

**Aaron Robertson**

London, Paris, Hikurangi. I'm still waiting for the T-shirt, but that's where the last 20-odd years of my life have been spent.

When I moved to the Ponsonby of the North (as the real estate agent called Hikurangi), I was fortunate to cross paths with fellow resident and writer Vaughan Gunson, with whom I discovered a shared interest in both words and wine, and not necessarily in that order.

We both soon found ourselves present at the inception of the Take Flight group of poets in Whangārei, led with great energy by Piet Nieuwland in its many guises for much of the past nine years.

The group has been a great local source of support during that time and it has been quietly satisfying to be involved in creating a literary community to call our own, with members who publish both nationally and internationally.

Not long after moving here, I began working at Northtec's Geoff Wilson Gallery and writing art-related pieces for the gallery's website, continuing an aspect of my writing started when living in other countries.

I still try to maintain some sort of critical dialogue with the region's art community, however intermittently. I'm also attracted to lesser-known aspects of local history and have published articles on this both locally and further afield.

Good writing changes my perception both of the world and what it is possible to do with words.

But language is not just something I'm passionate about, it also happens to be my business. I now work as a French to English translator (really another form of rewriting), with most of my clients based in the EU. Perhaps the only real downside of this is a lack of direct human contact.

For me, a local community of like-minded people is the perfect real-life antidote to an otherwise mainly online writerly existence.

Olivia Macassey

As we drove over the crest of the Brynderwyn hills, I grabbed a scrap of paper.

"In this light," I wrote, "I love/whatever it was that gathered these hills with their sharp valleys, rucked/smaller lumps up around the plains/cried rivers through rock and bit boulders through silt."

I was captivated – like many writers and artists before me – by the Northland landscape.

There are many ways into writing. Some writers I know sit down at a particular time each day and write, others create spontaneously during flashes of inspiration. Some express personal experiences, or are moved to communicate on public issues. They can be playful, serious, traditional, experimental...

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WRITE ON!

Interesting things are happening in the Whangārei writing scene. Whether public readings, writing and discussion groups or magazines to contribute to, there is much to take part in and a chance to enjoy the company of others, writes John Gereats. Here four local writers – two long-resident and two more recent arrivals, including Gereats, share something of their experiences.



My own practice of writing poetry is one of strange, random compulsions. Although, in general, I don't think in words (I have to translate thoughts from spatial images), the words in my poetry often seem to form by themselves – it's like being inhabited by poems.

When I arrived in Whangārei, I soon discovered signs of the literary community. Poems hanging from trees in the park, and murals of excellent poetry by Hone Tuwhare and Piet Nieuwland.

There is always something happening in the local scene here, with writing groups, readings, performance nights, workshops, conferences, and

publications. It's a diverse and welcoming community, with talented authors and writers of all stripes.

As a co-editor, with Piet Nieuwland, of Northland poetry anthology *Fast Fibres Poetry*, I get to read a fair bit of local poetry. I'm impressed by the different voices which make up our communities, the quality, and the variety of poems that people in the region are writing and sharing.

So if you're a writer, or interested in writing – or if, like me, you just find yourself writing poems for some unknown reason – if you haven't done so yet, I highly recommend checking out a local writing group or event.

Piet Nieuwland

Fast Fibres Poetry is a group of modest, very talented poets from a wide variety of backgrounds who meet monthly to share their poetry.

They have been gathering mostly out



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place where there are many people interested in conversations about poetry, writing, and much else.

This is now the place where Karen and I are settled. Interestingly, it was another Auckland writer friend, Rob Burt, who started the process off by inviting us to house-sit his new place in the Avenues.

Within a couple of weeks we'd bought our own house and I started to consider some of the groups Rob had mentioned – *OneOneSixPoets* and the flash fiction group at the library which he had joined, plus the *Fast Fibres* magazine, which he had appeared in.

Another surprise was to learn that poet Olivia Macassey also lived in town. Olivia edits *brief* magazine, which publishes really fresh writing in NZ. I feel proud to have been a past editor. And still to be a contributor!

Olivia, knowing I like all sorts of discussion, recommended *OneOneSixPoets*. There I met the other writers I write alongside here. I love crazy writing, so when I met Martin who'd also read Jackson Mac Low and Leslie Scalapino, I felt rather tickled.

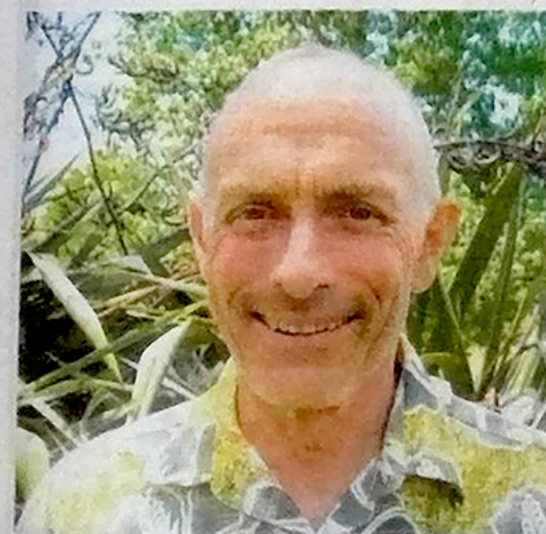
Present at our most recent meeting was Maggie Buxton. Her poems resonated and it made sense when she explained her business is to do with celebrating local places in Northland, where she constructs 'Parallel Reality Presentations'. Clearly there are talented people about.

I said at the group that, for me, places are both physical and in the mind. That's one reason I'm pleased a selection from 30 years of my writing has been published when my home is Whangārei. The book's title is *Everything's Something in Place* (Titus Books Press, available in Whangārei Library).

It's good to have this feeling of being 'in place' and to have the chance of linking up with others who enjoy the same experience.

Dirty Word: eventfinda.co.nz/2019/dirty-word-2019/whangarei-library-group-whangarei-libraries.com/Community/Craft-and-Hobby-Groups/Pages/Poetry-Group.aspx

Poets at OneOneSix, 116 Bank Street, Whangārei, third Thursday each month.



of the public eye in various bars, restaurants and other venues around central Whangārei (for the past decade). The sessions are open, informal and relaxed and there is plenty of discussion, not only on poetry, but also philosophy, politics, art, and whatever issues new members may introduce.

The group can currently be found in the backroom at OneOneSix Bank Street, usually on the third Thursday of the month.

Each year a 60-page anthology, *Fast Fibres Poetry*, is compiled and published. Contributors must be poets with a strong Northland connection.

The latest edition, *Fast Fibres Poetry Six*, is due to be launched at OneOneSix on Thursday August 22, just before Phantom Billsticker's National Poetry Day 2019. This will be supported by public readings by poets in the anthology at other venues including at the Butter Factory, Whangārei Central Library and Kings

Creative Theatre in Kawakawa. The books will be available for purchase.

The group has taken on many different titles during its existence, including *Take Flight*, *Poets at Te Studio* in the Old Library, *Poets Exposed*, *Plano Bar Poets* and simply *Poets at OneOneSix*. *Take Flight Poetry*, a substantial anthology of the seven founding member's poems, is due to be published later this year.

Visiting poets occasionally join the group. Highlights have been well attended sessions with Michelle Gaulupeau, a touring poet from France, Ron Riddell who normally enjoys the vibrant poetry scene in Columbia, South America, and Bill Sutton, ex-president of the NZ Poetry Society, from Hawke's Bay. Visitors also arrive from the Hokianga, Bay of Islands, Dargaville and elsewhere in Northland.

John Gereats

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