

The Writing Group ~No 7 2021



Editorial

It might be Women's Month but we have an eclectic mix for you. Enjoy the 'Match the Author' quiz, the poignant stories and the fun bits.

Just because it's Women's Month see if you can link up the author to the book:

No Time like the Present	Harper Lee
The Bell Jar	Jeanette Winterson
Rebecca	Doris Lessing
The Paying Guests	Sylvia Plath
To Kill a Mockingbird	Mary Shelley
The God of Small Things	Toni Morrison
Oranges are not the only Fruit	Nadine Gordimer
Frankenstein	Alice Walker
The Grass is Singing	Margaret Atwood
The Colour Purple	Virginia Woolf
The Handmaid's Tale	Daphne du Maurier
Beloved	Arundhati Roy
A Room of One's Own	Sarah Waters

Answers on the last page.

There was a young girl named Sue
Who loved the way the winds blew
She went collecting flowers
In the gale for hours
No wonder she came home sneezy
and blue.
Neela Dhaya

UNSUNG HEROINES IN SCIENCE

This month we celebrate the women who made a difference in South Africa but spare a thought for female scientists who could not receive the considerable honours due them simple because they were women.

Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin was not awarded her Ph.D. in astronomy from Cambridge because of her gender. In her thesis she postulated that the sun was composed of hydrogen and helium and these were the most abundant elements in the universe but her supervisor, and her external supervisor, the influential astronomer Norris Russell, did not agree and she had to state that her findings were unlikely to be true. Much later, Russell's own work validated Cecilia's findings.

Rosalind Franklin took "the most famous photo ever taken" - an X-ray photograph that solved the structure of the DNA molecule. But James Watson, Francis Crick and Maurice Wilkins used Rosalind's work without her knowledge and went on to win the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1962. No credit was given to Rosalind.

Lise Meitner, an Austrian, struggled to get an education reserved for males. She eventually managed to get a doctoral degree from the University of Vienna in 1901- only the second woman to achieve this honour!

Lise discovered 'radiationless transition' which led to the development of the nuclear bomb. She got no credit for this, the honours going to a male French scientist, all of two years later. In 1939, working with her nephew, Otto Frisch, she published a paper on nuclear fission but her colleague Otto Hahn received the Nobel Prize for the discovery and Lise's contribution was ignored. However, element 109 Meitnerium is named after her. *Cont...*

Marie Curie was another brilliant woman who struggled to get an education in her homeland. Working eventually in France, Marie earned her Ph.D. in 1903 for her work on radioactivity. She designed and carried out all the research but when awarded a Nobel Prize in Physics she had to share it with her husband Pierre, and Henri Bequerel her supervisor. Marie was forbidden to speak about her work when she and Pierre were invited to the Royal Academy in London and she nearly lost her second Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1911 (for her discovery of Polonium and Radium) because she had had an affair (after her husband's tragic death). Element 96, Curium, is named for Marie and Pierre.

Chein-Shiung Wu was a brilliant physicist and experimenter who worked in quantum physics at a time when women were not accepted as scientists. She was trusted to undertake the most difficult experiments. She famously disproved the Law of Parity Conservation. However, her co-workers Tsung-Dao Lee and Chen-Ning Yang, were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1957 but Chein-Shiung went unacknowledged.

THE FAMILY CAR

Michael had just got his driving licence and was itching to use his Dad's car, perhaps take the boys to Haga for an afternoon, or Pullen's Bay. So he approached the old man and asked if he was using the car that day. "No, but nor are you," his father said.

"Aw Dad, be a sport," said Michael. "The roads are quiet in the afternoons and I need some practice before I forget everything."

His dad looked at him searchingly, and said,

"You can't use the car whenever you want to just because you have a licence. You must earn the privilege. Tell you what, we'll talk about this again next school holidays. Meantime it would be to your advantage if your grades improved, if you read your Bible every night and if you cut your hair."

That term Michael attained B grades in all his subjects except Geography where he earned an A. He had obviously read his Bible judging by some of the stories of the saints and the prophets he had introduced at the supper-table. He had also trimmed his hair to a neat shoulder length.

The day of reckoning arrived. Father and Son met in the garage to discuss their bargain. Father was exceedingly proud of the improved grades, complimented his son on his Bible reading but expressed grave disappointment with his hair-length; Michael had not kept his side of the Bargain.

Michael knew that it was useless to argue but he reminded his father he had read his Bible and had realised that most of the prophets, saints and priests wore their hair long.

"Yes they did, but they also walked everywhere!"

Anon c. 2015

Who thought women could not be good at science?

ONLY TIME WILL TELL

by Noreen Burton

I dropped into a café for an afternoon cup of tea and found myself seated next to a table of four elderly women. They were speaking so loudly that unless I blocked my ears I could not but help overhearing their conversation.

"How long will she be laid up?" asked Strawberry-Blond, in a concerned voice.

"I don't know. Only time will tell," replied Natural-Grey, sadly.

"I'm amazed that Arthur was driving at that speed!" exclaimed Silver-White.

"We are taking her to a specialist tomorrow to see what can be done," continued Natural-Grey. "Hopefully she can have some parts replaced." She took out a photo and passed it around.

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Bottle-Auburn, "This is *awful*! I'm so sorry, dear!"

By now I was so intrigued that I just *had* to see the photo. I got up as though going to the comfort room. As I passed behind Natural-Grey, who now had the photo, I stopped on the pretext of extracting my cell phone from my bag but I was looking at the photo. When I saw the gruesome sight I burst out laughing, quickly placing my phone to my ear and moving rapidly on.

The photo was of a vintage car with a badly dented front bumper and bonnet.

A GOLF WIDOW

by Laura Maynard

Are you familiar with the terms - bogey, birdie, par, hook, slice, draw, or fade? Then you were a golfer, or like me, you were married to one.

Before all major events a golfer avidly watches the TV Weather Forecast, and if bad weather is on the way, he reassures himself that the forecasters are wrong.

The sun will shine on the morrow, and he will succeed in attaining either 'the best score of the day', 'nearest the pin', 'the longest drive', or better still, 'a hole in one'.

As I was a farmer's wife as well as a golf widow, I knew that on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons I had to 'keep the home fires burning'. Dear hubby would put his golf clubs into the boot of the car, and disappear in a cloud of dust.

No sooner had he left, when everything possible went awry. The belt of the potato lifter broke, and the local Co-op didn't have one that size in stock. The sick heifer that had survived all week expired. A ewe got stuck in a 'jigijolo' bush (bramble bush), and the farm assistants were struggling to free her. And so it went on and on ... Finally, I decided, "If you can't beat them, join them".

I became a golf addict instead!

Although I had great fun, I was never good at the game, and was what is generally termed a 'hacker', (someone with a high handicap). However, I was always invited to play in a four-ball better-ball game. My handicap was so high, that I scored more points than the others in the foursome, and helped my partner win a prize.

As I didn't hit far, but straight, I managed to 'fine tune' my short game with my wedge shots and putts. Consequently, I often shot a two ball on a par three hole, and scored more points than anyone else.

Every year a special match play four ball better-ball competition for the Ron Gordon Trophy was held. It was a game where two men played against two women. I usually played with my golfing pal against my husband, and her husband. However, this particular weekend, they were going to be away at a Farming Conference, so we were not going to take part in the competition.

During the week, I had a phone call from Sharon - our lady champion inviting me to play with her against her husband, and his partner. Honoured, I said "Thank you very much".

All golf matches are taken seriously, but with this one there was also a lot of teasing, fun and laughter at the first tee.

To begin with I was rather apprehensive, but soon relaxed, and got into the rhythm of the game. Sharon was playing particularly well, and I was scoring points on the short holes.

At the end of the eighteen holes, we had beaten the men!

Not only that, we had also scored the most points for the day, and had won the Ron Gordon Trophy, as well as a weekend for two at the nearest Holiday Inn.

A good time was had by all.

FOUR PALM TREES

by Michael Abdinor (Cape Town U3A)

It was overcast with mist patches in the low-lying areas of the N3 freeway. I seemed impatient and somewhat apprehensive as I urged my rental car towards my destination. To the right, I saw the blue mountains that had beckoned me home on numerous occasions.

Within the hour I reached the turnoff and from faded memories, navigated my way through the quiet streets of the town. I pulled up where the old bioscope had once stood. I imagined the galloping sound of Westerns playing and children shrieking. I paused, moved on, then saw the magnificent stone church standing gracefully as it had for many years. I located the spot where my primary school had once stood. I imagined the end of term song, "Lord dismiss us with thy blessing."

I drove south through neglected streets, crossed the river until I reached a familiar gravel road. At the top of the rise, I climbed out and breathed in the smell of fresh cold country air slightly tainted by khaki bush odour. The silence was only disturbed by the cooing of doves. The robust corrugated iron houses no longer graced the space between the trees. Higher up on the kopje, I sighted the remains of a Boer War fort where soldier games took place. I paused in thought then headed back towards town.

Next stop was the old station building. I made my way to the main platform where in decades past, proud parents, loved ones and families, waved farewell to one another as the powerful steam engine hissed and puffed, building up thrust for the journey to the coast. I left the station and steered past the sports fields where on winter sports' days the sound of rugby and war cries cut through the chilly mornings.

Heading east, I reached the main shaft, rusty and neglected. The entrance was sealed decades ago. I parked the car opposite the decaying recreation hall. The pool, overgrown with grass and weeds, did not dim the memories of informal water games, gossip and music from a valve radio. The tennis courts next door were reduced to rusty wire enclaves of veld. The remaining houses on the mine looked run down through years of neglect.

Finally, I made my way down a long driveway to my family home, now uninhabitable. The four palm trees, one planted for each child, swayed majestically in the breeze.



Golf Quotes from Gary Player.

"You can always speak with great authority on how well you played today, but never on how you'll play tomorrow."

"The ideal build for a golfer would be strong hands, big forearms, thin neck, big thighs, and thick chest. He'd look like Popeye."

"Golf is a puzzle without an answer. I've played the game all my life and I still haven't the slightest idea how to play."

Do you sometimes 'get the wrong end of the stick because you 'picked up a stompie'?

CAUGHT EAVESDROPPING

By Neela Dhayla

With the sound of my heart beating in my ears, I raced down the stairs from the bedroom. I was bursting to tell my husband, Bruce the good news. I had received a promotion at work. Perhaps Bruce and I could go out for supper to celebrate. But I quickly slowed my pace on reaching the passage. I'd remembered him saying that he had a zoom call and not to be noisy or disturb him if the study door was closed.

As I tiptoed on the parquet-floored passage, I noticed that the study door was not quite closed, a hint that it was okay to disturb him. I was just about to pop my head in when I overheard him on the phone.

Bruce: Yes Mary, my darling, You're the best, an absolute star. Perhaps we could meet tomorrow straight after work. Yes, I won't forget the flowers. I'll make sure they are the favourite ones.

I must have coughed, and Bruce said: "Melissa, is that you?"

"I'm quite happy to come back if you are busy," I said.

"Not at all, come right in. Did you want to tell me something?"

I hesitantly mentioned that I'd received a heads up that I would be receiving a promotion, "It becomes official tomorrow," I said, "so I thought we could go out for supper at about 7:30 pm to celebrate."

Bruce with an apologetic smile replied, "You know what, I actually have to work late tomorrow. I'm not sure when I'll finish, so don't prepare anything. However, if things change and I'm not too late, perhaps we could still make it for supper."

My heart sank and all I managed to say was a very weak "okay". My brain was already working overtime, barely hearing him ask me if there was anything else on my mind.

I walked with leaden feet to the kitchen. I could feel the tears behind my eyes and my mind was racing. Who was Mary the meanie? Why was my Bruce calling her darling? Why was he lying about working late when I had just overheard him say that he was to meet her straight after work? Was my Bruce having an affair and how did I miss this? I told everybody what a caring, loving husband I had. The vegetables on the cutting board received the brunt of my wrath. They were no longer baking size but looked more like julienne vegetables for stir-fry.

We sat down for supper and normally Bruce and I would laugh and chat about the day's happenings. I however was much quieter than normal. On enquiry, I faked a headache and said I would retire early so I'd be bright eyed and bushy tailed for work the next day.

Fortunately, the next day was busy as I immediately started training for the new post. Before I knew it, it was home time. I did my best not to watch the clock. I thought "perhaps I should just call Bruce and find out how things were going and when he expected to wrap things up at work. His line just kept ringing. I then tried the security desk. The guard mentioned that Bruce had left just before 6:00 pm. It was just a 15-minute drive from work to home and it was now just before 7pm. I stared at the telephone in my hand, not knowing what to think. *Cont ...*

Just then I heard the key turn in the front door lock. It was Bruce. He was full of smiles.

He said: "Hi there beautiful, brushing my lips with a quick kiss. Go and change quickly, there is just enough time for us to still get a table. I'll book while you change. I just looked at him dumbfounded. He said "Oh no, so inconsiderate of me, do you still have a headache? I thought we'd talk about your first day in the new job over supper, but we can postpone it if you're not up to it."

That's when I saw red and accused him of having an affair as I'd checked at his work and he'd left early. Also, that I'd overheard him on the phone talking to darling Mary. I knew all about their date after work and her favourite flowers. Much to my surprise, Bruce was bent over with laughter. I asked myself, "Was this how one reacted when accused of an affair? "

After his laughter subsided, Bruce said, "Hold on and just hear me out". He explained that at the last minute, his overseas client postponed their zoom meeting. He then left work immediately to collect complimentary tickets to my favourite Russian ballet from an ex-colleague, my meanie Mary. Mary, who was more of a rock star fan, was happy to part with the tickets to Bruce who never stopped talking about his wife who loved the ballet. Bruce then realising the time, had quickly booked a table at our favourite restaurant and organized with them to deliver flowers and champagne to the table on our arrival. He then raced home to get me ready.

After hearing all this, I felt a proper fool, but all was forgiven. Bruce was the kind, thoughtful, loving husband that I knew. My mom was so right when she said that nothing ever good came from eavesdropping.

And finally, from Laura Maynard

A mother bear with her two cubs lived in a den in Canada.

One day the female cub asked her mother, "When I grow up, will I have cubs?"

The mother replied.

"Yes."

When the male cub asked the same question, she replied. "No, you don't have a cubby hole".

Jimmy went to the Police Station to report the loss of his dog.

Sergeant: "Describe him to me."

Jimmy: "He only has one ear. He was in a dog fight, and one ear was bitten off."

Sergeant: "Continue."

Jimmy: "He walks on three legs. He chased a cat across the road, and was hit by a truck."

Sergeant: "Anything else?"

Jimmy: "A snake spat in his face so he's blind in one eye."

Sergeant: "What is your dog's name!"

Jimmy: "Lucky."

No Time like the Present - **Nadine Gordimer**

The Bell Jar - **Sylvia Plath**

Rebecca - **Daphne du Maurier**

The Paying Guests - **Sarah Waters**

To Kill a Mockingbird - **Harper Lee**

The God of Small Things - **Arundhati Roy**

Oranges are not the only Fruit - **Jeanette**

Winterson

Frankenstein - **Mary Shelley**

The Grass is Singing - **Doris Lessing**

The Colour Purple - **Alice Walker**

The Handmaid's Tale - **Margaret Atwood**

Beloved - **Toni Morrison**

A Room of One's Own - **Virginia Woolf**