



Briefing 5: Creative co-mentoring for writers Victoria Field and Angela Stoner

About the authors

Victoria Field is a writer, poetry therapist and small press publisher based in Cornwall. She qualified as a Certified Poetry Therapist in 2005 through the US National Association for Poetry Therapy and works with groups in many settings including primary care, schools and with older people. She is currently co-editing (with Gillie Bolton and Kate Thompson) a third book on therapeutic writing for Jessica Kingsley Press – a sequel to *Writing Works*. She is a regular tutor on the Writing in Health and Social Care programme at Ty Newydd and has a long association with Lapidus, the UK's organization for creative writing for personal development. She has published two poetry collections, *Olga's Dreams* (2004) and *Many Waters* (2006) and a children's book *The Gift* (2007). Her poetry has been broadcast on BBC Radio Cornwall and Radio 3 and 4. She is an Associate Artist at Hall for Cornwall which has produced two of her plays, *Blood* (2005) and *Glass Heart* (2006) and was previously writer-in-residence at Truro Cathedral.

Angela Stoner is a writer, poet, storyteller and writing tutor. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in many literary journals and she regularly performs her work at festivals. She has one published book *Once in a Blue Moon* (Fal publications, 2005) which has been performed by Shallal Dance company. A qualified English and Drama teacher, Angela has been teaching creative writing since moving to Cornwall in 1998. Angela has become increasingly interested in how writing can assist personal development, in particular how it can enable direct connection with inner dreams and power. She is interested in using mythology, symbols and the language of dreams to unlock inner potential through writing. She has contributed to a number of specialist publications on this subject and runs workshops and courses to facilitate this. www.farwest.co.uk

Part One: Introduction

The writer's life is usually solitary, especially at the early stages of a project. Later, editors or publishers may be involved or, if it's writing for performance, directors, actors and script editors. But for most writers, in the beginning it's just them, a desk, a room, paper, a computer and various rituals involving coffee, breaks, rewards and punishments. Those solitary hours are what the writer both craves and dreads, loves and loathes. Like someone bad with money, they complain that there are never enough of these hours and yet when they get them, they are often squandered.

Many writers combine their creative work with facilitating the creativity of others. Whether in formal education, workshops for adults or community settings, this work can be energising and a source of inspiration as well as a way of paying some bills. It is sociable and re-affirms the importance of the imagination and writing as a collective as well as an individual vocation. It can also be draining, provoke jealousy and be an unwelcome distraction from the real business of putting words on a page. In a world where there are more would-be writers than people willing to pay to publish them, finding a balance between writing and facilitating is a challenge for many.

Many writers and writing facilitators are some combination of freelance, self-employed and part-time. This portfolio way of working can feel precarious and the effort of keeping the show on the road can diffuse the focus required for sustained writing. On the other hand, there is usually flexibility and the chance to take new opportunities when they arise. For those in relevant full-time employment, such as, say, lecturers in creative writing, there are other pressures from the institution and administrative burdens which may make it difficult to find creative space. Another model (which was adopted by many dissident writers in Eastern Europe) is to earn money as a street sweeper or bar tender and keep the creative activity untainted by financial reward and external expectations. TS Eliot and Wallace Stevens famously kept 'work' and 'writing' separate and it's interesting to consider whether they would have written differently if they'd given up the bank or insurance office to teach at Arvon or facilitate creativity on the National Curriculum.

The lack of a defined career structure for a writer-facilitator means that regularly reviewing the direction work is taking is vital, even if only to reflect that the career-ship has drifted interestingly off-course. There are ways of doing this on a solitary basis including the excellent *Getting to Where You Want to Be* guide to professional development planning produced by literaturetraining. Doing it with the help of another pair of eyes can yield unexpected insights and surprises.

Mentoring has become a buzz-word recently even though the word mentor derives from a character in Homer's *Odyssey*. It has come to mean, according to the OED '...allusively, one who fulfils the office which the supposed Mentor fulfilled towards Telemachus... Hence, as common noun: An experienced and trusted advisor.' In most cases, the relationship is asymmetrical with the mentor bestowing the benefits of their experience and insight in exchange for payment. Co-mentoring is a relationship of equals. We have a multiplicity of relationships in our life, all of which impact on our working life, and mentoring has aspects in common with many of them.

Anne Paris in her book *Standing At Water's Edge* examines the reasons why so many writers and creative practitioners suffer from blocks and procrastination. Once writing, most feel relaxed, in the 'flow', as if they are doing the right thing and yet getting to that state can involve frustration, doubt and even despair. She hypothesises that the essential elements for being able to 'dive in' are all products

of the writer's relationships. She divides important relationships into three. We need a 'Mirror' – someone not in our own area of endeavour necessarily, but one who knows us well, values what we do, takes a genuine pleasure in our success and supports us in difficult times. This is often a spouse, close friend or at an earlier stage, a parent. We also need 'Heroes' – people who are successful in our field, whom we admire without jealousy and who may not even be known to us personally. The third category of relationship is with our 'Twins' – those who are doing what we do and are at the same stage.

A relationship with a traditional mentor has most in common with our relationships with 'Mirrors' and 'Heroes'. An ideal mentor would be a combination of both, offering unconditional support and encouragement and also providing a model of what it is possible to achieve. In co-mentoring, the participants are more likely to be 'Twins'. They won't be identical but more like fraternal twins, coming from the same source, being at the same stage and living in similar worlds.

The co-mentoring relationship may present some of the challenges of sibling rivalry in that the two people may sometimes feel in competition. This may be a useful and motivating factor or it might sometimes inhibit honest exchange. In traditional mentoring where a service is being paid for, the professional nature of the relationship can help maintain distance. Typically, the mentee is the one who is required to open up most about their perceived achievements and limitations and the mentor gives the benefit of their experience with the benefit of hindsight, in a sense telling the story that they have already told themselves.

In creative co-mentoring, co-mentors reveal more of themselves than they would as mentors. In order for the co-mentoring to work, there needs to be equal disclosure on both sides and this can mean risking vulnerability. For this to work, both parties must trust each other and ensure that appropriate boundaries are maintained. This requires a level of maturity and a sincere desire for the other to progress and develop their work.

A co-mentoring relationship can operate on a variety of levels. It could focus on an instrumental level as a way of setting work targets and identifying and monitoring the steps needed to reach them. This would be closely related to co-coaching and have the same kinds of advantages and limitations as life-coaching more generally. In a 'creative co-mentoring' project, the creative process and creative facilitation are integrated. Here, the creative process is being used as a tool to illuminate and interrogate issues around the self and work rather than as a way of generating a literary product. Having said that, the kind of material generated in these sessions may well end up in a more formal piece of writing.

The theory behind creative co-mentoring has much in common with the whole field of 'creative writing for health and well-being' and 'writing for personal development'. Essentially, it is based on the idea that our conscious, everyday, rational mind tends to run on tram-lines and that by 'always doing what we've always done, we'll always get what we've always got'. In order to change or develop, it helps to engage the imagination and by reflecting on the outcome, we often gain insight into our subconscious aspirations that are not often given voice.

It also has much in common with a Jungian world view where the image is of paramount importance. Working with the images that naturally arise in dreams or poems can be a fruitful way of understanding more about the individual and how he or she sees their place in the world. In creative co-mentoring, this process is focused through the use of creative exercises designed to find ways of generating a deeper understanding of the individual in a work context. One effective way of doing this

is to work with an extended metaphor. A popular one is to look at one's working and creative life as a garden and ask questions such as 'What is growing and flourishing?', 'What's dying back?', 'How are the elements of the garden arranged?', 'What's missing?' Staying with the metaphor feels playful and permissive and can often get to the crux of an issue more quickly than exploring it in a more literal and prosaic way. A metaphor that is complex and concrete such as a garden or a landscape also offers the possibility of change and development.

Inevitably, this way of working involves the whole person. This is appropriate for people aspiring to be professional in this area of work – creative writing and facilitating are holistic activities and history and personality pervade every aspect. What might appear to be external blocks to progress could have internal causes. These creative techniques can also reveal ambivalence to success and sometimes the revelation that what someone thinks they want may not, after all, be that at all.

Because creative co-mentoring can touch on some fundamental personal issues, it is important for the co-mentors to be aware of any drift towards co-counselling. Keeping the co-mentoring relationship time-limited, both in terms of session length and the number of sessions, helps to maintain the boundaries. It is also useful to state the desired outcomes of the co-mentoring and to keep revisiting these over the course of the mentoring.

In life-coaching, practitioners often talk of four phases that we all move in and out of during our professional lives. These are given different names but can be characterised as follows: the Doldrums (or a 'dark night of the soul') when we lose confidence in our selves and our abilities; Cocooning, when we go to ground in some aspects of our work but are at the same time unconsciously processing material; Getting Ready when we are actively preparing, perhaps taking courses, applying for work and finally Going For It when we are firing on all cylinders and achieving our goals. Apparently, we all have a tendency to drift into an habitual state where we might stay too long and, conversely, there's a state we resist which might yield benefits. It can be useful in creative co-mentoring for the co-mentors to reflect on which of these four phases might be a default and how to shift from it. Ideally, creative co-mentoring should be a form of Getting Ready which will enable the two practitioners to Go For It, energised and confident. It may though take place at other points in the cycle and the co-mentors may, or may not, be in-sync. Exploring this, perhaps through creative writing or drawing, might be helpful.

At its best, creative co-mentoring is a liberating, empowering and illuminating process. It will involve frustration and doubt at times and in this respect it models the life of a creative writer-facilitator. The challenge is for the two participants to use the more difficult aspects of the process as a way of gaining insight into their own process and the best way to move forward.

If you are about to embark on a creative co-mentoring journey, you will, like Odysseus in Cavafy's poem, find that 'the voyage is a long one, full of adventure, full of discovery'. (See <http://www.cavafy.com/poems/content.asp?id=74&cat=1> to read the poem in full.)

We wish you bon voyage ...

Part Two: A conversation about the co-mentoring experience

1 What made you decide to take part in the co-mentoring process?

Angela: I felt quite stuck in my career as a writer and writing tutor. I was an active member of Lapidus, an organization which promotes the link between writing and well-being. I had successfully led numerous writing for well-being workshops in the community and undertaken residencies outside the county. The evaluations and outcomes of these had been incredibly positive but I was not quite sure of the next step to take. Running workshops privately meant I was limiting what I charged and I wasn't able financially to run many free workshops for people who couldn't afford to pay. I wanted to reach more people with real needs. There felt a real mismatch between what I was capable of offering and the work opportunities I was getting. I was getting very little well-paid work. I was also becoming increasingly aware of the need for support and self-care when doing this kind of work. So I approached Victoria Field to ask if she would be a mentor in the hope she could offer advice about possible next steps as well as offering me support in the actual work I was doing. Getting funding for this, or being able to pay her what she really deserved, proved really difficult. I was most surprised when Victoria suggested, right from the beginning, that co-mentoring might be a way forward.

Victoria: In February 2007, Angela contacted me to say that she was interested in being mentored by me. I was new to mentoring and attended a one day course led by Jude Page of Cornwall's Creative Skills. The day gave examples of mentoring and I could see how the process could be beneficial. What was missing though was funding – it became clear that there was, in fact, no money available. It also occurred to me that Angela's skills and experience were complementary to mine so that if we worked together, I would have an opportunity to be mentored by her. Angela is a former Drama teacher – I have an interest in drama but no formal training. She has also successfully built up a business of leading Writing for Connection courses in her own home – I have tended to run groups with outside agencies. There is also a big area of common ground – we are both long-standing members of Lapidus, nationally and locally in Cornwall, and are practising writers.

2 What did you expect to get from the process?

Victoria: I hoped to be able to clarify my priorities. As a freelance self-employed person, I struggle with juggling different roles and responsibilities. My own creative work tends to get neglected in favour of meeting outside obligations – partly for the very practical reason that external work such as teaching or running groups is paid and my own writing is mostly speculative. I set myself the goals of working on a book on therapeutic writing and spirituality and a new play and being centred in my work and gaining a sense of focus and control. One of my ongoing challenges with work is completing projects, especially with writing projects with no external deadlines.

Angela: I hoped that I would sharpen the focus in my work. I wanted to understand more how to approach and speak with different agencies and how to publicise myself. I felt that Victoria could give me an experienced perspective on some of the difficulties I might face in these situations and how I could resolve them. I also wanted to share questions and concerns about my practice with another experienced facilitator. Like Victoria, my own writing was often getting neglected and I felt that my

balance of activities was wrong. My aim was to find more work as a writing tutor, to be better paid, to acquire more skills and to have an opportunity to reflect on my practice.

3 How did you negotiate the structure of the agreement?

Angela: We met in the spring of 2007 and agreed that we would meet for a session once a month over the following year. We agreed on a format in which we would take it in turns to report back on issues, or progress towards goals, while the other actively listened and suggested ways forward, setting goals where appropriate. We agreed to carefully time each section of this so that there was parity. We also agreed that we would include creative and imaginative activities in each session. During that first meeting we looked together at Rumi's poem *Guest House* (see http://elise.com/quotes/a/rumi - guest_house.php) and wrote our responses to it.

Victoria: We met for lunch in Spring 2007 and agreed to meet monthly for nine months to share practice, clarify goals and explore our personal process. We met alternately at each other's houses for a couple of hours and took turns to facilitate a creative session aimed at illuminating our work. We agreed to feed back in writing to each other after each session and to send the feedback as hard copy as we both feel that whilst email is excellent for making arrangements, it's not a good means of communication for more complex issues.

(See Part Four which describes a typical co-mentoring session.)

4 What surprises were there?

Victoria: My main surprise was the effectiveness of sharing creative techniques to gain insight into our working process. I had expected to be more instrumental and to have identified particular work goals – in a sense these were a by-product of the mentoring sessions rather than the focus. We were using the same techniques that we use with clients and groups so there was learning through modelling but in a way that enabled us both to focus on ourselves, something that doesn't happen when running groups. I was also surprised and encouraged by how much an image can yield insight. We both used cards as a way of stimulating writing and drawing and two cards in particular gave me ideas that have proved fruitful – one was the monkey – with all its positive and negative qualities and the other was from a pack of Celtic cards belonging to Angela of 'The Spinner'. Coincidentally, I drew it twice, in the first session and the last, and it was a potent image of being both 'in a spin' but also helped me to understand that what felt like disparate threads were actually all about the same work.

Angela: The biggest initial surprise for me was that Victoria wanted to take advice from me! I had done co-coaching before but wasn't quite sure what co-mentoring would be like. The real surprise though was how soon we were dealing with quite deep issues and how much of a spiritual context there was to our sessions. I think this is partly because, in our different ways, we were both exploring the link between reflective writing and spiritual growth. This meant that these sessions became at least as focused on our own personal and spiritual development as they were on our professional development and that boundaries were often more like the boundaries between shore and sea than those between home and outside. We discussed this early on and decided that it wouldn't be a problem for us and that in fact everything was linked, although it would need careful monitoring. We both naturally worked in quite an open and a deep way with our 'clients' and for that we needed to nurture our own creative sides. We also agreed to send each other reflective feedback after a day or two in the form of actual letters and cards, rather than e-mails.

4 What was the best thing about the process?

Angela: I really appreciated the deep wisdom behind Victoria's active listening and her experience. I also liked the way we used our skills as facilitators to make the experience very rounded, so that all aspects of ourselves were developed.

Victoria: The best thing was the degree of honesty about difficulties that came out in our reflections on the process. Also a realisation that personality and personal history is a real driver in terms of work and styles of work. There are many reasons why we don't actually do what we want to do – as a poem by Linda Pastan says 'What we want is never simple' (to read her poem, see <http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php?date=2008/05/27>) and it is vital to work with the blocks as well as with the vision.

Angela: Perhaps because we knew and respected each other already, we quite soon built up trust and rapport and it was good to discuss tricky issues quite openly and to know I was being heard with intelligence and empathy but without judgement. I really liked the way we gave each other suggestions and insights, rather than very specific goals. I found the insights very helpful indeed. I also realised that focusing on Victoria's issues also gave insight into similar issues of my own. The high point was a writing exercise in which I asked how to find my 'inner archer' or the focused, active, 'male' principle inside of me. Counter-intuitively, the answer came that I needed to delve deeper into my reflective, diffuse and 'feminine' energy, to find this strength. Paradoxically, by deciding not to seek outside work, but to delve into my dreams and to focus on my inner self, the work and opportunities began to come to me.

Victoria: Simply taking time out to reflect on work and its role in my life on a monthly basis was immensely valuable. Keeping a file of writing and reflection on the process is not only a record of the ten months but a resource to go back to.

5 What was the low point and what were the difficulties?

Victoria: In Autumn 2007 and early 2008, both of us were at a low point for different reasons. In terms of the co-mentoring, there was a real danger of being drawn into a co-counselling relationship, especially because we were friends and because we were using personal material in the mentoring. At this stage, I felt uneasy about the boundaries of the co-mentoring and we both felt a need to restate the parameters.

Angela: One positive outcome of the sessions during this time was an acknowledgement of different work styles – that what might work for one of us wouldn't necessarily be helpful for the other. Even though we work in broadly the same area, we have our own styles and concerns – although goals might be the same, the ways of reaching them might differ.

6 What image would you most use to describe the process?

Angela: For me the image would be of a prehistoric hut circle and camp fire, in which two wise women told stories and parables to one another.

Victoria: I come back to the idea of Rumi's Guesthouse where all the different emotions and parts of ourselves present themselves. A co-mentoring relationship is a particular kind of guesthouse and how that guesthouse is co-run is an interesting process.

7 Which suggestions were most valuable?

Angela: The biggest suggestion, which was at the heart of the process, was to improve my own self-belief. Very early on, Victoria suggested a series of positive affirmations for me. And to remind myself to always revisit my creative self when I felt stuck. Writing from prompts so often showed me a way forward. There were also practical tips on how to approach people and who to approach. I feel that because I tackled the inner confidence, the doors seemed to open more readily.

Victoria: The idea of integrating the strands of my working life rather than seeing them as conflicting demands was very powerful. I am still taken with idea of the Spinner and all her different threads and the challenge now of becoming more of a Weaver!

8 How did the mentoring progress your career?

Victoria: I am doing much the same work as when I started the mentoring relationship but it feels different. Whilst I still feel the pull of the various different strands, there is a sense in which I am seeing the links and integrating them more effectively. I have also begun to say 'no' to some work which doesn't feel central and this has left room for other opportunities. It may seem pretentious or dramatic but I feel that the mentoring has made me clearer about my life's purpose and the idea of 'right livelihood'. I am also now doing some paid mentoring in a more conventional way but I am drawing on the techniques Angela and I used in the creative co-mentoring. The experience of having been mentored is immensely valuable in terms of understanding the nature of the relationship.

Angela: I am getting far more paid work with Arts for Health and for the Mental Health Foundation and have more confidence in making contacts. Like Victoria, the change for me has been largely internal. I feel genuinely much more certain of my skills and interested in how I can help. Perhaps that has been what has opened the doors. My emphasis is now on what needs can I meet, rather than how I am going to pay the bills. Also, I am putting my own writing much more at the centre. I have learned to let go more of the outcome. I have managed to put a collection of poetry together and devised a new course for college, *The Adventure of Writing*. Both writing projects were directly influenced by the insights and encouragement gained through the co-mentoring process. Like Victoria, I have learned to say no a little more often, and have given up the residencies I used to run.

Part Three: How to set up a creative co-mentoring relationship

- Choosing the right partner is important. It helps to have areas of overlap in your practice but not to be doing identical work otherwise issues of competition and territory might arise.
- Your co-mentor needs to be someone whom you respect and trust and whose practice you feel you can both learn from and contribute to.
- If your potential creative co-mentor is someone you don't know well, it would be worth asking them to read this guide and to use it as the basis for an initial discussion about whether you both feel the relationship would be appropriate and beneficial.
- There needs to be commitment to the process over several months, so an initial discussion is very important. Because no one is 'in charge', it is vital that each person takes responsibility for seeing the process through.

Issues and guidelines

Issues

- Boundaries – one of the exciting things about creative co-mentoring is that it cuts across typical boundaries but that makes it extra important that these are discussed and defined. Creative co-mentoring is not counselling, nor life coaching, and both parties need to be aware of when it is in danger of becoming something other than what was agreed.
- This way of working is immensely valuable but using creative techniques such as flow writing, drawing and writing on certain images can access highly personal material. Both parties need to be able to self-manage the material.
- There must be a level of trust between the parties and an agreement on confidentiality which should be re-established as the mentoring goes on.

Guidelines

- For co-mentoring to be genuinely mutual, having a neutral venue or alternating hosting the sessions is important.
- Privacy and space are important for reflective processing. Conventional mentoring can happen quite comfortably in a semi-public space but we felt more comfortable meeting alternately in each other's homes.

- A two hour session felt right – beginning with an exchange of where we had got to since the last session, followed by a creative activity led by one of us, followed by wrap-up and next stages.
- Make sure the time boundaries are agreed and stuck to firmly to provide safety and structure.
- Keep the focus of that meeting on the creative co-mentoring rather than chit-chat or other kinds of information exchange.
- Although you might list your expectations at the beginning, don't be limited by targets. The constant reviewing of these is part of the process.
- Keeping a record of areas covered in the meetings is extremely valuable and can be a resource for future reviews of 'getting to where you want to be'.
- Be honest whilst still respecting the boundaries.
- Listen actively. The turn-taking is a useful structure for ensuring equal time. Check-in with yourself as to how you feel about what is happening and why.

Part Four: A typical co-mentoring session

A key part of how we worked together was to use imagery and creative processes such as writing and drawing to discover and challenge issues around our own work. Neither of us is a visual artist in any way, so we didn't consider any of the drawing we did as art, and the writing and metaphors generated in the writing were primarily about self-discovery, rather than efforts at literature or finished work.

It was natural for us to work in this way because we have both had a great deal of experience in working like this and trusted both the process and each other. Metaphor and symbol work on much deeper levels than simple goal-setting can do. The process works on a subconscious level.

Ideas for exercises and activities can be found in many of the books listed in Part Five – Resources.

Every session varied, although they tended to follow the pattern described in the previous section. The session described below happened about halfway through the process. It took place in Victoria's home. We mostly took it in turns to host and facilitate in our own homes because privacy felt quite important.

At first glance, the ways into writing may seem over-fanciful, mystical or even superstitious. In many ways, the specific writing stimulus or suggestion is not vital to the process as people tend to write about whatever issue is important to them regardless of the starting point. Flow writing around a random image often reveals subconscious needs and answers. This of course can be done solo but one of the helpful things about working with someone else – a 'twin' – is that they can sometimes provide insights the writer may not have seen.

... It is an August afternoon in Falmouth, a picture window frames a large tree. Inside the room a candle burns on a table on which are laid out flowers, crayons, pens, paper and a stack of cards. In this case, they are images from the Celtic tradition – they could be postcards, art cards or any images cut from magazines. After we have each shared concerns about our work, listened and fed back briefly to one another, Victoria suggests that we spend time framing these concerns into one specific question. We should then pick a card at random and flow-write what the images suggest to us. She suggests that we draw our response and then write about our own drawings as well as the original images.

There is silence as we both think of our questions, choose our cards, absorb the images we have selected and begin drawing and writing. We have given ourselves ten minutes for each activity.

Angela's question is *Where do I find my inner archer? How can I find the means to achieve my targets and be focused?* She picks a card with a picture of 'The Lady of the Cauldron' – a figure as far removed in her mind and imagination from a strong young male archer as is possible.

She begins drawing, not as an artist would but by simply letting her hand pick up crayons. She paints a dark outline of a cauldron, a tongue of red flame flickering inside: she considers the image to be a simple diagrammatic symbol of inner power.

Here is a sample from her writing which followed this exercise:

In the centre of the crone's black cauldron, the pot is scoured golden by flames. She holds a heart dripping with blood which pours into the cauldron. She is titanic. Snakes twist around her, chickens lay eggs, and bees make honey. Her ladies serve her.

What has she to do with my inner archer? I ask her, 'Where do I find my inner archer?' Her enigmatic silence answers me: 'By not being afraid, ashamed, or defensive about your woman power. By going into all you think of as diffuse, feminine, open, by going more deeply into your feminine, you will find your masculine power. By engaging more with the symbolic, the inner, the passive, you will find your power in the literal, and active and outer world'.

Now I need to write about my drawing. The cauldron I have drawn looks like a vulva (I only recognise this as I write it) and along with the weaving snakes my arrow does not look very straight!

I can't bear this. I have spent too much time navel-gazing. I need to get out there in the world.

Victoria has picked a card on which a child had drawn a monkey. Her writing dwells on the many pejorative associations we have with monkeys. Her question is *How can I stay focused? How do I stop losing momentum?* As monkeys are not known for focused behaviour, it appears that each of us has selected an image which offers no obvious solution to their questions and indeed, at first glance, appear to intensify the underlying problems. We both feel a little confused and disappointed about our writing and discoveries and our mutual feedback in the moment does little to diffuse this.

However, we have devised a pattern of sending letters and cards within a few days of our sessions. This little extra has been so rewarding. Now that the process has finished, we each have a treasure horde of cards full of helpful insights. In these days of e-mails and texts, it is a refreshing change to receive something in the post and it was well worth the trouble. A few days' reflection always provides insights. And as Victoria said in one of her letters *I get as many insights into my own process by thinking about yours as vice versa.* Here are extracts from both letters:

Victoria to Angela:

I was quite stunned by your drawing and insights. It did seem so eastern in its paradoxical truth that your masculine, archer strength is in your female centre. It made me go to the wonderful translation of the Tao by Ursula Le Guin – consulting it, I was drawn to the verses, no 36, on the small dark light.

So perhaps instead of looking for the male energy, it's a question of going into the female one deeper. You mentioned Women Who Run With the Wolves – perhaps both of us could look for a story that speaks to us and apply it to our working selves?

And Angela's to Victoria

The monkey energy seems to embody adventure, curiosity and play. I am thinking about how quickly they move and the puns which came to mind were 'branching out' and 'moment .. um' ... in other words you can keep momentum by staying with the moment and with intuition. A monkey can dangle from one arm and be perfectly safe ... he doesn't need to have everything exactly in place. He sees both the wood and the trees.

Perhaps now is the time to just 'monkey around' with your writing. Monkeys are imitators and actors. What if you were just acting out your life? How would you direct yourself right now?

A few days later, Angela came across a piece of writing from Bethroot Gwynn and Musawa in the We'Moon 2007 calendar (<http://www.wemoon.ws/>) about our 'inner and outer dimensions of purpose' – the 'goal-oriented, externally directed purpose, taking aim and shooting the arrow at a target' and the inner purpose, 'the place from which the arrow takes off' – and the importance of cultivating both, and added it to the folder.

Later, Victoria revisited the monkey in another piece of flow writing. In this reflective writing, the idea of the unconscious providing the roots to the process of writing and facilitating is also revisited.

The spinner seems to say something about the contradiction between stillness and motion – I have been 'in a spin' but now winter is coming and I can 'be a tree', put down roots, grow leaves, be fruitful and splendid ...

In this card are beautiful colours, fabrics, textures. There are no people in the image – the tree is solitary, non-verbal. It's where the monkey lives!

I note that the ash tree is one of the tallest and straightest of trees and in various mythological traditions, connects the sky, the earth – this makes me think about the whole process of writing and facilitating as a tree that branches out to various activities and has its roots in the underworld of the unconscious.

An extension of the flow writing is to stay with the idea of my work as a tree and my role in relationship to it as a spinner, bringing together different elements of my life.

There were often more questions than answers but we built on, and followed up, one another's ideas and shared our own insights and reading. We each saw different angles to each other's symbols. It was rather like a good friend holding up a mirror to the back of your head. It was fun and playful at times, frightening and painful at others but always revealing, empowering and rewarding.

Part Five: Resources

Web-based

Lapidus is the UK's organization for creative Writing for health and well-being
www.lapidus.org.uk

literaturetraining has a range of useful professional development guides on www.literaturetraining.com

Books

The following two are good introductions to creative writing for personal development:

Prompted to Write, Zeeba Ansari & Victoria Field (eds), fal (2007)

The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing, Gillie Bolton, Jessica Kingsley Press (2000)

All of the following books by Julia Cameron contain many suggestions for gaining personal insight through creativity:

The Writing Diet: Write Yourself Right Sized, Penguin (2008)

The Artist's Way: a Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity: 10th anniversary edn., Penguin (2007)

The Right to Write: an Invitation and Initiation into the Writing Life, Penguin (1999)

The Artist's Way: a Course in Discovering and Recovering your Creative Self, Penguin (1997)

These books have many kinds of suggestions for leading a writer's life:

The Writer's Way, Sara Maitland, Capella publications (2006)

Writing Your Way, Manjusvara, Windhorse Publications (2005)

Natalie Goldberg:

Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life, Bantam Books (1990)

Writing down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within, Shambhala (1986)

Standing At Water's Edge - Moving Past Fear, Blocks, and Pitfalls to Discover the Power of Creative Immersion, Anne Paris, New World Library (2008)

This book is an interesting exploration of what holds writers back.

Women Who run with the Wolves, Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Rider (1992)

This classic text contains many traditional stories which would be a good starting point for creative exploration:

Tao Te Ching, Ursula le Guin, Shambhala (1997)

This poet's new English version of the Chinese classic could be used to provide a stimulus for creative co-mentoring sessions.