

# Bourne toWrite...

creative writing  
workshops

## Pain

by Sue Hitchcock

Most of us only have one story to tell. This is mine. Descartes said “Cogito, ergo sum.” but maybe I would reverse it - “Sum ergo cogito.” The sum of my being is the result of sensory input. Baby me, seeing my mother's face, smelling her warm smell, hearing her soft voice, tasting her nourishing milk and feeling the cosy enclosure of her soft arms. I want to live!

The input is mainly pleasurable, but I can close my eyes when the sun is too bright (the dark is a bit frightening!) I put my hands over my ears if the noise is too loud, but even firework night isn't very loud. Hold your nose, if you don't like the smell! Spit out the nasty food, but mind you don't get a smack for it! Sensations on my skin I don't much notice except when I graze my knee. Mummy soon sticks on a plaster.

There was a rude awakening, of course. Coming from the great unwashed, I never had a toothbrush till afterwards. My front teeth had started to decay. Sweets had been on ration, and the National Health was started when I was five. Maybe my mother had deprived herself during her pregnancy – she was inclined to self-sacrifice- maybe the lack of a toothbrush was crucial, but when I was ten, a visit to the dentist was arranged. Anaesthetic injections had not been introduced and the pain of the drill was an attack on my essence. I fought back. “Go home! It's impossible!” the dentist said. Even a prescription of tranquilizers didn't help and a repeat fight the following week led nowhere, except like many other kids of my generation, a terror of dentistry was instilled. You aren't meant to volunteer for pain!

Of course, the maturity or vanity of a sixteen year old girl enabled me to find the courage to deal with the problem. Anaesthetics had still not arrived and so for six weeks I had two visits a week to a kind dentist who coaxed me through. I have had dentists I trusted, and some I didn't, but the terror never leaves me.

Pain has not worried me in any other context. Childbirth pains are only remembered through a mist, and the occasion when my ten year old daughter and I slipped over, so that she broke three bones in my foot while struggling to get up was so negligible that I slept that night before going to the hospital to get the bones set. It was New Year's Eve and A&E was not inviting.

As I get older pain is a daily thing – knees, guts, back, head, but all part and parcel of life, I suppose. The only thing is, I hope I die before I have to have my teeth drilled again.