

IDENTITIES UNITE

Edited By Paula David

"I thoroughly enjoyed this anthology of poetry and prose. This is a wonderfully evocative collection of writing from a diverse selection of writers, all of whom show genuine talent."

Max Kinnings Novelist, Screenwriter, Head of Creative Writing at Brunel University

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FOREWORD

All writers need the space and opportunity to develop their craft. Creating opportunities for writers within a Borough, such as Waltham Forest, is essential. This diverse community has a plethora of gifted writers that L B Waltham Forest has a unique opportunity to nurture.

The Voices Unite project has been able to bring together some of those writers from different sections of the community to share their experiences, views and opinions. This anthology reflects some of those experiences and views and includes written and visual interpretations of identity.

The stories and poems were performed at the Leyton Day Celebrations and Leytonstone Festival 2012 to much acclaim.

I would like to thank Leyton Six Form College and Limes Children Centre for their cooperation as well as L B Waltham Forest for its support.

A big thank you to all the volunteers: Rhian Corbett, Jack Fortescue, Katie Anderson and Rasheeqa Ahmad.

Paula David

Bridget Badoe McQuick lives in Tottenham. With a keen interest in creative genealogy, she has been working on a Reminisce project called “Collecting Stories” where she is working with families in Waltham Forest to capture life stories and family histories. Bridget began her writing journey at the young age of 14, after being inspired by the stories and poems written by Maya Angelou, which started from mainly writing poetry.

Over the years she has written a number of articles for different publications, a series of biographies and historical fiction about people who have inspired her. Her other passion is dance and she is involved in community dance and carnival arts as a dancer and performing artist. She has written two musical theatre plays, combining her love of poetry, drama and dance.

Her first play called “Reminisce “ presented dance through the eras from street dance right the way through to African dance across the Diaspora, which included narration, dancing, singing, and poetry. Her second play “A Yaa Story Knows” was a creative nonfiction piece that incorporated carnival arts. At times she would describe her writing as therapy, using it as way to make sense of herself and the world around her. She is currently working towards achieving her dream of becoming a full time writer.



MY LITTLE TREE

I remember when it was just a seed
That was being planted just for me
I watched it as it started to grow
Very small and unsure at first
Needing water, needing light
At times when I watched my tree
It seemed to have grown and overshadowed
Me
Looking down with arms of power
Tall and strong it stood so proud
Over the house and over the land
Sometimes when it had been bad
The wind came out and beat it hard
Swaying it from left to right
I loved to see how it could hold itself
While the wind just carried on
But one day I came home to see
How someone had destroyed my little tree

MY LITTLE TREE/BE VISIBLE

Peeled it of its lovely bark

Carved its branches for the wood

Stripped of all its beautiful leaves

And pulled out all its strapping roots

A gaping hole is all that's left

Broken, lying in a mess

I bury my head in such despair

My life is fraught with sadness

Because my little tree is not out there

BE VISIBLE

It takes courage to step out of the box into the place you belong

To unlock the freedom

And take out the deep rooted fears and challenges

That can keep you stuck into the ground like a tree

Standing bare all year round

With no movement, no growth, no leaves, no fruit

No way of knowing that it should be glowing and changing

BE VISIBLE

With every season

Whatever the reason for the lack of feeling

That this life can offer

There's so much more than you've been seeing

Being exposed to the circle of negativity

Every type of poverty

The lack of unity

Keeps you thinking life throbs like a sore thumb

You don't want no more

Of the darkness that overshadows your life

That stops the light from coming in and shining through

Take a cue from a few that have overcome the strain and pain

Stopped taking their life in vain

So you see

It is worth having a life worth living

With each step you can take on purpose and

Be visible again



Roger Huddle was born in Walthamstow in 1946, where he still lives. He left school at 15 in 1961 to take up an apprenticeship as a letterpress compositor. After 'doing his time', he taught himself typography with help from fellow designers. For the last decades of the 20th century he worked as a graphic designer and photographer, many years as a freelance, and then for the trade union Unison. He began to write poetry under the influence of jazz, R&B and the Beat Generation in the 1960s, but for no reason stopped until a very serious illness in 2001 brought him to death's door, and back to writing. Most of his work is concerned with place, music, and memory, and is largely autobiographical. He writes to entertain, unravel the complexities of life and to explore the possibilities of language. He enjoys performing his work away from the normal venues associated with poetry, and although he would feel good to see his writing published, as he gets older he wants to become good at the craft of composition – that's all, really.

The hum of electricity: palpable, along the web of cable twitching in the air above the street. The number 699 trolley bus, a tram without rails, its almost silent progress from the Bakers Arms, arrives over the hill at Hoe Street station towards the junction with Selborne Road and St Mary's. I was lucky: at that moment a train pulling out of the platform going towards Chingford blew its whistle filling the sky with its warning, as it gathered speed its funnel shot white steam bellowing over a row of shops, caught in a current of air, tumbling across the road breaking against the Midland Bank. I couldn't see the train. The trolley bus, its roof antenna whizzing against the line went into and out of the billowing steam, which disappeared as quickly as it had come. The 699 passed my mother and me standing on the corner outside the Tower Hotel waiting for my grandmother. It must have been Friday morning.

Nan came along the tree-lined path from the High Street, around Selborne Park, and walked towards us, smiling. As usual she wore a wide brimmed hat, fashionable sometime between the two World Wars. It was well cared for and squarely placed over her fine grey hair, wisps of which came free: her long coat with the wide lapels, open, inside her 78 year old body seemed to glide. She wore a grey skirt and waistcoat, as well as a blouse without a collar buttoned up to her neck. Her legs were covered with dark woollen stockings and she wore well-polished leather low-heeled buckled shoes. A large brooch with a glittering topaz stone at its centre was her only concession to colour; that is except for her smile, which I thought was radiant. On her nose were the steel-framed oval glasses that expressed her character.

Mum took my hand and with the other arm tentatively hugged her mother. They spoke to each other: Nan bent over and ruffled my hair. I watched the electric trolley bus go up Hoe Street, past the Granada cinema and turn at the bend by Holdstocks the bakers, where my brother worked for a time before going to do his national service: gone. Both of my hands were now held as I was taken away from the Tower, past Sainsbury's along the busy street and into J Lyons tearooms.

As we passed through the magic door of this palace, I stared at the cut glass and polished metal display stands containing every

imaginable sweet and savoury delight; on layers of mirror glass sat shiny currant buns, pink and yellow Battenberg wrapped in marzipan, bakewell tarts with their glossy red cherries, sausage rolls, beef and onion pies, Cornish pasties. We passed at such speed that I had no time to decide my favourite for that day. The windows went from floor to ceiling, the window curved on each side of the entrance doorway, distorting my image caught in a moment. I remember looking like that in the hall of mirrors at Southend.

J. Lyons tearooms seemed to go on forever: human chatter, the clatter of crockery, urns hissing, tills ringing, all wrapped in a quiet and refined atmosphere, replacing the noises of the street. With the air ringing with “pardon me” and “excuse me”, we went further into the hubbub. All the tables were the same size and made of marble. The bentwood chairs overwhelmed our path and Nan politely moved empty ones back into their correct space. Once a free table was found, I was lifted onto a chair and pushed up to the stone edge, resting my chin on its cool surface. Mum went to join the self-service queue, where a long line of customers pushed their trays along the counter, slowly shuffling past the rows of glass cabinets containing hot and cold food, lifting the hinged lid to reveal ready made meals of egg, bacon, beans, chips, or meat pie and two veg next to Jacobs crackers with cheese, tinned pilchards with slices of machine cut bread and seeded rolls with butter; also Victoria sponge, chocolate gateaux, scones, tea cakes and buns.

This was sometimes a long process; the collecting of food for their tray, manoeuvring for space, always leaving enough for whatever drinks were needed. Just before the till were piles of saucers and rows of cups, some warm and damp from the kitchen’s washing-up sink, and the glorious copper and steel urns, shining like gold and silver, fizzing and taps dripping; a glorious continuous motion, the constant filling of cups with boiling water and expelling steam into the room. The smell of bread being toasted, tea brewing, and bacon frying imprinted itself into my memory to stay for the rest of my life. On these Friday catch-up meetings between my mother and her mother, I was observer only. I was not allowed tea or coffee, or what passed as coffee, and would nurse a glass of Tizer or sarsaparilla and

unwind the strips of dried coconut from a puff pastry cheesecake.

The mirrored walls and dark wood panelling multiplied the palace of taste, noise and steam to infinity.



Graham Millington was born in a small Midlands town called Cannock, just over 60 years ago. After some time in Engineering and Banking, he moved to Waltham Forest in 1977 to start his career as a Mathematics Teacher - and stayed. He retired at Christmas, having enjoyed his career in the inner city environment, but eager to start the next phase of his life and to write more.

Mathematics and writing may not seem to go together, but he has enjoyed both from his early teenage years. However, he says that solving mathematical problems came to him far easier than constructing a story that others might enjoy reading! At age 11, he wrote a play that his class performed in a school assembly. He was also the writer/editor for an engineering company magazine.

However, now having a lot more time, he would like to develop his writing skills and to produce stories that follow the BBC's mandate to 'educate, inform and entertain'. He particularly enjoys trying to write comedy and has come to appreciate just how difficult this is. His poetic works are inspired by Adrian Henry, one of the famous 'Liverpool poets', because he is very accessible, entertaining and thought provoking.

He aspires to write magazine articles and a maths textbook but above all, like most budding authors, he would like to be read.



FEUD/DEATH

At this the combat began.
There was smoke and explosions,
Sparks and screams.
A bugle.
Inspiring speeches.
The late arrival of some Americans.
There was endless poetry,
Carnage, despair, misery and heroics.
But then... silence.
Once again my sister beat me in a fight.
I'm going to tell my Mum.

Warming breezes
Blue I feel this morning.
For after a frosty reception and icy words,
And cold, cold stares.
I was condemned last night to sleep next to a glacier.
Yes, I had skated on thin ice,
But please, can it be time for a meltdown cuddle?

DEATH

Death freed you from your pain.
But death is selfish.
Death is mean.
Death only takes.
So now death keeps your warmth and light,
So abundant before,
To itself.

To prevent Hamsa's immediate deportation, Samira recruited a competent solicitor, several MP's, local councillors and her school colleagues. Immigration control never stood a chance and soon the family was given 'leave to stay pending review'. Losing Hamsa and his Dad would have been just too harsh.

Hamsa was eight years old when his Father, Mother and Sister left their Somalian village, which was continually plagued by armed thugs, for the possible safety of a distant UN camp. It was a bad decision. Hamsa's Dad was beaten senseless trying to save his wife from the abuse and murder she suffered from their merciless attackers. Hamsa himself tried to intervene but was brushed aside.

He was too little to help, but old enough to see and hear.

At the camp, Hamsa's Dad energetically set about securing a future for his children and to him this meant access to the UK. He was no fool and soon got to know the people that mattered and he did what needed to be done. Four four years and many 'deals' later, they were accepted but tragically Hamsa's twelve year old sister was abducted from the camp and in spite of frantic efforts to locate her, she was lost.

On his first school day, the very personable Hamsa was a 'hit' and quickly became 'adopted' by a group of girls who fed him crisps and cola and acted as unpaid translators. The boys also responded well to his enthusiasm, as well as his playground soccer skills. He settled quickly and seemed wholly enamoured by school life. I met his dad at the first parent evening. He introduced himself to me in hesitant English by proclaiming with pride, "I am Hamsa's Dad, how's he doe – in?" Smartly dressed, he stood tall and his weathered face proclaimed an intensity of concern for my answer.

"He's very good," I said, smiling. The man positively beamed and hugged his smiling child closer to him.

Hamsa's dad became a school 'legend', getting involved with everything from jumble sales to dances and sports days. His energy, commitment and enthusiasm endeared him to staff and pupils alike. Father and son's English improved quickly and he never

missed a chance to purloin a teacher and say “I am Hamsa’s Dad, how’s he doe – in?” He soon knew that ‘doe – in’ was an incorrect pronunciation but this had become his ‘catch phrase’ and was often mimicked in a kindly way by my colleagues. I saw him often and although normally upbeat and positive, on occasion his eyes told me that in his head he had drifted to a darker place, a place of gnawing sadness, a place where light and warmth had been extinguished.

A year after the deportation scare, Hamsa was thriving in class but seemed overly assertive and on too many occasions lost control over his emotions. The sheer ‘rage’ he exhibited the day his soccer boots were stolen was excessive and a chat with Dad was called for. He told me, “My son has seen bad things. They come back to him at night .We talk but he has anger and will not be pushed”. Hamsa was never going to allow himself to be ‘brushed aside’ again.

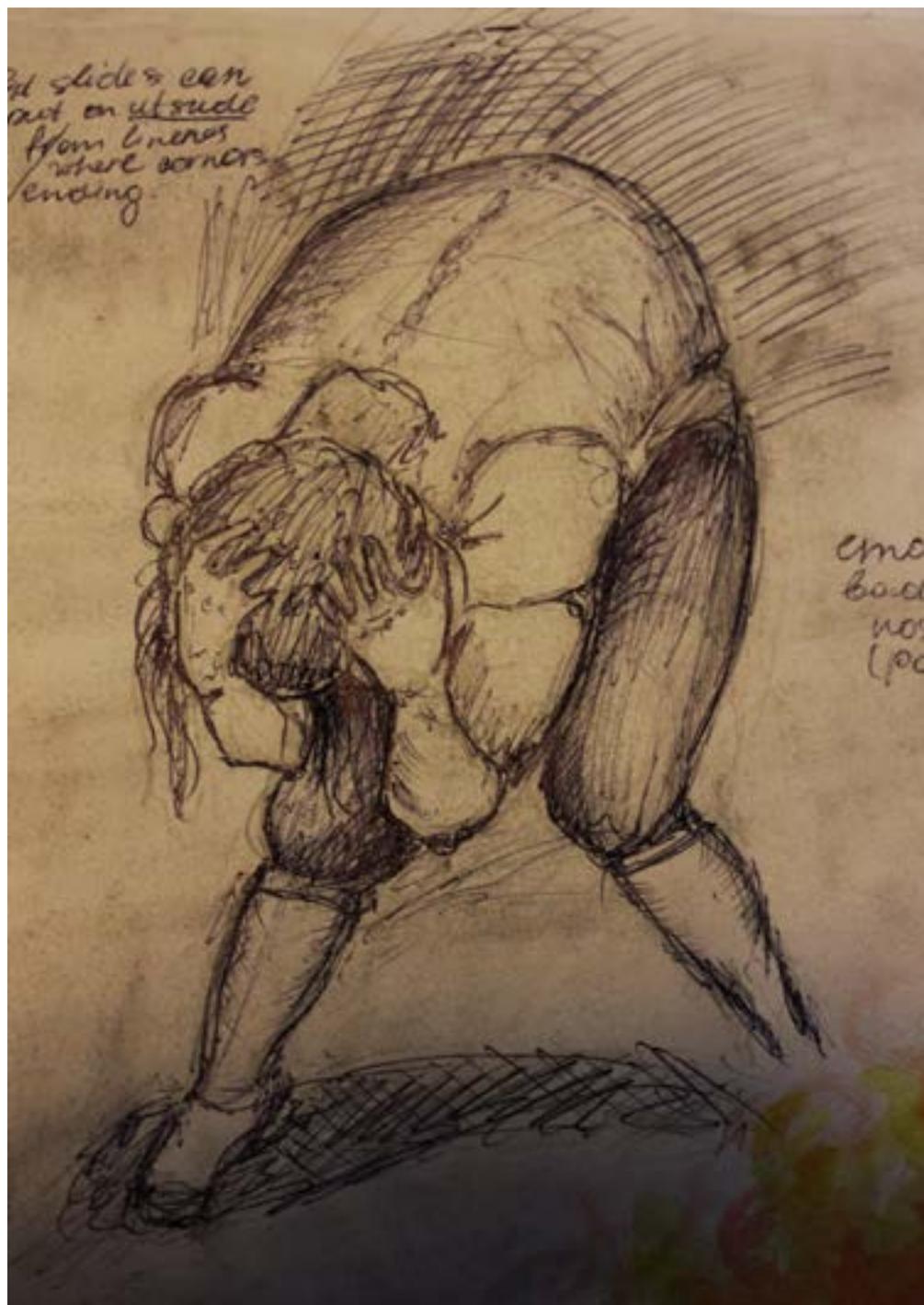
Eventually Hamsa was accepted for a College and on leaving day we presented his Dad with a framed certificate which said “Keep in touch. Let us know how you’re ‘doe – ing’. He loved it. The following September it was Samira who gave us the news. Two angry teenagers, a fight, a terrible mistake and a death. The school was stunned. Hamsa’s dad just didn’t deserve this. It was too harsh, far too harsh.

Hamsa’s dad only talks to Samira. She says he tries to stay positive and he talks of the future but he’s changed. “There’s a real sadness there now”, she said.

But not defeat.

I know any sadness will be hidden from his eyes twice a month when he visits his son. I imagine him entering the meeting hall and making straight for the nearest prison officer. He will stand tall and pointing to his son he will say with pride and intense concern,

“I am Hamsa’s Father. How is he doing?”



Jonathan William Strange was born in Waltham Forest and expects to die within ten miles of there. He is currently 22 years old and is involved in volunteer work in Waltham Forest.

He has always loved to tell a story. When a child, he used to write creatively because the school made him do it, but also would also occasionally want to write his own stuff at home (a sure sign of things to come). Now he can write obsessively, mainly concentrating upon micro-fiction and novels, although he enjoys trying his hand at poetry. The micro-fiction varies in topic and intended effect upon the reader, but the novels rely upon fantasy in order to illustrate elements of an underlying reality. He went to Birmingham University to study Philosophy with Classics Joint Honours and joined the creative writing society to develop his writing further.

He writes because he always has a story to tell, and believes creativity goes to waste if it is not put to good use. His dream is that he might write something so important that it promotes social or political change for the better.

In the long term, his goals are to become a respected genius, novelist, playboy and philanthropist. He wants to develop his writing until he can touch the sublime of Shelley, the creativity of Rushdie and the significance of Orwell.



Skin cracks from the heat,
Textured like thin wallpaper
Fragile as dry leaves
Fallen too young.
Lips bleed dust and cannot heal.
The beating of his heart slows
And the last shudders await.

His mother caresses him
With her arms of nothing,
Unable to lay bare her love,
Whispering a silent prayer,
As she lacks the drop of water
To offer him even one tear.
The shaking comes and mother knows;
His eyes are dead
Soul lifted from them,
And hers soon will follow.

“My lonely child
Waiting at heaven’s gates,
Mother’s sorry that these are the first
At which you have ever
Stood to wait for me.
I wish the first time could have been
At a school to take you home.
But do not worry now.
Not long till mother,
Will be holding your hand
Guiding you through.”

An abandoned attic is a sanctuary for the unwanted. Dusty boxes make soft pillows. The time of day is only revealed by fragments of light breaking through the miniature windows, formed by the passing of time rather than by design. It is a place where spiders fascinate me, with their intricate architectural weaving between old oak timber beams. They create the impression in my mind, of the days slipping away more slowly by making such complex structures the work of a moment. The floorboards, well-worn by time, bend slightly, even though my body lacks substance and I weigh about as much as a young child. In dark moments, I end up wishing that I had the strength to forge my way to freedom by taking the attic ladder to the world below. My own despair, imagining the distress that I would feel if somebody claimed this attic in my absence, saves me from believing that things could be better.

I do not like the daylight hours much. I tend to spend my days looking down at my bandaged legs; sore and wounded, ravaged by infection. I dream of being able to replace the things with wooden pegs. I would dance around on them: rotate like a spinning top until my heart stops. When night sets in though, my only friend comes with it. He stands proudly for hours on end upon a beam in my line of sight; he is no longer afraid of my scarecrow-like frame and dark-hollowed eyes like the pits of hell. We often end up talking about the weather; it is the only subject that we really know anything about, after all. I have named him Sebastian after my late father; he was the strong silent type. I remember the sound of his overcoat swishing like bird wings – usually the only sound he ever made; I only seem to remember him leaving us after dinner to gamble away our lives. However, my friend has started to peck at me as of late; I worry for our friendship.

Rachael walked briskly; being stuck in a bustling Paddington Station was not her idea of fun. Her hair was long and dark brown that day, a change from the usual bright crimson she had been getting used to. Her glimmering eyes were a brilliant aqua blue, like the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, filled with silver baby barracuda near a sandy beach at midday. Her cupid's bow was coated with coral pink lipstick; her skin, a light cream colour and her cheek bones, not particularly high naturally, had been moved-up her face by a clever application of blusher.

She moved through the crowd with swift effectiveness, plugged into her iPod and listening to Hendrix's 'Purple Haze'. It was coming to the roaring guitar solo when she was rudely awakened by a handsome man brushing past her and knocking her left shoulder. She turned to pass her customary glare of ill-feeling towards the passer-by. "I'm sorry," she said.

The man gave her an inviting smile and said, hanging onto every word, as if each one was precious to him, labouring over certain syllables in his low voice, "It was my fault and I am the one who should be sorry."

"No. I'm quite clumsy." She shuffled, looking down, very aware that she was already pointing out a defect to the charming man.

"I'm Andrei. What is your name?"

"Rachael. Where are you from?"

"Rostov. It is in the Ukraine."

"Oh wow. That's exotic."

"Not really. Would you like to grab a coffee with me? I have some time to spare."

They walked away together.

Andrei's diary

I met someone today. I cannot remember her name now. She went down well with the wine. Strange that even though she is now a part of me, I cannot remember her name...



Mary Dawson – (55) Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, moved to London in 1977 and lived in Waltham Forest ever since.

She started writing a few years ago after attending creative writing classes in the borough. Wishing she had started decades ago, she realises that she has lots of catching up to do.

Combining full time work and writing is never an easy task, but the hungrier she got the easier it becomes. Another reason she writes is because she find it cathartic and enjoyable and less painful than the gym. Besides, having a vivid imagination coupled with age was what she thought was probably enough material for a few good pieces.

She writes (stories, poems, and plays) about whatever catches her attention at the time, love, death, relationships, people, social injustice. She'd like to keep it real! She is currently working on that first novel, which will hopefully be one of many. Her goal for her writing career would be to become a full time writer.

She is passionate about one day having a play of hers performed at the Edinburgh festival. She is also a keen photographer and would like one day to do an exhibition of images with words. She currently has a short story published in Brittle Star, poetry published in Writers Forum and Notes from the Gean (this was a Renga collaboration).



I step off the edge
And free fall down
Encouraged by him

He doesn't count the syllables
Nor the lines
Just the passion

He likes the honesty
Praises the content
Never misses the point

Then I land
Where I want to be,
Thanks to him

LEST WE FORGET

The loss of a man and they lay down their wreaths
A carnival of drunks united in grief
For he was more than a soldier, this man without stripes
Who led them to battle in the dead of the night

On tubes and on buses, inside of the park
He'd gather them like animals to hunt in the dark
And victory was always the taste of fresh blood
Kids who joined gangs, looking for nothing but love

But fate has a way of repaying bad debts
For him it was someone, not prepared to forget
He was sat on the tube, for once all alone
No way to summon his army, without use of his phone

So this boy he stood up, looked him straight in the eye
He said, 'Bro, this one's for my brother, like him you will die.'
The carriage went silent, no one uttered a sound
With a blade through his heart he fell to the ground

And as one more statistic is covered in dirt
These kids without fear will fight for his shirt

Try telling them who you are and what you want but they never listen. They end up telling you what you need, so you resign yourself and don't argue. Then they end up knowing more about you than you do about yourself. That's how it happens, you see. That's how you end up losing it; your uniqueness and your individuality.

One day I'm just sitting at a table outside a café, minding my own business and this guy comes over. I think I know him, but I'm not sure from where.

"Mind if I join you?" He asks.

Well I wasn't going to say no, was I? After all, I was getting on a bit, and the thought of spending a few hours in the company of a good looking young man appealed to me very much.

"Free world," I said.

"Let me get you a coffee?"

He goes and brings two coffees and sits down beside me.

"How were the pills?"

"Pills?"

"Yes, the ones I gave you last week." Then it dawns on me. The penny drops; it's my dealer. I vaguely remember now; it was him, he was the guy that gave me some pills to try, maybe a week or so ago.

"Good," I tell him, "they must have been. Damn good in fact! Because most of last week is just one big bubble of fog, although I do remember your face, you're the guy that gave me them, aren't you?" He smiles.

"I've got some more," He says, putting a little silver strip on the table to entice me, "these will have a different effect than the last lot. You'll still be relaxed, but more in control."

“Are they more expensive?”

“Well, they’re harder to get, let’s put it that way, just new on the market. They’ll help you get to know and understand yourself better.”

“Like you understand me?” I ask as I watch him asserting his control with the temptation of the pills.

“Yes, like I understand you.”

I slip my hand in my coat pocket for cash, but all I can feel is a packet of razor blades that I took from the shop earlier.

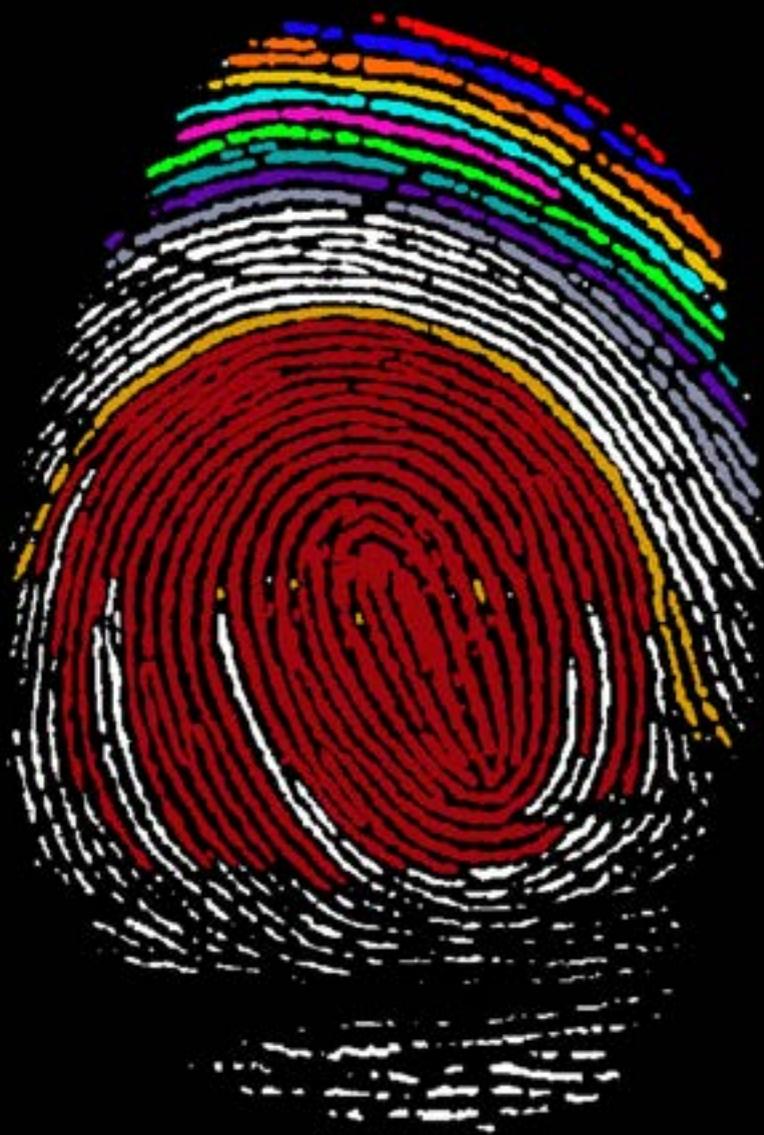
“Well, maybe another time. I don’t have any money on me, you see.”

“Oh don’t worry about the money, it’s not about money.”

That’s what they do you see, people like him, they lull you into that false sense of security, give you a few and bang next thing you know you’re hooked. He offers me one and I pop it in my mouth. The result is almost instant. A purple haze descends before my eyes. I can hear his voice talking, it is barely audible but I can still make out what he is saying.

“I’m going to take you back to your room and you’re going to have a little sleep and when you wake up, you’re not going to run away again, isn’t that right, Mary?”

And I hold onto him and I nod in agreement because he knows my name and who I am, because I no longer do.



John Dunne was born in Plymouth and has been on the planet for 60 years. John's association with Waltham Forest goes back 10 years where he was involved in the Leytonstone Festival. Having moved to the borough in March, John is pleased to be taking part in this literary adventure and hopes everyone enjoys the work produced. John's writing career began in his early 20s where he learned his craft in writing "letters to the editor" and short articles.

This gave him the economic sense of words and a disciplined work ethic that most writers need. John soon graduated to writing short stories, a form he was less successful with. However, in the late seventies, he caught the theatre bug and has been suffering ever since. Symptoms of his illness include theatre producing, directing, stage managing and of course, writing.

Over the past twenty years, John has been a jobbing theatre producer taking on anything that came along. As a writer, he has penned plays for children and adults alike. He went through a spell of working with people with learning and physical disabilities and also wrote short awareness-raising issue plays. During this period, John also developed a knack of adapting classic novels into small scale productions which were ideal for touring. Adaptations such as a three-handed *Pride and Prejudice*, a four-handed *Railway Children* with only one child and a two-handed *Far From the Madding Crowd* were the most successful.

Over the last 10 years John has been producing and writing Irish plays for the London Irish community, many of which having been produced on the London fringe with a couple touring Ireland. John's ambition for the future is to focus more on his own writing, for which this group has been a great help.

On entering the Temple of Dreams, Jack was struck by the darkened cavern of space topped with a dimly lit stage - both devoid of shape and form. Jack immediately noticed the smell of leather seating, row after row of empty expectations. There was a tangible hush of silence in the air, a noiseless peace enveloping the space around him.

Jack made his way across a middle row of seats, his fingers lingering on the soft leather. Then, looking up, his eyes could just about pick out the shape of a dark figure sitting in the middle of the empty stage. Perched on a stool, the figure was thick-set and seemed to occupy a brooding silence. The figure was male, in his thirties, and utterly still.

The figure suddenly looked up expecting to see - what exactly? His gaze took in Jack's own presence but there was no sense of recognition. The figure registered Jack but gazed through him at the same time. None of this mattered; the figure was occupying a space made for drama, which now laid quiet.

After a reflective moment, the man took out a half bottle of Powers and drank deeply. He then paused to rub a chubby hand across his lips and stubble-clad chin before returning the bottle to the brown suit pocket from whence it came.

Jack had a feeling at the back of his neck, which was disconcerting yet strangely comforting. He vaguely wondered how he was able to pick out the detail of the man's movements on the stage. The half bottle of Powers, the chubby fingers, the stubble on a podgy chin. Jack was even able to deduce that the man was a little drink taken, and not for the first time. But no matter; sighing slightly, the man stood and made his way off the stage without so much as a backward glance. He was no more.

Jack reflected on what he had just witnessed. A lonely man on a solitary stage in an empty playhouse.

To Jack, a playhouse was a space where magic and wonderment would create itself to adorn a temple to the gods - a safe haven for the demented followers of St Jude, the patron saint of lost causes.

Jack moved into the brightly lit foyer, which was beginning to fill with people. A young usherette moved towards him with a disarming smile.

“Everything all right, sir?” She enquired.

“I was just looking around, I hope that’s ok.”

“That’s all right. We always get people popping in. The theatre has a long history.”

“It’s not haunted, is it?”

“Why do you ask?”

“I just wondered.”

“Not as far as I know,” she said, unconvincingly.

Jack looked at her.

“We’re not supposed to say anything.”

“Whyever not?”

“The management don’t want people turning up looking for ghosts.”

“Have you seen anything?”

The girl looked thoughtful. “Nothing that you can put your finger on. Just an occasional feeling that someone is either backstage or even in the auditorium.”

“They say most old theatres are haunted in one way or another.”

“The manager says that’s rubbish, stories put about to give the place a bit of character.”

“A bit of kidology goes a long way.”

The girl looked at Jack. “You were in the theatre just now, on your own. Did you sense anything spooky?”

Before Jack could answer, the girl looked at her watch. “Sorry, I have to get back to work, lovely chatting to you.”

And with that the girl moved towards the box office. Jack was about to leave when he noticed the man he had seen earlier enter the foyer and head straight towards the box office where he began to chat to the girl.

To Jack’s surprise, the girl appeared to ignore the man, continuing with what she was doing. After a second, the man staggered off into the growing crowd and out of the door.

Intrigued by the girls apparent rudeness, Jack approached her.

“Excuse me,” said Jack.

The girl turned.

“That man.”

“What man?”

“The one who was trying to ask you something.”

“Sorry?”

At that point, the penny dropped.

“Nothing.”

And with that, Jack left the theatre.



Trevor David is 44 years old. He was born in Sheffield, England to Jamaican parents from mixed heritages. He has lived in various places, including Wales, Jamaica and Germany and chose to settle down in Walthamstow 11 years ago.

He began writing about the adventures of fantastical figures around age nine. His imagination and writing proved to be a haven from the world around him and he went on to take pleasure in writing poems. Two childhood memories that he values greatly are his introduction to 'Rats' by James Herbert and when a poem he submitted to the Voice (a Black British Newspaper) was published. As a self confessed geek, he especially enjoys the genres of science fiction and fantasy.

He extended his love of writing to drama and music. In his 20s, he worked as a singer/songwriter with various bands and producers. As a Counselling Psychotherapist and Trainer, he has seen first-hand that writing can be a powerful therapeutic tool for people in distress. A part of his work is writing and presenting training materials for various organisations. Although enjoyable, this can be draining. He finds creative writing revitalises him.

His short term ambition is to continue writing and maybe performing some material. He wishes to improve his writing skills through workshops and other learning opportunities. Eventually he would like publish fantasy based works of fiction.



“Daniel! Come here, I want a word.”

The timbre of his voice is warm and weary as the last shots of Jagermeister take their toll. Andy raises his stocky frame and grips his son’s shoulder. The other men stagger upstairs to sleep off the night’s excess. His embrace transports Daniel back to age eight; Brighton Pier, salt air and candy floss. There are memories of a young boy running and falling on to inflexible wood, a father gathering up a son in one sweeping motion and quelling the torrent of tears that usually followed. Those were the days of heroes and adventures.

Daniel is now 24 and six feet tall. Gone are the dark curls of youth. His hair is shaven, revealing dark eyes and amber skin. Andy removes his arm and goes to sit in the lounge. The curtains are drawn. The room is dark with muted colours of autumn; browns, rusty yellows and reds. Daniel likes this room, with its musty smells of tobacco and life.

“Sit next to me, Danny.”

Andy rocks gently.

‘Ok Dad.’

‘I like this time of day. Half light. When everything is ending and new is round the corner.’

‘Don’t start, Dad.’

‘Start what?’

‘Being all philosophical, you know it doesn’t suit you’.

‘Look son, I think it’s allowed, especially today. I want to have a chat before everything gets crazy. When the rest of the family, well you know...’

Andy leans forward and slips off the edge of the sofa. Daniel lunges to catch him. He feels the strength in his son’s arms. He stares, seeing how alike they are, although Daniel stands a foot taller. His

eyes; he has his mother's eyes and her brains too.

"Sometimes I can't believe you're my son."

"Shut up, Dad."

"You found yourself a gorgeous girl, good job, a flat round the corner. You're well on your way. I'm so..."

"Come on Dad, enough, bedtime, yeah?"

"Ok, son."

Daniel helps him upstairs and comes back down.

Later, Daniel stands by the front door, silent. He senses only the ache in his hand. He has been squeezing the handle for what seems like ages. There it is; that sick feeling. He has lived in this house all his life with the same friends and neighbours. Last night, the stag party walked past the place where he shared his first pint with his dad. The pub was gone and in its place stood a contemporary bookies, translucent windows and bright wooden panelling. Everything was changing around him, whereas he always lived life on the tides, floating wherever the waters took him. He never learnt to swim. Earlier, he was the heart of the party, laughing, chatting, and making the sickest of jokes, the sum of expectations around him.

Daniel looks in his free hand at the wedding vows he had tried to write. This act is the catalyst to his confusion. Inspecting the crisp white envelope, fires his intent and he is alert. He breathes, turns his head to look behind him. All the lads are still in bed.

He peers into the dark hallway. He barely makes out the pictures of his family. Their disapproval is agonizing. He turns round and covertly turns the door handle and pulls. He lightly taps his pocket and feels the slight weight of his passport. This is all he can carry without detection. He steps with the bird chatter piercing through the morning hush. He slowly shuts the door and walks into the last stages of night. Today he jumps into darkness, hoping for light. Gem hadn't slept, but felt more awake than ever. This is her day,

oops their day – Daniel and her. She looks around her room at the remnants of her adventures; the night before. The girls are all mad, but she loves them anyway. Kayla calls up to her.

“Gem, you up? Today’s the day. What do you want - coffee, tea or hair of the dog?”

Kayla makes her way to Gem’s bedroom and jumps on the bed.

“How’s the head babe? Last night was mad.”

“Yeah, and whose idea was it to have a hen do the night before my wedding?”

Kayla pauses. “Here, I found this by the front door.”

Gem opens the envelope and pulls out a white card that reads -
To Gem – SORRY.

HAIKUS

Warm seas chase sapphire
Ruthless waves make hills sand
An elemental war

Azurite skin scorched
Honeyed forms flaunt new hues
The gift of our Sun

Cradle of mother
Natures fortune my harbour
At peace I let go

Heal a splintered heart
A universe of chaos known
Let spoken word quell

Listen without thought
Allow the songs to be sung
Repair heart and hope

Art can save a life
A light where shadows linger
Guiding the lost home



Nerine Poalini-del'cognito was born in Belgium from French Italian origins. She has lived in England for 20 years. She has journals from time to time to write down what she feels, whether good or bad. She finds it enjoyable and relaxing.

Her writing has now evolved; she now writes poetry using the senses, which she enjoys.

As a linguist, teacher and interpreter, she likes referring to the manipulation of words and the originality of imagination. She likes poems because she wants to express something that is hers; about herself or people that are around her. Poems make the unfamiliar familiar and the familiar unfamiliar. She is surprised by her own writing. Some of her inspiration comes from reading the psalms and Song of Solomon.

She is a very sociable person and loves listening to stories. She loves true stories and is really touched by them. She then starts imagining what she could add to make it more interesting

As a next step, she would like to start writing a novel based on a true story with a little bit of fiction.

Angel of darkness, massacre of all

You knocked on my door; sweet talk,

You entered into my household.

From the rising of the sun to its setting, you asked for my seed.

I gave you my seed and you prepared a place for me to be slaughtered

Like a lamb.

Woe is me, angel of darkness, massacre of all

You took my innocence, my sincerity, twisted my values and with a

Sharp sword you pierced my soul, taking my light, my joy, the

Blood of my blood, the flesh of my flesh.

Whilst putting your garment of wickedness, you chained me,

Dragging me to Court.

Present were your family: your father lies, your mother deceit, your

Big sister greed and your brother, the crook.

Laughing out loud, you made me sign a covenant that cannot be

Revoked.

You enthroned yourself over the fruits of my labour, my silver and

My gold.

Woe is me angel of darkness, massacre of all.

Laughing out loud with lazy hands, you satisfy your greed by your

Perpetual rape.

Woe is me angel of darkness, massacre of all

Cry of despair, grief and sorrow.

In my sighing I find no rest.

My bones are dry and brittle my muscle aching no more tears

Silent in solitary confinement.

Woe is me angel of darkness, massacre of all

You took it all but you won't have my soul.

Pupils dilated, adrenaline overproducing

Feeling of euphoria, unspeakable joy

First kiss delight

Soft red luscious lips as sumptuous as velvet

Moist containing the effervescence found in sweet champagne from
The white grape of a Chardonnay elaborated with black grapes

Blanc de noirs

Marriage of white and black grapes

Your mouth captivates me; your curls thick and smooth remind me
Of dusk

Your eyes sparkle with happiness they greet spring and call me
With your own distinctive love song all through the night (like a
Nightingale)

Your love is more than champagne graceful daughter from the
Caribbean

Nothing compares to your gift of beauty

Arise from the vineyard, winter has gone and spring has come

Arise, shine, lets spin, swirl, swivel, twirl in your evergreen welsh
Countryside

My body trembles my heart beats for you I have been waiting so
Long

Your mouth is like excellent champagne and my lips ever flowing
For my beloved

I am still a sealed garden, my friend, my beloved



Paula David was born in London, UK to Jamaican parents with a mixed heritage. After completing a BA in Media and Creative Writing in 2007 at Middlesex University London, she completed her first novel. It was long listed in the Virginia prize for unpublished novels for 2009. Paula was commissioned to write a short story and poem for the Great book of Tottenham 2011 and also a poem to accompany the art of Halkart Tahir for the N.O.N, Carnival of monsters exhibition, October 2011.

Her short story, *Sound of Music*, was published in *Enigma* magazine 2008. Paula has performed her own brand of performance poetry, which included song and verse, all over London in venues such as Bishopsgate Institute, Poetry Cafe, and the London Poetry Festival. Her first play *Second Chance* won third prize in Newham's Playwright of the year competition in 2009.

Since then her plays *Malachi* and *Helen's Help* and *Second Chance* have had readings at Brockley Jack Theatre, June 2010, Stratford Circus, July 2010 and Jackson Lane Theatre May 2010 respectively. Paula was Resident Artist at Stratford Circus 2010 and Writer in Residence for Leytonstone Festival 2012. She was awarded an MA Creative and Professional Writing from Brunel University in September 2011. Paula hopes to find a publisher for her teenage novels and to continue writing plays. Projects in the community are close to her heart and she hopes to lead more projects like *Voices Unite*.



I walked up the High St, my feet hot and swollen, the edges of my shoes cutting into my flesh. I was nearly at the corner but I couldn't see Jason. I leaned on the window of the baker's shop. I imagined it would be cool. I winced as the glass burnt my skin.

"You OK?" Jas asked.

"You're late!"

He shifted nervously.

"We'll have to be quick. They'll notice that we've run away. Do you wanna have to go back to that place?"

I grabbed his hand and stepped into the gutter to avoid the crowds. I kicked empty cans and discarded packaging as I went.

"You're going too fast," he said, tripping over an empty water bottle.

"Wait!" He called.

His voice seemed to echo into the distance gradually as if I was slowly entering a tunnel. I felt cool air brush against my skin.

"Sally, you can open your eyes now," a voice whispered. I hadn't even noticed my eyes were closed. The voice sounded familiar, but I couldn't place it. I opened my eyes and at first all I could see was a splurge of colour, up close to my face, soft and sponge like. Slowly, they became more defined, leaves of peach, pastel green and pale brown easing into the distance as the moments passed.

Everything was becoming more and more clear. My surroundings seemed to go on forever, miles and miles of wilderness. I was alone. For the first time in my life I needed Jas more than he needed me. Where was he? I looked around frantically. Finally I looked down and there he was standing beside someone lying in the middle of the street, cars at a standstill, crowds gathering, sirens blaring in the distance. Why wasn't he with me? Typical of him to leave me stranded. I know this was all my idea, but he agreed.

RUNNING/IN THIS TOWN

His body was bent over, trembling, as if he was crying. I wanted to edge closer and suddenly I was. Standing beside him, I looked down at myself, bleeding and lifeless.

IN THIS TOWN

My section of sky has a recurring rain cloud

That leaks slowly like Chinese torture.

It spits small droplets of instruction

Telling me how to fit in, who I should be,

Predictable, and then irritating and then maddening

In this town

The street etiquette colours my tracksuit grey.

With its hood raised my individuality is hidden and my will suppressed.

I sit at the bottom of society's pyramid.

The chains of imposed identity tie me to this pre-written story,

Crowding my mind and my thoughts.

In this town

I'm a sell out if I take a detour from this street,

With my peers' ideas appearing fresh

But exercising the stale air

Of a preconditioned past existence.

In this town

I sit in the line and nod my head to the repeat of the bassline.
I spit my rhyme and bask in the admiration of my peers

But instead of ending with the cessation of school
Enslaves my actions to a dead end.

In this town

The suffocation becomes too much. I spread my wings and take a chance.

In the next town

I discovered my dreams of something better were shared by Maya Angelou in her poem 'Still I Rise'.

In the next town

Toni Morrison used words I wanted to hear over and over again and made me want write my own.

In the next town

Paul Williams, a black Architect who designed Los Angeles Airport, gave me a fresh view.

In the next town

Dr Patricia Bath invented a tool to remove cataracts and I could suddenly see who I was and what I could become.

In the next town

George Alcorn, a black American, invented the x-ray machine and I could see through all the propaganda.

In the next town was a road to another town and another town and another...

Where Barrack Hussein Obama became President.

Inside my skin my flesh is soft; my heart beats to a simple pace.
In your fearful hands, I gestate and expect
All credulous and wearing hope's face.

I try to forge forward, diploma in hand and proud ambition in place.
But you've defined and identified even told lies, ignoring that
Inside my skin my flesh is soft, my heart to beats to a simple pace.

The simple music of my natural voice attracts your scorn and fear,
So my destiny's set for an empty plate
Before I even attempt to taste, it is the paltry and the meagre here.

So what do you see when I enter your world, your future, your
Present, your past?
The clash, the rattle through of your own cultivation?
But remember,
Inside my skin, my flesh is soft, my heart beats
To your life's pace

Loosen the grip and open your eyes,
The richness of the diverse is safe.
You won't be lost to dread and the death of your own,
What was cotton will simply become lace

So loiter with the truth,
Incline to believe the opposite of what seems plain
You can't consume all
You can't lead regardless of him, her, or me
It will all become clear if you let go of your fear,
And breathe deep of our new day.





Jason Monero is 17 years old and lives in the Cannhall ward of Waltham Forest. He is blind and attends Joseph Clarke School for the Visually Impaired. He lost his sight at age 11. His family are St Lucians from the Caribbean. He enjoys writing poetry and was interested in the project because of his love for music. If the opportunity arose, he would like to take part in similar projects in the future.

MY FIRST SOFT TOY MONSTER

My first soft toy monster

An orange charmander won at the fair

The cousin loved that monster

The tail rips, sadness about the room

Orange felt tip to heal monster

Monster cries out for needle and thread

Monsters, better time for bed

Bricks of popcorn and ice cream sandwiches

Useful for snacks at the cinema

Door frames of chips with drumstick door handles

Great for making gravy

Rum sponge cake for floors

The scent goes to my head

Lychee windows

Part of my five a day

Soft nougat stairs

Thick, red and white candy stick handle rails

Tick tack radiators lead to

A bath of caramel

It awaits me

The chocolate taps scream at me

I dive in and come out sticky

I dry out on the

Sugarcane grass in the garden

Gorge on lemon cheesecake flowers

Candy apple lupins and sherbet coronations

Great food for the honeycomb bumble bees

Bubblegum dragon flies blow bubbles for their dinner.

SIX YEARS OLD, ST. LUCIAN BEACH

Six years old, St. Lucian Beach

Mum, Dad, James, Nathalie and me,

Blue, salty air, seagulls

Cold bitter splash on my face

James pushes me in

I ignore my parents' panic in the distance

The water is cool like a cold ice pop

I decide to try to doggy paddle

Dad turns with a gasp

He takes my hand and motions the front crawl

"Come on Jason," he dictates.

"Leave me alone," I say, "I can do it."

After 15 minutes, he marches me towards mum.

Hunched over and frowning

I listen to mum ranting at dad.



Andreas Georgio is 16 years old. He lives and goes to school in Waltham Forest. He attends a special school for the blind. He would like to go to college and be a bit more independent. He'd like to learn about life and living skills. He'd also like to get a job designing Braille CD covers.

THEME PARK ADVENTURE

Sunday night in a hotel

Straight to the park after breakfast

Sky drop

Sounds like my tummy goes funny

It's fine, exciting,

The weather is hot,

With a cool breeze

When we're done with all the rides

The moon comes up

I'm wide awake on the lookout for ghosts

Rattling ghost train whispers in the distance

Someone's there

Chloe dives under the covers

We speak the spell

"I know your boss," we whisper.

"I'm sorry," said the ghost

He leaves through the window.

PETER WILSON, 53, was born in Harare, Zimbabwe and lived there till he was 13 when he moved back to the UK in Waltham Forest. He experimented intermittently with writing over several years, but came up against two issues. Firstly, it was difficult to find enough time when working long hours. Secondly, he felt that he had nothing worthwhile to say.

A few years ago, circumstances meant he had more free time and by then he had a raft of ideas he was interested in writing about. It became something he loved doing in its own right, but he was naturally interested to see if any of it was saleable. With this in mind, he decided it made sense to build a portfolio of writing projects (completed, or proposals) and then send them out: this is what he is currently engaged in. The occasional interim small success – e.g. short story published in bookshop chain anthology - suggested it was worth pursuing.

He writes both fiction and non-fiction. The fiction is in several genres, but the common feature is normally humour – he started writing because it made him laugh, and that is still the driver. The non-fiction deals with Critical Thinking (aka argument analysis / informal logic), specifically how it relates to bad decisions and spin in politics. These two approaches often overlap. Some of the fiction includes satirical comment on current events, and the non-fiction uses humour to lighten what can be a dry subject.

Why does he write? Firstly, it clarifies his thinking. There is nothing like writing something down to force him to discover what he really meant. Secondly, he agrees with the person who said that it is simply the most fun anyone can have by themselves!

Like a weary piece of jetsam thrown overboard by life, Bergson had been washed ashore one evening in the strange no-man's land between E10 and E11. He had booked a few days in the area, staying at a B&B run by a woman called Catarina, whose advert he had seen in a local newspaper left discarded on the inbound train from Heathrow. Lacking any firm idea of what to do, he had chosen to go there on a whim.

He unpacked in the guestroom, and returned downstairs. From the business cards on the hall table, it seemed Catarina was also a therapist specialising in 'Journeys of the Soul' – whatever that meant. Bergson assumed the B&B was a sideline to bring in income when the Soul business was depressed. The only other furniture in the hall was a small terrarium, with a clump of blue-green cacti growing in it.

Catarina came into the hall.

"You look tired," she said. "Would you like a beer? We can use the consulting room. My 7 p.m. cancelled so I've got half an hour". Bergson hesitated. Well – why not? He felt like some conversation, and it was too soon to turn in. And whether it was his tiredness, the alcohol, or the subconscious expectations of being in a therapist's office, he began to pour out his life.

"I have a compulsion to travel. I can't stop. I always feel that the next place I go may be the place."

"What do you mean?" Catarina asked.

Before he could answer, Bergson was distracted by a small black cat that jumped into his lap and began purring.

"That's Camões" said Catarina. "Named after the Portuguese poet-explorer. You were saying?"

Bergson tickled Camões behind the ear. "The place where I can find answers to everything, where I'm at ease in my skin".

"Have you found it yet?"

"No."

Catarina smiled. "I can help if you like," she said.

"I can't afford therapist's fees".

"Tell you what," said Catarina. "I've hurt my back and the garden needs tidying. You do an hour's raking each afternoon over the next two days, and in the evening we'll chat. I'll set you a simple homework task to do each morning. Deal?"

"Deal."

"Excellent. Your assignment tomorrow is to visit the local park, and note the two features at either end of it."

The following evening, Bergson reported to Catarina that he'd found a fountain and a hedge maze.

"Very good," she said, "these represent the two aspects of your identity. Tomorrow we go back to the maze together at dawn, when it's quiet."

So the following morning, half-asleep and half-apprehensive, Bergson was down in the hall at 5.30 a.m. just in time to see Catarina cut a small piece from one of the cacti and put it in her pocket. A brisk twenty minutes' walk and they had arrived at the maze. Catarina looked around.

"Good, no-one here."

She took the succulent from her pocket and handed it to Bergson.

"Eat this."

"What is it?"

"Trust me. If I was going to do you harm do you think I'd do it in an open space where someone could come by at any time?"

Bergson took the piece of cactus and chewed it. "What happens now?"

Catarina pushed him gently into the maze entrance. "You'll know what to do in a minute."

As Bergson entered the maze it was as if all his worst nightmares had suddenly sprung to life. The hedges, which he had thought were waist-high, now reared up to form towering, suffocating, green walls. He tried to turn back but the entrance was blocked by a huge black puma with malevolent yellow and green brimstone eyes, its teeth dripping blood. Bergson spun round and rushed panic-stricken back into the maze. At every turn there was some horrific image: one moment it would be the decomposing death mask of someone he had known from his life, the next a treasured memory from his travels where the landscape had metamorphosed into a twisted sea of snakes and viperfish.

He tried to scream, but no words would come. Anyone passing the maze would have seen the comic sight of a grown man rushing round with his mouth open and hands waving, trying to get out of a maze whose hedges were low enough to vault. To Bergson, the gates of Purgatory had opened and were trying to pull him in. In sheer terror, he passed out.

He woke up at the B&B, with the scent of sulphur in his nostrils. He was lying on his back in the hall, his nose being assiduously licked by Camões.

"What the...?"

"Well done!" said Catarina. "You managed to walk back yourself, though you probably don't remember much about it. Then you fainted again. I suggest you go upstairs for a couple of hours' sleep, and we'll talk later this evening".

Later, sitting in the consulting room with Camões on his lap, Bergson vented his anger. "What the hell did you give me to eat?"

"Peyote. A Mexican hallucinogenic plant. Quite an ego trip, huh?"

"Did it serve some purpose, or is it just a game you play on everyone who stays here?"

"I would never do that. Without a shock to your system however, it's unlikely you'd ever change. You see, you've spent your life living in a mental maze where you think answers are only to be discovered outside yourself as a result of real journeys."

"Well, aren't they?"

"No." Catarina smiled. "The external world is inevitably subject to decay and disappointment. You've approached things the wrong way round by trying to find the fountain within the maze, instead of finding the fountain first. Then you'll be able to traverse the maze safely."

"What is the fountain?"

"The well-spring of your soul. You can find it anywhere: you don't need to travel."

Bergson shook his head. "This all sounds like a bad dream. A lot of nonsense... ow!"

Camões had bitten Bergson sharply on the thumb, drawing blood.

"What the...?" Bergson exclaimed again. His gaze locked with that of the animal, and he noticed for the first time that one of the cat's eyes was yellow, and one green.

Camões winked.

Writer's Thoughts on the Project

"I would recommend anyone to do a workshop with Paula. She has the ability to draw out the best within you whether you are a beginner or an advanced writer. Strongly recommend it."

Nérine Paolini-del'cognito

"It takes a lot to fill six Saturday afternoons with humour, a constant input to the imagination, co-operative working methods and just the pure joy of writing: this project did it all. I write better than when I started and I know more about why I write."

Roger Huddle

"I found the workshop both enjoyable and interesting – It was good to see work produced from the writing exercises, develop through feedback to publishable pieces. A great way to spend Saturday afternoons, let's hope it's the first of many."

Mary Dawson

"A very worthwhile project which developed technical writing skills in a collaborative, constructive, and fun group environment."

Peter Wilson

"Workshops were well planned and even better executed. Paula is able to draw out the best of each writer who attended, pushing limits yet making sure nobody got lost or waded out of their depth. Her sessions were also fun with plenty of laughter and much in the way of mutual support whereby she allowed the participants to contribute to the process. Well worth supporting."

John Dunne