One of our members discovered an online blog called Otherwordly (a fun play on the word “otherworldly”) that you can access through the email address: yee-lum@otherwordlyblog.com. It is a collection of strange and lovely words taken from a variety of languages and translated into English. Their definitions convey feelings and contain an aesthetic side to their meaning. I think it would be nice to have members contribute their favourites from this site and tell our readers why these words are special to them. I’ve chosen one from the site’s vast list that I thought might strike a chord with writers like ourselves.

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE**
- Alan’s New Year’s Welcome
- The Element of Laughter
- Poetry: With Some Gravity
- Children at Play (New Feature)
- Short Stories:
  - In the Moment
  - Animal Tales
- Reviews:
  - Performance
  - Books
  - Film
- Writers’ Tools
- Members’ Challenge Competition
- Submissions Invitation

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**Happy New year to everyone at Write On!**

We hope 2015 brings you happiness and inspiration. Keep your eye out for an exciting new challenge within the issue to help you develop your writing technique. It’s all about having fun, taking part and learning while writing. We will have book vouchers for the winning entry. Throughout the year we hope to have further projects for members to get involved in, if you have any ideas get in touch.

**Film Project reminder**: remember the film project suggested by members for this year’s Arts & Film festival. Ideas from scripting to shooting are welcome. Get in touch and we can tell you more. It would be great if we can get a small team together to generate ideas & produce a short film. Register your interest with us and we can get started!

**Especially for this issue**, as previously circulated, we have your collection of Halloween & Christmas themed work to reflect on the recent holidays ranging from “that creepy feeling” to “warm-hearted”

Alan

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**meraki (μεράκι)** Greek

(n.) the soul, creativity, or love put into something; the essence of yourself that is put into your work
**HAPPY CHRISTMAS?** by Norma

I’m a bit of a Ba Humbug you see
As greed at Christmas is not for me
The newly created “Christmas Jumper Day”
So well-meaning hypocrites can have their say
And families can’t forgive and start new fights
“Do they know it’s Christmas” ringing out
While Mum and Dad do nothing but shout
Debt and spending reaches new heights
Oh Joy! It’s Christmas again……so soon?
Travelling torture, queues,
Expense to a merry tune
Looking forward to summer, not holly
Can’t even keep up my brolly
Ba Humbug, grin and bear it
Visa, Mastercard take a fair hit
Oh Well, I can always have a sherry
Is it me? I just don’t feel merry
Happy Christmas everyone…Hic! Hic!

**THE GREAT AUK’S GHOST**
by Ralph Hodgson

The Great Auk’s ghost rose on one leg,
Sighed thrice and threes timed winkt
And turned and poached a phantom egg
And muttered, “I’m extinct.”

Contributed by Maureen

**Limerick**

The New Year

We’re done with a year now well past
It went by for most far too fast
Yesterday is history
Tomorrow a mystery
Make each moment count, it won’t last

----- Isolde

**Motivational Quotes**

*Contributed by Maureen*

The best way to cheer yourself up
Is to cheer someone else up

- Mark Twain

Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass
It’s about learning to dance in the rain
POISONED PETALS

When you touch the poisoned petals
You’re heart goes dark
Ignorance and arrogance justify the fists
and words
No room for compassion, just a fear of hate
So please try and understand
We are all the same, equal as one

We have all touched the poisoned petals
A life less lived, for a moment’s darkness
It is really sad to say
I don’t think prejudice will ever go away

The fear in the eyes
Vilification on the face
Why such contrast of emotions
We are all one of the so-called superior human race

Prejudice against race, sex, looks, ideals, religion,
appearance, beliefs - an endless list

Leaders keep their conscience in their wallets,
Pitiful humans lower than the cost of the next dividend
People running, getting nowhere fast
Part of the rude, arrogant, ignorant world of which we all belong

Many of us hope that the sad, tragic, sickening events
of 11th August 2007
May eventually cause the poisoned petals to wither and die.

Stamp Out Prejudice, Hatred, Intolerance Everywhere!
Stamp Out Prejudice, Hatred, Intolerance Everywhere!

-- Graeme
THE SPY’S DREAM
by Keith

Army boots off
Police boots off
Military slippers on
Kettle ready
Smoke
Drink endless coffee
Letters posted
Go through old letters
Check all bills
All bills paid to date
Check memberships

Been out four times
Fifth time later
Been in the hospital
Been in mental hospital
Now retired
Done my travelling
For the time being
More later
Done my phone calls
Wait for phone to ring…
Sunday hymns
On the radio uplifting

Done my work
Take a break
Got to carry on
Sick in the sink
Better rest
Now better and going on
Two pans of boiled lentils
Half way through them
No wonder I was sick
Civvy shoes on
Time for a snooze

Moving On
By Norma

I have just moved house and oh what a strain
Wrapping and packing and undoing it all again
Remembering where the cups are for that vital cup of tea
Amidst a heap of boxes as far as the eye can see
If it could go wrong or missing...well of course it usually did
And during the upheaval, I tried to get rid,
Rid of stuff to charity I haven’t used for years.
Looking at belongings reduced me to tears

But now I am settling down at my new address
I’m glad I went through it all, I have to confess
A new start and I hope a new me
Because this time I want to break the mould and feel free
Free of all the previous ways I hope to leave behind
Unfortunately, this does not apply to my over-worked worried mind
Thanks to some constants it isn’t all bad
Like my patient core of true friends, who make me feel glad.
It would be too easy to sit down and be sad
So a big Thank You to my friends I send
As Bugs Bunny would say, “That’s All Folks”

DANCE NIGHT
by Isolde

Clove of Garlic, forked Adder tongue
Stinging Nettle leaf, old web that’s clung
Shredded wool and plucked badger hair,
Pinch of compost and one goose feather

Ground up, shredded, pureed or crushed
Noxious ingredients turned to powdery dust,
From pestle into witch’s caldron they are sifted,
Spoken over and stirred so coffin lids can be lifted

For just one October night the dead will rise
And mingle with trick or treaters in disguise
Of ancient Pagan prophecy these are unaware
So admire life-like costumes at which they stare
Masquerading at the midnight ball is a gruesome cast
The dead will dance with partners long since past
Mummies with decayed cadavers waltz and loom
Banshee's swirl while skeletons skip about the room
THE CHRISTMAS FAIRY  by Irene

High up at the top of the Christmas tree
The little fairy stood
With golden hair and sparkling wings
She really did look good.

But the little fairy caught a cold
She said "Oh help me please!
I've got such a terrible itchy nose
I think I'm going to sneeze,
I mustn't sneeze, I'll shake the tree
The decorations too.
Oh dear, I cannot help it,
Atchoo! Atchoo! Atchoo! "

The Christmas tree began to shake
The tinsel, lights and all
And up at the top the fairy cried
"Oh no! I'm going to fall!"

She slipped from her branch at the top of the tree
She broke her wings as she fell
She tried to hold on to the tinsel
But she pulled it down as well.

The Christmas tree looked a sorry sight
And the fairy sobbed on the floor
When suddenly she heard a noise
And Santa came through the door.

Gently he picked up the fairy
And noticed her broken wings
Quickly he opened up his sack
And searched through all the things.

"Now " he said in a kindly voice
"I think that these will do.
A beautiful pair of silver wings,
A Christmas gift for you."

Then Santa fixed the Christmas tree
He put everything to right
And once again that little tree
Looked a lovely sight.

High up at the top of the Christmas tree
The little fairy stood
With golden hair and sparkling wings
She really did look good.

THE DARE  by ISOLDE

A playground taunt was how it began,
They wondered if I'd be too scared.
Denying this, boasting "Course I Can"
Didn't bother me what they'd dared.

"You won't last the whole night through,
Locked in the upstairs school room."
Everyone agreed this had to be true
And would likely spell my doom.

Recess over, so back inside we trudge
Upstairs for the last class of my day
Lining up, from behind me comes a nudge,
Better find a place to hide right away

What's so different in there at night?
Same place with shadows here and there.
I'd jump out of the cleaner's closet – I might
And give the poor man an awful scare.

I stayed hidden til he'd done each chore
And locked me in the upstairs science lab
Could there be anything so totally fab?

Sifting through window panes like a phantom aura,
Light from outdoors casts an eerie gloom,
Revealing all sorts of dead fauna and flora,
Displayed in cabinets throughout the room.

As I gaze at sea shells, old bones, horns and hooves,
Shark teeth, fly wings and porcupine quills,
Among these objects there's one that moves.
It shifts by itself and I get the chills.

"That didn't just happen" I try telling myself
Then I hear rattles rattling on classroom doors
And as more objects fly aloft from each shelf,
There is something pulling out desk drawers.

Bunsen burners spurt and turn into fiery flairs
And the room has suddenly grown much colder
While transfixed by the sight of weirdly floating chairs
I feel a creepy presence lightly brush my shoulder.

Whooshing noises swarm and whirl all around
I'd scream or shout but I can barely breathe
Then stillness, nothing, silence, not a sound
Is the poltergeist gone? Did it really leave?
One final click, like a lock turned by an unseen key
Slowly the lab door creeks, swings and opens wide
“What the heck am I waiting for? Right, that’s me.”
I’m off, down the stairs, pull the bar and run outside
At home, I didn’t let my family see I’d had a fright
I rushed to my room to hide under the duvet covers
“Eyes wide open, listening intently the rest of the night
At school tomorrow what would I tell all the others?”

Getting my courage up, I go to school the following day
Earlier than usual, I slip upstairs going you know where
Shocked to see everything is nice and tidy in there.
At recess, I swore my story was actually really true
You would have been scared out of your wits” I swear.
“So who else is not afraid to stay up there?” I dare.

THAT WAS ONCE UPON A TIME  by Stephen

There came a bright light
“What was that?”
“You have just been born”.
“Oh, and what am I”.
“You are a human child”.
“Oh and who are you?”
“We are your parents, and you’ll learn all there is to know from us”.
Then the child was shown a globe.
“What’s this?” asked the child.

“This is the world, your world, it’s called Earth, and it’s where you are, where you come from”.

And the child was handed the world.
“Oh!” said the child in wonder. “And what’s all this blue?”
“That’s the sea, and that’s all the land”
“And what are all those lines across the land?” asked the child.
“’They are the borders between one country and the next, and this is your country here” said the child’s parents, pointing at the globe.

The child often picked up the globe, turning it round and round in wonder, looking at all the different countries, some big, some small. And the child began to wonder about the other countries, especially the one next to the child’s own country.

“Who lives there?” the child asked.
“Our enemies live there” the child’s parents said.
“Why are they our enemies?” asked the child.
“Because once upon a time, long ago, the people in that country had a fight with the people in this country” answered the child’s parents.
“Long ago” repeated the child.
“Yes, long ago” the child’s parents said again.
“Oh” said the child, thoughtfully.

And the child often thought about this, and began to wonder what the enemy looked like.
One day, the child, holding the world in his hands, walked towards the border. When the child reached the border there was no line! And the land the other side of the border was just the same as the land on the child’s side of the border. The child looked from side to side, and behind, before carefully stepping over the border into the country where the enemy lived. Then, there in front of the child, stood another human child!

“Hello” said the child.
“Hello” said the other human child back.
“Are you my enemy?” asked the child.
“Well, my parents said that I was” said the other child.

“Yes, my parents told me you were too” said the child.
“Well, you don’t look like an enemy, you look just the same as me” said the child.

“Yes, we do look the same don’t we, although you do sound a bit different to me, and your skin is a different colour to mine, but you are a human child, that’s for sure” answered the other child.
“And so are you” the child said back.
“My parents told me that we are enemies because your people and our people had a fight, once upon a time, a long time ago” said the child.
“Yes, my parents told me that too” answered the other child.
“Well, I don’t feel that I want to have a fight with you now” said the child.
“No, neither do I” answered the other child.

And the two human children smiled at one another and began to play and laugh together as though there was no difference between them, sometimes they played on one side of the border, and sometimes on the other as if it wasn’t there.

It was nearly time for the children to go home to their parents and back to their own countries. Before they parted, the child picked up his globe and showed it to the other child saying “Look, this is the world, it’s our world”.

“Ooh”, said the other child in wonder.
“See these lines, they are the borders between countries like yours and mine. When I grow up and have a child, before I pass the world onto it I’m going to rub out all the lines on it” said the child.

“That’s a good idea” said the other child.

And the two children, facing one another, held the world in their hands.

There came a bright light
“What was that?”

“You have just been born”.

“Oh, and what’s this?” asked the child.

“This is our world, your world, it’s called Earth” said the child’s parent, handing the child the globe, “and it’s where you come from”.

Nothing more was said, and the child was left to wonder at its wonderful world where all the other human children came from and lived too.

WHAT IS HAPPINESS? by Billie

There are so many descriptions about the word happiness, but I don’t think that they are related to the main thing: the inner balance, the inner happiness no matter what goes wrong in our lives. This inner happiness can’t be stolen by somebody else and it is ours. It is really hard to reach this feeling of inner happiness and harmony, but once it happens then no matter what happens to our lives, bad or good, we can be sure that we will be fine and in harmony with ourselves. Herewith I will show you the steps, which I take in times of worry in order to re-establish my inner peace.

1. Have a good cry (there is no shame to cry, a lot worse is to hide the problem)
2. Practice yoga, walk (yoga helps not only the body, but the mind as well)
3. Meditate (I started to meditate and I can assure you it has a profound positive impact on me)
4. Watch feel-good movies (laughing heals)
5. Read spiritual text (inspiring)
6. Be creative (write, paint, decorate)

All of the things above make me happier almost instantly when I am alone. So my main happiness boosters are creativity, exercise, self-care and laughter. They move me from feeling the funk, to seeing things differently and helping me begin again.

And from this stronger perspective then I can feel solid enough to surround myself consciously with happier people. I can attend online spiritual communities (this works for me, as I live remotely) and enjoy the company of like-minded people. Because, as I really feel supported, loved, and nurtured by happier people, they not only lift me up but allow me to shine my light brighter.

So another key to happiness besides surrounding yourself with happier people is thinking less about yourself – and more about others. This is my point of view for creating happiness but feel free to share your opinion. I will be happy to discuss whatever is of interest for you.

Best wishes from me and remember
Your happiness depends only on you!!
“Falling for My Dream Man”  
by Betty

It was just a trip to the shopping mall, nothing out of the ordinary for me to be doing on a day out. I have my favorite shops there but I particularly enjoy browsing through the many departments of the posh multi-level Broadway Department Store situated at one end of the massive mall complex. I always take my time having a look around, checking it all out floor by floor, gradually working my way up to the upper most using the store’s escalators. The top floor had just two departments: kitchenalia and furniture. The later was a maze of beautiful sample bedrooms, dining rooms and the like. Shoppers were often seen wandering among the luxurious displays, dreaming about designing the interiors of their real or imaginary southwestern adobe ranchettes or gated townhouses with furnishings from The Broadway. Sigh…. This day, I’d made the rounds and was ready to explore my final destination. Stepping onto the escalator, looking above me with pleasant expectation, I noticed there was a middle-aged gentleman standing at the top. He was looking towards the furniture department. I chuckled to myself, thinking that if he was waiting for his wife to emerge from that captivating fantasy world, it wouldn’t be anytime too soon. It was a fair distance between floors and the escalator moved at a slow steady pace, giving me plenty of time to observe him. Nicely dressed in an embroidered grey suit coat traditionally worn by upper class Hispanic men, he reminded me of a distinguished estate owner who had travelled over the border from Mexico in order to stage a shopping excursion of some magnitude in an upscale shopping centre like this one. He certainly seemed to be fixated on whatever was of interest to him on the other side of the escalator shaft. This would not have mattered to me except that he was standing right in front of the escalator landing where I was headed. As I slowly approached, it was becoming more and more apparent to me that when I arrived there, he would be directly in my way.

About midway up the escalator I realized I’d better prepare myself for an awkward disembarking. For, unless he noticed me soon, we were bound to collide. I tried to remember the right words in Spanish to excuse oneself when needing to gain the right of way in an encounter or in this case, having to physically push past someone to gain access to somewhere. I said to myself, “Con permiso. Por favor. Necesito conseguir más allá de usted.” (English translation: Excuse me. Please. I need to get past you). Meanwhile, I detected no awareness on his part of my advancing presence. A short distance below him, within ear shot, I spoke my prepared Spanish phrases, “Con permiso. Por favor. Necesito conseguir más allá de usted.” He gave no indication that he’d heard me so I said the same thing but louder. Still no response! Drawing nearer to him by the second, in my growing desperation, I fairly yelled the words the third time. Denada—nothing.

I had arrived. Nothing left but to turn my shoulder towards him and brace myself for impact. Four - three – two …… I squinted my eyes shut in that natural reflex action you have when expecting to bodily bash into something or someone. In that fleeting moment I felt no obstacle hit me, only myself toppling forward into empty space. Instantly opening my eyes, I saw there was nobody there. Sprawled on the floor in a state of bewilderment, I let out a scream which sent the two ladies in kitchenalia running to my assistance. Naturally they thought I’d miscalculated my footing coming off the escalator and taken a tumble. Their attempts to assist me were met with my vague gestures of dismissal as I scrambled over to the parallel descending escalator hoping to see him going down. There was absolutely no one aboard it. As the ladies endeavored to manoeuvre me to a nearby guest bench, they were bombarded by my hysterical questions. “Where is he? Where did he go? Didn’t you see him?”

I must have appeared to be in a state of shock and out of my wits. The ladies were going to call emergency services but I had a different plan in mind. Extricating myself from their supportive grasp, I ran hither and thither throughout the two departments looking for the Spanish gent. Not finding him, I rushed down the escalator and proceeded to search that level. And so it went until I had covered the whole store. I gave the rest of the shopping centre a go as well but did not see him anywhere. By now Mall Security was keeping an eye on me and were doubtless relieved when I finally left the complex. I drove out of the mall’s parking lot and went home, the whole time going over and over in my mind what at happened. So strange. I kept trying to reason it out but in the end there was simply no satisfactory explanation. One
moment he was there and a split second later he was not. Plus, I had watched him for ages as the escalator slowly chugged its steps upwards. He seemed so real at the time.

No amount of examination after the fact was going to provide practical answers. After considerable thought and talking with friends, I finally accepted that I’d experienced something along the lines of a paranormal phenomenon. I’d learned with some research into the history of the area that the mall stood on what had previously been a Spanish Mission, complete with tall watch tower situated approximately where the Broadway’s escalators sit no. Was the gentleman a figure from the past who was watching from that tower, looking out on the desert beyond the mission walls? Maybe. Guess I’ll never know.

PET FISHES by Colyn

I KEEP FISH AS A HOBBY. LIKE MOST HOBBIES, IT IS RELAXING, ENJOYABLE, EDUCATIONAL, REWARDING, FUN, SATISFYING, THERAPEUTIC AND COSTLY.

But what sets an Aquarist apart from all other hobbyists?

Well take gardening, assuming you consider it a hobby and not a chore. What can be more pleasant than sitting in the sun drinking a cool drink, smelling the honeysuckle, other flowers and the cut grass, watching the birds find the grubs and worms you have disturbed or the butterflies and bumblebees fluttering and buzzing from blossoms to blooms after just mowing the lawn and tidying up the borders? Well it’s not always sunny or even daytime or maybe you are feeling a bit off or simply not in the mood. Similar can be said of fishing, photography, bird watching, walking, sports, the list is almost if not endless. Not that any of these activities can’t be enjoyed or even enhanced by the rain, wind, snow, frost, different seasons and light.

But I hear you say, there are lots of indoor hobbies too. True. There’s darts, painting, computer activities, chess, cards, reading, arty things, cooking / baking, TV, music, modeling, writing, games, quiz’s etc, etc, etc. Yes that’s true but don’t they all require some degree of concentration and or activity? Think of all the hobbies you can. I got to 125 and decided that it was pointless, endless and arbitrary unless it happened to be your hobby. Now imagine you have not slept for three, four or five nights in a row, you can’t concentrate or think straight, your mind is jumping from subject to subject, you don’t know the day or time, your vision is blurred, you have a buzzing in your ears, you are being sick every now and then, you’re shaking a bit, you have no balance, you’re very apprehensive and anxious, upset and perhaps hallucinating. Now think of all the hobbies you could or want to take part in or even do. The list is now very, very short indeed.

But it does not matter with fish keeping. You can stand, dance, kneel, sit or lie on the floor, flop on a beanbag, seat or sofa. You don’t even need to watch them, you can listen to the water flow and the air bubbles. If you do watch them you don’t need to concentrate; there is no plot. Either way they will calm you down, cheer you up, sooth you, give you a sense of responsibility, fascinate and bewilder you.

The RAF Red Arrow display team look mere amateurs alongside five or six goldfish showing off their aquabatics or playing follow the leader or by a small shoal of guppies playing tag or a shoal of tetra doing loop the loops and barrel roles. Watching them, just play dead and follow the water flow around the tank, sometimes they just lie on the bottom with barely a movement for an hour or more, from time to time they float or swim upside down, now that’s funny.

So at any time of day or night I can’t think of another hobby that gives so much, for so little time or monies in return or requires the least amount of effort for maximum pleasure. Indeed the biggest task in keeping fish is watching them or rather not watching them.

PS – Maybe I is lazy!!
 Nobody wants black cats. There are a lot of them in here and kittens. Kittens get taken quite quickly though. I was a kitten once, seven or so years ago. They liked me and my brother then. We had to come here because they had to leave our house and wherever they were going we couldn’t go. They called my brother “Freddy” and me; you are never going to believe this! Gucci!!! If I ever get taken, IF, I hope they call me something different. I just won’t answer to Gucci and that’s final! Wonder why nobody likes black cats?

Here we go again, all these people wandering around cooing at kittens. Suppose I had better try and attract their attention…no good, straight past to some kittens. Mind you, they are pretty little things, all different colours.

What’s wrong with us black cats?

Freddy doesn’t even bother to try to attract attention. He just curls up in the back of where we sleep and only comes out at feeding time. I do try to look my best. Actually we two are the only fluffy black ones in here. The others are very sleek and shiny. Either way, it doesn’t do any of us any good cause we are black.

Hang on a minute. These two have walked straight past the kittens. Not that the kittens have noticed. They are too busy playing at rough and tumble. Freddy and me used to do that. They have stopped at a pen further along the line. Now they have gone in to the pen but I can’t see from here what colour cat is in there. He has picked it up. Yes, it’s black, shiny and sleeky. Oh, he has put it down again. Maybe he likes black cats. Wonder what she likes? Just in case, I’ll fluff myself up a bit for when they come back this way.

Heart stopping moment.

He went past but she stopped and looked at me. They are coming in! “Freddy, wake up” I urge. “They might want two.”

“Don’t care”, he growls. “Is it tea time yet?”

She has picked me up!! I’ll snuggle a bit. They are saying nice things about me and he is stroking me. Drat! She has put me down and they have gone out of our pen.

“Hey! You two! What about me?” I tried to yell after them but they were talking to the people who feed and look after us and they didn’t look back either. I’m fed up now and I am going to sulk until tea time.

Here comes breakfast. Last night I didn’t eat all my tea ‘cos I was sad. Today breakfast looks good so I will eat it all up. Besides, if I don’t, Freddy will scoff it down. The people who look after us are busy now cleaning and blethering away to each other. They are kind people and don’t seem to mind us black cats.

“Look! Look Freddy! I called. “Those two from yesterday are back and they aren’t looking around. They have gone to the place where our people go and…..they are carrying a basket. I hope it’s for us don’t you Freddy?”

Don’t care” replied Freddy “Where’s breakfast?”,

The people have come up to us.

“Freddy look, look! He has picked me up and is putting me in the basket” I said with hope. “They must like me Freddy. Don’t you think?”

“Yeah suppose so.” yawned Freddy, turning his back to us

As they carried me away, I thought it is a pity Freddy couldn’t come but he will be ok sleeping ‘til each meal time, then eating and sleeping again.

Now they are putting me in one of those big noisy things that move so I must be going with them. They are talking to me and I talk to them, all the time I was in that machine. Actually, I didn’t really like it but if it meant I was getting a new home I would put up with it.
Now I am being carried into a house. Oh no! dogs. Two of them: one biggish and one little. Just as long as they leave me alone all will be well.

These people must like black cats. I have an igloo all soft and warm up quite high but I can still jump down. And I have a beanie behind the sofa in another room. As Freddy and me had our own beds, I know about these things but we didn’t have dogs there. The little dog is the nosy one. She keeps coming out and trying to look into my igloo but she isn’t tall enough…lucky for her. The big one, doesn’t seem to care. This one is a girl dog too.

I am staying in my igloo most of the time and these two people keep coming over to me and stroking and talking to me. Maybe I should get out? Nah, I’m staying put for the time being.

I think I will like being here when I get used to everything. Freddy and me were in that other place for a long time…I hope Freddy will be ok. If only he would try harder to be nice to people. Ah well! He is his own worst enemy.

Whoopee! My new name is now Maisie. I like that so much more than Gucci. These people are very nice to me. Apparently I must stay indoors for a time in case I might get lost but I don’t mind. I have lovely food and it is nice and warm here. Maybe when it is summer I will go outside. Maybe!

Adopt a Black Cat!

Black cats are just as BEAUTIFUL as any other cat. They DO NOT bring bad luck and they NEED to be loved just the same!

THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE ARE RESCUED

by Isolde

It was a very cold winter’s night with temperatures dropping below zero but for some reason we had decided to make a trip by car up a few block to the corner store. My brother and I piled into the backseat of the Ford and Mother drove. Off we went over the quiet snow-packed street, not too concerned because in Denver, winter snow tyres were allowed and a must in weather like this.

I loved looking at the winter wonderland in our neighbourhood: icicles dangling in rows from roof overhangs, tiny sparkles glinting on snow-covered front lawns, snow piled on either side of walkways and driveways, and street lamps creating circular spotlights with darkness outside their parameters.

So while I was busy studying everything passing by as I gazed out the window of the car, I suddenly noticed a medium-sized white dog treading across deep snow on a side street. I brought this to Mom’s attention and asked if she would stop the car so I could try and rescue it. She obliged and off I went after a slow moving, obviously exhausted old doggie. When I reached for him, he collapsed into the snow as if he couldn’t take another step.

I carried him back to the car. I don’t remember if we went home or carried on to the store but back home we warmed his frozen little paws and we watched him gobble down some dog food as if there was no tomorrow. Afterwards, nestled in a wicker basket and tucked in a wool blanket, he was off to sleep in no time; snoring his little old man’s snore.

I do remember how happy this dog’s owners were when we contacted them. Their old Beagle “Charlie” had been missing for a week and they had given up hope of ever finding him. They wrote a short piece that appeared in the newspaper, commending me as “a little girl with a big heart”. Mother seemed very proud of me when she read this. And to top it off, I received a letter from Charlie’s family with a five dollar bill enclosed as my reward. Amazing for a seven year old like me!
PERFORMANCE

Write-On member Joy has written a two thumbs-up review of Thriller, the stage and video spectacular celebrating the wonderful music of one of the greatest entertainers of modern times, Michael Jackson, who we sadly lost 25th June 2009. A musical celebration featuring the hit songs of Michael Jackson and The Jackson 5, the show has mind-blowing choreography and brilliant vocal performances as Jackson's amazing songs and videos are brought to life on stage. A full company of 40 performers including singers, dancers, a gospel choir and live band put on an incredible show, with over two hours of back to back hit songs including I Want You Back, I'll Be There, Rock With You, She's Out of My Life, Billie Jean and Earth Song.

In Joy’s own words: I’ve always been a fan of Michael Jackson’s music, so when I learnt that the show Thriller was to be staged at the Eden Court theatre in Inverness, a ticket had to be purchased. The performance began predictably with the early songs sung by the Jackson Five. But it was as Michael’s material as a solo artist was performed, it registered with me that 3 men and a woman were required in the show to do justice to the full vocal range in his songs. It was undoubtedly the dance routines which impressed and excited me most, as I’ve never seen such perfect synchronised movement. Watching the dancers was like seeing multiples of the same person move. It was extraordinarily brilliant. The musicians playing the accompaniment to the songs and dancing were actually on stage behind a screen and we the audience were unaware of this until practically the end of the first half of the show. When the graveyard dance routine for Thriller was performed on stage, a man a couple of rows in front of me was up on his feet joining in and he had all the correct moves. He was having such a jolly time that rather than being a distraction his enthusiasm added to the enjoyment. The man who sang and did the iconic routine to Billy Jean as the encore to conclude the show, did justice to Michael Jackson. I could have happily sat through the whole show for a second time the following evening!

Joy has also written a review of Halloween Fright Nights on Ness Islands. Originally scheduled for late October but due to heavy rains causing the islands to be waterlogged that month, the event had to be re-scheduled for the 28th and 29th of November. The event included a 1300 metre circuit around the islands. This year’s show had a distinctly Scottish theme; with a number of famous ghosts returning to Inverness for Homecoming including Robert the Bruce and his Spider; Mary Queen of Scots; Bonny Prince Charlie; Tam O’ Shanter; Rabbie Burns and Alexander "Sawney" Bean. Over 100 performers from the Eden Court CREATIVE programme and the creative talents of Arts in Motion, Limelights and The Highland Council’s Lighting Department brought the ghosts to life.

Here is Joy’s experience: I went to the islands with my family not knowing quite what to expect. It was dark, but we could see lighting as we walked towards the footbridge to get onto the islands, which are wooded - mist was rising from the river, it was atmospheric. An arrow on a tree pointed the direction we were to take along the footpath. What we saw was groups of people in costume acting out ghoulish events most being Scots in origin. Amongst the various acts there was the 3 witches from Macbeth; Robert the Bruce consorting with a spider; the beheading of Mary, Queen of Scots - this I didn’t watch but preferred to stand behind my son-in-law to obscure my view; Burke and Hare the Edinburgh grave robbers were represented. An enormous web had been constructed between 2 tree trunks and several people in spider costumes were lurking. Two people had a large toy spider suspended by string from a rod, which they kept swinging above the head of spectators. A small girl became very disturbed by the spiders, while my grandson was more intent on grabbing one for a closer inspection. It was the largish group of people wearing full skeleton costumes and dancing who I found the most effective, as they milled amongst the public and folk found this unnerving, they moved away. It took us nearly an hour to walk round the islands, moving from one performance to the next. I thought the event had been rather well thought out and it would have been a shame if it had been totally cancelled.
**One Summer at Deer’s Leap**

Authored by Elizabeth Elgin  
Published by Harper Collins  
Paperback Original 1999  
ISBN: 0 00651051 5  

**REVIEW by Pam P.**

Like quite a few of Elizabeth Elgin’s books this one touches on supernatural  
I don’t know why I was drawn to this book as I usually read Plantagenet and Tudor history. Maybe it was the handsome pilot on the book cover, can you really fall in love with a ghost! This is a story of cherished love that never dies.  
Cassie Johns is a budding writer and is invited by her Editor’s sister to a fancy dress party at her home Deer’s Leap. She gives a lift to a young man dressed in RAF uniform but he does not show up at the party. Cassie learns from the owners of Deer’s Leap that fifty years ago an RAF plane crashed nearby and a young milkmaid who lived there was in love with pilot.  
If you start reading this book you must finish it, there are three parts to it. This book came with me every time I went into Raigmore Hospital and that was quite a few times.

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**Shit Happens So Get Over It: Good Advice for Bad Times**

Review by Maureen

Published by Summersdale Publ.Ltd.  
Hardback Original 2011  
ISBN: 978-1-84953-132-0

This collection of quotes is perfect for when I need some inspirational words to pick me up. If you have the blues feeling like life is getting you down, I’ll bet this little book has something in it that will bring a smile back to you face and help you gain a positive outlook. Don’t let the title put you off. The quotes are anything but toilet humour.

Anyone who owns a dog (or several dogs) will appreciate the humour and witty observations. Every page makes you say "That's so true!". Having been a follower on Facebook of "Off the Leash", I decided to treat myself to a copy of the book. It is absolutely brilliant - I haven't laughed so much in ages. If you have ever owned a dog, you must read this book as it is so true to life.

**Review by Isolde**

**Off The Leash**

**Author:** Rupert Fawcett  
**Format:** Cartoons with captions.  
**Hardcover:** 158 pages  
**Publisher:** Boxtree  
(10 Oct. 2013)  
**ISBN-10:** 1447250842  
**ISBN-13:** 978-1447250845
It's A Wonderful Life

REVIEW by Graeme

It is the only film I've seen that has the audience showing a mixture of tears and applause at the end of every screening.

With the festive season soon just a fading memory, I thought this was the best film to review. I'd never had the pleasure of seeing this film until I started working at Eden Court. Since then, it has been an annual trip to see this classic.

Best seen on the big screen in its original black and white, Frank Capra’s, It’s A Wonderful Life is the ultimate ‘feel-good’ film.

The film stars James Stewart as George Bailey, a man who has given up his dreams in order to help others and whose imminent suicide on Christmas Eve brings about the intervention of his guardian angel, Clarence O'dbody (Henry Travers). Clarence shows George all the lives he has touched and how different life in his community of Bedford Falls would be had he never been born.

On its release in 1947 it did not succeed at the Box Office but is now a Christmas favourite in cinemas and households everywhere. If you have not seen this film yet, when next December comes, get yourself a ticket or if you need a pick me up, just buy it in the shops or online.

It’s A Wonderful Life is a wonderful film.

‘The Illusionist’

Directed by: Sylvain Chomet
Cast: Jean-Claude Donda, Eilidh Rankin
Running Time: 79 minutes

Sylvain Chomet’s The Illusionist, the film opening the 2010 Edinburgh International Film Festival, puts a vision of Edinburgh, and rural Scotland on screen like no other.

The Illusionist is a wondrous, poetic piece of animation. The product of five years' work in an animation studio, this is an exquisite portrayal of Edinburgh and Scotland. Set in 1950s Edinburgh and the Western Isles, locations depicted in the animated feature include Princes Street, The Balmoral Hotel, Broughton Place, George Street, Arthur’s Seat and Oban.

The film is based on an unproduced script written by French mime, director and actor Jacques Tati in 1956. The plot revolves around a struggling illusionist who visits an isolated community and meets a young lady who is convinced that he is a real magician.
“Said” is the past tense verb that usually appears in dialogues between characters in stories and poems. Using it over and over can be a bit boring for the reader.

There are hundreds of verbs besides “said” that can give the character’s words more descriptive accuracy by expressing the situation the character is in while speaking and the emotion he or she is feeling at that moment.

To give you a clearer idea of how this might work, let’s take 10 alternative words for “said” (mumbled, remarked, reminded, announced, moaned, scolded, grumbled, whispered, exclaimed and beamed) and incorporate them in that order into a story, a true story by the way, that actually happened to Isolde.

**Clink Thud**

“Gosh, my hands are numb.” I mumbled through half frozen lips. I pushed the barn door open and went in and pushed it back shut to keep out the cold wind. The scent of dry grass from the bales stacked within made the place seem like a nice place to get in out of the winter weather. “Hum, this isn't half bad,” I remarked to myself. I sat down on one of the bales. I looked at my watch to check how close it was getting to when the ferry would arrive. “Mustn't miss it” I reminded myself. Most likely with the wind getting stronger by the minute, further crossings would be cancelled.

Just then there was a clink thud sound which momentarily caught my attention. Thinking it was someone like me wanting to escape the wind, I announced, “Come on in. It's open”. But no one replied. Curious as to whether anyone was out there, I walked over to peep out a crack in the barn door. Nobody there. I decided while I was there I'd open the door a bit to see the ferry's progress across the channel. But….No matter how hard I pushed, the door would not budge. “Oh No! I'm locked in!” I moaned.

Giving my situation some thought, it suddenly occurred to me why I was trapped inside the barn. With the strong gusts of wind hitting it, the barn door had been rattling. This was because it was hung from a track above and consequently didn't quite touch the ground. That “clink thud” sound I’d heard earlier was the vertical pipe bolt dropping down into the corresponding hole in the ground. Foolishly, I'd neglected to turn the pipe handle and secure it in its keeper in the upright position. “You are such an idiot.” I scolded myself. I considered yelling for help but who would hear me? The wind would drown me out. Besides it was an embarrassing situation.

I simply had to get out of the barn before the ferry docked. Kneeling down onto my knees and reaching under the door, I found the pipe. Pinching it between my fingers, I wiggled it and discovered I could raise it out of the hole but how to keep it there? Searching about, I found a long flat headed screwdriver and a hammer. I managed to hoist the pipe up and slip the head of the screwdriver underneath it. I positioned the hammer's handle crosswise under the screwdriver to make a lever. Pushing down on the butt of the screwdriver, the pipe rose to where I thought it would be in line with the keeper slot. Painstakingly I twisted the pipe around and hoped it would hold. Nope. It crashed back down. Clink thud. “Damn” I grumbled.

This result repeated itself several times with precious minutes ticking by before the ferry would arrive. I kept at it. Perfecting my technique with each attempt, I thought I'd finally got the pipe handle to rest on top of its keeper. As I gingerly removed my lever tools, the pipe stayed up. I whispered “Thank Heavens.” Straightening up, I carefully shoved against the door. As it begrudgingly screeched open, I expected the pipe bolt to drop any second. When there was just enough room for me to slide through, I hurried outside and exclaimed with relief, “Free at last!”

I shut the barn door and released the pipe bolt. Clink-thud, a familiar sound by now. Never mind. Feeling happy with myself for rescuing myself, by myself, I cheerfully beamed “Hello” to the other passengers as we boarded the ferry. I’m sure they couldn’t figure out why I was so happy on such a miserable day.
Now it is your turn to give it a go. We invite you to create some interesting dialogue using all ten verbs listed below. Put them in any order you choose. Don’t worry. It’s still ok to use good old reliable “said” here and there. We look forward to featuring what you come up with, in our up-coming issues. If you are entering the challenge competition, please specify that your story or poem is intended for this when you send it to our editors.

Replied, Answered, Agreed, Offered, Recalled, Asked, Remarked, Sighed, Added, Chuckled

How about a challenge to put your own writing skills to the test? To add a wee bit of spice to the game, we will offer a £15 book voucher for the story that our editors agree displays the best and most creative use of all 10 of the alternative words to “said” listed above in red. Please send entries in before the next issue comes out. Go on! You know you want to.

The Submission Due Date for the Next Issue is 31st March

With the winter in full swing and the dark days & nights, now is the perfect time to get stuck into a new writing project. We are looking for more short story submissions so why not give it a try and see where it leads. In the past The Highlands has been a popular location for fiction / non-fiction. From Sylvain Chomet’s *The Illusionist* to Compton Mackenzie’s *Whiskey Galore* and more, The Highlands is an evocative, unique & dramatic setting to colour your story. And for us residents, it’s always nice to identify with places you are reading about! Have a think. You could put your stories together with some drawings or photographs to help set the scene. We hope you can draw some inspiration from this but if you have unrelated ideas we would love to include your work whatever form it may take.

We hope you continue to enjoy Write On & Keep the ink flowing!!!

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Happy New Year