

Retreat to inspire authors

Fran Metcalf

IF CHARLOTTE Nash and Darryl Dymock are anything to go by, authors are made rather than born.

Nash studied medicine and worked as an engineer before her debut novel, *Ryder's Ridge*, was published in April and Dymock is still employed as a senior research fellow at Griffith University.

His first commercial book, a biography titled *Hustling Hinkler*, is being released at the end of the month.

Both Brisbane authors realised their publishing dreams after they were selected to take part in an annual writers' retreat run by the Queensland Writers Centre in conjunction with Hachette publishers.

The program, now in its sixth year, will be accepting submissions from writers around the country for its 2013 retreat until July 15. Up to 10 emerging authors are selected to take part.

"We have received 150 entries so far and we always reserve three spaces at the retreat for Queensland authors," QWC chief executive officer Meg Vann says.

"It's been a fantastic way of developing fine books by Australian authors."

Twelve emerging writers have become published authors through the program over the past five years, including Favel Parrett whose novel *Past the Shallows* was short-listed for the Miles Franklin Award and won the 2012 Dobbie Literary Award.

"The work has been remarkably diverse, spanning genres and addressing topics from post-natal depression to abalone fishing in Tasmania, rural romance to the adventures of an Australian aviator," Vann says.

Nash and Dymock, who both attended the 2010 program, are also among the 12 success stories and say the guidance and structure they received on their manuscripts by literary agents, editors and publishers was invaluable but it was only part of the picture.

"It was a real step up in seeing how the industry operates and in working with an agent," Nash says.

They say the program also enabled them to meet and develop relationships with decision-makers.

Dymock's original idea of a young adult novel, which taught teenage readers more about Queensland's pioneer aviator Bert Hinkler through a fictional time travel story, transformed into a biography about the man's tumultuous life and career over the duration of the manuscript program.

"You get advice at the retreat on



WRITE ON: Authors Charlotte Nash and Darryl Dymock both attended, and benefited from, the 2010 writers' retreat.

Picture: Liam Kidston

how to improve your manuscript but there's no promise of publication," Dymock says.

"It's a developmental program so you're learning how to make your manuscript better."

For Nash, the post-apocalyptic story that earned her a place in the 2010 program never reached publication. She kept in touch with the publishers and editors she met at the program and submitted a second and eventually a third manuscript.

It took the Indooroopilly writer four attempts before Hachette published *Ryders Ridge*, which is a rural romance

She's already written a second

novel, based on the Pilbara, which will be released in April, 2014 and been commissioned to write a third about an army community in Townsville.

It was Nash's experience in regional Queensland as a medical student and an incident investigator at mining and construction sites that have created backdrops for her fictional adventures.

Now teaching creative writing at University of Queensland, Nash has been selected as an author mentor for this year's group of writers yet to be selected for the program.

More information on the 2013 QWC/Hachette Manuscript Development Program at qwc.asn.au

Books in our backyard

CRAZY capers up in Cape York and chilly memoirs set in Iceland are two of the Queensland stories to feature in a new catalogue.

Books from our Backyard 2012, launched by Arts Minister Ian Walker this week, lists nearly 180 books published by home-grown authors last year.

The Queensland Writers Centre created the catalogue to promote Queensland stories to local readers.

"The unique voices arising from the many and varied regions of Queensland - from the Cape to the border, from the coast to the bush - make a vital contribution to Australian literature," says QWC chair Kevin Gillespie. "QWC strives for more Queensland writers ... to be read and enjoyed."

A selection of the catalogue titles are on show in an exhibition at State Library Queensland.