

FAST FIBRES

FOR THE LOVE OF POETRY

LINDY DAVIS TALKS TO FOUR LOCAL POETS WHO ARE UNAFRAID TO REVEAL THEIR HUMANITY.

What do a retired physicist, a criminal defence lawyer, a University lecturer and a management consultant all have in common? A deep love of words.

According to the Fast Fibres Poetry group based in Whangarei, it's about sharing the human experience.

Since its inception in the early 1990s, a diverse group of Northland writing enthusiasts have met once a month to discuss and occasionally critique each other's work. The name Fast Fibres references the fibre optic cables used for communication, in a similar way to

strings or strands of poetic language.

Despite multiple venue changes (from humble beginnings in First Avenue, to an open-mic jam session at Riva's, a stint at the Butter Factory, the old Library, and the Bank Street Social Club, the core group has continued to cultivate their artistic talent.

They insist it's all about the poems, encouraging you to express yourself freely with others who may appreciate it.

IMAGES: Lindy Davis

Below, from left: Martin Porter, Piet Nieuwland, Olivia Macassey, Arthur Fairley.



'Love is at the core of my poetry.'

PIET NIEUWLAND

Piet recalls writing his first poem, about architecture, while still in primary school.

As a founding member of the Fast Fibres poetry group, he brought together several like-minded creative thinkers to form a group with a common interest in poetry. He was working as a management planner for DOC at the time, focusing on conservation management strategy and public consultation.

In the millennium year, he bought a 40ft yacht and spent the next 10 years berthed at the marina in Whangarei Harbour.

"I loved it, and our son was almost born on the boat. The moment I'd leave the office for the day we'd take off to Great Barrier, the Bay of Islands or Kaikoura Island." (His poem 'Humid over Kaikoura island' was penned after considerable time spent there.)

Piet's writing interest extends to mankind's relationship with nature and how various cultures see the environment and have different perspectives on it.

For the past 20 years he has explored poetry and the works of authors based abroad. His interest includes all sorts of themes related to politics, climate change and social justice, but the majority of his poems revolve around love.

"Creativity is the essence. It usually

stems from a real-life experience or something personal that's had an impact. It usually grows into something more fictional from there."

He likes reading the translations of foreign writers in parts of the world that are completely unknown to him, learning more about their thought processes, values and experiences.

Piet particularly admires the work of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (1904-73) and Mexican Octavio Paz (1914-98), saying their poems give him a better understanding of life and a greater, more intimate connection to the rest of the world.

Piet's poems have been published in American, Australian and New Zealand journals.



'I'm horribly omnivorous when it comes to books.'

OLIVIA MACASSEY

Having scrawled her first poem during an experiment in a physics class at school, Olivia is a firm believer that "poetry can sometimes happen when you're supposed to be doing something else".

Originally from the Coromandel, she was drawn to the Northland poetry group after spotting some poems slung from the trees to highlight the Whangarei Art Fair.

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With an academic background as a lecturer in Film Studies at Victoria University (Wellington), film has always been Olivia's first love.

"The discipline of academic non-fiction writing can tie your brain up in knots and I have to exit and switch to poetry instead," she says.

Olivia is particularly focused on the embodied human experience, especially memory and how it works.

Her poetry often evolves from a vague idea in her head and despite her best efforts to direct her thoughts, the poem will often emerge in an entirely different way.

"I love narrative. If I've written a poem that relates to human trauma, it will sometimes take a shape and form that accentuates the loss or grief, mimicking the structure of trauma."

She maintains that poetry is being open to ideas and alive to language, and likes to think of her poems as a conduit, connecting people to her thoughts.

Finding inspiration everywhere, she recalls being moved at an early age by the poems of Spanish poet, playwright and theatre director Federico García Lorca (1898-1936), who was executed by Nationalist forces at the start of the Spanish Civil War.

With specific reference to her poem 'Burnt Umber' published in the *Fast Fibres Poetry 4* publication, she says poems affect people in different ways.

"We don't have to be personally affected by a situation, either current or historical, to be moved by it. One of the things about traumatic memory is that it's not anchored in time. A world is taken every time someone dies."

For anyone keen to write poetry, Olivia suggests reading as much as you can, writing honestly and just giving it a go.

"You can't edit an empty page. Try not to worry about what a poem should be like. Poetry is what you want it to be – there are no rules."

On some occasions you may feel less creative and she likens it to a fallow field that will produce something favourable further down the track.

She doesn't think she's ever written a poem that fully expresses what it is she's feeling, but believes somehow the poem is always writing itself under the surface.

Olivia has published two books of poems, *The Burnt Hotel* and *Love in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Her poetry has appeared in several publications including *Landfall*, *Poetry New Zealand* and *Takabe*.



'You get to hone your craft through performance.'

MARTIN PORTER

Martin developed a love of writing at primary school and by the age of nine was compiling his first pieces of prose.

The retired physicist joined the Fast Fibres poetry group 10 years ago while working as a systems trainer at Northpower. His job largely involved training staff to use specialised IT systems.

"I like to write without feeling the poem needs to be event-based. Because I'm a physicist I'm more concerned in the principles of poetry, particularly form and structure. I'm less interested in the narrative of a story."

He says we tend to see things as a series of individual events and will often try to construct a narrative around them.

"I prefer to write commentary about poetry and then find myself dissecting the existing structure of the poem."

Martin believes that ideas often stem from the way we are programmed to think.

Unsurprisingly, he likens the concept to physics. Scientists think of a vacuum of space as being energetic or full, not the empty nothingness that many people perceive when they imagine a vacuum or void.

The idea of exploring these types of contradictions, especially in terms of

concepts and ideas, means his work is often arranged quite thematically.

The most recent is a series of library poems that were written over a period of six months in several New Zealand libraries and abroad.

Flash fiction is another area of interest for Martin. He enters international competitions and is a member of the National Flash Fiction Week Competition committee.

His poems can be found in *Fast Fibres Poetry Vols 1-4*, USA publications *San Pedro River Review* and *Better Than Starbucks*, as well as the UK publication *The Interpreter's House*.



'A good trial lawyer will speak with their heart. It's a concept I apply to every facet of my life.'

ARTHUR FAIRLEY

When not reading books, writing poetry or listening to music, Arthur Fairley is a dynamic criminal defence lawyer based in Whangarei.

The concept of a career in the legal profession came to him largely through a process of elimination.

"I was hopeless with my hands, I couldn't add up and barely got School C maths. My father called me a useless yob, so that ruled out a wide spectrum of human endeavour."

Raised in a household containing hundreds of books, Arthur's paternal grandfather was a "walking dictionary". Despite having no tradition of lawyers in his family, it was an early love of books and language, combined with a talent for words, that drove him in that direction.

"I studied law because of a deep love of words and the potential to use language."

He began writing poetry during his mid-20s and has accumulated an admirable collection of 3,900 poems to his name.

A prolific reader with 20 books on the go at any one time, Arthur sees his poetry as an extension of that. He believes it's not emotion itself that resonates in poetry, it's the articulation of the word and the phraseology that triggers an emotional response in the reader.

He says the great shift over the last century is to see beauty in words. The only emotion poetry requires is the emotion of the word.

"It's a two-stage process and quite often I'll be inspired by terms or phrases I've heard. It might be street signs, lyrics and maybe even a throw-away comment that resonated for some reason."

Inspiration could well come during a visit to the library or a quiet evening at home.

Arthur maintains he doesn't set out to actively write a poem, usually the text follows a single word.

"I imagine words as you would dinner party guests. I arrange the seating of the words in the same way you might position friends together, depending on the words you choose, the conversation will ebb and flow."

He reveals that occasionally when he's summing up in a jury trial, he'll resort to poetry or flamboyant language because ultimately it speaks to the human heart. ■

Want to join Fast Fibres Poetry?

Contact: Piet Nieuwland

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Submission deadline for *Fast Fibres Poetry 5th Collection* – June 15, 2018

Publication date – August 24, 2018 to coincide with National Poetry Day.

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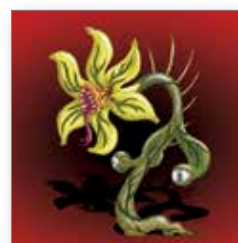
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