FULL HARVEST – NOTES FROM THE AUTHOR, ROSANNA LOWE

**MY MOTHER RIVER LOVER**

*My Mother River Lover* was written in response to a series of workshops, interviews and trips with members of Arts on Prescription to the River Arun and the Rother (its tributary), as well as an accidental trip to the other Rother in Rye (i.e. the ‘wrong’ river!). We travelled from the Arun’s source in the ‘ghylls’ of St Leonard’s Forest to its mouth at Littlehampton, focusing on the wild swimming spots and the wonderful historical bridges – from Littlehampton’s industrial swing bridge to the zigzagging masterpiece of Stopham Bridge (six hundred years old) as well as to many beautiful brickwork bridges in between.

A very special thanks to Lena and Darren MacAdam for sharing their very personal story.

Thanks to all who worked on the pieces – Sara from Inroads, Sally, Georgette and the Applause Rural Touring team, Oliver and Patrick. Many thanks too to Tara Reddy of the brilliant arts and wellbeing organisation Arts on Prescription and to the AoP creative writing group for a fantastic flow of stories, memories images and enthusiasm – thanks Darren MacAdam, Louise Christian, Sharon Moore, Tess Last, to Tony May for his beautiful writing on streams of tears, to Anthony Palmer for his trusty campervan and childhood memories of the Arun Valley and the Littlehampton funfair, to Jemia de Blondeville for endless word wizardry and historical research, to Rachael Cope for alerting the eye to the shifting patterns on a river’s surface.

Also much gratitude to Alison Williams-Bailey of Root and Branch Theatre, a fount of knowledge on local legend - she put me in a dragon costume to tell the myths of St Leonard’s Forest and took us down a blackthorn blossom corridor to meet a showy swan; to Andrew Ogierman of Aspire, whose River Arun Swim raises funds for people with spinal injuries – Andrew alerted me to the many medical benefits of cold water swimming; to Sue Groom for her experience of doing Aspire’s River Arun Swim – partly carried by the Arun’s tides, it’s a perfect first open water swimming challenge; to Anna Atkinson, who carries so many people along in her creative flow, and to all of the Consolations group for being a balm; to Gareth Williams of the Environment Agency for the talk on water voles and the wonder of eels (and the special waterchute he built for the elvers, who are also very grateful, I’m sure); to Margaret Sheehy and Jon Pratty for *the Sea Beneath* project and for Jon’s waterthoughts on the loss of magic in culverting rivers; to Tamsin Payne for the introduction to Mel Tudno-Jones, whose wonderful wild swimming tales included swimming through petals and tasting the different ‘malts’ of the river; to Philippa Anne Reed of Reed Maxfield for the glorious psaltery music of *Two Swans on the Arun* (check it out on youtube!) and an incredibly inspiring conversation about the swan as bardic bird, river rituals and channelling creative flow; to Rohan Heath for fascinating fishing facts, mayflies rising and what it feels like when a river sweeps you off your feet; to Holly Barber and Eco Monkey for the eco-therapy experience on the Arun, an eco-tour of the Littlehampton rivermouth and for the beautiful tale of a father who always stopped at lunchtime for an apple and the hope of a millpond kingfisher; to my own Mum, Chris Lowe, for the kingfisher moments we shared on her birthday in St Leonard’s Gardens and on the wildlife pond she built for her pupils at St Paul’s School – despite the dementia, may those beautiful bright blue birds keep winging through. Many thanks too to my Dad Bill Lowe, my sister Alice Lowe and my dear friends Rosie Lee and Jane Sowter for always trying to help me make sure my river did not overflow.

And the rivers, of course. Always thank the rivers.

**MEANDERINGS**

*Meanderings* was written in response to a series of workshops, interviews and two rivertrips with members of Arts on Prescription. We made the gentle walk along the course of the Cuckmere River, from the village of Alfriston to the sea at Cuckmere Haven, where we explored both its famous meanderings and the artificial rivermouth. Along the way, we made a diversion to two amazing viewpoints – one at High and Over (above the Litlington chalk horse) and the second up the hill from Exceat Bridge (also visible from the Brighton to Eastbourne bus). We also walked a short part of the stunning clifftop coastal walk from Seaford to Beachy Head, focusing on the river estuary at Cuckmere Haven, with its famous coastguard cottages and the views of the Seven Sisters, and made a special trip to the beautiful beach at Hope Gap, only accessible at low tide.

The final story mixes some verbatim material from interviews with fictional text. A very special thanks to Ollie Barber and Odi Okaka Oquosa for sharing their very personal stories.

Thanks to all who worked on the pieces – Sara from Inroads, Sally, Georgette and the Applause Rural Touring team, Oliver, Jean, Grant and Odi. Many thanks too to Tara Reddy of the brilliant arts and wellbeing organisation Arts on Prescription and to the AoP creative writing group for a fantastic flow of stories, memories, images and enthusiasm – Darren MacAdam, Jemia de Blondeville, Rachael Cope, Tony May, to Fiona Miller for the image of the Brighton buses spluttering uphill like chesty old men, to Tess Last for thoughts on water’s power to harm or heal, to Louise Christian for her powerful experiences as a human rights lawyer covering a major disaster on the River Thames, to Sharon and Phil for getting us to Alfriston, despite the lack of traffic flow; also to Anthony Palmer and Craig for the rides and the thoughts at Hope Gap on hope, despair, broken bones and being a lawyer; and to Sarah Janes, constant companion and Dream Queen of Constant Creative Flow.

A huge thanks too to Ann Bloomfield for her wonderful work with Active Arts, Mencap’s performing arts programme for adults with learning disabilities in Hastings, and to Chrys Brookes for additional support (including the sound of the wind through the reeds!); to Anthony Elvin for snaking memories of the Cuckmere and Jon Pratty for waterthoughts; to the Mississippi Meander Maps and Liz Gilbert’s thoughts on our lives as rebel rivers; And a final thanks, as ever, to my Mum Chris Lowe, my Dad Bill Lowe, my sister Alice Lowe and my dear friend Rosie Lee for steering my meanderings.

And the rivers, of course. Always thank the rivers.