

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2026

# THE CHRISTIAN writer

## SEE INSIDE FOR

### Articles:

The Publishing Journey of  
*London Longings a Memoir*  
SICBAN November Gathering Report  
The Damage of Evil Writing  
Recent Book Launch of  
*Curly Cat the Acrobat*  
Mental Health

### Book Reviews:

*Beloved Children* by Lorraine Dittrich  
*He is Faithful from A to Z* by April May  
*The Baby who went Straight to Heaven*  
by April May

Poetry, Devotions, Celebrations,  
Competitions and more!

A magazine of NZ Christian Writers



**Mission:** *Connecting Christian writers in New Zealand.*

**Vision:** *To encourage and inspire Christian writers throughout New Zealand.*

**Values:** *Christian faith, God's Word, professionalism, quality and social outreach.*

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**Book Review Requests:** (current members only)

Mail a copy of your book to our Book Reviewer, Julia Martin  
286 Karapiro Road, RD 4, Cambridge 3496 or email: [reviews@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:reviews@nzchristianwriters.org)

**The Christian Writer** is our bimonthly magazine published by NZ Christian Writers and distributed to all members. Contributions from members are always welcome. If you have some advice, encouragement, or an announcement of an event of interest to members, do send it to the editor for consideration by the 10th of the month before the next publication date. Submissions should be emailed as a Word document attachment and be no more than 500 words long, except at the discretion of the editor.

The editor reserves the right to condense and/or edit any contributions for reason of space. Ideas and opinions will not be edited but editing of a technical nature may occur to maintain a high standard of writing. Views and opinions expressed do not necessarily state or reflect those of the editor.

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# The Christian Writer

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**Website:** Our user-friendly website is full of helpful information, such as details of seminars and copies of past magazines. It gives each member an online presence. Feel free to share our website link with other Christian writers so they can join us. Our members are the best advocates for growing our collective of NZ Christian Writers.

[www.nzchristianwriters.org](http://www.nzchristianwriters.org)

# President's Report



Welcome to our Feb-Mar 2026 edition of *The Christian Writer*.

As many of you may know, we anticipate a new chapter for NZ Christian Writers later in 2026 as I look to pass my president role to a new person from September 2026. I've absolutely loved my time hosting, giving, and serving in this capacity, and know that after ten years it's the right season for new leadership of NZ

Christian Writers. I anticipate still being on the Board, working closely with our Board members, plus coordinating and hosting our Retreat 2027. We are positioned for growth and have a very supportive Board. If you've been a member of NZCW for over two years, have a desire to see Christian writers thrive, and know that you have the ability, skills, and time for this leadership position, feel free to reach out to me for a conversation together. My email is: [president@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:president@nzchristianwriters.org).



One of the best ways we want to help serve our members in 2026 is with a new website. Our treasurer, Andrew Stirling and I have been working closely with Tony Zwies at Yellow Design to co-create a brand-new website for NZ Christian Writers. This one will be a significant upgrade to our current website, with improved form and functionality that is more fit for purpose in 2026 and beyond. Best of all, it will have a user-friendly login where members can publish their own writer profile and book features. That means you can upload your own book artwork, profile photo and create an online presence with clickable links for anyone online to buy your published books.

Our collective of NZ Christian Writers has a wealth of experience represented by the many members who have joined us throughout our 43 years. We are blessed to have so many experienced published authors and writers among us. In addition, we find that every year there are new members discovering our collective for the first time and wanting to join us to see what value we can bring to their writing and publishing journey. If you know a Christian writer who would love to be part of our collective, simply point them to our website to learn more: [www.nzchristianwriters.org](http://www.nzchristianwriters.org).

Once again, special thanks go to member and photographer, Elaine Dixon, for contributing the front cover photo featured on this magazine. May God continue to bless NZ Christian Writers as we write for Him.

Be blessed

Justin St Vincent

# Editorial: Stay in the Game



Today is 12 January 2026 and I'm in the middle of a transition accommodation-wise and employment-wise. By the time you'll be reading this in February, the Lord-willing, my animals and I will be settling into our next home. I will be getting on with being self-employed as a freelance proofreader, editor and as always, author. My magazine editor role for NZ Christian Writers is voluntary. Along with others on our Professional Writing Services page, for a fee I offer proofreading and editing services to individual writers, operating as Steppingstone Editing and Proofreading Services.

One of my goals for 2026 is to continue with my Cecil Murphey Scholarship, which gives me lifetime access to over 100 online courses at Christian Writers Institute, USA. If you're looking for easy, short, reputable courses on topics to do with writing, editing, publishing, marketing and more, I encourage you to check out what their website has to offer. The courses are video and audio lessons from experienced tutors, with lesson notes and can be done in your own time. Here's the website:

<https://christianwritersinstitute.com/>

Some of you may be wondering; *How did Kathryn receive the Cecil Murphey Scholarship worth over \$2500 USD?* It was seriously a God-thing. I didn't have to do anything extra special. I entered my name in a giveaway and it was drawn 'out of the hat' so to speak, from more than 3500 entries from people in various countries. This was awarded to me on 1 March 2022. You can imagine how gob-smacked and overjoyed I was when I received the congratulations email. If you're not sure who Cecil Murphey is, he is a book author of 140-plus books and well known as the ghost writer of the books *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story* and *90 Minutes in Heaven*.

He's a popular speaker at Christian writers' conferences in the USA. I signed up to receive his monthly newsletter, and I find his content is always encouraging for writers. Here is his website: <https://cecilmurphey.com/>.



*Cecil Murphey* 

As writers, Christians and human beings, we will experience disappointments along our life journeys, but it's important not to get discouraged and especially not to give up. When you look for it, you'll find there's a lot in scripture about God comforting us. He knows this life is hard. He knows we need comforting and reassurance through all the ups and downs. You never know who will receive comfort and help through your written words. You never know how God may surprise you with a special blessing along your writing journey, to comfort and encourage you. Stay in the game. Keep writing.

With love in Jesus,

Kathryn Paul

*I love to hear from our readers. Email: [editor@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:editor@nzchristianwriters.org)*

# Notices

## Are you our next NZCW President?

NZ Christian Writers is seeking a current member who has been with us long term, for the voluntary president role. Email Justin at [president@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:president@nzchristianwriters.org)

## Creative Writing/Article Writing Submissions Wanted Please

You are invited to send your contributions for our magazines, *The Christian Writer* and *Young Christian Writer*. **The next deadline for *The Christian Writer* is 10 March 2026. The deadline for *Young Christian Writer* is 10 February 2026.** Please send your contributions as a word document attachment, maximum 500 words. Please send pictures as picture files, not pdf. Thank you. Email to [editor@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:editor@nzchristianwriters.org).

## Local Writers Group Leaders Wanted

Are willing to facilitate a Christian writers' group? Please get in touch to find out more details. Email Justin at [president@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:president@nzchristianwriters.org) or Kathryn at [editor@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:editor@nzchristianwriters.org)

## Book Reviews Criteria

Members are welcome to request a book review of any of their published books. The main criterion is the book must have some Christian relevancy. For more information on how to have your book reviewed in *The Christian Writer* please refer to page two.

## Join the NZ Christian Writers Group on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/newzealandchristianwriters>

## South Island Christian Book Authors Network

Meetings are quarterly and are specifically offered to those interested in writing a Christian book or who have published a book. For meeting details contact facilitator: Verna McFelin at [verna.mcfelin@gmail.com](mailto:verna.mcfelin@gmail.com).

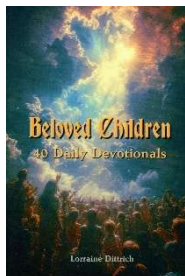
## Raising Godly Mothers Magazine

If you are an older mother who would like to write an article for future issues of *Raising Godly Mothers* or if you are a young mother who is struggling, please contact Shing at [rgm@rgm.co.nz](mailto:rgm@rgm.co.nz). For information or to subscribe to the magazine visit: [www.rgm.co.nz](http://www.rgm.co.nz)

## Warning! Scammer Alert!

Please remember no one from NZ Christian Writers is authorised to email members asking for money or other forms of help. Check for fake email addresses as the scammers like to pretend to be one of us. Do not reply to the scammers' emails; simply ignore them.

**To locate and read past magazine issues visit [www.nzchristianwriters.org/magazines](http://www.nzchristianwriters.org/magazines) and click on the relevant magazine cover.**



### Beloved Children

By Lorraine Dittrich

Review by Julia Martin

Self-Published 2025 Available from [anjo.books@gmx.com](mailto:anjo.books@gmx.com)

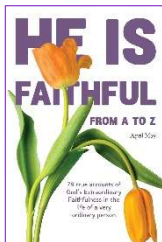
From her viewpoint and experience as a mother, grandmother, Bible-in-School teacher and facilitator of various youth programmes, the author has compiled this collection of 40 devotionals. She writes:

'Throughout my life, children from all ages, including young adults and my own children, enriched my life. I shared in their joy and in their pain. I realised early on that I had a gift for understanding children's hearts.'

From this standpoint, Lorraine takes the antics and remarks made by children – which are often amusing and insightful, and then skilfully develops them into Biblical truth and teaching applicable for adult readers. Each devotional is followed by a relevant scripture reference for further reflection.

One example of such devotionals is when a young girl in tears complains that her prayers about a serious matter have gone on for weeks with no answer. 'I guess God only listens to prayers He wants to answer,' she concludes. This frank comment gives Lorraine the opportunity to answer the child's wrong impression and thus develop the theme of prayer in many aspects as taught in the Bible for older readers.

The devotionals are short in length, easy to read, yet informative and challenging. The collection is suitable for all ages and is an ideal gift to encourage and inspire readers and draw them closer to the Lord.



### He is Faithful from A to Z

By April May

Review by Julia Martin

Self-Published 2022 Available from [aprilmaygems.com](http://aprilmaygems.com)

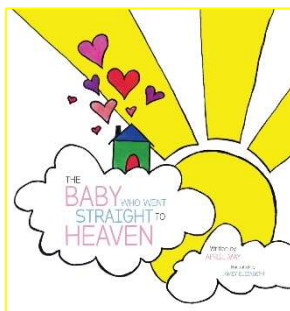
April May's book is an autobiography with a difference as it's not written in chronological order, but rather in a series of chapters presented in a random fashion with each bearing a letter of the alphabet.

The theme of the 79 chapters grouped under the letters A to Z is the faithfulness of God during an often turbulent life with challenges and problems of all kinds. Under the letter A in chapter one for example, the author deals with Abuse, Anger, Addictions and Abandonment, revealing her troubled childhood and youth.

The chapters vary in length and content and can be read in any order. They deal with April May's difficult times of hardship, failed businesses, financial debt, marriage problems, family challenges, the loss of a baby girl, along with significant dreams, premonitions, and unexpected miracles.

April writes with honesty and openness and is passionate about sharing her life stories and experiences to encourage and inspire others to believe in God and trust Him wholeheartedly in every situation of life

Though claiming to be 'a very ordinary person', the stories of her life are a powerful testimony of God's unconditional love, patience, goodness, and faithfulness. I believe this book will challenge, confront, inspire, and strengthen the faith of readers and give them hope.



### The Baby who went Straight to Heaven

By April May

Review by Julia Martin

Self-Published

2023 Available from [aprilmaygems.com](http://aprilmaygems.com)

From her own tragic experience of losing her stillborn baby girl (Anna Grace) in 2007, April May has written this children's book to help young ones cope with the sad situation where a mother goes into hospital to have her baby but comes home without one.

She writes: 'My hope is that these little ones be comforted and know their sibling is safe and loved – and so are they. With bright, colourful illustrations, it's a book full of hope and will help children as they grieve but also aid their healing by drawing them close to the One who loves them the most.'



# The Publishing Journey of *London Longings – a memoir*

by Leanne J Minton

Five years in the making, my manuscript was finally complete. I'd implemented my developmental editor's suggestions: anecdotes I'd toiled over telling, but were surplus to the main story, had been excised. In contrast, emotions had needed to be fleshed out in action and speech. Now the minefield of self-publishing could no longer be avoided.

The first task was to find someone to design my book cover. After a few false starts, a young woman, intrigued by my title, agreed to create a cover within a limited budget. To save costs she advised me to find a vector. After scanning literally thousands of them in the websites she'd recommended, I discovered one that encapsulated the title. From the image my designer crafted a striking cover.

Next, I needed to choose a printing company. The quotes shocked me. After some agonising I opted for PrintABook. With it being a subsidiary of Caxton Press, I could be confident of a quality product.

What I wasn't confident about was my ability to format the manuscript after I'd read their daunting 74 page *Guide to Self-Publishing*. While their guidelines were informative, I didn't know how to achieve them. I turned to YouTube videos for help but after trying my best to follow their instructions, issues still remained. One conundrum was that although Word automatically ensured there were no orphans or widows, it resulted in the end lines of facing pages not aligning!

Hours of frustration and some tears later, the formatting challenges proved too much and I emailed PrintABook of my failures. I was astounded and deeply grateful by their offer to perform specific tasks for me and soon the inside front cover, copyright, dedication and other pages were free of headers and footers. Other issues were also solved and with the manuscript looking clean, it was time to order a proof copy.

On its arrival, I read my memoir one last time. Unable to discover any errors I approved it for printing – although the thought nagged at me that I'd simply become blind to them.

After a two-week wait I collected my books in July 2025, taking the staff a home-made cake in gratitude for their help. Once at home I carefully slit open a box and eased out a book. As I admired the front and back covers and flicked through the pages, I breathed out months of pressure. The feeling of lightness was accompanied by an immense sense of achievement. It was not only the successful execution of a major project, but it signalled breaking free from a poverty mind-set I'd been struggling with for decades. It had been very difficult for me to spend several thousand dollars for the professional developmental edit, cover and printing. But God had provided the funds for me to do so. Our God is a God of excellence and I trust I have honoured Him with the calibre of my memoir.

# South Island Christian Book Authors Network (SICBAN)

## November Gathering Report

Presented by: Verna McFelin

On Thursday, 20 November, the South Island Christian Book Authors Network (SICBAN), hosted a special evening with guest speaker George Bryant, respected author, publisher and mentor to many in the New Zealand Christian writing community.

Although our meetings are normally held on Saturdays, we adjusted to a Thursday evening to align with George's availability. While this meant that some were unable to attend, we were delighted to have 16 in attendance and received 19 apologies.

The evening began with a potluck tea and warm fellowship, including a time of sharing where members talked about their current writing projects, recent progress and, for some, the personal challenges they had navigated over the past few months. It was also wonderful to welcome several newcomers to their very first SICBAN gathering.

George then shared from his remarkable journey as an author of 27 books, numerous booklets, and many articles, taking us through the process of writing and publishing from first draft to finished book and beyond. He gave valuable insight into the practical steps involved, from shaping ideas, editing and production, through to distribution and marketing.

One of the highlights of the evening was George's teaching on writing from a Christian worldview, which he delivered with passion, clarity and conviction. He reminded us of the unique privilege and responsibility Christian writers carry in stewarding words that both inform and transform. His enthusiasm was contagious and his encouragement deeply appreciated.



George was very generous with his knowledge, personal experiences and practical handouts, leaving many feeling equipped, inspired and more confident in their writing journey. We extend our heartfelt thanks to George for his wisdom and generous contribution to the evening.

Our next SICBAN meeting will be held in February 2026 and we look forward to continuing the momentum, encouragement and fellowship we experienced in November.

# The Damage of Evil Writing

by Kathryn Paul

Normally, I focus on the positive aspects of Christian writing, such as writing that is encouraging, inspirational, comforting and helpful. But recently, I read a novel by a Christian writer that had me pondering the potential damage of evil writing. In this case one of the main characters was portrayed as a believer but some of his conduct clearly was what the Bible calls sexual immorality. However, in this fictional story there was no repentance, and no conviction from the Holy Spirit. His character continued to pray to God but there was nothing to let readers know that his conduct wasn't aligning with scripture. This bothered me. I considered throwing the book in the bin, because I felt the story could wrongly portray to a new Christian, teenager or unbeliever that his conduct was 'normal Christianity'.

This is the difference between religion versus relationship. A religious person may pray to God and believe He exists but doesn't have a personal connection with Him. Someone with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is led by the Holy Spirit and the communication is two-way. Therefore, if that person is behaving in a way which doesn't align with what the Holy Spirit would have him or her do, that person experiences a sense of conviction as they are led in gentle correction. It's not condemnation or guilt – which pulls a person down, it's a deep conviction within their heart which prompts for change. The Bible tells us not to harden our hearts against the Holy Spirit and not to grieve Him. He is here to work in partnership with us. He is our counsellor, whom Jesus called, 'The Helper'.

Evil writing is happening all around us. It's in the libraries, bookshops, music, movies and on the internet. Usually, it's obvious enough for Christians to identify and steer clear of. But we're living in the last days when the Bible said evil would be called good. The lines are getting blurred, making it difficult for people to recognise wrong influences.

One of the difficulties of evil writing is once those words are out in the world, they can't easily be pulled back. The theory of evolution is an example. It was an evil theory used to deny God. Now the theory has been proven wrong, over and over again in various ways, scientifically. But look how difficult it is to undo the harm it has done and retract it from society.

All writing influences people in some way. We need to be careful to ensure our writing is influencing our readers for good at a Biblical standard. If you're not sure what that standard is, it's important to spend time regularly reading the Bible, with the help of the Holy Spirit, so that He can help you know.

Our minds are like computers – what we put in is what will come out. If we're reading books with bad language and detailed bedroom scenes, this is going to hinder the 'transforming of our minds' which the Bible wants us to engage in. We don't want written porn on the screen of our minds. Our minds are like gardens; we reap what we sow.

I'm so grateful for Christian literature that is clean and that influences readers for good. Be encouraged, because your Christian writing is important. Remember to ask the Holy Spirit to help you with it, so that He can show you if there's anything in it which needs to be changed or improved. Let's ensure our writing isn't damaging people but is helpful. Let's sow good seed in their gardens.



# Songwriting DIY

Column by Felicity Logan

## Part Eight: Pentatonic Tunes

We've looked at using chord notes on a ukelele. But if you have a keyboard, try using the **Pentatonic scale**. Find F-sharp (F# is the lowest of three black keys grouped together) and call it the "key/home note". Create a melody using **black keys only**. It will have a special quality reminiscent of Chinese, cowboy or other ethnic groups. You do know some such melodies: "Amazing Grace" melody starting on C-sharp (C# is the lowest of two black keys grouped together) follows black keys only. It will end on F#. Start on F-sharp to work out "Nothing but the Blood" (the old Billy Graham songbook version) easily. Now create your own! With this scale, you can't go wrong!

### Using ancient scales for special effects:

In the Middle Ages, churches used old Greek scales that are quite "otherworldly". Some persisted to become the Major scale and the Natural Minor. Explore these using **white keys only**.

- Major scale: with C as the key note (what we're used to)
- Natural minor: with A as the key note (slightly different from our modern minor scale)
- Dorian scale with D as the keynote (very olde worlde)

Do try Dorian mode, for thoughtful songs. Perhaps pick out a guitar accompaniment in single notes, or on guitar/piano strum a single chord and hold it until a change of harmony. Don't let it get "busy" or the effect is lost.

**Extra Pointers for your Chorus:** End the verse with a chord that flows easily into the start of the chorus, e.g. if the chorus starts with F chord, finish the verse on C7; if the chorus begins with A chord, end the verse with E7. Re-use any interesting rhythm patterns from the verses but not too many high notes in a row. Do you find yourself humming any worship choruses? Think about each one – *why has it stayed in my mind?* *Can it be a model for me?*

# Let's Celebrate!

Do you have a writing-related moment to share that we can celebrate? Perhaps it's a goal reached or a writing challenge you've overcome. Tell us so we can celebrate with you.

Congratulations to everyone who has released a book recently or achieved a goal in your writing journey. Remember to let us know.

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### Here are some helpful writer/reader websites:

NZ Society of Authors: <https://authors.org.nz/>

Storylines NZ: <https://www.storylines.org.nz/>

Read NZ Te Pou Muramura: <https://www.read-nz.org/>

Christian Writers Institute (USA): <https://christianwritersinstitute.com/>

Omega Christian Writers (Australia and NZ): <https://omegawriters.com.au/>

<https://www.storymonstersbookawards.com/>

<https://www.maoripostal.co.nz/>

[Writer Beware - Shining a small, bright light in a wilderness of writing scams – https://writerbeware.blog](https://writerbeware.blog)

For South Island Writer Retreats: <http://www.sistereretreat.com/>

Hawkes Bay Christian Writers <https://hbchristianwriter.com/>

Publishers Association of NZ <https://publishers.org.nz/>

NZ Booklovers <https://www.nzbooklovers.co.nz/>

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A big thank you to Felicity Logan for her Songwriting DIY column. Let us know if the column inspired you to write a new song. We'd love to receive feedback.



# Recent Book Launch of *Curly Cat the Acrobat*

by Jennifer Somervell

*Flying trapeze inspires swinging tale/tail*

*Oxford author releases tenth picture book*

*Children riveted by swinging tail*

*Swinging tale captivates children in Oxford*



Photo caption: illustrator Zerika van Jaarsveld (right) and author Jennifer Somervell (left) at the book launch of *Curly Cat the Acrobat*

Photo acknowledgement: Anna McDonald

Children were riveted by swinging adventures at the recent launch of Oxford author, Jennifer Somervell's tenth picture book, *Curly Cat the Acrobat*. This delightful book is the sequel to the award-winning *Curly Cat* published in 2021. Both picture books contain illustrations by Zerika van Jaarsveld.

"The story idea came from a childhood obsession with acrobatics and flying trapeze," said Jennifer. "I wondered what would happen if Curly Cat tried flying trapeze? Children present at the launch could tell this wouldn't go well! They listened, breathless, as Curly Cat climbed confidently up to the high trapeze platform, only to look down and freeze in terror ...."

Jennifer admitted the thought of a book launch in the middle of a house build was initially overwhelming. "Then I was invited to the local school for an author visit. I realised God had given us a helping hand. We printed personal invitations for the Year Three to Year Six students and they were super chuffed!" Many of the children came bringing their parents.

"Thanks to a team of wonderful helpers from our church, children had a ball: getting their faces painted and putting their own spin on Zerika's beautiful pictures. They gobbled up Curly Cat's favourite foods – fur balls, cat cookies, cats' tails, chocolate fish, and cheese mice munchies; all with cat-themed music playing in the background. Afterwards, many parents thanked our team for the wonderful time we gave their children. Some children asked, "When is the next book launch?"

Jennifer has been thrilled with feedback from children and reviewers. Children's and Young Adult Book Reviewer, Bob Docherty, called it "a fabulous picture book" which "will melt your heart."

Jennifer said children identify with Curly Cat's impetuous behaviour – and the predictable consequences. "They love his adventurous spirit and the fact he never gives up on his dreams. We all need encouragement to be adventurous and take risks, even when it can mean failing the first time."

*Curly Cat the Acrobat* and Jennifer's other books, including its prequel *Curly Cat*, are available at most independent bookstores and online at:

<https://www.talesfromthefarmpublications.com/other-books-by-jennifer/p/new-curly-cat-the-acrobat>

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## List of Christian Bookstores in NZ

Adventist Book Centre (Pakuranga and online)  
Art in the Villa (Whangarei)  
Bible Society NZ (online)  
Children's Bible Ministries (Mt Eden and online)  
Christian Resource Centre (Mt Roskill and online)  
Christian Superstore NZ (Christchurch and online)  
Christian Value Books (Christchurch and online)  
Church Stores (Ellerslie and online)  
Ecclesia Books (Christchurch and online)  
Emanuel Books (Manukau)  
Epic Books (Christchurch and online)  
Evermore Books (Mt Roskill)  
Gracebooks NZ (online)  
Heartbeat Christian Store (Warkworth)  
Living Word Bookcentre (online)  
Manna Christian Stores (8 stores and online)  
Pleroma Christian Supplies (Hawkes Bay and online)  
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Sonshine Bookcentre (Tauranga and online)

# Professional Writing Services

**Are you a subscriber who can offer a professional service related to writing or publishing? If so, you are welcome to advertise here for FREE. Send your advertisement of 100 words maximum to: [editor@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:editor@nzchristianwriters.org)**

## A WORD ABOUT EDITING

I am a freelance editor having received a Diploma of Proofreading and Editing from NZIBS in 2012. I have edited a large range of documents including novels, biographies, magazine articles, websites, and university assignments.

In August 1968, while beginning teacher training, Jesus Christ changed my heart and the whole direction of my life. I am passionate about working with Christian writers, helping them polish their work until it shines. I endeavour to read the writer's intentions, not just their words, helping them shape their writing into a more accurate, natural and pleasing form.

### Graham Pedersen

Ph: 027 440 5851

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### Kathryn Paul

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I have qualifications in technical and professional communication, editing and proofreading, science and laboratory technology. I am in my happy place when editing and thoroughly enjoy turning people's prose into award winning documents.

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# Who Remembers *The Writing School*?

by Kathryn Paul

*The Writing School*, from memory (please correct me if I'm wrong), began in Great Britain and became available in New Zealand, offering writing courses by correspondence, such as their Comprehensive Writing Course. As a teenager in the 1980's I remember being shown the newspaper advertisement for it. The desire to do the course was planted in my heart. When I had my son in the 1990's I knew, 'this is the time'. I signed up for the Comprehensive Writing Course by correspondence (snail mail in the post). I absolutely loved receiving the big fat yellow-orange envelopes which would be sent back and forth between me and my tutor.

*The Writing School* at the time had a promise that if I hadn't earned back the cost of the course by the time I had finished it, they would refund my total fees. The cost, from memory, was between \$700-\$800 NZD. True to their words, I had earned back the fees by the time I finished and received the Diploma of The Writing School. I earned money from a short story in *Woman's Day magazine* and articles in *NZ Baby and Child* and *NZ Wilderness* magazines.

Eventually the name changed to *The Sackville Academy* (run from Australia, I think) and *Lifestyle Learning Direct*. Around 2008 I completed my Certificate of Professional Proofreading and Copy Editing from *The Sackville Academy*. (There were more of those fat envelopes, yay!)

For this magazine article, I tried searching for information on the internet to see if I could find out more about the history of *The Writing School* and to see if they were still offering writing courses. Unfortunately, it appears the business, *Lifestyle Learning Direct*, has gone under and almost all information has been removed from the internet.

I'm aware of other NZ Christian Writers members who also completed courses with *The Writing School* back in the day. It's encouraging to see the good fruit that has come from those courses.



Are you hoping to purchase a great book by a Christian author? Are you interested in viewing the genres in which our members have been published?

A massive thank you to Fiona and Alan Murray, who have, together, prepared the NZ Christian Writers Members' Books Catalogue. Click the image above to view over 200

NZCW members' books available for sale or go to: [www.nzchristianwriters.org/catalogue](http://www.nzchristianwriters.org/catalogue).

# Join a Writers Group

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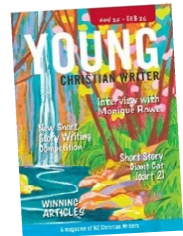
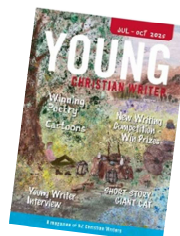
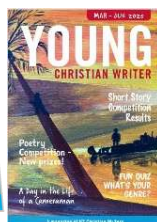
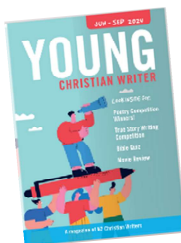
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# I Never Hit the Hundred

## Tribute to Beth, aged 99.9

by Felicity Logan

THEY were cheering me towards the mark, 100 years or more.

THEY were celebrating all I'd been and done in years before:

How well I moved, how well I thought, my mem'ry well defined,

How strong my faith, my quick recall of hymns that came to mind.

But when sight wanes, life has few gains, no joy when you can't read.

Instead, Eternity with God was what I'd rather heed.

To leave the house my husband built I silently bemoaned:

THEY placed me in a single room I knew was only loaned.

The staff so helpful, ever willing, trying just to give,

But oh how hard to find a purpose in that life to live!

There came the day I knew there was no use in looking back.

I'd never hit the hundred but my future had no lack!

THEY planned events to mark the day I'd reach the century,

But Paradise had more to offer, now meant more to me.

To lose the fears, to dry the tears, to don that garment white,

To join my Saviour when He comes, on His return so bright.

So bit by bit each hope I quit regarding worldly need,

And thought instead of heav'nly realms, from life's constraints quite freed.

We follow Truth, we follow Light, we walk by faith, not sight:

To lay aside the mortal coil, Eternity seems bright.

True -- I never hit the hundred but my future God has sealed:

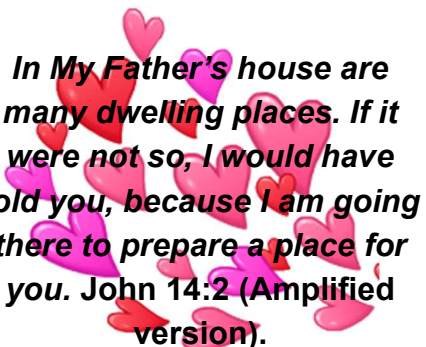
When Christ returns you'll see me too, all jubilant and healed.

I never hit the hundred, but that matters not one jot!

Just ask YOUR one big question: are you His -- or maybe not?

---

***In My Father's house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you. John 14:2 (Amplified version).***



# My Lord of the Dance

by Lesley Edgeler

Life is like a dance

Sometimes it is a lonely one as I dance on my own

I can express my love for my Lord of the Dance

Through gliding to music of worship and song

With dramatic emotional pauses to gaze at my Saviour

I use my limbs in a way that will glorify Him

And give Him my all through the sound of the timbrel, the pauses, the delicate notes, the musical moods

Sometimes I'll waltz with my Lord and keep in step

Other times we'll tango back and forth as I battle with the directions He wants me to take

If I'm feeling down, I find it hard to keep pace with Him

Perhaps I'll join others in a reel as I struggle to obey

Or in a folk dance as we try to discern and understand Scripture

We'll worship together in the unison of a minuet knowing His leading

Or listening to His voice in the stillness of a prayer retreat

During a rumba, I'll take myself on a journey of discovery, wondering what My Lord has next in His plans for me

A shuffle allows me to slow down, confess my faults and bow in sorrow before Him

His forgiveness allows me to take another posture during the dance of reconciliation

I stretch my arms to the heavens in wonder and thankfulness

I curtsy in adoration and pirouette as my eyes are opened to the wonders of His majesty

I follow in His footsteps in whichever direction He leads me, breathing in the perfume of the Holy Spirit, loving Him in the dance of obedience

He leads me by the still waters with His gentle whisper

He restores my soul as I take a breather, a long-awaited respite from the storm raging inside

His comforting presence is my mainstay and strength

He is indeed my Lord of the Dance

# Mental Health

by Peter Wilson

Is finding salvation through Jesus Christ the answer to mental health problems?

A vast array of the world's problems feed the anxiety many feel. Climate change, war, famine, earthquakes, mis-gender ideology, and many other problems seem to dominate our society. Nobody seems to have an answer to the ever-increasing avalanche of problems descending upon us.

One of the biggest contributors to poor mental health is the inability to believe in the possibility of change; the circumstances we experience on a daily basis are overwhelming. Seemingly irresistible pressure from uncontrollable sources creates frustration and exhaustion; an endless cycle of hopeless thinking gradually wears you down until you reach the point of wanting to give up. You may well be convinced that no one else really understands your situation. Why even try to explain. Is there an answer?

**YES! There is hope!**

**But not in the direction the world is looking.**

We need to look in a different direction for help; towards a higher power, towards divine enlightenment which will reveal sinful patterns in our life. We need to admit that we can't cope on our own<sup>1</sup>. This opens the way for Jesus to step in. Finding His forgiveness, which He has promised to those who ask for it, clears the way for a complete change of life.<sup>2</sup> According to scripture, our sin is nailed to His cross and His death has paid the penalty that we owe.<sup>3</sup> His resurrection proves He is who He says He is and has done what He said He would do.

When we repent of our sin, accept the forgiveness of Jesus and invite the living God, i.e., Jesus Himself to be the director of our life, the Spirit of the Living Creator God comes to dwell within us and we become a new creature.<sup>4</sup> Not only is our old life put to death but a new life with Jesus as the director, and the Holy Spirit as our powerhouse begins. There is no way that life with the living, powerful Holy Spirit indwelling us, will ever be the same as it was without Him.<sup>5</sup>

The hopelessness is replaced by the infallible assurance of eternal life with Jesus<sup>6</sup> where all sadness, ill health, depression, worthlessness and despondency are banished. External circumstances may not change immediately, but internally your attitude can change instantaneously. You can know without a shadow of doubt that God's promise of eternal life is yours and God's presence and power is with you every day regardless of your circumstances.

Satan, who has been doing his best to destroy all hope will continue to attack, but you can command him to leave you with the authority God has now given you over him.<sup>7</sup> Start by telling him you now belong to Jesus and you are no longer going to listen to his lies. Tell him to leave you alone because he has no authority or power to continue to harass you. Stand firm in the power of Jesus, the Son of the Living God who now dwells within you and very definitely and authoritatively tell Satan and his evil spirits you are no longer going to believe any of their destructive lies.

Remember you have the power of the Holy Spirit within you and you have been given the power and the right to declare authority over him.<sup>8</sup> Command Satan to leave you in Jesus' name; he has no option but to obey Jesus and leave you alone. He may well try again some other time in some other way but his power to defeat you will diminish as you keep sending him away and refuse to listen to him.

**"In all these things we win an overwhelming victory through Him who has proved his love for us".<sup>9</sup>**

Notes:

1 Rom 3:23 ...'everyone has sinned; everyone falls short of the beauty of God's plan'. *JB Phillips translation*

2 Jn. 14:6 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. *KJV*

3 Col 2:13, 14. 'He has forgiven you all your sins: Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads and has completely annulled it by nailing it over His own head on the cross. .And then having drawn the sting of all the powers ranged against us, he exposed them, shattered empty and defeated, in his final glorious triumphant act!' *JB Phillips translation*

4 2 Cor 2:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things have passed away; behold all things are become new." *KJV*

5 Read the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts Chap. 2

6 Jn. 14:2 'In my house are many mansions ... I go to prepare a place for you' *KJV*

7 Eph 6:11 '...withstand the wiles of the devil' *KJV*

8 Eph 4-7 'Resist the devil and you will find he will run away from you' *JB Phillips translation*

9 Rom 8:37. *JB Phillips translation*

*If anyone would like to contact Peter as a result of reading this article, he is happy to hear from people. His email address is: [windyglen@xtra.co.nz](mailto:windyglen@xtra.co.nz).*

## W E L C O M E New and Returning Members:

**Ave Robinson**

Pirongia

**Lenie Nilsen**

Kapiti

**Nick Maeder**

Christchurch



**All NZCW members are invited to share a Writer Profile and Book Feature(s) on our website. For details email our NZCW president, Justin St Vincent here: [president@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:president@nzchristianwriters.org)**

# Appraisal Time

by Rachel Jessop

It is time for my appraisal with the Lord,  
I bring my life roadmap with me;  
Take a deep breath, enter in,  
Lay it out for all to see.

I'm shocked to notice it's wrinkled and creased,  
Stained and torn, it has a few holes.  
I hang my head in disappointment -  
I am not achieving my goals.

It shows a path of wandering,  
More off track than on.  
Some was done in ignorance;  
Some deliberate, just being head strong.

I'm in disgrace. I thought I'd done  
My best to follow, stay true.  
My roadmap tells a different story,  
I see failure through and through.

The Lord knows all my thoughts so well.  
'My precious child,' he says,  
'Do you not know the wrinkles and holes  
Are from going through battles most days?

The stains have come from all your tears  
You cried in heartbreak and loss;  
Tears of frustration and deepest pain,  
The challenges of counting the cost.

The parts off track are lessons learnt  
About following me well;  
And lessons you learnt about yourself,  
Used for good, even when you fell.

I don't see a failure,' he said.  
'I see a warrior, strong;  
Who doesn't give up, keeps coming back.  
And I walked with you, the whole journey long.

All I ask of you is this:  
Keep going child, don't lose heart.  
Follow my plans, walking in my strength;  
Each day is a fresh new start.'

# Beyond the Borrowed Light

by Nick Maeder

A fugue of shadows twined, jungle deep,  
Where vows, hushed-pretence, less sworn to keep;  
And every soul, in silence, sighs—  
A dank, stark canvas where foul evil thrives.

The wicked wraith, with subtle art,  
Hath chilled to stone the scuttled heart;  
And in his sway, all nations cower,  
Vast 'neath cold, cruel, callous pyre.

But “Dusk!”—a Voice—bids through the blight:  
The Word, the Truth, the piercing Light!  
Whosoever scoffs—he smokes not sin—  
Deceives himself, yea, rusts within.

Confess—  
and HE IS JUST to cleanse,  
Each soul He saves, He swift defends.  
For though we steel, yet, stumble sore,  
Trumpets angels—unhinge Fear’s spectral sword!

Ye born of God, who dance not sin—  
A chastened, **ruby** fire leaps bold within.  
Naught valiance, Hear!—but Jesus kept;  
A jewelled vow, both steep and wept.

The scathing fiend may prance and howl,  
Yet never taint the blood-bought saint;  
For Christ betwixt—our guard—revives—  
Through trial, tear, and wince of vice.

Behold the Branch—His life divine—  
Such wondrous righteousness so freely mine.  
HE cannot sin; HE cannot die,  
Ascended—fore His Father’s eye.  
This HOLY root, Love’s most potent grace,  
Appoints to me a dwelling place—  
Aloft the stench of doom’s domain,  
Where Christ, the Firstborn, ever reigns.

Taut gales lick fiery, we wrest not—lost;  
HE suffered (immeasurable) insufferable cost.  
His status, Crowned; our debt, remiss;  
We walk by faith—an Ear of Bliss.

Ere mine surly grave doth snarlish chide,  
Yea Heaven's Throne shared, shineth raw, alive:  
Lo, sinner-knaves—Nay!—But Rome's lash strokes—freed—  
Co-regent brethren—yea sons—Eternal. See!

Thus wends the world—her wicked disdain—  
Mere fleeting glamour, pallid flame.  
But we, who adore the Shepherd's voice,  
In verity and mercy—we rejoice.

For HE is strong—and HE is true—  
Spiral pulsars throb galactic blue.  
Savor the Saviour—exalt Him supreme:  
In Christ—be of God—redeemed.

Glory—Inexcusable!  
Glory—Inexcruciable!  
Glory—Inscrutable!  
Ha.  
Jesus Christ is LORD.

*Note: This was written with AI assistance and is 90% the writer's own work.*

# How to Format your Competition Entry

by Kathryn Paul

Contestants for all levels please take note of this article. Judges are scoring you on meeting these criteria, so it's important to know how to do them. I hope the following instructions will be helpful to you. If you follow these instructions, you will benefit from expanding your skills.

I am referring to using Microsoft Office Word as I explain the competition instructions. There is a toolbar along the top of your document under the 'HOME' tab. This is where you will locate your tools to format your document or text. You can set these format rules at the beginning of your text and then type. Or you can highlight a block of text and then change the format rules for what you have highlighted.

1. **Word count:** Along the top of your toolbar is the tab 'Review'. Click on it and you will see 'Word Count'. Click on it and a box will open telling you what your word count is. Close it and return to the 'Home' tab.
2. **Font Arial 10 pt:** Under the tab 'Home' is a drop-down menu offering a long list of font style options. Click on the little down arrow and the alphabetical list will open up. Scroll up or down and locate 'Arial'. Select it. Then next to that box is the font size drop down menu. Click on the little down arrow and select size 10. You have now set the typing style and size of your font.
3. **Heading Bold Title Case 18 pt:** The heading should be in Arial type font:

## Heading

Highlight it and make it bold 18 pt as per the font instructions in No. 2 above.

4. **The next four instructions** are all found under 'Home' and 'Paragraph'.
5. **Line spacing Multiple 1.2:** Under 'Paragraph' locate the drop-down menu for line spacing. Select the word 'multiple'. Next to it is the measurement for it, select or type in 1.2.
6. **Spacing Between Paragraphs 6 pt:** Under 'Paragraph' locate the 'spacing' 'before' and 'after' boxes. Mine is usually set by default to 'before' 0 pt and 'after' 10 pt. Change it to 'before' 6 pt and 'after' 0 pt. This changes the measurement of the space between the previous paragraph and your first sentence, and the space after the last sentence before the next paragraph.
7. **Paragraph Indentation None:** Under 'Paragraph' by default it's usually already set at 'none'.
8. **Alignment Justified:** This is where you can change your text to align on the left margin, or be centered, or align against the right margin or be spread evenly against the left and right margins (justified). This option is found in icons above 'Paragraph' and it's also found under 'Paragraph' in a drop-down menu.

Fifteen per cent of your entry score is marked on meeting the above requirements. I encourage you to have a play around with the text and your toolbar until you see it is doing what you want it to. This is the guideline for most of the magazine content, so if you practise doing it with competition entries, you will then be able to do the same when sending in a contribution for the magazine.

*Note: I frequently receive magazine contributions without the author's name included in the document. I insert the name and doublecheck the spelling from the email message. Remember, it's important to safeguard your copyright. Ensure your name is with your writing.*

## Writing Competitions Points Board

Level One		Level Two		Level Three	
Jenny Fazakerley	15	Peter Wilson	15	Robert Prins	15
Judy Kibby	12	Debbie Bennett	12	Sandy Miller	12
Janet Scantlebury	9			Taylor Foster	9
				Stephen Douglas	9

In each magazine, place getters receive points: 15 points for first, 12 points for second and 9 points for third. At the end of May and November, those with the highest points in Levels One, Two and Three are awarded monetary prizes for first, second and third. Prizes up for grabs are: **\$60 for First Place**, **\$50 for Second Place**, **\$40 for Third place**. These are usually awarded as Christian bookstore vouchers. Thank you to Andrew Stirling at [www.purebooks.nz](http://www.purebooks.nz). Our next prize winners will be published in the June–July 2026 magazine edition.

All new members begin by entering in Level One. To be promoted to Levels Two or Three, contestants need to receive points at least three times on their current level. Our judges also require regular entries and improved writing. All entrants receive helpful constructive feedback via email from the judges. It's like a mentoring system and competition all in one!

***Please note published competition entries have not been edited.***

# Competition Results

## Level One

**Judge: Debbie McDermott**

**Requirement:** It is New Year's Eve and the clock is about to strike midnight when something unexpected happens. Writing in the first-person point of view, describe the event in detail and in a manner that keeps the reader in suspense until the end of the story. (500 words)

### General Comments

*I was pleased to receive five well-written entries to this competition and thank contestants for taking the time to tackle the topic during the busy lead-up to Christmas and New Year. I know a 1 January deadline is not easy to meet, but rising to the challenge builds the discipline we need to undertake and successfully complete larger or more complex writing projects within set timeframes.*

*All five contestants wrote in first-person point of view and described the unexpected event in reasonable detail, but only the three winning entries contained sufficient suspense to keep the reader wondering until the end of the story. I awarded First Place to first-time entrant Jenny Fazakerley. While the level of suspense in her story is quite low-key, the surprise ending with its subtle takeaway message is very moving. Judy Kibby won Second Place for her touching story of how sadness and despair turned into joy. Third Place went to Janet Scantlebury whose excellent story kept me in suspense from start to finish. Had she provided an explanation as to what caused the unexpected event, she would have tied for First Place.*

*I must now highlight two issues so other entrants do not make the same mistake:*

#### **1. Document Tracking Markups Must Be Disabled in the Review Menu**

*While using the Review Menu to track changes to your document is helpful, you must disable tracking markups by changing the 'All Markup' option to 'No Markup' before saving and submitting your entry. If you don't, the red markups (which include deletions and changes) will still be visible in your document.*

#### **2. Do Not Use the Shift+Enter Function to Create a New Paragraph**

*The Shift+Enter function is merely a soft line break that allows you to move to the next line without adding an extra space between lines. When used as a paragraph break, it will prevent the paragraphs from being correctly spaced. It will also create large gaps between the words in the last line of each paragraph. You should ONLY press the ENTER key to begin a new paragraph.*

# First Place



Jenny  
Fazakerley  
of Timaru

## Home

It was New Year's Eve. Normally an ordinary affair, I was in bed well before midnight. This year I had Natalia, Jo, and Sam, old friends from university staying with me, and we agreed to see the new year in together.

We'd partaken of an exquisite, three course meal cooked by Natalia. Cooking was in her blood - she was part Brazilian, part Italian, so we happily deferred to her expertise. Despite Natalia's protest that there was "absolutely no need", I'd made a dessert, a colourful jelly that when cut, resembled stained glass. This complimented the Panettone, a sweet bread dessert, made with candied fruits and shaped like a dome.

My friends provided some excellent red wine, which flowed with the inevitable reminiscing of memories from our university days, the professors, and the pranks we played on each other. This elicited much laughter, before the conversation shifted to current day relationships, our children, house projects, and work life. While it was special to be reunited, tonight felt different for some reason. I couldn't put my finger on it. I felt a peace, a joy, a sense of contentment which was extraordinary after the difficulties of the past year.

"Hey, it's nearly midnight!" Jo exclaimed. "Quick, find a channel that will give us a countdown." Sam jumped up and scrolled through the TV channels, while Natalia and I quickly cleared away the dishes and refilled the crystal wine glasses ready for the toasting of the new year. I glanced at the clock as time moved on its trajectory towards the new year.

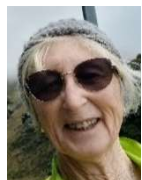
"Five minutes to midnight!" I exclaimed. I still had a lingering sense of anticipation, of something about to happen. The hum of conversation ceased briefly. "Any New Year's resolutions?" Jo asked. "Not for me. They never stick." offered Sam wisely. We nodded in agreement. "I'm just happy to be spending it with you all" I said, feeling grateful. There was a collective "aww, me too" as we spontaneously hugged each other.

Two minutes to midnight. "Any pearls of wisdom for the new year?" asked Jo. A silence fell, the question hanging in the air, as we each became lost in our own thoughts. I was thinking about Jesus and how the world seemed to be in a perilous state.

One minute to midnight. We gathered around the TV screen. We smiled broadly at each other, as we loudly counted down, 10...9...8...7...6...5...4...3...2...1! Just as the clock struck midnight, I was aware of a strange bodily sensation. I felt like I was floating upwards, and I had a sudden sense of euphoria. Was it the wine? No. I WAS floating upwards!

I gazed around me, trying to make sense of it. Shattered crystal and red wine were spread across the floor. I was shocked to see that my friends were staring, gaping in disbelief, at the heaped pile of clothes where I had stood moments ago. My gold cross lay atop glinting in an ethereal light that shone from above. Hallelujah! I was going home.

## Second Place



Judy  
Kibby  
of Taranaki

## New Life

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I lean back into the crusty, brown chair, originally designed to tilt and swivel. The chair, like me, at this stage of its life, only manages to lurch and hover, sometimes at a rather precarious angle. Waking from a deep slumber and glancing at the wall clock beside me, I am astonished, it is almost midnight and the beginning of yet another year.

These days I am on my own. My husband passed away fifteen years ago now and all the children have long since ‘flown the nest’. Their own families are now the centre of all their time, care and attention. They, borne on the wind, have managed to drift in the breezes, falling and seeding in various global locations.

Feeling quite on edge for several days now, I sense a sadness within me. Plainly put, I feel forgotten and left out. The flow of life seems to be passing me by. A life, once full of squeals and chatter, giggles and cries, banter and clutter, lives only now in my memory. My purpose in life then, never once doubted and each day rendered me happily exhausted.

No-one can ever accuse me of not making an effortful attempt at life. I belong to the obligatory groups; women’s, church and community. I even volunteer at the hospice shop. I attend church on Sundays as is my duty to the Lord, yet of late there has been a persistent dullness in my soul. I cannot shake it, neither do I want to. I have been thinking more about eternity than the here and now. Isn’t it time for my promotion? I pleaded with the Lord? Isn’t it time to leave this tired old ‘bod ’behind?

That’s it, I am weary of doing life. To top it all off, I have not seen nor heard of my beloved for three days now. She is the apple of my eye!

I am pulled out of my deep reverie by a creaking sound. Did I hear that? What was it? Something rustling and a faint high-pitched squeal reverberating from somewhere in the dark. Is somebody there?

I froze, superglued to my chair, adrenaline surging through me, imagining my lifeless, decaying body lying prostrate on the floor, a look of terror chiseled into my face.

I finally exhale, straining to see through the darkness.

"It couldn't be, could it?" I voice my astonishment to no-one in particular. In the dimly lit room she appears with something stuck in her mouth. Has she been gagged?

"Oh dearest, are you alright?" I let out a huge sigh of relief and feel wetness roll down my cheeks.

Not one, but three tiny bundles of cuddly feline fuzz, waddle toward me on the worn carpet. They instinctively nuzzle into their mother, filling their bellies with warmth.

I let out another deep sigh as fresh light and warmth wash over my soul.

At that moment, the clock strikes midnight, marking a brand-new year!

## Third Place



Janet  
Scantlebury  
of Raglan

## Eleven Fifty-Nine

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My eyelids fluttered as I looked over at our blue light alarm clock: 11:59 it said. We had tried to keep awake but for yet another New Year's Eve we had headed to bed early.

A sudden bang on the outside wall caused me to sit up in bed, alert, my senses straining to make sense. Pat dozed unsuspectingly as I grabbed a torch and tip-toed into the hallway.

No I hadn't imagined it. Another loud bang hit the wall.

I reached to put on the hallway light but strangely there was no power. Concerned, I slunk into the lounge and shone the light outside onto the deck. Flickering in the moonlight I could see an ominous plume of greyish smoke rising. My sense of ill-ease only increased as another loud bang permeated the still quiet of the night.

"Pat," I called out not meaning to sound alarmed.

Being roused from sleep unexpectedly it took a few moments for Pat to orient himself. A series of bangs continued and Pat stood in the hallway, slowly realizing that something was seriously amiss.

In the distance we could see flashes of fireworks as New Year's revellers celebrated the New Year.

Our attention was suddenly taken with the loud popping noises coming from below us in the carport.

"It's your car!" Pat declared emphatically as I tried to process the reality of what was happening.

“Quick grab your phone! We need to ring 111.”

A panic gripped me and I fumbled in the dark trying to find my phone. My mind was reeling and I couldn't remember where I'd put it.

“I can't find it,” I blurted out, panic causing my voice to sound high-pitched and unnatural.

It was then that the smoke alarm broke the night's silence.

“We'll have to get out now and forget the phone,” Pat yelled.

He grabbed my hand and led me out along the deck and down the stairs. A strange unfamiliar acrid smoke filled the air causing my mouth to feel dry and unpleasant.

As I looked back, shoes in hand, a strange bonfire flickered lighting up the night.

We moved quickly down the drive, not paying attention to the stones that cut into our bare feet.

From far away we could hear the faint sound of the fire siren being activated in the nearby town.

“Someone must have seen our fire,” Pat explained.

We scrambled up the hill to the neighbours, our torch pointing the way in the eerie stillness of the night.

“Is anybody there?” we called out. No lights were on and there was no response.

Again we called out. This time thankfully a familiar voice responded, our neighbour Matt.

“We need to call 111”, I blurted out. “Our house is on fire!”

“For real?!” Matt exclaimed as he quickly grabbed his phone and dialled the call for us.

From the distance we could hear a fire engine and then realized it was getting closer. As it approached it hesitated and then descended the drive to our house next door.

“Well, we got to stay up for new year's after all!” Pat declared.

## Level Two

### Judge: Shirley Jamieson

**Requirement:** Tell a story about a pet you have or have had. Include humour. (450 words)

#### General Comments

*The topic this time gives pet owners an opportunity to show the strong bond they have with their pets. The requirement to include humour meant that entries would have a positive flavour.*

*Companionship is often the most important aspect of pet ownership, love and trust enriches the bond over time.*

*Companion Animals NZ's 2024 Pet Data Report ([www.companionanimals.nz/2024-nz-pet-data-report](http://www.companionanimals.nz/2024-nz-pet-data-report)) released in March 2025, states that 63% of New Zealand households own a pet. It also points out that 60% of people who don't own a pet would like to have one.*

*It just shows how important our animal friends are to us Kiwis.*

*As in a short fiction story, the same points apply in writing a non-fiction one. A well-chosen title, and an interesting or surprising first sentence or two are important to catch a reader's attention. Structure brings the story forward and to finish, a satisfying – or in this competition's requirement – possibly a humorous take away message.*

*Before emailing your entry, it is a good idea to read it aloud and/or ask someone else to read it. Any sentence that doesn't flow well or doesn't quite make sense is picked up that way.*

*It is important when entering a Christian Writer competition to adhere to the topic's requirements. It meant an entrant unfortunately missed gaining a place in this competition.*

*Animals have always been a part of my life since I was four years old when a grey fluffy kitten joined our family. Over the years my children had mice, birds, rabbits, dogs and cats.*

*My present cat, Ellie, was a young rescue cat from the SPCA. For the first few months she was shy and defensive. With gentle reassurance, she grew to trust me and is now the most attentive and affectionate cat I have ever had.*

*She has taught me that God answers prayers for an animal's emotional health just as he is there for us.*

*I found some interesting verses in Job in the Bible about animals. It says: 'But ask the animals and they will teach you, or the birds in the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.' Job 12:7-10 (NIV).*

*What encouraging words! There are so many incredible creatures which display God's amazing creation with intricate detail. If we think about it, there is much our pets can teach us.*

*Congratulations to Peter Wilson for gaining first place with his story, Our 'Wild' Cats. It is a heart-warming story of Sheddy, a dumped cat and her two kittens. Over time, each of them gained trust in varying degrees, finding their forever home.*

*Second place goes to Debbie Bennett for her story, Her Favourite Christmas Present. Debbie tells the story of her sister's mouse, Snuggles, who she enjoyed too.*

*Well done, both of you. I look forward to seeing your, and other entrants' entries, in further competitions this year.*

# First Place



Peter  
Wilson  
of New  
Plymouth

## Our 'Wild' Cats

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Our cowshed was close to a bush covered cliff. Nearby, where our access road crossed the river, unwanted kittens were occasionally dumped. One day a hungry 'wild' cat appeared at the cowshed looking for milk. She was an attractive little 'tabby' and over time we managed to quieten her sufficiently to handle her.

She was still a very timid little pussy after recovery from her de-sexing and as she was released she immediately disappeared into the bush. Several days later she proudly re-appeared with two kittens; she had obviously given birth to them some weeks earlier. The Dutch veterinarian who performed her operation had a little girl called Breixie so one of the kittens was gifted her name and the other was named after a neighbour's daughter, Claire. The mother had been called Sheddy; after all she was just a cowshed cat. The three cats became a regular part of life at the cowshed but they never ever came to our house a hundred or so metres away.

One day Sheddy disappeared and as time moved on we assumed her natural life had ended but we continued to enjoy the visits of our two younger (now also de-sexed) cats that had become very happy to be fondled and loved.

A while later, when we built a new house a kilometre away we were concerned about what would happen to our 'wild' cats. They had never been domesticated enough to become part of the family anywhere but in the vicinity of the cowshed. We knew they hunted over a wide area but were rather surprised when Breixie appeared at our new house with a rabbit she had caught which she 'presented' to the builders. They immediately took a liking to her and made a fuss of her whenever she appeared which she did more and more often. As the house was enclosed she was very happy to come inside and she soon made it her home. So much so that when we moved in, there was only one place she deigned to sleep; that was on our bed, between us. Almost as though we were allowed to sleep with her.

Claire was different, still affectionate but her home was the cowshed and the bush. We decided to take her to the new house to feed her there. Eventually she decided she would stay; in the shed but never the house!

After a couple of years at the new house another, somewhat familiar 'wild' cat appeared. A close inspection of her revealed an ear with a piece out of it, which identified her as Sheddy, the one who had initiated our long affair with the 'wild' cats. After being alone for four long years she reclaimed us and let us enjoy her last years at the new house.

## Second Place



Debbie  
Bennett  
of Auckland

### Her Favourite Christmas Present

---

It was the Christmas of 1995. My older sister Merran was given a parcel from her friend. It was a large round container covered in red Christmas wrapping paper. Was it making a few noises?

We all watched Merran slowly rip the paper which was very loosely celotaped at the top. Why rip from the top? Rip by rip she uncovered holes punctured on the top of a clear plastic container. The container revealed a fluffy brown lump with a pointy snout, silver whiskers and a long pink hairless tail. Merran called her Snuggles.

The funny thing is, we weren't allowed mice. Mum! But my older sister Merran *had* to have one.

Just get best friend Judy to give you a 'special' present on Christmas Eve. It's a wonder how Merran always had a knack for getting everything she wanted.

It was soon decided that Snuggles would live in a pet-friendly transparent mouse box in our garage. That way it was cool to see Snuggles everyday as Mum's maroon Mitsubishi rolled toward Snuggles after school. Snuggles only needed a few things. She had a generously-sized water bottle hanging from the front, shredded paper to trample on and a pink wheel.

Mum didn't like any pets, but for Snuggles she didn't complain. Maybe it was because Snuggles just lived in her box and never bothered anyone. Maybe Mum secretly thought Snuggles was cute. Okay, I suspect Mum couldn't be bothered wasting energy on complaining about something she didn't have to look after. The only complaint with Snuggles was unsaid...her odour met our nostrils.

However, my eyes enjoyed a little show. Snuggles was *super* cute how she'd pick up a grain with her little pink four-fingered hands and nibble at it. My eyes didn't see much of Scene Two...but my ears did. I am talking about the dizzying fun run on the pink circular treadmill! You'd hear a jarring high-pitched squeak-squeak from metal rust as Snuggles did her evening jog.

Snuggles did have a nice simple life. She got a little play time out of her box as Merran carefully picked her up with her hands. Snuggles would be tumbling all over Merran's long, elegant fingers.

Snuggles seemed to live forever. She lived well beyond the average life span for a domesticated mouse, which is 1-3 years. Snuggles would have easily lived on for another four, five or six years. I wasn't exactly counting. Speaking of longevity, she taught me the secret to a long happy life. She ate her grains with her hands, ran on that squeaky wheel and pooped at her convenience. It is simple. Get someone to feed you and house you!

# Level Three

Judge: Julia Martin

**Requirement:** Write an opinion piece for your local secular newspaper on a current social or moral issue, giving a Christian perspective on the topic without preaching. (300 words maximum)

## General Comments

*While it may seem more difficult nowadays to have an opinion piece with a Christian perspective accepted for publication in a secular newspaper, Christian writers should not give up. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to be salt and light in this dark world, so it's a challenge we should try to meet whenever and wherever possible, despite inevitable rejections.*

*Certain skills and expertise are required for this kind of writing, and the article must be written with 'gentleness and respect' (1 Peter 3:15). Always avoid harsh, discourteous or sarcastic tones.*

## Points to consider:

1. *Choose a current topic that is in the news at present and research it thoroughly.*
2. *Give your article an attention-grabbing title and an opening statement that engages the reader.*
3. *The article needs to be your well-thought-out opinion on the subject filtered through your Christian world view.*
4. *As the destination of your opinion piece is a secular newspaper, the language and tone must be appropriate. Avoid using Christianese language and jargon which may be unfamiliar to secular readers.*
5. *Structure the article with compelling ideas and statements in a clear and logical order.*
6. *Weave a Christian perspective into your article that has the potential to challenge, inspire or influence the reader.*
7. *Complete your opinion piece with a powerful statement or thought-provoking question that will continue to resonate with the reader.*
8. *Cover your effort with prayer and leave the outcome to the Lord. At least one person has to read your article in order to discard it!*

*I was pleased to receive four excellent entries for this competition, and in varying forms, they followed the above suggestions for an opinion piece with thought-provoking ideas and compelling arguments. I awarded first place to Robert Prins for his scholarly explanation and for God's answer to the evil of antisemitism in the world, as manifested recently at Bondi Beach in Sydney.*

*Second place goes to Sandy Miller's entry about the possible dilemma facing foster parents here in New Zealand. I've awarded third place equal to Taylor Foster and Stephen Douglas. I sincerely hope each entrant has the chance to see their opinion piece published somewhere to bring light and truth to our dark world.*

## First Place



Robert  
Prins  
of Auckland East

### Antisemitism

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Antisemitism is on the rise. The shock we felt when Jews celebrating Hanukkah at Bondi Beach were shot and killed on December 14<sup>th</sup> 2025, revealed the surge of antisemitism in our part of the world. But strong condemnation, vigils and a morning paddle on surfboards in memory of the victims won't do much to stop antisemitism. Neither will public enquiries or reviews of gun and terror laws.

As far as the Jews are concerned, the Bible says they would be persecuted and become a byword (Deuteronomy 28:64 – 66). We are also told that after they had been ejected from their land, they would be regathered back to the land of Israel (Ezekiel 36:24). God has allowed us to see these two prophecies come true right in front of our eyes. Both the Bondi Beach shootings and the fact that the Jews live in Israel are proof that God's word is true. But God has not finished yet. He also says that Israel will eventually live in peace and prosperity (Isaiah 32:18).

Peace in Israel, and for the rest of the Jews around the world, is hard to imagine at the moment. I believe the only way to achieve peace is not through war, gun laws or midnight vigils, but by praying to God for peace, and specifically, by praying for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6).

As much as we might like to think we can fix it, antisemitism, racism, terrorism and war are things we will never get right. But God has shown his power in what he has already done, and he has given us his plan for what is to come. It is in his strength that it will all be put right. It's time to turn back to God and pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

## Second Place



Sandy  
Miller  
of Auckland

### Faith vs Policy: Foster Care under Debate

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At a Turning Point USA event held at the University of Mississippi, Erika Kirk, widow of conservative activist Charlie Kirk, delivered a pointed warning about the intersection of faith and family. "When the state decides your faith disqualifies you from loving and caring for children, freedom is under attack," she told the audience, sparking renewed debate over religious liberty and foster care policies in the United States.

Her remarks come amid a series of cases where Christian foster families have lost their licences after refusing to comply with state-mandated LGBTQ+ non-discrimination or gender-affirming policies. One prominent example involves Lydia and Heath Marvin of Woburn, Massachusetts. Since 2020, the Marvins have fostered eight children under the age of four, including a baby with challenging medical needs who lived with them for 15 months. Despite their record of care, the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families revoked their licence in 2022 after the couple declined to sign the agency's LGBTQIA+ Non-Discrimination Policy. This policy requires foster parents to affirm the identities of LGBTQIA+ children

In New Zealand, foster parents are expected to provide inclusive care but are not required to sign gender-affirming policies. Should similar mandates be introduced, Christian caregivers may face the same dilemma as their American counterparts. They will have to choose between compliance with government standards or challenging them under religious freedom and anti-discrimination laws.

From a Christian perspective, mandates requiring assent to gender-affirming policies infringe upon freedom of speech and religion. Penalizing couples for refusal undermines conscience rights, disregards pluralism, and risks alienating experienced caregivers. Distinguishing belief from behaviour is vital; coercion erodes democratic norms and threatens inclusion by suppressing dissenting yet respectful voices. As governments weigh inclusivity against liberty, the future of foster care remains a contested battleground.

## Third Place Equal



Taylor  
Foster  
of Tauranga

## The Lonely Generation

It is widely known that Generation Z (those aged between 13 and 28) are lonely (Harris, 2024; Sreenivasan & Weinberger, 2023). No matter how many friends you have, how much time you spend online or how many texts you receive, the ache doesn't fade.

We are the lonely generation

This is a major social issue in New Zealand. Gen Z feels stuck. Most scroll online trying to find anything to ease the ache. They'll go to parties, drink and vape, do anything to belong. Some will work themselves to burnout, aim for mega salaries, or wish for early retirement. We have influencers showing us the 'perfect life' and mega-celebrities pretending to be happy.

When did everything go so wrong?

Amidst this lonely generation, walking amongst His creation, is Jesus. He's ready to be the Friend we crave, the Lover of our souls and the Father who holds us close.

Over 2000 years ago, Jesus came to this world as a human just like us. He was rejected, beaten and despised. If anyone knows how it feels to be lonely, it's Him. But He called people to follow Him. And, He invites each of us to join His crew and walk alongside the God who made us, loves us, and is not ashamed to be seen with us.

God is our Papa, who will push us on the swing; He's our best friend who holds our hand. He's the one who wants to save us, ease our ache, put flowers in our hair, and love us as He walks us home.

Maybe He's the only one who can fix the lonely generation.

Maybe He's the only one who can fix the lonely world.

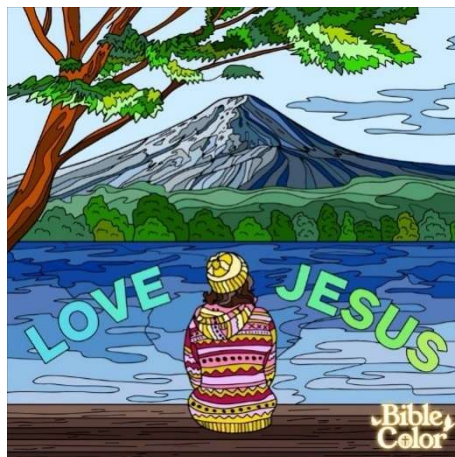
Maybe, in the end, all of us are aching for our Creator.

And, maybe He's aching for us, too.

## References

Harris, M. (2024, July 5). *The loneliest group in New Zealand – you might be surprised*. The Post. Retrieved December 30, 2025, from <https://www.thepost.co.nz/nz-news/350331627/loneliest-group-new-zealand-you-might-be-surprised>

Sreenivasan, S., & Weinberger, L. E. (2023, December 1). *The Epidemic of Loneliness*. Psychology Today. Retrieved December 30, 2025, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/nz/blog/emotional-nourishment/202312/the-epidemic-of-loneliness>



# Third Place Equal



Stephen  
Douglas  
of Wellington

## Puberty Blockers

The focus on a child's sexuality before teenage years concerns me. The New Zealand government announces an end to the use of GnRHa hormones, usually referred to as puberty blockers<sup>1</sup>. And the American HHS\* moves to protect kids from gender experiments, stating: "The use of drugs or surgery to alter a child's biological sex presents long-term health dangers."<sup>2</sup>

A Facebook quote speaks of one's sexuality as being an "innate state of orientation" i.e. no fault of their own, claiming gay kids commit suicide because of not being understood<sup>3</sup> — but I question how much of a child's internal orientation is innate as opposed to influence? Governments may ban puberty blockers and protect kids, but a child's parental quality is vital in nurturing our future adults.

I admit my dealings with a young person's sexual orientation, is limited, but I do identify with the internal struggles of 'who am I'. My attempt at suicide (though later than teen years) was likely due to immaturity and questions of my own worth. Therefore, my view on suicidal thoughts is they are poisonous interpretations of an internal questioning dialogue, centred around one's feelings of worth, value and emotional maturity.

I accept nature can make mistakes. It is mind blowing how we are formed—minute cellular changes. Any 'change' from the obvious gender to another requires the skill of negotiating personal feelings, societal preferences, along with mature long-term reasoning. Maybe it's a matter of seeking contentment with nature's workings.

My parents didn't create me, but they did provide a 'womb' for my nurturing. I think of my life as special; a created being designed to express my personal uniqueness. Life is a created gift; nature is our nurturing aide. Growth mistakes are made, but we need to be wise as to how much we manipulate versus what is left to the application of wisdom.

\*Department of Health and Human Services

### Footnotes:

1. The Ministry of Health introduced new regulations for puberty blocker prescribing 19-11-2025 (beehive.govt.nz), cited 05-12-2025
2. HHS quoted CBN News 19-12-2025 (cbn.com) cited 24-12-25
3. Lonny Loen Facebook post: "Homosexuality is not a mental illness, but an innate state of orientation ...gay kids commit suicide for not being understood." Cited 05-12-2025

# Competitions for April 2026

Due by 1 March 2026

EMAIL ENTRY AS AN ATTACHMENT, COMPLETE WITH WORD COUNT AND YOUR NAME.

**Font:** Arial, 10 pt **Heading:** Bold Title Case, 18 pt **Line spacing:** Multiple 1.2

**Spacing between Paragraphs:** 6 pt **Paragraph Indentation:** None

**Alignment:** Justified. **Send a photo** of yourself for publishing purposes.

**NB: If you are not sure which level you're on, email Debbie McDermott at: [level1@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:level1@nzchristianwriters.org)**

Entries are judged on: Entering, format and layout 15%, Topic requirements 25%, Creativity, flow and impact 25%, Grammar and punctuation 25%, Spelling 10%. Stipulated wordcounts have a 5% leeway under or above the required wordcount. A maximum wordcount has a 5% leeway under the wordcount.

## Level One—for members 16 years old and over

**Requirement:** After Jesus died on the cross, we are told that 'the earth shook, the rocks split... The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life' (Matthew 27:51-52 NIV). Pretend you are one of these resurrected ones—who may or may not have met Jesus—and describe this experience and the impact it has on you. (450 words maximum)

**Email entry to** Debbie McDermott at [level1@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:level1@nzchristianwriters.org)



*Debbie*

## Level Two—for members 16 years old and over

**Requirement:** Psalm 16:10-11 is a prophecy of Jesus' resurrection. Write an email to a non-believing friend who is grieving the loss of a Christian loved one. Quoting parts of the verses, explain how Jesus' resurrection fulfils them. Show sympathy and understanding, and avoiding preaching, tell from personal experience that Jesus is the path to life. (500 words)

**Email entry to** Shirley Jamieson at [level2@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:level2@nzchristianwriters.org)

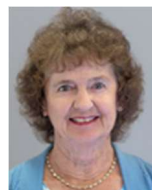


*Shirley*

## Level Three—for members 16 years old and over

**Requirement:** You have been asked to present a tribute at a funeral service. Write out your speech about the deceased who may have been known to you or be entirely fictional. Use humour if appropriate. (350 words)

**Email entry to** Julia Martin at [level3@nzchristianwriters.org](mailto:level3@nzchristianwriters.org)



*Julia*



**NZ CHRISTIAN WRITERS** is a nationwide collective of authors, bloggers, editors, lyricists, poets, publishers, songwriters, storytellers and writers throughout New Zealand. Along with our bi-monthly magazines and competitions we offer inspiring seminars and writers retreats to encourage, inspire and upskill people in their writing.

NZ Christian Writers' vision is to create a vibrant community of Christian writers by connecting them to other like-minded writers in New Zealand. We welcome both beginner and experienced writers.