

Why I write

Valerie Bloom

I write because I fell in love. I fell in love with words, the wonder of words, their sounds, their meanings, their images and rhythms. I discovered quite early that I could have fun playing with words. I enjoy making up new words and making old words perform new tricks. I like to watch them sing and dance across a previously blank page. I love to play word games, to see how much information I can get into the fewest words. That's why I write poetry.

I was a voracious bookworm when I was young. I read while I was eating, doing my chores, walking down the street, in the dead of night when I should have been sleeping... It was probably inevitable that I would want to recreate the pleasure I found between those pages and I started writing poems and making up stories as soon as I could write.

As a child, I was painfully shy. Speaking in public was torment, except when I was on stage reciting a poem or acting in a play. Then I could hide behind other people's words; they were my refuge. I could pretend to be someone else. I still hide behind words, but now they are my own.

Books have been my companions on countless travels to other countries, other worlds, other universes. They have transported me to places I

couldn't have dreamed of without them. I've walked with creatures so fabulous that I've been lost in wonder. And that sense of wonder lingers long after I've finished reading. Where the reading left off, the daydreaming took over. Writing was, and is, a way of capturing and keeping those daydreams so they're not forgotten.

I remember how thrilled I was each time my teacher read out my compositions to the class. My heart would sing each time we had a composition as homework, and I couldn't wait to start writing. I get the same thrill when I'm writing a novel now, and from hearing of people enjoying my books. There is no greater satisfaction than giving pleasure to others.

The Creation account in Genesis tells how God created the world and then gave it to Man to manage. A poem or a story goes through a process of creation and then the readers are allowed to manage it in their own way. There is no doubt that there is a sense of giving life, being a creator of a piece, and that can be an incredible experience when shared with the reader.

Writing can be a hard slog with periods of anguish, wondering why I didn't remain a teacher or a librarian. But sometimes there is that flash-of-lightning instant when inspiration strikes, and the result is shocking and exhilarating and makes all the hours of soul-searching and insecurity fade into oblivion. Those moments are few and far between, but they are definitely worth the wait.

I write for enjoyment, mine as well as others'; to make sense of the world and all that's going on in it; for self-fulfilment, for a living, and because I'm not very good at anything else; and for love.

Valerie Bloom

Valerie Bloom MBE is the author of several volumes of poetry for adults and children, picture books, pre-teen and teenage novels and stories for children, and has edited a number of collections of children's poetry. She has also written articles for teaching periodicals and newspapers such as *The Guardian* and the *Independent*. She has presented poetry programmes for BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4, and has contributed to various other radio and television programmes such as *Fine Lines*, *Woman's Hour* and *The Verb*. Her poetry has been featured in 'Poems on the Underground', and included in the GCSE and Caribbean exam syllabuses, and in the literature component for secondary schools in Malaysia. Her poetry is also included in over 500 anthologies worldwide.

Her books *Let Me Touch The Sky*, *Hot Like Fire*, and *Whoop and Shout* were all Poetry Book Society choices. *Fruits* won a Nestle Smarties bronze award, Américas Honorable Mention 1997, and was shortlisted for the Kate Greenaway Medal. Her novel *Surprising Joy* was shortlisted for the Branford Boase Award. Valerie Bloom is the winner of the Voice Community award for Literature, has been awarded an Honorary Masters degree from the University of Kent, and she was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2008 New Year Honours. She presently lives in Kent and performs her poetry and runs writing workshops in primary schools, secondary schools, libraries, and universities.

A recording of this talk can be found at **writersmosaic.org.uk**

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