



Carindale Writers Group newsletter

18 August 2011

Present: Nick, Leslee-Anne, Len, Kerry, Hilary, Rolando, Wendy, Ed, Chip, Maria S., Shirley, Dawn, Hazel, Dorothy, Brian, Debby, Bev, Judy.

Featured reader.

The work of Mike McMorrow was presented today, read aloud on his behalf by Brian Rowell.

Chapter 8 of *The Sawdust Apprentice* opens in the English winter of 1918-1919. It explores the predicament of 14 year-old Jamie and his 10 year-old sister Rosie. The children had already lost their father and older brother in the Great War when their mother was taken by the Spanish flu. They are now living in abject poverty with their scheming aunt and uncle where they are subjected to much abuse.

We see the world through Jamie's eyes, the hard slog of work he has to get through each day just to survive and his overwhelming worry for his consumptive sister, the only family he has left. He feels a strong bond with Rosie but a part of him knows that her racking cough and shrinking frame can only bode ill for the future. Rosie is sent out every day pushing an old pram laden with kindling which she is expected to sell. Jamie likewise is trudging the streets with a handcart piled high with sawdust gleaned from the mills on the docks, to sell to local butchers shops and pubs. Jamie and Rosie have to hand up every penny they earn which is promptly drunk away by their out-of-work uncle. Their aunt spends the day making white puddings, the smell of which makes Jamie feel sick.

Jamie's concern for his sister and his annoyance at his unfeeling aunt's attitude towards Rosie finally cause Jamie's anger to rise and spill over. A fight ensues in the kitchen of the two-roomed flat where Jamie slaps the woman across the face and she responds by hitting him a thunderous blow with the poker. Their uncle arrives home and drunkenly joins the fray. Unbalanced, he falls and hits his head on the fender, knocking himself out. The aunt shrieks that the children have killed him. She takes another swing with the poker at Jamie. Rosie pulls the rug out from under her making her collapse in a heap on the floor.

There is nothing for it. Jamie realises he and Rosie must leave that place or their aunt and uncle will indeed kill them. She willingly follows her brother down the rickety stairs of the tenement building for the last time. Neither of the youngsters have any idea where to go but Rosie trusts in her older brother to look after them both. Fortuitously he finds the key to their granddad's allotment with its little shed. This is where they seek sanctuary from the bitterly cold winter weather. The shed has everything they could want; a stove to provide them with heat and even the makings of tea. For all that, Jamie is still overwhelmed with the worry of how to survive and the intuitive knowledge that his sister will not.

Critique.

Critiques from around the table acknowledged the depth of detail in the author's work and the abiding compassion the main character Jamie is shown to feel for his sister. The dialogue between the combatants during the kitchen fight was very realistic. Many of the Carindale Writers' Group members were so absorbed by the easy writing style of the author they felt they were right there inside the story with the two children. It was all very easy to visualize. The intense level of detail recorded had the effect of slowing down the pace. One or two members felt this caused their attention to waver but most listeners felt the pace was exactly right. It was designed to show the worry Jamie couldn't escape but at the same time the pace was felt to be in keeping with the slower era of ninety years ago.

One of our members observed that the chapter was very rounded, with good hooks at beginning and end. The chapter began with Jamie's thoughts and worries and ended on the same note, although there was quite a bit of movement in between to make the reader feel Jamie's real and practical difficulties. However, some phrases local to Jamie's location in the north of England were queried as needing elaboration for an international market of readers; the washing machine 'mangle' for instance, and what is meant by 'allotment' and 'clippie mat'. Another member suggested the possibility of a glossary of terms to be included in the book. All agreed however that such expressions lent colour to the work and grounded the novel in the era it intends to evoke.

One listener observed that the beauty of this story is in the detail. Although there were occasional weaknesses in regard to syntax the author is aware of them and working on them. Another listener commented that the author has a natural gift to write flowingly about emotions and era. This is a strong story, both moving and evocative.

Many of the listening audience enjoyed the time setting and its atmosphere. The tension displayed in the chapter engaged us all but more than that, the close attention to descriptive detail made us wonder if the author had a photographic memory for it! The use of brand names for the tea and biscuits the children found in the shed were representative of the times and carry an echo down to us today. Sitting as they were in front of a glowing fire at the chapter's end suggested some form of hope for them for the future.

Well done, Mike! We all look forward to hearing the next instalment.

Our featured writer for our **next meeting**, on **1 September** is Chip Karmatz.

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Today's exercise topic was **The Morning**.

Wendy gave us an excerpt from her previous novel describing the stormy morning after an apocalyptic nuclear explosion. She wrote chillingly of how the red soil has slipped into the sea, completely changing the shape of the coastline. The new tide line is marked by shoals of dead fish, their stench already overpowering. Great compassion was evoked in the reader for the female character who was so overcome that 'she could not allow herself to be comforted'.

Rolando then read aloud for us a somewhat philosophical piece explaining that it will be all right in the morning; it always is, no matter what accusations we might have thrown at each other the night before. The morning brings a new perspective, a new rationale. What seemed like a big problem the previous night is a smaller one the next day, and possibly even a stepping stone to something positive. We do well to remember that other people's afflictions can be greater than our own. From them we could learn calm and acceptance.

Brian presented a story called Plea of Mitigation, around a priest who attends to prisoners on Death Row. He is now accompanying a confessed murderer during the last 6 hours of the night before his execution. The murderer displays such highs and lows in his personality the priest is convinced he is bi-polar. He wakes the prison governor to arrange for a stay of execution on the grounds of diminished responsibility. The reprieve is allowed whereupon the prisoner grins at the gullible priest and smugly claims, "That worked like a charm, didn't it!"

Len cleverly distracted his audience into initially believing he was just another customer queuing up at the computer store to buy the latest-release popular game. Two thousand of them were expected to fly off the shelves by 11am that morning. Our protagonist enters the store wielding a machete. The store manager, his girlfriend, has conspired with him to raid the tills of the anticipated \$800,000 in takings. Leaving the store the thief throws some smoke bombs behind him to disguise their getaway. They live happily ever after on the banana farm purchased with the proceeds.

Hazel read a further excerpt from her memoir, about the morning her family arrived on the train into the station at Mandalay. They know there is a new life ahead but one that will bring its own share of troubles due to the war they are attempting to escape. The platform is crowded with passengers and hawkers. The family waits in suspense as their father tries to locate an uncle they hope will help them. Their mother points out places on a map that were important to her as a child growing up in Rangoon; the school she attended and the house her parents left her when they died.

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Truth Will Out is our suggested exercise for our **next meeting on 1 September 2011**.

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More writers had stories to offer us today. Their turn came up next as presenting work of a different concept to what had gone before.

Dorothy read from her memoir about her family of characters as they arrived to stay with relatives in the town of Willoughby. The children were so tired they fell asleep almost immediately despite the presence of bed bugs. Their mother is aware of how unclean their new home is. She sets out straight away with kerosene and hot water to clean it up. She loved to sing to help the work along, in good times and bad. To the children's surprise and delight, several aunts they have never yet met arrive on the doorstep to help out, one of whom has a compulsion to knit wherever she is.

Ed read out an amusing story called Thank God. It combined contemporary language with the reactions of Noah's family as they learn from him that God has directed them to build an ark. "What's an ark?" was the first question. "Is he mad? In the middle of the desert!" came next. Noah confidently informs his three sons and their wives that he will work something out with God, so that they can collect all the pairs of animals in the world as God has directed them, and then the family of Noah can get back to doing what they do best – raising camels and begetting.

Hilary read for us Adventure in a Foreign Loo, a story she wrote during an overnight stop in Tokyo some while ago. She was entirely puzzled by a bathroom appliance she had never before encountered. She was therefore very pleased to be able to read in English the instructions for using it. The 'Toto Washlet' was, she considered, the loo designed for the twenty-second century. As she went about her business singing the theme music from Dr. Who, the author was very pleased to find how well the appliance worked. She was able to leave the bathroom both cleansed and unscathed by her novel experience.

Literary conventions.

As we moved onto discussions of writing practice and conventions, we brought up the use of the humble semi-colon. Its plight was triggered by a recent newspaper article suggesting the life of the semi-colon is coming to a full stop. Many writers don't avail of it anymore, some choosing to use a dash instead. The dash is felt to be more emphatic. It can also be overused, sometimes in places where the semi-colon might be more discreet. It is perhaps falling into disuse as it performs almost the same functions as the comma and the full colon.

The semi-colon really comes into its own where longer sentences are required containing varying but related ideas, where to break them up with full stops would be to break the thread of the writer's flow or intention. Semi-colons also serve to slow the pace. With short sentences becoming more the norm these days, if you feel as a writer that a semi-colon works, leave it in. If it doesn't, then use a different punctuation mark instead.

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Whilst the facilitator of the Carindale Writers' Group is away on holiday from mid-September to late October, some kind members will need to take over the reins temporarily, for guiding the meeting and to write up the newsletter. One suggestion is that a different member each time could take charge of one of the three meetings which need to be covered. They occur on 15 September, 6 October and 20 October. This is a good opportunity to get just a little more involved in your writer's group.

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August's edition of WQ magazine (Writing Queensland) is available by copying the following link into your browser:

<http://www.qwc.asn.au/Portals/0/QWC%20Files/Writing%20Queensland/WQ%20issues%202011/wq%20august%20web.pdf>

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Competition Announcements

1. This is a reminder of an announcement we made in the last newsletter, as being of continuing interest to our members. It's not a competition as such, more a call for manuscripts. Publishers Pan MacMillan are currently accepting manuscripts on Mondays. The website below suggests your electronic-only submissions will circumvent the hard-copy slush piles of legendary proportions. Please send first chapter only of your manuscript with a covering 300-word synopsis to:

http://www.panmacmillan.com.au/manuscript_Monday.asp

2. The competition below asks for a submission fee, but it does promise publication for place-getters and that's worth a bit for a writing CV.

Stringybark Australian History Short Story Award 2011

Australian history is endlessly fascinating, despite what some of us learnt at school. Stringybark Stories invites you to write a short story that explores any aspect of Australian history. It may be set sometime in the past with history being but a backdrop. It may be a story set in the midst of the battle for the Eureka Stockade or perhaps a story exploring post-war migration or maybe the home front during World War I, or the trials of a pioneering wife out the back o' Bourke, etc. We give you 1800 words to write the winning story. A\$500 in prize money available, plus publication for place-getters and highly commended stories. Entry fee of \$9.50 (discounts for multiple entries). Closing date 14 October 2011. Details: www.stringybarkstories.net

Forthcoming literary events

1. Festival of Independent Writers and Publishers.

Preparations for the first-ever Festival of Independent Writers and Publishers to be held on the Gold Coast on 29 October this year are well under way. An impressive line-up of writers and publishers have already signed up: Journalist and novelist Michael Jacobson, award-winning author Stephanie Dale, as well as Patt Gregory, Iris Detenhoff, Petajo, Julie Boyd, John Clark, Duncan Richardson, Jane Hanckel, Kathleen Stewart, Daryl Greer, Owen Clement, Joan Songaila, Terry Spring and Caroline Glen. And don't forget to enter the short story competition. Check out the website: <http://www.indieauthorsfestival.com>

2. SHEKILDA 2011 – Australian Women Crime Writers' Convention – October 7th to 9th, Rydges on Swanston, 701 Swanston Street, Carlton, Melbourne.

Five hundred hard-core crime readers, viewers, writers, screen producers and forensic specialists are expected to plot together at *SheKilda 2011*. Sisters in Crime National co-convenor, crime writer and founding member, Lindy Cameron, says *SheKilda 2011* will examine how the crime genre is being extended and/or subverted. She adds that *SheKilda 2011* will lift intellectual debate about women's crime writing of all persuasions.

Men – or 'brothers in law' – are warmly invited to join the conspiracy. A number are already members of Sisters in Crime.

Speakers include adult fiction writers Tara Moss, Kerry Greenwood, Kathryn Fox, Angela Savage, Katherine Howell, Marianne Delacourt, P D Martin, Leigh Redhead, Jaye Ford, Honey Brown and Malla Nunn; young adult fiction writers Catherine Jinks and Nansi Kunze, and true crime authors Liz Porter, Colleen Egan and Rochelle Jackson. A new addition to the crime writing ranks, Brisbane indigenous author Nicole Watson, is joining the action.

Also speaking are screen producers and writers Kris Wyld, Deb Cox, Karin Altmann, Deb Parsons and Kerry Lefever; former Victoria Police Assistant Commissioner Sandra Nicholson and forensic specialists Mel Archer and Shelley Robertson.

For more information contact Carmel Shute on 03 527 7126; 0412 569 356 or email cshute@internode.on.net

3. For information on Queensland Writers' Week from 10 to 16 October 2011 please visit [Queensland Writers Centre www.qwc.asn.au](http://www.qwc.asn.au)

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From Carindale Writers' Group member Jane Furey we are pleased to pass on the following useful websites. Jane tells us there are lots of really useful links here, well worth a look.

<http://thegracefuldoe.wordpress.com/2011/07/31/helpful-writing-sites-and-blog-posts-july-2011/>

Start Your Novel

Writing Tips From Best Selling Writer Dorothy Koomson <http://t.co/kGLvx1Q> via [@BubbleCow](https://twitter.com/BubbleCow)

The Shy Writer's Guide to Networking Like a Pro | The Creative Penn <http://bit.ly/pVefSy>

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Chip's Computer Tips

SlimBrowser is the fastest and simplest browser around. This is from its description: It saves you the burden of completing web forms over the internet with intelligent form filler. The built-in popup killer and AD filter eliminates annoying advertisement effectively. The quick-search box provides you instant access to all kinds of search engines and allows you to easily define your own. The auto-login function enables you to log into your favourite internet accounts with a single click.

I like its autocomplete: 'Autocomplete Word/phrase and Auto-expand Shorthands in ANY applications on MS Windows. Word and shorthand libraries cover most western languages, programming languages and medical abbreviations. IntelliComplete liberates you from the pain of laborious typing. All you need do is type a prefix, select the desired phrase or shorthand and IntelliComplete will autocomplete it for you.'

Two other features you will like: Blaze: This will search for any file or document on your computer. Easyclip: This saves you the trouble of typing long URL or clicking into deep folders step by step with mouse. Also simplifies your Bookmarks, Favourites or any other dropdown menus on your browser menu bars.

You get it free at FlashPeak.com. Take a look at it. You can make it your primary or secondary browser.

FN Karmatz

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