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NEW ZEALAND BOOK COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera Pukapuka o Aotearoa

WELCOME TO OUR MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

IN THIS ISSUE

The Value of Memoir in Troubled Times

By Deborah Shepard



Over the last year New Zealanders have witnessed catastrophe in their own land. We have watched a city fall down and people die in shocking circumstances, in the rubble of buildings and in a coalmine deep inside a mountain. We have heard tales of despair over the loss of loved ones, of homes and heritage buildings, of work and income, churches, cultural and learning institutions, familiar parks, gardens, streetscapes and the once sparkling channels of meandering rivers and streams. Many have now lost faith in critical concepts of home as haven and refuge, and the earth as grounding, rock solid and stable.

Once, I think, we watched disasters unfolding overseas and felt slightly immune and detached. That could never happen here, surely. But recent events on our tiny, shaky isles where two tectonic plates crunch and grind have revealed our vulnerability to the awesome forces beneath the earth. These are anxious times. We are exposed daily to information about the impact of global warming on extreme weather patterns and the depletion and loss of natural resources, habitat and species. We hear of the rippling effects of the global financial crisis and our own precarious debt levels. The language is bleak. The sources of worry are endless.

Writing memoir is one way of regaining a sense of mastery over our own destiny in troubled times. When we imaginatively recall events that have shaped us, we can forget, momentarily, the uncomfortable present and lose ourselves in the magic of creating a coherent story. As a teacher of life writing I love observing that moment when writers bow their heads and begin writing. The room settles into silence as people work on recreating scenes and getting the detail exactly right. The task requires intense concentration and willingness to access deep internal thoughts and feelings. It is like meditation, absorbing and endlessly nourishing.

Then comes the pleasure of sharing stories with like-minded writers and discovering the universal elements and also the distinctiveness of individual outlook and style. These moments are inspiring. There are smiles and sighs, much warmth and satisfaction.

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DRAW WINNERS



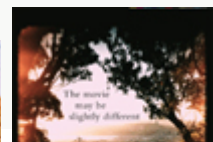
The winners of the two *Brighton Rock* prize packs containing a novel and double pass to the film adaptation of *Brighton Rock* are Bev Wills (Tauranga) and Alison Dyer (Wellington).

GIVEAWAYS



This month we have a fantastic poetry package from Victoria University Press to give away to two lucky readers. [The Best of Best New Zealand Poems](#), edited by [Bill Manhire](#) and [Damien Wilkins](#), draws on the

online anthology [Best New Zealand Poems](#) over the past ten years. Also included will be [Vincent O'Sullivan's](#) new collection, [The movie may be slightly different](#), and [Jenny Bornholdt's](#) new volume [The Hill of Wool](#).



Inevitably in every life we encounter stupefying loss and suffering. Can we write our way through these experiences? Usually people approach this material when ready and then they frequently demonstrate the creativity and resilience of the human mind. Given encouragement and understanding people can integrate their experience and write with clarity and courage.

Recently, in response to the Christchurch earthquake, I invited people to write on the theme of 'surviving a crisis.' The stories illustrated how writing can lift despair and shift perceptions. Sometimes though, we need distance from the horror before we can comfortably reflect, and that might be the case in Christchurch where the aftermath is ongoing and the ground continues to jolt and sway. Seventeenth century Japanese poet Mizuta Masahide wrote this haiku after seeing his home burn down;

barn's burnt down ...
now
I can see the moon

I doubt he achieved this insight immediately. In the meantime recording the broader life story can help us reclaim what has been lost and serve a strengthening purpose.

Deborah Shepard is an Auckland biographer originally from Christchurch. She teaches Life Writing at the Centre for Continuing Education, Auckland University and is running a new course 'The Art and Craft of Memoir' at the [Creative Hub](#) in October. Her [website](#) also offers a life writing forum where people can post life stories at 'Your Story'. Deborah Shepard's new book project is a guide to memoir, "Writing Your Heart Out: The Art and Craft of Memoir."

Five Easy Questions with David Elliot

Author and illustrator David Elliot is joint winner with [Margaret Mahy](#) of the [New Zealand Post Children's Book of the Year Award 2011](#) for *The Moon & Farmer McPhee*.



1. *Is it true that living in a gatekeeper's cottage at Edinburgh Zoo inspired you to begin a career in illustration?*

Well, yes, it is true to a degree although I have to say that I had a real interest in books and illustration before that job came along. I think it was more that it was such a fantastic place to live, surrounded by the animals, especially in the evenings when the zoo had closed and I could roam the park by myself... plus, I had a lot of time to myself to develop my drawings. I could also travel down to London where there

were lots of publishers who could give me feedback on my work.

2. *What do you enjoy most about visually bringing to life a written world?*

I love the very beginnings of working on a story, when the whole thing is full of potential, like a great big visual puzzle waiting to be solved. I love the hunt for the best ideas I can come up with.

3. *What books continue to inspire you?*

There are many books, many authors and illustrators who continue to inspire me, and I find new ones every time I go to the library. One of my favourites is



Enter by emailing

reception@bookcouncil.org.nz with the name 'VUP poetry' in the subject line, and your New Zealand postal address in the body of the email. Entries must be received by 12 noon on 6th of June.

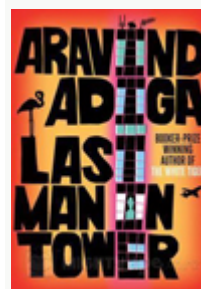
WATCH OUT FOR

Each month an industry insider tells us about books they're looking forward to seeing in the bookshops in the weeks ahead.

H&J Smith

This month [Lee-Ann McGinnis](#), manager of H&J Smith Take Note in Invercargill, gives us her picks. H&J Smith Take Note is part of the iconic H&J Smith Department Store, which last year celebrated its 110th birthday. Take Note will soon be changing over to the new look Concept 6 Paper Plus. Read more about the store in their Booksellers NZ [member profile](#).

We are looking forward to *Last Man in Tower*



(Knopf Doubleday Publishing), which is by Adiga Aravind, the same author who won the Man Booker Prize back in 2008 with *White Tiger*. It is set in Bombay and focuses on a housing estate

marked for demolition so that a luxury apartment complex can go up in its place. The property developer has made a very generous offer to the tenants to move out and they have all accepted except one man (hence the title). His neighbours of course are after the big pay out and turn on him.

Sophie's Legacy

(Random House) is Lesley Elliott's tribute to her murdered daughter, Sophie Elliot, a daughter she adored. It is a mother's harrowing account of a tragedy no family should ever have

