

WELSHPOOL U3A

“WRITING FOR PLEASURE GROUP”

JOIN US AND HAVE SOME FUN



The Zen Master by Susan walker

The gaze of the Zen Master falls upon me
Loving, watchful eyes shot with holy fire.
He moves little, the Zen master, and I barely
detect his measured, timeless breathing
Each inspiration mirroring expiration
I observe his lean, contoured body wholly
surrendered to relaxation,
Yet an underlying presence to external
phenomena.
He is largely silent, thus rendering his speech
with power.
Elevating it beyond base coinage. We pay
attention.
His needs and wants are simply and sparingly
articulated. Yes we definitely pay attention.
Every utterance, movement, gaze, broadcasts
his Zen message – simply being not doing.
Whilst he radiates love and being, he is
himself responsive –
Murmured words and soft hands upon his
head can start him purring in no time and then
Well it's time to groom those silken paws.

Thoughts on a country Walk by Pauline Walden

Sheep stray,
As is their way;
And who gets the blame?
It's always the same;
The twitcher,
The walker,
The man with his dog;
The rambler,
The stalker,
Those out for a jog.

But why should this be?
It's quite plain to see
The reason's innate
In that thing called a gate;
There are heavy ones,
Flimsy ones,
Some with a list;
Creaky ones,
Rusty ones,

Those you can't shift.
Chains and latches,
Hooks with their catches
Positioned too high –
Or not there at all,
Just a hole in the wall
For a bolt that's too short.
So you struggle and pant,
Then driven to rant
You decide to abandon
Respect for the 'code'
And take to the road!

Happy Days of Youth by Diane Hitchen

Down the long slope of the green hill they
came, running, jostling, snorting in the hot
morning sunshine.
Their hooves throwing up small clods of grass
and mud as they skidded clumsily to a stop

before wading into the canal for a noisy,
slurping drink.

A disgruntled Canada goose abandoned his
peaceful meander and flew to safer ground a
little higher up the bank.

The heifers, all black and white the young
milkers of tomorrow, moved about in the
shallows sucking up water and looking
around, enjoying the cool mud on their hocks
and flicking flies away with ears and tails, all
quiet.

After having thought for a while, the goose
decided he'd waited long enough and flapped
his way towards the girls honking his
disapproval noisily. Achieving the desired
effect they all fled at once, crashing and
careering out of the water and set off back up
the slope kicking and galloping.

I thought to myself that if they were teenage
girls they would have been screaming with
laughter. Ah those crazy, happy days of youth!

Worms by Carol Harris

When I was a kid my parents were quite
protective. If there could be a hidden danger
in anything they would be on the lookout for it.
So, one year, when it was coming up to Guy
Fawkes Night, I really wanted some fireworks.
Not the loud, bangy ones, I hasten to add, but
the pretty, twinkly, colourful kind.

I asked in vain for some time; not being
pacified by the offer of sparklers and, in the
end, my father gave in and purchased a small
selection of whatever he thought would be
suitable.

Of course, they were too dangerous for me,
my young sister and my mother to be let near.
So we watched from an upstairs window while
my father, no doubt grumbly and irritated,
positioned the fireworks in the ground. Yes, in
the ground!

And, in due course, he set them off. I expect
they were pleasant and nobody got killed, so
the event passed fairly uneventfully. I
suppose we were grateful, although I don't
really remember.

However, the next morning a sad sight
greeted us. All over the garden (can't
remember if we had grass or not) were
dozens and dozens, if not hundreds and
hundreds, of earthworms. They had been
blown up by the fireworks!

Summer of 75 by Diane Hitchen

The red double decker would be waiting, it
arrived at 5.35pm and would leave at 5.40pm,
carrying me, most likely the only person on
board from the tiny hamlet where we lived into
the metropolis of the local village 2 miles
away, where all the action was (so far as I was
concerned anyway).

I would be all dressed ready to go out for the
night wearing my very high waistband flared
corduroy skirt (home made, so the waistband
could be customized), collared tee shirt and
enormous, black wet look, wedged platform
shoes with ankle straps. Completing this
stunning ensemble would be black tights
(usually darned here and there with random
coloured cotton). The hair was long and
highlighted, fringe dramatically flicked to one
side, and held rock solid with lashings of

Silvikrin hairspray, so that if the wind was in
the wrong direction it would lift like an errant
seagull wing.

My blue eyes would be further lined with blue
or black kohl liner and darkest blue shadow,
with as much mascara as could be laden onto
previously only mediocre lashes. Final
touches included copious squirting of my own
perfume (Blase by Max Factor) or possibly my
mother's 'Youth Dew' by Estee Lauder *if* she
was still at work before the bus departed.
Obviously no handbag was carried as this
would cramp the dance, so purse, cherry lip
gloss and ten Number 6, along with a handful
of loose matches would be tucked into the
pockets.

Jumping off the bus (with care) in Oakworth, I
would head off up to my school friend Val's
house, where further primping and lacquering
took place and usually a few sneaky cigs in
her dad's garage where we put all the tab
ends into a dry drain (how would he ever know
we had been smoking ??!).

Sometimes we would practice a bit of dancing
in her bedroom, but mostly we just headed
round to the corner shop, calling for our other
school friend Carole on the way. I was usually
sent in the shop to buy the cider as I was the
tallest and most feebly eighteen (so they
said). In any case no-one questioned my age,
or anyone else's ever, as far as I know - and
once we even asked our form teacher who
happened to be walking past, if he would get
us three bottles of Olde English dry cider if we
gave him the money, which he did.

So having got our booze we would put it under
our jackets and walk down to the local park to
sit around drinking it, playing cards and
smoking, then singing songs from the top 20
at the tops of our voices. At 7.30pm we would
wander up to the Youth Club hoping some of
the older, more exciting lads would be there,
and they always were. Everyone would gather
into little groups in the noisy, hot dark,
watching each other, smoking and laughing. If
a good song came on the girls would dance in
short lines, all moving the same, side to side
shuffles then kicks and swivels. The lads were
a bit more adventurous (but in our defence
they were not wearing their platforms as high
as us girls) so required more space for
bopping, arms and legs flying before a back
drop or two, flared Oxford bags or floor length
leather coats exaggerating their moves.

If it was a lucky night, somebody might try to
kiss you, or put their masculine arm around
your shoulder as you walked up to the chip
shop after the youth Club closed at 9.45pm.
Everyone would gather outside the chippie,
laughing and eating their bag of chips with
scraps, showing off and larking about, but
disappointingly I'd have to set off walking
home, as I had to be in by 10.30pm, but one
thing was for sure, I'd be back to do it all again
the next week.

Cost of evening;

Bus fare-8p.

Olde English Cider - 29p.

10 Number 6 cigarettes- 11p.

Entry to Youth Club-5p.

Bag of chips with scraps-5p.

Total cost of evening-58p.

Mother's Day by Sylvia Bestwick

My mother and I sit together painting a rose
For the Mother's Day display.
She, that is. Not me.
Like a concerned parent
I mix the colours and hand her the brush.
I tell her which colour to put where:
Pink for the petals and green for the leaves.
She concentrates and paints between the
thick black lines.
The stem is tricky as the brush is thick but
Angela encourages and praises her.
So do I.
I smile at her as at a child and she laughs
As if to say, "this is not quite right."
We both laugh at the incongruity:
For now I am my mother's mother
And she, her daughter's child.

Travel by Pauline Wilkins

I set out on my journey with nothing to hand
Just the clothes I was wearing and the
strength of my mind
I boarded a rickety boat other souls within
Determined like me, hopeful for a better life to
begin
Babes in arms were crying despair hung in the
air
Old and feeble silent the creak of the boat
forlorn
The waves lashed over the side drenching
everyone
Cold and fear our companions the terror of
night to behold
What will become of us we silently asked
Each passenger facing the danger comrades
united in arms
Daylight surfaced gradually a light we could
see
People in orange jackets reached out their
hands as friends
I sank to my knees praying lucky to be alive
A journey like no other with salvation at the
end
My travel far behind me Italy now my home
Indebted to those who saved me memories of
Syria with pain

DUST by Bob Vidler

Dave had written a book every year for the
past ten years. Publishers loved him. His
books sold millions. He was rich. He had two
loves in his life, his wife and collecting rare
and old books.
Catherine loved him and enjoyed the rich life
style but didn't share his love of books new or
old. She didn't like being left alone for long
periods, often weeks at a time when he was
writing.
Dave had died a year ago to the day and life
had changed since the reading of his will.
Catherine had inherited the house and its
contents but the rights and royalties for all of
his books and all of the money in his personal
bank accounts went to his first wife and
daughters.
Catherine fought against the will but had lost.
She wasn't poor as Dave had given her a
monthly allowance during their marriage and
she had accumulated a million pounds. But
over the year she had spent most of it. With
no income she would soon have to sell the
house.
She had met Michael, a caring shoulder to
lean on and a good listener. They had talked
about her money worries but he had been of
little help. As she did in the afternoons, she
drank her cup of tea pondering the situation

and her thoughts drifted from one thing to
another. Michael had never paid for anything,
she realised. Was he just after her money?
She would confront him that evening, when he
came for dinner. It took well into the main
course before her courage was sufficient to
raise her concerns.

"Why do you always expect me to pay when
we go out or buy anything?"

"Do I?" he replied. "I never noticed sorry, you
always seemed willing to pay so I just let you."

"Well, my funds are getting short so you could
offer sometimes."

"Ok, no problem."

Later in the evening he mentioned Dave's
book collection.

"I know Dave was a writer but if he also
collected books they might be valuable."

"Possibly, I wouldn't know. If there is anything
it would be in the attic," she said.

"Did you say in the attic? You need to make
sure they are in good condition and not
deteriorating. You never know they might be
worth a lot."

She gave the comments no immediate
thought but later on when she was alone she
wondered if he already knew about the books
and was fishing for information.

She had never ventured into the attic even
when Dave was alive, let alone since. The
attic was where Dave wrote his books. It had
been his private space. Now she would have
to climb that final flight of stairs. It was time to
clear out the attic and close the door on her
past life.

She climbed the stairs pausing at the top,
holding the door handle. It took a few
moments before she could push the door
open. Her mind was racing, this was Dave's
space. She peered into the room still standing
on the top step. Everything looked grey, there
was dust everywhere. Glad that she had
brought a feather duster with her but now
wondering if she should have picked up the
vacuum cleaner instead, she took a first step
into the room.

"That smell, its Dave's aftershave," she
whispered.

No it can't be after all of this time, she
thought. But there was a definite something in
the air. As she looked around she could see
books piled everywhere, even across his
desk.

"How did he manage to write in here?"

Moving towards the desk, she moved the step
stool that was sitting in the centre of the room.
With a swish of her feather duster across the
top of the books, she tried to clear the thick
layer covering everything. Dust flew
everywhere, she stepped back briefly covering
her eyes and then screamed in shock. The
settling dust was highlighting her husband,
who appeared to be sitting on the step stool
she had just moved. He looked at her and
appeared to be shaking his head.

"Dave! Is that really you?" she whispered.

"Yes and I need to tell you two things. You
must look for and sell the first editions on that
top shelf."

He lifted his dusty arm pointing.

"And you must not have anything to do with
Michael. He is only after the books."

"How do you know about him?"

"I am permitted to watch and now warn
because he was a competitor of mine in the
book trade and knows about the books I
collected. He also caused the climbing
accident that killed me."

As he spoke these last words the dust finally
dispersed and he vanished. She sat and
thought for several minutes, had she really
seen her husband? The smell of his
aftershave had been so strong. Moving to the
top shelf, the first editions were obvious, as
they were individually wrapped. Staring at
them, her mind in a fog of confusion, what was

she going to do about Michael killing her
husband?

Determined, she packed up the books and
took them downstairs. She needed a cup of
tea to settle her nerves and whilst waiting for
the kettle to boil, decided that she would sell
them. The box of books, now packed and
sealed, sat on the floor in front of her. She
sipped her tea and replayed in her mind the
events in the attic. According to Dave it had
been Michael leading the climb with him the
day he died. The police knew that Dave's rope
had been cut causing him to fall, but they had
never identified who he had been climbing
with. She now knew. But she also knew that
nobody would believe her. What was she
going to do? Michael was coming over again
that evening, should she put him off or
somehow set a trap to get him to confess. She
decided on a trap. She turned the
conversation during dinner to Dave's death.
Catherine mentioned the incident with his
ghost. The look on Michael's face showed her
instantly that she had made a dreadful
mistake.

It was the postman who first raised a concern.
He had known Catherine for many years and if
she was going to be away she had always told
him, but she hadn't and the post box was now
full. The police were called and forcing an
entrance, noticed a smell of decay and rotting
flesh.

Catherine had been strangled. The police
investigation found no evidence of robbery
and no apparent motive, but they didn't know
about the box of rare books which was
nowhere to be found.

Train: Edinburgh to Carlisle by Susan Walker

Winter has drawn the landscape.

The scene is sketched and stretched in faded
monochrome and punctuations of dark
skeletal trees.

Now, exposed nests sit blackly amidst the
stripped, branched boughs.

Then, they are gone as we speed south-west
nosing suddenly into a tunnel of mist.

Startled by great Triffid-like wind turbines
rearing up and towards us.

Alien guardians of South Lanarkshire.

Then it clears and rows of low-planted conifers
appear as a back-drop to clustered white
cottages.

Someone has lit a bonfire.

Great orange flames lick skywards defying
Winter with colour and vibrancy.

Somewhere, we pass a prison.

Perimeter fenced.

Lit by harsh lights on tall gantries.

Dark crows fly above the compound – free in
the December air.

"Come with us" they squawk.

"Feel the arctic wind ruffle your feathers, taste
this northern air."

They are gone and there are stirrings as the
train is slowing and slowing.

Carlisle is close.

When we arrive will we be able to taste the
freedom of the crows?

The above contributors are Welshpool U3A Members

"Writing for Pleasure Group"

**We meet monthly on the 2nd
Tuesday of each month from
10 am till Noon at St Winifred's
Catholic Church in Welshpool.
New members are always
welcome**