

VERACITY

Edition 2

Verulam Writers' Circle Newsletter

September 2009

News in brief...

- VWC member uses Red Ink to sign with agent
- Present President interviews past President (try saying that after a session down the Six Bells!)
- Website facelift generates smiles all round

Competition Title Winner

Welcome to the second edition of our bi-monthly newsletter! Feedback on the first issue was hugely positive. Thank you so much for that.

There may have been a break in the St Michael meetings over the summer, as we all 'enjoyed' the patchwork British weather, but that hasn't stopped the news. We are delighted to include a report on VWC member, Julie Mayhew, who has secured an agent – well done Julie. We also focus on the recent overhaul of the VWC website, shine our spotlight on guest writers' circle the Watford Writers, and have interviews galore. A packed edition as they say.

In July, we set a competition for people to submit ideas for, and vote on, a title for our newsletter. We had many suggestions – even some sensible ones! – but the winner, as you can see from the header was Jenny Barden's suggestion, *Veracity* – meaning 'accuracy and truth'. Thank you to Jenny and everyone else for their suggestions. And without further ado...

Steve Barley (Editor)



Julie's Agent Success

Julie Mayhew, 'journalist-turned-actress-turned-model-turned-writer', says she writes 'to make sense of stuff and to make connections with other human beings'. She has co-written and performed in two plays, *Recruitment Stars* and *If No-One Loves You, Change* and has had a number of articles published in newspapers and magazines.

Bringing up two young children meant Julie's approach to writing changed because as she says 'If you know you only have the length of the lunchtime nap to write, you don't procrastinate.' The end results of those precious writing moments were some fabulous short stories and the beginnings of her first novel.

Red Ink, a coming-of-age novel about family myth, the weight of history and what it means to love your mother, attracted the attention of Curtis Brown agent Sheila Crowley. Julie met Sheila at an event organised by the Society Of Authors and, on the strength of three chapters, the agent asked to see the whole manuscript and a contract followed.

Julie has big plans for the future. She is working on a radio drama for the BBC, a collection of short stories, and a second novel provisionally called *Sisterhood*. 'Most women have a story to tell about the complexities of their relationships with other women,' she says and hopes the book will 'resonate with women and provide an insight for male readers'. All this whilst bringing up two children under the age of four! Find Julie at www.juliemayhew.co.uk

Mark Clementson



Events Calendar



Here are a few of VWC's forthcoming events and competitions. The full programme of events can be found on the VWC website www.vwc.org.uk

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|---------------------------|--|
| 23/09/09 8pm, St Michaels | – Speaker: Our own Jenny Barden: 'Crying over it' - Conveying emotion in writing. |
| 07/10/09 8pm, St Michaels | – MSS Surgery |
| 21/10/09 8pm, St Michaels | – Adjudication of the David Gibson competition/setting of the Lisbeth Phillips competition by Simon Bowden |
| 07/10/09 8pm, St Michaels | – MSS Surgery |

Additionally, informal MSS sessions are held in the Six Bells every alternate Wednesday from 8pm

JOYCE RIDDELL (1924 – 2009)

VWC members may remember Joyce Riddell, my mother, who joined VWC in 2000-2001 and was a member for around 5 years.

Joyce loved coming to the Circle and made many friends – socialising during the teabreak was her speciality! She liked entering the competitions and was particularly good at ghost stories in which the reader was unsure who was alive and who was the ghost. In one story, *The Meeting Place*, a man seems to be having dinner with his long dead wife. He glances out of the window and sees his car crushed under the wheels of a lorry. Looks like my car, he muses unaware he too is dead. Jes (Jeremy Guy) judged the competition and commented: “A neat, compact mystery with tender emotional

scenes. Drama and suspense held to the end, which was goosepimplly shocking.”

Joyce wrote volumes of thoughts on family, love, life, death and religion. She was a great admirer of beauty whether art, music, nature or people and loved writing poems, many with great humour - especially the one she sent to the tax man, for which she received a poem in reply. A teacher with the *Society of the Inner Light*, a Server in the local church and involved in numerous prayer groups, she wrote many beautiful meditations and hymns.

Joyce was all light and laughter; fun yet gentle and kind. I consider myself so lucky to have had such a mum and I’m sure her friends at VWC will remember her with great affection.

Wendy Turner.



VWC Member Goes Round In Circles



Janet Baldey, a part-time secretary by day, loves writers’ circles! Not only is she a member of the VWC, she co-founded Watford Writers and is a member of Tring Writers as well.

Despite being known at school as the ‘budding authoress’, Janet only started writing again when she joined her daughter to do an ‘A’ level in English Literature and then a creative writing evening class. In the 8 years she’s been writing, Janet has had several stories published and won a number of competitions, both external ones and within her different writing circles. She has also had her work performed on stage at *The New End Theatre* in Hampstead last December.

Janet prefers to write short stories with a strong emotional content. As in life, she likes to try different things and her stories encompass a range of genres. She has just finished a children’s story and is currently toying with the idea of a novel. Janet has a great love for the natural world, and would like to undertake more travel to exotic places (one memorable holiday was 3 weeks in Kazakhstan!).

Cheryl Alleyne

Word Of The Month

CACOGRAPHY (pronounced ka-kog-rafi)

Noun – bad handwriting or incorrect spelling.

Origin – late 16th century from Greek kakos (bad), itself a derivation from Indo/European *kaka* (to defecate), and *-graphy* (writing).

Meena Wells



Writer's Notebook



For a spotlight on writing groups, events or information from outside the circle:

Watford Writers

What do you do on a Monday evening? Watch Eastenders, work late or meet up with friends? According to one article I read, friends are allocated nights of the week according to how much they mean to you - Saturday night being for your truly best friends - so you can guess the type of friends Mondays are for. Well I've discovered that's not the case, and you can too if you come along to the Watford Writers at the Cha Cha Cha café.

We meet every Monday at 7.30pm, in all weathers, and in all seasons. Every other week is Manuscript night, where members bring

along their short stories, extracts from their novels, poems, or factual pieces and we read them aloud - not as scary as it sounds - then offer suggestions, encouragement and support for each others' work. Remaining weeks are usually themed or include guest speakers.

During the course of the year we also host writing competitions. The last was titled 'Hatch It' where everyone came up with one aspect of a character, which then had to be combined into a story. It made for some interesting and imaginative reading.

If you're beginning to think your Monday nights could do with a bit more excitement, then why not log on to www.watfordwriters.co.uk and find out more?

Helen Nicell (Watford Writers)

You Never Told Me You Were A Writer!

As part of my search for a career, I applied and was accepted for work experience at a publishing house. Although primarily there to work, I took away a few pointers that are good to know as a writer:

1. If you want to publish a book of any kind it is advisable to have follow up pieces in the making or, ideally, drafted. Publishers want to trust their authors, and the best way of doing that is to show you aren't a one trick pony, but a writer committed to making a name for yourself.

2. It was patently clear that a good agent really is a must.

3. Publishing is a small business in terms of staff numbers, which means they don't want to spend time and money on a writer's work unless they really believe it will be commercially viable.

4. When I happened to mention to an employee that I was part of a writing group a look of horror came over her face and she blurted: 'You never told me you were a writer! We don't accept unsolicited manuscripts!' The tales she told me about writers harassing her at social events were

quite distasteful, so I think that the common suggestion to 'use any contact opportunity' often overlooks the fact that an element of subtlety is prudent.

5. Finally – publishers still need new writers – a thought to remember at the next rejection letter!

(Full article available on 'If Shakespeare' at blog.verulamwriterscircle.org.uk)

Sam Ellis

Website Focus

The VWC website has undergone a major facelift. It's all cool blues and pale yellows with a brand new logo and a more modern layout and fonts.

They say 'a change is as good as a rest.' Well I've never been arrested, but the changes made to VWC's website are more than good if members' comments are anything to go by. It's been labelled, 'succinct, easy to read, and displaying a level of professionalism that does our circle and our writing credit.'

With a simplified Home page, full programme listings, a Member Showcase packed with short stories, links to useful writing websites and lots more, it has everything a successful writers' circle needs online. You can even see editions of this newsletter, so it must be good!

Why not pop along and have a look for yourself? If you like what you see, then let us know by posting a comment on our blog, *If Shakespeare*. And don't forget our Members' Area where, if you are a full member, you can chat to a friendly bunch of writers and have your work critiqued in a secure environment. Go on, give it a try!



When Presidents Meet

Ex VWC President and freelance journalist Gillian Thornton does not need to support her writing habit. It supports her, and has done so over her working lifetime. No other VWC member, past or present, can make this claim.

So what's her secret?

"Get out into the marketplace and network, network, network. Sell your ideas and your words."

Nor does it stop there.

"You must also sell yourself. You must be the answer to an editor's prayer: never failing to meet remit and deadline with accurate and sparkling prose."



It works for Gillian. She has written about everything from raising buildings to raising children, and has interviewed the famous and infamous - from Barbara Cartland to Jeffrey Archer. Constantly reinventing herself to survive in a highly competitive market, Gillian now specialises in travel writing and is Secretary of the British Guild of Travel Writers. And yet, although her words continue to sell in vast numbers, there is nothing precious about her attitude to writing.

"I love my job but earning money from it is an important part of that equation."

Shakespeare and Johnson would have nodded.

Nick Cook (President, VWC)

A Little Humour

Sidney Morgenbesser, the acclaimed American philosopher, was sitting at the back of an English class while a visiting Oxford linguistics professor lectured. "In English," said the Professor, "a double negative forms a positive. In languages like Russian, a double negative remains a negative. However, there is no language wherein a double positive can form a negative."

At which point, Sidney piped up, "Yeah, right!"

True Story

If you wish to join our newsletter mailing list, contribute an item, or learn more about our website, or VWC's events then email the Editor at:

writer@stevenbarley.com

'Get Writing' Saturday 20th February 2010 *Put the date in your diaries!*

Plans are proceeding apace for the VWC's next all-day writing conference with a new, purpose designed, web-based booking system ready for when we open for bookings – and that could be as early as next month, so watch the VWC website and your inboxes!

Recent developments are that Kathy Gale, a 'top-drawer' editorial adviser, ex Pan, Macmillan, Hodder and Stoughton and Simon & Schuster, has agreed to give a talk on 'Preparing for Submission'. In addition Anna Power of Johnson & Alcock will be joining our team of first class literary agents, and 'crime writer of the year' Mark

Billingham has said he would love to participate too.

Our list of workshop options is firming up nicely with choices ranging from 'Crackling Characterization': how to 'become' your character, through 'The Short Road to Success': writing a prize-winning short story, to 'Spinning the Web': exploiting new internet opportunities for promotion and publication.

There are so many stars now lined up to participate that the difficulty will be fitting everyone in! Speakers will include leading publishers, agents and advisers as well as acclaimed and bestselling authors – so book early, and don't miss out!

Jenny Barden