

Julia Deakin

Class of 2002

Master of Arts with distinction.

Julia Deakin is a celebrated poet and winner of the 2006 Northern Exposure Poetry competition, and more recently a winner of the Poetry Business Pamphlet competition. Originally from Nuneaton, Julia moved north to study English at York University, before turning her hand to advertising, au pairing, teaching and copywriting. After graduating from the Poetry MA course with a distinction at the University of Huddersfield, she went on to become a part-time lecturer in Copywriting at the University, and is enjoying the success of the publication of her first collection of poetry, *Without A Dog*.

So, what brought you to Huddersfield?

I moved to Huddersfield in 1999, and it turns out I've actually got some quite strong family connections, but I wasn't really aware of that at the time. I feel very at home here, and it was actually the move to Huddersfield that led me into poetry. I saw an advert in the local paper for a Poetry Master's course at the University with Peter Sansom, who is one of the big names in facilitating and editing poetry, and so embarked on the course. All the other students on the course were already interested in writing poetry, but I was really more interested in catching up on the literary theory, which had changed dramatically since I had last studied English. It was a bit of a shock to realise I was going to be expected to write poetry as well, and I didn't like that idea at all!

How did your dislike of poetry lead you to evolve into an award-winning poet?

Well the first few workshops I did during the MA were very difficult. But I enjoyed it so I stuck at it, and soon started to receive very distinct sounds of encouragement from people. After graduating the Master's course with a distinction, I was fortunate enough to be offered a job teaching 20th century literature, which led to me getting involved with the Pennine Poets. I began to have my poetry published and gained more confidence, and eventually I won the Poetry Business Pamphlet competition – after several tries! The thing about poetry is you have to persevere; the sense of achievement you get from knowing you were chosen out of thousands of entries is well worth the wait.

Where do you find your inspiration?

It often comes from memory, and the need to arrange my feelings on paper. Sometimes it comes from the urge to achieve something formally; it might be a poetic form that I find challenging and want to conquer, or an idea I want to explore. But I think the pleasure and reward of being published in magazines and being able to share what I write with others is the driving force; throughout my life I have primarily been a communicator – be it lecturing, writing, advertising – and poetry is another way of getting through to people. I just love discussing what I write and read with others, and listening to different interpretations and ways of seeing things that I had never thought of – that's my inspiration.

What do you hope people take away from your poems?

I think if somebody has made the effort to engage with a poem, they deserve to be met half way by the poet – I don't want to make them do all the work, so I would like them to take away some satisfaction from having developed a meaning from the text. I might like to amuse them or cause them to see things in a way that is meaningful for them, and relates to their own experience as well as mine. I would say my poems are a little bit unusual as a whole, because at times they're very dark and bleak and stark, and at times very humorous and whimsical, but you couldn't really put me in a box – I'm not Sylvia Plath and I'm not Wendy Cope, I'm somewhere in between! I'd like my readers to take away something different from each poem.

Where did the title for *Without A Dog* come from?

Well it's the title poem from my collection, but I'm not going to give away any more than that! It draws people into the collection – I mean some people take it a bit too literally – one woman was very keen to know whether I had had a dog and lost it – and in many ways poems are not so literally about you, so I can assure you it's no reflection on my domestic arrangements! All will become clear if you get to read that poem...

Where would you like the future to take you?

I'm not entirely sure what my next ambition is going to be. Working on the Poetry Business competition consumed me for quite a while, so I

would say in the shorter term I would like to enter more competitions and be published in more magazines. *Without A Dog* is my first collection of poems, and the process has been a relatively smooth one – it was a bit of a haul from first draft to actual publication, but in terms of the critical response it has been like a dream, so I suppose my next challenge is to release a second collection which is equally well-received.

What makes you happy?

This experience of success has really made me happy – for all my working life I have been a writer of some kind, and there is something wonderful about seeing your writing in print. I have written a lot for various publications, doing book reviews and articles, and of course there is a certain satisfaction in achieving those, but I've discovered a much greater satisfaction in writing a poem. A poem can often end up being more than you originally planned; somehow the process adds something and it almost acquires a life of its own, and so the satisfaction of a well-received poem makes me very happy. But I have to say, like most others, a bit of sunshine and a beach also makes me very happy!

Our thanks to Julia for allowing us to publish the following poem entitled *There*, which is in memory of Diane and Annika, drink-drive victims killed as they walked home from celebrating their move into a new house.

There

Not in the empty house unlocked by next of kin at 5am,
the little nest of mugs and plates in water not yet cold...
not in the folded limbs of clean socks and t-shirts waiting to be put away,
the tins of paint, the brushes soaking in white spirit...
not in the two names ringing from the clutch of letters,
not in the prized quiet of their double bed...
not in the smiles from the sideboard
nor yet in the open daily paper on the sofa...
not in the distant sirens
or the cat clawing...

but afterwards
over and over,
under the twisted metal, the piles of settling dust, the shrouds of fabric,
under the scorching ashes sifted through with teaspoons,
through the acrid fumes in the arc-lit tunnel behind the bulkhead
downstream, under the rock, caught in branches
under the shale, the mud, the weight of snow
in the crush of timber in the pitch black flooded chasm
under the rubble torn at with bare hands
there,
over and over
they will find their child.