

Learning to Sift Diamonds



Winner, Anne Ellis (centre), with judges Nick Cook and Sandra Norval

Anne Ellis recently won VWC's President's Competition with her short story, *Ice Maiden*.

Snow was the theme of this year's competition. Snow, to me, is magical and all the submissions managed to capture that magic.

Entries included an epic picture book tale about the seasonal battle between the Ice Lord and the Sun Queen; an exceptionally well-plotted action story featuring climate change; an imaginative tale of an escape from a Russian Gulag; and an account of an Alaskan sleigh race for madmen (and madwomen!). Interestingly, in several stories, snow helped to redefine, reinforce or create relationships. In one poignant story it was witness to unrequited love.

Adjudication can be fascinating but is also subjective which is why, this year, I was fortunate enough to recruit Sandra Norval to help with the judging.

We independently reviewed all the stories and met to discuss our findings; at which point we found we had a clear winner.

Ice Maiden by Anne Ellis told the story of a village girl, persecuted for lacking warmth particularly towards men. In prose perfectly matching the mythic theme, Anne described the maiden's flight from taunting villagers to find a special freedom in the winter forest with the Snow Goddess.

Second place went to *A Christmas Fairy Tale* by Barbara Cooper. This gave a haunting glimpse of rural Iceland through a child's eyes. Eyes that peopled the landscape with the trolls and witches from its Nordic past.

Third place went to a highly marketable story titled *The Best of Both Worlds* by Janet Baldey. An English grandmother, helping to care for her widowed son-in-law's children in a hot and dusty Australia, finally learns to say goodbye to her beloved English winters. The triumph of this story was to make nice

characters believable and interesting.

The winners are invited to help adjudicate next year's competition but there is no compulsion. But whoever does help will need one important skill...

...like me they will need to learn how to sift diamonds.

Nick Cook

News in brief...

- Hero blatantly rescues cat
- Scriptwriter creates scene
- *Ice Maiden* proves hot favourite
- Bailey's advice – a cocktail for success



Writer's Notebook:

GAMLINGAY WRITERS

Gamlingay Writers is a friendly, informal group whose aim is to improve our writing through encouraging each other, and by regularly entering competitions.

We meet on the first Tuesday of each month, never far from the Gamlingay area, at various members' homes. This has the advantage of being friendlier and cheaper than hiring a hall, and means our membership is totally free – a bargain! Meetings are usually based around a writing theme and we encourage members to circulate their work by email beforehand, so everyone can read it and provide detailed, yet friendly and constructive critique in the sessions.

We welcome people of all ages and abilities, from complete beginners to published novelists, and don't worry if you would rather not submit your work for your first few meetings. You are more than welcome to come along and listen. Even if you are currently working on a project which doesn't fit in with the set theme, you will be assured of a positive reception.

To find out more about us visit our website www.gamlingaywriters.org.uk, or email us for details of our next meeting at info@gamlingaywriters.org.uk.

Tracey Goodwin

Avant-Gardner!

Jean Gardner is a familiar presence at Circle meetings. This should not come as a surprise; she has been a faithful member for 28 years, also acting as secretary and treasurer.

What might come as a surprise is the volume of published work she has amassed. Pressed for an exact figure, she hesitates. 'Hundreds', she says at last.

Jean has an inquiring mind; everything interests her from aviation and stained glass windows to art deco and Hertfordshire puddingstone. Her articles have appeared in magazines as diverse as *Aviation News*, *My Weekly*, *The Lady* and *Hertfordshire Countryside*. Currently, she is awaiting publication of *Kiddiewalks*, commissioned by Countryside Books, featuring circular



walks for children. No danger of writer's block, one idea leads to another and she keeps a book by her bedside for when inspiration strikes. Now retired, Jean relishes the research involved but not for her the sterile computer, she prefers old-fashioned leg work.

Jean also gives lectures, and many organisations such as the W.I. and local history groups have benefited from her talks. She is also a keen member of the Hertfordshire Geological Society and regularly travels abroad on field trips to discover more about the natural world. Her favourite fiction author is Jane Austen.

Truly, it is a fact, universally acknowledged, if anything intrigues Jean, she will write about it.

Janet Baldey

A Little Humour

If you're worried about typos in your writing, then this example will help put things in context. Possibly the most expensive typo in the world happened several years back when one of Japan's biggest brokerage firms lost 27 billion yen (that's roughly £185 million in real money) on a stock trade after a deal was entered with the comma in the wrong place!

Teachers Aren't Always Right

London born VWC member Yvonne Moxley is not one to ignore a challenge.

A schoolteacher once told her she'd never make a reporter because she was 'not hard enough'. That was all the career advice Yvonne needed. She followed her love of writing.

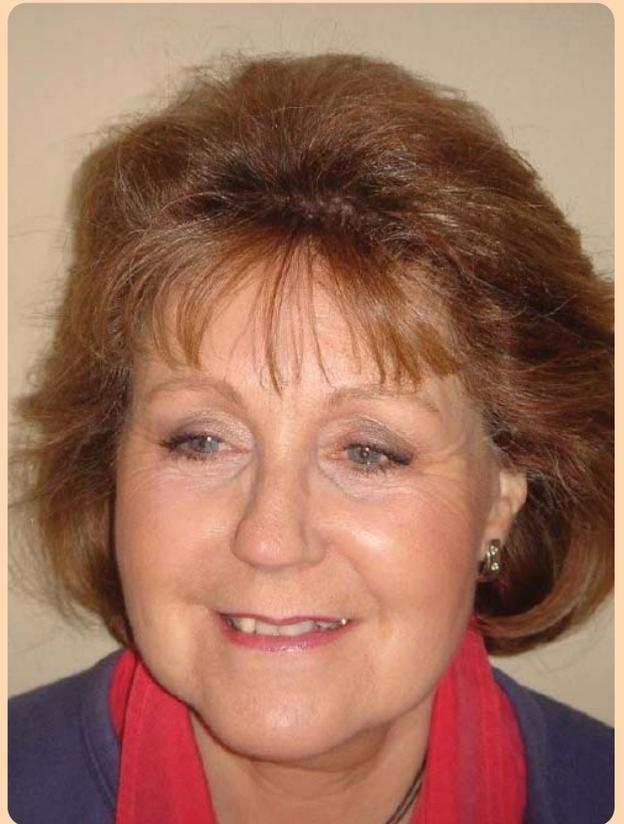
Although Yvonne's varied career has included managing a Citizens' Advice Bureau, covering an area for Avon Cosmetics and running her own floristry business, she has never strayed far from writing. Once a secretary at *History Today* (then an FT subsidiary), Yvonne has also been a junior reporter for *The Christian Newspaper*, a scriptwriter for two children's comics – *Pippin* and *Playland* – and a freelance copywriter for Thompson Holidays.

Yvonne's proudest moment was the performance, by Bill Wallis and Nerys Hughes, of her half-hour story *Flaws* on Radio 4. There is apparently a recording available. Can anyone help Yvonne to locate a copy, please?

Having completed her novel, *The First Celebrity* about a Victorian penny-liner who finds his 'big story' when Grace Darling helps to rescue survivors from a shipwreck, Yvonne intends to work on several half-finished projects, including three picture story books, a novel for young children, several articles, and another historical novel.

Oh, teacher, how wrong can you be?

Oscar Windsor-Smith



Writing Rules

There are so many 'writing rules' bandied about that it can be hard to know which are best to follow. So here, to help any writer in a quandary, are Elizabeth Bailey's light-hearted top ten tips for writing success:

1. Ignore any writing advice whatsoever and just get the damn story written.
2. If you happen to be feeling masochistic, read everybody's advice then ignore it and trust your own judgement.
3. If you feel like writing ten writing rules instead of getting on with the novel, go ahead - it's your life.
4. If you absolutely must have yet another cup of tea before starting, do that too. Sooner or later your characters will yell at you and you'll get going again.
5. Scream for help when you need it, otherwise it's strictly DIY. You are your own boss.
6. Accept the fact that pretty much every agent or publisher on the planet isn't going to buy the thing and relax. You only need one, or one of each.
7. Accept that half the world will hate it. It's the other half who are going to buy it.
8. Respect yourself. You know you can do it or you wouldn't be doing it.
9. Accept that life is going to interfere and stop you. That doesn't mean you have to stop.
10. Know it ain't easy because it ain't. But go on believing it should be and it might just be.

Elizabeth Bailey is an historical romance novelist now moving toward the historical crime genre. For three years, up until recently, she was Press Officer of the Romantic Novelists' Association. Her website can be found at www.elizabethbaileybooks.com

Jenny Barden

With the increasing interest in scriptwriting for screen and radio within the VWC, we decided it would be remiss of Veracity not to feature this important creative outlet. With that in mind, we hope that this next trio of articles will inspire you to become a budding scriptwriter! (Ed)

Special
Scriptwriting
Edition

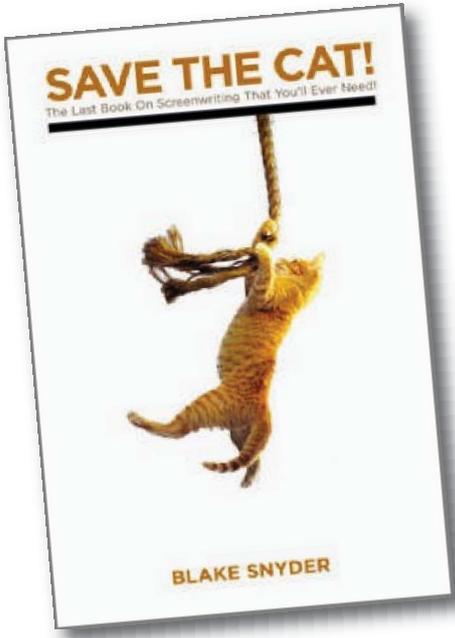
Save The Cat!

Having a lead character save the cat is one way to make them appealing. But is screenwriting that simple?

There is no getting away from it, writing for the big screen can be very different to writing prose. With prose you can write any length of book you wish, on any subject and in any style. A successful screenplay is infinitely more prescriptive.

Blake Snyder, author of *Save the Cat*, agrees. An experienced Hollywood screenwriter, Blake writes 'on spec' – confident he can sell his scripts later because he writes to a formula. In this book, he lays out his 'unique system' for novice screenwriters to follow.

Snyder's book treats screenwriting as a logical - almost mathematical - progression through the various stages. He begins with the need for a 'killer title' and 'ironic logline' to summarise (and sell) a story to studio executives. He then breaks the classic three act story structure into a 'fifteen step beat sheet' or scene breakdown and ends with a selection of tips drawn from experience. Although I found his incessant jokes more toe-curling than entertaining, many of his insights were excellent, and highlighted the technical demands of film writing.



If you want to be the next Richard Curtis, *Save the Cat* may be a good starting point. But don't be fooled. However good you are at following a formula, an innate ability to write creatively is still an essential function of any screenwriting equation.

Paul Casselle (Guest Reporter)

Let Software Do Your Script Righting

If you want to format your writing for radio, stage, TV or film, you'll need guidance. If it isn't presented properly, it won't be considered.

There are some clever little programmes out there that take away the stress and give you a fighting chance at success. Two of these programmes are free and worth a try.

Celtx is clever, swift and easy to use, great for covering the whole creative writing process from beginning to end incorporating character development, storyboards synopses and even production schedules. The downside is it takes a while to learn how to use it, and for a writer not experienced in production there's a great deal of cleverness you simply don't need.

An alternative to *Celtx* is *ScriptSmart* - recommended but not endorsed by the BBC. It's an add-on to word which means that once you've written your work of genius, anyone you send it to can open it as a normal MSWord document. *ScriptSmart* takes seconds to learn and is a script-writing tool not a production aid.

If you have money to burn, then there's a huge amount of script-formatting software out there for you to choose from. Some even offer trial versions to try before you buy.



Final Draft, Movie Magic Screenwriter, Movie Outline, FiveSprockets, and Page 2 Stage are all worth a look. The key benefit of all the packages mentioned is that they worry about the formatting of your script so you don't have to.

Mark Clementson

Say What You See

Do you hear voices? Do you tune into other people's conversations on the train? Do you, sometimes, (whisper it) write them down? Do you study these scribbled transcripts to understand the way people speak? Then why not write a radio play?

I love dialogue. When I was writing my novel, I relished opportunities to let my characters talk. With a few lines of conversation you break open a relationship, you see it first-hand.

No surprise then that my 'rebound' project after finishing my novel was an attempt at a radio play. I wanted to indulge in this chatter. Taking a nearly-forgotten stage play I'd written out of



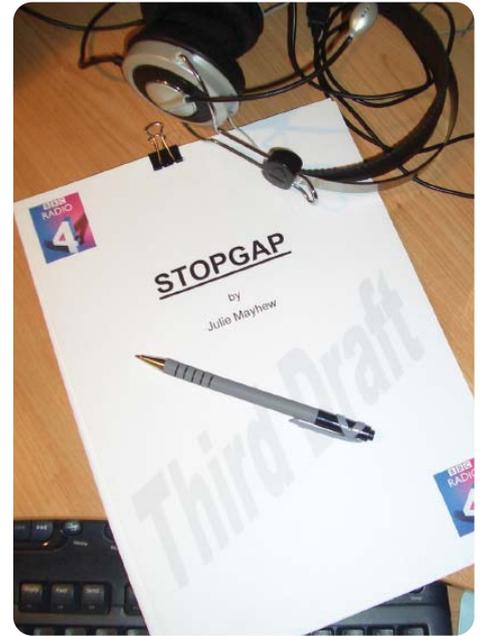
my bottom drawer, I started adapting it for the ear.

Compared to stage and screen, radio affords incredible freedoms. With no travel costs or expensive sets to consider you can go wherever you like - Outer Mongolia, 20,000 leagues under the sea, or even to the moon. And without the restrictions of costume and make-up, actors can be whoever the range of their voice allows.

That said, radio also presents writers with a challenge. It is not a contradiction to describe it as a visual medium. Your audience must *see* the action, yet you have just sound and silence in your toolbox. But, like a whiff of suncream evokes the memory of a holiday, you soon become attuned to sounds that have the power to transport.

Having had a play commissioned by the BBC and slogged through four months of rewrites, I understand more about what radio requires of a writer. There is no space on the page for idle chitchat - every word must count towards character, plot, theme, or mood. And after being buried in the internal world of the novel, it felt odd to work with so much live action and give little room to introspection.

The main thing I have learnt? If it happens in the story, it has to happen out loud.



Julie Mayhew's Afternoon Play 'Stopgap' will be broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on September 8th 2010 at 2.15pm. The producer is Jeremy Mortimer. More information at www.juliemayhew.co.uk.

Julie Mayhew (Guest Reporter)

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

EVENTS CALENDAR

A full programme of events can be found on the VWC website www.vwc.org.uk. Venue - St Michael's Church Hall. Time - 8 pm.

19/05/10 – MSS Surgery

02/06/10 – MSS Surgery

16/06/10 – Adjudication of the Crystal Decanter competition

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