

Let 1000 gardening writers bloom?

CAN WRITERS still make it in specialist fields, such as gardening? June's London Freelance Branch meeting heard from *Express* "Garden" editor Deborah Stone, and Marcia Macleod, founding editor of North London's *Your Allotment* magazine. The meeting also featured an LFB plant swap table for enthusiasts. But the debate went beyond the gardening niche – with speakers giving advice relevant to any field.

Deborah had been at the top of her game – she was *Daily Express* regional editor – before she had her first child, which meant she could no longer "do nights". She turned to "something I enjoy writing about: gardening".

She then found she had to start again from the bottom, an experience which can make a journalist "lose confidence." For gardening, "most nationals will only really employ big names". When she pitched gardening feature ideas, the *Express* asked her, "Do you have any [horticultural] qualifications? No? In that case we're not interested."

In response, Deborah "became qualified" – it took her three years to get the Royal Horticultural Society's Advanced Certificate in Horticulture. Her garden journalism top tip? "Consider getting some qualifi-

cations [even] on a part-time night school basis." And "never say no to work." "Also, 'go to as many networking events as you possibly can.' Finally 'start a blog.' These days that's your best way in."

And you can join as a probationary member the Garden Media Guild, of which Deborah is chair, and later "get in as full member if you're published, this could include blogs." The £70 joining fee includes a handbook listing "Public Relations people... magazines, book publishers, national newspapers details."

Marcia was writing for the trade press when she "got an allotment in Barnet". Someone suggested starting a newsletter, which eventually became *Your Allotment*.

It is deliberately not free, "not on-line, not national". Keeping it local means Marcia "gets interviews with local growers, tips on growing on clay – which is what most of London has... if there's someone doing it up the road then readers think, 'maybe I can do that too'."

To evolve from journo into publisher, as Marcia did, you need an ad rep ("I was very lucky to find an ad rep... willing to work on commission only;") a designer and a printer who lets you run up credit. "It's going to take a lot longer and cost a lot more



money. Get people to do things you can't do, like ads."

Don't be afraid to ask friends for help. "Network like mad." Finally, "don't give up, but know when its time to call it a day, according to my friends I missed that point." There's a possible franchise opportunity for a South London version of *Your Allotment* – contact Marcia via editor@yourallotmentmagazine.com

Marcia Macleod (left) and LFB members examine the LFB seed swap table at June's LFB meeting.

Photo © Matt Salusbury

EDM 80 on FOIA: yes, write to your MP please

PLEASE CONSIDER contacting your MP to request they support Early Day Motion 80 on the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). EDM 80 notes that "the Government is proposing to make it easier for public authorities to refuse Freedom of Information requests on cost grounds" – which would clearly be an impediment to proper journalism.

The motion opposes this proposal.

As of press day EDM 80 had 75 MPs signed up – EDMs can no longer be ignored when they reach about 200 signatories. See www.parliament.uk/edm/2013-14/80 for details and which MPs have signed it. If your MP's already signed it, please contact them to congratulate them and assure them they're not acting

in isolation. You can do so via www.theyworkforyou.com

Our thanks to Richard Shepherd, the magnificent MP for the 18th Century and for the Rights of (wo) Man, independently of his Party, for proposing this EDM. The *Freelance* understands a Branch motion on EDM 80 will be proposed at a forthcoming LFB meeting.

Training time: courses galore

THE NUJ is offering a wide range of courses relevant to freelancers this autumn. Confirmed courses in London include the following, presented by the Branch experts Humphrey Evans and Phil Sutcliffe:

- Getting started as a freelance – 1 November (£60 to NUJ members, £50 student members, others £110);
- Pitch and deal – 15 November (£70 to NUJ members, others £130)

Others (some possibly subject to sufficient interest) include:

- Making internet journalism pay – 11 September, 9 October & 13 November;
- Numeracy for journalists – 17 September
- Writing for the web – 23-24 September & 18-19 November

- Build your own website – 3-4 October & 28-29 November

- Business for journalists – 29 October

- Writing headlines, standfirsts and intros – 6 November

For details and to book, contact training@nuj.org.uk – and members in Northern Ireland can contact the Irish Confederation of Trades Unions education officer, kevin.doherty@ictuni.org – in Scotland joanm@nuj.org.uk – and in Wales see www.nujtrainingwales.org

Always Ask For More

Humphrey Evans gives a foretaste of the Pitch & Deal course with this true story: Footballer Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored all four Swedish goals

when they beat England in a 2012 friendly. The one that reverberated around the football world was an acrobatic overhead bicycle kick from 30 yards that looped over the head of England goalkeeper Joe Hart straight into the net.

Someone on a national newspaper sports desk that night tells us that their picture people quickly established that only one photographer had a good image of Zlatan launching himself horizontal. They rang and asked how much he wanted.

"30 euros," he said. Our source says they virtually had to stuff socks in their mouths to stop themselves laughing in gleeful amazement. The full story is at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1308more.html

Web woes

London Freelance Branch's website was down between 31 July and 5 August due to a massive Denial of Service attack on another user of the Internet Service Provider that hosts it. We apologise for the inconvenience, which was beyond our control. In the unlikely event of the site going again, watch the LFB Twitter feed www.twitter.com/NUJ_LFB

for updates. And see page 2 for a "QR code", readable by smartphones, that will take you straight to the LFB Rate for the Job page.