



Carindale Writers Group newsletter

21 July 2011

Present today were Leslee-Anne, Dorothy, Hazel, Jeff Petersen, Chip, Brian, Ed, Wendy, Hilary, Rolando, Len, Peter, Judith, Kerry, Debby, Annette.

Several apologies were tendered. We hope those who are unwell will soon be fighting fit again. To those whose further educational endeavours must take priority, we wish them the very best.

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To begin with, it's good to note the inspiring story of the winner of this year's Prime Minister's Literary Award for Fiction, which went to 56 year-old Stephen Daisley of Perth. 'The winner said the \$80,000 tax-free prize would enable him to quit his weekend job selling second-hand clothes and focus exclusively on writing,' quoted the WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN of 9-10 July 2011. Daisley's novel TRAITOR is about patriotism and friendship that starts on the beaches of Gallipoli.

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Chip's discussions with SLQ, the State Library of Queensland, have put him in touch with a firm called James Bennett, a publisher's book representative to schools and libraries. Through this company we may yet be able to sell our remaining copies of Allsorts of Allshorts.

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Frequency of featured readers.

We have 23 meetings on the calendar this year. We generally get around twenty people attending each meeting, and sometimes more. That means there are barely enough meetings in a year to allow each member to feature their work even once. It is fairest to permit every one of our writers at least one chance per year to have their work critiqued by their peers in the Carindale Writers' Group. The members present agreed that anyone who has already had such an opportunity this year would yield to members who haven't yet had their turn.

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If any member has interesting biographical information on a well-known writer we would be pleased to publish a paragraph or so of it in the newsletter. If you have a quibble you'd like to voice, or a question about grammar or the changing use of this English language we writers use as a fundamental tool, we would likewise be pleased to raise it in the newsletter. Submissions please, to carindalewritersgroup@gmail.com

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Today's featured reader was Leslee-Anne Hewson.

Leslee-Anne read to us Chapter 8, the final chapter of her 15,000 word children's book MAKE HAY WHILE THE SUN SHINES. To begin with, Leslee-Anne gave us a summary of the characters and story so far. Providing such a summary was very useful in bringing the listening audience quickly up to date on what has been happening in the lives of the animal characters.

The action so far has led the main characters, a family of European dwarf lop-eared rabbits, to the farm of Farmer Mack where they are friends with, and look out for, a family of Berkshire rats who arrived with them.

Sweet Pea is a caring mother bunny with lots of cleverly named offspring. Dasher is her confident mate, despite the loss of one of his legs in an earlier accident.

Toff and Twinky Ratsby have a large family who are told they must be brave today, to survive the farmer's fumigation of the feed shed where they live within the walls. The workers who are to perform this dastardly deed are described with close attention to the detail of their coveralls, their masks and the tanks they wear on their backs. The farm cat, Princess, is an ever-constant predator to be avoided by both the rabbits and the rats.

There are local rats living on the farm too. Some of these survive the fumigation by escaping through cracks in the floorboards of the shed. Both rabbits and rats are distressed to see the fumigators leave the shed with several sacking bags containing the bodies of dead rats. With nothing else to be done, the survivors line up nose to tail and scurry off into the bush. Sweet Pea, Dasher and their warren of rabbits return to the safety of their burrow for the night.

The next day Connie Crow flutters in to give news of the farm dog, Pirate, another enemy of the rabbits. He has been attacked by dingoes and is lying half dead in the sheep paddock. Kelly Kangaroo, Lizzie Lyrebird and some others have gone over to look. An argument ensues between those animals who are begging for Pirate to be helped and others who ask, "Why should we?"

Sweet Pea's compassion comes to the fore. She hops over and begins to lick Pirate's wounds. He manages to lift his head to see who is helping him. Then Connie Crow squawks an alarm. Farmer Mack has saddled his horse and is riding over to see what the disturbance is. The animals scatter away into the bush. The farmer gently wraps up his injured dog and carries him away.

Weeks later Sweet Pea comes unexpectedly face to face with the much recovered Pirate as she's nibbling on a juicy corn cob in Farmer Mack's field. Pirate snarls at her at first but then recognises her as having helped him when he was wounded. He pretends to ignore her, giving her a chance to hop away to safety.

That night, putting all her bunnies safely to bed, one of them asks to be told of the time at the start of Sweet Pea's life in the breeding shed where she was raised. This neatly brings to an end the story of Sweet Pea and Dasher's family, as it brings the story round to its beginning once again.

When it came time to critique MAKE HAY WHILE THE SUN SHINES, we found that Leslee-Anne's audience were quite engrossed. As one, they agreed it was a very good story. The author had clearly got well inside the mind of her main character, Sweet Pea.

The main points that were raised to help the author improve her story were simple ones of technique and layout. Another member made some observations as to fact, that a cat's paw could certainly reach through a hole in the wall or the floorboards to follow the body of a rat through even if the cat

Providing encouragement through sharing and discussion

couldn't get all the way in. When the rats escape, it might be useful for the reader to know where the rats disappear off to, so that the child listening to the story gets a firm idea that they have found a safe haven.

With regard to style in her use of dialogue, the author can often get away without mentioning the name of the character who is speaking. It's often clear enough already who the speaker is. On that subject, the names devised by the author for her many characters were delightful and imaginative. If she wished, she could even draw up a *Dramatis Personae* – a cast list – for the beginning of her story.

Several members questioned the bloody descriptions of Pirate's wounds as being suitable for the intended age range of the audience, 6 years old and upwards. Several more felt that even children of quite a young age revel in the squeamish parts. The proviso was made by the audience that as long as hope for recovery is included, children can accept realism with a certain amount of equanimity as long as that realism is not excessive. To that end, it was suggested that Pirate's wounds could be described to show he is getting better; how his scars are healing or his coat is growing back.

A couple of Carindale Writers' Group members suggested that some redundant word repetition could be removed. Likewise, condensing two or three sentences into one would tighten up the story.

When we reached the end of our critique a question arose as to how much we can humanise animals. The answer is, as much as the author likes but to keep it consistent. If the animals have paws, it's best to use 'paws' throughout and to beware of slipping occasionally into describing them as 'hands', not that this author did, but it's good general advice for any writer using animals as their subjects.

The final question raised was whether the story was intended to be read by children themselves or by an adult to a child. The author was keen to keep as many words as possible to within two syllables, with a few necessary exceptions, so that children could read this for themselves. The listening audience felt that children as young as six would not yet have acquired the reading skills to tackle this story. It would be better therefore to keep in mind that an adult would be the reader.

If the summary is to be used to promote the book it works well as it stands, though if intended as a 'blurb' it could be condensed from its current 330 words or so to fit onto a book's back cover.

One of our group's members has offered to show Leslee-Anne how to test the substance of her story for the market. He noted that illustrations in a book push up the publishing costs. Separately, another member alerted us to the fact that UQ, University of Qld, is looking for Australian authors of children's books. The author is to provide the illustrations along with the manuscript so that it doesn't cost as much as it might otherwise do if one went through a regular publisher.

Well done on your children's story, Leslee-Anne. We look forward to seeing it in its printed form.

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Our **featured reader** for the next meeting on Thursday 4th August will be Wendy Squires. For the following meeting on 18th August Mike McMorro will feature. Chip Karmatz will read for us on 1st September.

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Providing encouragement through sharing and discussion

Our suggested exercise topic for today was to use the verbs **slithered**, **slammed**, and **slapped** in the same story.

Rolando started us off with a short piece where a drunk man slithered and bumped into a rather snobbish woman. He quoted from Groucho Marx's biography a phrase previously attributed to Winston Churchill, differentiating between drunkenness and ugliness.

Annette followed with a clever piece describing a youngster who fashioned grotesque creatures as he played. Dissatisfied, he slammed molten balls of rock onto them so that he could virtually begin again. We learn at the last line 'it was Hell on earth when God was a boy'!

Hazel read to us a moving story about a time when singing the songs her dead sister used to sing brought her some comfort till her father slapped her cruelly, so hard that she passed out. Through fear of him she could never sing again.

Hilary read a light-hearted piece called Family Fortunes in which the heir doesn't quite have his priorities right. He's as much concerned about his breakfast sausage as he is about his sister not marrying the right sort. The values of the family were amusingly askew.

I presented a short story called Susannah Melissa Fieldmouse which was deliberately written full of sibilants. Susannah's brother Samuel Felipe calls her Smelly Melly. She retaliates by calling him Smelly Fella. An attack by a predatory cat dispels their differences and brings them closer together.

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Following on from our suggested assignment, we had two further readers on different topics.

Wendy wrote a ballad with haunting lyrics which has yet to have the music written to accompany it. Called Blue-eyed Soldier, it is based on a true story of the lone soldier from his platoon who survived his tour of duty to Afghanistan and returned home, 'death's unwanted favour, he'd won'.

Peter's latest script covered a confrontation between a female insurance company executive and a mentally ill male client who'd initially been declined insurance. He gave away the new car he'd just bought, losing all of what he'd laid out on it, only to learn six months later that the insurance company would in fact, now insure him. The script covers how the client attempted to take revenge on the insurance executive.

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The **suggested topic** for our next meeting on 1 August is **Meeting the Foreigners**. As always, if you find you just cannot get any ideas to flow with the suggested topic, don't let it put you off writing altogether. You are encouraged to write on any subject rather than none.

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A proofing tip for your writing: don't be too trusting of your computer spell-checker. Make sure firstly that you have set it to the style of English you want to check – UK English, US English, Australian English, etc. – and secondly, read slowly and very carefully through your work to check its content. Your spell checker will accept 'tough' as a correct spelling and will carry on past it, when the word you may have wanted was 'though'. Or you may have written 'though' but forgotten the t on the end if you actually meant 'thought'. 'Through' and 'thorough' are other correct spellings but might not be exactly what you meant to write.

COMPETITION ANNOUNCEMENTS

On-going good advice for writers comes to us from the 2011 Tom Howard Short Story, Essay & Prose Contest. Some otherwise excellent entries did not make the Final Short List of competition winners because they had certain faults. Here are some of them:

1. The title was ordinary, commonplace or well-used.
2. The opening paragraph did not grab the reader's interest straight away. This is very important. Your title and your opening paragraph are the first words the judges see. It's vital to make a good impression right from the start.
3. The dialogue and/or descriptions were dull. They lacked sparkle.
4. An otherwise outstanding entry fell by the wayside because of a poor conclusion. Many entrants seemed to be writing a story with 5,000 words firmly in mind. When they came close to this length, they simply stopped writing, almost in mid-sentence as it were!

Tom Howard Contest News

\$5,550 Prose and Poetry Contests Are Now Open.

The Tom Howard Poetry Contest for Verse In All Styles and Genres, plus The Tom Howard Short Story, Essay & Prose Contest are now open for entries. For the new prose contest, the prize pool is \$5,550 (including a first prize of \$3,000). Entry fees remain pegged at \$15 for each short story or essay up to 5,000 words in length.

You'll find full details of the Story and Prose Contest at <http://shortstorycontest.0catch.com>

An exclusive site for the Tom Howard Poetry Contest is <http://tomhowardpoetry.bravepages.com>

An alternative site for both contests: <http://www.winningwriters.com> (you will need to click the contest of your choice at the top right or top left).

Judging for the 2011 Tom Howard Short Story, Essay & Prose Contest is proceeding smoothly. Winners will be announced on schedule on September 15, 2011.

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Not a competition this, but a one day workshop on travel writing: Tales from the Road Travel Writing Workshop.

Ever dream of being a travel writer, but don't know where to start? Travel writing is more than just keeping a diary of where you went, what you did and who you met. It's about engaging the reader and making the travel experience as real and exciting as possible. It's also about selling your work to publishers. This one-day workshop takes a practical approach to travel writing, giving an overview of the market from writing for newspapers, magazines and on-line to authoring guidebooks. Students will learn how to write a great article, how to dress up articles with photographs and how to approach an editor with the perfect pitch.

Date: Tuesday, 9 August 2011
Cost: \$65/\$55 Concession

Time: 10am-4pm Location: A & I Hall, Bangalow
Bookings: 0400 887 991 or kim@wildwriting.com.au

Chip's Computer Tips

By FN KARMATZ

How to Avoid Unwanted Browser Toolbars

Have you ever found your Web browser loaded with mysterious toolbars out of the blue, and wondered where they came from?

I see this all the time. One day someone's browser is humming along as always, and the next it's saddled with a bunch of weird toolbars they didn't ask for and don't want.

Spyware is one possible culprit. If you suddenly encounter a toolbar called Super Internet Search or something equally fishy, it probably got there by way of a drive-by download (spyware that broke in when you visited a tainted site) or some other kind of infection. Scan the PC promptly with a good antimalware tool--and whatever you do, don't use any of the toolbar's buttons or its search box.

Another possible culprit: you. Many freeware, shareware, and even commercial programs try to slip in a browser toolbar during installation; and if you're not paying attention, you might click right past the setup screen that lets you opt out. For example, when you install a Java update, you'll end up with the Yahoo Toolbar unless you uncheck a box along the way. That particular toolbar isn't spyware, and you can easily uninstall it--but it's still an unwanted addition to your browser. Bad developers, bad!

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How To Bypass Windows Login

If you're the only one who uses your computer, and you're not worried about it (or your data) falling into someone else's hands, you may not need the protection that the login screen provides. Here's how to turn it off:

Open the User Accounts control panel. Delete any unused accounts that are not your primary, personal account. (Click *Manage another account*, choose the other accounts, and select *Delete the account*.) You can ignore the Guest account, which is likely turned off.

At the main User Accounts page, ensure that your primary account is active. Click *Change your password*.

Enter your old password where required and leave your new password blank.

Reboot your machine, and it will load Windows directly without presenting the login screen. Just remember that you are compromising your system's security by operating it without a password.

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