

Federation Magazine

The magazine of The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers £1.50



Coming Out at Night

Rosie Lugosi's
new book
reviewed p22



**Federation Magazine
No.19 Spring 2000**

**Urgent alert for action - Fed
Members arrested in Mauritius**

Glasgow Fed Day

**Community Writing - views
from Barnsley and Quebec**

**From Student Newsletter to
Community Practice**

QueenSpark's Diary Project

Over there, over here

Fritz-Hüser-Institut

Hand-in-Hand Update

Book Reviews

issn 1330-8598

C o n t e n t s

Urgent Alert for Action: FWWCP Members Arrested 4

A New Approach to Community Writing 6

From Student Newsletter to Community Practice 8

Fritz-Hüser-Institut 9

Glasgow Fed Day 10

Over there, over here 12

Children’s Millennium Diary 16

The Poetry Places scheme 17

Hand in Hand Update 17

Community Writing: Connecting Literacy and the Literary 18

Reviews

 A Life Behind Bars 19

 A Working Man 20

 What a Performance! 20

 If I can do it, you can also do it... 21

 Stories of Guru Nanak 21

 Sweets for my Sweet 22

 Coming out at Night 22

 Brighton Beach to Bengal Bay 23

 On the Writing Trail 23

The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers

The FWWCP was formed in 1976, and now has a Membership of nearly sixty independently organised writers’ workshops, community publishers and organisations in Britain, and around the World. It is an umbrella organisation for those who wish to share their skills and work with their communities.

The FWWCP aims to further working class writing and community publishing, and the Membership share a belief that writing and publishing should be made accessible to all.

The FWWCP publish this magazine and a Broadsheet of writing; we run an annual Festival of Writing; organise training; develop

networks; encourage people to express themselves; offer advice, and much more!

To become a Member of the FWWCP contact the address below. Membership is for groups only. Individuals can take a valuable role by becoming a Friend of the Fed, and get involved in all our activities. We would like to hear from you. By post:

The FWWCP, 67 The Boulevard, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent ST6 6BD

By e-mail: fwwcp@cwcom.net

This magazine, previous issues and a wealth of useful information is available on our Website: www.fwwcp.mcmail.com

Editorial

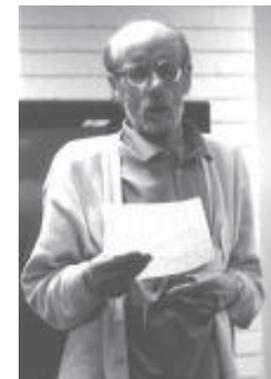
As the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers extends its contacts with our fellows both in Britain and abroad we are finding an increasing diversity of approach. This issue features articles on writing and publishing projects from Barnsley to Montreal, as well as containing further instalments on the Fed visit to North America last year. Looking forward to the festival, there is a feature on the Fritz-Hüser Institut from which we hope to have an exciting presentation. Hüser appears to have been something of a visionary archivist of working class experience.

However, it is also inevitable that through this extended contact we should meet oppression. We are very concerned for our colleagues in Mauritius, whose Government has imposed an

innocuous seeming piece of legislation between the lines of which are concealed sweeping powers for stifling dissent in any form. The act gives state of emergency powers; freedom of expression, freedom of association are all compromised and Ledikayson Pu Travayer, whose aim is to promote Kreol, the language spoken by 90% of the Mauritian population, has its very existence threatened. Already, following protests against the Public Security Act organised by a wide range of opposition bodies, several prominent FWWCP members have been arrested for “illegal demonstration”. Apparently little news of this has reached the media in the UK, or even the foreign office. Please support Ledikayson Pu Travayer’s appeal.

Nick Pollard

Michael Kirkland



Green Balloon

I didn’t know that I would see her there,
that party, purpose fled, date ages gone.
I wasn’t ready, only seeing where
His hands were straying where mine should belong.
My thoughts were bitter, green eyes, green young heart,
As now unbidden, strong emotions came.
Unjustified possessiveness, my part.
Green youth convinced it had a prior claim.
Wounds thought healed, opened. Jealousy was breeding
Like an invader crossing that green line.
she was with him, my love for her receding.
He was with her, with what I thought was mine.
I took from there this memory of that place.
her lips touched this balloon. this touched her face.

We are very sorry to have to announce the death of one of the FWWCP’s great supporters, Michael Kirkland (pictured above performing at the 1999 Festival). Michael served on the Executive Committee at one of the most difficult periods for the Fed, and gave great support not only to Prescott Writers, but to groups all over Merseyside and well beyond.

He will be remembered by many Members for his lively performances and workshops at countless Festivals. He was part of editing groups, a keen supporter of new writing and gave good advice. He was always willing to share skills and was active in many community organisations. Only a few years ago Michael received an MA for his writing from Lancaster University. The thesis was written entirely in sonnet form, over 200 verses.

Michael will be missed by all who knew him, especially the many groups and people associated with the Fed in Merseyside.

URGENT ALERT FOR ACTION: FWWCP Members Arrested

- **Police State law introduced in Mauritius**
- **7 arrested and charged on Friday 17th December**

APPEAL FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

The *Ad-Hoc Committee of the All Workers Conference* uniting the trade union movement, women's associations, progressive political organisations, lawyers, artists, associations for democracy appeals to you to send a letter of protest addressed to the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Mr. Navin Ramgoolam to demand that:

1) Government immediately repeal its newly-voted *Public Security Act*, a law which institutes a permanent State of Emergency, giving police an open licence to infringe fundamental human rights of people to freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of movement, the right to a fair trial, and the right to security of the person and privacy; and

2) To demand that charges be dropped against 7 representatives of the Ad-Hoc Committee:

Alain Ah-Vee (Secretary of *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer*, member of the *All Workers Conference* and member of *Lalit*),

Lindsey Collen (*Ledikasyon Pu Travayer*, member of *All Workers Conference*, Secretary of *Muvman Liberasyon Fam*, member of *Lalit*),

Reez Chuttoo (leading member of the *Federation of Progressive Unions*, member of the *All Workers Conference*),

Rajni Lallah (member of *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer*, member of *All Workers Conference*, President of *Muvman Liberasyon Fam* and member of *Lalit*),

Ram Seegobin (member of *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer*, member of *All Workers Conference* and member of *Lalit*),

Atma Shanto (President of the *Federation des Travailleurs Unis*, member of *All Workers Conference*), and

Ashok Subron (member of *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer*, member of *All Workers*

Conference, and member of *Lalit*).

These representatives were arrested by police while engaged in peaceful protest on Friday 17th December, the very night this law was being voted in the National Assembly and are being charged with illegal demonstration under an existing repressive law.

Government attempts to pass the *Public Security Bill* in secrecy

The Mauritian *Public Security Bill* gives the Government wide ranging powers to restrict freedom of expression, movement and association, and containing many clauses allowing police to search premises and remove items which they suspect may result in law infringements. Resisting or impeding these actions, failing to give evidence or inform the police of people whom you may suspect to be involved in organizations which have 'a tendency' which may promote terrorism is also illegal. The law is expressed in loose terms which allow for wide interpretation.

Many opposition groups in Mauritius, including Federation of Worker Writers members Ledikayson Pu Travayer see the bill as a direct threat, allowing the easy possibility of arrest and prison sentences on false charges. Of special relevance to Worker Writers and Community Publishers in Mauritius are clauses prohibiting publications or materials which have 'a tendency' to incite hatred or contempt for a place of origin, race, creed, or religion. Ledikayson Pu Travayer, which campaigns for the promotion of Kreol as a first language in Mauritius, may easily fall foul of these measures.

Recently Mauritius has seen growing unrest and social problems. There have been deaths in police custody, protesters have been shot with riot guns, and there is an atmosphere of increasing repression, which Le Mauricien, an opposition newspaper, suggests is more connected with facilitating profitable crimes such as drug trafficking, gambling and prostitution, protection rackets and other mafia activities than controlling them. The *Public Security Bill* apparently offers solutions to dealing with crime and hooliganism, while actually giving the police carte blanche for oppression. Prison sentences range from 2 to 30 years for infringements under

the new law.

The *Public Security Bill* went through the Cabinet of Ministers for presentation in the National Assembly on Friday 10th December. On Saturday morning, a newspaper leaked some of the salient anti-democratic features of the Bill. The same day, MP's received a copy of the Bill. Clearly the government had the intention of getting the Bill voted in as much secrecy as possible; the Bill had a certificate of urgency and was to be presented on Tuesday 14th of December, debated and voted: hardly any time was to be given for people, including Members of Parliament, to examine the Bill, let alone time to debate the Bill outside of the National Assembly.

The Mauritian *All Workers Conference* quickly took the initiative to call an Ad-Hoc Committee, held on Monday 13th December afternoon. A delegation from this meeting met urgently with the President of the Republic to ask him to hold up the Bill to allow public debate. The President said he would talk to the Prime Minister the next morning.

Ad-Hoc Committee Actions

On 14th December, Ad-Hoc Committee members went to the National Assembly to demand the Prime Minister withdraw the Bill. They wanted him to open up national debate on, and begin addressing the *root causes* of the riots that have taken place in Mauritius over the past 2 years, instead of having recourse to repressive legislation. A similar appeal was transmitted in the National Assembly to all Members of Parliament. At that stage, the Opposition had taken a public stand against the Bill, but had not taken a firm stand in favour of government withdrawing of the Bill. The same evening, the Prime Minister announced a delay in debating and voting on the Bill to give time for national debate.

However by the evening of 15th December, "Order" papers of the National Assembly made it clear that the Bill was to be debated and voted on Friday, only two days after it had been presented. All press editorialists (apart from those close to the regime), the Mauritian Bar Council and artists started taking firm and public stands against the Bill. On Thursday, realising that the government was totally isolated, the Prime Minister announced amendments to the Bill, but these proved to be mostly minor changes to correct sloppy drafting. It essentially remained unchanged.

The arrests

The Ad-Hoc Committee held a debate in the Port Louis Theatre, across the street from the National Assembly and Government building on Friday 17th December evening, at the same time as the Bill was to be debated and voted in the National Assembly. Trade union leaders, academics, barristers, representatives of women's associations, associations for democracy, artists, a wide spectrum of opposition party members, and local councillors were present. After the debate, there were four resolutions adopted calling for the withdrawal of the Bill, calling on the Opposition not to participate in Parliamentary debate and vote of such an illegitimate Bill, calling for a Commission of Inquiry to find the root causes of the last waves of rioting, and calling for the President of the Republic not to assent the Bill if it goes through Parliament.

Two representatives were mandated by the assembly to transmit our resolutions to the Prime Minister and MP's in Parliament. Everyone waited on the Port Louis theatre veranda calmly and in silence for them to come back with news. 11 women stood on the steps of the veranda with candles alight as a symbolic action against the Bill. Some 20 minutes later, 7 representatives of the *All Workers Conference* were brutally arrested by police. These 7 representatives were taken to Police headquarters and were released some 2-3 hours later after having been charged with demonstrating illegally on a day the National Assembly meets and sits. The 7 Accused risk up to a 2-year prison sentence.

The Parliamentary Opposition walked out from parliament in protest at the arrests and the government with a simple majority, voted its *Public Security Bill* after midnight.

The *Public Security Bill* will become an Act only after the President of the Republic assents. The Ad-Hoc Committee has met the President and has asked him not to assent the Bill. Federation has contacted the Government foreign office who were not aware of this situation; we are awaiting further news from Ledikayson Pu Travayer, but have heard nothing since this appeal.

It is urgent that letters of protest be faxed or e-mailed to the Prime Minister, and a copy be faxed to the President of the Republic to demand that the Prime Minister repeal its *Public Security Act* immediately.

Continued Page 7

A New Approach to Community Writing

Workers Education Association workers in the Dearne and Barnsley area have long been promoting writers' workshops, creating a picture of working class communities from the inside. Tutors Heather Johnson, Brian Sefton and Sue Copestake built on existing work with schools to develop community portraits in a new Community Writing Project.

The project involved three groups: year-eight students at Elmhirst Secondary School, their parents and relatives, and a group of older people attending a local Day Care Centre.

The work produced by each of the three groups was co-ordinated by the tutors to reflect on the work of the others. Tutors working with children would ask them to write about topics affecting their everyday lives, such as education, food, clothing, play, entertainment, and then ask them to make suggestions on how to improve life in their community. Furthermore, they would prepare the students to interview the two older groups, using tape recorders, and then ask them to transcribe the interviews.

Tutors working with both the parent group and the older group would encourage their students to compare their lives as school attenders with those of the children, and to explore relationships within the community, then and now, and to consider how community life could be improved. Writing and taping were used to collect these responses. At an appropriate point, all groups were brought together to discuss their ideas.

Elmhirst School housed some five hundred pupils mostly from the nearby council estates some two to three miles from the town centre. In 1952, the sociologist H Orlans described the way in which such estates were changing:

"In naturally growing towns, larger houses stood side by side with smaller... the split came with the rapid development of the industrial towns... the recent segregation has arisen from government activity in the housing of the working classes. Now, whole estates are devoted to the housing of one wage-earning group."

The people involved in the Community

Writing Project are the products of such an estate. When the majority of male tenants were wage earning, it was the local coalminers that employed them. Now, on these estates, there are as many women in work as men, and the work is often poorly paid.

A meeting was arranged for all three groups at the Day Care Centre. The older group ranged in age from mid-sixties to ninety-four; between them they could tell of a horse-and-cart Barnsley and the beginnings of these housing estates. They recalled young families moving into brand new houses, often with the roads unfinished, and with bathrooms for the first time ever. The Working Men's Clubs and the churches were the heart of the estate and, generally, the homes and gardens were well cared for. They were here to stay. Because they knew work was waiting for them, education had little place in the majority of their lives, but many encouraged their children at school.

The parents involved in the project were often the product of these homes. They, too, saw the possibilities of work, but many saw that taken away. They took houses on the estates, but these became seen as dormitories on the way to a 'better place', and the physical deterioration began then. The possibility of leaving was removed by the pit closures and the knock-on effect that had on local industry. Having gained little from their own school experience, they hoped for better for their children - but with little conviction.

Never again will this woman be that "old lass on't corner". Never again will the teenager be "her that makes all the noise"

The pupils of Elmhirst School were recently labelled by The Guardian, in a survey report, as lacking in confidence and without hope. This is not reflected in the pupils engaged in the writing project: the first group had very definite academic ambitions, whilst the second group, less academically inclined, harboured hopes far beyond the Job Shop. Their confidence often bordered on the aggressive. They saw the estates as empty of any attraction, and regarded the older people who lived there as afraid. All the groups agreed on problems in housing, the provision of leisure facilities and the taking of

drugs. The older people regarded the drug scene as some strange threat. The youngsters saw it as an everyday part of school and estate life.

The bringing together of all the groups offered surprises. The tutors expected reservations on all sides but very quickly, during the interviews, an ease developed. Many of the youngsters were intrigued by the colourful deprivation described by the older people. The elders were, in their turn, astonished by the money that passed through the youngsters' hands.

The first part of the project is ending now, and the tutors are bringing together materials produced by the groups, to make a book. Already, other groups in and around Barnsley are asking the WEA to mount a project, and a second will begin soon. Other permanent classes have been set up in Kendray, and further work is developing in Worsboro. Perhaps the most significant gains are demonstrated in the coming together of the older and younger students. Now, they have established a dialogue that moves out beyond the group meetings. Never again will this woman be that "old lass on't corner". Never again will the teenager be "her that makes all the noise".

The project in Kendray was part funded by the Performing Arts Development Service, a part of the Barnsley Education Department. The book of the project will, it is hoped, be published by Yorkshire South District, and sold throughout the community.

This article first appeared in WEA Reportback, Autumn 1999

(Continued from page 5)

**Prime Minister of Mauritius
Hon. Navin Ramgoolam
President of the Republic of Mauritius
Mr Cassam Uteem**

Fax: (230) 211-7524 or (230) 697 8102 Fax :
(230)464-5370

e-mail: pmopress@intnet.mu

Please send us a copy of your letter of protest at: LPT, 153 Main Rd, GRNW, P.LOUIS, Mauritius

Fax (230) 208 2132

E-mail: lalmel@bow.intnet.mu

From Student Newsletter to Community Practice

As a student at Middlesex University rapidly approaching graduation, I am preparing to cope without the sanctity of my Art Practice in the Community course. The course enables students with an interest in Fine Art to work within community placements, such as Hospitals, Prisons, and Schools, in order to develop an active role with art in society.

However frightened I am at the necessary onslaught of the 'real world', I feel reassured that my experience from the course and community publishing may help me in approaching what appears to be a very large cliff.

A year and a half ago the course magazine entitled *Unity Art* was developed in order to give students a better idea of how, or how not, other students are coping.

Whilst coping with the production and research for the magazine, I have become increasingly aware of the complicated student ethos, like figments of the imagination- seen one minute and gone the next. Regardless I have tried to develop in each issue Student Placement profiles, including where they work, whom they work with and how they find the work.

These areas have developed to include what students themselves wish to read- upcoming events, exhibition reviews careers advice and internationally based community works with reference to art.

Now on placement myself in an art studio, which allows people who, have suffered mental health problems to develop their creative skills. I have taken on the rewarding task of instigating a Newsletter for the charity.

Having learnt to use a combination of the Good Cop, Bad Cop routine in order to interview students, I am delighted to find my placement 'victims' are far less complicated.

As a Charity that enables members to develop creative expression, I have received great interest from those who would like to display their work and thoughts in the Newsletter.

One member has painted, in the studio, possibly some of the most vibrant and

spirited images to have graced exhibition walls, having abandoned avant-garde for the creation of art using little more than expression and fun. She has recently started to write about these works for her own pleasure and the Newsletter, exploring the creative side of literature.

Where art has been used for expression and fun, so too can literature. Giving people a new voice of expression through words as well as art is challenging and rewarding to both the individual and observers.

The purpose of this Newsletter is to inform society as much as it is to inform those who are involved in it's production. The Newsletter informs us of our abilities, expanding simple thoughts into discussion, and gives a critical voice to people who have often in the past had little control over their voice and role in the community.

I have learnt through the course and Newsletter that there is an important role for literature and arts in our communities, as a voice, a role, and a learning experience. I have learnt that this is an area I wish to stay within. I have peeped over the edge of the very large cliff and discovered that it was not as high or as frightening as it looked.

Emily Wright

Alison Smith Moves Job!

Former Fed Vice Chair and brilliant performance poet, Alison Smith, has left Survivors Poetry to be the Disability Arts Project Worker (Northumberland) for NORDAF. Alison will be working across Northumberland to bring together disabled people, survivors and deaf people through all the art forms - music, drama, photography, sculpture, painting, poetry, storytelling, dance etc.

Alison still wishes to keep in touch with the Fed, especially those working in Disability Arts, Survivors, and in adult literacy.

To contact Alison
Tel/Minicom: 0191 222 0708
Fax: 0191 222 0573
email nordaf@ndaf.org

Fritz-Hüser-Institut

The Fritz-Hüser-Institut für deutsche und ausländische Arbeiterliteratur (Fritz Hüser Institute for German and Foreign Workers' Literature) has a wider focus than its name suggests. Its founder, Fritz Hüser (1908-79) not only collected fiction and poetry by, for, and about workers from the age of 17; he had a general interest in working class culture. As a consequence, about 15,000 pieces of graphic art, documentary photos and other media are housed in this institute in Dortmund, Germany, along with a library of some 34,000 volumes and 1,300 periodicals, and a manuscript archive.

Hüser was a metalworker turned librarian after an industrial accident who knew a number of German worker writers and helped form (in 1961) the literary organization Gruppe 61 (Group 61), which included Gunter Wallraff and Max von der Grün. When he retired as director of the Dortmund Public Library in 1973, he gave his collection (including the complete papers of Gruppe 61) to the city, on the condition that an institute be established for it, which he would direct.

Until shortly after his death, Hüser's archive could be found in a small room, closet, and corridor, in inaccessible piles. The current location-the top floor of a government building near city hall-is much larger, with tables for readers and exhibition space. More recently scholars, journalists, librarians, and university students have been able to consult its holdings, and tours were given to participants in a program for young job-seekers and to elderly members of a group for environmentally friendly tourism.

Prof. Dr. Rainer Noltenius, who assumed directorship of the institute in 1979, initiated its outreach efforts. Trained in art and literary criticism and influenced by the goals of the student movement, Noltenius decided to use travelling exhibitions to bring the history of working-class culture to people who are unlikely to visit a non-lending library and archive. He has been very creative in matching themes and venues: An exhibition on the workers' sports movement appeared in sports clubs; another on political puppetry opened at a puppet festival; and one on the proletarian Esperanto movement is still being invited to meetings of Esperantists in Asia and Europe. (A brochure

on the institute's publications has just been updated and includes a list of its exhibition catalogues.)

The experience of everyday life is harder to present in exhibition form than the development of such cultural organizations, however. Noltenius's 1988 exhibition "Alltag, Traum und Utopie: Lesegesichten-Lebensgeschichten" (Daily life, dream, and utopia: Reading stories-life stories) was a strikingly original solution to that problem. After conducting twenty oral histories about the role that the media played in daily life, he and his staff chose four exemplary men and women and reconstructed the environments where their reception of books, radio, and TV took place. Guided tours by the interviewers and interviewees discussed the function of fiction in, for instance, a worker's kitchen or a communal apartment. "We wanted to get away from the abstract, cliched, and idealized view of workers that was rather common in the student movement and present a more personal and detailed picture of working people's lives, including their fantasies," Noltenius told me. The title refers to his theory that people often explore their fantasies in their favourite works of art and sometimes then try to live out those dreams, which he substantiated using family photos.

Recently Noltenius has interested Japanese colleagues in conducting similar studies in the sociology of literature. British library journals and the International Association of Labour History Institutions have given the work of his institute greater visibility in Europe. This, through exhibitions like its 1995 study of poverty in twentieth-century art, for example, deserves the serious consideration of curators and cultural historians.

Karen Rosenberg

Contact:
Fritz-Hüser-Institut, Ostwall 64, D-44135
Dortmund, Germany

This article first appeared in Public Culture in 1999

Glasgow Fed Day

Two FWWCP representatives report back...



Members of Survivors Poetry Scotland performing at Glasgow Fed Day

The journey up to Glasgow went without a hitch. I didn't have to hitchhike. I was sixteen (1973) when I last went to there, so I was curious to see how it had changed. I remember the tall dark buildings, not the handsome men - I was too young. They haven't changed much in stature (the buildings that is) but they have been cleaned up, probably to their detriment. I preferred them dark and sooty. I had yearned to visit when Glasgow was City of Culture, many years ago, but somehow I never managed it. Something to do with a particularly mean line manager...

The building where SPS has its offices is remarkable, set in a superb part of the city: Hillhead. We had visions of driving round for hours trying to find somewhere to park, but Tim seemed to have inbuilt antennae for finding empty parking spaces. We soon felt at home. Later we were shown the space where the Glasgow Fed Day would be held: the Tryst, used for prayer meetings by the church.

Our first task was to set up the meeting area. Arthur, Chris, Tim, and I had a thoroughly Glaswegian meal (curry in a huge converted cinema) a restaurant, which Chris described as deserving at least 100% for style. The meal accommodated our appetites and we then had to think about setting up the exhibition space. We were obviously keenly interested in doing this after several scotches, no pun intended.

The Tryst is a fine, recently decorated space with a high, vaulted ceiling. We decided not to use the stage area as it might seem as if we were preaching. We played musical chairs with the tables and screens and finally decided on a layout. We decided not to use

microphones, as the acoustics were so good. At the end of all this I was rewarded with a Fed badge.

The next day I ran out to purchase tea, coffee, etc. just in time for the opening of the snack bar. We needed to work fast because there was actually a

queue outside the theatre when we arrived first thing in the morning. The publicity had obviously worked.

The day began with Tim giving a talk about the Fed and then Glasgow Survivors put on a playlet, a particularly powerful piece. The group held up masks to their faces with their individual lines on the back, an innovation that was both practical and dramatically effective. Mental anguish is not always visible. The doctor in his "white coat" administered pills to the group, implying that mental health practitioners lead protected lives: often, they themselves have never been on the receiving end. To the vulnerable and mentally distressed those treating them seem to live in a pristine world.

After the Survivors' performance representatives, including myself, talked about their experience of the Fed: Tony Guest and Nick Pollard of Heeley Writers, Arthur Thickett and David Simons of QueenSpark Books, Alvin Culzac of Shorelink and Alison Smith of Survivors' Poetry and Eric Davidson of Dumfries & Galloway Survivors. Each representative spoke about the benefits of joining the Fed, gave an example of the benefits it offered members read work from their own group. It was a good mixture. Tony Guest aptly pointed out that the Fed "was not about winning prizes" and Nick Pollard described moving from Sheffield, where he had been a member of Heeley Writers, to London where he had joined another Fed group, Hackney Writers. In other words, wherever he moves to he will always be a part of the Fed. Eric Davidson and Arthur Thickett told how the FedFest is a great opportunity to network and I talked about the Hand in Hand training project and how

Manchester groups put on a successful showcase event at Manchester's Green Room. Through the training project we also produced a set of postcards, each one representing a different writers' group in the Manchester area.

Tea and lunch breaks gave everyone the opportunity to meet other member groups and potential new members. I met some extremely friendly Glasgow Survivors. I hope to see at least some of them at the FedFest in April.

In the afternoon, the Fed representatives formed into groups with non-members to give direct feedback about Fed membership. The result was that Drumchapel Writers Group and Wordshare applied for membership.

After the group meetings, there was an open mike. Amongst many very good performances, Alvin Culzac was as entertaining as ever, Alison Smith's performance was excellent and, equally dynamic and fascinating to watch, was her signer. One of her performances involved signing one of her own pieces herself whilst her colleague read it out. She was a good compere and managed to drag people off the stage to allow enough time for all the acts. Stage fright was not a problem that day.

Everyone agreed that it had been a good day and worth all the effort. The tangible evidence for that were the applications by two new members. It was a great pity I could not stay a bit longer, sample more of the Glasgow culture, and get to know the Scottish groups a bit better. I hope the FedFest in April will be as good.

*Louise Glasscoe
Commonword*

The Fed's Glasgow Saturday

Looking back at the Glasgow weekend; looking back across the bleak chasm that was the (so-called) Millennium Break... is not easy.

Tim and six or seven other Fed members, including myself, from groups across England arrived in Scotland on the Friday evening and enjoyed the hospitality of Scottish 'Survivor' Members, either in Glasgow itself or at 'Eric's Lockerbie' Survivors. I myself was very comfortably hosted at a house just off Kelvin

Grove, by the river Kelvin, pleasant in the fall.

Friday night Louise, Tim, and I had a good old walk, which saved me from getting completely lost - one thing I am good at - on the Saturday and Sunday. After helping to prepare the event's Venue Hall for Saturday, a gang of us had a cheerful meal in a huge and buzzing restaurant somewhere in the vicinity. I slept well.

Saturday, the event proper, was from mid-morning into early evening. Overall attendance, I would say, was about SO/C0. As well as prior publicity, posters encouraged anyone interested to walk in off the street. There were bookstalls for the Fed and for non-members. At first Tim, visiting, and Glasgow Fed members 'put over' The Fed, interspersed with individual 'performance.' In the early evening there was a general reading/performance session (including both Fed and non-Fed people.) It was a rare mixture! It is hard now to look back and remember. There were one or two very individualistic characters who were interesting if somewhat remote from the ethos of 'community publishing'; but only one went on really too long! - it happens. Overall it was lively and some of it, well, just great! - unfair to pick people out so I will not: there was miming, music, a shining compere, and good food in the breaks.

... Saturday night, found me, together with two other visiting Fed members Glaswegians, David and Alison, down along Byres Road. A meal, a drink, a chat and then David had to keep a prior engagement. "This is my patch!" said Alison: "I'll take you to a pub that used to have old fashioned ideas about women!" Laughingly, we went in; found they still did in a way! - and moved on. Happily, we found a 'student's' pub and once again, Byres Road - all but one wee corner of it - belonged to us...

I enjoyed my Glasgow weekend; savoured the flavour, the past, those Great Ships, the 'Red Clyde' - all that. Glasgow now is living and vibrant and full of drama past and present; tears too - Glasgow needs... 'Survivor's Poetry.'

*Art Thickett
QueenSpark Books, Brighton*

Over there, over here

Tom Woodin writes about his views of the visit to the USA and Canada by Fed members in June 1999

Street lecture tour in Kensington, 3,000 miles from Chelsea... 95+ degrees. A shimmer from the melting road. Jetlag. I get out of the car - carsick. I'm unsuccessfully 'shading' myself behind an excuse of a bush, getting sunburnt & feeling queasy in a strange country. Schmidt

beer is empty, a wasted, gargantuan structure, silent now the capitalists have moved to cheaper pastures. Its not exactly a poor country but we learn fast: graffiti visible from the highway is rewarded with a longer jail sentence than if sprayed elsewhere, local people cleaning up waste ground incur the wrath of the police, add a dose of inequality, drugs, exploitation, racism. A

man cycles by checking us out and decides the speakers (one ex-homeless one ex-student, both young) don't know what their on about (wrong faces, hair cut, shoes, who knows? it's a different language). He lets us know it, before disappearing around the corner, 'Don't listen to them, they don't know nothing'. There's a shift in silence for a few seconds, feet shuffle and we continue... Whose story gets to be told matters, people care, there's a deep and familiar anger here... almost like home.

A good thing about going on holiday is that things at home can all suddenly seem to make a bit more sense. You're able to see your life from another angle. You visit another group, you think about your own. I want to relate some of our experiences over there in the USA to those over here in the Fed. This is an important in order to help develop further international links and sustain them.

As you know, of course, the USA trip wasn't all holiday. There were many weary days of being cooped up in a van, lugging suitcases, hours of working on the performance and sleeping in a bed next to Roger snoring - or even in the same bed! The hectic

schedule meant some people wouldn't have been able to go even if they wanted to. I'm sure others were excluded by the money. Whilst the Fed paid for three, four others cashed in their stocks and shares to pay for themselves. This meant that those representing the Fed tended

to have both stamina and jobs/money. This may be hard to avoid but we should discuss how to offer opportunities to others who might better represent the Fed.

Conferences, practice, theory and therapy

The conference on Working Class Studies at Youngstown aimed to bridge the unresolved tension between the academic world and

practical initiatives. This is not easily done. In the workshops papers were often read directly from the page - sometimes 20 pages in 20 minutes - not easy to follow. Some thought the academic ladder (conference presentations helps to = jobs & promotion) was being climbed without bothering about those that were becoming increasingly smaller as the higher rungs were reached. But this shouldn't be an argument for doing away with using reflection and theory to help produce better work. The academic plenary sessions included Paul Lauter arguing for a democratization of our understanding of literature whilst Stanley Aronowitz stressed that knowledge is a means of production and academics should be more integrated with the labour movement. Discuss.

On the other side of the 'fence', besides our performance, there was Elise Bryant, a highlight of the conference. She argued robustly that artistic work gives working class people a chance to recognise internalised oppressions and to clarify their hopes and aspirations, 'what we want to become'. Although this process was full of personal and political difficulties, it was necessary in order to regenerate a rapidly



Street tour in Kensington

changing and widely misunderstood labour movement. This was too much for some people who walked out complaining of 'therapy' and not wanting to get too personal, too vulnerable.

We later discussed how private industry is much more sophisticated in using some of these methods, albeit for different purposes. I remembered meeting someone who'd been on a management training course where, as a warmer, the group had to tell each other about the worst thing that had ever happened to them - it took plenty of tissues! This supposedly meant they now had nothing to lose and would be willing to give their all - ready to kick ass!? The people at Schmidt beer had probably been on that one.

Then I remembered a Gatehouse writing workshop. The facilitator told his story about not being able to read and write and the pain this caused. Then he asks 'what about you'. Everyone dredges up something, painful but cathartic, it's a release and a way into writing. (We run out of time and I get off the hook, after all I'm the worker and better at protecting myself). Sometimes you need to dig where it hurts to produce something worthwhile - that's what so much of the Fed has been about - using personal experiences that makes the writer vulnerable but can also give strength. Despite the occasional put-downs by 'literary' critics, therapy can stimulate creativity and be a starting point for good writing.

The conference in Philadelphia had usefully brought together a variety of groups in order to consider how, and if, the university could set up a community based press. It got people talking and was a start at least, trying to bridge some of these divides. Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU) in north Philadelphia uses student volunteers from the university who have to learn how to support the activities without taking control. These sorts of initiatives may yet help us get closer to reflective practice and

grounded theories. I think each needs the other.

Who's on the controls? & organisational change

KWRU gives poor people a central role in campaigning for their economic human rights which the free market and Clinton welfare reforms (a model for Tony Blair) have taken away in the 'War on America's poor'. In this charged political context gaining control of your

story can be *both* truly empowering and a way to fight for social change. Their video, *Poverty Outlaw*, rejects the view of the undeserving poor:

'I'm an outlaw. My crime? Being poor. I - or should I say we - have taken over empty houses to live in; stolen throwaway food and eaten it, gotten used clothing and wore it - and for these simple acts of survival the City of Philadelphia throws us in jail'

Individual and collective stories are intertwined and used as a stimulus to collective action:

'I am one of the women you have just seen and I am all of them. My story is made up of bits and pieces of our true lives. With every passing day it's harder to get food and shelter. More and more have less and less. The cops may be able to stop some of us but they can't stop all of us'.

To some extent this is reminiscent of the beginning of many Fed groups that emerged in the early 1970's out of struggles like rent strikes and community based campaigns. Our Kensington tour guide told us that KWRU turned down the offer of government grants that might skew the organisation away from campaigning and into service provision, making it answerable to the same people whom they want to campaign against. Many voluntary groups face this dilemma about developing: will the funders influence what we do too much, will paid professional workers start to represent and 'take over' the



Contrasting streets in Kensington, Philadelphia, just a few blocks apart



organisation, but how will we keep it going without money? It was refreshing to see KWRU struggling with this issue, keeping alive the choice of not wanting to depend on government money, not wanting to become too professional.

In a similar vein the Canadian AutoWorkers (CAW) had run a scheme to encourage workers to support each other in developing literacy skills. This had generated some criticism from teachers' unions who feared losing jobs to volunteers but countering this was the argument that workers trusted their mates more than an official teacher, a debate familiar to many Fed groups over the years. As part of 'searching for a discourse with which to speak to workers politically' CAW currently runs education and artistic programs, mainly for activists.

Unfortunately, there was little distribution of the finished work back to union members. But it was still amazing to see any union committed to this sort of work at all. Unions here would do well to realise that they may have poets closer to home than Andrew Motion (whose recent TUC poem received a mixed reception).

Making Our Mark, Labour Arts and Heritage in Ontario

(Karl Beveridge and Jude Johnson) is a fascinating book that shows over 100 models for doing arts work with working people. Interestingly the writing section contains the quote by playwright Rick Salutin that 'A genuine workers culture doesn't just mean well intentioned middle class artists producing arts for workers.'

The last issue of *Federation* had an interview with Jim Villani of Pig Iron Press with his 1960's ideas about consensus and the freelance writing community as a sort of working class. It's impossible to know where the organisation ends and Jim begins: the two are meshed like Siamese twins. The organisation is his, he's sustained it, he literally owns it. The organisation is a 'proprietorship' and, in theory, Jim could make his millions in profit, but he never does, that's not why he's doing it. It reminded me of Geoff Mulgan and Charles Landry's arguments (*Remaking*

Charity for the 21st Century) that in the UK we don't have a wide enough diversity of legal structures to encompass the range of voluntary activity.

By way of a warning about buildings Jim found that moving from his basement to a building created its own work. His plans to increase publishing from one to six books a year have not been realised because of the extra work.

The local, community & class

In Toronto we saw Charly Chiarelli perform his one-man show, in both Italian and Canadian English, about his life growing up as the son of Sicilian immigrants. It was funny, poignant and sad as Charly acted out anecdotes that carried wider messages. For instance, when serving as

the family interpreter to the welfare officer he had to translate the 'rational' questions that were incomprehensible and insulting to his parents ('do you have any bonds or stocks & shares' etc.). We got a sense of the complex relations between his community and the wider society and between his identity and that of his parents. To the local Italian audience this show had

provoked screams of delight, grown men and women crying as their own stories were given back to them. But specific and located experiences do also have a wider currency beyond the communities in which they are produced. One of our group found that her fairground experiences of translating for her parents were similar to Charly's whilst others were fascinated by the differences.

Tony Buba's installation in Youngstown: he juxtaposed old maps and modern photographs of streets that have seen better days. In between residents had written their memories, sometimes small personal details that brought the now empty street to life for us, added to by the memories and discussions it provoked.

Many people we met in America argued that class doesn't have to operate as a blanket, covering over and denying other identities, of being a woman, a survivor of the mental health

system, homeless, black or anything else. This doesn't mean that the working class has simply broken up into these groups but that we need to develop a more complex understanding of how class relates to race, gender and other identities. *Writing Work, Writers on Working Class Writing* D Shevin et al. was also launched at Youngstown and perhaps reflects a growing interest in class. A number of academics and writers (and Bruce Springsteen), who've obviously 'made it' to some extent, reflect on their past and present lives, their reading and their work, a mix of analysis and stories. Some of the writers celebrate the working class values they've gained from their pasts. Others, like Janet Zandy, take a more critical approach to the changes between past and present, and she reflects on her sense of responsibility to her class as well as how she introduces working class writing into her teaching.

The conference in Canada had been cancelled due to a recent election in which 'Thatcherite' Bob Harris held onto power. The chair of Ontario Workers' Arts and Heritage Centre told me that following his first election victory many people started talking about 'community' as strong, vibrant, and already/always-existing. This was part of a rationale for 'rolling back the state', a somewhat familiar argument to those in 1980's Britain when the metaphor of 'community as spray-gun' became popular, painting a gloss over any and all 'problems' – community care, neighbourhood watch, community policing etc.

Fed groups have often argued for active and radical understandings of community that need to be created from the bottom up. But it's one of those contested terms that can rapidly lose its focus or easily slide into opposite meanings. Taking the word 'worker' out of the Fed's title would increase this ambiguity and lessen the sense of an oppositional movement that wants to put democracy into culture. Linking community with class, which 'worker writers and community publishers' does to some extent, helps to keep the organisation on track and reminds us who its meant to be for. The Fed's uniqueness lies in the very idea of 'working class writing', however defined. Those at the bottom of society have a right to creative expression. This is a major reason why invitations from places like the USA ever appear on the doormat. At a workshop in Youngstown I spoke about the current fashion for denying the

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relevance of class. I could almost feel the breeze from a sea of nodding heads, vociferous in their agreement. Seeing the Fed as an oppositional movement focusing on class doesn't have to exclude recognising the diversity of identities. Survivor poetry groups that include a range of class backgrounds have been welcomed to the Fed and have made an enormous contribution. I know this position isn't exactly coherent but it works well, it's practical.

To keep spreading the message is important. The performance, even with inexperienced readers like myself, proved to be an accessible and exciting way of introducing the Fed. I was taken aback at the reception we received. It's something we should not let go of. Could we not do another tour in this country focusing not just on literary festivals but trade unions, community groups, potential member and supporters?

Tom Woodin

Children's Millennium Diary

'Your Present to the Future'

QueenSpark Books are running a young people's collaborative Millennium Diary Writing Project spanning the whole of the year 2000. The Project is part of Brighton & Hove's initiative, The Place To Be, with funded by the Millennium Commission, Southern Water and RotoVision. In the past QueenSpark Books have mostly produced books written by older people, but this project is aimed at giving children the opportunity to be heard. We wanted to run a Millennium project that encompassed our ethos of making writing and publishing accessible to all and our belief in the value of personal history.

The project will give children the chance to write about themselves and the town that they live in, to be about the 'here' and 'now' rather than looking to the past or future and to extend beyond the future at the start of the new Millennium. We have planned the project to encourage as many young people in Brighton & Hove to keep a diary for a minimum of one week of their choice during the year.

Working with a core group of Primary Schools in the town we have co-ordinated individual programmes of activities to include, assemblies, diary writing workshops with professional writers and visits to the Mass-Observation Archive based at the University of Sussex.

One of our core participating schools will be linked to The Peninsula School in Mount Eliza, Australia to exchange diary entries on line, looking at the similarities and differences in lifestyles of the children in the UK and Australia.

All of the schools in Brighton & Hove received a specially compiled 'Guide for Teachers' to encourage and assist them to take part. Schools have requested diary booklets for their pupils and have become drop-off

points for their pupils completed diaries.

The project is also running a series of monthly diary writing drop-in sessions throughout the year. These are being held in a variety of locations, in libraries, cinema clubs, bookshops, and cafes. The first was held in Hove Library on 29th January, for children to get their diaries started using stories, poems and drawings as well as encouraging them to contribute to our Collective Diary entry for that day.

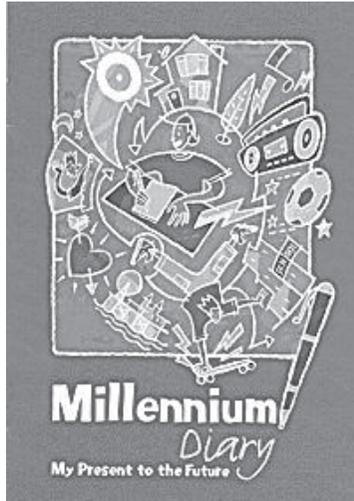
QueenSpark has designed and produced our own one week Millennium Diary Booklet, My Present to the Future, for those taking part. These will be available at all of the drop-in sessions, left in libraries, and museums and sent to schools (on request). However, children can design and make their own; they can e-mail us with their entries, fax us, make a tape-recorded diary, or even a video diary! They can be for any length - a day, a week, a month, or the whole year!

All diaries we receive will be entered into the selection for the Millennium Diary anthology, to be published and launched in 2001 (for Brighton Festival in May). This will be given FREE to all libraries, schools in Brighton & Hove, and be available for sale in bookshops.

The diaries will be archived in a special collection at the Mass-Observation Archive, with a selection also stored at the Local Studies Library in Brighton, to be kept and looked back on in the future. Look out for diary extracts on line in the coming year... if you return a diary to us - it could be you!

For more information about being part of the Diary project or about QueenSpark Books write to them at 1st Floor, 49 Grand Parade, Brighton BN2 2QA, or go to their Website www.queenspark.org.uk

Jackie Blackwell



Poetry Places

Last year The FWWCP were awarded one of the Poetry Society's National Lottery funded Poetry Places grants. These grants have paid for poets to work in all sorts of places, from Cross Channel Ferries to Marks and Spencers.

The Fed's grant has supported a series of workshops with members, leading to a performance at the 2000 Festival of Writing in Leicester. They were convened by poet Anne Rouse (pictured right reading at the 1999 Festival), who has two collections published by Bloodaxe, as well as appearing in many anthologies. Anne worked with Shorelink Writers from Hastings, Grimsby Writers, Prescott Writers, and Heeley Writers from Sheffield.

Each group has worked in different methods, the workshops designed to fit into their working and meeting times. But all have had a joint



theme, which was Milestones.

There will be a full report on the project in the next issue of Federation Magazine, and publication of some of the poems written in the Broadsheet.

Hand in Hand Update

Hand in Hand, the Fed's three-year Lottery-funded training project, has had a busy autumn and winter, and is set to have an even busier spring and summer as we move into the final year of funding.

Last September saw another successful *Working with the Media* weekend course at Wedgwood College, then in October the *Promoting Your Group* training project in Manchester culminated in a wonderful evening of performances from the nine participating groups at the Green Room. In the evaluation, everyone agreed that working collaboratively with such a diversity of groups had been one of the most positive aspects of the projects - despite the disagreements!

The next (and final) year of the project is packed with training opportunities to encourage more people to participate. Your group will receive further details, but here is a summary: Residential Weekends

How to Sell Your Books (July 2000, Leicester University). In response to popular demand - everything you need to know.

Working with the Internet (September 2000, venue to be confirmed). What can the internet explosion offer to community writers groups and publishers? Find out on this practical course.

Be Small, Think Big (January 2001, venue to be confirmed). Your chance, if you missed it the first time round, to look at developing smaller groups without paid workers.

also:

Training the Trainers

A programme of training for Fed members who are interested in developing their training skills for use in the community.

Training Handbook

A resource pack of practical information, step-by-step quick guides, and personal accounts by Fed members, available to all groups.

There will also be one other major training project, as well as the continuing *Helping Hand* scheme (short bursts of specialised, tailor-made training for individual groups) - so do get in touch if you have any thoughts, ideas, queries about how your group could be involved, or if you want to know more about any of the projects touched on above.

Christine Bridgwood, Training Development Coordinator, Kynance, Albert Street, Stone, Staffs. ST15 8HQ. Tel/fax: 01785 286177. Email: handinhand@cwcom.net

Community Writing: Connecting Literacy and the Literary

"... the tone of culture cannot depend only on the occasional genius, or the illusion of one; the prevailing temper of a society and a time is situated in its minor voices, in their variegated chorus." Cynthia Ozick, The New Yorker 1992

"Literacy is elitist. It's a form of imaginative elitism that is useless if we as adult literacy educators do not recognise and promote it." Francis E. Kazemek Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy 1999

There is only one letter's difference between the words "literacy" and "literary", but in the settings where most of us work, there is a chasm between the worlds of "adult literacy" and the "literary". So when the organisers of Blue Metropolis, the first International Literary Festival to be held in Montreal, contacted The Centre for Literacy last February to ask if the literacy community would like to be involved, it opened a door between what have usually been perceived in the literary world as the first class and steerage class of writing.

Linda Leith, Montreal novelist and co-editor of the literary magazine Matrix, had dreamed for years of organizing a local literary festival. Finally, last year, with co-operation from the English and French writing communities, she and a managing board won government and corporate support to create Blue Metropolis to bring 63 authors and translators together for five days of readings, discussions, launches, and others events for lovers of literature.

When the organisers requested some support from the National Literacy Secretariat, (NLS) the officer asked how the literacy community was involved, which led to the call to The Centre. The first conversation was exploratory - the festival offered free admission for adult literacy students to hear well known writers, to give a public voice to people who write at the margins of our society - the community based groups, literacy programs, support services, where writing is both expression and therapy or release? When Blue Metropolis said yes, "Grassroots: Writing in the Community" was born.

In six weeks, we gathered groups from Montreal, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, and Alberta, and one group from Chicago. Finances were cobbled together with NLS grant money and matching dollars in each of the four locales. At noon on April 24, we all met for the first time face to face. We had requested the smallest room available. Would anyone want to hear writers from far-flung neighbourhood centres? Surprisingly, more than seventy people showed up forcing us into a larger space.

For two hours, after a brief introduction of each group, writers read their work ranging from sophisticated poetry and personal narrative to the fruits of first writings by adult beginners. The audience was mesmerised: listeners recognised truth and accorded every reader respect, no matter what level of skill.

However, the story has just begun. The ripples continue. In the audience was the organiser of Ottawa's literary festival, who decided that community voices should be heard there as well. He contacted Craig McNaughton, longtime social activist and past Executive Director of the Movement for Canadian Literacy, to arrange a similar session in Ottawa. Craig designed a four-hour session of reading and discussion on September 16 around the topic of literacy, community writing, and social inclusion. CPAC, a local cable station videotaped the entire event for broadcast later this fall (1999).

The groups who met last April remain in contact; Helen Woodrow has designed a distance learning project for several of them in the winter of 2000. The Newfoundland, Alberta and Chicago groups have been accepted on the program of College Composition and Communication in Minneapolis to present a workshop on community writing and literacy, and Blue Metropolis has asked the Centre for Literacy to organise another event in April 2000.

What is community writing?

People have written stories since marks could be carved in walls; but over centuries, as literature slowly separated itself from its origins, and became professionalized, the only writers recognised have been those officially published or aspiring to publication. Individuals, however,

never stopped writing. They still write prolifically in diaries and journals, and increasingly more publicly on the Net which may lead to new forms in the future.

But what is community writing as we have defined it? Community writing happens when ordinary people who may something to say, and because recording it validates their lives or allows them to come to terms with personal demons, and allows others to understand them. It can be facilitated by a responsive outsider or by a member. As our examples demonstrate, there are no rules for starting a community writing group beyond these few common principles.

When Cynthia Ozick suggested that "the prevailing temper of a society and a time is situated in its minor voices," she was making a case for minor literary figures, in memory of a beloved colleague lost to an early death. But her insight can be extended to the unheard "minor voices" who are writing in communities all around us, including the many beginning learners in adult basic education. Stigma dissolves when community writers meet on common ground without the labels; among these writers are voices we should hear if we want to make sense of and change our world.

It has been said of the Danish Folk School that "without ever mentioning the word butter, they trained generations of farmers to make the best butter in Europe." The same claim might apply to literacy developed through community writing. It supports literacy through the literary, and part of its power comes from community ownership. Bringing it to a wider audience and acknowledging its link to the world of literature is no so different from bringing folk art into major museums earlier this century. It offers another way of seeing and being in the world, and an alternative to functional definitions of literacy.

Linda Shohet

The Centre for Literacy of Quebec

This article first appeared in Literacy Across the Curricularmedia Focus

R E V I E W S

A Life Behind Bars

A Life Behind Bars, Marjory Batchelor
£4.25 ISBN 0 904733 75 0
QueenSpark Books 37
Available from QueenSpark Books, 1st Floor, 49
Grand Parade, Brighton BN2 2QA

The cover of this book, with its black and white photo of the writer (smiling from ear-to-ear and clutching a pint of Guinness), welcomes you in. Marjory's 'life behind bars'



was not at Her Majesty's Pleasure, but behind the bars of various pubs around the Brighton area from 1908 until the 1990s. She was born in a pub and worked as a barmaid on and off throughout her life, and her life story is also the story of the changing role and nature of pubs through the twentieth century.

The book is studded with memorable details (from whitening the steps at each of the five doors of the pub each day in the early 1900s to making her first Irish coffee in the 1980s) which build up a vivid picture of the changes, as "juke boxes appeared, pianos disappeared and the old atmosphere of the pubs seemed to change". The descriptions of the austerities of war, both material and emotional, were moving (Marjory's babies were practically toddlers before her husband saw them for the first time) while the images of the West Pier in the roaring twenties made me want to be there. An enjoyable read which will give you food for thought the next time you visit your local.

Christine Bridgwood

R E V I E W S

A Working Man

A Working Man

A Century of Hove memories

Ernie Mason

QueenSpark Books no.36 £3.75

ISBN 0 904733 71 8

Available from QueenSpark Books, 1st Floor, 49
Grand Parade, Brighton BN2 2QA

I'm not from Hove, I think I've only been there a couple of times, but Ernie Mason's book brings Hove over the past century truly to life. This book is in the long tradition of QueenSpark, encouraging people to publish their life histories in their own words. Ernie shares his life, family and dogs with us.

His vivid down to earth portrait of life during the First World War has a particular interest, for instance about when his 16 year old brother lied about his age to join up, and the parties they had when on leave.

Ernie's school days are similar to so many others written about. The harsh discipline, the playground fights, the respect for teachers, it is all there, a whole world away from today's schools. A shared experience with millions of his generation.

Then Ernie's work life. Today we think people in the past had jobs for life, but they didn't. For Ernie's generation war broke up working life, and he writes vividly about his time in Egypt. Ernie had many jobs, workers were laid off easily, nothing was certain. From 11 years old Ernie worked, first as an errand boy for a greengrocer, then as a delivery boy, carrying twenty-eight pounds of potatoes on the front of a bike! And so life continued, and it is all here.

This is a valuable record of a life, as many of QueenSpark books are. It shows the harsh truth of life in 'the good old days' with humour and understanding.

Tim Diggles

What a Performance!

What a Performance!

Poems for Several Voices

John Carley, Helen Clare, Christine Potter

Big Lamp Books, 5a Manchester Rd,

Haslingden, Rossendale BBS 5SL

48 pp, £3.

This is an anthology which departs from the musty written word to the roots of poetry as it is spoke. You are invited not merely to read this collection, but read it with friends: "Don't the school-yard chant, the Hip-Hop mix, the High Church Litany and the Anfield anthem all contain suggestions of what poetry can be? Shouldn't we all celebrate call and response, chorus, refrain, interjection, overlap and counterpoint? And what about that primal magic: the power of many voices?"

...So this is not a book to read on your own, and if you can get 'an adventurous friend' to read with you (some poems need more than one other adventurous friends - as many as nine for John Carley's *Garden of Remembrance*) the magic or here, with Carley's poem, the ironies of a pets' cemetery, emerges. You can extract so much more than you could with one voice. How else to enjoy the echoing vacuousness of newspeak "Reporters are reporting reports/that a survey surveying surveyors/ commissioned by the commissioning commission/ showed repeats of repeat repetitions/ to be averaging on average, average." (John Carley: Rolling News)

The voices switch from the lyrical tones of Christine Potter's work to the terse documentary interspersing of Helen Clare's *Immigration Station - Angel Island California*. Being encouraged to read this way the relationship with the poem is much more intimate, you have to think how you will project yourself into the voice offered on the page, the spine chillingly innocent 'front' of Darren in Helen Potter's *The Last Time*. That the poems demand this of the performer is testament to the sharpness of the work, and at £3 a go, between nine of you, all this fun for 33.3p apiece is very good value.

Nick Pollard

R E V I E W S

If I can do it, you can also do it...

Oceans Apart, Kohinoor Akter

Book: ISBN 0 906253 62 4

Cassette: ISBN 0 906253 72 1

My Deaf Son, Umtul Nisa

Book: ISBN 0906253 57 8

Cassette: ISBN 0 906253 253 67 5

Gatehouse Books, Hulme Adult Education
Centre, Stretford rd, Manchester M15 5 FQ

These lovely readers are specially designed for learners of English as a second language, and were produced through Gatehouse's Asian Women's Project, and features the English text with translations opposite, supplemented with simple and clear illustrations. Each is also available on cassette, which features a 'slow read' version of the story allowing it to be followed in the text.

Oceans Apart describes in English and Bangla how Kohinoor Akter left Bangladesh for Manchester, and the difficulties and heartache of the immigration process.

In English and Urdu Umtul Nisa's My Deaf Son tells how Ahdil, who was born deaf, gradually makes progress with his education, and she learns to communicate with him through sign language.

The stories in these attractive and well designed publications will stimulate students' reading and discussion. They will encourage people not only to find out what is available to them, but also to write their own stories. As Umtul Nisa says, "If I can do it, you can also do it. Try your best."

Nick Pollard

Stories of Guru Nanak

Stories of Guru Nanak

Surjit Singh Kalra

Pitambar Publishing

ISBN 81 209 1023 0, £4.99 (33% discount to
FWWCP members)

Panjabi Language Development Board

2 St Anne's Close, Handsworth Wood,
Birmingham B26 1BS

Guru Nanak is universally recognised as the founder of the Sikh religion, which celebrated its 530th anniversary last year. This book contains 12 stories of incidents which occurred during Guru Nanak's life and travels.

Born in 1469 to a rich family, GuruNanak gave up his comfortable life style and for the next 23 years travelled throughout India and the Middle East preaching and converting. The faith he expounded was based on the principle that "to be good, one must do good."

In the foreword P.R. Bound likens the miracles and parables of Guru Nanak to those of Jesus Christ. I concur, and in today's multicultural society these stories told in simple terms are an ideal medium for informing young people of other races' lives and experiences.

My grand daughter aged 12 read the book from start to finish, declaring it to be "very interesting"; quite an achievement in this television age.

Included in the book is the conversion of Sajjan the Robber, who changed his life when he met Guru Nanak and eventually built the first Sikh temple. He journeyed through the land spreading the Guru's word, and in doing so became the first Sikh missionary.

The book is an entertaining read and a useful medium to pass on the message of Guru Nanak.

Margaret Pearson

R E V I E W S

Sweets for my Sweet

Sweets for my Sweet,
Northern Voices.
10 Greenhaugh Rd, Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear,
NE25 9HF

Reading *Sweets for my Sweets* I was reminded of cinema treats – Saturday matinees with a bag of sweets. This is a book that follows the history of Welch's Sweets from 1919 to the present day. It's a story told through photos and words from the owners and staff. It spans the old paternalistic family values of the firm and its employees with Christmas Do's, Candy Queen beauty contests, people who 'knew their place in those days' to the modern working environment and its problems.

Owners and staff speak of loyalty and togetherness. There are no complaints and people dwell on social activities, the sense of comradeship with approachable management. Only the union rep has a different view, she has 'good days, bad days', keeps out of the socials and worries about the regular laying off periods when business is slack. Although tensions between workers and management are not apparent in the text you can't help wandering where they've disappeared to.

The book conjures up a bye-gone era – sentimental and reassuring – but it's enjoyable precisely because the nostalgia is believable and Welch's sweets are the tangible product.

Susan Whitworth

Coming out at Night

Coming Out at Night
Performance Poetry by Rosie Lugosi
purpleprosepress £3.50
ISBN 0 9536746 0 6

Available from purpleprosepress, 5 Longford
Road, Manchester M21 9WP

In Fed Mag 18 I asked for another book from Rosie Lugosi, the Lesbian Vampire Queen of Manchester, asap, and here it is! Even more wonderful than her last. This is Rosie in full flow at one of her spine chilling performances and not for the faint hearted! As one of her reviews tells us "...Rosie Lugosi is a cross between Shirley Bassey and Motorhead". The poems match the reviews. Here's her welcome to us at the start of her show –

I'm Rosie Lugosi the Vampire Queen
Late at night my victims scream
For more of my spine-tingling wit
I'm the girl with more front than Ingrid Pitt
And so it goes on.

As you flick through the pages you'll get your fangs into gems like "I was a vampire bus conductor", and the wonderful "Mum, I've something to tell you...", a poem never forgotten after seeing Rosie perform it. There are poems that make you squirm with delight as you realise your pc pretension is being twisted, like "Product recall – feminism" and the almost Joyce Grenfell-like "A talk by the family planning clinic sex educator". But most relevant to the poet in us all is "Advice to budding poets"...

Let's start with the basics.
One. Appearance.
Real poetry is written by people with beards
And clothing of indeterminate shape and
colour.
You're a woman? Ah.
Then cultivate some facial hair. It's a start.
And so on in that vein...

My advice to you is buy this book, see Rosie perform and make sure you've still got eight pints of blood when you leave the venue.

Tim Diggles

(The vampire arts administrator of Tunstall)

R E V I E W S

Brighton Beach to Bengal Bay On the Writing Trail

Brighton Beach to Bengal Bay
Leonard Goldman
ISBN 09530593 1 6 £4:00
Self Published
Available from 26 Westfield Crescent, Brighton,
East Sussex, BN1 8JB

What is it about Brighton that generates so much excellent oral history and reminiscence writing? This is the second volume of Len Goldman's self-published autobiography and like the first "Oh what a Lovely Shore" it is an absorbing read.

Len's story takes us from 1920's Brighton through London of the 1930's where he joined the Communist Party, to wartime India and finally back to Brighton. Detailed recounting of events give this book a very real sense of the period it covers.

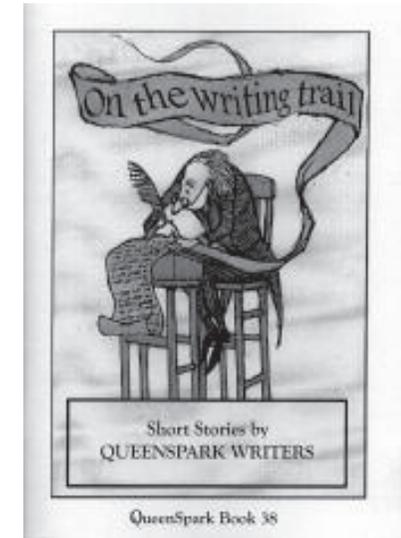
For me some of the most interesting sections of the book deal with the author's cultural pursuits. A wide definition of culture includes classical music, dancing, literature, cinema and going to watch football at the Arsenal. What is striking is how political these activities were in the highly charged prewar period. Len Goldman writes eloquently about the Unity Theatre a committed company of left wing anti-fascist writers and performers.

This interest in culture and politics is continued and when in India with the British army Len makes contact with the Bengal writers and Artists Anti-Fascist Committee at an arts festival and forms ongoing friendships there.

I would warmly recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the political and cultural history of the last century. I eagerly await Len's third volume of autobiography, which will bring the story up to date.

Richard McKeever

On the Writing Trail, short stories by
QueenSpark Writers
QueenSpark Books 38
Available from QueenSpark Books, 1st Floor, 49
Grand Parade, Brighton BN2 2QA



Some of these short stories are very short, no more than snippets of work in progress – but that lends this collection an immediacy and vibrancy that is quite infectious.

Nineteen writers from four groups (Hove Writing Group, Morning Women Writers, Club 94 and Brighton Nightwriters) are represented here, and the range of subject matter is impressively diverse. A few of the stories rely a bit too heavily on rather contrived supernatural twists for me, but generally this is a lovely book to dip into. I guarantee you'll find something to make you smile.

My own favourite was Arthur Thickett's ...*That's Helen*, an unsentimental piece about finding evidence of warmth and love where you least expect it.

Christine Bridgwood



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If you would like your group or organisation to join this ever growing list, there are four types of Membership.

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ASSOCIATE MEMBERS - who are groups unable to attend the AGM and other events, such as those abroad.

RECIPROCAL MEMBERS - who are organisations with similar interests to the FWWCP, but may not work in writing and publishing. For individuals there is the **FRIENDS OF THE FED**, which offers all the benefits of Membership.

For 2000-01 Affiliation costs £44 for funded organisations, £22 for unfunded.

As a Member you can take an active role in the decision making of the Fed; Members are eligible to have free training and consultancy through the Hand in Hand scheme; receive magazines and Broadsheets for your members; take part in training and publishing projects; be a part of an international movement who believe that skills should be shared.

For full details and forms contact the FWWCP on **01782 822327** or e-mail **fwwcp@cwcom.net**, membership application forms can also be printed from our Website: **www.fwwcp.mcmail.com**, where you can also find lots of information about the Fed and back copies of this magazine.

The next issue will feature the FedFest 2000 in Leicester, and the next deadline for submission of articles or reviews for consideration for this magazine is **26 May 2000**. Send copy to the address below, preferably on disk by e-mail. Send books for review asap.

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E-mail: **fedmag@cwcom.net**

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