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Preface

I arrived at the front door of a terrace house in Selly Oak on an unremarkably drizzly Monday at 7.a.m., four months before global catastrophe. Gaby took me into her communal kitchen, simultaneously decorated for Christmas, Halloween and someone's birthday. We sat, huddled over word documents and A3 mind-maps, planning, swapping, and editing plays, accompanied by the gentle clatter of her housemate making breakfast. Writing Community was unofficially formed.

By Summer 2020, we had both returned to Birmingham to run a small arts company. We began, as we all did, to meet over Zoom, eventually inviting fellow adrift arts graduates to form a support network. We had a PowerPoint and a friend's Zoom Pro account. I wore a new blazer, which I had bought to look 'more professional', notwithstanding my pink flamingo slippers out-of-view of the camera. We presented our meticulously-formatted PowerPoint to a small cohort of friends and friends-of-friends and then we asked what they wanted and the answer was almost unanimous: a community of writers.

Unfunded but unfazed, we began to run monthly Writing Group sessions over Zoom. Our writers shaped the group from a monthly workshop into a community. We were all astounded by the stories shared by our fellow members, and the second half of the sessions quickly became a time to share ideas and questions, and to develop stories together. I began writing again for the first time since I graduated, inspired by the writers around me. The group began to grow through word-of-mouth; each new person with a different story to tell and a unique way of telling it.

In December 2020, we were lucky enough to be able to introduce participants from our Northfield Writing Course to our group and they brought new stories, with a Brummie twist that is now integral to our Writing Community's identity. The group grew and diversified from this and now we are proud to have songwriters, poets, play-

wrights, novelists, mothers, grandfathers, actors, care-workers, and students in our numbers. We meet once a month on Zoom, to watch each other's stories develop.

In Spring 2021, the Community's feedback was clear. The first request was that the group should stay on Zoom, in order to stay internationally accessible. The second request was that we meet in person at the pub once it's safe (that request is due to be met for the first time this weekend), and the third request was for publication opportunities. We were all keen that our own stories, and each other's stories, were shared with the world. We hope that this book will be the first of many!

We are not full-time writers: few people are. For each member of our Writing Community, writing is something that is squeezed into the hours after children have been put to bed; into half-hour lunch breaks at the office; in the early hours of the morning before families are awake; and on bus commutes from commitment to commitment. *Between Bus Stops* is remarkable because it is an anthology of work created in the gaps around the rest of our lives. These pieces have been created to be performed on stages, at bedsides, around campfires, and in the streets. We can't wait for you to hear them.

Erin Gilbey, 29/08/2021