exact cause of SIDS is unknown, we need to exclude other possible reasons for Isabella's death.'

My face is wet with snot and tears. 'I don't want an autopsy.' Look at Kindly Nurse for an ally. 'Don't want to think about that right now.'

She offers tissues. 'You don't have to. It's a conversation for later.'

Guilt is a five. 'Would it have made a difference if I'd got to her sooner?'

'We don't know.'

'Could she have cried and I didn't hear her?'

'No.'

'Did she suffer?'

'No.'

'Should I have done CPR?'

We share a powerless look. The truth is: maybe, yes, we don't know. It's not about delivering the right answer, it's about the delivery. How does your response make me feel?

Social Worker asks if there's family she can notify on my behalf. Do I need food? Water?

'No, I'll wait until Tom gets here.'

We sit in sad silence for some time. It's a peaceful quiet because no one needs to be anywhere else. Isabella occupies a presence, a place in the space. A short life acknowledged.

But of course there's no Tom to wait for and this scenario arrives at a natural conclusion with a gentle explanation of what will happen next with 'handling the child's remains'. I ask if I can have time alone with Isabella and am encouraged to take as much time as I need. Social Worker leaves with Redhead after imparting condolences and offers of help of any kind.

Everyone is so kind. Kindly Nurse stays seated because no mother is ever left alone in these circumstances.

Knock, knock. Sim Tech mimes switching off mic. I do. 'That was intense,' he says and reaches for Isabella. I hold on for a second too long and hand her over.

'Are you okay?' asks Kindly Nurse.

I wipe my tear-smearing hot face. 'I'm okay.' Want to fistbump the air in triumph but give her a hug instead. 'Thank you.'

'Thank you. We've had actors who've misread the brief and overact like pork chops. Boy, could we smell the bacon.' She returns my hug. 'I'll see you in the debrief room.'

Superman, Kindly Nurse and all the doctors and nurses applaud; sore strain in their eyes, hearts ripped a little. This is their daily reality. Babies die. Not all patients can be saved. Doctors and nurses are only human like you and me, doing their best.

I return the applause because simulation acting is not about me. I'm just a vessel of information and emotion the participants draw from. My job is to play for truth. Be present. Be real. The participant's job is to suspend disbelief and go for it. Learn something. We sit around the table and discuss being physically comfortable in silence, sadness and shock. We chat about compassion and empathy, talk about human connection. Doctors often get accused of 'poor bedside manner' – too focused on facts, figures and results. Forget the patient is human.

And because we are vulnerable and before the debrief ends, we take a moment to each tell the group where we are going now, to remind ourselves of our real lives – our place in this life – to shake off today's training. They talk about lunch, returning to work and shopping.

I say, 'I'm going home to hug my teenage sons until they push me away.'

There's an audible sigh of relief.

It's just acting. 🎭

**Anita Smith is an RMIT PWE graduate, winner of the WRAP Synopsis Prize and was awarded the Eleanor Dark Flagship Varuna Residential Fellowship for a fiction application of outstanding quality in 2016.**

# Cheese, Wine & the Perfect Crime

WV member Sandi Wallace treats us to some perfect micro crime.

**C**heese and red wine was a sublime combination. And a crackling log fire radiating its fingers of warmth through a room of wood, stone and iron, perfected the scene

The shiraz had legs – sexy legs. The runs on the inside of the wide-bellied glass drew the eye to the backdrop: a spreading puddle of red on the floor, between the hearth and black sheepskin rug. The texture was thicker, the red more rust-hued, than the wine that dribbled from the prostrate bottle still trembling on the flagstones. Next to the bottle lay a glass, also overturned, both somehow unbroken.

She let a swallow of wine weave its path over her tongue, coat her throat with dark berries and spices, then slide into her depths, leaving her mouth full of black pepper. A nibble from the wedge of bitey cheese merged with the aftertaste of the earthy wine and a unique metallic tang that hung in the air. It gave her a delicious shiver and she savoured it with another sip of wine, then admired the outline of her lips left in scarlet on the rim of her glass. The glass would leave with her, of course.

She laughed. The sound belonged in a smoky jazz club. The fire popped, reminiscent of champagne corks and celebrations. Oh, he had made it dead easy for her. His fantasy of the noir woman – tight-belted trench coat, scarlet lipstick and stilettos, black suspenders and flimsy underwear – gave her the means for the perfect crime to match the cheese and wine. Black leather driving gloves, a trilby hat angled across her face and dark, Audrey Hepburn sunglasses, surprised him, thrilled him... and afforded her the flawless disguise.

The disguise wasn't entirely necessary because she had been meticulous in arranging their secret rendezvous, equally so in ensuring there were no witnesses. But the wig, coat and rest of the costume also eliminated any chance of DNA or fingerprint transfer. There would be no links back to her.

In fact, there would be nothing to show anyone else had been in the cottage when he died.

Her long eyelashes fluttered, as she took another mouthful of the sinfully good wine and reflected. She had known what he couldn't resist in wine, woman and song. Just as she had memorised the exact layout of the cottage, well before she'd stepped one red-toed shoe inside it tonight. Chloe, her beautiful, naïve, baby sister, had shared everything from the moment she'd fallen in love with this debonair man, right up to when he'd broken her heart and taken her will to live.

The seven months since Chloe had ended her life, afforded time to grieve and time to plot the perfect revenge.

The man was clueless to being played, right up to the denouement. They were in a clinch, chest to breast, eyes locked, swaying and dipping to 'Femme Fatale' by Nico, Reed and Cale. Timed with the line about playing him for a fool, she had tucked her ankle around his, grasped his suit lapel and flipped. His eyes had widened with realisation.

Momentum. The strength in her shapely calf and thigh. The angle of his fall if she thrust him away. The jagged edges on the stone fireplace...

He was at her mercy. She had whispered, 'This is for Chloe' and propelled him at the stone with just enough force to achieve her aim.

In keeping with the ultimate femme fatale – the killer woman – from his precious noir classics, she tipped back her glass, letting the last drips of delicious wine caress her senses, while revelling in her mission accomplished.

Death by accident, it really was the perfect crime. ⑩

**Sandi Wallace's debut rural crime thriller 'Tell Me Why' won the 2015 Davitt Award Readers' Choice and was also shortlisted for the 2015 Davitt Award Best Debut. The sequel, 'Dead Again', will be out April 2017. [www.sandiwallace.com](http://www.sandiwallace.com).**

# Flight

WV member Peter Symons writes a touching story about a woman struggling for connection.

The man sitting at the table next to Emily was looking up at the television mounted to the wall. The football was on. Emily didn't know a great deal about football but she knew enough to know that it was a game between Essendon and Collingwood.

In front of Emily, on the table, sat the cappuccino she had ordered. It was beginning to go cold. She didn't particularly like coffee, but she knew to never order tea at a café as it was inevitably just a cup of tepid water with a teabag dumped in it. She found coffee easier to drink if she added a lot of sugar to it. She had already stirred in two teaspoons of sugar but she still couldn't bring herself to drink it.

The man was mouthing something to himself as he watched the television. Emily leaned forward a little to hear. Something like 'Come on...' He was barracking for one of the teams. She knew that if she listened for long enough, she could find out who he was supporting. Her fingers wrapped themselves tightly around each other as she listened.

'Maggies!' the man said. 'Come on!' Collingwood, she thought.

Emily took a deep breath, then coughed a short, dry cough. 'Um,' she said, 'They're going well.' She paused. 'Collingwood, I mean'. Emily stopped for a moment. He looked a little older than her and wore a suit without a tie. His hair short and neat. Emily coughed again, a little louder. 'Collingwood...' The man turned and looked at her. 'What?' Emily looked quickly down at her coffee, took a sip and stared into her cup. The man turned back to the television, folded his arms, shook his head a little. 'Um... Collingwood is ahead...'

The man didn't reply and kept his eyes on the television. Emily could feel the embarrassment twist inside her. The longer she sat, the more it tightened. She wrapped her fingers around her coffee. She wondered whether she was breathing.

In one movement, she stood and hurried out of the café, half-running back to her flat across the street. She climbed the stairs and shut the door behind her.

Emily leant on the back of the door. Her body loosened and she breathed deeply. Her hands were flat against the door and she felt the strength of the wood. She breathed again, feeling her chest move up and down. Eventually she slowed. 'Tea', she thought.

Her kitchen was small and the kettle stood crowded against the dish rack. As Emily filled the kettle and switched it on, she heard a knock on the door. Rachel. Her sister. She said she would look after her sister's boy today. Just half an hour or so her sister said. She'd forgotten. She had forgotten this important thing. Stupid!

Smoothing back her hair she walked across the living room to the door. Another knock. Her sister stood in the empty door frame, right hand on the head of a boy. She spoke quickly and was a little out of breath. 'Oh thank you so much! I'm so sorry, but I had no choice. He'll be fine, he's got games, pencils, books. He'll be fine.' She gave the boy a little push and he stumbled into the room. In the next moment she was gone, her footsteps echoing as she hurried back down the stairs. The boy stood looking up at Emily. He was carrying a Ben-10 backpack with both hands and swinging it left and right a little. Emily felt the silence between them. Eventually she said, 'Alexander'.

Alexander said nothing and continued to stare at her, his bag now banging against his legs. 'A drink?' Emily thought that tea would probably be the wrong thing to give a six-year-old boy. 'Juice? Orange juice?' She hoped she had some juice left in the fridge.

'Yes, please.' Alexander mumbled.

Emily sighed a little. Juice was a start. 'Yes, please. Would you like to sit here? There's a window.'

Emily had her small dining table flush against the window where she could look into the street. On it were newspapers, a teapot and several mugs, along with her open journal and a few biros. She liked to sit here after her work, with the window open. She would sit and write in her journal and watch the people in the street below. She liked the breeze and to listen to the noises coming in from outside.

'You could draw here.' Emily pushed the things on the table to the side to make a space. She quickly closed her journal and put it on a chair.

Alexander slowly walked to the table and sat on the chair Emily had pulled out for him. He put his backpack on his lap and unzipped it.

'Juice. A drink.' Emily pushed back her hair again. In the kitchen the kettle was whistling. She usually found a little solace in the sound of the kettle. Opening the fridge she relaxed a little when she saw the half empty bottle of orange juice.

When Emily returned with a glass, Alexander was bent over something at the table. His cheeks still had that round face toddlers have and his brown hair was a little long and fell over his eyes as he worked. Not for the first time, Emily thought that the little boy looked a little like her. Her sister was ten years younger than her, a lawyer and married.

'What are you doing, Alexander?' She saw he was playing with a plain piece of white paper, folding it. 'Making a plane. I'll show you.' Alexander kept his eyes down on the paper as he spoke. 'A plane.' She pushed her hair back.

After a few moments of twisting and folding the paper, Alexander held up a paper plane. 'See? It really works.' He threw it and it floated gently across the room, landing next to the front door.

Alexander ran across the room and picked up the plane. He threw it again and it landed on the table. He giggled as he ran across to the table. He grabbed the plane again. This time it landed on the hat stand next to the door. Alexander threw it again and it glided past Emily. Instinctively, she reached out and caught it.

'Fly it!' Alexander was jumping up and down. 'Throw it, Auntie Emily. Throw it!'

Emily hesitated. She couldn't remember if she had ever thrown a paper plane. Lifting it up to her eye level, she jabbed the plane into the air. It flew straight and then took a sudden dip to the right. 'That was good,' said Alexander. 'My turn again.'

Emily watched as this little human ran back and forth playing with his paper plane. His hair was dark like her sister's and he had a slightly crooked nose like hers. So much energy in such a tiny thing! Alexander stopped after a few minutes. With a sudden change of energy, he sat at his table, put the plane down and took a colouring book out of his backpack.

'Why aren't you flying your plane?'

Alexander shrugged his shoulders, pulled out a red pencil and began to colour something in.

'It's a nice plane.' Emily sat opposite her nephew at the table. Her hands wanted to reach out and stroke his hair, pull him close to her. She placed them carefully in her lap. 'What are you colouring?'

Alexander tilted his head in a comical impersonation of an academic making a serious point. 'A robot. It's a red robot.'

'A red robot.' Emily felt her hands twist and turn. 'Auntie Emily.' Alexander was scribbling hard with the pencil as he spoke.

'Yes?'

'Why do you always repeat things I say?'

Emily laughed. A choking, embarrassed laugh. 'I don't.'

'You do. I heard you.'

'I don't!' She said this with anger. A curt two syllables, like a petulant girl in trouble at school.

Alexander frowned a little and scribbled hard with his pencil. He muttered something. Emily's eyes rested on the plane sitting between her and Alexander. She picked it up, looking at it carefully. She noticed there was a small face drawn on the side of the plane and, with large childish letters, was written 'MLY'. She looked again at Alexander whose little face was taut with concentration. The fringe of his dark hair fell over his eyes, and Alexander moved it aside with his left hand as he kept drawing with his right. She felt bad about shouting and thought perhaps she should apologise.

There was a knock at the door. Relieved, Emily picked herself up to answer it. Rachel stood in the doorway. Her hair was still perfect and she looked at Emily expectantly. 'Thanks, thanks so much. Where is he? I've got to go. Got to get home.'

Alexander ran up to his mother, hugging her knees. 'We made planes!' he said.

'Did you?' Rachel looked at Emily, turning her head. 'Really? That was good.'

Emily stuttered. 'It was him. Alexander. Not me, really.'

'Well, that's good.' Rachel put her hand on Emily's shoulder and gave it a rub. 'Really good.'

Rachel picked Alexander up and, with her other hand, took his backpack. 'Thanks so much for looking after him. Gotta go.'

And then Rachel and Alexander were gone.

Once again there was an empty rectangle where her sister had stood. As Emily closed the door, it filled the empty space. She sat down at the table where her nephew had made his plane. It was still lying on the table. Emily picked it up and turned it over. She looked again at the face Alexander drew and the 'MLY'. She picked up a pen that was lying on the table and began to doodle on the plane. Round in circles, more and more, quicker and quicker. As she wrote, she saw her hand form the words 'I HATE HER! I HATE HER!'

Horried, Emily threw the plane out of the window. She saw it float down and land outside the door of

the café. Not thinking or breathing, Emily ran down the steps of her flat and across the road.

The plane was lying on the street just outside of the door of the café. She bent down quickly to pick it up but as she reached out she noticed someone crouching beside her. The man. The football man from before. He smiled at her. 'Is this your plane?' He half-chuckled as he handed it to her.

Frozen for the smallest of moments, Emily looked into the man's face. It was tanned and his smile revealed deep wrinkles around his eyes. She grabbed the plane from him and, without knowing how, found herself back in her living room.

'Oh God. Oh God, oh God!' Emily sat on the chair next to her dining table, rocking up and down. Up and down. 'Oh God.' She felt every emotion connected with humiliation and fear burn through her body. She sat and she let herself feel it. She allowed the awfulness of it all fill her up.

Eventually she stopped moving and sat still on the chair. She did not think she could ever leave her flat again. She could not imagine breathing again, eating again, doing anything again. She looked at

her hands. In her right, the plane was a pulpy mess. Wet. She did not realise she had been crying.

She slowly walked across to her little kitchen, pressed her foot on the pedal which opened the bin and wiped her hand clean of the destroyed plane. Still wiping her hands, she fell into the seat Alexander had sat in and slowly raised her head to look out of the window. The football man was still standing outside the door of the café. His head moved up a little and looked at Emily. Emily saw him raise his arm and wave his hand.

Emily looked at him. She felt her right hand move and, impossibly, she gently waved back. 

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**Peter Symons is a teacher, writer and freelance editor. He has been published in 'Overland', 'Island', 'Pendulum Papers' and 'The Victorian Writer'. He has also published a community history.**

# Dining at the Big Table

WV member Meg Dunley writes about the frustrations of being an emerging writer.

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**A**n imposter. That's what I feel like as I try to feel my way into the writing world. I wonder if there ever is a time that a writer truly feels like a writer and has stopped looking at the grownups eating at the table wondering when they will be asked to join. It's an awkward space as everyone knows that they will never be asked to join, it is going to be up to them to put their foot forward and step up to the table dragging their chair with them. The risk is that you try to push in when you are not properly formed. But who tells you when you are properly formed? Are we all waiting for that suggestion, the request, for someone to whisper in our ear that now is the time, grab your chair and pull it up?

I assume the position of the writer. I have a notebook, or a laptop in front of me. I pile up books, books that have been recommended by brilliant writers, books with prestigious prizes.

I pour through them, struggle over the new words, wind my way through the circuitous sentences and paragraphs. I feel intelligent even though I may have missed the point, gotten lost in the lyricity of the writing. I plough through them while at the same time adding to the tower on my bedside table that threatens to fall and crush me in my sleep.

I practise writing, reminding myself that it doesn't matter what I am writing, as long as I just write. And write. And write. I write hundreds of three-page stories in my notebook that all begin with some thread of the day, or something that has just caught my attention, and wonder if there is any point to any of them.

I think about the manuscript that sits dormant on my usb. Is it ageing? Has it passed its prime? Is leaving it in my usb the equivalent to leaving it in the bottom drawer, and would it be best to just

leave it there? If it was worth dragging it out wouldn't someone who knows it ask me why I'm doing nothing with it? I convince myself that it best to leave it there and that maybe by doing that it enables me to write a ripper of a second. But I don't have a starting point.

I scan the world for a seed, something to germinate in my brain into a story worth telling. It feels like every story has been told before.

I meet with other writers, hang out with them in the hope that their success will rub off on me, that their storytelling abilities will remind me of what I used to feel so capable of doing.

I gravitate to the Moat, the Wheelers Centre, the State Library, then wonder if I am just a wolf in sheep's clothing.

My writing friends are kicking goals, winning awards, publishing deals and residencies. I am pleased for them, and ashamed of my own inabilities. Am I trying too hard? Is it becoming a forced thing?

Submission deadlines come and go like the waves. I watch them thinking that I will put myself out there, go for a ride and surf it in. Instead I just watch and applaud those who ride the wave the full distance. They worked for it, they deserve the applause. Fear stops me. Next one, I say, I'll catch the next one. I set up an intricate spreadsheet of prizes, residencies and submissions dates, then highlight the row and hide it from view as the dates pass me by. Next one, I say. Next one.

I resolve that my life is just too complicated now, and that my time will come. Real things are happening that require my attention and fiction seems so contrived when compared with my reality. I'm reminded that we should write what we know, but who wants to read about the mundanities of mothering three

boys, and managing an anorexic and angry adolescent.

I start endless stories, but there is always an angry and resentful mother who is wistful of a different life. There is always some too-skinny teen that is lost to her.

The best stories come in the shower when there is no paper to write on, no laptop to type on. They get lost on my towel before I have my clothes on. More stories come as I drive backwards and forwards to hospital appointments, and are shredded as I park the car.

Your time will come, my friends assure me.

My notebook assures me, feeds my needy side. The book thickens as I routinely ink three pages a day. I wonder if it matters whether the words make sense, or whether I could just write the same word over and over again. Would it still satisfy me when I flick through the pages hearing them crinkle?

I hang my hope on a number of pegs: a book I stumble on when clearing away debris in the house – that lists the people of the First Fleet, which includes my ancestor Ann Sandlin; a story of women struggling to accept the changes in their lives; an anorexic boy. I write around them. I imagine their lives. I know at some stage it will stop feeling so contrived, but I wonder when I will feel like I am dining at the big table.

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**Meg Dunley is writing her first novel as well as wrangling her teenage boys, working at the local high school and finishing her studies at RMIT in Professional Writing and Editing.**

# Milestones

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**Jacinta Halloran's** latest novel, 'The Science of Appearances', a coming-of-age story of twin siblings, has just been published by Scribe Publications.

**Tru S Dowling's** poem won the Vox Bendigo Fyffe Prize, and was printed in a zine commissioned for the Bendigo Writers Festival, 2016. A poem was also published in 'Shots from the Chamber' anthology. She performed 'Aches' in Word Jazz for the Castlemaine Jazz Festival, 2016. Other poems were part of the Bendigo Fringe Festival's 'ekphrastic' exhibition, Co.lab, and Cartel 2016. Poems were commended for Words in Winter contemporary poetry comp and 'Visible Ink'.

**Bronwyn Clifton's** YA novella 'The Devil's Pinch' focuses on domestic violence and addiction. The story follows a young couple who come from regional Victoria and are trying to make lives for themselves in the city. But Jed has secrets. He hits Beth and constantly deceives her. Will he overcome his inner demons or become yet another statistic? The book is available on Amazon and Kindle. While self-published, the writer is keen to find a publisher to support this project as the topics are currently hot.  
[www.amazon.com/Devils-Pinch-exploration-addiction-domestic/dp/1536936839/](http://www.amazon.com/Devils-Pinch-exploration-addiction-domestic/dp/1536936839/)

**Lee Kofman** had her new book, the anthology 'Rebellious Daughters', which she co-edited with Maria Katsonis, released in August. Her short memoir appeared in 'The Big Issue' in July.

**Charles Beagley's** latest book 'Sherwood Forest Man' is an unusual crime mystery about the discovery of a skeleton in the forest that turns out to be much older than first thought. Available now on Amazon.

**Kit Fennessy's** 'The Hidden People' – a rollercoaster adventure novel (in which a New York academic is kidnapped by Iceland's Huldafólk) – has been commercially released. Published by Blue Vapours Publishing, it is now available at all Dymocks stores and Readings Books. For more info visit: [www.bluevapours.com](http://www.bluevapours.com).

**Karen McKnight** has been awarded the inaugural 'Overland' Writers Residency, which this year focused on women writers who are the sole primary carers of one or more children. McKnight will have 'flexible use' of a private office at Overland's offices, a weekly stipend (totalling \$6000); and a mentorship with Melbourne writer Alison Croggon.

**Keren Heenan** has won the 2016 Alan Marshall Award (Open section) and also has a story in the forthcoming Forty South anthology to be launched in Hobart August 20th. She also had a story which was a 'Notable Contender' in the Bristol Prize.

**Lynn Smailes** was shortlisted for the 2016 Fish Memoir Prize. She collaborated with Tony Atkinson to write his life story, 'A Prescribed Life', which was published by Affirm Press in June.

**Michelle Scott Tucker's** biography of Anglo-Australian settler and pioneer Elizabeth Macarthur has been acquired by Text Publishing, for publication in 2018.

# Classifieds

## Writing Mentor and Freelance Editor

Are you seeking help with your writing project? Denise Taylor is an experienced writer with teaching and editing/proofreading qualifications. Her continuing studies enable her to keep up to date with current trends in most writing genres and the arts. Denise offers guidance and editing/proofreading for inexperienced and seasoned writers. You are welcome to submit an overview of your writing needs to [www.denisemtaylor.com.au/contact/](http://www.denisemtaylor.com.au/contact/) or call Denise for a chat on 0438 113 331.

## About Kids Books: Manuscripts Wanted

About Kids Books, an Australian children's imprint, (<http://www.aboutkidsbooks.com>) is seeking exceptional manuscripts for readers 8 to 12 years. All manuscripts acknowledged and a quick turn-around assured.

## Buzz Words

Buzz Words is the premier online magazine for those in the Australian children's book industry. Find up-to-date markets, opportunities,

competitions and much more. Contact [dibates@outlook.com](mailto:dibates@outlook.com) for a free, sample issue.

## Doing Us Slowly, What's Happened to the Australian Voluntary Euthanasia debate?

Three-quarters of Australians have consistently said we want law reform on the issue. Yet in her exploration of the Australian VE 'debate', Deb Campbell shows how those we think of as supporting reform are actually seeking to replace priests with doctors as our new 'moral gatekeepers' and explores the responsibilities we all have – including those politicians who seek to keep the issue in the too hard basket. [www.doingusslowly.com.au](http://www.doingusslowly.com.au).

## Diversity in Children's Literature

'In My World' is a new book that puts diversity front and centre for children aged seven-plus. It features two chapter books: 'In the Basketball Tree', and 'Wheels of Fire'. Author Carole Lander has a history of writing about diversity with her previous book 'Little People Big Lives' and regular articles in 'Link Disability Magazine'. [www.checkword.com.au](http://www.checkword.com.au).

# Member benefits

- › Discounts on courses, manuscript assessments, mentorships and writer's studios
- › 'The Victorian Writer' magazine delivered straight to your door
- › Weekly enews filled with writing news, events and opportunities
- › Up to three free listings a year in 'The Victorian Writer' enews
- › Discounts on books for sale on the craft and business of writing
- › Information, advice and guidance from the Writers Victoria team
- › Access to the Writers Victoria library on level 3 of The Wheeler Centre (10am to 5pm weekdays), including a great collection of writing-related reference books, literary magazines, journals, trade weeklies and more
- › Access to a place to write in our library, writer's studios or meeting rooms.
- › Representation and advocacy on issues affecting Victorian writers

[writersvictoria.org.au/membership](http://writersvictoria.org.au/membership)

WRITERS  
VICTORIA

All about writers

# Competitions and Opportunities

Soon you will be able to log in to a special members only section of [writersvictoria.org.au](http://writersvictoria.org.au) to view the details of ALL the competitions and opportunities we know about, not just the ones we can fit on the page. Stay tuned for more details.

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## **Joseph Furphy Commemorative Literary Prize**

Short story and poetry writing competition. Open, youth and junior sections. All entries must be accompanied by an entry form. \$5 entry fee for each entry in open sections. More info at [www.gvlibraries.com](http://www.gvlibraries.com) or phone Jan Sutton at Goulburn Valley Libraries Administration on 1300 374 765.

Closes Fri 14 Oct

## **2016 Deborah Cass Prize**

Victorian early career writers of migrant background are invited to apply for the 2016 Deborah Cass prize.

Now in its second year, the prize is in the memory of Deborah Cass. With generous support from family and friends, this prize aims to help someone outside the mainstream find a voice for themselves.

Christos Tsolkias, Alice Pung and Tony Ayres have agreed to judge the award again in 2016. The winning writer will receive a cash prize of \$3000 plus a three-month mentorship with an established writer. The winning manuscript will be presented to a publisher. <https://deborahzcass.org/>

Closes Mon 17 Oct

## **The Horne Prize**

Aesop and 'The Saturday Paper' are pleased to present a major new essay award, The Horne Prize, valued at \$15,000. It will be awarded in late December for an essay of up to 3000 words on 'Australian life'.

<http://thehorneprize.com.au/>

Closes Mon 31 Oct

## **Bisexual Alliance Victoria**

**- call out for submissions**  
Bisexual Alliance Victoria is seeking stories (fiction and non fiction) from individuals, on the positive aspects of bisexuality for our website. We refer to bisexuality as attraction to more than one gender; this includes people who use alternative labels or no labels. Please submit your stories/questions to [info@bi-alliance.org](mailto:info@bi-alliance.org).

Closes Mon 31 Oct

## **Ron Pretty Poetry Prize**

**2016 - date extended**

New closing date: Tue 22 Nov.  
First Prize: \$5000; Second Prize: \$1500; Third Prize: \$750. Entry fee: \$25 first poem; \$10 each subsequent poem. Online submissions only: <http://fiveislandspress.com/ron-pretty-poetry-prize>

Closes Tue 22 Nov

## **2016 Rhonda Jankovic Literary Awards**

The 2016 Rhonda Jankovic Literary Awards are named in honour of the late Rhonda Jankovic, highly respected social justice advocate and former host of Radio 3CR poetry program 'Spoken Word'. The Awards comprise two sections: Poetry 1st Prize \$600, Judge: Claire Gaskin; Short Story 1st Prize \$600, Judge: Helen Cerne. Theme: Social Justice. Poems to 50 lines, Stories to 2500 words. No limit to number of entries. Entry fee \$5 per poem or story entered.

For more info, including entry conditions and form, email [rhondajls@westnet.com.au](mailto:rhondajls@westnet.com.au)

Closes Fri 25 Nov

## **Hazel Rowley Literary Fellowship**

The Hazel Rowley Literary Fellowship supports Australian writers of biography, and extends to include a writer who is working on an aspect of cultural or social history. The Fellowship awards \$10,000 to assist with travel and research.

Applications now open at [writersvictoria.org.au](http://writersvictoria.org.au)

# Workshops and Courses

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

## **(More) Hard Bits in Literary Non-Fiction** with [Maria Tumarkin](#)

The hard bits in literary non-fiction are also the most exciting if you can get them right. In this three-parter, dig deep into the ways autobiographical material can be used to produce writing that goes well beyond the personal and consider how non-fiction can act as a catalyst for important public conversations.

When: Sat 8 Oct, 5 Nov,  
3 Dec, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$360/\$390  
Non-member price: \$540  
Level: Emerging

## **Interview Techniques for Non-Fiction Writers** with [Tom Doig](#)

Ever wondered how some writers get their interview subjects to tell the most candid, outrageous and profound stories? Discuss the tricks of the recorded-conversation trade, giving you practical skills to improve your interviews.

When: Sat 9 Oct, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$120/\$130  
Non-member price: \$180  
Level: Early and emerging

## **Novella: The Perfect Form of Prose Fiction** with [AS Patric](#)

Study craft and technique, character development and narrative function, voice and tone, ideas and aesthetics specific to the novella, with a focus on how to deploy your skills practically.

When: Sun 16 Oct, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$120/\$130  
Non-member price: \$180  
Level: Early and emerging

## **Intro to Memoir** with [Dmetri Kakmi](#)

Unlike autobiography, which moves from birth to fame, memoir narrows the lens to a specific period in time – a time that was unusually vivid or that was framed by a significant event. Tap into that period and find the story within the story of your life.

When: Sat 22, Sun 23 Oct,  
10am-4pm  
Member price: \$240/\$260  
Non-member price: \$360  
Level: Early

## **YA (Advanced)** with [Ellie Marney](#)

Writing for teenagers is not about dumbing down fiction meant for adult readers. Investigate the stories inside you that are right for a teenage audience, explore what it means to have an authentic voice and character journey, examine issues of diversity and gatekeepers, and think forward to markets and publication.

When: Sat 5, Sun 6 Nov,  
10am-4pm  
Member price: \$240/\$260  
Non-member price: \$360  
Level: Emerging and established

## **Novel Writing** with [Olga Lorenzo](#)

Explore the conventions of novel writing and analyse structure. Look at the crucial beginnings of novels and

learn how to seduce the reader and create narrative tension. Examine how the beginning relates to the middle and ending, and what makes a satisfying ending, as well as the nexus between plot and character arc.

When: Mon 7, 14, 21, 28  
Nov, 5.30-8.30pm  
Member price: \$260/\$280  
Non-member price: \$380  
Level: Emerging

## **Drawing a Joke: Gag Cartoon-Making 101** with [Oslo Davis](#)

A fun and practical workshop for adults who'd love to draw 'New Yorker'-style cartoons. Learn what it takes to make a cartoon funny and learn specific techniques and skills needed to come up with your own.

When: Sun 20 Nov, 10am-1pm  
Member price: \$70/\$80  
Non-member price: \$110  
Level: Early and emerging

## **Novel Writing: Taming the Beast** with [Sonia Orchard](#)

OK, so you've finally finished your first draft (or maybe you're stuck somewhere in the middle). What now? Learn how to tame that unwieldy beast and figure out the best path forward.

When: Sat 26 Nov, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$120/\$130  
Non-member price: \$180  
Level: Emerging

## Salons

Come and celebrate your milestones and delight in conversation with fellow writers. The Salon is FREE but bookings are essential. Join us as we invoke the grand tradition of literary salons (without the pretence).

### The Salon Does Subscriber-thon

During our month of Subscriber-thon, the theme for this salon is The Short... short fiction, non-fiction, poetry, extracts... all standalone pieces no longer than four minutes. Come hear writers at all stages read short pieces that intrigue and entice.

When: Tue 11 Oct  
6.15pm-8pm  
Free event

### The Salon Does 2017

Join us for a sneak preview of the literary goodies we'll have coming up for you in the new year.

When: Tue 6 Dec,  
6.15pm-8pm  
Free event

## Writing for Children

### Intro to Picture Books with Jane Godwin

In this interactive and informative workshop, learn more about the industry, explore different ways to build a strong story and become aware of common pitfalls.

When: Sat 15 Oct, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$120/\$130  
Non-member price: \$180  
Level: Early

### Intro to Chapter Books with Archie Fusillo

Through practical tasks and activities, get a framework for several key aspects of writing

chapter books for a young audience. Get professional insights and try your hand at writing exercises on producing work for younger readers.

When: Sun 16 Oct, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$120/\$130  
Non-member price: \$180  
Level: Early

## Industry

### How to Publish Your Poetry with Jacinta Le Plastrier

So you want to get your poetry out there? Get an insight into publication opportunities – journals, publishers, self-publishing, submission processes, dos-and-don'ts. Presented with Australian Poetry.

When: Mon 17 Oct,  
6.30-7.30pm  
Member price: Free  
Non-member price: \$15  
Level: All

### Following Your Writing Dreams with WV Staff and the Seniors Festival

A discussion for seniors about how to start writing, keep writing and all the supports available for different writing projects.

When: Thu 20 Oct,  
10.30am-midday  
Free event but bookings essential  
Level: Early

### Q&A Day with WV Staff

The WV team will be on hand to answer your burning questions about writing or publishing.

When: Tue 8 Nov,  
5.30-7.30pm  
Free, but bookings essential  
Level: All

### Author Rights and Wrongs with Alex Adsett

A fast and furious overview of Australian copyright, the ins and outs of a standard publishing contract, how and what to negotiate when dealing with a publisher, some of the sneaky traps to watch out for, and more.

When: Sun 13 Nov, 10am-1pm  
Member price: \$70/\$80  
Non-member price: \$110  
Level: All

### Pitching with Melanie Ostell

At long last your finished manuscript is ready to be seen by prospective publishers. How can you interest them to take a look at it? A carefully crafted pitch. A pitch is not a synopsis, but a good synopsis will help your pitch. This course covers both.

When: Sat 19, 26  
Nov, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$240/\$260  
Non-member price: \$360  
Level: Emerging and established

## Special Events

### WriteSpace Retreat

Ever wondered what it would be like to dedicate a whole day to writing? WriteSpace Retreat is a metropolitan retreat for you to escape to. Set up your desk and the WriteSpace team will look after you with coffee, tea, morning tea, lunch and snacks while you work. Retreats are for WV members only.

When: Sun 6 Nov  
9am-4.30pm  
Member price: \$70/\$80  
Level: All

## Indigenous Language Intensive

with [Bruce Pascoe](#) and [Koorie Heritage Trust](#)

Join us for this unique two-day Indigenous Language Intensive to learn how to write about Aboriginal language, stories and landscapes in a culturally appropriate way.

When: Thu 24, 9.15am-4pm,  
Fri 25 Nov, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$260/\$280  
Non-member price: \$380  
Level: Emerging

## How to Write...

### About Disability

with [Fiona Tuomy](#) and [Kate Larsen](#)

Have a conversation, not a checklist. Learn about the Social Model of Disability, talk about best-practice, language, advocacy and power. Supported by the Write-ability program. This event is for members of Writers Victoria or the Write-ability program only.

When: Tue 6 Dec, 2-4pm  
Free event  
Level: All

## Digital

### Webinar: The Freelance Life

with [Jackey Coyle](#)

How do you sustain your writing practice and make a living? Some writers teach, run workshops or hold down a job. Others speak, edit, and write copy, articles or corporate content. Design your writing life with the tools to plan, work smarter, keep the books, maximise tax deductions and run your micro-business.

When: Tue 25 Oct, 6-7pm  
Where: Online  
Member price: \$20/\$25  
Non-member price: \$40  
Level: Emerging and established

## Regional and Greater Melbourne

### Short Fiction (Diamond Creek)

with [Arnold Zable](#)

You have a story to tell, or ideas for stories. Taken from your own life, or what you've observed in others. What's the best way to tell the story? Explore the evolution of the short story, and its major forms. Examine how to distinguish ideas that are better suited to short fiction, as opposed to the novel or memoir.

When: Fri 4 Nov, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$80/\$70  
Non-member price: \$120  
Level: Early and emerging

### Fact or Fiction? (Clunes)

with [Andrew Masterson](#)

Research is essential for non-fiction, and often necessary for novels. But how can you use reliable research without weighing down your writing? Learn good research habits for writers and how to fine-tune your personal bullshit detector. Explore how to incorporate and acknowledge research in ways that don't cramp your style.

When: Sat 19 Nov, 10am-4pm  
WV & CC Member price: \$80/\$70  
Non-member price: \$120  
Level: Early and emerging

## Writers on Wednesdays

### Editing Your Own Work

with [Paddy O'Reilly](#)

Take your first draft to the next level. Examine the core of the work, structure and pace, language and voice. Learn techniques for stepping away from your work to get a clearer view. Participants are encouraged to bring a laptop or manuscript to work from, if possible.

When: Wed 26 Oct, 6-7.30pm  
Member price: \$30/\$35  
Non-member price: \$50  
Level: All

### Motivation

with [Catherine Deveny](#)

This workshop will focus on the three things writers struggle with, and how to overcome them, every time.

When: Wed 30 Nov, 6pm-7.30pm  
Member price: \$30/\$35  
Non-member price: \$50  
Level: All

# Membership Form

To renew  
online, visit  
[bit.ly/1TgVUxX](http://bit.ly/1TgVUxX)

WRITERS  
VICTORIA

Name  Membership number (if applicable)

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

Age (optional)  Under 18  18–25  26–34  35–44  45–54  55–64  65+

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  
 Childrens  Graphic novels  Poetry  Speculative fiction  
 Copywriting  Journalism  Popular fiction  Travel  
Other

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

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

Tax deductible donation \$  Card number  M M / Y Y

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>

# Writers Victoria Subscriber-thon

Join or renew in October for your chance to win loads of writerly prizes!

[writersvictoria.org.au](http://writersvictoria.org.au)

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All about writers



STAY  
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