

Don't Forget Anonymous

BY HAZEL EDWARDS OAM

“ The support of peers matters. Mentoring matters. Authentic literature matters for readers and for writers.”

Not many of us reach 95.

But the Society of Women Writers has always been supported by the generously shared skills of writers, to reach 95 productive years of Herstory.

It's the oldest women writers' group in Australia.

Virginia Woolf's 500 (pounds) a year and a room of your own is often quoted as money and space prerequisites for a female writer. Woolf was married to her publisher, came from an affluent family and could socialise with skilled peers who had time to read. Not typical.

Today's 'Ginia might be a single parent with dependants, renting, working on contract or freelance gigs, who writes into the night and has bills to pay, today. English may not be her first language. She may be part of a minority culture which gives her rich writing material, but... 'getting by' is her participant observation research. She's probably coped with being different and the ability to write has kept her sane or at least enabled her to adjust. As long as her internet works.

Or 'Ginia2, qualified as a lawyer, which is always useful when intellectual property issues arise. She can pay bills while writing outside the legally 'chargeable minutes'. Still faces conflicted values and feels guilty about taking time to write from other obligations.

'Ginia 3 is a retired poet. Retired age-wise, but continues to love crafting words and tackling social issues.

Self-employed, small business of one, 'Ginia 4 makes a living as a longterm, genre author.

Their aim is the same. To capture in words significant stories.

Early female writers had even greater challenges than today's pandemic lockdowns. Multi-tasking wasn't the label then, but they still coped with domesticity, earning a living and writing. So the technical and occasional financial support of other literary women helped during rejection times when all writers doubt their worth. The support of peers matters. Mentoring matters. Authentic literature matters for readers and for writers. Memoirs. Biographies, But also inspirational stories of idea pioneers.

In earlier times, the SWW was one of the few ways that women interested in literary ideas could meet. Some travelled a long way to the meetings. They treasured the newsletters and journals. Even now, online information about how others manage comparable writerly lives, is vital. Geographic isolation can be overcome.

Often the best writing comes from extreme experience, and that's hard if you have a family, health or money problems.

Some early women writers married or partnered male authors. Often they wrote the commercially viable, did the childcare and the domestics, while their partner 'mused' on literary matters or was the public face. Occasionally it was an equal partnership. But when the writing became the obsessive lover, some divorced.

Another reliable income was vital. Wealthy fathers were a genetic gamble, supportive husbands required emotional exchange, female literary partners might be more understanding. But the self confidence which came from writing work of value which was acknowledged was not always accompanied by sufficient money to live.

Important to recognise are the 'committee' women who kept an organisation such as SWW functioning. Often the 'admin' time was taken from their own writing.

Let's celebrate the work of the significant women writers while not forgetting ANONYMOUS. She wrote a lot.

But the other variation of ANONYMOUS is the partner, early adopter or hidden worker who enabled the 'famous' one to be acknowledged. Or the women who published or performed the work of others.

And many of them have been part of the SWW 95th history. The hidden as well as the visible writers who have contributed intellectual property to our culture and enabled others to solve problems or see from another viewpoint or be entertained. And let's encourage those stories to cross over into new mediums via entrepreneurial visionaries.

Autobiographies or biographies of atypical, adventurous women are important inspiration for youth. Male and female. Let's have fewer 'misery memoirs' and more inspirational writing in fiction or fact about our 'heroes', the role model females in engineering, medicine, invention, design, countrylife and small business, who have inspired others.

And let's acknowledge ANONYMOUS writers whose work has inspired and sustained us.

Hazel Edwards OAM is the Patron of the Society of Women Writers (Victoria). She's also known for her classic picture book '*There's a Hippopotamus on our Roof Eating Cake*' (Puffin) celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2020. '*Complete Your Book in a Year*' (BookPod) is just out as a result of pandemic closure of face-to-face workshops, and features strategies plus mentored Hazelnuts. Currently, Hazel's adult mystery with an asexual celebrant sleuth '*Wed then Dead on the Ghan*' is being adapted with co-writer Geoffrey Wright as a screenplay for ABC.

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Photo: (left) Errol Broome, former Patron of the SWW (Victoria), and (right) Hazel Edwards OAM, current Patron of SWW (Victoria).