

Writers on Travel

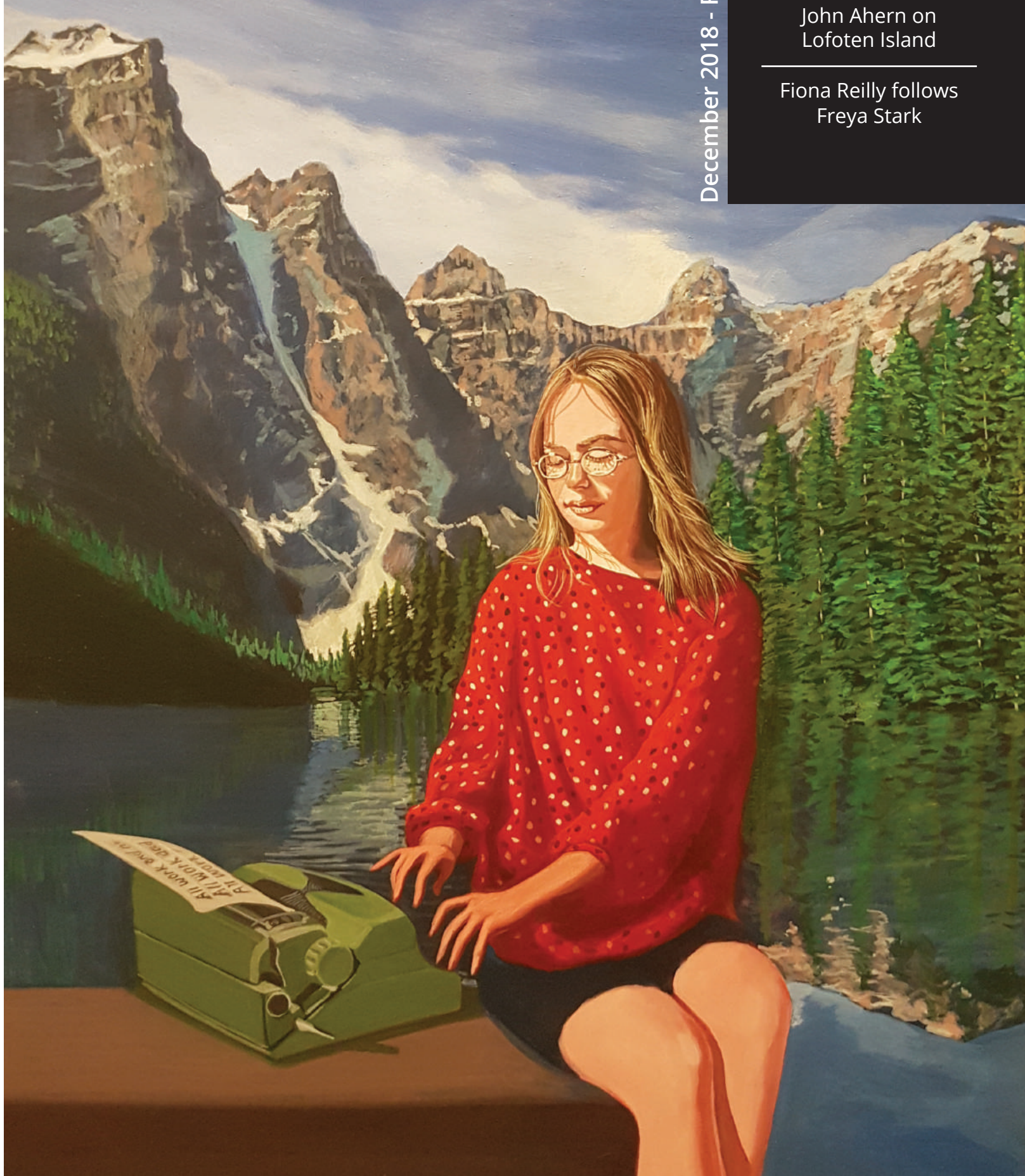
[WQ]

ISSUE 263

December 2018 - February 2019

John Ahern on
Lofoten Island

Fiona Reilly follows
Freya Stark



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PUBLISHED BY
W QUEENSLAND
WRITERS
CENTRE

ISSUE 263

December 2018 - February 2019

ISSN 1444-2922

About WQ

WQ is the quarterly publication of the Queensland Writers Centre. It is not just a magazine for Queensland writers – it examines issues and topics relevant to writing and publishing in Australia and around the world. It also publishes member milestones and lists of workshops and events, competitions and opportunities.

The WQ you get in your mailbox or inbox seasonally should be read in tandem with the magazine's online counterpart:

qldwriters.org.au/magazine

Editorial and production

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Paradigm Print Media

Printing

Submissions

Members can submit Milestones or details of Events or Competitions and Opportunities, or pitch articles for WQ, by emailing us at

editor@qldwriters.org.au

QWC reserves the right to edit all submissions with regard to content and word length.

Advertising

Advertising rates, deadlines and dimensions and other information on how to advertise in WQ is available at qldwriters.org.au/advertise. For advertising inquiries please contact Sandra Makaresz at:

editor@qldwriters.org.au

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QWC is the leading provider of specialised services to the writing community in Queensland. Through its annual programs, QWC promotes creative and professional development of writers and advances the recognition of Queensland writers and writing locally, nationally and internationally. qldwriters.org.au

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GUEST ARTIST

Anna Di Mezza

Anna Di Mezza is a Surrealist painter from the Blue Mountains NSW. She has a background in Graphic Design and has worked for Walt Disney Television animation as an assistant animator for ten years.

She has spent the past three years focussing on painting and has shown her work in local exhibitions in NSW. Her work is often seen as an analysis of today's social, psychological and sometimes political issues (ie: climate change) set within an historical context. While these paintings capture these topics, many of her works seem to straddle a fine line between humour and horror.

As the anonymous street artist Banksy has said "Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable". A quote that Anna wholeheartedly agrees with.

Instagram: annadimezza_art Website: <https://annadimezza.wixsite.com/mysite>

ISSUE 263 [WQ]



Editorial

Sandra Makaresz

Welcome to the final edition of WQ for 2018. With the holiday season almost here, many of us will be looking forward to travel plans made many months ago or setting off on impromptu summer getaways. Perhaps you'll finally find time to put pen to paper and finish a novel or short story – or indulge a dream of yourself as a travel writer exploring the world and sharing your unique experiences. However you spend your summer, I hope this edition will inspire, inform and entertain you.

WQ is made for members and I hope it continues to grow and reflect who you are and inspire the writer within you. In selecting works for this edition, I realised I met two of the writers included when we were participants in the very first Year of the Novel. The amazing Kris Olsson took us through the course and we made life-long friendships as an unexpected bonus. I encourage everyone to get involved, to take courses, to reach out to other members. You never know who you'll meet, how they will affect your travels through life, or the writing opportunities that will arise through these connections.

An excellent example of this is Pamela Tonkins, whose travel writing appears in this issue. Pamela's writing first came to our attention when she recently participated in a writing session with QWC. I think she's done a wonderful job and I'm so happy Lori-Jay invited her to contribute.

Happy reading.

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Queensland Writers Centre is supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland and is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Flying Back to Your Heart

for Yi-Ching, across the brine

In 1998, I was a guest of the Austin International Poetry Festival, and after another few weeks of touring and readings around Texas (and California), I flew home to my then partner in Brisbane.

I composed this villanelle on the flight back. Despite its antiquity (last millennium!), it has not been published before. It also reminds me of a grand poetic mateship formed with the Festival's director, Frank Pool, with whom I'll soon be publishing a shared volume.

I'm crossing the ocean to be back with you,
criss-crossing the lines that score this flat chart,
my head in grey chaos that floats in the blue.

The work and the journey to each other were true,
so I've folded the map and I've opened my heart
and I'm crossing the ocean to be back with you.

Our ship is miles-high and I don't know the crew
though their minds and their costumes are all so smart
when my head's in grey chaos that floats in the blue.

A restless tossing and returning is all I can do
till we bump on the tarmac and wake with a start:
I'm crossing the ocean to be back with you.

I learnt on my quest what I already knew –
that your mazed mind could not breathe apart
from my head in grey chaos that floats in the blue.

The sunrise outside will illumine the view,
and I've pierced the dateline with a temporal dart;
I'm crossing the ocean to be back with you,
and my head's in grey chaos that floats in the blue.

Ross Clark



How my disjointed travel stories became a book

John Ahern

A recent Queensland Tourism campaign advertised 'the best job in the world.' It wasn't for a travel writer, although I'd always thought that would fall squarely into this category. After all, could there be anything better than vagabonding around the world, scratching a few notes about gargoyle-topped churches and sandy beaches, and receiving free hotel rooms in return? It all sounded quite easy, and three weeks into a year-long motor-homing road trip around Europe with my family, a particular sight inspired me to chase this dream.

We were deep in the Arctic Circle on a rusty tub of a car ferry, thumping across the North Sea through huge stormy waves. My wife was vomiting, my kids crying, my ocean-faring shortcut not popular, till a sheltered harbour finally provided relief. An island emerged as a massive great silhouette through the blanket of misty rain. It was volcanic, dark and foreboding, as though we were arriving at a dastardly criminal's secret island lair. Towering up out of the sea, sheer-faced cliffs, jagged at their peaks, soared into the low clouds.

I'd only heard of the Lofoten Islands days earlier, but instantly decided this eerie archipelago would be the subject of my first feature-writing whirl.

For the next 48 hours, I scampered around snapping photos, collecting brochures and collating facts about Vikings and cod fishermen and rorbeurs - fishing huts cantilevered over water and converted to tourist accommodation. I moved us into one to round out my research and soon had enough information to fill a dozen Wikipedia posts.

But something didn't gel. It felt like I'd handed myself a school assignment on holidays, and a dry, forced compendium of facts began churning out. The only story I completed while on the Lofotens was in a letter to my mother, comparing my family's challenges of living in a rolling can on wheels together, with our stay in a comfortable rorbeur. The simple joys, I wrote, of cooking in a real oven or having a hot shower in an ensuite rather than a public facility, would never be taken for granted again.

This letter provided a snapshot of a family accustomed to creature comforts, but now struggling to live without them. We suffered through the loss of material privileges, then grew to love our increased connectedness. Over the ensuing year, all my homeward-bound letters contained tales of transformation and changed priorities, while, like scenes in a Bond film, the many awesome locations were relegated to backdrop.

Early one morning after returning from our year's journey, I woke in the dark, launched out of bed and ripped out a short story titled 'The Day of the Bean.' This commemorated a moonlit evening dinner on a cliff-top in Portugal, when my two-year-old son ate his first ever vegetable. Excited by this momentous occasion, my wife and I danced around under the stars, swinging him in our arms and singing, 'he ate a bean', to the tune of Abba's Dancing Queen, 'crisp and green, like a tambourine, yeah yeah!'

The lyrics needed some work, however it wasn't the memory of the bean that inspired me, but rather, the story behind it. As an absent working Dad, I'd previously missed my kid's first steps, first words. To be present at this little milestone filled me with a mix of joy and guilt. This led me to another story, in which I'd described meeting many grey nomads on the road, who, with all their bounty of retired time, wished they'd spent more of their younger lives with their kids.

Till then, I'd developed a delicious habit of splatting out short stories from our 32-country romp, chuckling at some, crying at others. But it hit me like a falling brick that many of these disconnected events were deeply linked with common themes and messages.

The kernel of a book idea formed, and my abandoned feature-writing concept evolved into a deeper longer narrative.

At this point in my non-existent literary career, I thought ACR was a video recorder, yet soon discovered that the flow of Action, Conflict and Resolution provided the story-telling road map I needed.

With this clarity, I put every individual story under the blowtorch. No longer could each stand alone. Riding dromedaries into the Sahara. Visiting Gallipoli. Getting to know all my kids' teddy bears by first name. What we did or where we went provided background, but now I grilled each tale for its inner meaning and purpose, and how it could link into the chain of the overall story.

I had no problem writing drafts about specific places or occurrences without knowing if they fit into the overarching plot. The greater challenge came later; sitting under a tree or staring at the ocean, and repeatedly asking myself why I'd written this piece in

the first place. Soon, I realised that for a memory to hit me with enough power to get my pen moving, it almost always had an underlying meaning; it just wasn't always obvious what that was. Asking 'How did I feel at the time?' often sliced open a clue, but at times, this procedure felt like doing open-heart surgery on myself.

Writing my travel memoir felt like going on a long road trip. As author, I was driver and navigator (and often the swearing mechanic), taking readers on a ride with me from A to B. There were lots of little stops along the way but eventually they connected. Small detours were fun, so long as I didn't stray too far from the main road - the main story - otherwise I risked losing my passengers.



John Ahern has travelled through over 80 countries and been shot at, poisoned, robbed at gunpoint, locked up in an African jail and been a passenger in two train derailments. His travel memoir *On The Road ... With Kids* won the Queensland Literary Awards People's Choice Book of the Year 2015.

Finding the Path Back to Writing

Fiona Reilly

It had been a bad breakup. After twenty-eight years braided together I'd lost all interest in the world and in my writing. Words drained out of me like blood. I naively gave myself ten months to grieve in which I didn't write a single word. When I thought I might be ready, I followed the advice of writing friends and mentors, turning up at my desk at the same time every day. I typed a few lines, my mind empty and at the same time overcrowded with malignant thoughts. Nothing. I purchased an app that locked me out of the internet, wrote a writing schedule, and clocked myself in and out of my study with a timesheet, week after painful week. I waited patiently. Still nothing.

My creativity lost, temporarily I hoped, I read instead, devouring my best-loved travel writing like literary therapy.

My favourites were the works of Freya Stark, the greatest travel writer nobody knows.

When she died in 1993 at the age of one hundred, she had published thirty books and been knighted by the Queen for her services to travel writing. I loved the rebel Englishwoman who spoke fluent Farsi and Arabic. In 1930, she set out to rediscover the lost castles of the Assassins, an Islamic sect whose principles ran to integrity, loyalty and calculated political murder, giving rise to our English understanding of the word. From the tenth to the twelfth centuries, they ran a nation-state from heavily fortified castles in strategic positions in northern Iran and Syria, controlling enemies by selectively murdering their leaders. After re-reading Stark's account of her journey, *The Valleys of the Assassins*, a wild idea sprouted. I would travel to Iran's far north, and re-trace Freya Stark's footsteps.

"Are you heartbroken?" asked Mojgan, my Persian host. In Persian, the name Mojgan means eyelashes. Hers were long and dark but her hair had a vibrant streak of silver curling out from under her hijab.

"Very heartbroken," I said, not trusting myself to reveal more.

She nodded. "Persia will improve your outlook."

Standing at the high pass in the Elburz Mountains, the dark folded rock walls of the Valley of the Assassins stretched far below me scored with a broad riverbed. The valley was overshadowed by dark mountains and white with snow. Tiny ice crystals, whipped by the wind, scratched my face. I felt like the eagle hovering on the wind nearby, wingtips outstretched and upturned. When Freya Stark described the same scene eighty-five years earlier, she spoke of "that great moment, when you see, however distant, the goal of your wandering."

By a hundred hairpin bends I descended into the valley and headed toward my goal - the Rock of Alamut, the first and most impressive of the Assassins' castles, rising like a clenched fist from its rocky black base between mountains. In 1088 Hassan-i-Sabbah, the Assassins' Grand Master, filled the castle with treasures and an extensive library, so it was said, and built a secret walled garden resembling the Garden of Paradise in the Quran: lush with grape vines, walnuts, pomegranates, figs and apples and cooled by the shade of stately trees. Freya Stark explained that many believed the word

Assassin came from a corruption of hashishim, hashish smokers or scoundrels. According to Marco Polo, Hassan-i Sabbah drugged young men with a sleeping draught. On waking they discovered themselves in the Garden of Paradise until the Grand Master required an assassination, when he convinced them they could return once they accomplished the deed.

Were any of these stories true? I had read and took notes, and followed Stark's footsteps to Qasir Khan and Garmrud village, then Lamiasar Castle. When the Mongols destroyed the Assassins in 1256, Lamiasar was the last of fifty fortresses to fall, holding out for six long months.

Perhaps here, I thought, I might find the ephemeral connection between my journey and Freya Stark's, eighty-five years before me.

Lamiasar was like a mighty battleship docked between mountains, with walls a thousand feet high and a deck fifteen hundred feet long and six hundred feet across. I climbed the castle stairs alone and wandered the vast grounds. Stark described this kind of solitude, of being alone in a magnificent landscape, as having some of the quality and intensity of love. The wind whipped at my head scarf and I briefly, daringly, removed it and let my hair fly in the wind.

As I walked back towards the main gate, head scarf neatly replaced, I heard a crunching under my feet, like jagged stones. When I bent down I saw not rocks, but pieces of broken terracotta pottery. Beneath the grass there were literally hundreds, probably thousands of pieces of broken pottery glazed in deep green, blue and yellow. Freya Stark had described this exact moment. "There are shards of pottery by the thousand lying about on the ground, all of an early kind." Just as I imagine she had done, I picked up a piece and dusted the dirt, feeling the contours and weight of a fragment of an eight-hundred-year-old bowl. The rim of a cup. The handle of a ewer. Eight hundred years, and eighty-five years, compressed into one moment on a hillside.

"Your travels were successful?" Mojgan asked on my return.

Persia had changed my outlook as she'd promised. Stories spilled out of me, spoken stories that soon became words and chapters on the page. It struck me that it wasn't my creativity I needed to rediscover, but my curiosity, a re-awakening to the wonders of our world and all it holds. Because for writers, all things stem from curiosity, which as Freya Stark said, "is the one thing invincible in Nature."

An irrepressible traveller, Fiona Reilly works as a food and travel writer between shifts as an emergency doctor at Queensland Children's Hospital. Her first travel memoir was a recipient of the 2014 Hachette Manuscript Development Program and a 2017 Varuna Fellowship. Fiona is completing her Masters in Creative Non-Fiction with a journey through the kitchens of five Islamic women around the world.

Travel Writer on a Lonely Road

Tim Richards



Do Travel Writers Go to Hell?

This was the question posed a few years ago by Thomas Kohnstamm, a former Lonely Planet author. In his tell-all book of that name, he confessed to accepting freebies on assignment in Brazil against the publisher's rules, while partaking in much sex and drugs.

Sadly, as a fellow member of that publisher's freelance writer pool I couldn't square Kohnstamm's debauchery with my own experiences in updating Poland for the Eastern Europe and Poland guidebooks.

Maybe it's the difference between travelling in Brazil and travelling in Poland, but I don't stumble across plentiful offers of sex and drugs while in Central Europe.

Complimentary lard dips before a meal, yes; quickies in the back of a Warsaw restauracja, no.

However, I do agree that being on a research assignment for a guidebook publisher is exhausting work and that no-one, not even the staff back in the office, realises how exhausting.

So it might be illuminating to outline an average day undertaking Lonely Planet research in Poland:

6am: Phone alarm wakes me up. Get ready for the day, organise notes, clipboard, map and camera while torturing myself with the only English-language cable news channel available ("No more CNN! Nooooo!").

7am: Hotel breakfast. If lucky, a nice buffet spread of cheeses, herring, scrambled eggs, pickles and bread rolls. If unlucky, a set plate involving a few slices of cold meat and cheese, and a boiled egg.

8am: Out of the door, following the map from the previous edition to check out all the hotels, restaurants and attractions previously reviewed, and to add new ones to replace those that have closed or fallen from grace. I'll check almost everything in the book anonymously, but sometimes the production of a business card is necessary at a hotel ("Just why do you want to see three rooms of different sizes?").

1pm: After hours of trudging around town, and up and down the staircases of hotels, I'll grab lunch, either at one of the restaurants in the book or at a possible contender. I also make notes from the menu. Unfortunately it's not possible to eat at every eatery in the book, as there aren't enough mealtimes. But I can at least check out the decor, menus, clientele and other people's meals by walking through a place.

5pm: If I'm lucky, I've covered enough places for the day. If not, and I've been delayed by dodgy map placements, roadworks, bad weather, numerous closures from the previous edition, or an insufficient spread of restaurants or hotels, there might be a few more hours of trudging.

7pm: Dinner at another place either in the book, or one aspiring to be. More notes.

8.30pm: Either tidying my notes at the hotel, or research on the city's nightlife. A lone bar visit is fine, but believe me, nothing is more tragic than sitting alone in a Polish nightclub at 9pm with a cheap drink, taking more notes.

11pm: Snatch some downtime before bed, watching a download on my iPad or reading an ebook. I nearly always have a PG Wodehouse novel in progress, or a travelogue. It helps to read about other people's much tougher journeys – Levison Wood's *Walking the Nile*, to give a recent example – as it makes my job seem so much easier.

In truth, there is no typical guidebook writer day. Sometimes I'm up later, sometimes earlier, and sometimes a day is blown on travelling to a new city on a slow *pospieszny* ("fast") train.

People often respond to hearing about my Lonely Planet gigs by saying "That must be fun." To which I say "That's the wrong adjective."

Stimulating, yes, fascinating, yes, memorable, yes, but not fun.

Fun is what occurs when you travel less intensely.

But the pay-off comes when I'm able to take my focus off the job, just for a moment, and feel the full impact of the glorious place I'm standing in.

On my very first LP gig, circumnavigating Poland in the bitterly cold winter of 2006, I stood in the courtyard of Krakow's Wawel Castle, looking over a stunning cityscape of snow-covered roofs and steeples; walked out onto a frozen lake in Masuria, watched by an onshore cat; hiked through a deserted, snow-covered forest to see huge European bison; and spent a memorable day in frozen-over Hel, an out-of-season holiday town at the end of a peninsula north of Gdansk.

There have also been intensely memorable encounters with Poles. Once, an elderly man engaged me in conversation at a tram stop below the castle in Krakow. We could only converse in an awkward mix of Polish and German, but I slowly gathered that he was trying to tell me that he and his family had been taken to Germany as slave labourers in the war.

On another occasion I met a man on a train who had been held prisoner by the Soviets in Siberia for eight years in the 1940s. And during one visit I discovered my Polish friend Magda had had her childhood fractured by the communist regime, when her opera singer mother fled to the West and was only occasionally allowed to visit her family in the years that followed.

So it's not necessarily fun. But every so often on a Lonely Planet job, I walk around a corner and something unexpected and extraordinary happens - something that reminds me why I love to travel. And then all the hard work seems worthwhile.

Tim Richards is a freelance travel writer based in Melbourne. He's the author of travel books including *The Kick of Stalin's Cow*, about communist-era Poland, and of the fantasy novel *Mind the Gap* (published by Harper Collins). You can find his published articles via www.iwriter.com.au, and his blog *Aerohaveno* at www.aerohaveno.com.

Writers on Travel



Pamela Tonkin

It is Monday, in Dinso Road, Bangkok. I know because the waitresses wear yellow. They are busy, and one passes me a menu to examine while I wait for a table. An amulet trader in a crisp white shirt has set up business on the sidewalk. His charms are laid out in a wooden box similar to one a gem dealer would use. Customers approach, make a selection and hold the piece to the light. The dealer offers an eyeglass. I wonder if he is trading in fakes. Lucky colours, lucky amulets. A lucky bargain won.

The side streets 'soi' of Bangkok's Wang Burapha Phirom district offer up colourful treats to me. More rewarding to the curious eye than the guided visitor attractions. Domestic scenes unfold of residents cooking, sweeping, shopping. They are busy with daily routines. The odour of marigolds, jasmine, spices and rotting papayas is pungent. Here on the 'soi' the noise, of scooters, cars and tuktuks competing for space on the roads, is not so loud.

The world is known to us today. The features of our destinations are known before we embark. So I am excited to be given a fresh perspective and the possibility of encountering unexpected experiences. On the ground there are limitless possibilities to be confronted by the foreign, and I recall travel writers who journeyed with their eyes wide open.

The first travel writers were the pilgrims. Theirs were accounts, describing scenes and peoples encountered on the way to a holy site, a tourist site. The ocean voyaging naturalists such as the few whose work I know best, Darwin, Wallace and Humboldt, collected samples from their journeys and with great diligence kept records of latitude and longitude, climate, fauna, flora, ocean currents and ethnography. As polymaths they educated us.

Ocean exploration and the discovery of 'new lands' bred a new traveller, the expeditioner. Their works reimagined the journey; sometimes agonisingly, as in Graham Greene's *Journey Without Maps*. Paul Theroux journeying by train *The Great Railway Bazaar* interacted with exotic peoples and places. Air travel opened up a new opportunity for travellers, once one landed. The transit itself was like time travel. Covering great distances in a few hours made it possible to experience the juxtaposition of cultures as William Dalrymple in *City of Djinns; a year in Delhi* achieved. In *The Snow Leopard*, Peter Matthiessen's diarised account to find the Himalayan blue sheep, he described with minute detail fragile flowers, pebbles and other nature he passed enroute.

Here in Bangkok I enter 'Pak Khlong Talad', the Bangkok flower market and I am overwhelmed to find a rainbow ocean of delicate blooms.

I wonder how far these precious flowers have travelled to be here and speculate on their destination. Sold in bunches of one hundred stems, they will be spread around the globe. The stall holders tout for custom whilst a workforce rhythmically packs and carts containers to waiting porters and couriers. Lucky colours, lucky hybrids. Lucky bargains. I will keep this image and recall it often while the memory of the artfully arranged flower vase in the hotel lobby will lose its detail.

The corpus of travel writing available today offers abundant novel angles on places I think I know. A future generation of writers on travel has yet to emerge. Astronauts, as yet, have not taken up the writers' craft. There is once again a frontier for writers on travel.

Pamela Tonkin has long been interested in people and places. With university qualifications in physical geography, human geography and fashion design she is keen to explore diverse places and observe different cultures. Her motivation is seeing how different peoples live; how they preserve historical traditions while moving to embrace modernity.

Tell Me a Story



Louise Creely

Writing a Travel Blog

Have you ever eaten an eyeball? Me either. Dissecting one in biology class was enough. But I've done a bit of writing and read a lot of travel articles and blogs, so I thought I'd share some tips I've picked up along the way...

Beyond the daily grind

Sometimes it's hard to know where to start your travel story. Which makes it too easy to get caught up in an (endless) checklist of your day, from the time you open your eyes to the moment you fall into bed exhausted after visiting 24 churches and museums.

Avoid starting with 'I woke up in the morning', because that's kind-of obvious, right? Unless you woke up in your hotel surrounded by water after torrential rains caused flash flooding.

And we don't need to know that you ate breakfast before setting off – unless you're in a Mongolian yurt eating pickled sheep eyeballs.

Find the hook

Remember as a kid telling a story? It went from 'and then and then and then' to the climax – while your parents developed the art of sleeping with their eyes open.

That was then... Now your online readers are gone in the click of a mouse, so you need to hook them into your story. Here's a clue: **start with the action.**

Tell me you took a long-haul flight from Australia, had a six-hour stopover in Beijing, did some duty-free shopping, and – I'm gone.

Start with those eyeballs and you've got me hooked.

Then I want to know what you're doing there and what you're getting up to next.

How do you find the action? First write a draft, then do

some serious editing, pulling the action up-front, and re-crafting the piece so it all works.

Finally, wrap it all up by bringing the focus (or action) back into your ending. You started eating eyeballs, now you're ending with another meal around a fire. Maybe you spent the day with nomadic shepherds and shared a meal with them, serenaded by the quiet bleats of sleepy sheep – no pickled eyeballs in sight.

Take me there

Tell me what it's like to be there and tell it with all your senses.

Take me there through the smells, tastes, colour and movement around you – and don't skip over the anxiety, the fear, the loathing, because those are what make you human.

It's also what brings your story to life. Can't you just feel that eyeball pop between your teeth and the warm jelly stuff inside squirting down your throat? But you can't spit out this delicacy and offend your hosts, so you anxiously try not to gag while you work up the courage to swallow it.

And you're a vegetarian.

Keep it short

Applying the KISS (keep it simple for success) principle to writing makes the reading easier. As a writer and editor, reading 'brain dumps' just feels like work. Hard work. And that's the writer's job, not the reader's. Yes, it is definitely harder to write 'short' and keep it simple. It requires editing (read: slash and burn) and losing some parts you're attached to because they don't advance the story.

Earlier, I had a bit about walking out of Indira Gandhi International Airport into a wet wall of heat and being enveloped in the heavy rancid odour of rotting vegetation. Gone. Well, it's here, but you get my point. I stuck with the eyeballs.

Tell me a story

Most of all, tell me a story. Talk to the locals, use interpretive dance if you have to. Find the funny side or the dark side.

Take me beyond the guide book, down the back alleys and side streets, away from the tick-off tourist sites and photo opportunities, and into your adventure.

Because travel is about living at the edge of your comfort zone. So go there, and tell me what it's really like. You may inspire me to follow you...

Louise is a certified freak for nature, travel, street art and wine – not necessarily in that order. She loves telling stories and writes for a living and for fun. Visit her travel blog ontheflightpath.com or follow her on Instagram @dragonfly_lou.

People Are the Landscape: A Reflection on Writers Residencies

Jonathan O'Brien



I recently spent ten weeks undertaking back-to-back writing residencies across New South Wales and Tasmania, and while away I spent a lot of time thinking about landscape. This was inevitable. A writer's residency consists more or less of sitting at a desk and working, just as writing in one's home or nearest public library consists of sitting at a desk and working. The key experiential difference then, must be in the desk itself and the context surrounding that desk.

As such, thinking about landscape becomes unavoidable.

**If you are engaging with
the residency, then you
are engaging with the
landscape.**

I'm going to tell you the way I went about that.

The centrepiece of my residencies was a month spent in Haefligers Cottage, Hill End—a miner's cottage in the lonely centre of an almost-ghost town in the western New South Wales highlands, just over an hour north-west of Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, who facilitate the Artist-In-Residence program. Out there, and in much of New South Wales right now, everything is the one faded colour. More than once I'd glance over a sunburned field from the car window while driving and notice neither the flock of sheep nor the farmer tending them till I looked a second or third time. The homogeneity of it all, visually, the rolling hills of beige—there was initially something deeply depressing about it, if I'm honest. As a city-dweller, I'm used to overstimulation: flashing electronic billboards and the whirr of train lines, the rhythmic morning-evening traffic cycles and road rage. Out in the country, if you don't engage closely then you'll notice only two things: the colour brown, and silence.

I found my way toward engaging closely after thinking about how landscape was treated in things I'd read recently: specifically, the somewhat-cliché pairing of Tim Winton and Cormac McCarthy, both of whom write about similar landscapes on separate continents. Both writers also forego dialogue quotes. Aesthetically, this leaves their works characterised by a more barren page—one that is clear and arid, much like the landscapes in which both writers tend to set their works. More importantly in terms of the reading experience, their writing strips away the obvious delineation between dialogue and description, between character and environment.

This is significant: it allows these writers to, at wish, blur the lines between the way a character speaks and the way he or she interacts with their environment. When utilised effectively, this technique allows as seamless a transition between these two elements of the text as the writer wishes.

This technique, I figured, could be reverse-engineered into providing a nice doorway into understanding the landscape—to seeing more than brown, and hearing more than silence. And so I began speaking to the people who inhabited the land of Hill End, the ones who blurred in and out of my vision from the car window.

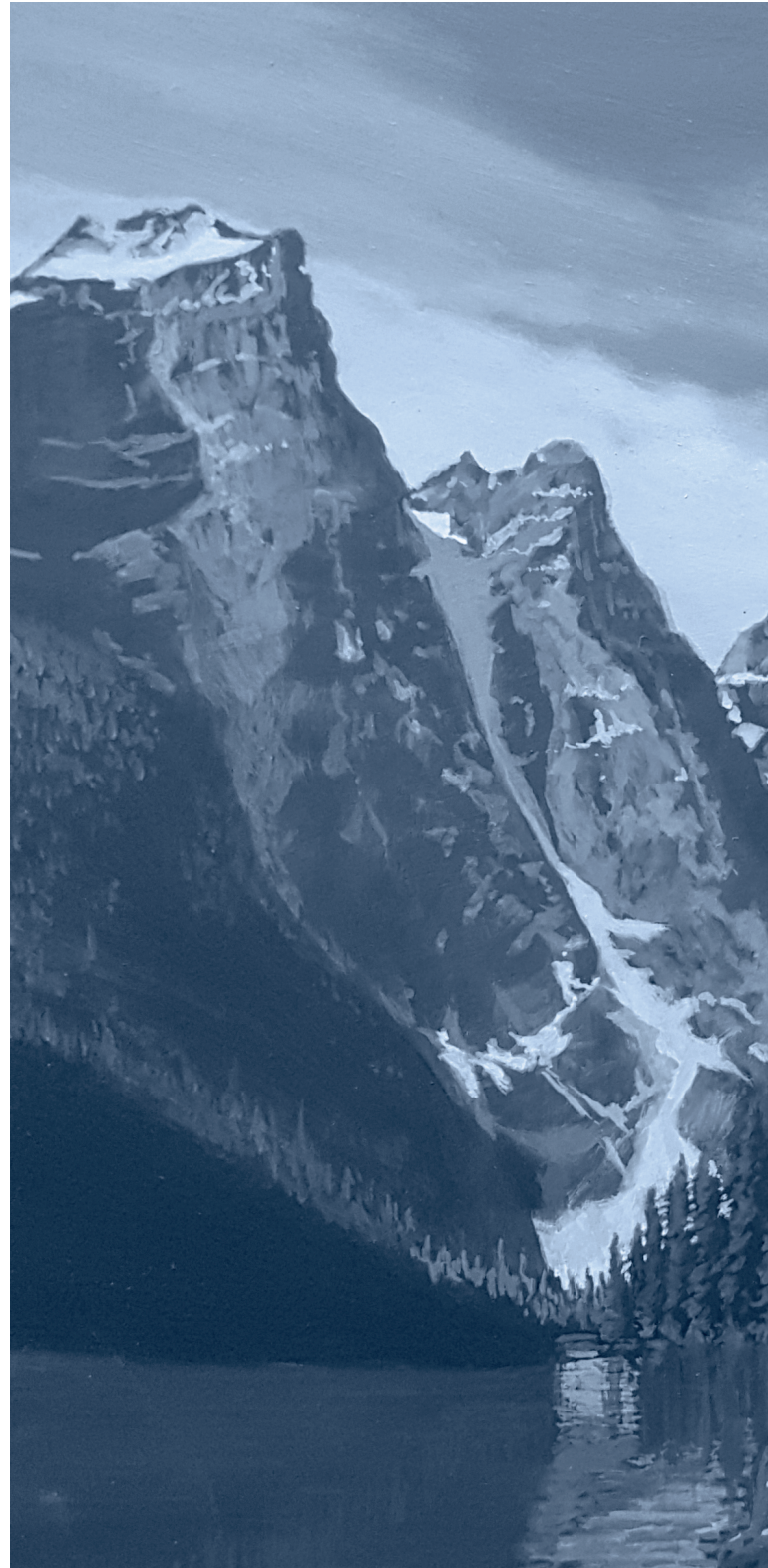
I established contact in the simplest way I knew how: by walking into the pub and ordering a glass of souring house red.

On my first trip there, I spoke to a man named Pete who introduced himself as The Most Painted Man in Town, and to an older guy who went by Ando and was the local handyman before the heritage legislation that ensnared the town became constricting of his livelihood, and before his back went out.

By the end of our conversations that night around the pub fire, The Most Painted Man in Town had become an emblem of the town: his lined face, his slur, his penchant for drinking twelve hours in the day. Ando's stories of his work and of the town's changing, fading nature punctuated this emblem, bringing a contextual depth to my new understanding of Hill End. The brown hills and courts of kangaroos and rusted rooves of half-collapsed cottages became more vivid, more delineated from their shared colour wash, and they became parts of a place lived in by real people, rather than a historical site on a map.

If good writing is, as I believe to be the case, predicated on empathy, then this people-based process seems to me as good a way as any of navigating and understanding any given landscape. Even if one isn't a writer, or has no plans to write about a given environment, then this approach still seems like a good way to go about understanding the physical world through which one moves. Throughout history, stories have functioned as a way of understanding both known and unknown environments—the seeking of this understanding comprises a large part of why we write. And a large part of why, when we travel, we listen.

Jonathan O'Brien is a Brisbane-based writer, editor, and creative producer. He is the founder of House Conspiracy, Editor of the 2018 arts anthology 'The Conspirator', and is currently working on a book of post-internet parables. You can find Jonathan on Twitter @jonobri, on Facebook, or at his website jonobri.com.



Home is Where the Wi-Fi Connects

Nadine Cresswell-Myatt

I'm staying in an airless cubbyhole, a room in a New York apartment. The host's pooch, 'Snoopy', just chewed through my last pair of undies and the owner possesses the only bathroom—her ensuite. I tiptoe across her bedroom whenever I need to shower. She usually stays on her bed petting Snoopy while I keep my ablutions as quiet as possible.

But, I don't mind. I'm a writer nibbling at the Big Apple and, in a city that never sleeps, who needs a great bedroom anyway.

Whatever the pitfalls of frugal travel, friends tell me I'm living the dream.

I'm a freelance writer. I can work from anywhere. Some of my travel is tax deductible and I have other allied writing employment such as teaching students in online writing courses.

I might spend my day visiting new places and meeting new people, then shoot off work at midnight to arrive in Australia in the early hours of the morning. But, while laptops and technology make it easy for writers to become digital nomads, writers have long merged writing with travelling.

Anthony Trollope wrote his novel, *Lady Ann*, on board the SS Great Britain in 1871 on a voyage out to

Australia. He had a desk placed in his cabin, put pen to paper as the ship left port in England, and wrote the finishing words as his berth drew into Sydney Harbour. Hopefully, he looked up and saw the great beauty of the magnificent harbour.

Long hours of arduous travel still tend to be a great space in which to write. I am probably the only person saying 'hooray' when a flight is delayed, because it allows me more time to write. In 1990, J. K. Rowling wrote her initial Harry Potter ideas on a napkin when her train from Manchester to London was delayed. Amtrak in the States even began writer's residencies, so writers could write on board while trains hurtled them across the wide-open spaces.

But, isn't it disruptive to write in busy places such as trains, cafes, bars and airport lounges? Well, no. It's electrifying. I often get more work done than I would at home, because the World is watching, or at least that is what it feels like.

And often the disruptions help in changing the necessary track in an article.

Great ideas float within the frenzy of conversations, the new sights and sounds that you just won't receive while staring at a wall at home.

The concept of working whilst travelling has grown since Tim Ferris wrote *The Four Hour Work Week*, and a whole generation have hit the road taking their laptops with them. Many are writers. The bulk are millennials, but baby boomers such as myself and career changers make up a large portion.

Once you had to be rich to travel. These days you simply need to be internet savvy to source and book cheap flights and accommodation. Learning new terms such as Workaway, WWOOFing and Couch Surfing helps too. And you can get your luggage down to a 7kg carry on, stuffing heavier items such as leads and adaptors into your jacket pockets.

But don't leave home without an income stream like a monetised blog, a regular writing gig, or work online. The trick is to make money in your own currency but spend it in a weaker economy. Places such as Thailand, Indonesia (Bali), Portugal or Morocco all fit the profile.

Writing while travelling is not holidaying. As Trollope said: 'All holiday-making is hard work, but holiday-making with nothing to do is the hardest work of all.' This lifestyle's not about sitting on a beach with a laptop. The sand would destroy your computer. But it might mean sitting at a table drinking a cocktail out of a coconut and looking out over the ocean as you work.

It's a good life, an achievable life for writers, as our work is so transportable. While I travel cheaply, there are times when I do stay in fine hotels and eat fancy food because my stay is sponsored by a tourism body. While this might sound ideal, there are days of subservient work involved in writing for one's supper.

But the thing is to keep moving. Keep it happening. Develop the means to stay on the road and keep writing. Even if it sometimes means the inconvenience of a less than salubrious stay, especially in expensive cities like New York.

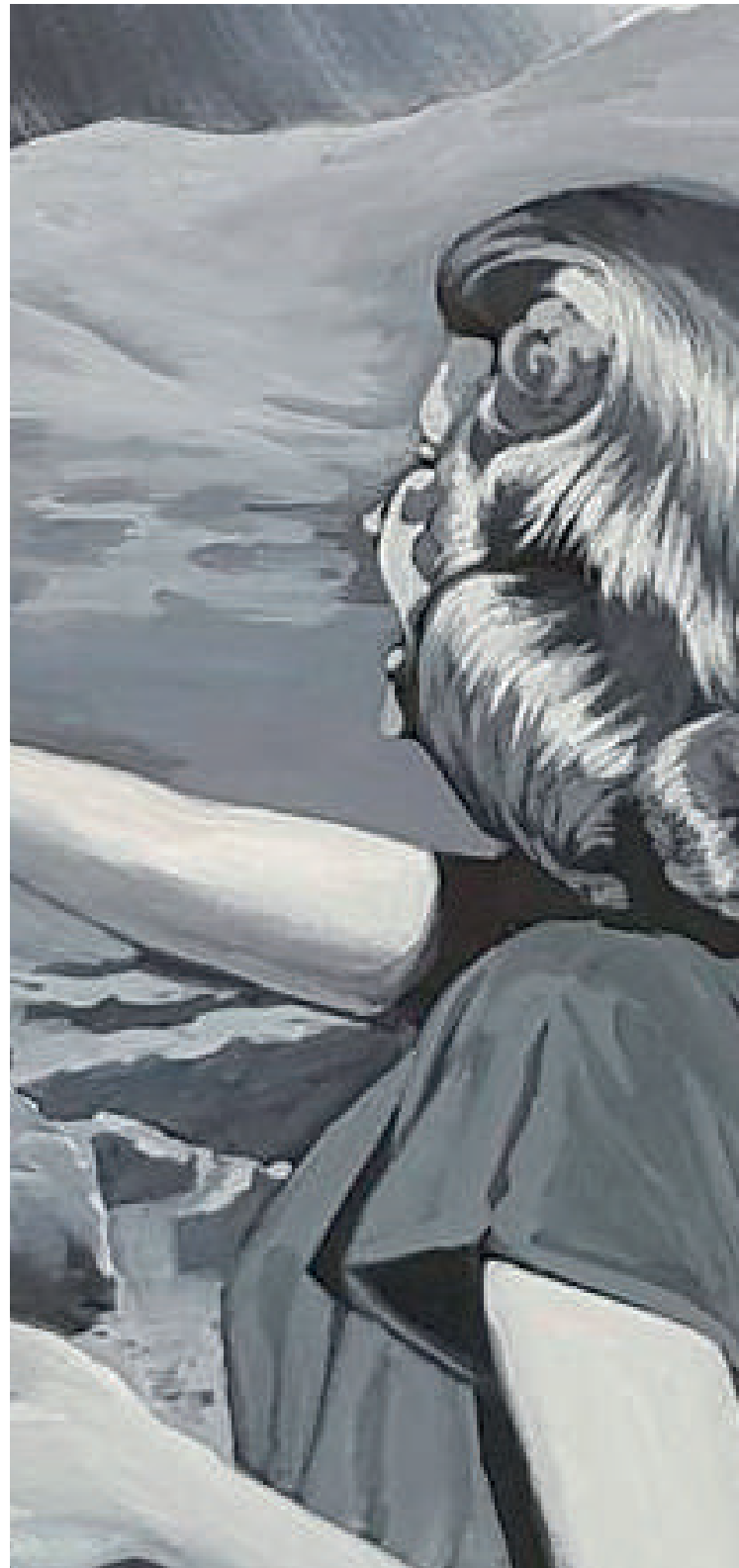
That said, after my shower, I head downstairs to chat to the doorman. He tells me another writer lives in the apartment block.

'She owns the penthouse,' he says. 'She wrote that book. You know. *Eat, Pray, Stray*.... Something like that.'

I'm gobsmacked and touch the front door handle in the hope that some of Elizabeth Gilbert's lust for words and travel will rub off on me.

Gilbert once said: 'I feel about travel the way a happy new mother feels about her impossible, colicky, restless newborn baby - I just don't care what it puts me through. Because, I adore it. Because, it's mine. Because it looks exactly like me.'

And I agree, travel and writing takes you places. It can take you to the same place twice as you live your travels over again when you write about them. If your words are wisely chosen, others will travel through you, and that is one hell of a trip.



Nadine Cresswell-Myatt has written travel stories for over twenty years for newspapers, magazines and online. Increasingly, these days she writes from the road, or a café, or an airport. Because these days, like many other writers, she can.

Q & A

Shelley Davidow

WQ caught up with Shelley Davidow, author of *Shadow Sisters*, to talk about writing advice and other things...



You've lived in a number of different countries. How does the place you're living in change your writing and/or writing routine?

That's a great question. I think I'm very much a writer of 'place'...responding to the dialogues and issues of the place I'm living in. I've learnt that living and writing in different countries, even in countries where English is the dominant language, requires an act of translation. When you move countries, you don't share the cultural history of the people living there, and it can take a while to absorb what's there. This impacts things even like the 'voices' of my characters. In writing my memoir, *Shadow Sisters*, which is set mostly in South Africa during Apartheid, I had to 're-translate' myself through the words I used, the references, the names of things – and because I've lived in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and America, I did not, for example know whether to call the thing you walk on by the side of the road a pavement, a sidewalk or a footpath!

In terms of my routine – I've been writing since I learned how. I grew up in South Africa in a loud noisy family and I had to learn how to write in the midst of chaos. I can still pull that off. As an adult I've written while breastfeeding, while watching Winnie the Pooh or while being interrupted by small people. My routine is an internal one. When I want to write, nothing gets in the way. I'll do it in the living room while everyone's watching TV, or at 3am if I can't sleep – so being geographically mobile hasn't impacted how I go about writing, which I'd say is very...organic! (I have been accused of being distracted and not hearing people when I'm writing – but then, they don't know that I'm actually working.)

Having written many books, what advice do you have for aspiring writers?

Having a good story does not make you a good writer. Necessarily. Making words do exactly what you want them to do – that's an art – and a craft – just like painting, or sculpting, and just as messy, even if you don't spill things on the floor or table. If you want to create something of value, read widely and write like there's no tomorrow. Tomorrow is not a sure thing. Craft is so important. Knowing, for example, that over-writing leads to sentimentality, or that there is power in what is silent or unsaid, or that if you use verbs rather than adjectives you can lift a piece off the page are all things I wish someone had shown me twenty years ago. Learn emotional and writerly resilience – writing is actually the business of rejection. In fact, open a file somewhere under 'R' in which you can stack all your rejection letters. My short memoir *The Eye of the Moon* was rejected over a hundred times before a small press in America published it. I believed it had value and I held onto that. So, resilience is an essential quality, as is knowing when it's time to abandon a project. Sometimes all of us write 'practice pieces.' They're not a waste of time. They teach you a lot even if no one ever publishes them. And if you really do aspire to write, I'd suggest, be humble, yet passionate and dedicated. Know when to take advice and when to ignore it. If writing is your passion, then it's more of a calling, than a choice. I'll probably write until I die whether things get published or not – because for me the act of writing is like living or breathing. It's like coming into the fullness of being human – and I love that.

Writing about the past can be nostalgic, cathartic or even unimaginable – how was the process for you?

My process was all of those things in writing *Shadow Sisters*. I waited more than two decades to have the courage to tell that story. It's my story, but it's also my family's story – and memoir is a creative act – no two members of the same family would talk about an event in exactly the same way, because we experience things differently – and that isn't straight-forward or predictable as a process.

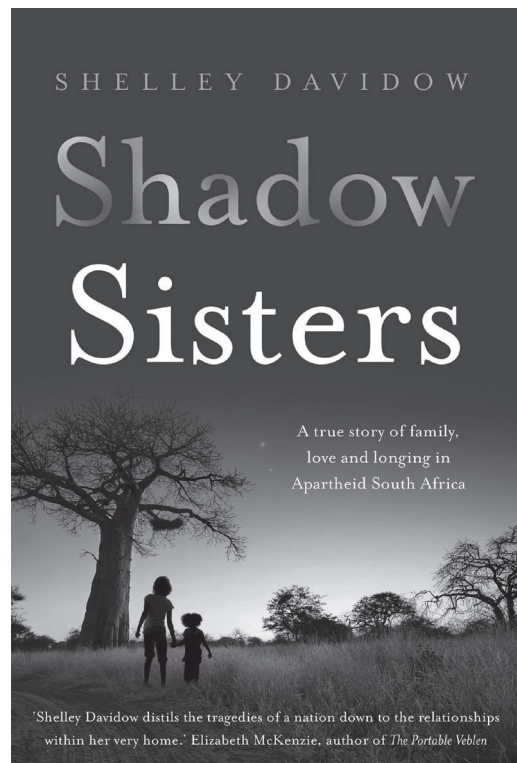
In writing that book I was catapulted back into my childhood in South Africa at a politically very tumultuous time – reliving and re-imagining close friendships, capturing the unbelievable events we lived through was a challenge – because it's obvious that turning life into art is a creative act akin to writing a novel – and memory is selective and often unreliable – but it was an emotional experience – it didn't evoke nostalgia, but perhaps I felt tenderness for who we'd all been, the people I loved, and how we'd lived – how much love and hope we had in the face of significant struggles. It was cathartic to finally have to find the words to express the inexpressible. I was writing about my adopted black sister during the height of Apartheid – about our relationship and how our family was impacted by appalling laws that divided black people from white people in every area of society. In the act of writing, I had a life-changing realisation (no plot spoilers here) – and difficult as it was, it set me free at some level. So that was both unimaginable and cathartic.

Tell us about a favourite book of yours.

That's a really hard question! In terms of books where the writing actually changed how I see the world, I'd have to say that *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy is burned into my mind for the way she re-invents the English language and for her metaphors. It's a hard narrative to read in terms of content but the writing took my breath away.

What's the best thing about being a writer in Queensland today?

I'll have to tell you about the best things – because there are a few! I've found home on the edge of Lake Weyba on the Sunshine Coast and I love being there every day. I'm grateful to my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander friends who have shared deep insights and knowledge about the land I live on, the far history, the recent history and how we're all connected. When I write now, I have a sense of place and a feeling of belonging that comes from understanding how we all fit into an invisible web of stories and histories. I appreciate the Queensland writing community, the value Queensland places on the arts – the grants, awards, publishers and cultural organisations – I hope these all continue to flourish. I love being a writer and academic in Queensland. I'm inspired when spending a rainy writing day listening to thunder rattling my house or walking along the coastline, or having our relatively tame resident kookaburra, Spot, sitting on my wrist with his painful claws. These are a few of my favourite things for which I will always be grateful.



The Writing Residency

Enrich your writing,
your soul, your life...
the writing residency

Earl Livings



I sit at my desk and watch mist wreath itself through the pine trees on Mynydd Fron-felen, the mountain opposite my window. Maps of ancient and Roman Britain crowd my studio walls. Later in the day, after writing and editing a few thousand words, I make a simple dinner downstairs in the communal kitchen then go to the pub next door for a pint or two and conversation with locals and my fellow residents. We talk about art, literature, valley history, and the myths and stories of nearby sacred sites. Some of this is in Welsh. I feel at home.

Obtaining a residency has always been one of my goals. The benefits are obvious: quiet, uninterrupted time to open up the mental space required for creativity; the stimulation of a different environment; and the chance to explore and experiment without concern for outcomes. I applied for some Australian residencies, but wasn't fortunate enough to land one. Then came an opportunity from an unexpected source.

When I was in the UK in 2013 doing research for my dark ages novel, I met Veronica Calarco, a visual artist who was a friend of one of my ex-students. Veronica lived in Dolgellau, a small village in North Wales. She took me to her local pub and made me welcome.

Later in the week, we spent a blissful afternoon on a path known as the Precipice Walk, foraging on blackberries and talking about nature, culture and dying languages.

A year after my return home, Veronica emailed me about Stiwidio Maelor, which she had established in Corris, a small village 10 miles from Dolgellau. The studio offered residencies for one to eight weeks and contained two spaces for visiting artists and one for a visiting writer. Each space had a bedroom and a workroom and, because there were no telephones, television or wifi, one could focus completely on one's creative endeavours without interruption.



The surrounding areas contained many walks through the stunning Welsh landscape. Great for inspiration and thinking time. I was definitely interested.

There are a variety of residencies out there for writers. With some, you pay; others are free. A minority even pay you. Some provide meals as well as accommodation, which itself might be a cottage or cabin, or one or two rooms and shared facilities.

Some leave you alone to do your work. Others require you to give a talk or workshop. With some, the peace and quiet to pursue your writing is what attracts you. With others, the location might be a drawcard. In the end, which residency you obtain depends on your literary standing, the quality and intent of your project, your willingness to travel, how good you are at filling out application forms, how persistent you are.

While I may have been lucky enough to know the founder, if not for the opportunities Stiwedio Maelor provided, I wouldn't have applied. My project is the re-creation of the life of the historical Merlin. While I had done much research into the myths, political situations and personalities of the era, the chance to actually live in the setting of the story was too good to miss. I went through the detailed application process and was soon accepted.

My eight weeks in Corris enabled me to immerse myself in the landscape and in the Welsh language, and research important sites. These in turn informed my writing: its rhythms and textures, its colours and contours, its character and story arcs. The mythic and spiritual aspects of the land seeped into me. Chance conversations and observations gave me tidbits of information I would not have gained any other way. The resulting experience was so valuable I went back for two more residencies (five and 11 weeks, respectively), to experience the land in different seasons and to work on subsequent drafts.

I also applied for a residency in Ireland, which I hoped to tack on to the end of my third visit to Corris. After addressing the selection criteria with what I thought was a strong case, I was surprised when it was rejected. One generally isn't told why, but apparently the fact I hadn't addressed an unspoken criterion hadn't helped. Some organisations want to know who you are as an

artist, not just what you intend with your project. So, if you can sneak this into your application. Talk about your influences (but not in exhaustive detail), the artistic trajectory that brought you to this moment, and the themes of and intentions for your writing career. Also, make sure you don't just repeat what the residency website says about its advantages (which annoys administrators) and find someone who has been there to look over your application.

A residency is a fantastic opportunity to gain the freedom to create new work or edit old pieces, and to explore ideas and techniques that may or may not result in specific texts but will enhance your creative practise. If you are looking for a way to help your writing flourish, put in an application and enjoy the experience and the results. Good luck.

At the pub the night before I leave, over drinks and chips (not the hot ones, but what the locals call crisps), some villagers ask if I'll return. I rub my thumb and first two fingers together to indicate it depends on finances. They nod. 'Corris is your second home. You'll be back.'

Earl Livings is an award-winning poet who has published poetry and fiction in Australia and also Britain, Canada, the USA, and Germany. His work focuses on nature, mythology, and the sacred. His dark ages novel is nearing completion, and his next poetry collection, *Libation*, will be published in late 2018.

Words Travel

Jennifer Tichon

The loud click of the external door locking me off from the outside world made my stomach lurch. She was screaming at me in a high pitched voice, 'Polizia! Polizia!'. She shook the telephone receiver menacingly in my ashen face. How did this happen to me? A respectable, middle-aged Australian academic on sabbatical in Milan. It was all my husband's fault, of course.

A month earlier, power suit ironed, I had diligently presented myself to a sub-office of the Istituto Auxologico Italiano. As world leaders in my field of psychological research I had contacted the group from my desk in Brisbane to set up this visit to their Institute. Expecting some lofty sandstone archways adorned by medieval Europe's leering gargoyles I was taken aback by the modest suburban townhouse they called HQ. No wonder internet images hadn't been available.

The Italian academics however were friendly, welcoming and generous with hugs. Receiving an effusive and loud 'Welcome to Milano' from each academic I was introduced to, I was guided down narrow halls and around tight corners to find them neatly tucked away in various converted rooms. The tour finished with the lucky person squeezed into the laundry. The academics were not at all limited in their work, enjoying the latest computer hardware and reliable internet. A nice contrast to the filing system of folders stacked in a bathtub.

At our first lunch break, over acqua frizzante and risotto at a nearby café, they kindly and loudly insisted that I also needed to take some time away from work to explore their beloved part of the world. I was happy to oblige. So too was my travelling sidekick, my husband Craig.

And so it was that on a sunny day in Milano we found ourselves drawn into a local travel agent by posters boasting trips to the rolling Tuscan hills (vineyard

overindulgence), glittering Lake Como (George Clooney stalking) and the relaxing glide of a Venetian gondola (tracing the footsteps of naughty Lord Byron). Inside, the travel agent showered us with glossy brochures and delightful stories, in broken English, of the many delights to be had. We were sold. Forget the budget. With the help of our credit card we would immerse ourselves and enjoy.

'No credit card.' She was still smiling. 'Only cash.'

'But we don't have cash,' we replied, also smiling and thinking she would understand that travellers don't stroll around foreign countries with cash filled pockets. She did not. Her smile dropped and we were rapidly ushered out the door.

Not to be deterred we moved on to the nearby internet café. The internet was far more accommodating and we'd soon made multiple online bookings, notched up to our credit card, and were ready to collapse into the nearest wine serving footpath café in satiated delight.

Weeks passed. We had a wonderful time. My research collaboration was flourishing and the gondola ride was indeed romantic. I was feeling quite affectionate toward my sidekick.

And so it was quite a surprise as we passed the travel agency one weekend, to see the lady fling open the front door, gesture wildly with flailing arms and in loud Italian request our presence in her shop. As loud and effusive communication was quite common I thought nothing of it. My husband nudged me toward her suggesting I explain any lingering confusion about our cash versus credit card situation. The last I saw of him was his fast retreat toward the internet café, smugly aware that he had once again shoved an unwanted chore onto the wife.

As I said, the loud click of the external door locking me off from the outside world made my stomach lurch. The agent had a button hidden under her counter that electronically locked the door. I'd willingly entered with no idea of my looming deprivation of liberty. All memory of the romantic gondola ride disappeared as I pictured my husband happily scrolling through the internet and face timing family as I sat frozen in my seat while the woman screamed 'Polizia' in my face.

I might have found it funny if I hadn't been overcome by the fear that perhaps she did have a complex tourist intimidation ring set up with the local police.

In a bizarre twist of good cop/bad cop, a younger woman appeared from the back of the shop and explained that due to my husband and I using the services of the lady's broken English on our prior visit, I needed to hand over 20 Euro or my passport. So there I sat, alternately yelled at and threatened with police intervention or more kindly cajoled by the younger lady who was probably concerned that her older colleague, if required to keep up the act for too much longer, might pass out from over exertion. I saw no hint of her failing anytime soon.

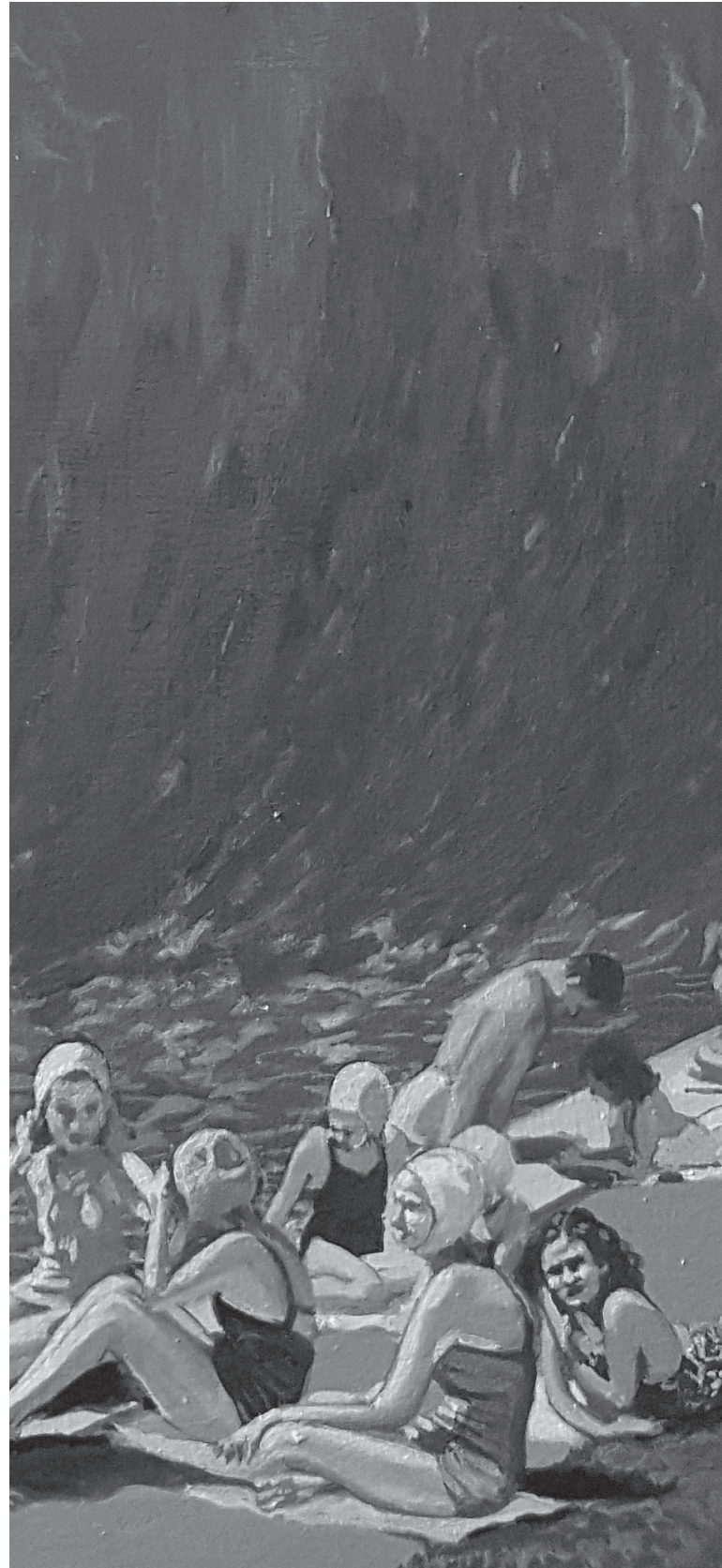
During the surreal duration of my deprived liberty in Milan, I obsessed over Craig in the internet café and the inordinate amount of time it was taking him to miss me. The even longer time it was taking him to decide whether to investigate my whereabouts?

However, this story ends well for in his own time my lovely husband did indeed close his browser and amble back down the street. I spied his much loved face peering expectantly through the travel agency window. I would like to end by saying he kicked through the glass door and carried me away but it didn't go down that way. Instead, finding the door locked, he startled the travel agent with his polite knocking. She unlocked the door with her secret button, no doubt hoping he'd arrived fresh from an atm.

Seizing the moment I bound out of the chair, stuck my foot in the door and yelled, 'Run for it, they locked me in.' My sidekick and I bolted down the street.

Later, over a chilled Italian vino, we nervously cracked jokes about the travel agent perhaps having ties to the mob and scouring the maps for an internet café on the opposite side of town.

Jen Tichon is an academic by day, a lover of non-fiction narrative at night. She finds the regaling of true adventures, hers and others, in any print form a delightful escape.



Travelling back in time: A History of the Society of Women Writers Qld

Toni Risson

Women have always been writers. They have written with babies at the breast and children crawling around their ankles. They have scrawled on envelopes with a pen in one hand and a wooden spoon in the other. They have been secretaries and bus drivers, journalists and novelists, and have written from inner-city apartments and remote cattle properties. For many, the support of other women writers has been crucial. To this end, four female journalists met in 1925 to establish a society that would foster contact between women writers in New South Wales. Florence Baverstock of *The Bulletin* was inaugural President and Mary Gilmore was one of four Vice Presidents of the Society of Women Writers.

A Queensland Branch

In 1970, (Australia) was added to the name and state groups operated as 'Magazine Branches' attached to the parent body. A Queensland 'Magazine Branch' was established in 1976 with Bridget Godbold as Coordinator. Dairy farmer Marjorie Wilke joined the following year. Moving to Brisbane in 1981, Marj placed a newspaper ad to gauge interest in forming a Queensland Branch of SWW(A). Mocco Wollert was among those who responded. The inaugural meeting of the Society of Women Writers Queensland (SWWQ) was held in Mocco's home 8 December 1982, and Federal President Kathryn Purnell travelled from Victoria to attend. Mocco became President of the first executive and Marj was Vice President.

Conferences

Each state administered SWW(A) for a two-year term with conferences held biennially in that state. Marj, Mocco and fellow member Jill Slack attended the Adelaide conference in 1982. Mocco remembers smuggling wine cartons into their CWA accommodation and Adelaide women admiring their tans. 'For four days we thought, talked, and read poems and stories,' says Mocco, 'and I enjoyed every minute of it.' In 1988, Queensland was the federal executive. Marj was Federal President and the conference held at Banyo Seminary .

Support for Women Writers

In its quest to support Queensland women who write, or want to write, SWWQ still meets on the second Tuesday of each month.

Speakers discuss everything from memoir and non-fiction to poetry and short stories as well as issues like author platforms and marketing. Then there's socialising over lunch. Writers also have the opportunity to join critique groups. Traditionally called Postal Magazines, an editor distributes participants' work and group members offer feedback on each contribution; especially helpful for members in **rural and regional areas**. Marj Wilke coordinated the original magazine, called *Morialta*, from 1979 to 1985. Membership expanded during this time and *Morialta* was divided into three magazines – *Variorum*, *Allambie* and *Jacaranda*. Today, there's an electronic version in the pipeline as well as an e-newsletter and writing competitions.

Special events dot the SWWQ calendar. At last year's Literary High Tea at the historic Inchcolm Hotel, author and journalist Susan Johnson spoke about the importance of place in her writing journey. Other events include the annual writers' retreat

on Bribie Island and the Sandcliffe Writers Festival, conducted under the auspices of SWWQ. Now in its sixth year, the Festival hosts workshops, literary dinners and panel discussions that feature writers like Melissa Lucashenko, Jackie Huggins, Matthew Condon and Samuel Wagan Watson. Every two years, SWWQ nominates a Queensland writer for the Alice Award. This coveted bronze statuette is awarded to an Australian woman writer for her contribution to Australian literature. Eleanor Dark was the first recipient in 1978. Others include Ruth Park, Kate Grenville, Elizabeth Jolly and, in 2012, Queensland writer Susanna de Vries OAM.

Queensland Writers Centre

When the Fellowship of Australian Writers of Queensland began lobbying in the 1980s for a state writers centre, SWWQ played a vital role. Representatives of various Brisbane organisations met as an official steering committee in October 1988, in the University of Queensland Press boardroom. Marj Wilke was appointed Treasurer.

Opening a brand new receipt book, Marj contributed the first \$10 membership fee and wrote her name on receipt No. 01, going down in history as the person to officially 'start' the Queensland Writers Centre (QWC).

Arts Queensland Literature Advisor Adele Moy, also a member of SWWQ, organised a press photograph in 1988/89, which was taken at Southbank after Expo. The QWC has gone on to support thousands of members and helped to establish countless Queensland writers.

Not all SWWQ members are published but many have distinguished careers across a range of genres

including children's books, short stories, articles, poetry, non-fiction and fiction. Mocco Wollert, who regularly wins poetry prizes, recently published *Bloody Bastard Beautiful*, the frank and hilarious account of a migrant girl who follows her German lover to Darwin. Trudy Graham joined the Society in 2000 after moving from WA. Trudy's memoirs *Cardboard Feet* (2017) and *A Gypsy at Heart* (2018) tell the warts-and-all story of growing up in post-war Sydney to face the challenges of the sixties. *Around the Next Bend*, the third in the series, will be published later this year. Other successfully published members include Helga Parl, Joan Turnour, Virginia Miranda and Marilyn Peck.

From outback properties to Gold Coast penthouses, women who embark upon writing journeys still seek the support of other women writers. In their company they find mentors and peers, are exposed to new ideas and share access to resources. Writers stimulate each other's creative energy. Founding members Marj Wilke, Mocco Wollert, Shirley Lawrence and Jill Slack cherish the lifelong friendships that writing together has inscribed across the past forty years. They still belong to the Society of Women Writers Queensland.



Helen Horton (FAWQ President), Katherine Davis, Adele Moy (Arts Qld Literature Advisor), Betty Birsks, Joan Priest, then Premier Mike Ahern, Nick Earls, Barbara Lilek, Donna Greaves (Arts Qld Director), Marjorie Wilke, Craig Munro (UQP) and Gerry Stiller.

Dr Toni Risson writes everything from picture books to academic articles. Food is a focus of much of her writing, with Australia's Greek shopkeeping phenomenon being of particular interest. She is also the world expert on Australian confectionery, or lollies, as we call them down under.

Field Notes

Fiction very loosely based on the author's real life experiences as a researcher in regional Queensland.

M. D. MacDonald

Up ahead is the hill I remember from that year of driving out here every semester for my first teaching gig. At the top was something I perceived at that time as a soft, almost unnoticeable portal, a warble into a slightly different world – a world slower in movement and speech, more intense in lighting, storm-work, heat, emotions. I was a lot younger then, full of fanciful notions.

I am returning now as a researcher, armed with theories, objectivity, a lens that keeps me separated from my subjects. My voice memos record my ideas and observations as field notes in categories suggested by my supervisor: first, jottings or recordings, taken on the spot, as you are observing, sometimes just key words or truncated expressions, to help you remember details later. Second, the methodological notes, descriptive and analytical notes, usually completed in the evenings, after long days of observing and interviewing, and third, the log. In the log, she said, is your description of how you are feeling and how you perceive your interactions with the people, landscapes and activities around you.

On a long and straight narrow bitumen highway, I head west. Flat dry paddocks lie to the south and north, to the horizons, intermittent trees.

A low range to the west. I am driving an old Commodore sedan, borrowed from a friend. I may have misled the uni health and safety committee slightly. They were running around like chooks with their heads cut off, overly anxious as only urban people can be about me driving so far west onto private stations in remote areas. I reassured them that I would be driving a ute, with a UHF, and that I knew the territory well. After all, I did do a rural year teaching.

I had intended to borrow my partner's ute, but that didn't quite work out as planned. This old sedan was the next best thing and it does have a bull bar.

There is a gravelled rest stop for road trains on the left side of the road at the top of the hill. I used to imagine that the trucks would stop there and change drivers.

I thought that some people could not go any further east. They could not breathe outside their world.

My overheated imagination of course, but I knew many people who had never left the area. Parents, grandparents of the children I taught. Never crossed the river, other teachers would say of them. One young mother said to me: my parents wanted to send me away to boarding school, but I didn't want to go to the ocean - ever. Another woman told me with a grave voice: people beyond the range are very strange. Teachers, doctors and other temporary people could go back and forth through the pass as long as they didn't stay in the district too long, shellacked themselves within strong previous discourses, and didn't allow any other modes of being to seep in.

I drive through the pass, through red rock cuts. I do feel that little shiver, but I now know that the red outcropping merely marks the geophysical line indicating where ancient Cainozoic floodouts and alluvial fans begin, not my entry into an alternate reality.

The warble must be just my anticipation entering a place I used to inhabit, and which still inhabits my dreams.

Driving down the other side, I note the paddocks to the left and right, rolling downs, dead wheat stubble on light brown soil, like a thickly knitted sweater. Groves of trees, ironbark, brigalow, and lining the pathways of dry creeks, magnificent white gums. Cattle under the trees, looking poorly. It has been another long drought.

I am driving through a finger of fertile country, where, in years when it rains, crops can be grown.

I decide to stop in the town, pick up a coffee and a sandwich, before my last five hour driving stint. I see the water tower, drive past the race course, and head for the café. Everything appears to be as it was twenty years ago. There is the school, with the same mural, Indigenous motif. No, there are a few changes. The kids' handprints around the edge are faded now. The town hall, spruced up. Someone must have got a grant. The playground we put in hasn't changed. Same with the Museum, the Council offices. I can see that the riverside walk has been improved, exercise machines, picnic tables. I pull up at the café where a group of young men stand outside wearing navy and yellow Council work clothes.

I walk into the dark interior of the café.

Same hotbox, same dim sums. Same lady in the kitchen, surely her hair is now whiter? It is permed exactly as it was. I can't quite remember her name. Mrs. Something.

Rosie is at the cash register.

'Hi Kate', she says, as if I was here yesterday.

'Hi Rosie', I say, as if I have been here yesterday. How do I know her name immediately? She was the mother of one my best students. I didn't know her very well, but still, same face, covered with freckles. She doesn't look even one day older. Maybe she wasn't very old when I knew her, just seemed older because she was a parent?

'What would you like?' she says.

'Chicken, avocado and cheese toasted sandwich, thanks. And coffee, takeaway,' I say after glancing at the menu. 'How's Meg doing?'

'Went away, we don't hear much from her now,' she says, taking my card and turning away to get the coffee. 'Want any sugar?'

'I shouldn't,' I say, 'but I've got a long drive ahead of me. Maybe one.'

Two of the young men come inside, get cokes out of the fridge, come to the counter.

The white-haired lady brings me my sandwich, wrapped in paper.

'Where are you driving to?' she asks.

I tell her and her eyes widen.

'Careful out there, Kate,' she says. 'Not so long ago a lady drove out there, got lost, hit a roo, got out of the car -'

'To see if the roo was okay is what I heard,' says one of the men.

'Nah, who would do that?' says the other. 'She musta been checking on the damage to her car.'

'We will never know,' says the woman.

'What happened?' I ask, feeling my chest tighten.

'Gored by a big old wild boar,' says one of the men.

'Dragged her around, gnawed her leg off,' says the other.

'Cut it out, boys,' says Rosie, and hands me my takeaway coffee. 'That was a long time ago, and no-one really knows what happened. It's just a story.' She glares at the men, takes their money.

'Don't get out of your car,' says the old woman, before retreating to the kitchen.

'Don't pay any attention to them,' says Rosie, 'but drive carefully. Have a good trip'.

Back on the road, I suppose I should record my feelings about seeing the town. It has been twenty years, I have been married, had two children, a completely different life, and yet they know me and I know them. It is as if I have never left.

Okay, back to observations. Driving through non-descript country, light brown soil, pine trees; I have driven this way before. It won't change much for a few hours, so I will listen to a lecture on ethnographic methods.

4 pm. Only a half hour to go before the turn-off. I am driving in red country now, the soil on the sides of the bitumen a deep rusty red. The foliage of the Mulga trees provides a soft pale green screen along the road. Almost blurry. This is sheep country, or it used to be before this drought. I guess I will find out shortly what people are producing now. Are some still grazing sheep? The family I am staying with tonight and interviewing tomorrow have shifted part of their enterprise to domesticating wild goats.

It will be interesting to find out how people are coping, what they are doing to keep themselves afloat, financially and emotionally, during this prolonged drought.

My feelings? Happy. Tired. I've been driving for eight hours so far, but I'm excited about visiting my first informants. This is what I have always wanted to do – investigate the unknown, unearth new knowledge. Even if everything else in my life is falling to pieces, I can find meaning and grounding in this researcher role. And I have always had an affinity with people in remote areas. I feel like one of them - only an hour or so to go.

I take the 'Mullamulla' turnoff onto a hard-packed, well-formed road. Should be fine. It is getting to that time of day, that magic time when the light is on such an extreme slant that it heightens all the colours. Everywhere I look, the red soil stretches out as far as the eye can see. It isn't just red, it is omnipresent blood red flowing in all directions with absolutely no ground cover to soften it.

The mulga trees have disappeared and in their place are spindly black tree trunks twisting up from the red carpet.

There is not a blade of grass, a stick or a twig on the ground, as if the paddocks have been vacuumed. It is a striking dramatic vista, no less beautiful for its harshness.

Loose gravel. Bumps and hollows. The Commodore has hit a different road surface while my eyes were on the paddocks. Another bump. The rear-view mirror dangles limply, then falls. Side mirrors will have to do. I hear the men's warning replay in my mind and placate myself by picturing the wallabies I've already seen: so thin, carrying their bodies like heavy sacks of dried out skin. They wouldn't have the energy to hop into the middle of the road, much less hit the car.

Finally, I see some sheep, first time in half an hour, huddled in one corner of a paddock. Then wild goats, multi-patterned, dark brown, golden, white swirling

coats, running in packs, heads held high, horned, primeval. They ignore me in my car, creeping along the narrow road, trying to stay on the higher tracks.

The gravel has given way to sandy soil, deeply grooved by the wheels of trucks. A 4-wheel-drive would have been a better option. The chassis of my borrowed car is scraping on the sand ridges. My head is aching.

An intense feeling of unease overtakes me. The paddocks are so bare, so desolate - who could possibly live here? What could these paddocks ever hope to sustain? This semi-arid wild country cannot possibly be of use to anyone. Roos hop in pairs across the road up ahead. I am going so slowly, trying not to hit them. Trying not to think of the stories told to me by the old woman and those men.

Ahead, a pack of goats turn and head right for my car. They look – purposeful. I slam the brakes and slide to a halt. For a moment I feel safe hidden in the dust cloud. As the gritty particles settle I see the goats stop, turn and run. What are they afraid of?

The car rocks back and forth. There's a flicker of movement in the side mirror. Dust and tusks, snout, encrusted eyes. Silted air fills my lungs, dries my eyes, but in the mirror the wild boar's image is clear. There'll be no field notes tonight.



M. D. MacDonald lives and works in rural Queensland, holds a Graduate Certificate in Creative Industries from QUT, and a Masters of Professional Studies from USQ. MacDonald is currently a consultant and a PhD candidate at USQ and often travels to South West Queensland for work and research.

Milestones

At the Queensland Writers Centre we love celebrating the milestones of each and every author, and this year we've been so happy to see one of our members, and past Programs Manager, **Jackie Ryan**, sweep the awards taking home the Queensland Premier's Award for a work of State Significance, University of Southern Queensland History Book Award, and a 2018 Queensland Writers Fellowship.

But the achievement by our members doesn't stop there with **Anna Jacobson** taking home the Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award, **Melanie Myers** winning the Glendower Award for an Emerging Queensland Writer and **Laura Elvery** received both the Emerging Queensland Writer – Manuscript Award and a 2018 Queensland Writers Fellowship.

We'd love to congratulate all of the winners on their success this year, and we can't wait to re-read all of these works and the new works to come.

Leanne Dodd's novel *Ebb and Flow* was long listed for the 2018 Richell Prize for Emerging Writers with Hachette Publishers.

Robyn Osborne's fourth picture book *Bruno the Boisterous Blue Dog* from the *Bush* has been released by Big Sky Publishing.

Amanda O'Callaghan's flash fiction has been shortlisted for the Bath Flash Fiction Award.

Kerry Lown Whalen's short story *Choices* placed second in the Burdekin Readers & Writers Short Story Competition 2018.

Richard Yaxley's novel *This Is My Song* has been shortlisted in the 2018 Prime Minister's Literary Awards for Young Adult Fiction.

Pam Rushby's historical children's novel *Lizzie and Margaret Rose* was awarded first place in the 2018 Society of Women Writers NSW awards. Her middle-grade novel *Princess Parsley* was also commended.

Toni Risson's *Steak and Eggs* was published as part of the *Within/Without These Walls* anthology.

Diane Demetre's novel *Island of Secrets* was released by Luminosity Publishing in October.

Warren Ward's essay *Her name was Marielle Franco* has been published in *Overland*.

The Charlie Waller Memorial Trust are giving away one thousand copies of Kathy Hoopmann's book, *All Birds Have Anxiety*, to education facilities in the UK.

Kylie Kaden's third novel *The Day The Lies Began* will be published by Pantera Press in 2019.

John Synott's debut novel *The Fake Prince* will be published by JPSfiction and launched on December 12th at *Avid Reader*.

Dr Hilary Davies is the recipient of the 2018 Queensland Business Leaders

Hall of Fame Fellowship for her project *Putting Queenslanders on the Road: The Canada Cycle and Motor Agency Ltd*.

Wenda Shurety's debut picture book *Eva's Imagination* has been published by New Frontier Publishing and released October 1st. Illustrations are by Karen Erasmus.

Dollhouse, the follow-up to M.T. Ellis's award-winning crime thriller, *Azrael*, was released on October 1, 2018.

Charlotte Barkla's picture book manuscript, *My Baby Brother*, recently won first place in the Sutherland Shire Writers' Festival 2018 Picture Book Competition (for unpublished picture book manuscripts).

Isabella Hargreaves's short story *The Jade Keepsake* placed first in the Romance Writers of Australia 2018 Little Gems Short Story Competition and her novella *Runaway Christmas*

placed joint first in the Romance Writers of New Zealand's *Koru Award* (novella category).

Allison Paterson's non-fiction title *Australia Remembers: Anzac Day, Remembrance Day and War Memorials* was released by Big Sky Publishing in October. It is the first in a series for primary-age children with *Australia Remembers: Customs and Traditions of the Australian Defence Force* to be published early next year.

Tess Rowley's short story *The Girl Who Wanted to Paint the Moon* placed second in the Hope Prize Short Story Competition 2018.

Lindsay Boyd's story *The Gratuity* has been published by *Fairlight Books*.

Damen O'Brien's poems *Laika Was a Dog* and *The Tree is Burning* were shortlisted in the ACU Poetry Prize.

Competitions and Opportunities

Tasmanian Writers' Prize 2019:

Open to residents of Australia and New Zealand and permanent residents, the competition is for short stories up to 3,000 words on an assigned theme.

Deadline: 17 February 2019

Text Prize:

Submissions for the 2019 Text Prize will open Monday 7 January and close Friday 8 February. The entry form for the 2019 Text Prize is available for download now. The \$10,000 Text Prize aims to discover incredible new books for young adults and children by Australian and New Zealand writers.

Deadline: 8 February 2019

The Somerset National Poetry Prize

As a part of the 2019 Somerset Storyfest, school-aged students are invited to participate in the Somerset National Poetry Prize sponsored by Dr Annette Allen of Tweed Banora Dental.

Deadline: Friday 7 December 2018

2019 Calibre Essay Prize:

Entry is now open for 2019 Calibre Essay Prize. Founded in 2007 and now worth a total of AU\$7,500 the Calibre Prize is one of the world's leading prizes for a new non-fiction essay.

Deadline: 14 January 2019

Submit to Rabbit Journal Issue 27: The Tense Issue:

Poet Pascale Burton and Northern Rivers-based poet David Stavanger. TENSE bodies / TENSE minds / TENSE societies / disguising TENSE / TENSE in-between / grammatical TENSE.

Deadline: 4 January 2019

Submit to Griffith Review 65: Crimes and Punishments: Griffith Review 65:

Crimes and Punishments invites stories that brush with the law: from felons to forensics, from true crime to social justice, from corruption and criminology to Koori courts and other revolutionary reforms. We seek essays, reportage, and

stories – fiction and non-fiction – as well as memoir and poetry that delve into the narratives, the policies and the procedures of the myriad aspects of crime, justice and punishment in Australia today.

Deadline: 4 February 2019

John S. Knight Journalism Fellowships at Stanford:

The application period for the John S. Knight (JSK) Journalism Fellowships Class of 2020 is now open. Applications will be accepted through Dec. 4, 2018 for international applicants. U.S. applicants have until Jan. 31, 2019 to complete their applications.

Deadline: 4 December 2018

Vida Lahey Memorial Travelling Scholarship:

We're looking for passionate, informed freelance critics to review shows and write features for Fest Magazine at the Adelaide Fringe and Adelaide Festival.

Deadline: 2 December 2018

Buzz Words Short Story Prize 2018:

The Buzz Words Short Story Prize is a new annual prize of \$1,000 awarded to recognise excellence in short story writing for children. The story must be suitable for readers 8 to 11 years. The inaugural judge for the competition is Jackie French, author of much-loved books for adults and children, AM, 2014-15 Australian Children's Laureate and 2015 Senior Australian of the Year.

Deadline: 31 December 2018

Tom Collins Poetry Prize:

The Tom Collins Poetry Prize is an annual competition inaugurated by FAWWA in 1975 in memory of Australian author Joseph Furphy (1843 – 1912). Under the name Tom Collins, he wrote the Australian classic, *Such is Life*, as well as many poems.

Deadline: 15 December 2018

Nature Writing Prize 2019:

Calling all nature writers! The Nature Conservancy Australia is delighted to open the fifth biennial Nature Writing Prize. The \$5,000 award is given for the best essay (3,000 – 5,000 words) in the genre of 'Writing of Place'. The winning essay will also be published as an online multimedia essay by Griffith Review – Australia's leading literary quarterly publication.

Deadline: 1 February 2019

2018 Hal Porter Short Story

Competition: Australian writers are invited to enter a short story, written in any style for the first prize of \$1000. Shortlisted writers will receive UQP publications.

Deadline: 10 December 2018

The Fantastica Prize:

Fantastica invites Australian and New Zealand writers to submit science fiction manuscripts for consideration.

Deadline: 31 January 2019

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Riverbend Books
SA Writers Centre
Sunnybank Library
Sunshine Coast Libraries
St Patrick's Senior College Library Tasmanian
Writers' Centre Townsville Library
The University of Queensland University of Queensland Press Voices on the Coast
Writers Victoria
WritingWA

Events

Gunnas Writing Master class Brisbane

New Farm, 1 February

Jane Caro: 'Accidental Feminists'

Brisbane, 13 February

Tosin Adewumi: 'Passion Reveals Purpose'

19 February, Brisbane

Jillian Hamilton: 'Risk Dollarisation'

Brisbane, 24 January

Discover the eLibrary

Arana Hills, 16 January

Anime and Manga Club

(grade 7-12) – Caboolture, 15 January

Michelle Beesley, Tanya Kean and Melanie Page: 'Destination Romance'

Brisbane, 20 December

Ebooks and more!

Manunda, 20 December

Emma Gilkison: 'The Heart of Jesus Valentino'

Avid Reader Bookshop,
19 December

Karen Sullivan: Mixed Metaphors

14 December, Brisbane

Mehrdad Rafiee: 'Persian Letters'

13 December, Brisbane

John Synott: 'The Fake Prince'

Brisbane, 12 December

The Conversation Yearbook 2018: Panel Discussion

10 December, Brisbane



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