

# Chrissie Gittins

Local writer Chrissie Gittins launches her new poetry collection at Manor House Library on 9 May. She talks to us about how she writes and what inspires her

★ You write plays and short stories, but you're probably best known for your poetry. What do you like about it?

It packs a punch – it grapples with language to say what it is to be alive; it sounds good, it looks good – all of this in a very short space. And it's portable!

★ You used to be an artist – how does poetry compare with painting as a means of expression?

Painting and drawing for me are about colour and shape, texture and layers. These also feature in poetry. I responded mostly to landscape in my visual work. In my adult poems I write about historical characters, family, relationships, death, animals, myths and landscape. In my children's poems I write about dinosaurs, sandwiches, time, benches, snow, noodles and swimming!

★ How long, on average, does it take you to write a poem?

Children's poems tend to be quicker than adult poems – though both require the same amount of thought and skill. It can be an hour, or I can be tinkering with a poem over several months.

★ How do you write?

I always have a small notebook with me to jot down ideas or words. Then I go on to a bigger notebook at home, then sheets and sheets of paper, then the computer. I don't need to be



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at home to write, but I need to be somewhere quiet and still.

★ Where do you find inspiration?

It can be something I read about, something I see in the Horniman Museum or the Dulwich Picture Gallery, a story a friend tells me, or something a child says. One poem came out of a visit to Sainsbury's, another from a visit to Southwark

Cathedral. I have a short story being read on BBC R4 around 6 May called *Just One of the Girls* which was prompted by a day out with a friend. It mentions Hilly Fields, Ladywell and the Honor Oak crematorium.

★ What are you working on at the moment?

I'm about to finalize the proofs of my adult poetry collection *I'll Dress One Night As You*, which I'll be launching at the reopened Manor House Library on 9 May. It's an exciting nail-biting moment trying to make sure that everything is right. And I'm researching an idea for a radio play, which comes from one of the poems in the book. I have a couple of ideas for poems, and a short story which needs revising. I also plan to write a stage play.

★ You live in Forest Hill – what do you like about it?

I'm from Lancashire originally, but when I first moved to London it was to the south east. I've never wanted to live anywhere else. I like the hill itself – and the fact that when I drive over Canonbie Road I can see the London Eye one way and the North Downs the other. I like to buy fish from the guy who drives up from Hastings every week to sell from his van outside the station. And I like the handkerchief tree and the orange azaleas in Sydenham Wells Park.

[www.chrissiegittins.co.uk](http://www.chrissiegittins.co.uk)