

BALLEA WRITERS NEWS

Book Signing for Successful Carrigaline Authors

By ELAINE RHYS-DAVIES

John O'Connell and Joe Kelly of Ballea Writers Carrigaline were the celebrities at a book signing evening in the Carrigaline Court Hotel on May 14th. John and Joe achieved their first publications within a year of taking up writing. They each have stories in the county arts office sponsored anthology 'The Barn and Other Stories' which represents sixteen up and coming Cork authors. The authors whose pieces are included in The Barn were the winning authors in the Bealtaine competition, a countywide Short Story Competition where the central character had to be an older person. John and Joe's paths to writing began when the enrolled in a 2006 Adult Education course in Creative Writing at Carrigaline Community School. Vincent McDonnell, who has taught this evening course for many years, has seen several of his students go on to achieve success as writers. Vincent was at the launch of The Barn to see Joe and John collect their awards.

When Vincent's course came to a close John, Joe and some of their colleagues founded Ballea Writers: so that they could continue to support each other through the early stages of writing. Vincent urges fledgling writers to seek the support of a writing group and to enter Short Story competitions because early competition success boosts one's confidence and can bring one under the radar of mainstream publishers. Competition success can be seen as a shortcut to getting one's work past the thousands of submissions that tend to get buried in publishers' slush piles.

John, a Civil Engineer, and Joe, a Lorry Driver,

would each like to be able to earn a living from writing and have each embarked on their first novels. They are both realistic that there is little money to be made from short stories collections but that short stories are a good training ground on the way to larger more profitable projects.

John, Vice President of Ballea Writers, and Joe, Chair and Co Facilitator of Ballea Writers are part of an ever-expanding club. In a year since conception Ballea Writers has grown to over twenty members and continues to pick up a couple of new members every month. Much of their growth is due to their portfolio coming 2nd in the thirty-two counties Writers Group of the Year Awards.

The book signing evening, attended by many of the up and coming authors of Carrigaline and District, kicked off with Champagne. Ballea Writers charge a €5 sub per workshop and allocate 25% of this income to the club library. They now hold over a hundred reference books on writing techniques. These books range from the literary through to the genres such as crime writing and also cover journalism, poetry and scriptwriting.

The evening opened with the book signing and John and Joe signed copies of The Barn for everyone present. Joe then ran a workshop on developing characters for stories. With the 2007 Bealtaine entries due by June 29th and this year's entries having to centre on an interaction between an older and a younger person, Joe divided the room down the middle and got one half to develop older characters and the other half to develop younger characters. To help them do this he gave them a sheet of prompt questions about their

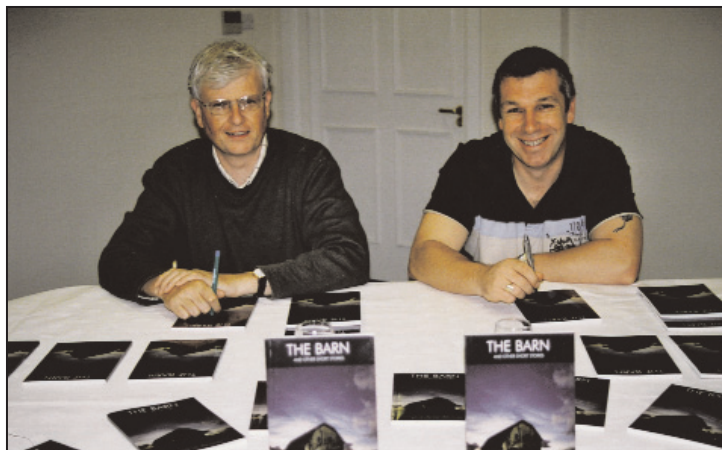
characters.

There are many approaches to short story. Sometimes one develops an enticing opening line and follows its lead. Another approach is to develop the plot, know the ending and head in that direction. And yet another approach is to develop characters, get them interacting and see what they do. Crime writing tends to be heavily plot driven whereas literary pieces tend to be more character driven and the Bealtaine Competition leans towards the literary. In Joe's workshop the writers learnt how to build a character: his physical appearance, his background, his psychological make-up and his hopes fears and wants. The characters need to be three-dimensional fascinating people as no-body is interested in reading about insipid or boring people. The characters have to have some sort of conflict or there is no story. This can be an internal conflict, where they don't feel empowered to achieve what they want, possibly due to a psychological condition, or an external conflict where something, like a mountain, or someone, like a boss or relative, stands in their way. When you have worked out a set of hopes, fears and needs for a character you will understand his struggle and have the ingredients to put him in a setting and follow his progress as he tries to overcome adversity and pursue his goals. By the end of the story the central character should have changed. He may be richer, poorer, happier, or whatever but he must be different from he was at the beginning or there really is no story. Where many fledgling writers stumble is that they present a slice of life rather than a story. For it to be a story something, be it a

realisation, a murder an affair or whatever, has to happen. If nothing actually happens one can get to the end of a beautifully written piece and think 'so what'. Or, one doesn't continue to the end because nothing has happened to hook you into reading on to discover the outcome. One of the best ways to make sure that something happens is to flesh out mismatched characters and put them together in a challenging situation where something has to give.

The book signing evening and workshop concluded with some of the members reading their Bealtaine stories in progress. I always find it interesting to hear what inspired particular stories. One story began when an elderly man and a younger man hid in a pub until it closed and stole a trophy. This story was inspired when the author was having lunch at the Bosun in Monkstown and spotted an interesting trophy on display.

With this years Bealtaine Competition deadline just around the corner Ballea Writers are running Bealtaine focus workshops on March 28th and June 11th and 25th. These will be from 7.30pm to 9.30pm in the Carrigaline Court Hotel. Attendees will be guided through the process of achieving a Bealtaine quality story of up to two thousand words. These workshops are open to non-members. They are open to anyone who would like to be supported on this path to writing success. The Bealtaine 2007 anthology, 'The Barn and Other Stories', is available in all Cork County libraries and the competition entry form and full set of rules is available at Carrigaline library and all other Cork County libraries.



Authors John O'Connell and Joe Kelly prepare for their book signing evening.



Members of Ballea Writers raise their glasses to John O'Connell and Joe Kelly as they sign copies of 'The Barn': that includes their first published stories.



Ballea Writers get together, in the Ballea Suite of the Carrigaline Court Hotel, for a workshop on developing characters for Bealtaine stories.



John O'Connell receives his Bealtaine award. Pictured with Ruth Flannigan, County Librarian, the Deputy Mayor Cllr Derry Canty and Sinead Collins, Bealtaine Competition Organiser