



# PROFESSIONAL WRITING NEWS

April 2009

## Bringing it all back home

**F**ormer MA Professional Writing student Judy Heminsley has launched her first book, a guide to making the most out of working from home.

Published by How To Books, *Work from Home* is packed with practical advice that draws on Judy's own experience of working from home for 20 years - running her own businesses, as an employee and, not least, as a writer.

It also tells the stories of homeworkers of all kinds, from artists to sales managers and B&B proprietors, allowing readers to learn from mistakes they've made and problems they've solved.

While it might seem cleverly timed to coincide with the credit crunch and the ensuing tide of redundancies, Judy actually began developing the book over two years ago and wrote part of it for her final MA project. But many of the points it makes are particularly relevant to people rethinking the way they work in today's climate.

### Heartening stories

"It was heartening to confirm that modern technology makes it possible to make a good living, running a small business or holding down a well-paid job, even if you're living in the depths of countryside," Judy says. "For example, one woman was able to become the main breadwinner in her family, earning twice her previous salary, by working from home in Cornwall as a sales executive for a company based in the South East."

Many such stories feature in the book, along with down-to-earth suggestions on key issues such as staying productive, keeping a healthy balance between work and family, not becoming isolated and maintaining a professional image when you work from the kitchen table - something that Judy herself seems to manage effortlessly.



Judy Heminsley: "One of the best things about working from home is being able to take time off when I feel like it."

## Rob's midnight rambles

**F**or Neil Armstrong it was a low-gravity sortie from the Apollo 11 lander. For Michael Jackson it was the dance move that propelled his career into the stratosphere. But for Robert Self-Pierson, moonwalking is a way to experience a magical transfiguration of the everyday world.

Rob, who completed his MA last year, has been undertaking a series of night walks across the UK and recording his experiences in his blog, [Discovering Britain by Full Moon](#).

Throughout 2009 - the International Year of Astronomy - Rob is throwing himself into the veiled world of night-walkers, moon-worshippers, ghost-hunters and lunar planters, uncovering the many hidden ways in which our closest natural satellite continues to exert a powerful influence on life on Earth. It's a project that's brought him up against some unusual difficulties.

### Witch's warning

"In January I was warned by a witch that I may lose a leg and an eye during my travels," he reveals. "Then a month later I was stranded in a winter storm beside the treacherous canals of Birmingham. In March, in a pub near Battle Abbey, a man



Inspiration for poets, lovers – and Rob Self-Pierson

from Fort William threatened to feed me to some mythical water horses.”

Rob’s travels will culminate in a moonwalk on New Year’s Eve, when a rare blue moon – the thirteenth full moon of 2009 – will carry him into 2010.

Interest from several publishers has convinced him that it may not be complete lunacy to think a book based on his experiences may finally emerge (along with Rob himself) into the light of day.

## All the fun of the fair

**A** large party of Professional Writing students were at this year’s London Book Fair, the most important event in the year for the UK publishing industry.

As well as attending master classes on how to get published with leading agents and best-selling authors such as Kate Mosse, they were also able to chat informally about book ideas with movers and shakers of the publishing world.

With support and advice from the Professional Writing staff team, several students succeeded in generating interest in book projects from agents and publishers.

“It was fascinating to hear first-hand about what publishers are looking for right now,” says Susie Marriott, the MA course’s non-fiction tutor. “Stories of transformation and serious, tightly focused non-fiction seem to be top of their wish-lists.”

You’ll find more about the event, including reports on various aspects of the fiction and non-fiction markets, at [Profwriting.com](http://Profwriting.com), the newly launched online network for writers.

Set up by staff on the MA Professional Writing course, Profwriting.com is aimed at

writers looking to brush up their skills, showcase work and have it critiqued by peers and experts. It also offers affordable mini writing courses and mentoring from successful established writers.

The editorial board includes novelist Patrick Gale, literary agent Victoria Hobbs and John Yorke, Controller of BBC Drama Production.

## MA in the news

**B**oyd Tonkin, literary editor at the Independent, recently picked up on the fact that Falmouth’s Professional Writing MA is seeing “a rising tide of applications from people rediscovering aspirations to write for a living, including accountants, company directors, an airline manager and a corporate lawyer working for hedge funds in the City”.

Writing in his weekly column, Tonkin was sceptical about whether choosing a career in writing was a wise move, given that many long-established scribes struggle to equal the national average wage. “Writing – fine,” he observes tartly. “For a living – in your dreams, hedgies.”

### Transferable skills

Christina Bunce, who heads the MA course, says: “What Tonkin failed to recognise is that the MA – unlike many creative writing courses – does not aim to help students produce slabs of navel-gazing fiction, but focuses on commercially viable forms as well as teaching a range of skills that are highly transferable to other areas.

“From our students’ point of view, the key to making a living from writing is flexibility. You may well have a wonderful literary novel in development, but it makes sense to make money from your craft in other ways until you get that killer advance: copywriting, public relations, writing for the web or magazine and newspaper journalism.

“Writing courses have come in for a lot of stick from critics who say they are a waste of time. But the evidence of our graduates suggests that there is a growing awareness in the business world – from banks to telecoms companies – that strong, practically focused writing skills make for good business outcomes.”