

### In this issue

<i>It's a Write Out!</i>	2
<i>Breaking Writer's Block</i>	2
<i>A Fact-finding Mission</i>	3
<i>Why Join a Writers Group?</i>	4

Top right: Red Rocks Amphitheatre, Colorado

Below: Sherryl the Glamourous wears fine hoop earrings while sealing the walls.

Below that: And seeing we're doing unflattering pics, Susanna models the latest in balaclava-wear on a recent family trip. Told you it was cold.



## Rockin' on, Sherryl ...

Sherryl's red handbag in the photo above honours the Red Rocks Park, in the Rocky Mountains outside Denver, Colorado. We didn't produce a March newsletter for you—sorry—because we went to the USA instead (more on page 3). We met people who are involved in all kinds of teaching and community writing. *Such fun, so inspiring.* A hearty hello to our new US readers.

We hope all textConnection readers have warmth in their hearts and writing fingers. Melbourne is serving us the coldest winter

stretch since last century ... we won't complain about the daytime temperatures, as we now have some readers in the US where it gets seriously cool.

We're starting to think about our next Hong Kong trip, 14-28 November. We'll have firm session details in our October newsletter. Meanwhile, there's lots of writing, editing, publishing, event organising and general living to be done. Hope you are thriving in your worlds,

Susanna Bryceson & Sherryl Clark

## What are we up to now?

**Sherryl:** In January, while I wasn't teaching, I set myself a goal of 5000 words a week. It was a challenge, but an achievable one. (Beware of setting goals that are too high or too low.) In the end, because I was working on three different projects, I wrote around 34,000 words! Of course, I haven't got anywhere near that since.

Instead, I've been preparing for classes and toiling over my house. I became an owner-builder three years ago and am

often painting or filling holes with various compounds—our local hardware is almost my second home. But come the day when I move my computer and desk into the small room I've dubbed 'The Writing Room', the sleepless nights and clothes spattered with strange compounds will be worth it.

*Sherryl has also just launched 2 new books: Now I Am Bigger (Working Title Press) and The Perfect Pirouette (Uni Queensland Press).*

**Susanna:** First, a confession: this late newsletter is all my fault. Sherryl wrote her bits in April before we went to the USA and—a thousand apologies—I've done mine just now.

I've continued my studies this year, taking on Zoology—which I've dreamed of since I was a teen—and Chemistry, which is compulsory: drat. Coming up: Genetics and Statistics. My elementary maths will be seriously challenged.

On the writing/editing front, I'm becoming consumed by our growing program at

Victoria University. Our course has grown by 50% in 18 months and we're expanding the ways people can get involved in writing and editing. I'm working with a lively bunch of teachers, inventing events and courses, and now planning a TV show about writing for a community television station.

Who knows, one day *textConnection* readers might fancy a trip to Melbourne to take one of our short courses—Novel in a Month, anyone?

*See page 2 for a report on our recent event, Write Out!*



Above: Sherryl, far right corner of the table, and the Pirate Corner writers: absorbed in their separate worlds.

Below: Susanna ponders the next part of her Tour de France writing sprint.

Below right: Write Out! in full swing.



## IT'S A WRITE OUT!

How many writers can fit into a university cafeteria and how many words can they generate in two hours?

As part of our community writing efforts at Victoria University, the Professional Writing & Editing course set up Write Out!, an afternoon of intense writing games and exercises designed to break through writers' blocks and maximise word counts.

We attracted a full house of seventy-five writers on 17 July. We don't have a final tally of words but one estimate puts it over 20,000!

Our teachers ran 15-minute writing activities, with no time for revising,

deleting, or careful crafting. Sherryl set up the 'Pirate Corner' for those who just wanted to write and not engage in the activities.

Participants ranged from published wordsmiths to beginners. They tapped on laptops or scrawled on notepads.

We're both still buzzing with the success of this event. One participant said, "the event got me writing—really moving—more than I have in years".

We're planning another Write Out! for later this year, and are thinking of hosting one in Hong Kong as part of our November trip. ∞

## BREAKING WRITER'S BLOCK

Often writer's block is caused by thinking everything you write has to be perfect or publishable. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Most working writers know that the first draft is just the beginning—the raw material—of getting your ideas down on the page, ready to be reshaped. Regular free writing can break you out of the perfectionist habit. In *Wild Mind*, Natalie Goldberg lists the rules for 'free writing':

1. Keep your hand moving.
2. Lose control.
3. Be specific.
4. Don't think.
5. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation and grammar.
6. Feel free to write the worst junk in the world.
7. Go for the jugular.

Here are some other ideas that might help you get going.

- ∞ Get involved in National Novel Writing Month ([www.nanowrimo.org](http://www.nanowrimo.org)) and write 50,000 words in November. It's all about quantity rather than getting hung up on revision and perfectionism!
- ∞ Start a writing group just for writing together. Meet in a café or somewhere inspiring and agree to write for a set time without stopping.
- ∞ Set yourself a goal of writing every day for a month—one page or one poem. Buy a special notebook for it.
- ∞ Write something you've never tried, and give yourself permission to fail.
- ∞ Join a class or an online writing group.
- ∞ Don't set unrealistic goals and don't go to bookshops to be inspired!

### Recommended books to get you started

- ∞ *Wild Mind; Writing Down the Bones; and Old Friend from Far Away*, by Natalie Goldberg
- ∞ *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott
- ∞ *The 3am Epiphany* by Brian Kitley
- ∞ *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron
- ∞ *Now Write!* ed Sherry Ellis
- ∞ *Living by Fiction and The Writer's Life* by Annie Dillard



# A FACT-FINDING MISSION

We hitched up our wagon and travelled to the New World seeking information, inspiration and connection.

What we found in the USA will fuel us for quite some time.

**Sherryl:** I had two reasons for going to the USA this time: the Association of Writing Programs conference, and more on-the-spot research for my historical pirate novel.

The conference was great, and I learned a lot about grading (which was actually fascinating) and also about how many people want to spend many thousands of dollars to do a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in writing fiction, non-fiction or poetry. Only five colleges in the USA offer MFAs in writing for children and young adults, and I'm hoping to study with one of them next year.

My research trip began at Charleston, where I spent a whole day walking from museum to historic house to historic landmark to cafe before starting again. I took two walking tours: one was a pirate tour with a helpful guide; the other was a night ghost tour which was awful because the tour guide hammed it up unnecessarily!

My writer friend Kristi Holl joined me and we visited Boone Plantation (she is writing a civil war novel) before heading up the South Carolina coast to Beaufort. The top photo is of me in Beaufort, where the Maritime Museum houses relics from Blackbeard's ship. (My novel features Blackbeard, among other characters of the time.)

In just a few days, we took in historic houses, museums, and shops selling local histories and specialised booklets. We even visited a civil war battlefield and field hospital. I admit it—I love research, and love imagining my characters in these places, seeing what they must have seen and imagining their experiences. ∞

**Susanna:** My reasons were a little different. As well as attending the AWP conference, I wanted to explore community writing ventures (see page 1).

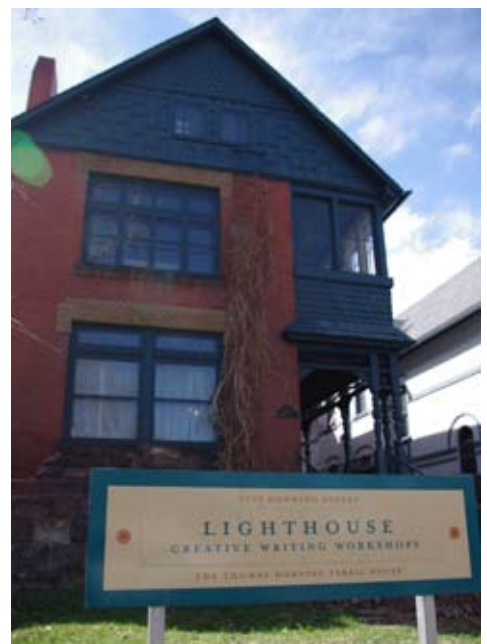
My US experience began with a bang—straight from Portland Airport to meet Dave Stout of Portland Community College (fantastic 'reading relay' event), then Brian Doyle from Portland Catholic College (writing guest at our events).

Next stop, San Francisco for coffee with Chris Baty, founder of National Novel Writing Month ([www.nanowrimo.org](http://www.nanowrimo.org)). This conversation spurred us to run our recent Write Out! event.

I dropped by the reknowned 826 Valencia and was awed by their writing programs for children and young adults. The whole operation runs with a community of local writers and editors who donate time ([www.826valencia.org](http://www.826valencia.org)).

Thence to Denver, Colorado, to meet Andrea and Mike, founder/managers of the fabulous Lighthouse Writing Centre (right), which has more than 200 students enrolled in writing workshops each term.

Sherryl and I mapped out which parts of the conference we'd cover—I attended some terrific community writing and publishing sessions—then downloaded at each other over dinner. We couldn't have been more immersed (except when we went to the ice hockey!) Then I flew home—exhausted—while she swanned off to play with the pirates. ∞



## In your dreams

*In lil ol' Denver, Colorado, is what must be one of the world's most beautiful bookshops: Tattered Cover ([www.tatteredcover.com](http://www.tatteredcover.com))*

*We visited the shop on our last night in Denver—regretfully just an hour before closing. I still yearn for hours not spent on the couch in this photo.*

*Melbourne's inner city is blessed with independent bookshops that exude character and textual riches but we have nothing on this scale, nor do I suspect there's anything like it in South-east Asia. Am I wrong?*

*We'd love to hear about your favourite bookshops.* ∞

# WHY JOIN A WRITING GROUP?

*Who else understands what it's like to be a writer?*

*Who else can offer encouragement, support, critiques, ideas, and a shoulder to cry on?*

If you have a family or spouse who asks you when you're going to get a real job, or who responds to your writing with comments such as "Hmm, interesting" or "That's nice dear", then maybe you need to join a writing group.

## What to look for in a group

Ask yourself—what do I really want or need from a group? Then see if you can find one where the writers are on your wavelength. They might be writing similar things to you, for example some groups only workshop poetry or crime fiction or children's fiction. Or you might want to be involved in a single gender group. You might want a group that offers good critiquing or workshopping, or one that's more social and simply enjoys sharing their work.

And don't be afraid to politely leave a group if it's not what you're looking for.

## What if you can't find the right group?

How about forming one of your own? You'd be amazed how many people are looking for a group to join but can't find one in their area, or one that offers what they need.

Put up a notice at a local library or bookshop, or in your local newspaper if it has a free community section.

Think about where you could meet. Do you want people coming to your home? There may be a local neighbourhood centre or your library may have meeting rooms.

You could start by organising a first meeting of interested writers. When they come along, ask them to say what they are

looking for. If everyone is honest, you will probably end up with a group that wants to workshop each other's writing.

Be aware that members will need to build trust, so that you can all comment honestly. Part of that trust is that comments are constructive, not destructive. Discuss this openly so everyone knows the expectations.

## There's always one

It's true. In virtually every class, seminar, writing group or committee, there's always one difficult person. The degree of difficulty can range from rude comments or taking offence at critiquing suggestions through to downright destructiveness. Sometimes the group can gently help the person to realise that their behaviour is disruptive and they'll either leave or change their ways. But sometimes it might come down to asking the person to leave—it's awful to experience but the alternative is that other members gradually find excuses to leave and the group dwindles to nothing.

## My writing group has been going for over 20 years. What's our secret?

We are all serious about getting published. We're also serious about supporting each other as much as possible, through constructive workshopping, sharing information and celebrating successes. Anyone we know who has been involved in a great writing group will agree—they keep you going when you most need support and inspiration, and provide practical editorial help to get you published. They are also the ones who truly understand rejection blues, unsympathetic family, writer's block and the need for a space of your own.

SC ∞

*If you'd like a copy of our workshopping guidelines to use with your writing group, please get in touch.*

Sherryl (back left corner) and her group, Western Women Writers.



textConnection

writing ∞ editing ∞ training

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the textConnection newsletter is produced and emailed seasonally.

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textConnection conducts training courses tailored to beginners and advanced writers, people working in publishing, education and business.

Our courses include:

- ∞ fiction writing for adults and children
- ∞ non-fiction and life writing
- ∞ corporate writing
- ∞ editing and producing publications.

We've been teaching writing and editing for more than 20 years each, and both work in the industry.

We conduct our courses in Australia and Asia.

