

# Our World of Writing

From across the globe...



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# An Elevated Experience

*By Sue Fleming*

Was it once a bright salmon pink? Now it is dull, dirt-splattered and lusterless. A metal door, the upper part with narrow bars covered by metal mesh, and a sturdy handle confront us.

Press a large black button by the side. After a few seconds of silence a series of clatters announces movement. Looped cables appear from above as the cage staggers upwards. The surface of its metal roof is hidden by a thick layer of dust, with scores of cigarette butts, short and long, spattering the entire area. Where do these come from? What is above? There is no way to find out as the stairs to the upper floor are barred off.

With a final clang the contraption arrives. Push down the handle, pull the narrow heavy metal door outwards. Inside are two more doors, opening inwards on lively springs.



By the end of a week's stay on floor five, block 3/88 off Nevsky Prospekt in St. Petersburg, we had learnt how to get in and out without bruising a shoulder each time. Open one door only, keeping a foot on it while stepping in with the other. Lift in the suitcases. Reach forward, pulling closed the outside door. Lean back and withdraw the foot. The dimly lit space is one meter square, just room enough for two large suitcases and two slim people pressed together.

Now to descend. The word OTIS, stamped into the metal above the door, gives a sense of safety and security. The panel of five black buttons has a red one alongside. Press the bottom black disk and, providing the outside doors on the other floors are shut, with a lurch and a series of creaks and groans, the apparatus descends.

On reaching the bottom level, not the ground floor, repeat the process. Pull one door



# Why I Write

## By Colette Brennan

For years I have thought about writing ghost and horror stories but could never bring myself to make a start. I have been in the Information Technology industry for years, and the thought of doing something creative left me uneasy. It certainly wasn't something I thought of as being natural initially.

I admit prior to writing that I did not read many books and preferred to watch movies instead. This stemmed from my disappointment from reading a number of novels which failed to deliver. I enjoyed delving into stories and getting that feeling of the anticipation and build-up but would always end up frustrated about the ending. I would resent the time I had invested in the story and feel let down.

After a number of years, I turned to movies and enjoyed watching ghost and paranormal films. Unfortunately, after a while I started to feel disappointed again. There are not many good horror or ghost films around. The originality has

inwards, place a foot to hold it, open the metal door, push out the suitcases, step out briskly to avoid the sprung door slamming the back of the head and close the outside door firmly.

Negotiate the stairs to the vestibule, opening the exterior door, which also has a vicious spring, with caution.

During our days of marveling at the glorious treasures of St Petersburg, we have been reminded on returning to the austere comforts of our 5th floor apartment each evening, that the city has also a more recent and less decorative past.

Sadly, we leave block 3/88 for the final time.

*Sue Fleming is a freelance writer, presently living in Vietnam*

been lost, and now each film seems the same.

I found my self thinking about how specific films could have been made better. I would change endings or specific elements of the film to build up more anticipation, or add additional shock factors. Having been disappointed by both forms of media, I decided to go back to writing.

I started to keep a journal of ideas, dreams and events that I found interesting. I began reading magazines which published these types of stories and did research online.

I looked at submissions from other writers and articles undertaken on ghost hauntings and sightings. Whilst reading the submissions of other writers, I thought of all the submissions I could send from my journal.

I had never written a story or article before, except for essays at school. So I started to look online for writing courses. I work full time and often long hours, with travel, so I needed a flexible way of learning. I looked

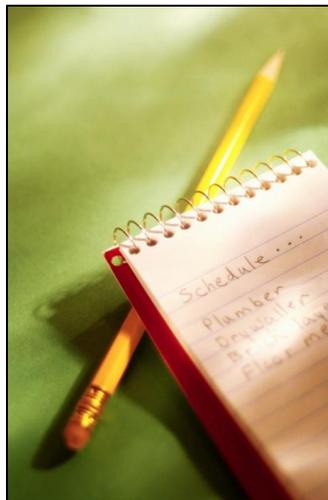
up a number of courses and compared the course content.

I chose a course which would enable me to write articles or short stories for magazines. I would not have the time or attention span to write a novel. I much prefer and am suited to shorter stories. I see my writing as a hobby, which with any luck may actually bring in some additional funds.

However, I also find my writing now as a form of relaxation. I can release all my thoughts and ideas onto paper. Sometimes my head is so full of thoughts that I cannot relax or sleep. By keeping a bedside journal, I can now write any ideas that appear.

There are so many online courses available and guidance online, that this is a great place to start. Writing is very personal and you can invest quite a bit of time in a story or article which is not accepted by a magazine. Rejection is hard, but inevitable.

I see rejection as an opportunity to revise or reconsider what I have created. Your submission could also be wrong for the type of magazine



you selected. Do not let a few rejections put you off your goal.

My advice to anyone considering writing is to keep a journal, review work of other authors who submit in the same or similar field and research your course.

Even if I fail to sell any story or article, the pleasure and release I find from writing is very therapeutic.

*Colette is a freelance writer who enjoys reading and writing ghost stories.*

## The Third Culture Kid

By Sue Fleming

In Hanoi, there are many families who come from outside Vietnam to stay for three or four years. Besides those that come as diplomats there are those who come to work in business or trade. Many of these families are from countries where English is a second or third language.

Many have very few other people from their own country in Vietnam. This means that there

is a substantial group of children living in Hanoi who cannot speak Vietnamese, know little or no English when they arrive, and have very few people from their own country with whom they can communicate and socialize. The working parent (or parents) usually comes with English language skills but the children, and non-working parent, often do not.



Harry is one of those children who arrived in Hanoi, unable to speak Vietnamese and with only a smattering of English. Because he comes from Taiwan, almost the only people he could communicate with were his own family.

Harry case is slightly unusual, because he had lived in Hanoi as a very young child, but he had no memory of this time, and any English or Vietnamese

he may have learnt he had forgotten. It also means that his early formative years were spent outside his own country, so he was not as fully exposed to his mother tongue as he acquired language.

**Harry, how long have you been in Hanoi and how old were you when you came here?**

*I first came when I was one year old, but then I went to Taiwan when I was 4. I came back to Hanoi again when I was 8 years. Now I have been here for more than three years.*

**Can you think back to before you came here, when you were 8, and you were still in Taiwan? How did you feel when your parents told you that you would be moving back to Hanoi?**

*I felt good. Taiwan was very difficult. School was hard. I was happy to move.*

**Did you know where Hanoi was?**

*My father told me something. He showed me on a map. He told me what I did when I was small.*



*Harry and his Japanese friend share a joke.*

**What were the important things to bring with you?**

*My PSP [PlayStation Portable]. It was small and easy to take. I also took some books in English and in Chinese.*

**Can you read Chinese?**

*A little.*

**What is your first memory of arriving in Hanoi?**

*Our old house keeper came to see me. She remembered me, but I did not remember her.*

**What did you think about your apartment?**

*It was nice. It was clean. Most of the people know me. It was like coming home.*

**Soon after you arrived here you started at an international school. What were the most difficult things about coming to a new school?**

*I did not know much English. It was very difficult to talk to friends and teacher.*

**Did you enjoy coming to school?**

*Yes, the teacher help me. The students were friendly and help me.*

**What about in the classroom, how did you feel there?**

*I feel scared. There were many people I didn't know.*

**Harry is not your real name. Why did you decide not to use your Taiwanese name?**

*The name is hard to say. People pronounce it wrong so it feel different. Spelling is difficult.*

**Who chose the name Harry?**

*My mother choose it.*

**The school has very few students from Taiwan.**

**Was there anyone you could talk to?**

*No one.*

## **The World of the “Third Culture Kid”**

American sociologist and anthropologist Ruth Hill Useem originally used the term Third Culture Kid (TCK) in the 1950s to describe “children who accompanied their parents into another society.”

David C. Pollock in his book ‘*Third Culture Kids*’ wrote that a TCK “is a person who has spent a significant part of [their] developmental years outside their parents' culture.” He goes on to say that the TCK “frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any.” TCK are most at home with other children like themselves – other TCKs – as they share the common experience of having lived in different places and having little knowledge of the culture of their own country.

TCK are not a new group, but an ever-growing number of children seem to fall into this category as more parents move globally and take their families with them. Most large cities will have international schools to cater for these children. These schools are generally privately owned and expensive. The students may be taught in a language (often English) that is not their mother tongue, nor the language of the host country.

The life of a TCK is not always an easy one. Being on the move means not only making new friends, but also having frequently to say goodbye. This can become a problem to some TCK, who rather than form close friendships knowing they will be short lived, prefer to stay as loners and isolate themselves. This can cause issues that may continue into adulthood.

**How did you feel?**

*I feel very lonely. At recess I have no one to play with.*

**It must have been very difficult for you. When did things start getting better?**

*I can speak more English. I have more friends so I don't have to be lonely.*

**How do you feel about coming to school now?**

*I feel happy because I'm in Secondary School.*

**Why do you think you feel differently now?**

*It's more fun. I have many friends because I know many people. Teacher is kind. Explaining clearly. I'm not shy now. I play ping-pong and 4 square [A popular game in the school].*

**Do you have a special friend?**

*Yes, Kohai [from Japan] and Kun Ho [from Korea].*

**Let's talk about when you are not at school. What do you do at weekends and in the holidays when you are in Hanoi?**

*I study some Chinese and English. Sometimes my mother's friends come.*

**How many times have you been back to Taiwan since**

**you came here?**

*I've been back two times.*

**Do you go back to your own house?**

*Yes, it is old now.*

**When you are back in Taiwan what**

**are some other things you enjoy doing which you don't do in Hanoi?**

*I see old friends. I go and see Grandma every Saturday. I go to the academy to learn Chinese.*

**So even when you are on holiday you have to go to school.**

*Yes.*



*A group of TCKs at their school's international day.*

# Luangwa Morning

*By Sue Fleming*

**How much longer do you think you will live in Hanoi?**  
*I don't know. I wish I could stay longer.*

**What will you miss about Hanoi when you leave here?**  
*Friends, teachers. That's all.*

**Would you like to go and live in another new country? Which one?**

*Yes America. Or England because cities are beautiful. They talk very nice and don't talk loud.*

**What do you think will be the most difficult part of going back to live in Taiwan?**  
*School. Maths and Chinese. Maths is very hard in Taiwan.*

**What will be the best thing about going back to Taiwan?**  
*I don't have to stay a long time on an aeroplane. Just study. Don't have to worry when I have to go.*

*Sue Fleming left the UK at the age of 6 to live in Southern Africa. Her three sons moved home every three years in their childhood.*

It is a winter dawn on the Luangwa River in eastern Zambia.

The dark of the night sky lightens, a pink glow spreads over the hills and the thorn tree thicket emerges dull green from black. Tall papyrus on the sandy bank turn creamy white, as rose flecks appear on the oily stillness of the water. The chill of the air sends a shiver up my legs, and I pull my fleece across my chest.

Choosing a chair facing the new day, I warm myself from the glowing embers of the campfire. Only a few twigs are needed to create heat from the twisted red-brown Mopane wood.

As the day quickly awakens, so do the inhabitants of the river. Birds are the first to break the silence. While the small hidden species create a background melody, the low drone of the ground hornbill competes with the harsh cry of the ibis as its broad wings dip and sweep across the sky. The hunched shape of an Egyptian

goose gains colour as the light increases, and small water loving-birds appear, skipping along the emerging water's edge.

From the trees' shadows on the far bank a dark shape looms and moves with lumbering gait across the sand. He comes to the water's edge and drinks long draughts of refreshing cool water. His tiny eyes sweep the bank opposite, more from habit than from a fear. He wades into the gently swirling water and begins to cross, drinking more as he goes. The water creeps up his legs and briefly onto his belly turning the already dark skin to a glossy black. He heaves himself out of the water and walks languidly over more cool sand. A grove of papyrus is his destination. Here he stretches out his trunk, bending the reeds towards his hidden mouth. He is alone, maybe lonely, but free to complete his morning ritual peacefully.

Further downstream a group of Thornicroft's giraffe leave the cover of the trees and stride over the now glowing sand. They differ from their



*A young baobab tree on the banks of the Luangwa River.*

compatriots in other parts of Africa. Small in size, they still have the height needed to feed from the tops of the thorn trees. Their brown colouring enables them to disappear into the leafy shadows, while their pale feet merge into the sandy ground. On the river bank they are fully visible, silhouetted against the blushing sky, as they bend their graceful necks to draw water from the river. They seem to sense our presence, but gaze more curious than afraid.

The sun appears above the hills, and the sand changes to a deep gold, blending with the impala whose turn it is to drink. The larger males of the herd usher their young to the water. The families drink but do not stay long. They move like shadows and soon merge with the trees.

Although most of the river that is visible from our camp moves through a wide flat bed, in one stretch the floodwater cuts into the bank. When the river is low, as it is now, a sandy cliff

rises up. Above it stands a solitary baobab tree, its branches, looking more like roots than branches, sticking into the air. Its shiny brown trunk stands out from the scrub behind, where the early morning antics of a family of baboons disrupt the quiet.

I hear a welcome sound – the rattle of teacups. Early morning tea is a camping ritual, and the sound travels around the tents, bringing others from their beds. We sip hot tea, kicking at the embers to enjoy the last of their heat. The stories of the night are told. One had a bat flying inside the tent, easily attracted by the flickering torchlight but hard to persuade to leave. Others speak of sniffing and snorting sounds which must have been lion prowling through the camp.

A family new to the bush appear in a group, wide eyed and with faces that do not indicate a good night's sleep. Hadn't we heard the sound of a baby crying in pain? Surely none of us had slept through such dreadful ghostly wails?

The camp's game ranger strides over with a steaming mug. He looks rested and refreshed. We question him about the night's events. He

looks unsurprised and a little amused. Without moving from his chair he explains that the wailing child was just a bush baby or nagapie (Afrikaans for little night monkey) calling to its friends to gather for the daytime sleep.

A walk down to the river confirms that an elephant or two had been munching and splashing during the night, but quite a long way from our tents. A search behind the camp's kitchen area shows fresh paw marks in the dusty ground. But no, they are not lion but only a scavenging hyena, identified by the claw marks of their dog-like feet.

We pour more tea and stand looking onto the river, now flooded with sunlight. A pod of hippo plays in the shallows. Sometimes a black dome in the water indicates their presence but more often just the eyes and nose appear as they come up for air. We watch them, trying to count how many they are. One lifts its head out of the water and, opening its wide mouth to display worn teeth, brings forth three deep grunts. Oh, he is laughing at us, as we stand on the bank delighted and proud to be noticed by one of Africa's giants.

# Keeping the Work/Life Balance

*By Colette Brennan*

We all strive for a good work/life balance, and yet a lot of us fail to achieve this. Work or personal commitments take over, and we find ourselves with little personal time, stressed or trapped in a routine of work, home, work.

There are people who manage to achieve a good, healthy work life balance. Bev Johnson is a good example of someone who has achieved this. For more than ten years she has incorporated a variety of exercise around her demanding working life and is a good example on how to balance activities in your life.



*times a week. We compete with other local teams and take part in competitions.*

**Has your exercise routine changed at all over the years?**

*Certainly. I have undertaken a number of dance classes, you know the latest crazes, e.g. Zumba, Step, Pilates etc. However, using weights has always been my favourite, and tennis is a sport I am very passionate about. I have had coaching and have read a number of books on the sport also.*

**What forms of exercise do you undertake currently?**

*I go to the gym two to three times a week and undertake weight training. I also play tennis as part of local team two to three*

**How do you manage to maintain your commitments around your demanding IT role?**

*It's all to do with attitude. I do not make work my life, or see it as my life. It is important to set*

*boundaries and ensure whatever activities you are interested in, have and keep the same level of importance as work.*

**What do you mean level of importance?**

*Well, I would never cancel a tennis lesson or gym session to work late. Once you start doing this, you will keep doing it and you will find yourself viewing your activity or commitment as secondary in your life.*

**How have you handled last minute deadlines or unforeseen work challenges? Everyone has a boss or customer they must deliver to.**

*Of course; however, nothing is that urgent. I ensure my boss and work colleagues know my boundaries. I openly discuss my exercise in the office and everyone knows I have commitments. So they do not ask me that often. I am also not scared to say 'No'. I put in a full day's work and I work hard and perform my role well. If more of my time is required at work, it is a choice, not mandatory.*

*If something is that urgent and the customer or work would*

*lose in some way, I would stay behind, or come in early the following day. However, I would then negotiate time off to accommodate, e.g. late start in the morning, or leave earlier the following day. Whatever would enable me to meet my commitments. For my local team events, I would say 'No' and would not let the team down. At work, there are other people available who could assist to meet any last minute deadlines.*

**Don't other people at work have commitments or activities they may want to attend also?**

*Of course, but they may be able to rearrange. Also, they have a choice as well, they do not have to accept if I say no.*

**Do you ever worry about job security or performance reviews?**

*No, I perform my role well and meet my objectives at work. I think if you make it clear you have commitments and ensure they do not take a secondary role, then you will find others will respect this as well.*



**How do your work colleagues react to your personal work style, any resentment?**

*No, they are fine about it. There can be some negative reactions on occasion, as I do not work over that often. However, I point out to my colleagues that I will assist where possible and have done so. I discuss my activities and I am very open, so they know it is important to me.*

*Basically, work is not my life; I work to live. I work hard and meet all my work objectives; I think if I failed to do that, then any negativity could be justified, but I over-deliver at work if anything. I make my boundaries clear and people will respect that.*

**What advice would you give to other people about trying to achieve a work/life balance?**

*Set boundaries and ensure work is not your life. Speak about your commitments at work and ensure your boss and immediate colleagues know these. Do not be afraid to say 'No'; however, do try to be flexible, work late another evening, or come in early*



*the following day, or work through lunch etc. Never make your activities a secondary option.*

*It's all about attitude and how you view and value your work and other commitments in your life. If work is ruling your life now, you need to reevaluate and change your attitude to work.*

**Why do you think a work/life balance is important?**

*Just concentrating on work can be isolating for many people. Having outside activities, whether salsa lessons, or just meeting with friends is important, as it can affect your social life, health and family life.*

*Just focusing on work and working long hours can lead to stress and illness if left unchecked. Taking time out actually improves your performance at work. You are less stressed, you gain a different perspective when work is not your primary focus and you can concentrate better.*