

Forbes Arts & Culture Working Group

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PRESS RELEASE

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LOCAL WRITERS SHARE THEIR STORIES IN FORBES

Fictions, non-fictions, memoirs and family histories: writing stories people want to read, the second Forbes Writers Workshop, Forbes Youth and Community Centre, 9 am to 5 pm, 22 July 2007.

Fourteen community writers from Forbes and Parkes met last month to develop their own short stories, histories and memoirs in the first of two intensive writing workshops hosted by the Forbes Arts and Culture Working Group. This Sunday, 22 July, they will meet again to share the fruits of their labours and discuss their projects with professional writer Merrill Findlay.

"I'm really looking forward to seeing what these talented locals have achieved over the last month," Ms Findlay said. "It is so important that people in regional Australia author their own stories from local perspectives because locally produced stories sustain our identities as country people and nurture our sense-of-place, that special bond we have with the places we love and are familiar with. Stories written by locals about local people and set in local places are important to the whole community, not just to the writers and their families."

The projects the fourteen aspiring authors committed to at their June workshop were extraordinarily diverse. One writer was working on a fairy story about a cranky old scarecrow, for example, while another was researching a more scholarly history of squatting along the Lachlan River before the Land Acts of the 1860s. Other projects included a novel set in World War I, several family histories, a memoir about an unhappy childhood, a narrative about a tragic yet comic bush funeral, and a short story about two obscure Athenian boxers mentioned 2,500 years ago by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus of Halicarnassus in his history of the wars between the Greek city-states and imperial Persia.

Ms Findlay hopes that all the participants in the first workshop will have completed at least a rough draft of their writing projects by now, and that some may even be at-final draft stage and ready to read their work to their peers next Sunday.

"The Sunday workshop will provide participants with a safe and supportive environment in which they can discuss their work and seek feedback from fellow writers who have

themselves been struggling over the last month to find the right words to express their ideas,” Merrill Findlay said. “I hope that by the end the day everyone will feel confident enough to produce many more stories for their own and others’ enjoyment.”

Ms Findlay urges aspiring writers to seek inspiration from other local authors, such as Paul Wenz and Charles Herbert Shaw, for example. Wenz pursued his writing career while he was irrigating lucerne and grazing sheep at Nanima Station on the Lachlan. His simple stories about rural life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were published in both France and Australia and have since become an invaluable part of Forbes Shire’s literary heritage.

Charles Herbert Shaw was a more successful author than Paul Wenz, although he had a less auspicious start. He arrived in Forbes with his swag in 1929 during the Great Depression looking for station work and one day happened to show the editor of the Forbes newspaper some of his writing. The editor offered him a job as a reporter and soon he was also contributing to Smith’s Weekly and the Bulletin in Sydney. He eventually joined the staff of the Bulletin as its rural reporter. Shaw wrote novels in his spare time, including ‘whodunits’ which were published under the pseudonym Bant Singer. In the 1950s one of his war novels published under his own name, *Heaven Knows, Mr Allison*, became a best seller and made into a film starring Robert Mitchum and Deborah Kerr. Shaw is also remembered locally as a co-founder of an Australian Rules football team in Forbes.

The Forbes community writing workshops, *Fictions, non-fictions, memoirs and family histories: writing stories that people want to read*, are sponsored by the NSW Government’s Country Arts Support Program (CASP) and Forbes Shire Council and facilitated by the Forbes Arts and Culture Working Group. The Sunday workshop, the last in the series, will be held at the Forbes Youth and Community Centre from 9 am to 5 pm, Sunday 22 July, 2007. Further details are available at the Forbes Library, phone 6850 1344. Programs can be downloaded from www.geocities.com/forbesculturalplan

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