

# PENNARD HOUSE

*Somerset*



SPRING WRITERS' RETREAT WITH SUSAN ELDERKIN

13<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> May 2019 at Pennard House, Somerset

## ON YEARNING, HOPING AND BEING MADE TO WAIT: How to write prose like a poet

In my regular weekly writing workshops, my students and I have discovered that if we start the session by reading a poem, our own writing is somehow different. Our words are more precise, they take us to more subtle and complex places, and the resulting stories pack a greater emotional punch.

In this very special Pennard House Retreat, we will seek a closer engagement with the world – and a greater intensity in our writing – by borrowing the sensibility of poets. We'll be led in this by my friend and ex-neighbour Bruce Coffin, memoirist and poetry-teacher extraordinaire from America. A real live version of the English teacher in *Dead Poets Society*, Bruce taught at the same school in Connecticut for 45 years, inspiring generations of students to engage with the form – both as readers and writers. A reluctant traveller, Bruce and his wife Maria, an organist, have generously agreed to fly over for this week at Pennard to help us take inspiration from some of Bruce's favourite poets.

“I think poetry keeps us young by offering us new visions of the world and demonstrating our intimate relation to it,” says Bruce.

Thus rejuvenated, we'll beg, borrow and steal from poems to add muscle and depth to our prose.





## WHAT THE RETREAT ENTAILS

During this five-day Spring Writers' Retreat at Pennard House in Somerset, we'll explore in daily morning workshops how to capture with accuracy what we see in the world around us, then bringing emotion and meaning to bear on it. The workshops will begin with Bruce introducing us to a poem. Susan will then lead you in applying your poetry-honed minds to the business of prose.

If you already have a writing project on the go (short stories, a novel, a memoir, or something as yet undefined) this retreat offers a brilliant opportunity to make great strides with it. If you don't yet know what you want to write, you'll almost certainly see a project taking shape by the end of the week. With a lovely room of your own, all your meals prepared for you, the structure of daily workshops and the support and inspiration of a lively and dedicated group of fellow writers, this is a chance to fully immerse yourself in your writing – and discover your book as you go.

## WHERE YOU'LL BE STAYING

Pennard House is a family-run estate offering the perfect mix of luxury and homeliness – the sort of place where you can pad around in your slippers, then share a candle-lit meal around an elegant dining table with various ancestors glowering down from the walls. The home of Harry and Gi Dearden and their two small children, Charlie and Adalie, the house has been in Harry's mother's family since it was built in the 1600s. Bedrooms are beautifully furnished in quintessential English country style, many with lovely views over the gardens and hills beyond. Most are ensuite.

The Retreat will be organised around daily workshops which will take place each morning in the Drawing Room. At mealtimes we'll gather in the Dining Room, where we'll be served healthy home-cooked food made with delicious local produce. Expect to eat some amazing local cheese. Afternoons are free for you to spend as you wish – you can go for a walk, sequester yourself in your room with your magnum opus, or curl up in a corner of the Conservatory with a good book. We get the full run of the grounds while we're at Pennard, so bring your waterproofs and a stout pair of walking boots or wellies to make the most of it.





## HOW THE WORKSHOPS WILL WORK

If you've come to any of Susan's workshops or retreats before, you'll know the fundamental tenets of her approach. Using a different trigger each day, she'll get everyone to write in the moment, read out what they've written, and discuss in the light of that day's theme (don't worry – everyone gets the hang of sharing their work very quickly. The supportive, encouraging environment is what makes these weeks so great.) Expect to get used to writing in an unpremeditated way, and to become familiar with aspects of the craft such as dialogue, pace, point of view, and why it's important to show not tell – and to practice these things as you go. It doesn't matter whether you write fiction or, like our guest Bruce, are more interested in memoir; the same techniques apply to both. You'll see your prose rise to a whole new level. You'll also be fuelled by delicious homemade cakes. Workshops will take start at 9.30 and go on 'til lunch (except for the first afternoon, when we'll plunge in after lunch).

In addition to the workshops, everyone is offered a one-to-one tutorial with Susan during the course of the week in which you can discuss your on-going project and any particular issues that arise with your writing. Guests are invited to send some of their work to Susan prior to the course to form the basis of this tutorial – Susan will email you once you've booked to let you know how and what to send.

Afternoons will be left largely unstructured, leaving you time to write by yourself, or go for a walk, or hang out and chat over a cup of tea.

## WEDNESDAY EVENING GUEST SPEAKER

We're thrilled this week to be joined by Bruce Coffin (right) who, as well as leading us in our morning readings of a poem, will be our Wednesday night Guest Speaker. Bruce is the author of a memoir about growing up in Vermont, *The Long Light of Those Days*, which was hailed as a "lovely and moving rescue operation", a "Proustian feat of memory and imagination", and "a quiet classic." Deeply connected to the landscape and culture of his native Vermont, Bruce was born and raised in Woodstock, where he still owns the family home. His career as an English teacher, which includes Malvern College in Worcestershire and two schools in London, was spent primarily at Westover School in Connecticut. Married (to the wonderful Maria, who will also be with us for the week) with two grown-up children, Bruce lives in Hamden, Connecticut where he is working on a memoir of his father's family.





## DAILY YOGA WITH SARAH CONSTANTINIDES

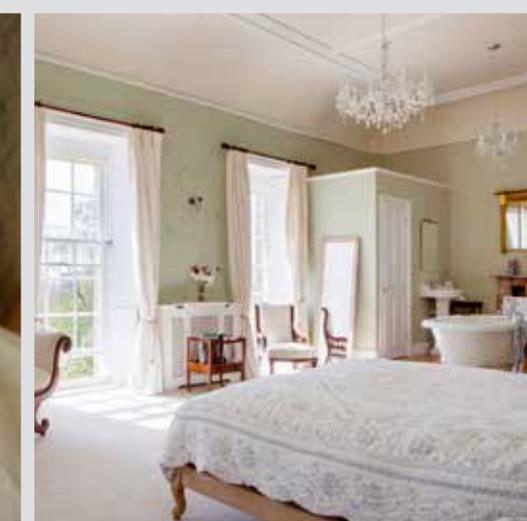
The feel-good factor of the week will be multiplied many times over for those who opt for early-morning yoga sessions with Sarah Constantinides (left), an experienced and effervescent Iyengar yoga teacher who lives and teaches in Somerset. Sarah's sessions are geared towards students of all standards, from complete beginners to experienced yogis. Sarah brings a buoyancy and playfulness to everything she does, and these sessions are highly recommended both for stretching out those sitting muscles and for enlivening the spirits. These yoga sessions will be offered only if there's enough demand, so please let Susan know at the time of booking if you'd like to take part. (Note that yoga is charged separately – for more on costs, see below.)

## A ROOM OF YOUR OWN

There are now nine beautiful bedrooms at Pennard House, each with its own distinctive character and atmosphere. Most have a double bed, one has twin beds; most have en suites, two a shared bathroom. All are sole occupancy, unless of course booked by a couple. In addition, there is a self-contained bedroom with full ensuite a short walk away belonging to Harry's sister, Venetia (this is Carpenter's Yard in the table below), which will suit those who enjoy more privacy.

The total price of your retreat depends on which room you choose – see the table below – and whether or not you opt for yoga. Rooms are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis; please specify a choice of room at the time of booking.

For more descriptions and photographs, visit [www.pennardhouse.com](http://www.pennardhouse.com), or contact Susan ([hello@susanelderkin.com](mailto:hello@susanelderkin.com)) with any questions.





## THE COST OF THE RETREAT

The retreat is all-inclusive, except for the yoga and wine/spirits which are pay-as-you-go from the bar (you can run a tab and settle at the end of the week). Prices shown below include:

- Accommodation at Pennard House or Carpenter's Yard from Monday night to Thursday night inclusive
- Five 3-hour workshops with Susan
- One 30-minute tutorial with Susan
- All meals, starting with lunch on Monday and finishing with lunch on Friday
- Guest speaker on Wednesday night

| ROOM             | TYPE   | FACILITIES | PRICE | PRICE WITH YOGA |
|------------------|--------|------------|-------|-----------------|
| Orchard          | Double | Ensuite    | £865* | £925*           |
| West             | Double | Ensuite    | £865* | £925*           |
| Blue             | Double | Ensuite    | £845  | £905            |
| Garden           | Double | Ensuite    | £845  | £905            |
| East             | Twin   | Ensuite    | £845  | £905            |
| Berkeley         | Double | Ensuite    | £845  | £905            |
| Venetian         | Double | Ensuite    | £845  | £905            |
| Gifford          | Double | Ensuite    | £825  | £885            |
| Carpenter's Yard | Double | Ensuite    | £825  | £885            |
| Oak              | Twin   | Shared     | £785  | £845            |

\*Prices shown are for single occupancy. If double occupancy, then prices are £805 or £865 with yoga per person.

## GETTING TO PENNARD HOUSE

If you're coming by train, the nearest station is Castle Cary. Trains to Castle Cary from London Paddington take under two hours and advance tickets cost as little as £17 each way (advance booking highly recommended as they go up quite a lot nearer the time). At the time of sending this out, the best trains to catch are the 10.33am on the Monday (arriving 12.17), returning on Friday at 14.24 (arriving 16.21). If you travel on these trains, lifts to and from the station can be arranged; otherwise a taxi will cost around £15.

If you're coming by car, East Pennard is about 2.5 hours from London, an hour's drive from Bristol, and an hour and twenty from Exeter. Let Susan know if you're able to take passengers. You can download a pdf giving directions here: [Driving Directions to Pennard House](#).

The address is: Pennard House, East Pennard, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 6TP.

## USEFUL NUMBERS AND EMAIL ADDRESSES:

Pennard House (Harry and Gi): 01749 860 700

Harry's mobile: 07767 487554

Harry's email: [info@pennardhouse.com](mailto:info@pennardhouse.com)

Susan's mobile: 07981 924315

Susan's email: [hello@susanelderkin.com](mailto:hello@susanelderkin.com)





## ABOUT YOUR TUTOR

Susan Elderkin (left) is the author of two critically-acclaimed novels, *Sunset over Chocolate Mountains*, which was awarded a Betty Trask prize, and *The Voices*, which was shortlisted for the Ondaatje Prize. In 2003, she was listed by Granta magazine as one of Britain's 20 best writers under 40. Her most recent two books, co-authored with her friend Ella Berthoud, are *The Novel Cure: An A-Z of Literary Remedies*, which is published in over 20 countries, and *The Story Cure: Books to Make Kids Happy, Healthy and Wise*. Herself a graduate of the MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, she has taught on some of the country's top MA courses, including Birkbeck, Goldsmith's, City University and Manchester University. She's also taught more than two dozen Arvon courses. She has run her own workshops and retreats since 2006, and at Pennard House for the last five years. Having living in the States for most of the last 10 years, Susan recently relocated to Somerset with her husband and son, where she spends a lot of time lying in a hammock and writing lists.

## PAST PARTICIPANTS

Previous attendees on Susan's courses include Annabel Leventon, whose memoir *The Real Rock Follies* was published in 2017; Gill Oliver, whose novel *A Backward Glance* was published in 2016; William Davidson, recent winner of The Puffin Review's Fairytale Competition; Sarah Leipziger, whose novel *The Mountains Can Wait* was published in 2015; Peggy Riley, whose novel *Amity & Sorrow* was published in 2013; and Ashley Dartnell, whose memoir about growing up in Iran, *Farangi Girl*, was published in 2011.

### TESTIMONIALS:

*"Before I attended Susan's writing workshops I had heard from several people how wonderful they were. I now know why she has such a great reputation. Her teaching and leading of the group enable one to learn while having fun. An inspiration."* Helen

*"Thank you so much for this inspirational week. I finally picked up my novel again after six years of delay tactics. I was so nervous about attending as I had convinced myself that I wouldn't even be able to write my name, let alone anything else. I really appreciated her gentle, persuasive approach."* Sarah

*"A total inspiration. I am now starting my day with an hour's writing, back in the habit again. I always learn so much about myself and about the process of writing, held safe in the group. I don't know how she creates the environment we work in, but she does it every time."* Annabel

*"Really focussed and valuable."* Anne

*"Brilliant. I always feel energized afterwards."* Tim

*"I so enjoyed it. We were buzzing with ideas on the way home. There was a lovely, supportive atmosphere and we learnt lots."* Juliet





## TO BOOK

To reserve a place on the May retreat, email Susan at [hello@susanelderkin.com](mailto:hello@susanelderkin.com), specifying which room/price bracket you prefer. The number of spaces is limited and bookings are taken on a first-come first-served basis. To secure a place, a 50% deposit is required at the time of booking, with the remainder due three weeks before the course. If for some reason you need to cancel, Susan will do her best to find a replacement, but payments are non-refundable if your place is not filled.

We look forward to welcoming you to Pennard!

Photos: Harry Dearden, Ash Ranpura

# A SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

## MONDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> MAY

- Arrive between 12 and 1pm for a welcoming lunch at Pennard House in East Pennard, Somerset, giving yourself time to settle in to your room, meet your fellow participants, and get the lie of the land.
- The first workshop will run from 2.30pm - 5.30pm.
- 7pm Pre-dinner drinks during which we'll meet our guests for the week, Bruce and Maria Coffin
- 7.30pm Supper
- After supper we'll gather briefly to discuss how to get the most from the week.

## TUESDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> MAY

- 7.15-8.15am Yoga (for those who are doing it)
- 8.30-9.15am Breakfast
- 9.30am Workshop starts
- 1pm Lunch
- Afternoon: Free to spend as you wish. Sometimes we do a group walk on the Tuesday afternoon.
- 5.30-6.30pm One-to-one tutorials with Susan will be on-going at this time every day - you'll sign up for a slot on Monday night.
- 7pm Drinks
- 7.30pm Supper

## WEDNESDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> MAY

- 7.15-8.15am Yoga
- 8.30-9.15am Breakfast
- 9.30am Workshop starts
- 1pm Lunch
- Afternoon: Free to spend as you wish

- 5.30-6.30pm One-to-one tutorials with Susan
- 7pm Drinks
- 7.30pm Supper
- 8.45pm-bedtime: Our guest, Bruce Coffin, will read from his memoir about growing up in Vermont, followed by Q&A.

## THURSDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> MAY

- 7.15-8.15am Yoga
  - 8.30-9.15am Breakfast
  - 9.30am Workshop starts
  - 1pm Lunch
  - Afternoon: Free to spend as you wish
  - 5.30-6.30pm One-to-one tutorials with Susan
  - 7pm Drinks
  - 7.30pm Supper
  - 8.30pm Guests are in charge of this evening's entertainment...
- More on this during the week itself.

## FRIDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> MAY

- 7.15-8.15am Yoga
- 8.30-9.15am Breakfast
- 9.30am Workshop
- 1pm Lunch
- 2-3pm Fond farewells and carriages



[WWW.PENNARDHOUSE.COM](http://WWW.PENNARDHOUSE.COM)