

EVERYDAY INSPIRATION

Writing from Workshops Facilitated by
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Josephine Butler College
Writer in Residence 2023

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Thank You All

Louise Powell

To you busy students and even busier retirees who took time out of your lives to take part in Creative Writing workshops at Josephine Butler College and Waddington Street URC during my post as Writer-in-Residence 2023.

For obediently pulling neighbours out of your memories and sparkly hairbands out of bags; for making characters out of pictures from Take a Break magazine. For brewing me cups of black tea, and forgiving me when I accidentally smashed an empty one into smithereens, and accepting my replacement with the graceful comment, 'this will always remind me of your residency'.

I hope this pamphlet will bring to mind those times we spent together at Josephine Butler College and Waddington Street URC, when you put your pens to paper and your trust in me, and wrote beautiful monologues, short stories, flash fiction and poetry.

I consider it a privilege to have worked with such talented writers, and I want you all to know that your openness, kindness and creativity has proved just as inspirational to me as I hope my workshops were to you. Thank you all.

December 2023

A Visit to Stanley Crook

Barbara Tinsley

An old miner is standing in front of Co-Operative Terrace in Stanley Crook, County Durham. Standing next to him is a middle-aged woman whose great-grandfather used to live in the Terrace.

MINER:

Eh, lass, so this is where your great grandfather used to live, old Billy Slater, I knew him you know, used to work with him at Roddymoor Pit – nice chap, hard-working, quiet, kept himself to himself, but friendly. Teetotal, his people were Salvation Army, brother played trombone in the Sally Army band.

Wouldn't think it to look at me but I'm 93, air up here keeps you feeling young. Good air up here, has a kind of sweetness in it, fresh and clean. Air blows across the valley, being so high up. No cars in Billy's day, we walked to Roddymoor Pit and back – walked down to Crook and back, got used to it – buses few and far between. People got cars now, go to Bishop Auckland to do their shopping. No shops left in the valley, used to be three shops once – as well as the Co-op and two pubs – all gone now but people still want to live here. Two families came up from London and the shop on the end's been turned into a house, holiday cottage, chap from Bradford rents it out. They say more people are buying property here, for holiday cottages.

We saved the village lass, saved it from demolition – was a Category D Village once, but someone clever from the village wrote a lot of letters to the council and newspapers got hold of the story. People put notices in the windows, 'Save Our Village' and we had meetings and the village was saved.

Our old schoolteacher, Miss Fisher, right strict she was but fair, loved poetry she did. Said the view across to Crook and beyond reminded her of a poem, "Blue Remembered Hills". She used to make us chant it, louder we chanted it, better she liked it, you could hear us out in the street.

I see your great Grandad's house is up for sale and you say you never knew him, died before you were born. Young when he died – only 61, collapsed at top of hill walking down from Crook. Kept goats he did, a Nanny and a Billy – on account of the milk, his wife was delicate, couldn't take cow's milk. Woman in the village now, bit of a hippy type, teacher at a college, she keeps goats, sells milk to a posh shop in Stanhope.

You might buy the house you think? Funny, something of your Grandad might still be there, an eyelash even. Once you live in the village, you'll never leave it, you'll never go away, it gets you. So many families here, lived here for generations.

Buy the house, keep it in the family. Think about it, aye think on lass, you'll not regret it, the village'll thank you. You're family, you see.

Cities

Marcus Hargis

Cities, like plants, need warmth to grow. Buildings on their own, placed on concrete flattened with bedrock, are but scaffold. It is human ingenuity, congruity, and community—weaving through the steel-reinforced wicker framework—that animates. Beneath the surface, like mycelium linking mushrooms, are interconnecting roots transferring life and liquidity.

Where settlements are cold, even in hot climates, those roots are shallow. Among their own kind, own colleagues, own nationalities, they starve the city of connectivity. The buildings, overcrowded as they are, stand empty when neighbour does not link with neighbour; not just ‘people like us’ but ‘people not like us who happen to live in close proximity’.

Where people are thrown on top of each other, as we in tower blocks are, roots have to start metres above before they can grow down to ground level, like a banyan tree. But such roots are especially vulnerable. Something as sharp as an ill-timed word can sever these foundational shoots. So we try to curtail the tongue, accepting neighbourly gifts of food, non-specifically offering to help (hoping that the offer will never be taken up.) Short, truncated pot-bound roots may be as sweet and savoury as the ethnic dishes offered, but rarely go further than cordiality.

We were here first, the block that is, with classic contemporary living to appeal to the aspiring added more recently on the ideological ground that more mixing of housing stock is a good thing—and so it is if people actually mixed together. In reality, I in my elevated cramped position look over the spacious rears and gardens of those who want nothing to do with me. These are the upwardly mobile young who I only ever see at a weekend after their hard week’s commuting to The City. Outwardly perfect couples with their apparently normal children do and have what they think everyone else does and has in their gardens: weatherproof furniture, chairs, table, sofa, gazebo; trampoline, always up but rarely used; barbecue fired up for late-night dinner parties under bare-bulb garden lighting that illuminates all and reveals nothing. For all their triple glazing, underfloor heating, woodburning stoves and bonhomie, there is little warmth down there amid the homogeneity.

Forgive me for my attitude of superiority, for such are the scissors that slice. I try not to look down, metaphorically, on anyone. It's like living at height, I get used to a certain altitude and I need to remain grounded. So, that's what I do; I walk out of the block, around the block, and into the neighbourhood. Summer in the city can be unbearably hot, or not—it has been known to snow in June—and municipal lawns of grass are showing signs of sunstroke. Clumps of mown silage still where the mower strew them. Workmen, digging then filling in a hole, are as pink as Peppa Pig, their hi-vis jackets competing with the sun for brightness. An emo hoodie passes by, wearing his hood, sucking in light like a black hole. Two West African grandmothers in colourful dress as flamboyant as their speech ignore their streetwise grandchildren scaling metal play equipment smothered in graffiti.

I walk along the front of those back gardens I look over. My windows up there are wide open. Theirs down here are shut. Am I the only free-flowing soul on this street? Beyond is not the end of the universe, but the beginnings of the University, and for some this might as well be. A curtain twitches, or is that my stereotypical imagination; my own prejudice that sees these people as phobic. I like people, but I am not like many people. Many of my age, with my education, have moved to streets such as these. Why am I in the concrete looming above rather than cocooned in brick-built domesticity?

I'll tell you why. I like life simple. I do not want to spend my days pursuing pounds sterling and getting tied up in knots pursuing not meaning but conformity. I want to notice people, patterns, the passed over; and I say what I see, which is that people—our energies, travels, purposes, perspectives—power cities.

Inside each of us are hubs and spokes, roads and junctions, highways to heaven and motorways to meaning. I use concrete examples, but actually the structure is organic. Trees and branches span cells making memories by electric charge. I don't seek to complicate, just to state that it's the friendly glance, the giving of way, the saying 'thank you' and 'after you' and 'excuse me'; it's the smile, the care, the kind thought which will never be shared. The only cost is to our sense of self-centredness; the greatest gain is in humility.

I smile, even though I see no-one; I wish well upon each and every home. I seek, in each moment, simplicity.

Fred Heads to the Rugby

Natasha Rowson

Oh bloody hell, that sun's bright.

Fred shields his eyes.

Right, where's Terry? Ah.

He points.

Got him! Good man is Terry. Still owes me a pint from last week, mind. Who we got today? Terry, John, Tommy... no Baz. It's alright, I'll see him and our Ellen on Saturday at the Subby Club. Must be his hip again, these steps won't be doing it any good, neither. Least they still kept them when they put this new place up, the old ground never had all that fancy seating. All those young ones sat through a match, won't do them any good once they get to my age. Back in the 50s me and my Dad never sat down – stands meant standing! It's what separates us from the bloody football lot. Speaking of, up we go.

Fred climbs the stands.

Nice quiet spot away from the crush behind the posts and I can nab Baz's spot at the barriers and all. Lovely day for it, it's cracking the flags out here and I just about managed up the steps without losing half of my bitter. I'll end up with a tan line halfway up my arm but I wouldn't miss it for the world. Sunday afternoon rugby league's what I live for. No place I'd rather be than between Terry and John with Tommy shouting to us all from not half a metre away, that is when he's not off down the sideline giving stick to the linesman.

I remember the first time he did that, it's oddly something that's only come about in his later years, him being 73 now and all, but he's always been passionate. We were losing 24-10 to Halifax a cold cold night in March one year and Tommy, feeling hard done to by the ref, was none too happy. Linesman calls a forward pass and he was off straight down to the, in his words, 'bald-headed get', walking stick waving about.

Fred laughs.

Part of me doesn't even mind when we're on the losing end cos we all get a laugh out of watching Tommy go spare.

Harriet's Hairband

Ray Anglesea

HARRIET, 5, sits on the floor amidst a pile of dresses, holding a hairband.

My Mummy and Daddy told me we are moving house because my Daddy has a new job in advertising. They have asked me to sort out my belongings and choose half, so I have my favourite teddy bears and dolls as well as Granny's hairband. Granny was a ballet dancer at the Royal Ballet Company and she wore this hairband when she played the part of the Fairy Godmother in the ballet Cinderella.

Because I too am learning to dance I would like to keep Granny's hairband to remind me of what a beautiful dancer my Granny was. When I wear it at ballet lessons it makes me feel very special and loved, and I feel watched over in my studies by my beautiful Granny who I loved so dearly.

So I shall pack away the headband in my ballet bag and take it to my new home!

Marguerite's Hairband

Andrew Tinkler

Marguerite, late 80s, is looking through lots of cardboard boxes.

I'm having a sort-out. Downsizing. Moving from my house to a residential care home. A retirement complex, they call it, with our own bedrooms. A prison, more like!

Anyhow, I can't take all my things with me. Gotta choose just my most precious things. Things that mean the most.

It's not easy paring your life down into 3 cardboard boxes, but we come into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing. Hopefully it's about the impact we make in life. How we treat others than the possessions we own, at the end of the day.

However, some things I can't part with. This is one of them!

Marguerite pulls a sparkly hairband out of one of the boxes.

It's the most beautiful diamond-encrusted hairband ever! It's very valuable. Shiny, mesmerising, alluring. The actor Sean Connery gave me this hairband before he was famous. He was a milkman then.

Why did he give me it? Because he loved me, of course! But then he got famous and...

I never saw him again.

I still love my hairband. I have to keep it.

It makes me feel all... attractive.

Just like a Bond girl.

Coffee

Sandy Ogilvie

The young couple had only just met. Well that's not entirely true. They had contacted each other some months ago online. Today was their first face-to-face meeting and they were a bit stuck for something to say. Having smiled a little self-consciously at each other for what seemed like ages, she suddenly said, "I enjoy coffee".

He smiled and they both relaxed.

The Policeman

Kath Ogilvie

The Policeman approached looking in control, but he appeared too young to know very much about the situation. Maybe this is only my perception as I get older...

We looked out to sea and saw a boat drifting in the glistening ocean. It appeared that no one was on board. Had they fallen overboard by accident or were there more sinister circumstances?

The policeman looked deep in thought as to his next move – this situation obviously a first for him!

The Cake

Yvonne Melville

The little boy gazed longingly at the cakes displayed in the baker's shop window. He looked at each one, imagining their taste. He felt his tummy gurgle and rumble.

"I'm hungry," he thought. "Which one would I have?"

Next minute he jumped as a hand was on his shoulder. It was his granny offering to take him into the shop to choose a cake cause that's what grannies do – buy treats.

There May Be Flashing Lights

Marcus Hargis

This morning, just after breakfast, an ordinary moment made extraordinary because of the resonance of faith. Getting on with the ordinary routine of a school morning, there was little warning of significance and faith, fatherhood and the Eurovision Song Contest.

"Dad, be careful, there may be flashing lights in this video," said Benji in all seriousness as he reviewed on YouTube the songs from the first Eurovision semi-final. His concern, humour and interest made me realise he's got a bright future.

There was a time when we didn't know if Benji would talk or communicate in any way except for crying. To hear his humour in language, very much in development, gave us hope.

My wife Jaya and I looked at each other, and laughed in relief.

Snowdrops

Kath Ogilvie

The first snowdrops of the year remind us of the seasons and that hope springs eternal.

Looking out the long window at the front of our house in February to our boundary and hedge. It's been brown since the Autumn but underneath, the snowdrops push through.

A long winter with its dark nights and family illnesses and issues to contend with sometimes makes it hard to smile – but the snowdrops make me feel positive.

The new life of the snowdrops with drooped heads, but looking magnificent in their large group together. Withstanding all weathers and staying strong.

We can all be like these snowdrops and withstand whatever is sent our way.

Thank You, Lucy Worsley

Yvonne Melville

Dear Lucy,

I am writing to thank you for yet another marvellous series. Your presenting of history and past events makes me feel that I have actually experienced those times. You are thorough in your research and down to earth in your presentation and your passion for the subject comes across for everyone to experience. People watching live the events you talk about. You bring the past to the present and I love watching your work. Look forward to the next chapter.

Regards,
Yvonne.

Thank You, Frasier

Marcus Hargis

Dear Frasier,

I enjoy your family dynamics which you, so generously, share with the world – the way that you're wound up so easily, but still love Nils, Martin, Daphne – even Eddie. Your radio show often teaches you a thing or two, as does Roz. You're pompous but always open to learning from your humiliations – that's what makes me laugh but also think.

I also like your catchphrase and adopt it as my own – 'I'm listening!'

And I'm watching your later antics as well. Your son takes after his grandfather – much to your dismay. You're still pompous, but your heart is in the right place and you're right to swap TV fame for humour, educating and not just entertaining.

But you do entertain me, even so.

Thank you.

Yours, etc.

Thank You, Fleabag

Katie Green

Dear Fleabag,

If that's even your name,

I am writing this letter as I feel I ought to thank you, to thank you for offering me something intangible, yet beautiful. 17-year-old me, apathetically trapped in the happenings of a life I could not control never knew that I could seek refuge in one person.

But that is just it, you with all your messy morals, mascara-stained face and flirty side-eyes hardly even constitute a person. You are fluid, like the water, more than flesh, immortally quintessential to the feeling of modern womanhood. And my oh my have I worshipped you for it. Our mothers raised us with love, but also that old-fashioned, English diplomacy, pretty smiles, the prudish never-saying-what-you-really-feel and never-drinking-from-a-pint-glass; the mythology of femininity that you sought to rupture. But watching you in that feminist lecture, hand high in the air as a response to the question 'Who would trade five years of your life for the so-called perfect figure?' did more than just make me laugh, it unravelled everything I thought I already knew and everything I was taught to expect from the world.

At that moment, you invented this new girlhood code where contrary to anything feminism ever told us – being aware of our realities, playing with them and eventually succumbing to male expectation anyway – was now shameless. We no longer had to feel guilty for the superficial ways in which we judged our worth, you taught us that. We girls could now exist in a world where we didn't have to deny we were shallow, conceited, or that from time to time we were subject to envy. Guess what, you said, that's human. Anyone who suggests otherwise is just pretending.

Thank you for opening your universe with an act of rough love and for never shying away from your most intimate, independent moments. And thank you for making it so visually unsettling that my mum had to close the laptop screen and make a cup of tea every, single, time. I had never seen someone test a generation's boundaries so playfully and I could almost imagine your devilish pride at that fact, terribly like my own. This idea of a thirty-something singleton running around London serving twenty-pound sandwiches, smashing glass awards, dating hot misogynists and carelessly fetishizing religion (to name a few) was always going to turn older heads. But you were so unserious that you never cared.

Fleabag, I don't know what I want to be, but at least I know that it will always be okay to be flawed if I'm trying, that I can do what I need to protect my own pain, that I can wear my sister's tops and steal her toilet roll when I'm broke. The list goes on. But sometimes I think the most important thing is that despite not knowing who or what I may want to be, at least I've learnt these illuminating truths about love. After all, it's far more integral to our existence than we'd both care to admit.

Love, you say is small. It's tender moments shared in the back seats of taxis, it's taking the fall for someone to spare them, it's confessions in a dark room, it's genuine happiness for someone even when it compromises your sense of the word. But love is also big. It's learning to accept yourself, it's an angry passionate speech, it's cutting all your hair off to feel closer to someone else, it's running through the airport, it's even leaving someone shattered underneath a bus stop because you know you'll only hurt them.

You, my friend, are not easy to love,

You are selfish, cynical, outrageous, and a thief.

I do love you anyhow,

And this love simply will not pass.

Gifts

A Collective Poem by

*Marcus Hargis, Andrew Tinkler,
Katie Green and Grace McNicholas*

People say that gifts are found in high street shops and online baskets. Tech, jewels and Lego. Temporary or transient, physical things to use until they cease to be of worth to us.

Underrated.

But I say that gifts can stay with us. Found in a call to an old friend or a smile to a stranger; our time and attention and generosity.

The lifeblood of humanity.

The best gift I can give is my love. Words of affirmation, a card or a sweet midnight text to someone I love.

To listen attentively.

To love.

Take my gift, and use it to build. To make the world a better place and remember you are never far from my thoughts. That for you, I will always give time. Take my gift, and use it to make someone else feel loved too.

Thought This Might Help

Grace McNicholas

The best gift I ever received was an electric blanket from my mum. So warm and comforting on long winter nights. A cure for university homesickness? Not quite. But perhaps a close second.

I twist the key in the front door, hands cracked from cold and my breath smoky in front of me. The house feels no warmer than the outside world I've just left. I climb the stairs and enter my room. There on my bed is a large package and inside my new blanket, and a text from Mum:

Thought this might help. xxx

That night I slept toasty and warm all night through. A year later and I still use it every winter night and it still makes me think of her caring so deeply about my frosty fingers and toes.

That is a mother's love.

A Handmade Card

Marcus Hargis

One of the best gifts I've ever been given is a hand-made Father's Day card produced by my oldest son Joshua. It meant so much because Joshua meant what he said on the card and put thought and time into making it. To be honest, many people say their Dad is the best ever – but receiving these sentiments as a Dad from your own child makes this one of the best gifts I've ever been given.

Wisdom

Marcus Hargis

Wisdom is a good gift to receive from life. A spirit of wisdom helps me put the trials of life in proper perspective; not letting trauma traumatisé and seeing every side to every story.

Or at least, I hope I do;
for it is indeed wise to recognise
that we don't know everything.

A Great Gift

Katie Green

One of the greatest gifts I have received was immaterial, as great gifts often are.

It's a gift that people can only hope for, not always easily given, but purposefully for the chosen few. That gift is friendship, but not just any friendship; her friendship. It's the gift that keeps on giving and because of it, my childhood is a privilege that'll always come to me in a rosy supercut. These beautifully visceral images that flicker like a technicolour picture. Laughter, tears, then laughter again, prompting a lane of memory that I'll never lose sight of.

I can see it now, you locking my tiny body into that pink tawdry monster of a prom dress (delighted in the hope that one day it would fit me). Me holding an imaginary microphone, conducting some version of a comedy skit I'd seen through a crack in the door one night on *Dave*; you and some boy my only audience. I remember you cackling breathlessly and thinking your stomach was churning because my humour was so sharp. I never would have guessed that it wasn't particularly any good. I remember baking cakes and licking the bowl, then you holding my hair as I retched over the toilet seat. Too much cake mixture. Playing a fairy or a queen, sometimes both as I dangled my legs over the kitchen side. The milkshakes, the mocktails, sticking out our tongues, purple from some strange concoction and licking our glittery grenadine lips. The ice cream sundaes you made me in your special glass.

You making me the custodian of all your Jacqueline Wilson books. Whoever said gifts couldn't traumatised you in some way? Passing Yorkshire puddings to one another when mum said we hadn't eaten enough greens, all those giggles behind cupped hands. Singing our hearts out in the back of the car, to track 16. Dani Harmer's 'Breaking free' – you loved that song. Dancing to 'Bullet Proof', John Travolta style, at one of our Christmas Eve Discos. Free entry with Quality Streets, except the purple ones.

Even now, separated by both years and miles, that friendship is with me, it seeps through all things. I now dance with my new sisters. A Friday night and we're all sticky and intoxicated, belting our hearts out to 'Murder on the Dancefloor'. I look down and there is a message from you that says 'I love you; I miss you and for god sake come up with some new dance moves'. I reply with the red heart emoji, but don't tell you I'm still doing the moves you taught me. Not because they're good – they're not, by the way. But because they're a part of our times together, part of a bigger gift which as I said never ceases to keep on giving.

Probably the best gift I'll ever receive,
You,
My Sister Sophie.

The College Woods

Katie Green

One of my favourite places in College is the woods behind. To my best friend Grace and I, they felt like our secret; a haven we didn't just find, but made for ourselves. The path was paved by Butler's trademark bunnies, these little bouncing emblems of life and activity different to any other I'd seen.

I remember the first time I stood to admire them. I was thinking about how hard their little hearts must have beat to stay alive and they were just watching me, calm, still, part of the furniture. At first, I felt like crying. I couldn't help but remember my Dad waking me up with torchlight and a whisper: *let's go on a walk and see how many rabbits we can count!* Or recall my tiny hand in my Mum's as we walked to the toilet block when we were camping somewhere, collaborating only so I could see my furry friends along the way.

Slowly but surely, Butler's bunnies became the very image I needed to see as a way of remaining grounded. The bridge, if you will, between the person I was then, before University (consumed by memory) and the person I was now (trying to make new memories). The woods were one of the ways I managed to do just that. Grace and I would leave the rabbits at the opening to the woods and retreat to the bluebells, overgrown and widely defiant. It was like stepping into a Thomas Hardy novel. We'd take a Bluetooth speaker and dance from tree to tree, watching their leaves rustle as if they were dancing too.

When I think of the many suns we watched set, I think of a photograph I have on my phone. Grace is carrying a speaker and has her arm outstretched to the sky. I captured a perfect moment in time that day, a moment of stillness in our otherwise busy and tired minds. I remember joking with her as I took it that we should just abandon all responsibilities and become 'people of the trees', but in a way it kind of made sense; it was a moment of mutual belonging.

Because at the time we felt as though we belonged to the woods, and the woods belonged to us.

Waddington Street URC: A Collective Poem

*Barbara Tinsley, Kath Ogilvie, Sandy Ogilvie
and Marcus Hargis*

I first came to Waddington Street when
I was introducing myself as the new minister.
We were newly married and moved to Durham in 1971.
I had recently retired and was adjusting to a different
sphere of life.

At the time, I felt
anxious and new, but I wanted to get involved.
I felt the need for fellowship and guidance.
I felt excited, meeting with new people.

At Waddington Street, I have found
Community. Support. Opportunities.
Friendship. A safe space. A special home.
Warm friendship. A purpose for living.

When I come to Waddington Street now, I feel
Acceptance and purpose.
Committed. I love the community spirit and being
involved.
I feel at home in a city far from where I live.

The Kitchen at Waddington Street

Kath Ogilvie

One of my favourite places in Waddington Street is the kitchen. It not only provides drinks and food, but also allows many conversations to take place. Folks can share their concerns in the confined area and have a private conversation. It also includes laughter and fun. During the Foodbank sessions, we make toasties which are free to those who attend, and 50p to any visitors. Again, sharing with other volunteers in the kitchen allows for good friendships and the sharing of food and drinks with the clients allows time to chat and more importantly, listening time. A problem shared is a problem halved.

A good place to share friendship and fellowship.

The Sanctuary at Waddington Street

Barbara Tinsley, Sandy Ogilvie and Marcus Hargis.

It is a quiet, contemplative place for reflection and worship. It has an excellent organ which helps tremendously with hymn singing. The Victorian interior is aesthetically pleasing. The carpet adds comfort and warmth. There are interesting tapestries on the walls which were designed by a very talented lady of the congregation. Each week, a bouquet of flowers is provided by a member of the congregation and placed on a pedestal at the front. The Sanctuary is a place for rejuvenation and comfortable reflection.

It is small and open with no hidden corners. It is comfortable and quite intimate. But it also has history of people worshipping here for over 150 years – there is continuity. The War Memorials are a reminder that the Church is not immune to the outside world, but shares struggle as well as joy – evidenced by the Cradle Notes. The organ is an asset, as is music generally in setting the tone for worship, which I find helpful. I value being in the mix of the people here where there is space to reflect alone, but worship as a group.

There is nothing to distract: it is a comfortable, warm, adaptable, welcoming space. That meaningful community use also happens here is significant: the space does not need to be set aside or apart to be a true sanctuary. Most importantly, the space is made holy by the people who gather here. Whether for support, community or worship, it is the people who make Waddington Street what it is: warm, welcoming, loud or silent.

Faith

*Alison Jolly, Barbara Tinsley, Charles Jolly,
Kathleen Clasper, Marcus Hargis, Kath Ogilvie,
Sandy Ogilvie and Yvonne Melville*

Faith is:

A small, wavering glow.
Hope.

A trusting relationship with the source of light and love.

Not the same as certainty.
A way of living.

Keeping on doing good even if we do not see the end.

The belief in a higher power that is guiding you.
There to help you live your life, giving comfort and hope.

To someone who is struggling with their faith, I say:

I'm listening. Tell me how you feel.
Don't give up your struggle.

Aren't we all? It's not what we believe, but trust that
nothing can separate us from the love of God.
Hang on and pray.

Let me listen.
Do you believe in the power of goodness?
Never give up hope. God is out there and He hasn't
given up on you.
Be strong, be true. Have hope and pray.

To someone who comes to Waddington Street looking for faith, we say:

Welcome!
Get to know us.
Welcome.
Join us.
Eat with us.
We will pray for you and with you if you want.
Come and share our joy.

Welcome.
Come in and join our family, and have a cup of tea.
Put your hand into the hand of God and step with
us into the dark.

Travel with us. We're on this journey together.
You are welcome as you are.

A Homage to Our Writers

Katie Green

Perhaps it's the time of year,
A time of blowing onto cold, crunched fingers,
Watching one festive classic after another,
Mulled wine settling into warm bellies,
And all the nostalgia and connectivity that these bring,
But I just can't help pondering upon these pages.

Hugh Grant says it well,
But we say it better:
Love Actually is, all around.

Granted, it isn't always particularly grand,
It doesn't save the world,
But it's powerful enough to bring a bunch of writerly folk
together,
Strangers telling tales, sharing lives
Until they become not so strange to one another.

Our love is not simply refined to one type of being,
Our love is places and people.
A University college made home by the spell of the bluebells
and bunnies.
A church on Waddington Street with its overflow of fresh
kitchen cuppas and a sanctuary blessed with a charming
continuity.
It's an old miner from Stanley Crook, embracing a lady as their
village's own.

It's Fred, Terry, John, and Tommy, bitters in hands, united by
sport.

Or it's potential lovers meeting each other in person for the
first time
With hope for coffee and kisses.

Our love is objects and gifts.
The first fall of snowdrops breaking through the winter.
A sparkly headband that carries with it stories of dance and
the wonderful Sean Connery.
A Granny's sugar topped-treat.
It's as sentimental as little Joshua's Father's Day card
And as warm as a toasty electric blanket.

Our love is written and verbal thank-yous
to family members
but also, those familiar faces that become family from behind
the screen.

Those that are easy to love
and those that make it impossible.

I suppose that's just it.
Our love,
Whether it be factual or fictitious, part of the lives we live or the
lives we watch,
It's unconditional.

Nothing needs to be changed about a person, or a thing.
Our love says,
You are welcome as you are.



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