



A safe haven & support
for all former boarders

Boarding School Concern Spring 2026



Dear

*Whan that Aprille with his
shoures sootè*

*the droughte of March hath
percèd to the rootè,*

With the arrival of Spring, the opening lines of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* remind us that a time of renewal is upon us. The warmer weather, fresh

green leaves and bursting blossom lift our spirits and give us a much-needed sense of hope in these uncertain times. It is all too easy to sink into the slough of despond, but it is hard to stay there when nature all about us is so cheerful.

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Conference 2026



We are putting the final touches to the programme for this year's conference in London, which will be on **Saturday, 7th November** – save the date!

We have a stellar line-up of speakers to attract your interest:

- **Nick Duffell**, the 'father' of the Boarding School Survivors sector, will talk on *Managing the Shadows*, how John Le Carré's *The Night Manager* (the original broadcast in 2016 and the recently-screened sequel) reveals the strategic survival personality.
- **John Shirley** and **Rachel Godfrey** from *Out of Bounds* will talk on the importance of the individual stories of all former boarders to be told and witnessed: that there is healing in the telling and witnessing as well as in the experience of vulnerability in a safely-held group. They will facilitate an afternoon group on creative writing (see below).
- **John Stanley**, a director of *Boarding School Concern*, will talk about his experience of *Lost Voices Heard*, a group of former boarders confronting their school.

- **Helena Thomas**, a psychotherapist specialising in former boarders and relationships will speak on *Relationship Dynamics between Ex-Boarders and their Partners*. She will facilitate an afternoon group on the same topic (see below).

After last year's record attendance, we have outgrown Friends House, and we have found what looks to be an ideal new venue at 20 Cavendish Square. It is the headquarters of the Royal College of Nursing, just behind John Lewis on Oxford Street. It has a spacious main hall and a beautiful, adjacent council room for catering. Best of all, there are lots of breakout rooms in a range of sizes. This means that we can offer a greater range of groups for the afternoon session. To whet your appetite, the following are planned provisionally:

Discussion Groups

- *Help! I'm Living With An Ex-Boarder* – the person you fell in love seems to have turned out differently – with **Helena Thomas**
- *Third Culture Kids* – what's it like to be neither one thing nor the other? – with **Nicky Moxey**
- *The Former Boarder as Offspring and Parent* – the cross-generational effect of boarding – with experienced facilitators
- *The Former Boarder in Friendship and Siblinghood* – the effect of boarding on peer relationships – with experienced facilitators

Creativity as a help to healing

- *Creative Writing* with the Out of Bounds team, **John Shirley** and **Rachel Godfrey**
- *Readings from **SENT AWAY*** (our new poetry book) with **Paul Fray** and some of the authors
- *Sculpture as a Means of Self-Expression* with **Tristram Thirkell** including exhibition
- *Movement Medicine* with **Carolyn Wood** – back by popular demand (TBC)

As former boarders ourselves, we are all too aware that the conference can trigger reactions that have the capacity to re-traumatise. Please be reassured that there will be plenty of informed support in place, and the opportunity to take time out and receive help.

Booking will open in May: and you, dear reader, will be the first to hear about it!

Poetry Book

SENT AWAY

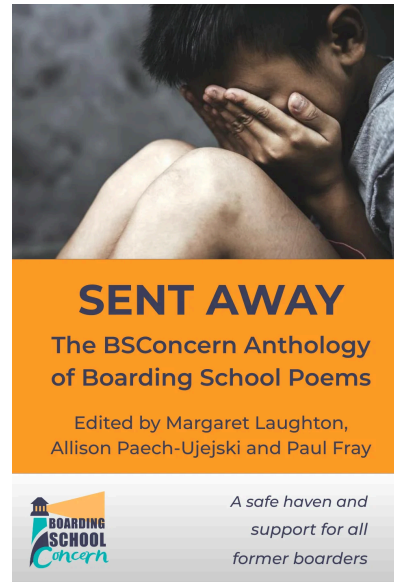
The BSConcern Anthology of Boarding School Poems

edited by Margaret Laughton,
Allison Paech-Ujejski and Paul Fray

This book has been a long time in the making. The idea was first mooted some ten years ago, and any number of events has conspired to frustrate its realisation. Nonetheless, the coming together of the editors over the last two years has provided a window within which to make progress, and we are delighted finally to have brought the project to fruition.

Most of the poems have been collected over a period of more than 20 years from letters written to us and those specifically written for Poetry Corner, which was set up by Margaret Laughton at the annual conference of Boarding School Concern and its predecessors. They come from the heart, and they express the raw emotions of the former boarder in a way that does not appear in normal discourse or other forms of writing.

We have untold respect for all those poets who have had the courage to look deep into themselves in this way and expose their vulnerability. It humbles us, and all the poets who have contributed to this anthology have our admiration for allowing us to include their work. Most of the poems have been written by novices, for many of which this is their first poem since schooldays. That in itself has great resonance for them and provides a connection back to their time at boarding school, contributing to the self-discovery that leads to healing. Other poets are published authors who have



magnanimously allowed us to republish their work in the same spirit of generosity and outreach.

Publication was made possible by a past donation from the late **Crispin Ellison** (1950 – 2019), a greatly valued former director of Boarding School Concern. It is dedicated to the memory of **Joy Schaverien** who coined and described Boarding School Syndrome, and who worked tirelessly to increase awareness of the long-term consequences of early boarding.

"What the reader will find between these pages is less about poetry and more a series of attempts to come to terms with something extraordinarily difficult to integrate psychologically. The sending away of small children to be raised in institutions designed for hot-housing elites is almost impossible to 'get your head around'. A reader from abroad might think that this collection flags a national disgrace, a transgenerational tragedy. My hope is that this powerful book is a further step on the path to our reclaiming a sensible and child-centred pedagogy."

Nick Duffell, founder of Boarding School Survivors; author of *The Making of Them*

"These poems articulate, straight from the hearts of former boarders, the devastation of being sent away from home by parents who I am sure loved them. Here, in the raw, is laid out the confusion, despair and loneliness of the child removed from its home, all that it knows, to the austerity of an institutional life the rules and conditions of which are set out by strangers. Voice is given to the long-term psychological impact of the trauma and abandonment that I see daily in my practice. Yet, these poems also reflect the growth that is possible from a life in survival to the more soulful living that is available through hard personal work. The wounded child within can be found and brought home."

Darrel Hunneybell, psychotherapist; leader of the men's Boarding School Survivors workshops

"Love seeps right down into children's physiology: their stress system, their posture, the neural pathways of their brains. So too does the longing for love. Adults cherish cloaking themselves in good intentions, dazzled by the hopes they carry for their children's

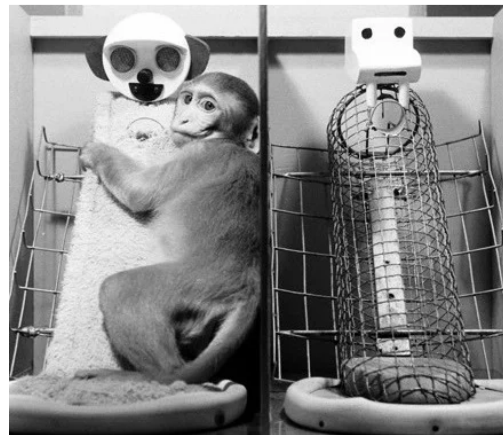
future. These poems stand pointing, asking us to see how often the emperor has no clothes – raw, sharp and courageous words insisting that readers embrace their adult vulnerabilities so that our society can, perhaps, avoid continuing to trample on those of its children."

Dr Suzanne Zeedyk, developmental psychologist; author of *Sabre Tooth Tigers & Teddy Bears*

Available postage-free [directly from BSConcern](#) for shipping to UK only, or from [IngramSpark](#) and [Amazon](#).

Concern

As an organisation, we are 'concerned' with boarding – it's in our name. To elaborate this, we are instituting a series of short essays exploring principal concerns in relation to boarding. BSConcern director **Mike Dickins** here outlines a central feature of boarding: broken attachment.



Human Attachment and Boarding Schools

A summary of learning to help us all

I wouldn't send a dog away to boarding school at age seven
(attributed to John Bowlby)

Human attachment is essential for healthy physical, social and psychological development – and few now would challenge this idea. Distress in children triggers an overriding desire for attachment to a safe individual with whom they can feel unconditional acceptance. Only when this deep proximity is secured can they continue to explore their world – inner or outer – in the context of what Dorothy Heard and Brian Lake describe as 'companionable interaction' in their book [The Challenge of Attachment](#). This basic premise of human development is well

established, and children entering therapy, for whatever reason, will most likely have a disrupted attachment history. Most people can comprehend that sending a child to boarding school engenders an abrupt detachment which exhibits many parallels with that of disadvantaged children whose troubled upbringing invokes far more concern within UK society. The centrality of secure attachment to human development is also why most therapy models agree that the relationship between a counsellor and a client is key to any therapeutic progress – because we can only move forward in the company of someone who accepts us and whom we trust in doing so.

Human beings are social animals, and some arguments have even been presented by neuroscientists, such as [Peter Jones](#), that the brain does not fully mature until as late as 25 years of age or beyond. During this crucial time of childhood development, the proximity of parents is considered of paramount importance. In 1953, it was John Bowlby who, following his study of evacuees in World War 2, emphasised the central role of attachment to the healthy growth of the human child. At this time, families in London especially were persuaded to send their sons and daughters away to care homes in the safer countryside, resulting in separations that pained both children and parents alike. Many mothers ignored the second order, preferring to follow their instinct and keep their children close regardless of the dangers from enemy bombing.

Bowlby's research led him to identify that broken attachment carried a serious psychological cost, not least in the children's subsequent ability to form intimate relationships following their ordeal. His findings were taken up by Harry Harlow, who, in his [study of parenting in monkeys](#), found that those detached from their parents found it difficult to form nurturing relationships with their own offspring. Mary Carslon and (separately) Elinor Ames found similar patterns in their [work with Romanian orphans](#) following the fall of Ceaușescu's regime. Many other researchers have contributed to the theory's acceptance across a broad spread of psychotherapy services – not least in underpinning the support work offered to vulnerable children across the world. Bowlby also connected his discoveries to the prevalent practice of sending children away to boarding school. While academic work has built on Bowlby's ground-breaking studies (and few, if any, have refuted him), the parallel with boarding school quietly has been forgotten.

Care inspectorates of boarding establishments continue to look beyond what therapists and psychiatrists take as an established truth.

Cases of physical and sexual abuse at boarding schools make headline news, but few correspondents make time to document the damage done by repeated childhood family detachment which can occur as many as twelve or more times each year. This practice was, and is, faced by every boarding child, but its impact – clear to Bowlby and his successors – continues to be ignored, hidden and denied. Of course there are safeguarding cases when it is better to detach a child from a home environment, but this is unlikely to be the primary factor for most children sent to boarding schools. The difficult truth is that many boarders grapple with the undervalued impact of something that, for many years now, has been recognised as damaging.

Boarding School Circles

Alexander Gray, a registered psychotherapist with specialist UMOT boarding school training, is planning to run a boarding school circle, as below.

Boarding School Circles are:

- *Small, confidential group sessions*
- *Structured but relational*
- *Online, with cohort continuity*

These aren't lectures or discussion forums. They're guided, reflective circles where shared experience becomes a resource rather than a liability.

Group work can really help to normalise your experiences and truly feel nourished and nurtured like you may not have felt before.

CLOSED CIRCLE

A **12-week structured circle** for those ready to commit to change starting on 17th April.

Includes:

- Weekly online circle (90 mins)
- Cohort continuity (same group)

- Facilitated themes exploring the boarding experience
- Private Boarding School Survivors WhatsApp Community
- One 30-minute Integration Coaching Call with Alexander

Programme Journey (Themes): Across 12 weeks we explore:

1. Introductions
2. Before Boarding
3. First Day & Survival
4. Sleep & Rhythm
5. Eating & Nourishment
6. Friendship Patterns
7. Authority & Teachers
8. Home–School Balance
9. Performance & Achievement
10. Career Identity
11. Relationships
12. Closing & Integration

(This sequence is semi-structured — responsive to the group's needs.)

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

This circle is for you if you:

- Went to boarding or similar institutional schooling
- Feel that early separation shaped your adult emotional life
- Want deeper connection with others who understand
- Are ready to explore patterns with intention

This is *not* a crisis support group. If you need immediate support or clinical trauma therapy, consider individual therapy first.

What You Can Expect

Participants commonly report:

- Feeling seen and understood
- Reduced isolation
- Greater emotional self-awareness
- Better capacity for intimacy
- Increased self-care confidence

This is a relational process — meaningful engagement yields the best experience.

[EMAIL TO FIND OUT MORE >>](#)

Article

NOTES TOWARDS A RIPENING REFLECTION:

On Responses to Anger

by Jonathan Sutton

As a former boarder, I've long had to confront, 'wrestle' with, 'manage' and come to terms with gushing wells of my own anger.

I want to share a handful of my new reflections regarding responses to that emotion.

As one of its starting points, Buddhism teaches that by its very nature anger doesn't solve problems, but, rather, tends to deepen, complicate and aggravate them. In the light of that outlook, we can initially be tempted to deny the arising of anger within us, or to suppress it. The 'braver' option is to be realistic and recognise its presence and then, mindfully, to reflect on the implications and possible repercussions of its presence in us.

Over whole decades my own reflections on anger have been much helped by two figures who stand out for the ways that they've found – in song and fiction – to express anger, namely Leonard Cohen and John Le Carré. I think I could write a whole chapter on the eloquence of their many and varied expressions of this core emotion.

My more recent reading has just led me to add three further names: Gillian Rose, Christian Wiman and Yuri Karyakin.

The philosopher Gillian Rose (1947–1995) succumbed to bowel cancer in her late-forties. When already confined to a hospital bed, she wrote a short book of reflections, *Love's Work*, an uncomfortable, unsettling and very powerful text in which anger is certainly present, offset by her reflections on the key role of love.

The Texan-born-and-bred poet Christian Wiman, born in 1966, recently published a book of prose reflections and poetry: *Zero to the Bone: Fifty Entries against Despair*.

He tries to equip himself and us, his readers, with something that could amount to an at-least-provisional working and credible counter-response to anger and despair.

Yuri Karyakin's first book came out in 1966, *Raskolnikov's Self-Deception*. I see the literary critic Yuri Karyakin (1930–2011) as an austere and at the same time benign teacher who, through a lifetime's reflection on Dostoevsky's writings, became adept in steering us towards hard-to-face truths. The only time that I heard him speak, back in 1992, his words expressed an impassioned and sharply-focused anger. The closing pages of his first book contain a short sentence that states his core insight:

'Self-consciousness is a process, a process which either overcomes or reinforces self-deception.'

Karyakin awakens our sense of the need to exercise the highest degree of caution. The stream of our reflections may go on and on, but we should heed their every turn – and remember our various indispensable teachers.

It could seem that this reading simply deflects and defers the moment of addressing my own anger; but I dare to hope that all this wrestling with the implications of anger precedes the attainment and exercise of compassion, compassion both towards others and towards one's own several selves, selves existing during moments, hours, days and months of denial and acceptance – and other states in between.



Helena Løvendal

We were greatly saddened to hear of the death of **Helena Løvendal**, psychotherapist and former partner and collaborator of Nick Duffell.

Born in Denmark 1958, Helena was in private practice from 1988. After graduating as a psychotherapist and group facilitator, she was a faculty member at The Institute of Psychosynthesis in London between 1990–96, offering workshops for women from 1993. In 1996, she co-founded The Centre for Gender Psychology with Nick Duffell. Creative Couple Work was founded in

2000 to provide specialist, post-graduate diploma training in relationship therapy and coaching.

Helena offered specialist training and supervision for professionals in the field of relationships, sex and gender relations in the UK, Europe, Scandinavia, Russia and Mexico. Amongst the first to qualify in Sexual Grounding Therapy®, she was a senior trainer and was appointed Head of Education SGT International in May 2013. Her unique approach evolved over many years out of her own personal development work and professional training with leading teachers from around the world in fields as diverse as psychoanalysis, family therapy, sexual grounding and indigenous teachings, such as native American shamanism. More recently she was inspired by the new developments within interpersonal neurobiology and neuroscience.

She was passionate about reconnecting men and women to their natural power and beauty and their innate potential for living wholehearted and zealous lives, enjoying loving and deeply fulfilling lives and relationships. When not in London or working abroad, she lived close to nature in the deep south of France, learning how to grow plants and vegetables and live a sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle, while enjoying family, friends and animals and time alone to write.

Helena was not a former boarder, but became very much involved in boarding school work alongside Nick. Together, they made a huge contribution by working with couples struggling with intimacy. As this is a common feature of former boarders, many have been helped by the courses and retreats they facilitated together, and the books they produced on the subject. We express our heartfelt condolences to all who loved her.

Jane Barclay, a former director of Boarding School Concern, has sent this very personal tribute:

Shock at being informed that Helena had died on December 19th continues, in the form of 'I can't really believe it'. This is, however, not a treatise on the process of grieving, which in itself would be a form of denial and avoidance, strategies super-familiar to me as a former boarding-school child.

I first met Helena as co-facilitator of the Boarding School Survivor workshops I signed up for in 2009. In awe, a tad frightened, I was aware of projecting onto her my fiercely denied sexual self. By the

second weekend, as trust developed, I could bear more contact, including sharing one coffee break during which she suggested I might one day facilitate these very workshops. Gradually I realised that not only was Helena the first woman ever to encourage me to tell and then believe my story (as much as I was able to know at the time), shame and all, but also believe in me.

Two years later, I enrolled in the year-long 'post-grad' training in the Boarding School Experience run by Joy Schaverien, Helena and Nick Duffell. For me, Helena's presence, as before, invited me to pay attention, however cautiously, to my own sexual nature, my feminine self – long locked up with key thrown away. As I became more involved in what was then Boarding Concern, I met Helena at occasional conferences, and then not at all. But she remained 'on my radar' and when I'd moved to south-west France myself, in 2020, becoming increasingly unhappy and conflicted about leaving, I felt her energetic presence move into my orbit. Hence, a year after returning, re-singled, to Devon, I was 'home' enough in myself to recognise the need for help to release the piece of me still locked up, terrified to emerge. Without hesitation, Helena was my go-to person and I emailed, glowing inside when I read her welcoming response.

While I write this, I've chosen to listen to Eva Cassidy's Autumn Leaves, her 'songbird' voice one of the purest I know. Far from idolising Helena, or idealising her, for me she is one of the purest, by which I mean honest, at ease in herself, with a heart full of love, radiating feminine energy of the 'Wise Woman', Medicine Woman, who she surely has been and continues to be for me. I remember her with immense gratitude for making space just before Christmas so that we could have two sessions together – with my heart full and tears flowing.

And finally...

Please remember that you can always **[contact us](#)** if you're in need, whether it be emotional distress or just for signposting, We will always answer promptly and in confidence.

This message comes with the very best wishes of all at **[Boarding School Concern](#)**: Caroline, Charlotte, John, Mike, Paul, Sam and Tim

Boarding School Concern

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All our directors give their time as volunteers, without remuneration.

Any income, whether from events, sale of books or donations, is used for the sole purpose of staging our annual conference, providing individual bursaries for therapy and participation, or providing financial support to organisations or endeavours that share our aims and objectives.

Therapy and Counselling: BSConcern believes that therapy and counselling should be delivered only by those who are members of professional bodies such as UKCP and BACP. We suggest working with counsellors and psychotherapists who have had specialist training in work with former boarders, e.g. UMOT training run by Nick Duffell.

Research: From time to time, BSConcern publicises details of opportunities to take part in boarding research. This is done in good faith, but we are unable to attest to the quality, ethics or aims of any research programme.
Please proceed only if it feels right for you.

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