

WINDFALL

Miriam Darlington
Oversteps Books £8

Is there any basis to the stories of poachers turned gamekeepers? It may not be quite the same, but here's a story of a poet who (accidentally) turned into an editor:

My last poetry collection, *Touching Earth*, was published by Oversteps Books in 2007. A few months later Anne Born, the well-known poet and translator who had run Oversteps Books since its creation, became ill and, out of the blue, asked me to take over as managing editor. After some hesitation, I accepted, and set out on a fairly steep learning curve.

Fortunately I had some relevant experience from my time as chief executive of a literacy and literature non-governmental organisation, and also from a number of years editing a journal, but running a book publishing business differed quite markedly from both of these.

The last two years have been exciting and rewarding, as Oversteps has grown and developed. More than a dozen new books have been added to our list; we have a website, send out regular e-newsletters, produce a poetry calendar and arrange numerous poetry readings all over the UK, including at Ways with Words in Durrington and the Edinburgh Free Fringe Festival; and we have already built a reputation for publishing high quality books of fine poetry.

The first poet I 'discovered' was the Devon poet Miriam Darlington. While I was reading a magazine in which one of my poems had been published, I came across, and instantly responded to, her work. Further research indicated that although Miriam's poetry had appeared in a number of magazines, she had not had a collection published. Miriam's *Windfall* was the first book to come out from Oversteps under the new management, and it has sold so well that we have needed two reprints. Other poets have been equally successful.

Oversteps Books is based in Devon, and many of our poets come from Devon, Cornwall or Somerset, including Anne Born, Rebecca Gethin, Andrew Nightingale, Caroline Carver, John Stuart and Rose Cook. Others live as far away as Scotland, New Zealand and Australia.

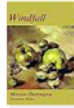
Anyone wishing to be considered for publication has to adhere to the strict submissions criteria outlined on our web page, as otherwise I should soon sink beneath an avalanche of poetry. After an initial sifting process, the final selection for publication is made by an editorial board; and as we can publish only a limited number of books each year, this selection is competitive.

It is well-known that there is no money in poetry publishing, so Oversteps has to be run on a shoe string. This is possible only because no salaries are paid, and all the work is done in-house.

Book covers were, initially, the most expensive part of the process, so I soon found it

Giving poetry pride of place

Dr Alwyn Marriage, managing editor of Devon-based Oversteps Books, explains the pleasures and pitfalls of running a poetry publishing house



Windfall was the first book to come out from Oversteps Books with Alwyn Marriage, right, running the business



necessary to obtain software with which to design the covers myself. Again, this was something of which I had no previous experience; but although it is time-consuming, I have to admit that I now enjoy this new-found outlet for creative activity.

Not all aspects of the work are as satisfying, of course. I have no love for administration and, as a full-time committed writer myself, I have to admit to resenting the time administration takes. But it is a necessary part of running the business and, unless and until I can find someone who would be prepared to help with this without financial reward, resisting it is not an option.

What are the up-sides that balance the bore of administration?

First, of course, I get to know lots of lovely poets. The South West is particularly blessed

with creative talent in terms of poetry, and I think I am fortunate to be able now to count many of them as friends.

Another plus is that right at the start I found a wonderfully helpful Devon printer, who gave invaluable advice in the early days and offers a solidly reliable and friendly service.

I am also extremely grateful to Arts Council SW who have recently awarded Oversteps a grant to purchase software and training that will help me keep down the outgoings and plough more money into producing beautiful books.

Finally, I was fortunate to take over as editor at a time when poetry is becoming more and more popular; and this growing popularity is reflected in our increasing sales.

Those who want to know more can visit our website: www.overstepsbooks.com.