

# Alison Chisholm – Talks about Writing Poetry

## Where do you get the ideas for your poems?

- Observation and memories with added imaginative input.
- Occasionally you get lucky and an idea just appears in your head.
- Reading poetry by other people - not to plagiarise but to inspire.

## How do you choose the form of a poem?

- Experimentation.
- 'Play' with an idea, and develop it through pre-writing processes.
- A poem may be written in half a dozen different forms before finding the right one.

## How important are technical details?

- Vital if you are to be taken seriously as a poet.
- Poets are the innovators, the guardians and developers of language, and need to be skilled in grammar and punctuation.
- If they're not, these skills are comparatively easy to acquire.
- All poets should be conversant with rhyme and metre, even if they always write in free verse. These are the poet's equivalent of a musician's scales or an artist's knowledge of mixing colour.

## Does imagery have a big part to play?

- Enormous, because it's through the imagery that you can really reach out to the reader.
- Imagery is based on recognition of a situation via the senses we all share.
- While readers share your experiences, they also recall their own, so that the poem becomes linked in their mind with something they themselves have gone through.

- The best images are concrete and specific.
- General or abstract words, phrases and images weaken the message of the poem.
- You can infer a vast concept via a tiny point, such as the huge depths of grief at losing a partner encapsulated in some tiny specific fact. e.g. a woman's inability to throw away her partner's toothbrush.

## How do you know a poem's finished?

- Revision is the most important part of the process of creating a poem.
- If you have revised thoroughly, over a period of time, and then look at the poem on two consecutive occasions and feel there's nothing else you want to tinker with, you can assume it's finished.
- You should keep every stage of the revision process, on paper or electronically. That saves the frustration of realising you got it right three versions ago, and forgetting exactly what you'd done at that point.

## Is there much of a market for poetry?

- Very few people can make a living from poetry; but there are plenty of outlets that will allow you the huge satisfaction of communicating your poetry to an audience - everything from publication in small press magazines or anthologies and collections to sharing your work at an open mic event.
- There's nothing in this world like the sense of satisfaction you get from a poetry competition win, or the day you hold your first published collection in your hand.