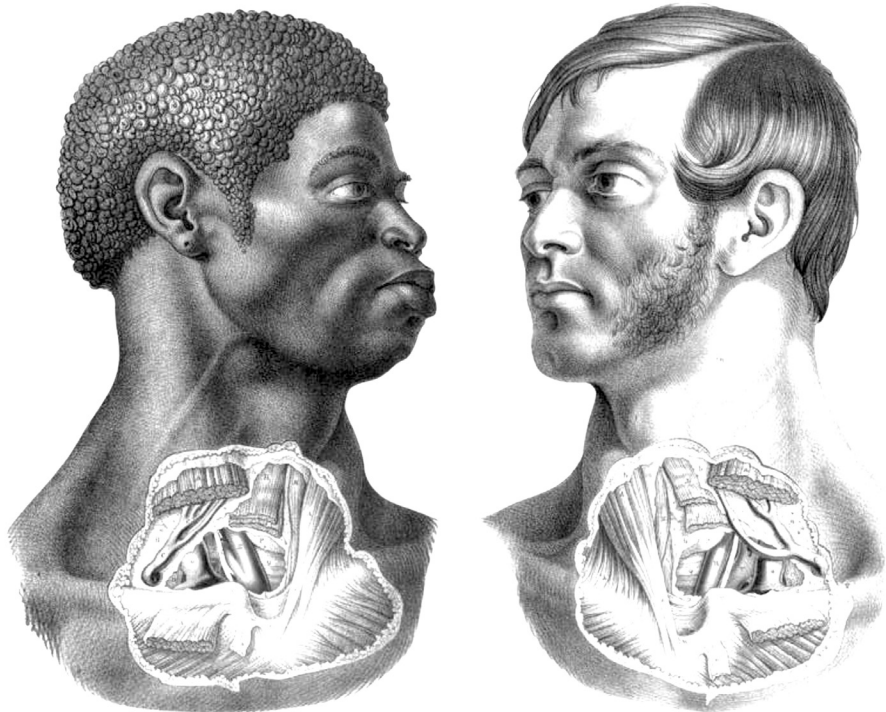


"COTTONMOUTH"



SPIT DICTION

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COTTONMOUTH

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COTTONMOUTH is a monthly performance night which is produced in conjunction with a podcast and publication. please direct all submissions or requests to info@cottonmouth.org.au and be sure to check regular updates online by visiting www.cottonmouth.org.au (.)

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Department of Culture and the Arts
Government of Western Australia

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ALWAYS THE SPIDER

Stuart Cooke

Up Broome-way recently, I was reading Philip
Hodgin's early poems about cancer
and thinking back to my own fights with it,
wondering what the poems might have been like
had I started writing my own by the time it all began.

I put his book down to pick at a nail
and found a huge, hairy spider having a rest
on my left thigh. I raised a hand and batted it onto the dirt,
where it scurried off into the scrub.

Thought returned to the surface, and with it

a faint sense of surprise, that I'd moved so calmly.
It can be unsettling to find your body behaving
so competently without you. Always those fangs,
half a centimetre long, nearly resting on my jeans.

I DREAM OF HORSES

Helen Hagemann

I dream of horses,
drawn in paddocks.
Stallions, colts, a silver bay.
I call out, 'get on, get on!'

Halfway to town, a ranger
in chaps, riding-pants,
high-calibre rifle, shoots one.
They've trampled the melons.

At the rodeo, Sunday, in the fracas
of bull riding & bucking broncos
the ranger dies
in a horse float
jam-packed with melons
to get his fill.

GURU #1

Belowsky

43 21

life of a working class guru
has just begun

not easy to become guru'd
how many hours does a guru work?
5 guru hours = a 40 hour week
but does a guru get 8 hours sleep?
what wheat does a guru eat?

so go find yourself a guru
its not cryptic code
cuz hey, now you can google your
guru
or go straight to www.guru.com
or wait for that guru
to materialize
don't be surprised
cuz a guru
always comes in disguise

there it goes down 5th avenue
simon
wow, check that smile
that ain't no average smile
that's the smile of a
real
living, loving guru
free and on the loose

a london guru
a new york guru
an LA guru
PR guru
ad guru

media guru
finance guru
guru at the Chateau
cuz a guru ain't restricted
to a himalayan cave
the guru has broken free
from weird freaky sheets
it's armani suits
with a perfect guru fit
prada shoes
bvlgari jewels

no lama guru
no ghandi guru
no maharishi guru
no hendrix guru
no lennon guru
no marley guru
no dead gurus
only living, loving gurus

no longer do gurus
tell to the time from the sun
it's rolex
and every guru has one

number plate is simple
it's GURU#1

at the airport
you got club lounge
exec lounge
and of course
the guru lounge
a place where gurus can connect

and subscribe to guru weekly

some fly coach

some fly first class

i fly the only way i know

that's guru class

and catch it tonight

on CNN

as Anderson Cooper

investigates

the sweet life

of the guru

and asks the question

"is there a hidden guru

lying dormant,

dormant within you?"

is there

a guru

ready to jump out

create

meditate

speculate

negotiate

communicate

tonight

all will be answered

as Anderson investigates

in a two hour special

not to be missed

you

me

and the mysteries

of the contemporary guru

and now also available

on youtube

so find that tag

tag goo

tag goo goo

tag goo goo goo

tag goo goo goo goo goo

tag goo goo

tag goo

cuz if there's a guru online

it just could be

a true

living, loving guru

who sees your

designs

blueprints

scripts

mega sounds

perfect comic timing

and he's ready to meet

offline

out on main street

ready to be your

very own

living, loving guru

and make it happen

or get ready

to download a guru

and stick in on your AMEX

stick it on your pod

yes, it's steve jobs

the one and only

living

iGuru

iGuru

iGuru

COUNTING THE STEPS FROM ONE THROUGH FIVE

Deborah Sheldon

A mother in a suburban kitchen tries to help her four-year old son, who is choking. They've been making rice paper rolls for tonight's dinner and he is standing on a chair at the bench. Each ingredient - chopped chicken, grated carrot, vermicelli, fresh coriander, mint - has its own bowl and the bowls are lined up on the bench like a scene from a television cookery show. Seven completed rolls are on a plate.

Caroline tried to get Joey involved in the assemblage but he just wanted to nibble on grated carrot. Caroline was softening a sheet of rice paper in water when Joey's breath hitched and stopped. He gaped at her with wide eyes. Adrenaline crackled through her guts, arms and legs. Paediatric first aid training came back in a rush. Stay calm, she reminded herself. Don't panic. Panic allows bad things to happen.

Step one.

She says in measured tones, so as not to alarm him, "Joey, are you all right? Can you talk?" His lips open and close silently. Now Caroline knows for sure that his airway is blocked.

Step two. She pushes fingers into his mouth and hooks out limp carrot strands. "Is that better?" she says. "Joey, are you all right now?" But he's clearly not all right. His ribcage convulses as his diaphragm

strains to pull air. He's had about ten seconds without oxygen. Caroline has got about three minutes and fifty seconds before hypoxia starts snuffing out his brain cells. *Do not panic.* She clamps her jaw. She has a science degree. She is a mathematician. She will not panic.

"Don't worry, Joey, Mummy can fix it, everything's okay." *Step three. Use gravity.* In a single motion, Caroline grabs him around the waist, drops to her haunches and lays him face down over one knee. His honey-blond curls sweep the kitchen tiles. She slaps him once, sharply, between his shoulder blades, as demonstrated by the paediatric first aid instructor, a bald man with a beard and paunch who had looked like a Hell's Angel rather than a retired ambulance officer. The course had been at a community hall by the beach, an hour's drive away. She had forgotten most of it. Some horrible things stood out. The instructor had talked about refraining from pulling cooked spaghetti straight off a screaming child's head because the boiling noodles would remove the skin; instead, you must first place the child under a cold shower.

Caroline slaps Joey again between the shoulder blades. At one point during the weekend-long course, which she attended a couple of summers ago with her sister-in-law, she had practised this

very version of the Heimlich manoeuvre on an adult-sized CPR mannequin because there were only three child-sized ones to share between the class of fifteen. She had turned to her sister-in-law and, for a laugh, pretended she was playing the bongos on the mannequin's back. Her sister-in-law giggled but another participant, a grandmotherly type with a massive bust, frowned and her look said, *this is serious*. And Caroline, chastened, had returned to hitting her mannequin in the proper fashion, counting the slaps.

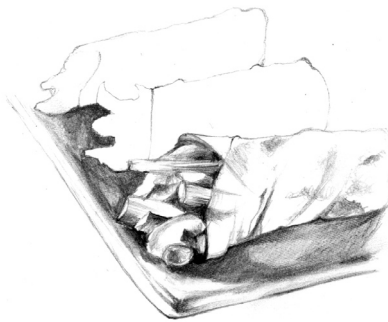
She slaps him again. That makes three. She says, "Joey, are you all right now? Talk to Mummy." His rib cage spasms. *This isn't working*. Her electrified thoughts whip across memories of pregnancy, birth and motherhood and she realises with awful certainty that some vengeful spirit has heard her exhaustion and unhappiness and is addressing it. This is punishment for all those times she has wondered how life would be if she and her husband Matt had never had Joey. Fourth slap. She doesn't believe in God but prays anyway. Panic overwhelms her rational mind and she becomes a desperate savage, dancing for rain.

She has her next move. Two

more slaps and if that doesn't work, she will flip Joey over and commence mouth-to-mouth resuscitation as per step number four. She will need to exhale hard – oh please, not hard enough to blow a lung but firm enough, hopefully, to blast the grated carrot down Joey's trachea and into one of the bronchi to leave the other free and clear; hospital staff can remove the inhaled carrot later. During step four, she will be running down the hallway to the master bedroom to wake up Matt, who is sleeping after twelve hours on nightshift, unaware in his dreams that their life is at a terrible crossroads and could fall either way within the next three minutes. Step five, she will continue mouth-to-mouth and commence heart massage while Matt calls an ambulance. There is no step six.

She slaps Joey again between his shoulder blades. His feet jerk and his abdominal muscles clench weakly against her knee. If she manages to dislodge the grated carrot, this will become a family story repeated often throughout the years.

Joey especially will demand and enjoy repeated tellings. But Caroline will be forever wary, unable to leave him to eat alone, calling out from the kitchen while he's in the living room chewing an after-school snack, Joey are you okay, and Joey, rolling his eyes, will yell back, yeah



Mum I'm fine. And if her attempts don't work, Caroline can see her life as an empty aching horror, stretching out for year after unbearable year, and she slaps him again. That makes five slaps. One more and she will turn him on his back, cradling her baby within the curl of her left arm.

Slap.

"Joey? Say something. Joey?"

A mother in a suburban kitchen is trying to help her son, who is choking. *Step four.* His cheeks are pale, eyes closed, lips slackly parted. She puts her mouth onto his and exhales. She starts her run down the hallway. Tears she doesn't even know she's crying drop onto his face like rain as she flings open the bedroom door.

IT'S FUNDAMENTAL

Maureen Sexton

I've tried to understand the christian
right. Right? What right do we have?
We have the right to remain
silent. How can they listen
when they're screaming at us?
Listen, silent
anagrams of inaction.
They, the fundamentalists
fund/a/mental
who are they financing
now? If the right wing flaps faster
we move in circles -
the wrong ones.
So what keeps them on that path?
They don't have to think -
th/ink is on those pages
tells them what to do.
It's all true you know
what the 'good book'
says - it's black and white. Ha!
Is that why so many are
racist? Where's the grey,
middle? Where are the words
they haven't listened to
yet? Even the bible is bi
two books, not one
open to inter/pretation
inter, to bury the real
meaning - enter pretext.
So here we are, left
behind at the back, less often
seen. Here's where they bite us
scream at us

take away our rights.
And now we've come full circle.
Time to create a front
a dividing line between two air
masses, where the left wing flaps
loud and clear. This brain was made
for thinking, hands for writing
and Docs, just in case.

ANGEL OF MERCY

Geoff Stevens

*Religious fanatics , I find are
extremely good company – Leonard Cohen*

fanatically anti-religious
he was nominated for church office
as a sign of disaffection
by those that saw late the damaging effects of religion
and felt the guilt of having done nothing about it

pithy scenes of him snuffing candles
taking his militant megaphone into monasteries
eating bacon sandwiches in synagogues
handing out pleas for sanity
burnt brightly in their dark but liberated souls

HARNESSING THE HORSE

Helen Hagemann

There are no horses in Broken Bay, only boats. And the talk in town is of half-tide rocks, kingies and poddy mullet. Loved boats in dry-dock feel the wire-brush, the gentle lift of barnacled coat. Our dinghy floor becomes a tiddle of feet and fish as we thread its wobbly life through the channel while cruisers pass, bolt about us like renegades. When they climb to twenty knots it's a stinging breath in the nostrils, opening out a neck of wash, bucking and breaking like a runaway. The bay is alive with their snorting. Well, we can all dream of horses in the horsepower, hooves in the whipcrack of water. Done with bailing the boat, filleting the fish, we harness the horse; check the bit, the colt's vermilion eye, slap reins, shift irritant flies from murmuring flanks. Then we arch Pegasus, lift happiness out, like he's that horse resting tall above the oil and pumps, those flightless wings rigid in smoky moonlight, in a stampede of wheels, boys under weighty hoods. He's no-eater of lucerne or wheat, just a red Mobil sign come to life, rising out over the bay, climbing an eastern sky. Unstoppable on wings of mythic feathers, he smells the wild honey dew of crimson clover, the percussion pot of blue below, because we always knew he wanted to fly.

ODE TO THE ORGAN OF INCOMPARABLE EMOTION

Gillian O'Meagher

the heart is

a malleable animal that can break

but more often than not-
it just bends, twists, and distorts itself

to avoid shattering

the heart spends a lot of time
resting
sighing away the hours with barely a murmur

sleeping between beats

a rhythmic stupor

every now and again-
it wakes up, blinks slowly,
and fixates on an unlikely candidate

the heart is an endless lover of the ever-inappropriate
it's in the blood

coveting odd, dark sparks, rabid with chaos,
inversions of light, obscure and remote

this is passion in revolt-

a revolting addiction to hard diamond people
the kind who plant seeds in the dark

lurking melancholia
murky between the cracks

be still my (sharded) heart
no, really

OUT WITH FRANZ, NORTH OF BROOME

after Philip Hodgins

Stuart Cooke

Franz was Dutch once
but after spending some time here in Broome,
Paddy decided to give him the _____ law.
He took us north
through some of the country, pointing out
plants and places of interest. We sped
at one-thirty down a dusty red road
gloved by burnt scrub to burst out
onto the coast: stupid, sheer blue everywhere.
Franz told us to walk down the beach a bit,
About a 'K, he said. He'd drive on
and meet us down where the red cliffs turned
into sand dunes.
After two 'Ks at least, the white sand burning
your eyes out,
we saw the red rock beside us start to sink
into the ground and big dunes rise up
with a few tufts of this and that on top.
There was a little beach.

Some of us undressed and wandered into the water.
I turned to see a relief of Franz striding down
the crest of a dune. It can be hard to think of this sort of thing
as paradisiacal: you can worry a lot about fresh water,
or how long it will be until you can get back to shade.
You think of what they say about skin cancer, too (the sun's
always there, beating down).
I joined the others in the ocean. Franz lay down on the sand,
took off his sandals and put them under his head.
For a whitefella he didn't seem to burn much.

I swam out for a bit then caught a small wave
in. All that heat and stress I'd felt earlier
had been washed off. I pointed to the blood red
of the cliffs; Franz said they were a big quarry once
where the people got paint and good rock.
When everyone was out of the water we followed him
through a valley between the dunes.
Around our feet were scattered thousands
of pieces of chipped sparkling shells
and thin teeth of stone. It was here,
he told us, over thirty people of the tribe had been shot
by paranoid explorers. Over the other side of that dune
was the burial ground.
You couldn't camp there. This was a better place to sleep.
Stop! he cried, his hands out.
At his feet: two eggs like small marbles
resting on a simple patio of broken white shell.
It was the oyster catcher's nest.
Then, further on, circles of grey ash in the sand.

During lunch, back behind the dunes, someone asked him
why the massacre wasn't mentioned
on the tourist information board. They don't want
to give the young people any more reason
to be angry, he said.

22.7 SQUARE MILES

Emilie Collyer

Are you old enough yet to know the treachery that lies within you?’

Her father’s cousin, a Lutheran minister, asked at her father’s funeral. Maybe he was dark that he didn’t get to take the service. The young parish minister, who had barely known her father, spoke in his sermon about the wages of sin. She read a Dylan Thomas poem. Yes, *THAT* Dylan Thomas poem. Her best friend wore a pale pink suit and a hat and cried.

‘We didn’t know he’d been so sick.’

Silver haired people cooed gently and assumed she knew who they were.

She was tired at the end of the day and felt special, as though she had been in the opening of a show.

She let her friend run her a bath and she sat in the shallow, lukewarm water for half an hour.

The psychiatrist she had just started seeing displayed a mild curiosity when she fronted up the day after the funeral and announced her father had died. ‘Oh, I see. That’s interesting,’ had been the psychiatrist’s exact words.

The week before they had started unpacking her

and the pieces were still laid around the consulting room, waiting for analysis, diagnosis, treatment and cure. Which meant she had been walking around empty for the last 7 days.

So her honest answer to her father’s cousin’s question had been No. She didn’t yet know which bits were treacherous and how serious the potential.

When the pieces remained unpacked and unexamined after this, their third session, she started to worry. It was February and there was a hot north wind blowing and she was getting lighter and lighter each time she left a building.

She didn’t want to drift away.

She found that she liked the formality of people who sent cards that said things such as: ‘We are very sorry for your loss.’

Her best friend from primary school arrived at the funeral with a posy of flowers she had picked from gardens along the way. When they were little the best friend had developed a strange dermatitis that meant great wads of skin constantly peeled from the palms of her hands. She had never once flinched in holding her



friend's hand as they walked to school.

When she mentioned the psychiatrist and her floor scattered with pieces to her sister, her sister told her that it wasn't a competition. She didn't have to keep seeing the psychiatrist just because she'd started. That she could simply walk away and never go back. And no-one would think poorly of her.

So instead of going back to the psychiatrist the week after the funeral she submerged herself in debt and went to New York instead.

She stayed in a hotel run by Indian men on East 17th Street. She had her own room but had to share a bathroom. She had no view. There was a diner at the end of the street where she could eat a workman's breakfast and bottomless coffee for \$6.50. Too much coffee made her feel jittery and reminded her of the threat of her own weightlessness so she took herself underground to explore the subway.

Her first time on the L train a mild mannered guy in pale jeans and white runners asked her if she was lost. He was very kind and he traveled with her and said he was a tourist too. But he was from Michigan, not Melbourne.

He was driving a RV around on a touring holiday of the United States. He asked her what her life's passion was. She said passion was a big word. He had small glasses and light brown hair that flopped

over to one side. There were faint freckles on his face.

He looked at her more closely and told her he could see that she was full of potential. But that something was holding her back. Some grief, a certain sadness, or a disillusionment with the world. He said that he could see an aura of light and compassion glowing around her and that once she moved properly into that light there would be nothing that could stop her.

They ate a meal of tacos together and he drank light beer and he was extremely warm and appropriately inquisitive. When she told him that her father had just recently passed away he offered his condolences for her loss.

He gave her his business card and told her he would be back in Manhattan within the week if she wanted some company. He gave her the name and address of a church on the Upper West Side where she would find people who would understand her and who would love to be part of her journey.

After that she walked. She walked for hours and hours and hours every day and liked the thumping of the concrete and the ache in her back and feet.

She ate a hot dog from the hot dog stand that declared itself as the hot dog stand featured in *Sex and the City*. She drank martinis in a bar in the Village

and left a dollar note tip for every drink she had. She watched Capoeira dancers at Union Square. She went to Tiffany's and ate a doughnut across the road. It was during peak trading hour so she didn't think the security guards would like her peering through the window.

Even though she was staying on her own in a city where nobody knew her, she never once had a panic attack. She slept, exhausted each night from walking. And woke up each morning free from the generalized anxiety of having to fill her days. She had no purpose but she had an island of 22.7 square miles to cover.

She ignored the scratchy voices in her head and asked the tattooed barman with the bandana in the vegan restaurant to take her picture. She said thank you and finished her bircher muesli and took her camera to a shop where she could print up the photo straight away.

She lay on the bed in her hotel room and studied the picture. She noticed a small roll of fat jutting over the top of her jeans. She looked down at her actual stomach. It was solid, fleshy. It would definitely stop her from floating away.

She wasn't sure that she was filled with light and compassion. But she preferred that notion to being inhabited by untold treachery, or having block sized pieces stacked up in the corner of the psychiatrist's office.

She remembered that her mother had

once told her how much her father loved New York. And how he would have lived in a high rise apartment in a big city if he'd ever had the chance. To look out every morning and every night at bright lights, big city.

It wasn't the reason she had come but she was glad to remember it while she was here. So she packed her pieces up and carried them all the way to the top of the Empire State Building where she took a photo on her dad's behalf.

The climb was tiring, she felt her weight at every step. She looked straight down and felt a shiver of excitement. It was a long way and she knew now that she would drop like a stone. No danger of floating away. The gravitational pull was tempting.

She looked out further, across the city. There was still at least 22 square miles to cover. She hadn't even been to Ground Zero yet. It was like she was in *The Amazing Race* and she was facing a detour. A choice between two tasks: Scrape the Sky, or Pound the Ground.

The first task would require stealth and a large leap of faith, but once executed would be short and sweet. The second task, a longer journey, would reward with a greater variety of sights and sounds along the way.

It was a tense moment, this moment of choice, but it was electrifying.

JEAN THERAPY

Geoff Stevens

two sizes down
skin tight
zip down
push and wriggle
tug and stand
exhale
fasten in
feel slim
run your palms
down hips and thighs
gloat within
your second skin

STAGGERING HOME ON A COTTONMOUTH NITE

parkBear

i was getting paid
and I had my audience
how did they wish for this whore...?
i think my words danced
like the sheep bones on my verandah
a salty salsa with the summer wind

i did ok

SATURDAY MORNING *SATURDAY NIGHT*

Browyn Mehan

A woman lounges by her backyard pool
but for gurgling spa pump
and skittering ta-ta lizards
it's a peaceful way
to spend a Saturday morning.

Local boyz loiter
at the bus stop
but for pumping testosterone
and passing doof-doof cars
it's a peaceful way
to spend a Saturday night

Finches dart
into her pool.

The bus-stop boyz peer
into darkness.

She sees her cat
sliding by the pool fence
in a manner that could be
construed as furtive.

They see
Sudanese refugees
(ex-boysoldiers)
sticking close to fence lines
in a manner that could be
construed as furtive.

She starts on the cryptic:

2-Down Territorial grass battles (4-4).

'Whatjalookin'at?'
A stone is thrown

She looks up.

'Leave them be. Scat.'

The birds hover

wet wings

return to safety.

TT

The boyz badger
flex egos
until their bus comes

she sips the last of her mango smoothie
writes:

T

U

R

F

W

A

R

S

CONTRIBUTORS

Belowsky is a poet, first and foremost. Originally from Manchester, England, Belowsky travels the magic triangle of London, New York, and Los Angeles. From the written word to his unparalleled live performances, Belowsky's prolific lyrical rants capture the excitement and chaos of modern consumerist culture. Neither a serious outlook or a playful wit can stand alone, but Belowsky has both.

Emilie Collyer lives in Melbourne. She writes mostly plays, poetry and fiction. Award winning plays include *Argonauta* and *Promise*. Some places she has written for are: Old Parliament House, Airplay (ABC Radio National), *The Australian Book Review* and the Melbourne Writers' Festival. She would like to be a better gardener.

Stuart Cooke is a Sydney-based poet and critic. His poems, translations, essays and stories have been published in most major Australian literary magazines, as well as in the UK and USA.

Helen Hagemann's poetry & prose have been published in literary magazines, including *Overland & Island*. In 2008, she was selected for the Varuna Longlines/APC Publishing Program with a forthcoming collection "Evangelyne & Other Poems" due April 2009.

Bronwyn Mehan is a Darwin-based writer. Her short fiction and poetry have been published in *The Sleepers Almanac*, *CrimeSpace*, *Famous Reporter*, *Hecate*, *dotlit* and *page seventeen*.

Gillian O'Meagher writes and is a stylist for just about anything and everything that catches her attention. She loves speculative fiction. Her first novel *Optimate* is soon to be followed by *The Conceptualist*, due out towards the end of 2009.

parkBear likes to give hugs and enjoys hanging out in parks- usually not in a pervy way. His notebooks are filled with words, some become songs, others poems, some are happy just being words. his online cave is myspace.com/parkbearsongs.

Maureen Sexton is a freelance writer, poet, haiku writer, editor, amateur photographer, digital media artist, webmistress and event organiser. She has a BA in writing and her poetry, haiku and short stories have been widely published.

Deborah Sheldon's credits include television scripts, feature articles, non-fiction books, the award-winning CD ROM *SomaZone*, and the Better Health Channel web site. Her short stories have appeared in *Quadrant*, *Polestar Writers' Journal*, *Australian Reader*, *Southern Ocean Review*, *page seventeen*, *Positive Words*, *FreeXpresSion* and *Eclecticism*. She lives in Melbourne Australia.

Geoff Stevens lives in West Bromwich, England and has edited *Purple Patch* poetry magazine since 1976. He was awarded the Ted Slade Award for Services to Poetry in 2009, and his latest books, *Absinthe on Your Icecream* and *Previously Uncollected Selected*, are out now.

Thanks to the Cottonmouth committee

Poster art and creepy anatomia curation by Michael Barlow Stringer

They are Rebecca Giggs, Patrick Pittman, Scott-Patrick Mitchell, Simon Cox, Jessyca Hutchens, Tomás Ford, Simon Mongey, Matt Giles, Sam Knee and Matt Ford.

We're in the 459 Bar of the Rosemount Hotel every month, usually on the second Thursday,
459 Fitzgerald St, North Perth, Western Australia.

You may visit us online at cottonmouth.org.au

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