

24th January 2018

Avoiding the 'glad tidings' of Christmas and New Year I decided, quite suddenly for me, to try and spend some time focusing on my own writing, my own poetry in fact. With this I have committed and paid for a 6 week afternoon course run by a poet and film buff Sue Burge. The course is entitled 'Inspired by Film' and uses film clips from different types of films each week to give us food for thought, inspiration and a place to share our different tastes in films.

My first afternoon was last Monday, 22nd January 2018 and I have to say it wasn't an easy session and the words certainly did not flow from my mind or my pen onto the rather bare paper in front of me. I have 'homework' to complete before next Monday, which I am not convinced I will achieve! We have to write a couple of poems to take in and Sue has offered to critique them. I am unsure of my own comfort having my work judged and suggestions made for improvement. That same discomfort has always filled me when I have been witness to others words. Perhaps that explains my love of writing for wellbeing where there is no judgement. It is what the words mean to the writer and how it makes them feel not looking to correct the words to make something better.

Sometimes in writing for wellbeing refashioning a poem can be part of the healing process or learning to be gained from it but that is always from the individual writers soul, not judgement from another. Still, I have committed to working on my own work so I guess I am opening up to that process of what others may think. Perhaps that may act as a type of censure, so that I do not put or open too much of my deeper self in a place I am unsure of or what the reaction might be. That feels an ok place to be and be careful with and be caring of myself.

5th March 2018

It feels like I am emerging from hibernation today! The sun is shining and the last of the snow is slowly disappearing and trickling down the paths and roads. I didn't get out of the house for the last week and it has been quite surreal to be able to spend some time catching up with the pile of reading I have built up over the last few months. Clients cancelled, unable to reach me or feel okay about driving in very difficult conditions.

I live on a gentle slope that looked and felt like a ski jump. To get on an off this estate there is only one road and that is a hill so anywhere you go you risk a slip or slide and it was impossible to get a car out, up and round the roads. That's not mentioning the snow drifts that affected the villages round the town.

It was a time of self-reflection and a time to write, trying out some new exercises from a recent book I'd purchased by Patricia McAadoo called "Writing for Wellbeing". It is a clear book and could be followed individually or used for group work. I have been trying out some of the exercises and have found them quite powerful.

Now the sun is shining it does feel more like spring and once the clocks go forward I will finally get more sun in my north-facing back garden and be able to sit and write in my conservatory more. I hope you are able to be in touch with this 'lift' and find a way forward out of nature and your own winter.

27th April 2018

Last week it felt like summer had arrived, I hope it wasn't all of summer, while today it feels like winter again being cold and wet. Perhaps that contributes to the feeling that the year is racing past, yet again.

I am realising I need to update my website with some new developments which I have been lax in completing but over this coming weekend I will revise and update my website so my apologies for any problems with pages as I work on them. There may well be more to note here in this blog over the next couple of months but I don't wish to preempt any discussion or decisions by others so I will try to contain myself. Or, in other words, I don't want to jump the gun and jinx things!

The other 'big thing' is the introduction of GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) a European Regulation about how organisations and businesses hold and use personal data which comes into force on 25th May 2018. All Data Controllers and Data Processors need to comply with this regulation and as I collect and hold personal data I have to comply with GDPR.

I already keep all personal details sheets in a locked filing cabinet separate from any session notes - both are shredded after 5 years. I only use client addresses, postal or email, whilst we are working together and the email addresses are on a password protected computer and phone. I delete all email addresses and phone numbers from my computer/phone once work has finished with the client. I will not contact you after our work has ended unless you still have invoices outstanding but once paid those details will be deleted. If a client wishes to return at a later date I have respect for each client's autonomy and that they can contact me. This is my own belief, not because new rules specify it.

For me, the best part of this regulation is that the Data Subject is able to ask to 'be forgotten' and to have their details wiped or shredded. I think it will make social media safer, at least that is my hope.

24th May 2018 - GDPR is launched tomorrow, 25th May

I have now completed my privacy policy in accordance with the new data protection regulations that come into force tomorrow, 25th May 2018, called General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and it replaces the Data Protection Act 1998. It is a European Directive that will remain in force when we leave the European Union.

It is, basically, about privacy & transparency and to give us all more control over our data. We can ask what data others hold about us, how long for, who has access to this data, what it is used for and we can request that what is held be deleted. It is, hopefully, going to improve our rights as individuals over multi-national companies and organisations. Even as an individual counsellor in private practice it has turned out to be a fair bit of work. There is now a copy on my website, the link for which is at the bottom of each page of the website.

As a counsellor confidentiality was already vitally important and a lot of what is in the policy I was already committed to but, to comply with the regulations I had to state this to be transparent. I do have a feeling that this will be a work in progress over time. It already is as the Information Commissioner's Office has updated it's website almost daily to help us. So while I have stated that the policy will be updated annually, it may well happen sooner if regulations are 'tweaked' by the IOC as time passes.

So check out my policy and any feedback would be welcomed as no one has really tested the ideas out fully. I just hope I've not made it too long, that equally, I have covered all that I need to and it can be understood by clients and supervisees and comply with the regulation.

If your email inbox is anything like mine you will have been bombarded with requests to give organisations permission to still contact you, links to policies that would put the hardest to sleep in double quick time but equally, as I have, come to a realisation just how much a click of a mouse on a website reveals about you. That is the sobering thought that got me through the drafting and final writing of my policy. The worldwide web knows our deepest secrets and, I hope, this change will keep them secret still!

29th June 2018

Summer has parked itself on our doorsteps and become a tad too hot for me. When I was younger I loved nothing more than sitting out in the sun covered in coconut oil to get a deep tan. Now I avoid the sun and the heat and find the highest SPF I can as my mature skin burns more easily. Is this a loss - perhaps but it is safer too. The incidences of melanoma, the worse type of skin cancers, are on the rise with the sun a contributory factor. Other skin cancers have also been shown to have been caused by exposure to sunlight, basal cell and squamous cell cancers affect more people every year.

I didn't mean to start with that warning so now I will explore something that has touched me very recently and I am wondering what other people feel about it. I am talking here about 'interconnectivity'. How we humans as well as animals, insects and our environment, connect together. We are not separate systems but part of the same system. Research has found that we are made up of the same matter as the stars. To quote a TV series from the 1990s (Babylon 5), "we are star stuff. We are the universe made manifest, trying to figure itself out."

Further to this the latest edition of the magazine 'Breathe' has an article on this interconnectedness with very simple meditation for this. Here is the link www.breathemagazine.com/portfolio-item/breathe-issue-13 and you can subscribe to a print or digital edition. I particularly like the following quote this month.

"There was a startling recognition that the nature of the universe was not as I had been taught... I not only saw the connectedness, I felt it... I was overwhelmed with the sensation of physically and mentally extending out into the cosmos...[.]" Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14 astronaut (with thanks to Tracy Calder, Breathe, issue 13)

I will leave you with this thought. Sometimes we can reach out and touch the universal, feeling at once, like you are the universe as you are huge and at the same time, that you are so small you are nothing. We are all connected to each other, other creatures, our world and other worlds. Maybe it is time to look after them so they can look after us?

22nd September 2018

Just as I think I am catching up with everything I find life comes in and bites me on the backside to make sure I remember I am human.

I had intended to write an entry to my blog last weekend, 15th September, to talk about the new writing group I have started running - Words for Wellbeing - which is a continuation of the group I used to run in the local library but with a longer time to write, opportunities to use creative media as well and a new venue.

Our first meeting was Saturday 15th September, 10.00 - 12.00 and the members who attended threw themselves into each exercise and got something out of them, for themselves. We are all looking to build on this and create a special place that is warm, welcoming and safe for sharing and supporting each other.

It has started well and my dream is that once the group has built up a little more and regular members get to know each other they will begin to put forward their own ideas for things to write about or incorporate. The group is open to all, despite it being held in a local cancer charity - Star Throwers - where I volunteer. Members don't need to be suffering from any physical illness to join in. At the moment the members come from The Wellbeing Service - mental health issues but anyone can come along. Even if you are just curious as to what Words for Wellbeing is all about, how it works or how writing might improve your wellbeing, we would be happy to see you.

There is no need to be able to 'write' just a willingness to join in and give the suggestions a go. After all, we all 'write' in some way even if it is our weekly shopping list! There's no judgement, expectation and the usual rules of writing don't apply here. No one will critique what you have written or suggest ways to improve it. There is no expectation that there will be any end product other than the passage of the pen across the paper. What you write is for you and if you decide to share any aspect of the process or the writing then that choice is yours. You can be a 'neat'

writer or, as my Dad's writing was once described, like a drunken spider that fell into a pot of ink and stumbled across a page trying to find it's inebriated way home. You can even write in shorthand if you have that skill.

Although I do run the group I do so from a therapeutic point of view by offering and facilitating you to explore your own issues at your own pace in your own words. If you do share with one other member of the group or decide to read your writing to the whole group you will be listened to with respect and your words heard. If you join us and something feels too much, you don't have to write anything at all. I arrive early to set up and remain after so if you feel you need a more private place to share what might have been going on for you during the writing I will be available for a while after we finish and am able to signpost to other support if necessary.

We aim to be relaxed and welcoming, starting with a hot or cold drink and biscuits and there is another break half way through our two hours. I ask for a donation of whatever you can afford at the time to cover any drinks, milk or biscuits I supply as well as being able to make a small donation to Star Throwers for the use of the room, heating, light, pens or paper and any of their supplies we use. As I volunteer my time there as a counsellor, supervisor and writing for wellbeing practitioner the charity is happy for me to use the room for free but they welcome the donation.

If you are curious, want to try it out or not sure if it is for you then get in touch with me via this website or come along to our next meeting on Sunday 14th October, 10.00 - 12.00 at Star Throwers, 30 Melton Road. I, and the other group members, will be happy to welcome you to the session.

7th December 2018

It feels like the brakes that the world has need some attention as a desire to apply them to slow things down just doesn't seem to be very successful!

We are fast approaching Christmas, the festive season, and counting down to the start of a New Year. While some people relish the time and enjoy the parties and getting together with family others do not or may not have the opportunity due to personal or family circumstances. The so called festive season may be anything but. It can be lonely, painful, cold and stressful. You may be working away from home and scheduled on the rota to work over that period. You could be estranged from your family and so cannot return to that home or the people. You may also be disillusioned with the whole commercial direction and the focus on money is necessary for happiness mantra. Whatever the reason there are people who do not want to 'celebrate' in any way or cannot and these are the people who feel alienated from society in general at this time and perhaps at others.

It may feel like there is nothing you can practically 'do' to help in this situation and perhaps that is true but if you are able to hold those people who are experiencing this lack of connection or able to touch the excitement or joy then you are remembering they exist.

I wonder if it might be time to reach out to family members who have drifted away, that you may have had disagreements with a long while ago, and just send them a letter, a card, an email or call them to acknowledge they still exist to you. They may not respond but maybe that is not the important thing focus on. To just offer with no expectation or reward to success is not a sacrifice, as some have said to me, it is simply being able to make the offer, to reach out to another, to give. That alone is a gift you can take into your own heart and know you made the effort. It may not bring that person back into the family then, but may do later. After all, if no one tries you never know if there will be success or failure.

If you are alone then maybe look out for local organisations asking for help, Shelter is one, where you can offer help and be around others. if you are near an elderly neighbour then maybe go along and knock on their door to see if they are OK and take a few mince pies, stay and make some tea and spend a while talking. There is a national scheme where families are able to invite an older person into their house and family for Sunday lunches.

I, personally, admit that this year I am tired of the continual pressure of buying this, that and the other, the focus on parties, drinking and eating. The crowded supermarkets and snarled up roads full of traffic. I would like to forget all of that and just take some time to be out in nature, walking with the small family I have and keeping in touch with friends with a few phone calls. Humans are relational, we are not designed to live in isolation. We can discover or reconnect with family and friends we have not seen for a while. We can also reconnect with our environment and ourselves.

Maybe this Christmas and New Year take some time to remember old family and friends and ponder how you can reconnect with them if they are still alive and how you can re-learn how to care for the environment and the living things within it. Maybe by trying this you can find you are more tolerant and can accept yourself. Would it not be an amazing thing if you 'found' your self again and how you connected to the universe around you?