

FEDERATION

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£2.00



Womens' Issue:

The Aurora Metro Story

**How does a Louise Shore
get to be a Jean Rhys?**

Lauren Hickey

Looking Back to the Sixties

Barlaston: Jan Holliday Sparks Clogs!

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Feditorial/Femitorial

Welcome to our first ever all (almost) women's edition of Federation. The usual writer of this Feditorial decided that it would be rather strange if he wrote it for this women's issue. So, with his usual 'forethought' he asked me to do it (with just a couple of days left before it goes to print!) So as for it being strange if he wrote it, it's gonna be strange anyhow with me writing it!

One of the reasons for this women's edition, is Sarah Richardson's research for a directory of working class women writers, Writing on the Line. You will find a couple of extracts from them in Sarah's article on page 3. Writing on the Line answers some questions, on page 7, posed by Sandra Courtman about the evidence of working class women's writing produced in the 1960s and 70s.

We've also included a couple of interviews with some of the women of the Fed (page 11). Another first is that we've included some stories. Some of these authors are starting out on similar roads travelled by at least three of the women interviewed by Roger Drury, of Forest Artworks.

Doreen Ravenscroft, started out as an adult basic education student in the early 70s and now serves on the management committee of Gatehouse Books. She runs Reminiscence Writing workshops for Gatehouse, and sometimes, Pecket Well College. Doreen attends as many Fed events as she can, either as a workshop convenor or participant. She also tells how Gatehouse began in the 70's, and how she is

still involved in her local Labour Party, as she has been since 16 years old.

Janice Fullman describes how, as a secretary, she joined Tottenham Writers workshop and was encouraged to take a degree. She did, and went into teaching at infant school, which, I believe, is the most important time in a child's schooling. If they get a good grounding here then they should sail through the rest of their school days, and I'm sure they'll get that with Janice.

Almost as soon as Janice joined her first workshop she was voted onto the Fed exec. committee and 'served time' as member, secretary and finally chairperson. Janice now runs a writing group herself, 'Chatshow Writers', which is part of Eastside Writers. Chatshow is made up of people with learning disabilities and difficulties.

Last, (but, I hope, certainly not least!) lil' ole me. I became involved after attending a basic English class and finding out about writers' workshops. I now pass on as many skills as I can to others. Some of these skills I wouldn't have gained if it had not been for the Federation.

I take a Writing group for disabled people, people with mental health problems and those who have been let down with their education. I do word processing and desktop publishing workshops for Pecket Well College, the Fed and other organisations. I too have 'served time' on the Fed exec as a member, secretary and, currently, as regional rep and the Fed mag. team.

What comes through strongly in the interviews is that most of this may not have happened if

it hadn't have been for the help, support, encouragement and just plain friendliness of everybody involved with the Fed. In fact, if a survey were to be carried out on 'what has being involved with the Fed done for you?' I'm certain we'd have hundreds of similar stories from both men and women of the Fed.

Perhaps we should do one! This being the 20th anniversary of the Fed. the mind boggles as to how many people have been through member groups. 1997 will see the 21st anniversary, so there's still time for you to let us hear your success story!

Pat Smart

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Laureen Hickey 1946-1995

Yesterday I said goodbye to a dear friend, Laureen Hickey. Laureen died on Sunday 15th October after battling against a debilitating illness for nearly two years.

Laureen's connection with the FWWCP dates from the early 80's until recently when she was involved with the discussions for the 20th anniversary celebrations. As executive member and later Secretary Laureen was active in Fed administration. This was in the lean years of the late 80's before the Arts Council funding was secured and a worker appointed. It therefore fell to the Secretary to update mailing lists, distribute minutes and edit the Newsletter. Tasks which Laureen undertook while teaching full time at a local comprehensive school and being active in the local NUT association.

Concern with Fed

Even after relinquishing her executive role Laureen was still concerned with Fed matters, supporting and encouraging the Chair and worker, always ready to debate the issues. She firmly believed in the development of the Fed as an organisation to be recognised for its role in promoting working class writing and publishing from the grass roots.

As co-ordinator of Tottenham and Wood Green Writers Laureen ensured that there was a place for local writers to share and develop their writing. Ever critical of her own writing Laureen had the ability to encourage others young

and old to pursue their creativity. As well as being a committed socialist and worker for equal opportunities Laureen was a loyal and supportive friend. She had the knack of bringing people together and I can witness to many social gatherings enjoyed at the Tottenham home she shared with her husband Bill.

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Laureen had a great sense of humour. During meetings this would often surface and diffuse heated debate enabling the protagonists to get things into perspective. There were many times I was glad of her company during the journeys to and from executive meetings, the most memorable being our sortie in the Red Light district of Sheffield, quite innocently looking for bed and breakfast accommodation. We were rescued by Nick Pollard, though not before Laureen had booked herself into the Howard Hotel, a dingy red plush wallpaper establishment resembling the set of the Munsters' show, presided over by a lard-pated landlord oozing obsequiousness, where you could rent rooms by the hour. Laureen

insisted on staying the night in the room she had booked. Laureen stood, white and shaking, at the door in the morning, having refused breakfast - but having survived. She was the first to see the funny side and exploited the story for its humour.

Laureen was a committed, dedicated and courageous woman. I personally will always be grateful for the support and encouragement she gave me when I followed her example and became a mature student, successfully completing studies to become a teacher. Her writing was honest and direct, some has been included in Fed anthologies. Laureen will be missed by many. She achieved much and influenced countless young people in her teaching career.

I will miss her as a colleague and friend and will continue to celebrate her life. The following poem gives some small insight into her philosophy:

Happiness is:

*My plant sprouting a new leaf,
Wine, good food and, friends, A
warm room when it's cold
outside.*

*Dancing to golden oldies,
Sun, sea, sand and a good book.
The smell of country after months
in town.*

Misery is:

*When these things cease to
matter*

Laureen Hickey 1989

Janice Fullman

Making “Writing on the Line”

January 1996 saw the publication of an important new source of information about and discussion of issues around the writing of working-class women.

Sarah Richardson describes the planning and the process of producing this milestone in women’s community publishing and critique.

The idea for the book initially came from a conversation I had at the 1993 Festival of Writing with Stefan Szczulkun of Working Press. He said that Working Press had published no books about working-class women writers and was anxious to do so.

He asked whether I would be interested in doing some research on the subject. At the time I didn’t think I was up to the task as I haven’t got an academic background; but I started in a fairly modest way to trawl through my own collection of books. I then photocopied this list of 20 or so names and sent it to fiends, colleagues and other interested bodies such as the Women’s History Network, independent bookshops, Marx Memorial Library, Trades Unions, the Labour Party and many others.

Debate

This list provoked a lot of debate, some strong reactions and discussion of terminology. I had used class background as my starting point, and included women from many different cultures. There were famous women writers listed such as Alice Walker and Maya Angelou as well as writers from the Federation and Yorkshire Art Circus. All the women wrote primarily in the 20th century. At the same time I used the Fawcett Library and the Feminist Library in London to find reference works and secondary sources to check factual details such as births and deaths. I also went to Hackney Central Library and used their CD ROM to scan the disc of “British Books in Print” to find publications details.

In Summer 1994, while I was still researching, I attended a conference organised by Working Press called “Class Culture and Identity”. The conference was

part funded by the Federation. It was there that I met Merylyn Cherry, Sammy Palfrey and Gail Chester. Sammy and Gail were both members of the Fed. Mel had just had a pamphlet published by Working Press focusing on working-class women writers. Sammy had written a dissertation on women’s writing during the Miners’ strike and Gail was leading a workshop at the conference on the problems of being published as working-class women writers. Stefan decided that these four separate pieces could come together in a very interesting book and we began to work together to make this happen.

Working Together

We had several all day meetings to discuss format, design, layout, illustration and marketing. We composed Advance Information sheets to send to interested parties and bookshops. We decided to opt for a full colour cover to attract people to the book, whilst also trying to break into the academic market. I rang round several printers that different community groups recommended, getting verbal and then written quotes. We decided on Spiderweb in Finsbury Park, because Eastside had used them before and they had a lot of experience with book publishing. A lot of the smaller printers do not, and so their bindings can be of poorer quality and liable to fall apart after a short time.

At the same time, I was learning how to use a desk top publishing package on the computer for the first time so that we could

keep costs down by doing the typesetting and layout ourselves. We chose the fonts, where to italicise, where to type in bold. Gilda O'Neill, another author on the list who I met at the Women Writers Network (London), agreed to do the introduction. My brother, Matthew Richardson, who is an illustrator, designed the cover, with symbols from a working woman's life.

Finally the whole book was ready to be proof read by Sammy. Once this was completed it was off to the printers with discs, the hard copy, the originals for the art work and instructions to the printer. Deadlines had to be negotiated and renegotiated. The first run of covers came out in very dull tones and had to be done again.

Launch

Meantime we were organising the launch at Eastside Books. Denise Jones and Roger Mills sent invitations to a huge list

Ethel Carnie 1886-1962 Novels

Novels

Miss Nobody (1913)
Helen of the Four Gates (1917)
The House That Jill Built (1920)
The Marriage of Elizabeth (1920)
General Belinda (1923)
This Slavery (1925)
Eagle's Crag (1931)

Short Stories

The Lamp Girl and Other Stories (1913)
Voices of Womanhood (1915)

Poetry

Rhymes from the Factory (1907)
Songs of a Factory Girl (1911)

■ **Born in Lancashire. Daughter of cotton weavers. Worked herself in the cotton mill, half-time as a young child progressing to full-time at the age of 13. Worked for six months as editor of "Woman Worker in 1909. After her marriage in 1915 she worked full time as a writer, in labour journalism and books.**

An extract from "Working Class Writing" by Sarah Richardson

Jessie Kesson 1916-1994

The White Bird Passes (1959* filmed)

The Glitter of Mica (1963*)

Another Time, Another Place (1983* filmed)

Where the Apple Ripens (1985*)

■ **Born in a workhouse in Inverness. Brought up by single mother until the age of nine when she was sent to an orphanage because her mother was too ill to look after her. Developed an interest in writing at school. Left at 16 to become a housemaid but was later sacked. She had a breakdown and spent some time in mental hospital. She met and married a farm-labourer in 1936 and from then until she moved to London in 1954 was seen as an eccentric, by being a working-class writer. After their move to London she worked in Woolworths to support herself, and worked with children and the elderly. Her work reflects the struggles in her life - to conform and not be taken seriously, or to rebel and be ostracised.**

An extract from "Working Class Writing" by Sarah Richardson

and sorted out the guests. Liz Thompson from Eastside Writers (and in the books!) was doing a reading and Gilda O'Neill was to come and speak, but at the last minute had to drop out with laryngitis. With a week to go, I went to pick up 200 of the print run of 1,000 from Spiderweb. It was a very exciting but also scary moment. Opening a fresh box of books, smelling them, seeing it

in print after 2 years of work was brilliant. But how would we sell that great mound of books and at least break even?

The launch night, in late November, was great. A mixture of Working Press associates, Eastside Writers and friends, and two or three car loads of women who had driven up from Greenham Common Peace Camp, Yellowgate. In all around 70 people, came to Eastside to celebrate the launch of this, and another Working Press book, "Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp: A History of Non-Violent Resistance". Denise Jones and Roger Mills were on hand to help run the event. I talked a bit about "Writing on the Line" and how Mel, Sammy, Gail and myself had been involved in the project, initiated by Stefan, an inspirational book to work on and hopefully to read. Liz Thompson (of Eastside Writers) did a very funny poetry reading in her own inimitable style.

Next Beth Junor, author of "Greenham Common", described how delighted she was to find a

publisher for an (as yet) untold story. Other women from the camp read moving, and at times harrowing, accounts of life there. We adjourned to the local hostelry, it was good to share an evening and meet new writers. We hope to stay in touch with the women of Yellowgate, who were likewise interested in learning more about the Federation.

Booker Prize

We sold 32 copies of the book, which was a great start. Eastside kept some in their window. We all began selling to family and friends. Those who didn't buy got a copy for a Christmas present anyway! We also blitzed national and local press, TV and radio. To some we sent review copies, others a copy of the cover and a Press Release, based around Pat Barker who is listed in the book, and had just won the Booker Prize. This mailing was followed up with phone calls. To date we have had agreement to review by Everywoman, New Woman and the Pink Paper as well as other, smaller publications. Just into the New Year, I was invited for interview by Viva Radio, a women's radio station covering the whole of London.

Hard Work

To get "Writing on the Line" in print has been much harder work than I ever imagined. Researching and writing it was hard enough and was a goal in itself. To continue that with learning a huge range of new skills that I'm still learning has been frustrating but ultimately rewarding. Working as a collective where each gave

The myth of academic objectivity is a close relative of the myth of artistic judgement, which is usually applied to fiction publishing. It is easy to see how working-class subjects are excluded. Potential authors never see themselves reflected in the existing literature and therefore feel their lives provide inappropriate material to write about. The publisher finds any exploration of working-class life depressing unless it is cloaked in history or regionalism (Catherine Cookson). Colourful characters and Warmth and humour" help, too- but who defines what is warm, colourful and humorous? And connected with this is the patronising view of what the predominantly working-class and female audience wants to read. Recently considerable Cultural Studies attention has been paid to genre fiction and in the case of feminists, romantic fiction, but I find a class sympathy often sadly lacking.

In my discussion group at the 1994 conference, I hoped to explore the first-hand experience - as writers, as readers, as cultural workers - of the working-class intellectuals gathered there. But time was short, and all the issues were pressing, so we did not have much of a chance to go into specifics. I would still like to sit some of us down and deal with questions such as: What were your earliest experiences of books? When did you first go to a library/bookshop? Do you feel comfortable in one now - what sorts? Have you ever tried to succeed in getting a book published with a commercial publisher? What was that experience like? What sorts of books do you like reading now? Do you, in fact, like reading? I would also look at the answers to see how they differ between women and men.

From: "Publishing - A Gentleperson's Profession?" Gail Chester

ideas and helped each other built confidence and is empowering. I recommend it!

Sarah Richardson.

Both books are available from Working Press, 54 Sharsted St, London SE17 3TN.

Trade distribution through Central Books, 99 Wallis Rd, London E9 5LN

Do YOU want to help the FWWCP make writing and publishing accessible to all? If "Yes" then like many others become a Friend of the Fed. and for a small monthly donation YOU can help make it happen. For details phone or fax Tim Diggles on 01782 822327 Do it today

The Aurora Metro Story

The strength of any small press is the writers it actually publishes, and we're very pleased to have a number of leading national and International writers among our contributing authors, as well as many up-and-coming new voices, all making for a rich and varied cultural mix.

We started as a writing workshop at the Drill Hall Arts Centre in 1986. This led to further workshops and a showcasing of material from the group annually through performance and readings. After three years we had generated a great deal of high quality poetry, prose and playwriting and the next stage was to look for publication.

With a grant from the Literature Department at Greater London Arts we set about publishing "*The Women Writers Handbook*" (ISBN 0 9515877 0 6) which offers advice and a set of workshop exercises for tutors interested in running their own creative writing class as well as examples of the material that was generated from our own workshop programme, including work by Cherry Smyth, Adziko Simba and Clare Bayley.

With the success of this book, we decided to publish a collection of plays by writers involved with the workshops, as members or tutors. Titled "*Seven Plays by Women: Female Voices, Fighting Lives*" (ISBN 0 9515877 14) including plays by April de Angelis, Ayshe Raif and Nina Rapi, the collection won the Arts Council's Raymond Williams Prize and we were also applauded for our work by Women-in-Publishing in the form of the Pandora Award. By 1993, members of the original writers' workshop had become sufficiently experienced in producing and showcasing new theatre writing that they formed a theatre company, The Women's Theatre Workshop. We agreed to set up the publishing project as a sister company, Aurora Metro Press and to broaden the remit.

Since then we've published the first ever collection of "*Black and Asian Plays by Women*" (ISBN 0 9515877 2 2) including plays by Winsome Pinnock, Meera Syal and Rukhsana Ahmed, an international collection "*Plays by Mediterranean Women*" (ISBN

09515877 3 0) including plays by Nawal el Saadawi, Ariane Mnouchkine and Dacia Maraini and most recently an anthology of short stories titled "*How Maxine Learned to Love Her Legs and Other Tales of Growing Up*" (ISBN 0 9515877 4 9), including work by Michele Roberts, Elisa Segrave, Bonnie Greer and 20 others.

Whilst we've been relatively successful in terms of reviews, awards and project subsidies, the sales of the books haven't been strong enough to enable us to expand beyond one or two books a year. We need to promote both new titles and our backlist more successfully. We're hoping to be able to set up a joint marketing initiative with Crocus Books, Onlywomen Press and Scarlet Press, dependent on Arts Council funding, to try and counter the drive to centralised buying in the big book chains. This policy ignores the differences in tastes and interests of customers in different communities and whilst restricting choice for the sake of commercialism, it means fewer and fewer books by smaller presses being stocked, so people don't get the chance to see anything beyond the mainstream on the shelves. We're looking forward to 1996 with excitement and hope to be publishing two new collections: "*Young Blood*" plays for young performers, and "*A Touch of the Dutch*" plays by Dutch women writers to coincide with performances in the Autumn.

Cheryl Robson

See Reviews, Page 26

Fed writer to literati or how does a Louise Shore get to be a Jean Rhys?

One exceptionally humid afternoon of last summer I made the journey to Sheffield to see Federation magazine editor Nick Pollard I asked him to help me with my search for certain types of women's writing produced in the 1960's and 1970's. Having looked in all the usual places, I had found the same four or five names recurring and they shared a particularly middle class experience. Who else was writing at that time and what were they writing about?

Although I knew that the Federation was not formed officially until 1976, it was formed because writers' groups were already in existence and the political and cultural scene preempted a need for a network for such groups. I was particularly interested in that first generation of Caribbean women who arrived in significant numbers from the 'fifties onwards.

The earliest Federation members

As Nick talked on, excitement and frustration intermingled. The absence of black British women writers pre - 1980 is documented apparently without much knowledge of the material written by Caribbean migrant women, who were some of the earliest Federation members. Founding members Ken Worpole and Rebecca O'Rourke both talked enthusiastically of the activities of multiracial groups at Centerprise: "some of the stuff was terrific" (1) The frustration lies in the fact that it is doomed to remain in boxes or in the (*) archives of the Federation. This first wave of migrant women's writing is part of a prehistory of current black British women's writing; the historical significance of which needs researching and recording before it is lost.

I know that I am hardly the first to ask certain questions about working class experience and its relationship to the literary establishment: Worpole and O'Rourke have made significant

academic contributions, as have Tillie Olsen, Joanna Russ, Carolyn Steedman, Mel Cherry and Sarah Richardson. But these are still voices in the wilderness and all the literary theses on Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing and Margaret Drabble only service a myth that other writing did not exist. I was told that we don't have a Toni Morrison in Britain because Caribbean women migrants were not educated and so did not write. Well many of them were highly educated and they did write, but it is more a question of what and how; of tracing their development and treatment as writers.

We learn something of the Empire Windrush generation from the fictional work of talented male Caribbeans like Sam Selvon in *The Lonely Londoners*. But what of the women? They appear in that work as peripheral to a lively male community. The women, if they exist at all, are here to be conquered, hustled for a free meal and a warm bed. The Caribbean Artists Movement (1966 - 1972) (2) was critical in encouraging and establishing many Caribbean writers but again, the women are mostly active in an organisational way, or they are the ones that patiently type and Xerox their male partners' unpublished manuscripts. It would be tempting to accept that the gender politics of the times rendered Caribbean women silent and servile. But this is curiously at odds with the real historical accounts of Caribbean women.

The West Indian Gazette

This was also a time when powerful, politically active women like Claudia Jones and Amy Garvey arrived in Britain and started The West Indian Gazette. In the 'sixties Sylvia Wynter, Merle Hodge and Beryl Gilroy were all in London writing novels and plays. The so called 'ordinary women immigrants' were far from passive. When refused acceptance in British social life, they instigated projects for child care, religious worship, and dispensed with the services of banks and building society with their 'partner' saving schemes. They challenged discriminatory work practices by , organising collective protests. Significantly Caribbean women without a university education did not confine their energies to dealing with the daily pressures of establishing a home and a life, they joined writers' and literacy groups and sought a means of expression to deal with their cultural dislocation.

Which brings me to Jamaican Louise Shore and the white West Indian novelist Jean Rhys. They both wrote the same story. In Rhys' case it has become a celebrated part of her oeuvre and is called *'Let Them Call It Jazz'*. (3) But in essence it describes the experience of finding accommodation, of exploitation, abuse and the resulting mental breakdown that Federation writer Louise Shore describes in *Pure Running* (4). The Rhys' story is a crafted literary product: valued (now), analysed and criticised. *Pure Running* is part of that inconsequential body of writing which is so often dismissed as

working class autobiography: therapeutic and of value as process rather than product. But we might consider how strikingly similar these two products are:

"To show you how I felt. I don't remember exactly. But I believe it's the second Saturday after I come that when I'm at the window just before I go for my wine I feel somebody's hand on my shoulder and it's Mr Sims. He must walk very quiet because I don't know a thing till he touch me.

Significantly Caribbean women without a university education did not confine their energies to dealing with the daily pressures of establishing a home and a life, they joined writers' and literacy groups and sought a means of expression to deal with their cultural dislocation.

He says Hullo, then he tells me I've got terrible thin, do I ever eat. I say of course I eat but he goes on that it doesn't suit me at all to be so thin and he'll buy some food in the village. (That's the way he talk. There's no village here. You don't get away from London so quick)" **Rhys.**

This is Louise's reaction to the knowledge that she has been conned by her 'landlord':

"I just keep talking this thing round, this thing I shouldn't really talk about. Anyway I feel so sick after that letter, I went to work, and everyone keep asking me

what happen. I say, "I don't know I couldn't tell you anything." I have to stop from work then. I have to go to the doctor. Doctor say I was very sick, and for I have to keep going, he give me an injection." **Shore**

Similar fragments but a world of difference in the status accorded the writing and the stage of development that both writers share. As a literary critic I praise Rhys for the authenticity of her narrator's voice and the emotional force of the narrative. But I find Louise's account equally powerful. It is authentic and valuable as a historical truth which typifies an otherwise lost experience. I don't know if Louise carried on writing. It is possible that the impulse to write may have passed away with the production of *Pure Running* or may have faded without the tender encouragement of her literacy tutors.

Union Street

What interests me is what keeps a writer writing, particularly in the face of rejection? After all, Rhys' work, much of it produced in the 'thirties was unknown until the late 'sixties. This year's Booker prize winner Pat Barker's first novel *Union Street* was finally published by Virago in 1982 after thirteen years of rejection slips from publishers. With working class origins Pat Barker, though not associated with the Federation, happened to join a writers' course led by Angela Carter. Carter encouraged her and it seems as if many writers do have someone, if not a group to encourage them. Rhys had Ford Madox Ford. But it doesn't really

explain how a writer keeps faith with his or her talent in the face of dismissal. It seems that some writers have to write regardless of audience. And some of the best discovered writing has been kept secret during the writer's lifetime.

Worpole and McGovern
Ken Worpole's experience as a facilitator at writer's workshops, has led him to conclude that one thing that may influence the development of a writer is their choice of appropriate (for them) form. It may be a case of shedding preconceptions about what serves as subject matter and what pleases as form. Consider if Jimmy McGovern with his extraordinary skill in characterisation and dialogue had concentrated his efforts on pastoral poetry. We may have missed out on Cracker and on his recent and best work, *Go Now and Priest*. McGovern is proving himself to be an extraordinary writer. The question is how did he get to be such an extraordinary writer? I have seen his early Federation pieces, written when part of the Scotland Road group. They are good enough but they don't stand out from the other contributions. It would seem that the years of labour, of inspiration and criticism have produced a certain confidence.

Personalising a form is important for every writer, but for women writers and for Caribbean women it may be critical. My research as led me to discover new forms and to consider them as a literary product. For example, an item in the Fed. archives is a beautiful little book called, *Captain Bluebeard's Beef Creole and other Caribbean Recipes*(5). It combines the traditional

womanly activity of sharing recipes with poems which also record the memories and feelings of women cut off from their traditional culture. As a form it is valid and relevant.

Writing letters involves a form of written expression that lacks the pretension of being a novelist, dramatist or poet. Letters are usually only considered as a literary form when they detail correspondence from celebrated writers. But letters are an exciting, if usually private form because they are freed from constraints, preconceptions or the anxiety of possible publication. They nevertheless often contain a narrative structure, characterisation and stylistic and linguistic invention.

Captain Bluebeard's Beef Creole and other Caribbean Recipes... combines the traditional womanly activity of sharing recipes with poems which also record the memories and feelings of women cut off from their traditional culture. As a form it is valid and relevant.

I am sure that for the many Caribbean women settling in to a recognisably hostile country the thought of working at being a novelist was irrelevant. But I expect that the legitimate act of writing letters back home gave them the form in which they could tell many a good story. Federation member, published poet, broadcaster and anthologist Betty Lightfoot wrote me a letter which narrates something of her life history and charts her

development as a writer. And the result is a letter with a wonderful story. (Betty's letter appears on p10)

A kind of prehistory of women's writing

So where do I stand with my research into a lack of certain types of women's writing in the 1960's and 1970's? I now have part of a picture in which I am trying to trace a kind of prehistory of women's writing today. A history of writing that validated women's experience and forced the women's presses into existence. The Federation has played a significant part in that history. My excursions into the private archives of Federation members proves that, of course, whether you are Jimmy McGovern, Pat Barker or Betty Lightfoot, You are positioned at the tip of an iceberg into which much valuable experience remains deeply frozen.

Sandra Courtman

1. Interview in Stoke Newington, London, 28 November 1995 with Ken Worpole, co-founder with Chris Searle, of the FWWCP in 1976.
2. See Warmlesley, Anne, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966 - 1972*, London, New Beacon, 1992.
3. Rhys, Jean, '*Let Them Call it Jazz*' from *Tigers are Better Looking*, London, Andre Deutsche, 1962.
4. Shore, Louise. *Pure Running*, London, Centreprise, 1982.
- 5 *Captain Bluebeard's Beef Creole and Other Caribbean Recipes*, Peckham Publishing Project, 198 1.

* *The Fed. Archives can be seen at: The Working Class Movement Library, Salford*

Looking back to the sixties

*Dear Sandra
Courtman,
The sixties were
exciting and deserved
to be written about.*

*Why didn't 't I write
then - I should have,
but I didn't. Or did I?*

*Looking back, I
suppose I did In
July 1960, I met,
and fell in love with
my husband to be. I
lived in Kearsley, a
village near Bolton,
Lancashire; Mike
lived in Crewe,
Cheshire. Our
courting took place
weekdays courtesy
of Royal Mail, and
weekends via British
Rail.*

So there it is, my writing in the sixties was letters to the man I love - and married two years later.

Naturally the urge to write started much earlier. I was a "why" and "what for" child born at the tail end of the second world war. I can remember the first box of Milk Tray I had after rationing ended, not for the taste, but

because I had transformed it into a writing box, complete with bulb and battery for writing under the bed clothes. Looking back I can't remember what I wrote, or why I went to such great lengths to keep my writing secret.

I was no Lolita - a Tom Boy, but, according to my mother, I was "all ears" when it suited me and stone deaf when it came to running errands.

I was bright enough for grammar school, but refused to sit the entrance exam. The row that ensued between the headmaster and my mother only made matters worse.

Grammar Bug

As a result I attended the local secondary modern and came top of the A stream from day one. This didn't go down at all well with my class mates, most of them being "borderline" for the local grammar school. All too late I realised I'd blown it for ever becoming a "GRAMMAR BUG" but I was expected to walk my 0' levels and go on to higher things. My favourite subjects were English, Maths, History and Geography. Essays, I wrote until I ran out of paper while others chewed their pens. I was in my element. My dream of becoming a teacher ended abruptly in May 1958. After a wonderful week, free as the wind, in the Lake District with school, I returned to a sedated mother, sobbing on the sofa. A voice said "Your dad's died, an accident at the pit, try not to cry, you'll upset your mum..."

Alone, Alienated and Godless

And my world fell apart. I couldn't, wouldn't accept that my dad, my lovely, kind hearted, generous dad was dead. I remember running into the back garden, standing stock still, staring at the park where I'd played, the trees, the fences, the houses, the families I'd grown up with - all with fathers - and feeling completely alone, alienated and Godless.

Then came the tears. I cried until I couldn't cry any more, went into the kitchen and splashed cold water on my face. I was fourteen. A young fourteen. Records, rock and roll and youth club but no boy friend - none of my friends had boy friends then.

I vaguely remember staring at my reflection in the kitchen mirror and seeing myself, red eyed and miserable. I forced myself to smile for my mother's sake and wore it until bedtime. I prayed, in tears, to wake up and hear dad whistling his favourite tune, "Danny Boy".

Instead I heard mum crying. That weekend, Whitsun, 1958, was when my childhood ended. I was kept off school five weeks to help mum; when I went back the following term, it was with a note for my form teacher, to say I wouldn't be taking 0' level exams because Alan was getting married and she couldn't afford to keep me at school. Alan, eight years older, had always been mum's favourite. I'd been dad's and now dad was dead nothing mattered any more.

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Women talking about the Federation

As part of a project to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, the Fed has been recording the oral testimony of its members.

During the Barlaston Writing for the Future Weekend, Doreen Ravenscroft, Sarah Richardson, Janice Fullman and Pat Smart talked to Roger Dury.

Four women did it, had a bit of time on their hands from the Abraham Moss Centre in Manchester, to get together to do a bit of writing. So the ICI... offered us the Gatehouse... the front of the ICI. Anyhow, it was empty... and we just had an electric fire and these four women.



Picture by Tim Diggles

Doreen Ravenscroft:

“I’m one of the founder members (of Gatehouse). Four women did it, had a bit of time on their hands from the Abraham Moss Centre in Manchester, to get together to do a bit of writing. So the ICI ... offered us the Gatehouse... the front of the ICI. Anyhow, it was empty... and we just had an electric fire and these four women. There was Julie, Tricia, Josie and I, and we all were in there and started having talking - you know - how our lives was as women. That was in 1977.

A bit whatsiname

I have an older son, there’s thirteen years difference between my children, that’s 42, and I had William when I was 36, so he’s 29, and I started going to study at Abraham Moss... I was a clever girl so I passed an eleven plus and I went to Notre Dame Convent in Manchester, and my mother died when I was 15... and of course I went away in the NAAFI and I lived there for three years and then I came home and then I started knocking about and anyway I had Alan my eldest son. I started going to the Gatehouse because Stella and Patricia, they were my tutors at Abraham Moss Centre. So I went to learn. I thought I’ll have to be a bit whatsiname for William because he’s clever. He’s a Bachelor of Science, educated at a comprehensive school, I put him through the system. So I learnt and I took up French, English and Maths....

I never heard about this worker writer Federation and I never went out, money was very tight. I didn’t have any money or anything. So Stella says, and Patricia, “would you like to come to this worker writer’s Federation?” And I looked it up and I used to go every year. And then I moved house and I was getting a bit icky-picky and William was getting older and so I went from 1978 to 1982, and then I had a break off, and then I’ve started going again.

They’ve been good to me because I’ve been on writing weekends. When you haven’t got any money and you’re stuck in the house with a child, no social life or nothing, and I worked very hard as well. My going out was going to the Gatehouse, and workshops... Every year we looked forward to going to the worker writer Federation. They used to pay for me it didn’t cost me a thing. And I never forget, it was the most marvellous part of my life that. And I still like to be involved with it, I’m on the management of the Gatehouse Publishing Charity, I’m involved with Pecket Well as well, ‘cause I know Gillian Frost from Abraham Moss Centre. She’s one of the founders of Pecket Well. I started going there but it’s a bit far from Manchester, I’ve got Rheumatoid Arthritis and I don’t travel very well, but I think I’ll always be involved with it. I think it’s a wonderful thing.

It brings you in contact with different kinds of people doesn’t it.

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Women talking about the Federation: Doreen Ravenscroft

(continued from page 11)
We've all got a story to tell, haven't we. They've made my life bearable - I've done workshops, I've been taught how to do workshops and all sorts of things through Gatehouse... I mean, they pay my expenses to go door to door, so I can't have anything better than that, can I - I've grown through that. If I wouldn't have had that I don't know where I'd have been. With the Worker Writer Federation I did a tour of Ireland in 1986. Eddie Barrett,

Jimmy McGovern, they asked me if I would do, Rebecca O'Rourke and Roger Mills, they took us. We went to Dublin first, in people's houses... we went to Ballymun, we went round the high rise flats there, then we went on the DART up to Belfast and stayed at the Ulster Peoples' College there, and we did a few workshops... The people were very good... What frightened me was, you know the letter box with the slit in in case you put bombs in, I found that very frightening in Belfast. I don't

think I'd like to go back there. We went to Derry and that was a bit scary...

Roger Drury: *How do your family feel about you as a writer?*

Doreen: I used to do a lot of writing. My son doesn't like it but he won't stop me being involved with it. He says, "What do you want to do all that for? You're too old. You should be sat at home darning the socks and cooking the meals. Typical chauvinist i'nt

(continued from page 10)

So I left school, found a job as an office junior with a wage of £2.12.6 a week, everyone ran me ragged, but at least mum seemed happy.

Spilt Milk

Had I been a boy, things may have been different but no point crying over spilt milk. Every cloud, no matter how black, has a silver lining. If I'd taken those GCE's in 1960, as planned, I would have been too busy swotting to swan off to Blackpool and so I wouldn't have met my husband to be, Mike.

Meeting Mike was the turning point. I was head over heels in love. Life was wonderful once more. After two years courting via the Royal Mail and British Rail Mike and I were married at St. Stephen's Church, Kearsley on the 24th March 1962.

Love Letters

What's all this to do with writing in the sixties? Nothing, and

everything. I did write - love letters - four sometimes five times a week to Mike and he wrote to me. After we were married the letters were tied up in neat bundles and stored in a small suitcase. Whenever Mike's worked away from home, we've written to each other. Always the letters are added to the ones we've written during our courtship.

Our two offspring, Michelle, 32, and David 29, - both married - admitted recently to having read all our letters when we were having dancing lessons!

I think it was the shock of becoming a grandmother that triggered my urge to write again. That was in 1985. In 1989 I joined a writers workshop, in 1990 two poems were published.

Due to cutbacks, Green Lane Adult Education Centre closed in 1992, and members of the writers' workshop began meeting once a fortnight at Eccles Library. We still meet, chew the fat, discuss our writing and publish

collections from time to time.

My biggest fan, for obvious reasons, is Mike, the "Love of my Life." He finally persuaded me to enrol for English Literature and English Language. A year later, June 1993, I passed - TWO GRADE As!

I don't know who was more pleased, Mike, or me. My only regret is that Mike didn't meet dad. Apart from that, no regrets. Lady Luck, and some editors, have been much much kinder to this poetic Lancashire Rose of late.

Betty Lightfoot

Women talking about the Federation: Doreen Ravenscroft

he (laughs)... Alan, he's not a lover of women. So sometimes he'll say "All these women are lesbians, sometimes mother I think - what are you?" 'Cause I've had an ickley pickley life, there's not been many men... I probably could have married (William's father), I don't know. It never appealed to me, marriage, really. Maybe I'm different, I don't know. I couldn't stand the drudgery of giving myself to someone and saying, "I will" and "I give thee my troth" and all that. So I'm the oddball, even now, my house belongs to the Trafford Community Housing Association and they always go "MISS Ravenscroft..." I say, "don't say that, just for my children's sake I go in the name of Mrs don't I. But if my son knew I was saying this he'd go mad. He doesn't like it (laughs). It's true.

You'll never alter me

Roger: *So you got a lot of confidence from being in Gatehouse?*

Doreen: Yes, I mean they took an interest in me, for what I were. Even now I can go to these centres where all the senior citizens go but it ain't the same is it? And I think it keeps you young... things have to be said, you have to say them. You'll never alter me, I've been like this all me life.

Roger: *Coming to the Fed - how different was it coming to the national gathering?*

Doreen: I was afraid, because when I first went to it which

was in Nottingham... Everyone used to come with their writing and stand over. Now I mean I wrote but I never actually spoke out like, said it on stage or anything... and the first time I did it was terrible because I was shaking from head to foot. And we all had to take our turn. I mean there was loads then in the Federation, loads. (The Saturday night reading) used to take (four hours). Only so many groups could do it and you could only have three minutes to say... a piece of your writing.

It's run by the workers

I was very afraid, but I think that's because you don't know what it's going to be like. Your confidence - as a matter of fact it's helped me to go into my old age very well because I lost my confidence. I've got very high blood pressure and... Rheumatoid Arthritis, but if I didn't have these things to do, to be involved - and I'd do anything for Gatehouse and the Federation, if they asked me. It's a wonderful thing. It's run by the workers, the ordinary people... You accept people for what they are, every nationality - and a lot of people are persecuted for what they are, which is stupid really - everyone's on an equal footing. You speak to each other.

My father was an atheist, my mother was Roman Catholic and our family was terrible. We used to go to my father's family and they used to say "do you go to that church Doreen?" And I'd go to my mother's family and they'd

say "What vestments did the priest wear today?" I used to be feared to death... But (my father) never interfered. He was in the first world war, he was a great socialist. He was the secretary of the trade union at Metro Vicks (?) at Trafford Park for many many years.. Well I used to be in the Labour League of Youth when I was young, about 16 and getting involved in all that. (Doreen talks about her father:) I'm still involved in the Labour Party and in our district I do a lot of canvassing and I deliver the newsletter for them. But you get a lot of funny people on. There's not a lot of true socialists. There is in the Fed though, there is.

For more about Gatehouse Books see Reviews, Page 26

Women talking about the Federation:

Sarah Richardson

I started going to Eastside Writers, I think it was 1991... From the first time I went I thought it was amazing, I felt so at home. I just couldn't believe it was such a brilliant group of people and straight away I just wanted to go to every session... and I used to feel like I wanted to write something every time I went... It was a really nice group of people, mixed group of people, and I really wanted to be part of it ...



Picture by Tim Diggles

I'd been going six months, I think it was then called THAP (Tower Hamlets Arts Project). Roger Mills, who ran it, told people about the AGM in Birmingham, it was in 1992, and I went up with him and Liz Thompson in the coach and had a brilliant weekend and met lots of other people. I think I was almost in tears when I met everyone, how warm everyone was, even people I'd never met before or didn't know. People were greeting each other like old friends. It wasn't cliquish you could go and talk to everyone.

On the Saturday night there was a reading and... everybody performed I'm not a performer, everyone did and I did as well and everyone got a clap. It was a really really nice atmosphere, it went on till one in the morning and then partying all night. I thought this is just amazing and I got hooked very early on.

I got elected onto the committee that first year even though I didn't really know what was going on. I've been on the committee ever since. I think the local groups are important - I still really like Eastside - and I think the Federation is very important. I really like travelling around, meeting people from all over the country.

Roger: *What makes it different from other organisations?*

Sarah: I just think it's very special, the way that it's genuinely working class people, but from lots of different places and different experiences... What's good about the Federation

is that you could be retired, you could be 18, you could be black or white and it is just a special group of people... it is such a mixture nobody could really say that they know what's going on or they've got all the answers and everyone helps other people to improve their writing or to make links or meet other people, and it's a very supportive atmosphere...

The good thing about the (Federation) executive is that it doesn't change, the atmosphere is still very accepting of people, it's not like you get on the exec. and a different sort of people are on it. If you've got something to say people listen and take notice of it, and anyone can put something on the agenda... Obviously it's not everyone's cup of tea to go to long meetings, and exec meetings are quite long... but I really enjoy the way that we go to different parts of the country. I think it's really good that we don't have all the meetings in London. I'm sure a lot of other organisations would... It's really good to go to Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, and Sheffield and meet the people from these writing groups as well. Often people from the local groups will come to meetings and take part. We just went to Newcastle for the meeting in October and four women from the local group came.

Roger: *Do other people in the group see being part of the Fed as being quite important for the group?*

Sarah: I think it varies... Regular people... start to see the

Women talking about the Federation: Sarah Richardson

importance of the Fed but new members find it quite difficult to understand and are quite surprised that there is a national organisation. They go along to a writers' group and they think it is just that local area and they're quite surprised to find that it's linked into 50 other groups all over the country. It's quite hard to encourage people to go to the AGM partly because it's a weekend away with people you don't know very well, and it's a big thing to do. As soon as people go for the weekend... they have a much better understanding of what's going on and what's involved. They understand a lot more, the good things about being in the Federation.

Eastside Novelists

Roger: *What's it done for you as a person who enjoys writing?*

Sarah: It's really helped. When I first started going to Eastside - I've always had a book of poems since I was probably in my early teens, and it was the same books of poems I've had since I was 15 to my late twenties. So I started by doing poems and reading them to the group, and people saying that they liked... or didn't like them as much, or how I could improve. Then I got the confidence up to write short stories...

Roger (Mills) started doing Eastside Novelists' Group, which is quite an unusual thing, because there are not many groups for novel writers... This encouraged me to start writing a novel... It's

Women talking about the Federation: Janice Fullman

I used to be known as Janice Day and thereby hangs a tale. I started off as newly out of a divorce and wanted somewhere to go and I started at a Workers' Education Association meeting which turned out to be Tottenham Writers.

It was a class. I just went along 'cause I've always written since I was 11 and I thought this was a good way to find something else to do with my one free evening a week that I was allowed from the babysitter. I can really say that I got educated through that.

I'd done secretarial work and stuff like that, but with their encouragement I went on to do a degree and became a teacher. And I've also been chair of the Fed from 1990-92. I well remember Sarah's reminiscence of the Birmingham coach because I helped organise the transport!

As Doreen was saying I think the thing about the Fed is that we do it all ourselves. We don't hire in anybody, we don't get any of the flash organisations to say we're doing a conference. It's all done from the people that write the stuff, perform the stuff and at the end of the day sit down and have a good old glass of beer or glass of orange juice and discuss their equal opportunities. Because that's what we're trying to be - the slogan of the Fed is making writing accessible to all, and I think over the years they've really tried to live up to that. They're always ready to go back to the grassroots and look again at ways of developing and encouraging people... to write.

Roger: *What was your first memory of the Fed?*

Janice: The first (AGM) I went to was 1985, and I took my children... which was a real bonus for me - there was someone to

set in London and it's about a black man and a white woman and their relationship. It's something that's more and more common especially in London, but there's not many stories written about it... I'm about a third of the way through. That's a really exciting thing to do... All the preparation has been really really good, but now all I want to do is finish the novel. It'll be great if it gets published but if it doesn't it'll be just good to finish writing it, you know, to do it.

Women talking about the Federation: Janice Fullman

look after them. What really amazed me was that people were talking about being working class, middle class, upper class and lower class, and I thought, 'Aren't they brave, talking about these things?' The debate is still going on now. Every year there are fresh people going along and they're totally gobsmacked... that there's this freedom. You don't feel that you're threatened by it, you don't have to take part in it if you don't want. You can go for a walk around the nice grounds of the college or the university, wherever we are.

You get to know people and get to know yourself - without getting too spiritual about it. There are so many different people, it's opened up my life enormously. I'm up here in Barlaston - it's a nice weekend away from the strains of trying to write my novel (laughs). This is a series of short stories for children. I've given up full time teaching now. I was teaching the early years, so the stories are about my two cats... and I've come away cause I've just had my first rejection slip, but never mind. I'm persevering and I'm going to send it off to someone else, 'cause it's something I've enjoyed writing and I'm concentrating on that even though a poem keeps popping up now and then.

Roger: *You've gone from being a member of a group to someone who runs a group.*

Janice: The group is called Chatshow Writers. It was one of the first groups that was started off through Eastside to work with people with learning difficulties

and learning disabilities, by (Sean Taylor). I write as well. They're writing poetry, we're now going on to writing prose, short stories, their everyday happenings. I write with them, so every time a poem comes out I'm either part of it or writing one of my own, so it's helping me.

Because Tottenham Writers unfortunately came to an end, 'cause Laureen Hickey, who's died recently, she and I were coordinating it for a time but our other commitments wouldn't allow us to carry on. The group came to an end, but that happens with writing groups. Other groups have taken over from it. There are lots of other groups in the area, women's groups and other writing groups that we can go to. Eastside isn't that far away, there's Vertical Images, London Voices, the Islington workshop, there's Basement Writers - we're lucky in London we've lots of writing groups that people can go to. I don't think we've mentioned...

the international flavour of the Fed... through people's connections in Canada and Australia and the US. There's groups now in France and Spain, and even in South Africa. It's just widening out the people that we're reaching now and they're all similar groups. What's interesting is that the people in these groups started off in similar ways to the ones in England, because there just wasn't anything available for those not thought worthy of an education. I was watching a programme on BBC 2 the other night, about John Keats - I didn't realise it was his 200th anniversary... He died at 25 and he was known as a working class poet. Now it's a pity that the Federation wasn't around in those days because he would have been famous in his time, not (after) his death. It's giving people a chance to see their name in print and think 'I've got something worth saying', and more to the point that there are people there that are going to listen, and appreciate it.



Picture by Tim Diggles

Women talking about the Federation:

Pat Smart

I've always had a pen or pencil in my hand from a child, but never did anything with it except draw patterns and pictures in school and get rapped on the knuckles for it... Until, it was just after my mum died, which was 12 years ago, and I found some time on my hands. I've always told children stories and made up funny rhymes for them but never written them down....

I began to write some of these things down and I made the mistake a lot of people do, think writing for children is easy, and it's one of the most difficult audiences to write for...

They're a very very tough audience. You've got to write everything factual and true, unless it's pure fantasy, and they accept that.

Then I decided to brush up on my English 'cause I didn't know where to put full stops and commas and things like that and my spelling was atrocious, and still is to this day and I don't care now. I decided to go to a night class... but found it had to be exactly like it was in school, sat behind a desk with the teacher, and do exactly as she told me, and don't drift off the subject... Well, I didn't like that.

I'm joining, you got me

Then I heard about a writers' workshop in the same building. I'd never heard of one of those before. I liked what I heard, and it happened to be Kirby Writers all them many years ago. So I joined with them, just for an hour... on a Wednesday morning, the same time as my English class. So eventually the English class went by the board and I stayed with the writers workshop.

Then I found one in my own area, which was Stockbridge Writers, and through being at Kirby for a few weeks I got the confidence to just waltz in to Stockbridge Writers and say, "here I am, I'm joining, you got me," and I did. I was writing quite a lot in them days.

Roger: *What was the main difference between an English class and going to the workshop?*

Pat: Well, in the English I thought I was going to

concentrate on where to put full stops and commas. They had me writing essays and it had to be in the form they wanted it, and crossing out and long red crosses and "that's not right, try again" and "you'll be sitting an exam soon."

The pressure was awful. Going to the writers' workshop nobody seen what I'd written... I just read it out so all the pauses were correct where I wanted them. I found it wasn't important and the spelling didn't matter one iota, and that pleased me.

Writing and hiding

So from then on, I, as the other people who'd been doing bits of writing and hiding, said come along, have a go, nobody cares about your spelling. Nobody cares these days. But there came a time when I wanted other people to read what I'd written with their own eyes. So I decided then I shall have to brush up on this, but in my own way. I'd got various people I'd met through the writers to say, "where do you put full stops and commas?" And somebody just told me one day why you had commas, and from that day on I put commas where commas should go. I never knew what they were for, I thought they was just to have a rest from reading, or speaking it...

I'm not saying it's perfect now, but who cares? If I write something that I know is going to go for publication, then I will go and get the full stops and punctuation put exactly where I want them as it should be with somebody's help.

Women talking about the Federation: Pat Smart

Roger: *You started off with children's stories, is that still the main focus of your writing?*

Pat: Not any more, because I've learnt, as I get older, how I hate kids and I ain't writing for them any more (laughs). No, I'd rather tell children stories. I can scare them more, it's more effective. I've found after being with a writers workshop I've started a lot of therapeutic writing. I think everybody goes through that stage, writing about things that have an effect on you... a bad... or a good effect, and getting them down on paper helps. And before I joined the writers' movement I was never in any way, shape or form political. It was something - mention the word politics, or an MP or the houses of parliament, and an iron shield would come down, and that was it, I couldn't see any further. And yet over the years, being with all these writers and being with the Federation and the Merseyside Writers I've suddenly realised I am political. And it's not all Maggie Thatcher, John Major, Neil Kinnock and all these people, it's how you feel about life. It's what's going on, the injustices of life, and I see myself standing on my soapbox so often these days, and I think, God, I'm political, and I never thought I would be. So I've found a difference there, from what I was led to believe politics was all about, to what it really means.

Roger: *How did you first hear about the Federation?*

Pat: First of all I heard about the Merseyside Association of Writers' Workshops through Stockbridge Writers, where

"it's only a fiver every year, jars out, bottles through the window, readings all over the show, performance"

they were looking for a fall guy to go down to the meetings once a month and bring all the information back. So me, being the big mouth, said "I'll go." And from then on I was hooked into that association.

It was electric

It was... the people there... people like Keith Birch, and Dorothy Barr, and people who were involved with the Merseyside Association, like David Evans who was one of the founders of the Federation and the founder, certainly, of Scotland Road Writers Workshop. Through them I heard about the Federation and the AGM, the famous AGM: "it's only a fiver every year, jars out, bottles through the window, readings all over the show, performance", I thought wonderful. And I came into the Federation just as we got barred from Nottingham University - or was it Manchester. I think Manchester was my first one... I came down for the first time or the second time with some children from the junior workshop. One of them was my daughter and two other youngsters, about 11 or 12, strutting their stuff in front of 200 people, it was electric...

Roger: *You didn't just come along to the Fed You got involved and got your hands in the sink, as it were, both in terms of the development of your own writing and development naturally...*

Pat: Well, in terms of my own writing, unfortunately it fell by the wayside. I seem to have come to the conclusion, well I know I can do it, when I need to I will. What had happened... was through the MAW W we developed a creative writing tutors' course. I and a group of 10 others were the guinea pigs... We came through it successfully, and a lot of them went on to take creative writing classes and work with groups of people. For me it went working with groups of people rather than classes...

So when I came to get involved with the Federation, (Michael Kirkland) who happened to be on the exec at the time... said come down to an exec meeting... I said, well, give us your expenses, to put some petrol in the car and we can all go, which meant three or four of us could go at a time. At first, watching how the business went on I thought, God, I couldn't do anything like this. And before I knew it, I'd only gone two meetings and I was co-opted, whether I liked it or not... Within 2 years I was on the exec, voted on. I was secretary and I thought I'm getting out of this while I can. But, I did my stint, did a few years. So... I find I'm more concerned with other people's writing, publishing for them when I can, published through the desk-top publishing unit which belongs... to the Federation (and) by means of a course that we do in Merseyside for the complete publishing process, right from the and writing to the laying out of the artwork, to the camera workshop for the negatives, to the litho platemaking, to putting them

Women talking about the Federation: Pat Smart

on big printing machines and printing them off.. and even then collating them... and folding them and stapling them... I wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been for the likes of the MAWW and the Federation.

Roger: *From being told off at school for not paying attention and not doing what the teachers wanted, you're pretty much seen within the Fed as an expert on Desk-Top Publishing. How do you think you got that far?*

Pat: ...The very first computer (my children) had was the Sinclair ZX 81 plugged into our telly. And I got interested because they were writing in programmes... and the writing was so small in the instruction book they said "Mam, read this out while I type it in. And make sure you get all the commas, all the colons, all the semi colons, everything has to be perfect." So I must have read out about a thousand of these little digits, and I pressed the button to make this little spider run across the screen and it didn't work. So just by helping them to put this right, I was hooked by what a computer could do.

At first in Stockbridge Writers we had some typewriters for the members to have on loan. I thought they were brilliant, just some fancy letters with a golf ball, little key thing, but that became not enough for me. And Michael Kirkland showed me his computer and, again, I was hooked and I... went out and bought one.

Actually I bought it off my brother, and he built it from

scratch. It's now a very famous computer, it's known as my little wooden box computer, it's a Zenith.... All these little components and tiny little chips and things, he built this, but he didn't have a case for it, so he built a wooden case out of hardboard, and he sawed it and there's all splinters on it, cut holes for the disc drive, and we added on a Phillips colour monitor... We had a complete Zenith computer, and I worked with WordStar, which is a word processing programme...

"Mam, read this out while I type it in. And make sure you get all the commas, all the colons, all the semi colons, everything has to be perfect."

Don't Judge This Book ...

How it really escalated from there was the MAWW had some money from... Merseyside Arts, as it was then, £2,000, to do an anthology of writing. I got roped into typing all the material in with Michael Kirkland, and we found a printer, he was a bit of a way out printer, who would help us get this into print. We went down to his workshop in a warehouse in Liverpool, freezing cold, and he had a different computer to the one I'd been learning on, an Amstrad, but usefully still using WordStar. He taught me how to use his computer, which was a little portable one, which you could put in a box and carry home, with a four inch screen. So we typed up Don't Judge This Book By It's Cover in freezing cold conditions, and we used to go out on the street to get warm, because it was warmer outside than in. I learnt on that

and then the MAWW had talks with the Liverpool City College about a course whereby local writers could get their work into computers and into print, and I was one of the first ones to join that, and I found we had BBC computers, and I thought, God, not a different one, so I buckled down and learnt how to use a BBC. Then we found out we had to transfer them to big print typesetting machines... So I had to learn that system, 'cause you had to do the work yourself... and then the college went all posh and got Apple Macintosh, so they discarded all the Harris typesetting machines, and I had to go onto the Apple Macintosh.

Not soft

I think learning all those systems at once over a year actually benefited me, because I realised, God, everything's the same, you just need to know what route to take on this certain computer. So, we ended up doing publications for some of the writers workshops in this way. And then I got involved in Federation Magazine, and I've got one of the Federation computers at home to make sure we get as good a quality as we can. But... I use it for as many groups as I can to get publications. I use it to train people at Pecket Well College... and it's been to other workshops and other weekends and AGMs.

I just find it easy to pick these things up. I don't know why the teachers thought I was soft, because I'm certainly not soft. I know that now, but 12 years ago I would have agreed with them that I was a "stupid girl"...

Women Write

Sunrise in the City

Clea Nellist be-ins this section of prose and poetry from the Federation

The sky had grown dark and it seemed as though the ceiling of the world would burst with the memories of the evening. It was not a long walk home for Aurora, "Club Tropicana" was no more than 15 minutes by foot, but on this night it took the young woman somewhat longer. She took the long route, passing through the local park and resting a while on the swings. Under normal circumstances the thought of sitting in the park for even a moment would have scared Aurora, but tonight it seemed like the best place to be. She lit her second to last Marlboro and tried to blow a smoke ring into the wind. As the smoke floated into the night, Aurora reflected on the events of that evening.

Her mother had phoned at around teatime to remind her to eat. Aurora reassured her fussing mother, put the phone down, and promptly forgot her mother's advice; she had other things on her mind - it was Friday night, Dancing night. She collected her wallet, keys and cigarettes and set off into the setting summer sun.

Club Tropicana should have been good, all the elements were there, but Aurora felt strangely unenthusiastic throughout the evening. Despite this feeling, she stayed until the end to see her friends. She would have felt guilty if she left before, and she thought the feeling might pass. It didn't, and Aurora was relieved when three o'clock finally arrived. She wandered out

into the night with the sense that a great weight had been lifted from her shoulders in that she no longer had to pretend to be having a good time for her friends' sakes. Now she was alone she felt a lot more comfortable and surprisingly awake. The streets were empty, except for the sound of birds singing and the traces of daybreak.

Aurora knew that the only thing waiting for her at home was the TV and a pile of dirty dishes, so she decided to stretch Friday out for as long as she could. Sitting in the park she felt completely safe, the thought of danger never even entered her head; she was untouchable.

She pushed herself gently on the battered old swing and watched the sun rise over the sleeping city. Songs lodged themselves in her head and refused to leave until she sang them out loud, she didn't mind, it passed the time and no-one was about anyway. Sunrise came and went with an amazing splash of colour that added something special to the day. It struck a chord with Aurora, so much so that she felt obliged to stay a while to see what else would happen in this day that has started so dramatically.

Aurora was enjoying the solitude of the park, she rarely went there alone, but seeing a new day born certainly gave her an incentive to repeat her visit. She wondered what it could be like to see it with friends, and decided that it was

definitely something she wanted to do alone. It was like her little secret, no one else knew about it because they were all tucked up in bed, not realising what they were missing. It was exciting to think that she had something that no one else had. She led a fairly mundane life, working in a newsagency and living for Friday nights, but now she had Saturday mornings. From now on she knew that the only reason for her to take part in the Friday night ritual would be to see the next day arrive.

Before Aurora knew it, eight o'clock came around, and people started to appear in the park. She felt a certain degree of bitterness towards the other park users, as if they were somehow invading her privacy, and that they had no right to be there at all. She picked up her crumpled jacket and cigarettes and headed for home, throwing dirty looks in the direction of every dog walker in sight. She knew it was childish, but she didn't let it stop her.

She turned the key in the lock and a sudden rush of fatigue hit her like a brick. As she crawled into bed, all thoughts of resentment left her as she closed her eyes and recreated her first sunrise in her mind. Aurora slept soundly, satisfied that she had found something special, and she knew she'd never let go of it.

Clea Nellist

Taboo Beat

She sat at the front,
in the teacher's chair
of authority, eyes dead
hands stopped and the
clockwork mechanism
of her teacher control
seized up in some
severe clogging of works.

And so her class of pre
teenage girls became
jeering agile monkeys
climbing the perspex
irregularities of her
mental collapse, splitting
grins and grotesque insults
at a mature adult
fractured in some still world
beyond social acceptance
and beating the drum
of her own taboo behaviour.

Lorraine Marwood

Victoria, Australia

The Hush

Maybe I should read this,
instil a bit of tension
as they try to hide their distaste
behind stunned silence and polite smiles.

Then we'll move, with haste,
to a Pam Ayres plagiarist,
sentimental indulgences,
hearts and flowers
and an old dear's memories of rationing.
And I realise I don't fit in.

I lack the "I'm well-read" name dropping
classical allusions,
the pastoral romantic references,
the monotone drone so fashionable;
an endurance test in remaining conscious.

I'm Anti-Writing-Groups of
cosy middle-class consciousness
and stilted narrow-minded prejudice
I'm suicide, politics, erotica and drugs

And I think I'm in the wrong place.

Jenny Fidler

Fruit Picking

I will tell you something about me as a child.
Something happy.
My happy life as a child begins late.
I went to live with my auntie when I was 11.
She sent me to school.
Starting to school was my first big happy moment,
because I hadn't been to school before.
That was my first starting point for happiness.
I begin to earn that great attention from my auntie
and share the love together.
We share a good companionship together.
She start to buy me nice little clothes.
She take me to church with her,
and taking me in the city with her,
in Kingston.
It's like a child reborn.
I had to have my duties in the home
But I also had times I could enjoy
like when I went fruit picking.

I used to have to go to the field. I used to enjoy it.
I used to pick the fruit. I sometimes eat so much,
when I get home, I couldn't eat my tea.
In Jamaica, the hottest season between March, April
and May.
That's when we have most fruit due.
It's the season for pineapple,
mangoes, rose apples, country pears,
star apples, guava, grapefruit and oranges.
Two names you must look out for are sweet sap and
sour sap.
Then, plenty of ripe bananas.

We used to take things from the kitchen
and cook things in the bush.
My auntie used to said, "Be careful
because you might set the bush on fire!"
she used to say "Whonou don't burn Jamaica down
you know!"
Because it was hot, and the grass could catch fire
if the wind blow a lot.
You daren't walk with a box of matches in your
pocket.

It could catch alight with the heat.
We used to climb the trees.
As kids, we know the fruits will fall,
but we want to climb the trees anyway.

That was my happiness and pleasure.

Dorothy Blake

White Nancy

High upon Kerridge Hill, she stands all white and majestic. Built by farmers as a landmark earlier this century. Be it bleak or bright she's always there for all to see is... White Nancy.

We can climb upon the hilly gorse, or from the other side passing field after field, or at the back of "The Redway Tavern"... yes that's the shortcut to... White Nancy.

Upon Kerridge Hill... she looks down upon Kerridge village, and then from the other side to the village of Bollington... some call it Happy Valley! Cattle graze below, but do keep climbing, you are sure of a breathtaking view from... White Nancy.

Bollington is a very old Cheshire village at the fringe of the Pennines ... but it's a tiring climb to the top of the hill, some sides have steps... but do watch out as it's very steep climbing... White Nancy.

When you finally reach the top ... many things you will see. St. John's Church, shops, more hills, working and redundant mills, and over yonder the old silk town of Macclesfield. I used to see her from my window... but sadly no more. So think of me when you have reached her... yes you have guessed... I mean... White Nancy.

Carol Ann Blackshaw

Eve's Wish, a fairy tale

Once upon a time there was a woman named Eve who lived with her children in a small cottage in a forest. The cottage stood next to a tranquil lake where the children would play. Some trees in the forest bore fruit and nuts which were gathered and stored for the winter. A large old oak leaned toward the cottage, reaching out friendly branches from which Eve hung ropes for the children to swing. Forest beasts would keep the small family company but for five miles, the distance to the nearest town, there was not a single living human being.

Luckily, Eve had a range-rover with which she drove the children to school (for they should be socialised), bought groceries (for they couldn't survive on fruit and nuts), visited the library and saw to any other requirements before returning to her idyllic home in the forest. Occasionally she would visit a lover or two. After all, one couldn't survive totally without civilisation.

Eve was a peace-loving woman, it broke her heart to see anyone hurt. She couldn't bear to think of a living creature suffering, for this reason she had raised her children to be strict vegetarians, as she herself was. She subscribed to many a compassionate cause, which eased her conscience at living in a rich country and having her own income.

Every week in despair Eve would read newspaper reports (for she would not allow television in the house) of wars and conflict. When one war is over, peace treaties signed, another conflict escalates and takes the position of being the main war to be reported. Then there was crime, violence spawned from poverty, jealousy. Eve retreated further into her own private world.

The forest, however, was not free from its share of conflict. Birds fought over territory, foxes caught and ate rabbits, sometimes leaving an ear or a bit of fluff as if deliberately to upset Eve. Even her own children squabbled over the most trivial of concerns and Eve had to admit that she felt an intermittent desire to hurt them herself. In a testing moment she once found her youngest outside MacDonalds munching slyly on a hamburger.

Minor incidents aside, Eve was convinced that if only everyone were as loving and gentle as herself there would be no more conflict and the world would be a better place.

For some months now Eve had known that she was pregnant and had long since stopped visiting her male lovers (for what other use was a male lover?). She decided one day that it was time to see her doctor, who was also a friend. Eve was told that she was expecting twins. After gathering her children from around the

Eve's Wish, a fairy tale

(continued)

school gates she drove home singing.

As it was still summer the children stripped off the moment they arrived home, and went to play in the lake. Eve left them there, splashing and shouting, to walk in the forest. She could hear their distant cries as she sat under a tree in a quiet corner of her world to contemplate the new discovery. Taking off her boots, as she enjoyed doing, she rubbed her toes into the earth. Looking around she saw she was in a small clearing for which the branches of the tree behind her formed a roof. She didn't remember being in this part of the forest before but felt safe, she knew she was close to the lake. As she was a bit of a pagan, Eve thanked the Goddess for the gift of twins. She held her stomach, then reached behind her to hold the tree.

Somewhat surprised at the feel of silken cloth, as she was expecting bark, Eve turned. Where the tree had stood was a beautiful wood nymph. Eve held a leaf-green wisp of gossamer which, as she let it drop, formed part of the nymph's long gown. She stood in wonderment, facing the nymph she looked into deep velvet-brown eyes. The nymph's hair was roughly braided with twigs and leaves, her skin was rich brown as bark but her face was pale brown and smooth, like newly stripped wood. A heavy heady aroma hit Eve and she began to feel faint. She fell forward into the nymph, who caught her in rough brown arms. A voice as old as the wind in the leaves rushed into Eve's ear, "I grant you one wish, Eve.

Your heart's desire." Then she blacked out.

When she came to, Eve was slumped with her arms around the tree, the wood nymph was nowhere to be seen. Feeling slightly hung-over, she took a deep breath of fresh air as she stood back from the tree. Looking up into its branches, she said, "If you really did grant me a wish then that wish is for peace. There should be no more conflict in the world." Smiling to herself, as she didn't really believe what she had experienced, Eve turned to go.

It seemed strange to Eve that all her friends should be out, especially in the early evening. In desperation she phoned her parents, but there was no answer. After dialling every number in her filofax, she dialled the telephone company helpline, thinking there may be a problem with the line. No answer there either.

A rustle of leaves behind her caught her attention and she rounded, frightened, but nothing was there. As she turned again to go she became aware that there was no longer any sound. She hadn't been aware of a sound before, it was rather like a low hum that is only noticed once it is gone. Brushing this feeling aside, she walked on towards the lake and home, eager to tell her children about the dream she'd had whilst asleep under the tree.

At the lake no one was around and she called, thinking they had gone to play in the trees. No one came running and she called again, going into the house

to begin making supper. The house was too quiet and Eve felt unnerved so she switched the radio on, as she sometimes did while cooking. She fiddled with the tuner and banged the side of the radio but it would not give reception. Giving up on the radio she went to the back door and called for her children again. When her voice was hoarse she went back indoors and ate some of the raw vegetables she was preparing to cook for the evening meal.

Really, Eve felt, she should tell her children the good news of the expected twins before anyone else, but as they were obviously on an important expedition, she decided to phone some friends. She placed the prepared dish into the agar and sat on the futon with a cup of warm milk and whisky, phone to hand.

It seemed strange to Eve that all her friends should be out, especially in the early evening. In desperation she phoned her parents, but there was no answer. After dialling every number in her filofax, she dialled the telephone company helpline, thinking there may be a problem with the line. No answer there either. Eve began to feel more nervous and had a creeping sensation that this had something to do with the wish the nymph had granted. Perhaps she had been misunderstood, by 'peace' the nymph may have thought she meant 'silence'. She laughed off this thought, but anxiously looked out of the window for her children.

The sun was low in the sky as Eve went out to her range-rover. She had left a note on the kitchen

table with instructions to her eldest child to dish up the meal. The noise of the engine starting was so loud it made her jump, she turned it off and for a while sat shaking, trying to pull herself together to drive. In a sudden moment of awareness she realised that she could hear no birdsong. Carefully unwinding the window she looked out towards the big old oak. At this time of the evening the branches of the oak especially and the other trees were lined with birds settling down for the night. Their twitterings were usually deafening. Tonight the branches were bare, only leaves swayed in the breeze.

Eve was beginning to panic, she felt that something surely must have happened to the forest. She started up the range-rover and sped down the track towards the main road, skidding on mud and twigs. The main road was unusually quiet as Eve drove towards the town, then she spotted a car ahead. This cheered her for a moment as she felt someone else was on the road, until she realised that the car was stationary, parked in the middle of the lane. She braked and swerved just in time to miss it and parked further up the road and reversed nearer to the car. Looking back over her shoulder she saw that the seats were empty, it seemed to have been abandoned. Eve looked around to the side of the road but could see no-one, nor any reason to leave the car. This was beginning to give her the jitters and she drove off without having left the safety of her seat.

Along the route several other cars on both sides of the road had also been abandoned, more as she neared the town. Eve deftly

swerved around them, determined to reach town in one piece. When she came to the traffic junction on the edge of town a queue of cars halted her. She left her vehicle, locking it out of habit, and walked along the path to the front of the queue. All the cars were empty of people, not one of them had crashed and there was nothing at the junction that would have caused them to stop. Eve stood for a while watching the traffic lights turn from red to green, green to red and became conscious of music in the distance. She walked in the direction of the sound, then started to run. As she rounded the corner of the main shopping street, she saw the source of this music: an abandoned car had a cassette playing in the tape deck. She reached in the open window and attempted to tune the radio, only to hear the same fuzziness that had confronted her from her home radio.

Tears pricked inside Eve's eyelids, but she fought back and swallowed hard, she could deal with this, she was a strong woman. There must be an explanation. She walked towards the nearest shop, it was a butchers so she went to the next one, a delicatessen. She opened the door and called out, no one answered. A sign on the door said that the shop shut at five-thirty, but Eve's watch said seven o'clock. The next shop was similarly deserted and the next. In a daze, for she still could not believe what was happening, Eve walked into a phone booth and began to randomly dial, first from the business directory, then the domestic. She stared forward along the row of shops as she listened to the ringing from the

earpiece, when her eyes focused she realised what she was looking at. Televisions in an electrical shop window, all tuned to different channels, all displaying snow. All except one, this screen had been linked up to a video camera which was directed at the street. In the screen she could see the distant phone booths, herself standing in the end one gaping at the shop window.

Eve let the phone fall from her hand and the door banged behind her as she ran back down the street towards her range-rover. Skidding on one foot around the corner of the junction, she nearly fell into the driver's seat. Thankfully she turned the ignition, reversed onto the pavement and drove forwards, crushing the wing of a car in the other lane as she turned the vehicle round to face the direction of her home. She drove madly, sometimes only just missing the abandoned cars on the way back, until the turning for her driveway came into view. Slowing and, she laughed bitterly, indicating, she turned into the drive. It was dark in the forest as the trees obscured what little sun was left in the sky. She had difficulty finding the tree again and when eventually she came to the small clearing she dropped to her knees and allowed herself to cry.

"Why have you done this? Where have all the people gone?" she screamed up to the tree. Through her tears she thought she saw the nymph's face in a hollow between branches. Eve blinked and rubbed her eyes, she looked up but the face was gone. "What happened?" she sobbed, her head in her hands.

Like wind rushing through leaves,

Eve's Wish, a fairy tale

(continued)

she heard the nymph's scornful whisper. "You asked for peace, no more conflict. It is impossible to have life with no conflict. I granted your wish, now there is

no life in the world, only you. You have the place to yourself, are you happy now you have your peace?"

Eve sat back, crossing her legs, and wailed, "No! I didn't want that! What's the use of peace

if there's no one to share it with?" But the nymph did not answer and all was silent. Eve sobbed quietly for a while, then felt hungry and remembered her supper in the agar. She was about to stand up when she felt a kick inside her belly. "It's just you and me now," she said and she reached to the tree for support as she stood. The nymph held her hand as she regained balance.

"I have granted wishes to women like yourself for thousands of years," mused the nymph, and only once has someone "and the same as you. Her name was also Eve."

josie henley

*As Featured on Sheffield Childrens' Hospital
Chrystal Radio:*

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"Formidable Talent": Rony Robinson, Radio Sheffield



Cartoon from "People's Culture"

see review p32

REVIEWS...REVIEWS...REVIEWS...

How Maxine Learned to Love Her Legs

How Maxine Learned to Love Her Legs and other tales of growing up,
Sarah Lefane (ed)

Aurora Metro Press, paperback
242pp, £8. 95, ISBN 0 9515877 4 9

A collection of 24 short stories by women writers - 4 known and the rest new - offering, in the editor's words "illumination and revelation along the adventure strewn path of growing up"... (the tales) "offer glimpses of different instants along that journey from childhood to adulthood, from girlhood to womanhood.

The title story, written by Brigid Howarth, describes the arrival of a young woman in Bournemouth. She has arranged to meet a friend but she doesn't show up - Maxine becomes enmeshed with an ice cream seller despite her attempts to get away... the story left me wondering what will happen next. Like a number of the stories this could be the first chapter of a novel.

Nylon Stockings

American Tan by Chrissie Gittens is also related to legs - this very short simple tale explores the emotions of a young girl wearing nylon stockings for the first time.

Probably the best known contributor is Michele Roberts whose story "Charity" is the longest in the book and concerns the contradictions of Catholic Beliefs through the eyes of a young convent school pupil

whose home life is not "pure". Two Women On a Bus by Hiliary Bailey is a sometimes very funny account reflecting the thoughts of a - you've guessed it - a woman on a bus - on her way to visit her mother. She mulls over the lot of women, nostalgia for the 50s, imagines the lifestyle of one of the other passengers and discovers an unexpected connection with one of them.

India

India by Ravinder Randwha explores love and disappointment for a British Indian girl - her brushes with ignorance and racism, her rejection by a boy she is in love with and her growing awareness and understanding of what life in the West means for her.

Nona's letter by Kirsty Gunn made me cry - a story of three women and the relationships, emotions and experiences that connect them. The author says the story stems from her close ties with her grandmother - maybe that's why it touched me.

Novel in Progress

Grandchild, by Geraldine Kaye, is extracted from a novel in progress. In it a woman recalls her own pregnancy when accompanying her daughter in-law, who is in labour, to hospital.

At the end of the book there are short biographies of each of the contributors. I enjoyed reading about the writers, backgrounds and what impact I thought that had on the style and content of

their story.

Painful

Many of the feelings described in the stories are painful ones the women generally find ways to cope, survive coming out stronger, wiser and sometimes more cynical.

The tales are about growing up, the process of growing up that is ongoing and not something that only happens in adolescence. This is the common theme running through the book.

Their differences lie in the situations, lifestyles, cultures and class experiences that are written about. There is nothing repetitive about the tales - their length, depth and understandability means that the stories are fresh - one for every occasion. Many of them I would read a number of times - they are thought provoking. This book is likely to be bought by women for friends, lovers and themselves - would it appeal to men... does it matter... buy it and see.

Barbara Nellist



Illustration from: Jane Reidy's 'Lust'

Lust

Lust, by Jane Reidy, paperback, 64pp, £6.95, Gecko Press, ISBN 0 9524067, or add £0.55 for p&p from 30B Stanmer St, Battersea, London SW11 3EG

A punchy collection of attitudes from this performance ‘poette’, although this book is divided into “performance” and “private” halves. It is the private side which speaks best, most of all in poems like “For Gareth”:

“You supply an image me in a red satin blouse with gold dragons and a shark’s tooth earring. Did that girl leave you? She is so hard to find..”

- whereas the performance material may lose something in being read rather than performed. This is a problem, because Reidy meets difficult subjects, for example bisexuality, sadomasochism, full on, as in A Bill of Rights, and Lust, no Labels. A Bill of Rights lists a series of vital questions of sexual expression:

“Do you have the right to whip him with his consent to hang weights from his balls...

...Do I have the right to take my clothes off in public without being harassed or raped...”

worthy rhetoric indeed, but I feel I want something more from this, for it to be poetry as well as discursive, to be less bathetic litany and more ringing. Related to Silence II, No Sexual Solution to a Failed Revolution, on the other hand, are more poem than list, and offer situations in which

some of these questions and contradictions can be explored.

“She said later, convinced “I want to be equal”; “You are”; he replied lazily, stretching out still on the planet where his ejaculation had propelled him...”

This is because, rather than in the strut of performance, they are grounded in experience of disappointment, abuse, the ambivalence of love and cruelty of lust. And that’s where they get under your skin.

Carol Nicholas

(In the Picture below)

Dudiya, Kauther, Fariba, Aissa, Champaben, Qaisra and Duncan.

ESOL group (English for speakers of Other Languages), Hulme Centre, Manchester.

Picture by: Tom Woodin

Two From Gatehouse

Gatehouse Publications are at: Hulme Adult Education Centre, Hulme Walk, Manchester M15 5FQ, Both books available on cassette.

Trader

by Rebecca Tagoe, 16pp, £2.25, ISBN 0 906253 46 2.

“When I was a young woman in Ghana

I was selling cloth

in the market in Accra.

I travelled to places far away like Kumasi to buy cloth.”

Trader, by Rebecca Tagoe is about a brave successful woman, telling us about her memorable experience of trading in Ghana and later in England. Rebecca’s story reminds us of life’s ups and downs; and the effects of migration from one’s country of origin to another. It reminds us about our own experiences in particular trading and business ventures.

We wish it had continued further, we didn’t want it to end!



Two From Gatehouse
(continued)

First Time Barmaid

by Louise Tonner 18pp
£3.50 including p&p,
ISBN 0 906253 45 4.

Another of Gatehouse Books Working Lives series, written by a “multi-talented mum of two boys and Parkview pub dart supremo”, and endorsed by Betty Driver (Coronation Street’s Betty Turpin)

*“Then came last orders.
Oh my God!
What’s happened to these
people?
All at once they charged to the
bar.*

*‘Louise, three pints of bitter
please.’*

*Louise, four pints of lager
please.’ “*

Louise survives “crazy hour” and decides she’s looking forward to working again tomorrow night. If ever you never had a thought for the woman you’ve been glaring at trying to get served here’s the story of the other side of the counter, illustrated by some excellent paintings and drawings. This lovely reading book is certain to be popular; I’m looking forward to Louise’s next book about darts; she hasn’t written it, but she ought to.

Carol Nicholas



Illustration from: “First Time Barmaid” by Jonathon Hargreaves



Illustration from: “Trader” by Jenry Bowers

Two from London Voices

Both available from PO Box
3416, London N3 2EZ

Real Memory and other Poems and Prose

London Voices Poetry Workshop,
85pp £3. SO plus £0. SO p&p
ISBN 0 9509489 6 5

The past compared with the present is a main theme of this publication by Greta Sykes and London Voices, with illustrations by the poets. Amongst the fifty two contributions are:

Greta Sykes poem for the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz asks us to learn from the past by “remembering what was forgotten.” The sadness of the victims’ simple utensils illustrated by Greta is most evocative of these atrocities.

Bill Eburn’s “*A Slight Misunderstanding*” draws attention to something so much a part of everyday life it could very easily be overlooked. A real cry for help is thwarted by the mechanical answer “thank you for calling” - a warning tale of modern times, whereas Ian Cameron’s “*Easter Timewarp at Old St George’s*” compares now with then and asks whether modern times have seen “*A return to Victorian Values*”. Retreating further, Steve Regan in “*Islington 2*” (illustrated by Bob Dixon’s equally funny drunken juggler) writes realistically of someone in such a shrunken world that they fail to recognise the different experiences others may have of life. “*The End of Prehistory*”, a

chapter from a book by Lawrie Moore, takes us on an interesting and eventful tour of 1936 London. The bitter-sweet title poem, “*Real Memory*”, by Richard Bell (who also illustrated the front cover) sums it all up: “It was all so 20th Century, so real”. A book for the millennium.

Jean Ashton

Disturbing Power

London Voices Poetry Workshop,
96pp f3.60 plus £0. 50 p&p
ISBN 0 9509478 8 1

An intriguing hotchpotch of material, this book includes poems and many curious stories and reminiscences. Gertrude Elias describes her adventures in Spanish Morocco, evading the advances of an English colonel, and finally getting marooned in Oujda during army manoeuvres, where all the hotel rooms were booked for prostitutes; and muses on promiscuity as a male device for economising on money and responsibility.

Tom Durkin tells of his brother Chris, who taught a donkey to dance and went to the pub in a “sheepmobile”, pulled by his Guinness drinking sheep, Tup (there’s a photograph to prove it). Lawrie Moore’s introduction to politics is a campaign to close the sweetshops. The title piece of this collection - in full, the *Disturbing Power of Motherly Love*, is an overly succinct account of a Nazi Eugenics programme, disappointingly elusive, particularly since the staff of the programme are alleged to have continued with their work in the

foundation for a new Europe. Whether this is intended as history or allusion is unclear.

Similarly, “*Paedophile on a Pole*”, by Ian Cameron, is a poem about the nightmare of being accused by “the sisters” of paedophilia and suffering the ‘medieval’ form of restraint with a broom handle up the nose. He wakes up, the broom handle turns out to be his forearm. Strange or foolish? This kind of thing is hardly enlightening, whereas Cameron’s “*The Martingale*” is a kind of ‘Call My Bluff’ explanatory verbal definition which gradually introduces the reader to a cruel restraint for horses. Elsewhere, however,

*Adam has fucked off again
leaving her holding the baby
and the half empty bottle
of gin.*

*Abel is hiding somewhere
under a bed*

*Cain has screamed himself into
sleep
after Almighty Adam swung him
like a cattail
against the dresser...*

Christine Manolescu subverts the garden of Eden into the present day; Kay Ekevall proposes a new scuffed shoe Oxfam chic, “*Tory Trendy*”; Richard Bell travels the tube for love in “*Love’s Curvy Triangle*”. Worth buying for the tale of Tup alone.

Nick Pollard

Homeless and Ex-Homeless Writers

Inside - Outside, Homeless and Ex-Homeless Writers, paper back, 64pp 11, University of Sussex Centre for Continuing Education, Education Development Building, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton, BN1 9RG

“All within a month I’ve been both sides. People led me to believe that being a proper human was to get up and go to work, look after the wife and children, pay for the house and do the repairs and go shopping. See the beggars on the street. Just remember it’s their fault. They don’t want work... They are just cadgers...”

It didn’t take long before I was sneaking round the back of Pizza Hut at One a.m. looking in the bin and getting what the customers could not eat. Cold but still tasted good. People on the street welcomed me, ‘join, it’s safer in a gang at night,’ and now they are good friends of mine... thirty three years before I found some,” says Mark in “Living Wild but Being Free”.

This anthology describes some of the experiences, hopes, dreams and kettle leads of Brighton’s homeless. There are three kettle leads, two James Penman has, but not the one he wants which fits his second hand kettle, so he makes coffee with the shower. Some of the trials of homeless living are far more life threatening - Phil Mitchell escapes from a car boot; Jerry has a knife pulled on him in a beach hut; Dean Booth returns some lip to the police and ends up dunked in the fountain at Marble Arch.

There are sections on the ins and outs of begging, and James Penman’s practical advice on sleeping rough. A frequent point made is of the unnecessary frustrations with an officialdom unaware of the dangers, needs and practicalities of homeless life: Dean Booth is offered, after some deliberation by the Crisis Loan Officer, £6.50 to buy a winter rated sleeping bag. Inside - Outside is a challenge to comfortable notions that homelessness is a situation which most people sleeping in shop doorways have chosen, but homelessness has some appealing advantages:

Freedom and Security

*Freedom is:
living in the countryside in the middle of nowhere meadow all around you, birds flying,
farm animals and horses maybe, nearby, looking.*

*Security is:
living in one place for a very long time,
with a job and a mortgage over your head,
always worrying about things.*

Ann Torrence

Often the experiences of the people here have arisen from serious accidents, trauma, stress, unresolvable domestic problems, and the freedoms they have discovered are balanced by the daily struggle of getting food, shelter, and respect. A well laid out value for money publication divided into many vignettes accompanied with short poems. A valuable source book for understanding homelessness.

Vertical Images

Vertical Images Number 10, 62pp paperback, £2.50, from Vertical Images, 10a Dickenson Rd, London N8 9ET, post free.

Of Marilyn Monroe:..

Why not compare you to a toilet door

You photographed better but wore

As many damp taboos:

A nation’s below belt graffiti

Snaked down the bare white

wedding

gown of skin around your

spine..

Jane Davis

... and beards

All barbarians have beards or ferocious moustaches & since Capitalism is a modern form of Decadence, its would be destroyers mostly all had beards, although Engels’ beard was 3/4’s moustache, and Nietzsche had a moustache which undermines the nature of photography as a realistic medium. A 19th century soup had to be strong to fight its way past a moustache like that...

Brian Docherty

Vertical Images offer another helping of their barbarian analyses of the malaise of our times in their latest magazine issue:

Sisters don’t you see, we don’t have it all

We damn well bloody well do-it-all We’ve been taken for ride, let’s turn the tide!

Let’s forget the right to work, Let’s fight for the right to take it easy, even shirk

Deborah Lavin

sandwiched between the flickering jazz rhythms and acid uneasiness of Chris Brown, Sue E Side and richard makin, where language itself begins to break up in layers of free association:

“the vapour in the air was at its finest high: it was a tension day in august in the year of leo minor, a modem constellation containing stars of faint magnitude their sluggard light reaching here after all be for becoming. Lying between the great bear and leo major a soul trader star warshipped gracious giving godhead passes through the ocular gap. A helmet rust unwhoed at planette earth hull hellcraft charon lees drunk to dregicides and woeful princes of velvet genocide indulging the extremest gust of nis....”

I had to reorient myself in Joe Bidder’s elegy to Walthamstow Marshes:

“I am absorbed sensuously drawn into this river landscape, and they say, they say the fish are coming back, the fish are coming back.”

Another cracking collection of enviable verse to stretch you, nothing duff, nothing dull, and nothing where you read the title, scan down the first couple of lines and think, “Oh for Christ’s sake, leave it out pal, leave it out.” Probably one of the best poetry magazines available, may deserve more commentary, but you keep wanting to say “here, read this!”

Nick Pollard

Personalised Education

Personalised Education and the Reconstruction of Schooling, Educational Heretics Press, 140pp, ISBN 0 9518022 7 5 hardback £17.95; ISBN 0 9518022 8 3 paperback, £9.50

“Most children fail in school and indeed, the model on which we set up in school could hardly do anything else.”

Holt, How Children Fail

In the face of the supposed debate on education at present this book is essential and refreshing reading for educationalists, parents and a Godsend to everyone else who is sick of the party political broadcasts exploiting so called educational issues. Although the messages are generally pessimistic, the tone of this review of Holt’s work is certainly not: I finished the book feeling liberated, enthused and better mentally equipped to undertake my own PGCE. The title belies the accessibility of the book.

I’m certain that everyone will recognise the effects of schooling on their child if not themselves in these pages. Meighan describes the structure and tone of each of Holt’s ten books in turn, outlines the intention and direction of each and paraphrases key points whilst his extensive use of quotes directly familiarises the reader with Holt’s work and style. Some criticisms of Holt’s ideas are outlined, but this book is a review, not a critique.

The one problem I found with Meighan’s book is that whilst Holt was justified in restating key points from one book to the next, it is not necessary and seems repetitive to do the same from

chapter to chapter. In Meighan’s charting of the progression of Holt’s ideas we soon find the conclusion that schools have got it wrong and that the case for traditional education is near to non-existent: “...the case of an education which will give child primarily not knowledge and certainty but resourcefulness, flexibility, curiosity, skill in learning, readiness to unlearn - the case grows stronger and stronger”

Holt, The Underachieving School

Further, that the ‘back to basics’ issue is a nonsense and that a National Curriculum makes everything worse, leading to learning that is “fragmented, distorted, and short lived.” We are shown how children develop detrimental coping strategies in order to deal with the implicit authoritarian “right answer culture” of schools. These strategies at least help children keep their heads above water with some dignity intact and that some strategists, “thinkers” may succeed in spite of, and not because of, schooling.

Holt describes the preschool child as a natural empirical scientist, an exceptional learner - better than adults - in a “continuum of experience”, so that it can be seen that education should not be defined as schooling. In fact Holt (“an ingenious and resourceful teacher”) found from experience that interfering in the learning process can prevent it altogether; the less he taught, the more his students learned: “...we do not need to “motivate” children into learning by wheedling, bribing or bullying... what we need to do, and all we need to do, is bring as much of

the world into the school and the classroom; give children as much help and guidance as they need and ask for; listen respectfully when they feel like talking; and then get out of the way. We can trust them to do the rest.”

Holt, How Children Learn

It is suggested we do this by replacing “teacher as cop” for “teacher as moral agent”, start trusting and liking children and dispose of the pessimistic attitude of “you’d better get used to this before you go out into the real world.” Moreover, “Tell and Test” must go in order to get out of the “Jail Business” and make invitational schools viable.

It seems that Holt had few illusions as to the probability of non-custodial schooling becoming a reality in the near future. He therefore ends by promoting and encouraging Home Education. Meighan found that his own student teachers learned much in being involved in real projects:

“What it all boils down to is, are we trying to raise sheep - timid, docile, easily driven or led - or free men? If we want sheep, our schools are perfect as they are. If what we want is free men, we’d better start making some big changes.”

By way of a conclusion Meighan suggests some of his own principles of educational reconstruction which serve also to assemble the key points in Holt’s work and which are, again, backed by relevant quotes. Some of the sixteen principles are:

“Schools should aim to produce free thinkers

How we learn best also applies to children.

Schools will not easily change society”

and the sixteenth:

“We can reconstruct schooling if we want to”

and the quote from Holt here:

“schools are not a force of nature. People made them, thinking they would be useful; people can do away with them when they are no longer of any use”.

Instead of Education

Finally, although John Holt died in 1985, one of Meighan’s hopes in writing this review of his work is that it will help ensure that John Holt goes on working. I certainly hope he does too.

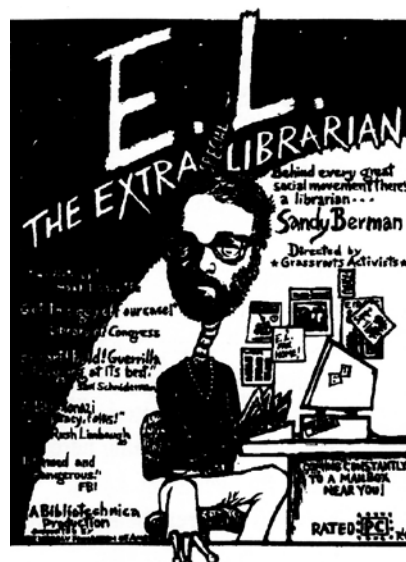
Carmel T O’Neill

People’s Culture

People’s Culture, US\$15 p. a. post free, worldwide, (6 issues) by Subscription Only, Edited by Fred Whitehead, Box 5224, Kansas City, KS 66119, USA

Further proof that in the land of Disney and Ronald MacDonald there are still folks like us. People’s Culture reviews socialist books (lots of poetry), films, newspapers, zines, with, in the issues sent to Federation, features on campus politics, the Non Governmental Organisation Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, anti-semitic racism in the Nation of Islam, librarians and censorship, and socialist and freethinking events. A valuable 12 pages packed with information on left wing and working class cultures and community publishing in the US.

Peoples’ Culture also publish books on Freethought, including



Cartoon from: “People’s Culture”

the following:

Freethought on the American Frontier. An anthology from the Midwest and West, eds Fred Whitehead and Verle Muhrer. Includes Twain and Sinclair Lewis, but also grassroots figures such as the German-American rationalists of Missouri, the anarchist editor of ‘Lucifer the Light Bearer’ and cowboy poets. 316pp, Prometheus books, US\$30.00 post free.

Culture Wars. Draws together sharply clashing statements and analyses from artists, intellectuals and politicians in the current “war” over culture in America. Topics include the historic role of Puritanism, curriculum, censorship, the question of decadence, religious People’s Culture values, immigration and the future of the country. 216pp, Greenhaven Press, US\$12.00 post free.

These books and details of more can be obtained from the above address.

Nnn Goes Mobile

Nnn Goes Mobile, by Geoff Davis, paperback 114pp, £3.95, Juma, 44 Wellington St, Sheffield S1 4HD, ISBN 18722041 5 5. A Nnn Goes Mobile multimedia disc can be obtained for a further 75p, you need to state whether you need PC or Mac versions.

Dalares, a South West African Herero woman keeps a computer disguised as a typewriter in her huge dress, and drives a mobile home in which several rooms have ensuite bathrooms. Computers have become living assemblies, and one of the people producing them is unaware that his robot flies (as in zippers) have military applications. Nnn is this cyberfugitive, under the influence of RemEm, a drug which extends dreamlife, pursued by two robotic Azerty agents, Kitch and Fluffy.

Bizarre and surreal, pared down writing which, with shades of Jerry Cornelius and vintage Ballard, could veer into indulgence but never does. Davis' book twists and turns wildly in a series of jokes and puns like the computer games, internet virtual world it parodies. This highly enjoyable confusion of the mind and cyberspace, flecked with distorted flotsam from the real world, is full of amusing surprises and inventiveness.

Nick Pollard

NEW FROM

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A powerful wartime tale of one young man's steady progress toward a life of crime. Ron's unique style and humour carry the reader through his early life; brutal and hard, but with deep friendship and mischief. Full of vivid memories and colourful characters, this is a compelling piece of personal and social history.

Market Books

Mary Adams *Those Lost Years* £ 1. 50

For almost fifty years Mary lived in St. Marye's Convent in Portslade. She tells us about her life, and that of the other women, noting the personal and social changes they witnessed.

Gary Irwin *The Sudden Change in My Life* £1.50

Gary writes about his experiences of life after he discovers he has a malignant brain tumour. He takes the reader through his treatment, physical and mental changes, to his eventual recovery.

Single Parents' Writing Project *The Lone Rangers* £1.00

Seven single parents write about their lives. We share their personal hopes, fears, struggles and achievements on their journey through parenthood.

Joan Parsons *Jobs for Life* £1.50

Joan talks about her working life, giving a light-hearted view of her employment in Brighton, which centres on her many years as a toilet attendant.

Lexicon

The Magazine of the Stoke on Trent Writers Group, c% 43 Dundee Rd, Etruria, Stoke-on Trent, ST1 4BS, 32pp, £1.75 (£6 for 4 issues)

An attractive new quarterly magazine of poetry, short stories, and articles. Tim Diggles, amongst others, reveals himself as a talent to watch out for, with a story about a girl footballer “They Think it’s All Over”, and an excellent poem, “Plastic Fields”.

The magazine is collecting memories of Stoke, and to evoke reminiscences there are some fine illustrations by Colin Beats, including the cover picture of the Botteslow Arms, Hanley, where the group meets. This issue however, has stirring tales of smuggling, “Dance with the Devil”, by Roger Stapenhill; an embarrassing come uppance with “Delilah”, by Sue Greaves; a magazine of interest and promise.

Literacy, Language and Community Publishing

Literacy, Language and Community Publishing, Essays in Adult Education, Edited by Jane Mace, paperback, 204pp, ISBN 185359 279 X

This collection, featuring Stella Fitzpatrick and Patricia Duffin, Sav Kyriaciou, Rebecca O’Rourke, Sean Taylor, Mike Hayler and Al Thomson is an invaluable source book with many useful references and accounts of experience in literacy and community publishing work, much of it from groups within the Federation: Ethnic Communities Oral History Project, Eastside, Gatehouse and QueenSpark.

Divided into three sections, the book deals with issues around publishing, the use of writing in a creative context, and challenging the supremacy of standard or

‘correct’ English, and the implications of working in a democratic way to empower the writer.

It is an essential text for anyone working as a practitioner in the field of adult education or community publisher, but the writing, whether recounting experience or developing theory, is clear and accessible. Unfortunately I have not seen a complete copy of the book due to a print finishing error - but I’ve got one on order from the local independent bookshop. It’s going to be well used.



Illustration by Colin Beats for his poem “The George & Dragon” from: “Lexicon”

Writing for the future

Jan Holliday of Pecket Well College writes about her, first weekend away with the Federation

I've been asked to write a short piece about the weekend at Wedgewood College, Barlaston, North Staffs, 3-5th November 1995. How can I condense a whole weekend of pure pleasure and experience into half a page of A4 paper?

To say it was magic and so much more than I expected is inadequate. I'm trying to write a short book about it. I learned so much, mostly about myself I may

feel alone and lonely sat writing in a corner about things other people never think about but now I realise I am only one of a great number of people who do the same.

There I felt like I'd stepped out of a closet able to admit "I am a writer and I enjoy it."

What I write may not be well known at the moment, but I comfort myself with the idea that Michaelangelo had to learn his art before he painted the Cistine Chapel ceiling.

I may not yet be a Coleridge or

Shelley, Burns or Shakespeare, but another Pam Ayres maybe, with an ability to make people feel my words on paper, laughter, sadness and the way the world is ridiculous. A Lowry in print, sparkin' clogs with words. That is what my weekend gave me. A sense of belonging and an aim.

Write on, from your heart, from your words, let your words speak about what you know. We all come from our heritage, with a different voice. Live in peace with your pen and paper. it is a cheaper hobby than pounds on the lottery.

Jan Holliday



Pictures by: Tim Diggles



Are You a member of a Writers' Group? Are they Members of The FWWCP? If not, why not?

If you believe that writing and publishing should be accessible to all, then join us! The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers has a Membership of independently organised writers workshops and community publishers from many different communities. Membership is Worldwide representing over 4,500 people who meet to offer constructive criticism in all types of writing, to produce and publish books and tapes, to perform and share skills. Although diverse in nature the main characteristics shared are:

- ★ To publish work by and for their community.
- ★ To develop writing within their community.
- ★ To encourage people to take an active, co-operative and democratic role in writing, performing and publishing.
- ★ To enable those usually excluded to express themselves through writing, performing and publishing.
- ★ A commitment to equal opportunities.

The Federation was formed in 1976 and over the past few years has had financial support towards running costs from The Arts Council of England.

The Federation's activities include training, networking, The Festival of Writing, sharing of skills, Autumn Workshops, FEDeration Magazine, the Newsletter, and acting as a representative voice for its Membership.

Membership is for groups only. Individuals can play an important part by becoming a Friend of the Fed. For more information contact:

FWWCP, PO Box 540, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent ST6 6DR
Phone/fax 01782 822327