

Inspiring Older Women's Creativity by Sharmilla Beezmohun, August 2023

The age of 50 is a good time to take stock of where you are. For me, even though I work in literature, it was a shock to realise that my own creative writing ambitions had fallen by the wayside over the years. Other older women I know in the arts felt similarly frustrated. There just never seemed to be enough time. Talking to friends more generally, practically every older woman had a story to tell about feeling invisible in some way. And so Speaking Volumes started **Women Speak Volumes**, our ongoing Arts Council England project to spark older women's creativity.

Our online Inspiration Bank features:



A list of **Fifty Inspirational Older Women** from across time whose lives you can read about. Among them are: the author Barbara Jenkins (*pictured, photo by Arnaldo James*) who started her writing career after she retired from teaching; India's oldest yoga practitioner and teacher V. Nanammal; and UK activist, publisher and science writer Dr Sarah White. Explore the whole list here: <https://speaking-volumes.org.uk/wsv-fifty-inspiring-older-women/>



UK Lives and Experiences, which shares feedback from older women who met to talk about what matters to them, how to share stories and experiences, issues that are ignored and what they want to tell the world. The forums were held online with older women from East Anglia, Liverpool (*pictured, photo by Edmund Morris*), London and South West England. Read more here: <https://speaking-volumes.org.uk/wsv-uk-lives-and-experiences/>

Writing Tips from Acclaimed Older Authors, shared in videos from thirteen writers from around the world. These tips will help you to start to tell your own story and include: the former New Zealand Poet Laureate Selina Tusitala Marsh; young adult fiction author Catherine Johnson; and short story, poet and activist author Gaele Sobott. Watch the videos here: <https://speaking-volumes.org.uk/wsv-writing-tips-from-acclaimed-older-authors/>



Videos and audio recordings of older women who have recently set out to tell their stories in a range of ways, from memoir (Philomena Mullen, Sylvia Wohlfarth) to poetry (Nandi Jola, Helen Thomas). See <https://speaking-volumes.org.uk/wsv-featured-older-women/>

Let the River Sing, a multi-artwork from South West England combining artwork by Susan Derge, music by Ruth Behan (*pictured*) and poetry from Louisa Adjoa Parker, which shows how older women can be creative in a myriad of ways: <https://speaking-volumes.org.uk/wsv-let-the-river-sing/>

During the next phase of **Women Speak Volumes** (2023-24) we will run creative writing workshops for older women in three locations around England, and hold a public event in London in 2024. To find out more about the project and to see what comes next, visit us at: <https://speaking-volumes.org.uk/women-speak-volumes/>

Sharmilla Beezmohun co-founded Speaking Volumes with Sarah Sanders. She is a literature events organiser and a freelance editor.